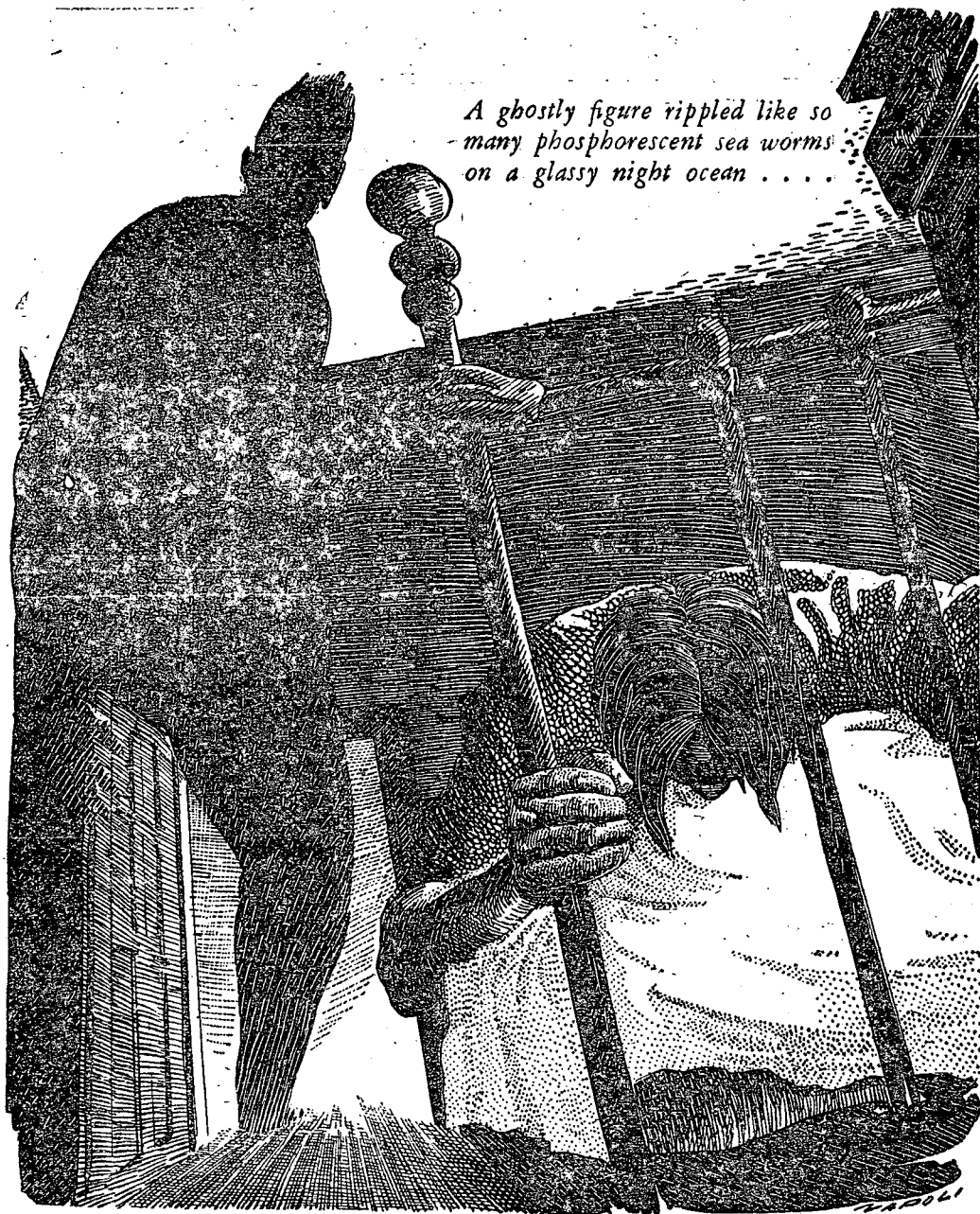


The Insistent Ghost

By Emil Petaja

*A ghostly figure rippled like so
many phosphorescent sea worms
on a glassy night ocean*



SEAGULLS, their bellies filled with herring spawn, halted their greedy peregrinations long enough to perch on Tessa Alder's faded sign, and not infrequently to add a brief comment to Tessa's corny but commercially sound device for luring tourists and townspeople into her little gift and book shop. Her beloved landlord would do nothing at all to relieve the peeled, dilapidated condition of the double-flat's facade (or indeed any other part of the house) so Tessa, with her usual delicate counterbalance of shrewd realism and affection for whimsy, painted the legend "YE OLDE GHOSTE SHOPPE" on an old piece of driftwood, and set it to swinging on the low brick wall in front of her window. Occasionally, when some young couple breathlessly asked her who haunted the shop and why, she would blandly improvise something appropriate.

