

Weird Tales

September
1954

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Published bi-monthly by SHORT STORIES, INC., 299 West 57th Street, New York 19, N. Y. W. J. Delaney, President & Treasurer; R. M. Cogan, Secretary. Reentered as second-class matter January 26, 1940, at the Post Office, New York, N. Y., under the Act of March 3, 1879. Subscription rates: One year in the United States and possessions \$2.00; two years \$3.50. Canadian: one year \$2.25; two years, \$4.00. Foreign: one year \$2.30; two years, \$4.10. The publishers are not responsible for the loss of unsolicited manuscripts.

D. McILWRAITH, *Editor*

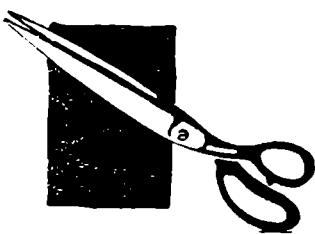
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Printed in U. S. A.

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Vol. 46, No. 4



Dorgen

BY SUZANNE PICKETT

TRION CONNER smiled as he unlocked his door, turned on the light and started across the room. Then he halted and stared in stupefied disbelief.

There, on his sofa was the most gorgeous pair of feminine legs that he had ever seen. Slim and long; they curved deliciously from ankle to knee to thigh. There was only one thing wrong. The legs ended abruptly in the middle of her thighs.

Trion rubbed his hand over his eyes and looked again. The legs were still there. Well, he was drunk. Crazy, stupidly drunk. And yet he had taken only one cocktail. The imaginary girl wore a pair of blue shorts. The cuffs and part of the legs showed, but they too ended in that incredible way.

The room was cold and the night would be colder. Trion smiled stupidly, then went to his closet took out a blanket and draped it over the girl. She sighed and turned over on her side. His eyes widened as he looked. The blanket wasn't invisible. It followed the perfect, rounded curves of a girl's body.

He felt his jaw go slack and hang open. With an effort, he closed it, marched himself into his room and put himself to bed. He'd just have to sleep this one off.

... difficult when
you run foul of a
jealous demon.



He was smiling as he woke the next morning. He yawned, stretched and turned over. Then he sat up in bed abruptly. The scent of bacon and coffee filled the room. He dressed hurriedly, went through the living room to see if the legs still occupied the sofa and stopped. The blanket was there, but pushed to one side and turned back as if someone had slept under it and left it thus.

Trion went into the bathroom to wash his face again and look into the mirror. His eyes were a little frightened, but they definitely didn't look insane.

And yet, the scent of bacon and coffee grew stronger. He tried to smile. Maybe a pair of legs could cook. That was certainly a wonderful aroma coming from the kitchen. He turned and followed his nose.

For a minute, he stared in horror. The table was set daintily, his best cups and saucers were out. Two steaming cups of coffee sat beside bacon, eggs and toast cooked exactly as he liked them.

HE SMILED foolishly and pulled out his chair. He'd see if he could do a day's work on a breakfast that was pure fantasy. The chair on the other side of the table pulled itself out and then drew closer to the table. He stared again. Just below the level of his eyes, across the

table from him was the most dazzling pair of brown eyes that he had ever seen. They were more startling than the legs of last night. They could smile, and then look mournfully and doubtfully at him.

Somebody had surely slipped something into his drink. It couldn't have been that strong. Nevertheless; he'd lay off the stuff from now on. No telling what might happen to him.

Well, at least he wouldn't go so far as to talk to himself. As long as he managed to keep quiet, he'd have that much control over his mind.

He ate his breakfast. Good too. Impossible that he could imagine such taste, and certainly not the coffee that burned his lips. The food across the table disappeared a little more slowly and more daintily than his own.

He was always as neat as an old maid's pincushion, and he was almost too fond of his food. Tired of eating the same tasteless, restaurant meals, he'd taken this apartment. Enjoyed cooking his own breakfast, dinner, too, when he wanted. And he kept the place clean. But this morning he left the bed; dishes, and all, and hurried out of the door.

Two or three times during the day, he started to mention the eyes and the legs that had visited him, but wisdom made him hold

his tongue. When Burt Jenkins, his best friend, asked him to stop for cocktails, he refused so emphatically that Burt gave him a queer look.

