

# STRANGE TALES

OF MYSTERY AND TERROR

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*He fell on his knees  
with his face to  
the floor.*



# The Veil of Tanit

By Eugene de Rezske

**C**ARL MARQUART, traveler and adventurer, was thumbing a catalog case in the reference department of the great library at Forty-second Street and Fifth Avenue when his attention was suddenly drawn to the face of a man at the next table, similarly occupied.

Marquart's prolonged regard was strange, for, to the ordinary observer, there was nothing about the man to attract the slightest notice. Small and pudgy of stature, soft looking, unobtrusively dressed, he was altogether the mousy sort of person one would expect to see bending over a ledger at a

Death is on the Veil-Which-May-  
Not - Be - Seen, and relentlessly  
comes the day of its fulfilment.

high desk or in a minor professional chair. It was something on his face that was in utter contradiction to this appearance that so held Marquart. Not his features, for they were in absolute agreement with the rest of him—no, it was the tan on that face that amazed him.

Marquart had just returned from a little adventure in Al Yemen in Arabia to his no small profit, incidentally. And Marquart had just such a tan himself, perhaps slightly lighter if anything. Now Marquart knew tans. There is a world of difference in tans. There is the tan you get in the Canadian woods of a summer. There is the tan you acquire in Florida of a winter if you can afford one. And there is the tan that burns into your skin under the Congo sun in a season's big-game shoot. This stranger's wasn't any of these.

His tan was nothing but a desert tan. A little closer inspection and Marquart narrowed it down either to that of the Sahara or to the Arabian; there was not the slightest doubt of it, he decided. No other sun ever produced that combination of color, that dark brown that in certain lights took on a purplish hue and radiated darkly emanations of stored heat.

Marquart was tremendously interested. What business would such a person have in mid-Sahara or deep Arabia?

**H**E forgot the book he was looking for and became lost in this speculation. The stranger turned and seeing himself observed became nervous. He gave Marquart one startled glance and hurried off to the ticket desk. There he handed in his slips, got his seating ticket and disappeared into the reading room.

Marquart's amused eyes looked after the scurrying figure until it

was out of sight, and then he followed. As he entered the reading room Marquart took the first book that came to hand from the shelves inside, located his quarry and took a seat some distance away, but one which afforded him a plain view of the little fellow.

His curiosity consumed him. A regular bloodhound for the strange, the unusual, the bizarre, the exotic, Marquart's accurate observation told him that here was a riddle and an enigma. Could he solve it? Perhaps, if he caught the man's eye, if he smiled at him casually and had a smile in return so that he could go over to the man and say plainly: "My name is Carl Marquart and I also have just returned from the desert where I had a pretty little adventure. If you've nothing to do in the next hour or so, let's tell our respective stories to each other."

Idle thoughts, these, as he sat slumped back in the chair, his eyes on the man.

The stranger suddenly raised his head from the book. Their eyes met. Marquart essayed a slightly embarrassed smile. It was, he felt at once, rude, uncalled for. He was prepared for a glance of contempt in return. But he certainly wasn't prepared for what followed.

As their eyes met the stranger's face blanched under the tan—went pale. His eyes, even from that distance, Marquart saw, distended with nothing less than terror. It was a look of such haunting fear that it froze Marquart's smile on his face.

The man arose abruptly and almost ran out of the reading room.

**M**ARQUART decided that he had gone far enough. Plainly, his interest had disturbed the little man profoundly. Well, that was that. He tried to read the book before him, to forget the strange

episode. But it was no use. He wasn't in the least interested in "The Economic Aspects of the Industrial Revolution in England." He shut the tome with a bang that brought him some nasty looks from the readers about him and slunk out of the reading room.

In no hurry, and still thinking of the incident he took the steps down to the Fifth Avenue exit. As he neared the bottom, that un-failing perception of men who have known and contended with nature in her primitive moods told him, even in this great marble hall, that he was being watched.

From the corner of his eye Marquart searched the hall. Sure enough, there, behind a marble column was that unaccountable man, his eyes riveted on Marquart. Marquart thereupon turned and smiled. The man left his position and walked over to the water font further down the hall. Marquart smiled to himself as he saw the fellow take out and swallow a powder paper and drink it down with water. Just what you'd expect, Marquart mused.

"One of these after each meal, Mr. Smith," he could almost hear the doctor saying, "and one before going to bed. It will do your liver a world of good and tone up the system. And how's business, by the way?"

And certainly it was an amazing tonic, that powder. For, as Marquart stood there the man came toward him. Gone was the fear in those eyes, the shrink in the body. The man came over with a quite genial smile.

"I see you are interested in me."

