
There is a Reaper ...

Charles V. De Vet



The Project Gutenberg eBook of There is a Reaper ..., by Charles V. De Vet

This eBook is for the use of anyone anywhere at no cost and with almost no restrictions whatsoever. You may copy it, give it away or re-use it under the terms of the Project Gutenberg License included with this eBook or online at www.gutenberg.org

Title: There is a Reaper ...

Author: Charles V. De Vet

Illustrator: W. E. Terry

Release Date: September 10, 2009 [EBook #29954]

Language: English

*** START OF THIS PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THERE IS A REAPER ... ***

Produced by Greg Weeks, Stephen Blundell and the Online Distributed Proofreading Team at <http://www.pgdp.net>

There Is A Reaper ...

By
Charles V. De Vet

Doctors had given him just one month to live. A month to wonder, what comes afterward? There was one way to find out—ask a dead man!

THE amber brown of the liquor disguised the poison it held, and I watched with a smile on my lips as he drank it. There was no pity in my heart for him. He was a jackal in the jungle of life, and I ... I was one of the carnivores. It is the lot of the jackals of life to be devoured by the carnivore.

Suddenly the contented look on his face froze into a startled stillness. I knew he was feeling the first savage twinge of the agony that was to come. He turned his head and looked at me, and I saw suddenly that he knew what I had done.

"You murderer!" he cursed me, and then his body arched in the middle and his voice choked off deep in his throat.

For a short minute he sat, tense, his body stiffened by the agony that rode it—unable to move a muscle. I watched the torment in his eyes build up to a crescendo of pain, until the suffering became so great that it filmed his eyes, and I knew that, though he still stared directly at me, he no longer saw me.

Then, as suddenly as the spasm had come, the starch went out of his body and his back slid slowly down the chair edge. He landed heavily with his head resting limply against the seat of the chair. His right leg doubled up in a kind of jerk, before he was still.

I knew the time had come. "Where are you?" I asked.

This moment had cost me sixty thousand dollars.

Three weeks ago the best doctors in the state had given me a month to live. And with seven million dollars in the bank I couldn't buy a minute more.

I accepted the doctors' decision philosophically, like the gambler that I am. But I had a plan: One which necessity had never forced me to use until now. Several years before I had read an article about the medicine men of a certain tribe of aborigines living in the jungles at the source of the Amazon River. They had discovered a process in which the juice of a certain bush—known only to them—could be used to poison a man. Anyone subjected to this poison died, but for a few minutes after the life left his body the medicine men could still converse with him. The subject, though ostensibly and actually dead, answered the medicine men's every question. This was their primitive, though reportedly effective method of catching glimpses of what lay in the world of death.

I had conceived my idea at the time I read the article, but I had never had the need to use it—until the doctors gave me a month to live. Then I spent my sixty thousand dollars, and three weeks later I held in my hands a small bottle of the witch doctors' fluid.

The next step was to secure my victim—my collaborator, I preferred to call him.

The man I chose was a nobody. A homeless, friendless non-entity, picked up off the street. He had once been an educated man. But now he was only a bum, and when he died he'd never be missed. A perfect man for my experiment.

I'm a rich man because I have a system. The system is simple: I never make a move until I know exactly where that move will lead me. My field of operations is the stock market. I spend money unstintingly to secure the information I need before I take each step. I hire the best investigators, bribe employees and persons in position to give me the information I want, and only when I am as certain as humanly possible that I cannot be wrong do I move. And the system never fails. Seven million dollars in the bank is proof of that.

Now, knowing that I could not live, I intended to make the system work for me one last time before I died. I'm a firm believer in the adage that any situation can be whipped, given prior knowledge of its coming—and, of course, its attendant circumstances.

FOR a moment he did not answer and I began to fear that my experiment had failed. "Where are you?" I repeated, louder and sharper this time.

