

# Weird Tales



MAY, 1951

Cover by Lee Brown Coye

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D. McILWRAITH, Editor

# The Bradley Vampire

BY ROGER M. THOMAS



Heading by Jon Arfstrom

**M**Y GREAT grandfather, James A. Bradley, had always been regarded among the closer members of the family as a highly emotional man. Not crazy or even eccentric, but perhaps just a little queer. Because of this we were not surprised to learn that he had directed that his little strongbox of personal belongings be held in trust to be opened at the end of 50 years by the eldest male member of the family.

Now, 50 years later to the day, the box

was turned over to me, Arthur James Bradley. Upon opening it I found it contained nothing but an assortment of personal keepsakes such as a large signet ring, a blue ribbon won in a hog judging contest and such things as that. Only that—and a letter. The letter, however, was such as I'll warrant has never before been written. I can now understand why great grandfather stipulated that it not be read until 50 years after his death. Had he made it public during his lifetime he would un-

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*... its sole purpose is to further Satan's battle against righteousness.*

doubtedly have been committed to the lunatic asylum with all possible haste. Read shortly after his death it would have possibly caused tongues to wag concerning the relative sanity of other members of the family.

I have allowed great grandfather's testament to be made public after careful deliberation. It is possible his writings are the ravings of a morbidly demented man. If on the other hand they are true, it is vitally necessary that the world be informed of the terrors he allegedly experienced on those few grim nights so that it might learn to protect itself against similar occurrences.

I, James Andrews Bradley, being of sound body and, I hope, mind, do attest the following series of events to be true.

THE evening of June 6, 1872 was stormy and wet. The day had been unbearably hot and humid—an almost sure sign of rain to come. The evening, however, had turned off so chilly that I was compelled to build a fire in the fireplace. My wife had gone to the next town to spend a few days with her sister who had just returned from the hospital following a rather serious operation, and I was sitting before the fire smoking my pipe, missing Martha terribly and wondering if, perhaps, she missed me just a little.

I must have dozed, for I was awakened by a repeated rapping on the door. I rose to answer it, wondering who would be calling on a night like this. We live in the country and callers are infrequent even under normal conditions.

Throwing open the door I saw a young appearing woman standing on the porch. There in the half light she seemed many more times beautiful than the most beautiful woman I had ever seen.

"Pardon me," she said, speaking in a low throaty kind of voice, "my horse bolted a few rods down the road and threw me from the carriage. I wonder if you could give me directions for reaching town?"

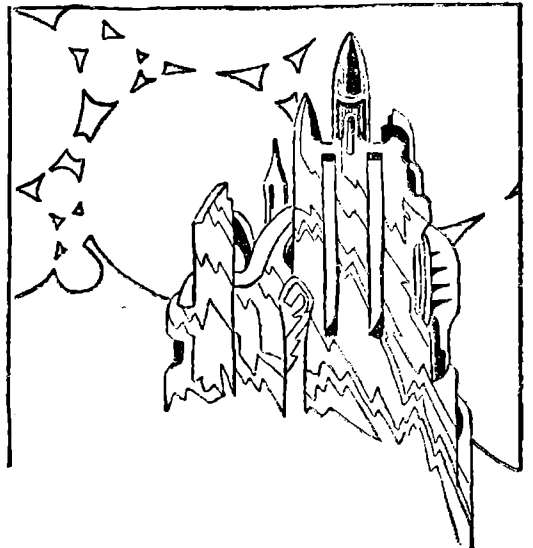
"Surely," I replied, "but come in. Come in. You must be drenched."

As she entered the lighted hallway I was

surprised to note that although she must have walked some distance in the rain she did not appear to be at all wet. I also saw that while unquestionably beautiful, hers was not the type of beauty the average man admires in a woman. Her hair was of a magnificent glossy midnight black, but her ears, which the hair failed to cover, were almost pointed. Her face was narrow with a sharp almost knifelike chin. She was tall, lissome, graceful, but her most arresting feature was her mouth. It was wide, the lips a little thin and very, very red. I found myself wondering what it would be like to be kissed by those lips but quickly dismissed the thought from my mind. I had not been long married and somehow did not believe Martha would approve.

