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NORMAN M. LOBSENZ

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CELE GOLDSMITH

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I WANT YOU, I WANT YOU

By SOLOMON SCHEELE

When is a fantasy not a fantasy? When it tells the story of the true secret desire of every man—whether he's made a deal with Satan or not.

KILLING the black cock had been unpleasant enough, but draining the blood out of him was really a gruesome business. I caught the blood in an empty milk container. When I couldn't squeeze another drop out I pulled the three longest tail feathers, just as the *Grimoire* said. I didn't really believe the spell would work, but I was following the book to the letter.

I threw the body of the bird aside and swiftly sharpened the tail feathers, fearful that the blood in the milk container would coagulate. It did harden rapidly, but there was enough liquid for me to draw the pentagram on my living room floor.

That did it, I thought. I glanced into the open *Grimoire*

again. The faded writing was hard to read . . . oh, yes. I threw the container and the remainder of the blood onto the smouldering charcoal in my fireplace. The wax caught fire and a flame shot up. I swallowed hard and stared at the empty pentagram. *Now . . .*

The telephone rang.

Impatiently, I picked it up. "Long distance call for Mr. Andrew Benedict," said an unpleasantly nasal female voice. "Will you accept the charges?"

Who could be calling me from out of town — or from right here in New York, for that matter? There was no one in the world who would have had even the mildest desire to telephone me. That was one reason I was sitting alone

in my apartment with a mouldy *Grimoire*, experimenting with an ancient spell for summoning — I glanced at the empty pentagram and my eyes widened.

"This is Andrew Benedict," I said. "Could you tell me who's calling, and from where?"

"Long distance call for Mr. Andrew Benedict. Will you accept the charges?"

Same words, same detached tone, same unpleasant nasal female voice.

I took a deep breath and shifted the phone from one sweating palm to the other. "I accept the charges," I said.

"Go ahead, please," said the unpleasant female. "You have three minutes. I will notify you when your time is up—"

A booming male . . . *voice* cut in on her. "Benedict! Andrew Benedict! Is that you?"

The moment I heard my name booming over the phone I had no further doubt. Still, I hesitated. I had to be sure. "Yes, who's calling?"

"You know damned well who this is!" the *voice* boomed angrily. "You summoned me yourself. Now — what do you want?"

"But — you didn't . . . I mean, I thought you were go-

ing to materialize in the pentagram—"

"Pentagram? *Pentagram!*" The phone quivered in my hand. "I'm too busy for that nonsense these days. If I made a personal appearance every time—but enough of that. We had only three minutes, you know. So speak up—*what do you want?*"

What did I want? Oh, what *didn't* I want! I thought of all the people who had laughed at me, taken advantage of me, ignored me, cheated me, pushed me casually out of the way. Mostly, I thought of the people who grimaced slightly when they saw me . . . which was almost everybody. There was a burning feeling in my throat, and I swallowed hard but it wouldn't go away.

"How many wishes do I get?" I asked huskily.

The receiver crackled furiously. "How *many?* What do you think this is—a lousy quiz show? You get one damned request granted. And you'd better be quick about it, or you won't even get that!"

One wish. I held the phone at arm's length and stared at it resentfully. This whole thing was certainly running true to form. Someone else would be sure to get two, three—maybe more—wishes, but not Andrew Benedict. He

gets one scraggy wish, and 'be quick about it.'

I could almost visualize the speaker at the other end of the phone. Self-assured. Businesslike. Tearing hurry. Eager to have me off his hands. Aunt Agatha's lawyer telling me the old goat had left the bulk of her fortune to a cat hospital, and had left me a thin yearly income. Or the renting-agent who had tied me to a three-year lease for this lousy apartment. "Snap it up before someone else comes along—a real bargain," he'd pressured. A bargain. The incinerator on one side, so I could never get rid of the cockroaches. The elevator on the other side, so every drunk going to or coming from a party pushed my bell by mistake. "Oh, hell," they'd say, staring at me. "'scuse me." Never: "Come and join the party." They didn't want me. No one did. Even Aunt Agatha, may she rot in hell. . . .

