

# Weird Tales



ALL STORIES NEW—NO REPRINTS

MARCH, 1941

Cover by Margaret Brundage

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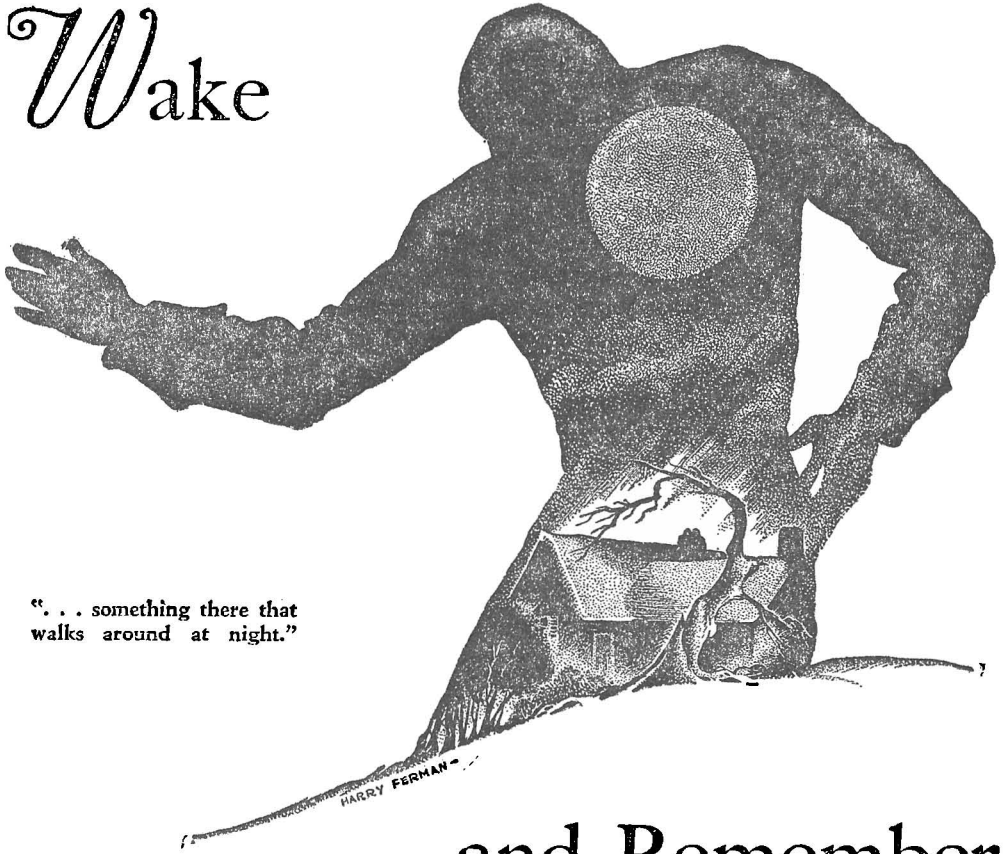
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# Wake



"... something there that walks around at night."

## —and Remember

By SEABURY QUINN

*Like the drawing of a curtain a century fell aside. And two lovers—who had known tragedy together in another yesterday—found happiness today.*

**M**EHITABEL stirred petulantly and thrust her face into the pillow as the mellow tinkle of a cowbell sounded through the open window. "Go 'way!" she murmured querulously. "Go get somebody else. I'm only the fifth call." Then with a sigh of relief she realized. She was no longer an interne. Her period of probation was over, her license duly issued. No more answering ambulance calls, no more interminable watches in the psychopathic ward. She was legally entitled to practice anywhere in the state—and get paid for it.

She turned over on her back, watching the latticed patterns of the early sunlight on the floor, raised her arms and stretched luxuriously. She was quite lovely when she smiled. It lightened her too-serious expression and lifted her eyes, ever so little, at the corners. But when she sat up the color drained out of her face and purple shadows reappeared under her eyes. Her arduous internship had sucked the stamina from her, only her nerve had held up the last six months; she hadn't come up here to rest one day too soon. "Lord, but it's good to—" she began, but broke

off with a grimace as the long-drawn hooting of a motor's siren sounded from the lane. "Drat it!" she exclaimed, glancing at the business-like man's style watch strapped to her left wrist. That fall she proposed doing special work in nervous diseases and insanity, and when she had announced her intention of vacationing at Mount Auburn, Superintendent Ballau had offered to give her introductions to the staff at Rocky Hill. Letters had been exchanged, and she had an appointment to breakfast at the sanitarium that morning at seven. Her watch said it was twenty minutes after six, the car was waiting for her and—here she wasn't even dressed. "Just a minute!" She leaped from the bed as if a call for ambulance duty summoned her, ran to the window and called to the driver. "Be with you in a jiff!"

She was. Years of response to the orderly's "Ps-st, Doc—ambulance!" had trained her to put on her clothes in less time than most women took to pull their stockings on, and her watch registered just six forty-five when, washed, combed and dressed in jumper, slacks and tennis shoes, she hurried down the garden path and climbed into the waiting station wagon.

**B**REAKFAST at the sanitarium was substantial. Tomato juice, cereal, bacon and eggs, fried potatoes, hot rolls and coffee. After years of internes' fare it seemed like a Lucullan feast to her. The younger doctors had gone out upon their rounds, but the superintendent, Dr. Stillwell, lingered over his fourth cup of coffee. "So you're staying at the Holmead Lodge?" he asked as he held out his lighter for her cigarette. "Alone?"

