

A MAGAZINE OF THE BIZARRE AND UNUSUAL

Weird Tales

REGISTERED IN U.S. PATENT OFFICE

Volume 27

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Published monthly by the Popular Fiction Publishing Company, 2457 East Washington Street, Indianapolis, Ind. Entered as second-class matter March 20, 1923, at the post office at Indianapolis, Ind., under the act of March 3, 1879. Single copies, 25 cents. Subscription rates: One year in the United States and possessions, Cuba, Mexico, South America, Spain, \$2.50; Canada, \$2.75; elsewhere, \$3.00. English office: Otit A. Kline, c/o John Paradise, 86 Strand, W. C. 2, London. The publishers are not responsible for the loss of unsolicited manuscripts, although every care will be taken of such material while in their possession. The contents of this magazine are fully protected by copyright and must not be reproduced either wholly or in part without permission from the publishers.

NOTE—All manuscripts and communications should be addressed to the publishers' Chicago office at 840 North Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Ill. FARNSWORTH WRIGHT, Editor.

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WEIRD TALES ISSUED 1st OF EACH MONTH

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The Face in the Wind

By CARL JACOBI

An eery story of a strange frog wall, and the beautiful but evil face—a woman's face—that appeared in the storm one night

TODAY is Tuesday. For more than a week, or since the morning of last Thursday when the dark significance of the strange affair was first publicly realized, my life and the quiet routine of Royalton Manor have been thrown into a miserable state of confusion. It was of course to be expected, all details considered, and I took it upon myself to answer carefully all questions and repeat again and again for each succeeding official the part I played in the prologue to the mystery. Doubtless the London press was justified in referring to the sequence of events as a Royalton Enigma; yet in so doing it aroused a morbid curiosity that has made my position even more bewildering. For the story which I told, and which I know to be true, has been termed impossible and merely the wanderings of a crazed brain.

• Just three years ago, there appeared in this magazine a story entitled "Revelations in Black"—a story that made literary history; for it was something entirely new in vampire stories. Its author, Carl Jacobi, at one stride became one of the most popular of the talented writers who make *Weird Tales* the undisputed leader in its field. We take pleasure in presenting herewith another story by the same brilliant writer, "The Face in the Wind"—a tale as unusual in its way as was "Revelations in Black." We know that you will enjoy it.

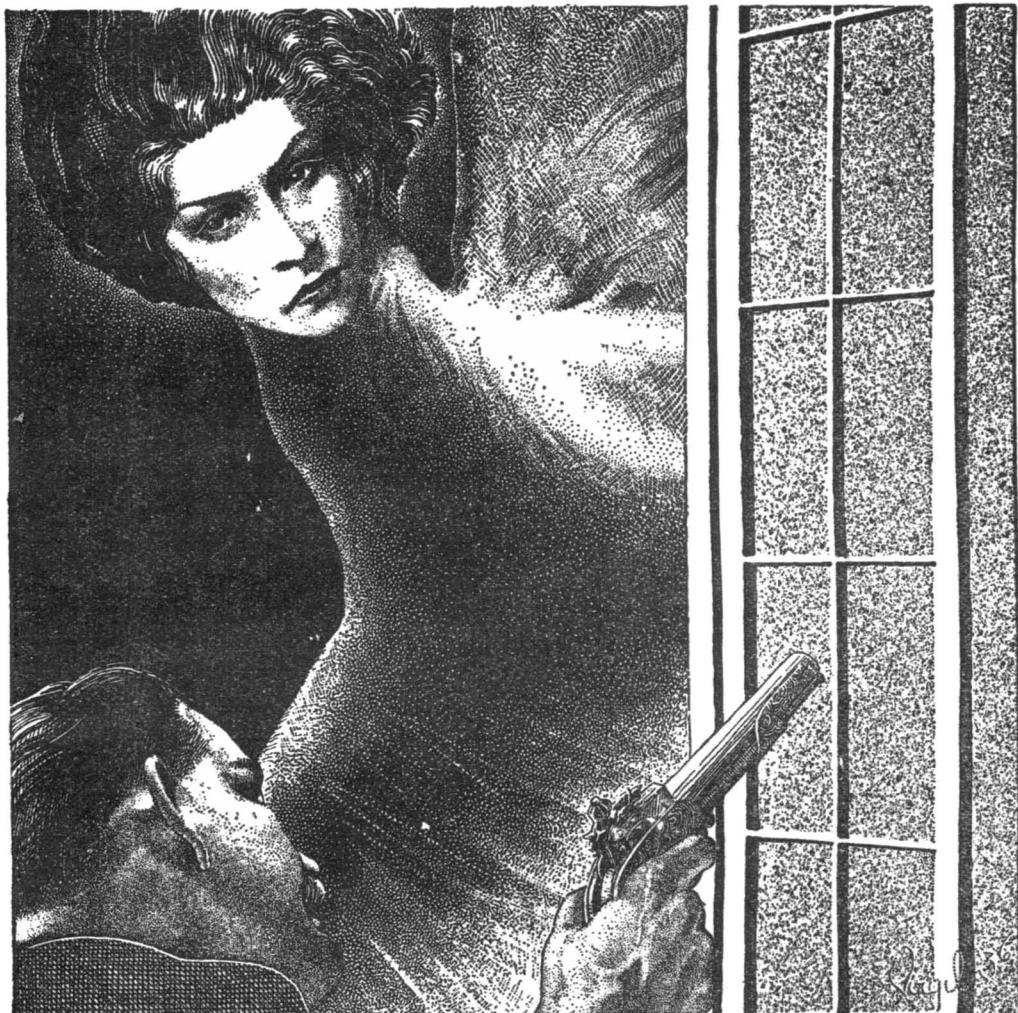
Let me begin by saying that like my fathers before me, I have lived here at Royalton all the days of my life, and I have seen the manor dwindle from an imposing feudal estate to a few tottering buildings and a small plot of weed-choked ground. Time and times have gone hard with the house of Hampstead.

