

Table of Contents

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THE AMAZING ADVENTURE OF JOE SCRANTON.....	3
EFFIE W. FIFIELD	
THE PHANTOM FARM HOUSE.....	15
SEABURY QUINN	
DAGON	23
H. P. LOVECRAFT	
THE MAN WHO OWNED THE WORLD.....	25
FRANK OWEN	
GREY SLEEP	27
CHARLES HORN	
THE PEOPLE OF THE COMET.....	32
AUSTIN HALL	
THE SIGN FROM HEAVEN.....	38
A. HAVDAL	
THE INN OF DREAD.....	39
ARTHUR EDWARDS CHAPMAN	
THE HAIRY MONSTER.....	42
NEIL MILLER	
DEVIL MANOR	47
E. B. JORDAN	
THE CASE OF THE GOLDEN LILY.....	60
FRANCIS D. GRIERSON	
WEIRD CRIMES	63
SEABURY QUINN	
AN ADVENTURE IN THE FOURTH DIMENSION.....	69
FARNSWORTH WRIGHT	
THE PIT AND THE PENDULUM.....	71
EDGAR ALLAN POE	
AFTER THE STORM.....	74
SARAH HARBINE WEAVER	
THE CAULDRON	78
PRESTON LANGLEY HICKEY	
THE EYRIE	80
THE EDITOR	

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THE SIGN FROM HEAVEN

By A. HAVDAL

DANIEL DIGGS, the honest sexton, had dug three graves today and was unusually tired. One of the graves was in very stony ground, making his task doubly hard. It was the grave of an old recluse.

"Hard and stony was his life, and hard and stony is his grave," thought the worthy Mr. Diggs. For gravity must be expected from grave diggers.

This recluse had lived in a tumbled-down shanty near the cemetery, no one knew or cared how long. How he managed to subsist, no one knew or cared. Children called him "Old Man Simon," but grown-ups generally called him "Simple Simon." Whether "Simon" was his first or last name, no one knew or cared.

Mr. Diggs, who was of a pious mind, had on several occasions tried to turn old Simon's thoughts to religion, but his exhortations fell on stony ground. Old Simon cared nothing for the sexton's preachments; but he was very fond of the sexton's little boy, Danny.

"You come to see if old Simon has any gold in his house," the recluse would say to Mr. Diggs. "Simon has no gold." And then the foolish old man wept.

"Danny," he would say to the sexton's lad, "when old Simon dies, he will take you with him and show you a tree with golden leaves." And the foolish old man laughed. "A tree with golden leaves! With golden leaves!" Little Danny would open his eyes wide.

Yesterday morning Mr. Diggs had walked past old Simon's hut, and had seen the old man sitting by the window. In the evening he passed by again, and the old man was still sitting by the window in the same position. The sexton entered the hut, but the old man did not stir. The dead never do.

As soon as it became known in the village that the old hermit was dead, there was a rush of people to the hut. Does not everybody love to believe that all hermits are rich old misers with stacks of gold hidden in their huts? In less than half an hour, the gold seekers had literally torn the hut to pieces, but not a piece of gold did they find.

Mr. Diggs had dug the hermit's grave beside a big tree underneath which old Simon had loved to sit by the hour. During the summer when the weather was fine, the demented old man would some-

times climb up into the tree and sleep in the branches all night. To passersby on the road, he looked like a great shaggy orang-outang huddled up in the branches of the tree.

Mr. Diggs laid down his pick, took up his empty dinner pail, and started for home. The dinner pail was not quite empty—he had left a piece of cake in it, as usual, for Danny. The little boy always came running down to the gate to meet his father and to relieve him of his dinner pail.

Yesterday, for the first time, Mr. Diggs absent-mindedly had eaten everything in his pail, forgetting to leave a dainty for Master Diggs. When he noticed it, he was quite distressed and not wishing to disappoint the child with an empty dinner pail, he had plucked a beautiful red rose from a grave and carried it home in the pail. The sexton had felt that it was not quite right for him to pick the flower, but he had soothed his conscience by telling himself that he would never do it again.

The child was more than pleased with the flower and even pinned it on his nightgown when he went to bed.

Mr. Diggs had now walked down to the cemetery gate, and as he turned to open it, he saw a small white figure dancing around old Simon's open grave. A flaming red rose was pinned on the white gown.

"Danny; Danny! What do you mean?" cried Mr. Diggs. The sexton dropped his pail, and ran as fast as his rheumatic legs would carry him, to the grave.

No Danny was there; but a small empty, white nightgown with a gorgeous red rose fastened on it, was dangling over the grave. Mr. Diggs was not superstitious (he had worked among tombstones for twenty years without seeing a ghost), but now he rubbed his eyes and trembled. As the white gown floated over Simon's grave, the rose became unfastened and the wind whirled it away, but the gown fell into the open grave.

"My boy is dead!" cried the terrified sexton. "It is a sign from heaven!"

He ran like mad down the road to his cottage. When he reached his home, no Danny met him at the gate. He burst into the house and cried out, "Where is Danny?"

"Why, Danny went down the road an

hour ago to meet you," his wife answered, terribly frightened.

"He is dead! He is dead!" moaned the sexton. "I saw his ghost!"

"No, no," said his wife. Although deathly pale herself, she tried to calm him.

Mr. Diggs told his wife of the white empty gown which he saw dancing over old Simon's empty grave. Though neither spoke of it, they both thought of the old hermit's words:

"Danny, when I die I will take you with me, and show you a tree with golden leaves."

"We must go to the cemetery," his wife said tremblingly.

They started down the road together, but the wife outran her husband, and reached the cemetery first. She rushed to the open grave and looked down. There was little Danny's nightgown! The mother was almost beside herself.

"Wicked old Simon! What have you done with my boy!" she wept.

She was answered by a great shaking and breaking of branches of the big tree beside the grave. She was too terrified to look up. Had old Simon returned to life and climbed up into the tree?

Mr. Diggs now came panting to the grave. There was another crashing and breaking of branches and little Danny came sliding down the tree trunk with a big leather bag on his shoulder.

"Look what I got, Ma! Look what I got, Pa!" shouted Danny. "A bag of gold money!"

"Where did you get it? Where have you been?" chorused his parents.

"Oh, but I scared you, Pa!" laughed Danny, jumping up and down. "And you didn't see me hiding up in the tree. I tied my nightgown on a string and was waving it over the grave."

"How could you do such a thing, Danny?" asked his father sternly.

"Don't you know it's April Fool's Day and my birthday and everything?" questioned Danny.

His father opened up the leather bag. "Impossible!" he gasped. "Gold dollars! Gold dollars!"

Danny explained how he had found the bag hidden in a hollow far up in the trunk of the tree in which he was hiding. The hollow was overgrown with moss, but when climbing down, he had put his

(Continued on page 89)

THE SIGN FROM HEAVEN

(Continued from page 38)

foot through the moss covering, and had discovered the heavy leather bag.

Uncomplainingly, the tired father carried the bag of gold home. He counted the money out on the table—one thousand nine hundred and twenty-three dollars in gold.

"A dollar for every year of the Christian era!" exclaimed the pious Mr. Diggs.

Truly it was enough to make even a worldly man rejoice spiritually. Danny had indeed discovered the tree with the golden leaves!