

A MAGAZINE OF THE BIZARRE AND UNUSUAL

Weird Tales

REGISTERED IN U.S. PATENT OFFICE

Volume 28

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Published monthly by the Popular Fiction Publishing Company, 2457 East Washington Street, Indianapolis, Ind. Entered as second-class matter March 20, 1923, at the post office at Indianapolis, Ind., under the act of March 3, 1879. Single copies, 25 cents. *Subscription rates:* One year in the United States and possessions, Cuba, Mexico, South America, Spain, \$2.50; Canada, \$2.75; elsewhere, \$3.00. English office: Otis A. Kline, c/o John Paradise, 86 Strand, W. C. 2, London. The publishers are not responsible for the loss of unsolicited manuscripts, although every care will be taken of such material while in their possession. The contents of this magazine are fully protected by copyright and must not be reproduced either wholly or in part without permission from the publishers.

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WEIRD TALES ISSUED 1st OF EACH MONTH



"There were heavy old neck-chains and lockets of twenty-four carat gold."

Midas

By BASSETT MORGAN

*A shuddery graveyard tale, through which blows an icy breath of horror,
like a chill wind from the tomb*

THE gloom deepened under the arching trees of the town's east end, where the darkies' shacks had stood, some of them since Civil War days. Orinsley was glad to get through it and emerge near the railroad tracks.

It was all familiar since boyhood. He wanted to get away then, never dreaming he would be forced back, hoofing it instead of driving a car, on a lousy little domestic errand his mother had invented as something for him to do.

The darkies knew him and grinned as they spoke, though they couldn't have liked the way he snarled or ignored their greetings. The whole damned town probably knew he'd been hauled out of a mess at college that cost his father plenty, and told he could settle down in his father's dinky, dusty little office with its stuffed owl over the book-case, its ancient medical books and poorly paid general practise.

Away from the trees the sun was hot, the tracks gleamed in the distance. The sprouting horse-tail ferns rasped his silk socks. Bullfrogs plunked in the green-slimed railroad ditch and he shied stones at them viciously.

The lonely whistle of the afternoon local train shrieked and he hustled to reach the flat-topped log bridging the ditch and leading to the cabin of Midas. The train rushed by as he balanced on the log, enveloping him in sooty black smoke curling low, a sign of moisture-laden air that meant rain.

Then over the padlocked gate he saw Julia on the cabin steps. She came slowly toward him, luscious-looking as ever, her tropic blood early ripened, her eyes questing, just as alluring as he had found her before he left for college. Dark hair with the sheen of a crow's wing framed her face. Her skin was flushed ivory. And he saw, as she unlocked the gate, the little opal-tinted moons at the base of her finger-nails.

Inside the gate, he heard, like an echo of boyhood, little hammers beating inside the front window of the cabin, and he saw the gleam of golden things, the spread of gold beaten thin under the hammers, the luster of ornaments new-gilded and drying on shelves. On the hot air oozed the smell of banana-oil mixed with gold-paint. He found Julia's hands between his fingers that stole to her wrists and felt the small hammers of her

blood beating faster at his touch. Little gold hoops at her ears danced in the sunlight. Julia was quivering, though she said little except: "I heard you were back. I knew you would come."

It didn't seem such a lousy errand then. Without the small oval frames, heirlooms his mother prized, he wouldn't dare walk into the domain of Midas in midafternoon, even if he had been fool enough to climb over a gate set in a wall of old rail ties sunk on end, their tops sharpened. Midas had treasure to guard; his gold, and what was dearer to him, his daughter.

The town, snootily, helped Midas keep Julia safe. Once Orinsley had advised her to get out. Now he was glad she was there, lithe-moving as a cat, her voice a throaty purr, walking with him to the cabin as Midas lifted his head and stared with black eyes close to his hawk's beak of a nose. The silver in his hair set off the sinister features. No smile quirked his thin lips as Orinsley laid the frames on his work-bench.

"No hurry about them," he said. "I'll drop around sometime and see if they're ready."

The paint-smell caught his breath a little. It was more wholesome on the porch with weed-tang and marigolds bordering the walk in the sun, and Julia's hands locked demurely around her knees as they talked.