There are, or rather *were* until last Thursday, but two of these buildings occupied. Both in a considerable state of disrepair, I had reserved the right lower wing of the one which in earlier years boasted the name, Cannon Tower, for myself and my books. The other, an ivy-covered cottage, formerly the gardener's quarters, I had given over to an old woman some four months before. Her name was Classilda Haven.

Classilda Haven was a curious individual. A hundred times I have sat at my desk watching her through the open window as she cultivated her patch of vegetables, and I have racked my brain for a reasonable excuse to remove her from my property. The woman, according to her own statement, was nearly eighty; her body was bent and weazened, and her face witch-like and ugly with the mark of age. But it was her eyes that bothered me, drew my gaze every time she came within my vision. They were black, heavily browed, and sharp and clear as a young girl's.

At intervals when I have taken my morning walk through the old grounds, along the ruined frog wall, as I still pre-

"He pushed the hammer to full cock, and leaped back to the window."



fer to call it, and on to the edge of Royalton Heath, I have felt those eyes staring after me. It was imagination, of course; nothing more. There has always been to my mind something grotesque in senility, something repelling in the gradual wasting away of all human qualities day by day.

Classilda Haven had stumped up to my door one evening late in April and inquired in a cracked voice if I wished to let the old gardener's cottage. She was a stranger to the district, I knew, and a woman of her age hobbling about unshel-

tered at that season is bound to be an object of pity. I asked casually if she had no relatives, no home; to which she replied that her son, her only means of support, had been killed in a motor lorry accident in London a week before. She had taken her few savings and entrained for Royalton, where she seemed to remember a distant relative was living. Arriving in the village she had found no trace of him, and so, without money, had wandered aimlessly down the Gablewood Pike.

'There was, of course, no refusing such

a plea, and much as I disliked having my solitude interrupted, I had given her the key to the cottage, loaned her a few sticks of furniture, and tried to make her comfortable. In due time, I presumed, the relative would make his appearance and the woman would go on her way.

But as spring gradually wore into summer and these things did not happen, I began to look upon the old crone as a fixture. Not until August did the horror begin, and then I had undying reason to regret my philanthropy.

IT BEGAN with Peter Woodley. Woodley was a youth of twenty, a son of merchant villagers, in whom I had taken considerable interest. The boy aspired to paint. He had no unusual talent, it is true, yet his canvases had a certain simplicity in their likeness to surrounding landscapes that had caught my eye, and I had given him two or three art volumes that had found their way into the Hampstead library.

But on this morning as he stood in my study he appeared greatly excited and upset. His hair was clawed in wild disarray, and he was breathing hard, as if he had run to the manor all the way from Royalton.

"Mr. Hampstead," he gasped, "it isn't true, is it, the story I heard in the village? You're—you're not going to change the frog wall?"

I leaned back in my chair and stared at him. "The frog wall?" I repeated. "Why yes, Woodley, I'm going to have it repaired. Repaired, that's all. It's badly in need of work, and the masons are coming tomorrow. But what on earth——"

Young Woodley dropped into the chair opposite me and spread his hands flat on the desk top.

"You mustn't do it, sir. You can't. You promised me I could use it for one of my pictures."

"Why, so I did," I said, smiling. "I had forgotten. But I'm not changing the entire wall — just the two sections on either side of the gate. The stones have fallen almost entirely away, and I don't want the frogs to get through. That's the only reason for the wall being there, you know, Peter. The marsh on the other side is swarming with frogs. The wall was erected by my ancestors to keep the manor grounds free from the pests and permit the Hampsteads to sleep. . . . If it's rustic settings for your paintings you want, there are plenty of places——"

"But you don't understand, sir." Woodley in his earnestness was leaning far across the desk. "You don't understand. There's something on the other side of that wall besides frogs. There's something in that marsh that will get out, that will come into the grounds if you have the wall altered. I can't say what, sir. I really don't know what. But if you'd been out there at night in the moonlight, staring at the gate as I have, trying to see how I wanted to place my painting, you'd know."

I looked at him curiously there in the morning light of my study. "The wall is already down in those two places," I replied. "If there's anything in the marsh, and I'm quite sure there isn't, it certainly could get through now."

Woodley shook his head slowly, half in negative, half in perplexity.

"It's not the physical boundary I mean," he said. "It's not the wall itself. It's the actual space and time that it's occupied all these years that you're changing. Mr. Hampstead, don't do it!"

NATURALLY, such vague innuendoes did not induce me to countermand my order to the masons. Yet as the hours passed, something in the memory of Woodley's disturbing attitude instilled in me an indefinable sense of nervousness.

Several times I caught myself staring out of the window toward the decayed remnants of the old frog wall, wondering what the boy had meant.

I turned at length to the shelves of the Hampstead library and spent two hours among the ancient volumes there, trying to rest my curiosity. The diaries of each successive resident of the manor were still intact, and I knew they included all mention of wine-cellars, out-houses and rooms which had been added to Cannon Tower during the generations. Curiously enough, however, search as I would, I could find no allusion to the erection of the frog wall, save one, and this, in the last memoirs of one Lemuel Hampstead, 1734, was most confusing. It read:

The Frogg Wall, which I have ordered builded, will this day be finished, God willing, and I am now contente to departe from this world and bestowe my title and possessions upon my eldest son. There will be no more tragedyes like that which befelle my father, Charles Ulrich, and his wife, Lenore. The wall will be blessed by the church in the manner which I have planned, and there will be a Holie Bible sealed in each corner poste.

