



Weird Tales

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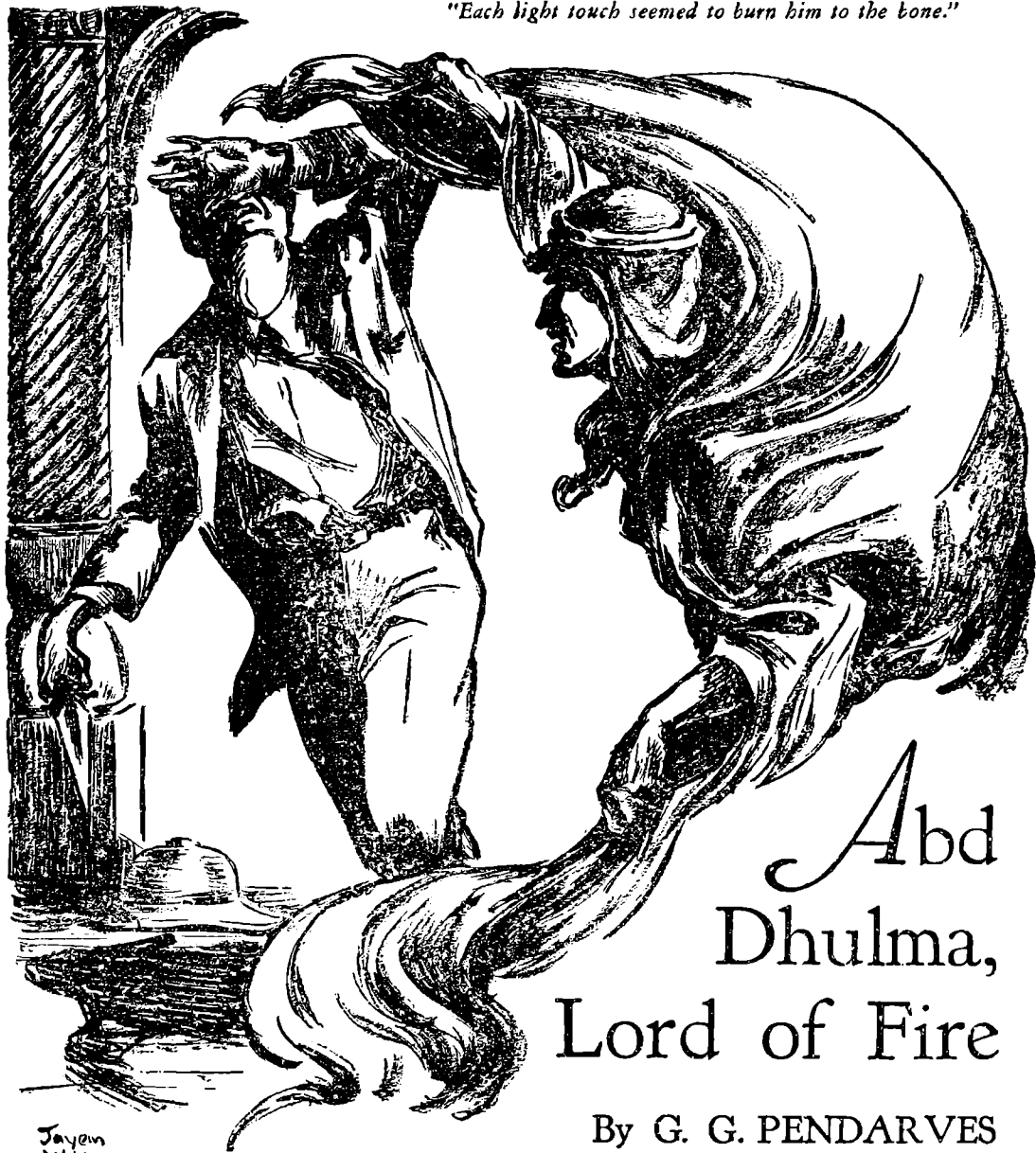
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WEIRD TALES ISSUED 1st OF EACH MONTH

"Each light touch seemed to burn him to the bone."



Abd Dhulma, Lord of Fire

By G. G. PENDARVES

A weird and shivery story of an evil Arab who contrived to postpone death for many centuries

BLIND! Warren Glenn turned his bandaged head restlessly on the silken cushions of the divan where he lay. Blind! Blind! Blind!

The word rang in his consciousness like a deep-toned bell, whose brazen note made every nerve of his lean body quiver. It seemed to him the bell was sounding just overhead, making everything in the

hushed and perfumed courtyard vibrate from roof to tessellated pavement.

Blind! After fifteen years of seeking, the cruel insatiable desert had struck him down in the hour of his triumph. He had found his treasure at last, and, in payment for the secrets he had discovered and taken from her age-old keeping, the desert had robbed him of his sight.

Blind! Blind! Blind! rang that remorseless tocsin overhead. A long bitter sigh escaped him, and a familiar Arab plaint rose to his lips. He was startled by hearing a voice answer his muttered words.

"Wherefore, *sidi*, art thou weary of thy being? Despair should be the portion of no man, since there is a remedy and a healing for every ill under the sun."

Warren moved his head in the direction of the voice, amazed by the liquid beauty of the syllables, and instantly aware of its quality of power and command. In some strange way the voice made him uneasy; there was a deep vibrating undertone in its music that he could not understand. He wondered for a moment why a servant had not announced the visitor, as usual, but that thought was instantly submerged in the peculiar interest he felt in this stranger who had invaded his privacy.

"You are a healer?" he answered. "A native of Kufra, who has heard of my blindness, perhaps?"

"In the *souks* here all men speak of thine affliction, *sidi*," the voice resumed. "I, who am known as Saiehh, the world-wanderer, have heard on every hand of the white man from the New World across the sea who has the gift of tongues and loves and understands the people of my race as if he were one of them. All men speak in praise and sorrow concerning thee, *sidi*, and therefore I am come to offer thee the gift of sight again."

"The gift of sight!" gasped Warren, for a moment on the verge of believing such a boon was possible. "No, no!" he went on, as the experience of the last few weeks rushed back to contradict the warm quickening of hope in his breast. "No, it is impossible! I have had advice from every one that money could bring here. They all agree. I am blind for life."

"No, *sidi*," pursued the calm, assured voice. "I can restore sight to your eyes. This I say without even examining them. If it is your will, permit me to remove the bandage and tell you how long the cure will take."

Warren's pulses throbbed. How utterly absurd of him to allow the faintest hope to disturb him again; it only made the thing harder to bear. How many times during the last weeks he had hoped against hope as each new man spent his skill on him; and how many times he had been plunged into a blacker darkness!

"No!" he said at last. "No, I can not face that ordeal again. I don't wish to be discourteous, but will you leave me now? This is one of my bad days when I'm not fit company for any man. You wish to help me, but it is no use—no use."

"I understand." The voice was completely unruffled. "Yet, now that I am here, it would be well that you should not allow your resentment of others' mistakes to make your mind as unseeing as your eyes, *sidi*. I say that I can give you the gift of sight."

