

Weird Tales

ALL STORIES NEW—NO REPRINTS

JANUARY, 1946

Cover by A. R. Tilburne

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*Except for personal experiences the contents of this magazine is fiction. Any use
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All the Time in the World

BY CHARLES KING



*Thousands of years ago I had come here first; it had taken
all this time to prepare me.*

“BORED, eh?”

I passed my hand through the whirling, leaping flames and nodded, miserably.

“Hmmm. How long have you been here?”

He knew as well as I did. He was just teasing me. His great, yellow eyes had a trace of unmistakable amusement.

To show that I wasn't nettled, I fondled one of the glowing coals and watched the steam form unpatterned traceries through my fingers. “Three thousand years.”

“And one month, fourteen days and thirty-seven minutes,” he gravely amended. I nodded again.

“Don't we treat you right?” His back was to me, but I knew that he was watching me closely just the same.

“Yes, Great Prince.”

“You've received steady promotions, haven't you?”

“Yes, Great Prince.” I kept my voice as steady as I could. It was not easy. I have seen what happened to others who didn't respond correctly to his questionings. Even

Heading by A. R. TILBURNE

I, much used to certain sights, have felt dazed and faint at such times.

He turned suddenly and let his hot eyes bathe me with lurid light. I knew what he was doing and I was terribly, unaccountably frightened. Unaccountably, because I had not lied to him. Still, it is horribly unpleasant to know that your mind is being stripped clean and bare without your having the slightest chance of evading or resisting the process. Not that I would try to resist. I have seen the mottled remains of those who did.

And my mind swept back to that moment, thousands of years ago, when I had first come here. I had led a hard life, and a vicious life, but it had been quite successful from the viewpoint of financial success.

Many men . . . and women too . . . had fallen quick victims to my dagger or strangler's cord. I suppose the only good thing that I can claim is that I never attacked the poor. There was no reason to, of course. They had nothing worth stealing. I had finally been caught, as I knew I some day would.

I lived three days through the torture. I had never known that pain could be so exquisite. When they were finished with me I hadn't a whole bone in my body. I was just a mass of bloated flesh that could be formed into different shapes by kneading with the fingers. I couldn't scream curses at them because they had sewn my lips together . . . but before I died I made a mental vow. If there was a hereafter, and if we met. . . .

Well, we did. But I was running ahead of myself. Again my mind went back to the time when I had first opened my eyes. My first reaction had been one of surprise that I was still alive, but then I saw that I wasn't. Not alive, at any rate, as you would know it.

Anyway, amazingly enough I was standing on my feet. The feet, you will remember, which I had last seen as shapeless blobs of flaccid flesh.

"Name, please."

And when I had answered it came to me that my lips were no longer sewn together.

My questioner had looked up at me with quickened interest on hearing my name. His

tail had dropped the writing implement it had been using, and its twitching motion had plainly beckoned me to follow.

WE HAD passed through many doors and along many twisting lanes. The walls gleamed redly . . . then seemed to move. But then I saw that it was only the red fluid on them that moved. It seemed to come from somewhere above, and I hadn't understood until a sudden burst of screams tapered off to strangled sobbing some place above me. I had realized then what the red fluid was . . . and where I was.

"This is as far as I go," my guide had grunted. He must have felt my amazement as I stared at the wall of twisting, flaring flame.

"Don't worry about that stuff . . . now. You're under His protection because He's expecting you. Go in and . . . good luck!"

I had tried to hold back, but it hadn't worked. Not even for an instant. There I was, moving through the dancing, flickering flames . . . moving toward the great figure indolently sprawled on an ebony throne.

He had been caressing something in his huge hands. He had moved it this way and that, bending it, twisting it, occasionally rolling it into a ball. Heavy shadows had prevented me from seeing what it was, at first, but as I had drawn nearer the thin, tortured screaming from the object crumpled in his fingers corroborated what my eyes had tried to reject. I had led a life replete with viciousness; there was nothing that I had not done or attempted . . . but I confess that I averted my eyes from what He was doing to that human body.

He chuckled, and the sound was like rolling thunder: "Now don't tell me that *you're* squeamish."

"I'm sorry if I've offended you, Great Prince."

Yellow, enormous, the slanted orbs regarded me a moment. Then: "You've been given quite a privilege, you know."

"Thank you, Great Prince."

He tossed the mangled body into a corner where it continued to scream thinly. "Your earthly dossier proves that you have served me constantly, and well. I am pleased with you." His shining, jet hooves scratched

against the floor as he rose from the throne. "Come along. I'll show you your assignment."

