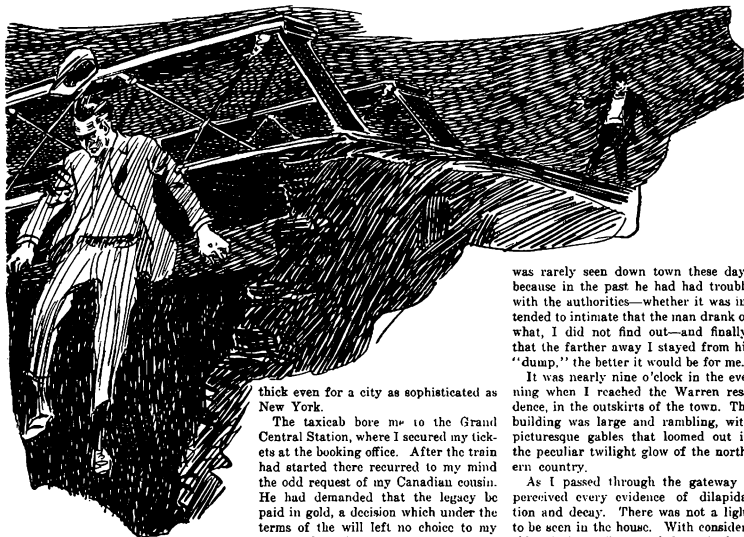


An Odd Little Tale
By the Author of "The Well"

THE BLACK PATCH

By JULIAN KILMAN



THE dead weight about my body made me gasp as I leaped into the taxicab.

So far as my uncle and I were aware, there was only one other person who knew of my errand. He lived in a small town in the northern part of Ontario and was the sole surviving member of that branch of the Warren family which had left England three generations before. The gold coin I carried was a legacy to him, and I could not think he would have divulged the manner of its delivery.

Yet twice during the short time that had elapsed since my arrival in New York I had been attacked, and on the second occasion my bag actually snatched from me. This seemed a bit

thick even for a city as sophisticated as New York.

The taxicab bore me to the Grand Central Station, where I secured my tickets at the booking office. After the train had started there recurred to my mind the odd request of my Canadian cousin. He had demanded that the legacy be paid in gold, a decision which under the terms of the will left no choice to my uncle and me, its executors, and hence I was lugging the valuable stuff on my person.

The visit to Niagara Falls was not to be given up, and nothing occurred to increase my apprehension during my stopover at the famous resort. At the end of the following day, after much discomfort from the execrable train service, I reached my destination, and hastened to a hasty luncheon.

That evening I ascertained something of my relatives, most of my information coming from a garrulous waitress who needed but the merest hint of a question not only to answer it but to anticipate five others.

Thus it came about that I learned that David Warren, my cousin many times removed, was a "queer duck"; that he

was rarely seen down town these days because in the past he had had trouble with the authorities—whether it was intended to intimate that the man drank or what, I did not find out—and finally, that the farther away I stayed from his "dump," the better it would be for me.

It was nearly nine o'clock in the evening when I reached the Warren residence, in the outskirts of the town. The building was large and rambling, with picturesque gables that loomed out in the peculiar twilight glow of the northern country.

As I passed through the gateway I perceived every evidence of dilapidation and decay. There was not a light to be seen in the house. With considerable misgiving, I proceeded up the long grass-grown walk to the door and plied the ancient knocker. No one answered. I waited a few moments, feeling less and less inclined for my task.

Suddenly the door swung open silently. I was confronted by an elderly man. He held aloft a candle and peered at me.

"Is this my cousin?" he asked.

"If you are David Warren," I replied.

"I am David Warren," he said, slowly; and then he added more quickly, as if appreciating his remissness as a relative and host: "But come in, sir; come in."

As he lowered the candle and turned to close the door I was startled to see that he wore a black patch over one eye.

Whatever my first impression of the man may have been, certainly nothing occurred during the remainder of the evening to excite distrust. He carried no "side" and treated me with the greatest cordiality. Indeed, there was that about him which gave me satisfaction that he was of my own blood: his was the first low-pitched voice I had heard since I left England!

With this opinion of my relative and host, therefore, I accepted his invitation to continue his guest, and soon, with every sense of fear lulled, was shown to a chamber at the head of the stairs. I respected his sense of delicacy in not mentioning the object of my visit up to that time, and did not refer to it myself for the reason that I did not wish to have him know I had taken such precautions as to conceal the gold about my person.

