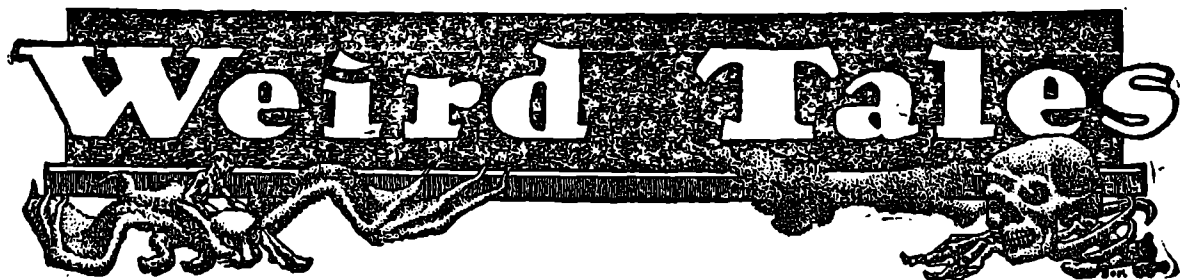


# Weird Tales



MARCH, 1952

Cover by Joseph Eberle

## NOVELETTES

**MORNE PERDU** . . . . . Alice Drayton Farnham 10  
*... a sleepless night, a spider bite on her arm, and she had seen goblins where no goblins were. Then all at once she heard the silence, like the crashing of drums.*

**THE HORROR AT RED HOOK** . . . . . H. P. Lovecraft 56  
*A master hand at tales of terror follows up the thought that awful, love is not, yet dead.*  
 (Copyright 1927 by Popular Fiction Publishing Company)

## SHORT STORIES

**THE MONKEY SHIP** . . . . . Garnett Radcliffe 26  
*Banda Bap, who is the god of monkeys, listened tensely for the voices that had left the forest.*

**THE MASK** . . . . . Curtis W. Casewit 34  
*The dead—they always look serene, features are never ghoulishly distorted.*

**THE SCARRED SOUL** . . . . . Seabury Quinn 41  
*... my body has to slay and haunt the place where my soul died.*

**THE PRISM** . . . . . Mary Elizabeth Counselman 51  
*Different folks, they show different color. Violet—can it be the color of saints and babies?*

**THE PLACE OF DESOLATION** . . . . . August Derleth 70  
*... a space-time warp, where time and space as we know them terrestrially, do not exist. How about a house that was built in it?*

**JUNGLE BEASTS** . . . . . William P. Barron 76  
*That which is alive hath known death; that which lives can never die.*  
 (Copyright 1923 Rural Publishing Company)

**VERSE** { **O GOLDEN-TONGUED ROMANCE** . . . . . Clark Ashton Smith 33  
           { **THE BRIDE OF DEATH** . . . . . Joseph Howard Krucher 69

**THE EYRIE** . . . . . 6

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, 26 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.

PRINTED IN THE U. S. A.

 178  
 Vol. 44, No. 3

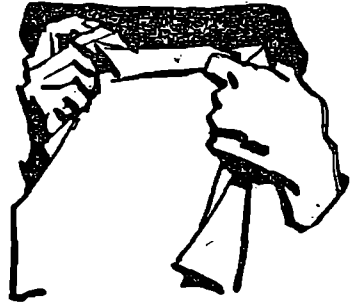
D. McILWRAITH, Editor



# The Mask

BY CURTIS W. CASEWIT

... good 'death masks — things to be cherished and displayed and treasured.



THERE were many reasons why Crouse was depressed. Gwen Stephenson was one of them. *Would she come back?*

Feverish pre-war Vienna. They called it the gay City of Waltzes. A delusion, when worries crush you. His wife was dead, this full year now, he was crippled and he didn't know whether Gwen was coming back. *Gwen, his good left arm.*

Crouse leaned on the side of the huge window of his studio. He leaned on his right arm. The left sleeve of his smock dangled loosely, a memento of his accident when he had arrived in Vienna five years ago. Leaning, he looked down into the street. Gaiety? Waltzes? From his window he could see the harsh limestone hills under him; he could guess the sugary Baroque façades at a distance.—The Danube? An ugly, slimy river, shrouded by the lonely gauche buildings. He had worries that was all. With worries everything could turn gray—even Vienna.

