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A Question of Identity

By ROBERT BLOCH

Illustration by JOHN STEWART

MY LIMBS were lead. My heart was a great coiled clock that throbbed rather than ticked, ever so slowly. My lungs were metal sponges, my head a bronze bowl filled with molten lava that moved like sluggish quicksilver, back and forth, in burning waves. Back and forth - consciousness and unconsciousness interplaying against a background of slow, dark pain.

I felt just that, nothing more. I had a heart, lungs, body, head - but I felt nothing external; that is, my body did not *impinge* on anything. I was not sitting or standing or walking or lying or doing anything that I could feel. I was just heart, lungs, body, head, alone in darkness that was filled with the pulsing of a muted agony. This was myself.

But who was I?

The thought came; the first real thought, for before that had been only an awareness of being. Now I wondered as to the nature of my being. Who was I?

I was a man.

The word *man* aroused certain associations which struggled through the pain, through the thumping heart and gasping lung sensation. If I was a man, what was I doing? Where was I?

AS IF in response to the thought, awareness increased. I had a body, and therefore I possessed hands, ears, eyes. I must try to feel, hear, see.

But I could not. My arms were lumps of immovable iron. My ears knew only the sound of silence and the throbbing that came from within my tortured body. My eyes were sealed by the leaden weight of enormous eyelids. This I knew, and felt panic.

What had happened? What was wrong with me? Why couldn't I feel and hear and see?

I had been in an accident, and I was lying on a hospital bed under ether. That was one explanation. Perhaps I had been crippled; blinded, deafened, maimed. Only my soul existed faintly, like a whispering

that rustles through the ruins of an old, old house.

But what accident? Where had I been before this? I must have lived. What was my name?

I resigned myself to the darkness as I strove to grapple with these problems, and the darkness was kind. My body and the darkness seemed to be equally detached so that they mingled. It was peaceful - too peaceful for the thoughts that throbbed through my brain. The thoughts fought and clamoured and finally screamed, until I felt myself awaken.

It was the sensation, I vaguely recalled, of finding one's foot "asleep." It spread over my body, so that a pleasant tingling made me aware, bit by bit, of having definite arms and hands, definite chest and pelvis, definite legs and feet.

Their outlines *emerged*, and were defined by that tingling. A burring droned in my spine, as though a dentist's drill had bitten into it. Simultaneously I became aware that my heart was a Congo drum within my chest, my lungs great gourds swelling and sinking in frantic rhythm. I exulted in the pain, for through it I felt myself. That sensation of detachment faded, and I knew that I - complete, intact - lay against softness.

But where?

That was the next question, and sudden energy seemed ready to solve it. My eyes opened. They encountered nothing but a continuation of the blackness which lurks behind the curtains of closed lids. If anything, the blackness was deeper, richer. I could see nothing of myself, and yet my eyes were open. Was I blind?

My ears still heard no sound other than the mysterious inspiration of my own breath.

My hands moved ever so slowly at my sides, rustling against cloth which told me that my limbs were clothed, and yet unblanketed. They moved upward, outward. An inch, two inches, three - and then

they encountered hard, unyielding surfaces on either side. They rose upward, prompted by fear. Six inches, and another unyielding surface of wood. My feet thrust out as I stretched, and through shoe-leather the tips of my toes encountered wood. My mouth opened, and a sound poured forth. It was only a rattle, though I had meant to scream.

For my thoughts whirled around one name - one name that somehow groped through a haze and loomed as the symbol of my unreasoning fear. I knew a name, and I wanted to scream.

Edgar Allan Poe

And then my rattling voice whispered, unprompted, that which I so feared in connection with this name.

"*The Premature Burial*," I whispered. "Poe wrote it. I am - living it!"

I was in a coffin, in a wooden coffin, with the hot stale air of my own corruption reeking in my nostrils, burning in my lungs. I was in a coffin, locked in earth, and yet I was alive.

Then I found strength. My hands had been frantically scratching and clawing at the surface above my head. Now they gripped the sides of my prison and thrust outward with all strength, my legs braced at the foot of the box. My legs, then, kicked. New vigor, the vigor of a madman, rushed through my boiling blood. In sheer frenzy, in an agony born of the fact that I could not scream and give expression to it, I lashed out with both feet at the bottom of the coffin, felt it splinter and give way.

Then the sides cracked, my bleeding fingers clutched at the earth beyond, and I rolled over, burrowing and scrambling at the moist, soft-packed earth. I dug upwards, wheezing in a sort of mindless desperation as I worked. Instinct alone combatted the insane horror which gripped my being and transformed it into the activity which alone could save me.

They must have buried me in a hurry. The earth above my grave was shallow. Choking and half-suffocated, I clawed my way to the top after endless eons of utter delirium during which the dust of the grave covered me and I wriggled like a worm through the dark ground. My hands reached up to form a cavity; then I lunged upward with full strength and burst through to the surface.

I crawled out into silvery moonlight flooding down upon a world of marble toadstools which sprouted richly from

the mounds of grass all about me. Some of the fantastic stone growths were cross-shaped, others bore heads or great urnlike mouths. They were the headstones of graves, naturally, but I saw only toadstools - fat, bloated toadstools of dead-white pallor, reaching unthinkable roots into the ground below to draw forth nourishment.

I lay staring at them, staring back at the pit through which I had come up out of death into life once again. I did not, could not, think. The words "Edgar Allan Poe," and "*Premature Burial*" had come unbidden to my brain, and now for some reason I found myself whispering in a hoarse, dreadful voice, then crooning more loudly, "Lazarus. Lazarus. Lazarus."

GRADUALLY my panting subsided, and I drew fresh strength from the air that sang through my lungs. I stared at the grave again - my grave. It bore no headstone. It was a poor grave, in a poor section of the cemetery; probably a Potter's Field. Nearly on the outskirts of the necropolis it was, and weeds writhed over the poor graves. There was no headstone, and it made me remember my question.

Who was I? It was a unique problem. I had been someone before I died, but who? Surely this was a novel case of amnesia; to return to a new life in the actual sense of the phrase. Who was I?

Funny I could think of words like "amnesia" and yet could not in the least associate them with anything personal in my past. My mind was utterly blank. Did death do this to me?

Was it permanent, or would my mind awaken in a few hours, just as my body had? If not, I was in sore straits. I didn't know my name, or my station, what I had been. For that matter, on reflection, I didn't even know where I was. The names of cities flooded foolishly through my brain. Chicago, Milwaukee, Los Angeles, Washington, Bombay, Shanghai, Cleveland, Chichen Itza, Pernambuco, Angkor Wat, Rome, Omsk, Carthage. I could not associate a single one with myself, or for that matter, explain how I knew those names.

I thought of streets, of Mariposa Boulevard and Michigan Avenue and Broadway and Centre Street and Park Lane and the Champs Elysees. They meant nothing to me.

I thought of proper names. Felix Kennaston, Ben Blue, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Studs Lonigan, Arthur Gordon Pym, James Gordon Bennett, Samuel Butler, Igor Stravinsky -

and they represented no image of myself.

I could see all those streets, visualize all those people, picture all those cities; but myself I could not associate with any of them.

Comedy, tragedy, drama; it was a mad scene to play in a cemetery at nightfall. I had crawled out of a grave without a headstone, and all I knew was that I was a man. And yet who?

My eyes roved over my person, lying in the grass. Beneath mud and dirt I saw a dark suit, torn in places, and discoloured. It covered the body of a tall man; a thin body, poorly muscled and flat-chested. My hands, rustling over my person, were long and leanly muscular; they were not the hands of a labourer. Of my face I knew nothing, though I passed my hand over each feature in turn. One thing I felt certain of: Whatever the cause of my apparent "death," I was not physically maimed.

STRENGTH prompted me to rise. I rose to my feet, stumbled over the grass. For a few minutes I had that drunken floating sensation, but gradually the ground became solid under my feet, I knew awareness of the cool night wind on my forehead, heard with indescribable joy the chirping of crickets from a swamp afar. I walked around the tombstones, gazed at the clouding sky, felt dew and dampness fall.

But my brain was aloof, detached, wrestling with invisible demons of doubt. Who was I? What was I to do? I could not wander strange streets in my dishevelled condition. If I presented myself to authorities I would be put away as a madman. Besides, I did not want to see anyone. This fact I realized quite suddenly.

I did not wish to see lights, or people. I was - different.

It was the feeling of death. Was I still -?

Unable to bear the thought, I frantically groped for clues. I tried every means of awakening dormant memories. Walking endlessly the night through, combatting chaos and confusion, fighting the gray clouds that clung to my brain, I wandered up and down the deserted corner of the cemetery.

Exhausted, I stared at a lightened sky. And then my thoughts fled away, even the confused ones. I knew only one thing - the need for rest, and peace, and forgetfulness. *Was it the death-urge? Had I risen from the grave only to return?*

I neither knew nor cared. Actuated by a compulsion as inexplicable as it was overpowering, I stumbled toward the ruins of my grave and crept inside, burrowing like a mole into the grateful darkness, whilst the earth tumbled in behind me. There was enough air, the thought came, to enable me to breathe while I lay back in the shattered coffin.

My head fell back and I settled in my coffin, to sleep...

The muttering and rumbling died away from dreams I could not remember. They died away from dreams and grew in reality until I sat up, pushing wet earth so that it fell around me. I was in the grave!

Again, terror. Somehow the hope had lurked that this was a dream, and awakening might bring me to grateful reality. But I was in the grave, and a storm howled above. I crawled upward.

It was still night - or rather, instinct prompted me to believe that it was night again. I must have slept the clock around. This storm had kept people from the graveyard, kept them from discovering the torn earth and its inmate. I rose to the surface and the rain lashed me from skies wild with anger.

And yet I was happy; happy for the life I knew. I drank the rain; the thunder enraptured me as though it were a symphony; I marvelled at the lightning's emerald beauty. I was alive!

All about me corpses rotted and sloughed, nor could all the fury of the unleashed elements imbue them with one spark of existence or of memory. My own poor thoughts, my own poor life, were infinitely precious in comparison to the lot of those below. I had cheated worm and maggot; let the storm howl! I would howl with it, share in the cosmic jest.

Vitality in the truest sense of the word, I began to walk. The rain washed the earth-stains from my garments and body. Singularly, I felt no cold, no especial dampness. I was aware of these things, but they did not seem to penetrate. For the first time I realized another odd thing; I was not hungry or thirsty. At least I did not seem to be. Had appetite died with memory? I wondered.

Memory - the problem of identity still pressed. I walked along, impelled by the storm. Still pondering, my feet carried me past the confines of the cemetery. The gale leading me seemed to guide my footsteps out onto the stone sidewalk of a deserted street. I walked, almost without

heeding.

Who was I? How had I died? How revived?

I walked through the rain, down the dark street, alone in the wet velvet of the night.

Who was I? How had I died? How revived?

I crossed a block, entered a narrower street, still stumbling alone with the wind and the laugh of thunder from clouds mocking my bewilderment.

Who was -

I knew. My name - the street told me. Summit Street. Who lived on Summit Street? Arthur Derwin, myself. I was Arthur Derwin, of Summit Street. I used to be - something, I couldn't remember. I had lived, lived for years, and yet all I could recall was my name.

How had I died?

I had been to the séance, and the lights were out, and Mrs. Price was calling to someone. She had screamed something about evil influences, and then the lights had gone on.

They hadn't gone on.

But they *must* have.

They had, but *I* wasn't there.

I had died. Died in the darkness of the séance. What killed me? Shock, perhaps? And then what happened? Mrs. Price had hushed it up. I was alone in the city; I had been buried hurriedly, in a pauper's grave. "Heart failure," the coroner had probably called it. I was laid away. That was it. And yet I was Arthur Derwin, and surely somebody cared.

Bramin Street said the sign in the lightning.

Bramin Street - someone had cared - Viola.

Viola had been my fiancée. She had loved Arthur Derwin. What was her last name? Where had I met her? What did she look like?

Bramin Street.

Again the sign. Unconsciously my feet seemed to have led me down this way. I was walking down Bramin Street without thinking in the storm.

Very well. I would let my feet lead the way. I wouldn't think. My feet would take me to Viola's home through habit. There I would learn. No thinking, now. Just walk through the storm.

I WALKED, my eyes closed to the blackness through which thunder beat. I walked out of death, and I was hungry now. I was hungry and thirsty here in the night, and I was hungry to see Viola and thirsty for

her lips. I had come back from death for her - or was that too poetic?

I came from the grave and went back to sleep in it and rose again and sought the world without memory. It was gruesome and grim and macabre. I died at a séance.

My feet plodded, slopping through rain. I felt no cold, no wet. I was warm inside, warm with the memory of Viola, her lips, her hair. She was a blonde, I remembered. Her hair was coiled sunlight, her eyes blue and deep as the sea, her skin the milky whiteness of a unicorn's flanks. I had told her so, I recalled, when I had held her in my arms. I knew her mouth as a scarlet gate to ecstasy. She was the hunger within me, she the burning beacon of desire that led me back through mists of memory to her door.

I was panting, and did not know it. Within me revolved a wheel that had once been my brain and was now just a grinding round screen, flashing kaleidoscopic images of Viola, of the grave, of a séance and evil presences and inexplicable death. Viola had been interested in mysticism, I had been interested in the occult. We went to the séance. Mrs. Price was a famous medium. I died at the séance and work up in a grave. I came back to see Viola. I came back to find out about myself. I knew now what I was, how I had died. But how revived?

But how revived? Bramin Street. Feet plodding.

And then instinct turned my feet up the pathway to the porch. It was instinct which caused my hand to fumble for the familiar door-knob without knocking, instinct which led me across the threshold.

I STOOD in a hallway, a deserted hallway. There was a mirror there, and for the first time I could see myself. Perhaps that would shock me into complete remembrance and recognition. I looked, but the mirror faded before my gaze into a blur. I felt weak, dazed. But it was due to the hunger within me; the hunger which burned. It was late. Viola wouldn't be downstairs. She would be in her bedroom at this hour.

I went up the stairs, dripping water at every step, walking quite silently aside from the little dripping patter of rills running down to the stair below.

All at once giddiness left me again and I felt strong. I had the feeling that I was ascending the stairs to Destiny; as though once I reached the top I would know the truth of my fate.

Something had brought me from the grave here. Something lay behind this mysterious resurrection. The answer lay above.

I reached the top, turned down the dark, familiar hall. The bedroom door opened beneath my hand. A candle burned at the bedside, nothing more.

And I saw Viola lying there. She slept, incarnate beauty, slept. She was very young and lovely at that moment, and I felt pity for her at what she must know upon awakening. I called softly.

"Viola."

I called softly, and while I did so my brain said the last of the three questions over and over.

"And how revived?" said my brain.

"Viola!" called my voice.

She opened her eyes, allowed life to flood them. She saw me.

"Arthur -" she gasped. "You're dead!" It was a scream, that last.

"Yes," I said softly.

Why did I say "Yes"? I wondered. And my brain whispered, "And how revived?"

She rose up, shuddering. "You're dead - a ghost. We buried you. Mrs. Price was afraid. You died at the séance. Go away, Arthur - you're dead!"

She moaned it over and over. I looked

at her beauty and knew hunger. A thousand memories of that last evening came to me. The séance, and Mrs. Price warning of evil spirits; the coldness which had gripped me in the darkness and my sudden sinking into oblivion. Then this waking, and my search for Viola to appease my hunger.

Not for food. Not for drink. Not for love. A new hunger. A new hunger known only at night. A new hunger that made me shun men and forget my former self. A new hunger that hated mirrors.

A hunger - for Viola.

I moved toward her, very slowly, and my wet grave-clothes rustled as I reached out my hands reassuringly and took her in my arms. I was sorry for her just for an instant; then the hunger came stronger and I bent my head.

The last question rang in my brain once again. "And how revived?" The séance, the threat of evil spirits, answered that question. I answered it myself.

I knew why I had risen from the grave, and who and what I was, as I took Viola in my arms, and my teeth met in her throat. That answered the question.

I was a vampire.

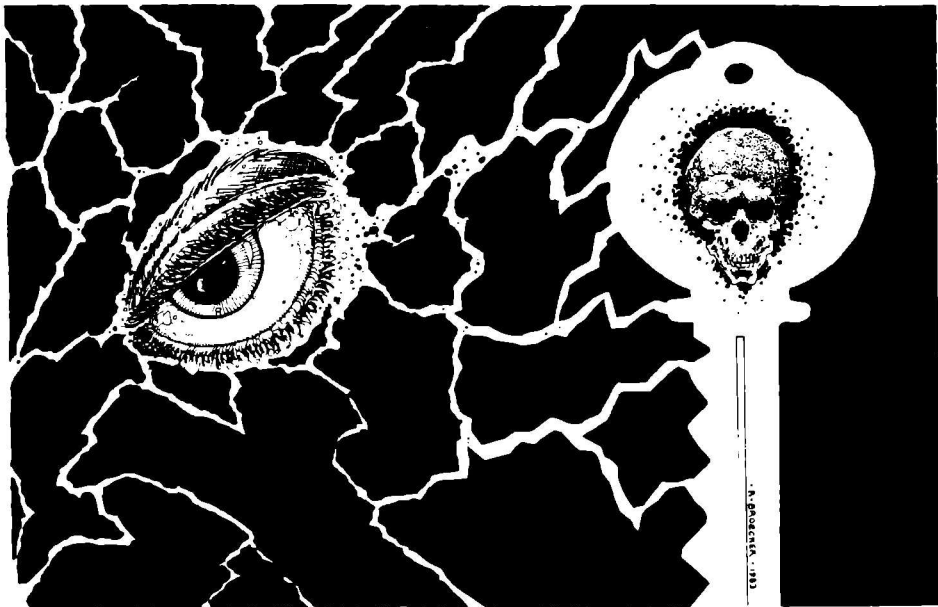
Robert Bloch's name has become synonymous with his 1959 novel, *Psycho*, and of course Alfred Hitchcock's acclaimed movie adaptation. But Bloch should hardly need any introduction to *Fantasy Tales* readers. Since his first professional sale, *The Feast in the Abbey*, in the January 1935 *Weird Tales*, he has written hundreds of short stories and novels, often combining psychological horror and black humour, as well as numerous film, television and radio scripts. His long-awaited sequel *Psycho II* (nothing to do with the movie of the same title) was recently published by Corgi in Britain and Warner in America, and his latest book is a novelisation of *Twilight Zone The Movie*. The story we have published here (like next issue's Bloch tale, *The Sorcerer's Jewel*) originally appeared in *Strange Stories* magazine (for April 1939), under the unlikely pseudonym 'Tarlton Fiske.' Our thanks to Frank H. Parnell for bringing it to our attention and Robert Bloch for permission to reprint it under his byline. As far as we are aware, this is the story's first airing for forty-four years...

