


# TERROR TALES



VOLUME TEN

MARCH-APRIL, 1939

NUMBER THREE

THIS SEAL PROTECTS YOU  AGAINST REPRINT FICTION!

All stories in magazines bearing this seal are written especially for this publisher and have never before been printed in any form!

## A SPINE-CHILLING FEATURE-LENGTH NOVEL

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 What foul and hideous power was it that drew the loveliest women from their beds in that pitiful transient camp—and made them surrender themselves to the unholy mercies of the monster that dwelt in the slime and ooze of the river-bed? Bill Coleman learned the answer; but the price he paid was dearer to him than life itself!

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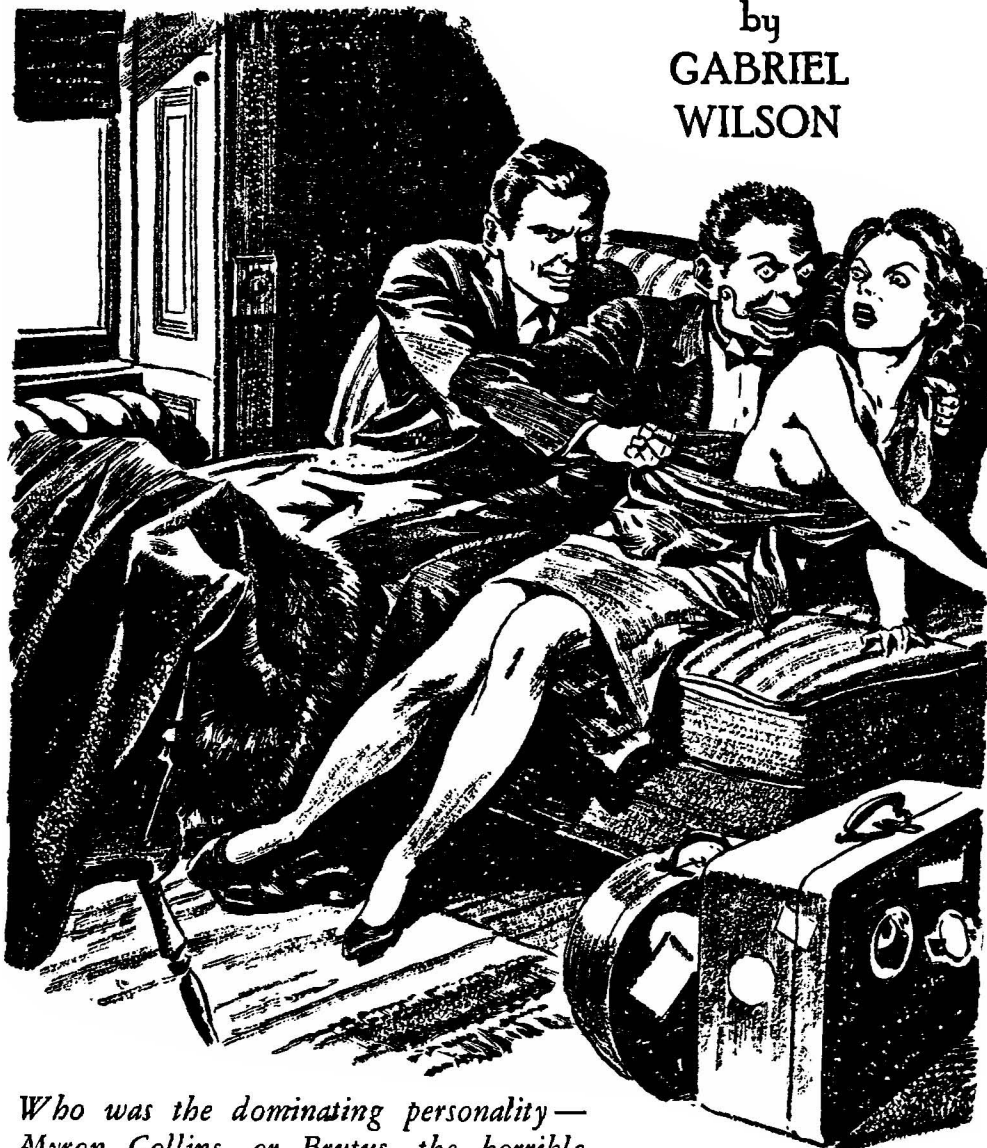
—AND—

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Published bi-monthly by Popular Publications, Inc., 2256 Grove Street, Chicago, Illinois. Editorial and executive offices, 205 East Forty-second Street, New York City. Harry Steeger, President and Secretary; Harold S. Goldsmith, Vice President and Treasurer. Entered as second-class matter, May 27, 1936, at the post office at Chicago, Ill., under the Act of March 3, 1879. Title registration pending at U. S. Patent Office. Copyright, 1939, by Popular Publications, Inc. Single copy price 15c. Yearly subscription in U. S. A. \$ .90. For advertising rates address Sam J. Perry, 205 E. 42nd St., New York, N. Y. When submitting manuscripts kindly enclose stamped self-addressed envelope for their return if found unavailable. The publishers cannot accept responsibility for return of unsolicited manuscripts, although care will be exercised in handling them.

