

Weird Tales

REGISTERED IN U.S. PATENT OFFICE

A MAGAZINE of the



BIZARRE and UNUSUAL

VOLUME VI

NUMBER 3

Published monthly by the Popular Fiction Publishing Company, 408 Holliday Building, Indianapolis, Ind. Entered as second-class matter March 20, 1923, at the postoffice at Indianapolis, Ind., under the act of March 3, 1879. Single copies, 25 cents. Subscription, \$2.50 a year in the United States; \$3.00 a year in Canada. The publishers are not responsible for the loss of unsolicited manuscripts, although every care will be taken of such material while in their possession. English office: G. M. Jeffries Literary Agency, Hopefield House, Hanwell, London, W. 7. The contents of this magazine are fully protected by copyright and must not be reproduced either wholly or in part without permission from the publishers. FARNSWORTH WRIGHT, Editor.

Copyright, 1925, by the Popular Fiction Publishing Company

Contents for September, 1925

- Cover Design Andrew Brosnatch
- The Gargoyle (Part One).....Greye La Spina 293
Three-part Serial Novel of Devil Worship
- The Terrific Experiment.....Hurley Von Ruck 313
Horror-tale of Hypnotism
- The Sultan's Jest.....E. Hoffmann Price 324
Strange Was the Sultan's Whim, but Stranger the Whim of Amru
- The Temple.....H. P. Lovecraft 329
The Lost Land of Atlantis—and a German U-Boat
- Weird Story Reprints
- No. 3. The Furnished Room.....O. Henry 337
Just a Whiff of Mignonette Was the Ghost in This Story

(Continued on Next Page)

(Continued from Preceding Page)

- The Midnight Visitor**.....**William Sanford** 341
A Lively Imagination Sometimes Plays Queer Pranks
- Darkness****Charles Hilan Craig** 342
Terror Seized This Man When He Found He Could No Longer See
- The Blackthorn Gallows**.....**E. E. Speight** 345
The Figure On the Gibbet Called Martin Hawk to His Side
- Itself****Seabury Quinn** 353
The Banshee Moved the Tortoise-Shell Comb As a Sign of Death
- The Flying Halfback**.....**Robert S. Carr** 357
Chung Wo-lung Accomplished a Spectacular Exit for Tommy Kee
- The Ether Ray**.....**H. L. Maxson** 363
Powerful Beam Makes Objects Vanish Into Thin Air
- The Masters From Beyond**.....**Edward Podolsky** 371
Last Days in a Lifeless World
- The Sev'n-Ring'd Cup**.....**H. Thompson Rich** 375
Thrills A-Plenty Are Met With in the Search for Jamshyd's Cup
- The Death Angel**.....**Francis Hard** 387
Sonnet
- Jean Beauce**.....**W. J. Stamper** 388
Haitian Dictator Metes Out a Gruesome Punishment
- The Were-Snake**.....**Frank Belknap Long, Jr.** 393
Arthur Fights With the Goddess, Ishwar in Her Subterranean Retreat
- The Devil Bed**.....**Gerald Dean** 399
An Old Curse Follows Those Who Sleep in the Devil Bed
- Ashes of Circumstance**.....**J. U. Giesy** 411
The Cold Ashes of a Cigar Spelled Sudden Death for Two
- The Eyrie**.....**416**
A Chat With the Readers

For Advertising Rates in WEIRD TALES Apply Direct to

WEIRD TALES

408 Holliday Building

Indianapolis, Ind.

by Frank Belknap Long

Jr.

The WERE-SNAKE



Author of "The Ocean Leech," "Men Who Walk Upon the Air," etc.

"**W**HAT a perfectly adorable ruin," said Miss Beardsley. "I love deepest gloom, and this place is as mournful as Erebus! The perversity of nature has entered into the rocks; they seem alive!"