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"She had thrown the key ring with all her strength."

You Can Go Now

By DENNIS ETCHISON

Illustration by RANDY BROECKER

THE receiver purred in his hand. He glanced around the bedroom, feeling as if he had just awakened from a long, dreamless sleep.

A click, then recorded music. He had been placed on hold.

There was something he was trying to remember. Everything seemed to be ready, but -

"Thank-you-for-waiting-good-afternoon-Pacific-Southwest-Airlines-may-I-help-you?"

He told the voice about his reservation, he was sure he had one. Would she - Yes. Confirmed.

He thanked her and hung up.

Wait. What was the flight number? He must have written it down - yes. It was

probably in his wallet.

He bent over the coat on the bed, feeling for the slim leather billfold. There, in the breast pocket. He fumbled through business cards, odd papers, credit plates.

No.

But no matter. He would find out when he got there.

Still, there was *something*.

He pulled out the drawer in the nightstand, under the phone, and started poking around, not even sure of what he was looking for.

He found a long, unmarked envelope, near the bottom. He took it and held it tightly as he slipped the coat on, then put it into the inside pocket while he

felt with his other hand for the keys. He patted his outer pocket, but they were not there.

Head down, he left the room.

His bags were stacked neatly by the wall of the foyer, but the keys were not there. He paced through the living room, the kitchen, checking the tables.

He went back to the bedroom, eyes down.

There.

By the door. The key ring was wedged by the bottom edge, between the door and the pile of the carpet, as though it had been flung or kicked there.

He picked it up, walked to the front door, lifted his bags, and went out to the car.

IT WAS still early afternoon, so the freeway would be a clear shot most of the way.

He switched off the air conditioning - who had left it on? - and rolled down the window, stretching out. The seat was adjusted wrong again, damn it, so he had to grope for the lever and push with his feet, struggling to seat the runner back another notch.

He connected through to the San Diego Freeway, made the turn and tried to unwind the rest of the way. He sampled the radio, but it was only more of the same: back scratchings about love or the lack of it and the pleasure or the pain it brought or might bring; maybe, could be, possibly, for sure, always, never, too soon, not soon enough, in the wrong rain or the wrong style. *Wrong, wrong.* He flicked it off.

The airport turnoff would be coming up.

He flexed his arm, checking his watch. But it had stopped. The face was splattered with dry, flaking paint, so it would have been hard to read the numbers, anyway.

He toed the accelerator until he was moving five miles over the speed limit, then ten.

He spotted the terminal-off ramp. He eased over, barely noticing the other lanes.

He was glad to have made such good time; a few extra minutes would mean a drink first, maybe two -

It was funny. The car ahead, at the foot of the ramp. The back-up lights were on, but not the brake lights. He did not slow, because it meant that the signal at the intersection would be -

Headlights. They were headlights.

Headed directly at him.

You can go now, said a voice.

He leaned on the horn, but then there was the heavy, bone-snapping impact and everything was driven into him with such force that the horn stayed on, bleating like a siren, whether or not he would have wanted it to or would even have thought of it or of anything, or anything else at all.

HE WAS late getting to LAX, so he swung at once into the Western parking lot, hoofed it over to the PSA building and sloughed his bags through the metal detector without stopping at the Flight Information desk. A couple of quick questions later, a hostess in a Hallowe'en-coloured uniform was pointing him onto the plane and forward into the smoking section.

He stashed his bags and found himself in a seat on the aisle, facing a pregnant woman and two drugged-looking hyperactive children. They continued to squirm, but slowly, as though underwater, as he tugged at the seat belt, trying to dislodge the oversized buckle from beneath his buttocks.

A double vodka and two cigarettes later he was halfway to Oakland and swinging inland away from the silvery tilt of the sea. He drained the ice against his teeth and snared the elbow of a stewardess.

Another?

Well, the bottles were all put away, but - yes. Of course.

Of course.

The smaller child was busy on the floor in front of the seat, trying to tear out the pages of a washable cloth picture book about animals who wore gloves and had one-syllable names. The child had already stripped the airline colouring book, the oxygen mask instruction card and the air sickness bag into piles of ragged chits. Now, however, he dropped his work and wobbled to his feet, straining to clamber up the seat and under his mother's smock.

But the mother was absorbed in the counting and re-counting of empty punch cups - one, two, three, see? one, two, three - over and over, for the older child, who was working with all his might to slide out from under his seat belt. He would flatten like a limbo dancer until his shoes touched the floor and his knees buckled; then the mother would reach down, hoist him back up and begin counting the cups for him again.

"One, two, three, see? Why don't you

try, Joshua?"

Ignored, the smaller child twisted like a bendable rubber doll and, sucking the ink off two fingers, watched the man across from him.

Who looked away. He was, mercifully, beginning to feel something from the double: a familiar ease, faint but unmistakable. He folded his hands, cold against each other, and tried to unwind while there was still time. He caught a glimpse out the window of farmlands sectioned like the layers of a surgical operation, beyond the flashing tip of the wing.

The child followed his eyes. "Breaking," the child announced.

Idly he watched the wing swaying as it knifed through the air currents. He remembered seeing the wing moving up and down like that on his first flight, how he worried that it might break off until someone had explained to him about expansion and contraction and allowances for stress.

"What's breaking?" said the mother.

"Nothing's breaking, Jeremiah. Look, look what Mommy's..."

The stewardess reappeared. She rattled the plastic serving tray, bending over his lap with the drink.

He reached into his back pocket for his wallet.

"Want more punch!" said the older child.

"More punch?" asked the stewardess.

The wallet wasn't there. He remembered.

He reached inside his coat.

He felt a long envelope, and the billfold. He removed both, peeled off two bills and laid them on the tray.

"Break-ing!" said the smaller child.

At that moment a shadow passed over the tray and the stewardess' wet fingers. He glanced up.

Outside, heavy strands of mist had begun to drift above the wings, temporarily blocking the sun. Looking down, he saw the black outline of the plane passing over the manicured rectangles of land.

Suddenly, sharply, the plane dropped like an elevator falling between floors. Then just as suddenly, it stopped.

"Looks like we might be hitting some turbulence," he said. "Sure you've got a pilot up there?"

His attention returned to the window. Now darker clouds clotted the view, turning the window opaque so that he saw a reflection of his own face within the thick glass.

He heard a voice say something he did not understand.

"What?" he said.

"I said, that's funny," said the stewardess, "like an open grave."

A flash of brilliant light struck outside, penetrating the cloud bank. She stopped pouring the drink. He looked up at her, then at the tray. He noticed that her hands were shaking.

Then a dull, muffled sound from the back of the plane. Then a series of jolts that rattled the bottle against the lip of the glass. He thought he heard a distant crackling, like ants crawling over aluminium foil. Then the quick, shocking smell of smoke wafted up the aisle.

"Oh my God," whispered the stewardess hoarsely, "we've been -"

"I know," he said, strangely calm, "I know," *with tears of blood I tell you I know.*

The tray, ice and drink went flying, and then they were falling, everything falling inward and children, pillows, oxygen masks, bottles, the envelope he still clutched stupidly in his hand, the whole thing, the plane and the entire world were falling, falling and would not, could not be stopped.

IT WAS dusk as he drove into the delta, and the river, washed over with the memory of the dying red of the sun, seemed to be reflecting a gradual darkening of the world.

He wound down the windows of the rented car, cranking back the wind wings so that he could feel the air. The smell of seed crops and of the rich, silted undergrowth of the banks blew around him, bathing him in the special dark parturience of the Sacramento Valley.

He had been away too long.

And soon he would be back, away for a time from the practices of the city, which he had come to think of more and more lately as the art of doing natural things in an unnatural way - something he was afraid he had learned all too well. But now, very soon, he would be back on the houseboat; for a while, at least.

He did not know how long.

He would anchor somewhere near The Meadows. He would tie up to that same old tree in the deep, still water, near the striped bass hole, hearing the lowing of cattle from behind the clutch of wild blackberry bushes on shore...

And this time, he dared himself, he might not go back at all. Not, at least, for a long, long time.

HE DROVE past the weathered, century-old mansions left from the gold days, past the dirt roads marked only by rural mailboxes, past the fanning rows of shadowey, pungent trees, past the collapsing wooden walkways of the abandoned settlement towns, past the broad landmark barn and the whitewash message fading on its doors, one he had never understood:

HIARA PERU RESH.

He geared down and took the last, unpaved mile in a growing rush of anticipation. Rocks and eucalyptus pods rained up under the car, the wheel jerking in his hands, the shocks and the leaf springs groaning and creaking.

Then he saw a curl of smoke beyond the next grove and caught the warm smell of catfish frying over open coals. And he knew, at last, that he was nearing the inlet, the diner and the dock.

He braked in the gravel and walked down the path to the riverbank. He heard the lapping of the tide and the low, heavy knocking of hulls against splintered pilings. Finally he saw the long pier, the planks glistening, the light and dark prows of cabin cruisers rocking in their berths, the dinghies tied up to battered cleats, their slack, frayed ropes swollen where they dipped into the water, the buoys bobbing slowly, the running lights of a smaller, rented houseboat chugging away around the bend, toward Wimpy's Landing.

The boards moved underfoot as he counted the steps, head down, and he smiled, reminding himself that it would take a few hours to regain his sea legs. He reached the spot, a few yards from the end of the docking area, where he knew the *Shelley Ann* would be waiting.

He tried to remember how long it had been. Since the spring. Yes, that was right, Memorial Day weekend. Sometimes friends rode him about paying for the year-round space - why, when he used her only a few times each year? Even Shelley had begun talking that way in the last few weeks. *Cut your losses on that alb-tross!* She had actually said that. But at times like this, coming to her after so many months, he forgot it all. It felt like coming home. It always did.

He looked up.

The space was empty.

His eyes darted around the landing, but she was nowhere that he could see.

Unless - of course. She had been moved. That was it. But why? His boat had never

been assigned any other stall for as long as he had owned her. Something had happened, then. But there had been no long distance call, no word in the mail; Old John would not be one to hide anything as serious as an accident. Would he?

He took a few steps, his hands in his back pockets, scanning the river in both directions.

He could just make out the diner/office/tackle shop through the trees. A dim light was burning behind the peeling wooden panes.

Yes. Old John would know. Old John would be able to tell him the story, whatever it was.

Which was the trouble. Knowing him, it would take an hour, two. A beer, three beers, maybe even dinner. The lonely old man would not let him go with a simple explanation, of that he was sure.

And now he found he could think only of the *Shelley Ann*. He had waited and he had planned and he had come all this way, and at the moment nothing else seemed to matter. He needed to feel her swaying under him, rocking him. Now, right now.

Then. Everything. Would be. All right.

He stepped off the end to the bank, peering under the covered section of the landing, even though he knew that his boat would have been too large to clear the drooping canvas overhang.

He crouched at the edge, feeling suddenly very alone. The river smelled like dead stars. He watched the water purl gently around the floats and echo back and forth over the fine sand. A few small bubbles rode the surface, and a thin patina of oil shone with mirror-like luminescence under the dimming sky, reflecting a dark, swirling rainbow.

No stars were visible yet. In fact, the sky above the trees grew more steely as he watched.

He looked again at the water. He fingered a chip of gravel and tossed it. It made a plunking sound and settled quickly, and as it disappeared he found that he was straining to follow it with his eyes all the way down to the bottom.

He reached into his coat for a cigarette. His hands were still cold, and growing colder.

He felt the cigarette case and drew it out, along with something else.

He pushed a cigarette into his lips and stared at the envelope. It had no name and address on it. He couldn't remember -

He opened it, slipped out a neatly folded

sheet of bond paper, unfolded it.

The leaves of the trees near him rustled, and then a light breeze strafed the water, tipping it with silver.

Still crouching, he fired up the lighter, lit the cigarette and squinted, trying to make out the words. It was written in careful longhand, a letter or - no. Something else.

He read the title.

The paper began to make a tapping sound. He held out his hand. Rain had started to fall, a light rain that danced on the river and left it glittering. As he blinked down at the paper, more drops hit the page. The ink began to run, blurring before his eyes.

The lighter became too hot to hold. He snapped it shut and stood. He heard the rain talking in the trees, on the canvas tarpaulin, on the struts of the rotting pier.

His legs were cramped. He made a staggering step forward. His shoes sloshed the water. He stepped still further, led by the swinging arc of his cigarette tip in the darkness, until the rain found the cigarette and extinguished it.

He dropped it and moved forward, ankle-deep in the river. Is she really there? he thought.

Then he waded out into the low tide, the rain striking around him with a sound like musical notes, the melting paper still gripped in his hand, trailing the water.

DAZED, he glanced around the bedroom.

The receiver was in his hand. By now the plastic had become quite warm against his palm. He stared at it for a moment, then returned it to his ear.

He heard recorded music.

Click.

"Thank-you-for-waiting-good-afternoon-Pacific-Southwest-Airlines-may-I-help-you?"

There was something he wanted to tell her. He had been trying hard to remember, but -

His eyes continued to roam the lower half of the room. Then he spotted the keys, the car keys, wedged between the bottom edge of the door and the pile of the carpet, as though they had been flung or kicked there with great force.

It started to come back to him. Shelley had done it. She had thrown the key ring with all her strength, a while ago. Yes. That had happened.

He raised his head at last, rubbed his

neck.

And saw her, there on the other side of the bed.

She lay with eyes closed, hands at her sides, fingers clutching the bedspread.

He didn't want to disturb her. He modulated his voice, cupping the mouthpiece with his hand.

He told the maddeningly cheerful voice on the phone - it reminded him of a Nichiren Shoshu recruiter who had buttonholed him on the street once - to cancel the reservation. His wife was not ready, would not be ready on time.

Yes. Only one. That's right. Thank you.

He hung up.

He lifted the phone and replaced it on the nightstand.

On the bed, where the phone had been, was an envelope.

He picked it up.

It was empty.

There was a sheet of paper on the floor, where Shelley had crumpled and thrown it.

That was right, wasn't it?

He smoothed it out on his knee.

It was written in a very careful, pains-taking longhand, much more legible than his own. He started to read it.

At the end of the first stanza he paused.

Yes, it was something Shelley had found - no, she had had it all along, saved (hidden?) in her drawer in the nightstand. She had taken it out earlier this morning, or perhaps it had been last night, and had shown it to him, and one of them had become angry and crumpled it onto the floor. That was how it had started.

He read it again, this time to the end.

(1)
brown hair
curling smile
shadowed eyes
the line of your lips...
hair tangled
over me

(2)
warm skin
tender breasts
your mouth and
sweet throat...
hair moist
under me

(3)
there will be more
my eyes tell your eyes
than love of touch

face lost in my face...
do you know what lives
between our breathing palms?

(4)
twisted hair
seashell ear
soft sounds
stopped by my chest...
dark eyes sleep
while I speed to your heart

He turned to his wife.

It was true; she was beautiful. Whoever had written those words had loved her. He studied her intently until he began to feel an odd sense of dislocation, as if he were seeing her for the first time.

He looked again at the paper.

At the bottom of the page, following the last stanza, there was a name.

It was his own.

And in the corner, a date; almost fifteen years ago.

Quietly, almost imperceptibly, he began to cry.

For so much had changed over the years, much more than handwriting. He did not love her now, not in any traditional sense; instead, he thought, there was merely a sense of loving that seemed to exist somewhere between her and his mind.

As he sat there, he forced his eyes to trace the lines of her body, her face: the

shrug of her shoulders, the sweep of her long, slender neck, the surprisingly full jaw and yet the almost weak point of the chin, the slight lips, the sad curve at the corners of her mouth, the smooth, even shade of her skin, the narrow nose, the nearly parallel lines that formed the sides of her small face, the close-set eyes, the thin and almond-shaped lids and delicately sketched lashes, the worried cast of her forehead and the baby-fine wisps at the hairline, the soft down that grew near her temples, the fuller curls that filled out a nimbus around her head, the hair bunched behind her neck, the ends hard and stiff now where the dried brown web had trickled out, just a spot at first but soon spreading onto the pillow after he had lain her down so gently. He had not meant it. He had not meant anything like it. He did not even remember what he had meant, and that was the truth. He had tried to tell her that, practically at the moment it had happened, but then it was already too late. And it was too late now. It would always be too late.

He lowered his head.

When he opened his eyes again, he was looking at the paper.

At the top of the page, perfectly centered, was the title. It said:

YOU CAN GO NOW.

