

Weird Tales

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*"Take Thy Beak From Out My Heart and
Take Thy Form From Off My Door"*

—Poe, in *"The Raven"*

THE PELICAN

By CHARLES L. FREDERICK

ONE early morning in mid-December we were making slow time up the higher stretches of the Peace River from Fort St. John to Hudson's Hope. The night fog had not lifted wholly and the half-breed pilot ran her hard and fast on to a sand-bar.

The shock tumbled me out of my berth on the upper deck and I heard the captain swearing furiously in the pilot house and calling for full-steam astern, then felt the ship tremble violently as the monstrous paddle-wheel throbbed and grated. We were stuck, and preparations were made to haul her off with cables fastened to shore-bound trees and turned by the power of the capstan.

Four of us who were cabin passengers went ashore in the second life-boat, to stretch our legs a bit. There was Travers, a novelist, out for some northern "color," McGrath, P. and G. trader from Fort Smith, Gerry and myself.

I was by way of being a writer but found fur-buying a good deal more profitable and had a working agreement with Revillon Frères. It was my fourth year north of Edmonton. As for Gerry, he was anything you liked to call him—fur-trader, gambler, heavy drinker, but generous to a fault—would share his last dollar with you, or last drop, for that matter. "Gerry" might have been either baptismal or surname. To my knowledge

he had never explained the matter, and no one had ever asked him. He was not a taciturn man, but he gave no confidences and expected none. It was commonly taken that he was a gentleman and had seen better days.

I was surprised, then, when, after we had climbed the river bank, and sat down for a smoke and to enjoy the view over the broad stretch of the Peace, to hear Gerry opening in conversation.

"Say," he began, "any of you chaps ever happen to be in a certain place at a certain time and think that you had been there before—same associations, you know, and all that?"

I stared, but Travers, the novelist, nodded his head in understanding. McGrath remained idly curious, throwing small bits of stick at vagrant gulls circling in the water below us.

"It was just such a day as this," Gerry continued in his slow, rather accentuated drawl. "Hot, you know, and extraordinary visibility—"

He cut off suddenly. "Say," he continued, "do any of you happen to believe in the transmigration of souls?"

I was astounded and McGrath turned around sharply, taking his pipe out of his mouth and fixing Gerry with a stare. Travers was going to speak, but Gerry, with his gaze fixed out over the river, went on.

"A day like this, as I told you," he said, "but it was on the Southern Californian coast, a cliff edge, plateau arrangement, y'understand, like this river bank. Only we had the Pacific out in front instead of the Peace. The Peace is wide, but the Pacific goes a long way to beat it.

"I used to paint a bit, watercolor and oils both. You wouldn't know it to look at my hands, I suppose, but that's some years ago. Was roaming down there—seaside hotel—big luxurious place; golfers, other artists, writers—all that sort of thing. There I met a chap named Rider.

"Queer duck, Rider—an artist too: painted damn well, a sight better than I ever hoped to, although he was a younger man and I had the greater advantages—Sorbonne three years, five in Rome—you wouldn't suspect it, I know.

"Well, we came to chumming around, as you will in those places, and finally to going out sketching together, rambling for hours along the coast.

"One day we came upon a lonely stretch about four miles from the hotel. Nothing in sight—not a house—no golfers. I said 'fine' and Rider unstrapped his easel.

"See those gulls circling around there? They think something may be thrown overboard from the boat. We used to see gulls along that coast, too—hundreds of them—but larger and they cried and wheeled a good bit more. Rider couldn't stand them—said they got on his nerves; cursed me roundly every time I threw them pieces of bread and scraps of meat from our lunch basket.

"Tell you what they have got there though, that you won't see here, and those are pelicans—maybe you have seen 'em too—lumbering, awkward things, with ridiculous looking bills and webbed feet. They fly over the water and when

they see the shadow of a fish they drop—plop—like lightning, and have him gobbled up before you can think.

