

WEIRD TALES




NOVEMBER

1940

Cover by
Margaret Brundage

THE LAST WALTZ	Seabury Quinn	8
<i>Death Comes Back to Dance</i>		
THE GREEN INVASION	Denis Plimmer	17
<i>Just a Quiet Professional Man—with Six Extra Dimensions Up His Sleeve.</i>		
WINE OF THE SABBAT	Robert Bloch	31
<i>Damnation Itself . . . Uncorked From Green Bottles</i>		
THE GREAT GOD DEATH	Edith Hurley	41
<i>Verse</i>		
AN ADVENTURE OF A PROFESSIONAL CORPSE		
(3) <i>The Wife of the Humorous Gangster</i>	H. Bedford-Jones	42
<i>Many's the Handsome Corpse He Made!</i>		
THE SANDWIN COMPACT	August W. Derleth	53
<i>"The Owls Are Hooting"</i>		
THE MIRROR	Liam Kennedy	68
<i>Hell Through the Looking Glass</i>		
TURN OVER	Dorothy Quick	73
<i>Dead Men Are Supposed to Lie Still</i>		
THE IMPOSSIBLE ADVENTURE	H. T. W. Bousfield	85
<i>In Greece the Hills Are Never Quite Asleep</i>		
SUPERSTITIONS AND TABOOS	Irwin J. Weill	96
THE MOUND (Novelette)	Z. B. Bishop	98
<i>Darkness and Gold . . . and a Timeless Underworld</i>		
IT HAPPENED TO ME	Dulcie Browne	121
THE EYRIE—and Weird Tales Club		123

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.

Published bi-monthly by Weird Tales, 9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York, 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, 15 cents. *Subscription rates:* One year in the United States and possessions, 90c. Foreign and Canadian postage extra. English Office: Charles Lavell, Limited, 4 Clements Inn, Strand, London, W.C.2, England. 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, 1940, by Weird Tales. Copyrighted in Great Britain.  173

PRINTED IN THE U. S. A.

Vol. 35, No. 6

D. McILWRAITH, *Editor.*

H. AVELINE PERKINS, *Associate Editor.*



"Two luminous specks seemed to smoulder where he had looked to see the eyes."

The Mirror

By LIAM KENNEDY

*Who—or what—was the murderous wraith in that old dressing-room?
The terrifying experience of an opera singer.*

SIGURDSEN strode briskly down the main street of the little Hungarian town and paused before the Opera House, noting with a nod of satisfaction that his name showed up well on the play-bills. His company was to open there that

night, and after spending a short week-end in Buda he had traveled down as late as he dared and come straight from the railway station, carrying his make-up and personal properties in a leather bag.

The Opera House was in the center of

a block of shops, with no passage on either side of it, and Sigurdson continued his progress along the street in search of the turning which would lead him to the stage door. Some thirty yards further along he found a side street at the end of which he turned into a dark alley which seemed to lead in the required direction.

The alley was a particularly unpleasant place, for one side of it was occupied by a row of derelict houses, while on the other side a blank wall stretched away into the darkness, showing no sign of the door which he sought.

He thought that it must be the fog which deadened the noises of the main street so that no sound of distant traffic came to his ears and he seemed to walk in an eery silence. He stumbled along through the murk, grumbling to himself at the callousness of theatre proprietors, until at last he discerned a dim glow of light in front of him and realized that he had reached his destination.

The dilapidated condition of the stage door served but to increase his discontent. In contrast to the front of the theatre, which was quite new, its interior and the passages leading away from it looked as if they had been standing there for centuries.

His growing dissatisfaction was slightly assuaged by the stage-doorkeeper who greeted him (to the satisfaction of his professional soul) by name and offered to show him to his room. The theatre, he explained, was a maze of corridors back-stage, and a stranger might easily lose himself among them. With a grudging word of thanks, Sigurdson followed his guide down a flight of stone stairs and along a bewildering succession of gloomy passages, until at last the stage-doorkeeper threw open a door and stood aside to allow him to enter, saying as he did so: "I've made it as comfortable for you as I can, sir. You won't want to change it, will you?"

Something in the tone of the man's voice startled the opera-singer, and he turned to look at him. He saw a face still young, unusually refined for the occupant of so humble a position, but white as wax, and lined and ravaged by some tempest of the soul which puzzled him. Only the eyes were plain to read, for they burned and smoldered with the same agony of hope which had rung in his voice.

Without waiting for a reply he closed the door and was gone, leaving Sigurdson to stand wondering at his unusual question—at the agony in his voice—and (strange afterthought!) why no sound of receding footsteps had accompanied his retreat along the corridor.

