

# Weird Tales

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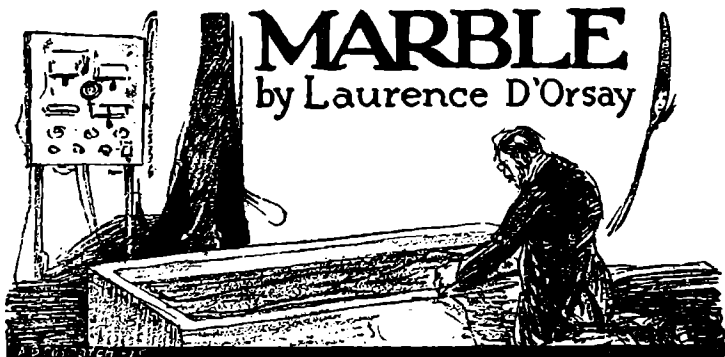
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# MARBLE

by Laurence D'Orsay

Author of "Phantoms"

"I ALWAYS said no good could come of it!" the woman cried with a sob, and then the crowd edged back to the curb, and gazed open-mouthed at the shuttered windows.

"An' you ain't seen your husband since Monday?"

"I ain't set eyes on him. It's just a week today. I said, as he left in the mornin', 'It would be better for you, Fred, if you quit your job at Dr. Lemoine's, because no good can come of it; an' he gives me the willies every time I look at him.'"

"An' what did Fred say?"

"He said, 'Beggars can't be choosers,' an' the doctor paid him well."

"An' you ain't saw him since?"

"No, I ain't, an' I b'lieve he's bein' experimented on."

"Why don't you call the police?"

"I have, an' they are comin' around this mornin'."

The group pressed forward again as a man, accompanied by two officers, entered the square and paused before the gloomy residence.

"Get rid of this gaping crowd, Jenkins," he said; and the crowd, by dint of physical persuasion and repeated instructions to "move on,"

was hustled to the corner, where it halted to await developments. "Now, Maloney, ring the bell."

Neither the first, second, nor third ring had the slightest effect, except to bring back the crowd, strongly reinforced, until it hung around the steps of the residence.

"Force it," the man said quietly; and in a few minutes the door stood open, and the excited idlers surged forward almost to the doorsteps. "Jenkins, clear this mob out of the street; come along, Maloney."

The door was pulled to behind the two men; the crowd again retreated to the corner, and the officer walked to and fro in front of the house.

The two who had entered glanced into the front room; it, as well as the back room and the upper part of the house, was empty.

"Try the basement, Maloney."

They descended the stairs, and came to a sudden stop as they were met by an unexpected door.

"Sounds like iron," the chief exclaimed, rapping his knuckles against it.

"That's what it is, all right," agreed the officer.

"Knock on it with that bar, and see if anyone's alive in the house."

At the first blow the door was thrown open, and a man clad in shirt and trousers confronted them; a man tall and dark, with face clean-shaven, his hair cut closely to his head, and his shirt-sleeves rolled tightly to his shoulders.

"What the devil's all this racket?" he asked, with some asperity. Then: "Come in." And he closed the door behind them.

The whole place seemed weird and uncanny. The farther end was draped by a long curtain, which hung from the ceiling to the floor; the walls were lined with shelves and cases filled with glass vessels and polished instruments that vividly suggested their own uses, while in a corner alcove stood a life-size statue, a Greek god, in black marble.

"What is the meaning of this intrusion? What do you want? Am I in America, or is this some part of the world where men's homes can be broken into, their scientific researches disturbed by strangers?"

"We are police officers, and here's the search warrant. This house has been without sign of life for a week, and your servant, who entered then, has never left it."

"You mean the man who used to do odd jobs for me? I discharged him some ten days ago, and I haven't seen him since."

"He came here on Monday."

"He did not. Maybe you don't believe me—maybe you think I have murdered him, eh? Of course, you've searched the house. This is my laboratory, and there's only the room through the curtains, there."

