

Had to Flee His Frankensteins!

Garrett Fort's Dramatic Escape from the Appalling Effects of Monsters He Created for the Movies

By Marjorie Driscoll

True! nervous—very, very dreadfully nervous I had been . . . I heard all things in the heaven and in the earth. I heard many things in hell.
—EDGAR ALLAN POE, in "The Telltale Heart."

GARRETT FORT, 37, chief "horror expert" of Hollywood writers, was nervous; dreadfully so.

An outstanding member of the West Coast's movie colony, for several years Fort had devoted all his working time to devising and adapting stories of mystery and terror for the screen.

He had attained the peak of his profession. But at a wrenching cost. In troubled sleep his eerie brain children still pursued him. The wrath of Dracula invaded his dreams. Frankenstein's monster tormentingly mastered his reveries.

Fort felt he was on the verge of some appalling, if nameless, calamity. Psychic? Or physical? He wasn't sure. But frankly he was afraid.

In like plight, most men would have done one of two things: consulted a nerve specialist and retired for six months to a sanitarium, or tried to face the frightful music, with collapse inevitable.

Fort did neither. Instead, he left Los Angeles quickly and quietly, his destination a secret to even close friends. Now, after a lapse of appreciable time, comes the startling and gratifying news that the troubled scenarist has reached success from the hideous apprehensions that were hounding him. In his own phrase: "I have found peace—with a God-man."

Garrett Fort, whose film "treatments" of "Dracula's Daughter," "Frankenstein," "The Suicide Club" and "The Invisible Man" raised universal hair and curled the blood of all beholders, is, today, in India.

In a stainless white temple, set high in the hills at Nasik, the ex-sophisticate and California hotpot-haunter sits tranquilly at the feet of a famed Hindu mystic. To join the little-known but integrally powerful colony of mystical Shri Meher Baba, Fort fled from a Western world where wealth and meretricious dance frantically together.

He is content—as content as other members of the Baba's group. The identities of most of these men and women are rigidly withheld from the public; exploitation, the mere thought of the slightest notoriety, would shock and revolt the Baba and his followers.

It would strike at the very keystone of their philosophy: Thought can accomplish anything, everything, he it good or bad; speech is a superfluity.

In proof of this credo, the Baba fairly recently began to practise deliberately and impressively what he always has preached. Three years ago, Shri Meher paid a casual visit to Hollywood. He had made this "pilgrimage" because, he said, he had heard from authentic sources that life in the cinema citadel was compounded of many diverse elements, some practical, others of deep psychic import and occult significance.

It so happened that at the time of his California sojourn, the Baba was immersed in a great silence. He had taken the solemn oath of vows—to himself—that he would not open his lips in human speech for eight years.

And it was at this time that he and Fort met at the home of a common friend, Rolf Passer, who, like Fort, was a concoctor of fantasies for the films.

Passer and his lustroously lovely wife, Marina, had been converted to

the esoteric beliefs of the Baba for some time. They were proud and glad to be the means by which the troubled soul of their colleague and pal could seek peace in the Baba's society.

But they didn't imagine then that Fort would instantly listen to the call of the East; not once forsake his old, time-honored haunts on the West Coast for the spiritual joys awaiting him in India.

They, like all Garrett's friends, were puzzled when he suddenly disappeared from their midst. Various rumors began to form and float about.

It was said that the writer had (1) sought seclusion to devote his whole time to research on some new occult photoplay idea; (2) that he had returned to New York to write a book dealing with vampires, demonology and the celebration of the Witches' Sabbath, as chronicled in the Broken scene of Goethe's "Faust," or (3) had retired from the world of show and tinsel to give his remaining years to holy meditation.

The last-named surmise proved to be correct. But the fact was not fully established

until Fort wrote the Passers a letter, explaining his actions and outlining his future plans.

"I became deeply engrossed in the great mystic's power-of-thought philosophy from the moment I met him at your home," wrote Fort. He went on to emphasize the hours he had spent speaking to the Oriental mystic with the bushy hair and the weirdly compelling eyes.

Shri Meher took no actual vocal part in these "conversations," Garrett told his friends. Instead, since his "reign of silence" was still operative, the Baba "replied" to questions by spelling out his answers in chalk on a portable blackboard.