"For three mornings now, we had been going out to this spot, taking lunch and spending the afternoons until the light grew bad. I was painting straight out to sea—not a sunset nor sunrise, or anything conventional like that—just broad noon, as near as I could get it—something different, you know. Rider was facing north, getting a stretch of the cliff and sea both, and said the colors were giving him hell. Between times he'd turn and regard my daub nervously. 'I don't like it,' he would say. 'What's the idea of all that glaring sunshine effect? Who wants to paint high noon, anyway, especially seascape?'

"I don't like the sea at noon,' he would go on. 'Too still and quiet, then—ominous—and in all this glare, ugh!'

"He was funny that way—strangest things used to irritate him, and sometimes he'd sit there looking straight ahead of him and *laugh*, go on laughing like a fool, and sometimes I'd look around and see him shivering—all of a quake, if you know what I mean—shoulders twitching, and me peeled down to my shirt, and that open with the perspiration fairly rolling off me.

"After he'd had one of these spells he'd usually turn and regard me. I tried not to notice anything wrong—felt it would be prying into business that didn't concern me anyhow, but one time I turned and caught him sitting there with a look on his face of such utter listless despair that I wanted to ask him what was the matter. In a moment, however, he caught himself up and I turned back to my work as if nothing had happened. I knew next to nothing of his past, and if he had a secret, it was probably his own business. I felt

it would serve nothing for me to ask for confidences, if you understand my point.

"Well, as I was saying, we had been going out to this place three days. It was right after lunch, and I was throwing scraps to the gulls, who were getting bolder now and advancing to within a distance of four or five feet of us, to retreat when they had grabbed something, as if in a great scare. All of a sudden a big shadow fell athwart the grass where I was lying. I looked up amazed and here was a full-grown pelican, large as you please, alighting not a yard away and pecking at a crust. I could have reached out and touched him with my hand. I called to Rider, to see what he made of it, and he wheeled around in a flash. 'What the hell!' he said.

"I had to laugh, he looked so startled, although I had jumped a good bit at first. Rider got up in a great state, knocking over his easel, but not stopping to pick it up. He rushed violently at the pelican, who bridled at his approach, circumvented a kick and dodged clumsily around me. It set me laughing worse than ever—couldn't help it—the spectacle of this absurd pelican waddling around, and Rider after it, grinding out furious oaths between clenched teeth, his face purple and working in his rage.

"On he came, with this damned creature flapping around me. Rider bore down on the thing like a hawk after a chicken and the pelican uttered a cry. It didn't sound a bit like the squawk they usually make, but I didn't think of that at the time. The sound stopped Rider dead in his tracks, though, and he turned to me with the queerest frightened expression on his face. By that time the bird had taken wing, but instead of vanishing out to sea it circled about and I heard its wings flapping hard close beside us. I cried a warning

and the thing turned and flew straight as an arrow, towards us, fast, and with wings closed, like a thunderbolt. It launched itself straight at Rider's head. He threw up his hands to protect his eyes, but the pelican struck with such force as to nearly knock him off his feet. Then the damned thing spread its wings again and without touching ground turned seaward again and disappeared. I looked at Rider and he had a great cut on his forehead where it had been opened with the creature's sharp beak.

"ALL his purple rage of countenance had disappeared and he was white as death. I thought he was going to faint, for he reeled and staggered like a sick man, not seeming to notice the wound until he raised his hand there and brought it away with blood upon it. Blood began streaming into his eyes, but he wiped it away abstractedly, looking bewildered at his hand, and shaking his head, as a dog will do when something is worrying or perplexing it.

"I was pulling out my handkerchief to wipe the cut clean when there came up suddenly a strong gust of wind, and I grabbed my easel to steady it. At the same moment small clouds came scurrying up out of nowhere and hid the sun. It was a squall and I yelled to Rider for God's sake to get his stuff together, because we would have to hurry if we were going to make the hotel before the rain came. He was still standing there, dazed-like, if you know what I mean, and staring at the blood on his hand. I was going to pack up his easel, when suddenly I noticed the canvas was gone, although palette and brushes were there still.

