

Weird Tales

January
1954

-
- MOP-HEAD** Leah Bodine Drake 2
*Its mockery of speech it had made from fox's bark, owl's cry,
rain's patter.*
- EFFIE'S PETS** Suzanne Pickett 17
*. . . eons and eons—a long time to be hemmed in by a strong,
wholly invisible wall.*
- BLACK HEATH** Farfal Delano 26
Since man can run, walk, jump, swim, and crawl—then why not fly?
- A VERY SPECIAL QUALITY** David Eynon 39
Caveat emptor—and most especially when bartering with the devil.
- WALPURGIS NIGHT (Verse)** Dorothy Quick 43
- TIGER DUST (A novelette)** Bassett Morgan 44
. . . terrible magic in the hills.
- YOU SHOULD BE CAREFUL** Garnett Radcliffe 65
How long does it take for a ghost to find itself?
- ATLANTIC ISLE OF MYSTERY** Cyrus Macmillan 70
*About the sea, and the mocking fugitive horizon, there is always
mystery.*
- SHADOWS OF BLOOD** Eando Binder 79
It was Caesar's own wish to speak with the barbarian.
- THE CALAMANDER CHEST** Joseph Payne Brennan 97
. . . the finger kept beckoning, beckoning. . .
- REFLECTIONS OF AN EGYPTIAN PRINCESS**
(Verse) Edith Ogutsch 105
- THE STORMCLIFF PAPERS (A novelette)** W. J. Suprenant 106
They ended with the ominous phrase, "the demon is impatient."
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D. McILWRAITH, Editor

after all, all he wanted was for his name to live forever!



I

"A GOOD year, 1937," the devil sighed appreciatively and held his champagne glass up to the light. In his dinner jacket and tartan cummerbund he looked as any of Drayton Foxx's guests might have looked. *They* couldn't have told the exact vintage of the champagne by taste alone, of course—but they would have known it was expensive. All Drayton's things were expensive.

"It's the best year," Foxx corrected. He said it flatly, a statement of fact, with no fear of

contradiction. It didn't really matter to him, but he liked to have things straight. Nothing really mattered, much, anymore. At least, expense—which had formerly been his clue to excellence—didn't matter. It didn't give the satisfaction it once had.

"But of course," the Devil nodded and smiled. "It *is* the best year—so far. I was thinking of other years, years that haven't . . . been bottled," his bland smile apologized, "—as yet. In my position, one loses sight of the fact that you couldn't know the future."

"No matter," Drayton shrugged

Heading by Joseph Eberle

and offered an inlaid box, cozy with Havana fillers. "I've just developed a taste for Piper Heidsieck, that's all."

"Yes," the Devil drew deeply on his cigar and blew a large, long cloud of smoke—a cloud worth about seventy-five cents, thought Foxx. "Champagne seems to be somehow. . . somehow peculiarly *mine*, don't you know? It's quite popular among my clientele."

"I would imagine," Foxx said dryly.

"It leads to so many things," he explained. "It's the symbol of so much that I have to offer. Would you enjoy meeting the founder of this Chateau?" He tapped the bottle lightly. "I can easily arrange it."

"Thanks, no," Foxx swung a chair around and straddled it, facing his guest. "But about your offer," his manner changed to one of business, and with it his poise and savoir faire coiled into a tight spring of purpose, "I'm prepared to meet the usual terms."

"Your soul?" the Devil seemed to hate spoiling the flavor of the moment—the cigar, the wine. He smiled sadly, "That's the standard price, you realize."

"You'd get it anyway," said Foxx. He called a spade a spade, and his rise to vintage champagne and leaded glass had doomed his soul a hundred times over. "In

fact, it seems to me you're wasting your time, buying something that's bound to fall into your hands sooner or later."

"I suppose," the Devil took a last, reluctant sip and put his glass aside. "Still, you know, there are always technicalities. And certain sources," his face reflected a look of well-bred distaste, "are always prepared to offer a last minute consideration, I understand. There's nothing they won't do, to save a soul—even a soul like yours."

DRAYTON'S face became wary. He saw the possibility of increasing his demands.

"Why, one scoundrel was snatched from my very hands," the Devil had a look of shocked disbelief, as if he had found a social equal cheating at cards. "A simple deathbed repentance, which he only half meant—he was delirious—and they used *that* as an excuse for salvation." The Devil sighed like a man who has had to endure endless unscrupulosities. "You can see what I'm dealing with."

