

Weird Tales

REGISTERED IN U.S. PATENT OFFICE

A MAGAZINE of the



BIZARRE and UNUSUAL

VOLUME VI

NUMBER 6

Published monthly by the Popular Fiction Publishing Company, 405 Holiday Building, Indianapolis, Ind. Entered as second-class matter March 20, 1923, at the postoffice at Indianapolis, Ind., under the act of March 3, 1879. Single copies, 25 cents. Subscription, \$2.50 a year in the United States; \$3.00 a year in Canada. The publishers are not responsible for the loss of unsolicited manuscripts, although every care will be taken of such material while in their possession. English office: G. M. Jeffries Agency, Hopefield House, Hanwell, London, W. T. The contents of this magazine are fully protected by copyright and must not be reproduced either wholly or in part without permission from the publishers. FARNSWORTH WRIGHT, Editor. Copyright, 1925, by the Popular Fiction Publishing Company

Contents for December, 1925

- Cover Design ----- Joseph Doolin
- The Tenants of Broussac** ----- Seabury Quinn 725
Complete Novelette About an Old Curse and a Gigantic Snake
- When the Graves Were Opened** ----- Arthur J. Burks 741
The Sepulchers Yawned and the Dead Came Into Jerusalem
- The Sea Thing** ----- Frank Belknap Long, Jr. 751
Out of the Ocean Came a Gulping Thing that Lived on Blood
- The Fan** ----- Frank Owen 758
Vampire Tale of China
- The Black Box** ----- H. Thompson Rich 761
Mystery Tale of Stark Horror

(Continued on Next Page)

The Sea Thing

by Frank Belknap Long Jr.



Three months ago I had a full crew, and full sails, and now. . . . Cholera isn't pleasant! Damn it all, cholera is *not* pleasant.

JULY 16—We are caught in one of the great calms. There is water in the well, and our food is nearly gone. Everything is hid from view by the fog. I confess that I am a hopeless coward. The situation appalls me. What an expressive word is *despair*. I shall write it large—**DESPAIR**. Luckily a flying fish came scudding over the rails this morning.

JULY 17—The fog has lifted, but there is no relief in sight, and the water in the well has risen several inches. The seven of us worked on the pumps all night. Thompson seemed surly and inclined to rebel. He is a man to be envied. He still retains his egoism and he fancies himself a very shrewd and important person. I hadn't the heart to be angry with him. Poor devil! He doesn't know how near we are to the rocks. I speak figuratively, of course. We are at present in the open sea, a thousand miles from land, and our rudder has gone by the board. We drift aimlessly. A fine situation, truly, for the skipper of the *Octopus!*

JULY 18—I have given up all hope. By working desperately we are able to keep the water in the well from rising, but our food has given out. We have pumped and cursed on empty stomachs for fifteen hours. Bullen collapsed. He collapsed like *the others*, but thank God, his face didn't turn black. We are done with the cholera now. I'll stake my reputation on that. My prompt disposal of the bodies nipped the cholera in the bud. In the bud, did I say? Ha! When a man loses three-fourths of his crew he can't think straight. The cholera really ran its course. It couldn't have lasted much longer. I wish to heaven that it had taken the rest of us.

JULY 19—It was funny. Another flying fish came aboard today, and Tommy Wells made a dive for it. He dived after it head first, with arms akimbo like a man just awakened from some crazy dream, and he slid along the planks. But he got the fish. He caught it between his two hands and bit into it, and finally disposed of it, bones and all. "That

was a devilish thing to do," said Thompson. Big Johnny Boeltzig cursed horribly. I felt rather light in the head, and I didn't say anything. But I was a bit put out. We could have divided the flying fish up, but as I say, it was funny.

JULY 20—Our case is desperate. There isn't a breath of air stirring and Boeltzig has joined Bullen. They are both below, unable to move an arm between them, and Bullen is very near death. Curiously enough, though, the five of us are able to keep the water down. But we are tired—tired.