WHEN we reached the big living room Shep, my collie dog who had been peacefully sleeping before the fire awoke and set up the most awful, fear crazed howling. This I could not understand as Shep, though a good pet and fine help at driving cattle, certainly was not fierce and, in fact, was not much of a watch dog. Why he should take offense to our visitor I did not know.

I knelt down and patted the dog. "Quiet, Shep," I said. "Settle down. Is that the way you treat our guests?" But I could not quiet the dog. He pushed his



belly against the floor and cowered back from the girl. Still his blood freezing howls rent the air. I led him towards the back door and he shot through it.

"I'm very sorry," I said turning back to my visitor. I have never before seen Shep treat a guest so—" I stopped, horrified at the expression of such living hate on her face. Her lips were drawn back and downward in a cruel grimace and her nostrils pinched. Her eyes, focused on the spot where Shep had lain, appeared to be flashing blue sparks. Looking into them made me think for a moment I was looking into the bottom-most depths of hell. I could not repress a strong shudder.

Seeing me stare at her, the girl immediately brought her emotions under control.

"I am afraid," she said, "that your dog doesn't like me. Now if you will tell me how to reach town I will leave you."

I gave her directions, protesting that she should let me hitch up the team and drive her in. She, however, would not hear of it and as I had no desire to go out on such a night I did not press the issue. I walked with her to the front door, asking her to wait there until I could call Shep into the kitchen in order to avoid any unpleasantness between them.

When I had Shep safely in the kitchen and started toward the front door I heard it close. I hastened my steps, picking up the kerosene lamp on the living room table. With the idea of throwing some light on the path for my visitor I opened the front door. To my complete dismay the pathway was deserted. I stood in the doorway a moment then returned to my pipe and easy chair, still wondering over the rapid disappearance of my guest.

Due to the night's rain, I was unable next day to do much outside of the regular chores. Consequently I decided to clean up the house, which had been sadly neglected during Martha's absence. About midway through these housewifely chores I began to appreciate the work a woman is daily put to. I toiled through an afternoon of dusting, sweeping, scrubbing and cursing the luck that had temporarily made a

bachelor of me. Occasionally my mind dwelt upon my caller of the night before, and I was surprised to find that I could scarcely remember any feature about her. All I could recall plainly was Shep's panic when the girl came near him. As for the girl herself I dimly recalled features of a somewhat unnatural beauty. Strange how today thought of her filled me with repugnance.

My musings were interrupted by Shep's barking. It was a joyous sort of yelp, one reserved for only three people; Martha, myself and my good friend and neighbor, Charlie Redik. Charlie, not bothering to knock, walked in the front door and saw me standing in the hallway, broom and dustpan in hand.

"Ah, James," he said, "I credited many achievements to you but your efficiency as the lady of the house comes as a surprise to me."

He was a sturdy, jovial man, always patient and kind. Being born in that superstition ridden section of Central Europe, some of its superstitions had become a part of his nature. Aside from this he was a completely solid and practical man. Charlie was several years older than I and had never married. He was predominantly a farmer and cared little for that not having to do with agriculture. However, an aesthetic spark had made him, of all things, a butterfly collector. He had a large and beautiful collection, each specimen pinned in a shallow box and the whole covered with a plate of glass making it airtight. He was justly proud of the net result of his hobby.

I led him into the living room and we smoked and talked awhile. I told him briefly of my visitor of the night before and he listened intently, a strange look on his face. I had tried to tell it lightly, but Charlie's look of astonishment gradually turning to horror struck a somber note to my story. I ended it as quickly as possible.

