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WEIRD TALES ISSUED 1st OF EACH MONTH



"When I dance amid the striking lightning, he dances with me too."

Bride of the Lightning

By EDMOND HAMILTON

Sheila danced on the hilltop while fierce bolts of lightning played about her—but what was that coiling thing of dazzling brilliance that reached for her with its arms of living light?

CRASH after crash of thunder split the night and rumbled away across the dark Wisconsin hills. Before each detonation, the

blinding fizz of the lightning illuminated the winding road in front of Dick Forman. His crisp blond face tautened and he pushed the coupé faster up the

grades, hoping to get to Adam Crail's house before the rain broke.

Dick rounded a turn in the road, and then suddenly applied his brakes with a startled gasp of horror. Beside the road rose the black, humped mass of a low, domed hill. Bolt after bolt of terrific lightning was striking its bare summit, succeeding one another in brilliant flashes that wreathed the summit in searing light. And up there in that wild lightning was a girl!

Dick Forman could glimpse her, running and leaping up there, amid the dazzling flashes. He exclaimed, "Good God, why doesn't she get away from that hilltop?"

He jerked back the hand brake and leaped out of his car. In a moment he was running up the slope, through brambles and briars, toward the lightning-wreathed summit.

Dick's eyes were nearly blinded by the flashes of lightning that came each few moments, all striking on the summit. He had never seen lightning strike so successively in the same spot, and his ears were deafened by the cataclysmic crashes of thunder.

He stumbled up onto the bare, rocky summit and peered incredulously across it. The lightning was striking now on one part of the summit, now another. And there amid the bolts was the girl he had seen. She was dancing!

The weirdness of it held Dick petrified even in the face of the blasting menace. The girl was young, a slim figure in a short white dress, her black hair streaming in the wind. Her face was wild and lovely, ablaze with a strange, mad intoxication.

To right and left of her, sometimes only a few yards away, smote the splashing blasts of lightning. And with each new bolt, she flung her white arms high, wild face upturned to the tempest,

dancing amid the bolts like some nymph of fire and storm.

Dick Forman recovered his presence of mind and ran desperately out over the summit toward her. There was a sulfurous smell in the air, and twice as he ran, the whole hilltop shook to the impact of new crashing bolts. Then he reached the girl and grasped her.

"Are you crazy to stay up here in this storm?" he yelled. "You've got to get out of here before you're hit!"

He was trying to drag her away. But the girl resisted furiously, struggling in his arms.

"Let me go!" she cried. "He is coming—He will be here soon——"

"What are you talking about?" cried Forman.

"The Lord of Lightning is coming!" the girl exclaimed. As another terrific bolt struck near them, she turned her dynamic face skyward with wild exultation. "Those are His messengers. He is coming, and will kill you like the others if He finds you here!"

DICK FORMAN wasted no more time in argument. It seemed evident to him that the girl was crazy and that they would both be killed if they stayed much longer in this lightning-haunted spot.

He snatched her up in his arms and started back down from the summit in a stumbling run. The girl struggled like a wildcat in his arms, her soft limbs writhing fiercely, her hands clawing at his face. Two more terrific bolts hit somewhere behind them, filling the world with light and thunder.

Then Dick was stumbling down through the briars to the road where his coupé waited. He shoved the girl unceremoniously into the car. Up there on the summit, the lightning had now become even fiercer—it was as though

the whole hilltop was alive with dancing white flame.

The girl was straining wildly against the window of the car, peering up with her body quivering and her nostrils dilated with emotion. Her wide, dark violet eyes reflected each flare of the terrific lightning.

"See, He has come!" she cried, pointing up to the summit. "The Lord of Lightning has come again, and I am not there to meet Him!"

"You're crazy as Christmas!" exclaimed Dick Forman, holding her arm while he started the car. "You're——"

Then as he glanced up toward the lightning-wreathed hilltop, the words died on his lips and his jaw dropped. There *was* something up there amid the volleying lightning: a strange, coiling shape of dazzling light that seemed to float amid the terrific bolts; a shining thing that moved this way and that over the hilltop as though searching. Dick had heard of odd freaks of ball lightning, but had never seen one like this.