The officers stepped forward. The doctor drew back the curtain, and made them a little mocking bow.

"Now, then, look! You see there's no one there, and if you're quite satisfied, I prefer to be left alone. You found your way in, so I suppose you

can find it out; and don't forget to close the door."

## 2

FOR three years the gloomy house in the square had been vacant—not for rent, but simply vacant, for Dr. Lemoine had been touring in Europe. The missing servant had not been seen since his sudden and mysterious disappearance, and the little gossiping group that once took such a morbid interest in his whereabouts had forgotten him in the excitement of other nine-day wonders, which had flourished and withered in their turn.

But now a change had suddenly come about, for the master of the house was returning.

Brisk, businesslike men measured floors and windows, energetic workmen sat on planks and smoked, and all was ostentatious bustle and activity. Finally the last workman took his leave. Furniture vans arrived and disgorged their contents, which were to transform the dismal dwelling into a habitation fit for a man and woman—for it was rumored that Dr. Lemoine was bringing a wife.

That she was beautiful, the few loungers who were privileged to see the couple descend from the taxicab could not but admit; but they also noted something chilling and repellent in that beauty. There was so much of the doctor's cold, insolent sneer reflected in her face, that it seemed indeed that like had chosen like.

Dr. Lemoine assisted his wife to alight, and she passed up the steps, and then turned and glanced back in icy astonishment as a young woman darted across the road and laid a detaining hand upon her husband's sleeve.

"Have you found him, doctor?"

"Found whom?"

"My husband—Fred, you know—who used to work for you."

"No, no, woman! Go away. How should I have found him?"

But the woman retained her hold of his sleeve.

"You know where he is, Dr. Le-moine!" she cried, fiercely. "You know where he is!"

"Nonsense, I tell you! How should I know?"

"You do know, because you know, as I know, *he's in there!*" And she pointed to the house, an almost insane light in her eyes.

Without further parley, he thrust her aside and passed in.

His wife, moving from the window, turned toward him as he entered.

"Some of your friends seem to have good memories for you," she said, a trifle sneeringly.

"Yes. It's nonsense, of course. Her husband disappeared three years ago, and she thinks I had something to do with it."

"And had you?"

"You're jesting."

"I never jest; least of all with you, for I know that life is nothing to you."

"On the contrary, life interests me. I shall be able to show you some remarkable experiments, now that we are home. I have everything to my hand in my laboratory—everything to aid me in my study of life and death."

"And I, to my horror, have found how little you think of either!"

"True," he said slowly. "I think nothing of either. But it is your homecoming. Forget these trifles, and let me show you the house."

She did not move.

"I wonder why I married you," she said, glaring into his eyes.

"Out of gratitude for my service to your father, of course," he returned lightly.

"I wonder why I did not sooner kill myself!" she burst out, not heeding his thinly-veiled sneer.

"Tush! You talk like a child."

"The first time I saw you, I shuddered, for you were as a blight in the very air; and then, slowly and viciously, you plotted in silence, until you had broken my heart and bought me from my father—until you held him bound hand and foot, and I was the price of your silence."

"You have said all this so many times before," he interjected mockingly, with an evil look.

"And I say it for the last time now," she cried; "for in this house I see death written, and it is yours. A death worthy of such a devil."

"Loud applause from the gallery," he said cynically. "And now for the tour of inspection."

PAUSING before the iron door, the doctor exclaimed: "My laboratory—or what you perhaps would call my torture chamber! Do you care to see it before science resumes her researches?"

She inclined her head, entered as he switched on the lights, and gazed coldly around the room, aware that her husband's eye was upon her to catch a tremor of the lips that would show a spark of fear. Suddenly, with a gasp she fell back a pace, pointing with trembling hand to the corner, where a curtain on a brass rod cut off a portion of the room.

"Who is behind there?" she cried wildly. "Who is behind there?"

He crossed the room, pulled back the curtain, and faced her.

