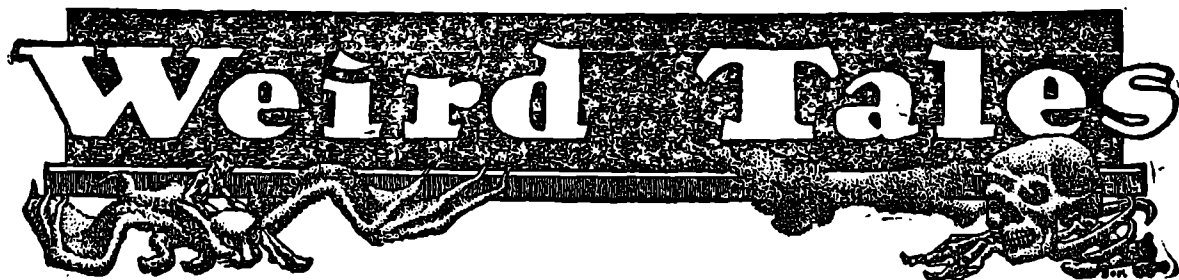


# Weird Tales



MARCH, 1952

Cover by Joseph Eberle

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*A master hand at tales of terror follows up the thought that awful, love is not, yet dead.*  
(Copyright 1927 by Popular Fiction Publishing Company)

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(Copyright 1923 Rural Publishing Company)

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Vol. 44, No. 3

D. McILWRAITH, Editor

His heart had told him she was still alive.  
... but was she?



# The Scarred Soul

BY SEABURY QUINN

WHEN Altamont Productions decided to give "White Goddess" to a waiting world they went about it in a lavish manner. The plot, concocted by two name writers in collaboration with at least a hundred earnest young men and women of Altamont's story department, was somewhat cornier than an Iowa field at harvest time, but long experience had convinced Altamont that anything sufficiently publicized would be sure-fire at the box office, and so their advertising experts had a field day.

Full-page advertisements were splashed across the country. Altamont, they announced, was looking for an unknown actress, one who had not been in pictures before, to play the rôle of the Goddess, and in furtherance of their quest they had hundreds of life-size cut-outs prepared and invited young ladies from Portland, Maine to its namesake in Oregon to step into these open silhouettes and test their measurements. Newspapers published views of simpering young women in becomingly brief bathing suits attempting to fit themselves exactly into the hole, and it was not until this fertile field had been worked to exhaustion that Altamont announced the winner was an unknown by the name of Fleur LaFleur whose measurements exactly fitted the cut-out. What they did not announce was that the cut-outs had been painstakingly tailored to Miss LaFleur's dimensions at

least a month before the contest was announced, that the lady had received her name not through the sacrament of holy baptism but through the genius of Altamont's publicity department, and that she was in point of fact none other than Joan Brown, once noted as the foremost striptease *artiste* in burlesque, but fallen out of public notice since the licensing department of New York City had banished both burlesque and Joan Brown's famous body from the purlieu of West Forty-Second Street.

ABOUT the same time Altamont announced selection of Fleur LaFleur for the part of the Goddess, Lubisi-Lubula, the great Devil-Woman of the Khiva People, stood before the throne of King Dabalah to prophesy.

Lubisi-Lubula was so old that no man could remember when she had not been as wrinkled as a spoiled melon, and among the Khiva people she spoke with finality. About the cave where she lived on the mountain-side above Dabalah's capital there stood a guard of virgins, each a perfect specimen of womanhood, each able to send home a spear as truly as the best of the young men, each dedicated to the service of Lubisi-Lubula the Devil-Woman who rejoiced in blood and suffering and demanded sacrifices of the first-fruits of the gardens and the flocks, and often of the family as well. The virgins numbered thirty-three, and every year eleven new recruits were added, replacing an unfortunate eleven who, because they had begun to age where deemed unworthy to attend Lubisi-Lubula further, and so were bound with cords and dropped into the river where crocodiles made short work of them.

"Lord King," said the Lubisi in her cracked, senile voice, "the thought comes to

my liver that the time is come for me to leave the Khiva People."

