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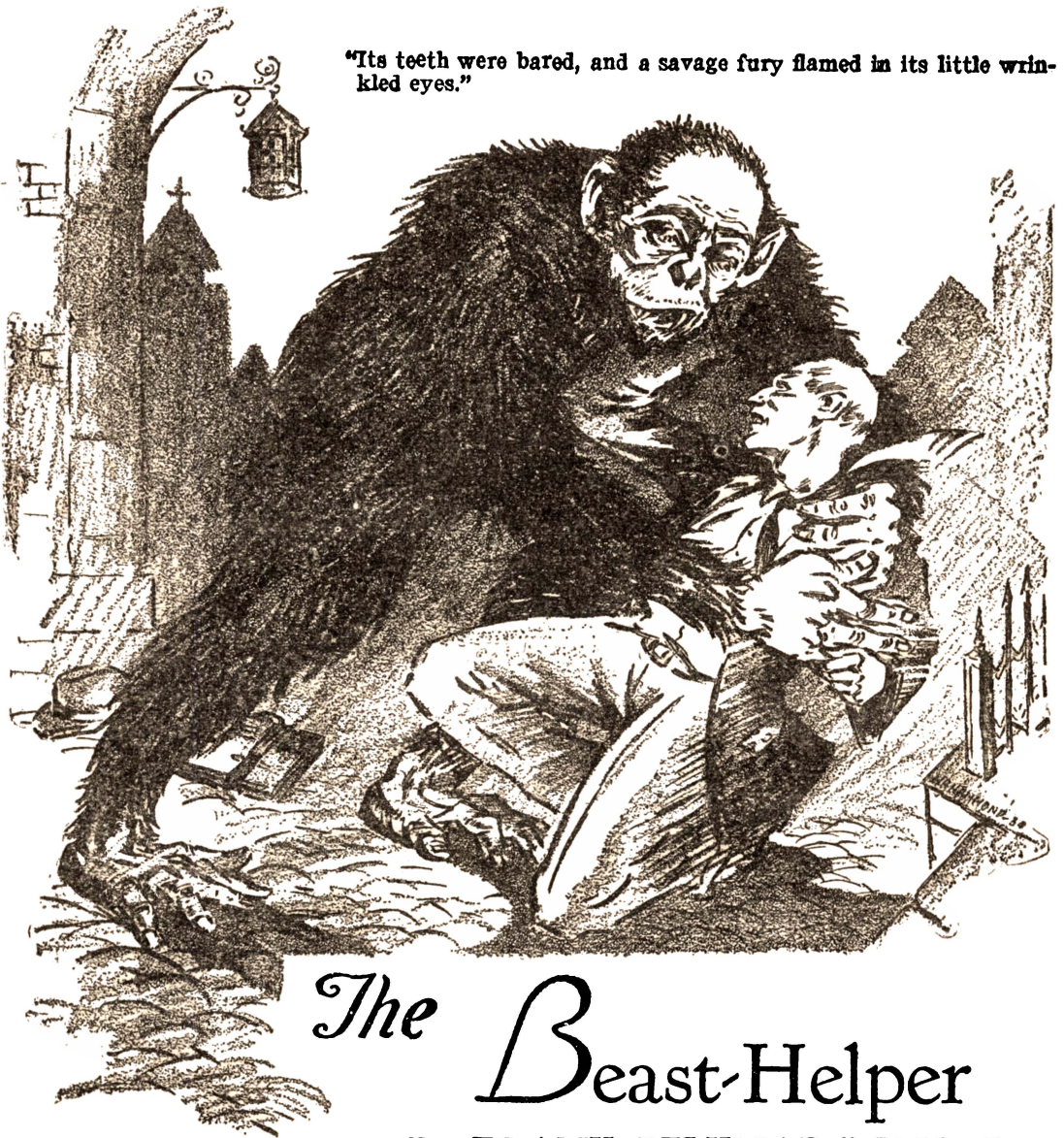
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WEIRD TALES ISSUED 1st OF EACH MONTH

"Its teeth were bared, and a savage fury flamed in its little wrinkled eyes."



The Beast-Helper

By FRANK BELKNAP LONG, JR.

