

Weird Tales



ALL STORIES NEW — NO REPRINTS

JULY, 1943

Cover by E. Franklin Wittmack

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D. McILWRAITH, Editor.

LAMONT BUCHANAN, Associate Editor.

Legacy in Crystal *By JAMES CAUSEY*

Never accept a gift from a necromancer or demon. Steal it or buy it, but do not accept it as a gift . . . or legacy.



AGATHA SIMMONS leaned forward expectantly.

"How long, Doctor?"

The man at the bedside looked up in

brief distaste. He consulted his watch professionally.

"I really can't say," he whispered. "Perhaps another half hour. Perhaps ten more

minutes—" He blinked at her and recommenced fumbling in his bag.

Agatha was silent. She looked at Jonathan's closed eyes. His breathing was barely perceptible now. She smiled.

So long. She had waited so terribly long for her cousin's estate. He must be well past eighty. In the past, she had been dimly afraid he would outlive her as he had all his other relatives.

But now—

"I must get some water." The doctor's voice intruded upon her thoughts. "For the solution—"

He went to the door, fumbling with his hypodermic needle.

Agatha did not hear him. She was gazing around the great gloomy bedroom. At the shades, drawn.

Behind the doctor, the door closed. The prone figure in the big four-poster bed stirred.

"Impatient, Agatha?"

She gave a little start. Jonathan Miles had raised himself on one elbow, with an effort.

He was staring at her, his thin dark face mocking.

"Why—no, Jonathan. I was only hoping you'd get well soon."

"Hab!" The old man cackled with laughter. "Me get well soon! You know, you remind me of a buzzard, Agatha. Waiting for me to die. A pity, too. That auto accident. Mashed ribs. . . . Complications. I bet I would have outlived you, too—"

He broke off, lips still moving. Agatha frowned, then as she noted his breathing become slower, more fluttery, she restrained a smile.

No one knew how Jonathan Miles had acquired his vast fortune. He had always been a scholar, delving into out of the way places in far-off lands. A dabbler in archaeology. Suddenly, in his middle years, he had struck it rich. Now, in the declining years of his life, he had lived all alone,

a gloomy old recluse in a dark old house, spurning all efforts of his relatives to visit him.

AGATHA'S gaze flicked avidly around the room. This old house—everything, would be hers soon.

She glanced at a ring on Jonathan's finger. A rather big diamond, that.

Jonathan Miles followed her avid gaze keenly. He chuckled.

"Ah, but you're a greedy woman, Agatha."

"Why, I—"

"I don't like greedy women."

Agatha was silent. For the fortune soon to be hers, she could well endure a few insults.

Then she blinked. For Jonathan was fumbling with the ring on his finger, and he was handing it to her.

"Here, Agatha." His smile was vaguely mocking. "Take this. A little token of my esteem. No, don't thank me—"

He made a feeble gesture and sank back on his pillow.

"You'd take it after I'm dead, anyway—so I give it to you now."

"Jonathan! Really, I had no idea of—"

"Keep the ring," Jonathan said softly. "It has helped me—a great deal." His shoulders rippled with silent laughter.

Agatha stared at the ring. It was not a diamond. A large rosy crystal, gleaming lamently in the dim light. Set in a massive base of silver with strange symbols carved on it.

"What do you mean, Jonathan—helped you?"

Her cousin did not seem to hear her. He was staring at the ceiling. His lips were trembling. "My soul," he whispered. "I'm afraid the bargain wasn't . . . quite . . . just."

"What?"

No answer.

Agatha looked at him. Jonathan's eyes would have all the money. His life would be worse than ever. . . .

He was not breathing.

AGATHA drew a deep breath and went to the door.

Walter Simmons, standing in the parlor, saw his wife emerge from the bedroom. He blinked guiltily, and, quickly hid his cigar.

"Walter! He's dead. Dead, you hear? This house—his money. All ours." She was jubilant.

"Uh—fine," said Walter, though inwardly he flinched at his wife's callousness.

