

# Weird Tales



MARCH, 1945

Cover by A. R. Tilburne

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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.*

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# Please Go Way and Let Me Sleep

By HELEN W. KASSON

**I**T WAS a room, just like any other room. It had walls and a floor and a ceiling—even a door. But no windows. In Spanish it was called *la tumba*; in French *le tombeau*; and in English—the crypt.

Anyway, the family was gathered—just as it would have been gathered in any other room—holding an indignation meeting. There was Great Grandfather for whom the tomb had been built. (He was the most indignant.) He had a long, patriarchal beard and was the first one dead and the head of the family. While he had undoubtedly had ancestors just like everybody else, no one cared about them. Gramps had founded

the brewery off which his descendants lived—and nicely too!—so the family traced lineage back to him and stopped, completely satisfied. Gramps was sufficient.

Then there was Great Grandmother, *Gammer*, little and shriveled and rather the worse for lying almost a century in the damp. And Grandpa and Grandma whose bones were not quite so old; and Mother and Dad and Aunt Pansy who had never married and was quite withered even before she died; and little Willie who had died at the age of eight and was still something of a brat. Besides, there were a couple of poor relations, in the crypt of necessity and on

Heading by LEE BROWN COYE

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*Can the living haunt the dead? After a manner of haunting?*

sufferance and therefore not in a position to be as indignant as the *real* family. And there was one stranger—a sad and irretrievable error which, for twenty years, the Collins dead had been bemoaning.

The name on his niche—read “Ned Collins” but he was *not* Uncle Ned. He had been Uncle Ned’s seat-mate when the train had run off the embankment and his bones had been so mixed up with Uncle Ned’s that the people who sorted them out had done a bad job. He was partly Uncle Ned: the right-hand little finger bone and the left shank which didn’t, by any means, make him a genuine Collins. But he was mostly a stranger, and it hurt to know that he would lie through eternity in the sacred Collins crypt. Of course, it was not until a Collins died that he discovered the profane and sacrilegious truth. The living mourned at the grave of Uncle Ned and knew no difference.

**B**UT time, even in a crypt, knits bones together and Uncle Ned’s proxy was made again of whole cloth, as it were. Often he complained of the stiff and arbitrary action of his right-hand little finger bone and his left shank and the Collins dead knew this was the *real* Uncle Ned’s family pride extending even to his dismembered bones crying for his rightful place and resenting the presence of a stranger in the midst of the Collins clan.

But tonight it was not about the stranger in Uncle Ned’s grave that the indignation meeting was being held. Strangely enough all anger was directed against the sole remaining living member of the family. His name was Ambie Collins and on earth he was known as a good and worshipful man.

And again, strangely enough, it was this very goodness and worshipfulness to which the dead in the family crypt objected.

“Why can’t he leave us alone?” Gramps moaned. “Come every Sunday, rain or shine, there he is tramping on our heads, pounding around to dig a hole to set his vase of flowers steady. Crying and wailing up there like a banshee!”

“He means well,” Mother said. (Comparatively new to Death she still had memory of the foibles of the living. Besides, she was Ambie Collins’ mother and so retained

a curious warmth of affection for him.) “It’s the custom of the living to mourn its dead.”

“Custom!” Gramps snorted. “You may well accept that custom. You’re the last one dead and on the bottom tier. How can *you* hear him down there anyway? It’s on *my* head he tramples. It’s on *my* coffin-top he scratches around at an hour when decent people should be sleeping. I lived a long time and I’ve been a long time dead. I need my rest!”

Gammer nodded. “You’re entitled to it, and so am I. I’m on the top tier too. He pounds on me as much as anyone.” Two tears rolled down her leathery cheeks. “I’m awful tired, Pa.”

