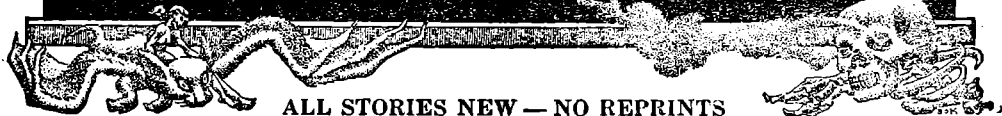


# Weird Tales



JANUARY, 1950

Cover by Matt Fox

## LONG NOVELETTE

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*When the ice-age retreated, who could know the forces it left behind to plague and outwit men of the scientific age?*

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- IN THAT SAME MOMENT** . . . . . Manly Wade Wellman 27  
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*The terrible, meaningless scream and cry of the City, its endless vibrations, at last have brought forth upon itself this ultimate inevitable product of itself.*
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# The Family



“**P**ERHAPS David really loves her,” Mother said indecisively. “We wouldn’t want our boy made unhappy, you know.”

Kate threw back her head and laughed. The lamplight glinted brightly on her long, strong teeth. “Of course he does,” she cried in her raucous voice. “Of

course he does. Desperately, enormously. Otherwise, why would he want to marry her?” From the ceiling of the dim, raftered room came the obedient echo, “marry her . . . marry her . . .”

“Kate’s always been in love with her brother,” Lance said from the other side of the room. Lance was *thin*; David had

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**BY MARGARET  
ST. CLAIR**

. . . in the black-draped cellar  
was a sense of sweet  
inner surety

Heading by  
Boris Dolgov

never known anyone as thin as Lancelot. "She really must learn to watch out for it. Our family name's Vlchek, not Volsung, Katharine."

Everyone laughed. A bright glance of understanding, of shared, familiar mirth rippled from face to face. Only Kate, rumbling in her throat, refused to see the joke.

"No offense meant, Katharine," Lance said with a touch of haste. "None at all. But it was agreed long ago that David was the only one of us who could pass for more than a day in the outside world. He has certain qualities which make him remarkably, outstandingly, attractive to the opposite sex. There's no occasion for heart-burning. Whatever it is he does, he does for us."

"But if he really loves her—" Mother repeated, staring down at the worn greenish webs on her hands. "If he really does . . ."

It was time for David himself to speak. "I like her, yes," he admitted. "More than I did any of the other ones. But that makes it all the better. As Lance said, whatever I do, I do for the family."

"You're a good boy, David," Mother said with a smile. "What would we do without you? Year after year, you always provide."

The others nodded in generous acknowledgment. David flushed with pleasure. What did anyone, even Elaine, matter when weighed against this?

"There won't be any trouble, though, will there?" Minna asked anxiously. "You remember what happened two years ago?"

"No, no," David replied.

"Not if *David* prepared things," Kate said warmly. "Dear brown David. David is so clever. We can rely on him." She came up to him and began rubbing her head against his sleeve, her eyes half closed. Pleased, he reached out and stroked the short stiff hair on the top of her head. He had always liked Kate.

"And she's coming—?" Mother asked, getting up from her chair.

"Tomorrow night."

The nervous moment was always when they entered the house. Mother might

air it, sweep, dust, polish—still it remained odd. That troublesome Gunning girl, two years ago, had sniffed and said it had a peculiar odor. But Elaine walked through the door without a murmur. Positively, she seemed to like the house.

"You're to help her dress, Kate," David said, meeting his sister on the stair. "She said you had pretty eyes. But remember, don't take your bandana off. We don't want to frighten her."

"I'll remember," Kate answered ardently. "Oh, David, she's ever so nice. I like her, like her too." Her throat throbbed.

"Good!" David gave her a little push. "Don't forget."