The voice was nearer now, close to the divan where Warren lay. He put out a hand and it was instantly taken in a clasp so strong and life-giving, so vibrant with power and warmth that Warren's strained features relaxed into a smile.

"And now I will take off this bandage."

THE strong sensitive fingers relaxed their grip and moved deftly about the blind man's head; the bandage was slipped off, and Warren felt a touch light as the fall of a leaf on his burning eyelids.

"It is as I thought, *sidi*." The voice broke a long silence at last. "I have wrought many cures more desperate. Within the compass of a few hours I can work this healing on you. Tomorrow you

shall see the sun shine in the streets of Kufra, and the moon silver the palms at night once more—if you are willing to pay the price I ask.”

“Pay!” echoed Warren. “There is nothing I would not pay to see again. I would strip myself of my last *mejedie* in exchange for my eyesight.”

“The white man thinks ever in terms of gold. I do not traffic with a child’s playthings thus. I have other standards, other measurements of value.”

The voice was mocking now, and Warren seemed to feel the pressure of incalculable forces closing in upon him.

“What do you mean?” he asked, unpleasantly shaken by that brief sensation. “What is the price you ask?”

The voice countered his question by another.

“Life is valueless to you without your sight?”

“Completely valueless,” agreed Warren. “If I can not work, I can not live in any real sense. My knowledge without sight is useless. My researches are intricate and involved beyond hope of teaching them, even to the most patient and skilled of assistants.”

On the verge of divulging the extraordinary nature of the manuscripts he had recently discovered in the Tomb of the Sultan Izzad ben Kari, Warren checked himself. He was amazed at the impulse which this stranger seemed to be forcing upon his mind—an impulse to tell the secrets which he had so far disclosed to none.

That night in the desert, following his great discovery, he had only had time to glance at the precious records as he sat poring over the manuscripts from sunset to sunrise, his torch like a lost star in the vast immensity of sand about the Tomb, while his men slept in utter exhaustion. He knew that the yellowed parchments

contained all he had ever dreamed of finding—the lost wisdom of the Magi who dominated the Ancient World, the supreme and secret Magic antedating the Flood and believed to have been destroyed in the fall of Babylon.

Warren, however, had believed otherwise ever since as a student at Harvard he had discovered the little battered volume in Sanskrit which had shaped his whole life.

The book was a most curious history of the life of a certain Sultan Izzad ben Kari who lived in the Eighth Century. The Sultan had been the dupe and disciple of Abd Dhulma, a priest of that day who had acquired the ancient wisdom and used it for his own ends. Abd Dhulma appeared to have been a false Magus, a Zoroastrian of the most debased and terrible character, and the little book asserted that he had found the secret of perpetuating his life by means forbidden to the true Magi. Warren could not grasp all the mystic symbolism of the account, but he gathered that the Sultan had in some way been tricked out of life to further Abd Dhulma’s dark purpose.

Warren was entirely skeptical with regard to Abd Dhulma’s continued existence beyond the ordinary span of human life; to him, the crux of the old volume was contained in the reiterated statement that the Sultan had broken the sacred rule of the Magi *by writing down* those secrets hitherto communicated only by word of mouth from generation to generation of priests. The Sultan had caused the secrets to be buried with him in his Tomb, and it was this Tomb that Warren had sought through fifteen years of unceasing toil and danger.

He had found the Tomb. He had found the precious records. But he was blind—the treasure was as lost to him as though it still lay in the darkness of the Tomb.

THE vibrating golden voice cut short his recollections: "You would choose a short life with sight and opportunity to continue your work, rather than the ordinary span of your days as a blind and helpless man?"

Warren laughed harshly: "Why discuss it? I have no choice."

"So! Yet there is a bargain I would offer you. I will give you your sight again, and a year more of work. In return you will pay me the balance of your life. That is to say, at the end of twelve months you will put your life in my hands unreservedly—body and soul."

Again that strange awareness of timeless primitive forces assailed Warren, but he resisted strongly.

"Let me understand this bargain more precisely," he began, in stiff deliberate fashion. "You mean you will restore my sight completely, and I can work for another year. After that, I must die. Do you want me to promise to commit suicide, or do you mean to kill me yourself?"

"I will take your life at the end of the allotted time. It will be painless and swift and easy. I will set free your soul in such a manner that I can use the living flame as my own. Your soul for a year more of life and work!"

"It's the most fantastic thing I ever heard." Warren's forehead above his blank unfocussed eyes was wrinkled in doubt and perplexity. "Who are you to talk about men's lives and souls as if you were a god?"

"I am Saiehh the Wanderer, a man like yourself, *sidi*." But the voice belied the words it spoke.

A long silence fell between the two, pregnant for the blind man with dim incalculable issues which his mind was not able to formulate.

A year of reprieve before the final dark! In one year he could translate the secrets

he had discovered, and leave a monument of success that would make his name pass down the centuries with those of the great ones of the earth.

What did this bargain entail more than he had always contemplated as the finish to his life? Death of the body was the end of him as a separate entity. A legacy of work accomplished was all of him he had ever believed could endure after his heart had ceased to beat. His ego would be extinguished like a candle-flame once the breath left his body.

If he did not make this bargain—always supposing his visitor could fulfill his promise—what was there before him but gray frustrated years and a final drifting out into the unknown with nothing to justify his long seeking, nothing to leave behind but the record of a great defeat? If he agreed to the bargain, if he bought one more year of life in its fullest sense, did it matter what happened after that? What could happen to him once he was dead? Did it concern him what this mystic babbled of his soul?

"You do well to ponder, *sidi*. Yet, I would remind you that the time for your choice is here, and now. This gift I have brought is like the fabulous lilies that grew by the Well of Zool and bloomed for ever in the keeping of that man who plucked them at their birth, but withered to decay if left ungathered."

Warren's thoughts flickered over the past, present, and future as a castaway might look desperately across a wide sea. Some obscure sentiment held him back. Deep in his consciousness he was aware of an unsuspected survival of faith in things greater and more enduring than human thought.

What did he dread in agreeing to the bargain? The sudden shock of blindness, the weeks of alternating hope and despair that followed—these, he told him-

self, must temporarily have undermined his lifelong convictions. He would buy the year of life, and let this Eastern mystic make the best of a bad bargain.

"I agree!" He spoke with sudden emphasis. "Give me my sight, give me a year in which to complete my work, and after that I am yours, body—and soul, since you insist on my possession of one."

Something which felt to Warren like a metal seal was pressed against the palm of his left hand, and his fingers involuntarily closed about the small hard object.

"Now you will repeat the words I say, the words of the oath which seals our bargain."

Syllable by syllable Warren echoed the voice in a long unaccented phrase which held only the vaguest meaning for him. He imagined he caught sounds resembling the names of certain dark divinities worshipped in the dawn of time; and again there was a recurring word which suggested the invocation to the Element of Fire used by Zoroastrians. But the inflexion of the slurred liquid voice made it impossible for him to judge accurately.

