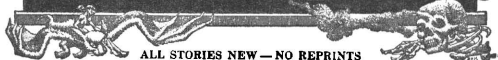


# Weird Tales



ALL STORIES NEW—NO REPRINTS

NOVEMBER, 1950

Cover by Frank Kelly Freas

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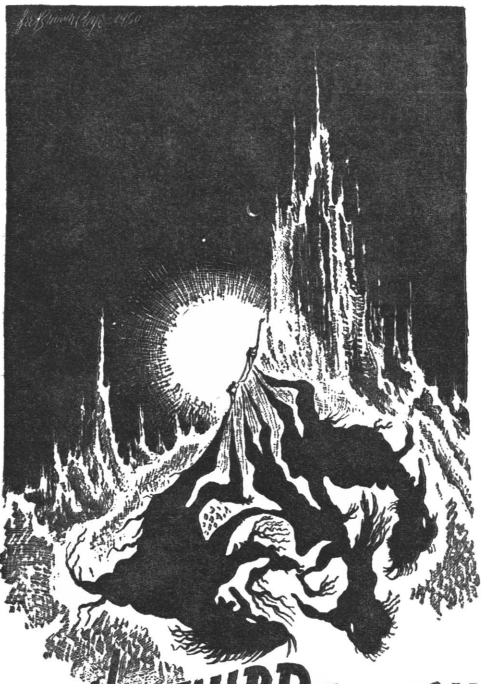
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D. McILWRAITH, Editor

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# The **THIRD** SHADOW

Heading by Lee Brown Coyo

“AND the other man on the rope, Andrew,” I asked, “did you ever encounter him?”

He gave me a quick glance and tapped the ash from his cigarette.

“Well, *is* there such a one?” he asked, smiling.

“I’ve many times read of him,” I replied. “Didn’t Smythe actually see him on the Brenva Face and again on that last dread lap of Everest?”

Sir Andrew paused before replying.

No one glancing casually at that eminent and superbly discreet civil servant, Sir Andrew Poursuivant, would have guessed that in his day and prime he had been the second-best amateur mountaineer of all time, with a dozen first ascents to his immortal fame, and many more than a dozen of the closest looks at death vouchsafed to any man. One who had leaped almost from the womb on to his first hill, a gravity-defier by right of birth, soon to revolutionize the technique of rock-climbing and later to write two of the very finest books on his exquisite art. Yet there was something about that uncompromising buttress, his chin, the superbly modelled arête, his nose, those unflinching blue tarns, his eyes, and the high wide cliff of his brow to persuade the reader of faces that here was a born man of action, endowed with that strange and strangely named faculty, presence of mind, which ever finds in great emergency and peril the stimulus to a will and a cunning to meet and conquer them.

We were seated in my stateroom in the *Queen Elizabeth* bound for New York, he for some recurrent brawl, I on the interminable quest for dollars. The big tub was pitching hard into a nor-west blizzard and creaking her vast length.

I am but an honorary member of the corps

of mountaineers, having no head for the game. But I love it dearly by proxy, and as the sage tells us, “He who *thinks* on Himalcha shall have pardon for all sins,” and the same is true, I hope, of lesser ranges.

I dined with Sir Andrew perhaps half a dozen times a year and usually persuaded him on these felicitous occasions to tell me some great tale of the past. Hence on this felicitous occasion my “fishing” enquiry.

“Yes, so I remember,” he presently said, “but are there not nice, plausible explanations for that? The illusions consequent on great height, great strain? You may remember Smythe, who is highly psychic, saw something else from Everest, very strange wings beating the icy air.”

“He isn’t the only one,” I said, “it’s a well-documented tradition.”

“It is, I agree. Guides, too, have known his presence, and always at moments of great stress and danger, and he has left them when these moments passed. And if they do not pass, the fanciful might suggest he meets them on the other side. But who he is no one knows. I grant you, also, I myself have sometimes felt that over, say twelve thousand feet, one moves into a realm where nothing is quite the same, or, perhaps, and more likely, it is just one’s mind that changes and becomes more susceptible and exposed to—well, certain *oddities*.”