Today, the sky having produced rain several times already, remained bleak and gusty and portentous. Inside the shop Tessa was giving her friend Verbena Smith tea.

"Artists sometimes take poison. Don't they, Verbena?" Tessa was asking, in her invariably mild sweet way.

As a matter of fact they had been discussing last night's movie, a lavish musical. Verbena Smith smoothed down her lavender ruffles and smiled uncertainly. She wished Tessa would not ramble so. People frequently asked her if Tessa Alder wasn't just a little off her head, and Verbena's no was not always as convincing as it might be. But she did enjoy taking tea with Tessa, and going to the movies with her. Then, too, Tessa was *old*—Tessa was sixty-seven, while she was only sixty-one.

"More tea, darling?" Tessa asked, when Verbena, in her old maid's brown study, neglected to answer her.

Verbena shook her head and sipped from her egg-shell cup significantly. Tessa hummed as she reached behind the little coal stove for her own special earthen pot and poured herself a third cup. Verbena coughed to conceal her smile. Tessa was so odd. She would serve herself from that ugly earthen pot behind the stove, whereas guests were served from the pretty China pot with the cosy on it, the jaunty red and

yellow cosy Verbena herself had knitted Tessa for Christmas. Well, it was likely her way of indicating that her guests were better than she was. Verbena was willing to accept this judgment.

The pursed grimace she put forth to camouflage all this mental activity was intended to be a gracious smile. She would string along with Tessa's odd fancies, humor the poor thing.

"Sometimes they hang themselves," she tittered.

"Who—ah—oh, yes! What I meant, Verbena, is that artists are peculiar. They get so intense about their work, and then when their paintings don't sell and nobody even wants to look at them—" She tilted her dark eyebrows significantly.

Verbena smiled.

"I know who you're thinking about. You're thinking about the young man in the flat upstairs."

"Mr. Teufel. Perhaps. He *is* an artist—and come to think, I don't imagine he sells many paintings."

"He doesn't sell any," Verbena corrected. "We were discussing him only yesterday at the Ladies' Sewing and Bridge Club."

"Oh?"

"Mrs. Abernathy's husband knows all about him. He can't pay his rent. He can't pay for anything. He tried to get a loan from the bank, but Mr. Abernathy wouldn't give him one because of course he has no security. Imagine him trying to put up some of his outlandish pictures as security! Mr. Abernathy said if Mr. Heckle, the grocer, wants to be silly and exchange food for those ridiculous daubs of his, let him. As for Mrs. Abernathy's husband's *bank*—"

"Poor Mr. Teufel."

Tessa wagged her head and poured herself more tea.

"What I say is why doesn't he go to work? Oh, Tessa, there's another seagull on your sign."

"Let him," Tessa said recklessly. "What else are the dear ladies doing these days, Verbena?"

"Oh, they're doing some marvelous things for the community, Tessa. Our bazaar alone made enough to plant flowers all along the boardwalk over the city dump

and keep the Bird Fanciers going for another year at least."

"Poor Mr. Teufel." Evidently Tessa's thoughts were jammed on an earlier track.

"Why do you keep saying that, Tessa?" Verbena found Tessa's vaguenesses very irritating. What she had really hoped from this tea was to acquire some new tidbit to dispense at the card party tonight. "Surely you must know something about Mr. Teufel by this time, something the rest of us don't. Something *definite*."

"I never eavesdrop," Tessa said.

"Of course not, but—" Verbena wiggled her cup impatiently.

"But I don't have to with Mr. Teufel. He has a phonograph and he plays it very loudly at all hours. And you can hear every footstep up there, the ceiling is so thin."

VERBENA set her cup down and cocked an ear upwards. "I don't hear a thing."

"Mr. Teufel is sleeping."

"At three o'clock!"

"Mr. Teufel always sleeps 'til four. I imagine he paints better at night, although I always thought artists preferred sunlight to artificial light."

Verbena sniffed. "With the junk he paints I don't know what difference it makes. All great gobs of nasty colors with no pictures to them at *all*."

"Anyway I wish he'd paint in the daytime," Tessa sighed. "I have to put a pillow over my head to get to sleep, with all that clumping around and that wild music."

