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WEIRD TALES ISSUED 1st OF EACH MONTH

# The Room of Shadows

By ARTHUR J. BURKS

*Those of you who love to revel in a powerful, horrifying and utterly fascinating weird story will find this vivid novelette exactly to your taste*

## 1. *The Woman of the Black Sash*

I CAUGHT a peculiar odor in the room as the boy grinned strangely at me, dropped the key on the bureau and went to the outer door. He didn't wait for the usual tip, and I didn't like the way he licked his lips. Those lips were too red, and the eyes too black, too deeply sunken. And the odor I had smelled! . . . Well, I'd been around a bit and knew the odor: in all lands the same, the cheap scents of women lacking in good taste.

But this was in one of New York City's most exclusive hotels. Exclusive, yes, but popular.

"We'll have to give you an inside room, Mr. Clerc," said the man at the desk, "but you won't mind, I'm sure, and in a couple of days you may have your old room back."

I signed the registration slip, Adam Clerc, with a flourish. I don't think I'd have been quite so cocky if I had known what faced me.

I felt something distinctly *other* the second I entered the room, and I'm not

usually sensitive to impressions, because I don't believe in their original stimuli. I believed only in what I could hear, feel, see or taste.

To begin with, it had been broad daylight outside. And here the lights had to be turned on immediately. There was one window, in the corner of the room, which gave on a dark well-court that seemed to be filled with eddying soot. There was a light in the ceiling which appeared to be strangely blurred, to possess some reflecting property that caused shadows, especially my own, to look queerer, more distorted, than even shadows usually did.

The one standing lamp merely threw a circle of light on the floor below the shade, while the light which went upward to make a circle on the ceiling . . . well, there was something queer about that, too. For there was a little shadow on the ceiling, in the center of that light. I studied the shadow; it looked like the silhouette of a small dog, a sleeve-dog.

I shivered without understanding why. The bellhop had opened the window which gave on the black court, and I closed it hurriedly. Cold seemed to be

"Together again, as all of us will be down the centuries to come."



rising out of that court; which was silly, of course, because the air was really balmy. Yet I felt the cold. I had the feeling that the black soot which seemed to fill the court—nothing but the shadows of high, surrounding buildings—hid something, something that could see without being seen, could see *me!*

But why worry? This was New York City, less than a block from Times Square, and I had never been afraid of anything.

On a hunch I lifted the receiver from the hook, asked for the desk.

"I wish," I told the desk man, "that

you'd send that same bellhop back to me."

"Bellhop, Mr. Clerc?" There was surprise in his tone. "I don't understand you. Don't you remember? You have been a guest here so frequently that I simply gave you the key and you let yourself into your room."

I figured the fellow must be drunk or jesting. But he couldn't be jesting; for nobody, certainly no hotel flunky, had ever been humorous with me, not with Adam Clerc.

A cold chill circulated in the room.

The shadows in the corners, as I clicked up the receiver thoughtfully, seemed to move outward. I drew my neck deeper into my shirt collar. I had taken off my tie, opened the buttons on my shirt. Now I buttoned the shirt again, put the tie back on. Small things, you say; yet small things could be so terrifying.

*Small things!*

I wondered many times, later, why I should have thought of *small things*.

"The whole thing is deucedly queer," I thought. "I saw that boy distinctly, and I haven't had a drink in two years! There's something peculiar somewhere, no doubt about that."

I was young, resilient, a fighter. I could have demanded a change of rooms, without giving a reason, but I became stubborn. If there were a mystery here I would find out what it was.

**T**HE telephone rang. There is no personality, no character, about a telephone bell; yet there was a hint of mockery, of vague laughter, in this one. Of course it would be from the desk, for nobody knew I was at this hotel—the David Crocker. Yet I hesitated to take down the receiver.

It was a man's voice, and it wasn't from the desk.

"Is this Adam Clerc? The explorer?"

"Who's calling him?" I asked, irritably.

The man chuckled, and did not answer directly.

"Is Carla Miller there?"

"No!"

Again that chuckle, which made my hackles rise somehow.

"Is Dee Janey there?"

"No!" I almost shouted it. "I've never been in this room before. If it was occupied before now by——"

I clicked up the receiver, paused for a moment, then signaled the switchboard.

"Listen, sister," I said, "some man is calling here, asking for women. Head off calls after this, unless someone asks for me, understand? Just because this room was occupied by dames before——"

"But, Mister Clerc," there was distress in the girl's voice, "no one has telephoned you since you registered. I'm sure of it!"

That certainly got under my skin. The shadows had crept closer. I put my hand against my heart. I felt a little dizzy. My heart was hammering loudly. I took a deep breath.

"For Pete's sake!" I said.

Then I stiffened. I wasn't accustomed to recurrent cold chills. They irritated me; especially when, after hanging up the receiver, my attention whirled on the door by which I had entered. A key was being fitted into the lock. Someone was trying to get in.

I hadn't set the night lock. It could, of course, be the maid, though she would ordinarily not come to my room until after nine o'clock tomorrow morning.