"These people worshiped a curious pantheon," I explained. "Ishtar was represented here. Hellish rites were performed on the altar before you. The modern mind cannot conceive them, and to describe them would require the invention of a new language. These piles are older than Stonehenge or Egypt. They antedate the pyramids by thousands of years, and probably go back to the neolithic age."

"Who was Ishtar?" asked Miss Beardsley.

"The great mother goddess, the *magna mater* of the Babylonians, the Assyrians and darker, more sinister peoples whose civilizations were legends in the age of Homer. The worship of Ishtar, variously called Innanna, Nina, Astarte, extended over the whole of Asia; and her altars are to be found in Persia, India, China, Arabia and Siberia. . . Ishtar's earthly counterpart was a woman of devastating beauty, who possessed the cruel and vicious nature of the Roman em-

press Messalina. In Nineveh, in Tyre, in Erech her terrestrial manifestations lured camel-drivers in from the desert, and destroyed them with kisses. It has been estimated that her victims in a single year outnumbered armies of locusts!"

Miss Beardsley scowled and poked with her parasol among gray, antiquated stones. "It isn't that I don't trust you. But they told me in the village that native girls walk here at night and pretend to be reincarnations of that goddess."

"The native girls are very ugly," I assured her. "They have flat noses and square ears and they wear rings through their lips. No white man could love them."

"I never liked them," murmured Miss Beardsley.

I took Miss Beardsley's hand and smiled into her nervous blue eyes. I found her anger more delightful than the impecunious glory of archeology, but like most stubborn men I invariably sought excuses. "There is no truth in those silly old tales," I said. "But it is something to sleep here. The place is haunted and it will give me prestige."

"But what has superstition to do with archeology?" demanded Miss Beardsley.

"We must investigate all superstitions," I responded. "They often furnish us with invaluable data. Lord Clayton-Maddox ignores haunted ruins, and the Royal Society ignores Clayton-Maddox."

"What of it?" pouted Miss Beardsley. I felt that her frivolity did not become her.

"I fear," I said, "that you underestimate the satisfaction of achievement and the value of rewards!"

Miss Beardsley made a gesture indicating contempt. "But they are both quite worthless," she snapped. "In fifty years you will no longer desire them!" She stooped, and picked up a handful of grayish sand. "You will be less than that!" she said.

My guide's eyes sparkled, and he smiled at Miss Beardsley. "It is encouraging," he said, "to hear a woman talk like that. We of the East place less value upon externals. We educate the *soul* and we do not value rewards. With us it is a distinction to remain humble and unknown. We rather despise those who are rich in the world's goods."

"And what is the purpose of such a ridiculous attitude?" I asked.

There was a hint of reluctance in his voice when he answered me. "You Saxons are primitive and uncivilized. You amuse yourselves with absurd toys; you are proud of your bridges and your automobiles, your telephones, and fireless cookers, and your vile, vicious factories; but we seek true culture and understanding. Your culture decayed before the invention of printing. Your middle ages were glorious. You had then great cathedrals, sacred and profane mysteries, magic and holy symbols. You had one great seer who surpassed the ancient East in wisdom. John Dee knew the secrets and terrors that lurk in lonely souls, and had you followed Dee in-

stead of such children as Newton and Watt you might now be in direct communication with the unknown. The true culture of Greece vanished when the philosophers entered Athens; your civilization took the wrong path and perished with the Italian renaissance. You ask me why we educate the soul. We educate the soul to make it strong. When the soul is strong it is able to conquer—but there are things which I can not name!"

"Fiddlesticks!" I retorted. "But tell me, do any nameless things haunt these ruins?"

My guide looked at me evasively and avoided a direct reply. "You will need a knife, Heaven-born!" he informed me.

"And a gun?" I queried.

"It does no good to shoot when you see the eyes. They are invulnerable. But a knife you might find useful."

"A gun should be sufficient," I insisted. "And I do not think that I shall take a knife!"

"You must take a knife, too," said Miss Beardsley. "And if the native girls—" Her eyes hardened, and I saw that there were possibilities and depths in her which I had not suspected.

