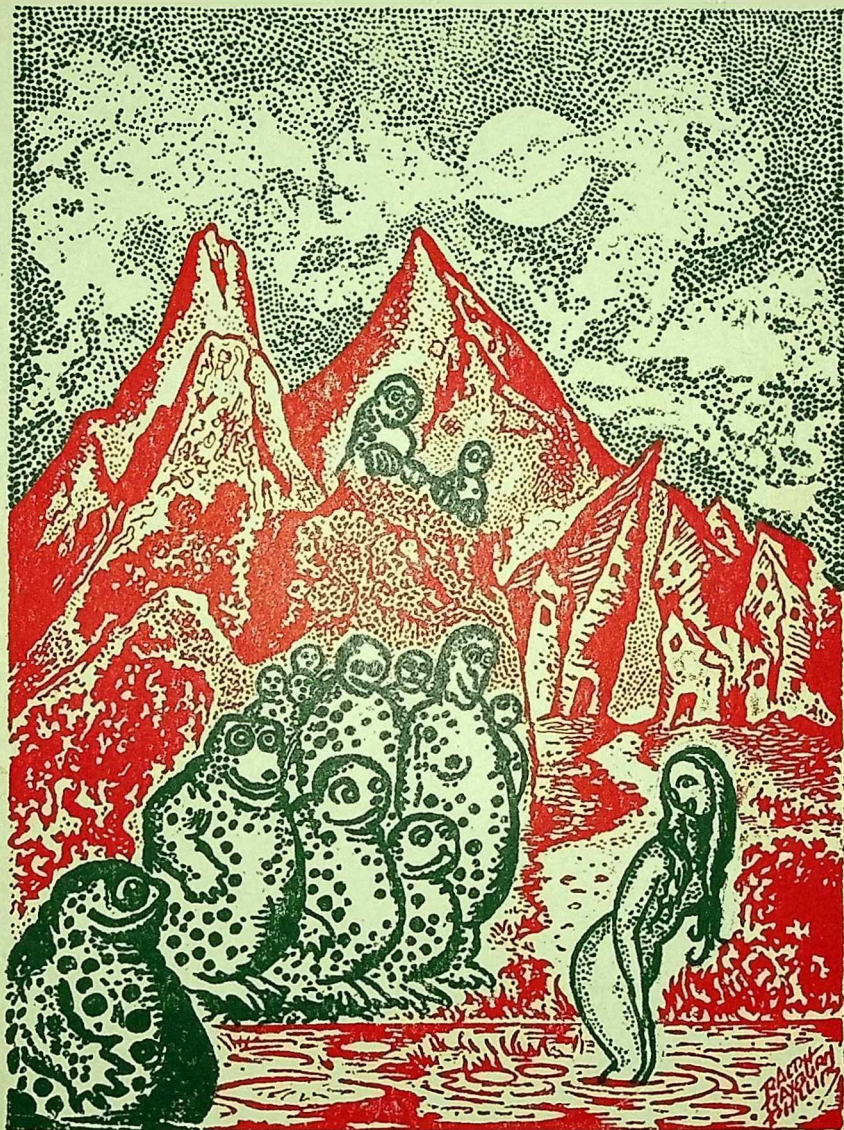


# The NEKROMANTIKON

*Amateur Magazine of Weird and Fantasy*



Volume 1, Number 2

Summer 1950



# THE NEKROMANTIKON

Amateur Magazine of Weird and Fantasy

Summer 1950

Manly Banister, Editor-Publisher

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COVER BY RALPH RAYBURN PHILLIPS

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Autumn issue out about August 1st.

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Printed in U. S. A.

For weeks we have been up to the elbows in a fuming vat of nitric acid, painfully learning by experience the devious and arcane art of the photo engraver. We have inhaled hydrogen enough to inflate the lamented Graf Zeppelin, nitric acid vapor in quantities that would scald the rust from the boilers of the Queen Mary. These are, by the way, vaporous by-products of the engraving process. The moderate success of our efforts is to be seen and analyzed on the cover and in the following pages.

We work under disadvantages, after all. We made engravings at the kitchen sink, but it is not the best place for it, you can believe us. No more shall be made until a proper "plant" has been constituted for it in the basement, with adequate ventilation.

Many thanks to you readers for your kind letters and helpful suggestions. We feel that an improvement has been effected in the format of the magazine. Some of you complained of the lack of sturdiness of the cover, and this has been, we think, adequately remedied. We have worked over and modernized our bookbinder's "plow and press" to simulate mass production in the trimming of magazine edges. We have given thought to our choice of paper for this issue and have laid in a number of fonts of interesting type to dress up story heads and type pages.

We hope to continue improving the magazine, even if it should prevent the meeting of publication deadlines. We are in this for fun and, thank Heaven, punch no time clock and waste no rue upon throwing profits after losses.

You who have seen our Spring issue will note that this Summer number is six pages longer. This signifies nothing. The Fall number may be longer, or it may be shorter. We maintain an attitude of cheerful irresponsibility in respect to how many pages shall constitute an issue; though we avow that our readers shall not get less than their two bits' worth. . . wholesale.

We are very well taken with the possibilities of color in the field of photo engraving. We have not the facilities (nor do we intend to acquire any) for the production of screen half-tone plates. Line plates offer a fascinating enough field for interesting experimentation. Our cover and Ul-Ul on the back cover demonstrate the basic fundamentals of such color work. (Ul-Ul is printed from one zinc and two lino blocks.) Complex variations with the use of solid and Ben Day tints are full of possibilities. Look for something of this nature in the Fall Issue.

We feel that our writers this issue have done themselves proud. We are highly pleased with the quarter's achievement in this direction. A small matter of technique is all that stands between most amateur writers and their goal of professional standing. If your basic thinking is sound, you can hammer at technique until you get it down right. Knowing what to say is at least three quarters of the battle. How to say it comes with practice. We would not counsel any who hoped to write to give up that hope. You can always write, if not to sell, at least for your own satisfaction.

Let us see more of your scripts.

RALPH RAYBURN PHILLIPS  
Ultra Weird Artist

New indeed is the fan who has not before this made acquaintance with the work of Ralph Rayburn Phillips, whose generous zeal in the interest of the weird and macabre is portrayed in these pages.

Hailing from the green hills of New England, Ralph now shares a grave with another corpse in a prominent Portland, Oregon cemetery. As shadows of night close subtly down and the last spark of a bloody sun is extinguished in the purpling sky, the earth crumbles, and a horrid figure dredges its way out of what should be its resting place serene. Ralph Rayburn Phillips! The world's weirdest and most macabre artist! You recognize him by the clay-smeared drawing board under his arm. . . and those long, long fingernails he uses to draw with (all five at once, and sometimes ten), after dipping them in the blood of his latest victim! (Our film is orthochromatic, anyway, and red photographs black).

Seriously, Ralph is one of the most original artists in this field we have seen. Unlike Dali who mutilates normalcy to achieve his desired effect, Ralph departs entirely from normalcy to the extent that you either like his work immensely, or you like it not at all. We happen to like it.

Actually, Ralph does do his work at night, when the owl hoots outside his window, and the bat makes like a flying saucer against the moon. When you view his work, you can hear the creak of the coffin lid, the clangor of lugubrious chains, the moan and wail of the spirit condemned.

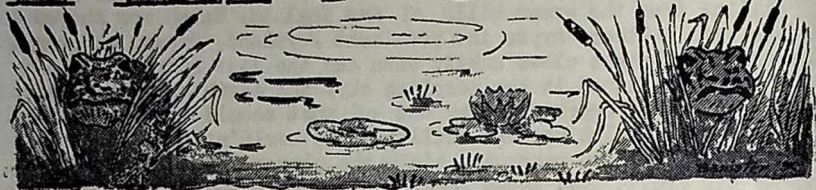
Like a living alter-ego of Lovecraft, Ralph Rayburn Phillips brings to life the inventions and imaginings of that master of the weird and fantastic. Indeed, Ralph feels that between himself and Lovecraft in his grave there exists an intangible bond, a sharing, as it were, of the ghostly knowledge of worlds beyond worlds, of universes beyond ken.

If there are, indeed, works of pictorial art that will reveal that dimension from which Lovecraft drew his imagery and inspiration, then these are the work of Ralph Rayburn Phillips.

Other fields besides art grapple with Ralph for his time. He is, for instance, the founder and head of the American Buddhist Society and spends much time in the meditation of profound and esoteric things. He is a mystic, with a mystic personality. The utterance he finds for this absorbing mysticism in the products of his pen and brush can best be judged by the individual observer. If you do not see it there, if you do not read into the boldness and obscure symbolism of his work the soul of a true mystic absorbed in a contemplation of the infinite, then you have no part of the mystic in you.

Most cogent of all, perhaps. . . Ralph is a fan among fans, a sincere devotee to fandom. He is a member of the Portland Science Fiction Society of Portland, Oregon, and an earnest friend of every serious fan. Try to make it to the Norwescon this September 1--4, and you will doubtless get a chance to meet him.

# FEN-WER



**By Manly Banister**

**What loathesome, evil Thing  
dwelt in the mire of that ghastly fen?**

*Illustrated by Banister*

A SHRILL, MULTITUDINOUS PIPING OF FROGS found voice suddenly at high noon in August, in downtown LeFarge.

John Logan stopped with one foot outside the LeFarge National Bank and received a smart rap on the heel of the other from the revolving door. A perspiring patron catapulted from the exit, caromed off Logan's left arm, scowled over his shoulder, and hurried off into the swirl of the midday throng.

The froggy litany shrilled to a crescendo. Logan mentally thumbed his brain-index of sounds. Frogs. Only frogs. He shrugged and grinned to himself.

Frogs? Downtown. . . in mid-August?

He followed with his ear, then his eyes, the course of the sound --now a vibrant noise, loud and painfully throbbing; though apparently it was unheard or ignored by the hurrying crowd, for none save he paused to listen.

An enormous fat man sat behind the wheel of a disreputable black sedan parked at the curb. Half the wheel was hidden in his enormous paunch. Coarse, hand-sewn clothes gaped at the seams in a Gargantuan



*Something rose up out of the water—*

task to encompass such a mountain of flesh. From swollen, doughy hillocks of gray-green flesh, black eyes pierced keenly toward Logan, as if their monstrous owner was aware of Logan's interest.

The two locked glances. The fat man turned his head, made a ponderous movement. The chuckling of frogs merged with the sound of the revving motor. The sedan moved out from the curb.

John Logan shook himself and grinned sheepishly. For a moment, he had imagined the froggish din was coming straight from the fat man's paunch--when more likely it was the protest of main bearings in need of oil.

He swung off down the street and promptly forgot the fat man and the idling motor that had seemed to sound like a swamp full of frogs.

Linda Logan--brunette, dainty, "pretty as peaches" in the parlance of husband John--had finished packing their bags by the time John got back from the bank.

"Hullo, Yawn, dear." She slithered into his arms.

"I won't yawn," said John. He kissed her ear, then planted a firm buss on her healthy, pouting lips.

Linda laughed, tossed her long hair, pulled back in the circling embrace of his arms.

"Woe is me - the honeymoon is over!"

"Not this one," John denied. "It's just starting, baby, and it's going to last fifty years!"

Linda pouted. "A week ago, you'd have. . ."

Logan pushed her away. "Shut up. Are the bags packed?"

"Yep - for the last time. Tomorrow we'll be home. Home!" She looked starry-eyed and soulful.

"Home!" echoed John. "Home - where you walk up two flights and back in through the door, so you'll be facing the right way when you come out in the morning! Nope. We're not going home, Linda-sweet."

She looked a question. John fumbled in his pocket, brought out a crumpled, yellow telegram.

"From Grant - feature editor, in case I neglected to mention him before."

Linda wrinkled her nose thoughtfully. "Mmmm...Aloysius G. Grant of the Never-Grant-Anything Grants. Gimme."

She smoothed out the paper.

PLAGUE OF FROGS AT YAGGERS LANDING WHERE IN GOD'S NAME IS THAT LOOK IT UP GRANT.

Linda fluttered the message. "Did you, Yawn?"

"I didn't yawn, and if you don't quit using that infernal sobriquet, I'll --"

"Ah, ah, dear! Never make idle threats to your wife!"

John grabbed her, sprawled her across a lifted knee, and raised a threatening hand.

"I'll 'idle threat' you, you witch!"

Struggling, Linda turned a stricken face.

"I won't ever again, honest. Lemme go. Where's Yagger's Landing?"

John lifted her to her feet, dusted his hands. They both laughed, and he kissed her.

"That's better. Thirty-two miles from here. That-a-way." Sweep-

ingly his gesture included the countryside generally from north to south in a westerly approximation. "Let's get out of here."

THE FOOTHILLS BEGAN almost on the outskirts of LeFarge. Logan tooled the sleek little convertible around dizzying, hair-pin turns. The motor labored from the climb. Sunlight glinted on the white safety-rail hugging the edge of smooth macadam. An occasional turn brought glimmering peaks into distant view, pine-skirted, capped in glistening white, hewn in bold relief against the clean, blue backdrop of sky.

"The glories of Nature," breathed Linda, "where the hand of man has never trod!"

John ignored her flippancy.

"As far as I could find out," he said, "Yagger's Landing isn't much of a place. I phoned the hotel there. The clerk didn't even know why it was called 'Landing.' There isn't a river for miles. It has a population of two hundred - the town, not the river. It's some kind of resort, I gathered, though the frogs have played hob with business this season. Noisy, the clerk says. People don't stay long."

"I thought you always heard frogs in the country at night," remarked Linda. "I always did - I think."

"I also telephoned Grant," Logan continued. "Some friends of his vacationed - tried to - at Yagger's Landing. They left after the first night. Frogs kept 'em awake. Peculiar, too. Yagger's Landing is dry ground. The marsh is at the headwaters of the river I mentioned - fifteen miles above the town. Grant wants me to interview the frogs and find out why they've migrated over fifteen miles of dry land to make life miserable for tourists at Yagger's Landing. Maybe, he says, there's a story in it. Maybe, he says, the frogs are tired of being cooped up in marshes and are marshalling - ha, ha, that's a good one! (quoting Grant) to descend upon civilization. Make the most out of it, he says, if you have to write the story around a recipe for fried frog legs."

"You talk," said Linda, "like a feature writer. All choppy, but to the point."

"I don't waste words," John retorted.

"Did you ever waste time, dear?" cooed Linda sweetly.

Logan ignored the pointed inference to their errand.

"Not till I met you." He leaned over and kissed her swiftly.

"Hey, watch out! Keep your eyes on the road!"

"Last time I did that, a truck ran over 'em, and I've been pop-eyed ever since!"

