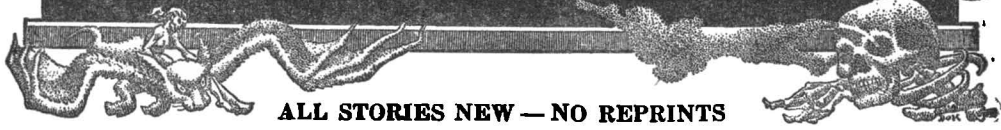


# Weird Tales



ALL STORIES NEW — NO REPRINTS

November, 1943

Cover by A. R. Tilburne

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*Except for personal experiences the contents of this magazine is fiction. Any use of the name of any living person or reference to actual events is purely coincidental.*

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# The Third Cry to Legba

By MANLY WADE WELLMAN

Suddenly I was aware of great shapes moving in the rain, and heard the sound of voices that were not of my city nor yet of any that I ever knew.

—LORD DUNSANY,  
*The Madness of Andelsprutz.*

THE glare and the clatter died at the same instant throughout the Club Samedi. Even the buzzing crowd-noise suspended in expectation. Behind the orchestra sounded a gong. Once. Twice. Thrice. . . .

The master of ceremonies intoned:

"Midnight. The witching hour. And Illyria!"

The gong chimed on to twelve, and stopped. A clarinetist piped certain minor notes. A mixed quartet began to croon:

*"Ibro mahnda . . . ibro mahnda . . ."*

A spotlight, dim and brownish, bored through the smoky air. Into it paced a black-robed figure, bowed face hidden under cascading black locks. To the center of the dance floor moved the silent, slow shape. *"Ibro mahnda . . ."* breathed the quartet.

A sudden explosive gesture. The robe swirled away, the head lifted. There stood a woman, a long-limbed dancer figure, clad as scantily as night clubs permit. Her face was lovely, tense, rapt. Her eyes burned out of slant sockets. The clarinet squealed louder, a tom-tom slogged into rhythm. The dance began, grotesque, nimble, quickening.

The dancer's flower-mouth spewed out words, soft and solemn:

*"Legba choi-yan, choi-yan Zandor—  
Zandor Legba, immole'—hai!"*

Louder sang the dancer called Illyria, and louder grew the quartet's obligato—  
*"Ibro mahnda, ibro mahnda. . . ."*

Illyria spun her body. Her flying hair strained outwards in a bushy umbrella. Her arms writhed like snakes, seeming to glide caressingly over her body. Her bare, rouged toes clapped out a pattern of sound in time with the drumbeat. She sang always:  
*"Zandor Legba, immole'—hai!"*

And suddenly she froze into a strange, updrawn statue, face lifted, hair back, arms out. At the same instant all the music hushed. A tuxedoed attendant stole into the spotlight's brown glow, holding out a fluttering something—a rooster, speckled black and white. Greedily Illyria seized it, her long, strong hands clutching. The sickening crackle of broken bones was audible. She dropped the rooster, which flopped spasmodically. The attendant seized it and backed away. Illyria snatched her cloak and sped out of sight. Lights came up, the orchestra played a gay flourish.

"You've just seen an authentic voodoo dance-ritual," blatted the master of ceremonies into his microphone. "Never done before, except in a real meeting of the cult—but it'll be done tomorrow midnight, and the midnight following, and every midnight after that. . . ."

John Thunstone's table was well back from ringside. He was a man almost

Heading by FRED HUMISTON

*The keeper of the Gate must be invoked to open the way between worshiper  
and other-world; the password is a voodoo sacrifice.*



too big to be reassuring, and most of his clothes had to be tailored especially for him. His hands and eyes were sensitive, his big nose had been twice broken, his black hair and mustache showed a little streaking of gray. He sat as relaxed as a big contented cat, and sipped his highball. His eyes gazed somehow hopefully at his companion.

She was as blonde as John Thunstone was dark, of medium height and of figure both full and fine. Above her dark velvet gown her bare shoulders and arms were creamy white. Her large, level eyes shone bluer than the sapphires at her ears and throat. Her lips smiled without parting, in the manner associated with the Mona Lisa and the Empress Josephine. "Was it what you expected, John?" she asked gently.

He rocked his big, close-combed head in what might have been yes or no. "It gave the impression of authenticity," he temporized. "Not that I'm well grounded in voodoo."

"You always were sunk deep in occultism and magic," she rallied him. "Deeper than you'd admit to anyone. Even to me."

He looked at her sidelong. "And you were piqued, eh? Enough to go abroad because you thought I wasn't telling you all I should of my studies—to go abroad and marry Count Montesecco—"

"Which is past, and not particularly nice to bring up."

He sipped again. "I never meant to snub you, Sharon. Not then or now. But the little I know of magic spells danger. And I don't want to let anyone in for it. Least of all you. I hope you don't still condemn me."

