

# magazine of **HORROR**

## The Bizarre and The Unusual

Volume 4

CONTENTS FOR SEPTEMBER

Number 5

COVER . . . . .	<i>Virgil Finlay</i>	
THE EDITOR'S PAGE . . . . .		4
THE ABYSS (in two parts, part one) . . . . .	<i>David H. Keller, M.D.</i>	6
THE DEATH MASK . . . . .	<i>Mrs. H. D. Everett</i>	57
ONE BY ONE . . . . .	<i>Richard M. Hodgens</i>	66
THE THIRTEENTH FLOOR . . . . .	<i>Douglas M. Dold</i>	72
LEAPERS (novelet) . . . . .	<i>Robert A. W. Lowndes</i>	85
IT IS WRITTEN (Your Comments & Our Replies) . . . . .		113
THE RECKONING (Your findings on our May issue) . . . . .		115
COMING NEXT ISSUE . . . . .		117
READERS' PREFERENCE PAGE (double-barrelled) . . . . .		129/130

While the greatest diligence has been used to ascertain the owners of rights; and to secure necessary permissions, the editor and publisher wish to offer their apologies in any possible case of accidental infringements.

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

MAGAZINE OF HORROR, Vol. 4, No. 5, September 1968 (whole number 23). Published bi-monthly by Health Knowledge, Inc. Executive and editorial offices at 119 Fifth Avenue, N. Y., N. Y. 10003. Single copy 50c. Annual subscription (6 issues) \$2.50 in the U. S., Canada, and Pan American Union. Foreign, \$3.00. Manuscripts accompanied by stamped, self-addressed envelopes will be carefully considered, but the publisher and editors will not be responsible for loss or damage. All payments for accepted contributions are made on publication. © 1968 by Health Knowledge, Inc. All rights reserved under Universal International and Pan American copyright conventions. Printed in U. S. A.

# The Thirteenth Floor

by Douglas M. Dold

To the oldtime science fiction enthusiast the name *Dold* means Elliot Dold, the star illustrator for *Astounding Stories* between the issue dated April 1934 and beyond the end of the Tremaine period. If he had any illustrations in issues dated later than January 1939, there were not many. But knowledgeable veterans will recall that Elliot had a brother, Douglas, who was also connected with the magazines; and his novelet, *Valley Of Sin* appeared in the first issue (April-May 1931) of the short-lived *MIRACLE SCIENCE AND FANTASY STORIES*. Brother Elliot had a novelet in the second and final issue, which he also illustrated, *The Bowl of Death*.

IN THE DUSK-FILLED BOUDOIR the blue, fluorescent mist thickened and grew steadily, and presently a whisper sounded faintly in the silence. But neither the maid nor her young mistress noticed. They could not notice, because the mistress was too intent upon having the maid leave her, and the maid was too intent upon remaining.

Lois Carnchon had to command twice before her maid, Marie, pale and trembling, showed any sign of stirring from the boudoir. And even then the girl moved only as far as the door.

"Mam'selle Lois, 'ow can I leave you! Oh, mon Dieu, you are so beautiful and so—so streeken! You mus' not be left alone 'ere in your room in zis great 'ouse wiz ze sairvants downstairs, so far away. Your grief, it is too, too great! Let me stay, ma cherie! I beg—"

Copyright 1931 by The Clayton Magazine, Inc., for *STRANGE TALES*, November; no record of copyright renewal.



She could see wraithlike figures .

illustration by H. W. Wesso

Only the quiet, penetrant, final tone which the Carnchons used very occasionally enabled Lois at last to work her will . . .

After Marie had shut the door and pattered fearfully away down the echoing marble hall, Lois, wide-eyed, tall, golden, stood still for a time. Then she turned to her dressing table and took up from amongst the litter of gold toilet implements and amber and jade phials of delicate scent, the yellow-sheeted extra which she had surprised Marie reading here five minutes ago.

The headlines of the extra informed her that Ronald French had

crashed his plane in Los Angeles while piloting himself to victory in the International Amateur Sweepstakes.

