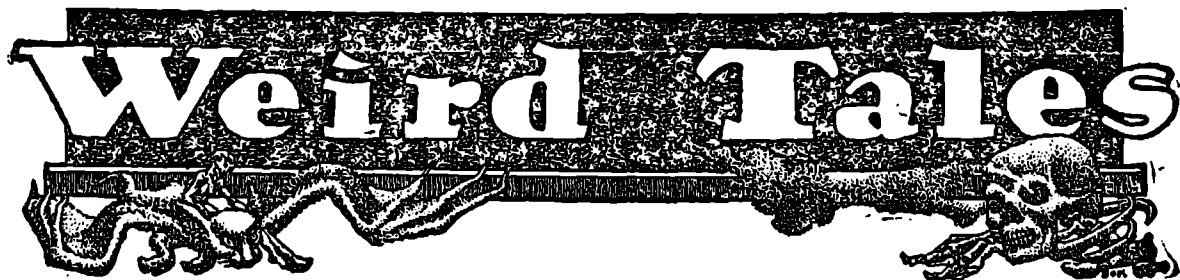


Weird Tales



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.
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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.
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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.

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PRINTED IN THE U. S. A.

 178
 Vol. 44, No. 3

D. McILWRAITH, Editor

THE MONKEY SHIP



BY GARNETT RADCLIFFE

Sometimes the gods of the Outlands look twice at Science

NO ONE could have called the *Dawn of Hope* a "Hell Ship." Although her tonnage was only fifteen hundred, every possible convenience had been supplied for the benefit of her two thousand odd worried little passengers.

Her owner, Mr. Edmund L. Donovan, had seen to that. He had told the ship's architect that "Only the best was good enough for the monks," for he was passionately fond of children and animals. Also, he was an idealist who was resolved

that posterity should inherit a world as free from disease as possible. He'd two children he worshipped. If he'd any qualms about the fate of the two thousand odd monkeys who were to sail thrice yearly on the *Dawn of Hope* as his gift from the forests of Burma to the Wise Men of the West, he could always resolve them by remembering that Harry aged seven and Lucy aged five would be amongst those who might one day benefit from his practical philanthropy.

It had been a magnificent gesture for a private individual to have made. Every scientist and medical journal in the world had applauded his action. Research-workers from every hospital in America had sent him grateful letters of thanks. An English writer who was famed as a great humanitarian had had an article published in the *London Times* entitled the "*Dawn of Hope*."

"Scientists all over the world," said the article, "must feel gratitude to Mr. Edmund L. Donovan, a wealthy American citizen, for a munificent gesture which should shame our Government and the Government of the U. S. A. for their niggardly attitude towards those who work in the field of medical research. Before they can be generally placed at the disposal of suffering mankind such drugs as Streptomycin and Aureomycin have to be tested on living creatures. In the past medical research-workers have been heavily handicapped by the expense of procuring suitable subjects for their experiments, but the arrival at San Francisco of Mr. Donovan's ship with its cargo of monkeys will bring new hope to the men and women who are struggling to stamp out forever the great scourges of humanity. . . ."

THAT article delighted Donovan. He read it for the first time in Rangoon on the very evening of the day on which the *Dawn of Hope* had sailed with her first cargo of little gray martyrs to science. And it pleased him so much that he read it aloud to Christabel, his wife, over the coffee cups after dinner on the veranda of the luxurious bungalow he had rented in the Chindwin Bund.

Christabel listened delightedly. The children were in bed so she could give him her full attention. As he read she adored him

with her eyes. What a man, she thought. Big, strong, practical and kindly, and yet as bashful as a schoolboy who has had a good report. He's big, she thought. Big, reliable and sound, and a philanthropist who really gets things done.

Donovan finished reading with a self-conscious grin.

"What do you think of that, Chris? It makes me feel like Socrates, St. Francis and Roosevelt all rolled into one."

"All set for the White House?" Christabel teased.

"No, honey, I've no ambition that way. I want to help, not to rule. Seriously, are you pleased with me?"

"I am, I agree with the writer of that article that many people will have cause to bless your name."

"Thanks. That means more to me than all the pretty speeches this morning."