Interminable corridors had been left behind when we finally arrived in a small room. Hooks were fastened to the white hot walls; and on each hook was impaled a human body. There were men and women, both, and a scattering of children. All faces were a blend of two expressions. Evil . . . and suffering.

A taloned finger flicked toward a table in the room's center. "You'll find some amusing instruments there. If you can devise any new ones the shops will be only too happy to make them for you." The cleft hooves had clicked across the floor, and I was alone.

I had been good at my work from the start.

A natural aptitude, I imagine. Anyway, the volume of shrieks, howls, groans and wailings I'd produced in my small workroom must have pleased him. It wasn't long before I'd been promoted to a larger place. Of course I really did my best work when my earthly torturers were, in time, assigned to me.

It was very enjoyable because I had limitless time in which to improvise. They had died once, and couldn't die again. You see?

A SHORT bark of laughter caught me up abruptly. He had been following my thoughts and apparently He was entertained. "So you are bored. Well, you're a good man—one of the best—and deserve a vacation."

I fell upon my knees in gratitude, but His sinuous tail jerked me erect. "No," he smiled, "let us thrash this out as man to—ah—"

He certainly was in good humor.

"What would you like to do?"

"Anything, Great Prince, in which I can serve you."

I meant it. And he knew it. "Very well. There is something which can afford both of us pleasure. However, it is dangerous . . . for you."

"I am ready, Great Prince."

His vast wings flapped idly. "I will send you to Earth for a while. You, without saying, will know what to do there."

Humbly I answered: "Spend my time, and

efforts, Great Prince, recruiting subjects for your domain."

"You haven't asked me about the danger."

"No peril is too great to be borne in your service, Great Prince."

He smiled, and his red teeth shone brightly. "Heed me, loyal one. On Earth you will seem as all others . . . unless you wish to change form. You will have that power—and many others. But my power, large as it is, is circumscribed. It is the immutable way of things and there is no changing it. If I repeat myself, it is only because you, loyal one, must be aware of the hazard which I can neither prevent nor remedy.

"As I have told you, your powers will be many and yours to command. Only—be—ware your bloodstream. You will be immortal impervious completely to destruction no matter what befalls . . . but the fluid in you *must not be contaminated!*"

Back in the enormous, vaulted chamber, of which I had become Supervisor, I formulated my plans. I was not going to do anything that would cause undue comment at the beginning. Only fools would do that. Once I had seen my way around, and placed circumstances, I'd have plenty of time for extemporizing. One thing He had repeated to me clung tenaciously. I would be indestructible—but I would show signs of hurt. Nothing could disturb my immortality . . . only that outwardly, for a space, I would have all the signs and symptoms of human weakness of body if it were necessary. Undoubtedly this was necessary, if only to avoid questions . . . and suspicion.

Everything resolved itself and I was happy. My plan of action was set. I felt so good that I picked up an instrument of my own design and went over to one of the sobbing bodies hanging on the wall. My assistants were surprised because this was no longer part of my work. I outlined persecutions and savageries, even improved on them occasionally, but left the physical action to my crew. This, however, was a great moment and deserved some special attention.

My assistants naturally fawned as I worked upon the shrieking flesh that swayed before me. Frankly, though, I fully believe

that I outdid myself. It is no idle boast to say that when I got through you could not identify the tattered remnants that littered the smoking floor. Except—naturally—that they kept screaming!

NOW Blakely Julius was a very sick man. He was going to die unless, as his doctor said, he acquired the will to live. Blakely Julius didn't want to live . . . and I could understand that. For some time now I had had him marked in my ledger as a future assistant.

Yes, he was that bad. That is, as bad as you would call it. His actions had always proven that he would be wonderful administrative material for the Great Prince.

However, his conscience had tricked him and caught up with him. He wanted to die. That was all right . . . but not if he died *his way*. We'd get him, anyway, but it would simply mean that we'd have to receive him as a victim. No. He was too good material to lose. So, before his conscience could betray him, he would die *our way*. It would serve the double purpose of serving the Great Prince well, and give me the chance of entering the world of Men unobtrusively.

At the same moment that his soul was whisked by me, down to the Great Prince, Blakely Julius opened his eyes. *I was Blakely Julius.*

"Darling . . . darling . . . speak to me . . . say you're going to live. . ."

