

Weird Tales

REGISTERED IN U.S. PATENT OFFICE



A MAGAZINE of the

BIZARRE and UNUSUAL

VOLUME XIX

NUMBER 6

Published monthly by the Popular Fiction Publishing Company, 2457 E. Washington Street, Indianapolis, Ind. Entered as second-class matter March 20, 1923, at the post office at Indianapolis, Ind., under the act of March 3, 1879. Single copies, 25 cents. Subscription, \$2.50 a year in the United States, \$4.00 a year in Canada. English office: Charles Lavell, 13, Serjeant's Inn, Fleet Street, E. C. 4 London. The publishers are not responsible for the loss of unmailed manuscripts, although every care will be taken of such material while in their possession. The contents of this magazine are fully protected by copyright and must not be reproduced either wholly or in part without permission from the publishers.

NOTE—All manuscripts and communications should be addressed to the publishers' Chicago office at 840 North Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Ill.

FARNSWORTH WRIGHT, Editor.

Copyright 1932, by the Popular Fiction Publishing Company.

Contents for June, 1932

- Cover Design ----- J. Allen St. John
Illustrating a scene in "The Devil's Pool"
- The Eyrie ----- 724
A chat with the readers
- Birch Trees ----- Marvin Luter Hill 726
Verse; decoration by C. C. Sanj
- The Devil's Pool ----- Greye La Spina 728
A tremendous werewolf story, full of eery thrills and shudders—by the author of "Invaders from the Dark"
- Black Invocation ----- Paul Ernst 763
A strange tale of a fearful elemental that was evoked by the chanting of a formula from an old Latin parchment

[CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE]



"Our horrified eyes had just a glimpse of a hairy black shape, a nightmare figure about to leap."

Black Invocation

By PAUL ERNST

The story of a frightful elemental evoked by the chanting of an old Latin formula

MY TELEPHONE rang one night about a month ago, and on the wire was Bryce Woodward.

"Have you time for some psychic investigating this evening?" he asked me.

"More mediums?" I countered. On several occasions I have gone out with Bryce to visit psychic mediums whose powers were confined to tricks with mirrors, hollow tables and sound amplifiers.

"No," said Bryce, "this is something different. Another experiment with invocation. Want to indulge?"

"I suppose so," I said.

"All right. I'll be over in half an hour to get you. I'll explain then."

In less than the designated half-hour he was at my door, his dark eyes shining with a light half of eagerness and half of amusement.

A word here concerning Bryce Woodward: A young man with an inherited income, he has entertained himself since leaving college with studies of things psychic, supernatural and abnormal. Rather, he has entertained himself by exposing alleged demonstrations of those things as fakes. And I, interested from a professional viewpoint inasmuch as I am a beginning medico with a pathological bent, have often gone with him. For the rest, Bryce is tall and very dark, with a sparsely bearded but virile-looking face in which, under heavy eyebrows that have a sort of Satanic slant, are set deep, dark eyes. A good fellow, though inclined to be a bit mysterious and secretive.

"We're going back to Sixth Century Rome," he began his explanation, while I was getting my hat and locking up my combination office and living-apartment. "You know that old parchment work on demonology I picked up in Paris two years ago?"

I nodded. "The fragment that instructs students in Black Magic on how to call up devils and things? Yes, I remember it."

"Well, we're going to work with that," said Bryce.

I recalled one whole evening we had spent—"with that"—in pronouncing solemnly aloud certain mystic words in Latin guaranteeing to call weird and marvelous beings from their haunts in the outer-world. No weird or marvelous beings had replied.

"Tonight will be different," said Bryce, when I reminded him of our failure.

WE LEFT my apartment and started walking north, with our destination as yet unnamed by him. From time to time I stole side glances at him. I had never been able to figure out what were his real beliefs in things supernatural.

He seemed always to be sure he would be disappointed in his search for psychic proofs; yet he seemed, oddly enough, always to be hoping he would find them *this* time.

"You remember the theory I put forth that evening we worked with the bit of parchment?" he asked at length.

I had forgotten it, so he proceeded to remind me.

