

"Two Face"—FRANK BELKNAP LONG

Weird Tales

MARCH

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When the Rats
Take over!

"Home
to Mother"

by

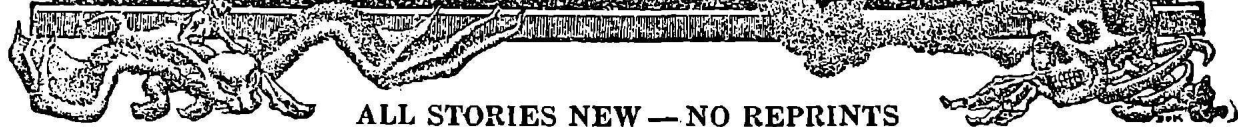
MANLY WADE
WELLMAN



"The Shadow of Saturn"

E. HOFFMANN PRICE

Weird Tales



ALL STORIES NEW — NO REPRINTS

MARCH, 1950

Cover by Lee Brown Coye

NOVELETTE

- HOME TO MOTHER** Manly Wade Wellman 4
Whatever was to live through man-made catastrophe on earth would be bound to be altered into the sort of monster that alone could survive—horror piled on horror.

SHORT STORIES

- TWO FACE** Frank Belknap Long 19
Until now we have been free to speculate on the planetary mysteries of the universe, but on some great tomorrow these mysteries shall be known—for better or worse.

- THE SHADOW OF SATURN** E. Hoffmann Price 30
Wish is a firecracker, will is an A-bomb. Wishing is an emotional muddle; willing is pure force.

- THE TREE'S WIFE** Mary Elizabeth Counselman 43
Her young husband shot, her Paw in a hospital, how could she do anything else but marry a tree?

- THE CORN DANCE** Margaret St. Clair 50
To see the Corn Dance—and talk about it afterwards—that was an experience few terrestrials could have.

- TAKE THE Z TRAIN** Allison V. Harding 60
At the end of a hot monotonous day at work do you dare long for something truly different?

- STAY WITH ME** Shelby Steger 66
It was a comforting assurance that one need not be afraid either of living or dying.

- THE HUNGRY GHOST** Emil Petaja 74
"He's come back, Doctor! He won't let me eat because I starved him to death!"

- DEAD MAN'S SHOES** Day Keene 81
He had never killed anyone, blasphemed, nor stolen and what had it got him? A sentence of death at forty.

VERSE

- DO YOU FORGET, ENCHANTRESS?** Clark Ashton Smith 29

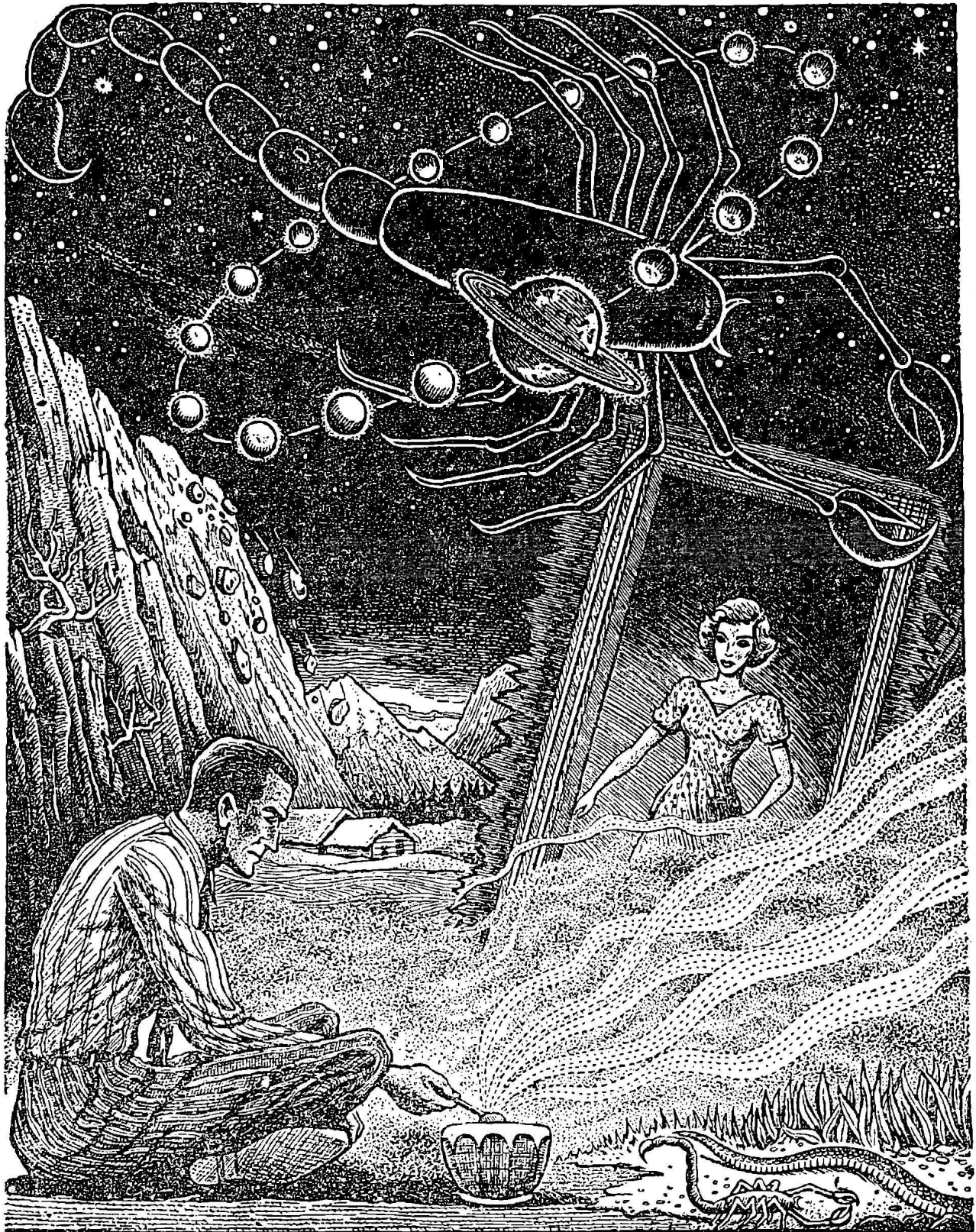
- WEIRDISMS** Lee Brown Coye 65

- THE EYRIE** 94

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The Shadow of Saturn
By *E. Hoffmann Price*



WHAT I have to say about the Siamese triplets will have nothing at all to do with any linking together of physical bodies. The bond which connected Dick Wayland, and Benson's wife, Diane, was an invisible one.

