

A MAGAZINE OF THE BIZARRE AND UNUSUAL

Weird Tales

REGISTERED IN U.S. PATENT OFFICE

Volume 30 CONTENTS FOR AUGUST, 1937 Number 2

Cover Design M. Brundage
Illustrating a scene in "Thing of Darkness"

Thing of Darkness G. G. Pendarves 130
A desroying, ravening Thing brought death and terror to Troon House

The Abyss Under the World J. Paul Suter 154
Three men were precipitated into an adventure as astounding as ever befell mortal men

The Mandarin's Ear Frank Owen 172
A curious story about a Chinese mandarin who had the ear of a thief grafted in place of his own

World of the Dark Dwellers Edmond Hamilton 179
A thrilling weird-scientific story of the dreadful creatures that tyrannized over a distant world

Ghost Shadows Clarence Edwin Flynn 200
Verse

The Last Pharaoh (end) Thomas P. Kelley 201
A story of the weird doom that enmeshed two lovers in the Pharaoh's castle of gloom

Sea-Wind Minna Irving 223
Verse

The Will of the Dead Loretta Burrough 224
An unusual weird tale, of a mother's malign resentment of her son's wife

The Soul-Eater Robert E. Howard 231
A posthumous poem by a popular writer of weird tales

Gica Lacilu, the Magician Ernst Wurm 232
Retribution overtook the boyard who oppressed his serfs intolerably

The Jest of Droom Avista Henry Kuttner 235
A brief, poetic tale about an alien city and a metallic doom

The Terrible Parchment Manly Wade Wellman 238
The author describes this as "a Necronomicon story to end all Necronomicon stories"

Weird Story Reprint:

 The Statement of Randolph Carter H. P. Lovecraft 242
 Reprinted by popular request from an old issue of WEIRD TALES

The Eyrie 248
A department wherein the readers express their opinions

Published monthly by the Popular Fiction Publishing Company, 2457 East Washington Street, Indianapolis, Ind. Entered as second-class matter March 20, 1923, at the post office at Indianapolis, Ind., under the act of March 3, 1879. Single copies, 25 cents. Subscription rates: One year in the United States and possessions, Cuba, Mexico, South America, Spain, \$2.50; Canada, \$2.75; elsewhere, \$3.00. English office: Otis A. Kline, c/o John Paradise, 86 Strand, W. C. 2, London. The publishers are not responsible for the loss of unsolicited manuscripts, although every care will be taken of such material while in their possession. The contents of this magazine are fully protected by copyright and must not be reproduced either wholly or in part without permission from the publishers.

NOTE—All manuscripts and communications should be addressed to the publishers' Chicago office at 840 North Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Ill. FARNSWORTH WRIGHT, Editor.

Copyright 1937, by the Popular Fiction Publishing Company.
COPYRIGHTED IN GREAT BRITAIN



WEIRD TALES ISSUED 1st OF EACH MONTH

Gica Lacilu, the Magician*

By ERNST WURM

Retribution overtook the tyrant Romanian boyard, who oppressed the serfs intolerably

THAT is what his neighbors still call him. But Gica Lacilu, a big, plump old citizen of seventy, who lives comfortably with his placid old wife under the fragrant acacias in the outskirts of the little village of Jalomitza, in southern Rumania, does not look like a man with a mysterious past. Still, when I asked him about the tales which the admiring villagers told me of his youth, he was flattered and confirmed them, adding details which made nearly complete the incident which earned him his title of Magician. Nearly complete, I say; for he was notably reticent about one part of it, and left the story, so to speak, without its key. A mystery story without its clue is always exasperating; but I will set down all I know of the case, and the reader's imagination may be able to give it a certain completeness.

Even as late as when Rumania won her independence of Turkey, a date still within the memory of Gica Lacilu and of some of the rest of us, the country was barbarous and lawless to a degree that western Europe and America can scarcely conceive. Men were born, lived precariously and died without benefit of clergy, physicians or police. The population was three-fourths illiterate, and superstitions were rife. The brutal feudal landlord Gioranii de Joos tyrannized over the Jaromitza peasants with a mad violence that would have been impossible if the country had had any real organization, or

the population any real information as to their rights and the strength of their united arms.