While he repeated the last long-drawn syllables, he felt a sharp stab of pain in his left hand, as if the little hard object he held had suddenly turned to a prisoned flame, and for a moment his whole body glowed as if plunged into a river of fire. This passed in a flash, and he felt the healer's touch upon his eyes in a slow rhythmic movement that was irresistible. Veil after veil of perfumed darkness swept down upon him. He sank—drifting downward—deep into the womb of time. . . .

THE long quiet night hours wore on, while Warren lay in a profound and healing sleep. His visitor remained beside the couch, and any one who entered the silent courtyard retired in awed and in-

stant obedience to the watcher's gesture and commanding look.

The sun rose, turning the lovely pattern of color in the glass roof above the sleeper to fresh clear hues of some faery orchard, with its glowing fruit, delicate blossom, and palest leaf patterned against the sky. Warren's face was dappled with flecks of blue and rose and green as he lay breathing like a child, the recent lines of pain smoothed out, the grim endurance of his lips relaxed to plastic curves of youth.

He stirred and opened his eyes, then flung himself from the divan with a loud astonished cry:

"I can see! I can see!"

He stood still, unbelieving, and stared at the soft harmony of color overhead as a man might stare at the gates of Paradise.

"I can see!" he repeated in a hushed whisper, looking intently at his own hands, the details of his dress, then letting his glance flash around the pillared courtyard.

Suddenly his bright swift look encountered another pair of eyes, and his gaze remained fixed and frowning as he and the healer stood face to face for a long silent minute. Warren's body tingled from head to foot as if he had received an electric shock.

"I have fulfilled my promise," said the healer finally. "You have the gift of sight."

Warren did not reply. His eyes grew cold and stern as he looked at the tall figure in the wine-red burnoose. Repulsion and anger overmastered him so completely that his tongue grew dry and stiff between his set teeth, and he could only look in silence at the narrow face of his companion, with its long slanted black eyes, high cheek-bones, aquiline nose, and the crimson, woman's mouth above the sweeping strength of the jaw.

Such mingled power, subtlety, intellect, and unspeakable vice Warren had never seen in any human countenance, though his long wanderings had brought him in contact with tribes degraded almost beyond imagination. But here was something that, in contrast, made those savage degenerates seem merely unpleasant, unfortunate animals. Here was more than human nature at its lowest dregs. The nerves at the back of Warren's neck stiffened as if iron fingers gripped him; this being in man's image was dark, inhuman, not natural flesh and blood.

Under the hood of the burnoose, oblique narrowed eyes gleamed wrathfully in shadow; Warren met their gaze, refusing to turn aside or let slip his inner resistance to their power. A silent duel was fought in that minute, will against will. The issue was not decisive, for they were disturbed by a sudden cry, and turned to see the wizened figure of an old man standing under one of the arches.

"WARAN! Waran!" The intruder crossed the wide courtyard in joyful haste. "My prayers for thee are answered! Allah hath removed the veil of darkness from thine eyes! *As shukr l'illab*, thou dost surely see once more!" With extravagant unbounded emotion Ibn Sa'ud took Warren's hand and touched it to his lips and forehead. "*Al hamdu l'illab!* Said I not that thine affliction would pass? Ah, how I rejoice with thee!"

Ibn Sa'ud, the wealthy old jewel merchant, had been friend and almost father to Warren since the two met in Tunis some twelve years ago. He turned with a courteous apology for his interruption toward the tall figure in red, but the words died on his lips.

"Thou . . . thou!" Ibn Sa'ud stammered, horror blotting out the benevolent joy on his wrinkled face. "*Ya gomâny,*

it is thou, accursed one! By the life of my beard, I have long sought thee, and now——"

Snatching a two-edged knife from his girdle, Ibn Sa'ud leaped, stabbing viciously at the breast of the tall healer. Warren made an instinctive, hasty movement to stop the merchant, but the healer remained calm and immovable as a statue of bronze. Ibn Sa'ud, as his knife touched the red burnoose, was sent spinning across the room like paper in a high wind, while the knife clanked on the marble floor, its sharp blade a lump of molten metal. A wave of heat, sudden and fierce as the dreaded *gibli* that preludes a sandstorm, beat up against Warren's face, and it seemed as if the healer's burnoose were on fire, so intense and blinding was its color in that moment.

"Fool!" The healer's voice was full of contempt. "There is no knife so keen that it will not turn aside from my heart. As well fight the desert wind as pit such toys against my strength. Touch me once more, and thou wilt lie as shapeless and twisted as thy useless weapon there."

Warren dashed across the courtyard to lift Ibn Sa'ud to his feet, but the Arab drew away and tottered forward to face his enemy.

"*Billab*, I fear thee not! I shall die when Allah wills. What is written, is written! Thou, whose thrice-accursed bones should have crumbled to dust a thousand years ago, I fear thee not! What stolen soul is prisoned in thine evil body now? Whose life burns within thee, thou devil's spawn?"

"Toothless old chatterer!" replied the healer, his eyes mere gleaming slits of light. "Without doubt thy wits are grown feeble as the legs that tremble under thee. I am Saiehh, the World Wanderer; all men know me by that name."

"By Allah and by Allah, no other

treads this earth unto thee, thou fuel for hell's burning! Thou hast another name, and dress, and speech today, but think you another man ever wore a mask like thine—with its soft red woman's mouth, and eyes like the gray wolf when he hunts? I know who and what thou art! My father learned too late to save himself. But this man shall not add another span to thy cursed existence. He shall know this very hour."

The healer waved a slender, supple hand toward Warren.

"There, most wise and venerable prophet, stands the answer to thy words." He turned with a profound salaam to Warren. "In twelve moons' time I return for my payment. May thy work prosper, *sidi*. Be ready to receive me in this room when the last hour of the twelfth moon is come. That is my hour, and you can not escape it, or me. Nor may you leave Kufra now. I advise you not to attempt it, for my servants are strong and sudden, and you will oppose them to your own hurt."

As the red burnoose vanished in the shadow of a deep archway, Ibn Sa'ud plucked Warren's sleeve.

"Is it so? Did *he* give back thy sight?" gasped the little Arab as Warren urged him gently toward a pile of rugs and cushions. "Tell me, my son, didst take thy sight from his evil hands?"

"He healed me, yes."

"*Aie! Aie!* How art thou forsaken of Allah! And the price—the price he asked?"

IBN SA'UD'S pitiable agitation had the effect of steadying Warren. He felt strong and sane once more; the fears and doubts that the healer's strange personality had imposed upon him passed like a cloud from his mental horizon. He felt assured that in less than twelve months

Saiehh would turn up to claim a more substantial reward than he had asked.

No use denying the fellow must possess unusual powers and unusual knowledge to have cured him when so many others had failed. But old races preserved old secrets, as Warren well knew. Modern science was notably defeated now and then by the wisdom of the ancients. His own case was merely another illustration of the fact. Saiehh was an Eastern physician, the mystic touch was part of his stock in trade. A soul! What was a mythical soul compared with two sound invaluable eyes? Oriental jargon and tosh about paying in souls!

"Thou hast no answer, yet I know the price," wailed Ibn Sa'ud. "I know the only price he ever asks—that son of darkness! It was thy soul, thy living soul!"

