

Strange STORIES

VOL. II, NO. 1

CONTENTS

AUGUST, 1939

SNAKE GODDESS	E. Hoffmann Price	
<i>The Eyes of Don Warren Behold the Great Naga and the Pathway of Damnation in the Heart of the Jungle!</i> [A Novelet of a Mystery Python]		13
THE BOHEMIAN	Heydorn Schleh	
<i>Did the Bleeding Heart of John Gilford Unite Two Lovers?</i>		31
PINK ELEPHANTS	Robert Bloch	
<i>At Night They Came, from Out of Dark Corners!</i>		41
MRS. ELTING DOES HER PART	Tally Mason	
<i>Shadow or Substance—Who Can Tell What Dwells in Darkness?</i>		50
A SENTENCE OF DEATH	John L. Benton	
<i>He Who Lives by the Knife, Dies by the Knife</i>		53
SILENT IS THE CLOCK	Fenton W. Earnshaw	
<i>Madame La Ferte Oversleeps, a Cat Jumps and a Hearse Passes</i>		60
SAGASTA'S LAST	Carl Jacobi	
<i>An Augmented Eye Pierces the Mist-wall Rising from the Grave</i>		67
MEMOIR FOR LUCAS PAYNE	August W. Derleth	
<i>A Queer Little Man Drifts Across the Path of John Allory</i>		72
FLOWERS FROM THE MOON	Tarleton Fiske	
<i>Stranger than the Spatial Voyage is the Horrible Doom of Lycanthropy</i>		77
DEATH BRIDGE	John Clemons	
<i>The Moon Shines on Murder—and Dead Men's Coins Have No Tails</i>		87
THE CURSE OF THE CROCODILE	Bortram W. Williams	
<i>The Man Who Violates the Banga Ju-Ju Returns to the Saurian Ooze</i>		95
SEA VISION	Will Garth	
<i>A Short Short Story Complete on Two Pages</i>		104
THE CITADEL OF DARKNESS	Henry Kuttner	
<i>Black Arts and Necromancy Flourish in an Ancient Forest when a Prince Pits Himself Against Astrological Gods</i> [A Complete Novelet]		106
THE BLACK ARTS (A Department)	Lucifer	10

STRANGE STORIES, published bi-monthly by Better Publications, Inc., 22 West 48th Street, New York, N. Y. N. L. Pines, President. Entered as second class matter November 3rd, 1938, at the Post Office at New York, N. Y., under the Act of March 3rd, 1879. Copyright, 1939, by Better Publications, Inc. Yearly, \$2.00, single copies, \$1.00; foreign and Canadian postage extra. Manuscripts will not be returned unless accompanied by self-addressed, stamped envelopes, and are submitted at the author's risk. Names of all characters used in stories and semi-fiction articles are fictitious. If the name of any living person or existing institution is used, it is a coincidence.

Read our companion magazines: Thrilling Detective, Thrilling Adventures, Thrilling Ranch Stories, Thrilling Wander Stories, West, Thrilling Mystery, Thrilling Sports, Thrilling Love, Sky Fighters, The Lone Eagle, Everyday Astrology, G-Men, Popular Sports Magazine, Popular Detective, Popular Love, Popular Western, Masked Rider Western Magazine, Startling Stories, Texas Rangers, Range Rider, Detective Novels Magazine, and Black Book Detective Magazine.



*Stranger Than the Fact of the Spatial Voyage Itself
is the Horrible Doom of Lycanthropy!*



The hands were claws, and the body was furry and shaggy

Flowers from the Moon

By TARLETON FISKE

Author of "The Seal of the Satyr," "The Unheavenly Twin," etc.

ONE minute there was nothing in the clear blue depths of the sky. The next, streaking across the far horizon like a silver comet, the great ship appeared, roaring down to earth.

With anxious eyes I watched it fall as the roaring intensified. With a sense of relief I heard the sound diminish, even as the speed of the dropping space-ship diminished. They had shut off the propulsion successfully. The last danger had passed!

Now the vessel seemed to drift to-

ward earth. I ran back to my car, raced the motor, then shot down the road toward the west. The ship would land in the plain about three miles distant, I calculated. As I sped toward the spot my eyes scanned the silver hull, and I sighed with relief as I noted that it seemed undented, unblemished.