The small muscles about his eyes puckered with an unnatural tension while the rest of his face held its death frost. Slowly, slowly, unnaturally—as though energized by some hyper-rational power—his lips and tongue moved. The words he spoke were clear. "I am in a ... a ... tunnel," he said. "It is lighted, dimly, but there is nothing for me to see." Blue veins showed through the flesh of his cheeks like watermarks on translucent paper.

He paused and I urged, "Go on."

"I am alone," he said. "The realities I knew no longer exist, and I am damp and cold. All about me is a sense of gloom and dejection. It is an apprehension—an emanation—so deep and real as to be almost a tangible thing. The walls to either side of me seem to be formed, not of substance, but rather of the soundless cries of melancholy of spirits I cannot see.

"I am waiting, waiting in the gloom for something which will come to me. That need to wait is an innate part of my being and I have no thought of questioning it." His voice died again.

"What are you waiting for?" I asked.

"I do not know," he said, his voice dreary with the despair of centuries of hopelessness. "I only know that I must wait—that compulsion is greater than my strength to combat."

The tone of his voice changed slightly. "The tunnel about me is widening and now the walls have receded into invisibility. The tunnel has become a plain, but the plain is as desolate, as forlorn and dreary as was the tunnel, and still I stand and wait. How long must this go on?"

He fell silent again, and I was about to prompt him with another question—I could not afford to let the time run out in long silences—but abruptly the muscles about his eyes tightened and subtly a new aspect replaced their hopeless dejection. Now they expressed a black, bottomless terror. For a moment I marveled that so small a portion of a facial anatomy could express such horror.

"There is something coming toward me," he said. "A—beast—of brutish foulness! Beast is too inadequate a term to describe it, but I know no words to tell its form. It is an intangible and evasive—thing—but very real. And it is coming closer! It has no organs of sight as I know them, but I feel that it can see me. Or rather that it is aware of me with a sense sharper than vision itself. It is very near now. Oh God, the malevolence, the hate—the potentiality of awful, fearsome destructiveness that is its very essence! And still I cannot move!"

The expression of terrified anticipation, centered in his eyes, lessened slightly, and was replaced, instantly, by its former deep, deep despair. "I am no longer afraid," he said.

"Why?" I interjected. "Why?" I was impatient to learn all that I could before the end came.

"Because ..." He paused. "Because it holds no threat for me. Somehow, someday, I understand—I know—that it too is seeking that for which I wait."

"What is it doing now?" I asked.

"It has stopped beside me and we stand together, gazing across the stark, empty plain. Now a second awful entity, with the same leashed virulence about it, moves up and stands at my other side. We all three wait, myself with a dark fear of this dismal universe, my unnatural companions with patient, malicious menace.

"Bits of ..." He faltered. "Of ... I can name it only *aura*, go out from the beasts like an acid stream, and touch me, and the hate, and the venom chill my body like a wave of intense cold.

"Now there are others of the awful breed behind me. We stand, waiting, waiting for that which will come. What it is I do not know."

I could see the pallor of death creeping steadily into the last corners of his lips, and I knew that the end was not far away. Suddenly a black frustration built up within me. "What are you waiting for?" I screamed, the tenseness, and the importance of this moment forcing me to lose the iron self-control upon which I have always prided myself. I knew that the answer held the secret of what I must know. If I could learn that, my experiment would not be in vain, and I could make whatever preparations were necessary for my own death. I had to know that answer.

"Think! Think!" I pleaded. "What are you waiting for?"

"I do not know!" The dreary despair in his eyes, sightless as they met mine, chilled me with a coldness that I felt in the marrow of my being. "I do not know," he repeated. "I ... Yes, I do know!"

Abruptly the plasmatic film cleared from his eyes and I knew that for the first time, since the poison struck, he was seeing me, clearly. I sensed that this was the last moment before he left—for good. It had to be now!

"Tell me. I command you," I cried. "What are you waiting for?"

His voice was quiet as he murmured, softly, implacably, before he was gone.