"Yes, very much indeed."

**T**HE obvious retort, "Why?" didn't come. Instead the little man regarded Marquart steadily for a moment with a quizzical, puzzling, unfathomable look.

"My name is Carl Marquart."

The man smiled.

"Names. Do they matter? Call me Smith if you wish." And again that puzzling look now spread to the corners of the mouth in a wry little smile as if he and Marquart were both in on some droll story.

"Smith? Smith? . . . Why, that's very suitable. Just the name I had in mind. How do you do, Mr. Smith?"

Mr. Smith looked at his watch.

"I have just half an hour, Mr. Marquart, before an appointment. I have no doubt but that you'd wish to accompany me for a little walk there. It's a beautiful day."

"Why, I'd be delighted, Mr. Smith. I won't deny that I'd like to hear you talk if you would. I'm sure the story—"

"Oh, yes, yes. The story. It is an amazing story, Mr. Marquart, simply astounding. I shall tell it to you." Mr. Smith slapped his thigh and went into a burst of laughter. "Yes. That would be effective. That would be the thing. I shall tell you what happened to me in detail and you will be the only man to know it from beginning to end. Yes. From the very beginning to the very end. Otherwise, it would remain forever untold. First of all, because I don't know a soul I could tell it to; and secondly—well, secondly, it happened to *me*. To *me*, you understand. That in itself is astounding!"

They walked through the great doors and were soon on Fifth Avenue. Mr. Smith turned downtown with the silent Marquart at his side. In the sweet spring sun the little man expanded and became animated. He began his story and Marquart forgot the sun and the sky, the time, the place, the circumstances. For he was listening to one of the strangest stories in all the annals of adventure.

"UNTIL two years ago," Mr. Smith began, "there was, in all the world, but one individual with whom I was intimate enough to call him friend. And he has gone.

"When I was a boy, I was a puny little fellow and soon learned to turn inward that normal energy which only brought me insult and ridicule from my school fellows. I had a strong sense of life, of adventure, of daring. I built castles and dreamed dreams. My physique chained my energy but not my fancy. I took to reading omnivorously and soon came to prefer history above all other types of literature. It was the only food that came near to appeasing that hunger for adventure in me. Excluded from the world of mundane things I slew dinosaurs, drew plans for pyramids, commanded a legion in the Punic wars and was Alexander's closest adviser.

"I am trying to convey to you how intense was my longing for living actively, physically, intensely. What do you think I became? A professor of ancient history in a small mid-western college where I lived and taught obscurely until two years ago, until my forty-ninth year. In all my life, until that time, nothing had happened to me. Nothing had even come near to happening to me. Absolutely nothing.

"I TOLD you I had one friend. His name was Peter Armand, a resident of our little college town. We were drawn together because of a similarity of interests. I was a professor of ancient history. He was a collector in a limited way of Egyptian and Persian antiques—vases, trinkets, coins, bits of statuary, and so forth. He was, like myself, a bachelor and a recluse of simple tastes. His only pleasure was his occasional trips

abroad from which he'd come back loaded with all sorts of pieces. Most of them were devoid of interest. Many were fakes. But now and then he'd come back with a real find, and we'd discuss it for days and weeks before it went into that part of his collection which he valued most.

"There you have the background of my life. Can you imagine anything more placid, anything more rooted and riveted? But listen.

"It all started because of a newspaper write-up. Armand had allowed a Sunday paper of a nearby city to photograph and reproduce some of his pieces. Among these was a photograph of a certain very ancient and crudely, but profusely, carved block of scarred metal that might have been a box except that there was no apparent means of ingress into it. It had no joints, no hinges, no seams, no lid of any kind. I had hardly even glanced at it, and Armand never mentioned it that I can remember.

"EARLY one evening about three months after these pieces had been brought out in the paper he telephoned me to come over.

"'Smith,' he said as soon as I had arrived, 'I have just had an interesting visit from an extremely interesting stranger. What do you make of the name?' He handed me a card which bore upon it one word: Eochim.

"'The word strikes an echo somewhere in the depths of my brain,' I told him. 'But don't expect me to unearth it. My mind is a regular junkshop of obscure jetsam of every description.'

"'Well, what do you think this Eochim was here for? He wanted that box affair.'

"'I suppose you told him that you never sell anything out of your rummage bag.'

"I would have if he'd asked to buy it. He didn't. He said that the thing belonged to him—no, to his people. That's what he said. To his people. That it had been unlawfully abstracted three centuries ago by Shah Lelaad of Irak, since when it had been lost track of until it appeared that I had it."

"Interesting if true," I said.