He was alluding to the ceremony that had attended the sailing of the *Dawn of Hope*. It had been a gay, colorful ceremony attended by many high personages. Everyone had worn garlands of flowers, a band had played, and after the passengers' quarters (as the monkeys' cages were jocularly termed) had been inspected, there had been speeches and champagne. Beneath the surface gaiety there had been a serious note. No one had been allowed to forget that the *Dawn of Hope* was a mercy ship, a ship sailing to the rescue of sick humanity.

DONOVAN'S thoughts went to her now. He could see her in his mind's eye throbbing along under the stars leaving a phosphorescent wake on the dark waters of the Bay of Bengal. In the great cages the monkeys would be sleeping in huddled bunches. Everything possible for their comfort had been done. There were branches and swings where they could play to their hearts' content, shady hiding-places for when they wished to sleep. The cages were ventilated and warmed to precisely the correct temperature and there was green and amber-tinted lighting to simulate the sort of light to which they had been accustomed in the forests. Yes, the *Dawn of Hope* was a real simian paradise. No snakes, no stalking leopards and an abundance of fresh fruit and water.

Donovan gave a sudden chuckle.

"If I were a monk I'd be queuing to get my name on the next passenger list," he said. "See the marvels of Modern America. . . . Sea, air, gay companionship and good food. . . . Non-stop luxury cruise from Rangoon to San Francisco!"

"One way tickets only," Christabel supplemented. "Ed, do you think monkeys get homesick?"

"Not if they're treated right. . . . Hullo, a visitor! Chris, look at this guy."

Christabel looked. In the moonlight she saw a native entering the front compound. He was a tiny little man with a shaven head wearing a ragged robe reaching to his ankles. He walked very slowly leaning on a staff that was taller than himself.

"I've seen him before," she said. "I noticed him this morning on the quay. He wanted to come up the gangway and a Sikh policeman stopped him."

"Shame!" smiled Donovan. "If he'd sailed with the rest of the bunch no one would have noticed the difference. Look at him scratching himself."

"He's simple," Christabel said.

The native had squatted down in the exact center of the lawn fronting the bungalow. In the moonlight he looked like a little stone Buddha. Donovan watched him with tolerant amusement. At home one wouldn't have stood for that sort of thing, but this was the East.

It was Christabel who uttered a protest.

"I'm sure he's not hygienic. I don't like him on the grass where Harry and Lucy play. Do send him away, Ed."

"I guess you're right, honey. Hi, *Chaukidar!* . . . Abdul Hakim!"

The *chaukidar* (watchman) appeared round the corner of the veranda. He was a Pathan ex-policeman whose duty it was to protect the bungalow from night marauders.

"The Sahib wishes?" he asked.

"The Sahib wishes that old scallywag to vacate his grass," Donovan said, pointing. "Here, give him this and tell him to clear off."

ABDUL HAKIM took the one rupee note; but he still looked doubtful.

"He is a very old man and he is but

resting. Doubtless he will remove himself in a little while."

"I want him to go now. *Ek dum*, do you understand? What's the matter with you, Abdul Hakim?"

"Sahib, I have a little fever."

"I believe you're scared of that old flea-bag! I thought Pathans were brave men!"

"We are brave men, but that one is a Holy Man and a priest of the Banda Bap. Nevertheless, I will give him the sahib's message."

They watched him march down the veranda steps, and across the graveled drive to where the priest squatted. As he neared the motionless figure his steps slowed. At a safe distance he stopped and said something in Pushtu.

The priest answered in a high-pitched, fluting voice like the song of a bird. In a moment the *chaukidar* was back on the veranda. He was breathing hard and his skin glistened.

"Sahib, I have a high fever. Will the Presence grant me permission to retire?"

"Nonsense. What did the beggar say?"

"It was but the foolish talk of an old man. He says the Banda Bap who is the God of Monkeys is listening for the voices that have left the forest. And he bade me tell you and the mem-sahib to beware lest a great evil should come upon this house."

"He did, did he? Give that stick."

Donovan's blood was up. That superstitious, flea-ridden old humbug! He'd give him monkeys if he got within range.