Ironically, his keen, blue eyes turned toward his studio. An array of plaster heads overloaded the shelves. He hated his profession. The Austrians called it a *Maskenfabri-*

*kant*. "Warren B. Crouse—manufacturer of masks." He, a sculptor of serious promise. And Gwen had been his assistant. He had never attempted to make her more than that. He was too sensible.

Gwen was an art student, the only fellow American he had met lately in Vienna. Gwen Stephenson: Des Moines, Iowa . . . Rome, Italy . . . Vienna, Austria. She had come to him from the Vienna Sculpture School, after the completion of her studies. Her eyes were brown like chestnuts, and always grave and a little misty. Her hair was black and silky, and drawn back in a knot. Her mouth delicate and expressive. It said, to him, mutely: "No, Warren B. Crouse. No. You may look distinguished with your straight, sharp face, and your gray hair and knowledge of life. But still: no."

Presently the sky turned black. At a distance, the spires of the *Stefansdom* looked like tiny saws. The studio was very dark. Only the skeleton shone from the wall, and a Beethoven in clay, he had bought in Berlin. There was a collection of grinning Buddhas, some sea shells from Venice, and two Indian wood masks, from the States.

Perhaps, Rudolf von Kleffensteiner would discourage her from coming back. Von Kleffensteiner was a supercilious Austrian youngster, who had more money and more than was good for him. The money had gone to his head—the women under his

feet. Warren B. Crouse didn't like Rudolf von Kleffensteiner. He often wondered how much Gwen cared for him.

Outside it was raining now. The waves of disorderly roofs at the bottom of the hill began to gleam and glitter, and look like churning waves on an ocean. The ivies rustled against the walls of the house, and the linden trees in the garden trembled, shaking off their summerly leaves.

Crouse gazed at the rickety operation table, all furnished with flat cushion, waterproof blanket and leather straps. Here, he made his clients lie down, with a smooth "*bitte, bitte*—it isn't going to hurt, be all over in a minute—just a little patience." He had learned the German language all right. A *Maskenfabrikant!* Him! A sculptor, formerly New Haven, Conn.

HIS thoughts were interrupted by the staccato noise of an automobile engine, droning up the hill. He heard a car stop and a door slam. The rusty bell at his gate tingled.

When he opened the door, von Kleffensteiner stood in front of him, in all his arrogance. His figure was athletic and wiry, almost herculean. He wore a brown tweed suit, the latest fashion in London and Milan, and a trademark of many an habitué of the Vienna coffee-houses.

His shaven face gleamed sleekly. He wiped the rain from his forehead, and two lines formed between his brows, dramatically.

"I wish to talk to you, Crouse."

He spoke to him as if to a servant, and he grinned mischievously, for he never smiled. Some people can't smile.

"Come in," Crouse said, reluctantly.

With a long step, von Kleffensteiner strode into the room. He took off his green felt hat, placing it facetiously on top of a mold. Crouse seized it with his only hand, and put it on the table, sour-faced and silent. The rain was dancing waltzes against the window.

The visitor's blond, short-cropped head bent down, with a stealthy glance in the direction of Crouse's left sleeve. Then he stared at his own hands, slowly. They were hairy and muscular, and manicured with care.

*Let's hope he won't light his pipe this time*, Crouse thought. Kleffensteiner smoked an atrocious variety of Bulgarian tobaccos, which Crouse detested.

"What can I do for you?" he asked.

Von Kleffensteiner sat down, putting one leg above the other. His face was clad with its habitual sneer. A protruding chin gave him an air of ruthless brutality.

"Gwendolyn has sent me."

He always called her Gwendolyn. He liked to toy with her name.

"Well?"

"She has a message for you."

"What message?"

"I think she will not come back to you."

A slight tremor passed over Crouse's face. Tension gripped him. The stump of his left arm hurt, and he fingered it nervously.