"Not quite as brave as you thought yourself to be, are you? But you are frightened at nothing," he chuckled. "A statue in black marble is enough to set you trembling. Come nearer and examine it. Come and see with what truly marvelous accuracy every

vein, every muscle and tendon is carved upon the stone."

"Who did it?"

"I—from life. You did not know I excelled in sculpture as well as the arts."

"It's a wonderful piece of work," she whispered, attracted in spite of herself, struggling to regain her composure, and not knowing why an icy fear still seemed to grip her heart. "Very true to life."

"Very true, indeed. Give me your hand."

He took her hand, and placed it upon the arm of the statue.

"There," he said, quietly, "you can almost fancy you feel the muscles beneath the skin, almost fancy that arm once moved. It is, as you say, very true to life."

She suddenly went white as death. With a cry of terror she dragged her hand from his grasp, and, clutching the table for support, leaned back against it, utterly unnerved by the nameless horror of the revelation that had all at once come to her.

"Is he—it—like the missing man?" she gasped at last.

Dr. Lemoine pursed his lips, and eyed the statue critically.

"H'm! It is strange," he answered, after a moment's hesitation. "But now you mention it, there is a likeness."

He offered her his arm. She recoiled from him, shuddering.

"That is the result of my greatest experiment. You heard of the missing man they're still worrying me about?"

He jerked his head meaningly toward the statue. She was still looking at him with a horror in her eyes that deepened with every word he uttered.

"It is not true!" she cried at last. "You are trying to drive me insane!"

"Nonsense!" he returned slowly. "It's true enough. That's the miss-

ing man—and I defy the world to find it out!"

His face flushed with the dull blaze of passion, and he caught her by the wrist and twisted her around until her eyes looked into his.

"And remember this, Evelyn: let there be no more of this childish folly. Your threats, which you have been pleased to hurl at me since you imagined you had penetrated some of my—well—scientific secrets, do not frighten me. I know that you would betray me if you could, for the interests of science are nothing to you; and I shall be on my guard and make very sure that you are not given the opportunity. And as sure as you stand before me, at your first attempt I will kill you, and you shall be the companion statue on the pedestal. Remember that, Evelyn!"

## 3

"WHAT do you think of the wine, Hendrickson?"

"Splendid bouquet; '94 Château Yquem, isn't it?"

The man held his glass to the light.

"No, quite a modern vintage. Treated by my own process."

"What a wonderful fellow you are, Lemoine!—always doing something to astound people; always inventing or discovering something."

"Pshaw! You can't call an artificial maturing of wine an invention; but I have one or two inventions with which some day I mean to surprize the world. The illumination of this room, and, indeed, the whole house, is one of my secrets; those electric bulbs will burn for years without renewal or attention. Electricity as men know it is nothing; as I know it, it is a power that can control the world, that can prolong man's life beyond his wildest dreams, and then preserve his body unalterable for all time. It beats the much-vaunted embalming processes of the ancient Egyptians."

He frowned under his eyebrows at his wife, sitting opposite to him.

"Then you have invented a process to arrest decay?"

Dr. Hendrickson's tone betrayed surprise, incredulity.

"Yes. It will be made public after my death—not before."

A trembling sigh came from Mrs. Lemoine. She rested her arms on the table and leaned toward her husband, the color going and coming in her cheeks.

"You own you have invented a process to arrest decay in the human body after death?" she said slowly. "You own it, before your friends?"

Her excitement was all but uncontrollable.

"Certainly," he returned, carelessly flicking the ash from his cigar.

"Wonderful!" Dr. Hendrickson exclaimed involuntarily. "Mrs. Lemoine, your husband is a remarkable man. You must be proud of him."

"Proud of him!"

She bent toward the visitor, twisting her fingers in the tablecloth in her agitation.

"Proud of him! I hate him. I loathe him! He is right; he speaks truly; he has invented such a process—a process which enables him to slay men with impunity, and to change them into black and shining marble! He is indeed a remarkable man!"

