

Weird Tales



ALL STORIES NEW—NO REPRINTS

MARCH, 1941

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An Adventure of a Professional Corpse

The Affair of the Shuteye Medium

By H. BEDFORD-JONES

He certainly took a dive when he invaded the spirit world!

IN RECOUNTING the singular affair of the shuteye medium, and my final appearance as a professional corpse, I desire to make it clear that I have no belief in ghosts or in the occult powers of any professional spirit guide. This understood, on with the tale!

Doctor Roesch and I dropped into a thriving western city, got settled comfortably in a small hotel, and ran our usual ad in the local papers:

PERSONAL: It is possible to simulate death, as I can demonstrate to interested parties. Endorsement of medical profession, absolute discretion. All work confidential but must be legal and subject to closest investigation. News Box B543.

Our determination to stick to legal, ethical work was real. We had run close to the edge in the case of the miraculous healer's daughter, and wanted no more of it.

Roesch had developed many improvements in our technique. My peculiar physical attributes, having my heart on the right side in combination with a barrel chest and a very slow pulse, were not enough to trick any careful examiner into thinking me dead; but by a judicious combination of drugs that put me to sleep,

Roesch was able to induce all the symptoms of death. The one thing he could not get around was the mirror test for breathing.

However, he could manage this by being in charge of the act himself, as he must be. I would trust no one else to administer the injection that brought me out of the trance.

Our advertisement brought the usual run of answers from curiosity seekers and crooks, which I discarded. Then came one of a different sort. It read:

Gentlemen:

I believe you can fit into my plans, which are entirely legal. In fact, they are philanthropic. You can assist me in saving unfortunate people from the trickery of a scoundrel. If you can convince me that you can do as you boast, and are honest, suppose we get together.

Yours truly,
John McWhirt.

I tossed this letter over to Roesch.

"Sounds interesting, Bronson," he said when he had read it. "But when a Scotchman claims to be a philanthropist, you want to keep your eye peeled!"

"Look him up," I said, "and get him here this afternoon if he's on the level. Tell him our price first."

Our price was high, naturally; I was not

"He really went to town, doing things in the spirit line that positively left me aghast."



risking my life in any piker's game. Roesch disappeared, and did not return until lunch time. When we settled down over our meal, he disgorged his information.

"McWhirt's coming around to look us over, Bronson. Canny is the word for him, too; but he's straight as a string, financially good, and not a local man. He's about fifty and was a manufacturer of chemical goods in Chicago. Now he's retired."

All this whetted my curiosity, for our prospect had done little talking. When McWhirt was brought up to our hotel

room an hour later, he was still slow to talk. He was a brisk, red-haired, hard-eyed man, cautious but to my notion extremely honest.

"Gentlemen, prove to me that you can do as you say," he told us. "Then I'll put my cards on the table; not before."

I had no hesitation in trusting him. I gave him ocular evidence of my peculiar physique, then went on to tell exactly how I played the part of a corpse. He shot in shrewd questions; he knew all about drugs.

"Sounds good," he said. "Hm! A bit of atropine, to dry up all secretions and stop

saliva or sweating. Yes, antipyrin will cause coldness of skin and finger-tips, and blue lips—yes, yes. But breathing does not stop.”

I told him how Roesch managed the mirror test himself, and showed how, by practice, I was able to breathe “via diaphragm” without moving the upper chest, forcing the lungs down instead of up and sideways. He nodded.

“I see. I believe you’re honest enough; so here are my cards. Do you gentlemen know what a shuteye medium is?”

We shook our heads, and he went on.

“It’s slang for a fake spirit worker who, in one way or another, comes to believe in his own powers. When this belief seizes such a person, he is overcome by remorse for his own rascality. In nearly every instance, he becomes a suicide. Now, here’s the advertisement of a local spirit-worker. Look it over.”

Unfolding a copy of a local newspaper, he pointed to the grandiloquent advertisement of one Professor St. Edward. The professor ran the usual religious racket, it seemed, thus avoiding all licenses or fees and other legal impedimenta; he was in direct contact with the spirit world, not to mention the Almighty.

