

Weird Tales

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D. McILWRAITH, Editor

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I flitted silently across rivers whose names I had never heard.



Morpho on the screen

Arthur J. Burks

A RECURRENT dream inspired me to visit the Amazon Valley, the jungles of Central Brazil. I don't just remember where the dream began, it came first so long ago. I was the hero of the dream. I was very small; so small that I rode, easily, surely, on the back of a butterfly. I was utterly free. I traversed jungles I had never yet seen. I flitted silently across rivers whose names I had never heard. When I was old enough to read I dis-

covered the name of the largest one, and found it already an old friend: the Amazon.

Long before I found her picture in my schoolbooks, I rode Morpho through scenes of the most heartbreaking beauty. I had never heard of Her Ladyship Morpho, but she, too, was an old friend. Her wings held no dust. They were bright light blue, their sheen so aggressive it hurt the eyes.

Each night I made plans to

Heading by W. H. Silvey

mount Morpho. Each dream I learned some new exquisite thing. One night, for instance, we flew, in the rest of the world's silence, but amid soft music of our own, northward across the mouths of the Amazon from Belem, on the Bay of Guajara, to Macapa, the blazing town through whose heart the Equator passes. Lady Morpho never tired. As we approached each island she dropped down to just under the jungle crown. There, she put both of us in close communion with the trees, the lianas, the insects, the birds, animals, reptiles. Each living thing, I knew before ever I attended school, had a musical note of its own, like a singing heartbeat, by which "true-dreamers" could always recognize it. Lady Morpho introduced me to other Morphos, Lords and Ladies, and I made countless new friends thus, for each Morpho bore on his back, or her back, one of the Small Ones about whom the life of the world revolves. They were the musicians who played the music for the living, and I found that I was one of them. Each Small One was a kind of key. A different kind of Small One lived with a differently-keyed creature: symbiosis, such living is called.

Under the shadowed trees, sometimes in total darkness which kissed one with lips of soft velvet, sometimes flitting

from shaft to shaft of exquisite moonlight, Lady Morpho and I learned the small jungle secrets. We learned how the tracua ant lived, high among epiphytes in the tallest of trees, how the tracua ascended and descended on rubbery lianas, from ground to wild pineapple nest; how the music of the tracua varied with his distance from the black floor of the jungles. We learned how the tree boas sang among themselves, but did not hear their own singing, because it was music that moonlight, or sunlight, or total darkness, made when it touched their varicolors.

I learned, little by little, to know the whispers of leaves, of nuts, fruits, flowers, to realize that every living thing had a way of speaking, and that in these matters the Small Ones were master linguists.

Lady Morpho and I never descended more than a few feet below the jungle crown. I think she was born knowing that it wasn't safe. She was a precious lepidoptera, and men and women sought her often and everywhere, with long-handled nets.

WHEN we flew to the ends of islands, and were over the brown waters, Lady Morpho, half the size of my palm when I was "I," decreased altitude slightly, so that I could hear the voices of the rivers, like the

Jacare, the Jabiru, the Taujuri, the Straits of Breves and the mighty main stream of which all the others were parts: the Amazonas herself. Down low against the water I could see the fish below the surface, the acara, acari, the surubim, the *piranha*. Authorities insist that there are no *piranha* on the Lower Amazon, but long before I ever saw the name in any book, I had seen three varieties of the *piranha*, in the "mouths" of the Amazon.

I remembered every detail of each dream, and when I was old enough to write, I set them down in great detail. I called my record a "journal" instead of a "diary," because adventurers wrote journals, stay-at-homes wrote diaries.

Lady Morpho, sometimes the same Lady for several dreams, when she would vanish and some other Lady would take her place in my dream—I knew even when very small that vanished Ladies had been taken to some everlasting place by Small Ones who didn't have to waken and grow big, as I must—always taught me something.

She taught me to hear and feel. Every human being hears the whisper of light winds in the leaves. But where is the human being who, hearing such whispers, can say that the leaves belong to the jutahi, the molongo, the hevea, the apricot, the urucu, the apple, the plum, the massa-

randuba, without actually seeing the leaves of the tree? These things I learned to know; they were my introduction to exquisite music. I was never in fact a musician, but I knew master music, *world* music, for always I heard it when I slept.

