

Weird Tales

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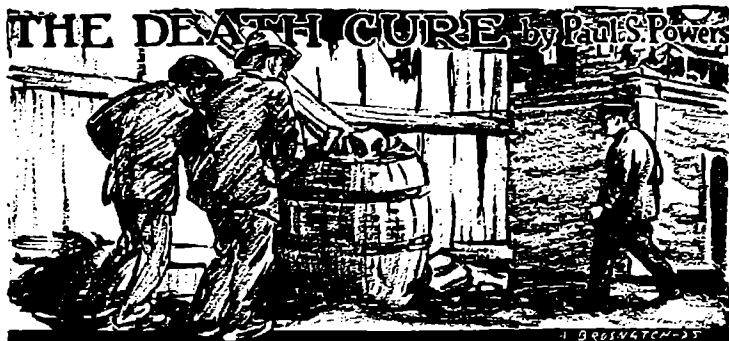
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Author of "Monsters of the Pit"

UNDER the ghastly glare of a swinging street lamp two human derelicts met. The first was a youth with an aged and dissipated face, and at the first sight of the man from the alleyway he stopped with a low whistle. It was answered, and the other night wanderer beckoned from beyond the light. The second man might have been fifty. He looked sixty-five. The drawn face, pinched and distorted with suffering, told the secret. The youth knew that it was a drug face, and the light of the lamp told him what it was. Morphine!

"Well, kid," breathed the older man in a tense whisper, "slip me the junk!"

Broadway Charlie looked down at the derelict's trembling and twisted hand and broke into a dismal laugh. The fellow was clutching a five dollar bill.

"So you got fooled, too," he said. "I've been waiting on this corner for two hours."

The drug addict groaned, and then peered into the wild eyes of the youth with a look of sudden hopefulness.

"Cocaine, eh?"

"God, yes," whined Broadway, "and I haven't had a whiff for days. Just took a flyer at the Tombs, and

I've been waiting for Whispering Willie. He's ditched me, or else he's pinched. For a few grains of snow, I'd—"

"Yes, I know," snarled the older man. "You've got it easy—if it was morphine, or heroin, you'd know what it is to suffer. I'll die, sure as the devil, if I don't get it pretty soon. If something's happened to our peddler we've got to get it somewhere else, that's all! What time is it, kid?"

Broadway shook his head with a scowl.

"Soaked," he explained. "It's about 1 o'clock, though. Not much chance, out this way at this time of night."

"Then we'll make a chance," gritted the derelict.

He introduced himself as Tim the Spotter, and explained that he had arrived in the city only a few days before. Here he had met the dope peddler, who had promised to deliver two cubes of the "poppy", on the corner at midnight. He whispered that he had been on the lookout since 11 o'clock, and knew of a place where some dope—both cocaine and morphine, perhaps—could be stolen. It was the office of a physician, he told the youth, and the last time he had passed that way he had noticed that

the windows of the inner office were still lighted. Maybe he would sell them some, and if not—. The Spotter tapped his pocket suggestively, and Broadway could see there a bulge that looked very much like lead pipe.

"I don't know about those docs," said Broadway. "Only one in a thousand will sell any, and there ain't many who'd give a guy that if he was dying. I've always got mine from peddlers—it's more safe. I don't want to go back to the Tombs."

"Neither do I," leered the Spotter. "But I'm goin' after the junk—are you going to be in on this deal?"

Broadway's answer was a muttered curse of horror and agony. He placed the ends of his nervous fingers in his mouth and fastened his teeth in them.

"God!" he whispered. "It's the bugs again—I can't stand this!—they're crawling underneath my skin—I know they ain't really there—but it'll drive me nuts if I don't get a few grains of snow. Yes, I'll go with you—I've got to have some—I've got to!"

