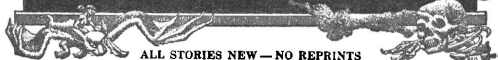


# Weird Tales



ALL STORIES NEW—NO REPRINTS

NOVEMBER, 1950

Cover by Frank Kelly Freas

## NOVELETTE

- THE DEAD MAN** . . . . . Fritz Leiber, Jr. 8  
*One could fairly see the tabloids playing up a story about  
"the doctor who ordered a man to die."*

## SHORT STORIES

- THE THIRD SHADOW** . . . . . H. Russell Wakefield 24  
*Roped together were two mountaineers on the treacherous  
cone—but three shadows on the snow.*

- THE BODY-SNATCHERS** . . . . . Seabury Quinn 33  
*"Jules de Grandin, I ask me, 'are it not odd that a man  
and a woman should have the same delusions,  
and at approximately the same time?'"*

- GROTESQUERIE** . . . . . Harold Lawlor 47  
*. . . the inmates of the house scuttled away in the purposely kept  
dimly lighted halls; the latest comer was never seen about at all.*

- SOMETHING OLD** . . . . . Mary Elizabeth Counselman 59  
*"Something Borrowed and Something Blue . . ." so the old  
Babylonian ring was on Celia's finger on her wedding  
day. A ring with a secret compartment.*

- THE INVISIBLE REWEAVER** . . . . . Margaret St. Clair 70  
*So many fatal accidents couldn't be just chance; one man  
certainly had a fantastic theory that covered them.*

- BLUE PETER** . . . . . Murray Sanford 76  
*"A year an' a day the curse will haunt ye, and  
your own words will bring you ruin!"*

- THEY WORKED THE ORACLE** . . . . . H. S. W. Chibbett 82  
*Black Markets weren't due to be thought of for thousands of  
years, and Hades hadn't sunk that low as yet.*

## VERSE

- THE HAUNTED** . . . . . Stanton A. Coblenz 46

- THE EYRIE** . . . . . 6

- WEIRDISMS** . . . . . Lee Brown Coye 69

- WEIRD CROSSWORD** . . . . . 75

Published bi-monthly by Weird Tales, 9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York, N. Y. Reentered as second-class matter January 26, 1946, at the Post Office at New York, N. Y., under the Act of March 3, 1879. Single copies, 25 cents. Subscription rates: One year in the United States and possessions, \$1.50. Foreign and Canadian postage extra. The publishers are not responsible for the loss of unsolicited manuscripts although every care will be taken of such material while in their possession.

Copyright, 1950, by Weird Tales. Copyright in Great Britain.  
Title registered in U. S. Patent Office.

PRINTED IN THE U. S. A.

D. McILWRAITH, Editor

178  
Vol. 43, No. 1

# Blue Peter

BY MURRAY SANFORD



Heading by Vincent Napoli

**D**IDN'T the whole business begin, then, on New Year's Eve in this same bar of Tim Rafferty's, many years ago before the war, and the boys packed in for a drop of something to keep

out the cold? All the more because Peter Corrigan was home after three years in

*Set one curse to catch another!*

Chicago, with a pocket full of dollars and the fingers of him itching to spend them.

The great bucko was Peter that night, airing the Yankee way of talk he'd picked up in his spell as a Chicago policeman, and the rest (except meself, that's been off and on in the States) not understanding the half of it. But sure, they could understand a round of drinks, and Peter was free enough with his invitations.

Devil knows who started the witch-talk. Before you could speak the whole room was disputing. Some declared there was no such thing. Others that witches were unchancy creatures and not to be crossed or denied. Wasn't there Biddy Magee, living but two miles over the hill, could put the evil eye on you for a wrong word?

Peter called them for a pack of ignorant hayseeds. You can't be a copper in Chicago and swallow such rubbish, said he. Witches? Baloney! Nix on the witches!

