

JANUARY

# Weird Tales

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*The Witch's Mark*

By  
**DOROTHY QUICK**

Seabury Quinn

Edmond Hamilton

Vennette Herron

A MAGAZINE OF THE BIZARRE AND UNUSUAL

# Weird Tales

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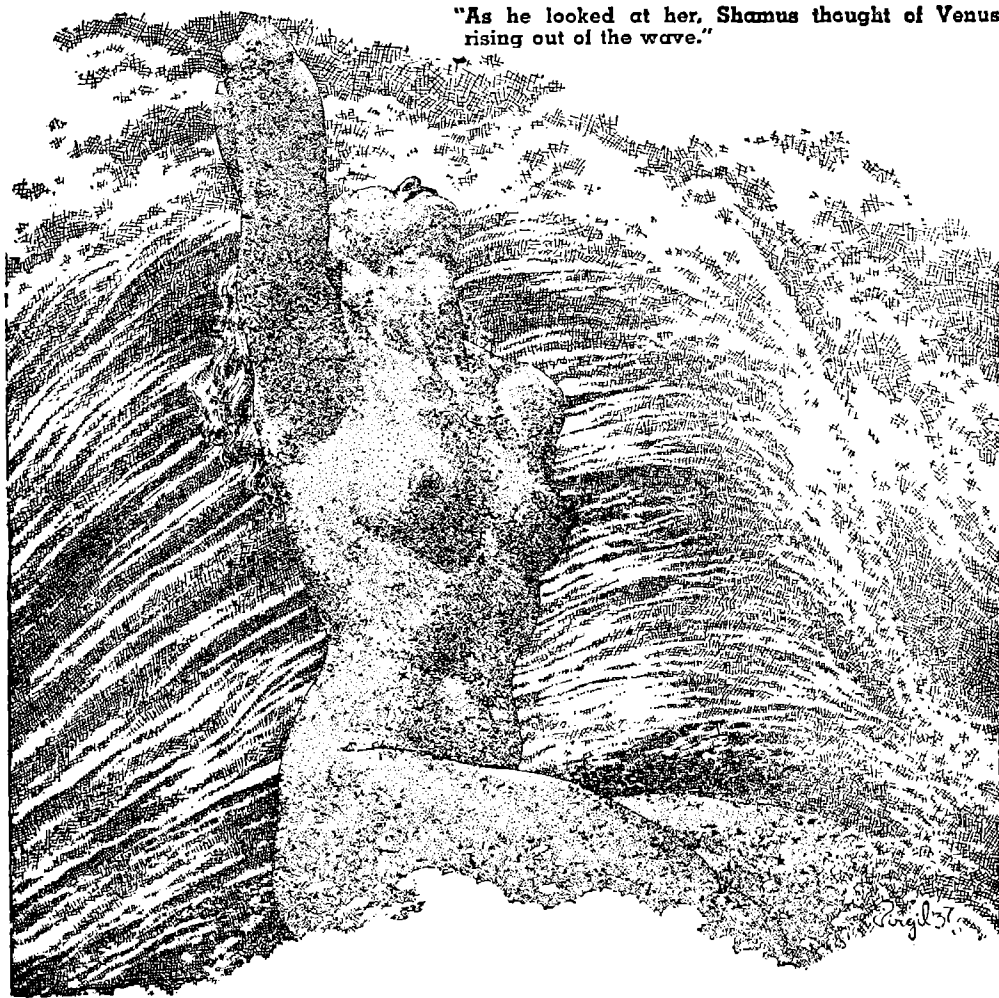
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WEIRD TALES ISSUED 1st OF EACH MONTH

"As he looked at her, Shamus thought of Venus rising out of the wave."



## The Witch's Mark

By DOROTHY QUICK

*Shamus O'Brien risked his very soul for the red, red lips of Cecily Maltby—  
a strange and curious story about a beautiful, evil  
woman with red-gold hair*

**T**HE first time Shamus saw Cecily Maltby he thought her easily the most fascinating woman he had ever seen. He weighed her charm against her beauty and found they balanced each other perfectly.

The second time he thought of Isolde—Isolde of the red-gold hair and the snow-white skin. Cecily Maltby's skin was so white that a camellia seemed yellow against it. She had a slim figure from which her breasts curved lushly, and

she moved with the unconscious grace Isolde must have had.

The third time he saw her he was conscious that her lips were much too red, that they looked as though blood had been smeared across them. Quite suddenly he forgot her beauty and charm and felt an odd repugnance toward her, all the more odd because her great eyes were looking at him with the expression a woman wears when she loves a man and is willing to let him see that she does.

Shamus O'Brien was an author of sorts. That is, he lived on an income left him by his father and played at writing because he had nothing better to do and was always in hopes of striking literary gold. He had an attractive apartment in the East Sixties and was popular enough to have his engagement book filled far ahead.

He had a sense of humor. His father was Irish and his mother French. He was six feet tall, broad-shouldered, with regular features and brown hair that would wave no matter how he struggled to make it lie flat. All in all, he was quite an ordinary young man of twenty-seven and there was no apparent reason why he should have been thrown into such a maelstrom of curious events.

They began on the Friday morning when Jim Blaketon came breezing into his living-room.

"Hi, old Stick-in-the-Mud, I've come to dig you out," he shouted, his words reverberating among the Italian antiques.

"I've just settled in for the week-end. I've got a swell idea for a new story." Shamus waved a box of newly sharpened pencils at his friend.

"Rats! You're too good-looking to deprive the debutantes of for anything so inconsequential as a story. Come on, my lad, Trudy's giving a house-party. She's a man short, so she sent me an S. O. S. to get you."

Shamus liked Trudy Rose. She was a swell girl and they'd always been friends.

"Why didn't she call me herself?" Shamus asked.

Jim laughed. "I just happened to be talking to her. Long-distance calls cost money these days." Then his face sobered. "If you must have the truth, I think Trudy's a bit shy of you. Unrequited love turns sour after a point."

Unrequited love! Trudy in love with him? Shamus had never dreamed of such a thing. Trudy and he had been pals, playmates, for years. He couldn't picture his life without her, and yet often he didn't see her for weeks. He conjured up a vision of her piquant rounded face with its turned-up nose, friendly smile and clear blue eyes. She was like Diana, slender and unawakened. It had never occurred to him to light the spark that would change her from the cold moon-maiden into a warm, passionate woman. If it hadn't been for Jim, he would have gone on playing big brother to Trudy indefinitely. But now he suddenly realized how lost he would be without her, and his heart beat faster at the idea of Trudy—and love!

