

# Weird Tales

March  
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Cover by EVAN SINGER

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"My arm is determined to kill me."



FROM the beginning I should have stopped his obsession to make his left arm the strongest arm in the world. At first I thought it would help him to take an interest in something again, after the months he had spent in gloom and misery, unable to accept the loss of his right arm. I even helped him buy the barbell and weights and a pair of gloves so that he would not blister his hand. I remember

now, how touchy he was about the gloves and had flung them across the room while I was copying out a set of exercises for him.

"What good is a right hand glove to me?" he demanded.

"Be sensible, Frank," I answered, "you can't buy one left hand glove."

"I don't care," he shouted. "You bought them to mock me with their ten fingers. I won't

Heading by Joseph Eberle

have them, I won't have them." He crossed to the bathroom and banged the door after him.

These angry outbursts of his, unpredictable, sudden, should have warned me; but my desire to help him clouded my judgment. My idea was to get him interested in something; anything. Until he realized he was not a cripple.

I misjudged the mind that once commanded his hands to do delicate wood carving.

His work had been remarkable but with the loss of his arm had come loss of interest in life, death of his soul. I had hoped to resurrect that life; to show him that his brain was the same creative brain he had before the accident.

HE BEGAN to work at the exercises with an energy that astonished me, day after day, night after night, hoisting up his barbell so many times I thought he would strain his heart. I warned him not to overdo it but he would not listen.

"I will make it the strongest arm in the world," he said to me one night, sweat dripping off his thin body, his black, curly hair soaked as if he had just stepped from a shower.

I stared anxiously at his face, ridiculously thin, the high cheek bones prodding through the tight, dark skin. His eyes were

bloodshot, and the bags under them puffy and black.

"You must exercise the other parts of your body as well," I pointed out, "otherwise your arm will grow out of proportion to the rest of you. You were never a big man, Frank."

"I am not interested in the rest of my body," he snapped. "And if you leave me I can get on with my exercises."

A business trip took me away from London for nine months. I wish I had never gone. I realize now that by neglecting him for so long I was directly responsible for the night of terror which followed so swiftly.

In my absence he had doubled the size of his arm. I saw no beauty in the muscles that knotted themselves into great ugly lumps at his command. I could not share his excitement when he snapped a nail between his fingers and bent an iron bar held in a vise. To me this show of strength, amazing as it was, was childish, and I told him so.

He refused to listen to me and continued another two months, picking up heavier and heavier weights, so heavy that with my two arms I could not lift them as high as my knees.

THEN one night I called on him unexpectedly, after I had been to a theatre. His door was unlocked, and when he did

not answer my knock I went in.

He lay, naked to the waist, on his bed, his huge arm across his chest. His eyes were shut but his lips moved. He was talking in his sleep. When he did not wake up after I had coughed and thumped my stick on the floor I listened to what he was saying. What I heard startled me.

"Pain . . . How long must I roll and twist in agony? What are these vague shadows about me? Who is that man on the rack? God—it—is—it is—me. I am on the rack. The Inquisition has sentenced me to be tortured. What is that fiendish thing standing at the rack wheel? It is long and bloody. It—is—my God—it is—MY ARM! There is the finger I broke; there is the scar at my wrist. My arm resurrected to torture me. My arm slowly turning the wheel, stretching me out. Increasing the pain. Oh—the pain. The pain. The pain . . ."

The rest of it was choked by his groans. I crossed quickly to him and shook him roughly. He sat up, his eyes now open and frightened.

"Did you hear?" he whispered. "Was I talking?"

"Yes," I answered abruptly, "and what is it all about?"

"They come every day now. Every day. I cannot ward them off any more."

"What come every day?" I

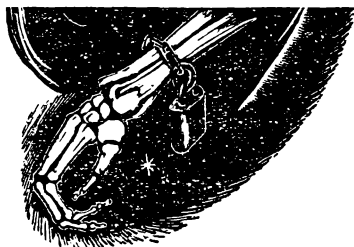
snapped petulantly. "For God's sake pull yourself together."

"The Moods. They come when I least expect them. And when they come I feel a rushing in my ears, my head swims and I cannot see. And I am back again reliving those awful moments after the accident. I see again my arm lying battered and useless, the fingers curled and motionless. I see again . . ."

