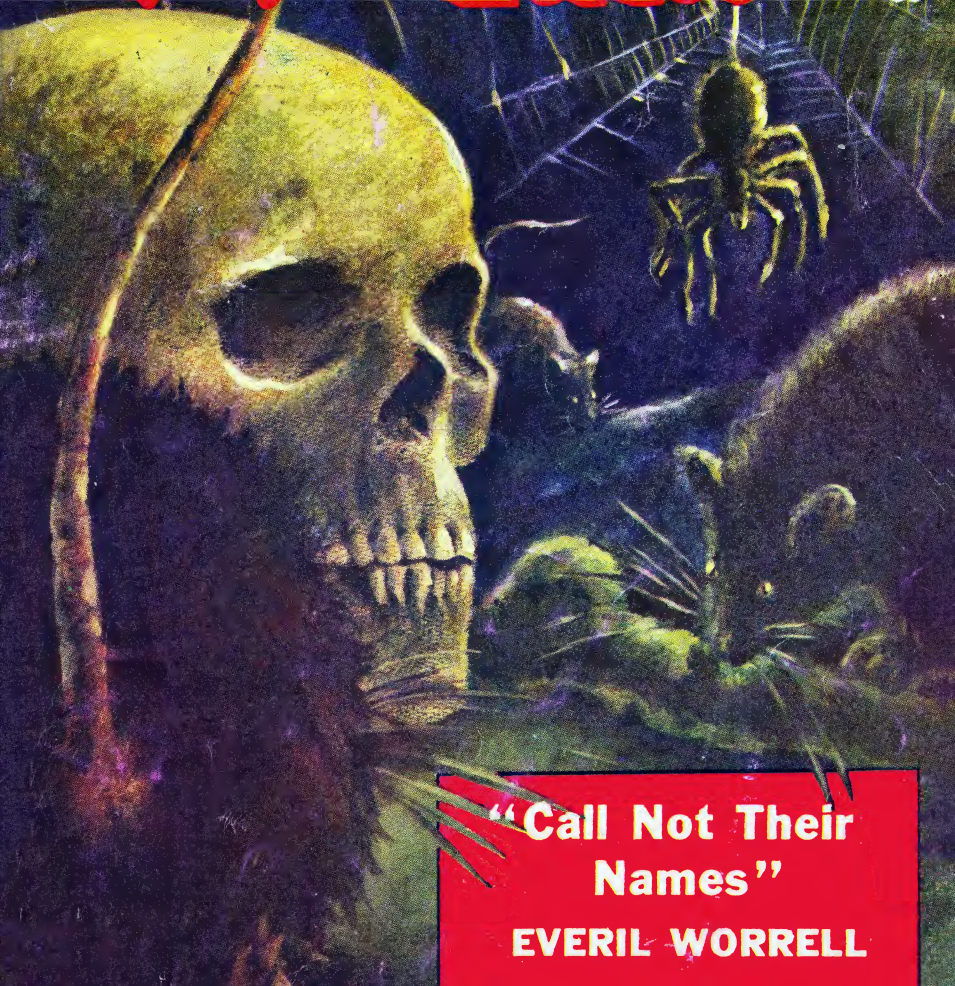


March

Weird Tales

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**“Call Not Their
Names”**

EVERIL WORRELL

Weird Tales

March
1954

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Call Not THEIR NAMES

by Everil Worrel



... real and terrible was the ancient goddess of death.

SHALIMAR walked between the two tall men into the room. She had committed herself at last. She was to marry Merlin Caliver in the fall.

Ice hardens and separates itself from the flowing ocean streams and forms its hard, crystalline pinnacles. Ice floats—the top of the berg rides sky-lit; and this makes the earth possible to mankind.

The thing that lurked hidden and crystallized somewhere in the girl Shalimar was a weightier

matter. It was submerged; over it flowed the fluidity of life—but it was there; it was real, it was danger. Of the stuff of dreams, perhaps; how much more solid are one's waking thoughts?

She was marrying into a family of distinction. Merlin's name in the field of behaviorism would equal Byron's among anthropologists. Already, at twenty-seven, Merlin had authored articles which won him the name of trail-blazer. He

Heading by Joseph Eberle



dared to interest himself in that new stuff known familiarly as "para-psych."

Merlin would look like his uncle at the same age; now his hair was a darkish brown, and his sun-tan blended into it. His eyes were bluer, more intense, and the angle of his black brows gave his face a whimsical difference.

He leaned down now, and whispered:

"We *aren't* rushing you, are we, Shalee? You did say you'd marry me, you know. You said it at last! Still, this show is a build-up for the electrified home—and it *was* a little like forcing household matters on you a bit prematurely—"

Shalimar could see the three of them in a hall mirror. She forced the corners of her mouth into a smile. Her face had worn for a moment the look she did not like.

It was—well, be frank!—a look of tragedy. And in Shalimar's life there had never been a tragedy, beyond the loss of her father and mother in a storm that capsized their little sail boat. And that had happened long ago, when she was ten. Since then, under Byron's guardianship—leave out her nightmares, and her life had been pure sunshine.

She was wearing a dark blue dress and a blue-sequined shell

hat, and her dark, smooth bangs accentuated the size of her deep, dark eyes. Around her neck natural curls clustered, and the clear pink of her skin set off her sapphire ear clips. Now that she smiled, her image reassured her.

"I don't feel rushed, I just think maybe all my life I'll be a little bit mixed!" she breathed impulsively. "Uncle Byron used, you know, to have to wake me at night. And even yet, sometimes—but you know all that, you know me as well as if we were brother and sister. I still have that nightmare, you know, only I don't wake screaming!"

"I wake—crying. When I was little it scared me—and as I've grown older, the dream has seemed to break my heart. Aren't I the kind of girl that might grow into a neurotic woman? And isn't that, maybe, why I had such a hard time making up my mind?"

"If you *have* made it up," Merlin said, on a sigh. "Once the knot is tied, though, I think I can relax. Suppose you *are* a bit of a dual personality? Who hasn't some kink?"

"You, Merlin, you haven't."

SHALIMAR was speaking out loud, now, although very low.

"If there were any *sense* to my crying-dream!" she went on impatiently. "Thick masses of

vegetation all around—that I can understand. It's India, of course."

"The dream," Merlin prompted, "is uneventful. In front of the jungle, then, a cleared space. Smoke, as though a big fire had burned itself out. A shelter built of branches, like a child's playhouse. And that's all! It shouldn't be impossible to live with a dream like *that*—"

He was not impatient. He was practical. And the side of her he was trying to reach, didn't respond to practicality.

She was whispering now, close in his ear:

"Merlin, tell me one thing. You offer me love. I know that. But *how* do you love me? Suppose—suppose, for instance, something parted us. Would you go looking for me, looking through countries and years and centuries, and no one else would do, you must find *me*? I think I need to know, Merlin—is that the way you feel about me?"

Merlin tried to smile, and frowned instead.

"I think that's the kind of thing you want to forget, Shalimar," he said gently. "That sort of thing is esoteric, introverted fantasy. I think men and women fall in love when they are right for each other. And if they lose each other—they needn't, unless one dies—then, I think the one left just goes on as well as he or

she can, making the best of things."

Shalimar sat down lower in her seat.

Better to think about the electrical equipment show. Soon she'd be picking her own electrical equipment. Oh, wonderful not to have to smell house dust and get sneezy when you cleaned rooms!

The murmur of voices died. A suave young man began his speech.

The row of seats ahead had been vacant, but now three seats were filled by a large woman ablaze with purple, and her two unpleasant offspring. These were a girl in her teens, and a boy of about ten. The girl had a heavy face overlit by somber hazel eyes. The boy's face was thin, with sharp features. Meanness and cunning must have stamped it from the cradle—a thing which fortunately happens seldom, Shalimar thought. Think of the boy, she must; he immediately turned and fixed her with the kind of stare nice people discourage very young in children so inclined.

When the lights were lowered, his pale eyes were still on Shalimar's face.

The demonstration *was* pretty. Shalimar tried to see herself flipping down tumbler switches, making the dishes wash themselves, making dinner cook.

After awhile she grew tired; it seemed more natural to let servants do it. Why grudge a few rupees? . . . She caught herself, sharply. Well, after all, that was the way her mother had kept house.

Perhaps she made some uneasy gesture, because Byron murmured, "The interesting part is what follows, Shalimar. The dark light demonstration will be beautiful. Gadgets are wonderful, but new discoveries in radiant energy are soul-shaking."

Merlin spoke across Shalimar to his uncle.

"Dark light—and the new optical effects in photography. Recently I read a story in which two charming children, annoyed by their parents, misuse their wonderful nursery, which captures electrical impulses from the human brain and converts them into visible forms. These children create lions which come alive and eat their parents up. And I found myself wondering how far science may go—into what possibilities of thought materialization it may lead us—"

Shalimar thought, "Suppose that happened to *my* thoughts!"

Now it was Byron:

"If the old folklore came back to haunt the race in terms of its new science, it would be more disastrous than an atom bomb. In America would live again the medicine men, the shamans; in

the west—out around our Colorado lodge, for instance, where the Aztec sun symbols are carved far from their known origins—the cults of human sacrifice; in the East, the sad white dream of witchcraft—"

"Stop it!" Merlin said suddenly.