"Well, yes, that's exactly what he asked," assented Warren, taken aback, "though how on earth you should guess——" He pulled himself up short, on guard against making any more mystery about the healer and his peculiar bargain. "I suppose the man is well known here in Kufra, one of the sacred mad marabouts the people revere just because they are mad."

"No! He is not one of us, not one of our Holy Men whom Allah hath afflicted. He is not a man, as we are men, my son—I swear to that by the seven sacred streams of Paradise. Ah, how art thou lost and betrayed. *Aie! Aie! Aie!*"

The old merchant rocked in misery, wraith-like, shrunken and forlorn, his long white beard brushing his lap. Warren looked at him with pity, but at the same time Ibn Sa'ud's exaggerated laments made him feel more obstinately convinced that the whole affair of the healer and his bargain was fantastic to absurdity.

No doubt this Saiehh was a magician

of sorts, skilled in hypnotism and many time-worn tricks by which he imposed his will upon others. Warren recalled, with a pang of shame, that he had not come through the test very creditably himself.

"Thine ears are closed against my words," reproached Ibn Sa'ud. "Yet must I speak, although every word is poison on my tongue. Tell me, in all the books of old, which thy wisdom hath mastered, hast ever read of one, Abd Dhulma?"

"Abd Dhulma!" echoed Warren. "Yes, but where have you come across that name? How have you found the books in which that name occurs?"

"Not in books have I met him, but in flesh and blood."

Warren stared in speechless surprise and interest. Could the ancient, semi-legendary character of Abd Dhulma really have been perpetuated to this day? All his scholarly interests were aroused. He settled back, drew out his pipe with a momentary pang of joy at this minor pleasure now fully restored to him, and prepared to listen.

"Go on, Ibn Sa'ud," he begged. "Tell me everything you know about Abd Dhulma."

"By the life of my neck, I will tell thee all! He came to my father who was sick of a wound received in a desert foray with the Veiled Ones. My father lay dying before his tent, while I, a boy of ten, watched beside him. I listened for the tread of the Black Camel, death, with a breaking heart. In that hour came a healer, even this one who restored to thee thine eyesight. He promised my father life, and he exacted a price which I was too young to understand. I did not heed their talk, I did not care, save that my father should live."

"Yes," urged Warren gently.

"He lived five years to teach me many

things of wisdom. Then came a moon's uprising when he knew for certain who and what was the healer. I found him stricken, looking at a strange fiery mark upon his hand—the seal of Abd Dhulma, Lord of Fire." Ibn Sa'ud's voice sank to the rustle of dried grasses. "My father told me all concerning his bargain and the price that he would be made to pay."

Warren listened with intense interest. This was an extraordinary survival of old beliefs, and, since his own recent encounter with one of these healers, he could readily understand the baneful influence a type of that sort might exert over his patients. Probably they really did die at certain times ordered by the healers, the power of magnetism and suggestion being almost unlimited under favorable conditions.

"That price was paid," went on the whispering, halting voice at last. "I found my father one day at dawn . . . his eyes were open . . . staring . . . full of horror!"

Warren did not interrupt by the slightest movement, afraid of disturbing the old man's memories.

"And thus that accursed one renews his years, by stealing the soul out of a man's body as one would take a jewel from a pouch."

"Extraordinary!" murmured Warren, under his breath.

"And now thou also must pay to keep life in Abd Dhulma. Thy soul is forfeit to him!"

"You believe, then, that Saiehh and Abd Dhulma are one and the same man? But that's utterly impossible! It's sixty years since you saw the healer you call Abd Dhulma, and the man who cured me is young—thirty, or thirty-five at the most."

"Even so, and is not that the proof of my words? It is Abd Dhulma who bargained with thee, Abd Dhulma the Walk-

er-through-the-centuries! He will steal thy soul even as he plucked my father's from him. *Aie! Aie!*"

"No, no!" urged Warren. "It is a strong likeness that has deceived you. The healer that was here is no doubt of the same blood and kin as the man who dealt with your father; but I can not believe he is the same man."

Ibn Sa'ud rose and gazed mournfully at the speaker.

"I have no more words with which to convince thee of the truth," he said with dignity. "Yet, at the rising of the twelfth moon, that same sign will burn redly on thy hand which told my father his hour was almost come."

DISMISSING Ibn Sa'ud's forebodings as the result of his age, and inborn superstition, Warren plunged into his work, absorbed to the exclusion of all else.

The faded brittle parchments yielded up their secrets one by one. He had never felt more inspired, and he blessed the hour that had brought Saiehh to him. His eyesight was stronger and keener than he ever remembered it; often he would forget to use his magnifying glasses for an hour at a time, and would be amazed to find himself deciphering scripts and maps that had formerly tried his eyes even with artificial aid.

Then he reached a chapter in the Sultan Izzad ben Kari's record that brought back, with a quite peculiar chill of discomfort, the memory of his bargain and of Ibn Sa'ud's warnings.

The first part of the manuscripts had dealt exclusively with the profound wisdom of the true Magi, a wisdom which the Sultan had tried to preserve for himself in writing when he discovered that slowly and insidiously the false Magus, Abd Dhulma, was deflecting the course

of his ambitions. Evidently the Sultan had been a true seeker after knowledge in the beginning, and had followed the stern rule and discipline of the Magi faithfully.

Later, misled by Abd Dhulma, the Sultan relinquished dreams of freedom and happiness for his people, and sought more personal ambitions. He used his magic powers for unworthy ends, causing rare flowers and fruits to bloom in mid-winter, producing wines and luxuries at his feasts beyond the most epicurean imaginings, painting a still lovelier bloom on the beauties of his *barim*. From a wise and noble ruler of a great kingdom, the Sultan sank to the level of a mere necromancer, while Abd Dhulma tempted him further and further into the morass of folly.

At last the Sultan Izzad ben Kari was stricken with leprosy, and all his magic was powerless to make him clean again. Abd Dhulma took advantage of his extremity and offered him the first of those grim bargains by which the Lord of Fire was henceforth to perpetuate his own existence: a further span of life, free of disease, if he would yield up his soul into Abd Dhulma's evil hands.

"Nor might I pass through the gates of my city from the hour that bargain was struck," read Warren in the Sultan's records. *"Abd Dhulma, Lord of Fire, set his barriers against me, so that I might in no way escape the terror of mine end. All my life is spent. All my magic power is spilled like water in the desert. I pass from my kingdom unlamented and accursed."*

Warren read on all through that day and the night that followed, without pausing for food or rest, and dawn found him still at his desk, with desperately weary body and desperately uneasy mind. He recalled the last mocking words of

the healer: "Nor may you leave Kufra now." Was that true? he wondered.

He had not attempted to leave Kufra, so absorbing had been his work, so great his anxiety to guard his precious eyesight by not exposing it again to the glare of the desert sands. He took his sun-helmet, and a pair of dark glasses, and left the house, determined to put the healer's threat to proof at once.

He went to the Bab-es-Shergui, the Gate of the East. His pulses quickened as he approached it; involuntarily he straightened his shoulders and dug his finger-nails into the palms of his hands. By the opened gateway only a sleepy watchman stood, whose greeting ended in a noisy yawn.

