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CONTENTS FOR DECEMBER, 1932

Number 6

- Cover Design J. Allen St. John
Illustrating a scene in "Buccaneers of Venus"
- The Door to Yesterday Seabury Quinn 722
Weird doubts and strange racial memories—a tale of Jules de Grandin
- The Man Who Conquered Age Edmond Hamilton 749
A weird-scientific tale of a scientist who ran amuck in New York's streets
- Thrice Haunted Alfred I. Tooke 768
Verse
- The Phoenix on the Sword Robert E. Howard 769
A tale of the incredible thing that happened in King Conan's bedchamber
- The Quick and the Dead Vincent Starrett 785
An intensely human story about a poet's grief, and a body that moved in its coffin
- Buccaneers of Venus (part 2) Otis Adelbert Kline 793
Breath-taking adventures amid the perils of another planet
- The Lives of Alfred Kramer Donald Wandrei 817
An astonishing story of atavism, by the author of "The Red Brain"
- Weird Story Reprint:
- Frankenstein (conclusion) Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley 830
A famous classic of weird fiction
- The Eyrice 843
A chat with the readers

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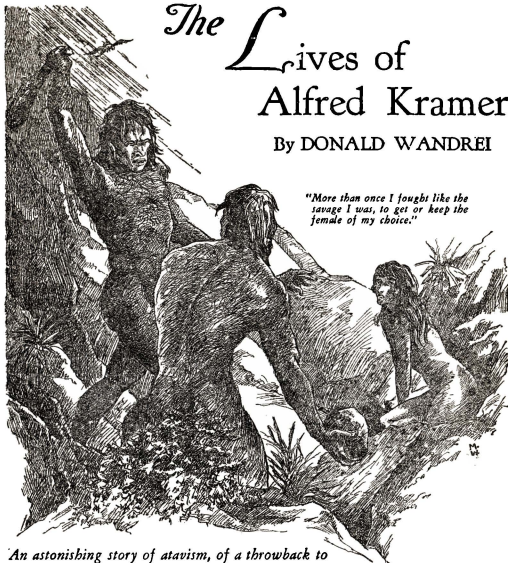
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The Lives of Alfred Kramer

By DONALD WANDREI



*"More than once I fought like the
savage I was, to get or keep the
female of my choice."*

*'An astonishing story of atavism, of a throwback to
ancestral lives*

THOUGH my train did not pull out till eleven p. m., I had boarded it at ten. While the berths were being made up I strolled around. There were few passengers this early in the week. Indeed, when I walked back and took a seat in the smoking-car, I noticed but one other occupant. To my casual glance, he appeared singularly repulsive. His grayish face, an immobile setness of expression, burning black eyes in which no pupil was visible,

W. T.—7

his gloved hands folded stiffly in his lap, all combined to give me an immediate dislike.

I paid no further attention to him during the quarter of an hour or so that I sat smoking. Several times, however, I had an impression that he was intently watching me.

When I arose and began to walk toward my berth, I had an equally vivid impression that he addressed some remark to me in a low and extraordinarily

husky voice just as I was passing him. So inaudible was his voice and so marked my aversion that I pretended I had not heard and continued on my way.

Dismissing the incident from mind, I prepared for slumber. A variety of noises kept me awake. I heard brakemen call, the train pull out, its wheels clack rhythmically.

An hour later I was still tossing restlessly.

At about twelve-thirty I gave up my futile effort to sleep, climbed from my berth, and slipped on a dressing-gown. Cigar in hand, I again made my way back to the smoking-car. Its lone occupant had evidently not moved, for he was still sitting where I last saw him. I did not notice his lips move, but plainly this time I heard his abominable husky voice.

"Won't you join me for a few miles?" it said. "I am an invalid, you see."

Perhaps his appeal for sympathy touched me, or perhaps his obvious loneliness. At any rate, I suppressed my unpleasant reaction to his physical appearance and dropped into the chair opposite him.

I made some reference to my unconventional garb, and idly remarked, "I thought I'd have another smoke. Sleep was impossible."

"Yes," he responded, "there are times when one would like to sleep but can not. It is worse," he added cryptically, "when one would prefer to remain awake, but can not."

A bit puzzled, I waited for him to continue.

"I have not slept for three nights," he volunteered.

"Indeed? I am sorry if your illness prevents you from sleeping," I said politely.

"No, it is not that. My indisposition

is of such a nature that slumber is dangerous. I have kept myself awake by stimulants. And the long night hours are monotonous when one is alone."