“I’ll have nothing to do with any such racket,” I said. “He’s a friend of yours?”

“We have never met, Mr. Bronson,” said McWhirt frigidly. “He does not know me; but I know him. For five years I’ve been on the trail of this crook; and now I’ve got him.”

His cold, implacable manner was impressive. He went on to explain.

It seemed that McWhirt and his wife, years ago, had lost an only child. Mrs. McWhirt had fallen under St. Edward’s mystic spell, endeavoring to communicate with her lost child as so many grief-stricken parents do. St. Edward had kidded her along and taken her money in chunks. Then, one day, she learned he

was an absolute fraud; the shock killed her.

Ever since, McWhirt had been gunning for the professor, and had now located him, and meant to get him hard.

He knew all about the quarry. St. Edward was doing very well here, pulling off miracles right and left, and had come to believe implicitly in his own occult powers. As McWhirt explained it, this was a psychological phenomenon which frequently affected such fake workers in the spirit world.

St. Edward was actually good, as McWhirt grimly admitted. It seemed that our client, using another name, had joined the “congregation.” Now he intended to get into personal contact with the professional and play the part of a sucker with money.

“We’ll be bosom friends inside two days,” he went on, and prodded his finger at me. “You come along and pretend to fall for his stuff. Roesch, you likewise. The man drinks like a fish. The better class of people here are down on him, and so are the local churches, on account of his travesty of religion; but he’s too smart to be touched legally.”

“Then what do you intend?” I demanded. He shook his head.

“I don’t know yet. I’m building on the vague idea of using your trick death; give me a few days to think it over. I’ll pay half now, the other half when you agree to fall in with whatever plan I think up. You’ll be worth it, if my hunch is right.”

It sounded fair enough and it was fair enough. We agreed, on condition that his plan meet with my approval; and he wrote his check on the spot.

ROESCH and I attended Professor St. Edward’s “services” that night. Doc Roesch had dabbled in the fake occult and knew how many of the trick “manifestations” were produced; but we both got the surprise of our lives.

St. Edward was a burly, uneducated, rough and red-faced racketeer with all the big heart of a wall-eyed pike; but he had the gift of the gab, a convincing personality, and the gall of a canal-horse. The way he milked the suckers was a crime. It was pitiful to see what implicit confidence some of those poor men and women had in him, and how he abused it. His seance produced spirits, voices, table-talk or anything else that was wanted.

Yet he had something on the ball, something we could not understand. He was the worst sort of a faker—and he was something more.

His "church" was a small hall, with platform and chairs. After his religious rigmarole ended, the seances took place in a large, bare back room dimly lit by invisible lighting. Any one could see that no apparatus of any kind was used.

"Just the same, he used it," said Roesch. "Illusion's a great thing. But how did he pull all that spirit talking. He got my father, who spoke of things I alone knew; it was no trick. The man never saw or heard of me. He did the same thing with other folks there."

"Illusion's a great thing," I repeated mockingly. "You fell for it."

In my heart, however, I felt this was not the answer.

Roesch, who had a genius for detective work, devoted himself for the next three days to running around town, finding out what he could do about the professor. I took it easy. We both stuck to the nightly seances, and witnessed things past comprehension, mixed up with undiluted fakery. The only explanation was that the professor had a number of stooges planted in his circle; yet the people who got messages or manifestations or even materializations were not, to my way of thinking, stooges. They were too really and profoundly affected.

On the fourth day, McWhirt came to the

hotel and we held a conference. I had not asked Roesch about his findings, but now I did so, saying frankly that before going ahead I wanted to know where we stood. I did not intend to victimize any innocent man.

