

WEIRD TALES

THE UNIQUE MAGAZINE

EDWIN BAIRD, Editor

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crowded in for good measure**

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What Comes After Death?

*An Anonymous Author Gives a
Startling Answer in*

The **YOUNG MAN** *who* **WANTED TO** **DIE**

By ? ? ?

FIRST EPISODE

IN A MEAN, miserable, two-dollar-a-week bedroom in a Chicago lodging-house a young man was calmly and deliberately preparing to kill himself.

He possessed youth, health, affluence and comeliness—and yet he was preparing to kill himself. Calmly and deliberately. In the shabby room of a shabby hovel.

With a penknife, he was ripping the bedclothes to ribbons and wedging them into chinks and crannies. At last satis-

fied that the room was as near gas-tight as he could make it, he stripped to his underclothing and sat down at the battered bureau and began to write:

“As soon as my dead body is found the newspapers will want to know why I did it. I’ll tell them. And they may scarehead it as much as they like. I don’t care. I’ve destroyed every clue to my identity, and though I am wealthy enough to be pointed to and stared at, there is not one in this vast city whom I know, not one who cares

whether I am alive tomorrow morning, or dead.

"A love motive? Yes. But there is also something else—something equally potent to me, however weak and flimsy it may appear to others. I loved and do still love a girl whom I have known from childhood, but always there has been this thing that stood between us, and which is chiefly accountable for what I am about to do. It is not drink—nor gambling, nor hereditary disease.

"It is a Curiosity. An awful, overwhelming, unconquerable Curiosity. As far back as I can remember, I've had a terrible desire to know what follows death. As I grew up, this craving increased until it was a positive mania. I devoured every book on theosophy and kindred subjects I could lay hands on; I attended meetings of psychic societies; at college my avidity for psychology was remarked by everybody. At length I had reached the point where I yearned to tear aside the black veil of death and discover her secret. Why wait? I asked myself. Since you are bound to go some day, why not go now?

"One day I half-playfully voiced some such sentiment to her. It led to a dispute, which led to a violent quarrel; and that night she left the town where we both lived.

"I traced her as far as Chicago, and here I have lost her. For three years now I have searched the city for her, but not a trace have I found. And so I have given it up. It is hopeless. I shall never see her again.

"Like myself, she is alone in the world, but, unlike me, she is very poor. And somewhere in this great, monstrous city she is living even as I write these words—perhaps miles away—perhaps in the next block—perhaps . . . God alone knows, and God protect her!"

He stopped, put down his pencil, and placed his hand before his eyes. Thus he sat for several minutes. The yellow gas flames flickered weirdly at either side of the shoddy bureau; the clangor of a distant street car reached him faintly; a motor-truck rumbled heavily in the street below; a bickering couple jawed and wrangled ceaselessly in the next room.

After awhile he picked up the pencil and went on:

"Well anyway, I'm going to gratify that Curiosity. In a few hours I shall be in an unknown country I have always longed to explore. I've an idea I'll find a happiness there I have never known on this earth.

"In any event, I shall leave some good front page stuff for the newspapers. It ought to make an interesting story: 'Rich young man, seeking his lost sweetheart in the great city, gives way to despair and kills himself.' If the girl is found next door, without money to buy food or pay her room rent—"

He arose abruptly with a sharp curse, and tore up what he had written. Then he turned off both gas jets, then turned them on full, and then lay down upon the cot in a corner of the room . . .

It was perhaps some twenty minutes before his body began to twitch convulsively.

"Lily May!" he murmured huskily. Then more hoarsely still, "Lily May—forgive—Lily May!"

His body was writhing and twisting horribly now. His hands were clutching at the air, at his clothing, at the mattress; his legs were contracting and relaxing spasmodically. His face turned purple: he choked and gasped.

"Lily May!" he cried in a stifling whisper, and attempted to lift his arms.

