

BREVIZINE

FREIBERG
PUBLICATIONS

September
15¢



Dramatic Short Stories:

"The Waiting House"
By Dennis Murphy

"The Bottomless Pit"
By Elmer R. Kirk

"The Invisible Levitant"
By Howard Barton

BREVIZINE

VOLUME 3, NUMBER 5

SEPTEMBER, 1954

TABLE OF CONTENTS

THE WAITING HOUSE
By Dennis Murphy.....3

THE BOTTOMLESS PIT
By Elmer R. Kirk.....13

THE INVISIBLE LEVITANT
By Howard Barton.....16

Special Feature:

THE BONE OF CONTENTION
By The Readers.....19

Cover by: William Reins

Editor:
ERWIN J. HUGHMONT

Managing Editor:
RAYMOND CHRISTOPHER

Art Director:
WILLIAM REINS

Associate Editors:
PATRICIA ASHBURN
MARGARET CULLINANE
GALE TRENT

Art Editor:
LANE MARIN

W. A. FREIBERG & CO.
Executive Offices:
5369 West 89th St.
Oak Lawn, Illinois

Members of the Board:
WESLEY REYNOLDS

LAWRENCE LERSNER
Circulation Director

EDWARD MATLANE
Production Director

I. H. LERSNER
Advertising Director

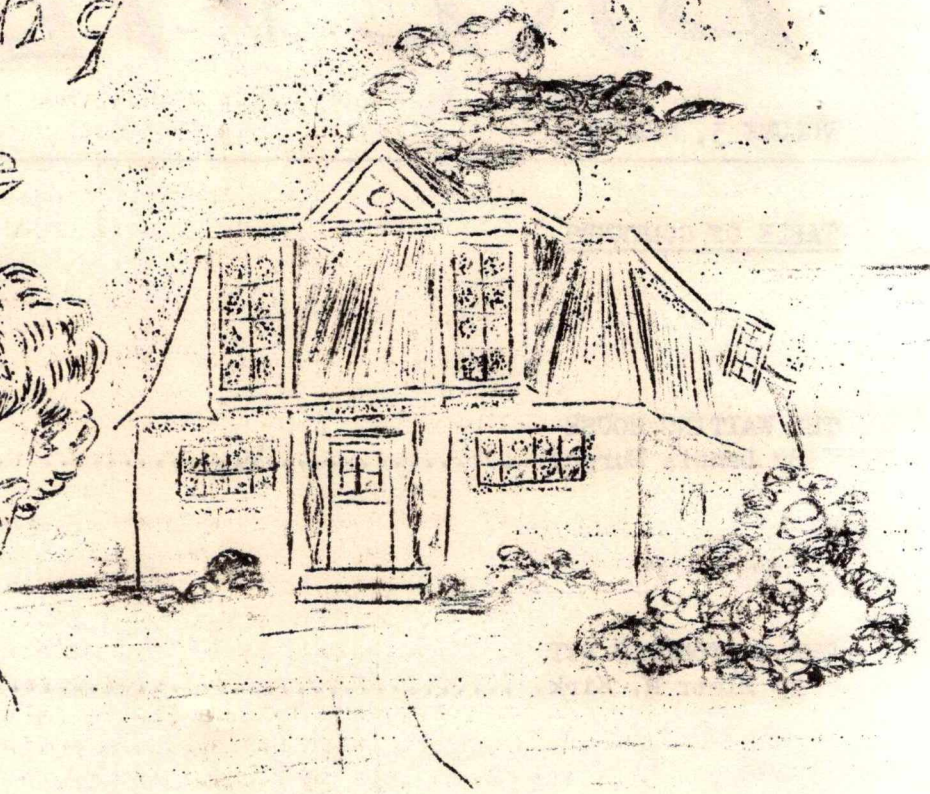
CHARLES BERNARD
Treasurer

Circulation Manager:
WANDA LESLIE

BREVIZINE: is published bi-monthly by W. A. Freiberg Company, Warren Allen Freiberg, Chairman of the Board, at 5369 West 89th Street, Oak Lawn, Illinois. Subscriptions: \$1.00 for eight issues. All foreign countries add a nickel per copy. Manuscripts are subject to necessary editing and revision..

Waiting House

BY
DENNIS
MURPHY



I HADN'T BEEN TO SEE my cousin Paul in a long time, not since my aunt had passed away about three years previous. Since then, his sister Estelle had married, and moved out of the state. His brothers Carl and Rudolph had also left the old homestead. Carl was in New York. Rudolph had married, and built himself a home about six miles away.

As I sat looking out across my garden that September afternoon, I thought of them all, and wondered how they were. I wondered how Paul was making out in that house all alone. Did the others come back sometimes, to visit him? Paul was working, last I'd heard, in a mill in the next city north. He didn't own a car, so he had to commute by bus. That meant a fifteen minute walk every morning to and from the bus line. I wondered if he still kept the cow, the pigs, and the horse, and if he still managed to work the gardens. It would be tough, doing that all alone.

It being a nice day, I decided to get the car out and go over to see him. He had no phone, so I'd take a chance on finding him home. Anyway I would at least get a look at his place again.

As it was Sunday, there were a good many cars on the main highway. The people were making the most of what was left of the good weather, before the setting in of winter. I turned on my car radio. Some disk jockey was spinning a Montavoni recording of the Destiny Waltz. I stuck out my arm, and took the left turn that would lead me out to Paul's place. Five minutes later, I swung into his yard, beside the gaping-doored garage that cousin Carl had used. The roof probably leaked during the storms, for I saw a lot of rusted farm tools lying around.

I got out of the car, and headed for the house. Everything seemed so quiet, so oddly quiet. Even the breeze seemed lulled to an almost inaudi-

ble whisper. The big elm west of the house had lost a couple of branches, obviously a long time ago, for they lay near the house, well-decayed. The old wagon shed which had stood out in the south side of the lot was gone. A couple of old wagons sagged their wheels into the weeded ground. The old corn crib stood, at a slant, to the south, well beaten by the seasonal winds which tore through the open spaces beyond the old bog-infested swamp. The old barn still stood, its roof drooping in the middle like an old sway-backed horse. The pig sty was still there, retaining a faint, lingering scent of its former occupants. The chicken coop stood east of the house, just a short distance from the edge of the swamp. I could see that only one of the gardens was still in use, and only half of it at that. A Plymouth Rock hen poked her head around the corner of the old outhouse, saw me, and dashed off toward the coop.

