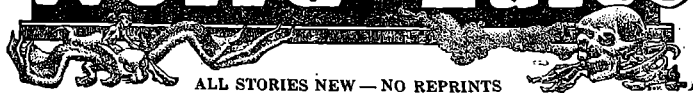


# Weird Tales



ALL STORIES NEW — NO REPRINTS

JULY, 1943

Cover by E. Franklin Wittmack

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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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LAMONT BUCHANAN, Associate Editor.

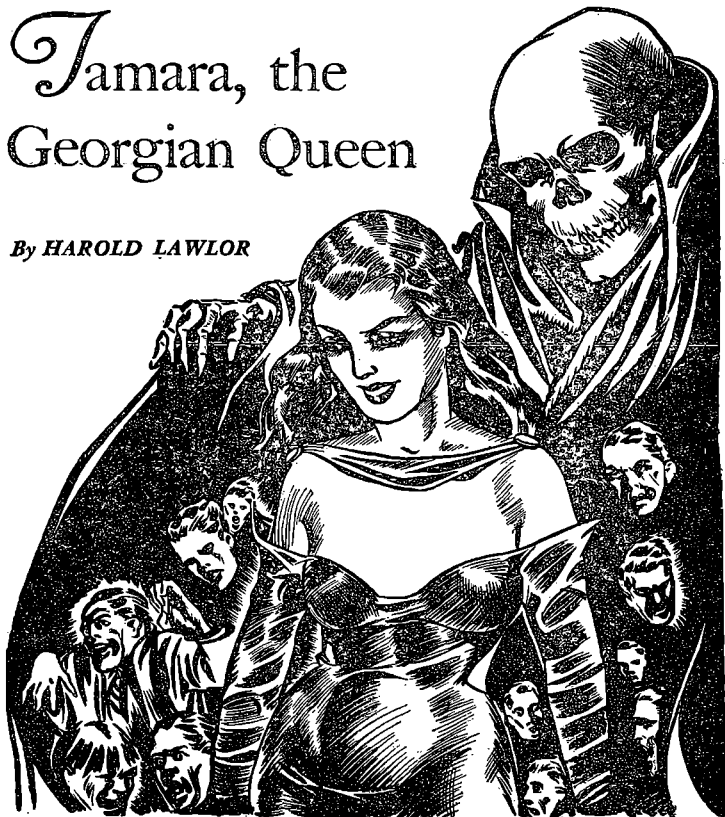
*He had a beautiful wife who was really "different"—having lived once before; many centuries ago.*

**I**T'S horrible to remember now that the thing started in gaiety. Gaiety! God, and my heart aching with a pain that can't be dulled! My whole being crying yearningly for Eve!

After eight lean years of marriage—years that held days on which we'd barely had enough to eat—we were at last on top of the world. For I'd written a best-seller. It was one of those phenomena of the pub-

# Tamara, the Georgian Queen

By **HAROLD LAWLOR**



lishing world that make critics tear their hair out by the roots. It wasn't a good book. The critics panned it to hell and gone.

But it was full of the good old corn. The public loved it, and bought 400,000 copies the first six months it was on the stands. I had a shrewd agent. He set three film companies bidding against each other for the screen rights. When Olympic Productions finally won out, it set them back a sum running into six figures.

We went a little crazy, then, Eve and I. But who could blame us? We weren't yet thirty, we were still deeply in love, and we'd damned near starved to death!

We took a three-year lease on a Lincoln Park West penthouse, we bought a convertible, long and sleek and black, and blinding with chromium. And when Eve thought she'd like a mink coat, I laughed and quoted Valentina, "Meenk? Meenk is for foootball!"

So Eve wore sable.

We had nearly six months of almost drunken happiness, and then—then Eve met Madame Yalta Salkov.

To this day I don't know how the meeting came about. Perhaps one of Eve's new friends said, "Eve, there's the weirdest woman—Yalta Salkov. She tells you the darnedest things about yourself. Twenty-five dollars for a fifteen minute seance, and worth every penny of it! You *must* see her, darling!"

And Eve, with an afternoon to kill and still unaccustomed money in her purse to burn, went.

**I** REMEMBER when she came home. I was in shorts, stretched out on a deck chair on the terrace, a sandwich in my hand, a highball at my elbow. I'd been turning over in my mind the plot of my next story, but I wasn't working very hard at it. This was the life! I stretched, and lapped up the sun.