**I** HEARD the lock click. Whoever it was had the right key and the right room. At that instant, out of the black court, rose a sound that got under my skin. It was the long-drawn howling of a dog. Now, there is ordinarily nothing frightening about a dog's howls. Just the same, this one set my teeth on edge, my skin to crawling, as though there were tiny white worms below the epidermis. I was unaccountably glad that the window was closed, locked. I turned again to the door.

A gorgeously beautiful woman entered. Her hair was as black as a rain cloud, snug above a face that was as arresting as any I had ever seen. Her eyes were as black as her hair and deeply brooding. Little fires seemed to glow far down in them. She entered the room with the sweeping, silent grace of a pantheress.

Her feet, I noted, were sandaled, and white skin showed. Her toe-nails were as black as her hair or her eyes. Her finger-nails, too, were tinted black. Her dress was white, all of it, with a black sash holding it against her body—that would have sent Praxiteles into mute rapture. I caught my breath, started to speak to her.

She looked right through me. She moved ahead as though she believed herself alone. And from the court below the dog howled again.

The woman—girl rather—was unfastening the knot which held that black sash about her body. Good heavens, didn't she see me?

I didn't know, but I breathed a sigh of relief when she entered the closet and shut the door behind her. I had no aversion to looking upon a woman unclothed, but there was something here I didn't understand, many somethings!

I heard rustling sounds in the closet; then the door opened and the girl came out. . . .

This time the black sash was gone, the white garment was gone, the sandals were gone. . . .

She went into the bathroom, shut the door.

Again the dog howled from the sooty court.

I dashed to the window, swept it open, and the dog's howling came to me like a bullet, up out of the court, a thrown missile. It crashed against my ears. It hammered against my ear-drums. There was menace in it.

I had heard dogs bay the moon. I had listened, deep in many nights, to the howling of wolves of all kinds. But I had never been as afraid as I now was, with the mournful howling of that invisible dog from the well-court.

I caught up the first thing I could lay my hands on, which happened to be a telephone book, and hurled it down into

the court. I heard it strike something. I had aimed at the spot whence I was sure the howling had come. I heard the book strike flesh, I'd have sworn. But no yelp answered, just a repetition of the strange howling.

I felt the sweat break out all over me suddenly, and had never in my life been so much afraid. I stared at the closed door of the bathroom, out of which came no sound whatever.

"Deucedly queer," I thought.

Then, strangely, the latch on the bathroom door loosened, and the door started to swing open inward. No light was on in there, though I had left it on myself. Just a gaping rectangle of utter dark. That darkness seemed to be trying to edge around the door, as though it had been a monster intent on attacking me.

I licked my lips, to find them suddenly dry, almost parched. I rubbed my forehead, just now conscious of a splitting headache. What was going on here, anyhow?

I GOT up with a greater show of bravery than I felt—feeling the necessity for courage in my own eyes as I passed the full-length mirror—and started for the bathroom door. I saw myself in the mirror strangely. My features were blurred, unnaturally white. My hair was awry.

I passed the mirror quickly, averting my head, wondering what I had eaten to cause me to feel as I did.

I went to the bathroom door, which now hung entirely open. I cleared my throat.

"Is anything wrong, Miss?" I asked.

No answer. No sound. No movement. The shadow in the bathroom, the inner darkness, was a black wall barring my entrance, even if I had elected to enter. Terror flowed at me from the dark of an ordinary, modern, hotel bathroom. Swear-

ing, I put my left hand in, turned on the electric light.

That bathroom was unoccupied!

Nobody had passed me going out. There was no possible other way out of the bathroom, except, of course, through the drain in the bottom of the tub, where there were apertures into which, perhaps, I might possibly have thrust my little finger. I swore fiercely.

And the dog's howling now, from the black court, made me think of a maniac's laughter at a madman's jest.

I dashed to the closet where the mysterious black-haired woman had disrobed, looked in.

Hanging neatly on a hanger, beside my own clothing, was the white garment. Looped over it was the black sash.

If, by some weird necromancy, the girl had left the room when I hadn't been watching, or during some mental hiatus common to absent-minded men, she had gone partly clad into the hallway of a crowded, *exclusive* hotel!

It was little wonder, I fancy, that my brain was in a whirl, as though being churned by maggots.

I took the steps two at a time, down to the desk. There, panting, I waited for the clerk to come to me. I had to regain control of myself, for the lobby was filled with people. After all, this was modern, present-day New York, and I wasn't drunk. Somehow the presence of people was reassuring.

Two men bumped against me at the desk, stared in amazement, as though, the poor fools, they couldn't see me, and went on, muttering to themselves and shaking their heads. What ailed this place, anyhow?

The clerk finally came, to look at me questioningly. I stared at him, my fear growing. He wasn't the same clerk at all. He was the bellhop who had taken me to

the room of the shadows, and his eyes were deep wells of mysterious mockery!

## 2. *Little Things*

"LOOK here," I said to the fellow, "what kind of a dump is this, anyhow? I've been a guest of this hotel off and on for five years and never ran into anything like it before. Dogs barking in the court. Men calling and asking for girls."

There was a shocked look on his face, though his eyes still were mocking, as though he knew something he could tell me if he would.