Of the three, Wayland was the first I met. His upper eyelids, lurking beneath overhanging brows, betrayed their existence only by the lashes. His eyes had a purpose more important merely than looking and seeing. Except to a person of considerable self-assurance, they could have been intolerable whenever he chose to make them so. Now, however, they were amiable and winning as his voice.

"Why won't you tell me how long I have to live, Mr. McQuoid?"

"If your health worries you, why not see your doctor instead of an astrologer?"

The man's will drew back like a well-trained leopard, to remain poised behind the persuasiveness of smile and eyes. The nose, neither straight nor aquiline, added to his expression of power consciousness.

"There used to be a time," he retorted, "when no doctor worth his salt was ignorant of astrology, and no astrologer ignorant of medicine. Just why won't you tell me how many years I have ahead of me?"

"In the first place, to do so would be a violation of professional ethics." I fingered the letter and the check which he had sent a

few days previously. "In the second place, when you wrote me the minute and hour and date of birth, and the town also, you left out something quite important."

"What was that?"

"You did not tell me that this is another man's birth data, not your own. If only because you tried to trick me, I wouldn't deal with you!"

"Do you mean," he demanded, "that you believe you can judge at first sight whether I am older or younger than the date indicates?"

"The horoscope I set up describes a man taller and heavier than you are, Mr. Wayland. He has a squarish face. He is ruddy, he has thick hands and a thick neck, and is probably on the way to being bald. He loves spotlight. You prefer being the power behind the throne. Next time you try to pull a fast one, send data to fit."

Wayland, however, was persistent. He wagged his head appreciatively and countered, "That was to see whether you knew

Heading by
Matt Fox



your business. You said, *he*. That happens to be a woman's birth data."

"You never can get your fill, can you? Only a male could have been born when the degree corresponding to that time was rising. This cannot be a woman's birth time. Here is your check. There is no charge. Whatever you are up to, I don't want to deal with you."

"Oh, all right, Mr. McQuoid! There are three of us in this. He and she and I. It is one of those situations."

"And it's important for you and her to outlive him?"

"Yes," he answered. "First time in my life that anything ever has been really important."

Whether I wanted it or not, I had a client; three clients, in fact. Although I did not for a moment feel that Wayland would use pistol or poison to reshape things to his taste, it was clear that something deadly was developing.

"Give me your birth data, and hers."

When he did so, I opened the 1890-1930 ephemeris to his birth month and glanced at the positions of the planets on his day. Usually one has to draw a map of the heavens, the twelve-spoked Wheel of Fate, to see what influences ruled a man. Wayland's stars on the contrary were so conspicuously aspected as to shout from the page. And a glance at the Table of Houses clinched it.

"At your birth," I told him, "the seventh degree of Scorpio was rising."

"What's wrong with *that*?"

I pointed to the wall chart. "Most signs of the zodiac have only one symbol. Yours has four. There is the scorpion, waiting in the dust and ready with his poisonous barb. There is the snake crawling in the grass with his poison. There is the eagle of pride, flying up to stare the sun out of countenance. Finally there is the Phoenix—reborn man, freed of earth, and become god-like. And judging from your stars, your eagle is still in the dust, playing with snakes and scorpions.

"You are using an invisible weapon, your will power. Like an Australian bushman, 'pointing the bone' to will someone to death."

"That's not true!"

"Whether you know it or not, you are practicing black magic. If it weren't for my bare chance of opening your eyes, I'd wash my hands of the entire business, and good-riddance! Pick up your check—I can't take any pay."

"Why not? This is important to me."

"If a man asks a lifeguard to give him swimming lessons on his day off duty, payment is in order. But you rarely hear of a lifeguard offering a drowning man swimming lessons at so much an hour. I'll see you when I've studied your chart and hers and his."

Wayland—Benson—Diane—they were Siamese triplets; and Wayland was a blind man with a kit of psychic surgical instruments, trying to cut the invisible bond, so that he and Diane would be free to start a new life together. While the operation might succeed, not one of the three patients could survive.

All this became so clear and so haunting that I broke away from a dinner party right after the coffee and brandy; and on my way home, I followed an impulse and went directly to Wayland's place in the foothills behind Atherton.

The house was on a bald knoll whose base was fringed with oaks. Knowing well the atrocious parking most country places offer, I left my car at the level spot not far from the entrance. The ascent was neither long nor steep, yet the effect was odd. At first I thought that too many cigarettes and too many years sitting at a desk had made me more short-winded than I had realized; but it proved to be another sort of breathlessness, and it was combined with that light-headedness which one experiences after a swift drive from six or seven thousand feet elevation down to sea level.

It is not so much an actual giddiness as it is a sensing that one's balance is slightly off; that one's own voice sounds like someone else's; probably all this is because the inner ear, which seems to control equilibrium, has not had a chance to readjust itself to the change of pressure.

Ear . . . inner ear . . . sound . . . *sound*,
not elevation at all!

Yet there was no more than a suggestion of sound, and that so uncertain as to be no more than premonition that I should presently hear something. Still and all, it played tricks with the equilibrium mechanism, so that I had to exert a conscious effort, however slight, to remain normally balanced.