He screeched the convertible around a turn.

TO SAY THAT YAGGER'S LANDING was not much aggrandized it. Yagger's Landing wasn't anything. The clerk who had claimed the population as two hundred had lied in his teeth. Linda and John did not see two hundred blow flies as they rolled up the dusty main street.

"Good Lord!" said Linda.

Logan agreed with her. The town was barren. Houses and stores

looked deserted. There wasn't even a loafer in sight. The sun dwelt in a liquefied golden haze upon a silent tomb deserted even by its corpse.

John found a parking lot beside the testering, rangy structure of weathered clapboard that called itself a hotel, and turned off the ignition. The shimmering engine plunked gratefully, gurgled and grated into a kind of breathless quiet that matched the bright pall of silence over the village.

The inside of the hotel was no more prepossessing than the outside. A bit cooler, perhaps, and darker.

On their way to the desk, John almost fell over the outstretched legs of a man buried in a Morris chair. He sidestepped nimbly just in time, adjusting his vision to the gloom. The ponderous bulk in the chair looked familiar. The keenly penetrating eyes were blanked out now in folds of somnolent fat. The mountainous man snored thinly, with a sound as of a multitude of frogs yodelling an infinite distance away.

"Yes, sir. Yes sir! You're the man who telephoned!"

Linda looked askance at the weedy, middle-aged clerk, who held her with his bright-eyed glance, and pointed at John.

"No, he is."

"Of course. Of course! Welcome to Yagger's Landing, sir! You, too, ma'am. I know you'll like it here at Yagger's Landing. Fine place. Except for the frogs, like I told Mr. - uh - Nolan - uh - Logan. Really, we don't mention the frogs to prospective guests, but you asked. . ."

"Yes, I asked," said Logan. "Who's your fat friend?"

The clerk grimaced, lowered his voice.

"He don't belong here - not at Yagger's Landing. Disgusting, ain't he? Whole tribe like him live up in the swamp country. Didn't used none of 'em much to come down this way, but he's been here pretty regular all summer. Does nothin' but loaf - goes home nights, though, thank Goodness!" He made a motion of dusting with his hands.

Logan felt a prickle of interest. "Town up there?"

"Marshville. Not named for the swamp, though. Everybody in the place is named Marsh. A regular trike of Marshes. They - yes, sir. . . here's your key. Like I was saying, the room is nice and airy, and you can see the mountains from the window. . . ."

Logan was aware that the distant tittering of frogs had ceased. He turned. The fat man was staring at them with a certain malignancy evident in his black-eyed gaze. Only for an instant Logan clashed glances with the man, then the puffy lids merged and the fat man became again a somnolent mountain of flesh.

"AN UTTERLY GRUESOME HOLE," Linda muttered succinctly. Their room was barren as the town of Yagger's Landing itself, though moderately clean.

"This room," queried Logan.

"A hole within a hole. Horrible!" Linda sniffed. "Who said this is a resort?"

"The clerk. People come up here for a few days in summer. Go

tramping over the mountain trails. Excellent sport, and so good for one."

"Well, where are the frogs? I haven't heard a chirp since we've been here."

Logan pursed his lips for a reply, relaxed. He could hear the frogs ululating a long distance away.

"Listen close," he advised.

Linda listened, twisting her pretty face into a frown of concentration.

"Nary a frog, dear. Why listen?"

Logan cocked his head. "No... can't hear a thing myself... now. Thought I did. It's daytime, anyway—or will be for another thirty minutes."

He went to the open window. Limp curtains hung listlessly in the still air. Toward, the mountains rose gold-capped, skirted in deep mauve and purple. Linda found the circle of his arm and sighed.

"Lovely, isn't it? It's like - like - oh, nobody ever wrote a poem that's like that."

John cuddled her. "That's what I love about you, darling. You appreciate things."

Together they watched the golden sun sink to meet the mountains. Purple shadows swirled up from slumbering valleys, danced into the sky to stain the blue and etch out the stars. Twilight was brief - then the frogs began.

Linda slammed the window. "What a climax!" she cried in hurt rage.

From near and far, and seemingly from within their very room, the frogs boomed, bellowed, twittered, chirped, and belled. The night was alive with frogs, and the air quivered with their noise. The very walls shook with a horrible cacophony of froggish throats shouting in tympany glee.



Linda stopped her ears against the din.

## THE NEKROMANTIKON

Linda stopped her ear against the din. "Are we supposed to sleep through this, or do they ~~let up~~ after a while?"

"As I understand it," Logan winced, "they keep it up all night long. That's our story - remember? Translate that, and it means bread and butter. Which reminds me, I'm hungry. Do they feed people in this vile place?"

As if on cue, a tapping came at the door. Logan opened up. The clerk looked sheepish and miserable.

"I'm sorry about the frogs, folks. Didn't used to be any at all in these parts. Terrible now-a-days - druv the whole population out of town except me. They. . ."

"Is there a place around here we can eat?" Logan put in brusquely.

"That's what I come up here to tell you. Dinner is ready in the Coffee Shop. You two are the only guests. I fixed your supper special myself."

"I guess your fat friend is gone," said Logan.

"Don't say that! He's no friend of mine! He's - he left when the frogs began to holler. Don't like 'em no more'n you or me, I guess." He turned to Linda. "I'm sorry the vittles ain't better'n they are, ma'am. Our cook left two weeks ago. No guest stays here longer'n, mebbe, a night, so I get along cookin' for 'em myself."

They ate a drab supper with the drab little man for company. . . and the booming of the frogs. Logan found that if you concentrated on the food, the noise seemed to diminish a little--maybe. But the food was as bad to one sense as the noise to the other, so it wasn't worth the effort.

"My ears hurt," said Linda.

"I think I'm a little deaf to the high notes," opined the clerk. "And the low notes don't bother me. I used to be a drummer in an orchestra."

Logan abandoned their cheerless repast and took Linda back up to their room.

"Tomorrow," he said, "we're going up to Marshville and look in on the Marshes as well as the marsh, find a frog willing to be interviewed - or failing that, a Marsh will do - and get home by tomorrow night. Damn Grant and his frogs. Thank heaven I don't have to write the thing here!"

IN SPITE OF THE CLERK'S ALMOST TEARFUL PROTEST, John and Linda drove off toward Marshville in the morning.

"You don't want to go there!" he mourned. "All them horrible, ugly folks. . . They - they do things--" He put a hand over his eyes.

"What things?" asked Logan.

"Not Christian - you know? I - I don't know. There used to be people in Yagger's Landing. . . before the frogs came. They. . . talked. Said things, you understand. Just gossip. I only went to Marshville once. Got the horrors and came right back. It's not a. . . good place."

Marshville was an evil place. Its main street ended in the mire of a swamp, scummed and nauseous looking, mud-flats and stagnant pools forested with giant cattails nodding brown, fuzzy cylinders

above the reeds and lesser marsh grasses. Logan turned the convertible, drove back along the muddy street.

There was an air of slothful activity about the place that had been entirely lacking at Yagger's Landing, though houses and one-story buildings were equally run-down. Logan noted with interest that the houses were almost windowless, silent in the hot breezes of the August morning.

A weary tree grew in the town square. A few corpulent citizens lolled in its shade, or sunned themselves speechlessly on the grass. Logan spied a dirty window with the legend: MARSHVILLE. U.S. POST OFFICE. He left Linda in the car with a word of admonition and went inside.

The place appeared to be disused. The floor was inch-deep with dried mud. More mud smeared the walls and the fly-specked glass fronts of the mail boxes. Logan went to the only window and peered into the darkness beyond. Something stirred with a soft scraping sound in the gloom of the back room. Short hairs prickled on the back of Logan's neck. A formless blob of deathly white wavered into the semi-dark of the front, resolved itself into one of the corpulent citizens of Marshville.

He peered at Logan over puffed, greenish-white cheeks.

"Nobody ever comes here," he rasped warningly.

The cold scrutiny of the Marshvillian gave Logan a feeling of annoyance.

"I'm here," he said brusquely. "I'm looking for a hotel. Didn't see any sign--"

"No hotel," croaked the misshapen postmaster. "Nobody ever comes here, I say! Why should there be a hotel?"

"I don't want to live here - or even stay over night." Logan was impatient. "I just want a place where my wife and I can clean up and get a bite to eat. We're just passing through."

The postmaster knew he lied. Marshville was at a dead end. You didn't "just pass through."

"Nobody--" he began ponderously, then clamped his thick lips at a croaking whisper from the dark at his back. He shuffled from the window and was merged with the shadows. There was a faint plopping and clucking noise.

Logan fretted and bit his lip. Should he walk out, or had he got the impression that the postmaster would return? While he debated, the postmaster dragged into view.

"Missus Uriah Marsh," he said stolidly. "She will take you in."

"A hotel?" said Logan.

"No hotel, I said. Missus Marsh - Uriah Marsh - will take you in."

He grunted directions and Logan went out. At the threshold, he cast a glance over his shoulder. A pale, blobby roundness at the postmaster's window was snatched suddenly from sight - but not suddenly enough to prevent Logan's recognizing the face of the fat man he had seen in LeFarge and at Yagger's Landing. Unaccountably, a chill went through him.

Outside, the rank swamp air smelled clean and tasted sweet after his sojourn in that morgue of a post office.

"I've found a place where we can clean up and get something to eat, honey," he told Linda. "You can stay there and rest this afternoon, while I look the town over. Then we'll get out of here."

Linda offered nothing to say. She was unusually sober and quiet. Her normally glowing charm struggled without effect against the dismal atmosphere of the village. In spite of the bright sun, a shadow as dark as the mephitic odor of the swamp seemed to hover over the town.

MRS. URIAH MARSH HAD NO DISCERNIBLE AGE. Like all Marshvillians, she was bursting the seams of her coarse, hand-made clothing. Her demeanor was bland. She spoke hoarsely.

"Come in. It ain't often we have visitors in Marshville."

"The man at the post office--" Logan began.

Mrs. Marsh waved a fat hand.

"I've had word, Mr. Logan. Come right in."

Logan jumped. He thought--the fat man. The hotel register at Yagger's Landing. The fat man had shown undue interest to read his name. . . and remember it. Who. . . or what. . . was the fat man in Marshville? Certainly, he had instructed the postmaster to send them here.

Logan said, "Is Uriah a fat man - fatter than most in Marshville?"

Mrs. Marsh nodded elephantine agreement. "He's my husband and our mayor--so far as we've got one. But don't stand there--come in. I've got stuff fixed for you to eat."

They ate and the food was surprisingly good. Afterward, Mrs. Marsh, ponderously affable, showed them to a room where they could "freshen up." It was cool, and there was an oil lamp burning on a stand by the bed. The room was windowless.

"No windows!" Exclaimed Linda.

"Windows ain't much the fashion in Marshville," Mrs. Marsh explained. She hesitated. "Glass is mighty expensive and breaks too easy,"

She turned and waddled away, leaving them alone.

"Keeps out the smell of the swamp, at least," Logan observed. He squeezed Linda's arm affectionately. "You lie down and rest a bit, honey. I'll see what I can dig up around town, take a few pictures, and we'll be on our way."

Linda clung to him. Her voice sounded frightened and breathless.

"John! Don't go away and leave me here alone. I-I'm scared!"

Logan attempted a laugh, but the resulting noise was hollow. He stroked Linda's dark hair and held her cheek against his chest.

"Darling! This isn't like you. After a frog-ridden night, you need rest. Just take it easy an hour or two--"

Linda's fingers dug into his ribs.

"Listen!"

Somewhere in the house, something dragged and bumped. The sound repeated itself a time or two, then the house grew still.

"Just the old lady moving a sack of flour," Logan said carelessly. "Don't get nervy now, darling. I'll get my camera out of the car and stroll around a little, and be back before you know it."



Logan struggled back through giant cattails.

He led her unprotesting to the bed, saw that she was comfortable, and left the room.

In a way, Logan didn't blame the girl. The atmosphere of the whole town was one of brooding, abysmal depression. And to be led, in broad day, into a gloomy, windowless chamber lighted only by an oil-lamp was something on the shocking side. He hoped she would rest.

The town square seethed sluggishly. Double doors stood open at the front of a windowless building opposite the post office. A crowd of natives shuffled about the entrance, some passing inside, others standing and greeting their neighbors.

Logan held up his press camera and made an exposure that took in the entire facade of the building. He hoped he could capture something of the air of sodden gloominess that infested the place. He went closer and made a few close-ups of the stolidly shuffling citizens. No one seemed to mind or pay him more attention than a curious glance or two.

Logan wondered what was going on. Was this a town meeting—or a religious group gathering to "do" things? Swinging his camera by its strap, he joined the entering stream.

A hand seized Logan's shoulder, pulled him out of the line. Logan convulsed with a hot spasm of rage.

"Why, you--!"

The Marshvillian regarded him with blank, puffed features.

"Sorry. Strangers ain't wanted in here."

"Listen," Logan said through set teeth. "I'm a reporter, see? I'll go where I please. Now--"

The last of the citizenry had passed inside. Stolidly, complacently, the fat native placed a hand against Logan's chest and pushed.

Logan picked himself up from the dust and hardened mud of the street, wrathful and choking; but the double doors were ominously closed.

There was no contesting the blank disinterest of that facade. An aura of cold malignancy struck chill to Logan's wrath. A reporter gets used, he told himself, to being told no, in one form or another.

"At least," he thought, "they don't object to my taking pictures."

He raised his camera and spitefully photographed the post office.

Practically the entire population seemed to be attending the meeting in the windowless hall. In his stroll he met an occasional olderster or a woman shuffling along, but never once did he see a child. He began to wonder about this.

His attempts to question the occasional villager he met proved fruitless. They simply croaked and shambled on. He wandered to the verge of the stinking swamp, photographed the giant cattails, and never saw a single frog.

At last he gave up and went back for Linda. The Uriah Marsh home looked even gloomier than it had before. It had two windows only - at the front - and these were tiny. He wondered about Mrs. Marsh's explanation of the lack of windows. There was plenty to wonder about in this macabre town. Even if he had found out nothing about frogs, he already had the makings of a whale of a feature article -- with pictures. Maybe he could weave frogs into it somehow.

He went in. Linda was sleeping. In spite of his care, he made noise walking on the bare floor. Linda woke with a start, eyes wide. Recognition flooded her glance, and she smiled tiredly.

"I did sleep after all, dear."

"It did you good, too," he told her jocularly. There was a damper on his speech. He felt too depressed with his peregrination about town to go into details about it. "Let's go," he said.

