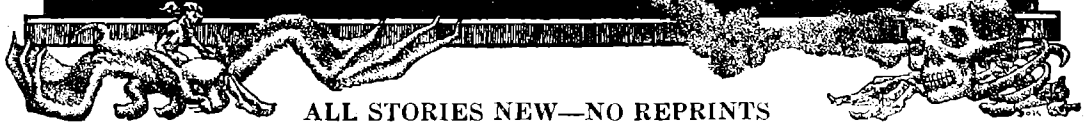


Weird Tales



ALL STORIES NEW—NO REPRINTS

MARCH, 1943

Cover by E. Franklin Wittmack

NOVELETTES

- FLIGHT INTO DESTINY Verne Chute 6
After all, he had a right to go where he pleased—even if he was trying to run down a lost Viking
- UNDER YOUR SPELL Henry Kuttner 72
Other mortals have tried to get the best of the gods, usually with disastrous results

SHORT STORIES

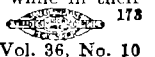
- A BARGAIN WITH THE DEAD Seabury Quinn 22
Would the watching dead enforce a vow made so long ago?
- NO LIGHT FOR UNCLE HENRY August Derleth 37
Is it possible for a dream to make a man do things alien to his nature—like killing?
- THE BOOK AND THE BEAST Robert Arthur 44
If there is no natural explanation to a crime the authorities will invent one, rather than admit the supernatural solution
- THE WHISPERING WINE Thorne Lee 51
Was there a connection between the ghostly babble of voices and those dead things in the forest?
- LIL Mindret Lord 64
It was more than superstition that made her strike him when he tried to open the old make-up box
- A BOTTLE OF GIN Robert Bloch 94
The doctor said there was gin in the bottle—or did he say djinn?
- THE WIND Ray Bradbury 106
He was tracked across the world by the damnedest, biggest prehistoric killer that ever hunted prey
- COREY'S CAT Harry Raymond 114
It was an ideal vacation spot; nothing to worry about. That's what he thought!

VERSE

- A VASE FROM ARABY Leah Bodine Drake 69
- FROST DEMONS Joseph C. Kempe 93
- NECROMANCY Clark Ashton Smith 105
- SUPERSTITIONS AND TABOOS Irwin J. Weill 70
- THE EYRIE AND WEIRD TALES CLUB 121

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, N. Y. Reentered 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, 90¢. 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, 1943, by Weird Tales. Copyrighted in Great Britain. Title registered in U. S. Patent Office.



Lil

By MINDRET LORD



I DOUBT if a bird knows where it's going when it starts out on a migration. It probably doesn't even know it's going anywhere in particular. It just takes off and instinct, or some force we

don't understand, leads it to its destination. I think that's the way it was with Tony Cross, the night he met the woman he married.

Tony was a big, lean, easy-moving lad

*All men look forward to finding the perfect girl
... perhaps it has something to do with the small
case with a gold lock.*

with a tan face and blue eyes that were a little squinty as if to keep out the sun. He left his bachelor apartment and started out, this night, without any very clear idea in his head of what he wanted to do. He felt restless. He didn't want to go on a party, which would have been the easiest thing in the world for him to do, because everybody wanted Tony Cross, at any time. He didn't want to get tight. He didn't want to take in a show. He just wanted to go out. Probably he thought the impulse was his own.

HE WALKED through the park for a while, thinking about nothing—football, maybe, or golf, or fishing off the Florida Keys. Perhaps he walked for an hour or so and then he left the park without noticing the direction, and without any idea of where he was bound for. All he knew was, he didn't want to go home yet, and he didn't want to hunt up anybody he knew. On a corner there was a nice-looking little bar and he thought he would go in and quench the thirst he had worked up. He stepped in—and there was the girl he had been coming toward all the time. Not that he knew that.