Cars behind me hooted horns, for the reporters were here, too. I pressed my foot down hard and shot up to eighty, then ninety. Ahead of me the ship was purring to rest, easing gently

down upon the smooth turf of a meadow. It landed.

I put on the brakes and the car screeched to a halt; then with my heart thumping and thundering in my chest, I ran across the grass toward the ship—toward the silver door.

"Edna," I murmured. "Edna!"

Of course my voice could not be heard through the insulated duraluminum walls of the space-ship—but it was almost magic to see the door slowly open in response to my cry, and it was magic when she stepped into the doorway, lovelier than the images of my dreams during the past two months. She hesitated, blinking in the sun that flamed through her auburn hair; gazed at the ground six feet beneath the base of the doorway.

Then I held out my arms, and she leaped, and we were locked together in an embrace that freed me of all the anxious longing and heart-sick worry of the past eight weeks.

"Edna, you're safe—alive," I whispered tenderly.

"Oh, Terry, I knew you'd find us."

"Your father—Charles—the captain—are they all right?"

Her blue eyes clouded in momentary confusion. "Yes," she whispered. "But—"

The sentence was never finished. The reporters were on us; literally on us from all sides. The cars straggled in. Cameras clicked.

"Story, Miss Jackson? . . . Picture. . . . Hold it, please. . . . Your father safe? . . . Get to the moon, Miss Jackson? . . . Gonna marry this young man?"

Edna's white hands tugged at my shoulder.

"Terry, do something. Let Father and the others get away from these men. They're—they're too tired to talk now. And, besides, Charles isn't well."

FOR answer I fought my way through the struggling swarm of reporters and climbed into my car. Deliberately I wheeled around and drove straight at the babbling horde. The reporters scattered as I skidded to a stop directly under the ship's doorway. By this time a rope ladder

had been let down from this ship, and now Professor Jackson appeared.

His tired eyes blinked nervously, and one hand went to his white head as he took in the scene. He descended the ladder and seated himself in the car. Then the captain appeared; not the fat Captain Zurril I remembered, but a thinner, haggard looking man. He carried a great satchel in one hand. He paused in the doorway to shout into the depths of the ship. He scowled, then slowly descended. Halfway down he paused again and reached up to shut the door. But the door opened.

A figure appeared then.

It was Charles DeVeaux, my rival; Charles the suave, Charles the laughing, the debonair, the black-haired, sleek, handsome scientist. So I remembered Charles.

But this man was different—horribly different.

His face was dead white, and his black hair bristled down almost to his eyebrows. His features seemed oddly altered—the shadows of the sun seemed to have lengthened his nose and chin. His hands went to his face, and they seemed thin as claws, and when the hands came away I saw his red eyes. They glared. And his mouth grinned.

That mouth! It hung open, working, a crimson maw of drooling imbecility. Charles DeVeaux was mad!

The captain looked up.

"Go back!" he shouted. "Charles—go back!"

Charles opened his mouth and snarled. I have never heard such a sound from a human throat. The yelling reporters quieted about the car, and then Charles came down.

He didn't climb down. He leaped.

"What's wrong with him?" shouted an excited little man, who climbed on the running-board as the captain took his seat. "Hey, buddy, what's the matter?"

Charles leaped and landed—not on the running-board, but on the shoulders of the little man.

With a sound I can only describe as a *growl*, Charles bore the small reporter screaming to the ground. His hands clawed at the little man's throat,

and his mouth gaped open, and then he snarled and put his mouth to the reporter's throat and *bit*.

Edna was shuddering at my side, and the professor was screaming something in a high, hysterical voice.

The reporters were tugging at Charles, pulling him away. I tried to free myself, but Edna clung to me, sobbing. The captain acted. With a single gesture he pulled out a revolver and fired. There was a moan, and Charles fell backward, hands clawing the air; fell backward from the bleeding horror of the little man's torn neck.

And then the captain heaved the crumpled figure of Charles into the car and snapped, "Drive, Terry—drive like hell!"

I did.

