



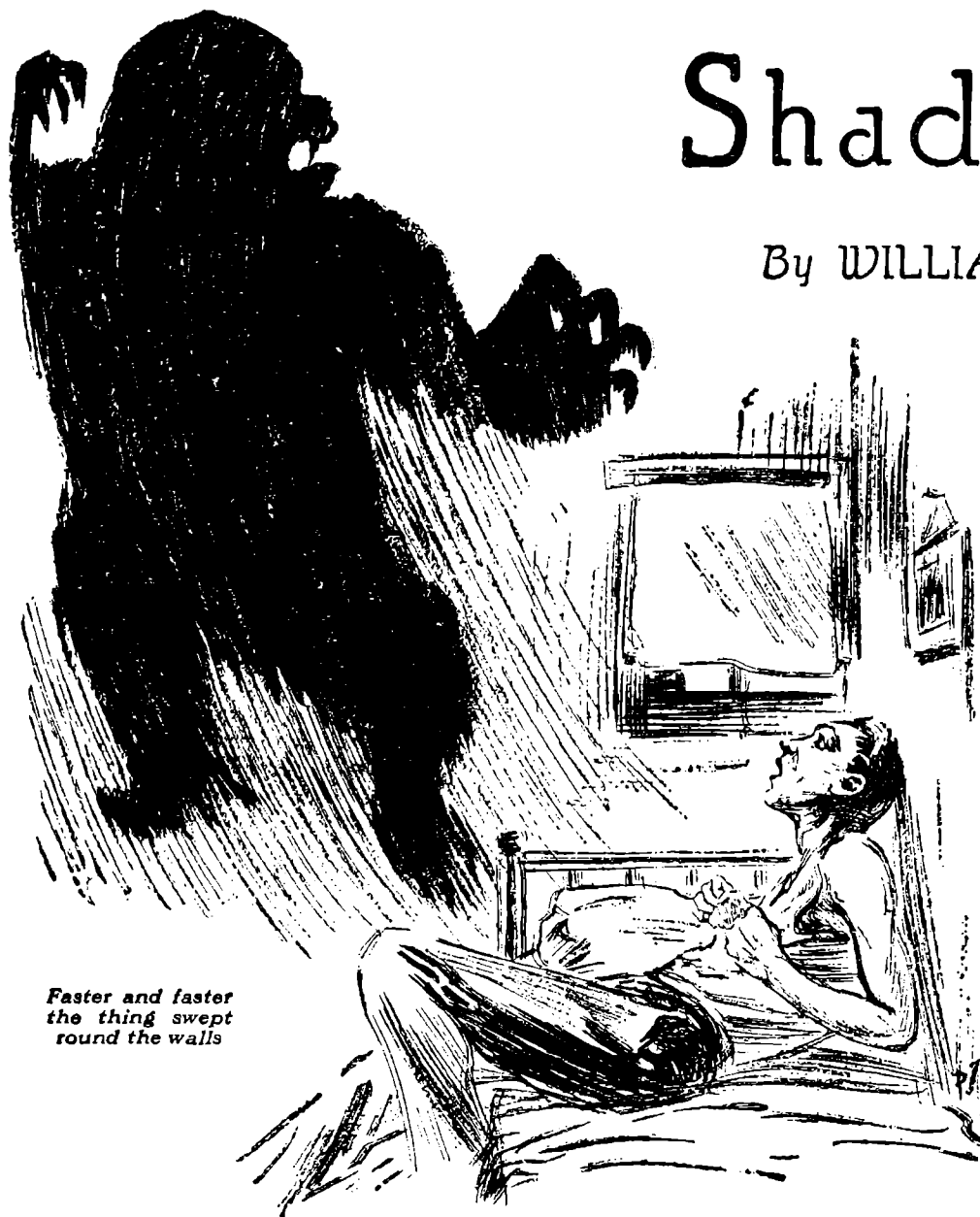
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The Room of Yellow Shadows

By WILLIAM STEVENS



*Faster and faster
the thing swept
round the walls*

*Would YOU
dare
to stay in a
place haunted
by the
ghoulish shade
of an
unseen Thing?
This reporter
did—
and thereby
discovered
the secret
of that place
of horror*

YOU may not be able to see him at all, and if you do see him you may not be able to get him to talk," said the Night Editor.

"What's the idea?" I asked. "Why should I see a crazy man for an interview?"

"I think there is a story there," replied Grantham. "It's just one of those hunches of mine. I've paved the way for you, and Doctor Farquhar expects you at the County Hospital at eight o'clock tonight. See what you can get."