"Mr. Clerc!" he protested. "This hotel has a reputation."

I interrupted to tell him everything. He shrugged, beckoned me to follow him to a side door off the lobby. I went. He pointed to the well-court, in which there were no shadows whatever. The sun fell into the court and it was like a tropic midday for brilliancy. There was just one thing that made it seem like the court I had seen from my window. The telephone book I had thrown. . . .

"And we don't allow dogs at the David Crocker, sir," the boy—clerk rather—said again. "Are you sure you're all right?"

I'd have taken the hint, blamed it all onto delusions caused by something I had eaten, but for one thing—the hidden, mocking laughter in his eyes.

I whirled, went back in, and to the switchboard.

"I called you a while ago, sister," I said, "and told you to refuse to connect people calling my room. You told me nobody had called. . . ."

"That's right, Mister Clerc, nobody has called since you came in!"

"Either," I muttered, "you're drunk or I am, and I haven't had a drink."

There was inexpressible shock on her face. Spinsterish spectacles, drab, black clothing, frizzled hair, didn't somehow

go with an accusation of drunkenness. I mumbled a quick apology, went back to my room. But the closer I got to it, along the hallway whose carpet muffled my foot-falls, the slower I walked. I didn't know why. I just knew that I looked forward to entering that room with inexplicable dread; I also knew that if I asked to be changed to another room with the riddle unsolved, I'd always hate myself.

I forced myself to enter the room.

Only, now it was utterly dark—and I hadn't turned off the lights. The door slammed behind me, caused by some breeze through the hall, I supposed, and I was alone in the utter dark—and *that dog was howling again from the well-court!*

Nor was that all. Warm, soft arms went around my neck. I was pressed forcibly against a pulsating body, that of a woman, I guessed, almost as tall as I was. Fragrant perfume, heady, overpowering, was in my nostrils. Hot lips that were soft, that called to something primeval, deep down inside me, were pressed against my own. Terror shifted the hair on my scalp, even as the arms went around me. It was still there, and growing, as the kiss seemed to burn into my very soul, as the soft hot lips moved against mine, as the body of the unseen clung to me.

Terror mastered me. I knew that deadly danger was in the arms, in the kiss, in the fragrant, heady perfume. But, knowing, my arms went out, around the woman. I knew without a word being spoken that it was the woman of the black sash.

I heard her whisper against my ear!

"Adam! Adam Clerc!"

Her voice was like a cool hand on my body. It caressed me, kissed me, that voice.

"Adam! Adam Clerc!"

She moved against me. Somehow she

had slipped from my arms, however, and was somewhere away from me, there in the dark room, whispering:

"Adam! Adam Clerc!"

Her whisper came from somewhere near. I reeled in the direction of the sound. I stumbled against the standing lamp, and inspiration came. I had to see this woman. I had to see her black eyes looking into mine. . . .

I SWITCHED on the light. There was a whirling of black mist in the room, no more. The window giving onto the ebon well-court was part-way open at the bottom. The black stuff seemed to be vanishing through the slit under the window.

I raced to the bathroom again, to find it as empty as before. I whirled to the closet, to find that the white garment and the black sash had vanished. The girl had disappeared again, and she couldn't have got through the outer door past me. I'd have seen her when she opened the door.

There was one other way—the open slit of a window, the black mist going out—and, of course, the mysterious exit from the bathroom which she had used once before.

"Who are you?" I shouted. "Where are you? What's going on? Come back! Come back!"

The only answer came in the howls from the well-court, the howls that were like mocking laughter.

But now the light was on. The shadows in the room seemed alive, and out of them the whisper kept coming:

"Adam Clerc! Adam Clerc!"

I had to find some semblance of sanity here, or go stark, staring mad. I raced to the mirror past which I had hurried, unaccountably, earlier in the evening, and stared at myself.

My face was white, drawn, the skin taut over the cheekbones. I looked as

though I hadn't eaten or slept for days and nights on end. My eyes were deep-sunken.

Then I leaned closer. I had noticed something on my neck, a pair of little red dots. They were oozing blood. They were so situated that they looked like the punctures the fangs of a poisonous reptile might have made. But I had had no sensation of having been bitten by anything. I had, I decided, scratched myself in a sort of frenzy.

I whirled back to that window as a thudding sound broke on my consciousness. The window had dropped shut with a sound of grim finality. The whirling black mist had entirely vanished, unless the shadows in the corner were part of it.

The barking of the dog was muted now by the closed window. But was it?

I stood there, staring at the window. No, the sound wasn't muted. It was rising . . . actually, rising to my window, as though the dog had taken wings. That was silly, of course, but there it was. No mistaking the howling sound, nor the fact that the sound was approaching. What filled me with terror was this: my room was four stories above the street, and above the level of the well-court . . . and yet . . .

I stared through the window. That black court was black again, and I knew it had always been, always would be, black when viewed from this window—if viewed by Adam Clerc.

There was something on the window-sill—something small, inexpressibly ferocious, savage-eyed! I looked. Blazing eyes looked back. They might have been the eyes of a mad lobo wolf, or a giant Newfoundland with the rabies, but never of the tiny creature that stood out there, on the sill, staring at me, snarling, and emitting the howls I had heard from the courtyard.

