

*A Spell Was Cast by the Cold Blue Eyes
of a Skeleton, But Suddenly
the Spell Snapped*

EYES

By GALEN C. COLIN

HAPPY" Bill Ransom of struggling Medical College days is now Dr. William Ransom, world renowned surgeon, and collects thousands in fat fees every year. But to this day the stare of a pair of unblinking, intense blue eyes will make him shudder. No matter what the possible fee, he will always refuse a case of optical surgery. His colleagues call it eccentricity—but I know different, for you see, there is a story and I got it first hand. It happened near the close of our last year in school.

I didn't usually study on Sunday evenings. A medical student who spends his days cutting up cadavers and listening to lectures on symptoms and ailments needs at least one day's relaxation each week. But final examinations began Monday morning, and I was not sure of myself in optical anatomy. That is the reason "Happy" Bill Ransom found me in my room that drizzly and drear June night.

There came a clatter at my elbow. Two tiny red lights flashed on. I turned to my door and called, "Come."

The door opened and there stood Bill. Big handsome, blond, poor as a church mouse but carefree and happy—that was Bill. His hat was gone. His hair was unkempt and uncombed. The usually radiant face was haggard and drawn. Dark circles were beneath his eyes. He staggered like a drunken man.

"For God's sake, Jim, the eyes! Turn off that damn thing!"

His voice was hoarse and broken as he begged.

He was looking at my door-knocker, a contrivance of which I was inordinately proud. It was a perfect snow-white skull with the lower jaw hinged. Tiny electric bulbs of red glass were in the eye sockets. A touch of the button outside my door turned on the red lights and set a toy motor running. The motor in turn started the lower jaw clattering.

"What's the matter, Bill?" I gasped as I threw off the switch.

He sank into my big Morris chair and covered his face with his hands. His body shook with a violent chill.

"Some jag!" I mumbled, half to myself.

"I'm not drunk," he said hoarsely. "Jim—Jim—I believe I am going insane. I've got to tell someone. You're the best friend I have in the world. Will you listen to me? Will you help me fight it off? You've got to, Jim!"

"Calm down, old son," I said evenly, although I was beginning to get just a little shaky at Bill's palpable terror. "Sure I'll help you—you know that. What is it?"

"We've only three weeks more at the old school," he began. "Then we'll be full fledged M. D.'s. And Jim, I've wanted a skeleton to mount for my study. I have never before wanted anything quite so badly. It has become an obsession with me. I can't buy one. It is all I can do to earn my expenses. I have tried to trade for one—I have even been tempted to steal. Jim, I had begun to get desperate. The days were passing and I was still as far as ever from getting my skeleton. It maddened me that the cemeteries guarded thousands of skeletons and I could not even have the smallest and most insignificant of the lot.

"Last Friday I succumbed to temptation. I determined to desecrate the home of the dead. You don't blame me, do you? You know what it is to want something so badly that any sacrifice is not too great.

"Do you remember last Friday night? It was foggy and a chill was in the air. A light mist was falling—just enough to make each branch and twig along the cemetery drive moisture-laden and dripping. You couldn't see ten feet ahead of your face. I went alone. Under my arm was a grain bag in which to carry back the bones. A spade was my only tool, and I filched it from the caretaker's shed. An electric flash gave all the illumination I needed.

"I was not afraid of the dead—then. A medical student seldom is. Yet, as a heritage from our ancestors, a graveyard always holds something of shuddering dread—and this was a gloomy night.

"As I slunk along the drive, the wet branches slapped me in the face. I knew what they were but I could not repress a shudder at each cold touch. I could almost see the spirits of the dead. I could almost hear their protests at this vandalism.

"I searched among the headstones, reading the inscriptions. I wanted a body that had been buried long enough for the flesh to drop from the bones. The skeleton must be that of a man of intelligence, for I wanted the skull to be beautifully moulded. That is why I chose the grave marked. The name sounded solid and dependable—and he had been buried in 1902. The name doesn't conjure up the image of a haunting specter, does it? But, God, why did I choose that grave?

"I began digging. Deeper and deeper I went. Every spadeful of earth taken from the grave added to my dread. But I was desperate. Finally my spade struck something solid, something it would not penetrate. A few more spadefuls and I uncovered the box that held the coffin. I threw out the last of the earth—and with it went my terror.

"The wood was so badly decayed that it would hardly support my weight. It came away easily as I pried with the broad spade. The coffin came into view, an old-fashioned casket, solidly built, but not securely fastened.

"By the radiance of my flashlight I found the catch and threw back the lid. I was standing at the head. As the cover came up I had my first view of the skeleton. All the flesh had returned to dust, but the bones were snow-white and beautifully preserved. I first saw the feet—then the leg bones—then the arched ribs. I gloated—I laughed aloud and the grave threw back the echoes. Then the laugh froze on my lips as I looked at the skull.

"I screamed with terror. Clammy sweat dripped from my brow. The spade fell crashing into the naked ribs. Jim—you'll never believe it—two cold blue eyes stared up at me from the fleshless skull. They were glassy with hate. Unwinkingly, glaring back the light from my flash, they bored into my very soul.

"Again I screamed. Frantically I tried to climb from the pit. Three times I clawed my way to the top only to fall back among the bones. Still the eyes stared at me. They seemed to leer at my fright. The fourth attempt and I reached the top. Flashlight, spade, sack—everything was forgotten. I fled for my very life from those eyes. They seemed to follow me. They menaced me from every side. As I sped up the street and into my room they darted venomous glances at me from every street light. I slammed the door, and still those hateful orbs were with me.

"I tried to read. Those eyes came between me and the page. I went to bed but I could not sleep. After hours of tossing I dozed fitfully. I dreamed. The eyes were those of a demon. He tortured me with red-hot irons and glared sardonically at my helplessness. Again the eyes inhabited a corpse and I was bound to it hand and foot. Gradually it decayed and I could not break my bonds. At last it was the skeleton I had dug from the grave. I struggled, bound by that terrible sense of powerlessness

which paralyzes us in our dreams. Finally I awoke. Those eyes! Those horrible staring eyes! I could see them everywhere.

"Then came morning—yesterday morning. I was weary and worn, but I could not study. I went to a picture show for distraction. All I could see was the eyes of the players, blue and cold. I tried to forget them in a round of golf. The little white ball stared up at me in a glare of hate—those eyes again!

"Last night I tried again to sleep. The same dream haunted me. Jim, I must sleep, but I cannot. Help me, Jim! Talk to me—reason with me! Jim—Jim—am I going insane? Will those eyes haunt me forever?"

Bill was truly in a pitiable state. It would take but little more to push him across the bridge into insanity. But before he had fairly gotten into his story I knew the sedative to administer.

"Have you read the papers within the last two days?" I asked him.

"I can't read, Jim, I can't even think. What is news to me when those horrible eyes will not leave me in peace?"

"Listen to this," I began, as I picked up Saturday morning's *Gazette*.

"Some time during last night vandals entered Memorial Lawns and opened the grave of Robert William Sheldon, who died in 1902. Sheldon was noted during his lifetime as the only blind attorney in Kansas.

"The motive of the marauders is not known as they were apparently frightened away before they had completed their designs.

"The skeleton was shattered, but the skull containing the two wonderfully constructed glass eyes was strangely untouched."

"Does that help you any?" I asked as I turned toward Bill.

But he only gasped once and sank back into the big Morris chair. His expression of terror had given place to a look of astonishment and blessed relief.



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