

Weird Tales

ALL STORIES NEW — NO REPRINTS

JANUARY, 1949

Cover by Lee Brown Coye

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*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 20, 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, 20 cents. Subscription rates: One year in the United States and possessions, \$1.20. Foreign and Canadian postage extra. The publishers are not responsible for the loss of unsolicited manuscripts although every care will be taken of such material while in their possession.

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Vol. 41, No. 2

PRINTED IN THE U. S. A.

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Open Season on the —Bottoms

BY SNOWDEN T. HERRICK

I HAVE the misfortune to be named Higginbottom. Up to nine weeks ago, I often defended this name as equal in honor, dignity and euphony to any in the land.

It first occurred to me to suspect that Higginbottom might not be synonymous with peaches and cream when a news story appeared in a New York evening newspaper. On the front page of its early editions the paper ran a piece under the three-column heading: "Where, Oh Where Have the Ramsbottoms Gone?" In later editions the story was on page 3, under a two-column head: "Ramsbottom Disappearance Mystify Wives, Friends."

The story began, under the byline of the paper's staff humorist: "The Thistlethwaites and Postlethwaites had better look out. Because the Bottoms are disappearing and the Thwaites may be next."

The rest of the story related that a -bottom a week had been vanishing for the past month, according to the Bureau of Missing Persons. Two Ramsbottoms, a Rowbottom and a Winterbottom had been reported missing, at roughly regular intervals, with not a clue as to where they had gone. I consider the so-called humorist's reference to the burdensome nature of their names as sour grapes. His name is Jones.

The story made no lasting impression, except perhaps in the minds of the bereaved families and a few other -bottoms, like myself. The humorist's next piece was an inter-



view with a platypus, and it only made page 7 for two editions.

A month later—that is, this morning—it occurred to the assistant city editor of the New York *Morning Bulletin*, where I work as a reporter, to put in a call to the Bureau of Missing Persons to ask how the -bottoms were making out. What we heard made him yell for a rewrite man, me, and the morgue clippings on everyone named -bottom.

The rewrite man took over the phone connection to the Bureau, the head librarian beefed about asking for clips by the last half of a name, and the editor and I had a conference.

- "Listen, Hig," said the assistant city editor, "once a week for nine weeks now somebody whose name ends in -bottom has

Heading by BORIS DOLGOV

This was a strange kind of discriminatory scourge!

been reported missing in this town. I'm getting the names and addresses and I want you to talk to the families of all nine and get the details. The morgue is going through the files backwards. And let's not you disappear. I want this story signed Higginbottom."

I took the list from the rewrite man. It had the names and addresses of the vanished nine and the people who had reported them missing, and the dates of the disappearances. It didn't work out to every seven days, but it came close, and it was certainly once a week. By this time the names included three Ramsbottoms, two Winterbottoms, a Winterbotham, two Rowbottoms, and a Higginbottom. The Higginbottom disappearance had been in the papers, but otherwise I'd never heard of my namesake.

I HAD to shake off a slightly eerie feeling before I could start to work on the list. Part of the information I got over the phone, part by foot, and part from the district men. I'm putting it down here in chronological order. Almost every case had no clues and no evidence of motive on the part of the missing men.

When I had everything, I sorted it out and studied it. It gave me the creeps.

No. 1 on the bottom parade was a Ramsbottom. His wife had already left town and I couldn't get much, but apparently she woke up one morning and he simply wasn't sleeping beside her any more. No clothes were missing and there was nothing unusual in his actions the night before. He was a postman, middle-aged, sober and quiet.

Another Ramsbottom came next. He worked in an export company downtown. He was a bachelor who lived with his mother in an apartment on the west side. A normal guy—thirtyish, went out with girls, was good to his mother, nice job. The elevator boy in his office building swears that Ramsbottom asked for the 17th floor and wasn't in the cage when it reached the floor.

Things started getting funnier now—but not to me. The first Rowbottom left a wife who was still weeping when I saw her. She blamed herself. She had accused him of mental misconduct with a divorcee across the hall. He got sore, slammed the door, and

was never seen again, according to the testimony of the doorman and the divorcee. Thirty-two years old, a dentist, well off, lived on the east side.

The Winterbottoms were brothers—the only two of the whole lot who knew each other. Winterbottom No. 1 was a radio actor. He played the role of the snake in the grass in "Portia's Other Husband." He left his fellow-actors at the counter in Whelan's Radio City drug store to go to the back to make a phone call. Exit Mr. Winterbottom. They say the scriptwriters set a new speed record for writing a character out of a soap opera.

HIS brother got his the next week. He was down at his brother's lawyer for advice on the missing Winterbottom's affairs. He sent his name in by the receptionist and was asked to wait. When the girl looked up to have him go in, he was gone. She supplied the nearest thing to a clue. The caller had tripped and nearly fallen as he entered. While talking to her he rubbed his shoulder. This Winterbottom was an advertising solicitor.

A very unusual disappearance followed—a Rowbottom. He worked in a Brooklyn department store. One Sunday he took his two-year-old daughter up in a Ferris wheel at Coney Island. His wife, who was scared of heights, stayed on the ground. When the wheel came down, the child was alone in the car. She didn't know where Daddy had gone. No one had seen him leave the car, nor was his body found on the ground.

The third Ramsbottom was apparently used as a temperance lecture. He worked in the shipyards in the Erie Basin, and according to his custom was proceeding to the subway via the taverns on every corner. About the fourth tavern he disappeared from the bar. Seven guys swore off, the bartender told me, the rest ordered another one, straight.

Winterbotham was the best known of the vanishees. The self-styled "Poet Laureate of Sheridan Square and Seventh Avenue South" and author of the "Mental History of Twentieth-Century Civilization" (which existed only in his own mind), he had faded away on the stairs of his Greenwich Village studio, running from his landlady. She pur-

sued him to his room, to threaten him with eviction for non-payment of rent, but he wasn't there. Her explanation of his disappearance does the poet little credit.

Whatever is responsible for all this is working around to the Higginbottoms. The most recent case was this other Higginbottom. When it came up as a news story, the desk had the decency to assign it to someone else, but I remember it. The point of the story was that the guy disappeared on his wedding night.

According to the bride, he had retired to the bathroom of a midtown hotel to disrobe. For reasons of delicacy, she waited quite a while before pounding on the door. The management had to break it open, to disclose no Higginbottom. The tabloids made much of Higginbottom's extreme lack of motive for pulling a sneak.

As I looked over the notes I'd assembled, it was very clear that I had cause to worry. In fact, it took considerable will power to force myself to write the account of the nine disappearances. I began my lead: "It seems to be open season on the 'bottoms."

THAT'S all I know about it. I am sitting here at home, drinking and thinking and typing out the facts.

It's obvious to me that somebody, or something, is collecting -bottoms at the rate of one every week. I've looked and looked for another link between these cases. Absolutely the only connection is the -bottom (however spelled) at the end of each one's name.

I suppose it can be said that this thing has a sense of humor. To rid the world, or at least New York, of -bottoms is a notion that might appeal to one type of mind —perhaps a jealous Smith. Surely there can't be many -bottoms left now.

I can see only three ways out. The whole business might suddenly stop, but it isn't likely to. A Higginbottom may be skipped while it works down the list of Bottoms, Bottomes and Bottomleys. Or it may start on the -skys. There's a really funny ending for you.

Just as sure as my name is Higginbottom, I'm next in line to vanish. But the tenth week isn't over.
