

Esquire

THE MAGAZINE FOR MEN



Wide-Open Eyes

All the world loves a storyteller. To illustrate this, a mischievous lecturer once caught his university audience about and yawned away from an honest pun, so he told them a boy-misadventure yarn. It was the most banal, stupid, and wholly predictable little plot he could dream up. Yet—as he lazily told them all a few minutes later—he supposedly sophisticated audience perked up and listened with whole absorption while he foisted the boring little misadventure on them. It was suggested that he give up lecturing and tell more stories, good ones this time.

Irvin S. Cobb was the classic stylist of storytelling. He could enthrall you even if you'd heard him tell the same story before. His was a literary craftsmanship, something very close to an art, which kept you all at once listening and waiting and still wishing he'd never come to the point.

Such storytellers are rare, but, when they appear, all the more welcome for it. And welcome in *Esquire* is an author who brings high up on the list—William Francis. On page 28 of this issue is his latest *Esquire* contribution, *Wide Open With Open*. Mr. Francis has the true storyteller's touch for the plot, eye for character, and intangible timing that all add up to good writing and good reading.

Not, because he's in *Esquire*, but because he really has a way with a story, we recommend Mr. Francis to you.

Although, come to think of it, maybe both reasons are really the same.

—D.L.R.

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Neighbor to a Nightmare

We don't say it's probable, but it could happen that the man who sits next to you in the commuter's train has an overpowering thirst for warm, red, human blood

A Story by

MARGARET ST. CLAIR

Even so, Carr remembered things. Hamilton's dark glasses, for instance, his habit of wearing gloves even in summer, and the way he rebuffed ofcoliques. And he lived out by themselves.

On the other hand, Hamilton worked in a broker's office, he took the 7:45 to the city and came back on the 10:15, he read the *Star* on the way in and the *Chronicle* on the way back, just as everyone else did. In fact, except that he was uninterested and didn't play golf, he corresponded to the commuter's norm.

It was the aftermath of the week that made Carr think. Whether the vampire mirrored the signals or the signals were wrong nobody knew, because he was killed. Carr, who had been reading a most interesting editorial on the new congress, looked up with his mouth open when the first shock came. There was a long moment when the car seemed to hesitate about whether to leave the rails before it rolled over twice and came to rest on its side.

As the lights went out and flames began to shoot up, Hamilton was admirably self-possessed. He took his shoes off, got up on the arm of the seat, and with the best of his feet broke the glass out. Then he heated himself through the opening, crawled down and helped Carr out too.

There were people still in the train and he lost Hamilton while helping as many as he could. Then he had to stand there and listen to the screams.

Ten bodies were taken to the mortuary, sixty-four persons were hospitalized. Of those, three subsequently died.

Never had been worse, and a train wreck is always interesting. And when you add a genuine mortuary attendance to an imaginative reporter you may get something sensational. Three days after the wreck

there was a feature article in the *Chronicle*, and it was captioned: "Is There a Vampire on the 1-12?"

Carr read it and reacted indignantly. He thought the article in the worst of taste, and sent it to Keith, who shared his seat. To his annoyance Keith read the article slowly and shook his head. "You can't always tell," he said.

Carr felt outraged. "You mean you believe all that crazy stuff about bodies being drained of their blood in a way for which no wound could account?" he said. "Well, I'm surprised!"

"Well, you know how the papers are. But I think it's possible. Suppose there's somebody on this train who's fond of blood. Psychiatrists know about people like that, don't they? And suppose that person took advantage of the wreck to indulge his taste. As the writer points out, there's no reason why a vampire should spend all its time in a graveyard and only come out at night."

Afterward, Carr had nightmares about the wreck, in which the whole weight of the burning train lay upon him while he, helpless, watched something more horrid than the flames drawing near.

As he walked out past Sunnyside one evening in May, considering the investment program he was going to discuss with Hamilton, there was a nagging little worry about Mary Jane, his sister's seven-year-old daughter, who had been hospitalized with the doctor called cryptogenic meningitis.

Arriving early, he stood for a moment in front of Hamilton's place admiring the car-

wall lawn and smiling the rich color of apricots, lilacs, and Verbena-Garland. He must guess Hamilton once more to tell him what he'd like to read.

There was no answer to the bell and after a moment's hesitation Carr tried the door. Found it unlocked, and went in.

There was nobody in the house. Carr went through the rooms calling "Hamilton?" in careful tones. The caller occurred to him as a last resort.

Carr looked around the kitchen, saw that the door in the side wall, which obviously led to the cellar, was open, and went over to it. From the darkness beneath came a faint but unmistakable drip...drip...drip...drip. "Hamilton?" Carr called.

There was a series of noises in the darkness, a pause, and then Hamilton, preceded by a wave of vapors, came up the stairs.

He shook hands with Carr with apparent cordiality, and installed him in the living room in the most comfortable chair.

They went over the investment program together and in the middle of the discussion Hamilton remarked casually that he'd been trying to stop a persistent leak, probably from an underground spring, in the corner of his cellar, and Carr nodded assentfully. Does a man stop leaks in his cellar in the dark? Carr thought.

That night he had the dream again, but this time Mary Jane lay beside him in the wreckage of the burning train.

Next day he concluded he must be run-down, and had his secretary call Dr. Glendon to arrange for a checking next week.

Ellen met him at the door that night in tears and said that his sister had called out that Mary Jane was much worse. Much worse! They'd had a consultation, with three specialists, and she was to have an immediate transfusion.