"We are waiting," he said, "for *you*."

THE END

Transcriber's Note:

This etext was produced from *Imagination Stories of Science and Fantasy* August 1953. Extensive research did not uncover any evidence that the U.S. copyright on this publication was renewed. Minor spelling and typographical errors have been corrected without note.

End of Project Gutenberg's There is a Reaper ..., by Charles V. De Vet

*** END OF THIS PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THERE IS A REAPER ... ***

***** This file should be named 29954-h.htm or 29954-h.zip *****
This and all associated files of various formats will be found in:
<http://www.gutenberg.org/2/9/9/5/29954/>

Produced by Greg Weeks, Stephen Blundell and the Online
Distributed Proofreading Team at <http://www.pgdp.net>

Updated editions will replace the previous one--the old editions
will be renamed.

Creating the works from public domain print editions means that no one owns a United States copyright in these works, so the Foundation (and you!) can copy and distribute it in the United States without permission and without paying copyright royalties. Special rules, set forth in the General Terms of Use part of this license, apply to copying and distributing Project Gutenberg-tm electronic works to protect the PROJECT GUTENBERG-tm concept and trademark. Project Gutenberg is a registered trademark, and may not be used if you charge for the eBooks, unless you receive specific permission. If you do not charge anything for copies of this eBook, complying with the rules is very easy. You may use this eBook for nearly any purpose such as creation of derivative works, reports, performances and research. They may be modified and printed and given away--you may do practically ANYTHING with public domain eBooks. Redistribution is subject to the trademark license, especially commercial redistribution.

*** START: FULL LICENSE ***

THE FULL PROJECT GUTENBERG LICENSE
PLEASE READ THIS BEFORE YOU DISTRIBUTE OR USE THIS WORK

To protect the Project Gutenberg-tm mission of promoting the free distribution of electronic works, by using or distributing this work (or any other work associated in any way with the phrase "Project Gutenberg"), you agree to comply with all the terms of the Full Project Gutenberg-tm License (available with this file or online at <http://gutenberg.org/license>).

Section 1. General Terms of Use and Redistributing Project Gutenberg-tm electronic works

1.A. By reading or using any part of this Project Gutenberg-tm electronic work, you indicate that you have read, understand, agree to and accept all the terms of this license and intellectual property (trademark/copyright) agreement. If you do not agree to abide by all the terms of this agreement, you must cease using and return or destroy all copies of Project Gutenberg-tm electronic works in your possession. If you paid a fee for obtaining a copy of or access to a Project Gutenberg-tm electronic work and you do not agree to be bound by the terms of this agreement, you may obtain a refund from the person or entity to whom you paid the fee as set forth in paragraph 1.E.8.

1.B. "Project Gutenberg" is a registered trademark. It may only be used on or associated in any way with an electronic work by people who agree to be bound by the terms of this agreement. There are a few things that you can do with most Project Gutenberg-tm electronic works even without complying with the full terms of this agreement. See paragraph 1.C below. There are a lot of things you can do with Project Gutenberg-tm electronic works if you follow the terms of this agreement and help preserve free future access to Project Gutenberg-tm electronic works. See paragraph 1.E below.

1.C. The Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation ("the Foundation" or PGLAF), owns a compilation copyright in the collection of Project Gutenberg-tm electronic works. Nearly all the individual works in the collection are in the public domain in the United States. If an individual work is in the public domain in the United States and you are located in the United States, we do not claim a right to prevent you from copying, distributing, performing, displaying or creating derivative works based on the work as long as all references to Project Gutenberg are removed. Of course, we hope that you will support the Project Gutenberg-tm mission of promoting free access to electronic works by freely sharing Project Gutenberg-tm works in compliance with the terms of this agreement for keeping the Project Gutenberg-tm name associated with the work. You can easily comply with the terms of this agreement by keeping this work in the same format with its attached full Project Gutenberg-tm License when you share it without charge with others.