Linda got up with alacrity. A brief hunt for Mrs. Marsh located her in the kitchen. She loomed palely, ponderously, in the ill-lit gloom. When Logan offered payment for the respite given them, she shook her head heavily.

"Glad to help." The rasping tone of her voice made Logan wince. "Sorry you got to go so soon. Sure you'll come back won't you?"

The parting was an ordeal, but they made it finally to the car. Logan put his camera away behind the seat, settled back with a gratified sigh, and stepped on the starter. The motor turned over without responding. After ten minutes of cursing and prodding under the hood, Logan gave up in exasperation.

"Go ask Mrs. Marsh," he told Linda, "if there is a garage man in town."

Linda went and came back with Mrs. Marsh waddling behind her.

"Well, now, that's a shame, Mr. Logan. There's no regular garage man--only Luke, a sort of cousin of mine, who does know something about cars. It'll take a little time, but I'll go fetch him for you."

She shuffled away behind the house.

Linda regarded her husband with large, frightened eyes, in the dark depths of which a certain horror swam.

"She - she acted like she was expecting me to come back. Oh can't we do something to get out of this horrible place? It - it frightens me!"

Logan shrugged gloomily. "Not unless we get the car started, dear. Luke will find out what's wrong." His words lacked conviction.

The wait seemed endless. It was fully half an hour before Mrs. Marsh came back, towing her "sort of cousin" Luke. Luke was puffed and bloated like every other Marshvillian Logan had seen.

The native pattered under the hood, came up with a bit of something clamped between fat fingers.

"Burned out," he observed laconically.

Logan was irritated. "Can you fix it?"

"Need a new one."

"Get one and put it in."

Luke became placidly stolid.

"You can get one in LeFarge."

Logan exploded. "LeFarge? That's fifty miles away!"

"Forty-seven," corrected Luke.

"How in the name of - of ..how am I going to get a part like that from LeFarge?"

Luke glanced at Mrs. Marsh.

Mrs. Marsh said, "Luke, you go down to the post office and telephone somebody in LeFarge to send up a part like that for Mr. Logan. It can come in tomorrow's mail." She turned to John and Linda. "The only telephone in town is at the post office."

Logan didn't care. "Never mind," he said quickly. "We'll go to LeFarge ourselves and send somebody back with the part to pick up the car."

Mrs. Marsh looked at him queerly.

"I don't see how you can do that. There's no way to get to LeFarge except to walk. Or wait for tomorrow's mail truck."

Logan's nerves tingled. "Somebody must have a car and will drive us!"

Mrs. Marsh shook her head. "Shame. My husband owns the only car in town. He's gone. . .visitin'. Won't be back until tomorrow." She smiled benignly at Linda. "You might as well have Luke telephone, Mr. Logan."

The resistance went out of Logan. He put a dollar in Luke's hand, and the native shambled off.

"Now you come right in and make yourselves to home," Mrs. Marsh urged them. "You'll be comfortable here tonight, and tomorrow's as good as today for what you have to do, I always say." She smiled at Linda, and somehow Logan's stomach felt sickish.

He looked at Linda and read the defeat in her eyes. They got out their bags and went into the house with Mrs. Marsh.

"As long," Logan said gloomily, "as we're going to have to stay here, I might as well develop my film tonight and check those shots."

Linda had a headache. She lay on the bed and rested, while Logan got bottled chemicals and the film holders from the car. A little later, when he had lighted the lamp again, Logan held up the films one by one and swore. It was all clear celluloid - not the ghost of an image.

Logan got out his camera and checked. The curtain shutter was tied open, as he kept it. The front shutter functioned perfectly. He distinctly remembered removing the dark slides. In the dim glow of the lamp, Linda's eyes were large and dark.

"If you took pictures, there should be pictures on the film, shouldn't there?"

"There should," Logan agreed dispiritedly. "Something went wrong somewhere."

Linda whimpered. "John! John - let's leave - on foot if we have to."

He put his arm around her. "Linda, darling! It's fifteen miles through the wildest kind of country back to Yagger's Landing, even! We'd be no better off there than here."

Linda appeared genuinely frightened.

"John - there's evil in this place - awful, horrible evil! I can feel it through and through me! Silver rejects evil, John. Silver is a charm against bad things. The silver in your film - oh, John!"

Logan held her close and tried to soothe her frightened sobbing. Abruptly, she held her breath, listening. Something dragged in another part of the house. It bumped, like a thing soft and heavy dropped from a height. The curious sound was repeated several times.

"John, Mrs. Marsh wouldn't spend the whole afternoon moving - or thumping - a sack of flour around, would she?"

They listened while the sound continued. Finally it stopped. Logan stroked Linda's hair.

"You worry too much about nothing, dear. Lie back and try to rest."

He laid her gently back upon the pillow. Linda closed her eyes. Her face was drawn and pale, waxen in the dim shine of the lamp. Soon the sound of her even breathing told him that she slept.

Logan went out to the car, glared at it futilely, and fished in the trunk for a few essentials. Time had passed swiftly. It was nearly sunset. Mrs. Marsh met him at the door with an invitation to supper.

"I don't believe I'd care for anything, thanks," he told her. "My wife is sleeping, and I'd rather not disturb her. I think perhaps she'll sleep the night through."

Linda did sleep, even after the croaking of the frogs began with the sunset. Somehow the noise seemed more bearable here than at Yagger's Landing. The windowless walls muffled the sound. Logan felt an overpowering weariness. He lay down beside Linda, not bothering to undress, and slept.

Hours later, Logan aroused. He reached to touch Linda. The room was pitch dark. The lamp had used up its oil, or somebody had come

in and blown out the flame. His groping hand felt only the weave of the coverlet.

Dazed, he whispered her name.

"Linda!" The syllables slithered like a nameless serpent in the dark. He applied flame to the wick. Linda was not in the room. Confused with sleep, he took out his watch, but he had forgotten to wind it, and it was useless to tell the time. He went to the door and called Linda.

The house echoed with a creeping, repulsive silence. Away from the feeble, yellow glow of the lamp, the shadows seemed like monstrous things crouched to spring. He recoiled, took up the lamp with a feeling of mounting alarm.

"Linda!" His voice cracked hoarsely on the final syllable.

The booming of the frogs mocked him. The noise they made pounded against his skull, breaking the tenuous threads of thought in his mind. He carried the lamp from room to room and found no one. Leaving it on a stand in the hall, he went out to the car and got a flashlight. Its cold, white cone of illumination offered some measure of comfort.

Where should he look next? The house was empty. Where was Linda? Where was Mrs. Marsh? Had Linda gone some place with the Marshvillians? It was absurd to suppose so. Where could he look for her?

A full moon rode high in the sky. He skirted frosty patches of moonlight in the yard, casting his torchlight into the shadows and calling Linda's name. At the back stoop, he found his first clue - a footprint, and definitely Linda's. She wore the only pair of high-heeled shoes he had seen in town.

With quickening hope, he went in the direction indicated by the pointing toe. Another print marred the dust at the rear gate. There was a weedy alley here that abutted against the back of a tumbled out-building. He turned down its length, casting his light ahead.

Where the alley debouched into a street of windowless houses, the dust was heavily tracked, many broad footprints overlaying the marks Linda had left. Logan panted.

He felt cold. Something was going on here. What? Why had Linda gone away - and with whom? She would never of her free will have left him alone in the middle of the night. Yet the marks she left showed where they were not overtrodden that she had walked freely, easily, of her own accord. Logan followed more quickly.

In the open, the croaking of frogs was intolerable to his ears. He palmed one ear to muffle the sound, and played his light on the ground.

Was Linda walking in her sleep? She never had, that he knew of. Had she been led by guile? Were all the Marshvillians abroad tonight? Their tracks were thick with and overlaying Linda's.

He came to the town's edge. He smelled the scent of pines, mingled with the marsh smell. The ground was steep and rocky. Logan's breath came in ragged gasps. He stumbled and dropped his light. The light went out. He fumbled and found it, but it no longer worked. He cursed the thing and stumbled up the hill, ripping through underbrush until his clothes were in tatters. The threnodic cacophony of the

frogs beat upon his nerves with a sawing rhythm. He topped the rise and staggered out into the open moonlight. The bare hillside sloped before him to the grim mire of the swamp. The air quivered with the shrilling and booming of frogs.

There was shadowy movement at the swampside. A large crowd of shapes weaved in the elusive moonlight. Logan plunged ahead, panting. His mind groped for the vague thread that connected this place, these events, and the frogs.

Moonlight glittered pale silver on the stagnant face of the swamp. Dark hills stood round, soaking their cattailed feet in the mire. Logan sobbed.

"Linda!"

Linda, dark hair shining in the light of the moon, stood naked, thigh-deep, in the putrid water of the swamp. The Marshvillians were clustered thick behind her, splashing in the cattails, shouting - no, croaking abominably as she went slowly forward, arms up-lifted, white skin like molten silver in the moonshine.

"Linda!" Logan screamed again and tore madly down the slope.

He ran, slipped, stumbled. The mire was about his knees, about his thighs. Stinking mud splashed into his face. A hand clutched at him, and he struck at the puffy face above with the dead flashlight. The Marshvillian fell back, yammering frightfully.

Then Linda was in his arms, pale, relaxed, mired with slime, and the thing Logan saw he could never create again in the mind of him. SOMETHING rose up out of the water - SOMETHING that bore vague resemblance to Uriah Marsh - SOMETHING that might have been him . . . or might have fathered him. There was a fat, wide mouth, that yawned in the moonglow, and dark things that came out of it, sprawling, wriggling Things that explained, perhaps, why there were no children in Marshville.

Logan yelled then and struggled back the way he had come, forcing his way through clusters of giant cattails, Linda relaxed and quiet in his arms. Through the crowd of vocalizing Marshvillians he splashed, beset with horror - for these were no longer human who croaked and ululated, green-dappled and slimy, with webbed, waving paws and bulging eyes and wide-open, croaking maws.

Somehow Logan made it, back through the noise and din of frogs, back through the moon-barred alleys of the pine forest and the shadowed village street; and because there was no place else to go, back to the house of Uriah Marsh.

There, gasping in bloody agony for breath, Logan laid Linda upon a sofa where he could look at her in the shine of the lamp. He whispered her name over and over and wiped futilely at the mire sliming her body.

Linda stirred, opened her eyes, and smiled up at him.

"I just had the most amazing dream, dear. I dreamed - I dreamed I was queen over a great race of frogs!"

Logan shuddered, dropped to his knees at her side.

"It was just a dream, darling. Forget it! Forget it - please!"

Linda's eyes were open wide and raptly staring - no, bulging! Helpless with horror, Logan watched, heard her speak, and every word

on a lower, more rasping note.

"I - was - queen - and - I - loved - it!"

In the yellow lamplight, her skin took on an unholy sheen - dappled green and white. She smiled... smiled - God, no! Her mouth... Logan shrieked then - shrieked as only a man can in agony of soul - and long and long he stayed there on his knees, shrieking helplessly, mindlessly, long and long after he heard the last, slithering bump of the Thing that had been Linda, hopping grotesquely out of the house to rejoin its worshipping subjects.

#### THE END

### MOON CALF

By

Rory Falkner

When I was a wee lad, the moon was a goblin,  
A blank pumpkin-face that peered in through the pane;  
A flat silver plate that a cow could jump over;  
A bowl that tip-tilted, and poured out the rain.

When I was a stripling, I worshipped the new moon--  
That slim lovely crescent, that silver sea-shell!  
She danced through my dreams like she danced through the  
cloud-drifts,  
And no mortal mistress could shatter her spell.

My manhood I wasted in moon-haunted dreaming  
Of beauty untouched in a world still unknown. . . .  
Now, younger men, riding the thundering fire-jets  
Will ravish the moon-goddess I called my own!



# DOOMSROAD

BY WILKIE CONNER

It was a long road, a dismal and lonely  
road, but there was company to be had  
at its end. . . .

*Illustrated by Banister*

THE HIGHWAY WORE A SHROUD OF FOG. Mellis glanced at her husband's anxious face. He was leaning forward, peering beyond the few feet of yellow glare billowing in front of their headlights. Mellis' confidence in Dave bent back the little finger of fear that tried to pry a scream from her lips. She felt a sudden desire to talk, to say something. . . anything to relieve the tension that corded her throat. She choked down the impulse, strained her own eyes into the murky dark. Fog undulated evilly in the beam of their lights, like a horde of saffron ghosts dancing a Sabbath of unholy festival.

The car moved at a snail's pace. Mellis forced her eyes to leave the road, seek again her husband's strained face. It was a handsome face, full of the glow and brightness of youth. He glanced fleetingly at Mellis. There was a flash of his old, familiar smile.

"We'll get there yet. . ."

He did not finish, for the road demanded his full attention. Mellis caught the oncoming glare out of the corner of her eye. She turned swiftly, blinded by the lights, big and horrible, bright and terrible, that bore down upon them. They were close--damnably close.

lights! And a motor that hummed and sang. She wanted to shout and laugh and sing with it. She wanted, too, to cry and dance. She wanted to fall down upon that rough, obscure road and pray. . . she wanted. . . Dave!

The vehicle was near, now. She could see the vague outline of it through the fog, which seemed to be thinning. The outline struck a familiar chord in Mellis' brain, and she could recognize the machine for what it was--a bus! It showed plainly now.

Mellis stood in the middle of the road, unmindful of the danger of being run down by the bus, and waved her arms furiously, calling out into the muffling miasma of fog. The bus was a benevolent giant, breathing a warm friendliness in the heated smell of its exhaust as it ground to a stop a few paces away. It was a little island, a tiny world of light and warmth and friendliness in the vast emptiness of the fog-cosmos. Mellis touched the hot metal of the hood as she went by, thrilled as the heat stung her fingers. A wild hope seized her. . . hope that Dave was aboard. . . would be awaiting her with his proud, pleasant smile, a light of joy in his eyes.

The doors swung apart. Mellis climbed into the bus. Light. . . and the warm smell of humanity. The driver smiled at her, and she felt warm all over. He was an angel, she thought, . . an angel of kindly mercy. She stood on the step inside the door, and suddenly she panicked. She had no money. Her purse. . . she had left it in the car. The driver smiled at her hesitation.

"No fare on this line, miss. Just find a seat."

Mellis felt wonderfully relieved. "Thanks. . . oh, thanks! I--I was afraid you'd pass me by."

He shook his head. "I always see my passengers. . . always."

His tone bore a certain sureness. Mellis wondered, for a second, if she were wise to ride this bus. She smiled then, reproachfully and to herself. Absurd! Everything was all right!

