

WEIRD TALES *The Unique Magazine*

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THE THUNDER VOICE

The Story of a Hairy Monster

By F. WALTER WILSON

IT WAS my grandfather who told me of The Thunder Voice, and of the terror which it spread throughout the Valley of Trelane away back in the early days, when scattered Indians hunted the forests thereabouts—told me of how the gruesome horror of it changed strong men into whimpering weaklings, afraid to step beyond their thresholds after dark.

Perhaps I was a morbid child, for it was on wild storm-ridden nights, when the rain splashed in sheets against the windows and the raving wind screamed dismally about the eaves of the big house, that I would climb upon his knee and beg for 'The Thunder Stories,' as I had come to call them.

Full well I knew that I would later creep up the dark stairs with quaking knees, and with my heart pounding against my ribs—knew too, that I would lie awake, with the blankets drawn tightly over my head, and listen, yet dread to hear—the Thunder Voice!

The Indians had so named it—for that is what their word "Namshka" meant—but grandpa himself had heard The Thunder Voice, when he was no older than I, and he assured me that it was little akin to thunder in its tone, although it came to be known in the valley by the name the Indians had given it.

It was on the night Jeanne Delloux had died in the pine-wood coffin in the best room of Bartien Delloux's cabin that The Thunder Voice was first heard in the valley.

It was a custom, when one died, that neighbors would sit all night with the bereaved, to lessen somewhat the poignancy of the first smarting blows of grief. Bartien's cabin could scarce hold them all that night, for he was popular with the valley folk; and Jeanne, his wife, had been loved by young and old alike.

"Boom! Boom! A-i-e-h—"

Its first notes were deep and strong, but trailed off into a shrieking scream—first loud, then dying out in a wailing whine.

The men held their breath, their questioning eyes fixed upon each other. The women screamed, and Millie Barton fainted.

Again and again it sounded, coming, it seemed, from somewhere down the valley road. At length the men found voice:

"It's a panther," suggested John Carroll. "I've heard many a one before."

"If you have, then you know that's no panther," another retorted.

Fear was written on every face but one. Old man Dodson—Old Bill Dodson, as he was known in the valley—had yet to learn what fear meant. But before another sunrise he was to know.

Shouldering his flint-lock musket, he opened the door and passed out into the pitch-black night, which now and again was illuminated by flashes of lightning, for a storm had threatened since early twilight.

Grouped about the fireplace, the others huddled together and listened, scarce breathing, for another of those cries which made the roots of one's hair to tingle, and the spine to prickle creepily. For a time it came at almost regular intervals:

"Boom! Boom! A-i-e-h—"

At length a shot was heard, and several of the men spang to their feet.

"He's got it!" one cried. "Old Bill Dodson never missed a target in his life."

And, thus reassured, they stood in the doorway, listening, and then called loudly. From the black, still night there came no answer. Across the ridge the rumble of distant thunder alone broke the awful quiet.

It was near daylight when they heard a shuffling step, and, opening the door, Dodson pitched headlong across the threshold. From his hands fell the stock and barrel of his musket—broken one from the other!

Physically, the old man's injuries were slight. On his swollen neck were four blackened welts extending half way round it. Otherwise, he appeared unhurt—but his courage, his well-known bravery, was a thing of the past. For the remainder of his life the old pioneer, who had faced so many dangers, was a nerveless coward. At any unusual noise he would start in abject terror,

Questioned, he could tell but little. He had seen an object—a dark bulky *something*—in the road, and had fired. It was too dark to see clearly, but he could not have missed. Had it been of this earth it would now be dead.

After the shot it had vanished among the shadows. He was hurrying toward it when something crashed down upon him from the overhanging boughs. Long, hairy fingers closed about his throat and all went black. It was the devil himself—of that he was positive.

