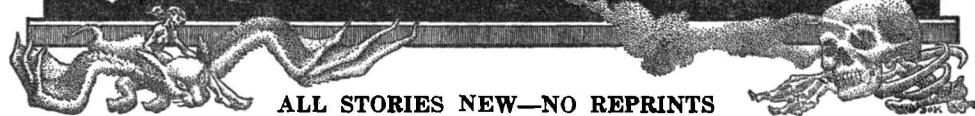


Weird Tales



ALL STORIES NEW—NO REPRINTS

NOVEMBER, 1942

Cover by Richard Bennett

NOVELETTE

- NURSEMAID TO NIGHTMARES** Robert Bloch 6
Julius Margate collects horrors the way some people collect stamps

SHORT STORIES

- THE HOUND** Fritz Leiber 34
These monsters feed on our fears, they haunt us, terrorize us
- THE CROOKED HOUSE** Thorne Lee 45
A hunchbacked, brooding monster, this house with the twisted soul
- THE VICTORY OF THE VITA-RAY** Stanton A. Coblenz 60
Twenty bloodstained bigshots of history are recalled from eternity
- THE GOLDEN BOUGH** David H. Keller 67
*In the moonlight the laughing man would come, playing his Pan-like music
—and she knew she must dance or die*
- THE GHOST OF THE MODEL T** Betsy Emmons 78
This man was stalked by a phantom, the specter of his first car
- THE CANDLE** Ray Bradbury 83
The proprietor pronounced the candle an implement of destruction
- THE LIPS OF CAYA WU** Frank Owen 90
*There was no escape, for octopus-like, the Chinaman's schemes
spread out everywhere*
- HERBERT WEST: REANIMATOR** H. P. Lovecraft 96
*The scientist finds that the quest for the secret of life leads
surely through the grave*
- THE POSSESSED** Alice-Mary Schirring 100
*Some macabre horror was here, changing this town and the people
in its appearance as night drew near*
- THE EVIL DOLL** Hannes Bok 107
*Was it hypnotism or witchcraft—she must know for her sanity;
her very life depended on the answer*
- VERSE**
- THE DEAD WORLD** Clarence Edwin Flynn 77
- INTO FANTASY** Maria Moravsky 82
- SUPERSTITIONS AND TABOOS** Irwin J. Weill 58
- THE EYRIE AND WEIRD TALES CLUB** 120

Except for personal experiences the contents of this magazine is fiction. Any use of the name of any living person or reference to actual events is purely coincidental

Published bi-monthly by Weird Tales, 9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York, N. Y. Reentered as second-class matter January 28, 1940, at the Post Office at New York, N. Y., under the act of March 3, 1879. Single copies, 15 cents. Subscription rates: One year in the United States and possessions, 90c. Foreign and Canadian postage extra. English Office: Charles Lavell, Limited, 4 Clements Inn, Strand, London, W.C.2, England. The publishers are not responsible for the loss of unsolicited manuscripts although every care will be taken of such material while in their possession. Copyright, 1942, by Weird Tales. Copyrighted in Great Britain. Title registered in U. S. Patent Office.

173

PRINTED IN THE U. S. A.

Vol. 36, No. 8

D. McILWRAITH, Editor.

LAMONT BUCHANAN, Associate Editor.

A strange spell was cast by this mountain forest place. A spell that brought untoward dreams, music . . . and death.



The Golden Bough

By DAVID H. KELLER

“LAST night,” she said, “I had a dream. In that dream I saw a house in a dark forest. Now that we are married let us travel till we find that house, for it is there that I want to live.”

Paul Gallien smiled as he looked at his bride of a few hours. This was her first request, and long ago he had promised her

that her first request after their marriage should be granted, no matter what it was. This idea of hunting a dream house seemed a peculiar one but he decided it would be fun—and besides he had promised.

Gallien was of royal blood, but it was in an age when royalty was no longer fashionable; so he contented himself with the

other things he had inherited and forgot about the title. He had been bequeathed money, pride which held his head high, courage and a kindly manner. He had married Constance Martin knowing little, and caring less, about her ancestry. All that concerned him was the plain fact that they were in love.

So Gallien and his bride started eastward through Europe, with no definite destination, simply sliding over the hills and down through the valleys in search of their dream house. For Constance often said to her husband:

"I shall not have any trouble in knowing the house when I see it. When we find it we shall rest there a long time till the remainder of my dream comes true. It is a house in a dark forest and it is as real as the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. I know you are laughing at me, but it is not a wild goose chase. We are seeking an actuality."

