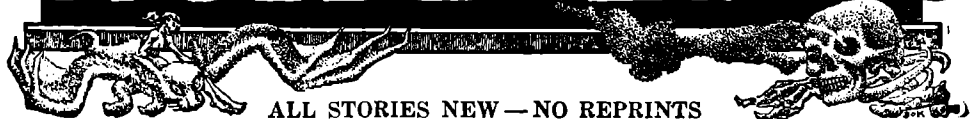


# Weird Tales



JULY, 1946

Cover by Matt Fox

## NOVELETTES

SHONOKIN TOWN . . . . . Manly Wade Wellman 8

*The Shonokins are real—real almost-men with peculiar knowledges and sciences, fearing only their own dead*

CATSPAWS . . . . . Seabury Quinn 46

*A girl attacked at night by some creature; not human, not animal, but monster*

## SHORT STORIES

THE NIGHT . . . . . Ray Bradbury 23

*This was a summer night that waded deep in time and stars and warm eternity—a night when reason ended and universal evil took over*

THE WINGS . . . . . Allison V. Harding 28

*One never knows what incredible forces are ready to loose themselves upon the world at any moment*

THE MAN WHO TOLD THE TRUTH . . . . . Jim Kjelgaard 38

*"From this night on everything you say will come true, so watch your language!"*

I'LL BE GLAD WHEN I'M DEAD . . . . . Charles King 60

*It's written that pint-sized demons can only give out with vest pocket spells!*

THE CINNABAR REDHEAD . . . . . Harold Lawlor 64

*Life is full of problems and in the lonely hush of a foggy night ghosts become one of them*

THE SHINGLER . . . . . E. L. Wright 72

*Next time you have work done on your house be sure you don't get the Shingler!*

FOR LOVE OF A PHANTOM . . . . . Stanton Coblentz 81

*The room was a musty six-by-eight where unearthly shadows seemed to dance in the gas-light*

GHOST . . . . . P. Schuyler Miller 86

*It is a pleasure to remember sometimes how certain people died*

## VERSE

MOON PHANTOMS . . . . . Dorothy Haynes Madle 45

LONG WATCH . . . . . Dorothy Quick 85

SUPERSTITIONS AND TABOOS . . . . . Irwin J. Weill 59

THE EYRIE AND THE WEIRD TALES CLUB . . . . . 94

*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.*

Published bi-monthly by Weird Tales, 9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York 20, N. Y. Registered as second-class matter January 26, 1940, at the Post Office at New York, N. Y., under the act of March 3, 1879. Single copies, 15 cents. Subscription rates: One year in the United States and possessions, 90c. Foreign and Canadian postage extra. English Office: Charles Lavell, Limited, 4 Clements Inn, Strand London, W.C.2, England. The publishers are not responsible for the loss of unsolicited manuscripts although every care will be taken of such material while in their possession. Copyright, 1946, by Weird Tales. Copyrighted in Great Britain. 173 Title registered in U. S. Patent Office.

PRINTED IN THE U. S. A.

Vol. 39, No. 6

D. McILWRAITH, Editor.

LAMONT BUCHANAN, Associate Editor.