Charlie sat trance-like for a few moments, occasionally muttering "Vampire—vampire—"

His manner was making me so nervous that I finally said rather rudely, "Charlie,

what in the world are you talking about?"

The dazed look was still on his face as he replied, "Friend James. You have been visited by the vampire. That creature not of the living, yet undead. In Hungary I knew of many who had been visited by the vampire. I know its method of coming."

I scoffed at his words. "Surely, Charlie, you don't actually believe such a thing, do you?"

"James, James," he said, "why will you not believe what your very eyes tell you is true? You saw the features. Yet today you can recall only that they seemed pointed—sharp. You can remember nothing definite—a good sign that you were gazing at a supernatural being. It seemed beautiful last night while in your presence yet today your mind's eye rejects it as repulsive. That is the hypnotic influence the vampire would have over us. And if that is not enough, what about poor old Shep. Dogs are not subject to what you call superstitious nonsense. And Shep certainly is not easily frightened normally."

The part about Shep is, of course, what struck me as particularly strange, but even taking his actions into consideration I did not intend to credit Charlie's weird theories as fact and told him so.

He continued:

"You still refuse to believe me, eh? James, the vampire dates back beyond ancient Egypt. It can be found in Asia, Europe, the Americas, anywhere in the world. Text after text has been written on its habits, its existence. Even today in our so-called enlightened age the vampire demands some attention. The only difference today is that instead of being treated, and rightfully so, as a supernatural being, too many incline to the belief that vampirism is a form of melancholy giving a human being a fear of the daylight hours and an insatiable thirst for blood. I say the vampire is the pawn of the devil. It feeds on—yes—lusts for the blood of living beings. Its sole purpose is to further Satan's battle against righteousness on earth. If the vampire tastes of your blood you after death yourself become a vampire. It is thus that their ranks are swelled."

This lengthy speech by the usually rather taciturn Charlie had made me decidedly uneasy. Whether it was his talk or the eerie wind which was now whipping around the corners of the house I do not know, but I was suddenly conscious of a creepy feeling. I diverted the conversation to pleasanter channels by suggesting a game of cribbage. As dusk had fallen I also lit the living room lamp.

We had scarcely got into the first game when the air was split asunder by the most chilling howls of pure terror from Shep, who had been left outside.

Dropping our cards, Charlie and I raced out, not bothering to shut the door as we went.

Shep was cowering in front of the barn. His tail between his legs, he seemed trying to back away from something. His movements were vile, craven, and the horrible howling must have awakened neighbors for miles around.

WHEN Charlie and I reached him we could see nothing near him except a large moth which was circling over his head. As we came on the scene it flew past us in the direction of the house. Shep immediately quieted down, though he still shook visibly.

"I cannot understand it," I told Charlie. "Shep has never behaved this way before."

"The vampire," Charlie said, a shudder in his voice. "The moth, the bat, the rat. The vampire can assume the form of all those beasts and many more. Friend James, believe me. You are in grave peril. Not of your life but of your very soul."

"The peril," I said, trying to make it sound light, "seems to be with Shep. Personally, I still don't believe in your vampire, but apparently he does. Charlie, I wish you would do me a favor and keep him a few days for me. Shep likes you and I'm afraid that if he stays here any longer something will frighten him to death."

"Or kill him through taking the blood from his body," Charlie added. "James, neither you nor the dog is safe. Shep is in danger because he knows the peril hovering over you. You are because you do not, or

will not believe what you do know. Certainly he comes with me, James; and you, my friend. Be very, very careful."

With this final word Charlie left me, Shep at his heels. I spent the next couple of hours doing the evening chores and then returned to the house to make a cold supper. I then pondered over Charlie's words. I certainly was not going to be so credulous as to take what he said as fact. Indeed, had it not been for Shep's actions I would have set them aside as the morbid pratings of a very superstitious mind. I was trying to think of a natural explanation for everything when I heard:

"Good evening, James Bradley."