But Shalimar thought the talk should have gone on. Not only *she* had secret fantasies; you must pick your way among them. Dreams haunted the human race, but the race progressed by selecting the good dreams and blocking out the evil.

That boy's eyes plunged into hers. They were chatoyant—lustrous, like a cat's.

PEOPLE gasped as the utter blackness hit them like a physical blow. And again, as pictures painted themselves on the walls in light. And yet again—because the "dark light" pictures seemed to float close, rather than to be visible only on the walls.

But the pictures were lovely. Roses, lilies; a flowering shrub—then a projection of waves on a white beach, and a pretty roadway stretching under arching trees.

More flowers, and then a pause. Someone said something had broken down. The blackness grew more oppressive.

Shalimar's eyes rested on the place where the panel mirror

was set in the wall. A faint opalescence marked the oblong.

Mistily blue, it became a window opening on deep space that filled all known dimensions, and others known only by vertigo. In the black room a woman stifled a scream.

The light hurt Shalimar's eyes, but she could not look away. And now a figure formed there, to draw into itself the blueness, to shine in darkly blinding blue. It was a woman's figure, nearly nude; but the outlines blurred and shifted and shimmered. The face was lovely—the face was cruel. It was cruelty personified—yet something in it drew you—

The figure flung out arms, and the light shimmered madder and bluer.

The being projected itself third-dimensionally forward. The face came close, the horrible arms outreaching—

Shalimar screamed.

HER head was on Merlin's breast, Byron was rubbing her wrists, the woman in front was staring, the horrible girl and boy were staring, people were saying things like—"She's all right!" and "She fainted—no wonder! I *nearly* did—"

She could walk, feeling only a little weak.

But the woman in purple and her boy and girl blocked their

way, and the woman put a small white card into Shalimar's limp hand.

"I must speak to you," she said, like one under a compulsion. "Please—people will tell you I'm not a publicity-seeking mountebank. I have a strange gift, and—my boy Denny has it also. That frightening image can't have been part of the show. The wall mirror, I'm sure, acted as sometimes a crystal ball, or even a pool or a mirror *does* act—and showed a thing that wanted to manifest itself to someone here.

"She was, you know, the Hindu goddess Kali. The goddess of destruction. Did you see the necklace—the human skulls?"

They couldn't get by without physical pressure. The woman spoke faster.

"My boy Denny *felt* that something was seeking to contact the young lady. He had whispered to me.

"Please believe me, it isn't for the fee. It's—that I know I can get a message that concerns you!"

Her eyes were on Shalimar. "My card. Call me. Any time, at your convenience."

Shalimar's fingers closed on the white cardboard square.

"Madame Margoli—Medium" it said, with a telephone number.

SHE had feared the intrusion into her dreams of the goddess Kali. Under normal consciousness she felt the swelling tide of the subconscious, its upward thrust, its sucking withdrawal. The girl Shalimar felt the arms of Mother India drawing her back to lost memories.

The dream came upon her painfully, obsessively; for four nights she woke shaken by sobs, face wet with tears. The terror grew. The low streamers of black smoke, the pungent, oily smell; the utter dreary desolation of the clearing before the crowding jungle, the rag-tag miserableness of the rude, low shelter, roofed by broken branches on which leaves drooped dying. Tatters of coarse cloth hung like ruined pennants; they bound the crude structure together; they had been torn from her garments; for she wore rags in the dream—and the realization of this was a new thing. Once her own face stared up at her from the waters of a river. Her eyes, wide and dark and tragic. Her face, darker, but heart-shaped still—the darkness had the look of unwashed neglect and sun tan, and perhaps of different pigmentation as well.

Her hair drifted forward from the downbent head, and it was long and black, dishevelled, with the torn look of the cloth tatters that swung from the

jointures of the shelter. As though she had "rent her tresses" in the ancient symbolic violence of grief and mourning!

It was on the fourth night that Shalimar saw herself like that. On the fifth, at last, came something new into the dream.

This new thing was simply the appearance of a face that was not her own, nor the face of anyone whom she had ever seen. It was the face of a man.

Its coming ended sorrow. Simply there was this man, this face—strong and brown, with sparkling dark eyes and white teeth shining a joyful greeting. In the dream the apparition had all the impact of a miracle, even a resurrection.

This face, this beloved head (wearing a turban!) was love. It was fruition. It was an end to sorrow and weeping, it was the sun in its glory, it was the conferring on a lonely, abandoned, deserted body of a soul. It was healing, it was life; and dirt and tears, rags and loneliness, shame and despair were nowhere in the universe. The moving finger had written lines too terrible to bear—but they had been erased.

"You live, beloved!"

Tender and poignant, the words hung on the air. Shalimar was awake in the moon-drenched light pouring in through the window, and somewhere a mocking bird sang in a tree.

Her own voice echoed in her ears—poignant and throbbing as she herself had never heard it. Yet neither words nor voice were hers; they belonged to the one who had evoked them from her dream-held lips. They belonged to the face that had been so near, so real, in the moment before waking.

NEXT afternoon Shalimar spoke to Byron and Merlin together. It was important that she be frank. Not to the point of speaking of the new longing in her heart, of her necessity. Not that; that was for her alone. But it was all linked together.

"I'm calling this Madame Margoli for an appointment," she said, ignoring the looks of concern on their two surprised faces. "I expect both of you think I am foolish. I've always discouraged anything that might develop my off-trail tendencies. But—I've been dreaming again, so regularly, so vividly. I can't rest until I find out—if the purple lady with the terrible children can see around the corner, rend the veil—whatever it is a medium does! I feel, for the first time, that it would be best to follow up that subconscious part of me that won't stay buried. Probably the seance, or whatever, will be merely a crude joke. It's something I must find out."

To her surprise, this was endorsed by a somewhat rueful Merlin.

"I wish all this didn't bother you," he said. "They say, you know, that a slide picture from a set made in India, showing statues of Hindu deities, got in by mistake. All the images seemed alive, floating in air, three-dimensional. I'll be honest with you, Shalimar; their explanation is probably authentic—and yet, they'd have to say something like that.

"The only other explanation which I might suggest would have to do with mass hypnosis and the projection of a thought image from somebody's mind.

"On the chance that such a thought image emanated from *your* mind, I think it may be as well to act on your impulse. Things buried are dangerous, things openly dealt with hardly ever. I'll make the appointment for you. I'd like to go—"

"I'd like both of you to come with me," Shalimar said at once, "if you will, please. If anything strange should happen—I'll want you to see for yourselves. If it's just a silly hoax—well, three heads are better than one, and of the three mine is the least scientifically trained, beside being the one—afflicted?"

It was Byron who tried to protest.

"It isn't being afflicted, Shali-

mar, to have super-perceptions. The most brilliant are the most perceptive.

"But I wish you wouldn't go, my dear. Remember the story you quoted, Merlin? The mind-created lions materialized and killed. I expressed a misgiving then, in which I was quite serious. Anthropologically speaking, whole races and cultures have been tyrannized by ideas that would have been better buried. So to cause hallucinations, perhaps. Better that, than to draw power from the coordinated powers of the mind.

"Disembodied nuclei of potency may drift through our strange universe, which James says we see only as a cave dweller sees shadows on the wall of his cave. To summon them forth is another thing. I am reminded of Saul and the witch of Endor. There was an edict, and it was direct and plain and very clear:
"Call not their names!""

THEY presented themselves at Madame Margoli's home that evening at nine o'clock.

This house was in an old part of Georgetown. One in a brick row, it faced directly on the street—there would be a walled garden behind. The front windows were shuttered, as were those of most of these houses, for privacy and coolness. Street lights battled feebly under a

dark arcade of over-arching trees; the heavy branches served to block out any breeze.

The house number showed black on the illuminated fan-light. As they stopped to make sure of it, a strange night bird cried raucously somewhere ahead of them and was answered by another from behind.

"Ugly kind of croak!" Merlin said distastefully. "Almost like a crow—if they flew at night."

The dark, hot street was a place to get out of. Shalimar's feet flew up the steps. Her finger pressed the bell as the two men overtook her.

The sad girl opened the door—tonight her greasy braids hung down beside her sallow cheeks.

"In here—please," she stammered, leading the way self-consciously.

"In here" was a narrow, long room with polished dark floor, white walls and lofty ceiling. There was little furniture, though an adjoining room showed rows of folding chairs. Wide windows and an open door gave on a balcony, and beyond that loomed the dark of the garden. Near the shuttered end of the front room a settee and three chairs were grouped around a table; on the table, black-velvet-draped, rested a large crystal ball.

The girl hesitated, seeming to

want to achieve some friendly, hostess-like gesture.

"My name is Dorcas," she said after awhile. "Make yourselves comfortable, will you? Mother will sit here behind the table. She will use the crystal ball. My brother Denny is going to try to get something at the same time. It seems to help mother. Sometimes they get the same thing at the same time, and it—well, it shows it's all authentic. I guess it reinforces things, too; strengthens the Forces, mother would say. Probably we'll see you before you go."

They sat around the table, Shalimar in the middle. Her eyes turned to the crystal ball. She half expected the scenery of the dismal dream to float into the curvilinear patches of light and darkness. The thing held your gaze, if you let it; you could hypnotize yourself with such a thing, she was sure. She had been frantic to try, somehow, to see the face that had come into the old, sad dream. But the crystal drowned her memory of it in a mystery of its own.