These answers gave the dream-wracked scenarist plenty to ponder. And aside from the imagery presented by the Baba's undoubted intellect, there was the question of his standing in the different communities he had visited.

Everywhere, simply as a human being, he had made the most affecting

and durable friendships. People of all ranks "took to" the taciturn Hindu instantly, and their liking for him lasted.

Among his intimates and associates, for a long time now, has been Maria Carmel, the world-celebrated Nun in Max Reinhardt's spectacular stage pageant, "The Miracle," known in private life as the Princess Matchabelli. But it wasn't only the famous and socially important who formed a fondness for the Baba. Quite simple souls—laborers in ordinary jobs—were irresistibly drawn toward him.

Shri Meher had already taken his oath of silence when he left the land of his birth in 1934. On his world tour no word escaped those ascetic lips. When officials at various ports peppered him with personal questions, he stayed speechless. When would-be interviewers sought him out to establish his reactions to this or that event, his impressions were looked in his inscrutable breast. Always the Baba's smile was serene with an other-worldly quality that both amazed and

HE FOUND PEACE FROM THESE
These Characters in Horror Stories of Poe, Stoker and Mary Shelley, Which He Brought to Life for the Movies, Became So Real to Garrett Fort (Left), Scenarist, That He Flew to the Temple of a Hindu Mystic, High in the Himalayas, to Find Peace of Mind.

precipitation, Garrett Fort began to pay the price.

Nightmares pursued him like infernal hounds from the bottomless pit. Even his daylight hours were stricken through with dreadful dreams.

Now, happily, those dismal days and nights are past. Garrett Fort sits in his white temple high on the Nasik hills, dedicating, dreaming, speculating, thinking the higher thoughts.

One of hundreds of similar pilgrims to the shrine of Shri Meher Baba, in India, Fort has found his haven from the world. He has achieved peace with the silent help of his "God-man."



DISCIPLES
Above: Followers of Shri Meher Baba Gathered Around Him. Left: Marina Passer, of Hollywood, Who, with Her Husband, Was Responsible for Converting Fort to the Cult.

soothed. Always he gestured his devoted secretary to give out such information as might be thought necessary for public and press.

Naturally such a personality was bound to leave its imprint on Hollywood. But no one could have foreseen that, among the California converts to Shri Meher's placid faith would be—Garrett Fort!

For Fort was, or seemed, at the other end of the psychic and esoteric scale from the Baba. Fort, like his new master, had thought deeply on many matters. But they were dark, dire things, lit up by the red glare from the imagination's most sinister gulfs.

In his work as screen adapter for such powerful fictionists as Poe, Robert Louis Stevenson, Bram Stoker and other practitioners of the macabre and lethal literary arts, Fort had experienced all the soul tremors of such authors' heroes.

He had undergone the grinding torments of Dr. Jekyll as he turned into the hideous Mr. Hyde. He had writhed in the frantic self-reproaches of the anguished Roderick Usher. He had known how the Monster of Mary Shelley's fancy felt when first he tasted great power, and had drunk the blood of Count Dracula's victims—figuratively.

These acute agonies of creation in piling shock upon shock and thrill

upon thrill which the master-scenarist underwent were, of course, imperceptible to spectators of his horror-movies. From their viewpoint, naturally, the more gruesome the spectacles he evolved, the keener their interest in the theater.

Nothing delights the thrill-addict more than a good rousing feast of suffering, cruelty, revenge and remorse. That was why "Frankenstein," with its piled-up woes, was such a resonant smash at box-offices.

When the inventor (Colin Clive) concocted his monstrous effigy (Boris Karloff) and the latter terrorized the countryside and committed a peculiarly fiendish murder, the Frankenstein fans were thrilled and charmed.

When Count Dracula's daughter (Gloria Holden) saved the soul of her dead, weird father by fair and foul means, there was applause. When the wicked president of the Suicide Club (Reginald Owen) menaced the lives and love of Rosalind Russell and Robert Montgomery, they were appalled—and entertained.

And when Claude Rains as the Invisible Man wrought havoc in an English village and finally died, visibly, in the snow, the actor's reputation was securely established.

But after he had tossed manuscript after brilliant manuscript at the Hollywood producers and all had been directed and released to salvoes of ap-



SILENT
Shri Meher Baba Vowed He Wouldn't Say a Word While He Was Visiting the United States. When This Photo Was Taken, and Followers Said He Did Not.