"'Where's your canvas?' I asked him. The wind was howling a gale and he did not hear me. I shouted: 'What did you do with the painting—hey—picture, you know?' The wind was screaming along

the cliff edge now, and the surf was thunderous. Rain began to fall in immense drops. I made signs to Rider, imitating the motions of painting, taking up the palette and dipping the brushes towards it—it was ridiculous. Losing patience at last I bundled our stuff together, poking his easel towards him. He took it mechanically, and catching him by the arm I urged him along the cliff to the hotel at a fast trot. The rain beat upon us, drenching us to the skin, but we never stopped until we reached the hotel. People were out on the verandas, watching the rain, and when we drew in sight they began laughing and pointing. I was wet but hot from the run. The blood was running from the cut on Rider's forehead, and we looked comic enough, I suppose, but the sight of those giggling fools roused me to fury. I urged Rider into the drive and would have made a rush through the front entrance, but he stopped me. 'Come on, you fool!' I said, impatient. 'Get inside and have some iodine put on that cut. Do you want to be poisoned?'

"The pelican took it," he said, looking at me fixedly.

"I thought the man was crazy. 'Took what?'" I said.

"Why, my canvas," he replied, still fixing me with that strange look.

"You idiot!" I said, although I confess the idea startled me, in its eery suggestion. 'The picture must have fallen into the sea. The wind took it over.'

"Not the wind," he returned quietly.

"We went inside then. I looked straight ahead, although I was uncomfortably conscious of the curious stares of everyone in the lobby, over which an unaccustomed silence fell as we passed through. Rider, however, looked directly at them and out beyond, as

though he were totally unaware of their existence. We got into the elevator. The attendant did not seem to notice anything amiss and I was relieved. Rider's room was first along the hall, and I pushed him into it, proceeding then to mine. I set down my outfit, dove into my trunk and found no iodine but a bottle of hydrogen peroxide. With this in my hand I went to Rider's room and tried the door. It was locked. I knocked. No answer. I called him by name, once, twice, and at the third time knocked again and then rattled the handle. A reply came in a strained voice: 'It's all right, old chap. I can manage.'

"I've brought some antiseptic for your cut," I called.

"I've washed it out," he answered, his voice faint and strained through the door. 'It's only a scratch. Please don't trouble.'

"I protested, but receiving no answer I decided to leave the ungrateful wretch to his own devices, and if the wound had poisoned him, so much the better. It would be a lesson.

AFTER I had bathed and dressed, however, I felt a good deal refreshed, both in mind and body. The weather, too, had cleared, in that capricious fashion which is half the charm of Southern California. The sun was making glorious splendor of setting over the headland whence we had come running through the rain and in the bay some large birds were flying low. 'Pelicans,' I thought, and pulled down the blind.

"On the way to dinner I passed Rider's door and knocked, but received no reply. Through the door, however, I heard deep and sustained breathing and concluded he was asleep.

"Next morning I was awakened early by a knock on my door. I arose and

opened it. It was Rider. His face was pale and he wore a long sliver of plaster across his forehead. His eyes were clear, as if he had slept well, but his manner was diffident.

"He apologized at first. Had been a fool, he said. Unstrung, he supposed. That rain coming, when it ha' not rained for so long, atmospheric conditions upset, what?—and all that. I could see he was anxious not to refer to the absurdity of the pelican incident, and to spare him I began to talk briskly, while disrobing for a shower. He sat on my bed and smoked my cigarettes. I splashed water about and made a good deal of noise. It seemed to make him happier, and when I emerged he was in fine humor and said he had an appetite for breakfast.

"Afterwards we sat and smoked on the veranda. The morning was clear, delicious, with only a few early golfers abroad, calling to each other over the course about half-a-mile distant.

"Rider said the day was an inspiration and he felt he could work. I made some mention about the vanished canvas, and instantly cursed myself for a fool, for opening my mouth, because instantly he went white and straightened in his chair. 'I think I shall begin another,' he said. 'Something new. I didn't care much for the last one, anyway. Sort of got started off on the wrong foot. Stupid of me, wasn't it, to kick over the easel and lose it that fashion?'