WITH the Spotter leading the way, they moved off into the night. Broadway broke into a nervous trot, and his companion cursed him softly and held him back. A policeman was passing the glare that fell from the next arc light, and for a few minutes the two waited discreetly. Then, the danger over, they passed up a dark alley, and came out upon an even darker street than the one they had left. Creeping in the shadows they passed a row of two-story brick houses, and then reached a solitary one at the end of the branch street. The upper windows were still lighted, but the remainder of the block was draped in a velvet gloom. In the distance they could hear the hum of an occasional motor car on the boulevard, but that was all. It was a great night for a job, anyway, as the Spotter had said.

"That's the place," said he, triumphantly. "The light's still on. Now use a little judgment and do as I say."

A dark stairway opened on the street, and above it shone a sign in faded gold letters. Broadway made it out with difficulty.

"Dr. Abram La Forne, Specialist in Diseases of the Mind and Brain," he repeated. "What does all that mean, Tim?"

Tim the Spotter shook his head.

"It's beyond me, unless he's an asylum doctor—what's the difference? He's got what we want and we're going to get it!"

Broadway shivered, and shook his head.

"I have the creeps anyway, tonight, without going up there. You go up and see what you can do. Whistle if you need me."

"And expect me to divvy, eh?" snarled the Spotter. "Come on—you fool. We might have to knock him in the head to get it, but—"

The Spotter patted his coat pocket.

"All right," sighed Broadway. "Here goes."

With a look around to see that he was unwatched, Broadway quickly ascended to the first landing. Here he paused to whisper with his companion.

"There's a light under this door," he said.

"I don't hear a sound," rejoined the Spotter. "This is going to be the grapes—I'll bet he's alone."

Broadway could near nothing save the regular and melancholy tick of a clock somewhere in the building. He held back for a moment, then went ahead with a shrug. He must have something, and have it quickly!

He knocked at the door, with the Spotter only a few steps behind him. He knocked again, as he heard a faint movement from beyond the door.

"Come in."

As the door yielded, the two men staggered inside. Broadway paused while his eyes grew accustomed to the bright light, and then rubbed his eyes and looked again at the man before him. He shuddered violently, and had the Spotter not been directly behind him, he would have turned and fled.

Was this thing human? Broadway felt a cold chill creep up from his spine to the roots of his hair. Was this a dope dream, or was it reality? If this was La Forne and this place was his office, Broadway wished that he was miles away. Yet here was this little man smiling at them over a blood-bespattered apron—smiling and nodding like a manikin! And such a face! Broadway had never seen a face like this one, not even in the terrible dreams and visions that his drug sometimes brought him. It was a small shrunken face overshadowed by a huge skull. The eyes were veiled behind heavy-lensed spectacles, but the mouth was fascinating. A close student would have called it a cruel mouth, but at present the thin lips were writhed into a smile. Broadway looked at the yellow skin stretched over the horrible mask, and shivered. It looked like parchment.

"Come in, gentlemen," said the doctor in a voice that made his visitors think of the clink of iron on ice. "What can I do for you at this late hour?"

He smiled again, as he closed the door, but when he had turned and scrutinized his strange callers, the distortion faded.

"Suppose you take the iron bar, or whatever it is, out of your coat pocket. I'm sure you will find no use for it here."

The Spotter started, looked guilty, and placed a trembling hand on his lead pipe. Broadway held his breath, and waited for the sickening impact. It never came. The morphine addict's eyes were held for an instant like a

bit of iron in a vise. What he read in the doctor's eyes he never told, but he withdrew his weapon and placed it gently on the table. Broadway breathed easier.

"There, that will do," murmured the doctor. "That's fine. Now I suppose you two drug addicts came here after—dope?"

The two men cast anxious glances toward the closed door.

"You want morphine, don't you?" he asked, staring at Tim the Spotter through his heavy glasses. Then as the derelict gulped nervously: "It's easy enough to fathom," smiled the doctor, unpleasantly, "to the professional eye. Your pupils are contracted and very unequal and your skin, facies, and manner also point to morphinism. It's just as easy to diagnose your companion's case. Cocaine! Pupils dilated, face clammy, hallucinations of perception—you are digging at imaginary parasites at your fingertips, I see. Quite common—these delusions."

