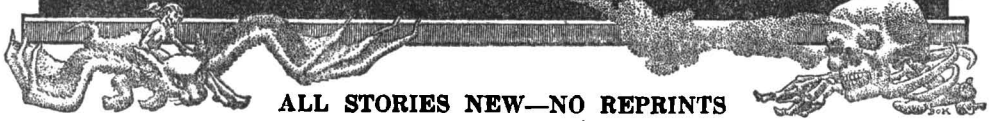


Weird Tales



JULY, 1941

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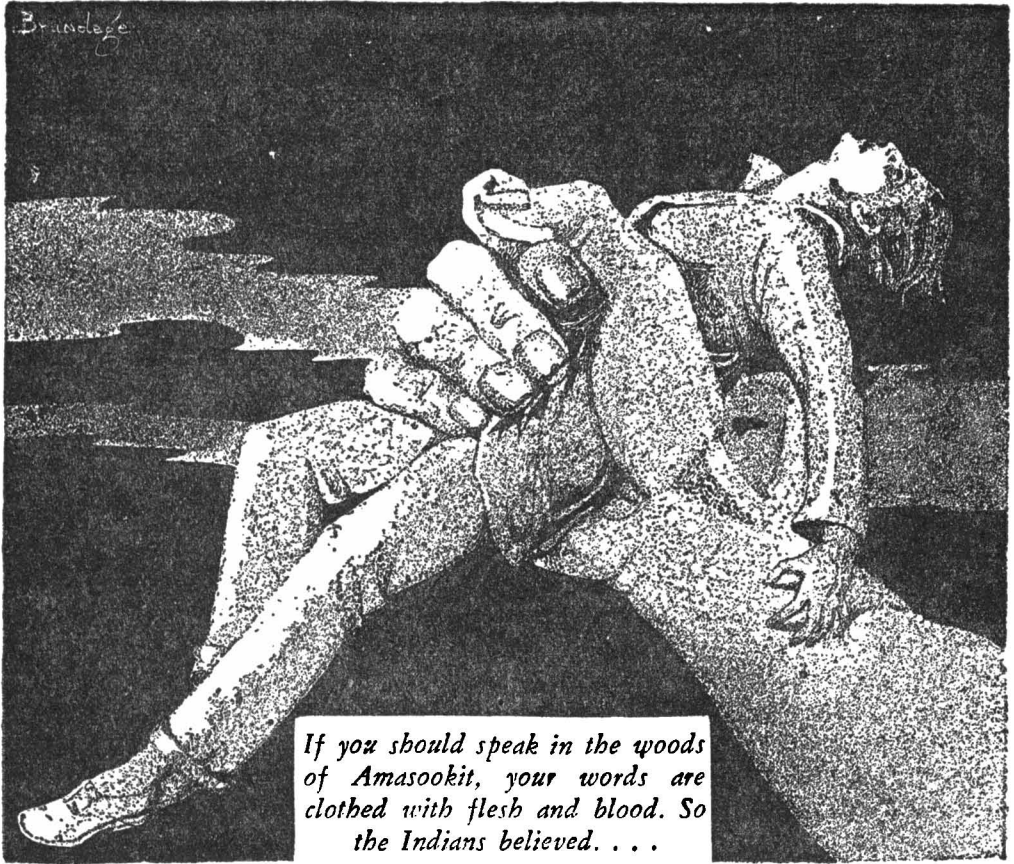
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*If you should speak in the woods
of Amasookit, your words are
clothed with flesh and blood. So
the Indians believed. . . .*

It All Came True in the Woods

By MANLY WADE WELLMAN

When the Horror passing speech
Hunted us along,
Each laid hold on each, and each
Found the other strong.

In the teeth of things forbid
And reason overthrown,
Helen stood by me, she did,
Helen all alone.