"Any visitors?" Verbena leaned forward. "Any *girl* visitors?"

"Not that I know of. I doubt if poor Mr. Teufel has any visitors at all."

"Oh." Verbena lost her gleam. She stood up briskly. "Well, dear, I must run along home and feed Poo."

"Your cat," Tessa said, without relish.

There was more chit-chat at the door, and out along the rococo veranda. Tessa watched her gossip-loving guest mince around the pools of water remaining in the sunken portions of the brick patio and destined for early refills. All at once came a great clatter of army surplus shoes over Tessa's head, down the open stairs leading

to the upper flat. Lean Mr. Teufel swooped past Verbena so rapidly that Verbena's umbrella lost its moorings and went skittering and bobbing down the walk.

The artist's gaunt face lifted in the semblance of a smile when he retrieved and handed it back to her. Verbena emitted an explosive little shriek and drew back, as if Mr. Teufel had been a springing cobra.

Mr. Teufel scowled and said, "Boo!"

Verbena fled.

Mr. Teufel looked at Tessa and grinned. Tessa smiled politely, then went in the shop and poured herself another drink from the earthen pot.

After a while, sitting there and watching the day gradually droop and vanish, Tessa became quite tiddly. The sun made a last lavish gesture just before it dipped behind the Farallons. Its burst of brilliance highlighted Alcatraz and the populous hills of San Francisco, and put color to the muddy masses of clouds that hemmed in the East Bay horizon. While this was everyday stuff to Tessa, she was not entirely oblivious to its spectacle, and now, when the brilliance was blotted out and the Bay presented the appearance of something shrouded and good as dead, she shivered. There were seagulls, many seagulls, wheeling ambiguously across the heavy sky. But they were like vultures, and the sound they made, like that last fling of sunlight, only intensified the melancholy assurance of death. . . .

TESSA started thinking about Herb.

It was time to start thinking about him.

She poured herself another cup of sherry from the earthen pot and let him take over her thoughts. He would anyway.

Thinking about her dead husband had its amusing aspects, when you came right down to it. Maybe that was why she allowed him to keep possession of her emotions and her thoughts now, even as he had while he was alive. Oh yes. Herb had been a greedy man that way. He had expected Tessa to give him first consideration in every instance, even in her most secret thoughts. In a way she had, too. And there was no reason to assume that Herb's character had under-

gone any change now that he was dead, even if his physical self had. No, Herb could never change. He would remain as cantankerous, as selfish, as vindictive as ever, until there was no more anything at all.

Of course she had loved him.

He was handsome, bold, amusing. He captured her fancy completely. It was later, years later, when these traits blossomed forth and enveloped her with what was apparently a studied desire to strangle her and crush her.

But Tessa didn't crush easily. For all her flights of whimsy, Tessa was an intensely practical woman. So practical as to drive Herb insane with rage at times. She refused to accept surface excuses and reasons, dissecting each one to its very core. She saw into Herb as if he were made of plastic, and after a while that made him hate her. He couldn't lie to her and foist off cheap excuses or third-class reasoning on her. She always saw what was underneath and indicated she did, in her calm sweet voice.

When his heart went bad—mainly from self-indulgence in spite of his doctor's stern periodic admonishments—he blamed Tessa. She should have stopped him. How she could have done this, particularly with a self-willed individual like himself, was something Herb never bothered to consider. He had to blame somebody, besides himself, so he blamed Tessa. He took it out on her both in petty vindictiveness, and by a constant stream of ill-temper that would surely have crushed and destroyed a less valiant creature than wiry little Tessa.

He lost his handsomeness. The lines in his face which had formerly suggested swaggering boldness turned to visual evidences of mean suspicion and lurking sadism. He couldn't work, so Tessa invested the little money he hadn't squandered or needed for doctors in "YE OLDE GHOSTE SHOPPE." She made it pay, too. Not much, to be sure, but enough to keep them independent, if she were very careful.

One thing association with Herb had done for Tessa—good or bad—it had given her a taste for sherry, even mediocre sherry. There were so many remembered times

when it had proved a great solace. But after Herb became really ill, so ill that he could do nothing but sit in his chair and let Tessa wait on him hand and foot while he raged and bellowed about the condition of the world and about Tessa's inadequacies, there was no more sherry. None for Herb. It would have killed him. None for her because Herb couldn't have any. They couldn't afford luxuries, to be sure, but a thimbleful of sherry now and then wouldn't have made much difference. But Herb said no, and it was folly to cross him.