And then Eve was there, on the edge of the chair, running her hands over my naked shoulders.

"Mmmm!" she said. "Eight years married and I still love the guy. Dull and stodgy and hopeless of me, isn't it?"

"Yes," I said, and kissed her.

And then she must have remembered; for her green eyes, laughed at her secret knowledge.

"You know," she said, "I always thought you'd got a bargain when you married me, but wait'll you hear!"

She was off the chair, a flash of white, striking a pose before the low parapet with its coping of Bedford stone edging our terrace.

"Careful!" I warned. "That parapet's too low for safety."

"Guess who I am!" she cried, her sleek black curls blowing in the wind.

My heart caught at the picture she made there. "You're—the girl I love."

Her eyes thanked me, but, "Try again!" she urged.

"Well, then," I said, lazily agreeable, "you're the old battle-axe I'm married to."

"No!" She made a face at me. She couldn't hold it back any longer. "I'm Tamara! Tamara, the Georgian Queen! Madame Salkov said so!"

"Who is Madame Salkov?" I wanted to know.

Eve told me. With her hands and her eyes and her voice she even made me see the mysterious turbaned woman, with her mask-white face, her mouth done in purple-red salve, her haunted black eyes.

"And she said I'm the reincarnation of Tamara," Eve finished. "She saw it in the cards, in the crystal, in my hand. You know, I think the woman actually believed it! She almost pushed me from the room. She looked scared to death."

Eve laughed, and came back to sit on the edge of my chair.

"So all right," I said. "You're Tamara.

We should make a liar out of Madame Yalta Salkov. But tell me, who was Tamara?"

"She was the queen of Georgia, in the Caucasus," Eve said. "According to Madame Salkov, Tamara was a beautiful, glamorous, fascinating, wicked, evil woman. Just like me! She lived in a castle high above a rocky gorge. And she had lovers. Scads of 'em. Every night a different one. And in the morning, tired of her plaything, she called her minions and had the luckless lover tossed from the battlements to be broken on the rocks below."

"Every morning?" I asked. "Every lover?"

"Every blessed morning! Every gosh-darned lover! And I'm her reincarnation, mind you!" Eve finished.

I pulled her toward me. "Well, don't go getting any ideas, toots," I said, looking at the parapet. "We're forty stories up."

And we laughed. We *laughed*. God, to remember that now!

**A** WEEK later tragedy struck.

I'd been out that night, giving a talk on writing to a woman's "culture" club. I hadn't wanted to do it, but I couldn't get out of it. When I reached home about eleven-thirty that night, Eve was sitting on the sofa, the French doors opened behind her, reading a book. She looked up when I came in.

"Well, how did you go over?" she asked.

"They were rolling in the aisles," I admitted modestly, when the bell cut through my words. I raised my eyebrows at Eve, and hiked back to the door. It was the police. A burly Irishman, and a younger, slighter officer who seemed to be the spokesman.

"Excuse me," he said, "but there's been an accident. Have you had any visitors tonight?"

I looked at Eve, who called, "No," from

the sofa. I told them I'd been out, and had only just reached home. For some reason they wanted to come in, so I stepped aside. The slighter fellow walked over to the French doors.

"These been open all evening?" he asked, looking at Eve. At her nod, he went out onto the terrace, and came back almost immediately.

Eve was watching him wide-eyed.

"My wife told you there'd been no one here tonight," I said sharply. "What's the matter?"

"A young guy leaped or fell from somewhere in this building," he said. "Landed in the alley just below your terrace there."

Eve made a little strangled sound of pity in her throat. The officer jerked his head toward the hall, and I followed both of them out.

"I'm Taylor," the younger officer said. The other's name was Doheny. Taylor went on, "No sense upsetting your wife unnecessarily, but we'd like you to come down and see if you can identify the man. You may have seen him around the building, though the manager claims the man is a stranger."

I went down with them, and through the side lobby to the alley. A squad car was parked there, and two more officers stood waiting. From somewhere they'd secured a blanket, which they pulled back now to permit me to see the dead man's face. I leaned forward, my stomach muscles taut.

The man was young, well-set-up, and darkly handsome. I'd never seen him before in my life. A search already conducted had shown there were no identifying papers or labels in his clothes.

