

# WEIRD TALES *The Unique Magazine*

EDWIN BAIRD, *Editor*

Published monthly by THE RURAL PUBLISHING CORPORATION, 325 North Capitol Avenue, Indianapolis, Ind. Entered as second-class matter March 20, 1923, at the postoffice at Indianapolis, Ind., under the act of March 3, 1879. Single copies, 25 cents. Subscription, \$3 a year in the United States; \$3.50 a year in Canada. The publishers are not responsible for the loss of unsolicited manuscripts, although every care will be taken of such material while in our possession. All manuscripts and other editorial matters should be directed to WEIRD TALES, 854 North Clark Street, Chicago, Ill. The contents of this magazine are fully protected by copyright, and publishers are cautioned against using the same, either wholly or in part. Copyright, 1923, by the Rural Publishing Corporation.

VOLUME II

25 Cents

NUMBER 1

## Contents for July-August, 1923

*Thirteen Thrilling Short Stories*      *Two Complete Novelettes*  
*Two Two-Part Stories*      *Interesting, Odd and Weird Happenings*

SUNFIRE	-----	FRANCIS STEVENS	2
	<i>Harrowing Events Which Startle Five Adventurers Who Land Upon a Faroff Island</i>		
THE OUTCASTS	-----	GEORGE WARBURTON LEWIS	14
	<i>A Story of Stark Adventure With an Uncanny Climate</i>		
THE ROOM OF THE BLACK VELVET DRAPES	-----	B. W. SLINEY	18
DOCTOR X	-----	CULPEPER CHUNN	21
	<i>A Good Short Story</i>		
THE TWO MEN WHO MURDERED EACH OTHER	-----	VALMA CLARK	23
	<i>A Remarkable Novelette</i>		
THE STRANGE CASE OF JACOB ARUM	-----	JOHN HARRIS BURLAND	33
	<i>A Sardonic Novel of Witchcraft</i>		
BLACK CUNJER	-----	ISABEL WALKER	46
	<i>A Short Tale of Black Superstition</i>		
SHADES	-----	BRYAN IRVINE	49
	<i>A Realistic Ghost Story</i>		
VOODOOISM	-----	WILL W. NELSON	55
	<i>A Special Article About a Weird Oult</i>		
SEÑORITA SERPENTE	-----	EARL WAYLAND BOWMAN	57
	<i>A Strange Tale of the Mayan Snake Worshipers</i>		
THE ROOM IN THE TOWER	-----	D. L. RADWAY	61
	<i>A Terrifying Ghost Story</i>		
RIDERS IN THE DARK	-----	VINCENT STARRETT	63
	<i>A Grim Tale of Self Sacrifice</i>		
MANDRAKE	-----	ADAM HULL SHIRK	66
	<i>An Uncanny Tale of a Flesh Colored Plant</i>		
PEOPLE VS. BLAND	-----	THEODORE SNOW WOOD	69
	<i>The Mysterious Midnight Visitor Played an Important Part in this Murder Trial</i>		
THE EVENING WOLVES	-----	PAUL ELLSWORTH TRIEM	73
	<i>Final Installment of this Exciting Tale of Chinatown</i>		
THE CORPSE ON THE THIRD SLAB	-----	OTIS ADELBERT KLINE	76
	<i>Weird Tale of Happenings in a Morgue</i>		
THE GUARD OF HONOR	-----	PAUL SUTER	79
	<i>The Author of "Beyond the Door" Spins Another Eerie Tale in His Masterful Style</i>		
THE CAULDRON	-----	PRESTON LANGLEY HICKEY	85
	<i>True Adventures of Terror</i>		
THE EYRIE	-----	THE EDITOR	87

# SENORITA SERPENTE

By EARL WAYLAND BOWMAN

**I**T WILL BE SAID: "It is impossible; such a thing could not be!" Yet, it shall be told:

Cortesana Serrano, most beautiful, most alluring of all the ladies in the ranchito at Socorro, or for that matter throughout the whole of San Bendito, was also the "Senorita Serpente," and lovers who tasted her lips died quickly, or worse!