The two guests gazed in amazement at the woman. She had risen from her seat, and with dilated eyes stood pointing at her husband, who sat imperturbably in his chair smoking his cigar.

"My dear Evelyn," he said, coldly, at last, "you have another of your hysterical fits coming on. You are overwrought and excited. If you would rather retire, we will excuse you."

She paid no heed, but turned her eyes full on him.

"I denounce you!" she cried wildly, "—denounce you before your

guests as a murderer—the murderer of the man who was in your employ three years ago! They scoured the continent for him, and he was never found, and why? Because he never left this house! Because he is here now! I dare you to take your friends, scientists like yourself, to your laboratory and show them the black statue—the body of the man you murdered, as you would murder me—" Her voice rose shrilly as she turned toward the others. "Protect me, save me, Dr. Hendrickson, Dr. Werber!" she cried wildly. "Ever since I accidentally stumbled upon one of his dreadful secrets, shortly after our marriage a month ago, I have been held a close prisoner, and when last night I divined the secret of the *thing* in there"—she pointed a shaking finger in the direction of the laboratory—"he threatened—"

Dr. Lemoine frowned and looked perplexedly at his guests.

"I am sorry, my dear friends," he exclaimed, rising and laying a hand on the shoulder of each. "It is very unfortunate—poor girl! You understand, of course. Would you mind humoring her? Will you come and see the statue that frightens her? It's a magnificent piece of work, a Greek god I bought in Italy."

And he led the way to his laboratory.

WITH eyes that keenly appreciated, the two guests glanced around the room, at the various appliances and delicate instruments that filled the cases along the walls, at the strange-looking coils and other apparatus, the purposes and uses of which even they could not divine.

"Here," cried Dr. Lemoine, walking to the alcove screened by the curtain, "is the statue. Lifelike, I grant you, startlingly lifelike. But that is all. Behold!"

With a flourish almost melodramatic, he flung back the curtain, and the

light gleamed upon the polished figure—the Greek god with his arms folded on his breast.

“Well, what do you think of my statue?”

“Your victim!”

Unnoticed, the doctor’s wife had entered.

“Hush, Evelyn! You alarm my friends.”

“It is magnificent!” exclaimed Dr. Werber. Hendrickson, too, stood rooted to the spot. But he gave no sign beyond a slight start, unnoticed by the others. His eyes swept from the statue to the wife of his host, and there was in them an inscrutable expression.

“Magnificent!” he echoed then.

“Yes,” continued Lemoine, proudly, “it is life itself. Look how the muscles stand out on the arms, the veins in the hands and temples. Observe the folds of the girdle. Is it not superb? And yet, it is only marble. *Only marble, Evelyn.*”

He picked up a tiny pestle from the table. “Test it, Werber.”

“My dear Lemoine—”

“To gratify her. Perhaps it will soothe her.”

Dr. Werber placed his hand on the smooth, cold surface of the statue, and lightly tapped it.

“It’s a human body!” the doctor’s wife cut in shrilly. “Can’t you see it is a body, or are you blind?”

“My dear Mrs. Lemoine, no. You must forget all about that. It’s only a beautiful piece of work in marble.”

“You fool! You blind fool!”

“Evelyn, how dare you?”

Lemoine’s hand closed on her arm with a grip as of a vise.

“Don’t excite her, Lemoine, please. It’s very unfortunate.”

“It’s marble, Evelyn, don’t you understand? Marble! Marble! Marble!” and the doctor struck the figure with his fist as he shouted and glared at his wife. “I am expecting a companion to it, Evelyn—a Venus. I’ve

waited too long for it, but I will have it within a week.”

There were hidden meanings, for his wife alone, in all that Dr. Lemoine said during the remainder of the evening, and she answered back, scorn for scorn, hate for hate, and contempt for his contempt. She was no longer afraid of him; she remembered the look of understanding in Dr. Hendrickson’s eyes.