The story of a dictator who sought to hold power by allying himself psychically with a powerful beast

1. The Dark Shape

THE Dictator sat energetically erect, and delivered his pronouncements in a cold, metallic tone. To the American correspondent he seemed like an automaton—a flesh-and-blood machine that functioned at white heat, and expressed itself in a manner wholly remorseless.

The Dictator sat before his desk in his

spacious, walnut-paneled study. His fat, pudgy face was aglow with fanatical rancor.

"Trivania will become the most powerful corporate state in Eastern Europe," he said. "Our cause is a sanctified one, and we shall march from triumph to triumph. We intend ruthlessly to suppress all—dissenting opinion."

The American correspondent was scrib-

bling hastily. Suddenly he looked up, looked at the Dictator. "May I quote this?" he asked.

"Yes, Mr. Thompson. You may quote me at length."

Mr. Thompson was a thin, pale little man with mild blue eyes. He looked conspicuously harmless, to the Dictator. A smile of scorn curled the Dictator's heavy lips as he contemplated the press man.

But the American correspondent had more iron in him than the Dictator. It was a different kind of iron. Mr. Thompson was a profound skeptic and a scientific humanist. To Mr. Thompson the Dictator was a savage barbarian.

The Dictator continued to profess himself. "We shall be merciless to the critics of the state," he said. "Representative government is an absurdity, an historical anachronism. We will relentlessly repress——"

Suddenly he stopped, and his mouth fell open.

The desk before which he was sitting was illumined by a green-shaded arc lamp which cast a diffused radiance on the wall behind him. The rest of the room was in semi-darkness.

Something had opened the door on the other side of the room, and as the Dictator stared and gasped in sudden terror a shadow fell on the illumined section of the wall. The shadow was visible to Thompson. The thing in the doorway, whatever it was, was visible only to the Dictator.

Thompson didn't follow the Dictator's gaze. The shadow held and riveted his attention. It was a humped, aberrant shape, nebulously human in outline, and as it hovered above the Prophet of Power it gestured menacingly with its long arms.

The Dictator sprang from his chair with a hoarse cry, and lurched toward the door.

Thompson turned slowly about in his chair. He was far too startled to turn speedily, and when his gaze swept the door it encountered only a very frightened fat man cowering white-faced against the closed portal.

Thompson felt a cold chill at the nape of his neck. He got quickly to his feet and started toward the door.

The Dictator raised a tremulous hand. "Sit down, Mr. Thompson," he said. "It was only an attendant."

Thompson looked at him. His face was twisted with fright.

"Sit down, please," reiterated the Dictator.

He crossed the room and resumed his position behind his desk.

Thompson was genuinely shaken. It was on the tip of his tongue to blurt out that the shadow he had seen was *not* that of an attendant, but something in the Dictator's manner restrained him.

He did not resume his seat, however. Gathering up his papers he thrust them into a portfolio, and excused himself with as much tactful adroitness as he could summon.

2. *The Little Professor*

THOMPSON dined in a modest restaurant on a dark, narrow street. All about him impoverished Trivianians sipped diluted and inferior wines, and discussed the November Revolution in awed whispers. The name of Kerriling, the new dictator, was on everyone's lips. Some murmured that he was a brutal tyrant—a cruel, egoistic madman with a Messianic complex, and that the reign of terror and ruthlessness which he had inaugurated would outrage the moral sense of Western Europe. Others praised Kerriling, and proclaimed that he was the savior of his people, and that his critics were traitors, or worse.

Thompson sat at a small table in a corner of the restaurant, sipping a sherry punch and staring abstractedly at the waiters as they moved about between the tables. Despite his abstracted gaze his mind was very busy. He was confronted with the appalling necessity of explaining a great horror in rationalistic terms.

His mind refused to tolerate the naked memory of what he had seen. It spewed it forth, embellished and modified, and as he sat sipping his beverage a giddiness came upon him.

He *had* seen a shadow, monstrous, ghastly, unspeakable—and Kerriling had seen the thing itself. But surely, his mind kept clamoring, the shadow had been merely a queer and freakish distortion of a perfectly normal human shape. A freak of lighting had magnified and distorted it, no doubt, but surely the form itself, the reality behind the caricature—had been quite normal. A *thing?* Preposterous! And yet it was difficult if not impossible to ignore the certain significance of Kerriling's fright, and the abnormal outlines and queer, purblind jerkiness of the shadow's movements.