Hell. I glanced up at the clock. Less than a minute left. One wish. Okay, boy, I told myself, for once get it right—there won't be another chance. My eyes left the clock and I caught a glimpse of my face in the mirror. I averted my eyes quickly as I always did. What a face! Only a

mother could love it—only in this case even my mother couldn't quite manage it. She never came to see me once after I went to live with Aunt Agatha. I didn't even know where she was, or if she was still alive. And Aunt Agatha detested me. She enjoyed telling me that. But you can't hit maids and trained nurses with a cane, even if you're rich as Aunt Agatha. And there are things even a maid or a nurse won't do. But I did them. Even Aunt Agatha hadn't been as vicious as some of the maids and nurses. The best of them had just ignored me. No one had ever loved me. And as for girls my own age—the same, only worse.

I made up my mind. It would have been nice to have political power, or a long life, or physical beauty, or strength, or the ability to read minds—but there was something I *had* to have.

I put the phone back to my ear. The *voice* was shouting, "Benedict! Damn you, man! Speak up! Do you want—"

"Listen," I said quietly, "I know what I want. I want—" and I took a deep, deep breath— "I want to be absolutely irresistible to women. They'll fall madly in love with me, understand? Give in to my

every wish. Live only to please me. That's my wish."

"All women?" He sounded a little awed.

I thought about it for a second, then I shrugged. "No," I amended, "only beautiful women. But the more beautiful they are, the more they love me, is that clear?"

"Right. Beautiful women. Madly in love." He sounded as if he were jotting down notes. "Fine—that takes care of that. Goodbye—"

"No! Wait!" I shouted frantically. "What about payment?"

"Payment? You accepted the charges, didn't you? You'll be billed in due course."

The unpleasantly nasal female spoke up suddenly. "Sorry—your three minutes are up."

"One second more!" I pleaded. "What—what do I pay? I mean—do I really have an immortal soul that will—"

"Your time is up," she said, and I heard the click of a broken connection.

My hand was shaking so much I had to make two tries before I could hang up the phone. I was aware suddenly that my shirt was wringing wet and my throat was painfully dry. Shivering uncon-

trollably, I poured myself a drink of water.

So now I was irresistible to beautiful women. I didn't really believe it. I had never gone out with a girl in my life. Most of the girls I had ever met treated me as if I were part of the woodwork. Even that one in the "house" in New Orleans . . . I flushed as I remembered the way she had stopped in the doorway, stared at me, and called over her shoulder, "For Pete's sake, Mae, what did I ever do that you wished *this* on me?"

I slammed the glass of water to the floor. Water and pieces of glass splattered. The bottom of the glass bounced high and landed in the pentagram.

The apartment was a mess, I realized suddenly. The body of the black cock was a huddled mass of feathers in the corner. The floor was covered with blood, ashes, candles, herbs and all the assorted paraphernalia the spell had called for. The cleaning woman would be here in the morning, and I couldn't let her find all these things lying about.

It took me over half an hour. The hardest part was scrubbing away the pentagram. Finally, though, most of the stain was gone, and I had

all the junk I had used jammed into a big paper bag.

The bag was heavy and awkward and I staggered slightly as I opened my door. For once I was glad that the incinerator was right next to my apartment. Only there was someone else ahead of me, stuffing a paper bag into the tiny door.

Her back was to me, but I didn't have to see her face to know who she was. Hell, I'd dreamed about her often enough. She was the beautiful blonde in the apartment at the end of the corridor. The renting-agent had introduced us the day I took the apartment, but she had stared through me during the introduction. I passed her in the hall lots of times, but she never even noticed me. Well, what girl ever had?

I shifted the bag of garbage and waited for her to move away from the incinerator door. She was a model, I thought, or an aspiring actress. For a while I had thought she was some rich old guy's mistress, but then he disappeared and there was a succession of handsome young men visiting her. She was wearing a kind of thin, filmy robe tonight—a negligee, I guessed. I could see her body outlined against the thin material, and I fell into my usual

daydream. She would turn around, and she would see me, and her whole face would light up as she would say—

"Why, Mr. Benedict! What a lovely surprise!"

I jumped. The bag of garbage shot out of my arms and plopped on the floor. She *had* said it! She was smiling at me!

The smile changed to a pout. "Oh, you poor man! I startled you. I'm so sorry. Here, let me help."

We both bent down and picked up the bag. Her robe slipped open. I goggled and gasped. She wasn't wearing anything underneath it!

At my gasp she looked up at me, then down at herself. Her eyes met mine, and she bit her lower lip in playful, mock embarrassment. Then, leisurely, casually, she pulled her robe together—but not all the way.

