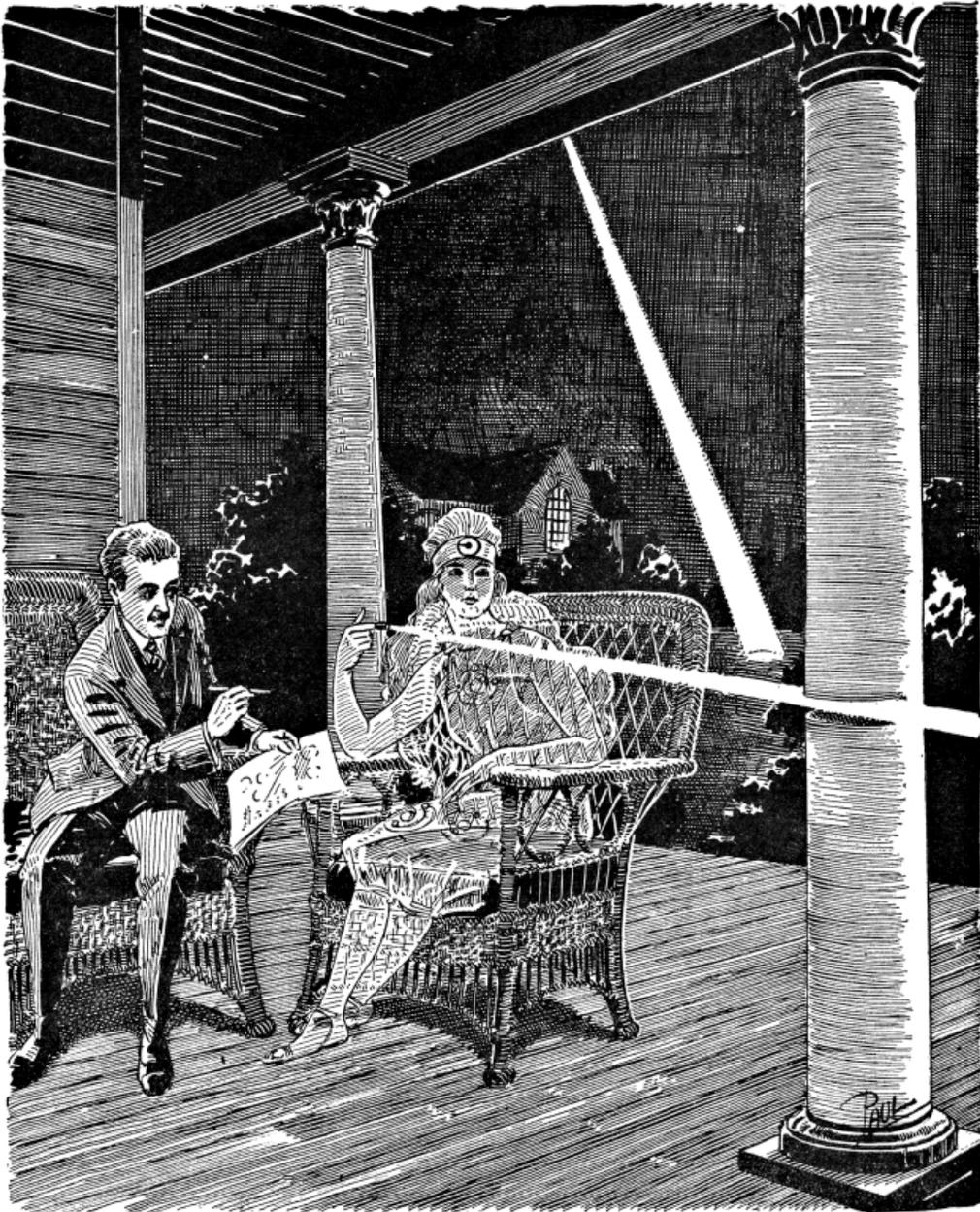


The STAR of DEAD LOVE

- By Will H. Gray -



... He suddenly noticed that his laughter had frightened her, for besides showing signs of alarm, spurts of violet rays were coming from her metal-studded finger, and as she moved her hand, the flame, or rays, passed through one of the veranda posts ... the post was severed in the middle and showed a gap about four inches deep.

