

# fantastic

JUNE

1959

Volume 8

Number 6

REG. U. S. PAT. OFF.

**Publisher**

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Cover: EDWARD VALIGURSKY

ZIFF-DAVIS PUBLISHING COMPANY, One Park Avenue, New York 16, New York, William Ziff, President; W. Bradford Briggs, Executive Vice President; Michael Michaelson, Vice President and Circulation Director; H. B. Sarbin, Secretary; Howard Stoughton, Jr., Treasurer; Albert Gruen, Art Director.



# BEDSIDE MONSTER

By  
JACK  
SHARKEY

*Laura was surprised by her husband's laissez-faire attitude. Other men would not have been so tolerant . . . other men would not have been so clever.*

I DON'T know when I consciously decided to do something about Jason and my wife. I suppose that from the moment I knew that there *was* anything to do something about some hidden corner of my mind began to fabricate a grisly revenge. They had done me no real hurt except to my pride—my heart had for many years been out of reach of Laura's claws—but pride was enough. All I really had in life were my pride and my practice. By flaunting her attachment to another man at me Laura hurt my pride, but directly. By flaunting her newfound love to the world, she hurt my practice, if only indirectly.

People grew strange and distant, and appointments were cancelled abruptly. I

suppose it only natural that people should doubt the capabilities of a doctor with strangers when he had proven so inept with his own wife.

Perhaps I'm wrong; maybe the slackening of my practice hurt more than my injured pride. If Laura had wanted to run off with another man fine. She should have run off and been done with it. I don't really think it would have affected me very strongly. Such an event would if anything, have *helped* me in my work. I'd have been the deserted party, the poor betrayed spouse, a magnet to the sympathies of my patients.

As it was, I was a boob, a cuckold, a sucker. No wonder my patients doubted and despised my weakness.

For Laura had not left me.

She still bore my name, lived in my house, hosted my infrequent parties, and in every way let the world know that she was tied to me legally. On the other hand, she never missed a chance to mention to my friends how poor a mate I was, and how she enjoyed her paramour's attentions much more, in his apartment hardly a mile from my home. As I said, she lived in my house—but only by day. And everyone in town knew where she spent her nights.

I don't know what brought me to the breaking point, or even just when it occurred. But break I did. I was tired of—how do they phrase it?—messing around this way.

I gave Laura an ultimatum. She could have a nice legal divorce, alimony, and her share of the community property, if she'd just go off and leave me be. She laughed and refused.

I guess *that* was when I decided to do something about them.

"Laura," I said to her, early one afternoon when she'd just returned from shopping, "I have a gift for you."

"Really?" she said, with elaborate unconcern. Laura set down her purchases—more clothes, more hats, more

shoes—and smoothed her already-smooth ash blonde hair at the temples. She wore her hair in an upsweep, to show off the curved perfection of her ears, and their glittering diamond clusters screwed fashionably tight to the lobes.

"Yes," I said, controlling my temper, "really."

I set the box on the table beside my armchair, and determined to mention it no more until she did. I knew she didn't care *what* I gave her; I also knew that she'd be unable to resist looking at the gift, if only to refuse it or laugh at it.

I took the afternoon paper from my lap and began to read it, affecting unconcern. Irritated, Laura hesitated at the door of the room. I could feel her eyes on my face as she began to peel off her long gloves, her hands working automatically. I turned a page carefully, keeping my eyes aimed at—if not focused on—the newsprint before me.

"All right!" said Laura. "What is it?"

"Look for yourself, dear." I said gently. "It's a sort of surprise."

"I hate your surprises," she said, in an ugly voice. But she was crossing the room as she spoke, and had the package in her hands in a flash. Her slim

fingers plucked away the ribbons, and her blood-hued nails shredded the wrapping paper on the box.

"Do you like it?" I said, as she lifted the lid.

"If this is another of your stupid little brooches, or sick-smelling Parisian perfumes—" she began, then stopped short as she spread the internal tissue wrapping apart.

"Wh-What in the world—?" she faltered, staring into the box.

"Do you like them?" I asked, lowering my paper. I knew the answer even as I asked. Platinum is a beautiful metal. Not many people can recognize it, it looks so much like silver. But Laura was one of the few.

"They're beautiful, Edward!" she said despite herself. She held the two rings in the palm of one hand, watching the light gleam brightly off the satin-finish surface of the twin bands.

"And they're inscribed." I said with a smile. "Inside the band darling."

Laura lifted the two rings up before her eyes, between thumb and index finger of each hand, like tiny binoculars, looking for the inscriptions. When she saw them, she gasped.

"Is this some sort of joke?" she asked weakly, her mouth uncertain whether to smile or just gape.

