

# Weird Tales

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Newspaperman Who Afterwards Committed Suicide*

## A Soulless Resurrection

**A**S WAS my custom each year, I went to St. Maude, that beautiful little suburb of Paris, in June, 19—, to spend my vacation after a taxing year of study in the Ecole Polytechnique, where I was being fitted, as my father had been before me, to emblazon upon the family escutcheon the title "Architect" and thus justify my existence.

St. Maude was but a step for me. In Pont St. Esprit, which the good God chose to have the honor of my birth (for, with my lofty ambitions that would outstrip the works of Notre Dame and St. Peter in Rome, I considered even Paris would some day like to claim me), I had often made thirty-five kilometers a day hunting with my father. I was proud of my strong limbs and rugged frame, and the mincing promenades of the afternoon I left to the boulevardiers. So I set out on foot for St. Maude, where my fair young cousin Genevieve, her mother and the latter's aged father, long a retired physician, expected me.

Bright and fair was the day of my approach to the pleasant suburb where I was to spend the next two months. The sun's brilliant rays glistened like rain drops on the rich foliage of the stately trees so generously scattered at every turn of the eye. The humming of a bee that I startled from a vagrant honey-suckle by the roadway as I trudged along with springing step, gladdened my heart with its musical suggestion of bucolic quiet and aroused a flood of happy associations formed in idle moments spent

in the picturesque purlieus of my aunt's little home. I drew in full breaths of the fragrance of lovely bluebells and lilies of the valley. In the distance I could see the cattle lazily grazing. As I crossed a rustic bridge, my eyes fell upon two youngsters languidly reclining on the bank of the stream awaiting the disappearance of their cork floats to announce that some venturesome fish had swallowed the bait. At sight of them my own pleasant boyhood days were recalled.

They recognized me instantly and called, "Hello, Jean!" and I whiled away a bit of time with them, promising to join them in their sport, some day soon. They were overjoyed to see me, for the little rascals knew there was fun ahead and a few sous.

I tramped along the border of the woods, enjoying with infinite zest the smell of the fresh green earth. I heard the cheerful chatter of a busy little squirrel, disturbed in his woodland industry. Cutting through the patch of forest, where at every turn I recalled some familiar spot, I soon espied my aunt's quaint cottage half-concealed by a growth of birches.

Its gabled roof, even from that distant viewpoint, showed sorry need of a repairing hand. Where the sun's burning rays penetrated through the loopholes left by the foliage, the shingles had cracked and curled. Blistered patches of paint, too, rendered the house more in spirit with its woodland environment. As I neared it I could see that,

as of old, the flower boxes stood on the front window sill and from them trailed the clematis and nasturtium. A dainty ivy threaded its serpentine way to the eaves. Saucy little birds chirped and sported about the ancient chimney. In the garden everything ran in nature's own seeming confusion save in one little spot where a woman's hand had set some choice plants. Here a patch of marigolds, there a cluster of peonies, then a touch of daisies showed their pretty heads in the midst of the geraniums, and with a careless eye to artificial nicety bashful fuchsias hung their tender bells in the shadow of some giant sunflower.

Traveling the well-worn path I had so often trod, I suddenly came upon my young cousin, fairer this day than ever. She was sprinkling the flowers, and until then had been hidden from my view by a mass of rose bushes. She turned as she heard my footstep, and, instantly recognizing me, ceased her pleasant labor and ran to welcome my arrival, throwing her arms about my neck and kissing my cheeks. Her beautiful face, the picture of lovely innocence, was radiant with joy. Her voice, as soft and sweet as the nightingale's, thrilled me with its lovely tone. Zip, the old house dog, came leaping upon me. Genevieve's mother, attracted by the unwonted commotion, next greeted me.

We talked about the flowers, the woods, the odd little house and the dog. I even found myself twitting my lovely cousin about the fantastic weathervane that whirled and squeaked and turned jerkily this way and that as if in a pet over the contrary winds that never would let it point in one direction for even a minute. Indeed, under the charm of her singular beauty, the music of her voice and the grace of her sinuous figure, I forgot to reply to her invitation to enter the house and partake of refreshments. At last, however, having ex-

changed all the news that came spontaneously to our minds, we stepped inside.