I whirled around. There in the semi-darkness of a corner stood the girl of the night before.

"You!" I gasped. "What are you doing here?"

"Do you not remember? You asked me in last night. One invitation is all that is needed."

I let that pass. "What I mean is, how did you get into the house?"

I had risen and she advanced toward me.

"I have many ways of entering or leaving. Ways that you do not yet understand; but ways which you, with my help, may soon achieve." She smiled at me; such a ghastly smile. I had risen to my feet, but I must confess her smile made my knees weak.

It was more of a snarl or malicious grin. And those teeth! Small, very small, and coming to needle sharp points. The gory red gums tried to outdo the lips in brightness. The whole picture was unspeakably evil, yet fascinating.

As she smiled she advanced toward me and, I swear, I could do nothing but back away from her. To step to one side or shove her away from me would have been impossible at the moment.

My reverse motion was halted by the big living room table which I had backed into. My hands I put on the surface of the table and there I stood, the girl (for lack of a better thing to call her) advancing closer. As she moved she said:

"Why do you fear me, James Bradley? Why do you shrink from me? Come, will you not enter my world of beautiful darkness?" She put icy cold hands on my shoulders and leaned toward me. Her breath, warm, stickily sweet was in my nostrils. A peculiar lethargic feeling stole over me and I seemed to have no desire to break away from this strange creature.

My hands, which had been unconsciously roving about the table top behind me, suddenly closed over something which I knew by the feel was the small Bible Martha always left lying there. The moment I touched the Bible I felt a surge of strength go through me and the feeling of lethargy seemed suddenly broken. I stepped to one side, at the same time bringing the hand holding the Bible out in front of me.

The girl recoiled as though she had been struck. She stood a moment, breathing hard and gnashing her teeth. At last she grated:

"So, James Bradley, you shun me this time. But there will be other times, never fear. One day you will be as me, to walk the night through eternity. Before that time, however, you will wish you had not refused me this night. That, (she pointed to a picture of Martha) must be the wife you set such great store by. I believe I will enlist her in my ranks first, unless, of course, you should experience a change of heart by this time tomorrow night when I return. I would much rather she were brought into my world by you. That would lend such a nice touch. But you are powerless to stand against me, James Bradley. Remember that. Absolutely powerless against me."

She laughed then—the most hideous sound I have ever heard and directed at me a look so intense with malevolence that I was forced to throw an arm over my eyes. When I dared look again she was gone.

**I** RETIRED shortly, but I did not rest. My sleep was disturbed by nightmares of a type which could only have been induced by the weird girl's presence and the



equally weird explanation of her by Charlie Redik. I did not yet believe Charlie's story. I still groped for a natural explanation, but of her power to harm Martha I had no doubt. Do you wonder that my sleep was fitful and broken?

The next day was a bad one for me. I first discovered that several of my chickens were dead in the barnyard, including old Gus, the rooster who had assumed the task of getting up on the fence and waking me every morning at dawn. To lose all these fowl was bad enough, but to discover that they had died from all the blood being in some way drained from them made it many times worse. It lent an unearthly aura to the whole thing and made me more than ever conscious of my own weird troubles and the creature behind them. I wondered if perhaps she had anything to do with this latest misfortune.

I was still pondering the situation that evening when Charlie Redik showed up, followed by Shep.

I was glad to see Charlie again for I had a lot of questions to ask him. I wasn't ready to accept his vampire theories in full, but recent developments had made of me at least an agnostic on the subject. When we went into the house I was surprised to see that Shep absolutely refused to follow. Nor would he go near the barn where we had found him howling the night before.

When we were comfortably seated in the living room I told Charlie the story. When I had finished he was profoundly shocked. He said:

"This is even worse than I feared. James, since the vampire will return tonight you must not be here. Instead I will be here in your place."

"But, Charlie," I protested, "even though I still can't agree that we're fighting the supernatural I do believe there is a grave risk to be run. I can't let you be the one to take the risk."