The doctor came back from the kitchen, his hypodermic filled. "What's this? Did you say he was—"

"Dead," said Agatha, and hardly could restrain her morbid pride in possession of the house until the doctor had completed the necessary formalities and departed.

Walter Simmons heard the front door slam behind the physician and felt quite sorry for him, having had to deal with Agatha in her present mood.

"Walter!" His wife's voice was shrill.

"Yes, dear."

His wife sniffed suspiciously. "Cigar smoke. How often have I told you—"

"I'm sorry," Walter said nervously.

"Well, let's see. There's this living-room—ghastly old place. Gloomy. We'll have chintz curtains put in instead of those dreadful black drapes. The whole place needs remodeling. Maybe we'll sell it . . . later."

"Yes, dear."

"Of course you'll quit your bookkeeping job," mused Agatha. "We'll live here for the time being."

Walter Simmons nodded meekly. Ever since their marriage ten years ago he'd led a dog's life. Do this. Do that. Don't smoke cigars in the house. You know they're bad for my asthma. Now Agatha

would have all the money. His life would be worse than ever. . . .

He saw her tall, ungainly figure move about from doorway to doorway, criticizing, exclaiming, planning.

Walter sighed and went into the study. It was a huge dark place, with queer paintings on the walls. Near the center of the room was a dusty desk piled high with books.

Walter looked at these books. Old they were, crumbling with mildew. He paused, fascinated. He opened one book which was lying on the desk, closed. He frowned.

"Greek," he murmured disgustedly. He'd had four years of it in college. Squinting, he tried to decipher some of the words sprawling blackly across the pages. . . .

Walter Simmons turned very pale. He shut the book quickly, and moved away from the desk where he stood for a moment, rubbing his hands suspiciously as if something had contaminated them.

Presently, fascination overcame his horror, and he stepped forward, looking at the book. But he did not touch it. His lips moved as he tried to decipher the faded dark words on the cover.

"The Nec—Necro—" he blinked. Cautiously, he turned the cover and looked at the first page.

Small and precise, the scrawl read.

Greek Trans. Abdul Azbelred.

Walter Simmons did not look into the book again. He remembered what he had read, and shivered.

He glanced at the other books. One caught his eye.

Des Vermis Mysteries. Pynn.

There was a little slip of white paper thrust in the middle as a bookmark. Gingerly, he opened. He frowned. It was in Latin, of which he knew little, and there were penciled translations upon the sides. On the piece of paper was scrawled.

Trans. P. 103—

Never accept a gift from a necromancer

or demon. Steal it, buy it, earn it, but do not accept it, either as a gift or legacy.

The word *legacy*; was circled in red pencil.

Walter Simmons stared at some of the strangely shaped hieroglyphics just beneath the notation. He licked his lips.

He looked around the huge dark study, and suddenly got out of there—fast.

“WAL—TER!”

“Yes, dear,” he said, wiping the sweat from his brow as he stepped into the living-room. Agatha looked at him sharply.

“Here I tell you about how I’m going to redecorate this place, and I turn around and you’re off browsing somewhere. Fine thing, I must say . . .” She paused in mid-sentence.

“Did you hear something?”

Walter swallowed uneasily. “No, I—”

The sound was repeated. The faint tinkle of the doorbell.

Walter and Agatha stared at each other.

“Probably the doctor,” sniffed Agatha, brushing back a lock of straggly brown hair. “Phoned the undertaker, probably, to take the body away.”

Walter answered the door. He blinked nearsightedly and stepped back.

The stranger standing in the doorway bowed. He was tall, and impeccably clad in striped trousers and tails.

Walter stared entranced, at his flourish-ing auburn beard.

“Good afternoon.” Their visitor straightened, and stepped into the room, smiling disarmingly at Agatha.

Agatha stifled a faint feeling of apprehension. “What do you want?”