DOCTOR JOYCE sat on his veranda one evening smoking and thinking of nothing in particular when his attention was attracted to, what appeared to be, faint rays of blue light projected on the lawn. They were fairly distinct near the ground, but disappeared at a height of a few hundred feet. Being a scientist, his interest was aroused and he wondered what their origin could be. As he watched, a human form took shape at the place where the rays touched the lawn. The form was that of a young woman robed in white with fair hair fastened back, but apart from being semitransparent, there was nothing very ghostlike about her.

The doctor—a most practical man—walked to the veranda steps and beckoned the form towards the house. She came at once and the doctor calmly pointed to the steamer chair beside his own. She went over to it, and he, watching intently, thought he saw a slight movement of the canvas as she sat down. He resumed his own seat and looked at her intently. He had much too good a grip of himself to think that he was dreaming or suffering from hallucinations. Presently an idea came to him. Relighting his pipe, he watched the smoke carefully until it was wafted towards her. Yes, there was the proof that he had sought; the smoke, when it reached her, diverged from its course and went round instead of through her. He smiled, and reached out his hand in an attempt to feel her hand; but he failed. He got up, went inside, and returned with a spool of fine thread, a couple of feet of which he unrolled and held stretched out in front of her. She understood his meaning and reaching out made a movement as though to break the thread, but it seemed to pass through her hand without effort. He was greatly pleased, however, because he noticed a slight sagging of the thread when she touched it, although not enough for him to feel the extra tension.

When he came to the conclusion that she was a real being, he began to study her carefully. She wore a loose, white gown, reaching to her ankles, and without sleeves. She wore no stockings, and her shoes, which were oval, seemed to be exactly similar and, therefore, interchangeable. They were made of an ivory like substance. On the index finger of her right hand she wore what seemed to be a smooth thimble of the same substance, with a small, metal stud imbedded in the end. Her fair hair was held back by a broad ring of the same material. On her forehead there was a circle with a line like the hand of a clock pointing to what would be a quarter to the hour. She appeared to be about seventeen—barely grown up. But she was semitransparent and it was hard to judge her age.

Well! thought the doctor, the next thing is to communicate. He soon satisfied himself that she could not hear, and she made no attempt to speak. He pointed to the clocklike sign on her forehead. She took a tablet of the same ivory like material from an inner pocket, and with her thimbled finger drew a circle that shone as if drawn with luminous paint; she marked it off into quarters, and each quarter into eleven divisions. Then she drew four sketches in a row, all more or less alike: he could not make them out at first; somehow they reminded him of the inside of a walnut. She drew a circle under each, but with the hand varying in position. He looked at her for explanation. She tapped her head, and then put her finger on one of the sketches. Then he realized that the sketches depicted the human brain, and that they varied slightly from each other; the circles and pointers were evidently for the purpose of showing the brain development; thus his visitor, apparently, claimed her brain power to be equal to thirty-three parts out of forty-four maximum. He took a pencil and paper from his pocket, and drew a circle; then

he tapped his head and held it toward her. She touched it at the place where the fourth or fifth point would be. The doctor burst out laughing.

Although he was not conceited, he did think his place on the circle should have been a little more advanced. He suddenly noticed that his laughter had frightened her, for besides showing signs of alarm, spurts of violet rays were coming from her metal studded finger, and as she moved her hand, the flame, or rays, passed through one of the veranda posts. She noticed it at the same time that he did, and controlling herself, she shut off the rays, for the post was severed in the middle and showed a gap about four inches deep. "My dear girl," he remarked, "if you aren't careful with that thimble of yours, you will bring down the house."

He got up and examined the parts of the post. The wood was clean and smooth where it had been cut; there was no sign of burn or sawdust or anything to show where that four inches of wood had gone. He sat down again, and taking pencil and paper, drew a diagram of the solar system. She saw at once what he meant, and put her finger on Venus. He went into his library, and returned with a large volume on astronomy, which he opened at the pictures and diagrams and pointed them out to her. Then, referring to his pencil diagram again, he traced the earth's orbit around the sun, and then put a stroke. He did it again, and put down another stroke, and so on until he had ten strokes representing ten years; then he put a circle around the ten strokes. He looked at her, and it was evident that she understood him. He drew two other circles beside the first and then made five strokes, and pointing to himself and spacing his hands about a foot apart, indicated to her that thirty-five years ago he was about so big. He directed her attention to Venus in the book, and indicated that he wanted her to tell him her age. She pointed to his circles, each representing ten years, then to Venus in the

