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# CARNATIE CRYSTAL

BY MAYO REISS.



"It was bursting through—  
flashing—sentient."

**I**T ALL began so simply. I had just finished reading an article in a popular scientific magazine which described in detail the method of "growing crystals" by filling a suitable receptacle with silicate of soda (commonly called "water-glass") and carefully depositing in this medium crystals of various kinds. These crystals, after periods varying from two hours to as many days, would, according to the article, proceed to "grow," forming weirdly beautiful "trees, shrubs, ferns and other chemical flora." This "crystal garden" would, the article stated further, remain in this condition of "an interesting ornament" until it received a jar, or shaking, sufficient in force to break down the crystal formation.

Simple enough—yet I would give all I possess had I merely read the article as an interesting bit of scientific information and forgotten it.

Unfortunately (though at the time I felt it a happy coincidence), as I looked about the laboratory I had arranged in the small room which had been intended by the builder of my rather comfortable apartment to be a "dinetto," I saw all the needed articles for carrying out the experiment.

I am a bachelor, healthy, phlegmatic by temperament, fond of friends, yet sufficient unto myself in that a good book, an interesting magazine, an electrical or chemical experiment, or an odd job of tinkering, requiring the use of small tools, provides the means for an evening of contentment—accompanied always, of course, by the

solacing influence of a well broken pipe. I do not drink intoxicating liquors, but am a devoted subject of My Lady Nicotine, especially when she is typified by a short-stemmed "bulldog" containing my favorite blend.

My vocation is that of an attorney, with a clientele of substantial business men, and I have limited my endeavors to corporation and business problems. In this field I may say, with due modesty, I have achieved some measure of financial success. Prior to my admission to the bar, however, I had been, for some sixteen years, a physician. During that period I had been granted the honor of being chosen as president of the local "Research Society," an organization devoted to the working out of new methods of treatment, new remedies and experimentations, tending to the advance, no matter in how small a modicum, of our knowledge of a subject virtually limitless in its scope.

The enjoyment which I had derived from the research work was really intensified, now that I had left that field, when, on occasions which were becoming more and more rare, I found time to permit nature to demonstrate her immutable laws.

The laboratory contained a conglomeration of chemicals, retorts, test-tubes, Petrie dishes, microscope slides, in fact a hodgepodge of the remains of my old medical laboratory, and, as I mentally inventoried and checked the things I would need to carry out the experiment mentioned in the magazine article, I found everything available except the "water-glass." Lazily, and rather disconsolately, I considered the necessity of getting out of my comfortable lounging-robe, completing dressing, getting out the "old bus" and driving to the drug store for a stock of the necessary medium. It hardly seemed worth while, as the experiment could be conducted on the next available evening just as well. I had concluded to post-

pone the matter, when I recalled (how unfortunately I was soon to realize) that the manager of the apartment building had called my attention that very afternoon to a five-gallon container of that very same solution which she had purchased for the preservation of her winter's supply of eggs. We were on friendly terms, and I knew she would have no objection to my using a portion of the liquid, which I could return promptly the next day. I remembered that she had placed it on the back porch, within a few feet of where I was sitting.

With a smile—heaven forgive me!—I rose from my comfortable chair, picked up the two-gallon, globe-shaped fish aquarium which I had before mentally noted as a suitable container, and stepped out on the porch, where it took but a moment to fill it to what I considered the proper height.

From that moment on I gave myself fully and completely to the fascination of completing the experiment I had decided upon for the enjoyment—God!—of the evening.

Setting the globe on the small dining-table which graced the center of the laboratory, I glanced up to the triple row of shelves built against the southern wall, and haphazardly picked up several bottles containing crystals of various chemicals. Copper sulfate, alum, and half a dozen others, of various colors, sizes, and shapes, were deposited in the globe. With a slightly amused smile I watched them sink slowly through the heavy liquid, to come to rest finally, an inch or two apart, around the flattened edge of the bottom. Only the center of the base was unadorned. Certainly that portion was entitled, from the standpoint of artistic balance if for no other reason, to be the site of the most outstanding growth.

Idly I glanced over the shelves to pick out a crystal of particularly arresting color, when—God, if only death had taken me to his kindly

bosom at that moment!—my gaze was suddenly riveted to IT!

A FEW days before the time of which I write, Professor Willey, curator of the museum, had dropped in for a chat—an event of fairly frequent occurrence, due to our long-existing friendship—and to bring me a souvenir in the shape of a lump of metal, about the size of my fist, with a most peculiar granular, or rather crystalline, appearance. Unexpectedly light in weight, it proved to be fairly friable when I scraped it experimentally with the blade of my pocket-knife, emitting, as the edge passed over it, a high-pitched, enervating, nerve-racking *squeal* which seemed almost *sentient*.