MADAME MARGOLI entered quietly. When she seated herself behind the crystal ball, Shalimar saw that the woman's face was drawn. Shalimar felt a quivering certainty that, after all, this visit would not

leave her untouched. Something would happen in this dimly lit room tonight.

"Before we begin, I must show you a newspaper clipping," Madame said.

She was wearing a loose, black hostess robe, which accentuated her pallor.

"Sometimes I find myself—almost afraid!" she confessed impulsively, drawing a clipped news column from a pocket as she spoke. "Read this. It was in the paper the day after the dark-light demonstration."

Shalimar held the bit of newspaper so that the three of them could read:

"... after the crash landing at National Airport last night, three men were taken to Emergency Hospital and pronounced dead upon arrival. One was an East Indian, one a former New York gunman who had barely missed being excluded from re-entry into the United States, and the third, a passenger suffering from amnesia, returning from treatment in a French hospital. A few minutes after being pronounced dead, all three 'returned to life' and recovered with extraordinary rapidity.

"An additional overtone of mystery is the fact that the two who were known to be naturalized Americans from other

countries immediately stated that they were fellow citizens and also friends and companions of the Indian gentleman. All three left the hospital together. Names are withheld at the request of the Indian, who has come to America for observation and study by arrangement with the State Department.

"The former gunman offered a prayer of gratitude to the Indian goddess Kali, in American vernacular—interspersed, says an attending physician, with East Indian phrases.

"Well! Well! Pennsylvania still suffers from hexing; a year or so ago, several witches were arrested in Panama. The United States has been plagued with subversives — is the Indian goddess Kali now seeking illegal entry? This deserves a full scale Congressional investigation."

"Very funny!" Byron muttered.

But a series of thumps from the back regions of the house prevented other comment.

"Denny is making the table rap," his mother said. "He gets marvellous results. I feel—the Forces—"

"Denny is ripe to be host to a poltergeist!"

Byron had spoken impulsively, and bowed an apology. Madame's

eyes flashed cold fire, and an oddly impressive dignity came upon her.

"That has been said of my boy before, but it's a lie!" she retorted briefly. "Now I must ask for silence."

So they were hushed and still, in the big, dim room.

The crystal, some ten inches in diameter, showed a watery mingling of light and dark. It was like a large, unlidged eye, Shalimar thought. She stared into it, half in longing, half in fear. Yes, it might hypnotize one. But nothing happened, and somewhere the slow ticking of a clock gave way to its slower, deeper chiming.

Madame Margoli's hands clenched on the black velvet, and the knuckles whitened. Face upturned, she began to speak:

"There is a message for one here. My guides are silent. Yet I feel the presence of a Great Being.—I think it is she who deigned to show herself out of darkness five days past. I think this Great One wishes to reveal herself. Kali, I dare to call your name!"

"No!"

Byron half rose from his chair.

A change came over Madame Margoli. Her eyes stared blindly, raptly before her. Her body tensed and straightened, seeming to grow taller; her hands relaxed, then turned palms upward, the

fingers drooping slackly. She seemed no longer conscious of anything in the room. Only her voice swelled and soared.

"Kali! Great Kali!" she intoned; and it was like the peal of an organ. But in the back room pandemonium broke loose.

The thumping grew louder and then ceased, and the shrill voice of the boy Denny rang through the house, rough and sharp-edged like the barking of a dog.

Shalimar thought that he, too, called "Kali!"—then, that he had been seized by a fit which broke the complete articulation of the word, as instead he repeated: "Ali, Ali, Ali!"

Madame Margoli was dragged back from wherever she had been by her boy's voice. She closed her eyes painfully, and reopened them, looking at each of the three around the table in turn. She shuddered.

"He sounds sometimes—so nervous, so wild!" she said. "My little son, I think he is clowning, now. It makes the vibrations bad, he knows it does."

Denny appeared in the doorway, a gnome-like vehemence making every hair stand on end. His sister, large eyes awed, came and stood behind him.

"She'll tell you—Dorcas will!" the boy cried triumphantly. "We knew you were trying for Kali. We know about Kali. The table

spelled her name—then it was just that other name—*Ali—Ali—Ali!* It's a man's name, better than a woman's, even a goddess. I'll bet there was an Ali who was a great guy, and I'll bet he came through. But first, the table spelled another word — three times. I wrote it down. B-H-I-L—that was it. *Bhil*. Mother, who was named *Bhil?*"

"Some Hindu worshipper in the spirit plane—trying to join us. Ali, too—"

Madame was speculating, trying to remember having heard the names.

"'*Bhil*' is not a name." Byron's voice was rough. "It's a word, and an ugly one. It means—oh, never mind. It had an historical association with the name Ali. I don't doubt the boy 'got something.' Something better left alone. Madame, if you have sense, you'll screen these things from him—"

THE screech of the two night birds sounded again, coming in through the open back windows and doors, and through the shutters. And immediately after, a shuffle of feet on the front steps. Then something heavy thudded against the door.

Merlin was first in the doorway. He helped into the house a man who was just being lifted upright by two pairs of hands.

"He went that way!" a coarse

voice said, panting. "We drove him off. The *buzoor* had already fallen—under the robber's attack. We were but a few paces behind."

A touch of Brooklynese in the voice went queerly with the way of speaking and the words. The speaker looked like a typical gangster, Shalimar thought; but his right arm still tenderly supported the other man who was just getting back his breath and raising his head, which had drooped forward at an odd angle.

This man now straightened and stood alone, and then stood looking at Shalimar. She drew back; seeking to hide what she knew must be shining in her eyes.

This was the face she had seen in her dream. The eyes—and now that the eyes had found hers clearly, the smile! The dark face—not so very dark; the pale duskiness of a high caste Hindu was on it. The strong, firm, open features.

This, she was able to think, was how the love of an Indian prince had come into the heart of the writer of the Indian Love Lyrics: The Temple Bells—Less Than the Dust—Kashmiri Song—Till I Wake.

'Lawrence Hope' was the pen name that woman took to hide her love; but when the days of gladness were run out she had died for her love, nevertheless.

East and West—they never can meet, Kipling said.

But she, Shalimar, was no longer of the West.

Madame Margoli seemed to be in a daze of her own. She was like a telephone wire that knows nothing of the miracle it conducts. She offered tea, and the sad girl Dorcas brought it in.

Yes, these were the three gentlemen who had been in the plane that crash-landed. The press had it wrong—they had recognized each other on the plane, although it was a fact that the smash had made their memories of that meeting quite vague. Only, thinking back, they knew it had been so—as they had known that one of the names of each was "Ali"—which was on none of their passports.

So they had decided to stick together. Sahib Kanoor planned to cross the continent—and without servants. Tony Rigotta knew the United States, and Carl Walker, who had suffered for awhile from amnesia, would benefit by joining them. Sahib Kanoor was in a sense their leader.

The scuffle at the door? Well, a would-be robber had caught Sahib Kanoor from behind around the neck and throat. His friends had driven him off.

Tony Ali Rigotta was worried about his teacup, saucer, spoon, and a little cake which he had

daringly accepted and couldn't find an extra hand for. Carl Ali Walker handled his tea and cake easily, but had little to say.

Kanoor talked with his lips to everyone, graciously, easily. Only to Shalimar, his eyes spoke.

"ELECTRIFIED Homes" invited everyone who had attended the August 1 benefit to a free three-dimensional showing of "Temple Glories from Foreign Lands." Apparently there had been telephone calls and letters of inquiry.

Merlin and Shalimar attended. Byron said, "I know what you'll see—and I'm feeling my age. And two's company, and three—"

He had, in fact, aged twenty years in half as many days, Shalimar thought. She had asked Merlin to release her at once, and he had told his uncle, and his uncle seemed weighed down not only by disappointment, but by a sense of disaster, which Shalimar resented. Pyar Kanoor was of a race alien to Byron and to Merlin; she did not feel it to be so. Pyar himself was not a man about whom one could imagine something sinister—as in all the stories about love from a stranger. Byron himself, she imagined, could see nothing but open hearted charm in this man who was no stranger to her heart. In fact he did not pretend to:

"I think my misgivings are for him, as well as for you, Shalee, my darling child!"

Sitting again in the dark auditorium, Merlin and Shalimar watched a procession of temple scenes and shots of heathen idols. Among the last was one of Kali, her grotesque face, with tongue protruding. The skull necklace was impossible to miss. These draperies were not of mist, but, like the rest of the image, carved of wood or stone. The projection of the idol was startling; but it was just an ugly carved idol, after all.

People see what they expect. They went out talking, laughing a little, saying, "So *that* was what frightened us! We'll have to get used to this new projection. They say all the movies will have it—"

Merlin and Shalimar went for a drive, and then to dinner. It would be their last dinner together. Pyar and Shalimar had set their wedding date as soon as that. Their honeymoon was to begin next week.

"You'll let us hear from you from the Colorado lodge?"

"And all along the way!" she promised.

"It was a royal gesture that Byron insisted we make the Colorado place a stop. Where you and I—"

"Were to have gone," Merlin ended her broken sentence. "You are like his own daughter; it

gave him real comfort to have you still enjoy the place. It's lovely, Shalimar. The caretaker lives half a mile down the road with his little girl, and they'll 'do for you,' as they say out there. Since Kanoor doesn't want to drive through the Rockies—a sensible thing—and since, thank God, you aren't going to be saddled with the two Ali's—you'll have to go round by Green River, Utah, and into southwestern Colorado by bus.

