

# Weird Tales



JULY, 1953

Cover by W. H. Silvey

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*The colonel had a theory—that the beauty of dying young is that one doesn't have to face one's mistakes.*

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*It is not commonly believed that the mind can duplicate in a dream state any experience which is utterly alien to it; this I had done.*

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*There had been rumors of ghosts about the old place, but neither of the brothers could credit that sort of thing.*

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*If only I knew the source of this evil on earth. It has spread malignantly to nearly all the people and is fishing for me at this very moment. . . .*

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*The storm-tossed waves beat against the boardwalk and the very foundations of the hotel itself. Was it they that churned up a secret long meant to lie buried at sea?*

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*The old butler heard a scream; but it was muffled by street noises outside the deserted and ghostly old house.*

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THE SEA WITCH (A novelette) . . . . . Nictzin Dyalis 73

*...One and all they turned their dead eyes on me with a curious fixity.*

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D. McILWRAITH, Editor

*It was a dream house; yet the dream could have been a nightmare. . . .*



## *The Missing Room*

by  
*Lyn Venable*

FROM the low cruising helicar, the cottage appeared charming. Lorinda gave a little exclamation of delight and exclaimed breathlessly, "Oh, that one, Dyke. Please, we must look at that one."

The helicar was only about a hundred feet from the ground, and they could easily see the "For Sale" sign on the green lawn. Dyke guided the helicar down onto the landing strip beside the attached copterport. The cottage certainly had the most modern conveniences.

They stepped out, Dyke assisting Lorinda from the helicar with all the self-conscious

solicitude of a brand new husband. They stood for a moment on the neat little postage stamp of a lawn, arm in arm.

The cottage was different from the others on the block, it was similar in its contemporary design, its just-for-two smallness, but still, it *was* different. It seemed to radiate charm out of all proportion to its physical aspects, as sometimes a relatively unattractive person will, for no reason you can put your finger on, be utterly irresistible.

"I wonder if it's open?" asked Lorinda.

"There's one way to find out," answered Dyke. After a token rap on the door, he

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Heading by A. V. DiGiannurio

twisted the knob. The door opened quietly inward.

"Oh, Dyke, should we?"

The young man made a deprecatory gesture. "It says 'for sale' doesn't it? It was probably left open especially for the purpose of prospective buyers going through. Now, do you want to go in or not?"

Lorinda was torn between her tremendous attraction to the house and an innate desire to do things exactly as they should be done. "Oh, I—I do want to go in, but there's no one here. Don't you think we should go and make an appointment with the agent first?"

Dyke sighed with impatience, "Look, it's almost dark now, too late to fly all the way back to town and back again with the agent. This is the second afternoon this week I've had to leave work early to go house hunting with you. Travis gave me a dirty look when I left today, and I can't get off again. Now, let's go through this place and then if we like it we can call the agency in the morning and get the details. Okay?"

With a little frown between her eyes, Lorinda followed Dyke into the house.

*There was a hidden closet, indistinguishable from the pretty pastel wall. Freev was behind its locked door. He had been sending a message to his superior in The Big Ship that hurtled unseen in her slow orbit around Earth. "Freev regrets that no specimens have been taken as yet. There were two groups today, both unsuitable. The first was a mated couple but too old for bearing young. The second was a pair of females, the second being the young of the first. I turned on the Repulsor Beam for both groups. They never stepped over the threshold but left immediately with negative Mind-plants. They will not choose to return. It is approaching dusk, I fear that my hunt has been a failure. I may as well cut off the Attractor Beam and prepare for . . . wait! Specimens have just come in, two of them! I think . . . yes, a young, mated pair! I must break connection now, this demands all my attention."*

LORINDA brought her hands together in a gesture of utter fascination. Her eyes wandered from the little open fireplace

to the wide-set casement windows, "Ohh . . . lovely, Dyke, lovely. Let's see the rest of it."

The kitchen was a dream. Row on row of glistening white metal cabinets lined the walls. Everything was the answer to a housewife's dream. Lorinda suddenly realized that Dyke was not beside her. "Dyke, where are you?" she called.

His voice came from another room. "I was just looking for the . . ."

"Well come here," she interrupted, "I want you to see the kitchen. What did you say you were looking for?"

"The bathroom. I can't seem to find it. I—I don't think there is one!"

"Silly! There must be one. If this is one of your jokes . . ."

Lorinda followed Dyke's voice, opening doors as she went. Closet . . . bedroom . . . closet . . . closet . . . bedroom.

She didn't see the closet without a door-knob, the one that was indistinguishable from the pretty pastel wall, the one with Freev in it.

Finally, after they had tried all the doors, they stood looking at each other in a kind of amused perplexity. Lorinda burst out laughing. "How could they, Dyke, oh how could they forget the . . . and it's such a darling house?"

Dyke grinned, a little embarrassed. "Oh, you know how they slap these houses together nowadays, mass production and all that . . . well, we might as well leave."

Lorinda pouted, "But Dyke, it was such a treasure of a house."

Freev realized that there had been a change in the attitude of his specimens. He felt their desire for the house wane, even though he turned up the Attractor Beam to its highest potential. Something was wrong. They were preparing to leave. No time now to contemplate on what he had done wrong, what detail he had overlooked. Something was wrong with the house and the specimens were leaving. He hadn't wanted to frighten them but emergency action was the only alternative now. The specimens had to be taken today if at all. The Big Ship had almost exhausted its fuel reserve fruitlessly circling Earth. It was

now or never. Freev pressed the necessary studs.

There was the sound of things closing. Doors slamming, windows shutting down tight.