For, listen!

The dog's hot nose was against the window-pane. He wasn't standing *along* the sill, but across it—and there was plenty of room for him! I had seen plenty of Chinese sleeve-dogs in my time, but never one so small as this one.

And he was barking and snarling at me—and the giant sound, coming from a creature so tiny, filled all the well-court with rocketing echoes.

And yet, I heard blaring radios all through the David Crocker, and no one else seemed to be bothered by the snarling, howling dog. I started for the window, feeling myself in the presence of a horror that was utterly incomprehensible.

No canine body so small could possibly hold such gigantic fury, no lungs emit such wolfish howlings. Yet there it was. It was only a small dog, after all. I'd open the window, bring it in. The echoes from the court had fooled me. Some neighbor, perhaps, had allowed his sleeve-dog to go out onto a neighboring sill, from which he had hopped to mine. But that didn't explain the gigantic fury of the beast, nor the might of his howls.

I found, then, that I hadn't the courage to open that window. I couldn't have done it for all the gold in the world. That fury out there could somehow destroy, annihilate me. I knew it, even as I knew it was impossible. . . .

**I** WAS almost knocked off my feet by a furious, unexpected attack from behind me. I whirled as tiny teeth sank into my back, my thighs.

My room was filled with sleeve-dogs! They had come from somewhere, absolutely in silence, and had attacked me. I stared at them as I kicked out. I grabbed one of the little things in my two hands, which were far too big to hold him, and his savagery was a challenge which drove me mad. I twisted his savage little head from his shoulders, flung him to the floor,



where he rolled under the bed, head and all. But even as I slew him, his eyes stared into mine, with mockery in them, as though he laughed at me through his snarls.

Horror nestled against my heart then, enclosing it in cold tentacles that were beyond expression; for the instant I slew that dog, while others attacked and bit me, I had the ghastly impression that it wasn't the eyes of a dog which looked into mine, but the eyes of a human being!

Great God! Just once I had looked into such eyes — just once. And they hadn't looked into mine. They had looked past and through me. They had been the eyes of the woman with the black-sashed white garment. . . .

I dashed to the door and out, slammed it shut behind me, leaned against it, panting, and looked about me, ashamed lest someone see how badly frightened I was. Someone did see: a woman, through the crack in an adjoining door that stood ajar. I spotted the door, flung myself toward it as it started shut, struck it savagely, sprawled on the floor of a strange room.

"May I ask the meaning of this intrusion?" said a cold voice.

I stared at the woman, who was dressed for the street, and my heart turned a somersault. There was no mistaking her. She was the woman of the black sash. I would have sworn that she was the woman I had just held in my arms. But in her eyes there was no slightest sign of recognition, not even a flicker.

Cold, distant, aloof. Obviously she considered me an intruder. But one thing she couldn't hide, one thing that made us kin in spite of anything that could have happened: abysmal fear, deep down in her black eyes.

I clutched her shoulders.

"Tell me about it! Tell me, do you hear? *What about the dogs in that room?*"

The coldness left her, the fear took possession, ghastly, horrible fear. She would have fallen if I hadn't clutched her, lowered her into a chair.

"Oh, my God!" she moaned. "*The little things are back! The little things are back!*"

### 3. Eda

I CAUGHT her by the shoulders and shook her until her teeth rattled. Her eyes, big with terror, never left mine for a moment.

"You know something about it!" I told her. "I've got to know — for my own peace of mind I've got to know, do you understand? What are the 'little things' you keep mentioning? What do you know about that room?"

"Little things? Little things?" she repeated dully. "But of course! The dogs. The sleeve-dogs. The tiniest in the world, lots of them; the kind *he* had raised, trained——"

"He? He? Whom are you talking about? One of us, maybe both, are crazy. I've got to know. I never ran into a mystery yet that I didn't solve. Whom do you mean by 'he'?"

"Lun Yurka, the Eurasian! He used to have that room. That's where my sister lived when I last heard from her. I've been here since, wondering if I might not get some hint——"

I shook her again.

"Begin from the beginning," I demanded, "and make it snappy and to the point."

"Lun Yurka, the Eurasian, as white as you or I, used to have that room. He dealt in . . . women. My sister Maida was one of them. My own name is Eda Noonan. When I didn't hear from her I came here, got another room, managed to get a pass-key. Maida was . . . well, maybe you understand. . . ."

"The kind of a girl men call over a telephone?"

"Yes, but not as you think. Strange, *unearthly* men. She *couldn't* be different. A wild streak in her. She didn't even try. She was somehow other-worldly in her mad desire for excitement. But I loved her, the whole family loved her. We didn't even condone her, because it wouldn't have made the slightest difference. In her mind there was nothing to condone. She had to do the things she did. Then she vanished. I've always believed she was murdered. I've sneaked into that room, the horrible, grisly room, and waited for a sign, for the telephone to ring. It was rung, there have been men's voices. . . ."

"I know. I know. And what else?"