"I will be protected," Charlie said. "I am much better protected than you because I know what we have to deal with. You know but will not believe. Now, when the vampire appears it will be as a bat or other winged creature in order to flit from

done? Wouldn't I be just as well protected as you?"

"I shall answer that question with a question, James. Tell me, what is garlic or wildrose used for according to legend?"

"Why, if I remember correctly, to ward off vampires and other evil spirits."

"Exactly. And do you believe, seriously, that it has the power to do that?"

"Certainly not. In the first place I don't even believe in ghosts, evil spirits, boglies, warlocks or any of the rest."

"Exactly," Charlie replied. "Therefore you couldn't trust the precautions one must take to ward them off. To you the garlic is a fetish; the symbol of a superstitious mind. Legend has it that in order to be effective the wildrose or the garlic must enjoy the utmost faith of the person under its protection. Whether this is true or not I do not know, but we must take no chances. To you the garlic is nothing more than a seasoning for the table. You see now why I must be the one to deal with your nocturnal lady friend?"

I SAW what he meant but I still didn't like it. Nor was I much pleased with what Charlie directed to be done next. He ordered me to help him smear garlic around every possible means of entrance or egress. Windows, doors, all got a liberal dose of the garlic odor, especially around the casements. Charlie even rubbed a good bit around the fireplace opening and around a mousehole which we discovered in a corner of the kitchen. Finally he tied a few sprigs of the garlic around his neck and declared himself satisfied with the arrangements.

"And now, friend James," he said, "it is for you to go to my house to spend the night. And under no circumstances are you to return here before sunrise. Is that understood? Under *no* circumstances whatever."

I had no choice but to do as he bid me, having let him direct the operations thus far, and I bid him good night and started for his farm, closely followed by Shep. It was starting to sprinkle a little as I set out.

window to window seeking you out. However, it will not be you it finds but me, in your bed and apparently sleeping. Tell me, James, have you any garlic in the house?"

"Yes, plenty," I recalled smiling. "It was the cause of Martha's and my first argument. I bought it thinking I was purchasing a bushel of onions. But, Charlie, why can't you let me do what has to be

My sleep, such as it was that night, was shattered by a volley of the loudest claps of thunder I have ever heard. I looked out the window and saw that the sprinkle of the preceding night had turned to such a downpour that it threatened to make a small river of the entire countryside. It was so dark that I supposed I had awakened sometime in those forlorn hours just before dawn. On looking at the alarm clock on Charlie's dresser, (which I had neglected to set) however, I saw that it was well after six o'clock. Why, that was over an hour after sunrise and yet it was still dark. I hurriedly dressed and started for my own farm, hoping that Charlie was all right and fearing that he was not.

My fears were groundless, however, for when I reached my house Charlie was in the kitchen boiling coffee and frying eggs. He looked very tired, a little apprehensive and somewhat pale, but he greeted me cheerfully enough.

"Ah, good morning, James." He said. "You are just in time to join me for breakfast. That is if I can get these so very contrary eggs to come loose from the frying pan."

"Did you put grease in the pan?" I asked, forced to smile.

"Ach! No. I was sure I forgot something. You see, James, I am so excited over the new addition to my collection that my mind wanders this morning. Come, I will show it to you."

"First, Charlie," I said, "what about last night? Did anything happen?"

"Happen?"

"You know what I mean. Did you have any—uh—company?"

"James," he said evasively, "let us consider the matter closed when I say that I very much doubt that you will be bothered any longer by unwanted guests. See how Shep gambols about. Is that not proof enough?"

It was true. Shep had come bounding in, tracking mud all over the house he had so recently abjured.

"Now, come," Charlie continued, "let me show you the piece for my collection."

He took me into the living room and there showed me the largest moth I have ever seen. It seemed to have an evil expression if a moth can be said to have an expression at all. I also noticed that instead of being impaled through the center with a pin this specimen had a pointed match stick pushed through it about one-fourth of the way down from its head and slightly to the left of center. As I said before, it looked evil.