Gramps inched his bones a little sideways and rattled his right hand for emphasis against the wall. “Entitled to it, I am,” he croaked. “It was promised to me. All those days I went to church—fifty-two Sundays for eighty years. Well over four thousand days I spent listening to promises of the peace and rest I was going to get after I died. And what comes of it? My only living descendant maliciously spends one day a week trying to deprive me of my eternal sleep!”

“All right,” Mother said, “he disturbs you. What are you going to—” The rest of the sentence was drowned under the sound of heavy banging. “Willie!” she screamed. “Stop pounding on that coffin. Do you want to break it?”

“Yippee! I’m a ghoul!” Willie shouted. “I’m robbing graves.\* Look at me! I’m the head ghoul!”

“Well, stop it,” Mother said, “or I’ll sick a Vampire on you.”\*\*

**G**RAMPS disconsolately resumed the conversation. “I don’t know what I’m going to do, but something’s *got* to be done. That Ambie. He’s—he’s *haunting* us!”

“Why don’t we haunt *him*?” Willie suggested with the fresh viewpoint of one just eight.

In unison the family, including the poor relatives who were in the crypt on sufferance and the usurper of Uncle Ned’s final resting place, turned admiring eyes on Willie.

\* Author’s note: Little boys learn an awful lot of funny stuff after they die.

\*\* It doesn’t hurt to frighten little boys after they’re dead. You can give them all the psychoses you want. They’re not going to grow up, anyway, thank goodness.

"That's it," they said, in as near unison as ten voices can make it.

"That's it," Gramps repeated as the founder, the head and the backbone of the family—and, incidentally, as the first and only Collins who had ever made a living for himself. "That's *exactly* it! He's been haunting us—now we haunt him. Show him how it feels to be pestered by someone from another world! Maybe upset his life a little."

"Not too much." Mother said quickly. "Don't upset his life too much."

"No, not too much." Gramps looked grim. "Only as much as he has upset our death. Perhaps we might make him feel the way it was when we were dying. Remember?"

"When you choked and couldn't get another breath and your bones were pulled and pulled and pulled until the joints cracked. And that weight on your chest. Remember? When your ribs almost snapped and broke? And that s-q-u-e-e-z-i-n-g around your heart, that w-r-i-n-g-i-n-g, till you could almost feel it burst and break and the blood splash over whoever's fingers it was who was doing the s-q-u-e-e-z-i-n-g. And that icy trip with the Angel of Death, with his wings flapping and blowing frozen air over your body. And crossing the river in all that mud and slime, with obnoxious reptiles waiting to grab you if you slipped from the boat. No, we won't upset his life too much. Just a little. Just enough to make him know how it feels to die and how much you need rest after you've accomplished Death. Just enough to make him quit trampling on our heads and leaving those infernal flowers every Sunday morning. That's all."

Gramps grinned. It wasn't much of a grin, but you knew what he meant.

IT WAS Friday night and Ambie Collins didn't feel so hot. Charlotte had been nagging him again—and about the same old thing: Lulu. Now, don't get the idea there was anything *wrong* between Ambie and Lulu because there wasn't. They did have a thing in common: they were both *psychic*. But there was nothing more. Nothing more than a delicate spiritual affinity between them about which Charlotte had no right to be

jealous. But this is the way it all came about.

Ambie Collins was known as a good and worshipful man—to the world. To his wife Charlotte he seemed faulty. He dropped his clothes where he stood at night, didn't bathe *quite* as often as nice people should, cracked his knuckles sometimes in a most annoying way and, worst, he resented terribly any questions which he believed infringed on his personal liberty.

Now, he wasn't a rounder. Don't think that! He spent his days in a conventional and circumspect manner clipping coupons on bonds bought with the money earned by Gramps' brewery (long since sold) and sitting in the stock exchange watching other people sweat as their investments swelled or withered. It was only for half an hour during the day that he did anything Charlotte might criticize, and that was when he left the broker's office and went to the corner drug store for an ice cream soda, just to keep his strength up, you know. And Charlotte *did* criticize that. With a vengeance!