"Dyke!" squealed Lorinda. Dyke ran for the front door as it slammed in his face. He pushed at it, fumbling with the latch. Nothing happened. He ran through the house to the rear door. Locked tight. The same with the windows. Then Lorinda screamed. The house was vibrating, the floor beneath them pulsating rhythmically. The vibrations grew stronger . . . and louder . . . and STRONGER . . . and LOUDER!

"What is it, Dyke?" shrieked Lorinda. "What's happening?"

*Freev was sending again, "Preparing for blast-off with two specimens. No time to dismantle exterior of house . . . will have to blast through . . . may be disabled on arrival . . . prepare for crash landing."*

Dyke hammered at the glass of the windows. They refused to break. They weren't glass. The vibrations were almost unbearable now, like the tremendous surge of trembling power in an airliner the second before take-off, magnified a thousand fold. Lorinda slumped to the floor in a faint.

Dyke ran into the kitchen, if only he could find something to . . . Somehow, he gathered the strength to rip the door of one of the metal kitchen cabinets from its hinges. Using the door as a battering ram, he ran toward the window with all his strength. There was a jarring impact as the metal smashed into the "glass." It buckled outward but did not break. Dyke staggered back, shaken. Again and again he battered the metal door against the window, the metal curled and bent under the beating, the window gave . . . and gave . . . and finally broke, not shattering; like glass, but merely being penetrated; like tough plastic. He worked frantically, using the door now to ream a larger hole into the window.

Finally it was large enough so that he could ease Lorinda's unconscious form through the opening. She came to as she hit the ground outside with a jarring bump, and she was able to groggily help Dyke himself through the opening. They ran for the helicar, hand in hand, the still woozy

Lorinda and the exhausted Dyke, dragging each other, stumbling, supporting each other, gasping for breath. They collapsed into the familiar bucket seats of the helicar and Dyke gave it full throttle. They did not look back.

*Freev was angry and discouraged. Not only had two fine specimens escaped, they had damaged the skin of the Boat. He cut the engines disconsolately. It would take half the night to repair the damage and prepare for blast-off. He would also now have to dispose of the framework of the house, bury each nail and board. If he'd gotten the specimens he could have taken off right through the flimsy structure, leaving the wreckage, but now, no specimens. The Big Ship would have to come back—someday when more funds were voted by the directors of the Galactic Zoo and Museum Endowment Board—oh well, he was just a Hunter. Those problems were really not his concern. After all, he had done his best. Tricky creatures, these Solians III.*

That night there was a bright streak across the sky for a second, thousands saw it. It must have been a falling meteor. The strange thing was that it appeared to be ascending, but then . . . the night sky plays funny tricks on the eyes.

DYKE and Lorinda, back in their tiny apartment, did not talk for a long time. For a while, they tried to act as though nothing had happened. Finally, Dyke blurted out, "Well, those sudden Earth tremors are a lot more frightening than they are serious. There must be an earth fault directly under the house. Just a bunch of rock settling; that's all."

"But Dyke, the doors . . . the windows . . . ?"

"Stuck. That's all, just stuck. The temblor got them out of alignment and they slammed shut and stuck." His mind dwelled uncomfortably on those desperate moments when he had battered "glass" with metal and the "glass" had refused to break. But then, they were always coming out with new plastics and things, weren't they?

Lorinda drew a long drag on her cigarette with a hand that still trembled slight-

ly. "But Dyke, we must tell the real estate agent. After all, no one must ever move into that house. It's dangerous, with earth faults under it and doors that won't open and . . ." she shivered.

"Okay, honey. In the morning we'll fly by and tell the agent, if it'll make you feel better."

The agent slowly flipped the pages of the black notebook in which he kept his listings. He gave them a long appraising look.

"Are you sure the house number was 7865?"

They both nodded. Dyke pulled a crumpled scrap of paper from his pocket. "I jotted it down before we went in, in case we should want to contact you about buying the house." He handed the paper to the agent, it said 7865.

The agent picked up a clipboard. He compared a listing to that in the black book. He shook his head slowly with an expression that was half wary and half embarrassed. "Er-you folks must be mistaken. There is no 7865. There's an empty lot between 7863 and 7867."

Lorinda gave a little squeal. "But we were there and there was an earthquake and . . ."

The agent looked distinctly uncomfortable. "Lady, we had a geological survey made of that entire area before the development was started. An earthquake there is virtually impossible. Besides, if there had been a quake, the seismograph at the uni-

versity would have recorded it. Outside of that bright meteor last night nothing unusual was reported in the area, absolutely nothing. Now, if you folks are interested in a house we have several other nice little . . ."

Lorinda placed both hands firmly on the man's desk and leaned close to him. She repeated in a tight little voice, "But we were there, and the windows wouldn't open and the floor vibrated and the house had no bathr . . ." She caught a warning glance from Dyke.

He placed a protective arm around his wife's shoulders. "Thank you, sir, I guess we . . . well, thank you very much anyway. Good morning." They left the agent shaking his head sadly. They had seemed like such a nice young couple, too.

**I**N THE helicar, Lorinda sobbed bitterly. "Ohhh Dyke, you know it happened. And you know it didn't have a bathroom. Who would build a house without a bathroom? Who? Answer me, who?"

Dyke patted her arm absently as he switched on the ignition. "I don't know, honey, I don't know. But you saw the look he gave us—the agent—the way he stared at us. Unless we want the little men with white coats easing us into nice comfortable strait-jackets, we better not say any more about it. Do you understand? Let's try to forget it. We must never mention it again," his hand trembled at the controls, "not even to each other."

