

Weird Tales



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ECHOING DREAM

In the course of a year or so I think that most topics have their turn at our club; and one day we were discussing the feasibility of possession by evil spirits,

and in spite of all examples quoted, the weight of the opinion of the Billiards Club appeared to be against it, when Jorkens joined in with the remark, "I should say

it was quite possible."

"Ever seen a case of it?" asked Terbut.

And for a while Jorkens was silent. And then he said, "No."

"Then what makes you think it is possible?" said Terbut.

"Well," said Jorkens, "it is a long story." And Terbut uttered a sigh and Jorkens began.

It was in a southern country and a long way to the west, a land of earthquake-rumpled hills, and the hospitality of hearts warmed by that southern sun. My kind host had a Caribbean cook and a Guatemalan gardener, who seemed to understand the gorgeous flowers that bordered all the lawns, and for whom they seemed to thrive. And he employed an odd man as a mechanic, to look after all the machinery that he had in his house and grounds, and to attend to anything that went by electricity, and to see that it did, and in addition to that, he did every job that the Guatemalan and Caribbean neglected to do.

So he was really a very industrious man, though where he learnt industry I have no idea; that land was too warm to have taught him, and he came from some sunny shore of Andalusia that would not have taught him, either. He was just a freak, a throwback perhaps to some old conquering horseman left behind by the Moors.

And another odd thing about him, besides his industry in that warm land, was what my host told me about him as we sat in his garden, when the heat of the day was beginning to cool, and the sun that had gone from the white walls was brightening the red of the tiles and the tops of palms and making the oranges flame, and the odd man walked past us along a row of hibiscus.

My host also came from southern Spain, but long generations ago, a forbear of his having been a conquistador by profession, who had left his Spanish towers to carry religion after the setting sun and to plant it far in the west, where he had possessed himself of lands as wide as a good-sized county, and the King of Spain had made him Count of the Golden Mountains, for there was a range on the lands of his conquest which had been thought to be gold. And these lands his family had held for ages till the curse of modernism, as my friend put it, had left him with no more than a grand old house — built under the influence that was the pagan Moors' rather than of the religion for which his sires had fought — and some spacious and lovely gardens shadowed by cypresses.

And as his odd man now walked under orange trees and past a blaze of hibiscus, Mr. Sierradoro, which is the name in use today by that old line of conquistadors, told me this of his odd man.

He had asked him, he said, when he first employed him, if he ever took dope, and the man said no; and he had asked him if he drank, and he said only seldom, but that he was sometimes possessed by an angel. And my host had asked him if that happened to him often, and he had said no. And so he had decided to chance it.

"I judge a man," Sierradoro said, "by the amount of

work he gets through in a year. I never dismiss a man because he gets incapacitated on a feast day or a holiday and for most of the day after. I judge by his total output. This man gets through a wonderful amount of work in the year, both his own and other people's, and I shouldn't dream of parting with him just because he may go off for a whole day and not quite know what he is doing."

"What kind of things does he do?" I asked.

"Well, for instance," he said, "one day a queer look came into his face and he said he was possessed by his angel, and I could see by his eyes that something of the sort had occurred."

"What sort of thing?" I asked.

"You never can tell," said Sierradoro. "But he said he must play some music, and he set off down the road to look for a violin, and I saw it was no use stopping him."

"Did he find a violin?" I asked.

"I don't know," he said. "But the trouble was that all the girls that he met as he went down that road followed him, and some children too. I think he did get hold of a violin, because I heard some rather queer music in the distance, and from complaints that I heard later it seemed that it was a long time before any of the girls came back, and all the children who followed him were out late."

"It only happened once, but he won't promise that it will not happen again. He is a good man and I shouldn't dream of dismissing him. But I have told him that if he does get like that again and feels that he must play music, he had better come in here and play on my organ. That will prevent any more trouble outside, and I have promised the neighbours, that there shall not be."

Sierradoro had a very fine organ; not in a central place on any wall, but rather as an incidental feature of the great room.

I was about to ask what abilities he had with an organ, when the handy man turned and came back along the flowers, facing us as he came, and I saw that he was of a quite illiterate type and that, whatever he could do with machinery and whatever he knew about flowers, he would never be able to handle such an instrument as an organ.

I stayed some time in that house of a bygone day, entertained by Sierradoro with such courtesies as, I fear, may almost be called bygone too. And then, one afternoon, I heard my host say in a low voice to his wife, "I am afraid that man Huan is possessed again today."

"Why?" she exclaimed at once.

"There is that look again," he said.

"Are you sure?" she asked.

"I think so," he said.

"Then get him indoors at once," she said. "We cannot have him making all that trouble again."

And Sierradoro went to look for his odd man, while the Señora and I stayed in the long room in which the organ was built into a wall.

She wore a long mantilla of fine black lace, whether because she herself was Spanish, or because of the lineage of her husband, I did not know, but she

certainly wore it with a natural grace that seemed to show she was born to it.

She was troubled about Huan, for she did not estimate him, as her husband did, by the amount of work he accomplished so much as by the risks that his strange seizures, as she named them, entailed.

"But is there any harm in him?" I asked.

"There is always harm in a drunken man," she said.

"What do you think he will do?" I asked.