Casual though our conversation was thus far, and despite my friendly resolve, I had been becoming more uneasy. There was a kind of psychic chill in the air which early autumn could not entirely account for. My companion's repellent aspect was hardly modified by the soft lights around us. For all the expression on his grayish face, an automaton or ventriloquist might have been speaking. No muscular change had yet livened his countenance, his lips had made no perceptible movement. His unrelaxing gloved hands, the unnatural shine of his black eyes, and his rigid carriage were as disquieting at close range as they had been at a distance. Nor could I accustom myself to the throaty degeneracy of his speech. About his person there was in addition an odor that bothered me. It was quite indefinable, but had an element of the beast in it, and of corruption, and stagnant sea-water, and mildew.

I now noticed what had hitherto escaped me, that a pile of books lay beside him. The topmost was Strindmann's monograph, *Racial Memory in Dreams*. Other books underneath it dealt with abnormal psychology.

"Are you a student of psychology?" I asked.

"To some extent, yes, but I am more interested in dreams. You see, I have been troubled by nightmares for some time. I am on my way to Vienna to place myself under Strindmann's care.

"Allow me to introduce myself: I am Alfred Kramer."

"And I am Wallace Forbes. Your dreams must be rather upsetting to necessitate a trip half-way around the world."

I, who never dream, had always been

fascinated by that phenomenon in other people. Kramer himself must have desired sympathetic ears to receive his story, because, hesitantly at first, then more directly and swiftly, he began to tell his narrative.

"From early childhood," he commenced, "I was inquisitive into the world around me. I seem to have been born with a scientific and inventive bent. At the same time I was a dreamy child. My nights were vivid with a constant stream of images. Sometimes these were pleasant, often they were terrifying. I saw scenes and had strange experiences that I could not explain on the basis of anything I had read, or witnessed, or heard.

"Because of these visions I acquired a profound interest in brain processes as I grew older. My studies dealt with dream psychology, racial memory, and mental inheritances.

A CERTAIN dream kept recurring over a period of years: I stood in the midst of a somber glade. All around rose the vast and evil boles of monstrous trees. Long shadows lay athwart the sere grass of autumn at my feet. There were indistinct figures at a little distance which harmonized curiously with the colossal trees. They were watching me intently. In my hand I held a wicked sacrificial knife. Before me was a great stone altar, stained with the blood of countless victims. It stood by the hugest of the trees, and it had a slanting trough so that the spilled blood would water those gnarled roots. A naked young girl of goddess-like beauty lay upon this altar. Her gray eyes regarded me with a baffling mixture of religious ecstasy, terror, and love, as I slowly raised the knife to plunge it into her breast.

"Time after time that vision came to me as clearly as an episode from life. But

I never dreamed of what preceded the scene, nor did I know what followed.

"Out of my wish to know the full episode, and from my belief that many dreams were memories of past events, I conceived a hypothesis. The unbroken stream of life had descended from parents to children throughout the ages. Why might not major experiences have been so deeply impressed upon the brain that they too were inherited? Perhaps they were latent, awaiting only a magic touch to awaken them into reconstructed pictures. If this were true, possibly it would account for hitherto unexplained dreams. My own persistent nightmare was like an inherited image, surviving in me, of some impressive episode in the life of a long-dead ancestor.

"Under proper conditions, why shouldn't it be possible to release these ancestral adventures?

"Fascinated by the thought, I plunged into years of labor. Mental therapy, psychiatry, brain surgery became my special studies. I exhausted all sources of information on every phase of the brain, in health and disease, infancy and maturity, life and death. I made elaborate investigations into physiology, the nervous system, motor stimuli, 'why the wheels go round,' in other words. I began a thorough and detailed research into the structure, nature, function, purpose, and action of brain cells.

"Behind my wild idea and its resulting intense activity was a coldly logical plan. If past events could be retained in memory by descendants, they would be recorded somewhere in the brain itself. And among its component parts the source most likely to offer fruitful results was the cells. Of these there are several millions, a vast majority of which seem never to be used. In fact, the average human being requires the services of

only a few thousand cells during his lifetime. The remaining cells apparently are capable of storing up facts but simply are not called on except by individuals who pursue knowledge inexhaustibly. It was my belief that this enormous number of unused cells retained, but ever so slightly, impressions of the dominant incidents which had affected the lives of all one's forebears.

"I next supposed that when a cell was required to store away a fact or event in one's life, its latent memory of ancestral experience was obliterated. But if it were not used, the latent memory continued to exist, sometimes never to be realized, sometimes, however, to flash forth vividly in sleep or subconscious dreams.

"For a long time I pursued a wrong path. I thought that the memory-impressions made a physical change in the cells, just as a particle of metal changes in shape when you strike it violently: and that all I needed to do was to invent some sort of sensitive electric device which would tap these cells by means of their specific differences.