Even these startling events might have been forgotten, if the Voice had given an opportunity to forget. Now here, now there, it would be heard—sometimes in the direction of the ridge hills, at other times from the river growth in the lowlands. Often it seemed quite near, and dogs would bristle and whine, and lie under the beds with green-glowing eyes, as they quivered in nervous fear. The horses, too, would tremble in their stalls when the unknown monster broke the night stillness with its unearthly:

"Boom! Boom! A-i-e-h—"

The valley people seldom ventured out at night; and the younger men no longer sought opportunity to boast of their bravery.

It was some weeks after Jeanne Delloux was buried that Margaret Kingsley, the young and pretty teacher of the valley school, disappeared.

It was the Carroll's who boarded her that winter, and John Carroll had gone on a trip to the lower mill. Jennie, his wife, and the teacher were alone in the cabin that night. Jennie had protested that she would not be afraid, since Margaret would be with her.

As Jennie related it, they had been seated before the fire, she engaged in darning and Margaret correcting examination papers. For a time they had been silently working when—from quite nearby—it came:

"Boom! Boom! A-i-e-h—"

Sick and limp from terror, Jennie's work rolled from her lap to the floor. The dog was outside, and piteously it whined and scratched at the door, but she dared not open it.

Then her attention centered on Margaret. She stood erect. Her face betrayed no sign of fear. Instead—*she smiled!*

Then, as Jennie watched, Margaret moved toward the door, opened it, and walked out into the night.

She was never seen again!

Jennie called to her frantically, but there was no reply. She had moved as one might walk in a sleep—her eyes wide open, but fixed straight before her, gazing vacantly.

Within the next three months, until about the beginning of the spring rains, other strange things occurred in the valley.

Lucy Duval met the monster at dusk one evening as she followed the path through the woods behind the Rhodes' place. She had swooned from terror, and, recovering, fled in panic to her home, fainting again from exhaustion as she reached the door. Safely within the house, she noticed for the first time that her long hair, which had been coiled upon her head, now hung unfettered. The pins and two side-combs, which had held it in place, were missing! Aside from the shock she was uninjured.

A school child, too, saw the beast as she came from school, and while it was yet daylight. Her parents went in frantic search when she failed to arrive at the usual time, and found her cringing in terror by the roadside. Her leather school-bag, containing her books and writing materials, was nowhere to be found.

It was a very long time before the child recovered from the fright inspired by "the big hairy man" as she described the monster.

Again, on a gusty, moon-haunted night, it was heard by Jule Darien and his wife—right in their yard! Had they dared, they could have looked from the window and seen it, but instead they bolted the door of their room and lay face down upon the bed—a fact they were not at all ashamed to admit.

In the morning Jule's clothing still fluttered from the rope clothes-line, which spanned between oak trees in the yard behind the cabin—but every garment belonging to his wife had disappeared! An even greater misfortune was the loss of three soft, heavy, woolen blankets. But Jule Darien and his wife considered this a trivial matter in view of the fact that they had been unharmed.

It was Delia Callahan, of all the valley folk, who found aught that was amusing in these uncanny doings.

"It's true—as ol' man Gibson's always maintained—th' devil's a woman; ain't it proven, right 'ere in th' val-

ley?" she demanded. "An' it's an edication she's goin' to git, too. Some fine day she'll be comin' to th' school wi' her books in th' school bag, an' her hair done up wi' Lucy Duval's side-combs, an' like as not a' dressed up in Fan Darien's clothes. *Ha! Ha!*—it's too funny!" Shaken with laughter, she rocked back and forth until tears rolled from her bright blue eyes.

But she was quite alone in her mirth, for there was none who laughed with her. None dared to laugh. They feared to make sport of The Evil One.

The long winter broke at last with a protracted period of drenching rains. Never in all the experience of the valley dwellers had there been so much rain in such a length of time. Rivers could not be forded; the rich, loamy soil was washed in great patches from the fields; little gullies, usually dry, now ran brimming with muddy water. Cattle were drowned and the spring planting was long delayed.

But when the sun again broke through the gray clouds people began to remark that for a long time they had not heard The Thunder Voice.

As a matter of fact it was never heard again.