Mehitabel drew down her brows in a mild, puzzled frown. "Why, yes, of course," she answered. "Why not? You're the second person to ask that. The taxi driver at the station almost balked at bringing me up to the place last night, and

nearly ran us off the road twice in his hurry. Muttered something about not wanting to go there after dark. What's wrong with the place: bears, robbers or spooks?"

Dr. Stillwell's smile was reassuring. "I'm afraid I'm old-fashioned, my dear, that's all. Somehow, I can't seem to get used to young women traipsing all around the country, living in deserted houses two miles from the nearest neighbor, and all that."

"Oh," she laughed, "is that all? You should have seen some of the places they sent me into when I was out on ambulance duty. After East Side dives, and Chinatown, and Bowery flophouses, solitude has no terrors for me, I assure you.

"Shall we start?" she added as he glanced down at his watch.

Rocky Hill Sanitarium was a beautiful, remodeled, private country home, and in appearance differed in no wise from the typical Adirondack estate except that its extensive park was enclosed by a stone wall topped with an overhang of barbed wire. Quarters for the staff were in a pleasant house set fifty feet or so from the main building, with which they communicated by a covered porch. "How's Delarue this morning, Miss Sears?" asked the superintendent as he and Mehitabel entered the wide central hall of the main building.

"Worse, Doctor," replied the competent-looking young woman in nurse's uniform at the desk. "I've sent Sarles up to him twice this morning, but the dosage had to be increased each time, and the medicine doesn't seem to hold as well."

"Umph," he muttered noncommittally, then to Mehitabel: "I think you'll like to see this case, Doctor. It's a young man, just past thirty, who's been in our charge almost three years. He was an aviator, and had done some really brilliant work in design, but when the Spanish Civil War broke out the offer of a huge salary, plus

his natural craving for excitement, I suppose, lured him away. It was criminal, sending those inexperienced kids out to fight seasoned flyers. They shot him down in his first dog-fight, and though his 'chute opened and he got down all right he left the best of him up in the sky somewhere."

"The best of him?" she echoed, puzzled.

"That's right. A young man, educated, with a brilliant future, good-looking, and with everything to live for, took an airplane out that morning. What they picked up when they cut him loose from his 'chute's rigging was a helpless, hopeless imbecile. No more reason than a two-months-old baby.

"His family is well-to-do, but he has no near relatives, so when he came back he was shipped up here. Poor lad, physically he's perfect; he'll probably outlive all of us.

"He's been an ideal patient, from our standpoint. Never gave us a moment's trouble, but last night he began acting like the devil. Tried to brain a nurse with a cup, and made a murderous assault on another. From a sweet-tempered little idiot he's turned into a first-class hellion overnight. If he'd been suffering from ordinary dementia I could understand it, but—" His voice trailed off as they approached the barred door of a ward.

"How's Delarue?" he asked the male nurse who admitted them.

"Resting quietly now, Doctor, but when th' dose wears off—" The nurse shrugged his shoulders pessimistically.

Mehitabel peered through the peephole in the door that barred the young man's room. If she had not been warned of his condition she might have taken the boy on the bed to be in perfect health. About him there was neither the emaciation nor the obesity commonly seen in cases of dementia, no drawing of the features, no flaccidity of the mouth. One cheek was pillowed on a bent arm, and as Mehitabel

looked at him he smiled slightly in his sleep with the wistfulness of a tired and not entirely happy child.

Mehitabel took a quick breath. It was as if a breeze laden with memories blew over her. Somehow, there was something poignantly familiar in the calm, sad face of the sleeper. Sometime—centuries ago, perhaps—she'd seen it, loved to watch emotion steal across it as ripples steal across a quiet pool when a raindrop falls into it. Centuries ago? Or was it centuries ahead?

"Poor lad," murmured Dr. Stillwell. "It would have been far better if his rip-cord hadn't worked."

His soft voice wakened the young man, and instantly a dreadful change came over him. His lips stretched into a square like the mouth of an old Greek horror-mask, his eyes glared with a fiendish light, and from his gaping, distorted mouth came a flood of abuse and invective foul with the nastiness of two languages, dirty with the mingled indecencies of waterfront and camp.

A dull flush of embarrassment spread on the superintendent's face. "I'm sorry," he apologized. "He doesn't know what he's saying, of course. Such language—"

Mehitabel checked him with an impatient nod. She was a physician, and as such impermeable to language which should have shocked her merely as a woman. "What have you been giving him?" she asked. "This seems more like delirium than dementia."

"Umph?" Dr. Stillwell had forgotten momentarily that she was also a doctor. A young woman with a disturbingly pretty face, dressed in sports clothes which set off rather than concealed a figure Aphrodite might not have cared to disown was certainly not his idea of a physician, male or female. "Why, we've been administering brandy and strychnine in small doses, but they haven't seemed to take hold—"

"We found hypnotics more effective than stimulants in our psychopathic ward," she broke in professionally. "Half-hourly doses of hyocin hypobromide injected intravenously—"

"By Jupiter, of course!" Stillwell interrupted. "That should be a cerebral sedative; give him some rest, and us, too—I say!" He checked himself in amazement, for another lightning change had come to the young maniac.

He had caught a glimpse of Mehitabel through the peephole, and from a blaspheming, cursing fury had again become a quiet, sorrowful-looking child, and on his suddenly-calmed face there was a look of longing, beseeching entreaty. "Me—" he stumbled on the syllable as if it were an unfamiliar foreign word, then, "Mehitabel?" he asked half longingly, half incredulously.