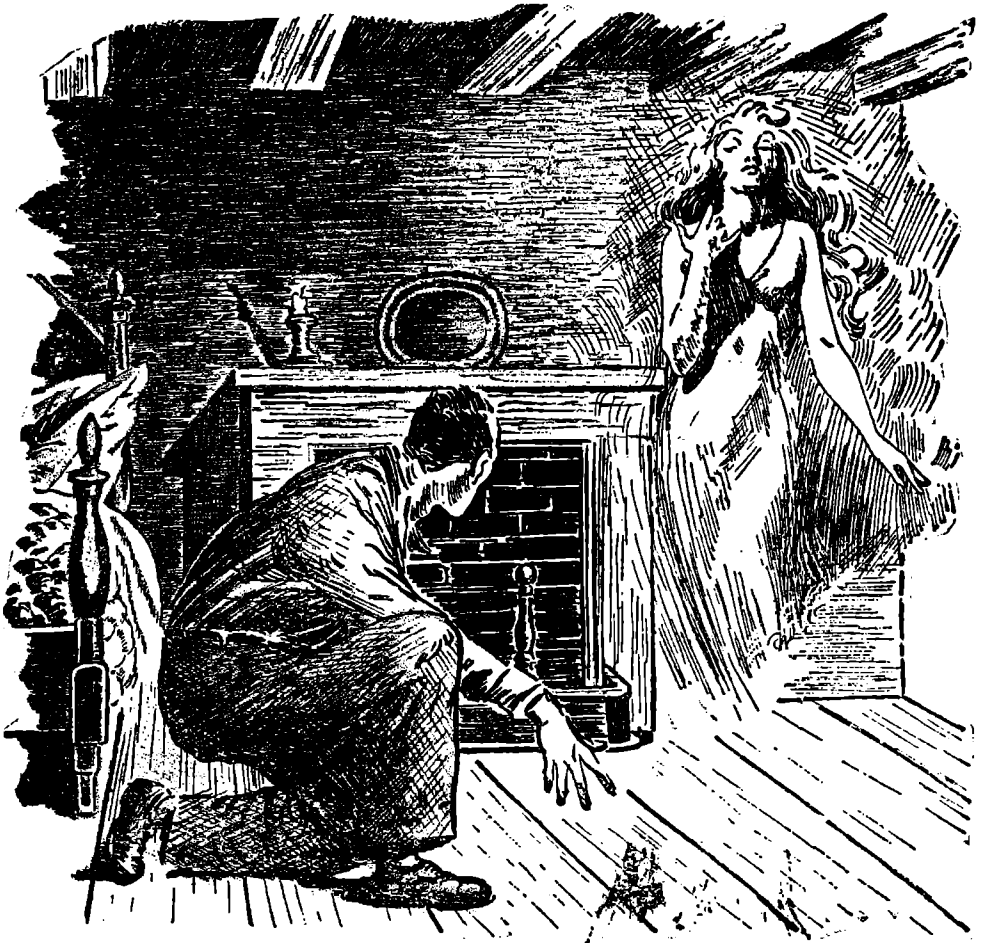
# For Love of a Phantom

*Must ghosts always, always be grim, terrible, revengeful creatures?*

**T**HERE were five of us in all, old friends who convened regularly at the "Bachelors' Club"; and we had been discussing the subject of ghosts. I do not know what led us into this theme, unless it were the uncanny, blustery autumn night; yet four of us had had our stories to tell—

the usual harrowing, incredible tales of weird sounds heard near graveyards, of midnight prowlers, haunted houses, and invisible hands and presences. All the while the flames in the great fireplace, burning to red embers, lent emphasis to our mood by the fitful shadows they cast across the room.

By **STANTON A. COBLENTZ**



Heading by **A. R. TILBURNE**

The fifth of the group, speechless in a corner, listened to our tales with a steady, faintly whimsical smile. In his blue, vaguely dreamy eyes there was an enigmatical light; and in his very silence there was something that irritated and provoked us.

"What's the matter, Evanson?" I finally asked. "Maybe you don't like our childish drivelings?"

Evanson's smile broadened into one of hearty good humor. "No, it's not that I'd call them drivelings. It's that I was thinking of another kind of ghost story entirely."

It seemed to us that the smile was drowned in a fugitive sadness, before he offered to explain, "You see, I can't quite put myself into the mood of those ghosts of yours—grim, terrible, revengeful creatures. Ghosts, in my experience, have been kindly and lovable."

"Your experience?"

Again that sad light flickered and faded. "Yes, in my experience. You'll think I'm crazy—sometimes, when I remember it, I'm inclined to think so myself—and yet I did once meet a ghost that wasn't at all of the hair-raising variety. At least, not after I got to know her. The adventure was the strangest and most precious of my life."

"Out with it!" we all urged.

**H**IS manner was serious, almost solemn as he leaned forward, chin propped upon palm, and slowly commenced, "It's something I rarely speak of, yet was as real as this room we're sitting in. It all happened about fifteen years ago, when I was still a youngster. I had just left my small-town home in Iowa, and had come East to look for work in the city, and was still jobless and desperate when the big event occurred.

As my pocketbook wouldn't allow much, I had taken a room in the oldest, dingiest part of town. I can remember that room as if I lived there yet—a musty, six-by-eight little box, with high ceiling, and torn greenish-brown wallpaper where unearthly shadows seemed to dance whenever I turned on the gas-light. Yet that room knew some of the saddest and most exalted moments of my life. For it was there that I met Vera."

"Vera?" someone echoed.

The speaker paused long enough to sigh reminiscently.

"Vera is the name I gave her. I was never to hear any word from her lips. Had she really any name? I do not know. From first to last, she was like some mysterious superhuman essence. But let me get on with my story. Even before we met, I suspected her presence—or, rather, I suspected the presence of something queer and unaccountable. I'm sure it was not my imagination, for I've never been subject to what you'd call attacks of nerves; but I couldn't help being upset sometimes at night when I would hear an odd rustling as of a skirt swishing, or a creaking as of someone entering lightly. Of course, I tried to reason that it was only a mouse burrowing in the closet, or else the sagging timbers of the old house; but, at the same time, a creepy sensation would go shivering down my spine, and there were moments when I leapt up in dread, with the sense that something weird and invisible was standing at my elbow, or leaning over my bed, or entering at the door or through the walls. Like most people, I had always laughed at yarns of haunted houses; now, however, I can tell you I was not ready to laugh, but often went up to my room trembling, and with a cold perspiration coming out on my face. If I could have afforded lodgings elsewhere, I would have moved in a hurry.