"No danger," said the doctor grimly. "I've uncovered a lot of stuff, although not with legal evidence. St. Edward has swindled no end of people in this town. He pays high police protection and can't be touched ordinarily. His victims are usually women. He owns half a dozen pieces of property taken over from his victims; here's a list of it," and he laid down a typed paper. "Complaints have been made against him and dismissed for lack of evidence. The chief suckers haven't squawked, of course; they never do. At the same time, other folks swear by him. We've seen how he goes after the coin like a bird-dog—yet a lot of people think they get their money's worth."

I nodded and looked at McWhirt, who had a dour gleam in his eye.

"What d'you think of him, Mac?"

"What Roesch has said, is true. My belief is that the man does have some natural talent in the occult direction, and doesn't hesitate to mix it with really raw work, the lowest sort of trickery. He has an avid cupidity for money, and stops at nothing to get it."

I nodded again. "My scruples are removed. Have you got a plan?"

"Yes. First, I have a present for you." McWhirt produced a box which held a small pocket mirror with a glass in each side. "You told me that the only danger to your little trick of simulating death, lay in someone trying the mirror test, which would reveal that you were still breathing. Well, I know a few tricks myself," he added, smiling. "One side of this mirror is treated with a certain acid, the other is natural. Try it."

I did so. The natural side was clouded

by my breath; the treated side was not. An exclamation burst from Roesch as he, too, tried it.

"Good lord, Bronson! This answers all our chief and last problem! With this mirror, we're safe, absolutely safe!"

"Right," said McWhirt briskly. "I thought you'd jump at it. By the way, let me make a copy of that property list, will you? Thanks. Well, here's the scheme. All three of us will gang up on the professor. We'll join his classes, we'll become ardent followers of the occult, we'll kick in with money as well to prove our devotion; I'll put up the cash needed."

McWhirt had been busy, it seemed, among reputable citizens and among the churches. There was a growing sentiment that Professor St. Edward was no credit to the city; that he was, in fact, a distinct menace.

Better business organizations would be only too glad to get rid of him, and McWhirt, guided by his insatiable desire for punishment upon this man, was providing the means.

"With your help, I'll bust him higher than Gilroy's kite," he told us. "Lend yourselves to the job for a week or two. When he goes on one of his periodic benders, then I'll strike—"

"Hold on," I broke in. "He can't pull this occult stuff when he drinks."

"You don't know him. He's better than ever at such times! Didn't I tell you he believed in his own powers? It's even more true when he's drinking heavily. Well, the plan is simple. You keel over during one of his seances. You're dead. I'll be running articles in the local papers about the danger of such seances; your death will prove it. Roesch will file a murder charge. The press and pulpits and public organizations will take up the matter and ballyhoo it to the skies—and St. Edward, blast him, will either be run out of town or into jail, or else will skip in a

hurry! He'll be ruined for life as a medium; I'll see to that."

We had no objections. We were working in a good cause. But we should have known that McWhirt, being Scotch, had kept a card or two up his sleeve.

As we became more firmly established in the professor's circle, I became more aware of a peculiar thing about his racket. This was the personal angle. All the occult stuff he pulled for anyone else, even for Roesch, impressed me little. It might be real or it might be fake; I could not be certain either way, and cared less.

But he began angling for my sucker money, and I chuckled to myself. He had a queer way of getting to his point; he would announce frequently that names did not matter in spirit-land, but he would describe certain people in the audiences, for whom messages were waiting, or with whom spirits wanted to speak. It cost five dollars or more to get the works later in the seance, depending on how affluent the sucker looked.

SO, two nights in succession, he described me among others. I thought this was all a clever dodge to avoid using names which he could not know, as he did not know mine; but now I am not so sure. While I attended the seances afterward, I did not swallow the bait at first; he got his money in advance, and one had to arrange with him before the call would be answered. Watching others get results which seemed to amaze them, I got curious at last, and one night hunted up the professor before the performance began. He had a strong aroma of bourbon on his breath, but this was not important.

"Twice," I said, after bringing myself to his attention, "you've described me and said someone wanted me. I wonder if it could be my sister Kate?"

I had no such sister, of course. St. Edward rolled his eyes in a wild way he

had, and spoke with unction as he saw me taking the bait. Or so I thought.