"Ould Nick's ye mean," chuckled Paddy Regan, who's the one for his joke. Then he winked to the rest of us. "I never saw ye nearer to Biddy's house than throwin' stones at it, for the matter of that," he said with a grin. "An' I'll bet ye a bottle of Tim Rafferty's best whiskey ye won't visit the same Biddy this night, to hear your fortune read."

Glory be! Wasn't the fat in the fire, then. We had the drink in, Peter and all, and he rared up at once. What, him, who'd walked among blazing tommy-guns, and shot down gangsters, afraid of poor ould Biddy Magee? Sure, and he'd take Paddy Regan's bet, and be glad to share the bottle of whiskey with his friends. Of course, and he'd go to Biddy's right away!

And with that, he stalked out from the bar, and into the snow that was still falling.

Biddy lived, as I told you, nearly two miles away, as ugly an old harridan as ever ye saw. Peter, with the whiskey warming him, marched along brave enough for a while, the snow in his face, but soon he was beginning to curse the quick temper that was in him and brought him from the warm bar on such a stupid errand. An uneasy road, across the hill and down along the bog to Biddy Magee's, and never a soul on

the way. He was glad enough to see the light of the bothen and at last he knocked on the door.

"Come ye in, Peter Corrigan," cried Biddy. For all his big talk, Peter felt the creeps come in his spine, for how in the world did she know it was him, and it so dark. She must have the two sights, and that was an unchancy thing.

HE WENT in and shut the door against the snow. Biddy was sitting beside a fire of peats, stirring a pot in the candle-light and grinning at him with half the teeth of her missing. At her feet was a great brute of a cat, staring with green eyes that put a shiver through Peter.

"Heh! heh! The fine upstanding young fellow it is, come to keep old Biddy company," she cackled. "Now what would brave Peter Corrigan want with an ould witch, to walk across the hill in the middle of the snow? Heh! Heh!"

Peter didn't like the tone of her, nor her teasing.

"Cut out the kiddin'," he growled. "I'm come for me fortune, and if it's to be wise-cracking ye are, then I'll hit the trail."

You never saw the sudden rage that Biddy flew into, when he spoke in his Yankee slang. Glaring, she was, with eyes as green as the cat's, and spluttering with anger.

"Divil fly away wid ye!" she screamed. "Speak the mother's tongue ye learned, or get out of me house wid your outlandish talk."

For a second Peter's temper matched her own, and he glared back. Then he remembered his bet with Paddy Regan, and the fool he would look if he went back and said he'd come all this way and Biddy hadn't read his fortune.

"Sure, then, it was a slip," he buttered the old one, "and it's sorry I am if I offended ye. Come ye, Mistress Biddy, will ye not kindly tell me fortune?"

She gave him the suspicious look, but quietened.

"Ye'll cross me hand wid silver, mind," said she. "All right, then. Sit down on this stool and let me be studying your palm."

SHE was so long at it, muttering and shaking her head, that Peter got impatient, wriggling on the stool and tapping the floor with his foot. Then she gave him the queer, sideways quirk with her eyes.

"Saints have mercy!" she said. "Never have I seen the like. Fortune, an' sudden death all mixed up in it. Fortune, by the wagging tongue that's in ye, and death at the end of it, through the same clattering tongue—Wirra! Now cross me hand with silver, an' go quickly, for 'tis Biddy Magee doesn't like what she's read this night." And she shivered, and drew close her shawl.

Peter listened to her with his mouth open, then snapped it shut. Of all the pack of nonsense, thought he. Well, he would get his own back on the old witch that she was. So he fished in his pocket and took out half a crown.

"Will half a dollar be enough to cross your dirty hand?" he said. Biddy held out her fist to take it, but Peter grabbed the fist, opened it, drew the half-crown over her palm one way and then the other, and put the money back in his pocket.

"That's crossin' it with silver for you!" he chuckled, and was at the door before she could get her breath.

Biddy fair screeched with rage.