2

THAT night I camped in the gray and ominously deserted temple of Ishtar. It wasn't pleasant. The wind swept in from the desert and whistled eerily about lonely altars and dark, amorphous piles. Locusts alighted upon my nose and ears; and they made molasses upon my beard and refused to disembark. Nothing is more repulsive to me than insects, and yet it was no good being angry with them. I sat and dozed, or stared drowsily into the darkness, and thought of the charnel worms which the mad Arab Alhazred bred in the bellies of slain camels. I wondered if I should have the moral courage to face the apparitions

tion when it came. It would be necessary to challenge and expose it.

What impressed me above all things was the survival of the Ishtar legend among the natives. I recalled the horrible rites connected with her worship, and curiously enough, I could not rid my mind of a vague longing to sit enraptured at the spectacle of a living sacrifice to the Assyrian pantheon on the dark, ageless altar before me. Like an idiot, I imagined one. The sacrifice took the most loathsome form. The victim was fastened to the gray stone altar by six hooded priests of Ishtar and hacked to pieces with little knives. And while the horrid priests wrought their unhallowed butchery Ishtar smiled, and standing at the base of the altar comforted the victim by stroking his hair.

And yet in spite of Ishtar's cruelty the Babylonians and Assyrians had worshiped her with a curious devotion. Ishtar, I had been told, was so beautiful that no man could look upon her unveiled face and retain the sight of his eyes. Her hair was bronzed, like the sands of the desert near an oasis, and her lips placed the beholder in immediate danger. Men forgot their wives, and sometimes even their merchandise and camels, and fell down and worshiped. All day over the smooth sands processions of men crawled toward her on their hands and knees. Imperial edicts had been levied against her; but men risked death and exile and crawled toward her on their hands and knees. She was more beautiful than the dawn when it comes up all white and purple and fragrant with the odors of paradise. There was something in her movements, in the way in which she held her head, in the curve of her elbow or in the glimmer of light on her tapering ankles that sent a bright, impossible joy into the hearts of her devotees; and no man who had once beheld Ishtar could be satisfied for long with an ordinary woman.

I AWOKE from a dream of Ishtar and stared into a darkness that shamed the stars. Only in the desert does the darkness thicken, like whipped cream, and stream past with an audible whisper.

The darkness was like a great black beetle covering the world with its wings. No shadows moved in it and no one breathed in it, but the dark itself was alive, and it *whispered*. The night was like an old woman that had given birth to the darkness. Up beyond the darkness sat the mother of the darkness, with her changeling upon her knees. And then in that desolate wilderness of smothering black I saw two luminous green eyes that stared and did not blink.

I got nervously to my feet and told the eyes that I didn't care. The sound of my own voice reassured me. "You are not really the eyes of Ishtar!" I said. "This is some trick—some ridiculous, shameful trick! You take advantage of Americans. But I shall inform the consul. We are not to be trifled with. Our consul has red hair, and he beats his wife and he judges men by the color of their skin. He will not even complain to our government. He will take a delightfully unconventional view of the affair. He has a nervous dislike for impostors. He will fasten you to a post, and pull out your teeth, and tickle you upon the soles of your feet until you scream, and gibber, and a nameless horror fastens upon your brain."

The eyes did not even blink. The eyes were green coals in a whispering void. They stared lidlessly in the dark and I thought: "These are surely the eyes of Ishtar!"

An extraordinary numbness passed over me. It seemed to me then that nothing mattered; and my excitement gradually gave way to a stoical indifference. And yet in the back of my mind there lurked godless horror, and my heart beat with tragic unsteadiness.

ness. The eyes were a seal of the unspeakable horror of the night. They confirmed my hatred of the dark, made the dark more mephitic, more vividly malevolent. The eyes emitted two greenish rays, which traversed the dark but did not illumine it.

I walked forward toward the eyes, holding out my arms to preserve my balance. Twice I nearly stumbled, and a sharp stone pricked through the thin soles of my moccasins.