"Oh, I believe it's true enough, Smith. Up to that point friend Eochim sounded logical enough. But then he demanded the box, and I refused him pointblank, naturally. Do you know what his counterthrust was? A good old-fashioned magic threat. He said that he was in no hurry. He'd get it all right after my doom had overtaken me—just like that."

"Let's see the box or whatever it is," I said. "There must be something to it."

**A**BOUT an hour later there came a telephone call by long distance from the next state where a brother of Armand and his old mother lived on a farm. His brother was on the wire. I know he recognized his voice immediately. His mother had suddenly been taken sick and the brother wanted to know if he would come the next morning. He said he would, of course. And then he spoke to the old family physician who was attending her. After he hung up he decided he would not wait until morning after all. He telephoned an automobile-renting firm in the city and engaged a powerful car with a chauffeur to make the trip then and there.

"I remained in his house intending to give this antique a real inspection. I was all alone, Armand's housekeeper having left for the night. I lifted the metal block from its pedestal and brought it onto the large library table and under a strong reading light. I

wondered then how I had ever missed noticing the thing. For, from the first close glance it captured my interest completely. I knew I was in for a work of hours so I decided I'd stay over, and, to make myself comfortable, I went upstairs and brought down a suit of pajamas, a dressing gown and slippers. There was a couch in the library, and, intending to sleep here if sleep could tear me loose from that box, I donned the pajamas and robe and went to work.

"The antique was about two feet square and about one foot deep. It appeared to be made of bronze, roughly hammered. The carvings I mentioned covered its every surface. These appeared to have been done simply by working a sharp instrument into the surface of the metal, and so, outlining the figures. I soon discovered that all those figures were simply different attitudes and postures of the same person and that person was none other than Tanit, the great goddess of Carthage, the deity of plenty and fertility, second in power only to Moloch, and a divinity of the most popular cult of the Punic republic.

**I**CAN tell you I was impressed. If the thing was genuine it was a rarity of rarities. For the Romans did such a thorough job in the destruction of Carthage that, although its civilization was contemporary with that of Rome, research had discovered little that would permit us to reconstruct its life directly. All we know of Carthage is still in the writings of Romans, their inveterate enemies. Nevertheless even the prejudiced Romans attest to the perfection of its crafts and the splendor of its arts. That was why these crude carvings puzzled me so. The thing had so patently been intended for permanence that the indif-

ferent workmanship of the figures was puzzling, paradoxical.

"I studied the figures and noted that the attitudes of Tanit were distinctly threatening, warlike. She was represented with a sword, with a brand of fire, with a bowl of pitch and sulphur. In other postures she seemed to be hurling anathemas, uttering fearful curses, and so on. Not once did she appear in her natural character as the placid and voluptuous Tanit whose business was the very opposite of war and destruction.

"The problem presented by these two paradoxes—the crudeness of the art and the strange attitudes of Tanit—threw me into a fever of excitement. To a professor of ancient history that in itself would be in the nature of an adventure. Suddenly I remembered that Armand owned a very powerful magnifying glass.

"So faint, that even by the aid of the glass it took me hours to decipher it, was an inscription in Roman characters, sandwiched in between the figures. Here was another surprise: Roman characters on a Carthaginian antique? But when I deciphered that writing it all came to me at last. What drama!

"Herein by the Eochim, the Dead; the Zaimph of Tanit. The dread vengeance of Tanit pursue the generations forever of him who touches. . . ."

"IN the small house approaching dawn I reconstructed in my mind a scene. Scipio Africanus II was battering at the walls of a doomed Carthage. In the marvelous temple of Tanit, the ancient Eochim—the family of Tanit priests, heirs to all the secret knowledge of Ur and Babylon and Egypt before them—gathered outside the innermost sanctuary that

enshrined the Veil of Tanit, known as the Zaimph, the very essence of the deity.

"To touch the Zaimph was death; to even look upon it was the most horrible of sacrilege. 'Herein by the Eochim, the Dead. . . .' What else could it mean but that the Eochim had put the Zaimph into this metal block that was indeed a box, a box upon which the threatening postures of the goddess had been hastily chiseled and the line written for the special benefit of the Romans whose entry into the city was now but a matter of days. And then, having touched and locked upon the Zaimph they themselves were 'The Dead.' They all immediately committed suicide!

"And in surged the conquering Romans, ploughing Carthage and its civilization into fine dust to the hysterical scream of Cato that reached them from across the Mediterranean: 'Delenda est Cartago!' Carthage must be destroyed!

"But this box? None had touched it!

"I was mad with an excitement that had me trembling from head to foot. Was it possible that in this bronze casket reposed the most famous, the most dreaded sacred object antiquity, the Zaimph itself!

