

SHOCK

Magazine

VOL. I, NO. I

MAY, 1960

FEAST DAY <i>by Matthew Lyng</i>	4
BIANCA'S HANDS <i>by Theodore Sturgeon</i>	14
THE BAND PLAYED ON <i>by Gene Dilmore</i>	23
GRAVEYARD RATS <i>by Henry Kuttner</i>	28
THE CROWD <i>by Ray Bradbury</i>	35
PARLOR GAME <i>by Reginald Rose</i>	44
THE MONKEY'S PAW <i>by W. W. Jacobs</i>	51
FOREVER AFTER <i>by Jim Thompson</i>	61
THE EMPTY MAN <i>by Anthony Boucher</i>	68
CRICKETS <i>by Richard Matheson</i>	83
SPECIALTY OF THE HOUSE <i>by Stanley Ellin</i>	89
GREEN THOUGHTS <i>by John Collier</i>	106
THE TENANT <i>by Avram Davidson</i>	122

SHOCK MAGAZINE, Vol. 1, No. 1, published bi-monthly by WINSTON PUBLICATIONS, INC., 157 West 57th St., N. Y. 19, N. Y. Subscriptions, 1 year (6 issues) \$2.00. Single copy 35c. Application for second class entry pending at the post office at Holyoke, Mass., and New York, N. Y. Characters in this magazine are entirely fictitious. Copyright 1960 by Winston Publications, Inc. Printed in U. S. A. The Empty Man, copyright by Mr. Boucher, 1952; Specialty of the House, copyright by Mr. Ellin, 1948; Bianca's Hands, copyright 1947, 1951, 1953; Reprinted by permission of Harold Matson Co.; Graveyard Rats, copyright 1936 by Weird Tales, Inc.; Green Thoughts, copyright 1941 by Mr. Collier; The Crowd, copyright 1913 by Weird Tales, Inc.



MEMO FROM LULUBEL:

Now, here's the kind of story I really like. It proves that everything turns out for the worst in this worst of all possible worlds.

CRICKETS

by RICHARD MATHESON

AFTER SUPPER, THEY WALKED DOWN to the lake and looked at its moon-reflecting surface.

"Pretty, isn't it?" she said.

"Mmm-hmm."

"It's been a nice vacation."

"Yes, it has," he said.

Behind them, the screen door on the hotel porch opened and shut. Someone started down the gravel path toward the lake. Jean glanced over her shoulder.

"Who is it?" asked Hal without turning.

"That man we saw in the dining room," she said.

In a few moments, the man stood nearby on the shoreline. He didn't speak or look at them. He stared across the lake at the distant woods.

"Should we talk to him?" whispered Jean.

"I don't know," he whispered back.

They looked at the lake again and Hal's arm slipped around her waist.

Suddenly the man asked.

"Do you hear them?"

"Sir?" said Hal.

The small man turned and

looked at them. His eyes appeared to glitter in the moonlight.

"I asked if you heard them," he said.

There was a brief pause before Hal asked, "Who?"

"The crickets."

The two of them stood quietly. Then Jean cleared her throat. "Yes, they're nice," she said.

"Nice?" The man turned away. After a moment, he turned back and came walking over to them.

"My name is John Morgan," he said.

"Hal and Jean Galloway," Hal told him and then there was an awkward silence.

"It's a lovely night," Jean offered.

"It would be if it weren't for them," said Mr. Morgan. "The crickets."

"Why don't you like them?" asked Jean.

Mr. Morgan seemed to listen for a moment, his face rigid. His gaunt throat moved. Then he forced a smile.

"Allow me the pleasure of buying you a glass of wine," he said.

"Well—" Hal began.

"Please." There was a sudden urgency in Mr. Morgan's voice.

* * * * *

The dining hall was like a vast shadowy cavern. The only light came from the small lamp on their table which cast up form-

less shadows of them on the walls.

"Your health," said Mr. Morgan, raising his glass.

The wine was dry and tart. It trickled in chilly drops down Jean's throat, making her shiver.

"So what about the crickets?" asked Hal.

Mr. Morgan put his glass down.

"I don't know whether I should tell you," he said. He looked at them carefully. Jean felt restive under his surveillance and reached out to take a sip from her glass.

Suddenly, with a movement so brusque that it made her hand twitch and spill some wine, Mr. Morgan drew a small, black notebook from his coat pocket. He put it on the table carefully.

"There," he said.