Presently the sound became audible, yet hearing it was something like seeing an iceberg—in that what is perceived is less than a tenth of all that is actually there. The unheard part of what came from the house was what had the disturbing force. The murmuring, the rustling, the whispering were only the perceptible indication of something beneath the level of hearing.

Wayland was beating a drum. Not a snare drum, not a bass drum, not a tympanum, but something far more primitive. Perhaps remember the travelogue and sound track which Harrison Smith recently brought back from Tibet? Hundreds of yellow-robed lamas gathered to chant to the sunrise.

AUM! Mani padme hum! AUM! Tat Savitur varenyam!

Wayland's drumming was like the chanting of those lamas; and I began to understand as from direct experience why the explorer had insisted that the actual chant gave an effect which the sound track did not have; that the intoning of *mantrams* literally went to one's head, and seemed to wrench the sutures of the skull, and to hammer the nerve center of the solar plexus.

Pain and dizziness became more pronounced. I could not feel the porch flooring under my tread. It was as if gravity had ceased to act. I caught at the jamb, and got a glance through the small pane, slantwise through vestibule and archway and into the living room. Wayland sat on the floor. He had a saddle drum whose wooden shell was no larger than a good-sized mixing bowl. With one hand he beat the head.

Beat is hardly the word. For while he did tap with knuckles and fingertips, and heel of the hand, and slapped with the palm, the strokes were only at times percussive. He varied the impacts by rippling his fingertips as though on the keys of a piano. He made dragging, caressing sweeps. There was only a little sound: a murmuring, a whispering,

a muttering, like the persistence of a gong note when the bronze is stilled yet not actually mute.

He swayed and nodded. It was as though he had become a mechanical toy. Wayland was absent: what I saw was his animated frame. The man himself had stepped into another dimension. His will, carried on drumbeats, reached out. What I felt was only the eddying backwash of the currents which he was directing elsewhere.

Wayland was making magic. Magic, stripped of ritual, is nothing more than directed and controlled vibration, the carrier wave of concentrated will, of pure power. Thought, in its plane, is moulded into shape as are iron or clay on the material plane.

I groped, fumbled for the pushbutton. Whoever was receiving the directed impulses of Wayland's drumming was being twisted on a psychic rack. Though I found the button, my fingers acted as though they belonged to someone else. While not ignoring my will, they seemed unable to understand or obey. Rather, my will was groping, hobbled, stumbling.

That beating, that surging, those flashes and whirlpools of light in my own head were the interference waves of a fourth dimensional heterodyne: the illusion of sound and light, images made stronger by twisted nerves.

The geometry of the room was warping out of all relation to reality. It was not only as though I now saw Wayland at once full face and in profile; it was as though, without disturbance of the walls, there was an additional dimension down which I could see all the way to infinity. Perspective became wholly false. The woman who came down the hyper-dimensional spiral changed rather in figure and feature and expression than in apparent height as she moved from infinite remoteness to step at last into the room.

WHEN the face and form solidified, I recognized Diane Benson. The Ascending Sign of her horoscope had correctly described head shape and carriage, the set of the shoulders, the expression of the dark eyes. I had expected unusual brunette

beauty, with Saturn in Libra: Diane went far beyond expectation.

Wayland seemed not to see her, nor she, him. Yet her lips moved, and her eyes, at once haunting and haunted, were fixed as on someone facing her.

Whatever this was, it would be dangerous to interrupt, even if I could. But the hand which had so long been unable to obey now acted as though of its own will. Space rearranged itself. The bell snarled in the hallway. Wayland continued his drumming; however, the sound was only a normal one, the curiously stirring appeal of drums. The apparition of Diane had vanished.

IRANG again, and gave the knob a twist and a rattle. The door opened without warning. I lurched headlong across the threshold and into the hall. Wayland yelled, jumped up, and checked himself against a chair.

"Where the devil'd you come from?"

"Walked in. I rang, but it seems your drum kept you from hearing. I must have got impatient and jiggled the door and it wasn't latched. Sorry I startled you."

Though Wayland had not yet wholly returned into himself, he made a characteristic grimace, wry and half-humorous. "Drums always have fascinated me. This one's more relaxing than liquor. You can have your electric organs and the like, I'll take a drum for self-expression."

"This is an odd one," I said, kneeling to get a close look. "Wouldn't be out of place in a museum. Is it something liberated during the war?"

He shook his head. "I picked it up when they auctioned the St. Cyr estate. Junk from the trophy room. Persian armor, Zulu assegai, Tibetan statuette—and this." He reached for the decanter on the tile-topped cocktail table. "Bourbon?"

"Thanks, no. I just broke away from dinner, and followed the impulse to barge in. I had you three people so strongly in mind I couldn't stay in step with sociability this evening."

"Well, now! What did our horoscopes tell you?"

"You're practicing black magic with that

drum. If you are not trying to will him to death, you are trying to will her to pack up and run out with you. Pretty mess, you and he, law partners!"

Wayland's face tightened. "How would I be able to do anything of the sort, assuming I were trying to?"

"About one human in every hundred thousand, perhaps one in every million, let's not quibble about numbers, has *will* power. The others aren't able to go beyond mere wishing, hoping. Wish is a firecracker, will is an A-bomb. Wishing is an emotional muddle. Will is pure force. It's the same as electricity, magnetism, gravity, heat, light. It is energy directed and harmonious. That's what you're dabbling with and you're very likely to destroy everyone concerned—yourself, her, and him!"

Wayland's downdroop of the brows, further shading his eyes, told me he had been impressed, so I bored in. "When matter disintegrates it becomes energy. When energy is collected and organized, it becomes matter. The whole material universe is nothing but organized will, and you, you damned fool, are playing with *that!* With a psychic A-bomb. Quit it!"

"You said, black magic."

"Magic is directed will. It is black when directed for your own wishes, even if they are good, as people ordinarily reckon good."

"Aren't you going a bit too far, just looking at the stars?"

