

# Weird Tales

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# THE DESERTED GARDEN

By AUGUST W. DERLETH

MR. JERYM WARING'S archeological researches had brought him at last to the Gower coast of Wales. He stood now in the center of the highway that ran through the unnamed hamlet that he had reached with the aid of kind tourists. In one hand he held a suitcase; in the other the clipping that had brought him there. He looked askance at the headline—"Dead Man in Mysterious Deserted Garden"—and hoped fervently that any prying investigators would have completed their work. The article went on to say that a tourist had been found dead in a strange, out-of-the-way garden overlooking the sea, and that his death was supposed to have been by murder, though it was rather late to ascertain definitely, the body having gone long undiscovered. There were curious marks about the throat, it seemed, and the intrepid detective in charge of the case insisted on murder. This, instead of contributing to the clarity of the matter, tangled it still more. Mr. Jerym Waring had a penchant for anything that suggested the ancient; consequently, when he read the last paragraph of the article, telling about the antiquity of the garden, he lost no time in making for the place. Unfortunately he lost himself, and arrived seven days later than he had scheduled.

Mr. Jerym Waring looked up from the article to find himself the cynosure of several pairs of eyes. Two

of them were directed at him from behind a curtain to his left; another came from a large frame dwelling on the other side of the road. Mr. Waring fixed his eyes on this building, reflecting to himself that it suspiciously resembled a hostelry. The eyes abruptly vanished, and a moment later a large, rotund man ambled casually out of the building and planted himself against the door-jamb. The archeologist took hold of his suitcase and went over to him.

"I say, brother," he began, "can you tell me where I can find some place to put up for a week or a fortnight?" He shifted his weight from one foot to the other.

The rotund man slowly removed a pipe from his mouth, made a little bow, and answered him, with a far-away look in his eyes, as if he were watching for sailboats along the distant sea-horizon, "You can make yourself right at home here, sir. This has always been as good a hotel as you can find hereabouts." He bowed again, and imperturbably turned to lead the way into the building. Mr. Jerym Waring saw nothing to do but to follow his host.

At table that night Mr. Jerym Waring casually mentioned the mysterious garden. Was it far from there? And could one get to it easily? And how?

"It's a good many steps," said his host, "but it's not what I'd call far." He turned to his wife for corrobora-

tion; she nodded hastily. "The path's pretty clear, now that all those detectives and doctors have worn it down so. You follow it right down to the sea, and there you turn northward and start going up on the cliffs. You'd best be pretty careful there, sir, for the path's narrow as can be, and the sea's below, and there's sharp rock under the water." His wife nodded again, and Mr. Waring nodded, too. The host was using his fork to punctuate his remarks.

THE following morning Mr. Jerym Waring rose especially early and made his way out of his hotel to the sea-coast. It was as yet somewhat misty, and he stood for some moments debating on the advisability of ascending the cliffs in the half light. The path upward seemed fairly clear, but it was also dangerously close to the edge of a sheer wall to the sea. He resolved at last to continue his jaunt, and he made his way carefully up along the cliff wall. At times gulls flew screaming past him, so close that he might have reached out and touched them, had it not been for the danger of upsetting himself. He emerged from the rocky path finally in a sort of ravine, equally as rocky. This he followed to its end, where he came upon the deserted garden.

At first glance it looked like a forlorn cemetery: there were a great many vine-grown rocks and slabs of stone to be seen among the trampled weeds. Here and there were sickly-looking flowers—not at all what Mr. Waring had expected. He walked about among the stones, examining them under his glass, and leaving one after the other with a disappointed air. About half-way through the garden he discovered himself to be in the middle of the ruins of what had once been a stone building. He stood for some minutes looking around him, trying to trace the outlines of this old ruin, when his eye lighted on a

peculiar flat slab, close to the wall line of the ruin. It struck him at once as being infinitely older than any of the other stones, and he hurried over to it eagerly.

It was certainly a marker for a grave, reflected Mr. Waring, and he bent closer in a vain effort to decipher the cryptic scrawls on the stone. But the writing was totally strange to Mr. Waring, well versed as he was in ancient lore. Mr. Jerym Waring was chagrined, and he stood up and glanced shamefacedly about, as if on the lookout for anyone who might have seen him. He rambled through the remainder of the garden, but his fancy drew him at last back to the slab. He tried, half-heartedly, to move it, but the effort was futile; the stone was too large, and besides, it was half imbedded in the earth.

It was somewhat after 12 when Mr. Jerym Waring reached his hostelry. The archeologist noticed at once that his host's manner was rather strained, and he wondered vaguely whether this had to do with his presence. At table he mentioned casually his intention to return to the garden for the afternoon. A quick glance passed between his host and hostess, and for a moment after his announcement there was complete silence. Mr. Jerym Waring's host coughed nervously and put his tea-cup in his saucer.

"You'll be back before nightfall, I suppose, sir?"

"That depends," said Mr. Waring reflectively, "on what I find. I have a flashlight with me; so don't worry if I fail to come back for lunch."

"We'd like to have you with us for lunch, Mr. Waring. All afternoon, in fact. You needn't go up there today—you've all week to visit, sir."

"There's never a time like the present. Besides, there may be nothing there after all; so that I may leave you tonight. If I waited and found nothing, I should lose that much time."

"I don't like to mention it, sir, but that garden is a bad spot—an unhealthy spot at night."

"There's a queer slab up there. It has a lot of curious carvings on it," Mr. Waring went on, as if he had not heard his host.

His hostess suddenly set her cup of tea on the table, and moved her chair slightly away.