Perhaps he'd eat out tonight, he thought. Too big a mess at home. The girl who came to clean every week would do the apartment tomorrow. He would not even bother with his breakfast dishes.

Then he frowned. He hadn't cooked, nor set the table. The whole breakfast, the blanket too must have been his imagination. Anyhow, he wanted to hurry home. Maybe the eyes would be there again. He'd always preferred blue eyes, but he'd never seen brown ones like these.

They were large and clear, the whites almost blue. The lids were wide and shadowed, and underneath the eyes looked a little tired. The lashes were long and soft, like black silk tassles. Slanting at the edges, they turned back over the lids to darken the shadows; while the iris seemed to constantly change; from brown to almost purple, then to black, yet always glistening with a soft, sweet light.

HE WAS a little tense as he went up the stairs, unlocked his door and looked at the couch. He smiled in relief. It was neat and bare of legs or blanket. It had only been the

drinks. Everything was all right now.

But—he wrinkled his nose. There was the distinct aroma of garlic and onions in the air. Of bubbling meat—what did he have to cook? He hadn't bought groceries the day before as he planned. There was only a can of beef, some onions and potatoes. But as surely as the couch was bare now; just that surely he smelled the most delicious hash of his entire existence.

Fearfully, he went into the kitchen.

The table was set again. Something bubbled on the stove. He walked over to look at a pot of steaming potatoes and meat in a smooth, brown gravy. His mouth watered as he looked then he glanced around the room.

There, across the table behind a fork that rearranged itself; was a perfect, white, rounded chin. A soft, pink mouth that trembled on a smile; and cheeks with dimples that deepened, then disappeared. The tip of a small, dainty nose could be seen; but above and below these nothing was visible.

He smiled tentatively. The lips smiled. He opened his mouth to speak, but for a minute, no words came. Then he swallowed, moistened his lips and said. "Hello." It was a bare whisper, but at least it was a sound.

"Hello," the lips opened and small, white teeth showed. They came closer and he felt a hand on his arm. Then the lips trembled on a sob. "I was afraid you—you'd—I thought you'd run or something when you decided I was real."

"You—are real?" he asked carefully; as if he were handling eggs that would break at the vibration of his voice if he used it too much.

"Of course I'm real. Can't you see—" The words trailed off. "What—" she said. "How much have you seen?"

"There were your legs last night, your eyes this morning, and now your mouth and chin." He put his finger on it to be sure that it was real. "And the tip of your nose."

The lips smiled again. "Do you—" Her chin was childish and sweet. "Do you think I have pretty eyes?"

"The most beautiful in the world," he said fervently.

"And—and my lips and chin?"

"The only things, I have ever seen that were almost as beautiful as your eyes," he declared.

Her chin dipped. She must be looking at her legs. "And—" modestly, then a delicious pink swept from the tip of her chin, over her dimples and colored the small, white nose.

"Your—" he began. But she was shy. He didn't want to embarrass her. "You must be very beautiful," he amended. "The most beautiful girl on earth."

"I am," she sighed. "That's the trouble."

"You mean it is troubling to be—"

"Yes."

"But—why?"

"You see," she began. Then he heard her steps as she ran to the stove. "Just in time!" she gasped. Her lips and chin faced him again. "Aren't you hungry?" she asked.

"Starving," he said, sniffing the air.

"Let's eat, then I'll tell you."

"By the way," he said, unfolding his napkin and eager to get at the hash. "What is your name?"

"Venus," the lips grinned impudently.

"Really?" he stared in awe.

"Actually," she stopped smiling. "You see, daddy is an artist. When I was born, he said I had beautiful bones, someday I would be—you know, so he named me Venus." Then she smiled again. "My friends call me Vee."

HE ATE awhile in silence. "How did you do it?" he asked and dipped the fourth helping of hash.

"What?" she asked.

"How did you get this flavor with what I had?"

"Why it was simple. Just enough garlic and onions. A touch of celery salt, sage, oh, all of your herbs; then the gravy must be just brown enough and only so thick—"

"Will you marry me?" he leaned across the table. His head was giddy and light. The drink was still active, even after a whole night and day, but he might as well enjoy himself.