He looked at Jim with perhaps a little of the elation he felt showing on his face.

"Shamus O'Brien," Jim said sternly, "if you ever so much as hint to Trudy that I've let the cat out of the bag, I'll tar and feather you! I just couldn't keep my mouth shut and let a fine romance go to waste for want of proper direction."

"I never dreamed——"

"You wouldn't. You're kind of dumb where women are concerned. That's why I spoke up. I knew you had a soft spot for Trudy and that you'd never find it unless it was pointed out to you."

With the perfect understanding there sometimes is between men who have done college and night-life together, they read each other's thoughts. Then Jim slapped

Shamus on the back and pulled him toward the bedroom, talking as they went.

"Come on, pack the bag. I'll guarantee you a moon tomorrow night so you can propose."

**T**HERE was a moon, and Trudy was beside Shamus, her arm linked in his—but he did not propose. In the meantime he had met Cecily Maltby.

Jim and he motored up to Ridgefield, where the Roses had a large country estate outside the little Connecticut town. They used it only for spring and fall and occasional winter housewarmings, but it was always lovely. Now, in the beginning of June, it was particularly so. When Shamus and Jim drove up under the rambler-covered porte-cochère, Trudy followed the butler to the door. She had on a soft yellow sports dress that brought out the deep brown of her hair and eyes. She was lovely to look at as she stood in the doorway with the wind ruffling her curls and whipping her skirt back against her slender legs.

"Shamus! I'm so glad Jim actually got you." There was real joy in her eyes that he would not have noticed ordinarily.

He caught her two hands and raised them one after the other to his lips. It was the first gesture of sentiment there had ever been between them and he made it as a tribute to the girl he had decided to make his wife.

A swift color flooded Trudy's cheeks and she looked as though she had been suddenly given a passport to the Seventh Heaven. Then Jim swept down upon them and presently they were all inside, the center of a laughing, welcoming group.

It was several minutes before Shamus saw Cecily. When he did, she was standing over against the mantelpiece. The gray stone threw her red hair into startling relief as it silhouetted her figure.

She wore some kind of clinging green material tied around her waist with a gold cord. Shamus couldn't tell what type of dress it was—sport or afternoon, morning or evening—he only knew that she looked like Undine standing there and that when she spoke her voice was like the rippling of deep waters over silver stones. Sweet and mellow it vibrated against his heart-strings as she acknowledged Trudy's introduction.

She didn't move from her place by the mantel, nor did she make the slightest effort to call Shamus to her. Nevertheless, when he had acquired a highball, he found himself beside her.

"Can I get you something?" he asked, matter-of-factly.

"Not now," she said in that deep melodious voice, "but perhaps some day——" She looked at Shamus, and there were smoldering fires behind her eyes.

It was an odd thing to say, "Not now—later perhaps" would have been the expected thing—"but perhaps some day——" with the blank spaces left unfilled! Shamus didn't understand it; he didn't want to—he only wanted to hear her speak again.

She gratified his unspoken wish.

"You are Irish, are you not? There's a touch of the Gaelic about you."

"My name could have told you that." Shamus wondered if one could tease a goddess.

"Your name?" she repeated, puzzled, "I did not even hear it. Last names mean so little. What is your given name?"

"Shamus—Shamus O'Brien. That confirms the Irish, doesn't it?"

"There have been many men in Ireland who bore that name. One Shamus, who was very like you, wooed the King's daughter, Deidre; wooed her away from all the King's sons who sought her hand. Though he was but a farmer's lad, the

Princess Deidre loved him and came down from her golden throne to take him in her arms. Do you remember that?"

All at once the room in the Connecticut mansion was gone. Shamus seemed to be out in the open spaces with the music of Cecily Maltby's voice singing in his ears. The sky was blue and there was green grass all around him and somewhere in the distance the sound of waves. And in his arms was a slender loveliness with a cloud of red-gold hair that sent a wave of fragrant scent through his nostrils, a strange unearthly perfume that he knew even in that moment was unforgettable. There was a beating in his ears, a thumping of his heart. The loveliness in his arms raised her head, the cloud of red-gold hair fell back revealing the white face—of Cecily Maltby. The past and the present surged about Shamus in a mad spinning whirl. Presently out of it he heard Cecily's voice saying triumphantly, "You do remember!"

He was back in the room at Ridgefield once more, looking at Cecily, who regarded him with strange languorous eyes. From somewhere behind, Trudy's voice called, "Shay!"

He started to turn. As he did so, Cecily put her hand on his arm.

"Some day you will remember even more, and I will tell you the rest of the story."

He bent over, and as his head came level with hers, he caught a whiff of that unforgettable perfume. Then her hand left his arm, and in some curious way he knew he was free to answer Trudy's call.

That was the first time he saw Cecily Maltby.

**W**HAT happened between then and the time they went to dress for dinner, Shamus didn't know. He was in a kind of daze. Nobody else noticed it, apparently, for he mixed highballs for

several people and added his share to the banter that was going on. But that was with only part of his mind, another part—a tiny part that he had never known existed—was listening to the music of Cecily Maltby's voice, was remembering the loveliness he had held in his arms. Only a second more and he would have kissed the full red lips.

An overwhelming longing swept over him. Shamus shook himself as a terrier whose coat is overburdened with water might do. This was foolish. He'd had a long ride, and listening to an old Irish legend had made him dream day-dreams. It could be nothing else. Only why had the girl in the vision had the face of Cecily instead of Trudy? Trudy was the girl he loved. He had definitely decided that on the way up. And then—oh, it was all too silly! Just because Cecily Maltby was easily the most beautiful, charming woman he had ever seen, he mustn't take her too seriously. Incongruously he wondered how old she was.

Jim and he shared a room; so while they struggled into their tuxedos, Shamus asked him who Cecily Maltby was and how she happened to be there, in a tone it was an effort to make casual.

"Just one of Trudy's friends," Jim replied. "Nobody knows much about her. She has a house not far from here—took possession of it several months ago and kept to herself. Trudy met her one day while she was walking through the woods, felt sorry for her lonesome state and invited her for tea or something. She's had her here quite often. You know Trudy's soft heart."

Shamus didn't say anything. Fortunately for his curiosity, Jim went on.

