

Just a Dreamer

By Robert Arthur

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"Don't Be a Goose," etc.

Rockabye, my baby. . . .
Dream of diamonds
and awake with a glit-
tering fistful of Kohi-
noors. Dream of death
and wake up wearing
crepe. But do you have
to go to sleep with
that picture of a Ben-
gal tiger poised above
your bed?



"LAST night I had the most remarkable dream," Nichols, who manufactures saxophones, was saying as Morks and I entered the club reading room. "I was in a rocket ship that had just landed on the moon, and a herd of beasts as big as elephants, but with wings, were flapping around, trying to break in and get at me. I knew it was just a dream, of course, but it was so real it frightened me into waking up."

"I knew a man," Morks—his full and unlikely name is Murchison Morks—said in a thoughtful voice as we came up to the little group, "whose dreams were much more remarkable than that. And they were so real they frightened his wife."

"Into waking up?" Nichols asked, puzzled. Morks shook his head.

"No. Into running away and leaving him, gasping with terror. She was a very strong-minded and unscrupulous woman; very hard to frighten, too."

Nichols got red in the face.

"As I was saying," he went on, tight-lipped, "after I got back to sleep, I dreamed that I had found Captain

Kidd's treasure. The money was so real I could hear it chink when I dropped it, and—"

"When my friend dreamed of money," Murchison Morks put in, in that curiously soft voice which carried so remarkably, "it was so real you could spend it."

Nichols, crimson with anger, tried to ignore him.

"I wish you could have seen the beautiful girl who came up then," he said. "She—"

But Morks is a hard man to ignore.

"When my friend dreamed of a beautiful girl," he murmured, a faraway expression on his long, sad face, "you *could* see her."

Nichols turned from crimson to purple. But Morks had won. All eyes were turned on him. Morks, apparently unconscious of it, sank into the softest leather chair in the club and stared thoughtfully out of the window until I stopped a passing bar-boy, picked out the biggest drink on his tray, and put it in Morks' hand. Then Morks looked down, examined the drink, raised it to his lips, and after swallowing a third of it looked about him.

"Perhaps I ought to explain, though," he said courteously. "So no one will think that I am exaggerating. About my friend's dream, I mean."

And he began:

THIS friend of mine was named Weem—Wilfred Weem. He was a small man, with a friendly manner and a pleasant voice, and I once heard a woman say he had nice eyes. But he was very quiet, and I guessed he was hen-pecked. In this I proved to be right.

Weem was an accountant, and made a good income, which his wife, whose name was Henrietta, spent on herself as fast as he made it. His was not a very exciting occupation, and perhaps it was for that reason Weem took so much pleasure in his dreams. For they were, he explained to me later, very clear-cut and pleasant dreams about traveling through foreign lands, meeting interesting people, and such: things which in his waking life his wife certainly never permitted him to do, or even to think about.

It seems to have been shortly after moving to the Jersey suburbs that Wilfred Weem's dreams began to grow extraordinarily vivid. He himself suggested that his house being located within a hundred yards of the transmitter for the world's most powerful radio station might have had something to do with that. You know—the air full of curious energy currents, and so forth.

It's a fact that the antique iron dog on the lawn in front of the house could be heard singing torch songs, or giving the latest European news, almost any clear cold night. Radio experts explained it easily, but it was eerie to hear, and I have no doubt the other phenomenon I'm about to tell you of had some connection with the radio station.

I was sitting in the park one fine, sunny day, watching the swans, when Wilfred Weem came walking along in a somber manner. Seeing me, he sat down.

We conversed politely, then suddenly he burst out: "Morks, have you ever had a dream so real that—damn it, so real that somebody else could see it, too?"

I considered the matter, but was forced to say no. Weem mopped his brow.

"Well, I have," he said. "The night before last. And I've got to talk to somebody about it. Besides my wife, I mean, and that phoney doc. Alexander Q. Brilt, he calls himself, mental specialist; but he's a quack. He's a smooth-faced guy with big popping eyes and a black-ribbon pince-nez, and he's a phoney-doney."

Weem snorted. "But I'll tell you what happened," he said.

Two nights before he had gone to bed as usual in his tiny cubbyhole of a room, off the bedroom of his wife, who

let him have a room to himself because he was allergic to her face powder, and got asthma when occupying the same bed.

