

Weird Tales



ALL STORIES NEW — NO REPRINTS

JULY, 1943

Cover by E. Franklin Wittmack

SPECIAL FEATURE

- HIS LAST APPEARANCE** H. Bedford-Jones 6
A reef in the middle of the ocean is an ideal place for occult manifestations

NOVELETTES

- THE UNFRIENDLY WORLD** Allison V. Harding 28
No one knows what strange lands we pass through on our way to and from consciousness
- RETURN OF THE UNDEAD** Otis Adelbert Kline & Frank Bellnap Long 56
No less than anybody else, a medical student has to be shown that things really do come back from the grave

SHORT STORIES

- THE STREET OF FACES** Frank Owen 20
It was a strange street; it had seen many strange faces—like the man without a face
- LOST** Alice-Mary Schnirring 43
Life and death are never far apart in the enveloping darkness of the blacked-out Atlantic coast
- THE SCYTHE** Ray Bradbury 46
Somewhere there is a field, and a farmer there who unendingly cuts the wheat, his blade moving on day and night—forever!
- LEGACY IN CRYSTAL** James Causey 74
She dreamed that the ring had a funny little red man inside, and he was laughing at her
- YOURS TRULY — JACK THE RIPPER** Robert Bloch 83
When stalking a mad monster, the trailer must take care that he doesn't find himself the trailed — too late!
- TAMARA, THE GEORGIAN QUEEN** Harold Lawlor 96
It's horrible to think that such tragedy can start with gaiety, and just an evil suggestion — no more than that

VERSE

- STRANGE MUSIC** Dorothy Quick 55
- DESERT DWELLER** Clark Ashton Smith 71
- SUPERSTITIONS AND TABOOS** Irwin J. Weill 72
- THE EYRIE AND WEIRD TALES CLUB** 107

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.

PRINTED IN THE U. S. A.

Vol. 38, No. 12

D. McILWRAITH, Editor.

LAMONT BUCHANAN, Associate Editor.

By ALICE-MARY
SCHNIRRING

Lost

*Her dreams were
nightmares and
through them
threaded the little
voice of a child lost
in the darkness.*



ONE or two stars, tiny and remote, appeared silently in the high, pale green sky that arched infinitely over the level marshes, stretching as far as the eye could see until marsh and sky met and fused with a silver thread that was the Atlantic on the horizon. A belated gull wheeled in the still twilight, and once

cried harshly. The stiff grasses whispered tentatively and then were silent, as the first movement of the sunset breeze gently reminded them that darkness, the enveloping darkness of the blacked-out Atlantic coast, was imminent.

The artist had put down her brushes a good half-hour since; now, with a sigh, she

stirred, shook herself impatiently and briskly, and with an almost cheerful alacrity made an untidy bundle of her easel, brushes and camp stool. Carefully carrying her still damp canvas, and clutching the impossible bundle, she began to pick her way homeward across the marsh.

Suddenly, with an exclamation, she stopped short; then, dropping the bundle and canvas with equal disregard, she bent over a little huddled figure on the damp ground.

It was a little girl, soaking wet and shivering. Her little bare feet were blue with cold; over a torn cotton nightgown, small blue hands clutched a blanket, sodden with sea-water, to the scrawny little breast. With a wordless cry of pity, the artist dropped to her knees beside the child, who, in complete silence, regarded her with enormous blue eyes set in a white, pinched face.

"You poor little lamb," crooned the girl, half-sobbing, as with an infinitely quick and graceful swoop she gathered the pathetic little wet huddle into her arms and rocked it there. "How did you get here, darling? What are your people thinking of—or—?"

A tiny thread of voice came from the blue lips. "Is it all right to talk now?" it said. "They won't hear us?"

"Nobody will hear you but Marion, darling," she murmured, kissing the cold little face. "Marion will take care of you; there's nothing to be frightened about now."

"I'm cold," said the little voice; not complainingly, but as one who states a rather uninteresting fact.

"We're going to get you all nice and warm, right away," said Marion, firmly; and, cradling the child in her arms, set off without delay across the darkening marshes to her cottage. Forgotten, her painter's toys lay unregarded in the grass behind her.