# MURDER PUPPET

by  
GABRIEL  
WILSON



*Who was the dominating personality—  
Myron Collins, or Brutus, the horrible  
man-sized puppet he himself created? Which of the two left the girl  
Myron loved, a tragic corpse in a welter of gore?*

**T**HE accident snarled traffic into a tangle of automobiles and glaring headlights. A policeman came running. He pulled the mangled pedestrian to the curb. The crowd milled forward, jabbering questions.

"Is he dead? My God, look at him—all covered with blood—"

"Get an ambulance! Somebody send for an ambulance—"

"Too late—he's dead. The policeman says he's dead. Which car hit him?"

"That young taxi-driver."

The young chauffeur was pallid with terror. "My God, officer, I know you got to arrest me, but it wasn't my fault. I swear it wasn't. Listen, there must be witnesses—somebody must have seen I was innocent. The guy just walked in front of me—like he was drunk—or in a daze."

"I saw him," a man said. "Take my name, officer—I'll testify. Good Lord, he stepped off the curb twitching—stiff-legged—like an automaton or something. Wasn't the driver's fault—"

"Who is he?" somebody else asked.

"Myron Collins," the officer said. "Name's in his purse."

"Myron Collins!" The crowd took it up. "Myron Collins, the famous ventriloquist!"

A tradesman in white apron came running from a corner store. "Myron Collins—that's who he is! I know him. He lives right here."

He gestured to the big brownstone boarding house. And suddenly, from a third floor window an old woman screamed:

"Come up, officer! Look what his puppet's done up here! Blood on its hands! Murder! Murder!"

\* \* \*

Myron Collins, even as a little boy, seemed a born ventriloquist. He was a strange, unnatural child, locking himself in his room for hours. Once his mother came and listened outside. She heard him practicing this ventriloquism, going over and over a scene so foreign in its character that it sent a chill of fear through her.

She called to him to open the door. As the key and door handle turned, she said, "Myron Collins, I never heard such talk. What in the world are you doing?" But the words chilled on her lips as she met the weird look on her small son's face.

"I was playing," he said softly. "Just playing."

For Christmas, he was given a Punch and Judy show. He practiced with the little puppets for weeks. Then, after a supper party given by his parents, he gave a performance for the guests. It was a weird and exciting experience to him: his audience stood gaping with amazement and horror at the cruelty he displayed in this act he had created. He seemed to be striving to make the puppets more real, more appalling—perhaps as an outlet for a latent, dormant nature of his own. Whatever it was, the effect on his audience was one of repugnance and disgust. How could a child conceive a thing so vicious as this play?

Not long afterward he was taken out of school. And he was glad. He had a tutor who made a pretence at giving him lessons, but somehow Myron didn't seem capable of mastering them. He quietly, but determinedly, brushed them to one side.

**H**IS father had set up a carpenter's workshop for him in the barn. It was several hundred feet behind the house, and every day Myron would make his way there, feverishly. Sometimes in his work, he would drop his head to his arm beside the pretentious puppet he was making, and he would sob at his inability to create it to his satisfaction. Finally he would go back to his work. Sometimes, on the manipulation of one finger alone, he would work for days, a grim, consuming haste upon him. At nightfall, spent and weary, he would go back to the house, furtively escape his mother's questioning gaze, and sink to a chair in his room.

When he was seventeen, his mother died. He always remembered, with a vague wonder, the strange shuddering glance she gave him as she passed away, still holding to her heart his almost fem-

inine hand. She must have known things she never mentioned; seen, perhaps, a tragic vision of the future.

His father died a year later. They had come to the workshop and told him his father was sinking. But he was working on the last detail of a life-size puppet, and he delayed. At last it was done, and in an exultant rush, he came to his father's bedside, a triumphant gleam in his pale eye.

"Father, I've finished him. He—he seems almost alive—"

His father gave him one brief, hurt look. Then he sighed heavily and was dead.

Myron glanced from his dead father to the barn behind the house where the puppet lay—the puppet that almost lived—and he could not have told at that instant, whether his achievement, or his father's departure stirred him with more emotion.