For she had happened to pass the drug store one day just at four and seen Ambie half-heartedly sipping an ice cream soda, but whole heartedly devouring the luscious Lulu with his eyes. (It was near the beginning when Ambie and Lulu had just discovered their mutual preoccupation with spirits.) From then on nothing could ever make Charlotte believe Ambie needed that chocolate ice cream soda to stay the pangs of hunger. Truthfully, Ambie didn't. He needed Lulu to feed his soul, to stimulate his spirit, to speak with him of the realms of the Great Beyond. They both believed in Life Hereafter, they both *knew* they were psychic, they both lived in hope of some night meeting a benevolent ghost who would, in cosmic terms, explain a few things they were still hazy about. And they were, in the very near future, going to attend a seance together.

So Ambie's days were worth the living and he resented mightily having the gaunt Charlotte interfere with them. To tell the truth, he was a little afraid of her. In a way he loved Lulu—in a very high-minded, spiritual way—but he never considered asking Charlotte for a divorce. Besides, he really had no *good* reason to divorce her. It was only the intangibles that made them mis-



mated. The fact that he was psychic and she was not; that he had deeper, finer instincts and she was about as spiritual as a kitchen pot.

"If Charlotte were to die—" The thought slipped into Ambie's mind sometimes in the dead of night when, he was sure, even God was too tired to listen. Then he'd be free to pursue his out-worldly interests with Lulu and life would be worth living both by day and night. Who knows? Perhaps with free, untrammelled minds, he and Lulu *might* be able to raise a ghost.

THINGS were resting exactly at this point the Friday night Ambie came home tired and worn from a day of coupon clipping. He had had a chocolate soda and a frosted—Lulu had been unusually interesting that afternoon. So, though his mind was light and buoyant and his soul inspired, he had a heavy weight in his stomach and was in no mood for dinner. Charlotte saw that immediately from the way he picked at his food and, as usual, started picking at him. (It was maid's day out. She had cooked dinner herself and was terribly put out at the thought that Ambie might not do justice to it. And all because of that—that nothing!—that piece of fluff!—behind the drugstore soda fountain.)

"I suppose you had a chocolate soda this afternoon," she said acidly.

"I did."

"I suppose you were hungry."

"I was."

"So hungry that you drank the soda in complete silence and never raised your eyes from the glass."

Ambie raised his eyes now from the mess of food on his plate. "No," he said coolly, "I didn't drink it in silence. Why do you ask?"

Charlotte's cheekbones reddened. This was worse than she suspected. Ambie had never before admitted he had spoken to the luscious womanly bit behind the counter.

"I ask," she said hotly, "because I have always known there was something underhanded about you. I have always known you were a liar and an adulterer—and that you left the broker's office every afternoon for something besides an ice-cream soda."

Ambie threw down his napkin. "You are the liar," he said.

"You beast!" Charlotte's little black eyes flashed. "You monster! You betrayer of women! Don't think it will get you anywhere. I'll *never* divorce you. Never!"

Ambie had always suspected that. Probably that's why he had never asked. But now that she had brought up the subject he thought he had better plumb it further. "I'm a good man," he said. (Some slight acquaintance had told him that once. Someone who didn't know of the double life he was leading between Lulu and Charlotte, who knew only of his Sunday pilgrimages to the Collins' crypt.) "But if you think *that*, probably it would be better if we went separate ways." He cracked his thumb knuckle decisively.

Ignoring the knuckle-crack, Charlotte changed tactics. She knew she'd never get another man if she lost Ambie—not with her bony frame and close-set eyes. "Ambie!" She burst into tears. "How can you! How can you be so cool about breaking up our marriage, our life, our love?"

It was the word "love" that did it—turned Ambie from a mouse into a lion. The word was somehow an anacronism on Charlotte's thin lips.

"Love!" he sneered. "You don't know what the word means. You're just a mass of flesh and bones and—and a stomach! You haven't *anything*—not anything. You're no deeper than a—than a—sirloin steak!"