When he heard this Dabalah pressed the knuckles of his hand against his lips and licked his fingers to insure immunity from wandering ghosts and devils. His father had sat in the shadow of Lubisi-Lubula, and his father's father before him. A king of the Khiva—or the Khiva People themselves—without the Devil-Woman for prophetess, protector and demigoddess was unthinkable as a goat without horns or birds without wings. "Thou wilt not leave us leaderless, O Mighty Devil-Woman?" he asked.

"Nay, Lord King, I pass my office to another. Another comes to serve in my stead, and this shall be the sign: She shall be tall and white of skin as the bole of a lightning-blasted tree, and on her head shall be a crown of flames as if the sun had come to rest upon her brow or fire been kindled in her tresses. I have said."

Then Lubisi-Lubula, Devil-Woman of the Khiva, who had reigned in terror since the time when no man's recollection ran to the contrary, stepped into her palanquin borne by eight straight-backed virgins and was carried up the mountainside.

Just at sunrise the next day the people heard the wailing of the virgins' death-song, and when Tufulo, Dabalah's *sensi-sensi* or chief minister, went to the cave to make inquiry the guard of virgins pointed vaguely to the sky and told him, "Lord, she has gone to dwell among the mighty dead on the Ghost Mountains."

THE hot Africa moon came up slowly; its face a disc of scorched gold. So swollen was it, and so heavy, that for a time it seemed it could not struggle above the horizon, and the branches of the trees seemed to have been drawn on it with charcoal.

All about was the soft scent of the forest mingling with the sharper tang of wood smoke from the fires beneath the cooking pots and the greasy, heavy odor of food stewing in the kettles.

Miss Fleur LaFleur, not long before known as Joan Brown, stirred restlessly in her canvas camp chair. The temperature was somewhere near a hundred and ten and the relative humidity not far from ninety; the

air felt like that of a superheated greenhouse. It was too hot to eat the tinned food from the commissary; there was, of course, no ice to chill the bottled Martinis, and a lukewarm cocktail was insipid as turnip juice.

Nevertheless she had taken one, and then another, in hope of working up an appetite for food she did not want, or possibly to help her forget her surroundings. Why, and double why, she wondered, had Abernathy decided to come overland through the French country? The films of "White Goddess" were in the can and had been shipped back to America, and most of the company had gone with them, but Abernathy had insisted on the long trek overland in hope of getting a few "documentaries" which he could splice into a short feature. Besides herself the party consisted of Abernathy, Frank Bohan the cameraman, Chet Fairchild the sound effects man and Joe Mellish who had charge of lighting. Of course there was a host of porters, cooks and hangers-on, as well as several guides who seemed to have only a vague notion where they were, and a squad of *tirailleurs d'Afrique* commanded by a coffee-colored sergeant to insure safe conduct to the British territory.

The French *administrateur* had not liked the idea of their passing through the backlands of his district, but they had letters from those in authority . . . *que voulez-vous?* He had given them a parting word of warning:

"Before you reach the British country you will pass through Khivaland, and there, if anywhere, lies danger. Me, I do not greatly like the Khiva, they are untrustworthy and troublesome. Some day, when the government gives me a sufficient force, I shall go into their country and teach them what is which, I tell you! Meantime, be careful when you cross their land, and safe journey, *mes amis*."

THREE days before the five guides who had piloted them declared they knew the way no longer, received their pay and hastened back along the trail. They had been replaced by a quintette of tall, sullen men with ornaments of bone in ears and noses, teeth filed to a row of pointed tusks, and heavy spears in their hands. Miss LaFleur

had not liked their looks, but Abernathy reassured her. "They're harmless as a basketful of kittens, Fleur—"

"Kittens, me eye!" she had interrupted inelegantly. "They look a lot more like a lot of full-grown tigers to me—and tigers with a yen for my meat."

Indeed, the new guides had looked at her strangely, almost in fascination. Since work on "White Goddess" had ended she had washed the black dye from her flaming hair, now it shone like burnished copper in the shadows and glowed like molten rose-gold in the sunlight, and the guides seemed awe-struck by its brilliance. More than once she had observed them looking at her, then muttering to each other, and tapping themselves on the head.