My granduncle, they told me, was in his laboratory. Of late, they said, he was eternally puttering about with his chemicals, attempting experiments that sometimes by their strange noises would arouse them suddenly from their sleep in the middle of the night. Perhaps I would see him in the evening, but I was cautious not to disturb him at his work, for he had become exceedingly secretive and peevish.

Inside the house, everything bore the touch of the hand of time and the earmarks of generations before me. The ancient clock in the hall seemed weary of ticking away the moments of mortal man's time.

That night I did not see my old granduncle. I could hear the tinkling of test tubes, the gurgling of fluids and the shuffling of his feeble footsteps as he dragged himself about in his workshop, from which pungent odors of acids emanated.

Next day at lunch I heard him slowly feeling his way like a blind man through the narrow hall that led from the room he used for his laboratory to the dining room. He nodded his ragged head when he saw me and smiled absently, but never deigned to say a word or proffer his hand in welcome. I was struck by the marked change a year had wrought in him. Long white locks fell disheveled over his aged head. His face was like a time-worn sheet of parchment, wrinkled in a thousand folds and yellowish gray in patches. His eagle-like eyes, set beneath finely arched brows and a magnificent forehead, burned with an unnatural fire. Constantly he was deeply engrossed in his thoughts, to the exclusion of the rest of us.

But with the charming Genevieve, sparkling in her maiden beauty, what more needed I to fill my time and make

the summer days pass happily? Often I sighed because this fascinating girl was so near to me in relationship. Otherwise I should surely have courted her impetuously and, no doubt, have lost her through my reckless ardor. We strolled together through the summer woods, her mother often accompanying us, or sat for hours on the rustic bench in front of the cozy home, as happy as the birds building their nest.

Once a week I would take her to Paris, this exquisite flower, so fresh, ingenuous and lovable. We would wander through the Louvre, admiring the marvelous paintings, or stray through the Luxembourg. On other days we would promenade along the Boulevard des Italiens or the Champs Elysées, commenting on the ceaseless gaiety of the life we saw. Once I took her to the Ecole Polytechnique, showed her all the departments and even the desk at which I sat and absorbed the knowledge I hoped would some day rebound to the fame of my family. One night we went to that most magnificent of opera houses, the Grand Opera, and saw "L'Africaine." For a week she was in ecstasy over that immense production. Her gentle soul responded sensitively to all that was beautiful and refined.

**A** FORTNIGHT after one of these delightful trips, a sudden gloom and sorrow smote this happy circle. I came home one night from a two days' sojourn in Paris to find my beautiful cousin in bed, her mother, grandfather and Dr. Maneau around her. She had tripped, the day before, on a rusty barrel hoop. A jagged end had penetrated her dainty foot and blood poisoning was making rapid progress. I was distressed beyond belief. Five days later, death had forever clouded the brilliant luster of Genevieve's soulful orbs.

That night we carried her into the old parlor and laid her gently upon her bier. My granduncle said he would embalm her body himself, and even though kindly Dr. Maneau offered to arrange all the funeral details, the old man held to his determination to do the ghastly work.

In the evening, the mother, exhausted from grief and loss of sleep, fell into a profound slumber in her room. I had remained all day beside the bier. I ate nothing. About dusk I went out to cool my fevered brow. For hours I wandered through the woods and fields, halloved by the feet of her who had gone.

Returning, I saw the room where the bier lay, dimly lit, and from the shifting shadow on the curtain I knew her grandfather was standing over the corpse of the saintly girl.

It was not with premeditation that I approached the house softly and quietly, turned the knob and shut the door so noiselessly that even I heard no sound. My great grief had rendered me unconsciously quiet in my every movement. At the side of the room nearest the old man was a folding screen wrought in fantastic tapestry, and a step further was a lounge. Not wishing to disturb the old gentleman in his sad contemplation of that dear face with its ghostly traces of mortal beauty, I sat down upon the lounge, completely hidden from his view, and buried my weary, aching head in my hands.

How long I sat thus, I do not know nor do I remember hearing the old hall clock sound the midnight hour. I was suddenly startled by the shrill voice of the old man. From the stairway which led to above, I could hear the heavy breathing of the worn-out mother. It was not his voice that chilled my very bones, though at that hour and in that situation, considering the condition of my nerves, a bit of nervousness could be overlooked.