“But you have never encountered this particular oddity?” I insisted.

“What an importunate bag-man you are.”

“I believe you have, Andrew, and you must tell me of it!”

“That is not quite so,” he replied, “but—it will be thirty-five long years ago next June, I did once have a very terrible ex-

By H. Russell Wakefield

perience that had associated with it certain subsidiary experiences somewhat recalcitrant to explanation."

"That is a very cautious pronouncement, Andrew."

"Phrased in the jargon of my trade, Bill."

"And you are going to relate it to me."

"I suppose so. I've never actually told it to another, and it will give me no pleasure to rouse it from my memory. But perhaps I owe it to you."

"Fill your glass, mind that lurch, and proceed."

"I haven't told it before," said Sir Andrew, "partly because it's distasteful to recall, and partly, for the reason that the prudent sea-captain turns his blind eye on a sea serpent and keeps a buttoned lip over the glimpse he caught; no one much appreciates the grin of incredulous derision."

"I promise to keep a straight face," I assured him.

"Yes, I rather think you will. Well, all those years ago, in that remote and golden time, I knew and climbed with a man I will call Brown. He was about my age. He had inherited considerable position and fortune and he was heir, also, to that irresistible and consuming passion for high places, their conquest and company, which, given the least opportunity, will never be denied, and only decrepitude or death can frustrate. Technically, he was a master in all departments, a finished cragsman and just as expert on snow and ice. But there was just occasionally an unmastered streak of recklessness in him which flamed him as a leader, and everyone, including myself, preferred to have him lower down the rope.

"It was, perhaps, due to one of these reckless seizures that, after our fourth season together, he proposed to a wench, who replied promptly in the affirmative. He was a smallish fellow, though immensely lithe, active, strong and tough. She was not far short of six feet and tipped the beam at one hundred and sixty-eight pounds, mostly muscle. With what suicidal folly, my dear Bill, do these infatuate pigmies, like cer-

tain miserable male insects, doom themselves with such Boadiceas, and how pitilessly and jocundly do those monsters bound upon their prey! This particular specimen was terribly, viciously, "County," immensely handsome, and intolerably authoritarian. Speaking evil of the dead is often the only revenge permitted us and I have no intention of refraining from saying that I have seldom, almost certainly never, disliked anyone more than Hecate Quorn. Besides being massive and menacing to the nth degree, she was endowed with a reverberating contralto which loaned a fearsomely oraculate air to her insistent spate of edicts. Marry for lust and repent in haste, the oldest, saddest lesson in the world, and one my poor friend had almost instantly to learn. Once she'd gripped him in her red remorseless maw, she bullied him incessantly and appeared to dominate him beyond hope of release. Such an old story I need enlarge upon it no more! How many of our old friends have we watched fall prostrate before these daughters of Masrut!

"She demanded that he should at least attempt to teach her to climb, and females, of her build are seldom much good at the game, particularly if they are late beginners. She was no exception, and her nerve turned out to be surprisingly more suspect on a steepish slope than her ghostly assurance on the level would have suggested. Poor Brown plugged away at it, because he feared, if she chucked her hand in, he would never see summer snow again. He did his very desperate best. He hired Fritz Mann, the huskiest and best-tempered of all the Chamonix guides, and between them on one searing and memorable occasion they shoved and pulled and hauled and slid her on feet and rump to creditably near the summit of Mt. Blanc. She loathed the ordeal, but she refused to give in, just because she knew poor Brown was longing to join up with a good party, and have some fun. I need say no more, you have sufficient imagination fully to realize the melancholy and humiliating pass of my sad friend. And, of course, it wasn't only in Haute-Savoie and Valais she made his life hell, it was at least purgatory for the rest of

the year; she was eternal punishment one might say. A harsh sentence for a moment's indiscretion!"

"What about those occasional feckless flashes?" I asked; "had she quenched and overlaid those, too?"

