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CONTENTS FOR MARCH, 1934

Number 3

Cover Design	M. Brundage	
<i>Illustrating a scene in "The Black Gargoyle"</i>		
The Black Gargoyle	Hugh B. Cave	274
<i>A tale of goose-flesh horror in the jungles of Borneo</i>		
Gray World	Paul Ernst	290
<i>Gregor awoke to a terrifying gray dawn, and life was terribly changed</i>		
Winged Death	Hazel Heald	299
<i>An eerie story of poisonous African insects</i>		
The Charnel God	Clark Ashton Smith	316
<i>A vivid tale of a ghoulish cult in the temple of the black god</i>		
Thundering Worlds	Edmond Hamilton	331
<i>An Odyssey of interplanetary space</i>		
Remembrance	Mary C. Shaw	350
<i>Verse</i>		
The Clenched Hand	Stuart Strauss	351
<i>An unusual story of a bronze fist and a weird murder</i>		
The Solitary Hunters (conclusion)	David H. Keller	362
<i>A powerful weird novel of living death in the crater of an extinct volcano</i>		
Ghouls of the Sea	J. B. S. Fullilove	378
<i>The story of a ghastly horror that came up out of the sea</i>		
The Nightmare Road	Florence Crow	382
<i>A sensational story of a vampire-infested region in the Hartz Mountains of Germany</i>		
The Late Mourner	Julius Long	386
<i>An odd little story—John Sloan received a shock when he looked upon the face in the coffin</i>		
The Eyrie		389
<i>A chat with the readers</i>		
Why Weird Tales?		394
<i>A reprint editorial from WEIRD TALES of ten years ago</i>		

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WEIRD TALES ISSUED 1st OF EACH MONTH

Ghoul's of the Sea

By J. B. S. FULLILOVE

*The story of a ghastly horror that came up out of the sea and spread death
aboard the freighter Kay Marie*

MOST readers of the daily papers, and especially those persons who follow with interest those accounts relating to the men of the sea, will recall the strange disappearance of the freighter *Kay Marie* some seven months ago. They will recall the brief flurry of excitement attending her reported foundering with all hands aboard. Desper-

ately storm-ridden and swept far off her course, she sent forlorn appeals for aid, reporting that her rudder had been swept away and her engines seriously damaged. Near-by ships immediately put out to her aid, but her wireless signals suddenly ceased. Apparently she had drifted far, for no trace of her was ever found.

In common with most others, I accept-

ed as the most plausible explanation the theory that, in her crippled condition, she had either been swamped by the mountainous waves or driven to her doom upon some uncharted reef in unknown waters.

But today, with the *Kay Marie* farthest from my mind and all but forgotten, I chanced upon something else. As is often my habit, I had risen before the sun and gone down to a favorite stretch of beach to cast in the surf for bass. As I walked along the shore I stumbled upon a large glass jug lying amid a pile of driftwood and debris. Even before I smashed it with my heavy sand-pike I knew that it contained some message from the sea, for through its salt-caked sides I had seen a flash of white.

And message indeed it was! Part of the manuscript was missing, but the remainder comprises a bizarre and incredible tale which I set down here precisely as I found it. The true account of the *Kay Marie* disaster? That is for the reader to decide.

Here is the account:

"... calm, and immediate danger is past. But we are completely cut off from the rest of the world and there is nothing to do but wait and hope that some ship picked up our S. O. S. and will find us before our food and water become exhausted.

"There are many sharks about, and to relieve the monotony of waiting, the crew for a time engaged in fishing for them. Two were caught, and then the fishing suddenly stopped. Here is something very strange, something which arouses superstitious fears in the men. Until now I have been unable to ascertain exactly what it is, because the men are all strangely reticent concerning the whole affair. All I have been able to get out of them is that the sharks they caught were dead.

"Svensen, the big Swedish mate, how-

ever, tells me that there were curious gobs of pinkish jelly covering their heads. He says that Doctor Curey took samples of the stuff to his cabin for examination.

"It is indeed surprizing that men like Svensen, who can laugh in the teeth of a storm, should exhibit fear at sight of a few dead fish.

"I HAVE just left Doctor Curey in his makeshift laboratory busily engaged in working on the specimen he took from the head of the shark. It somewhat resembles a huge, pink jelly-fish. It has the same disgusting feel, and is without definite form. Still, there are differences. This thing is continually in motion; shimmering at all times as though some one were shaking the table upon which it is placed. A mephitic odor hovers about it, and an indefinable something about it fills me with a kind of loathing and a queer feeling almost of fear. At times I felt as if it were alive and possessed some uncanny power of sight and were watching me.

"Doctor Curey is very much excited. He says that it is an entirely new form of parasitic growth secreting a powerful, bone-dissolving acid which enables it to get at the flesh and blood of its victims. But he, too, is at a loss to explain their immediate and deadly effect when the sharks were taken from the water.

"Captain Wilkes picked up a trail of smoke on the horizon this morning; but they passed us by. We are far from shipping-lanes, and it is good to know that some one is looking for us.

"GOD is indeed merciful! Had the ship we sighted picked us up, what a ghastly horror might have been loosed upon the world! My fear of the strange specimen of Doctor Curey was

well founded. It is a spawn of the nethermost depths of some hell of the sea.