"I don't like her much. There's something about her that gives me cold shivers up and down the spine and makes me remember that lady vampires are supposed to have red hair."

Shamus laughed. The idea of Cecily Maltby being even remotely associated with a vampire struck him as excessively funny.

Jim joined in a good hearty guffaw, then suddenly turned serious.

"I don't think the lady's up to any good. She lives alone except for a gaunt foreign maid she brought with her when she came."

"Sounds odd," Shamus said, as he put the finishing touches to his tie. But he was thinking more of the strange, unforgettable perfume and the day-dream it had evoked than of what Jim was saying.

"She's a 'mystery woman' all right," Jim went on, "and I wish Trudy had never met her. Trudy's like a beautiful rose blooming in the sunshine, and that Maltby wench is one of those orchids that hang from trees in South America, exotic, gorgeous, but they draw living things into their mouths for food, attract them by the strange perfume they send forth."

Shamus started. How strange that Jim should compare Cecily Maltby to a flower emitting strange perfume—almost his very words, remembering the day-dream and the loveliness he had held in his arms! He shrugged his shoulders, annoyed with himself. This was utter foolishness!

"You must have been delving into weird literature," he told Jim, "what with red-haired vampires and orchids that——"

Jim eyed his friend shrewdly. "I saw you talking to her. Don't, my boy—don't! Tell Trudy you love her, and stay out in the sunshine—it's better than the jungle depths."

"You talk as though you were my grandfather," Shamus scoffed, although Jim's words had rung a warning bell in that corner of his brain that he had only discovered this afternoon. "I told you on

the way up I was going to propose to Trudy. Did you ever see anyone look sweeter than she did standing in the doorway when we arrived?"

"Never!" There was something in Jim's tone that made Shamus wonder.

"Jim, do you, by any chance——"

"I did, but it was no go. That's how I knew you were the one she cared for—she told me. Trudy's a swell girl! You needn't get steamed up over me, though. I'm going to marry Margery Standish. It will be announced next week. I love Margery and we'll be happy—but I'm still fond of Trudy, fond enough not to want you to fall for either orchids or vampires."

For a long minute they looked into each other's eyes. Then Shamus said blithely, in the way men have of covering real emotion, "You needn't worry—I love Trudy." Their hands met in a strong, solid clasp, as he added, "Congratulations about Margery. She's a grand girl. I'm glad she and Trudy are such good friends."

"We'll make a swell quartette," Jim remarked, and Shamus agreed heartily. He had completely forgotten Cecily, the strange perfume and the vision he had had.

**T**RUDY was waiting for them when they came downstairs.

"You're going to sit on my right, Shay," she announced, slipping her arm through his. Her eyes looked up at him clearly, with no evasions.

"It's more than I deserve. Trudy, I've got something to tell you—a question to ask——" He leaned toward her, so close that he could have touched her brown curls with his lips.

"Shay!" Her eyes were glowing now and a kind of inner light illuminated her face. "Tell me now!"

"Can't you guess?"

"I might," she sighed happily, "but I'd rather hear."

Just at that moment someone moved out of the little group of people that were clustered around the cocktails and came toward them.

It was Cecily Maltby.

Cecily was in misty green chiffon that clung to her revealingly. The dress couldn't be described. It was like the sea as it rippled about her feet. Shamus thought of Venus rising out of the wave as he looked at her neck and arms emerging from the green material. Her face had the beauty that poets sing of yet can never wholly describe because of its intangible loveliness. Her red hair was bound about her head in two thick braids, like a coronet. Her gray-green eyes looked at Shamus with a strange, compelling glance, but she spoke to Trudy, and her voice had changed again. Now it was like the bubbling waters of a brook dancing down a mountainside.

"You must come and make your guests behave. Someone wants to put a bottle of absinthe into the cocktails. Perhaps you can exercise restraint, Trudy."

Was there a challenge in her words? There was none in her tone, only the gay bubbling mountain brook sweeping downward. But Shamus thought of a stream he had once seen rushing down the mountain, full, torrential, carrying great trees in its wake, creating havoc as it went.

He felt a sudden cold and caught Trudy's hand in his. It was warm, reassuring, just as her voice was, and comfortingly natural.

"Come along then, we'll see what we can do." Trudy kept her arm linked through Shamus' and stretched out her free hand to Cecily.

Cecily gave Shamus a wise sidelong glance and started over toward the group,

ignoring Trudy's gesture. Without knowing why, Shamus was grateful that Cecily's long tapering fingers hadn't touched Trudy's.

As they walked along, Trudy squeezed the hand which was still holding hers.

"You'll have to tell me later," she whispered.

"I certainly will," he whispered back.

Just at that moment Cecily turned and waited for them. There was an inscrutable expression on her face, but Shamus knew just as though she had spoken aloud that he would never tell Trudy what was in his mind, if Cecily could prevent it.

He knew, and all at once he felt afraid.

It was just then, as Trudy made a dive to rescue the cocktail shaker, that he smelt the strange unforgettable perfume once more. It was as though someone had sprayed a powerful atomizer over him so that he was enveloped in a cloud of nascent sweetness that was almost intoxicating in its effect.

Through the mist that surrounded him he saw Cecily Maltby's red lips curving in a triumphant smile.

Something stirred in that corner of his brain that he had never known he possessed until today. In some vague way he knew a memory was there struggling to come forth—a memory that belonged to the vision he had had—that vision of the green meadow and the blue, blue sky with the sound of the waves and the loveliness in his arms—a memory that went beyond that—which was tremendously important—he couldn't seem to grasp it. He could only see Cecily Maltby's face with its triumphant smile, and his fear deepened until he wanted to cry out, "Save me!" to Jim, to Trudy, to anyone. And just as he felt his throat muscles constrict to give the cry, he heard the butler say, "Dinner is served, Miss Trudy," and the scent of the perfume died away. He



laughed at himself for an utter fool as he walked unmolested toward Trudy.

That was the second time he saw Cecily.

**D**INNER was very gay. There were just ten: nine house guests and Cecily Maltby. Mr. and Mrs. Rose had gone out to dine, so the young people had the place to themselves, and mirth ran high.

There wasn't any chance for individual conversation. Cecily saw to that. She dominated the conversation, did it with a chance word here and there, unobtrusively, as though she were a juggler keeping nine balls bouncing in the air with no effort at all. Her balls were people and she juggled them around as she pleased.

