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DURING 1932 and 1933, it seemed to readers of WEIRD TALES that virtually every issue of the magazine carried a collaboration by August W. Derleth and Mark Schorer. Most of these stories were written the Summer of 1931, while the two friends were living in a cottage in Sauk City, Wisconsin, trying to see if it was possible to earn a living by full-time writing. Most of the tales under this collaboration were eventually collected thirty-odd years later in the volume *Colonel Markeson and Less Pleasant People* published by Arkham House in the year, 1966.

August W. Derleth proved it was possible to make a living at full-time writing, creating quite a reputation for himself, though he drove his muse at such a thunderous pace that his heart gave out while he was still in his early sixties. Mark Schorer wrote a much admired and definitive biography of one of America's great literary figures, under the title of *Sinclair Lewis: An American Life*. This work of superb scholarship was honored as a Book-of-the-Month selection.

However, as teenagers, both had collaborated on stories that went into amateur magazines. One of the standby publications of the National Amateur Publishers Association was THE TRYOUT, printed by C. W. Smith. So renowned was the magazine in amateur circles that C. W. was known as "Tryout" Smith. He encouraged much early talent including H. P. Lovecraft and Clark Ashton Smith, among others. He published in the January, 1927 issue *The Figure With the Scythe* by August W. Derleth and Mark Schorer. It is a brief, weird allegory, harbinger of the outstanding later literary achievements of the two collaborators.

The Figure With The Scythe

By AUGUST W. DERLETH and MARK SCHORER

THE STATELY HOUSE on the hill-top was very quiet. There was no sound of merry laughter, no noise of hurrying motor cars, no hum of life that usually emanated from the Mason-Warner home; there was only the majestic serenity which death alone can bring. Outside, the rays of sunlight played on the leaves of the trees and the blades of grass, casting long patches of light and shadow; the breezes skipped lightly from tree to tree and into the garden where they played havoc with the week old roses and the slender lilies that reared their proud heads far above the modest violets clustered below them. The birds sang merrily as if nothing at all had happened, and, indeed, nothing had happened to stop their carolling. In the house servants trod softly to and fro, each wearing the immobile, impassive countenance imposed upon him by the death of the master of the house.

The widow sat in the library. She was attired in a simple, very unostentatious black gown. Her tapering fingers fondled the locket

about her neck, and her kindly gaze rested upon her daughter who sat in silence at one end of the room. Her face wore an expression of unutterable sadness, but there was no hint of tears about her eyes. The servants had noticed with surprise and the children with anxiety that she had not shed a single tear since her husband's death. Her sorrow was too deep for mere tears. The soft cooing of a mourning dove broke upon her revery, and her lips quivered ever so slightly.

She stared intently at the portrait of her late husband above the heavy portieres at the door. His beautiful iron gray hair fitted him like a king's crown. And he was smiling. It was so like William, always cheerful. She closed her eyes and sent her ruminative thoughts scurrying backward to the almost forgotten nooks and crannies of her memory. She visualized William, the youth, the lover, and she almost fancied that she felt his lips on hers and that she heard him murmur softly to her. She smiled very lightly. Swiftly her thoughts traveled. She saw William and herself

radiant in their wedding garments. How happy they were then! It was not difficult to remember William's first great success on the exchange. Success followed success. And now...

She opened her eyes and allowed them to rest on the picture surrounding the bookcase on the left wall—the grim, malevolent figure with the scythe. William had always liked that picture because it reminded him of the inevitable termination of everything. The soft hum of a motor and the sound of subdued sobbing scattered her thoughts. She rose and walked into the vestibule. Her daughter followed her with her eyes.

In the vestibule the butler was relieving her other daughter and her son-in-law of their wraps. She walked quietly over to them. Calmly she embraced her weeping daughter and touched her lips lightly to her son-in-law's forehead. She murmured an order to her butler with reference to the disposal of their personal things, then summoned a maid and directed her to show her children to their rooms.

She stood and watched them ascend the broad staircase, and, when they had gone beyond her sight, she walked listlessly back to the library and reseated herself.

She thought mutely and imperturbably. This daughter was the last of her children to arrive. There was a solace in having her children about her in this hour, but within a few weeks they would all be gone. Then she would be alone; there would be no William, no children, only the dull servants.

The bitterness of the thought assailed her and she smiled a smile that was not a smile but only a

fleeting shadow of a lost hope. She would be so lonely in this house, so lonely. She could not impose upon the hospitality of her children; she was welcome she knew, but she could not. They were all married and happy, and, as the years passed, she would become a burden in their care.

The high room became dim with its own shadows as twilight descended upon her revery. She turned her chair slightly so that she could watch the pale moon rise. The silvery moonlight splashed idly about the room, touching objects here and there, causing them to shimmer brilliantly, and somehow the scene lightened her depressed spirits. It was late before she left the library, and her thoughts had found a culmination.

When would the figure again move the scythe?

THE FUNERAL was almost over. Mrs. Mason-Warner stared dully at the coffin. Her daughters were weeping audibly, and even the eyes of her three sons were moist. She heard the minister deliver a few short lines on the merits of her husband. The beautiful grey casket shone speciously in the sparkling sunlight streaming in through the open windows. It seemed to her that a white vapor hovered strangely above the coffin, and she stared at it wonderingly.

Suddenly she started up and moved a step toward the casket. She raised one arm in a gesture of despair, and cried softly, poignantly, "William." A fitful breeze that had entered dispersed the smoke from the sputtering tapers about the coffin, that had gathered above it, and the widow's hand dropped. She swayed slightly and crumpled to the floor.

The figure had moved its scythe.