

# Weird Tales



ALL STORIES NEW — NO REPRINTS

JANUARY, 1948

Cover by Boris Dolgov

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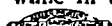
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*Except for personal experiences, the contents of this magazine is fiction. Any use of the name of any living person or reference to actual events is purely coincidental.*

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# The Lorenzo Watch

BY CARL JACOBI

**I**T WAS a curious fact that Martin Hatworth, though affected with a bad case of myopia, necessitating thick-lensed spectacles, was nevertheless singularly adept at finding things other persons had lost. Throughout the village of Farn's Landing he was forever being called upon by residents, young and old, to retrieve articles that had strayed from their owners.

The Farn's Landing *Sentinel* had in its file of back issues several accounts of Hat-

worth's peculiar prowess in this field. There was the time in 1933 when the Marshal had dropped somewhere a costly diamond brooch, placed in his keeping by a tourist's wife who had decided to accompany her husband fishing. Hatworth, without asking questions, had gone straight to the stile of a nearby pasture, groped a moment in the weeds under the bottom board, and discovered it. Asked why he had gone there, where even the Marshall had forgotten he



*He might best be called a retriever. A retriever of dead bodies*

had been, Hatworth had only smiled quietly and replied:

"I got a knack for this sort of thing, that's all."

But knack or otherwise, it was an unprofitable avocation, frequently in fact expensive, taking time away from his work at the grist mill on the edge of town. Moreover, his wife, a nagging woman at best, was continually upbraiding him for what she called his unappreciated efforts.

Nineteen thirty-nine had been a good year of discovery for Hatworth. He had found no less than twenty-seven dollars in cash, five dollars of which he was able to keep for himself as unclaimed, two sets of ignition keys for non-residents' cars, a .30-30 rifle, Old Man Barne's "folding camera," and a pair of copper-tipped oars. But it was in 1942 that he discovered how to realize a profit on his strange ability.

In that year Farn's Landing had a total of four accidental drownings, and in spite of extra guards put on at the bathing beach and warnings given to all fishermen, the succeeding years saw a mounting toll of water deaths. Of course, Farn's Landing was primarily a resort town, and such tragedies were to be expected. But in each case there was considerable difficulty in locating the body. More and more it was realized that Cannon Lake, with its upper and lower bays, its many islands and channels, was as dangerous a labyrinth as it was beautiful.

Hatworth's plan was simple. He would recover those bodies and do so in a way that would play upon the superstitious beliefs of the year-around townsfolk. Himself a confirmed skeptic, a large raw-boned man in his middle fifties, he formulated the advance details carefully. First he saw to it that his finding abilities were advertised to every settlement on the lake. Next he caused it to be bruited about that those abilities were the result of occult methods upon which he had put a considerable amount of study. To his work at the grist mill he frequently carried a book on spectral manifestations, and he kept a shelf of equally impressive volumes in a prominent place in his home, all to the outspoken disgust of his wife.

When the spring of the year came around and with it the first drowning of the season, Hatworth waited impatiently during the

long days of dragging the lake, and when all attempts to find the body had failed, quietly offered his services. Not for nothing had he lived his entire life in Farn's Landing. He was aware of one fact that so far had escaped the other townsfolk: that there was a central underwater current running obliquely through both arms of the lake and that sooner or later any heavy object would be drawn into that current and so would be carried along to Blackwell Marsh on the south shore. Blackwell Marsh was seldom visited, even by those in search of drowning victims. There was something oppressive about its tangled rip grass, its dark cattails nodding sullenly in the wind, and its constant chorus of frogs.

THE first time Hatsworth was called upon, he had acted a little too impulsively. He had rowed once around Crane Island, waited until dusk, and then headed directly for Blackwell Marsh. In the course of an hour, aided by a powerful flashlight, he had discovered the body, that of a boy of twelve who had wandered from his companions while swimming in deep water. Hatworth had removed all tell-tale reeds and rip grass and returned to Farn's Landing, there to claim the hundred dollar reward which had been posted.

There were commendations on his work and a few under-the-breath remarks that he had joined with the devil in accomplishing it. But these, he realized, were not enough.

On the next occasion when a young woman was the victim, he paid more attention to stage setting. He dressed all in black and demanded that the immediate shores of the lake be vacated for an hour after he had begun his activities. Earlier in the afternoon he had cast upon the water six loaves of bread, after first digging a hollow in each loaf and depositing a drop of quicksilver therein. These loaves, he carefully explained, would converge on the spot where the body lay. Then with a red lantern on the thwart of the rowboat and the oarlocks heavily muffled with strips of black cloth, he pushed out on the dark water.