A HOT bath, old woolly pajamas of Marion's (ludicrously rolled up in the arms and legs), and a bowl of soup stopped the shivering. At least, the child was no longer shivering, but Marion was—inside—at the appalling emaciation that the hot bath had revealed. Although she was emotional, Marion had plenty of common-sense; and, except for a gentle question that had elicited the baby's name—Moira—she had kept up a cheerful, soothing monologue that comforted the little thing and made no demands on her. Tucked up in Marion's bed, her fawn-brown hair lying like floss on the pillow, Moira turned her head and gravely regarded her. Then, suddenly—her first change of expression—she threw Marion a fleeting, enchanting smile. It was gone almost as soon as it had come, but it transformed the pointed little face, lending it the illusion of baby-rounded cheeks and unshadowed eyes; and it wrenched at Marion's heart like a clawing hand.

"How did you get out on the marsh, darling lamb?" Marion asked softly, bending over the little form almost lost in the bed.

Moira's mouth drooped; her eyes stared hopelessly at the girl, as if searching in darkness, as she whispered, "I was lost—looking for the others."

An alarm bell sounded in Marion's mind. "What others, Moira, baby? Your mommy and daddy?"

The little head moved in negation on the pillow. "The others—like me—the children. Tommy, and Derek—and Betsy. . . ."

"Were they on the marsh with you, darling?" Marion, for a frantic second, thought with horror of other children in the black night, lost on the marsh; but the baby's next words removed that fear, to replace it with a more dreadful one.

"No—in the boat. Tommy—Tommy took care of me. I want Tommy! I want him now!" and to Marion's utter consterna-

tion, big tears rolled down the little face; tears that were the more appalling because there was no accompaniment of sobs.

She had recourse again to the ancient comfort of cradling arms, and as she crooned and babbled reassurances the veined eyelids fell at last over the tear-dark eyes, and the last tears dried on the pitiful sunken little cheeks. Marion kissed the child, and put her gently down on the bed, and covered her up to the chin; noting, with a pang, how cold the cheek still felt to her touch.

Toward morning, Marion herself fell into a restless sleep, twisted uncomfortably in the armchair beside the old-fashioned oil stove.

Her dreams were nightmares; and through them threaded the little wailing voice of a child lost in the darkness. In the chilly hour before dawn, she woke with a start. In her ears echoed a little voice, saying, in a cry of pure delight, "Tommy!" and, completely awake in a second, she turned toward the bed, a smile forming on her lips.

And the bed was empty.

All that day, long after darkness had made mockery of her search, she roamed the salt marshes, mile on mile, calling Moira by name; crying little loving names to the endless undulations of the marsh-grasses, until her voice was only a whisper. At last, stumbling with exhaustion, she went home, and a drugged sleep took her thoughts and twisted them into formless horrors. She woke finally, feeling bruised and leaden; noted without interest that the stove was cold and the oil tin empty, and wearily realized that she would have to go to the village for more. She met no one on the road to the village; an unusual thing, but it made no impression on her apathy. Once, she stopped, and was about to turn

back to the marshes; then the thought struck her that if she found Moira—no, no; when she found Moira—she would need oil to cook with, and to warm the cottage; so she hurried on again, stumbling in her haste.

AT THE outskirts of the village, it did impinge on her consciousness that the streets were unusually deserted; but she brushed aside the faint stirring of curiosity, and went on, breaking into a clumsy run occasionally. Her objective was the wharf, where Mr. Elkins' General Store sold milk, bread, dry goods and oil—oil for the stove to warm Moira, oil to warm chicken broth for Moira.

As she neared the wharf, the explanation of the deserted village became obvious, had she cared. The whole population of Fleetport was clustered like a swarm of bees on the wharf, and an ominous sound, wordless and menacing, rose from them, as they pressed close around something hidden from Marion's sight.

The alarm bell rang again in her clouded mind; loudly, warningly. Acting on an impulse which, not then nor ever after, could she explain, she silently and fiercely pushed a way through the crowd, until, at the water's edge, she stopped short.

Rising and falling gently on the quiet rock of the tide was a battered, sea-scarred lifeboat. In it, like little worn-out toys, were four small bodies. They looked like very young dead birds; poor little mouths open, yellowed skin stretched taut on tiny bones. Two of them lay in the bottom of the boat, covered with a tattered sailor's peajacket; and in the bow, heads pillowed on a life-preserver, a little brown-haired baby girl lay in the arms of a little boy, about eight years old.

Betsy and Derek, Tommy . . . and Moira.