II

SO RAN the stories, and so often did my grandfather tell them, in order to humor my childish demands, that at length I could repeat them all—just as he told them, and almost word for word.

One by one, the years dropped into history, and recollection of "The Thunder Stories" came to me but rarely; and brought, instead of thrills of horror, only a mild amusement, as I would reflect on them as folk-lore of the Valley of Trelane.

But, there was the disappearance of Margaret Kingsley. That was difficult to explain away. A normal, healthy young woman walks out into the night and is never seen again!

Hunters accustomed to trailing animals and Indians utterly failed in their efforts to find her, or to track this evil monster to its lair. Often its spoor was plainly marked—a four-toed foot of unfamiliar shape. Bloodhounds had been brought from a distant settlement; but, as with the human hunters, the trail ended at the base of a huge white-oak tree. There the dogs looked up and whined; they could follow the scent no further.

Along with fairy tales, and stories of grim giants, told to me in childhood days, these stories of the Thunder Voice might have passed into hazy forgetfulness, but for a grisly reminder which oc-

curred while I was studying to become a physician.

In the college I found much interest in visiting the library and poring over bound volumes of *The Medical Journal*. Some of these dated back to many years before my birth.

It was while reading one of these that I suddenly started into quickened interest at sight of a familiar name—*Bartien Delloux!*

For a few moments I could not recall where I had heard the name, and then came back to me my grandfather's stories. I pictured again, as I had often done before, the log cabin peopled with sympathetic neighbors come to console Bartien Delloux. The dead body of his wife in an adjoining room. The dull rumble of distant thunder, with now and again flashes of lightning. And then, suddenly, from out the black night—The Thunder Voice!

It was he—the same Bartien Delloux—his name handed down on these age-brown pages in a history of most unusual kind.

A physician had told the tale in plain matter-of-fact language. Briefly it was as follows:

A patient, who said his name was Bartien Delloux, lay dying in a charity hospital. He asked for a priest. The priest remained with him until he died. Then, coming to the doctor, the priest had remarked:

"I think that man's story is of more concern to your profession than to mine. I'm sorry you didn't hear it."

"How so?" the doctor inquired.

"Well, because it dealt with the bodily, not the spiritual side of life. It was not confided to me under the sanctity of the confessional, for the man had nothing to confess in the matter. He simply wanted my opinion, and if possible some comforting assurance. Given under these conditions I can repeat it to you."

Urged by the doctor, the priest continued:

"At one time the man lived in one of the Eastern Townships of the Province of Quebec, in a district known as the Valley of Trelane. Once a year it was his custom to go to Quebec and market his stock of furs, for, like others who dwelt in the valley, he combined the pursuit of farmer with that of a hunter and trapper.

"On one such trip his wife accompanied him. This was against his wishes, since the journey at that early day was beset with dangers and hardships.

"One day, as they walked about the city, they came upon a tentshow; stationed on a vacant lot. Outside the tent,

banners announced the exhibition of a so-called 'wild-man,' said to have been captured in the jungles of Africa. They visited this show, and from Delloux's description the creature was evidently a huge gorilla.

"After a brief look at the ugly thing, Delloux made to go away, but his wife would not consent to leave. Fascinated, she stared between the iron bars, and the hideous-featured animal crept close to her, and crooned and gently whined as it gazed at her with little black beady eyes, which peeped from its black wrinkled face.

"At length Delloux induced his wife to accompany him. As she moved away the animal became violent. Tearing frantically at the iron bars, it growled and screamed. So vigorously did it shake the bars that it seemed the cage must fall to pieces. The owner of the show urged them to leave quickly.

"They returned to their home, and later, when their child was born, it resembled—in miniature—the gorilla!"

"It is not an impossible instance of pre-natal influence," the doctor remarked.

"Perhaps not," replied the priest, "but there are incidents pertaining to its later life which I fancy are quite unusual."

The priest's story was resumed:

"In spite of the ugliness of the half-beast the mother loved it dearly. She realized, however, that it must not be seen by the neighbors, and in consequence it was kept in the cellar, but when it grew older was allowed to roam about at night. Always it returned before daylight, and crept to its bed in a corner of the cellar.