Drownings at Cannon Lake continued to mount at an alarming rate, and Hatworth, gradually increasing the fee for his services,

profited nicely. He found himself scanning the western sky each morning in anticipation for a possible storm, and then counting the fishing boats that were visible out on the bay.

The money he received from this employment gave him a glow of satisfaction as he watched it slowly grow. Nevertheless, personal finances began to play a more and more disagreeable part in his life. His wife constantly bemoaned the fact that their house was in need of repair, that her clothes were shabby and that her table held only the plainest of food.

"Found the Altmore woman's body today," Hatworth said unemotionally, seating himself for the evening meal. "Took me four hours."

Martha Hatworth brushed a strand of iron gray hair from her eyes and voiced a single question:

"How much?"

"Two hundred dollars," Hatworth replied uneasily.

"Humph. Well, it'll pay the taxes and my dentist's bill, if not much more."

This incessant talk of money would not have irritated Hatworth so much if he had not known that his wife had a tidy sum of her own.

When her father, a jewel merchant, had died recently, she had inherited considerable money, together with some bonds and a fine Lorenzo watch. The watch was a rare one. It had twelve large-sized diamonds in the back of the hunting case and a beautiful emerald mounted in the center, and Hatworth had coveted it from the first moment he had seen it.

But Martha had ideas of her own. "These things are mine," she said, "and you keep your hands off. It's your duty as a husband to support me."

True to her word, she had even kept from Hatworth the amount of her inheritance. Only the watch did she display openly with a flaunting deliberateness aimed apparently at goading her husband into jealousy.

**E**ACH night before retiring, she carefully removed it from the chain about her neck, wound it slowly and wiped it with a polishing cloth. After that she opened the back of the case and did something to the

movement with a tiny screwdriver, apparently following the training passed on to her by her father. Then she pushed in the stem and let its little fairy bells announce in consecutive chimes the hour and the minutes after the hour. She replaced the watch on the chain around her neck, a mute warning to Hatworth that she did not trust him.

Once and only once had Hatworth been able to get close enough to see the watch in detail. Ornately carved, it was equipped with five dials: the usual hour, minute, and second hands, and little square readings for the day of the week, the month, and the year. The face was an intricate mosaic of engraving; in the top right corner a tiny skull was in evidence; at the bottom was some inscription in what seemed to be Latin but so minute as to be illegible. The hands themselves were flesh-colored and were fashioned to resemble human feminine hands.

But it was the jewels that attracted Hatworth, and one way or another, he intended to have them.

The summer passed, however, and he had other things to occupy his mind. By the first of September, Farn's Landing had recorded no less than seven drownings, in each of which tragedies Hatworth had recovered the body. On September 2nd the town was in an uproar again. Sixteen-year-old Cynthia Dobson had taken out her canoe alone and had not returned. A search party was organized and took off in a power launch as soon as the news became known. They found the canoe floating bottomside up near Crane Island but no sign of the girl.

Hatworth was sitting on the wharf, placidly smoking his pipe when the search party returned.

"Looks like another job for you, Jeb Howatt said, shaking his head. "This damned lake is a devil lake, if you ask me."

Three hours after his initial theatricals had been completed, Hatworth returned with a silent object covered with sail cloth in his rowboat. He also returned with something else—a plan.

All the way home that night he mulled over it, and by morning the details were complete in his mind. He did his work at the grist mill badly during the ensuing day, counting the hours until it was time for him to go home. When at last he was ready to

leave, he slipped a crowbar under his arm and headed down the East road.

A quarter of a mile from town, he turned into an almost overgrown side-road which led to his house through a grove of second-growth Poplar. Presently he came upon the wooden bridge that crossed the deep-flowing Talberry Creek.

There he fell to work. He pried loose three center planks of the bridge, breaking off bits of their rotting ends and arranging them so that they would swing downward when weight were put on either side of the middle beam. Then he carefully kicked dirt over the boards, hiding all traces of his work.

Back home, he said to his wife, "Have you seen old Mrs. Bentley lately? Jeb Howatt told me today she was asking about you. She's pretty bad."

The bait was taken. An hour later Martha filled a vacuum bottle with some chicken broth and put on her hat and coat.