"The Lodge is comfortable—almost luxurious; a pity we haven't all gone out there together. Till the last years, Byron took so many trips abroad. Now I expect he'll be going again."

"He looks so *tired*—" Shalimar began, stopping short. It was her fault. A week ago, Byron had been neither old nor tired.

"He wouldn't go for awhile," Merlin said quickly, and the opposing tide of resentment flooded her again. Oh, no, he wouldn't. He would wait to see if her marriage "took." He would wait to observe this meeting of East and West. Would he, actually, cherish a hope? Her road now was Pyar's road, his life was hers, his people. . . .

A soft, tender nostalgia claimed her and her soul knew peace. She could afford this gentle sorrow for all the old life. In an hour she would be in Pyar's arms.

PYAR and Shalimar sat hand in hand, watching the moon slide down the sky. He had parked his rented Packard, and they had climbed to the top of the hill. Beyond the river loomed the dark perpendicular of the Virginia palisades. The moon laid a quivering roadway of silver from the inverted crest of their reflection to where a tangle of branches netted and blotted it out.

"You are sister to the moon, 'Ah, Moon of my Delight!'" Pyar murmured after a silence. He stroked her hand, and then her arm. His fingers were cool and gentle, but to the girl they were as vibrant as though electricity coursed through his veins.

"Those words of a Persian poet have been made into an English song. Perhaps you know it," he said. "'Ah, Moon of my Delight'—it might have been written for you. But the ending is sad:

"'. . . thou shalt look.

Through this same garden,
after me—in vain!'"

"May we never be parted, Shalimar.

"I know that in the former life of yours which you remember, dreaming, you were my wife. When death took me, you were not *suttee*. In the dream that haunted you, you were, as such,

an outcast. It would not be expected now of you, you know; India is very different. But in the older time, not to be suttee was a fate worse than death. Something stopped you; as in a story of an ancestor of mine. You know that sometimes the soul of a man returns in the person of a descendant."

The story he told might have frightened her, but for his arm around her. He was traveling incognito, although of course the State Department knew that he was a prince of Bengal. Some two hundred years ago, a prince of his line had belonged to the ancient order of Thugs—many of the highest, as well as the lowest, had so served the goddess of death.

"No Westerner would ever understand. Yet, without death, there could be no birth!" he interjected. "Think of a world ever more populated, without the gift of death! 'No man dies but by the will of God—' that is one of the basic beliefs of the true Hindu; it was the great apologetic, one might say, of the followers of Kali. Not any more, my little flower; it is all so different now—as different as the Christian life of your country differs from the witch days of old New England. I have read eagerly of every land, and countries, like men's souls, show similar patterns of evolution.

"Well, my ancestor followed Kali. He took the long road with the Thugs, and partook with them of Kali's sacred sugar, and—yes, they killed! Buried their victims, took their treasure—Oh, it has all passed away like an evil dream. But there is no doubt my ancestor practised Thuggee with his band, like it as little as I may, until—

"He married. It was in the days of the English rule, and the highborn girl he loved had studied at a British mission. She would not have married him, prince though he was, had she known of this association of his; she was a product of two worlds, two beliefs, and she had not been baptized into the new faith—yet her mind was very open to it. To the unfortunate young wife, ritualistic killing was what the British called it—murder.

"She learned of the activities of her husband's band, and she did not betray them. But when they found out that she knew, they demanded her death of her young husband. His should be the hand—"

Again Pyar paused, then forced himself to continue.

"He refused. And it was he the Thugs slew, in sacrificial manner. They thought to dispose of the girl by suttee. They found her reluctant in this, and their scorn was boundless. Driven by motives of contempt and the

need for self-protection, they took the young wife. She was carried swathed in cloths and gagged. They carried her swiftly in the early dark of the evening to the pyre they had built in a clearing before the jungle—

"She was rescued by a young Englishman. He had admired the girl—or maybe he had known and loved her. Anyway, he had been watching over her, and he raised an alarm and led a rescue-party.

"The Thugs scattered and were lost in the endless windings of the old Indian roads they knew so well. But the girl-wife—she waited, it was said, in a crude shelter built of branches; until death released her.

"She lived, but not for long. A year or two. Long enough, perhaps, to shut a gate against her—the gate she might have passed through at once to overtake her husband's soul."

SHALIMAR knew, vaguely, of the former cult of Thuggee. She thought the comparison Pyar had made of it with the old New England days of witchcraft fair enough. She passed it by for the more personal story.

"Love should be a thing without end," she said. "You really believe, Pyar—"

"That our paths, after centuries of waiting, have been permitted to cross again!" he said

eagerly, his face lighting up with the smile she adored.

"Don't let India frighten you, my little love! It is all so different now. Your happiness is more to me than anything I have. We will travel, see the world together. To me it will be new again. India is becoming very different. We are fostering the sciences. The recent rulers of my house have worked against the caste system. My father was devoted to Ghandi's teachings. Of course, there is still much in India to shock and alarm you—but by my side you will not see what your eyes should not—I swear it.

"There was the recent news item in your American papers, about the rich Indian woman, ruler of a palace and estates, who had a thirteen-year old slave girl whipped to death. Although the *chabouk*, the whip, is seldom now so used, I have no doubt it happened. But that woman is not true to the new spirit of India, which you shall know and love.

"My palace will be a setting for the jewel I will bring to it. I haven't described it to you, have I, little rose? Ah, I was coming to that—"

Far below on the road where cars whirled smooth and silent like big glow worms, one stopped behind Pyar's parked car. Three figures tumbled out, and a shrill

boy's voice cried: "That's it, that's it! A Packard, and the license—I know the number as well as you do!"

Pyar's arm dropped from Shalimar's waist, and he stood, pulling her to her feet. Good-humoredly he grumbled:

"They are like watch dogs! Ever since that *dacoit* attacked me on the boy's front porch, to which undoubtedly I was led to find you—they have constituted themselves my guardians! They'll watch over you also, beloved—and they've recruited the *chokra*. Not his mother, the Memsahib Margoli, but her young son, claims constantly to get messages from Kali. It is not good for the boy; but the night under the sky is good, the race in a car down the long road is good—I suppose there is no harm in any of it. Only, I have read of the unbalanced young who invite a thing called *poltergeist*—a rough mischievous spirit, a thing most unlike the spirit of the Dark Mother. Sometimes I feel he will anger her and bring us trouble!"

"You still — believe in — Kali?"

For the first time something of darkness and chill seemed to touch Shalimar's spirit.

"The old terrors are long passed. But all Hindus honor their gods—" Pyar was beginning, when the three leaped up the slope and joined them.

"We are not pleased by the intrusion, Tony!"

It was prince and leader who reproved the first of the three who followed him so worshipfully, and a queer exultation rose in the worried girl and sent away the nagging little uneasiness.

"I was about to describe my palace in Bengal. All of you shall see it. Yes, even you, *chokra* Denny—if your mother will spare you for a visit. Each time I try to tell my affianced one of it, you come upon us and our private talk is broken. If it were not that we two go on our bridal trip so soon, I would see that you learned a lesson. A matter of days—"

Shalimar was remembering with pleasure the old Indian words—the young lad, the *chokra*!—when Denny interrupted.

"Don't take her, Mr. Kanoor!" he cried. "The ouija spoke of her too. It was some sort of warning. It said she is *beetoo*. B-E-E-T-O-O. Is that a word you know? It sounded—well, not good."

The moon dipped with what seemed an impossible suddenness behind the black wooded line of the opposing palisade. The stars were out, but they were dim and cold and far away.

Beetoo. It was not one of the words Shalimar remembered. It dropped heavily into silence as

that other queer word the boy Denny had dredged up from the depths of his subconscious—or from some table-tilted communication, as really seemed more likely—had dropped into silence. B-H-I-L, Denny had spelled. *Bhil*. Byron had been disturbed by *that*. Byron, who had been everywhere, read everything, had known the word. He had said, "It is an ugly word," and that was all. He had said that Shalimar would not know it.

Nor did she, nor the word Beetoo. But she shivered as Pyar led her, now himself fallen into silence, down the steep path.

THERE were, of course, difficulties. Through his legation, Pyar arranged the Hindu marriage, and Shalimar had persuaded her old rector to officiate at a Christian service. Since she felt that she had belonged to Pyar from a time before conscious memory, she told herself that they were triply married.

It was over at last, and they could go away together.

They took the bus from Denver on a bright August morning, and checked in for one night in Green River, in a comfortable little hotel with a delightful landlady who talked enough to make them welcome and afterward left them alone.

In the evening they walked

along the highway street of the small town on the desert edge. Sharp and fantastically pink as mountains on the moon, the rocky rampart that surrounded half the little town faded and showed ghostlike against the violet sky.

"This is a happy place!" Shalimar murmured. And then, "I was so glad your two friends and their horrible little disciple Denny left town a week before we did. I enjoyed our marriages—both of them—far more, without them. I hope their boy scout-camping and touring trip took them north, or south—anywhere but west. They won't turn up out here?"

"I gave my orders!" Pyar said with that occasional sternness Shalimar loved. "They had disturbed us too often. I made my wish clear. The change of plan was because of my marriage; how could they not accept it?"

