

Weird Tales

July
1954

THE SURVIVOR . . .	H. P. Lovecraft & August Derleth	2
<i>The very house itself did seem possessed.</i>		
MORE THAN SHADOW . . .	Dorothy Quick	22
<i>... where beauty has no ebb, decay no flood —a land of Heart's Desire."</i>		
NEVER STOP TO PAT A KITTEN	Miriam Allen deFord	33
<i>Because—you never know what's going to have happened the day before yesterday.</i>		
WESTERN HIGHWAY (Verse)	Clarence Edward Flynn	39
THE SIN EATER . . .	G. G. Pendarves	40
<i>A powerful novelette of possession and dual personality.</i>		
BEWARE OF VAMPIRE WOMEN (Verse)	Patricia Burgess	77
THE GREEN HUNTSMAN . . .	Dorothea Gibbons	78
<i>Who knows what ghosts and legends haunt the woodland depths?</i>		
THE TREE OF LIFE . . .	Paul Ernst	86
<i>Was it legend that a green leaf could bring back a life that had gone?</i>		
GUARDIAN . . .	W. J. Suprenant	92
<i>... the police captain was trying to find any human connection with the abominable horror.</i>		
PASSING OF A GOD . . .	Henry S. Whitehead	101
<i>Would the story be too outrageous, too incredible, to appear in print?</i>		
OFF THE MAP . . .	Rex Dolphin	119
<i>Of course, 1665 is a long time ago; can aught but legend survive?</i>		
THE EYRIE		127

Published bi-monthly by SHORT STORIES, INC., 9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York 20, N. Y. W. J. Delaney, President & Treasurer, R. M. Cogan, Secretary. Reentered as second-class matter January 26, 1940, at the Post Office, New York, N. Y., under the Act of March 3, 1879. Subscription rates: One year in the United States and possessions \$2.00; two years \$3.50. Canadian: one year \$2.25; two years, \$4.00. Foreign: one year \$2.30; two years, \$4.10. The publishers are not responsible for the loss of unsolicited manuscripts.

D. McILWRAITH, Editor

Copyright 1954 by WEIRD TALES. Copyright in Great Britain.

173

Title registered in U. S. Patent Office.

Printed in U. S. A.

VOL. 46, NO. 3

Everything seemed normal—except that one man,
and the kitten, had vanished.



Never Stop to Pat a Kitten

BY MIRIAM ALLEN deFORD

HANRAHAN did. Then he disappeared. When Seaforth went back to find out what was

keeping him, there was no Hanrahan. The street was light enough to show the fluffy black

Heading by Boris Dolgov

kitten, its eyes bright, its back still arched to rub against Hanrahan's leg. Its purr was still on the air.

But no Hanrahan.

Seaforth went to the corner, looked both ways. Nobody at all was in sight except a couple arm in arm, and an old gentleman with a cane. "He walked around the horses," Seaforth murmured; he was a science-fiction writer. But Hanrahan hadn't. He had just stopped to pat a kitten.

To Hanrahan, it was the kitten and Seaforth who had disappeared. He looked everywhere for them, but they just weren't there any more. The street was otherwise exactly the same, except that it was deserted.

Hanrahan was one to accept strangeness. He walked on, thinking of possible improbabilities, learned from Seaforth. Of teleportation—but he was not somewhere else, he was here in his own city. Of another space-time continuum—but at a corner was a stand full of tomorrow morning's papers, and he remembered the headlines he had read an hour before. Of death—but in his abstraction he walked into a traffic signal, and it was hard and hurt his knee. Of insanity, which was the most disturbing—but everything seemed perfectly clear and normal to his mind, except that Seaforth and the kitten had vanished.

He had mentally painted himself into a corner; he decided to give up and go home. He and Seaforth had only been taking a late walk, because it was hot in the apartment and they wanted some fresh air and exercise after a lazy Sunday. Probably when he got home he would find Seaforth and there would be some simple explanation. Even the kitten might be there—it had seemed to have no owner and to be interested in being adopted.

Only, why were the streets so curiously empty, even for late on a Sunday night? He saw not one living creature in the mile or so back to the apartment, and not a single car passed him or could be heard on nearby streets.

He let himself into the apartment house, and his key worked. The downstairs hall was lighted but vacant. That was natural, at such an hour; there was no desk or lobby. The automatic elevator worked too, and so did the key to his apartment.