“I? The man smiled—oddly, it seemed to Walter. “I was wondering about Jonathan. Is he—”

“He’s dead,” said Agatha. “Passed away ten minutes ago.”

“What a pity. Ten minutes, eh? I

hardly expected him to last so long. Exceeded his time by a good three hours. Ah, well. Hardy fellow Jonathan. I—ah—decided I’d stop by and see what the delay was.” One hand stroked his long beard absently.

Walter Simmons took a step backwards. There was a strange shine to this fellow’s eyes he did not like, nor the way he kept looking about the big house, almost—reflectively.

As usual, Agatha took the bull by the horns.

“What’s your name, anyway?”

“My name?” The man’s eyes glowed.

“Sat—never mind. Never mind. I managed Jonathan’s—legal affairs for him.”

“Legal affairs?”

“Certainly. It was largely through me, Madame, that Jonathan acquired all his money . . . this house.” His eyes flicked around the room briefly, fixed themselves upon the crystal ring on Agatha’s left index finger.

“Ah!”

“What’s wrong?” inquired Agatha uncomfortably.

“That ring. Believe it or not, I gave that to Jonathan. It—helped him, a great deal.”

“Oh,” snapped Agatha. “You gave it to him. Well, it’s mine now, see? He gave it to me!”

“Gave it to you?” The stranger’s shoulders shook silently, and he made a laughing face, though no sound came forth. “My, but that’s good. Lively fellow Jonathan. Always did have a sense of humor. Well, I always give warning . . .”

“Warning?”

“Yes. That ring. It’s Jonathan’s. It really should remain with him, you know.”

“If you’re trying to threaten me—”

“No indeed I assure you.” Again came that strange smile, and one hand stroked the brown flowing beard. “And this house

was in the contract we made. It was to be taken too. . . ."

Walter Simmons was not listening. He was staring, aghast, at the man's head. At the two little curls of hair jutting up just off his brow.

Like two horns.

And that shadow on the wall behind him. It had a very disconcerting shape, indeed.

Agatha had, however, regained her self-composure. "What do you want here?"

"Nothing—now." Their visitor smiled urbanely at them both and bowed. "I have it. Good day."

They both stood mute as he crossed to the front door. He opened it. He went out.

"Well!" said Agatha. "I never! Trying to scare me into getting rid of this ring. Walter. Go see which way he went."

Uncomfortably, Walter went to the window, looked out. The stranger was nowhere in sight.

"THE lawn'll have to be changed," said Agatha.

Walter nodded, silently. He was wondering why the lawn outside the house was so parched and sere.

Jonathan's funeral had been yesterday. "As soon as possible," Agatha had told the undertaker. Well, thought Walter, the undertaker had certainly been obliging. He wished disconsolately, for a cigar.

Agatha stared at the house possessively. "We'll go to the bank tomorrow, and see what he had in his vaults," she mused.

"But—" Walter found himself saying desperately. "I—I don't think it would look good Agatha. So soon after the funeral. . . ."

"Don't be so childish. Of course it'll look all right. And I'm having the remodelers start in tomorrow."

Walter sighed and looked up at the old

house, looming, huge and gaunt in the gathering dusk. Like an old, empty skull, he thought. The windows like two dark eye-sockets, the door like—

He stopped thinking. He seized Agatha by the arm.

"Look!"

Agatha stared. Her mouth dropped open, and then she started screaming shrilly for firemen, police, anyone—to come and save her house. Her beautiful house:

The house was on fire.

It was no use. The firemen squirted streams of silver water against it, long into the night. Agatha bothered the firemen interminably, until finally a cop shoved her back into the crowd with the gruff admonition to "Keep back lady. We're doin' all we can."

Walter stood back in the crowd, watching the blaze. Great gouts of flame mounting crimson and splendid against the night sky. The screaming of the sirens in the distance. The wild confusion. . . .

Walter could not help smiling. He remembered what he had seen in that book on Jonathan Miles desk.

Such a book as that should very well be destroyed. Walter thought of these things, and how he could not possibly live in this house now, and he was glad.