He had been rather tired, so after glancing through a magazine had retired a bit earlier than usual. Henrietta had stayed up to curl her hair.

He had been asleep perhaps half an hour, and was dreaming of a prize Persian kitten he'd seen a photograph of in the magazine a short while earlier, when all of a sudden he realized that he was not only dreaming about the kitten, but stroking her as well.

He lay still for some seconds, as this realization came to him. The dream of a fluffy gray Persian kitten curled up on his bed, purring, continued. But as he dreamed, he could actually feel the soft fur beneath his fingers.

Then he knew he was in that curious condition we all achieve sometimes, of being both asleep and awake—asleep and dreaming with half our mind, I might say, awake with the rest.

He heard his watch ticking. He heard an automobile go past the house. And he heard the kitten purring.

He did not open his eyes, lest that wake him completely, but nevertheless a part of his mind was fully conscious. In his dream he could see the curled-up kitten perfectly. With his hand he could feel her. Stroke her back, smoothing the fur, and feel the small, rough tongue lick his finger.

IT CAME to him then, in a vague sort of way, that something very strange was happening. He knew they owned no kitten: Henrietta hated all animals, except a moulty canary she fussed over as if it were a baby.

Then the kitten mewed, quite plainly, as if hungry. Immediately Wilfred began to dream that a bowl of cream was on the floor beside the bed; and as if looking for it, the kitten under his hand got up, jumped down to the floor—he heard the thump as it landed—and then Wilfred Weem heard a lapping sound.

Puzzled, he let one hand slip down beside the bed, and there was the kitten, busily lapping up a bowl of cream.

He was so surprised that he sat up and opened his eyes. Naturally he stopped dreaming. He looked over the side of the bed for the kitten, but it wasn't there. No trace of it or the bowl of cream remained.

He was puzzled, and a little upset. But presently he told himself that it all had been a dream, unusual in its vividness as so many of his dreams had been since moving into this house where, likely as not, the faucets would broadcast hill-billy music when you took a bath. So he went back to sleep.

Presently he was dreaming again. This time, for no good reason—you know how dreams are—he seemed to find himself the owner of a very handsome, leather-cased, luminous-dialed clock that had been advertised on the same page of the magazine that had held the picture of the kitten. He could see it clearly, even the grain of the pigskin and the position of the luminous hands. They stood at eleven forty-four.

Then Weem became aware that he was again in that half waking, half sleeping condition—and he heard a clock ticking beside him.

Cautiously he stretched out a hand. On the table beside his bed was a clock which had not been there when he retired. It was leather-encased square, with metal corner pieces.

Realizing now that something highly unusual was indeed occurring, Weem risked opening his eyes slightly. He managed to do it without disturbing that segment of his mind which was still dreaming, and he saw the clock. Standing there on the table, as it did in the dream, glowing dimly in the darkness, the hands at eleven forty-four.

Weem opened his eyes wide then, and the dream faded at once. And at exactly the same instant, the clock faded away too. By the time he was wide awake, it was quite gone.

"You see?" Weem asked me anxiously. "You understand? I was not only dreaming that kitten and that clock—but while I dreamed them, they actually existed!"

I nodded. I understood. It was an upsetting thought. It's all very well to dream about a kitten and have one come to life on your bed. But suppose you had a nightmare instead? Nightmares are very different matters. The thought of dreaming into existence certain nightmares of my own gave me rather a nasty turn. I mentioned this, and Weem nodded.

"That's worried me, too, Morks," he admitted. "Now I don't think there's much danger, though. I believe that I can dream only real things: things that actually exist, or have existed. But of course, there in the darkness, I was in a cold sweat at the thought of having a nightmare. I tried to stay awake. I pinched myself, and pulled my hair. But I seemed to be exhausted. I couldn't keep from dozing off. And then—then the worst possible thing happened."

"You did have a nightmare?" I asked.

"No." He shook his head. "I dreamed about a girl. A very pretty girl, with nice blue eyes and honey-colored hair. She was the image of a girl whose picture was in the magazine. It was a page showing what was in style at Palm Beach, and she was wearing a bathing suit. A two-piece lastex suit, quite brief. She was young, and very pretty, and in my dream she was smiling at me, as she had been in her picture."