AS THEY slowly drove through the country or sat over their meals at little taverns or enjoyed the sunsets at the close of the day, they talked of the dream house and Gallien asked a thousand questions. Was it a house or a castle? How large was it? Was it habitable or just a mass of ruins? Were they really to live there? Was there a library? Fireplaces? Thus, through long conversations they discussed the most important details of their search.

Gallien did not care, so long as he could spend twenty-four joyous hours with Constance; he did not care if the journey never ended, if only she remained contented and happy. On and on, day after day, they went and finally came to a dark forest. There the giant pines rose a hundred feet upward before branching. There was a hush in the air and a peculiar absence of little living things, which made all still and unusually quiet. The ground was covered with a heavy matting of pine

needles. In some of the little open spaces thick moss shone softly green against the copper background of the dry spills. Circles of moist ground were ringed round about by toadstools which glowed waxy-white in the dim, uncertain light; on high bare rock shelves fool's gold glittered in the occasional sunbeams.

From the lofty branches of the pines, cones had fallen on the road; these crackled loudly under the tires, but this and the throb of the engine were the only sounds that broke the eerie stillness. The road crossed over other roads, yet here and there, bunches of wild grass grew in the wagon ruts, showing how old the road was and how seldom used. Gallien throttled the engine down till the car made only a few miles an hour; they drifted rather than rolled; seeming to sail into a dreamland of ethereal beauty. At times an unexpected ray of sunshine illuminated a part of the forest, like light breaking through the multi-tinted windows of a Gothic cathedral, and for a moment the heart paused in its beating with the beauty of it all.

They came at last to a fork in the road. The main road went on down into the valley; the other climbed in tortuous curves, up the mountain. When the woman saw that up-winding road merging into the pines she whispered, as though anxious that no one, save her husband, should hear:

"Let us go that way. What a beautiful road! Where will it take us? What shall we find at its end?"

"I know," replied her husband, as he turned off the main road. "We shall go on and up and on and up, and at the end we shall come to the home of a wood-cutter or a charcoal burner and, after much trouble, we will turn around and come down again."

"Let's do that!" she urged enthusiastically.

GALLIEN was not correct, however, in his prophecy, for at the end of the road was neither hut nor peasant burning charcoal. Rather, there was a house in the woods. Constance Martin Gallien looked at it once and looked at it twice; then covering her face with her hands started to cry. Her husband, who now was accustomed to her moods, gently drew her to him saying nothing until her sobbing ceased. At last she lifted her head from his shoulder and turned a smiling face to him, saying:

"How stupid! But it was joy, Paul, that made me cry and nothing else. Now we have come to the end of our search, for this is the house of my dreams—and in it I want to live a long time—till I know what life is and the real definition of love."

Gallien looked at her, surprised and slightly disappointed.

"I did not know your plan included really living here. I am sure it would be a splendid place to stay for a little while if we had servants and could entertain and had all the little accessories to make life comfortable and pleasant, but none of these things can be had here. Still, if you want to, we will stay here, if possible, for a few days. Perhaps after a day and a night of it you will be glad to go on with me to some city where there is light and laughter, music and dancing."

Constance jumped out of the car.

"At least we can see what it is like! I called it a house, but it is really an old castle. I am sure it must be very old. Do you remember anything about castles, Paul? Could you tell how old this place is just by looking at it?"

He looked at the rough stone-walled building; the weathered parapets, then shook his head.

"How can I tell? But there is a part of your answer. See that tree? The one growing near the wall? That was not there

when the castle was built. It would have afforded too easy an access to the windows. No doubt when the place was built all the trees within a hundred yards were cut down so if an enemy attacked the castle they would have no shelter. This one tree, surely, and perhaps all the others, must have grown since that time. Some of them are five feet in diameter. This road must have been built by the Romans. Maybe part of this castle was built by them. Shall we go inside? No one lives here save bats and toads. However, we can look around and go on until we reach a town."

But again he was in error for, circling the wall, they came to an old woman, seated on a three-legged stool, herding a few goats and geese. Gallien spoke to her first in French and then in German, but she only smiled at him toothlessly. Constance tried Italian, and at once there followed a conversation that glittered in explicatives as a summer storm is forked with lightning. At the end of ten minutes the bride turned to her puzzled husband.

