

(CONTINUED.)

Are they coming yet?
"Not yet, Ishmael; they have not had time to perform their feat. Patience a little longer, they will come; Zanea says they will come. Here is Terry Denver come to see thee."

"Ha! and to say again I will not garner the return I hoped for. What if he were right? No, no, I did not sin. I will reap an abundant harvest. I tilled well and deep."

"There, there, he has come to talk with thee. Zell comes soon and then all will be happy."

Terry noticed now, down on the road, the white-clad Zell with Shem, and he watched them make the ascent. Near the summit Shem turned and left Zell to finish the journey alone.

"You meet Zell, will you, Terry Denver? This will be the first time she has met Ishmael."

"So it will be."

Terry met Zell and the two walked to Ishmael.

CHAPTER IX.

ELL, this is Ishmael."
She paused a moment, then knelt by the aged man.

"And this is Ishmael? Thou art like a drift of snow, yet thou art warm."

Thou art a warm snow, drift overhanging the mountain."
She drew her little hands down the silken beard in reverent admiration, then bent her head to his knee like a weary child.

"Ishmael, do you know this is rest."

"Well, rest thee my little one. Zanea, come too, and kneel to me as does Zell."

"Zanea knelt and bowed her head to rest on the other knee. Ishmael lay one hand on either head. For a short space of time the earnest old face lit with the joy of fatherhood. Yes, Zell, this is rest, peaceful rest. This is for the young and the old—middle life is for work; mine is finished. I will soon know—soon see the mystical beyond."

"Have you inlaid your life, Ishmael, with purest gems or crumbling sandstone?"

"Zell, let him rest."

"Let me rest, Zanea? No, no, I must work yet a little; let me go. Wait me here, I will return when all is complete."

They were very much depressed after the old man left. Zell clung to Zanea and Zanea soothed the timorous Zell with gentle touches, till the depression vanished. Then the two paced slowly along the platform several times. The moon burst in full radiance over Tarn and hill, and Zell and Zanea stood to look at the circle of reflected sun. How perfect the beauty of those two, and as perfect their minds. It was what ought to be, when Terry could not decide which was most to be desired. He sat with his elbow resting on the table and his long fingers shading his eyes, studying the two. This was a favorite position and occupation of Terry's. All were quiet for some time, then Zanea threw her arm around Zell.

"Thou art winsome, my Zell. Thou hast won his love."

Low, so low spoke it might have been a re-echo. She caught a strand of Zell's hair and twined it around her hand and arm, a trick she often indulged in. To-night she stroked and lay each hair in place, then coiled and smoothed it, until it shone in the moonlight, and reminded Terry of a copper snake. Playfully Zanea tossed a fold around Zell's neck. Again the echoed murmur.

"Thou art winsome, my Zell. Thou hast won his love."

She drew Zell to her and kissed her tenderly, so very tenderly, then lightly she tossed another fold around Zell's neck. Zell smiled at the notion, and Terry shuddered. It was like the sure twining of a snake, but it was only her own glorious hair. Softly Zanea spoke again.

"I love thee, Zell. I love thee, little sister. Sister—what a sweet word."

Then into the grand face of Zanea a wierd, unholy light flashed. The eyes glistened as did the eyes of the venomous rattler she had crushed to death, then grasping the coil of hair she drew with all her strength. The folds slipped tight around the white throat of Zell, so tight as to prevent any cry for help. She threw up her hands in the struggle for life with such force that both staggered backward toward the precipice. Their feet caught in their clinging silken gowns, and again they staggered forward, right to the verge, there they swayed. Terry watched the scene as if fascinated until the two paused on that awful brink of death. With a bound he gained them and all the power of concentrated love broke forth in his cry for—Zell. He leaned forward and encircled her with his arms, with his two hands he caught the rope of gleaming hair, then braced himself to sustain the weight, the fall of Zanea would make, and prevent Zell from being strangled. Only a moment of this horrible waiting, a heavy jerk, then Terry lurched backward, bearing his Zell to safety. He unwound her hair from around her neck and watched her lay still and white in his arms. A distant, muffled splash told that Zanea, too, lay still and white, but in death.

"Zanea, hast thou left me, my light? Where art thou gone, my child? To



THAT AWFUL BRINK OF DEATH.

seek thy mother thou hast left thy father. Nobly, without a cry of fear thou didst receive grim death. To be with thee, my illustrious one again, I would forfeit the harvesting of my life's great work. Thou wert the greater Ishmael. Ishmael was but the scive that winnowed thy great thoughts. Zanea, Zanea, where hast thou gone? What is beyond? They will not come. They will not come. They—they come not."