"It was my idea that certain definite sounds, in precise series, might set up vibrations—key vibrations, so to speak—which would act upon substances ordinarily invisible and intangible to us in such a way as to make them both tangible and visible—cause them to leave their own dimension, whatever it may be, and invade ours."

"Just what is 'them'?" I asked.

He shrugged. "Who knows? Dark monsters, ghosts, the beings we know as angels—anything might respond. But all answering, mind you, only to a certain sequence of definitely uttered syllables—like the electric device that opens a door in response to the ordered vibrations of a certain password to which it has been tuned."

"But we tried once to invoke the spirits by definitely uttering the syllables of that old Latin phrase in the parchment, and got nowhere."

"There's a possible reason for our failure. We didn't know how to pronounce the Latin correctly. No man alive knows how. At least, I thought that till yesterday. . . ." His voice trailed off into silence.

"Oh. And now you've found some one who can speak Latin as it was spoken two thousand years ago?"

"I've found a man who claims to be able to. He's a janitor's assistant at the Larchmont Hotel," he added.

I had no answer for this. It looked as though our present evening was to be as fruitless as any that had gone before. But having started, I decided to see the thing through.

"I met the man—an Italian from north of Milan—in an old book store yesterday afternoon. We got to talking, and, as it was his afternoon off, I asked him up to my place. I showed him the old parchment sheet with the Black Magic incantation on it, and he was intensely interested. It was then that he claimed to be able to speak Latin with its original, natural inflection."

"How did he explain that ability?" I asked skeptically.

"He didn't explain it. He simply asserted it. Then he asked if he could take the parchment back to his basement room with him. He confessed to being interested in spirit-lore, said that this looked like a genuine treasure, and wanted to examine it more closely. I let him borrow it. This afternoon he called up and urgently begged me to come and get it again—he couldn't get away from his duties long enough to deliver it in person. I thought there was a good deal of nervousness in his voice, as though he was afraid of something."

"Well?" I said, after we had walked half a block in silence.

"Well—don't you see? Here we have a supposedly authentic magic phrase that will make fabulous things materialize from the other-world, or the fifth or sixth dimension, whatever you choose to call it. Also, here we have a man who says he can pronounce the phrase correctly—phonetically, just as some old necromancer wrote it down—setting up the ancient sound-vibration-series that we, in our fumbling mispronunciation of a dead language, were unable to attain. All we

have to do now is tie the two together: get the man to speak the phrase in the precise way that will register on that device which will open the psychic door between worlds. It might be interesting."

At this point we reached the Larchmont Hotel, a huge but modestly middle class resident-hotel building on the fringe of Chicago's Gold Coast.

Bryce walked down a flight of concrete stairs and rang a bell. The door before us was promptly opened, and we entered to confront a man who was evidently the one Bryce had mentioned.

I CONFESS to a slight shock at his appearance. To begin, he didn't look like the type of fellow one would expect to see in a job that called for physical strength. He was slight of body, with hands that were tapering and artistic under their coat of grime. His hair was snow-white, though he couldn't have been more than forty-five; and his brow and eyes were those of an intelligent man with a studious turn of mind. His eyes, incidentally, were not the liquid brown usually attributed to Italy's sons, but were blue-gray as are the eyes of so many Italians born at the foot of the Alps. And in those blue-gray eyes—more responsible for the little shock I'd felt at sight of him than was his physical appearance—were haunting melancholies, like the shadows of far-off fears.

Bryce named him as Mr. Abracelli when he introduced us. The man bowed acknowledgment of the introduction. "Will you come to my rooms for a moment?" he invited us, with a polished manner and an English accent that told of an excellent education.

We followed him down a corridor lined with slatted store-rooms, and came to the apartment furnished him by the hotel.

I got a second slight shock when we stepped inside.