"'Why don't you tack down your stuff?' I said, concealing an immense pleasure that he had decided to take the loss in a commonsense manner. He replied evasively, and we went indoors to assemble our outfits.

"As we were leaving the hotel I asked Rider where we should head for. 'Along the cliff, of course,' he replied, eying

me steadily. 'You've still got *your* piece to finish, haven't you?'

"I cursed myself again for being a stupid fool, and we began to talk quite cheerily in the course of our walk. When we came within sight of the scene of our yesterday's experience, however, Rider grew silent and *distract*, biting nervously at the pipe he gripped, unlit, between his teeth.

"I appeared to notice nothing unusual, and, arrived at our rendezvous, I set up my easel, took out palette and brushes and began to work. I occupied myself with detail. It was a perfect morning, the sun dazzlingly bright, the sky absolutely unblemished.

"There was a vague swell on the water, however, as though it were upheaving in response to the urgings of subterranean force, and I began to wonder at the change of tide, when suddenly I glimpsed the moon over my shoulder—a cold, remote object, fixed discernibly in that fleckless blue. The moon in daytime always impresses me, somehow, with a sense of unreality, and I saw that Rider was watching it too, his gaze transfixed and inscrutable. Our eyes met and I turned back to my work.

"Bye-and-bye I ventured a glance in Rider's direction. He had a large canvas out and was painting absorbedly with broad strokes. The contours of the thing intrigued me instantly, and I strolled up for a closer inspection. The subject was a bit of landscape entirely foreign to anything I had seen Rider do, and utterly apart from sight of anything except the imagination. It was dark stuff, with unnatural shading, no highlights visible.

"'What are you doing?' I asked, curious. He laughed nervously. 'I don't know,' he said. 'That is, I can't tell, exactly. I've just been going on, you know—started in on this thing without

the faintest idea of what it's going to be.'

"It was high noon now, and I turned back to work at my reflections. Rider left his easel and came to watch me. 'I can't work now in this light, with so much sun,' he said, in a querulous tone. His voice was pitched a trifle high. I could sense, rather than discern, his gathering nervousness. 'I hate this light!' he added. 'Why do you want to paint in it?'

"Reply was useless. The plaint was familiar, but we sat down to luncheon and the tension eased up a bit. When we were through, and with Rider lying on the grass, pulling at his pipe, I began abstractedly tossing some sandwich scraps towards the sea, when it was borne in upon me that my friends, the gulls, were not here today. I was about to exclaim on this fact to Rider when a shadow fell athwart both of us. A large body interposed itself momentarily between ourselves and the sun, and dropped awkwardly beside the lunch basket, gulping wolfishly at a crust I had thrown there.

"IT WAS a pelican. Rider was sitting up now, wide-eyed and shaking. He pointed to the bird which was gulping the food down the length of its skinny throat and looking at us out of beady, shining eyes, hard and brilliant as sequins. 'It's the pelican!' he said, gasping.

"I will admit the coincidence had me dumfounded for a minute, but the pelican walked calmly towards me and snatched away a crust I was holding mechanically in my hand. I had time to reflect in my subconscious mind that here was the first pelican I ever knew to show inclination for food other than fish diet. Then I was alarmed by Rider rising and going towards the bird.

"The thing sat there stolidly, looking up at Rider with its bright eyes. There was something impudent in the lift of its head with the ridiculous pendent bill. It stood still there as if it had viewed some Medusa-head, which was Rider, and had been turned to stone. It stood still as a carving, seeming to have taken on petrified form before my very eyes.

"Rider stooped to touch it. I wanted to stop him, but something arrested the protest that rose to my lips. He circled his hand, tentatively, about the bird's neck, a strange, fascinated expression on his face. The thing never moved, just stood there looking up at him. I saw Rider's hand close, convulsively, and the bird made a dry sucking movement through its throat. Rider snatched his hand away with a frightened look. The pelican waddled away to forage for more food.