He wanted to ask her about her origin, and things the town had wondered about when Midas came there long ago in the night, like a hunted man; began building his cabin of old timbers and started knocking at house doors asking for ornaments to be gilded. But even college hadn't given him quite nerve enough to get personal with Midas sitting watching, beating gold so thin it fluttered as he warmed a camel's-hair brush on his arm and lifted the tissue between pages of

little blank gold-books for use by sign-painters.

AFTER an hour he went away with Julia laughing softly from the gate as she made a date for that night with him. But when he got home young Dorothy Correll had come for dinner, the last unmarried daughter of wealthy Dickson Correll, sweet as a rose and not without thorns of wit that set his father beaming and his mother laughing. She whispered to him after dinner that Dickson Correll gave each of his daughters ten thousand dollars when they married, and Dorothy was the last one unclaimed.

"If you youngsters would like a ride, take the car," said his father. "Unless there's an accident, I'll not be using it tonight."

"That old wreck!" Orinsley snorted scornfully.

"It's all right, Jack," said Dorothy insistently.

Afterward he understood. She wanted to dance at Paine Court, down the river, a place strictly forbidden to Correll's daughter. She got wild at this convention-ridden little dump of a town where everyone knew you and saw everything you did. She was trying to appear sophisticated and wise, which amused him because when he kissed her she quivered and her pretty hands clung; she went all tender and intense and quoted verse. She was quaint enough to be utterly charming, and danced like a dryad at Paine Court after a mild gin drink or two. There were a number of other youngsters dancing and drinking and acting hard-boiled ineffectively, and he started home with Dorothy for more shy kisses on the way.

Then something happened to the car. He was trying to fix it and tempering his curses for her ears when some of the crowd came along and offered to take

Dorothy, as it was late and she was getting jittery. Orinsley told her to go.

It was much later when he got the car rattling over the rutted mud road and the headlights shone on a man walking on the side who darted into the ditch slope as if avoiding being seen. But Orinsley had recognized the tall, lean form of Midas, carrying a sack.

"Jump in and I'll give you a lift, Midas," he said. "You're quite a way from home and it's after midnight."

"Pete Latour in the Frenchy Village wanted some work done and I went to see about it. We sat late, drinking. . . ."

But in the dashboard lights, the boots of Midas looked muddy and grass-streaked. There was a smell of mold more ancient than fresh-trampled mud or even fresh-turned earth, a smell that sets the dogs howling when somebody is dying after a siege of sickness.

"I wouldn't think it paid you to go so far for work," said Orinsley. "Those gilding jobs don't pay much, though I imagine your gold-beating is a good graft."

The loose connection he had fixed in the car balked again just in sight of the cabin. Cursing, Orinsley got out, and so did Midas.

"I've got some wine if you'll come in," he said. "I make it myself, and it's mellowed a long time."

"Thanks. You know a lot of trades, don't you? Where did you learn gold-beating, Midas?" Orinsley asked as they walked to the cabin.

"Long ago, in the Bahamas, where I was born." Midas went on telling of the green islands of the Spanish Main. "There was always a bit of pirate loot turning up, and we beat it down to sell better." He told of old stone strongholds on the islands, streets that were flights of steps, poinciana seeds popping in the heat. Orinsley listened earnestly.

IT was the first time he had entered the living-room of the cabin, where Midas lighted an oil lamp that struck flares from the gilded nymphs and urns, spindly chairs and trinkets waiting to be called for. Julia came from dreams wearing a silk negligee over pajamas and little mules with feather ruffs, the hoops at her ears flashing. She brought long-footed wine-glasses on a tray inlaid with gold. Golden bangles at her wrists tinkled through their talk. In the corner Midas sat watching as Orinsley emptied glass after glass and grew bolder with Julia until she perched on the arm of his chair and what he said was for her alone.

"Well, the wine is all gone and I might as well be," he said finally.

"There's a big hogshead of it down cellar," said Midas. "Show him, Julia."

"Ever sell it?" asked Orinsley.