"Might as well take the short out over Talberry Creek," Hatworth said as she headed for the door. "That is," he added, "unless you're afraid of the dark."

Martha's derisive humph told him that this suggestion too had reached its mark. Hatworth waited until he heard his wife's steps die off down the walk. Then he left the house quickly and headed across the adjoining fields for the house of his nearest neighbor, the Plummets.

As he paced down the path in the darkness, he visualized what would happen. Martha, crossing the Talberry Creek bridge, would step upon the loose planking and be catapulted into the center of the stream. Unable to swim, she would be carried out into the lower arm of Cannon Lake, where eventually her body would be drawn into the underwater current, to be finally deposited at Blackwell Marsh.

It was now six-thirty p.m. Martha should reach the bridge in a quarter of an hour or six forty-five. Immediately upon her falling, water would enter the old-fashioned case of the Lorenzo watch she always wore about her neck and stop it.

There was no reason for any suspicion, but in the event any were directed toward him, he would have a perfect alibi. For the stopped watch would indicate definitely not

only the hour and minute of the accident but also the day of the week. And at that particular time he would be innocently chatting with the Plummets.

EVERYTHING happened as Hatworth had expected. He was part of the crowd of morbid onlookers that watched the investigation at the bridge, and he held his breath as Marshal Edmonds examined the splintered ends of the planks. But Edmonds only sighed and said:

"She fell through here all right and must've been carried out into the lake. I'm sorry, Martin, but I guess that's the way it was."

That was Tuesday, and it was not until Wednesday night that Hatworth began to notice the ticking. The sound came into his consciousness gradually, and he did not become fully aware of it until he was ready to go to bed: a low indistinct pulsation that he fancied at first was the beating of his own heart. He sat very still on the edge of the bed and listened. But he heard nothing then, and after a moment got up and extinguished the light.

He fell asleep almost at once, but awoke an hour later, vaguely aware that he was straining his ears again. Was it his imagination or had he heard the tinkling chimes of a repeater watch, almost at the limit of his hearing range? The sound was not repeated, however, and he dozed off.

On the morrow he set about to search for his wife's inheritance which must be somewhere in the house since he knew Martha would have no time for banks. At the end of two hours, however, he stood again in the bedroom nonplussed. Though he had searched the house from top to bottom, he had found no trace of either money or bonds. For the first time his knack of finding lost articles had resulted in failure. He cursed savagely. And then suddenly a thought occurred to him.

Several nights ago when Martha had taken the Lorenzo watch from the chain about her neck to wind it, she had opened the back of the cover and scratched some words on the soft gold with her nail file. He knew that Martha had a bad memory. She was forever writing memos on odd scraps of paper. He couldn't be sure, of course, but

it was reasonable to suppose that she had marked the location of her hiding place on the watch case.

He returned to the living room, took up a magazine and began to read. But presently he became aware of the ticking again. He sat there, listening. The sound had a hollow quality as if the watch—for unmistakably it was a watch—lay in a box or some covered receptacle.

Hatworth's fingers trembled slightly as he poured himself a glass of peach brandy before going to bed.

That night he dreamed. He was climbing up the sheer wall of a granite cliff, fighting to find toe-holes in the black rock. Above him, a huge watch depended from a golden chain. But the rope to which he clung with his left hand was fastened with a careless loop over the hour hand of that watch. He could see the hand plainly; it rested horizontally on the quarter after the hour mark, and even as he watched, it began to move downward very slowly. As the hand moved, the looped rope slipped relentlessly toward its end.

He looked down in desperation. Below was a heaving sea, capped with fingers of flying spume. The yellow waves rolled and receded, and then he saw that they were not waves at all, but a layer on layer of microscopic watches, closely packed. Their faces seemed to be looking up at him like a thousand sightless eyes. And the huge watch above began to chime the half hour as the anchoring rope began to slip free.

Hatworth awoke, bathed in perspiration, trembling violently. Fantastic as it was, the dream had seemed real, so real that he could almost hear those chimes now, vibrating through the silence of the room. He did hear it! Lying there stiff and motionless, he strained his ears for a repetition of the sound. When it came—ten faint peals followed by a pause and two more chimes, Hatworth leaped from the bed, ran across the room and switched on the light. He saw nothing foreign or unusual.

Morning came, and he was definitely in bad sorts. He blamed the night's experiences on the peach brandy, and he cursed what in broad daylight seemed to be an overactive imagination. Noting that his supply of

food staples was running low, he headed for town, deliberately taking the short cut road which led to the bridge over Talberry Creek.