"'Ugh!' said Rider. 'The thing felt all cold and wet—clammy!'

"I did not know what to reply. I ignored both the bird and Rider and turned back to my work. Bye-and-bye I heard his brush being drawn over the canvas, then a pause, and then a sort of frightened sob from him. 'Well, I'm damned,' he said, hysterically, half laughing or crying, I could not tell which.

"There was that damned pelican, if you will believe me, stationed in front of the canvas, and to one side, in perfect pose for a sitting, and looking up at Rider as if in impudent demand.

"A fury seized on Rider. 'I'll paint you, damn you!' he shouted, sorting his brushes in a frenzy. The pelican remained there, unmoved. Rider grabbed up his palette and set to work like a crazy man.

"I had no doubt then that indeed he was crazy, but the thing had begun to

exercise a strange fascination over me. I found myself trying to laugh—trying to see it as a joke, a burlesque—a pelican, bird of caricature from time immemorial, being painted, sitting there for his portrait, as self-satisfied as you please. The sun shone brilliantly as ever, out of a sky from which the moon had now faded altogether, but in spite of myself I sensed an unreality about the day, and the place, and the sea below us, and a glimpse of the white working face of my friend served to heighten my concern.

"I went back to my reflections, but it was a poor attempt at best. After two hours I heard a quick rush of wings and a muffled exclamation from Rider. I turned just in time to see the bird winging out to sea. Rider was sitting there with a peculiar tense expression on his face, but it was the canvas that compelled my attention.

"There was the body of that pelican painted in a style entirely foreign to anything I had seen Rider do, or any man for that matter. The thing loomed up monstrous against that exotic background, and black as night. The wings were raised, hoveringly, but there was no head.

"Where's his head? I asked, as though it were the most natural thing in the world.

"His head?" said Rider. "Head? I didn't get it. I was going to paint it when the damned creature walked around and looked at the canvas, then flew away."

"Nonsense," I said. "Looked at it?"

"Rider was silent.

"How did you get him hovering—that effect?" I queried. "Looks like a bird of ill-omen; and what did you paint him black for, when he's mottled gray?"

"I painted him black because he's black, damn him!" Rider almost shouted at me. "Black as night and blacker than

the powers of darkness—black as his cursed black heart!" then dropping his voice almost to a whisper: "I painted him hovering because he looked that way to me. He put his wings up—so!" He illustrated like a child with his hands.

"Like a child, too, I walked him back to the hotel, and he held my hand part of the way, stopping only once to comment on the disappearance of the moon. 'First quarter, isn't it?' he remarked, gazing apprehensively skyward. 'What day is it?'

"Friday," I answered.

"Not the thirteenth?"—with a sickly smile.

"I tried to laugh. 'No, it's the fourteenth. Friday, September the fourteenth.'

"No! No!" he cried in agitation. "Not that!"

"Why, man," I said. "What do you mean?"

"He gasped. 'In two days, then. In two days.'

"Two days will be Sunday," I said, "and on Sunday afternoon, as we planned, you know, we are going to Los Angeles.

"(I had some business to transact there and we had wanted particularly to attend a certain play, opening that evening.)

"To Los Angeles, certainly," he said, seeming to be relieved. "But let's get the picture finished first."

"I thought he meant mine, and replied: 'By all means.'

WE went back to the hotel, dressed, and had dinner. Rider was flushed and talked a great deal in a rather nonsensical strain. Had he been a drinking man I should have suspected him of being intoxicated, but there was no evidence of this. I went to bed early but woke up once during the night to hear

someone pacing up and down the courtyard outside. I looked out, and as the figure passed by a lighted window I saw it was Rider, walking with bared head, his hands behind his back. 'Rider!' I called. He looked up and to my amazement I saw tears were in his eyes and streaming down his face. He wiped them away unaffectedly with a handkerchief and went indoors. A few minutes later I heard him enter his rooms."