"Only to one person, Dickson Correll, the only man in town that appreciates real 'Jerez' that you call sherry. He knows wines and doesn't kick at my price."

"Doesn't need to. The depression didn't affect him, they say. Corrells are riding high," Orinsley said as he started after Julia down a dark stair until below she lighted a candle. Cobwebs festooned the rafters and corners. Many barrels stood on cross-legged "horses." One huge, copper-strapped "pipe" had a stone jug under the spigot.

"Hold your glass," said Julia.

The long foot was still clasped in his fingers, a gorgeous goblet covered with golden filigree in delicate designs. In the cellar gloom Orinsley sat drinking, with Julia in one arm, caught by her lure, tossing reason through the small hoops at her ears, careless of the tread of Midas going to and fro overhead. Through their kisses the little hammers began beating. Midas was at his work-bench, late as it was, pounding gold, somehow setting Orinsley's blood to a quicker tempo.

"Nobody would ever guess the treasure this cabin holds," he said to Julia. "You, and your father's gold. . . ."

"I won't have to worry," she said breathlessly and waited, her eyes questing, the perfumed temptation of her soft body in his arms.

"Where does he get the gold now, Julia?"

"Ask him," she crooned. "And the trade will die with him because he thinks it isn't a trade for me to follow, though I can beat the gold and I've learned to work it. That tray and the glasses are my work."

"Julia!" He stood up, his head swimming. "I'd better travel. Tomorrow night, maybe."

"But earlier," she whispered, "before he comes home!"

She had pestered him about that broken date and his breezing in with Midas, as most girls would have done. He spoke to Midas before he left, praising Julia's gold-work.

"She's wonderful, Midas. The trade needn't die with you because you haven't a son. Lord, you'll have a son-in-law one of these days. . . ."

Midas glared at him with fever-bright eyes. The thin lips twitched under the hawk's-beak nose.

"He would have to be a man with guts, somebody to look after Julia and the gold . . . and all else . . . getting it," he hissed, rising in a crouch as if stiffened with age and labor, coming toward Orinsley, whose arm still held Julia in her silk gorgeousness and little bare ankles, her scented dark hair flying. Orinsley was very drunk, but he caught through the perfume that sinister smell of death carried by Midas.

"You said it was pirate loot, but there are no pirates now," he said. "I'd like to get in on your graft, Midas. I'd make

this town sit up and take notice * * * wouldn't we, Julia?"

"You mean it?" croaked Midas, gesturing toward Julia with a hand that shook.

"Sure I mean it! You don't think I enjoy that rattling old bus my father lets me drive when he isn't using it. I wanted to hang out my own shingle as a doctor. But it takes money to set up anywhere, and I had an accident that took money to settle. That's why I'm here, in my dad's office, though no one is going to risk a young doctor after dad's experience. So here I am, eh, Julia . . . darling . . . sweetest." And he was drunk enough to take her in his arms and kiss her passionately while Midas looked on, his lips and jaw-muscles working now under the dark skin, his nostrils twitching, hell in his eyes.

"I'll be back here, Midas. Not for your damned gold secrets, but your living treasure. . . ."

HE DIDN'T remember what else he vowed before staggering to the car at break of day. But, befuddled with the golden wine, he stalled the car on the tracks as the morning train was roaring down. He had time only to roll out and down the ditch when it was heaved thirty feet into twisted junk.

The shock of ditch-water sobered Orinsley to face the worst day he remembered in years, his father's anger at the loss of a car still useful to him, his mother's grief at the family row from which she tried to shield him. Through it the night with Midas seemed like a riotous dream, fabulous golden vintage in a cobwebby cellar, gold-stemmed goblets, the lush beauty and temptation of Julia, the lumps of gold Midas was beating.

That day Dorothy ran in to say they were leaving for their summer cottage at the lake and said good-bye to him in the shelter of lilac trees heavy with fragrant

bloom. Sun spattered her light dress with shifting brightness and shadow. She was blond as ripe wheat and twittering youngly as a canary, but went quiet at his kisses that started her cheeks glowing and deepened the blue of her eyes. Perhaps, if she hadn't gone away . . .

