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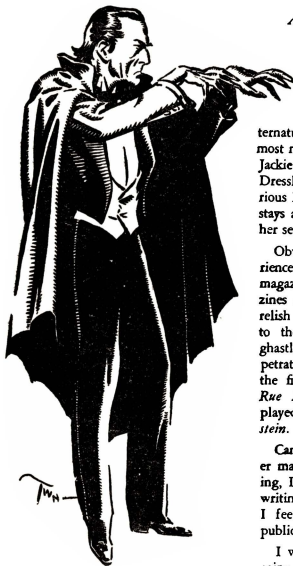
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# Demons of the

By THEODORE

*A gigantic hoax was perpetrated on "Frankenstein" Karloff, aided*



Lugosi as Dracula

**F**OR ten years I have been writing stories about the activities of the motion picture colony for what are known as the "fan" magazines; and, in strict justice to the movie people in and

about Hollywood, I never before had an experience such as the one that befell me recently — for there is nothing weird, preternatural or otherwise affrighting about most motion picture people, from the child Jackie Cooper to the more elderly Marie Dressler. There have been, it is true, curious legends about Greta Garbo, but she stays away from interviewers. Whatever her secret, she keeps it.

Obviously, I could not relate the experience I had in the pages of a "fan" magazine. The readers of these magazines are too accustomed to sunshine to relish shadows. So I decided to submit to the readers of WEIRD TALES the ghastly details of the gigantic hoax perpetrated on me by Bela Lugosi, star of the films *Dracula* and *Murders in the Rue Morgue*, and Boris Karloff, who played the monster in the film *Frankenstein*.

Candidly, for reasons which the reader may surmise before he finishes reading, I have hesitated considerably about writing of just what happened, but now I feel I should make what happened public.

I was just leaving Universal City one rainy, dreary morning when John Le Roy Johnstone, Universal publicity director, called to me:

"Ted, don't go away. I just happened to think that our two demons, 'Dracula' Lugosi and 'Frankenstein' Karloff, are coming here in a few minutes. A demons'

# Film Colony

LeBERTHON

*the author by "Dracula" Lugosi and  
and abetted by the photographer*

rendezvous ought to interest you. I might add that they're hastening here from opposite directions, to meet for the first time. They actually have never met. You see, *Dracula* and *Murders in the Rue Morgue*, in which Lugosi starred, were made here at different times than *Frankenstein*, in which Karloff played the ghastly, man-made monster. And that's why they've never met professionally. Nor have they ever met socially, although both have been in Hollywood, on and off, for several years. But you know the film colony. All split up into little groups and circles."

I didn't mind sticking around. For one thing, a murky drizzle had begun to fall outside. The mammoth Universal stages, seen through a window, seemed, in the grayness, to be enormous squat tombs, unadorned sarcophagi in which giants five hundred feet tall, stretched in death, could be laid. It might not be a bad idea, I concluded, to wait around a little, if only to give the rain a chance to stop.

"Doggoned if it isn't just the kind of a morning for a couple of monsters to meet," laughed Johnstone. "And do you know something, I've a queer hunch something funny'll happen when they meet. Not that there's any professional rivalry between them in the demon field, as far as I know; but there's been a lot of banter going around the studio about the weird possibilities, you know, the things that could happen, when *Dracula* meets the *Frankenstein* monster! Candidly, I wouldn't be surprised if they try to frame each other."

"What do you mean?" I chuckled nervously.

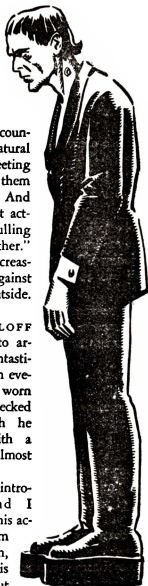
"Well," he countered, "it's natural that this meeting should strike them both as funny. And you know what actors are for pulling gags on each other."

The rain, increasing, muttered against the ground outside.

**B**ORIS KARLOFF was first to arrive—and, fantastically enough, in evening clothes, worn under a rain-flecked overcoat which he tossed off with a mischievous, almost boyish fling.

We were introduced. And I learned, from his accent, then from his admission, that his name is not Karloff, but that he is an Englishman with a most unfortunate name. But we won't go into that.

He is slender, debonair, graceful, with



*Karloff as Frankenstein's  
monster*

powerful shoulders and large strong hands, smooth iron-gray hair, darkly tanned skin, and lucent, deep-set brown eyes. A witty, casual, well-bred fellow, with one of those strong-boned, hollow-cheeked countenances that seems carved out of hickory, and is characteristic of so many well-travelled, weather-beaten, distinguished-appearing Britishers.