Three days later his father was buried and Myron sat in the workshop back in the old barn. The puppet was on a discarded sofa, beside him. It was a man-puppet, life-size; with evil carved into the lines of its wooden face.

Myron said, "Now there's no one to stop us, and we must decide how to begin. You're to be the most famous puppet in the world. Your name is Brutus and I must train you as carefully as a parent would train a child."

He was surprised to hear himself make the puppet say, "We'll start with one understanding: I am the one who gives the orders from now on."

The grim mouth opened and shut. The words, coming from Myron yet seeming to issue from Brutus, clicked out with an almost metallic ring to them. Myron was becoming so expert, that he worked the controls of the puppet with comparative ease. It would not be long now before it would be second nature to him and require no conscious thought.

He realized, and it made him shudder with a sudden thrill, that from the first he must have seen this malignant Brutus as an evil being. Those words of Brutus' were the keynote of their relationship as it would be henceforth. Brutus would play the part of the strong, cruel dominating character; Myron would continue to be the quiet, self-effacing person he had been always.

Vaguely he wondered if those words were crystalizing a submerged craving within himself.

THREE years later—Brutus and Lamb, as they were now called—were a national success. A fad. People engaged Myron to entertain their after-dinner guests with his puppet, and the menace and satire hurled at them by Brutus fascinated even as it terrorized them with its uncanny, demoniacal realism.

On such a night as this Myron met the girl he was doomed to love. After his performance, he was about to accept his hostess' invitation to have a glass of punch.

"I should like to wash my hands first, if I may," he had said.

In the half-light of a turn in the upper hallway he saw a young girl leaving one of the guest rooms. He had not met this girl, though he had seen her earlier in the evening, and was disappointed not to see her when he glanced about during his performance.

"Where were you?" he said softly. "We missed you."

She, probably thinking he was another guest, answered his smile.

"Oh, I came upstairs," she said. "That man down there with that horrible dummy—it was so revolting—"

Myron quickly took in the situation. "Yes, wasn't it? And the man—"

Already he was realizing this young girl's beauty and charm were giving him

sensations he had never before experienced. Her radiant face with its halo of golden, clinging curls, her body, lithe and rounded. . . .

"I haven't seen him. But he must be despicable. No civilized person could create such a ghastly travesty. Don't you think I'm right?"

Her liquid, expressive eyes made his heart pound absurdly. "Of course you are. I'm glad you had the sense to stay up. But now it's over, won't you meet me on the terrace, say in five minutes? You remember me," he found himself lying glibly, "I'm Myron Wainwright—"

"I forget names, but I should like to know you better—"

"Your name is—"

"Wanda Carter. You're not good at remembering either."

"There are so many new faces tonight," he said quietly.

"Of course. In five minutes, then."

"I'll be there."

But how? He must be careful. Wanda must not know who he was. That would be fatal. Myron knew beyond a doubt, that he had fallen in love. Strange that he should have gone for so many years, and had no interest in women. He made his way furtively to the terrace. She was standing there, pallid in the gleaming moonlight, with the marble of the terrace a weird setting for her vibrant youth. . . .

**H**E saw much of her in the months following, always keeping his true identity from her, yet always promising himself that he would disclose the deception and trust to her growing love for him, to understand.

Meanwhile he worked untiringly on Brutus, changing the features, the mechanisms, as he found their defects. He had made the lines of its mouth more cruel, the eyes more human: they sent a harrowing chill of exaltation through him, when they were done. There was a

giant strength in the look of Brutus now, and in its speech a stark cruelty which inspired Myron with a shuddering awe.

Moreover, Brutus had become so closely hinged with his every thought and action, that at times Myron could almost believe that it was Brutus who was engineering their words and actions, rather than he. This thought persisted and it gave Myron a nauseous wave of horror, when he realized its consequences if he did not curb it.

Then came the day when Wanda wrote that she was coming to New York. Would he meet her at the train? Suddenly he was forced to face himself; and the picture he saw frightened him. He had not realized where he was heading. He had not realized that his grip was gone; that uncertainty of himself, of his other self, Brutus, made him a gruesome, dual personality unfit to be responsible for the girl he loved. But he fought away the thought.

He said softly, "When I'm married, all this will be over. She'll help me. I'll get rid of Brutus: that's the way out. I've been with him too much. My head aches so I can't think. But when I'm married. . ."