When I reached the house, I found the kitchen door ajar. On the stone just outside, lay a large, lazy looking brown and white dog, who eyed me steadily for a minute, then sat up on his haunches and began barking. It was old Buster, who used to sit at Aunt Betsy's feet when she was out under the elm, sewing or reading or just taking it easy. In memory, I could almost see Aunt Betsy herself, coming out through the doorway, wearing a big apron, and greeting me heartily.

I had a strange, cold feeling as I stood before the half opened door, and memories of bygone years swept over me. I remembered the time I had visited here for a week, when I was a little fellow, and had so much fun on the farm. I remembered when Uncle Willie had given me such a definite seat-warming the time I got to roaming around the swamp and fell in. Poor Uncle Willie, in eternal slumber now, for ten years. I remembered the time the wild white rooster had chased me all over the lot, pecking at my bare legs. And how we used to sit in the parlor in the evening, and listen to the records on the old gramophone.

Old Buster stopped my train of reveries by sniffing around my feet. Then he laid down again, watching me, and waiting for my next move. Dead silence settled in all around again. The door stood agape, waiting for me to walk into the house. It seemed as if the house itself was just crouching there, like old Buster, and waiting. Waiting--waiting for what--or who? I didn't know, it was just the odd feeling the place was giving me, I guess.

I stepped into the kitchen and called out. There was no answer. My nostrils were treated to that distinct smell one always finds in old houses, but not entirely unpleasant. There was the old cast-iron stove, with the tank attached on the back end for heating water. The old wood-box was in the corner nearby, half-broken, with some sticks of wood thrown helter-skelter into it. The table by the window wore a well-used cloth of faded roses and leaves. I felt hungry as I thought of the meals Aunt Betsy used to place on that table. The old mirror still hung beside the pantry door. It had seen the family grow up, seen the lines of care appear on their faces, and the threads of gray in their hair. If only a mirror could speak! On a chair nearby, hung a couple of sad-looking neckties, one decidedly faded and crumpled. On the wall over the iron sink, a calendar hung, showing a picture of a flock of chickens.

I turned and looked out through the doorway, wondering why Buster hadn't followed me in. He just stood there, with his feet on the door sill, watching me. I looked out of the east window, at the old lilac bush. It had grown all over itself, and was just a wild tangle of brush. I wondered if it still had the power left in it to send the sweetness of its blo-

ssoms into the air on early summer mornings. The watching eyes of the dog made me feel like an intruder. The house itself gave me the same feeling. I decided not to prowl any further, and called out again.

This time, by way of answer, I heard a low groan from the direction of the living room. The groan developed into a noisy yawn, followed up with Paul's voice asking, "Who's there?"

"Me! Stanley!" I answered.

"Come in here, then," Paul called. I walked through the small room off the kitchen, and into the living room. Paul was lying on the old wooden-backed sofa, and grinning at me. He waved me to a chair. There were only two chairs, one an upholstered affair with its insides peeking out here and there, and a dingy wooden one. I chose the latter.

"I thought nobody was home. I was just thinking of heading back home myself, but finally you answered me," I said.

"Oh, I've been sleeping. Just me and old Buster left here now, you know. The rest of the gang are all gone. Once in a while, they drop by. Oh, well, that's the way it goes," he said, then yawned and stretched a bit.

While we chatted, I let my eyes rove around the room. There was the dusty, old fashioned cabinet radio standing between the two west windows, and a couple of Paul's wrinkled shirts draped over it. Above it, on the wall, hung a picture I'd always admired. It came from Germany, and it was painted on the back of curved glass. It showed a castle on a hill, bathed in moonlight. Shiny stones were set into the castle as windows. Some of the paint had peeled off from temperature and weather changes. Over the couch hung a family group picture I also well remembered. On the east wall hung a colored picture of Paul's sister Janie. She had died in an excursion boat disaster about twenty-five years past. Under the picture, on the floor, were more of Paul's discarded clothes, in a sad looking heap. Evidently the house was just a roost now, and I could mentally visualize Aunt Betsy striding in, and trying to make order out of chaos.

"Stan, remember Grace, my old schoolday flame?" Paul was asking.

"Yes, I sure do! Always thought you and her would get married, but her and her folks moved off to some other town. Ever hear from her anymore?"

"Not for about ten years. Guess she's married off by now. She was a nice girl, Stan. I always liked her, and I still do. Oh, I can get myself a woman if I want to, but somehow I can't see them sitting here, sharing this house. I can only see Grace that way. For all I know, she may even be dead..." His voice trailed off.

"Wouldn't it be something, if she's still alive somewhere, and she could come back here to surprise you some day?" I asked.

Paul shook his head. "No, I don't think she'll ever come back. I guess all I'll ever have of her are dreams and memories. And she was the only girl I ever seriously considered settling down for life with!"

The conversation turned to the topic of neighbors. While he talked, I looked up at the hole in the ceiling, where some plaster was missing. I could see a spider in it, waiting for prey.

Paul followed my gaze. "Oh, that chunk of plaster came down the other morning, when I was eating my breakfast. To hell with it! This place will last as long as I will--and maybe longer. Maybe I could sell it, and get a smaller place, just for myself and old Buster. But, somehow, I just can't part with it. So, I guess we'll just rot away together."

"Good thing you don't believe in spooks, and all that sort of stuff, you being all alone here. I get a funny feeling, just sitting here. I guess

it's just my remembering other days, when the family was still together. Seems so empty here now. Must get darn lonesome sometimes," I said.

"Well now, maybe the place is a bit haunted," Paul laughed. "The doors creak, the stairs squeak, and the floorboards squawk. An old house is bound to make some noises on its own. The creaks of old age. It's drafty and rheumatic, just like I'll be some day."

"What room do you sleep in?" I asked.