WE WERE safe at last in the laboratory. Safe from the screaming headlines:

JACKSON RETURNS FROM MOON

JACKSON'S DAUGHTER RETURNS FROM MOON VOYAGE TO WED

MADMAN IN JACKSON'S LUNAR PARTY ATTACKS REPORTER

We were safe in the laboratory, and Captain Zurrit had gone back to remove the party's effects from the space-ship. The professor and Edna sat beside me in the room, while upstairs Charles DeVeaux tossed and moaned with a bullet through his shoulder.

"Tell me," Professor Jackson began, "have you kept the charts?"

I nodded, a bit ruefully, I must confess. It was something of a sore point with me—those charts and records of the voyage I had astronomically recorded while they were away. It dated back five years ago to my college days, when I worked with the professor in his laboratory; became his intimate and then his assistant.

During those years I met and learned to love his daughter Edna, and during those years my life, like his own, was centered about his plans for a voyage to the moon. We had

gone over the construction of the vessel together.

Then Dr. Charles DeVeaux had come as assistant. He designed the actual space-ship while I plotted the course by astronomy. Edna had helped me, and we had all worked with but a single goal for years—that voyage to the moon and return.

When the trial ships we sent up exploded, or disappeared forever, we had suffered the keen pangs of disappointed dreams. Then Captain Zurrit had come from Moscow to perfect our plans and finance the venture. The voyage was about to begin.

But when it came to selecting the passengers, the professor omitted me. The captain, Charles DeVeaux, Edna, and himself had gone. I was forced to stay behind and keep the records—a bookkeeper of astronomy, I reflected bitterly. Up there in the solar blue my future bride rode with my nearest rival, while I could not share her perils.

It had been a bitter pill for me to swallow! To wait, to gaze each night in agony at the cold moon; wondering, wondering where she was, whether I'd ever hold her in my arms again. It was hell on earth those eight anxious weeks.

The papers had scoffed, called us all mad for our scheme, despite the validity of our plans we gave them. That had added to my worries. Was it, after all, an impossible scheme? I wondered, wondered through sleepless nights.

But now they had returned. There were a thousand questions I must ask. What had they found? Was there life on the moon, as the professor had always staunchly maintained? What was the temperature, the nature of the soil, the effect of gravity?

And what had made a drooling madman of Charles DeVeaux?

I asked those questions now. And the professor answered, while Edna sat at my side, her eyes alight with a strange, unspoken fear.

THE voyage had been calm enough as planned. Captain Zurrit handled the ship nicely, the propulsion devices had worked smoothly, the in-

sulation had been perfect and the air-conditioning sound. Food capsule supplies had held out. The speed had been calculated properly, the automatic direction steering had proved practical.

The actual voyage took a little over three weeks each way. They had spent four days actually on the surface of the moon. The figures, exact detailed reports, were all here. The instruments were to be unlocked and their findings checked and recorded. The voyage had proved a brilliant success.

But why was Professor Jackson so haggard? Why did his hands tremble so when he spoke of the voyage home? Why didn't he begin, with his old-time enthusiasm, to recount the story of his days on the moon? Why did Edna draw closer to me as though in fear?

These questions flashed through my brain.

"But your actual experiences on the moon, Professor?" I asked. "What did you bring back with you?"

"Terry, I'd rather not go into that just yet. I'm tired, my boy." The professor's words came too hastily.

"Don't ask about that, dear. It's—it's something you'd better not know," Edna whispered.

"But I've a right to know," I snapped angrily. "You made me sit here and eat my heart out, my heart that belonged to you and to the plan for years. Now I've a right to know what happened on that voyage—to know what made a lunatic out of Charles DeVeaux!"

"Lunatic!" The professor breathed the words. "Lunacy—madness caused by the moon. The old definition was right. Yes—and that *other* definition."

"Father—please—" Edna begged.

The professor looked at me.

"No, Edna. He has a right to know, as he said. He must know about what we found—and about Charles. Because we'll have to do something right away."

He rose to his feet as I watched him, and went over to a table on which rested the big satchel the captain had brought with him.

Without a word he opened it and motioned me over. I went to his side

and looked down at what he drew forth.

His hands were filled with flowers—white, orchidlike flowers, waxen as the face of Death, and lovely as pearls. The ivory petals hung open on scarlet depths unblossomed, and as the professor stroked the thick, white cups they seemed to tremble, rising and falling like the flesh of a woman's throat as she breathes. And they were lovely, lovely past all imagining.