—Rudyard Kipling

HELEN took long steps to keep up with her father. Her chubby face, solemn in its pointed blue hood, turned up to him. "What are these woods called, Daddy?" she asked for the fifth time.

"The Indians called them A-ma-soo-

kit," Clay said patiently, blowing out blue smoke on the brisk autumn air. "Can't you remember, Helen? You're six now, and you recited 'Horatius' for the people at the cabin last night."

"'Horatius' is easy," Helen explained, as her short legs in ski-pants made hoppy

haste to stay beside her father. "A-ma-soo-kit," and she achieved it at last, "is not. That's foreign." She was silent, catching her breath, and Clay slowed to a saunter.

No sense in wearing the child out, and the walk along this trail was too beautiful to hurry, anyway; the brush that fenced them in on either hand offered every fall tint that was richest and brightest—lemon, peach, orange, scarlet, royal purple. As for the trees of the wood, taller and more distant, they might have been a sea-floor garden with their welters of warm red and gold clumped on their boughs.

"No, it isn't foreign, Helen," laughed Clay. "Why, the Indians were the first Americans—they lived here for ages before our people ever thought about the *Mayflower*."

"Before George Washington?" That was Helen's ultimate conception of antiquity.

"Ever so long before. They had a right to name these woods."

"What does the name mean, Daddy?"

Clay drew on his pipe. It was a favorite of his, a big-bowled English briar. Quite a time would pass, he mused, before he'd be buying any more pipes in England, what with the war and all—Helen was tugging at his hand to hurry the answer. "Why, I've told you that, too," he reminded. "A-ma-soo-kit—the Trees of Truth. Because the Indians believed that any words spoken here came true."

"Oooo!" Helen was again intrigued. She liked outings of any kind, and had danced when her parents took the cabin on the edge of this forest reserve for fall weekends. Now, if the place had a story attached—"All words come true," she repeated with relish. "You mean, like fairies and dwarfs?"

"Exactly," nodded Clay with the utmost gravity. Imaginative himself, he encouraged when he could any romancing his

little daughter might attempt. "Fairies and dwarfs."

"Oooo!" squealed Helen again, and glanced around searchingly. "Daddy, there was a dwarf right there—with a long beard and a red cap—peeking out from under that bush."

She pointed excitedly. Clay smiled down at her, and led the way around a bend of the trail. The shrubbery was thicker here, and its coloring even richer. Moss made the earth green under their boot-soles.

"It was something to see, then," Clay remarked, still grave. He knew some parents, and despised them, who would call any child who claimed to see dwarfs a liar. But Clay remembered his own childhood, the vividness of his games and imaginings.

Helen put her hands in her jacket pockets, imitating her father. "Are there witches here too?" she pursued her inquiries.

"Mmmmm—no." Her father would like to rule such thoughts out, ever since a night of awful dreams after Betty had heard some Hallowe'en tales. "Whatever witches there were in this country got driven away by Cotton Mather, you know."

"Is Cotton Mather here?" she asked at once.

"Cotton Mather is in heaven," said Clay. "Let's stop while Daddy fills his pipe."

Waiting, Helen glanced up at the half-hazy sky, as though she expected to see the old Puritan divine look out at her, dwarf fashion. "Well," she said, "are there giants in these woods?"

Tamping down the tobacco in the bowl, Clay held a match to it. He shrugged in defeat—what can you do with kids? They simply thrive on stories of excitement and danger and terror. He and Mrs. Clay had tried to hold Helen down to gentle fantasies like Peter Rabbit, but Helen's taste ran stubbornly to Red Riding Hood's wolf and even grimmer gentry. It came to Clay that in keeping the stories mild he might

be frustrating an instinct. That would be bad—what did J. G. Fraser have to say about such childhood tastes? Or Irvin S. Cobb? Or Freud? Clay decided not to deprive Helen further of giants. Bad dreams tonight would be on his own head.

“OH, YES, indeed,” he nodded. “The Trees of Truth would be full of giants. Big ones.”

