

## ANCIENT GODS

"It may all be blamed on Kevin Christopher," muttered Hopkins.

"What on earth are you talking about?" I asked.

"That beastly nightmare that I experienced in Labrador of course," he replied.

"Please elucidate, Dr. Hopkins, for unlike you we cannot read the mind," Wansbrough broke in ironically.

In the deep chairs of Pearson's study we four sat around a blazing grate. Outside the December winds chilled and howled. Billow on billow of leaden grey was piling angrily and grimly around the horizon. Doors and windows rattled a premonitory warning and whirls of drifting snow mixed with the dust of a city street went skirling at intervals by the windows. We were discussing our different activities since our last memorable vacation together. Wansbrough had taken his degree and had embarked on life's journey in Canada. The lives of Pearson and myself, now that we were engaged in the prosaic task of instructing the youth, offered no eventful Odyssey unless a visit to Wembly could be called a romantic quest. And so this startling beginning on the part of Hopkins seemed to tell that adventure had attended at least one of us. Yet Wanny had come very close to spoiling things, and it was some time before Hop began again.

He is one of those peculiar men who do not allow themselves to be rushed into anything. If he has a story to tell, he will tell it in his own time and in his own way, and any facetious interruption is liable to drive him into complete silence.

For some minutes he seemed sunk in contemplation.

"Kevin is married now," he said, "Norah Fitzmaurice. Pretty little thing. Cherwell Edge I think. She did make a conquest of hearts. You all knew her?"

"Yes," I said.

We had indeed all known her and worshipped more or less at her shrine. In fact I had introduced Kevin to her. After that there was no one else. I was glad to hear the news as they suited each other so well,—he strong and tall with laughing Irish eyes,—she fair and very feminine with a divine voice and supreme mastery of the piano. Once I heard her sing at Benediction in the little chapel at the Edge, and I thought of an angel come to earth, but then

I was half in love with her myself. And Kevin, too, was a strange mixture of modern ideas and old romance. I knew him well, probably because he was the only relative I ever discovered over there, and then, like myself, he believed in the Banshee and ghosts. I can remember him at my tea parties holding forth to Mike and Wanny and sometimes to Hopkins, who was much more appreciative, on goblins and fairies, and he never tired of telling of the family ghost or banshee which seemed to be a most faithful retainer, and at times this preternatural follower went so far as to actively intervene at critical moments.

Again we waited on Hopkins.

"Kevin Christopher was to blame for it all," he continued. "I had just finished at the Middlesex Hospital, and was looking forward to some cricket and tennis in Worcestershire when I bumped into Christopher one evening in May at the New Varsity Club. He had a geologist friend with him, VanHelfsdorf, a South African from B. N. C. I think you know him?"

We all assented, and he continued.

"He had a scheme on. He said he knew where there was gold in Ungava. Van Helfsdorf was going along. Would I join? There would be good hunting, fine scenery, a jolly vac, in fact I needed the rest. It would be more exciting than country cricket, etc. And so on a sudden impulse I yielded. Well, I got my things together, and the same week we sailed for Quebec. There we were picked up by a little coaster of about a hundred tons under the command of Captain Martin. There too we met our guide. The trip down was pleasant enough and the only incident was a short call at Tadousac where we mailed our letters and took on our supplies and half a dozen Indians. Martin was to return for us about the end of September.

We disembarked one glorious June afternoon at Port Consolation. The water was the bluest blue, and the deep inlet walled with towering cliffs rivalled Norway's grandest fjords. And then, when sunset came slanting down the forest-filled ravine, lower and lower, until that sombre valley seemed filled with a molten stream of gold flinging and losing itself in the dark and placid waters of the bay. I climbed one of the cliffs—the stars were coming out one by one in a cloudless sky—not a sigh of wind on the whole visible bosom of the earth or sea—but here



it seemed so lonely and cold—even the stars seemed to have lost their friendly twinkle and only glared forbiddingly in the heavy silence—it wasn't material coldness that caused a shiver to run down my spine, but a sort of spiritual chill pervading imponderably the very atmosphere. I felt like I think Satan felt, as described by Milton, among the dim and lonely outposts of Eternity. We camped for the night on a little plain at the base of this huge precipice. In the morning the bay was empty, Martin was gone.