BUT afterwards, on the homeward drive, he did not feel so glad. Agatha kept wailing, and alternately blaming him, the firemen, and their strange visitor of three days ago.

"It's all your fault. You know it is. You dropped a cigarette or something on the rug and it caught fire—" She paused again for breath.

"But Agatha, I didn't—"

"Shut up!" Walter covered back behind the wheel, and was silent.

"Or maybe," said Agatha ominously, "it was that fellow who said he was a lawyer. The one with the beard and the funny

smile. I bet he did it. Just 'cause I wouldn't give him this ring."

Walter was silent. Their visitor had said something about Jonathan. Having his little joke. Giving the ring to Agatha. And that odd crystal set in it.

"Well, anyway," Agatha said with an air of apparent unconcern. "The bonds in his safe-deposit boxes at the bank are safe. Three quarters of a million worth, so the executors said."

"And besides I got this—" She rubbed her ring reflectively. Wonder how much it's worth? Sure shines pretty, doesn't it, Walter?"

"Yes, dear," he said mechanically.

He glanced sideways at the ring. He shivered, as he saw the symbols carven in the sides. Strange twisting runes, like the ones he had seen on that little piece of paper back in Jonathan's study. . . .

"Agatha," he ventured timidly. "Agatha, maybe you'd better sell that ring. I think—"

No answer.

He turned.

Agatha was staring into the crystal with a strained, rapt expression. Walter Simmons swallowed uncomfortably as he looked at the crystal.

In the darkness, it had a dim reddish tint, it seemed to be pulsing with a strange unsteady glow. It looked—ceric.

Walter bit his lip.

Yes, the crystal looked remarkably like some gleaming, baleful eye.

The next morning, they went to the bank.

Agatha bustling ahead, buoyed up with a sense of her own importance; Walter, trailing small and timid, just behind.

Agatha informed the bank clerk they were the heirs of Jonathan Miles, and why they had come.

"Ah, yes," the clerk said. "Right this way, please."

They went down to the vault.

"Mr. Miles, you understand, always did business with us by mail," said the clerk, pausing uncertainly in front of them.

"Yes," Agatha said impatiently. "Of course. Let's see in the boxes."

The man drew out the two safe-deposit boxes slowly, opened them. "At last reports Mr. Miles told us he had two hundred thousand dollars worth of negotiable securities in this one," he began abstractly. "And almost half-a-million in bonds in this—"

His voice choked off. He blinked.

Agatha stared, and Walter stared, and then Agatha's voice rose in a shrill, angry scream, demanding to know where the money was. Who was the thief, and why didn't the bank take care of what belonged to her, and was this the right deposit box after all?

Where was her money?

The bank clerk could not explain it.

The boxes were empty. That was plain.

And for a very brief moment, as Agatha stared around the vault, trembling, clenching and unclenching her fists on empty air, she seemed to hear the faint tinkle of distant laughter.

Jonathan's laughter.

THE president of the bank could not explain it either. He looked quite grave, informed them there would be an investigation made, but Agatha refused to be consoled.

"We'll sue them, that's what we'll do!" she announced grimly to Walter afterwards. "First the house, now the money. You—you realize what this means?"

"Yes," said Walter a little wearily. "I suppose I'll have to get my job back."

"You certainly will! And furthermore—" And she was off on another tirade.

Walter did not say anything. He was thinking. Thinking about what the stranger had said.

"This house will have to be taken with the rest—"

The rest. The bank securities. The house. Everything. Remembering the way the stranger's shadow had looked, Walter Simmons was not surprised that the bank president had been unable to explain the disappearance of the bonds.

THE remainder of the week dragged slowly. They managed to sell the lot the house had been on for a rather pitiful sum, but Agatha was at least half-satisfied.