"I LIFTED the box and shook it. Not a sound. Where was the lid? How had those cunning priests sealed it so there was no trace left? I dipped a cloth in benzine and rubbed at the surfaces until they were polished clean. Then, with the glass, I began a minute examination, inch by inch. I came across a small particle of a different metal encrusted upon the bronze in one corner. I scratched it bright with my knife, and it looked like lead. Why was it there? It looked for all the world like a deep set plug. I fetched up a box of tools.

"From this I selected a sharp and stout awl and began hammering it gently into the lead spot. It was deep. The awl bit into the metal three inches, and then, of a sudden, there was a sharp hiss of air that jerked the tool handle back into my palm. Simultaneously one side panel of the box flew open striking the table a resounding blow as it fell flat upon it. It was held to the inside of the box by an ingenious, inner hinge.

"Do you understand how that box had been sealed? Think of it! *They had created a vacuum that had lasted for over two thousand years!* And that was part of the knowledge that Rome destroyed.

"Do you remember Flaubert's attempt at a description of the Veil of Tanit? He spent half a lifetime on research of Carthaginian life and here is what he says of it: 'It was bluish—like night; yellow—like dawn; and crimson—like the sun; harmonious, diaphanous, glittering and light. This was the mantle of the goddess, the sacred Zaimph, which no one might behold!' And here was I, an obscure pedagogue in an obscure mid-western town in the U. S. of America, beholding it. The Veil of Tanit!

"**I**T lay folded tight and wrapped about in white cloth, as fresh and bright and glittering and diaphanous as the day it had been put in. Trembling in every limb, my teeth chattering, half believing I would drop dead any minute, I uncoiled it and spread it out to its full length, and, absolutely spellbound, hypnotized, I regarded it for minutes and minutes. I forgot myself completely, forgot my surroundings; forgot where I was, or in what century I lived. I was back in Carthage, a worshipper of Tanit and terrorized by the sacrilege I was committing.

"The mood switched. Now I was

a barbarian chief from across the Pyrenees, and my name was Matho. I had stolen the Zaimph and was wearing it, walking boldly through the despairing populace of Carthage to my army of three hundred thousand men on the plains below. None touched me. They averted their heads at my approach even while desiring with all their souls to tear me to pieces. For they felt I was taking with me the thing that made Carthage great. I knew that Hamilcar, their great general, was destined to wipe me and my armies off the face of the earth for this sacrilege. Yet the feeling of momentary power I had was so tremendous. . . .

"**I** THINK it was unconsciously, that, musing thus, I took off my robe and the pajamas and lifting the Veil over me I inserted my head into the hole in the middle and let it fall about my naked shoulders in mantle fashion. The Zaimph enveloped me, rippling softly about my body, billowing down to my ankles. It covered me voluminously from neck to feet. How can I describe what it did to me? It seemed to make me grow a foot taller in stature, to bulge out my flabby muscles into knots of cast iron, to unsurge into every corner of my being will and power and daring and strength.

"The sharp ring of the doorbell broke rudely into my little act and threw me almost into a fit.

"Hastily I drew on my clothes over the Zaimph, hardly conscious of my surroundings. I closed the box and put it back on its pedestal. The door-bell kept ringing.

"When I opened it a stranger stood at the threshold. He had on an ordinary business suit of blue and carried a cane. He was rather tall and spare and very dark. On his chin was the strangest beard I had ever seen. It was short, but



it had two points, and was waved horizontally. The hair of it was black and tightly curled. In his lapel was a sprig of some flower that I had never seen before and it smelled strongly with a soft penetrating odor. His eyes were black as night and deep as abysses and they never left my face.

"I knew who he was. I whispered it.

"'Eochim!'

"**H**E bowed slightly and followed me into the library. His voice was deep and vibrant, and he spoke perfect English as only educated foreigners can speak it.

"'I was strolling by and noticed the light,' he said. It did not occur to me that there was anything unusual in a stroll at dawn. 'You are—?' he inquired.

"'Professor Smith,' I answered. 'A friend of Mr. Armand.'

"'Then you will be interested in this. I imagine you don't yet know—'

"He extended a newspaper to me. It was the morning paper. I read the headlines hurriedly: Peter Armand dead. Auto accident. Terribly burned and lacerated. Tortures. Hospital. Death. Struck a tree off the road. Chauffeur miraculously untouched. Car demolished.