Mellis became gradually aware of the other passengers. They were quiet, at peace. One was a little old woman. Her face wore the childishly dazed expression common to the very old. There was an old man--his bald head glistened in the shine of the dome lamps. Mellis' searching eyes hopefully scanned every passenger. . . a young woman with a baby at her breast, a large man with scars twisting across his face, a small boy clutching a baseball in one small, grimy fist. There were no more. Hope faded. Dave was not aboard.

She glanced at the driver, intended to question him, urge the bus to greater speed. The driver was studying the road intently, keen eyes alert for passengers waiting in the fog.

"I don't miss any. . . they all ride this bus," the driver tossed back over his shoulder. He had missed Dave. But Dave had not been standing beside the road. Dave was. . .

The bus rumbled through the fog. The road, now smooth, now rocky, was robbed of its terror for Mellis. Exhausted, she slept.

Mellis awakened with a start. The driver was shaking her gently. He smiled, silently, as she thanked him.

She joined the others moving toward the exit. She was impatient to get off, but the others were ahead of her. She wanted to get in-

to the station and to a telephone. Again a panic of desperation seized her. Why were these people so slow? Why did they not hurry? Of course, they had no cause to hurry. None of them had a Dave. . . somewhere behind on the fog-locked highway, injured, perhaps. . .

At last she reached the door and stepped down. There was no sound, no light, nothing to indicate a town or terminal. She was afraid, and she hesitated, but the others were moving on, so Mellis followed.

Something showed dimly ahead. The terminal? No. . . it was a wall, solid and high. . . high! There was a gate, a small gate in a great big wall. There was a sign over the gate that Mellis read with difficulty: "BE YE AT PEACE WHO ENTER HERE, AND PEACE SHALL COME UNTO YOU."

Mellis' co-travellers passed through the gate, but she paused, stricken with doubt. She glanced back at the bus. It was an indistinct, shadowy mass in the fog, windows glowing saffron. It was slowly moving, turning around for the trip back. Mellis shrugged and passed through the gate.

She passed through the gate into a confusion of noise and light. There were people. Smiling, happy people. It was like a big city terminal, with everywhere people enthusiastically greeting each other. She knew from the bustling stir of the numberless horde of people that there were other busses and other gates. Music drifted over the noise of the happy throng, soft, sweet music, ethereal in the poignant harping of its chords. The sound throbbed with a singular beauty, pulsed at a paeon of joy in Mellis' ears.

Her eyes sparkled. She was not alone any more. . . so many people! No fog in her eyes. . . no fear in her heart! This was supreme happiness. She looked quickly about, darting her glance in search of a phone booth and saw none.

There was a man, his back toward her. She touched him timorously on the shoulder.

"I beg your pardon. . ." she said.

The man turned, and the words choked in Mellis' throat.

"Dave!" she cried. "Oh. . . Dave!"

"Mellis. . . Mellis, darling!"

There was gladness in his voice, joy in the shine of his eyes. Mellis was aware of her tears, of Dave's kisses. Nothing mattered, any more, only this. . . this and Dave!

People were streaming past them now, pressing forward with eager, alert expressions toward an effulgence of golden light that poured in horizontally beneath the vaulted ceiling. Dave's grip on Mellis' hand was a tight promise of forever assurance. Together, they fell in with the crowd, walked hand in hand into the golden light. . . .

BEYOND THE GATE, at the end of the fogbound highway, Azrael turned the ponderous bus back upon its fated way. A bus! In yesteryear, it had been a procession, then a chariot of fire, and now. . . a bus! What will it be tomorrow? Whatever, he thought, it will never miss a passenger. He pressed a foot upon the accelerator. If you do not ride with him this trip, you will. . . eventually.

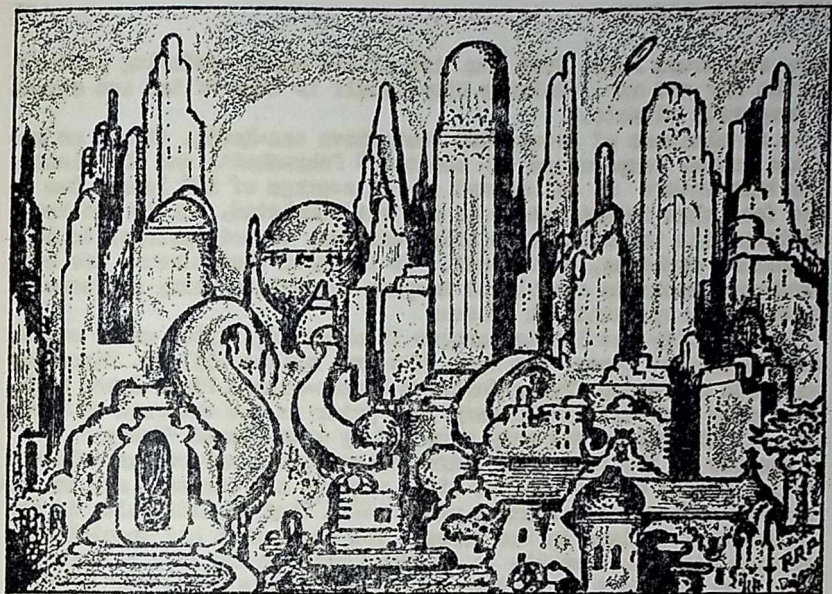
THE END

## RAINBOW CITIES

Our ancient legends whisper of a place  
Near the Antarctic waste of ice and snow,  
Where dwell strange beings, not of Terra's race,  
But sprung from other stars, whence from below  
They voyage ceaselessly from star to star,  
Guiding their airy spaceships, while we gaze  
In fear upon the sight, and in amaze  
Do wonder who the unknown travelers are.

But far above the glacial Southern pole  
Unearthly towers of magic cities rise,  
Arrayed in rainbow colors; human eyes  
Have never viewed them; nor has mortal soul  
Beheld their fearful beauty, as they stand  
Flaunting a splendor wrought by alien hand.

—Emili A.



# RAINBOW CITY OF ANTARCTICA

BY C. H. SPAULDING

*Illustrated by Ralph Rayburn Phillips*

TODAY ON THE ANTARCTIC CONTINENT, ancient, all-plastic Rainbow-City is again opened and being used. It is located in an open valley, shaped somewhat like a dumbbell, about twenty-five miles long by ten wide. The city is in the narrowest part of the valley, somewhere near its center.

If you will look at a map of India, you will readily see the long peninsula reaching southward into the Indian Ocean. Go directly south from this point to the edge of the Antarctic Continent. Continue inland for 500 miles, and there is the approximate location of Rainbow City Valley.

This valley is surrounded by ice walls ten thousand feet high. In winter, low hanging fogs veil the valley from curious eyes. In sum-

mer, reflected light from the ice cliffs casts confusing patterns in the sky and air. Rainbow City itself is free of ice and enjoys a temperate climate.

At an altitude of about 5000 feet above sea-level, it has an average summer temperature of about 65° Fahrenheit, and in winter, the temperature is maintained at an average of 10° lower. Due to the fact that investigation is not yet completed, it is not known whether this temperature is owing entirely to hot springs, to heat producing machines, or to both. It is known that there are heat producing machines capable of keeping the valley warm, and some of them are in operation at present.

Rainbow City was located around Thanksgiving, 1942, under orders of the Ancient Three--Who Were, Who Are, and Who Will Be. Discovery was made by a group flying the first Circle-Winged Plano Space Ship. This ship was built in Hungary just prior to the outbreak of World War II. The men on the ship were led by a man named "Emery."

Because of the fact that there is a continual war of ice cold and valley warmth around Rainbow City, violent air currents are in continuous action. An ordinary plane would find it difficult, if not impossible, to land in the valley. The space ship has special propulsion units that enable it to stand still in the air, go forward, stop, go straight up or down as desired. This space ship settled into the large park near the Rainbow Temple in the center of the city.

Rainbow City is built of a super hard plastic, in all the colors of the rainbow. This plastic readily scratches or crushes ordinary diamonds.

When the party landed from the space ship, they found the lights on in the streets and in some of the buildings. The light has at least two sources. The hard plastic walls of the buildings give off an illumination which can be varied in color and intensity by manipulation of switches in the walls. Another source of light is a special lamp found in the five levels of the underground city. This light is very much like sunlight, and has an effect of revitalizing or renewing the air.

Rainbow Temple is a large structure covering about four city blocks on a side. It rises in steps or tiers several hundred feet into the air. It is the tallest building in the city. Stretching out and around Rainbow Temple are buildings that could be the same as our modern stores, as their windows fronting the streets are filled with articles useful in the homes and on the farms. The buildings near Rainbow Temple are two and a half stories high; around them are buildings two stories high; farther out are buildings only one story high, and residences. There are no slums.

Rainbow City is one of seven all-plastic cities on the Antarctic Continent and the only one accessible at the present time. These cities were built perhaps as long ago as 50,000 years by the original colonists from Mars, who were our ancestors. These Antarctic cities were the source of the settlers in ancient Lemuria, and later in Atlantis.

The valley has numerous plastic roads leading to farms and small

farm communities. The roads and houses in the valley are made of the same plastic material as Rainbow City itself. In the valley are many buildings for the storage of farm machinery and produce. Also in the valley was found a large building that housed a space ship used by the Ancient Three for interplanetary voyaging long ago.

The study of a city far ahead of anything known on earth is a complex and almost endless job. We speak today with a certain amount of pride in our invention and development of the atom bomb. Some work is going on toward the development of atomic energy as a source of power. In Rainbow City are three-wheeled automobile-like vehicles using a form of atomic energy as a source of power NOW. Also in the valley are many pieces of farm machinery that are powered by small blocks of material which produce the atomic energy. The complete story of Rainbow City includes a completely new (to us) language, a new science (205 elements), and a new system of mathematics to the base 7. Also, countless machines, most of which have not been understood after seven years work by hundreds of the best minds on earth today.

Below Rainbow City are five levels that extend not less than four miles or more beyond the boundaries of the surface city of houses, repair shops, factories, hydroponic gardens, storehouses, etc. Below this subsurface city is a gigantic railroad terminal with large yards filled with trains ready to operate. The trains are composed of an engine each and several cars. The engines measure about a hundred feet in diameter and two hundred feet in length. Each coach is about 350 feet long.

Radiating from Rainbow City to all the world is a complex system of tunnels lined with a special hard and strong alloy of metal. The tunnels are a little over a hundred feet in diameter. The trains in operation float free of the walls. Most of these tunnels and tunnel terminals are closed. Only those connecting Rainbow City with Tibet are in use. These trains have test-performed at a speed in excess of 2000 miles per hour.

Rainbow City Valley has numerous large shade trees and a number of fruit bearing trees with fruit unknown to the rest of the world. Here were found butterflies with wings several feet across and bodies large enough to fill a platter. Aside from these, the valley is remarkably free from insects.

Power comes to Rainbow City from a large generator in an enormous cavern under the Blue City, elsewhere on the Antarctic continent. It has a vertical shaft and many pick-up brushes set at varying distances from the central shaft. It was in operation when found, and it is still in operation. Large cables carry the power to Rainbow City. There the power enters a large container filled with a peculiar vibrating liquid of unknown composition. From this liquid-filled transformer, power in liquid form is piped to various parts of the city. Wires also carry a current that is more familiar to the world at large.

The Ancient Three specialize in the three great departments of human activity--physical, mental, and spiritual. All share their combined knowledge and combine their efforts to bring peace, har-

mony, progress and happiness to all the world.

With the Ancient Three at Rainbow City are about 2000 people, according to last report. Many of these are women and children. Some prefer to work the farms in the valley, which work is most familiar to them. Many entered the valley from the United States, via Tibet.

In the Rainbow Temple are three completely equipped apartments, one for each of the rulers. The doors are operated by a code word and by pressure applied to a certain place. The bedclothing, garments, and furnishings are all of a fire-proof plastic. In each apartment is a vibratory unit into which clothing is placed for cleaning. This is a kind of furnace that burns out all impurities.

In each apartment built for the rulers is a special room called the "Portal." This room is about seven by ten feet in size, with a large television screen at the end, and near it a door that opens upon a blank wall. When in operation, the "Portal" machine can tune in and see and hear any person or place on earth or in the earth, can read the thought of any person or group imaged on the television screen. At present, "Portal" machines reach out as far as the moon, but not much farther. Later, when piped power becomes more readily available, it is expected to reach far out beyond the moon.

The Portal, however, has many other uses than this. It can be used to trace into the past any person, place or thing, to its absolute beginning. The use of the Portal has proved that everyone has lived many times on this earth. People and places of the past, in sound and color, can be seen NOW. In tracing past events, the door beside the television screen remains closed and cannot be opened.

However, when the Portal is tuned to the present, a special control locks the Portal at that place. Then the Portal door may be opened and it is possible to step out of that place and instantly into anyplace on earth or the moon. This means of teletransport is the most efficient transportation method the world has ever seen.

Below the first floor of Rainbow Temple, in a sealed room, were found a great number of robot bodies preserved by a special gas and left there by the Serpent Race. These were destroyed to avoid possible danger from that inimical race of beings. A twelve-foot specimen of the Serpent Race was found alive in an apartment at the apex of the pyramid-shaped Rainbow Temple. This individual, profoundly hoped to be the last of his odious race, committed suicide when discovered.

(This material was prepared especially for The Nekromantikon by Mr. Spaulding from 200 pages of writings and letters from Mr. and Mrs. W. C. Hafferlin, 1040 Leavenworth Street, San Francisco.)

#### THE END

##### FALL NUMBER:

"Twilight over Avalon" by M. Houston - a fine novelette by this talented writer. Also, fiction, articles, verse - a line-up you won't want to miss. If you don't subscribe, send 25¢ and have a copy reserved for you.



*Dry Brush by Bonnier*

## MR. HODGETT'S QUICK CONVERSION BY BATTELL LOOMIS

"Ghost? Pooh, pooh and tommyrot! Never was a ghost. If there was, what could a ghost be? Dead men are buried. Their bodies weigh as much as in life, minus a few grams paid to evaporation and loss of body fluids. A ghost, if any, could be only a vapor, like the will o' the wisps of methane gas escaping from swamps and sometimes igniting by friction."

Pompous Mr. Harvey Hodgett was expressing himself upon a subject he knew nothing about. I decided to take him down a few pegs. I knew how. I knew a house on Clay Street that was really haunted, and I don't mean only by things that go bump in the night! Anyone could see what went on in the Clay Street house!

I decided to contribute only one bit of stage-setting to the show.

I went to the house ahead of H. H., who had accepted my invitation, and buried a gold piece bearing the date 1855, an issue of the San Francisco mint worth more than its weight in gold. I buried it shallowly in the gravel of the path leading to the front door of 1211 Clay Street.