Herb was a dog in the manger other ways, too. He didn't want Tessa to take a stroll down the breakwater, or go to the movies, or have any friends. Every facet of her existence must belong to him.

Tessa wanted an occasional glass of sherry, she wanted to see Gregory Peck's latest, she wanted to hear Verbena's newest gossip. She wanted to very much. But Herb always provided logical (to him) reasons why she shouldn't have these things. And it was so much easier to let him have his way. It was easier to stay home and wait on him and listen to his invalid grumblings, because if she didn't Herb would surely make her pay for it—some way.

THIS insistence on revenge for disobedience was carried to fantastic lengths. Herb was very near-sighted, so near-sighted that he couldn't even read any longer. But he seemed to develop an uncanny second-sight about everything Tessa did. He had to know everything that went on, every tiny little thing. He distrusted all her actions. He would accuse Tessa of stinting him on cream for his gruel. She was saving it for herself—or for somebody who would slip in later. Then he would proceed to take it out on her. Always he must have his revenge, even when the reason for it existed only in his imagination.

Little things, surely. And yet little horrors, piled one on top of the other, *ad infinitum*, can lead to desperation. . . .

Tessa began to dream, and in all her dreams there was no Herb. He just wasn't there. And being essentially a practical person her dreams began to lean toward real-

ity. Herb was near-sighted. For this reason and for selfish reasons he insisted on having a hodge-podge collection of items on a large round table near his chair. Besides his heart medicine, there was salt and cat-sup and mustard and picture books and a kaleidoscope—and any number of other things.

One day when Herb picked up a vinegar bottle and started spooning vinegar into the water glass Tessa had brought for his medicine, Tessa's dreams began to take definite shape. She knew about the other medicine bottle in the bathroom, the medicine which was not poison but would surely kill a person with a serious heart condition. And she knew just how to provoke Herb into waiting on himself when it came time for his medicine.

Tessa wouldn't kill Herb. Oh, no. But she would make it convenient for him to kill himself.

The dangerous medicine bottle found its way onto Herb's cluttered table. It became an interesting gamble to see just how long it would be before Herb drank some of that, believing it to be his own medicine. Tessa invented excuses for being out of the room at medicine time, then peeked between the dining room drapes behind Herb to see what happened. It was always a breathless moment. Then she would breathe a sigh of relief when Herb picked the good bottle. After several months the strained sigh of relief became just a sigh.

A year or so went by. It seemed longer. Tessa dreamed harder than ever. Not only would she be able to have her sherry again when Herb was gone, but there would be more money to afford it. During this long period of waiting and dreaming Tessa determined that *if* anything happened she would never stint herself. She would go to bed tidily from sherry every night. She would!

It happened finally and she did.

TESSA put her cup down, regretfully, and prepared to shut up shop for the night. Humming snatches of old songs all mixed together, she took the "Open" sign

out of the window, locked the shop door, and snapped off the light.

Outside the seagulls made patterns on the wind. The tide gushed in on the breakwater. Tessa's driftwood sign creaked gently. Tiny drops of vagrant rain smeared the darkness.

Tessa found her way to bed by feeling the walls, the drapes, the familiar jumble of too much furniture. She went to sleep like a baby. There was nothing to prevent. No Herb, with his querulous rasp. No Mr. Teufel, with his wild phonograph music and his clumping. Mr. Teufel was out. And the contents of the earthen pot had made her all warm and cosy inside.

But that warmth wore off—and then something cold, something ice cold, entered the dark room. It was the room Tessa and Herb had shared for so many years. And now the coldness made her shiver and waken. She yawned and half sat up.

"Herb?" she called, after a long moment. "Is that you?"

There was no other sign—only the cold wind. But somehow she *knew*. All those years with him had given her a sixth sense where Herb was concerned. She could feel those muddy gray, half-blind eyes watching her as they had when he was alive. Crafty, suspicious, vindictive.

"Herb!" She was not afraid, no. But she was startled and uneasy. It wasn't nice of Herb to come back like this. Her voice cut the darkness sharply. "I know you're there, sitting in that same chair, just as you always did. Well? Why don't you answer me?"

Still no answer.

All the same she knew he was there in that big ugly chair of his. She had meant to get rid of that chair right after the funeral, but somehow she hadn't got to it.

"Herb Alder! I know you're in this room! You might as well let me see you."