I—

Here age had left its mark on the page, and the writing became undecipherable. But vague and meaningless as it all was, it was enough to set me thinking hard.

I personally supervised the masons' work the following day. It was a prosaic affair. The two workers simply removed the crumbling bits of stone from the two sections of the wall flanking the gate and patched the aperture with modern bricks. But they were forced to move the gate forward a few feet because of the marshy condition of the ground.

Classilda Haven shambled up to me as I stood watching the men ply their trowels. She smiled a toothless, evil smile.

"Ye'll be changin' the frog wall, I see," she said in her rasping voice. "All of it?"

"No, just the two sections," I replied, viewing her presence with some irritation.

The aged woman nodded, and I found myself staring again into her strange eyes. They were young, those eyes, clear and piercing, and they seemed oddly incongruous there in the wrinkled, leather-like face.

She turned abruptly, hobbled forward a few steps and, head down like a bird, stared at one of the workmen as he carefully placed his bricks in position. gingerly she ran a veined hand along the newly mortised surface, then looked up and shrilled:

"Why don't you tear it all down?"

I forced a tolerant smile. "Don't be absurd, Classilda," I said. "If I did such a thing, the place would be overrun with frogs, your garden as well. You know that."

She made a queer reply, an answer which seemed to escape from her involuntarily.

"Frogs," she squeaked, her eyes gleaming queerly. "I like frogs. I like them better than anything in the world."

PETER WOODLEY came that afternoon with his easel and his box of paints. I saw him through the window of my study as he selected a position near the iron gate-door, opened his little folding camp-stool, and began to walk slowly back and forth along the side of the newly repaired wall.

His agitation, which had been so pronounced the day before, seemed to have left him, though I couldn't help feel that he looked upon the renovated stonework with resigned eyes. He moved about several times before he apparently found the angle he desired, then seated himself and began what I presumed were the charcoal outlines.

My book attracted my attention then, and I forgot the boy for perhaps an hour. But suddenly I was jerked out of my chair by an ear-splitting scream. With a

lurch I was across the floor and staring through the open casement at the weed-tangled grounds.

Peter Woodley lay prone on his face by his easel, his body still as death!

I raced out of the house and across the intervening space with all the speed I could muster. A moment later, as I examined him, I breathed a sigh of relief. He was still alive, but his heart was fluttering weakly. Cold water applied to his forehead and smelling-salts administered to his nostrils brought him around five minutes later; but when his eyes blinked open and he looked up at me, a moan of terror came to his lips.

"Good God! Mr. Hampstead!" he whispered. "I saw it! It was beautiful, but it was horrible. I saw it!"

"Saw what?" I asked, chafing his wrists. "In heaven's name, Peter, what's the matter?"

He struggled to his feet then, swayed dizzily and stepped over to his easel. For a moment he stood there, staring down at the few charcoal outlines on the canvas. Then he slumped weakly onto the camp-stool and buried his head in his hands.

"Mr. Hampstead," he said, looking up abruptly, "promise me you'll never let me come here again. Promise me you'll keep me away from the manor grounds, by force if necessary. I must never attempt to paint that wall again, do you understand? And you, sir, couldn't you lock this place up and move into the village? Couldn't you, sir?"

There was sincere anxiety written across his face, and his eyes were still gazing far out into space with a bewildered frightened expression that was foreign to the boy's usually calm nature.

"Nonsense, Peter," I replied. "You've been working too hard. You've let your imagination run away with you, that's all. Come into the Tower, and I'll give you a bit of brandy."

He shook his head, muttered something incoherently under his breath, and then, picking up his painting equipment, turned and strode quickly through the manor grounds toward the distant Gablewood Pike.

For a while I stood there, watching his figure grow smaller and smaller in the afternoon sunlight. I was puzzled more than I cared to admit by his strange attitude, and I was deeply disturbed by his allusions to "something which he had seen." For obviously as strapping a fellow as young Woodley does not faint dead away from sheer imagination. Neither does he babble queer warnings to a man twice his age without a reason.

And then as I turned and began to walk slowly toward the door of my study, my eyes suddenly took into focus a patch of ground near the old wall. The workmen repairing this section had, in order to aid their movements, torn up the weeds and rank underbrush which grew unmolested in this part of the property.

And there in the freshly upturned earth was the imprint of a gigantic bird-like claw.

IT WAS ten minutes past twelve that night when I found myself sitting up in bed, staring at the radium dial of the taboret clock. Cannon Tower was still as death, and there was no sound from without save the distant mournful croaking of frogs beyond the wall. Even as I listened, that bass obbligato ceased abruptly, and the world lapsed into a heavy, ringing silence.

I got up, slid into a pair of slippers and moved across to the window. Curious. If there is one thing that is a certainty in my life, it is my profound manner of sleeping. Once retired, I seldom if ever awake before my usual rising hour. And yet there I was, eyes wide open, heart thumping madly with the terror and bewilder-

ment of one who has been jerked suddenly from the macabre fantasies of a nightmare.

But I had not been sleeping. Neither, I was positive, had any unusual sound disturbed my slumbers. The manor grounds stretched below me, blue under the August moonlight like a motionless quilt, and beyond, vague and indistinct, I could see the flat, barren expanse of Royalton Heath.