Then, though I slept at night, and dreamed at night, sometimes I would find myself atop Lady Morpho in broad daylight; but always somewhere in the jungles, where the whole world was warm, almost hot, sometimes even *blazing*. I knew, before I knew Morpho, that the Lady was a hothouse Pegasus; only the tropics knew her, and that fairly close to the equator.

Sometimes we flew close above the heads of Indians, making music with their primitive flutes. Whence did the Indians have their music? I learned that, too, for though the Indians did not see them, they were surrounded by the creatures of the wilderness, each creature closely allied with a Small One, each Small One an impatient perfectionist who screamed—though no Indian could hear, with his *ears*, that is—at the flutists until they produced something at least akin to Music. And because it was the best they could do at the time, the Indian music was world music, too.

During the days when Lady Morpho bore me across river,

lakes, creeks, below the crowns of the mighty *castanbas*, the lordly *piquia*, every brilliant junglescape was shot through and through with sunshine. Dazzled, almost blinded, I rode from shaft to shaft aboard Lady Morpho, to make each time more glorious discoveries: each shade, each tint, each primary color—I never saw *exactly* a primary color—had, like other living things (for who could say that color was not a living thing?) its note of divine music. Blue, violet, orange, but not *exactly* blue, violet, or orange; no, the shades and tints between and through, spoke each for itself, and Lady Morpho showed me how to hear them as *she* heard them. She did it so easily. She simply flew me into the shaft of light. Its beauty bathed me, and so my spirit heard its music—and never forgot so much as the infinitesimal fraction of a note.

I began to tell people little "Amazon" stories when I was very young. I knew better than to tell them whence the stories came. Friends listened to them, spellbound, and asked how they might remember them, so that I set them down on paper. When I was old enough to go to school, indeed when I had been in school three or four years, I discovered that I had a rather good voice. I didn't have perfect pitch, not quite, but it served. I began to

hum, or sing without words, the music I heard in my dreams; the music of moonbeams, of sunlight, of rainbows, of leaves, of ants, and butterflies; I hummed and sang mostly the songs of the *silent* things, rather, the tiny creatures which, to all humanity, *seem* to be silent. I knew better than to tell anyone whence the music came.

VARIOUS people transcribed the music I hummed or sang, or tried to; but they could never quite capture it, nor could any musical instrument they produced quite reproduce the minor things out of my dreams. I knew then that man, as man, was not to have, to hear, or see, or feel, the little secret things I heard, saw, felt, while I slept, and some small, *very* small, part of me roamed the jungles, the rivers, sang with the moonbeams and the rainbows, with starlight over brown-black waters, and recorded every last experience, every slightest sound and feeling, in that small segment of the heart and spirit which, I was *sure*, had experienced it.

When I was twelve, older people came to see me, to question me. How did I know these stories I told? Whence came the music I hummed and sang, which nobody could ever quite accurately play, though even masters tried it? Authorities, they

told me, had been able to check on some of the jungle things, to find them miraculously accurate. How could this be, when I had never been a hundred miles from my own home, and had some of the experiences, knew some of the music, before I was able to read? Who had taught me, since my parents did not know, either?

"Lady Morpho," I said, and knew even then that I had said too much.

Lest, as father warned me, I become "queer" to people, I held my peace through my teens. But even more frequently thereafter, when I slept, that small strong part of me wakened at once, already aboard the blue metallic back of some Lady Morpho, who carried me away to teach me new knowledge of the secret places of the world.

Naturally, when I became a man, and a scientist, a graduate *magna cum laude* from a great Eastern college, I told nobody of my boyhood dreams, certainly not that I still had them, more sharply detailed in all ways with each experience. No two experiences were ever the same, so perhaps I should not call them "recurrent" at all. But so would a scientist have called them.