Her neck muscles twitched. She knew something strange was about to happen. It did happen. Even though this middle room was closed in so that there was no stray light from the outside at all she knew just where to look, and she was looking there. The chair began to glow. It was an untidy

unrelated mass of phosphorescence, first, then it took shape and became Herb. She could still see the chair behind him, it was as if he were etched on plastic.

"Took you long enough," Tessa greeted him. "What are you up to? Oh, I see. You are back to spy on me, again. To keep track of everything I do, as you did before. Well, let me tell you, Herb. Last night I went to the movies. With Verbena. Yes, and I've seen her nearly every day since you died. And I've been drinking sherry, too. Lots of sherry, Herb. Like you couldn't have and wouldn't let me have. How do you like that, Herb?"

The figure in the chair didn't like it. It clouded up redly and elongated, as if to reach out for her.

Tessa began to laugh.

"Trying to frighten me, are you? Let me tell you this, Herb. You never did scare me, with all your yelling and snarling. You didn't then and you don't now."

She paid no attention to the ghost's feral gyrations. She had always wanted to tell Herb off. Now that he was dead she could. She flared up in a flame of righteous triumph.

"I put up with you a long time, Herb. With your childish tantrums and your petty suspicions. And your little revenge when you thought I was neglecting you or slighting you. Well, I got my share of revenge too! Do you know how, Herb? Haven't they told you where you are?"

The ghostly figure rippled like so many phosphorescent sea-worms on a glassy night ocean.

"Surprise, surprise, Herb!" Tess chorled, nearly hysterical by now with this supreme adventure of telling Herb off. "It was I who killed you, Herb! It was I who put that bad medicine on your cluttered table. I had to wait a long time for you to pick that bottle. But the gamble kept me amused while I waited. What do you say to all that, Herb?"

Herb expressed himself by elongating almost to the ceiling. He made himself into a luminescent tower of rage. His lips moved and although no spoken words came out he seemed to be saying: *I suspected as much.*

That's why I came back. Now I know for certain and now. . . .

"What can you do about it now, Herb?" Tessa taunted him. "What can you do?"

She fell back, rocking with laughter.

A faint wisp of light entered the room, a tenuous harbinger of daylight. A blast of freezing cold swept the room and just before Herb vanished, Tessa was sure she heard him rasp:

"I always have my revenge, Tessa. Make the most of your freedom, because you have only until tomorrow night. . . ."

TESSA lagged about her duties the next day. Try as she might she could never quite erase those words from her mind. Her head was fuzzy, too, from over-indulgence in the tea department the day before. She had been a fool to tell Herb she killed him! What a stupid thing to do! And now, typically, he wanted his revenge. That ugly rasped threat! *Tomorrow night. . . .*

He wasn't giving her much time, was he?

The more she thought about it the uneasier she became. She hadn't a very clear idea just what Herb could do to her, dead and all. But he would do something. Trust Herb. And it wouldn't be at all nice.

Her frugal lunch of cottage cheese and canned peaches was interrupted by the strident tinkle of the cat-bell over the shop door. She hurried out in front.

"Can I help you?"

It was a young couple, happy honeymooners, trying to match their delirious mood in her quaint little shop, inasmuch as the lowering skies outside did not.

"Tell me, is the shop really haunted?" the girl twittered.

"Yes." Tessa frowned. It used to be rather fun, building up sham gothic romances for tourists. Not now.

"Really?" The new bride bubbled over. Her husband winked at her fondly.

"Who haunts it?" he asked Tessa.

"My husband."

"No!" The bride, fondling her new husband's lapel, assumed interest in the shelf nearest her to hide her smile. "Look, dear. Isn't this just the darlingest little Chinese elephant?"

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"If you think so, sweet. Why does he haunt it?" The young man's lips twitched suspiciously.

"He wants revenge," Tessa found herself blurting. "He was murdered, and he's come back to—"

"Who murdered him?" The young man peeled off a dollar for the elephant.

Tessa took it, staring at him. "Nobody!" she snapped. "It's just a story!"

They left, the bride-cooing about the quaintness of the shop and the darling-

ness of the driftwood sign and wasn't Tessa the cutest thing. Tessa picked up the nearest object to hand with the idea of hurling it after them. It turned out to be the earthen pot, and it wasn't quite empty. So she sank back in the chair by the window and had a slug.

Two more and she began to relax.

She must think, think, *think*. What did Herb have up his ghostly sleeve, and how was she going to circumvent him? It was past one already. Not much time. . . .

Think fast, Tessa!