The ground was littered with incredibly ancient rocks; and the sand was soft and wet, and it gave beneath me. For a moment I imagined that from somewhere beyond the narrow gray confines of the temple there came a current of sickly, evil-smelling air blowing noiselessly in the dark. I felt the unwholesome warmth upon my cheeks and throat. But worst of all was a sense of evil that enveloped me like a putrid shroud.

I resolved to anticipate the embrace of Ishtar, and I deliberately stared into the eyes before me. They blazed with unconcealed fury. My body sought to rebel and the palms of my hands grew damp with the fear of Ishtar; but my will kept me from the brink of the pit. I thought: "It is very queer that Ishtar does not challenge me. It is very strange that she does nothing but stare with her large soulless eyes." Then I became dumb. I saw that the eyes before me were divided into tiny sections, and the idea came to me that Ishtar's eyes were complex, like the eyes of a fly, and consisted of a million million blazing orbs. The eyes before me were not human!

I RETREATED until my back was against a high, jutting wall. I ran my hands rapidly back and forth across the stone to assure myself that the wall was high and firm. The wall was a protection against the evil changeling of the night. It was a buttress of the visibly strong and real

against the shadowy and amorphous. I quietly drew my revolver from its holster and leveled it at the glaring, unblinking green eyes. My revolver could wreck the darkness, cleave it in two, tear it to shreds. My revolver was a symbol of power brought to bear upon evil that sulked, that stabbed in the back.

I sought to orient myself to the unaccustomed weapon. The thought of the sudden, brutal bark of a revolver in that shrouded place seemed a desecration, and my fingers trembled upon the breech. A queer paralysis held me; for a moment I felt like a corpse standing in a shroud. I was tortured by the fear of noise and action, of anything that would unsettle the darkness and make the situation drastic. For a moment I wavered, and turned over in my mind the advisability of going on my knees to Ishtar and asking her pardon; and then suddenly courage swelled within me like a wave.

I dared to press upon the trigger; and the loathsome blackness disappeared in a plethoric glare which swallowed the earth. Nothing existed but an evanescent and transcendent whiteness; and the darkness quivered like jelly and fell away and writhed on the knees of the night. And then from the matrix of the glare came a thunderous report, and sound took the place of light, and the darkness came rushing back. I shut my eyes, and cried out. My knees threatened to give way beneath me. But I thought: "One shot is not enough. I must take care to see that Ishtar does not escape."

I discovered that I had no desire to see Ishtar. With my back against the wall and my revolver throttling the darkness I rejoiced that I could not see—I know not what! But I discerned in the momentary glare low, crumbling walls, and leaning altars, and black, satyrlike faces carved in black basalt, and I was filled with

horror and awe inexpressible, and I thought that Miss Beardsley had concealed strange realization beneath her flippancy. She had tried to warn me: "This place is as mournful as Erebus. The perversity of nature has entered into the rocks; they seem alive."

The whole business looked ugly, and it especially explained the villagers' fear of the temple of Ishtar. There was dead silence for five minutes or more, and then I threw aside the thing of flame that had failed to justify its boast of strength. I heard a metallic ring as it went clattering over the stones. The eyes of Ishtar had moved nearer; and I felt that I had sounded the depths of anguish, and that I now dangled above an un-reverberate abyss. Far above me through a fissure I saw the stars, but they glittered so weakly that they seemed to exude darkness and not light.

What if I should go on my knees to Ishtar and entreat her to love me? Perhaps her eyes would grow soft; perhaps I should see her and find her beautiful. The camel-drivers had found her beautiful. They had come in from the desert and she had comforted them with kisses and killed them with love.

"I could love you!" I said to the eyes, and I loathed the sound of my own voice. I knew what I had done, but I should never have spoken to Ishtar had not some force superior to my will persuaded me that utter destruction is more desirable than suspense.