"It was beside that stone," said his host slowly, "that the body was found."

"Is that so? Well, that's most interesting. I wonder, now. . . . How old do you take the garden to be?"

"I don't know, sir. That garden was there before this town was founded. Some say it's Roman."

"Do you know what night this is?" asked his hostess suddenly. Mr. Waring stared blankly at her. "May Eve, sir. And for years past there've been queer doings up in that garden on May Eve, to say nothing of All Souls and All Hallows."

"What do you mean—'queer doings'?"

"Lights, greenish-blue lights," his host broke in. "And often weird, uncanny music that scares you."

"And no one ever investigated?" asked Mr. Waring incredulously.

"Yes. One of us went up." There was a significant silence. "He never came back; we never found his body." His host coughed again. "But we heard him in the night, screaming."

"What do you suppose——?" began Mr. Waring.

"There is," said his host stolidly, "it is said, an old god named Pan—a Greek god—of good and of evil, of nature. On May Eve, on All Hallows, on All Souls, the evil predominates, and it is better for man to avoid the spot Pan and his satyrs frequent."

Mr. Waring made an effort to speak, but he said nothing. The eyes of his hostess were staring blankly into the past; her face had gone a pasty white.

Mr. Jerym Waring was somewhat

perplexed. But in the afternoon he went up, and by evening he had quite forgotten about the matter.

HE LEARNED nothing from the slab, save that it might have been moved. Had it not been for this discovery, Mr. Waring would have returned to his hostelry in time for lunch. As the matter stood, his lingering was pardonable. His first reaction on sight of the disturbed ground about the base of the slab was one of intense surprize. It was clear to him that it would take more than one man to move the slab, and it was fairly certain that not more than one man at a time had been up here, save perhaps the detectives who had investigated the death some weeks before. Yes, that was most probably it. But it did not seem to him that the stone had been disturbed at all that morning.

Mr. Jerym Waring stood up, relieved. The discovery had been made at sundown, and when the archeologist rose from his crouching position there was only a deep red fringe on the horizon to show where the sun had been. A gull wheeled about high up in the sky, and another followed it, screaming raucously. Mr. Waring stood for a tentative moment. All was strangely silent, with that curious silence that falls in still places when the birds have ceased their crying. It was getting rapidly darker, and all that was left of the day was a faint, darkening line of red on the sea, as if someone were dying there, and bleeding from a hundred wounds. A dim moon was making its way slowly through great clouds of fog rolling up from the lowlands.

Mr. Waring stood there until the fog had entirely surrounded the peak he surmounted; it was as if he had suddenly been thrust out into the far reaches of the sky; as if the earth were thousands and thousands of miles below him.

He turned to go at last, even while

the wisps of vapor were curling around him. He sought out the slab once more, and directed his flashlight at it. He had not anticipated what he saw: the slab had been raised fully an inch from the ground, and it stood on one edge at a distinct angle. Mr. Waring had a sudden, unaccountable vision of his hostess' drawn face. Then his flashlight went out. He stood quite still for a moment; then he ran forward—and fell over a stone. He picked himself up, bewildered, and ran again, only to fall a second time. Again he stood still, and looked in vague fright toward the place where the slab should be.

The fog was too thick to see anything, but the archeologist was not unaware of the faint greenish luminosity that hovered in the vapor near him. He had yet to assure himself of its reality, and he knew of no way to go about it. He was frightened, though he could not himself tell why. Within him stirred indistinct fears, and he felt in the air about him a power, as of a strong charge of electrical current released close by. He anticipated something, though he could not say what.

For some minutes nothing whatever happened, and he was just about to make a tentative step forward, when suddenly, in his immediate propinquity, sounded a succession of weird notes, as if from a group of flutes or willow pipes—sounds as of some diabolic *Danse Macabre*. At almost the same instant a brilliant flash of green light came into being before his eyes, and in its midst he saw a curious, swirling outline, suggestive of a face framed in curling black hair, crowned by a pair of odd upright structures, as of horns. From pipes that the weird creature held at its lips came awful music. Mr. Waring was chilled. He felt in some unaccountable manner that this thing before him was not destined for human eyes, and he wondered if he, too, were

seen. The greenish light spread and undulated as he watched, and beyond it he could see hundreds of little black figures dancing.

But suddenly Mr. Waring became acutely conscious of the music that the creature was playing on the pipes. From pianissimo it rose sharply to crescendo after crescendo in a succession of piercing notes that came to Mr. Waring as sharp stabs inflicted. For a moment he had no knowledge of what was passing; even while he strove to reassert himself, he felt the music drawing him, and looking around him in his terror, he saw the vague outlines of the trees writhe and twist to the notes. The last thing he saw was a hawthorn bush, whose great white flowers were limned on his consciousness like dead things. Then he felt within him a searching and prodding, as if the strains of that melancholy, weird music had gained entrance to his body, and were now seeking for something to which to ally themselves. And then, finally, a terrific withdrawal. He collapsed, striking his head against the slab as he fell.

MR. WARING'S host found his body at about noon on the following day. He came at the head of an exploring party, organized for the express purpose of discovering Mr. Waring's whereabouts. The archeologist was lying close to the slab, and it was assumed by many that he had slipped and fallen, striking his head on the slab, thus mortally injuring himself. Mr. Waring's host said nothing. He interested himself mainly in the disposal of the body, but he did not fail to note the hundreds of minute hoofprints in evidence on the grass.

Then, too, quite close to the dead man's hand, almost hidden by a clump of grass and an overhanging hawthorn bush, lay a brown, discolored group of willow pipes.