"We brought these back to earth," the professor said. "We found them on the second day when we descended into the crater. We had seen no life in the barren soil, but we descended into this deep crater and found them growing at the bottom, near the mouths of the caves."

I listened, but scarcely heard, so intently was I studying the white and scarlet blossoms.

"We plucked them. Charles carried them back with him, and he put them away." His voice sounded from a great distance. "We didn't know, then. But that night, as they lay on a shelf in the ship, we had the dreams. And we heard the howling. Waking, I realized for the first time that these flowers had a scent."

A SCENT! Abruptly I jerked myself into awareness. That was it—that was why I couldn't hear, couldn't see. These flowers had a scent!

It was a scent so subtle, so delicate, I had not known that I was inhaling it. And it was a scent so powerful that I could scarcely stand. It was a scent so strong that my olfactory nerves blotted out consciousness of other faculties; I could only smell, could no longer hear or see or feel.

It was an indescribable scent—but terribly sweet; so sweet it hurt my eyes and throat and burned in my brain with lovely white fire.

I fought to awaken as I stood there, reeling before the strange white flowers from the moon, and then I saw once more—*saw that my breath was coming in rhythm to the pulsing of the flowers.*

"Terry!" Edna's voice called from far away. "Wake up, Terry!"

But I didn't want to awaken. I wanted to drown in that sweetness, let that scent flood my veins and surge up in white fire. My closed eyes saw waving blossoms; and I was suddenly in a deep, black pit on the surface of the moon where flowers nodded in the darkness and bent toward me blossoming, their hungry red mouths like the avid ruby lips of vampires. I was bending toward them—

"Terry!"

Edna's arms, her voice, brought me to my senses.

"What are these accursed things?" I gasped.

The professor shook his head gravely. "I do not know. The odor affects one strongly at first. I'm used to it now, I think. But that first night we all had queer dreams, and I remember waking from my slumber to stare at the glass door of the ship—the glass temporary door we affixed after landing. I could see eyes in the doorway—great red eyes, like the eyes of a wolf.

"And then we all awoke and heard the howling, the dreadful, wolfish howling. God, I'll never forget the way—"

"What's that?" I shouted the interruption.

The ghastly sound rose on wings of nightmare dread, sweeping down from the rooms upstairs. It was a sound that made the short hairs rise on my neck, that caused my throat to go dry with sudden, unnamable fear. It was the sound all men instinctively dread—the horrible, deep-throated baying of a wolf.

And it came from within the house! "Charles!" shouted the professor. "Come on!"

He raced from the room and plunged up the stairs, while I pounded at his heels. Edna tried to hold me back, but I brushed her arm away.

The professor, his face frantic with alarm, ran down the hall and jerked open the door of a bedroom where Charles had been placed. I followed swiftly, entered behind him. Too late.

For as the door opened, the horror sprang.

The professor went down, and then the thing was at his throat, tearing

and tearing, with that monstrous growl rising from a fanged maw as it bit and snapped.

I staggered back, my eyes blurring at the enormity of the dread I saw before me. It was not Charles DeVeaux attacking Professor Jackson. DeVeaux had disappeared; he was not in the room.

There was no Charles DeVeaux any more. There was a wolf. . . .

THE face I thought lengthened in the sunlight's shadows was now completely gone. It was a snout, a furry-rimmed, gleaming muzzle with wicked red jaws from which the long yellow fangs protruded. The clawlike hands were claws, and the naked body was furry and shaggy as a gigantic wolf's body is shaggy.

That nightmare metamorphosis had occurred—and now this *thing* tore at the professor's helpless throat, and then it looked up at me and snarled, and sprang. I flung up my arms to shield myself from the ripping talons. One hand struck against the coarse hair of the beast's shoulder, and the lupine creature yelped with pain.

My hand had touched the wolf's shoulder where it bled from a bullet wound which Charles DeVeaux had sustained. Whining with pain, the animal swerved aside and sprang past me, out the door. It scuffled down the stairs and I raced after it. Edna was in the laboratory.

I sighed with relief as the thing continued on out the open door. In my daze I didn't realize that the horror was escaping, loosing itself on the world. My only thought was for Edna's safety.