picture to show him that she meant years of two hundred and twenty-five days. Then producing her tablet, she drew ten little circles and put a square around them. He smiled to himself, and remarked, "You don't look a hundred, even if your years are only seven months each." But as he spoke, she was busy making squares and did not stop until she had made twenty-five. Then she made three circles and finally six strokes. Again he was greatly tempted to laugh, but the sight of her thimble finger and the veranda post quelled the impulse. "Twenty-five hundred and thirty-six of your own years! Well, if you don't tell anyone, they'll never guess," he remarked. She was still busy with her finger on the tablet. This time she was drawing a small child; she put five strokes above it; then she drew a larger child, and put a circle to indicate ten years, then touched herself, and drew quite a presentable likeness, and over it put two circles and four strokes. "Now we have it," remarked the doctor, "twenty-four years of two hundred and twenty days each. If my mental calculations are right, you are almost fifteen." The doctor began to see a little light. In actual age she was fifteen, but it was one thousand five hundred and eighty-five years since she was born.

She rose, and walked into the library, beckoning him to follow; she pointed to various books which he took down and opened on the table. At last a small edition of an Encyclopaedia seemed to take her fancy, and making signs for him to carry the big collection of books, including the volume on astronomy, she led the way down the steps and out on the lawn where the rays of light were still shining. Laying down her writing tablet, which she had opened out as large as a newspaper, she indicated that the pile of books were to be laid upon it. He dutifully put them down, and watched her touch them. It did not surprise him to see the books grow until they were higher than the house, and at the same

time become transparent. Again she touched them, and they melted into the blue rays and vanished. She picked up the ivory like sheet, folded it, and put it into her pocket. Then she looked at him, inclined her head, looked up, touched her forehead with that all powerful thimble, and melted away into the rays just as the books had done.

DOCTOR JOYCE went back to his chair on the veranda. Every now and then he smiled to himself. "Some dream all right," he muttered. Then his glance fell on the veranda post, with the four inches missing out of the middle, and with face set in hard lines, he examined it carefully. Picking up the spool of thread, he broke off two or three yards, and putting a pin in the veranda post at the cut, he stretched the thread exactly parallel to the lower cut until he came to the chair where his visitor sat. Then he stretched another thread along the upper cut, and noticed with satisfaction that the threads came together exactly where she had her hand. Walking inside, he looked at the empty spaces on the bookshelves where his Encyclopaedia and his Astronomy had been. He went out on the lawn and gazed up at the star of love, the planet Venus, that shown brilliantly above.

His dreams were feverish that night, and when he awoke, he lay thinking for a few minutes, and then burst into his boyish laughter. "Jim," he called, "bring me the small Encyclopaedia and the big astronomy book from the library. And say, Jim, you also go out and see if the veranda post is cut in two." He laughed again at old Jim's look of astonishment. In a few minutes Jim was back. "Sah, the books you mention is not there. Yes, sah, the veranda post, as you say, is cut in two."

Night after night the doctor sat in his chair watching and thinking. He had prepared various ways of communicating, should his visitor appear at any moment. Suddenly he

was smitten with the thought that perhaps she had come while he was out, and even now might be waiting for some sign from him. How stupid! No wonder she had put his brain power at four parts out of forty-four. Hurrying inside, he took a large sheet of white paper and drew with charcoal a big circle, in which he indicated a hand at a quarter to the hour. Underneath the circle he wrote COME. He took it out, spread it on the lawn, and returned to his chair. Fifteen minutes later the blue rays focused on the lawn, and he saw the girl materialize. She took out the folded sheet, opened it, and spread it on the lawn where the rays touched it. Then he seemed to see his books as big as street cars, and transparent so that he could see the houses across the road through them. When she touched the books he saw them shrink and become opaque and solid. In answer to her beckoning he went down and picked up the books. He hesitated just long enough to touch the sheet of white material. At first it felt smooth and cold like glass. Then he noticed that he was not really touching it at all, for his finger was about a quarter of an inch or so above it. "Negatively charged," he told himself, as he carried the books inside. When he returned she was sitting in the canvas deck chair. He switched on the light, but quickly turned it off again, for she seemed more dim in the strong light.