What was happening to me?

I fumbled with the bag of garbage while she held the incinerator door open, smiling at me gently with her blonde head on one shoulder and her eyes half closed. I was so rattled I could hardly remember my own name. *Was this some kind of a gag?* Maybe she was trying to get me to make a

pass at her, and then a bunch of people in party hats would jump up shrieking with laughter. Or maybe it was the old badger game. I had read about that. She'd get me into her apartment, and then her husband would come in and I'd have to pay plenty.

Whenever I get really rattled my hands start shaking, and this time was no exception. The paper bag shook, and two black feathers and a piece of mandrake root fell out. I stared down at them, making no attempt to pick them up. So help me, I had forgotten all about the spell—and the telephone call! I thought it was all a mistake.

I raised my eyes slowly and stared into hers. She squirmed delightfully against the wall and her face brightened. I felt the blood come roaring up from my toes to my ears. I was irresistible. She was mine for the taking.

Only—how did I go about it? What should I say? I mean, I'd hardly said a dozen words to a pretty girl—or to any girl, for that matter—in my life. Then I shrugged mentally. What difference did it make? I was irresistible, wasn't I? I could say and do whatever I pleased. And I'd seen enough movies and read

enough novels to have some idea.

"You're beautiful," I said. The robe had fallen away from one shoulder, and I put my hand on the bare flesh. It was smooth and cool to my touch. I had always wondered what a girl's skin felt like. . . .

She rested her cheek against my hand and rubbed it gently. I could smell her now . . . that mixture of perfume and bath salts and—*woman*—that, until this moment, I had known only on crowded subway trains. I had to put my other hand on the wall to steady myself. My knees were weak.

"You're very sweet to say that," she whispered huskily. "Mr. Benedict . . . oh, I can't call you *that*. What's your first name? I'm so ashamed of myself, but I've forgotten."

I cleared my throat. "Uh, Andrew," I said. "And your name is Diane, isn't it?"

"Imagine you remembering." Her full red lips brushed the back of my hand. "Diane de Vrieds—it's my stage name. My agent picked it. I'm not supposed to tell anyone my real name." She giggled softly. "But I'll tell it to you, Andrew, later on, when we have no more secrets from each other." Her fingertips wandered under my sleeve,

caressing my wrist. Each touch was like an electric probe. "Andrew," she said thoughtfully. "Andy. . . . I know—Drew! I'm going to call you Drew. It's more . . . more masculine — it fits you better."

She looked at me anxiously, her red lips parted slightly. "You don't mind, do you? I mean, if I call you Drew. Because if you would rather I didn't—"

"No, that's all right," I told her gruffly. "You call me whatever you please, Diane." I put my arm around her neck and she snuggled her head against my shoulder. The blonde hair tickled my nose. It was so fine, so shiny. . . .

She pulled away from me suddenly, drawing her robe tight around her. Terror swept over me. Had I done something wrong? Was this the end of it? Would she yell for help, or start laughing now?

She glanced quickly around the corridor. There was no one there. If she laughed at me, I'd, I'd—

"We *are* being silly, Drew—out here in the cold hall—when there's a lovely roaring fire just going to waste in my apartment."

Again that anxious look came into her eyes. "You do

have time to drop in for a moment? Just for a drink, if you can't stay longer," she pleaded.

"I'm—I'm free for the evening," I said.

"Oh, *good!*" She grabbed my hand in hers and swung it joyfully. "Quick! Before someone comes along and interrupts us!"

Holding my hand, she skipped lightly down the corridor to her door. I lumbered after her, tripping over my own feet.

As soon as we were inside she slammed the door shut and snapped the safety lock.

"There!" she announced. "Now no one can come in even if they happen to have a key." She grinned impishly at me. "And if they ring the bell, whoever they are, we'll just hold our breath until they go away, won't we, Drew?"

She leaned back against the door, putting her hands behind her head and ruffling the loose golden hair. Her breasts were firm and strong, thrusting against the flimsy fabric of the robe.

"How funny," she mused. "Here we are, neighbors, and we've never really met until tonight. All that time wasted. What a shame."

I clenched my fists and

stepped close to her. "Kiss me!" I said.

Her eyes shone with delight. "Yes, sir!" she said, with mock seriousness, and stuck out her tongue at me. Then she put her arms softly around my neck and kissed me. For a second I panicked—I hardly knew what to do. But Diane knew . . . and not only with her lips. Her body moved gently against mine. Her hands stroked the back of my neck.