The road was deserted as it had been since the new highway had been cut through a quarter mile farther west. Hatworth strode out onto the bridge and stopped to gaze over the rail down at the dirty brown water. Suddenly he stiffened. Someone was coming. Well, he must remain the sorrowed husband, immersed in his thoughts. He didn't move.

The steps thudded hollowly as they entered the approach to the bridge. And there was something strangely familiar about those steps. Abruptly there came a crash, a rending of wood and a short cry. Hatworth wheeled.

But as he looked back on the sunlit bridge, he stared with incredulity. There was no one in sight. The bridge planking was firm and solid where it had been nailed down by the Marshal the morning before. And below the brown water of Talberry Creek swept on placidly without a ripple to disturb its surface.

WHEN Hatworth returned with his provisions, he glanced at his watch as was his custom to see how long the trip had taken him. The watch had stopped at 6:45, though he was quite sure he had wound it the previous evening. He went into the living room and looked at the old-fashioned grandfather clock in the corner. Its pendulum hung motionless, and the hands were stopped at 6:45. A mounting sense of uneasiness began to sweep over Hatworth. He stood there a moment, gnawing his upper lip. Then he strode into the bedroom. The taboret clock he had given Martha for a Christmas gift three years before would tell him the correct time. It never stopped.

But the sweep second hand of the electric taboret clock was motionless, and with a kind of grim horror Hatworth saw that the figures in the tape dial were 6:45.

Control left him then. With unsteady steps he moved into the hallway to the wall telephone and called Seth Denning, the town jeweler.

"Can you come over here right away?" he said when the connection was made. "I've got something I want to show you."

The time until Denning arrived Hatworth

spent sitting in a chair, staring blankly into space. At length, however, the jeweler arrived, a little precise individual with pince-nez glasses. He came in somewhat testily, irritated at having been called away from his shop. Silently, Hatworth ushered him from one timepiece to another, then said huskily: "They all stopped at 6:45. I want to know what's wrong."

Denning stared. "You're a fool, Martin," he said. "I suppose, though, I'll have to look them over just to satisfy you."

He busied himself for the better part of half an hour, taking off the back covers to reveal the movements, tapping a few things here and there, making adjustments.

"They're okay now," he said finally. "I'd have that grandfather clock cleaned one of these days, though, if I were you. It needs it pretty badly."

Hatworth nodded, then asked a question that was uppermost in his mind.

"Denning," he said, "how long can a watch run with one winding?"

The jeweler thought a moment. "Oh, fifteen or twenty hours in some cases. Depends on the watch."

"And do you think," Hatworth persisted, "it would be possible for a watch to stop and start up again of its own accord? A watch that had been mislaid, for example?"

Denning shrugged. "It's possible, I suppose. Vibration might stop it; a jar could start it up again. Good-bye, Martin. Don't forget about cleaning that grandfather."

LATE that afternoon Hatworth, still deep in thought, strolled down to the lake front. There he met Jeb Howatt just as the latter was climbing into a dory, preparatory to rowing out on the lake.

"I'm going to look once more," Howatt said. "If I don't find her, I'm afraid it'll be up to you."

But Hatworth could stand it no longer. "Get out of that boat," he said huskily. "I've got to find her! Do you understand, I've got to . . ."

Howatt slowly climbed onto the wharf, and Hatworth took his place at the oars.

Three hours later he was back in his house, pacing back and forth restlessly. Though he had searched the length of



Blackwell Marsh, he had found nothing. His entire plan hinged on the recovery of his wife's body. Without it, while there would of course be *corpus delicti* and consequently no evidence against him, there would likewise be no alibi and hence ample grounds for talk and rumor that even now he was aware was gathering. And there would be no Lorenzo watch. Hatworth was even more convinced now that the watch held the secret of his wife's inheritance.

It happened at that moment he was turning down the covers of the bed. Out of the corner of his eye he thought he saw a movement of something on the top of the dressing table. He turned very slowly.

Outlined darkly against the mahogany veneer of the table was the wet imprint of a female hand. Hatworth watched the little film of moisture slowly dim and grow smaller, to be replaced by a second impression farther along the table surface. It was as if an invisible blind person were there, groping for something it couldn't find. Then Hatworth saw a third point taking form near the center. At that point stood Martha's satin jewel box, and the top of its padded cover was depressed as if some round object rested there. Abruptly the depression was gone with the padded satin rising slowly back into position. Hatworth felt a cold draught of air pass through the room and out the door.