On a pad of paper he wrote: "Have you learned our language from the books?" She hesitated, and made no sign of understanding. He was surprised, and a little disappointed. Then he noticed that she was writing in her luminous characters with that fatal finger tip. It was his script that had floored her, for she wrote in perfect printing letters. "There is nothing in your books like your writing. Please give me a sample alphabet of small letters and capitals in your own writing." He wrote them out, and watched her study them for about twenty seconds. At the end of that time she knew them for always.

Now the way was open, and all of the mysteries of the planet of love were his for the asking.

Doctor Joyce wrote rapidly, tearing out sheet after sheet as he wrote them, and laying them on the arm of her chair. He leaned back while she answered his questions.

“You people on earth are on the verge of the discoveries we made ten thousand years ago.

“Life was altered when we found out that the attraction of the molecules of any substance could be changed. When we applied it to ourselves it meant that we could cease to have the feelings and sufferings of the material, solid body. This dematerialized body—just as you see me now—is not subject to feeling or age, neither do we need nourishment. We used to suffer from disease, but we needed only to dematerialize, have the disease germs collected, materialized, and destroyed. Disease has long since disappeared from Venus. Every one can be material or dematerial just as she likes. Of course, in the natural state, when we are two inches high, we are delicate, little things, and lives are sometimes lost through accidents. With all our knowledge we cannot restore life, nor can we create it except from life.

“You earth people call Venus the star of love. There is no love on Venus now. There used to be at one time when there were two sexes. Now there are no males, parthenogenesis is the general law. You observe this method of reproduction from one parent only in the bees, ants, and other insects. Your scientists have caused frogs’ eggs to develop without fertilization. When we discovered that the males were unnecessary they gradually died out. None have been born now for thousands of years. The last one survived for seven hundred years, but as his brain development was very low, he was forbidden to materialize. In the end he and another broke this rule of the Supreme

Eugenic Committee—and they were eliminated.”

Doctor Joyce shivered and scribbled on his pad, “Eliminated like the piece out of my veranda post?” She wrote, “Yes,” and touched her metal studded finger tip in a way that showed the doctor that justice was not tempered with mercy on the planet Venus.

Suddenly she got up, looked agitatedly at the lawn where the rays were no longer shining. The doctor joined her, and saw a small cloud obscuring part of the sky. She raised her right hand and pointed toward the little cloud. Spurts of violet flame shot into the sky, and the cloud was gone without trace. Again the faint rays touched the lawn. This time she actually smiled as she touched her forehead, and melted into those rays that carried her millions of times faster than light to her own abode.

EVERYONE was talking of the wonderful discoveries of the young scientist, Dr. Joyce, in the field of chemistry and electricity. He had shown that vitamins were just at the margin of the science of proper dieting. His new microscope combining ultraviolet and mercury vapor light, and focusing at the point of synchronism made visible objects a hundred times smaller than the filterable viruses of the Gye Barnard experiments. This discovery alone far exceeded the super microscopes of the day. Electricity waves could now be seen so that complete control was no longer a matter of calculation and guess work based on past experience.

“Such a pity that so promising a young man dabbles in spiritualism,” confided the wife of a professor of engineering.

“No, you don’t mean to say he could be fooled by any such trickery!” murmured the other lady.

“Well, it was this way, but you mustn’t tell a soul; my husband went to see him one night, and found him conversing with a ghost

on the veranda. When my husband asked him if he was a spiritualist, he said he kept an open mind on the subject.”

“How very thrilling.”

“Not a bit thrilling, my dear. My husband made inquiries and found that a little boy in the house opposite was having a party, and had a magic lantern entertainment upstairs. Of course, it must have shone out of the window and into Doctor Joyce’s veranda. How very simple these clever men are about little things like that.”

Doctor Joyce heard the rumor, and was very well pleased, for one story was as good as another, and it was inevitable that his visitor should be seen occasionally, now that she was coming so often.

For several weeks now Doctor Joyce had been feverishly active; he would see no visitors on any pretext whatever. He refused important gatherings where he was expected to give an account of his wonderful discoveries. His interests seemed very diversified; he had been in communication with several of the leading beekeepers of the country and had arranged to pay one hundred dollars for two ounces of honey gathered under special conditions that he should specify. A great firm of silversmiths was making a miniature set of furniture on a scale of one to thirty-five. Linen and silk merchants were sending samples of their finest material. A tiny amplifying set had been constructed in which the sound collector was to be the trumpet of a living flower—a columbine—with the five spikes, or nectaries, leading to five different transmitters.

