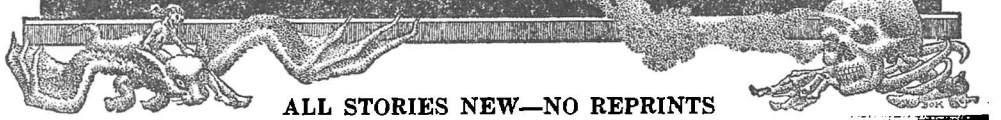


Weird Tales



ALL STORIES NEW—NO REPRINTS

MARCH, 1941

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Except for personal experiences the contents of this magazine is fiction. Any use of the name of any living person or reference to actual events is purely coincidental.

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"'Come!' he said softly, and this time held out his hand. The girl tried to grasp it, but he was going down—down into the blackness."

Edge of the Cliff

By DOROTHY QUICK

It takes courage to jump into the Unknown; but the Stranger understood—and helped.

THE girl sat on the edge of a cliff and gazed down at the jagged rocks below her, watching the water beat relentlessly upon them. The last rose tints of the sunset gave the eddy-

ing waters a translucent loveliness, but she shuddered as she looked at them. She couldn't see the beauty, only that the rocks and water were terribly far away.

"I haven't the courage," she half whis-

pered, her voice lost in the rushing waters. For a long while she sat quite still, staring blankly before her. From somewhere in the distance came the shriek of a whistle.

Automatically the girl raised her head, listened, and laughed—a laugh that had no mirth in it. Her thoughts, which had been a formless confusion, suddenly focused.

"The factory whistle. Jim will be home soon. How he'll rave when he doesn't find me. If I went back, he'd beat me. But I won't go! Dear God, help me to be brave."

With the force of her prayer she clasped her hands and moved convulsively. As she did so her pump slipped off and went down into the dimness. She strained her eyes to watch, but she could discern nothing in the darkness. So she listened, every nerve tense.

But she heard nothing—only the swishing snarl of the water beating on the rocks. Her slipper had gone—soon she would follow. She dully wondered if it would hurt. She saw herself lying crushed and mangled, perhaps not dead, and began to shake. Unsteadily she got to her feet. She was going away from the terror of the cliff, back to Jim—It would be horrible, but at least she knew what it was like.

"If I were only brave," she thought, "I wouldn't go back." She buried her face in her hands and sobbed hopelessly.

All at once she was conscious of someone near. She took her hands away to look. There was a stranger standing beside her.

"What is the matter?" he asked softly. There was no light and she could not see his face, but something in his voice swept her terror away.

Without an instant's hesitation she began, "I want to die." She pointed downward. "But I haven't the courage."

"Perhaps I can help you." There was deep understanding in his tones. "But first you must tell me why."

Strangely she didn't wonder that he made no attempt to preach or dissuade her from her project. Her soul went out to the sympathy and understanding she sensed in him. Her words came tumbling out jerkily, one sentence after another.

"I loved Bob—my family married me to Jim. Jim had money—a house. I was pretty and could cook. Jim didn't love me, but I was useful. I hated him!" She clenched her hands until the nails, digging into the soft flesh, brought drops of blood to the surface.

"Yes?" questioned the stranger. "So—" Monosyllables which left a gap to be filled.

She went on, "I tried hard to like Jim—I couldn't. He was a drunken beast. Bob kept on being sweet to me, brought me little things when Jim wasn't there. Once he found me crying, saw my arms all black and blue. Then he took me in his arms." She paused a second to savor fully the joys of the remembrance.

"We decided to go away together when Bob got enough money," the thread of her memory continued to unwind. "Jim came home early. I hid Bob but Jim was drunk. He began beating me. I tried to be brave, but God must have been asleep that night. I cried out. Bob came to help me—and Jim killed him!"

The stranger was silent.

She continued, "Jim got off—he was a wronged husband. The jury was on his side. It was worse than ever for me when he came back. I can't stand it anymore. I want to go to Bob, only—I'm not brave enough."

The stranger moved a little nearer.

"It only takes a minute," he whispered, but in his low tones there was a vibrancy. "One second and it is over."

Her slight figure swayed, "I can't!" she gasped.

The stranger took another step.

"You won't be alone. I will go too," he said slowly.

"But why?" she began, then suddenly reached her hand out toward him.

He ignored that and took a step toward the edge of the cliff. "Come."

She moved forward. All at once she was aware of the sound of the water striking the rocks below—those sharp, jagged rocks. She shrank back. "I'm afraid."

"Then return to him!" He flung the words at her.

"No, no!" cried the girl.

"You must choose between Jim and Bob," he said sternly, then added, "once you did not take so long to decide."

"Bob might not find me," she sobbed.

"It only takes a second," he pleaded, "and then there is—Eternity!"

The girl shivered again. "It is very dark!"

"At the bottom there is light."

"It will be very cold."

The stranger smiled. "My arms will be warm. Come!" he said softly, and this time held out his hand.

The girl tried to grasp it, but he was going down—down into the blackness. There was a strange luminous light about him. It didn't look quite so dark. The girl suddenly found courage.

"Wait!" she cried, "I am coming!"

From below the stranger was smiling at her with Bob's smile, and his arms were outstretched. He wasn't a stranger anymore—he was—Bob! Without one second's hesitation, she flung herself into his arms.

They went down and down, toward the bottom. Bob's lips were warm on hers. She did not even know when the waters enveloped her completely.