"And—"

"Yes," Weem said. "Just like the kitten and the clock. She was really there. I reached out and she took my hand. Her fingers were warm, exactly as any living person's would be, and I could even hear her breathing, very softly. I could smell a faint odor of perfume. And she started to speak. I heard her plainly. She said, 'My name is—'

Wilfred Weem paused. "And then," he groaned, "Henrietta burst into the room!"

H E RAN his finger slowly around inside his collar.

"She'd been curling her hair," he said. "And she'd heard me tossing about, as I was trying to stay awake. So she peeked in the keyhole, to see what was the matter. And—she saw the girl."

He shuddered a little at the recollection.

"Of course," he told me, "when she burst through the doorway, I came fully awake and the girl was gone. Henrietta was in a fury. It was only when she saw the screen was in place, and nobody was hidden in the room, that she'd let me get a word in. Even then it was almost morning before she'd half believe the truth about it being only an extraordinary dream.

"But I showed her the picture in the magazine, so she could see for herself it was the same girl. That at least made her realize I might be telling the truth. So first

thing in the morning she dragged me around to see this Doctor Brilt, this phoney psychoanalyst some of her friends had raved to her about."

Dr. Alexander Q. Brilt had tried to get him to demonstrate, there in his office, his peculiar dream-power. Weem was tired enough to sleep, indeed, but his dreaming produced no tangible results. Therefore, seeing the grim look of renewed suspicion gathering on Henrietta's features, he had insisted that the doctor come to the house in Jersey that evening.

"That was last night," Weem told me. "I had to convince him, you see, in order to convince Henrietta. I did think perhaps the power would be gone, that it had just been temporary; but it wasn't. It was easier than the night before. I just looked at a picture of a mink coat in the magazine, then lay down and went to sleep—half asleep, anyway; enough to set part of my mind to dreaming about the coat. I dreamed that it lay across the chair in the living room, and at once I heard a squeal from Henrietta.

"'A mink coat!' she exclaimed. 'Good Heavens! I wonder how it would look on me?'"

"I opened my eyes a little, and through the open door saw her trying the coat on. But then the phone rang—it was a wrong number—and I woke up entirely. The coat faded away, right off Henrietta's shoulders, and she became indignant.

"I might have stayed asleep long enough for her to see how she looked in it, she told me. Heaven knew, she'd never have any other chance to see herself in a mink coat, real or dreamed. And so on. But Brilt quieted her. He asked me if I could do it again.

"I was feeling awfully tired, so instead of punching him in the nose—I just didn't like anything about him—I proved that I could. I dreamed an overstuffed chair, a bowl of tropical fish, and a set of book ends, all of which were pictured in the magazine. I tried to dream something I hadn't seen a picture of, but nothing happened when I did.

"And after all that, Brilt just nodded as if he'd seen a hundred men do the same thing, and said it was a very interesting case. Interesting case, indeed!"

Weem snorted again.

"After that he asked Henrietta to come in and see him at his office today," he glowered. "She's there now. They're cooking up something, and I'd like to know what. I don't trust people who wear glasses on black ribbons and use big words."

Weem looked at his watch then, and jumped up, appearing agitated.

"I'll have to hurry or I'll be late meeting her," he stammered. "I'm glad I could talk to you, Morks. It's eased my mind some. But I've got to hurry now, or Henrietta will be angry—"

His voice faded out as he hurried down the path toward Fifty-ninth Street.

I DID not see him again for several weeks. But one afternoon when I was sunning myself in the park again, he came hurrying up as if he had been looking for me. His first words proved he had.

"Morks," he said desperately, "I'm glad to see you again. I must—I want to ask your advice."

We sat down. He was thin and haggard, with dark circles of fatigue under his eyes. His hand shook as he

held a match for my cigarette. He didn't smoke; his wife wouldn't let him.

Then he told me of the developments since our previous conversation. . . .

He had been surprised when Dr. Alexander Q. Brilt had appeared at his home that evening after he had last seen me. But Henrietta seemed to be expecting him. Dr. Brilt explained suavely that he wished to make some additional notes on Wilfred Weem's case. He hoped Weem wouldn't mind. Weem did mind, and a lot, but Henrietta overruled him. Of course Wilfred didn't mind, she said. Wilfred was only too glad to oblige.

