

M A G A Z I N E O F  
**HORROR**

THE BIZARRE, THE FRIGHTENING, THE GRUESOME

Volume 6

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**Robert A. W. Lowndes, Editor**

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# Tales From Cornwall

by David H. Keller, M.D.

(author of *The Abyss, Heredity, etc.*)

## No. 6 The Tailed Man Of Cornwall

The selection of *Tales From Cornwall* by DAVID H. KELLER, M.D. (1880 - 1966) which ran in *WEIRD TALES* all dealt with the humorous and whimsical Cecil, self-appointed Overlord of the area; there were four of them, and they were published in the proper order, the last of this part of the series appearing in the October 1930 issue. Now we see that instead of being the first four stories of the entire series, they are actually the fifth to eighth stories, and that the earlier ones were somewhat different in tone. It is one of the ironies of history that if, at one time, the Irish believed that the men of Cornwall all had tails, at a later date the marauding English and Scotch, under Cromwell, would send back reports that the Irish had tails.

## ARGUMENT FROM DATES

- 200 B. C. Folkes-King Eric rules in Wearfold, Norway. Olaf is Lord of the House of Wolves in Jutland.
- 190 B. C. Balder, son of Olaf, is born.
- 189 B. C. Thyra, daughter of Eric, is born.
- 171 B. C. Balder adventures to Wearfold, kills a giant and marries Thyra.
- 140 B. C. Odin, only son of Holga, is born.
- 100 B. C. The Wolves are driven from Jutland by the Norsemen. Balder is transmuted into an oak tree. Under the command of Lord Holga the Wolves sail southwest and find a new home in Armorica.
- 99 B. C. Harold, son of Odin, is born.
- 77 B. C. Edward, son of Harold, is born.
- 58 B. C. Edward adventures to the east and marries an eagle. She lays an egg, hatches a boy, changes to a woman and calls her son Cecil.
- 57 B. C. Caesar invades Gaul. The Wolves flee to Cornwall. Lord Harold dies and his son Edward becomes Lord. The family name is changed to Hubelair.
- 43 A. D. Claudius conquers most of England and builds the Hadrian Wall.
- 350 A. D. The Romans are driven from England.
- 400 A. D. The Hubelaires are never conquered, but repeated sieges of their castle, destruction of their lands, and frequent pestilences so weaken them that they leave Cornwall and sail to the Isle of Lundy in the Hungry Sea. Here they build a walled town and live at peace for thirty years.
- 430 A. D. The Rathlings invade Lundy and attack the Hubelaires. After long fighting with heavy losses on both sides, peace is declared; but the Rathlings remain in Lundy.
- 440 A. D. The Rathlings break the peace and kill all the Hubelaires; but Raymond the Golden, before his death, becomes the father of two sons, Raymond and Doom.
- 462 A. D. Raymond and Doom destroy the Rathlings and then sail to Armorica, where they establish the little kingdom of Walling.
- 782 A. D. Cecil is Lord of the Hubelaires in Walling. His only daughter, Angelica, dies after destroying a giant.
- 783 A. D. Cecil, nephew of Lord Cecil, adventures to Cornwall and becomes the Overlord of that country. He lives in the castle of the Hubelaires, first occupied by his family in 57 B. C.

FOR SEVERAL DAYS I WAS more than busy receiving the great men of Cornwall, who, driven by some mysterious urge which no one fully comprehended but myself, had thronged to the castle to acknowledge me as their Overlord. The statements they made to me concerning my fitness for this position were most flattering, yet, at the same

time, as I heard their petitions to have this or that giant killed and one or another of the land's enemies driven out or destroyed, I felt there was certainly a large amount of work connected with my new position of authority. Still, I told all of them that just as soon as I could I would attend to all these minor adventures, because if I was to be Overlord of Cornwall I wanted that land to be peaceful, quiet, and safe. They were delighted with my promises and departed thoroughly convinced of my power to do all they had asked of me. Of course, there was no doubt in my mind as to my ability to perform any great act of chivalry that fell to my lot, for I was certain of my cleverness in fighting against any evil man or animal, even without help; but at the same time it was pleasing to know that in any conflict I would have the assistance of the little man I had rescued from the glass bottle on the occasion of the Battle of the Toads.

