

If You Like a Creepy Story of a
Haunted House You Will Enjoy

Tragedy Island

By J. M. ALVEY



HALF a mile out from the mainland lies Tragedy Island, a few hundred acres of rugged old earth that have withstood the assaults of sea and sky these many years. Mostly sharp sand and jagged rock and coarse grass is Tragedy Island, although a few cultivated patches stretch up the hill to the small forest of old trees that cluster round the ancient house.

The house itself is more than a century old. The main section, built of brick that crossed the Atlantic as ballast in a Dutch merchant vessel, has had wings added and little rooms built on and porches thrown out in whimsical irregularity. It has thirty-two rooms and to go from one room to another you must either go up a few steps or down a few

steps, so that you might say none of the thirty-two are on the same floor.

Each of the thirty-two rooms has a mystery and a ghost story or so of its own, and dueling swords have clashed up and down the great stairway, and murdered men have bled to death on the parlor floor.

The place is haunted, so to speak, by a whole company of ghosts. Ghosts in wigs and knee breeches; ghosts with smoking pistols in their hands; white-robed ghosts, according to popular fancy, and ghosts with fair complexions and gay laughter; all make unearthly visits to the old house and there rehearse old times within its storied walls. Believe me, it is quite a ghostly place.

But, wild as Tragedy Island is and

weird as the house is which stands there, far wilder and more weird, much stranger and many times gloomier have been the men who were masters of the place.

Said an old boatman to me one day: "If you want to know what I think o' Tragedy Island it's just this: Heaven may be over it, and the sea all around it, but Hell's at the bottom of it, and the devil himself lives there.

"Man alive! Talk o' tragedy! The island's well named, sure enough. It's had six masters in a line and everyone o' them has made away with himself. Guess that's tragedy enough for one wee hunk o' island, eh? But folks hereabouts have growed 'ustomed to it. When word comes in that another

Hagenhaufer has upheld the family tradition people just say, 'Well, let's see. Who's the next heir to the suicide estate?' Right creepy, ain't it?'

"Horrible," said I.

"A young man's master o' the place now. I guess you know more o' him than I can tell you. You visit him every so-so. It's none o' my business, and it ain't my way to nose into another's doings, understand, but take care, friend. Better watch out. It's one thing to hear o' this here creepy, bloody goings-on, but it would be another thing to see it take place."

I laughed at the old boatman then, and often afterward, but I remembered what he said and thought of it more than once.

Guy Hagenhaufer was the seventh master of the fateful old mansion. He was a young man when he came into his grim inheritance and he was yet a young man at the time of which I write.

We had been classmates at our Alma Mater, and it was during those college days that a close friendship grew up between us and I came to learn of the curse of the Hagenhaufers and the uncanny history of Tragedy Island.

In our senior year Guy did not return from the Christmas holidays. It was during that jolly season of the year that he had his inheritance passed on to him.

I went down to Tragedy Island for the first time that June.

YOU go from the city by train to a little village on the sea coast. From the village you walk three quarters of a mile down a lonely road that follows the shore to an old shack on the beach. A crazy old pier runs out into the surf, and at the end of it waits the Hagenhaufer launch, piloted by the gardener, to take you out to the island, which seems to ride at anchor out at sea like somebody's farm, buildings and all, carved out of the solid earth and floated off to that inconvenient mooring.

Another rickety old pier runs out into the water to meet you at the island and take you ashore where a boathouse stands on the rocky coast. A sandy path leads over a grassy, marshy stretch to the cultivated land, where a sort of farm lane runs up the hill and through the trees to the house.

There, on that June afternoon, I found Guy, in overalls, palating the porch.

"Fixing up a bit. Got to make the place cheerful, you know. Going to do lots of improving this summer. This can be made a wonderful summer home, you know. It really can, you know."

During the week I stayed there I tried to reason him into shutting up the old house and come away to the city. But he had made up his mind to stay, and at the end of the week I left him with the thirty-two old rooms and the ghosts and only the gardener to share them with him.

During the first year or two I went back for week-end visits pretty often. Then I left for a distant part of the country.

Three years later I came back. On a Wednesday morning I dropped Guy a line to the effect that I would run down to see him on Friday as per my old custom for a week-end visit. Friday morning's post brought me word from my old school fellow that he would be glad indeed to welcome me back again.

My train brought me to the seaside town in the early evening. It was September and beginning to grow dark early. I walked down the lonely road to the old shack on the beach and out on to the rickety old pier to which I found the same old launch tied up. But there was no gardener. I waited a while. Still no one came.

So I went back to the village and made inquiries concerning the gardener. He had not been seen.

Back to the launch I went. I stood out over the surf and looked off to where Tragedy Island lay, a dark blotch on the dark sea.

I at last decided to go over by myself.

Getting the launch started was not hard work and getting it out into the open water was not hard, either, but heading it for the island was quite a job, for I suddenly missed something. It was the light that burned in the boathouse. It was not there.

I had a long search for the landing pier, but after a considerable time I made it and tied the launch up. Then I set out for the house. And as I went I had vague misgivings, for there was no light there, either.

Not a living soul did I see. Not a sound did I hear. I stopped before the house. I called out. I listened. I called again. I gave our old familiar whistle. I called his name a dozen times. I went up, feeling creepy, and pounded on the front door.

IT seemed to burst open, and there I stood a tall figure that I could only feel, instead of see.

A voice said:

"Who are YOU?"

"Why, Guy!" I cried, for I knew his voice. "What's the matter? What's the matter?"

"The matter?" said the voice: "Come in and look at me."

I groped my way along to where a light showed through a door that stood ajar. He entered it ahead of me. I followed him.