"And what has that—that other thing got? That piece of nothing at the drugstore—what has she got, I'd like to know?"

Ambie smiled, a secret smile. His voice was soft, nostalgic, when he spoke. "There are things," he murmured, "of which you have no conception. There are other worlds—worlds of the spirit, of the mind, of the soul. There is another life to which we shall all go, from which we have all come. The dead walk and speak with the living; the living sleep and speak with the dead."

Charlotte stared as wide-eyed as the close-set slits could make it. This side of Ambie she had never encountered before. She knew knuckle-cracking, non bathing, coupon clipping Ambie, but not the spirit, the *psychic* Ambie. Was he mad? Had his brain been harboring such thoughts all these years—

or had it, this moment, snapped because of her discovery of his perfidy with Lulu?

"There are ghosts," Ambie continued, unseen spirits who dwell constantly with the living. Who knows? Perhaps there is one here now—" He stopped abruptly, gasping and gagging. There was certainly nothing to keep him from speaking, but somehow he couldn't get words out though Charlotte could tell from his popping eyes that he was trying hard enough.

She poured a glass of water and thrust it at him. He got it to within half an inch of his lips but it stopped there. Something *seemed* to be in the way. But what?

"Drink it," Charlotte advised.

"Glub!" Ambie said.

"What's the matter with you?" Charlotte screamed.

"Tell her," Gramps said, and removed his hand from Ambie's lips.

For it was Gramps, arrived just in time to verify Ambie's statement about unseen spirits and just too late to catch the first part of the conversation about Lulu.

Ambie whirled. "Gramps!" he shouted. "Is it really you?"

"Is it really *who*?" Charlotte asked. (You see Ambie, being *psychic*, could see Gramps; but Charlotte, being nothing but a sirloin steak, couldn't.)

"It's Gramps, my great grandfather, come back from the Other World. Oh, wonderful! Wonderful! Wait till I tell Lulu." In his excitement, Ambie forgot that the Other Woman should never be mentioned before one's wife.

"There, there, Ambie," Charlotte said in a frightened voice. "Maybe you'd better sit down."

"Maybe I had," Ambie said weakly. He bent in the right places, but the chair was gone before the right place reached it. Gramps had whisked it away. Ambie landed, in the wrong place, on the floor with a dull thud.

Then again he seemed to strangle. With nothing visible before his lips, yet he desperately struggled to speak with no results. Nothing human sounding, anyway. "Kuh ih ow," he gargled, "Ah, Am." Which translated meant, "Cut out. Stop, Gramps!"

But Charlotte couldn't understand. She saw only a maniac, an epileptic, perhaps,

writhing on the floor, kicking its legs and fighting against—absolutely nothing! (Being a sirloin steak is decidedly disadvantageous at times.)

**F**INALLY Ambie was on his feet and again in command of his tongue. He turned his back on Charlotte and faced Gramps. "Well!" he said. "Now that your little joke is over I'm certainly glad to see you. And looking so well, too."

(Gramps did look well, considering. Gammer had combed some of the grave mold out of his beard and his burial suit, having been made before the war—the Civil War, of course—when materials were really *good*, had lasted surprisingly well.)

"It's a wonder if I am," Gramps said solemnly. "I certainly don't get any rest."

"I suppose things are busy there—where you are."

"Busier'n they should be," Gramps said meaningly.

Charlotte was listening flabbergasted. Being unpsychic she could hear only Ambie's half of the conversation. "To . . . whom . . . are . . . you . . . speaking?" she asked peremptorily.

Ambie jumped as if he had been pinched. He had. Gramps chuckled maliciously.

"That ought to teach you," Gramps said.

"Teach me what?"

"How it feels to be haunted—to be deprived of rest."

For a moment Ambie thought Gramps was resentful of his and Lulu's interest in the Great Beyond, but on second thought he was sure that couldn't be it and decided to ignore the matter. "Look, Gramps," he said, "quit talking in riddles. How did you get here? Was it hard breaking through?"