It is hard to believe.

But they who are skeptical know not of the mysteries that take place in the land of the Azteccas, where whispering voices, evil and good, come from the Llanó Sonora at night; and in the darkness of the Sierra Negrito gorges there is enchantment.

Padre Algonza de Reya, the holy priest who cares for the Mission at Magdalena and has seen many things, both pleasant and terrible, saw three men, all strong in body, young and with souls when they went to the hacienda La Queratto, where Cortesana Serrano had enticed them; and when they came back they were creatures scarcely human or animal, writhing and hissing, unable to speak, making noises in their throats like Blunt Nose, the rattlesnake who

lives under the Black Boulder among the cactus beds and the basalt boulders on the slope of San Miguel.

Padre Algonza saw, and Padre Algonza would not lie.

Besides that, there was the thing which happened to Skinny Rawlins, called by



the Mexicans "Senor" Skinny, the cowpuncher Americano, and the Ramblin' Kid, the other vaquero from Texas and who is known by his gentle manner of speech, the dark eyes, and who smiles always, even as he did when he mastered the "Senorita Serpente" (after shooting "Lobo," who was said to be the Yaqui and who watched) after Senor Skinny had already yielded and was helpless. They too, the Americanos, as well as Padre Algonza, knew it was so.

Who, then, shall say it was false?

Not only were those who went into the house La Queratto, the fine casa, the luxurious home of Cortesana Serrano—the "Senorita Serpente"—and which was hidden among trees behind the thick walls of the court by the rock-cliff at the edge of Canyon del Seco, loathsome in their movements and the look in their eyes when they came out (if ever they came out), but even their bodies were mottled like the skin of the gila monster, or Blunt Nose, the rattlesnake, and their flesh had the odor of the reptile.

It was horrible.

"They are accursed!" Padre Algonza declared. "The breath of 'Senorita Serpente'—she with the face of an Angel and the passion of a fiend—has been blown into their mouths! Their souls have been withered! No more are they men. *They are snakes!*"

Even so, no Senorita in all Socorro was so bewitching, so hard to resist, as was Cortesana Serrano, the "Senorita Serpente."

Men followed eagerly after Cortesana Serrano.

From where she came was not told—only this: it was from the South. Some said she was Azteca, others said she was Tolteci—and all agreed that Cortesana Serrano was most beautiful and lived alone with the old watchman called "Lobo," said to be a Yaqui, at the casa La Queratto.

Wise men, even, sought Cortesana Serrano and died—or went mad—in the embrace of the "Senorita Serpente!"

First, there was Francisco Trevino; he came from Mazapata—very handsome—a captain with the soldiers of Comandante Garcia. From the moment he saw the "Senorita Serpente," smiling from the doorway of the dance place kept by the big one, she who smokes mirrihuana, and is called "Old Bonanza," Captain Trevino was under the spell. That night they went to the casa La Queratto. Pietro Gonzales, who tends the goat-herds of Don Alvarado, saw them go in.

For two days after that neither "Senorita Serpente" or Captain Trevino

were seen. What happened in the house behind the high walls has not been said, but there were sounds—like the wind in the dry branches of a yucca that is dead, or the noises that come from the small caves under the basalt cliff where many snakes are known to have dens.

The third day Captain Trevino was found, half way between the casa La Queratto and the cantina El Merino—crawling on his stomach in the dirt of the road! He could not speak, he could not stand, he could only squirm in the dust with the undulating motion of the reptile. From his throat there came hissing, and his face and body were spotted like Blunt Nose, and his flesh had the smell of the serpent.

That night he died.

**P**ADRE ALGONZA tried hard, but could get from Captain Trevino no look of understanding, nor a word to tell what had been done.