"No, I'm not. The way her horoscope is related to yours and to her husband's is such that a danger to one of you is a danger to all three."

And then I told him what I had heard and seen before shock made me give the door a wrench.

Wayland's eyes, probably for the first time in his life, opened wide. "Is that true? Man to man, is it?"

"Could I have cooked it up out of my imagination? And if I were trying to fool you, wouldn't I have picked something more plausible?"

That seemed to satisfy him, for he asked, "How do you explain it? My being able to—to will this, do this."

"If you can accept the idea of reincarna-

tion, at least as something possible—if you can accept the idea of *karma*, the law of cause and effect, the law that every action and every desire sets in motion a train of events—that, life after life, we come back, bound to those we have either loved or hated in previous lives—if that is not too much for you to swallow, I'd risk answering your question. Not with the idea that you should believe it, but that you would not set yourself against it without taking at least a moment's thought."

He gave me an odd look. "I've heard of such things. Hearing a little more won't hurt. But am I to understand that an astrologer can read a man's past lives?"

"To a degree, yes. And the probable trend of his next life. The stars tell all. The only limitation is man's ability to read them. Anyway, you and Benson are law partners, a quite prosaic and matter of fact profession. But you, in your former lives, learned something of the science of vibration. Now you are using it with the self centeredness you've always had. Though never before have you had the power to go with the selfishness.

"Here is your test—will you be a scorpion, or a Phoenix?"

By way of accepting the challenge, he told me about himself and Diane and Benson. There was nothing novel about the situation, not even in the frills and trimming. Benson and Diane had outlived whatever love they might have had—but he wasn't going to let anyone else have her. It gave him a sense of power to hold out, to command; and Diane would not leave her husband, which infuriated Wayland.

"Chicken-hearted!" he summed up. "Nobody'd be hurt, really!"

"She is not what you call chicken-hearted," I told him. "She is simply incapable of changing an innate conviction. That is by no means the same as being stubborn from pride. She was born under fixed signs. In whatsoever pattern such a person is set, she is there to stay. Change is possible, but very slowly, and it has to come from within, never from without. Don't you understand?"

"No! That makes no sense whatever!"

"Probably not. Scorpio, your sign, is also a fixed one."

BEFORE that jab had a chance to sink in, a car came up the drive. Wayland exclaimed as though in recognition of its sound. He bounded to the window. After a glance out, he turned on me, exclaiming, "There she is now! Get out, will you? Whatever's brought her here, I don't want her embarrassed—get out! No, Lord, no! Not out the front—leave by the back—that way—"

His gesture had the force to match the ferocity of his voice. Impatience, resentment at my meddling presence; and, triumph also: he conveyed all these with eye and tone.

I was in the laundry alcove before Wayland opened the front door. I heard her greet him with an inarticulate cry rather than with words. Then a few heel clicks, sharp and jarring, and she was in the living room with Wayland.

Diane was trying to explain her inexplicable urge, and why she had not phoned. She was violently agitated, and scarcely coherent; this, with the echo of distortion of vestibule and hall kept me from catching more than a few words.

". . . for a minute I was so dizzy I pulled over to the side of the road. . . . I must have blacked out . . . no, darling, nothing has gone wrong—I simply had to get out had to and did, and oh, it was the strangest, craziest thing, heading for your place, but I had to!"

He said something to the effect that a drink would do her good. While he had himself under better control than she had, more had happened than he was able to understand. I twisted the latch knob, and very carefully opened the door. After this unexpected demonstration of his power to command her will, Wayland would certainly not pay heed to anything I might say to him later.

It seemed, as I skirted the house, that my meddling had done more harm than good, for in telling him what I had seen, I had given him an awareness of a power he had apparently been exercising blindly.

Once in the parking circle, I saw her coupe. I looked into it. She had brought no luggage. But that did not prove that he and she might not leave within the hour, and not to return. This could well be Wayland's long-awaited victory, won by magic.

I WAS at the the foot of the grade, and in the deep shadow of the oaks under which I had parked when a long convertible swung into Wayland's drive, tires squealing and scattering gravel. With well over four million cars registered in California, the odds were very much against my guessing correctly whose it was that swooped up the grade and around the curves. But since I, a spectator, had been drawn into the outer fringe of the "sending," it was likely enough that Wayland's drumming had affected Benson; or that Benson had simply trailed his wife.

By the time I returned to the level of the house, the visitor was indoors. To avoid a betraying latch click, I had not closed the back door after me. In another moment, I was again in the laundry alcove, and tiptoeing for the front.

"Don't be piggish, Dick," a man was saying. "Diane's life is her own, she's entitled to it, whatever you two have together is your own business. As long as it's kept quiet and private. But when she blows her top and bounces out of the house, jet propelled, after getting rid of some guests by telling them she had a headache, it's going too far!"

By now I knew that the speaker *was* Ron Benson. Diane was crying; and insisting that it had not been Wayland's fault; that she had followed an irresistible impulse. And Wayland, seeing no good in discussing magic, got down to a point of his own:

"We're serious, Ron. This went way past the flirtation stage a long time ago. She and I did not have an engagement this evening, and if we had had, I'd certainly not expect her to hustle unexpected callers out of your house. And since that's what she seems to have done, you can put two and two together. You might as well be realistic. The situation is getting under her skin. Break it up, neither is good for the other any more."

As Wayland paused for breath, Benson broke in, "If Diane left me to marry you, you can figure what would happen to our practice. Our clients would lose confidence in us as a team. So quit the sentimental schoolboy stuff and act grown up! She's getting no divorce—" He chuckled affably. "She can't. No more than could I. Everything's too comfortably complicated, you know."

And that was when I left. Their fate seemed now to be so much and so immediately in their own hands that details did not matter. It was not until several days later, when Diane Benson called at my studio, that I learned that nothing had been decided, and that Wayland was more than ever at work, forcing a decision.

