

# Weird Tales



ALL STORIES NEW — NO REPRINTS

NOVEMBER, 1949

Cover by Matt Fox

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D. McLWRAITH, Editor



# The Green Window

BY MARY ELIZABETH  
COUNSELMAN

IT IS one of those old Colonial structures, with great fluted columns in front and a kitchen detached from the house by a long hall-porch. There are half a dozen just like it in Stuartsboro—but if you are driving through here, if you will ask any of our leisurely-moving inhabitants, they will gladly direct you to "the house with the green window." Anyone, that is, except myself. I would not go near the place for any reason whatsoever. I'll never go back there. *Never.*

There is nothing to see. The beautiful old grounds have grown up now in mustard and Jimson seed. The large plaster fountain on the lawn runs no more; it is full of stagnant rain water, probably, at this season, and choked with last autumn's leaves that drifted down from the giant whiteoaks standing like sentinels before the house.

*What was there about the window?  
Look long enough and you shall know!*

Furthermore, the windows have been boarded up—even that queer opaque one to the left of the fan-lighted door. Especially that one . . . There are ten-penny nails in the heavy planks that cover it from sight. Otherwise, Aunt Millicent insists, passing tourists would swarm in with claw hammers

and rip them off, to take a peek at those panes. The American tourist is a predatory animal; he would break pieces off the Venus de Milo to take home a souvenir to the folks. Several times the "window lights," as panes are called locally, have been broken out by the curious, by would-be detectives of the supernatural who yearn to give that weird green glass a laboratory test.

I wish I could see their faces when they smugly take it out of pocket or handbag, back home again, with a tale to tell the neighbors. For, whatever it is that causes the glass in that one particular window of the old Dickerson home to cloud over, it disappears about half an hour after the panes are removed from the windowframe. I don't know why. Jeb and Mark and I, as children, have scraped them with razor blades, peered at them under our toy microscopes, and smeared all sorts of acids on them. But the green scum—that is what it looks like; a foul gray-ish-green scum on the surface of a pool—seems to be *inside* the glass, under surface. I could not tell you how many times the opaque discolored panes have been replaced by ordinary glass, only to cloud over again by sunset of the next day.

**B**UT that is not its attraction. The "green window" is supposed to be a prophetic window, an opening into the future; or, more accurately, a mirror for tomorrow. The story is: when Great-great Grandpa Dickerson was thrown from his horse and lay dying in that room, over a century ago, he called for an old slave on the Place, a wizened old negress purported to be a *mamaloï*. The plantation was heavily in debt, and it seems the old boy was worried about the welfare of his wife and two small sons. Lying there on the brocaded couch, with his spine broken from the fall, he had begged the old voodoo woman to look into the future for him, to help his widow make necessary plans.

She had done so, the story goes, using that window as a sort of "psychic screen." All the Evil Ones that crowd about someone who is dying, she had summoned to that spot—it was their fetid breath, she explained, that clouded the glass panes. But there was only one trick of dark magic in

her power: to make a mirror of that opaque window, in which could be seen the dim reflection of the room where her master lay dying. A reflection of the room, yes—not as it looked at the moment, but as it *would* look, at some unnamed future date, when the *next* person in the house should die. The mental picture of that mumbling old black crone, of the sobbing wife cuddling her two terrified children before that slowly darkening window, has always been vivid to me.

All my life, of course, I have heard family tales about its prophecies. But the old Place itself has become a white elephant, tax-ridden and run-down. Mother married a Virginian and moved away, but she would never sell her equity in the property to Mark's father or to Jeb's mother, my uncle and aunt. Jeb's mother married a local lawyer and moved across town, but Mark and his father lived on at the old Homeplace, selling off some of the land when the old man had his stroke. It was, I may add, somewhat of a disappointment that his actual death occurred in a hospital. I think half the people in Stuartsboro had planned to "drop in" at the moment of his demise, for a peek into that prophetic window. No death had occurred in the house for seventy-two years—a fact I believe people resentfully accused our family of arranging, just for spite.