“Bigger than you?” suggested Helen, who considered her father to be of tremendous stature.

“Much bigger, darling. And bigger than Uncle Frank, or the football boys you saw last week. Twice—three or four times as big. Taller than those trees yonder.”

Helen glanced at the trees, and shivered. “How many eyes do they have?” she almost whispered.

“Only one eye apiece,” improvised Clay promptly, remembering the Cyclops who imprisoned Ulysses. “One eye in the middle of the forehead. But, on the other hand, they have each two or three rows of teeth—sometimes more, and as sharp as swords. And shaggy beards.”

She glanced over her shoulder at the trees, and grew pale.

“I’m afraid of them,” she said.

But Clay had been thinking hard and fast, to deal with just such a contingency. “Don’t worry,” he told her. “The giants can’t hurt us—not when Daddy smokes this magic pipe all the way from England.” He blew out a great cloud of blue vapor by way of punctuation. Because giants are afraid of it.”

“Really truly?” And Helen squinted hopefully at the pipe.

“Oh, yes. Terribly afraid. They’d never dare come near enough to touch us.” Clay began to mix in fragments of half-forgotten Indian lore, learned a generation ago in Boy Scout camp. “You see, the old Indians used tobacco for a charm. Their medicine men smoked it to drive away

bad things—spirits and witches and so on. Giants are bad things, just about the worst. They hate the smell of tobacco. Especially,” and he exhaled a bigger cloud, “when it’s in a magic pipe, like Daddy’s.”

Helen glanced at the trees once more, but not pallidly this time. Her chin was squared.

“Well, then, I won’t be afraid of those old giants over there,” she announced sturdily.

At her games again, thought Clay. “Good girl!” he applauded. “Let’s sit down here, on this nice soft rock, and I’ll tell you more things.”

He had meant to turn the conversation to the autumn colors of the leaves, discussing them in simple terms Helen’s six-year-old mind might digest. But, as she took a seat beside him, she had no such idea.

“What do giants wear, Daddy?” she continued on the subject which just now preoccupied her.

“They wear skins,” he smiled down at her. “Deerskins and bearskins, sewed together like patchwork, to make a piece big enough to cover them.”

Her eyes were still fixed on the middle distance beyond the brush. “What kind of shoes?”

“No shoes, of course. Their feet are too big for shoes, aren’t they now?”

“I suppose so,” agreed Helen seriously. “I can’t see their feet from here—What do giants eat?”

“Men,” said Clay impressively.

“Men who don’t have magic pipes?”

“Yes.” To comfort her, Clay blew smoke. “Nobody had better come among the giants without tobacco.”

“They look scared,” announced Helen, and stood up as if to get a better view of something. “Look at them, Daddy.”

“Yes, yes, you’re right,” nodded Clay, stooping to pick up a very brilliant maple leaf. “Now, take this to Mummy when

we get back, dear. Say that it's a souvenir of this walk in the woods."

"You're not looking, Daddy. Not looking at the giants." Helen was pointing insistently.

To fall in with her humor, Clay lifted his head and looked.

THERE were three of them, and not more than thirty yards away, taller than the topmost branches of the gorgeous red-and-gold trees.

Clay could see them from the waist upward, above the thick trailside brush—lumpy, hairy, skin-clad, like the ugliest of colossal statues come to life. Two had beards—one black, the other grizzled and blond—and the third wore long gun braids hanging like lengths of cable at either side of a gross, hairless face the width of a bureau.

So Helen had not been imagining giants, after all.

In the back of a brain that throbbed and whirled, Clay fenced off a tiny corner for what sensible thoughts he could summon. No time now, he told himself, to wonder how or why. The necessity was to get away—get Helen away, at least. Without rising from where he sat, he caught Helen's shoulder and pressed her back and back, sliding her off the stone.