Pitying sorrow welled up in her heart. She was more woman than physician, now. "Yes?" she answered. "What is it?"

"Mehitabel?" he repeated. "Is it really—" Something seemed to grasp him by the throat, choking off his voice. A dazed, bewildered look spread on his face, like the expression of one who wakes up suddenly at some strange noise, and tries to identify it. Then a look of utter, fatuous imbecility came in his eyes, and he burst out in sudden speech, eager, bubbling, yeasty words scarcely intelligible; oddly jumbled, senseless words, babblings about betrayed love and hangmen's ropes and the possibility of expiration. As she left the ward with Dr. Stillwell his voice came after her, weak, half-stifled, punctuated with deep, broken-hearted sobs: "Mehitabel, Mehitabel, don't you know me?"

"CAN you shoot, Miss—er—Dr. Goodrich?" asked Dr. Stillwell apropos of nothing while they waited for the station wagon to take her back.

"I've shot skeet and made fair scores," she answered, wondering at the question.

"That's good; fine," he replied. "I'm glad to hear it. I suppose you brought a gun up with you?"

"Why, no. The hunting season won't be on for three more months. Besides, I didn't come up here to shoot; I just want to rest. Three years interning has almost done me in, Doctor."

He gave her an odd look, seemed on the point of speaking, then apparently thought better of it. Finally: "I wish you'd let me lend you a gun and some shells. This is wild and lonely country, Doctor. All sorts of critters around here—wildcats, snakes, even a few bears. And, of course, an occasional tramp. A gun might come in handy, and I'd feel better if I knew you had it."

"Why, thank you," she replied. If he wanted her to take the gun the least she could do was to accept it gracefully.

"By the way," he added as he brought the light sixteen-gauge gun and a box of shells from a coat closet, "what made you decide to spend your vacation at Holmead Lodge?" His voice was casual and friendly, not at all prying, not demanding an answer, just inviting one. But she had a feeling there was urgency behind his off-hand question.

"No special reason," she returned. "The property was once in my family, you know. A great-great-aunt of mine—I'm named for her, in fact—was the last one of us to occupy it. She had some sort of unfortunate love affair, I've been told, 'died of a broken heart' and all that sort of pre-Victorian nonsense. Strangers bought the house just as it stood when she passed on, and quite by accident I ran across an ad, in *Country Life* announcing it was vacant and for rent. It's been modernized to a considerable extent and is really quite comfortable, but they're asking only twenty-five dollars a month for it, so I took it for

two months. I wanted a place to hole up in for the summer, away from everything, off main highways, without even a telephone. Holmead Lodge seemed just the thing, and there's an added attraction in living in a place our family once owned, and using some of the very furniture that once belonged to my ancestress and name-sake."

Suddenly a thought struck her. "Is there something wrong about the place, Doctor? The hackman at the village didn't want to go there with me last night, and"—with difficulty she suppressed a giggle—"you seem so solemn about it."

"Oh, no," he answered with somewhat more emphasis than occasion seemed to require, "there's nothing wrong about the house that I know"—he put just the slightest emphasis on "know"—"but, as you say, it's lonely, and for a woman by herself—"

Her tolerant laugh broke through his rather halting explanation. "'Votes for Women' won the battle years ago, Doctor. There are no clinging vines or sheltered, drooping violets in skirts today—even when we wear 'em." By way of emphasis she stretched a straight, slender trousered leg out for his inspection. "But thanks for the gun, just the same. I'll take it with me on my walks and sleep with it beside my bed."

"Is that a promise?" he asked rather soberly.

"It's a promise, Doctor." She put her small, firm hand out to shake his in token of their bargain.

Mehitabel would have laughed even more tolerantly if she could have listened to a conversation between two nurses as she climbed into the station wagon for her homeward trip.

"Cute little trick, that Dr. Goodrich, ain't she?"

"Yeah, but she's an educated little fool, if you ask me."

"How come?"

"Stayin' at that Holmead Lodge. Don't she know what's happened there?"

"Search me. What has happened?"

"Why, ain't you heard? They can't rent that dump for sour apples. Nobody's been able to live there more'n a few months for gosh knows how many years. Something there that walks around at night, bangs the doors and windows, and sometimes jerks the bedclothes off folks while they're sleepin'.

"Just last summer—that would be before you came here, though—a couple of fellers from the city took the place. They was tough guys for fair, talked out the side o' their mouths an' called ever'body 'sister'. Some people said they was a pair of gangsters from New York on the lam from the police. Well, anyhow, they heard some funny things, and started to shoot it out with whatever it was that disturbed 'em. One of 'em was killed—choked to death—and the other was so scared he didn't stop to pack his stuff before he lit out for the city."

"Humph, that so? What d'ye think it is?"

"Ghosts, you chump. That place is haunted, and has been ever since the old girl died there more'n a hundred years ago. Looks like she resents anyone livin' there."

"Listen, simple, you better lay off whatever it is you've been drinkin' lately. Ghosts! D'ye actually mean to stand there with your bare face hangin' out an' tell me you believe in 'em?"

"I don't know if I do or not. An' I don't know if those New York gangsters believed in 'em, but one of 'em got killed and the other took a powder, didn't he?"

