

Weird Tales

REGISTERED IN U.S. PATENT OFFICE

A MAGAZINE of the



BIZARRE and UNUSUAL

VOLUME V

NUMBER 1

Published monthly by the Popular Fiction Publishing Company, 325 N. Capitol Ave., Indianapolis, Ind. Entered as second-class matter March 20, 1923, at the post-office at Indianapolis, Ind., under the act of March 3, 1879. Single copies, 25 cents. Subscription, \$2.50 a year in the United States; \$3.00 a year in Canada. The publishers are not responsible for the loss of unsolicited manuscripts, although every care will be taken of such material while in our possession. The contents of this magazine are fully protected by copyright and must not be reproduced either wholly or in part without permission from the publishers. FARNSWORTH WRIGHT, Editor.

Copyright, 1924, by the Popular Fiction Publishing Company

Contents for January, 1925

Cover Design.....	Andrew Brosnatch	
Invaders From Outside.....	J. Schlossel	5
<i>A Planet From Outer Space Wages War on the Twelve Worlds</i>		
The Electric Chair.....	George Waight	17
<i>Death Faced Him—or Else the Grisly Horror of an Unknown Fate</i>		
As Obligated.....	Armstrong Livingston	26
<i>The Baronet's Bathroom Bell Was Bewitched</i>		
The Rajah's Gift.....	E. Hoffmann Price	35
<i>Oriental Tale—One Crowded Hour of Glorious Life</i>		
The Fireplace.....	Henry S. Whitehead	40
<i>A Weird Murder—and a Ghostly Revenge</i>		
White Man's Madness.....	Lenore E. Chaney	49
<i>Last of the Incas—the Lure of Gold</i>		
Red and Black.....	Irvin Mattick	67
<i>Yong Lo Was a Reptile with an Artist's Soul</i>		

(Continued on Next Page)

(Continued from Preceding Page)

When We Killed Thompson	Strickland Gillilan	73
<i>For Thirty Years He Believed Himself a Murderer</i>		
Wings of Power (First Part)	Lady Anne Bonny	77
<i>Three-part Pseudo-Scientific Novel</i>		
Out of the Long Ago	Seabury Quinn	95
<i>Werewolves—a Tale of Heredity</i>		
On the Highway	Cargray Cook	106
<i>Wild Automobile Ride, with Death at the Wheel</i>		
The Ocean Leech	Frank Belknap Long, Jr.	109
<i>Uncanny Monster Oozes Over the Side of a Ship</i>		
Two Crows	Francis Hard	115
<i>Verse</i>		
Fog	C. Franklin Miller	116
<i>Prehistoric Patagonian Monsters—a Tale of Stark Terror</i>		
Luisma's Return	Arthur J. Burks	123
<i>Haiti—Death of Henri I, Emperor of the North</i>		
A Changeling Soul	Victor Lauriston	129
<i>Tale of Tangled Personalities</i>		
The Specter Priestess of Wrightstone	Herman F. Wright	134
<i>Ghostly Legend of an English Castle</i>		
The Valley of Teeheemen (Conclusion)	Arthur Thatcher	138
<i>Two-part Novel—Strange Valley in South America</i>		
The Remorse of Professor Panebianco	Greya La Spina	157
<i>Scientist Tries to Find the Physical Qualities of the Human Soul</i>		
Arhl-a of the Caves	C. M. Eddy, Jr.	163
<i>Zurd the Coward—and the Love of Arhl-a for Wagh the Mighty</i>		
The Festival	H. P. Lovecraft	169
<i>Eldritch Tale of New England Witchcraft</i>		
Phantoms	Laurence R. D'Orsay	175
<i>Crime—Dope—and a Haunted Conscience</i>		
The Eyrie		179
<i>A Chat With the Readers</i>		

For Advertising Rates in WEIRD TALES Apply to

W. B. ZIFF CO.

Transportation Building
Chicago

Architects Building
New York

Bryant Building
Kansas City

WHEN WE KILLED THOMPSON

by STRICKLAND GILLILAN



MY, HOW I used to lie awake nights, staring into the darkness of the attic, wishing we hadn't done it!

By staring a long time with eyes stretched wide, I could see the rafters; and hanging to the rafters near the little partition that turned part of the attic into a room, were his pants—brown-striped they showed in the daylight—and his white shirt.

There was quite a while before I would admit that we had done it. I kept my mind resolutely bent on believing we hadn't, until by reviewing the circumstantial evidence over and over again I could see no loophole. And when his brother-in-law was reported to have been in the neighborhood asking others about him, and never came near us, I knew it was no use to deny it if any one should accuse us. Yet it would be unfair to confess without the consent of the others involved in the killing.