"Beautiful, is it not?" Charlie asked in a pleased tone of voice. "Now come, James. Let us try to eat this revolting mess I am cooking. After that we have a task before us. We must remove all traces of garlic from the house before your good wife returns else she will suspect that we have been at the hard cider in her absence or that we both lost our minds at the same time. And take my word for it, James. You will be troubled no more with clandestine visitors, so I would suggest that you and I keep this matter from your wife. Just a little secret wholly between ourselves, eh?"

CHARLIE was right. The events I have chronicled took place well over a year ago, and so far I have had no more such nightly calls. Everything is once more serene and Martha has no knowledge of what occurred.

But now we must seek an explanation for these events and their sudden ceasing. I have two.

The first is that the girl who had caused all this trouble was an escaped lunatic. It was our good fortune that she was captured before she could do any real harm. This could explain Shep's fear of her too, as dogs are said to recognize and fear those of unsound mind, but it would hardly explain why he wouldn't enter the house even after she was gone. There are a lot of things such a theory doesn't explain, so it doesn't satisfy me at all.

The other possibility is that Charlie Redik was right all along. The girl *was* a vampire. When Charlie went to bed in my house he left the window beside the bed open so the vampire could enter. Once

it was inside he managed to shut the window and the garlic around the casement served to make a seal. Charlie himself was well saturated with garlic. He believed in its powers. Hence, the vampire was powerless against him. When it attempted to leave, of course, the garlic sealed means of exit prevented it from doing so. Probably before Charlie's eyes it changed its appearance to that of a moth in a vain attempt to find some small opening. If this is the case its struggle must have been horribly terrific.

It was still dark even after the usual hour of sunrise, so the vampire in its frenzy to escape failed to notice that night was gone. As legend tells us that the vampire can operate only between the hours of sunset and sunrise it of course became powerless after the night had ended and collapsed in its present shape, that of a moth, to the floor. There Charlie had driven the match stick through it and put it in the airtight container with the rest of his collection. As I said before the stick was driven in such a manner as to suggest the position of the heart of a human being. (Or one of the so-called 'undead').

I don't like this theory either, for if I accepted it it means that I must revise all my former opinions concerning the subject. I must admit a belief in the supernatural. I must believe that my very soul was in jeopardy from the vampire and that Martha could have been in just as great danger from me. I must change my beliefs so thoroughly that I fear the transition would be more than my mentality could stand. And yet the facts speak for themselves.

Shep hated and feared the creature the first time he saw her, or it. Hence, the near attack on Shep in the barnyard.

My chickens were killed. Not eaten, but every drop of blood drained from their bodies. And finally, the being's uncanny ability to apparently manifest itself in what I had supposed to be an empty room or to disappear in the twinkling of an eye.

As to my second theory, I do not know if it is correct or not, and I am sure that Charlie Redik, who does know, will never tell.

THAT, then is my great grandfather's story, told fifty years after his death. He died a happy and, to all outward appearances, completely sane man. It is now up to the reader to decide how much if any of his tale can be taken as fact.

In closing I should like to add that Charlie Redik, who remained a bachelor to the end, passed on shortly before his friend and left most of his belongings to my great grandfather. Among these properties was his magnificent collection of butterflies. He stipulated that if the collection were to be destroyed it must be done by fire, and it must be done thoroughly.

The collection has remained in the attic of great grandfather's house, where my wife and I are living, for over fifty years. Out of curiosity we brought it down and looked at it. The collection was beautiful with the exception of the large moth mentioned in my relative's story. As he said, it looked ugly and, in some way, unspeakably evil. The match stick was still in its place, yet there seemed to be an air of living hatred and malevolence surrounding the creature.

Though we are not superstitious people we thought it best to be on the safe side. We burned the entire collection immediately.