At once the eyes grew immense and soft and tender in the night. They lost their snakelike glitter. They advanced toward me, and I heard a low swishing sound, as if something smooth and soft were crawling on its hands and knees over a rough, uneven surface. A curiously indescribable odor, acrid and necrophilic, came to me on the tiny breath of air blowing noiselessly in the dark. And then

from beyond the narrow, gray borders of the temple I heard a sudden, sharp exclamation of fear and pain.

It was a voice of pity and terror in the night, shaming the eyes of Ishtar. It arose from the dark spaces, tender and full of infinite compassion and infinite fear, and it softened the hard edges of the darkness.

"Stay back," I shouted. "I shall take care of this."

The voice rose to a higher pitch; it swelled in the darkness and formed phrases and sentences and pleaded and reproached.

"Oh, Arthur, I warned you! I told you that nothing good would come of sleeping here. Arthur, where are you?"

"Miss Beardsley," I cried, "you must go back. It is nothing. No hurt will come to you."

"It is something, Arthur, and I would face it with you. I have no fear, Arthur. There is nothing in the darkness that can hurt us. Only our fears hurt us, and make monsters of the darkness. You must banish fear, Arthur—and I will help you!"

I knew that Miss Beardsley had rounded the gray walls, and that she walked within the temple, directly beneath the lowering, menacing eyes of Ishtar. I saw the eyes narrow and their softness disappear and a cold fury flame in their pupilless depths.

"Arthur!" called Miss Beardsley, and I knew that she stood not three yards from me. I could have stepped forward and touched her in the darkness. "Arthur!" The voice was reproachful and despairing.

I moved forward to intercept her, and I saw the eyes drop and swerve to one side. They struck against something soft, and I heard a sudden, frightened scream; and I knew that Miss Beardsley had been attacked, and thrown forcefully upon the ground.

I left the protection of the wall and went down on my hands and knees,

groping among gray, cutting stones. Surely, I thought, there must be some way of breaking through, of tearing the darkness apart and rescuing Miss Beardsley.

I shivered and moaned and struggled with the darkness, and the most awful terror filled my mind. I pulled myself forward over the sharp stones until my body became one great sore, and my clothes hung in rags and my eyes filled with tears. For it was all dark and indistinct ahead, and I could not reach Miss Beardsley.

Low, choking gasps came from Miss Beardsley, followed by sobs and guggles, and I heard a thrashing and a retching. "This is lethal horror!" I thought. One solitary, tremendous purpose acted like a tonic upon my will. Ishtar was the horror in the night, and I must save Miss Beardsley from her dark, loathsome paws!

I recognized the menace of Ishtar with a new acuteness. The unearthly evil of Ishtar would imperil the soul of Miss Beardsley, for the goddess would not be satisfied with a mere body, an empty husk. I was fighting, then, to save both the body and soul of Miss Beardsley. I struggled forward, trying to murder the dark with my two hands. I suffered pain. In the darkness, in the night, I knew a great hurt. And Miss Beardsley was crying and moaning three yards from me.

It seemed frightful to me, my inability to reach Miss Beardsley. I had climbed and climbed over rough, gray stones, and my hands and knees were covered with blood, but I could not reach Miss Beardsley. She retreated from me. Something was carrying her off, dragging her ruthlessly over the stones.

SUDDENLY my hands and knees went wet. My thoughts became confused, but I knew that I knelt in something wet. It seemed as if I had

passed from agony into dumb, unreasoning delirium. I raised one hand slowly out of the wet. I did not confess my fears to myself; I did not openly acknowledge them. Things remained blurred and indefinite in my mind. But in the back of my brain the fear lurked like a panther about to spring.

I raised the hand slowly. I understood dimly that I could not live if the wet confirmed my fear. But it was not blood. It wasn't. Blood was less thick, less cold.

I knew that I knelt in dark slime of the earth. A godless slug that had never seen the sun and moon and stars might leave such slime. I shut my eyes, without precisely knowing why, and my brain became quite quiet. I would go on and on, and find Miss Beardsley!