While this was going on, Shamus reached under the table and held Trudy's hand. A kind of contentment flowed from her fingers to his. He felt a sense of security and almost forgot Cecily's eyes resting on him from the other end of the table.

Cecily looked like a queen as she sat in the high-backed chair, her head crowned with braids. Like a queen she looked over her subjects, insolently, except when her glance touched Shamus. Then there was something in her eyes under their straight brows and heavy lashes that he could not read, nor did he want to. He was content to sit with Trudy's hand in his. He forgot to wonder about Cecily. He even forgot to pay attention to the conversation. He only held Trudy's hand tighter, as though he were welding their fingers together for ever and ever.

When the dessert was finished, Trudy started to rise, but before she could do so Cecily said quickly, "Can we not all have coffee together? In my country we do not separate the men and women as we do sheep and goats."

Trudy acquiesced gracefully. Someone asked Cecily where her country was and

she said, "I thought you knew, I am Hungarian."

Was it fancy, Shamus wondered, or had he heard that certain parts of Hungary were noted for vampires? It was at that moment he decided Cecily's lips were too red. But he brushed the thought away. What *was* the matter with him? He wondered. He was acting as though this were the Middle Ages instead of 1937. Seeing visions, smelling strange perfumes, associating vampires with Cecily Maltby! There definitely must be something wrong with him—a touch of liver probably. He'd see a doctor when he got back to town.

Cecily was speaking, and now her voice was as it had been when he first heard it, like the rippling of deep waters over silver stones, and her gray-green eyes had glints of the sea in them.

"It's my turn to tell a story," she said to the crowd—but she looked at Shamus.

"Once there was a Princess of Ireland," she began, and he wondered why she was telling that story to the others, wondered for a minute, then forgot everything but the magic of her voice and the tale she was telling. "Her name was Deidre, and many were the kings' sons who sought her hand. Among her suitors was a farmer's lad, and because he was tall and handsome with arms that were strong for holding a woman and lips that were eager to kiss, the Princess Deidre loved him and came down from her golden throne to take him in her swan-like arms."

It was the same story she had told him before, almost the same words, and already Shamus could hear the singing in his ears and the faint, distant sound of the waves.

Her voice went on, water dripping slowly on the silver stones, dripping into that far corner of his brain, awakening it.

"Then all the king's sons who had

sought her hand were angry and they went to the King who was Deidre's father and they said, 'This is an ill thing your daughter has done. She has scorned us for a farmer's lad. It will mean war.'

"The King was sore beset, for he loved his daughter and he loved his kingdom, but in the end he loved his kingdom more; for he called Deidre to him and she came with her red-gold hair in two long braids about her head, for she was no longer a maid and could not let its flaming glory loose. And with her was the farmer's lad, straight and strong, with his arms to hold and his lips to kiss that had won the Princess."

**G**RADUALLY as Cecily talked, Shamus let go his hold of Trudy's hand. Little by little his fingers unclasped until finally his arms rested on the table and his eyes met the curious gray-green ones of Cecily Maltby. It seemed to him as though in the whole room there were only he and Cecily, that the others were not there at all, though he could see their tense faces as they listened to the magic of Cecily's voice continuing her tale.

"The King looked at them standing together and he said, 'Give up this farmer's lad, my daughter.'

"Deidre shook her head. 'We have gone beyond that, my father,' she said proudly. 'He is mine for now and all time to come.'"

Through the singing in his eyes and the dripping of Cecily's words, Shamus heard Trudy say, "Love is like that." He knew she meant it for him with one part of him, but the other part was growing stronger every minute and was so avid to know the end of Cecily's story that he ignored the girl beside him.

Cecily went on. "The King said, 'There is no use sending more arrows into the air to be lost. I have spoken. Go, my daughter, take with you your farmer's lad,

but only on pain of worse than death will anyone give you food or drink or help of any kind. Go now, before my heart breaks in two.'

"And the Princess Deidre took the hand of her farmer's lad and walked out into the world with him."

"Did they live happily ever after?" It was Jim who asked the question—or was it someone else? Shamus didn't know. His mind was confused. He couldn't see the faces at the table, but only Cecily's gray-green eyes holding his.

"Yes," she said slowly, "they lived happily ever after."

"But how could they when the King forbade anyone to help them?" It was Trudy who questioned now.

"The Princess Deidre made a bargain with the Little Folk, and the fairies let them come to the Land of Heart's Desire, where they lived happily ever after," Cecily answered.

All at once the memory that had eluded Shamus all evening came back. He leaned on the table, toward Cecily, and cried excitedly, "No, no! There's more than that! It wasn't the Princess who made the bargain—it was Shamus who bargained for the Land of Heart's Desire. He even gained it for a little while; but soon he found that he hadn't bargained with a fairy, he'd bargained with a witch woman, and the price he had to pay—was the—the——"

Like a shutter dropping, something closed between that far corner of his mind and the rest of it—a door that sealed away the end of the story. The singing died out of his ears and he leaned back in his chair feeling very foolish.

"Shamus?" Trudy was puzzled. "Did you say the farmer's lad was named Shamus?" she asked Cecily directly.

"Of course I did," Cecily laughed—a laugh that sounded like the vibrations of a crystal glass when it is struck suddenly

—a beautiful laugh, but entirely without mirth. "Of course I did. That's why I told the story, because of the coincidence of the names."

Shamus knew she lied. Not once had she mentioned a name—she had always said "the farmer's lad."

"It wasn't nice of you, Mr. O'Brien," she said lightly, "to spoil my happy ending. It was such a nice story. You must have heard a different version of the legend." Shamus felt her words as piercing as thin slivers of ice.

"Yes, Shay, tell us how yours went." Did he imagine it, or did Jim look toward him curiously?

"I don't seem to remember much more than I said," he managed to stammer. "I'm very sorry, Miss Maltby."

Cecily smiled. "It's no matter. To show that I forgive you, I'll let you take me home tonight." She smiled again and then rose from the table, her green skirts swirling around her like rippling waves. As she passed by Shamus, she brushed against his hand, and it seemed to him as though his fingers had been touched by a cold ocean spray. He caught a whiff of the strange unforgettable perfume, and as he did so he thought he heard her say, "What else do you remember, Shamus?" but he was not sure whether she had spoken or not; and before he could find out, she had gone.

