

# Weird Tales

REGISTERED IN U.S. PATENT OFFICE



Published monthly by the Popular Fiction Publishing Company, 408 Holliday Building, Indianapolis, Ind. Entered as second-class matter March 20, 1923, at the postoffice at Indianapolis, Ind., under the act of March 3, 1879. Single copies, 25 cents. Subscription, \$2.50 a year in the United States; \$3.00 a year in Canada. The publishers are not responsible for the loss of unsolicited manuscripts, although every care will be taken of such material while in their possession. English office: G. M. Jeffries Agency, Hopefield House, Hanwell, London, W. 7. 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. FARNSWORTH WRIGHT, Editor.  
Copyright, 1925, by the Popular Fiction Publishing Company

## Contents for November, 1925

- Cover Design ----- Andrew Brosnatch
- The Stolen Body ----- H. G. Wells 581  
*Evil Entity Seizes a Man's Body and Tries to Destroy It*
- The Return of the Undead ----- Arthur Leeds 589  
*A Hospital Vampire—Morphine—and a Ward Full of Children*
- Lukundoo ----- Edward Lucas White 599  
*Every Tale of African Pigmies That Whistled and Jabbered*
- Vale of the Corbies ----- Arthur J. Burks 607  
*The Beating of Unseen Wings Filled the Valley of Ravens*
- Midnight Realism ----- William Sanford 612  
*At Midnight the Phantom Stepped Down and Stabbed Itself*

(Continued on Next Page)

*Every Hundred Years the Woman Stepped  
From the Portrait and Killed Herself*

# Midnight Realism

By WILLIAM SANFORD

*Author of "Grisley's Reception," "The Scarlet Night," etc.*

"MIGHTY glad to see you, old man," exclaimed my host, Jimmy Carson, as he extended his hand and met mine in a hearty shake. "Quite a little storm we're having. I'd have met you, only, as I wired, Dan doesn't get back until very late with the car, and the bus is far more comfortable on a night like this anyway. Guess it will be too wet for partridge shooting tomorrow, but I have plenty of books, and an old billiard table stands in one of the rooms here. You'll make out somehow, and day after tomorrow we'll make it warm for the birds!"

"Don't worry about me, Jim," I answered. "I'm always content under your roof and never have found a lack of pleasure. And then I've never seen your new home, you know, and I'll be mighty glad to spend a few hours tomorrow looking it over. Used to be an old tavern, didn't it?"

"Right!" replied my friend; "and pretty old, too, I can tell you: it is more than two hundred years since this place was built, but it has been kept in good repair. Most of the timber is as sound as the day it was put in. They used real lumber in those times—the profiteering sharks were not so numerous. I bought the place because my boy took such a fancy to it. He is everything to me since my wife died."

I nodded understandingly. "And I'll bet that's an old portrait over in

the next room yonder," I remarked, indicating a large, full-length canvas of a beautiful young woman. "Know who she was?"

"Have a smoke," Carson replied, and extended the box. He selected a cigar himself and we settled ourselves comfortably before the wood fire, for I knew from the look on my friend's face that a story was forthcoming.

"Yes," he replied, "that beautiful creature was the wife, so the story goes, of the man who built this place. He was, besides the owner of the tavern, a painter of some ability, as that canvas shows. He died when still young, it is said, and his grief-stricken widow, unable to endure existence without him, ended her life with a dagger, in that very room where the portrait hangs. Soon after, so the tale goes, an old witch of the town made a prediction that once in every hundred years, exactly on the hour of midnight, the wife would step from the portrait and go through the act of killing herself, just as she killed herself on that fatal night so long ago. I suppose the prediction was believed by many, for the words of the so-called witches were not always taken lightly in those days."

"Well," I drew a cloud of smoke from my fragrant Havana and idly watched the rings float off toward the chimney, "at least one anniversary of the hundred years must have taken place. Did she step from the portrait?"

Jim laughed. "There is a tale that she did," he replied, "but of course in these days no one takes any stock in it. The story goes that a group of men were in this very room making merry with liquor and song when someone told the legend of the picture and the witch's prediction. Everyone got to talking about it, and the tale, with the liquor, worked strongly on their imaginations, for they claimed that on the stroke of midnight the woman *did* step from the portrait and stab herself. That's what liquor will do to some minds. I suppose they would have seen six women, if that had been in the story that helped to work them up." He laughed and re-lighted his cigar, which had gone dead. "And by the way," he added, "that was just a hundred years ago tonight!"

"A hundred years ago tonight!" I said. "Why, then, the portrait is due to come to life again in less than an hour!" And in spite of myself I felt a touch of goose-flesh creep over my spine.