"Stop it," I cried. "Stop it at once. You have been overdoing it with that barbell. Making your arm into a monster has become an obsession with you. Now you have made it so abnormally strong what are you going to do with it? Let it dominate you?"

HE GAVE a weird cry and scrambled off his bed.

"How did you know?" he cried excitedly. "How did you know?"



"Know what?" I asked, unable to keep the exasperation out of my voice.

"How did you know it dominates me?" he whispered.

I hate theatrics and was about to tell him so when he crossed over to me and caught me in a fierce grip, his fingers biting into my arm.

"Will you come and stay with me?" he pleaded. "*My arm is determined to kill me. It wants to strangle me.*"

"Don't talk nonsense," I said severely. "That would be physically impossible. Your fingers would lose their grip as soon as you blacked out."

"That is where you are wrong," he answered stubbornly. "The fingers would go on squeezing and squeezing."

It was then I should have called in the doctor. Instead I moved in to share his room, sleeping on a camp bed I brought with me.

On the first night he had one of his nightmares, waking me up with a yell. He was talking in his sleep again.

"Look out," he shouted, "we are skidding. Too late. The car has hit the curb and we are rolling over. We are upside down in the back. The black-haired girl is lying across my stomach. Her back is to me and her dress has fallen to her waist. There is glass and blood. Everything is in a muddle. Everything is twisted, out of shape. Except the seams on her stockings. They are straight. I can't move my right arm. It is battered and useless.

But I can move my left arm. Mind if I run my fingers up your seams, Cynthia? From now on I will only be able to feel left leg seams. Do you hear that nurse? Cynthia did not mind because she was dead. Do you mind, nurse? Have you met my ghost? If only he were not such a painful ghost. He has ghostly fingers and he plays ghostly tunes in my arm that is not here. Can you understand that, nurse? I have an arm you cannot see. I have fingers that dance and dance. Ghostly fingers in a dance of death . . ."

I SWITCHED on the light.

He was silent for a moment; then he started talking again, knotting the muscles on his arm as he clenched his fist.

"I can't kill myself. Put my fingers round my throat you say? Squeeze. Squeeze. My own fingers round my own throat? My own fingers to choke me . . . to choke me until I am suffocated? Dead? Squeeze, you say, squeeze . . ."

I crossed quickly to him and shook him awake.

"Frank," I cried. "Frank. It is all right. I am here." He stared at me sullenly for a moment.

"He will kill me one night, I cannot resist him much longer. I will have to obey him soon."

"Now look here, Frank," I said severely. "We are grown men. Such things are impossible

and you know it. I am not a psychiatrist so I do not know what is giving you these dreams and hallucinations."

"They are not hallucinations," he answered stubbornly.

I refused to argue with him and said, angrily, "Tomorrow I'm bringing Dr. Phillips to see you. He is a psychiatrist and a friend of mine."

"It won't help," he said gloomily.

"I'm going back to bed and to sleep," I said, determined not to give him any sympathy. However, I waited until I heard him snoring before I dropped off to sleep.

**T**HE next day I phoned Phillips but he was out of town. I got him on the long distance and told him briefly about Frank. He said he could not be back until the next morning; but he would contact me as soon as he arrived.

Frank was surly all that day. I talked of the days we were in the army together to try to get his mind off it. But he was uninterested.

"Why didn't he come today?" he asked me repeatedly.

"I've already explained, Frank," I said patiently. "He is a busy man. I am taking you out to dinner; you hardly ate anything yesterday."

The meal was a bigger success

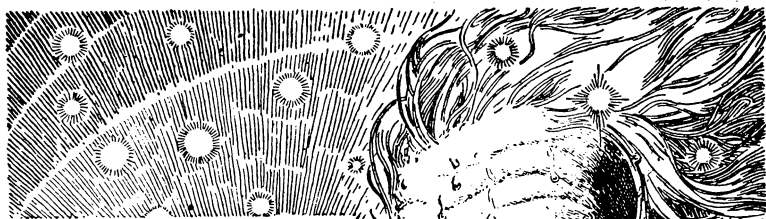
than I expected and by the time we returned to his room he was cheerful. We stayed up until eleven. He told me about his trip to Kenya in 1950 and the lion he shot near Kilimanjaro. I felt that on this night we were both going to get a good sleep.

