

Weird Tales



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Cover by John Giunta

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*Except for personal experiences the contents of this magazine is fiction. Any use
of the name of any living person or reference to actual events is purely coincidental.*

Such Stuff As Dreams

BY SEABURY QUINN



The cold wind blows and all about ghosts laugh with a shrill, malicious glee

We are such stuff as dreams are made of,
And our little life is rounded with a sleep.
—*The Tempest, Act IV, Sc. 1*

WHEN the Very Reverend Gerald Pancoast read the lessons Sunday mornings, or when he preached at evensong, adoring tears jeweled every

feminine eyelash and every woman's heart beat just a little faster.

For Gerald was the perfect, the pluperfect, answer to a maiden's prayer—or a matron's or a widow's, for that matter. Tall, wide-shouldered, with a profile like John Barrymore's before loose living blunted it, white skin and sleek black hair and deep-set

Heading by John Giunta

eyes so darkly blue they were like spots of shadow in the pale oval of his face. More than one young woman's heart was near to breaking as she remembered he was a vowed celibate.

His languishing admirers had no notion of his other life: The dreamland in which milky-skinned Circassian girls with hair as russet as the copper beech and small high breasts and eyes like tortoise-shell awaited him, or Russian women, white as the moon, or Mongol maidens with slant eyes and lily feet, like the daughter of the Kha Khan Messer Marco Polo knew and loved so long ago in far Cathay.

Gerald had found it when he was just a little boy, and it was still his refuge and asylum from grim reality. Worn out with Lenten and pre-Easter work, Father had gone to Atlantic City for a few days, and Mother had gone with him, so Gerald had been sent to Aunt Lillian.

Aunt Lillian's was an old house, a place designed with dignity and crowned with innate beauty. It stood back from the street behind a screen of maples and oaks and looked out on what had once been a lovely lawn. The place was run down now, the grass was frayed and moth-eaten beneath the trees, and the trees themselves needed trimming, but it had mellowed beautifully, and like the sturdy gentlewoman who owned it made a brave show of facing down adversity in old age. Inside, mingled with the smell of lavender and cloves, there was an odor of dry leather. The shutters were too seldom opened and the heating was inadequate; fuel was expensive and the pension paid a soldier's widow had to be stretched like a heretic on the rack to provide minimum subsistence.

Easter had come early that year and there were neither smiling skies nor daffodils to greet it. It rained almost continuously, not with soft spring showers, but in steady drenching downpours, and when the rain stopped the dregs of it lay in the gutters and the roads were pockmarked with sad muddy puddles. Gerald had to stay indoors, and it was there he found the entranceway to his dream world.

The parlor was a formidable place. Whatnots stood like spectral sentinels in the corners, a Procrustean haircloth-covered sofa

stretched between the seldom-opened windows, the chairs were ceremented in gray linen and the massive Bible on the table seemed ominous as the Book of Doomsday. But in the age-black walnut bookcase was a copy of Sir Henry Yule's translation of Marco Polo's journal illustrated with woodcuts. The text was far too recondite for Gerald's reading, but he spelt the captions underneath the cuts out, and their syllables raced his blood like the long roll of a drum: Bokhara, Samarkand, Tiflis, the Gobi—names freighted with a magic completely their own.

As he looked in fascination at the stilted drawings they seemed to take on perspective, and unwittingly as little Alice when she passed the portal of the looking-glass he found himself in a strange land, a land of warmth and brightness teeming with insouciant gayety, where life was measured by no rising moons or setting suns or by the mechanisms of clocks.

Some lads scourge the Caribbean with Sir Henry Morgan, some share the hardships of a desert isle with Robinson Crusoe, others, less daring, the watered-down adventures of the Swiss Family Robinson. For Gerald there was that far country where the Polos traveled, where blue and pink tiled houses hung like bright beads threaded on the narrow streets and camel bells and muttering tomtoms were an obligato to high brittle laughter and love songs quavered in shrill nasal falsetto.

He was a big boy, twelve or thirteen, before he timidly drew back the curtain from his dreamland and invited an adult to share its enchantments.

The fond look in his mother's eyes as he began describing the Xanadu to which he fled from the dull routine of Latin, logarithms and the Litany on Sunday morning became first a question, then an appeal, finally a stare of sickened fear. "I'll have to tell your father about this," she said in a voice from which all feeling seemed to have been wrung.

Father was an assistant, but not the principal one, at Saint Simon and Saint Jude's. He was a good earnest worker, a conscientious preacher and a staunch churchman. He strove sincerely to live by his faith, but that faith was narrow as the grave, and

as inexorable. To him the devil was no abstract representative or evil; he was personal and corporeal and had been hurled in the flesh from heaven's battlements by the Archangel Michael. When he prayed that he might beat Satan down under his feet he meant it literally and physically.