Dennis Etchison is known primarily as a short story writer, superlative in his exploration of oblique nightmare. We could mention over fifty periodicals and anthologies which have published his work, but have space to mention only a few: *Cavalier*, *Rogue*, *Fantastic*, *Weirdbook*, *Whispers*, *New Writings in SF*, *Frights*, *Dark Forces*, *New Terrors*, *Shadows*, *The Year's Best Horror Stories* and so on. Besides his stories, Dennis is also a screenwriter, with adaptations of the works of Ray Bradbury and Stephen King to his credit, as well as several originals from his own tales. In 1980 Bantam had a best-seller with his novelisation of John Carpenter's *The Fog* (published by Corgi in the U.K.) This was followed by novel adaptations of *Halloween II* (Zebra Books), *Halloween III* (Jove/Star) and *Videodrome* (Zebra/NEL) all published under his pseudonym 'Jack Martin'. Another novel, *The Shudder*, awaits publication. New short stories can be found in *Everest House Book of Horror (The Chair)*, *The Year's Best Horror Stories Series XI (Deathtracks)* and *Whispers IV (Home Call)*. *The Dark Country*, Dennis' first collection, published last year by Scream/Press, has gone through three printings and has sold in paperback to Berkley. This superb volume contains 16 of his finest short work, illustrated by Jeff K. Potter. The title story, you will remember, was first published in *Fantasy Tales 8* and subsequently won both the British Fantasy Award and World Fantasy Award for Best Short Story. *You Can Go Now* first appeared in the *Mike Shayne Mystery Magazine* (September 1980) and is also one of the stories featured in the Scream/Press volume and we have great pleasure in making this reprint a readily available sampler.



The Stones Would Weep

By DARRELL SCHWEITZER

Illustration by ALLEN KOSZOWSKI

IN THE time of the death of the Goddess, there lived a boy named Ain Harad, who wanted to be a singer. He was the son of Thain, who had been a soldier, the son of Scidhain, who had served in the Golden Legion of Ambrotæ IV, the Guardian of the Bones of the Goddess. Long before, when the Goddess was yet living, the Harads had tilled the soil since time's beginning.

But change was in the air. All things were in upheaval in the time of the death of the Goddess. Signs and wonders multiplied. It was whispered that soon all men would be free from caste, no longer subservient to lords, that the world would be remade. Therefore Ain Harad aspired to be a singer.

Now when Thain saw his son grow to be slight and slender and not very tall, he knew that his son would never bear arms. Therefore he put him to work in a field. The goats only acknowledged Ain's presence when he poked them with his stick, or stood up and shouted. Although beasts were said to have obtained the ability to speak in the aftermath of the Goddess' passing, they never revealed the secret to him. He and the goats regarded one another with close-mouthed contempt and not a little boredom.

To fill the hours, Ain would play upon a lute which his father had brought back from the wars, and sing songs of his own devising. This was his true calling, as anyone who had ever heard him could attest, save for the goats, who offered no opinion. When he sang he forgot all that was around him, and seemed in a different world. It was as if some fleeting, beautiful spirit possessed him. Perhaps one did. Those were unsettled times.

It was said that when he fell into his trance and played, even the stones would weep at the sound. It was said that the trees bowed down, and streams stopped flowing, pausing to listen. Many things were said in those days.

And it was also said, or at least observed, that when Ain was enraptured with his music and paid no attention to anything else, the goats would wander off in search of tastier pastures.

One evening in his sixteenth year he came to himself again after playing, and not an animal was in sight. Ain rose, slung the lute over his shoulder, took up his staff, and set out patiently to round up his charges. One by one he found them, until he drove the mass of them before him up and down the dry, brown hillsides of Randelcainë, but by then he was far from home, and from the position of the wolf as it swung around the bright star that was its eye, he knew that it was very late. The sun would rise soon. Therefore he resolved to wait, and return in the morning.

He brought the goats into a cave and set a fire at its mouth to keep the dread things of the night away. Then he softly touched the strings of the lute, and sang a song about sailors drifting in an open boat on a wintry night. All are frozen to the oars, stiff, nearly dead as they sit. The darkness around them is impenetrable, the sea also dark, broken with foam-capped waves. The wind chills one to the very bone, until the sensation of land beneath the feet, the warmth of a hearth fire, seem impossible, half-forgotten dreams. But then a light appears and grows. It is a watchtower. The mariners take heart, and the vessel leaps forward as if it had wings, and they reach the harbour and all are safe.

The goats huddled quietly as he sang. They had heard other versions of this song, about men lost in the desert, about mountaineers, and the folk of Randelcainë venturing into the forbidding forests of the north.

Ain looked out over the plains to where the Endless River curved like a vast serpent in the starlight. To the east, it broke through mountains beyond which he

"He had never seen such people before."



had never gone. To the west, it vanished at the horizon. Both the beginning and end of it were mysterious. He had once heard that it flowed in a circle, engirdling the world. He wondered dimly, but did not really care, save that someday he might make a song about it. He had a verse:

*Oh endless river, return your
waters,
Return your waters, to where
they sprang,
Oh endless river, return your
waters,
The Goddess made you, to bring
us home.*

Then, after a pause, he was moved to make another, different song. He scarcely had words for it, but he sang, and the words came. He sang of a longing for something more beautiful than anything on Earth, something to transcend human conceptions of beauty, and he wanted to be raised to this new level, to be reassured, to be made to understand.

There was a tiny portion of his



mind which was not involved in the song, which could analyse the wonder which had settled on him, and this portion now looked out through his eyes, and watched the landscape.

A light, which was not a reflection of a star, appeared in the middle of the river, and began to drift to the nearer bank, faintly blue, with a hint of rosy pink, the colour of the twilight that precedes the sunrise. Then it moved onto the shore, no more distinct, but definitely approaching him. As it climbed the hillside it brightened. All this while he sang, his fingers dancing over the strings. That distant, calculating part of his mind remarked, *as if a fisherman had caught the sun on his hook and were reeling it in.*

More intense grew the light, and still Ain sang, unafraid. The moment of transition was imperceptible, but there was a time when only a huge bubble of light climbed the slope, and another in which a procession of figures moved within a glowing circle.

Still he sang.

He had never seen such people before. There were knights in plumed helmets and golden armour, bearing lances with flowers on their tips instead of blades. An old man, robed in white, led the group, bearing in one hand an ivory staff from which aurorae flickered, showing the way. There were tall musicians, not all of them human. Some had lacy wings they could beat in time, and four arms, enabling them to play on the tambang and the zootibar, and other unearthly instruments. One had a face like an elephant, his lips extended a full arm's length in front of his face, forming a trumpet, and he flew on wide, flapping ears which served as wings. His legs were shrivelled and limp, never used at all. At last came she for whom all this was an entourage, beside whom all paled into drabness, a lady clad in a gown of woven light, the burning white of noontide, the pale blue of a summer sky, the crisp oranges, reds, and browns of autumn, the glittering silver of winter ice. She rode a shapeless beast which rippled over the ground like a wave and flashed the brilliant, harsh blue of electric fire. When she came to a stop and dismounted, the creature vanished, and all the company knelt before her.

They waited at the mouth of the cave, silent as mist, armour and jewels glit-

tering in the light.

Still Ain played and sang. He should have been awed, terrified, but the music burst forth like the ocean out of the earth when the spear of the Goddess struck it, on the first day of her epoch. He had passed a threshold. There was no turning back. He drifted, a leaf in the torrent, unable to understand what was happening to him or why, unable to care.

The Queen - for obviously she was - bade her followers rise, and the musicians joined in the boy's song, and she danced in the middle of a circle of her knights, who banged their lances on the ground in time to her steps.

Now he had before him, concretely, the source of his inspiration, and in her honour, to praise her, he sang with greater power, struggling to describe her in song when mere words were not enough, and she leapt and whirled, and she rose to fill the sky, touching the ends of the world, clad in aurorae.

Somehow, slowly, Ain recovered some of himself. He became fully aware of what he was doing, and he truly saw what his singing had conjured up. And as he watched the lady in amazed wonder, his concentration broke, and he missed a note.

The dancer paused in midstep. The ghostly musicians fell silent. Still filled more with pride and awe that he had summoned such a one, than with any fear, he asked:

"Is the great lady pleased with my song?"

At this the whole company turned toward him, as if noticing his presence for the first time. The lady looked at him. Their eyes met. He was sure her expression was that of an adult reproving a child who has begun well, but gone on to make an utter fool of himself.

She might have smiled. He could not tell. The movement was so slight that before the image could register in his brain, all of that company vanished into the night like sparks cast off from a burning log.

IN THOSE days the Earth was disordered, and the Goddess newly dead, and things were changing, but this didn't stop Ain's father from screaming furiously at him when he arrived home in the middle of the afternoon, dazed, dreamy, stumbling, missing at least half the goats. Zadain, the boy's elder brother and the very image of the soldier Thain was in his youth, was equally wroth. The two of them seized

switches and chased Ain around the yard in front of their farmhouse.

"Fool!" cried Thain, striking.

"Idiot!" added Zadain, striking.

"Good for nothing!" (*Thwack!*)

"Brainless cretin! The goats should be taking care of you!"

All the boy could do was shield his precious lute. When Patek, his mother, wife of Thain, came from behind the barn where she had been feeding the chickens, she discerned the cause of the uproar and yelled, "To think I wasted myself nursing such a dolt! Quick! Give me another switch!"

It was a very bruised and miserable Ain Harad who spent long hours climbing through briars, limping across stony plateaux, scaling hillsides in search of the missing goats. He found them, one by one, but was sure the imps of evil had spent all that morning placing the creatures in the most inaccessible places. There was a pillar of stone in the middle of the plain. It was said to be part of a palace from some ancient time, before the age of the Goddess. It was smooth on all sides. Sure enough, there was a goat on top, gnawing at a weed that grew there.

He was not allowed to sleep in the house that night. When he got home, his family wouldn't feed him. They barred the door. So he sat out under the stars, and tried to play a song. It was a simple one, something he had known for years. But for the first time he could ever remember, he could not play. It was terrifying. All the music was wrung out of him.

Only after many hours of sleepless sorrow did anything come. It was as if breath had returned. He thought of the lady, of the song he had played for her. He could not remember it wholly, but he recalled little parts of it, and the memory of the dancer was his inspiration.

ON THE day before he was to leave for the wars, Zadain came upon his younger brother Ain as he sat on a rock in the middle of a pasture with his face held between his fists. The boy was so caught up in his brooding that he did not notice the goats scattering at his brother's approach. Nor did he mark Zadain's dress: tall leather boots, a blue tunic, a kilt set with metal strips, and a round helmet.

Said the elder to the younger, "Brother, you've always been a bit distracted, and I've always said that maybe your head isn't right. But I know that something

special troubles you. I'm not sure I'll be back, where I'm going, so I'd like to set everything right between us before I leave. So tell me what the problem is."

When Ain saw that his brother was sincere, he unburdened himself of the whole story, but his trust was shattered when Zadain burst into laughter.

"You're haunted by some dancing hussy you met in the hills? You mean that, after all the years in the world, after the Goddess has lived and died, you've finally discovered sex?"

"No! No! It isn't like that at all!"

The goats scattered as he shouted.

"Oh, I see. You mean to say that some lofty, ethereal creature appeared out of heaven, which can never be seen by any of us insensitive, vulgar mortals. Except you, of course -"

"Yes. I mean, no. I mean - not exactly -"

"Goat crap! Now look here, idiot little brother -" he grabbed Ain by the front of his shirt and shook him. "I'll show you what sort of girl she is. I'll go up into those hills this very night, and if she's still there I'll bring her back over my shoulder, like any other piece of loot -"

"No! You can't!"

"I think I can." Zadain shoved him to the ground roughly. The lute, which had been leaning against the rock, fell over with a hollow clangor. "Listen, little boy, when and if you ever grow up, you'll find out what that thing between your legs is good for. You don't play music on it!"

Helplessly Ain watched his brother stalk off in the direction of the hills. And he watched the sun set behind those hills. The stars came out. He stayed in the field, allowing the goats to wander where they would. When he was sure the new glow in the hills was not moonlight, he ran toward them, stumbling over rocks and falling painfully, but always pressing on. His father's wrath didn't frighten him. Nothing else mattered.

At last he came to a spot where, through a trick of echoes, he heard a dim strain of music. He was sure. And there was another sound. It was the lady. He was sure of that too. Was she angry, frightened, startled? No, she was laughing.

The light went out.

AIN got back to the farm, again without most of the goats, just as the sun rose, but before his parents could reach for the switches, Zadain arrived. The

elder brother was not visibly harmed, but he seemed diminished, *emptied* of all but a rudimentary awareness. He walked like a corpse rooted out of its grave. His face was blank. He spoke only when spoken to, and then without any feeling.

The younger brother looked on with knowing dread, but at the same time he was sure this was Zadain's punishment for his blasphemy. *He* would not end up like this...

Then Thain exchanged glances with Patek his wife, and they grabbed Ain by either arm, dragged him out of Zadain's hearing, and demanded of him what he knew. The tale was recounted, and afterwards the father spoke in a low, grim voice.

"And what do you think this lady will think of you now? After this?" He pointed to his eldest son.

"Father, I don't imagine. I can't imagine. But I've heard old stories, about people who loved ladies like that, and I'm sure that if she's pleased with my music, she'll come to me again."

Thain struck him on the face.

"You blind *fool!* Can't you see that your brother is bewitched? I think you are too. I think your brain has melted away. Know this: I've heard of creatures like this lady before, and I haven't been listening to idle stories or ridiculous poetry. I *know* what she, or *it*, really is. She is one of the Bright Powers. The Bright Powers move about with the changing of seasons, like clouds, like wind. They don't care any more for you and me than do the rain or the wind or the sun. They have no minds. Their outward forms are illusions. They are fragments of the Goddess, shards, splinters, motes of dust. When a great image falls, it breaks into a million tiny pieces. These are the Bright Powers. They are remnants of the fair aspect of the Goddess. She had a dark side too, from which came the Dark Powers. Overtly, they are more dangerous, but as you can see, this Bright one didn't do your brother much good."

"Father, I am sure you're wrong. She is a lovely lady."

Thain struck him again.

"Listen! I am not wrong! I know this from more experience than you're ever likely to get! This is my judgement: I forbid you to play the lute, or to sing when you are in the fields, or otherwise summon the Bright Powers. If you do -" he looked back to where Zadain stood, still as a wooden statue, then into his wife's

face, then back at Ain. His voice broke. He seemed about to weep. "If you do... If you do, then I have no more sons. You shall be turned out from this house, driven from all Randelcainé, as is the law. Understand?"

"Yes, Father. I do."

Then Thain took the lute and hung it on a peg inside the house. "There it stays," he said, "until you're over this madness."

A little while later the thing that had been Zadain rose, took up shield and spear, and departed for the wars.

THE boy tended the flock for another two days, and he remained silent all the while, in obedience to his father. But then he knew that the time had come for him to go to the Bright Lady. This would not be blasphemy, he told himself. This would be no violation of the law. He would not summon her, as a village conjurer summons a spirit out of a tainted well. No, he would go to where he had seen her last, and wait. Perhaps he would perish in the waiting, but he would wait all the same, so strong was the compulsion within him.

So he drove the goats home on the evening of the second day, and sat with his parents on the doorstep after supper, in the cool breeze. At first talk was slow and faltering, as all were reluctant to mention Zadain, but then words came quickly and easily. They spoke of everyday things. Thain and Patek were pleased to see their son behaving sensibly once again. Ain was tense, but he dared not reveal it. He was about to go away, as Zadain had gone, but much farther, and perhaps he too would never return. He wished his brother could be with him.

It was nearly midnight when they retired. He lay above his parents in a loft which seemed vast and empty, now that Zadain was gone. But for all the unhappiness it might bring, he knew what he had to do. He put his ear to the floorboards and listened to his mother's gentle breathing and his father's snoring for a long time. Then he sat up, tied on his shoes, wrapped a cloak about himself, and climbed carefully down out of the loft. He paused in the darkness over his sleeping parents. He wanted to lean over and kiss his mother goodbye, but dared not, so he merely slipped away, into the kitchen, where he gathered some bread and cheese and dried meat into a bag, and slung a

waterskin over one shoulder. With tense, breathless stealth, he lifted the lute down from the peg. Then he was gone. The night received him.

In darkness he walked toward the hills. The moon was just up and the sky very clear, so he could see the slopes before him, but the light did not reach into the lowlands yet. Each tree and boulder stood in black outline like some silent sentry in the land of the dead. But he knew the way intimately, having wandered over this ground since he was old enough to walk. Before long he came to the bank of the Endless River. This he followed until he came to where the land sloped upward. He followed the path he had taken on that first night.

He looked up at the cave mouth and saw a light. Fear shot through him. Bandits? Then he saw how foolish his fear had been. The light was a steady glow, not the flickering of firelight, and in it, lesser lights drifted up and down. As he neared it, he could make out upright figures moving. Some of them he knew.

The Bright Lady was waiting for him. He stood before her, all terrors forgotten.

"I am pleased that you have come again," she said. "When the other came...it was not you."

This was the first time he had heard her voice. She spoke the words in a human fashion, but there was something else, like an afterecho, just beyond the range of hearing, a quality of sound not of earth at all.

He did not ask if she wanted him to play again. He merely did, and at once the four-armed musicians joined him on the tambang, the zootibar, the kabukkuk, and others, for which the languages of men have no names. Once more the lady danced, whirling the aurorae around her, and a great force came over Ain, something as elemental as any which moves the earth or causes the seasons to change. He could not comprehend the vastness of it, but he felt it in his music, and played on.

The lady began to move away. The white-robed man with the staff approached Ain, becoming like a cloud drifting over and around him. Then the boy felt himself rise up. He was caught up in the spell of his song, and even that part of his mind which was still conscious knew better than to hesitate for the tiniest instant, but still he dimly perceived that he was being borne aloft in a litter by some of the winged musicians, who held long, curling

horns in their free hands. The knights with the flower-tipped lances were his honour guard. The lady circled him like a bright planet in its course. For a time he seemed to be high in the air. The moon was very close, but then horizons whirled. The stars spun like beads in a top. The ocean rose up to meet him, but there was no coldness, no splash. He had been translated into another form of being, not wholly material. Still he played his song, as the company passed through the earth.

At last they came to a place few men have seen, even in visions, where all solid things, all earth and stone melted away and only light remained, not blinding, but bright beyond seeing, bright on a whole new scale of perception. Brilliant against brilliance, there were shapes and forms, and gradually Ain discerned an overall pattern as he approached the centre of the realm of light: A huge burning rose unfolded before him, swallowed him up, filled the core of the world. This was the home of the Bright Powers.