"Vain delusion! I wasted two precious years pursuing a ghost, as it were.

"And like many another person who deals with complexities, I found simplicity the keynote to my riddle. It was in 1931, not long after the cosmic ray was discovered and the electrogenetic theory of life propounded, that a brilliant idea occurred to me. You are acquainted with this theory? Its assertion that the human system is somewhat like a battery, and that what we call life lasts while a positive-negative interaction of electricity continues, while death is the complete cessation of that activity? Well, the thought came to me that by increasing this electrical energy of the body, and more particularly by heightening this activity in the brain, each cell might re-

lease its individual retained fact or ancestral memory. Recent impressions, being nearer and therefore stronger, would be unloosed first; but by gradually building up activity, older and yet older events ought to permit of resurrection.

"I worked with new energy. Light, wave-lengths, rays occupied my attention. Weird and intricate machinery accumulated in my laboratory.

"And now at last I began to feel success approaching with my isolation of the Kappa-ray. I found it in minute quantities in the bright sunshine that poured down, found too that it directly supplied human beings with much of that electrical energy which gave them life.

"I toiled feverishly until I succeeded in crossing my last barrier. I constructed a sort of Kappa-battery that would isolate from sunshine and store up in concentrated form the Kappa-ray! Day after day, as my black metal box stood in the open glare of the sun, charging itself with precious invisible stuff, I watched it, fondly, jealously. I would have killed any one who chanced to come upon it.

"Then came that evening when its capacity was reached. Carefully I closed it and carried it to my quarters as gently as if it were nitroglycerin. Worn out and prematurely aged from my years of intense labor, tired in body yet wonderfully excited in spirit, I lay down on my bed with the black box beside me.

"With a strangely steady hand I reached out and opened its shutter and pressed a switch.

"An invisible warm radiance flowed and flooded and poured into me. My head swam with an indescribable nausea, a kind of opiate thickness combined with an increasingly rapid surge of extraordinarily lucid thoughts. My mind seemed to be working faster and clearer than it

ever had before. But at the same time, that soothing warmth stole pleasantly over me. Lest there be danger, I extended my arm and closed the box.

"Almost instantaneously I slept.

"A panic-stricken mob, fleeing in terror, bore me along in its mad flight. I fought and struggled to prevent myself from being crushed to death. A confused roar deafened my ears. Cries of racing figures, groans of injured and dying men, crackle of flame and howl of wind blended into a hideous noise. Buildings appeared to speed by me as I forged ahead. I knew I must be in some large city.

"MY BURSTING lungs gasped for clean air but only drew in acrid smoke. The sky glowed redly, flame-shot darkness swirled around me, from behind came the glare of a vast conflagration. I saw swaths of fire leap from building to building on the wings of a stiff wind. Clouds of smoke billowed up, drifted upon us, choked the lungs of refugees. Ever and again, some poor devil fell, and the sheeted flame raced inexorably over him.

"A lumbering brute crashed into me. I cursed savagely and plunged after him. He tripped. I saw him no more. A frail woman with two children, crying as the mob jostled past her, leaned helplessly against a door-stoop. I caught her in one arm and swung her along with me, the children folded to her. And all these people were dressed in the fashion of a full half-century ago!

"We struggled onward in the midst of this livid nightmare. The city's heart was an inferno, a raging furnace.

"But now we were approaching outskirts and less thickly populated districts. Gradually we forged ahead. Smoke and

blistering heat still smote us, but the danger region lay farther behind.

"Then, abruptly, the scene changed.

"I was at a ship's wheel. Under full sail we scudded along at a fast clip. Stretching to every horizon, with no land visible anywhere, a white-capped sea surged under a strong trade-wind. The sun poured warmly from a sky in which only a few clouds floated high.

"With terrifying suddenness came a cry from the lookout.

"*'Derelict dead ahead!'*

"I swung the wheel mightily. The ship skewed. Crash! She quivered a moment, began to sink. I saw a waterlogged hulk, black, submerged, hover by our ripped bow. There was a pandemonium of leaping men, despairing shouts where boats fouled in their davits or capsized when badly launched, a bitter fight for positions in those that remained. One went down, overloaded. Another was drawn by suction and followed our ship as she sank.

"At the first shock I tore my clothing off and dived far overboard, swimming rapidly to escape the deadly suction. I was hauled aboard one of two boats that survived. In all there were eleven men left out of thirty-two.

"Then came tragedy in the days that ensued as thirst, starvation, and a blazing sun took their toll. We knew of no land closer than five hundred miles. Some time during our second night adrift, the two boats became separated.