At this point Gerry paused in his story. Dead silence lay upon all of us. Travers, the novelist, motioned for him to go on. He was completely immersed in the web of the tale. McGrath lay quietly sprawled, looking skyward. For myself I was suddenly made aware of the fact that there was a white moon riding very high and remote overhead in a sky of cloudless blue.

"I hardly know how to go on with this," said Gerry, "it seems too absurd, but you will remember what I asked you all about the transmigration of souls!"

We nodded and Travers signaled impatiently for him to go on.

"Well, it was this way," said Gerry, in a matter-of-fact tone, and his drawl had never before seemed so maddeningly slow.

"We set out again next morning after breakfast, but I could see right away that there was something very much the matter with Rider. At breakfast he had asked me twice what was the date, and I told him 'Saturday the fifteenth.'

"'Of September?' he asked.

"'Of course,' I said, irritated, and then he had requested the waiter for confirmation, and the man, having heard the query and my reply, was dumfounded and produced a calendar. There it was, Saturday the fifteenth—a crazy proceeding, I reflected, and hardly calculated to start the day off in a sane manner.

"You can understand that by this time I was beginning to feel—well, not exactly a strain—but a sense of something inexplicable intruding itself upon us. Our very surroundings appeared to have taken on an unreal aspect. An ultraclarity of atmosphere which persisted despite the intense heat distorted the semblance of the hills, magnifying them to towering masses, appallingly close, and imparting to the sea a vivid and ominous shimmer.

"'Especially so was this true when we arrived at the spot we had chosen. I felt disturbed, without knowing exactly why. There was a small bit of sand near the cliff-edge, and imprinted visibly on it were the marks of webbed feet. I was hoping Rider would not notice them, but he followed my glance and came over to inspect them closely.

"'Sea-birds,' I remarked, feeling that I should say something.

"'A large one, a pelican,' he said, as if forcing himself to speak. 'Did you ever see such huge tracks for a bird? What can it mean?'

"The tracks were assuredly large, but not abnormal, and I said so. Rider did not answer. I set up my easel and went to work, but could do nothing properly. Rider set his up also, but turned that terrible canvas with the black bird painted on it away from him and kept staring at the blank whiteness of the reverse side and biting on his pipe-stem until I felt I should go mad.

"It was intensely hot, and just at noontime by my watch I heard an exclamation from Rider. I wheeled around. He was ashen and was pointing skyward. I knew what it was before I looked. That shadow, blotting out the sun a moment, lit by our feet and resolved itself into the pelican.

"The bird was sleek today, and darker, somehow, as if he had taken color

and size, too, from Rider's canvas. I have asked myself since how we should have known it was the same pelican, or whether indeed it was. I never questioned it at the time, I know, but this day the damned thing had a human air about him. He looked at once furtive and impudent. He disdained a crust I offered him. I sat down to lunch, but Rider would eat nothing. The pelican, seeing him at his easel, waddled into its accustomed place, and sat there looking up at him. Entirely absorbed, Rider turned his canvas right side to, and began to paint.

"He painted steadily on, and the shadows began to lengthen before I turned to speak to him. At that moment I heard a ghastly cry, indescribably horrible, and then felt something cold and wet brush past by my cheek. It was the pelican in flight. I rushed over to Rider, who was lying face downwards on the grass, his shoulders shaking in an agony of grief. I tried to rouse him. He only motioned me away.

"I turned to the canvas and my senses reeled. It was a human face my friend had put upon the shoulders of this horrible thing. There it was—half bird, half man. The face was merged into such dark shadows that the expression on the features was not to be clearly defined, but I could discern that it was leering, horrible. The contracted features held a suggestion of such utter malignance that I was revolted, and put up my hands in front of me, to shut out the sight."

Here Gerry paused a second time, and looked with interest at the sun.

"It is high noon, now," he said, and I glanced at my watch for confirmation.

"It is a coincidence," Gerry continued. "That will lend some dramatic effect to the remainder of my story."

"Go ahead," we demanded.

"How we got back to the hotel that night I never will know. It was dark by the time we reached it, and the journey was like a nightmare. Rider insisted on bringing the horrible canvas, although he would not look at it, but wrapped it in the tablecloth taken from the lunch-basket.