As Warren reached the violet shadow cast by the walls across the threshold of the Bab-es-Shergui, he was arrested by a sensation of violent heat, and drew back as from the open mouth of a furnace. The record of the Sultan's despairing attempts to escape from Bokhara, and from his master, Abd Dhulma, seemed to dance before Warren's dazzled eyes.

Eight centuries ago the royal victim had written down those words, and today Warren himself tasted the same agony of helplessness and awe that the Sultan had known. Again and again he strove to pass the unseen barrier, only to draw back with scorched clothing and blistered hands. The watchman looked in mild astonishment at this fresh proof of the madness of the Nazrani, and concluded that to fight the air was but another of the many foolish customs of these dogs of Unbelievers.

Warren goaded himself to try gate after gate, and at each one the same fiery obstacle stretched between him and the freedom of the wide desert beyond. At last one more chance only remained to him, the narrow gate by which camels

were driven into the caravansary. He entered the *fonduk*, passed between the groups of men sitting round their cooking-pots, and came within ten feet or so of the narrow gateway. He took a deep breath, and dashed for it with the energy of despair.

Next moment the natives in the *fonduk* were startled by a loud cry of intolerable agony, and those nearest the gateway saw Warren drop like a stone. He was carried back insensible to his house, and lay there still and silent for many hours. A smell of burning was strong upon him, and his face and hands were scorched and blistered as if he had walked through fire.

At last he returned to consciousness. For days he sat staring in front of him, old and stricken, unable to work, to do anything save to sit silently staring. . . . Stunned, unbelieving, his whole nature rose in revolt against the convictions that were forcing themselves upon him.

AT LAST he turned back to his work again like one possessed. Haggard and thin, he slaved on at the Sultan's records, bitterly grudging every hour his tired body demanded for food and rest. Ibn Sa'ud was the only visitor admitted to his study, and to him alone Warren disclosed the results of his researches. The old man grew, if possible, more frail and wraith-like than before, and would sit for hours in the mosque of Kufra, his lips muttering prayers and verses from the Holy Books, his eyes dim with the slow difficult tears of age.

In Warren's mind, thoughts of the bargain he had made and of the price he must pay grew to an overwhelming ever-present horror. His soul! What did that mean to him, and to Abd Dhulma? What was it that this Master of Magic intended to claim of him in a few short months? A new respect, a new fear of this thing

that was his soul, deepened in Warren's consciousness.

Did the bargain mean that his inner self, his thoughts, his memory, his will, were to be transferred to the healer? Would they become one with the vice, and intellect, and forbidden wisdom that mingled in the dark soul of Abd Dhulma?

Warren shivered in spite of the suffocating heat, and bent with haunted eyes over the ancient manuscripts, striving with growing fear and anxiety to find some word of hope in the black despair of the Sultan's confessions, some suggestion that a loophole existed by which the bargain might be cancelled.

Two-thirds of the yellow parchments were translated now, and each page brought closer and closer the menace of Abd Dhulma's return, until he seemed ever at Warren's side. He was conscious day and night of that narrow face, with its scarlet mocking lips, and long half-shut eyes, whose glance drew a man's soul from his body and sent it whirling into space.

"... so mighty now, to what power may this false Magus attain throughout the centuries to come?" Warren read on feverishly. **TO KNOW ALL. TO DARE ALL. TO WILL ALL. TO KEEP SILENT.** *These four rules of the true Magi he has kept, and the ancient magic lies like a star within his hands. Yet hath he also drawn about him the fires of black, forbidden magic. . . . And now the time approaches when I must be one with Abd Dhulma, living his life, sharing his thoughts, bound for ever to such evil as never man conceived."*

"Living his life, sharing his thoughts——" Warren repeated the words in a whisper, his eyes sick and miserable. "No, no!" he protested, as if the writer of that lament had been stand-

ing there at his side. "No—not that—not that!"

ONE night when only three months were left of the year that Abd Dhulma had allotted, Warren greeted the jewel merchant with a new expression in his eyes. Ibn Sa'ud marked it at once.

"Thou hast made some new discovery?" The Arab's hopeless face brightened. "My son, my son, what hast thou found? Tell me, hath Allah made clear a way of escape for thee?"

"It is a doubtful and dangerous way, if so," returned Warren slowly. "Yet the pages of the manuscript are clear on one point at least. The Sultan left in his Tomb a weapon of destruction which he had neither opportunity nor courage to use. It is all very vague, and the language is so cryptic and cautious that I scarcely know whether there is any real hope or not. This much the Sultan states in plainest terms—he feared to employ that weapon more than he feared to die. It belonged to the Magi, and was used in their sacrificial rites. Also, it brings fearful punishment upon any one who wields it without sufficient strength and daring."

Warren put up a hand to restrain Ibn Sa'ud's joyful emotion. "A sentence follows which I can not decipher—no doubt a warning to the man who uses the weapon, or instructions as to its properties. I have already spent three days and nights trying to discover the meaning of those few words. They must be of vital importance. But I can not understand them—I can not!"

"Allah!" breathed the little merchant. "Do not give thyself to despair, my Waran. Hast thou not read of the dagger? When the time comes, Allah will guide thine arm. What need of more?"

Tell me all concerning this blessed weapon."

"It is concealed in the Tomb. See this——" Warren indicated a roughly outlined sketch in the broad margin of a parchment he held. "The Sultan has used an ancient Chaldean symbol signifying a sword, or knife, or any weapon with a keen cutting edge. The floor of the inner chamber of the Tomb is of polished red sandstone marked out with many magic signs. Under the symbol, repeated here in this sketch, lies the only instrument in the world that can end Abd Dhulma's abnormal existence."

"And thou wilt return to the Tomb to find that weapon?" Ibn Sa'ud's face was transfigured.

"Impossible!" Warren's features grew pinched and haggard. "I find I can not leave Kufra."

"Not leave Kufra! Why thus, my son? If it is money for thy men, and camels, my gold is at all times thine own. And there are many great ones who would provide all thy needs and count themselves happy. What strange thought possesses thee? Indeed thou must leave Kufra, and at once. How wilt thou return in time with the weapon unless thou dost make all speed?"

"Ibn Sa'ud, I can not pass the gates of Kufra," repeated Warren, his voice cold and quiet with the effort he made to be calm. "Every one of the four gates I have tried, even the narrow gate to the *fonduk*. I am prevented from leaving the city," he finished meaningly, his eyes full on Ibn Sa'ud.

"Thou art prevented!" repeated the merchant, dropping his voice. "Aie, by the fires of hell I take thy meaning at last! Abd Dhulma hath closed the gates to thee?"

Warren nodded, his face turned aside from the lamplight, his lean nervous fin-

gers tapping the papers which covered the great table before him.

"I can not describe it very well," he went on. "A wall of flame seemed to cut me off from every gate. I tried to force my way through and fell senseless. It was like being struck by lightning. The Magi guarded their temples in this way, and an intruder was struck down on the threshold if he tried to enter a sacred place. I think that Abd Dhulma was probably standing by me at each entrance, and used his strange control of electricity to keep me back. I did not see him, of course, but to make himself invisible is a child's trick to one so versed in occult arts as Abd Dhulma."