"What a bore!" Miss LaFleur stretched shapely arms above her head and yawned at the ascending moon. "I'm going down the trail to get some air," she told Abernathy. "Want to come along?"

He shook his head and tilted the half-empty cocktail bottle over his cup. "Better not go too far, Fleur. The sergeant tells

me there are no big cats about, but just the same—"

"Oh, stay here and get drunk then, you dope!"

She turned petulantly and started down the jungle path. "I think I'd welcome a leopard as a change!"

Seeing her as she strode down the narrow trail one could not wonder that she had made a success in her profession. She wore an olive drab wool shirt left open at the throat, and her high, firm breasts seemed fighting the restraining fabric for release as she walked. Her slim waist and sleek hips were encased in khaki riding breeches, and to the knee her shapely legs were covered by high boots of the kind worn by woodsmen and Boy Scouts, but far from disguising her, the masculine apparel seemed to call attention to her femininity like a shout. No wonder audiences had gone wild when Joan Brown unzipped the fastenings of her costumes, bared her lovely arms and shoulders and the smooth expanse of torso, showing the quick play of hidden muscles underneath her white soft skin. She was feminine

as Eve, seductive as Salomé, provocative as Trojan Helen.

At the curve of the path that hid her from camp she paused and shook her head back till the glowing copper-golden waves of her hair swirled about her face and down her neck. She took a deep breath, drinking in the spiced scent of the forest, then raised her hands above her head in a luxurious stretch and yawned again. But this time her mouth remained open. She tried to scream, but no sound came between her parted lips. She turned to run, but her legs shook so that her knees seemed in each other's way.

Before her in the path there stood the biggest blackest man that she had ever seen. Great daubs of yellow and white paint were on his cheeks and forehead, a skewer of white bone was thrust through his nose, and in each ear another splint of bone was driven. His massive chest was laced and criss-crossed with a design of long-healed scars which obviously had been made for ornament. In one hand he held a knobkerry, the other he stretched out toward her. "You come," he told her, speaking the words with a grunting effort, as if he found it hard to force them out.

The sort of feeling one has in a rapidly descending elevator took possession of her stomach, and for a moment everything around her seemed to be on a turntable. As she glanced across her shoulder she saw another huge black warrior in the path, and two more emerging from the pathside bush.

"You come!" the man who barred her way repeated. Respectfully, almost gently, he laid his hand on her shoulder.

Then Fleur LaFleur fainted.

**H**OW long it was before she regained consciousness she had no idea. She had a cloudy recollection of a long, forced journey, of big black men who carried her as easily as if she were a babe in arms, of something sweetly bitter they gave her to drink from time to time, and after each drink she had lapsed once more into unconsciousness.

Now she was awake again—or was she? She seemed to be in some sort of cavern, for stone walls rose about her to a vaulted

roof that lost itself in shadows. Against the walls at irregular intervals were shallow earthen dishes in which there floated feebly burning wicks, and by the light of these crude lamps she saw she lay upon a bed of woven skins turned fur-side up. At her feet their crouched a chocolate-colored girl who waved a fan of vulture feathers, and behind the fan wielder knelt several other girls, each armed with a short sword. As she looked sleepily at them they raised their hands palm-upward before their faces, looking at her through spread fingers. What they exclaimed in chorus sounded like, "*Oom-wah-tab, Lubisi-Lubula!*" but she was in no mood to analyze their diction.

"What gives?" she asked.

She roused upon an elbow and exclaimed, half in astonishment, half in dismay. Somewhere in the course of her trip she had been divested of her clothes, and now, except for a fringe of monkey tails sewn to a girdle tied about her waist, she was as nude as the brown women kneeling before her.