"The Lord of Lightning!" the girl was shrilling. "I must go to Him—let me go——"

For answer, Dick let in the gears and sent the coupé racing forward with motor roaring. His mind was in a mad turmoil from the strangeness of all this.

A chance bolt struck a tree beside the road, and he heard it crash down behind them as the coupé sped past.

"You see, He will kill you if He learns that you are taking me away!" cried the girl.

But now the lightning back there on the domed hilltop was diminishing. The storm was moving off across the black hills, and as Dick drove on at full speed, the mad uproar dwindled into a sullen, distant grumbling and far-off flares.

He slowed down the coupé, then. His brow was damp and he felt as

though for a moment he had been moving in a nightmare. He turned and looked at the girl. She had become silent now that the storm was moving off, but her dark violet eyes were still wide and brilliant.

"Why in the world were you risking your life up there in that lightning?" Dick Forman asked her. "And what's your name and where do you live?"

"I'm Sheila Crail," she said slowly. "I live with my uncle, Adam Crail, in the next farmhouse down this road."

"Adam Crail?" he repeated. "Why, that's the man I'm here to see—I'm Dick Forman, of a Milwaukee bank, and I'm up here to see your uncle on business. But you haven't told me why you were dancing about in that crazy lightning," he added. "Why, you might have been killed."

"The lightning would not hurt me," Sheila said soberly. "Many times during storms I have been on that hilltop. I love the lightning and it is always wilder on that hill than anywhere else. I go there because I love to see it strike about me, and to hear the thunder of its voice."

"But what was that stuff you were crying out about the Lord of Lightning, and how he would kill me?" Dick Forman pressed.

Sheila hesitated. "I do not think you would believe if I told you. But there is something that comes when the lightning is fiercest—something that is a living thing of force, of lightning. You glimpsed it yourself, that dazzling shape amid the bolts. I call it the Lord of Lightning. When I dance amid the striking lightning, He dances with me too. And I think that He is very jealous of me, for in the past those who have tried to make love to me have died—by lightning."

She laid a soft hand with sudden ap-

peal on his wrist. "Dick, sometimes I am a little afraid—of Him. But I am always drawn by the lightning. Since I was a little child, and clapped my hands at storms, it has fascinated me, attracted me——"

Dick felt quick sympathy. "Why, you poor kid, you've lived out here so long by yourself that you've worked up all kinds of queer fancies about storms and lightning. That shining thing I saw—it was just a freak of ball lightning, that's all. Your imagination is simply over-active."

Sheila shook her dark head. "It is not so. The Lord of Lightning is real, and terrible——" She broke off suddenly. "But here is our house."

It was a rambling old stone farmhouse sitting well back from the road amid tall pines and spruces. Yellow lamplight glowed from its lower windows. As Dick stopped the car and helped the girl out, two men came out to meet them on the porch.

One was an elderly, spare man with a clean-shaven face that sagged with worry, and fear-haunted eyes. From behind him peered a bulky, straw-haired farmer with a blocky, suspicious face.

The older man, as he saw the girl, cried, "Sheila, when I heard the storm I went to your room and couldn't find you. You've been to the hill again!"

Her dark head hung and she whispered, "Yes, I could not help it——"

She suddenly ran past them into the house.

Dick noticed that the big farmer shrank back from her in instinctive, fearful recoil as she passed.

Forman advanced to the older man, who was looking after the girl with a face gone white and eyes full of misery.

"I suppose you're Adam Crail?" he said. "I'm Forman from the Milwaukee bank—you wrote us, asking

someone to bring up those real-estate papers to go over with you."

Adam Crail nodded uncertainly, his mind obviously far away. "It's a great favor of you to bring them, Mr. Forman. I don't go to the city often now—I'm afraid to leave Sheila——"

Then he added, "You'll stay here while we go over the papers, of course. Do you mind telling me just where you picked up Sheila?"