Her heart informed her that if Ronnie was gone, neither her beauty nor her wealth nor her position were any good to her any more—nothing was any good to her.

While she gazed tearlessly at the paper, the blue mist began to shape itself into something which resembled a human form. But Lois was very intent upon another matter. In her bathroom cabinet stood a bottle of oxalic acid with which Marie occasionally rinsed stains from the porcelain fixtures. It would be hideous stuff to manage, she thought, but it was ready for instant use, and that was what counted.

She entered the bathroom and took the bottle from its place on the highest shelf of the medicine cabinet. Deciding quickly that it would be best to go to her bed, where she could stifle her groans in the pillows, as acid drinkers had done from time immemorial, she snapped out the bathroom light and turned. And then, in the doorway between bath and bedroom, she stopped quite still. The sudden tension of her right hand nearly shattered the bottle of the skull and cross-bones.

On the edge of the bed, looking at her, sat a white-haired old man with a tortured face. Shimmery. Real, yet evanescent. The rich blue silk of the dressing gown he wore was sticky and sodden with the blood which welled from a wound under his heart.

"Uncle John," Lois whispered.

"Yes," came back in a whisper lower still, a thready whisper. "I am John Carnchon who died fourteen months ago rather than face the poverty left me by a certain drop in stocks . . . I must talk with you, Lois."

"Why?"

"You know why. Because of that bottle you are holding."

"Ah . . . You have come back across the border to try to dissuade me?"

The old man sighed. Slowly the blood from the wound under his heart seeped down the blue robe until it began to drip upon the floor in a dark puddle. Yet Lois now found herself above being affected either by that or the old man's presence. Death loomed so close that Uncle John's appearance seemed natural; and the greatness of her own suffering prevented her from understanding his.

"Why do you do it, Lois?" he asked suddenly.

"You know what happened to Ronnie French this afternoon?"

"Yes, my dear, but even so . . ."

"Uncle, I can't go on without him. The only possible thing—" Her hand closed tightly about the bottle.

"Lois." The whisper became louder, almost stern. "Lois, look at me well—at my face; at my blood. Does that not make you ask yourself if you are acting wisely? Does that not make you hesitate?"

She shook her head.

Again the old man sighed. "You see what is there, but you do not understand. Your suffering is so intense that it prevents you from understanding. Poor child . . . Lois, if I commanded you to put your bottle aside, would you obey?"

"If death," she answered simply, "brings any insight at all, you must know that I could not."

A long silence followed. A silence in which the old man and the girl each suffered according to their own destinies. Then:

"Lois, since you refuse an order to put your bottle back where you found it, and since you suffer so greatly that you are blind to the warning a dead man has come here to give you, *will* you do one thing for me?"

"What?"

"Will you, instead of drinking the acid here, go to the Hotel Belton to do it?"

"Why, that is where you . . ." She started a little.

"Yes. I want you to go to the hotel and register, and I request that when you do so, you insist upon having a room on the fourteenth floor or higher. After that, I request that you walk up to your room. Remember those two things: the fourteenth floor or higher, and walk up to your room. Will you do it for me?"

Lois stood very still for a time. The bedroom was almost dark now. It seemed to her that the figure of the white-haired man, her uncle, was becoming less distinct.

"I will do what you ask," she answered finally. "I am afraid that you can never prevent me from joining you, but I feel as if you had tried to help me . . . I am grateful."

"Good." The whisper came faintly indeed.

As she moved toward the bed, the shimmer there vanished, and the dark pool on the floor.

Though the conversation with a dead man had been a thing unparalleled in her experience, she felt no fear. Now that she herself was so close to death, it seemed but natural that she should speak with the dead.

She managed to leave the house without exciting suspicion by re-

questing the butler to tell the other servants that she felt better and was going for a walk. A taxi which she signalled on Fifth Avenue, just below the great Carnchon house, bore her slowly through the heavy traffic of the evening toward the Belton.