JULY 21—We have one thing to be thankful for. The water has not risen an inch in twelve hours—and we didn't pump. We are too tired to pump. We lay about on the decks, and cursed and made faces at the sky, and we never mentioned food. But Thompson's tongue stuck out queerly. "Put that rag in your mouth." I shouted. It was a coarse remark to make to a starving man, but I was suffering acutely. Why do I continue to write in this log?

JULY 22—We are saved! Who could have anticipated such glorious good luck? A boatload of provisions and a jolly companion to cheer us up. He claims that he is the sole survivor of the *Princess Clara*. You have undoubtedly heard of the *Princess*. A finer brig never put out from Frisco. And she's gone. A hurricane and a leak did for her. Six or seven got away in the long boat, but my friend (I call him that, because he has saved us all)—my friend threw them overboard. They died first, of course. Get that straight. They died from fright or from drinking salt water, and my friend didn't like the company of corpses. So he just naturally disposed of them.

That's his story, and I accept it at its face value. I'm not a man to go poking about and asking questions. It's enough that he's brought us provisions, and jolly companionship. We were growing weary of each other—we seven. He calls himself Francis de la Vega.

JULY 24—De Vegie (we call him that) has been with us now for three days. He has the run of the ship, and I have given him the mate's cabin. The mate has no further need for a cabin, since he spends his nights on the ocean floor. A splendid chap, the mate. He was the first to go. But I mustn't rake up old ashes. De Vegie is tall and amazingly lean, and I never saw a paler man. His face is drawn and haggard, and his eyes large—and they consume you. There is something devastating about his eyes. Sometimes they seem a hundred years old. His forehead is high, and as yellow and dry as parchment, and his nose is curved like a simitar. Strangely enough, he reminds me of Poe's Usher. I say strangely enough, because the man has nothing but his appearance in common with the aristocratic neurotic of Poe's tale. He is boyish, gay and utterly free from gloom. His manner is ingenuous and charming. He is all smiles and assurance. And he tells stories that are almost Rabelaisian in their frank, coarse humor. He possesses a remarkable knowledge of medicine, or perhaps I should say, of healing, since he uses no drugs. But he has completely restored Bullen and big Johnny Boeltzig. The eight of us make a jolly crew. He has given us new life, new confidence. His presence is a delight to us. There is one thing curious about him. His hands are cold and almost lifeless. There is no blood in them. I never before saw such hands on a human being. And the nails are astonishingly long.

JULY 27—De Vegie has kept more to himself. He remained locked in his cabin this morning, and answered my anxious questions through the keyhole. But I was too busy to show surprise. There was a curious chill in the air, which promised wind, and Thompson, Wells and I worked desperately to get up the topgallants and strengthen the weather leaches. The rest were too tired to work and I did not press them. I have no desire to reassert my authority just yet. The first sign of a breeze will increase the crew's morale, and then I hope to regain my old power of discipline.

JULY 28—I am worried about De Vegie. This morning he came on deck looking so drawn and haggard that I left the taffrail where I had been standing with one hand grasping the weather vang and crossed the deck to comfort him. His eyes looked appealingly into mine. "Couldn't sleep all night," he said. "The ship tosses so. The great calms certainly make a ship roll."

"They do," I replied. "But you don't notice the roll so much on deck. If you wish, you may carry your bedding up, and sleep with the boys on the planks. But don't be startled if a flying fish flops in your face."

De Vegie smiled. "Thanks," he said. "The idea appeals to me. I'll act on it tonight."

JULY 29—A breeze is surely coming soon. All of the signs point to it. I have been working frantically on a miserable substitute for a rudder. I think that I shall be able to steer fairly well in a pinch, but I hope the breeze doesn't come until we are better prepared.

De Vegie slept on the planks with the crew last night, and this morning he looks ten years younger. His cheeks are flushed and full, and the greenish hollows have disappeared

from under his eyes. But Thompson isn't well. He complains of pains in his chest, and once or twice he spat blood. He is abnormally pale.