Von Kleffensteiner looked at him, eagerly watching the effect of his words. His eyes wandered round the room, leisurely, resting first on the skeleton on the wall, then on the debris of plaster on the ground.

"Gwendolyn has enough of this—err crazy profession," he said.

Crouse kept silent. His dignity did not leave him for a moment.

"In fact, Crouse, if you really want to know, I will not let her come back."

Crouse winced with astonishment.

"You?" This was it. Gwen was his very *raison d'être*. It would be frightful if—

"Since when do you, Sir, have anything to say about Gwen's decisions?" Crouse asked. Irritation was slowly getting the better of him. He turned visibly pale.

"There are many reasons," the visitor said, rising. "I rather prefer not to discuss them." Whereupon he seized his *Tiroler* hat, and swung it over his blond stubble. With a catlike step, he reached the door. "I'll see Gwendolyn tonight. *Auf Wiedersehen!*"

AFTER the other had left, Crouse took stock of the situation. Kleffensteiner was perfectly capable of bluffing, and his visit might be nothing but a maneuver. Chicanery and intrigue were a special hobby with him. It would be relatively easy to find out about Gwen. But Crouse was no man to rush matters, and too cautious to delve into anything foolish.

It was evening. Somewhere a mechanical piano groaned, with monotony. Streetcars screeched. Lights began to glitter from some houses.

If Gwen *didn't* come back? Then what? He paid her well. There would be others. Mask making brought money. But *would* there be others? Would there be quite someone like Gwen?

He walked up the spiral staircase to his room. The howling of dogs kept him from sleeping, and the twittering of sparrows awoke him early. After coffee, he carefully prepared the paraphernalia for the day. He assembled the spatulas, a small bag with plaster, a bowl, assorted tools and his white smock. As he was leaving the house, he saw Gwen at a distance.

She pushed her bicycle up the hill, her bare knees jolting the skirt up and down.

He went toward her, his heart pounding. They met at the gate. She smiled brightly, and her white teeth sparkled. Her skin was extremely pale, as always, but her face ended in a soft graceful triangle. She wore an Austrian costume, with elegance.

"Yes, Gwen?" His voice was unsteady. There was much at stake.

Silently, her eyes searched for his. She had a directness of her own, but her face said little.

"I've come back to work."

Happiness almost strangled him.

"I thought you wouldn't come back," he said.

"Why?"

"Your friend Kleffensteiner paid me a visit last night. He—"

"Oh no!" she pursed her lips, her brown eyes wide open with astonishment.

"Did he tell you I wasn't coming back?"

"He did."

"But how could he know? I haven't seen him for days."

Crouse tucked his empty sleeve into his left coat pocket.

"It's immaterial now," he said. "We have an appointment at the Chapel. Are you ready for work?"

"Yes," she said, simply.

She propped her bicycle behind the wall, and they left, side by side.

Mortuaries were non-existent in Vienna, and the Chapel was downward some twenty

minutes away. Crouse walked in silence, and Gwen's low shoes tapped on the cobblestoned road. They passed clusters of gardens, with wooden fences around them, and tiny houses, nestled in high, green grass. Sometimes, a horse and cart overtook them, or women with shawls around their heads, and straw baskets in their hands, on the way to the market.

When they arrived, Gwen helped him into his white coat. It was a gesture which he appreciated; she had many suchlike habits. She looked at him, as he unpacked his instruments, his one hand working with slow precision. The white coat accentuated his gray, patrician head. A persuasive intelligence and distinction emanated from his large, clear forehead, and the unlined, symmetric face.

They went to the middle of the room, to a white-clothed crib, adorned with roses and wreaths. A woman lay in it, silent and waxen.

Crouse reached for a small jar of vaseline. He pressed it under his left arm-pit and opened it with his right hand.

"How important is Kleffensteiner to you?" he asked, omitting the *von*.

She handed him a brush.

"That's a difficult question to answer," she said.

He leaned over the corpse. Meticulously, he smeared the eyebrows with vaseline. Then he placed a cloth on the woman's hair.