But he didn't get within range. At sight of the angry American looking twice as large in his dinner suit of white tussaud the priest scuttled away like a disturbed spider. As he went he uttered little angry, monkey-like cries. When he reached the shadow cast by the trees fringing the compound he disappeared as if the ground had swallowed him.

Donovan returned laughing to the veranda. His momentary annoyance had vanished with its cause.

"That's disposed of him. I don't fancy he'll come back. Where's Abdul Hakim?"

"Probably in bed with the blankets pulled over his head. He's got a 'very high fever indeed.' I'm going to have a look at the children. *Au revoir* for now."

WHEN she had gone Donovan mixed himself another highball and lit a fresh cheroot. He was feeling good, but rather tired. All the fuss and ceremony that had attended the sailing of the *Dawn of Hope* had been exhausting.

Again his thoughts went to the ship. By now she must be quite a way out. The monkeys would have settled down in the dim greenish-lit cages. Van Ruder, the Dutch skipper, would be playing cards in the officers' saloon; the Lascar crew would be singing and gambling forrard on the moonlit boat deck. And the *Dawn of Hope* would go steadily on, on, on, ploughing her way across the dark waters, a relief ship carrying ammunition to those who fought in the laboratories against pain, disease and death.

Then he heard Christabel's step. She was half-angry; half-laughing as she offered him the filled tumbler she had carried from the night-nursery.

"For Pete's sake, taste that, Ed, and tell me what you think."

Obediently Donovan took a sip. Then he tilted the glass and drank the contents.

"Iced orange juice and very nice too! Can I have some more?"

"You don't think it tasted salty?"

"No. Should it have done?"

"The kids won't touch it. They say they're thirsty, but they won't drink a drop. The ayah's almost distracted. Ed, will you speak to them?"

"Sure, honey. You sit down and relax. I'll soon fix this."

He was gone some little time, but when he came back his expression was triumphant.

"They've had a glassful each. 'Salty or not, down it goes,' I said, and they saw I meant it. There are times one has to be firm with kids."

NEXT morning he was up early. While the rest of the family were still in bed he drove in his Buick along sandy, tree-lined roads to the office he had rented on the waterfront.

Early as he was, his neat little Burmese secretary, Miss Ammah Lun, had forestalled him. As she wished him a smiling good-morning she handed him a wireless-message form. It was from the Dutch skipper of the

Dawn of Hope. Donovan laughed as he read:

"Having a splendid trip. Passengers in high spirits and looking forward to Frisco."

He settled down at his desk. There were many letters to be read and answered. Half-a-dozen lesser universities were complaining because they had been overlooked in the distribution of monkeys. But the great majority of the letters were laudatory and grateful. Despite his modesty, reading them made him feel that he really had done something of value to mankind.

Presently a distinguished visitor was announced. Donovan, who knew Professor Hiran-dah Singh already by reputation as the world's greatest authority on tropical diseases, was delighted. The doctor beamed on him through thick glasses.

"The whole world of medical science is in your debt, Mr. Donovan," he said. "Perhaps you will allow us to name our new children's hospital at Calcutta after you as a small token of our appreciation?"

"My wife will be delighted," Donovan said simply. "Thank you very much indeed, Professor."

Then the telephone bell rang. Christabel was at the other end. She was worried about the children, she said. They were complaining of thirst and yet refusing to drink. Everything she or the ayah offered they spat out because they said it tasted "salty."

"And I don't think it's just naughtiness," she said. "Their temperatures are a little up and they're fretful. Do you think we should have a doctor?"

"Yes, I do," Donovan said promptly. "We'll have the opinion of Professor Hiran-dah Singh. If he wasn't sitting right here at my elbow I'd tell you he was the cleverest doctor in Asia. Isn't that right, Professor?"

He drove the Professor to the bungalow in his Buick. Hiran-dah Singh looked at the children and confirmed that they had a little fever. Probably, he said, it was due to their having been too much in the sun the day before. No, he didn't suspect malaria or sandfly. But to make quite certain since one couldn't be too careful in Rangoon he'd take blood-slides and have them analyzed at the hospital.

"And the taste of salt?" Christabel asked. "Is that a symptom or anything?"