I turned back up the stairs, but it was too late. One glimpse of the fallen professor and I knew that it was all over. Mercifully I covered the torn features and hurried down the stairs. Edna, sobbing, fell into my arms. I tried to speak.

"Oh, Terry—I know, I know," she murmured. "Father's—gone. And it was Charles. Did he get away?"

I nodded. And then Edna showed the stuff that she was made of. Her eyes cleared, her voice became firm.

"We must act at once," she said.

"Terry, you're the only one who can save us from it."

I held her close.

"It was my fault, I should have made Father tell you everything at the first. I will tell you now."

She spoke swiftly, urgently.

"Those flowers—I have a theory about them, Terry. Have you ever read those old books in Father's library? Those ones on witchcraft and demonology he collected?"

I looked up, comprehending. "Yes."

"He was a serious student of occultism, remember? You used to argue with him as to whether there weren't actually distorted scientific truths in old superstitions and legends that strangely persisted in every age and every country. He said that perhaps these legends had a basis in truth, and a scientific meaning men just hadn't learned to interpret yet. And I think he was right. Because of this."

She paused for breath, then hurried on.

"Those books speak of werewolves. Remember? The legend that men sometimes alter their shape to that of beasts? Under the influence of some drugs, the books say, the minds of men change. That's true—it's regularly accepted science. Opium, various narcotics do that to your mind. They are made from flowers, remember.

"And the old books say that there are *other* drugs, rarer ones, that alter not the mind but the body. They say that in certain valleys of the Orient, where the moon shines always, there grows a curious white flower which blossoms under the full moon. The books say that those who breathe the scent of this flower change their bodies and become wolves. *Werewolves*.

"Only a silver bullet slays them, once they breathe the scent of these strange, rare flowers that legends say grow from seeds that drift in space—seeds that come from the moon."

WHEN she paused for breath, I spoke hesitantly.

"You mean that—"

"Yes, Terry. Don't you see? And those other medical theories of olden

days about lunatics, people who go mad when the moon is full. The moon influenced their minds, those ancient savants believed. The moon is a strange thing, Terry. It's a weird world, that controls much on earth. It affects our tides, influences our seasons—why not our minds? The old faiths that worshiped the moon were aware of long-forgotten truths. These white flowers that grow on the moon; you smelled them and you know what happened to your own mind. It's true."

"But Charles DeVeaux? What did he do?"

"We were asleep that first night after plucking the flowers. Their scent filled the ship, although we didn't know it then. And the howling awoke Father. He saw the wolf outside. It howled. And Charles began to howl in return!

"It was horrible. Father and Captain Zurrit knew at once that he had gone mad, somehow. We strapped him to the bed, but he was raving about flowers, about how he had sat there poring over them all evening. We didn't listen to him, then, thinking that he babbled in delirium brought on by some strangeness in the lunar air, or by the rigors of the trip. But the wolf howled outside, and Charles raved about the white flowers and a change within his blood, and how he felt his body going wrong. That was the worst, Terry—Charles guessed what the truth was. And we didn't heed.

"The wolf vanished. Father went back to the craters again, though I begged him to leave at once. But he was so excited by the possibility of life on this dead planet—particularly such a high form as canine life. He theorized as to how this particular form managed to maintain its existence.

"He searched for hours. When he came back he was pale; stricken and aged. Charles was worse, straining at his bonds, and howling continuously. We put the flowers away, still not believing in their potency. And we started back.

"The return voyage was terrible. Charles began to change visibly. And

Father and the captain argued, until they hit on the truth. The wolves on the moon must have once been men, but the flowers of lycanthropism had changed them into wolves who howled in pits, just as poor Charles howled for blood.

"We landed, hoping to keep Charles confined until we could move him secretly. Father wanted to study his lycanthropy as a disease—cure him, if possible. But Charles knew. Even though he could no longer speak, he knew. And he gnawed through his bonds and tried to escape. When he bit the reporter, Captain Zurrit shot him. But ordinary bullets won't kill a werewolf. And now he has killed Father—"

Edna laid her head on my shoulder and shuddered.

