

Weird Tales



JULY, 1952

Cover by Jon Arfstrom

HELL'S BELLS	Duncan H. Munroe	8
<i>A lingering relic of a forgotten age whose sciences today would seem as so much priestly magic.</i>		
WHICH'S WITCH?	Harold Lawlor	21
<i>Even a syndicated columnist can't afford to treat witchcraft with flippancy.</i>		
THE EMPEROR'S LETTER	David Eynon	31
<i>One way to record history; each man a frozen page to show the way he died.</i>		
ELMER BITTERSNIFF AND THE THREE BEARS	Harry Botsford	35
<i>One could certainly understand why Elmer was allergic to honey—clover honey especially.</i>		
THERE WAS SOOT ON THE CAT	Suzanne Pickett	47
<i>I was the only one who had read the diary; I, too, had seen the cat with the awful eyes; and I had felt the horror emanating from the house.</i>		
THE GREEN PARROT	Joseph Brennan	52
<i>A pheasant or a woodcock or a hawk might have flapped across the road; but a large green parrot, in New England, late in November. . . !</i>		
THE TEMPLE OF SERPENTS	Paul Ernst	56
<i>"I am about to make a wish, and may the devils that hide in the dark places see to it that my wish comes true. . . ."</i>		
<small>(Copyright 1928 Popular Fiction Publishing Company)</small>		
THE PLAID	Abrach	64
<i>In some strange way it seemed as if the child completed the glen; without her it could be naught.</i>		
LIVE EVIL	Emil Petaja	69
<i>All sorts of machines are being invented daily, hourly—why not a deghosting machine?</i>		
THE LAKES OF NAI LOODIE	Donald F. Vieweg	77
<i>The story of a strange goddess with red eyes and blue skin who was the incarnate spirit of a glacier—well, that didn't help one to keep things in proper perspective.</i>		
VERSE {		
{ ALETHIA PHRIKODES	H. P. Lovecraft	43
{ BLACK CANDLES	Yetza Gillespie	51
THE EYRIE		4
A WEIRDUTATION	Joseph Howard Krucher	55

Published bi-monthly by WEIRD TALES, 9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York 20, N. Y. Reentered as second-class matter January 26, 1940, at the Post Office at New York, N. Y., under the Act of March 3, 1879. Single copies, 25 cents. Subscription rates: One year in the United States and possessions, \$1.50. Foreign and Canadian postage extra. 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, 1952, by WEIRD TALES. Copyright in Great Britain
Title registered in U. S. Patent Office.

 178
Vol. 44, No. 5

PRINTED IN THE U. S. A.

D. McILWRAITH, Editor

The Green Parrot

BY JOSEPH PAYNE BRENNAN

SOME years ago, finding that urban interruptions were threatening to prevent my completion of a new novel on the deadline set by the publishers, I moved back to a room at the Winford Inn where I had spent the previous summer. Winford, a tiny village tucked in the northern Connecticut hills, offered very few formidable interruptions.

I arrived at the Inn during October and worked steadily until late November. At length, well pleased with my progress, I decided to take a day off.

I got into my car and drove rather aimlessly around the countryside, admiring the scenery and in general enjoying myself. Although most of the leaves were down, and in certain lights the cold hills looked rather bleak, I felt that the little excursion was doing me a world of good.

Late in the afternoon, as I was approaching Winford, looking forward to a quiet evening in my cozy room at the Inn, I turned down a narrow dirt road which branched off the main route and was reputed to be a shortcut.

I immediately regretted it. The road was in a bad state of disrepair and was crowded on both sides by large overhanging hemlock trees whose branches scraped against the car.



I was just about to switch on the car lights when a large green parrot suddenly flew out of the hemlocks on one side of the road, fluttered frantically away from the windshield, and disappeared under the trees on the other side.

I was so startled I very nearly ran the car off the road. Braking to a stop, I sat staring into the woods, wondering if my eyes were playing tricks on me. If a pheasant, or woodcock, or hawk, had flapped across the road, I might have been momentarily startled, but no more. But a large green parrot, in New England, late in November. . . .