The air was a sweet wine that chilled swiftly after sunset. They hurried, laughing now and then at nothing, back to their hotel. They were surprised to find it crowded.

In the lobby a group of Green River citizens were gathered, discussing something with the pleasant landlady. When Pyar and Shalimar entered, the talking broke off too sharply. Then, as the two passed with quickened steps toward the stairway, the

friendly Mrs. Gibbs came impulsively to meet them.

"Maybe I should warn you two," she said. "We don't want out-of-town people to think Green River is a dangerous town, because it's not. Our people who live here are good people, all of them! But—on one of our few side streets, the sheriff came across a frightful thing just now. And if two men were not safe on our streets tonight, a man and his wife might not be. So I must tell you—"

She sounded like a record running down; and after all, she had told them nothing.

Shalimar felt the already known and dear comfort of Pyar's hand on her arm, the slight tensing of those delicate long fingers. And it was he who prompted Mrs. Gibbs, with just the right tone of authority, to which the tall uniformed man with a two-gunned holster nodded approvingly.

"So you will tell us—Mrs. Gibbs? On the side street, your sheriff found—"

"Two corpses, Mr. Kanoor. They had their necks broken. Mr. Green, our sheriff, says they were—garrotted. Never before, in all my twenty years here—"

Her voice broke.

Shalimar felt a wild trembling seize her. Pyar's voice was rough.

"And what else, Mrs. Gibbs? Mrs. Gibbs! Were the men rob-

bed? Were there no clues? Did your authorities know of no *dacoit* bands—armed gangs, I mean?"

It was the sheriff who answered this.

"Why yes, sir, they were robbed. At least neither of them had billfolds, and they looked like prosperous men, who naturally would carry some money on them. We don't know yet where they came from. It looks as though they were picked up somewhere else, and brought here and murdered. Of course the victims will be identified. The murderers? That may take time. I'd say—there were no clues. A silver half dollar was lying in the dust. That's all."

THEY had, that enchanted sunset of an hour ago, spoken of stopping over here for a few days. The feeling was gone from them now. When the lovers were alone they spoke no more of their ugly welcome to the West, but their joy was tarnished. They loved no less; but it was as though a note of doom had sounded through a lovely rhapsody.

They did not speak of the gruesome incident, but Pyar quoted from his favorite Persian poet, choosing the lines:

"The moving finger writes;
and having writ,

Moves on; nor all thy piety
 nor wit
 Shall have it back to cancel
 off a line,
 Nor all thy tears wash out a
 word of it."

Shalimar remembered saying those lines to herself, immediately after her dream of Pyar; she had told herself that it was as though an awful writing of doom had been erased by the sight of his face. She sensed that their ugly greeting here where they had come for happiness had somehow struck deeply at something mystic in her husband which lay deeper than even she could understand. And she set herself to recreate their happiness, most of all his.

When at last they slept, the passing of trains thundered through her dreams; but there was, too, the singing of a bird that sounded like the eastern mockingbirds. This made Shalimar wake, at last, with tears on her lashes. She was not homesick! Where Pyar was, was home. But the bird had seemed to sing of a beauty too great to be borne, because it couldn't last.

Straining her eyes to see Pyar's face in the early dawnlight, she was amazed to see a moisture about his closed lids that matched her own. Deep in sleep, even a man born to rule the lives of other men might weep.

She curled close against him, cautiously, so as not to waken him.

THE lodge was as she had imagined it.

There was the huge living room paneled in pine, the enormous graystone fireplace. Navajo rugs on the floor, and even on one wall. Deep, welcoming chairs and divans. Mountain and desert pictures.

And across the highway that cut by too close in front there was rolling terrain, arroyo carved, bespeckled with sagebrush; off southward lay a maplike extent of wheat fields broken with green checkerboard squares that were beans. These, too, belonged to the Caliver family, and yielded an income. Half a mile down in that direction a smaller white painted house stood farther back from the road, and there lived Hiram Weldon, a Mormon widower, with his thirteen-year old daughter Sarah. They were very blond in a dusty way that matched the country. Hiram hired migratory Indian help to work the Calivers' fields and his smaller plots. Hiram and Sarah were to "do for" the Kanoors.

"As if we needed them!" Shalimar protested. "I *can* cook a little—"

"If it made you happier, my darling—" Pyar began, with a slight frown. "But I hope it will

not. I think you should have servants. You must remember that in India—”

Shalimar did remember.

“Hiram is the silent kind—though I doubt he does much thinking!” she offered, following her thoughts out loud. “Sarah, too. A good child with no horrible subtleties about her. People with plain, ordinary backgrounds. Comfortable people!”

Pyar was making her hair curl around his finger. “Don’t you forget that not too many years ago, there were blood-feuds in this western country? One made an enemy, and one night—Zing! The blade of the knife bit as deep as a Sikh kirpan.”

Shalimar laughed.

“You know too much about our historical weaknesses!” she told him. “You tempt me to turn the tables on you. By degrees, I’ve remembered that I knew a little—a very little—about your ancient Thugs. The *rumal*—that was what they strangled with. Here, you know, such a thing is unknown; it’s not a regular way of killing. And certainly not a religion. They call a similar approach *yoking*, in our crime-ridden cities, but it’s not at all the same. I think someone tried that on you, the evening your knights errant saved you at Madame Margoli’s door. Anyhow, it was religion with them, as you told me yourself. They

used a silver coin to weight the *rumal*—they ate sugar in the name of Kali—”

Pyar’s hand flashed down with a terrifying suddenness upon Shalimar’s mouth. His face whitened, and in it was something like anguish. Then his fingers dropped away, and he drew her head down tenderly to his breast.

“Never say that name!” he entreated.

There was a soft tapping at the door, and the two sprang apart. Sarah came in at odd times and their caresses were not for other eyes.

Pyar crossed to the door, as Shalimar said softly, to reassure him:

“It was only that you had spoken of it so freely before. Byron said something like you’ve just said, Pyar. ‘Call not their names. . . .’”

“Your guardian was right,” Pyar said stiffly, as he opened the door.

But it was not Sarah who stood there, but Hiram. And Shalimar read in his eyes, stolid though they were, that through the glass top of the door he had seen Pyar’s hand across her mouth. She felt herself redden.

But he only handed in a parcel, and said briefly:

“Sarah said you wanted extra milk, and she forgot to bring it. You’ve been here near two

weeks, and she's done extra errands, and now after dark I'd better. So long as things have been going on in the village as they have."

"*What* things?" Shalimar demanded. But the door closed behind him.

"Tomorrow we will find out," Pyar promised.

THEY depended on Hiram for rides into West Bluff, and on the next day he made excuses. Pyar's dark brows came together as they did when he was angry, and he dismissed the subject curtly.

Shalimar, insistently anxious, refused to be silenced, and demanded some definite information.

"It's not for me to tell you folks that the town people are half crazy, and since they don't know who to blame, trust no one but themselves," Hiram told her. "It's just that them they don't know, they can't be sure about."

Shalimar felt the moisture in the palms of her hands.

"I expect you to tell us more than that, Hiram," she said. "If something terrible is lurking around the town, we aren't far from it. If the people out here are so silly and ignorant that they want to involve innocent strangers here on a quiet honeymoon—people who haven't even a car of their own, two people

who have kept entirely to themselves as Mr. Kanoor and I have done—well, what they think isn't worth the bother of knowing. Just the same, if they are in danger in West Bluff, we two alone here may be in far more danger. As we came through Green River, two men were found murdered in the town. If it's anything of that sort—"

Hiram turned his dusty, wide-brimmed hat around in big awkward fingers.

"Just so, ma'am," he said slowly. "Just so. As you people came through Green River, two men were found dead there. Circumstances of their death weren't like anything ever seen in these parts before. West Bluff knows all that, ma'am. Well, West Bluff has found no corpses; but people have been disappearing, these past two weeks. And no strangers seem to be around West Bluff at all; not even a strange car. A whole family disappeared, a picnicking family, the Rountrees. Their car was found down an arroyo trail where people sometimes go. The Rountrees were gone, every one of them. Nate and Bella, and their three kids—the youngest a little girl only five years old. Before that, a young fellow named Sam Sloane—he turned up missing first.

"I've took up for you people, and I've had to do it. Last night,

though, I looked through the doorglass, and it seemed to me like your husband here was a bit rough with you, ma'am. So—Mr. Caliver asked me to do fer you, and I'm still doin'. My Sarah can still come over day-times, for I don't myself believe no harm of either of you: you especially, ma'am, being a woman and gentle, and Mr. Byron Caliver's niece or ward or whatever.

"If you need help, ma'am—"

He seemed trying for more words, not finding them. With his usual "See you around!" he walked out of the kitchen, through the front yard and down the road.

Shalimar found herself shivering in the noonday heat. Terror was all around, in the glare of the sunlight, in the black shadows of the cottonwood trees.

She knew a violent, protective surge of emotion for her husband.

He was a stranger in America. It had welcomed him with one of its ugliest manifestations. Some crazy pervert, or a band of perverts; a gang wandered from some city—escaping a crime wave grown too "hot!" And these local yokels turned on Pyar, because he was alien in race, native of a country they knew nothing about!

She saw a somberness in his

face that kindled her resentment to fever pitch.

"Pyar—" she hated to say it! They had planned their honeymoon so joyously. "Can we go east—at once? I don't want to stay here."