1.D. The copyright laws of the place where you are located also govern what you can do with this work. Copyright laws in most countries are in a constant state of change. If you are outside the United States, check the laws of your country in addition to the terms of this agreement before downloading, copying, displaying, performing, distributing or creating derivative works based on this work or any other Project Gutenberg-tm work. The Foundation makes no representations concerning the copyright status of any work in any country outside the United States.

1.E. Unless you have removed all references to Project Gutenberg:

1.E.1. The following sentence, with active links to, or other immediate access to, the full Project Gutenberg-tm License must appear prominently whenever any copy of a Project Gutenberg-tm work (any work on which the phrase "Project Gutenberg" appears, or with which the phrase "Project Gutenberg" is associated) is accessed, displayed, performed, viewed, copied or distributed:

This eBook is for the use of anyone anywhere at no cost and with almost no restrictions whatsoever. You may copy it, give it away or re-use it under the terms of the Project Gutenberg License included with this eBook or online at www.gutenberg.org

1.E.2. If an individual Project Gutenberg-tm electronic work is derived from the public domain (does not contain a notice indicating that it is posted with permission of the copyright holder), the work can be copied and distributed to anyone in the United States without paying any fees or charges. If you are redistributing or providing access to a work with the phrase "Project Gutenberg" associated with or appearing on the work, you must comply either with the requirements of paragraphs 1.E.1 through 1.E.7 or obtain permission for the use of the work and the Project Gutenberg-tm trademark as set forth in paragraphs 1.E.8 or 1.E.9.

1.E.3. If an individual Project Gutenberg-tm electronic work is posted with the permission of the copyright holder, your use and distribution must comply with both paragraphs 1.E.1 through 1.E.7 and any additional terms imposed by the copyright holder. Additional terms will be linked to the Project Gutenberg-tm License for all works posted with the permission of the copyright holder found at the beginning of this work.

1.E.4. Do not unlink or detach or remove the full Project Gutenberg-tm License terms from this work, or any files containing a part of this work or any other work associated with Project Gutenberg-tm.

1.E.5. Do not copy, display, perform, distribute or redistribute this electronic work, or any part of this electronic work, without prominently displaying the sentence set forth in paragraph 1.E.1 with active links or immediate access to the full terms of the Project Gutenberg-tm License.

1.E.6. You may convert to and distribute this work in any binary, compressed, marked up, nonproprietary or proprietary form, including any word processing or hypertext form. However, if you provide access to or distribute copies of a Project Gutenberg-tm work in a format other than "Plain Vanilla ASCII" or other format used in the official version posted on the official Project Gutenberg-tm web site (www.gutenberg.org), you must, at no additional cost, fee or expense to the user, provide a copy, a means of exporting a copy, or a means of obtaining a copy upon request, of the work in its original "Plain Vanilla ASCII" or other form. Any alternate format must include the full Project Gutenberg-tm License as specified in paragraph 1.E.1.

1.E.7. Do not charge a fee for access to, viewing, displaying, performing, copying or distributing any Project Gutenberg-tm works unless you comply with paragraph 1.E.8 or 1.E.9.

1.E.8. You may charge a reasonable fee for copies of or providing access to or distributing Project Gutenberg-tm electronic works provided that

- You pay a royalty fee of 20% of the gross profits you derive from the use of Project Gutenberg-tm works calculated using the method you already use to calculate your applicable taxes. The fee is owed to the owner of the Project Gutenberg-tm trademark, but he has agreed to donate royalties under this paragraph to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation. Royalty payments must be paid within 60 days following each date on which you prepare (or are legally required to prepare) your periodic tax returns. Royalty payments should be clearly marked as such and sent to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation at the address specified in Section 4, "Information about donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation."
- You provide a full refund of any money paid by a user who notifies you in writing (or by e-mail) within 30 days of receipt that s/he does not agree to the terms of the full Project Gutenberg-tm License. You must require such a user to return or destroy all copies of the works possessed in a physical medium and discontinue all use of and all access to other copies of Project Gutenberg-tm works.
- You provide, in accordance with paragraph 1.F.3, a full refund of any money paid for a work or a replacement copy, if a defect in the electronic work is discovered and reported to you within 90 days of receipt of the work.
- You comply with all other terms of this agreement for free distribution of Project Gutenberg-tm works.