"Permit me to tell this story my own way and pour me out another drink. In the second summer after their marriage the Browns had preceded me by a few days to the Montenvert, which, doubtless you recall, is a hotel overlooking the Mer de Glâce, three thousand feet above Chamonix. When I arrived there late one evening I found the place in a turmoil and Brown, apparently almost out of his mind. Hecate had fallen down a crevasse that morning and, as a matter of fact, her body was never recovered. I took him to my room, gave him a stiff drink, and he blurted out his sorry tale. He had taken her out on the Mer de Glâce for a morning's training, he said, determined to take no risks whatsoever. They had wandered a little way up the glacier, perhaps further than he'd intended. He'd cut some steps for her to practise on, and so forth. Presently he'd encountered a crevasse, crossed by a snow-bridge, which he'd tested and found perfectly reliable. He'd passed over himself, but, when she followed, she'd gone straight through, the rope had snapped—and that was that. They'd lowered a guide, but the hole went down forever and it was quite hopeless. Hecate must have died instantly; that was the only assuaging thought.

"Should that rope have gone, Arthur?" I asked. "Can I see it?"

"He produced it. It was poor stuff, an Austrian make, which had once been very popular but had been found unreliable and the cause of several accidents. There was also old bruising near the break. It wasn't a reassuring bit of stuff. 'I realize,' said Brown hurriedly, 'I shouldn't have kept that piece. As you know, I'm a stickler for perfection in a rope. But we were just having a little easy work and, as that rope's light and she always found it so hard to manage one, I took it along. I'd no intention of actually having to trust to it. We were just turning back when it happened. I swear to

you that bridge seemed absolutely sound.'

"She was a good deal heavier than you, Arthur," I said.

"I know, but I made every allowance for that."

"I quite understand," I said. "Well, it's just too bad," or words to that effect. I was rather at a loss for appropriate expressions. He was obviously acting a part. I didn't blame him, he had to. He had to appear heavy with grief when he was feeling, in a sense, as light as mountain air. He got a shade tight that evening, and his efforts to sustain two such conflicting moods would have amused a more cynical and detached observer than myself. Besides, I foresaw the troubles ahead.

"THE French held an enquiry, of course, and inevitably exonerated him completely, then I took him home to face the music, which, as I'd expected, was strident and loud enough. How far was it justified, I asked myself. He should, perhaps, not have taken Hecate up so far. Even if that rope hadn't gone, he'd never have been able to pull her up by himself—it would have taken two very strong men to have done that. He could merely have held her there, and she would, I suppose have died of slow strangulation, unless help had quickly come. Yet there is always risk, however prudently you try to play that game; it is the first of its rules and nothing will ever eliminate it. You must take my word for all this, which is rather outside your sphere of judgment. All the same the condition of that rope—and I wasn't the only one to examine it—didn't help things. Still, all that wouldn't have mattered nearly so much if he'd been a happily married man. I needn't dwell on that. Anyway the dirty rumor followed him home and resounded there."

"What was your candid opinion, Andrew?" I asked.

"I must ask you," he replied, "to believe a rather hard thing, that I had and have no opinion, candid or otherwise. It *could* have been a pure accident. All could have happened exactly as he said it did. I've no valid reason to suppose otherwise. He may have been a bit careless; I might have been

so myself. One takes such practice mornings rather lightly. There *is* risk, as I've said, but it's minuscule compared with the real thing. The expert mountaineer develops an exquisitely nice and certain "feel" for degrees of danger, it is the condition precept of his survival—and adjusts his whole personality to changing degrees. He must take the small ones in his stride. The errors of judgment, if any, that Brown committed were petty and excusable. His reason for taking that rope was sensible enough in a way.

"Yes," I put in, "I can more or less understand all that, but you actually knew him well and you're a shrewd judge of character. You were in a privileged position to decide."

"Was I? A very learned judge once told me he'd find it far easier to decide the guilt or innocence of an absolute stranger than of a close friend; the personal equation confuses the problem and pollutes the understanding. I think he was perfectly right. Anyway I am shrewd enough to know when I am baffled, and I have always felt the balance of probability was peculiarly nicely poised. In a word, I have no opinion."