"Ye black-hearted, swindlin' shame on the mother that bore ye! A curse on your lyin' tongue! A curse——" All suddenly she was quiet again. "A curse," she muttered. "'Tis that was in his hand." Then she screeched louder than ever. "Cheat an ould woman, would ye? Twist the decent speech of your fathers into outlandish blatherings? A curse is on every word ye misuse an' turn into horrid foreign gibberish. A year an' a day the curse will haunt ye, an' your own words will bring ye ruin."

There was a roar of laughter from Peter, standing in the doorway fit to hurt his sides.

"Ho! ho! Are ye trying to put a jinx on Peter Corrigan?" he told her. "I'll give ye another curse—when ye're able to make that one stick, then the whole mountainside will fall on this two-bit shack." And with that, while Biddy screeched to split your ears, he slammed the door and away into the night.

I'll not weary you with his adventures

before he got back to Tim Rafferty's. The snow was so thick, he missed his way and fell into a drift. Half an hour he wallowed, and when he won clear, he found he'd lost his wallet. Worse still, he'd also lost his directions. Back and forward he tramped, cursing Paddy Regan, cursing Biddy Magee, and cursing himself for a fool. The dawn was coming when he at last found himself near to the village, and Tim Rafferty was lighting the morning fire when he came in.

"Where have ye been, all night?" cried Tim. "Lost your way? Here, I'll get ye a drop of spirits. Ye're blue with cold, man."

He brought a stiff glass of whiskey.

"Blue, is it?" Peter cried when he had swallowed it. "You're darn tootin'! Crazy bets, an' losing me wallet with half me cash in it, an' traipsin' the hills all night! I'm blue as a buzz-fly, if I'm nothing else!"

With that he went upstairs, threw off his clothes, and slept like a dead one.

IT WAS the middle of the day when he I woke with the shivers. He put on a clean shirt and dry trousers and jacket, and came down for a drink to warm him. There were some of the boys in the bar, who wished him a Happy New Year and were hardly finished speaking when they all gave him the queer stare.

"Sure, it's meself all right," laughed Peter. "Ye can stand me a drink and I'll tell you of me adventures last night, and how I crossed Biddy Magee's palm with silver." But they kept staring with never a word, so he looked in the mirror behind the bar.

"Holy Mike!" cried Peter. The face of him, and his neck, and his hands, and his arms clear to the elbow where the shirt came, were blue. Not with the cold. No, blue and shining like the steel of a pistol barrel.

He rubbed his face with his sleeve. No difference at all. He rubbed harder, but he might as well have been trying to clean the color from that same pistol.

"Here, try this," said Tim, giving him a rag with spirits on it. But there was nothing would take off the blue that was in his skin.

"Bedad!" chuckled Tim. "Ye said ye were blue as a buzz-fly, whatever that would be, but——"

"Thunder an' corpses!" howled Peter. "'Tis that ould hag Biddy Magee has done this to me." For he had just remembered the curse that she had talked of, and saw in a flash what Biddy was meaning. Out he came with the whole story, vowing that if the old witch didn't call off her curse he would choke out the life of her. And a buzz-fly was the same as a bluebottle, he told us.

By the powers, and he didn't waste any time. Upstairs for his topcoat and boots. Down again and out the door in a towering rage, and off to Biddy Magee's with the rest of us trailing after. Through the snow to the top of the hill we skeddaddled behind him. When he reached the top he stopped all suddenly and stood staring. One by one we caught up, and didn't every mother's son of us stand and stare, too. Glory be! What was become of Biddy's house, down there and along past the bog?

Don't be asking me if it was a curse, or if the snow was too heavy on the hill side, but half the mountain had slid down over the bothen and not a trace of it to be seen for black earth.

"Save us!" gasped Paddy Regan. "It's gone, Biddy an' all!"

"Howly heaven!" whispered Peter. "'Tis —'tis the curse I put on her last night meself," and he gaped at the sight it was. "Well I'll be dumb as a mule!" cried he in amazement, and that was as far as he got with whatever he would have been saying next.