"The southeast, at the top of the stairs. That was Mom and Pop's room. It ain't much to look at anymore, with the paper peeling off the walls. Same conditions in the other rooms upstairs. Maybe you'd like to go up and look around? I'll just sit here and loaf."

The well-worn stairs creaked under my feet as I ascended. Paul's room was a shambles, with the old dresser strewn with varied articles of clothing, and what not. Faded ragged curtains slumped from the two windows. A picture of a brook, above the bed, was scarcely recognizable for the dust. The iron bed had lost a lot of its original paint, and rust showed through. There was a faded blanket balled up on the twisted bedsheet, and a pillow peered out from beneath it, like a limp ghost. The whole room seemed neglected and oppressive.

Next, I looked into the room that had been Estelle's. Though in need of a good going over, it was in a less cluttered condition than Paul's.

I went to the last room, on the northwest corner. The door was locked. I peered through the keyhole, and could see part of the room, the faded and peeling wallpaper, and in some places, bare clapboards. One of the clapboards had a wasp nest securely fastened to it. This was the room, the one I had slept in, when I visited here as a child!

Just as I turned away from that door, to return downstairs, there was a funny feeling somewhere inside of me, a sort of a chilled sensation. The air around me seemed to grow heavy, and misty. The feeling of chill turned to a pronounced coldness, and goose-flesh appeared on my arms. At the same time, I felt a tingling along my scalp. The whole house seemed to be suddenly quiet, so ominously quiet—like a silent beast preparing to pounce. I hurried down the stairs, and into the room where Paul waited.

"Things just aren't the way they used to be, when Mom and all the others were around. Then, seeing the expression on my face, he asked, "What is ailing you? You look sort of sick!"

"I guess I let my imagination get the best of me upstairs. I had the damndest creepy feeling. How the hell you can stand this place, I don't know! If you could get someone to help brighten the place up, it would make all the difference in the world. How about me coming over on weekends and help you fix up around?"

"Awww," sighed Paul, "I'm used to it. It'll do as is. Maybe you think I've taken to rooming ghosts?"

"Just the same, the place needs fixing. And I didn't say the house is haunted!" I was getting uneasy again. "Let's go outdoors. I'd like a stroll and really see the place."

When we came outside, Buster got up off his haunches and followed us.

"Does old Buster still sleep beside the woodbox by the stove, like he used to?" I asked Paul.

"Funny thing, Stan, he won't go inside the house at all. Something got him scared..."

"What could of scared him? Make with the details," I prompted.

"Well, near a year ago, him and I were in the living room. I was read-

ing the paper, and he was sprawled real cozy in the corner. All of a sudden he began whining. I looked at him, and saw the hair standing up on the back of his neck. He was staring toward the hall, but there was nothing there. Then he got up and almost crawled out of the room, toward the kitchen. He stood by the door, whining, so I let him out. He headed straight for the barn. He's never come any further than outside the kitchen door since! I don't know what's ailing him at all!"

I glanced back at the house. Maybe Buster had sensed, or seen, something in that house, something more tangible than what I had sensed when I had visited those upstairs rooms. The whole house seemed to crouch there near the road, as though it were waiting for something. "The waiting house?" I thought.

After our inspections of barn, gardens, and other buildings, I took my leave, saying I would be back in a couple of weeks for another chat, and that maybe we could figure out how to start getting the place mended and painted. I was glad to leave, to get away from that depressive state that seemed to dominate the whole place.

A month went by, during which time I often thought of Paul being all alone in that lonely, decaying "waiting" house. More than once during the month I had been tempted to get out the car and go over there, to see if all was well with him. Now, I couldn't put off a visit any longer. I felt almost drawn to the place.

The afternoon sun was drooping toward the mountains in the west, as I drove into Paul's yard. The west windows of the house reflected the reddening sun's glow, as if there was a fire behind them. The air was getting chilly, and a thin veil of fog hung over the big swamp, north of the house. A bird emitted a harsh note from the elm, then took off toward Martin's Hill to the west. I didn't see the dog Buster anywhere around. I made my way to the kitchen door, which was open. Someone was walking around inside, but it didn't sound like Paul, not his sort of tired, listless shuffling walk. I stepped on into the kitchen.

It was Paul, but how changed he looked! His face was newly shaved, his hair combed and brushed, and he was wearing a neatly ironed white shirt. His navy blue trousers, though a bit faded, were freshly pressed, too... His shoes were well shined. I looked from him to the table. There stood a bouquet of blue gentians, and some other mixture of wildflowers. The entire kitchen showed signs of a thorough cleaning.

"Hi, Stan," Paul greeted me, "I'm tired! Worked like a beaver all day, getting the place in order. How do you like the flowers? Got some of them up on Martin's Hill, and the others from down by the swamp. Best I could do on such short notice! Here, do me a favor, will you? Help me wipe these dishes!"

I caught the dishtowel he tossed in my general direction, and began to wipe a plate, wondering all the while if the long solitude of this house had upset Paul's emotional balance.

"Paul, what's all this sudden cleaning and primping up all about? Have you picked yourself a girl friend somewhere?" I asked.

"Grace's coming back," Paul said, turning on the kitchen light to offset the rapidly growing shadows of nightfall.

My grip on the plate tightened. "Wh-h-h-at?" I asked.

"But yes! She's probably in New York by now, maybe on the train already, on her way out! She sent me a long letter last week, asking me if I would like to see her again. She says if I still feel the same way about

her that I used to, she'll come back and marry me! I wasted no time letting her know I wanted her back again. Then she wrote again in answer, "and said she was on her way, but for me not to come to meet her when her train comes in, as she wants to walk in and find me right here, like in bygone years. In the meantime, I went to work and fixed the house up and did a good job of it, too." Paul waved his hand toward the other room. "Go ahead, take a look."

"I will, later. Grace coming back! By gee, Paul, what a break for you! Maybe I better set out for home now. When she walks in, she wants to see you, and only you," I said.

"No, stay awhile! She won't get here for about three hours yet. I sent her enough money for her cab fare out here, so she won't have to hang around at the station wasting time waiting for a bus."

Buster came out from under the table, and waited for me to stroke him.