How long I slept I do not know, but some time must have elapsed, when suddenly I found myself wide awake. I sat up trembling, my hearing alert for the noise that had disturbed me.

Then it came: a faint call, near and yet far distant—like the successful effort of a ventriloquist. It seemed to me that the word I had heard was "Help!"

THOROUGHLY alarmed, I thrust a hand under my pillow: The gold was still there.

I decided to reconnoitre and tip-toed downstairs to the living-room, lighting an occasional wax vesta. I had about concluded that in my nervous condition I was the victim of an hallucination, when my attention was attracted by an antique writing-desk. Something white projected from under the blotter, and quite casually I pulled it out.

It was a letter that had been in the bag snatched from me in New York! The sight of that bit of inanimate evidence—my positive knowledge that it came from the stolen Gladstone, caused my heart to flutter.

To my room I returned, but sleep was not possible, and I relieved the tedium of the wait for daylight by a thorough examination of my quarters.

At seven o'clock there was a rap at the door. An old negro signed for me to follow.

"Good morning," I heard as I entered the dining-room. "I trust you slept well, my cousin?"

The man with the black patch stood by the window, his good eye resting on me.

"Splendidly," I lied.

As we finished breakfast, however, and I made no mention of the purpose of

my visit, my host appeared restless. He rose from the table.

"And now," he said, almost sharply, "I assume you have with you the amount of my legacy—one thousand pounds!"

"Sorry," I said, "but I thought it advisable to deposit the gold in a bank at Niagara Falls: the weight of the stuff made traveling tremendously uncomfortable."

He proved to be a consummate actor. "Of course; of course," he exclaimed, with quick buoyancy. "Let's not worry about it. We can manage it later."

Twice that day I endeavored to slip away; but each time my host, with a manner disarmingly casual, contrived to join me. On the second occasion, I had reached the road and started for the village when, with profuse apologies for his carelessness, he overtook me. I continued the walk in his company.

It accomplished nothing. Again and again as we passed along the streets of the little town I noted the curious gaze of those we met, and the words of the woman scullion recurred to me. The man with me spoke to no one and no one spoke to him. Meanwhile, he kept up a running fire of comment, his thoughts seeming to race.

"By the way," he exclaimed, as we turned to retrace our steps. "I haven't shown you my laboratory."

Later, in exhibiting his workshop, he evinced extreme nervousness.

"This eye," he explained, "I lost years ago in an experiment."

At the thought of the sightless socket beneath that black patch I felt it difficult to repress a shudder.

The evening with my host did not serve to allay my fears. I had definitely planned to remain and keep awake all night; and in the morning to communicate in any event with the authorities.

During the long hours that followed I lay fully dressed on my bed, revolver in hand; but the vigil was too much for me in my exhausted condition and I finally dozed.

It must have been after two o'clock when I awoke and lay tense; a hand was being moved cautiously back and forth beneath my pillow. The search was thorough, but the gold was not there: it was again fastened about my body. And the owner of the hand seemed to conclude that some other course was necessary, for a moment later I heard him steal out.

As I slid from the bed, there came a sound as if someone had stumbled in the hallway. Instantly it was followed by a horrible shriek—again and again it pierced the air.

The hair of my head stiffened with fear.

FLINGING open the door of my room, I could just make out that a terrible struggle was in progress between two men. It continued for a brief bit, and presently I heard a long-drawn sigh; one of the combatants slid to the floor.

I waited no longer, but leaped into the passage-way, my hands extended before me. Suddenly, in the darkness, they touched those of another. *He was feeling for me!*

We crouched there an instant, each reaching for the other, as in the preliminaries of a wrestling match. His fingers were hot and slippery with moisture. Then he rushed me. The pistol was knocked from my hand, and the next instant the two of us were struggling together.

To and fro we staggered. Finally my feet tripped over the prostrate body of the man on the floor. My adversary and I went down together.

The fall loosened his grip. I was able to breathe more freely, and I got a hand on his throat: the other hand wandered about his face, and clutched something.

I shrieked with the horror of it. One of my fingers was digging into the empty socket of a human eye!

Wild with the pain, my antagonist arose sheer from the floor, flinging me off as if I had been a child. An instant later I heard him running down the stairs.

It has been difficult for me since to understand my course that dreadful night. I was insensate. I followed the man with the one eye, for I felt that murder had been done. It was moonlight and I could see him plainly. With incredible swiftness, the fugitive sped over the landscape and made for a trestle which spanned a cove half a mile in the distance.

