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This isn't a new story, but one that has been told many times before. Yet this time it is told in a very effective fashion, with a cold sensation that runs up and down your spine from the moment you first suspect the thing that is going to happen until it does happen. When you finish, you will ask yourself: "Do things like this really happen? And how do they happen?" Yes, they do happen. Any psychiatrist can assure you that it is not only possible, but rather frequent, among the more primitive races of the earth. Many of them claim that results depend on the knowledge by the victim of what is being done. Your editor would rather not be so sure!

HENDERSON strode impatiently down the narrow street, threading his way past patient, pannier-laden donkeys; angry, spitting, eternally incensed llamas and crowds of bare-foot Indians balancing enormous baskets on their heads.

He entered the open door of a flat-roofed adobe house, hurried through a single room to the patio beyond and crossed this inner court to another half-darkened adobe structure.

As his shadow fell across the threshold, a decrepit Indian woman who resembled nothing so much as a mummy appeared in the doorway.

Henderson's tired eyes sought her face. "How is he?"

The woman shifted her cud of

coca leaves and shook her head. "Last night the freezing; today again the fever."

He pushed past her into the room, pausing a moment until his eyes became accustomed to the shadowy interior.

In one corner of the room a paraffin lamp spluttered ineffectually and next to it on a homemade cot Larrifer tossed and moaned as he had done for three days. He was light-headed and feverish, given to hallucinations, and he did not recognize the man who had been his close associate and business partner for half a decade.

A week before he had enjoyed vigorous good health and spirits; today he was half alive, a muttering, sleepless bundle of parchment-like skin and protruding bones.

DEATH IN PERU

By

Joseph Payne Brennan



The Wizard

Henderson stood by the cot, scowling, studying the wasted fever-racked form. At length he turned away, inwardly cursing his luck, cursing the business venture that had brought them to this inaccessible Peruvian village. It would be days, possibly even weeks, before the runner returned with the only white doctor in the vicinity. And Larrifer was getting worse almost by the hour.

He gave some brief instructions to the Indian woman, moved at a weary gait along the sun-steeped inner wall of the patio and bent through a narrow archway which gave access to the garden in the rear of the buildings. Angling off the grass-grown pathway, he reached the shade of a giant araucaria tree and sat down.

The setting suited his mood. In former more prosperous days the

garden had no doubt boasted delicate capuchin roses and gorgeous white trumpet flowers, but today it was the abode of dust-coated prickly pear, unsightly Indian figs and black creeping thorn thickets.

He surveyed the scene with distaste and tried to think.

At first he had assured himself that Larrifer had contacted some tropical ailment, something brought on by the food or the water, or by the climate itself. But Larrifer had spent years in the tropics. And the usual medicines did not help as they had in the past. And then there was the attitude of the native Indians.

Of course he knew what they were thinking—what they were whispering among themselves. They believed that Larrifer was bewitched.

THE story had had its inception two weeks before when Larrifer with his usual excess of animal spirits had become enamoured of the young daughter of a family of poor maize growers on the outskirts of the village. The girl was hardly more than a child to a white man's way of thinking, but Larrifer had experienced no great difficulty in satisfying his desires. The girl's parents, with that curious native blend of **inbred** fatalism and **passivity**, had at least outwardly consented, even if they did not inwardly approve. They were poor people and a little gold was like an immense fortune.

But it appeared that the girl had an admirer. He was a young lad, an Indian, who roamed like a vicuna in the nearby mountains and occasionally visited the village. Several days after Larrifer's little affair he had come down from the mountain with a sprig of blue snow flowers for the maize grower's daughter.

Of course he had soon learned what was on the tip of every gossip's tongue.

He had done nothing—nothing, that is, which to a white man would appear especially meaningful or sinister. He had merely loafed outside Larrifer's lodging until Larrifer appeared. Then he had fixed on Larrifer a strange concentrated gaze, turned on his heel without a word, and disappeared.

Larrifer had been annoyed, no more. But the next day he was ill. He had been sick ever since. And he was steadily growing worse.

Henderson hated to admit the fact even to himself—but actually he was half in agreement with the Indians. He had been the unwilling witness to more than one inexplicable event during his sojourn in the tropics. There were some things he would never admit, things he disbelieved with his mind but believed with another part of himself, with his heart, with his instincts, with some primitive elemental part of his being which did not reason but merely accepted without explanation.