"Yet my first meeting with Vera didn't occur during any of those spells of chicken-heartedness. One November evening—very much like tonight it was, with the wind a roaring tempest, and the dead leaves dancing amid flurries of snow—I had been roaming the city dejectedly. Try to picture my mood: all that day, and all the day before, and all the day before that, I hadn't spoken with a soul, except to ask for work and hear a merciless 'Nothing doing!' snapped in reply. Not one friendly voice or face had greeted me. At last, feeling like a homeless puppy, I returned to my room, shivering, drooping in despair. I didn't notice anything uncanny, and didn't hear or feel anything unusual as I flung myself down upon my couch and buried my face in my hands.

"It is hard to say what impulse urged me to look up almost immediately. But I did

look up—and what I saw made me gape and stare. I was not frightened—no, I was not, though more startled than ever before in my life. In the opposite corner, beside the door among the shadows only half dispersed by the gas-light, stood the figure of a woman!

"Or rather—and this was the remarkable thing—there stood the upper half of a woman, her face and bust perfectly outlined, but the lower half of her seeming to melt into a mist. Even her upper members had a filmy, intangible quality, as though she had been made out of some faintly luminous vapor. She was someone I did not remember having seen before—a girl of nineteen or twenty, with the most wistful, piquant look I had ever observed; her features were small and exquisitely proportioned, and when they smiled it was as if all heaven had opened up. You'll think me the victim of some poetical frenzy if I attempt to describe her smile, which had such a flooding grace and radiance that I could have believed—yes, you'll laugh to hear it, for I am not a religious man—I could have believed some angelic presence stood before me.

"I suppose it was only a few seconds before the figure had faded back into the darkness, but those few seconds were packed with more impressions than whole days. Stunned as I was, I saw that she was something more than a mere hallucination—no, she was an actual individual, no less than I. From the first, I never doubted her reality. Even as I watched, she began to move; or, rather, to drift through the air, to glide toward me with a slow, effortless motion; and, at the same time, her expression altered slightly, her smile broadened and deepened, and was fixed upon me with a sorrowful and benignant look, as if she were somehow yearning toward me.

This impression was confirmed when her arms, emerging from the haze, were lifted toward me as though in pleading. While I stood staring at her dumbfounded, she gradually approached, until her form, venturing closer into the gas-light, seemed to become transparent, and suddenly vanished. But at the same instant—you'll say I was dreaming, but I know I was not—I felt a light touch as of a caress upon my cheek."

WITH a faint sigh, the speaker paused, and sat staring absently into the fire-light, where the flames were dying amid a red glare; while, from without, the wailing and complaining of the wind was borne to us more dismally than ever.

"I simply don't know how to account for it," Evanson continued, "guess I must have a queer temperament, but from that moment I felt soothed and relieved. I did not feel forlorn or lonely any more; the earth had ceased to be an empty, uninviting place; it was as if I had caught glimpses of great unseen worlds of love and kindness that lay all about me.

"What I did not understand was that my experience was only beginning. An hour later, after I had undressed and turned off the gas-light, I noticed a faintly luminous patch in the corner; and, after a second or two, that patch resolved itself into the same phantom shape. The same smile was upon the face, a smile of great kindness and longing; and I thought that the girl nodded, almost as if to a friend. I did not tremble as she drew near, although my heart did leap and thump, and I can't tell you what an exultation was within me, something that—yes, let me admit it—something that was mighty close to dawning love.

"Standing there in the darkness close to my cot, the woman of mist drew to within a foot of me. I saw her arms reach out, her hands upraised as though to take mine, while in her eyes there was such a yearning brightness that I could have believed her tears of joy to be flowing across actual lids. On an impulse, my hands were flung out to take hers, so near to her that our fingertips might have touched—then, where she seemed to be, they felt nothing at all!

"Still smiling her heavenly smile, she faded back into the darkness.

"That night I saw her in a dream. But now her lips quivered into speech, and I felt her arms about my neck; and low words of love were in my ears and on my tongue, and I held her close, and whispered things such as I had never said to any girl before. And happiness surrounded me like a blessing, and my senses were held as in a magic spell—until all at once, like a vapor, like a vision, she passed from my arms, and

I awoke. I am not ashamed to confess that, as I stared out into the gray dawn, the teardrops were still hot upon my cheeks.