"Brother, I don't get names, I don't call names," he said. "The spirits don't take much stock in names, far as I can discover. If you want to take a chance during the seance, I'll say you're ready and you can figure results for yourself. My vibrations are strong tonight and it may be an important message. It'll cost you five bucks now, though."

I slipped him the five, and he beamed.

He ran through the usual patter, adjourned the "service," and we trooped into the seance room. He was doing a trance act this evening, combined with a crystal. There were a couple of dozen in the room, including Roesch and McWhirt.

Holding hands all around, going through the usual songs and ritual, he stared intently into the crystal ball and then began to twitch. His eyes closed. His voice came in a hoarse straining manner as though he were short of breath.

"A brother is waiting," he said, and described me. "Who wants him? Who wants to speak with him? Come closer, friends, closer! Now I can see you. There are two of you. One is a man with a wart on his left cheek; I see the little finger of his right hand is gone. The other is a boy with red hair and a freckled nose. Step up, young man! Deliver your message through me. I am waiting."

He waited, and I waited, and there was a chill inside me, too. I knew who the man was, all right; the description was exact. And I knew who the boy was. St. Edward began to speak, jerkily.

"I'm your cousin; you remember me," he said, or the boy spirit said. Take your choice. "I was with our folks last night. Your mother was saying they had not heard from you in two months and she's worried. I'm worried too. You are associated in business with a man who has red hair like me, and he is holding out on you.

He has no evil intentions, but you are being used by him for his own purposes. I want you to know this for your own good because we were always pals. You are in some kind of danger but I don't know just what it is, so be careful. Good-by, Art, and I'll meet you when you come over—"

The voice faded out. St. Edward went on to play the next sucker; I was through. But the woman next me, a nice motherly old soul who was in the racket for all she was worth, leaned over to me.

"Your hand's sweating," she said. "I bet it was a real message, wasn't it?"

"Sure sounded like it," I replied.

AFTER the show, Roesch and McWhirt and I met in our hotel room.

"Now, gents, pay attention," I said. My nerves were steadied by this time. "My real name, which I'm not using, and which even you, Roesch, don't know, happens to be Art. It's exactly two months since I've written my mother. That boy was the spit and image of a second cousin who died years ago; he and I were intimate friends. And, Mr. McWhirt, you're the only red-headed man I'm in business with. Are you holding out or not?"

McWhirt's blue eyes were bulging.

"Lord!" he gasped. "Yes, it's a fact; I am. Nothing that's any of your business, though; I'm putting over a little deal of my own on the side."

"Then forget it," I said. "You're straight. I just wanted to clear up the facts in the case. Now, how the devil did St. Edward know all this stuff? Oh, I forgot! The man he described, with the wart and one finger off, was my uncle John . . . no mistake there. Speak up, Roesch! Did the man read my mind, to know such things?"

Roesch was anxious, McWhirt was mopping his face.

"Might be that," replied the doc. "Don't ask me, Bronson!"

"That rascal has something on the ball," said McWhirt earnestly. "I told you he mixes real with false, didn't I?"

"Either," said Roesch, "you've got to accept the occult business in a gulp, or else figure it's some sort of trickery, perhaps telepathy, we don't savvy. One thing is sure, though. Remember the old lady sitting next to you in the seance, Bronson?"

I nodded. He went on quickly.

"I happened to be looking her up today. She's a sucker for sure; alone in the world and was left well off by her husband, but she's turned over most of her money to St. Edward. All she has left is a boarding house, which supports her. He's fixing to get his hands on that, next."

"Then suppose we get busy and stop his game," I said. "The thing got me jittery tonight, I don't mind saying. I'd like to get it done with."

McWhirt was brisk and assured once more. "Suits me," he said. "St. Edward is drinking, which means that for the next week he'll be on one holy binge and pulling no end of his blasted miracles. Let's set the business for Saturday night. Suit you?"