I knew that on the opposite side of it was a heavily-wooded stretch and, fearing his escape, I endeavored to head him off. He reached the bridge a few seconds before me, however, and to my horror I saw him poise his body at one side; the next moment he went over.

I think we both screamed then; the one-eyed man as he whirled through the moonlight to his death, and I as I watched him.

Not until daybreak did I come to myself. The soles of my boots were scuffed through, and I seemed to have been running for hours; running to blot out of my vision the sight of that body spinning downward into the abyss—running to brush from the tentacles of my mem-

(Continued on page 88)

The Black Patch

(Continued from page 18)

ory the horrid thought that I had driven a human being to his death.

Then, filled with forebodings as to the identity of the body over which I had stumbled earlier in the night, I started to return. When I reached the house it was a long time before I could summon courage to enter. Once inside, however, I gained confidence and hastened upstairs.

The body was gone from the hall. But in the small room at one end—a mere closet—I found what I was looking for: the body of the man who had fallen in the struggle in the night—evidently he had dragged himself thither. His heart was still beating, and I carried him down stairs. He was heavy, and I groaned with relief as the weight slipped from my arms to the floor.

Then I looked at the face. Never shall I forget it.

It was my host! The black patch was displaced. It had covered a perfectly good eye!

I MUST have swooned at the sight, for the next I knew there were many men about me. They came from the village and had been notified by the old negress.

I was taken into custody and lodged for three weary hours in a ridiculously small place they called a "lock-up." At the end of that time I was led before a magistrate who took my statement.

Next morning I was informed that the body of David Warren had been found in the ravine. It confirmed my worst

fears. I had driven to his death my own cousin!

That day the authorities obtained a confession from the man who had worn the black patch. He was unknown to them and stated that his name was Douglass. For about three months he had been employed by David Warren as an assistant in laboratory work. Having opened by mistake the first letter from our solicitor, Douglass learned of the legacy and kept my cousin in ignorance of it.

For two months he had confined David Warren under circumstances of the greatest cruelty in the little closet at the end of the hall. He insured the silence of the old negress by threats of death.

How Warren escaped from his room Douglass could not say. He suspected that the negress finally had dared to unlock the door. In any event, my cousin met Douglass in the dark just as the latter stepped from my room after his futile attempt to steal the gold. Then ensued the struggle in the hallway that I had heard and in which Warren stabbed the impostor with a knife—a wound that later resulted in the death of the criminal.

Although aware that we had never seen our Canadian cousin, Douglass wore the black patch fearing that we might know that David Warren had lost an eye.

After the inquest I hurried, shaken and trembling, to the hotel and packed the stolen Gladstone which had been found and returned to me. Then, feeling that I had a sufficiently vivid impression of America, I purchased a draft with the gold and started on the long journey home.

Table of Contents

The contents of *Weird Tales* is fully protected by copyright and must not be reproduced either wholly or in part without permission from the publishers. All communications should be addressed to the publishers main office at 854 North Clark St., Chicago, Ill.

THE PEOPLE OF THE COMET.....	3
THE BLACK PATCH.....	17
AUSTIN HALL JULIAN KILMAN	
THE SOUL OF PETER ANDRUS.....	19
THE CASE OF DR. JOHNSTONE.....	23
BURTON PETER THOM	
THE DEAD-NAMING OF LUKAPEHU.....	26
F. D. GOD	
THE CUP OF BLOOD.....	27
OTIS ADELBERT KLINE	
BLACK MAGIC.....	33
C. F. OLIVER	
THE DEVIL'S CABIN.....	35
VANCE HOTT	
THE OLD BURYING GROUND.....	39
EDGAR LLOYD HAMPTON	
SUNFIRE.....	48
FRANCIS STEVENS	
THE GORILLA.....	59
HORATIO VERNON ELLIS	
THE TALISMAN.....	62
NADIA LAVROVA	
THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF A BLUE GHOST.....	64
DON MARK LEMON	
THE DAMNED THING.....	70
AMBROSE BIERCE	
THE TEAK-WOOD SHRINE.....	73
FARNSWORTH WRIGHT	
THE MONEY LENDER.....	75
VINCENT STARRETT	
THE BLOODSTAINED PARASOL.....	77
JAMES HAVENSCROFT	
THE EYRIE.....	79
THE EDITOR	
THE CAULDRON.....	86
PRESTON LANGLEY HICKEY	

For Advertising Rates in *WEIRD TALES* apply to YOUNG & WARD, Advertising Managers,
163 North Michigan Blvd., Chicago, Ill.