But home was desperately uncomfortable at meal-times, and his mother innocently asked when the frames would be gilded.

"I'll go and see," he said, with martyr meekness.

MIDAS was away, but Julia had the gate unlocked. Her taffeta dress whispered as he crushed her in his arms, and he stayed until Midas came through the starlight carrying the sack and the death-smell. He went to wash his hands while Julia poured wine, and Orinsley seized the chance to feel the sack. His fingers were still gripping it when Midas returned without his shoes and caught him with the sack in his hands.

Orinsley's jaw was belligerent, Midas was in his power.

"I said it was a good graft," he remarked. "How about a partner, Midas?"

Through the sacking he had felt bones, jaw-bones with teeth. He knew one source of Midas' gold: he was a ghoul, hoarding the gold from graveyards.

And Midas began nodding his head and muttering. "The Frenchies like gold teeth, and bury rings and trinkets with their dead. It's just a waste of gold."

"Yes, and there are the old graves around the church and in the new cemetery, Midas. Lots of stuff there."

"But you can't dig a grave in town," croaked Midas, poking his head on its long neck nearer Orinsley. "They'd see."

"Around the church the stones are sagging untidily. It's time they were straightened and the graves leveled. Civic pride

shall inspire me to agitate the town about it. And when the workers get digging . . . eh, Midas?"

The old man was polishing one hand over the other and chuckling wickedly. His eyes flickered and rolled, showing their whites in gleams. Orinsley needed the wine he'd imbibed to endure that scene.

"And the big stone Correll vault, Midas. They moved the ancestors to it, and Grandmother Correll had dental plates of gold, which was town gossip."

"And why should I share my graft with you?" asked Midas with oily cunning, though his voice grated through his yellow teeth.

"Because I know about it, for one thing. Because while you haven't got a son to carry on your trade, you'll be having a son-in-law to take care of everything and Julia. How about the Correll vault tonight, Midas? The lock could be picked. . . . But don't tell Julia I'm in this."

"No," the voice of Midas creaked through thin lips. "It kind of spoils young love. It did that to me. Her mother found out and——" But Julia returned.

Only when Orinsley was going home did Midas appear out of the shadows carrying a limp sack and a handful of tools. A hedge of clipped conifers bordered the cemetery roads, casting pointed shadows over the tomb-stones. A thick evergreen hedge grew tall around the Correll vault. Orinsley sweated at the creak of tools on the lock of the iron-grille door. A tube-rose wreath lately placed gave off a sickly sweetness as with a cold-chisel wrapped in rag they broke cement around the inscribed slabs and finally slid a coffin from its shelf. The old screws squealed as Midas twisted them. But once the lid was up, Orinsley did not mind so much. No worse than

pickled cadavers of the dissecting-room, anyway.

But coming away, the death stench on his hands sickened him until, imitating Midas, he cleaned them somewhat in grass and earth, and washed them at the house before swigging more golden wine and assisting Midas to sort their loot, gold dental plates, rings and heavy old cravat pins.

ORINSLEY went home in high excitement, schemes flooding his brain.

He began at breakfast to mention the disgraceful state of the old churchyard and wrote about it to the town paper. His mother encouraged this sudden flare of civic pride, though his father merely snorted. He was still angry at having to spend money for a new automobile.

Only in a little home town could he have stirred so quickly the fuss over the grave-stones, but it elevated him a good deal in town opinions when he went around saying what a pretty place it was, and historic enough to have its history written. The obvious response came. He was urged to write about it.

"I'll do it!" he agreed, and talked about advance money from publishers to account for his own sudden financial acquisitions. Even his father swallowed that story when Orinsley paid a first installment on a new roadster and went to the lake to show it to Dorothy Correll.

The big Correll summer-house was filled with the nicest town youngsters. Over a week-end Orinsley danced and swam, played tennis and made love to Dorothy. After the passion-purple of his affair with Julia in the cabin, Dorothy was like white roses, cool, delicate, fresh and charming. He even hated coming to her with the death taint on his hands. Even without her father's ten-thousand-dollar gift to each daughter at her wedding, he wanted Dorothy for ever and

ever. He was reckless enough to ask if she couldn't stay in town that summer, for his sake.