"You did not know I could do that?" she asked. "I was raised in a convent in Rome. This old dame says she is the caretaker of the castle. Years ago the owner went to war and simply told her to look after the place; that if anyone came who wanted to live here, to rent it for a certain sum in gold. She says there is everything in the place for comfort and she will serve us. Her people live in the valley and will bring us food. She prefers to live here with her pets."

The aged woman took the bride's hand and whispered. Tears brimmed Constance's eyes as she translated:

"She says the man who went to war years ago was her lover. They were happy here for a month and a day. Since he has gone she just stayed here, with her memories for companions."

The dame showed them through the castle. They were surprised to find it so

comfortable in its homely simplicity. Throughout there were signs of great age; but all had been well and lovingly cared for. A slight chill was over all, but it was not dampness; the walls were dry. The woman asked if they wished her to build fires. Constance looked pleadingly at Paul. Half reluctantly he handed the woman five pieces of gold, the price of a month's service. Thus it was that they came to live in the dream house, now materialized as a castle in the Dark Forest.

Many were the rooms in the castle which the lovers thrilled over, but two delighted them especially, each in a different way. One was a library, with solid walls and a long, horizontal slit of a window through which the sun came from morning to night, and time could be told by the position of the beam of light. The first streaming light of morning fell on Eve, graven in pink marble, conscious of the knowledge gained by the fall in the Garden. Just before night came the last light which fell on a bronze man, tortured by the surety that he must die before he achieved to the wisdom greater age might have taught him. Between the marble Eve and the bronze man were books of every size, cover and age. Paul Gallien knew that he would be very happy in this room.

The other room was a bedroom. The floor was of wide, oaken boards covered here and there with bear skins. A bridal chest was the only furniture, save a large four-poster bed standing central in the room, and was, according to the ancient guide, the best bed in the castle. Her eyes glistened as she looked at it—glistened through tears. Many narrow windows completed one side of the room; casement windows, which could be opened, giving the night full freedom to enter. Decorations there were none; no pictures nor draperies; simply the chest and the bed.

Constance, beholding the bedroom, quivered with delight.

"This will be our room," she said and requested that the bed be aired forthwith and made with fresh clean sheetings. Thus, one was happy because of the library and the other because of the bedroom and each pleased in the joy of the other.

FOR a week they did nothing but explore the castle and the dark woods surrounding it. During that week the automobile stood where they had left it.

The road ran past the castle and on through the woods to a sudden ending at a sharp precipice, making an edge to the mountain. A mile below they could see a little mountain stream decorating the mottled green of the valley like a silver ribbon, lying haphazard. Standing on the very rim of the world one day the lovers felt that here was truly the end of a long trail. Constance turned to her husband saying:

"Will you do one more favor for me?"

"If it will make you happy," he replied with a kiss.

She looked at him anxiously, twisting in her indecision.

"All my life, dear, I have wanted to be happy in just this way. I do not understand my emotions—but I do know that I am happy and that I am fearful lest something spoil it all. I want to stay here. At night I wake up crying, and I know the tears come because I cannot bear to think of leaving. Ever since I dreamed of this place I have wanted it, and in it I have found, not quiet peace, but a tumultuous rapture—expectation of what I know not nor why.

"This I do know; that if I have to leave here I shall die with longing to return. I can't bear to look at the car; it is a symbol of roving; it means that some day you will ask me to sit on the seat beside you and ride to the cities you delight in. When I see it standing there a dark despair fills my heart."

"Suppose I take it down to the village and store it?"

"No! Because then you can claim it again. I want— Oh! I know it is silly, but I want—I must have you do it! Start it and let it go down over the side—here. When I know that it is down there, crushed and broken, a mile below me, I shall sleep in peace—the fears of the great cities will no longer torture me with the menace of their nearness!"

Gallien drew a deep breath. "'Tis a good car," he said simply.

For answer she clung to him, trembling in the fierceness of her desire. And, because he loved her, he asked her to wait for him. Without looking at her again he went and drove the car within ten feet of the lip of the ledge. Stepping out, he threw on the gas and let it go free. Up it plunged into the air and down it fell—like a fallen star, striking so far below that no noise came to tell them of its destruction.

The man looked at the woman, and on his face was a twisted, bitter smile, but the woman, with eyes shut, breathed deeply, peacefully. Nor did she rouse from her seeming sleep for a long time and then only to kiss him passionately, lapsing again into her dreams. Thus it was dark before they returned to the castle.