A beautiful little glass cabinet contained these things. Filtered and warmed air was admitted by automatic valves and regulators.

At last came the evening that was to be the crowning glory of all his preparations.

The night shone fine and clear as the doctor waited. In the distance some one sang:

“Oh, star of love whose tender beam
Shines on my spirit’s troubled dream.”

Then came the faint blue rays and the familiar form taking shape. This time she had something with her, a large, square thing of the same white ivory like material. He led the way into the library. There on the polished mahogany table stood the cabinet. She inspected it carefully, and motioned him to open the door. Then unfolding her insulating sheet upon the table she stepped lightly up, and placed the square, white box in the center. Slipping off her sandals she placed one bare foot on each of two metal studs in the cover of the box, at the same time touching her forehead. Immediately she began to shrink until she was just about two inches high. The box was now about as big as a sugar lump. The doctor felt a curious thrill as he saw her materialize. She took up her tiny box, and carried it into the cabinet, returning for her insulating sheet.

Now that she was really flesh and blood he felt a new interest and he longed to hear her voice, but she was busy arranging the furniture on the insulating sheet. He helped her, for it was too heavy for her to handle without great exertion.

“Speak to me,” he murmured, switching on the amplifier.

“I am tired and hungry,” the little voice replied.

HE directed her to the miniature silver salvers and she helped herself to some honey and fruit. The doctor adjusted the receivers on his head and tried the different degrees of amplification. Now her voice sounded rich and clear, although her phonic pronunciation made it difficult for him at times. Presently she sang in her own language and it sounded like the old love dirges that he had heard his mother sing when he was a child. He felt

drawn toward this little creature; it was no longer her scientific knowledge that appealed to him. Just to have her near with her earthly feelings of tiredness and hunger would satisfy all the desires of his life.

"I must sleep now," she said. "When I awake I will show you how to dematerialize, and if you like, materialize again as small as I am now."

Going to her ivory box she pulled up a telescopic pedestal until it stood an inch and a half high. Then waving goodnight she turned a sunken switch and from the pedestal a dome shaped fountain of blue flame shot up and curved over until it touched the insulating sheet spread like a carpet beneath box and furniture. The fountain of flame hid everything beneath it so that he could no longer watch her movements. Taking up a metal paper knife, he touched the dome of flame and saw the blade disappear like solder in an oxy-acetylene torch. Glass, ivory, carbon and even asbestos disappeared before that deadly destroyer. Idly he took up a flashlight and turned its beam on the dome of fire. To his utter astonishment it penetrated the opaque flame and revealed everything beneath. The little creature was there, a perfect image of beauty, under the dome of fire. He sat down in a chair, clutching the flashlight convulsively. His heart raced so that he almost lost consciousness. Little did he realize that the pent-up love of centuries was being unloosed upon him. Without thinking, he kept pressing the button of the flashlight and sending flashes of light about the room. So absorbed had he become that he did not notice the room filling with shadowy forms. They looked at him vengefully and if it had not been for the

flickering flashlight, which they did not understand, he would surely have been eliminated from the face of the earth. One of them pointed her finger at the glass cabinet; a little spurt of flame shot out and the cabinet was destroyed as if it had never been, but the little dome of blue flame continued untouched, immune. Then one of the figures, resembling a middle-aged woman, spread an insulating sheet on the table beside the original with its edge overlapping. A companion passed her a square white box, similar to the first, and she stood on it and materialized. Then she pulled up the pedestal and started a dome of flame so near the other that it mingled with it, forming an oval. It was evident that only flame could touch flame. The fire vanished suddenly, revealing the elder of the two little figures holding the younger by the wrist. In a moment both had dematerialized and gone completely, leaving only the original white ivory case standing on the insulating sheet.

Bitterly he reproached himself for not having tried to protect her from her own people. But he felt the uselessness of trying to match his brains against these super Amazons. Full well he knew that they could have destroyed him in an instant had they wished.

Later the doctor tried to X-ray the little box, but found it perfectly opaque to the very strongest rays capable of penetrating even thin lead and thicker steel. He has not tried to turn on the flame for fear of doing untold damage with a power as yet unknown on earth.

Many, many nights has he waited in vain for the reappearance of his visitor, but doubtless her friends are reminding her that she belongs to the star of dead love and that there must be no retrogression.