JULY 30—Still no breeze. Thompson is sick unto death. He lies in his cabin and groans, and I can do nothing for him. His pallor is genuinely alarming. Even his lips are bloodless. He complains of noises in his ears. And De Vegie has shown his first gleam of ill-nature. "I can do nothing for him," he says, and shrugs his shoulders. His eyes smolder when he speaks, and I discern for the first time a hard cruelty in the man. He is not what he pretends to be!

JULY 31—Thompson died this morning, and De Vegie actually gloated over his death. What does it mean? Why such a sudden change in a man who owes everything to our generosity? It is true that his coming supplied us with food, but we snatched him from the very maws of the sea. That is ingratitude for you! Human beings are utterly despicable, and I have lost faith in them. De Vegie does not differ from the rest. He gloats over the misfortunes of others. He actually smiled when I read the burial service and dropped poor Thompson into the sea. Imagine it!

AUGUST 1—There is still no wind. I should welcome any sort of breeze after what I *felt* today. There is something unnatural about this ship. Even the cook has noticed it. "It ain't natural," he said, "for a ship to smell like this. And that De Vegie's fellow's cabin. Phew! It not only stunk, but—"

I laid my hand over his mouth. "You're an idiot," I shouted. "De Vegie's all right. I don't know what made him smile yesterday when I shipped off poor Thompson, but he

isn't a bad sort." I lowered my voice: "He never complains, and his companionship is jolly stimulating. The boys couldn't get along without him. You have a feeling that he knows more than ten ordinary men whenever he opens his mouth to tell one of his amazing yarns. And that tale of the Spanish Inquisition that he frightened Boeltzig with yesterday morning was so real, so vivid—"

"I allus distrusted him," said the perverse fool. I grimaced, and remarked coolly that nothing could be more absurd than the prejudices of a lazy son of a sea-cook. But I must confess that the smell of De Vegie's cabin did horrify me. I had entered it while De Vegie was on deck, and the stench nearly laid me on my back. The place smelt like a hellish charnel-house. The odor of decaying shellfish mingled with a peculiarly offensive and acrid smell that in some indefinable way suggested newly-shed blood. There was no sign, however, of anything amiss in the cabin. I was so horrified that I left almost immediately, slamming the door with a bang. Tonight I shall drink heavily. Oh, I shall get gloriously drunk! I shall make a fool of myself, but what does it matter?

AUGUST 2—De Vegie has grown hard and cynical. He curses my men and refuses to speak to me. This morning little Tommy Wells went below and lay down. He was as white as a squid's belly. Something told me to examine him. I commanded him to strip, and I searched his entire body for signs of discoloration. I thought that possibly the cholera had taken a new form. Like influenza, cholera may manifest itself in curious and amazing ways. I had never read of cholera draining the blood from a man, but I wasn't taking any chances. Well, it wasn't cholera. It was a bite. Something had bitten him in the chest. A round,

circular discoloration disfigured the center of his chest, and in the very middle were two sharp incisions, from which blood and pus trickled ominously. I didn't like it. Neither did Tommy. When he saw the wound he sat up very stiff and straight, and asked me if I knew any tropic insects capable of such devilry.

"There are no insects a thousand miles from land," I shouted. "Don't he such an incredible imbecile!"

Tommy looked at me reproachfully. "Flies," he said. "They're often found on board. You know that just as well as I do. This stinking hold would breed 'em as big as whales. It couldn't have been anything else. I didn't feel it at all—didn't even know that I had the bite."

"There's something more than flies in this, Tommy," I said. "The thing that bit you came out of the sea. Ever see a lamprey's wound on a fish, Tommy?"

"Did I ever see a man walking with his legs!" snapped Tommy. "But how could a lamprey get me? I didn't sleep on the bottom of the sea. I slept on deck, and I was covered up. I suppose your lamprey climbed over the rail, and walked about, and finally decided that I would make a good juicy meal. Then I dare say he lifted the blankets, and crawled under my shirt and fed until morning. He would be wise enough, of course, to get away and over the side before daybreak. Is that your theory, captain?"

I was curiously impatient with the boy. His levity had somehow stung me. "It's a better theory than your flies," I responded.

Tommy smiled grimly, and turned over in his bunk.