A thin blanket of clouds slid over the moon then, darkening the shadows into a thick, brooding umbra, and simultaneously it happened.

From the east, from somewhere deep in the recesses of the marsh that lay beyond the frog wall, there rose into the still air a horrible, soul-chilling cry. It was a cry I can never hope to forget, the scream of a bird of prey about to make its kill, a thousand times magnified, and ending in a high-pitched shriek that was strangely human.

Motionless I stood there, eyes riveted in the direction of the old wall, muscles tense as wire. For a moment I saw nothing, the blackness below me was thick and impenetrable. Then suddenly, with the quickness of a camera-shutter, the moon broke through that cloud mass once more, and the manor grounds returned to their blue silver.

The cry came again, nearer. The echo thrown back from the walls of Cannon Tower passed on into the distance like the wail of a lost soul, and with a choking gasp I turned my eyes skyward.

High above me, outlined against the driven cloud, circling like a giant vulture in the night, was a bird of colossal size. Its wing-spread was enormous, a full twenty feet from tip to tip, and its head and body were curiously elongated and heavy. Even as I stood there, staring at it, my face wet with terror, it wheeled and swooped toward me.

Forward, straight toward the Tower it sped as if intent on dashing itself to pieces against the ancient masonry. Then it veered sharply and raced toward my window.

An instant I stood there, transfixed. Then, stupefied and numbed as I was, my subconscious mind had enough clarity to whip me around and send me lurching back into the room. There was a century-old percussion pistol on the right wall, mounted in its carved metal holster, and I knew it was always loaded, a feeble but comforting protection in my solitude.

In the half-darkness I seized it, pushed the hammer to full cock, leaped back to the window and fired.

There came an instantaneous violent flapping of those mighty wings, an overpowering stench of death and decay, and crashing into my ear-drums a repetition of that hideous cry. The specter disappeared.

Faintness seized me then. Spots and queer-colored lights swirled in my vision, and I sank backward to the floor. But even as I closed my eyes to unconsciousness I knew, as I know now, that what I had seen was no dream, no vagary of a sleep-drugged brain.

For gazing at me there, with its huge feathered wings and repulsive vulture body, had been the face of a beautiful woman!

A BAD electrical storm came up next day after almost three weeks of sultry heat. I spent the morning pottering about my studio as usual. Outside, the thunder crashed and boomed ceaselessly.

But come afternoon I refused to be kept indoors any longer, and so, donning an old rain-jacket, I began my usual walk through the manor grounds. I was still weak and trembling from my unexplainable experience of the night before; my

brain was bewildered and seeking an answer.

The rain was coming down hard from a thick, gray sky, and the weeds and undergrass flanking the little path were dripping with wet. Behind me the great vine-covered walls of Cannon Tower loomed grim and silent.

At the gate-door of the frog wall I suddenly stopped. The barrier, always locked with staple and bolt, stood wide open, revealing just beyond the wild, undulating expanse of the marsh. I moved to close it, but a moment later Classilda Haven appeared, working her way up the reed-covered incline toward me. And for some unknown reason I viewed her presence there with suspicion.

"Classilda," I snapped. "Who gave you permission to go beyond the gate?"

Her clothes and her hair were dripping with rain, and the dishevelment gave to her, it seemed, a curiously repelling ornithoid appearance. It was odd, but never until that moment had I noticed how distinctly avian were the contours of her weazened body and her talon-like hands. She cocked her head to one side, looked at me, and laughed a squeaky laugh.

"I've been down in the marsh," she said. "I went to get some dirt for my garden. Those workmen, the careless fools, have trampled all over it."

I glanced at the orderly rows of lettuce and cabbages which in some places had been crushed and overturned by unobserving feet.

"Not workmen," I said. "I'm afraid it was young Woodley that did this. I shall have to tell him to be more careful. He comes here to paint, you know, at night sometimes in the moonlight, and I suppose he didn't notice where he walked. But," I added, remembering his words and firm decision which he had made following his fainting spell, "I don't think you'll be troubled with him

any more. He's taken a dislike for the place, and he's staying away."

The old crone stood looking at me with those youthful, beady eyes. She smoothed some of the water from her black dress, shifted her basket of dirt to her other hand and smiled cryptically.

"Not too much of a dislike, Mr. Hamps-ted," she said, displaying her toothless gums. "He was here last night, painting. I spoke with him."

I stared at her. If both Classilda Haven and Peter Woodley had been awake and in the manor grounds during the night, then they too must have seen the hideous thing which had flown out of the marsh and looked in my bedchamber window. All the horror of what I had seen, all the terror of that nocturnal vision which the intervening hours had inclined to soften and pale in my memory, returned then, and I leaned weakly against the bole of a cypress tree.

"Classilda," I began slowly, "were you—did you see—"

But with a swish of her sodden skirts the old woman turned, laughed that mirthless falsetto laugh once more, and hobbled off toward her cottage.

Deeply troubled, I buttoned my jacket closer about the throat and continued my walk through the slanting rain. I was heading for the edge of Royalton Heath, where, as was my custom, I would stop a moment and gaze out over that somber stretch of wasteland which I had known for so many years. But this time my leisurely walk was destined to be interrupted.

Near the end of the manor grounds where the frog wall turned abruptly to the left and headed into the depths of the marsh, I came upon Peter Woodley. Hatless and without coat of any kind, he was sitting in the long, brown weeds, unmindful of the swirling rain and appar-

ently oblivious of my approach. And in his hands were two impossible things.

For a full instant I stood there gazing at him, watching his hands as they worked diligently at their task. Then I cleared my throat and spoke:

"Peter," I said, "what on earth are you doing with that bow and arrow? I thought you were an artist, not a huntsman."