He joked waggishly, this Englishman from God knows where, whose name is *not* Karloff, about his coming meeting with Bela Lugosi.

As he was talking, and Johnstone and I were absorbed in his high spirits, the door leading to the studio outside evidently opened. No one saw it open. In fact, we did not see anything until Karloff, who faced the door as he chatted with us, suddenly looked up and asseverated startlingly, "Oh my God!"

Johnstone and I looked around and I don't know what he thought or felt. I do know I became visibly disconcerted, to put it lightly.

There stood Lugosi, filling the doorway, quiet as death, and smiling in his curiously knowing way. It is the smile of a tall, weary, haunted aristocrat, a person of perhaps fallen greatness, a secretive Lucifer who sees too clearly and knows too much, and perhaps wishes it were not so, and would like to be a gracious chap. He, too, was in evening clothes—on a rainy morning! He advanced with a soft, springy tread.

Karloff stood up as if galvanized by some sudden irrevocable plan of action. Then he turned on the advancing Lugosi a cold, unbelieving stare that would have riveted another man in his tracks. But the tall, tapering-fingered Hungarian, drawing himself erect, continued to smile with unmistakably ghastly knowingness.

IT WAS Lugosi's hand which was thrust forward first.

As they shook hands they seemed to lock horns with their eyes. Only for a moment, however; for both broke into ear-to-ear grins.

"I hope I didn't scare you to death," Lugosi smiled, narrowing his eyes, and seeming to look right through the quondam monster.

"I hope I didn't scare *you*," parried Karloff mirthfully.

I could not be certain, but I thought Lugosi bristled, as if his demoniacal prowess had been challenged by a tyro in demonism.

Finally he said slowly:

"I think I could scare you to death."

Karloff struck a match, lit a cigarette, puffed a couple of times, and retorted with an air of whimsical scorn:

"I not only think I can scare your ears right off, Mr. Dracula, I'll bet you that I can."

Within the next few minutes a wager of a hundred dollars had been made. They would go onto a deserted set, within one of the vast, empty, tomb-like stages squatting in the rain outside. No lights would be turned on. They would tell each other stories—such stories of darkness, terror and madness that one or the other would either faint or cry out for the other to stop. The other would then be pronounced victor.

Publicist Johnstone, grinning a bit unconvincingly, as if he were somehow ill, protested:

"There should be a referee. You go along, Le Berthon, and decide which one out-scars the other. And, I'll tell you what. Take Ray Jones, the photographer, along. He can get incontrovertible evidence."

"I don't want to oppose your wishes,"

put in Lugosi, his eyes widening like wrathful alarm signals, "but I would rather be alone with Mr. Karloff. You won't need any evidence. All you may need is a doctor, a nerve and heart specialist. You see, only one of us will walk off that stage. The other will be . . . cr . . . carried off."

He said this with some heat, yet with a growing twinkle in eyes which gradually narrowed again. But Johnstone was obdurate.

And so, two tall actors in evening clothes, a photographer, and a writer walked with bowed heads and hunched shoulders in the rain to reach the stage building with its unfortunate resemblance, for me, to a colossal sepulcher.

**WE** ENTERED a small door in the side, nearly tripping over cables that coiled like lifeless serpents about the floor in the dank, dusky atmosphere. Photographer Jones lit a match. We found our way to a set where, among other articles of furniture, there was a davenport. It was then agreed that Jones could take photographs if he and I would stand twenty-five feet away in a dark corner, and if he would use only noiseless flash powder.

The tall actors in evening clothes sat on the davenport. In the obscure gloom we scarcely could discern their figures. But soon we were to hear a mournful voice, Lugosi's.

"Boris," he began, in a gloating sonority, "what would you say if this set, this stage, this studio, suddenly vanished, and you found that in reality you and I were sitting at the bottom of a pit? Ha! That would be inconvenient for you, wouldn't it? But of course I might provide some charming company—I might drag down into this pit an exquisite young woman. And I should indulge in a curious ex-

periment that would cause your hair to turn white—and your stomach to turn inside out.

"Boris," he went on in a ghoulish, sickeningly exultant tone, "women are thrilled by Dracula, the suave one. Women love the horrible, the creepy, more than men. Why does a woman always tell the story of her husband's death so often and with such relish? Why does she go to cemeteries? Tenderness? Grief? Bah! It's because she likes to be hurt, tortured, terrified! Yes, Boris! Ah, Boris, take her with you to see *Dracula*, the movie. As she sees me, the bat-like vampire, swoop through an open casement into some girl's boudoir, there to sink teeth into neck and drink blood, she will thrill through every nerve and fiber. That is your cue to draw close to her, Boris. When she is limp as a rag, take her where you will, do with her what you will. Ah, especially, Boris, bite her on the neck!