Tex Grantham and I were old friends. Though I was a free lance in newspaper work, my stories of night life in Chicago had often appeared in the big daily paper of which he was Night Editor. Sometimes he tipped me off to things which might almost be called assignments—items hardly worth a regular reporter's time, and never of a pressing news nature; but some of the best stories I had written in ten years of night life had come from just such unpromising beginnings.

Here indeed was a case seeming to offer little. A middle-aged foreigner had gone violent while under the influence of moonshine whisky, and had babbled that his alarm clock was haunted. The police had clapped him into a cell to

sleep it off, but when he had slept the moonshine off he still babbled of his haunted alarm clock. He was now in the County Hospital, under observation to determine his sanity.

I could see the reasons for Tex Grantham's hunch easily enough. If a fact seemed curious to him, he believed the reason for the fact might be even more curious. What he called a hunch was merely logical reasoning based on a keen observation of life.

For my part, the stories I liked best were the ones which did have curious beginnings. People, rather than events, interested me. Tex laughingly called me his "mental specialist," and it was in line with that idea for him to suggest that what seemed a whisky-born dream about a haunted alarm clock might have a real story back of it.

I HAD ridden in more than one police ambulance with Doctor Farquhar, and he greeted me with a grin when I reached the hospital at eight o'clock. Five minutes later I was sitting beside the bed of Francois Fircone in Ward D. "Give me a chance at him alone, will you, Doc?" I begged. "Fifteen minutes," replied Farquhar with a friendly wave

of the hand as he moved away to other beds in the ward.

The man in bed before me had his head bandaged. The police had handled him roughly in taming him. He was conscious and awake, however, and willing to talk.

"I am a friend of Doctor Farquhar," I began, using the approach we had planned. "The Doctor says you are a foreigner, and without friends in the city. We would like to be your friends, and see that you pull out of this trouble all right if you will let us. I'm a little better fixed for time than the Doctor is, so I've called to see if there is anything I can do. I am a newspaper writer."

"You are right—I have no friends," said a hoarse voice from behind the bandages which partially covered the man's face. His black eyes gleamed with a light which certainly did not seem natural, as he bent on me a look half suspicious and half eagerly welcoming.

"What was the trouble?" I asked.

There was a long moment of silence, as the piercing black eyes searched my face. Then came the hoarse voice again, in good enough English, though with a slight foreign accent.

"Monsieur I am not crazy. I have been through enough to make me crazy, but I am not. What happened to me sounds impossible, but I know it happened. It was not moonshine which gave me my idea about the clock; it was the clock which drove me to the moonshine."

"Tell me about it. If you are in real trouble, we will see it through together," I promised.

"Ah, Monsieur, that is the most welcome word I have heard since I came to this great city. I will tell you what happened, and I do not care if you write about it. I have told it a hundred times already to the police, and they laughed and sent me here. Monsieur, there is something alive inside that alarm clock of mine, and it turns back the hands every night."

I could hardly repress a smile at this statement, and it must have shown in my eyes. I had had alarm clocks myself of which I could readily believe the same to be true.

The black eyes in the bandaged face regarded me with almost a glare. The man certainly was sober now, but there was no doubt that he was convinced he had been through a real and hideous ordeal, deluded though he may have been.

"You think I lie!" he cried, starting up in bed and gripping the blankets with tense hands. "Oh, my God! My God! I thought you would be a friend, but you are like the rest. I have had a nerve-breaking experience, and you, too, think I imagined it! For a week now I have sat in the dark by that clock, watching it in the faint light from the window and waiting for two o'clock to come, and every time it came—the hands on the clock began to move the wrong way! They set the time back four—six—sometimes eight hours. Sometimes they would jerk forward and back as though a child or a crazy person were playing with them, but after about five minutes it would all be over. The clock would begin its steady ticking again, but the hands would always be at a wrong hour."

"WHAT makes you think something moves the hands?" I asked. "Maybe something is wrong with the works." Here was a story sure enough, but no newspaper would handle it as an actual happening. They would give it a "laugh paragraph," and dismiss it as in the same class as perpetual-motion claims.

"In the last two weeks I have had a dozen clocks," cried Francois Fircone. "I, too, thought it was the works at first. They are cheap clocks, and I bought one after the other to try to get a good one. They all did the same thing; they all lost hours of time between midnight and morning. This week I went to bed one night and forgot to wind the clock. It was almost two o'clock when I went to bed. I lay there for a few minutes, and Monsieur—I heard that

clock begin to jump around on the table! I could hear the bumping, and I could hear the bell tinkle!"