"I'm lost without you," he told her. "I wish we needn't be parted even for a day, darling. Dorothy, couldn't it happen like that some day? Couldn't it?"

"Honey," she whispered, "leave me a little . . . breath . . . between kisses. . . ."

Through the week the patients calling at his father's office saw Orinsley writing industriously and they told him stories of earlier days. The town clerk searched old records for him, as did the editor of the town paper. In the old files funerals were chronicled with the same elaboration as weddings and gave him many a "lead." By night he went with Midas far afield, and they returned with loot to Julia and the golden wine in goblets that would have pleased a Borgia. Of course Julia knew. . . .

But she had a rare gift of wisdom and silence. She knew how deeply he was entangled in her love and her life. There were times when Orinsley viewed with amazement the adventures he encountered in that quiet little dump of a town, loot and love, beauty and beastliness, the softly enveloping flame of Julia's thrall poisoning his brain as the wine fumes fired his blood, the cruel eyes of Midas watching them with menace and amusement in their glittering black orbs.

He was so deeply in the parlous partnership that Julia made no demands, did not fuss because he never appeared during the week-ends. That interlude was for Dorothy Correll, young and lovely as a rose with dew in its heart, trusting him with her lips and her life, ready to give him her hand and her fortune.

He was responsible for the renovation of the churchyard, yet dreaded its beginning. And when he evinced faint-heartedness about a night foray with the greater risk of being discovered, Midas

showed his teeth, though he waited until a storm crashed its bolts of thunder and lightning. A horrible job it was shoveling mud and water, ducking down when lightning flared, pawing among the rotted rags and bones. The old newspaper records had not exaggerated. There were heavy old neck-chains and locketts of twenty-four-carat gold set with diamonds and pearls, diamond rings and ear-drops, bracelets and wedding-rings, a rich haul.

That week-end he took gifts to Dorothy, an expensive little purse with powder compact and cigaret case, along with candy and flowers. And he borrowed one of her rings to have her size for an engagement solitaire. She lent him a quaint little gold ring with a lover's-knot that belonged to her grandmother. Into the mind of Orinsley flashed the night in the vault when he gouged with a tool the dental plates from that estimable and once pretty old lady. It wasn't so easy to hear Dorothy's raptures about her ring with the ghosts of his crimes gibbering mutely between them.

THE Corrells accepted him with old-fashioned graciousness, and invited his father and mother for a week-end to the lake cottage, where innocently they crashed over Orinsley the penalty menacing him only vaguely until that hour.

"We have wanted a trip to Europe for a long time," said Mrs. Correll. "Dorothy doesn't want to go. She wants her wedding this fall, and I've suggested she and Frank stay in our house this winter while we are away. Perhaps when we return, his book will be published. We're going to be very proud of that."

Orinsley's hands were as cold as his face was hot. But a man had to act impatient to have his own marriage hurried along. He had to appear eager to have the world know he had won Dorothy. Across the table from him Dorothy's blue

eyes had little flames of joy in their depths. Her red mouth pouted kissingly for his eyes to see. But under the tablecloth his hands were scrubbing each other of the horror they had dabbled in; he could have emulated Lady Macbeth's cry of despair, as Mrs. Correll spoke of having an announcement in the town paper.

Knowing a crash was coming, he endured through that week-end. Coming home, his father, the old doctor, tried to make up for his anger over the son's escapades and the wrecked car.

"You're making me proud of you, son, though not just the way I planned. I just hadn't patience at first. . . . But it's a good old name. Orinsley . . . never been smirched . . . never a breath of scandal. I haven't wealth, but a good name . . . better than riches. . . ."

Orinsley was sweating nervously then, and later that day, when the news kid left the daily paper in the office; and opening it he saw the splurge made of the wedding announcement. He sat staring until his father bustled in shaking rain-drops from his hat and wrung his son's hands in felicitations. Only then did young Orinsley realize that the afternoon sky was black and the first big drops of storm spattered down. A greater gloom was in his brain, an ordeal to face that he dreaded unspeakably.