Fleur LaFleur had never felt self-conscious at the lack of clothes. She was aware of the beauty of her body and the admiration it evoked; for years it had been her chief asset. She had been a little past fifteen when she had wheedled Mike Ginsberg who owned the Club Tropicque to give her a spot in his floor show. How well she remembered: she had done a fan-dance to the bleating of a four-piece "orchestra." Very little dance there had been to the exhibition, and considerably more dancer than fans. She had posed and postured in the spotlight, fluttering the inadequate ostrich feather fans coyly, then run from the dance floor to a perfunctory spatter of applause. Later, when she had developed to magnificent young womanhood, she had been undisputed queen of burlesque strip-teasers, and every theatre where big time burlesque played had proudly displayed at one time or another a sign reading SEE JOAN BROWN'S BODY! When the script of "White Goddess" required her to pose before the camera in little more than a haughty look and several strings of pearls she had not felt the least embarrassed.

But this was different. Posing nude, or virtually so, before a theatre audience or camera was business, just as an undraped model posing for a life class was performing

routine work, but in Africa clothes marked the distinction between the native and the dominant European. To be nude among clothed Americans was to be different—to be an *artiste* playing to her public. To be naked among naked savages was to make yourself one of them.

"Where are my clothes?" she demanded.

The nude girls kneeling before her shook their heads uncomprehendingly, and further questions brought no more responses.

Diversion came in the form of a meal: baked plantains served on fresh green leaves, a calabash of rich stew (this was made of succulent young dog, but as she did not know the difference she ate heartily), and finally a big bowl of mealie beer, which was very good indeed.

After breakfast she was shown into a further cave, and there a little cataract fell tumbling from a height of some ten feet into a natural basin in the rock. When she had stood beneath the waterfall, then lain in the pool for a while, she felt better. "Looks as if they don't intend to barbecue me, for a while, anyway," she told herself as she followed the brown girls back into the first cave.

THE Bantu dialect her captors spoke was a simple one, having a small vocabulary, practically no conjugated verbs and no genders to its nouns. She learned it readily and soon could carry on a kind of conversation with her guardians.

From what they told her, always with averted faces and eyes respectfully cast down, she was a sort of combination goddess, high priestess and oracle. Before she went to dwell among the shades on the Ghost Mountains her predecessor had foretold that she would come to them, "a woman on whose head there is a crown of flame, as if the sun had come to rest upon her brow or a fire kindled in her tresses," and ever since the Khiva warriors had sought her till they found her walking by the river. Her will was law, her word was a sword, and her sword death, but before she entered fully into her reign she must be "prepared."

"I hope they'll give me something more to wear," she said a little wistfully when the virgins of her guard told her the day of preparation neared.

They did, but not at all what she expected or hoped for. Upon the day appointed Kisiki, the King's chief witch-doctor, knelt and beat his forehead on the earth before her, as did his eight assistants. Then twelve roosters—four white, four black, four red—were decapitated and thrown on the ground to run and flop in crazy circles till their headless gyrations came to an end and they lay quivering and stiffening. A venerably-bearded black he-goat protested loudly when Kisiki and his assistants transfixed it with their spears and-sprinkled each other with its blood.

Except in pictures Miss LaFleur had never seen anything killed, and movie deaths were not much more convincing than movie life. This was the real thing, raw and bloody, and she retched at sight of it.

But her incipient nausea gave way to consternation when she saw Kisiki coming toward her with a bone stiletto in his hand. She gave a squeal of anguished fright when two of her guardians seized her hands and two more grasped her firmly by the hair, making it impossible for her to move her head.

Next instant she felt a sharp pain in the lobes of her ears, and saw Kisiki standing back, admiring his handiwork. They didn't need to tell her, she knew that she was ornamented like a Khiva warrior—women of the Khiva might wear loops of wire in their ears, or even discs of bone, but only warriors might wear bone rods; not even witchdoctors might thus ornament themselves.

Then, "Not that! Not *that!*" she screamed as Kisiki came toward her once more. This time he held an eight-inch bone bodkin delicately between his forefingers. "No—no, I tell you—I won't—" Miss Fleur LaFleur fought like a trapped tigress with her guardians.

Resistance was useless. Almost before she realized what had happened the long, needle-sharp bone splint had been thrust through the septum of her nose and she was bleeding profusely while a virgin of her guard knelt before her, sponging blood from her chin and bosom with a soft rag.