"Senorita Serpente," that night also, came again to the ranchito in Socorro; her black eyes were brighter, her red lips were warmer, her dancing more sinuous and inviting, and her laughter more seductive than ever!

Two there were then who did not come back.

One, a Gringo—his hair was the color of straw—came to San Bendito because of the mines and was going, next day, to Los Oro, where the copper ledges are worked; instead, that night with "Senorita Serpente," he went to the casa La Queratto. Never again was he seen.

The second night "Senorita Serpente" once more was at the fandango at Old Bonanza's.

Then it was Manuel Valencia, son of Don Julio, very rich. Manuel danced three times with "Senorita Serpente" in Old Bonanza's after which the two left together.

Two days later Manuel was discovered crouching against the wall of the cantina El Merino, his head swaying from side to side like a snake that is watching to strike. From his throat came the hissing, his face was blotched and hideous, his eyes were the eyes of a demon, and the odor from his mouth was the odor of the gila monster—the reptile diablo.

Padre Algonza worked all day and part of the night, but could not save the son of Don Julio.

Again "Senorita Serpente," who had been gone for two days and two nights, appeared, more fascinating than ever, at the ranchito in Socorro—yet, in her eyes at times there was a look that could not be understood. It was a mingling of recklessness, of horror, of dread.

**A**FTER ONE NIGHT at the casa La Queratto, Jose Santoyez, brother of Pablo, was found trying to hide under the bench by the great palm at the corner of the fonda. His head only was sticking out, and when anyone came near he hissed at them like the poison viper, and he also was mottled and smelled the same as the others—as does a venomous serpent.

Pablo, with the help of Padre Algonza, got Jose in a box and sent him to Hermorillo, and to this day he is there, in the place where they keep those that are mad—still acting as he did when they found him.

"Senorita Serpente" came after that to Old Bonanza's, and though she laughed and danced and her charms were greater, if anything, than before, it could be seen in her soul was a weight—a sadness she dared not make known.

Senor Skinny and th' Ramblin' Kid came then to Socorro.

There was to be the Celebration Fofiro. A great time was to be held. For one thing, there was the bull-fight. Stebano Venustanio, bravest matador in all San Bendito, was to kill the black bull, "El Toro Satan" they called him, because already he had gored several horses and was famous for the sharpness of his horns and the wicked manner of his fighting.

Coming from the Rancho del Crazy Snake, where they guarded the cattle, th' Ramblin' Kid warned Senor Skinny:

"It is not necessary always for a man to be th' fool—" th' Ramblin' Kid, sitting on the little roan stallion, told Senor Skinny, "—on this trip—leave th' senoritas alone!"

Senor Skinny laughed.

"If a cowpuncher can't fall in love once in a while," he answered, lightly, "wat the hell is the use of bein' alive!"

"If a cowpuncher does, as you say, 'fall in love once in a while'—under certain conditions—" th' Ramblin' Kid replied significantly, "—especially in th' country we're goin' to now—"

"Don't be so darned mysterious!" Senor Skinny cried gaily, "love is love wherever it happens—"

"—he won't be alive!" th' Ramblin' Kid finished.

Senor Skinny looked superior tolerance at his slender, dark-eyed companion. Once more Senor Skinny laughed, very joyously, and, as was his habit when thinking of the ladies, he broke into song:

*"Oh, the bussards watch th' carcass—  
While the coyotes whine an' yell;  
But Old Skinny loves a Maiden—  
And he'll follow her to hell!"*

"To hell' is truer than you think—" th' Ramblin' Kid said, seriously. "You do not know, San Bentito! There are things—"

"There ain't any of them worryin' me!"

"A fool is a fool," th' Ramblin' Kid muttered pityingly.

"Senorita Serpente," that night, was in Old Bonanza's when th' Ramblin' Kid and Senor Skinny came in. Senor Skinny looked once at her—and was ready, if need be, to kill the handsome Matador Stebano, who at the instant was holding the hand of the "Senorita Serpente."