"I can buy me that fur wrap from *Modent's* I've always wanted," she told him Friday night over the supper-table. "And maybe some new silver—"

"Walter's forehead wrinkled. "But how about that—Pipe you promised me for Christmas, dear? The red briar—"

"Oh, shut up! Always thinking of yourself. Why can't I have a husband that thinks of his wife once in awhile. Let's see. . . . I'll wear it to Church, Sunday. And will make them all jealous! Walter. Did you get your job back today?"

"Yes," he said slowly. "I got it back."

He neglected to tell her he was getting ten dollars a week less than formerly. If he had, she would only wither him with scorn and ask him, as she always did, why didn't he stand up for his rights? Why didn't he assert himself, instead of being a timid little mouse all his life. Why indeed?

"Pass the sugar." Her voice broke shrill, strident, across his thought.

Walter reached for the sugar bowl casually—and then paused, his arm in mid-air.

It was over by Agatha. He could have sworn it was next to his plate not ten seconds ago.

He could also have sworn that he had seen out of the corner of his eye, a dim red flash—across the table.

It was after supper. Walter was sitting

in the front room, reading his paper and wishing he dared smoke a cigar.

"Walter!"

He looked up. Agatha was standing in the kitchen doorway. Her face was white.

He got up slowly, went into the kitchen.

"Look, Walter."

He looked. The dishes were all washed and shining and stacked neatly into place.

"Very good dear," said Walter vaguely, searching for some new compliment. "Very fast, too—"

"You fool! I didn't do those dishes!"

"Huh?"

"No. I was standing over by the ice-box, putting food away, and wishing that I—well, I was wishing that I had a husband who was considerate enough of his wife to do the dishes for her. And I thought I saw something red."

"Red?"

"Yes. Behind me. A—a flash, sort of. I turned around, and there they were. Done!"

"Oh," said Walter weakly. Then he caught sight of the ring on Agatha's finger.

It was glowing like ruby fire.

ABOUT four o'clock the next morning, Walter Simmons was quite rudely awakened. Beside him, Agatha was screaming over and over in a shrill falsetto. Screaming, and still asleep.

Abruptly she woke, and clung trembling, to him for a good five minutes before he managed to soothe her.

"Walt," she sobbed hysterically. "Oh, Walt! I had a bad dream."

She had not called him Walt for almost ten years now.

"I dreamt," she whispered, "that this ring had a funny little red man inside, and he was laughing at me and hiding. I wanted him to break the crystal, and let me see him, but he wouldn't."

"Then, all of a sudden, he did show me

his face. Oh, it was . . . awful." She sobbed shudderingly. Then she was silent.

She was gazing dreamily into the ring.

Walter Simmons moistened his lips. He said, "Agatha."

"Agatha!"

She gave a little jump, and turned on him. "What?"

"Look, Agatha. Why don't you sell the ring?"

"Sell it?"

He gulped, took a firm hand on his courage. "Yes. After all, you said you were afraid."

Agatha looked at the ring. She was smiling strangely.

"I know. But I—I've changed my mind."

Walter Simmons left for the office next morning with a sickening apprehension gnawing at his insides. His fears were not relieved by the sight of Agatha, after breakfast, sitting on the sofa, staring at the winking bit of rosy crystal on her finger.

She did not even bid him good-by.

That evening, Walter did not go home. He went instead to the library, and spent a good hour and a half browsing through the sections marked "Demonology" before he found what he wanted.

FAMILIAR—he read. A demon given to a sorcerer or witch as part of his compact with Satan. In the olden times they inhabited usually the body of a toad or black cat. Of late, however, it has been found more convenient to use for the dwelling-place of the familiar some more personal object—such as a bracelet, a necklace, or ring—

"Ah," said Walter very softly. He read on.

. . . And if the owner of the familiar die, or his compact with Satan run out, then the imp should be buried with him. In the event another human come into possession of the familiar, it owes him temporary allegiance—though it can, perforce, commit

whatever mischievous pranks it will.—Should the name of God be mentioned in the familiar's presence—

Walter Simmons gulped as he read the next few lines. He jumped up and went out of the library hurriedly, his short fat legs, pumping, eyes wide.