I INHERITED money on graduation, so I went straight away to the Valley of the Ama-

zon, to research all the dreams of my life. Now, however, I was not a Small One. I was a man grown, eager to know, as a man, the shadowed aisles of the Hy-lean Amazon, the criss-crossing game trails, the lianas, the reptiles whose bodies whispered through the leaves and mold, the plants, poison and medicinal, the cotton trees, the huge nut trees, the strange fragrant fruits without names, the animals and birds, the creeks, rivers, lakes and ponds, the giant saurians. I wished to hear the tongues of the creatures. I wished to see in fact the substance of my dreams.

In one way it was a vast disappointment. Afoot in the jungles, burning in the sun on river smallboats, parched with fever within a week, crawling with food pains in much less time, I knew that, as a man, the jungle was not for me. Walking among the giants of ancient rain forests was a grind I could scarcely endure. One never took a normal step, because of holes, windfalls, trees uprooted, protruding rocks, above-ground roots of great thickness. One stepped short, then long, long, then short; one jumped, slid, staggered. One was never in balance, always trying to balance, and it was Hades afoot. I perspired until there seemed to be no moisture left in me. My eyes blurred with the

steaming heat. I lost two pounds a day the first ten days.

But in another way, my dreams were brilliant as the wings of my own Morphos. When I slept in my hammock, my buttocks swinging but a few inches above moldy jungle floor where snakes, tarantulas and scorpions crawled, I wakened instantly aboard some Lady Morpho, and all the jungles which had refused me knowledge, now gave it me. Where I had stumbled and staggered, had fallen and risen—each time rising with more painracked difficulty—I now moved wholly harmonious and free, sometimes by dream-night, sometimes by dream-day, but always at the peak of perfect health, at my highest plane of perceptiveness, with mounting joy in me, joy so great that it was always a shock to waken again in my hammock to find myself aching in every ligament, bone, muscle, even my eyelids. The contrast between sleeping and waking—whichever was sleeping, which waking—was almost too great to be borne. As a man I dwelt in the descending depths; as a Small One I reached for the stars, and Pegasus Lady Morpho bore me.

On occasion, when the fever was on me by day, and I talked—so my associates said—deliriously beyond belief, even talking, with strange exaltation, as if I rode the occasional Morphos

which appeared up under the jungle crown, where the shadows swung, I actually *did* ride Morphos, as I did when I slept and dreamed. For what dream is more intense, more factual, than the dreams of malaria, dengue, and jungle or yellow fever? If anything, my fever dreams were sharper, more ecstatic, than my hammock dreams. For during my fever dreams I walked the jungles, and so my man-living entered into my Small One—living, and the two were strangely fused.

I BEGAN inscribing in my journal, not the things I learned as a grown man, tramping the jungles, though I *included* those items, as minor contributions, but the things that came to me as a Small One, atop the ever-ready Morpho. And speaking of Morpho my Brazilian and Indian guides and hunters noted an odd fact when and while I deliriously pretended to be riding a Morpho: a Morpho, at such times, *always* flitted far above us, under the jungle crown! I could have told them. It was just as well none of them had the eyes of the Irish, to see the Small Ones. Then they would have known that while I moaned and babbled in delirium, I wasn't even in the staggering body that voiced its agony.

My doctor put down his foot after a few weeks of it, during

which I had amassed an amazing amount of information no man whose work I had ever read, and assembled on any Amazon Valley expedition. I spoke of sounds no one else had ever heard, suspected, or, of course, recorded. Given time, I could have recorded those sounds; I'd have had to construct special adaptations of recording devices then in general use, but I knew how to do it.

"Go out," the doctor told me, "and soon, or you'll die!"

I told him I didn't mind dying, and found my own statement, somewhat to my amazement, true. My Indians and Brazilians were aghast. I stayed on in the Amazon Valley for weeks beyond the day of safety. I was a sick man, but a joyous man, for while I had come home to my jungles a failure, I had lived in them, as I had lived in them in my dreams all my life, a success beyond all expectations.

I knew the jungles as only the Small Ones, who paint their leaves, who guide their creatures, who color their rainbows and starshine, who know their music and direct it with infinitesimal batons, could know them.