Something sifted into her thoughts, interrupting them. Music. Dirge-like music from upstairs. At this hour! Mr. Teufel was actually up at one-thirty, playing his blankety-blank phonograph. The dirge ended and was followed by some wild modern dissonances. Tessa couldn't help listening. After a while it struck her that there was some insidious pattern to Mr. Teufel's selection of music. It all suggested a particular train of emotion. And when a scratchy, banal interpretation of *Good-bye* began to smite her eardrums Tessa leaped to her feet.

By the time it repeated for the third time Tessa was upstairs peeking through the bamboo slats into Mr. Teufel's studio.

"Mr. Teufel, no!" she exclaimed. "You mustn't do that!"

The young artist was inside, busily engaged in hanging himself from the middle rafter.

TESSA banged on the door without result, so she whipped out her own door keys and tried them. One of them, with the added impetus of a severe inward push, sent her plunging through.

The studio was sizable but dreary. The bare floor made it ice cold, and the artist's furnishings consisted mainly of nail kegs and orange crates. Somehow the gay bohemian dash was utterly lacking. True, there was a half-completed oil on his easel, but the canvas had been slashed across as if in a spasm of despondent rage.

"You stop that right now," she told the emaciated young man on the nail keg. Mr. Teufel was endeavoring to thrust his head

into an ill-made noose of clothesline rope. "Why should I?" he demanded, scowling down at her.

"For one thing you're not doing it right," Tessa told him. "Always put the noose around your neck first, then wrap the rope twice around the rafter, overloop, and—never mind!" she finished off tartly.

"*What are we waiting for, oh, my heart?*" queried the tenor dismally. "... *the leaves must fall, and the lambs must die.* ..."

Tessa snapped him off. His voice deepened and munched out and vanished. The artist stared at her sullenly, then collapsed his lanky frame to a sitting position on the keg. Tessa marched about the room briskly. Mr. Teufel's studio was an exact replica of her own bedroom, except for the lack of furniture and the rafters. Paint it up a little, apply a few rugs and pictures, and it would be livable.

Tessa turned her attention to the artist.

"You make an awful amount of noise nights," she reprimanded him. "Don't you realize you're supposed to sleep nights and work days?"

"Then why didn't you let me go through with it?" he demanded bitterly. "Suppose you go downstairs now and forget what you saw." He brightened perceptibly.

"That wouldn't help," Tessa said. "You need furniture. The place is like a barn."

"I need a lot of things—including talent." He got up and began to pace. The clump of his army surplus shoes on the bare floor was all too familiar, although easier to take here than downstairs. Pacing up and down was, then, one of the best things Mr. Teufel did. And his self-expressed lack of talent was the bone of contention.

"Who says you have no talent?" Tessa's sharp eyes traveled to a nearby corner, to a heap of canvases carelessly tossed therein. They, like the one on the easel, had been slashed across.

"Everybody says so," the artist growled irritably. "Yesterday was my last chance to prove to myself that I might someday be an artist, even a passable good artist. A critic from Paris was visiting San Fran-

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cisco. All the others said I stink, but Charles Demeaux is notoriously aloof from them. He helped a friend of mine once, a nobody like me, just on the strength of what he saw in his paintings. My friend told him about me, and yesterday a letter came saying Charles Demeaux would see me if I could get over there yesterday, as he was leaving today. I waited until twelve-thirty last night in the rain, until he came home from the ballet. Demeaux was very kind. He fed me I don't know how many crepe suzettes and how many glasses of wine. But when it came to my paintings—

"He didn't like them?"

A spasm of utter misery crossed the artist's gaunt face. "He didn't say it like that. He was too kind, too polite. But that's what it boiled down to. No talent. No expression. No future in art. Nothing!"

Mr. Teufel was plainly a man obsessed. His world had crumbled. Tessa made a tentative effort to cheer him up.

"There must be other critics. Maybe you are ahead of your time."

"They all pretend that." Mr. Teufel's lip curled. "Not me. At least I can be honest with myself. I'm no good. I never have been and I never will be."

"Of course I don't exactly understand—" Tessa said soothingly.

"No, you don't!" Mr. Teufel raged. "You don't know a damn thing about it, so why don't you get the hell out of here and leave me alone? Nobody understands anything! The world is full of sadistic morons who pretend to mean well. Bah! Bring on your atom bombs! The sooner the better!"

Tessa's sharp eyes widened, then closed.

"Well?" Mr. Teufel glared at her scornfully. "Aren't you going to go call the police or something?"