As a matter of fact, none of my generation believed in the hoodoo. We grinned about it fondly, the way others smile at myths about Santa Claus or the Easter Bunny. Mark, Jeb, and I—children of the Depression and the Second World War—were not inclined to believe in anything we couldn't see and touch. Jeb took over his father's meagre law practice in Stuartsboro, and managed to support himself and his widowed mother. Mark sold off more and more land, then went into the Air Corps. He came back with a charming little bride, a redhead with a bright gamin-face and a Brooklyn accent you could cut with a knife.

They were such a gay fun-loving young couple that I began visiting them, or Jeb, every summer after my teaching job closed in June. Mark was small, arrogant, with the lazy good looks of a Spanish don. Jeb was tall, lanky, good-humored, and wore glasses

that ruined whatever good looks he might have inherited from Aunt Millicent. As a girl, I often toyed with the idea of marrying one or the other of them, if they had not been my first cousins. Occasionally we would pretend among ourselves that they were my brothers.

But after Sherry came, with her light laugh and boundless energy, I had to take a backseat as their "best girl." Mark worshipped his little redhead; he became restless and bored unless they were in the same room.

It was easily apparent, too, that Jeb was in love with her, in that quiet awkward way of his. I felt sorry for him, because it was just as easy to see that Sherry's attention was all for her husband.

The plantation had dwindled now to only the grounds around the house, hardly an acre. Small houses had sprung up like mushrooms all about it, making it look like a dignified old dowager drawing her skirts haughtily away from a flock of tenement children. Mark started a real estate office, failed at it; built a movie drive-in outside of town and had to sell it at a loss; found two more jobs, and lost them. Then the family—especially Jeb Randolph and I—became distressed because of his drinking. He drank all the time now, lounging around the house in an old dressing-gown with a highball tinkling in his hand.

We all worked at getting him back on his feet. Jeb and I dropped in several times a day to pull him out of one of his moody spells. And Sherry was never more cheerful and loving. I often noticed the stiff pained look on Jeb's face when she sat down in Mark's lap, throwing her arms around him and kissing him with the childlike abandon that was her greatest charm. She invented things to amuse him around the house—small tasks to take his mind off his failures; little games to coax him out of his despondency.

ONE afternoon when we dropped by, she had been cleaning out the attic, and had come across an old letter wedged into a skylight. It was brown with age, streaky with rain, and almost illegible. But Sherry had made out the fine cramped old-fashioned

handwriting, and was perched on Mark's chair arm, reading it aloud to him excitedly.

"Liz, Jeb—it's about the green window!" she called as we entered. "Some relative of yours, way back there . . . It's signed 'Lucy.' There's a blot on it, See? It's unfinished; she must have been writing to somebody, and spilled ink on her letter. Then the skylight rattled, and she or the servants stuffed the page in to wedge it . . ."

"Detective," Mark laughed, jerking a thumb at her. "She's got it all figured out . . . Jeb," he chuckled, "the 'Lucy' was Aunt Lucy Dickerson, Grandfather's maiden sister. She never did have all her buttons, I remember Dad used to say. And this letter proves it!"

"Something about the window?" I asked, amused at Sherry's excitement, "What'd the old gal say? Read it!"

"Well, it starts off in the middle of a sentence," Sherry said importantly. "Must have been the second page of her letter, or some such. She's thanking somebody for the funeral flowers they sent, as I make it out. . . . *beautiful wreath,* it starts out. *'There were so many lovely flowers, and poor dear Ellen looked so natural, lying there in the casket . . .'*"

Mark, Jeb, and I yelped with laughter in chorus.

"That's Aunt Lucy, all right!" Jeb nodded. "She was always going on about somebody's funeral. Liked to cry, so she went to 'em all! What else does it say?"