"Do you have any plans?" he asked.

"Yes," she said. Organ music came from above, softly. A funeral in progress. They were used to it.

"What plans, Gwen?"

She walked to the end of the huge, high cellar-room, to fill a basin with water. "Mainly," she said, over her shoulder, "to stay with you, for another six months."

He betrayed no emotion. He kept perfectly calm.

She came back with the basin, and placed it on a bench. Her white, beautifully shaped hands dipped into the water, probingly.

"And then?"

"Iowa perhaps." She smiled, suddenly with warmth. He felt the singular mixture of nearness and distance in her. Sometimes he fancied to think that he was important to her.

He poured the plaster into the water, and stirred. Then he spread the white, thick substance on the subject's head, with his fingers.

"I'm learning a great deal from you," she said. "This is a fascinating experience."

He loathed the profession, but it *was* fascinating. Austrians regarded good masks almost like good paintings, hanging them onto their walls, cherishing them for generations.

They waited until the plaster on the face dried. Then he withdrew the mold, with care. He handed it to her, and she wrapped it in a rug. He picked up his tools, and they left the chapel.

At the studio, he smeared plaster into the mold. After it hardened, as she removed the completed mask, they heard the throttling of the engine, coming up the hill. They looked at each other, quietly, their eyes finding one another for an instant.

A minute later, they saw von Kleffensteiner jump out of the sportscar. Every movement conveyed the feeling of elasticity and buoyant action. He wore a military-style raincoat, with a lavish belt and colossal lapels.

Gwen stared at the floor when he burst in. His overflowing poise embarrassed her. She was disturbed.

"We're not quite through, Rudolf," she said.

The mask of the woman was in front of her, on the table, eyes closed, features serene and distinctive.

**K**LEFFENSTEINER withdrew his coat, and thrust it on a chair, with a wide, sweeping gesture. Then he leaned against the wall, lighting a pipe. He knew Crouse didn't like pipe smoke. Suddenly he said, "*Ach*—these artists! It smells like a paint factory in here!"

He eagerly approached Gwen, who was squeezing colors out of tubes.

"Good Lord, Gwendolyn! Who is this woman?"

His English was good; he used the language like a toy.

"She is a former actress, Rudolf."

"*Donnerwetter*, what a head she has! Beautiful." He strode to the back of the room, where Crouse stood washing his hand.

"Why don't you make a mask of me sometimes, Crouse?"

Crouse rubbed dry his hand slowly. Then he walked to Gwen's table. The Austrian followed. Crouse snapped on the light, and it exploded on the visitor's short-cropped head.

"I'm serious, Crouse. How about a mask?"

He had lost all his hauteur when he wanted something. He had seen the woman's head, and vanity tore at him, now.

Crouse kept silent. He stood behind Gwen who was painting the woman's lips. The shrill voice of a singer pierced the stillness, from somewhere. Piano keys echoed dreamily.

"What do *you* think about it, Gwendolyn?"

"I think your head is interesting, Rudolf," she said with seriousness. Then she put the paints down and rose, facing him. "Your cheek bones, for example. They emerge in a remarkable way. Or—" her fingers tentatively followed his sharp profile. He clutched the hand, firmly and drew her to him.

"Good night now," Crouse said.

THEREAFTER, strangely enough, Kleffensteiner didn't come anymore. Gwen left alone, nights. Characteristically, Crouse avoided asking her further questions. Several days passed, and Gwen assisted diligently, speaking little. They took the *stadtbahn* to chapels and rich villas, and people had appointments at Crouse's residence above the town.

Then, one late evening, Crouse heard the car door slam, and the bell tingle.

He opened the door, and von Kleffensteiner stood outside, pipe in his mouth. He was as haughty as usual, his brows twisted with sarcasm, a smirk on his face.

"I've made up my mind," he said, without greeting.

"About what?"

"Don't you remember, Crouse? *The mask*. My mask."

"But this is rather late at night. I—Why such a rush?"

"Gwendolyn convinced me."