A little man at a near-by table had been watching Thompson intently. Now he rose and crossed to where the journalist was sitting.

He had a lean, darkly-bearded face. His nose was sharp, his mouth saturnine and thin-lipped, and he wore blue-tinted spectacles. He was attired in evening clothes, and a thin yellow ribbon spanned his white shirt-front. He sat down opposite Thompson and rested his thin hands on the checkered table-cloth.

"I've been observing you," he said. "You've been trying to drown the stench of Kerriling in that bouquet." He pointed to the wine.

Thompson raised his eyes, and stared in astonishment.

The little man said, "I am Doctor Carl Luton. I am director of the Trivanian Academy of the Natural Sciences, and senior professor of anthropology at the University of Sisbeck."

Thompson's brow furrowed. "Doctor Luton?" he murmured. "Yes, of course. You were formerly the Minister of Education."

Doctor Luton nodded. "I was Kerriling's intimate adviser until a fortnight ago. I was at the palace this afternoon, and one of the servants informed me that the Dictator had granted you an interview."

Thompson nodded. "Yes, I saw him," he said.

Doctor Luton's eyes narrowed. "And were you—satisfied?"

"I'm not quite sure I understand you, Doctor," said Thompson.

"You expected that the Dictator would put his foot into it, as you Americans say. I know you expected something of the sort. Kerriling has thrown caution and discretion to the winds. He is now wholly obsessed with his brutal and ferocious dogmas."

Thompson nodded. "The Dictator was very frank," he said. "He advocates a ruthless military imperialism as a national policy, and seems quite determined to destroy all liberal and dissenting groups."

Luton said: "You know, of course, that he has already disposed of the Minister of Finance, the Minister of Public Health, and the Minister of War?"

Thompson looked nervously about him.

"We are safe enough here," said Luton. "If it is treason to call Kerriling a murderer I am prepared to take the consequences. I am no longer afraid of the beast."

"But Doctor, surely——"

Doctor Luton leaned forward. "Listen, my friend. I have decided to reveal

to you the secret of Kerriling's hideous power and dominance, so that you will be on your guard. I know that you hate Kerriling as much as I do. I have read your very able articles in the American press. Kerriling will never permit you to leave Trivania in a whole skin. He believes that you have caused even his friends in America to turn against him."

Thompson turned slightly pale. "You are sure of this?"

Luton nodded grimly. "I *know* Kerriling. The brute in him has gained strength from communion with something indescribably bestial."

The American's mind leapt back to the interview, and the horror that had terminated it. What, in God's name, was the little professor hinting at?

Luton's eyes narrowed until they were thin gray slits. He said: "Kerriling does not live alone in the palace. *He has a servitor.*"

Thompson felt a sort of shiver go through him.

Luton wet his lips with the tip of his tongue. "It is a thing so awful that I am reluctant to describe it. I alone am responsible. Had I refused to reveal the mechanism of my brain-tube, Kerriling would have killed me. But now I have the deaths of three men to atone for."

For an instant the little man was silent. Then he said: "When Kerriling says to the beast, 'Kill!' it goes forth with the blood-lust upon it. It creeps through the narrow dark streets at night when no one is about, and climbs into open windows, and twines its huge hairy hands about the throats of its victims. It has the strength of ten men."

THE little doctor poured himself a drink from a bottle of Rhine wine. As he quaffed it, his hand shook.

"The Minister of War," he affirmed,

"had his throat torn away. The Minister of Finance was found with his back broken. The Minister of Public Health was brutally strangled."

The little man was sweating profusely. He seemed to be nerving himself for an ordeal. It was a full half-minute before he spoke again.

"I will tell you all I know. Kerriling keeps in the palace a huge male gorilla. It obeys his will. When he commands it to slay, it slays. I gave the gorilla to Kerriling. The animal came from my private zoo.

"For several years I have been conducting a series of experiments with the great apes. I have perfected a device which I have called the brain-tube. It is a thin, metallic instrument with a rhythmically moving central axis, and by applying one pole to the cerebral cortex of a human subject and the other to the infinitely less evolved brain of an anthropoid ape I have succeeded in bridging the gulf between the two organs of thought to an extent that would astound and horrify you."

