

# ALL-STORY WEEKLY

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# The Volcanologist

by Philip M. Fisher Jr.

## CHAPTER I.

### GODDESS OF DAMNED SOULS.

**I** SAW the whole thing. I saw it from the rather commonplace, though I admit unusually situated, beginning, to the appalling catastrophe at the end. I saw it. I beheld the slow change that Kilauea wrought. I observed the break, the physical and mental collapse, that Mme. Pele, that volcano goddess of damned souls, forced up on my good friend Harrison Rhodes—forced upon my practical-minded, hard-headed, only fact-believing friend and man of exact science, Professor Harrison Rhodes, volcanologist.

And yet, seeing that change, I did not foresee the inevitable end of it all. Seeing the approach of the breakdown, I did naught to avert it. Seeing that final pitifully horrible climax—I simply stood stupified, and, with unseeing, or perhaps benumbed mind, saw with my eyes—and yet did nothing.

I see now that nothing could have been done. The thing was inevitable.

I did not cross to the islands with him. He took the Lurline, which landed him directly at Hilo, so that he had only thirty miles by automobile to land him at the very crater itself. So had he always been—eager, direct, ever quick scented and on the job.

I took the sugar boat Manoa, landed at Honolulu for a fortnight or more with friends—and thence, on the little Mauna Kea, leisurely traveled through the islands,

the two hundred odd miles that separate these main cities of the Hawaiians.

Every minute of that passage was full of grace and color and strange interest to me—the pure sapphire of the snow-flecked water and the skimming dash of the flying fish on either side, the tawny browns of the smooth sloping flanks of algaroba skirted Molokai and Lanai, the vari-green checkered cane fields on swiftly rising Maui; at Lahaina the slender leaning coconut palms and low lying habitations crowding so eagerly about the gleaming white staff from which glowed in the setting sun the good old “homy” stars and stripes; a night of crystal clearness and constellations that hurt my eyes, then morning and Hilo; and the drive through cane, bananas, guaves, tree ferns—to the suddenly opened vista at the very edge of the volcano itself.

No wonder I forgot for those overflowing hours the errand on which I had come. No wonder that there entered into my scene-drugged mind no foreboding thoughts. No wonder, as the full view of Kilauea broke from the copse of ferns and ohelos on my left, that for the moment only the thrill of another picture of startling newness and strange beauty came over me.

The fascination of the volcano—the fascination of it, I say, I did not at that moment comprehend.

But then I was surfeited with sight-seeing.

I turned to the chauffeur.

“Take me to the observation laboratory,” I said.

It was perhaps a hundred yards farther, and but a few steps from the crater's rim; a long flat yellow frame structure, mostly of glass and wire screen, it impressed me, and remarkably fitting its purpose. A Japanese, in starchy white, bowed at the doorway.

"Meestah Whitcomb?" he queried with great display of teeth.

I nodded; and he hustled my bags away. I tipped my driver, a Portuguese, and followed.

"Thees a way, sah," hissed the Jap. And he lead me to the farthest room of the building, deposited my grips, shot up the blinds, and with another grin swept aside the curtain, and said:

"Mos' painstakin' view, iss not, Meestah Whitcomb?"

I nodded at his rather remarkable adjective—another bit of the strange country, I mused. Then I started—for as I leaned out of the window I found that it actually overhung the great hollow beneath. I drew back with heart beating wildly and palms pressing against the sill.

I caught the servant swiftly turning away in pretense at putting away my clothes—I saw the grin on his face.

"Whew!" I smiled. "Pretty deep right here."

He turned.

"Four hundred eighty feets, sah, Profess' Rhodes say. An' ovah there"—he pointed to the bluffs at the right—"ovah there, Professor say eight hundred—straight jump."

"Whew," I said again, for I began to feel a bit perspiry after that first glance. "Under my feet."

"Floor ver' strong," said the Jap. "Professor Rhodes smile when he see it," he added ambiguously.

Then I recollected.

"But where is Professor Rhodes?" I asked quickly.

The Jap shrugged his shoulders, and showed his prominent teeth again.

"Halemaumau," he said, giving the native name—main crater, sir. Study."

"Oh," I said, and took another look out of the window. "Where is it?"

The Japanese pointed straight out to

where, in the basin that was beneath me, the shiny stove polish gray of the old lava flows coned up to a smoking eminence a short distance off.

"Oh—too far," said the Jap. "Couple miles, ver' hard on shoe—and Professor Rhodes be back lunch time."

"Two miles to the main fiery pit!" I cried. "Just over there?"

The little chap nodded.

"Air ver' clean," he explained. "Rock ver' hot, an' sharp where are break places. Profess' Rhodes say me keep you here where he come lunch time, sah. Yes, sah."

I stayed.

So Rhodes was already hard at it. Scientific enthusiasm! Well, let him study. I'd take my own time—unless he drove me. And Harry Rhodes had a way about him that was driving, too—a personal force that impelled one to work as he willed, and when he willed, and where, and in what manner. That was one reason I liked the man. When "on the job," as he used to say, poor chap, he was "on the job"; cold, hard, matter of fact, determined to win out, going at his work in an everything-else-be-damned attitude that was simply inspiring. All his life, short but already full of achievement, he had sought, and believed only in, fact. He had come here to discover the facts about the volcano of Kilauea. I believed he would not leave until he had worked out these facts. I was not surprised that, instead of lingering here to greet me, he was out there where the smoke was rising, after facts.

And already I began to feel that I, too, must get out and to work.

## CHAPTER II.

### THE PIT OF EVERLASTING FIRE.

AT noon I heard a stamping at the door, and then in crisp hard tones, but full of friendly greeting:

"Hello, old man. Mighty glad to see you. What a great time you must have had! No circles under your eyes, plenty of healthy color, firm grip in your hand, quick movements, head up. Great! Great! Fit for work. And you'll have it. By

jinks, man, it's a great study, great study. You'll have work. Let's get some food in us, and then we'll be off. Glad you're so fit—need to be. Got heavy shoes?"

There you are. That was his way.