"My dear, don't you like them?" I said solicitously. "I thought you'd be pleased. 'Jason' and 'Laura.' One for you, one for him. I—I hope I haven't offended you?"

"Why, no . . . No, you haven't. It's just that I'd rather thought you felt—well—*strongly* about us. And then, to give us something like this—?"

"My darling" I sighed, "this is the twentieth century." I hated that cliché but it was one of Laura's favorite phrases, so I knew she'd appreciate the *laissez-faire* philosophy of it.

She looked sharply at me as I spoke, and I forced my features into a deliberate innocence. After a moment, as though it hurt her to do it she managed a smile and leaning forward, kissed me quickly on the forehead. "Thanks, darling," she said, lightly, then turned and, retrieving her packages, swept out of the room.

My plan had begun well.

The next morning, the newspapers were full of the deaths at the zoo. I knew the details of the crime before

I picked up the *Herald* at the breakfast table but I read them over anyhow, enjoying the stir they'd occasioned throughout the city.

**MANIAC KILLS ZOO ANIMALS!  
5 FOUND DEAD!**

*The five Canadian timberwolves at City Zoo were found dead in their cage this morning. Medical examination showed the deaths to be the work of a maniac. The animals had been fed drugged meat, and while unconscious had had their spinal and cranial fluids drained off, resulting in death. Police are seeking someone with considerable medical training, as the report shows the punctures, probably made with a hypodermic, to be the work of a skilled technician. Police guards will patrol the zoo after dark until zoo officials are certain that no repetition . . .*

I refolded the paper contentedly and ate a hearty meal.

After breakfast, I stopped at the hall telephone long enough to call Mrs. Belden, my nurse, at the office.

"Sarah? . . . Doctor Crayden . . . I won't be coming down to the office today. Will you cancel my appointments, please? . . . No, no, I'm fine.

Something's come up at home, that's all . . . Yes, thank you . . . I'll be in tomorrow as usual . . . Fine . . . Good-bye."

I hurried up the stairs, taking out my keychain as I did so. Selecting the key to the east wing, I moved to the thick oak door that divided my home laboratory off from the rest of the house. No one but myself had a key to that section of the house.

Laura, as women will, was intensely curious about that part of the house. She had no real interest in my work, just an insatiable desire to know everything about everything. When I'd first had the equipment installed in the wing, I'd purposely taken her on a tour of the lab. Half an hour's chatting about tumors, glands and abnormal skin conditions had done the trick. She'd left the place quite a definite shade of lettuce-green, and had never asked further about my work there.

I usually worked in there at night, when she was—when she was "elsewhere." But today, I was in a hurry. Those fluids from the timberwolves would keep a few hours under refrigeration, no more. I had to work with them while they were still fresh . . .

Part three of my plan took

place the following night. It was Laura's birthday, and we were having a group of people in.

I played the part of the host well. I'd even dropped a casual mention that—while the gift of the rings had been to show that I harbored no hard feelings—I'd much prefer it if Laura didn't have Jason over for the occasion. Within five minutes of my declaration, Laura was on the phone, asking him to the party.

It was a wonderful party, too. It began at eight in the evening with a sumptuous dinner. Toward the end of the meal when Laura as was her habit, was regaling everyone present with all sorts of morbidly detailed accounts of her extramarital affair, it was a simple matter for me to drop something into Jason's cup. Very simple. The stories Laura was telling were of a nature that, while fascinating, had a slightly embarrassing effect on her audience because of my presence there. They studiously avoided looking at me while she spoke. I could almost have stepped round the table and cut his throat with the carving knife undetected.

But I had better plans for Jason.

As Laura finished episode

number four, everyone chuckled self-consciously and, like a trained chorus, all turned and took up their cups to down the last of their coffee. All the cups were safely returned to their saucers save one, Jason's, which cracked itself in two upon the handle of his fork as it fell from his shocked-open hands.

"Jason, what is it?" said Laura's voice.

Incapable of speech, he was standing half-erect at his place, his face plum-colored around eyes that bulged and ran water down his cheeks. Smoothly, without haste, I left my place and reached his side, where I proceeded to deliver the time-honored—and here futile—slaps upon his shoulderblades.

"Must have—" he gagged, "must have gone down the wrong pipe!" He managed one small, weak smile at his lack of dinner manners before falling back into his chair, unconscious.

"Quickly!" I said to two of the men hovering near us. "Help me get him upstairs!"

With Laura following, wringing her hands and chattering inane words of worry and concern, I helped the men carry Jason up the stairs to my laboratory. I cast a sur-

reptitious glance at Laura's face, but she'd as yet thought of nothing but the fact that Jason was taken ill. In a few more moments, she might recover enough of her poise to realize into *whose* hands his health was being given. But she hadn't, yet.