H. H. arrived, blustering, as usual, calling the whole thing nonsense.

I kicked up the coin, as if by accident, as we approached the front door. I showed it to H. H.

"Holloa!" said he. "Nothing ghostly about that, and don't try to tell me it's an apport! Apport! Pooh! No use for words that mean nothing, apply to nothing. People who pick money from the air! Pack of fools. Belong in asylums for making such absurd claims. This gold is cuprous, but as a coin it's worth a lot more than a double eagle. American river gold!"

"You seem to like to hold gold," I said. "You may keep it in your hand until we come out, but don't lose it, whatever you do."

"Do? Do? I'll do just what you tell me. Sit where you say, but I'll not promise not to go to sleep and drop this piece."

"Ha! I'd like to see you sleep through the next quarter hour!"

I had timed our arrival just so. The show would start almost the minute we entered the dining room and took seats opposite the butler's swing door entry, across from the big dining table of age-dark mahogany. All the furniture had been left in place, despite the difficulty in keeping the house rented.

H. H. settled his bulk in a strong and easy leather padded chair and sat tossing the coin from hand to hand. It glinted in the light of the candle I had stuck in a saucer on our side of the table.

Across the table from H. H., a space to my right, was an empty chair, its back to the pantry door. It did not remain empty.

"Who's that queer duck, a Chink?" asked H. H.

I shushed him and we watched the old Chinese set a small chest on the table before the chair opposite us, then seat himself in the chair, raise the lid of the coffer and begin to count and stack gold pieces on the table. I nudged H. H. and pointed to the swing door. It was open about half a foot, when, though we could not see it, a cat entered. The cat mewed, and we saw its head appear above the table level as it leaped into the chair upon the miser's left, our right, across the table from us with the widening crack of the door behind it. The old Chinese set down a tall stack of double eagles like the one in H. H.'s hand--still there, he hadn't dropped it yet--and leaned aside to pet the cat.

In doing so, his head turned toward the opening door so that the side of his left eye saw the cleft and read its hideous meaning. He kicked his chair back and dashed behind the cat, around the end of the table on our right. After him, through the now wide open door, leaped a young Chinaboy, a long slim knife in his hand. He struck at the old man but missed. Both disappeared into the hall through which we had entered, and I rose to follow them.

H. H. stood up too, asking, "Who are these actors? Did you hire them? That was a tense moment!"

"Actors!" I said scornfully. "Hurry into the hall! Look up the stairs!"

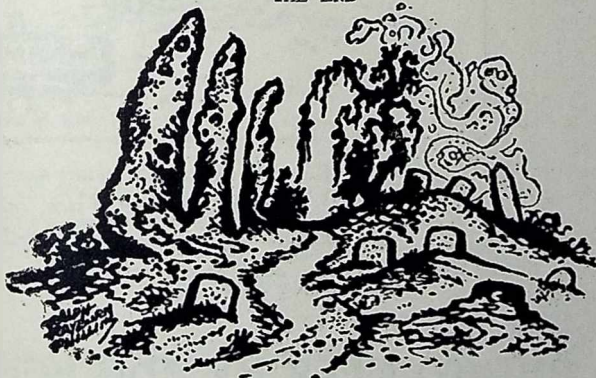
Looking up the stairs, we both saw the enrobed old Chinaman still leading the race, but the bloodthirsty knife was gaining on his back. Had the boy thought to hurl it--but he was too late when he thought of it. The old man reached the top of the flight and pushed back downstairs, upon the boy, a heavy chest of drawers that stood at the flighthead. The booming of its descent, its drawers sliding back and forth and rattling against the banisters, was horrid--the shrill scream of despair voiced by the youth was the most terrific sound I have ever encouraged myself to hear more than the first time. Youth and cabinet came to the bottom together, the cabinet having all the advantage of the fall.

The old man descended the stair, hurried, breathing heavily, into the dining room. He dashed the gold back into the chest, put the chest under one palsied arm and the cat under the other, and left by the front door. As he descended the steps, a gold piece slithered out of the crack of the hastily closed lid and rang cheerily on the bricks, tinkling off into the gravel.

"That goldpiece in your hand, H. H.," I said, "is the very one that you just heard ringing. Its ringing gave me the clue to search for it in the walk, where I found it several months ago. This piece is re-enacted every night at the same hour. Some can see it. Others can only hear its sounds. You are lucky to have been able to witness the whole show with both eyes and ears. What have you to say now about ghosts?"

"Hurry!" said the practical H. H. "Let's follow that old fellow and find out where he hid his chest."

THE END



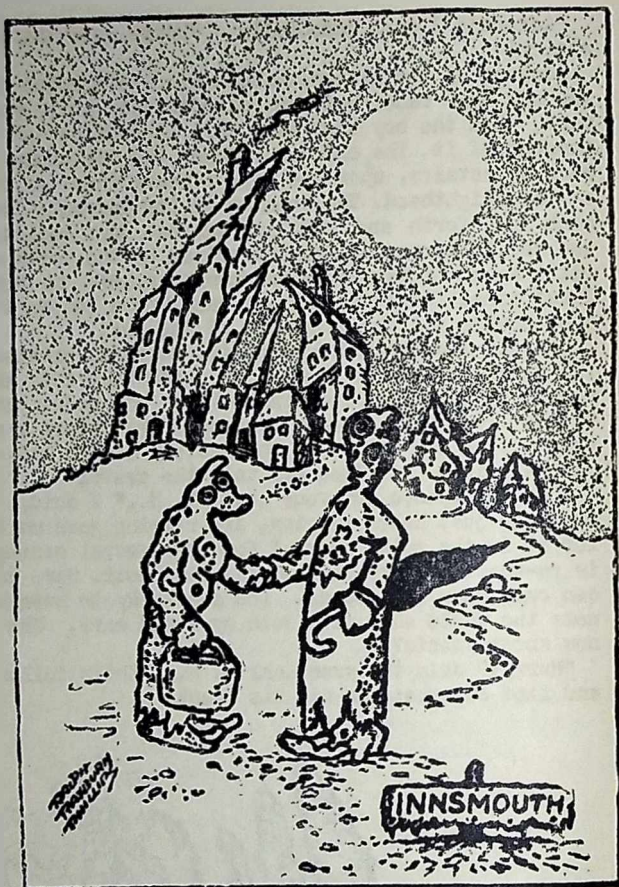
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# I N N S M O U T h



*Where the unnameable abides nameless,  
the unknowable lurks half-seen, and the  
shunned folk of an ancient tradition  
dwell in curious solitude. . . .*

## DREAD CITY BY THE SEA

By R. Hobbie Carson

*Illustrated by Ralph Rayburn Phillips*

There was a city in a by-gone age  
Built sturdily on sea-lashed, rocky shores,  
A city deeply steeped in ancient lores,  
Where dwelt the crone, the wizard, and the sage.

The city prospered for a time, until  
The fishermen caught more than simple fish,  
And wives were wont to brew a stranger dish  
Than browned corn cake and mellow, bubbling ale.

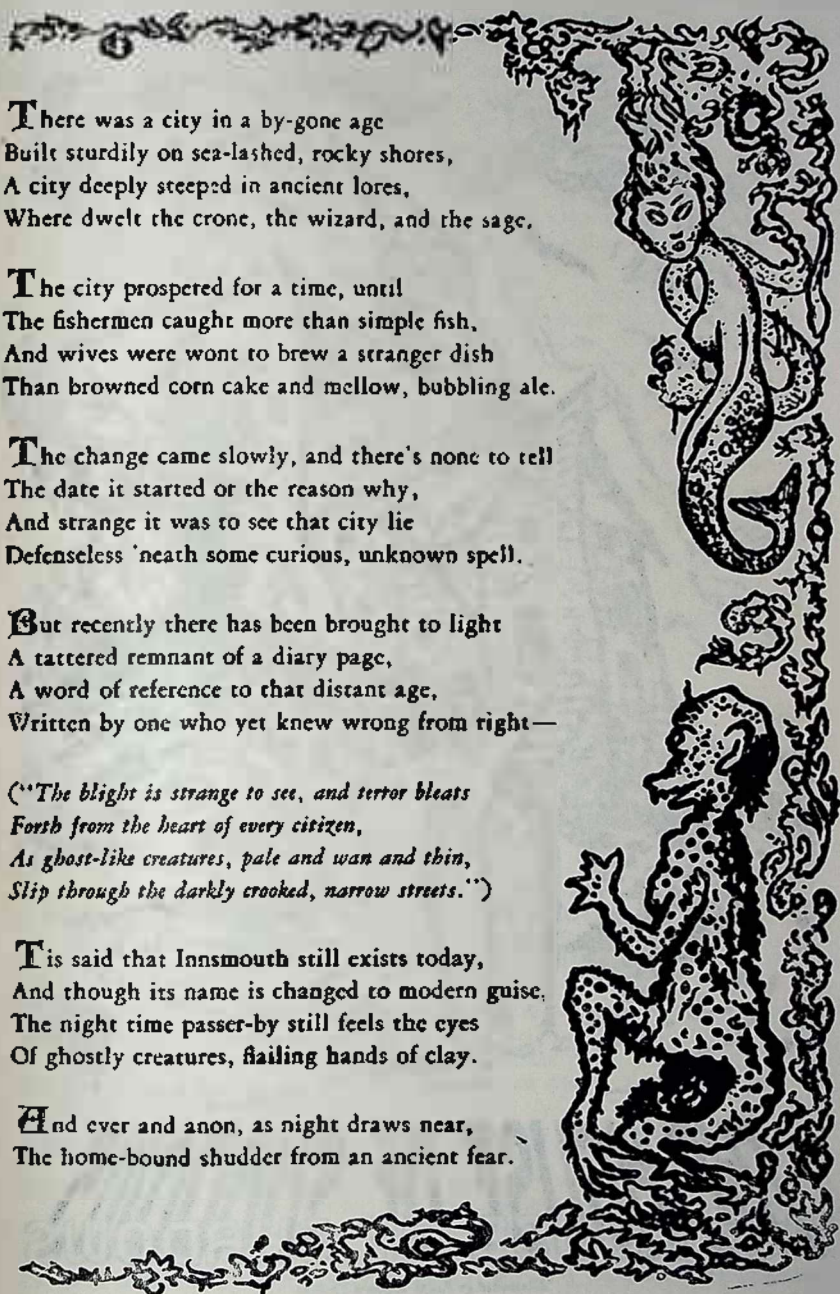
The change came slowly, and there's none to tell  
The date it started or the reason why,  
And strange it was to see that city lie  
Defenseless 'neath some curious, unknown spell.

But recently there has been brought to light  
A tattered remnant of a diary page,  
A word of reference to that distant age,  
Written by one who yet knew wrong from right—

*("The blight is strange to see, and terror bleats  
Forth from the heart of every citizen,  
As ghost-like creatures, pale and wan and thin,  
Slip through the darkly crooked, narrow streets.")*

It is said that Innsmouth still exists today,  
And though its name is changed to modern guise,  
The night time passer-by still feels the eyes  
Of ghostly creatures, flailing hands of clay.

And ever and anon, as night draws near,  
The home-bound shudder from an ancient fear.



BY HERMAN STOWELL KING



# THE HOUSE OF SHADOWS

*Illustrated by Ralph Rayburn Phillips*

Turn left at the second intersection on Victoria Avenue and follow River Street to its termination. There you will find the old Hester Mansion. It is separated from other houses by wide-spread, undulating lawns and dense shrubbery. The mansion itself sits on a gentle, grassy knoll overlooking the hindermost part of Newfork Bay. Several tall magnolia trees crowd jealously about it, a shelter against the winds that continually blow in from the sea; and numerous, interlacing creepers twine around the grey stucco walls in a saprophytic embrace. River Street ends upon a tiny wharf to which are usually moored two or three private boats.

The house was built by a Hester and inhabited by Hesters on down to the last of the line--old Vera Hester, who died without husband, child, or known relative. She did have a relative, but several years elapsed before he was found. Henry Drake was a fourth cousin. After he had paid off the accumulated taxes, Henry Drake came into possession of the house.

Henry had been living in London, working as a journalist for a prominent newspaper. He had already decided to come to America and settle down. Before moving, however, he contracted with a firm in London to write a long treatise on superstitions, especially as practiced among illiterate mountaineers of America.

Henry liked Hester Mansion at first sight. Many of the furnishings were perhaps antiquated, he thought, but they could be gradually replaced. The grounds were delightful, ideal for his periods of contemplation. There were five rooms downstairs and four up, excluding the bath. When he got tired of one room, he could move into another, he told himself half-humorously.

He decided to take the fifth chamber, on the side facing the bay, as his study. The only immediate change he made was to take down the purple damask curtains and replace them with gay yellow chiffon. The room was thereby considerably brightened.

The bath was just across the hall, the kitchen next door. These conveniences had been partly instrumental in his choice of the fifth chamber. But more attractive was the view it afforded. Beneath the overhanging branches of a heavily leafed magnolia, the bay appeared blue and charming in the distance. Occasionally a tiny boat would idle past within range of his vision. Someone fishing, or just joy-riding with a sweetheart. With the window open he could hear faint laughter.

Henry went to work immediately on the treatise, working up material he already had on the subject. He would work from nine in the morning to noon. Following lunch, he would take a short stroll; either along the banks of the bay, down town, or to the grocery store at the end of the block.

At two p.m., he would return to his study and work until five or six o'clock. Sometimes he would break this routine, for Henry was not one to let his way of life become too much of a habit.

He had lived in the house for two weeks before he noticed the peculiar atmosphere--not smelled, but felt. At first, he attributed this to the long inoccupancy the dwelling had suffered. But as he grew more sensitive to this peculiarity, he modified his opinion.

There was something else. The house would not become familiar, homey; rather it maintained an aloof--even resentful--feeling to him. Inexplicably, as if sentient, it seemed to reject his presence. The house refused to make friends.

This, he concluded sternly, won't do. It is a big old house for one person. It will take time to lose this feeling. Perhaps old Vera Hester had wanted the house to die uninhabited. Along with her. As empty as she was. Although he debunked the supernatural in his articles, Henry actually believed in psychic residue to some extent. Not that that was necessarily supernatural. A house would naturally retain some of the personality of the person who lived in it for a considerable length of time. Vera Hester must not have had a good personality.

Finally he shrugged all these speculations aside and reasoned that the basis of his feeling was caused solely by the physical aspect of the house. The place was oppressively gloomy. The living room had black oaken floors, uncarpeted, and the walls were papered a dull brown. The corners were the worst. The house had too many corners. They were angled, as if deliberately, so as to produce deep shadows--even on a sunshiny day with the window curtains drawn aside. In every room except the bath, which was modern in every respect, Henry noticed the peculiarly angled corners. And the constant shadows that coalesced there.