The old woman was anxious about them, for seeing the car gone when she returned from her herding, she thought they had left for further adventuring; a new life, perhaps, in the great, to her unknown, cities, where her lover had gone whistling in the days before the war.

Thus the springtime came and went, and summer brooded warmly over the dark forest, in all its sweet majestic beauty. Time passed happily, though slowly, through long months. More and more time Gallien spent in the library, while Constance, in a long, happy daze, spent hours on the bed dreaming of the future

and of dreams already come true. The dame had shown her dresses of ladies long dead, and more and more frequently the bride wore these gay things of past ages, and more and more she wore her hair braided down her back in two long ropes, falling below her knees; and more and more she passed the minutes looking through the windows into the dark forest.

One day she noticed that the room was but twenty feet from the ground and that the ivy covering the wall formed a perfect ladder for adventurous feet. That night she could not sleep. The old woman in her walled-off bedroom slept, dreaming of her long dead lover and the beautiful wild thing in the forest that had come to her through him. Gallien, tired from a day of study, slept dreamlessly. Under the flagstones in the kitchen the cricket slept, but Constance Martin Gallien, wide-eyed and pulsing-hearted, lay with her face in the moonbeams. Sleep she could not. In the dark forest there was neither song of bird, hoot of moon owl nor howl of far-away wolf. There all slept.

THEN came the near music of a pipe, the thin-trilling, few-noted music of a pipe, and Constance, without knowing that she knew it, realized that the tune was the oldest in the world contained in one octave, but encompassing every dread and exultation known to mankind throughout the ages. Even in bed her fair body wove from side to side as she lay listening to the music of the pipe. Not being able to bide longer she ran to the casement where she saw a man making the music, and around him in silent circles, were geese and goats. The man sat on a rock and made mad music in the moonlight.

The woman put on a pair of slippers, crept into a black silken robe, and inching to the window climbed down the ivy. Her feet hardly touched the ground as she sped to the rock, broke through the circle of

goats and geese and came near to the man who was making the olden music. As he came to the end of his song, and the music died in the murmuring notes, mixed with the mellow moonbeams, he looked at her with a glad smile.

"You like my music?"

"It's wonderful! Who are you and where did you learn to play?"

"I have always lived around here; this is my home. I never learned to play. I always knew how. Only one piece, but it can be played in an infinity of ways. Would you like to hear more? Come here, beside me, while I pipe for you."

Then he played in a livelier manner, and the goats and the geese stepped a gay measure to the music. Round and round the rock they went till at last Constance joined them. Between a goat and a goose she danced till there was an ending to the music. She rejoined the man on the rock, flushed and breathless, happier than she had been in all her life.

"Oh! I am so happy!" she whispered, entranced.

Throwing back his head he laughed, revealing glistening white teeth in the moonlight.

He tossed his arms upward. In one hand was the pipe, in the other there was nothing, and with that hand he clutched at moonbeams. Again he laughed gaily.

"'Tis wonderful to be happy. Men and women used to be happy. I seem to remember this place being filled of a night with bravely dressed men and dainty women in love, and sometimes the men piped for the ladies to dance, sometimes the men loved for the entrancing of their women, and which pleased the women the more, the music or the loving, how can I, being a man, tell? Those days are gone save in my memory, and I am not sure even that serves me honestly. At least, I now have no audience save such as you see."

Suddenly she turned to him and asked: "Who are you?"

"What does that matter so long as my music thrills you?"

"It does make me glad. Weeks ago I dreamed of this place and asked my husband to find it with me. He did. I asked him to destroy the car so we would not be able to leave. He did. I want a son—a gay, gladsome son—who will be able to catch the moonbeams and play the pipes. Can he give me that son?"

"Perhaps, but what odds? If you want a son, I will tell you how. Have you seen the pool of dark water over the hill on the other side of the castle? No doubt the old lady told you not to drink there—that it was poison. Near the water is a giant oak. Now you must do thus and so—"

Slowly, for an hour he held her hand, telling her just how she should do and why and if she did this and the other as he directed, the desire of her heart would be granted. He promised that on every moonlit night he would sit on the rock, playing the pipe for her pleasurance and thus, when her child was born, it would be a child of great joy and wondrous beauty; a player of ancient tunes upon the pipes; a gatherer of moonbeams and star dust.