"We must find him, Terry! He's loose on the world now, and he'll seek blood wherever he goes. Those things live on and on, and the flowers will change others, too. We must destroy those flowers first of all. All the blossoms must be burned until that evil scent is gone forever."

"No, you don't!" a deep voice barked through the room.

BOTH of us turned to see the set face of Captain Zurrit. I looked at that face, then into the staring muzzle of a revolver.

"Lucky I arrived in time," the captain said. "Just listen to what I say, and keep your hands at your side. I don't want trouble."

Edna looked curiously at the captain.

"But the professor is dead," she faltered. "Charles escaped."

"That's no concern of mine," snapped the captain. "I'm interested in the flowers—not saving a few worthless lives. This flower cluster came from the moon. Don't be fools. It has incalculable scientific value. It is a form of lunar life and must be studied. Science can learn much from it that should be known. You must not destroy it in childish, superstitious dread."

"But DeVeaux is out, and he'll kill," I argued.

The gun waved to silence me.

"Stop talking like a schoolboy. What if he is? He'll be captured in due time, and captured alive, too. He must be studied now, as well."

"You're mad," I shouted. "Crazy, a fanatic! Science or no science, there's a horror in these blossoms that must be destroyed to save humanity. His bite will kill many, but it will merely infect others—like rabies from a dog, it will work in their blood until they too become living-dead animals that raven to kill. The world will be filled with snarling horrors, werewolves. They'll destroy all men. You saw what happened on the moon; it can happen here. Whole cities of baying wolves, howling at the moon. You can't want that!"

"I don't care. I'm taking these flowers, now."

I glanced at the windows. It was dark outside, and the moon was already rising. Night was falling, and somewhere in the blackness that loping thing waited to kill, red tongue lolling, gleaming jaws agape.

"The papers from the ship, the instruments?" I asked, stalling for time to think.

"I brought them here," said Captain Zurrit. "They are safe in the house, all your precious secrets. The vessel has been checked over, too—you will find it in readiness for a return voyage, if you like. That doesn't interest me. I stalled off the reporters and the police about the shooting this afternoon. They won't be around till morning. I didn't want anything to hinder my plans. These plants leave with me tonight for Moscow. I shall study them at my leisure, with my own staff."

Edna moved away, but the captain saw her.

"Don't try anything foolish, girl. I'll shoot without hesitating, I assure you. Now—I'll take the flowers and go."

He scooped them up from the table and for a moment one great hand clutched the mass of white, evil blossoms. His nostrils flared as he inhaled the cloying scent. His eyes narrowed.

"Exquisite," he murmured, half to himself. "They bring me dreams. I

dreamed on the voyage back, dreamed of them. Now they shall be mine, their perfume mine to breathe. I shall inhale all beauty and all strangeness—"

"He's mad!" Edna whispered to me. "He's mad! His story is insane; he doesn't want the flowers for scientific reasons, but because they've begun to bewitch him. The scent is starting to change him, as it did poor Charles. He'll become a—"

"*He is!*" I hissed.

AND he was. In the wan twilight I could see it. The evil fingers of moonlight clawed at the windows, then entered in long, bony webs of luminance. They seemed to strike at the blossoms in the captain's hand, and a white fire blazed forth. The odor, that unhallowed effluvium, seemed to strengthen in the lunar rays. I could not shut my nostrils to the increasing scent, the sorcerous scent that rose from my breath to my brain.

The captain held the flowers and I could see him change, now. His nose was a snout, and his eyes were red. Faint hair bristled on his face, coarsened in his beard and on the shadowed neck. His arms were long.

He inhaled deeply, holding the gun steadily enough. Yes, it was true! He must have succumbed later than Charles, his stronger will had resisted longer, but now the flowers were winning; the wolf-taint was in his blood, his lungs, his flesh.

His shoulders slumped as he turned away. "I'm going now," he mumbled—and it was dreadful to hear his deepened voice, his growling, slurring tones. "You can go out and catch your werewolf whenever you please. I shan't care. My plane leaves at once."

He left the room, stooping in a monstrous way. I wondered how long it would take for the change to be completed; how soon he would howl like a thing of darkness in the night. And how soon the world would howl with him, a nightmare world of shaggy wolves that tore away at the throats of all humanity and plunged earth into a barren horror akin to the shining moon above.