1.E.9. If you wish to charge a fee or distribute a Project Gutenberg-tm electronic work or group of works on different terms than are set forth in this agreement, you must obtain permission in writing from both the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation and Michael Hart, the owner of the Project Gutenberg-tm trademark. Contact the Foundation as set forth in Section 3 below.

1.F.

1.F.1. Project Gutenberg volunteers and employees expend considerable effort to identify, do copyright research on, transcribe and proofread public domain works in creating the Project Gutenberg-tm collection. Despite these efforts, Project Gutenberg-tm electronic works, and the medium on which they may be stored, may contain "Defects," such as, but not limited to, incomplete, inaccurate or corrupt data, transcription errors, a copyright or other intellectual property infringement, a defective or damaged disk or other medium, a computer virus, or computer codes that damage or cannot be read by your equipment.

1.F.2. LIMITED WARRANTY, DISCLAIMER OF DAMAGES - Except for the "Right of Replacement or Refund" described in paragraph 1.F.3, the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, the owner of the Project Gutenberg-tm trademark, and any other party distributing a Project Gutenberg-tm electronic work under this agreement, disclaim all liability to you for damages, costs and expenses, including legal fees. YOU AGREE THAT YOU HAVE NO REMEDIES FOR NEGLIGENCE, STRICT LIABILITY, BREACH OF WARRANTY OR BREACH OF CONTRACT EXCEPT THOSE PROVIDED IN PARAGRAPH F3. YOU AGREE THAT THE FOUNDATION, THE TRADEMARK OWNER, AND ANY DISTRIBUTOR UNDER THIS AGREEMENT WILL NOT BE LIABLE TO YOU FOR ACTUAL, DIRECT, INDIRECT, CONSEQUENTIAL, PUNITIVE OR INCIDENTAL DAMAGES EVEN IF YOU GIVE NOTICE OF THE POSSIBILITY OF SUCH DAMAGE.

1.F.3. LIMITED RIGHT OF REPLACEMENT OR REFUND - If you discover a defect in this electronic work within 90 days of receiving it, you can receive a refund of the money (if any) you paid for it by sending a written explanation to the person you received the work from. If you received the work on a physical medium, you must return the medium with your written explanation. The person or entity that provided you with the defective work may elect to provide a replacement copy in lieu of a

refund. If you received the work electronically, the person or entity providing it to you may choose to give you a second opportunity to receive the work electronically in lieu of a refund. If the second copy is also defective, you may demand a refund in writing without further opportunities to fix the problem.

1.F.4. Except for the limited right of replacement or refund set forth in paragraph 1.F.3, this work is provided to you 'AS-IS' WITH NO OTHER WARRANTIES OF ANY KIND, EXPRESS OR IMPLIED, INCLUDING BUT NOT LIMITED TO WARRANTIES OF MERCHANTABILITY OR FITNESS FOR ANY PURPOSE.

1.F.5. Some states do not allow disclaimers of certain implied warranties or the exclusion or limitation of certain types of damages. If any disclaimer or limitation set forth in this agreement violates the law of the state applicable to this agreement, the agreement shall be interpreted to make the maximum disclaimer or limitation permitted by the applicable state law. The invalidity or unenforceability of any provision of this agreement shall not void the remaining provisions.

1.F.6. INDEMNITY - You agree to indemnify and hold the Foundation, the trademark owner, any agent or employee of the Foundation, anyone providing copies of Project Gutenberg-tm electronic works in accordance with this agreement, and any volunteers associated with the production, promotion and distribution of Project Gutenberg-tm electronic works, harmless from all liability, costs and expenses, including legal fees, that arise directly or indirectly from any of the following which you do or cause to occur: (a) distribution of this or any Project Gutenberg-tm work, (b) alteration, modification, or additions or deletions to any Project Gutenberg-tm work, and (c) any Defect you cause.