Her small hand crept across to touch his big one. "I'm with you tonight. Isn't that enough?"

He looked as if it wasn't, and listened to the dance music. Then: "No, I'm not

well grounded in voodoo. Don't understand it at all. Neither, I suspect, do the voodoo worshipers themselves. After all, what is voodoo? African jungle worship, or modified European witchcraft, or both—or neither?" His eyes seemed to study something unseen to any but himself. "Did you hear the words of that ritual?"

"French, or French patois, weren't they?" suggested the lady he called Sharon. "That quartet sang something like '*ibro mahnda*.' Mightn't they mean '*hereux monde*'—happy world?"

"Or perhaps '*ira au monde*'—roughly meaning, 'it shall happen to the world.'"

"Which I call ingenious interpretation," said a voice beside the table, a voice soft, deep and gently amused.

Thunstone shot up out of his chair with that abrupt transition from relaxed ease to ready action which sometimes irritates his friends. He faced someone as tall as himself, and broader, almost deformedly deep of chest. Above European-cut dress clothes and jeweled studs not in the best of taste rode a huge high-craniumed head, either bald or shaven, with a grand hooked nose and eyes as gray and cold as frozen milk.

"I am also an enthusiast for voodoo," said the newcomer silkily. "May I introduce myself? Rowley Thorne."

He offered a big, over-manicured hand. Thunstone took it.

"I'm John Thunstone. Countess, may I present Mr. Thorne? The Countess Montesecco."

ROWLEY THORNE gracefully kissed her fingers. Without waiting to be invited, he sat down in a chair between them. "Waiter! Champagne, I think, is best traditional usage for cementing of new friendships."

The champagne was brought. Rowley Thorne toasted them, and his gray eyes narrowed over the glass. "I was sitting almost back of you, and heard your won-

derings about this Illyria and her dance. I can help a little, I have traveled in Haiti. Yes, the ritual is authentic, an invocation of Legba."

"Legba?" echoed the Countess. "A voodoo god?"

"One of them. Damballa is more important, and Erzulie perhaps more picturesque. But Legba is the great necessity. He's keeper of the Gate—must be invoked to open the way between worshiper and other-world, to permit prayers to mightier gods. It's like speaking a password. Impressive, that bit with the fowl. Other voodoo sacrifices are killed by cutting the throat. Legba's sacrifices die of a broken neck."

The Countess shivered, and Thunstone saw. "Suppose we change the subject," he said.

"Suppose we don't," she rejoined warmly. "Mr. Thorne is willing to talk of magic, though you aren't. And I'm fascinated. Tell us more about Legba, Mr. Thorne."

"He's said to be a shaggy or furry creature with red eyes. He's also called Baron Cimmiterre—master of the graveyard—and Baron Carrefours—master of crossroads. The prayer to him for opening the gate is always preliminary to a prayer elsewhere."

The Countess' blue eyes were bluer. "And what can Legba, Baron Cimmiterre, Baron Carrefours, do for a worshiper?"

"He can but open the gate," said Rowley Thorne. "Hark, music—Latin American. Will the Countess honor me?"

Thunstone rose and bowed them away from the table, but did not sit down again. As the Countess danced off with Rowley Thorne, he swiftly skirted the outer fringe of tables, spoke earnestly to the head waiter, offering some bills. The head waiter led him to a side passage indicating a row of dressing room doors. "Number two, sir," he said and Thunstone knocked.

"Who is it?" asked a woman's voice from within.

"Press," said Thunstone. "After a feature story."

The door opened. Illyria smiled there, hastily wrapped in a robe of flowered silk. "Come in, Mr.—"

"Thunstone."

He entered. She gave him a cordial hand, and sat down by her dressing table. "What paper, Mr. Thunstone?"

"I write for magazines and syndicates," he said truthfully. She accepted a cigarette from his case, and he went on: "I'm interested in your voodoo dance."

SHE chuckled. "Oh, that. I was in Martinique a year ago. My doctor said I had to have fresh salt air and warm weather. Martinique was cheap, and I was broke—don't print that, though. Say I was fascinated enough to join the voodoo cult. Because I was."

"Many white people in it?" asked Thunstone.

"Quite a few. But I think I was the only practical one. I knew I could make a sensation with voodoo stuff. And haven't I? Before this season's up, I'll be signed for a revue. After that, maybe stardom."

Thunstone looked at a bright print on the wall. "Isn't that a saint's picture—John the Baptist?"

"It is and it isn't." Illyria smiled at his blank look. "The voodoo people want pictures of their gods, to use for idols. The best they can do is regular holy pictures. For Damballa they use St. Patrick—because of the snakes. And John the Baptist is the hairiest, so they take him for Legba. That print was given me by the *houngon*, the medicine man you can call him, when he got real pictures."