"It must work this time! It cannot fail! It cannot fail!" I heard his piping voice exclaim.

I arose and looked over the screen. There he was, as before, leaning over that white lovely face, hands clasped behind his back, fingers nervously clutching each other, his breath coming in short gasps, his whole frame atremble.

"One more, another one, five thousand units more and it cannot fail! Ah-h-h-h! How the Academy will hail me, me the old Bergeau!"

I saw him take a hypodermic needle. I saw him grasp a tiny phial from a pocket of his shabby coat. I watched him fill the needle to the full, his hand shaking as if palsied. A strange light was burning in his eager little eyes. Like a ghostly goblin haunting some graveyard sepulcher, he stretched out his thin gaunt arms and turned toward the dead girl. I was transfixed with horror. Why I did not intervene, I cannot say. Some horrible curiosity kept my eyes fastened on his wizen form and held my limbs powerless to move.

I could see him part the dainty lace that covered her cold, alabaster bosom. He sank the needle into the lifeless, unresponsive flesh and slowly stepped to the end of the bier to watch jealously the saintly face, ethereally pure in death.

For several seconds he kept his ghastly watch. The terrible silence froze my breath. The old clock ticked with awful regularity. The great brass lamp on the heavy center table flickered a ghostly flare, and I thought I saw the girl's lips move. But it was only a fancy then.

Five minutes went by, the old man standing immovable save for the trembling of his arms. My eyes turned first to him and then to the girl on the bier.

The old clock struck one, so faint and

solemn that it seemed miles away, and I knew midnight had flown.

**M**ERCIFUL Father! What was that? Had my mind snapped? Had reason suddenly left me? Had madness insidiously crept into my brain? Or were my strained eyes growing treacherous? God, no, for the old man was trembling so violently now that his teeth chattered, his eyes dilated frightfully, and he began to reel and totter like a drunkard as his wheezy voice exclaimed:

"She moves, oh, God, she moves!"

Sick and faint with horror, clutched by an icy dread, my throat swelling under a strangling sensation and my eyes feeling as if they would burst their sockets, I groaned heavily and my head dropped to my breast as I saw the girl's eyes open, one hand raise itself from its folded position of repose on her bosom and her lower limbs tremble as if shocked by electricity.

When I looked again, she had raised her head and half turned her body. Another moment and she fell heavily from the bier. Like one asleep, she slowly raised herself and stood at full height, now seeming doubly high in her long white robe, her rich black hair streaming down her back. Such a picture of nameless horror no human being ever saw before. The old lamp threw a dim glare over the tall ghastly figure. Her eyes, wide open and staring vacantly, were as glassy as in death; her white lips were parted in rigid lines, the whole giving an unearthly expression to her ashen face, tinged at the cheeks with the faintest trace of color.

The old man had resurrected her body, but not her soul! It was a corpse, alive, moving, more terrible a hundred-fold than death!

From sheer horror, I fell at full length as the animated Thing came

toward me, its great glassy eyes looking nowhere, its arms moving like those of a person groping in the dark; the head, oh, hideous, unnamable horror, creation unthought of by man, too terribly ghastly for the grave; blood-chilling, flesh-shriveling sight, turning slowly from left to right, the staring eyes moving oppositely, the mouth leering as no death had ever leered!

There was no mind to guide, no soul to govern. The old man had sunk to his knees. His hands were clasped in agony and his withered face raised to Heaven.

"Oh, God, what have I done, what have I done!" he moaned and sobbed piteously.

I RAISED myself as if from the grave and again beheld the Thing. It had turned and, as it reached within a foot of the lamp, tottered. From its throat came a hideous gurgle; the mouth

opened wide; the arms outstretched; and it pitched suddenly forward.

The lamp fell and an instant later exploded with a terrific detonation. The old man uttered an unearthly yell. The room filled with flame and smoke. I could see neither the Thing nor the old man as I leaped through the door. In a trice the room was a roaring furnace.

I rushed upstairs to wake the old mother, but collided with her at the head of the stairs.

"Henri! Where is Henri!" she shrieked, frantically pushing my hands aside and swaying down the steps into the parlor, before my smarting eyes.

"Henri! Henri—"

The voice died away in the furnace's roar.

Screaming wildly, I leaped through the open window on the landing and ran into the forest.