She walked slowly back to the castle, climbed the ivy, put off her shoes and her black silken robes, she stole again to her husband's side, while he, never having wakened, snored peacefully, for that he had never knowingly wronged anyone. Constance, awake beside him, heard him snore and still in her soul rang the unearthly sweet music of the stranger's pipe, she could not help contrasting the two. Placing one ear against the pillow she covered the other with a mass of hair and a pink palm. Thus she slept, lulled to calm by the memory of that soul-engulfing liquid music of the moonlight. The next morning she woke and could not tell whether it had been a dream or a reality.

Her husband was still asleep but she woke him with a torrent of kisses and then was unable to tell him of the night or her desires.

THE same day the old woman left the castle and wandered through the dark forest till she met the man who had played the pipes. She kissed him tenderly and ran her fingers through his tight-curved hair and over his pointed ears. At last she took courage and asked him to play no more at the castle till the woman and the man departed.

"But you were asleep last night," he answered her.

"Yes, but I saw the tracks around the rock and the woman's footprints, mingled with those of the animals and the birds; so leave her alone, for the sake of your mother."

For reply he only laughed and ran away in big skipping leaps.

The mother was worried. She had never been able to tell whether she had created a simpleton or a God.

Constance began to prepare according to directions of the man who piped in the moonlight. There had to be a ladder, a sickle and a white sheet. Some of those things could only be got by the wiles of a cunning woman. Finally all was ready. With burning heart she undressed and pretended to sleep on her pillow. But while sleep came swiftly to her husband she remained wide-eyed and anxious till she was sure of his slumber. She donned her robe and slippers. Tying the sickle in the sheet and the bundle to her back, she went out the window to the ivy and down to where the ladder rested against the wall. Lifting the ladder to her shoulder she tiptoed westward from the castle to the place of the pool of dark water.

It was moonlight and the shadows and the moonbeams made curious fairyland of the dark forest. Though her heart was

beating fast—fast—there was a song on her lips, a very old song, such as could have been sung within one octave or upon a very simple pipe. She came at last to the old oak tree which grew by the dark pool and drank of its water.

Placing the ladder against the scabby bole she looked upward. On the first branch, just a little above the ladder, grew a spray of mistletoe, its green leaves, white berries and gray stems all shimmering in the eerie moonlight. Taking the sheet she spread it evenly over the ground under the parasite plant; on the sheet she placed the sickle. Now she loosened the two long braids and let those dark, wonderous tresses come in freedom, one in front and one behind her body, which she freed from her silken robe and white gown. Taking the sickle in hand, she, trembling, started up the ladder.

Near the top she paused. The mistletoe was within her reach. She still hesitated, and while she did so—was it the wind?—a long strand of hair reached over and entwined around the gray branched parasite. The woman looked at the union of plant and hair, then slowly reached and freed herself. With the curved knife she began cutting the plant from the oak, being careful to take a large piece of the bark with the roots of the plant in it. With the last slash the mistletoe fell earthward, but on the shadowed sheet, which was as it should be, for all in vain had it touched the heart. Then this last of the Druid worshippers descended the ladder carefully and placed wet moss over the cut bark, tying it tenderly in the white linen sheet. The ladder she slid into the dark pool and did up her hair and put on her clothes. With ineffable joy in her heart, she tripped back to the castle. Somewhere in the dark, moon-spangled forest a laughing man piped a very old tune, and she, hearing him, sang the song to his music.

Back in the bedroom she found it still

light from the moon. On the headpost of the bed, on the side on which she slept, she fastened the freshly cut bark placing the wet moss over and around it, and wrapped it all with the white sheet which she tied in hard knots. Thus was the mistletoe grafted onto the oaken bed, just a foot above her pillow. She kissed the white fruit, and loosening her hair fell asleep.

Thus Paul Gallien first beheld her in the morning; on her face the smile of infinite peace. Her slippers, kicked wantonly from her feet, he found were wet, and her silken robe stained with dew.

"She is a queer little wild thing, and so far I cannot tell what she is doing. Perhaps the old woman can help me," he spoke to himself as a feeling of frustration and futility settled over him as a raincloud envelopes a mountain peak.

The next time one of the girls came up from the village with fruit, Gallien took her and the old woman into the kitchen where by the girl's little knowledge of French made the woman understand what he needed to know. Sighing, she bade the girl leave them. She then led Gallien to the library where she found him a very old book with pictures in it, and, crossing herself, left him. Gallien began the study of that book, even as young men have studied it in all centuries past.

