

Weird Tales

January
1954

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D. McILWRAITH, *Editor*



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by Suzanne Pickett

EFFIE'S PETS



*the two ghosts
fought savagely.*

WE LISTENED to ghost tales
at night and hunted all day.

Funny thing, too, these people
seemed literally to believe in
their ghosts, and acted queer
about my hunting. "Better stick
with Rafe," they'd say as soon as
they learned that I had come
down from Detroit to hunt in
these Alabama back woods.

"Why?" I wanted to know.
But I never got a satisfactory
answer.

A friend from the South told
me these woods were full of
wild turkeys; I had some busi-
ness in Birmingham in late
November, so I took an extra
week for hunting. Rafe Hogan,
the best hunter in the country
accompanied me, but so far we
hadn't even seen a turkey.

"I ain't never had such luck."
Rafe leaned his gun against a
persimmon tree, tore a hunk from
a plug of tobacco with his yellow
teeth and began to devour it. At
least he seemed to be eating as

Heading by W. H. Silvey

he spat streams of amber against a sumach bush.

"That looks like good hunting." I pointed to an area thickly overgrown with timber. "Plenty of squirrels there, anyhow." I could see them running along the ground under the trees. First game I had seen at all. And these looked quite tame. "Bet there are turkeys too."

Rafe twisted his head and stared at me. Something about his face reminded me of a turkey. It was red, with a beak of a nose above a long neck. "I don't hunt there," he said and his face darkened, seemed almost frightened.

"Why?" I laughed.

"Just don't." He spat another stream of amber, took out his knife and began to pare his nails.

"Time you started then." I said. "Come on."

"I ain't goin'," Rafe's voice rose stubbornly.

"I'm paying you to guide me and I want a turkey," I said angrily. "Bound to be some in that timber."

"Well, I ain't goin' there," he said stubbornly.

All at once I wanted to laugh. He was so much like a child, you couldn't stay mad at him. "Why, Rafe?" I asked.

"Just ain't goin'." He chewed some more, scratched his ear and spat again.

"It's not posted," I said.

"Don't need to be. Nobody round here goin' to hunt there."

"You sound like the place was haunted or something," I was still laughing.

He stuck his nose in the air but didn't speak.

"Who lives there?" I asked.

"Nobody livin' there now."

"Well, who did then, murderers or something?"

"Old Jock Davis and his sister Effie."

"Bad folks? That why you're scared?"

"Didn't say I was scared."

"Then it's Jock and Effie. Didn't you like them?"

"Liked 'em all right. Me and Jock's hunted many a night through these woods. Had the best pack of dogs in the country."

"Think Jock wouldn't like your hunting?" I was getting impatient.

"Him. Naw. Jock'd be glad to see me."

"Then why in—" I checked myself, and said evenly. "Enough of this foolishness. I'm going to find at least one turkey before I go back to Detroit."

"Better find him somewhere else."

"Where then?"

Rafe scratched his head again. "Danged if I know," he said.

I STARTED towards the Davis place. "Going with me?" I asked.

"Nope. He leaned stubbornly against his tree."

"Well, I'll see you tonight." I said just as stubbornly.

"Hope so."

"Rafe," in exasperation, "I didn't think YOU would be so superstitious."

"Ain't superstition."

"Of all the—"

"You WILL go?" he asked.

"Of course."

"Well, remember, I warned you." He spat his cud of tobacco to the ground, took his knife and began to pick his teeth.

"I won't forget," I said sarcastically and started off. I wanted to take a switch to him as you would to a stubborn child.

"Dugan!" Rafe called as I neared the worn, rail fence.



"Yes?" I stopped, hoping he had changed his mind.

"If you need any help any time, just call Jock."

I snorted, walked up to the fence, jumped over it and was in the forbidden place.

Late that afternoon, I stopped to rest and eat my lunch. Three turkey toms and six squirrels were a good sized load. I

could have killed at least six more. I had never seen so much wild game in any one place. They seemed to feel that no one would bother them there and were almost tame.