But he could not, and his lips ceased moving and his head fell back, and he lay very still.

SECOND EPISODE.

WHEN the deadly gas fumes reached the youth on the cot he turned over on his back, threw his arms out, and breathed long and deeply of the poisoned air.

His head throbbed and pounded; his heart pumped madly; his eyes started from their sockets. Yet still he lay with outstretched arms, inhaling evenly and steadily.

Then everything within him seemed to warp and become distorted and askew. His veins tied themselves in knots. His blood choked and clogged. An awful weight crushed and crunched his breast.

But he set his teeth and clenched his fists, and continued to gulp in the murderous air.

Then he felt himself dropping, gently, gently—down, down, down—as though invisible hands were lowering him into some bottomless, pitch black cavern.

But suddenly there burst upon his vision a dazzling golden light, and far above him he saw a blazing throne, sparkling and flashing with a strange brilliancy, and on the throne a girl, her hair undone, her body clothed in a virginal robe. And she gazed down upon him with eyes full of sadness and reproach. And he tried to call out to her, and tried to lift his arms to her.

And the fiendish darkness swept all away and closed in upon him and crushed him, and he knew no more.

THIRD EPISODE.

EONS of time had passed. All was impenetrable blackness. With incredible velocity, he was whizzing through infinite space. Nothing supported him; nothing touched him. Some unseen, unfelt, unthinkable Force was hurling him outward into a Stygian, unbounded void.

Then, so gradually that it was scarcely perceptible, the blackness was dyed a pallid, ghastly hue. And with a shocking suddenness it became alive

with a horrible larvae. Bloodless and transparent things, they seemed, filling the air with a swarming, wriggling magnitude of loathsome life. And he was a part of this!

He put out his hand: and though he felt no touch, he saw the squirming mass of worms pass through his flesh as though nothing were there. And he knew his body swarmed with them as though it were decayed cheese, and an unspeakable, revolting nausea surged through him.

Then the paleness vanished, and the larvae with it, and he was still shooting through the horrible darkness.

ANOTHER eon had passed.

Nor had his terrible flight abated. Outward, through unlighted infinitude, he swept untiringly. Unearthly sounds now filled the air—voices screaming in agony, cries and moans as of tortured souls, insane laughter and maniacal shrieks. Anon, with a howl and a hiss, some shrieking air dragon would roar past him. And, all around, he could hear the bellow and screech of monsters of the air in terrible conflict.

Then all turned to an ocean of living blood; and great crimson bellows belched over him, wave upon horrid wave. And the frightful aerial mammals, invisible a moment before, were now seen leaping and plunging through that scarlet sea.

Under him and over him they ducked and bounded—gigantic, green-hued monsters extravagantly hideous. Now and again one would dart for him, mouth distended. But the next second he would be far away, with the ghastly creature in hopeless pursuit.

Slowly the liquid redness merged into a shimmering rainbow of vivid colors. Yellow and green, and purple and blue and orange, streaked the air with a prismatic glory, glittering and scintillating with a marvelous beauty.

Then, with a terrific suddenness, like a noiseless thunderclap, the blackness rushed in and blotted out the dazzling iridescence, and cloaked all in Cimmerian darkness.

FOURTH EPISODE.

ANOTHER con.

So far away it seemed a distant star, the lone traveler through the infinite Void discerned a dull red glow. Larger and larger it grew as he soared toward it with lightning velocity.

And now it seemed a great mass of flameless fire, shedding its cold rays for millions of miles. With every second it grew in size until it was come to inconceivable proportion. And then it seemed to shrivel up, and turn ashen and wrinkled, and become as a dead and crumbling sun.

But suddenly the husk burst open, and the wayfarer described, dimly at first, what seems the outermost rim of some gorgeous, primeval world.

Awhile it was as though he were watching it from afar off; but he traversed thousands of leagues in as many seconds, and swiftly it took definite shape as he flew nearer and yet nearer.

