

Weird Tales

REGISTERED IN U.S. PATENT OFFICE



A MAGAZINE of the

BIZARRE and UNUSUAL

VOLUME XIII

NUMBER 3

Published monthly by the Popular Fiction Publishing Company, 2457 E. Washington Street, Indianapolis, Ind. Entered as second-class matter March 20, 1923, at the post office at Indianapolis, Ind., under the act of March 3, 1879. Single copies, 25 cents. Subscription, \$2.50 a year in the United States; \$3.00 a year in Canada. English office: Charles Lavell, 18, Serjeant's Inn, Fleet Street, E. C. 4, London. The publishers are not responsible for the loss of unsolicited manuscripts, although every care will be taken of such material while in their possession. The contents of this magazine are fully protected by copyright and must not be reproduced either wholly or in part without permission from the publishers.

NOTE—All manuscripts and communications should be addressed to the publishers' Chicago office at 840 North Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Ill.
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Ballade of Wandering Ghosts

By HANNA BAIRD CAMPBELL

Have you heard the story the old wives tell,
 When winds in the turret sob and groan,
 And the bloated moon casts an evil spell
 On the hearts of men when the day has flown?
 When shadows out of the void are blown,
 And the reeling stars grow sick and pale,
 When phantoms meet and their sins condone—
 Have you heard them whisper the evil tale?

They mumble and mouth of a loathsome dell,
 And a stagnant pool, with dead leaves strown,
 Where vapors, foul with the stench of hell,
 Strike the chill of death through blood and bone;
 And above the pool on a slimy stone,
 Wrapped in a luminous mist-gray veil,
 Sits the ghost of the self-slain Angelone—
 Have you heard them whisper the evil tale?

They swear, at the stroke of the midnight bell,
 Betrayed by her lover, to rest unknown,
 Her eery songs on the night-winds swell
 As she hushes her unborn babe's faint moan.
 And the old wives clack in an undertone,
 And drown their fears in mugs of ale,
 While Love looks down from a rotting throne—
 Have you heard them whisper the evil tale?

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Ah, ravished heart, can man atone,
 Or prayers, or penance, or tears avail?
 The ghastly harvest is reaped as sown—
 Have you heard them whisper the evil tale?