Jim laughed again. "Yes," he said, "and a real act is going to be slated just for our benefit. My boy, Dan, as you know, is a vaudeville performer. His star act is a female impersonation scene, a tragedy scene, in which a woman kills herself with a dagger. He's putting on the act this week over at Kingsby, about ten miles from here. He'll be back any moment now. I've promised to turn off all the lights, and he is going to work up some phosphorus effect and pretend to step from the portrait just as the clock tolls midnight. He's going through with the act just as the woman was said to have done it, and he says he will make it so realistic we'll just about think it's the real thing. Dan has a lot of ability and will give us a real thrill. It's almost half after 11 now. Suppose I turn off the lights, and we can smoke here by the fire. It won't throw any glow into

the next room to spoil the phosphorus effect. Dan will be here in a few minutes. He's going to come from the theater right in his stage costume, with his make-up on. He'll get in by the track way, and we'll never know he's here till we see him in the portrait act. It will give us a better thrill than if we saw him first in the costume, and talked with him."

"I'll say it will!" I answered with fervor. "Hear that rain beat down and those pine trees moaning in the wind! If there was ever a night made for ghosts and goblins this is one of them. We'll get the full effect all right!" And I can not say that it was with complete joy I watched my friend carefully turn off every light in the place.

THE minutes ticked by. Far away in the town below I heard a clock strike the half hour after 11.

"That's the tower clock," said Jim in a low voice. "It's always right to a second, and almost a hundred years old!"

"Everything around here seems to be old," I replied uneasily. "I suppose some witch predicted that the clock would always be right, and a goblin winds it every week with a key made out of witch-smoke!"

Jim laughed, but there was a bit of unsteadiness in his laugh. "Sort of gets you, that story about the woman, doesn't it?" he said. "And this being the anniversary of the night she is due to appear. Let's have a drink. It will steady us up a bit. That damned wind in the pine trees seems almost alive!"

"Thanks," I said.

Jim arose, and from a sideboard produced a bottle and glasses. We drank to each other's health, and then to Dan's success, and the success of the performance we were about to see.

"Just one more," Jim muttered, and commenced to fill the glasses. As

he did so the clock in the tower, far away, began to toll the hour of midnight.

With a muttered ejaculation Jim dropped the glass he was filling and it fell to the floor, breaking into a thousand tiny pieces that glittered in the firelight. "Look!" he whispered. "The light!"

Yes, a light was gathering out of the inky blackness of the next room, just where the portrait hung, but it was not as if created by phosphorus, but rather a weird, unnatural glow, unlike anything that could be created through human skill.

"Great!" Jim whispered. "Isn't he a genius? I'll bet that's something of his own invention. See! the portrait seems to be moving. Say, isn't that effect astonishingly real? That boy's fortune is made. He'll be recognized before long as the most famous in the business!"

Yes, the portrait was moving. Slowly the canvas seemed to open and fade away into nothing, and from the great frame there stepped the figure of a beautiful young woman. Her face was as clear and white as ivory, and a great mass of silken hair of yellowest gold flowed down her back, reaching almost to her waist.

I heard Jim's breath coming quick and short. "By Jove!" he muttered. "If I didn't know it was Dan, I wouldn't believe—isn't that a make-up, though? Talk about a star act! How the devil does he get that portrait opening effect? It ought to be worth a fortune, a trick like that!"

I muttered something to indicate that I agreed, and that the working out of the act was as great a mystery to me as to my friend. Then we both gasped. From the bosom of her flowing white robes the woman drew a bright, shining dagger, and her lips parted. "I come," she said softly, "I come, beloved to join you!" With a quick movement she sank the dagger to the hilt in her breast, and with

a half-choking moan slipped gradually to the floor.

Jim and I leaped to our feet. "Bravo!" shouted my friend, and I echoed the word. "Some act, old boy; your fortune's made when you can do stuff like that!" I shouted. "For God's sake turn on the lights, Jim; there's goose-flesh enough on me to feed a whole poultry yard!"

"Me, too!" Jim answered, fumbling for the switch. "Let's catch him and make him show us how he did it with the light on. Here it is!" And the next instant both the room in which we stood and the portrait room were flooded with the electric glow.

"Come on," Jim shouted; "he's probably in the room beyond the portrait one—there are rooms enough in this place for half a dozen families. How in heaven's name did he get that dagger effect? I'll swear I saw something red staining that white gown just as she fell! Dagger blade must slide up into the handle, but it surely was realistic!"

WE STARTED for the room beyond where the portrait looked down on us, calm and restful, as we had seen it earlier in the evening. Suddenly the telephone rang out sharp and clear.

Jim turned to a table and picked up the receiver. "Hello—yes—this is Carson's place — Carson talking — what—who did you say? My God—"

The receiver fell from Jim's hand, struck the table and rolled off, falling to the length of the cord, then dragged the telephone after it. The instrument clattered to the floor. Jim turned his face to me. It was soaked with great drops of perspiration and as white as death.

"That was Dan," he muttered thickly, speaking each word as if it were choking him. "It was such a storm—he decided to wait and come in the morning—he didn't leave Kingsby at all!"