She was a honey—there's no getting around that. I'll make the point, though—and you'll see what I mean, later—why shouldn't she have been a honey? Unless I'm wrong it was just a matter of a few words, a crystal shaped like a hen's egg, and the rest was a matter of choice. She had black hair that curled on her shoulders and shone with bronze and purple lights; her skin was like a magnolia petal; the curving of her body was what men dream about, because they are a thankless lot who can never be satisfied by the looks of any normal woman. Her mouth was like the rest of her—too good to be true; and her eyes were too true to be good. As Tony came in the door, she turned and looked at him. He stumbled over his own

feet on the way to the bar where she was sitting alone.

It never occurred to Tony to wonder what a girl like that was doing alone, but I think I can tell you—she was waiting for him. I mean that, literally. She was not just waiting for some good-looking guy with plenty of dough. There was nothing like that about her. No, when the door began to open and she turned her head, she knew whom she was going to see—Anthony Cross.

Her name was Lilith; Tony and she were married about three weeks later.

Lil and Tony got along like a house a-fire. You hear about people who seem to be made for each other but this was it. I guess it wasn't much short of miraculous. Her beauty never got in her way; she liked it because Tony liked it. She kept house easily, she cooked the best food that anybody ever ate, she was the best sport in the world and would do anything you could think of at any time of the day or night; you couldn't spoil her (though Tony tried hard enough). When he took her out, she was a sensation and it didn't go to her head. When they stayed at home, Tony always felt as if he were cheating on all the other men in creation. You will say all this could not be real. I agree with that.

THERE were several mysterious things about Lil. One was that she would never talk about her past. A girl who looked like her would just naturally have to have a past of some important kind—in Hollywood—on Broadway—somewhere. But I had never heard of her and neither had Tony, nor anybody else. You couldn't help wondering why. But if you asked her, she would change the subject so cleverly you wouldn't know she had told you nothing until you were on your way home. Tony never even found out where she was living at the time he met her. I doubt if he cared very much—why would

he? If you find a pearl, you don't worry about what oyster it came from.

Lil had one piece of luggage that was different from the rest of the stuff she brought with her when she and Tony came together.

It was just a small case, about the size of a portable typewriter but the leather was very fine, white parchment, and the lock on it was gold. It was a rather strange lock with a jagged slot that must have taken a remarkably crooked key.

The first time Tony saw the case, he was digging back in a closet for something. He brought it out to the light in the bedroom, and asked, "What's this? I never noticed it before."

Lil took it away from him, before she answered. "It's just an old make-up box of mine. I lost the key long ago."

"What's in it?"

"Nothing, I imagine. Probably some old lipstick."

Tony was one of those men who can't resist a lock. "Let's open it," he said. "I'll bet you I can do it with a hairpin."

She was holding it under her arm and she took a step backwards. "No—you'll ruin the lock. I can get a new key made sometime."

He just wanted to show how smart he was. "Ah, come on! Give it to me. I'll have it open in a minute." And he stuck out his hand.

She struck a blow at his arm that was so fast and so hard that he yelped. Her eyes were like burning coals and for the first time, Tony heard fury in her voice. "This is mine! I don't want it opened! I don't want you to touch it! Ever!"

He stared at her in amazement and suddenly she laughed apologetically. "Oh, I'm sorry, darling," she said. "I didn't mean to sound so—awful. Really, I'm sure the case is empty—but even if it isn't, I don't want to open it, because—well, because I'm superstitious about it."

"Why?" Tony's feelings were still a little hurt, even with her so close to him.

She rubbed the arm she had struck. "It's nothing—honestly, darling. It doesn't concern anybody in the world but me—and—and I'd rather not talk about it. You won't make me?"

It was an appeal to chivalry. "Of course not!" He felt like a dog having suggested it in the first place.

That was the end of the incident. Never again in their life together did Tony see Lil in a temper. As for the dressing case, he wouldn't have touched it with a barge pole. Any woman is entitled to some privacy, and a woman like Lil was entitled to anything she wanted.