"Edna, we have to stop him!"

She nodded. Together we ran out into the hall, toward the open door. And there in the garden twilight we saw him running across the lawn. The night was still, but a faint breeze stirred, and on it was the strong, almost overpowering scent of the lycanthropic moon-flowers. The vine trailed from the hands of the mad captain as he sped away. It filled the garden as the moonlight filled it; under a full moon the full scent rose in a world of white light, white perfume, white horror.

Even as he crossed the lawn the captain's body seemed to change. His coat sloughed off, his form bent closer to the ground. His hands, holding the blossoms, were dark and hairy. Moonlight performed a dreadful acceleration of his condition. The scent was so strong that Edna reeled in faintness beside me. I smelled that damnable odor everywhere.

Another smelled it.

A long howl sounded from the bordering bushes near the walk.

It was Charles. He had waited there, drawn back to the house by the scent of those maddening evil-scented moon-blossoms.

The captain turned halfway. Charles saw him, crept from the bushes, shaggy body crouching close to the ground. The captain held up one hand as though to shield himself, and the blossoms glistened slickly in the pale moonlight.

Then Charles leaped forward. The wolf-head dipped, raking talons hurled the captain to the ground. With a triumphant baying, the wolf was at his throat.

And—the captain bayed back!

"Terry," Edna moaned, clinging to me.

THERE before our eyes two wolves fought and snarled in the moonlight, fighting with fang and claw, leaping and slashing with bloody muzzles. Back across the lawn they raced, the captain still clutching the ragged flowers in one paw—one paw that should not, could not be real; yet was.

The yelping rose in our ears. Champing jaws grated on bone. Two

wolves fought to the death, and through the growling came an abominable, throaty voice.

"I must—have the blossoms—Charles."

And then it happened. The flowers slipped from wolf-paws as the two rolled in a rending embrace. I raced silently across the lawn, caught up the scented moon-flowers, and sped back to Edna: "Come on," I whispered. "Let's get out of here."

She turned and ran at my heels as I made for the car, clutching the handful of demonic blossoms. Behind us the baying rose to the cold moon.

"What—where?" gasped the girl.

"To the ship," I panted. "Put these things aboard. Zurrut said it was ready. Going to send them up in the ship, let them plunge back into space, back to the moon, perhaps—anything. Must get them off the earth."

I suppose I was a little delirious. But the notion fastened to me. It was the only way to cleanse the world of the terror, the scented terror. I raced the car.

"Terry—look!"

Down the silvery white road that gleamed in the moonlight behind us, two figures loped. Two fully formed wolves! Charles and the captain had discovered the theft of the blossoms, and now they pursued.

It was a mad race through midnight with two creatures of myth howling at our heels, the scent of doom welling in our nostrils as I shot the speed up, up. We turned. The running forms vanished from behind us. Yet they were coming, coming.

And I was in a garden, a cool, sweet garden, and the air was a white wine that I breathed richly, intoxicating myself with the deep fire of strange new life. I was in a garden, and Edna was beside me, eyes closed, lips opened to inhale the magic perfume of rapture. . . .

No. I wasn't in a garden. I was in a car, doing seventy miles an hour down a moon-blazed road, while between my face and Edna's rested the damnable cluster of vampiric blossoms, their scent sucking our souls out with every breath. The cursed things were getting at us!

I dared not throw them away. Those things behind would catch up, find them. I dared not. I had to fight, fight to keep awake, to keep speeding down the road toward the ship.

Yet I didn't want to fight. I wanted to sleep, to rest, to forget everything except the beauty of perfumed dreams. Now I understood the enslavement of opium eaters, of hasheesh addicts, who sought strange worlds of the mind at the expense of their bodies.

Edna must not be exposed to this scent any longer! I shot up to a hundred, screaming down the road toward the plain where the ship rested. Edna lay white and still, her bosom rising and falling, rising and falling in rhythm with the weaving blossoms that coiled out as though to touch her milky, moon-white skin. Edna!

We jarred to a halt before the great gleaming bulk of the ship. I wanted to rest. I could smell the scent, and I wanted to rest. The moonlight hurt my eyes. So easy to close them, to forget. . . .