She was not as tall as she looked, nor was it the high heels; the illusion came from the way she carried herself. Diane was that uttermost rarity, a woman who knew how to walk. Her hair was all alive, and even though its vital quality might have been the result of skillful processing, no beauty parlor could possibly have given her skin that exceedingly fine texture. Most important, however, were the dark eyes. They told that from living and learning, she had reached full human stature; the other two of the Siamese triplet had not, though their chance was just around the corner of Time.

She summed up what had happened, and except for details, told me nothing I did not already know. She concluded, "Dick finally admitted he had been willing me to leave Ron, commanding me to. Though he certainly hadn't intended to have me drive about in a trance, and just on the verge of being blacked out. He promised most faithfully he would not try any such tricks again."

HER features were perfectly under control, with an almost Asiatic serenity, except for the twitch of her eyelids.

"Well?"

"Now he's concentrating on Ron."

"You mean that your husband has begun to take drives like the one that gave you such a shock? Neat way of making you a widow?"

"Oh, Lord, no! Nothing like that. Dick has simply been willing Ron to release me."

"And you're not cooperating a bit, when you could make yourself so thoroughly obnoxious in a million dainty feminine ways that your husband would in no time at all be glad to give you to the Indians. Easiest thing on earth, only you've not done it. Why not?"

"Call it a matter of obligation. No one and nothing compelled me to marry Ron. I knew I was wrong at the time, but I went ahead anyway. Because he was good to me, and because I was all in a whirl, looking for escape, and nowhere to go. I didn't love him, but I liked him. He was solid, he had his feet on the ground. Oh, you wouldn't understand what I mean by escape!"

"Wouldn't I? Escape seems to be humanity's career, and first urge."

"I think this must have been escape from myself," she went on. "Or from the giddy crowd I was part of. Nothing seemed especially important, and nothing was. Except getting away."

I pointed to the column of solar arcs on the margin of her chart. "Sun square Venus and Neptune. Saturn crossed midheaven. Say, 1945, in the autumn?" At her nod, I continued, "Escape or rather the attempt to didn't work out at all, and so?"

"Somehow or other, I realized that one can't ever escape from oneself and from what one has made. One has to stick and see it through. If I forced the issue and walked out on Ron, all I'd do would bring Dick grief in one way or another, and we'd probably end by being each other's stumbling blocks, resenting and accusing each other. I'd rather stay and pay my bill, my debt to fate. I have to pay it before I can ever have someone I really love. Idiotic sounding, isn't it? But that's how I feel."

"Did someone tell you what you've just told me, or did you read it, or—?"

"It simply came to me. That you can't run away from what you've made for yourself. It follows you wherever you go. Does that make sense?"

"That," I told her, "is the beginning and the end and the entire substance of Wisdom.

You've stated the Law of Karma. You set forces in motion, and now you're at the receiving end until the forces have expended themselves. And what worries you right now is that Dick Wayland is setting fresh forces in motion."

She nodded. "Will you *please* tell Dick that whatever he's doing, holding a thought or whatever he wishes to call it, it is not working out the way he wants it to. Ron is becoming morbid, shaky, and stubborn."

"Why not tell him yourself?"

"He'd only laugh and say I'm chicken-hearted. He insists that he and I belong to each other. That Ron encouraged the flirtation, largely for his own convenience, and now it's up to him to like what he promoted."

"Promoted? So you'd look the other way while he had some other woman on the brain?" I glanced at the chart. "The spring of 1948?"

"That's right. And I was very happy about it all. Taking the easy view of things again! When I could have made a break and been free—ever hear of anything so utterly crazy."

"Pardon my yawn," I said, and gestured toward the filing cabinet. "I've lost count of the number of times I've charted that story. There's not even a bit of novelty about the three of you being so civilized about it all. There is only one thing unusual about you three, and maybe I can convince Dick Wayland."

"What is it?" she asked eagerly.

"It's not necessary to tell you, so I won't. Words may very often set forces in motion, too, you know. The same as acts or desires."

"Suppose Ron went to the mountains for a couple of weeks. That'd break the close association—they've both been working day and night on a case that's wound up now, and a change of pace wouldn't hurt a bit. That's the oddest thing about it all—the way they work together, and really like each other—there isn't any jealousy or animosity, or can you believe that?"

"Just because it's never allowed to happen in fiction, on the ground that it's quite impossible, and that they simply ought to

hate each other, doesn't keep it from happening in actual life."

"So you see where that puts me! They're close as brothers."

"Much closer," I told her. "You three. That's what's dangerous. There's nothing I could tell your husband—he's a down-to-earth thinker—but I'll talk to Wayland. He can understand, if he wants to."

"But can't you tell me now what to do, what not to do, how it's going to turn out?"

"No."

"That makes you a queer sort of astrologer!" She spoke without petulance; she was merely puzzled. "After all, that's your business, predicting and foreseeing?"

"You're confusing astrology with fortune telling. There is one element which never shows in any horoscope."

"What's that?"

"Will and choice. The stars shape your personality and the pattern of your moods, your peaks of vitality and your depths of depression. But whether your mood will rule you, or you rule it is a matter of choice. There's neither pure predestination nor purely free will—there is rather a blend. You can't escape from the circle of your fate, but within the circle, you have a million choices. Whatever I said to you now would influence you, and since there is no real need of my saying anything, I am not saying it."

"I think I understand," she said, and when Diane left, it seemed that she had actually understood; and the eyelids had quit twitching from tension.

Whether or not Benson's leaving town for awhile would get him beyond the range of Wayland's magic was an open question. He might go into the mountains to set to work with his drum. I began to consider the merits of breaking into his house and burning that diabolical instrument, but ending by discarding the thought. Destroying the drum would not decontaminate Wayland's will, without which no amount of thumping would have any force at all.

When I phoned the office and learned that Benson would be away for a week, I went to see Wayland; and, as before, without first calling him.