Oscar, Grady and the boys would never believe me when I told them. I wished now that I had brought a camera.

Squirrels played all around me as I ate. A row of turkeys topped the hill and walked slowly by. I couldn't resist them and raised my gun to shoot. Something pushed it to the earth and I could have sworn that I heard a gruff, but definitely feminine voice say: "You ain't goin' to kill no more."

Startled, I looked around, then grinned ruefully. Rafe had got ME to thinking things. But the turkeys were out of sight, so I finished my sandwich, cupped my hands and drank from the clear, cool spring that ran from under a rock. Then I picked up my game and started back the way I came.

There was the same rail fence. There was the sapling I had broken as I jumped it. I reached my hand towards the rail, but something, some invisible force, stopped me as suddenly as if I had run into a wall.

I tried to laugh again and pushed at the "thing" that held me back from the fence, but it could not be moved, I could tell

now. It was another fence: made of logs, like an old fort or a log house. "This is carrying imagination too far!" I said. But still I couldn't move forward.

Terror gripped me for an instant, but I stepped back and it was as before. Nothing hindered me and there was nothing visible to hinder me. I walked parallel to the rail fence and started to jump over it.

I thought for a minute I had cracked my head, it hurt so bad. I lay on the earth stunned, then stood up and moved back. "This is silly!" I remarked angrily. I would show them. There MUST be an opening somewhere.

AFTER reading of the fifty thousand acre ranches of the West, forty acres seems just a dot of land. But have you ever walked around forty acres? Between one sentence and the next you can cover a quarter of a mile in a car. But try walking it! It seems over a mile.

Then there's four quarters to surround a forty acre tract. Just one mile altogether. But with three turkeys, six squirrels and an invisible fence pushing against you— Well, I circled the thing three times. The third time I was so tired, so scared from running— Yes, I was running now, but doggedly I held on to the game. I'd show them. I'd SHOW them. If they didn't want me to

have it, why had they let me kill it?

"Who are you?" I called suddenly. "What do you want? Why can't I get out of this danged place?" I had never used the word before, but it came naturally after a week with Rafe.

Suddenly, a little thin, wrinkled woman with dirty, gray hair straggling about her face from a knot at the back of her head, appeared. Her dress was incredibly dirty, her fingernails hooked, with a black, half moon under each of them.

Her eyes were gray too, and they seemed friendly. "You're home folks ain't you?" she asked. It must have been the word "danged," that I used to make her think that. "You orter know then," she said.

"Know what?" I asked crossly. This creature wouldn't hurt a fly.

But her face grew angry and her eyes danced as she snatched the squirrels from me and cuddled them in her arms. "Pets," she said. "Nothin' but pets. Ain't goin' to have 'em." She looked stubbornly at me. "Ain't nobody goin' to git no more. Kill my pets will you? I'll show you!"

She stroked the fur of a red squirrel. "We'll show 'em, won't we honey? Dance for Effie, play with me."

A horrible thought struck me. This woman is crazy. I am fenced

in with a mad woman. Then the full horror of the thing came upon me. I was the one who was mad. There was no visible wall, yet I was so mad I believed it was there.

I hope I never feel the terror, the helplessness of the next few minutes as I contemplated the awful thing that had happened to me; the loss of my mind.

"I didn't know," I said hopelessly. "I didn't know that the insane person KNEW he was mad. This was torture beyond bearing. I always thought he believed everyone else was crazy, and he the only sane person in the universe."



Yet the woman WAS real. She stood before me in her anger. I couldn't imagine the ring of filth under her fingernails. This was NOT fantasy. NOT a shimmering dream. And perhaps not—not insanity on my part.

The woman was TOO real. Her image didn't vary, only as anger came and went in her face. Her wrinkles were natural, her straggling hair. There was noth-

ing distorted as in a dream or fantasy.

Comforted at last, I thought, poor creature. SHE it is who is mad. I must placate her then go back to Rafe's house. I laughed aloud in happiness at this assurance of my own sanity. OF COURSE I was sane. The very thought, the very idea in my own mind of this thing had proved my sanity.