It did. This was Tuesday; we had four days to go. McWhirt meant to get the press and the pulpit stirred up, guaranteeing to have some newspaper men on hand Saturday night, and a local physician to back up the findings of Doc Roesch. It would make a big story in the Sunday papers, and he predicted that by Sunday night the professor would be finished for keeps. We discussed the details, and McWhirt departed.

Roesch gave me a queer look. "Are you in earnest about being jittery?"

"Yes," I said, and told him why. That uncle of mine, with the missing finger and the wart, had been a wanderer all over the world, and had come home to die. With him he had brought all sorts of queer plunder. I had dipped into it, and found

some queer herb extract from the Peruvian jungles. Sampling this, I had died, as everyone thought, only to come alive once more when the effect wore off.

"That's what started me on the corpse racket," I concluded. "Analysis of the stuff led to the dosage I now take, on a scientific basis. Thus, my Uncle John was more or less responsible for my career as a professional corpse. You yourself never knew these details; then how could St. Edward have faked his spirit stuff with me? It was telepathy."

"I expect so," he agreed. "He pulled it out of your own mind, eh? Well, I'll now get more personally acquainted with the professor, just so he'll know a doctor is on hand when the break comes Saturday night."

THIS was essential, since Roesch had to handle me and give me the dose that would fetch me around afterward, as well as manage the details with the mortician in charge.

When we showed up next evening at the "church," St. Edward beckoned me into the back room. He had been hitting the bottle, but his potations had not impaired his occult powers.

"Glory be, young man!" said he impressively. "I'm told you had two visitors last night—of course. I know nothing of what transpires while I'm in a state of trance. Did you get your money's worth?"

"Plenty," I said. "One of the visitors gave me a swell message."

"Then you must get the other one," he went on, and I saw his little game. "You can't afford to let the matter drop, when you get such remarkable results! Shall I call your other visitor tonight?"

"No thanks, I'm satisfied," I rejoined. I had no intention of passing the time of day with my Uncle John; he had always been a rough customer. Nor would I hand the professor any more cash. "I'll

stick around and make up my mind later. Right now, I want to wait."

"Well, don't pass up a sure thing!" said the professor solemnly.

"I won't," I said. "I want to be sure you're not faking it, to be honest with you."

That hurt him. He put an arm about my shoulder and almost wept with emotion.

"Young man, I used to be a sinful fraud," he said, with a hiccup. "Yes, I confess it; the ways of fraud and evil laid hold upon me and the bond is hard to break. But I have the power, understand? When my vibrations are going good, I can do anything! And some day I'll quit all the faking and stick to honest work, like I am doing with you."

I GOT away from his maundering, whiskey-sodden confidences. McWhirt was right; he believed in himself. He was a shuteye and no mistake, drinking himself into remorse for his rascality but not abandoning it.

And during these next three days, he really went to town. He did things that positively left me aghast, in the spirit line. Whether they were real or fake, I could not tell; as I said before, only the person concerned would know this. It seemed to me that the harder he drank, the more astonishing became his wizardry; and if he could nearly convince me, it may be imagined how his less skeptical devotees fell for his line.

However, there was one thing that argued against his occult power. He never tumbled to the presence of McWhirt, who was using another name, or to my game, or to the danger that threatened him. And if a master of the occult cannot divine his own peril, then what good is his racket?

During the seance that evening, the professor again described my Uncle John. He went into a frenzy; it seemed the spirit

was demanding, not asking. I got up and left the seance abruptly. I really thought that St. Edward was just making a determined play for my cash, and it disgusted me.

McWhirt, during these last three days, was rapidly improving his acquaintance with the professor and flashing a good deal of money. He got manifestations every night which must have cost him heavily, and he played the sucker to perfection; but apparently none of the spirits tipped off the professor, for all was lovely.

On Saturday McWhirt lunched with us at the hotel and we checked every detail of the arrangements for the night's job.

"You may think I'm a fool, but I've got a funny feeling about this," Roesch said gravely, when he and I were alone again. "No question that the professor deserves all that's coming to him; but I think we've mixed into something deeper than we know."

