

A MAGAZINE OF THE BIZARRE AND UNUSUAL



Weird Tales

REGISTERED IN U.S. PATENT OFFICE

Volume 23 CONTENTS FOR JANUARY, 1934 Number 1

Cover Design	M. Brundage	
<i>Illustrating a scene in "The Red Knife of Hassan"</i>		
The Solitary Hunters	David H. Keller	3
<i>A powerful story of the blood-freezing horror awaiting the men who were sent to a living death in the crater of an extinct volcano</i>		
The Red Knife of Hassan	Seabury Quinn	22
<i>A thrill-tale of the Assassins of Syria—an exploit of Jules de Grandin</i>		
Place Names	Katharine van der Veer	42
<i>Verse</i>		
Invaders of the Ice World	Jack Williamson	43
<i>A weird-scientific tale of the far-distant future, when the sun dims, and creatures spawned by the frost make war upon the survivors of the human race</i>		
Too Late	Alfred I. Tooke	58
<i>Verse</i>		
A Phantom in the Sky	Dale Clark	59
<i>A strange tale of an aviator's weird experience in a doomed airplane</i>		
Rogues in the House	Robert E. Howard	68
<i>A swift-moving tale of the squatting monstrosity that sat in the death-chambers of Nabonidus</i>		
The Weaver in the Vault	Clark Ashton Smith	85
<i>A story of the weird doom that came upon the searchers in the tombs of Chaon Gacca</i>		
The Vampire Master (conclusion)	Hugh Davidson	94
<i>A novel of corpses that would not stay dead, and a gruesome horror in the New York hills</i>		
In the Triangle	Howard Wandrei	109
<i>A brief, strange tale about a weird beast and an old man in gray</i>		
Candles	Dorothy Quick	113
<i>Verse</i>		
Weird Story Reprint:		
The Woman of the Wood	A. Merritt	114
<i>One of the most popular stories from WEIRD TALES of several years ago</i>		
The Eyrie		132
<i>A chat with the readers</i>		
Possession	Julius Long	136
<i>A short but intensely interesting weird tale</i>		

Published monthly by the Popular Fiction Publishing Company, 2457 E. Washington Street, Indianapolis, Ind. Entered as second-class matter March 20, 1923, at the post office at Indianapolis, Ind., under the act of March 3, 1879. Single copies, 25 cents. Subscription, \$3.00 a year in the United States, \$4.00 a year in Canada. English office: Charles Lavell, 13, Serjeant's Inn, Fleet Street, E. C. 4, London. The publishers are not responsible for the loss of unsolicited manuscripts, although every care will be taken of such material while in their possession. The contents of this magazine are fully protected by copyright and must not be reproduced either wholly or in part without permission from the publishers.

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WEIRD TALES ISSUED 1st OF EACH MONTH

Possession

By JULIUS LONG

A short and amazing tale of hypnotism and dual personality

WHEN I beheld Anderson's face as he emerged from Doctor Silvara's inner office, I expected the worst. His manner was easy and calm. Years of intimacy had taught me that my nervous and excitable friend was serene and tranquil only when face to face with some inevitable misfortune.

I had never before seen him so cool. Never before had he been confronted with a catastrophe so dire and unavoidable. I knew that he was doomed to die. In his bosom he carried the fatal seed of extinction. It would soon expand within him until it had suffocated the last small remnant of vitality.

"Let us take a bus," he said.

We climbed to the top of a Fifth Avenue bus and occupied a front seat. Slowly we progressed down 57th Street to the Drive. I could not bring myself to question Anderson concerning the interview. I anticipated the answer and did not wish to make him repeat his own death sentence; yet I feared he might interpret my silence as indifference. He must have sensed my dilemma, for he turned and spoke to me. His tone was utterly casual.

"You may not know it, but you are riding with what is virtually a corpse. I have but two weeks to live. Doctor Silvara was very precise about it. Two weeks exactly. I must be careful not to live thirteen days, or fifteen. That would seriously undermine the doctor's reputation for infallibility."

I was appalled by this ghastly raillery.

One expects a certain measure of dignity in a man on the threshold of death. But the speech was characteristic of Anderson. He could take nothing seriously, not even his own demise.

"You must resign at once," I told him. "You must use these two precious weeks to complete your book."

Anderson was professor of psychology, and he had intimated to me that his latest work was based upon a discovery that would revolutionize the science of psychology.

He laughed cynically. "Nothing matters to me, except my own life," he said. "If I am not to live to enjoy my fame, why strive for it?"

I was surprised by this selfish attitude, but said nothing about it.

"I shall have to find someone else to put me to sleep at night," I observed, more to break the silence than anything else. I had suffered from insomnia for years, and not until Anderson had come to my aid with hypnotic treatment had I enjoyed relief. Every night thereafter, he would come to my apartment, which was in the same building as his own, and repeat his treatment. I became so responsive to his efforts that he could send me off to sleep merely by uttering a few soothing words. I was conscious that my suggestibility had reached a stage where my friend might abuse his trust. I knew very well that prolonged hypnotic treatment subordinates the mind of the subject to that of the operator, but Anderson

(Please turn to page 138)

(Continued from page 136)

had never caused me to doubt his good will.

