

# Strange

## STORIES

AUGUST

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FEATURING

### THE SEAL OF SIN

A Complete Novelet  
of Evil Powers

By HENRY  
KUTTNER

### SATAN'S SIDESHOW

A Novelet of  
Siamese Twins

By CARSON  
JUDSON

ELI COLTER  
WILL GARTH

NORMAN A. DANIELS  
AUGUST W. DERLETH

MARIA MORAVSKY  
AND OTHERS

« « « GRIPPING TALES IN EVERY ISSUE » » »

# Strange STORIES

VOL. IV, NO. 1

CONTENTS

AUGUST, 1940



## THE SEAL OF SIN

*A Complete Novelet of Evil Powers*

By **HENRY KUTTNER**

*Both Blessed and Cursed is the Hand that Wears the Ancient Seal of Solomon, Until a Twisted Soul is Drawn into Its Sinister Bondage and Reaps a Ghastly Harvest . . . . .* 14

**THE DEAD KNOW ALL** **Norman A. Daniels**  
*A Would-be Murderer Meets His Nemesis! . . . . .* 31

**THE HOUSE OF STANLEY** **George J. Rawlins**  
*A Knight in Armor Rides from the Past to Preserve His Noble Name . . . . .* 37

**THE TAPESTRY GATE** **Leigh Brackett**  
*Mortal Greed Was the Force that Drew Souls into the Devil's Cloth . . . . .* 46

**SATAN'S SIDESHOW** **Carson Judson**  
*Between Two Men Joined by a Strange Law of God Comes a Flame of Searing Hate to Rip the Bonds—and Wreak Vengeance! [A Complete Novelet]* 54

**BIRKETT'S TWELFTH CORPSE** **August W. Derleth**  
*Darkly Swirling Waters Covered All that Remained of a Hideous Secret . . . . .* 67

**I AM GOING TO CRACOW!** **Maria Moravsky**  
*A Swamp Witch Shows Jacob Wolski the Road to His Heart's Desire . . . . .* 70

**THE DEAD SHALL RISE UP** **Will Garth**  
*A Prophecy Defeats a Merciless Ghoul . . . . .* 79

**DESIGN FOR DOOM** **Eli Colter**  
*An Ancient Bronze Tool Evokes Weird Visions of Violence . . . . .* 81

**THE BLACK ARTS (A Department)** **Lucifer**  
*Join THE BLACK ARTS CLUB—Coupon on Page 96 . . . . .* 90

STRANGE STORIES, published bi-monthly by Better Publications, Inc., 22 West 48th Street, New York, N. Y. N. L. Pines, President. Entered as second class matter November 3rd, 1938, at the Post Office at New York, N. Y., under the Act of March 3rd, 1879. Copyright, 1940, by Better Publications, Inc. Yearly, \$3.00; single copies, \$0.10; foreign and Canadian postage extra. Manuscripts will not be returned unless accompanied by self-addressed, stamped envelope, and are submitted at the author's risk. Names of all characters used in stories and semi-action articles are fictitious. If the name of any living person or existing institution is used, it is a coincidence.

PRINTED IN THE U. S. A.



# Satan's

## CHAPTER I

### *The Golden Harvest*

**I**F YOU turn left at the Brooklyn end of the bridge, you'll be on Sands Street—seven blocks of life-in-the-raw. In those seven blocks you'll see everything from pure English to Eskimo. Everything from millionaire to stumble-bum.

And if you stop on the corner of Sands and Gold some rush afternoon, you'll see a bent and twisted creature with a withered left arm and leg, as if half of him were dead, and the other half dragging it around on crutches. He'll be selling pencils or shoe strings and safety pins, and he won't be talking—because he can't. Something in his throat died along with the arm and leg; but the rest of him breathes, demands food and drink, and stays alive because he's afraid of hell.

Stumble-bum, beggar, object of pity. When you see him, you'll see—me.

A couple of nights ago a sailor bought a pencil and dropped a silver dollar on the tray I carry around my neck so I could make change with my one good hand. The sailor shook his proud blond head when I offered him a bunch of nickles and dimes, and he walked off with a blousy girl clinging to his arm.

"Poor devil, he's only half a man—" I heard him say.

I had to bite down on my tongue to keep from shrieking the awful mewling noise that comes when I try to make a sound, because the sailor

Men and women crowded about the little ticket booth watching Tom struggle against an unseen something



# Sideshow

A Complete  
Novelet

By CARSON  
JUDSON

Author of "The Devil in Her Eyes,"  
"My Life Is My Own," etc.



*Between Two Men Joined by a Strange Law  
of God Comes a Flame of Searing Hate to Rip  
the Bonds—and Wreak a Horrible Vengeance  
That Is Far Beyond Human Understanding!*

was right. God help me, I'm only half a man.