"If you have ever been in the Labrador country, you will know that the land is a plateau for the most part, rising to an elevation of about one thousand feet. In the south it is heavily wooded, but around this part it wears a bleaker aspect and there are leagues on leagues of wind-swept granite plain.

"Our objective was somewhere in the vicinity of a body of water of unknown extent, but of evil repute, and probably for that reason called Devil's Lake. The route mapped out was up the Consolation to Lake Corinne, thence up the Blue Snake (why named I know not), across to the Blackwater which flows into, or is supposed to flow into, Devil's Lake. All day Kevin and Van Helfsdorf pored over a map, making and discussing detours and portages with our guide.

"Jean la Tour, for he boasted an aristocratic name, was a remarkable man. Small, wiry, and keen-eyed, he impressed one with a sense of efficiency and reserve power. But his eyes were my fascination, a cold snapping black, yet they could be tender too, and then, sometimes when he spoke of things, you knew those eyes had seen sights given to few men to see; you knew that Jean La Tour was wise with the wisdom of space and vastness conned from the Book of the North.

"Since the old days of the Golden Fleece, since Cortez, Pizarro, and Raleigh, stories have been springing up of El Dorados awaiting the fortunate and bold discoverer. It is surprising, too, how these legends live, and Labrador was not without its tale. The Company's factors had heard the story, and one, bolder than the rest, marched off one day into the wilderness of Ungava, but he and his party vanished forever. Whether they fell victims of wolves or famine we know not. Indians—no—these feared that part of the north, for they believed it the residence of spirits. Even the Eskimos, who frequent the northern coast of thi

territory, will not venture inland since, they say, devils or monsters lurk in the wild and unexplored waste land of Ungava—waste—in the true Malorian sense. (The Argonauts of 1924 were out to recover a new Golden Fleece.)

"Our travelling was comparatively easy up the Consolation and its tributary the Little Green to Lake Corinne into which the Blue Snake empties. We expected our trials in our ascent of this river, as we had been informed that it was full of rapids and extremely dangerous.

"It was during our ascent of Blue Snake that the first incident happened. We were sitting about the fire just after dusk (we had to have a smudge to keep the mosquitos off) when I noticed a woman standing at Kevin's side. Fair and tall she seemed, and though I knew I must be dreaming, she looked strangely unlike a vision. She seemed to be entreating—I thought Kevin saw her and shook his head. Then she was gone."

"An optical illusion," said Mike.

"So I persuaded myself," Hopkins replied.

"I more or less forgot about her during the next few days. We reached the upper Blue Snake without incident, and completed our portage to the Blackwater, and here we decided to rest a space. It was an eerie place. In front lay the dark and silent river—the other side an inhospitable desert of glacial scarred rock—our own side a fringe of pine forest running into a vast expanse of peat bog where human foot might not tread. All night we heard weird bird calls—now far, now near, the wolves howled mournfully yet exultingly to the moon, and Jack o' Lantern performed mystic evolutions over the swamps. Our Indians suffered a bad attack of nerves and complained that the spirits were abroad. This whole land, so their ancestors said, was accursed, for it was the home of the bad spirits and the animal gods.

"The Blackwater resembles the Saguenay on a small scale. The dark water runs sullenly, and, as we paddled down, the cliffs rose higher and higher on either side, and the landscape became more and more wild and forbidding. About four o'clock on this particular day, our first on the Blackwater, the river broadened out and on the South we saw a sloping beach and clearing. The further end of this expansion was guarded by two great overhanging cliffs of granite towering up at least fifteen hundred feet and entirely devoid of trees. Beyond, as far as we could see, the



land was utterly desolate. We kept on, and were just about to enter this narrow channel through which the water ran menacingly, when a voice hailed us from the clearing. In clear and bell-like tones we all heard a woman call, but strangest of all was what she said: "Kevin Christopher, come here, come here!" I, myself, saw no one—and naturally didn't believe my ears. Nevertheless we were brought to a momentary halt—and well that we were, else we had never returned. For at that moment, with a reverberating clang—echoed and reechoed a hundred times in eerie tones by the beetling cliffs—a huge section of the North Western wall of the gorge plunged into the stream. It was some moments before we recovered our faculties. I noted Kevin and his paleness.