Section 2. Information about the Mission of Project Gutenberg-tm

Project Gutenberg-tm is synonymous with the free distribution of electronic works in formats readable by the widest variety of computers including obsolete, old, middle-aged and new computers. It exists because of the efforts of hundreds of volunteers and donations from people in all walks of life.

Volunteers and financial support to provide volunteers with the assistance they need, are critical to reaching Project Gutenberg-tm's goals and ensuring that the Project Gutenberg-tm collection will remain freely available for generations to come. In 2001, the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation was created to provide a secure and permanent future for Project Gutenberg-tm and future generations. To learn more about the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation and how your efforts and donations can help, see Sections 3 and 4 and the Foundation web page at <http://www.pgla.org>.

Section 3. Information about the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation

The Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation is a non profit 501(c)(3) educational corporation organized under the laws of the state of Mississippi and granted tax exempt status by the Internal Revenue Service. The Foundation's EIN or federal tax identification number is 64-6221541. Its 501(c)(3) letter is posted at <http://pglaf.org/fundraising>. Contributions to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation are tax deductible to the full extent permitted by U.S. federal laws and your state's laws.

The Foundation's principal office is located at 4557 Melan Dr. S. Fairbanks, AK, 99712., but its volunteers and employees are scattered throughout numerous locations. Its business office is located at 809 North 1500 West, Salt Lake City, UT 84116, (801) 596-1887, email business@pglaf.org. Email contact links and up to date contact information can be found at the Foundation's web site and official page at <http://pglaf.org>

For additional contact information:
Dr. Gregory B. Newby
Chief Executive and Director
gnewby@pglaf.org

Section 4. Information about Donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation

Project Gutenberg-tm depends upon and cannot survive without wide spread public support and donations to carry out its mission of increasing the number of public domain and licensed works that can be freely distributed in machine readable form accessible by the widest array of equipment including outdated equipment. Many small donations (\$1 to \$5,000) are particularly important to maintaining tax exempt status with the IRS.

The Foundation is committed to complying with the laws regulating charities and charitable donations in all 50 states of the United States. Compliance requirements are not uniform and it takes a

considerable effort, much paperwork and many fees to meet and keep up with these requirements. We do not solicit donations in locations where we have not received written confirmation of compliance. To SEND DONATIONS or determine the status of compliance for any particular state visit <http://pglaf.org>

While we cannot and do not solicit contributions from states where we have not met the solicitation requirements, we know of no prohibition against accepting unsolicited donations from donors in such states who approach us with offers to donate.

International donations are gratefully accepted, but we cannot make any statements concerning tax treatment of donations received from outside the United States. U.S. laws alone swamp our small staff.

Please check the Project Gutenberg Web pages for current donation methods and addresses. Donations are accepted in a number of other ways including checks, online payments and credit card donations. To donate, please visit: <http://pglaf.org/donate>

Section 5. General Information About Project Gutenberg-tm electronic works.

Professor Michael S. Hart is the originator of the Project Gutenberg-tm concept of a library of electronic works that could be freely shared with anyone. For thirty years, he produced and distributed Project Gutenberg-tm eBooks with only a loose network of volunteer support.

Project Gutenberg-tm eBooks are often created from several printed editions, all of which are confirmed as Public Domain in the U.S. unless a copyright notice is included. Thus, we do not necessarily keep eBooks in compliance with any particular paper edition.

Most people start at our Web site which has the main PG search facility:

<http://www.gutenberg.org>

This Web site includes information about Project Gutenberg-tm, including how to make donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, how to help produce our new eBooks, and how to subscribe to our email newsletter to hear about new eBooks.