He started as though prodded with a knife, leaped to his feet, and tried to conceal the two articles upon which he had been working. But as if through a telescope my eyes centered upon the arrow-shaft. It was the metallic arrow-head that held my gaze, a head long and slender, ending in a needle-point and made of silver.

Without answer Peter Woodley wrapped the two articles in a piece of canvas and seized a larger package from the ground, a package I had not noticed before.

"With your permission, sir," he said, "I'd like to walk back with you to the Tower. I finished my picture of the wall last night, and I'd like to hear what you think of it."

FIFTEEN minutes later, bent over the desk in my study, I stared down upon Woodley's newly painted canvas. The lowering clouds without had spread a premature darkness in the room, and I had lighted two of the candelabra. But even with this added illumination I could not quite believe my eyes.

For a long time I stood there, looking down at the oily brush marks, examining the background and the objects in the center. Then with a gasp of incredulity I sank into a chair.

"Peter, my boy!" I exclaimed, "did you actually paint this? It's excellent—a masterpiece!"

He looked suddenly wan and haggard as he seated himself opposite me and be-

gan to run his fingers absently along the design of the table.

"Yes," he said dully, "I did it. There are a few remaining touches to be added before it is completed, but the painting as you see it is the work of a few hours. I worked last night in your grounds by moonlight. I—I wish to God I hadn't."

"What do you mean?" I asked.

He nervously lit a cigarette and leaned forward in his chair.

"Mr. Hampstead," he said, "that painting—I simply can't realize it came from my brush, done by my own hand. I meant to paint a simple likeness of the old frog wall with the iron gate in the center. But as I worked there in the moonlight, something seemed to take hold of me. I felt as if a will other than my own were controlling my thoughts. I painted as I have never painted before, worked at terrific speed in a nervous frenzy. And when I had finished I was in a state of complete exhaustion.

"I don't understand it, sir," he went on. "Sometimes I think I've been going mad the last few days. But there's something wrong with that picture, something terribly wrong. Every time I look at it I have a dreadful feeling it never should have been brought into creation."

"Nonsense, Peter," I said, looking across the desk at the propped-up canvas. "You've done an admirable piece of work. Frankly, I didn't think you had it in you. None of your earlier efforts have displayed such unusual talent as this."

Woodley left half an hour later, but not before I had persuaded him to leave the painting in my care.

"I'd like to study it if you don't mind," I told him. "I'm planning to go to London next month, and I may want to take this along. Perhaps I can place it in a contest for you, or if not, find someone who would like to buy it."

He seemed little affected by my words.

Ordinarily any compliment I might bestow upon his work would have been received with boyish enthusiasm and appreciation of my interest. But now he stood there in the doorway, hands hanging at his sides, eyes lowered as if he were oppressed by some mental cloud.

When he had gone I carefully shut all the doors to my study, returned to my desk and moved the painting a few inches farther back where there was no chance of shadow impairing my view of it. Then I trundled the heavy armchair into the center of the room to a position about four feet directly before the desk, sat down, and deliberately fastened my eyes upon the canvas.

I CONFESS that at the moment there was nothing positive in my mind which would account for my actions. But from the first moment I had gazed down upon the picture I had realized that young Woodley's strange speech was not the result of an overwrought imagination. Quite definitely there was something wrong with the painting. Something wrong, I say, and yet I was unable to see anything in the oil presentation beyond a simple and familiar scene.

That scene had been beautifully done, it is true. There was the old frog wall and the black bulk of the huge gate-door with the blur of the marsh in the background. The coloring and effect of the mellow moonlight had been accomplished with rare artistry, and it did not seem possible that so inexperienced and untrained a youth as Peter Woodley could have wielded a brush with such finesse. And yet more and more as I stared across at it there came the impression that I was looking upon something indescribably evil.

For perhaps ten minutes I remained there, studying each brush mark in the flickering glare of the two candelabra.

Then abruptly, acting on impulse, I stepped across the room and unhooked the long framed mirror which adorned the farther wall.

I placed the painting now at an angle on the right corner of the desk. And at the opposite corner, lengthwise on a parallel angle, I set the mirror.

Returning to my chair, I adjusted my position slightly, then looked hard at the reflection in the mirror. Beyond the fact that the glass vision thus seen was the usual reverse of the original, there was no change.

But an instant later, with a choking cry I had leaped from the chair and, face down, had pressed my eyes to the looking-glass. In God's name, what I had seen could not possibly be true! It was a trick of my thoughts, a mental image projected into the droning solitude by a still persistent and bewildered memory. But no . . .

Clearly focused in the mirror was the reflection of Peter Woodley's painting in oil. But my eyes had caught a different angle to the lines now, the perspective had changed, and where before I had seen only the likeness of the frog wall and the iron gate-door, and the marsh—in place of that was—a woman's face!

It was incredible, and it was incredibly beautiful. A woman's face returning my gaze silently—with black lustrous hair, Grecian features, and lips that were curved in a slight mocking smile; an exquisite face painted with classic loveliness but with strange piercing eyes I seemed to remember having seen once and many times before.

Many moments I remained there, staring far into the glass. Then I reached for the decanter, poured myself a strong, undiluted portion of whisky and slumped dazedly into the chair. My brain was going round and round, my heart pounding like a trip-hammer.

It would have been a most curious enigma, this optical illusion, this accidental use of the double perspective, even had I looked upon a reflected object thus that was new and foreign. But when I stopped to realize that what I saw there was not only familiar but engraved in my brain in a hideous memory of the immediate past, the whole vision became alive with horrific possibilities.