His lips were moving, but never a word came. He tried with all his might to speak, breathing hard and his eyes all screwed up. Then he gave a terrible howl and charged down the hill again, back to Tim Rafferty's with the rest of us at his tail and the fear of Biddy Magee giving us wings.

The discussing and advising we had, in Tim's bar while the drinks went down our throats to drive out the queensness that was in us! The end of it was that we all took Peter to the doctor, who was not well pleased to be bothered with patients on

New Year's Day, but near fell over himself when he saw the color that was in Peter. He had never seen the like, said he. We told him of Biddy's curse and the words Peter had spoke about buzz-flies, but he wouldn't be listening to such nonsense, he said. It must be something Peter had eaten or that he had drunk. And as for Peter losing his tongue, it was not uncommon for the vocal chords to be paralyzed with a shock—and more scientific discoursing like that.

But when Peter was the same next day, and nothing wrong with him excepting that he was blue and couldn't speak, the doctor was sending him to Dublin for the professors to examine him. Peter shook his head at the first and created in a temper, but the doctor said he would be paying the fare out of his own pocket, and unless Peter went, then he might never be getting rid of the blue in his skin or having back his speech.

SO TO Dublin went Peter, and one of us with him to look after him, since he couldn't speak a word. Begob! You never saw such an arguing and discussing, with the professors falling all over each other with excitement. One long drink of water said it must be tattooing. And where are the punctures, then, cried another. It's some kind of infection, says a third. And it's nothing of the kind, cries another, but congenital this-and-that.

Peter's friend told them of the curse, but devil the attention he got, and devil a bit of good did the whole pack of them do for Peter. They took specimens of his blood, and set Peter to howling with rage when one of them sliced off a bit of his skin when he wasn't looking. At last Peter stamped out in a rage, his friend after him, and they went back to their hotel.

Now the friend that was with him was a bright boyo, with brains in his upper story. He'd been puzzling all the time, to try and see couldn't an honest bit of cash be made out of Peter's misfortune. And a scheme had come to him, so he told it to Peter. If they could only lay hands on enough money to get the two of them to New York, and then——

Wisha! It happened just like his friend

said. To New York they went, and never a side-show like it, in any circus up and down the length of the States. "The Blue Man from Burma," they called it. Peter in a great cage with thick bars that would hold a tiger, and him bare except for a cloth round his middle. Every now and then he would leap at the bars, grab hold on them and shake them like a crazy one, howling all the while like a wild bull. Small wonder the folk came crowding to pay their ten cents.

Gape! They came in thousands. Then a newspaper boy smelled a story, and wrote all about the Blue Man from Burma in his paper. There were letters came flocking in, declaring it must be a fake. University professors, and doctors of all kinds, must be investigating. Which the friend let them do, him in the cage also, to keep the wild man peaceful while they were about their rubbings and scrubbing, and testings and demanding bits of Peter's skin. And not a one of them could be saying where the blue came from.

Sure, wasn't it the grand publicity for nothing, and every town they came to was burning with excitement to pay ten cents and stare at Peter. The price was raised to fifteen cents, and then to a quarter, but still there was always a pack round the cage, with the cash rolling in. Easy money!

In two months there was more than enough dough to buy a truck. It was no joke for Peter, you'll understand, sleeping on straw in a cage bumping on the railroad. But hid away in the truck he could have a bed, and what he fancied for his dinner, and maybe a drop of beer, without anyone to be seeing. They made the truck with sides that could be lifted off, so that they didn't have to move the cage but just stop the truck where they were to be showing the Blue Man from Burma.

And they hired a driver, a boy from Con-nemara. Of course, he had to be let into the secret that Peter was no wild man, but just an unfortunate that was bewitched and trying to earn a few dollars from his misfortune.

"Well, I'll be drowned in a tub!" exclaims O'Reilly when he heard it. "Sure,

'tis all one to me, and good pay. I won't split, ye can depend on me for that."