The apartment consisted of a large living-room, a small sleeping-alcove, and a plainly unused kitchenette. This living-room was furnished like a charlatan sorcerer's studio. There was a small crystal ball in a corner, uncovered as though Abracelli had been peering into it when we rang his bell. There was a pile of aromatic herbs on a scarred end-table. A skull hung by a wire beside the door of the kitchenette. The walls were draped with black cotton cloth so arranged that the small windows could be covered if it was desired to shut out all light. A pestle and mortar, of the sort used by pharmacists, was on another end-table, with a residue in the mortar of some grayish powder.

"I amuse myself sometimes by mild experiments," said Abracelli, with a deprecating wave around at his unusual possessions. That was all the explanation he offered.

He opened a cheap, battered trunk, and got out a thick, discolored parchment sheet, which I recognized as the one Bryce and I had vainly pored over on the evening I have mentioned. He handled the thing in a most peculiar way, as though it were so hot that it scorched his fingers, and yet clutching it tightly as if he were afraid it would explode if he dropped it.

"What do you think of it?" asked Bryce, with a deference that showed me he conceived himself to be speaking to an expert in parchment antiquities. "Is it genuine?"

Abracelli nodded his snow-white head. "It is undoubtedly genuine," he said. "And if it were mine, I would throw it into the furnace."

"Then you think the incantation would work?"

I peered closely at Abracelli, curious to see how much of superstition (as I myself have always labelled all these things) could find a place in his obviously keen intellect. I saw a quick nervous spasm contort his face.

"I am sure it would work," he said quietly.

"Have you tried it?" demanded Bryce.

"*Dio!* No! There are things in life it is best to let alone!"

"Would you repeat the incantation for us?"

"Not for anything on earth, *Signor*," said Abracelli, in a tone of finality.

Bryce looked disappointed. "I had hoped you would place your remarkable knowledge of Latin at our disposal," he said. "I'll pay you well."

"No payment could be high enough."

"But what, exactly, do you fear?" demanded Bryce. "What sort of creature, or shade, do you expect to answer the invocation?"

Abracelli shook his head. "I don't know. Something—sufficiently terrible. I will not pronounce it."

"Then," said Bryce, "we will pronounce it ourselves. You must teach us the correct pronunciation."

This too, Abracelli refused; and there followed a verbal conflict that left me more and more perplexed. Bryce pleaded with Abracelli, browbeat him, almost threatened him. Abracelli stubbornly refused either to repeat the incantation himself or to teach Bryce to enunciate it in living Latin. And I, as onlooker, didn't know whether to laugh or to become annoyed and leave. The superior behavior of this curious janitor's assistant had strongly predisposed me toward him; and his almost peasantish fear—for fear pure and simple had begun to show on his face—of an absurd Latin

phrase on a tattered parchment sheet now disappointed and disgusted me.

I was at the point of suggesting to Bryce that we end the farce and leave, when Abracelli surrendered.

"Very well," he said with a sigh, "I shall teach you how to say it as the man who penned it would have said it. The result be on your head. I will not stay in the room while you pronounce the invocation."

I thought I detected an inconsistency here, and promptly jumped on it.

"How can you teach us the pronunciation," I asked, "without yourself repeating the incantation and calling up—whatever it is that may respond?"

"I shall teach you word by word," said Abracelli, with a quiet dignity that made me feel, for an instant, like a boor. "The invocation, if it is like others I have known, is only effective when intoned as a whole, in a regular, syllable-by-syllable manner."

"That sounds like my vibration theory," said Bryce quickly to me. "Our other-world neighbors are not summoned by the wording of the incantation, but by the peculiar combination of sound waves caused by a particular combination of vowels and consonants."

"I have never heard it explained that way," remarked Abracelli, with thoughtful frown, "but it may be as you say. Come—I will teach you how the living Romans spoke their language."

I HAVE tried since to remember exactly the shadings of inflection given the Latin tongue by this man who, rightly or fraudulently, claimed to know the language of living Rome. But I can't. I can only offer an approximate description. There is a vague memory that the speech as a whole was almost as guttural

as Arabic; that the U's were pronounced after the French manner of saying *Monsieur*; that the B's were enunciated as if there were an almost audible G before each; and that the V's seemed to have a hint of W after them, thus: *vwee*.