When I'd denied any knowledge of the man, Officer Taylor said, "All right, Mr.—Wallace, is it? Thanks for coming down."

That was all. I went back to the elevator, feeling rather sickish. Eve was waiting for me upstairs. She looked pale and distraught, unlike herself.

"Who was it?" she asked.

"A young guy. Good-looking. I've never seen him around."

"Oh." Eve's lashes covered her eyes. "Dead?"

"Yes." I shivered a little. I wished I could forget the huddled, awkward way that broken body had lain. Like a rag doll, tossed carelessly aside.

I DON'T know what made me remember that ridiculous Tamara story, just then. But it flashed across my mind. And because I didn't want Eve to see how badly shaken I'd been by that scene below, I said senselessly, "Say, Eve, I hope you weren't being Tamara tonight, tossing boy friends off the terrace."

She didn't smile. I could see her whole body grow tense, and she said, low. "What a perfectly rotten, beastly thing for you to say!"

It was as if she'd slapped me. At any other time she would have known instinctively what had prompted my foolish remark. But now—I didn't know what made her take it like that. I swear it was the first sharp word she'd ever said to me. She turned quickly, but not before I'd seen the swift glint of tears in her eyes.

"Why, Eve!" I said helplessly, starting after her. "Why, honey, I didn't mean—"

But she ran blindly for the bedroom, and slammed the door. I stood there, staring dazedly at the white panels. I didn't go to her. I didn't know what to do. Such a thing had never happened between us before. I had no precedent to guide me.

And, oddly, I was afraid. The antennae of my imagination drew back instinctively from some horror they sensed, but could not define. Perplexed, I went back to the sofa and picked up the book Eve had been reading.

A half hour later, she crept from the bedroom and came to me where I was pretending to read. She sat down alongside

me and laid her cheek against mine. My arm went around her.

"I'm sorry, Thorne," she whispered. "I don't know what made me lash out at you like that."

"It was all my fault." My arm tightened around her. "It was a half-witted thing for me to say."

We never spoke of it again. Once more things seemed to be between us as they were. But strangely, not quite the same.

So far as I know, the body of the dead man was never identified. We heard no more about the affair, and the police didn't come near us again. But Eve seemed quieter. No, not quite that—she was gay enough, at times. But the gaiety was forced. Or was I just imagining things?

I SAID the police never came near us again. I didn't mean it quite in that way. For two weeks later, they were back.

Again I'd gone out alone. Again Eve had spent the evening reading. And again the body of a young man had been found in the alley beneath our terrace!

When Officer Taylor came to the door and told us, I could feel my heart sink. Literally. And I know my face grew pale. I suppose Eve and I both presented the picture of guilt. The memory of that other death was as yet still fresh in our minds, and now—

The police were harder to satisfy this time. At their repeated questions, Eve only said, "There was no one here all evening. I was alone. Reading. See?" And she held up the book.

But she voiced her denials so lifelessly, with so complete a lack of conviction, that I could scarcely blame Taylor for looking skeptical. Her eyes went from Taylor to Doheny to me, and—was that dawning horror in their depths?

Luckily, my sense of the ridiculous came to my aid. I was dramatizing, letting my imagination run away with me. I was sus-

pecting Eve—*Eve!*—of who knows what sinister actions, just like any stupid hero of my earlier detective stories!

When Taylor went out onto the dark terrace, I followed him with an easier mind, after making a reassuring gesture to Eve. Taylor was leaning over the parapet gingerly: On my way to join him, I stepped on something round. Mechanically I picked it up, felt the smoothness of leather under my fingers as I thrust it into my pocket.

Taylor straightened, and his shoulders executed a baffled shrug. "Well, no dice," he said. "Would you come down again with us, Mr. Wallace?"

I nodded, and breathed more naturally. Evidently there was going to be no trouble, then.

Eve watched us go through the living room with wide eyes. If she saw the second gesture of attempted reassurance that I made, she gave no sign. Doheny stayed with her.

Again the body of the man lying in the alley, crumpled into an attitude that spelled hideously broken bones, was young, well-set-up, darkly handsome. I'd never seen him before in my life. There was no blanket this time. He was wearing brown covert slacks and a camel's-hair sport jacket. My eye vaguely noticed that one of the round leather buttons on the jacket was missing.