Electric lights had never been installed. Henry planned to remedy this oversight in the near future. First he wanted to complete his treatise. He would just have to ignore the atmosphere. It was psychologically unpleasant, but not unbearable. After he had fixed the place up a bit, modernized it, it would be as charming within as without, he reflected.

He finished half the treatise, and found himself stagnated. He knew what he wanted to write; the facts were before him. Yet, every time he started, the words would not come out in smooth sequence. He would erase, re-write, scratch out, re-write again. Henry knew something was intruding on his concentration--the atmosphere of the house itself. He could not ignore it. He was to the point of feeling uncomfortable--even uneasy.

He left his study and walked down by the bay. There was purity in the wind. It wafted the webs of gloom from his mind, cooled his face with its soothing caress.

Out on the water a man and boy were fishing. The boy laughed with delight. The day was bright. Sunshine sparkled golden in the bay. To leave the house was to step out of a musty, sombre crypt.

He looked back at the mansion. On the outside it was still attractive. Creepers wove green traceries about it in beautiful patterns. The magnolias, in full blossom, guarded it solidly from the bold glance of the outsider.

Outsider! Why had that word come to mind?

Yes, that was it. He was an outsider. The house had been unoccupied for many years, and it wanted to remain that way.

"I own it," Henry told himself. "I'll change it to suit myself!"

It would take time and money, but he could not live in a house

full of shadows. Whoever had first built Hester Mansion had had a peculiar sense of architecture. He made a mental note to find out something about his ancestors. Why had they wanted so many corners? Was the odd geometry the result of poor craftsmanship?

He strolled to the back of the house; into the walled garden. There a larger and more beautiful magnolia cast an expansive patch of shade. He would have it cut down before he could contemplate a kitchen garden, and cultivate the weed-grown lot, moreover.

Henry went back inside to his study, and took up a book. Later, he ate meagerly and went to bed. His dreams were filled with a curious disquiet. Invisible presences seemed to watch him. They were intangible presences, sentient. . . evil. Wakening, he decided to make immediate arrangements to have electric lights installed. The early morning sunlight streamed through the windows of his study and he felt like writing some more on the treatise. He breakfasted on eggs, bacon, toast, creamed oatmeal, orange juice and hot coffee. Then began to pound his typewriter. The words came freely, a flood of inspired rhetoric. Noon found him two-thirds finished...but temporarily stymied. He had reached a spot that required more research.

Leaving the house, he automatically checked the mailbox. There was one envelope, surprisingly, addressed to him in a fine, spidery hand. There was no return address.

Curious, Henry ripped it open and extracted a small note sheet. A single sentence wavered across the page:

Your lease has expired; please vacate the house.

He was astonished. He stared at the paper uncomprehendingly. There was no letterhead, no signature. He looked for the postmark. It was smudged, unreadable. What lease? He had no lease! The house was HIS.

Who would write to him in so preposterous an imperative? A practical joke, of course. He looked again at the handwriting. Very small, spidery, yet legible. Black ink. An educated adult had written this, he surmised; no pranking adolescent. There was a smudge of dust on the paper, but no discernible fingerprints.

What an odd sense of humor! Or was it meant for humor? A coldness trickled the length of his spine.

Henry placed the letter between two pulp magazines, and left the house. At the corner of Victoria Avenue, he stopped to chat with Davis, the storekeeper. It was Thursday, and business was slack.

"Mighty big house for one person to live in," declared the vocally energetic storekeeper. "A young feller like you ortn't to be cooped up in a dark, shadowy old place like that. Now Vera Hester -- it suited her!" He looked darkly at Henry.

"It does have a lot of shadows," agreed Henry. He peeled a banana, ate slowly. "There are too many blamed corners. I'm going to have lights installed. That'll brighten it up considerably."

"Yeah. Old Vera frowned on electricity. Wouldn't have it." The storekeeper leaned across the counter, rubbing the side of his thin, blue-veined nose. A mysterious glint appeared in his watery brown eyes.

"I guess you know old Ebenezer Hester who built Hester Mansion was accused of trafficking with the devil?"

"What!" Henry's brows shot upward. "No, I didn't know. In fact, I know little about my ancestors. I was born in England."

"Well, now of course, there ain't nothin' to such wild yarns." The storekeeper spoke placidly, "But Ebenezer, so I hear, was a mighty peculiar feller. He sailed the seas nigh on to thirty years before settlin' down here. He married a woman much younger than he was, but she didn't last long. Ebenezer read queer books. . . and rumor was he dealt with demons. There were people claimed they heard strange whisperings in the house - like more'n ONE person was conversin' - when old Eb was supposed to be alone!

"He lived to be a hunderd, Eb did. Maybe that helped the stories. He had two sons, y'know. They was ordinary, respectable people. Vera was his daughter. She was exactly like Ebenezer, maybe worse. Never got hitched, hated folks, stayed to herself much as she could.

"There was a couple of fellers who wanted to buy the house, but she said nothin' doin'! Said the house was her'n, and she was gonna keep it. . . always."

The storekeeper paused for breath.

"Yeah...she was the re-inkarnated spirit of old Eb hisself!"

A customer came in, and the grocer withdrew. Henry pondered what he had heard. So his relatives had been eccentric! Cousin Vera must not have been aware of his existence; at least she had failed to contact him.

He wandered outside, turned the corner, and entered a small cafe. He ate almost mechanically, still thinking about the strange note, and Davis' disclosure. Finished, he paid for the meal and went into the phone booth. Dropping a nickel in the slot, he dialed the lawyer who had handled the affairs of the Hester estate after Vera's demise.

"Collins Brown speaking," the lawyer's voice came crisply over the wire.

Henry identified himself and told about the note.

"Obviously a practical joke," Brown said. "Don't let it worry you. Just ignore the whole thing."

"It wasn't worrying me. I just thought I'd tell you about it. I wondered...maybe you could hazard a guess why somebody is trying to frighten me out of the place?"

"Hardly," Brown assured him. "Some high school kid, doubtless. Pay no attention to it."

The lawyer was right. Anyway, Henry had other things to think about--like doing some research for his treatise.

He borrowed several books on southern folklore from the library and returned home to read, determined to keep his mind on his work. This he succeeded in doing, and only when the hall clock chimed ten did he quit and retire. That night his sleep was untroubled.

The next morning he took a shower, shaved, ate a hearty breakfast, and worked hard on the treatise. At eleven-thirty it was finished. After one re-write it would be ready to mail.

At the end of a fortnight, Henry had received a check from the publisher and a royalty contract to sign. He arranged to have the mansion wired for electricity the following Wednesday.

The shadows were more depressing than ever. He took to walking

by the bay more often, ruminating philosophy and noting his observations in a small notebook.

He had acquired a profound dislike for the antiquated furniture in the house. He decided to sell it. And the living room should be carpeted.

On Monday morning he ascended the stairway to the second floor and entered the chamber that evidently had been Vera Hester's bedroom. Here, too, the furniture was of a by-gone era. Dust had collected and the shadows seemed to congregate more thickly in the odd geometry of the corners.

A hand-carved teakwood box on the bureau attracted Henry's attention. He opened it and found a diary. It was written in a small spidery hand. . . hauntingly familiar. Vera's diary?

Henry felt a chill aversion to reading the tome in that unpleasant room. He returned to his study, clutching it gingerly. He turned a few crumbling pages. The thoughts of that eccentric old maid! Why, she had been stark mad! And incredibly evil!

The outside world had been the object of a hatred that could have only been spawned from a warped mind; a mind that was a cesspool of foul imagining! He felt a disgust that bordered on nausea. He thrust the diary into the teakwood box, vowing to burn it at the first opportunity.

Someone struck the brass door knocker. He hurried to the door. It was the postman. He handed Henry a pencil and paper.

"Registered letter, sir."

Henry signed, accepted his mail. The postman turned away. He had received two letters. The registered envelope contained another check from his publishers. The other had no return address. And the postmark was blurred. He recognized the handwriting of the address . . . read the brief message.

If you don't vacate the house immediately, you will be evicted.

He felt an unease that was more than vague. This was a direct threat! The handwriting! A bell chimed in his brain. . . he strode quickly into his study and compared it with the writing in Vera's diary.

He could discern no difference; no variation in the formation of the letters. But of course they were different. They had to be! The woman who had written the diary could not have written the letters! She couldn't! He remembered some of the things he had read in the diary and shuddered.

"This is absurd," he muttered aloud, "but I'll put it to a test."

He found the address of an eminent graphologist, and mailed him a page from the diary along with the ominous note. He sent it air-mail to insure speedy delivery.

Wednesday morning brought reply. The dismal report made Henry's brain reel. Both examples, said the graphologist, had been written by the same hand.

Still Henry could not believe it. It just wouldn't register as a fact. He was glad the electricity was going in today.

Henry sat in his study and looked out upon the bay; smooth, pale lucent turquoise. A cluster of delicately tinted magnolia blossoms

brushed his window pane. It was a lovely day. Birds sang, flowers bloomed. He should not remain cooped up in this dark old house! He looked around. The queerly angled corners cast impenetrable shadows.

But he did not move. A cold terror came down upon him suddenly as if someone had tip-toed up from behind and flung a wet blanket over his head. His eyes, slightly staring, darted from dark corner to dark corner of the room.

Did something stir there? He squinted his eyes, peered into the deep gloom. Nothing stirred.

With a violent effort Henry jerked his attention back to the window. The tranquil summer scene was a balm upon his stifling fear.

A sound reached his ears. A truck had stopped outside, and men were busy unloading things. The men from the light company! A spasm of joy seized him. He got up quickly, breaking the rigor that had held him. He glanced at the teakwood box, at the diary; sneered and walked toward the door.

He stopped. Was that a shadow? He thought of the fanlight over the entry. It was not in line. What cast that unearthly darkness upon the woodwork? There was no furniture nearby.

It had no shape--yes...like a hideous, bent caricature of an old woman!

Toy pincers of dread squeezed him. The outer world seemed far, far away. How could he pass that noisome blotch? Whence had it come?

He tried to cry out, but no words came. They tumbled over and over in his petrified brain. "You're dead -- you're dead! You can't be Vera Hester--you're counting daisy roots!"

But he knew it was false--it was Vera; he understood now the veiled malignancy that had been concealed in the warnings mailed...where?

The workmen thundered at his door. Light! Light to combat this evil horror! Henry uttered a strangled sob, leaped past the grotesque shadow of a Thing that blocked his passage. He felt a soft grasping at his ankle, a clutch that tightened like a steel band. He plunged headlong. His head struck with violent impact against an outjutting corner of the baseboard across the hall. Only an instant Henry was aware of the shadows that rushed in, and the greater, gloating shadow that spread pinions of sable above him and chuckled with a dry, rasping glee. Then the greatest Shadow of all came down and Henry was...evicted.

THE END

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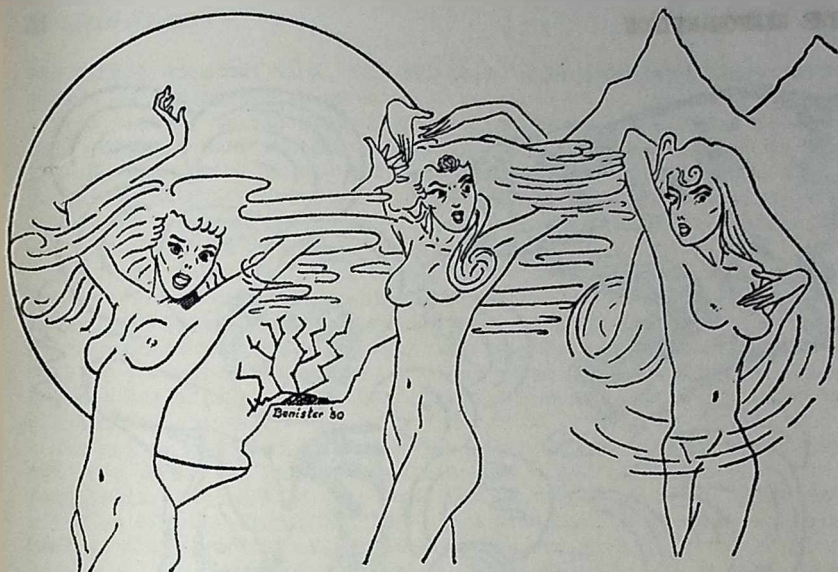
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Pen and Ink by Benister

## The Tall Terrible Women

By Lilith Lorraine

Have you seen the tall, terrible women  
 Whose eyes are black pools of desire,  
 Who chant their ineffable hymn in  
 Weird tones of articulate fire?

Whose song is the music of fountains  
 On a star that died ages ago,  
 Who walk with the moon on the mountains  
 And fade with the coming of dawn?

Whose shapes are as sinuous and flowing  
 As the serpentine tendrils of night,  
 Whose flesh is as pulsing and glowing  
 As the amber quintessence of light?

If you've clasped their lithe forms as they swim in  
 The tann that your madness has crossed,  
 If you've loved the tall, terrible women,  
 You are lost! You are utterly lost!



Pen and Ink by John Dunn

## METAMORPHOSIS

BY J. A. McKEE

What mysterious force linked these predators, wild and civilized?

A RED TIDE OF HATRED and primitive blood-lust welled up in Nicholas Gray's brain as he listened to the bitter, but calm, indictment and ultimatum which came across the desk to him. With an effort, he suppressed the hot retort which sprang to the tip of his tongue. Some hidden instinct told him that it would be to his advantage to adopt an attitude of repentance and willingness to reform. The revenge for which his heart cried out must wait until some later date.

Nicholas Gray was the product of an over-indulgent widowed mother's misdirected affection. His father had died when Nick was only four, and his mother had thenceforth lavished on him the love which would normally have been divided between husband and child. His father had left the family quite well provided for, and his mother's purse

was always open for Nick. His slightest whim had always been gratified. To desire was to have.

As a result, he had grown to knowing only one aim in life: to have that which he desired, and to use his ability, by any means, to get it. He had never, in his entire life, done any useful work. When social amenities required, he could feign an attitude of consideration and concern for his fellow men. In his own secret heart, he recognized no one's wishes or desires except his own.

The Fates had given him both the well-formed athletic body of his father and the delicate beauty of his mother. He could be very affable when he thought it to his interest and, consequently, he was quite popular in certain circles. His popularity had been the downfall of several local belles, who had loved him well but not wisely, but his mother's money had always managed to settle the affairs without any scandal.