"Yes, even Buster seems different. He isn't afraid anymore. When the letter came, from Grace, and I brought it into the house from the mailbox, Buster came strolling in right alongside. Good old Buster!" Paul affectionately scratched the animal's head. "I fixed the victrola, too. We shall have music when she gets here. Go on, Stan, take a look around the house and let me know what you think. You'll find the light switches right where they always were. I'll finish off the dishes."

Everything in the downstairs rooms was so clean, so neat. It would have delighted Aunt Betsy's heart, if she were to see it all looking so nice! Even the hinges on the hall doorway had been oiled. The hallway itself had been the proud victim of a thorough cleaning. The stairway to the second floor had been scrubbed, and only squeaked a little as I ascended. Upstairs, I looked into Paul's room, into Estelle's room. There was still some dust here and there, but all was in order. I got bold, and pushed against the door to the northwest room. It was still locked. A look through the keyhole showed me nothing but the of the window in the neardead daylight. There was no longer any feeling of oppression, as in my previous tour of inspection. It had all been my own imagination in the first place, no doubt. I recalled the term "the waiting house." Now it was a house that knew its occupants would be happy again, and it was happy, too! I walked into Paul's room, and looked out of the east window. The fog over the big swamp to the north had become a huge, bloated body, stretching out a mist arm across the road and over the smaller swamp at the end of Paul's garden. I turned away, and walked downstairs, again inwardly laughing at myself for the silly sensations I had thought I experienced on my first visit to the farm.

Paul had gone through the dish wiping in remarkable time, and was putting the last of them away in the pantry just off the kitchen. The dog sat in the middle of the floor, looking up at me, and wagging his tail contentedly. The stage was well set for the happy reunion.

Paul talked gaily and unrestrainedly of his plans for the future. He'd get the house really fixed up. He'd get more livestock, he'd work the gardens. He and Grace would make a go of the farm. He painted a verbal picture of Grace planting flowers all around the edge of the house. It was so good to hear his enthusiasm! I caught some of his overflowing happiness in my own heart, and ached to get back home and tell Lil all about it. But, right in the midst of Paul's joyful planning, it happened!

There was a long drawn sigh, a loud, deep sigh, as if from some gigantic throat! The dog suddenly turned his nose northwestward, and the h a ir

rose on the back of his neck. He seemed to actually shrink. At the same time, Paul dropped a platter on the floor. It landed with a deafening crash. The sound of the sigh ceased with the breaking of the plate. Then came a wave of icyness, a real tangible frigidty. It was in the air all around us. Not a breeze, just a dense, silent coldness. The dog crawled on his belly, whining, to the kitchen door. Then the feeling of intense cold was gone. Paul looked dazedly at me, and at the dog cowering and whimpering against the door.

"What was that?" he asked me, in a hoarse whisper.

"I--I--don't--know." I pointed to the dog. "Buster's scared--plenty!"

Paul moved to the door, and opened it. Buster fled, howling, into the night....

"Maybe a door came open somewhere in the house. It gets pretty damp and cold around here when there's a fog. But--that awful sound--maybe I'd better go and look around the house and see if I can find out what's wrong!" Paul started out of the kitchen toward the hallway.

"No," I said, stopping him, "I'll look. I'll be right back."

Though I felt no chill in any of the downstairs rooms, there was a feeling of heaviness in the air, a sensation of waitful suspense. I started up the stairway toward the second floor. The heaviness permeated the air there, too. It seemed to be everywhere, all around me! I reached the top, and went through Paul and Estelle's rooms. No windows open there. No drafts. I stood by the locked door of the northwest room. No sign of a draft there, either. What had caused that terrible sighing sound, and that awful icyness in the air downstairs? I descended the stairway slowly, confused. I had just set foot on the hall floor, when the heaviness of the air closed in, stifling me, causing me to gasp for breath! I flailed my arms, beating madly--at nothingness! I pivoted and looked back up the stairs. I had turned off the light at the top of the stairs as I descended, but there wasn't any darkness there now, at least, not all darkness! There were wavering wisps of shiny mist up there, at the very top of the stairs, foggy veils writhing, trying to merge into one ghastly unit! My feet felt like lead as I tried to make a run for the kitchen. I banged against furniture and walls, while the tangible heaviness of the air tried to hold me back and suffocate me! Somehow, I got into the lighted sanctuary of the kitchen, and slumped into a chair!

"Paul!" I gasped. It was a job, all right, to drag the words from my lips, to find the breath in my stony throat. "You've got to get out of this house--right now! Get Buster. I'll--take you over--to my place--"

"What's the matter with you, Stan? Did you see a ghost?" Paul's following laugh seemed a bit brittle.

"I did, Paul! So help me--I did! We've got to get out of here, I'm telling you!"

"Look, feller! Grace will be here any minute now! I've got to be here when she arrives!" He pointed toward a whiskey bottle on the table. "Help yourself. I just had one. It'll chase the ghosts away."

The whiskey felt burning, but good. It numbed me a little, took off some of my panic. But still--fear was within me. I felt that all that heaviness in the air in the other rooms was waiting to erupt into the kitchen and stifle the both of us. I poured myself another shot, downed it.

"Paul, I'm not kidding you! You had better get out of here with me right away! Something's going to happen if we don't. Something horrible--"

"No, I'm staying! I think there's some down-to-earth way of explaining

The reason for the sounds, and the cold air, and even your--your ghosts... This is an old house, you know that, and old houses do funny things--"

I got to my feet. "If you won't come with me now, I'll go without you!"

"I have to wait for Grace, and you know it. I think you and I let our imaginations work us over a little too much! When Grace comes, I'll be here!"

"O.K., then! I'm going! But I'll be back early tomorrow, just to be sure everything is all right, and I'll bring Lil with me!" My coat and hat were on before I finished talking, and it didn't take me very long to get outside. When I reached my car, I looked back at the house. At one of the upstairs windows, I saw a wavering, luminous form. I got in the car, and took off for home in a real hurry. When I told Lil all about what had happened, and my fears, she laughed. I thought she would. She hadn't felt and seen what I had! But I felt better for having talked it out.