My knowledge of metals, rather superficial at best, gave me not the slightest clue to the kind or origin of the metal—and metal it was, I felt sure—which I held in my hand, and rather shamefacedly I asked my friend what it was. My *amour propre* was partly reinstated when he confessed that he had been unable to catalogue the substance, which he had discovered as attached to, if not a part of, a meteorite which had fallen a few nights before in a field just outside of town. This visitor, or that portion of it which had survived the friational effects of our protecting atmosphere, had been dug out, after cooling, and deposited in the museum. During his cursory examination of the mass the professor had discovered the specimen which I held, and which drew his attention through its totally different structure from that of the remainder of the meteorite, in a small pocket in the larger body of metal, formed by projecting lips on the top and sides. A few minutes' work with hammer and cold-chisel had sufficed to separate the granular mass from its protecting bed.

After the professor had left, I sat for some time holding that harmless-appearing mass of crystalline metal

in my hand, studying it from various angles. A feeling of great depression began to steal over me, accompanied by strange, nightmarish thoughts so intangible that I could not quite resolve their import (oh God!—if I had only heeded that subconscious warning and thrown the hellish thing some place where it would have lain dormant forever!), and, to throw off the unpleasant sensation, I decided to occupy myself for a little while in determining some of the physical properties and characteristics of my find.

With hammer and chisel I set to work to break off a piece approximately a half inch in diameter. With the first blow, as the edge of the chisel penetrated deeply, I heard again that high-pitched, nerve-racking *squeal*, almost, I thought, whimsically, as though the crystalline mass were protesting, in pain, against the violence being done by a pitiless hand. Pitiless—I have experienced the meaning of that word to its ultimate!

However, after a few blows, I succeeded in separating the fragment I desired, and picking it up in a pair of pliers I held it in the intense flame of a Bunsen burner for some time. Finding that this heat had no effect on the specimen, I applied an oxy-hydrogen blowpipe. Even under this the mass showed no evidence of any effect whatsoever.

The feeling of depression which had prompted these experiments was mounting, and, too, I was aware of a distinct feeling of mal-ease, of impending horror, threatening I knew not what. Suddenly I was seized with an intense desire to rend, tear, destroy, break, and, to this moment I believe—nay, I know—that some *outside* influence prompted me to grasp the hammer I had been using shortly before and smash and batter at that innocent-appearing mass before me until I had reduced it to a pile of small fragments. The instant this had been accomplished the frenzy left

me as suddenly as it had taken possession of my actions, but the feeling of depression seemed to intensify. Gloomily I surveyed the debris, and wondered whether my close application to work might be precipitating a nervous breakdown. Surely I had received no warning of any overtaking of my nervous system—yet how otherwise could I account for the maniacal frenzy which had possessed me a few minutes before, and for the haunting feeling of impending evil which I was even then experiencing?

With a mental determination to visit one of my old colleagues, at the earliest opportunity, for a complete physical examination I abstractedly picked up the pliers lying on the table and idly turned and milled in the heap of fragments. A red, baleful flash arrested my roving glance; carefully I pushed the concealing pieces away until I was able to see—

An octohedral crystal, of a peculiar blood-red color which made it seem strangely alive, sentient, evil, pregnant with an undisclosed menace, a balefulness almost unbearable, greatly intensified by a flickering flashing which seemed to emanate from within its being—an *animate inanimate*.

Almost fearfully I picked it up with the pliers—then dropped it instantly with a low cry of pain. I had felt a distinct shock. Was it pain? Reaction? I do not know how to describe the sensation, but there was no doubt as to its unpleasantness. This was followed by a feeling of such great lassitude that I decided to retire immediately to obtain the night's rest of which I felt greatly in need.

Leaving the thing where it had dropped, I went to bed and finally dropped into a troubled and restless sleep. The feeling of depression seemed almost unbearable when I awoke the next morning, and I decided that I would pass up all social engagements until I had regained my normal physical condition. I thought

no more of the crystal or my experience with it, for with the coming of the morning and daylight everything seemed normal and usual. How little I knew!

Thus it happened that on the evening when chance brought to my attention the article, I had proceeded to the point where I looked for an especially outstanding crystal which was to provide the *pièce de résistance* of my "chemical garden," and I saw IT. Carefully, remembering the result of my handling on the previous occasion, I grasped it in the pliers, with absolutely no physical result whatsoever. Almost there seemed to be a lessening of that feeling of depression which still weighed me down. I smiled at this; surely I had been the victim of overwrought nerves, of nervous strain, hallucination.

Dropping the crystal with careful precision, I had the satisfaction of seeing it land in the center of the base, just where I had planned. Due, I thought, to some peculiar refractive effect of the liquid in which I had just immersed it, there seemed to emanate from the crystal an intense blood-red shower of flashes. Again I had that uncomfortable feeling of sentiency, of life-being. There was something triumphant, malicious, inimical, saturnine, which I seemed to sense in the radiancy of those flashes.