"The little things. The barking of dogs in the well-court, when I know there are no dogs there. Lun Yurka had such dogs, ferocious, horrid little creatures. I've even thought . . . you see, Maida hinted in letters, of strange, ghastly things happening to other girls who were pawns of Lun Yurka. Of girls disappearing, of new sleeve-dogs coming . . . sleeve-dogs with the animal ferocity of wolves. I think she must have been taking dope, for she hinted that the vanishing of girls, and the appearance of sleeve-dogs, were too close together. . . ."

I couldn't help it. A cold chill, as from a glacier, caressed my spine. My hair shifted oddly on the back of my neck. Terror was an invisible blanket of many layers, fluttering over this girl, Eda, and me.

"Listen," I said, "while I tell you something. . . ."

I didn't think it would be a surprize to her, and it wasn't; but it frightened her even more, if that were possible. I told her of entering my room, of taking a woman in my arms. I told her everything, of the kiss. . . .

"Oh, my God!" she said. "Oh, my God!"

"Were you in there?" I demanded.

"No!" she moaned. "No! No! And yet——"

"Yet what?"

"I was sleeping in this room, with the door locked. I dreamed that I rose, went into *that* room. I didn't seem to open any doors. I seemed merely to go through them. I was in the dark. I felt the presence of a man. I couldn't seem to help myself. I was in a daze, wherein nothing seemed to matter. I dreamed—Mother of God!—exactly what you have told me. And then I came back here."

"Let me see your negligée!" I snapped.

**S**HE started to rise, to go to a closet, but was unable to complete the task. I went to the closet myself, and there hung the white garment with the black sash. I took it down, held it in front of her. She covered her face with her hands.

"That's all I could find," she said brokenly, "that belonged to Maida. I found it in the room."

"But doesn't the maid ever clean up when a guest leaves?"

"That room is always rented," was the surprizing answer. "I don't know why you were put into it."

I had an idea. I took my key from my pocket, then gasped. The room in which these queer things had been happening was 426. The key tag said 428! Yet 428 had opened 426. I'd got into the wrong room somehow.

My brain was in a whirl. How had I got into that room? I shook the hysterical girl again.

"This Lun Yurka, what did he look like? Did you ever see him?"

"Yes. He walked up to me when I came into the hotel lobby the first time, called me by name, and told me I'd better leave—or I would die!"

"What did he look like?" I demanded.

She described him carefully, while little ants crawled along my spine, seeming to increase in numbers as she spoke; for the man she was describing was the bellhop who had taken me to that room, the clerk who had shown me a well-court empty of dogs of any kind.

"And this Lun Yurka," I said, "where is he now?"

"That's the terrible thing," she said. "He was shot to death, right in the hotel lobby, within twenty minutes of his warning to me! Nobody ever knew who did it, but someone said a girl had run from the place, screaming, looking down at something on the floor nobody else could see, and shrieking: *'The little things! The little things! Take them away!'*"

I shook her again.

"We've got to look at this thing calmly," I said. "I don't know what's going on. You've lost a sister. You're trying to find some trace of her. I've got a mystery to solve. Besides, whoever that woman really was, I learned one thing when I kissed her: she's another mystery I have to solve, and I'll solve it if it takes until I die. Whatever you may have dreamed, that girl was flesh and blood, understand."

She stared at me out of her deep black eyes. Her lips were red, red as ripe cherries.

"You're not afraid?" she asked. "I'm sure it means death. I've dreamed of the little things, and always there was death in them. If that girl you mention" — she shuddered, recalling her dream, and I winced because she shuddered at the recollection — "was real, how did it happen that the window was open? How did it happen that a black mist——"

She didn't finish what she had started, for she suddenly remembered something, as I did. *I hadn't told her about that black mist!*

"And how," I said, "did you know of the black mist? I didn't tell you."

"My dream," she said brokenly. "Oh, what's the use? I dreamed of everything you said!"

But she couldn't say it. Her face went fiery red and snowy white by turns. Here, normally, was a sweet, fine girl who, in dreams, became something else. It was little wonder that she was terrified. And I was terrified, too, when I asked the next question.

"Tell me, Eda, how many times you've had this dream. How many other men——"

SHE was on her feet instantly. "Never another man!" she cried. "Only the empty black room, filled with the barking of sleeve-dogs, and the search."

"The search?"

"Yes, for a man! I can't understand it. Suppose you had been less the man, less——"

"Make no mistake," I said grimly; "if you hadn't fled from me I would have forced an explanation. I am brutally frank."

"Then so will I be. That black mist . . . well, in this wild dream of mine I always, on the point of finding whatever it was that filled me with the dreadful, ghastly urge, turned into a black, sooty mist, and flowed out through the window! The window was always opened for me, and always closed behind me, and I never saw what, or who, opened or closed it."

"And how," I asked grimly, "did you escape from the bathroom?"

Her cry sounded like that of a mouse caught in a trap. She hadn't mentioned the bathroom.

"I became black mist," she whispered, "as soon as the door closed behind me, and mingled with the shadows in the

room when the door opened, so that my going wasn't noticed."

You can imagine how that made me feel!