The bulky Teutonic farmer stuck his head forward and asked Dick hoarsely, "Was she on Lightning Hill when you met her?"

"Lightning Hill?" repeated Dick puzzled.

Crail told Dick, "This is John Burger, the hand who runs the farm for me. By Lightning Hill he means that dome-shaped hill a half-mile down the road. It's always been called that because during storms the lightning seems to strike there more often than anywhere else."

"It certainly was striking there tonight—I never saw anything like it," Dick declared. "I saw your niece up there, dancing amid the lightning strokes, and I ran up and got her away before she was hit by a bolt."

"*She* hit?" said Burger incredulously. He spat. "Not she—she is a lightning witch. She loves the lightning and it loves her."

CRAIL uttered a groan. "Now don't start that again, Burger. Mr. Forman has no desire to hear such stories."

"It's true!" declared the German farmer vehemently. "There are things I have read about—elementals—creatures of fire and wind and water and lightning, that are living even though they do not have bodies of matter. It is such a thing, the elemental of lightning, that meets the girl. Since she was

a little girl, she has loved the lightning. Time after time she would sneak away to Lightning Hill when there was storm, and laugh and clap her hands as the bolts struck around her. And now that she has grown, the lightning elemental he comes there to meet her in storm. Twice in the last year have I seen them, the girl and the shining lightning creature, dancing together up there!"

Burger's heavy face was working as he pointed toward the low, domed hill, humped black against the cloudy night sky.

"Twice have my own eyes seen them there!" he repeated. "And each time I fled lest the lightning creature strike me down from jealousy as he did the others."

"As he did the others?" repeated Dick Forman keenly. "What do you mean by that? Sheila said something——"

"It's just an unfortunate set of coincidences," began Crail, but Burger interrupted excitedly.

"Coincidences? Listen, and judge for yourself. A boy named Wilson, from a near-by farm, fell in love with Sheila and came here many nights to see her.

"Then once when he walked home during a little storm, he was struck dead by lightning. They found his body in the road the next morning.

"A few months later another young neighbor of ours, Jan Reeves, also fell in love with her. He also started to come here nights, though Sheila did not want him to. And one night, as they stood together on the porch, a bolt of awful lightning hit from the sky and killed him—without hurting her in the slightest. Yes, the lightning elemental that loves her is jealous, and kills any other who would be her lover."

Dick felt a slight chill. He looked toward Crail, who said hastily:

"It's true that both of those young men were killed by lightning. But we have a great many electrical storms in these hills—their deaths were just accident."

"Accident? No!" exclaimed the German, breathing heavily. He pointed a thick finger at Dick. "If you are wise, you will keep away from Lightning Hill after this. And from that girl."

He stalked off without another word. Dick looked after him, then turned at Crail's anxious voice.

The elderly man was saying worriedly, "I wouldn't pay too much attention to Burger. Like a lot of the other natives around here, he has strong superstitions——"

He shook his gray head wearily, and then said, "You can stay here a few days, can't you, Mr. Forman? That will give me a chance to straighten out all my business without having to leave here."

Dick stayed. He told himself at first that it was only to take care of Crail's business, but very soon he had to admit to himself that that was not true. It was Sheila who was keeping him here day after day. He had fallen in love with her, and he knew it.

There was an untamed quality in her that drew him, a lithe, swift shyness of the wild. He tried to be near her as often as possible, but the girl avoided him, murmuring only a word in answer to his earnest attempts at conversation, slipping away after meals.

He told himself that he was a fool. And then he told himself that he was no fool at all. For Dick knew more strongly with each passing day how much he had come to love this girl, and he was resolved to tell her. Yet Sheila

gave him no opportunity, evading him as elusively as a shadow, seeming afraid of proximity to him.