IT SEEMED that he always sang, and also that he had stopped, as if he were separated into two Ain Harads. There was no sense of time. He could dimly spy the Powers as they moved around him, as they gathered around him, as he drifted suspended in the light. Sometimes a shape would flash intently blue or red or green, and fade away, like an afterimage in his eyes.

ONCE he seemed to be in a long, wide place with many pillars. Fountains spewed gold. He sang. He thought of a court. The Bright Lady sat on a throne, flanked by her knights. The musicians hovered above, high among the pillars.

An image came to him: A tiny fish in a glass bowl, being passed from hand to hand among the splendidly-garbed lords and ladies of the court. They talked and laughed and made intrigues, the fish only faintly aware of them, understanding nothing.

BEAUTIFUL? he said to himself. There were no words, no sounds, no sights, no memories, but something being all, which could not be encompassed by eye or ear or mind.

HE SAT at the lady's side in a small boat, drifting on a mirrored lake, his lute in hand, the strings strangely solid,

more substantial than anything else. He touched them gently. Of their own accord, they made music.

The lady wore something around her neck. She leaned forward, holding it up for him to see. It was a sphere of blue glass. Inside, a tiny boat drifted on a mirrored lake. A boy sat there by a lady, playing a lute. He could hear the music, coming out of the glass ball. The lady sitting beside that other boy held up something. Within, a lake, a boat, and the two of them, and within the next ball, the scene as repeated, and again, and again. Somehow his eyes were made more keen, and he could see into his infinite smallness. His ears were more sensitive, and he could hear the vast harmony of the music from all those strings, from all those fingers.

Once he awoke in darkness and was astonished to feel the chill night air and the lumpy mattress beneath him, and to hear the straw rustle as he sat up in the loft. Eagerly he opened the trapdoor. More than anything else he wanted to behold his parents sleeping down there, to know that they were real, solid -

He set foot on the top rung of the ladder -

- and the light -

- the burning rose, slowly unfolding -

- he awoke into the light, and the lady spoke inside his mind:

"Ain Harad of Randalcainé, son of Thain, surely you have known since you arrived here that all your ideas about this place are... to use an example from your world... like the efforts of a worm in the mud to describe the running, dancing deer. You *are* someone special. Your music alone, of all the products of your race, has attracted the notice of the Bright Kind. Do not ask how this has come to be. It is from within you. You may never understand its source, but the mystery is within you. You thought to move me with song and win my love. That cannot be, but I am pleased in a simple way. Now your song is part of the great dance which is our world. For this I am grateful.

"No, do not ask more. Do not presume to raise yourself higher. We are of the substance of the Goddess, whose nature and death even we cannot understand. Your words have no meaning.

"I wish you no ill, Ain Harad. You have brought me a trivial delight. But now, think of where you came from. Think too of a lady with a beautiful bird in a cage. She has tired of it but does not hate it.

Therefore she sets it free. Think of your world. The door of the cage is open. Grasp the solid ground with your mind.

AND flying on wings of light, the two of them began to pass through the great rose, rising or falling, or drifting in some new direction. He felt the lady's hand on his. There was an illusion of solid flesh and warmth.

He thought of stones and hills and rivers, of men and their noisy cities, of marching armies, of ships under sail, of gulls rising on columns of air, of a time one winter when a dog snatched his slippers and he ran after it into the snow in his bare feet. As he recalled the sharp, clear sensation of cold, the world became more real. He smelled the smoke of the hearth-fire. He reached out with his mind, grasping the land of his birth with all his might, drawing himself toward it.

For an instant he had a vision of a realm opposite that of the Bright Powers, a dark rose, turning at the world's heart, facing the night, no more as his father had described them than the prancing deer or the midnight sky are described by the worm.

The Lady was his beacon through this darkness, until at long last he seemed to be rising from the bottom of a murky sea. There were pinpricks of light above.

Imperceptibly, his motion stopped. There was solid ground beneath him, and his body seemed solid once more. He had his lute over his shoulder and he was standing in the middle of a flat, grassy meadow beneath a clear midnight sky.

There was a flicker of light behind him and he turned, and beheld for the briefest instant, the image of the Bright Lady, like the flame of a candle snuffed out. He was sure - he forced himself to believe - that she was smiling. Then he was alone.

AIN Harad walked out of the field into a town where a strange tongue was spoken. The people there saw by his manner, by the look in his eye, that he had been touched by something beyond nature. They provided him with food and drink, did him reverence, and hurried him on his way. He passed through many lands, always unmolested, seeking his home.

For a long time he delighted in the simplest things, the feel of the dusty road beneath his feet, the good green woods, the chatter of birds as they heralded the

day's dawning. Sometimes he would sit for hours by a stream listening to the rushing waters, or watching tiny fish swimming in a pool. He had words of cheer for all he met, but most avoided him, thinking him a holy pilgrim deep in thought, or a Power, clothed fleetingly in material form.

More than anything else, in those days, he wanted to see his parents again. This drove him on. He thought of his brother Zadain, off in the wars. He even thought of herding goats.

As long as he kept such thoughts in his mind, he continued on his way. But one evening, after a long afternoon's climb up a steep mountain road, he paused at the summit to watch the sunset, and the fading light reminded him of the Bright Lady and her kingdom.

It was as if he had awakened out of a stupor. The memories came flooding back, overwhelming him. With them came a flash of pride: He would be the greatest of all musicians when he portrayed his Lady in song. He would be her equal. She had been wrong about him.

The memories filled his mind. He went deeper into his trance than ever before. That last, detached part of his consciousness was also filled, like a final housetop submerged in a flood. He thought of his parents and his homeland no more.

He came down the mountain singing. The music was far stronger than any human music. It sustained him. He knew no need of food, drink or rest. Wild beasts bowed down before him and, yes, the stones wept.

The people of many towns and cities left their homes and followed him, scarcely aware of what they were doing. The strange procession trampled fields of crops and interrupted battles, and no voice was raised in protest. He crossed stilled seas, walking on the water, and they followed him in ships. Islands were depopulated as they passed.

When at last he came to his own country, the folk of Randelcainé saw before them the largest army ever assembled. The dust from those countless feet filled the sky. This throng joined with another, streaming out of the holy city of Ai Hanlo, as all gathered to hear the boy play. Beneath Ai Hanlo Mountain, the bones of the Goddess stirred.

Then the Guardian of the Bones, the lord of the city, called together what few counsellors had not yet joined the listeners, and said:

"In the days of our forefathers, the body of the Goddess plummeted from heaven,

trailing light across the sky like a comet, crashing deep into Ai Hanlo Mountain. Out of the chasm made by that fall, the newly formed Bright Powers swarmed, filling the nights with their glory. Out of it came too the Dark Powers, enshadowing the days. Men died in ecstasy and terror; their minds and hearts were overwhelmed; and it seemed all Randelcainé would perish. It was only when the Powers had fled away, and the first of the Guardians contained contained the bones in a vault that the survivors could return. Each Guardian tells this to his successor, but now the danger is so great that I tell you."

"Has *another* goddess fallen from the sky?" someone asked.

"No, but a similar duty is upon me."

So the Guardian went forth, dressed in the half white, half black vestments of his office, with his staff of power in his hand and wax plugs in his ears. It was the first time in centuries that the feet of a Guardian had touched the streets of the lower city, at the base of Ai Hanlo Mountain. He walked among the deserted shops and houses, then out the Sunrise Gate, and onto the plain. So great was the crowd that it took him many hours to get within sight of the singer. He stepped over many corpses of people who had been entranced by the music of Ain Harad, but not sustained by it, and had died of hunger and thirst, and, as of old, of ecstasy.

When he stood before the blank-faced lute player, he spoke a word that only the Guardian may know, and held aloft a reliquary containing a splinter of the bones of the Goddess.

Silence struck the crowd, as if the spinning world had suddenly snapped to a halt. All stood frozen in shock. For Ain, returning to himself, it was the most exquisite of all agonies to be wrenched from the contemplation of his Bright Lady. But some remembrance of his former life came to him, and, dazed, not sure where he was or how he had come to be there, he stared with reverent awe into the face of the Guardian, that holiest of men, and paid heed when he leaned over and whispered a command in his ear.

Obediently he rose, and parted in silence from the land of Randelcainé, wandering northward, knowing many hardships as he grew from boy into man, never able to rest until he came to that place where he could resume his playing. He crossed mountain ranges, crossed oceans which would no longer hold him up, on the backs of great

birds and beasts, on the backs of whales, taming each with the word the Guardian had spoken, until at last, very close to death, he came to a warm valley in the middle of the ice country at the top of the world.

There he crawled to the base of a tree and sat up, the warmth of the valley washing over him, bringing faint sensations into his frozen legs. He dreamed of his Bright Lady, and once more touched the strings of the lute. As before, he never stopped, and spirits and Powers gathered around him.

In Randelcainé, those who had heard him could not return to their lives after having known such beauty. Some retired to monasteries, where the brothers worshipped little sounds and shadows and the rustlings of leaves, and conversed with silence. The streets of the city were quiet in that

generation. Those who did not shut themselves away lived out their lives in longing, wishing for nothing greater than to travel beyond death to hear that song again. Thereafter all the departing were dressed in travelling cloaks and walking shoes, and staves were put into their hands, that they might rise from their funeral biers and walk that long road to paradise.

In time Ain was reunited with his family. The lord of the goats became the lord of the dead. Those very near to death could just begin to hear his song, faint and far away, growing louder as they sank from this life.

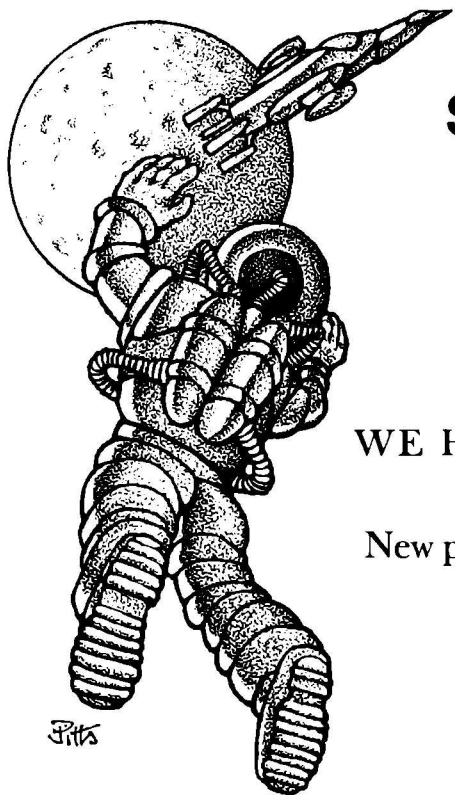
Thus, by the wisdom of the Guardian, the world came a little closer to order amidst the chaos that followed the death of the Goddess.

Darrell Schweitzer is one of the assistant editors of *Amazing* and the SF/Fantasy reviewer on the *Philadelphia Enquirer*. This provides a sideline for his main occupation of fantasy novels and stories. *The Shattered Goddess*, a new novel, was published this year by Starblaze Books; the story you have just read will appear in a collection, *Echoes of the Goddess*, a series of linked sequel stories published by Starblaze in 1984. Starblaze, again, will publish Darrell's re-written version of *The White Isle* (serialized in *Fantastic*) under a new title, *God of Darkness, Prince of Light*. A non-fiction book about Lord Dunsany, *Pathways to Elfland*, is due from Owlswick Press, and next year Borgo Press hopes to issue *Exploring Fantasy Worlds*, an anthology of essays edited by Darrell and with contributions from such luminaries as Michael Moorcock and Poul Anderson. Also next year, Starmont House will publish *Discovering H.P. Lovecraft*, an updated version of his 1976 book, *Essays Lovecraftian*, and another collection of essays, *Discovering Contemporary Horror Fiction*. In the short story line, recent or forthcoming appearances can be found in *Amazing*, *Kadath*, *Weirdbook*, *PulpSmith* and *Night Voyages*.



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The Zulu Lord

By ROBERT E. HOWARD

Illustration by STEPHEN E. FABIAN

THIS is the tale the Kaffirs tell as the tints of twilight melt
And the jackal jeers from the kopje's stones and the night-time veils the veldt;
As the cooking fires begin to glow and the lounging braves match tales,
This is the story the ancients tell in far, fire-lighted kraals:

Chaka sat in his throne of state; no girls that dance or sing
 Bent supple forms in the palace hut for Chaka the Zulu king.
 For Chaka the king was a man of war and his hands with blood were red
 And never a girl could thrill his soul as the sight of the spear-rent dead.

But the idle assagais hung in the rack
 And idle the warring horde
 For the tribes of the veldt-land bent the back
 To Chaka, the Zulu lord.

Then he formed his impis rank upon rank and bid them smite and slay;
 Three thousand warriors of Zululand fell on that bloody day.
 Spear clanged on shield and the squadrons reeled under the hot blue skies;
 From his throne of state King Chaka watched with his gleaming, magical eyes.

And now when the dim stars light their brands
 And the night wind brings its musk
 The ghosts come out of the Shadowlands
 And stalk through the shuddering dusk.

They say, when the night wind stirs the leaves and the starlight gleams and peers,
 That 'tis the rustle of unseen shields and the glitter of shadow spears.
 And there in the dim of the ghostly night, far out on the silent plain,
 The phantom hordes form ranks and charge, retreat, surge on again.

And the moon that rises above the ghosts
 And silvers the dusky land
 Is Chaka, watching the spectral hosts
 That died at his command.

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The Summer House Party

By PETER A.
HOUGH

Illustration by DAVID LLOYD

IT WAS hot. The heat hung like a shimmering mantle over the house and grounds, sucking the moisture from every fibre, every blade of grass. The neat lawns and flower beds were baked hard, criss-crossed with hair-line cracks, like mouths closed tightly in mid-scream.

Beyond the orderly garden, but still a part of the estate, was a small copse. The golden sunlight drove it into deep shadow so that someone could perhaps stand watching near the perimeter, yet not be seen from the house.

"Hell it's hot! One can either go inside and suffocate or sit out here and fry!"

They were out on the stone patio that fronted the entire length of the rear of the large rambling house. The gangly young man who had spoken moved in his seat and fumbled with the collar of his shirt. His greased-back sandy hair glistened in the heat like molten wax.

His sister eyed him impatiently, no doubt wishing he was not there, as she continued a conversation with her father which he had evidently disturbed.

"Well, daddy, won't you at least come and look now it's finished?"

Arthur Chamlegh, big and bulldog-faced, unsuitably dressed in dark serge, clasped his hands on his knees and stared apprehensively towards the copse.

"It's lovely now," Violet continued, mistaking his gaze for silent enthusiasm, "the workmen have done a splendid job cleaning out the dirt and repainting the woodwork. Rodney was thinking of giving them something extra... Daddy, are you all right?"

His face had turned pale and a white



"As he stepped onto the verandah he broke out in perspiration."

handkerchief appeared in one hand to wipe his lips nervously. He was staring ahead as though mesmerised by something beyond the lawns amongst the bushes.

"You should have left that awful place alone, Violet. I'm sorry but you had no right... They haven't disturbed anything else I hope?" There was the hint of a tremor in his voice.

"No, of course not, daddy, but please come and -"

He abruptly stood up, leaving the protection of the sunshade.

"I think I'll go inside and see how they're getting on in the kitchen. It's too damn hot out here."

He was gone in a moment through the open French doors of the drawing room. Violet let out a weary sigh and her brother Frank sniggered. He moved slightly and the sun caught his face, highlighting his freckles, which were a source of embarrassment as he was well past adolescence.

Violet stared at him with mounting anger. Her carefully manicured fingers tugged with annoyance at the string of beads around her long, slim neck.

"Well I'm glad you think it's so funny, Frank! All I was trying to do was cheer daddy up a bit. I thought it would be nice to have the old summer house done up for him on his return from Scotland."

"You mean you thought he would favour you more in his will! Admit it, Violet, you're after the estate when he's gone!"

She jumped up, her petite, round features tinged with anger. "That's not fair! You know well enough that daddy has promised Rodney and I a generous endowment when we marry. You're jealous because you don't get along with him!"

"That will be the day when that little idiot marries you! How long have you known him, seven years? If you want my advice, he's leading you up the garden path!"

"I don't want your advice!" she screamed. "I don't!"

Then she stormed off across the patio, the movement of her legs hampered by the three-quarter length frock she wore.

THE three of them were gathered for dinner with the addition of Rodney Matheson. The large dining room table was a solid dark oak affair that fitted in morosely with the dimly-lit lofty room. Cutlery scraped the willow patterned plates, a salt cellar was put down, a



"No!" he screamed, and lunged forward, grasping wildly in the air."

wine glass re-filled, and the sounds were distorted and magnified by the hard barren walls.

Between courses, while they were sipping their wine, Violet spoke across the table to her fiancé.

"I was telling daddy this afternoon that we had had the summer house refurbished, wasn't I daddy?"

He glanced across at his daughter without replying, then smoothed the napkin on his lap. Rodney, an alert-looking young man with a prominent jaw smiled at his future father-in-law.

"Oh, and did you like it, Mr Chamleigh?"

Violet's eyes dropped to her empty plate. Frank saw his chance and shot an exaggerated grin across the table as he said:

"I'm afraid father hasn't found time to look at it yet. Damn shame, eh?"

Violet looked up sharply and held his gaze for a moment. "I'm sure he will; it was too hot, that's all, wasn't it daddy?"

Arthur Chamleigh glanced around, and said to no one in particular, "I read today in the *Times* that Chamberlain's talking about a war again with Germany. Ah, good, here comes Mrs Meechan with the sweet trolley!"

LATER, much later, a lone figure stepped out into the warm evening air.

The sun was fleeing the sky and the garden lay in deep dusky shadows. The suffocating heat of earlier had subsided, although a warm breeze now filtered through the trees and bushes of the copse.

He walked slowly across the patio and down the stone steps to the lawn, glancing back at the house to see if he was observed. Soon the tall chestnuts and elm trees closed about him as he trod in the failing light along a short neglected path to the summer house. Every step was a sharp pain in his chest, a source of terror that tried to make him return to the sanctuary of the house; but no, he had to see for himself.

