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*The Desecrated Dead Body Sought Revenge***MUMMY****By KELSEY PERCIVAL KITCHEL**

I HAVE always prided myself on being a practical man; prosaic, if you will. In the old days the boys used to call me the man from Missouri. . . .

Well, so I was. I had to be shown—and I was shown. Let me tell you. . . .

It was in South America that the thing happened. I had been engaged by the Babylonia Copper Company to go to their mine and smelter two miles high in the Andes. Being a metallurgical engineer and having had blast-furnace experience in the New Jersey plant, I was put in charge of the furnaces there in the desert.

At that time Babylonia was in process of growth and organization; it was not the finished affair that it is nowadays with its hospital, married quarters, white women and a club. When I went down from New York there wasn't a wife in camp. We men—a handful of us—lived at the mess-house and worked eighteen hours a day for seven days a week. Oh, yes, the pay was good; we would not have stayed if it had not been for the high salaries. You see, there was not a thing to amuse a chap. We were fifteen miles from railhead, living in a tiny village clinging to a mountain-

side that is a desert in the absolute meaning of that much-abused word. You yourself have seen so-called deserts, haven't you? And they were usually graced with sage-brush, lizards, mosses and lichens, weren't they? Well, the Atacama has nothing on it that may be called "life." Not a thing. Rolling reaches and ridges of black, volcanic rocks and red gray sands; great salt-caked basins; leagues and leagues of alkaline dust blown westward at night by the winds pouring down from the Andes, then blown eastward during the day with the winds coming from the coast.

Yes, you have to be pretty hard-boiled to keep your sanity in such a place. We worked on eight-hour shifts there at the furnaces, of course. . . . My buddy was Preston, a good scout who roomed with me and had the next shift to mine, knew his business and all that. Kellogg looked after the third shift in the twenty-four hours.

After I'd been there a year, more or less, I had naturally absorbed plenty of information about the surrounding country. I'd heard stories of the Indian burying-grounds over at Chiu-Chiu; some of the boys had managed to get leave and ride over

there—twenty miles of vile going through the desert. They had brought back a few turquoise beads, some pots and so forth. I had never been particularly interested in archeology, but since I couldn't pry a vacation loose from the G. M.—and by "vacation" I mean a trip to port where there is a decent hotel; there's a movie-palace, too, and you can sit on a plaza bench and look at white women—as I could not be spared for that, I asked for, and got, a couple of days. Having nothing better to do I decided on Chiu-Chiu and the burying-ground. . . . I believe that one should try everything once, and it seemed a pity to go back home to New York, at the end of my contract, without being able to show some honest-to-goodness relics. And I had a notion to get a skull and have it made into a tobacco-jar. You can tell by that how young I was.

This place was situated on the River Loa, but don't run away with a fancy picture of a meadow-fringed stream, clumps of woodland and fields of waving grain. Nature does not work that way in northern Chile. The Loa struggles down from the snows across a region as desolate and terrible as any inferno. For untold centuries the river has been eating its way through variegated strata laid down eons ago—like the Colorado, you know. In most places the canyon is so steep and deep that no human being could tap enough water for a window-box; but in a very few places the escarpment has broken away, leaving an approach to the narrow, turbid stream. In these rare spots the aborigines have, from time immemorial, irrigated and cultivated the ground. Yes, oases, with skimpy fig and pepper-trees, some highland corn and alfalfa and small, stony patches of puny vegetables. Life is unbelievably difficult for the desert farmer there in the Andes. The huts, made of stone and mud, cluster around a squat, gray church.

Chiu-Chiu, being the seat of a post-house on the Inca highway long before Pizarro dreamed of coming to the New World, had buried its dead for centuries in the sandy wastes outside the little sun-baked oasis.

I rode over there alone. I had always preferred doing things by myself because it seemed to me a mark of weakness to want somebody tagging along for company. . . . I do not think so now, but—well, let me go on.

One does not suffer on such a ride. You and your tough pampa horse have a good drink before starting and you take along a brace of water-bottles—the horse gets a sip from your hat, you understand—and the sun blisters your parched skin, and your eyes squint in the merciless glare, and you sneer at the deceitful mirages that mock you with their glimpses of blue lake-water. . . .

Chiu-Chiu has a hotel—at least a hovel goes by that name; but you can get a meal there and a shake-down. Being so high in the air you are not troubled with insect life, with the exception of flies.