His mother had died when Nick was 21, but under the terms of his father's will, the estate would not come to him until he was thirty. John Fells, the administrator and an old friend of the family, had tried to adopt a firmer attitude, but Nick had found ways to evade most of the restrictions. Fells had insisted that Nick cease being merely a useless social butterfly, and go to work in his bank, but Nick had seen to it that the work did not become burdensome. There had been numerous clashes between the two during the past eight years, but this was apparently the final show-down.

"I called you here to settle this thing once and for all, in private. To give you one last chance," Fells said with calm deliberation, as the two faced each other across the library table. "Out of friendship for your father and mother, I've tried to guide you as I would have guided one of my own children, had I been fortunate enough to have had any. I've dug into my own pocket and bought you out of God knows how many scrapes. I've done my best to make a man out of you, but I don't think you have the makings in you.

"This thing here is the last straw!" he continued, pointing to a bank draft on the table before him. "I've tried to be a father to you. Even made you the beneficiary in my will. And you repay me by forging my name to this draft!"

"It was a bad guess, I'll admit," Nick replied with feigned contriteness. "I was certain I had analyzed the market correctly; that the stock would go up. It was intended as a temporary loan. I'll make it good as soon as I come into my inheritance."

"You'll make it good right now!" Fell thundered. "You'll sign this assignment form right this minute, or this draft and my affidavit go to the district attorney first thing in the morning! I've been soft with you too long. For the sake of your parents' names, I'm giving you one last chance to redeem yourself, even though you're not worthy of it. You won't like what you're going to do, but you'll do it; or you'll go to the penitentiary."

"First thing in the morning, you will put your cars and horses up for sale, and put the proceeds into a trust fund. You will move out of your gold-plated apartment, and take rooms in a boarding house which I have selected. Naturally, I wouldn't trust you in the

bank any more, but I've arranged a job for you as helper at the car works. You will take the job, and keep it, and bank at least one-fourth of your pay.

"You will need the money for your old age. This assignment which you have just signed takes the lion's share of your father's estate. Naturally you're no longer my heir--or, at least, you won't be after I've had a conference with my lawyer in the morning. I'd rather see my money go to a Home for stray cats! You'll stay away from night clubs and stop playing the market and the horses. You'll get involved in no more affairs with women. So long as you do as I've told you, all will be well and good. The minute you step over the line, this forged draft goes to the District Attorney, and you go to the pen. Now get out!"

Nick was back in his own apartment and preparing for bed before the full import of the ultimatum sank into his head. Then a wave of panic swept through his brain. Why! He was a pauper! No car! He couldn't go anywhere. Working in the car works as a helper--a common laborer! Living like a dog in some stinking hole! Why! It was a living death!

When he finally went to bed, six stiff drinks later, the feeling of panic had once more given way to an all-consuming hatred. In his mind's eye he could see Fells working at his desk, by the light of his oil lamp. His bank was modern, but he would have nothing to do with electric lights in his home. They were too harsh, he claimed. He preferred the mellow glow of an old-fashioned oil lamp.

The draft of his new will, and the affidavit to be used against Nick, if necessary, would long since be done. By now, he would be working on the accounts of his suburban farm--"minding his fences", as he always laughingly put it. Fences were an obsession with Fells. There had been rumors of a wolf in the neighborhood of the Fells Farm recently, and the banker inspected his fences daily to make certain that they were tight.

Fences! Nick thought. That's all he thought about. That's what Fells was doing to him! Fencing him out! Building a fence around his car--his apartment--his friends. Around everything that made life worth living! If only there was some way for him to project his being unseen into that dim library! Some way to tear the life out of that scrawny, worthless body!

Exhausted at last by the violence of his hatreds, Nick fell into a troubled sleep.

THE HUGE WOLF SPED SILENTLY toward the Fells Farm, its gray body blending almost into invisibility in the shadows. Food it must have--and it must have it soon, if it was to stay alive. For others besides John Fells had been minding their fences since appearance of a wolf had been first reported. The wild life in the neighborhood had long since vanished. The wolf's ribs already stood out plainly against its sides. Soon, unless it fed, starvation would take its final toll.

It knew from past experience that the Fells Farm was the least likely of all to produce food, since it was best guarded of all.

## METAMORPHOSIS

But the urgency of its need did not permit it to neglect any possible source. Phantom like, the animal skirted the barn and chicken house, but found no slightest defect in the fences and doors. Finally it left the tantalizing animal smells which were driving it almost insane with hunger.

In desperation the beast approached the house itself, carefully inspected each door and window. All were securely closed and fastened. The single lighted window attracted its attention. With a bound it reached the roof of a low shed from which it could look into the library. Here too it saw that it was foiled, for it recognized the impassable barrier of the closely spaced bars and the heavy screen.

Flattened against the roof until it was only a vague shadow, the wolf stared at the figure of John Fells, bent over his desk. It recognized all humans as its enemies, but some instinct told it that here was its particular enemy--the one who, with his fences and carefully locked doors, had condemned it to starvation and death.

As the wolf stared, a stream of pure, concentrated animal hatred flowed from its brain to the seated figure of the man. And then, by some strange circumstance of chance, the stream of hatred which flowed simultaneously from the mind of sleeping Nicholas Gray became en rapport with that flowing from the mind of the wolf. The body of the gaunt beast twitched convulsively as the two energy flows merged--and suddenly it found itself in the room!

Fells sprang to his feet in alarm as he caught sight of the huge animal. He opened his mouth to call for help, but the sound never left his lips. For in that same instant, the monster leaped, sharp fangs bared. . . .

Running footsteps clattered in the hallway outside the room. The wolf whirled to face the menace, bumped heavily against the desk, and the lamp crashed to the floor.

Frantically it sought a way to escape, but found none. The heavily barred window still formed an impassable barrier. The fire started by the smashed lamp was rapidly spreading. Retreating to the furthest corner of the room the wolf crouched, snarling defiance at the sound of fists pounding on the locked door.

Crouching, the wolf yearned in desperation for the safety of its den in an almost inaccessible part of a nearby rocky ravine. Against a background of hatred and frantic fear, the wish to be safely in its den began to grow. Then suddenly it WAS in its den.

For a moment the wolf stood bewildered at the sudden transition. Then its nose began to recognize familiar odors, and it realized that it was safe--that it was no longer in the hated room. Its mind was not bothered by abstract speculation as to the ways and means. It was safe. That was all that mattered. Selecting a favorite corner, the wolf curled up to sleep.

THE SUN WAS HIGH IN THE HEAVENS when Nicholas Gray finally awoke and lazily stretched. He would be late at the bank, he thought, but without any great interest or concern. Then he remembered that he did not have to go to the bank this morning--or any other morning.

He was all finished there. Tomorrow he'd have to go to work at the car works. Oh, well, tomorrow was tomorrow. Worry about that tomorrow.

He began leisurely to dress to go out for his breakfast. Even the thoughts of breakfast didn't seem to interest him much this morning. Usually he wanted his breakfast as soon as he awakened, and was in an ugly mood until he got it. But he didn't seem to be particularly in the need of breakfast this morning.

He recalled the unpleasant interview of the night before, and the feeling of anger and terror which he had felt. It all seemed so far away now. Just a bad dream. Everything would turn out all right. It always had. He dismissed it from his mind and began to hum a gay tune as he dressed.

He was putting on his hat and coat when he heard a key turn in the lock, and the housekeeper stepped into the hallway.

"Oh, I beg your pardon, Mr. Gray. I didn't know that you were still in. I'll come in a little later and do up your apartment."

"That's all right. You can do it now," he answered pleasantly. "I'm on my way out. Slept a bit late this morning. Wasn't feeling too good last night. Touch of cold or something. So I slept in."

"Oh! You haven't been out? Then you haven't heard the terrible news?"

"News? What news?"

"Poor Mr. Fells! Done to death in his own library! Oh! It was a horrible affair! His throat had been torn out, and something had been eating him! A wolf, they say. They heard it howling in there. But it was no wolf, if you ask me! It was the devil's own work! The window was barred, and the door was bolted from the inside. The hired man and the chauffeur had to break down the door to get in."

Nick made a wordless gesture of astonishment.

"The house burned too!" she continued. "Right down to the foundations! A lamp had been upset, they think. By the time they had broken in, all they could do was drag poor Mr. Fells' body out. The fire had spread so that they couldn't do a thing to save the house. By the time the fire brigade got there, it was gone!"

"Oh! I shouldn't have told you all that!" she exclaimed, as she noticed Nick's ashen face. "You and him being just like father and son, everyone says. But still, you had to know it some time. I'm so sorry for you, Mr. Gray. If there's anything I can do, just let me know."

But Nick's sudden paleness was not from grief. It came from a sudden vague remembrance of a strange dream the night before. Was it a dream? Or could it be..... No!!! Such things just didn't happen! The animal got in and out some way. Probably the window bars were loose or something. But let these silly fools have their superstitions if they enjoyed them. After all, it didn't matter HOW it happened. The important thing was that it HAD happened.

So! The house had burned down to the foundations, eh! Fine! That meant that the forged note and his assignment were gone too. No one would ever know, now. The draft of the new will would be gone too. He would still be Fells' sole heir. He'd get his father's estate in a few months, and Fells' estate as soon as affairs could be set-

tled up. There had been no restrictions in Fells' will. He knew that. Once, when Fells had been away on business, he had hunted around his desk and found it, so he knew what was in it.

Luckily he had held his temper last night. Everyone would still think they had been the closest of friends. He'd have to put on an act of properly mourning Fells until things were settled up. Then he'd be on his way. Florida! Cuba! Paris! The Riviera!

Finally he came to himself and saw the housekeeper standing before him. Mumbling his thanks for her sympathy, he turned away.

THE FUNERAL WAS MAGNIFICENT. John Fells lay in an opulent state while the mourners came by and paid their respects to the dead. Out of respect for the living the coffin remained closed.

This he could afford, Nicholas thought with that raucous up-bubbling of spirits he knew as happiness. He kept a long face, none-the-less, and seemed appropriately shocked and stricken. He was shocked, as a matter of fact--as shocked as one can be at a gift of manna from Heaven. . . at a reprieve from a death sentence.

He even enjoyed standing in the rainswept graveyard, at the edge of the brown, yawning pit into which the remains of John Fells were swiftly lowered. And the thud of the clods upon the coffin lid was a jubilant counterpoint to the angelic hymn of satisfaction that throbbed in his rioting veins.

The days that followed were absorbing enough. Conferences with lawyers in which many papers were signed. Burning acquaintanceships with John Fells' many associates, debtors, friends. Nicholas had scarcely a thought to give to the odd circumstances that had hurled him into the popular position of heir to a not inconsiderable fortune.

Slowly, he began to reabsorb himself into his old life. . . the round of parties, amorous adventure, liquor, song, and dance. He became quite the old Nicholas Gray, and everybody marvelled that one so young should be blessed with so many of the good things of life.

Marianne, Nicholas' newest, became the talk of the town through her association with him. She really planned to marry him. . . and his fortune. It is very doubtful that Nicholas reciprocated her feelings to this same extent. He had not, in the first place, the character actually to love any human being other than himself. In the second place, he was shrewd enough in his wastrel's way to know that it was not so much himself as his fortune that attracted Marianne's greedy little soul. His fortune was a commodity she was more than willing to barter her lusciously attractive body to share.

Though it is rumored that money will not buy the things that matter, Nicholas found that it readily bought the things he wanted. So far, he had Marianne, and that was as much as he wanted for the moment. The installment payments had not yet become exorbitant, he considered, and before long would cease altogether. Meantime, there was life and love and. . . Marianne!

He toasted her beauty over the rim of a cocktail glass in the opulent serenity of his "gold-plated apartment", more than a little dazed by the number of toasts--and cocktails--that had preceded

this one.

"Gold-plated!" He said thickly. "Those were his very words, honey child! Well, if old John Fells could see me now!"

"It was very fortunate for you, darling," sparkled Marianne, tossing honey-colored curls in gay abandon. "I mean. . ."

"For us, my dear!" Nicholas chuckled. He shrugged deprecatingly. "Of course, I'm sorry, and all that. A good man, in his way." He cocked an eye shrewdly at the ceiling, thinking of his last interview with his benefactor. He had never breathed a word of that, not even to Marianne.

"He died the hard way, poor old fellow. And nobody seems to know exactly how."

Marianne made a moue of disgust. "Darling, must you? I read the papers."

Nicholas set down his cocktail glass with elaborate care.

"I can't help wondering. He was in the library, you know. Probably going over accounts or something of the sort. I can see him now -- busily absorbed in his work, unaware of the horrible thing creeping upon him. Then. . . a noise! He lifts his head. The monster. . . what was it? . . . springs. . ."

"Darling!" shrieked Marianne.

"Tore him to pieces!" mouthed Nicholas drunkenly. "The Devil's own work, my landlady said. Well, I wonder. I can see the whole picture so plain, except for one thing. . . If I could only. . ."

What curious relationship was it that established between man and beast that inexplicable band of ego? What identity existed between Nicholas Gray and the gaunt gray wolf in the ravine? What intra-dimensional twisting of space occurred with the heterodyning of emotional quanta that streamed from their kindred minds? There could be no explanation, but the million million chances to one that that which had happened before could happen again, did happen, and instantly there was a voracious wolf, ravening madly in the room with them.

Exactly what happened in Nicholas Gray's apartment was only surmise on the part of the authorities, as it had been in the mysterious case of John Fells. Of course, Marianne might have told them. But she did not. She could not. Marianne would never tell anybody anything, ever again. When they found her, crouched over the bloody remnant of what had been Nicholas Gray and shrieking as though to burst her own lungs, she was quite mad...quite hopelessly mad.

#### THE END

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*Dry Brash by Bonister*

## THE HAUNTED STREET

*By Astara Zimmer Bradley*

Just once I walked that narrow, cluttered street,  
penned by damp houses, overhanging low  
with shuttered gables and old panes to throw  
the blood-red sunset at my hesitant feet.  
The houses all were empty, and the slow  
pace of my steps resounded, and each blow  
echoed my heart, that almost ceased to beat.

The vacant windows leered with empty glee  
near cobweb-traced black doors that nearly fell  
from screaming hinges; and the clogged old well  
that poisonous, leaf-choked, stared back up at me  
(as if there was some horror it would tell)  
showed me a black and open shaft to Hell!

# OCULUS PENETRANS

**By M. Houston**

**He was granted one wish. . .in a most astonishing way!**



*Illustrated by Banister*

All I could see was her jaw-bone going up and down and up and down.