Determined not to permit myself to be influenced by what I was satisfied was merely an unpleasant symptom of my physical condition, I pulled down the adjustable light so as to throw as much illumination as possible on the globe, pulled a comfortable overstuffed rocker close to the table, filled and lighted my old, caked Jimmy-pipe, tightened the cord of the dressing-gown, and settled myself to a patient waiting for the phenomenon of the crystal growth.

FOR perhaps half an hour I could see no change. Little streamers of red, blue, green, orange and all the

various colors of the crystals I had placed in the globe seemed to form from them and rise lazily a short distance upward. But the crystals themselves were motionless, inactive, quiescent—wait, was that a movement? A quivering? So slightly that I could not at the moment be sure whether it had actually occurred, or whether my imagination, spurred by my tense expectancy, had deceived me, the red crystal seemed to stir; a moment later I was sure—the crystal was growing. Another crystal, of equal size, and attached to the first by one facet, had sprung into being. A moment later—another, and another. Faster and faster new crystals, each attached to the facet from which it had developed, materialized before my almost unbelieving gaze. Fascinated, breathless, my eyes riveted on the miracle occurring before me, I waited. New formations, endlessly branching, laterally, upward; each, as it formed, glowing with that same blood-red, vaguely threatening, *sentient* inner light which had so affected me on first seeing IT.

In less than ten minutes it had outgrown the bowl, spreading out above the curved lip of the top, forming new crystals so rapidly that the eye could not follow their ramifications, growing—growing. . . .

The feeling of depression, of impending evil, was becoming cumulatively more acute. Proportionately with the growth of the thing, the sensation became increasingly unbearable; I felt that I must tear myself away—or go mad.

And then it happened.

A single point, a few more, then many, then—a shower of flickering flashes (how else shall I describe them?) leaped from that ghoully thing to surround, encompass, bathe me from head to foot. Instantly I was paralyzed, immovable, a frozen statue of horror. Only for a moment, however; then—

Such excruciating agony as would

have drawn a sigh of pity from the most hardened fiend in hell took possession of my being; every muscle, nerve, fiber, every cell of my poor body seemed to be rended, dragged, forced, torn away from every other. A living dissolution, a disintegration of myself into the infinite particles which before had constituted me—and each particle suffering separately the agony which yet was the whole!

How long this unbearable, excruciating quintessence of pain endured I can not tell; it seemed ages, eons, infinity; then—

All those uncountable, infinitesimal, separate particles, which yet were the entity which constituted myself, rose to meet and mingle with IT.

Understand me—I was not absorbed, I did not lose my identity; I was myself, and yet—I was—IT.

Perhaps I can better describe the incredible occurrence by saying that the phenomenon which occurred was much the same as when two swarms of bees approach, mingle, and pass through each other, assuming and regaining their separate identity (which had never been lost) after the passage. So I met and mingled with IT—but I did not pass through.

I was agonized with pain, yet my being thrilled with a great, palpitant, unbearable happiness, an elation, an ecstasy beyond human comprehension. I was dead, annihilated; yet I lived more poignantly than ever. Each separate particle that had been a part of me was now myself—yet I no longer existed! My ego lived completely in every dissociated cell—yet I was IT. All those agonies of dissolution seemed now the labor pains of a great birth—IT had borne me—yet I was now the author of ITS being!

IT—I—WE were still growing. I could see IT—US—reaching out, enlarging, expanding—haleful, evil, pitiless, yet, withal, noble, a supreme intelligence, *consciously* wielding a force unknown to Earth to carry out

the instinct of propagation implanted by an all-knowing nature.

Dimly my—our mind seemed to dwell upon another scene—a bleak, sparsely vegetated plain with strange, ghastly forms—obscene, slinking, nauseating, yet nevertheless life, as humans know it, dominated by sentient, intelligent, purposeful beings, such as I—we—were now; beings rooted in the thin layer of spongy, friable, silicate-bearing formation, such as that specimen which had been brought to what had been I (was it hours? ages? an infinity ago?); beings dependent for their life, their growth, their very existence upon the absorption of the silicate content of the material in which their roots were imbedded, and from the atmosphere; beings who realized that their slow growth and uncertain propagation were due to the small amount of the substance, so necessary to them, which was available in the restricted area to which they were confined, and who, through the ages, developed within themselves a force which, consciously directed, was powerful enough to disrupt the atomic formation of living tissue, breaking it up into its component parts, and drawing the whole into themselves, make it a part of their being.