Brutus was beside him as usual, his sole companion in the apartment. There were words coming from Brutus now, metallic words clicking out sharply, unexpectedly:

"You fool! You can't marry. You're insane. It isn't something new. Your mother knew it. You'd have been locked up long ago if you hadn't been rich. You can't marry. She'd soon realize—and she'd have you put away. Remember—she doesn't know you. But I do. And I'll tell her the first chance I get."

A wave of insufferable helplessness came over Myron. He must have said the words for Brutus. He *knew* he had. But they were words that had come from him without his conscious knowledge—

words that must have come against his will. How would such a grisly matter end?

It was an intolerable situation, with Wanda coming. How could he explain such a condition to her? Would she understand?

He knew she would not. He must do something: avoid the issue in some way. Perhaps if he were to hide Brutus—that was it! Lock him here in this closet. When he was out and away from Brutus, these things did not happen. Yet a nagging fear still followed him as he left for the station, after locking the puppet away. A fear he could not answer.

His moody brooding had made him late. Wanda stood there, looking about. She seemed younger, more lovable than he had ever seen her before. It sent a strange pang through him.

"Wanda, I'm sorry to be late."

"Oh, there you are! It doesn't matter." She smiled. "I'm so relieved you've come."

"You look so lovely, Wanda," he said softly. He picked up her small suitcase. "Come. I'll take you to my place first," he said.

He saw a puzzled wonderment upon her lovely face, but she said nothing. Why did she look at him so strangely? And what a child she was, really, with those large questioning eyes. A sudden premonition made Myron want to say, "We won't go to my place, after all. I'll take you to a hotel—" But the words would not come.

SOON they were in a taxi, heading for the darkly oppressive rooms which were Myron's home. An increasing unrest was upon him. Almost he wished that Wanda had not come. Suppose she were to see Brutus? Immediately she would recognize it as the revolting dummy she had avoided that night. But she wouldn't see Brutus; he had locked the

closet door. His fear was nonsense; he told himself, with the reaction from the thrill of her soft young lips upon his, and the tiny trusting hand now resting within his own.

They arrived at his address and walked up the three rickety flights of stairs. The halls were noisome with a conglomeration of smells. He felt her hand clinging to his arm. Once she stopped, almost as though she, too, had become suddenly aware of some grim menace lurking here.

He glanced down at her. "We're almost there," he said softly, and they continued on up.

He unlocked his door and they went into the dim, shadowy interior. There was a strange ominous silence. It struck at them. Myron could feel a dank chill of apprehension go down his spine. He stood for an instant, fighting the impulse to snatch Wanda's arm and drag her from the frightening room.

"Myron," she murmured. "I—I seem to be afraid. I feel as though we weren't—weren't alone, as though we were being watched. What is it? Why do I feel this way?"

From the closet, before he could form his words of reassurance, before he could control it, the metallic rasp of Brutus' voice came to them:

"You feel that way," it said, "because the man you love is crazy—insane. He hasn't told you about himself. Let me out, and I will."

Myron stood by, helpless at this thing he was doing. This was no usual ventriloquism and he knew it. There was a rasp of murderous hate—a hate so vehement that it caught him unawares, unable to believe that he was the instrument of so fierce an outburst. It was as though some nomadic spirit were brooding within this room. Was he being used as its tool? Those words had not emanated from his conscious brain. He had

been used, merely, to say them. Almost as if he, instead of Brutus, were the puppet!

Wanda's agitated cry steadied him. "My God, what is that—who is that? Myron, don't stand there looking like that! Do something, say something!"

"Don't be afraid," he said softly. "It's nothing to be afraid of. Sit down and I'll show you. Then you'll understand, and I hope you'll forgive me—" They were quiet words, but his heart was racing.

"Put on the light, Myron. I'm afraid. I tell you, I'm terribly afraid."

He lighted the lamp. "Are you all right now?"

"Yes," she said. "But don't go away. Don't leave me. Oh, I'm so ashamed of myself, but I don't seem to be able to help it."

A nervous tremor was upon him. Why was he doing this thing? It pounded at him. What mysterious agency was this, forcing him on—to what? What was this terrifying crisis which lay ahead, like some great abyss yawning beyond its brink, with him stumbling toward it, unable to save himself?

He wanted to cry out, "Wanda—save us—save us—" But the futility of his desire, his inability to execute it, numbed and confused him.

He heard himself saying softly: "Just a moment Wanda. . ." He was unlocking and opening the closet door. "You'll recognize it—but don't be angry."

**I**N quick staccato repetition, the question hammered at him now: why was he doing this? Why, in Heaven's name, was he doing this to Wanda! Was it voluntary, or was he being impelled by a force stronger than himself? Was he torturing this girl whom he loved, torturing her and getting a sadistic triumph from his power to frighten her? What horror was this, stalking them both!