THE room which, to his disgust, was lit only by two candles in sconces at the side of the table, was squalid enough to set him grumbling again, although there were signs that someone had tried to make it comfortable. There was a small square of carpet by the table and the floor had been swept clean. The clothes-hooks on the wall were empty, as was a large dress-basket which stood against the wall between the table and the door, and Sigurdson determined to give the wardrobe-master a piece of his mind when he arrived late with his stage-clothes. Seating himself at the table, which was furnished with a large mirror, he set to work to put on his wig, leaning forward close to the glass as he made the join.

Behind his own image in the mirror he could see the door, the wall with the clothes-hooks and the top of the dress-basket into whose empty interior he had already peered; and the first time the lid of the basket moved, he was so intent upon his work that he did not immediately notice it. By the time it had forced itself upon his attention there was a definite gap between the lid and the rim, and he swung round in his chair, staring at it in surprise.

The lid was shut, as he knew that it should be, and with an angry shake of the head he turned back to the mirror. This time, however, for some reason which he would have found it hard to explain, he kept a wary eye over the shoulder of his reflected image, upon the top of the basket, only to discover with an unpleasant sense of shock that the lid was now open wider than before, as though it were being pushed up from below. Once again he turned away from the image in the glass and looked directly at it. The lid was shut, though he had heard no sound of its falling, and he strode angrily over to it, wrenched it open, and once more examined the interior of the basket. As he expected, it was empty, and he slammed down the lid, muttering his annoyance as he did so. Once again he sat down at the table—and this time his heart seemed to miss a beat and his body stiffened, for the image in the glass showed him that the lid was now half open and he could see it slowly rising as he watched it.

It was at this moment that he began to be afraid. He wanted to turn away from the mirror, for some vague instinct warned him that in its depths he was about to see something which was not good for him to look upon. He felt an urge to smash the mirror in pieces—to get away from the dressing-room—from the theater, if possible; but some force stronger than himself, stronger even than his fear, held him prisoner. He stared into the mirror and watched the lid of the basket rising, rising, until at last it rested back against the wall and he braced himself to look on that which had lifted it.

There was nothing.

He was soon to discover that although there might be nothing visible, nothing tangible in the basket, *something* was there, for he was immediately conscious of a wave of cold which seemed to pour from its mouth with the silent flow of milk—a

freezing, numbing tide which rose higher and higher about him until it reached the level of his face, filling his nostrils with the unforgettable smell of death. Then it flowed over his head and he was completely engulfed. He felt as though he were encased in a block of frozen putrescence, unable to tear his eyes from the well-spring of its emission—the depths of the mirror.

Nor had he long to wait, for as he watched he saw the basket begin to tremble and a creaking sound came from it. He fell into a violent fit of shivering, for he knew, with a terrible certainty, that something which he could not see was alive in the basket—alive with a different life from his own—and it was coming out.

He heard a soft squelching sound upon the floor and the rustle of cloth being dragged free of the wicker, though he could still see nothing. Or *was* there something beginning to take shape in the mirror—something darker than the surrounding gloom—a formless shadow out of which two luminous specks seemed to smolder where he had instinctively looked to see the eyes.

THE shadow came nearer until it stood immediately behind his reflected image, and now he was able to discern things about it which had not been clear to him before. It had looked formless because its garments were not clean-cut, but ragged and torn at the edges and dirty gray in color, and he realized with a violent shrinking of his body that they were grave-clothes, earth-stained and worm-eaten and rotten. He knew that he must escape before the thing came closer: the mere thought of its touch set him to retching; but no power on earth could have moved him from his chair. The thing might get between him and the door and put its hand on him!

He saw it pass round to the side of **him**,

and, despite his terror, was compelled to look into the luminous specks reflected in the mirror. To his comfort, the eyes were not looking at him but downward to the table. His glance passed beyond the eyes and he saw with a numb frozen horror that it had no face. Yet there should have been something there, for a soiled filthy bandage passed from what might have been the top of the head down and under where he had expected to see the jaw. But the bandage framed a gray nothingness, and he felt that even a grinning skull would have been better than that.

By this time, Sigurdson felt that he had plumbed the last depths of human terror—that he could endure no more and remain alive. Indeed, the thought passed through his mind that he must be already dead and part of the world of shadows into which he was staring. Perhaps the thought comforted him a little and numbed the sources of his terror; by no other reasoning can he explain how he lived through the next few moments.

As he stared into the depths of the mirror he saw the thing take up his grease-paints and begin to make itself a face.

Out of the gray nothingness there gradually emerged a pale yellowish mask as the foundation color was put on. Then, swiftly and skilfully, the highlights were painted in: the cheeks were reddened and a little pink put on the point of the chin: and, last and most horrible of all, the eyes were outlined and a Cupid's bow formed on the lips.