"I'm *not* here," Gramps said. "It would take a Georgia chain gang to break through that layer of stone. Double locks on the door, too," he added petulantly. "You sure didn't take any chances I'd escape when you built that crypt."

"But you *are* here," Ambie said. "I see you."

Gramps looked annoyed. "I am not. I'm still *there*, lying in my coffin!"

"But Gramps—"

"Listen, Ambie. Did you ever read Freud on Hallucinations?"

"Yes, but—"

"Well, there you have it!"

Ambie took a deep breath. "But you *couldn't* have read Freud. You died before he was translated."

"Didn't say I did," Gramps growled. "But *you* did. That's all that's necessary."

"You mean," Ambie said slowly, "that you're a hallucination, not a ghost?"

"Are they different?" Gramps asked disinterestedly. "I donno. You read the book. You ought to know."

Charlotte refused to be ignored longer. "Ambie," she screamed "Stop talking to yourself."

At that moment the doorbell rang. Charlotte was afraid to leave Ambie alone to answer it and Ambie was too busy staring incredulously at Charlotte to hear it, so Gramps went.

"Do you mean you can't see Gramps?" Ambie asked unbelievably of his wife.

"Of course not. And neither can you!"

"Nor hear him?" Ambie persisted.

"I've heard nothing all evening but your insane mumblings."

"Whee!" Ambie shrieked. "That means I really am psychic. Lulu always said so."

At a look from Charlotte he turned to find the minister, pale and shaken, leaning against the wall and mopping his forehead. "Who opened the front door?" the minister whispered.

"I did," Gramps said.

The minister being nothing but a sirloin steak with a spiritual calling hadn't been able to see Gramps at the door and wasn't able to hear him now. Ambie saw that he was waiting for an answer.

"I did," Ambie said.

"But—but—you were in *here*."

"A form of magic," Ambie said airily. "My great grandfather taught me. The body is quicker than the eye and all that stuff, you know. Sit down, reverend."

THE reverend sat. On the floor, just the way Ambie had a few moments before. (Gramps, being an old guy, didn't know many new tricks. It is doubtful whether the hot foot had been in vogue during his lifetime. So to Gramps the whisking away of a chair just as a bottom descended was still the height of humor.)

Not only that, Gramps was thinking of all those Sundays he'd spent in church listening to promises of eternal rest, and Gramps was remembering just how early Ambie wakened him every Sunday morning. When he recognized the back-side-to collar of the reverend he decided to get even for at least one of those Sundays.

Charlotte helped the reverend to his feet while Ambie held the chair, firmly.

"That's enough, Gramps," Ambie said. "Play your jokes on me, if you must. Leave our guests—" He stopped and gagged. Gramps was taking him at his word.

Suddenly there was the sound of a loud slap.

"Ambie! Don't crack your knuckles," Charlotte said.

Ambie had put one hand to his cheek. When he removed it there were the marks of five bony fingers spreading out from his ear.

"Gramps," he pleaded, "stop. I don't know what I ever did to"—The sentence wasn't finished. Neither was Gramps. Ambie was struggling to speak again.

The reverend fastened his eyes on Ambie and drew back. "What is it, Mr. Collins? Are you ill?"

AMBIE decided not to attempt speech. He shook his head and walked toward the far side of the room. Midway his feet got entangled and he started doing something that looked like Shuffling Off to Buffalo, except that he wasn't shuffling off to any place. He was merely standing in one spot and tripping over nothing. The carpet was perfectly flat and unwrinkled, his shoelaces were tied, his socks were caught up tight with garters—to the naked eye there was absolutely nothing in the world to impede his progress. Still, his progress *was* impeded.

"Ouch," he yelled. "Take it away! What is it?"

"Barbed wire," Gramps chuckled. "The builders left it in the crypt. I always thought it might come in handy."