"What did you do?"

"I thought I must be half asleep, but I got up and switched on the electric light. The clock was in the air, ten inches above the table! The second the light went on, it fell to the table on its side, and the hands had been set back four hours! I tell you the truth, Monsieur."

"What do you think makes the hands go back?" I asked after a pause during which I had done some startled thinking.

There was another long moment of silence. Francois regarded me with eyes in which excitement was rapidly fanning fright into terror.

"It is haunted!" he cried. "It is haunted, I tell you! There is something inside of it! You don't realize, Monsieur, what it is to try to sleep in a room with such company!" Suddenly the poor fellow's body stiffened, and his eyes filled with a stony glare of horror. Before I could restrain him, he had hurled the blanket off and was frantically shaking me by the shoulders.

"It may not be inside the clocks!" he shouted. "There may be something in the room which I cannot see, which creeps about and may lay hands on me some night! Oh, Monsieur I will go crazy, crazy!"

The uproar Francois had made, quickly drew half a dozen interns and nurses to his bed. They forced him back into it, and strapped him down. They intended taking no more chances.

"YOU will have to go," said Doctor Farquhar to me. "It would not surprise me if I were criticized for letting you talk to him at all. We have been watching and making notes, and they will be useful, but you will have to go now."

Francois was straining at his straps, and trying to shout through the aluminum silencer cup which was fastened to his mouth.

"Let me say just one more word to him while you are here," I begged. "I think I can quiet him a little."

"All right—one minute," said the doctor.

"Listen, Francois," I said, bending over him. "I will be a real friend to you. Do not be afraid. Get well. If you are quiet and good, and show you have a good mind, they will let you go soon. As soon as you get out, I will come and live with you, and I will not leave until we find what this trouble is and drive it away. Do you understand?"

The struggling form became quiet, and the glare died in the burning eyes.

"Did you hear me?" I asked.

The bandaged head nodded, and an indistinct murmur came from the aluminum silencer cup over the mouth which a moment before had been raving. The black eyes rested on mine—with faith and comfort, I thought—and then turned to Doctor Farquhar's face with a look which seemed to say: "I am not insane, only frightened. I

will show you I can be trusted, if you will only let this man help me."

"We'll let your friend come to see you every day while you are here, if you are good," said the Doctor to Francois—and as we turned down the ward and into the hall, he said to me, "By George, Bill! This doesn't look like the usual run of crazy cases to me. I wonder what happened to the fellow. Are you really going to live with him?"

"Yes," I answered. "I came here tonight to get a news story, but instead of an eccentric character I have found a suffering soul. I'm going to try to help him. I don't think he is crazy."

"Well," said Doctor Farquhar as we parted, "I'll save a bed here for you, in case you find the job drives you out of your head, too. And here is a tip: go and have a talk with Doctor Zeman. He makes a specialty of so-called



psychic stuff, and some of his scientific data may be useful to you. Meanwhile, if you should need an ambulance, give me a ring."

Prophetic words!

I visited Francois at the hospital every day, and he began to recover rapidly under the influence of friendship and hope. I also called on Doctor Zeman, who gave me several hours of his time and placed his library at my disposal. I found considerable scientific data which was a direct help in my problem.

Francois was discharged as sane, a week after my first call, and I went to live with him. He had a large, well furnished, third floor front room in the rooming-house district on West Washington Street. The only change we made in his previous arrangements was to add a cot for me, near the one he used.

Francois proved to be a waiter at one of Chicago's popular night clubs, on a shift which brought him home at one o'clock in the morning. He was well read, had traveled a good deal in Europe and spoke several languages well. His personality, though quiet, promised to make our association agreeable. I arranged my affairs so that I was free to meet him when his work was finished each night, and to join him before he came home.

The first night of our association began quietly. Francois seemed well poised and unafraid. We chatted until about one-thirty in the morning, and then climbed into our cots. The room was in darkness except for the faint light of the moon. We could see the dim outline of the little alarm clock on a large table near-by.

SLOWLY the hour of two approached. I could hear Francois' breathing become more rapid and nervous, and I could see that he was sitting up in bed. Except for the faint sound of his breathing and the ticking of the clock, there was absolute silence in the room. The window was wide open.