I went home, finally, perfectly at peace, to die. I myself knew I had stayed too long.

I settled down in Eastern Pennsylvania to wait. I did not know how the summons would come, but only that it would. I

dreamed no more of Morpho riding. That was done, and I knew it. I slept dreamlessly. By day I wrote my books and stories. I tried to mimic the creatures whose voices no other man had ever heard, but it was no go. I couldn't record them. I consoled myself with this thought:

"This music is not yet for mankind."

I had two servants, a married pair. One morning Jennie came to me, all excited. I had already heard Taffy, my cocker spaniel, barking in the backyard until her voice was an endless ululation.

"Are you strong enough to come to the back screen?" asked Jennie.

I managed it, knowing there was something strange there, to startle Jennie. Louis, her husband was there, staring.

A GAINST the screen, outside, was an impossible something: a living Morpho, metallic light blue wings opening and closing. It was half the size of my palm. If my information were correct it could not live north of southern Mexico. Yet it lived here, and clearly had flown a long and weary way. Slowly, carefully, I opened the screen. The Morpho flew free, swung gracefully about the outer edge of the screen, and entered my home. For a moment it stood in the air in front of my face,

as if to identify me. Then it fluttered down to the floor, all strength spent, and expired in ghostly silence as, to other men, all Morphos moved.

"I never seen such a butterfly," said Jennie.

"I have, in the Brazilian jungles," I said, not realizing what it could mean to a pair of superstitious Plain People. "It is a Morpho. It can't live so far north."

"How did it *get* here, then?" asked Louis.

"Possibly I drew it hither!" I murmured.

I knew now, the manner of my departure. Only, I did not know exactly when. I lost much ground that week. I became weaker and weaker—and, surprising Jennie and Louis, happier.

In the second week Jennie came to me again.

A second Morpho peered in through my backdoor screen, but I could not go to see it. I told Jennie how to open the door so as not to frighten the glistening blue-backed butterfly from Brazil's jungle shadows. Then, I waited.

From the back screen to my bedroom, the way leads through a kitchen, a dining room, a sitting room, up two flights of steps, and a turn to the left, and there I lay, waiting. Morpho came in just ahead of Jennie and Louis,

whose faces would never be paler in their coffins. Morpho alighted on the high foot of my bed, her face to the window. Then she turned, and looked majestically down upon me. She rested for a few minutes. Then she toppled onto the counterpane, and I knew that my time was not yet.

I lost more ground, *much* more ground.

Near the end of the third week, palefaced Jennie and Louis came to me together. There was a third Morpho on the screen of my back door. This one, they told me fearfully, showed not the slightest signs of fatigue. This one, they insisted, would live much longer! Then, I knew.

The third Morpho, as the second had done, preceded Jennie and Louis to my bedroom. It came to me, they whispered, as if it knew exactly where to find me. And why should it not find its way through my house, since it had found me across two great continents, I demanded weakly.

Lady Morpho stood on the foot of my bed, looking at me. Sunlight came through the high windows, and the blue of Her Ladyship's metallic back filled the room with faint azure light. And the azure light made music that *only* I could hear—and, possibly, Lady Morpho.

This Morpho showed not the slightest inclination to die. She

pranced back and forth on the bed-foot. She rose to the ceiling, examining the high corners. She returned to the bed-board, looked at me, as if impatient to be off. In every way available to her, she *told* me.

And when, near dusk that night, I knew beyond any possible mistake, I called Jennie and Louis to me.

"Tonight, sometime," I told them, "I shall leave you, on a long, long journey. People will say that I have died, but you will know that this is not so. Will you remember this, Jennie, Louis?"

They both nodded, even their lips white. Their eyes were wide as they glanced at the very much alive Morpho, striding back and forth on my bed-foot.

"And I charge you, as my principal heirs," I told Jennie and Louis, "to remember this as you wish your own salvation when *your* turn comes: when you know that I am gone, open the door and let Lady Morpho go."

They didn't understand, of course, how could they? But they nodded their promise, and I knew they would keep it. With Lady Morpho keeping me impatient company, I waited.