I grinned. The Jap began to fly about like a white shade. Evidently he knew Rhodes pretty well after these few short weeks. I looked fine, did I? And so could do work, eh? I suppose he would have had the same enthusiasm over a piece of machinery that came to him in good condition.

"Thanks," I said. "I have."

"You'll need 'em," he said. "Where the surface lava is cracked it's like broken glass—is broken glass. Fact!"

I smiled again. Fact.

"Your first trip," Rhodes snapped, as the Jap served, "we'll make a general round-up. Broad view at first is better. Did it myself. Later come details. Great work—you'll be mad over it. I am already in a little more than two weeks. Fact!"

Lord, thought I, he is going to lead me a merry race!

And he did. But how dearly was it won! And how appalling it's finish! Had I known then, or felt—but that of course, is absurd. How can one know that a thing is to occur, and then set about to avert it, to thwart the will of fate? It is well we have no vision of the future. Our miseries are sufficient as they are, God knows.

But perhaps I sound pessimistic, gloomy. I should not, for after all it was a glorious thing, a splendid thing that Rhodes did at the finish—a thing that should, in the reflected glory it sheds on civilized man, make us who know, and perhaps you who read, better, whole-hearted, more optimistic.

Luncheon over, old-clothes donned, and we started down into the crater by way of a trail out in the precipitous wall below the observatory. And all the way down, and as we picked our way over the ancient flows in the basin below, Rhodes, in his jerky matter-of-fact sentences was giving me a general idea about the thing we were to study.

"Whole groups of islands are volcanic," he snapped. "Bubbles, blisters, on earth's

surface, shoved above sea. On this island two bubbles, Mauna Kea. Loa's dead, more or less—Kea, this one, still a bit hot. You'll see that," he added grimly. "Damn hot!"

"And smelly," I interpolated facetiously.

"Sulfur," he snapped without a smile.

"To continue: Kea rises up twelve thousand feet—main crater on cone top, dead long ago—but this one broke out on the mountain's flank—like a boil. Big one though, Kilauea is—see for yourself. Take a lake the size of Manhattan Island, and let the bottom suddenly drop out of it so that the banks fall straight down from five hundred to eight hundred feet—let the muddy bottom be a hard and shiny slate gray, and appear to have flowed, or be flowing, in massy rounded molasseslike rolls, from a slightly raised place in the crater—let steam be rising at odd intervals about the muddy looking floor, and a cloud of blue sulfur fumes and whiter smoke be blowing as from a great conflagration in the hollow of the mounded crater—let a mist be falling, a strong breeze blowing, an all permeating odor combined of steam laundry and match factory be ever in your nostrils—let a feeling gradually grip you that you are treading on a mined field which may at any moment blow you to atoms or crack open and drop you into a sea of molten stone and living fire—let your senses sudderly comprehend that this is a work of living nature in the very act of earth change, and that over it man has not the slightest control—and you have Kilauea. God! It's magnificent!"

We reached the bottom at last, and began to pick our way over the crackling crust of brittle lava. Now and again a section of the stuff would tip beneath my foot, and my heart wildly pound.

But Rhodes would exclaim:

"No worries, old man. Nothing hot right here. Hell's a bit further on."

Yet a hundred paces along, he stopped and pointed to a bit of steam trailing in the breeze from a low break in the floor.

"Stuff flowing there," he said matter-of-factly.

I craned my neck and started for the place.

"Approach it from below!" cried Rhodes.

"But it will run right at me, then!" I remonstrated.

"You can dodge these little fellows. But if you get above, you might break through the crust, and lose a foot before you knew it was burned. Native did that a month ago—unpleasant, they say."

A little coldness seized me.

"You mean that above us here, under the crackly stuff on which we're treading, the liquid molten rock is lying."

He nodded.

"Fact," he said. "There's the main fiery pit—" He pointed ahead a mile or so to where the rise was craggily cut off and smoke was rising. "Natives call it the Pit of Everlasting Fire, Halemaumau. They've names for everything here you know—queer ducks. Well, up in there the lava level must be a hundred yards or more higher than we are here. Only the hardened crust around the pit holds it from getting us right now—from getting the whole country, I might just as well say. Why, if the thing took a notion to rise, it could flood half the island, and destroy—ugh! I don't like to think of that—with nothing, *nothing*, you know, to stop it—beyond man's power. "Huh!" He smiled belittlingly at the thought of man. "Huh! Little shrimp—man—insignificant atom."

I smiled my appreciation.

"But this little tongue of lava breaking out right here?" I hinted.

"Well, there are weak places, of course," Rhodes went on. "And of course the pressure of all that stuff above in the pit is terrific. So naturally some of it leaks through—creeps between old flows, you know—under enormous pressure. See!" He pointed at a little glowing tongue that suddenly streamed from under the crust to our left. "There's a bit forced out. But see it turn gray—hardened almost at once. Watch it, now—and you'll see the hardened tip lift a little, and out the molten stuff will run again."

It so happened, and weirdly enough. Then the surface of that tiny flow hardened; we waited a few moments; then as before, the tip of this last flow raised ever

so little, and out was forced another fiery trickle.

I gasped.

"It's alive!" I exclaimed.

Rhodes smiled mockingly.

"Yes, the natives say that. They have legends, you know. Superstitious rot!"

"But do these little flows take place throughout all the older stuff?" I queried. He nodded.

"They are continually raising the bottom of the crater. It may be that the very spot you stand on will to-morrow be covered a couple feet—"

I jumped.

"Let's move on," I said. "The stuff is alive."

"You're as bad as the Kanakas," smiled Rhodes. "Remember you're here to get facts, not to go batty over a bit of hot stone being alive."

"I don't blame 'em," I grunted, as we turned aside to clear another tricklet of smoking, glowy stuff that seemed to hurriedly run out to meet us.

"Who?" said Rhodes.

"The natives," I answered.

Then Rhodes stated another fact.

"You're a fool!" he snapped, and strode on.

Submissively I followed.

But I smiled within myself. Harrison Rhodes, volcanologist, said I to myself, will let nothing prevent him from getting the facts about Kilauea. And nothing I added soberly, can prevent him from learning all that mere humans might learn.