So I held my peace. With the exception, of course, of the one night at supper when I blurted, out of a dead and oppressive silence, "I wish we hadn't killed Thompson."

Every one stopped eating and looked wildly at me. They had not expected me to say this, evidently.

Mother asked harshly: "What do you mean?"

I got up and left the table hurriedly. I hadn't meant to say it. It was unfair to the others.

THOMPSON had come to our house to board. It was spring-time. He was a timber-looker for a spoke and rim company of Portsmouth. People sent him to our house because sometimes we took folks in. We were reputed to have good food, and our little frame home was one of the best in a poverty-ridden vicinity.

Not so much of a home it would appear now. There was a combination kitchen-dining-room, with an old stove in one corner, the stairway to the attic in the corner nearest the stove, the gun hanging over the doorway leading to the living room where the big fireplace was, and an out-of-doors door leading to the back porch where the morning wood was piled in the winter. Off from that back porch opened the little room where the boys of the family sometimes slept. Always one or two of us slept there. Then leading back from the living room was the parlor, and back of that the spare bedroom.

On the wall of the living room hung a chromo entitled "Rock of Ages." It consisted of a large lady draped in a single garment, reaching up with bare arms and clinging to a great stone cross on a wave-washed rock

Mighty religious-looking picture for a home whose occupants would—

And we did set a good table. We had plenty of apple butter and jelly and yellow tomato preserves and peach butter and all kinds of jam and pickled peaches and canned pears, and dried apples — schnitts — and everything else edible. Besides, we kept a flock of cows and mother was a mistress of the art of dairying. Many and many a night I sat beside her churn after dusk in the entrance to the hillside cellar, listening to her working the dash up and down to the rhythmic accompaniment of Scott's "Lady of the Lake" or "Marmion"; or do the churning myself while she sat on her bare feet (she was a more than half wild woman) and recited Campbell's "Hohenlinden" or "The Ritter Bann from Hungary came back renowned in arms," etc. She wasn't the sort of woman one would pick out as a conspirator in taking human life, however. But how can one tell? One knows so little of the inner workings even of those with whom one is most intimate.

Thompson was a quiet man with brown whiskers and a nose that turned up a little. He had blue eyes. I can see him yet. He had a way of sitting, on the cool spring evenings, and staring into the fire that father would have one of us boys build to keep off the chill. There was, as I now see, nothing else for Thompson to have done. The coal-oil lamp didn't give a very good reading light; there was no lamp for the spare room; and we children—I in particular—sat and stared so hard at the man that he couldn't keep his countenance. He was a stranger, and any stranger was mysterious to me. I would sit and look at him for half an hour at a time, endowing him imaginarily with all sorts of miraculous attributes and surrounding him with an aura of dramatic possibilities. It was no fun for Thompson, as I now realize, to be gog-

gled at by a small, freckled boy with mouth and eyes both hanging open.

Now and then he talked. Father was a great pumper. His cross-examination of strangers, of whom he was always wistfully suspicious, was something to listen to and for mother to scold him about afterwards. One night in a burst of confidence, Thompson told us his first name was Charley, his wife's maiden name was Lewis, he lived at Frost Station, over in Athens county, he had a brother-in-law named Lewis (his wife's brother). He referred to the fact that Thompson and Lewis were two very common names. I thought a great deal about that. It has stuck in my mind through all these years as if there were something really significant or important in the statement.

Thompson would disappear early in the day and go to Jake Garret's, Billy Gordon's, Levi Halderman's, Joe Armstrong's or Eli Tope's or somewhere else in the vicinity, looking for the sort of timber that would make spokes and rims for wagon and buggy wheels. Now and then, when he would return in the evening, he would mention that he had found enough for a "cah". It was in that way he referred to a car-load lot of his sort of timber. It would need, he told us, to be seasoned for a year or so after cutting, before it would be ready to make into wheel timbers. I can hear him yet saying he had "found enough to staht a cah". He had no other dialectic tricks, and his "staht a cah" sounded strangely to me. Had it been today I might have accused him of plain affectation. But then I didn't. It was a part of Thompson, the stranger. It seems to me now he was never out of my thoughts, waking or sleeping, from the time he came till now, forty years later.