"'I have come for that box,' Eochim said after a minute. 'It is mine. It has been stolen. That is why your friend is now dead. Three centuries ago it was stolen from us by one of Shah Jelaad's men who had come with a caravan to buy frankincense from us.' Eochim glanced down at the sprig of flower on his lapel. 'That man died in the Ruba-el-Khali, in the "Place of Loneliness" upon the desert in horrible torture. To Shah Jelaad and to his household the box brought death and misfortune of every kind; to him and to his

heirs. Peter Armand bought it from a Persian knowing it had been stolen from the subterranean treasure coffers of a palace in Iraq. That eunuch is now a leper in Shiraz and Peter Armand is dead. The time has come. It shall repose once more within our temple.'

"'You are an Eochim,' I whispered, 'a priest of Tanit? Where? Where upon this earth is Tanit worshipped?'

"**T**HE stranger gave me a startled look. 'How do you know?'

"'Ah, I know more, Eochim. Much more. That box contains...'

"A repressed cry escaped his lips. But I went on, suddenly enjoying his amazement.

"'The Veil of Tanit! The Zaimph!'

"Eochim ran to the box and snatched it under his arm. I laughed exultingly, possessed of an inexplicable frenzy. For the first time in my life something was happening that involved me, something that I felt was smeared with the brush of danger, stamped with the seal of adventure, signed with the leering signature of death itself. Now was my chance to plunge into the thick of it. I laughed hoarsely.

"'No, Eochim. It is not there. The Zaimph is gone. The box is open. I have the Veil, Eochim! I am wearing it! It is mine! Shall I show it to you. . . .?' I made a movement of my hand toward my shirt front. Eochim believed. He fell on his knees with his face to the floor.

"'No! No!' he cried. 'It is death. It is sacrilege! You are doomed!'

"'I am not afraid, Eochim! It is not death to me. It is life and power! See how you cringe before me?'

"He had gotten up slowly with face averted from me and as soon as he was on his feet he ran from the house.

**I** KNEW I was going to hear from my friend, Eochim. I longed for the adventure to develop. I couldn't eat or sleep; I couldn't work. I was another man. And since I couldn't attend my classroom duties, I resigned and left town, a few days later, taking the box with me and wearing, for precaution, the mantle of Tanit.

"A good thing it was, too, for Eochim had me kidnaped one night. Bundled, tied hand and foot and gagged, I was thrown into an automobile and taken to a coast city. If I had not been wearing the Zaimph I would have been done for along the way. But he was beside me in the car during the journey and I warned him. The next thing I knew I was a prisoner in a dark hole of a freight hatch. The lurching motion told me I was already on the high seas, and the violence of the movement impressed me with the fact that the vessel was some battered hulk of a tramp that knew the tropic seas and their frowsy ports better than it knew the Atlantic.

"The sea journey must have taken months; actually months. During that time I was more dead than alive. When I was taken out at last it was in the deep of night. Within an hour of our arrival there was a cavalcade of camels ready, and, perched under awning in a takht-rawan of two camels, like a prince or some great potentate, except that I was securely bound, we were on our way into the desert, into the 'Place of Loneliness,' the Ruba-el-Khali itself.

**T**HE desert journey must have taken more months. Half the time I was unconscious from the torture of my bonds. It was only in the cool nights that some spirit came back to me. During the day that terrible sun beat into my little shelter atop the camels as if the

canvas was made of gauze. The tilt of the animals bruised my soft body into blotches of insensible flesh.

"At last we reached a great salt lake, skirted its shores for a day and came to a range of quite lofty hills. We reached these hills at night. They were covered with verdure which gave off a perfume that drenched the night. We pressed on over them through a pass and came one morning to a great oasis nestling in a valley. Tall palms rose into the air, and houses of white sandstone trimmed with red brick and profusely balconaded shone through the trees.

"As we neared I heard the murmur of running water and the tumult of a town. We entered a great gate into a wide street and I saw in a square at the end of this street a great and beautiful temple of curious design. I knew it was no mosque and I knew these people were not Moslems. During the journey, instead of the five daily prayers, there was only one stop for prayer and that was at high noon. And it was not a prayer. It was an act of adoration, to the sun. And at night there would be another such to the moon when it was high. These were fire-worshippers, Shamanaim, devotees of Moloch-baal, the sun god, and of Tanit, the moon goddess.

**T**HROUGH surging crowds of people we proceeded until we reached the temple. There I was taken down, unbound, and ordered to wash my hands and face. Frankincense was given me to put on my hair and rub upon my hands. When I was ready I was ushered in through magnificent corridors of flagstone and alabaster to a high ceiled apartment. I was taken through many rooms.

"But at last I stood before a great dais supported by unspeak-

able figures and shaped in the form of a great belly. Upon this dais, in a milk white robe with crimson facings, sat Eochim. At his feet upon the platform was the box of the Veil of Tanit. He bade me sit.