There is always a place, admittedly, where man comes against a wall, a vast wall, opaque, impenetrable, unsurmountable, against which he may fling himself until exhausted and yet which, still stubbornly sphinxlike, will answer his questions—not. I felt that Rhodes would glean all he could, all man could, until he reached this wall. Then, for the man was built that way, he would scan the wall from afar, measure it with wisdom's eye, close up to it and minutely search every detail; then, because he wanted fact and only fact, he would say, "I have come to the end of my labors. There is nothing farther that I can pick apart and set aside

and say: This is fact. Therefore, my good friend, let us pack up our notes, our photographs, our paraphernalia, and hie us back to the good old coast where we can, at leisure, write the book the university so madly craves—a book of facts.” Then he might add, for he differed not from the rest of our kind: “Let some fool old graybeard there theorize—we’ll get the facts.”

Again I smiled to myself as I slipped and stumbled over the crackling surface. Rhodes was practicality itself—I a fool.

Yet I argued, I was right where I said that I didn’t blame the natives for their superstition. That vast wall against which we would finally come was simply one of a series, an infinite series. The wall against which the Kanakas came was simply one earlier in the series. We had solved the *Open Sesame* to its mystery, had penetrated it and trod the ground betwixt it and that wall that finally would defeat us, with eagerness, certainty, wisdom. To them, what lay beyond the wall at which their knowledge of fact ended was blackness, mystery, gods—to us, because we were secure in deeper sight, this blackness, mystery, and talk of gods was superstition. They did not conceive, perhaps, of other walls beyond our wall. To them all that could possibly be beyond theirs was blackness, mystery, gods—but to us, what lay beyond our wall we smugly said was yet unsolved nature, and we let our graybeards build fanciful theories. The natives conjured up ghosts and gods and pulled off each other’s heads to prove a favorite’s peculiar powers. The graybeards conjectured over heat and pressures, and plucked each others whiskers to prove their own particular principles.

A difference not of kind but of degree.

And even Rhodes had said that we were to note fact and fact only.

“Well,” said I to myself, as we puffed up the steeper slope to the main fiery pit, “just what will he do when he comes to his wall. He said all he wanted was fact—let the philosophers at the university theorize.” As I looked about me at the vastness of the arena of steaming heat to the center of which we, little atoms, walked

so boldly confident, I wondered if Rhodes would hold to his word; just get facts—or would he then try to go beyond? And if he tried to penetrate *his* wall—what then?

Perhaps it is fortunate that man has not the gift of prescience. I am glad, with such thought running through my mind, that I had not.

As we slipped and crunched upward, a deep gurgling and heavy puffing struck my ear. And at the same time came a shrill chorus of excited voices. A half dozen tourists at the pit’s brink beckoned to us to hurry.

We leaped on, and in a moment more stood with them.

### CHAPTER III.

#### MME. PELE’S HAIR.

THERE are two visions of Halemaumau that I will ever carry with me—and would that they were but one! The first view I had of the fiery pit is one, the last view is the other. The first, a vista of wierd, thrilling, fascination. The last—of hellish horror. God, had I but dreamed it! Had I but—but the thing is done, and naught is left but to tell it—naught but to tell it all.

My first impression was of craggy, jagged, out-reaching jaws, a wide opened mouth of heated-hazed gray and livid red, a leaping, pulsing, eager tongue in the very center—madly opened wide and spewing at the heavens, and, in a sobbing thwarted voice, cursing God—a thing in and of itself, alive, terrible, malevolent.

My second impression—I turned to Rhodes.

“A bit of hell, itself,” I muttered.

There was no answer.

Rhodes, hands behind his back, was gazing fascinatedly at the leaping turmoil of lava in the swirling pool of molten rock at our feet. His face was tense, his eyes burning with a heat that was second only to the crater itself. I thrilled a bit—if I could only feel in myself but a portion of his scientific ardor!

I nudged him.

"As if beneath that pool," I said, "some monster ogre was chained in everlasting torment, his writhings causing those slow currents beneath the cliffs, his choking breath the convulsive leaping of the molten lava, his desperate sobbing the grumbling of the stuff and the trembling of the rock beneath our feet."

Rhodes jerked awake.

"Perhaps there is," he said in a low voice.

For a fraction of a second I took my eyes off the pit of fire. This much from Rhodes—even in fun?

"Well," I said, "that is a concession to native superstition, and"—I could not help but add—"to a fool."

A bit irritable, I fancied, my good friend shook himself.

"Every day for almost three weeks past," he said, "three hours each day, I have watched the scene before us. I have seen the whole pool silent, heavy, gray surfaced and wrinkled slightly—as elephant hide in tough appearance, as a pot of molten lead in color and calmly latent possibilities—gray, placid, but hot; only at the edges beneath the cliffs continually and redly lapping, lapping, lapping, hungry for the rock on which it feeds.

"And then in a moment a split appears, great sections of the congealed surface swing apart, the red molten stuff beneath, touching the air, leaps and hisses and bellows, the whole pit becomes alive, great blocks of the cliffs slide in, leap in, eagerly throw themselves in—and the place does become even as the natives call it, Halemaumau, the Pit of Everlasting Fire. Three weeks of it, I've seen. And the natives sacrifice to it." Here his face hardened and his hands clenched. "Fools! As if man—" Then he shrugged his shoulders again. And stared to the left, where the gray, hardened surface was slowly entering a glaring, puffing hollow beneath the cliff—and disappearing in its maw.

Then suddenly Rhodes chuckled.

"Look at 'em," he said nodding to the tourists, who had made their way to a low level of hardened lava to our right. "That is what I call practical—broiling ham over a crack in the surface."

"What!" I exclaimed.

"Not possible?" he ran on. "Look beneath you."

I did, and confess to another real thrill. For not three feet below the surface the fissure in the lava was glaring red. I stepped aside a bit hastily—nearer to the crater's edge.

Rhodes chuckled again—then his face went white—and tightened in horror.