For the woman's face which looked back at me from the reflection of the looking-glass was the same face I had seen in the head of that loathsome flying monster that had peered into my bed-chamber window the night before!

I ATE no dinner that evening. As dusk darkened into night and the thunder and rain dwindled off, I sat by the window of my study, staring out into the dripping grounds, drawing deeply on my old Hoxton pipe. The hours passed slowly. By ten o'clock the last remaining cloud had left the sky, and the moon rode high and clear.

I roused myself then, and still smoking furiously, let myself out of Cannon Tower and through the garden exit into the manor grounds. In contrast to the gloominess of the afternoon, the way before me now was brilliant under the blue light and tessellated with curious elliptical shadows from the overhanging verdure. Off in the marsh, the frogs, still unaware no doubt of the complete cessation of the storm, were silent.

I walked slowly, head down, immersed in my thoughts. When I reached the high gate-door in the wall, I paused a moment, reflecting how perfectly young Woodley had caught the moonlit scene in his painting. Then, knowing that sleep would be impossible under the circumstances, I crossed over to an old tree-stump, wiped the rainwater from its surface with my handkerchief, and sat down.

How long I remained there in the half-darkness I don't know. The moon moved high in the heavens and began to descend toward the west. I filled and lighted my pipe several times.

But suddenly the snapping of a twig whipped me out of my reverie, and I turned to see Classilda Haven slowly advancing down the path. I watched her casually. Then I sat bolt upright, huddled farther back in the shadow, and stared with a rising feeling of perplexity.

What was the old crone doing in the grounds at this hour? And why was she skulking forward like a wary snake, looking back over her shoulder at each step to see if she were followed?

A moment later I was pressed close against the bole of a cypress tree, muscles stiffened to attention. With a final look behind her, Classilda Haven had stepped to the iron gate-door, unlatched the staple and pin, and was swinging the barrier slowly open. One instant she hesitated, head cocked to one side, listening. Then she passed through the aperture and disappeared in the direction of the marsh.

For a quarter of an hour I held my position, waiting for her to return. Far back in a corner of my brain a vague suspicion was beginning to grow, and I sought for an answer to the woman's strange actions.

Then it happened! The iron gate opened again — slowly, and a figure stepped into the shadows. It was not Classilda Haven. It was a woman who did not resemble the old crone in any way. She was young, tall, dressed in filmy white, with long raven hair that cascaded down her back. A moment she paused there, her hand on the latch. Then she moved into the open moonlight, and I jerked electrified to attention.

That face again — divinely beautiful with a satin complexion, carmine lips, and eyes black and piercing! The same

face I had seen once flying in the night and again in the changed perspective of Peter Woodley's painting! Was I going mad?

The woman seemed to glide slowly forward, to float down the path as though her feet were treading air. Presently she moved closer to the frog wall, raised one arm high over her head and began to move it up and down, back and forth, in long sweeping arcs.

She was writing! Writing in chalk! I saw that as the moonlight streaming through the trees focused the crumbling masonry and the silent figure in blue relief. A foot high and carefully fashioned in curious stilted lines the characters took form.

The word completed, the woman stepped back and studied it carefully. I looked out from my hidden position behind the tree and read:

"CELAENO"

The chalk word seemed to gleam like white fire against the gray darkness of the old wall, and although I could not at the moment fathom its meaning, it touched a responsive chord somewhere in my memory. Celaeno. It seemed—

There was something weirdly impossible in it all. Standing there deep in the shadow of the huge cypress tree, my unlighted pipe clenched tightly between my teeth, I felt as if I were viewing the scene from the doorway of another world.

The woman moved farther down the wall to a position on the other side of the iron gate-door. Abruptly she stopped again, raised the chalk and scrawled in those same stilted letters:

"CELAENO"

I thought then I had unwittingly made my presence known, for the woman, upon completion of the last letter, whirled and turned those penetrating eyes straight in my direction. But it was another sound

which she had heard, a sound of slow footsteps advancing down the path.

In measured pace they came on, louder and louder, like the rhythmic cadence of a muffled mallet. An instant later another figure came upon the scene, and a new wave of bewilderment swept over me.

It was Peter Woodley—Woodley clad in an old green dressing-robe, with his eyes closed and his arms stretched stiffly before him in the manner of a sleep-walker. Straight toward the woman in white he advanced, step by step.

"I'm coming, Celaeno," he whispered. "Celaeno . . . I love you, Celaeno."

As he drew nearer, a slight smile turned the woman's lips. I saw it in the moonlight. And she leaned forward, grasped the boy by the right arm and began to lead him toward the gate.

But there, as the iron door swung open of its own accord, a change came over Woodley. His eyes flickered open, his body stiffened, and a hoarse cry sounded deep in his throat. On the instant he seemed to realize what was happening. He wrenched his arm away from the woman's grasp, turned, and with a scream of terror began to run down the path toward the Gablewood Pike.

Transfixed, held by some inner hypnosis, I stood there, looking after him. He fled like a deer, running wildly across the open patches of moonlight, the skirts of his green dressing-robe swirling after him. And when I again turned my eyes to the scene before me, three inexplicable things had happened.

The woman in white had disappeared; the iron gate-door was locked and pinioned from the outside; and the two chalk words scrawled upon the frog wall were no longer there!

PETER WOODLEY slammed open the door of my study next morning and strode into the room without knocking. I was thankful that he had come. There

were a thousand questions I meant to ask, the whole fantastic mystery to discuss. It was time, I realized, to talk openly.