"Real pictures?" echoed Thunstone.

"Some artist was making them, someone on Haiti. The Legba one would scare a top sergeant." She shrugged her shoulders

out of the robe in a mock shudder. "The artist's name was Thorne."

Thunstone stared. "Rowley Thorne?"

"Maybe. Rowley or Roland or something. I never met him, he stayed close to the big shots in Haiti. Now, what publicity pictures will you want?"

"Later," he said. "May I call again? Thanks."

He returned to his table, just as the Countess and Rowley Thorne finished their dance.

"Jealous?" smiled the Countess Montesecco in the homeward taxi. "Miffed because I found Mr. Thorne attractive?"

"Should I be?" Thunstone smiled back. "He was informative about voodoo."

"Wasn't he, though? No mock-mysterious puttings off on his part. He wants to explain all the things you've held out on me." Her smile grew wistful. "Men usually like to talk to me, about themselves and their interests. You're different from them all."

"Different, I hope, from Rowley Thorne."

"Which sounds as if you know more about him than you admitted. Here's my apartment house. Come upstairs and tell me about him."

"I'll come up," said Thunstone, "but I'll not talk about Rowley Thorne. Because he's part of the magic that the world had better not know about."

**T**RUE to his stated policy, Thunstone did not ask the Countess to go back with him to the Club Samedi on the following night. But as he entered, after 11 o'clock, he wished he had. For she sat at a choice table, well forward to the floor show, with Rowley Thorne.

The lights seemed to blur, and the torch singer at the microphone—loud though she was—faded into the back of his consciousness; but he was sure he betrayed nothing of being startled or disappointed as he

moved between the tables and Rowley Thorne stood up with a gentle smile of greeting.

"Mr. Thunstone, I was a guest at your table last night. Sit at mine tonight. Sharon said that she was sure you would come."

Sharon, he had said. They were at first names, she and Rowley Thorne. He looked down at her and said, "It's so nice to see you again. Thanks, Thorne. But it's my turn to buy a drink, eh? Waiter, the lady will have an old-fashioned. You like champagne, Mr. Thorne?"

"Champagne cocktail," ordered Thorne.

"Scotch and water," added Thunstone. As the waiter moved away, he said to Thorne, "This will become one of my favorite night spots."

"Illyria is a great drawing card," purred the other, his gray eyes estimating the throng of guests. "Not long now until her midnight act. Ever study the importance of midnight in occult ceremonies, Thunstone? It's exactly midway between sunset and sunrise. Allows the supernatural force to split the dark hours halfway—half for the summoning of courage and strength to come forth, half to do whatever is in hand to do."

"That's the kind of thing John always refuses to explain to me," interjected the Countess.

"You know why," he smiled to her. Then, to Thorne: "Last night you borrowed my lady for a dance. May I borrow yours?"

The singer had finished, the orchestra played. Thunstone and the Countess glided away together. Her bright hair came up to his chin. She gave him a quick, appraising flash of blue eyes.

"I really came here to meet you," she said. "You wouldn't invite me, so—"

"So you asked Rowley Thorne to oblige?"

"Hardly. He telephoned me. Entertaining gentleman, to find my address and so on. We had dinner, a theater, and lots

of fascinating talk. About your forbidden subject. Why don't you approve of him, John?"

"Haven't I said that I wouldn't talk about him?"

"And I suppose you won't, even to show me that I shouldn't go out with him any more. You're pretty stern in your policy. Or is it too strong a word, policy? Shouldn't I say prejudice or obsession?"

"I'm afraid," he said slowly, "that I'm a very old-fashioned dancer."

"Which means that you dance only to please me. I'm really flattered, John."

Their dancing continued in silence. When they returned to the table, their drinks waited. Rowley Thorne was charming, exhibiting a strange ring with a cabinet setting, which he said had once held poison for a Borgia; and he had begun a good-humored discussion of thought transference, when the lights and sounds ceased as abruptly as before. The gong tolled, the master of ceremonies spoke: "Midnight. The witching hour. And Illyria!"

She was there, in the brown spotlight, throwing off her robe to dance and chant. "*Legba choi-yan, choi-yan Zandor—*"

Thunstone felt a sudden light touch on his hand. Sharon, the Countess Montesecco, wanted to hold hands in the dark. For reasons of his own, he drew his fingers away, straining his eyes to pierce the gloom. Because something was there with Illyria, who should be alone in the center of the dance floor—it wasn't time yet for the man with the speckled rooster—

*"Legba choi-yan, choi-yan Zandor—  
Zandor Legba, immole'—hai!"*

THAT old trick, taught him long ago by a Pennsylvania Dutch coon hunter—Thunstone closed his eyes tightly for a moment, then opened them wide. The darkness paled ever so slightly, to a sort of bluish dusk, and he saw it, saw the stir

of motion above Illyria's tossing head. Branches of a tree, with long trailing leaves or moss—branches, or their shadow, here in the Club Samedi, far from any natural growth of any kind—and along the branch lay and quivered something, a definite hulk of substance that moved and lived within arm's reach of the dancer. . . .

