

Weird Tales

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FARNSWORTH WRIGHT, Editor.

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What Strange Horror Lurked Above It?

The Bed of Shadows

By FRED R. FARROW, JR.

MARCH 6th. At last, after two months of sleeping on a cot, I am back in my own room again. It has been completely redecorated and refurnished. First of all, it now boasts a real fireplace, not one of those make-believe electric affairs, but one with andirons and a screen. How cozy it will be to read by its flickering light on long winter nights!

The walls are paneled in driftwood oak up to within two feet of the ceiling, which is papered in some odd design. The furniture, selected by my sister Myra, is of the Early Colonial period. The bed especially is a prize: a huge, grim four-poster, with dingy dark maroon drapes on the sides and open at the top.

As I have a passion for reading in bed, Myra has provided a wrought-iron bridge lamp which can be swung so as to illuminate my book. The room is so delightfully gloomy that I can hardly wait until evening to lie there in bed and begin reading *Ghost House*, which I picked up at the store today.

March 7th. As I had intended, I retired about 11 last night to read. I had my bridge lamp on, and the curtains on that side of the bed were drawn back. The interior looked so dark, except where the light shone through the parted curtains, that it seemed almost like entering a tomb. There was a log fire which cast queer, quivering shadows on the ceiling. The ceiling . . . I had not noticed before what sort of paper Myra had picked out for the ceiling. It has a

most intriguing design of scroll-work on a dark background. I lay in my gloomy bed and idly traced out the intricate curves in the wavering fire-light.

My book is only fair. I read about two chapters and then put it down. My eyes wandered to the ceiling. I shall read some more tonight. There is a faint musty smell in the air. Perhaps the curtains need airing. I shall speak to Myra about it tomorrow.

March 8th. It is wonderful to have a fireplace in one's room. It seems so completely comfortable when the fire is just barely flickering to watch the little flames leaping up from the charred logs. I read some more of *Ghost House*. The book gets better as I progress. From time to time I cast my gaze up at the ceiling. I don't know why, but somehow I enjoy looking at the odd design of scrolls and spirals. A queer pastime, but fascinating. If Myra knew, she would wonder at it. I wonder myself.

March 9th. As soon as I retired last night my gaze rested on the ceiling. For the first time I seemed to feel attracted in some vague uncomfortable way by the queer spirals on the paper. What was it that I read long, long ago about certain cabalistic signs and their power to hypnotize one who looked at them too long? I seemed to remember only the one called the swastika. Surely there were none on my paper. Again I noticed the peculiar odor. Myra declares she airs the room every morning.

Just a word about my dreams. For the past two nights I have dreamed

about my room. In the dream room there is something indefinably terrible. I can not place what it is as yet. I wake up with an uneasy feeling that all is not as it should be in my room. Perhaps I shall have the same dream again. Strange that I have had it now for two consecutive nights!

March 10th, Sunday. Again I have had the same dream. In some odd fashion in my dream I seem to be in my gloomy old four-poster, the curtains tightly closed, looking up at the ceiling which is fitfully illuminated by the dying fire. I know definitely that the disturbing influence, whatever it is, is in the ceiling. This morning when I awoke I was exhausted. Perhaps I do not sleep at all but lie there all night tracing out those maddening curves and spirals by the light of the fire. Terrible thought, that of not knowing whether one is actually dreaming or lying there in that dim shadowy void between true slumber and wakefulness!

I must go to bed early tonight. If my book becomes more exciting I may be able to keep my eyes from those mocking spirals on the ceiling. I hope so.

March 11th. A peculiar thing happened last night. As it was Sunday, I retired early to read. After an unsuccessful attempt to rivet my mind on my book I put it down in disgust. Eagerly (why do I use the word?) my eyes turned to the ceiling. For the first time, instead of tracing out the little scrolls and whorls, I saw the thing as a whole. It is strange and a little uncanny, for the vague blurred outline bears a semblance to some monster. If I look directly I can not see it. If, however, I look out of the corner of one eye, then it takes shape.