MEHITABEL stretched luxuriously in a big rattan chair set on the small bricked terrace behind the lodge. Her hands were folded idly in her lap, her

head was pleasantly empty of intention. Before her the land fell away in a steep slope to the little lake, at the horizon the green hills made a notched line across the smooth blue of the sky. In the small unkempt orchard apples lay in the long grass, birds bickered in the branches. The sunshine of high summer lay on everything in a sort of pale, powdered-golden light that seemed to take on iridescence from the massed green of the woods. Idly she wondered what the boys and girls were doing at the hospital. Who had the ambulance duty today? Who had the "murder beat" south of Canal Street; had any calls come in for fire duty. . . . Fire! as she framed the word mentally she was suddenly aware of something she'd been seeing for some time without noticing it. From the grove of pine trees bordering the lake a tall, gray shaft of wood-smoke mounted like a weathered obelisk against the still blue of the sky and still green of the trees. Some fool had made a campfire in the pine woods.

Visions of the roaring devastation of a forest fire flashed across her mind . . . the orange flames advancing in merciless *blitzkrieg*, destroying birds and beasts and people as they swept across the wooded slopes and valleys, leaving blackened ruination in their wake.

In an instant she was on her feet, but at the terrace edge she halted. Doctor or no doctor, she was a woman, and alone. She'd need something to enforce her authority. Running back to the house she picked up the light shotgun, broke it, thrust two shells into its breech, then hurried down the path that wound between the trees to the lakeside and pine grove.

Parked on the gravelly shingle of the lake was a decrepit motor truck which looked as if it might have been second cousin to one of Ringling Brothers' earliest circus vans. Several incredibly dirty children wrestled on the short grass. A man

in greasy corduroys sprawled full length under a tree, a slouch hat pulled over his face, while another lounged in the van doorway. Two women in faded calico dresses and an amazing amount of junk-jewelry were busily engaged, one cutting brush-wood to replenish the fire, the other stirring something in a large, smoke-blackened pot that swung from a tripod above the blazing sticks.

"You, there!" called Mehitabel. "What d'ye mean, building a fire here? Don't you know you're apt to set the woods ablaze? Go down to the lake if you want to camp; there's no fire hazard there." Authority—the sharp, uncompromising authority of the "amb'lance doctor" ordering tenement-dwellers was in her voice.

But this was not the lower East Side, nor did she have the driver and policeman to support her commands. The women looked at her in sullen silence, their fierce beady eyes aglow with anger under straight black brows. The man turned lazily, nudging his hat up until it showed one eye. "I lika deesa grass for lay on," he informed her. "Too mocha stone an' sand down dere. I stay here. See?"

Mehitabel could feel the wash of angry blood in her cheeks. She faced him with dilated nostrils and hard eyes. "Pull your freight!" she ordered sharply.

The man rose slowly, menacingly. "You talla me pulla da freight?" he demanded, almost incredulously. "I showa you somet'ing, me." He was a big man, tall and heavy-set, but none of his fat sagged. His eyes were black and bright as obsidian and his jaw was thrust out truculently. From childhood he had seen his women cuffed into submission; Simon Legree could have been no more surprised and angered if Uncle Tom had struck him in the face than he was at this summary order from a woman. "I showa you somet'ing," he repeated ominously, and a sharp *snick* sounded as he pressed the spring of a case-

knife, releasing a six-inch blade from the bone handle.

Mehitabel snapped back both hammers of her gun. "Steady, girl," she told herself. "Aim low the first time, but let him have it in the legs if he keeps coming on. You're sunk if he once gets his filthy hands on you." Aloud she repeated:

"Pull your freight, I told you!"

She had faced drunken men, insane men, criminals. She knew murder when she saw it, and she saw it in the gypsy's eyes that moment.

Easily, effortlessly, without raising her gun from the crook of her left elbow, she squeezed the forward trigger. The gun's report was like a cannon's roar. The charge of shot struck the earth scarcely six inches ahead of the advancing man, and one or two small pellets ricocheted and lodged in his shin.

It was as if he'd walked into a stone wall. One foot half raised, he halted in his tracks, and she could see his black eyes widen with surprise and fear as they looked into the smoking muzzle of her gun. He slipped his knife back in his pocket, forced his swarthy features to the semblance of a smile, and doffed his tattered hat. "Pleeze, Missa Lady," he besought, "don' pointa da gun deesa way. I make da joke. See? We taka da camp offa you' lan' right away. Yes-s."

"Put that fire out and get going!" Mehitabel commanded, continuing to keep her gun in readiness. "If you're not gone before I've counted twenty-five I'll let you have it—and next time I shan't aim at the ground. One—two—three—"

The fire was trodden out, the van's protesting engine cranked, the filthy brats collected, and the gypsies gone almost before she reached fifteen.

SHE had eaten a light supper, washed the dishes, set the oil-lamps glowing; now she sat at the piano, idly thumbing



"She felt — she *knew* — that she was not alone."



through a portfolio of songs, sampling this one, playing a stray bar or two from that, sometimes singing to her own accompaniment. It was a room in which to sing love songs, this big, timber-ceilinged apartment with its fieldstone fireplace, its row of casement windows draped in flowered chintz, and the mellow glow of lamplight over almost threadbare rugs and the softly-gleaming polish of old, waxed mahogany and maple and walnut furniture. She sang well in a slightly husky contralto, sometimes with a note of longing in her tones. She had chosen her career, hers was the task of mending broken bodies, straightening twisted minds, bringing other women's babes into the world, but—the deep scent of the woods came to her through the opened windows, outside the moon-stained shrubbery and trees were whispering in the light breeze—it must have been on such a night Leander swam the Hellespont; it must have been a night like this that Romeo poured out his heart beneath Juliet's balcony.