Beyond the park the sun had set, and lights were beginning to twinkle; the faces which filled the cars about her, the faces of pedestrians on the sidewalks, showed that that day had been fine and that the world seemed good to many. Yet always she heard the shrill cries of newsboys calling the extra, and always she saw the only one face, Ronnie's . . .

A block away from the Belton she left the cab. It was impossible to sit longer, inert, while the driver wormed through the last interminable traffic.

Indeed, as she stood at the edge of the sidewalk, with clattering trucks, squawking cabs, sleek limousines streaming past endlessly, her tearless grief became unendurable. And suddenly a thing which was almost inevitable happened, despite her original sincere intention of keeping her compact with the dead. She asked herself why she should obey that old man, her uncle. The Belton was so far away still. The downward tide of traffic had just been released by the officer in the center of the street. If she hurled herself into the midst of it . . .

But even before her resolve became firm, she gave a start and drew back. Out in the street a whistle was shrilling frantically. Brakes screeching, the down traffic came to a halt. Wonderingly, as she gazed at the man with the whistle, she saw that he was startled and unnerved, that he had become a puppet worked by some power outside himself. So great was the power that it even made its puppet signal brusquely to her to pass in front of the raggedly halted line of vehicles. The last she saw was that the man had released the cars again and was holding his hands over his eyes. In her ears sounded a thready whisper.

"The Belton. Fourteenth floor. Walk up."

"I want a suite on the fourteenth floor or higher," she found herself saying to a desk clerk a few minutes later, as she wrote her name none too steadily on the registry card the man had handed her.

The headlines of the extra glared at her from a table behind the clerk's wicket. And the man knew her, had known her uncle. It was plain that he was troubled by her appearance, unattended, at the hotel. She forestalled interference, however, by assuming a manner which he could readily question, and then, thinking quickly, she cut off his inevitable question about luggage by saying that hers would follow.

"No need for you to come up, Charles. I believe I've been in 1420 before. I will ring if I need you."

"Thank you, Miss Carnchon, very much!"

There was no one else to trouble her now. In the crowded lobby it was easy to mingle with sauntering groups while she moved toward the first of the many flights of stairs which she must ascend. She heard two men in front of her discussing the crash and herself in connection with it. They seemed to feel that it was a tough break for the girl, especially as the papers had it that her feeling for French was above ordinary; but they also seemed to feel that the Carnchon income would help her get over it. Perceiving, as she never had before, the actual worth of her money, she hugged close under her arm the handbag which contained the small bottle, and went on until she felt the soft carpet of the first staircase under her feet.

She had not reached the first landing before she knew that she was being watched, guarded, and almost guided. Try as she might, though, she could see nothing. Nor was the whisper there. It was only a sense of being surrounded by presences which would close in and cut off retreat should she turn back, or seek an elevator. Constant crushing memory of her loss made a feeling of leaden fatigue, of hopelessness steal over her. Too, she began for some reason to feel almost as if she had been drugged. But there was no fear of the entities.

On the landing between the eighth and ninth floors, when her feet dragged so heavily that she wondered whether she would ever reach the fourteenth and the oblivion she sought there, she sat down to rest. Looking about her, she realized in a dull way that this landing was identical with all the others she had passed. There was a window which overlooked the city; an ornate, soft lounge, potted palms; and, facing each lounge, almost filling the space between the two floors, a tall mirror . . . While she sat on the lounge looking into the mirror, she thought she could see a group of wraithlike figures hovering close, stealing furtive glances at her. They vanished, though, when she looked hard. She arose, mounted slowly to the ninth floor, and thence to the tenth and the eleventh.

"There is no thirteenth floor in this hotel," she thought dully as she gained the twelfth floor and turned to face the upward steps which would carry her to the fourteenth. "There is no thirteenth floor in most hotels. Many are superstitious, and that is why . . ."

And that marked the end of the first phase of her peculiar experience. No sooner were the words about the thirteenth floor in her mind, than

a dry whisper sounded beside her, and she knew that some change had come.