Finally it seemed all my nobles had departed from the castle, which gave me great pleasure, for so far I had used my library only as a consultation room and had found no time to do more than glance at the shelves of bound manuscripts. To my great interest I found on a low table on one side of the room a most peculiar ebony box on the top of which was inlaid the letter H. I carried this over to the central table and opened it. Inside was a book of blank vellum pages elegantly bound in leather, along with a large pot of black ink and a number of goose quill pens. These gave me an inspiration. For some years I had longed to write a history of my life, feeling certain that if I lived long enough I would have many interesting tales to place in proper order and thus give future Hubelaires an accurate account of the adventures of one of their great men. Now I had vellum, ink and quills and, since there seemed nothing imperative to stop me, I decided to start my narrative. But first I placed in the back of this book the chart given to me by my uncle showing the location of our family treasures, not wishing it to be lost and yet not wishing to have the search interfere with my writing.

Unwilling to be disturbed, I sent a page for my seneschal, Aethelstan. He was an old man but very capable and had cared for my guests in a most efficient manner.

"How go the affairs of the castle this morning?" I asked. "I have had no visitors, so I judge the nobles have all departed. This pleases me, for I long to be at peace and divert myself with literary work that, for some time, has demanded attention."

"There still remains one of your guests, my Lord," he replied. "He is Lord FitzHugh, last of a very ancient and honorable Cornwall family.

Usually he has a pleasing personality, but since coming here with the other nobles he has been in a dour humor. During all the days he has eaten your meat he has never smiled. The gossips say he had ambitions — wanted to become the Overlord — and, of course, since your coming to Cornwall that has been impossible."

"Strange," I mused. "He has not asked to see me."

"That may be for the best. He may be looking to slip a dagger into you."

"I hope not. Such a stroke would deprive me of much future pleasure and prevent me from doing all I wish for the welfare of my country." At the same time I stroked the Golden Key and determined to keep it always on me. My friend had promised that I would become Overlord, but had not said for how long.

"Send the Lord to me," I commanded. "It would be best to talk matters over with him. Suggest to him that it would be best to come without a dagger, for I have magical powers he wots not of."

FitzHugh came to the library, and there was no doubt that he was far from happy. But I found that I had completely misjudged the poor fellow. He was not worrying about his loss of power, but about the loss of something far more precious to him, his fair lady love.

He was evidently fond of the finer things in life and, in the peace of my library, in front of the fire, he lost no time at all in unburdening himself and telling me of his great sorrow.

"I am a man of Cornwall," he began. "My family have always lived in Cornwall. Perhaps I would have been wiser had I never left it; but, like many young knights, I had to go adventuring. Fate took me to Ireland, and Boy Cupid introduced me to Queen Broda. When we met, doves flew over us and a sparrow lighted on her golden chariot. It was love at first sight, but the sad hap was that she did not know I was from Cornwall. She rules mightily over a large part of Ireland, and there her word is law, but she loved me and the fact I was poor made little difference in the sweetness of her kisses. We were ready to marry, but when she found that I was a Cornwall man, she simply told me that she would never marry me, even if I was the last man on earth."

"That was a very positive statement," I suggested.

"It was, and there is no doubt she meant it. Then I came home, and since then it has made little difference to me whether I was ever to be Overlord or even whether I was alive or dead. For, to be happy, I must have Broda for wife, and for her to be happy she must have me

for her lover, and yet she says it can never be simply because I am a man of Cornwall."

"'Tis a sad tale," I agreed, "and I suppose you want my help?"

"That is why I lingered."

"Did she give any reason for her cruel refusal of your love?"

"That in very truth she did. She said that all Cornwall men have tales of braggadocio and other tails, the very thought of which filled her with fear."

"Do you mean that she believed you to be a tailed man?"

"Yes. That is what she said."

"Of course she must have some reason for such an idea."

"She certainly must."

"Naturally, if she really thought so, we cannot blame her for not wishing to marry you. Under the circumstances the lady showed rare judgement and a very fine discrimination. But why did you not show her she was wrong?"