Ibn Sa'ud sat pulling at his long beard, his forehead wrinkled in thoughtful perplexity. At last he looked up with something approaching a smile. "I will make this journey to the Tomb. I will bring back the weapon to thy hand. Thou hast but to give me directions. I will go within three days; as soon as guides are found, and camels brought from pasture and watered, and provisions packed for the journey, then will I go!"

Warren shook his head; words were impossible in answer to such proof of his old friend's devotion. It was unthinkable, of course, that Ibn Sa'ud should face such a terrible ordeal of endurance. The journey to the Tomb was one from which the bravest young tribesman might shrink; for this frail old merchant it would be certain death.

"It makes no difference whether thou sayest yea or nay." Ibn Sa'ud touched Warren's clenched hands understandingly. "Think you it would be easier to see thee taken from me, as my father was taken long years ago? I shall not die on this journey, for Allah hath surely discovered to us this secret that we may destroy Abd Dhulma. I shall return in

safety again to Kufra, *billah!* Do not let us spend strength in foolish words or argument, as do the women of the *barim*. Tell me rather, my son, what needs there for me to do?"

THREE days later, Ibn Sa'ud on a priceless white *mehari*, that aristocrat among camels, rode out of the south gate of Kufra. A picked band of desert-men accompanied him on the trail, and two guides were those who had been with Warren himself on his own expedition to the Tomb; all were seasoned fighters and steeled to the utmost endurance.

Warren stood on the walls of the city to watch the *garfla* depart, the camels strung out in a thin dark line across the desert, moving like a snake among the sand valleys toward the limitless horizon. It cut him to the heart to see Ibn Sa'ud ride out on this perilous journey; and he watched him vanish with small hope of ever seeing him, or any of that valiant little company, again.

Weeks passed. Months melted, and were swallowed up within the hot white walls of Kufra, and Warren worked unceasingly as the thin crescent moons of those last months rose over the lovely oasis-city, grew to red orbs that hung vast and portentous on the rim of the wilderness, then faded, shrank, and vanished.

Sick with restless misery he paced the broad white walls in the hour of the twelfth moon's rising. He looked steadfastly to the south, watching for a cloud of dust on the horizon which might herald Ibn Sa'ud's return. At intervals his gaze flickered irresistibly to a belt of palm-trees, above which the silver rim of the new moon would soon be visible.

His hands clenched in unbearable suspense as dusk deepened to complete darkness. It was coming—coming—every sec-

ond brought it nearer to him. In a moment he should know! The final, damning proof of the healer's power would come now, or——

A glint of light above the palm-trees. Warren held his breath. The moon's tip showed bright and sharp. He sank onto a stone bench, catching his left hand convulsively with his right. The crescent moon rose higher. Warren crouched down, murmuring with white lips:

"No! No! It can not be that!"

The burning, throbbing pain in his left hand increased to agony, as the sky grew bright with stars, and the new moon hung airily in space. At last, with an abrupt desperate movement, he thrust out his hand and looked at it. On its palm a blood-red fiery symbol burned, seal of Abd Dhulma, Lord of Fire. Warren stared at it with death in his heart. Line for line, curve for curve, it was the mark that Izzad ben Kari had both drawn and described in his records—a winged serpent writhing on the arrow that pierced its body. It seemed alive on Warren's shrinking flesh; he felt its poisoned fangs bite to the very bone.

His eyes sought the horizon again. Would the caravan return in time? Would he be granted one last chance to reckon with his inhuman enemy?

His work was done, the year's work for which he had paid so overwhelming a price. And yet it would not have been too great a price perhaps if he might have left behind him that unparalleled record of the Ancient World. But he knew now that he must destroy both the Sultan's manuscripts and his own translations of them. Those long-buried secrets were a legacy too dangerous for the world of today. The old and terrible wisdom must be rediscovered slowly, century by century, as nations gradually learned such stern discipline as had made the vast

power of the Magi possible. His work, the labor of his years, must be sacrificed.

That night, he ordered a great brass bowl to be brought and set down on the delicately patterned mosaic of the paved courtyard. In this bowl he heaped the brittle old manuscripts and with them his own fresh, carefully inscribed pages. Then, taking an unlighted lamp from a wall-niche, he poured oil upon the heaped-up papers in the bowl.

For long minutes he stood looking down at the manuscripts he was about to destroy. If only he had closed that little book he found at Harvard fifteen years ago! He had had his chance like other men. He had chosen the wrong road. Now he must pass out of life—and to what?

His whole body shook violently, and he was obliged to sit down until the fit of nausea and trembling passed. At last, nerving himself afresh, he set alight the mass of papers. As the flames licked up greedily Warren felt the heat in every nerve of his body. The precious parchments crackled and collapsed, settling deeper and deeper in the bowl.

From time to time he stirred the blackened mass so that the flames sprang up afresh, and unburned sheets of yellow parchment and white foolscap caught fire, and curled and writhed and fell to ashes with the rest.

It was done. His lifework was a handful of black dust. All that remained to him now was the price that must be paid.

"To give my life that Abd Dhulma may live on!" he groaned, his somber gaze on the contents of the brass bowl.

THE days dragged past in a march of slow intolerable hours, and Warren went to and fro, to and fro upon the city walls, watching for a cloud of dust in the south, waiting for Ibn Sa'ud to bring

back the only thing on earth that might save him. The long days and hot sleepless nights seemed interminable, yet they flashed past with a cruel speed that Warren would have given worlds to arrest.

The last dawn came. Warren watched the sun roll back the mists from the empty desert with a terror that shook him almost to madness. The next day's sun would shine on this body of his—a robbed and worthless sepulcher. And he, himself, the living thought and brain that was Warren Glenn, would be living still. His personality would be behind those oblique, inhuman eyes that mirrored Abd Dhulma's monstrous ego; his decent human experiences and precious memories caught up into the devilish intelligence of his enemy.

When the sun went down, Warren left the walls, while a pageant of gold and red and purple gave him farewell of the world. He imagined it might, perhaps, be easier to wait through the last terrible hours under his own roof. The peaceful desert was too cruel a contrast with the dark tumult of his mind, its emptiness mocked his longing eyes.

He sat in the courtyard, and watched the unrelenting hours pass. The brass bowl which held the cold dead ashes of his lifework stood close by. He wanted to see that to the end. Those ashes were all that were left of the treasure he had sought, and found, and finally lost for ever.

Once more his mind struggled with the Sultan's cryptic references to the weapon Ibn Sa'ud had gone to find. The phrases, conned so often and carefully before he burned the manuscripts, beat over and over in his memory:

"Between the weapon and him who wields it; Abd Dhulma will drop the blinding veils of many illusions . . . strong indeed must be that one who can

endure his magic . . . a cunning wrist, an arm as strong as steel are naught . . . Abd Dhulma veils the senses, putting to shame the clearness of the eye, the straightness of the aim . . . to fight This One is to fight the wind, and cloud, and changeful sea . . . YET THE MAN WHO HOLDS THIS WEAPON IS MASTER OF THE HOUR."