But Woodley brushed aside my preliminary remarks with a wave of his hand.

"My painting," he cried. "Where is it? I'm going to tear it apart bit by bit and throw the pieces in the open fire! Give it to me!"

I stood up, walked across to the window, and answered him dully.

"It's gone," I said. "I had it locked here in the old wine cabinet. When I came down this morning I found the doors still locked but the picture gone."

He seemed on the verge of a complete collapse as he stood there swaying.

"Gone," he repeated in a far-away voice. "Gone." Then:

"It's that painting that's caused it all, Mr. Hampstead. It's a net, a spider-web that has entangled me and brought me under her power. Since I have finished it I can not help myself. I almost succumbed last night. She was beautiful. God, how beautiful! But when I think of the condition of my arm——"

"Your arm?" I repeated. "What do you mean?"

He stared at me a moment as if hesitant to say anything further. Then, abruptly, he slipped out of his coat and pulled back the sleeve of his shirt.

"I haven't been to a doctor yet," he said slowly. "But I know medicines won't be able to do anything for me. This—this is not a physical ailment."

I took a step closer and then suddenly recoiled, a wave of nausea sweeping over me.

"Good God!" I whispered. "Not a physical ailment? Are you mad?"

From the elbow down, the flesh of the right arm was a horrible blackened mass,

with the veins standing in livid prominence and the hand shriveled as in the last stages of gangrene.

"But Peter—yesterday!" I began in a trembling voice.

He nodded lifelessly.

"Yesterday," he replied, "that arm was all right. I found it this way when I awoke in bed this morning. Mr. Hampstead, don't you realize what we're up against? Don't you realize what it all means?"

I reached for the brandy glass and drank a little with shaking lips.

"Am I going mad, Peter?" I asked finally. "Are we both mad? None of it seems possible—like some strange dream that has become a reality."

Woodley turned abruptly and strode across to the wall of book-shelves on the farther side of the room. There he ran his eyes slowly along the stacked array of ancient volumes. At length he chose one and returned with it to the desk.

"I was here yesterday morning when you were still in bed," he explained. "I knew I could find what I was looking for in your library, and I wanted to verify my suspicions. Mr. Hampstead, when you read this, you must believe. You must help me. Together perhaps we can free ourselves."

THE volume he had laid on the desk before me was significant in itself. It was a copy of Richard Verstegan's *Restitution of Decayed Intelligence*, that evil work long ago banned by God-fearing people as being inspired by Satan. Up to that moment I had never been aware that it existed in my library, but from the signature on the fly-leaf I saw it must have come into my ownership as part of the collection of Lemuel Hampstead, my ancestor of the Eighteenth Cen-

tury. Woodley now opened it to a middle page, and bending lower, I read:

And Neptune and Terra had three daughters. And their names were Celaeno, Aello, and Ocytete. But theye were offspring accursed, for theye were winged monsters with the face of a woman and the bodys of vultures. Theye emitted an infectious smell and spoiled whatever theye touched by their filth. Theye were harpies!

With a choking cry I kicked back my chair and leaped to my feet. "Harpies!" I screamed. "God in heaven!"

Harpies! Those fabulous monsters, creatures of evil who delighted in carrying mortals from this earth to hell and everlasting torture! Harpies, winged horrors of classic mythology, sometimes with the face of a hag, sometimes with the body and face of a beautiful woman! Was it possible such fantasies were more than the mental creations of Grecian philosophers and actually existed in our own mundane world?

In a swirl of confusion the pieces of the mystery were beginning to take position in my brain. One thing I saw. Alone among my ancestors, Lemuel Hampstead had sensed the hideous danger that lurked in that ancient marsh, and under guise of keeping the frogs out of the manor grounds had erected a protecting wall. I recalled the faded passage I had read in his memoirs:

The wall will be blessed by the church, and there will be a Holie Bible sealed in each corner poste. . . .

Now I understood why the two manor residents previous to Lemuel Hampstead, Charles Ulrich and his wife, Lenore, had come to such dark and horrible ends, the woman dying from "a strange maladie whiche caused her face and hands to blacken and rot away," and the body of the man "to be found in the depths of the slough with his eyes torn from their sockets and his head slashed with the mark of claws."

An idea struck me, and I whirled upon

Peter Woodley. "Classilda Haven!" I cried. "Classilda Haven, it is she——"

He nodded. "I've suspected so for a long time," he said. "But there are two more. Always three. They are the spirit of the storm winds. Their homing-place is said to be in Crete, but they can move about the world with the speed of light. They are the personification of classic evil, created perhaps by mass mental imagery long ago and still existing, a throw-back from another age."

"Classilda!" I repeated dazedly. "Oh, the foulness of it!" I jerked to my feet. "I'm going to her cottage and——"

Woodley shook his head slowly. "You wouldn't find her now," he said. "But even if you did, nothing can harm them while in human form. No, we must wait." He turned on his heel, left the room a moment and returned with a long tube of rolled canvas. Opening it and removing its contents, I saw that he was holding the long bow and arrow which I had seen him working on in the grounds the day before.

"They're finished, sir," he said; "the only method I know of fighting them. A bow and an arrow with a silver head. I've made two arrows. What good they'd do even if they struck, I don't know. But we can try."

For a moment as the clock pounded its ticks through the silence of the room we sat staring at each other. Woodley's face was tight and drawn, his eyes were glassy, his hands shaking.

"Tonight," he said suddenly, "in a few hours the horror will begin. God help us!"