And then—electrified—my hand closed over the smooth round thing that my fingers had been nervously playing with in my pocket. The thing I'd picked up on our terrace. And I knew, I knew even without looking at it. The smooth leather sphere in my pocket was a button, just like the one missing from the dead man's sport jacket!

"You don't know him then?" Taylor's disappointed voice came to me like a voice in a dream.

"I—no! No, certainly not!"

I saw Taylor look at me sharply in the alley's dim light. Then apparently satisfied, he turned again and bent over the body. We were alone. Stealthily my right hand withdrew the button from my pocket. As cautiously as I could, I threw the thing far to my left.

There was a sharp *ping!*

Taylor straightened. "What was that?"

"What?"

"That noise I heard."

I saw that he wasn't really suspicious. My heart started beating again. "Oh, a rat, probably."

He nodded absently. "You needn't wait, Mr. Wallace. Would you mind telling Doheny, though, to come down here?"

I went back to the apartment. When Doheny had tramped out, I looked at Eve. She was like a ghost, huddled there in the corner of the sofa. I didn't say a word. I just went over and held her close. Her body was trembling under my hands.

"Thorne," she whispered. "Thorne, I'm afraid."

Like a child, confessing a fear of the dark.

"Ssh!" I said, stroking the soft hair.

But she shivered uncontrollably. And, again, "I'm afraid."

And, remembering the button, I knew a sick fear, too, that I couldn't down.

**T**HIS time the police were able to identify the dead man. Perry Waite, his name was, and he was a resident of a North Shore suburb. But his parents knew of no one in our building with whom he was friendly. Nor could they give any reason why he should have committed suicide. Yet it was a suicide verdict that the coroner's jury returned.

For, luckily for Eve and me, a window was discovered open in a vacant apartment on the twenty-second floor, just above the spot where the body was found. In the absence of any other clues, the police

offered the theory that he'd jumped voluntarily from there.

The case was closed.

But for us it was only the beginning. I was terribly worried about Eve. She moved around the apartment looking like a wraith. She grew thinner and thinner, until at last I couldn't stand the look of mute dread in her eyes.

"Eve, what is it?" I asked desperately. "What's worrying you?"

"Nothing. Nothing." And her eyes slid away from my face to focus unseeingly on some spot over my shoulder. She was like she'd always been of late. Far away. I felt as if I never had her complete attention, any more. Now, when I grew insistent, and caught her by the shoulders, her head tilted back, and she said, "Thorne, hasn't it ever occurred to you that perhaps I had something to do with—with the deaths of those young men?"

That drugged look in her eyes! It scared me. And there was something else—something that I could hardly find courage to voice. "Eve, you weren't—lying, when you said you were alone those times?"

"No, no!" Her denial reassured me. But then, "I told the truth, so far as I know. *So far as I know*," she repeated in a whisper. "But suppose, Thorne, that Madame Salkov was right, and I really *am* Tamara?—Without knowing it myself . . . in some strange Jekyll-and-Hyde way?"

"That's crazy!" I scoffed. "You're letting this thing prey on your mind. Look, Eve. We'll get out of here. We'll take a trip somewhere, anywhere."

But she wouldn't agree to go. When I pressed her, her green eyes grew cloudy and obscure, and again her attention wandered off to some far, strange place where I could not follow. That eerie, fey quality! It got on my nerves. It persisted, until even I began to find myself wondering . . . was she Tamara?

Eve retired to her room. She seemed

always to want to be alone now. Late that afternoon, I stopped my nervous pacing and fled from the house. Something had to be done. I'd get hold of Madame Yalta Salkov and force her to undo this damage she'd done.

Eve had told me where the seeress lived. A tumble-down brick rooming house, painted in scaly red, on a poverty-stricken near North Side Street.

But the slatternly rooming housekeeper whined in a Zasu Pitts voice, "Salkov? She ain't here no more. I dunno, Mister. She just went. They come and they go."

"But it's important!" I stressed. "She must have left some forwarding address."

"Not wit' me. Maybe Ella knows. *Ella!*"

But the wan slavey knew no more of Madame Salkov's present whereabouts than did her mistress.