It hurt Dick, at first. And then he began to understand. For he saw that John Burger was uneasy whenever he saw the young man and girl together. The stolid German had something of dread in his face whenever he came upon them together. And there was nervousness in Adam Crail's thin face too, at such times.

Dick understood, then. The two young men who had previously paid court to Sheila had died—by lightning. And they were afraid that he would die the same way. Burger was superstitiously convinced, and Crail was at least badly worried, though he tried to conceal the fact.

And Sheila too, he thought, must be avoiding him for the same reason. With her fanciful belief in the thing she called the Lord of Lightning, she must be utterly convinced that proximity to her would mean his death.

"The poor kid!" muttered Dick to himself. "No wonder she believes such stuff, living out here in this God-forsaken, superstitious place."

THAT night, he grasped Sheila's wrist when she started to slip off the porch as he went out. She turned, startled.

"Sheila, have you been avoiding me because you're afraid that I would get hit by lightning?" he demanded.

Her violet eyes went wide with terror, her face paled.

"Yes," she whispered. And then her words came with a rush. "Oh, Dick, it's true! If you stay near me, sooner or later you will be killed by the jealousy of the Lord of Lightning, just as those others were killed. I did not love them—yet they died."

"Sheila, listen," he said earnestly,

prisoning her hands. "I love you. I want to marry you. Will you—do you care enough for me to do it? I'll take you out of these dark hills," he continued eagerly. "To towns, and lights, and people, where you can forget all this fantastic nonsense."

"No, no!" she gasped, straining away from him, her face white and deathly. "It would mean death for you, Dick. I know you don't believe it, but it would—and I couldn't stand that."

"You do love me then?" he cried exultantly, his arms going around her. "You do care?"

Sheila's violet eyes were suddenly dark and dim with tears. "Yes, I do. Dick, until you came I had never loved anyone but the Lightning Lord, so bright and splendid and terrible in his power. I—I promised myself to him, that I would become his, would be his bride. But since you came, Dick, I have felt differently. I would give my soul to be with you always, if it were only possible."

"It is possible!" cried Dick jubilantly.

And he was suddenly kissing her tear-wet face, his arms tightening yearningly around her quivering slimness.

Sheila's lips clung a moment to his, wildly sweet. But then she drew back, and in the darkness her eyes were wide, dark pools of terror.

"No, Dick—no! I am promised—to Him. And He will surely kill you if you stay near me. You must go away."

"I am, and you're going with me," he told her firmly. "You won't be afraid once you're away from here, Sheila."

"It will do us no good to run away," she moaned. "He can follow us anywhere."

"Nonsense!" he told her. "Sheila, we're going in and tell your uncle now—about us."

Adam Crail was inside with the German when Dick went in with his arm around the quivering girl.

"We're going to be married," he said happily.

"My God!" exclaimed Crail, his face paling.

"I know it's pretty sudden," Dick hastened to add, "but we love each other and that's all there is to it."

"You marry death itself!" cried Burger, his square face working. "How long, think you, will it be after your marriage before a lightning bolt blasts you?"

"Shut up that talk," Dick snapped angrily. "It's superstitious maunderings like yours that have made Sheila believe in such nonsense. She's not going to hear any more of it."

He turned to Crail. "Have we your permission?"

Crail looked with strange dread on his face at his niece. "If—if Sheila is willing to marry you, I shall not try to stop you."

Sheila remained mute, clinging fearfully to Dick. Burger looked at her accusingly as he stalked out of the room.

That night a storm came across the hills, as Dick was preparing to retire in his bedroom. He heard the rumbling crash of distant thunder, growing louder and louder. Going to the window, he watched the distant flare of the lightning above the dark hills.

The storm grew in volume, and seemed to converge toward the black, domed summit of Lightning Hill. As Dick watched, he saw one bolt after another clang down and strike the hilltop.

He wondered why that spot was so favored by the lightning. Then sudden anxiety for Sheila's state of mind made him go along the dark hall to her door.