Terror spread across his face like moss on sour ground as Mother told him of their son's dream country. "And he sees women—heathen wantons—in these dreams?" he asked in a small cold voice.

"It seems so, Hillary."

"God save us! They are succubi, Matilda, the ancient device of the Archfiend for the ruin of men's souls and bodies!"

So Gerald was called to the study and for the first time heard an unexpurgated version of the Temptation of Saint Anthony. Then Father prayed that he and all good Christians might be delivered from the snares of the Evil One, and dismissed him with the command to pray faithfully each night that he might not be further troubled by unholy dreams, and "not to think about such dreadful things" while waking.

But somehow the dreams did not disappear. Indeed the longer he was on his knees before he went to bed the more vivid were the visions, the more alluring the sweet songs of Araby, the more affectionately artless and delighted with his coming were the girls of Circasia and Cathay and High Tartary.

GERALD progressed from Saint Timothy's to Harvard where he conscientiously eschewed Professor Nock's courses in the history of religion, beer binges at Jim's Place, cocktail parties at "Santa Clara's," petting parties with Radcliffians and similar undergraduate in discretions, and in due time was given his *artium baccalaureus cum laude*. After three years at the Seminary he was ordained a deacon, then a priest.

He served as curate in three fashionable churches, each a little larger and more stylish than its predecessor, making friends and having no small influence on people by his good looks, gentle manners and innocuous preaching, but chiefly by his good looks. There was a fluttering of hearts each time he presided at a Girls' Friendly meeting, the lady teachers could not drag their eyes from

him when he conducted Church School, when he moved from chancel to lectern to read the lessons the involuntary sighing of the choir girls was like the rustle of a small wind in a summer wood.

He kept his interest in the ewe lambs of his flocks on a platonic basis, for the honorable estate of holy matrimony played no part in his plans. He had been reared in a curate's household and knew poverty and the rigors that attended it. There had never been sufficient ready cash for anything. Money had to be "found" for his education, even for the modest wardrobe of canonicals with which he began his ministry, and the finding of it was a dour process that entailed the sale of cherished heirlooms and the long drawn out repayment of principal and compound interest. He could support himself on curate's wages, but a family or even childless marriage would entangle him past all hope of release.

There were rich girls in his congregations and their hearts beat quite as quickly at his nearness as those of their less well-dowered sisters, but their parents knew the Social Register as they knew their prayers, and knew Dun and Bradstreet even better. An obscure curate without background and with small hope of preferment was hardly rated as a catch. Gerald risked no rebuffs or affronts.

The deanery of the Cathedral of Saint Michael and All Angels was vacant, but the bishop was a High Churchman who would countenance no married clerics in the chapter. His canons were all dedicated celibates. If Gerald would be reasonable. . . .

Reasonable? The deanship meant security and safety. It meant a mellow old red-brick house filled with Georgian silver and mahogany, with carpets from Muskhabad on its waxed floors and paintings dating back to West and Copley on its tinted walls; it meant yearly trips to Europe—and not tourist class—or summers on Cape Cod or Martha's Vineyard; social recognition. In fine it offered everything that one born with the tastes of an aristocrat and pauper's purse could reasonable hope for.

In the chapel of Saint Justin Martyr Gerald took the vow of celibacy according to the Anglo-Catholic rite while candles burned

with lambent golden brightness and organ murmurs and the acrid, anesthetic reek of incense filled the air and from the painted windows olden saints seemed smiling on him as they welcomed him to their company and offered him a portion of their anguishes and ecstasies, their despairs and their raptures. And afterwards he was installed as dean.

IN HIS new surroundings Gerald burgeoned like a shrub transplanted from the desert to a garden. He played good tennis and still better golf, he danced well, talked well; he was much in demand socially.

The yoke of celibacy did not weigh heavily on him. His dreams, he knew by now, were only shadows, empty visions. He had never in his life seen any woman who could approach those girls of his fantasies. If he had, he might have known a tragic and despairing love, and even that would have been fulfillment in some measure, for it was not merely the thought of happiness that fascinated him. For a being such as one of those he dreamt of he knew he could suffer agonies. But he had never seen a woman who could fit his ideal, or even vaguely approach it, never conceived of one in the flesh, until. . . .