## 4

DR. LEMOINE had received the half-suggested, half-expressed sympathy of his departing friends with the quiet dignity suitable to the circumstances, and now he bolted the door and descended direct to his laboratory. He was conscious of a deep contempt for scientists in general as he recalled his momentary uneasiness when, his hand forced by his wife’s accusations, he had stood side by side with his two colleagues before the statue. It was well, he told himself, that some scientists were fools.

But Evelyn was dangerous to him. He had complacently thought himself secure by virtue of the fact that he did not leave her out of his sight; but the contretemps this evening had convinced him of his fallacy.

He passed into the inner room. There came a sound of basketwork creaking as a big jar was dragged across the floor, and then a running and splashing as liquid poured into a bath. The furnace threw out a ruddy glow, and the doctor took off his coat and vest, and worked in the red light as the heat of the room increased.

Next he attached wires to one of the strange instruments at which his guests had marveled, and the opposite ends to plates, which he cast into the bath. Then he lit a cigar, started the battery, and waited.

Perhaps a quarter of an hour later, he dipped a rod into the liquid, and, withdrawing it, gazed with triumph-

ant satisfaction at the black, shining glaze with which it had become coated. He placed it on one side, and passed into the outer room.

For a moment he stood listening at the door of the laboratory, then stealthily he began to move up the stairs. The house was silent. Through the long transom over the hall-door a struggling moonbeam threw a narrow ribbon of light upon the polished floor. Outside, a footstep passed, and faded away. The clock struck 2.

Slowly he ascended toward his wife's room. And then, in the blackness of the staircase, he became conscious of the presence of another person, heard the suppressed breathing of someone hiding in the darkest corner and fearful of discovery.

The doctor's hand crept to his pocket and withdrew a vial. Holding it well away from his face, he poured the contents upon a handkerchief, and again stood listening, every muscle of his body tense. Yes, there was someone! Instinctively he knew it was his wife—perhaps creeping down to him as he was creeping up to her; coming by stealth to kill him as he worked in his laboratory.

He sprang forward, and gripped her by the throat as she passed by him. There was an instant's struggle as he held the handkerchief over her mouth, pressing it down viciously, with all his might; a moan, stifled in its birth; and she dropped limply to the floor with a shuddering gurgle.

Half carrying, half dragging the body, he descended to the laboratory. He turned the switch. The lighting system had somehow failed.

"Damn!" he muttered savagely, groping in the darkness; "at this time, above all others—and I boasted that it was perfect."

He passed into the inner room, where the crimson glow from the furnace gave just sufficient light to enable him to discern the outline of the bath on the floor. Gradually and

carefully he lowered his burden, until it lay full length on the bottom and the liquid rose almost to the edge.

Then he returned to the outer chamber, and by the flare of an alcohol lamp set himself to repair the defect in the lighting system.

With a startled exclamation he suddenly wheeled around, and glanced fearfully at the door, whence he fancied a slight sound had come. The curtain of the empty alcove was swaying slightly, and he began cautiously to advance toward it; then the half-open door caught his eye, and with a sneer at his own nerves he pushed it to, and bent again to his task.

A little longer, and the room blazed with light once more, and he walked into the inner chamber and gazed into the bath.

At the bottom there lay a figure seemingly cut from black marble.

A LONG-DRAWN sigh came from immediately behind him, and he turned with a cry of terror.

"Evelyn!"

He must be insane, haunted! He gripped the side of the bath and stared down into it.

Yes, there was the woman—but now he saw that it was not Evelyn, but the wife of the man standing behind that curtain—the two of them now turned to everlasting stone.

And even as his eyes sought the curtain, it parted. Paralyzed, unable to move or speak, he stared at Dr. Hendrickson, who, with a constable and a tall plain-clothes man, was advancing toward him.

"Game's up, Dr. Lemoine," said the plain-clothes man, quite impersonally. "You fooled me three years ago—remember? But I think we've got the goods on you this time. . . . I arrest you for unlawful restraint of your wife's person, on complaint sworn to by Dr. Hendrickson here, and on suspicion of murder. Bring him along, Maloney!"