Everything was ready in the cellar. The black-draped altar, the black tapers, the big brass bowl. David felt gratitude invade him. Everything was going so well, with such seemliness, such decency. He hated inadequacies and scenes. The Gunning girl's behavior had been an ugly blotch on an ancient ritual. But there would be nothing of that tonight. He felt a sweet inner surety.

Mother came down the steps while he was still kneeling. "I forget the henbane," she explained. "Minna was worrying." She took a fat-bodied flask of mottled greenish pottery from a cupboard. "David, you're sure it won't be too hard on you, giving Elaine up?"

"No. He—" David nodded in the direction of the altar—"likes it better that way."

"I know." Sympathetically she took his hand in her cold, indented one. "Dear David," she said.

Elaine was wonderful at dinner that night. She ate, she drank, without urging, laughed at Lance's jokes, seemed not to notice Mother's hands. And how beautiful she was! Her arms were whiter than ivory, than parchment, against the black stuff of her dress, her mouth was dark wine, her hair shone like black satin on her head.

Kate, who was serving, was obviously enchanted with her. Once she forgot and rubbed slowly against Elaine, and Elaine, brightly, affectionately, smiled up at her.

Now came the delicate moment—delicate in spite of the henbane, which should have made Elaine responsive and suggestible—

when Mother suggested that they go downstairs. But Elaine stood up quite as if one's prospective mother-in-law always invited one to visit the cellar after a meal.

The cellar stairs had been mended since last year; that distressing squeak was gone. Solidly mother descended, gracefully Elaine followed her. Even Minna silent, the others trooped after them.

**A**T THE bottom of the stair Elaine halted. This was the place at which the Gunning girl, two years ago, had screamed and tried to run. It was certainly a delicate moment. (But then the evening would be composed of delicate moments, one after another, up to the piercing deliciousness of the last, most transcendently delicate of all.) Elaine turned her head to David. "How beautifully you've arranged everything," she said.

Had her eyes widened a little before she spoke? David found himself wondering. She had spoken with the practiced graciousness of a royal personage; and like the queen's loyal subjects the listeners behind had responded to her, looking at each other and smiling with pride, their eyes glistening as bright as those of bats. Or had the cellar's traditional decor found her utterly without surprise?

David would have liked to ponder this point, but he had no time. Elaine was moving slowly toward the altar, and he felt the others pushing him after her by a pressure which was as much psychic as it was actual and physical. The train of worshippers moved across the floor in a slow, skirling dance, while the altar receded and space itself seemed to flap around them giddily. Then David and Elaine were on firm

ground once more and facing the cross with the impaled toad.

The chanting came softly up to them. Elaine let her cape glide slowly from her shoulders to the ground. In the light of the black candles her skin shone like alabaster and as she drew her midnight hair down from its pins Kate (David could see her heavy body from the corner of his eye) gave a little skip and moaned deliriously.

Wonderful Elaine. He loved her, they were all in love with her. He felt himself flooded by an emotion that was only the more poignant because he could not be sure whether it was basically anguish or bliss.

The chanting grew louder. It was time. Half-stifling, David took over the role of celebrant. He was submerged in emotion, drowning in it. In the midst of his passion he clung desperately to the words and symbols of the ritual, and wonderfully, unbetrayingly, the rite mounted from climax to climax in the old vertiginous way.

There came the moment when he picked up the knife. "Kneel," he said to beautiful, wonderful Elaine. And Elaine, smiling faintly, reached out and took the knife from him.

Did Kate gasp? No, there came no sound. And the strangest thing was that there was not the least change of emphasis, even when he knelt and she held the basin before his throat, the strangest thing was that nothing was in the least strange.

No, not even *there* was there strangeness. Whatever he had done had been done for the family. Year after year he had provided. Tonight, too, he would provide. The knife in Elaine's hand was descending. Relaxed and gratified, David closed his eyes.

*Horror piled on horror, for, next to humanity rats are perhaps best fitted to conquer and rule.* . . . . .

## **"Home to Mother"**

A novelette in the next WEIRD TALES

**by MANLY WADE WELLMAN**