His brow lightened.

"You are wise, Shalimar. There isn't another bus, you know, until tomorrow. Yes, we will leave in the morning. Tonight, I will be glad of the rifles on the wall. I am a good shot, you know, I have shot often in the jungle. I think I would prefer a jungle to the wide emptiness all the way to those far mountains. Nevertheless, you are not to worry."

THE day passed somehow. Their little packing done, there was nothing to do and little to say. Only when it was evening, when the lights were lit and a fire blazed for the last time in the mighty fireplace, Shalimar felt comforted. They sat as they like to sit, in one big chair before the fire, and the lamplight and firelight seemed to raise a wall around them. It was a little moment too bright for time to dim.

"Always we have been interrupted, when I have started to tell you of my palace—" Pyar said. "This, now is our time for that. You shall see it as I tell you, Shalimar; for words are but

vibrations, and so are thoughts, and so, even is the material world—yes, even the strong walls of the palace itself. And so I create it tonight for you.”

She listened, seeming to see domes and minarets and walls of alabaster, and the secret forbidden gardens around them.

“The central hall is sixty feet high, pillared and balconied, and on the balcony a grill covered with gold conceals the long hall on which open doors to many apartments,” he was saying. “In the great dining apartment stands a table four feet wide and forty feet long, and the top is all of glass. Under it, but a little narrower, runs a pool with floating lilies and golden fish darting. In my father’s day, beautiful dancers were placed in the pool to swim in graceful patterns and divert the guests—but the custom has been discontinued—”

Laughter bubbled from Shalimar’s lips. He looked so like a little boy who wanted her to know that he was good, not overfond of sweets—

The laughter checked, and the words, and they were a man and a woman sitting close together, tense, rigidly listening. And yet, neither of them knew what soft, unexpected sound had startled them.

Then both of them heard footsteps on the porch, and both of them heard the raucous cry of a

bird and an answer from the other side of the house. They slipped to their feet.

Pyar reached the rifle on the wall with three strides, and lifted it down, and then he went to the door and threw it open. And outside, lit by the light of their lamps and the hearth, three faces they knew stared in at them.

Tony “Ali” Rigotta’s face wore a grin. Carl “Ali” Walker’s was emotionless. But the boy Denny looked white in the mellow mingled glow.

“We have come for you, Brother Ali!” Tony said. “These parts have turned dangerous, worse than the cities. You need us by you, Jemadar; your feet might stray into danger!”

Incredibly, Pyar made no objection.

He laid the rifle down and walked into the dark. Denny made a sudden dive toward Shalimar, who stood quite still. Carl “Ali” snatched the boy back. “With us, *chokra!*” he said in his dull-toned voice, and the boy cringed and obeyed like a dog.

Shalimar went on standing still; she caught Pyar’s backflung words:

“Until — after awhile, my Shalimar! Try not to fear.”

Try not to fear! She knew now in her heart, not knowing how she knew, who had done the garrotting in Green River. She

knew who had caused a whole family in West Bluff to disappear. And she realized that Hiram would have no inclination to drop in on a friendly errand tonight.

She knew, too, that between these men and Pyar there was a certain bond. Yet—he loved her. He was gentle, good and kind—not evil.

He had not taken the rifle, but it would have made little difference against the two "Alis" and Denny.

When he had stopped her speaking of the Thugs, she had been about to tell him that among the things she had remembered was this: the members of Thuggee had all called themselves by that name, had greeted each other as "Brother Ali" in a sort of secret code. The thugs had simply added "Ali" to their other names—as had Tony and Carl.

Her breath was coming hard, now, and inaction became unendurable.

SHE slipped out into the chill of night here near the roof of the continent. The highway was empty; sometimes it was empty for hours, between spurts of roaring cars. A rise of ground blocked out the light in the Weldon home.

She walked to the north end of the porch, which afforded a

view of the back yard and out-houses; the clutter of buildings nestled in a little grove of cottonwood trees had never attracted Shalimar's interest. Now she stood staring at the barn, which was an old and unused building in bad repair.

It was not empty now. Rays of dim light struggled through cracks in the warped framework. She thought it imperative that she go as near to the barn as she dare. Before she ran down the road to the Weldon's house to throw herself on the mercy Hiram had grudgingly extended. But she must see, first; one of those cracks might serve as a peephole. And the sound of voices should be audible outside the crazy, warped old structure.

When she was halfway to the barn she remembered her dark, hooded rain cloak hanging in one of the closets. It would have hidden her, even her face; but she would not go back for it. Not self preservation drove her, but terror for Pyar. Whatever this horror was, he had wanted no part of it. Whatever it was, he was in danger. And a canny remnant of logic told her that Hiram would not come back with her, unless she had something specific to tell him. He would take no interest in a meeting between her husband and two men with whom he had gone willingly. She was not good

at lying, and she could think of nothing that would serve her purpose but the truth. She must find out the truth, and then she could make Hiram come back with her.

She felt pitifully vulnerable as she crept up to the largest crack in the wall of the old barn. Her dress was a pale blue that looked white in the starlight. Her legs were white and bare. Then her eyes focused on the scene in the interior of the barn, and she might have been a disembodied spirit—so completely did she forget herself.

Candles stood on the four corners of a sheet spread out on the barn floor. A short-handled pick axe lay on the sheet; toward the center, brownish lumps.

"Let us see you take the sugar. Let us see you eat the sweetness of Kali!" Tony Ali said. But the voice was not like the voice of Tony Ali. The Brooklynese had quite gone from it. It was deep and sonorous, now.

Then Carl Ali spoke, and the flatness had left his voice. It was as though he came more fully alive. But the aliveness was an ugly thing. There was a glitter in his eyes, a fanaticism, a hungry longing; and she knew that the longing was—to kill.

The boy Denny cringed, now hiding his eyes and again staring before him. The men ignored him.

Shalimar's eyes sought her husband's face. If it showed that horrible change, that mad glitter of evil, she felt that she would go mad. It did not; but there was that in it which brought her no comfort.

Slowly Pyar accepted a lump of the brown sugar and placed it on his tongue.

"I do not turn from our gods," he said. "But I have told you the days of blood sacrifice are gone, and it is so. I have told you the old customs have passed from our land, and have never belonged to this new one. I have come with you willingly, to know what you want of me."

"You had little choice," said Carl Ali, "against two servants of Kali. And even the little cur, the *chokra*, is obedient. He is a digger of note!"

Pyar's voice answered.

"You have dared this thing? You have found your *bhil*, your killing place? You have made live again the whole accursed ritual—"

"Have care, false Jemadar! Our work has been done at night, here on your place, behind this barn—wherein twice we have lain down and slept! We have killed according to the law of Kali. The pit was dug by the little one, not large, since bodies broken at the joints need little space. Behind your barn you may see the log and the hammer

where the breaking was done, and you may see the sharp stake which was driven through the dead *beetoos*. In fact you may see more by a little scraping, for the little digger was easily exhausted, and the pit is shallow. Yet all are in it; the young man, and the man with his wife and their three children. A poverty stricken party these last, whom we induced to join us in a better picnic place! Not like the men in Green River, who carried considerable wealth.

"Jemadar, when the pit is discovered, due to shallow digging, the credit will be yours. We are not known in the little town down there; only once we entered the small store, to buy many pounds of butter against a need, which are in our car hidden in a gully."

SHALIMAR'S trance of horror was pierced by the anguish in Pyar's outcry—which was to her utterly inexplicable, since it concerned the one harmless detail in the horrible narration. Pyar cried: "*Butter!* No, in Kali's name!"

Tony Rigotta seemed to start and stare, and there was a kind of awed-rapture in his voice.

"You called on her, Jemadar! It is not too late for you. The dark goddess of the air shows herself! *Kali-Pyar*, you are still her beloved!"

Pyar meant "beloved." The name had come straight down in his family—

Thought left Shalimar then. Her eyes followed the eyes of the four in the barn.

The waning moon was making its late rising, and its pallid light sifted into the old barn through a window high up under the roof. Dust motes whirled in the dual light of moon and flickering candles; and they coalesced and shifted slowly, until imagination could mold a central figure with multi-numbered limbs.

Was it imagination?

Her husband's voice brought her back to reality. The moonlight struggled against the candle light, the motes whirled dustily, the vision was gone. But her husband's voice was dream-held, with no will in it.

"What do you want of me?" it asked, tonelessly; and Carl Ali answered.

"Your hand must kill the *bee-too*, the outsider. Even though she is your wife, your hand must kill her. Kali has spoken. You know the law."

"You bought many pounds of butter. Why, then?"

"If you refused to obey. If you were false, Jemadar. We would strangle you. The butter has been melted in a large can. It is nearly *ghi*. Wood, taken at night from a lumber yard, has

been piled down the arroyo there. Your hand will be more merciful than the flame, and you would live to serve Kali. There is room in the lonely places for her cult to rise again. Here are long roads—and lonely travelers, and many with money."

"I find all this impossible to believe," Pyar said slowly. "These things, in our day, are not. You make them live again, and these are troubled times, and such breed strange happenings. Yet I cannot be sure these are not empty words. A cruel game?"

"We have thought of that, Jemadar," Tony Ali said. "It was another reason for permitting the shallow burial. Come—you shall see."