The young bride woke, saw the mistletoe, smiled and went to sleep again. When next she woke, she dressed. After dinner she took the silver pitcher and in it carried water from the dark pool, as was her wont each day, for the moss must be moist for the grafted parasite to grow. And it grew. Finally it spread all over the head of the bed, fastening here and there to the ancient oak, and seeming to sap the life from it.

At last Paul Gallien solved the secret of the book and understood the conduct of his wife. Now while in the library he

slept so when night came he was able to stay awake. The full moon passed, the dark of the moon had come and gone; now the crescent moon was growing larger, thriving on her diet of stars.

The first night of the watch Constance slept as though drugged. So satisfied was her husband with her sound sleep that he arose, lit a candle, and sat on the bridal chest, watching her. It was dark in the room and he decided that when she stirred he would blow out the candle, even though by so doing he would be alone with the shadowless things.

Her girlhood beauty was now ripening into the full bloom of womanhood; her white face shone like a pearl amid the blackness of her loosened hair which covered the pillow. Above her shadowed masses of the gray mistletoe, green leaves and white berries. Even as he looked a branch drooped slowly, until it rested on her breast. The ringlets of her hair seemed to curl upward from the pillow to interlace, caressingly, with the green leaves. All her fair body was at last covered with black hair and green plant. She smiled as though her dream were giving her great joy. Now and then her lips moved—as if caressing a lover.

The next nights were the same. Then came a fuller moonlight and the woman was restless. She tossed by her husband with little murmuring cries.

"I cannot sleep," she sobbed. "Life is too full. There is so much love and happiness in the world, why should a woman spend her life sleeping?" She flung herself passionately into her husband's arms, smothering him with kisses, wrapping her hair all about him.

"Life is too short!" she cried again and again.

HE TRIED to satisfy her and calm her, but at last pretended to sleep. She lay quietly by him, but he knew by her

short, sharp breathing that she was wide awake and restless. Then, through the sweet, resinous air of the moonlit forest came the sound of music. Constance sat upright. She listened to her husband, then satisfied that he was asleep, she ran to the window. There on the rock sat the laughing man, surrounded by the goats and the geese and the tune he played was a very old one, all within one octave. Drawing on her leather slippers, she climbed down the ivy, hurrying on eager feet to join the dance.

Paul Gallien stood in the shadow and watched her dance, all lovely and exotic in the moonlight with the goats and the geese who paced sedately with her. After the dance she sat on the rock with the man who clutched moonbeams.

"Is all well with you?" he asked her.

"All is well. The plant is growing on the oak bed. Every night the spirit enters my body. I never knew how exquisite real happiness could be. The thought of your love and your music fills my every thought."

"Life is naught without love," replied the man, laughing, as he reached into the air for the moonbeams. "Keep the plant well watered, my dear. Whenever you are not sure of yourself, follow me."

As Gallien watched from his window he thought of the old book with its pictures and knew that he had but little time to spare. Below, in the little room next to the kitchen, the old dame heard the music, crossed herself, kissed the silver cross which hung from her neck, prayed and remembered other such nights, long years gone by. She determined to ask the strangers to leave before it was too late.

The next day the young woman made her usual visit to the dark pool, carrying her little silver pitcher, while her husband went to the little village at the bottom of the valley for letters and food. There he talked with some of the young men

and they went far away with a mule team, and in a week came back with a number of long iron pieces of pipe.

Came a day when Constance went to the dark pool, carrying her little silver pitcher and instead of the dark pool of water there was but a mud spot; nothing save the slime of the ages, and on the slime rested the ladder. Angry, she walked around the edge of the muddy hole and at last found where the water had all drained through long iron pipes. She looked at the giant oak and saw all the mistletoe on it was turning golden, a sign of dryness; death, decay. Crying, she ran back to the castle with her empty pitcher. Up to her bedroom!

Her husband was there arranging some of his ties. She ignored him as she ran to her side of the bed. There was no mistake. The love plant was indeed golden, on the bed as on the tree. It must have water every day from the dark pool; and now it was dead from the lack of it. She touched it, pityingly, and the leaves dropped off. All the dried berries rolled in a pitter-pattering across the floor; all the dark green had turned to golden brown. She faced her husband.

"Why did you do it?"

"Do what?"

"Drain my pond?"