*"—immole'—hai!"*

The speckled rooster was in her hands. She caught it by the neck, forced its head back and around. *Crrrrrack!*

Overhead something seemed to sag down for a moment, like a strand of fabric, or a tentacle, or an arm. Next moment Illyria was gone, the attendant with the dead rooster was gone, the lights were blinding, and—no branch showed waving from the ceiling.

"Tomorrow midnight will see Illyria repeat the voodoo-dance," the announcer was shouting, "and the midnight after that. . . ."

Thunstone got up. "Good-night," he said, and bowed toward Sharon. "This is all I came to see."

"Must you go so soon?" she pleaded, and he nodded that he must. "Good-night, Thorne. I'll see you again. Later."

He put money in the waiter's hand and strolled away to the cloak-room. Retrieving his hat, he turned to go. Rowley Thorne was there beside him.

"You said you'd see me later," said Thorne. "Why not see me now, Thunstone? You know, I know all about you. You're an exhaustive researcher into certain things, to destroy them. I'm surprised that you don't know me."

"I do know all about you, Thorne, or as much as I want to know. I just didn't let on. You were kicked out of two European universities for pursuits the faculties abhorred. The police of France, England and India have all issued you standing dares to set foot on their territory. You'd be a known international crook if it wasn't for the fact that you steal or swindle only

enough to support you in luxury for your activity in the very thing I've been fighting."

Rowley Thorne bowed. "You being what you are, I wouldn't want any other estimate of myself from you. We've been on opposite sides for years, and now we're face to face. One of us will be hurt."

"I'm sure of that," said Thunstone. "Good-night, Thorne."

Thorne did not move from his way. The gray eyes were pale as moonlight. "I don't think, Thunstone, that you can afford to play tricks with me. For I haven't any vulnerable point. And you have, sitting at my table yonder."

Thunstone returned his stare. Where Thorne's gray eyes narrowed, Thunstone's widened a trifle.

"The Countess is charming," Thorne almost crooned. "You've thought so for years, haven't you? And yet you let her get away from you. Another man got her. Perhaps that will happen again."

"The future will tell," Thunstone replied. "I recognize her appeal to you, Thorne. Money, isn't it? She's rich."

"I'll need money for what I intend to do, for which the ground work is two-thirds complete." Thorne stepped aside and bowed. "I mustn't detain you longer, Thunstone. Good-night. Sleep well. Maybe I'll send you a dream."

Thunstone left the Club Samedi, but he did not sleep. He visited three people, all of them among his friends and all of them owing him favors.

**F**IRST of these was a high official of the New York police. The man argued vehemently but futilely against what Thunstone demanded, and finally agreed. "I don't know what the charge can be," he mourned lamely.

"Find one, and thanks."

Thunstone's next stop was in Harlem. He entered the modest but comfortable

home of a smiling brown man who wore the round collar and high waistcoat of a preacher, and who shook Thunstone's hand warmly. They talked for a while, and the brown man's smile vanished. He took books from a shelf. The first of these was gaily striped in red and blue.

"'Tell My Horse,' by Zora Neale Hurston," said the brown man. "She's a Barnard graduate, a Guggenheim fellow, an anthropologist, and an open-minded truth seeker. She traveled a year in the West Indies, and wrote this book. Lippincott published it in 1938." His sepia-tinted finger found a place for Thunstone. "Read right there."

Thunstone noted the page number, 171. He began to read aloud: ". . . for Legba is never honored alone. He opens the gate so that the other gods come to their worshipers."

"Exactly," nodded the brown man, and leafed backward in the book. "Now. Read again."

**T**HUNSTONE did so: "The way to all things is his hands. Therefore he is the first god in all Haiti in point of service."

The book fell shut, and the two men looked at each other above it.

"I'm thinking of an old legend, almost an outworn one," said Thunstone. "It's about a sorcerer's apprentice, who raised devils without thinking of the consequences. What's that next book?"

"It's by Montague Summers, the greatest authority on witchcraft." Brown hands opened it. "Here's the reference. He says that those who attend the ceremonies of evil without protesting or trying to stop them become, by acquiescence, participants in the cult. That would hardly include you—you attend to learn how to fight such things. The others, whether deliberately sympathetic or just unknowing, become cult-members."

"I hope not all," said Thunstone, think-



ing of fair hair and sapphire eyes. "And the third book there?"

"It's by Joseph J. Williams. Like Summers, he's a priest, a Jesuit. As a resident of Jamaica, he studied and wrote of voodoo and obeah. He mentions the missionary-effort of the cult to spread, and how the worshipers hope to transplant their evil spirits to other lands."