Her giggle was real and not the product of his imagination. Then her lips trembled again.

"I don't suppose I'll ever be able to get married," she said.

"Why?" he leaned forward. Might as well humor her.

"Dorgen won't let me."

"Dorgen? Who is he?" Trion wanted suddenly to see this Dorgen, he'd murder him—he'd—

"He—he's the spirit who is in love with me."

"The spirit—" he stared at her lips. "You mean there's a— a real spirit who—"

"Yes," simply. Then she sighed. "If I hadn't been so beautiful and if we hadn't gone on that world tour. That's where he saw me."

"We?"

"Mother and daddy."

"Where are they now?"

"They're at home of course."

"At home? I see. And where is that?"

"In Birmingham."

"But what are you doing here in New York?"

"Dorgen lets me be visible here sometimes, just to—to get my mail. But half of the time not long enough to buy food, and I was hungry—"

"But your people?"

"They think I'm trying to get work on TV. They send me money."

"Surely they're not fools."

"Of course not!" angrily.

"But it seems they would know that any producer would hire you the minute he saw you."

"They think I don't have talent."

"And they don't know about Dorgen?"

"Oh no. I was always visible to them. He didn't even show himself to me until I stayed on in New York."

"And now, he makes you invisible," soberly. "But isn't there any way to get away from him?"

"Not any that I know," sadly.

"How did you find me?"

"I was trying to hide from Dorgen. I was hungry, hadn't been able to buy food for days. I darted into this building—"

"You were invisible all of that time?"

"Yes."

"Completely?"

"Of course not! That's what made it so bad. He always lets part of me show."

"I can see his point."

"What do you mean?"

"If all of you is as beautiful as the parts I have seen—"

"Unfortunately, it is."

"Then he wants to marry you?"

"Oh no, I told you, he's a spirit."

"But what—"

"He's jealous. He doesn't want anyone else to have me. And he's so mean— If I were completely invisible—"

"You could take what you needed."

"Certainly not. That would be stealing."

"So you buy when you can?"

"Yes, but Dorgen— As I told you, I hadn't been out for a week, when I tried to buy anything—well, it was pretty awful. You know," she leaned forward. "You're the first person who has not had a fit when he saw part of me."

"I'd likely have one if I saw all of you," he remarked.

SHE blushed again, but her dimples showed, and her lips wore a complacent smile. Then they trembled again. She took a bite, chewed a minute and said. "I passed your door, smelled the soup you were making, and slipped in. You put entirely too much garlic in it," she said.

"I make very good soup," stubbornly.

"Too much garlic."

"You know," he was afraid he couldn't hold another bite, looked wistfully at the small amount of hash in the bowl, then leaned forward, "I forgot about the soup." He looked at the cabinet, saw the red pot very empty and very clean. "Did you eat all of it?"

"Every bite," she said.

"Then it couldn't have been so bad," triumphantly.

"I was starving," she dimpled.

He managed another bite. "By the way," he asked then. "Where is Dorgen now?"

Her dimples grew deeper. "He saw Jean Milliford down the street and left me to follow her."

"Jean Milliford?" he asked. "Boy, it would be too bad if he fell in love with her!"

Her lips made a thin line. "Why?" she asked. "Is she more important than I?"

"Of course not. But Wallflowers and Belles would likely fold."

"She has an understudy."

"Nobody could take Jean's part."

"I could," smugly.

"You mean—?"

"I saw her and thought maybe Dorgen—anyhow, I began to haunt the place; listened, found a copy of the play and learned her part. I can beat her too."

"How do you know?"

"I've seen it twenty times."

"Whew! How did you get tickets?"

"I don't need tickets," primly. "I just walk in when only my eyes or lips show."

"Doesn't anybody have a fit?"

"In that mob? Nobody has noticed yet."

"Wasn't that wrong?"

"Why—" the lips trembled. "I didn't think."

He patted her chin, then said, "And if Dorgen falls in love with Jean?"

"No chance of that," sadly.

"Why?"