Slowly, carelessly, the eyes of th' Ramblin' Kid also lifted to the eyes of "Senorita Serpente." Suddenly his body grew tense. His look became a searching scrutiny. Recognition flashed across his face:

"Serrano! Daughter of the Snake!" he exclaimed under his breath.

"Senorita Serpente's" gaze wavered, her form trembled; quickly, with a gasping cry, she turned her head away.

At Senor Skinny the "Senorita Serpente" smiled.

Again, as if unwilling, but unable to resist, she looked at th' Ramblin' Kid; in his black eyes was something that made the color drain from her cheeks, and once more "Senorita Serpente" shuddered—even while she threw back her head and laughed daringly, defiantly, and with a subtle lift of her brows invited Senor Skinny to come to her side.

"GAWD!" Senor Skinny murmured to th' Ramblin' Kid. "Did you see that? Did you see her eyes?"

"I saw her eyes," th' Ramblin' Kid answered, a queer gentleness in his voice, "and I saw in them that which you didn't see—which you *couldn't* see, you poor damned fool!"

"Oh, well, everybody can't see what you see," Senor Skinny bantered, a bit scornfully, "When they were little they didn't get nursed, like you did, in the arms of the "Wise One" of the Toltec—"

At the reference to his orphaned boyhood among the Mozos los Sierras—"Men of the Mountains"—far to the south in the land of the Tolteci, before he wandered north into Texas, th' Ramblin' Kid's eyes narrowed, grew hard. Then his look softened; it was pity.

"Fool!" was his only reply.

Matador Stebano, very attractive in the brightly-colored green and yellow uniform of his calling, slender and graceful, with the red sash about his

waist, scowled as Senor Skinny approached.

"The Senorita will dance with the Americano cowpuncher!" Senor Skinny smilingly reached for the small warm hand.

"Tomorrow—I kill—" Matador Stebano snarled.

"The bull!" Senor Skinny laughed derisively, as he led the "Senorita Serpente" away.

"Who is he—the dark-eyed one—he that plays at the monte?" "Senorita Serpente" breathed eagerly to Senor Skinny, her body close against his breast in the dance. "His look—it—it fills me with—with dread! His eyes—they seem to—to—*know!*" The last word was almost a gasp.

Senor Skinny glanced indifferently toward th' Ramblin' Kid, seated already at the table where they gamble with the cards—

"That's just th' Ramblin' Kid," "Senor" Skinny replied lightly—"a good old scout, in some ways, but not dangerous! He ain't much for the ladies. He don't understand 'em like I do, for instance!"

"He does not care for the señoritas?"

"Not so you could notice it—"

"Does he fear?"

"Nothin' on earth or in hell! He lived too long with the Toltec—"

"Tolteci!" The syllables leaped from the lips of "Senorita Serpente" like the hiss of a snake; she swayed, her hands convulsively clutched the arms of Senor Skinny; she reeled as if she would fall; her body became almost liquid in its limpness, in her eyes was terror—

"Tolteci—" "Senorita Serpente" repeated pantingly, as if frightened, "—the White One—Son of the Flame—without fear; without desire!"

Then she laughed. Such a laugh! Blending maddest of passion, wildest exultation, utterly hopeless despair.

After that "Senorita Serpente" danced, as never woman danced before—or since—in Old Bonanza's, in the ranchito, at Socorro.

**PADRE ALGONZA** brought the word.

Because of the bad sickness of the small child of Mateo and Nanita Sandoza, Padre Algonza came back very late, when the moon was going down, and rested almost on the top of Capaline, the volcano that is dead; at the entrance of the hacienda La Queratto, he saw "Senorita Serpente" and Senor Skinny pause for a moment; from behind the walls there was a rustling—like creatures gliding through the grass—the gate swung open, Senor Skinny and "Senori-

ta Serpente" stepped inside of the place and again it was closed.

Padre Algonza did not wait.