The Arbuthnots had given a small theatre party, and afterwards they went to the *Pantoufle Dorée*. They arrived just in time for the supper show and Gerald had not sipped half of his *Oloroso* when the lights were lowered. A beam of golden brightness cut the blue smoke-clouded atmosphere, a beam that focused on the gilded archway at the far end of the dance floor, and slowly, almost ominously, the orchestra began Ravel's *Bolero*. "Ladies and gentlemen," announced the emcee from his perch on the bandstand, "Allura!"

From chin to heel she was sheathed in a gown of Tartar red shot through with threads of gold, its clinging folds no more obscuring her long slender lines than a fruit's rind conceals its contours. Slim throat and tapering shoulders, lush fictile breasts and sleek lithe hips were outlined by its silken embrace. From hem to knee it was slit up each side, displaying cream-white legs and feet and gold slave bracelets

flashing on each fragile ankle. Behind her head, poised like the nimbus of a saint, she held a gilded tambourine.

Her face was like an ivory temple-mask, bone white, calm, bland, almost contemptuous, with upward-slanting eyes and high cheek-bones, slashed scarlet mouth and brows so slimly black they might have been drawn with a pen and India ink. Her iridescently black hair lay on her small head like a patent leather skullcap, smoothly parted in the middle and drawn tight across her ears to loop in a great heavy knot at the nape of her neck.

Slowly, aloofly, as if she were alone and did it for her own amusement, she began to dance. The sensuous percussions of the *Bolero* were transposed into motion, the urgent rhythm of the kettle drums was mocked and echoed in staccato by the hollow booming of taut parchment as she struck her tambourine with fist and elbow alternately. Her feet were scarcely moving, but her body undulated with a graceful bending like grain swaying in the wind. Pose melted into plastic pose as a kaleidoscope's prism presents fresh patterns when the tube is turned. There was a sudden gleam of white against red silk. With her left hand she ripped her gown from throat to waist and as a strip of pale body showed through the tear the tip of a white breast peeped for an instant, then retreated like a frightened pink-nosed kitten.

With the suddenness of frenzy she dashed her fist through the tambourine and flung the ruined instrument to the floor, thrust her arms out right and left as if she had been crucified against the air, jerked back her head and shoulders and curved her body like a bent bow. Her torn robe burst like the calyx of a bursting bud to let her young apple-firm breasts thrust forth, beautiful almost beyond imagining.

"Boy, what a playmate *she'd* make these long winter evenings!" chuckled Arbuthnot as the lights went up. "For my money she's—why, what's the matter, Gerald?"

Gerald's heart was jerking like a thing in its death struggles, through every pore of him a cold wind blew, and it seemed all about him ghosts were laughing with a shrill malicious glee. "I—I—" his voice was like a rook's croak in his throat, his

tongue and lips were stiff, almost paralyzed. "O, my God Almighty!"

In seminary days he had told himself that if ever he met a woman like the creatures of his dreams he would fling textbooks aside and go with her, though their way together led through poverty and squalor to disgrace. Even after ordination he had felt no sacrifice would be too great if in return he might share life with such a being. But now. . . .

He had seen her like a dream walking, like a vision made carnate. She was the distillate and concrescence of all the women of his dreams, and he might not go to her. He was barred and interdicted, emasculated by a vow as Origen and Abelard had been by steel.

A man of coarser fiber—or a less devout one—might have rebelled at the embargo and thrust his vow of chastity aside. But Gerald was the son and grandson of clergymen; despite his overlie, of sophistication his faith was simple and direct, almost naïve. He no more thought of questioning the fixed immutability of sacerdotal celibacy than of doubting the validity of the law of gravitation.

Life stretched before him like an interminable alley of loneliness.

He was sick and faint with longing and denied desire when he finally reached the deanery that night. Sleep would not come, and till the changing light before the dawn showed in the sky he walked a frustrated quadrangle in his room. At last a dose of phenobarbital brought physical surcease, but no respite from memories.

The thought of her was like a haunting phantom. He saw her everywhere, in shop windows, in passing taxicabs, at busy street crossings. Her face, so like a mask, with slanting eyes and haughty brows and full red rutile lips hung a little slack as though with longing, swam between him and the text he tried to read, when he begged divine deliverance he saw it through his tight-closed lids. He wanted her, yearned for her as a miser yearns for his gold or an addict for his drug.

THE fox in Aesop's fable denounced the high-hung grapes as sour; by degrees Gerald achieved compensation in discover-

ing the *blanc de chine* feet of his idol were common clay.

He read the gossip columns of café avidly; when he learned Allura, bright particular star of the *Pantoufle Dorée*, was the current heart-throb of five-times-married, four-times-divorced Willy Hauptman, heir to a soft drink fortune, he was almost elated. When Mrs. Hauptman the fifth named Allura correspondent in a divorce suit that made headlines from Portland, Maine, to its namesake in Oregon he found comfort in the news. "She is Jezebel," he told himself. "She is the Scarlet Woman of the blessed John's vision." And every night he gave thanks to his personal, anthropomorphic God that He had saved him from enmeshment by this wanton.