"You're wrong about the thirteenth floor," the whisper creaked. "There is a thirteenth floor, and, my dear, it's crowded. All permanent guests. God help us."

She stopped climbing and stood still, halfway up the steps which led to the landing between the twelfth and fourteenth floors.

There was a thirteenth floor? A floor filled with permanent guests? . . . What did it mean? And what was happening to her?

Why it was she could not say, but all at once the apathy which had made her fearless so long left her, and remembrance of the dry, husking whisper which had sounded in her ears filled her with horror.

"Uncle John," she whispered through a throat suddenly constricted, "is that you?"

Against a tapestry depicting a wine cellar in an abbey, a shadow moved oddly.

"Uncle John! Uncle John!"

Just above her, where the shadow had passed, grew on the steps a slowly widening pool of dark red. Blood was dripping heavily from a wound. No wraith of a form became visible, though, and no one spoke.

"Oh, my God! Uncle, what have you made happen to me? I wasn't afraid at first. But now —"

What *had* happened? What was there about the thirteenth floor which should—She did not know, but quick as a flash she knew she could not stand it. The elevators! She whirled to run back down to them, a scream welling up behind rigid lips.

"But you can't scream!" sounded in her ears.

And she could not. And bloody prints of naked, spongy feet slopped out on the steps below. Prints from invisible feet. Prints that barred retreat from the hideous staircase. Clammy as the touch of putrescent corruption, a hand gripped her shoulder.

"The stairs!" came a rasping order.

It was a terribly changed Lois who reeled about and faced upward, coerced by what seemed the ultimate power directing the universe. Gone the girl so stunned by shock that she could not understand the torture gleaming redly in an old man's eyes. In her place, a palpitant, golden girl confronted by stark horror.

She was standing halfway up to the landing above the twelfth floor. Since the stairs could not be avoided, the thing was to run and keep running until she reached the fourteenth floor, and the warmly lighted



corridor, and people who would come out of friendly doors at her cry. She did run, and knew that she was making headway because there flashed into view the potted palms, the ornate lounge, the mirror of the landing between the twelfth and fourteenth floors. Panting, striving wildly to reach steps which would carry her higher, she gained the landing and swung to the right—and tripped across a thing which yielded like the flesh of an invisible corpse.

A faint moan reached her ears. She fell.

After a time she realized that she had fallen across the lounge. And knew that there could be no escape. The spongy prints of naked, bloody feet guarded the stairs. If she moved, cold hands sought her ankles, pressed soggily against her shoulders. She sank back against the cushions.

"You must see what here is to be seen," whispered someone out of nothingness. "It is true that a premonition of what exists here broke through your apathy a moment ago and left you afraid. It is true that even as much as you have seen would make you think twice before drinking the contents of the bottle in your bag. But now you must see all, for you could have been spared the ordeal only had you understood the warning and obeyed the command which was given you back in your bedroom . . . There are reasons why you should not try to end your pain. You must see all, and then decide."

For a moment she beheld her own lovely image reflected in the mirror. Then, across the crystal, whirling and swirling, drifted a gray smoke out of which grew eyes—horrible, tortured eyes. The mirror remained no longer; in its place loomed an open corridor, dark and gloomy, lit wanly by a phosphorescent glare.

She could not move. Her will was gone.

Come!" Her uncle was standing beside her, his eyes swollen with pain, his face stern, his voice louder than she had yet heard it. There was no resisting him, and she arose; or at least some part that seemed herself, arose. Together they took a step forward.

The corridor did not vanish. Instead, the refracted, sulfurious light grew stronger, and, as the old man extended his arm that she might steady herself upon it, she saw that the place was thronged with people.

Men, women, garbed in an unnatural array of nightgowns, street dress, dating back to 1908 made her realize in a dim way that the Belton had taken in its first guests in that year. There was a deadness to the air, and no man or woman breathed. Many were hideous with wounds and terrible disfigurements which gaped in their flesh. The

expression of white faces was agonized beyond the power of human senses to comprehend.