"Six survivors had manned our boat to begin with. At the end of a week we were four. This number was reduced to three on our tenth day afloat when Olaf went mad from drinking salt water and leaped overboard. That left Petri, Andrews, and myself. I think Petri recklessly committed suicide rather than suffer a lingering death of torment, but I

can not be sure, for I became delirious on the twelfth day.

"I returned to my senses strangely refreshed. A rain squall had evidently struck and passed. I greedily lapped up warm, fresh water from the boat's bottom and revived still more. I noticed that only one of my companions was now left—and he had been dead for I know not how long. I heaved his body overboard.

"Two days later a little palm-fringed island came in sight. With what desperate anxiety I watched it grow larger, and how eagerly I stumbled ashore to drag myself feebly up its beach! I was saved! Saved! And without warning the scene vanished.

"Then followed a couple of less interesting dreams with whose details I will not bother to tell.

"When I at length awakened at dawn, I could scarcely keep calm because of the excitement that possessed me. Columbus could not have been more thrilled when he discovered a new continent. I had made a discovery that might open up unguessable stores of knowledge to mankind, or that might clarify many obscure and forgotten pages of history. Yet I had no intention of announcing it publicly until I had first explored for myself in full its potentialities. I hoped that I would sooner or later have a complete re-presentation of that persistent but fragmentary vision which I alluded to earlier. I speculated on what fascinating episodes from ancestral life might present themselves as I continued using the Kappa-ray. For insofar as I could tell, it left no ill effects. Indeed, I felt unusually energetic, my thoughts came with exceptional clarity.

"That day I spent much of my time obtaining books from libraries and dealers. These were mainly works on geneal-

ogy, history, costume, antiquities, biography, and sciences.

"I pored over these till late at night. Two items rewarded a tedious search. One brief record told how my father had escaped in his youth from the great fire of Chicago. The second excerpt, which I ran across in Cooper's *Maritime Disasters*, narrated that a whaler, the *Nancy R.*, disappeared in the South Seas, 1809 A. D.; and that her fate was not learned until two years later when the clipper *Seagull*, anchoring for repairs at an atoll southwest of Keaua, found the sole survivor of that tragedy, my grandfather, who had been living there ever since.

"I was happy as a child over this verification of my theory, even though I had strained my eyes by such intensive research. More than satisfied with my achievement, I again opened the Kappa-ray battery and felt its radiant-soporific energy pour through my head just before sleep came to me.

"1638. They were ready to burn a condemned witch in England. A wizened, half-demented old woman, she was already tied to the stake. A crowd of stupid faces and stern persecutors ringed her in. I had somehow been drawn there but now looked at her with compassion in my eyes and would have turned away, sick to my heart, if I could. Any movement was difficult, wedged in tightly as I was.

"A vicious mob shout arose as the executioner advanced, torch in hand. Above that babel the old woman's voice suddenly ascended.

"'Innocent! I am innocent!' she croaked. 'Burn me, will you? May your heart turn to the stone that it is!'

"A startled expression came into the executioner's eyes. He paused in his stride, clutched his breast, plunged to earth dead before he struck.

"Supernatural fear laid an absolute quiet on the crowd. One of the witch's relentless tormenters, bolder than his associates, walked forward and picked up the fallen torch.

"'Sorceress!' he cried. 'Prepare to meet thy God and be sentenced to eternal damnation!' And he flung the torch among the faggots heaped around her. It caught, a thin flame sprang up and raced from stick to stick.

"'Fools! Fools!' the old crone cursed. 'May the vengeance of God and Satan, for this day's work, pursue every one—*except you!*' And she raised a withered hand toward me. 'Only you have pity—may you and your descendants be blessed, even unto the tenth generation. But after the tenth generation, beware! *We shall meet again, yea, three hundred years hence, and you will tell me you remember!*'

"Without willing it, I cried, 'I will remember!'—and awoke to hear my own voice, '*remember—remember,*' echo hollowly in my room and die away. I tossed fitfully, dropped into a sound sleep."

But this account is growing longer than I intended. I must omit many details, fascinating though they would be. Flying miles accompanied flying minutes while I listened spellbound to Kramer's husky voice, and looked into his fever-bright eyes, and wondered how he managed to speak with any distinctness when his lips had not yet visibly moved. His story flowed on—or shall I say continued backward?—through Henry the Eighth's court, the Spanish Inquisition, Constantinople at its fall, Paris of Villon's day, the Norman conquest, weaving its way through earlier and yet earlier centuries.

"**S**o I finally came to my puzzling dream," Kramer went on. "I do not know exactly what year it was, but from

its place in my sleep-atavism, I would guess the Fifth or Sixth Century.