**H**AVE you ever known futility? The kind that seems to be an iron hand gripping your lungs, gripping until every shallow breath you draw is torture? I wandered over to Lincoln Park, and sank onto a bench. I wasn't thinking. I was numb. Time slipped away, and darkness fell unnoticed. It was eleven o'clock before I rose, and made my way listlessly back to the penthouse.

Eve was there—and yet, not there. She took no notice of my entrance. She asked no questions as to where I'd been. I received the impression that she hadn't even known I was gone. Yet she'd changed to a clinging white dinner dress. She must, at least, have noted the passage of time.

I couldn't sit in the living room, watching her white set face, hearing the almost palpable silence around us. I got up and went to the terrace, stood at the parapet gazing far out over the trees of the park.

Presently Eve was at my side. "Thorne?"

I turned. Her face was washed in the moon's radiance. Her red lips were parted,

smiling, alluring. I caught her to me, and bent to press my mouth to hers. This wasn't the comfortable love of eight years. This was something new and strange and exciting. We pressed close.

And then the shuttered eyes before mine opened narrowly. Their greenness was a lambent flame. I was looking deep into the eyes of someone—not *Eve!*

I pushed her away, and at my startled instinctive action her eyes grew strange and smoky, and a half-smile—inexpressibly evil!—played about her lips.

I turned away and covered my face with my shaking hands, as if to press from my vision the fantasies that my sickened thoughts were conjuring.

Perhaps I heard some sound then. Perhaps it was only an atavistic sixth sense warning of danger. But a chill ran up my spine, and the hairs prickled at the nape of my neck. I half-turned.

Eve was very near me, a ghostly figure in the moonlight. And then—with the quickness of light—she leaped; her arms stiffly outthrust. Her hands jolted against my shoulder, and the parapet caught me just above the knees. I toppled, almost righted myself, then fell!

My arms flayed wildly. Air rushed into my lungs in swift horrified intake. Then my left hand struck, the fingers caught the coping. Slipped. Clung.

The jerk was like a rabbit punch on my neck. My legs swung, pendulum-fashion, over a forty-story drop. My fingers were slipping, slipping on the rough stone. My eyeballs were starting from their sockets.

And then—there were hands under my right shoulder. Lifting. Until I could raise my right hand and grab the coping. I hung there, my breath coming in tortured gasps, my heart pounding.

And always there were those tense hands clutching from above, doing their utmost to ease the full force of my weight on my agonized arms.

My breath came a little easier. I tried to throw my right leg up, and over the coping. Twice it slipped, and then the third time, my heel caught and dug desperately into the stone. Slowly, inch by inch, I eased upward. Until, with a last desperate heave, I was up and over.

My knees refused to support me. I sagged there. Sweat sprang out on my forehead, trickled from my armpits. Through a gray haze I saw Eve standing before me.

*Eve!*

Her hands were half-raised. She stood there, frozen, her open mouth a black hole in her twisted face.

"Thorne, I pushed you!" she whispered. "I pushed you!"

And then, with a little sigh, she sank into a shivering heap at my feet.

ALL through that long night I watched at her bedside. If I thought she was pale before, her pallor now approached the waxiness of death. There were deep purple shadows under her eyes, and occasionally she writhed and moaned.

I must have been in a near-coma myself. Certainly my thoughts were a jumbled chaos. I just sat there helplessly, unable to take my eyes from Eve. It wasn't until morning that I thought of calling one of the physicians who lived in the building. And before then, Eve had regained consciousness. Her stricken eyes told me she remembered clearly the events of the past night.

But when I would have touched her, stroked her hair, done something to make her feel I knew she hadn't been herself, she only twisted away from me.

"Don't!" There was utter despair in her voice. "I can't bear to have you touch me, after what I did."

She wouldn't listen. Nothing I could say would make her listen to me.

When the doctor appeared and had seen



her, he came back to the living room. "I've given your wife a mild sedative. She'll sleep most of the day. But what happened? She seems to have had a severe shock."

"I—we quarreled." I said the first thing I could think of.

"Ah, marriage!" the doctor said philosophically.

And I answered something. Anything to get rid of him. But when he'd gone I reopened the door, and caught him before he reached the elevator.

"Could you give me the name of a reputable psychiatrist?" I asked.

He looked startled, but he told me where one could be reached.

The thing had gone far enough. I'd been too long a hesitant fool. Time now I did something. Eve was sleeping when I left the apartment, and I felt she'd be safe enough. The effects of the sedative should last the greater part of the day.