"I tried to in every way I could but in the argument she said twenty words to my one, which is a way women have of winning an argument. I told her that I was as tailless as any of her Irishmen, but she simply cried and said she could not trust me and how would she feel after we were married and she could not undo it, to find that I had lied to her. I told her that I was a true man and spoke the truth, and she retorted that thus had all men spoken to women since the days of Knight Aeneas and Lady Dido and none were to be trusted, especially one with a tail."

"Oh, these women! These women!" I sadly remarked, shaking my head.

"Have you ever been in love?" he asked dolefully.

"No. I have had so many more important adventures to accomplish that there has been neither time nor inclination to fiddle-faddle and waste my time over such a frail, inconsequential part of life as women."

"Then you don't know anything about them. Ever try to argue with a mad woman?"

"Positively no. When I was in Araby a very wise man gave me this sage bit of philosophy: 'He who argues with a woman is a fool and he who tries to argue with an angry woman is a damned fool.' So I leave them alone except when they become too dangerous, and then I simply kill them."

"I thought you could help me," he sighed, "but I would not want you to kill her. Then I would have to kill myself, and our spirits would

wander by the water of Lethe, seeing each other every day, yet unable to realize that we ever knew each other."

"Cheer up," I said; "I may be able to help you. I think I will send for this haughty queen and explain a few things to her. Can I tell her positively that you have no tail?"

"That is something you will have to decide for yourself," was all the satisfaction FitzHugh would give me.

"I think you ought to be candid with me," I cautioned him, shrugging my shoulders. "I am Overlord of a country which I hope some day will be a great realm. One of the foundations of my land will be honesty and fair dealings with our neighbors. Thus we may hope to escape devastating wars. Suppose, on my word of honor as a true Overlord, I tell this lady that you have no tail, and on the strength of my say-so she marries you and then she finds that I told her wrong? Think how she would feel! She probably would cut off both your head and your tail and come to Cornwall to revenge herself on me. So it is very important that I know certainly about this problem."

"You will simply have to make up your mind, form your own opinion." He was so stubborn that I was on the point of telling him to be gone but, on learning that he lived only a few hours' ride from my castle, I suggested that I ride with him and spend a few days in his company. This seemed to cheer him, and he at once urged me to do so. He told me his mother was a fine old dame and had lovely roses and a complete herb garden where she raised simples for the healing of their folk.

In fact, I was greatly pleased with Dame FitzHugh, She was a very pleasant lady, quite witty and at the same time remarkably learned. Though greatly distressed over the unhappiness of her son, she spared no effort to make my short visit a pleasant one, and we had several very interesting and profitable conversations in the privacy of her rose garden. Then I left them, promising that I would do what I could as soon as I could and assuring them that I was certain everything would turn out in a most happy manner to the great satisfaction of FitzHugh.

It was a fortunate happening that I returned to the Hubelaire castle when I did. While the nobles of Cornwall were perfectly willing for me to be their Overlord, the men of Wales had some different ideas. In fact, they had a candidate of their own. Ambassadors were waiting for me who said that unless I left the country at once they would secure the help of Queen Broda, who hated Cornwall more than she hated Hell, and they

would come over my land and replace all the dead Cornwall men with first-class Welshmen.

I consulted with several of my mightiest knights. It was their opinion that if the Welshmen came by themselves it would be an even fight, but if the Irish became their allies it would be hard to overcome them. They were certain that all of Cornwall would be loyal to me, but there was no doubt they were afraid of this Irish queen. Of course the little man I had befriended had kept his promise and made me Overlord but, after all, he had made no definite promise as to how long I was to retain that honor and, thus far, I had had no opportunity to test the efficacy of the magic words on the Golden Key. However, I decided to act bravely and told the Welsh ambassadors to hurry back to their own land and tell their King, Harold Dha, to mind his own affairs and stay out of Cornwall or I would work a magic on him that he would always remember.

I had a hard time enjoying the library that evening. Even the manuscript of *Elephantis* failed to thrill me. I told myself that this matter of politics was a most unsatisfactory one and, just as soon as I could, I would retire to a very quiet place such as Avalon-by-the-Sea.