Thunstone frowned in thought. After a moment he said: "Legba, then, is to be invoked in conjunction with a prayer to some other spirit. But here he's invoked alone. Twice."

"A third time in succession—that's pretty familiar magical routine. He may give attention, and do something else beside open gates."

"Exactly." The dark man's head nodded slowly. "And, in a new place, a new power to profit—evil profit—will be placed in the hands of certain cult-founders. Your acquaintance, Rowley Thorne, won't have overlooked the chance. It is best that the ritual be somehow prevented this coming midnight."

"I think I've attended to that," said Thunstone. "And I half guessed these other matters. But I'm grateful for your agreement. I take your word on voodoo-fighting as better than any other man's. Well, I shan't keep you up any later."

"Heaven protect you," said the brown man in farewell.

Thunstone grinned. "Heaven's supposed to protect all fools."

"Yes, and all fighters for the right. Good-by."

His third call was to a small shop in a big building in mid-town. It was open, and a single person, a little grizzled old fellow, in charge. He greeted Thunstone warmly.

"I want," said Thunstone, "protection." "For yourself?"

"Not for myself. A woman."

"Come into the back room." Thunstone followed the proprietor into a musty work-

shop. From a table the little man took a black velvet case and opened it.

"Silver," he pronounced. "Sovereign defense against evil."

"And set with sapphires," added Thunstone. "So much the better for my purpose."

"Observe, Mr. Thunstone, the pattern of the brooch. An interweaving of crosses. That flower, too—"

"A blossom of St. John's wort," said Thunstone. He peered at the brooch. "How old is it?"

The grizzled head shook. "Who can say? Yet the man I got it from says that it's a good thousand years old, and that it was designed and made by St. Dunstan." Shrewd old eyes twinkled at Thunstone. "Dunstan sounds like Thunstone, eh? He was like you, he was. A gentleman born and bred, who studied black magic—and caught Satan's nose in a pair of red-hot pincers!"

"How much?" asked Thunstone.

"To you, nothing. Not a cent. No, sir, don't argue. I owe you my life and more. Where shall I send it?"

"I'll give you the address, and a message."

Thunstone took out one of his cards, and wrote on the back:

Sharon—

I know you love sapphires. Won't you wear this for me, and take lunch with me today?

John.

"It'll reach her early in the morning," promised the jeweler. Thunstone thanked him and departed.

The dark hours, ascribed by Rowley Thorne to supernatural agencies, had gone, and the sun was three-quarters up when Thunstone sought his bed.

SHARON, Countess Montesecco, was charming in tailored blue as she met Thunstone in the lobby of the restaurant.

Her one piece of jewelry was the sapphire-and silver brooch.

"Why so glum, John?" she asked as they sought their table. "Cross? Because I gave a date to Rowley?"

"First names with you, too," he murmured. "No, Sharon, not cross. I haven't a right to be, have I?"

"Rowley said that you and he quarreled about me last night."

"We discussed you," admitted Thunstone. "But if we had quarreled, seriously, one or the other of us would not be on view today."

They paused as a waiter drifted up to take their order. Over the cocktail, Sharon said, "You won't object, then, if Rowley takes me to the Club Samedi again tonight."

Thunstone scowled a little. "Club Samedi? But it's been closed. Some little technicality about the precautions against fire. I saw a couple of lines in the morning paper."

"I know about that, but it'll open in a few days. Meanwhile, there'll be a late rehearsal of the entertainers tonight. No guests, but—"

"If no guests, how are you and Thorne going to be present?"

She smiled a little. "You are interested, after all, even interested enough to interrupt me. It happens that Rowley has bought an interest in the Club Samedi. He'll be present, and he said he'd call for me at 11 o'clock." She paused, and looked at him shyly. "If you would care to see me earlier in the evening . . ."

He shook his head. "I'd care to, but I can't. I have something that, as Jules de Grandin would put it, demands to be done. Sharon, do you know where Rowley Thorne lives?"

"Not exactly. I think somewhere near Gramercy Park—yes, on East Nineteenth Street. Why, John?"

He did not answer that, but gazed at

the brooch she wore. He put forth a finger and touched it lightly. "Now, I'll ask a favor. I don't do that often, do I? Sharon, wear this tonight."

"Oh, I meant to. I love it, John. It's a beautiful old thing."

The food arrived, and Thunstone had not told her why he wanted Thorne's address. But, after they parted, he again called on the police official who had, at his request, closed the Club Samedi. He asked several questions, and waited while his friend made telephone calls and checked many papers. Finally the policeman gave him an address on Nineteenth Street. "Don't know what floor, John," said the policeman. "We'll know tomorrow, if—"

"Tomorrow may be too late," Thunstone told him. "Now, one last favor. If I'm arrested tonight for house-breaking, will you do what you can to get me a light sentence?"