HE NEVER finished staring at Peter, all the same, and smacking his leg with a "Well, I'll be drowned in a tub!" and no great variety to him. So that after a week of hearing him, Peter wrote on the slate that his friend had bought that O'Reilly must be sacked, or make him stop his infernal "I'll be drowned."

For Peter had become nervous as a cat of any slang. So his friend told O'Reilly to cut it out, which he did, excepting when he forgot—and then it was Peter got into a fury!

All over the States they travelled, from Maine to New Mexico and Minnesota to Miami. Big towns, hick towns, villages and country fairs. Peter and his friend were to split fifty-fifty, with a bonus to O'Reilly, and the dollars piled up every month. It was precious little Peter could be spending, of course, and in six months his share was five thousand dollars, in nine months it had rose to eleven.

When New Year's Eve was come again, they were in a fairground outside Denver City, and Peter had nearly sixteen thousand dollars to his name.

"Another year like this one," said his friend, when he had finished counting the takings at the end of the day, "and it's buying estates in Old Ireland we'll be, and live like lords."

In the morning he went into the truck before daylight, to take away Peter's bed and give him breakfast before O'Reilly helped him take down the sides. Peter yawned and threw off his pajamas, to put on the cloth that covered his middle. His friend had come back with a tray and a bit of a table to put it on, shining his torch to see where to put it. The torch fell on Peter, just getting on his dressing gown, for it was cold so early.

"Jumping snakes! Peter, what's happened to yourself?" cried his friend, shining the torch full on Peter's legs and chest.

Peter looked down. He gave a queer gurgle. All the blue was gone and he was white as you or me.

They stared at each other for a minute. Then Peter grabbed his slate. "A year and a day," he scribbled. It was a second or two before his friend saw what he was at.

"By the saints, we'll have to get out of here at once!" he cried, thinking quick. "They'll be tearing us to pieces if they see you all white and take it in their heads you're a fake."

He jumped from the cage, threw in the bed again, and told O'Reilly to pack up and get moving or they'd all be dead ones. Never mind the tent! Never mind anything except the suitcases, and he'd tell O'Reilly what it was all about when they were going.

**I**T WAS near noon when they stopped outside a small town that was on the railway.

"The truck's yours, O'Reilly, and here's five hundred dollars to be holding your tongue," said Peter's friend. With their suitcases the two of them made for the town and the railway, and took tickets for the East. In the train Peter's friend fell to groaning and bemoaning at the bad luck of it, and what a fortune they had lost because the curse was after lifting and turning Peter white again, and such-like waste of breath.

Peter sat in his corner, more and more irritated. Then he got up and made for the saloon, glad to be dressed like a decent human creature again. But he remembered he had no money, so back he had to go again. He poked his head in at the door of their private compartment.

"Here, hand over some of the cash. I'm wantin' a drink," he said. His jaw dropped.

He gaped with his mouth open. "Did—did ye hear me?" he cried. "Holy Mike! I can—me tongue is—Glory be! I can speak again!" And then, before he had time to be thinking in his excitement and amazement, "Well, I'll be drowned in a tub!" exclaimed Peter.

He clapped his hand to his mouth, with his eyes rolling.

"Ochone! Wirra the day!" he lamented. "Now I have as good as killed meself! Death at the end of it, said Biddy Magee, and here's Peter Corrigan as good as drowned!"

Down he plumped himself in his seat, head in his hands and groaning like a demented one. No matter what his friend said, that the curse was for a year and a day and was finished now, no comfort or sense came to Peter again. The sight of a tub was enough to set him running like a mad one the other way. Even a bath he would not go into, saying there was plenty that called it taking their tub, and maybe Biddy would have it that way, so he would never wash himself except in a shower.

His friend got tired listening to the complaints and the groaning all day and all night. They left each other.

Yes indeed, sir, you're right. Peter Corrigan is dead. He set off from New York to go to South America, in an old tub of a fruit ship—Ach, then! I've let the cat out of the bag.

Thank ye, I'll have just one last one. Sure, the old tub sank. Caught in a hurricane in the Caribbean, and down to Davy Jones with all hands.