Gioranii de Joos had had a wife, but she had died of terror and heart-break years before. He had never had any children except illegitimate children of whose existence he was as ignorant and as careless as a drunken auto-driver might be of the dogs and chickens he leaves maimed and helpless in his wake. He had a way of riding through one of his villages and scanning with his sharp black eyes the face of every woman he passed. If his glance fell on a particularly appetizing young matron or a fresh and graceful maiden, he would pull up his horse, call the terrified woman to his side, and order her to bring to his castle, at such and such a time, some contribution in kind, eggs or vegetables or the wonderful, juicy melons for which the region is famous. This, short of death, was the most horrible disaster that could befall a countrywoman of the Wallachian hill country, but the universal fear of Gioranii was so cringingly abject that the order had never been disobeyed.

ONE day Gioranii de Joos rode rapidly around the hill along whose base straggled the long street of Jalomitza, and came without warning on a young girl who, when she saw him, turned red and then pale and tried to look in the other direction and seem oblivious of his presence. The rider with the ugly eagle-

* Adapted by Roy Temple House from the German.

beak and the hard lips stopped and stared at the girl. But she quickened her pace and ran into one of the huts at the end of the street.

Gioranii's brow clouded with annoyance at the hint of disobedience. He turned and noticed an old peasant standing near, trembling with apprehension, but careful, since he was caught in the trap, to save his own skin by truckling to the tyrant. The Boyard called to the old peasant:

"Did you see a girl go into that house?"

"Yes, Your Honor."

"Who is she?"

"She is Marivara Guip, daughter of Xerxe Guip."

"Call her out at once!"

The old man ran to the house as fast as his cowardly old legs would carry him, and disappeared inside. The Boyard waited. After a delay of several minutes, two peasants came out of the house, but no woman.

Gioranii choked with indignation. "I didn't send you to bring out a man!"

"This is Xerxe Guip."

"What do you want of me, Xerxe Guip?"

"My daughter cannot come out."

"She just ran in, on good legs. Has she forgotten how to walk?"

"She cannot come out, because Gica Lacilu has forbidden her to."

"And who is Gica Lacilu?"

"He is my daughter's bridegroom."

The Boyard ceased raging and smiled, a cold, terrible smile. He dismounted from his horse, pushed the peasant rudely aside, and strode over the threshold of Xerxe Guip.

A young peasant, a magnificent figure of a man, with a desperate black look on his handsome face, stepped across the Boyard's path. The mad rage welled up in Gioranii again, and he lifted his whip. Then he must have realized, even through

his blind fury, that this man was not ready to crumple before him as the other peasants had always done, and that the young giant's fist could strike a hard blow. He paused, and considered the situation.

The hut was only one great room, and over Gica Lacilu's mighty shoulder the Boyard could see Marivara Guip cowering in the far corner. As if the young champion between them did not exist, the tyrant called to the girl:

"Why didn't you come out when I called you?"

"Because she belongs to me and not to you, Boyard!"

The young man had spoken, quietly, unflinchingly. Gioranii could scarcely believe his ears. These words from a peasant, from one of his serfs, his chattels! Gioranii ground his teeth, and he lifted his whip again. But once more he mastered his rage. Still ignoring the audacious peasant, he spoke to the girl in the back of the room, in a tone of icy command:

"Tomorrow, at midday exactly, you will bring to the castle the two finest and ripest cantaloupes in your father's field. At midday exactly, do you hear? And wear a better gown than the one you have on now!"

He turned abruptly, and without another word he strode haughtily back to his horse. His long, crooked legs swung themselves in place again around the belly of his mount, and without deigning to cast a glance at the fearful villagers whose curiosity strove with their apprehension as they slunk out of his path, he scattered clouds of dust over them as he galloped down the village street.