I got into bed, but sleep was an elusive thing. The night's events milling around in my thoughts. I switched on the bed lamp, hoping I could get my thoughts off of it all by reading awhile. But the words in the book remained words, I couldn't get into the feel of the story at all! I switched off the light again, and finally fell into a dreamy sleep, in which I seemed to be running over hills and valleys, with Paul's house in hot pursuit of my person. I awoke with a jolt, just as the house was about to pounce on me and me to earth.

I sat up straight in bed and looked toward the window. There was a furious red glow in the sky to the northwest. It was a fire--somewhere in the general direction of Paul's place! It took little time indeed for me to be out of my pajamas and into my clothes. Lil stirred and woke. I told her about the fire.

"Get back to bed, Stan! There's a fire department in town! You've been a wake most of the night so crawl back in and get some sleep!" she ordered.

But there was no stopping me now! The glow in the sky had died down considerably by the time that I got the car out of the garage and in to the road. But I didn't get very far, for I'd forgotten to get gas the night before, and the tank was empty. I hailed a passing car, and the driver was kind enough to give my car a push to the nearest garage. I had the tank filled, and took off again. On the road to Paul's house, a fire truck and a line of cars passed me going the other way. There was no longer any glow in the sky, the fire was out. I hit a bank of fog a quarter of a mile from Paul's place, and had to stick my neck out the window to see the road. When I was nearly to the corner where the house stood, the fog broke in the middle....

To my left, was Paul's swamp. And there, at its edge, stood Paul, Grace, beside him. I yelled, "Heyyy--Paul! Grace!" I pulled up and stopped. They evidently hadn't heard me shouting. I stood at the fence, looking at them. I got my leg over the fence, calling again to them the while. They did not pay me any heed. Were they so damned in love that they couldn't hear my voice yelling at them? Now they were moving toward the house, going further away from me. "Don't go to the house, Paul! Hey, Paul! Grace! Come over to my place til morning!"

It was no use, they kept right on going toward the general direction of the house, which was invisible because of the fog. Only a faint, glimmering, radiance showed. The bank of fog moved forward, and enveloped them. I went back to my car, got in, and started off. Morning wasn't too far off now, and in just a couple of hours it would begin to show daylight. I drove slow as I passed the vicinity of Paul's house, but I couldn't see the

house itself because of the fog. Only the windows showed with a cold light. I slowed to a crawl, stuck my head out of the window, and called, once again. My answer was a strange, sizzling sound, and a funny, burned out sort of smell. Then came that heavy, icy-feeling, almost tangible in its intensity! The very same sensation that I had felt in that house the night before! That was enough for me! I stepped on the gas, and wheeled for home....

I stayed up awhile, smoked cigarettes, drank coffee. I still managed to gulp down some breakfast when Lil got up later. When breakfast was done, we got into the car, and headed for Paul's place. I switched on the car-radio, in hopes that there would be some news of the fire, and where it had been. The usual political and state news came on first.

A little over a mile from Paul's, we were surprised to see old Buster, coming along the side of the road, in our direction, walking slowly, head down. I pulled up beside him and stopped. I opened the back door, and when I called his name, he jumped in and sat cowering on the back seat.. Before I could remark about his strange actions, the newscaster handed a shock to Lil and me.

There had been a passenger plane crash the night before near New York. And among the dead was--Grace DeMille! Grace! I stopped the car, and turned to Lil.

"How could that be? I saw Grace early this morning, down by the swamp, with Paul! I couldn't be mistaken! Who else would be there with him, at that hour?"

"Stan, it must have been someone else you saw! If Grace was in a plane she couldn't be there with Paul, too. Not unless you want to start believing in ghosts," Lil offered.

"Listen, Lil, after what I've been through lately, I'm ready to believe in anything! Let's get over to Paul's, and see what the whole situation is! I've got a feeling that what I went through before isn't anything compared to what I'll go through---Lil! Look!"

We'd rounded the curve, and come upon Paul's place. But the house wasn't there! All that remained of it was a smouldering pile of timbers! It didn't take us long to be standing close to the fire-streaked ruins.

"Lil, I came by here just a couple of hours ago, and the windows showed through the fog! The house was still here then! That was right after I saw Paul and Grace by the swamp! But--that fire during the night--"

Lil gripped my arm. "Stan, there's something wrong, either with you or the whole situation. Better ask somebody, there's plenty of people wandering around."

I saw Paul's next door neighbor, Bevens, standing arms akimbo over by the former site of the kitchen, staring into the embers.

"Hey, Tom!" I called out to him. "Where's Paul? What happened?"

Tom Bevens walked over to us. "Hello, Stan. Hello, Lil. I'm afraid you won't see Paul anymore."

"What?" I gasped, though already I could guess the answer.

"All that's left of him is buried somewhere in there." Bevens indicated the smouldering mess. "He couldn't get out! I heard my dog barking early this morning, and stepped out on the porch to try to quiet him. I looked over this way, and I saw a light in Paul's room. He was at the window, looking down the road this way. All of a sudden, he turned his back on the window, and let out the most God-forsaken yell I ever heard. Then he disappeared, fell down, or something. Before I no more than got

to the road, and I moved fast, mind you, flames came out of all his windows at once! Like an explosion, only there wasn't any report! The whole house was a torch! I never saw anything burn so fast in my life! Nothing could escape a fire that burned like that! Err--what's the matter, Stan?? You look pretty sick. I know it's bad news---

"I--I'll be--all right--" I took Lil's arm, and walked away, almost leaning on her for support, because my own legs didn't seem to really belong to me. My stomach was a stony knot, and there was a pressure that ached in my head.