Broadway felt as if he were being slowly dissected beneath the searching eyes of the scientist. He coughed uneasily. How did this man know of those little bugs crawling through his tissues? It was uncanny. Tim the Spotter was not so easily frightened.

"Don't kid us, doc," he spoke up, in a husky voice. "You're right. We do need the dope, and we need it bad. Do we get it—just a little?"

He was pleading now.

"We'll do anything for you—anything, doc, if you'll only—"

The doctor shook his head, and smiled sarcastically.

"You'd do anything?" he sneered. "No matter what I asked—for a few grains of morphine?"

"God, yes," whimpered the wreck before him. "Anything—but I've got to have a shot, doc!"

The doctor's face underwent a change. His high forehead wrinkled into a thoughtful frown. Drumming

on the table, he looked the two drug victims over with a searching eye. Broadway noticed that a horribly yellowed skull rested on this table, a few inches from the doctor's hand. Mentally he compared the skull with the doctor's head, and shuddered.

"And you?" The doctor shot the question at Broadway Charlie with an abruptness that shook the youth from his reverie.

"Just a few grains of the snow, doctor," he whispered, "and I'd do anything!"

The doctor smiled again, and again a cold twinge crept up Broadway's spine. The scientist's demeanor changed at the young man's answer, and he removed his spattered apron with an apology.

"I have been dissecting in the back room," he explained. "A rather bloody job. A brain case, of course, as that's my specialty. The fellow died of cerebral edema, and it's very interesting. Care to see it?"

Broadway's face went a shade whiter.

"This fellow's getting on my nerves," he whispered in the Spotter's ear. "As soon as he comes through, I'm getting out of here. I can't stand much of this!"

"Shut up," breathed the older man. "Let me handle this!"

THE doctor was busy scrubbing his hands in disinfecting soap, and while his back was turned, Broadway looked about him feverishly. What a ghastly place this was! Books! Books everywhere, and the shelves that lined the study overflowed in great stacks on the floor. And charts, the like of which Broadway had never seen and hoped never to see again. Huge diagrams of the brain, and the dissected human body, stared at him from the walls, and in the darkest corner a skeleton was hanging suspended from a slender wire. Broadway's mind, already unbalanced from the use of co-

caine, seemed to sway close to the snapping point. God! This place was awful—terrible! If he could only have a whiff of the snow, now, to steady his raw nerves! He noticed that the Spotter, too, was trembling. Whether it was the thought of morphine or the fear of the doctor Broadway did not know. But he knew that he was very much afraid.

"Well," said the scientist, drying his hands carefully. "I'll see to your case first, Mr. —"

"Tim Smith," supplied the Spotter, licking his lips, feverishly.

"Well, Mr. Smith," smiled the doctor, "what's your dose? How much of the drug have you been using?"

"Four grains," whimpered the Spotter. "Let me have it quick—doc!"

He fumbled at his inside pocket and drew out a battered and dirty "hypo". The physician eyed the instrument contemptuously.

"It's a mystery to me how you men live," he snapped. "Every time you use that filthy needle you are flirting with tetanus and worse. Can't you keep them sterile? Here, if you must have your drug, you'll at least take it the way it should be given."

He opened a drawer in his desk and extracted a hypodermic syringe and withdrew the plunger from the glass barrel. He then filled it with distilled water, and lighting an alcohol lamp, sterilized the needle in the flame. The two men watched him with fascinated eyes, and when they saw him insert a key in another drawer, they stirred impatiently. The doctor had extracted a vial of amber glass from the inner drawer and was now shaking a dozen or so of tiny white tablets into the barrel of the syringe. While the little pellets dissolved, he turned and faced them with an ironic smile.