That fatally untranslated sentence had followed. The line of strange undecipherable words stood out blackly ominous in Warren's memory. "Probably the key to the situation!" he reflected bitterly. "But what matter now? It's too late. My time is up. I have no weapon—no chance of using one if I had it. Ibn Sa'ud must be lying dead somewhere in that cursed desert. Yes, he is dead . . . and in a few minutes I shall be——"

The courtyard darkened. Warren looked up and saw a shadow pass between the arches. He rose to meet Abd Dhulma, who came forward, his tall red-clad figure vivid and dangerous as a pillar of fire.

WARREN faced him, his mind racing back over all he had learned since last he looked into the healer's eyes, those fathomless wells, where points of light flickered like marsh-fires over a black morass.

Abd Dhulma lifted a dark slender hand, motioning him to approach. Warren felt the solid floor sway beneath his feet, and a thousand compelling impulses urged him forward to that waiting figure. He felt his breath coming deep and slow and rhythmic in response to Abd Dhulma's compulsion, and moving abruptly he fought to break through the web of illusion which was closing in about him.

Abd Dhulma gestured again, the slightest, most imperceptible of movements; yet Warren's body, traitor to his will,

stepped stiffly forward in obedience to the command. His thoughts broke up into a thousand swimming stars. He had the sensation of diving into incalculable space, of falling—turning as he fell—swinging in vast giddy circles in an immense void. . . .

The motion ceased with a jolt that brought a sharp cry to his lips. He found himself standing firmly on the tessellated pavement. At that moment he saw Ibn Sa'ud fling himself across the courtyard, a dagger in his thin, shaking hand.

"Allah! I am in time! In his heart, Waran, in his heart!"

One glance Warren gave to the travel-stained emaciated figure, as he grasped the weapon and turned swiftly to face his enemy, his heart lifting in wild new hope, his limbs strong, his brain cool and steady once more.

Abd Dhulma's crimson mouth mocked no longer; its line was grim and unsmiling; his eyes, narrowed to gleaming slits of hate, were fixed on the short broad blade in Warren's hand; all the youth and beauty of his dark face was transformed to venomous fear.

Warren rushed upon him, the dagger poised to strike. He thrust with all his strength, but the dagger seemed to shrink to a child's toy in his hand, and missed Abd Dhulma by many inches, causing Warren to stagger almost to his knees. As he recovered himself, he saw the other's long eyes fixed intently on him, and, for a brief second, he felt the room, with its pillared balcony, swing dizzily about him. He thrust again, but now the blade seemed to bend and coil about his knees and body like a long rope, pinioning him helplessly, while Abd Dhulma stood aside and watched him from under heavy lids.

Warren clutched the strange weapon more tightly, aiming again and again at that tall figure, but the blade turned ice-

cold in his hands, and his numbed fingers were helpless and stiffened to the bone. The Sultan's warning flashed into his mind: "*To fight This One is to fight the wind, the cloud, the changeful sea.*"

He gathered himself together for a fresh attack, determined to shake off the spell of illusions. The face of Abd Dhulma grew dark and terrible; his red burnoose swayed with his swift movements like a fiery cloud, bewildering and dazzling Warren as he sought to plunge the dagger home.

Now . . . now! Warren sprang to take advantage of Abd Dhulma's unguarded moment, but the dagger seemed heavy as lead; it dragged down his arm, wrenching his back and shoulders with a sudden cruel pull; he fell back sick and helpless. For a moment he despaired.

Abd Dhulma's flaming eyes met his in triumph. Goaded beyond fear and weakness by the challenge, Warren sprang forward and struck repeatedly, putting all his failing strength into the blows. He crashed to the floor, for the weapon became light as a flower in his fingers, and the red burnoose brushed past him like a living flame.

Painfully, Warren got to his knees, struggled to his feet once more, his strength running from him like a tide set seaward; but his will clung fast to his purpose even as his fingers clung to the weapon he wielded to his own hurt.

From a great distance he heard Ibn Sa'ud's thin reedy voice calling: "Fight! The hour is almost run! Fight, my Waran!"

Desperately, Warren lunged forward to where the red burnoose flamed before his aching eyes; while Abd Dhulma's face set in hideous effort as he strove to break down his opponent's obstinate resistance.

FROM somewhere in the perfumed dark of the courtyard came the soft deep chime of a clock. Twelve notes rang out . . . echoing . . . solemn. . . .

Warren held fast to his weapon. It had failed him, but he held it in a grip of steel. Instinct, stronger than reason or despair, warned him not to loosen his grip for a second, useless though the dagger seemed.

Abd Dhulma circled bafflingly about him, moving with the dancing flicker of a tall red flame. As Warren stood, breathless and dizzy in the center of the courtyard, Ibn Sa'ud ran eagerly forward, calling out: "The hour is struck. Thou hast won, my Waran!" But, as Abd Dhulma menaced him with swirl of blood-red draperies, the old man stepped back, and Warren heard him mutter: "Now, surely, all is lost! The hour is struck and Abd Dhulma yet lives! Alas, that Waran knows not the Magic of the Blade!"

That sentence—that lost sentence in the manuscript. Warren knew he was fighting as one blindfold. What knowledge those untranslated words might have given him! Ibn Sa'ud spoke truly—he did not know the Magic of the Blade!

Abd Dhulma stood, back up against a massive pillar. It struck Warren that his enemy was leaning heavily against it for support; and, with the thought, he leaped forward to catch Abd Dhulma off guard. So nearly did he achieve it that his dagger slit the red burnoose from breast to hem.

With a snarl, more beast-like than human, Abd Dhulma drew aside. Scorched and blistered, Warren fell at his enemy's feet. Once more the awful agony that had met him at the gates of Kufra struck him down. Shivering and helpless with pain, he waited, his eyes on the tall figure of the Magus.

Abd Dhulma waited also. And now it

was certain that he was glad of a moment's respite. Warren stared—uncertain—afraid to trust the evidence of his senses.

A loud sudden exclamation from Ibn Sa'ud confirmed his own belief. "Ha! He grows old! By Allah and the Prophets, he fails—he grows old! See, he shrivels like a dead leaf! He grows old, *billah*, he grows old at last!"

It was true. Abd Dhulma's dark skin was drawn and puckered around mouth and eyes. The strong column of his throat sagged. The erect muscular body was bowed and shortened.

Warren got to his feet, and stared incredulously. And as he stood dazed and uncertain, Abd Dhulma was upon him. No longer gracefully defensive, the Magus now attacked. Savage and dangerous as a cornered beast he fell upon Warren.

And if Warren had tasted all the pains of hell before, he felt he had not known what torture was until this moment. Abd Dhulma's burnoose flicked about him in lightning strokes, and each light touch seemed to burn him to the bone.