**O**NCE— But I'll have to go back a long way, back to where Hans Lepke and his Swiss wife, Gretel, were snow-bound in a little village in the Bavarian Alps, in nineteen hundred and seventeen. There was no doctor or midwife to help Hans Lepke when Gretel's sons were born. There was nobody to tell the goat-herd that twin boys are not normally joined at the hip by a fibrous bridge, scarce thicker than their smallest finger. Had a doctor been there, he might have tied the ligament with a piece of goat gut, or a silken thread, and nature would have severed the unnatural bond which bound the brothers.

But Hanks Lepke, grieving for the dead young cousin he had loved and married, knew only to keep the infants warm and well fed with the milk of a mother goat. He would sing them to sleep with a high, hushed yodel, and wait for spring to melt the snowdrifts.

Johann and Siegfried Lepke lived and if their childhood was different from that of other little boys, they did not seem to notice. I was Johann, and Siegfried was a part of me—joined at my left hip by a bridge that was scarce thicker than my thumb, and which troubled me not at all. If I wished to walk a little faster, Siegfried matched his steps with mine. If I became tired and wanted to rest, Siegfried settled contentedly on the sunny slope and watched the clouds make pictures in the blue Bavarian skies. So much a unit were we in those early days of childhood that neighbors gradually stopped regarding us as unlike themselves.

But as we grew older, I was conscious of a difference between my brother and myself. I was wild and willful, eager to climb the blurred, high mountains, to find the fragrant clumps of edelweiss that dotted the crags. Siegfried cared little for climbing. He would be content to lie for hours, whistling to the little lame goat which followed us about, to talk of queer, fanciful things he saw in dreams.

There were no schools for goat-herds in Berggarten. The village had been stripped of younger men during the war, and the younger women were busy with finding enough food. Though father could read and write a little, he seemed to forget that his boys were more than goats. Summers were spent in finding pasturage for the flock, in milking and making the rank cheeses which paid for what little clothing we needed. Winters were spent as all snow-bound winters must be, feeding stomachs and keeping the bodies warm. We sheltered the goats as best we could, finding our greatest comfort between night-fall and morning, when we could huddle under goat skin covers and keep warm.

**Y**EARS passed, as years must, and from somewhere there came an American showman who had heard of the Bavarian boys who might possibly take the place of a famous pair of Siamese Twins whose death had left a vacant platform in the side shows of Manheim-Woffard-Stengle Brothers' Biggest Show on Earth.

At first Hans Lepke was indignant and insulted, but Oscar Tillford, the circus scout, was used to bargaining. When Hans Lepke saw the shining gold money and shared the ale Tillford spilled into great earthen mugs, he decided nature had indeed been indulgent in giving him sons who could make life easy for him in his old age. Thirty dollars each month with twenty of those dollars for himself would be, *Ach, Gott*, a hundred American dollars—enough to make Hans Lepke rich in Bavaria.

And for the sons there would be America. America, where every man makes his fortune, where no one counts his dollars. Where New York comes down to Ellis Island to welcome all those who knock on the gates of gold. *Ach*, it would be a chance for Siegfried and for Johann to see the world, to hold it like a shining ball in their hands. And maybe sometimes they would come back home and buy the greatest herd of goats on the Bavarian flat lands.

"You will teach them to read, nein?" Father's eagerness made him angry

when he learned it would take weeks to get passports and permission for the boys to enter America. Hans Lepke wanted them to begin earning money at once.

"We'll teach them to read and write and figure," Oscar Tillford promised.

"*Ach, ja,*" Father said into his mug. "To figure better than me. To count, I must use my fingers."

The village people were fired with excitement, and filled with doubt, when they learned that Hans Lepke's sixteen year old sons were going across the world to America to become rich. And all because nature had made them different. Because they were the one pair out of a hundred thousand pairs of twins who were born an actual part of each other, Siegfried and I were feted in Berggarten, made much of, petted, kissed, wept over.

Then came the day of departure, and Siegfried, always tender with father, put his arms about him, promising to learn to figure and read quickly, so that when we came back to buy the great herd, he, Siegfried, could keep accounts of all the milk and cheeses.

I, too, put my arms about my father, but I made no idle promise. If America was as Oscar Tillford painted it, I would never come back to the sleepy village. I would make much money and see great cities in the strange country. I would spend my time away from the circus seeing things and meeting people. And I would make Siegfried like the things I liked. Later, if father wished, he could come to America also, and wear fine clothes like Oscar Tillford.

**I**T WAS like a dream. The long journey to the coast, the great ship, the noise, the people—and only when Oscar Tillford told us we could not walk on the decks did I begin to realize something of the life ahead of us.