It was a woman's face which now smiled at him, slowly and terribly, from the depths of the glass, but a ghoulish parody of womanly beauty such as Sigurdson could not have imagined in his wildest nightmares. It was like a face made of multi-colored wet blotting-paper and gave the impression that if you touched it, it would fall to pieces. But when, staring insanely into the mirror, he saw that the

thing was whitening its grave-ravaged arms and hands with the contents of a wet-white bottle, he was seized with a violent fit of nausea and the room spun about him so that for a moment the mirror was obscured.

When he could see clearly again the thing was behind him in its old position, but closer—much closer—than before. He knew now that the moment of climax was upon him, and in a wild paroxysm of terror he strove to lift himself from the chair.

The thing placed its arms about his neck and fondled him.

Nothing which he had feared up to this moment could compare with the terror which racked him now. The arms were soft and womanish, but spongy and wet—and cold—cold as frozen metal, which burns and blisters where it touches. And as they caressed him, he could smell the sour reek of wet clay. He felt that if he did not get loose from them he would go mad and die of disgust. Yet worse was to follow; for after what seemed an eternity of nausea he realized that something new was entering his soul: a horrible, horrifying pleasure, an obscene delight in the touch of those hellish caresses. His last feeble resistance flickered out like a candle in the wind and he surrendered.

He felt the arms being drawn back and cold wet hands began playing about his throat. The fingers were searching—searching, as Sigurdson realized in a helpless, drugged fashion, for that one particular grip by whose aid even a weak woman can break a man's neck like a rotten stick. As he sat there in a kind of sodden ecstasy, he wondered why the thing should wish to kill him in this manner.

Suddenly, through the growing darkness of the mirror, he saw the door flung open and the stage-doorkeeper stood on the threshold, his face a twisted mask of anguish. Sigurdson noticed, in a foolish half-witted way, that he seemed to be a long

way off and that when he spoke his voice sounded faint and distant.

"Pray!" he sobbed. "Pray! Oh the long night of Eternity! The long, black night of Eternity!"

It was as though a blinding light had flashed through the room, and in a sudden blaze Sigurdson saw clearly the awful peril in which he stood. He knew that he must fight the thing that stood behind him or be lost. Not his body, but his soul was the prize, and he too would know the long terror of eternal night.

With an effort which almost racked him in pieces he flung his will against the evil which was ravishing him and knew, on the instant, that his challenge was accepted. Wave upon wave of sensuous anesthesia flowed over him, while those wet spongy arms renewed their fondlings, and the thing seemed to break into a horrid whispering, suggesting unspeakable delights. Sigurdson fought with the courage of despair and in the deep recesses of his spirit struggled to pray. For a moment the strength of the attack seemed to waver. Struggling to his feet, he grasped the mirror with his two hands and brought it down with a crash upon the make-up table, breaking it into fragments. A dreadful bubbling scream rose from behind him, and he sank deep into unconsciousness.

When he came to his senses he found himself, lying on the cobblestones of the alley, his leather bag still unopened by his side. No light shone out into the new lifting fog—he could see no stage door in the wall. He picked himself up and staggered back to the main street, to find that the stage door for which he was searching was in the opposite direction and was reached through an arcade in the side of the block. He arrived there in a state of collapse, was taken to his hotel and put to bed, and for three weeks he hovered on the verge of insanity.

Later, when he had recovered sufficiently

to talk of his experience, he drew the story of the theatre from the unwilling manager.

Some fifty years previously, when the old theatre was still standing, a resident stock company had played there whose principal actress was more than ordinarily beautiful. She had begun her professional career in a traveling circus where she had learned a good deal of out-of-the-way knowledge, and, so she confessed at her trial, had become a willing initiate to Satanism. On her own statement she took a keen delight in the act of murder and had actually succeeded in killing twelve men before she was caught, first lulling them to a sense of security with her caresses, and then breaking their necks by means of that peculiar grip which Sigurdson had such good reason to remember. Her method of killing led the police to believe that the criminal must of necessity be a man of considerable physical strength, and she might never have been caught had it not been that her lover betrayed her. He was a young man of good family who, besotted by her beauty, left his home and took up the position of stage-doorkeeper in order to be near her. She told him of the murders and initiated him into the horrid mysteries of her cult; but he revolted under the burden of guilt, betrayed her to the police and poisoned himself. At her trial she professed herself proud of what she had done in the service of her master and went to her death laughing and unrepentant.

After her execution, said the manager, strange things continued to happen at the old theatre. More mysterious deaths took place, always in the old manner, until the proprietor of the building, vowing that there was a curse on it, had it pulled down and erected the new theatre in its place. And the part where the old dressing-rooms were situated was walled off and filled up with rubble, so that you couldn't get into it if you wanted to.

But Sigurdson knows better.