Headlines shrieked across the country like a pack of fiends in full cry. Bull-voiced newsboys echoed them hysterically. The tabloids had a field day:

DANCER SLAYS RICH PLAYBOY

Hauptman Shot by Night
Club Entertainer in Love
Nest on Palatial Yacht

The sordid story varied slightly from others of its sort as one movie plot does from another. Jessamin Cawley, known professionally as Allura, and Willy Hauptman had spent the week-end on his cabin cruiser the *Leprechaun*. The crew of three had been dismissed just after dinner Saturday and Willy and his guest had settled down to a night's drinking and love-making.

A little after five the next morning the lookout on the harbor police launch had seen a woman in pajamas dash from the yacht's cabin to the after deck and draw in the dinghy tied astern. She had climbed into the boat and was fumbling with the painter when a man rushed after her and began to haul the line in. He shouted something and she screamed a reply, then drew a pistol from her jacket and fired twice at pointblank range.

Two hours later Willy Hauptman died at Mercy Hospital in circumstances of elaborate discomfort, but not before his dying

declaration pinned an inescapable charge of murder on Allura.

He had, he said, informed his paramour (an epithet beloved of the tabloids) that he had no intention of marrying her when his wife obtained her decree, whereupon she flew into a rage. He was accustomed to take large amounts of currency on cruises in order to have cash on hand if banking facilities were not available. Allura had snatched up a sheaf of bills and his pistol and screamed, "I'll take this for a down payment on my breach of promise suit!" as she rushed from the cabin. When he followed to retrieve the money she shot him.

The trial was Grade-A entertainment. No tasty bit of testimony went unpublished. There were pictures of the *Leprechaun* at anchor and at sea, pictures of Willy and his town and country houses, pictures of Allura in her famous Tartar dance and as she sat beside her counsel at the trial table, pictures of her as a police matron led her from the courtroom and as she entered jail.

Her lawyers did their clever best to make the shooting appear "in defense of her honor," but their best fell short of requirements. Allura was no wide-eyed ingénue; her love affairs had been notoriously varied and remunerative. Two of her former suitors were in prison for embezzlement, a third had shot himself in fear of blackmail. Also, she had fired the fatal shots in furtherance of a felony, to wit, the larceny of five hundred dollars, which had been found on her by the police.

There came a day when the newspapers showed a picture of her muffled to the eyes in a raincoat and handcuffed to an Amazonian matron as she entered the state prison where the death house was. Then, like a puppy tired of shaking a frayed rag-doll, the press dropped her for a while.

TWO candles in tall silver standards splashed a baroque pool of light on the antique kidney desk where Gerald sat. In the corners of the study shadows advanced and retreated as the pointed orange candle flames wavered in the light breeze that crept through the French windows looking out on the garden.

He had to write his sermon for next

Sunday afternoon, for it was Friday and next day he was to umpire tennis matches at Rock Spring, and after that there would be tea at the clubhouse, then dinner with the Siblings. Text after text he picked up and discarded. Somehow he could not find the precise verse to set up thought-gemination.

The mellow tritone of the study 'phone broke through his abstraction, and he had an eerie feeling of some quality of dark enchantment in the air as he picked up the instrument.

"Dean Pancoast?" the challenge came in the clipped, brittle accents of a character in a Noel Coward comedy.

"Yes."

"This is Howard Ambrose, Warden Parnell's secret'ry."

"Yes?"

"The death sentence is to be executed on a prisoner at ten fifty-nine tonight. Perhaps you've heard of her. Her name is Jassamin Cawley—on the stage they called her Allura."

Something like a jet of gellid air seemed playing on the back of Gerald's neck, he felt a shiver zigzag up his spine, but mechanically he answered, "Yes?"

"She's asked for you—wants you to be with her when—it seems she heard you preach once at the Cathedral, and. . ."

The sharp-clipped words paused in aposiopesis, and in Gerald's heart a mighty shout rang like a pæan of triumph: "She wants you—she needs you—she has asked for you. What does it matter if she's good or bad or innocent or guilty? You love her, adore her. Go to her!"

His voice had all that timbre of superb gentility that made his preaching so successful as he asked, "Isn't there a chaplain at the prison?"

"Why, yes, sir, but—"

"I think it would be best if he consoled the unfortunate young woman when—in her extremity. That sort of thing is rather out of my line." He hesitated for a space that might have marked a rest in four-four time, then, "Besides, I'm indisposed."