AUGUST 3—Tonight I went down into the pit. Something *walks* at night in this ship. "The pestilence that walketh at nightfall"—I wonder

if the Hebrew prophet saw what I felt. I awoke from a heavy sleep, and something that does *not* sleep was standing above my bed. The cabin was wrapped in a velvety blackness, and I could see nothing, not even a shadow. But I heard it gulp. And I smelt—the odor of decay was so strong that it stung my nostrils. And I heard the thing above me gulp. It didn't breathe or whisper or cry out, but it simply *gulped*. I tried to rise, but it laid its hand on my head and forced me back. And its hand was slimy, like the hand of a frog.

AUGUST 4—An unaccountable incident occurred on deck today. I am obliged to believe that De Vegie is insane. "Red" Walker was working on the braces, and his hand accidentally slipped. He cut himself badly. The blood ran down his arm, and we all feared that he had severed an artery. His under lip trembled, but he didn't complain or cry out. He simply walked with unsteady steps toward the fore-castle, while he sought to stanch the flow of blood with his uninjured hand. De Vegie was standing above the lee scuppers, and the sight somehow startled him. He threw up his arms and ran straight for "Red." "Red" saw him coming, and stopped, puzzled and a little hopeful. He recalled De Vegie's power of healing. In a moment De Vegie had seized upon the injured arm. He gripped it forcefully, and *put it under his shirt*. He held "Red" Walker's wrist against his chest, and he seemed horribly excited. His eyes bulged. His cheeks turned gray, and balls of sweat accumulated on his forehead. De Vegie was making a tremendous effort to achieve something—but we couldn't guess what. The situation was uncanny. I stepped forward to interfere, but when I reached them they were free of each other, and "Red" was exam-

ining his arm with horror and amazement. "There's no blood in it," he groaned. "And, my God, it's as cold as ice!" De Vegie scowled. "I didn't expect gratitude," he said dryly, "but you have no right to complain. I've fixed your wrist for you. It won't bleed again—for some time!"

I could only stare. Is De Vegie mad, or has he mastered some monstrous system of healing?

AUGUST 5—"Red" Walker is dead. I disposed of his body this morning. It was white and rigid, and I noticed an extraordinary discoloration above the wound on his wrist. From the elbow down, his arm was bright green. I can not explain it. Blood-poisoning, perhaps—but I do not like De Vegie. I no longer trust him. His presence has become obnoxious to me.

Something walked again tonight. It bent above my head, and I heard it gulp.

AUGUST 6—I am stunned, frightened. Who could have dreamed, who could have expected? The thing is so incredible, so hideous, so utterly outside human experience!

I found the book in the ship's library. It was one of forty water-soaked volumes. It was a very ancient book, and the leaves were yellow and the cover eaten away at the corners. It was dated 1823. But that is not strange. Books one hundred years old are not uncommon on clipper ships that should have been scuttled before the beginning of this century.

I had poked among the absurd books out of curiosity, incidentally seeking something to read that would lift me above a gruesome world of sea and sky and walking pestilence.

I turned the pages of the little book rapidly, and laughed at the ridiculous lore that graced its soiled

yellow pages. It was a miscellany, bearing the title, *A Winter's Evening*, and the incongruity of such a book among such surroundings amused and delighted me. And then I discovered the following passage, and I had no longer any desire to laugh:

According to Father Feyjoo, in the month of June, 1674, some young men were walking by the seaside in Bilbao, when one of them, named Francis de la Vega, suddenly leaped into the sea, and disappeared presently.

About five years afterward, some fishermen in the environs of Cádiz perceived the figure of a man swimming and sometimes plunging under the water. It is said that his body was entirely covered with scales. They also added that different parts of his body were as hard as shagreen. Father Feyjoo adds many philosophic reflections on the existence of this phenomenon, and on the means by which a man may be enabled to live at the bottom of the sea!

AUGUST 7—This morning I showed Tommy Wells the miscellany. He read it slowly, and his face actually turned yellow. His small blue eyes narrowed. "We must act at once," he said.