Vaguely I seemed to sense these intelligences working their will upon all living things in that far distant world unfortunate enough to come within the scope of their force—taking unto themselves the lives, the vitality, the power, the knowledge, of their poor victims—*vampirism*, upon a scale undreamed of—*unholy*—annihilating—and now loosed upon this poor, defenseless, unsuspecting world.

Ever more acutely I became conscious of a sensation of loss, of weakening, of debilitation. The sense of exultation, of exaltation, seemed lessening, yet the tearing, rending pain seemed augmented, if that were possible; and, at first slowly, then ever

more rapidly, the infinitesimal particles that had been I swarmed (there is no better way to describe the happening) from the annihilating embrace of IT, settled, coalesced, homogenized, became once more—myself!

The searing, tearing pain grew less, became almost a subconscious realization, as though a beneficent nature, recognizing that my poor body had undergone suffering to the ultimate, had mercifully spread upon it a numbing anesthesia.

Fearfully I raised my eyes to IT; then stared, incredible. All the light, the fire, the *sentientcy*, were gone! IT was dying—dead! A mass, almost filling the room, of branched—crystals; no more!

I glanced at the bowl which had nurtured that evil cosmos—empty, dry, drained of every vestige of the life-giving fluid from which IT had drawn sustenance, and which had, in the concentrated form, destroyed the very thing it suckled by giving too freely to its insatiate demands, until there was no more.

Even as I watched it there came an appearance of opacity, a dullness; the mass took on an aspect of decomposition; branches began to drop off here and there, thudding to the floor and there disintegrating, so that, within a few minutes, all that was left of what had been an all-powerful, malignant entity, apparently threatening the life on our globe, was a dull red powder, scattered about the floor of the laboratory.

THERE is but little more to write. I feel no particularly bad physical effects from the terrible experience, but mentally I shall never recover. The horror of those few hours will remain with me to the grave—possibly even beyond that bourne of supposed rest and surcease. I have denied myself to all callers and am going to commit the entire experi-

ence to paper while the details are still fresh (as though I could ever forget them!) in my mind. They will make interesting reading for my friends, should I ever summon the courage to permit them to peruse this record. Most likely I should be accused of having patronized an especially bad bootlegger, or of having aspirations to being pointed out as a writer of weird fiction, possessed of an exceptionally imaginative mind.

I have just glanced over the last paragraph, and I note that I made the statement that I feel no particularly bad physical effects from my experience. I wish to modify that statement slightly, though I believe the matter of which I am about to speak has no direct bearing upon the experience itself. For the last two hours I have been feeling a sort of pressure—from the inside—just under the skin, all over my body, much as though a number of boils were trying to “come to a head.” The sensation is not painful; it is more of irritation or itching. I have just noticed that little nodules are actually becoming noticeable! There is one developing on the back of my right hand as I write; it is growing larger very rapidly; strangely, the center is almost white, while the swollen surrounding tissue is a peculiar deep red. It is losing its symmetrical, round shape, and starting from the central point it slopes away, angularly, in several directions, almost like the facets of a crystal—

It is bursting through—a blood-red, flashing, sentient—

Oh—my—God—

• • • • •

June 16, 1927.

I hereby certify that the foregoing is a true and correct transcription of the document delivered to me for deciphering by Officer Slayton on the

13th inst., to the best of my knowledge and belief.

J. MANVILLE,  
Chirographic Expert.

• • • • •  
*Reprint of an article in the Evening Herald, dated June 12, 1927:*

#### Prominent Attorney Missing

Edward Martin, age 46, who has been a practising attorney in this city for many years, has been reported missing to the police department. His absence was first noted on the 5th, but no particular attention was paid to the fact, as his friends thought he had left for a short business trip and would soon return.

The protracted stay, however, alarmed them and an inquiry was set on foot. The manager of the apartment in which he has maintained bachelor quarters states that she spoke with Mr. Martin on the 3rd, and that he appeared in splendid health and spirits. He had made no statement of any anticipated trip. She willingly opened his apartment for the inspection of the officers, but a careful search disclosed no clues.

On the table of a room which he had evidently fitted up to be used as a chemical laboratory were found a number of closely written sheets, unintelligible to the officers, due to the rather illegible writing of Mr. Martin. While it is believed that these have no bearing on the inquiry, they have been turned over to the handwriting expert of the department and a full report of the contents will be in the possession of the officers in a few days.

The report also showed that the floor of the laboratory was covered with a heavy layer of some dark red powder, probably dry paint. A large-sized mound of this material was found between the folds of a lounging-robe, lying on the seat of an overstuffed chair in the laboratory. In this mound the officers discovered a valuable diamond ring, identified as the property of Mr. Martin, and worn by him when last seen.

Captain Ellsworth, chief of detectives, is of the opinion that Mr. Martin may be the victim of the gang which has terrorized the community for some time, as he was known to be moderately wealthy. Every possible effort is being made by the department to locate the missing man.