"What is it?" asked Hal.

"A code book," said Mr. Morgan.

They watched him pour more wine into his glass, then set down the bottle and the bottle's shadow on the table cloth. He picked up the glass and rolled its stem between his fingers.

"It's the code of the crickets," he said.

Jean shuddered. She didn't know why. There was nothing terrible about the words. It was the way Mr. Morgan had spoken them.

Mr. Morgan leaned forward, his eyes glowing in the lamplight.

"Listen," he said. "They aren't

just making indiscriminate noises when they rub their wings together." He paused. "*They're sending messages,*" he said.

Jean felt as if she were a block of wood. The room seemed to shift balance around her, everything leaning toward her.

"Why are you telling us?" asked Hal.

"Because now I'm sure," said Mr. Morgan. He leaned in close. "Have you ever really listened to the crickets?" he asked, "I mean really? If you had you'd have heard a rhythm to their noises. A pace—a definite beat.

"I've listened," he said. "For seven years I've listened. And the more I listened the more I became convinced that their noise was a code; that they were sending messages in the night.

"Then—about a week ago—I suddenly heard the pattern. It's like a Morse code only, of course, the sounds are different."

Mr. Morgan stopped talking and looked at his black notebook.

"And there it is," he said. "After seven years of work, here it is. I've deciphered it."

His throat worked convulsively as he picked up his glass and emptied it with a swallow.

"Well... what are they saying?" Hal asked, awkwardly.

Mr. Morgan looked at him.

"Names," he said. "Look, I'll show you."

He reached into one of his

pockets and drew out a stubby pencil. Tearing a blank page from his notebook, he started to write on it, muttering to himself.

"Pulse, pulse—silence—p u l s e, pulsepulse—silence—p u l s e—silence..."

Hal and Jean looked at each other. Hal tried to smile but couldn't. Then they were looking back at the small man bent over the table, listening to the crickets and writing.

Mr. Morgan put down the pencil. "It will give you some idea," he said, holding out the sheet to them. They looked at it.

MARIE CADMAN, it read.
JOHN JOSEPH ALSTER. SAMUEL—

"You see," said Mr. Morgan, "Names."

"Whose?" Jean had to ask it even though she didn't want to.

Mr. Morgan held the book in a clenching hand.

"*The names of the dead,*" he answered.

* * * * *

Later that night, Jean climbed into bed with Hal and pressed close to him. "I'm cold," she murmured.

"You're scared."

"Aren't you?"

"Well," he said, "if I am, it isn't in the way you think."

"How's that?"

"I don't believe what he said.

But he might be a dangerous man. That's what I'm afraid of."

"Where'd he get those names?"

"Maybe they're friends of his," he said. "Maybe he got them from tombstones. He might have just made them up." He grunted softly. "But I don't think the crickets told him," he said.

Jean snuggled against him.

"I'm glad you told him we were tired," she said. "I don't think I could have taken much more."

"Honey," he said, "Here that nice little man was giving us the lowdown on crickets and you disparage him."

"Hal," she said, "I'll never be able to enjoy crickets for the rest of my life."

They lay close to each other and slept. And, outside in the still darkness, crickets rubbed their wings together until morning came.

* * * * *

Mr. Morgan came rapidly across the dining room and sat down at their table.

"I've been looking for you all day," he said. "You've got to help me."

Hal's mouth tightened. "Help you how?" he asked, putting down his fork.

"They know I'm on to them," said Mr. Morgan. "They're after me."

"Who, the crickets?" Hal asked,

jadedly.

"I don't know," said Mr. Morgan, "Either them or—"

Jean held her knife and fork with rigid fingers. For some reason, she felt a chill creeping up her legs.

"Mr. Morgan." Hal was trying to sound patient.

"Understand me," Mr. Morgan pleaded. "The crickets are under the command of the dead. The dead send out these messages."

"Why?"

"They're compiling a list of all their names," said Mr. Morgan. "They keep sending the names through the crickets to let the others know."

"Why?" repeated Hal.

Mr. Morgan's hands trembled. "I don't know, I don't know," he said. "Maybe when there are enough names, when enough of them are ready, they'll—" His throat moved convulsively. "*They'll come back,*" he said.

After a moment, Hal asked, "What makes you think you're in any danger?"

"Because while I was writing down more names last night," said Mr. Morgan, "*they spelled out my name.*"

Hal broke the heavy silence.