Wanda was sitting on the edge of the sofa, her soft blue eyes hazy with tears, her red lips trembling. As he opened the door, showing the malignant, evil-looking Brutus, she let out a scream of frenzied revulsion.

"It's Brutus," Myron said softly. "I made him. I'm Myron Collins."

He seated the puppet in a large arm chair. Wanda glanced at it, shuddering. "My God, Myron—don't bring it here. What made you make it? How could you—how could you! I thought it was alive for an instant. Put it back!" She was sobbing now and cringing.

"Don't be afraid," he said softly. "You'll get used to it." He put it on the couch between them.

She put her hand to her lips to stifle the scream of terror. "I can't believe you're Myron Collins. I can't believe it. I must be dreaming. . . . Take it away! Don't let it touch me—it's touching me!"

Its cloying, sodden hand was upon her arm in a rude caress. It was not a human caress, yet its palm was resilient. Then its hand closed upon her arm. Myron was watching quietly, leaning forward on the sofa so that he could see Wanda.

"You'll get used to Brutus," he said softly.

Yet there was a tumult within him, as though there were two of him, each at war with the other. There rose in him a fierce struggle to warn the girl he loved, warn her of this mad storm that was going on within him and over which he had lost all control. But the other, his evil self, seemed now to be the stronger force.

"Take it way. Make it stop!" She was tearing at Brutus' arm, beating its chest in her panic.

A strange light feeling was coming over Myron, as though he were floating, perhaps. The tumult has eased. He felt as though he had left his body—been dispossessed perhaps—thrown out of the

temple in which he had lived. He was hanging in midair, gazing dazedly at this demoniacal debauchery.

"Take it away! You're making it do this! Stop it—Oh, Myron!"

It was forcing her backwards now. Its monster face, with set animal greed showing in the pallid lamp light, was bending over her. One hand began methodically clawing at her soft dress, her hair, in harsh rhythmic strokes. It came closer; it seemed to open and shut its mouth with a click, yet the lips smacked together in a sound most horrible.

**M**YRON'S hands shook as he gripped the puppet's arm controls, urging it with its caresses. Within him, stronger than the pity he felt, the strange horrible thrill grew more demanding.

She was fighting desperately now. But Brutus had her pinned back on the sofa. Her dress was rent down the front. Soft silk things were in ribbons and blood gushed from the claw-like marks on her firm, white breasts. There was blood streaming from her arm where the flesh was torn away, and her face—stark terror was written in her eyes.

Yet now Myron had no impulse to make this grisly horror be done. Vaguely he wondered what had come over him.

Wanda was struggling and twitching now in agony. The pallid light showed her in mortal pain. Her arm had been broken and hung dangling. Her neck was twisted, her eyes goggled and her lips moved spasmodically.

Myron said, "She is dying." Or had he uttered it? He could hear no sound.

Then, incredible horror, he thought he saw Brutus getting to his feet. From this strange detached place from which he was watching, he saw the dummy stagger to the door.

Why couldn't he think? Why didn't he do something. What in God's name was this numbness upon him! Had he

gone mad! Had he been mad always!

Brutus couldn't open a door. Yet he was opening it now, his eyes seeming to gloat as he turned to face Myron, who was sitting stiffly, with eyes staring, moving with a rhythmic jerk to cover the exposed bleeding breast of the pallid, dying Wanda.

The door closed after Brutus. . . .

Myron thought, "I'm dreaming. This is a dream. I wasn't clever enough to make Brutus walk as well as that. And doors were always too difficult for him—" But a dawning, sweeping terror came at him. There was a mirror across the room. In the pallid light, with the room now a gruesome silent tomb, in which Wanda lay dead, Myron saw himself.

Saw himself? Could that be he—so horrible?

Then what was left of the consciousness of Myron Collins, still housed there in that strange form, suddenly departed—stricken into a heap of wood and sawdust.

\* \* \*

In the dim gaslit hall of the lodging house, by the bottom of the stairs, the terrified old landlady stood peering. What was all that commotion upstairs?

Then she saw Myron Collins come down—his big spare figure walking with strange steps that jerked mechanically as he fumbled at the front door and went out.

The jerking figure crossed the pavement, walking like an automaton. The body of Myron Collins—the suddenly dominant, unleashed thing that was Brutus, not knowing how to use this human mechanism, not knowing the meaning of rushing automobiles that could kill. . . .

Is that what it was?

Brakes screamed. The jerking, weirdly stalking figure went down—mangled.

Myron Collins, or Brutus the puppet? Who shall ever know?