The song book fluttered open to a musical setting of Browning's *Evelyn Hope*. There had been small time for poetry in her life. The verses were new to her:

"I claim you still for my own love's sake!  
 Delayed it may be for more lives yet,  
 Though worlds I shall travel not a few:  
 Much is to learn, much to forget. . . ."

Something stirred in the quiet room. Not a breeze, exactly, but a soft, light current of air, a little colder than the summer night, yet not precisely chilling. She had that oddly-persistent feeling a person has when someone stares fixedly at him from behind. There was no fear in it, no uneasiness, even, but it was there. She felt—she *knew*—that she was not alone. The feeling grew so strong she turned and looked across her shoulder. Everything was as it had been, the lamplight penetrated to the farthest corner of the room; nowhere was there a shadow, certainly

there was no substance of another in the place, yet—

She turned again to the piano, singing softly:

"So hush, I will give you this leaf to keep:  
 See, I shut it inside the sweet, cold hand.  
 There, that is our secret; go to sleep!  
 You will wake, and remember, and understand."

What was that? This time there was no mistaking an alien presence. Not only could she feel it, she could hear it. Stealthily, almost soundlessly, but certainly, a footstep scraped upon the gravel just outside the window; a hand was on the sill, then, silhouetted against the night, with the lamplight full upon it, rose a face.

A tense, taut face it was, with murder written on it. She recognized the gypsy she had driven off that afternoon, recognized the black malignancy in his eyes, the scar that traced a half-moon on his right cheek and seemed to dance grotesquely as he smiled.

"Deesa time you not have gun!" he told her, speaking softly, with a sort of dreadful jubilation in his voice. "Deesa time I cut you' heart out, you—" His knife-blade slid out of its handle with a sharp *snick*; he raised it, drew it back. . . . Like a boxer, gauging his opponent's next blow by his eyes, she knew with perfect sureness where the blade would strike. There was no time to dodge, no time to run for the gun standing in the corner. As certainly as if she faced a firing-squad she was looking wide-eyed in the bare-boned face of death. There was a queer, flinching feeling in her left side just below the roundness of her breast. The steel would pierce her there—

It was incredible, impossible, preposterous; but it was so. Nothing moved across her line of vision, there was no shadow, no opacity, but, unbelievably, the gypsy's face blotted out—like a figure fading from a motion picture screen when the film tears. She heard a startled, strangling,

choking cry, saw the knife fall, heard it clatter on the floor. Then the intruder was visible again, but now he lay across the window sill. His empty hands hung down before him, his face was partially averted, but it required no second look to know that he was dead. A light froth lay upon his lips, his tongue protruded, the eyeballs almost started from his swarthy face. She knew the signs—trust a graduate of three years' ambulance hopping! He was strangled, and his neck was broken.

Mehitabel rose, stepping unsteadily. She let her breath out slowly, with an odd jerk in it. She felt as if she hadn't breathed in a long time, and needed practice to pick up the way of it again.

Death doesn't frighten doctors, soldiers or embalmers; it's an incident in their business. She knew what she must do. Medical examiner's rules required that the body be left in place. Coroner's regulations were probably the same. Methodically, she changed her lounging pajamas for a sweater and tweed skirt, kicked off her sandals, pulled on a pair of woolen socks and heavy walking shoes. The nearest farmhouse was two miles away, and she must telephone to the state troopers.

At the door she paused. The shotgun? She half turned back, then shook her head. Somehow, she knew she wouldn't need it. She felt safer in this old deserted house, safer in the dark, untenanted forest, than she had ever felt on Broadway or Fifth Avenue. Somehow—she didn't try to analyze the feeling, but she knew—she was not alone.

**N**EXT night it rained. Not one of those soft cooling rains that she'd been used to in the city, darkening the pavements and making fuzzy, butter-colored glows about the street lamps, but a shrieking, tearing torrent with wild thunder and the blinding blaze of lightning. The tall trees bent and twisted in agony, the wind

howled down the chimney, frightening the lamp-flames till they cowered flickeringly in their glass shades. The bushes growing by the walls scratched at the window panes like fingers of dead things that clawed for entrance to the house.

She had found a stack of cordwood in the lean-to at the rear of the lodge; now a fire blazed on the hearth, its dancing flames etched ever-changing patterns on the rug.

From her suitcase she had brought a book, Skeel's "Manual of Gynecology and Pelvic Surgery," but the precise wording of its technical text palled on her. She tossed it in a chair and crossed the room to the tall secretary desk. Surely, there would be a book or two in there, perhaps some poetry. The lock was stiff with long disuse, she had to wrestle with the key, and then the door was stuck. Once, twice, three times she tugged before it came open, and with the jar of its forced opening came a litter of knick-knacks: A Dresden figurine of a shepherdess in Marie Antoinette costume, a leather-bound edition of the Rev. Silas Higginbotham's "Gems of Devotional Verse," a little gold locket set with a circle of seed pearls and fastened to a cord of plaited silk.

"How lovely!" she exclaimed, and snapped the watchlike case open. Inside were two miniatures, exquisitely painted on ivory.