I got out of bed to throw a log on the fire. Immediately the whole fantastic design seemed to fade away and became simply the papered ceiling. Seen from the bed again, the faint ir-

regular outline reappeared after a few moments.

Perhaps I should get rid of the four-poster. It is so huge and even sinister with its old red drapes that it may be affecting me as I lie there, night after night, trying to read my book. Certainly there is a smell as of old cloth.

Myra came in last night. "Can't you sleep, Paul?" she asked.

"No, dear; I have been reading and have read myself wide-awake."

Dear girl! She would never understand. She has no imagination. Show her a fragment of cloth from an airplane wing brought down in battle. She would see—simply a piece of cloth, so many inches wide by so long, possibly a bit soiled. She would get no thrill at the thought, nor would she even think of that piece of cloth, miles above the earth, helping to sustain the plane, dodging and dipping around and finally coming down with terrible speed after a well-directed shot.

Ah well! maybe she is better off without an imagination. Perhaps most truly happy people are so because they lack one.

March 12th. This thing is becoming fascinating. As I undressed last night I looked up at the ceiling—ordinary commonplace paper with a design. As soon as I got in bed, though, I looked up and saw the outline of the—shall I say *thing*? It has only a vague shape and I can not say just what it resembles. I tried the experiment of leaning out one side of the bed. Immediately the form disappeared. Can it be because of the poor lighting and the fact that I in my bed lie in comparative darkness, or is it something evil and sinister that is taking place?

I have had no more dreams.

March 13th. Tonight I gave up all pretense of reading. The form in the ceiling fascinates me. Its shape is becoming more and more clearly defined. I am anxious and yet I dread

to see what it will resemble if it continues to grow in clearness.

Myra suspects something. She questioned me several times as to why I look so worn and haggard after what she thinks is a good night's sleep. If she only knew, she would not wonder. But she must never know or she will think I am mad. Perhaps I am. I wonder. . . .

March 14th. My work at the office suffers because of the strange fascination of the ceiling. I can not keep my mind off it for a single moment. At night, as soon as I can leave Myra on a pretext of reading in bed (as though anyone could read inside those old dark drapes!) I slip into my dressing-gown and lie there gazing at the ceiling. It is now more than just interest which draws my attention. It is like an awful attraction which compels us against our very will to look at some terrible accident or catastrophe when we would like to shut our eyes.

The form is growing clearer. It resembles a gigantic bat.

March 15th. I must get rid of my four-poster. It is exerting some evil influence over me, I am sure. Still I have a morbid desire to see this thing through to the finish. Last night the details of the shape in the ceiling became more and more pronounced. I imagined I saw its eyes. In addition, some of the scrolls and spirals seemed actually to writhe. I could not have been asleep. The bridge lamp was on.

I have a feeling that soon the purpose back of all of this will be terribly revealed to me. Somehow I can detach my mind for a time and regard myself in this grim little drama from a distance. I see myself inside my

darkened bed behind the red drapes, a look of terrible fascination in my eyes, looking, watching, waiting—for what?

March 16th. I am writing this in bed, and will make notes of all that happens. As soon as I closed the drapes, I looked up at the ceiling. It was already there, a huge, irregular, murky blot on the paper with the writhing scrolls and spirals.

The thing is gaining in clarity and definition. Now as I lie here and look up, its form is quite distinct. I am watching it. I can see its ribbed wings and its little red eyes (can I be sane?) evilly glowing. An odor of things long since consigned to the grave pervades the air—the smell of a charnel-house.

The fire has almost gone out. As the wood ashes smolder and fall to the hearth, the thing in the ceiling seems suddenly to move. Its great bony wings flap slowly and clumsily. It is crawling, crawling, along the ceiling, until it gets directly over my head. It is only a few feet away. Closer, closer, and—oh God! it's going to jump down. . . .

* * * * *

THE young man was found dead in bed the following morning, an unforgettable look of horror in his wide, staring eyes.

"Death," the coroner reported, "due to heart failure, evidently induced by some violent shock."

But engraven in tiny characters in the ugly carved headboard of the grim old four-poster was found the curious legend:

Let him that sleepeth in this bed
Take heed ere reason leave his head!