"Bright metal, and keen-edged tools, appeared to fascinate it, and due to this the father first learned of its amazing strength.

"Delloux possessed a long-bladed knife which he valued highly, and he was using it one day in skinning a fox when his wife called to him. The knife was left lying beside the half-skinned carcass of the animal. When he returned, both had disappeared!

"Entering the cellar, he found the beast cutting apart the body of the fox and greedily eating it. It had never liked him; and when he approached and made as though to take away the knife it rose and, with a shove of its long arm, sent Delloux sprawling through the open doorway. When he picked himself up the creature faced him from the door, and growled menacingly.

"It was then but ten years old.

"Delloux was a strong man, but his strength was a puny thing when matched against this powerful brute. The knife was abandoned to it thereafter.

"From that day on, it refused to eat cooked food; but at night went into the forest and killed game, which it carried home and ate raw.

"A few words of the French language it was able to learn, but not enough to permit of continued conversation.

"Finally, on the night when Delloux's wife lay dead, it went forth, never to return to the cabin. That night, as Delloux's neighbors were gathered about his fireside in friendly condolence, strange cries were heard—unlike those of any animal known to the vicinity. It inspired them with a superstitious terror—and Delloux did not dare to make known to them what he believed to be the real origin of the dread sounds.

"After that night the weird, unearthly cries were repeated on many nights, and throughout the valley people came to believe that The Evil One himself had come among them.

"Delloux alone knew the truth.

"There were strange occurrences in the valley that winter, but whether the thing was responsible for them or not, Delloux could not say. Some claimed to have seen it. Perhaps they had.

"Finishing his story, the dying man begged me for assurance that this curse put upon him did not signify that his soul was lost, and I did for him what the Holy Church prescribes in cases of similar kind."

There followed a lengthy report of the discussion by other physicians. Some argued that the story was untrue—impossible. Others considered it quite within the bounds of possibility.

I closed the volume and gave myself over to reflection on the strangeness of this tale. Assuming that it were true, the mystery of The Thunder Voice was explained. But only in part, for many questions hurtled through my mind as this story recalled them.

What about Margaret Kingsley's disappearance? Where had the beast lived after it left Delloux's home? Why had it indulged in the queer doings which were so meaningless and puzzling? Why did it voice those terrifying cries which frightened the usually brave pioneers? And, finally, what had happened to still the awful Thunder Voice, leaving the valley people to regain their wonted equanimity?

At length I gave over the futile questioning.

III.

AGAIN a measure of years slipped by, and I was nearing my fortieth birthday. I had succeeded in my profession. I was happily married.

In the busy interest of full-lived days, the tales of The Thunder Voice were again relegated to a place alongside the story of Jack-the-Giant-Killer and other legends of the kind. But subconsciously, behind my sane, sunlit life, there lurked a strong desire to know the truth—all the truth—about this strange affair; for, try as I might, I could not catalogue it with mythical legends, for somehow I *believed* Delloux's story.

It was about this time that I received a letter from a solicitor, who resided in a small town to the north of Quebec, informing me that a relative—a man named Carroll—had died without making a will, and search had established that I was the next of kin, and his estate would therefore come to me.

I was greatly surprised, but on reflection I recalled having once heard that the Carrolls, who lived in Trelane Valley were distantly related to me. At that time I had given the information no serious attention.

In order to settle the matter I went to interview the solicitor, and for the first time in my life visited Trelane Valley. A broad fertile valley it was; now beautified by acres of waving grain. Along the road on which I motored were scattered substantial homes of the prosperous farmers.

The legal formalities had been concluded, and I had signed my name to the last of several documents when I had a visit from a stranger.

He informed me that he was a Civil Engineer employed by the railway company whose line ran through the valley. Davis was his name. His company wished to build a water-tank nearby, and the only available water supply which had been discovered was a large spring, which he understood was located on land now owned by me. The company wished to lease the water rights, and obtain permission to construct a pump house near the spring.