"Yes, damn it!" I agreed. "Exactly what I feel myself, Doc. A sense of danger, as it were. I'm uneasy. Yet I know it's all imagination. You keep your eye peeled tonight."

"Trust me," he said, and I did.

Knowing to the minute how long my sleeping-potion required to work, I arranged to take it during the preliminary "services" so that it would hit me during the seance following. As evening approached, I grew nervous, which was most unusual for me. With any decent excuse I would have thrown up the job, but we had taken McWhirt's money and could not back out now.

The hall was partly filled when I drifted in. Up on the platform, McWhirt was talking with the professor. They were both pretty jovial, and it was easy to see that St. Edward had been imbibing heavily; his expansive manner told as much.

Roesch was already here. I took a seat directly behind him, so I could get rid of

the bottle after swallowing the drug; if it were found on me, I might be thought a suicide. The "services" began, and St. Edward was in fine fettle, roaring and bellying his alleged religious patter. Some of his talk was directed at me, and I saw that he seemed to have me on his mind.

I furtively uncorked the little bottle, awaited my chance, and swallowed its contents. The die was cast. No way out of it now. I passed the bottle to Roesch, and relaxed.

It was an unusually large circle that trooped into the back room for the seance that evening. A couple of newspaper men were planted in the crowd, and I knew McWhirt had others waiting outside, with police handy. Everybody held hands, and the usual ceremonies of prayer and singing went ahead. I was seated directly opposite the professor.

The invisible lighting was dim, but objects were perfectly clear. St. Edward went into his trance, and about the same time I felt the drug beginning to take effect. Almost at once, the professor let out a yip and, his eyes bulging at me, began to describe me so exactly that eyes were turned upon me from all directions.

"This man," he went on, "has a visitor who insists upon delivering a message. It is a message of vital import, a message of life and death—"

That was all I remembered. They say that I just gasped and keeled over.

Now there was the devil to pay. Roesch was ready; shouting that he was a doctor, he took charge of me. At the same moment, the newspaper boys went to work, and in from the outside came others with the police. Flashlight bulbs exploded. Women shrieked; there was a rush to get away, while St. Edward sat humped over in his chair in a daze.

Thanks to McWhirt's precision and the adroitness of Roesch, who had mapped out every detail, everything went off like

clockwork. The police took charge; I was pronounced dead from heart-failure, a police surgeon backing up Roesch in the matter. The professor was hauled off to jail on some trumped-up charge, and McWhirt went along to bail him out—a highly essential part of the scheme.

Since I was a stranger in town and Roesch claimed to be a friend, he was put in charge of the corpse, and the coroner was summoned to hold an inquest immediately. This was done. It was obvious that, startled and perhaps horrified by the words of St. Edward, my heart had given way. Thus, everything was neatly cleared.

A mortician, with whom Roesch had previously made arrangements, was summoned. My body was placed in the coffin he brought, then at the request of Roesch was left here until the morning; a more devoted friend than the doc never lived. He wanted to say some prayers over the corpse before it was moved, he declared.

It went off swimmingly. Everyone skipped out and the doors were shut. Then, just as Roesch was about to administer the injection that would bring me to life again, in walked St. Edward and McWhirt. They had arranged the bail quicker than expected, because there was no question of murder in the case and no real charge to be laid against the professor.

Roesch ducked for cover behind a curtain, and neither of the two men noticed him.

St Edward had a bottle in his pocket, and took a stiff pull at it before looking at the corpse. He was in a tearful, melancholic mood and mighty sorry for himself. McWhirt, said he, was his only friend on God's green footstool.

"Well, you've got plenty of spirit friends," said McWhirt, and encouraged him to take another swig, which he did. "But right now, you're in one hell of a bad spot, professor. The morning papers are going to lam you hard. You're going

to need cash, and plenty of it. I hope you're well heeled?"