Reluctantly, Wilfred lay down on the couch, and the doctor took from his pocket a green object, which he held out for Weem to gaze at. It was a ten-dollar bill.

"Please," he said, in a liquid tone, "gaze at this carefully. Impress it upon your mind. For curiosity's sake, I wish to see if you can reproduce it as you did the other objects."

Weem stared at the ten-dollar bill. He noted every detail of it, including the far-seeing, eagle stare of Alexander Hamilton's portrait. Then, fatigued from two nights without real rest, he drifted off to slumber. And began dreaming.

"But not about ten-dollar bills," Weem told me, with the ghost of a chuckle. "I already had a pretty good idea I could only dream things I'd seen *pictures* of, and not the real things themselves. The dreams are projections of the pictures, I guess you'd say, not reproductions of the reality. Anyway, I dreamed of Alexander Hamilton."

A faint smile quirked the corners of his lips.

"It was quite a shock to Henrietta and Dr. Brilt to find Alexander Hamilton in the room with them, giving them that proud, imperious stare. He looked at them, and didn't like them. He sneered. Sneered very plainly. They were so startled they couldn't speak. Alexander Hamilton took a pinch of snuff and sneezed loudly into a handkerchief.

"Of course, it wasn't *the* Alexander Hamilton. It was my dream projection of his portrait. Real, of course, as long as I dreamed him, but not the original.

"Just as, Morks, if you gave me a snapshot of yourself, and I looked at it before falling asleep, then dreamed of it, the Morks that would come into being wouldn't be *you*."

He was very anxious for me to understand this part of the curious phenomenon, and I assured him I did. So he went on.

"Then Henrietta recovered enough from her fright to screech, and that woke me up. So Alexander Hamilton vanished. But Brilt and Henrietta were thoroughly upset, and had had enough for one evening. Brilt hurried off, and I took a sleeping tablet and went to bed. I never dream when I take sleeping tablets.

"The next morning I told Henrietta that we would have to move. That away from that house I would be all right. But she said no. That it was nonsense. That we had signed a lease and would have to stay. She was very emphatic about it. So I knew we wouldn't move."

WILFRED WEEM was silent for a moment, brooding. Then he took up the story. "I thought we were through with that quack, Brilt, though," he muttered darkly. "But that very next night he came around again,

and Henrietta welcomed him like an old friend. This time he'd brought a *picture* of a ten-dollar bill, a glossy photograph.

"So naturally, when I dreamed—Henrietta made me try it—I dreamed a ten-dollar bill. Lying on the living room table. Half awake, I saw Henrietta and Brilt feel it, stare at it; then Brilt looked at it through a microscope.

"They seemed excited, and they whispered together. Brilt took the ten-dollar bill and went out. I guessed he was going to try to spend it, to see if it was a perfect reproduction. So I waited a couple of minutes, then made myself wake up.

"Of course, when I did the bill vanished out of his pocket; and he came back ten minutes later hopping mad. Henrietta was mad, too. They said I'd spoiled an important part of an important scientific experiment. I said I couldn't help it. So Brilt put on his hat and left. Only, before he went, he whispered something to Henrietta. And the next evening he was back again."

Wilfred Weem took out his handkerchief and mopped his brow. His eyes were dark wells of weariness and perplexity.

"Morks," he said unhappily, "what happened after Brilt arrived that time, *I don't know*."

"You don't know?" I repeated.

"I can't remember a thing. Until I woke the next morning, feeling like the very devil. I had an impression I had dreamed something all night long, but I couldn't remember what. Henrietta insisted I'd just gotten sleepy and gone to bed, and that I hadn't dreamed a thing. I'd have believed her, but—"

Weem's eyes held mine with desperate intensity.

"But," he finished, "*the same thing has happened every night for ten nights now!*"

I pondered this. It was a highly significant fact.

"And I want to know what has been going on those nights I can't remember!" Weem said. "I am determined to know. Something most peculiar, Morks, because almost every morning when I wake up, Henrietta has some new luxury.

"The first time it was a mink coat. Then an ermine jacket. Next a string of pearls. Then a set of silverware. After that a flagon of highly expensive perfume. And yesterday morning it was an emerald bracelet."

I asked how his wife explained them.