The next day was stormy. So was the next day and on the third day frightened runners came and told of a large Irish army marching toward my castle; and soon after other runners told of a Welsh force within a day's march. Thus, before I could gather together my own nobles and their warriors the Hubelaire castle was almost surrounded, the Irish on one side and the Welsh on the other. It was safe enough with the drawbridge raised, but in a rather sorry situation for the Overlord of a great county.

Then to make the affair more complicated, Queen Broda asked for an interview with me. Her herald, a most interesting old man, said she plotted no treachery, but that, if I doubted her word, I could be accompanied by some hundred warriors. This was most complimentary, as I had less than thirty fighting men at that time in the castle. The herald said the queen preferred privacy and wished to meet me alone that night on the grassy green before the drawbridge. I told the herald I would be there and alone as the queen requested.

I spent the afternoon in moody silence in the library, trying to imagine what the lady wanted and what would satisfy her, but I finally give it up as something that was hopeless, as there seemed to be no telling what



she wanted, and, as far as I knew, no man had ever satisfied a woman — at least he had not lived to boast of it.

So, to pass the time, I read of the temptations of Saint Anthony, and a most weary time he had of it, what with the desert dust and the lively women he did not yield to — at least he boasted that he did not yield. Suddenly, to my great surprise, two men walked into the library: young FitzHugh and the unusual person who had by his mystical powers made me Overlord of Cornwall. My mysterious friend was dressed as a priest, but I had no difficulty recognizing him, especially when I looked at his feet.

"Hail, my dear sib," he said with a lilt in his voice, "and how do you like your new position of power?"

"In a way it is most satisfactory," I replied, "but with the Irish on one side of the castle and the Welsh on the other I feel somewhat like a squirrel in a cage. How did you and my loyal FitzHugh come here?"

"By a secret tunnel. We bring you news. The nobles of Cornwall have come to your aid. The entire country is in arms. Belvidere, Mallory, and Arthur have surrounded the Welsh King and are only waiting for your command to crush Harold Dha and his entire force. Now all you have to accomplish is to make your peace with Queen Broda and the Welsh must make peace or die."

"This is far better than I expected," I replied, "but it seems to me that the hardest part has been left to me, for you and my loyal Cornwall knights have only solved the Welsh problem, while I am left to deal with a woman."

"Use your charm, Cecil," the priest advised.

After supper I donned my best and walked slowly over the drawbridge to the grassy spot in front of the castle.

Queen Broda sat silent in her golden chariot. She was rather easy to look at and I certainly could not blame young FitzHugh for his infatuation. In fact I even considered the possibility of explaining to her that I was from France and that things might come to a worse pass than uniting our forces and giving the Welsh a sound thrashing, followed at an appropriate moment by a marriage that would unite the kingdoms of Ireland and Cornwall. But there was a determined glint in her eye and a pert way of holding her head that made me feel it would be best for me if I could induce her to take FitzHugh on faith — perhaps I could do more with some other woman than I could with her — maybe FitzHugh could handle her better and more easily.

She did not wait for me even to introduce myself, but began, "Are you going to give me what I want?"

"Well, that depends. So far, I have not the least idea of what you desire. Now if you want me to help you fight the Welsh, I think we can come to an understanding."

"Don't be silly. I had another reason for coming to Cornwall than thrashing the Welsh, though I have every reason to hate them. Harold Dha was foolish enough to think I would marry him, and his offer was a deadly insult. I just want one thing, and that is the head of your Lord FitzHugh."

I raised my eyebrows slightly.

"Why Queen Broda! I am astonished. I thought you and the young man were friendly. It would be too bad to deprive him of his head, and he so young and wonderfully debonair. What can the poor fellow have done, that you treat him thus?"

"He courted me and when I promised to marry him, told me that he was of Cornwall."

"Well, what of that? He had to be from somewhere, did he not?"

"Now, listen to me, Cecil, son of James and grandson of David, you who hold your place as Overlord by some chicanery that has caused endless talk in this part of the world. In my country we have elephants, cametunnus, metacollinarum, white and red lions. We have satyrs, pigmies and forty-ell giants, but we have no tailed men, and we most certainly are not going to have any, at least not as the husband of Queen Broda; so I have crossed the Irish Sea for the head of this man who has insulted me."