After that they gave her a big dish of some sweet-bitter medicine, and in a little while she fell asleep.

THE next few weeks were like a long, dark night of troubled dreams. Dimly, she remembered waking, moaning feebly in pain, and having something bitter-sweet poured into her mouth, then sinking back to sleep again to have the process repeated endlessly.

At last she struggled back to full consciousness. The pain and swelling had gone from her ears and nose, and as she glanced down she could see the eight-inch splinter of white bone projecting each side of her nostrils above her lip, and from the corners of her eyes she could detect the ends of the long skewers thrust through her ear-lobes. She raised a tentative hand to the nose-rod. To her dismay it did not budge, neither did the long white splints set in her ears. In the healing process scar tissue had formed about the savage ornaments, so that they had grown fast in their positions. They had become as inseparably a part of her as her own skeleton or skin.

She ran a frightened tongue across her lips. There was something wrong with her mouth, something in it that should not be there, or . . .

Her eyes fell on her forearm as she raised her hand to finger her nose-skewer. It looked like an earthworm—several earthworms—writhing across her skin. She brushed at the loathsome thing, and felt the sliding pressure of her fingers. What . . . ? She pressed cold fingertips against her cheek. There was a roughness there, a sort of lace-like series of swellings that when she stroked them gave back the sensation of touch.

There was, of course, no mirror in the cave, but she knew what to do. Into the farther cavern she ran, seized a lamp-dish from the wall and held it over the still water of the bathing pool.

She felt a cold sense of foreboding as she leant above the pool, but when she gazed into its limpid depths and saw the image they reflected she gave a scream that rose and flickered like a living flame.

Never in her worst nightmares had she envisioned anything so horrible. Across her brow and cheeks and chin, along the bridge of her nose and over chest and shoulders, down each arm clear to the wrist, and over her abdomen from the swell of her breasts

to her hips, there ran a lacework of discolored welts as intricate in pattern as the braid on a circus band-leader's coat. The skin had been scarred deeply with a sharp knife while she slept, and lampblack and blue clay had been worked into the cuts so that they healed in permanently raised seams of a dark liver-color. Every other one of her front teeth had been knocked out, and those remaining had been filed to a needle-point, so that she seemed to snarl like a great carnivore when she drew her lips back.

She screamed again as she beheld her image, a scream that spouted in a thin, terrible geyser of sound. Up and up the anguished cry mounted, growing shriller and more shrill until it seemed no human throat was capable of sustaining it.

Then everything was still in the cavern.

THE life-prisoner who hears the steel gates clang shut behind him knows that he has left the world he knew behind. From then on there will be no failures or successes, no thoughts of loss or gain, no hope of love or courtship or marriage.

So it was with Fleur LaFleur. Her horrible disfigurement, the savage ornaments that she could not remove from nose or ears, her almost-complete nudity, the constant presence of her guard of virgins had shut and barred the gate that never could be opened on the world that she had known. Lubisi-Lubula they called her—"the Holy Devil-Woman."

Very well, then, she would *be* Lubisi-Lubula. She would forget that she had ever been Joan Brown of Broadway or Fleur LaFleur of Hollywood; she would forswear her race and birth to be what Fate had decreed she must be. Lubisi-Lubula was a cruel demigoddess? All right, they wanted it that way, that was the way they'd have it.

Twice every month, at the new moon and the full, they bore her in her sedan chair about the fields and through the village, that she might overlook the growing crops and insure increase in the flocks. The people of the kraal fell on their faces as she passed, and even King Dabolah bowed his head and hid his eyes respectfully.

When she sat in judgment she was terrible. The old Lubisi-Lubula had ordered

thirty lashes for a trivial offender, the new one with the fiery tresses ordered hands or feet hacked off as casually as she might order gardeners to prune bushes. More times than not she ordered the death penalty and watched the executioner perform his work without the tremor of a lip or flicker of a lid.

Twice a year they offered human sacrifices to her. In the old days two youths and two maidens had been selected by lot to kneel before her cave and have their throats cut when the Lubisi gave the signal, but the new Devil-Woman could not be propitiated by such offerings.