"This way," he cried hoarsely. "Jump! Jump!"

Needless to say I leaped straight over the red hot crack that I had just avoided. Rhodes, still white and tense, seized my arm and ran me a dozen paces to one side. And as we scrambled on, a rending crash came from behind us, a giant *plopping* splash followed.

And when I turned to look, the entire ledge on which we had been standing had disappeared and the pool of molten rock was in turmoil. My knees weakly deposited me onto the ground, and my head swam.

Rhodes's hand trembled as he, sitting also, and breathing heavily, placed it on my shoulder. His smile was rather forced, I imagine, when he said:

"Well, old man, your tortured ogre nearly got you that time, didn't he?"

I nodded quietly, jerkily.

"Not a pleasant way of going, I imagine," he ran on a little smoother. "I never did fancy so hot an end. Rather glad we noticed the ham broilers—"

I looked up, a bit anxiously.

"Oh, they never even heard it," he said. "But if they hadn't been playing there I might not have looked at the crack beneath our feet, might not have seen it slowly widen, might not have jumped with you in time, you see? Tourist boasting—'I did it too—over a crack!'—probably saved us from a rather unpleasant end."

I pressed his hand.

"It's not a joke," I murmured. "Thanks."

He grinned, but returned the pressure.

"No joke—fact! But it did almost get you—Beware what you say of Kilauea. Now let's go over to the second crater. Three little ones now, you know." He

hurried on, seemingly quite over his emotion. "All the stuff in sight, even the crust we're standing on, is new flow of the last four months—used to be one great pit, now three—fact!"

So was the man changed again. Fact, fact, fact—he adored fact. And yet—there was that on his face as he stared at the lapping, fiery rock that seemed to say:

"Yes, this whole thing is a single great fact; it is, it exists, it is fact. But behind it all—well, I do wonder now what is hidden there. Something—it fascinates—fascinates." That is what his face, his glowing eyes, had seemed to say. And recalling, I wondered if something were changing in the basic character of my good friend, Harrison Rhodes, volcanologist. Whether, after all, he were not wondering what lay beyond his wall—whether, after all he was charmed only by—fact.

The days passed; we photographed, took notes, tested for temperature, for the chemistry of the lava, the fumes, the steam. We observed by day, by night—recorded the movement of the flows, the varying heights which the pools in the crater caldrons reached, the coincident amounts of vapor and smoke and seismic action.

Rhodes was incessantly "on the job." He never wearied. He never seemed to fear. He was obsessed with scientific fervor. He must have facts. He took chances, risked horrible death a dozen times a day, laughed when I remonstrated, when I recalled to him our narrow escape of my first day at the crater—boasted that nothing could get him—and on it all waxed fat.

Then one day came a package of books from Honolulu. I was glad, for I anticipated an evening of enjoyment.

But, before I had a chance to mention the thing to him, Rhodes had Azaki carry it into his bedroom, unopened. He did this almost secretly, as though he thought that I might see the books—and laugh.

I wondered at this—for we shared all our pleasures and difficulties together, even as we had done when students in the university for which we now labored.

I wondered too, as each day we made our observations at the fiery pit of Hale-

maumau, why Rhodes had at times those fits of seeming abstraction, why he would stand and gaze so fascinatedly at the teeming stuff within—stand thus when our notes of that particular formation or phenomenon were already quite complete.

He would watch the stuff as the surface spiraled about, as the gray sections of it would tip and up-endedly slide the one beneath the other, as great chunks of cliff would thunderingly fall into the lava with a ponderous splashing and upheaval of the heavy liquid, as fountains of liquid fire would dance with clumsy grace and fantasy—would watch it as though dazed by its vastness, as though hypnotized by its constant variation.

Then one day as we were taking motion pictures of a particularly beautiful play of lava, I saw his eyes eagerly scanning the formation on which he stood. And suddenly he stepped closer to the crater, stooped, and scooped up something from the ground.

He held out his hand to me, one finger bleeding plentifully—and in the palm was a fluffy bit of hairlike material, soft as spun glass, and really the same stuff spun by the winds playing on the spurting lava.

"Pele's hair," he said with a smile.

I nodded.

"Yes," I said, "another pretty native superstition. And you've cut yourself on the sharp lava break—that's a blood sacrifice for the hair, I should say, eh?"

He shrugged his shoulders, and turned away. I watched him from the tail of my eye. He did not toss the soft stuff to the winds, but surreptitiously stowed it in an envelope. Playing with me, eh, I smiled to myself? Or seized with a sudden taste for curio-saving? Or—what else might it be?

Why this growing secrecy—if indeed it were secrecy at all?

That night I found one of the new books on the spreading porch where he had undoubtedly forgotten it. I picked it up, and read the title.

It was: "Native Hawaiian Superstitions." The author I have forgotten.

I laid it in my hand, and it opened naturally and easily at a chapter labeled:



"Legends of Kilauea." And a little further along came the story of Mme. Pele, the goddess of fire, and of native sacrificial feasts in her honor on the crater's crumbling edge.

So that was what Rhodes was reading. I had heard of such books. I knew the Kanakas had such tales, such folk-lore. Rhodes knew that I knew this too. Then why, I pondered, this secretiveness? Why did he not share the books with me? Was it perhaps that he didn't wish to distract me from the work at hand—gathering facts? Was it that he knew it was utter nonsense, and so was a little ashamed that I find him immersed in such literature after all his outbursts regarding his obsession for the pursuit of fact and his mocking of those who, halted at their wall, according to their lights, conjure up spirits or conjecture as to principles?

Or was it something else?

Why had he been so fascinated to-day in that little tangle of Mme. Pele's hair, when the stuff was in every nook and cranny near the crater, and we had seen it every visit we had made?

Why were his observations of the changes in the pit made now with so much more of the fanatic than the cool, hard-headed, practical-minded, only-fact-believing man of exact science that heretofore he had been?

Why had he not accepted my little joke about blood sacrifice when I noticed his finger bleed from the cut made by the newly broken lava edge?

He hadn't. He hadn't even smiled. He had simply turned away, and tucked that bit of volcanic spun glass in his pocket.