Her tone was determinedly casual. She was being very much the modern mother who knows how foolish it is to make a fuss.

"Their little insides are upset so they have a nasty taste in their mouths," Hiran-dah Singh said. "When the fever has resolved itself the taste will go. However, I will look in again when I know the result of the blood test."

Donovan returned to his office. The kids would be all right. A touch of fever didn't amount to anything. Not with all these miracle drugs like strep-what-was-its-name? on the market.

THERE was a lunch in his honor at the Irrawaddy Flotilla Club. Again he had to listen to laudatory speeches. Someone called him the most practical philanthropist of the age. He responded with a semi-humorous speech in which he said that the real philanthropists were the monkeys on the *Dawn of Hope*, and that it was to them the scientists should feel gratitude.

"Although," he added, "if I were a monkey I'd rather die painlessly from the prick of a needle in a laboratory than be chewed up by a leopard in the jungle."

He excused himself as soon as he could and returned to his office. There'd been a telephone message from Christabel to say that the blood tests had proved negative; Hiran-dah Singh was giving the children an injection and he wasn't to worry.

Reassured, he resumed work. There were callers to be seen. One of these was the young Eurasian forestry officer who had supplied the first consignment of monkeys for the *Dawn of Hope*. To Donovan's surprise he said he didn't want to renew the contract.

"Doesn't two chips a head leave you enough profit?" Donovan demanded.

The Eurasian looked down at his boots and spoke almost ashamedly.

"It's not the money. It's—it's just I happen to like monkeys. I've got two as pets. Ever seen a sick monkey, Mr. Donovan?"

"I can't say I have."

"It's all the world like a sick child. It cuddles up to you and cries. Did you know monkeys shed real salt tears like humans? And they have toys, and they make up games and they laugh. No, I'm not trapping any more."

Donovan would have liked to have argued with him, but the telephone bell intervened. It was Christabel again. He hardly recognized the voice of his wife who was usually so poised and self-controlled.

When he had grasped what she was saying he turned rather white.

"Raving for water? Why don't you give it to them?"

"They just spit it out. Their poor little lips and tongues are encrusted with salt. And now Hirandah Singh says we mustn't give them anything to drink. He's given another injection of something. . . . Ed, I believe our children are dying."

"Has Hirandah Singh called in anyone else?"

"There are two specialists. They don't know what to do. I can tell by their faces. While they argue Harry and Lucy are dying slowly of thirst like people on a raft. Ed, you must do something. . . . Do you hear me? . . . You must do something."

HER voice shocked him. His cultured, self-controlled Christabel was speaking in what was almost a scream.

He, too, was afraid. He stammered as he answered.

"Hold on, Chris. I'll be with you before you can look round. Just hold on."

He flung on his jacket, cursing the delay. As he was leaving the office Miss Ammah Lun stopped him with a wireless form she seemed to think important. It was from the *Dawn of Hope*:

"Heavy swell upsetting passengers. Many seasick and refusing food. Have reduced speed."

He crushed the paper into a ball. Monkeys? What the hell did monkeys matter when his children were dying?

He was in the Buick, traveling fast. Night was falling as he turned into his compound. With all its rooms lighted and people scurrying about and the servants panicking, the bungalow gave the impression of a ship on fire. As he stopped the car a cry came through the open windows of the night-nursery.

"I'se thirsty. Mummy, water. . . . I'se thirsty."

His face and hands went suddenly wet. That had been Harry—his own son wailing

like some little animal in pain! He ran across the veranda and was confronted by the tall, stooping figure of Hirandah Singh.

He caught the Indian's arm.

"What is it? Speak, man! What is it?"

"Mr. Donovan, control yourself. Come in here and sit down. We mustn't distress your wife."

He found himself in a chair. Hirandah Singh was speaking—telling him things that seemed nonsense.

"Mr. Donovan, you'll have to know the truth. We can do no more than we have already done. Your children have been attacked by some rare virus similar to the virus that causes rabies."

"Rabies?"

"A form of rabies. Drinking of sea-water produces rather similar disorder. I've risked giving them an injection of the new drug *pennyllsylvicita*, but as yet it's not produced the reaction I hoped for."