She demanded ten, a dozen, twenty victims at each sacrifice, and sometimes took the sacred knife and did the bloody work herself.

Almost frantically she set herself the task of thinking as well as speaking in Kiswahili. In two years she discovered with elation that she was forgetting English. With a perverted glee like that with which the suicidal maniac contemplates self-destruction she looked forward to the time when, all English forgotten, she would be as completely a savage as any woman of the Khiva, speaking only savage dialects, acting, thinking, *being* the Lubisi-Lubula and nothing else, with only her red hair and blue eyes as souvenirs of a totally forgotten past.

FROM the moment she first walked on the set Frank Bohan the cameraman had loved Fleur-LaFleur. With him it was the desire of the moth for the star, the hopeless yearning for the unattainable. He saw her, tall and lissome, altogether lovely, with hair that shone like burnished copper in the shadows and glowed like molten rose-gold in the light, and from a side view he beheld her face, small-features, clearly cut as the image on a coin, with the sweet line of her chin sweeping down to the flower-stalk curve of her throat. The emotion that possessed him at the sight of her was not accurately to be called love; it was more like magic, like bewitchment, and the moment he first glimpsed her he knew that as long as his heart beat and his blood pulsed he would bear her image in his heart and cleave to her as faithfully—and helplessly—as the tides swing to the moon.

Fleur LaFleur saw in him only a compactly built small man with rather untidy hair, a bridge of freckles across his nose, and deep-set, serious gray eyes. She submitted to his orders with a gracious condescension such as that a young queen might have for the modiste who fits her gowns, she always smiled at him, but as a person he made no more impression on her than one of the cameras he handled with such magical effects.

The night she disappeared Frank was like a man possessed. He combed the jungle like a beagle questing for a rabbit, searching fruitlessly until compelled to stop from sheer exhaustion. When the sergeant and the troopers reported no clues he raged and swore at them in hysterical fury, and forced Abernathy to hold up the safari for three days while they explored still farther in the bush.

"I've heard there's a big kraal not far from here," he told the sergeant. "Feller named Dabolah's the boss there. Why don't we go and ask him what he knows about her?"

"*Mais ici, M'sieu l'Americaine, ce n'est pas possible!*" the sergeant, who was a full-blood Yafouba, achieved a shrug that would have done credit to a boulevardier.

"Why the hell ain't it possible here?"

"This is the Khiva country, M'sieu, and Khivamen are very bad peoples. At times they practice *le cannibalisme*. They are the last cannibals left in the territory, and are very warlike, very treacherous, very fierce. If we had a battalion—or better still a regiment—I should gladly go to them and say, 'My friends, produce the lady with the flaming hair, or we shall do unpleasant things to you,' but"—once more he shrugged in helpless resignation—"I have not a battalion or a regiment, or even a full company. It would be foolhardy to attempt it. *Voilà tout.*"

So the safari crossed the rest of the French country at forced march, went into British territory and eventually reached Free-town. Then they went back to California and work.

But never for a moment did the thought of Fleur LaFleur leave Frank Bohan. His salary was a large one, for he was a top-notch technician, and as no one expected



him to live in the style of a star or director, he saved most of it. In three years he had enough to make possible a plan which he had nursed since Abernathy and the sergeant gave up the search.

The French *administrateur* viewed his plan with a dim eye, but a present of two cases of Pernod brightened his outlook. "But it is impossible!" the *sous-officier* of *tirailleurs* declared, but when he heard that Bohan was prepared to pay a bonus of five cartons of American cigarettes and ten American silver dollars to each member of the expedition he was all enthusiasm. Two weeks later Bohan with an escort of a full platoon of native troopers and armed with a machine gun camped five hours' march from Dabolah's capital.

The moon-stained shrubbery of the jungle was a mass of purple shadows and shifting highlights. Northward the low hills rose and dipped and rose again like the back of a nesting bird, and behind them, like an Oriental lamp, rose the bleached disc of the African moon. "It wasn't far from here she disappeared," Frank told himself. "That guy Dabolah has his place right over yonder," he nodded toward the hills that rose against the horizon in a low saw-toothed line.