"We've got to put our heads together. I'm not superstitious, or have never regarded myself as being so, but I'm beginning to wonder a great deal about all this. You must have some idea."

"Yes. When I dream that dream, I'm not myself, but Maida, seeking something. She is dead, I'm sure of it, and trying to show me something, trying to tell me something. . . ."

"Does this mean anything?" I asked hoarsely.

I pulled down the neck of my collar, showed her the two tiny dots which had bled a little, and her answer was that sharp cry again.

"Yes," she whispered, "Maida's letters, her mention of other girls who served Lun Yurka! Just before they disappeared they became lethargic, anemic, and had those dots on their necks."

"You don't," I asked, "by any chance believe in vampires?"

But I had no answer to that, for a good and sufficient reason. There was a sudden, nerve-shattering banging on the door. Eda looked at me, startled.

"The house detective," she said. "A girl mustn't have men in her room."

Well, I'd already gone to the door. The hammering, savage, terrific, kept up until I put my hand on the knob. I spun the door open. I was ready to smash the face off any house detective that walked. But—nothing doing! That hallway outside was empty of any living soul. And no human being, between the time I grabbed that door and opened it, could have got even to the nearest door and through it, after his last knocking on the panels!

It was eerie, I can tell you. I started to go back, when I saw something else,

something that made me squirm. Moving footprints! Yes, just that: successive indentations in the carpet, which instantly sprang back into smoothness, as though a tiny invisible dog were walking along the carpet! Nor was that all. The footprints turned at my door . . . and kept on going. The door didn't move, but I knew that the invisible dog had gone through it or under it. But what sort of dog, in God's name, could crawl under a door? Even the tiniest of sleeve-dogs couldn't have done it.

I went back to the girl.

"There's danger, all right," I said hoarsely. "Plenty of it. I'm in on it by accident; you're in it up to your neck. I think you must be getting close to a solution of the mystery of your sister's disappearance . . . and the . . . the . . . forces behind it are angry. I don't mind admitting I'm scared. If it were wolves—imagine them in hotel rooms!—I wouldn't be afraid; but those tiny dogs! They're worse than wolves."

"Yes," she whispered, "worse. Much worse, because they, because they——"

**T**HE knocking on the door again, loud, insistent. I got the idea that whenever either of us, in talking, came close to a solution, a hint of what was behind it all, that knocking would come to drown out the words, divert our attention.

"It's in my room," I said. "Nothing will happen here. For some reason they don't cross your threshold. I can't figure it out here. I'm afraid to leave you here. Come on to my room."

She went. She was afraid, for herself, for me. I was afraid for both of us, more than I would admit, even to myself. A *crawling* something, horrible, as though slimy with the life-leaven of the ages, menaced us both. We closed the door behind us, and instantly the dog howled from the well-court. I heard, moreover,

the scurrying of many feet, there in the dark room. With a cry of abject terror Eda swung against me, clung to me, her face against my neck, her arms around me.

"I'm afraid, so horribly afraid!" she murmured.

I tried to comfort her, though my teeth chattered and my voice shook as if I had the ague.

She was panting, there against me, panting, her bosom heaving with her terror. I held her tightly, sorry for her, wishing I might give my life to be of service.

The little footfalls didn't come close. They seemed to be circling us, as though thwarted in trying to reach us by some invisible wall.

It was exactly here that I felt the girl begin to *change in my arms!* To change, to become—and she knew it, too, as I did, and both of us were stricken with terror greater than we had ever known before—the woman I had already, here, held in my arms.

"Don't," she was sobbing into my ears, "let me get away. Don't let me go out through the window. For this time, dear God, I won't ever be able to get back. Do you understand? Before I dreamed it. *This time it's real!* Hold me! Hold me!"

The myriad snarlings in the black room held a jeering note. I couldn't help the impression—born, of course, of what Eda had told me—that the jeering was that of many women.

I stood like a man turned to stone, wondering what in God's name I could do.

Eda's clothing had changed, seemed to be getting thinner. I could feel the warmth of her through her waist.

"Oh God," I prayed, "what shall I do? I *can't*, simply *can't*, let her get away!"

#### 4. *The Ebon Smoke*

THERE was the feeling of conflict, of the antagonism of abysmal forces, there in the room. I was fighting, uncomprehending, against those forces. I could feel the surge and flow of a mighty will. It somehow expressed itself in understandable terms through the chuckling of the woman I held in my arms.

I stared, during the *change*, at the window which gave on the well-court, and the damned thing was slowly rising. There were no visible hands, just the slow, inexorable lifting of the window.

And the woman in my arms was changing still, into the other creature I had already held in my arms; while from her lips came two sounds: the voice of Eda, begging, beseeching me, to hold her against the forces; the chuckling of something, or someone else, from the same lips, making light of my mundane powers to hold *anything* against the unknown forces which eddied and swirled about me.

That damned window! And the howling from the well-court, and the scurrying here and there of the tiny feet in the room! I felt, strange as it sounds, that in a matter of minutes the ultimate change would come, that Eda would become the black smoke and vanish through the opening window. It couldn't, mustn't happen! I whirled with her to the closet, forced her inside, shut the door. Then, panting, terrified, not believing anything I did, but knowing I must do it, I hurried to the window and forced it shut.