"Ireland," I replied, "must be a most interesting country. Have you ever heard of what we have in Cornwall? Have travelers told you of our Cyclopes, fauns, and centaurs; of our wild oxen, hyenas, and lamias; of our white merles, our crickets, and men with eyes before and behind? Just as soon as I can I intend to destroy all these evil monsters, and I really am surprised, Queen Broda—in fact I cannot understand at all—why it is you have allowed your fair land to be overrun by such trash as you tell of. Allow me to offer my services after I have cleansed Cornwall of its monstrosities. Did you know I have magical powers? How surprised were Gog and Magog when I conquered them, and Agit and Agimandi were absolutely dumbfounded when I bound them in chains and cast them into the Mare Nostrum. I have eaten of the plant Assidos, which protects the eater from evil spirits. I wear on my body the stone called Nudiosi, which prevents the sight from growing feeble and makes

it possible for the wearer to see a great distance. For example, at this very moment, I can see how this matter is going to end."

I could see that she was impressed, for she replied, "Just from looking at you, Lord Cecil, one would hardly believe you had all these powers; yet there must be something about you, because in no time at all you have assumed great authority here."

"Well, it is hard to tell about a man just by looking at him. But tell me one thing; what put this idea into your head about Lord FitzHugh having a tail?"

"He is a man of Cornwall and all men of that land are thus shaped.

Are you sure?"

"Certainly. You are not doubting my word, are you? You will not call me a liar. It happened this way. Years ago a saintly priest visited Strode, one of your villages, determined to convert the people and have them accept the Christian way of life. The Cornwall men living in that place, wishing to put a mark of contumely on the godly man, did not scruple to cut the tail off the horse he was riding. For this profane and inhospitable act, they covered themselves with eternal reproach. Since then all the men of Cornwall have been born with tails and no such man shall ever sit by my side and help me rule Ireland. The only way I can ease my pride is to take his head back with me"—here the poor lady began to cry—"and he should have thought of that and how it would make me feel, before he did speak of love to me. How would it be for me to be the mother of a poor little princess with a tail like an ape or a monkey?"

"That would not do at all," I replied in my most soothing way, and when I try to soothe the ladies I usually succeed. I remember very well how I completely changed the desire of a lady in Araby. At first she was minded to kill me, but by my power and a certain talisman I carried I compelled her to other ideas. So I soothingly said: "That would not do at all. But how would it be if, by my magic, I removed his tail? Suppose I made Lord FitzHugh like other men? Would you still demand his head?"

"Don't be silly," she replied archly. "Of course I would rather marry him than kill him, but I had no thought such like could be done. You mean without a scar? And if there was a little baby, would she be all right? Just like any other little baby?"

"If I promise you everything will be all right, everything *will* be all right. All you need do is trust me. Of course it will take a powerful magic. I will at once begin my sorcery, and it would be best to begin

with rhadomancy; later I may have to use the blood of a newborn child, but I would rather not do that unless it become necessary. Lord Fitz-Hugh is at present in the castle. Tomorrow you can be my guest for supper. I will invite King Harold Dha to join us. Since he is practically my prisoner he will be glad to eat with us and sign at that time a treaty of friendship, which he probably will keep, knowing he cannot fight both Cornwall and Ireland. After supper you, Fitz-Hugh and I will go to my special cavern in the bowels of the earth, under my castle, and there I will do what is necessary to your lover and make him closer to your heart's desire."

"Promise me that it won't hurt him much?"

"Not as much as cutting off his head. Of course he may moan a little, but he is quite a brave man and I am certain he will be glad to endure the pain for your sake. I suppose you are anxious to return to Ireland at once, a happily married woman. But you must promise me one thing: Since I am doing this feat of magic to restore your lover to you, I would appreciate it if you moved part of your army so they could aid my warriors and thus show this Welshman that further resistance is useless; this will help greatly to make this a bloodless war."

She promised, and further said that she would gladly join me at supper on the morrow. When I left her she was seated silent in her golden chariot, but there was a look of happiness and hope on her lovely face.