We were a freak, Siegfried and I. We were depending on that one small bit of difference between ourselves and other people to bring us a golden harvest of money. If we paraded the decks of the ship, or the streets of

America, we would no longer be a curiosity. We must understand that we were selling ourselves, and unless people paid, they could not look upon us. It made me a little sick to hear him talking as though my brother and I were a goat with two heads.

"But in Bavaria," I said, and Siegfried held my hand warmly, "people did not look upon us as a freak. It is only when the wind blows my coat or his aside, or when we swim in the lake, that anybody notices."

"Son, we'll have to dress you so's people will always notice when you get up on the platform." Tillford laughed boisterously. "One of you'll have to twist around a little and sort of walk backwards. You know, emphasize the thing that makes you different. Play it up."

## CHAPTER II

### *Shame For Sale*

**W**E DIDN'T understand then, but later we learned. It was Siegfried who learned to "sort of walk backwards." Siegfried, too, learned first to speak English, so that he might answer the questions of the curious who came to look at us with a strange mixture of curiosity and pity on their faces.

From the first, I hated being the butt of careless, cruel humor.

"When you eat something, can he taste it?"

"You two would be in a fix if you ever got in a fight, wouldn't you?"

"You're German, ain't you? Did a vampire frighten your mother before you were born?"

Siegfried would laugh and talk and sell our pictures for a dime, but I retched with the shame of it. I hated all those straight, independent creatures who came to look at us. When I would see someone with only one arm, or a hunchback, I would breathe deeply and curse silently, glad that there were others who knew the burden of being "different." I looked for physical handicaps and gloated when

I saw them in the throngs that visited the circus.

In the car which housed the freaks, though, I never gloated. I hated it, and wondered at the spirit of gaiety that pervaded the side-show. I could not understand how they could be so unaware of all that set them apart from a world of men who walked alone. I resented the courage and pride which was a part of most of them.

There was Captain Tim, the tiny midget and his small doll-wife; Mademoiselle Therese, the fat girl—four-hundred - and - forty - pounds - of - feminine-daintiness. There was long John, the human skeleton, and Atlas, the eight foot giant; Alex, who had three legs; Conrad who swallowed bits of glass; Little Wally, who boasted the tip of a tail. There was Bruno, the dog-faced man; Naida, the girl who could feel no pain, and allowed the barker to ram needles into her white flesh; Portia, the spider girl, whose bones were gristle; Toto a pin-headed Australian; Duvall, the ventriloquist; and Pix, who wore a thousand tattoo marks upon his body.

**A** WORLD apart, even in the compact world of the circus. Looking about, turning my head to see Siegfried poring over a first-grade reader, learning slowly but surely the names of things and how to say them, I felt hatred inside me. Hatred for the brother, welded to me by a ligament no thicker than my wrist. Hatred for the mother who died in giving us birth, for the father who had allowed us to leave the little Bavarian village to come into a strange and bitter world.

From Siegfried I learned to speak the alien tongue he studied, and because there was little else to do, I gradually learned to write it. But not Siegfried or anybody could teach me acceptance of a life I despised.

Because there had been no money in Bavaria, and because Hans Lepke forgot that his sons were more than goats, there had never been reason to discover that Siegfried could draw pictures with colored crayon, and I could carve out quaint caricatures of

animals out of bits of wood. In Bavaria, Siegfried had used the snow for making little pictures, and I had tried to carve dried clay with father's great knife, used mostly for slaughtering goats.

In America though, there were many colored crayons, and I acquired slender bladed knives of my own. It helped to pass many long hours when we had to sit in idleness.

Siegfried, however, was seldom idle, and never lonely. He liked the noise and the smells and the excitement. He liked the crowds that came to be amused, the music, the crash of drums and cymbals, the raucous voice of the barker. He liked the candy vendors, the wheels of chance, the big, bright bundles of balloons, the pink lemonade and hamburger sandwiches with onions. In three years Siegfried learned to love the only America we knew—the Coney Island midway, the world under canvas with the circus side show, and sometimes the museums in big cities in the winter. Bitter as it was, hemmed in as it was, Siegfried loved life.

I didn't. I wanted something I had never had, something I had dreamed about and knew I could never have. I wanted to swing along Broadway of a mad midnight, brushing shoulders with a crowd that didn't gape at me. I wanted to go into a great hotel dining-room and order a meal without having the waiter wonder why two men sat so close together when there was a chair on the other side of the table. I wanted to swim and ride, and dance with a girl. To hold her in my arms, lift her mouth to mine in long, rapturous kisses. And these were hopeless desires, pushed down inside of me until they choked like hot ashes.

**Y**OUR little hoard of money grew, since there wasn't much my brother and I needed which was not provided. Enough to eat, a place to sleep, money sent to our father in Bavaria each month, and almost a thousand dollars on the books by the time we were eighteen.