"She says I dreamed them," Weem muttered glumly. "She says I dreamed them, and they—stayed. Didn't vanish. Because Dr. Brilt, the smooth-faced phoney-doney, has been helping me concentrate in my sleep by whispering suggestions to me. She the same as says he's been hypnotizing me into dreaming them so hard they didn't go back when I woke up. But I don't believe her."

He gnawed his lip.

"Or maybe it's true after all!" he exclaimed wildly. "I don't know what to think. Morks, I'm going crazy. I wake up in the morning feeling a hundred years old. I sleep all day at my office and all night at home, and every day I feel worse. I've got to stop dreaming things. I've got to get away from that house, to some place where I can get a decent night's sleep. And Henrietta won't let me."

He was in a highly overwrought state. So I quickly told him that I might be able to help. However, I pointed

out that first we must know what occurred during those nights of which he had no memory. He saw my point, and we agreed that that evening I would come secretly to his home and hide myself in the shrubbery.

Dr. Brilt usually arrived at nine. After he had entered, I would slip up to the window which Weem would leave slightly open, and watch and listen. The next day we would meet at my apartment, and I could tell him what had happened and make further plans.

THAT night, shortly before nine, I hid myself in the deep shadow of some lilac bushes, just outside the living room window of Weem's modest Jersey home. A hundred yards away the great towers supporting the radio aerials loomed against the night sky, bejeweled with little red lights.

The antique dog on the front lawn was, in an uncanny manner, singing *Jeanie With the Light Brown Hair*, and the rain spout was echoing it at a higher pitch. I was wondering what radio salesmen did for a living in that neighborhood when a coupé stopped at the curb, and a tall man with a curiously pale, smooth face came up the walk, knocked, and was admitted. Then through the window I watched what followed.

It was much as I had suspected it would be. Dr. Alexander Q. Brilt, as he shook Weem's reluctant hand, stared fixedly into his eyes. Weem's face became blank. Brilt was a good hypnotist.

"You are going to sleep soundly tonight, Weem," he murmured, his tone unctuous. "But first, I have a picture for you to look at. Here it is. It's a picture of money—of a fresh package of ten-dollar bills. A hundred bills in all. Fix it in your mind. Now you're going to bed, aren't you? You're going to sleep. You're going to sleep soundly until morning, and every second of that time you're going to dream about this picture of ten-dollar bills. Aren't you?"

"Yes, doctor," Weem muttered, without inflection. "I'm going to dream about the ten-dollar bills."

He moved slowly off and disappeared into his bedroom. Ten minutes passed. Dr. Brilt and Henrietta Weem, a large woman with a pronounced jaw and a snub nose, sat tensely waiting, saying nothing.

Then from nowhere a small package appeared on the living room table. Dr. Brilt pounced upon it, broke the manila wrapper, and extracted a handful of crisp green slips that were undoubtedly ten-dollar bills.

He riffled them through his fingers, and the look on his and Mrs. Weem's face was avid.

"Too bad they aren't as real as they look," he remarked. "Eh, Henrietta? But they're the next best thing. I trust you have ordered nothing for tonight, as tonight is my night, and I placed an order in town for delivery here, as usual."

Henrietta Weem sighed.

"There was a sable jacket that I wanted, advertised in today's paper," she said fretfully. "But I didn't forget it was your night."

"Good! We can't have too many unexplained losses occurring all at once, you know. So far, though, everything has gone just as I predicted. I told you those rascally delivery men would take care of themselves. Every one so far has claimed he was held up, when he came to turn in the money and couldn't find it."

The door bell interrupted him. I had been so engrossed

I had not seen the delivery truck stop, nor the uniformed messenger come up to the door. But the messenger stepped into the room when Henrietta Weem opened the door. He held a small, securely wrapped parcel.

"Watch from Tiffany's, special order, to be delivered C.O.D. tonight to Mrs. Henrietta Weem, this address," he said briskly. "You Mrs. Weem?"

"I am," Henrietta Weem said decisively. "How much is it?"

"Nine hundred fifty-eight dollars, sixty cents, including sales tax."

"Platinum," Dr. Brilt murmured dreamily. "Swiss movement, thirty-nine jewels. A repeater, with special dials for the day of the month and the phases of the moon."