His knock could not be heard in the crashing thunder, so he opened the door. Sheila was standing by her window, peering tensely at the distant hill. He saw that her slim figure was as tautly strung as a bow, and was quivering wildly. With quick strides he reached her side and put his arm protectively around her.

She turned almost wildly. Now a continuous drumfire of blinding lightning was striking out there on the domed hill.

"Dick, He is out there—expecting me!" she cried, pointing at the fire-branded hilltop.

"You just imagine it, Sheila," he said soothingly. "Forget all about it and go to bed."

"No, He is there—and is angry because I am not there!" she exclaimed.

Dick saw that in fact the electrical storm had become hellish over Lightning Hill. The continuous crash of thunder was nerve-shattering. Then he noticed that the storm was beginning to move from the hill in the direction of the house.

"He is coming!" cried Sheila wildly. "The Lord of Lightning is angry that I am not there, and comes to search for me."

"Nonsense!" Dick repeated, but his throat felt dry and his nerves were tingling with strange fear.

He could see terrific bolts hitting now out in the farm yard. A wagon was smashed to charred flinders, a shed roof was ripped off, two tall pines were smashed to earth as though by a giant hand.

The impacts of thunder seemed the raging voice of an invisible giant stalking about the huddling house. In the brief intervals of comparative silence, Dick could hear the wild screaming of wind and rain and faint cries of terror

from Burger. The hair was bristling strangely on the young man's neck.

"He searches!" moaned Sheila. "Dick, let me go out to Him before He destroys you all."

"No!" Dick rasped. "It's all imagination——"

Suddenly, with almost inconceivable swiftness, Sheila flung herself between Dick and the window.

At the same instant, it seemed, the world was lit by a terrific bolt of lightning that seemed to have lanced straight down at the window and then to have curved *away* from it. The house shook crazily to the explosion of thunder that followed on its heels.

"Stay back from the window!" Sheila cried, dragging him frantically back. "He would have killed you that time, had I not thrown myself in front of you."

"It—it was just a freak bolt," Dick said hoarsely.

The storm was raging onward, leaving the house and ravaging madly across the hills, leveling giant trees and smashing down poles and fences and sheds with superhuman fury.

Sheila sobbed against Dick's breast.

"He has marked you for death, Dick. Another time, were you away from me only a few steps, I could not save you."

He tried to soothe her as the thunderous storm raged away in the distance.

"Don't cry, Sheila. There is no danger to me."

Sheila did not seem to hear. Her white, agonized face was strange, and her voice, when she spoke, a whisper.

"There is only one way in which I could save you now, Dick. By going to Him as I promised to do, becoming His for always. Then He would no longer be jealous of you."

"Sheila, for God's sake, forget all this fantastic belief of yours," Dick groaned, his own nerves on edge. "Tomorrow I'm going to get you out of this storm-cursed place, if it's the last thing I do."

Over the distant rumbling of the angry thunder there were hurrying footsteps in the dark hall. Adam Crail came into the room, his thin countenance bloodless, his hands shaking. Over his shoulder peered the scared face of John Burger.

"Forman, are you all right?" gasped Crail. "I thought that one bolt had hit the house and——" He broke off, peered fearfully out the window at the raging night. He muttered, "That storm's circling back——"

"*Ja*, the Lightning Lord walks the hills in anger tonight!" cried Burger excitedly. "He will come back to destroy you, Forman—to destroy all of us but Sheila. I am going to get out of this house!"

"You won't need to get out of here," Dick said with savage contempt. "*We're* getting out—right now. I won't have Sheila staying in this atmosphere another minute."

He saw the half-suppressed look of relief on Crail's haggard face. Miles away, the ferocious storm was circling around, coming back across the hills, its thunderous raging growing louder again.

"You'll never get out of these hills alive with that girl!" cried Burger to Dick. The German's face was gray, his eyes bulging. "Listen to that storm! He is coming back—searching, and will kill you when he finds you with Sheila out there."