He was at it when I arrived. There was that same inaudible undertone of vibration, the same queer and distressing effect, but apparently he had not yet got his will in tune with the rhythm. While the archway opening into the living room had begun to warp, and the walls were approaching a shimmering translucence, there was not yet any opening into higher dimensions.

I rang, and called his name. No answer.

Another jangle, another shout. Concentration broken, Wayland came pouncing for the door. I endured his eyes, and said, "You wanted to know how long Benson had to live, and I wouldn't answer. I may not tell you now, but you have forced me pretty close to telling."

"Come in."

"Get in touch with Mrs. Benson. Let me talk to the two of you at the same time."

"She went with him as far as Modesto—she'll be visiting relatives there while he and two friends from around there are up at the lodge, fishing. If you have a good argument, you don't need her here to team up with you."

I spread the three horoscopes on the cocktail table. "In each chart, the malefic planets are so placed, were so placed at the birth of each of you, that when the daily motion of the planets—the transits, that is—puts one of you under a disastrous influence, the other two are likewise under it."

"It looks as clear to me as the fine print in an insurance policy is to anyone but an insurance broker!"

"All right, take my word for it, then. You three are linked more closely than the Siamese twins were to each other. Except that you're not bound together by flesh and cartilage, but by your karma—by your associations in former lives you are so linked that you cannot be separated. Trying to cut him loose will finish all three.

"She told me how she drove out here, that night, almost in a total blackout."

He nodded. "All right. That cured me of trying to influence her."

"Pouring the power on him can drive him into a fatal accident."

"It needn't!" Wayland retorted.

"What you really mean is that as long as

you don't shove him off a cliff with your own hand, it's quite all right. I've come to tell you that if you finish him by remote control, by accident as it will appear, you will at the same time finish her, and yourself as well."

He was doing his best not to believe me; at last he said, doggedly, "All I was doing was willing him to release her."

"And that's getting him into such a muddle he'll drive head-on into a collision, or step off a cliff, or forget that a gun is loaded. You've been bringing things to a climax, and the stars are getting closer and closer to the transit that will touch things off. You'll liberate her, all right, and him, and yourself, but not in the way you want."

"I am here. She is in Modesto, with her sister. He and Fred and Dave Sims are up at the lodge, not far from Sonora Pass. How the devil could anything hit us all at once?"

"It need not be all at once in the kind of time and space we know. Though you have been monkeying with time and space of another sort. But skip that. If something happened to him alone, it would kick back at you and her. She'd never again be the same. She would know that you caused it. And that would be hard to take. If you simply must be rational and materialistic, I'll put it this way, as one of many possibilities—the strain, the tension, the upset, would make you both accident-prones. And the corporations that retain you are constantly in hot water about the accident-prones on their payrolls. Don't tell me you don't fully understand what I mean. Accidents don't simply happen—they are caused by the tangles and confusions in the subcellars of the subconscious."

He gave me a twisted smile. "I thought it was the stars?"

"Same thing!"

He said, slowly, "We three are in danger that I am making?"

"You're a butcher boy trying to separate Siamese triplets. There is only one way to break the bond that holds you three together."

"What is that way?"

"Quit driving with that will of yours!

Burn that drum. It may not have any real bearing on the case at all. It could not have, unless you had the will to make it serve you. Destroying it would nonetheless be an outward token that you have abandoned occult surgery. That you are accepting things as they are. That you have quit trying to rearrange lives. That you have renounced your stubbornness and your arrogance and the importance of your own desires. That you've become a grown-up man.

"Go to that lodge with the drum and burn it, right before him."

"Fine business, with the Sims boys there!"

"Herd them out for a bit of fishing, while you and he supposedly confer on an emergency that's just come up."

Wayland snatched the drum. "Will you go with me?"

"Any time you say."

He glanced at his watch. "Make it now."

I said, "We can take it easy, and be there in time for breakfast. That'll make it natural and easy for the Sims brothers to carry on with their fishing."

"You're afraid to trust me alone with this drum till tomorrow."

"I'm afraid to trust your moods and thinking. Let's go."

WE DROVE through the warmth of the great central valley. A red moon came up through low-hanging haze. Wayland took his time, yet there was constant demand on his skill until we finally got out of the unbroken procession of trucks. He was busy with more than driving. He was thinking, digesting, analyzing, after the fashion of his sign. It was not until the moon was high and white, and valley sultriness replaced by mountain chill that he spoke.

"I'm glad we picked the situation to pieces," he said, abruptly. "One thing though that you skipped."

"Could be more than one, but let's have it."

"If the three of us are so tied together, there is nothing left to reach for. I don't need a certificate of title to Diane. There's nothing left to be had—we already have everything there is. Funny, that's about the

way she expressed it, when she and I started. We'd not upset any applecarts, we'd hurt no one. She must have known from the beginning, subconsciously at least, what it's taken me until now to get through my head. I think I've become so used to complicated cases in my practice that anything really simple confuses me."

The eagle, I now knew, had at last begun to use his eyes for some purpose other than trying to stare the sun out of countenance. Wayland's company was no longer disturbing. He had ceased radiating that remorseless and avaricious will. He was becoming human.

We stopped once for gas, and several times for coffee. The wind whining down from snowcaps reaching twelve thousand feet into the moonlight had a biting edge. The thin air at once soothed and stimulated Wayland.

"She was speaking of karma. Fumbling with your words, but somehow, speaking in her own right. It wasn't exactly retribution, or crime and punishment. It seemed bigger than all those."

"It is bigger. Thoughts, desires, cravings set up vibrations. People are drawn to each other, either for love or for hate, because they vibrate in the same wave length. The only way to break a bond is to change the wave length of your thoughts and feelings. Once that's done, you make new contacts, there are new attractions, for better or for worse."

This was oversimplifying things; but what checked Wayland's impending query was our coming to a road marker. There we left the paved highway to go laboriously up what was little more than a wagon track.