Shalimar turned to run, as an animal runs in terror. But she was not an animal, with its instinct and its strength. Her legs turned to butter, she thought; to butter—which has become a horrible thing! She held herself upright by leaning against the barn.

The three men and the boy came out, and she was there in her pale blue dress, with her white legs and arms which she could see and her white face which they could see but she could not.

They walked toward her together. Then Pyar's arm supported her. She knew that there

was nothing he could say to her now—nothing at all.

They walked around the barn and Tony Ali gave Denny an order.

"Dig! Not far, you know. You barely covered them."

There was a spade. The boy took it and set it into the ground. Once—twice. Three times. And the thing was seen.

Something like a broken white stick, that seemed to reach up to be seen in the moonlight. And a small arm and hand protruding from red rags that had been clothing.

Shalimar fainted.

SHE had escaped from a cold hell of horror. Warm fingers of light caressed here eyelids. She opened her eyes, and the walls of the room where she had known happiness were around her.

She sat up, Pyar's name on her lips. Then she saw him.

He was very still and very far away. This was a long room, and he lay on his back on the floor at the end toward the kitchen hallway. She was on the divan with the woven Navajo robe. She pressed her hands against her eyes, to rub away the pain. When she took them down again, she saw that the three others had come in from the kitchen; silently they stood looking at her.

"His own hand sheathed the knife in his heart," Tony Ali said. "It was not fit that he should lie outside with the dead *beetoo*s, the outsiders. The struggle was too great for the Jemadar. Either he must kill you, or let us kill him for a traitor. Or perhaps it was that, though he thought to renounce Kali, his heart would not let him. He had acknowledged to us that he knew himself reincarnated from the former Thug leader in his line; he had acknowledged us as former comrades and followers. But in this present life he had grown soft. Yet he chose an honorable death."

Shalimar tried to speak, to think.

Carl Ali had drawn a large white handkerchief from his pocket, and in one hand he held a silver dollar. He played with the two, half knotting the dollar in the handkerchief.

Tony Ali spoke again.

"My Brother Ali is impatient to make an end, Memsahib!" he said. "The silver coin in the kerchief, or *rumal*—such is the death ordained for the *beetoo*. And you are *beetoo*, Memsahib!"

"Also—she knows too much to live!" Carl Ali interrupted.

"That is true. But also, there is the place deep in the arroyo," Tony Ali reminded. "The log pile we laboriously carried, and the *ghi*—the butter?"

Carl's hands lowered slowly, and a brighter look of interest crossed his heavy features. He might have been a sullen child diverted by a new toy.

"I have not seen such a burning, and she will be living!" he said. "Still—"

Tony resumed:

"It is in my mind to give you choice, because you were a true wife to him who should have been our chief. Because he laughed at the old things, I nearly let Carl Ali strangle him on the doorstep, that first night when we all met—then because I loved him, I insisted on trying him again and again—believing he would at last be one with us!" Tony said, "He trusted us when we said another, following, had seized him. Now, it is in my mind to allow you choice between the *rumal* and the *ghat*—the pyre of burning.

"The *rumal* is a swift death. Your neck breaks, you understand."

Carl Ali stepped forward, and it was like the advance of a Frankenstein monster. His great hands rose again, putting together silver coin and white cloth.

But an instinctive response of horror and fury drove Shalimar to her feet, and something in that fury stopped the big man with the look of an idiot lost in a vicious dream.

"It doesn't matter!" she cried, and realized that her voice had risen to a shriek. "You're going to kill me, and I don't care how."

"Yet—" Tony shook his head, impatiently, tossing back a long black lock, staring at her. "When you looked at me, just now, I saw a strange thing. You had seemed—a silly girl, soft, like all women. Then a dark strength came into your face. . . . When you looked your hate at me—you looked as I have thought that Kali must look."

Denny had been out of Shalimar's thoughts, beneath her notice. He was to her a pawn, trapped into a horrible companionship, a thing of little significance. Now he flung himself forward, crying in a voice that showed the break of adolescence:

"You mustn't look like that, Miss Shalimar! Not *you* . . ."

Carl took one step and made one violent motion with his huge hand and heavy arm, and Denny fell inertly to the floor.

"So it remains to decide about the widow of Pyar!" Tony resumed after a moment. But his voice was different; uncertain, faltering, and for a while he said no more.

Shalimar waited. There was no hurry. The long night lay ahead of them. Time enough for any kind of death. But the cavern of the fireplace began to have a strange fascination for her. She

felt a compulsion to watch the struggling flames of the dying fire; the smoke that seemed held in the chimney by a downdraft; that formed a whirling blue pillar, and that sent out streamers into the room.

"Kali manifested in *blue*, didn't she?" she heard herself saying. "Look, there in the fireplace! I didn't quite believe in the thing that scared us that day when the strange projection was shown. Mass hysteria, I thought. I believed I was half out of my mind, when I seemed to see—up in the moonlight, in the barn—

"Whatever you do to me, I'm no longer afraid. And there's been so much horror, I seem to have come out on the other side. I think I ~~am~~ ready to die. But—the smoke where it gathers is bluer and bluer, and the arms it puts out—why, now they have fingers! And the face—it isn't all horror, is it? There's a dark, awful sweetness in the face—"

"Like a woman who loves death because death is beautiful. Or—like a woman who goes to join her husband on a funeral pyre," Tony Ali said softly.

And yet he made no move.

There was a clock in the kitchen, and Shalimar could hear it tick.

She dragged her gaze from the blue smoke, and looked earnestly in turn at the two men. If she had changed, so had they.

Carl Walker said, looking awkwardly from Shalimar to Tony Rigotta:

"It isn't any good, without the kid—is it?"

"No!" Tony answered. And he began talking to Shalimar fast and earnestly as though he must make her understand him, and as though he were also himself trying to understand a thing that puzzled him. He spoke with a new, awkward formality in which the Brooklynesse accent strengthened and grew:

"When I came to in the hospital, I had dual memories—my thinking was double, like the things you see when you drink a mickey. First I remembered walking a long road, one of a band of turbaned men—and I remembered Kanoor, who was our leader. I remembered places in India: Delhi—Lahore—and little Indian villages. Then I would remember Brooklyn and New York, and places in America and Italy.

"The Indian memories fitted in with Kanoor's talk, and later with Denny's, and more and more nothing else mattered. And with Carl it was even more so, because of the amnesia he had before he—died.

"So we all understood that we had died in the plane crash, and that Kali who rules the air had thrust into our bodies older souls, and that we, now, were

these older souls, and belonged to Kali as we had in an earlier time.

"Pyar had talked to the doctors, and he could explain the dual memories—which he did not fully share, because he was the reincarnation of his own ancestor, and had the same racial memories, and was more one person. But according to the doctors, our bodies were dead only minutes, and the brain cells were not greatly damaged; and Kanoor said those same brain cells had stored in them the memories that belonged to them.

"Then we got thick with Denny. And you know what? Funny, the stuff that kid had collected in the attic where he kept all kinds of crazy things. Had a mess of water moccasin eggs hatching, and two black widow spiders in a bottle. And books—books—books. Neither Carl nor I had done much reading. We didn't know how fascinating books could be.

"The kid had all this torture stuff, and gang war stuff, and some of that was authentic—I could recognize it was. Then he had stuff about primitive tribes—African Voo-Doo, American Indian medicine man stuff—and this old East Indian business about the Thugs, the Deceivers. After a while we didn't know what part we were learning, or what we were remembering.

After we killed the men at Green River sometimes Denny would get the horrors; yet he would always tell us that he was closer to Kali than any of us. He was what his mother called a *focal point*—spirits and forces 'came through' him.

"Now—something has happened to me. Something that scares me! When Denny was knocked out, I felt myself suddenly fall apart. Those brain cells that didn't die—they seem to be telling me what I am and what to do—but it is as though I am crippled and only half knowing.

"Something beautiful and terrible, and a wildness in me that didn't care, is gone. I'm half in myself and half out, and I could go screwy and half-witted like Carl here—"

"You go on like that, and I kill you next after the girl," Carl said heavily. "Either you can kill like Denny helped us remember, or like the gangster you were before you died in the plane. *And stop talking!*"

SOMETHING shook the lodge, as though every particle of air was disturbed by a wind that moved no object; as though an earthquake rattled no picture on the wall, no dish in a cupboard, yet burst the atoms of the silent air apart. Shalimar looked at the two men incred-

ulously. An impossible, forbidden, unseen universe was rocking the known, habitable world. Her senses screamed this knowledge; the men made no sign.

Outside a bird called, and another bird answered. And did she remember from conscious knowledge of Thuggee—or did she know because she was possessed, she in her turn!—that this bird cry and answer were Kali's sign and token?

"With Denny knocked out, I'm through with all this." Tony muttered unhappily. "You, Carl?"

"Me, too!" The voice had a twang, a slight gutturalness that might be mid-European, now. "Me, too! But we can't let her go. No place on earth would be safe for us."

"If there were any way of trusting her—" Tony began. "Especially as—Don't you see? You shouldn't have knocked Denny out. He *was* a focal point! Without Kanoor, I guess that crazy boy was our leader after all. And the worst of it is—I'm afraid to let her go; and half afraid to touch her. This—goddess! If she has been here with us—working through Denny—Well, don't you see? Kali hasn't gone away from here. She's—got something to do with—Shalimar. I'm afraid—whatever we do, will be only as she permits!"