Luton helped himself to another drink.

"The highest centers," he resumed, "are not affected. The communication is subconscious, primordial. From man to ape there flows a stream of deep, subterranean understanding. If you are familiar with the Jung school of analytical psychology you will not need to be told that deep within us, far below the little civilized substratum of consciousness which we call the human brain, there lurks a great writhing mass of primal sense-images, memories, thoughts, dreams, instinctive-habit patterns which are not in any sense human.

"Jung affirms that every human being carries within him these brutish vestiges of life-cycles long since discarded or transcended. Far below the man-mind

in us there lurks an ape-mind, and below the ape-mind, a reptile-mind, and below that a fish-mind, and so on down the scale till we reach life's dark and obscure beginnings.

"I have always believed that communication between man and beast on the basis of *shared* memories and habit-patterns was theoretically possible. But the deepest layers would naturally be the hardest to reach. In man's slow climb toward the stars he has discarded layer after layer of his animal self. Deep within us is a reptile-mind, but its memories are buried beneath the debris of a hundred million years, and to tap that fount would be difficult, if not impossible. But the great apes are very much nearer to us in time. They have shared with us a recent and common heritage."

He raised his glass again, drained it dry.

"To connect the brain-tube, a tiny hole must be drilled in the skull of both subjects. It is a risky and dangerous operation. But Kerriling submitted to it. He wanted a servitor very badly. He prided himself on his cunning and iron will. He felt confident that he could convey his desires to the ape, and that the ape would obey him. He was not impressed by the scientific grandeur of the experiment. He cared nothing for science. He was a vicious and brutal politician, intent only on feathering his own nest by violent and bloody means.

"He envisaged the ape as a helpless tool in his hands, as an instrument of vengeance. With the aid of the beast he could slaughter with impunity his personal and political enemies."

The little scientist was tugging nervously at the loose skin of his throat. Thompson's eyes were fixed on the man's face.

"I vigorously opposed him. But he

threatened me with the block. He has revived the executioner's block, as you know. He said that if I refused to help him, my neck would feel the knife. I fear that I am something of a coward. To a modern man that kind of death is unspeakably awful.

"I pleaded with him, but he was stubborn, determined. So in desperation I acceded to his request. I arranged for the operation. I was present when he lay etherized upon the table. He was at my mercy then, but somehow I couldn't bring myself to betray him. I could not kill him, even though I knew he deserved to die. I told the surgeon how to proceed, stood at his elbow and guided his mind and hand.

"The skull-pan was laid open and a small incision made in the cerebral tissue. Then a permanent hole was drilled in the skull, and the larger suture was reset.

"The operation was a complete success. In a fortnight Kerriling was up and about, and only a small opening in the skull remained to mark the site of the incision.

"The gorilla was promptly anesthetized. It was bound with iron bands to the table, and in the presence of eight powerful attendants the ether cone was placed above its brutish countenance, and it lapsed into a deep sleep.

"I directed the operation in a kind of morbid trance, and when the animal's primitive brain came into view I experienced a sick revulsion.

"Yet the second operation was as successful as the first. The ape recovered its strength quickly, and in a few days we thought it safe to proceed."

Doctor Luton's face was very pale.

"The ape was chained to the wall in one of the small upper rooms of the Dictator's palace. It was spread-eagled against the wall, with ponderous steel

links on its arms and legs, and a metal band about its hairy torso. It bellowed and squirmed, and yellow froth appeared on its bestial muzzle, but it was securely fastened.

"Kerriling was fearless. He stood beside the roaring beast, and smiled calmly and coldly as I adjusted the tube. One end went through the hole in his skull, and rested on the naked brain-stuff within. The other end rested on the unfathomable, primal brain of the great beast.

MY HANDS shook as I set the revolving interior axis in motion. A great awe and dread of the unknown rested upon me. Revulsion vied in my mind with a consuming, insatiable curiosity, and as the inner axis began speedily to whirl, the blood in my temples began a furious pounding.

"For several seconds the axis revolved, making a subdued, whirring sound. Then, with appalling suddenness, the ape ceased its savage lashings. Its enormous chinless jaw seemed to vibrate, to squirm, and into its eyes there came a look of wild and unutterable fright.