"The love-bite, it is the beginning. In the end, you too, Boris, will become a vampire. You will live five hundred years. You will sleep in moldy graves at night, and make fiendish love to beauties by day. You will see generations live and die. You will see a girl baby born to some woman, and wait a mere sixteen to eighteen years for her to grow up, so that you can sink fangs into a soft white neck and drink a scarlet stream. You will be irresistible, for you will have in your powerful body the very heat of hell, the virility of Satan. And some day, of course, you will be discovered—a knife, after long centuries, will be plunged into you, you will groan like a dying wolf, and you will drop like a plummet into the bottomless sulfurous pit. Yes, Boris, that's the end—for you! For us! For, look at me, Boris . . ."

"Ha! Ha! Ha! You fool, Bela," came

Karloff's scornful, pealing laugh in the darkness, "why try that kindergarten stuff on me? You ask me to look at you, Bela. Well, look at me! Look . . . look . . . look . . . and take an occasional glance upward, Bela. These two hands of mine, clenched together above my head, could descend at any moment, in a second, ay, even before I finish this sentence, if I wanted them to, and they'd bash your distinguished head in as if it were an egg. Your brains would run out like the yolk of an egg, and spatter your pretty tuxedo.

"Bela, a monster created by Frankenstein is not worried by your stories of sucking blood from beauties' necks. But did you see the movie *Frankenstein*, Bela? Did you see me take an innocent little girl, a child playing among flowers, and drown her? Some sentimentalists said I did it unknowingly. Bosh! I have done it a thousand times, and will do it a thousand times again. Bela, it's dark in here, but you know me. You know it was no accident or chance, but significant, that I—the Englishman from God knows where whose name is *not* Karloff—was called upon to play that monstrous role! You know me, Bela, you know me. Why that bosh about five hundred years old? You know that both of us are nearly six thousand years old! And that we've met many times before, the last time not more than two hundred years ago. . . . And you shouldn't have made that foolish wager. Admit it, Bela!" Karloff's voice shook with deep agitation.

"I wonder," came Lugosi's reply, dreary as a fog-horn in the semi-darkness.

In the meantime, Photographer Jones in his scarce-visible corner kept snapping pictures. The noiseless powder recurrently rose in puffs, so that—spookily enough

—the scene resembled the laboratory of a mediæval alchemist.

"Come, Bela—let's go. Er . . . Jones, Le Berthon," Karloff shouted hoarsely, "are you ready to go? Bela and I have found we're members of the same—well, suppose we say lodge. We're therefore, quite unable to scare each other to death, for reasons you might not understand, even to oblige you. You'll just have to call it a draw."

"All right, we're ready to go," responded Jones, nervously enough for that matter. "And—say—I've used up my last match. Will one of you fellows strike one?"

I SHALL never know whether it was Lugosi or Karloff who struck the match. All I do know is that when the match was struck it apparently revealed, not Lugosi and Karloff on that davenport, but two slimy, scaly monsters, dragon-like serpents, with blood-red, venomous eyes. The apparitional things flashed before me so suddenly that I became sick to my stomach and made a rush, on buckling legs, for the exit—and the cool air.

Just as I reached it and noted fleetingly that the rain had stopped, and that my heart was pounding to the bursting-point, and that I was strangely weak and giddy, Jones and the two tall actors in evening clothes came through the door. Jones was rather sober and unconcerned, but Lugosi and Karloff were laughing heartily over something or other.

"Will you have lunch with us?" Lugosi asked me, still grinning but with something of a physician's tender concern.

"No, thank you," I replied, scarcely looking either at him or Karloff, "I have to hurry away."

And I did hurry away.

I am, of course, now convinced that

what happened was their idea of a practical joke, that the slimy, scaly things I had seen, the things which had so frightened and sickened me in that fleeting moment, were either the imaginings of my over-wrought nerves—or some mechanically contrived illusions in which Jones had some share.

There are, of course, some who will wonder if I do not merely prefer this

simple, comforting explanation to one that might cause Hollywood hostesses to fear to invite Lugosi and Karloff to social functions—and fear not to invite them!

Many people, deep down, still are superstitious. And there are many things in life we do not fully understand, such as why it is the destiny of certain human beings to portray certain roles—whether in real or "reel" life.

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