The impossible happened then. Footsteps rang on the porch, and Merlin's voice called Shalimar's name.

Tony Rigotta threw the hearthrug over Pyar's body and slipped swiftly after Carl, who carried Denny into the kitchen.

Shalimar walked to the door. But it was not Shalimar who opened it; something strange and alien was using her body. She knew, and did not care.

On the porch were Merlin and Byron, Hiram and three other men.

"Hiram wired," Merlin said. "We have a car. We've come to take you home."

Then Byron said, "You look like a sleepwalker, my little girl. Hiram said there'd been a gang terrorizing the town. You and Pyar will come home with us?"

The stranger in Shalimar spoke carefully.

"Don't you think you should have telephoned? My husband is asleep. You know, he'd be bound to resent this—"

Merlin looked at her closely. It was a face she could have loved dearly, dearly—as dearly as that other dark, beautiful face. She felt tears behind the lids of her eyes and blinked them fiercely back.

"I thought I heard you, before we reached the house!" Merlin insisted. "I heard a woman scream. I thought it was your

voice. And this is the only house—"

She was cold and hard, and she got rid of them. She stood in the open door and watched them drive away. Then she closed the door.

The two gangsters came back into the room, and they had drawn together in the imminent danger of the intruders.

Carl was holding the dark travelling cape with the hood, the one Shalimar had left hanging in the closet when she went out in her thin, light dress. It seemed a long time ago.

Tony spoke, his eyes averted.

"Too much talk it's been, all along. We've got to get rid of you, Miss, although I'd rather not. And since we built a pyre of logs up the arroyo, I think that's the answer. We'll wrap you—so—"

Carl threw the heavy wrap around her.

"Carry you so. No one would see, and if they did—a bundle—"

The hood went over her head, drew down over her face.

And still she did not care. She had been claimed by the dark goddess. She had belonged to her from the beginning. When she refused suttee, centuries ago, she had angered the goddess of death, and she had incurred a debt, and it was time to pay.

She felt herself lifted and car-

ried, as though her body were already dead. And she did not know if the rough uneven way was long or short.

When they had reached the place they loosed the hood, and she could see the desolate escarpment, and the piled wood. The men half poured, half scooped out butter from a gasoline can, throwing it upon the logs.

"The butter is all in lumps and splashes—it won't burn right. But it will light the wood."

"There ought to be more. And it wouldn't be so hard to handle in India," Carl grumbled; and Tony told him to shut up.

"Pyar should be here with her," he said then. And Carl said there was no time for any more play or games. Let them find Pyar, with all the other dead, the ones they had called *beetools*.

"But most of the butter landed on the far side. There's a steep take-off over there—we'll have to lay the girl on the near side. She'll die slow!" Tony said shakily.

Carl answered slowly, his tongue seeming to savor the words: "Hell! I'll bet plenty Hindu wives died slow. Rich, high caste families like the Kanoors had all the *ghi* they needed to go up in smoke like fireworks. Poor devils' wives were dumped afterward into the Ganges half charred, with their husbands'

bodies the same. What do we care?"

None of it mattered to Shalimar. Her thinking was detached. What was it the followers of Kali—and indeed all Hindus—believed about murder?

"No man dieth but by the will of God!"

Well, that was true. And when Kali entered into you to possess your thoughts and reconcile you to your own payment of a debt to death, you could know no enmity against her instruments. Her mind had closed against the awfulness behind the barn. You could think of only so much at a time, and there was no time left, and she thought only, now, of death.

Matches struck and went out, and each match lit the wild loneliness of the rocky gorge. A waning moon threw ghost shadows. The stars were bright and big, but very far. Didn't a widow dying in the flames go to a place in the sun beside her husband? But every star was a sun; would you find your own? And there were clouds.

BODILY sense and feeling passed away. The other senses sharpened incredibly. Shalimar did not feel the hands that lifted and bore her and laid her on the rough logs. But her ears caught the crackle of the logs as they caught fire; her

nostrils drank in the pungency of the oily smoke without offense. The hidden, frozen secret part of Shalimar surged upward in pre-ordained fulfillment. The iceberg knew its season of thawing, sundered and released its buried segments. Always this hour had swung toward her through Time and Space, as the great clock of the universe marked its slow time.

The flames curled up slowly, and the blue-black heavy smoke streaked upward like torn banners. They blotted out the stars, sweeping skyward, sagging downward like a canopy. The heat grew, but it did not concern Shalimar. She lived and the flames had not found her; but her life had passed into her eyes and ears and thoughts that were not thinking but a subliminal deep stream of consciousness.

This short eternal moment was life and death, escape from broken dreams, a greater thing than ugliness and killing, terror and heartbreak. It was fate, and its acceptance. There would not again be two Shalimars struggling against each other. Fire cleansed and welded; fire fused the soul into its true essence.

A log broke and part of the pile became a flaming hell, and it did not matter, because now everything was gone and forgotten.

She thought it a death-fantasy

when she heard her name called by Merlin's voice:

"Shalimar! My weight will topple those logs into the fire. This way, toward my voice!"

Her body came to life, straining upward—with a curious, knowledge of its own of how to balance, to slip sidewise, not to disturb the logs which were giving toward the blazing heart of the fire.

She forced herself back to inertness. She had given herself to death and to Kali. She could not go back; and she crouched silent behind the wall of smoke, trying to win back the insensibility, shrinking now from the fury of heat, but shrinking more from a terror that he might try to take her by force.

And the double terror climaxed the life-long dualism that had tortured her, and she knew that she was quite mad, and did not care. Madness as well as death belonged to Kali the destroyer, and she was Kali's creature and sacrifice and adorer.

Merlin was right. His added weight, or any violent movement, would topple the pile. The instant the logs fell, she would be a flaming torch. If he could reach her then and drag her clear, and if she lived, she would be hideous, disfigured. If he forced her back from the death she had embraced, it would be into an awful travesty of life.

She had a swift, bright, awful vision of a woman who once had been a girl called Shalimar. The woman's face was veiled; behind the veil seared flesh cringed, mad eyes glared hate, and a twisted mouth gibbered endlessly.

For this place and hour and she herself belonged to Kali, and no man's hand could wrest her free.

But his voice called her again, saying words she would never have thought of his saying. Now, as the flames roared a new, high song and the black smoke eddied, choking her, Merlin cried:

"Shalimar! Quick, in God's name! Shalimar—in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost!"

The flames shot up in wilder fury, a near log burst and split, a burning spark struck her forehead. Shalimar crawled toward the voice. Her ears were ringing, they were filled with a sound of bells. Bells had rung so on her confirmation Sunday. She slipped from the smoking carrier of logs that fell in behind her, and they rang louder still. A spout of fire shot skyward, knives of hot pain stabbed her as her smouldering clothes ignited. Merlin tore off the cloak and then her flaming clothing and threw his coat around her. And from the heavens a sudden torrent of rain poured down, as

though God had sent a baptismal cloudburst to put out a fire of hell.

Tears poured from Shalimar's eyes, washing dark images from her sight and soul.

MERLIN would not have waiting or delay, and they were married quietly and at once.

"It was a catharsis," he told her when they were driving East together. "You worked it out of your system by acting out the thing that always haunted you. You've a red scar between your brows that looks like a Hindu caste mark—but you've come home to your own time and race and faith.

"Tony and Carl Walker stole a plane in Durango and crashed it. Denny will face the courts. He will be given psychiatric treatment, perhaps. He seems to have been exactly what Byron said he was—a natural gateway for vicious influences.

"Knowing Pyar's belief—about his earlier incarnation and yours; you must remember that an Englishman saved you then. I'm English by descent; I love you now; maybe I loved you then. Maybe you would have loved me, too—but the old gods held you.

"It was not right that you should turn back to the old things. And after you saw—

what I'm sorry you had to see—"

He drove silently for a while, his face stern and drawn.

"It shocked you into feeling a *need* to die. I can understand that, too. Built on the old dream, on your love for Pyar; then, a need for expiation—for him, as well as for you. Then the dreadful Being so many of us had seen entered into you. I couldn't have won against *that*; no defiance of my own would have mattered then. Only an exorcism—only the Greatest Name—"

Since the night of horror, Shalimar had found it difficult to talk. Now *she* found words.

"Thank you for knowing. And—I won't forget. Not again, Merlin. That I'm supposed to be a child of light!"

Light was around them as they drove. The long road turned to sunset gold, and the mountains rose like silent, watchful guardians, snow patched and pastel tinted.

"You haven't told me how you drove Tony and Carl away. You followed us through the

arroyo alone. You risked your life for me, Merlin."

"Even Byron believed you resented our coming because you were so happy with Pyar," Merlin said simply. "Only I—somehow knew. I made them let me out, and I watched and followed. I was delayed, then, by Denny. He ran after me, and I had to knock him down, finally, and left him lying—as you told me Walker had done once before that evening. When I reached the—the place—

"Those two were standing, watching the fire. They looked like two whipped dogs, or cornered rats, even before they knew that I was there. I had a revolver and I fired one shot. Then they ran. Only you mattered. The rest, you know."

The rest she knew. Someone had died, after all, in the flames that night. Someone had left her free, at last—waking and sleeping. The revenant who had owned the sovereignty of Kali was gone forever. Real and terrible was the ancient goddess of death; but for Shalimar the spell was broken, the power gone.