"You're not going out tonight?" his mother said.

"Now, Emily, I know how he feels, just too happy to stay inside walls. Youth, romance . . . nothing like it."

Nothing like the predicament he was in as he drove to the cabin through cannonading of thunder and flashes of lightning that made steel javelins of the pouring rain. The gate was unlocked, showing they expected him. On the workbench was an opened newspaper. In the living-room Midas paced the floor, and in his eyes were lightnings. Julia was on

the couch, her eyelids puffed from weeping, her mouth sullen, her beauty sultry.

ORINSLEY'S scalp prickled as the tongue-lashing of Midas began and he heard the thing he was, not only a ghoul, but a liar, a cheat, a felon.

Orinsley sulked and raged. He began cursing Midas and grew defiant.

"Try smirching my name! You'll land yourself and Julia behind bars. I've been engaged to Dorothy Correll for months. I'm going to marry her. Keep your tongue quiet and we'll go on with this unholy partnership and get rich. Talk, and you're through. Not only through, but in prison. You've always been a mystery around here. My name is solid. Nobody'll believe your rantings about me."

"Marry Dorothy Correll!" cried Julia. "It's me you love. All these years. Before you went away. You said——" and she hurled at him the promises he had made, endearments, love phrases that betrayed to Midas how deep was his affair with her. And Midas adored her. Midas stood silent, like an accusing god carved of bronze with only his eyes alive and shining insanely.

Midas turned, his feet moving heavily, as if his reason fought an overpowering impulse. Then, suddenly, his hand shot to the wall and plucked down a long-bladed dagger with gold-encrusted hilt knobbed with gems, a gorgeous weapon. He whirled as Orinsley shrank away and threw up his elbows to guard himself, backing toward the door, paralyzed with fear like a man in a nightmare trying to run on wooden legs. Midas came warily, on his toes, moving like a panther gathering itself to spring.

There was a screech as he leaped. Julia was between them as the long blade flashed.

For a moment she clung to Orinsley's

neck. Then her hands let go. She crumpled slowly, smiling at Orinsley as he and Midas stood stupidly watching the color drain from her face and the life fade from her eyes, and a dark stream creep beneath her body along the floor.

Crashing through the horror that hypnotized Orinsley came like chords of music the memories of his hours with Julia. He couldn't help pitying, or kneeling to touch her wrists and throat and listen for her heart to know if she was beyond help. And while he knelt the hands of Midas darted to his throat. The claws of his fingers sank deep, garroting Orinsley. Nor could Orinsley fight off their peril, though he struggled.

The dagger was still there, but Midas didn't use it. When Orinsley's senses returned, he was bound from shoulders to ankles, sitting with his back against the work-shop wall. And on the work-bench Midas slaved at his greatest masterpiece.

The storm still raged. Lightning blazed at the window. Thunder crackled and rumbled. Outside there was the clean fume of rain, the wholesome breath of bursting sod and beaten foliage. But in that den was the fruity ether of Lethe, the overpowering fumes of lacquer that Midas brushed over his transcendent task, and whisking the camel's-hair brush along a brown arm knotted with veins, he lifted gold tissue and placed it meticulously and patted it with loving care on the body of Julia.

Orinsley had to watch, with his heart pounding so that it strained his bonds and at his lips his breath panted, as Midas made a golden image of his daughter. The lightning poured furious illumination over her pretty feet and legs, the little mounds of her breasts on which her slender hands were folded. Her face was a gleaming mask. Midas dipped her dark hair in gold paint, and wrung it out and

coiled it skilfully to dry and set, and with a brush he gilded her eyelashes.

Inside Orinsley the joy of living, the soul-fire, died out never to rekindle during that terrible vigil until, exhausted, Midas laid his arms on the work-bench and his head on his wrists and slept.

Orinsley began wriggling his body to where the dagger lay. He got it between his feet and sawed his wrist bonds apart. In five more minutes he was free and cat-footing to the door, to the storm that was heavenly wet on his face, and the winds of God that lashed a man back to sanity after madness in hell.