They had done a good job. Even before he saw it he could smell the fresh paint mingled with the sweet sickly scents of the trees and bushes.

The summer house had been built on the specifications of his father some fifty years ago. It owed something of its design to an American homestead. Contrary to the popular English fashion, it was rectangular with a long verandah or colonnade along the front. John Chamleigh had had it built on impulse after returning from Texas on a

business trip. The estate had remained in the family for generations, passed down from father to son. Arthur Chamleigh loved the estate as much as his father did, yet he had not set foot in the summer house for nearly forty years.

He reached the short wooden steps and with trepidation stepped off the rich loamy earth. As he stepped onto the verandah he broke out in perspiration which owed something more than to the warm evening. For a moment he gripped one of the wooden supports and inhaled and exhaled deeply.

It was strange out here, he decided, at the summer house in the slowly darkening copse. He thought back over the years of torment this place had caused him. Forty years of pretending that everything was fine, to his wife, his children, everyone. Except himself. The mask always seemed to slip when he caught a glance of himself in the mirror.

The burden seemed heavier with each passing year. He was celebrating his twenty-first birthday when the nightmare began, here in the summer house. He had been different then - an arrogant, spoiled individual used to having his own way. Lord, how he had changed! How the nightmare had sobered him up...

Without thinking, he had turned the handle of the door, and then his feet were echoing off the bare boards. Thank goodness the floor had remained untouched. Same solid firm boards. But then what if the floor had needed repairing too, after all he had suffered, would it have been so bad?

There was a table and two chairs in the room. He eased himself into one and let out a deep sigh that echoed queerly in the building. It was almost dark now. What little light remained crawled across the floor and table from the open door.

He felt suddenly very chilly, and not alone anymore. Perhaps someone had followed him from the house and was watching, although he had heard nothing. Yet he could feel a - presence? - somewhere ahead in the shadows. But he did not want to see...no... He placed his grey head in his hands and softly wept.

IT WAS Arthur Chamleigh's birthday. He was sixty-one. Violet and Rodney decided to take him out for early evening dinner at The Willows, a country club set in the lovely Cheshire countryside. What he did not know was that his celebrations were

not to end there. They had organised something else, and two days earlier Violet had tried to swear her brother to secrecy, but he had merely used the occasion to bait her.

"Don't you dare tell daddy!" She had said. "Rodney and I want it to be a surprise."

"Like the last one, you mean? He wouldn't even go and look at the dratted summer house after your precious Rodney had spent some of his money doing the place up. I take it it was *his* money?"

She jumped up from the chaise-longue and presented her back to him as she went across to the coffee table for her handbag. Her annoyance showed by the way she fumbled with the clasp, and opened a fresh pack of *Craven A* cigarettes.

"There's no need to be sarcastic, Frank. I thought even you would be interested in celebrating daddy's birthday. You know how miserable he's become recently, and with mummy passed away almost two years. He never had any close friends, I know, but I think we should do something for him on his birthday."

"With you and Rodney organising things, of course?"

She spun around, the cigarette smoking from the end of a long tapering holder.

"Come off it, Violet, you know the old man isn't all that fond of me, why pretend?"

She fixed him with a vexatious look. "You never give up Frank, do you?"

Dinner at The Willows was excellent. As they left, Rodney tipped the waiter and pressed half-a-crown into the palm of the doorman.

The house was in darkness as the Aston Martin crunched up the long gravel drive. As soon as the car stopped, several lights suddenly came on and the front door opened, spilling out a crowd of people - people he had not set eyes upon for years.

Their lined, aged faces smiled and congratulated him, offering presents and shaking him with stiff rheumatic hands. They babbled and babbled, and yes, he was in good health, and no, he had had no inkling of his daughter's surprise.

Did they really look so grotesque? They were not as he remembered them, fresh and youthful, just painted wrinkled prunes trying to hang on to a past that slipped through fingers like water. Many had been present at his twenty-first party.

He moved away from the car and felt a hand in his. It felt like Violet's but he

was not sure. It was very cold. He was swept away around the side of the house and across the back lawns by the crowd of wild chattering people. With mounting horror he realised he was being led in the direction of the summer house. Oil lanterns twinkled through the trees as he was carried on by the wave of noisy, gesticulating bodies. He knew there was no escape and that he would have to suffer these dreadful people invited here by a mistake of his daughter's.

He could feel again the pounding of his heart as he was jostled up the steps into the summer house. The table had been pushed to the far end of the room and was now dressed with a marvellous buffet. In the centre was a beautiful cake with his name upon it. He noticed his son near a makeshift bar helping himself to a drink.

Rodney appeared out of nowhere and began lighting the birthday candles on the cake. As Arthur Chamleigh bent over to blow them out, a sudden draft, an icy chill, cut through the warm air and sucked the flames from the candles before he could draw breath.

He turned around and looked at the grey smiling faces, but no one seemed to have noticed anything. Through the scenario of crumpled dinner jackets and tired evening dresses he noticed Violet giving him a smile of encouragement, and then they were upon him again. There was no way out, and he would have to play along with this charade until he could politely leave.

They slapped him on his back, someone poured him a scotch and soda, and he did his best to smile, smile... Out on the verandah dance music began to play on a gramophone, and soon couples were embracing to the strains of the Glenn Miller Orchestra.

There were tears in his eyes. They filled his glass and mistook the tears for the effect of the cigarette smoke, or because he was touched by the occasion. He did his best to chat to a few old acquaintances, and when he felt he had done his bit, sat down at the end of the table, his head swimming slightly with the drink.

His blurred vision roamed listlessly over the gathering. What a decrepid bunch, he thought, hoping that he did not appear the same to them. He nodded and smiled and wished that Frank did not drink quite so much. Frank stood a few yards away, his checked sports jacket discarded over the back of a chair. His face was a light pink, making his freckles stand out all the more.

But why was he staring so?

Arthur Chamlegh began to feel uncomfortable. Frank turned away for a moment to re-fill his glass and then staggered across the floor. He was obviously angry about something.

"Listen, father, I've something to tell you that I think you should know. You know why Violet and Rodney organised this lot don't you?"

"To celebrate my birthday of course..." he replied, sensing trouble.

Frank stared at him with dilated pupils, and a sneer crept across his face. "So that's what you think?" The index finger of his left hand began pointing in the air. "Now let me tell you that they're only keeping on the right side of you, that's all, so you'll leave Violet the estate and not me!"

His voice had risen and a deathly hush spread across the room.

"Don't be such a fool, Frank," he hissed. "And if that's what you think, why didn't you have the courage to tell me earlier when you were sober?"

"I thought I'd wait until your friend had gone."

"Friend?"

"The girl who had her arm around your shoulders."

What on earth was the boy talking about? True, when he thought about it, he had felt something across his back, something cold, but he had thought it was a draught from the open window.

"I suppose she's another of your lady friends?" He spat out the words. "When I was younger I used to hide and listen to the kitchen staff discussing all the women you were having affairs with while you were engaged to mother!"

Arthur Chamlegh slapped his son hard, across his freckled face.

THE party was at an end. It had finished at that moment, if, as in Arthur Chamlegh's opinion, it had ever begun. Amid embarrassed goodbyes, the guests vanished into the night as quickly as they had appeared. Violet was close to tears but he assured her that everything had gone down fine, and asked to be left alone for a few minutes. Rodney escorted her back to the house. Damn my son, he thought.

Apart from the occasional crackle of the lanterns, it was quiet now, like that other quietness all those years ago. Then there had been two of them left in the summer house. He had been a cold-blooded bastard

then, only concerned for himself. How he had lived with that foul memory he would never understand.

He moved uncomfortably and the chair scraped the wooden boards, driving an icy memory to the forefront of his brain. A thin veil of cigarette smoke still lingered in the room. He knocked back the remains of his drink, and his stomach churned over. He thought he might vomit so he put his head out of the nearest window.

That first party was supposed to celebrate his coming of age, his maturity into manhood, but he had been spoiled like a child.

His fiancée, later to become his wife, had left earlier feeling unwell, and he had crept back to the summer house after the party had ended, where he knew one of the maids was clearing up.

She was small, he remembered, with a round pretty face and short dark hair that finished in ringlets. He had had his eyes on her for some time. He wanted her. And why not? He had had others. Junior servants came and went at a steady rate.

They had stood right on this same spot, he recollected, and he had kissed her. But he wanted more than a kiss. He had roughly attempted to grope his way into her clothing but she had rebuked him, shocked.

He had lost his temper then and struck her hard across the face so that she lost her balance and fell, striking her head fatally against the hard floor...

Suddenly it was not such a warm evening anymore. He shivered, although sweat was oozing out of his pores and sticking to his clothes. It seemed impossible but the lingering cigarette smoke seemed to thicken and the lantern light dim. He rubbed his already sore eyes.

He saw her then. She was there, standing on that same spot, those big eyes open wide, filled with horror and shock as she fell slowly, ever so slowly, backwards towards the cruel wooden floor...

"No!" he screamed, and lunged forward, grasping wildly in the air, losing his balance, reaching out and knocking one of the lanterns from the wall.

THE summer house was completely gutted. In the early light of the morning, firemen sifted carefully through the still-smoking debris. They found the remains of two people; one male and one female. The

female was buried considerably deeper, _____ in the foundations of the summer house.

The Summer House Party is Peter Hough's first appearance in *Fantasy Tales*. He has been published in *The Fontana Book of Great Ghost Stories*, but in the main his work has appeared in non-genre magazines such as *Tell Tale*, *Competitors Journal*, *Writer* and *Short Stories Magazine*. Some non-fiction work has been published as well as a story broadcast on Radio Medway.



Ballad

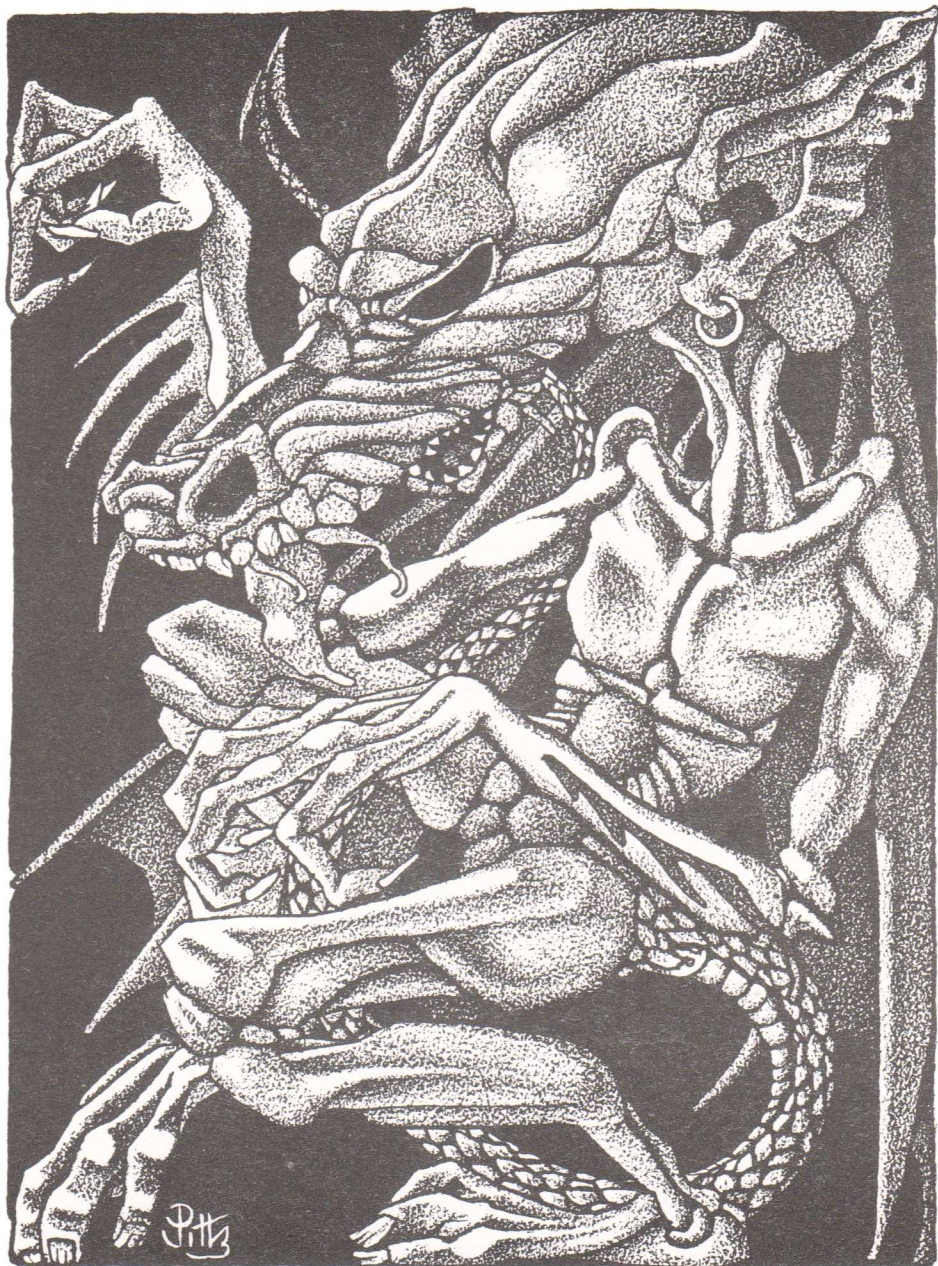
By MARISE MORLAND

I THE minstrel, kept legends alive:
My hand swept a harp and conjured visions
From the dust of the plain.
I sang of dynasties and palaces,
And the opulent riches of kings.
I whispered of evil and sorcery
And the pale cruel face of a witch-queen.

I sang to the beat of horses' hooves
And the conquest of dreaming cities.
I sang of the velvet night,
The glitter of jewelry and rustle of silk.
I sang for the love of fair women.

And then came the ringing of metal
And the clash of arms,
And the brightness of blood spilt in battle.
I sang of death; long ago was I slain.
Drifting sand covers the stone
They raised in my honour.
Now jackals howl and brigands laugh -
Carrying my spirit in tatters
Before the desert wind.

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"Something moved out of the fog and into the dim light."

In the Labyrinth

By SIMON R. GREEN

Illustration by JIM PITTS

Shade lay shackled in the dungeons under Mhüle. Silver chains led from ankles, wrists and throat to a single iron loop deeply embedded in the damp stone wall. His eyes were blindfolded though neither torch nor lamp lit his windowless cell. The heavily-armed guard who pushed a bowl of bread and slop through the door's revolving section shuddered none the less; for in the condemned cell Shade was chuckling quietly, and there was murder in that laugh.

CAPTAIN Varles of the pirate ship *Revenge*, together with his first mate Jarryl, stalked uneasily along the curving stone passage lit only by flickering oil lamps set high on the walls at irregular intervals and the blazing brands they carried. Damp collected on the low ceiling, sliding down pitted walls to collect in scummy puddles on the cracked stone floor. Straggly lichen and fungi pale as dead man's flesh lay clumped where wall met floor.

In the dungeons under Mhüle, all was silent, and Varles and Jarryl became convinced they were the only living things remaining. Jarryl took to peering into odd cells at random and once, when Varles thought he heard giggling in a dark cell, they held their torches to the window, but there was no one there. They strode on, passing deeper into the Labyrinth of Mhüle.

When Varles last walked this route, it had been lit by brightly-flaring torches, and a brace of well-bribed guards strode at his side. They had guarded his back while he made his deal with the man called Shade, who lay awaiting execution in Mhüle's deepest dungeon. Varles smiled grimly. Shade, master thief of the Known Kingdoms. The man who had walked in shadows. Little good his titles had done him since he slew the King's son. Now he waited only for the King's torturers to ready themselves for his prolonged ex-

ecution. Unless, of course, Varles should free him first.

The two guards now lay dead at the top of the long winding stairway that led down from the guardhouse, because they would take no more bribes and had threatened to betray him rather than enter the catacombs at night. Varles frowned uneasily. Dark tales were told of the Labyrinth of Mhüle, muttered in taverns as the night wore on, and shutters were slammed against an evil all the city seemed reluctant to discuss. After an evening's wine an old soldier, once a guard in the catacombs by day, had talked bleakly to Varles and Jarryl of shadows with no man to carry them and paintings that stared with hostile eyes.

Varles' hand rested on the hilt of his scimitar. He needed Shade if he was to take the lost treasure of Ravensbrook, called by some Port Blood. Any risk was worth it that would bring him one step nearer the treasure he had dreamed of for so long. He stopped suddenly and scowled. Jarryl followed his gaze and her sword whispered from its scabbard as she took in the blood-splashed cell door half torn from its setting. She knelt and tested the blood with her free hand as Varles glared into the gloom about them, his scimitar at the ready. Jarryl glanced into the cell, but like the others before, it was empty.

"The blood's freshly-spilled, Captain, but there doesn't seem to be a body."

"Aye." Varles stooped and picked up something half-hidden in the shadow of the cell door. Jarryl hissed softly. It was a human jawbone, with strings of bloody meat still hanging from it. Varles tossed it back into the shadows.

"It would appear we are not alone in the Labyrinth."

They exchanged a glance, and made their way deeper into the catacombs, swords held at the ready. Some time later they came to an iron portcullis lowered against

them. Varles growled a curse. His bribed guards had told him nothing of this, though in their defence it could be said that never had they entered the Labyrinth at night. No King, they insisted with hands atremble, could pay them enough to walk the catacombs while night lay across the land. Varles studied the heavy iron grating and sheathed his sword, handing his torch to Jarryl. He took firm hold of the chill metal and slowly took the strain. Ropes of muscle corded across his broad shoulders as the iron-work groaned and shifted, and then he snarled triumphantly as, with a tortured squeal, the gate lifted a few inches from the floor. He grabbed desperately at the sweat-slippery metal, his muscles standing out in sharp relief as the portcullis rose another inch, and another.