"BUT I was to see her again, and yet again and again. Nightly she would come to my room; sometimes for many minutes she would stand by my cot, staring at me with the same sweet yearning look; sometimes, when reading or writing, I would turn about in my chair, to find her hovering behind me; and sometimes she would be seated at my side, and would lift her hands as though to caress me. But never a word came from between her lips, although I, in a sort of new-found rapture, would hold out my arms, and murmur, 'Sweetheart! Sweetheart!' She, in response, would always smile, and I told myself she heard and understood.

"Strange as it will seem to you, I was coming to feel toward her more than ever toward any woman of flesh and blood. There wasn't one of the pangs, the exultations, the longings of love that I didn't experience—all things, except its sweet fulfillment! That dingy room in that dreary old house was coming to be home to me; I would rush back to it of evenings expectantly, awaiting my first sight of Vera; and if she did not appear at once, I would feel like one disappointed at a lovers' rendezvous; but when she did come, it would be as if a wind of joy had swept over me. And she too, I thought, took pleasure from those meetings, though they were fleshless as a meeting of wave and starbeam; the wistful, faintly melancholy look, which I had at first observed on her face, began to vanish; and in its place a contented expression appeared. We were happy—she, the shadow-woman, the airy nothing; I, the friendless, lonesome youth — though perhaps never had a stranger attachment been known. Do not tell me there is no ideal love! I knew it then, and was to know it during all those three enthralling, unearthly months. . . .

"Three months—that was all. Today it seems to me like a dream that could not have happened—yet it embraced a whole life within itself. Sooner or later, the end had to come—but it did come even earlier than need be. How many times I had re-

turned to my room in trembling and fear, lest she be gone; and how many times, when the dear, familiar features had reappeared, I had been ready to cry out in wonder and thanksgiving! I could not have known that I myself was to take flight.

"By this time, I was adapting myself to the city; I had work, and prospects of advancement; and I would not have exchanged my dismal room for Aladdin's palace. Just the same, fate was to drive me out. One day there came word that my mother lay critically ill in our home-town many hundreds of miles away; my father's excited message urged my return post-haste. What a shock as I stared at the telegram! Of course, there was only one thing to do; and though I loved my mother and was pierced to the heart by the news, I was moved almost as much by the thought of leaving the city—and Vera. Just as if by some mysterious divination, I suspected that I would never see her again. 'Dearest,' I remember saying, among other mad things on our last evening together, 'dearest, I must be going. I am needed away from here. I will come back as soon as I can.'

"She nodded in a sort of melancholy resignation; and the old yearning wistful expression flitted once more across her face, and her arms were lifted toward me as if in pleading. As I took a last step toward her, with the impulse to embrace her as though she had been a breathing woman, she waved as if in farewell, and slowly began to fade, at first her breast and arms, then her neck and vague dark hair, then her face itself, until only the eyes were left, looking out at me caressingly, luminously, like a blessing and a reproach . . . before they too were lost amid the gas-lit shadows. An hour later, I had boarded the train for home."

THE speaker paused, and a long silence followed. The wind still screamed and sneered; the red embers in the fireplace waned unnoticed to a coaly black; but Evan-son, still brooding, sat staring before him with dream-filled misty eyes.

"Ever see the girl again?" one of us finally asked.

Evan-son shook his head, and resumed in lifeless tones, "My mother's illness was

slow and lingering. It was six months before I could revisit the city. Even then, I hastened back eagerly—yes, joyfully, hoping to return to my old lodgings. But I was to receive a great shock. The building where I had lived, antiquated barn that it was, had been torn down. Already a new edifice was rising in its place! And at the sight of this the thought swept over me once more, as clearly as if I could read the future, that I should never see Vera again. . . .

"And yet, despite that vivid premonition, I did hope to see her. I engaged quarters near at hand, and waited, waited. But she was never to come to me. And that, if you want to know it, explains one of the secrets of my life. It explains why I'm a single man today. I'm afraid that, subconsciously,

I compare every girl I meet with Vera—and, somehow, the reality cannot match the phantom."

Another long silence intervened.

"After all," I said, while one of us started passing the glasses, "there is one point you haven't made plain. Who was Vera? Usually, in such cases—"

With a hasty wave of the hand, Evanson cut me short. "Yes, I did make investigations. A few months before my arrival, a girl of about nineteen—a young art student—occupied the room I had taken. They say she had been abandoned in love—and one day she was found dead, with all the chinks and crannies of the room stuffed up, and the gas escaping. Her photograph bears a remarkable resemblance to Vera."