"Sure." Drayton was all sympathy. "I know how it is. Well, then, will you fix things for me?" He shot a look at the Devil and weighed his own chances of success.

"But, of course, my dear fellow." Satan laid his cigar on the malachite ashtray and fished in

his jacket for a minute. He extracted a slim, folded sheet of parchment. "You draw up the terms yourself. I hate haggling, you know. And I really haven't time for squabbling over points of order." For a second he looked incredibly weary. "They always squabble in the end, you know. Claim they don't get full measure, or some clause lets them out—nothing personal, you understand," he added hastily.

Drayton took the paper from him and began to write. A few short sentences satisfied him. He signed the document and thrust it towards the Devil.

Satan added his thumb print, folded the sheet again and slipped it inside his jacket.

"You aren't going to read it?" Foxx's eyebrow made an arch.

"Why bother?" The Devil retrieved his cigar and settled back in the overstuffed leather chair. "I understand your problem well enough, I think."

"You've got everything," he waved his hand around the paneled study, "and yet, something eludes you. Your brother-in-law, the one who paints, I believe, is troubling you."

"I've worked hard all my life." Foxx looked earnestly at Satan, as if *he* would surely understand. "Hard! And I've made my way to the top. All those years I supported that, that. . . wastral. And *now*, now that he's sponged

off me so long, he's become famous.

"Why, some of my guests only come to meet *him*! And it's me! I made it possible!"

"Quite," the Devil nodded. "You've got everything but fame. Still, a press agent, perhaps? A foundation for charity? Your name needn't be unknown."

"But I want something special," Foxx's eyes looked off into a greater distance than the room. "I want a quality that no one else has—something that will make my name known all over the world, forever!"



"A natural urge," said Satan. "It's a feeling I can't deny enjoying myself," he explained modestly.

"You *can* do it, can't you?" Drayton looked at him hungrily. "You will make good on *our* deal?" For the first time in years

he felt himself dealing with someone who just might best him.

"Now, now," Satan raised a manicured hand ever so slightly. "My dear fellow. If I do say so myself, my reputation is above question in these matters. Set your mind at rest." He looked pointedly at the cigar box, and Drayton stood up to offer it to him again. "You shall," he struck a match and spoke between puffs, "have everything you asked."

"A special quality," he held the cigar up and rolled it between his thumb and forefinger, admiring the smooth leaves, "that no one else possesses. Not easy, of course, but I'll do it." He smiled and patted Drayton's knee in a fatherly way. "These cigars are priceless!"

"And my name?" asked Foxx anxiously.

"Your name shall live forever, nodded the Devil, "among the wisest men in the world." And with that he was gone. A cloud of cigar smoke hung over the chair, and the ice tinkled in the bucket as the empty bottle leaned over towards the edge.

II

DR. SMYTH-ROLLO folded his stethoscope. He cleared his throat in his best one hundred dollar visit manner. It was his fifth visit in a week. He was be-

ginning to toy with the idea of a convertible Jaguar.

For a second he was lost in appreciation of the gleaming machine. Perhaps, he thought, Foxx might be stretched out to a Bently with a tonneau—but these respiratory cases never lasted long. Still, there was the fame to consider—and it was all his!

"You say your friends noticed a change?" inquired Smyth-Rollo. "Some subtle metamorphosis?"

"A haunting quality, that's how they described it," said Drayton feebly. "There was a party for my brother-in-law, and the usual writers and artists were there. They all noticed it." He was reliving the pleasant surprise of having become the center of attention. "An odd, wistful look, they said—like nothing they'd ever seen before. As if I were from another world, or something."

"Hmmmnnn, Dr. Smyth-Rollo dragged his mind from a Mercedes Benz and faced his patient. "They were right, of course." He brought his fingertips together and nodded—a device he saved for the denouement of his most exclusive cases. "You *do* have an altogether unusual . . . er 'quality.'—It's completely new to Medical Science," he said positively, as if he were himself medical science.

"Fatal, of course, ultimately,"

he added. "At least, I should imagine, if it pursues the same course for another week."

Drayton flinched, but knew it was no use arguing.

"I've written a paper for the society," said Smyth-Rollo, as if it could possibly interest Foxx. The Doctor realized his *gaucherie* and attempted to recover it.

"But still, there's this to think

about," he added quickly, "I've called it 'Foxx's Syndrome'—I hope you don't mind?" He looked up into Drayton's desperate eyes, then looked away quickly.

"Remember, old man," he added soothingly as he felt for the doorway, "your name will live in the medical profession forever."