Seaforth wasn't there. Neither, needless to say, was the kitten. Hanrahan went out to the kitchen, switched on the light, and got himself a can of beer out of the refrigerator. He took it back to the living room, and sat down to think things over. He could make no sense out of what had happened.

He picked up the book he had been reading when Seaforth sug-

gested a walk, and opened it a few pages past the place he had marked. Bronowski, "The Common Sense of Science." "There is not a fact and an observer," he read, "but a joining of the two in an observation." And then: "Event and observer are not separable."

But he, as observer, was now apparently separable from all events.

HE SAT brooding until almost dawn, but he did not see or hear anything of Seaforth. At last, worn out, he undressed and went to bed. A moment later he was deep in sleep.

Hanrahan woke to a silent world. The only sound he could hear was the one he himself made by sitting up in bed. Instantly he remembered the night before. He put on slippers and a dressing-gown, and knocked on Seaforth's door. There was no answer. He turned the knob. The room was empty.

In the mirror over the chest of drawers he saw his worried face.

"Steady, you fool," he scolded himself. He glanced at the clock; it was ten minutes past ten. He grinned in relief. Monday mornings at ten Seaforth had a class in creative writing at State.

He wandered into the kitchen. Seaforth had been there, sure enough; the dishes from his breakfast were in the sink, and

the pot was half full of cold coffee. Mrs. Beck would be in at eleven, to clean up; he'd better get himself shaved and dressed and have his own breakfast before she arrived. At 50, and with her face, she was still jittery about working in a bachelor apartment; it would never do to let her find him in his pajamas.

"Lord, what a nightmare that was!" he thought as he heated coffee and made toast. He tried to remember how much he had had to drink the night before.

By noon Mrs. Beck hadn't come, and this was her payday. "To hell with it," he grunted, wrote out a check for her and left it on the sink-board, and got his hat. He had an appointment for lunch with Rathbone, and just time enough to get to the magazine office to pick him up.

Hanrahan let himself out and down in the elevator. At the corner where the bus stopped realization struck him like a blow on the solar plexus.

There were no autos, no buses, no pedestrians. The street was absolutely empty.

He stood staring, fighting panic. With an effort he choked his terror down.

There was a drugstore on the corner. He opened the door and went in. The place was deserted —no clerks, no customers, the goods piled unguarded on the

counters. Shaking, Hanrahan made it to a phone booth. He put in his dime, heard the dial tone, dialed Rathbone's number, heard two rings: Then the ringing stopped.

There was no sound of a receiver's being lifted, no voice, just silence. He waited a long time, then he hung up slowly. His money was not returned.

Stealthily, as if he were committing a crime, Hanrahan left the booth and moved to the next one. He looked up the number of the public library and dialed it. The same thing happened—three rings this time, then utter silence, no answer to his queries.

He would give it one more chance. All the phones couldn't be out of order. This time he would call the police.

There had been three phone booths in a row when he went in to call Rathbone.

Now there was only the middle one from which he had just emerged. The two on either side of it had vanished.

WEAK with fear, Hanrahan rushed from the store out into the unpopulated street, and stumbled back to his apartment.

The living room had been tidied and his bed had been made. Almost afraid to look, he went to the kitchen to see if Mrs. Beck was there. She wasn't. Had

she come and already gone again? He glanced at the sink-board to see if she had taken the check.

The check was gone. But so was the sink. There wasn't any sink there any more.

As he stared, the sink suddenly reappeared, with no check lying on the board. And the stove vanished instead. Then the stove popped into sight, and it was the refrigerator which disappeared. Hanrahan waited to see no more; he staggered into his bedroom and locked the door behind him. All the furniture was in its usual place, and stayed there.

For hours he sat by the window, unable to collect his thoughts. The window looked out on the back of another apartment house on the next street. Nobody showed his presence there, even through binoculars.

There was not a sound in his own apartment, or in the one next door through the thin connecting wall.

At three o'clock a thought struck him. He forced himself to unlock the door and go into the empty living room. He found a radio station with a news broadcast and tuned it in.

It was on, all right. The announcer was giving a baseball score.

So there was no unguessable calamity abroad. If anything was wrong, it must be with Hanrahan himself. He went back to his

bedroom. He had had no lunch, but he could not make himself enter the kitchen again.

Seaforth was nearly always in by six, if only to get ready for a date. At six Hanrahan left his bedroom once more.