"It's another mystery to the profession," he said, shaking the needle, "how the morphine addict can take

seven or eight times the normal dose and carry it. There's enough of the drug to kill six men—normal men. I suppose you think I am doing you a service. Neither of you has long to live. The younger of you has possibly a span of five years with his cocaine, and you, Mr. Smith, have six months or a year. Your cyanosis does not lie, my friend. In a month you'll be taking six grains of the stuff, then seven, but you'll never live to take eight."

The Spotter shivered, and shifted from one foot to the other, uneasily. The doctor had turned toward the light and was forcing the air bubble from the needle.

"All right, doc," sighed Tim. "Let me have the shot and let me go."

The physician raised his eyebrows until they appeared over his spectacles.

"I believe you made me a promise," he began.

The men shuddered, looked toward the closed door, and then, seeing no other way, nodded.

"That's fine," beamed the little scientist. "Now roll up your sleeve."

When the Spotter had complied, and a small area of his dirty arm was washed clean with alcohol, the doctor, with a sudden movement, thrust the needle into the lean flesh of the addict's arm. Tim did not wince, but his eyes bulged with satisfaction as the plunger was shot down and he felt the solution sink deep into his tissues. As it was absorbed into his blood stream, he heaved a great sigh of relief.

"Thanks, doc," he muttered. "That's like living again—God! But I was needing it bad."

The Spotter's face had changed, and he had drawn himself erect. He looked like a human being again, now that the devils had ceased hammering at his brain and body. He felt like

a starving man, after a feast. Feverishly, he rubbed his arm, and smiled across at Broadway, who was waiting impatiently for his dose. Tim drew a cigarette from his pocket, lit it, and puffed luxuriously. He felt a living, breathing man once more. What a hell the last twelve hours had been!

The doctor had brought out a bottle from some mysterious place, and Broadway felt that he could almost scream, when he read the label over his shoulder. Cocaine hydrochlorid! The youth shivered with anticipation when the doctor uncorked it and weighed out a few grains of the deadly white crystals on a pair of scales.

"I use this drug for a local anesthetic and mydriatic," exclaimed the physician, "but I'll violate the Harrison narcotic law once again, and let you have a few grains, as you seem to be really suffering."

"Believe me, doctor," said Broadway, "no one shall ever find out from me."

The doctor's smile thrilled the youth with something akin to horror. What was this man? What was the explanation of all this?

"No, no one shall ever find out—from you," said the doctor, absently, as he washed out the hypodermic syringe and refilled it with cocaine and water.

"Never mind the needle, doc," said Broadway, becoming suddenly distrustful and not a little frightened. "I'll sniff it—I don't want a shot."

"You'll take it this way, or not at all," snapped the physician.

Broadway tried to resist, but his will failed him at the thought of that blissful alkaloid that was his for the taking. He took it.

IN A space of some sixty seconds life changed from black to white. In the stimulated mind of Broadway Charlie. No longer was there the

dull void in his brain, the cramp in his limbs, and the "bugs" had ceased their endless journey at his fingertips. He felt the wild stimulant racing through his veins, and creeping into his brain. Soon Broadway, like Tim, had shaken off his fear and horror, and was talking and laughing with the genial physician. This doctor was a friend to the sufferers of mankind—a philanthropist—more than that—a god! He wondered what he had seen in this little doctor a few minutes before to excite his horror and loathing. The world was a bright place, after all!

"Well, doc," grinned the Spotter, "what is it you want us to do? Want to swipe a body, do you, and you think we might help you?"

The doctor answered the smile by a faint upward distortion of his thin lips. He took a cigar from a box on his desk and lit it, carefully.

"No," he said, at length. "What you two are going to do for me won't be hard. In fact, it's easy. Why, you really can't help doing it, you see. It's very simple, and it will save you both a great deal of misery and suffering, perhaps."