"Kerriling also responded, quickly, terribly. His features contracted, his eyes bulged. At the corners of his mouth a thin foam accumulated.

"I was horribly frightened. I wavered on my feet and was compelled to lean against the wall for support.

"The contraction of Kerriling's features is difficult to describe. The muscles of his face seemed to draw the flesh together in little folds and puckers, as though the normal avenues of facial expression had somehow clogged. For an instant stark madness looked out of his eyes.

"In frantic terror my gaze passed from this twitching mask and fastened on the countenance of the ape. It, too, had un-

dergone a startling change. It was no longer snarling and distorted. A great calmness seemed to rest upon it. It was like the face of a dead beast, peaceful and utterly relaxed.

"For an instant I experienced relief. Then I looked again at Kerriling, and my heart ceased to beat. Kerriling's features had shed their human cast. They were convulsed, bestial, malign. His lips writhed back from his teeth and a wild light flamed in his eyes.

"I thought for an instant he was going to spring at me. I swayed and retreated a pace. His lips continued to writhe. I was dazed with fright, but instinctively I reached forward and disconnected the tube.

"As I did so he bent, and sank his teeth into my wrist. I cried out, and lurched away from him. He followed me across the room. I seized a weapon from the wall behind me, and threatened him with it. He backed away, snarling.

"I stared in terror. For a moment he continued to circle about, snarling, grimacing, threatening me with his hands. The fingers of his hands were splayed. He moved them backward and forward, as a beast would.

"Then, gradually, the ferocity faded from his face. He moaned, and sank down upon the floor in a dead faint."

The little professor was trembling, and his face was very pale.

Thompson was shivering also. The restaurant was nearly deserted now, and it seemed horribly empty and cold, like a morgue.

"I should have killed him then," said Luton in a hopeless tone. "The Greek Trivanians in West Duksburg were ruthlessly massacred because I did not kill him. The great and gentle-spirited historian Burkovan was sent into exile because I did not kill him. The Minister of

War had his throat torn out because I did not kill him. May heaven forgive me for my cowardice."

Tragic suffering looked out of his eyes.

"I am directly responsible for all the atrocities which Kerriling has committed," he went on. "Kerriling's mind subdued and controlled the ape's mind, *but something from the beast flowed into him.*"

He rose from the table.

"I must go now," he said. "I have warned you. Be on your guard."

He stood for a moment gazing at Thompson with compassionate eyes. Then, with a sigh, he took down a black cape from a rack in the corner, and walked slowly from the restaurant. Thompson watched him pass through the revolving glass door and advance slowly down the street outside. He carried a walking-stick, and he hesitated, and looked in at Thompson as he passed the window of the restaurant.

WHEN Luton vanished from sight, Thompson shivered. It was colder than ever. He summoned the waiter. "My check, please," he said.

A few minutes later he was threading his way through a squalid and silent slum. It was impossible to conceive of a street more dismal, empty and sordid than the one which echoed his footfalls as he moved along its gloomy length. It was virtually a cavern flanked by houses which were rotten with age, and whose gambrels met in a dizzy embrace above his head. The stones beneath his feet were tilted at irregular angles, and were overgrown with straggling weeds and a noisome mildew which made them as slippery as ice.

Thompson's immediate objective was his hotel, and he was glad that it was located in a pleasant neighborhood, and that the slum would soon vanish from

his ken. He had chosen the slum route because it was the shortest and because time was precious in his sight. He intended to pack his belongings and escape from Trivania as quickly as possible.

Not that he wholly believed the little professor. As he sped along the dark street he kept repeating over and over that Doctor Luton had been insane, or drunk. He kept repeating it to himself, as a deaf man will sometimes whistle to keep his courage from evaporating completely. He was really insane with fright.

It was past midnight, and the weather was as chilly and depressing as a damp shroud. No footfalls besides his own echoed on the slabbed pavement, and the windows of the houses were vacant and lightless.