"I was afraid of malaria. It was the only place like it on the mountain and I did not want you to be sick."

"Fool! Fool! FOOL!" she shrieked. "If you had only asked me. Now all life is dead for me!"

"I still live," he said kindly.

At that she burst into tears and ran to him and caught him in her arms.

"I didn't mean it," she sobbed. "I didn't mean it. I was just worried and sorry because my beautiful plant died. I do have you but it may be that you die as the plant and the moon and the song of the laughing man. Everything dies, and perhaps your

candle will go out in the dark some time. Take me away from here. I am afraid! I fear the dark, and the moon will soon pale, shrink and die also."

He soothed her as best he could, caressingly, telling her they would leave in a few days; just as soon as he could get another car.

They spent that day as lovers and for long moments Constance seemed to forget her fears in the embraces of the man. At other times she looked furtively into the dark forest. They told the dame they were leaving and she sighed, saying she wished they had never come. None too happy, the bride and her husband returned to their bedroom, discussing plans for their future.

"And I think," said Paul Gallien suddenly, "that before we go we had better throw out that dead mistletoe and clean the room. Suppose we do it now? I will borrow a shears from the old woman."

He returned shortly with a great pair of shears, such scissors as the oldest Fate used to clip the thread of life. While Constance sat on the bridal chest and cried a little, he cut all the ropes and rotten sheet, then threw the dead plant and other things with it out the window. As he wiped off the oaken bedstead he remarked:

"This wood is all dry and powdery. I believe I could break it in two in my hands. The mistletoe must have taken most of the life out of it."

"It has taken most of the life out of me," the woman added under her breath.

"No. We are just beginning to live. There are so many happy days to come."

THUS and so he tried to cheer her. The work done, he placed the shears on the bed and then coaxed her to come to supper. She said she was tired and asked that they go to bed early that evening.

Returning to the room she noticed the shears on the bed, exactly in the middle of the coverlet.

"How odd you are," she said to her husband. "You left those shears on the bed, exactly in the middle. If it stays there, it will be between us all night."

"That would be a good idea," he answered gently, "you are tired and this has been a hard day for you. Thus in olden times the knights did with their swords when they wished to assure their damsels of an undisturbed night. So, you stay on your side of the shears and I will stay on mine. Thus we shall both waken refreshed on the morrow."

Half an hour passed.

"I am frightened, Paul," she whimpered. "Is that thunder I hear? Hold my hand—tight!"

He did so and went to sleep.

Then came the full moon lighting the room with its yellow beams, and the woman heard the sounds of the pipe in the dark forest. At once she knew she must go out and dance or die from desire. As she tried to rise her hair held her back. She started to pull the long braids but they still held her. At last she took courage and slid her hand down the braid till she found it wrapped round the neck of the man who had held her hand. Her hair, those long, black, snake-like tresses, was wrapped around his neck; covered his face.

She screamed; for she knew that Paul Gallien was dead; and she knew the manner of his death.

Yet the pipe called her to the dark forest.

She took the shears and cut her hair, close to her head she cut it. Strand by strand, she cut it till she was free, and as the hair loosened it clung closer to the man's face and throat as though not quite satisfied that the deed was done.

Constance took off her silken robe and spread it over the thing that lay on the bed. Under the silk all was still, save for the final convulsive twistings of the ropes of hair, tightening uselessly round the

throat of the dead. Then the woman ran to the window and climbed feverishly down the ivy. This time she did not wait to put on her slippers.

Once she reached the ground she ran to the rock. The laughing man was gone; the goats and the geese were gone; but through the woods, down the road, she heard the tones of the music, a very old tune, all within an octave, and she hastened after the song, crying:

"Oh, Pan! Wait for me! Please wait for me so I can love you and be happy."

But the laughing man walked on. The running, panting woman could come no closer to him till at last she saw him standing on the edge of the cliff. There he stood and played, waiting for her. She

reached out to catch him and kiss him, but failing to touch the fantasy of his body, she plunged over the cliff, her white body curving like a falling star, till she silently became one with the crushed automobile.

The laughing man, lurking in the shadows, ran out into the moonlight and threw his open hands into the air as though to pluck the moonbeams with his questing fingers. Then he began to play his pipes anew. From the dark woods came the goats and the geese and gathered silently round him, and the song he played was all in one octave and very old. He laughed, and laughed.

"These mortals are never content. They always try to gather moonbeams—and even I cannot do that."