"'My friend,' he said, 'consider your situation carefully. You are in Al Khartoug, the city of the Beni-Khartougs, descendants of the refugees from the destruction of Carthage. We trace our lineage directly to the great families of Carthage, to the Barcas, the Hannonos, the Schanhabarim, children of the Baal-gods of antiquity. I am the supreme power here with one associate, the high priest of the Moloch. You are completely in my power.

"'Know then that you are destined for a terrible death. That is inescapable, inevitable, and in the hands of Tanit herself. I am willing to leave it in her hands. I will leave here for half an hour. If you will take off the Zaimph and put it back within the box and remain undressed so that I may see that you do not have it I shall give you a royal escort and see that you get back safely to America as far as it is in the power of a human being to do so. For I believe that you will die, anyway.

"'If you do not do that, if you refuse to return what does not belong to you, but to us, we shall have to devise ways of taking it from you. In that case I promise you that no human being ever endured the torture you will be put through.'

"**M**Y veins were pounding with excitement and with exultation. For months I had turned the situation over in my mind. What could they do? If it was death to see or touch the Veil, if they indeed believed that, how could they molest me? Killing me would mean

tearing the Zaimph by dagger or bullet and tainting it with my blood. They could poison me, true. But then who would strip the corpse, who would disrobe me of the sacred mantle? The priest's offer itself confirmed me. I myself was to put the Zaimph back into the box. And the only way he would verify that would be to see that I did not have it on me! What belief in the Veil, in its sacred character and in its powerful tabu, that signified!

"'Was I going to cheat myself of playing such a role as I could see unfolding before me? Did I get so far in my adventure only to lie down and cry quits. Unthinkable! I was going to go through with it, death or no death, torture or no torture. The feel of the Zaimph next to my skin sent a wave of power and exultation through my whole being.

"'You can have my answer right now, Eochim,' I cried. 'It is no! And what are you going to do about it?'

"At this juncture another man entered. He was an impressive looking individual, extraordinarily tall. He wore a toga of shimmering yellow and on his breast a shining plate set with blazing jewels. His beard covered his chest and almost hid a face cast in evil lines. Eochim stepped down from the dais, and they engaged in a whispered conversation. Eochim's face was troubled, but the other one's shone with an ironic malignancy. I knew of course that the tall one was a priest of Moloch by his robe and the equality with which the two conversed; he was the high priest, and, also, co-ruler with Eochim. If Eochim asked his counsel in the dilemma he got no help from the Molochite for the latter soon left, laughing as if at a joke and casting what I took to be a glance of admiration in my direction.

“‘**W**HATEVER your motive may be,’ Eochim said to me after an interval, ‘you are certainly a man of great courage. Who would have suspected it!’ He had a charming smile as he spoke. In fact the fellow was, by every standard, a gentleman. ‘I must take time to think this out clearly and if you will give me your word, Professor, that you will guard the mantle from exposal I shall turn you loose until we decide what shall be done. Don’t think of escaping. It would be folly, and you would perish on the desert before a day is gone. Besides, you would be tracked down with ease.’

“That suited me. I gave him my word and went out upon the street. There, in front of the temple, a great crowd was assembled, and, as I emerged into the sunlight, the assemblage gave up a murmur and all knelt on hands and knees before me as if I were a god. So they knew I was wearing the Zaimph! You can imagine my feelings. Not even in the wildest dreams of my boyhood days had my soaring imagination placed me in such a position. I enjoyed it immensely. For the first time in my life I was supremely happy with the realization of the extent of my power.

“I descended among the people. Saving the men who once a year guided a caravan of frankincense to the coast none had ever seen a blond-haired man before. This distinguishing mark, added to the fact that I wore the mantle without dropping dead on the spot, endowed me with the attributes of divinity. As I came down they parted before me, dreading to touch me.

“**F**OR months I was free in Al-Khartoug. I refused a house offered me and chose to live in a tent in an open space so that I

could see and hear all about me. They spoke Arabic, a tongue whose roots I am familiar with, so that it was not difficult for me to piece their talk together. And I circulated freely among them and was treated everywhere as if I were a valuable piece of delicate china. Continually I marveled at the inaction of Eochim whom I seldom saw, but at length I understood the reason from snatches of conversation I overheard and the character of political undercurrents that I caught.

“It seems that the town was split in two great factions: The supporters of Tanit, and those of Moloch. The Moloch cult had enjoyed the greater power since the disappearance of the Veil these three hundred years. They were loath to see the other party come back into power which the recovery of this sacred object would certainly bring about. For Tanit was a cult devoid of the cruelty and the bloodthirsty character of Moloch, and the Veil was by far the most sacred symbol in their entire religion. Ahrim, the high priest of Moloch, therefore, had been putting every possible obstacle in the way of Eochim, to recover the Veil.