"Well, I have," I proclaimed. "I think he had a sudden fearful temptation. I don't think it was exactly premeditated, yet always, as it were, at the back of his mind. He realized that bridge would go when she had her weight on it, knew a swift, reckless temptation, and let it rip. I think he'd kept that rotten rope because he'd always felt in a vague half-repressed way, it might, as they say, 'come in handy one day.'"

Sir Andrew shrugged his shoulders. "Very subtle, no doubt," he said, "and you may be right. But I know I shall never be able to decide. Perhaps it is that personal equation, for I was always fond of him, and he saved my life more than once at the greatest peril to his own; and since his marriage, that ordeal of thumb-screw and rack, I had developed profound sympathy for him. Hecate was far better dead. I greeted his release with a saturnine cheer. We will leave that point.

"Well, he had to face a very bad time. Hecate's relatives were many and influential and they pulled no punches, no stabs in

the back, rather. No one, of course, actually cried, 'Murder!' in public but such terms as 'Darned odd!', 'Very happy release!', 'Accidents *must* happen!' and so on, were in lively currency.

"Very few people comprehend the first thing about mountaineering, just sultry, celluloid visions of high-altitude-and-octane villains slashing ropes, so this sepsis found receptive blood-streams. I did my best to foster antibodies and rallied my fellow-climbers to the defense. But we were hopelessly out-numbered and out-gunned, and it was lucky for poor Brown he had more than sufficient private means to retire from public life to his estate and his farming, and insulate himself to some extent against the slings and arrows which were so freely and cruelly flying about.

"I spent a week-end with him in April and was shocked at his appearance: even life with Hecate had never reduced him to such a pass. His nerves were forever on the jump, he had those glaring insomniac eyes, he was drinking far more and eating far less than was good for him; he looked a driven haunted man."

"Haunted?" I asked.

"I know what you mean," he said, "but I don't think I can be more definite. I will say, however, I found the atmosphere of the house unquiet and was very glad to quit it. Anyway, something had to be done.

"You must start climbing again, Arthur, I said.

"'Never! My nerve's gone!' he replied.

"'Nonsense!' I said. 'We'll leave on June third for Chamonix. You must conquer all this and at the very place which tests you most starkly. You will be amongst friends. It will be a superb nerve tonic. This tittle-tattle will inevitably die down—it has started to do so already, I fancy. There is nothing to fear, as you'll discover once you're fit again. Come back to your first, your greatest, your only real love!'

"'What will people say?' he muttered uncertainly.

"'What say they, let them say! Actually I think it'll be very good propaganda; no one'd believe a guilty man would return to the scene of such a crime. My dear Arthur,

you're a bit young to die, aren't you! If you stay moping here you'll be in the family vault in a couple of years. I'll get the tickets and we'll dine together at the Alpine Club on June the second at eight p. m. precisely."

"To this he promptly agreed and his fickle spirits rose. So the fourth of June saw us entering the Montenvert, where our reception was cordial enough.

"IT TOOK him over a week, far longer than usual, to get back to anything like his old standard, but I'd expected that. On the ninth day I decided it was time for a crucial test of his recovery. It was no use frittering about, he'd got to face the hard thing, something far tougher than the practice grounds.

"After some deliberation I chose the Dent du Géant for the trial run. It was an old friend of ours, and the last time we'd done it, four years before, we'd simply raced to the aluminum Madonna which more or less adorns its summit. The Géant, I will remind you, is a needle, some thirteen thousand feet high, situated towards the southern rim of that great and glorious lake of ice, part French, part Swiss, part Italian, from which rise some of the most renowned peaks in the world, and of those the acknowledged monarchs are the Grandes Juras, the Grèpon Aiguilles and, of course, the Mont Blanc Massiv itself. It is sacred ground to our fraternity and the very words ring like a silver peal. The Géant culminates in a grotesque colossal tooth or rock, some of which is in a fairly advanced state of decay. These things are relative, of course, it will almost certainly be standing there, somewhat diminished, in five thousand years time. It provides an interesting enough climb, not, in my view, one of the most severe, but sheer and exposed enough. Nowadays, I understand the livelier sections are so festooned with spikes and cords that it resembles the fruit of the union of a porcupine and a puppet. But I have not revisited it for years and, for very sure, I never shall again.