"I'm prettier than Jean."

HE CHOKED, remembered her legs and eyes, looked at her chin and lips and nodded. "You know, I rather think you are," he said. He sipped his coffee thoughtfully. "If I could make Dorgen forget you, could I see all of you then?"

"Yes, he'd leave me alone if he didn't like me any more."

"A dirty trick to play on Jean."

"Maybe he'd forget her in a little while. Find someone else."

"Yes—he might if we tell her."

"Tell her what?"

"If I managed it, would you marry me?"

The lips were open. A bite of hash was almost inside, the hash lowered, the lips closed quickly then opened again and came

across the table until they were near his. "Kiss me," she whispered.

Her body was firm and round and soft. Her lips—"Roger!" he gasped. "No wonder Dorgen—" He narrowed his eyes. "He loves you because you are the most beautiful girl in the world?" he asked.

"Yes. He won't look at anyone who has the slightest flaw."

"That's it then!" he snapped his finger. "He can see you when others can't?"

"Oh yes."

"Is he here now?"

"You'd know it if he were," bitterly. "He hasn't found me yet."

"But he will?"

"Of course. He always does. You see, he has helpers."

"Any of them around?"

"No."

"How would you look in a turban?"

"Pretty," she said regretfully. "I'd look pretty in anything."

He kissed her again and for awhile forgot what he had been saying. Then he remembered. "But, would you marry me," he asked.

"Of course." Her voice was sweeter than apple blossom honey.

"What color is your hair?" he asked wistfully.

"Black," she said.

"It would be, with those

eyes." He tried to picture her. "Jet black?" he asked.

"No, it sort of has red lights, makes it shine in the sun."

He rubbed his hand over her head. The hair was below her shoulders and as soft as milk-weed down. He touched it lovingly, then said, "No girl, not even you could be pretty if she were baldheaded."

"Why hadn't I thought of that!" she gasped.

"You wouldn't have met me," smugly.

She gave him another kiss. "Where are your scissors?" she asked excitedly.

"Can you cut your own hair?"

"I will," grimly. "Shave it too. What kind of razor do you have?"

"Electric."

"Good."

HE WENT to his desk drawer, found the scissors and handed them to the air. A hand took them from him, he saw them raised high and heard the snip, snip, but saw nothing.

Her lips disappeared, then he heard a gasp in the bathroom. "I look awful," she wailed. "Perfectly terrible. You couldn't love me if you saw me. Nobody could."

"Sure?" he asked gleefully, then he smacked his lips silently, remembering the bacon, eggs and coffee: and the taste of that hash

was still with him. Besides; with her eyes, lips and those legs— Well, what man would spend much time looking at her head? He heard his razor buzzing, then it stopped and her chin came into the room.

The door opened suddenly, then slammed angrily and a voice full of rage said, "What have you done to yourself?"

"What does it look like?" saucily.

"You—you—I never saw anything so hideous."

"Good," she said, but her voice trembled on a sob.

"He's welcome to you!" the angry voice said. "Or anyone else who would have you. I can't bear the sight of you now." The door slammed again.

Trion saw her legs first. They were more beautiful than he remembered. Then her body. The blue shorts fitted over an incredibly small waist. A shirt to match filled out in just the right places. Her arms and hands were perfect. Her throat, her whole face. There were those unbelievable eyes and a brow that should have inspired a hundred poets. And there, above all of that beauty, was a hideous, white dome; as bald and bare as a door knob. It was incredible, fantastic, horrible.

For the rest of his life, Trion was proud of the way he acted then. He walked over, took the

bald head in his hands, closed his eyes and kissed her.

"You couldn't want to marry me now," she sobbed.

"Of course I do," he kissed her again, but he kept his eyes shut. "Of course I do sweetheart." He opened his eyes a minute, but directly under them was that—that bare—Quickly, he closed them again.

"In—in spite of my head," tearfully.

"Your hair will grow, darling." He stared at the floor, turned her loose, then stooped. The soft, silky strands lay visible now. Shining ringlets, dark against the hardwood floor.

She took a handful and wept.