A faint breeze entered, swaying the curtains slightly. They quickly resumed their inert position, but I had the startling feeling that the breeze was still traveling about the room. Papers rustled here and there, a hanging picture tapped against the wall, and a book I had left standing on the bookcase fell to its side with a thump. Then the clock tinkled!

In spite of myself the gooseflesh went up my spine! A quick glance at Francois told me that he had thrown himself flat on his bed with his face in his hands, and was leaving the entire affair to me.

I fixed my eyes on the spot where the clock had been. To my amazement it no longer rested on the table, but seemed floating in the air a yard above it, where it moved about—sometimes slightly and sometimes violently, as though being shaken by some unseen hand. The bell tinkled frequently.

"This will not do," I said to myself. "Something is going on here beyond a doubt, but I will not find out what it is by lying still in the dark and waiting for it to explain itself."

Slipping from the cot, I softly crept on my hands and knees to the table, where I rose to my feet. The clock was floating in the air level with my breast, and seemed to be bobbing about. Cautiously I reached out and closed my hand around it. Nothing happened. I got it at an angle where the reflection of the moonlight fell on its dial, and I could see that *the hands had been set back six hours*. Silently and carefully I set the hands correctly, and then continued holding the clock in the air, with my fingers on the setting key.

The moonlight was slowly creeping across the floor, and the room was becoming lighter. I seemed absolutely alone at the table, and yet—suddenly—I could distinctly feel fingers on mine, trying to turn the set key at the back of the clock! They felt like fingers swathed in cotton wool, but they were unmistakably fingers.

"No wonder Francois got flighty if he tried anything like this many times," I thought. "This is uncanny."

Three—four—five times the unseen fingers tried to turn the key on which my restraining hand rested, and then they seemed to give up the attempt. For a moment there was a dead silence, except for the ticking of the clock and Francois' breathing; the next instant I could feel the fingers touching my shoulders, my arms, my legs, moving cautiously and lightly over my body.

To tell the truth, it got too much for me all of a sudden, and I let out a yell of revulsion and horror—and the moment I gave that yell, pandemonium broke loose in the room!

Something seemed to be hurling itself in all directions. Chairs overturned, pictures fell from the walls, and suddenly it seemed as though somebody was dashing across the table in front of me. Books and papers fell to the floor,

the table lamp went over with a shattering of glass, and then the table itself went to the floor with a crash of breaking wood. Something like cigarette smoke, caught in a draft of air, went out the open window, and then a deep silence fell.

I snapped on the wall light. Francois was crouched on his cot, the old light of frenzied panic blazing in his eyes again. I think it was that glare which steadied me, for I was ready to shriek again myself.

I put the clock on the bookcase, and sat down beside Francois.

"What was it, Monsieur?" he asked in a hoarse whisper.

"**F**RANCOIS—I don't know," I answered. "There is something wrong here. You were not mistaken. There is something we cannot see which enters this room at night. I went through this experience in the dark tonight, for it was the only way in which I could find out for myself what the actions of this Thing have been like. But, Francois, I do not believe this visitor is after you.

Whatever its purpose is, it seems to have little concern for the people in the room. In fact it seems afraid of people. Its actions seem to be a strange mixture of curiosity, timidity, ferocity and supernatural power. If such a thing were possible, I would say it was as nervous over being in this room as we are to have it here."

"Then why in God's name does it come here!" groaned the poor fellow, putting his shaking hand on my arm.

"I don't know," I replied truthfully. "It acts as though it had never *seen* a clock before, and was fascinated by it. We will find out the reason for these visits, though, and end them. You can safely go to sleep now. It won't come again tonight. I will sit up and watch, with the light on. Turn your back to the light and go to sleep."

After smoking a cigarette, he did as I ordered. In five minutes he was asleep, and I was sitting in his one big easy chair prepared to spend the rest of the night in thinking about the strange experience we had just gone through. When daylight came I was still sitting there, with two packages of cigarettes consumed, but with some new ideas. I fell asleep then, and slept until noon.

I awoke to find Francois gone, and the landlady knocking at the room door.

The Devil in the Clock

The night-club waiter raved hysterically about a haunted alarm clock—and William Stevens, a Chicago newspaper man, accompanied him to his lodgings.

There the reporter discovered a room where horrible shapes flickered across the walls—without apparent cause! What did it mean? Can a shadow be ALIVE?

