



# Weird Tales

REGISTERED IN U.S. PATENT OFFICE

Volume 25

CONTENTS FOR APRIL, 1935

Number 4

Cover Design . . . . .	M. Brundage	
<i>Illustrating a scene in "The Man Who Was Two Men"</i>		
The Man Who Was Two Men . . . . .	Arthur William Bernal	402
<i>A story of the next sensational development in radio after television</i>		
The Hand of the O'Mecca . . . . .	Howard Wandrei	425
<i>An uncanny story about the weird figures that beset Eloy Bocak one night in the fog</i>		
Shadows of Blood . . . . .	Eando Binder	434
<i>A grim story of torture in the cruel days of the Roman Emperor Caligula</i>		
Dear Ghosts . . . . .	Clarence Edwin Flynn	447
<i>Verse</i>		
Lord of the Lamia (part 2) . . . . .	Otis Adelbert Kline	448
<i>A colorful weird mystery-tale of an eerie adventure in present-day Egypt</i>		
Dream-Stair . . . . .	Robert Nelson	465
<i>Verse</i>		
The Last Hieroglyph . . . . .	Clark Ashton Smith	466
<i>A grim figure strode like the approach of doom through the houses of the astrologer's horoscope</i>		
The New World . . . . .	Richard F. Searight	477
<i>Verse</i>		
Out of the Eons . . . . .	Hazel Heald	478
<i>A tale of elder magic and a monstrous idol—a shuddery story of primordial evil</i>		
The Aztec Ring . . . . .	John Flanders	496
<i>A story of the grim and terrible conflict that took place one night in a pawnbroker's shop</i>		
The Man Who Could Not Go Home . . . . .	L. E. Frailey	501
<i>A fascinating, human story about the Great War</i>		
An Empty House at Night . . . . .	Cristel Hastings	507
<i>Verse</i>		
<b>Weird Story Reprint</b>		
The Canal . . . . .	Everil Worrell	508
<i>One of the finest vampire stories ever written</i>		
The Eyrie . . . . .		524
<i>The readers express their opinions about this magazine</i>		

Published monthly by the Popular Fiction Publishing Company, 2457 E. Washington Street, Indianapolis, Ind. Entered as second-class matter March 20, 1923, at the post office at Indianapolis, Ind., under the act of March 3, 1879. Single copies, 25 cents. Subscription, \$3.00 a year in the United States, \$4.00 a year in Canada. English office: Charles Lavell, 13, Serjeants' Inn, Fleet Street, E. C. 4, London. The publishers are not responsible for the loss of unsolicited manuscripts, although every care will be taken of such material while in their possession. The contents of this magazine are fully protected by copyright and must not be reproduced either wholly or in part without permission from the publishers.

NOTE—All manuscripts and communications should be addressed to the publishers' Chicago office at 810 North Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Ill. FARNSWORTH WRIGHT, Editor.

Copyright, 1935, by the Popular Fiction Publishing Company.

COPYRIGHTED IN GREAT BRITAIN



**WEIRD TALES ISSUED 1st OF EACH MONTH**

# The Man Who Could Not Go Home

By L. E. FRAILEY

*A grim, human story about the Great War—a story with  
an unexpected ending*

“VERY well, since you must have it,” said the young captain, “I will tell you the story, but do not blame me if your dreams are bad tonight.”

We were passengers on the New York Central, and for several hours had been talking and smoking. One of us had asked the officer, whose left arm had remained in France, if it didn't seem jolly to be going home, and he had answered that he was journeying a thousand miles out of his way to make good a mysterious promise. This had aroused our curiosity, and, although reluctant to say anything more, the captain had at last consented.

\* \* \* \* \*

FROM the beginning of our voyage home on the transport *Liberty*, I was curious about the occupant of Stateroom 17—the one to the right of my own. Call it premonition, or what you will, I could not pass the closed door of that room without a strange feeling of fear—an emotion which I had not felt in such measure even while fighting in France. I wondered who the fellow might be, and why he kept to his quarters. You see, the door was always shut. I decided finally that he was one of the more severely wounded officers who could not go on deck.