I crawled forward on my hands and knees over the dark earth. It seemed as if I was going on forever, and yet I knew intuitively that I should eventually find light—and Miss Beardsley. Something that left dark, evil-smelling slime in its wake and that had eyes like the eyes of Ishtar was carrying Miss Beardsley away over the dark. And I would discover its retreat and destroy it utterly. My heart beat wildly, and a buzzing commenced in my brain, but I ground my teeth together, and went on and on.

I followed a trail of foul-smelling slime, and my whole body ached. Formless shapes branched and grew in my mind. I thought aloud: "Will there be no end? Is there no dawn? Will dawn never come up over the desert, all white and clean and radiant? Is there nothing but formless dark that conceals a blasphemous slug that is not human, that leaves slime in its path?"

For the first time I had found voice! I decided to try again, and I pierced the dark with the sharp insistence of my voice. I sought an

(Continued on page 424)

The Were-Snake

(Continued from page 398)

answer; I sought assurance. There was a sort of malicious cruelty in the silence, and I sought to lessen the torture, to ease the tension as I crawled forward on my hands and knees.

"Miss Beardsley, you must have faith. I am coming for you on my hands and knees. The way is long, and there will be much pain—but you must fight Ishtar through your will!"

"Arthur, it is squeezing me. It is soft, and I cannot grip it. It flips away from me. You must hurry! But I shall not fear, Arthur. Fear is deadly, and will destroy us both."

Long and white and smooth was the passage that opened out before me, and ran down into the earth. Into my mind came fragments of horrid superstition, and malicious memory, and a phrase from Joseph Glanvill which Poe had once quoted: "the vastness, profundity, and unsearchableness of His works, which have a depth in them greater than the well of Democritus!"

The passage before me was a tunnel of nightmare, and with my brain I doubted; but I saw the tunnel clearly, and the light streaming out of it.

And the thing that had carried Miss Beardsley over the rough ground, the thing of slime and night, had crept into the tunnel, and it did not expect me to follow. Or did it expect me to follow?

Through interminable windings and turnings I clambered on my hands and knees. The tunnel narrowed and threatened to embrace me, and then it widened until I could not glimpse in the wavering light its high, sloping top. Forward I pressed through the shadows, and shouted and wept in the darkness; and far ahead

I heard an audible swishing, as the thing crawled through the damp cold, leaving a trail of slime and unspeakable odor in its wake.

The impressions left me by that horrible descent were profoundly grave and unforgettable. But some destiny over which I had no control had arranged that I should suffer, and as I crawled downward on my hands and knees I knew that no bestial god could survive that destiny. Suffering and terror would be mine, but out of the night would come a marvelous dawn, and the confused discords about me would somehow harmonize one with the other, and I should listen with exaltation and ecstasy to a gorgeous and stupendous symphony. I would return from the brink of the pit, and Miss Beardsley and I would face the new dawn together. Why is a cold, ill-lighted tunnel that twists and turns superior to the darkness? Why did I feel a resurgence of confidence as I moved forward over the cold ground?

FOR eternities I crawled forward on my hands and knees, and then, quite unexpectedly, upon turning a bend I *saw* it. Stupendous and awful! And to think that one might anywhere, unexpectedly, come upon such an abomination. "What is the use of going on?" I thought. "This thing cannot be. If it exists there is no longer any reason for living—if it exists we are all hopeless, helpless, wretched creatures living in an hallucination, living on the edge of an abyss, living in a dream from which it is death to awake. We live surrounded by a Walpurgis night of obscene shapes; flapping harpies that would tear out our brains and glut upon our bodies in sleep; ghoulish, black-lipped incubi; serpents of nightmare from Acheron; Calibans

from Tartarus; we live surrounded by famine and pestilence and death—if such as this can exist under the stars!”

I gnawed at the ends of my fingers to keep from shrieking. Miss Beardsley lay in a pool of ooze, the muscles of her face relaxed; and an awful, indescribable agony shone in her eyes. Her arms hung limp at her sides, but the fingers of her right hand opened and closed convulsively. Above her in the dim light, its face in profile against a dark, ageless boulder, crouched the thing that I had followed through the darkness, the shadowy, lethal thing of unutterable evil that had left a dark, noisome trail of slime behind it.