"Brown agreed with my choice, which he declared himself competent to tackle, so off we went late on a promising morning

and made our leisurely way up and across the ice to the hat. He seemed in pretty good shape, and once, when a most towering and displeasing sérac fell almost dead on our line, he kept his head, his footing and his life. Yet somehow I didn't quite like the look of him. He didn't improve as the day wore on and to tell the truth, I didn't either."

HERE Sir Andrew paused, lit a cigarette, and continued more slowly. "You are not familiar with such matters, but I will try and explain the cause of my increasing preoccupation. We were, of course, roped almost all day, and from very early on I began to experience those *intimations*—it is difficult to find the precise, inevitable word—which were increasingly to disturb and perplex me on that tragic expedition. It is extremely hard to make them plain and plausible to you, who have never been hitched to a manila. When merely pursuing a more or less untrammelled course over ice it is our custom to keep the rope neither trailing nor quite taut, but always—I speak as leader—of course, one is very conscious of the presence and pressure of the man behind. Now—how shall I put it? Well, over and over again it seemed to me as if that rope was behaving oddly, as though the pull I experienced was inconsistent with the distance Brown was keeping behind me, as though something else was exercising pressure nearer to me. Do I make myself at all plain?"

"I think so," I replied. "You mean, as though there was someone tied to that rope between you and Brown."

"Nothing like so definite and distinct as that. Imagine if you were driving a car and you continually got the impression the brakes were coming on and off, though you knew they were not. You would be puzzled and somewhat disconcerted. I'm afraid that analogy isn't very illuminating. It was just that I was conscious of some inexplicable anomaly connected with our roped progress that day. I remember I kept glancing around in search of an explanation. I tried to convince myself it was due to Brown's somewhat inept, sluggish and er-

atic performance, but I was not altogether successful in this attribution. To make it worse a thick mist came on in the afternoon and this increased our difficulties, delayed us considerably, and intensified my sombre and rather defeatist mood.

"Certain pious, but, in my view, misguided persons, profess to find in the presence, the atmosphere, of these doomed Titans, evidence for a benevolent Providence, and a beneficent cosmic principle. I am not enrolled in their ranks. At best these eminences seem aloof and neutral, at worst, viciously and virulently hostile—I reverse the pathetic fallacy. That is, to a spirited man, half their appeal. Only once in a long while have I been lulled into a sense of their good-will. And if one must endow them with a Pantheon, I would peopple it with the fickle and malicious denizens of Olympus and Valhalla, and not the allegedly philanthropic triad of heaven. In no place is the working of a ruthless, blind causality more starkly shown. And never, for some reason, have I felt that oppressive sense of malignity more acutely than during the last few hours of our climb that day, as we forced our groping way through a nightmare world of ice-pillars, many of them as high and ponderous as the Statue of Liberty, destined each one of them, soon to fall with a thunder like the crack of doom. And all the while I was bothered with that rope. Several times, as I glanced round through the murk, I seemed to sense Brown almost at my heels, when he was thirty feet away. Once I actually saw him, as I thought, near enough to touch. It was a displeasing illusion."

"Were you scared?" I asked

"I was certainly keyed-up and troubled. I am never scared, I think, when actually on the move. It was just that there was a noxious puzzle I couldn't solve. We were in no great danger, just experiencing the endemic risks inherent in all such places. But I was mainly responsible for the safety of us both and my mode of securing that safety was impaired."

"I imagine," I said, "that the rope establishes, as it were, some psychic bond between those it links."