Mrs. Weem, evidently well rehearsed in her act, counted out the money from the pile of ten-dollar bills on the table, received change and a signed receipt, and the messenger left, seeming to sense nothing unusual.

"Well, that's that," Brilt stated then, when the truck had gone. "Your husband will continue dreaming the money into existence until tomorrow morning, and by that time its strange disappearance will in no way be associated with us. I must be going now. It occurs to me, Henrietta, that we had best make no more purchases for a while, lest too many trips to the well break the pitcher."

Mrs. Weem looked sullen. "I want that sable jacket," she said determinedly. "After that we can stop."

Brilt shrugged. "Very well, Henrietta. After tomorrow, then, we'll allow a slight interlude. For the present, good night."

He dropped the package containing the watch into his pocket and left. Henrietta Weem tossed the four remaining ten-dollar bills into the wastebasket and turned out the light. I slipped away to my parked car. As I left, the iron dog was heatedly assailing the Administration for spending so much money.

THE next afternoon in my apartment, Wilfred Weem was horrified at what I told him. He flushed, then paled. "But that's *stealing!*" he cried. "They're buying expensive things with the bills I dream, that vanish when I wake up, and—"

I agreed that it was certainly dishonest, and Weem sank back into his chair.

"Morks," he groaned, "I knew Henrietta was selfish and greedy, and of course she's always spent all my money on things for herself, but I never guessed she'd do a thing like this. It—it's monstrous."

He shook his head. His face was haggard, his eyes hollow. "What can we do? It wouldn't do any good to try to reason with Henrietta, and I—"

He didn't go on, but I understood. And I told him that, having given the matter some thought, I believed I knew of a way to reform his wife and Brilt. It would take a day or so to accomplish; but I felt I could promise him results.

I suggested that he go home that night, and by the simple expedient of going to bed and being asleep from the effect of a sleeping powder, he could foil the two temporarily. Asleep, of course he could not be hypnotized. Then, I said, if he would drop in again the next day, I would give him further details.

Taking heart, Wilfred Weem left, and I went to the phone and called up a promising young artist whom I

knew. I gave him full instructions, said I wanted the work finished by noon the next day, and received his promise on this point.

When, the following afternoon, I told Wilfred Weem what I had in mind, his face brightened. A smile touched his lips—the first in some time. He promised to follow instructions exactly, and said he would expect me that night about eight thirty.

At eight thirty exactly—I always like to be exact—I rang his bell. He admitted me, and I stepped into his little living room. Henrietta Weem gave me a look of glowering suspicion.

Weem introduced me as an art dealer who had promised to stop by with a picture which had taken his fancy, and I gave him the flat package I had been carrying.

"A picture?" Henrietta Weem snorted. "What kind of picture, Wilfred?"

"Oh, just a picture for my room," Weem said vaguely. "Hmmm." Holding the picture under his arm, still wrapped, he turned the key of his door back and forth, as if testing the lock. "Needs oil, I think."

"Wilfred, what are you doing?" His wife's tone was ominous.

"Er—just making sure my door will lock tightly," Wilfred told her. "I thought that tonight I might want to lock it, and—"

Henrietta Weem snatched the picture from him.

"Lock your door?" she screeched. "Wilfred, I'm going to find out just what you're up to."

SHE ripped the paper off the picture. Then, as she stared at the painting beneath, she turned pale and gave a startled squeak. "Wilfred! You wouldn't!"

"I'm just going to hang it above the foot of my bed, where I can see it the last thing before I go to sleep." Weem took the picture from his large wife's nerveless hands. "Lifelike work, don't you think?"

"Wilfred!" There was fright in Henrietta Weem's gasp. "You—you— If you went to sleep looking at that, you'd—"

Weem did not answer. He held the picture out at arm's length, admiringly, and Henrietta Weem stared at him.

"You would!" She choked. "You—you murderer!"

"I think," Wilfred Weem said pleasantly, "that I'm going to be very fond of this work, Mr. Morks. I've always dreamed"—he lingered over the word—"of owning a genuine masterpiece."

It was at this point that Mrs. Weem's nerve broke. She screeched hysterically, and rushed for the coat closet. Not even thinking to seize up one of the ill-gotten fur wraps hanging there, she snatched at the first coat she found. Jamming on a hat, she jerked open the front door.