"I was engaged in working on my hopelessly damaged apparatus when suddenly a scream echoed through the ship. It was a scream of paralyzing horror and fraught with agony, but through its terror I recognized it as the voice of Doctor Curey.

"Perhaps no one else knew wherefrom the scream had come, for I was the first to reach the cabin of the stricken man. As I rushed in, I saw the doctor seated in a darkened corner, where, I judged, he must have fallen asleep. Only the pale rays of the moon lighted the room, and I could not see plainly, but there was something peculiar about the way he sat. He seemed strangely stiff and as straight as a statue. Apoplexy! instantly flashed through my mind. I shouted to him and stepped closer.

"At the sound of my voice, he half turned and rose slowly from his chair. Something about his movements abruptly checked my rush toward him. The peculiar, frightful *stiffness* of his actions is impossible to describe. They were the movements of a reawakened corpse who tries to force worm-eaten muscles into the forgotten movements of life.

"With my heart still, I stood motionless and watched him as he painfully arose. Once again I called to him in a voice hoarsened by strange fear. As if in answer, he turned. At the same time my hand darted swiftly to my pocket, and with trembling fingers I lighted a match against the wall. As it flared up, I looked into his face and sank to my knees with a low gasping cry. The flickering light of the match was dim, but, even so, that first view of the horror was so indelibly stamped upon my brain that even now—days later—as I write, I can still see it vividly, frightfully.

"The face staring sightlessly into mine

was a white, drawn mask of insupportable agony. The blackened tongue, grown sickeningly to astounding length, protruded from half-open lips. He seemed to be trying to scream. His eyes were leaping from their sockets, and already there was forming over them a cold and ghastly glaze. . . . *The man walking stiffly toward me was plainly dead!*

"And then as the last flickering rays of the match burned out between my fingers, I saw. . . .

"Until now, I had not thought of any connection between the doctor's experiments and *this*. I had unconsciously supposed him to have fallen victim to some new and horrible disease. But with the last dimming ray of the match, a glimmering of the incredible truth burst upon me with terrible clearness. Even then my dazed and weakened mind refused to grasp the full significance of what I saw in all its ghastliness.

"The top of his head was a shimmering mask of dark red jelly, and from it I could see a long tongue of the same unspeakable stuff slithering down the back of his neck. The whole loathsome mass seemed to swell and grow from his skull with unbelievable rapidity. Despite the awful dazedness of my mind, I still noted the significant change in the color of the mass . . . and that mingled with its grisly red, there were flecks of white and gray.

"As in a dream I heard excited voices and knew that the room had filled with men. I saw the captain, with a curious glance at me, dart forward and catch the swaying doctor in his arms. Frozen with horror, I could only stare—and wait.

"As swiftly as the movement of a striking snake—too swiftly for the eye to follow—a tongue of the dribbling mass hanging nearly to the doctor's shoulders licked out and spattered upon the cap-

tain's head. He clawed madly at his hair for a moment, gave vent to a single agonized scream, then slumped forward. He stiffened almost before he struck the floor; then with the same frightful rigidity that the doctor had shown, he slowly sat up, then rose to his feet.

"The horror upon his head had sunk in, disappearing beneath his matted hair. Now it reappeared, growing, swelling like a toy balloon—a shuddersome mass of quivering, sensate jelly, whose soul-chilling scarlet was thickly dotted with white and gray. . . .

"Miraculously then my power of movement returned. Gasping weakly, I stumbled toward the door. I saw the thing that had been the doctor move also, and a ghastly hint of its intention thrust itself into my stunned consciousness, lending speed to my laggard limbs. Close behind me, it circled the milling, craning crowd, who still could not understand; or having seen, stood rooted, held powerless to move by sheer ecstasy of horror. I staggered through the door and sank exhausted to the deck. Behind me the door slammed shut, and there came the sound of a heavy body falling against it.

"For some moments, then, there was silence; then from behind the door there came the ghastly sound of scream after scream of mortal agony and horror, the sound of thudding bodies and of madly stamping feet; but now and then above this hellish din I could hear with terrible distinctness a faint *splat, splat*, like the sound of wet rags falling upon the floor.

"Only a short time I lay thus. Then I remember somewhat vaguely running madly and mingling my screams with the screams of the imprisoned men. For the

madness of terror that had descended upon me was now complete. *Just in time I had risen, warned by reflected moonbeams shining into my eyes, and seen the faintly luminous, slithering rill of the jelly that was flowing out toward me from under the door. . . .*

"WHEN I regained consciousness later—whether days or weeks I do not know—I found that I had bolted myself within my own cabin. In the fever of madness I had stuffed up every crack and hole in the walls and door. Still there is everywhere the indescribable stench of the things. I am now certain that I must have been insane much longer than I at first believed, for now I can detect another odor. But upon that I dare not dwell. The picture it brings is too unutterably horrible for contemplation in my weakened state . . . rotting corpses, animated by hellish creatures who supplant their brains, walking in ghastly parades across the decks! . . .

"Am I alone? Outside I can hear the slow tramping of feet. Whether they are the feet of living men or of the horror I dare not look to see. I shout, but never is there an answer. The things I hear outside number many.

"But there is a way out if I am swift. There is powder in the hold. If I can reach it, a match will save me through quick death from the other end I face. Besides, the *Kay Marie* must never be found or allowed to drift too near to land.

"If the things are waiting when I step outside the door, at least I shall have tried to send them back to where they belong—at the bottom of the sea."