And then his journey through illimitable space was at an end, and he had alighted upon this unknown world, and was wandering through a dense jungle of some marvelous fungus that attained a wondrous height.

Seemingly without his own volition, he at length found himself lying on a verdant mound overlooking a vast tropical morass that reached off on all sides into endless vista.

And while he lay there he witnessed in that untracked wilderness a diabolical spectacle appalling as hell itself!

Grisly, indescribable Things—satyrs and ogres and demons and fiends—appeared in countless numbers, and held orgies that were Madness intensified. Now they were reveling and cavorting in wanton abandon; anon, battling among themselves in murderous ferocity.

After a time he viewed a sight still more horrible. Off to the right, he saw a monstrous snake's head, as huge as the body of a hippopotamus, rise up from the swamp and gaze on ravenously at the riotous revel.

An instant later the licentious carousal was become wildest terror. The

forest was alive with frightful reptiles—gigantic, stupendous things that passed the extent of all imagination. Down they swooped upon their terrified prey, their enormous, slippery bodies undulating in great writhing leaps.

The horde of unearthly Things, disporting in hellish debauchery a moment before, were swiftly swallowed up by the serpents. Left in possession of the swamp, they flopped about venomously for a time, demolishing and laying waste all about them.

They then fell upon one another in unspeakable combat, wriggling and squirming simily together, their repulsive, green-black lengths intertwined like enormous angle worms. And they killed and devoured each other, until at last there was left but one hideous, swollen monster.

It leaped and dashed about, lashing its great tail furiously, tearing down giant trees as though they were weeds. And as the young man watched, the incredible thing seemed to swell larger and larger. And then he saw it stop suddenly in its Brobdingnagian gambol and rigidly poise its hideous head. And he looked straight into its horrifying eyes!

They were fixed steadily upon him. But a moment it staid thus; then its head dropped, and he saw its mammoth body undulating swiftly toward him through the swamp.

He strove to cry out, but could utter no sound. He tried to move, but his body was as lead.

On came the thing with frightful rapidity; parts of its writhing length now sinking in the quagmire, now towering high above it. Now he could see that massive head swinging from side to side. Now only a dark, slimy greenish mass, describing an arch above the swamp, showed its location.

Now it was close upon him. Its vast head swooped up a scant distance away. Its fulsome eyes blazed upon him with a furious fire. Its great drooping jaws swung open. They bristled with venomous fangs.

The monster gathered itself in a dozen gigantic coils and lept through the air—

"GOD!" he shrieked.

"There, there," soothed a tender voice. "Don't excite yourself. You'll be all right presently. Just remain quiet, that's all."

A cool hand was laid gently upon his brow. He looked up at the young nurse who sat beside his cot.

Without saying a word, he stared for quite a long time at her face, until her cheeks were as crimson as the ribbon at her throat. When at length he spoke, he was half laughing, half sobbing, and the syntax of his utterance would scarcely have delighted a professor of English at Harvard University.

"Well, I've been, girl," said he. "Got a round trip ticket. But never, never again. What'd you run away for? Yep, I've had my fill; no more metaphysics. *Phew!* Such reptiles! Big as this room,

some of 'em. I looked three years, and it ran me crazy. *Ugh!* those snakes and lizards. Hired detectives, too, but it was no use. And I thought it was all sunshine and flowers and sweet music. You won't run away again, will you? Could you get me a little brandy, Lily May? I'm feeling a bit faint."

LAST EPISODE

THE YOUNG man made a mistake about the newspapers. One inch was all he got, tucked snugly between a patent medicine advertisement and the notice of a sheriff's sale. It read:

"An unidentified youth attempted to take his life in a North Side rooming-house last night by inhaling gas. The landlady smelled the odor of gas and called the police. Miss Lily May Kettering, a nurse at the National Emergency Hospital, who seems to know the young man, although refusing to divulge his identity, reports that he is on the road to recovery."