"This, ladies and gentlemen." John Carnchon announced in a stiff, creaking voice, "is my niece, Lois Carnchon. You know my niece's story. Greet her and then continue with what is ordained."

Lois found herself powerless to cry out, and never for a second did the arm which supported her relax its powerful grip. While the hideous ones drew closer, darting furtive glances, whispering dryly amongst themselves, while they approached, never touching her, but always reaching with puffy, dead hands, she tried to close her eyes only to find that in this place eyes never closed.

"This, Lois," her escort told her, "is the thirteenth floor of the Belton."

"But there is no thirteenth floor! Above the twelfth floor stands the fourteenth. There is no thirteenth floor!"

"Yes," came in a sure, mournful tone, "there is a thirteenth floor. There is such a floor in nearly every house in every city in the world. Only very happy houses, or houses new and never inhabited, lack a thirteenth floor. Watch!"

She breathed an odor of death and stagnation. She wrenched backward. But she found herself held as by a strait-jacket.

"You must watch," said that mournful, leathery, voice. "It is ordained."

And the group who had crowded close fell back to flatten themselves against the wall, nightgowns, evening clothes hanging deadly upon them, wounds showing red, ghastly. The whispering ceased. The blue lights grew brighter. The corridor was a stage, long and narrow, brightly illuminated, a stage watched desperately by rows of burning eyes.

"Let me go! Uncle, let me go!"

"You may not go."

"I tell you I can't stand it. I am breaking!"

"You will not break. You will watch to the end. It is ordained."

To the smell of death was added an odd odor of hemp. Instantly fell upon the whole corridor a leaden silence. A tall man, fair haired, handsome but for his flabby mouth, shambled forward, leading an hysterical, full-lipped woman. On one arm he bore a coil of new, hempen rope.

"Lovers who were denied each other through the bonds of marriage with another," John Carnchon said hollowly. "Instead of making something decent out of the cravings of a futile passion, they did this."

Out of the glaring blue of the corridor materialized a half visible

garret room, moldy and dusty, with stark rafters jutting through the gloom of the peaked roof. Two discarded chairs, one with a broken back, teetered in a black corner. While the woman whispered incoherent sentences, mixed words of passion and despair, the man scraped the chairs over the floor to a spot beneath a rafter. With a penknife which he opened with a click, he hacked through the rope, and, working with twitching hands, tied in each of the two lengths of yellow hemp a hangman's noose.

As the two mounted the chairs, and the man tested carefully the strength of the ropes which he had made fast to the rafter, a queer look came into their faces. Some urge of sanity from within seemingly made them hesitate. But the moment passed. More than ever the flabby weakness of the man's mouth and the unbridled hysteria in the woman's dark eyes stood out. About their necks the nooses were adjusted and drawn taut. They bade each other a crazed farewell. The woman began to sob harshly. At a word from the man, they kicked away the chairs

...

Lois stood still, watching them die, unable to close her eyes.

The picture of the garret faded soon, and once more the corridor became visible, but now a change had come over its inhabitants. The men and women rocked back and forth in torture, and their shrieks and sobbing moans rose loud in the dead air.

"The thirteenth floor," whispered the old man, while with one hand he clawed spasmodically at the dripping wound under his heart. "Each time any one of us re-enacts his deed, all of us feel the whole pain of it. And it goes on all the time. All the time . . ."

"Uncle, let me go! I am not dead yet. I have done nothing. It is not right that I should be made to see this! Let me—"

"You may not go."

Even then the blue light from the corridor was clouding again and from the blur was emerging another room. A room in a hotel, this time. A man distinguished in appearance, with beautiful thick white hair, was reading from a paper the news that Evan Markley's misappropriation of Gulf State National's funds had been detected and that Evan Markley was being traced.

After a time Evan Markley rose and entered the bathroom. His touch on a switch flooded the room with light. From a shelf he picked up something with a black handle and a glittering blade. On a table beneath the light he placed a mirror, and then seated himself before the

glass in such a position that the hand which held the razor might be truly directed.