Time went on. Carr had the interview with Glendon. Dr. Glendon thanked him and tapped him and listened to him and gave him a series of laboratory tests. In the end he said that while Carr was certainly nervous, it was nothing that could not be accounted for by the combination of delayed nervous reaction to a serious accident and worry over his niece. He advised an early vacation.

Mary Jane's death shook him to the core. After the funeral he had nightmares about the burning train more frequently, and now Mary Jane, too little and distorted with horror, pleading with him woolly-headed to save her... from the thing.

The vacation, toward the end of June, did him no good. He came back haggard, but no less nervous than before. The dreams had followed him, and the apprehension and the guilt.

Hamilton went away on his vacation, and for a time Carr improved, and regained some of his lost weight. Ellen remarked sagely that sometimes a vacation didn't really do you any good until after you get home and were, as to speak, rolled up from it.

Three weeks later she was writing to her mother that Will (Continued on page 142)

Neighbor to a Nightmare

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than was interested in some woman, and did he expect her to believe those fairy tales about working late at the office when he got home at ten-thirty in the morning with grass stains on his knees and mud on his shoes?

Actually he was spending his evenings in a very damp vein in an unimproved portion of Sunnylawn, watching Hamilton's house.

On the third night of his vigil, when the clock in the Sunnylawn parlor tower was striking the half-hour before twelve, Hamilton came softly down the steps. He crossed the street into Sunnylawn (Sunnylawn has modern security, naturally), passed Carr's hiding place, and turned to the right.

Carr did not diverge very close. This may have been why he lost Hamilton's trail after the other got near the chapel. He decided to wait.

A little more than an hour later Hamilton returned. As he came abreast of Carr he put up one hand and with its back definitely parted his lips.

Three nights later Hamilton visited Sunnylawn once more. He was gone rather longer than on the previous occasion, but as Carr caught sight of him Hamilton raised his hand and made, once again, the gesture of the wolfed.

Carr stayed home the next night and the next, lying in a miserable, rigid frame. He did not go to Sunnylawn on the third night either, and when, a little after two, there was a whirling outside his bedroom window, it seemed he had been expecting it.

Next morning the girl at the Southwestern desk took a preliminary look at Carr and hesitated. He looked normal enough, but the expression of his eyes . . .

"Somebody to see you, Tom," she said into the phone, cupping her hand around the microphone. "It's about that place you wrote last winter about the vampires."

Thompson listened to Carr's painful verbal stumbling for several moments and then suggested that they go out and have a special run. Once the second drink Carr managed to get to the point.

"Well, of course, Mr. Carr, you've got to remember that sometimes newspapers print things that, well, one has to take with a grain of salt. . . . Two more of the same, please. . . . I don't quite get the point about the dripping noise you heard in his cellar, though. What would it be?"

Carr shook his head. "I don't know. I can't imagine."

"But whatever it is you feel it's something sinister?" "Um-hum. Well, I've got to admit, Mr. Carr, that his visits to the cemetery do look suspicious." (No one discouraging the old fool too much, Thompson thought; he had a highly developed nerve sense, and he could almost smell Carr's potential nervelessness.)

"Um," Carr tapped the handle of his heavy chair, musing. "The

main problem, of course, is what to do about him."

"Well, why don't you try putting garlic around your place? They say that keeps them off. Like moth balls."

Carr was not amused. "He killed my niece," he answered solemnly. "Do you think, after that, I want to be lulled with garlic?"

"I've got it!" Thompson said suddenly. "Why not try silver bullets? They're poison to even wolves and things like that."

Carr picked up the check and started toward the cashbar. "Thank you," he said.

It occurred to Thompson that the interview had been a mistake.

When Carr went home that night he had in his brief case three silver pieces, a pair of calipers, and a file. Besides these items he was carrying a small alcohol Monarch and some garlic bulbs. He already had a gun.

It took Carr nearly a week to prepare the bullets satisfactorily. He wanted the bullets to be well enough so that the gun would not blow up in his face.

Tuesday night with the gun and six silver bullets in his pocket he walked toward Sunnylawn. It was not quite dark as he got to Hamilton's place. He went up to the front door and rang the bell. When Hamilton answered he told him that he wanted to discuss the matter again. They went into the house.

"By the way," Carr said when there was a lag in the talk, "did you stop the leak in your cellar?" "The leak? Why yes, yes, I did."

"I wondered if I could take a look at it. There's some leakage in our cellar, and I'd like to see how you've fixed yours."

"I'm so sorry, but it wouldn't be convenient just now. You know how business is, Carr. Mine is in a dreadful mess."

"You're quite sure?" Carr said. He drew the gun from his pocket and thrust, "how filthy vampires?"

He hit Hamilton in the chest six times. The bullets went into the plaster behind him with a splintering sound.

Hamilton laughed. His body seemed to boil out around the places where he had been hit, frothingly, and then to knit itself around them and grow solid again.

"I'm not a vampire, Carr," he said. "What a stupid mistake! Do you think I like blood?" He was so close that Carr caught his body smells above the smell of toilet water and saw, behind the dark glasses, the tiny flares that flickered where his eyes should have been.

"Why, I can't stand the stuff. I won't touch meat until it's been thoroughly blud. That was the dripping you heard in my cellar."

Hamilton laughed again. He put his hands—his hands—around Carr's throat. "You haven't was right, but your conclusion was wrong," he said. "I'm not a vampire, Carr. I'm a ghoul." ☐