"Nope," Tessa said. "I've got a job for you."

Mr. Teufel's expression told her what he thought of work. Tessa just waited.

"Well, if I'm forced to delay my departure I guess I'll have to eat sometime. What kind of a job?"

"I want you to help me move some furniture. Yes, I'm giving it to you, Mr. Teufel—in return for a small favor."

TESSA slept well that night. She went to sleep brimming over with great satisfaction in having done a good deed. There was nothing, she told herself before Morpheus took over, quite as edifying to a human being as having performed a kindness for another human being.

Near dawn she woke with a start. The thought that awakened her was the illusion that she had missed her cue, that her alarm clock hadn't gone off, that she had left a dangerous heater burning all night. *Something...*

And yet full consciousness assured her it was actually none of those things.

The springs creaked as she hiked herself up on the pillows. She cast her eyes about the darkness but she saw no shred of light anywhere. It was as if she had just missed hearing something.

"Herb?"

Her whisper vibrated into the dark, but there was no answer.

Then it came, a far-off sound like a sigh. Or was it only a seagull calling mournfully over the dark waters? Tessa chose to think it wasn't a seagull. She folded aside the covers and slid her legs down on the shag rug. Her feet groped for her sheepskin-lined slippers and invaded them. Without snapping on a light she found her robe and wrapped it around her. A habitual toss of her long black hair to unsnarl it from the collar and she went to the outside door.

She idled a second or two, listening to the swirling sucking noises the tide made as it drained away from the rocks, then she pattered to Mr. Teufel's door and listened.

She heard nothing.

She applied her key and pushed. . . .

There had been sounds in there, mysterious sounds, and movements. She could sense their aftermath. Now there was only darkness and the cold swirling of air, as if a grave had opened and closed.

"Mr. Teufel!" she called across the room.

She knew exactly where the bed was. She knew just where everything was, inasmuch as she had given Mr. Teufel most of this furniture and had helped him arrange it.

"Are you there, Mr. Teufel?"

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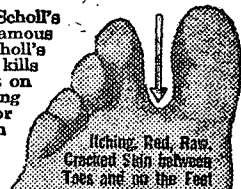
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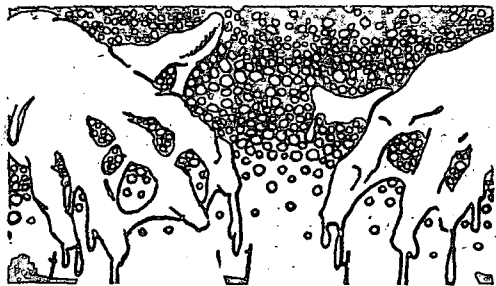
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WEIRD TALES

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Still no answer.
"Herb?"
Nothing.

TESSA took a deep breath and pulled the string that switched on the ceiling light. The room leaped harshly to life. Ah. There was Herb's big chair, which she had given Mr. Teufel. And by it was Herb's old table, the one that used to be so cluttered. All there was on it now was an empty bottle.

There was no label on the bottle, none at all, but it looked like some kind of medicine Herb had taken at one time but which a normal heart could never stand. It was rather careless of Tessa not to have thrown it out, and to have scrupulously removed the label.

She didn't touch it. There would be fingerprints.

The bed was quite a mess, as if Mr. Teufel had threshed about in the throes of great misery—or under the hypnotic influence of some demanding spectre. But now that he was dead Mr. Teufel looked so calm, so peaceful, so happy with the world—or to be leaving it.

Tessa smiled there a moment, as at some teasing memory. Then she stepped softly out on the veranda and locked the door behind her. The sky was brighter now. There would be sun today, bright sun.

Tessa leaned on a rococo pillar and sighed. If Herb hadn't been quite so insistent on his revenge—Anyway, now he could rest in peace. And so could dear Mr. Teufel. He had been so definite about destroying himself, and who can stop a man from doing that if he has firmly made up his mind? And it was so much nicer than hanging himself, so neat. No bother for anybody.

Herb had followed his cue to perfection. His ironic revenge had consisted of forcing Tessa to drink medicine that would kill her, too. Only Herb couldn't know that Tessa had got Mr. Teufel to exchange flats with her this afternoon, and poor Herb was so nearsighted—

The Eyrie

(Continued from page 6)

of that "batch," but not us. We have been receiving some variation of this promise every week for the last three months—sometimes word of an impending cover is included—but that is all we get. We are holding a good story (all set, too) for the cover, we are holding our readers at bay about the promised WEIRDISMS, we are holding our breath, but so far to no avail.