"Autumn had come. Dead leaves and withered grass marked the dying year. I was a high priest among the Druids. Each year, upon the last evening of fall, we sacrificed our loveliest virgin to the forest god so that her blood would appease him and cause him to let our sacred trees grow green again when spring returned. I, as high priest, must offer the sacrifice—and she whom they had chosen was Neridh, beloved of my heart.

"I had done everything in my power to save Neridh, until they had grown suspicious. One desperate hope of success remained, but the ritual had been chanted, Neridh lay upon the altar, and a semicircle of dark faces watched me from all around this woodland glade. I dragged out my invocation and supplication. The sun sank lower, and shadows crept longer on blown leaves and brown grass.

"There could be no further delay. Sacrifices must be made before sunset. I raised my arm slowly and held the knife high, poised for its downward plunge into my beloved's heart. Anguish, terror, love, resignation struggled for expression on her face. Already the sun's rim was dropping, and—

"Somewhere afar a tree gave forth a sharp crack. Fear leaped into those eyes that watched me. I heard a heavy groan, a series of sounds from rending boughs, then a booming crash as a giant tree toppled.

"The wood-spirit is angry!' I shouted. 'Our sacrifice displeases him! To the Great Hill, fly! and witness the evidence of his wrath!'

"Terror gripped the Druids, they melted away like ghosts. I knew what they would find—a forest monarch half chopped in two, and a slow fire that had

eaten its way in. My work, my secret efforts to rescue Neridh were triumphant.

"I bent over and slashed her bonds. Swiftly but gently I set her on her feet.

"Follow me, there is not a moment to lose!" I whispered. "Make haste before they return!"

"Hand in hand down the endless forest aisles we raced. Neridh ran like a nymph, her graceful body flashing white among the shadows. Night drew on, and I saw her shiver with the chill of early evening. So intent had I been on saving her that I had forgotten her lack of raiment. I unloosed my outer robe, and scarcely pausing in my stride threw it around her as we sped onward. She gave me a quick glance of pleasure and clutched the warm ceremonial garment close to her.

"And so, deeper and deeper into the vast forest, through thickening darkness, by trails that only I knew, we ran toward safety, weaving our way past immemorial oaks and gigantic boles that had stood even before the coming of our people.

"There my dream ended. I can merely surmise that we escaped into the fastnesses of that forest. There too, since I had discovered what I sought, I could have ended my experiment and ceased energizing myself with Kappa-rays. Such self-denial was beyond either my will or my desire. I was caught in a maelstrom, farther goals lured me on, I succumbed to a magnetic spell which my own imagination had woven. How much more could I learn of what my forebears had lived? I wanted to carry my experiment to its limit. Night after night I therefore utilized the Kappa-ray in pursuit of those adventures which a part of me had long ago experienced.

"A YEAR that I do not dare to guess. I must have been a merchant, and I had gone on some annual trip to a town

far from my native land. It was a rambling town, a town of crowded, connected little clay and stone houses. It lay beneath the glare of a scorching sun, and farther out the shifting desert dunes melted into bleak, red wastelands. Its men were swarthy, bearded. They wore long and flowing robes and spoke a language that I could understand but little.

"As I walked down the narrow streets, I heard a sudden hubbub above the usual street cries. When I came to a sharp curve that had interrupted my view I halted abruptly. There was a crowd of the curious, the holy, rich and poor alike, following a stranger who paced along the sunbaked street. He was simply clad. On his face was an expression of such glory, and in his eyes a light of so divine a purity, that my first instinct was to recoil in humility. He was radiant, and the very air about his head seemed luminous with a light I have never seen elsewhere. Then I felt a great serenity come upon me, and my spirit was lifted out of me, cleansed as if I had bathed in some mystical, immortal essence.

"There came a woman who flung herself at the feet of the stranger. Her left hand was hooked like a claw, and spotted with ominous patches of white. The fingers of her right hand were withered away, and her face was disfigured. The crowd shrank back, muttering "Unclean! Unclean!" But the woman heeded them not and pleaded to the stranger with sorrowing eyes.

"He paused. I saw an expression of infinite pity and compassion shine through his eyes. I was reverent in the presence of ineffable beauty and transcendent wonder.

"The stranger stretched out his arm, and blessed the woman in a voice melodious as distant bells. I saw the claw-shaped hand become firm and rosy, the

withered arm fill out to its former symmetry, the mutilated face glow with the happiness of restored health.

"The stranger continued on his way. The woman transfigured knelt in the dust. . . .