He knew now who the impeccably-dressed stranger had been.

He knew about the ring.

And—he had a very good idea what would happen should Agatha wear that ring to church tomorrow.

WHEN he arrived home, Agatha was huddled over on the sofa, staring into the ring. She looked up as he came in, gave him a dreamy smile. "Oh, are you home, already?"

Walter blinked.

"Look, Walt! Look at my coat."

He glanced briefly at the new fur wrap, and nodded. "Yes, dear. Very nice."

"Just wait 'till they see me tomorrow with it at church. And with this ring." She smiled in anticipation.

Walter blinked again. There was something odd about his wife's behavior.

"Agatha," he whispered numbly. "You've got to listen. That ring. You mustn't wear it tomorrow to church."

Agatha looked at him. "Why not?"

"Because. It's—evil. Look, dear. Do me a favor, will you?"

She nodded, absently.

"Make a wish. Wish that, oh, that supper would be ready. Right now."

Agatha's lips moved. For an instant the crystal on her finger sparkled with unearthly brilliance, and Walter thought he saw something red streaking toward the kitchen—and then back again.

"Now," he managed. "Come into the kitchen."

Walter had half-expected to see what he did, but the sight was still rather frightening.

The roast was done. The table was all set. The potatoes had been mashed and the salad was made. Everything ready to go on the table.

"There," he said weakly. "See that?"

Agatha was smiling. "Of course. It's the ring. . . ."

Walter fought down the black wave of panic that closed on his insides. "Then you'll get rid of it? Sell it, or—"

"Of course not. I rather like this ring now. Sort of . . . fascinating." She kept staring at it.

Walter argued and pleaded all through supper, but to no avail. Agatha liked the ring. She would wear it tomorrow morning, to church and nothing Walter could say or do would change her mind.

That was that.

AT CHURCH services next morning, all their neighborhood acquaintances were properly awed by Agatha's new coat. They *oh'd* and *ah'd*, as Agatha smirked, and displayed it to her heart's content.

A dull, fatalistic feeling had fallen upon Walter. He did not even respond to his wife's most barbed insults, paid no heed to her hisses of "Walter! Sit up straight. Everybody's looking at us!"

But as the services slowly dragged through the next hour, Agatha stopped prodding him. She was staring into the crystal on her finger, as if hypnotized. Walter closed his eyes very tightly as he remembered what he had read. . . .

Somehow he couldn't stop trembling.

At the conclusion of the hymns, the pastor turned to the congregation and lifted his hands for the blessing.

This was it. Walter held his breath. The minister's voice thundered out.

"In God's name, may peace reign!"

As the pastor uttered the words, Walter felt Agatha stiffen beside him. }

Then she screamed. Horribly.

Everywhere there was commotion, the babble of excited voices, people craning and demanding to know what had happened, ushers exclaiming and hurrying forward.

Very slowly, Walter Simmons turned. He looked at Agatha's face.

Her eyes were wide and staring, and at the expression in them, he felt the short hairs bristle at the nape of his neck.

He looked at the ring.

He was not surprised to see the dim red glow gone, instead the crystal was white and lusterless, as if—whatever dwelt in it, had fled forever.

Walter wondered briefly, how the familiar had looked to Agatha, as it came out of the ring.

There were no complications. Heart failure, the coroner said.

At the funeral, many were the strange remarks at Walter Simmons' strange apathy.

"Don't look a bit sad," one of his friends whispered. "Well, that's not surprising either, if you knew how Agatha treated him. A regular shrew, she was."

The good neighbors of Walter Simmons might have been a great deal more concerned than they were, had they seen him the next night—seen him in the cemetery, digging furtively in a grave which could not have been over a week or two old. A grave with the name "Jonathan Miles" inscribed on the headstone.

They might have said much and wondered more, could they have seen the small crystal ring Walter left in the grave.

The ring which he was returning to its former owner.