"Do not worry about the future until it is the present," he said lightly.

THAT night, he came as usual to my rooms and began his operations with great impatience. I accepted this as natural, assuming that he wished to be through to rush back to his book.

In the few seconds before I went to sleep, I was struck by the unusual appearance of his face. The light had been extinguished, and only the soft moonlight illuminated the room. His features were shadowed. Even his blond hair appeared black and sharply outlined. His eyes seemed to appear from the impenetrable recesses of bottomless wells. His thin lips spoke with scarcely perceptible movements. I had never seen a countenance so diabolical, and in the fraction of a second before I lost consciousness, I regretted that I had let myself become so dependent upon the man.

Throughout the night, I dreamed strange nightmares, which, upon awakening, I could not call to mind. I knew only that they had been horrible and gruesome. During the day, I was tired and weary, as if I had not slept the previous night. Throughout my English classes, I stammered and stuttered. My students did not conceal their suspicion that I had dissipated, and they exchanged amused glances.

The next day and the days after that, my condition grew worse. Then there occurred an incident which tried my credulity.

It happened during my eleven o'clock class. I was lecturing on the idiosyncrasies of Laurence Sterne, when I noticed a stirring and uneasiness in my listeners. I paused an instant and continued. The

students again became attentive. At the end of the hour, I summoned one of them to my desk.

"There seemed to be some irregularity during my lecture," I said. "Did I commit some frightful blunder?"

The student stammered hesitatingly. "Out with it!" I commanded impatiently.

"We were wondering," he confided, "why you broke off your lecture to give us a discourse on the symptoms of agoraphobia. It was all very interesting, but it seemed a bit unusual to hear such information in a lecture on Sterne."

"I can believe that," I said. "That will do. Thank you very much."

During lunch, I racked my brain to account for this strange lapse. The circumstance that puzzled me most of all was that I knew absolutely nothing of agoraphobia. I doubt that I had ever heard of it before. I decided to consult Anderson. He taught the neuroses. He would know all about the disease. Besides, he might be able to explain my unusual experience.

That night I told him of it, but he was very vague. "You mustn't take your experiences too seriously," he said.

That night's sleep was suffused with mad dreams whose hideous content was too elusive for me to recapture upon awakening. That day was more tedious and annoying than those previous. The strange incident of the day before was complicated by an astounding discovery. A student came to me after class and reported that a similar phenomenon had occurred during Professor Anderson's eleven o'clock lecture on the neuroses. Without warning, he discontinued his lecture on agoraphobia and spoke eloquently of the style of Laurence Sterne. I was assured that he supplied the very information that I omitted from my own lecture.

I SPENT the rest of the day trying to account for this strange phenomenon. Had Anderson's personality been exchanged with my own? What could cause such an unnatural occurrence? I could not believe that there existed between Anderson and me a mutual sympathy of such intensity that it would give rise to a supernatural phenomenon. Indeed, I had begun to feel that he hated me for my healthy body and the years I was to outlive him. His manner had become subtly strained, though outwardly he manifested the same friendship.

I confronted him with the fact of his own simultaneous lapse, and he simulated surprize which did not deceive me. Why did he try to pass the whole affair off as a commonplace occurrence? I suspected that even then he was attempting to allay my suspicion.

That night, I was frightened by a nightmare which I could later recall. Indeed, I remembered it so vividly that I refused to think it a dream. Here are the details:

I was awakened in the middle of the night by an almost unendurable pain in my lungs. Gasping for breath, I climbed out of bed. My limbs weighed heavily, and my muscles were unresponsive. I was conscious that I was a very sick man.

With difficulty I made my way to the window. Not until I stared down into the street below, did I discover that I was not in my own apartment. My rooms open only on 112th Street. I found myself looking down into Broadway. I reflected a moment. Had I spent the night with someone? I instantly recalled that I had not.

I looked about myself. The clothes that hung carelessly over chairs were not my own, yet they were strangely familiar. In the moonlight I caught a glimpse of my hands. I started in horror. They

were bony and almost devoid of flesh. I rushed through a door, which I thought would lead to the hallway. I found myself in a bathroom. I searched for a switch and snapped on the light. I saw at once that I was in Anderson's apartment. I turned and stared at my reflection in the mirror.

The face I beheld was the sickly and sallow visage of Anderson!

Oblivion folded over me.

Such was my dream—or was it a dream? I was racked by the terrible suspicion that the experience was not imaginary, but real. There was about my memory of it a persistent vividness that was very unlike the fading recollection of a dream.

Was my soul temporarily transferred into the dying body of my friend? Had the unaccountable experience in the classroom been repeated? The thought nearly drove me mad.