And that evening when he came in, I having left the crater earlier in the day in order to develop some film in which I was particularly interested, I mentioned jokingly, testingly, I had better say, these books.

It was natural for me to do this, too, for no sooner was the dinner over and our cigars lit, than he started for his own room.

As his hand touched the door knob, I opened the question.

"Pretty interesting stuff for a practical

man whose business it is to set down fact," I hinted.

He paused—his face a study.

"You mean—have seen—" he then said a bit hotly, chin lifted.

"I didn't spy, Harry, old man," I said.

"But why the secrecy—why all the—"

He closed the door, and dropped into a seat at my side, whence through the great glass windows he could view the fast dimming crater. He seemed to be pondering over just how to explain himself, and put his action into the right light. His cigar smoke drifted idly for several minutes, before he spoke. And finally when he did vouchsafe a further answer, his voice was calm, but his words uncertain, as if he himself were not sure of himself, were not quite clear in his own mind.

"I don't know," he said. "I confess it—I don't know why I did it. I sent for the books on—well, on impulse. And I found, when they came at last, that I was a bit fussed, you know—wondering what you would say."

I raised my brows.

"Was there any reason why I shouldn't think it quite natural that you read that type of book—dealing with the subject that is our present study—even though only native superstition?"

He glanced at me—and I read surprise in his quick eye, and a little mortification as well.

"Well," he said slowly, "you know I detest fanciful—"

"Yes," I interrupted quickly, "you *did* detest such stuff."

At that his face hardened slightly. Then he said shortly:

"The things interest me—rest me. And it is possible, is it not, that even native folk-lore may shed some light on ancient volcanic phenomena here. Legends originate in *something*—some physical, concrete action or object of nature, do they not?"

I had to acknowledge that they did. But nevertheless, I could see clearly enough from his talk, his actions, the suspicious and furtive look in his eye, that he had hidden these books from me for more reason than he would acknowledge. And as I sat and

the blue smoke of my cigar mingled in the ensuing silence with that from his, I saw him again as he stood a few days before in rapt fascination on the crater's edge—I saw again the strange look that was on him as he held up that suddenly plucked fluff of Mme. Pele's hair.

The first days of my stay with him he had not acted thus. Why did he now?

Surely, tourists enough had I seen gazing enraptured, even dazed, into the seething, glowing crater, their eyes reflecting the reds and vermilion of its fires, their cheeks aflame with the heat. All who came to see Kilauea did thus; then, awestruck, inspired, perhaps a bit frightened and dreaming of a cleaner, friendlier life during the rest of their days, they picked up their bits of lava, their envelopes full of Mme. Pele's hair, burned the edges of their souvenir post cards in the red hot fissures, and went their way.

But Rhodes—his case was different. His was not to be expected. His was unique.

And why?

As I dreamed thus there came a knock on the door.

I instructed Azaki as he came through the room to answer it.

"Wait!" said Rhodes quickly, "I think I know who it was."

And he opened the door himself and stepped outside.

#### CHAPTER IV.

##### THE RUMBLING OF THE PIT.

**I** CONFESS that I listened intently, and unashamed of my eavesdropping.

From the soft gutturals of the strangers, for I had seen at least three forms standing in the gathering darkness outside, I knew them to be natives. And I concluded at once that they were bringing specimens to us—possibly of a whiter-colored lava formation that was found in one of the olden craters, long since quiet.

Yet when, after the conversation had continued for at least five minutes, Rhodes gravely and with only a silent nod to me came in, took his hat, and left again, I began to wonder what his errand might be.

Rapidly on the hard roadway the echo of their footsteps retreated—and I was left alone with my cigar and my reverie.

Heretofore, in all our expeditions—and Rhodes and I had been to Java, to the Aleutian Islands, to Popocatepetl in Mexico, to Vesuvius in Italy, and Etna in the island of Sicily, in our pursuit of facts about volcanic action—Rhodes had been in all things my confidant, and I his. Personal matters we discussed with the openness of full and trusting friendship; business matters with the confidence of a friend's suggestion and aid; professional matters with the free give and take, acceptance or mockery, construction or sarcastic destruction, of two men who had studied the same branch of geology and shared the same discoveries, the same defeats, and who held the same ambitions, for a full score of years.

And yet here, but why I could not for the life of me see, Rhodes chose to hold aloof, chose other books than those we might together enjoy, chose other thoughts than those he might communicate to me, chose other companions than myself for an untimely and secretive jaunt away from the laboratory. Leaving me, his lifelong partner in all he did and was, alone.

With my cigar dropping its ashes unheeded, I stared out at the crater which now, with the great glow in the clouds above the Pit of Everlasting Fire where dwelt Mme. Pele, and with the living rubies dotted about the great basin where the little tongues of lava continually broke up the open, was a veritable bivouac ground of a mighty army. The scene was beautiful, and I confess, despite its natural explanation, awesome. And I shrugged my shoulders as I thought of those books on native superstition. Who, viewing such a vast example of nature's mightiness, could blame the natives for their beliefs. Who, seeing that gleam from the fiery pit, could mock the native when he declared that pit to be under the control of Mme. Pele, goddess of fire—particularly when that mysterious and all-powerful superwoman's hair lay in every nook and cranny near the pit itself. I smiled. What these simple, spirit-loving, spirit-fearing folk would not conjure

up in answer to their questions of the unknown!

By ten o'clock Rhodes had not returned, and, a bit disgusted, I told Azaki to go to bed and turned in myself.

In the morning, at breakfast, Rhodes seemed a bit sheepish, and hung his head as though he felt his truancy.

Then, with the meal half over, he suddenly burst out:

"Poor fellows, poor chaps—they—they believe—believe."

I glanced up questioningly.

Harrison flashed red as the strawberries on his plate.

"Believe, eh?" I said a bit coldly.

He pattered with his spoon.