Later—We have made our plans. Tommy and I are to bunk together tonight. We have automatics—and a sharp knife. The knife, we feel, will be necessary. This morning Tommy and I discussed vampirism. "A stake or knife must be driven through the heart," said Tommy. "But a sea-vampire, Tommy," I responded, "is—is different." Tommy shrugged, to conceal the horror and uncertainty in his tired brain. *We are resolved to do everything possible.*

AUGUST 8—It is over! Poor Tommy is gone, but De Vegie will trouble us no more. I am dazed, horrified—but I must write it all. It is a duty I owe to Tommy. He would want it on record. Tommy was always methodical, and he insisted on regulations. I must put it in the log to please Tommy.

We were awake in our bunks when the door opened. We heard the door creak on its hinges. Something unutterable had entered the room. We could hear the thing gulp. Tommy gripped my arm, and I got ready to strike a match. I waited until its soft, slimy approach became unbearable. I waited until it stood at the foot of my bunk and until its green, glassy eyes were vaguely discernible in the almost total blackness. It was watching me, and I realized that it could see in the dark. I lit the match. My hand shook frightfully, but I carried the match to the tallow wick and then—it sprang.

But it didn't spring at me. It went higher, and it got Tommy about the neck. I could hear him choke and gasp. In passing me the thing had knocked the match from my fingers, and we were once more in total darkness. I had seen something long and green and slimy going upward, and I had heard Tommy's frightful scream. But I saw and heard nothing else for the space of thirty or forty seconds. I was unable to move or think. I sat on the edge of my bunk, and my heart came up in my throat and flopped over.

I was conscious of two objects struggling and gasping on the floor. I heard a gulping and a low moaning, and then the night was loud with Tommy's screams. He shrieked, and shrieked, and shrieked. And between the screams there came a torrent of jumbled nouns and adjectives. "Green—eyes! Ugh! Ooze! Mouth! Wet!"

I finally got out another match, and struck it. I kept my eyes averted, and carried the match rapidly to the candle wick. I knew that if my eyes fastened upon the thing on the floor I should drop the match. I waited until the wick flared, and then—I looked!

Something was on top of Tommy. It covered him, and seemed appar-

ently about to absorb him. In its evil, distorted features and long-nailed hands I recognized a caricature of De Vegie. But the evil in the man had sprouted. It had turned him into a jellyfish, fishy monstrosity. His legs and arms actually *gave*. They were like nothing in this world under the sun and moon and stars. They lengthened, and enveloped and choked Tommy. But the worst of all, the body of the thing was covered with greenish scales, and it had pink suckers on its chest. The suckers were lustily at work on poor Tommy.

The suckers were draining Tommy dry. His screams kept getting louder and louder. And he muttered pathetic invocations and shameless blasphemies. And his scared eyes watched me. There was a challenge and a mute appeal in them.

I thought of the revolver in my bunk. I turned, and my fingers sought frantically for the weapon. At length I found it. I gripped the butt, and leveled it. I leveled it at Tommy and the thing on the floor.

I fired at Tommy and the thing. I had no intention of sparing Tommy. I knew that Tommy would not want that. The appeal in Tommy's suffering eyes was unmistakable. After that objects refused to retain their

identity in my sight. They coalesced and separated and came together again. The objects on the floor merged with the table and chairs and bunk-ends.

I have a vague recollection of carrying two bodies on deck and dumping them overboard. I remember that one body was long and slimy and strangely heavy. The other was amazingly light. Before I carried the long heavy body on deck I drove a knife through its heart. I think that the blood spurted out and splattered my arms and legs. But the memory of this occurrence is more vague than the shadow of a dream. Did the long green body groan when I stabbed it, and did a look of ineffable happiness and gratitude come into its eyes? Did the small body also speak to me before I carried it on deck? Did I later go into De Vegie's cabin and breathe the fresh, clean air that blew through it? I can not answer these questions, but I do not think that they require an answer.

AUGUST 9—A breeze! A breeze! The great calm is broken, and all hands are busy forward. I thank God that by tonight we shall be headed toward Frisco.