I was still scowling into the woods, when a cracked and quavering voice began calling out plaintively, "Here Toby! Here Toby!"

At first I thought it might be the parrot; then I saw a little old lady appear out of the hemlocks and step into the road. She looked around uncertainly, while a most woebegone expression came over her wrinkled face. In her shapeless housedress and



*"Here, Toby—"
the old lady called
to the parrot among
snowy New Eng-
land hemlocks.*

Heading by
Lee Brown Coye

funny little poke bonnet she made an odd and pathetic figure.

I got out of the car and approached her. "Your parrot," I said, "just flew across the road. He went toward the woods." And I pointed toward the clump of hemlocks where I guessed he had headed.

SHE stood stone still and stared at me. Apparently she hadn't even noticed my car. Finally a slow unfathomable smile wrinkled her face.

Her faded eyes sought my own. "Help me," she whispered. "Help me find Toby. I've been trying to catch him so long. I'm so tired."

It was impossible for me to refuse. Her pale eyes held such a pitcous appeal—and she was so old and frail and helpless-looking.

"You'd better wait here," I said. "I'll see if I can catch him."

Without waiting for her reply, I plunged into the hemlocks. I knew there was little time to spare. It was already twilight under the trees; in another hour the forest would be dark.

I began calling the parrot by name: "Here Toby! Here Toby!"

From far away in the woods a faint, mocking echo came back, "Here Toby! Here Toby!"

Once I thought I caught a glimpse of the bird, high up on a branch in one of the hemlocks. But I couldn't be sure. It might have been merely a last ray of sunlight glinting briefly against a green bough.

As I moved away from the road, the hemlock wood became denser. The trees grew closer together: briars and underbrush barred the way.

Darkness closed in more swiftly than I had thought possible. With it, came cold. In spite of my exertions, I began to shiver.

When I finally stopped to catch my breath, I was, for the first time, struck with the absurdity of the situation.

Here I found myself, at twilight, scrambling through brambles and briars deep in a hemlock wood which stretched for miles—in search of an escaped parrot whose owner I didn't even know!

I shrugged and turned to retrace my footsteps. While I hated to go back and admit

my failure to the little old lady in the poke bonnet, I felt that I could accomplish nothing by searching further. In a very short time it would be impossible to see anything at all in the woods.

In a few minutes, however, I pretty much forgot about facing the old lady—because I realized that I was lost. I hadn't gone far from the road, but for the life of me I couldn't find it again.

IT GOT completely dark and became extremely cold. I lost all sense of direction and although I kept assuring myself that I couldn't possibly be *very* far from the road, a kind of panic began building up in me. My thin topcoat was not, I knew, designed for overnight wear in cold November woods.

At length, purely by accident, I stumbled into the road. Luckily, the car was not far away. I climbed into it, stiff and literally aching with cold, and started the motor.

As I had expected, the little old lady had left. Probably she had gone home far more concerned about the loss of her parrot than about my own failure to reappear.

Back at the Inn, I took a hot bath, changed clothes, drank two tumblers of brandy—and made the dining room only a few minutes late.

As had been my custom since returning to the Inn, I seated myself at the table which I usually shared with Colonel Buff, Miss Grover and old Mrs. Spence.

When Colonel Buff joshed me about my late arrival, my first impulse was to answer testily. I held my temper however, and presently when the brandy and warm food began to take effect, I decided to reveal the entire ridiculous episode from which I had so recently emerged.

I determined to relate the bizarre incident without—and it was a temptation—adding any trimmings or melodramatic trappings of my own invention.

I soon saw however, that, oddly enough, even without embroidery my little narrative was producing an extraordinary stir. From the very start, when I first mentioned the parrot, Colonel Buff stopped eating and laid down his fork as if he didn't want to risk missing a single word. I thought old Mrs. Spence turned somewhat pale, and

Miss Grover appeared unaccountably agitated. She mumbled something about snow and kept glancing at the windows.