"Day after day I kept drawing aside the veil of oblivion. Night upon night I lived again in my dreams my previous lives and ventured still farther back through vanished years. I saw Phryne pose for Praxiteles at Athens in 338 B. C. when the Aphrodite of Cnidos was taking immortal form under his hands. In Egypt I witnessed the wakening of a mummy from its tomb of ten centuries, and saw the doubtful Egyptian gods arise from crypts older than civilization. I dwelt at a lamasery near Tibet when all my future was foretold to me by priests of a forgotten cult. And ever I pursued my ancestral life backward through mounting ages. There came a night whose dream no history records, the memory of an event that must have occurred more than ten thousand years B. C.

"My lives had turned away from Asia and gone westward, beyond Egypt, beyond Greece, beyond all Europe, to a vast island or little continent far out in the wastes of the Atlantic. It was a fertile country, a land of mists and sunshine, whose people were happy in the unbroken advance of their civilization. In bays by the murmuring sea, and on slopes of the central hills, golden spires rose high above cities of white and black marble. This continent was a world by itself. There were legends of lands that lay far east from which the ancestors of these inhabitants had come, and there were occasional voyages to nearer countries westward. But they were an indolent race, safe from attack, undisturbed by strife,

living in plenty, and rarely venturing afar since there was no need to.

"SO THE fruitful years marched by, and now there came to this island kingdom the rumor of approaching disaster. In Ixenor, capital of Atlantis, Lekti, high priest of the sun-worshippers, made a prophecy of doom.

"Our god is angry. The sun shall fail above Atlantis."

"What did this strange forecast mean? The Atlantians looked at their sun-god smiling high in the heavens and could not understand. They asked of Lekti that he interpret the warning, or tell them how to appease Elik-Ra, god of the sun. But Lekti had spoken, and answered that he could only receive the message of Elik-Ra and that it was not for him to explain.

"The sun shall fail above Atlantis." A hundred virgins were sacrificed with prayers and supplications for mercy to Elik-Ra. The foundations of a great new temple facing east were laid. Days passed and there was no sign that the prophecy would come true. Gradually the Atlantians regained their faith, and went about their usual tasks again, and believed that their sacrifice of a hundred virgins had satisfied Elik-Ra. Even the prophecy began to fade from their minds, and no one quite remembered why another temple was being erected.

"But superstitious fear had taken root in my heart. I felt that words of warning, however obscure, should be heeded. There was a legend that fertile hot countries lay far east of Atlantis, beyond where any of us living had gone, whence our ancient fathers were supposed to have come and where the home of the sun-god himself was said to be. I reasoned that some terrible menace might be threatening Atlantis the golden, while

the gods bided their time. And if Elik-Ra was really angry, I could either save myself by fleeing westward, or take an offering with me and strike out east to seek the god's home across the great sea.

"I set to work and had a large new galley built for me. When the inhabitants of Atlantis heard of my undertaking, a few thought my mission could be successful, some said I was foolhardy, but the majority mocked, saying that I was mad or presumptuous since Elik-Ra had been appeased by the sacrifice of the hundred virgins. Their scorn raised momentary doubts in my mind, but I went ahead with my plans.

"Thus there came a day when sixteen slaves took their places at the sweep-oars and we set off across dark waters to seek legendary lands of the rising sun. My galley had one mast whose sail could be used in emergency or when the crew was exhausted. There was a great store of provisions aboard, and as much wealth as I owned. Beside me in silver chains lay the sacrifice I intended to offer Elik-Ra when the time came: a young girl, lovely as the fading spires of Ixenor, and with red-gold hair that flamed like the setting sun.

"We had left Atlantis at dawn. Hardly a breeze stirred. The ocean heaved undulantly in slow, sinister swells. By noon we were entering that trackless wilderness of waters where no living man had penetrated. Far behind, my island kingdom, the only land I knew, dwindled toward the horizon, becoming dream-like and misty and unreal.

"And now as the oars pulled rhythmically a strange thing happened. The waters around us changed from heavy green to a complete and frightful black. Thousands upon thousands of dead fish floated to their surface, whales, tarpon, swordfish, octopi, sailfish, and a dozen

other varieties of monsters of the deep such as had never been seen, all dead. Bubbles oozed out, vapor and wisps of steam drifted up. The sea boiled with a vast and nauseating motion. All in one instant Atlantis vanished from the horizon as the ocean reclaimed its own.

"The sun shall fail above Atlantis."

"To me alone was given understanding of the prophecy, unless my slaves remembered. Blind terror had come upon them, and they shouted wildly. I followed the direction of their eyes. From sunken Atlantis a colossal, a mountainous plateau of water extending across the whole horizon hurtled toward us. We saw it coming and we were helpless. We saw it tower overhead and engulf our galley as if it were a flock of sand. Something bumped me and I grabbed it unthinkingly. An infinite roaring deafened my ears, I was sucked under and flung violently ahead, furious forces raged everywhere. I crashed into something else, hung on, half-drowned pulled myself and my burden up. A freak of the great wave had righted my galley. With two feet of water in its bottom it raced along with the sea-wall. Not one of the sixteen slaves had been saved, only myself and Teoctel, the flame-haired, who had been thrown against me when we capsized, were left of all the millions that had dwelt in Atlantis. . . .