But when I called Dr. Hadley, the psychiatrist, I was told that he was out of town, and wouldn't be in to his office before one o'clock that afternoon. I had a few hours to kill, so I went over to the library.

I found little about Tamara in the encyclopaedia, save that she ruled Georgia during the years 1184-1212 A.D. But a sub-reference the librarian found for me unearthed a book that was more informative. It carried substantially the same story about Tamara, or Thamar, as Madame Salkov had told Eve.

The monarch's sensuality . . . the long parade of lovers . . . their deaths in quick succession as they were hurled from the castle's walls into the depths of the rocky gorge below.

There was a footnote. My eye, reading hastily, skimmed over it. I remember only a part:

". . . until at last, the satiated monarch died by her own hand. She was found in bed, a dagger plunged into her left breast. There was no doubt it was suicide. The

dagger was her own—with the royal crest emblazoned on its haft, a miniature of the royal crown worked in pearls for a finial."

I closed the book and returned it to its shelf.

I WAS able to make an appointment with Dr. Hadley, and when I was at last seated across from the slender psychiatrist with the poker face, I told the story as quickly as I could. Frankly, I felt like a fool in the telling, for here in these austere offices, the story sounded wildly implausible and fantastic. Evidently, however, the doctor had heard stranger, for he listened with grave attention.

"I—I suppose I've sounded like a madman," I apologized lamely, when I'd finished.

"Not at all, Mr. Wallace." The psychiatrist permitted himself a winty smile.

I couldn't believe it. "You mean you think *Eve is* the reincarnation of Tamara?"

Dr. Hadley shook his head. "It's perfectly obvious what has happened. Madame Salkov planted a thought-suggestion in your wife's subconscious mind. Your wife is evidently a woman of a highly impressionable type. The Tamara fixation built itself up until—"

"But why should Madame Salkov tell her such a thing!" I cried.

Again the doctor smiled. "It's a fortune-teller's stock in trade to give her clients a thrill, you know. The woman, I think, never realized what mischief she was stirring up."

I wasn't quite satisfied. "Those two young men—"

The doctor spread his hands. "Coincidence. Purely coincidence, Mr. Wallace. If the truth could be known, you'd find the deaths of those young men had absolutely no connection with your wife."

"But the button! The button from Perry Waite's coat."

Dr. Hadley looked a little annoyed. "You told me you threw it away without looking at it. Could you swear the button

came from that particular coat? Of course not. You've had friends visiting you on your terrace who wear coats of that type, no doubt. You probably own a couple yourself. The button may have been there for days, weeks."

I nodded. It was true enough. And I *wanted* to believe him. There remained only the attack on me for him to explain away. And he had an explanation for that.

"That was your wife's subconscious acting," Dr. Hadley said. "The stage had been carefully set by the previous deaths of those two young men. Your wife was nervous, highly emotionalized, which induced a traumatic state, not unlike a sleep-walker's. Under its spell, she pushed you. When you felt yourself falling, you probably called out, though you do not remember doing so. But it was sufficient to awaken your wife, bring her back to *herself*. Proof that it did is your own statement that she immediately ran to catch you, help you." And Dr. Hadley smiled benignly at the obvious relief on my face.

"And you can help her? Cure her?" I was still afraid to hope.

"Yes," Dr. Hadley assured me. "We have only to plant a counter-suggestion in your wife's subconscious. It won't be difficult, as I feel the shock of her attempt on your life has already done much to set your wife on the road to recovery. Bring her in to see me tomorrow. I'd suggest, by the way, that you give up your apartment. It would be wiser if you left there immediately, and went to a hotel for the night."

Dr. Hadley stood up, terminating the interview. I know now that he was wrong. But I went out of his office—it's a *trifling* simile, but it fits the case as no other could—like a man with a last-minute reprieve.

I could hardly wait to tell Eve. To shatter this evil spell that had held us in mounting alarm for weeks. Easy to cast off our thralldom now, I thought happily. For, like many fantastic stories, ours had a perfectly naturalistic explanation.

But it had not.

I RACED home. The elevator crawled slowly upward at a maddening snail's pace. I hurried across the granite landing, opened the walnut-finished fireproof steel door of the penthouse.

"Eve!" I started to call, but the name died in my throat.