THE particular block on East Nineteenth Street was a shabby, quiet one. It was past ten o'clock when Rowley Thorne emerged from a building with a yellow-brick front. He was dressed magnificently in evening clothes, with a cape falling from his thick shoulders in dignified folds. He got into a waiting taxi, which rolled to the corner, then uptown. After it had gone, John Thunstone emerged from behind a basement stairway railing opposite and entered the door of the building.

On the right wall of the vestibule were five mail slots, each topped with a name and a bell button. Thunstone studied the names.

None of them remotely resembled Rowley Thorne's name. On Thunstone's brow appeared the creasy frown that showed his descent into deep thought. Then he approached his forefinger to the button at the rear of the row, beside a lettered label reading *BOGAN, 5*. At the last moment he did not touch that button, but

the one above the next slot, which was marked *LEONARD, 4*.

A moment of silence, then the lock of the door emitted a muffled buzzing. Thunstone turned the knob and entered. A narrow hallway revealed itself, with a staircase mounting upward. Thunstone started to climb, swiftly and softly for all his size.

He came to the top of two flights of stairs without adventure. At the top of the third waited a stocky man in a sleeveless undershirt. "Yeah?" he prompted.

"Mr. Bogan?" asked Thunstone.

"Nah, my name's Leonard." The man jerked a thumb upward. "Bogan's on the top floor."

"I see. Thanks." Thunstone's eye caught a gleam at the center of Leonard's throat—a cheap gold-plated crucifix. "Sorry to have troubled you, Mr. Leonard."

"That's all right." The man shuffled back into his apartment. Thunstone mentally crossed him off of a possible investigation list; no partner of Rowley Thorne would wear a crucifix.

He went up the last flight of stairs. Halfway to the top he heard voices, a man's and a woman's, in furious argument.

"I'm fed up," the man was saying vehemently. "I'm tired of all this constant pretending. We're through."

"That suits me fine, and double," rejoined the woman. "Okay, get out."

"Get out?" the man echoed scornfully. "Me get out? Listen, I pay the rent of this place. You're the one that's getting out."

"I'm doing nothing of the sort! It's my furniture, isn't it? Didn't my own mother give it to us? Well, I'm not walking away and leaving you in possession of my furniture—"

Thunstone permitted himself to smile. Plainly there would be no room for Rowley Thorne's career of strange study and experiment in such an atmosphere as that. . . .

He descended to the third floor. He

knocked at the door. There was no answer. After listening a moment, he produced a great bundle of keys. The third of them unlocked the door, and he entered. Enough light came through the windows for him to see the interior, comfortable though dingy. There were five rooms, and in one of these was a bed, on which lay the drunkest man Thunstone had met in many months. Thunstone's search was for writings and books. There were no writings, and only two books. Thunstone carried them to the window. One was a cheap, worn copy of "Gone with the Wind," the other a New Testament. Thunstone left the apartment without hesitation.

The apartment on the second floor was occupied by three working girls. Thunstone introduced himself as a field man for a national poll, and asked questions that brought forth the readiest of answers. Within half a dozen exchanges he absolved this apartment too of any Rowley Thorne influence, but it was with difficulty he made his exit; the girls were expecting company, and wanted to exhibit their poll-making visitor.

Finally he tapped at the door on the first floor. A pudgy middle-aged woman answered the knock. "Is this the superintendent's apartment?" asked Thunstone.

She shook her head. "No. He's in the basement. That is, he was. I think he went out just now, all dressed up for lodge or something."

"I'll talk to his wife," said Thunstone. "Ain't got a wife. Just him."

"What kind of superintendent is he?"

"All right. Kind of close-mouthed and cross. But I'd rather have them that way than too talky. Why?"

"I'm thinking of moving in here," Thunstone told her.

"You can't. House is full up."

Thunstone thanked her, and turned as if to leave. When her door closed, he tiptoed down the basement stairs.

**B**UT the door was fitted with a patent lock. His keys would not open it. Thunstone drew out a pocket knife and whittled knowingly at a panel. He made a hole big enough to admit one hand, and unfastened the door from within. Then he moved stealthily inside, past a furnace and coal bin, to an inner door.

This, too, had a strong and complicated lock, but its hinges were on the outside. Thunstone managed to grub out the pins and lifted the door bodily out. He walked into the silent room beyond.

It was dimly lighted, by a little lamp on a shelf. Thunstone walked to it. There sat a small stone image of extreme ugliness. Thunstone sniffed at the lamp. "Ghee," he muttered under his breath. "Indian god—Indian worship." On the same shelf were several books, two of them in languages that Thunstone could not read. The others were on occult subjects, and all except one had been proscribed, banned and outlawed by various governments.