"Darling," he said, wondering why his voice remained steady, "there are bushes near us. Crawl under them. Far under. If there are thorny branches, get under those. Don't move or make a noise, until Daddy has made those—those things go away from here. When you can't see or hear them any more, get up and run back along this trail we came. Get to the cabin. Once you start running, don't stop—"

He heard the dry leaves rustle as she silently obeyed. She was doing her part. Now he must do his.

Springing up suddenly, as high into the air as he could, he flourished both arms

over his head. At the top of his voice he yelled:

"Hi! Hi! Hi!"

From his gaping mouth the pipe dropped, bouncing on the mossy ground beside the rock. Clay turned and ran his fastest down trail.

At almost the same moment he heard a mighty crashing, as of elephants among the timber. He permitted himself one backward look. The three great towers of flesh had sprung through the brushy hedge and were lumbering after him. All three. None had paused to hunt for Helen.

He felt a thrill of elation. Thus the parent partridge saves its hidden young—by diverting danger and pursuit after itself. He flourished his arms and yelled again. Then he saved his breath for running.

No use.

Their legs were longer than his entire body. One of their strides made four of his. Behind, then above, he heard a furnacelike panting. A grip fastened upon him—fingers as long as his arms. He was lifted from the ground in mid-career. The air rang with a deep stormy growl—a concert of prodigious laughter.

After one convulsive struggle, like a chicken in the jaws of a fox, Clay made himself go slack. He might have a chance later, had best save his strength for that. If there was no chance, a doomed man should have dignity—The three gathered and exulted grossly over him, the two giants and the giantess. To them he was smaller than Helen would be to him like a doll or a baby. He saw at close hand their eyes—each had but the one, deep set in the middle of the low forehead—as large as tennis balls; their mouths like open satchels, all studded inside with rows of pointed sharky teeth; their hairiness, their patchwork skin garments, their bare feet like toe-fringed bolsters. Dangling in mid-air, Clay recognized his own handiwork.

Among the A-ma-soo-kit, the Trees of Truth, any spoken word became fact. The idle improvisations of a father diverting his little one had taken shape, flesh, life.

The one who held him was the oldest, with a mat of buckskin beard turning gray. Some of his myriad teeth were broken. This captor grunted to the younger black-beard and the terrible woman-mountain with the braids. The dark giant drew from his girdle-thong a stone knife as long as a scythe, with which he began to whittle.

First he uprooted a cedar sapling, and pared away its branches with powerful slashing digs of his blade. Then he sharpened the tip, like a pencil. Beside the trail lay a fallen trunk of pine, dead and beginning to rot. Setting down his pole, the young giant caught this log in his huge hands and with a single humping of his muscles wrenched it in two lengthwise. Kneeling, he set the sharpened point of cedar upon the exposed inside of one slab, and began twirling the stake briskly between his palms.

Thus spun, the point drilled a hole. Wood meal crawled out. It smoked from the friction, glowed. The giantess, with a fistful of shredded bark, evoked a flame that greatened and put forth smudge—fire made by rubbing sticks. Fire for what?

Beneath big skilful hands the fuel quickly caught. The flames grew and climbed. The grizzled monster that held Clay nodded his big bushy head in approval. It was a cooking fire.

His huge captor lifted him. The cedar point turned toward his stomach. The other two giants watched with relish, and the tongue of the giantess, like a red banner, came into view to moisten her lips.

This, Clay thought with the corner of his brain kept sensible, was an end that nobody would ever believe. He would never be seen again. Helen, back at the cabin, would tell a story that would not

make sense. Even if searchers found his bones, stripped and crushed—

"You let my Daddy alone!" commanded someone close at hand.

THE voice was young, shrill and indignant. Clay bracing himself to feel the crushing impalement of the cedar stake, knew that voice, and in despair counted his sacrifice as useless—Helen hadn't hidden, hadn't escaped. She had followed his abhorrent captors, was coming among them.