Crazy people DIDN'T know it. I had personally learned that when my cousin went mad. That was a week of horror. We had been on just such another hunting trip as this. He had been acting strange for months, was excitable, then had moods of depression. Then the killing of animals seemed the final thing to send him completely off. His excitement grew explosively. He began to talk constantly, told the most absurd tales, yet was able to repeat them time and again.

Fantastic adventures he had known that grew with the telling, yet he never forgot a detail once recounted.

But he didn't sleep. Neither did the rest of the party. All night and all day he loped across the cabin or the yard, talking incessantly, his eyes wild, excited, then happy. Sometimes a sweet, childlike look in his face, then a mad anger.

And you couldn't cross him in anything. It was almost impos-

sible to do anything with him. He wouldn't hear of leaving, but finally I had hit on a way to make him behave.

He was constantly running to me with some tale of the others. They were all insane, all completely mad and did the craziest things. One day he flew into the kitchen in excited rage.

Oscar was completely mad, he id. The only thing to do was tie him up and ship him off.

AN IDEA had struck me. Solemnly, I agreed, but softly suggested that we didn't want to hurt poor old Oscar. After all, he couldn't help himself. We must humor him. No matter what he said we must try to do exactly what he suggested, then we could get him to the hospital and perhaps he could be cured.

George had thought a minute, smiled and agreed with me. After that he took great pains to do exactly what Oscar wanted. Even agreed to accompany him home quietly, sat in the doctor's office, while the doctor—who was in on the trick—apparently examined Oscar.

Luckily, George was placed in an institution, and luckily a few shock treatments were all that he needed to restore his mind.

'Well. It's an ill wind, etc., so this experience proved that I was not crazy. If so, I would never doubt my own sanity. I arose

to leave the mad woman. She eyed me cunningly. I still had the turkeys, though she held on to the squirrels.

But one thing I had forgotten in my fear.

The wall!

I ran into it again, and she smiled jubilantly as I fell to the earth in my surprise and despair.

"Thought you'd get away with it, didn't you?" she chuckled. "Can't kill Effie's pets and get away from her."

I wanted to scream but no sound came from my throat. At last I managed to whisper, "Are you a witch?"

"Witch," she cackled. "Now, whatever give you that thought?"

"Then why—what have you done to me?"

"Wouldn't you like to know?" she leered at me.

"Effie," I said placatingly, "let me go. I won't kill any more of your pets."

But the word "kill" sent her into another rage, "Never!" she shrieked. "I'll never let you go! I'll learn them. Can't kill Effie's pets! I'll keep you here for eons and eons and eons!"

"Effie," I groveled before her, "I must leave, Effie. I must! Please."

"No, she said. "Never!"

"Then I'll find a way out!" I shouted, feeling as mad as she sounded. I began to run around the enclosure, bumping into the

"wall. Before long I was bruised and sick. All the way around I went, then again. There WASN'T any way out.

And always near me I heard Effie's cackle. She never tired.

Sometime during the night, exhausted, I fell asleep against the wall. The autumn birds woke me with their songs pouring all over and around me.

IT WAS a nightmare. I thought in relief, it is morning now. I'll go home and try to explain to Rafe. I stood up, stretched, then recoiled in horror as my hand touched the invisible wall.

Effie's giggle told me it WASN'T a nightmare. Evidently, she had meant it when she said she would keep me here for eons and eons.

And there was no chance of rescue. Hadn't Rafe said that he wouldn't cross that fence? Nor would anyone else that he knew. I tried to remember our conversation, and suddenly recalled the last thing he had said. "If you need any help," he had remarked, almost casually, "just call Jock." Of course, I thought. Why hadn't I remembered?

"Jock!" I yelled as loud as I could. "Jock! Help me please."

Instantly, Effie was beside me, her cold, clammy hand over my mouth. I struggled. Was she going to strangle me? Gad, but she was strong!

"Call Jock will you?" she said savagely. "Just try again and see what happens!"

A large, gnarled, dirty hand took her fingers and wrested them from my face. "What's going on Effie?" A gruff, yet kindly masculine voice asked. "What are you doing to this fellow?"