Then Hans Lepke died, and money that had gone to Bavaria, grew against our names on Manheim's books. Two

thousand dollars, then three, five. Siegfried owned a diamond ring, while I boasted a flawless ruby in my tie-pin. We dressed in evening clothes when we appeared on the platform—fine black broadcloth and faultless linen, made by a tailor who knew how to measure us.

We danced, to the amusement and wonder of those who watched us, with two girls who doubled in the big tent on the trapeze. Verna Byron and Marguerite McKeever looked enough alike to be sisters and prided themselves on being able to follow when Siegfried and I led in a waltz and never make a blunder.

We were much together, Venra, Marguerite, Siegfried and I, and there were times when I almost forgot we were different. Perhaps if it had not been for Toni—but Toni came later.

Strange, but in those years Siegfried and I grew to look more and more unlike each other. We were both dark-haired and blue-eyed, both five feet eleven, with strong, broad shoulders, slim waists and delicate hands. But gradually the contours of our faces changed until we hardly looked like brothers. I knew, vaguely, it was our different natures exerting themselves upon us, but there was nothing to be done about it. Siegfried looked at the world with kindly eyes, while mine held only contempt, narrowing beneath a fretful forehead. Siegfried's lips were full and generous and smiled easily, while mine were thin and bitter, and stranger to a laugh.

Until Toni came. Toni, slim and dainty as a fairy princess, in her tulle skirt and spangled bodice. Toni, who rode a white horse in the middle ring under the big top, and who had known Captain Tim and his midget wife in Russia.

I was twenty when I saw Toni first, and a little awed by her slim loveliness. But Siegfried wasn't awed, then or later, when Captain Tim squeaked up that Toni was "all wool and a yard wide."

It didn't make sense. Toni wasn't cloth, and she wasn't wide. She was little and lovely, all pulsing life and laughter. Captain Tim assured me that it was simply an American phrase

he had picked up, one which meant that Toni was 'regular', 'a swell gal'.

I agreed with that, for there was neither curiosity nor pity in her golden eyes when she took my hand and said she was glad to know me.

**T**ONI was at home among the freaks, for her mother was a hunchback, made that way by long exposure and hardship on the Russian Steppes after the Red rebellion. Toni had been educated in the upper circles of Russian aristocracy, and her first horsemanship was learned in the Royal Riding Academy. After the fall of the Czar, Toni had turned to the Big Top to feed herself and her mother. Now Mamma Lenski mended costumes and dyed silk tights for the trapeze artists. Toni often visited Captain Tim and his wife in the side tents, and never seemed to mind that these people were sometimes—different. For she would hold her small mother in her arms at night and rub the crooked back with ointment. And she had been with circuses long enough to accept the many phases of life in them.

It was Toni who taught Siegfried how to translate his text books from German into French, from French into English, and Toni who discovered that there was real artistry in the small pictures he made with colored crayons.

It was she who had urged him to put his bright dreams on little squares of canvas, and it was she who posed for him till he learned the lines of a slim body, the sheen and texture of white skin, the shapes of hands and bare, beautiful feet.

With me, Toni was different, as though she knew my eyes were not an artist's eyes. And, as much as I could, I busied myself with a book, or carving a small bit of ivory or pliant wood into the caricature of an animal for which I needed no model. And strangely, it was only Toni who aroused in me the instinct to protect, to shelter. I knew at last that I loved her as a man loves only one woman. When I would dance with Verna Byron, it was always Toni I felt in the circle of my arms. And it was of Toni



I deamed at night—dreaming, too, of being free of Siegfried.

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### CHAPTER III

#### *"What God Hath Joined—"*

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**P**ERHAPS it was those dreams that set me thinking of the possibility of someday becoming actually free of my twin. I said nothing for a long while, though, for there was a contract with Manheim, renewed each year. And money would be needed—a very great deal of money.

And all the time, resentment against my life, against all I knew of life, mounted inside me, thinning my lips and narrowing my eyes. Discontent and disgust, weariness and the horrible nervous strain of waiting, all the while daring to dream and hope—it made me a little mad.

"Johann," Toni said one evening, "how is it you and Siegfried are so unlike each other? Don't you like me at all, Johann?"

I felt my nails dig into my clenched fists.

"I do like you, Toni." I said calmly. "In what way am I different from Siegfried?"

"Well," her beautiful golden eyes looked straight into mine, "I can feel you hating things and people. You laugh so little, and Captain Tim says you—I had thought that twins—"

"You mean twins such as we, don't you, Toni?" I finished for her. "You think then that we are interdependent? It is not so. Without each other we could live as well. And someday soon, there will be enough money. Then—"

"Then you will visit the Great Daniell in Baltimore?" she smiled. "Is that what you mean to do? And you, Siegfried? Are neither of you afraid?"

A chill shook me.

"Afraid?" I shouted. "Afraid of something that might let me walk down Broadway alone some day, Toni? Of not being stared at and pointed out as being a jest of nature? Afraid?"