"Came to get me last night—me"—he went on hastily, yet, it appeared to me as though to confirm his own thought—"me, the most practical man in the world—whose sole ambition is to discover and make note of the fact—get me to go to one of their infer—I should say—ungodly native luaus in honor of Mme. Pele. Imagine"—he looked up but his eyes were anywhere but on mine—"imagine that—me—at a native feast, eating seaweed, and unsinged chicken, and raw pork liver, and slimy poi—in honor of a Kanaka goddess. Ye gods!"

He pattered once more at his berries.

"You left here a bit hurriedly, Harry," I said.

He hastened to answer—face still red.

"They wanted me to hurry—pretty far to go—and the kahuna said there's a prophecy or something that there's to be an eruption, a violent one, that 'll cover the whole island very soon; so they wanted me. Pele has said it, they declare. Absolutely sure about it. Can you imagine that? And getting me—me, a man of fact, mind you—fact and cold, hard, science—to go to their horrible feed and—well, and help them—help stop that awful thing that's prophesied."

"Help them!" I cried. Then, with I don't know what underlying thought forcing my words: "Think you can?" I questioned with a bit of scorn in my voice.

His answer was astonishing.

"God knows!" he said with great rev-

erence—then abruptly put his napkin down and left the table.

All that day he avoided me.

And that evening, again, he disappeared.

And so for a week at least each day the same thing occurred.

Our conversations were limited to bare necessity. His attitude, do not mistake me, was not unfriendly—but simply aloof. He acted as though a bit ashamed, a bit abstracted, a bit frightened of possible consequences of I knew not what—a bit mysterious, a bit secretive. He acted as he had never acted before. Two months ago he was himself, Harrison Rhodes—now, after two months' intimate acquaintance with the volcano, he was another man—another being, I might say.

On the evening of the eighth day, however, my friend did not as usual retire to his room, nor did the natives come to the door and call him away.

Instead, he sat himself down, humming softly, and picked up one of his books and idly fingered it.

Then he said, out of a clear sky:

"Well, old man, you'll admit, after what you've seen of the fiery pit, that if there isn't a goddess of fire, there ought to be one."

I looked up. His face was unclouded, clear. This, I instantly concluded, was more like my friend's real self.

"Absolutely!" I affirmed enthusiastically, and waited for him to go on.

But he did not—simply sat down and puffed away at his cigar and turned the leaves of his book.

And at perhaps ten he arose, stretched himself, smiled warmly, shamefacedly, as though in confession and plea for forgiveness, and went off to bed. And I, after a glance at the fire-dotted abyss below us, retired too.

I was awakened shortly by a slight trembling of my bed—as though some giant hand was gently shaking it. I sat up in the darkness, and heard a muffled exclamation from the next room as I did so. My bed trembled again, and the timbers of the building creaked protestingly—and I knew at once—an earthquake—a good one, and

this house on the very edge of that dizzy gulf!

Even as I leaped from my bed, the door opened, and the giant, pajamaed figure of Rhodes stepped in.

His voice was hollow as he spoke—and his words unbelievable.

"Even as it was prophesied," said he, "it has come to be—Mme. Pele awakens."

A shot of cold thrilled my spine. Was the man suddenly mad? Or was the whole thing a vast hoax he had contrived to relieve the monotony of our study. Should I rush him, knock him down, and drag him out of the house before another earthquake shock should precipitate us both into the hungry abyss below—or should I pass the thing off as a joke.

I decided on the latter.

"Nonsense!" I cried. "Get some clothes on and let's get off the edge before we're tumbled in."

His white face shook negatively.

"The kahuna said it," he went on, "at that first feast he foretold it—Mme. Pele awakens."

"Get shoes on, anyway—snap into 'em," I ordered.

He came over and put a hand on my shoulder—I winced at its chilly touch. The scene was weird enough—what with the drizzle outside, the creak of the house, the pale ghost of this madman beside me, the talk of fire goddesses, and all about us tinged with the crimson reflection from the glare of the eternal fires without. Rhodes patted my shoulder reassuringly.

"Don't worry, old fellow," he said soothingly. "Nothing will happen to us—at least"—here he hesitated, and I saw that his eyes sought Halemauau, above which the clouds were as of blood—"at least," he repeated—"not yet."

Another rumbling shook the building. The hand on my shoulder gave a spasmodic clutch.

"What the devil do you know about it?" I cried. "Come, now, you've got to go."

He did not resist. And once outside, my own fear left me, and I confess I felt the complete fool that not so long ago Rhodes had called me. We waited in the silence for half an hour or more. Then, following

the example of the hastily clad guests we could see on the hotel lawn, we turned back to our rooms.

At his door Rhodes seized my arm again.

"Forgive me, old man," he said quietly, sanely. "I—I must have been dreaming—and those kahunas are so damn impressive when they prophesy—I admit it—must have had me going." Then he nodded toward the crater. "I don't see that the shock has changed things any over there, do you?"

Through the glass I could see no increase or decrease in the palpitating glow above the fiery pit.

"Not yet!" I said shortly.

Rhodes's hand still held me. "Not offended, old fellow, are you?" he asked.

"See you in the morning," I answered, and left him.

I could hear him sigh deeply as he entered his own room. And later, as I lay awake, unable to sleep as yet, I could hear him tossing and muttering on his bed, and wondered what was so troubling his mind. Was the man a bit crazed by his strenuous concentration over the gathering of fact, or was the various and vast superstitious lore of Kilauea overpowering his scientific faith, and slowly making him, too, as confident in the belief in, and worship of, Mme. Pele, as any native of these islands? Or, after all, was it all a hoax—was he simply, by strenuous means, trying to have a little sport with me?

Toward dawn came another knocking on the door, and a thump from Rhodes's room. But hushed voices immediately following, told me there was no need for me to arise. The natives again! Yet this time my friend did not leave with them, but shortly the door closed, and I heard him retire once more.

## CHAPTER V.

### TONGUES OF FIRE.

**A**T the fiery pit that day were fair a hundred natives.

"Come to make sacrifice," nodded Rhodes, a lot more communicative than lately.

"To their gods?" I asked, to draw him out.

"To Mme. Pele, goddess of fire," he said. "Those fellows last night came to ask me if it would be all right."