The picture in the left-hand panel was that of a young woman with dark hair smoothly parted in the middle and brought down each side the face in little corkscrew curls. A very pretty girl. She had a broad white forehead, wide-spaced hazel eyes, a small, straight nose, a full-sized mouth with full red lips. She would have been much prettier had she not seemed so serious. She wore an off-the-shoulder gown of palest yellow satin, the décolletage fringed with a lace bertha.

Mehitabel's eyes went wide with sur-

prise. She'd seen those calmly studious features too many thousand times to fail to recognize them. Every time she combed her hair, each time that she renewed her make-up, they looked back at her from her mirror. The only difference seemed to be the pictured woman wore her hair a different way and was, perhaps, a year or two her senior.

In the right-hand side of the locket was the portrait of a young man, blue-eyed, auburn-haired, with a hint of weakness in his face; not weakness denoting lack of strength or character so much as the frailty of something delicate. He wore a uniform of some sort, a deep-blue coat trimmed with white, with a double row of gold buttons sewn on the facings. The collar was unhooked, displaying a black-satin stock tied round a linen neck-cloth, on one shoulder was a gold-laced epaulet.

There was something vaguely familiar about him, but what it was she could not say.

Somehow, it seemed to her that she had seen that sensitive, attractive face before, and not so long ago, but where, she could not recall. She had an oddly melancholy feeling as she gazed into the smiling blue eyes—like experiencing the re-enactment of an old, unpleasant scene.

She raised her shoulders in a shrug. Why struggle with the memory? It was like the effort to recall a name, or fit together the notes of a tune she had forgotten. The more she tried to recall it the more elusive it became.

The little walnut-cased clock on the mantelpiece began to whirr as she moved toward the fireplace with the locket. Perhaps, she thought, if she sat there a few moments she would recall the face of which the picture reminded her. She took a step, the clockwork's whirring stopped, and the gong struck a quick, light bell-note, the first stroke of the hour of nine. The second ring was just sounding as she

caught her foot in the frayed border of the rug.

Involuntarily she closed her eyes, put out her hands to break the fall, but—astonishingly, she did not strike the floor. Instead, her outstretched hands seemed plunging into something soft and warm, like a steam-cloud, and faintly perfumed, like the breath from a hot-house. Now the fragrant cloud enveloped her; she was not falling; rather, she was floating. Slowly, easily as a snowflake she drifted downwards. "Good gracious!" she exclaimed, and opened her eyes.

THE vapory mist was swirling round her, but it was beginning to thin a little. As she looked about she began to distinguish objects. A chair, a couch, a table—all the familiar furniture of the room. Yet it was not quite familiar. It seemed newer, and it was arranged differently. "Good gracious!" she repeated. "I must have hit myself an awful crack—" She stopped abruptly, for someone else was in the room, and speaking *with her voice*:

"Nay, Allan dearest, I beg you to give this folly up. The war must soon be over, then you can return with safety. Meantime, am I of such small account that you cannot find diversion here in our hills?"

Mehitabel looked toward the speaker. She was the woman of the portrait, but in life she seemed much younger than the picture showed her. Now her eyes were warm and soft, and her voice tender as she spoke.

Across the fireplace from her sat the young man whose picture was in the locket. His uniform was slightly shabby, his linen, though clean, frayed about the edges. He spoke softly, persuasively:

"You do not understand, Mehitabel. I am an officer of His Majesty's Navy. This information is vital to our cause. If I can cross the border into Canada—"

"Nay, Allan," broke in the girl, "let us not talk of it. We love each other dearly, but our countries are at war. If you persist in this folly my only recourse is to inform General Maccomb—"

"Mehitabel!" Unbelieving astonishment was in his eyes, his voice. "Surely, you would not consider such an act! 'Twould mean the death of me."

Her hazel eyes met his blue ones steadily. "Allan, my dear, my only love, I love you more than life, or soul, I love my country more. If you attempt to escape with this information you have gleaned I must stop you any way I can. If they take and hang you, know that my heart dies with yours; my spirit will forever hover round your grave, but"—her serious, wide eyes met his and flickered for a second—"a woman's heart is but a little thing to lay upon the altar of her country."

He rose and took her hand. "Good night, Mehitabel," he told her gravely. "If you do this thing, a dozen lifetimes' sufferings will scarce atone for love's betrayal—"

"Then tell me that you'll give the project up," she burst in eagerly.

"Nay, little love of mine. 'Tis as you say, a life—and heart—is but a little thing to lay upon the altar of one's country." Then he took her in his arms and kissed her.

Her arms were warm and tender round his neck for a long moment, the tears were coursing down her cheeks, but she made no move to stop him as he drew his cloak about him and went out into the raging storm.

A sudden shrill wind seemed to blow across the room. The bite of it was marrow-chilling. Mehitabel felt goose-flesh forming on her arms but hardly noticed the discomfort, for the billowing clouds of mist were swirling round her again. She was blinded, closed in, smothered by it, then, slowly, almost imperceptibly, the

cloud-curtains drew aside, and once again she saw the room clearly.

But it was changed. The chairs and sofa had been moved back, and in the center, all alone, and gruesome as the altar of some prehistoric terror-god, an open coffin stood. She knew before she looked what it contained, yet, impelled by something stronger than mere curiosity, she glanced across the bowed shoulder of the woman kneeling by the bier—into the pale, still features of the young naval lieutenant.

Her medical training told her how he died. Even if his linen collar had not just failed to conceal the circling band of livid bruise about his throat, she could have diagnosed the cause of death. The man had been hanged.