"I'll go in alone and give him a good sales talk—and have the troopers ready to close in with the machine gun . . ." He rose, made sure his pistol was all loaded and in order, and nodded to the sentry. "If I'm not back here by daylight, you know what to do."

"Perfectly, M'sieu," the trooper answered. He had heard the plan discussed a dozen times.

"Now, let's see," Frank halted to take a bearing. "If she'd gone down this way—that's toward the river—she would have turned about here . . ." The impact of a knoberry against his head was like the sound of a fist struck into an open palm, and he went down as bonelessly as a rag doll from which the sawdust has been ripped.

A GREAT fire roared against the darkness some fifteen feet away, and he could feel its heat against his cheeks. About the edges of the zone of firelight he could see the sheen of sweat-slicked bodies and

the whites of intent, hostile eyes. Somewhere in the shadows a drum sounded with an urgent rhythm. There was insistence and a sort of chuckling fiend-joy in the hollow booming of the taut skin. Across the fire from him, his body streaked with sweat and hideous with ceremonial scars, a fat man with a leopard skin draped on his shoulders sat and looked at him with dull, lack-luster eyes, and to the fat man's right and left there stood a double rank of warriors with long spears in their hands. Beside the warriors there crouched a group of old men, wrinkled as worn-out shoes, with snakeskins braided in their hair and necklaces of human toe- and finger-bones about their throats. Witch doctors!

For what seemed like a week he strained against the grass ropes binding wrists and ankles, and the fat man in the leopard skin sat watching him in moody silence. The utter silence was more terrifying than a chorus of warwhoops; the fixed eyes of the king and people bored into him like a dentist's drill, the terror of the unknown and unguessable plucked at his nerves like a harpist at the harp strings.

Suddenly the stillness crashed. A wave of whispered warning rippled through the crowding savages: "*Lubisi-Lubula, Lubisi-Lubula!*"

From somewhere in the shadows back of the fire came a double rank of tall young women, each with a spear in her hand, each adorned with a string of white beads, and nothing else. Behind them came eight more tall, lithe, naked maidens walking ceremoniously under the poles of a sedan chair, and after them came other armed young women.

The litter-bearers set their burden down and from the palanquin there stepped a figure hewn full-membered from a nightmare. The face was terrifying as the accusation of a guilty conscience, for on brow and cheeks and chin there lay an intricate lacework of liver-colored scars, and through the nose was thrust a length of human shin bone, while in each ear a similar savage ornament was pierced. Upon the chest and stomach, too, was an elaborate design of blue-purple scars like those worn by the most distinguished savage warriors, and up each arm from wrist to shoulder was a network of dis-

colored scars, as if worms crawled upon the flesh.

When the mouth opened in the mutilated face he saw that every other front tooth had been knocked out and those remaining filed to a point—the mark of highest distinction among the cannibal tribes.

But the body! Graceful as a young tree in the wind, with delicate, slim wrists and ankles and a neck like the stem of a flower. And as if they drew sustenance from the rest of her, her breasts were ripe and full and lovely almost beyond imagining. When she stepped it was with a peculiar lightness, and the curves of her high insteps were arching lines of loveliness.

The smattering of Kiswahili he had picked up enabled him to understand her: "Lord King and people of the Khiva, I claim this one as mine. You all have seen me deal out death, you all know I am a stranger to pity. To this one I shall do as does the spider to the fly. *Hyab!* I shall tear his throat out with my teeth and drink his blood as it runs hot and gushing from his neck. Bring him to me in my house-in-the-mountain. I have said."

The room in which he lay seemed some kind of cavern. Skins lay like rugs upon the floor, on a raised platform stood a bed of carved wood, and on the walls were native lamps which shed a faint and smoky glow. By their light he could see her standing at the far side of the room, and when she spoke her lips curled back from pointed teeth like those of some great carnivore about to pounce. "Get out!" he heard her tell the virgins of her guard. "Begone while Lubisi-Lubula slakes her thirst and eats her fill!"