"Let him alone," she was repeating, "or I'll—" There was deadly, confident menace in her little-girl voice.

The grizzled giant lowered both his hands, with the spit in one and Clay in the other.

His huge single eyes widened and protruded grossly. The firelight made it gleam like a very nasty jewel. The fulvid tangle of beard parted, the open mouth writhed over the rows of broken fangs.

Clay managed to turn his head as he hung in the prisoning grip.

He had never realized how small Helen was, how frail. She seemed barely as long as any one of the great bare feet among which she had planted herself. Her arms were set akimbo, her head flung back so that the hood drooped from it, her eyes glittered. So Clay had seen her often before, when her young temper was up. Only one thing was really strange about Helen.

In a corner of her mouth, clamped tight between her six-year molars, rode the English briar pipe he had dropped. Above and around Helen's ruffled hair whirled a wreath of tobacco smoke. Even as he saw all this, she puffed out a bigger, bluer cloud.

"Why did you—" Clay tried to begin, but no words came. He was done for, unable to move or speak. Helen looked, not at him, but at the giants.

"I guess I'll show you!" she squealed at the three staring hulks, just as she might

have defied the biggest and roughest boy in her school.

One giant, the black-bearded one that seemed youngest, was first to move. Very raptly he lifted one foot and set it down again, well behind the other. Then he retreated a second pace. A third. The giant-ess, who had crouched to blow upon the fire, also moved backward on all fours, rather like a tremendous and revolting crab. Helen favored these fugitives with no more than a flick of her bright eyes. She wheeled toward the grizzled one who still stood his ground, holding Clay like a trapped frog.

Rising on tiptoe, Helen hooked one hand in her father's trouser-cuff. "You put him down," she ordered terribly, "or I'll blow some more smoke, and you'll wish you had."

She suited action to word.

Above Clay sounded a great hacking cry, as the giant choked and strangled. He felt himself released, falling heavily to the ground. The odor of burning tobacco smote his nostrils. He heard the heaviest of feet scrambling and stumbling away. He heard Helen laugh, in harsh triumph, as Deborah might have laughed over the fall of Sisera's army.

"They're gone, Daddy," she said brightly. "You shouldn't have dropped your pipe in the first place. But I remembered—giants hate tobacco. I came to save you."

Mist swallowed Clay and he fainted gratefully.

When he awoke, Helen was sitting beside the great dying fire, quite unconcerned. "Did you have a nice sleep?" she asked.

He rose on his elbow. "How long was I like that?"

"Not very long. About five minutes, I guess." She offered him his pipe. "It didn't make me sick a bit."

Clay got up, shakily. Helen took his hand, as though it represented to her the surest pledge of safety. They turned homeward on the trail. "Helen," he said, "what has happened today? Before I—slept?"

"Oh, you mean about those giants? Why, just what you said." She looked up at him with a little wonder that he should not be sure.

Then it had been true, among the Trees of Truth. She, too, had seen and known. "Helen, how were they driven away?"

"With the magic pipe, Daddy. "You know. I smoked it."

This as carefully and clearly as though she were the adult speaking to the child. "Why, Helen," he said, "this isn't a ma—"

Then he broke off. Better to be careful about talking away any protection. He asked another question. "You weren't afraid?"

"Not with the magic pipe. You told me they hated it. And everything comes true in these woods—whether it's about giants or pipes."

Clay agreed in his heart that it was a thing not to be explained—only to tremble over his whole life long. Helen was more fortunate. Six years old in a world of wonders and importance, to her three hungry giants were no more wondrous or important than many another thing.

"Don't tell Mummy about this, Helen," he said. "We'll have it for our secret."

She smiled and nodded, pleased by the word "secret." Clay felt better. That would help matters now. Some time when she was older, and mentioned the business as a childhood memory, he could get her to agree that it was a dream—grotesque, frightening, but only a dream.

"Daddy," said the little girl, "are there squirrels here, too? Because I think I see one."