It took all my strength, and I am a powerful man. Then I whirled to face the black room of many shadows, and I was panting like a spent runner.

I heard myself say, in a croaking voice, like that of a raven perhaps:

"You shan't have her, understand? She is mine! Mine, do you understand?"

The window started rising again. I could feel it against my back, and the cold breath of the night wind against me, through my clothing that perspiration had dampened. I turned, forced the window shut.

Then, savagely, forcing my will to perform the tasks, afraid of what I would see when the light came on, but holding my eyes open with all the strength of my body, I switched on the standing light first. As its light struck at the darkness like a lash, a myriad of baleful eyes glared back at me. The room was filled with snarling. It would break into howls in a moment, I knew, unless . . . unless the howling dog in the well-court bade otherwise; for somehow I knew that the dog down there was master of all the others.

Don't ask me how I knew, for I can't tell you.

But the glaring eyes, like those of cats reflecting the light, were growing dim. I dashed to the switch which turned on the dim bulbs overhead, and the shadows seemed to coalesce in the corners, outside the range of the lights.

The shadows had swallowed the eyes, the snarling things from Hell . . . or else the snarling things and the shadows were one.

Now I stooped, broke off a chair-leg, smashed one end to a broken mass against the wall, and jammed it in between the two sections of window, so that no power could lift that window without breaking something. And something—*something*, I say!—immediately tried. The howling down in the sooty dark was ghastly. The dog came back on the sill, flinging himself against the window-pane; but for all his vociferous scolding, which rasped my nerves and shriveled my soul, his body *was* small, and he couldn't break through the glass.

I stared at the dogs. One, I would have sworn, should have been dead, for I

had twisted his head off, flung him under the bed. Yet now I could see the spot where I had flung him, and that it was empty. I got the ghastly idea:

"You can't slay the dead, or the undead!"

And as though my own words had been a spell, I became rigid, moveless, and the dogs poured over me as I sat, and over Eda Noonan.

It was right here that I heard a soft chuckle, near the window. I turned my head, which felt heavy and sick, and saw the dog from the well-court. He was just hopping from the window-sill into the room . . . and his eyes which looked into mine were the mocking eyes of the bell-hop-clerk! No mistaking them, nor that he was Lun Yurka, the Eurasian!

If only, now, I could get to that window! But my body was inert, lifeless.

### 5. *Strange Transfer*

MY MIND seemed to be working with lightning-speed, even though my body would not work at all. My eyes swerved from Eda to the sleeve-dog, with the eyes of the Eurasian, there on the floor. The sleeve-dog from the well-court was laughing, and his eyes were as mocking as ever.

There, said my brain, is Lun Yurka, the Eurasian, a vampire out of the high passes of the Far East, ages old. Sleeve-dogs have been the pets of oriental rulers for ages. It is little wonder then. . . .

And how did the animal rise from the court?

That was easy, too, when one accepted the premise that Lun Yurka, the undead, and his women—now the dogs which fought over blood from my throat—were vampires. Maybe the howling in the court had been nothing but that—howling. The vampire could have flown to the window-

sill as a bat, and there taken the shape of the sleeve-dog.

Foolish, absurd, fantastic, insane! Yes, I used all those words to describe it, though I could find no words to describe my horror and fear. The brutes had imbibed before my eyes of the blood of Eda Noonan; by the ancient hellish creed of the vampires she, when she died, would become as one of them. Not only that, but her own sister, here among the sleeve-dogs, must have been among her attackers!

It made my flesh crawl, even as I forced my lips to call a name:

"Maida! Maida!"

And one of the dogs on my chest, which now was dyed with my own blood, broke from the mass, looked all around—and would have howled dolefully, nose pointed at the ceiling of the room, had not the dog from the well-court, Lun Yurka the Eurasian, barked softly, a command, I knew, for silence.

Horror gripped me. There seemed no escape. Then my eyes were on Eda, there on the bed, and again a change was taking place in her. The dog from the well-court had hopped to the bed, was squatting on her chest, red tongue lolling out in hellish laughter. Baleful eyes fixed on the sleeping girl.

Eda's eyes slowly opened. Out of her mouth came a strange, unearthly voice:

*"I hear, Lun Yurka, and I obey!"*

Even the last word, "obey," came from her lips with difficulty, for the change was almost too swift to note. But one second there was Eda Noonan, promising abject obedience to Lun Yurka. And next moment—

A sleeve-dog, with the eyes of Eda Noonan, jumped blithely out from under the covers, advanced to rub noses with the dog from the well-court—and Eda Noonan was nowhere to be seen!

I think the horror of that gripped me

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more than anything else could have done. I figured it out this way: the dogs had drunk of Eda's blood until she had died, and her death had made her one with them. In spite of everything I had been able to do, I hadn't been able to keep her on this side of whatever horrible veil separated normal people from the ghastly people who were like Lun Yurka.

And it was all the fault of Lun Yurka.

*And I would be like him, too, if I did not do something!* But what could I do? Old legends said you cut off their heads, drove stakes through their hearts. But I had nothing with which to sever the brute's head, nor any stake to drive.