Back in the castle I gave orders to my seneschal to prepare a proper feast for the next evening, as I would have Queen Broda, King Harold Dha, four of my nobles, and another very important personage as my guests. I sent a messenger to the King requesting his attendance at this banquet and suggesting that he had best come unarmed and with only one knight to attend him. Then I returned to the library, where Fitz-Hugh and the priest waited for me.

"What did she want?" asked the young Lord.

"A relatively simple request," I replied. "Either I will have to remove your tail or she will demand the right to remove your head. One or the other, or this wild Irish colleen of yours will join forces with the Welsh and wash Cornwall in blood. So off comes your tail."

"No one can take my tail off," he answered, surly and sad.

"And why not?"

"You know why," was all he would say.

Certainly in that mood he was no fit playmate for a girl like Queen

Broda. I saw that I would have to be rather clever or they never would marry, and there they were, madly in love and grieving themselves sick over the matter.

In spite of my best efforts and the excellent food, the banquet was a rather dismal occasion. I lost no time in showing Harold Dha what I thought of his behavior.

"My very good neighbor," I remarked so all could hear me, "I am deeply puzzled over your conduct. Why, if you wished to visit me and sign a treaty of everlasting friendship, was it necessary for you to bring an army with you?"

"You mistook my motives," he replied. "When I heard that Queen Broda intended to invade Cornwall it seemed only proper for me to come to your aid. I am certain you would do the same if the barbarians from the north invaded Wales."

"That was kindly and diplomatically said," I answered, bowing, "and I hope you will never forget the lessons you have learned on this visit. Now, after you have eaten I will ask you to sign this treaty I have prepared and then leave, taking a copy with you so you may refer to it in the future when your memory of these times fails you. It would be best for you to lead your army back to Wales, starting this very night. Both Cornish and Irish warriors will accompany you so your men will not lose their way in the dark forest. And now hail and farewell and get you gone, for I have very important duties to attend which do not require your presence."

After the banquet the three of us gathered in a dismal cell far down under the castle. It was a very unpleasant place, but it was very suitable for the terrific magic I contemplated. I had sent down some rattling chains, a brazier of charcoal and some incense which threw off a nauseating odor. I had a hound-dog tied in one corner and seven rats in a wire cage hanging from the wall. It all looked horrible enough, and even my blood chilled when the hound howled, which he did every time I looked up at the rats. I had a stool for the lady to sit upon but Fitz-Hugh and I stood. I began with the Lord's Prayer in Latin, said backward, a trick I had learned in my boyhood. Then I threw a dead mouse on the burning coals, closed my eyes and just muttered. Suddenly, with a howl that startled them all, even the dog, I jumped on poor Fitz-Hugh and began to wrestle with him. Finally I shook him loose from me and had his tail in my hand. After showing it to the Queen, I with shaking hand threw it on the charcoal, and as it burned it gave off a mighty offensive smell.

There was no doubt left in the mind of Queen Broda. The man of Cornwall had had a tail; by my magic I had taken the tail from him; now that he no longer had the tail she could marry him. She did not waste a moment but took the lad in her arms. She kissed him; he kissed her. I marveled that any two persons could spend so much energy in such osculations. Rather tired and slightly embarrassed at being a spectator to such amorous time-passing, I suggested that we return to the library.

There the priest waited for us. The young people talked matters over and arranged for their future. The Queen said she would never forget my kindness and that I need nevermore worry about the men of Wales. FitzHugh promised he would send me a golden chain to hold the Key to Cornwall, also some books he had which I would enjoy reading. So everything was lovely and that very night they were married by my priestly friend.

The next morning when they departed I went down the road a piece with them. Of course Lord FitzHugh was riding with his bride in her golden chariot. She was silent, but her sparkling eyes and dimpled cheeks did a lot of talking. Finally he stepped out of the chariot and came over to my horse to say good-bye.

"Cecil, Overlord of Cornwall and my very kind friend," he said earnestly, "how did you know I did not have a tail?"

"That was not hard to find out," I replied, laughing. "When I had the opportunity, I asked your mother."

We looked over at the beautiful bride.

Queen Broda sat silent in her golden chariot. She was smiling happily.