One day he announced that he was going to Jackson or Wellston to meet his workmen, whom he had arranged for by mail, to come and start cutting

the timber he had contracted for. He was to walk to Simpson's station, to take the train into Jackson. Before he left, Father asked him if he hadn't better settle up for his board. He did so with seeming reluctance. Whether this was because he hadn't intended squaring up, or whether he was a little miffed at being asked for it, we couldn't tell, though I wanted to continue discussing it for days. He left his brown-striped pants in his room, with a spare white shirt. So we were sure he was coming back.

WE NEVER saw Thompson again. Days and days we looked for him and his gang of workmen to return.

They did not come.

No message was received.

As the days went by with no word from him, I began to grow uneasy and apprehensive. Who had been with Thompson last? We had, so far as I could know. I covertly inquired of people who lived near the railroad track between our house and Simpson's, but none remembered having seen a man of that description. Then I began to be afraid, and stopped asking.

Night after night I lay awake till near midnight, thinking about Thompson and wondering what had happened.

I thought: "Maybe he has been killed. If anybody accused us of it, could we clear ourselves? He was here; we would say 'he went away'. Would any one necessarily believe it? Could we prove he went away?"

I speculated on a motive, but could find none except robbery. He might have had money on him.

Then a neighbor told us of Thompson's brother-in-law, Lewis, having been in the neighborhood, inquiring of those who owned timber he had been looking at, as to when the man had been seen last. Lewis never came

to see us. We were the last people who had seen him; he had lived in our house. Why hadn't he come to see us? It looked bad for the brother-in-law. It looked bad also for us—the fact that he had omitted us from his list of inquiries. Did he suspect us? What should we say if we were accused of making away with Thompson? Back it came in the inevitable vicious circle to that question.

It haunted me day and night, until I made up my mind we ought to admit the killing. Why try to defend ourselves in the face of such overwhelming circumstantial evidence? No criminal ever felt guiltier than I felt for my whole family.

Then the way they acted when I blurted out an expression of my regret that we had killed the man—that was suspicious. They looked as people would look if they had done such a thing and were surprized that it was known or that any of the conspirators had the nerve to speak above a whisper about the dastardly deed.

The pants—the brown-striped ones—and the white shirt had been relegated to the attic, from Thompson's room. They hung where I could see them. I marveled at the foolhardiness of the folks in keeping the things about as incriminating evidence when the investigation by the detectives should begin. Every tramp that came to the door for a hand-out was a detective in disguise, and I would watch from the foot of the hill until he went across the Whaley bridge and over the next rise toward Jim Boyd's.

Eventually, we being very poor, it was up to some of us to wear out these garments of Thompson's. No men's clothing should ever be allowed to rot out in that house. It fell to my lot to wear the things, I being a long-legged, growing boy. Oh, how horrified I was to have the things on me! The stripes in them seemed to writhe. And I also had to wear that white shirt. But I made short-shrift of it,

as I wore it corn-cutting, which whittles out a shirt in no time.

How glad I was to be rid of both the articles of wearing apparel.

"Kill a man and then appropriate his clothes," I used to mutter to myself. But strictly to myself. I never again ventured to mention the killing to any members of the family, and of course not to strangers. I had found, by my family's reception of the one mention, that it was a sore and unwelcome topic with them. Had there not been so many appalling silences in our house, so many "hushes" when one of us would speak, so many "stop that sniggerin's" when we would get to laughing, those reflections of mine on our crime might not have been so constant and so poignant.

Nobody knows better than I what are the thoughts and apprehensions and conscience twinges of an undiscovered murderer.

THIRTY years after Thompson disappeared, I happened to be traveling on a local train. Looking at the time card I noted that Frost was the next station. Yes, and it was Athens county, too! I slipped into my overcoat and ran forward while the train slowed down. A little, withered old man was loafing at the station, looking up at the coach windows.

"Did you ever know anybody around here named Charley Thompson?" I precipitately asked, while the baggageman began struggling with one trunk and the station agent waited with one milk-can on his truck.

"That's my name," he said.

"Did you ever work as a timber-looker for a Portsmouth spoke and rim company?"

"Yes, I bought many a cah for that company."

"Did you"—

"B-o-o-oard!" yelled the conductor.

I had to hop on to resume my journey without finding out what I'd always wanted to know: why Charley Thompson hadn't come back, where he was while his brother-in-law was hunting him, and everything.

But I felt a thousand pounds lighter. I knew now we hadn't murdered him; and for the first time in three decades I was absolutely at peace with the world. Of course common sense had asserted itself years before and I had known positively that there was no foundation for my childish and self-conscious obsession: that is, I had known it mentally. But a fear had lodged in my emotional system that had not, until that withered native had said "cah", been wholly absent from me.