"He did not hear the secretary's murmured, "Why, you dirty, self-righteous son of—" for he laid the 'phone back in its cradle quickly and sat there, breathing in

short, laboring pants like a spent runner, or a man who has escaped some deadly peril by the barest fraction of an inch.

It was very quiet in the study. Not quiet with the absence of all sound, but with an unheard harmony of small noises: the ticking of the banjo clock on the wall behind him, the chirring cheep of insects in the garden, the muted sounds of traffic drifting in from the street.

He drew the writing tablet to him and picked up his pen. Like one who finds the missing key piece of a jigsaw puzzle and knows he nears solution he had found his text. He began writing in his precise Graeciform hand, word following word in quick succession.

The whisper of his pen across the page was like the little rustle of a bride's train on the church aisle, and from the garden came the faint perfume of verbena and mock orange. Somehow the scent annoyed him; made him think of a funeral. Five or six blocks away, where the cross street met the Avenue, the Salvation Army held its nightly revival, and the singing, slightly raucous, just a little off-key, filtered through the distance, punctuated by the throbbing of a bass drum and the tinkle of a tambourine:

"Behold how many thousands now are lying
Bound in the darksome prison-house of
sin,
With none to tell them of the Saviour's
dying,
Or of the life He died for them to
win. . . ."

He tore the last sheet from the tablet, blotted it, and glanced at his wristwatch. It was his methodical habit to read his sermons aloud, timing them to an exact twenty minutes, adding to them if they fell short or making such deletions as were necessary to bring them within the limit.

"My text is from the thirty-fifth verse of the twenty-fifth chapter of the Gospel According to Saint Matthew," he began: "I was a stranger and ye took me in, naked and ye clothed me. . . ."

The long hand of his watch had reached the line dividing the fifty-eighth from the fifty-ninth minute on the dial as he began to read, and slipped across the demarcation

to point to one minute of eleven as he finished his text: ". . . I was in prison and ye came unto me."

Something was wrong. Terribly, horribly wrong. It was as if a dreadful cramp had seized him, not alone in limbs and stomach, but in every nerve and muscle and tendon.

A roaring like a salvo of artillery deafened him, a light so brilliant that it blinded him flashed in his eyes. Then like the after-image of the blinding light against his retina he saw her face for the fragment of an instant, white, agonized, the lovely slanting eyes suffused with tears and holding in their depths a look of mortal terror, the petulant red mouth a square to frame a scream of torment unendurable. He tried to speak, but nothing but a moan so faint it might have been a sigh, or the ghost of a tired sigh, slipped through his lips, and at the corners of his mouth a froth of tiny bubbles formed.

IT WAS a beautiful, impressive funeral. The Cathedral was filled to capacity, the clergy of the diocese in robe and surplice, but with black tippets instead of stoles, attended in a body; the Bishop conducted the services, and the choir sang "For All Thy Saints," "Ten Thousand Times Ten Thousand," and "The Strife is O'er, the Battle Done."

It was almost three o'clock when the last shiny limousine rolled back to Gadston's garage, and Julius Gadston, always careful in such matters, saw it was inspected for lost articles, checked for gas and oil, and carefully backed into its berth. "You did a fine job, Harvey," he told his chief embalmer as he passed his employee in the hall connecting with the office. "Dean Pan-coast looked magnificent, superb. Have any trouble with him?"

"No, sir. I was afraid I might when I saw the coroner's certificate. It said the primary cause of death was coronary thrombosis, and the immediate cause arteriosclerosis, evidently of long duration—you know how hard such cases are sometimes—but—"

"Yes?" his employer prompted as he paused with a puzzled frown.

"I didn't find much evidence of any such

condition of the arteries. The circulation was just about perfect, only—" Once more he halted, and there was something almost frightened in his face.

"What the devil are you driving at?" demanded Mr. Gadston testily. "What's all the mystery?"

"Well, sir, you know we had Jessamin Cawley's body here, too. The girl they called Allura. Wilson and McCullogh went out to the State Prison for her after the electrocution—"

"Yes, I remember. You prepared her, too, didn't you? Fine piece of work—"

"Yes, sir. I attended both her and Dean

Pancoast. That's what's got me jumpy as a bullfrog."

"Eh?"

"Well, you know, she was electrocuted, and there were two little burned spots on her. One on the right leg just above the ankle, and the other at the base of the brain, where the head-electrode made contact. . . ."

"Of course." The older mortician nodded. "You often find such marks in cases of electrocution—"

"Just so, sir. But there were exactly the same sort o' burnt marks, and in exactly the same places, on Dean Pancoast's body."