At his suggestion, I went with him to view the location of the spring, and decide what I should do regarding his proposition.

As we walked along the railway track he pointed out the location selected for the tank, and then, leaving the right-of-way, we descended a gentle slope and, turning sharply to the left, came before the face of an outcropping ledge of gray, lichened stone.

A large, almost circular, hole appeared in the cliff, and as we stood before it, there lay, a few feet beneath us, a pool of bright clear water. The roof of the hole pitched downward at a uniform slope to where it met the level of the water.

The deal was quickly arranged, and a lease of the water rights drawn up and signed.

I returned to Montreal and resumed my work.

But it was a matter of only a few weeks until I was again called to Trelane Valley. A letter from the railway company informed me that the supply of water in the spring had failed, and they wished to cancel the lease.

The letter invited me to come and see for myself, and a few days later I again stood at the mouth of the huge hole which opened into the upright face of the cliff.

But now the water had receded until, from the entrance, one could discern only a black pool, far underground. The hole in the cliff was now the entrance to a cave of impressive dimensions. The shaft pitched downward at a gentle slope, and I could see that the roof of the cave now hung clear, above the water.

Through mud and slime we waded along the floor of the cavern until we reached the water's edge. Davis carried a flashlight, which he turned into the further depth. On the other side of the water the floor sloped upward until it became lost in the gloom beyond the reach of the light.

Somewhat past the opposite edge of the water, I made out two objects—bulky, and but dimly defined against the black floor.

"What do you think they are?" I asked Davis.

"Loose boulders—flaked off from above. Stones are always dropping from the roof of caves."

This suggestion left me unsatisfied. Of course, such stones might be of almost any shape, and yet the outline of those objects did not suggest the chance figure of loose stones.

Curiosity mastered me, but I was silent.

Returning to the village, the cancellation of the lease was soon effected. The very next day the pumping engine was hauled away, and the board shack which housed it was torn down and removed. A few pieces of its timber framing were left lying about—some of substantial cross-section, and some pieces of board.

This I noticed with satisfaction, for they would prove useful in carrying out my determination to explore the cave.

IV.

THAT night, while the village people slept, I walked to the cave. I was equipped with a hammer, some nails, and an electric flashlight.

From the refuse lumber of the pump-house I constructed a raft, and with a pole to propel it, easily crossed the pool of water, and stepped out into the muddy slime which covered the upward slope of the cave floor.

Although encrusted with mud, it was at once apparent that one of the objects I had come to examine was a human skeleton.

But, *such* a skeleton!

Short of stature it was, with a barrel-like chest of prodigious size. The arms reached well below the knees. The skull was of unusual thickness and abnormal shape.

It required no effort of imagination to recall the stories of *The Thunder Voice*. Such a frame must have housed lungs of a power far surpassing that of any ordinary human being. I could easily conjecture the vocal might this creature had possessed when this skeleton had housed a living organism.

The other object was a boat—of most unusual build.

It was constructed from rough slabs which had apparently been hewn from solid timbers with an ax. It was flat-bottomed, with square ends which sloped upward. The pieces were fastened together by wooden pegs driven through roughly cut holes.

I turned from the boat and, climbing the sloping floor, roved my light about as I continued my exploration. A little further along the floor under my feet became dry, and then the cave turned abruptly to the left. Just beyond this turn I stumbled over something.

It, too, was a skeleton!

Different in every particular from the first, however. Its living tenant had been fairly tall, and with a well-proportioned figure. The cave was quite dry here, and only a light dust covered the yellowed bones.

My interest quickened. There had been *two* tenants in this unknown cave! One, I felt sure, had been the son of Bartien Delloux—the creature with *The Thunder Voice*. But who had shared this dark cavern with him?

Inch by inch, I examined the floor, the walls, and even the roof of the cavern. There was little to be seen—some bones of small animals, the rusted blade of an axe, portions of rotted fur, and in a nook opening out from the main cave were some scattered fibers of decayed cloth.