More feeble grew the voice and body. Down on the rock he sank. His spirit had sought Zanea's away in the mystical hereafter. Terry bore Zell into the cave and placed her on one of the couches, then hastened to Ishmael. He lifted the time-worn man and placed him, too, on one of the beds he had prepared for his victims. He then ran swiftly down the hill, untied his boat, pushed it from the shore, and paddled down the Tarn to seek Shem's assistance. Shem sat by the water's edge waiting Terry's return.

"Shem, hurry into the boat. Ishmael and Zanea are dead, and Zell needs you sorely. Make haste, Shem!"

Shem struggled to his feet.

"Ishmael dead, and Zanea? Impossible, Terry Denver! Impossible!"

"Oh, haste, Shem. If Zell should gain consciousness alone there with the dead!"

"Yes, Yes."

Back they sped. They strained every muscle to increase the speed. Terry waited not to tie the boat, but up the hill they ran without a break. Zell lay as Terry had left her. Shem bent over her, numb with fear least she too had gone. Her eyes opened, and she whispered:

"Father Ambrose, I have studied hard. Zanea says I know my first lesson. I will soon read."

Then a more distinct recollection of events surged through her dazed brain, a tremor ran from nerve to nerve, and she raised her hand to her throat.

"Where is Zanea, Terry? Shem, where is Zanea? Tell me."

"She is in the water. She fell from the platform."

"Oh, Terry."

"We will have to go and seek her body. Shem, what will we do with Zell?"

"I will go with you. When you find her I am the one who ought to be there."

"Very well. Shem, has Ishmael no attendant?"

"I will call one."

He passed behind the drape at the back of the cave. Soon he came back alone.

"He has left the three in that heavy mesmeric stupor or sleep. They will not, they cannot waken. He will have to lie thus until Zanea is found."

"Why, Shem, what is the matter with old Ishmael?"

"He is dead."

"And that is death, Terry. Not an atom less to be desired than life. That was what you said death was. How quiet he is, Terry? Will he never move again?"

"No."

"Go on down, Zell, and you, Terry Denver. I will meet you at the foot of the hill."

When they came to the door in the rock Shem stood waiting them. A coil of rope in one hand and a grappling hook in the other.

"Zell, you must wait on the shore, the canoe will hold but two."

They paddled to where they thought Zanea's body would have gone down and cast the iron. Back and forth they went in the dim light for an hour, then the hook caught on some yielding object. They drew in the rope and the spiritless body of Zanea, in its wet, clinging silk, rose and fell on the slightly disturbed water. Shem caught and held it, while Terry took them ashore. They lifted Zanea from the water and lay her on the rock. Her hair clung to her, darkened by the water, making a strong contrast to the still white face. Zell looked down at Zanea. She did not weep. She had not learned there was aught to weep for.

"Terry, Zanea is dead, too."

"Yes, Zell."

"She is in the abode with Ishmael is she not? She looks the same as he does, that same deep peace."

Shem had brought from the door in the rock a stretcher. On this they plac-

ed the body and bore it to the cave. Shem, aged past his years, then took Zell's hand, saying hoarsely:

"Zell, thou art not afraid of these, the dead, art thou, for to thee, my little one, falls the duty of making her ready for burial? 'Tis a sadly dismal work for thee, but thou art the only one fitted for this, the last demand of Zanea."

"Afraid of Zanea? No, neither of old Ishmael. What am I to do, Shem?"

"Dress her afresh in the clothes that I will fetch thee. Dry those dripping masses of hair. Arrange her as thou wouldst thyself to meet with one loved. That is all."

From somewhere he brought fresh clothes and all needful things, then withdrew, leaving the girl alone with the dead Ishmael and Zanea. Shem and Terry seated themselves on the platform amid the midnight moonlight.

CHAPTER X.

ERRY DENVER, the time has come for you to hear old Ishmael's history."

"Ninety-nine years ago was born of an eastern mother a son to a British father. From the Buddh-