I stared.

"Came to ask *you*? What do they think you are—a kahuna?"

He shrugged his shoulders and looked away.

"Hardly that, I think. But they know I study the thing, and so—" He made an expressive gesture.

"Humph!" I grunted, eying him—"I study it, too—they don't—"

He wheeled.

"Perhaps," he said shortly—"perhaps I understood them better."

"Harry!" I cried then, "do you mean to say that you believe all this bally rot about this thing being alive, and all that?"

I was resolved to get at the root of things at last.

When he turned again to answer me his eyes were aglow. But instead of the flood of biting words I had expected, came the following enthusiastic outburst:

"Why, man, man!" he cried, flinging his arms out wide, "it *is* alive! It's the good old mother earth alive. Form-changing mother nature, struggling to exert her power, and in the struggle shaking the very earth as she did last night. Can't you see, man, that this living fire is indeed the living earth? Why the very spirit of the universe is fire—the very heavens are alight with it at night—the infinitesimal bit of cosmic dust which we inhabit owes its life to its congenial warmth. Fire? God, it's man's salvation. The structure of all our civilization is built on fire, even as is the ground we stand on at this moment. Man is man, dominant, thinking, dextrous, because of fire. Alive, you ask? Alive? You bet this old Kilauea is alive—as alive as you and I—and its spirit is as animate.

"Good old Mme. Pele"—here he choked and his face paled, and he added in a lower tone—"and cursed old Mme. Pele! The goddess of fire! Yes—good, for she warms our bodies—evil, for she feeds upon our souls. God! old man, if you but understood her as do I. These last days"—

his voice broke again, then—"and Pele, Mme. Pele, the living earth rising and falling, leaping playfully, storming in diabolic rage; gay, dull, beautiful in glowing color, now hideously red, mouthing at these walls that hold it in from the destruction it might do man—the force, the living, vibrant force of it—seeking outlet with little fingers of it eagerly breaking into the sunshine and freedom through every long-sought weakness in the barrier the outside cold throws over it; great flows of it now and again seething over the crater's mammoth lip and seeking to find far fields; or baffled, falling deep, deep, deep back into the unfathomed depths of Halemaumau, back to the comforting bosom of Mme. Pele, back for fiery food, and new vigor, and greater reenforcement for the next vast attempt. Alive, man? Alive? And you can call it bally rot, what these wise old natives think—what they believe. I tell you, friend of mine, that had we, too, dwelt as long as they beneath the glow of Kilauea, beneath the rule of Mme. Pele, we, too, might hold some strange beliefs.

"Look below you at those natives—even now they make sacrifice to Pele, for last night she made her power felt; last night came her warning even as the kahuna declared it would, even as the kahuna swore she had told him as he slept—warning that she was about to rise, to summon all her fires, all her terrors, and all her diabolic hosts of hissing gas, and liquid flame, and vast torturing floods of the molten flesh and bone of earth, and sweep with godlike avenging power over the fair lands and villages and cities below, that once more can she say: 'Behold, how little is man; what conceit hath he in the puny forces he controls; what pride in the puerile destruction he makes in far countries; how vain are the intricate labors with which he builds in this—while I, with but a single day of silent use of fire, can destroy a civilization, can erect a new land.' Thus did the kahuna declare Mme. Pele had spoken in his ear, my friend—and thus it may well be."

Rhodes paused, breathless.

I stared at him in unbelief—then turned to the worshippers.

The natives, perhaps a hundred strong, were gathered on the windward side of the fiery pit in a curved line not a dozen feet from the sharp, cut edge of the crater. The lava pool was now within as many feet, too, of the brink, and was in slow motion, the leathery, heat-hazed, surface lead colored, heaving gently, corrugatingly and folding, as it spiraled below the cliffs. None of the molten fluid was visible save where the tough scum met these jaggedly rising walls, and there, as usual, the liquid lava constantly and hungrily lapped, lapped at the crumbling rock, bit off huge chunks of it, swallowed them bodily and lapped, lapped, lapped, and mouthed and chewed for more—insatiable was Pele's appetite.

The stuff *was* alive!

A sudden chanting arose from the group of worshipers, and with the rhythm of the song their bodies moved in unison. One old fellow who seemed to be the leader tore off all his clothing but a cincture about the loins, and led the chanting and the dance. Faster and faster the time arose, wilder and wilder the antics and gyrations of the dancers became, until finally they went suddenly into frenzy.

I heard Rhodes, gazing spellbound beside me, gasp as the madness increased.

And when the leader seized the pile of his clothing and advanced to the very lip of the crater's maw, stood there a moment with eyes upcast, then threw the lot of it into the mass beneath him, my companion muttered:

"Good old kahuna. That 'll help—that 'll help."

And he pointed to the natives, who by now were all casting into the mouth of the pit small articles they valued—seed chains, poa pots, metal rings, and ornaments saved from the old days of the whaler settlements. I gripped Rhodes's arm.

"Is it sacrifice?" I whispered.

"To Pele!" he whispered breathlessly—"to Mme. Pele. That kahuna has brought them here—the prophecy, the earthquake." My friend paused a moment, then muttered: "God! If I only could help—could stop the trouble—could prevent—"

He seized my arm convulsively.

"Look—look, man, for God's sake—the pit—the pit!"

I turned from the natives—and froze stiffly. For the level of the lava had risen half-way to the jagged crust of the verge—and before my eyes, with a silent menace that was diabolical, was swiftly rising still—but a few scant feet and the margin would be reached and the fiery stuff rush over upon us.

For a space I stared, hypnotized.

Death in the most horrible form confronted us, for the crusted lip of the crater was, but for a few jagged bluffs, the highest part of the volcano. Should that steadily rising mass of molten fire reach the lip no power of man's could prevent us and those simple worshipers from falling its victims. I looked about me, and dimly heard Rhodes shouting to the Kanakas, and saw him motioning desperately for them to run back while the chance for life still remained.

They, too, seemed as dazed as I at the sudden rise of the lava, hypnotized by the terrible menace of its motion.