There was still no one in the living room. He decided to try the radio again; perhaps some incomprehensible disaster had been kept off the air so as not to alarm the listeners, but by this time it might be over and ready to be explained.

Halfway across the room he stopped. He fought down nausea.

The radio and the chair beside it had both gone.

Back in his bedroom Hanrahan had the thing out with himself.

There was his maternal grandmother who had heard the banshee and could see ghosts. There was his father's cousin who had died after years in a mental hospital. There were the two months he himself had spent in a hospital, after Okinawa; "combat fatigue," they called it now, and he had been discharged with a 30 per cent disability.

"So that's that," said Hanrahan grimly, and reached into the bureau drawer for his revolver.

The last thing he ever sensed was the shocking roar.

cided Hanrahan had simply left and gone home. Hanrahan was getting too damned temperamental, he reflected; what innocent thing had he said to set him off this time? Seaforth shrugged and walked leisurely homeward himself. The kitten scampered away.

Hanrahan wasn't in the apartment. Walking off his peeye, presumably. Let him. Seaforth went straight to bed.

He overslept and barely had time in the morning to make himself some breakfast and get to his class. Hanrahan's bedroom door was closed, and he was probably still asleep. Seaforth was in too much of a hurry to find out.

He got back about 12.30, and Mrs. Beck was there. She called to him from the kitchen, where she was washing dishes.

"Mr. Hanrahan left me my check, Mr. Seaforth," she said.

"O.K.," Seaforth answered. It was Hanrahan's week to pay her. Doubtless he'd gone out by now.

The phone rang. It was Rathbone. "Seaforth?" he asked. "You know what's happened to Hanrahan? He's half an hour late for a luncheon date."

"I haven't seen him today," Seaforth said. He felt a little uneasy. But he had an appointment himself, and he had to leave.

He returned shortly before six, mixed himself a highball, and sat

SEAFORTH searched for a while up and down the street, that Sunday night, and then de-

down by the radio for the six o'clock news. Then he dressed and went out again. There was still no sign of Hanrahan.

He got home late and didn't bother to see if Hanrahan was there. They were both busy and often went a day without meeting. But in the morning he decided he'd better check up.

Hanrahan's bedroom door was locked. There was no answer to knocking or calls. After ten minutes Seaforth began to feel scared. He got out a hammer and broke the lock.

There was no one in the room.

VERY late that same Sunday night when Hanrahan had looked in vain for Seaforth and Seaforth for Hanrahan, the kitten's mother slipped out through a basement window and found her young one wandering down the block. She was a sleek, handsome cat, black as Hades. When she caught up with her offspring she cuffed him expertly.

"You little devil!" she meowed. "Where have you been? I told you not to run away again."

The fluffy kitten whimpered.

"I haven't done anything," he whined.

The old cat growled deep in her throat.

"You been fooling around with any humans?" she asked menacingly.

"No, honest I haven't!" said

the kitten. "I've just been walking up and down outside here."

"You didn't let a human touch you? Are you sure?"

"Just one, mamma, and all he did was pat me. I remembered what you told me."

"All he did!" The black cat swelled with rage. "The minute I turn my back! You're the stupidest kitten I ever had—you make me wonder who your father could have been. Haven't you any sense at all?"

"He was a nice man, mamma. And I didn't ask him to. He saw me and came right up to me himself."

"Oh, Lord! Go on, get into the house with you. What our old lady will do to you I can't imagine!"

"But why, mamma?" The kitten scuttled away from his mother's claws. "I see all the other cats in the neighborhood being petted by humans—why can't I be? It feels good when you rub against them and they stroke your fur."

"How many times do I have to tell you, you little idiot? You're not just a kitten, any more than I'm just a cat—we're a witch's familiars. What's more, we're both specially conditioned familiars. We're curse-carriers, if you have brains enough to know what that is."

"Do you know what you've

done to that nice man of yours? From now on, once he's touched you with the spell on you, he won't be able to see or hear or feel any living creature, or any inanimate thing that a living being is using, and no living being can ever again see or hear or feel him. Satan only knows what kind of existence he'll have from now

on—and all because you're a little flibbertigibbet that disobeyed your mother!"

"Oh, mamma, I'm sorry," mewed the kitten. "Please don't hurt me—honest, I won't ever do it again.

"Please, please—I said I was sorry! Ouch! He was such a nice man!"