The Editor, WEIRD TALES.

The Editor, WEIRD TALES

9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York 20, N. Y.

I am quite glad you have decided to reinstate the letter department, always one of your magazine's better features. A mag with no letter column seems empty and lifeless, somehow. Please keep it in. Please let us see more of Dolgov on the covers. . . . Clark Ashton Smith, one of this reader's favorite contemporary poets, appears in WT only too seldom for me. His latest poem had his usual fine imagery, mood, and colorful choice of words, although I can't completely admire the poetic form. Keep up the poems, though. Good luck with future issues!

Lin Carter

1734 Newark St. So., St. Petersburg, Fla.

The Editor, WEIRD TALES

9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York 20, N. Y.

I think the July issue is in most ways, an improvement. You keep a nice variety of writers, the style of Quinn always a bit sentimental (perhaps better described as morbidly sentimental), balances nicely with the English stories of H. R. Wakefield, and all the other regulars. I only wish Quinn would bring Jules de Grandin* onto the scene more often. . . . I suggest a forecast of the next issue notice each time you make up the contents.

Bob Barnett,

1107 Lyon, Cathage, Mo.

*There's one in the shop now.

The Editor, WEIRD TALES.

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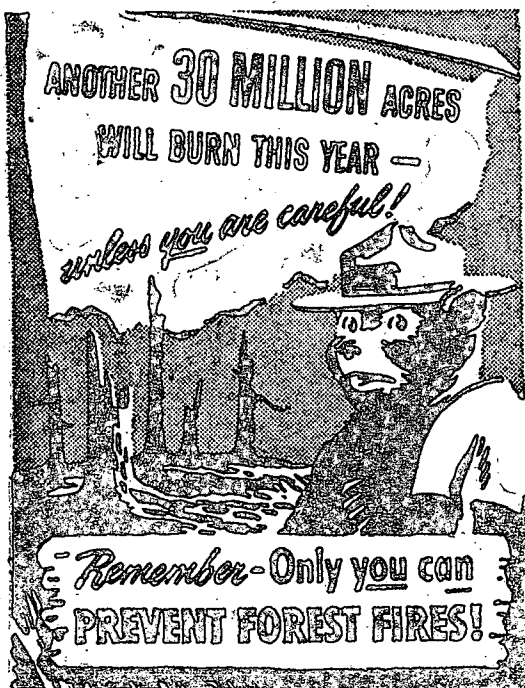
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The Editor, WEIRD TALES

9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York 20, N. Y.

On the science-fiction vs. fantasy controversy, I want to throw my vote solidly on the fantasy side.

The world is now filled with science-fiction, while there is (to my knowledge) only one WEIRD TALES. It's quite bad enough, getting WT only every two months. If, in addition half of it is to be given over to stories of a kind that can be found in half a dozen other publications, that's just too much.

As you doubtless know even better than your readers, good stories of fantasy and the supernatural are hard to come by. If you give us what your title stands for and we pay our money to get, we fans of the supernatural will be faithful to WEIRD TALES.

James W. Hoffman,
Holmes, Pennsylvania.

The Editor, WEIRD TALES

9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York 20, N. Y.

I want to compliment your magazine on the improved quality of your stories. Years ago I read the magazine, but quit because of the horror stories which had a very bad effect upon my mind.

Recently I became interested in science-fiction and fantasy, and began buying the magazines again, and among them your July issue.

I liked the story "Shallajai" very much, and wish you would print many more like it. It was good fantasy with truth as a basis, and you cannot fail when you print stories of that type. I do not like your covers, nor illustrations, for they are definitely horror stuff; and as such should not be printed for the greater good of the common welfare. I believe the science-fiction-fantasy field is under the guidance of evolutionary forces, and as such will grow up into something that will be uplifting and noble. It has a great future, and will surely evolve out of the lurid and horrible. There is much for mankind to learn of the etheric worlds, and of himself if you please, but it is for his good and not for his detriment as horrors are.

(Mrs.) Naomi Holly,
Colton, California.

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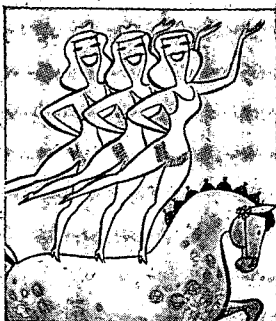
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