The house was quiet with a silence which was almost terrifying. Nothing but the ticking of the clock upon the mantelshelf disturbed the utter stillness. The woman kneeling by the coffin seemed hardly breathing. Her face was pale and motionless as if it had been carved from ivory, there was no reddening of the eyes; she had not shed a tear. Occasionally her clasped hands tightened on each other, otherwise she made no movement.

At last she spoke in a small, scarcely-audible whisper: "I died when you did, dearest love; only the shell of me remains here. Tomorrow when the sexton puts you in the grave he lays away my dead heart with you." A pause, then: "See, beloved, here are the first flowers that you gave me that sweet day so long ago." From a little bag of taffeta she shook a cupped handful of faded rose leaves. "These are thine, beloved, take them with thee." Tenderly she took one of the pale hands lying on the shabby blue coat and put a pinch of petals in it, folding the white, slender fingers over it. "These I'll wear always on me"—she put the small bag back in her bosom—"and these I'll put in our locket. Perhaps, in some far-distant day, some

other lover will find them, and may they bring her happiness." Snapping back the locket's case, she thrust a few brown, withered petals into it, then:

"Good night, dear love; good night of all good nights, until the dawning of God's Great Tomorrow." She bent and kissed the dead lips softly. Mehitabel heard the small rustle of her dress as she rose and tiptoed from the room.

Once more a chilly draft of air was blowing over her. The mist-clouds deepened, thickened; she heard a sharp, incisive chiming, and . . .

She was lying on the rug before the fire. The locket, fallen from her hand, had burst open and from its broken case a few crisp, browned rose petals had spilled into a spot of firelight. The little clock upon the mantel was striking. She looked up. Its hands indicated nine o'clock. Her vision—if it had been that—had lasted only while the hurrying gong beat out the final seven of nine strokes. Less than six seconds.

**M**Y DEAR NIECE [wrote Aunt Susan in response to Mehitabel's urgent appeal for enlightenment]: I am sorry I can't tell you much about the tragedy of the unfortunate young woman for whom you're named. Your Uncle Pembroke and Aunt Agatha had her diary and many of her letters, but these, unfortunately, were destroyed in the Chicago Fire. Accordingly, I can give you only hearsay accounts, and as I shall be seventy next birthday, I must ask you to bear with me if at times my memory seems to falter.

As I recall the story, Mehitabel Holmead lived alone in the house where you're now staying, her parents having died some years before the War of 1812.

Following the Battle of Lake Erie, captured British officers were quartered inland for safekeeping, as our military prisons were inadequate. One of these, a young

Lieutenant Allan Arbothnot, was billeted in the village of Mount Auburn, some five miles from the Holmead Lodge, the office of the village church having been pressed into service as his quarters. He had given his parole, and as Mount Auburn was so far inland, no guard was kept on him, and he mingled freely with the villagers and local gentry.

Great-aunt Mehitabel fell desperately in love with him, and he returned her devotion, but early in the summer of 1814 he came into possession of General Macomb's plans to halt the British army which was to invade New York from Quebec. Thereupon he determined to make his way in disguise to Canada and warn the British of Macomb's plans.

Your great-great-aunt begged him to respect his parole, and when he refused threatened to denounce him to the American authorities. Nevertheless, he persisted, and, true to her threat, she informed against him. He was arrested in civilian clothes, tried by summary court-martial, convicted, and hanged as a spy forthwith.

Great-aunt Mehitabel begged his body from the American provost marshal and had it buried from her house in the Holmead family plot in the village graveyard. She died before the first snowfall that winter, and by her express request was buried in the same grave with him.

A single tombstone served for both of them, and I've been told she dictated the epitaph, which described both him and her as patriots, and ended by declaring that each loved his country so much that he did not hesitate to lay a votive offering of a broken heart upon the altar of duty.

Mehitabel laid down the letter. So—She'd heard of such things, heard how inanimate objects sometimes had the quality of storing up thought-waves and emotional vibrations, keeping them imprisoned as the anthracite holds prehistoric sunlight, then,

just as the coal releases its stored heat in combustion, giving forth their long-held secrets when some sensitive person was brought near them in the proper circumstances—she'd heard such theories expounded, but she had never believed them. And yet—

The baying of a hound came to her from the hills beyond the lake, deep-throated, with a bugle-note in its tone; eerie, mournful, lonelier than the wail of a forgotten soul. Then, from somewhere to the south, an echoing deep-toned call, and, so far away that it was scarcely audible, a third. She raised her head, listening intently. The hunting season would not begin for three months. If the dogs were out upon an expedition of their own they would be running in a pack, not widely separated.

She stiffened with a sudden tenseness. The word-association formed a chain in her mind: Hounds—fugitives—man-hunters— This was wild country, such as fleeing criminals might head for after escaping from prison— She took the little shotgun from the corner, broke it and inserted shells. The feel of it in her hand was a comfort.

The baying drew nearer. Now, mingled with the barking of the dogs she heard men's shouts. They were coming up the incline from the lake. "What is it?" she hallooed through cupped hands as she went out on the terrace.

"That you, Dr. Goodrich?" came an answering hail. "You're all right?"

"Of course, why shouldn't I be?"

"Were from Rocky Hill," the man replied, and as he spoke she saw the gleam of his white jacket underneath his dark topcoat. "Delarue, the young flyer, got away an hour ago, and we're trailing him with the dogs. He's dangerous, ma'am. Very violent. This evening he got so bad we had to strap him down before we could administer the hypo.