"A pretty how-do-ye-do!" she exclaimed, viewing the broken table and the disordered room. "I'll tell ye what it is, young fellow, I didn't think ye looked like a reliable party when ye came yesterday. If ye are going to have any more wild parties in this room, ye can leave right now. As I was saying to Mr. Christensen, the piana player on the first floor this morning—"

"I know—I know," I interrupted. "I'm very sorry, Mrs. Scorey. "We weren't having a wild party, however—not the kind you mean. We were making some experiments, and I know we made too much noise. Would this twenty-dollar bill enable you to repair the damage?"

Mrs. Scorey accepted the twenty-dollar bill with dignity.

"As I said to Mr. Christensen," she continued, "'Maybe them two gentlemen in the third floor front are rehearsing a play where they have to murder each other,' and Mr. Christensen he says, 'Well I hope they—'" The rest of it was lost to me, for I was half-way down the stairs.

THAT afternoon I installed additional electric wiring in the room, and when I had finished, I had twenty tiny small blue lights burning in frosted globes. They were so located that they would fill the room at night with an evenly diffused, blue light. Then I moved every piece of furniture, every picture and every ornament out of the room—except our two cots.

At one o'clock that night Francois and I began our vigil again.

"What are all the little blue lights for?" he asked.

"Francois, we are going to try to *watch* whatever it is that visits this room at night," I replied. "Even a vapor which cannot be seen by the naked eye will cast a yellow shadow if in the proper light. A diffused blue light, through which a yellow light travels from the side, will cause every object in the room to cast a yellow shadow. Look on the floor at your feet."

He did as I told him. "My shadow has become yellow!" he exclaimed.

"It is supposed that a red light, used as I am using these blue ones, would make an occult presence visible to the naked eye, but in this case that has a disadvantage. Red is a color which would register in the consciousness of the manifestation. The Thing would be aware that it was being watched. Blue will not register on its consciousness, just as blue does not register on a photographic plate. If my plans work as I expect them to, we will be able to observe the movements of our visitor by its yellow shadow tonight, in a room that to us will be lighted—and yet the Thing that visits us will believe that it is unobserved and is in a dark room."

"Why did you move all the furniture out?"

"Simply in order that nothing can obstruct our view of the yellow shadow."

Francois stared at his shadow, which lay like a pool of yellow fluid at his feet; then, with a start, he turned to me.

"It is nearly two o'clock," he whispered.

"Snap out the big ceiling light, and get on your cot," I whispered back, as I lay down on my bunk.

As I had expected, the tiny blue lights in their frosted globes filled the room with a faint blue glow, while the one subdued yellow wall light sufficiently upset the balance of diffusion so that the casting of a clearly discerned shadow was possible.

"Monsieur! The window!" came a whisper from Francois.

"Do not move," I said in a low tone. "No matter what happens, nor what our visitor or I do, do not move unless I tell you to."

The lace curtain at the window swayed slight as I ceased speaking, as though a breeze had come through it, and then—*over the sill slid a yellow shadow*. No mist was visible, only that yellow shadow, and it was a huge one. It must have taken at least a second for that yellow shadow

to flow silently across the window sill and enter the room.

For a moment the shadow huddled in the center of the floor, as though puzzled by some new condition it could not identify. I was confident the blue lighting arrangement could not be the cause of this, and concluded it must be the absence of furniture in the room.

Lying motionless on my cot, and watching through half closed eyelids, I watched the yellow shadow on the floor, a shadow for which there was no visible reason. For a moment it remained stationary, as though listening, and then it moved uncertainly toward the spot where the table and clock had been. Evidently excited at not finding this familiar object, the yellow shadow seemed to begin a systematic search of the entire room, but whether for the clock or for some other object which might be the reason for its visits, I could not of course tell.

Faster and faster the yellow shadow swept round the walls. It paused for a moment beside Francois' cot, and then flowed partially over his legs. I could see the poor fellow shudder, but no sound escaped him. Finally the shadow stood beside *my* cot, and flowed partially over my legs and body. As the shadow touched me, I could distinctly feel the pressure of the same invisible fingers which had endeavored the previous night to remove my hands from the set key of the clock.

At last, as though satisfied from my motionless body, that I must be asleep, and that it was therefore free from chance of interruption or discovery, the yellow shadow seemed suddenly to act on a definite plan. It moved directly across the room and remained stationary on the floor close to the wall, moving slightly and jerkily at times as the shadow of a person might move who was working at something hanging on the wall. It remained there so long, that I, too, concentrated my gaze on the wall near where the shadow stood, and for the first time I saw the projecting steel knob of a wall safe, which had previously been concealed by a picture.