There was something wrong. I knew it the minute I opened the apartment door. The Venetian blinds were closed, and the darkened penthouse was full of a sentient silence. A frightening silence. It was a miasma, smothering, that caught me in the throat, the nostrils.

My eyes strove to pierce the half-light. And then I saw. The bedroom door was closed.

*The bedroom door was closed.*

Nothing so ominous about that. Nothing so terribly—I started for it. Slowly. Reluctantly. My hand outstretched before me like a sleepwalker's. The lagging steps. The terror at my heart. The long slow journey over the thick carpet. And then . . . the crystal knob of the bedroom door, cool under my hand.

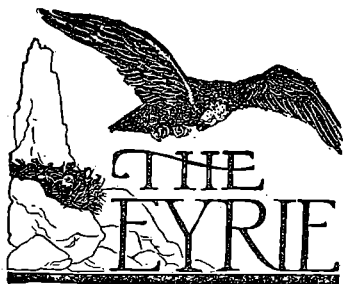
I opened the door. Eve was lying on the bed, her sheer negligee in disorder.

"Eve?" Was that my voice, that hoarse whisper? "Eve?"

I came nearer. She was lying quietly. So very quietly. Nearer . . . until at last I saw that she was dead. Dead. . . .

And plunged into her left breast was a dagger—a dagger with a chased crest on its haft, and for a finial, a jeweled crown of pearls!





Harold Lawlor

WE'RE following up Harold Lawlor's first story for WEIRD TALES—*Specter in the Steel*, presented in the May number—with *Tamara, the Georgian Queen*, the author's second yarn for us and in this issue.

Mr. Lawlor, who claims to have ducked his homework for a copy of WEIRD TALES as a schoolboy—and with no appreciable ill-effects, sends along the following data on himself and his first two stories for WEIRD TALES.

I wrote my first story at the age of nine—a thriller called *The Taxicab Boys*. Unhappily this valuable "first" is no longer in existence. It'd probably bring a fortune today!

The Muse went into hiding then for quite a while—years devoted to schooling and the usual varied assortment of jobs which seems to be the common lot of all writers. (And incidentally is becoming as corny for publicity purposes as the erstwhile convent background of every actress.)

It was during the depression that I once again felt the desire to write. Escape, probably—increasing deafness made jobs hard for me to get. And then, too, writing seemed such an easy way to make some money. (Ah, Youth and its lost illusions!) I didn't learn any better until I'd written many love stories and confessions, igniting no rivers the while. When I'd been thoroughly humbled I went to work as secretary to Don Wilcox, one of

the well-known writers of science and fantasy fiction.

He had faith, when I had little myself, in my future as a writer. It was at his suggestion that I tried a fantasy, and I sold the first one I wrote. Proof perhaps that those midnight hours spent with WEIRD TALES and Poe and Sax Rohmer, instead of homework, weren't wasted after all. There have been other sales since then, and I hope some not too distant-day to be as good as the top-notchers in the field.

As to the writing of the stories *Specter in the Steel* and *Tamara*, *The Georgian Queen*: *Specter* came to me from nowhere. One of those "blue moon" stories. All of a sudden it was just *there*—plot, characters, background and all. I wrote it rapidly, put it away for a few days, and then changed only one sentence. I don't mind adding that if this sort of thing happened oftener writers would lead happier lives.

*Tamara's* genesis followed the more familiar jig-saw puzzle pattern. Once, long ago, I saw a brief reference to *Tamara* in some now-forgotten book. She stayed half-buried in my memory all these years, and obligingly nudged me when I needed a plot idea. The character of Eve came next—the unhappy harbinger of *Tamara's* psyche: Then Thorne—and bit by bit, piece by piece, the rest of it. The writing, then. Fiddling with the opening: Writing, tearing up, throwing away . . . until at last the opening *felt* right and said what I wanted it to say. The rest of the story went along all right then. That's the way it usually is with every story. And then—

It's finished. It's in the mail. You'll never write another story as good—not if you live to be a hundred. You've shot your wad this time. You're through. You mope.

*Who'd want to be a writer?*

Pretty soon . . . another idea. Another story. *Better*. Maybe you're right. Maybe weeks later you learn you were wrong. But in the meantime—you're off!

*Who wouldn't want to be a writer?*

Harold Lawlor.