He flicked the ashes from his cigar, and again his lips writhed in a terrible smile.

"I want you to die!" he said. "Die—and in a few minutes!"

The laughter and humor fled from Broadway Charlie's face, and the Spotter's eyes seemed to start from their sockets. Was this man mad!

"It will be easy," said the scientist. "In fact, you can't help doing it for me. I made sure of that. Remember—you promised to do anything, and though you are both depraved and abnormal men, you will do very nicely for an experiment tonight—one that I have been planning for a long time. Lucky you came here, tonight, or I should have had some trouble."

The Spotter gasped, and shook his head. Something seemed to be creeping about his brain. He suddenly realized that he was becoming very, very sleepy. Through glazing eyes, he saw Broadway dash wildly for the door, only to be stopped by the doctor's revolver, and those dreadful eyes. The Spotter sank back into his chair with a contented sigh, and felt the walls of the office fade into immeasurable distance.

"Don't try to get away," smiled Dr. La Forne. "Sit down."

Broadway did so, without knowing why. He could have wrenched the gun from the feeble hand of the little physician, he felt sure—but those eyes!

"You murderer!" he sobbed. He had seen the Spotter's head drop down upon his chest, and his anger overcame his morbid fear.

"Not yet," murmured the scientist. "If my experiment is successful I can bring him back again. But first we'll let him die."

Broadway, overcome with a sickening terror, started to rise—to reach the door at all costs—he cared little if this mad doctor did shoot—he must fly—get away! This was horrible! But he fell back into his chair again in amazement.

"My legs!" he cried. "My legs! I can't move them!"

The doctor nodded.

"Hyosein," he murmured. "I gave you both an equal amount of the drug, along with your narcotic. You will be conscious for quite some time yet, as the cocaine acts as a chemical antagonist. Morphine, on the other hand, hurries the action of the hyosein. Your friend will soon be dead. He is in a deep coma."

Broadway's mind was clear, and yet he could not move his paralyzed lower limbs. He wanted to scream—to shout; but instead he watched the doctor with fascinated eyes. The

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The Death Cure

(Continued from page 36)

doctor was listening to the pulseless heart through a stethoscope, and when he rose to his feet again there was a look of fiendish exultation on his yellowed face.

"He's dead, but I must make a few tests to be sure. We can't afford to make mistakes, now." The doctor seemed to be talking to himself, rather than to Broadway. "After he has been dead twenty or thirty minutes—I think, but I'm not positive—I think I can bring him back to life. But I must not wait until rigor mortis has set in or until his blood coagulates; that was a mistake I made at the Bellevue Hospital morgue, two months ago."

The terrible paralysis had now reached Broadway's thighs. He could not stir, had all the demons under the sea been tugging at his helpless body.

"We shall now try the Balfour test to find whether or not the heart is still active," said Dr. La Forne.

He brought out a long, white-headed pin, and thrust it into the tissues directly over the heart, for a length of about a quarter of an inch. Broadway could see the white head of it move rhythmically with the beat of the heart. Then the Spotter was not yet dead? For a few seconds it moved, then its movements became slower and slower. Then a shadow seemed to flit across the tense face—the jaw dropped suddenly, with an accompanying rattle from the stiffening throat—and the pin stopped moving. Broadway saw the doctor kneel and place a mirror at the lips of the dead man.

"His respiration, too, is nil," murmured the scientist. "I'll now try the final test—Monteverde's sign."

He injected a solution from a

small bottle directly into one of the veins of the lifeless form.

"No reaction from a solution of ammonia," he said. "The man is dead."

Broadway, stricken with a wild horror at the ghastly spectacle, tried to gain control of his limbs. God! They, too, were dead, and he could feel a numbness creeping—creeping—. He cried out in terror.

"Kindly refrain from disturbing me," smiled the doctor. "A distraction, now, would cause evil results—both to you and to your friend. At present he is dead, but with good luck I can bring him back across the divide."