First, to give us an idea of how it went, Abracelli read all that was decipherable of the fragmentary foreword: ". . . whoso shall utter the formula in a loud clear tone, sound by sound with equal emphasis on each, shall call from the hidden world about us dread denizens. . . ." I must say that, while his Latin sounded like no Latin ever heard in a modern classroom, it did sound oddly authoritative.

From here he passed to the invocation itself. But there he balked for a moment.

"I implore you," he began, with profound distress showing in his blue-gray eyes.

"You have promised," was Bryce's inflexible answer. So, syllable by syllable, with palpable care to say no two of the mystic words in proper sequence, Abracelli gave us a model enunciation of the phrase that was supposed to be a sort of vibratory bridge between our world and others. And Bryce repeated each word after him, till he had his palate reasonably adjusted to the unfamiliar sounds.

"You can now say it correctly enough," said Abracelli. "But—are you really going to risk it?"

"I am," replied Bryce. "For several years I've earnestly sought after proof that there is some foundation of fact for the old fables about spirits and ghosts and demons. To date, I've got nowhere. But I would still do anything, no matter how ridiculous it seemed on the face of it, if I thought it offered a remote chance of affording me that proof."

"This is not a remote chance," said Abracelli. "It is a certainty! If you will excuse me, I will go to the boiler room while you conduct your mad experiment."

And go he did, closing the door firmly behind him. I turned to Bryce and laughed. The more I thought about how genuinely frightened at the invocation the Italian had seemed to be, the harder I laughed.

Bryce didn't join me; and at length I sobered enough to notice in his dark eyes a curiously dubious look.

"Good heavens, Bryce!" I exclaimed. "You don't mean to tell me you think anything supernatural or weird will actually answer to the calling of that Latin formula?"

"The vibration theory sounds rather plausible," he said, lighting a cigarette. And that was all I could get out of him.

BRYCE stepped to the door and locked it. Then we looked around the room to see if, for some unknown reason, Abracelli had secreted devices to fool us. The man was admittedly a dabbler in occult things; and no other class of humans will go to such elaborate lengths to try to trick others into their own fantastic beliefs. We found nothing suspicious-looking, however, so we prepared to perform our simple experiment.

We took the thick old parchment sheet and laid it on the round table that occupied the center of the room. Over this was a shaded light, which poured a circle of illumination on the table top and left the rest of the room in comparative dimness. Bryce drew up a chair, and I drew up another. But before he started to read the ancient invocation, he hesitated.

"You're quite sure you want to go through with this?" he asked me solemnly.

"Of course," I replied impatiently.

Then: "If you really believe that some supernatural thing will appear in answer to that silly invocation—you're alone in your belief!"

Bryce shrugged. "I suppose you're right in your skepticism," he said slowly. "I suppose tonight as usual we shall discover nothing more exciting than hypnotic effects or hidden wires."

We gazed at each other an instant over the ancient sheet of parchment—seated in that curiously furnished room that was actually in the bowels of a great modern building, but which figuratively might well have been the tapestry-draped cavern of some old-time wizard. Then Bryce began to read the ancient invocation.

I felt a curious prickling of the skin as his voice rolled out the gutturally sonorous syllables in the manner Abracelli had taught him. The queer power of certain sounds over us! The Latin Mass—for example. How that stirs and thrills one, though one may be utterly ignorant of the meaning of the separate words! It is the stateliness of the thing, not its meaning, that causes every nerve to thrill in response.

Just so did the reading of this old incantation, with the pronunciation Abracelli claimed was that of the mystic Roman who wrote it, make the nerve-ends seem to flutter and twitch in sympathy. There was just one difference. While this had all the rolling stateliness of the Mass, there were buried in it subtle shades of obscenity and terror. It sounded not unlike it had been designed to be read in some gloomy huge cathedral erected not to God, but blasphemously to the Devil. I daresay, though, that this was all imagination on my part.

". . . come from the reaches of the outer dark and the shades of the other life to my presence . . ."