LATER, other people came in for dancing. The rugs were rolled up and two colored men appeared to play. Shamus wondered if Cecily would dance. He could picture her swaying like a wood-nymph while Pan piped his tunes, but somehow couldn't associate her with the modern type of dancing.

She did not dance. She stood by the fireplace surrounded by men. But though she talked with them, Shamus felt her eyes upon him, searching, probing; and

the far corner of his mind stirred under her glance.

He danced with Trudy. Several times the words, "I love you," trembled on his lips, but he did not say them. He knew in some vague way that it was Cecily Maltby's sea-green eyes that kept the words back, and he resented this, yet couldn't defy her by telling Trudy what he wanted to. It was almost as though Cecily had put a spell on him, binding his tongue where Trudy was concerned—a witch-woman's spell. Shamus caught his thoughts up sharply. This was all nonsense! For the rest of the evening he would forget Cecily, and above all things he would not take Cecily home. He was quite determined about that.

Nevertheless at midnight he found himself walking through the woods with Cecily.

"We'll just take this short cut," she had said. "It's only a step this way," brushing aside his suggestion of running over in the car.

He had submitted gracefully, for he had realized he couldn't get out of escorting her without a scene; so there was nothing to do but make the best of it.

THERE was a deep stillness in the woods, which consisted mainly of white birch trees. They walked along quietly. Shamus was annoyed that despite his resolve she had made him bring her, and she was quite silent. Wrapped in chiffons, she looked like a wraith silhouetted against the white trunks of the trees as she glided along. Shamus thought of Rider Haggard's *She*, and decided Cecily had the same deathless indescribable beauty that Ayesha had had.

"I am glad you find me beautiful," Cecily said, and her voice was like golden temple bells rung by a flower-scented breeze.

Shamus stopped short. "Can you read thoughts?" he exclaimed.

She stood facing him. "I can read yours, Shamus, because in the old days we were one."

The strange, unforgettable perfume was filling his nostrils, seeping into his senses. He tried to think of Trudy, to remember what Jim had said of an orchid luring living creatures into its mouth by its scent, but he couldn't. Everything was swept away from him by the wonder of Cecily Maltby.

She had thrown her draperies aside and stood there against the white birches with the moonlight streaming down upon her through an opening in the trees, almost as though it were a spotlight. Shamus knew she had on the green dress she had worn at dinner—he could see it rippling like the waves of the sea about her feet—but it had suddenly become transparent. Through it gleamed the white lines of her body. It was as though someone had thrown a thin chiffon over a marble statue.

Desire such as he had never known before swept over Shamus. He stretched out his hands to her.

"Not yet," she whispered, her voice changed again. It was like deep waters falling over silver stones. "I am Deidre—you are Shamus. Once before we loved and lived, but we were parted, Shamus—parted because you tired of my beauty—and I have gone down through the ages seeking you—seeking you——"

"But you said we lived happily ever after in the Land of Heart's Desire."

"Do you think I could tell them that you left me because my beauty was a well-known tale to you—that you went away from the Land of Heart's Desire out into the world, and a curse was put upon me to find you again, though it took age after age, century upon century?"

The far corner of his brain was struggling to come to life, struggling to tell him something, fighting against the desire for her that was mastering him, but he shut his mind against it. Nothing mattered of that dim past, nothing. He did not care which was right—the long-dead memories that were striving to revive themselves, or Cecily Maltby's story of a curse, a seeking. They were in the past and he was in the present, and he wanted her—Cecily or Deidre—as he had wanted no other woman.

"Give me your lips!" he begged.

She caught his hands in hers and pressed them against her. His head swam with the scent of her perfume. He forgot everything, his doubts, his fears. In all the world there was only this woman and his longing for her.

"Give me your lips!" he cried again.

She swayed nearer, yielded herself to his arms. But still he could not reach her lips. Red, inviting they were there, but he knew he could not touch them until she gave him leave, and he knew he should die of desire for her unless she gave that leave.

She spoke again, and now her voice was like the soft petals of roses falling on emerald grass.

"Shamus, Shamus, you shall have my lips if you desire them. You shall have myself if you desire me. But this time there must be no turning back, no running away. I will roam the earth no more under a curse. You must be mine utterly, now and for ever. Tell me if you will give me yourself in return for me!"

She brushed her lips against his cheek. It was as though every fiber of his being leapt to life at her touch. It was beyond explaining, beyond knowing. It was wonderfully glorious, and yet hideously obscene. It gave him a glimpse into an

unknown world, but when she took her lips away he felt as though he were losing all that made life worth while, and the desire for her that possessed him was intensified, until there was no longer anything within him but that desire.

SHE stood a little away from him and Shamus could no longer see the swirling chiffon of her dress; he could only see her lush nudity, which was no longer that of a statue but of a vibrantly living woman. She shook her head, and her hair fell about her in a red-gold flame. Eve! She was Eve, the mother of all living, and Lilith, the serpent woman—both in one.

"Do you want me, Shamus," she asked, "enough to pay the price you must pay?"

"I want you," he heard himself say. "I will pay the price."

She stretched out her arms, those wonderful swan-like arms. She threw back her red-gold hair.

"Then come to me, Shamus, and seal the bargain with a kiss!" In her voice was the music of the ages. It sang in his ears, filling them just as the unforgettable perfume filled his nostrils, and desire for her filled his soul.

He caught her in his arms. Her skin was soft and lovely to touch. She took a long lock of her hair and bound it about his throat, drawing his face nearer and nearer to hers with the red-gold rope.

"At last, my Shamus!" he heard her whisper through the mad beating of his heart.

Their lips had almost touched when he heard a voice—a far-off voice—calling. He couldn't make out what it was saying, but he knew that the voice was calling him.

He hesitated. Cecily pressed closer, wound her white arms about him, tight-

ening the coils of her hair around his throat.

"Shamus, Shamus, I will be yours if you kiss me—kiss me——"

He bent closer; then he heard the far-off voice distinctly. It was Jim's voice calling, "Shay! Shay! Where are you?" and at the same time the far-off corner of his mind broke loose the bonds he had put upon it, and an almost forgotten memory cried its warning, "If you kiss her this time, you are hers for ever—you will have lost your soul!" just as he suddenly realized that her hair was bound so tight around his neck that he could hardly breathe.

"Shay! Shay!" Jim sounded nearer.

"Shamus—kiss me!" It was the voice of the loveliness he held in his arms—water dripping over silver stones, silver stones with sharp jagged edges.