I looked up at the fat, heavily made-up face that hovered above me with such saccharine solicitousness. So this is my wife, I thought. A sharp, quick probing into her mind told me all that I had to know. She would make a fine victim for one of my assistants to work upon.

"Darling! Say something . . . please!"

And her nasty, brutish little mind said: *Oh, why doesn't he die! What keeps the fool hanging on so? It's just his meanness and stubbornness . . . and here I have such wonderful plans for his insurance money. Die, you fool! Die, DIE!!*

And that fat, over-rouged face of hers said: "Darling . . . speak . . . say something. . ."

"Hello, honey, I feel much better."

Her mind: *No! He can't do this to me!*

He just can't! He's going to die. HE MUST DIE!"

Her voice: "How wonderful! Oh, darling, I'm so happy."

The doctor bent over me. "That's fine, Mr. Julius. You've done what I could not do for you. You want to live again . . . and you certainly shall."

I smiled.

THERE was no purpose in rushing things. I had plenty of time. I had Eternity. I stayed in bed for a week, showing, by proper signs, that I was regaining my strength.

Watching my new-found wife was an endless source of entertainment. She so obviously wanted to kill me, and yet didn't dare. Bending over me, feeding me, I'd probe her mind and find it hard not to grin. Poisons of all sorts would silently occur to her and as silently be rejected. I would certainly have had a lot more respect for her if she'd tried something. The thoroughly damned fool couldn't know that it would have *helped* her if she'd tried to kill me. It would have caused me to lessen her tortures *below*—but she didn't, which gave me pleasurable speculation on her future-treatment in the Great Prince's domain.

Seven days behind me, and I got up. She argued prettily against it, but I insisted.

Then, as I was finishing my coffee at the table: "Please be careful, sweet. Since you do insist on going to the office, watch yourself on street corners and don't walk too fast."

Her mind: *Let him die! Oh, God, let a taxi or a truck catch him and . . .*

My mind: *Don't worry, my pet, things are going to work out all right . . . but not for you. I've got plans for you. I will unfold them tonight.*

Aloud: "I'll be careful, honey . . . and thanks for everything. I'll have a big surprise for you tonight." At the door I kissed her, laughed inwardly at what she was thinking, and went down the walk to the bus stop.

My thoughts were busy as I rode to my office. I knew, naturally, about my employees; several I had already earmarked. Their minds would always be open to me for necessary information. No, it wasn't

that. It was concern about starting something big that would insure a steady delivery of mortal merchandise to the Great Prince. Short as the time I'd been on Earth I was already itching for action. I was always ambitious.

I got out at my stop, walked into my building and was whisked up to my office. I'd toyed with the thought of materializing myself at my desk, but there's a time and a place for humor. I am a very logical person. I always have been.

I OPENED the door to the main office and entered. My employees were lined up to receive me. Their congratulations upon my recovery fell in waves about me as I made for my desk. Most of them didn't mean it, and they were the ones whose voices sung their gratitude the loudest.

Old Hamilton was pathetically glad: "It is good to see you again, sir. We were all quite worried." He meant it, too. He was the type who drew his salary and repaid it in full with loyalty.

"Thank you, Hamilton. By the way, how is your son?"

"He is improving, sir. The doctors say it is a matter of time."

It wasn't a matter of time at all. An instant of inner probing into his mind told me that. His son needed the attention of high-priced specialists. Hamilton couldn't afford that. As he walked away, my will slipped a quick thought into his unsuspecting head. By nightfall he would be resenting the fact that I had money for expensive medical attention and that his son hadn't. Tomorrow he would spend in brooding over ways and means of getting the money; and by nightfall he would have found a way of getting at the cash in the safe.

He would be caught. The Hamiltons of this world always are. The shame of giving way to dishonesty would be too much for him. Suicide, to him, would be the only way out. The Great Prince would welcome Hamilton to his realm . . . *personally*.

He is very fond of one-time sinners who take themselves—and their egos—so seriously. He reserves a special treatment for them. It is very interesting . . . and very agonizing.

I let my eyes rove over the rest of them.

I had plans. Many plans. The hours fled quickly with my thinking. My secretary brought me some papers to sign as the others said their goodnights and left for the day.

"You looked worried, Miss Ellsworth."

"I . . . I'm sorry, Mr. Julius. It's my fiance. He's on a selling trip. . . . I haven't heard from him in two weeks. . . ."

Her fiance was, at that very moment, hurrying home. His trip had been a very successful one; provided him with the money they'd needed to get married upon and set up a home.