"I'm going to Dr. Brilt," she gasped, breathing heavily. "He'll make you—"

"Bring him back with you," Wilfred Weem advised her cheerfully. "Be sure and tell him about the picture, though. Or better still, perhaps you should stay with him. I think you've forfeited any claims on me, Henrietta; and I assure you, I do not intend to part with this work of art.

"If Brilt doesn't want to take you in and give you shelter, and marry you after you divorce me, threaten you'll tell the police what the two of you've been up to. I think he'll listen to reason then. Now"—he yawned

luxuriously—"I think I'll go to bed. *To sleep—*" he winked at me—"perchance to dream."

Henrietta gave a strangled scream, and sobbing half in rage, half in fear, slammed the door and ran down the walk. Weem smiled at me.

He held the picture up to the light, and I was forced to admit it was. I had told the young artist to go to the zoo and paint the leanest and hungriest tiger they had, the bigger the better. He had followed instructions. And the beast that glared out at us from the canvas, over the title *Starving Tiger*, had the most famished look I have ever seen on any creature.

Weem turned the thing face down on the table.

"Ho hum," he yawned. "I really am going to bed. And I'm going to take a tablet. No dreams tonight! And tomorrow"—his words were emphatic—"tomorrow I'm going to move away from this house."

"Drop in and see me tomorrow, then," I said. "I know a lawyer who may be able to break your lease for you. I'll give you his name and address."

Weem thanked me fervently, promised he would, and I left. But—(Murchison Morks, at this point, paused to gaze around at the little group that was listening)—when Weem stopped by my apartment early the next evening, he refused to take the name of the lawyer I wanted to give him. He shook his head, firmly.

"Er—thanks, Morks," he said. "But I don't think I'll get in touch with him just yet. Henrietta didn't return; I was quite sure she wouldn't. And I slept like a top last night. Felt fine today for the first time in weeks. It's remarkable what a pleasant little place that house is, after all. I actually enjoyed hearing an installment of a heart-rending radio serial from my electric razor.

"In fact, I—ah—well, to tell you the truth, the house is for sale and I rather think I'll buy it."

I must have stared at him strangely, for he colored a bit.

"Yes, I know. I did want to get away. But I've changed my mind on that point since—er, since Henrietta left me. Now that I can do as I please, I don't find the house at all distressing. But I won't bother you any more. I'm still a bit tired, so I think I'll just go on home and get into bed with a good book."

He had a book under his arm, in fact: a large, flat volume.

"That book?" I asked him.

"Um—yes," Weem admitted. "I saw it in a bookstore today, and it occurred to me that I ought to own a copy."

"Oh," I said. "I see. Well, in that case, Weem, good luck."

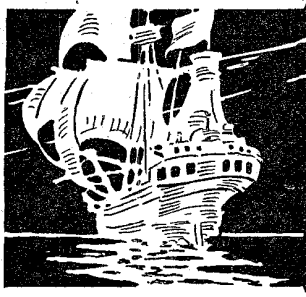
"Thanks," he replied, quite seriously, and hurried out. I haven't seen him since. I'm sorry, too. I really did want to ask him about. . . .

BUT Morks let his narration die away into silence without finishing the final sentence. He leaned back and put his finger tips together, as if meditating on something. Nichols, finding nothing to say, stamped off, face purple. It was one of the younger members of the club who broke the silence with a question.

"What," he asked, "was the book?"

Morks looked at him.

"Why," he said, "it was a volume of color reproductions of the works of various great painters. Fine pictures, you know. The title of it was, *The Hundred Most Beautiful Women in History.*"



Argonotes

The Readers' Viewpoint



THERE'S scarcely room in our office to sit down this week. You see, it's stacked high with explosives—innocent and childish ones. A visiting author just sat down on a fire-cracker, to his annoyance; and if our secretary doesn't get that Roman candle out of her hair, there is going to be trouble.

You see how it is. We are going out pretty soon with all this stuff and make a lot of noise. We are going to try very hard to make so much harmless racket that we will momentarily drown out the so-different thunder of a world at war.

Now here's a long letter from a reader down South who has several kicks and several compliments to offer.