Again she smiled, the slow smile I had learned to love.

"Sometimes the words 'What God hath joined' do not mean just a marriage, Johann," she replied. "Believe me, you would not be happy. These things are beyond our understanding sometimes, but we must learn to accept them."

I clamped my jaws shut and she did not know that I defied the God who had allowed my life to be a travesty. She did not know I hated Siegfried. Later, when she had left us, my brother leaned closer.

"What has happened to us, Johann? Why do you hate me? Am I to blame for the thing which makes us prisoners of each other? If it is only that, there is enough money. We can go to this Daniell Toni spoke of. Perhaps he could make us free of each other. If there is danger, and you do not mind, I am willing, Johann. If it means death for one of us, I would give my life for you."

Later, I clutched at that promise. It seemed to justify me.

**I**N AUGUST, we were outside Washington, and although Manheim shrieked against it, we went to see Daniell, famous for his amazing skill with a knife. He shook his head gravely.

"At birth, yes. Even when you were five, or ten, perhaps. But now—the risk is too great. One, or both of you might die. I am sorry." He shrugged, helplessly.

Siegfried covered my hand with his, but I leaned toward the surgeon, pulling at his coat.

"It is our risk," I said passionately. "What do you care if we die? Your price, man? Your price for the operation? We have money—we both want it—"

"No!" Again he shook his head. "You are both young, healthy. You can make a life for yourselves. Other men, less favored than yourselves have accomplished miracles in the world of science. You each have talents. One the artist, the other—there is need for little carved gargoyles that make children laugh with delight. If you wish, you can leave the side shows. If

not, if you feel you must earn your bread and butter by presenting yourselves to the public, then do that with courage and fortitude.

"You cannot risk the chance of throwing your life—however worthless it may seem to you at the moment—back into the face of the God who gave it to you. I can call in other surgeons, but I assure you they will agree with me. Unless one of you should die, and there were a possibility of saving the other life, such an operation could not be considered at your age."

Back in Washington, in the car which was our home, Siegfried broke the long silence between us.

"Johann, is life so intolerable?" he queried. "Once you were content, happy. If you do not like life the way it is, we could go back to Bavaria, or even find a place to hide from the public here in America. What is it that is driving you?"

"Read my brain, brother," I laughed wildly. "It is not the public I dislike. I wish to be among people, but not a target for their curious eyes. I wish to be like other men. I am going mad with desire for something I cannot have."

"But mostly it is Toni, isn't it?" His breath whistled through his teeth.

**I SAID** nothing, and for the first time since I could remember, Siegfried showed anger against me.

"Johann, you could not have Toni," he said quietly. "Of all the world, Toni is the one thing I would keep from you. Yet, I would not expect her to love me. Can't you understand?"

Sideways, I caught the tightness about his mouth, the slow whitening of his upper lip, and suddenly I knew that he, too, hated being what he was. Until then I had not guessed how deeply he loved the girl who was too kind, too generous to be repulsed by a thing we both railed against.

"So," I gritted, "you can feel something I did not guess. I thought it was only my heart that felt the bitter need for Toni. You never made a sign. You transfer her bright beauty to bits of canvas, but never once—"

"Loving her more than you can, I

wouldn't want her to know I desired her as more than a friend, Johann," he sighed. "Neither of us could ask any woman's hand in marriage. It is unthinkable."

I covered my face with my hands, and he touched my shoulder gently.

"Women are not for us, my brother," he went on. "We must understand and accept that since talking with Daniell."

I shoved him away with a force that sent me spinning with him, reminding me furiously that I could not even fight him. Yet, mad with days and months of pent-up bitterness, crazy with disappointment over Daniell's answer, and on fire with jealousy, I beat at his face with my hands.

"Damn you," I said through clamped teeth, "damn you! Why were you conceived along with me?"

My thoughts tied themselves into knots. What was it Daniell had added as an afterthought. If one of us should die, and there was the chance of saving the other life— Suddenly I quieted. If one of us should die—

That night and for many nights, I lay beside my brother and planned how I could kill him. Poison? No. I could speak no word, buy no smallest thing without his being with me to hear what I said, to see what I paid for. A gun? That too, was beyond consideration. A knife. A quick thrust, a hurried call to the circus physician. Then Daniell or some other reputable surgeon, and freedom—or death. It made little difference. I would rather die than know I must go on living forever a prisoner.

One month, two, and poison brewed in the hot cauldron of my brain. Siegfried and I lived, walked, breathed together, but we might have been at separate poles, so distant we were from each other.

**AND** in the end it was Toni who set the flame to dry tinder. Something Siegfried said, some way he looked at her, perhaps, and suddenly she understood the thing of which she had not dreamed. She moved a little away from him, facing him, so that I could see only part of her startled face.