By pantomime with fingers and eyes, I asked Francois if the safe was locked. He nodded that it was, and then—with an inward prayer that he might live through the ordeal—I motioned to him to cross the room to where the yellow shadow was, and to *unlock the safe*.

As Francois drew near on this mission, the yellow shadow on the floor moved wildly, as though in anger or terrible eagerness, and when at last the trembling man stood before the safe, the shadow had fled to a near-by corner of the room and was huddled on the floor as though watching.

With swift though shaking fingers, Francois worked the simple combination of the safe lock, and then with blanched face and body bathed in perspiration, he leaped for my cot and threw himself beside me. For pure, silent courage in the face of a torturing fright, I have never seen the equal of his obedience in opening that safe.

HARDLY was the safe door open, before the yellow shadow leaped from its corner and sped to the safe. In a moment more a little shower of papers fell from it to the floor as though snatched out and dropped, and then—my startled eyes saw what seemed to be a little ivory idol burst forth from the safe cavity. The object hung in the air for a moment as if held in trembling hands, and then flew swiftly toward the open window. Underneath it—on the floor—keeping pace with its swift movement—was the yellow shadow! As it passed my cot, I was almost overwhelmed by a terrible odor, ammonia-like in intensity.

As the shadow reached the window, I pressed an extension-cord light switch which I held in my hand. Instantly all the lights in the room were extinguished, and in their place a vivid red spot-light flashed on and was directed squarely toward the window sill.

The yellow shadow had vanished, but in its place—standing upright on the sill and faintly materialized by the red light—was the figure of a gigantic man. It poised there for but a fraction of a second—there came a hollow, reverbera-

ting shriek of either triumph, fright or anger, and then the shadow and the ivory idol were gone into the night.

A cool night breeze, scented from some near-by flower box, entered the room through the still open window, and with its coming the terrible odor of the yellow shadow was swept away.

FRANCOIS had fainted. Nothing I could do restored him. I slipped into the hallway to the wall phone, and in a moment had called the County Hospital and got Doctor Farquhar on the wire. Twenty minutes later, thanks to a swift ambulance, Francois was on a hospital cot, breathing heavily, but conscious, and with his nervous and almost cataleptic seizure gone.

"What was the little ivory idol?" I asked when he was able to talk.

"I don't know *what* it was," he replied weakly. "I was in Cape Town, South Africa, a few months ago, as a waiter in the English Café there. One afternoon some English explorers who had been on a hunting trip in the interior, and who were waiting for their ship, called at the café. After serving them, I stood watching a group of their native porters in the street outside. From one of them I bought that idol. He claimed he had made it while on the hunting trip. It was a crude piece of work, with jagged ends, as though broken from a larger piece.

"When I arrived in Chicago, I put the idol in the wall safe some previous lodger had had installed in the room, not because I thought it valuable, but because it seemed peculiar."

"I'll freely admit it was peculiar!" I exclaimed. "The excitement is over, however, and you will not be visited again by whatever it was that wanted that idol."

My prediction proved true, for the terrible night prowler never again visited the room, to which we returned that night, and where we talked for hours as I wrote this manuscript.

South Africa—voodoo—head hunters—tremendous beasts! Could our ferocious visitor have any connection with any of these? Did the setting back of the clock hands simply represent the fascinated curiosity of some savage? What did that terrible odor mean? Was it the breath of the jungle?

We could arrive at no answer to our questions, and the next day I submitted this manuscript to Tex Grantham, as a news item for his paper. He read it through without comment.

When he had finished reading he said, "Bill, I can't run this story. I'll admit that I think it is all true, but the occult is something a modern newspaper won't touch. To show you that my decision is due to policy and not disbelief however, I am going to show you something which seems to have such a startling bearing on what you went through, that it makes my hair feel creepy."

He touched a buzzer on his desk, and a few minutes later he handed me a decoded press dispatch from the newspaper's representative in London, England. It read as follows:

A rather mysterious happening occurred in the anthropological section of the National History Museum in South Kensington last night.

The Suffolk Exploration Expedition to Central Africa had recently presented the museum with the skeleton of a gigantic gorilla, perfect except that a section of one arm bone was missing. For a month the directors have debated whether or not to supply this missing part artificially, but when the museum was opened at nine o'clock this morning the missing section of the gorilla's fore-arm was found clutched in one skeleton hand.

The surface of the piece of bone had been crudely carved into an idol, but the jagged ends fitted perfectly into the fractured portion of the animal's arm.