Shamus looked at her, and underneath her beauty there was an avid rapacious look. His throat began to throb agonizingly.

The desire died. Slowly, as dew drops from a flower, it fell away.

"Shay! Shay!" Jim's voice again.

"Here, Jim, here!" Shamus called back, the words tearing through his tortured throat.

"Coming!" The normality of Jim's voice recalled Shamus entirely to his senses.

"You'd better put something around you," he said, letting go his hold of Cecily Maltby, stepping back away from her, putting up his hands to loosen the tightness of her hair about his throat.

Then he gasped with amazement, for she stood in the moonlight with the green chiffon dress swirling about her feet like the rippling waves of the sea, no longer transparent, but exactly as it had been at dinner—and the hair which he had just

loosened from his throat was bound securely and sedately about her head.

His throat still ached from the constriction, and yet there were the braids coroneting her head. The red-gold hair that he had seen loose, enveloping her, that he had felt round his throat a second ago, was now braided neatly. It didn't seem possible, and yet looking at her Shamus saw a frustrated fury stamped on her face that filled him with terror and made him doubly glad to see Jim's six-foot-two emerge from behind one of the birch trees.

"My scarf is very warm," Cecily said, touching the green wrap, the anger gone from her face. She turned to Jim, saying casually, "Mr. O'Brien was worried for fear the night air would be too cool for me."

Shamus had seen her throw that wrap on the ground, and yet now it was about her shoulders.

"I must be going mad," he thought, "unless—witch-woman, vampire—what has happened to me tonight?"

"You're wanted on the phone; old chap—long distance. Your publisher. I rushed after you—he's holding the wire." Jim's sentences were disjointed. "You run back. I'll take Miss Maltby home."

"Thanks!" Shamus squeezed Jim's arm hard in appreciation. Then he turned to Cecily, "I'm sorry," he said.

She looked at him quizzically; then her lip curled a little.

"Are you?" she whispered, too low for Jim to hear, and for a second Shamus caught a whiff of the perfume again and felt a touch of that mad desire. "I shall see you soon, Shamus," she said louder, more confidently.

Then she turned and took Jim's arm. They walked off, and Shamus went stumbling back to the house in a kind of a daze, wondering if he ever wanted to see Cecily Maltby again.

THE party was still going on. Shamus' mind was in such a turmoil that he could not face the idea of seeing people, especially Trudy. With the memory of Cecily still in his mind, that glorious obscenity that made his pulses leap, he couldn't look into Trudy's clear eyes.

He went in by a little side door and made his way upstairs quietly, unseen. When he reached the room he shared with Jim, he threw himself down on the bed. His head ached, his throat throbbed; he couldn't see, he couldn't think; he could only remember Cecily's white body gleaming in the moonlight, her cloud of red-gold hair, her outstretched arms.

Presently he heard the door open and shut—and there was Jim standing over him.

"God, man, what's happened to your neck?"

Shamus staggered up and went across the room toward the mirror. With his dinner jacket he had worn a low turned-down collar; above it was a fiery red line that ran, so far as he could see in the mirror, completely around his neck. He put his hand up to it. The skin was smooth and cool to the touch, but the red line was there, about an inch wide, flaming against the tan of his throat, just where Cecily Maltby's hair had been wound about his neck.

Suddenly the far corner of his mind clicked again. "It's the Witch's Mark!" he screamed, and tumbled over on the floor at Jim's feet.

WHEN Shamus came to, Jim was bathing his head with a towel wrung out in cold water.

"Is it still there?" he asked.

"It doesn't rub off, if that's what you mean. I tried," Jim answered grimly. Then he helped Shamus into a big arm-chair. "If I'd known what I was letting

you in for, I'd have left you in New York."

"It might have been better," Shamus admitted. "You came just in time to-night."

"I had a hunch. Of course, you know I made up that story of the phone call, but anyway it worked. Now, suppose you tell me all about it." He pointed to the mark on his friend's neck.

Shamus was feeling more normal now, more Shay O'Brien and less Shamus the farmer's lad. He told Jim everything, every small detail that he could remember, and when he'd finished he could see that Jim was perfectly bewildered. Shamus didn't wonder—he was all mixed up himself.

"What do you make of it?" Jim asked.

"I suppose it might be a case of mental suggestion, that I saw what she wanted me to see. It must have been that—she wouldn't have had time to braid her hair between the time you called and——"

"I always thought she was a witch," Jim remarked truculently.

"There aren't any witches now——"

"There were. Anything that was, still can be. You said yourself it was a witch's mark." He pointed to the mark again.

"I didn't say that—Shamus, the farmer's lad, said it. He knows all about it." Shamus spoke slowly as though he was searching for words. "See here, Jim, I believe I was the Shamus in the legend. In fact, I *know* I was. Reincarnation—or if you won't have that, perhaps it was ancestral memories. There's a man who has a theory that our ancestral memories are buried deep in the unused parts of our brains. It may be the farmer's lad was an ancestor whose memories were born with me; or it may be I am Shamus himself come again, reborn just as she is reborn. Or perhaps she never died—witch-women don't die!"

"You seem to know a lot about this." Jim watched Shamus closely.

"I don't really. I'm only groping in the dark, but I must talk while I can. This is the first time I've been really normal since I saw her. I'm afraid it won't last. See here, Jim, we've got to fight her, otherwise I'll lose my soul. The far-off corner of my brain told me that. Wasn't there something, somewhere, about witches—succubæ—eating up spirits to make them strong?"

"My God! Like the orchid luring in the flies for food!"

"Like that. I may be crazy, but I believe that if I had kissed her to seal the bargain, as she put it, my spirit would have been drawn into hers, my body would have died. Probably that's the reason for this." Shamus touched the mark on his throat.

"It makes sense, if you're goofy to start with!" Jim paced up and down. Suddenly he stopped short. "What did you mean at dinner when you busted up her story of the legend, with the talk about a bargain with a witch-woman?"

"I don't know. That's one of the memories, ancestral or actual. It didn't finish. There's something wrong with the legend as she tells it. She's twisted it for her own reasons. I know that much. Despite the red-gold hair and the swan-like arms, Cecily wasn't Deidre—Deidre—Deidre——" Shamus' voice died away as that far corner of his memory began to wake again, to try to tell him——

THE door opened. "Did you call me, Shay?" Trudy was standing on the threshold, Trudy with her gallant head held high, her sweet lips curving in a smile, and love shining from her eyes. "I thought I heard you call me as I came along the hall."