Instead of going home he went to the office, poured disinfectants over his hands, rubbed the thong-marks from his arms and legs and was sitting at the desk with paper and pencils when his father came in, startled at his son's inspired industry that kept him writing all night.

Orinsley crumpled the scribbled page on which automatically he had written "Insane . . . mad . . . crazy . . . golden image of her . . . nobody would listen to his ravings now . . . even rifled graves . . . I'm safe. . . ."

He burned the page but could not endure himself that day; so he drove to the lake to see Dorothy and in the company of that wholesomely happy, healthy child, try to forget horror.

Yet in the evenings, in the stillness of night, small fiends came mocking him. The gold in the cabin might as well be his. He had raised ghosts to get it. Skulls and skeletons alight with phosphorescent decay haunted his dreams. And there was the hour ahead when the golden image would be discovered!

When he returned home, his mother asked about the little oval frames, and he had to say he'd call for them.

THE uncertain autumnal rains left the night dark and starless. No light marked out the cabin, but he carried a flash and a gun. Through the window he saw that the work-bench was empty, tidily cleared. Nor did Midas appear. Room by room he searched, first for Midas and the image, then for gold. Greedily he pawed over Julia's silken fripperies, the clothes of Midas, the shelves of gilded trash where his mother's frames shone, and then went to the cellar, where he and Julia had laughed and kissed under the cobwebs. But he found no gold. Midas and the golden image had disappeared.

Leaving the cabin, Orinsley breathed more freely. Midas was gone. He could marry Dorothy Correll without fear of the insane croakings of the mysterious old ghoul. But he reported his failure to find Midas.

"I remember when he came here," said Mr. Correll; "a strange man. I was interested in him from the first. People looked askance at him, and I think he appreciated my friendliness. I hadn't intended to mention it, but I can throw a little light on his disappearance. I had a note from Midas, left under my office door, which said he was going where he came from with his daughter, and begging me to accept a slight token of our friendship. I'll reveal it in good time, so don't tease about it now, Dotty."

"Ah, secrets!" cried Dorothy. "A wedding present!"

Autumnal colors blazoned the little church where Dorothy came to her bridal in misty lace and left it in rice showers that began again at the steps of her own home where the wedding breakfast was held. The guests were kissing her and shaking Orinsley's hand when the old darky butler came with a tray of golden inlay and goblets with golden filigree filled with wine of unmistakable bouquet. Orinsley stared at the goblets, feeling

blood that sang in his veins begin to chill until he could count the slow beat.

"Where . . . where did you get these?" he gasped.

"From Midas," answered Mr. Correll proudly. "I told you he made me a gift. Come down-cellar and see . . . you have all the years ahead with Dorothy. Three minutes now——" but Orinsley didn't catch the old man's chatter. He followed to gaze at the great "pipe" on its cross-legged horse, and under its spigot the jug he remembered. With his knees wobbling, Orinsley turned the spigot and filled the jug. He needed stimulant.

Mr. Correll went fussily away and left him draining the jug. Putting it down, he let it fill again to drown the sharp jab of memory, the gleam of a golden image in his brain. And when he had emptied a second Brobdingnagian draft he wiped his lips with his hand and found something clinging: a wiry golden hair!

His legs buckled under him. He was sick, reeling. Even the thud of his head on the cellar floor didn't matter. His body twitched unmercifully when they found him on the floor and his father bent close to hear him muttering: "Strychnin . . . I think . . . in the wine . . . look in the cask."

Foam spouted and rimmed his lips. A greater convulsion silenced coherent utterance. Vaguely through the gathering mists he knew they were opening the cask-head, dragging rakes through the wine, screeching at horror quickly silent. He knew the gleam of the golden image, the gloom of another form, and heard the clink of golden lumps dropped on the stone floor, the loot of ghouls, himself and Midas.

Dorothy, widowed before she was a wife, would never know. She would cherish his memory tenderly. They wouldn't let her know about Julia the golden in the cask, and the strychnin-

soaked carcass of Midas who crawled into the cask to die knowing Orinsley would swig the golden wine as greedily as he always did. . . .

His father's voice, anguished and far away, was receding still farther.

"No hope . . . he's dying . . . he's dead!"