"Dinner was a horrible strain, and afterwards I complained of being tired and went to bed. I was tired, thank God! and slept soundly, rising only once with the thought that I heard that horrible cry again, but everything was still as the grave. I cursed my fancies and slumbered on.

"Next morning I was awakened early again. Rider entered, flushed high as with a fever.

"'Why, you're sick, man!' I exclaimed. I felt his forehead—it was cold and wet, and his hands, too, were cold.

"'It is Sunday, Sunday the sixteenth!' he cried, his voice quavering and high pitched as with a great fear.

"'We go to Los Angeles this afternoon,' I said, trying to speak reassuringly.

"'Yes, for God's sake!' he answered. 'Let us get away from this horrible place!'

"'Agreed,' I said. 'What about a round of golf this morning?'

"'No, no!' he cried. 'First, the painting!'

"'But it's finished,' I said. 'That is, all except a few touches, and I can do those out of my head.'

"'But the lights—the high light of noon!' he cried. 'How are you going to get that? No, we must go out.'

"I protested that I did not want to go. Some inner sense kept crying me a warning, and I tried to heed it, but Rider grew almost sullen, so that I became afraid he might go off by himself, and at last agreed. He brought out his traps,

with that fearful canvas still wrapped up in the cloth.

"It was about eleven o'clock when we reached the appointed place on the cliffs. I sat down and forgot about Rider in the joy of my work, which at last was coming right. The day was hot again. The sea had almost a brassy tinge to it. One could feel the scant grass about us burning and wilting beneath the stare of the sun. As for Rider, he did not move.

"He was waiting for that bird.

"It came flopping down before us, just at the stroke of noon. To my astonished eyes it was almost coal-black now. It faced us, hovering with half-raised wings, as Rider had it in the painting, with that ridiculous bill hanging pendulous. It was very real and very horrible.

"I tried to make some joking remark to Rider, but my lips only formed the words. My tongue refused to utter them.

"As for Rider, he was motioning, in a mechanical way for the awful thing to come beside him. He did not speak to it—just motioned—and in response to that grotesque mimicry, the bird hopped along and took up its former position in front of the easel. Arrived there it lifted its head to look at Rider."

Gerry paused again, and glanced at his watch.

"And what then?" demanded Travers, all excitement.

"It was just about the time it is now, nearly half after twelve," said Gerry, consulting his watch. "I tore my gaze away from Rider, painting in the detail of his horrible face, and looking at that frightful bird from time to time as though there was some mesmeric contact between them.

"Finally he called out, loud and clear: 'God Almighty, help me!' and I heard

a sound of wings beating. The pelican rushed past me to the edge of the cliff, with Rider after it, his face like death. On the very verge the thing turned and faced him. Rider made a blind rush and stumbled against the bird, clutched it, and went on headlong, sheer over the cliff. An unearthly cry came up from that place.

"I had to run back for a mile before I found an incline that would make descent to the beach possible, and when I came to him he was quite dead, but the pelican was gone, and there were no traces of it—no feathers, even—and yet Rider's hand was clutched as if he still held the neck of the thing and was strangling it through all eternity. I took one look at his face and covered it with my handkerchief."

Gerry paused again—a long pause, and this time we were silent.

Finally he recommenced:

"You remember that first of all I asked you if you believed in the transmigration of souls. We found a clipping among Rider's effects—a newspaper clipping and photograph. The article told of a man's body being found on a Florida beach, at the bottom of a cliff. Murder was suspected. The body was found at 6 o'clock, but the hands of the man's watch were stopped at 12:30. The date of the occurrence was September 16, on a Sunday, ten years ago.

"I had a shock when I looked at the picture in the newspaper. It was blotched, and the paper was yellow and faded, but I could have sworn the features bore an actual resemblance to those Rider painted in on the shoulders of the pelican, and yet it may have been only fancy.

"The painting! That must have blown into the sea, too. . . . Rider never was a man to pin down his stuff."