MIDNIGHT, and the wind was screaming over the grounds with the mournful whine of an Eolian harp. I lay stretched at full length in a clump of underbrush, waiting . . . waiting for I knew not what. At my side, within arm's reach,

lay Woodley's bow and his two silver-headed arrows. In my pocket was a metal bottle with the crucifix emblazoned on its sides.

There was water in that bottle, holy water from the little church in Royalton, obtained by Woodley early in the afternoon as part of our feeble and blind defense. What its Christian effect would be against these nightmares of another theology I did not know, but in case of any emergency I meant to use it.

We had made hurried plans there in my study before darkness closed in. Woodley was to remain in the Tower, all lights turned off, while I, armed with those strange weapons, kept watch near the wall. Not unless I called out for help was he to show himself, and then only with the utmost caution. I had argued hard before Woodley grudgingly consented to this arrangement.

"It's youth they want, Peter," I told him. "They want you because you're young. They care nothing about me. I'm a middle-aged man with a life half spent."

Time snailed by as I crouched there. Up above, the moon shone at intervals through rents in a flotilla of velvet clouds. Ahead of me the tree branches clawed the night darkness, and the tall, dead weeds undulated like snakes.

And then the garden door of the Tower creaked open, and I saw Peter Woodley step out and advance down the path. He had removed his hat and coat, and his face shone white as death.

Unable to understand his appearance, I hissed a warning at him there in the shadows.

"You fool!" I cried. "Go back! I didn't call."

My words had no effect. Slowly, stiffly, with the same mechanical sleep-walking pace that had marked his entrance to the grounds the night the harpy-woman wrote

her name in chalk, he passed me and continued parallel to the wall. Straight to the iron gate-door he moved, then stopped motionless.

"Celaeno!" he called softly. "Where are you?"

For a moment there was silence, broken only by the moaning of the wind. Then mounting into the night air, wavering and hideous, came once again that wailing scream. From the other side of the frog wall it sounded, rushing nearer.

An instant later I had leaped to my feet and was staring above me. In the gloom, high over the manor grounds, circled that mighty shape—a giant, vulture-like bird with great pointed black wings and the head and breast of a woman! A harpy!

Heart racing, I watched it hover there, carried back and forth by the raging wind. Then my eyes turned farther to the left, and I jerked back with a shriek of horror. There were two more of the loathsome creatures, and those two were swooping down straight toward me.

Paralyzed, I caught a glimpse of female faces with exquisite features, long, streaming black hair and crimson, evil lips. Then a sharp claw ripped across my chest and tore my coat to ribbons. I struck out madly, felt my fists pound deep into the feathery expanse of their wings, struck again and went down, overwhelmed by their bodies.

It was a moment of madness. I fought with every ounce of strength I possessed, with terror striking deep into my very soul. I rolled over and over, sought frantically to free my right hand and draw forth the bottle of holy water.

A nauseating stench of death and decay seared into my nostrils. My face and body were bleeding from a hundred places, and I was fast losing my strength. But suddenly one of those razor claws yielded to my frenzied blows and with a

lunge I whipped my hand sideward, grasped the bottle, uncorked its spout and showered the water out before me.

The result was cataclysmic. The harpies leaped back and stood gazing at me, women faces twisted in expressions of stark hate. Again I whirled the bottle, this time spilling part of the contents into their eyes.

There was a double shriek of rage. The monsters ran clumsily backward, hesitated a moment, then swooped into the air and fled.

For a moment I leaned gasping against the trunk of a tree. Then as the realization that the horror still was not finished filtered into my bewildered senses, I turned, seized the bow and silver-headed arrows and ran on into the grounds.

Near the end of the property, far beyond the gate, I saw them again. They were flying high above me, three titanic shapes etched black against the moonlit sky. And in the claws of one of them, held by his hair, dangled the body of Peter Woodley.

With shaking hands I fitted an arrow to the bow-string and pointed it upward. Back until the bow was bent almost double I pulled, then released it. It whined upward, shot past one of the monsters—and missed.

Panting, mumbling a prayer aloud, I seized the second shaft and made ready to fire again. But the harpies had sensed their danger, ceased their circling and with enraged cries were heading high toward the frog wall and the distant marsh.

I gave a last frenzied look above me, took quick aim and let fly that last arrow. Upward it sped, a gleaming streak in the moonlight.

And suddenly the night was hideous with the cries and shrieks of the wounded

monster. The creature fluttered and spun like a top. It opened its claws as it wobbled off toward the marsh, and the body of Woodley, released, dropped downward, fell like a meteor straight onto the jagged top of the frog wall.

An instant later I was at the boy's side, bending over his broken and blood-covered body. He rose up as I lifted his head in my arms.

"Thanks, Mr. Hampstead," he whispered. "It was—it was the only way."

He fell back with a sigh, and I was alone with the corpse of Peter Woodley.

THREE is little more to tell. No one believes me. The villagers stare curiously at my whitened hair and shrink away shuddering as I meet their gaze. The district doctor feels of my pulse, looks into the cornea of my eye and shakes his head perplexedly. And the police continue to search the countryside for some trace of Classilda Haven.

Fools! I have taken them to the gardener's cottage and shown them the empty black silk dress, nailed as it is to the center of the floor by a silver-headed arrow. I have led them to that section of the frog wall near the iron gate-door and traced slowly, letter for letter, the faint, almost obliterated lines that one moonlight night spelt so clearly the word "Celaeno." And I have placed on the table the wall mirror and Woodley's painting, which had been found somewhere in the depths of the marsh—placed them at their proper angles and pointed out the strange woman face that looked back silently from the changed perspective.

But in each case they only look at me sadly and murmur: "Poor man, there is nothing there."