"It was——," whispered he as he wiped the perspiration from his brow. He was very much agitated and I was unable to catch the last part of his remark. When I questioned him he only continued to mutter unintelligibly to himself. We were undoubtedly lucky. One minute more and we would have all been buried under that thousand tons of granite mass. A voice had saved our lives. But our Indians were paralyzed with terror, and so we returned to the sloping shore and made camp.

"The next morning dawned uneventfully enough—though all night we were disturbed by the near exulting and yet mournful wOLF, and once a shadowy form which Jean assured us was a bear appeared for a second in the outer glow of the fire. That night too we heard for the first time what we supposed to be some bird of the bittern family and its note was a low throaty drum like roll which began in the forest quite near us and spread and was answered away in the distance; it was singularly disconcerting and sounded evil and menacing, but luckily it did not continue very long. It reminded me quite a bit of the peculiar little drum that the Swazis use for signalling purposes, but it was not so loud or so sharp in tone. We rose to see spread before us one of Nature's glorious pictures. The East was faintly rosy, but the lake floor was still wrapped in gloom and a lone fading star twinkled uncertainly in the depths. In the stillness we could hear the faint sighing of the wind in the gorge. The star twinkled more feebly and went out—a moment of uneasiness on nature's face—then the western heights were touched with fire—in a moment burst into flame and the sun was up. Away in

the distance the great Northern Diver laughed demoniacally and we turned to prepare breakfast.

In spite of the rest and the invigorating morning air, our Indians were in no condition for travel and we had perforce to postpone getting away for a day at least. Van Hellsdorf proposed looking over the rock face exposed by the previous evening's fall. Kevin and Jean decided on hunting and for want of better occupation I joined the nimrods. In ten minutes we were in the virgin forest.

For an hour we walked but laid eyes on no living creature and strangely, though the wood seemed full of bypaths—trails that completely baffled Jean—who stoutly maintained that those we were following were man made. We had almost given up hope of replenishing the larder and we were moving along through some very fine timber when suddenly we stumbled on a clearing where the most amazing sight met our gaze—I rubbed my eyes—was I asleep? Was I in Yucatan? No. Yet here before us lay a giant pile of masonry identical with those one meets in the Maya country. Kevin was standing in a trance but Jean was visibly perturbed,

"M' Sieurs," he said, "come away, leave it—it is bad."

"Don't worry Jean" I replied "no one has been here for a thousand years."

"Mais non," continued Jean "here live the evil gods."

Then our curiosity got the better of us, and we proceeded to investigate much against Jean's will. It was as we first supposed an old deserted temple. Its proportions were tremendous, and there it stood singularly lone, yet stern and defiant. How it ever came to be dropped in the heart of Ungava is a mystery. I have a theory about that, though it is outside my story. Within we found the expected idols,—hideous monsters carved from stone, one indeed had the distorted countenance, the wielded bow and golden arrows, and the hugh serpent-fold about his waist, which marked his relationship or identity with Huitzilopochtli, the blood-thirsty Aztec god of war. Before him, too, like one finds on the great Teocalli stood the polished stone of sacrifice. There were golden chains and jewels in profusion hanging about the images and on the walls. The temple was remarkably fresh and well



preserved—it seemed to betray none of the dust and decay one would expect from its long neglect.

We are all vandals at heart, and so we removed several ornaments to take back to camp for examination. Soon I got the uncomfortable feeling that these horrible images were following us with baleful glances. As we talked in the presence of these ancient gods, long forgotten, whose people had faded leaving no trace as to their fate, our feelings of uneasiness grew, the idols were watching us with a sort of cold fury, and Kevin said as we trekked back to camp that he expected the priests to re-appear any moment and resume their ancient rites.