Jarryl squeezed as far into the narrow gap as she could, eyes smarting from the smoking torches she carried, and waited patiently, knowing that should Varles slip, the massive ironwork would surely crush her, but trusting him nonetheless. The gate lifted still further and with some small cuts and much muttered cursing, Jarryl finally wriggled through. There was a dull thud as the portcullis tore itself from Varles' grip, and Jarryl nodded soberly as the crude bars at its base dug hungrily into the soft stone floor. She quickly wound up the portcullis with much complaining of its rusty chains. Varles ducked past the grating and Jarryl let it fall again.

Together they inspected the flight of rough-hewn steps that led down to the last level of the Labyrinth. Worn dangerously smooth by the passing of many feet, they stretched away into an unrelieved darkness neither Varles nor Jarryl could plumb. Jarryl handed Varles his torch, and side by side they padded down into the gloom.

At the foot of the steps they stopped and glared quickly about, for lying in a pool of blood were the two guards Varles had slain but an hour past up in the guardhouse. He studied the vilely mutilated bodies as Jarryl guarded his back with drawn sword.

"Strange. They insisted there was but one entrance to the Labyrinth, yet if that were true, how were they brought here without passing us?"

Jarryl shrugged lightly, eyes darting from shadow to shadow. "Have they any valuables on them, Captain? T'would be a

shame to leave any such pickings for the morning's guards."

Varles nodded solemnly. "Aye, but it seems to me I took what little they had when I disposed of their services earlier this evening." He shared a brief grin with Jarryl before turning back to the guardsmen. "How came they to be ripped apart from throat to crotch? I give a clean kill, always."

Jarryl glanced at the mutilated corpses and shrugged uncomfortably, remembering the casually discarded jawbone. "Mauled by some animal, mayhap."

"Aye." Varles sounded unconvinced. "Have you noticed how clammy the air is down here?"

Jarryl nodded. "I've heard the Labyrinth extends far out under the harbour. There's even some kind of mist down here." She gestured with her torch at a few wisps that dissipated into the dank air even as they watched.

They made their way further into the catacombs, passing cells obviously long abandoned, their dull metal doors scarred with the rust and filth of long neglect. Their attention was caught by paintings on the walls, which, starting at the foot of the stairs, depicted in marvellous hues a legend of the long ago, when Others stalked the Earth with Man. Heroes vied with monsters, both so vividly presented Jarryl was hard-pressed not to reach out a hand and prove them real. There was a war, and in it battles and treacheries, foulness and great deeds, for this was a war between Man and those who ruled before him.

Varles studied the walls curiously, for though they were dripping with a brackish water, the dyes seemed strangely unaffected, as though soaked into the stone itself. They walked slowly on, torches held close to the walls that they might more clearly see the long story unfold. There were many heroes, most of whom died unpleasant deaths, but strangely only one demon, who recurred again and again until the story ended, so suddenly as to be surely unfinished. The final painting, just as the first, showed the demon wrapped in chains, striving to reach a crowned man who threatened it with a blazing brand.

"A strange history indeed," Varles said slowly, "but I know this last man by his profile; Harak, first King of Mhùle these centuries past. His head still marks their coins."

"And the demon?" Jarryl asked, glancing

at the wall and as quickly away again.

Varles frowned. "It seems to me there was a similar painting on the door leading down from the guardhouse, half-hidden under the dirt of years. When I commented on it, the guards talked hastily of something else." He shook his head and strode quickly on. Jarryl hurried after him.

The narrowing corridors led still downward, the cracked stone floor became ever more treacherous. Varles was no longer sure of his way, and more than once had to stop and retrace his steps. But finally their torches revealed a featureless iron door set into the wall with only a small revolving section to pass food through. Varles grinned, relieved his memory had not played him entirely false. He rapped on the door.

"Shade! Can ye hear me?"

"Aye! Get the door open and free me from these cursed chains."

Varles sheathed his scimitar, took the ring of keys from his belt and began the slow process of trying them in turn. He soon found the right key and struggled with the obstinate lock.

"Captain Varles!" Shade's voice floated through the gloom so clearly Jarryl would have sworn he stood beside her rather than the other side of a thick iron door.

"Aye, Shade, I'm still here. What is it ye want that can't wait the few minutes it'll take to free ye?"

"I have to know, Captain; is it day or night?"

Jarryl glanced at Varles, who shrugged.

"Night, Shade; when else might we come acalling?"

He pushed the door open and by the light of their flickering torches Jarryl studied the beaten and manacled figure who lay in the far corner of the condemned cell. Long and lean with sun-bleached hair, he wore only a filthy blood-stained tunic and a dirty rag at his throat. Half-healed wounds showed clearly on his wiry frame, and blood dripped from ankles, wrists and throat where the chains chafed him. Jarryl's eyes widened; with no window and no chance of release till his dying day, it was no wonder Shade had lost all track of time, but for what mad reason had the guards blindfolded a man kept in a completely dark cell?

As Varles entered the cell Jarryl heard a faint scuffling behind her. She spun, sword at the ready. Back down the corridor, something tittered in the darkness. She gripped her sword firmly and padded

silently back down the passage.

Varles slipped his torch into a battered iron holder and busied himself with the deeply embedded iron loop, but this time the key was not easily to hand, and he began to doubt it was even on the ring. He paused, eyeing the wall dubiously. If all else failed, he could perhaps tug the iron ring far enough from the wall to saw at it with his scimitar.

"Captain, why are ye taking so long?" Shade's patient voice jerked him from his reverie. "If this be night, we face certain danger here. In nights past I have heard something scuffling outside my cell that from its sound I'd not face through choice, something only the cold iron of my door kept at bay. If I must use the sorceries of night in such a place as this, I'll not answer for the consequences."

Varles repressed a shiver at Shade's calm and measured tone. He bent again to his task, and then spun suddenly round as Jarryl's shocked scream echoed faintly in the distance.

ON LEAVING Varles with Shade, Jarryl had quickly made her way back down the passage, sword held out before her. She knew the tales city dwellers told of this place, but her contempt for all who walked the land instead of a ship's deck had led her to discount such fears till now. She felt sure something moved in the darkness ahead, though ever and again she rounded a corner with torch held high to find nothing but dancing shadows and the hint of a mocking titter. Whatever she was chasing seemed always to retreat before her, leading her back to the steps that ascended from this last level of the Labyrinth.

Jarryl sprang round the far corner in fighting stance to face an apparently empty corridor, but she knew better than to relax her vigilance. Whatever she pursued, she had not given it time to scurry far. She held her flickering torch a little higher, glanced down the corridor and gasped; the dead guards no longer sprawled at the foot of the stairs. Only a wide pool of blood remained to mark where they had lain.

A flicker of movement spun Jarryl round to face the wall at her right. She stared at the opening painting of the chained demon, uncertain as to what had caught her eye, and then her heart jumped as it slowly turned its awful head to look at her.

Swirling mists curled up around its misshapen body as the chains fell away, the painting coming horribly alive as she watched. A few strands of mist drifted out of the painting towards her, and then a thick fog boiled from the stone, filling the corridor. Jarryl backed away as the tittering sounded suddenly close, and then screamed as something impossibly large loomed out of the fog. She dropped her torch and flailed out wildly with her sword, feeling something give under the keen blade's urging. High-pitched chattering sounded in her ears as she turned and ran headlong back down the pitch-dark corridors.

Without her torch she was soon lost, and rather than run blindly through the Labyrinth, she stopped to take her bearings. A light glowed dimly from a side passage, revealing that she stood before the final painting of the chained demon. The unsteady light grew stronger till she recognised Varles running towards her with drawn sword and a freshly blazing torch.

"What happened?"

"A demon, Captain." Jarryl fought for breath. "The demon from the wall painting!" Thick fog spilled suddenly from the painting beside them, filling the corridor. Shade's voice rose faintly in the distance.

"Free me, Captain! Ye need my help!"

The naked urgency in his voice contrasted strangely with his polite use of the formal *ye*. As Varles and Jarryl stood together, blades at the ready, something moved out of the fog and into the dim light. Fully a dozen feet tall, hunched over in the cramping confines of the passage, its bony head scraped the ceiling and massive arms drooped to the floor. It was long and lean, with a barbed tail that hung twitching past misformed flanks. There were no eyes, only dusty sockets where eyes had once been, yet it followed their movements nonetheless. Its gaping maw revealed row upon row of stained serrated teeth.

The high-pitched tittering was strangely inappropriate for such bulk, Varles thought fleetingly as he dropped his torch into a nearby holder and leapt to the attack, Jarryl at his side. Their blades sank deep into the demon, spraying foul-smelling blood across the floor and walls. It screamed, and an overlong arm sent Varles flying down the corridor to smash into a wall. Jarryl ducked the return swing and sprang under its reach to pierce the demonflesh

that would hide a heart in any body less misshapen. It hissed and Jarryl had to throw herself headlong to avoid wicked claws that dug furrows in the stone wall behind her. Varles staggered forward, and she screamed at him to free Shade. He gazed stupidly at her as she snatched his torch from its holder, touched it to another on the wall, and threw it back to him. His eyes suddenly cleared as he snatched it out of mid-air and darted back down the corridor. Jarryl ducked the demon's petulant swing and retrieved her blade from where it lay sheathed in the demon's chest. She danced back just in time to be sent sprawling by a clawed hand that tore her cloak away and ripped a bloody track across her left shoulder. Blood splashed down her numbed arm. She spat out a curse and staggered to her feet again, pressing home an attack she knew to be hopeless, her skill weaving a web of steel between her and the demon. The wall torch was already burning low.

Varles tugged and twisted at the sub-born iron loop. Shade cursed dispassionately and pulled at his chains, which were so arranged that try as he might he could lift his hands no higher than his waist. As Varles paused to wipe sweat from his eyes, Shade suddenly tensed.

"Captain! Is there light in my cell?"

"Aye, Shade, how else could I see to wrestle with these damned chains?"

"Then free my eyes!"

"I haven't the time, Shade!"

Varles took the iron ring in both broad hands and put his shoulders to the task. With agonising slowness, he felt the corroded metal stir under his grip. He jammed a foot against the wall to brace himself and threw his weight against the loop. For long moments he stood straining, and then the stone gave, the ring flying from the wall in a cloud of dust and splinters. Varles lay sprawling as Shade reached up and pulled the blindfold from his eyes. He laughed triumphantly when a shadow fell across his face though there was nothing to cast it, and then he tore the manacles from him as though they were but paper. Varles staggered to his feet, but by the time he was up Shade had already gone. He lurched back into the corridor, sword in hand, and snatching the torch from its holder, hurried after Shade.

Jarryl swung her notched sword with aching arm, sweat running into her eyes, her blood making the floor slippery. She only just ducked the demon's lazy return

swing and heard again its hateful titter. She knew it was playing with her, but dared not retreat. With her gone, it might disappear back into the wall painting again, and there was no telling where it might re-emerge. She thought fleetingly of the painting on the guardhouse door and realised who had mutilated the dead guardsmen. The discarded jawbone swam before her eyes and in a flash of inspiration she understood the empty cells and why the city lived in fear. The King let the demon live by feeding on those prisoners it could reach. Only a thick iron door had saved Shade. In her musing she let her attack slow, and again the heavy arm sent her flying. She lay exhausted, knowing she had to get up, but unable to force herself to her feet.

She stared helplessly up at the sniggering demon, and then her eyes widened as Shade stepped from the shadows beside her. The demon screamed shrilly and threw both gnarled hands to the ceiling. Flames burst between them, dull red with the stink of brimstone. The demon screamed again, and the flames crackled unsupported on the air. It seemed to Jarryl that the demon knew Shade, and in its own way feared him. Varles helped her to her feet, and she leaned on him a moment before pulling away. She'd not miss the battle this promised to be.

Shade howled something in a tongue only the demon seemed to recognise, and it threw the flames at him. He darted aside and Jarryl grinned with a savage joy as the sorcerous flames seared the demon's picture from the wall. It howled in agony as flames licked up around its bulk, but there was no longer any painting to disappear into. Fire roared in the narrow corridor, consuming the demon in a brightness too painful to look upon. It screamed in rage while it roasted, held fast in the passage by its bulk. As Varles and Jarryl watched, flames scorched along the walls, obliterating the paintings. The demon seemed to fall in upon itself and soon the sorcerous flames had left nothing but a charred skeleton. The stench of burned meat hung heavy on the air as the flames flickered low. Shade loomed suddenly out of the shadows.

"We'd best leave; the sorceries of night have been called upon here, and I'd not stay to see the result of that calling. This fire is not the kind that can easily be banished."

He turned and ran down the corridor, leaving Varles and Jarryl to follow as the

flames roared up again, eating into the very stone itself. With the heat already scorching their backs they sped along the narrow twisting corridors, just managing to keep Shade in sight, for he seemed to need no directions to lead him out of the Labyrinth. When he reached the portcullis he barked a few words, gestured with a hand, and the iron grating rose obediently before him, hanging on the air as he sped under, and then falling slowly back again. Varles and Jarryl only just scrambled through the lowering gap. Jarryl shot a venomous glare after Shade, but saved her breath for running. There'd be time for a reckoning later. Behind her, she could hear flames crackling, and realised that although Varles' torch no longer burned, the corridor was still well-lit. She risked a glance over one shoulder and cursed as she saw the corridor was already ablaze.

By the time they reached the final stairway, the flames were a raging inferno and no more than a dozen feet behind them. Sweat poured off them and their breath came hard as they assayed the narrow steps. Shade stood in the guardhouse door at the top of the stairway, a grin twisting his mouth as he watched, making no move to help. They forced themselves up the last few steps with flames licking at their heels, and burst into the guardhouse. Shade slammed the door shut behind them, sliding home the bolts. They lay panting a moment, regaining their breath, and Varles absently noted that the ancient painting of the demon on the inside of the door was naught but a patch of charred wood. Shade smiled.

"Be grateful ye're both good runners; another moment and I'd have had to slam the door on ye lest the flames reach me."

Jarryl glared at him. "Ye'd have done that to us, who freed ye?"

Shade shrugged. "If I'm to have partners, they must be my equal."

Varles got to his feet. "Partners, is it? Shade, ye swore an oath to serve with me in return for your freedom from that cell. Ye'll keep your oath, won't ye?"

He drew a silver dagger from his scorched sleeve. Shade regarded it thoughtfully a moment and nodded.

"As ye say, I swore an oath. Now let us leave; the fire will not long be balked by that door."

He turned, and pushing open the thick iron doors, left the guardhouse without a backward glance. Varles and Jarryl

shared a look and then followed him out into the cool night air.

ABOARD the *Revenge*, they stared back at the burning city. With sails full of wind, the ship was fast pulling away from shore, but still they could see men running to and fro fighting the blaze. Jarryl watched unmoved. She had little love for cities, and still less for Mhüle, that fed its prisoners to a captive demon. Varles watched the leaping flames with dark and brooding eyes, and did not turn as Shade joined them on the bridge.

"Aye, Captain; they'll long remember the night I worked sorcery in their city." The words held a cold satisfaction un-

softened by his sardonic grin. He stalked aft, and Jarryl watched him go, gingerly caressing her bandaged shoulder. "I'd no more trust that one than a starving wolf at my throat. Why do we need him, Captain?"

Varles smiled. "If we are to gain the treasure I seek, we need the magic he possesses."

Jarryl growled softly, caressing her shoulder. "Your damn treasure had better be worth it."

"It will be, Jarryl. It will be."

The sails creaked under the urging wind, and they watched the burning city fall behind them as the *Revenge* sped out to sea on a rising tide.

Simon Green has been spending a good deal of his time working on TV serials, but with no luck so far. He is currently putting the finishing touches to a four-part series called *The Crooked Man*. Simon describes it as a cross between *Quatermass and the Pit* and *Halloween*. A local drama group in the Wiltshire area is rehearsing an original pantomime with traditional characters; called *The Prince and the Darkwood*, it will have been performed by the time you read this. Stories due to appear are *The Crawling Kind* in the long-delayed *Spectral* and *Demonbane* in *Fantasy Macabre*. Earlier appearances include *Manlayer!* in *Airgedlamh*, *Cascade*, part of an illustrated folio by Martin Helsdon from Rosemary Pardoe, *Soulhunter* in *Fantasy Macabre 3* and *Awake, Awake, Ye Northern Winds* in *Swords Against Darkness V* (Zebra Books).

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"Something glimpsed when the sleeper breaks from his nightmare."

The Green Man

By KELVIN JONES

Illustration by DAVE CARSON

AS THE Reverend Bear opened the stout door to the west entrance, a gust of wind swept inwards. He stepped back, startled by this sudden intrusion of the elements. Past the porch he could see the dark shapes of the cedars, their branches laid bare, against the black sky. He had forgotten how late it was.

He drew the heavy brass key from the ring attached to his belt and inserted it into the door. As the lock engaged, he had a sudden image of the church's interior, the solid round pillars ranged either side of the nave, the great hammerbeam roof shadowing everything beneath it. St Helen's was not a church he liked to linger in, especially in the winter

months. Not only was it difficult to heat, but its Norman builders had allowed little light to penetrate the dark interior, even on a day of brilliant sunshine. The deeply recessed windows gave a cloistered feeling to the interior and no amount of polish or ventilation eradicated the cloying fustiness of the central tower. It was not, to his mind, the most suitable of places for Christians to worship in.

He shivered, suddenly aware of the chill night wind. A procession of thoughts wound its way through his tired mind, ecclesiastical obligations, each more dreary than the last. His sermon was not due until tomorrow, yet he had not even the faintest idea of his subject.

Not that it mattered, he thought cynically. He could always choose a ready-made one from his countless volumes. Besides, of late his mind had been otherwise preoccupied. Workmen had been carrying out extensive restoration in the clerestory, stripping away the layers of whitewash, the legacy of sober Victorians and their Cromwellian ancestors.