Sherry made a face at us. "All right! Laugh! I'll skip a few sentences, where she tells what the pastor said about . . . Allen? No, it's Ellen . . ."

"That was Grandma," Mark told her. "Died of cancer, poor old gal . . . Say!" he burst out, suddenly interested. "She was the last person to die here in the house, wasn't she? Aunt Lucy nursed her for years. Old maid. She lived for the family; never had any life of her own."

Jeb and I nodded. Sherry was poring over the stained letter-fragment again, trying to make out the words in faded ink.

". . . *my dear, what I saw in the window! You'd never believe . . .*" she read. "Never believe . . . something-something; it's blotted out. . . . *'twas an Oriental,*" she

made out another phrase or two. "Sitting there in Father's chair with a turban on his head—if indeed 'twas a man, dear Martha—and . . ."

We laughed again uproariously.

"Good old Aunt Lucy!" Mark hooted. "Wasn't that about the time of the Yellow Peril talk? When everybody thought the Chinese were going to take over the country? And the gals sneaked around, reading Indian love-lyrics?"

Jeb grinned, nodding. "Guess Aunt Lucy took it from there, planting a rajah in our parlor! She had so little romance in her life . . ."

SHERRY gave him a sharp look I could not translate. "Aunt Lucy isn't the only one," she muttered cryptically. "Don't you even want to hear the rest of it? All about a thief breaking in to steal the rajah's treasure, and the Oriental shoots him—she saw it all in the mirror, the letter says. There's a cap pulled down over the burglar's face. When the Oriental sees who he's shot, he falls sobbing on the body of the young boy. Maybe his brother, she says, or his son . . ."

"Good grief! How corny!" Jeb held his nose expressively. "Mother told me Aunt Lucy used to read dime novels all the time—and I can well believe it! Kept 'em hidden between the leaves of a *Godey's Ladies' Book* . . ."

Sherry gave us one glance of disgust. She then wadded the letter into the fireplace, and whirled on us, directing most of her temper at Mark.

"All right, of course it's silly! But we could pretend, couldn't we? You three are so . . . stuffy about everything! Mark half drunk all the time, and we never go anywhere any more! I never have any new clothes or . . . or . . ." Tears welled into her pretty brown eyes. "Or anything but family pride!"

Mark went white, averting his eyes from our faces. I could not think of a word to say, but Jeb, with admirable tact, leaped into the breach.

"Sure," he said gently. "We're getting to be a bunch of stick-in-the-muds. That's why Liz and I ran by this morning, to persuade

you two to go to the Lindsay's dance at the country club. We . . ."

"Not going," Mark snapped. "Sally Lindsay yapping in my ear, and Jay handing out those dishwasher cocktails like they were champagne . . .!"

Sherry looked at him, temper sparkling in her eyes. She compressed her lips, fighting for self-control, then burst the dam:

"Maybe you're not going. But I am! Jeb will take me, and Liz can go with that drip of a Joe Kimball who keeps trying to marry her off. She's too smart, though! Marriage is . . . a bog hole! Ours is, anyhow! . . . Come on, Liz," she whirled and swept out of the room to run upstairs. "I'll take some clothes, and dress at Jeb's with you. Mark can sit here and *drown* in his cheap rye. I'll spend the night at Aunt Millicent's!"

She came running down again with a lavender tulle dress, slip, and gold sandals, and stalked out to the car with no further word to Mark. Jeb and I mumbled something to our cousin; but he was already gulping down several slugs of whiskey in white-lipped anger, and did not reply. We followed Sherry out to the car, and drove away, not blaming her, only wishing Mark would find his way again and return to his old self.

On the way to Aunt Millicent's, Sherry became contrite, but covered it by chattering about the letter she had found in the attic.

"Oriental potentate!" she laughed. "With a turban on his head, and a flowered robe! She really dreamed that one up, didn't she? It's not so fantastic, though. The window didn't predict the date, by any chance? Say, December 7th, 1941 . . .?"