"An unexpectedly precipient remark," replied Sir Andrew. "That is precisely the case. The rope makes the fate of one the fate of all; and each betrays along its strands his spiritual state; his hopes, anxieties, good-cheer, or lack of confidence. So I could feel Brown's hesitation and poor craftsmanship, as well as this inexplicable interruption of my proper connection with him."

"When we eventually reached the hut I had in no way elucidated the problem. I didn't like the look of Brown; he was far more tired than he should have been and his nerves were sparking again. He put the best face he could on it, as good mountaineers are trained to do, and declared a night's rest would put him right. I hoped for the best."

"Did you mention your trouble with the rope?"

"I did not," said Sir Andrew shortly. "For one thing, it might have been purely subjective. For another, what was there to say? And the first duty of the mountaineer is to keep his fears to himself, unless they are liable to imperil his comrades. Never lower the psychic temperature if it can possibly be avoided. Yet somehow, I cannot define precisely how, I gained the impression he had noticed something and that this was partly the cause of his malaise."

"The hut was full, but not unpleasantly so, with young Italians for the most part, and we secured good sleeping places. Then we fed and lay down. It was a night of evil memory. Brown went to sleep almost at once, to sleep and to dream, and to tell of his dreams. He was, apparently, well, beyond all doubt, dreaming of Hecate and—how shall I put it?—in contact, in debate with her. And what made it far more trying to the listener, he was mimicking her voice with perfect virtuosity. This was at once horrible and ludicrous, the most pestilential and disintegrating combination of all, in my opinion. He was, it seemed, pleading with her to leave him alone, to spare him, and she was ruthlessly refusing. I say 'it seemed,' because the repulsive surge of words was blurred, and only at times articulate; just sufficient to give, as it were, the sense of the dialogue. But that was



more than enough. The sleep-hungry Italians were naturally and vociferously infuriated, and I was compelled to rouse Brown over and over again, but each time he relapsed into that vilely haunted sleep. Once he raised himself and thrust out blindly with his arms. And Hecate's minatory contralto spewed from his throat, while the Italians mocked and cursed. It was a bestial pandemonium.

"The Italians left early, loud in their execrations of us. One of them, his black eyes wide with fear and anger, shook his lantern in my face and exclaimed 'Who is this woman!' 'What woman?' I replied. He shrugged his shoulders and said: 'That is for you to say. I do not think I would climb the Géant with him if I were you! Good luck, Signore, *I think you will need it!*' Then they clattered off, and at four o'clock we followed them.

"I KNOW now I should have taken that Italian's advice and got Brown back by the easiest and quickest route to the hotel, but when I tentatively suggested it, he almost hysterically implored me to carry on. 'If I fail this time,' he said, 'I shall never climb again, I know it! *I must conquer it!*' I was very tired, my judgment and resolution were at a disgracefully low ebb, and I half surrendered. I decided we would go up some of the way to a ledge or platform I remembered, at about the twelve thousand foot level, rest, eat, and turn back.

"We had a tiresome climb up the glacier, Brown in very poor form, and that nuisance on the rope beginning again almost at once. We crossed the big crevasse where the glacier meets the lower rocks and began to ascend. There was still some mist, but it thinned as the sun rose. I led and Brown, making very heavy weather, followed. The difference between his performance this time and that other I have mentioned, was gross and terrifying. I remember doubting if he would ever be a climber again and realizing I had made a shocking error in going on. I had to nurse him with the greatest care and there was always that harassing behavior of the rope. Only those with expert knowledge of such work could

realize the great and deadly difference it made. I could never be quite sure when I had it properly firm on Brown, and he was climbing like a nervous novice. My own standard of the day was, not surprisingly, none too high. I'd had a damned bad, worried night and my mind was fussed and preoccupied. Usually one climbs half-sub-consciously, that is the sign-manual of the expert, a rhythmic selection and seizure of holds, with only now and again a fully controlled operation of will and decision. But now I was at full stretch all the time and ever ready for Brown to slip. Over and over again I was forced to belay the rope to some coign of vantage and coax and ease him up, and there was forever that strong interruption between us. The Géant was beating us hands down all the time and I hadn't felt so outclassed since my first season in the Alps. The light became most sinister and garish, the sun striking through the brume, creating a potent and prised dazzle. So much so that more than once I fancied I saw Brown's outline duplicated, or rather revealed at different levels. And several times it seemed his head appeared just below me when he was still struggling far down. And then there were our shadows, cast huge on the snow-face across the gulf, vast and distorted by those strange rays.