"I DREAMED again, in search of my ancestral lives, and for many nights my visions became increasingly barbaric. I wandered through hills in what is now Spain, where swart people dwelt in caves. I fought a woolly rhinoceros in the Balkans, ruled a tribe of blond giants in the Rhine valley. Time and again I brought down my prey with primitive weapons, or even made my kill with only my bare hands and sharp teeth. More than once

I fought, like the savage I was, to get or to keep the female of my choice.

"When the fire people discovered again the lost art of building a fire, it was I who found that meat improved by being burnt. Then the great cold and the field of ice crept down from the north, and my lives were passed in a strange warm country far to the south where my tribe had fled. And always the faces around me became more bestial, the marks of civilization fewer, until finally the only law was the law of one's strength.

"There, more than fifty thousand years ago, I halted my dreams. Did I say halted them? No, that is not quite true.

"For a week I had been feverishly writing my observations during the daytime, and poring over piles of books in order to localize in time and place the substance of my released memories. I begrudged the moments necessary for eating; it was many days since I had shaven or paid any attention to myself.

"But, as I said, my visions were becoming more savage, primitive, less varied the farther back I went. My initial excitement had begun to wear off, and on this morning, despite a certain heaviness that appeared to possess me, I felt the need of attending to my long-neglected personal appearance.

"When I bent over to draw the water for my tub, some unexpressed thought vaguely puzzled me. That thought continued to bother me while I slipped from my clothing. There is, in my bathroom, a full-length mirror; and not till I was passing it did my feeling of unease receive expression.

"For I glanced at my naked body in the mirror, and such a shock of utter horror froze me as I can never again experience on earth.

"What I saw in the mirror was a mas-

sive, shaggy, beast-like man of fifty thousand years ago!

"I can not relate the rest of that fateful day. I tried to convince myself that I was the victim of an optical illusion. Perhaps my dreams had become so vivid that they persisted even in my waking hours. My mind may have temporarily given way, I thought, and made me a victim of hallucination.

"But it was all in vain. The mirror did not lie. Each time that I returned to it, drawn by a morbid curiosity, the same appalling figure leered back at me, ape-like, brutish. Slowly the bitter truth forced its way in, though I tried to evade it. Some powerful element in the Kapparay, or some unknown organic change that it had influenced in my physical system, was causing my body to revert, to follow my brain as it went back through the ages in the trail of my ancestral lives. I had played with mysterious forces and I was paying the penalty. A physiological atavism or throwback kept pace with the transformation of my mind.

"Shuddering, sickened, I gave way to a frenzy. I raged and stormed around like a trapped animal. My hate concentrated on the Kappa-ray. That was the source of all my misfortune. But at least I could prevent this abominable devolution from going any farther. Perhaps I might even be able to regain my old self when the source of that malignant energy was destroyed. And so, hardly realizing what damage I did and caring less, I kicked the Kappa-ray box across the room, smashed it, trampled it under my feet and ground it into wreckage. Even though I could never again become as I was, yet I would check this degradation before it went farther and before it was too late.

"I do not know how long the madness ruled me. It must have been far into the

night that I finally managed to drop into the deep slumber of exhaustion.

"And that night I dreamed again! I re-lived a fierce, nomadic life in southern Italy, followed the first glacier as it retreated north, hunted the mammoth, and then roamed anew through the valleys of central Europe in the warm days before the glaciers came.

"When I wakened at dawn, I was beyond any paroxysms of despair. An apathy came upon me. I walked with dull and heavy tread, listlessly pondered over my fate. I realized now that the Kappa-ray had done its fatal work, and that I had saturated myself in an energy which I no longer had power to control. Whatever changes the ray had begun to make in my brain and my body were proceeding as freely as if they were a natural part of me.

"I could only hope that the effect of the ray would wear off in time. Sedatives, drugs, opiates, alexipharmics—I tried them all and without success. Nightly I lived backward through obscure dawn ages. Daily I wakened to find hideous and subtle changes metamorphosing me into a prehistoric creature. And what faint hope I had held died in my heart when I discovered that the rate of my nocturnal return to former life was accelerating with ever-increasing rapidity. At first I had spanned a few decades in a night, then it became a few centuries, now I bridged thousands and tens of thousands of years each time that I slept.