Sitting on an old stump a ways from the ruins, I managed to get myself. But my thoughts raced, trying to find answers. And when they came, they weren't good! Grace had died in the plane crash. That must have been about the time I was there yet with Paul, and when that terrible sigh was at hand, and when that death-cold sensation came into the room with us! But, what of the lesser weird sensations I'd experienced on my previous visit? More spectral visitations, unmaterialized? The spirits of others of the family, clinging to the home they loved? Beven had seen Paul at his window, heard him scream. Perhaps Grace had appeared to him just then. But the fire? What could have started a fire which would burn with such rapidity, as Beven described? But what caused the vision of lighted windows through the fog, when the house had already burned down? Ghosts--ghosts, the whole business was ghosts! Even the ghost of a house--

I remembered when my thoughts cleared more, how I had been impressed by the feeling that the house was just crouching there, waiting. The phrase "the waiting house"---

I looked toward the ruins again. I wondered if a house could feel, like we do, and know the same emotions that humanity is addicted to. If that is so, perhaps the house felt lonely, when the others died or moved away. It still had Paul to shelter, but he was lonely, too, and the house knew it. And when the spirit of Grace had appeared to him, the old house knew: Paul would never be happy again. So, it clasped the spirits of her and all the others who had loved the house, and gave itself to the flames, flames from a supernatural source, yet so potent that they could destroy a house and a living man---

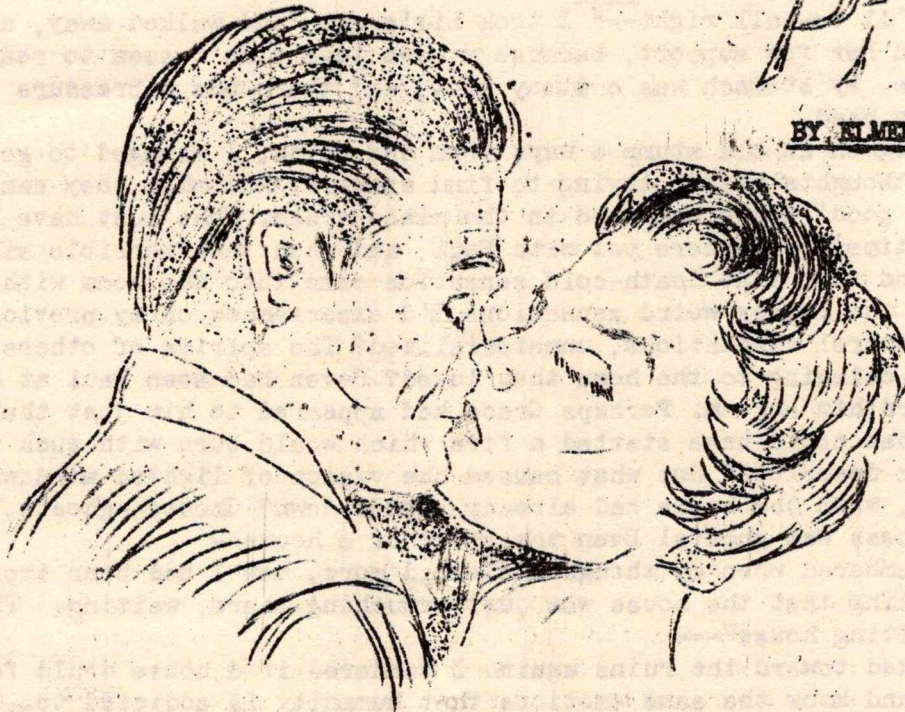
I reached for a cigarette, finally got it lit. Through the swirl of its smoke, I stared at the ruins of the house, the "waiting house."

The "waiting house" waits no more.....

Bottomless

Pit

BY ELMER R. KIRK



DANIEL DRAPER, REPORTER FOR The Springdale Morning Call, jumped from his car and inquired of the gas station attendant: "How do I get to the Markham place from here?"

"Well, let's see," the attendant replied, "you go straight south from here, about three miles. Then drive slowly and you will notice a little used wagon road to your right, going west. Just follow your nose on it —but, if you expect to explore or buy the old Markham cave you got another think coming...."

"Why?" Dan asked.

"Because old man Markham sealed the entrance to the cave twenty years ago," the attendant smiled, "and no one has been inside since. Besides, rumor has it that the cave is...is haunted—if you believe in ghosts."

"Thanks, pal, for the information," Dan said getting back into his car. "But I am going to see the inside of that cave and nothing is going to stop me...."

"That's what you think, brother. Better men than you have tried and failed. Don't say that I didn't warn you."

The death of trees and foliage during late October, in the Ozark mountains, cast a weird spell over Dan as he drove along Highway 65, south of Condon. Trees and vegetation, he thought, die a beautiful death in the Fall of the year and, like human beings, are reincarnated again in the Springtime with the transmigration of a better soul...new sap...new blood...and a new beginning...ever on and on.

Then, as the mid-day sun parched dead leaves about the landscape, he caught sight of the little used road going west and turned his auto off the highway, as directed.

He had heard about the mysterious old caverns from the natives and decided that a feature story might gain him a bit of journalistic glory in the sight of the managing editor at The Springdale Morning Call.

It was hinted that old man Markham's cave was among the largest in the mountains. Because of some unknown reason, the old eccentric kept it closed. Promoters had offered him fabulous prices hoping to turn it into a tourist attraction. But the old man of the mountains refused all commissions and continued to live in desolation on his isolated domain of mystery caverns....

Now, as Dan's car rounded the crest of a hill, he hunched his tall lean figure forward, shifted into low gear and rode the brakes to the valley below. The weird and died beauty about him was overshadowed only by a thought of what might lay ahead.

He parked his car, locked it and was about to turn around when that inner sixth-sense telepathed his brain that someone was cautiously approaching from behind.

"Hello," a feminine voice said, almost before he could face her. "May I be of some help? My father has gone into town for supplies and I am here alone."

"You sure can," Dan answered, eager to get a story and visit the inside of the forbidden cave. "I am looking for a cave that is supposed to be located around here, someplace..."

"Oh, that's easy," she said. "Come with me and I will guide you through it. That is, provided you will promise not to mention me doing so to my elderly father. He has old-fashioned ideas about young couples being together in secluded places. Know what I mean--promise?"

"Sure, kid, I wouldn't let you down on that," Dan assured her. Then he thought, It's as easy as that. And I thought this was going to be a hard assignment.

He looked her over, up-and-down, appraisingly. Her hair was raven-black short-bobbed and set with a delicate rose over to one side. Her dark eyes held that look of magic that compels youth to abandon all logic and reason. Her cheeks were pale-pink and without make-up. She wore a bright yellow sweater, dark green slacks cut to the latest style, and strapeandles. She was young and about his own age.

"What's eatin' you, friend?" she said. "Come on, let's go."