"There is no telling with drink," she replied.

"But is it drink?" I asked.

"There are only two things," she said, "that will make a man act like that."

"Drink and love?" I suggested.

"Sí," she said.

"And you think it is drink in his case?" I asked.

"But certainly," she replied. "One cannot miss a woman. And I have watched. Bottles are so much smaller that they are more easily hidden."

And then Huan came in with that look in his eyes. I don't know where Sierradoro had found him; probably doing some useful job that the gardener had neglected, but with that look in his eyes. I saw it the moment he entered: a look as far from us as we were from heaven. He was dressed in a thin shirt, open all down the front, for it was a warm day, and a pair of trousers, and shoes that were more like sandals. He wore no socks.

As soon as Huan saw the organ an awed look came into his face, and he almost ran to it. His fingers were stained with the dark oil of some machine at which he had been working; he spread them upon the keys as he sat down, and then he began to play.

The music rose up from under his hands at once. It was like torrents coming down the faces of brazen mountains which rang with them as they fell; torrents full of river-nymphs in the gold of the dawn, singing, as they swam by, their songs to a quiet land turning from sleep below, to the sound of sheep-bells and pipes of awakening shepherds. There was lark-song in it and the sound of trumpets, and it seemed full of old memories of all melodious things ever heard long ago.

It set me somehow thinking about my childhood and my earliest pictures of heaven, but that music seemed to brighten them, making them more like visions. And it made me think of acres of may in bloom, and they somehow seemed to be singing, singing of things long gone, but brought back by that music.

Before our eyes as we looked out of the window, Sierradoro and the Señora and I, were the flowers of that warm land shining in the late sunlight, and from a lily-pond in the garden came the roaring boom of the bullfrogs; but we did not seem to see or notice these things, or anything but the music, as it flowed over deep soft carpets and filled the room to the rafters, and lingered among old memories brought back to our day and enchanted. That's how it seemed to me as he played, and a great deal more that I can never describe, for words limp far behind music.

The Señora was looking past me out of the window, as though to something very far away, and Sierradoro had his gaze fixed on something else — one couldn't tell what — and he seemed to be puzzled by it, whatever it

was. Huan's back was towards us so that I could not see his face, but his head was lifted upward, away from the keys on which he seemed to play with the ease of a butterfly's dances. I wondered if he was conscious of what he was playing. The Señora, motionless under her black mantilla, seemed hardly to hear the music, so absorbed were her dark eyes with the vision the music had shown them. Nor did Sierradoro appear to be within years of what was happening here.

Horns from a far country seemed to be luring and calling, as those hands flashed over the keys like shadows of birds migrating; birds of paradise, as I fancied, on a flight from their distant home. I wondered who had taught this miraculous art to the peasant from Andalusia. And then I suddenly saw it was as he had said, and that what you were talking about just now was possible, and that he was possessed by an angel.

The music flowed on with that astounding ease and that clear call to Sierradoro and his wife and to me, but all to different dreams. And in the great flood of that music, all heaven seemed to be smiling, and the earth and its common things to be glowing in that smile's radiance. The large leaves of bananas in the garden outside, slowly swaying, seemed lit by that smile, and the shadows of leaves of an olive on a white wall seemed to rest with an infinite rest, and in that rest there seemed to be living again old memories of the simple things of our world, and I thought I could hear bells chiming in valleys of lost summer evenings.

Then the spirit that played that organ seemed growing weary of earth, for there came a longing into the music more wistful than any of ours, as the sadness of all earth's sorrows weighed more and more on his wings, and he seemed to be yearning now for his far home and to sigh for the glories of heaven that he had left. And then he suddenly ended on one great note, like a thunderbolt falling upon mountains of bronze and setting their peaks a-ringing, and a window of heaven seemed to have been thrown open, and I thought I heard its choirs singing their answer with the sound of a far rejoicing, or was it but the sound of Huan's music coming back from heaven's walls?

I could not tell. But I thought at the time that all the others were calling him with their unearthly musical voices, and — was it possible — me too, who was so far from heaven and did not know the way.

And the boom of the bullfrogs came back, and the Señora withdrew her gaze from that far past where it had wandered, and I left all that I left in far-away days, and Sierradoro came back with me to the present, and Huan rose up and brushed his hands together, as a man leaving a job that has been forced on him, and walked out of the house, and I heard the smack of his spit hitting the paved path as he hurried back to his work, the plain peasant again.

And outside the window I saw the evening light reflected upwards from ripples that the bullfrogs made in the lily-pond, pale gold on the under side of the leaves of a lemon tree; and, something causing me to lift my gaze, I looked on and slanting upwards, with gold light shining on large leaves, on and on, till my

eyes met golden clouds which parted asunder as though making a pathway all the way to the lily-pond, till it was almost lost in the radiance to which it led. And into that radiance I saw, just as it passed from sight, what may have been a flock of white herons or anything else, but which looked like two great wings with which a spirit departed. And up that golden vista it seemed to right into heaven.

I would have followed, I would have followed indeed, for I felt I could. I don't know how, but I felt I could have walked up that shining pathway into heaven. But just at that moment, just as I would have gone, I heard a door slamming, the door of the engine-shed, actually, in which that fellow worked; and the gates of heaven closed.

Ω