Above the mumble of the engine, I caught the mutter of distant waterfalls. Once, I heard a far-off rumbling. The previous winter's snows were beginning to shift and slide.

Gray glamor reached in and thinned the darkness of the pines. The gray became an eerie lavender. The headlights, now murky and deceptive, created illusions, through reflection from foliage and granite walls, to make it seem at times that Wayland was about to drive over the edge of a thousand-

foot drop. Fatigue made such illusion more disturbingly realistic.

Wayland cursed, booted the brake, and whipped into a skid. There was a grinding sound. As the car slewed over, a fender crumpled. After spinning the wheels in a futile effort to pull out of the ditch, a shallow one, Wayland said, "Well, it could be a lot worse. We're almost there. Ron can tow us out."

It was only then that I noticed the boulder which, because of the deceptive light, Wayland had not observed until he had come within a couple yards of straddling it. A small fragment had wedged under the oil pan. We tugged and heaved until we got the larger obstacle against the bank, and out of the way. It was wet and muddy; apparently it had been dislodged after nightfall. The hot sun, beating down all day, had melted enough snow on the upper slopes to saturate the earth, and release the boulder.

"We could have been right there when it landed," he observed, as we went on, "Or we could have been stalled a couple miles back."

As we entered a cleared wide space, I glanced across the ravine. The opposite wall reflected a sickly glow. "Whoever's on the way behind us probably has enough clearance, with your car jammed against the bank," I remarked. And then, noticing that the light did not shift, I added, "The reflection of your headlights. Walked off and left them on."

"Count on me for that. Favorite trick."

Though mists obscured the clearing ahead, I could distinguish the dark bulk of two lodges. The roofs had a steep pitch, to keep them from collapsing during the heavy snows. We were at the edge of a small upland meadow which reached from the rim of the ravine to the nearby foot of the heights which towered over it.

"The first place is Ron's lodge," Wayland said. "Our timing has been a bit too good. I hate to barge in so early, but waiting in this damned mist is no treat."

"Suppose I go back and snap off the lights before the battery's run down," I proposed. "While you rout him out. It'd be better that way, than having me at your

heels. At the best, he'll be surprised to see you, and whatever you two have to say will be none the worse for having it between yourselves."

I had scarcely turned when he said, "We forgot the drum. Something else you can tend to."

WHATEVER happened, I told myself, that devil's drum was not going to survive. Engrossed with this thought, I retraced my way as far as the buttress which marked the beginning of the meadow shelf before I noticed the rattle and patter of rock fragments. Then a big chunk thumped down to the springy earth, and rolled to within a few yards of me. A crash helmet would come in handy, it seemed.

I turned and called to Wayland, "Watch out!"

But he had already stopped. Though little more than a dark splotch in the early gray, his posture made it clear that something other than my words had warned him. I heard a deep rumbling. He must have sensed the vibration an instant before I had.

The mists shifted and thinned a little. Far up, the snow-packed slopes reflected the first ruddiness of dawn. An acre or more of the mass shifted, so that of a sudden, it no longer mirrored the glow. The rumbling, deep and sullen, increased in volume; but the sound was like that of the stream which roared incessantly in the gorge. Anyone lulled to sleep by it could hardly be aroused by the new and ominous undertone.

I did not know the lay of the land; Wayland did. He knew how much or how little space there was between the two lodges, and the steep slope down which poured a hundred thousand tons of saturated earth sheared off by the pressure of settling snow fields. Surely this must always have been considered a safe spot until now, when a trick of nature had upset all previous estimates. Boulders, freed from the slow-moving mass, thumped down to the meadow. Above, the creeping earth was picking up speed.

The roar was like the sound track of a freight train, enormously magnified and in the tempo of a slow-motion film. Instead

of ducking for the shelter of the buttress, I yelled, and ran toward Wayland, as though I had to risk doing what I was sure he would not do. Stumbling over a fragment however sent me sprawling.

"Stay away!" he shouted. "I'll wake him!"

He raced for the lodge. I had landed afoul of an outcropping of rock. Numbed for a moment, I had difficulty in getting up, and when I did regain my feet, I could do little more than grit my teeth and hobble.

Wayland pivoted, wove, evaded a boulder which bounced and went crashing into the ravine. He became a barely visible blur in the mists. Dark against the darkness of the cabin, he vanished entirely from sight. He shouted again. For all his heart-breaking effort, he could not have made himself heard.

I yelled till my throat cracked. I took a few steps forward, then stopped. Wayland could not make it. I was sure he had been knocked down. Then I got a glimpse of him; his motion revealed him. He reached the door.

A lag in the ever-deepening rumble allowed me to hear even the rattle of the latch, and his cry, "Ron, get out!"

A late poker game, and a comfortable amount of Bourbon; no wonder Benson and his friends had not turned out already. Wayland was kicking, beating at the door. I began backing away from my relatively safe spot. Instinct drove me, though every moment made me feel as if I myself were in the lodge, and as good as doomed, and paralyzed by the knowledge that there was no escape for me.

Lights blazed from the windows.

The seconds dragged eternally.

A long path of light reached out as the door opened. Two figures were outlined by the glow. One was a woman. I caught only the momentary twinkle of white arms, the glint of silk, the gleam of hair—

The light winked out, and the meadow quivered. I could barely distinguish the crash and splintering of the sturdy lodge as it was engulfed by the dark flood and ground to bits by the boulders which were part of the flow.

The edge of the slide moved slowly now, as the pressure behind it subsided. The further lodge still stood, untouched. Benson had blended into the black mass which stopped a few yards short of the ravine's lip.

Neither Wayland nor Benson nor that woman, whoever she may have been, could possibly have survived. If by some miracle any shred of life remained in any of them, it would be no blessing either to that survivor, or to anyone who had to see what remained. Nevertheless, I hobbled forward. I had to listen, if only to make sure there was no sheltered pocket from which came a cry for help.