Presently he moved his hand. Horror came into his eyes. He slumped forward across the table. An outflung arm sent the mirror to the white tiled floor with a crash. Then it was over, and he ceased to move.

"The thirteenth floor," came a whisper as the scene faded and the corridor with its pain-wracked throng became visible once more. "Night and day are one with us who dwell here. We do not sleep. During the reaches of time we murder ourselves over and over again."

The girl beside the old man could not even moan further protest. To her shuddering consciousness came an awful whisper.

"You will watch this. This is for you. Acid . . ."

A tornado of rank mist blotted out the blue. Against the mist a blonde girl in an evening wrap of ermine stood snarling abuse at someone who never answered. The girl was spoiled, beautiful. At the one who never answered she shrieked that she would get even, and jerked from under her wrap a bottle that reeked of carbolic acid. Straight to her petulant lips she carried the bottle and drank furiously in long gulps.

When her agony had only begun, a look of consummate fear blazed into her eyes, and she hurled the bottle from her, wailing. But she wailed too late. A long splash of the acid which had spilled across the white fur of her mantle was eating visibly; and she had swallowed a yet greater amount. The girl tottered, collapsed, and lay on her side, convulsed.

While the mist faded, and the blue corridor with its ranks of suffering inhabitants began to stand out clearly again, Lois stood transfixed. She was paralyzed. Her soul was cold. The power to think, even the power to feel, had almost left her. Knowing only that during this last wrenching tragedy something had broken in her, that some vital, far-reaching change had come upon her, she felt herself swaying.

"You have stopped thinking about the bottle in your bag," whispered the old man at her side.

"I ceased to think of that long ago."

"And you have even given up the futile thought of trying to escape."

"I know that I cannot escape so long as it is ordered that I remain here, and I know that to remain is good for me."

"And you are pitying us!"

"Yes," she gasped. "Oh, yes! I—I think I am not even horrified any more. It is all so pitiable! Oh, if only I could help you, help all of you, I would do anything, give anything!"

"Ah," whispered the old man, "but if you have learned to pity us, you have seen enough . . ."

And even as Lois listened humbly to the words, she saw the blue fade out and felt herself swooping down through rushing, tearing layers of darkness. She returned to consciousness to find herself at home in her own bed. Little Marie was bending over her. Little Marie was bending over her. In a few moments she was lucid enough to understand from the torrent of excited, thankful words which poured out the moment she opened her eyes, that the manager of the Belton had found her lying on the landing between the twelfth and fourteenth floors, and had himself accompanied her home in an ambulance.

Marie did not ask questions about how she had come to be lying unconscious on that landing. Instead she moved quietly to the dressing table and turned back with the yellow envelope of a telegram in her hand.

"It came a very few minutes after you left the 'ouse, ma cherie," she said, and gave Lois the message.

Slowly, but with the quiet strength of a woman resigned to misfortune, Lois tore the flap. Slowly she unfolded the sheet which dropped from the envelope. With the thought brooding in her heart that this would bring sad confirmation of news she had received before, she yet took consolation from the knowledge that she could read and still go on bravely, steadily.

But the message was not the one she had expected.

She uttered a low cry.

"Ronald French," she read, "has suffered a fractured skull and three broken ribs, but he will recover. Resting quietly in hospital. Advise that you come to Los Angeles to be with him during convalescence if possible."

It was an hour later, just as she was leaving her room to start for the train, that she saw the last of the white-haired old man. From a fluorescent mist which shimmered in one corner he emerged. And he was smiling.

"Ronnie loved you so much," he whispered, "that he was kept alive even though another, in his case, would have died. That made it necessary that you should be saved, and to us it was given to preserve you . . . And see, Lois," he whispered on, pointing toward his heart, "what *you* have done for us! It is because you pitied us, my dear . . ."

Staring with blue eyes which widened slowly, she saw that blood had ceased to drip from an open wound beneath the heart, and that the wound itself had healed.