Broadway looked down at the livid face, on which startled amazement of the tomb had been frozen, and wondered whether Tim's soul was in heaven or hell. The doctor was busy with test tubes and chemicals, and was pouring a serum from a large ampoule into a great glass syringe. Hysterically, Broadway cursed him through his set teeth, but he was powerless, he could only watch the gruesome scene as it grew more ghastly beneath those skilled fingers.

THE dead man's face had turned a bluish, cadaverous hue, and a swollen tongue protruded from the blackened lips. The doctor was now

holding the naked arm of the corpse, and was preparing to inject the serum. He leered at Broadway.

"Don't be impatient," he smiled. "Your turn will soon come."

Broadway shook off the mist that seemed to be creeping about his brain, and watched the terrible proceedings. He could not move hand or foot now, and his head seemed to be clasped in a grasp of steel, compelling him to look. He could not tear his gaze from the hideous figure on the floor.

The doctor, with a razor-edged knife, had sliced neatly into the dead man's forearm. With a sponge he absorbed most of the blood that oozed slowly from the wound, and with his other hand he tied some bluish cords that were exposed to view. Veins! Broadway tried to scream, but the breath rattled futilely in his throat. The doctor held an artery, now, in a clamp, and was fastening the rubber tubing that led to the syringe on the dripping end. The horrified youth tried to close his eyes but they remained wide and staring. How would it end?

He watched the livid death mask on the floor, while the scientist pushed the piston of the syringe. Could he force the serum through the entire length of the blood vessel?

What was that? The sound seemingly came from the corpse, and in a moment it was repeated. A death rattle from a body dead for half an hour! And as he looked, he saw a red flush suffuse the pallid face. Then—oh, God!—the tongue vibrated again and the lips writhed back from the line of teeth. The glazing eyes seemed to burn with a greenish light. The doctor was watching the effects of the serum with a triumphant smile. His scheme was working—it was a success.

The face of the corpse twitched spasmodically, and something in its intensity of expression made the hair

on Broadway's head crinkle with horror. The tomb had been cheated—the dead man lived! The Spotter's arms were moving convulsively, and with the movement the tubing was wrenched from the wound in his forearm. His heart had resumed beating, for a spurt of blood splashed out against the doctor's chemicals and test-tubes.

Quickly, the physician knelt to tie the artery, but he was too late. The Spotter had risen to his feet and was reeling drunkenly toward the table. His eyes, still glassy from death, were wild and staring. Then he spoke—and what a voice! Broadway gasped at the sound. It resembled the twang of a violin string, suddenly plucked by a metallic hand. The Spotter was speaking—through that wide-open mouth, through which the discolored tongue still protruded—and his voice was the echo of the grave! The doctor stood as if petrified.

"Fool!" shrieked the resurrected man. "Why did you bring me back? "Do you not know that I am dead? Yes, damn you, still dead—my soul is dead—and my body is here!"

His voice rose to a high pitch, and he laughed like a maniac. He shook a finger at the doctor and blood flew in a crimson stream about the room.

"*You did it!*" he fairly screamed. "Don't you know I've got to go back—there!"

In vain the scientist turned to evade the mad rush. He felt himself seized by powerful, terrible, iron hands. He was whirled aloft as if he had been a child. For a moment he felt a cold breath on his neck. Then crash!

The body of the physician shot through the window, glass, screen and all. There was a dull impact as it hit the pavement below, and

silence. Dr. La Forne's experiment was at an end.

"WHAT'S the matter here?" Sergeant McCarty shook the paralyzed form of Broadway Charlie. "What's all this?" yelled the policeman. "I find a man with his brains knocked out in the street, and

then I come up here and find another one that's just bled to death. When did this fellow die?"

"The first time—or the second—time!" mumbled Broadway, wildly.

"Say! What do you mean?"

But Broadway was already in that mad delirium that precedes death from hyoscin.