Shamus sprang up, drew her into the room, held her two hands close.

"Trudy," he said slowly, "Trudy, you are Deidre."

She looked amazed; then her eyes widened in horror as she saw the mark on his neck. Behind Shamus, Jim motioned to her to be quiet.

"Trudy," Shamus went on, "you saved me once before. Will you save me again?"

"Of course, Shay, of course." She spoke soothingly, as one might speak to a sick child.

Now Shamus knew the truth of the legend. He knew why Cecily had twisted it, and he knew the depth of his danger. But about his neck was the witch's mark and in his ears the faint singing he had heard in his vision of the meadow; a faint scent of strange unforgettable perfume was drifting through his nostrils—soon it would permeate his being again. He knew that, and he knew, too, that there was little time—so little time!

"Trudy," he cried, "Trudy—take me in your arms—hold me fast!"

Beside Trudy he could see Cecily Maltby standing, her body gleaming whitely through the transparent green chiffon, her red-gold hair floating about her like a cloud, her milk-white arms extended toward him.

"Trudy, if you love me, take me—save me! Trudy, for God's sake——" Shamus heard his own voice almost as though it were not a part of him.

The perfume was stronger now; it was deadening the part of his brain that could think, shutting the door of the far corner that was striving to save him.

Cecily's voice, like deep waters falling on silver stones, like golden temple bells, ruffled by perfumed breezes, like soft rose petals falling on emerald grass, came to him.

"Shamus, Shamus — just one kiss to seal the bargain—just one! You remember——"

He did remember, and he knew that while there was still life and death and the world continued to revolve he would always remember. He took a step toward Cecily. He couldn't see Trudy any more; he could only see the loveliness that waited, arms outstretched, bidding him come to her with honeyed magic in her tones. He touched her, as he had touched her before, felt her white arms twine themselves about his neck. In another minute he would touch her lips—she would be all his. Once again desire swept over him—desire that must be satisfied before it destroyed him utterly.

He forgot everything but that consuming desire. He wanted more than even life itself to kiss those red, red lips.

All at once he felt himself being pulled back from those milk-white arms, away from the red, red lips. He heard another voice—Trudy's voice—saying, "Shay, Shay, my darling! Shay, I love you—I love you!"

He struggled to release himself from this new hold. He wanted to lose himself entirely in Cecily's arms.

"Come to me, Shamus," Cecily was whispering. "I can open the door to unspeakable delights, unbearable joys. I will give you myself, myself, Shamus—Shamus——"

Other arms were around his neck, strong, sun-tanned arms, and a lithe muscular figure was between him and the evil loveliness. It was Trudy holding Shamus fast, Trudy pressing herself against him, kissing his eyes so he could no longer see Cecily, and Trudy's voice, warmly normal, crying, "Shay, Shay, my darling, I love you—I love you—kiss me—kiss me——" so that he could no longer hear the melodious voice, though the last notes of the music still vibrated through his brain.

The loveliness grew less distinct as Trudy became more tangible. Still he



fought against Trudy, for the desire for the loveliness was driving him mad.

"Come to me, Shamus—Shamus!" He could still hear the magic voice, but it was very faint, more like the echo of golden bells than the actual chiming, and the loveliness was far away, a vision dimly seen through mist.

A command came to him from Cecily; clear and sharp it rang in his brain, her thoughts speaking to his. "Kill that woman, then you can come to me—then I can be yours." And his hands went to Trudy's throat because the desire that was ravaging him must be appeased—the loveliness must be his no matter what the cost.

As he pressed his hands about Trudy's neck, he could see the loveliness more plainly, smiling triumphantly. And then Trudy with a last desperate effort pulled his face to hers and set her lips on his, her fresh young lips, although already the pressure of his hands on her throat was cruel.

Trudy's lips held his, and through them her spirit reached out to the spirit of Shamus.

He forgot the loveliness of Cecily Maltby; his hands loosened, fell away from Trudy's throat. He held Trudy in his arms drinking of her sweetness, her love allaying the desire that Cecily's evil loveliness had aroused.

Suddenly Shamus realized it was Trudy he loved—Trudy who loved him—that they belonged to each other. There was no longer desire, or perfume, no longer the singing music. He looked up: the evil loveliness was gone. Cecily Maltby, the witch-woman, had been conquered by love.

**T**RUDY went limp. As she did so, Shamus was aware that Jim was beside them. Jim took Trudy and laid her on the bed.

W. T.—2

"Is she——" Shamus couldn't say the word "dead"—he could hardly move. He was weak and trembling with the emotion he had lived through. "Have I killed her?" he cried.

Jim looked down at the bed. "Trudy's all right, she's only fainted. She'll come to in a minute."

Shamus began to speak, words rushing from his mouth like newly freed waters that had been dammed up for a long time. "Trudy was Deidre. When her father put us out with the ban upon us, we roamed the kingdom looking for food and drink and a place to live." He had to tell Jim the things that the far corner of his mind had revealed to him, tell them before they were lost again, for the door was shutting now into that corner of his mind and Shamus knew intuitively it would never open again.

"Everyone shunned us, afraid to help; so we went to the forest to live. But we could not find food. Even animals were against us—the King's curse had been a wide one. I could only defend Deidre from their onslaughts, give her water from a brook and some berries that grew near by.

"Deidre weakened, she grew ill. I begged her to return to her father, to leave me, but she would not. Then one day while Deidre was asleep, came a woman with red-gold hair and lush rounded breasts who said she was of the fairy folk and that she would take us to the Land of Heart's Desire, and the only price I had to pay was to kiss her now, and once again when she asked me to. It seemed simple enough. I kissed her lips, and she took Deidre and me to a wonderful land where everything was truly as our hearts desired. We saw no one, but all our needs were satisfied and we wanted nothing but each other.

"Deidre grew strong again and we were happy; only all the time I remem-

bered the magic of the fairy woman's kiss and knew I would be glad when she came to claim the rest of the bargain—the second kiss I had promised.

"Deidre knew there was something on my mind, and being a woman as well as a Princess she made me tell her. When I did, she shrank back in horror, for she said that the woman was not of the fairies who were good and kind, and would ask no payment—the woman was a witch-woman and if I kissed her the second time I would lose my soul; that we must leave this pleasant land before she came again.