I pulled away, gasping for breath. I seemed to see her through a red haze.

She smiled sweetly. "You're cute," she whispered, and wrinkled her tiny nose at me.

I reached for her again, urgently, and she pressed her face against my shoulder and whispered, so softly I could just make out the words, "Shall we have a drink first, Drew, my darling?"

My tongue was too numb to form words. I nodded dumbly and released her. She led me slowly into the next room. We passed her hall mirror and she blew a kiss at my reflection. I avoided my own image and stared at hers. She kissed me twice more—little pecks—before we reached her living room.

The fire was dying down in

the fireplace. I would have fixed it, but she pushed me onto the gaily covered studio couch opposite the fire. She kissed me lightly on the top of the head and then danced over to the basket of firewood. In a few seconds the flames danced up, crackling. Diane switched off the lamp so that the only light in the room came from the fire. I sat hunched on the couch, my body stiff with desire, watching her as she tripped around the room. The flimsy silked robe danced as she moved, veiling and unveiling her gleaming white body.

She walked toward me, carrying a tray of glasses and bottles. The robe was hanging loosely open, and she made no effort to close it. Her blonde hair hung down to her shoulders. The flames behind her gave her body a reddish-pinkish hue. And what a body . . . the long, clean legs, the thin waist, the jutting breasts . . .

She kissed me on the forehead as she went by, and set the tray down on the little coffee table at the side of the couch. I studied her face as she mixed a drink for me. She seemed so happy—as if this were the most wonderful moment of her life.

Sinking down on her knees

in front of me, she took a sip from the glass, staring at me wide-eyed over the rim. Then she placed the glass gently in my hand and rested her chin on my knee, without removing her eyes from mine.

I tried to drink, but I could hardly swallow. I hadn't the slightest idea what was in the glass. I put the glass down on the tray and it tipped over, spilling. Neither of us glanced at it. I bent my head down over hers, searching for her lips, while my hands went down over her body.

"Oh, Drew," she whispered, as my lips found hers. "My darling . . . you're so — so handsome. . . ."

I jerked my head away and stood up, knocking her to her hands and knees.

"Darling!" she cried. "Tell me what's wrong?"

"Don't call me handsome!" I snarled. "I'm not handsome and you know it!" That—that damned spell is making you say that. You're blinded and you don't really see *me*! If you did you'd turn away in disgust--just like everyone else!"

She scrambled frantically to her feet. Her robe was hanging from one arm and her hair was tumbled about her face. There were tears in her eyes.

"Oh, my darling!" she sob-

bed, trying to put her arms around me. "What did I do that was wrong?" I do love you so—I *do*!"

I grabbed her wrists and stared into her eyes, trying to see the truth. "But is it *me* you love — me, *me* — Andrew Benedict, not some dream image?"

She was weeping now. "Yes, yes! Of course it's you! You're so handsome, so virile, so witty, so—so—*wonderful*! There's no one else in the—"

I cursed wildly and pushed her away. She fell to the floor, sobbing pitifully. I took one despairing look at her and strode from the room. I could hear her wailing my name as I forced the hall door open. Only when I slammed the door behind me was her voice cut off.

I staggered down the corridor and into my own apartment. I fell into a chair, and then the tears came to my own eyes.

I had been cheated again!

Diane was irresistibly attracted to me, all right—but not to *me*, not to the ugly, uncouth, disgusting slob I knew I was. When she looked at me, she saw a handsome, suave, fascinating man of the world. The kind of man who always took advantage of me,

and who always would. The kind of man who had everything, when I would always have nothing. When she kissed me, she was really kissing him. It was worse agony than being ignored, than being laughed at.

Diane didn't want me. She wanted a debonair, witty, handsome man. The spell had made her think she saw all that in me. Making love to her would be about as pleasureable as making love to a woman who had been hypnotized into thinking you were her husband. I had lost all desire for Diane. Her

body had become a Dead Sea fruit for me. Diane didn't want me.

I had been wrong. I had answered too quickly and I had made the wrong wish. I didn't want a woman to find me irresistible; I wanted a woman to *want* me—to want *me*—with all my faults and all my ugliness.

Nobody wanted me—nobody ever had.

I noticed my telephone suddenly. No, I was wrong. Somebody did want me, after all.

And would get me.

THE END