But Number 17 was not a bed prisoner. That was evident. The first night

I heard him pacing up and down his quarters. At times, he played old songs, the sentimental kind, on a singularly sweet violin. Both in the music and the monotony of his walking, there was something that suggested a melancholy mind. Hour after hour he kept going, and as the partition was very thin between us, I felt like asking him to become quiet so that I could go to sleep. But I never did. Maybe I sensed it wouldn't do any good, or maybe I just didn't want to play the bully. I don't know. But I did fall asleep finally, perhaps about midnight. I can't be sure of that.

Toward morning—time for the sun to be coming up, as I understood later—I was half awakened by a commotion in the same room. You know how it is, gentlemen, when you have been sleeping soundly and are not ready to call it a night—how you are vaguely aware that things are going on, and yet so quickly go back to sleep that you are never sure what happened? Well, it was that way with me. I knew that several men were in the room, that they were talking low, and that at last they went out with dragging feet. As they went by my door, one of the men spoke to the others—“He's better off than he was before”—and then I was asleep again. Sure—I know what you are thinking. I should have known. Well, maybe so, but it was all too much like a dream. I thought nothing more about

it until that last night on the ship—the one which I can never forget, and never understand.

Every night I continued to hear the music and the footsteps, but they didn't bother me so much—not until the night before we reached New York. I was sitting in my stateroom, excited at the thought of landing the next day, going over all of the experiences of my two years in France. And then, suddenly and quite terribly, I began to be afraid. I didn't know why. It is a sensation you would have to feel to understand, but I began to tremble and my body was wet with sweat. The thought came to me that more than anything else I wanted to get to bed and bury myself in the blankets. You see, the music of that violin seemed closer than ever before. The fellow was still walking up and down, but each time he stopped on the other side of the partition—he stopped and played *for me!* Maybe you don't understand, but I couldn't stand it. The wild notion came into my head that soon he wouldn't stop—that he would walk right through that wall. I didn't wait to see. I rushed out of my room and up to the deck.

Nerves? Sure, I told myself that. I was ashamed of my funk. I laughed to think how many dangers I had faced in France, only to run away from a fellow officer and his violin. I wondered what he would do if I stopped on the way back to my room and knocked on his door. Why not?

I had about decided to do it, when one of the sailors touched my arm. It startled me a bit, especially when I saw that he was shaking and that his face was pale.

"Look here, my man," I cried to him crossly, "what's up? You look as if you had seen——"

But he wouldn't let me finish. Thrusting a note into my hand, he hurriedly crossed himself and fled across the deck.

I never found out who the fellow was, or how he got the note, but you can imagine my astonishment when I discovered that it had been written by the occupant of Number 17. It was a short note, written in a peculiar hand. He wanted to see me—asked if I would mind coming to his quarters. It would only take a few minutes, the writer said, and was of great importance.

I READ the note under one of the ship lamps; then I tossed it to the deck. For a while, I stood wondering if I wanted to go. You can laugh at me, if you wish, but the cold fear which had sent me bolting out of my stateroom had again swept over me. All during the voyage I had been wanting to see the fellow, and there I stood, afraid now that the chance had come. It is all still so unexplainable. Perhaps if it had not been for the package—but then I must stick to my story in the way it happened. You can explain for yourselves the mystery of that room.

The fellow was playing his violin again when I got to his door, but when I knocked, the music stopped immediately, and in a few seconds the door opened. The light in the room was shaded, and at first I could see but little. I did notice, however, that the air seemed unusually cold, and, curiously enough, that there were no covers on the bed. That struck me as queer, but I forgot all about it as gradually there appeared the outlines of a tall figure standing at the other end of the room.

When the man spoke, I noticed that his voice was pleasant but quite unnatural in quality.

"Will you not sit down?" he began. "I thank you very much for coming. One can always count on a marine for a favor, even though the supplicant is a stranger."

By this time my eyes were becoming

more accustomed to the shadows. Imagine my astonishment when I saw that a mask concealed the lower half of the man's face. Of course, as a soldier, I had become more or less indifferent to the unexpected, but the thought of the man meeting me with masked features was so far from my mind that I could not resist a start of surprize. I took a step backward toward the door.

In a second, however, I was ashamed of myself, for the manners of my host were those of a gentleman, and he wore the uniform of a colonel of the infantry. It was absurd that I should have doubted him. I took the stool which he had indicated and, while waiting for him to explain, studied all of his face that was not hidden.