"Dick, it's *true!*" sobbed the girl, clinging wildly to him. "You're doomed if you go outside with me now! You're doomed anyway if you stay near me."

He comes—to claim my promise——”

“No more of this, Sheila,” clipped Dick decisively. “You pack a bag and I’ll get my own stuff together. If it’s that storm that frightens you so much, we’ll get out of here before it comes back over. Get moving!”

Sheila stood a moment, violet eyes great and dark in her white, terror-haunted face. Crail and the German had shrunk hastily, fearfully, back to their own rooms.

A tremulous smile appeared on Sheila’s face. She suddenly flung warm arms around Dick’s neck, her quivering face pressed against his cheek, her soft lips against his, blindly. Then:

“I—I will make ready, Dick,” she said, and he hastened to the door.

“Be as quick as you can, Sheila.”

IN HIS own room, Dick hastily gathered his belongings and threw them into his kit-bag. Now the wind was rising again to screaming pitch, rushing wildly through the groaning trees around the house like the madly racing outriders of a coming army. The hubbub of thunder was rising in volume.

He grabbed up the bag and ran down the hall to Sheila’s room. The girl was not there. Cold fear clutched instantly at Dick’s heart and he shouted frantically: “Sheila!”

There was no answer. He ran to the window. By the thin flare of distant lightning, he glimpsed a white figure flitting along the road toward the dark dome of Lightning Hill.

“Sheila!” he yelled wildly. He plunged down the stairs and out of the house.

He *knew* what Sheila intended. Believing that his life was doomed if she remained near him, she had gone blindly to be claimed by the lightning—to save him!

He was running along the road after that flitting, fleeing shape. Great winds were blowing through the trees, their shriek and the hiss of rain drowned by the crashing uproar of thunder. The storm was nearer.

Sheila was racing up the hill. As he started desperately up the slope after her, he saw the girl gain the summit. She stood poised, her sweet, slim body a white silhouette in the storm-torn darkness.

He saw her fling her arms high, in wild appeal. And on the instant, a mile away, the storm crashed forth a terrific yelling peal of thunder. The storm swept toward the hill with incredible speed, the screaming wind and hissing rain its forerunners. Down upon the hilltop swept the mad, fire-shot tempest, just as Dick struggled up to the edge of the flat summit.

Dick stopped, frozen by an awful vision. Sheila, standing there with arms upraised, and a hell of dancing white bolts of lightning striking all around her—lightning that curled around her slim, wild body, that split the rocks beside her feet, that darted and played and danced around her in a blinding halo of awful flashes.

Down through those dazzling death-bolts danced a coiling thing of intolerable light, a rocketing thing of super-human splendor. With wild joyousness of shouting thunder and yelling wind, it sped down toward the girl.

Dick yelled hoarsely, plunged forward. But at that moment, from the coiling thing of light, smote unbearable bolts of white lightning that bathed Sheila in blinding radiance, that wrapped her in a robe of dazzling force. The hill rocked to the mad impact of world-shaking thunder, and Dick was thrown violently from his feet.

And when he staggered wildly to his knees, Sheila was gone. The storm was lifting from the hilltop, bellowing in superhuman jubilation. But now up there among the dancing flashes of lightning there moved *two* coiling things of light, moving off amid the wild music of the storm.

Dick tried to shout, and could not. He felt the earth cold against his face. And then he felt only darkness. . . .

PEOPLE often wonder why Dick For-
man is not afraid of lightning. It seems queer, for everyone has heard how the girl he meant to marry was killed by lightning, destroyed so ut-

terly that even her body was consumed and never found. They cannot understand why, after that, Dick should seem to like lightning. And he does, for let a storm come up and he must be out in it, no matter how terrible the lightning.

And there are those who have told of seeing him stand with upraised arms while lightning strikes and dances around him. It never seems to harm him, yet it seems strange to everyone that he should so love the lightning, that he should seek it, should even *talk* to it.

It would seem stranger still, if they knew what he was saying.