I FINISHED amid a strained silence. At length, Colonel Buff, after exchanging pregnant glances with Mrs. Spence and Miss Glover, cleared his throat.

"My lad," he said, "this is as good a time and place as any for you to be informed of a very peculiar and pertinent fact about your, ah, experience."

"What fact is that?" I inquired.

"You must be prepared to be startled."

"Well . . . ?"

"The fact is," he continued, "that the two chief protagonists in your recent experience—excluding yourself, of course—were—ghosts."

He nodded his head at my expression of blank amazement and disbelief.

"I know it must seem incredible to you," he went on, "but that little old lady in the poke bonnet disappeared in those hemlock woods eighty-odd years ago."

Mrs. Spence nodded, shivering. "It's a well known story hereabout," she said. "Leastways, it is to the old folks."

After dessert, Colonel Buff lit a cigar and settled back to tell the "well known" local story which I had never heard. I had, meanwhile, eaten my remaining food in such a state of suspense that I hardly tasted a morsel of it.

"The little old lady in the poke bonnet," the Colonel began, "was a spinster named Miss Meerchum. At one time her people were moderately prosperous farmers. They occupied a large tract of land bordering the hemlock woods on that dirt road which you came over.

"Well, to make a long story short, the Meerchums gradually died off until finally only old Miss Meerchum was left. She continued to live on in the farmhouse, eking out a sparse existence.

"Her only solace was a large green parrot which she kept as a pet. Being alone in the world, she became inordinately attached to the bird. It was said—and this is probably sheer nonsense—that the bird could carry on a sustained conversation and that old Miss Meerchum held lengthy gossip sessions with it. In any case, Miss Meer-

chum undoubtedly valued the parrot above everything else in her world.

"Well, one dismal day in late November, in the year 1868 to be exact, Miss Meerchum came stumbling into Winford in a vastly agitated state. Tearfully, she explained to the villagers that Toby, her pet parrot, had escaped into the hemlock woods. She pleaded for help in locating the prized bird.

"The local menfolk, deeply touched by her piteous appeal, organized a searching party and plunged into the woods in an attempt to retrieve the aged woman's companion.

"When they started out, the skies were somewhat overcast but there seemed no threat of imminent storm. The party—men and boys—struck boldly into the hemlocks. Apparently the search, in the beginning, was considered something of a lark.

"Toward evening however, when more than half of the searchers were still far in the woods, a blinding snowstorm struck. It quickly turned into a raging blizzard. A terrific wind roared through the forest, drowning out all other sound.

"Those men and boys who had already come out of the woods were forced to return to town in order to save themselves. There was no possibility of attempting to save the others. Some of them were not found until the following spring. In all, seven men and four boys perished in the hemlock woods."

"And the old lady?" I inquired after a long silence.

"Contrary to instructions," the Colonel said, "she followed some of the searchers into the woods, calling out for her beloved parrot. She perished with the others, and to this day her poor bones have never been located. They still lie somewhere in those woods—and whatever might remain of the parrot lies there also, for it, too, was never found."

THE Colonel relit his cigar. "Since that tragedy over eighty years ago, at least a dozen different people, at different times, have reported an encounter with the little old lady in the poke bonnet. Always in the fall of the year. And, invariably, not many hours after their meeting with the pathetic

apparition, a severe snowstorm has settled on the area."

Miss Glover looked toward the window. "We'll be snowed in by tomorrow," she said resignedly.

When I looked outside that evening before retiring, I could see stars. I drank another stiff tumbler of brandy, shrugged, and went to bed. In spite of my experiences and

Colonel Buff's story-in-explanation, I slept soundly.

But the next morning when I got up, I shivered in spite of the warmth of my cozy room.

The world outside was muffled and heaped with a half foot of snow, and the flakes, driven by a howling wind, were still rushing down.