But the most important mystery about Lil was something a great deal pleasanter, from Tony's point of view. The first indication he had of it was one night when they were coming home late from a party. Lil was half asleep, curled up beside Tony on the front seat of the convertible coupé; there were hardly any cars on the streets and he was driving along in a drowsy sort of way when all at once she sat up straight and said, "Stop, Tony! Pull up to the curb!"

LIKE a good driver, Tony braked the car before he asked, "Why? What's the matter? Anything wrong?"

She was looking forward, as if she saw something that amused her for a little, but it was only a moment, and then she said, "I just wanted a cigarette."

"Oh—sure." Tony lit one and gave it to her. As she put it to her lips, a gas main under the pavement three blocks ahead blew up with a roar that shook the city.

It was just luck.

Lil was lucky, all right, and she was clever. When she gave Tony advice (which she never did unless he asked for it) it never failed to be good. Sometimes it was

actually brilliant. Tony's stock went up a long way while he had Lil.

I have said that Tony was crazy about Lil, and he was. But a thing like that is a fever, and eventually his pulse slowed down to normal and his temperature slid back to 96.8 degrees. It took about three years, and at the end of that time he was just as mad about Lil as ever—but in a calmer, easier way.

An ordinary woman would probably not have noticed the gradual change. She would have been changing, too—settling down to a long, quiet, happy marriage. But Lil was no ordinary woman.

Once, Tony caught Lil gazing at him curiously, and he asked her, "What's on your mind, darling? Why have you been so thoughtful lately?"

"I've been thinking—" she answered slowly, "I've been thinking that you don't love me quite so much as I hoped you would."

It was not like Lil. He looked at her for a moment to see if she were serious, then he grabbed her up and set her on his lap. "Now what's this? You know I adore you—beyond all the woman in the world. There's nobody like you. And I'm not such a fool that I don't know it. Give me a kiss—and let's hear no more of such nonsense."

She shook her head. "No." She kissed him with those velvet lips of hers. "No. If I left you—or if something happened to me, you'd soon get over it."

The thought of it was enough to scare Tony. "Don't even speak of such a thing! I couldn't live without you. I tell you in all sincerity—if something happened to you, I wouldn't try to go on living. I'd simply die."

She still shook her head. At last she said, "You're a darling, Tony—and the only man I've wanted in—I've ever wanted. But I'd rather have you love me more."

Tony was almost angry. "I couldn't!

I love you as much as it's possible for any mortal man to love!"

She patted him on the cheek and slid off his lap. Apparently she was over her doubts, and the whole thing was forgotten. Tony didn't remember it until about two weeks later—when Lil disappeared.

IT WAS terrible for poor Tony. It did not seem possible that a man could suffer the way he did, and still live. It would have been horrible and tragic if Lil had died in some way—but the uncertainty of the way she vanished was almost worse. Tony came home from the office and she was gone—that's all there was to it. Except for what she had been wearing, she left all her clothes and possessions. Nobody saw her go. There were no clues of any kind. The police and private detectives fooled with the case for a while, and finally gave it up. Tony went on hoping, and at the same time fearing to hope. For a girl as beautiful as Lil to disappear without trace—! It might mean something too awful to imagine, and Tony's brain was sick with imagination. I think he would have ended in an asylum if it had not been for Helen.

Either before or shortly after Lil's disappearance, Helen moved into the apartment next to Tony's; he saw her first on that evening when he was still thinking Lil was probably at a movie and would be home in an hour or two. She came to the door and asked if she could use the telephone, because hers wasn't connected yet.

"Certainly! Certainly!" Tony said. "Come in! By all means!"

Helen was a blond. If Lil was the most beautiful brunette Tony, or any other man, had ever dreamed of, this golden-haired girl was her equal. She was a trifle taller than Lil, and perhaps a little more slender, but she had high, deep breasts and slightly flaring hips, and she carried herself as if she were proud of it. Her face was the

face of a goddess—but not cold, or haughty—just gorgeous.