As fast as he could, he hurried to the ranchito to find the other Americano cowpuncher, th' Ramblin' Kid. In Old Bonanza's he was still at the monte—

"Quick!" Padre Algonza whispered. "Senor Skinny has yielded! At the casa La Queratto—with the 'Senorita Serpente'—she whose kiss is the death—or madness. I saw them go in! What can be done?"

"Th' damned idiot." Slowly, th' Ramblin' Kid got up from the table, "I will go!"

"And I?" Padre Algonza questioned.

"Come also. From the outside you can watch!"

The casa La Queratto was black; the great gate was closed tightly and barred; from within was no sound save at times the swishing noise, as though something brushed swiftly past shrubbery heavy and dense.

"Your hand, Padre Algonza!" Very low th' Ramblin' Kid spoke.

Padre Algonza's hand was held down, th' Ramblin' Kid's foot rested in it—with a leap he caught the top of the wall, swung up and dropped to the ground inside of the court.

Th' Ramblin' Kid stepped to the gate, quietly lifted the bar, threw open the entrance.

"Stand here. Do not come in—unless—"

Padre Algonza stood at the opening. Inside it was dark; from the shadows there came such hissing as never before had the holy priest heard; the thick, sickening odor of venomous serpents filled the air; Padre Algonza made the sign of the Cross and shuddered.

Th' Ramblin' Kid, stooping forward, ran quickly to the door of the casa. It was open. A thin stream of red light poured from the room; at the door Padre Algonza saw th' Ramblin' Kid pause for an instant. Then he stepped inside—

There was silence, save for the hissing, hissing, that came from every part of the court, silence and the fearful nauseating smell of reptiles.

"The place is bewitched—it is accursed—it is the abode of the brood of the Evil One!" Padre Algonza whispered.

It seemed an age. Padre Algonza could not remember. He waited.

Then, holding the Crucifix before him, Padre Algonza himself went cautiously to the door.

That which he saw he cannot forget.

A SINGLE BURNER hung from a beam in the center of the room. Under it was the great copper shield of Zachu, "Lord of the Reptiles." A dull glow—red, as from smoldering embers—filled the place.

On a couch, covered with the skin of the spotted leopardo, at the far end of the room, was Senor Skinny wrapped in the slimy folds of a monster serpent, its head drawn back, the neck arched, jaws wide apart and reaching toward the parted lips of Senor Skinny, who stared with entranced vision, unable to move, into the fiendish eyes that to him seemed to be the caressing, inviting eyes of "Senorita Serpente" burning with love!

Crouched at the other end of the room was th' Ramblin' Kid—his will battling with the demon will of another great snake coiled before him and that blocked his way to the couch on which Senor Skinny was lying; the frightful head was reared, ready to strike—swaying from side to side—held back only by the look in the eyes of th' Ramblin' Kid—

Padre Algonza could not move, scarcely could he breathe.

The venomous mouth of the great snake bending above Senor Skinny was lowered slowly, surely, toward the face of the cowpuncher Americano. Another heart-beat, and the slimy gums would be glued to his lips and the soul be drained from his body—

"Serrano!"

The word whipped from the tongue of th' Ramblin' Kid like the stab of a dagger.

"Serrano—Daughter of the Snake!"

There was irresistible command in the tone. The thick folds about Senor Skinny trembled, the ugly, terrifying, head was turned toward th' Ramblin' Kid—in the eyes was all the fury and madness of passion arrested, and, with the look, a terror unspeakable.

"Serrano!"

Again, not loudly, but to be obeyed, came the word from the smiling lips of th' Ramblin' Kid.

At the interruption, rage tore at the monster serpent coiled and barring the path of th' Ramblin' Kid to Senor Skinny and the snake that held him enthralled on the couch—the ugly wedge-shaped head was drawn back—back—that the fangs might leap with the sureness of death into the flesh of the slim young Americano before it.