Already they had revealed a series of remarkable wall paintings, patterns of interwoven flowers; their colours fresh and vivid as the day they were painted over eight hundred years before. The Reverend Bear paused at the entrance to the porch. It was almost unbelievable that Christian worship had been practised here for such a period. What would the subject of tomorrow's sermon have been then? The seven deadly sins, perhaps?

He shut the outer door and looked upwards. Against the pale halo of the city lights, three distorted gargoyles jutted from the central tower, their faces grimacing at him. He turned, rather more swiftly than usual, and began walking at a brisk pace down the long drive towards the main road.

There was a narrow footpath linking the old vicarage with the main south circular and it was his habit in the summer months to take a short cut along this route. Of late he had avoided the path since the way was poorly illuminated, a thick wood skirting much of its length. But tonight was an exception. Whether it was the thought of his cosy fireside that directed his footsteps this way or maybe some unconscious desire for excitement he could never afterwards determine. But he strode purposefully ahead, plunging into an indeterminate well of darkness where all that was visible was the dim strip of the chalk path.

Half-way along the path he stopped. He had no reason to do this. He told himself as much, for he had work to prepare before the evening was spent and already a sense of fatigue was starting to settle uncomfortably on his mind.

Nevertheless, he surprised himself by stopping and lighting his pipe, an action that could only suggest confidence in his surroundings. This was curious, for the Reverend Bear was nothing if not timid and darkness of any kind had always seemed to him to be a facet of that alarming world conjured by the medieval mind in which the souls of the departed languished in everlasting perdition.

He stood at the edge of the path, conscious of the wind biting angrily at the trees. It was odd to think that in the middle of the great city there were places like this wood, sealed off from the world, still much the same as it would have appeared in the Dark Ages. Only then, he reasoned, it would have been a place of wild beasts and nameless fears. Now it was something else; it represented that border of the conscious mind where vague shapes flitted...

Suddenly, something broke in on his train of thought. He listened. There it was again. The sound of a voice. Something between a sigh and a gasp. A curious sense of excitement began to rise within him. Should he not investigate? What if someone had injured himself and lay there in the darkness in need of assistance? He could not, in all conscience, pass by without offering help.

He began to make his way through the bracken, stopping every so often to listen. Embarrassment prevented him from calling out lest the sound be the product of his own imagination. No, there it was again, to the left of him, this time much closer, more sustained. He began to wish he had a torch. But slowly his eyes began to adjust to the darkness and he could discern the outlines of the tree trunks.

By the edge of a clearing he stopped. He peered into the gloom. He could hear it distinctly now. The breathing was rapid, but was it not more than one voice that he could hear?

The shadow of a suspicion began to cloud his mind. Then, as his eyes scanned the ground in front of him, realization dawned. Through the bare branches of the trees, a skein of moonlight fell on naked limbs, locked in a tight embrace. Slowly the body of the man rose and fell above that of his companion. The sighing of the woman grew faster, more ecstatic. The sight repelled him, yet he could not turn and bolt. He remained there, behind the tree, fascinated, frozen with anticipation...

"IT IS a truly remarkable piece of sculpture," said the Reverend John Waldon.

"Remarkable, yes, but I find it hideous."

They were standing in the clerestory. It was eleven o'clock. Above them, beyond the hammerbeam roof, the sun poured down on St Helens, but only a fraction of its power penetrated the length of the nave beneath.

Up here in the clerestory there was a

smell compounded of age and disuse which made the Reverend Bear slightly nauseous. He looked again at the huge carving. It was, as his companion pointed out, remarkable. The workmen had discovered it only this morning, hidden away behind three inches of plaster. It was a large motif, probably dating from the 13th century, consisting of a grotesque head encompassed by a thick webbing of intertwined leaves and foliage.

The Reverend Bear felt slightly incensed by his friend's obvious pleasure in the piece. To him there was something altogether loathsome about the face. Its high cheekbones, curled saturnine nose and the cruel twist to the mouth gave it a suggestion of menace.

"What on earth does it represent?"

"It is certainly not a Christian image," replied his companion, a man steeped in the architectural trappings of early churches. "I remember seeing something similar in a church in Berkshire. There they called it the Green Man."

"The Green Man? Jack of the Green?"

He recalled a curious figure, clothed in a bush, in a mummer's play he had once seen. It had made little sense to him.

"The same. I imagine that to our pagan ancestors he was like a Roman silvanus, a creature of veneri and of the wild hunt."

"All the same, I dislike it."

The Reverend John Waldon gave his companion an odd look. There was something in the clergyman's manner, a suggestion of unease, that had never manifested itself before. His normally pallid complexion and watery grey eyes seemed drained of life.

"The restoration work certainly has lightened much of the church's interior," he said, changing the subject.

The Reverend Bear managed a smile. As they turned and walked away from the scaffolding he felt a sense of inward relief. It was always so cold up here in the clerestory.

"THE sun was risen upon the earth when Lot entered into Zoar. Then the Lord rained upon Sodom and Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the Lord out of heaven. And he overthrew those cities, and that which grew upon the ground. But his wife looked back from behind him, and she became a pillar of salt. And Abraham got up early in the morning to the place where he stood before the Lord. And he looked toward Sodom and Gomorrah and toward all the land

of the plain, and beheld and lo, the smoke of the country went up as the smoke of the furnace. Here endeth the second lesson."

The Reverend Bear rose from a velvet cushion, bordered with golden tassels and inscribed with the initials INRI. To the left of him the gold-plated eagle which served as a lectern shone, distorting the features of the reader.

"We will now sing Hymn number fifty-two, *O God Our Help in Ancient Times*."

The congregation droned into life. He looked about him. *Men, women and children, all in white and their faces as pale as moonlight*. His grip tightened on the brass rail. He made a conscious effort to concentrate on the words of the hymn. When he came to the words "In ancient times," he stopped abruptly and looked up.

It seemed as if the dark shadows of the clerestory had dispersed, giving way to a yellow effulgence. Although he was some sixty feet away, the head appeared almost brilliantly outlined among the scrolled leaves, the blank eyes bulging, the nose sharp as a razor edge. He looked down quickly at the hymn book but he was hopelessly lost.

He coughed to cover his embarrassment. He thought of Lot's wife, turning to view the forbidden city, her body turning to salt. A glimpse of unbelievable perversions, bodies articulated in death at their moment of ecstasy. Beads of perspiration broke on his brow...

WHEN the service was concluded, he hurriedly changed out of his vestments and left the church. Outside the sun was streaming down, throwing the dazzling greens and browns of the late autumn into startling relief. Compared with the stale air of the church's interior, the excursion came as a pleasant contrast. Outside, standing beneath the tower, was the Reverend John Waldon. He approached rapidly, his face beaming.

"I must congratulate you. That was a most excellent sermon."

"You thought so?"

"I have rarely heard a better one. Such force. And such conviction."

Bear smiled gently. He felt strangely displaced. For the life of him he could not recall the contents of his sermon.

"Good. You must visit us again in the near future."

"Now, if you'll excuse me, I promised

to see the members of the Mother's Union at twelve. Good luck with the restoration."

The Reverend Waldon made his way out of the churchyard with firm, unwavering steps. He was a man whose faith never faltered. Bear watched him go, then turned towards the driveway. He was looking forward to his lunch. Certainties of that type gave an added dimension to his life. The sound of the beef as it dropped sizzling onto the plate, the pungent aroma of white cabbage, these things comforted him.

The main road was particularly busy this Sunday morning. Several parishioners nodded to him as he made his way towards the railway bridge. He was beginning to feel like his old self again. Perhaps I should take a holiday, he thought. Maybe the work is beginning to get on top of me. He disliked doctors. He felt distinctly uneasy in their presence. It was the fear of being analysed that put him on edge.

At the corner of the bridge he stopped and looked about him. It was a beautiful day, sharp but vivid, the perfect weather for walking. Then he encountered the footpath which he had taken the previous night. He recalled the experience there that had so disturbed him. Still, it was unavoidable. It could not be helped. Today it was a different path, a different setting, he consoled himself.

He made the plunge. Soon he was halfway down the track, walking at a brisk pace. There was no one else about, which surprised him a little. It was such an obvious choice for a morning constitutional.

Half way along he stopped to sit down on the sawn bole of a tree. To his left, across an open field, a flock of black crows circled silently. He took out his pipe and lit it. Soon the pungent tobacco was swirling about him. His mind felt sharp and vigorous, full of distant thoughts and half-remembered phrases. He tried to recall some of his sermon but found the exercise dull and unedifying.

He was about to reach for his box of matches when suddenly he heard a sound behind him. He turned sharply, expecting to see a stranger there, but he could see nothing except the long line of trees stretching back towards the railway track.

He stood still for some moments, listening intently. There it was again, the sound of a voice, calling. But it was indistinct. He could not tell if it were a woman's or a man's. He stood up, irritated by his uncertainty, and knocked the bowl

of his pipe against the tree stump. He moved towards the edge of the wood. There it was again. A sound like laughter this time, a woman's voice.

He felt an urge to continue his route, yet there was a part of him which pushed him over the bracken between the thick tree trunks into the shade of the wood. He moved silently, not wishing to disturb whoever it was who had penetrated the interior, desiring only to remain unseen.

From the depths of his brain words formed, a meaningless pattern, a rhyme he had heard as a child. But now they revived in his consciousness, flew hither and thither about his expectant mind:

"Fly then quickly, make no stay
For Herne the Hunter rides this way."

The words took on a magical force. They would not disperse, would not shift from his thoughts. He felt puzzled, confused by his own behaviour. What was he doing here? Why had he stepped across this threshold into the shade of the wood?

He stopped. It was the same clearing, but now brighter because of the sunlight that filtered through the branches. It was the same couple, he could swear to it. The voices were identical. Even their positions had not altered.

But now the act appeared even more brazen, daringly explicit. The woman lay with her back to him, her knees drawn up almost to her breasts. Above her the man rose and fell, his broad back moving with uninterrupted ease, his face suffused with pleasure. With each stroke the woman clenched her fists, then relinquished them, gasping as she did so. The man increased his speed, lengthening his strokes. Perspiration began to drip from his brow onto the woman's neck.

Bear shut his eyes, trying to blot out the picture, but the sounds continued, penetrating the barrier. His mind whirled chaotically but he knew that he dare not move; that he was an unwilling witness to the act. Slowly the words filtered back into his tortured mind:

"Fly then quickly, make no stay
For Herne the Hunter rides this way..."

He saw himself as if from far above the wood: a silent figure, petrified, cut off from the spectacle that took place before him. Then, from beyond the trees came a sound like none that he had ever heard before.

Like a cloud of darkness it crashed upon him, heavy and stifling, a nebula of chaos

bearing with it the voices of the long-dead. High in the air broke the frenzied neighing of stallions, their teeth champing, their eyes staring and mad, and beneath this was the unleashed anger of the beast, tearing at the ground, rooting up trees and bushes, rending flesh.

The Reverend staggered back, stunned and confused by the appalling sounds which had broken about him. His eyes were now wide open. No lingering doubts remained in his mind as to the meaning of this place. Whatever had sought to lure him here, whatever had lulled him into a false sense of security was now revealing its purpose with unchecked ferocity.

He looked about him. The wood, formerly so tranquil, was now plunged in unutterable gloom. The branches of the trees crashed wildly, locked with each other in a frenzied parody of the act of coition he had just witnessed. The man and woman, their embrace broken by the sudden change, sat staring about them, clutching at their clothes. Leaves whirled into their faces, flung by angry gusts of wind and above all this the sound of a horn, cold and shrill, as ancient as time itself. It was the summons of the Hunter.

Over the clearing a dark shape fell. From its centre there was fashioned a face, something glimpsed when the sleeper breaks from his nightmare, shaking the presence from him.

Burning eyes set in a halo of green and over all this there was the smell of decay, the acrid odour of death. He turned and fled from the wood. Behind him the storm still raged. But now there was another sound, a long sustained screaming. He dare not turn. He must not watch.

THE Reverend Francis Bear dried his hands on the red towel that hung behind the bathroom door. He sighed. It had been a long day. But it had been an enjoyable day.

He padded along the corridor that led to his Italiante bedroom in his fur-lined carpet slippers, smiling to himself. Sodom and Gomorrah. It had been an excellent theme. It had fired the imagination of the congregation. He turned the gleaming brass door knob and opened the bedroom door. Inside, the heavy brown wood paneling was barely discernable in the light of the flickering embers of the coal fire. The landlady must have drawn the heavy velvet curtains in his prolonged absence, for the darkness in the room had a close,

suffocating texture to it that he found almost overpowering.

He went to the curtains to draw them back then thought better of it. The room was snug. Why disturb things? He sat on the coverlet of the bed, staring into the fire. The red coals shimmered with a baleful intensity, sending up occasional flames of an orange hue into the chimney. He looked about him at the objects in the room. Somehow their familiar shapes appeared distorted. The mahogany bureau lay huddled by the bed, its scrolled feet scarcely visible in the shadow. They were like the feet of a giant bird of prey. Above them, the two brass handles glinted in the firelight.

He moved to the fireside and, picking up the poker, began to move the glowing coals into fresh life. He wondered if he should turn on the light. But what reason had he, a man of the cloth, to fear from a room he had lived in for nearly twenty years? He was tired, he told himself, and in that condition his imagination lay open to the suggestible.

Putting down the poker, he changed position so that the majority of the room's furniture lay to his left. He sank back into the Georgian armchair, feeling the protection of its enormous sides, and smiled to himself. His mind began to wander in the direction of the day's events. He wondered what it was that destroyed the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. A nuclear explosion perhaps? Was God capable of that? Of course. God transcended moral or immoral actions. God was eternal. He pictured the earth, blasted bare, the trees torn from their roots, legs and arms and broken faces sticking out from beneath the rubble.

Suddenly his hands tightened on the arms of the chair. Barely perceptible, just out of the corner of his left eye he detected a movement. He turned his head, but that area of the room to which his attention was now drawn seemed quite still. Could it have been the reflection of a car in the street outside? Then he remembered that they were drawn. Their heavy texture permitted no light. He sat staring at the corner of the room in the vague dread that something would move there again. The corner, which had a potted plant on a small oak table and a low bookcase, lay silent as the grave.

He tried to concentrate on God, but God seemed remote and disinterested in the heavy Italiante room with its heavy furniture. He said the name out loud to

himself: "God," but the word had lost its meaning and once uttered it was instantly lost in the enormity of the room.

He looked at his hands. Across the backs broad streaks of red still spread their tell-tale stain.

He had tried everything but not even the strongest bleach could remove the marks. And now there was something else, something that puzzled him, a deformity that he had never noticed before. He held his left hand in front of the flames and curled the fingers towards the palm. It was undeniable. In the course of a day the fingernails had grown to twice their length. And there was a faint greenish tinge to them.

He sat in the darkened room, thinking of the clerestory and the image on the

wall there. What had he said to Waldon? That he found it hideous? What a peculiar remark. And then there was something else, some other memory. It frustrated him not to be able to locate it. Yet as he grasped for it, the imprint evaded him. What had he done today? Very little. The sermon, the walk along the footpath, the traditional Sunday lunch.

He looked back again into the fire and the flames leapt up at him like accusing fingers. The flames were scarlet now, like the colour of blood, like the colour of Babylon's whore in Revelations. The fingers of flame pinned him to the chair, daring him to move and be damned.

He would never be alone.

Not again.

Kelvin Jones is a student of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, and this year Gaslight Publications of Indiana will publish his book *Sherlock Holmes and the South Eastern*, an illustrated guide to the Holmes stories in the Kent region, and Doyle's origins for his story ideas. Kelvin has also published numerous articles on Holmes in *The Sherlock Holmes Journal* and in several American periodicals devoted to the character, the latest being a detailed study of the myth and folklore origins of *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (Wheelwrightings, Illinois). The author's interest in folklore is admirably reflected in the story you have just sampled. *Dark Horizons* published his Holmes pastiche, *The Weird of Carton*, earlier this year, *The Alabaster Bowl* recently appeared in *Ghosts & Scholars 5* and *Jar* is due in *Fantasy Macabre*, with further tales in future issues of both the latter magazines. Kelvin's articles on Kent history were used in *Bygone Kent* (Meresborough Books, 1980).





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Hunter

"He freed his shortsword from its scabbard and took a fighting stance."

A Rock That Loved

By JESSICA AMANDA SALMONSON

Illustration by ALAN HUNTER

"I love you," said the rock. "Who speaks?" growled the bronzed-skinned swordsman, leaping to his feet as a puma roused from slumber. He freed his shortsword from its scabbard and took a fighting stance. He blinked twice, which was all he needed to do to clear morning muddledness from his head.

I must have dreamed the voice, he thought, seeing no sign of living souls; but he had not reached towering manhood from lack of caution.

"Do you draw sword upon she who professes love?"

No dream, he thought, and reeled to face the direction of the voice. He saw only the boulder he had camped beside. "I draw my sword," he replied, "whenever I find that someone - be she evil witch or harmless hag - hides behind the very rock I've sheltered by."

"Then sheath your sword, beloved, for not even a hare lurks here, much less a sorceress or hag."

"We shall see!"

He walked thrice around the boulder with wary sword set before.

"You see?"

"Stand still that I might catch you nymph! I know you run ahead of my vision, around and around the curve of this stone. Stand, I say! In a moment, I shall leap upon this boulder and look all about it at once."

"That would be pleasant. I should like to have you perched atop me."

"Very well. Enough of jokes." He sheathed his shortsword and climbed atop the rock, looking all around and seeing nothing but the dry, crisp, morning desert.

The swordsman sat down atop the boulder, shaking his shaggy head like some wild beast in confusion. "It cannot be," he mumbled to himself. "Rocks do not speak."

The voice beneath him said, "I watched you all the night, asleep by the light of your campfire's embers. One so tall and handsome, with muscles as strong as adam-

ant, though yielding and soft as spring moss in gentle moods, I'll warrant...how could I help but love you?"

The swordsman still muttered. "No rock is mightier than my sword. If never my sword spoke, then how can it be a mere stone might do so?"