“I learned that it had been proposed to cast chances so that he upon whom the symbol fell was to either strangle or poison me: that is, kill me in a neat and bloodless manner, then strip me of the Veil, return it to its box, and commit suicide. It was this plan of Eochim’s that Ahrim opposed, and he was strongly upheld in his opposition, of course. No one wanted to take the chance.

“**E**OCHIM was in despair. Not only was Ahrim’s opposition gallingly effective, but another factor had now entered into the situation. I had personally be-

come quite popular. There was no doubt but that the Beni-Khartougs took to me from the first. While they were careful not to come in contact with me they continually dogged my footsteps, and I had only to wish for something and it would be brought and put down within my reach.

"Incredible as it seemed, I knew, that, little by little, a third party was taking shape in Al-Khartoug—my party. I suddenly began seeing visions and dreaming dreams of superseding both Tanit and Moloch, banishing their priests and founding in the Ruba-el-Khali a little kingdom of my own, reigning as a god-king, taking a queen and passing the title on to my heirs.

"There was only one flaw to this dream, and that was Tanit. Yes, despite myself I had a sneaking respect for her power. Not all my learning, my own religion nor any power within myself had been able to do for me what the Veil of Tanit was doing. It, and it alone, kept me, preserved me, raised me to the heights where my secret desires had ever been enthroned. How could I help believing, there, where the civilization of the Occident is as unreal as Shamanism is here on Fifth Avenue!

"Fool that I was, I couldn't wait for events to ripen. I precipitated matters by proposing a truce to Eochim. Again I was before him in his apartment telling him of my plan, clothing it in wily words.

"'I have you cornered, Eochim,' I said; 'and you know it. If any harm came to me now you would have to reckon with a factor you never thought of—my popularity. Listen then to my proposition. I like Al-Khartoug. I will renounce the West completely, and, I assure you, without a twinge.

"'Let us make an alliance, working to one end—the elimination of

the worship of Moloch. Let us enshrine Tanit, and Tanit alone. With the Veil it will be possible. I shall wear it on me all my life. Only when I come to die will I restore it to its casket so that it may be placed in the sanctuary of the temple. There is your solution. In return for that, make me a ruler with you in Al-Khartoug. With your party and my popularity we can do it, despite Ahrim. And then, in our lifetime, you will see, we will raze Moloch to the dust.'

"**H**IS eyes glowed. I had struck home, I knew. I admired my own Machiavellian finesse. It did not occur to him that in the back of my mind, despite my apparent respect for Tanit was a plan for the eventual elimination of that pagan goddess also. It was such a dream, I thought in my ecstasy, as marks the beginning of empires and the birth of dynasties.

"He sprang from the dais and walked about the room. 'There are more private chambers in my apartment than this,' he said. 'You should have warned me of what you had in mind first. If the priests of the Moloch-baal heard you they would throw you to him to burn, Veil and all. I cannot afford *that*. Leave me now until I talk it over with my people.'

"I left, sobered somewhat. At the door of the temple sat a beggar cutting a piece of bread with a dagger. An impulse came over me, and I stopped to snatch the dagger from him. He let it fall from his hands and cringed away from me. I picked it up, stuck it in an inside pocket and walked on.

"That night I awoke in my tent to the sound of footsteps without. I sat up with a lurch as the flap parted and the tall figure of Ahrim stopped to enter. He came to where I lay and regarded me with a venomous smile.

"'You are an ungrateful dog,' he said evenly. 'But for me you would have been food for the vultures these three months. Do you think I am Ahrim, Right Hand to Moloch-baal himself, for nothing! Walls speak to me and the innermost secret of the crawling ant is written in plain characters for my eyes. Now even the Veil of Tanit cannot save you. For the Moloch is greater than she, and his vengeance comes first.' He spat on me and then bent down and picked me up with one powerful hand.

"**I** SNATCHED at the dagger in my pocket and with a frenzied sweep of my arm I let him have it in the ribs. It sank in with a soft crunch. Surprise and agony spread upon that evil face, and he dropped to the ground. I raced out of the tent, sped through the deserted streets to the temple of Tanit and reached the door of Eochim's apartment. My wild knocking was answered by a sleepy priest who was armed with a scimitar. He fell away before me, and in a few moments I came upon Eochim who had risen at the noise.

"'I have killed Ahrim!' I gasped. 'What shall I do?'

"He gave a groan. 'They will feed you to Moloch!'