They still stood at the door. Vienna loomed below them, dots of light in the darkness. Kleffensteiner spoke again.

"She insisted. So I thought, I'll give her the mask for our—wedding."

"Are you intending to marry her?" Crouse asked. He still held a book in his hand. He put it into a chair.

"Marry her? Of course, why not?"

"Does she know you're here?"

"No." He walked into the middle of the room, and took off his trench-coat. He wore a white shirt, with an emblem on the breast pocket, and a loud tie.

"So, are you going to do it or not?" he asked impatiently.

He still held the pipe in his hand. The sickly odor of Bulgarian tobacco spread in the room.

"If you can't do it, well—"

"All right, take your jacket off."

The other complied, displaying a pair of broad shoulders. Then he walked to the mirror on the wall, and glanced at himself approvingly.

Crouse slipped into his smock. Then he rolled the antiquated operation table into the middle of the room, directly under the strong, concentrated lamp. Its beads trembled.

"I want you to be comfortable," he said, "Loosen your collar, take your tie off. Now lie down here."

As the Austrian did so, Crouse went to the wall where there was an old-fashioned gramophone, with a huge speaker. He put a record on, and presently the bold opening chords of Beethoven's *fifth* thundered through the high room.

"A little music will put you at ease."

"I am, I am—! Why such ceremonies?"

Crouse mixed the plaster, stirring with care.

"This is plaster of Paris," he said.

"Why plaster of Paris?" Kleffensteiner asked.

"Oh, Paris was rich in plaster."

The fifth surged through the night, a rhythmic harmony of woodwinds, flutes and violins. Crouse was receptive to music, and the theme flew through him, lifting his spirit.

Presently it reached a summit of grace and beauty.

"Do you like this music?" he asked.

"Oh—it's all right."

Crouse's one hand worked with deftness,

applying the cloth to Kleffensteiner's hair, brushing his eyebrows and eyelids with vaseline. Then it reached for a cardboard frame which went over the man's head.

"What's this for?" Kleffensteiner asked.

"It supports the material."

He stirred the plaster again, with his right hand, the left stump propped against the bowl. Then he fetched some salt and poured it into the thickening substance. Salt makes plaster harden with speed.

He began to spread the white material on Kleffensteiner's forehead, skillfully, like a doctor operating on a patient.

"This is cold, Crouse." The Austrian still held the pipe in his hand, and the infernal smoke penetrated Crouse's nostrils.

"Give me this, please." The American placed the pipe on the table. Then he reached for a blanket and with exertion wound it round the other's body.

"That's better," Kleffensteiner said.

"Close your eyes now."

Expertly, Crouse's hand spread more plaster on the forehead, then over the lids. He worked down over the hollow cheek bones, to the nose.

"How are you feeling?"

"Fine, fine. *Sehr gut*. It's for Gwen, anyway."

"The things one can do for a woman," Crouse said, a nuance of irony in his voice.

The quality of the plaster was perfect. It hardened fast, the salt helping.

The record had come to an end. Crouse had no time to get back to the gramophone. Its needle rasped screechingly.

"You'll have to breathe through your nose. You must not speak anymore—I'll cover your mouth now."

**H**E SPREAD the white material over the mouth. The other kept still while the plaster hardened.

"You'll breathe through the two straws which I put into your nose now." Crouse inserted the oiled straws, then quickly applied plaster over the nose.

With a split-second movement, he put the leather strap around the immobile body buckling it. The other wasn't aware what was done to him; if he were, he couldn't have said anything. His mouth was shut by plaster.

"Now hold your breath for a minute. It won't be long."

With dexterity, Crouse removed the straws. His spatula dipped into the bowl, lifting slabs of the white material, which he applied to the nose, and in turn, with his thumb into the nostrils.

There was a violent movement on the couch, followed by a feeble, stifled gurgle. But there was no escape. Kleffensteiner was gagged, tied and trapped.

The struggle had been brief and fierce. Death by asphyxiation comes quickly. It was like the hissing of the Austrian's pipe which Crouse threw into the basin with water.