He had not directed his wondering to the boulder, but she answered: "Only love holds the magic of life. Your sword bares blood and death. I did not know myself that I might converse until I fell in love. Love has given me life."

The swordsman had hardly heard, for he was lost in musings of his own. He reflected aloud: "If stone should speak, then think of the secrets these desert sands whisper midst themselves. Think of pebbled beaches chattering busily about the sea. Or a mountain! What a deafening roar there must be when one peak hails another. Gods and devils! But the Earth itself should hail the Sun and Moon, if stone truly spake."

"Do you mock my love? I know that ours cannot be, for you would needst be quite perverse to care for me as I for you. But - show kindness for my plight, O dearest paladin. I cannot help my love."

"To be loved by something cold and hard is an honour, I suspect," he said, placing an affectionate palm flat upon the surface of the rock.

"Indeed!" she agreed happily. "He who thaws granite could beguile heaven and earth. He who wins the love of stone has attained a thing imperishable. Long after the world is a dying crust, I shall remember you, and cherish that memory."

"Such devotion," he said, with the vaguest hint of cruel sarcasm. He leaped to the ground with feline grace and swept about to face the boulder, saying, "It must be that you are no ordinary rock at all! To love, you must have a heart of purest gold. What do you say I split you in half and make off with your heart!"

"My darling! My love! How can you

speak it? How can you consider ruin upon one who cares as much as I do?"

"I am neither saint nor crusader, madam," he informed her, turning his back in rejection. He folded his arms and said, "I am a hero at times. At other times, a thief and a piker - a soldier of fortune, vile and suspect. I steal my food, demand my wine, and take what women I choose. I boast no ounce of purity, no speck of honour. You have the misfortune to love a culprit, a landless follower of sun and moon, an adventurer. To a man such as me, a purse of gold is worth far more than the love of a stone."

"Stop! Please! You've broken my heart as you promised." The rock made a sound like sobbing, or lava burbling deep at her roots. "Woe be to the world if stone should weep," she warned. "But you must be an honest piker at least, to tell me of your wickedness. Therefore you are worthy of my love. Aye, love is blind, or I would not forgive you so well. But do not think that I was unaware of the blood upon your sword. I could see that you had laid down dragons as easily as lesser men crush bugs, that you had scattered armies of men as though they were dry leaves. A man of blood you are and a man of blood I fell in love with in the night."

The swordsman bowed low as to a princess, then rose. "Beautifully said, my granite queen. If only flesh damsels could woo so well! But I fear I cannot dally. I must join a mercenary band then ride East to conquest. Though I take my leave without promises, it is possible that I may pass this way again, if only in haste. If so, it will be good to know at least one true love would welcome me. I shall do

good in lonely times to come here, to seek a rock's wisdom of the ages, to sit and share opinions of matters trivial or profound."

"My knight, you make me swoon! Gladly shall I be your advisor if thus you seek. But this is not the whole extent of our togetherness, O champion. One day, after long life, your bones will crumble to dust. Later still, the wind will have worn me to less than sand. Then shall our dusts find one another and sail on the wind and spread throughout the world. Wherever a part of you and a part of me falls together, a great mountain or courageous hero shall be raised. In this way, love survives and grows."

"I shall remember that prophecy throughout my conquests," said the swordsman. "If I fall by the sword, at least I shall know something good yet awaits."

"Goodbye, then, for now, O fire that burns within me. Conquer well the world! You shall, I know. You have already conquered a small part of it."

"Goodbye, then," he said, and, "farewell."

Then the swordsman left to join an army and raise in its ranks, to conquer and slay a wicked king and set the crown upon his own head.

But every now and then, when the intrigues of court began to wear him down, the courageous king returned to the desert and sat with his back against a boulder, there to write poetry. As he grew older, this habit became a popular curiosity. There is a road by there now, and passer-by often think the king is daft, sitting all alone, singing sonnets to no one but himself.

Or so it appears.

Jessica Amanda Salmonson is a prolific American authoress whose 'Tomoe Gozen' books, about a 13th century Samurai woman, will be familiar to readers of adult fantasy. The trilogy, *Tomoe Gozen*, *The Golden Naginata* and *Thousand Shrine Warrior*, is published by Ace Books in America and Quelle in Germany. Another novel, *The Swordsman*, was published by Tor and the SF Bookclub. As an anthologist, she is responsible for *Amazons I and II* from DAW Books, *Tales By Moonlight* (Robert Garcia, publisher) and *Heroic Visions* from Ace, the first in a series. Short fiction has appeared widely, included in such anthologies as *Elsewhere I*, *The Berkley Showcase III and V*, *Fantasy Annual V*, *Hecate's Cauldron*, *Beyond the Lands of Never* and in magazines like *Weirdbook*, *Owlflight*, *Amazing*, *Fantasy Book*, *Fantasy Macabre* and now *Fantasy Tales*. Jessica also finds time to edit a small press magazine called *Naginata*, concentrating on her interest in the warrior women of fantasy.



Pharaoh's Revenge

By C. BRUCE HUNTER

Geoffrey glanced once more at the dusty papyrus scroll he had spread out beside a candle on the display case. He didn't need to read it again, of course. He had translated it a half dozen times to be sure there was no mistake, and by now he knew its contents by heart. There were the obligatory prayers to Osiris and Ra, a list of ingredients, instructions for their preparation, and the promise of eternal life and unlimited power. And a cartouche at the end he hadn't been able to translate, but he didn't have to know its meaning. He had already deciphered all the important information on the scroll.

Luckily all the ingredients still existed, though researching their modern names had taken three months, and assembling them had meant another month of exploring chemist shops, spice companies and industrial manufacturers. But he had finally completed the task, and the reward for his labours now effervesced in a beaker in front of him.

He took a deep breath and reached for the long-forgotten alchemist's formula that would soon catapult him from the lowly status of junior Egyptologist to king of the world. Closing his eyes, he gulped the dark, astringent liquor.

It burned slightly going down and Geoffrey exhaled abruptly. The burning became a pain in the centre of his chest, then spread slowly through his body. He gasped for air, but the pain turned into the searing heat of desert air too hot to breathe.

He gritted his teeth and groped for something...anything to squeeze his hands against. He stumbled into the display case, knocking over the candle and thrashing

wildly. Then, in one final, excruciating moment, an abject darkness invaded his head.

Outside the room, a shuffle of footsteps echoed down the hallway.

"I'm sure I heard a noise in here," said a muffled voice that was quickly followed by a jiggle of the doorknob and the rasp of a key in the lock. The door swung open and the curator stepped into the darkened room.

"Turn on the lights, will you, Smyth," he said, and when the overhead bulb flashed on and he saw the body crumpled on the floor, he exclaimed, "Good Lord, Smyth, isn't this one of the assistants in your section?"

"Why, yes. That's young Jones," Smyth replied. "What happened to him?"

"Looks like he may have done himself in." The curator pried open the youth's fingers to free the crumpled paper clutched in his fist.

"What's that?" the other asked.

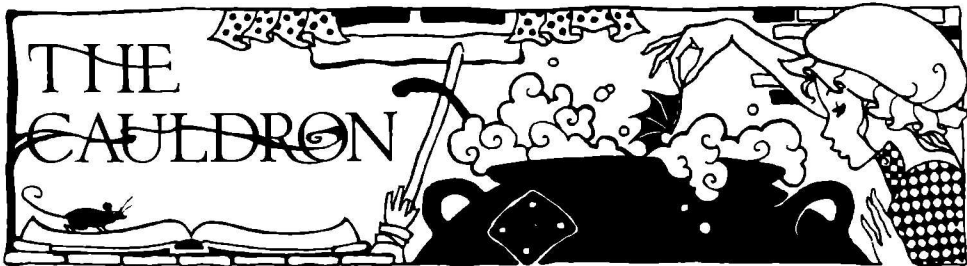
"It appears to be one of the scrolls from the store room. Jones here must have been translating it."

"Ah, yes," Smyth said, taking the scroll from his colleague's hand to examine it. "It's one of those formulas that's supposed to give life and power to its users. The museum has a number of them in storage; they're historically unimportant, really. Funny thing, though, I've never been able to make out this cartouche that comes at the end of some of them."

"Let me see," the curator said, peering at the crumpled document. "Oh, that's just a warning. It translates roughly, *for external use only.*"

C. Bruce Hunter made his *Fantasy Tales* debut last issue with *To Welcome One of Their Own*; we welcome him back this issue with the preceding brief, but pertinent, tale, originally published in *Sorcerer's Apprentice* no.15 (Summer 1982).





FIRST off, we would like to apologize for the long wait since our last issue, but our involvement this year with The British Fantasy Society and other projects has left us precious little time to devote to *Fantasy Tales* - so much for our planned quarterly schedule! For the time being, we will continue to publish *FT* on an "occasional" basis.

Last year we finally won our first World Fantasy Award - well, after a fashion: Although nominated in the 'Non-professional Special Award' category for the third time, we were beaten by Robert Collins/Paul Allen's *Fantasy Newsletter*. However, Dennis Etchison's *The Dark Country*, first published in *Fantasy Tales* 8, won the 'Best Short Story' award (making a unique and well-deserved double for Dennis, as the story also picked up the British Fantasy Award in the same category). Not quite an award for *FT*, but the next best thing...

This year the Scream/Press edition of *The Dark Country* has been nominated for a World Fantasy Award in the 'Best Anthology/Collection' category, and *Fantasy Tales* has yet again been nominated for both the British and World Fantasy Awards.

Fantasy Tales may have been keeping a low profile this year, but stories that previously appeared in the magazine have been turning up all over the place, including Randall Garrett's *Just Another Vampire Story* (from *Fantasy Tales* 5) and Robert Cook's *The Woodcarver's Son* (from issue 7) which both appeared in Marion Zimmer Bradley's anthology, *Greyhaven* (DAW Books, April, 1983); while America's *Fantasy Book* reprinted Frances Garfield's *The Elementals* (as *Jimmy and the Elementals*) and H. Warner Munn's *Dreams May Come*, both from *FT* 6.

Finally, in this issue is a list of back numbers of *Fantasy Tales* still available from us. Please note that since the last *FT*, issue 7 has gone out of print

(joining numbers 1, 2 and 3), and stocks of some of the others are getting rather low.

MORE MUNN PLEASE

From, Nic Howard, Reading, Berks:
 "Many thanks for *FT* 11, which I fear, overall, was below the quality of the last couple of issues. I only really enjoyed two stories: H. Warner Munn's *A Sprig of Rosemary* and Allen Lucas' *Dead to the World*. Munn's story had that same haunting, elusive feel to it that much of his work seemed to have. *Dreams May Come* (which you published in *FT* 6) was similar. I hope that you'll reprint more Munn or, better still, get your hands on some previously unpublished work - assuming there still is any! *Dead to the World* was a fine piece, with a creeping inexorability about it that made it a horrible read indeed! A real "noxious fragment" as HPL said, when praising a story highly. The best story in the issue. Publishing 'Dray Prescott's' *The Story of Lallia the Slave Girl* was pushing it a bit. Sure, it's nice to have something by Ken Bulmer in the issue - but he's written so much better in the past that *Lallia* is a real let-down. *To Welcome One of Their Own* (Bruce Hunter) suffered from a bad prose style, though the poignant ending was reasonably handled. Peter Tremayne's *The Storm Devil of Lan-Kern* - well, I don't seem to be able to get on with Lan-Kern at all: The artificial style puts me off completely. The illustrations were well up to standard, particularly Dave Carson's illo for *Dead to the World* (still getting away from tentacular horrors - a welcome change; carry on the good work, Dave!) Jim Pitts' cover and illo for *A Sprig of Rosemary* were superb: The expressions on the faces of the two characters were perfect."

A BIG IMPROVEMENT

Regular *FT* author, Brian Lumley, writes

from Crouch End, London: "First off, this is one of your better issues. A *big* improvement over last. Art first: There are three fantasy masterpieces here. (All the art is first-class, but three in particular stand out). They are, in this order: Carson on page 21. His heading for the Lucas story is superb! A classic of horror etching if ever I saw one. At his best Carson *is* the best, no doubt of it. Next is Jim Pitts for Munn's story: Stylistically brilliant! And finally Russ Nicholson for the 'Dray Prescott' tale. Hardly macabre - but who cares? Stories: Munn and Lucas share 1st spot; Prescott and Tremayne share 2nd; C. Bruce Hunter, 3rd. But all the stories are readable. Also, you seem to have hit just the right length in these tales. Seven stories isn't bad for a little magazine of only 48+ pages. A very nice balance of verse, stories and artwork."

ONE OF OUR BETTER ISSUES

From, Peter Coleborn, Stechford, Birmingham: "It's getting to be a cliché, but... Congratulations on yet another superb issue. *FT* 11 is undoubtedly one of the better issues of the last year or so. The best story has to be Harold Munn's *A Sprig of Rosemary*. It's a sad, poignant tale that reads as fresh today as it must have done in 1933. I was unsure about *FT* reprinting so-called 'fantasy classics', but this story fully vindicates your policy. Next comes *At the Mouth of Time*, good heroic fantasy, a mix of Howard (especially the beginning) and Leiber; and *To Welcome One of Their Own*, a haunting, melancholic tale. The artwork, once again, is faultless - well, almost. The back cover is below the high standards you usually set for *FT*. Dave Carson's illustration on page 21 is surely more horrific, more effective than any of his tentacled, clawed creepies. Jim Pitts, again, is tops. I'm amazed that Jim, one of the stalwarts of *FT* who always delivers the goods, hasn't been fully recognised with a World Fantasy Award, let alone a British Fantasy Award. Finally, commiserations on not getting this year's World Fantasy Award. Maybe next year the judges will wake up..."

EXCELLENT QUALITY

R. Nicholson-Morton, from Fareham, Hants, writes: "I didn't like Jim Pitts' cover but thought his illustration to

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A Sprig of Rosemary was excellent; this tale was an impressive start to issue 11, evoking compassion and concern for the characters: There was also a good moral, love thine enemy. I was pleasantly surprised to discover it was originally published in 1933; whilst I would normally prefer to read stories by contemporary writers, it is both instructive and enjoyable to encounter old gems. Peter Tremayne's tale captured the flavour, no doubt, of Celtic Cornwall. But the denouement was signposted by the illustration and confirmed seven-tenths the way through; the preceding seven-tenths said a lot about little. C. Bruce Hunter's piece was quaint and atmospheric, redolent of age and supernatural mystery. Yes, it seemed about right. Now, Allen A. Lucas' *Dead to the World* was, in my view, the best, even outdoing Ramsey Campbell at the gradual exposition of creeping horror. And featuring an original ailment, too - no mean achievement! Dave Carson's illustration, though very well executed, perhaps spoiled the effect, giving away too much too soon. Joe R. Lansdale's sword & sorcery tale was well written, with telling metaphors and imagery, wry humour and knocked spots off Howard's prose style! Peter Bayliss' *Legacy of Evil* held no surprises and, whilst possessing some good description, occasionally lapsed: Would anyone say or even think in such lengthy explanatory sentences - "The traitor, Benjamin Simons, who wormed his way into my affections only to betray my trust with murder, will die!" - ? An excellent illustration by Russ Nicholson for an otherwise inferior piece of fiction by Dray Prescott/Ken Bulmer. The reader feels little concern for Lallia, thanks to the style of storytelling; perhaps this is intentional... As an appetizer for other Prescott sagas it fails completely. Allen Koszowski's impaled vampire skeleton end-piece is so good it makes me jealous! With regard to the inclusion of SF in *FT*, I would put *Dead to the World* in that category and also, I regret, the Lallia story. Of course the presentation quality of the magazine was excellent and on the whole it was an entertaining and thought-provoking issue."

ASTONISHING RANGE

From, Philip Collins, Hither Green, London: "*The Story of Lallia the Slave Girl* shows once more Bulmer's wide inconsistency. Here is a man whose writings range from the very fine to the absolut-

ely awful. I felt that the story in question was definitely nearer the end of the latter part of the range. More serious, however, was the *very* distasteful accompanying drawing by Russ Nicholson! Otherwise I thought the standard of artwork in this issue to be very high. As with issue 10, I thought the best piece of artwork was on the back cover. A scorching, smoking skeleton from Ian Hicks and Graham Crossland. When I first saw Jim Pitts' front cover, I was initially dismissive, but something drew me back to it: The old man's eyes, although small and half-shaded, have really haunted me. First place definitely goes to Allen Lucas with *Dead to the World*. The utter inevitability of the progress of the disease and of the story was especially compelling and horrific. I look forward eagerly to the promised future tales from this writer. Second was the H. Warner Munn story, *A Sprig of Rosemary*. It had some really beautiful, warm characters which made the whole story so much more touching and haunting than it might have been in the hands of a less-skilled author. Only just third was C. Bruce Hunter's *To Welcome One of Their Own*. Like the Munn story, it was effective due to the life the author breathed into the characters, and the description of the house also helped give it another vivid dimension. This issue of *Fantasy Tales* was certainly a further demonstration of what an astonishing range the word *fantasy* covers. This means that not everyone will like every story, but personally I much prefer this system to one that rigidly sets up barriers as to what type of fiction that will or will not get published. Long live variety! Thank you for another fine issue of *Fantasy Tales*.

MOST POPULAR STORY

Our readers voted last issue's lead story, H. Warner Munn's *A Sprig of Rosemary*, the best in *FT* 11. Runners-up were Allen A. Lucas' *Dead to the World* followed by C. Bruce Hunter's *To Welcome One of Their Own*. To vote for your favourite stories this issue, list them in order of preference and send them to: *Fantasy Tales*, 130 Park View, Wembley, Middx. HA9 6JU.

ARTISTS IN THIS ISSUE

The illustration on page 23 is by Alan Hunter; page 32 by Allen Koszowski; and page 45 by Ian Hicks & Graham Crossland. The *Contents* page heading is by Jim Pitts and *The Cauldron* heading by John Grandfield.

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