Several trees had survived the dwindling fury of the rush. Timber, squared timber, projected from the slide. I skirted the end, as though the further, the darker side would offer a more promising front. There was now no sound except that of the wind and the stream. Both seemed far away and feeble.

Then, beyond any doubt, there were human voices.

"... so help me, Dick, I never saw anyone look as downright foolish as you did when a woman turned out instead of Dave and Fred—and then you couldn't believe it was Diane!"

That was all I could grapple with for a moment. That any one, much less all three, could have escaped was too much to be grasped at once; so that while both Wayland and Diane spoke, I could not get what they were saying. The voices seemed far off. My thought was, "I am rather far off myself." Reaction was more of a shock than was having witnessed the actual destruction.

Benson spoke again: "You took the craziest chance, Dick. I'd never have had the nerve. You know—well—everything looks different—I've been stubborn about you two—three *is* a crowd. . . ."

There was a murmuring and a rumbling in my head, as though that devil's drum had begun to sound. I hobbled along the edge of the debris until once more I tuned in on speech. Diane was saying, and with wonder and new life in her voice, "Ron, do you really mean it? It's really the way you want things now?"

". . . No, not trading, not paying, it's just that things look different. . . ."

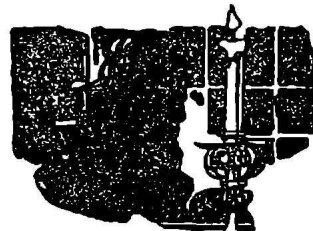
All I saw was three wavering spindles of mist, so much like all the other grayness that I could not have distinguished them had they not been luminous in the manner of phosphorescent flecks in tropical waters, though by no means as bright. There were three vague spindles, and no more speech at all.

After blending into and with each other, they became distinct again, and separate. And by now I understood that I had not actually heard any speech at all; I had perceived thought so strong and vital that it had seemed that there had been spoken words.

Two of the shapes moved closer together, and somewhat apart from the other; and then they, as well as the one from which they had separated, thinned into morning mist.

By the time the debris was cleared away, I had learned that since the Sims brothers had at the last minute been unable to join Benson, Diane had changed her plans and had gone with him; wherefore he and she and Wayland had met for the last time under the shadow of Saturn.

During his final few moments, Wayland had risen from among scorpions to become a Phoenix, winning liberation for him and for Diane, and for Benson as well. And it was not until later, when I burned the devil's drum, that it came to me that Benson had also risen above himself, earning his freedom.



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he gives you a bum steer. Catch on? It ain't you, it's this other Murray who's got his travel orders. One of them coincident things. But that don't do you any good if you jump off the Santa Monica pier or pump yourself full of monoxide."

Murray gripped the steering wheel hard. It wasn't so. He wasn't going to die. A mistake had been made, whose fault did not matter. But a queer thought struck him. M. H. B Murray—*Might Have Been Murray, Might Have Been Me*, either way you looked at it it was strange, unreal. But it had happened. Then he thought of Mary and smiled. Mary was waiting for him. Mary wanted him. He was glad he was not M. H. B. Murray, except in the realm of fantasy. He was himself.

"You're okay? You can drive?" the patrolman asked.

His eyes shining, Murray nodded. "Yes. I can drive," he told him.

*Good in Any Decade*

ON THE contents page of this issue of WEIRD TALES appears the name of Ed—E. Hoffmann to you—Price, a name which has been missing lately from our pages, but one which used to appear frequently not so long ago. It has a special significance, Price writes, because it appears in our first 1950 issue—January is out in December—and counts as an anniversary with him. Even without any nostalgic impulses or fond remembrances we liked "The Shadow of Saturn"; here is the letter that came with the manuscript:

I remember, a long time ago, my first appearance in WEIRD TALES: the January, 1925 issue. I had just written the "Stranger From Kurdistan," and your preceding editor was wearing a gas mask, carrying a Geiger counter, and handling the MS with tongs, trying to build up enough courage to hand it to the printer—which he finally did, and there was only a reasonable degree of atomic fission, or that day's equivalent thereof. This present yarn is by no means so spectacular. All this is purely from the reminiscent mood which old files of W.T. evoke: and those files, many months ago, persistently reminded me that it would soon be twenty-five years, yea, one-quarter of a century, since I first appeared on the newsstands in W.T.

While I hope of course that you like "Shadow of Saturn," there is always a 50th anniversary, you know!

Though not in the way I have fictionized it, I have several times encountered in my astrological practice such "Siamese triplets" as those whose doings I describe. But that's neither here nor there: from here on, it's all yours.

ED PRICE

Not Just Tabulations by a Long Shot

WE HAVE been under considerable pressure to revive the Eyrie, and we always thought it was a good idea anyway so were glad to concur and oblige. *But*—we have long since decided that letters merely tabulating preferences and saying that the writer liked one story better than another or one heading less than any we'd ever printed made exceedingly dull reading, though valuable to us here in the shop. So we are not going to print letters which merely say, "I liked such and such a story and didn't like the one on page 88." If you liked a story tell us the point or the idea that interested you; write us any sidelights that may occur to you, discuss anything and everything in our field at large, but don't send us lists that look like something for the statistical department, with ratings worked out in mathematical fashion. They aren't weird enough.

Here are a few bits from letters received about the last issue: this comment is a bit double-edged, but we pass it on. MICHAEL VARADY says, "Your January issue was really a nice surprise. You haven't had, I think, such a good ish in just about ten years. Almost all the stories were excellent, and it was good to see the Eyrie back." It was our impress that we had had some other good numbers lately. A. HAYES says, "Congratulations on not having a section dealing with readers' letters." Well, we are cutting them short. A comment from W. M. AUSTIN interested us; he said, "The Cactus in your January issue was a really weird yarn in the best tradition of the magazine." The story was picked from the unsolicited pile by the newest member of our editorial staff, so we are glad that this new writer (and Editor) invoked commendation; the story was by Mildred Johnson.

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