"What can we do?" he asked in a voice that bordered on uneasiness.

"Stay with me," said Mr. Morgan, "so they can't get me."

Jean looked nervously at Hal.

"I won't bother you," said Mr. Morgan, "I won't even sit here, I'll sit across the room. Just so I can see you."

He stood up quickly and took out his notebook.

"Will you watch this?" he asked.

Before they could say another word, he left their table and walked across the dining room, weaving in and out among the white-clothed tables. About fifty feet from them, he sat down, facing them. They saw him reach forward and turn on the table lamp.

"What do we do now?" asked Jean.

"We'll stay here a little while," said Hal, "Nurse the bottle along. When it's empty, we'll go to bed."

"Do we have to stay?"

"Honey, who knows what's going on in that mind of his? I don't want to take any chances."

Jean closed her eyes and exhaled wearily. "What a way to polish off a vacation," she said.

Hal reached over and picked up the notebook. As he did, he became conscious of the crickets rasping outside. He flipped through the pages. They were arranged in alphabetical order, on each page three letters with their pulse equivalents.

"He's watching us," said Jean.

"Forget him."

Jean leaned over and looked at the notebook with him. Her eyes

moved over the arrangements of dots and dashes.

"You think there's anything to this?" she asked.

"Let's hope not," said Hal.

He tried to listen to the crickets' noise and find some point of comparison with the notes. He couldn't. After several minutes, he shut the book.

When the wine bottle was empty, Hal stood. "Beddy-bye," he said.

Before Jean was on her feet, Mr. Morgan was halfway to their table. "You're leaving?" he asked.

"Mr. Morgan, it's almost eleven," Hal said. "We're tired. I'm sorry but we have to go to bed."

The small man stood wordless, looking from one to the other with pleading, hopeless eyes. He seemed about to speak, then his narrow shoulders slumped and his gaze dropped to the floor. They heard him swallowing.

"You'll take care of the book?" he asked.

"Don't you want it?"

"No." Mr. Morgan turned away. After a few paces, he stopped and glanced back across his shoulder. "Could you leave your door open so I can—call?"

"All right, Mr. Morgan," he said.

A faint smile twitched Mr. Morgan's lips.

"Thank you," he said and walked away.

It was after four when the screaming woke them. Hal felt Jean's fingers clutching at his arm as they both jolted to a sitting position, staring into the darkness.

"What is it?" gasped Jean.

"I don't know." Hal threw off the covers and dropped his feet to the floor.

"Don't leave me!" said Jean.

"Come on then!"

The hall had a dim bulb burning overhead. Hal sprinted over the floorboards toward Mr. Morgan's room. The door to it was closed although it had been left open before. Hal banged his fist on it. "Mr. Morgan!" he called.

Inside the room, there was a sudden, rustling, crackling sound—like that of a million, wildly shaken tambourines. The noise made Hal's hand jerk back convulsively from the door knob.

"What's *that*?" Jean asked in a terrified whisper.

He didn't answer. They stood immobile, not knowing what to do. Then, inside, the noise stopped. Hal took a deep breath and pushed open the door.

The scream gagged in Jean's throat.

Lying in a pool of blood-splotted moonlight was Mr. Morgan, his skin raked open as if by a thousand tiny razor blades. There was a gaping hole in the

window screen.

Jean stood paralyzed, a fist pressed against her mouth while Hal moved to Mr. Morgan's side. He knelt down beside the motionless man and felt at Mr. Morgan's chest where the pajama top had been sliced to ribbons. The faintest of heartbeats pulsed beneath his trembling fingers.

Mr. Morgan opened his eyes. Wide, staring eyes that recognized nothing, that looked right through Hal.

"P-H-I-L-I-P M-A-X-W-E-L-L." Mr. Morgan spelled out the name in a bubbling voice.

"M-A-R-Y G-A-B-R-I-E-L," spelled Mr. Morgan, eyes stark and glazed.

His chest lurched once. His eyes widened.

"J-O-H-N M-O-R-G-A-N," he spelled.

Then his eyes began focusing on Hal. There was a terrible rattling in his throat. As though the sounds were wrenched from him one by one by a power beyond his own, he spoke again.

"H-A-R-O-L-D-G-A-L-L-O-W-A-Y," he spelled, "J-E-A-N-G-A-L-L-O-W-A-Y."

Then they were alone with a dead man. And outside in the night, a million crickets rustled their wings together. And waited.