The maidens of the guard bent foreheads to the floor and crept from the dread presence of the Devil-Woman twittering with fear. Who knew if she might choose one of them for dessert?

She stepped toward him, as he lay bound and helpless, and he could see the light flash on her pointed teeth.

But there was no fear in him, only a great pity as he asked, "Fleur—poor Fleur!—what have they done to you?"

She stopped in mid-stride, almost in mid-breath.

"Frank Bohian, you know me?" She

spoke slowly, hesitantly, as though she had to feel and fumble for each word before she brought it out.

His voice was soft with tenderness. "How could I fail to know you, Fleur, seeing I

have had no thought of any one but you since the moment I first saw you?"

"Oh!" Her sob was like the cry of a hurt animal. "Oh, Frank, *no!*"

"You knew I loved you, Fleur? You couldn't help but know it. I've thought of you so constantly since they stole you that night that at last I had to come and look—"

Her smile was a mere writhing of the facial muscles, making the grotesque scars on her face do a macabre dance. "And you found me—like this!"

"Untie me, Fleur," he begged, then, when she took a short sword from the wall and slashed the cords that bound his wrists and ankles: "I've hunted you almost a year. I *knew* you were alive. No matter what they told me—no matter what my brain said, my heart told me you were still alive. I've got a platoon of troopers—with a machine gun—ready to close in; they'll march into the kraal if I don't show up by daybreak. We'll take you back—back home—"

Her laugh was a dreadful thing, as shocking a scream of pain. "Like this?" she ran her hands across her hideously scarred face and body, then touched the bone spikes grown fast in her nose and ears. "What would you do with me, put me in a Coney Island sideshow? 'The Wild Woman from Africa?'"

"We'll have a plastic surgeon take 'em off, Fleur. They can do wonders—"

She broke in: "Short of flaying me no one could take these scars off, Frank. They're more than skin-deep; they reach clear down to the flesh underneath. And even if a plastic surgeon could take the scars off my body, what sort of surgery should we need to take the scars off my soul? I've sent hundreds to their death for no reason at all; I've demanded human sacrifice; sometimes I've done the butchery myself. I've eaten human flesh like any other cannibal. What surgeon could cut out those memories, what priest could grant me absolution for those sins?"

"I love you, Fleur."

"Poor Frank, to have loved so loathsome a thing!"

He knelt beside her, resting his cheek

against her knees, and for a long time there was silence in the cave, then:

"You told them back home you were coming to look for me?"

"Of course."

"Then listen, Frank. You must go back; you must tell everyone that Fleur LaFleur—or Joan Brown, if you please—is dead, but that you found her grave. Joan Brown—or Fleur LaFleur—is dead, Frank, and this cave is her sepulchre."

"But—"

"No buts, my dear. I can't go back. I am as powerless to go back as if my body were indeed dead and I only a ghost. It would have been far better for me if they'd killed my body, but they didn't. They killed my soul, and so my body has to stay and haunt the place where my soul died."

He took her hand and held it to his cheek, then kissed it slowly, first one finger, then another, and finally the smooth palm. "Please, Fleur—"

"You must go quickly, Frank. There is another entrance to this cave—I'll show it to you—and if you hurry you can meet the soldiers before daylight. Please, if you love me as you say you do, you *must* go back and tell them Fleur LaFleur is dead, and that you saw the place where she is buried."

Beside the secret exit of the cave she halted and gave him her hand, and he kissed it once more. "Follow the path straight down the mountain, then turn left," she told him. "You'll meet the soldiers on the way, and—hurry, hurry, dear, there's not much time till daybreak."

At the turn of the steep mountain path he looked back. The moonbeams picked her out as if she stood upon a darkened stage in the glow of a spotlight. None of her disfigurements was visible in the soft light, but her lovely body shone like pearl in the moon-radiance.

She raised her hand in a gesture of farewell. "Good bye, Frank darling. Good bye! And Frank—"

"Yes?" he halted at the call.

"Don't forget, dear. Give my regards to Broadway!"