I recalled Anderson's strange manner, his seeming indifference to death. Could it have been that he expected to live—to live on in my body after his own had succumbed to the ravages of his disease? Was he transferring his soul into my flesh? How could this be so?

I remembered his hints of the tremendous discovery he had made, of its revolutionary effects on psychological theory. Was this interchange of personalities a demonstration of his power, a ghastly experiment which was to give him new life, perhaps enable him to live on through the centuries? Was I his chosen victim? Was my own soul to be transferred into his decadent body, to die with it?

I did not know how to answer these questions, but I resolved to confront Anderson with them. That night when he came to repeat his hypnosis, I eyed him sternly.

"Your experiment is over," I said boldly. "You will never again hypnotize me."

His eyebrows lifted with more amusement than surprize. I shuddered as I looked at his emaciated features. If Doctor Silvara's prediction were correct, he had only two more days to live. I marvelled that he managed to drag himself to classes.

"Whether you want me to hypnotize you or not, makes very little difference," he said evenly. "You are no longer in a position to command. You are so suggestible to my treatment that it is not in your power to resist it."

I winced at this, but faced him with all the courage I could muster. "You flatter yourself," I said. "You have dominated my mind only because I was fool enough to trust you. I know not what knowledge and skill is at your command, but I realize now what you have been attempting to do. You will fail. In a very few days you will be dead."

Anderson laughed. "So you have discovered my little secret? Yes, I have worked every night with you, and last night I almost succeeded. Tonight, I will. It will not be I who will be dead in a few days, but you. That will be the reward of my genius. I am the first to prove that the soul is a separate psychic entity that can be completely divorced from the body! My soul will not live in another world, but on for ever in this one, in the bodies of men whose will is less strong than mine. 'Man doth not yield him to the angels, nor unto death utterly, save only through the weakness of his feeble will.' "

I was discountenanced by the conviction with which he spoke these words. I recognized them as Joseph Glanvill's, which had been quoted by Poe in *Ligeia*.

(Please turn to page 142)

(Continued from page 140)

I felt helpless to cope with the knowledge which was at Anderson's disposal. Nevertheless, I put up a brave front and replied boldly, "It is not I who am weak, but you. If you do not leave this instant, I will take you by the collar and throw you out."

Anderson only laughed and moved carelessly toward me. His face was so withered by disease and his body was so frail that I could not bring myself to touch him. He began slowly to repeat the words he had used for years to induce sleep into my nerves. I struggled not to listen to them, to fight them off. I felt a numbness creep upon me. My God! was I so weak-willed that I was to lose this battle for my life? I could hear nothing but Anderson's monotonous voice. I knew that I was lost. My mind became befuddled and my vision befogged. Sleep invested my body. Anderson had won.

WHEN I regained consciousness, I only slowly recalled the terrible scene. I switched on the light and looked at the clock. It was four in the morning. I noticed at once that I was in my own room. Thank heaven, Anderson, though he had succeeded in hypnotizing me, had failed to effect the transference! But my joy was of short duration. I began suddenly to cough. I reached for a handkerchief, and beheld my arms and hands. They were the bony, yellow arms and hands of Anderson! I did not trouble to look into a mirror. I knew that I dwelt in the dying body of my false friend.

I heard a sound and turned about. Anderson stood in the doorway. But it was I who seemed to appear there; it was *my* body, *my* face that I saw!

Anderson smiled amusedly. "Well, you see what has happened. There is nothing you can do now to save yourself. You must die with the miserable body that houses your soul."

A fit of uncontrollable rage shook me. "You devil!" I cried, "I will kill you for this. Both of us shall die!"

I rushed wildly to the bureau and opened a drawer. Anderson suspected that there was a revolver there, and he sprang after me.

"Oh, no, you don't," he said, pinioning my arms.

I struggled with all my pitiable strength. He held me fast. I gave a last, violent lunge. I tore myself from him and faced him. My victory was short-lived. While I regarded him furiously, gasping for breath, my very lungs seemed to collapse. Blood filled my mouth and nostrils.

Anderson watched me sardonically.

My knees sagged under me, and I fell to the floor. The pain was insufferable. I was choked, unable to breathe. I knew I was dying. Blackness enveloped me.

A second later, I found myself standing, reeling on my feet. On the floor below me lay the body of Anderson. It was bathed in blood. I realized at once that he had suffered a frightful hemorrhage. I stooped to his assistance. I felt his pulse. He was quite dead.

In a flash, the memory of all that had happened came to me. I rose to my feet and looked at the dead man with utter stupefaction. What had happened? What had saved me, restored my soul to its own body?

The only answer I can give is that the spirit is more inextricably rooted to its corporeal form than Anderson had suspected. Though he had indeed effected a complete metempsychosis, death had undone his work.

I simply told the coroner that he had been taken very ill and rushed frantically into my apartment, where he had succumbed from his hemorrhage. It is a pity his genius has been lost to the world.