That night his tired brain kept on speculating even in sleep. He

kept dreaming of Larrifer, Larrifer coming out of his adobe lodgings into the sun-flooded street and meeting the young Indian lad who lived like a vicuna on the mountaintops. He saw Larrifer's satisfied smile turn to a grimace of sudden irritation as the lad stared at him, saw the young Indian turn away meekly without uttering a single syllable and vanish in the crowd, saw a sprig of blue snow flowers lying unnoticed on the footstones, trampled by the throngs, withering in the sun.

THE next day Henderson paid a surreptitious visit to the town's reputed sorcerer, a centenarian sandal-maker who dealt in toads' hearts and condor claws and according to local legend made a yearly pilgrimage to a shrine of the elder gods, the lost Incan deities, deep in the mountains.

The gnarled peering ancient emerged from the rear of his shop like a reluctant spider, shading his eyes, as if the faint sunlight filtering through the dust-filmed windows was more than he could bear.

Haltingly, Henderson told his tale. He finished, hinted at the huge reward he was willing to pay for his friend's cure, and waited, hopefully.

The old man spoke at last, his voice as toneless and far-away as an evening wind rustling in distant guava trees.

"The sun burns the mountains by day; by night the mountains

freeze in the wind."

He started to turn away, then added, as if with an after-thought: "Take the llama trail that leads to the top of the mountain. At the end of the path, before the snow line, the earth has been broken. There you must dig."

Henderson paid him, somewhat furtively departed, and hurried back toward his own quarters. With many misgivings, he packed a light lunch, and after stowing it in a knapsack along with a few other items, set out for the mountains. He carried a small pick in his belt and under his left arm in a hidden holster a .32 caliber automatic pistol.

He did not like riddles, and as a matter of fact, had little real faith in the sorcerer's advice. He would never have admitted to any white man that he intended climbing to the top of a mountain on the suggestion of a Peruvian sandal-maker who worshipped the gods of the Incas and dealt in such items as toads' hearts and the preserved finger joints of suicides' hands. He would not quite admit the real object of his little jaunt even to himself. He assured himself that he needed fresh air and sunshine; he needed exercise too. And there would be a splendid view from the mountain.

He passed the maize fields on the outskirts of the village, and after crossing a dreary plain, barren save for patches of forbidding thorn thicket, began a gradual ascent of the mountain. The foothills

with their grass slopes and hidden song birds seemed especially inviting, but as he toiled upward the grass gave way to grey lichen and at length almost absolute silence prevailed.

THE llama trail led along ragged cliffs, skirting steep yawning gorges, so that prudence demanded his eyes remain ever on his feet and the better the view be-

growing sense of horror. He seemed to have entered another world, a world composed of soundlessness and space, a timeless world of brooding mystery where even the eons left hardly a sign.

He recalled the sorcerous sandal-maker with a feeling of dread and began to wish he had never consulted the hoary dispenser of charms.

At length, however, he reached



Wenderson

came the less he was able to enjoy it. Occasionally the rocks creaked in the colder air but this only accentuated the growing silence. Once a huge shadow dropped across the path and he whirled in momentary terror. The cold unswerving eyes of a passing condor stared down at him and then the majestic bird floated off across an adjacent gorge.

In spite of himself, he shuddered. He began to become conscious of a

the end of the llama trail, which was as close to the top of the mountain as all but a vicuna might get, and recalled the words of the wizard: "At the end of the path, before the snow-line, the earth has been broken. There you must dig."

Just ahead of him the fringe of a snow-field glittered in the sun. He began to inspect the ground. Although there was no sign of any recent trespasser, neither footprints nor hoof marks, he decided on a

systematic search. Watching the ground carefully, he started near the snow-field, pacing off parallel strips.

Finally his efforts were rewarded. About three yards from the edge of the snow-line he discovered a small patch of recently disturbed earth.

As he removed the pick from his belt and began to dig, the little hairs on the nape of his neck tin-

He gasped with astonishment as the thing came into view. It was a peculiarly repellent little doll, a kind of puppet about eight inches high, moulded out of some wax-like sticky substance which was probably llama fat mixed with maize meal. Although the point of his pick had rather seriously damaged its head, there was no mistaking the crudely-shaped features. The doll's face was undoubtedly



Larrifer

gled and lifted. There was something weird and uncanny about the business. How had a decrepit cobbler in the village known that at this particular spot on the mountain he would find a patch of freshly broken earth? How had he known that.