She led the way up a path, worn by the hoofs of farm cattle to where it emerged on the rock-floored entrance of the cave opening. He gazed in astonishment. The entrance was sealed with a network of heavy iron bars and the massive iron door in the center was fastened shut and locked with a huge padlock....

She took a key from her pocket, deftly turned it in the lock and they entered. She picked up a kerosene farm lantern from a ledge of stone near the door and with the aid of Dan's flashlight they proceeded down the narrow dark corridors of the cave. It was, indeed, a weird, cold and dunge-on-dark subterranean wonderland.

She pointed out to him, under ledges of overhanging rock, a bears' den, where once those grizzly animals hibernated. The shallows that their bodies had rounded out still remained and cast dim shadows in the eerie lantern light.

Then she rolled away a round stone from a small opening and Dan saw, by the piercing beam of his torch, a dungeon cell where skeletons barred their ghostly skulls. This ghostlike cavern crypt, lined with human bones,

caused him to wonder if that master of the strange and macabre, E.A.Poe, had been here at the time of his writing The Cask of Amontillado. Dan would not have been surprised, at the moment, to see the famous character, Fortunato, come forth from the wall of bones, his cap of tinkling bells-jingling weirdly in the eerie recesses of this lost underground ca'comb.

Dan shuddered and said nothing.

She continued to lead him on and on through a maze of underground corridors and narrow passages where huge stalagmites reflected their spectral robes of filmy white mist.

Suddenly, and without warning, they emerged into a cold and giant room the ceiling of which could not be reached with the beam of a flashlight. Dan held gently to his guide's arm and permitted her to lead him toward the center of the dismal chamber.

At this particular moment, he was thinking horrible thoughts. Alone and without his guide, he would be unable to find his way back through the labyrinth of uncharted corridors to safety. His bones might well end with those he had seen in the dungeon cell. An evil forbidding ran through him as his faithful guide bade him rest beside her on a raised stone.

He flashed his light before them as they sat resting from their walk.. To his astonishment, a huge and black-rimmed hole appeared only feet in front of their resting place. Had they walked a few more steps they would have plunged into the gaping jaws of a bottomless pit.

She extinguished the lantern. Pitch-blind darkness surrounded them; utter darkness reflecting nothing. She leaned close to him and the feel of her warm lips against his ear as she whispered caused the hackles on the back of his neck to rise.

"That," she murmured, "is the Bottomless Pit..."

Dan straightened, trying to overcome his emotions. "What is your name," he asked in an undertone.

"Millie," she answered. Then in the cold dank darkness she continued: "Twenty years ago, a young girl was tempted by her lover at this very spot. The girl, rather than yield to her own Edonic temptation, pushed her lover aside and plunged into the black void of the Bottomless Pit..."

Dan put his arm around Millie's neck, drawing her close and kissed her tenderly....

"Thank you," was all she said.

He turned on his flashlight, she lit her lantern and together they walked back to the entrance of the cave.

She had just finished locking the heavy iron door when they saw a car, coming from the steep hill, and toward the valley.

"You must go on without me," she begged. "My father would not understand. Please, remember you made a promise...."

Dan turned, thinking to press another kiss upon her warm lips. She had vanished.

Still a bit bewildered, he made his way toward the cabin of the eccentric. He was waiting for him at the door. "I saw your car--won't you come in?" Mr. Markham welcomed.

"Thanks, I believe I will." They went inside and sat facing the fireplace. The old man of the mountains waited for Dan to continue the conversation. "I would like for you to tell me the secret of your cave," Dan, brash in his youth, flatly stated.

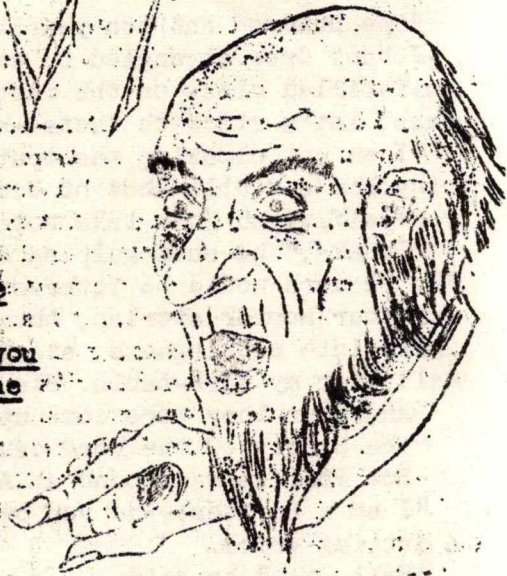
"Well, son," the old man replied, "you seem to have an honest face. -I

Continued on Page 18

INVISABLE LEVITANT

BY HOWARD BARTON

The old saying that faith can move mountains was not one that Johnny Crow took to his heart. That is, you understand, previous to the time he met the mysterious Mr. Levy.



I HAD JUST FINISHED typing the manuscript, Four Days with the Dead, and affixed proper postage to the brown envelope addressed to a weird fantasy magazine, when a thunderous booming sounded at my chamber door.

"You don't need to knock the damn door down to gain admittance," I screeched. "Come on in." For I, too, Edgar-Allen-Poe-fashion, kept midnight hours during the drab month of December.

A gaunt hulking man entered with an old beat-up brief-case that looked as if it had been fashioned from the dried skin of an ancient Egyptian mummy.

"My name's Johnny Crow," he extended his hand.

"Oh, from The Aurora Leader and Press? For an interview, eh?" I had read Johnny Crow's "Living Portraits" for which he was famous, and felt flattered.

"Yes, Mr. Levy, if you don't mind," he answered.

"Do you want the truth or a lie?" I asked, pouring him a generous hoker of bourbon.

He looked astonished. "Why, the truth, of course," he said.

"Well, my inky-fingered friend," I advised, "that puts you on the spot, for, if I tell you the truth you can't and won't print it; and if you permit me to fictionalize my strange and horrible past, you will get a good story...."

"I refuse to compromise, Mr. Levy. I report fact, not fiction. I want

the truth, the whole truth and nothing but!" he emphasized, opening his mummified brief-case with a sudden zip and extracting a formal questionnaire.