BLINKING painfully, I threw the door open and jumped to my feet. I shook Edna into wakefulness. She moaned.

"Come on—come on," I panted. "Hurry!"

The ladder still hung, although the door was closed. I forced Edna to mount before me, placing the blossoms in her hands. It was awful to see her fingers close lovingly about the stems of the leprous growths, awful to see the cataleptic stare in her eyes, the way those eyes slanted in the moonlight. But I had to have my hands free to support her, to urge her upwards. We scrambled up the ladder, and I prayed that the door was unlocked. It was. The captain had left in haste. We pulled ourselves into the darkened cabin of the ship. I fumbled for lights.

Edna crouched on the floor, clasping the flowers to her face. I had to tear them away from her. In the little cabin the scent rose strongly, compellingly. We had to get out of here. I fumbled with the panel controls. Impossible, of course, to chart a course; to plan. Just throw the switch

with a half-minute's delay, catch hold of Edna, and hurry out in time to be clear of the ship as it left—taking with it in its plunge those damnable blossoms. That was the only way. Get those things off earth before it was too late!

I studied the panel for a moment. There must be no hesitation. We were in danger from the scent ourselves; or was it a danger? It was so pleasant, that odor, so peaceful. Why not surrender?

And then, from without the door, from the ground below, a long dreadful howling from two throats. They had found us and they were waiting!

That was the end. We couldn't escape. I knew it then, knew that the things that waited would rend and tear if we ventured outside. And here, within the cabin, the flowers still rustled as though filled with alien, moon-given life. The scent rose stronger on the air. Edna lay still, beside the blossoms, breathing, breathing. . . .

HOWLS rose from the outside. I found pen and paper then. Had to, to keep from going mad. Had to concentrate on something, anything. Anything but the howling outside and the quiet horror of scent within.

So I scribbled this. I don't know how long I've been sitting here. There is no howling any longer, but low whining sounds proclaim that the waiters are patient. My task is finished, but I cannot step outside to face those ravening fangs, those fangs set in what were once human throats.

Nor can I stay inside. The air is close. No, there is no air any longer. There is merely the scent. For a while it weakened me while writing, but now it seems to be easier to breathe. I can hear myself breathing, quite hoarsely, but easily enough. I feel a little better, a little stronger. Perhaps I'm immune. Edna is still asleep, but she's stirring. Maybe she, too, is immune. I pray that this is so. She is waking, now. The flowers still move, her breathing is attuned—and so is mine. Perhaps there's nothing to worry about. But what shall we do?

It is difficult to write these last

words, for some reason. The labor makes me glance down at my hands. And I read the answer there.

My hands are growing darker. There are hairs sprouting on them. The fingers are curling. The dark hairs are sprouting.

I know what I must do, now.

I thought we'd throw the switch and leap out, and send the flowers back to the moon, or back into space. But we cannot leave. That was the problem, but it has been solved, dreadfully solved. We shall have to go with the flowers, now, out into space. *My hands are hairy.*

Sitting here in the close confines of the cabin has done it. I have breathed too many fumes. No wonder I don't mind it any longer, don't try to resist that cursed scent. I'm—changing.

How soon, I wonder? Better start the ship, now.

Edna mustn't know. I pray to God she doesn't know. The knowledge would kill her. Just start the ship and pray she doesn't suspect at first. Good idea. If she doesn't know, then she'll trust me. She is smiling at me now, bravely. Her blue eyes, so frank, so trusting! And still she breathes in rhythm with the white blossoms.

I won't tell her. Because then, when I get hungry enough—why do I get hungry when I look at her now?—I can approach her. She trusts me. She doesn't know what the flowers have done to me. And the pulse-beat in her white neck moves up and down, and I'm hungry. When we're plunging out there in the spatial darkness all alone it will be too late to think of my hairy hands when I do tell her. When I tell her, and take her.

I will throw the switch now, and throw this manuscript out of the ship. I'm hungry. That perfume from the white flowers is making me hungry. Well, there will soon be a feast.

Yes, very soon. And yet, I wonder. Edna is standing at my side now, trying to read what I write. She still isn't afraid, and has just laid one hand on mine. And I see something else.

There will be a feast soon out in space, but perhaps I will not be the feaster.

Edna's hand is growing hairy, too.