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FARNSWORTH WRIGHT, Editor.

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The Nightmare Tarn

By CLARK ASHTON SMITH

I sat beside the moonless tarn alone,
 In darkness where a mumbling air was blown—
 A molded air, insufferably fraught
 With dust of plundered charnels: there was naught
 In this my dream but darkness and the wind,
 The blowing dust, the stagnant waters blind,
 And trees unknown, or pines or cypresses,
 Wherefrom a rain of ashes weariless
 At whiles fell on me, or was driven by
 To feed the tongueless tarn; within the sky
 The stars were like a failing phosphor wan
 In gutted tombs wherefrom the worms have gone.
 But though the dust and ashes in one cloud
 Blinded and stifled me as might a shroud,
 And though the foul putrescent waters gave
 Upon my face the fetors of the grave,
 As if therein some rout of skeletons
 Had washed the worm-spored tatters from their bones,
 Though all was black corruption, and despair,
 I could not stir, like mandrake rooted there,
 And with mine every breath I seemed to raise
 The burden of some charnel of old days,
 Where, tier by tier, the leaden coffins lie.

While sluggish black eternities went by,
 I waited; on the darkness of my dream
 There fell nor lantern-flame nor lightning-gleam,
 Nor any gleam of moon or sun; the wind,
 Withdrawn as in some sighing tomb, declined,
 And all the dust was fallen; the waters drear
 Lay still as blood of corpses. Loud and near,
 The cry of one who drowned in her despair
 Came to me from the filthy tarn; the air
 Shuddered thereat, and all my heart was grown
 A place of fears the nether hell might own,
 And prey to monstrous wings and beaks malign:
 For, lo! the voice, O dearest love, was thine!
 And I—I could not stir: the dreadful weight
 Of tomb on ancient tomb accumulate,
 Lay on my limbs, and stifled all my breath,
 And when I strove to cry, the dust of death
 Had choked my mouth, nor any whisper came
 To answer thee, who called upon my name!