

---

June 2020

## *Head Over Heels*

H. Lovekin

Follow this and additional works at: <https://dc.swosu.edu/mcircle>

---

### Recommended Citation

Lovekin, H. (2020) "*Head Over Heels*," *The Mythic Circle*: Vol. 1988 : Iss. 7 , Article 16.  
Available at: <https://dc.swosu.edu/mcircle/vol1988/iss7/16>

This Fiction is brought to you for free and open access by the Mythopoeic Society at SWOSU Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Mythic Circle by an authorized editor of SWOSU Digital Commons. An ADA compliant document is available upon request. For more information, please contact [phillip.fitzsimmons@swosu.edu](mailto:phillip.fitzsimmons@swosu.edu).

To join the Mythopoeic Society go to:  
<http://www.mythsoc.org/join.htm>



---

# Mythcon 51: The Mythic, the Fantastic, and the Alien

Albuquerque, New Mexico • Postponed to: July 30 – August 2, 2021



# HEAD OVER HEELS

by H. Lovekin

Louis had just cut off the head and now he picked it up by its long hair, swinging it as he walked down the road. The hair had been of invaluable assistance as Louis struggled with the woman. A witch! Maybe. And if she wasn't exactly a witch, well, he had grounds for suspicion. Why wait to find out for certain; that was the point. He'd heard rumors that white owls nested in her chimney and even that wolves licked her hands. Worse still, she had no kin - reason enough to grab her by those long snaking locks and tug hard on them until her neck was exposed and bent back. Hack! Hack! and the head was off, swinging by its hair at the end of his arm while he walked along the road to town, where he'd collect the witch's bounty.

So gaily did he swing the head that he failed to notice at once how it tried to elude his grasp. But in the midst of a downward swing, Louis felt a tug from the head that froze his merry gait. And then it tugged again, as if trying to pull away from him. When he looked down, Louis saw that coils of hair had wrapped around his fingers. But a worse shock awaited him. The eyes that had been glazed by death and left wide open in terror had suddenly cocked upwards, and now regarded Louis with a strong

measure of contempt. Tug! Again the head seemed to be straining away from its gaoler, and the coils of hair that tightened around Louis' fingers weakened his grip.

This is how Louis later told the story, when he was an old man, his bounty days gone forever:

"I thought at first I'd just been pulling the hair out myself, from swinging the head up and down. You wouldn't know it to see me today, but in those days I was strong enough to smack the Devil's ugly snout, may God save us all. So you can see that even a witch's head was no match for me. I could pull their hair out by the bale, and I'll call myself a liar in front of you now if I haven't yanked out great handfuls from even the most hellbound hag.

"But when it rolled its eyes up to me, I could feel my soul trying to flee by rushing out from my heels. If I stood my ground, my soul would have escaped and Satan himself would have been waiting, jaws open, to swallow it up. Thinking back on it, I'm sure an angel saw my plight, for my feet began to fly into a dance to keep my sorry soul within this body. Yet even as this blessed intervention came, the head kept trying to jerk around and curse me with a glance. It's evil hair tried to trap me so I couldn't avoid that damning gaze. I would have been claimed by its power if my angel had not frightened the head into trying to escape once and for all.

"With one more great heave, it pulled itself free. Bat's wings sprouted from its ears, and with one more glance back at me - the baptized soul it had tried to claim - it flew away to an unknown filthy place, to bide its time for the less wary."

On the day Louis had run into town like a foaming berserker, two scornful students were part of the crowd that listened to him tell of his narrow escape.

"Stupid ass," sniffed one as he swept his cloak about him in disgust. "He's so busy with God and the Devil fighting over his heels, he can't see he pulled the hair out himself. Swinging a head by its hair, indeed! Tuggings. Escapes. The lying fool simply doesn't understand that the head's weight shifted every time he pulled out another handful of hair." The first student pulled a book from his sleeve and showed his companion the proper theorem demonstrating his thesis.

"I've no doubt that your mathematical deductions are correct," sniffed the second student haughtily. "But if you ask my opinion, I believe the oaf is spinning this yarn to collect his bounty without proper evidence. Whatever the reason, it appears that he's killed a witch and left the head behind."

The first student considered the validity of his



friend's theory, and immediately drew up its benefits and drawbacks. If his friend was correct, then a witch's head lay in the fields waiting to be claimed for a ten sou bounty. A little windfall like that would purchase some cheer for two poor students' idle nights. On the other hand, Louis was drawing a good-sized crowd with his story, and the people seemed convinced he spoke the truth. In no time, they would shut the city gates and not allow anyone to enter or leave. If the students wanted to find the head and claim the bounty, they would have to act quickly.

The first student pushed his way through the crowd and faced the blood-spattered Louis. "What rubbish you tell people," he sneered. "You've botched the job but you'll still want the ten sou. Who knows what trouble you've caused the peasants or what harm you'll bring to this town because of your cowardice? Which one of you people has ever heard tell of a human soul escaping through the lowest part of the body?" He faced the crowd, which had grown silent, and looked as stern as possible.

Cowed by the student's rhetoric, the crowd respectfully let the second student pass through to join his companion. Together they announced that they would find the head and bring it back, first to demonstrate the falsity of Louis' story - for they were scholars first and always sought the truth - and secondly to rid the countryside of the supposed witch's remains. The people set up a cry of alarm and begged the students to remain within the safety of the town's walls. But Louis, smarting under their accusations, encouraged them to find out for themselves that witch hunting was no simple task.

Without waiting another moment, the two students set off in the direction Louis had described. The crowd followed them to the gate, begging the young gentlemen all the way to the portcullis to stay back. As the first student had predicted, the gates slammed shut behind them. They were forced to shout at the top of their lungs that they would return with the head before nightfall and prove that the only evil afoot was a fool's lies.

The students had no trouble finding the stretch of road where Louis had dropped the head. A trail of blood swerved off towards the freshly plowed field nearby, and the two readily agreed that Louis must have flung the head there in his superstitious panic. In a short time, the head was found, and the sight of it momentarily overcame the students' arrogance and avarice. They



remarked on its lovely face, and noted how its hair spilled across the furrows like mossy tendrils. The head had landed on the stump of its neck and its dead, filmy eyes gazed into the tree branches as if calling the wasps for a feast. The two dropped to their knees and kept themselves still, inwardly composing odes in Latin as students are wont to do.

Then, quicker than either could have imagined, the eyes blinked and cleared themselves of death's blindness. Clear and cold, they flashed upon the students, and the bluish lips curled into a smile. A small tremor shook the ground about them, and like a vile plant spurt-ing up, the woman's body shot from the earth beneath her head.

The students sprang up at this ghastly sight, having only enough time to see the ragged red band around the woman's neck, which set her head at a peculiar floppy angle. Her smiling lips drew back to expose a set of lupine teeth. Simultaneously, the students recalled Louis' loud story, and they began to frantically pound their feet, which burned and tingled. But of course it was too late.

---

When power leads a man to arrogance, poetry reminds him of his limitations. When power narrows the area of man's concern, poetry reminds him of the richness and diversity of his existence. When power corrupts, poetry cleanses

-- President John Kennedy, October 26, 1963, at the dedication of the Robert Frost library, Amherst College.