Good Lord! What a sight! Everything upside down. Furniture piled up against the windows, rubbish littered all over the floor. In the midst of this wild scene stood my old friend, pale and haggard, a revolver in his shaky hand.

"What's the trouble? What's wrong?"

He passed his hand across his brow.

"In the morning," he said, "You will understand. Don't ask me now."

He looked at me as we moved about, and his actions seemed to be his own actions, but the look was like the look of another person, just as though some one else was inside of him and was peering out at me.

We cooked our own supper and ate it.

When it was over he said:

"I'm tired. If you don't mind let's go to bed?"

"Of course I don't mind," I said.

"It's getting late, and I am tired, too, but before we go will you please tell me what's wrong?"

Again he passed his hand over his forehead and again he said:

"In the morning you'll understand. Don't ask me now."

I did not go to bed. I sat up in my room and listened. Then I lay down on the bed and listened. Then I dozed off.

It was Guy who awakened me.

"Did you hear it?" he whispered.

"What? When?" I mumbled, scrambling to my feet.

"Just now," he replied. "A shot."

"Guy," I said, "For the love of Heaven, what's going on here? Where are the servants? No one met me at the pier tonight. Good God, man, what's it all about?"

He laughed.

"Are you afraid?" he asked.

I was, and yet I was not. I did not answer.

"The servants ran away, the cowards. They took the launch and left at sunset. That's how you found it with no one to bring you over. You see quite a sailor, old man, to get here alone in the dark."

He walked out of the room.

I sat by the open window. It was then that I heard a low moaning sound that rose and fell on the night air.

As I listened someone touched me on the arm. It was Guy.

"You hear it, too," he said. "What the devil is it?"

"It's two o'clock in the morning," I told him. "I understood you were tired. Why don't you go to bed instead of wandering round this place in the dead of night?"

He went away again. I heard him go through the rooms, up a few steps here, down a few steps there, and on to his room and shut the door. His footsteps sounded heavy and drear through the weird house at that stilly hour.

I dozed by the window. Suddenly I was wide awake. I looked out and saw a light at the landing pier. I watched it.

"Whoever is causing all this is getting away," I thought. "I'll follow and see what I can."

I went to Guy's room. Not a sound. At last he was asleep. So I hurried out of the house and through the dark woods and down the lane to the sandy patch of marsh and along the path to the boat-house.

As I came near the launch started. The "put-put" of its motor snapped out on the night. It moved off to the north

and went out of sight around the curved shore.

I ran up the shore, and as I ran the low moaning rose and fell, and grew nearer and nearer.

Then I discovered it.

WELL to the back of the island the sea had worked in under the rocks, and as the tide rose it ran in and whirled round in a little rocky cavern with a moaning sound. When the wind was northwest, as it was that night, I figured this sound could be heard at the house.

I felt relieved to make this discovery and turned back to the house. I went to Guy's room and listened again. I opened the door. I went in. He was not there.

I hunted him through the house. He was not to be found. Out into the night I went to find a track of him. Another light attracted my attention. I ran back to the landing pier. The light came on and on. Nearer and nearer it grew. It was a dory rowed by the gardener and my old friend the boatman.

"He is gone!" I cried. "He is not here. It was he, no doubt, who left in the launch about two-thirty. He went off to the north."

"He went off this afternoon," said the gardener. "Off in the head, Master's gone plum crazy."

"Crazy?" I repeated. "Crazy?"

"He ran us off the place just afore supper. I got this man to come back and see what had happened. He was the only one would come."

It was dawn now.

"It's bad business," said the boatman. "There's always such things as this when something's about to happen here. What's that?"

"A shot," I said.

"And listen," said the gardener. "The launch, our launch. I know that engine. There! There it comes!"

We ran out on the pier and looked north.

It came fast. Straight for the pier it headed. It grew nearer and nearer, the spray dashing up over its prow. By not so much as a foot it missed the pier and went racing off to the open sea.

As it went by I saw the figure at the wheel. It was a limp, lifeless figure, lying over the wheel and holding the launch true to its course. It was Guy Hagenhaufuer with a bullet hole in his pale forehead just where he had been passing his hand in the night.

Table of Contents

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THE HOAX OF THE SPIRIT LOVER.....	3
HOUDINI	
EBENEZER'S CASKET	6
J. U. GIBBY and JUNIUS B. SMITH	
THE WHITE APE	15
H. P. LOVECRAFT	
DOWN THROUGH THE AGES.....	19
REX HALL	
THE GREAT ADVENTURE	23
BRIAN IRVINE	
TRAGEDY ISLAND	30
J. M. ALVEY	
THE BROWN MOUSE	33
EDWARD PARRISH WARE	
EXHIBIT "A"	35
ANNE HARRIS HADLEY	
THE TRANSPARENT GHOST	38
ISA-BELLE MANZEN	
THE DEVIL BIRD	39
HAL HALBERT	
COILS OF DARKNESS	43
SYBLA RAMIUS	
THE SPIRIT FAKERS OF HERMANNSTADT	52
HOUDINI	
DRACONDA	57
JOHN MARTIN LEAHY	
SPORT FOR LADIES.....	68
STANLEY G. THOMPSON	
THE MAN WHO DARED TO KNOW.....	70
JUNIUS B. SMITH	
THE GHOST-EATER	72
C. M. EDDY, JR.	
THE THING	70
FRANK MARION PALMER	
NEMESIS	76
H. P. LOVECRAFT	
SHADOWS	79
FRANK OWEN	
WEIRD CRIMES	80
SEABURY QUINN	
ASK HOUDINI	86

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