He started as his pick struck into something that was not earth. Laying the implement aside, he carefully scooped away the loose dirt with his hands.

modeled after Larrifer's.

As he lifted it from its earthen bed he noticed several short hairs glued to the top of its head. Coarse, reddish-brown hairs. Larrifer's.

The sandal-maker's riddle suddenly rang in his ears with its full meaning. "The sun burns the mountains by day; by night the mountains freeze in the wind."

So that was it! Larrifer wracked by a raging fever during the day; Larrifer seized with fits of freezing

by night! A puppet made in Larrifer's likeness buried on the mountain, baked by the heat of the sun during the day, frozen by the frigid winds that swept over these peaks by night!

Of course, it was a coincidence, and yet

CAREFULLY, he deposited the puppet in his knapsack, replaced the pick in his belt, and began to retrace his footsteps down the llama path. Glancing at his watch, he saw that it was just after three o'clock. He suddenly felt very much alone and began to hurry in spite of the serious consequences which a misstep might entail. He almost wished for a glimpse of the condor even though it had frightened him before. He forgot completely the lunch which he carried. There was something eerie and terrifying about these mountains. Under different circumstances he might have gloried in their grim lonely grandeur, but that caricature of Larrifer staring up at him out of the freshly broken earth had shaken his nerve. He fingered the butt of his pistol and more than once glanced warily over his shoulder.

Once he reached the foothills however, his apprehension vanished. He felt ashamed of himself and smiled when he thought what an amusing little story he would someday tell at his own expense. The time a little wax doll had sent him scurrying down a mountain like a

frightened child!

He decided to go at once and look in on Larrifer. For some reason he felt optimistic. Perhaps today Larrifer had thrown off the usual fever and fallen into a quiet sleep.

The minute he crossed through the patio however, he knew that something was wrong. Nearly a dozen Indians stood clustered near the open doorway of Larrifer's room. They were silent and as he approached they stiffened in expectancy.

He hurried up, glancing from one to another. "What is it?"

The old coca leaf chewer who resembled a mummy looked fearfully into the room and made a sign to ward off demons. She began to mutter unintelligibly in her native tongue.

Henderson frowned in impatience, thrust her aside and hurried into the shadowy quarters.

THE paraffin lamp still spluttered in one corner of the room and as Henderson approached the cot there was revealed to him by its flickering light a spectacle which rooted him to the floor in a rush of sudden horror.

Larrifer lay dead on the cot, his skull ripped open as if by a savage blow, and on his face an expression of unspeakable terror. Blood saturated the cot and in the deathly silence Henderson could hear the drops which had soaked through drip into a pool on the floor.

At last he tore his eyes away from the ghastly scene, and gradually his initial horror and shock were replaced by gathering rage. He saw it all now! The cunning sandal-maker had deliberately tricked him! He had been sent on a charlatan's goose-chase up the mountain so that he would not be on hand to interfere when the revengeful young Indian lad crept in to kill Larrifer! No doubt the sorcerer had informed the lad soon after he left.

He rushed outside and began to shriek curses at the bewildered Indians. Clutching the aged Indian women who had been Larrifer's designated attendant, he accused her of aiding in his murder.

His rough grasp and accusations seemed to rouse the creature out of the daze which until now had locked her tongue.

Shaking off his hand, she vehemently denied any hand in the hideous business.

But Henderson was not pacified. Why, then, he demanded, had she left the premises? Perhaps if she

had remained in the room—as she was being paid to do—the terrible deed might never have occurred.

But again she shook her head. She was willing to swear a sacred oath by the gods of the Incas that she had been not more than two feet from the doorway when Larrifer screamed in his last dreadful agony. No one had entered the room before that last fearful shriek; no one had quitted it afterward.

Suddenly a wild insane thought struck Henderson and his voice shook as he asked the old Indian woman another question.

At exactly what time, he inquired, had that terrible last scream been heard?

She crossed herself. "It was just as the bells of the church were ringing three, señor."

He stared at her transfixed with horror, numb, sick, cold in the hot sunlight—for *Larrifer had screamed and died at almost the exact instant that Henderson's pick had crunched into the head of the little buried puppet up on the mountain!*