"I laughed at her fears, but when she wept I said that we would go. Just at that moment the woman with the red-gold hair and lush rounded breasts appeared beside us. 'You made a bargain, Shamus the farmer's lad, and I have come to claim my kiss,' she said.

"I remembered the first kiss, and desire for her ran high in my heart. 'I am ready to pay.' I moved toward her outstretched arms.

"'No, No!' cried Deidre. 'You shall not!'—and she ran between us and pressed her lips against the woman's, and fell down dead from the force that was in them, the force that was ready to take my soul.

"Deidre's soul it did not take, for she had only been kissed once; but she was dead, the beautiful Princess who had left her throne for the farmer's lad, and my heart was dead with her.

"I looked at the woman, and the desire for her was gone. I saw behind the loveliness that was hers, and I knew her for a witch. So standing there, with Deidre's body at my feet, I cursed the witch-woman, cursed her with the curse of the undying—that she could never find food, that she would grow hungry through the ages longing for my soul, unable to attain it.

"She looked at me with a glowering hate. 'Well is it for you that the second kiss must be given, not taken,' she said, 'or your soul would feel mine this moment. But if I must wait until you come again to feed my hunger, then you must go quickly so you can return quickly. I do not like to wait.'

"And she stretched out her hand and whispered a name—and I, Shamus the farmer's lad, fell across the dead body of the Princess Deidre, my love!"

**S**HAMUS stopped talking. The room was very still. Then Jim asked, "You remembered all that?"

"Yes, in that second before I asked Trudy's help. What happened in between I don't know; my memory didn't go beyond this, but evidently the witch-woman, Cecily, has lost some of her power with the years—she didn't blast me to annihilation this time." Shamus sighed thankfully. Life still looked good to him. "She didn't tell the truth of the legend, either. Obviously she wanted me to think her Deidre, to give her the second kiss freely."

"I caught one glimpse of her as she stood beside Trudy. I don't wonder you wanted to kiss her. Do you think she'll come back?" Jim's voice was strained.

"I don't think so. I think at least for now she's vanquished by my love for Trudy, but——"

"We'll take no chances," said Trudy from the bed, sitting up. "Come on, Jim, you're going to be best man at a wedding."

"Now?" he exclaimed.

"Right now. We'll motor over to that place where you can be married at any time. I heard everything you two said, and I believe it. I'm not going to risk losing Shay, now that I've got him."

"She's right, Jim. Let's go." Shamus

took Trudy's hand and helped her to her feet.

Jim caught a scarf from the bureau. "Better put this around your neck—the mark's still there."

"The witch's mark!" Shamus shuddered; all the more need for haste.

They went down the back way, although the house was dark and everyone was already sound asleep.

AS THEY drove up before the minister's door, the clock on the dashboard said four o'clock. They woke up a kindly old man who agreed to officiate if they'd get a license from the Justice of the Peace who lived next door.

As the minister said, "Those whom God hath joined together let no man put asunder," Shamus thought he heard a faint sigh like the rustle of leaves in a dying wind. Trudy must have heard it too, for she clasped his hand tighter.

They were quiet as they drove away. Shamus felt an utter peace pervading him—all the strange madness of the last two days was over. Trudy was his. At last Shamus, the farmer's lad, had regained his Princess.

As they turned into Ridgefield, Trudy said to Jim, who was driving, "Go past Cecily's house."

"But why?" Jim remonstrated. "Haven't you had enough for one night?"

"I have a feeling that I *must*," Trudy answered.

"If you're going to get feelings too and be psychic——" Jim groaned.

"Go ahead," Shamus told him; "I'm not afraid—not now." He looked into Trudy's upturned eyes that reflected the love in his.

"I wish Margery were here. All this romance is hard on me," Jim grumbled as he speeded up the car.

Neither Trudy nor Shamus bothered to answer. They were very busy with each other.

After a while Jim announced as he slowed up, "There's the house." Then his voice became puzzled, "Why, look, the front door's swinging open!"

He was right. Through the iron gates set in the wall, they could see the front door swinging back and forth.

"I'm going in," Trudy said.

Jim stopped the car near the path that led up to the house, which stood quite a way back from the road.

"Now, see here, this has been a hard night. Twice we've snatched Shay back from something—witch-woman or—what—I don't know. The whole thing may be as Shay doped it out, or it could be suggestion. Miss Cecily Maltby may have fallen for Shay in a big way, and be a hypnotist de luxe. But whichever it is, why jump into the lion's den?" There was anxiety in Jim's voice.

Trudy smiled. "The mark has gone from Shay's throat."

"It has!" both men exclaimed together.

"It faded while we were being married. I was watching it. There's no danger now, Jim. I know there isn't—and I must go in."

Shamus got out and held the car door open.

"Come on Jim, Trudy's right. We may as well get this settled now."

As they walked up the path toward that swinging door, Shamus was afraid of what the blackness behind it might reveal, and although he knew he was free of the witch's mark, he dreaded seeing Cecily Maltby again.

On the porch Jim threw the beam from a pocket flashlight into the dark hallway. It was empty. There was not a stick of furniture in the place. The

house was barren, stripped of any sign of life.

"I don't understand. I suppose people can move in the middle of the night, but the place was furnished when I brought her home—lovely old antique furniture in the hall," there was awe in Jim's voice. "Now there's nothing—it's as though it had never been lived in."

"Perhaps it never was," Shamus said slowly.

"But I've been here! It was like any house, and we all saw Cecily!" Trudy clung to me.

"We won't see her again, darling," Shamus whispered. "Between us we've driven her away, back to Witch Land, wherever it may be."

Across the air floated just the vaguest reminder of the unforgettable perfume, as though it was a farewell from Cecily

Maltby to Shamus. He knew it as such. The witch's mark had gone from his throat, but would the mark she had made across his soul ever vanish? he wondered. Would the remembrance of her haunt him until in some future life they met again and fought the battle over—and if they did, how would it end?

He felt Trudy tremble against him. "Come, dear," he said gently. "We must go now—and we must forget Cecily Maltby."

Shamus said that, and he meant it, but as he guided Trudy out of the door toward the new life that was to be theirs, he wondered if he could ever quite forget Cecily Maltby, the witch-woman, with her red-gold hair and her lush rounded breasts.

Despite the happiness he has found with Trudy, it is a question that has never been answered.