"Okay, pal," I said. "You asked for it -- shoot."

"Your full name?"

"Lester Levy."

"Your age?"

"One hundred and ten years...."

Johnny Crow strangled on his bourbon, spilling the remainder of his half-filled glass on the floor. He looked at me critically and said: "Please, let's stick to facts--shall we, Mr. Levy?"

"I am not cloaking the truth in a shroud of gloomy lies," I said, pouring him a double-shot of bourbon. "Take a good snort of that and brace yourself...you just take notes while I explain."

"Thanks," he said gulping down his liquor without coming up for air. "My readers would be interested to know where and how you get material: for your horror stories, those weird and fantastic..." He left his words drift into nothingness, staring in awe at a framed motto hanging on the wall over my work-table. His pencil shook in his fingers as he read:

"And when they were come up out of the water,

the Spirit of the Lord caught away Phillip...

But Phillip was found at Azotus...Acts ix:39,40"

"I am a levitant--do you believe in levitation, Mr. Crow?" I asked in a droning voice.

"Hell, no," he said.

"Oh, so you're an atheist--an unbeliever, eh?" I said, getting up and turning the motto's face toward the wall. "Forget it. When I was ten years old I discovered, one dark night, that I was endowed with the supernatural power of levitation. I possessed this tendency"--Johnny's pencil was now following my every word on his note pad--"to rise into the air in spite of gravity. This magic power lasted only one hour during a black tenure of the night.

"Now, to add to this--this fantastic and sub-human trait of levitation I found that I could, at will, cloak myself in a transparent raiment of ectoplasm and become invisible. This rare combination of cosmic arts permitted me to come and go, unseen by the human eye, and experiment in to the black mysteries of ancient wizardry.

"During this one hour of Earthly escape, I would spend days, sometimes, even weeks, visiting the horrible denizens of werewolves, phantoms and witches. When I tired of this, I would plunge into caves and bottomless pits where dwell only the hellish man-bats and the she-reptiles that cross-breed some of the inhuman spawn of Earth...."

"Stop that!" Johnny Crow yelled at me, stark terror blazing from his helpless eyes. "You--you are a propounder of Black Magic and evil sorcery. It is nothing more than thin-layered illusion of self-hypnosis." He grabbed up my bottle of bourbon and let down its entire contents. He shook his head. "Ug," he said. "That's better. Now, I suppose, you are going to tell me that that is where all your inspiration for stories evolves."

"That," I agreed, "was exactly what I was about to tell you."

"Can you prove--will you demonstrate this uncanny method of invisible levitation to me?" His eyes were still filled with terror and disbelief.

"Sure thing, Johnny," I said, sitting back in my chair. "Just watch me closely...."

I drew about myself that gossamer cloak of ectoplasm, gently levitated

myself into a horizontal position in mid-air and vanished.

Upon my return within an hour, I found Johnny Crow's chair empty....

I picked up The Aurora Leader and Press the next evening and looked at his column, Living Portraits. It was boxed and black-bordered with an obituary enclosed....

I turned toward my cluttered work-table, thinking to begin my new horror story, The House of Velvet, when I noticed the motto on the wall.

It was turned back, face-out again. Johnny Crow had believed.

The Bottomless Pit

By Elmer R. Kirk

Continued from Page 15

believe you would not betray my confidence. Twenty years ago, my daughter entered that cave and...and never returned. She was thought to have stumbled into The Bottomless Pit...And only one person could have persuaded her to enter that cave of utter darkness...her lover---you!"

"B--but that can't be possible," Dan faltered, watching fantastic lights dance in the old hermit's eyes.

"Or could it?" the old man of the mountains intoned.

Dan stood to his feet, trying in vain to shake the numbness from his brain, trying to gain a semblance of logic and reason. He sat down limply into the chair.

"Wh--what was your daughter's name?" Dan finally asked after a prolonged silence.

"Millie," the old man sighed.

Then the old man did a most peculiar thing. He handed Dan the key to the cave and Dan, unflinching, headed toward it.

LETTERS

AN AUTHOR TAKES THE DEFENSE

Sirs:

I am delighted to know that the many readers of Brevizine enjoy my yarns, and to Leonard Latenstein whose comments in the July issue objected "...to the fact that many of his (my) fiction pieces show 'Mountaineers' as hillbillies," I owe a word of explanation. We can not say that all the people of any city or community are murderers just because the setting of a murder story happens there. Neither did I mean to infer that all mountaineers are hillbillies because of a story's delimitation. But honestly, Leonard, there are a few hillbillies outside of fiction... because...well...I haven't been wearing "city shoes" too long...

One of our local K.W.T.O. radio programs is "Hillbilly Heartbeats," a newspaper column is titled "Hillbilly Philosophy" and a magazine "Hillbilly Tidings" was once edited by...Hillbilly Ann...

Elmer R. Kirk

Buffalo, Missouri.

READER SUPPORT ALWAYS HELPS

Sirs:

....I would say Leonard Latenstein has no gripe. He may live in Montpelier, Vermont, but Elmer Kirk lives in Buffalo, Missouri the Heart of the Ozarks....

Ronald Elik

Long Beach, California

INTO THE HUMAN MIND

Sirs:

Let me take this opportunity to congratulate you on the publication of "The Secret Place" by R. G. Warner in the July Brevizine. It held the distinct honor of being a psychological tale without peer. I enjoyed the phrasings that so clearly delved into human emotions of an old man..

Paul Rathje

Key West, Florida

EXPOSITION OF DEPRAVITY

Sirs:

..."How Ghastly She Looks" served to illustrate how low humanity, in pure coarseness, has sunk. However, this letter is not meant to condemn Brevizine or Mr. Kirk, but rather praise them for the exposition of these vulgarities in a form of entertainment.....

Mrs. Douglas Mountford

Rutland, Utah

MORE ON FLYING SAUCERS

Sirs:

You have my sincerest thanks for re-opening the matter of Flying Saucers, which has been taken to lightly. ...They are a potential danger

Thomas W. Chappel

Chicago, Illinois

Return Postage Gtd.
Mimeographed Matter

2-2 X

G.N. CARR
8325-31st NW
SEATTLE 7, WASH.