But I'd find a way. With all my will I commanded my body to act. I know now, looking back, that I did only the will of Lun Yurka, who, Eda Noonan said, had been slain before I had even come to this hotel.

I SWOOPED from the chair. The dogs spilled onto the floor, where they instantly attacked my legs. Their sharp teeth struck at me, but I scarcely felt them. I scooped up the sleeve-dog I knew was Eda Noonan, thrust her into my clothing, where she lay warm against my flesh.

My other hand clutched and held the sleeve-dog from the well-court.

What followed then was proof, I think, that I was utterly mad, or that I was not in possession of my own faculties—literally.

I held the dog in my hands, tightly clutched. Its eyes dared me to do anything. Its lolling red tongue laughed at me with the mocking laughter of that bellhop.

I heard myself saying, in a raucous croak:

"I know you, Lun Yurka, and you are finished. Never again will you create new horrors to loose upon the world. You are going, now, to die."

He howled in glee, that blasted thing, that horrid *little thing*, out of some oriental Purgatory.

He could, then and there, I am sure, have become the bellhop in his full stature. But he did not, which proves, I think, that he didn't wish to; that he wished to happen—what did happen.

How should I destroy him? I had twisted the head off one sleeve-dog, and it hadn't died.

But there must be a way. The drinking, the ghastly blood-feast of the sleeve-dogs, actuated me; or maybe, deep down inside me, kin to Lun Yurka because his hell-dogs had tainted my blood with their taint, his will forced me to obey his commands.

But I went mad, with a horrible lust to destroy, and I had nothing but my hands and my teeth.

And when my hands had finished, ripping, tearing, while my mouth snarled, the sleeve-dog from the well-court was gone, and my mouth was smeared with blood. . . .

How could Lun Yurka return, then, when I had so completely destroyed him? Certainly the oldsters who had kept the legend alive—the legend of decapitation and the stake through the heart for vampires—had never thought of this!

Then I took the little sleeve-dog from my garments, dropped her on the bed, and whispered hoarsely:

"I've found the way, Eda, and we shall never again be parted; at least not by Lun Yurka's horrors. Never ask me how I did it, for you would turn from me in mad hysteria."

I dropped her on the bed, said:

"Lie quietly and become Eda Noonan again."

The fact that I gave such a command, spontaneously, and that she obeyed so implicitly, should have told me the truth,

but it did not. It simply seemed the natural thing to do; so I did it.

And there, while I sat back with a sigh, Eda Noonan reposed on the bed, smiling a secretive smile at me.

"You are a very smart man, Adam," she said . . . and her voice was so very strange, her lips so very, very red.

I looked, and the window was open. I lighted the electrics and the dogs were gone, shadows were suddenly in the corner; then black mist was going out through the window, and I was alone with Eda Noonan.

It no longer seemed to matter to her about Maida. Why should it have mattered? She had found Maida, and whatever could have been done, I . . . well, I had done it, erasing all vestiges of Lun Yurka.

**I** FELT very strange when morning came and I went down to the desk to check out. Eda had gone. She was to meet me on the corner, in the heart of Times Square. I was eager to meet her there. At any other hotel in town we could be together.

"I'll have my bill, please," I told the clerk.

He started, looked at me. It irritated me.

"What the devil's wrong, fellow?" I snarled.

"Your voice, Mister Clerc," he said. "It reminded me of something!"

"Of what, may I ask?"

"We had a guest here, before your present visit. He had the room next to yours. It was very unfortunate . . . his name was Lun Yurka, and your voice, just now, was his voice!"

Abysmal fear swept over me, fear greater than any I had ever known. I was, I was sure, Adam Clerc. I looked at myself in a mirror, going out of the hotel,



and I *was* Adam Clerc, though my own eyes mocked me from the mirror.

And when, later, Eda and I registered at another hotel, it was with the greatest difficulty that I did the usual, signing my name, Adam Clerc, with my customary flourish. I felt as though I were forging a name, that the name I should have signed was: Lun Yurka!

And on the way to the hotel I had stared at the necks of all beautiful women on the street, and it had been a vast effort of will, on my part, that had kept me from attacking them, ripping at their white necks with savage teeth.

Eda, I noted, stared with a hunger akin to mine, at the necks of men we met—the young, handsome, *blooded* men!

And with us, as we went, trotted the sleeve-dogs. Eda saw them, I saw them;

but none in this hotel, where dogs were positively forbidden, paid them the slightest heed, or sought to sidestep them as they walked. . . .

Yes, I am Lun Yurka. Maida and Eda are together again—as all of us will be down the centuries to come, until someone thinks of decapitation and the stake through the heart.

I think, after finding a body that suited me, that of Adam Clerc, I was very clever in obtaining possession of it, for now Adam has his Eda, Eda has her Maida, but I . . . I . . . Lun Yurka, old almost as the Himalayas, am master of them all.

There is a touch of humor in it, too—that, though Adam Clerc will never die, his terror can never end. Even Lun Yurka must have his touch of amusement to make bloody eternity endurable. . . .