"No, Siegfried, no! I—oh, my poor friend. I—"

Tenderness sounded in Siegfried's voice, but fury dulled my brain.

"Toni, I didn't mean you to know. Surely, surely you cannot deny me the right to love you, even though I understand—" was all I heard.

"We both love you, Toni, if it adds up to anything," I laughed harshly. "How does it make you feel to be loved by two men, Toni? Both good looking, both working steadily, with a fortune of ten thousand dollars between them. Aren't you flattered?"

It was cruel, but I was turning the knife in my own heart, and her answer killed me.

"It does make me proud, Johann. Love is the highest compliment any man can pay a woman, but—"

"Yes," Siegfried's voice had an edge now. "Yes, Toni, I see. Please forget what has happened, my dear. Only remember that I do love you, and wish only for your happiness."

I saw her turn great eyes to Siegfried, eyes that for the first time held pity.

"Oh, my poor boy," she whispered. "All my life I shall be proud that you can understand and still go on loving me. And I love you for all that you are—good, gentle and courageous. Good-by, Siegfried, and—Johann."

It didn't seem possible that her good-by could mean she was lost. But in the world of the circus, there are many places to hide, and for two or three weeks we saw nothing of the girl. All the while, the poison was being distilled within me, twisting my brain into furious knots.

"If one of us should die! If one of us—should die!"

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## CHAPTER IV

### *The Bond Is Severed*

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**A**T LAST, I knew that one of us must die. I would wait some night until Siegfried slept, and I would hold a pillow over his face until he stopped struggling. Then I

would call the doctor, tell them to hurry. They would think—everyone must be made to think it an accident.

Once I'd made up my mind I didn't hate Siegfried so much. I even talked to him about unimportant things. When the show was over, I would play checkers with him, or chess. I pretended, how carefully I pretended to all who questioned us, that since seeing Daniell, I'd given up all thought of an operation.

And how easy it was that mid-September night, a year after we had been to see Daniell. We were in Washington again, on the same lot, seeing the same crowds, after a year of monotonous repetition. The same circuit across-country to the middle west, and back on the southern route. Then Dallas and Memphis and New Orleans that were scarcely more than sand lots, so far as I knew them. Twelve months of soul-trying patience for me—twelve months of life for Siegfried.

**W**E HAD seen little or nothing of Toni during those months. She stayed South through the heavy Winter, perfecting a new routine in Winter quarters, while Siegfried and I spent the months in a Philadelphia dime museum. In May we opened the show in New York, and once or twice we did see Toni. She had been with Leon, a featured attraction on the billing, and there were whispers that the two of them might double their act and be married.

Those whispers maddened me. I felt sure if I were free of Siegfried I could make her love me. The desperate plan was beginning to take concrete shape.

On Friday, after the night show, the long car which housed the freaks settled itself for slumber. Except for Pix, the tattooed man, who was playing very softly on a harmonica, everything was quiet. Long John snored, at peace with himself and the world, and somewhere in the stillness, in her own compartment, Mademoiselle Therese wheezed in fat discomfort.

I lay silent, breathing evenly only by tremendous force of will. Once Siegfried whispered to me and nudged me gently, but I said nothing. Let him

think me asleep. Almost I could feel him thinking, remembering Hans Lepke and the blue, Bavarian skies, the quiet goats along the Alpine slopes. I wanted to shriek. Why didn't he sleep! Perhaps I was signing my own death warrant, but it no longer mattered. I had to be free of him, free to meet Leon on his own ground and fight for Toni and happiness.

Two o'clock. Three—and I felt Siegfried's arm move in the darkness, reaching for the little box of aspirin on the small shelf which served us as a night table. Just as well. If he slept soundly, he would not know—would not need to know—

Four o'clock, and the nervous flow of Siegfried's thoughts quieted. The twitching in his right arm stilled, and I knew he was asleep. Softly, slowly I slipped the pillow from beneath his head, and then, half blind with passion, I carried out the hellish idea which had been born in my brain so many months before.

It was odd how little Siegfried struggled. A low sigh, one or two convulsive movements, and that was all. It was almost as though he wanted to die and refused to fight for his life. Yet, it took all the will I possessed to remain silent, to keep from jerking the pillow away from his face. How did I know how long it would take for him to die? How did I know how long I could lie there with him beside me? How long could I wait, and how long must I wait to know if Daniell had been right, that death for Siegfried would mean death for me.

Holding my breath till my chest was on fire, keeping my eyes shut tight against the darkness, I felt something cold, misty, yet light as thistle floss against my face. My lids jerked open to see a gray web waft toward the curtain window, moving slowly, almost as though it were reluctant to go.

And suddenly I shrieked, pulling the pillow off my brother's quiet face and tumbling the blanket, shouting that Siegfried had died quietly in his sleep.