The horse was fed and watered while I got a snack myself; then I started for the burying-ground; the hotel-keeper was a trifle reluctant to direct me but he did not hold off long. You see the farmers depended on selling their green stuff to the Babylonia Mine, and consequently nobody wanted to offend a gringo. We foreigners could arrange to secure our pumpkins and green corn from the port, you see, and the people at the oasis knew it.

WELL, I found the place and, with a trench shovel that I'd fastened to the saddle, I began to dig after having done a little preliminary stamping which, I had been told at Babylonia, was the way to locate a grave. If there is a hollow sound underfoot, why, you have come to a likely place to dig, see?

It was interesting, that delving there in the limitless desert under the towering, snowy peaks of the Andes.

I uncovered a brown, dried figure, mummied by the arid climate. It sat with its arms wrapped around its bony knees and with its head bent; clinging to it were fragments of ancient cloth, and from the fine sand close to it I lifted out darts, lances, arrows, pots and a few rough necklaces of shell and low-grade turquoise. No, he was not a prince; or if he was from a royal house he must have been desperately poor. God knows how long he had been squatting there, looking east and waiting for Judgment Day.

The face was a splendid aquiline one with deep eye-sockets; the brown skin was drawn incredibly snug over the skull. Every bit of flesh was gone—dried away; there was nothing left but what is popularly termed "skin and bone."

He was quite freed of sand by the time I had laid my discoveries on the crusted surface of the desert. I sat down to roll a cigarette and have a swig at the canteen, and I fell to thinking that what I was doing would be called grave-robbery if it were carried on in a modern cemetery; but if a burying-ground is ancient, why, we illogical little microbes called men name our digging "archeological excavation."

I had a feeling of discomfort that I could not understand; I wondered whether the long ride in the blistering heat had anything to do with it. An intuition came to me that I'd better leave that mummy alone with his worthless trumpery; but being a practical man and taking no stock in intuitions, I pulled myself together and rather half-heartedly selected the best of the trash from the sandy grave and packed it in the saddle-bag. That one hole in the ground was enough for me; I did not search for any more; somehow the whole affair

seemed a dubious sort of pleasure. I was sick of it and decided suddenly that I would change my plans and return to Babylonia that night instead of sleeping in the *tambo*. I knew that by going slow the horse would be able to make the trip.

I went to work at the head, which I intended using for a tobacco-jar. There was little difficulty in cracking it loose. Brittle, friable, dusty, musty, it came off in my two hands and I stuffed it in the bag along with the other things. . . .

Something seemed to impel me to cover up that stark, headless thing; something seemed to tell me that I should leave him as I had found him. But I obstinately ignored these intuitions.

Back at the *tambo* I bought the horse a good feed and rested him but could not eat the disgusting supper of beans and tough steak offered me. As the moon rose I started for Babylonia, going slowly for the sake of the tired animal under me. There was no danger of my getting lost, as there is a fairly clear trail from the oasis to railhead; and from there I had the mine lights to guide me.

There was a curious tingling sensation all over me; I thought that perhaps I had a touch of sun; or maybe I was getting scurvy, for in those days that disease was not infrequent in the more remote mining-camps in the Andes; we could not depend with any certainty on the oasis vegetables and it was pretty hard to get fresh food up from port. I felt sick, and had delusions. I was sure I was being followed. . . . Now the natives are as gentle as sheep; they never bother gringos. In spite of that I kept looking behind me; I saw nothing but the long shadows of the rocks. It was cold. You know that at an altitude of ten thousand feet the nights are bitter even in the tropics. The sudden changes of temperature crack the rocks, night and day, and

in the pampa silence you can hear the soft whispering "ping" of flaking granite as it comes away and rolls down to the skirt of sand at the base of every boulder.

Once I was sure that the saddle-bag quivered and wriggled. The horse was aware of something extraordinary, to judge by his behavior, because tired as he was he acted the terrified child that night, jumping, shying, shaking.

The lights grew brighter and larger as I neared camp, and I heard the roar of the ore-crushers; for the first time I liked the sound. It seemed almost homelike. It meant that there were human beings round about—lots of 'em! Mostly Bolivian and Chilean laborers, to be sure, but humans at any rate. I was ashamed of myself for wanting to be with my own kind; I was unreasonable, foolish, I told myself.

The corral was below the plant and I stopped there to leave the horse, which was pretty well tuckered out. I left the saddle-bags, too; common sense warned me that I should go up to the mess-house and turn in, for night was nearly gone and I needed sleep. But I did not do that. Preston was on shift at the furnaces and I wanted to get near my buddy. I wanted to tell him what a fizzle my *paseo* had been. He would laugh at my disappointment, perhaps, but I didn't care. He had told me before I started that burying-grounds are not what they are cracked up to be. He had tried that sort of dissipation himself and had found it dull.