The eyes, just above the mask, were large. The forehead was high. I could imagine that women must have loved his hair, for it was so boyishly curly—just the kind of hair that entwines easily about a woman's fingers. He stood very erect, and in the tight-fitting fatigue blouse he suggested muscular quickness rather than brute strength. Above all, there was something unreal about the man, highly intensified by the dim light, the dull thumping of the engines below, and the insistent beating of the waters against the ship.

My nerves were jumping, and I was glad when he spoke again.

"You are wondering what I want of you and who I am. Is it not so, Captain Thomas?"

"So strange a summons could hardly fail to arouse my curiosity, sir," I answered. "I am content to wait, however, until you are ready to explain."

I fancied that his big eyes were smiling at me for a second or so.

"Part of your curiosity—which is indeed justified—I may satisfy," he said, "but some things are better left untold. Let it be enough that I am a stranger who

must take the liberty of asking a great service. Perhaps the fact that we both fought for the same cause, and" (his glance wandered to my empty coat sleeve) "have both suffered for it, is sufficient reason to make me hope you will not refuse my request."

I may have been rash to promise, but I felt keenly the speaker's personality; besides, he was my superior officer. I lost no time in assuring him that he could count on me for any reasonable service.

He was silent for a moment as if seeking the best way to begin. "Captain Thomas, you are looking forward to seeing home again, are you not? May I ask if you intend going there at once?" He put the questions calmly, but his voice had a queer break in it at the mention of the word *home*.

"Just as soon as the train will take me, sir," I replied with enthusiasm. "You might not believe it, but there is a little woman and two kids in Virginia who are mighty anxious to see me—even if I am minus half an arm."

I might have rambled on, but I noticed that my words seemed to hurt the man in the mask. There was a sudden droop to his shoulders, and he turned quickly away, pretending to glance out the open port-hole. I stopped in some confusion, and then, like a fool, made it worse by apologizing.

"I am sorry, sir," I told him, "if I spoke of unpleasant things. I did not know——"

He turned back to me, and I thought I saw an escaping tear run truant-like under the black mask.

"Do not worry; it is nothing," he said. "You are not to blame. Your words, however, brought back to me some very precious memories. It happens that I, too, have a wife and two kids waiting for me."

"Well, that's jolly fine," I interrupted.

"Isn't it great to be out of the trenches—out of them and on the way home?"

"Great enough for you," he cried almost fiercely, "yes, but it is hell for me."

I thought then that I understood why my words about home had pained him.

"Forgive me, sir," I pleaded. "I have unintentionally touched upon a sorrow of yours. You mean that something has happened while you have been away?"

"No, nothing has happened—they are alive and well, thank God. I am the one who is dead."

For a moment I thought he must be insane. He went on rapidly.

"You are going home, Captain Thomas. You will feel again the arms of your wife about you. Your children will cling to you and shout for a good old romp. At night, you will sit among them, and they will listen with big eyes while you tell them about what you did in France. As for your empty sleeve, they will worship you for it, and your children will brag about their soldier daddy to all their playmates. For you there is heaven—for me, nothing! I, too, have a wife and children, but I will never, never see them again. For me no happy reunion, no tiny fingers to cling to my uniform. For me nothing at all but eternal loneliness. Is not a man who can not ever hope to see his friends, his children, his wife—is not such a man one of the dead?"

He had spoken with tremendous passion, and even though I did not understand what he meant I knew that I had just witnessed the overflowing of a man's soul filled to the uttermost with misery.

"I do not want to seem inquisitive," I said soothingly, "and yet—is there some reason why you can not go home?"

The interview had not prepared me for the answer to my question. With a quick step to the light, the man tore off the cloth which had shaded it, and, while

I blinked from the new brilliance, he rushed toward me.

"Look," he screamed, "look—have I a reason? Would you want to go home like this?"

May God help me if ever a human being looked at anything more hideous than the face which he thrust within six inches of my own. Describe it I can not. Yet to forget it is impossible. All my life it will live in my memory—that mutilated countenance grinning at me in the stuffy stateroom.

"Take it away!" I shouted. "For God's sake, let me get out of here!"

I MADE for the door, nauseated, trembling. My nerve was gone. I had only one thought—to get out into the open air as quickly as possible.

At the threshold, I shot one terrified glance over my shoulder. Instead of that awful thing, I saw only the mask-covered features of the colonel. He was standing with folded arms and bowed head.