Syllable by syllable, beat by beat, like a beginning pianist playing an exercise to the tick of a metronome, Bryce read up to here. At this point he stopped, and stared intently toward a chair in a corner only dimly lit by the shaded lamp.

I followed his gaze—and a startled exclamation came from my lips.

The chair at which we were staring with wide, incredulous eyes was a prosaic easy-chair with a faded tapestry covering, that was drawn up slantwise to the corner of the room leaving a V-shaped space behind it. It wasn't at the chair we were gazing, though, but at something that dangled down its back.

The something was a huge, black paw, not unlike the paw of a bear except that it had almost human seeming, thick fingers tipped with curving talons. It was the paw of a beast, with the definite fingers-and-thumb configuration of something near-human. The whole—paw and claw-like fingers and thick wrist (which disappeared over the back of the chair away from us)—was covered with matted, coarse black hair.

"Do you see it, too?" Bryce whispered.

I nodded, while my scalp felt as though each separate hair was rising like the hackles of a frightened dog.

The claw-like, bestial hand contracted slightly. I'll swear I heard its talons scratch against the fabric of the tapestry covering. Then it was withdrawn slowly from sight over the back of the chair.

Together, with muscles tensed for action, we leaped for that chair and whirled it away from the wall.

There was nothing behind it.

We looked at each other, and at the same second each of us had the same thought.

"Abracelli was acting when he pretended to be so frightened," I said.

W. T.—4

"Hypnotism! But he's pretty good to induce such a clear picture in both our minds from a distance."

Bryce nodded; but he frowned a little, as though not quite convinced.

"Hypnotism, probably," he said. "Well—let's get on with it, and see what new tricks our friend can furnish to mystify us with."

WE WENT back to the table and sat down. Bryce cleared his throat. "This time," he declared, "I'll finish it!" And he began again to read the invocation.

". . . come from the reaches of the outer dark . . ."

The measured syllables struck at the brain like the rhythmic beat of a tomtom. Again I felt that odd prickling sensation all over my body.

". . . and the shades of the other life . . ."

As further testimony to the power of what I was still sure was Abracelli's hypnotic ability, I thought I detected a faint odor in the room now that hadn't been there a moment ago: a musty, animalish smell, like that which pervades a zoo. But it was a mere ghost of an odor, nothing definite enough to describe accurately.

". . . to my presence here in the world of men I command you."

There. The reading was done. The supposedly dread invocation had been hurled as a challenge.

Bryce looked up from the parchment. His eyes followed mine to the chair-back where we had seen (or had been hypnotized into imagining we had seen), the hairy black paw.

It wasn't there now. It had not reappeared, either in our mind's eye or in actuality. We stared around the room.

Nothing. We listened intently. Nothing.

I drew a deep breath. In spite of the assurance of common sense and logic that nothing could be in that room, that the mumbling of a few syllables in a dead language could not possibly cause other presences to materialize, I was unutterably relieved to find that we really *were* alone, just as we had been before the uttering of the invocation.

For a few seconds longer we sat in silence. Then Bryce sighed, and lit a cigarette.

"Once more we draw blank," he murmured, sending a blue cloud of smoke to curl in the beam of light cast by the lamp, and lose itself in the dimness beyond. "I suppose we might as well go home—good God!"

On the table between us had suddenly appeared the paw. It was resting on the table top, palm down, as solid-seeming as the wood itself.

In every detail we could see it: the coarse black hair, of a slightly reddish cast near the roots—the thick nails, or talons curving from the blunt finger-ends—the folds of grayish, money-like skin at the hairy knuckles.

At the same instant I felt a hot, fetid breath on the back of my neck, felt my chair creak forward as though a heavy weight had pressed against its back, felt hairy fingers fleetingly touch my shoulder.

For the first time I felt fear. Numbing, sickening fear! This could not—*could* not be hypnotically induced illusion! I shouted aloud, and leaped from my chair, to stand trembling, staring at the space behind it.

I saw nothing. Nothing! I looked at the table. The paw had disappeared again.

"Steady," said Bryce. His own lips were white. "Steady." He stopped

abruptly, and his eyes, following mine, saw what I was seeing.