"No," said St. Edward. "Didn't you supply the five hundred to bail me? I can't get any money this time of night. I haven't much in the bank anyhow. I'll have to raise some on my property. I've got plenty of that."

"You won't have it long," McWhirt told him. "This man will have relatives. Sure as fate, they'll sue you and clap down on everything you own."

This was probable, and the professor sank down on a chair, wagging his head.

"All my own fault," he said mournfully. "It's a punishment brought on me because I misused the power given me! The spirits have done this thing, I had the power, and wasn't satisfied but went farther and faked results—"

"Never mind mourning about it," McWhirt said briskly. "I'll show you how you can get out of this with some cash and save your property to boot, if you'll trust me."

He went on to explain, while St. Edward finished off the bottle and listened. He had a couple of thousand cash with him. He would buy, on the spot, all the professor's property. He had deeds all made out and ready, it seemed, pre-dated a day. Thus, if and when the pinch came, the relatives of this dead man would find nothing to grab.

To the professor, it looked wonderful, a real miracle, and he said so tearfully. To Roesch, who was listening, it was a dead-give-away on McWhirt's canny scheme. He was getting all the revenge he wanted, and he was also getting some chunks of valuable property for a trifle in cash. Except for the liquor and his remorse, St. Edward would never have agreed to such a thing, naturally; but now remorse had him by the throat, stifling his reason.

"I'll do it," he sobbed out, wringing his

hands. "You're my only friend. I'll sign anything, anything!"

And he did it. But McWhirt was not finished.

"Did you ever know a woman by the name of McWhirt, in Chicago?" he asked.

St. Edward looked up, wildly. "Eh? Yes, yes. Where did you hear of her?"

"Why, tonight! When you were in your trance, she spoke. She said she was an old client of yours, and you had tricked her and caused her death—"

THE professor nearly went out of his head at this, talking about the spirits and his lost power, and so forth. McWhirt stuck in his barb more deeply.

"If you've got the power," said he, "why don't you bring this dead man to life?"

"I could do it in a minute," mourned the professor, staring at the corpse and the coffin. "I could do it, sure; but now the spirits have turned against me. It's a punishment for what I've done—"

"Well, try it and see," said McWhirt, getting out one of his trick mirrors. "The man's dead—this mirror will prove it. You call on the spirits; if you've really got any power or if you ever had any, you can put breath in his body."

St. Edward groaned, but rose and stood over the coffin. McWhirt tried the trick side of the mirror, showing that I was really dead, as the glass remained blank.

The professor went into his act, and really meant what he said according to Roesch. He was groaning and heaving and sobbing out his remorse, praying to the spirits to give him one more chance; it must have been a ghastly and sickening performance. Presently McWhirt held the real side of the mirror to my nostrils.

"Look!" he cried.

In his excitement, the professor nearly shook me out of the coffin. Sure enough, the glass showed that I was breathing!

"You've brought him to life!" exclaimed McWhirt, straightening up. "But maybe the spirits only wanted to show what you might have done—here, try it again. You try it."

St. Edward took the mirror, as McWhirt put it into his hand, and held it before my nostrils. A deep groan burst from him; there was no breath on the glass.

"Dead, dead!" he cried, and dropped the mirror. "A judgment on me, sure enough!"

"I guess so," agreed McWhirt. "If you had never done any trickery, this wouldn't have happened. If you hadn't caused the death of that woman in Chicago—"

"Oh, my lord!" groaned the professor. "You're right, you're right! To think how I've misused my powers, and what I might have done—"

They went away together.

Doc Roesch, who had heard every word, slipped in beside me with his hypodermic ready. He gave me the injection that would fetch me around, and waited for it to work. When I came to myself, he pressed my arm hard.

"Easy, now! Stay right where you are. Everything all right?"

"Sure," I rejoined. It was exactly like waking from slumber, for me.

"Then don't move," he said. "I've arranged with the mortician that I'll close the coffin here; he won't object or investigate. But I'll have to get the weights that will replace your body, so lie still. If anyone shows up, play possum. I'll be back in ten minutes. Our grips have already gone to the station."