We found Van Helfsdorf rather preoccupied. The Indians were sullen and morose, and gave us to understand that they would go no further. We decided to watch them closely as we did not want to be deserted in the wilderness.

But our temple discovery successfully relegated minor matters to the background. There was no longer need to discover an Eldorado. The temple would provide sufficient treasure to make us all rich beyond the dreams of avarice. I was pleased in addition, for now my archaeological proclivities might be allowed full play.

That night we discussed old gods and ruined fanes. VanHelfsdorf told something of the monuments found in South Africa evidently pre-Bantu, by some ascribed to the Egyptians, by others to Sheba and the Abyssinians. Kevin, of course, you have heard on the Druidical remains of Ireland, Anglesea, and Brittany. Jean La Tour had a wonderful tale of the great Temple of the White Indians whose habitat as far as I could gather lies somewhere between the Great Slave district and the Coppermine.

I still had the peculiar sensation of being observed by unseen eyes—I noticed, too, that the Indians were restless and furtive as if sensing some impending danger—and that they remained about the fire much longer than was their wont. During the night I was awakened by the curious feeling that someone was in my tent. I flashed my light around—there was nothing—turned over, and went back to dreamland. Strangely enough though, the others had experienced the same thing. Jean reported that two of our carriers had taken leave of absence unofficially, but that no canoes were missing, and supplies were intact.

After breakfast we made our way back to the old temple. There it lay in the morning sun just as we had left it the night before. I had half expected it to disappear like some old enchanted castle of romance. But once inside there was something different in the atmosphere—there was a subtle indefinable change in things. But we set to work removing gold and precious stones which proved a much more arduous task than we contemplated, and the long shadow fingers of the trees were pointing to sunset before we had accomplished much—I probably was a slack worker, for I was really more interested in the archaeological remains than in the gold. Just before leaving I was making a fresh examination of the Stone of Sacrifice when I discovered, or thought I did, traces of blood upon it.

At the same moment Van Helfsdorf accidentally let fall a lump of metal on an old drum lying beside an idol and then to our startled ears rang out the call of the bittern. We looked at each other in fear and amazement, but just then Kevin called to us excitedly, 'Come and look at the priests.' The human voice reassured us and we went to where Kevin and Jean had entered a chamber on the left wall and there, row upon row in open coffins lay the ancient worshippers of these gods. They were fresh and almost lifelike, indeed they were in a state resembling Bram Stoker's undead Count Dracula and we noted their cruel faces and claw-like hands. It was growing dark and we were compelled to return to camp.

That night we decided to abandon the most of the treasure as we could only carry out a limited amount, and we also doubted whether we should be able to hold our Indians over another night. Our plans were to return to the temple in the morning, box the stuff that we had removed the previous day, and begin our return journey in the early afternoon.

Then we retired. The denizens of the wood were active—and we went to sleep amid the hooting of owls, the mournful howling of the wolves, and the inevitable cry of the drum-like bittern. All the animals seemed calling to each other about us. Towards midnight I was suddenly awakened by the most dreadful screaming and commotion from the direction of our Indians. I immediately leaped out with my automatic and torch to find the rest already on the scene. One Indian was missing, and the remaining



three so terrified that their statements were utterly incoherent. Ultimately we were able to learn that just after midnight one of them awakened, and he thought that he saw a bear approaching them. He was just about to give the alarm when, according to his description, this shadowy form which he stated to be of gigantic proportions, rose from the ground, seized one of his companions, and made off before he could give the alarm. It was his screams and those of his comrades that had awakened me. The only explanation we could offer ourselves was that our carrier had become the victim of a bear, which on the face of it was very unlikely—and then we could find no tracks. Our Indians were certain that it was the evil Spirit himself, and indeed we were not inclined to argue with them. Needless to say, we slept no more that night.

With the dawning of morning and no trace of the missing man, our main business became one of preparation for return. Tents were struck, and supplies packed. Then, leaving the Indians in charge because we couldn't get them to move, we four began our last trip to the Temple. We never saw Indians, canoes, or supplies again. Luckily we went heavily armed and with a fair amount of ammunition.