Its doglike head was covered with scales, and a long, reptilian tongue protruded from between its black, bulbous lips. Its eye in profile seemed large and gray; but the tunnel-light had glazed it, and it no longer glittered. It was quite hopeless from a sane or human point of view, and when I raised my arm in a gesture of despair and fury it hissed, and spat at me. I knew that I should shiver and grow frigid at its touch. For a moment I did not think that I could ever move again; and I wondered if Miss Beardsley suffered pain. I longed to soothe and console her, to assure her that I understood.

“I shall attend to this!” I said, but I had no intention of attending to anything. My mind ran in one narrow channel, to the exclusion of everything that should have concerned me. “If it does not move, I am safe,” I thought. I stood very still, fearing that if I moved an inch I should bring it down upon me. In fancy I felt its cold nostril nuzzling my face. I knew that it would nuzzle me and nuzzle me until I perished of horror and loathing. I was more upset than I cared to acknowledge. I

suppose I thought of Miss Beardsley ; but one thing comes back now, and shames me—my vile, shocking cowardice.

But something destroyed my shivering inhibition of muscle and will, and sent me forward like a released spring. *I saw its body!* The head had held me back, and tied my muscles into knots, and filled me with shameless fright ; but the body called for quick, decisive action. I went forward instantly, and did what I had to do. But before I joined with it in that foggy earth-crypt I bent with amazing agility, and picked from the ground a thin, sharp stone.

I remember severing with one stroke the great, doglike head, and I remember how the black arterial blood ran out of the neck and splattered over my arms and legs. I know that the body twisted and writhed in the cavern gloom, and tied itself into knots, and monstrous, fleshy folds.

I can see it now, writhing and twisting in the shadows ; and I see the severed head lying beside Miss Beardsley on the ground. The jaws open and close ; and the eyes are amazed, almost indignant, like the eyes of a child who has been punished for what it does not consider a wrong.

When I had finished, and the folds lay still, I got up and walked over to where Miss Beardsley lay upon the cold, hard ground. I realized that sympathy and pity would never do. Miss Beardsley needed more drastic medicine.

“Get up!” I shouted at her. “I don’t intend to stand here and wait for you. Get up!”

Miss Beardsley moaned, and her lips quivered ; but a pink tinge crept back into her cheeks.

“Get up at once!” I shouted.

A moment more and she was on her feet, her blue eyes flashing with anger,

and a red blush covering her throat and cheeks. I knew then that she was saved, and I drew her quickly toward me, and away from the headless thing on the ground.

"We'll be in time for breakfast," I told her. "I have ordered ostrich eggs and pomegranates. We shall sit on the terrace and watch the dawn come up over the desert!"

"Oh, but my aunt never rises so early," said Miss Beardsley.

"For once," I responded, "we shall do without a chaperon."

I led her out into the cool night. For a moment we stood under the gray wall of the temple of Ishtar, and then we walked, arm in arm, toward the hotel. "You are worth a dozen Ishtars," I told her.

"That is not very complimentary," she said. "To tell me that I am only worth—"

In a moment my arms were about her, and I knew the sweet magic of her yielding body.

3

AT NOON my guide came to me. "You will never guess what we found in the ruin," he said.

"A snake?" I asked.

His face became horribly solemn. "Yes, and no! We found a headless woman! But that is not all. The gray sacrificial stone was covered with blood; and upon it lay the head of a snake—a hooded cobra!"

Miss Beardsley shivered, and plucked at my sleeve: "In the village they tell queer tales. They say—they say that *you* killed Ishtar!"

My guide's small eyes narrowed. "Yes," he said. "And we are grateful. Your courage has delivered us from Ishtar—the were-snake!"

Below the balcony our camels eyed us with tolerant, disillusioned eyes.