"What you mean is there's no hope?"

"You'd be wise to prepare yourself for the worst. Your wife is with them now. Would you like to join her?"

"Of course."

In the night nursery he felt an inclination to run away. This was a nightmare. A few hours couldn't have transformed his splendid, rosy children into those tiny waxen things with sunken faces and wild dark eyes. And the white-faced woman with disheveled hair who hissed at him across the cots couldn't be his beautiful Christabel.

"Look at them! That's what your vanity's done. If you hadn't dragged us to Rangoon to hear a lot of silly speeches this wouldn't have happened."

"Chris, you don't know what you're saying."

"Oh, I know all right. The children are dying of thirst and it's your fault. You should have left them in the States."

"All right, old girl."

HE COULDN'T meet her eyes, couldn't find anything to say. Lucy was tossing in delirium. He sat down by the cot and took her in his arms. She clung to him with feverish strength and he heard her hoarse whisper:

"Just a weeny drop. . . . Oh, please. . . . A weeny drop for Lucy."

Her eyes stared up into his with a wild appeal. Her tiny puckered face reminded him of the forestry officer's words.

"A sick monkey is like a sick child. . . It cuddles up to you and cries."

His little monkey! Lucy who'd been so gay and beautiful and who'd loved to romp and dance had become just a little monkey shriveled with thirst. And she wouldn't understand—that was the pity that wrung his heart. . . . She was suffering and she couldn't understand. . . .

"Water. . . . Just one ickle drop. . . . Please, Daddy."

As he tried to soothe her an idea flashed into his mind. At a saner moment he'd have rejected it as unscientific, superstitious and absurd, but now he clutched it as if he were drowning.

"Chris!"

"What?"

"That priest—that priest of the Monkey God. Has he been here today?"

She raised her head and stared at him for a long moment. Then comprehension sprang into her eyes.

"Yes, yes, he has. The servants were afraid to send him away. He's there now. Why do you ask?"

He turned his head. Yes, through the open window he could see the Buddha-like figure motionless in the moonlight. It was ridiculous, but . . . ?

"Ed, do you think . . . ?"

"I daren't think. Anyway, I'm going to call back the *Dawn of Hope*. We'll put those monkeys back where they belong."

"Yes, Ed, do. Free the poor little things. Let them go back to the forest. Oh, Ed, be quick! Don't lose a second."

They were speaking in whispers like children planning some naughtiness. Almost guiltily Donovan tore a leaf from his notebook and scribbled a message.

"Return Rangoon immediately"

He felt a turncoat, almost a traitor. But

he'd make it up to the scientists. Surely there were other roads to knowledge than through the suffering of innocent creatures who couldn't understand.

He gave the message to a servant with orders to have it wirelessed to the ship at once. Again he sat down by Lucy's cot. Hours that seemed centuries dragged past. Then he became aware that the night was lifting like the slow withdrawing of a curse.

The *Dawn of Hope* must have changed course for Rangoon. Christabel had taken Harry in her arms. He heard her voice as she rocked the child. She was crooning softly, simple words that might have been a spell.

"It's over now. . . . The little ones are coming back—back to the forest they love. They'll see the sun and the stars and hear the birds sing. . . . Yes, and there are pools where they can drink. . . . They're coming home, home, home. . . . No more fear and pain. . . . The ship is bringing them home to freedom."

"Chris?"

"Hush, he's asleep. My baby is asleep!"

Had the boy died in her arms? Then he looked at Lucy and his heart stood still. No dying child had ever looked like that!

His shout brought Hirandah Singh at the double. Hirandah Singh had been waiting with a morphia syringe in readiness for the worst, but a glance told him it would not be needed. He seized Donovan's hand and wrung it so that it hurt.

"The pennyllyllicite has acted! They will get well very quickly now. Look, their mouths are already moist and clean! No, don't thank me. It is the miracle drug that has saved their lives!"

"*Pennyllyllicite!*" Christabel tried to wink at her husband while tears rained down her cheeks. She could see through the window where the birds were serenading the dawn that the little priest of the Banda Bap no longer squatted on the lawn.