FOR young Gica Lacilu the die was cast. He knew that nothing could make his case any worse with the Boyard than it

already was, and he was determined to defend the honor of his bride with his own life, if necessary. Bellowing as furiously as the half-mad lord of the manor had done, he swore that he would kill the girl if she carried anything to the castle, tomorrow or any other day. But old Xerxe Guip whimpered and protested that the young man was calling down on the heads of all the family persecution, ruin and perhaps death.

Death? Instead of frightening young Gica Lacilu, the word seemed to inspire him and please him. All at once he grew cheerful and compliant, and agreed without further argument that the best solution of the matter would be for Marivara to take the cantaloupes to the Boyard at noon of the next day.

In the forenoon Gica came for the girl and insisted on choosing the cantaloupe for her. Gica was a famous judge of cantaloupes, and he spent a long time examining the finest-looking specimens in the whole field, before he finally brought in two magnificent big melons. But as he was in the act of handing them to the girl, he seemed to be struck suddenly by a new idea.

"Wait a minute," he said, "till I take them to the brook and wash them off, so that they will be perfectly clean and very inviting. You must urge him to eat one of them at once. Tell him they are the juiciest melons we have ever had, and *make* him taste it! You *must* make him taste it at once, girl! If you don't I'll——"

And the young man's face grew so dark and threatening that the girl shuddered, and hastened to assure him that she would obey him to the letter.

Bravely young Marivara made her way to the ogre's den, carrying her two luscious big melons. She was taken at once to Gioranii. The brute paid no attention

to her burden, but devoured the beautiful girl with his eyes, and drove the servants furiously out of the room. Marivara evaded his grasp, and held out to him persistently the larger and more perfect of the melons, till the Boyard, who was a great glutton, laughed almost good-naturedly at her flattering interest in his palate, sliced the tempting fruit open with his dagger, and thrust great, fragrant, refreshing fragments of the delicious flesh into his enormous, slobbering mouth.

Then when the joy of eating began to pall, he rushed at the girl. But Marivara escaped him. And when, with her lace collar torn and her long hair falling in disorder over her shoulders, she fled out of the room and ran through the long hall and out into the court, Gioranii was able to follow her only as far as the stables. All at once he was seized with frightful pains and fell to the ground roaring in agony. He writhed and cursed and bawled for help, but he was in a state where no one could help him but God. Three hours later, three hours of hideous suffering, he died. And no one, in the castle or out of it, mourned his death.

"What had happened to him?" I asked the peasants who first told me the story.

"Gica Lacilu had laid a curse on him," was all they would tell me.

"What had happened to him?" I asked old Gica when *he* told it.

"I had laid a curse on him," said Gica, "just as the others told you."

And this was all I was ever able to get out of him. And I might have been more insistent if, in order to profit by my stay in Wallachia, I had not bought and read with a good deal of care a German volume on the history, ancient and modern, of the Vlachs or Wallachs who inhabit that part of Romania. A paragraph from the last chapter of this useful work,

a chapter which treats of the manners and customs of the modern Wallachs, runs as follows:

"As a protection against the fevers which are epidemic in this country during the trying hot summers, the peasants of Wallachia brew a strong and very mysterious drug whose formula seems to have been successfully kept a secret from outsiders. It is said to be a mixture of powerful herbs and the juices of various uncanny reptiles and insects, and there are hints that ceremonies much like the incantations of witches play a part in its preparation. It is so powerful that when taken for medicinal effect, a dose consists of only one tiny drop. In any considerable quantity it is a deadly poison. Many

Wallachians appear to make use of it frequently, but with the most careful precautions and with the utmost secrecy. . . ."

I SHOWED the paragraph to a Wallachian acquaintance who knew German. He turned pale and declared vehemently that he had no idea what the ignorant traveler was gabbling about. But it was perfectly clear that I had touched him in a tender spot, and I was very careful not to mention the paragraph to Gica the Magician.

Or to his cheerful old wife, who listened complacently and with something approaching a smirk when her husband told the story of which she was the heroine.