Finally, when I was on the point of turning about to leave the place, I found something which fired me with renewed interest. It was a small bottle of flattish shape. The bottom was covered with dry, black, flaky particles—dried ink, I surmised.

In a crevasse of the rock I found a rotted leather bag, which fell to pieces at my touch. From it dropped several articles, but eagerly I seized upon one—an age-yellowed, thin, paper book; such as school-children, even to this day, use for writing exercises.

Gingerly I turned the leaves, for the paper was brittle with age. The pages were filled with writing—but no childish scrawl, this!

The penmanship was exquisite—of that type affected by ladies of a generation long past—the letters narrow and slanting, yet as clear and distinct as those on a printed page.

Carefully I tucked the book inside my coat, and with all possible haste made my way back to the village hotel.

LOCKING the door of my room, I opened the book, and the words upon its first page brought me to a startled attention:

"Why am I, Margaret Kingsley, the child of good, honorable parents, living now in a cave, eating raw meat, existing as a savage—my mate, a hideous creature whose very sight would disgust and appall the people I have heretofore known?"

"The answer is, that I am here because I WANT to be here. Since the night when he called to me, and I went forth to be carried here in his arms, I have had many chances to escape, but I CHOOSE TO REMAIN!"

"Ugly he is, beyond argument, but I love him for his giant strength, and for the tenderness he shows me—a tenderness exceeding that of a mother for her child. Within his misshapen body is a heart starved for affection—and that I am glad to give."

"Only a few words of French can he speak, and yet he quickly grasps my unspoken wishes and tries to gratify them."

"This book, the quill, the ink with which I write this, belonged to one of my pupils. The other night he brought them to me, in the bag containing her school books. How he obtained them I know not. Secretly I had longed for the materials with which to write—not that human eyes
(Continued on page 118)

The Thunder Voice

(Continued from page 95)

will ever see that which is written here—but because I have been accustomed to write down the things which are me—those inner thoughts and impulses which possess and dominate me.

Then followed pages describing her life in the cave—and of night journeys through the woods when her mate would delight himself in voicing wild cries—sounds which she came to love. Wildly she rejoiced with him, and laughed as she thought of the terror these resounding cries brought to the simple folk in the valley below them.

Strangest of all, she thought, was his understanding of her slightest wish without the medium of words.

On one occasion she was trying to arrange her long hair, but the hairpins she had brought to the cave had, one by one, been lost. It was impossible to arrange the hair with none, and she had been vexed. That very night he brought her some hairpins and two side-combs. The latter she recognized—they belonged to Lucy Duval! Again she wondered how he had obtained them; and laughed as she considered Lucy's probable fright.

Another time she had shivered with the cold, for the cave had been damp—the next night he brought clothing, and several woolen blankets.

Whatever he might be to others, he was her chosen man. He could not live her kind of life—gladly she would live his.

Then came an entry on the very last page.

“The storm! How it has rained, and rained, until somewhere the flood has changed the course of some small stream, and now we are imprisoned—the water has risen to the roof of the cave, and we can no longer leave it in the boat. The flood came quite suddenly, last night, while we slept.

“Perhaps it may subside in time—but probably it will not. I shall write no more. Good-bye, little book, and good-bye to all—everything! In dying I can reflect that at least I have lived. So very many never do!”

I closed the book. At last my strong desire to *know* had been gratified. In the yellowed manuscript which I held in my hand was inscribed the last chapter in the mystery of *The Thunder Voice*.

Now that curiosity was satisfied, the professional instinct asserted itself. I reflected on the peculiar warped trait which so often causes a woman gifted with all the refinements of civilization to become infatuated with a male who is, in every sense, a barbarian.

I recalled the season at Earls Court exhibition in London when a dozen black, repulsive-featured cannibals had been exhibited. The over-zealous attentions of a concourse of well-dressed women of apparent refinement, who daily surged about them, caused their removal from the exhibit.

No, there was nothing very remarkable in the infatuation confessed by Margaret Kingsley. At least it was not remarkable to those who observe life with wide-open eyes.