For the first time, th' Ramblin' Kid's hand flashed to the gun at his hip—

"Serrano—that you may live—Zacaratta, the Azteca, your *malvado aliento*—must die!"

As th' Ramblin' Kid spoke, the gun crashed.

The great snake before him lashed wildly, futilely, about on the floor. A hazelike smoke for a moment enveloped it. The overwhelming fumes that come from the gila monster, the reptile diablo, when it is dying, filled the room. The six-foot length of the serpent shuddered convulsively and grew quiet—

And "Lobo," the Yaqui, lay dead, with a bullet in his brain!

"It was the snake—I swear it—th' Ramblin' Kid shot," Padre Algonza afterwards declared, and Padre Algonza would not lie. "Yet, it was 'Lobo,' the Yaqui—that died!"

Even the roar of the gun did not break the spell that held Senor Skinny—his mouth open, parted in an idiotic grin, still eagerly reaching for the touch of the hideous serpent-jaws bending toward him.

Breathless, Padre Algonza watched.

Th' Ramblin' Kid stepped forward, over the body of "Lobo"—quickly went to the couch—

"Serrano—your Master!" tenderly, almost as a lover speaks, the words came from his lips, smiling, gently, sadly.

"—Without fear—"

The open hand of th' Ramblin' Kid shot out and slapped the dripping mouth of the serpent.

"—Without desire—"

Again the hand crashed against the ugly head, and with a laugh—not of mirth, not of anger, not of passion—th' Ramblin' Kid turned away!

The sinuous coils tightened convulsively, then loosened, the head drooped, a haze like that which had enshrouded the other covered the forms on the couch—Senor Skinny and the reptile—and out of the mist came suddenly the agonized scream of a woman, filled with torture, and "Senorita Serpente," the Cortesana Serrano, stood up—swayed—and fell sobbing and moaning to the floor! Her lips were bruised as if they had been struck and blood was at the side of her mouth.

*The great serpent was gone!*

Senor Skinny, dazed, his eyes staring wildly about, started dizzily up from the couch.

"Where in hell—what's happened?"

"Leave quickly!" Padre Algonza commanded.

Th' Ramblin' Kid paused at the door.

On her knees, her body rocking back and forth, her hands clasping the Crucifix that hung from Padre Algonza's girdle, "Senorita Serpente"—Cortesana Serrano—piteously called:

"Tolteci! Tolteci—my own! Son of the Flame—the White One!"

Th' Ramblin' Kid stepped to her side, looked tenderly down into the upturned tear-drenched eyes; a smile of infinite sadness trembled on his lips as he whispered:

"Not yet, Serrano! Not yet. . ."

THAT NIGHT, not waiting for the dawn, th' Ramblin' Kid and Senor Skinny rode to the North.

The body of "Lobo" Padre Algonza left where it lay; "Senorita Serpente," the Cortesana Serrano, he took to the Mission at Magdalena. Never again did "Senorita Serpente" dance in the ranchito at Socorro, nor from that day has any person gone into the casa La Queratto.

In the afterglow, when the sun has dipped beyond the wild crags of Del Christo range, and darkness is over the Llano Sonora, "Senorita Serpente" slips out from the Mission and by the giant yucca stands and looks hungrily—her eyes no longer burning with the passion that lured men to the casa La Queratto, but instead glowing with the soft luster of undying love—toward the White Star that hangs over the top of Sentinel Mountain, far to the North.

There Padre Algonza found her the night after the Fiesta of the Penitentes.

"Padre Algonza—" "Senorita Serpente's" lips quivered with a smile, heart-tearing in its wistfulness, "Will He come? Will Tolteci—my Own—the White one—Son of the Flame—come again to Serrano?"

The answer brought hope to the upturned eyes—

"He will come, Daughter of Sorrow—" the arms of the priest drew the head of the girl to his breast, "—Tolteci, your Own, will come when your Soul—having been proved—can meet Him—"

Padre Algonza paused, the last words were a whisper—

"—Without fear; without desire!"