Thunstone moved into the other room of the caretaker's apartment. Another shelf held more idols, of various makes. Before one burned a long stick of incense. A second was of wood. The caretaker apparently observed several worships, each with its proper and esoteric ritual. On the table were several papers.

The first was a carbon copy of an agreement, whereby Rowley Thorne agreed to pay within thirty days the sum of ten thousand dollars for a half interest in the fixtures and profits of the Club Samedi. The second was a penciled scrawl, by someone of limited education but undeniable shrewdness, reporting on the financial affairs of Sharon, Countess Monteseco. The third was in ink, on scented stationery, the writing of an educated woman:

Thursday.

Like you, I feel that too many worshippers spoil a worship. If you find what

you seek, then you will be master of a faith never before followed, and I shall be content, as always, to be your servant. When you have miracles to show, others will bring service and wealth. If this is what you have always wanted, I will be glad, so glad. Even if it must be gained by your gallantry to that blonde fool, I will be glad.

Thunstone did not know the name signed to this letter, but it completed his search for knowledge. He glanced at his wrist watch—the illuminated dial showed that it was 11:30. Quickly he unfastened the front door of the apartment, hurried up the outer steps, and on to the corner, where he waved wildly for a taxi.

"Club Samedi," he bade the driver.

"The Samedi's closed down," the driver began to say.

"Club Samedi," repeated Thunstone, "and drive like the devil."

**H**E REACHED the rear of the club by entering a restaurant, bribing a waiter, and walking out through the kitchen. Across a courtyard was the dingy back door. He tried the door stealthily. It was locked, and he did not attempt to pick the lock. Instead he turned to where several garbage cans were lined against the wall. One of these he set on the other, climbed gingerly upon them, and with a sudden leap was able to clutch the guttered edge of the roof.

For a moment he clung, then, swaying powerfully sidewise and at the same time flexing the muscles of his big arms, he drew himself up, hooked a heel into the gutter. He dragged his body up on the flat roof and stole across it to a skylight.

Cautiously he peered in and down. The room below was dark, but he caught a gleam from pots and pans on a rack—this would be the kitchen. He pushed himself through feet first, lowered himself to

the full length of his arms, and dropped.

Noise he must have made, but nobody challenged him. He dared to strike a match. On an oven-top he saw a cardboard box, marked SALT. He eagerly clutched it.

"Lafcadio Hearn commented on it," he said under his breath. "So did W. B. Seabrook. I'm set."

He tiptoed toward the service door to the club auditorium. As he reached it, he heard the voice of the master of ceremonies:

"Midnight. The witching hour. And Illyria!"

THE voodoo music began, clarinet and tom-tom, and masked the slight noise of Thunstone's entrance.

From the kitchen threshold he could see Illyria's dance begin in the brown glow of the spotlight. To one side stood Rowley Thorne, extra big in the gloom, his hands quelling the struggles of the sacrificial rooster. Plainly he would substitute for the regular assistant. The only spectator was Sharon, sitting beyond the spotlight at a ringside table.

This much Thunstone saw at his first glance. His second marked the other presence in the darkened club.

There was a swaying above Illyria, a swaying in time to music. A great fringed shadow drooped lower and lower, as if a heavy weight forced it down. The jungle foliage that Thunstone had seen before had returned to being inside the ceiling, and the shaggy bulk was upon it, edging stealthily close to Illyria.

*"Legba choi-yan, choi-yan Zandor—  
Zandor Legba, immole'—hai!"*

And, "*Ibro mahnda!*" chanted the drummer and Thorne, doing duty for the absent quartet.

*"Ibro mahnda. . . Ibro mahnda!"*

The climax of the dance was approaching. Faster and faster went the music, then

died suddenly as Illyria struck her pose, head back and arms out. Rowley Thorne stole forward, holding the rooster at arm's length. And yet another pair of arms were reaching, enormous arms from above, like the distorted shadows of arms on a lighted screen, but arms which ended in clumsy claws and not hands, arms tufted and matted in hair. . . .

Thunstone darted forward. Under one arm he held the salt-box. His other hand caught Thorne's wrist, wrung it like a dish-cloth. Thorne gasped in startled pain, and the rooster sprang free, running crookedly across the floor.

A great streak of gloomy shadow pursued it, something like claws made a grab at it, and missed. Thorne suddenly began to rave:

"Legba, Legba! I wasn't at fault—a stranger—down on your knees, all of you! Death is in this room! Death to your bodies, and your souls, too!"

His voice had the power to command. All of them floundered to their knees, all save Thunstone and the shaggy bulk that was sliding down through the shadows of foliage. . . .

Thunstone tore open the salt package. One hand clutched as much salt as it could hold. The other threw the box, and it struck something that, however ill-defined in the brown light, certainly had solidity. The missile burst like a shell, scattering its contents everywhere.