After the injection he was quiet for a while, but when the nurse went in with his dinner he attacked him and threw him up against the wall so hard he almost cracked a rib. Then he got clean away. Can't be gone far, though. We'll find 'im before morning, sure. Keep your doors and windows fastened," he flung back as he ran down the hill to join the other hunters.

The dogs were at fault. She could hear them circling through the undergrowth down by the lake, now whining in a puzzled way, now yelping suddenly, as though they had picked up a scent, then whimpering disappointedly again. She turned to re-enter the house, paused uncertainly; came to a full halt, her gun half raised. There was a rustling in the branches of the big birch overhanging the terrace, a scrape of slipper-soles against the bark; something hurtled down and struck the bricks with a soft thud. Not twelve feet from her stood the madman.

Mehitabel had not been trained in vain. The first rule was to take no weapon near a maniac. Remembering, she tossed the gun behind her, and advanced slowly toward the visitant. "Be calm," she told him in a cool, authoritative voice. "Don't get excited. I won't hurt—" She stopped in mid-syllable.

**T**HIS was no raving, raging lunatic. The eyes were bright and clear and wholly sensible, save that they seemed to hold a light of almost breathless surprise. "Mehitabel!" he exclaimed, and held both hands out to her.

Recognition flooded over her face. This face—it was that of the young man pictured in the locket, the young lieutenant she had seen in her vision—

Then, like the ghost of dimly remembered past years made carnate, something else came to her. Not recognition—memory!

"Allan!" she cried tremulously. "Oh, Allan, my beloved, I've dreamed such dreadful things—I thought they'd hanged you!"

Now she was in his arms, his kisses warm and tender on her face while she whispered brokenly against his cheek, soft, meaningless words, the kind of words that women have made use of since the dawn of time to comfort their children—and their men.

"Good gracious!" she exclaimed. "I'm acting just as if I were Great-great-aunt Mehitabel, and you were Allan Arbothnot." She half pushed him away, but his arms tightened round her.

"Does it matter who we are—or were—my sweet, now that we've found each other?"

All will and power seemed to have gone from her; it seemed as if her life had flowed out of her hands and into his. The present blended with the past, the past was intermingled with the present. She wasn't certain of her own identity, or his, or what the year was. She knew only that she'd found a thing so infinitely precious that life would have no worth without it; but whether it had just come to her, or whether she had lost it years and centuries ago, and had regained it, she neither knew nor cared. "Oh, my beloved!" she breathed ecstatically. "It's been so long, so long—"

A hail behind them brought them racing back to reality. "Hey, Doc, here he is—there's *two* of 'em!"

**D**R. MEHITABEL DELARUE (*née* Goodrich) leaned on the rail of the balcony. Behind her the lights of the hotel dining room glowed softly, the orchestra was playing an old favorite, recently restored to popularity by radio:

"Kiss me, my honey, kiss me,  
And say you love me, as I love you—"

Almost at her feet the beach stretched out as white as burnished silver in the moonlight. The sky was filled to overflowing with big, cool, untroubled stars. Little wavelets, delicate as duchess lace, tiptoed with soft chuckling noises up the sand. Her evening dress was silver net that sparkled like a dew-jeweled cobweb in the moon-radiance. It was backless and strapless, adding suspense to the fascination of her smooth white shoulders.

"Happy, dear?" her husband asked.

"Blissful, darling!" Her fingers found his and laced through them. "When I think how easily it all might not have happened—"

"Have you any idea how it came about?" he broke in. "I haven't—"

"I've a theory, treasure. I've told you what I saw that night in Holmead Lodge, and shown you our pictures in the locket—"

"Yes, I know, but—"

"Quiet, darling. Don't interrupt the doctor when she's making a diagnosis. As I was saying, I've a theory that Allan Arbothnot and Mehitabel Holmead were earth bound, because their destiny had not been worked out here. The ghost that haunted the Lodge was his—perhaps because he had the greater vitality, possibly because of the violence of his death. You know, he wasn't disagreeable to everyone who tried to live there, but when they happened to be the sort of people he thought had no business in his dead sweetheart's house—those gangsters, for instance—he could make himself extremely obnoxious. I'm certain, too, that it was he who saved me from the gypsy that night."

"He?"

"Well, you, then, if you want it that way. At any rate, I'm descended from Great-great-Aunt Mehitabel, and look as much like her as you look like Lieutenant Arbothnot. You—your body, that is—were

in a sort of suspended animation, due to your experience in Spain. I'll never believe it was by accident you were sent to Rocky Hill, or that it was just chance that put your body so near Holmead Lodge. When I came up there all the conditions were perfect for the spirits of those poor, thwarted lovers to take possession of our memories, and realize, through us, the happiness that was denied them in a former incarnation."

"But why should I have been so violent just before we met that night?" he wondered.

"Perhaps it was the poor, sick spirit of your body fighting hard to hold it against

Arbothnot, when he was trying to take possession—"

"See here," he interrupted with a puzzled laugh, "what does that make me? What am I, anyhow, a ghost walking around in a borrowed body, or—"

Her slim bare arms stole up and tightened round his neck. The fragrance of her hair was on his cheek. "I don't know if you're a ghost or not," she whispered. "And I don't care. I only know—"

The last bars of the tune's refrain came from the orchestra, and she hummed the words softly, invitingly, against his lips:

"—"kiss me, honey, kiss me,  
I love you."

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