Fear clutched at his vitals as he walked. He accelerated his pace until he was almost running. The professor, he kept repeating, was mad. For a time the reiterated assurance sustained him, filled him with a kind of panicky bravado. But as the dark street continuously lengthened before him, and he awoke to the magnitude of the slum in terms of blocks still to be traversed, his courage forsook him entirely. He broke into a sweat, and his pace faltered. And in the same instant, almost directly behind him, he heard something panting in the darkness.

He whirled in terror.

For an instant he thought that the enormous black shape was a shadow. It leapt and wavered like a shadow, and seemed to fill the street with its bulk. It was not a shadow, however. It was something massive and alive and menacingly concrete.

Thompson shrieked when he recognized it. He swayed and took a frantic step backward. As he did so his foot slipped, and he went down on the slimy pavement. The gorilla moved cumber-

somely forward, beating with its clenched fists on its resonant chest.

For an instant it towered above the prostrate American. Its teeth were bared, and a savage fury flamed in its little wrinkled eyes.

Thompson cried out again, tried to evade the menace by lurching frantically sideways on his knees. But the gorilla fell on him with a snarl of rage, and encircled his body with its great arms.

A nauseous stench filled Thompson's nostrils. He squirmed and groaned. The gorilla's arms tightened about him in a malignant hug. Thompson felt a stab in his lungs. His chest seemed on fire.

He raised both hands and tore at the foul-smelling hair of the monster's head. With a scream of rage the gorilla withdrew its arms. Raising its paws it gripped Thompson by the wrists of both hands, and tore away his hold. Thompson turned on his side, and kicked the gorilla violently in the stomach.

A bellow of pain issued from the gorilla's throat. It rolled over, and dragged Thompson with it. Thompson was now in a position of vantage.

He had one hand free. With a convulsive effort he thrust it beneath his coat and drew it forth again. As the gorilla tightened its hold he pressed the cold nozzle of a .38-caliber revolver against the beast's hairy side.

The gorilla made no sound when the bullet plowed through him. There was a heavy thud, and Thompson felt the reverberations in every part of his body. He fired again. The gorilla's great bulk was suddenly convulsed. A roar of agony, deep, raucous, abysmal, issued from its throat.

Releasing Thompson, it leapt into the air, and descended, and leapt high again. It roared and screeched and clutched at its side and belly with its paws.

Thompson was bruised and bleeding. But he swayed to his feet and fired again. As he fired he backed away quickly, his eyes burning in his taut face.

The gorilla collapsed. It fell forward upon its face, and its arms jerked convulsively for a moment. Then it ceased to move.

Thompson dropped the revolver, and staggered away into the darkness.

3. "The Dictator Is Dead!"

A HUGE crowd milled about the Dictator's palace. Men and women shouted, screamed, wept. Kerriling's mounted guards raged amidst the populace, splitting skulls, trampling the unwary under foot.

From a thousand throats came a single exultant cry: "The beast is dead! Kerriling is dead!"

On the edge of the crowd a little man stood swaying dizzily in the glare of the torches. He was hatless, disheveled, with tousled hair. There was blood upon his clothes, his face.

Suddenly a face whiter than his own came close to him in the darkness, and a familiar voice said: "You *did* kill Kerriling. You *did*."

Thompson started violently.

Doctor Luton gripped his arm. "Where have you been?" he cried. "I have searched everywhere for you. I wanted to protect you from Kerriling, if I could. I did not know that Kerriling was stricken until this morning. His advisers kept it a secret. When I learned you had killed the beast I searched everywhere, but was unable to find you. I am glad that you are safe."

The American passed his hand before his forehead. "I have been—ill," he murmured. "I remember sleeping in a park, and walking in the country somewhere. It is all horribly indistinct. The

veil lifted for a few hours, and descended again."

Luton said: "You must rest, my friend. You must come with me."

Thompson muttered: "Why did you say I had killed Kerriling?"

The little scientist looked at him. "Thought-transference is not a myth," he said. "When the deep mind of the race is stirred, the deep hidden mind which we share with the beasts, it may well be

that emotions and even pains and injuries can be transmitted through the ether in potent, invisible waves."

He nodded grimly. "Kerriling died because four deep abscesses developed in his side three hours after you poured four shots into the gorilla."

The American started, swayed.

Luton said: "You are very tired, my friend. Our guest room is unoccupied, and my wife is an excellent cook. Come along."