Thunstone will remember to his death the prolonged wave of high sharp sound that might have been scream or roar, and might even have had words mixed into it—words of whatever unidentified tongue formed the voodoo rituals. A grip fastened upon him, a great embracing pressure that might have been talon-like hands or coils like a huge serpent. He felt his ribs buckle and creak, but he let himself be lifted, gathered close. And he put out his handful of salt, swiftly but coolly and

orderly, and thrust it well at the point where a face should be.

The surface on which he spread the salt opposed his hand for but a moment. Then it was gone, and so was the grip on his body. He fell hard and sprawling, but was up again in an instant. Overhead there were no branches. There was nothing. But just at Thunstone's feet lay Illyria. The light was enough to show him that, at some point in the proceedings, her neck had been broken, like the neck of a speckled fowl sacrificed to Legba.

He went to a wall, found a switch, and flicked it. The room filled with light. "Get up, everybody," he ordered, and they did so. Only Illyria lay where she had fallen.

**H**E WALKED back among them. "Salt did it. Salt will always drive away the most evil of spirits. It was something that Mr. Thorne had not planned for, that I'd attend his rehearsal, too."

"You've caused the death of Illyria," accused Thorne. His face looked pallid and old, and his gray eyes roved sickly in it.

"No. You doomed her when you first took an interest in this matter of invoking Legba. It's possible that her unthinking invocation would have resulted in unpleasantness, but no more. Your knowledge and deliberate espousal of the activity made the coming of Legba dangerous.

"He'd have come at the third time, if I weren't here to prevent him. He would have come with other powers than the mere opening of gates, for you prayed to no other voodoo diety. A cult could have been founded here, and not even heaven knows how it may have developed."

Thunstone looked around at the shivering listeners. "You others are lucky. Thorne intended to bind you all to Legba, by the sheer fact of your witnessing the cult's beginning. He's the sort who could do it. You'd have been made to help him

establish Legba-worship with this club as a headquarters, and with money he intended to get from—"

He felt the wide gaze of Sharon, and said no more, but walked to her.

At her side, he turned on Thorne once again.

"Whatever money you get, you must get elsewhere now. I don't think that Sharon will listen to you further. I'll be amused to know how you are going to meet a debt of ten thousand dollars, when you have been living on sheer wit, bluff and evil. But whatever you do, Thorne, do as honestly as possible. I intend to keep watch upon you."

Sharon caught Thunstone's arm with one hand. The other clung to the brooch on her bosom. "I don't exactly understand . . ." she breathed.

"Of course not. You weren't supposed to. It will take time to make itself clear. But meanwhile we'll go. Thorne will have his hands full and his mind full, inventing a plausible explanation for the death of the club's star dancer."

Nobody moved as Thunstone conducted Sharon to the street.

"John," she said, "I only half-saw that something was coming into view. What? And from where?"

"It came through the gate beyond which such things have life and power. And you may call it Legba, if you want to remember it by name."

"I don't," and she put her hands to her face.

"Then I seem to have made a point. Evil magic isn't to be poked into, is it? Not unless you're able to take both precautions and risks. Shall I see you home, Sharon?"

"Please. And stay there and talk to me until the sun rises again."

"Until the sun rises again," repeated John Thunstone.



Enter John Thunstone

**M**ANLY WADE WELLMAN, who, through the years, has given us some of our best and weirdest "weird" tales, has uncovered a new character in John Thunstone, introduced in *The Third Cry to Legba*.

This Thunstone being a likeable chap we're a bit worried on his account. To be sure, he's resourceful, as all who seriously study the mysteries of occultism, magic and the supernatural must be. But Mr. Wellman tells us that Thunstone, a man well able to take care of himself in all ordinary circumstances, insists on getting into the most outré and macabre scrapes. We'll hear of these in future issues of WEIRD TALES.

Says Wellman on the *Legba* story:

All of the characters in my story—including Legba—are founded on people I know, and any resemblance to actual persons and occurrences is as vivid as I can make it. Nobody will sue, however, because John Thunstone and Sharon, Countess of Montesecco, are in favor of this story, and Rowley Thorne is much too busy and harassed these days to pick any fresh fights.

It is a fact that something appeared recently in New York newspapers that might be the public version of *The Third Cry to Legba*. Some may remember an account of how a certain singer chanted black magic songs and attracted big audiences, including at least one attentive being that she must have wished would stay away. We can't check on that now, for the singer is untimely dead. I don't intend to cite any moral, for if my story or the newspaper yarn have morals, they are too obvious to be pointed out.

I mention several books, all of which are in existence and within reach of my hand as I write. The voodoo pantheon, including Legba, is also very real indeed to its worshippers. As to the actual Legba invocation, that is garbled somewhat. When you read my story, you will know my reason for garbling it.

*Manly Wade Wellman.*