istic mother this son drew a love of the dreamy religion of Buddha and a thirst for occult lore. From the British father he inherited tenacity and physical structure, but nothing else. At twenty he was learned past the ordinary. To the study of all things esoteric and occult he devoted himself, living but to study. Mother and father died. The mother left him wealth untold. He became famous in the east as a scholar of unbounded scope. When seventy-nine years of age he met, while exploring for science sake, a lovely Italian girl of twenty. What freak of fate made the lovely child of Italy forget her youth, and wed the aged recluse, is hidden knowledge that even Ishmael could not fathom. At the same time why one so wise as he could take a child like that out of a land of laughing eyes and ardent wooers is just as strange. However it was, wed they were. He resumed his studies, carrying his bride into a mountain cave to spend a most lugubrious honeymoon. This was under the Arctic sky. Time passed, then the lonely wife pleaded to be taken to Italy. He grew irritated because his studies were interfered with by such requests. Another span of time passed, of weary loneliness, in solitude, and again the wife begged to be taken home, that her babe might be born under the blue sky of her beloved Italy. A cruel thought took root in his masterful brain, and grew and bore fruit. He gathered his wealth, and with bales of richest silks, gold, silver and his library, he journeyed, she thought toward Italy. It was to America he came. Onward and onward, then by chance he found the Tarn. One month before the expected birth, he picked me up a half-starved halfbreed, on Deer Bay, and brought me here as servant. He has been a considerate master. The grewsome disappointment went hard with the wife. Afterwards he told her she was to remain forever amid these barren rocks. She never spoke of Italy again, until the day the babies, Zell, and Zanea came. She called the aged sire to her and asked him for the sake of her babies, the blessing of the warm climate of Italy. The rest you know. I loved the father. I loved the mother and her babies. I have served them well." Ishmael concluded to bring Zell up in utter ignorance of all that goes on out there, just for experiment. She would be under my care. Zanea he cared for himself, and educated her. They had, of course, to be kept apart, else Zanea would have been an education for Zell. Ishmael, as Father Ambrose, taught Zell to speak correctly; he also taught me. Zell never knew that old Ishmael and Father Ambrose were the same. Is there more you wish to know?"

"Who are the victims?"

"I do not know. Some of them drifted here as you did, Ishmael brought the rest. Judith is an old servant who came from the east with him."

"Shem, look, what is that?"

Out of the pass drifted a canoe, into the Tarn. In the boat sat two men.

"It is the two Ishmael waited so restlessly for. They have returned. The crowning of his life's work came too late. Sin never reaps. What is the matter with them? They sit and do not try to gain the shore. Come, Shem, and help them."

Down the hill and into the boat. A few strong strokes brought them to the men. Flat on the bottom of the boat sat the two, perfect wrecks mentally and physically. Their bones were almost fleshless and they babbled as do babes seven months old. Such a sight for science sake! Had they returned violent maniacs it would not have been so heartrending as this imbecile childishness of these grown men.

"They will have to be cared for, Shem; where will we take them? Zell must not see this."

"No, we will take them to one of the lower caverns. This whole place is a chain of caves, all well furnished. We have plenty room for those unfortunate creatures." In at the door they guided the faltering steps. Through cave after cave, piled high with everything one could wish for, they led the men. They came to a cave large and furnished with low beds. Here the poor victims were put to bed. They fastened the doors then back again to the platform, where they found Zell calling for them. She came to meet Shem and Terry.

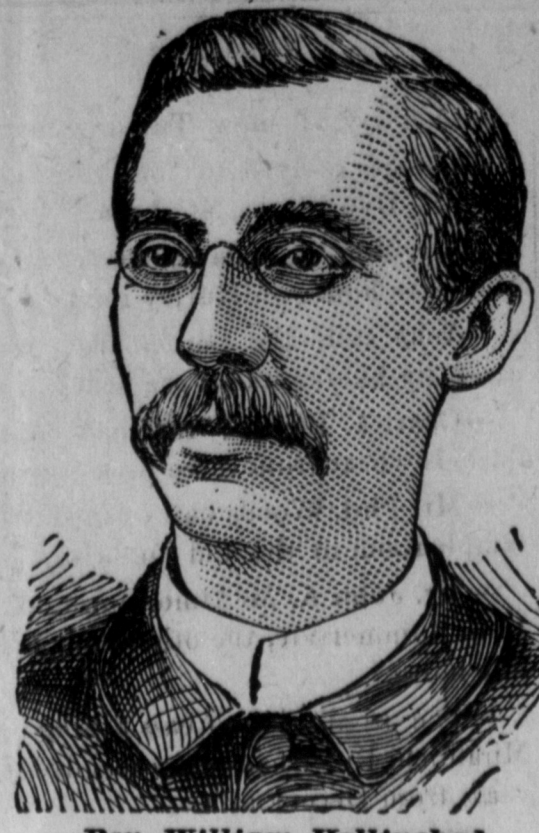
"Come, I have dressed her as you said, Shem. What now?"

"I will take thee to Zanea's cave where thou canst rest. Thou art weary."

"Will she be alone all night, Shem?"

"Terry Denver will help me prepare old Ishmael; it will then be near dawn. At midnight following this we will bury them in the water. It was his wish. Come."

He led her from the main cave, leaving Terry alone with the dead. Terry



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