"'It mustn't be. Come.'

"In half an hour I was perched on a camel with one companion to lead me through the desert, and I can still hear Eochim's words ringing in my ears:

"'He is taking you by the long way to Makalla. If you get through, take ship from there to Aden and seek the protection of the British. Wait for me there. It is very likely that now Ahrim is dead I may accept your proposition in good faith. It will do you no good to try and hide from me, for I shall find you wherever you are. Till then, farewell.'

"'I shall wait,' I said quietly.

"**T**HE first journey through the Ruba-el-Khali was simply a passage in the royal suite of a Cunarder compared to this second one. It is indescribable. It was after twenty solid weeks in the desert, and after it was all over, that I really came to believe with heart and soul in the Veil of Tanit. Certainly I couldn't ascribe my lasting through as much as three weeks of it to the body God gave me. I believe that without the Veil of Tanit I would now be a patch of white bones under that sun.

"My driver, used to the desert, kept cursing the day he was born that he should have to endure such hardship, such torture of sun and thirst and madness. Well, what was it in *me* that made me the stronger of the two? Look at me! Look at my body. Listen, we have been talking only a little while—do you hear how my breath whistles for shortness? It was this same body, enfeebled by a long sedentary life, that went without water when there was only just enough for one, so that a hardy Arab of the desert might drink it instead. How do you account for it?

"But I shan't linger on that journey. Accept it as a miracle that we reached Makalla after twenty weeks in the Ruba-el-Khali. There I boarded a filthy native fishing-boat and reached Aden at last. And, miracle of miracles, when I got there Eochim was waiting for me.

"**I**T was in the library of the Government House that I had my last interview with him.

"Ahrim, he informed me, was recovering from the wound. It was now impossible for me ever to return to Al-Khartoug. Eochim had brought the box with him. He pleaded with me to return the Veil.

"No," I answered. "This thing must be played out to the end, Eochim. When I am wearing it I feel like a god. Without it life would become empty, dull, meaningless. I would be what I was, a particle of nothing. And I refuse to be nothing if I can help it. I have been that for close to fifty years. Others have climbed the ladder; others have fulfilled their lives. I have the same right despite the form in which I was cast. I will do only this for you. I will make a will in which I shall bequeath the Veil to you and your successors when I die."

"For a long time he didn't speak. When he did at last his words were charged with fate, with prophecy.

"My friend," he said, "you are living in a fool's paradise. Tanit is playing with you, for she has her playful moods. And you are responding like the puppet you are. But I tell you this: *Some day soon you will forget or neglect to wear the Veil of Tanit. That day will be your day of doom. You will die.* Whether by the caprice of Tanit or by the hand of one of my men, wherever you are, you will die. And you know very well that Tanit's vengeance is not mild. Remember Peter Armand. Remember the leper eunuch."

"With these words he left me abruptly and forever."

**P**ROFESSOR SMITH had stopped in front of a building some minutes before he came to the end of his tale. Marquart did not even look up, so absorbed was he in the story. Smith paused for a long while. His next words tore into Marquart's consciousness.

"Those last words of Eochim have burned into my brain. 'Some day you will forget to wear the Veil,' he had said. I resolved to make a test of that, in short, to

see my adventure through to the very end, to squeeze every last drop of juice out of it.

*"To-day I took off the veil, put it in its box, and went out without it!"*

"On the box I left instructions for its disposition to Eochim should I fail to return within forty-eight hours. I then divested myself of every possible mark of identification so that if I was to die I would do so anonymously and without trouble. This I owed to Eochim. I went to the library. There I saw you, and I noticed you watching me, marking me. I saw you follow me into the reading room and smile at me. You knew! I saw you follow me downstairs. I was sure then.

"You are one of Eochim's men! By your hand I was to die! I was caught. There was no Zaimph to save me!"

**P**ROFESSOR Smith swayed suddenly, and Marquart attributed it to his inordinate excitement. He decided that Smith must be demented, of course. But he lay on Marquart's arm like a dead weight, and Marquart eased him to the steps of a building. Smith's eyes opened and a smile came to his lips. He looked at his wrist watch and Marquart had to bend close to hear:

"This was a half-hour powder. It's fast—by two minutes. . . . I foresaw everything. . . . I owe it to my friend, Eochim, to save you from a possible—death penalty. . . . My regards to Eochim. I even came here. . . . Here! Save trouble . . . no regrets. . . . I have lived. . . ."

And then Smith was no more. Marquart shivered in the spring sunlight. He looked up at the building over the heads of the crowd that had quickly gathered. With a gasp he saw that Smith had led him to the threshold of the morgue.