"Thank God you've come!" I gasped. "Your sister is mad. Why didn't you come before now?" His face was wrinkled and as dirty as Effie's, but his eyes were gentle, kind in his dirty face.

"Good hunting." He glanced at the game on the path. Effie had dropped the squirrels to hold me. "She wouldn't never let me kill them neither," Jock grumbled. Crazy as a loon all her life." Then he seemed to remember my question.

"Would a come sooner," he explained, "but I ain't learned her trick yet. She comes any time she's a mind to, but I got to wait until I'm called before I can make it."

I was almost weeping with relief. "Well, now that you're here, let me out of this place if you can."

He moved towards the invisible wall, but Effie was on him like a tiger, screeching and clawing. I reached to help him. I knew her strength, but he motioned me away.

So I stood in this nightmare while two spirits, ghosts, or whatever you wish to call them, fought savagely.

FOR a while she seemed to be getting the best of it. But Jock was a man, with a man's strength; and slowly, he subdued her. Finally, he took off his belt; an old rope twisted about his middle. With this he tied Effie's hands and feet while she scurried, coughed and yelled to be free.

Then he went to the wall. I saw his muscles heave as he moved the transparent logs; heard the thud as they dropped to the earth, but not a thing could I see.

"All right," he said when he had finished, and motioned for me to leave. I started to run. "Take the turkeys if you wish," he said.

But I looked at the game with loathing. During the night it had bred worms and stank!

I rushed towards the wall. It was gone. I leaped over the fence and turned to thank Jock. What could I do for the fellow? How COULD I thank him?

BUT HE WASN'T THERE!

Three feet from me I saw the turkeys, and beside the place where he had bound Effie were the squirrels. Leaning against a sapling was my gun. One hundred and fifty dollars worth of

gun. There, too, was my hunting knife and wallet. It must have fallen out of my pocket while I struggled with Effie.



In the wallet was about four hundred in bills, my driver's license, social security number, and several receipts and pictures that I valued highly.

But I valued my life more highly. I heard Effie snarl. "He got away eh?" For a minute, I

thought I felt her cold hand reaching for mine from her side of the fence.

I turned and rushed frantically from the place.

I was sobbing helplessly as Rafe met me. He handed me a vacuum bottle of coffee, then poured it for me as he saw I was unable because of the shaking of my hands.

"Didn't know if you'd git out alive or not," he said. "When you didn't come in last night I knowed she'd found you."

"Why didn't you stop me?" I asked indignantly.

"Stop you!" His voice was almost angry. "I warned you didn't I?"

"But you should have told me."

"You wouldn't a believed," he said shortly.

I started to expostulate, but stopped. He was right of course. I **WOULDN'T** have believed. And neither would Oscar, Grady or anyone believe me. I must have imagined it anyhow, or dreamed it. What a fool thing to dream.

"Rafe," I said, suddenly chummy. "I left my gun and wallet inside the old fence. I'll give you a hundred dollars to get them for me."

"Get 'em yourself," he grunted. "I wouldn't try for a thousand."

Well—I left them there. It was silly of course. But how did I know? Perhaps there was some—charm on the place. I might dream again.

After a hot bath in a tin tub behind the kitchen stove, I took the mirror to shave. My face—my cheek felt sore as if a briar were sticking in it.

I raised the brush to lather my chin, but stopped. There **WAS** something in my cheek. Looked like a—thorn—I hoped.

Carefully, I took my knife and removed it.

It was a claw like, round, dirty fingernail. Too small to fit any of my fingers, besides none of them were torn.

I still have the fingernail. It is here, on my desk now, under glass.

I took to reading more, writing, delving into old books, collecting odd stories and curious objects.

Hunting?

Well, I didn't bother to hunt again ever.

And people may think it odd, but on Thanksgiving day we have ham or roast at our house. Of one thing you can be sure. We never have, and never will as long as I am head of my house, have the traditional bird.

You see, since she loved them so much, I just—couldn't eat one of Effie's pets.