No need then to pretend the horror that had me by the throat. Suppose it

was all for nothing! Suppose Daniell couldn't be reached! Suppose—

**T**HE car was in an uproar. Water dashed on Siegfried in an effort to revive him chilled me to the marrow. I breathed harshly, feeling myself sucked down into a slime of unreality. I could hear fat Therese moaning; and above the turmoil, I heard the booming voice of Ajaz calling the circus doctor.

"Daniell," I screamed, in an agony of fear. "Get Daniell in Baltimore. Get anybody, but get Daniell too. If Siegfried is dead, if he is dead, only Daniell can—"

The rest is vague and unreal. I was conscious of fear frothing my mouth, and a sense of horror at what I had done. For there was horror. If, in that moment, I could have given my own life to bring Siegfried back, I would have done so. Yet there I was, bound to a thing that had been my brother, a thing that had moved and walked and laughed and loved its life. And, almost, I could feel myself dying by inches.

Daniell, after a few hours, was there in the hospital, looking down at me with accusing eyes.

"So, Johann? Nobody will believe you killed him—but I know. No court would try you, for oddly, the heart of your brother was weak, and he might well have died some night in his sleep. I knew that when I examined you, but warning would have been wasted. And now, you shall have your wish. We will give you a chance for life, but I cannot say if it will be worth anything to you. If I were more the man and less the doctor, I would let you die.

And I did die, almost. Two months in the hospital. For six weeks of those two months, I knew nothing. Then, gradually, I felt myself being pulled back by a force beyond Daniell's. I knew, beyond a doubt, that it was Siegfried. Siegfried, with all the gentleness gone from him, with no smile now, forcing me back into the body no longer linked to his.

The nurses, urging me to talk and take food, could not see what I saw creeping in through curtained win-

dows at night. They could not feel what I felt brushing across my forehead. And, because they could not see nor hear nor feel, they wondered when I started up in the night, screaming to them for death.

**I**N THE second Friday of the third month, I left the hospital. I was walking alone for the first time in my life, yet, as I passed through the office where a great mirror hung, something forced my eyes up. There was Siegfried beside me, gray and shadowy as a wisp of fog, but his brooding eyes were looking into mine and there was a bitter smile on his lips.

I closed my eyes and tried to shriek, but no sound came from my clogged throat. As I had been bound to Siegfried in life so I was bound to him in death. The difference was that now he hated me.

On the hospital records that operation was written as having been successful. Three of the ten thousand dollars which was Siegfried's and mine paid for Daniell's skill. Yet, when the doctor himself saw me in the office that night, he did not look proud of his handiwork.

"Johann," he said slowly, "there is a book which you should learn to read. There is one verse which says 'Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord.' I am a strong man, Johann, but I fear the vengeance of the Lord. So I take no credit for having been successful in saving your life. Good day."

There was no one from the circus to meet me when I rejoined them in Savannah. Manheim himself was surprised.

"But, Johann, you have nothing now for the side show. You are not unlike other men, with two arms, two legs and one body. I have torn up your contract, of course. If you like, you can stay on with us. You could, say, sell tickets."

I was glad for that. The world of the circus was all the world I knew. There, at least, would be people to call me by name.

And I wanted desperately to see Toni. I felt that I had to see her.

The first night was not so bad, al-

though I had no glimpse of Toni. I was kept busy selling tickets, making quick change for the people eager to go inside the big tent. Once I found myself smiling at the antics of a clown who paraded the entrance with a trained pig.

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## CHAPTER V

### *Vengeance Is Mine*

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**I**N THE next night a small child with curling yellow hair—and eyes that saw what others could not see—caught her mother's hand.

"Mamma, there are two men in there, see? One is like a shadow. Is it a mystery man, mamma?" She whispered loudly enough for me to hear every word.

And turning, I was conscious of the gray blur on my left, cold and damp as Bavarian mist. Through the shadow, beyond it, I saw Toni coming toward me, mortal terror in her golden eyes. I knew she could see Siegfried beside me and that she was hating me.

"Toni," I begged, and my words rasped my throat raw. "Toni, I—"

She shook her bright head slowly. "Johann, why? Oh, why—" Her voice faltered.

"I wanted you," I said desperately. "I thought—"

"Did you think that would make me love you?" Scorn curled her red lips. "You fool! Siegfried was worth more than a hundred like you. He had talent, he was glad to be alive, and gay, and I cared for him as one might care for a loveable puppy at first. Then I began to love him for his goodness, his fine mind and his gentleness. And you—you with your maggot-ridden brain, you thought I—"

I quivered under the whip of her accusing eyes.

"Toni, I couldn't go on living like that. One of us had to die. It might have been both of us." I tried to plead with her.