Helen was a tremendous help to Tony, during the first few months of his agony. He didn't want to see any of his friends because their sympathy was too hard to bear. But Helen lived right next door, and somehow it was easier to talk to her for the very reason that she had not known Lil—and she was an eager listener. Tony poured out his broken heart to her. They dined together practically every night. Then, after four months, Helen tripped over a rug and Tony was there to catch her in his arms.

Tony felt like the worst kind of heel, but he was honest enough to face it: he loved Helen. He loved her as much as Lil. Maybe he loved her more. It was lousy—it was not possible—but it was true.

Now, more than ever before, it was necessary to discover what had happened to Lil. If she could be found, and if she had not left of her own free will, Tony would take her back and do his noble best to forget Helen. If she had gone intentionally, a divorce could be arranged. If she were dead. . . . But what more could be done? The police had scoured the entire country, newspapers and radio had carried the story. It seemed hopeless. Yet, lost somewhere in the maze of Tony's brain was a vague feeling—a presentiment—that the mystery would be solved. It was more than that: he had a curious, hazy notion that if he could only *think*, he could find out the truth, himself. The idea was like a word on the tip of the tongue that cannot be uttered.

One night, Helen asked, "Darling—do you love me?"

It was a rhetorical question, of course. Tony had his arms around her and his face buried in her golden hair. He kissed her on the ear.

"As much as your first wife?"

"More! A thousand times more!"

"Sure?"

"Dead sure!"

"Oh," Helen sighed, "I'm so happy!"

"If only—" Tony began, speaking mostly to himself.

"What, dearest?"

IT WAS Lil on his mind again. If only he could *know*! And what was it that was nagging at his memory? Was there a clue in something she had left behind? But the police had seen and examined every—the *make-up box*! He had forgotten to show them that. In fact, he had forgotten its existence.

Dreamily, Helen was repeating, "What is it, darling?"

"Something I just remembered," said Tony, getting up. "I'll only be a second."

As he left the room, he saw Helen reflected in the big mirror over the fireplace—a golden vision, sheathed in pale green, lying back against the deep, burgundy velvet of the divan—a jewel. A sacred jewel.

Tony closed the bedroom door and struggled to the end of Lil's closet, behind all her hanging clothes. The case was still there. He brought it out and set it on the dressing table. In a drawer were some of Lil's hairpins. Tony bent one of them and went to work. Suppose that inside there was a piece of paper with an address—or some little personal belonging to point the way—

The lock flew open. Tony raised the cover and looked inside. The box was lined with heavy black silk and contained a polished crystal shaped like a hen's egg, that was held in the center of a curious setting—a six-pointed star of some dark metal. The lights on the dressing table struck through the crystal and lit the interior of the box with the colors of the rainbow.

Tony picked up the crystal egg and held it in his palm. It was very cool and surprisingly heavy. Then he saw that some

strange words were engraved in the metal underneath where the egg had been. He read them, speaking the syllables half-aloud. It was all very mysterious—but it was nonsense. Tony put the crystal back in the setting, closed and locked the case and returned it to the far corner of the closet. He had tried his best to recover Lil, even to opening the box that she had forbidden him to touch. This had been the last possible hope. Now he was free. He felt better going back to Helen.

Tony halted in the doorway. There was Lil, lying on the divan, her black hair shining against her white shoulders, her lithe body curving the gown of pale green.

Tony's heart stopped.

Lil looked up, smiling, and held out her arms. "You've been gone so long, dearest—I thought you—"

Tony interrupted, his voice coming from he didn't know where. "For God's sake! Where have you been? How did you—and what is—and where's Helen?"

Lil stared. The words seemed to shock her for an instant. Then she jumped to her feet, her eyes blazing. "What have you been doing in there!" She took a step toward him and saw herself in the mirror.

Choking with rage, she whirled and cried, "You fool! I *told* you not to! Now see what you've done!"