

WEIRD TALES *The Unique Magazine*

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A Five-Minute Tale by Culpeper Chunn

Doctor X

OUR OLD PROFESSOR, Sven Borgen, has become famous almost over night," I remarked, glancing up from the morning paper. "You remember him, don't you, Pat?" "Sure," returned McKane, lazily flicking an imaginary speck of dust from his burnt-orange tie. "The Swede who used to lecture on psychology at G. W. I. during our last year there. He was bow-legged and had a cast in his right eye. Erratic nut, what? We used to call him Bug. What has he done now? Proclaimed himself emperor of Wuzu or eloped with his grandmother?"

"Nothing of such international concern," I said. "But he appears to have gotten himself in the limelight just the same. A few days ago it became known that he had perfected an operation for grafting the brain of an animal in the cranium of another animal of the same species, in much the same way, as I understand it, that living tissue and bone are grafted on human beings."

"Ah!" rejoined McKane, and yawned. "What is Consolidated Steel quoted at this morning?"

"His experiments have been successful to a degree almost past belief," I continued, ignoring his question. "The paper says that out of fifty operations

performed on dogs and other small mammals only two proved fatal. These operations, the account continues, have been performed chiefly on living animals, but in one case at least the brain of a live dog was grafted in the cranium of a dog killed by concussion of the brain. The dead dog was brought to life."

"Tough on the first pup," Pat commented.

"Although Borgen's experiments have been confined to animal subjects," I resumed, "he was recently granted permission by the Swedish authorities to experiment with incurable patients in an asylum for the insane, but on the very day the story was given out to the papers—which, by the way, are playing it up big—he was run over by a street car and instantly killed."

"Lucky devil," said McKane, without much interest. "If he had lived he would have ended his days in a dippy-house. Brain-graft? Pooh! The man had ants in his attic."

"I don't know so much about that," I rejoined. "The paper says—"

"Bunk!" McKane interrupted rudely.

"The paper says," I continued doggedly, "that he—"

"Piffle!"

"You are wrong," interposed a quiet voice behind us. "'Piffle' is scarcely the word. The story about Doctor Borgen in the morning papers is quite true. I happen to know the facts in the case."

I turned my head sharply and gazed at the speaker. He had stopped directly behind my chair and was gazing over my shoulder at the paper spread out over my knees.

He was a tall man of uncertain age and nationality, although there was an elusive something about him that suggested the Scandinavian. He had a saturnine face the color of old parchment, a hawklike nose, and a pair of glittering blue eyes that appeared greenly iridescent when one gazed into their depths. He was dressed in a shabby black suit of clothes, wore a slouch hat pulled down over his forehead, and a well-known brand of cigarette hung from between his thin red lips.

An unprepossessing person, in short, and yet, strangely enough, one who at once roused my interest.

"And who the devil might you be?" asked McKane, looking him up and down with an insolent eye.

"I beg your pardon," returned the stranger, without embarrassment, "I

happened to hear the tail-end of your conversation as I was passing, and as Doctor Borgen once honored me with his friendship, I could not let your statement touching his mental condition pass unchallenged. Sven Borgen was not a lunatic, as you seem to think, but a genius whose death will prove a sad blow to science."

"And this newspaper story is based on fact?" I questioned.

"So far as it goes," nodded the stranger, tossing the stub of his cigarette into the sea; "but the best part of the story, the crowning achievement of Doctor Borgen's life, in fact, has not been told. I wonder if you would care to hear it?"

"Why not?" I asked, and looked at McKane.

Pat nodded, but whether in acquiescence or in order to get the sun out of his eyes, I could not tell.

The stranger walked over to the rail, and for a moment stood gazing out over the vast expanse of water beneath him. The giant Cunard liner, *S. S. Princess Maritza*, had just swung past Sandy Hook and, in a sea as smooth as glass, was gathering speed with every revolution of her engines as she headed for European waters beneath a blazing hot sun.

I propped my feet up on the rail and sprawled out comfortably in my steamer chair. The trip over, it appeared, was not going to be as monotonous as I had at first believed. It promised well at the start, at any rate, I thought, as I watched the stranger coil his lank form in an unoccupied chair in front of us.

"Although the newspaper story fails to mention the fact," he began, directing his hypnotic gaze at McKane, "the idea of the brain-graft originated not with Doctor Borgen but with a surgeon whom we will call Doctor X. To perfect this operation was Doctor X's life-long ambition and he worked and experimented for over thirty years with this end in view.

"Almost at the very beginning, however, he realized that he would be unable to carry on his experiments unassisted,

and it was for this reason that he took his friend and colleague, Sven Borgen, into his confidence. With the latter's co-operation, the experiments were carried on in earnest over a period of many years, until at last science triumphed and the labors of the two surgeons were crowned with success.

"The brain-graft was an accomplished fact.

"The experiments, however, had been confined to the lower animals, and before revealing his secret to the world, Doctor X wanted to operate on subjects drafted from the human race.

"Think, gentlemen, what this operation, if successful, would mean to humanity. The alert brains of old men could be given a new lease on life in, say, the bodies of young, physically perfect lunatics, and the minds of geniuses could, by successive operations, be made to live on, perhaps—who knows—forever! It would only be a matter of time before the human race would become a race of supermen.

"But to continue: Doctor X, himself a very old man, had a son, a clean-limbed, strong-minded youngster about twenty-two years of age, who was attending a medical school in Copenhagen.

"One night shortly after Doctor X had brought the first phase of his experiments to a successful conclusion, he received a telegram informing him that his son had been severely injured in an automobile accident. The message came in the dead of night, long after Doctor X had retired, but he hurried into his clothes and caught the first train to Copenhagen.

"The boy had been taken to a hospital. He was suffering from a compound fracture of the skull and was not expected to live. Indeed, he regained consciousness only long enough after his father's arrival to realize that he was dying and to beg his parent, in the name of science, to use his body to carry on the brain-graft experiments. This Doctor X promised to do, and then, in spite of his heroic efforts to save the boy, his son died almost immediately afterwards of cerebral hemorrhage.

"It did not occur to Doctor X to break the promise he had made his boy. He was perfectly willing to sacrifice his own life if necessary for the advancement of science, and it seemed but natural to him that his son should want his body to be used for the same purpose.

"So he did not hesitate. He telegraphed Doctor Borgen, and then had his son's body removed to a colleague's private hospital in the same city. Then he made his will.

"When Borgen arrived several hours later Doctor X was ready for the operation, which was performed almost immediately afterward.

"I will not try to describe the operation itself. The technicalities would bore you. Suffice it to say, that a short time after the two hemispheres of Doctor X's brain had been grafted in the cranium of his dead son, the organs of the latter began to function. In short, gentlemen, the operation was a success, and the dead man was brought to life."

THE STRANGER struck a match on the heel of his shoe and applied the flame to a fresh cigarette. Then he looked up and his gaze encountered mine. I hastily averted my eyes.

I certainly did not believe his story, but there was, nevertheless, an indefinable something about him that inspired in me an odd feeling of repugnance and fear.

McKane yawned and reached for a cigar.

"Well," he remarked, "your story is not uninteresting, but if you expect me to swallow it, you will be disappointed. Not that I doubt your sincerity, but—well, how do I know your story is based on fact? I confess that it sounds very improbable to me. May I take the liberty of inquiring your name?"

"Certainly," said the stranger, and fixed his hypnotic gaze on my friend's face. "Before I died I was Doctor X's son." A sardonic smile twisted his thin red lips. "Now," he added slowly, "I am Doctor X."