We fell in with her mood and began to kid each other about the Japanese Invasion of Stuartsboro that might have actually come off in 1941, but hadn't quite made it. At noon I discreetly called Mark on the phone, but he sounded very drunk when he answered. Sighing, I hung up, and went ahead with our plans for the dance.

What I had forgotten to tell Sherry was, it was a masquerade ball. She was disappointed, for she had a lovely little Pierrette costume at home. She would not go back after it, however, so I promised to get her

some kind of costume, if I had to lend her my own "Colonial belle" outfit—inherited from Grandmother, complete with powdered wig and hoopskirt.

Meanwhile, Mark was sulking in the big cool parlor, with a mystery novel held upside-down in his hand and a half-empty decanter beside him on the floor. He was in pajamas and dressing robe, as usual, with a two-day growth of beard on his puffy face. He also had a splitting headache, and had tied a rubber icebag on his head. I could picture him when I phoned—a tragi-comic figure, sulking there in the semi-gloom.

He sat there, pretending to read, until the sun sank below the Blue Ridge foothills. Then, still muttering things he wished he had thought to say, he fell into an alcoholic doze . . .

**A**BOUT midnight, he awakened with a start. His head was pounding. The dim light from a lamp in the hall illuminated the high-ceiled room palely. Mark heard a faint scraping noise to his right. Somebody was prying at the window that faced on the garden, trying to open it, trying to get in.

Dizzily, his heart pounding, Mark slid out of his chair and made his way over to a cabinet where his father had kept a collection of pistols and knives. His fumbling hand found one weapon, a blunt automatic. Mark could not remember whether it was loaded or not; but, he thought, it might scare the prowler. He waited, motionless in the half-dark, eyes glued to that window across the room. Beside it, locked as always, the green window—the prophetic green window—gleamed back at him like a shadowy mirror.

The window raised slowly. A figure in slouchy pants and a patched white shirt climbed up stealthily, shinnying up the trellis outside. A tweed cap was pulled far down over the intruder's eyes. A knife held between the teeth, a knife that had been used to pry open the window, gave the lower part of the face an evil distorted look.

Mark took careful aim, and pulled the trigger. No one was more startled than he was at the deafening explosion that rocked the room, filling it with the acrid stench of cordite.

The intruder screamed—a high-pitched cry of anguish and pain—then toppled forward over a chair, knocking it to the floor. Mark quickly switched on the light, aiming at the marauder again. But a gasping cry stopped him.

"Mark! Don't shoot—it's me! I left my latchkey! Thought you were in bed."

Then Mark cried out, throwing himself to his knees beside the still figure lying face up on the rug. It was Sherry—in an old pair of Jeb's pants, a shirt of mine, and someone's borrowed cap: the "Bowery thug" costume she wore to the masquerade dance. Moaning, Mark gathered her up in his arms. He rocked back and forth, crooning to her as her blood flowed out over his dressing gown.

And the green window began to glow with a weird radiance, mirroring the room as it had many times before, according to my parents and grandparents. A picture began to take shape in its shadowy frame, like a dim movie. My cousin Mark raised his head, holding his dead wife in his arms and watching the pattern of the future unfold in those green panes.

The day before the funeral, Jeb left Stuartsboro abruptly. Even Aunt Millicent could not explain his sudden departure, following a decision to join a law firm in New York. I was there, standing beside Mark as a loving sister might uphold a bereaved brother. He seemed stunned and vague. Now and again I caught him staring at me all during the service. There was a deep bewilderment in his piercing gaze, a look of horror that transcended even what I expected him to feel. Was it only his great sense of loss?

"Mark dear," I whispered. "Get hold of yourself. I'm still around."

After the interment of pretty shallow little Sherry, we were riding back from the cemetery. At my words, Mark broke his sober silence abruptly.