W. B. MACQUEEN

I'm one of your oldtimers who's forever rearing back and raising hell about this innovation or that. I admit without further loss of time that I'm one who'd prefer the ARGOSY the way it was in the old days, meaning from about 1917 through 1940, with especial reference to 1921-22-23-24 and 1931-32-33.

On the other hand, I rise with pride and say that I kept the temper and didn't squawk when you changed from the old format to the present one. I was saying to myself, whatever happens to ARGOSY, I'm with 'er to the bitter end.

If this new size increases the old circulation, then more power to you, and I, like thousands of others, will likely stick around.

To-day, I find myself with two compliments and one or two kicks for you.

Kicks first: I don't like Dikar and the Bunch, I don't like two-part serials, and I hate the guy who does your inside illustrations for Westerns. If the latter is an artist, I'm a helluva poor judge. As to Dikar, isn't that getting a little too close to home? Haven't imaginative Americans enough to worry about, without having to picture this country under the iron heel, even if an accidental and pseudo-Tarzan does happen to come along in the nick of time?

I admit it might be, but I suggest that if you must show us the future, show us an America that has survived these damnable times. Better still, let the matter drop, and give us fantasies such as Merritt used to do. "Fantasy," as I understand it, implies the capricious exercise of the imagination. Do I buy ARGOSY for a touch of reality? No, Suh, not I! I buy it for escape—in any direction, South Seas, far North, West, East—any place but here!

And while I'm on the subject, how about less of this Fifth Column stuff? I think I'm a good American, and I think I know where the danger lies, but I get good and tired of finding reality in my escape literature. I took two degrees in English literature. I know where to find life, with all its sadness and all its disappointment.

Give me a Western—a horse-opera, if you will, a tale of the Yukon in the gold-rush days, a good murder mystery without a Nazi for a villain. Or give me something with a touch of humor in it—if you can. I know the world is a tough place: don't repeat that to me—show me Romance, and make me believe it's true. That's the ARGOSY I've been buying all these years.

Two big compliments for you: (1) The new cover, beginning with the April 26 issue, seems to be what we've been looking for. In this man's opinion, it's the best ever, and I honestly believe it will set ARGOSY apart, the way you've been wanting to set 'er apart from the usual run of pulps.

(2) I can't find too much praise for Jack Byrne's "Gunswift." If I abhorred all Westerns, as some persons do, I'd still like that story. Here's one vote that says it's great, looking at it from any angle you want to take it. Utterly different as to style, utterly new in treatment; action, mystery, gunplay, suspense—what could you ask? Say, I liked that guy, and I liked that gal, and I felt repeatedly that I'd never read a Western like that before.

If it didn't have everything, I'd like for some kind soul to tell me what it lacked! I finished it with something mighty close to a sigh, and I said to myself: Now here's a tale that somehow

puts me in mind of the ARGOSY as she used to be—the ARGOSY I read when I was wearing short pants and going barefooted, the ARGOSY that helped me live when all else had skeddaddled out the window, or somepin'. I wish Jack Byrne could know, whoever he is, with what fervor I'd like to shake his hand.

And doggone it, give us three serials or give us two; what's the use in making a two-part serial out of a novelet? I never have figured that out. Let the majority rule. My vote's for three big 'uns; but anyhow, the two-parters don't count, and you know it.

'Nuff said. Selah, etc. I've always wished the best of luck to ARGOSY, and I still do!

Columbia, S. C.

OUR next correspondent is not so well pleased with the new cover. Judging from our recent mail, we are certain that he is in the minority. Here is the opposition.

RICHARD P. SCHURLHAMMER

To begin with, I'm not the kind of a fellow who usually complains. I've read ARGOSY for a number of years and have always been more than satisfied with it. Literally, I live your magazine from cover to cover every week.

I have more than heartily approved your changes in it, for it has become better to handle and to read.

But why did you have to change the cover? The newsreel effect of your previous cover I thought was very typical of the magazine. When you announced that the cover would be changed, I looked forward to seeing something good. When I picked up my latest issue from the newsstand, I was more than just disappointed; I was actually shocked.

I thought that ARGOSY was better than the general run of fiction magazines. Don't you think that it is? The cover that you have on it now certainly doesn't measure up to the contents of the ARGOSY.

Give Argosy back its old eye appeal, because looks are always the best seller. Elyria, Ohio