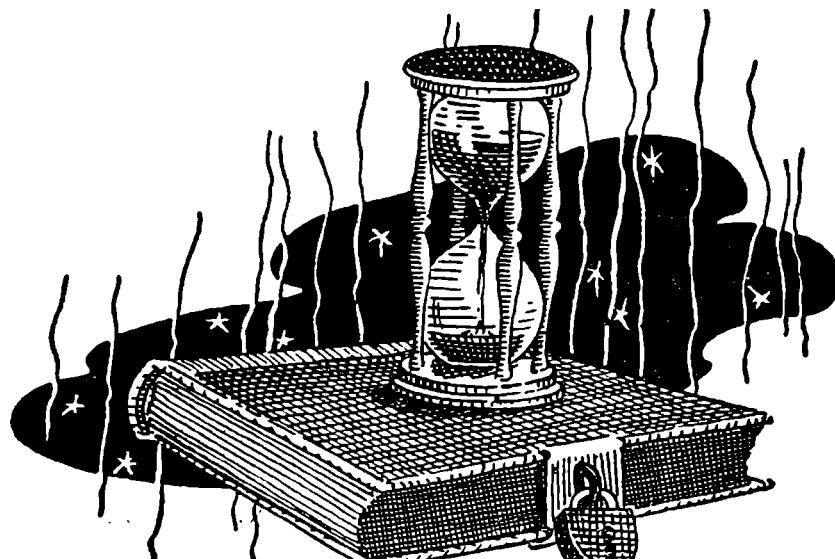
Trion went into his bedroom, searched until he found a blue silk scarf someone had given him for Christmas. "Here," he said gently. "Try this."

She took the silk and went into the bathroom. A few minutes later she came back looking like an Indian Princess.

"I love you, I love you!" he said fervently. She didn't seem to notice that he had not told her that before.

SHE even wore a veil for the wedding. One of those little caps of pearls with white tulle flowing all around. Trion was glad Dorgen couldn't see her then. She had picked her clothes carefully. The model was exactly her size; though not half so pretty, so no one thought it strange that she didn't try them on.

There had never been a better cook in the world. Trion was as happy as a man could be. There was only one small fly in his glass of champagne. Vee



must always wear a scarf or turban. His friends were beginning to wonder. They couldn't guess. But she even slept with it on her head.

Jean Milliford was suddenly ill, the paper said, and her understudy took her part.

Vee felt of her turban mournfully. "All of my study wasted," she said. "If I had my hair, I'd have gotten the part."

"Aren't you happy?" he asked. "Of course, darling."

"Then forget about the stage."

"I might as well," she said. But her face was wistful.

Carefully, they wrote a letter to Jean. She'd get her mail of course, Dorgen would give her time for that.

Three days later she returned to the stage to play her part in a turban. Set a new style too. Everyone thought Vee very smart to be the first to wear one.

But Trion was a little tired of them. One afternoon he came in from work cross and worried. Things were not going so well at the office. But they always got better after a bad spell, and one of Vee's suppers would fix everything.

"I'm in the kitchen, darling," she called. But she didn't have to tell him, his nose did that. Dumplings bubbled on the stove, the smell of sage and onions; of dressing, roast turkey and gravy

came from the oven. This *must* be an occasion. He tried to think. It wasn't her birthday or anything.

She was standing at the table. He lifted his eyes to her and they widened in delight. Why, he hadn't dreamed— Why no one on earth could be that beautiful!

She wore blue, the perfect shade to set off her white skin and dark eyes. A white necklace and earrings made her beauty more startling: and, turban gone, she proudly lifted a head covered with shining, soft black ringlets. Little curls swirled about her cheeks and back to her neck in the most beautiful head of hair that he had ever seen with the most beautiful Italian haircut.

He started across the room with delight. Why this, this unearthly creature that he had married was too beautiful to be real. He stared in unbelieving rapture. Slowly, the hair, dress, lips and chin disappeared. Only her eyes, stricken, yet angry looked at him, then they filled and ran over as she whispered. "Oh no!" in tones of despair.

He continued to stare a minute, went slowly towards her, kissed her, felt her hair with his hands; then crossed into the living room went to his desk, found the scissors and brought them back to her.