The men held him while I produced the key to the door of the east wing, then, at my instruction, carried him inside and laid him, blue-faced and silent, upon a white-sheeted cot that "just happened" to be standing empty inside the room.

"I'll take care of him. Thank you," I said to the men. I wasn't foolish enough to even *try* to have Laura leave the room. Even as the men were going, her eyes had taken on a suddenly cold, calculating look, which I avoided meeting as naturally as possible.

Rather than say something weak and foolish, I enlisted her aid. Keeping her busy was the simplest way to keep her from thinking on the fortunate aspects—from my perspective—of Jason's form being in my power, as it were.

"Quick, Laura," I said, gesturing toward a rack of stoppered flasks upon the wall. "Get me the bottle marked 'Adrenalin.' It's the one with

the rubber hood over the mouth."

I knew that almost *every-one* had heard of adrenalin. To the layman's mind it seemed just the sort of thing to be employed in the case of a person's losing consciousness. Laura, the exigencies of the situation washing the coldness from her gaze, hurried to get the bottle.

As she returned with it to the side of the table upon which her lover lay, I'd already taken a hypodermic syringe and chrome-plated needle from an alcohol bath conveniently near at hand, and was fitting the needle onto the neck of the syringe.

"Give it here!" I said, taking the bottle from her.

She stood watching me as I inverted the bottle, plunged the point of the needle upward through the rubber membrane and drew off a full syringe of the colorless liquid.

Keep her busy, I told myself. Don't let her think.

"Here, now. Hold his arm for me, will you?"

Laura, who'd seemed on the point of saying something, moved to her lover's side and obediently took hold of his arm at biceps and wrist.

"The sleeve!" I snapped impatiently. "I can't go through the *shirt!*"

Very much flustered, Laura unclasped Jason's cufflink and shoved the sleeve upward to his shoulder.

"Steady, now," I said, glancing at his face. Already it was losing its bluish overtones and reverting to its normal shade of rich tan. I hoped she'd be too concentrated on the needle to note this interesting fact. "Hold the arm rigid." I cautioned. "I don't want a muscle spasm breaking off the needlepoint under the skin."

This had the desired effect upon her. Her eyes remained glued to that muscular, golden-skinned arm as I sought, found and invaded the vein at the hollow of the elbow joint.

"Careful!" I said, as I depressed the plunger slowly, watching the crystalline liquid pulse into his bloodstream. "Easy . . . hold that arm steady . . . there! That's got it."

I jammed a wad of alcohol-soaked cotton against the skin near the shaft of the needle, and, pressing it down firmly, I withdrew the hypodermic from his vein. Jason's arm had jumped a bit with the insertion of the needle, which had helped to keep Laura's eyes from his face.

"Hold that cotton in place for a moment, dear," I said,

taking the bottle of 'Adrenalin' and the empty hypo away. "He'll be all right. Don't worry."

Jason's eyes were fluttering open, now, and he and Laura indulged in a where-am-I-what - happened - darling - you're - all - right - don't - move-for-a-moment dialogue. It fitted the chummy scene.

"Perhaps" I said returning to them, "you'd best take him home, Laura. He'll need a bit of rest."

"Yes," she said, with a grateful smile that somehow stung me with its honesty. "Yes, perhaps I'd better."

"I'll explain to your guests," I said, generously.

"Thank you, dear," said Laura, kissing me lightly on the side of the face. I felt myself reddening, and hated myself for my weakness.

"Don't mention it," I said, turning away. "He'll be all right, now."

After they—and then the guests—had gone, I returned to my laboratory, put the *real* bottle of adrenalin on the shelf in place of the other, and crushed and destroyed the hypodermic syringe, needle, and rubber-topped bottle. Then I went downstairs to check on that cup. But the maid had already cleaned up



the fragments and thrown them into the garbage.

Nevertheless, I searched out the two shards of coffeecup in the garbage can later that night, and washed them in boiling water before replacing them for the City Sanitation Department to take away. Then I returned to my laboratory.

All facets of my plan were now completed. It but remained for me to set the wheels of disaster in motion . . .

I checked the wall clock. It had been three hours since I'd given the shot to Jason. The serum I'd made from the fluids of the timberwolves—with certain alchemical additions that would have raised every eyebrow in the A.M.A.—should be taking effect momentarily.

I chortled deep in my throat, thinking of Jason, with his magnificent youthful body, his curly hair and golden skin. In the next half of an hour, he would be undergoing a metamorphosis not unfamiliar to devotees of horror movies. And this change needed no full moon to bring it off.