"Well, take it back there. And get back there yourself."

"I am there," Gramps said. "So's the barbed wire. Remember, Freud on Hallucinations—"

"Get out!" Ambie screamed.

"Really, Mr. Collins," the reverend said. "To whom are you speaking?"

Charlotte's eyes were getting more and more frightened, but the germ of a thought was growing behind them. "Ambie," she said gently, "there's no one here but us. Come. Sit down and talk to the reverend while I mix up some lemonade."

Ambie came. And sat. But he couldn't talk. Whenever he got ready to, Gramps slapped an invisible hand over his lips and Ambie *couldn't* talk. The reverend did the best he could with a one-sided conversation. He exhausted the weather and the parish house and finally got around to what he had come for—collecting money to build an addition to the church, from which money, incidentally, he expected to take a substantial squeeze. When he asked Ambie point-blank for a donation Gramps thoughtfully removed his hand from Ambie's mouth long enough to allow him to say, "Yes."

The reverend got out a pledge and Ambie signed it—for two hundred dollars. That meant about twenty for the reverend's private purse, which was about all he could expect from one parishioner, so he got up and left. He said he didn't believe he cared for any lemonade after all; it upset his digestion. Charlotte wasn't making it anyway. She was telephoning to her lawyer.

**IT WAS** Sunday morning in the crypt and everything was quiet. Until nine. Then there was the clatter of footsteps overhead and the sound of digging. A little later there was a heavy bump as the vase of flowers found its resting place. Then Ambie started pacing up and down and meditating aloud on the virtues of the departed.

"My mother," he said, "and my dad. And my dear grandfather and grandmother and Gramps—who made all that money. And Gammer—she always carried peppermint drops for me—and Uncle Ned who used to dandle me on his knee." He went down the roster—even including the poor relatives who were in the crypt of necessity and on sufferance and little Willie whom he had always loathed—until finally Gramps could stand it no longer.

"Get away from there, you idiot," he shouted. "Go away! Lemme sleep!"

But somehow, today, Ambie couldn't hear him. Maybe Ambie's hallucinatory powers were weaker, maybe Gramps' frail voice was not strong enough to penetrate the layer of earth and stone which separated them, to say nothing of the worlds between, or maybe Ambie's psychic deafness was due to the fact that though he mourned verbally and loudly his mind was completely centered on Lulu—and not in a spiritual way at all!

So, obvious of Gramps' irritation, Ambie continued his audible mourning. For this Sunday he was inordinately grateful to Gramps. You see, Charlotte had left his bed and board the Friday night of the haunting and already suit for divorce was in progress. Charlotte had weighed the facts and decided no man at all was better than a crazy man. Then too, Ambie's being crazy was sufficient explanation of why he preferred Lulu to her. So her pride was saved and she'd be able to live nicely on her alimony with no knuckle-cracking to distress her.

So Ambie was overcome with love and gratitude for Gramps who had made Charlotte want to divorce him. And he wailed. And Gramps shouted. And Gammer said she was getting an awful headache from all the noise and what did they mean when they said, "Quiet as the Dead?" Finally little Willie woke up and jumped out of his coffin and started to play Lampire Bat on Uncle Ned's proxy. Uncle Ned's proxy batted him away and cursed the day the people got his bones mixed with Uncle Ned's and laid him here. And Aunt Pansy, the spinster, wailed, "If I'd only married that man—even if he *wasn't* good enough for me—maybe I'd have been buried in *his* family crypt instead of here. Maybe I'd have gotten a *little* of that eternal rest I was promised."

The poor relatives didn't say anything because, after all, they were in the crypt on sufferance, but what they thought was enough to raise the whole clan of Collins dead.

But Ambie went on mourning—from nine to twelve—and then put on his black hat and got into his car and drove over to the drugstore.

He had a date with Lulu to go to a seance, but he thought they'd call it off and just park on the lake shore instead.