A quick, last look to make sure we were the only ones in the office, and then I let my form dissolve . . . change. . . .

The doctor, who came up in response to my telephone call, shook his head sadly.

"She'll pull through this, Mr. Julius, but her heart—*bad!*"

"Liable to go any time, eh?"

"Yes. Too bad—she's so young . . . and good looking . . ."

All very amusing. On learning the new condition of her heart she would feel it unfair to get married. Her fiance—impetuous, young—would insist. There would be strain between them. A strain that would lead to wounds that would not heal. What made it all the better was that their love was a genuine one. Their lives would be irretrievably shattered . . . their unhappiness complete.

Once again I was alone. I locked the office and, on a sudden whim, waited for the elevator. It was a rewarding experience because it was quite full. I stepped back, saying I would wait for the next trip.

It goes without saying that there was no next trip. An instantaneous change into demonic form . . . the elevator cables shriveling between my flaming fingers . . . the loaded car plunging wildly down the shaft . . . a pretty picture.

I laughed all the way home!

MY WIFE was very careful to convince me of her love, that night. Her puerile mind had decided, during the day, that I was to be done away with. An overdose of sleeping tablets was what this futile female had decreed for me. My death would be ascribed to my getting out of a sick bed too soon.

Dinner over, we retired to the living room and pretended to read. She was going over, mentally, the method she would use to convince me to take the drugged drink she'd prepared. I made it easy for her.

"Tomorrow's going to be a tough day at the office, honey. Sure wish I had something that would help me get a good night's rest."

She got up so fast that her chair went over. Her words came tumbling out. "Why, darling, I have just the thing for you. I bought some nice wine today. I'll get it at once—"

She was so obvious about it all that I almost felt sorry for her. As she poured the wine before me, she spilled a few scarlet drops in her nervous haste.

"Here . . . it will make you feel much, much better."

I took a sip and nearly gagged. The fool must have dissolved an entire box of the sleeping tablets in the wine. The taste couldn't have fooled an idiot.

"What . . . what's the matter, dear?"

"Nothing," I replied, "it's fine." I downed it all in a gulp. "How about another?"

Her good fortune almost demoralized her. The frantic speed with which she refilled my glass was pitiful. I tossed this one down as fast as the other.

Then I went into my act. I had, of necessity, to pass out for a while because the body I was using was human. She must have used the time making up her mind what speech she was going to give the doctor she would summon. Also, the histrionics she would deliver with wifely tears.

As my eyes opened she was about to lift the phone off its cradle.

I willed her to look at me.

Her mouth opened. Closed. No sound came forth. Her eyes widened . . . became glazed. She wasn't pretty to look at—and, for that matter, neither was I!

I let the flesh slough from my frame in chunks. I let my skeletal remains crumble to the floor in a disordered heap.

A long, low moan was coming from deep within her. Her fingers kept plucking at her face.

I reassembled my body, except for my head. That, I kept in my lap as I sat down

in my chair; One of its eyes winked lewdly at her.

Her eyes rolled crazily in her head until only the whites showed. Her body hit the floor with a sodden plop.

I disposed of the drugged wine, replaced my head upon my shoulders and called for help from a nearby hospital.

It took four strong internes to carry her off. They finally had to use a strait-jacket. Believe me when I tell you that she will continue screaming until the moment she dies. A very unpleasant woman . . . a very unpleasant fate. . . *Sic.*

I slept well.

THE morning gave promise of a successful day. Breakfasting in the corner drugstore gave me a chance to get in some small touches. I did something to the brain of the clerk behind the drug dispensing counter. The prescriptions he would mix that day would serve purposes that would raise me even higher in the estimations of the Great Prince.

I tipped the counter girl well and left. It was a beautiful day and my spirits were high. I was crossing the street when it happened.

The traffic lights were changing and shooting out of a side street came a car determined to beat the signal. A taxi on the avenue had already leaped forward. Both drivers swung their wheels hard in an effort to avoid each other, but it was too late.

The wheels slewed and the metal bodies came together with a grinding crash, then bounced apart. It all happened too fast for me to do anything. The crazily careening taxi slammed into my human body and darkness descended upon me.

I was dreaming . . . something was happening . . . I was carried . . . I tried to talk. . . I couldn't . . . dreaming . . . there were long corridors . . . they were doing things to me . . . warning . . . something warning . . . couldn't stop them . . . tried . . . couldn't dreaming . . . warning terrible tried . . . tried enormous yellow eyes . . . pitying . . . worried . . . pitying . . . worried . . . frightened. . . .