Soon the flesh of his body would begin to itch, to grow tough and raspy to the touch. Then the coarse sproutings of gray fur all over its surface,

the sudden thickening and lengthening of his finger- and toenails. And his mouth, with its sensuous pink lips, changing, twisting. The upper lip growing swollen into a dark, cruel muzzle, his lower jaw jutting forward until his teeth were in a position to slash and worry the throat of the next person he encountered. There would be no resisting the base animal lustings for blood. The serum, coursing through his brain, would override any horrified protests of his dulled conscience with its animal proddings toward tearing with his teeth at the next person he saw.

And that next person would be Laura. I'd made sure of that. I took no chances on her being elsewhere when he turned into the hideous lupine nightmare. I daren't count on her staying with him just because she always did.

That was where the rings came in. I'd noted at dinner with considerable satisfaction that each of them wore the tiny platinum bands I'd so generously given them.

And even now, in my laboratory, I was undraping the small-but-powerful machine that would activate those rings. Once the switch was thrown, the wearers would be powerless to leave the pres-

ence of each other. Laura would be manacled to Jason by a desire, well-nigh irresistible, that would feel as though it were her own.

I threw the switch, and the tubes of the machine began to hum and quiver and glow.

Laura would feel an unaccountable urge to remain with Jason, even stronger than her natural tendencies to do so. And while she was there, bound to him by will-numbing electric signals from the machine in my lab . . . The *change* would begin.

She'd be helpless, watching him turn from a young handsome lover into a hairy, slavering, bloodthirsty beast. And he'd tear her into bloody ribbons of flesh before the serum ran its course. And then he'd become himself again. I wondered vaguely what would happen then. He'd probably go mad, realizing what he'd done. The mind can absorb only so much horror before it bursts the bonds of sanity and retreats into the security of insanity . . .

Leaving the machine on, I left the lab, locked the door, and went to my bedroom, ready for a soothing night's rest.

I was in bed, just about to turn off the bedside lamp

when the door opened and Laura walked in.

My heart stopped beating, and my flesh turned to ice. I felt my head swim with baffled tangles of thought, and I had to force myself to breathe.

"Laura!" I gasped. "What—?"

I got a closer look at her face, then, as she approached the bed. Her eyes had a wild, terrified look, and a glistening patina of sweat coated her face, which bore a deathlike pallor.

"Edward . . ." she said, in a small, choked voice, her hands reaching out to me. "Edward, I've—I've come back to you!"

She was shivering, as one in the grip of some—*The machine!*

I leaped from the bed and ran to her, took her in my arms.

"Take off the ring!" I shouted. "You've got to take off the ring!"

"I—don't understand," she said, her face contorted with the pain of her fight against the relentless power of the machine.

There was no time to explain. I grabbed her by the hand and tried to slip the slim band from her finger, but her hand was clenched inflexibly into a fist and, even with the

strength of both my hands, I couldn't open it.

My mind was flooded with hideous projections of what might — of what *must* — be happening at that very moment.

Jason, a ravening beast, was even now seeking out the wearer of the ring. His apartment was scarcely a mile from my house. With the indefatigable energy of the beast he was, he'd be here at any moment.

"Why?" I shrieked at her. "Why did you come here?"

"Tonight . . ." she said, trembling as her will fought the urgings of the machine, "when you helped . . . when you were so kind . . . I—I began to hate myself for what I was . . . for what I'd let myself become . . . I broke off with Jason, Edward . . . It—It was so much harder than I thought it would be . . . something is pulling me, driving me back to him!"

My brain was reeling. I had to get to the machine, to turn it off. But I daren't leave her alone. If Jason came to the house . . .

"Hurry, darling!" I said, snatching up my keys from my dressing table and half-dragging Laura down the corridor to the door of the lab.

I heard lithe, nimble footsteps bounding up the staircase behind us.

Laura screamed.

My time had run out.

The gray-furred thing was crouched at the head of the stairs, glaring at us with glittering, red-flushed eyes. It came, with teeth bared and dripping saliva, down the hall toward us like a gray blur.

I jammed the keys into Laura's hands and shrieked, "The lab! Get inside the lab!"

I sprang to meet the monster halfway. I felt the teeth clamping upon the flesh of my throat, an agonizing, painful pinching of the skin in a remorseless grip that tugged and drooled and tore until the flesh ripped away in its mouth.

I tried to cry out, but my words had become a gargle in my throat, a gargle that flecked the face of the monster with red spume.

And then I heard the door of the laboratory slam, even as I began to strangle on my own blood, and I knew that Laura was safe.

And somehow, I was happy, even as my vision dimmed and faded and my life gushed away in a sticky, warm pool that soaked the carpet beneath my head . . .

**THE END**