"That there were *three* such shadows, now stationary, now in motion, was an irresistible illusion. There was mine, there was the lesser one of Brown, and there was another in between us. What was causing it? This fascinating and extraordinary puzzle served somewhat to distract my mind from its heavy and intensifying anxiety. At last, to my vast relief, I glanced up and saw that hospitable little platform not more than sixty feet above me. Once there, the worst would be, I thought, over, for I could lower Brown down more easily than get him up.

"I shouted down to him, 'We're nearly there!' but he made no reply. I shouted again and listened carefully. And then I could hear him talking, using alternatively *his* voice and Hecate's.

"I cannot describe to you the kind of ghostly fear which then seized me.

There was I fifteen hundred feet up on a pretty sheer precipice with someone whose mind had clearly gone, on my rope. And I had to get him, first to the ledge, then try and restore him to a condition in which descent might be possible. I could never leave him there; we must survive or die together. First, I must reach that platform. I set myself to it, and for the time being he continued to climb, clumsily and mechanically, and carrying on that insane dialogue, *yet he kept moving!* But for how much longer would that mechanism continue to function and bring him to his holds? I conquered my fear and rallied again that essential detachment of spirit without which we were both certainly doomed.

"So I set myself with the utmost care to reach that ledge. Between me and it was a stretch of the Géant's rottenest rock, which I suddenly remembered well. It is spiked and roped now, I believe. When that gneiss is bad, it is very, very evil indeed. Mercifully, the mist was not freezing or we should have been dead ere then. How I cursed my insensate folly, the one great criminal blunder of my climbing career! This rush of rage may have saved me, for just when I was struggling up that infamous forty-five feet I got a fearful jerk from the rope. I was right out, attacking a short overhang, exposed a hundred per cent, and how I sustained that jerk I shall never know. I even drove my teeth into the rock. It was one of those super-human efforts only possible to a powerful, fully-trained man at the peak of his physical perfection, when he knows that failure means immediate death. Somehow then he draws out his final erg of strength and resilience.

"At last I reached the ledge, belayed like lightning, gasped for breath and looked down. As I did so, Brown ceased to climb, screamed, and then a torrent of wild, in-

coherent words spewed from his mouth. I yelled at him encouragement and assurance, but he paid no heed. And, though he was stationary, clawing to his holds, the rope was still under pressure, working and sounding on the belay. No explanation of that has ever been vouchsafed me. For a moment my glance flickered out across the great gulf on to the dazzling slope opposite; and there were my shadows and Brown's, and another which seemed still on the move and reaching down towards him.

I COULD see his body trembling in every muscle and I knew he must go at any second. I shouted down wildly again and again, telling him I had him firm and that he could take his time, but again he paid no heed. I couldn't get him up, I must go down to him. There was just one possible way which, a shade technical, I will not describe to you. Nor is there need or point in doing so, for suddenly Brown relinquished all holds and swung out. As my eye followed him, once more it caught those shadows, and now there were but two, Brown's hideously enlarged. For a moment he hung there screaming and thrashing out with his arms, his whole body in violent motion. And then he began to spin most horribly, faster and faster, and almost it seemed, in the visual chaos of that whirl, as though there were two bodies lashed and struggling in each other's arms. Then somehow in his writhings he worked free of the rope and fell two thousand feet to his death on the glacier below, leaving my shadow alone gigantic on the snow.

"That is all, and I want no questions, because I know I should have no answers for them and I am off to bed. As for your original question, I've done my best to answer it. But remember this, perchance such questions can never quite be answered."