"It would be about ten o'clock in the morning when we reached the old Temple by the now well-marked trail. Its solitary splendour struck us anew as we advanced to the entrance. It seemed new—resplendent in the morning sun. It seemed to have returned to the days of its pride when sacrifices were offered daily within its walls. We entered, and then a vision of horror met our gaze. There on the sacrificial altar lay last night's victim with staring eyes, a huge and jagged wound in his breast, and more horrible than all—a sight to turn one sick with terror—we beheld his bleeding heart at the foot of the hideous god—Huitzilopochtli. What sustained us at that moment I don't know, but in a moment, from insane terror we all passed to insane anger, and with whatever instrument that came to hand fell to wrecking this shrine of the devil. How time passed is blank to me, but suddenly I found myself weak and weary and weeping on the huge stone flags outside, and the sun was going down. I looked up—Kevin and Jean were half carrying and half dragging Van Helfsdorf, no longer the reserved English University product, but a

raving hysterical madman. Fortunately we reacted on each others nerves, and in a short time we felt more or less composed. We remembered our canoes—our only thought was escape before we, too, fell victims to the bloodthirsty deities of the past. Gold and jewels were forgotten. Our only hope lay in the canoes and speedy escape. We had just entered the forest when for the third time we met our Lady in White. To Kevin she addressed herself:

“‘It is useless,’ she said, ‘your servants and boats are no more. The things you hear and see are spirits of this evil place. Twice I warned you, and you failed to obey. You are surrounded by the vampire survivals of the mighty priests of the sanguinary gods. There is yet a way, and I will lead you.’”

All that night and far into the next day, we struggled along with our own vision—strangely confident and courageous though we were ready to drop from weariness and hunger. Our guide stopped—she spoke to Kevin.

“Follow this line” she said, pointing south east, “and you are safe. I go and when I come again it must be to mourn. Go home.”

It was Deidri, the Christopher banshee, or so Kevin said, who conducted us through that maze of death. Well we kept on the path indicated but Van Helfsdorf grew weaker and weaker and finally we had to halt. It was hard but nothing could be done and we all realized that poor old Van must take the long lone journey. And then one evening he told us something he had not before revealed. It was this, that the rock fall which had so nearly been the doom of us all was certainly caused by some human or praeter-human agency. His wish for treasure had caused him to conceal his knowledge of such fatal results, for had we known we must surely have retreated.

We buried Van Helfsdorf one hot August morning and prayed for his soul. Should you ever stumble on a stone cairn in that country bearing this simple incscription rudely carved in sandstone:

A. V. H.  
1899-1924  
R. I. P.

you will know that you are on our old trail.



One evening about the third of October we stumbled to the shores of Port Consolation Bay—three ragged weary, and I was almost saying broken men. Captain Martin had already been waiting five days for us and had not intended remaining much longer as that coast rapidly becomes dangerous in the fall of the year. He didn't seem very surprised at our story, and remarked that it only confirmed the legends he had heard. Surely he said the devil must hold sway there. Silently we agreed.

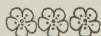
Our run up to Quebec was as uneventful as our trip down. Jean left us at Tadoussac, and Kevin soon took passage to Europe thoroughly cured of the gold fever. What I did you know.

Here Hopkins fished an odd looking green stone covered with characters similar to the Maya hieroglyphics out of his waistcoat pocket and handed it to Mike.

"This is the only proof of our story; it is all that remains of our plunder."

We believed him, and then we began to discuss Christmas presents.

—J. R. H. F.



'Tis a little thing  
To give a cup of water, yet its draught  
Of cool refreshment drained by fevered lips,  
May give a shock of pleasure to the frame  
More exquisite than when Nectarine juice  
Renews the life of joy in happiest hours.

—Thomas Noon Talford.

Without a smile from partial beauty won,  
O what is man? a world without a sun.  
The world was sad—the garden was a wild;  
And Man, the hermit sighed—till Women smiled.

—Thomas Campbell

The elevation of the mind ought to be the principal end of all our studies; which if they do not in some measure effect, they will prove of very little service to us.

—Burke.