So I plowed through the heavy dust and sand, over loose stones, up to the furnaces.

PRESTON was on the feed-floor; he had one man working under his eye, a burly fellow who pulled the loaded barrow of mixed charge off the elevator and dumped the contents into the furnace mouths. As I drew near I saw Preston on the platform above

me and climbed up to him. Again I felt that there was something behind me; it was close, too; I seemed to feel two hands on my shoulders—bony, clawlike hands—and yet when I reached back quickly there was nothing there—nothing.

Preston watched me mounting the iron steps but instead of his cheery grin I saw, in the bright glare of the sputtering arclight, an odd, startled expression on his face.

"What in hell?" he shouted as he looked over my shoulder and down toward the lower floor. I turned, too, but there was nothing unusual to be seen.

"There was somebody behind you—with the thinnest face that ever came down the pike!" Preston laughed sheepishly. "Guess I must have been half asleep. I didn't expect you back for another twelve hours—what's the matter?"

I was thinking of that bony face in the saddle-bag at the corral; the head that was to be cleaned up and fashioned into a jar—bah! I shuddered while I was angry with myself for giving in to nerves. Before I could formulate an answer Preston glanced down from the feed-floor, then ran past me down the stairs, two steps at a time. Below, a laborer, tapping the copper, could not stop the flow when the ladle was full. The sparkling, iridescent stream ran wild, and Preston was needed, *pronto*. The Bolivian on the platform had no business to leave his job, but he caught the excitement and ran down the stairs, too, leaving me alone.

A full barrow was standing on the elevator facing the furnace-mouth. It came up just as the Bolivian ran below. There was no reason why I should stay there and do his work, but I saw that the furnace needed another charge, so I stepped across and took hold of the handles of the car, thinking to dump it and close the furnace.

Then two hands seized mine—and, man, *I saw them!* . . . Disembodied hands, clawlike, brown and shriveled, with each bone showing through the papery, dark skin. They clutched my wrists, holding me fast while they forced the barrow and me along with it toward the open door where the white-hot hell-fire raged. . . .

I struggled while the car trundled slowly, jerkily, straight toward the fury of the fire. The gripping hands dug dark nails into my wrists. . . . I have the scars yet. Look! You see them? Ten white crescents that I shall always carry. . . .

The barrow moved faster and I felt a cold breath on my cheek in spite of the searing heat from the open furnace. For a second I looked over my shoulder into the eye-sockets of a mummied head with skin drawn thin and tight over the bones; coarse, harsh hair brushed me. . . . I saw it, felt it—yes. . . . The barrow tipped.

I slid with it—down. . . .

You have guessed, of course, that Preston returned to the platform just in time to grab me as I fell.

A wave of unconsciousness swept over me. When I opened my eyes I was flat on my back panting like a branded steer and Preston was examining my bleeding wrists. The workmen from various parts of the building had gathered near, and one of them said, in his slurred, rapid Spanish: "Those wounds never came from the car. The *patrón* has had dealings with a spirit!" He spoke with the surety, the finality of an Indian who sees and knows, perhaps, more than we foreigners do.

Just then Kellogg, the lad in charge

of the 7-to-3 o'clock shift, came along fresh from his bed and breakfast; so Preston was free to get me back to the mess-house.

But after we were away from the furnaces I refused to go to my room. I told him everything—"and I've got to get that thing back to its body—now!" I finished.

He was a good sport; he did not laugh as many a man might have done, although I think that I could have killed him if he had sneered. No, he looked at me, nodded and remarked quietly: "I saw something behind you as you came up the steps." He put his arm through mine and without another word we went to the corral; he had his own horse saddled and chose a fresh mount for me. The bags he took care of himself, remarking as he picked them up: "You can not have those relics, old man."

Together we rode back to Chiu-Chiu. I no longer felt that there was something behind me; the thing, whatever it was, moved at my side, waiting.

It did not have to wait long. The horses were fresh and we arrived at Chiu-Chiu before noon, making a wide circuit around the oasis to avoid curious villagers.

Back on the shoulders I put the head of that seated Thing and I replaced each piece of trash I had pilfered. Then we covered the mummy from the light of day. The sand was smooth when we had finished. . . .

That's all. I've never had a haunted feeling since; being a practical man I won't either, for I shall never again disturb a dead man. No, never again.