**H**E SAID he was tired and went to bed. I read for half an hour before putting out my bedside lamp. I was just settling down when I heard his mumbling. I sat up to listen.

"Right arm. What are you now? A stump or a dwarf? You are ugly. Red, like uncooked meat. And your head ends in an absurd point, like the tip of a gnome's hat. I am glad they are going to dress you up and hide your ugly face and the lines down your ugly sides. And why do you drip? Drooling at your mouth like a baby. They will hate you as they hate me. They will not look at you. They will laugh at you as they laugh at me. They will scorn you. You are ugly, frightfully ugly, they will say. So frightfully ugly . . ."

I waited but there was no more. Ten minutes passed and he was still silent. I decided he was all right.

I do not know what woke me. Whether it was the sound of some drunks laughing outside the window, merrily singing as they went home, or the crash of



the early morning train which passes behind the boarding house, often sounding as if it would plunge through the room.

I opened my eyes in a room half alight from the street lamp across the street. Frank stood over me, naked to the waist as usual. His face was twisted into an ugly sneer. His giant arm was above my face, the long, thick fingers extended as if to play a chord on the piano.

"Frank," I shouted, "wake up."

He had me by the throat before I could struggle up from the bed, my feet trapped in the bedding. At first he only gripped me lightly, but such was his power that I was held firmly as if tied by rope.

He forced me up until I was sitting and then pushed his sweating face close to mine.

"You did not believe me," he snarled. "You did not believe me. Now I must kill you. *He* says so. I must kill you and then kill myself."

He shook me gently from side to side increasing his pressure ever so slightly. Automatically

my hands came up to try to break his grip. I might as well have tried to tear open a pair of locked handcuffs. I realized that as soon as he squeezed it would be over quickly. He would snap my neck.

**I** KNEW it was useless to try to reason with him. Something had clicked in his brain and he was going to kill me. They would find me with my neck broken, my tongue sticking out, my eyes bulging. And he would be locked up for life in an asylum, mumbling until he died that he had to obey his arm. He would tell the doctors that after he had made his arm the strongest arm in the world it

began to dominate him. That it had a will of its own. And they would laugh at him and say that only novelists thought up such ideas.

These ludicrous thoughts flashed through my mind. It was only when he began to squeeze that the terror of dying shocked me into action. I tried to burst my neck from his grip. My lungs sucked in air and his fingers choked it off as it came rushing out. A pain shot through my chest. I kicked at his shins and clawed the back of his hands with my nails, until I felt the blood running through my fingers. Blood thumped into my temples. The room spun round like a burnt out catherine-wheel. For a second his grip slackened. I screamed. The fingers tightened and a black blind curtained off my mind.

I was on one knee gasping for breath when the door burst open and someone entered. I struggled up and rushed for the door.

"No you don't," someone yelled. Something hit me behind the head and I fell to the floor.

**W**HEN I opened my eyes it was daylight and the room was filled with tramping men. Pain throbbed behind my eyes. Someone pulled me roughly to my feet and shoved me onto the bed.

A big man with a bloated face and a sad smile came over to me.

"Well, tell us about it," he said.

"About what?" I asked, feeling my throat.

"About last night."

"Where is Flanagan?" I asked, startled.

"You should know," he answered, "you killed him."

"And then choked myself I suppose," I snapped.

"A man from next door heard a scream. He thought he was dreaming. Then he heard scuffling and something thump to the floor. When he opened the door you tried to rush him. He hit you with a baseball bat."

"What nonsense," I cried. "Flanagan tried to kill me. He was mad."

The big man grinned. He took a pair of handcuffs from his pocket and stared idly at them.

"Where is he?" I shouted, alarmed.

"Over there," he answered.

He was ugly, dead. His face was swollen and blue and his tongue stuck out in a white foam of spittle. His eyes pressed out from their sockets in a wide, bloodshot stare.

*He had been strangled.*

"You know," said the big man sidling up to me, "it is impossible for a man to strangle himself."