"Okay," I said, and he went out of the place.

I closed my eyes drowsily and relaxed. Something flicked across my face; opening my eyes, I looked up and saw a man standing beside me.

It was my Uncle John.

Say, if you like, that it was some

hallucination resulting from the drugs; yet such a thing had never happened before. I woke clear-headed and alert. My mind was clear as a bell at this instant. He was there, scowling down at me, dressed as he had been in life.

"Art, you're a fool," he said.

I lay speechless; a chill panic had seized me. I could not move a muscle.

"I've been trying night after night to reach and warn you," he went on slowly. I knew him, I knew his voice. I could hear the ticking of the big clock on the wall. "You refused to accept the message. Tonight your medium had a strong control. He has given me strength to appear to you. Art, do you realize the power of thought?"

I mumbled something, I know not what.

"A thought, a word, is creation," he went on. "Keep any thought before you strongly enough and it becomes reality. Every thought or word is an energy for good or bad. Speech clothes thoughts, and speech creates thought in others. There is no chance; there are no accidents to human beings. What you do today has to do with what you did yesterday. Even the suicide is not aberrate; he is fulfilling in one blinding instant the destined accumulation of countless years of accretion. So with you, in thought, word and deed. You have been playing with dreadful forces, building up for yourself a karma that now threatens you."

"Karma?" I repeated blankly.

"Karma is a force, exerted by anyone who does any action; it may be good or bad. It is a result, not a cause. Thus far you have committed no great wrongs, but this is the end. If you once more repeat this trick, let me warn you solemnly that you will not waken from your imitation death; it will be real."

"Are you real?" I blurted out, staring at him. He smiled.

"As real as your cousin, who spoke to you the other night. As real as the sun-

light, as the soul itself, as the terrific peril which menaces you; as real as the Ancient Law which binds us all! Ask your friend the name of the woman who spoke with him last night, the woman who wore a cluster of golden flowers at her throat and a rose in her hair; ask him what she said to him, and tell him she was as real as I am. That is all."

Shivering, I closed my eyes and lay immobile. When I looked up again, the room was empty. Roesch came in a moment later.

I tried to tell myself it was nerves. Roesch had occupied our double room at the hotel each night; there had been no woman at all. When he helped me out of the coffin I went to the nearest chair and collapsed on it, waiting until he stuffed the flour-sacks into place and was screwing down the coffin lid.

"Roesch, tell me something," I said. He looked up and grinned.

"Everything's okay, Bronson. You're taking the two-thirty train; wait for me at Centerville. I'll be along tomorrow with the coffin, for burial there."

"Hold on," I said. "Do you know of any woman wearing a cluster of golden flowers at her throat, and a rose in her hair?"

Doc Roesch is about as hard-boiled as the average physician, but as he straightened up and looked at me, he went white as death.

"Good God!" he breathed. "How do you know that? I dreamed of her last night. I dreamed that she was warning me to get out of this business and never do it again."

"Who was she?" I muttered.

"My mother. She always wore that old brooch at her throat—she loved flowers—"

Laugh if you like; call me a fool if you like; explain it if you can! But, when Roesch had put me aboard the two-thirty train for Centerville, we had made a solemn compact. Our partnership was ended. This stunt would never again be pulled off.

Centerville was only fifty miles north. I got there, secured hotel rooms, and tumbled into bed. The drug dosage always made me feel drowsy and bad for a day or so, and I did not waken until late afternoon.

Then I got a morning paper and looked it over. But I did not read the story of my own death, at once; something else caught and held my attention—a boxed, flash item on the front page. "Mystic Kills Self," it was headed. And then I remembered what McWhirt had told us about the inevitable suicide of a shuteye medium . . . and I knew with what savage cunning he had played for his revenge to the uttermost.

For, last night, St. Edward had gone home and put a bullet through his brain. That was his end. And it was the end of my career as a professional corpse, also.