"Liz," he said quietly, "I have a hunch she was running away with Jeb, that night after the dance. He must have been waiting for her. She just came back for her clothes, probably—though I let Jeb believe it was to make up with me . . . She wasn't. You see, I know. I lost Sherry, not by death,"

he said heavily, "but a long time ago, to Jeb. Didn't you suspect?"

I stared at him, amazed. "Sherry? I knew he was in love with *her*, but . . . Whatever gave you the idea that she . . .? Why, Sherry adored you!"

"No." Mark's smile twisted. "She didn't," he said heavily. "She told me over a year ago that she'd married me for a meal-ticket, one of those war marriages. If Jeb would have taken her, she'd have left me long ago . . . but I played on his sympathy, let myself go to seed, just to keep her. Out of loyalty to me, he held out against her . . . until the night of the dance, is my bet. He blames himself for the whole mess, but of course I should have given her up to him long ago. Well . . ." He straightened his shoulders with an effort. "That's all over now. Think I'll go back into the Army. And, Liz . . ." He hesitated queerly. "It might be well for you to sell the old place. We must never go back there, the three of us. I told Jeb if we did, there'd be tragedy. That I saw *murder* in the green window that night . . ."

**M**Y EYES widened. "Mark!" I took his hand in both of mine; he stared oddly at our entwined fingers. "You told him *that*? No wonder he left so suddenly! He must have thought you meant you were going to kill him, or he you! . . . Oh, Mark!" I sighed. "The three of us grew up together. We've been so close, I couldn't bear this town without you both. Look here!" I laughed. "Are you forcing me to marry Joe Kimball and move to Idaho with him? No sir! I won't do it! I'll stay here with Aunt Millicent and grow into a lonely old maid like Aunt Lucy, without you and Jeb around . . . Mark, I'm ashamed to confess I've rather resented Sherry barging in and taking both my . . . my best beaux! So now, please, I'd like to have you back! With a little teamwork, we could make the old Place into a tourist hotel. Call it 'The Three Cousins' . . ."

Mark did not respond to my attempt at levity.

His dark eyes were still searching my face with that bewildered expression. He

shook his head slowly, and patted my hand.

"No . . . we've got to board it up. Don't . . . don't ever open it, Liz . . . How little people really know about each other!" he muttered. "I about Jeb, or he about me, or both of us about . . . Only the green window really *knows* . . ." He passed a shaky hand over his forehead. "I wonder. If I'd been forewarned by that letter, could I have prevented the accident to Sherry? Do you think . . .? Liz, if we never go near the old home again, the three of us together, how can it happen, the thing I saw . . .?"

I shivered at the peculiar look of dread on my cousin's face. The car had rolled to a halt in front of the old Dickerson home, built by our great-great-grandfather nearly two centuries ago. The murky green window stared out at us like a blind eye, seeing not the present but the future—the incredible future, like that strange trick of fate which had caused Mark to shoot his adored wife and Jeb to leave his hometown forever.

"Mark," I demanded, "What did you see in the window, the night poor Sherry . . .? Mark, she's gone now, and you and Jeb must forgive each other! We three have to stick together, as we did when we were children. Blood is thicker than water, Mark, and . . ."

My cousin looked at me, and all at once he began to laugh harshly.

"Blood?" he said queerly. "That's what I saw, Liz! Blood all over the room, that shadow-room inside the window, our parlor as it will look . . . I don't know when. Next month. Next year. I don't know. Jeb and I were lying there on the floor, hacked to pieces. And someone was standing over us with . . . with an ax. Still . . . still *chopping* . . . That's what I saw."

I shuddered and hid my face against his shoulder. "Oh, Mark! How awful! But it couldn't ever happen, of course." I laughed nervously. "Jeb has gone, and you'll be gone next week . . . D—did you see who it was? I mean, the face? Did it look like anyone we know?"

"Yes," my cousin held my hand tightly for a moment, then answered quietly. "Yes, I saw the face. Liz . . . it was *you*."