"I shouldn't have left him alone with you." Her eyes narrowed. "I should have told them all to watch

you. Now it's too late. Nobody would believe me if I told them you murdered him. They'd say you ran too great a risk. They'd say—"

She caught a quick breath and her small hands covered her eyes.

"Siegfried—Siegfried, don't—" she cried.

Men and women crowded about the little ticket booth, watching Toni struggle against an unseen something which clutched her, pulling her closer and closer to me, until her hands were fighting at my face through the bars of the booth, clawing the skin of my cheek until blood ran in salty rivulets into my mouth. Suddenly she slumped, half fainting in the dusty clutter of confetti.

"You killed only the good in him, Johann. Oh, God, the thing you carry with you now is—is—"

They took her away, a slim, broken, sobbing wisp of a girl with a bright kimono blowing open to show a tarleton skirt and a spangled bodice. And in my left ear there was the muted sound of laughter, like, yet so unlike the laugh of Siegfried.

And in that moment I felt the healing scar on my left hip burn as if a flame were pressed against the flesh, sending a fierce pain coursing down the muscles and bone of my leg and up through my arm, into the thick cords of my throat and into my head. It was as if Siegfried were creeping back inside me, his laughter still sounding in my ears.

**A** WEEK, and the cords in my throat thickened, the sinews of my arm and leg tightened, and the skin turned red and angry, pulling against the flesh.

A month—and when I stripped the tickets off the little rolls on the booth, the ligaments in my fingers were slow to obey my mind, and my left leg slewed about a bit as I walked. My throat no longer let my voice pass clearly, and always, always I could feel the undead fingers of Siegfried clawing at my vitals.

Another month, and my leg and arm were almost useless. Massage refused to revive them. Already I was bent sideways, so that I could not straight-

en. But in the mirror at times, I caught a gray reflection of Siegfried, and he was still as straight and strong as he had been in life. He was held to me now by a thin thread, light as thistle floss, but all my effort could not break it. My hand passed through the shadow, and there was nothing in the mirror. I was slowly going mad.

Six months, and now Manheim could not even allow me the poor privilege of selling tickets. He was kind enough, but no circus carries dead weight.

"Go to Hot Springs," he advised. "The mud baths, perhaps. If you improve, there will always be something you can do, Johann."

A year, and my money dwindled, sifting from my pockets into the pockets of reputable doctors and quacks—anything, or anybody that might possibly arrest the spreading death. And yet, I didn't want to live. More than ever, I was bound to Siegfried, and now the eerie laughter which none but I could hear was forever in my ears; and my nostrils flared against the never lessening odor of decay that clung about me.

Why didn't I kill my worthless self, you wonder? Ask why men fear the unseen, and they seldom explain. But I can answer that I tried to die—and couldn't. Once, a gun, loaded and held against my temple, the trigger pulled, and only a thud against a bullet that did not explode. A cold mist wrapped itself about my hand until my fingers let slip the revolver. And the laugh, eerie and humorless, rang against my ear drums.

And once, on Broadway, where the traffic rolls in billows against Thirty-second Street, I stepped into the stream. But something spun me outward, till the great truck wheel straddled my body and left me untouched, for strangers to pick up and exclaim over because of my narrow escape. It was then I knew that Siegfried would not let me die. I must live my worthless life out with him forever beside me, laughing at my misery.

Two years, and there was no money left at all. Yet the part of me that kept on breathing demanded food, the luxury of a bed, even if it were

only a twenty-five cent flop on the Bowery, where other men retched when they saw me.

Yes, I walked down Broadway alone, but still the eyes of the curious followed me, and nobody paid. This was not unusual, this bent and twisted back, and the leg that slewed about, the arm that crooked upward. This was slow paralysis. A poor old thing who couldn't even talk because of a tight band about his throat, a band that felt like fingers, almost, but not quite smothering.

And always, wherever I went, waking or sleeping, I was conscious of the flame against my left hip, of the scar that never entirely healed. And there were times, when I made my slow way past shop windows, that I would see Siegfried walking with me, matching his steps with mine—but nobody else ever seemed to see. Only once, a blind man's dog bristled his thick neck ruff

and showed his teeth, not at me, but at the shadow that stalked beside me.

With the last of my little hoard of pennies, I got a beggar's license, and now—well, if you turn left at the Brooklyn end of the bridge and go down Sands Street to Gold, you'll see me peddling shoe strings and pins and pencils.

Half a man! That's what the sailor said, wasn't it? But then he couldn't see the ghost of Siegfried standing beside me, pale as thistle floss, but stronger than I shall ever be.

"Vengeance is mine," said the text in the Bible I learned to read, but the God of that Book takes strange ways to wreak his vengeance. Through the slow hours and long days, my brother laughs into my ear and curves his slim, artistic fingers into the unseen ligament that binds us. Siegfried walks beside me, keeping me alive to die by inches—waiting—waiting—

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