A wave of pity swept over me. I paused, ashamed of my own weakness. While I hesitated, knowing not what to say, he spoke to me in the same precise tones which he had used in the early part of our meeting. Understanding the condition of the lower half of his face, I marveled to note how well he enunciated.

"Sit down again, Captain Thomas," he said kindly, "and forgive me, if you can, for the rude manner in which I have frightened you. At least, you can now agree with me that I never could have gone home. Do not fear that you have offended me. With quite brutal candor, they told me in the French hospital that my wound was the most hideous they had ever seen. If the sight of my poor face so terrified you, a soldier, imagine what the result would have been upon my wife."

I did not argue. In my heart, I knew he was right. I offered one suggestion.

"Couldn't you always wear the mask?" I asked.

"Quite impossible," he responded. "It is a tragedy I would not wish to bring into her life. By now my name has already been reported among the dead. I would rather live in her memory as I once was than live in her presence as I now am."

I remained silent, still sick at what I had beheld.

"That is why I sent for you," he continued. "I want you to go to her. I have a little package. Tell her I gave it to you just before I died. In the package is a medal. It will mean much to her—and some day the children will prize it, too."

He handed me a little box, neatly wrapped in brown paper, and I took it mechanically.

"Make it as easy for her as you can. Tell her I was glad to die for my country and that she must be happy—if only because I wanted her to be."

"But there is no address on the package—I do not know your name——"

"You will find it inside," he interrupted. "It has two wrappers. Please do me the favor not to open the package, or seek to read the address, until you land."

He drew himself to the position of a soldier and looked at me with stern intensity.

"On your honor as a gentleman and an officer," he commanded, "promise me to do what I have asked."

"On my honor, I swear to do it," I cried. "But *you*—what are *you* going to do?"

"That was not difficult to decide," he replied, as he opened the door. "It is a great service you are doing me. Good night."

I did not want to go, but what else could I do? As I passed him, he suddenly

held out his hand. His grasp was firm. There were tears in my eyes and a lump in my throat.

"Thomas," he said, "if you see the little ones, kiss them for me."

I nodded, then the door closed behind me. In some way, I found my way back to the upper deck. I felt that I must have fresh air and plenty of it.

It was past eleven o'clock, and most of those on the ship were asleep. Occasionally, the full moon eluded the rushing clouds, and for a few seconds I could see the ugly waves beneath.

I had fallen into a melancholy retrospection, leaning on the rail, when I heard a sudden splash as if something heavy had been thrown into the water. For just a moment, the moon escaped the clouds, and I thought I could make out the body of a man. Was it my imagination, or did I really see, down there staring up at me, the mutilated face of the man in Number 17?

\* \* \* \* \*

THE young captain hesitated. "Gentlemen," he said nervously, "it has not been easy to tell you this story. The rest I do not expect you to either believe or understand. And yet——"

We gazed at him in mute sympathy, our foreheads wet with sweat.

"Don't stop!" stammered the traveling man who sat huddled in one corner of the smoker. "Tell us what happened to the colonel. Did you actually see him in the water?"

The captain shuddered. "That I do not know," he replied. "I realize now, as I did not then, the significance of many of the incidents in that strange experience. Piece by piece, I can put them together now. So can you. There was that commotion in the room the second morning—and the fellow's remark that he was better off than before. Remember, too,

the sailor who gave me the colonel's note. I told you how he trembled. Those things, I suppose, should have prepared me for what I discovered about that stateroom. But——"

"Well, what did you discover?" I pleaded.

The captain hesitated. I think he feared to end his story, feared that we would not believe him.

"You see," he finally said, "I rushed below and dashed down the passageway. I kicked open the door, but Number 17 was empty. I called the commander. He said that the colonel had died on the second night of our voyage. The door had been locked ever since. The colonel had been buried at sea."

For a moment, probably we all felt that we had been cheated in the telling of the story. At least, the man in the corner laughed. "Oh, so it was only a dream," he said. "There wasn't any man in a mask after all."

"Perhaps you are right," replied the captain slowly, "but do not decide too quickly."

The air in the smoker seemed suddenly to grow damp and thin, and our faces as white as the frosted windows, as the captain extended his hand so that we all could see.

"Maybe a dream," he said, "but there is still a promise for me to keep. You see—here is the package which I must give to the colonel's wife."