Round and round the two whirled, Warren turning on his own axis to meet the raging, baffling, fiery-red figure of Abd Dhulma. Above the prayers and exhortations of the frantic little merchant, Warren could hear his own voice shouting defiance at his enemy. Beside himself with pain, he spun on his heel, cursing, slashing the air, sweeping his dagger to and fro as if he were mowing grass with a scythe.

Suddenly the tormenting flickering burnoose was stilled. Its billowing folds collapsed and fell about the Magus. Warren stood with feet wide apart to balance himself, his arms hanging heavily, trembling from head to foot. He blinked . . . stared . . . blinked again.

Was *that* Abd Dhulma before him? Was that worn decrepit creature the dread healer? Warren looked incredulously at the old, old man—a haggard skeleton swaying weakly across the courtyard—incredibly ancient, wrinkled, ugly, and tremulous.

Warren's astonishment betrayed him. Surprise loosened the tension of his nerves and muscles. His hands relaxed, his grip on the dagger loosened. In another second the precious weapon would have fallen to the ground.

In time, he saw Abd Dhulma's eyes. They were fixed on the dagger, watching it hopefully as it slipped . . . slipped . . .

In a great flash of illumination, Warren divined the Magic of the Blade! The words of the Sultan had been literally true. *THE MAN WHO HOLDS THIS WEAPON*. . . The whole secret was to *hold* it fast. While it was in his hand Abd Dhulma might threaten and torment, but he could not utterly destroy him.

Another truth dawned almost instantaneously in Warren's quickened brain. If he could hold out long enough with the weapon in his hand, he could starve Abd Dhulma out of his borrowed existence. On the stroke of midnight the Magus should have renewed his term of years—stolen the flame of a living soul to revitalize his age-old body!

As if in answer to the thought, Abd Dhulma's red lips twisted evilly, his long eyes narrowing to slits of malice. He moved forward, his tall figure held stiffly, his feet heavier in their tread.

"You have learned my secret," the healer's voice echoed deep and hollow under the pillared arches, "and you think to match yourself against my centuries of wisdom! Fool! For this you shall suffer greatly when at last you pay your debt to me."

Warren braced himself, and wasted not strength in words. Abd Dhulma thrust his face within a few inches of Warren's own, and the slanting eyes sent their cruel chill to his very brain.

With a cry he recoiled, a horror of darkness enveloping him. He knew his reason could endure no more. A fury of bestial madness crept through his veins . . . rising swiftly . . . overwhelming him. He heard his own voice like the howl of a dog. The impulse to run on all fours . . . to crouch . . . to spring upon his enemy grew to fury.

Who was this enemy? What heavy weight dragged at his right hand . . . holding him back . . . keeping him upright on his feet? . . .

It was a dagger! No, a serpent that twisted in his grip, its wicked head drawn back to strike! He raised his arm to fling off the creature, when Ibn Sa'ud's thin reedy cry recalled him partly to his senses.

"Waran! Waran! Waran!"

Whose was that voice? What name did it call? Warren heard his own snarl of impatient fury at the check, and the shocking sound restored his sanity.

Abd Dhulma's gaze was fiercely concentrated on him, his lips muttering rapid words. Warren found himself shaking his right hand violently, and realized that no snake's head, but the handle of the dagger, was between his fingers.

The dagger! He must not drop the dagger! Mad or sane, he must keep that in his hand. His strength was almost spent. He knew it well—knew his exhausted brain and body could endure no fresh assaults.

But Abd Dhulma was failing too. The evil flickering fires behind his eyes were growing dim, the long oblique eyes themselves were sunk in cavernous sockets. The crimson woman's mouth was colorless, its full curves pinched and sucked

inward. The high cheek-bones protruded yellow and shining above hollow cheeks. The proud aquiline nose showed fleshless as a mummy's.

HEAVILY Warren tried to calculate his chances. How long? How long would it take for the centuries to roll back on his enemy, to put the burden of their years upon the man who had cheated them?

His mind refused the problem. His strength was done. He could fight no more. The Sultan's word's danced like will-o'-the-wisps across his memory . . . *the man who holds the weapon. . . .*

Once more the swimming burning darkness . . . full of whispers . . . full of half-seen faces . . . eyes that stared . . . blazing lidless eyes coming closer and closer. . . . He was surrounded by the Things . . . closer they moved in on him . . . eyes full of hate . . . green slanting eyes. . . .

But he had wings! He could fly up from the circling horror of those eyes! Why did he stand so stupidly grasping a heavy stone in his right hand? It was the weight of the stone that prevented his escape. The fiery eyes were drawing in . . . closer. . . .

"No! Keep off! Keep off!" His hoarse cry of terror drowned the rattle of the stone as he opened his fingers to let it drop to the ground.

The eyes vanished. His own voice was echoing in the courtyard and Abd Dhulma faced him in senile triumph.

Warren heard Ibn Sa'ud's long sorrowful wail. He looked down to see the dagger at his feet. He stooped to pick it up, but its weight was unbelievable. He could not lift the weapon an inch from the tessellated pavement. The Magic of the Blade was lost to him!

He raised his eyes to meet Abd Dhul-

ma's. One brown claw of a hand grasping a carven seat for support, the other hand fumbling at his belt, his enemy stood leering and cackling at his despair.

Dully Warren watched him lift trembling skinny arms above his head, heard the cracked wheezy remnant of the healer's voice. Unable to resist, he found himself moving on slow heavy feet toward his enemy. The fight was ended. Abd Dhulma had won.

Inch by inch, Warren dragged himself across the courtyard. In another minute that obscene and ancient horror in the wine-red burnoose would be transformed—would stand in proud strong youth once more! And he, himself, would be part of that youth. His own soul would live—remembering—behind those rheumy eyes that drew him nearer . . . nearer still. . . .

Now his eyes were on a level with the blinking, drooping eyes of Abd Dhulma. Only a few inches separated his face from the other's twitching features.

The Magus put a pellet in Warren's passive fingers. Warren received it like an obedient child, the glinting fire in the other's eyes drugged him utterly. Cold, ice-green, those eyes still held him fast.

Stiffly he raised the pellet to his lips. This would at last deliver him to Abd

Dhulma, Lord of Fire. Poison! to cut loose the soul from out his body.

Abd Dhulma's lids drooped—lifted with effort—drooped again over the fierce old eyes. Warren stood arrested—awaiting orders. Abd Dhulma's eyes opened widely. Horror was in them . . . they looked through Warren to some unimaginable sight.

With the pellet in it, Warren's hand dropped to his side. A cold weight seemed lifting from his head and heart.

Abd Dhulma swayed, caught at the great carved chair . . . his cold fingers slipping . . . clutching . . . A gurgling moan died in his throat. He strove to speak, to fix his gaze on Warren. Too late. By a few seconds the Magus had been outstripped by Time at last. He fell—his body crumbled, disintegrated, turned to dust. The wine-red burnoose lay, a flat and empty pall, upon the marble floor.

Ibn Sa'ud ran to Warren's assistance, easing him to a pile of cushions, bringing wine and cordials. At length he took up Warren's left hand, peering at it anxiously.

"The Mark is gone!" he cried. "By Allah and by Allah, thou art free! The Walker-through-the-centuries will walk no more!"