"I followed primitive man when he crept out of Asia half a million years ago. I lived in a luxuriant land that is now the desert of Gobi. Earth itself underwent great transformations. A continent sank under the waves, another one rose from the Pacific deep. Beasts that no living man has seen appeared in growing numbers, the curious vegetation of van-

ished eras became my habitat. There were vast saurians on land, ferocious nightmares of air, gigantic marine reptiles and monsters that battled in the warm seas.

"And always, too, there came a hotter, damper climate upon earth. Swamps and marshes became more numerous. Tropical jungles flourished everywhere, with weird, conical trees and hundred-foot ferns and evil flowers growing to incredible heights.

"SO THE years mounted by millions and the geologic ages were born again in my dreams and drifted on like a camera film run backward. The Carboniferous Age became an era of the future, the giant beasts of land decreased in number, steaming jungles and poisonous marshes covered what ground lay above water. The seas grew almost boiling. Terrific storms and deluges of hissing rain swept the globe. Not a single vertebrate now roamed upon land, only a few ephemeral moths winged their brief way through air, moths far larger than any we know, soft, immense, and spotted with gold, scarlet, indigo. But even these passed away; and life swarmed only in the almost universal sea.

"How long I have retrogressed in years I do not know, but it must be millions upon millions, beyond any computation. And it has been not only a dream that came to me, but a reality overshadowed by abysmal terror. My brain has tottered on the brink of madness and I am so far degenerated physically that for three nights I have been taking powerful injections to keep me awake. I fear another vision more than I fear death."

The husky choking voice trailed away in a low gurgle. Over me as the hours waned there had been creeping a nausea, a kind of revulsion against my loathsome acquaintance and his mad story. A perspiration had broken out all over me, and

I was about to make a hasty departure when that disgusting voice continued but in a more uncertain and throatily tired way.

"That last dream—Ugh! I shall never forget it. It haunts all my thoughts and hovers deep within me like an evil incubus ready to descend whenever I weaken.

"Dim sunlight filtered down through water that was thick with sediment and vile with elementary life. In masses of subaqueous growths lurked nasty pulpy things. The black ooze beneath heaved with soft, wriggling forms—gastropods, univalves, protozoa, cephalopods, infusoria, animalcules, and gelatinous forms of a myriad other kinds. A shadow enveloped me—I stared up. Not far above, a giant cephalopod settled toward me, its beak open, innumerable suckers quivering on tentacles that were mushy as worms. I moved slowly aside—and found myself enveloped in the ichorous filaments of a gigantic and viscous jelly-fish. I do not know what happened—I do not wish to know. Ugh! I can not convey the vertigo caused by that sticky stuff—and the clammy life-forms that originally rose in the ancient seas that once covered earth."

The voice trailed away and died, and silence descended stealthily. It seemed to me that the invalid's figure had relaxed, and I thought his head fell back. I did not wait to make sure as I stiffly stood up, for I felt uneasy, yes, and slightly afraid. I do not know why it was, but even as I recoiled physically from the stranger, so my spirit shrank as from a thing unclean or accursed. Trembling a little, I steadied myself and paced down the aisle after the briefest of muttered phrases, to which I heard no answer, if indeed my acquaintance made one.

I had about reached the vestibule when a peculiar sound impinged on my consciousness. I paid no attention to it, and

tried to quicken my step. My hand was outstretched toward the door, I believe, when that primeval cry froze me in my place and brought me facing about. It was a whispered scream that died away hideously; a sub-human, sub-animal wordless gurgle, like the death rattle in the throat of a drowning person.

Alfred Kramer may have dreamed his last dream. Psychologists tell us that the subconscious mind may work at abnormal speed when the conscious mind is at rest; and it is at least possible that a lifetime's visions paraded through the fitful slumber of Alfred Kramer during those long seconds that I required in approaching the door. I do not know. And it may be true also that I was temporarily insane. Again, I do not know. But the sight that met my eyes when I whirled about could have been merciful only to madness. One may preserve an equilibrium in a completely normal world; and a madman would find, I suppose, a certain unity in his completely abnormal world; but to face the abnormal in the midst of everyday life, to find the incredible exchanging place with the usual, that is to unite insanity with sanity and make one doubt whether normality exists at all.

For when I spun around, I saw that Alfred Kramer had somehow risen to his feet. And as I stared in his direction, a frightful change took place.

His hands dropped from his wrists and thudded to the floor. His face suddenly went awry, slipped, melted away. The clothing squirmed, bulged, ripped off.

And now I knew the meaning of those motionless lips and that pasty face. It was a mask that I had been watching.

Swaying horribly for an ageless second, what was left of Alfred Kramer shook convulsively and collapsed.

On the floor lay a writhing mass of protoplasmic slime.