"There, old man, don't toss yourself around so. It's rest you need."

My eyes opened. Looked wildly around.

"Take it easy now," the voice continued, "you're in a hospital . . . but you're going to be all right. You'll be up and around before too long."

I tried to keep my voice calm. I kept it weak . . . deliberately. My human body had had its shock and now, on awakening, my immortality had made me as good as new. That was something, though, which I could not let them suspect. So, weakly: "How . . . how long have I been here, Doctor?"

"You were brought in unconscious twelve hours ago. Pretty badly bunged up, too, but that's been all patched up. Matter of rest, now . . . steady recovery."

Gruelling to keep up the pretense of acting in a normal manner when there were so many questions to ask. It was better to go slowly . . . slowly . . .

"Thanks for everything, Doctor; I owe you my life."

"Nonsense, old man. We did our best—and luckily it was good enough."

"Did . . . did I lose much blood?"

He patted my shoulder. "Don't you think you ought to save your questions until you're a bit stronger?"

STRONGER! It was all I could do not to tear his throat out as he evaded my question!

"Please, Doctor. I'm anxious to know just what happened. Do me the favor."

"All right. Then you'll go to sleep. Promise?"

"I promise." *Talk. Talk!*

"You lost quite a bit of blood . . . but luckily our blood bank was able to replace that."

"*What!*"

"Of course. That's what saved your life."

I knew.

I was on him with a bound. He had time for just one feeble squeal before I shredded him into red ruin. The anger that filled me was not to be measured. I was blind to everything but sheer destruction.

Feet coming down the corridor warned me. I changed my shape, melted through the closed window, and took myself off to that nether bourne where the Great Prince awaited me.

His glowing eyes were sad.

I dropped to my knees before him as he

shook his head. "I am sorry, loyal one . . . sorry.

"But it wasn't my fault."

"I know. I know. It is the order of things. It cannot be changed—even by me."

"That blood . . ."

"Yes, loyal one. It means you cannot come back again. You must go back to the Earth."

"For . . . for how long, Great Prince?"

"For all time!"

"Never to come back . . . never?" -

His eyes were sorrowful. "You will return to Earth, loyal one. You will remain there—forever. You are immortal. You can still serve me faithfully . . . but you cannot return. It is the law. Immutable."

"Tell me, Great Prince. Will I still retain the powers and the talents you have given me?"

"Yes. That is what I meant when I told you that you could still continue to serve me."

"One last favor, Great Prince."

"Ask it."

"The power to enter the body of those who are well. Not to take the place of a departing soul, but to be able to enter the human form of any one . . . to control them from within . . . to force them to my will . . . to have this complete power throughout all Eternity."

"Granted. That is within the Rules."

I TOOK one long, last look around and then I left. I have been back on Earth now for about a month. I have not been idle. Do you wonder why I have told you all this? Do you wonder that I have taken the time and trouble to outline my career? But surely you must have suspected. You are no fool.

Remember that I am immortal.

Does that mean anything to you?

Think.

Think of the hundred . . . thousand . . . ten thousand . . . hundred thousand . . . million . . . thousand million . . . billion . . . trillion years I have in which to serve the Great Prince.

Think of your Earth. Think of the people that crawl upon its surface. Now narrow it down. Narrow it to your own hemisphere . . . to your own country . . . to your

own state . . . to your own city, town or village
to your own house . . .

To yourself.

Let us be sensible about it. There is absolutely no way out for you. Of course you can argue that, with the population of your Earth consisting of numberless millions, it is possible for me to miss up on you during your lifetime.

That is not logic. It is specious reasoning.

I admit that you have as good a chance as any one in dying before I get to you. *But —haven't you noted how I have harped upon my immortality?*

If you will forgive my feeble humor, remember that I have all the time in the World.

Suppose I don't get to you . . . *personally*. You still cannot escape me. Repeating that I have enough time to get around to everyone *eventually* should stir the chords of understanding.

Get it?

Your descendants.

If not this generation, then the next. If not this century, then the next. If not this eon, then the next. It is of no importance to me whether I get to you directly or through your descendants. The important thing is that—without any possible chance of failure—I'm going to get at you *somehow*.

I can be your cab driver. I can be the policeman on the corner. I can be the barber who shaves you. I can be the person who gives you your next job.

I can be the next person to ring your door-bell . . .