Though I am Irish and proud of it. . . remembering the tales of my Irish grandmother who each evening in the old country would leave bowls of cream in the kitchen for the little Folk. . . I am also in my way a man of science. For a policeman cannot go about 'Bellevin' in the Little Folk. . . no more than he can in the gift of second sight.

But. . . though I am NOT superstitious for an Irishman. . . still I must say that the thing, when it happened, gave me the sick shudders. One minute there was the pretty face of Mary Catherine Sullivan before me. . . and in a fine rage she was, too, with her red curls tossin', her blue eyes shootin' sparks, and her lips all drawn up in a pout.

And the next minute all that had melted away. . . just like ice on an August mornin'. . . and I was starin' horror-stricken at a skeleton--a grinnin' skeleton--with Mary Catherine's voice comin' out of it, still full of fury.

A good thing it is that I'm NOT superstitious. . . or I'd probably be stark ravin' mad this minute. And, of course, the whole thing has a perfectly natural scientific explanation which will be discovered soon no doubt by the scientists workin' on it now.

So, to help them get things straight, I have decided to write out this full, clear report for the Department.

To begin at the beginning, I should probably report on my psychology the day it all began. Psychology, they say, is a very important part of the new police methods. And that day I was feelin' low as the temperature in Little America. For Mary Catherine had taken it into her head that we two weren't matched to be married.

"You have," she had told me only the night before, "a superficial mind. All you really SEE is the surface me. The man I marry has to care about my mind. . . my soul. . . not just my. . . my face."

"But I do," I told her of course. "You have a BEAUTIFUL soul." And I tried to kiss her and make up, but she would have none of that. She was all full to bursting of something she'd read. . . about the marriage of true minds. . . or was it souls? And she wanted me to shut my eyes and commune with her in silence.

I did. . . but when I reached out with my eyes shut and tried to take her hand, she got mad about THAT. In the end we fought, and I went home in a huff.

Well, next morning we started out as usual in the patrol car. The first call we got was to investigate a woman, reported to be telling fortunes, on O'Keefe Street.

Pete drove over, and the place was just off a dirty alley, with a gang of tough-lookin' kids hangin' around. So Pete stayed with the car while I went in to investigate.

I'd been on those jobs before, and usually the fortune-teller was a gypsy grinnin' at you out of bold eyes, ready for you to cross her palm with silver. Or a sallow, cringin' old woman with brown spots on her face and a dirty turban on her head.

But this time you could have knocked me over with a feather.

There, gay and spry as a robin, with her little face wrinkled and her silver-gray eyes twinkling, was almost the spitting image of my

Irish grandmother. (Though, of course, it wasn't she, for Granny's been dead these fifteen years.)

Right away she saw I was Irish, and welcomed me, too, like a long-lost son. And we got to chatting of this and that, and presently I had told her all about where my folks had come from in Ireland. And she said she had come over, herself, long ago. . . but from a different county.

Then, though I felt ashamed to do it, I had to set forth before her the reason for my visit. But she wasn't angry.

"Bless you," she chuckled. "I don't tell fortunes. I CAN'T. I can't foresee the future."

"Of course," I told her. "It must just be that you have an enemy. One spreading tales about you, too. . . and you know that's slander. Why, you could take them to court for it, no less."

"Could I indeed now?" she sat there with her head cocked on one side, lookin' thoughtful. "Well, no need to be mixin' mischief for someone when no harm has been done."

"But I DON'T tell fortunes, and I don't want it noised about that I do to confuse the people who need me. I. . ."

Her gray eyes twinkled at me.

"I only have one power. I grant wishes."

"You what?" I asked her, thinking I'd heard wrong.

"I only grant wishes," she repeated. "Now if you want to foresee the future, I could grant your wish, and you WOULD! There's quite a difference, you'll notice. For instance, would YOU like to foresee what's going to happen next month?"

"Now, now, granny," I said, "you can't do that, you know. It's against the law."

"Nonsense," she told me. "I never heard of a law against granting wishes. I have even imposed certain limitations lately. Why, if you wanted me to grant a wish that someone be shot or stabbed, I wouldn't do it. So there."

I couldn't decide quite whether she was joking or serious, so I laughed. She laughed too, and I decided that it was all a good joke.

"I like you, Patrick," she said. "And for the sake of your Irish grandmother, I'm going to grant you a wish."

I remembered the gypsies and their silver.

"I'm a policeman, granny, on duty," I told her. "Any present I accept would be only a bribe in the eyes of the law."

"I wouldn't bribe you," she said, sounding hurt. "But I tell you what. Tonight when you're off duty, make a wish. Not for money or promotion if those are against your conscience. Just for something you'd like. And I'll grant your wish."

Naturally, I didn't believe a word of the nonsense, but I thanked her, thinkin' that even the Irish grow old and feeble witted. And I warned her kindly again against telling fortunes, and bade her good-day.

BY NIGHT I'D FORGOTTEN THE WHOLE THING, of course, for my mind was full of Mary Catherine. Already I'd forgiven her her harsh words, for I have a generous nature. And I was ready to let bygones

## OCULUS PENETRANS

be bygones, hug and forget. But when I walked up to her porch at seven, there was Timothy Ryan sitting in the porch chair beside her, looking for all the world as if he belonged there and intended to stay.

I am pleased to say that I outlasted him at the staying, for he drove a milk truck and had to be up at three. But naturally when he was gone, harsh word followed harsh word.

"I told you," Mary Catherine said, "that I wouldn't marry a man with a mind as shallow as yours."

"You prefer HIS," I told her bitterly, "a milkman to a Policeman . . . a truck-driver to the scientific guardian of your life and your property. And besides, won't I some day be promoted to a detective?"

"Bah," said Mary Catherine. "A detective! Why you couldn't detect a germ under a magnifyin' glass if it carried a sign identifying itself. All the time Timothy is driving his milk truck, he is THINKIN' of lofty things. He meditates on my MIND. But you couldn't see past my face if you had X-ray eyes."

"Oh couldn't I?" I yelled at her. "Well do you know what I wish? I wish that I HAD X-Ray eyes. . . just so that I could see into the mind of your Timothy Ryan. For if I could see past that red face of his. . . . ."

But I didn't finish. I couldn't.

For that's when Mary Catherine's bright curls, and her soft rounded cheeks, and her little red mouth began to fade away. And where her bright hair had been was only a bony skull. And where her eyes had been. . . .

Someone was saying "Hail Mary" over and over. I guess it was me. And Mary Catherine was crying something at me, but all I could see was her jaw bone going up and down and up and down. I jumped off the porch, and ran and ran and ran. . . through the streets, with my breath sobbing and my side aching. . . till I finally found myself in my room.

IT TAKES A LITTLE WHILE to get used to X-Ray vision. I'll admit that at first I thought I was crazy. But so would anyone if he looked into the mirror, and there was just a gray blur and a lot of bones. Or if he walked down the street and saw skeletons all around. And at night, even now, I sometimes awaken with the cold sweat of terror on me. And no one will be happier than I when the scientists have finally figured the whole thing out.

I called Headquarters at first and told them that I was sick. Mary Catherine telephoned me two or three times, sounding kind. . . and worried. . . but somehow I couldn't face her. I just stayed inside, and ate from cans. And gradually I began to understand what had happened. My wish had indeed been granted, and I had X-Ray vision. . . though 'tis strange how little I guessed of the ways to use it.

First thing, of course, I tried to reach the old woman who had granted the wish for me and entreat her to take the gift back. But it was no use. The skeleton who came to the door when I rang told me that the Irish lady had left in the morning shortly after my first visit, carrying all that she owned in a little gray carpet bag.

I had to return to work, finally, or be fired. And so simple a thing as going to my job in the morning created a thousand hazards for me. In the times before, I had hardly seen Tony at the newsstand, for instance, or Joe at the shoe shop. But now I bought my paper from a skeleton with a familiar voice that I recognized as Tony's. But it did not seem right to look into a pair of gaping eye sockets while we discussed the weather or passed the time of day. And at the shoe shine shop, I had to watch Joe's false teeth click together with every word while he shined my shoes and spoke from a grinning mouth about labor and capital.

At the Station House, I had to identify the chief, and even Pete, by their voices. Naturally enough, I did not tell them what had happened. For though I might know I was sane, who in the world would there be to believe me. . . particularly if I let it drop that I could see clearly the bullet still imbedded in the chief's hip from a gun battle he had fought with a gang, way back in the days of prohibition.

In truth I will never know how I got through that first day. Before it was over, Pete asked me in a strange voice if I had waited long enough after my fever to come back to work.

But in the days that followed, the skeletons began to take on a certain familiarity. I became used to them. . . as to the flesh itself. Pete's bones, for instance, seemed broad and jocular and friendly. . . the chief's straight and stern.

Finally, I even brought myself to pay a visit to Mary Catherine. But perhaps she had been right at first about my seeing only her face. For her bones never had the charm for me that her flesh had had. And though she seemed to feel guilt over my illness, I shrank when she patted my hand with her bony one.

Nor could I miss the fact that, though she wore nothing on her fingers, there was a ring on a chain about her neck, moving up and down on her breast bone when she breathed. And well I knew that I had never given Mary Catherine a ring.

I DEVOTED MYSELF TO MY CAREER. And here let me speak a word for science. For while X-Ray vision is a hard thing on a man, 'tis a fine thing for a policeman.

Who but I could have seen that one-legged Jake the beggar had his second leg taped up behind him?

Or the gun swinging lightly down the street between the lipstick and the cigarette lighter in a woman's purse? ('Twas the woman who later confessed how Carter's Department Store had been robbed.)

And who but I could have known that the Mexican involved in the opium ring had fed hundreds of hollow metal pellets to the scrawny chickens cooped up in the back of his car.

'Tis no wonder that I became famous. . . I whom Mary Catherine had called a man of superficial mind!

They raised my salary on the force and promoted me to a detective. . . assignin' me to special cases. In the end I had to confess the truth about my X-Ray vision. For how could I look for a blonde dressed in a gray flannel coat. . . when all I could see was a knock-

knead female skeleton. . .with a large safety pin where the shoulder strap of her slip would be. . .and great quantities of the costume jewelry that someone had been filchin' from the local five and ten, drifting along against each of her hip bones.

And, of course, you know the great stir that it made when I confessed at last to my X-Ray vision. The stir that extended even to the offices of the FBI. And in truth, I was slated for great things in those days, and there is no limit to the places that I might have gone in my time.

But all the while the FBI was investigating. And while I am as patriotic as the next man, and appreciate the science of their methods more than most, having had some experience with the marvels of science myself, still and all I think there are some mysteries better left unsolved.

But I suppose what was done was necessary in view of a very important and secret job for which I was being considered. (Security is involved, so I cannot tell the true nature of the job, I am sorry to say. . .and, in fact, I am not quite clear myself just what it was.)

But the FBI was thorough, and they were on the trail of the little Old Irish Lady (the spittin' image of my grandmother) who had granted me the wish for X-Ray vision. And sure enough, in time, find her they did. . .and bring her in they did for me to identify. . .and her naturally as mad as a hornet, thinking they were after her again for fortune telling.

When they took me into the room where she was supposed to be waiting, I could not identify her. . .not for the life of me, though I looked in every corner.

"Where is she?" I asked the guard on duty.

"Right there under your eyes," he said surprised. "What's the matter? Do her bones look different from her clothes?"

I heard a dry little rasping chuckle. . .but still I couldn't see a thing in the room. . .not so much as a tibia or a dorsal vertebra.

Naturally, hearing the chuckle and seeing nothing, I thought it was a joke. And I said so loudly, denying that I could see the old woman's bones. . .or anyone's bones. . .or that any human thing was in the room. . .besides me, of course, and the guard. For wouldn't that have been a likely trick to prove me a liar?

Then, I heard her voice. And sure enough, there was no failing to recognize it. But the voice came from no one I swear. Or at least from no more than a dancing light I could see against the wall.

"Fortune teller, indeed!" it said. "I'll show them. I'll make them wish they were dead. . .and then not grant the wish." The light danced harder than ever. "But 'tis no fault of yours, Patrick," the voice said. "And how are you?"

Fool, fool, fool that I am! For, do you know, before I could think . . .before I could remember the gift that I was to science. . .or reflect on my ambitions and how I was in a fair way to realizin' them one and all. . .I answered her. And the answer I gave had to take the form of a wish!

"It's fine I am, granny," I answered. "But wishin' I could see you."

And like that, quick as a flash, she was there, with her little wrinkled face and her pert ways. And there was the guard, too, heavy of features, dressed in his blue uniform. I had lost it. . . lost my gift of X-Ray vision through another wish, too hastily expressed. I gaped at the old woman in surprise, and her silver-gray eyes twinkled.

"Pat, my lad," she said, "'Tis a great gift you have lost. But still you are lucky. For one day you would have seen the bare bones of one human being too many."

So now I have left behind me my fame and my chance for fortune. I am back with Pete in the patrol car, though there is a kind of shadow hanging over me. And Mary Catherine is married to Timothy Ryan, which is just as well. . . for her bones were far from the prettiest that I ever saw.

And to end as I started with a bit of psychology, I'm happy these days. For I have met a girl with eyes of brown and hair the color of jet. And a fine figure she has too. . . and wit and a ready tongue. When I go to her house, we read from library books she has borrowed or speak of science. Already she has let me kiss her once. . . which was when I told her how much I admired the beauty of her mind.

So I sincerely hope that the scientists at work on the problem can solve the matter of my X-Ray vision to her satisfaction, for I know that it worries her. Or I wish that the old woman who's the spittin' image of my grandmother will turn up again and grant me one more wish.

But do you know, I sometimes wonder if the REAL secret project that the FBI had me workin' on was to help them locate the old woman. For sure the government would want a monopoly of the power to grant wishes, wouldn't they?

And do you know, that if so, and they try to force her (though I am an admirer of science) somehow I believe that she meant what she said. She will make anyone who tries to monopolize magic wish they were dead. And then she won't grant the wish.

#### THE END



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*David H. Keller, M. D.*

*By Tom Carter*

People are his mind's own secret toys.  
He can heal frail, injured flesh,  
but keen fingers of his thought lance sharp  
into private souls. The twisted mesh  
of brain is wilderness he longs to scan.  
He meets fear, but is not afraid;  
in the soul's sad and sullen marrow  
he finds rare good. For insight he paid  
his birthright: Man's bright fallacy  
of hope. This Earth, he sees, is earth,  
not more, and Mankind not exalted.  
But still his harsh and accurate mirth  
is unsubdued. So great his love  
for humanity's brief, brave hour, that strife  
can not break him. His strength endures  
and gives him mastery for this life.



The Norwescon, 1950



Portland, Oregon