But nothing happened after that; he heard no further ticking, and he slept the night through with the completeness of one whose nerves are bordering on exhaustion.

Next day Hatworth began a second and more systematic search of the house for his wife's inheritance. He left no article of furniture, no conceivable hiding place untouched. He probed the seat cushions of the chairs with a long needle. He took out the dowel pins and separated the sections of the tables. He looked for false bottoms in bureau drawers. He emptied vases, looked in back of pictures, even examined the chest where Martha had kept her silverware. He found nothing.

At nine o'clock that evening he headed for the lake front, carrying three loaves of bread, in each of which he had scooped out a hollow and placed a drop of quicksilver.

A week ago Hatworth would have looked upon such stage props with an inward smile. Now he wasn't so sure. Old Wives' Tales did say such loaves would float over a drowned body, and considering all that had happened he was not inclined to ridicule them.

He reached his dory without meeting anyone, untied the painter and pushed out onto the black lake. The oar locks were recently oiled, and there was no sound save the dip of his oars and the waves slapping against the prow. Hatworth rowed swiftly, watching the lights of Farn's Landing recede as the distance increased. Once a loon startled him as it dipped low in the sky and gave forth its queer laugh. He passed Crane Island, a darker shadow in the gloom, and headed directly for Blackwell Marsh.

When the reeds and cattails began to brush against the sides of the boat, he switched on his electric torch and played it over the water. Back and forth he moved, gradually working his way deeper into the marsh. But he saw nothing. No familiar white face leered up at him; no dark figure was revealed by the light of his flash.

He was somewhere in the southeastern tip of the swamp when he suddenly heard the ticking. The sound was remote at first, as though a watch hung somewhere above him, high in the air. Then, as he listened, it seemed to come from below, from beneath the surface of the water.

And then he saw it and a wave of horror swept through him. A foot beneath the dark waves, gleaming with a ghostly radiance, was the Lorenzo watch. He could see it clearly; the face cover was open, and the hands pointed to six-forty-five. But there was something else, an impossible something that held Hatworth's gaze like a lodestone.

A female hand held that watch; the moving fingers were caressing the case; they touched the stem and began to turn it slowly and deliberately. Even through the water Hatworth could see the movement of the fingers. He gave a scream of terror and pulled with all his strength on the oars.

The boat glided forward a few yards and drifted to a standstill. Again the ticking pulsed through the silence of the marsh; again he saw the watch and the hand in the circle of radiance a yard beyond the gun-whale. In desperation, Hatworth jerked the

oar from its lock and brought it smashing down upon the water.

The first blade made a pistol-like report as it struck the surface. Watch and hand vanished in the circle of foam and ripples, only to reappear when the water had quieted, nearer the boat. And then Hatworth gave in to stark fear. Once more he lifted the oar, but as he raised it, he shifted his position on the bottom of the boat, lost his balance and pitched headlong into the lake. He thrashed water violently, but in spite of his efforts, he felt a hand coil about his throat and drag him slowly downward.

**M**ARK BRASH, the undertaker, was pleased when he was told that the dual funeral was the most beautiful the town had seen in a long time. However, there were several matters that perplexed him not a little and dampened his satisfaction.

Brash was one of the group of town-folk that finally discovered the bodies of Martin Hatworth and his wife, Martha. They lay in a scant four feet of water near the edge of Blackwell Marsh. The body of Hatworth's wife was in a decent enough condition, considering the fact that it had been in the water for several days, and Brash realized he might have been mistaken when he got his first look at the woman's right hand. After all, there was only the uncertain light of a kerosene lantern, and he was not exactly accustomed to his new bi-focals. But he could have sworn that when that hand came out of the water, it was pulsing with life and the fingers were opening and closing convulsively. Yet subsequent observation on the embalming table plainly refuted this.

There was also the odd occurrence of the Lorenzo watch which hung from a chain about Martha Hatworth's neck. That watch showed five minutes past twelve when it was retrieved by Brash at Blackwell Marsh. The next day, however, when he went to place it with the other Hatworth possessions, he noted that the hands had moved. They had, in fact, advanced more than six hours, an impossible action considering the long immersion of the timepiece in water. Yet there it was; the hands pointed to six forty-five.