**T**HE man lay quite still then, and the tobacco spread in the water, eerily. Crouse went to the gramophone and lifted its arm.

Musty air pierced his lungs, and his heart was pumping ferociously. He was very excited. *What had he done?* The sudden realization swept over him: he had murdered a man. Warren B. Crouse—murderer. His brain was numb. He went to a chair, and sank into it.

At one thirty, he went to the couch and unbuckled the straps. Under the blankets, he found the virile hands in convulsive fists. The victim had struggled.

At two, he took the frame off, and the plaster mold. The face was blue, but astonishingly serene.

*The dead always look serene*, he told himself.

He reached for some boiled soap, and started to paint the inside of the mold. With sudden fright, he saw that the features were ghoulishly distorted. The man himself lay there, two yards from him, in rigid placidity. But the mold displayed a ghastly expression. Frantically, Crouse filled the negative with fresh plaster, trying to forget.

He worked quickly, sweat covering his brows.

At three, he heard the deep peels of the bells of the churches in town. The Votif-church followed, with three slow beats. A barge wailed on the Danube.

At four, he dizzily chipped the plaster off the mold, and held the finished mask under the light. It was as peaceful as the

dead man's face. *Everything would be all right.* He placed the mask on a shelf, all by itself, on a wooden base. For a moment he gazed at it thoughtfully.

*Dispose of the body, he thought. Gwen will be coming in the morning.*

It was still completely dark outside when he stumbled out of the house, dragging the cold corpse behind him. Far beneath, the spires of the *Rathaus* glittered and lights, here and there. Vienna was asleep.

He finally reached von Kleffensteiner's car, his arm trembling with the effort. There wasn't a soul in the streets, when he reached the bottom of the hill. In an alley, he put the parking lights on, and pushed the stiff body into the driver's seat. With silent, frightened irony, he placed Kleffensteiner's two hands on the wheel. *Two good, dead hands pawing a wheel.*

Meticulously, he chose backroads and small alleys for his return to the house. He saw no one, except an old milkman, on a cart, drawn by a sturdy horse.

The milkman said: "*Guten Morgen.*"

He had never seen the man. Systematically, he went over his chances of being discovered.

There was no proof whatsoever. He had used a glove, no finger marks would be visible on the car. As for the body, he had washed every trace of plaster away. Gwen hadn't known that Kleffensteiner had come to his house. Kleffensteiner probably hadn't told anyone. He was boastful, but he shunned any suspicion of being considered vain.

When Crouse reached home it was almost dawn. He did not turn any lights on. He stumbled through his studio which he knew well enough. He didn't look at the mask, but tiptoed up the staircase to his room. Utterly exhausted, he threw himself on his bed.

IT DIDN'T seem much later that his half-sleep was interrupted by the tingling of the bell. Drowsily, he got up. He looked out of the window. She had already reached the door below him. She had a key. He heard it turn. His head dizzy, he staggered down the spiral stairs, toward her.

He saw her look past him. He read in her eyes that she knew everything. *Everything.* Her mouth twitched, and lines of dread seared across her face. Her eyes began to glint furiously. She shook her head, with quick, spasmodic movements, and the black knot of her hair swayed from side to side. Sudden passion seemed to well through her.

"It's insane," she muttered. "Insane." Advancing steadily toward him, until he almost felt her breath, she cried, "Oh Warren, I—loved you!"

His heart beat like a drum, and he felt needles of fire in his arm.

She still stepped forward, toward him. Her breath was on his cheek now. She was livid, her lips white: "You fool, you fool, you murdered him!"

His head seemed to burst open at its very seams.

"There! Look!" she cried. She turned him bodily till he faced the mask.

*The mask*—its mouth wide open in horror, tongue lolling between the teeth. An abominable contortion twisted its features. The eyes were swollen, apallingly, as if they had tried for one last time to force themselves out from beneath their prison. Nameless creases of terror furrowed the plaster.

Every instant of the inflicted torture was there, in front of him, with monstrous deviltry:

For a last time, he heard her voice, faintly, "fool, fool, I loved you."

Then he passed into unconsciousness.