Just outside the range of clearest light, across the table from us, coiled the thickest wisps of smoke from Bryce's cigarette. In the still air of the room these had not been much dissipated. But now they were suddenly being agitated, as though something were moving through them. At the same time, some of the thicker, further coils were blotted from sight, to reappear again, as if a body moved before them. But our eyes could still see—nothing.

The agitation of the smoke wisps persisted, in a sort of airy trail behind something that moved around the table and toward us. Involuntarily Bryce threw up his hands in a gesture of defense.

The burning ash of his cigarette was abruptly scattered in a shower of sparks as though something had struck violently against it. There was an odor of scorched hair, and the air was rent by an ear-splitting howl.

The black hairy paw again materialized before us. But this time it was not still. It was clenching and unclenching, clutching savagely toward us. And now, slowly, as though a cloud of mist were whirling together more and more tightly to pack into a definite shape, we saw—the body the paw was attached to.

Just a glimpse our horrified eyes had of a gigantic, hairy black shape, something like a man, something like a gorilla. Just a glimpse we had of flaming eyes that were those of neither man nor beast. Just a glimpse of a nightmare figure about to leap.

Then, as we cowered back, the thing howled once more with fury, the electric lamp was dashed from the table with unimaginable violence—and we were in darkness with the creature.

I felt talons rake across my cheek. A

great hand closed around my throat, and I was hurled clear across the room. I heard Bryce cry out in mortal terror, heard a bedlam of bestial snarling and howling, and felt a weight on my chest that I was sure must crush it in. Then I lost consciousness.

I CAME to my senses, how much later I do not know, to find that my shoulders were being roughly shaken. Instinctively I raised my hands to protect myself, but when I opened my eyes I saw—not the hairy terror, but Bryce, white and trembling, bending over me.

"I thought you were dead," were his first words. "My God, what a narrow escape!"

"Where is the—the thing?" I asked weakly, gazing around the room. The place was in fearful disorder, with chairs knocked about and the table tipped over and the black cloth ripped from the walls in a dozen spots. But there was no sign anywhere of the awful hairy paw, or of its even more awful owner.

"It has disappeared back to whatever place it came from," said Bryce.

I sat up and dabbed at the deep scratches on my cheek. And as consciousness returned more completely to me, reason followed close behind—and at the things reason intimated, I began to wonder, and then to feel very, very sheepish.

I looked speculatively at Bryce.

"Done in!" I said. "Tricked to a turn! The prize fools of the universe!"

Bryce stared. "What do you mean by that?" he asked at length.

"I mean that we must bow to Signor Abracelli. He has handled us like children. We must certainly congratulate him when he returns from his boiler room retreat."

Bryce's heavy eyebrows went up. "You

think there can be a doubt as to what we saw?"

"Unfortunately, there's no doubt whatever. It must have all been transmitted bodily from Abraelli's mind to ours."

"And what we felt?" demanded Bryce.

"Was—simply each other! In our excitement one of us knocked the lamp over, and in the darkness we fought each other like a couple of frightened cats."

"The thing that struck the sparks from my cigarette?"

"You knocked your cigarette against the edge of the table as you raised your hands. Yes—a fine pair of fools we proved ourselves to be!"

Bryce smiled grimly. "All these things you claim are quite possible, even plausible. But don't patronize our foolishness too *much*, old boy. For I have proof, which will satisfy even you, that the thing we saw was no hypnotic illusion. It was real enough—here in this room, called into being by the Latin incantation."

He raised his right hand. I observed for the first time that he had been keeping it tightly clenched.

"I don't know just when, in the struggle, I accumulated these souvenirs, but I regained consciousness to find them safely clutched in my hands. They tell the whole story, I think. You're still skeptical? You're still unable to believe what you saw with your own eyes and felt with your own flesh? Then—look!"

He unclenched his fingers, and as I looked at what he held, I felt an abrupt return of some of the cold horror that had gripped me before.

In the palm of his hand were several coarse, crinkly black hairs, slightly reddish at the roots—to which still adhered flakes of grayish, monkey-like skin.