The kahuna, by his frantic gesticulation, was evidently exhorting them to stay; and he seized treasures from the heap before him and cast them into the mass to appease the angry spirit of Kilauea. Rhodes continued to wildly wave, and his voice was already hoarse from pleading with them to retreat. Then, suddenly, like sheep, they bolted for the little ridge by which they had come—daring not to cross the slightly lower swale toward us.

They were safe, and I breathed a sigh of relief and turned to seek our own retreat. Then I heard a cry that seemed racked from the souls of men—and I turned about again.

Rhodes, beside me, pale as death, exclaimed harshly:

"They're cut off—a flow has broken over the edge just beyond that turn—they'll have to risk it this way!"

And then he shouted again—and by now the level of the stuff was lapping at the very rim, and our clothes beginning to smoke.

"This way—this way!" he cried. "Your only chance—this—" And then he interjected some words in the Hawaiian tongue of which I knew nothing, and had

never known him to know anything before. Then: "Cross the low place—for God's sake, don't hesitate—come—*come!* Ah, God, it's too late—too late!"

## CHAPTER VI.

### THE LAP OF PELE.

IT was, indeed, too late. For even as the flock was teetering in hesitation, the lip was reached, and a wild, eager, seething mass hissed triumphantly over the swale.

A shivering wail arose. The natives were cut off on both sides by spreading rivers of molten rock, gorgeous glowing streams which, the veritable arms and fingers of Mme. Pele herself, sought out every nook, every crevice, every fissure. As we stood, half-dazed, the mass in the pit arose higher and higher, and the flood over the rim became deeper and widened hungrily, and the living mass of it arose about the little islet of higher lava on which the little group of erstwhile worshippers pitifully huddled.

The kahuna, his back to the creeping death, still exhorted his flock to pray, to sacrifice. Wildly he shouted, frantically, he tore off chains from his flock, hair ornaments, clothing, and cast them into the seething torrent. Vainly he raised his arms to the crater and cried out to Pele to hold back the horror that crept upon them, that so eagerly devoured with flaming tongues the sacrifices they had made, to stay the torture that even now the half-naked assemblage was beginning to feel.

A curse gritted at my side, and Rhodes megaphoned his hands and pleaded frantically with them.

"Sacrifice, you fools!" he cried. "All—all—all you have—you, there, with that purse in your hand—throw it to Pele—throw it to Pele! Fools, is it worth more than your life? Will you burn in that hell of fire before you give that money? Sacrifice—and Pele will hear your prayers—give—*give—give—all—all!*"

Madly the Kanakas stripped. Great chunks of the cliff beside them fell off, eaten away by the blazing flood, and floated like islands on the rushing stream. A great hissing geyser of sulfur smoke and lava

leaped a hundred feet in the air from the center of the crater. The solid crust began to tremble. The natives fell on their knees on the smoking ground.

"Pele! Pele! Pele!"

Rhodes, pale, seized me. His breath came more quietly. He was as death itself.

"There is but one way," he cried to me, "but one way—Pele must be appeased and those fools—"

I turned on him.

"We cannot stop that flood. Let's get out over that point while we can. God help them—no man can now!" I cried.

Rhodes's face set.

"No man can save them," he repeated. "You are right. No man can—but a god could, or a *goddess*—and Pele, Mme. Pele"—he turned once more to the natives—"Give what you have left!" he cried. "All—all—sacrifice—or it will be too late."

He turned on me savagely.

"There is one way left to save them," he muttered. "Lead on—I'll follow you. One way!" he cried. "And the fools see it not!" He gritted his teeth. "Nor will I tell them, for I see now it is for me to do. The kahuna said it when he told us of Pele's talk. One way—"

His voice died away behind me, though I could hear the gritting and scraping of his heavy boots on the crust over which our path to safety lay.

A mighty wailing arose as we left, and I covered my ears with my hands to keep it out.

Then I cried out once more:

"Hurry, hurry, man, hurry—the stuff is higher and higher—and we must cross."

There was no answer. I turned.

Rhodes was not following me.

He was rapidly making his way up a steep incline that led to the highest crag overhanging the fiery pit—a mass of hardened lava that arose straight forty feet above the sea of liquid fire in which Pele dwelled. At the very tip, with his feet at the brink itself, he paused—his coat and hair waving in the seaward breeze, his profile bending toward the center of the mass, toward the vast geyserlike eruption that gracefully, ponderously, and menacingly diabolic, danced in the center.

A full minute Harrison Rhodes, man of hard science and cold fact, stood there, arms hanging naturally, head slightly bent, figure erect. Then he stretched out his arms toward that playing fountain of molten stone.

"Pele!" he cried clearly, simply. "Pele—accept a final sacrifice—I am coming. Take me, and withhold your anger, Pele—I am yours."

And he forthwith flung himself from the crag—flung himself, and hung suspended in mid air a moment even as does an expert diver. Then down, down—

Involuntarily I started for him, hands outstretched—to help to stop him. Then involuntarily, too, and mercifully, my eyes closed, and I fell upon my knees with my head buried in my hands.

How long I thus remained I do not know. Yet when I stumbled back to that same crag in a sobbing effort to see if something might not be done about my friend, a sight struck my eyes that has caused me to wonder much since as to the exact meaning of Harrison Rhodes's faith.

For the flow had ceased, the playing fountain had fallen, and the level of the lava, now once more gray and leather surfaced, had fallen to a vast and dizzy depth—the glowing lake of fire had retreated—the crater was now simply a deep well of vast size—and, for the time at least, harmless.

And when I looked across to the islet on which were marooned the Kanakas, the turbulent stream of liquid fire had already crusted over, the natives were singing once more; and though to me the song sounded more like the funeral dirge of my good friend, I learned afterward that it was in praise of and thanksgiving to the goddess of fire, to Mme. Pele—who had stayed her hand in time and saved their lives.

I blindly found my way back to the hotel. And the first remark of the persons there was, how badly my trouser knees were scorched.

"Had I perhaps been worshipping Mme. Pele?" they asked.

And then I told them of the thing my friend had done.

(The end.)