

# Weird Tales

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# The Dream that came True

By VICTOR ROUSSEAU



"He resolved to make the hypnotic condition more absolute. 'Sleep!' he said, passing his hand over her eyes."

I HAD often wondered why Dr. Ivan Brodsky had never married. I had been associated with him in numbers of those cases of psychical investigation in which he had brought relief and happiness to many sufferers whose souls had capitulated to evil forces; I had heard him speak of women constantly in terms of the utmost reverence. He had indeed dimly hinted at some unforgotten love episode in his own life, but he had never confided in me, and of course I forbore to question him. It was the merest accident—if, indeed, anything be fortuitous—that revealed to me the story.

We were sitting upon the veranda of a summer hotel, a little place in the mountains to which we frequent-

ly journeyed to spend the week-end, one summer evening. With us was a stranger, a man of rare personality whom we had met the day before; and, as is often the case, we had discussed with him matters of belief and conduct on which one is silent toward acquaintances of long standing. And then came up the ever interesting question of faith.

"There is one thing that could give me back my faith," said the stranger slowly. "I was married for twenty years to a woman of the highest character; we were supremely happy together. I believe in her still, as I once believed in the consolations of religion. Yet my wife died without recognizing me, calling upon the name of some man whom I had neither seen nor heard of. Restore to me my complete confidence in her, answer that nameless question that will rise up in

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the depths of my consciousness, and I will believe again."

Then, somehow—I do not remember just the sequence of words that led to it—Brodsky was telling us his story.

"I CAME to America when I was a young man. Through all my early struggles the friendship of one woman sustained me. I do not think there has been a moment since I first met her when I had not loved Marion Strong. But nothing was said. It was a quiet understanding that grew up between us; so that, when the rupture came, there remained nothing to be unsaid either. Marion explained nothing of the trivial incident that came to be an unbreakable barrier between us. That was her way; Marion was always proud. If she had been less proud our lives would have been different.

"I saw her only twice after her marriage. She still resided in Boston, where I was then in practise, but in a different quarter of the city. I had sought comfort in work and had succeeded in some measure in finding it when we met face to face in the rose garden that adjoins the Common. She stopped and spoke with me.

"'You are not looking well; you must take care of your health,' I blurted out in the foolish manner of friends long sundered, who meet to interchange only banalities.

"The second meeting was at a dinner party and equally unsatisfactory. Nothing of the old friendship seemed to remain for me in that glance of friendly indifference, that word of conventional greeting. Soon afterward I heard of her marriage. Her health broke down; they hurried her to Florida, and she died there.

"Thank heaven for work! It is life's anodyne. I put her memory out of my mind to the best of my ability, for I think only the sentimentalist weaves the silken threads

of longing around the cocoon of his sorrow. And then, I had no right to think of her. I worked hard, I had already achieved some measure of recognition in my profession. When the methods of the Nancy school of hypnotics were introduced into medical practise in this country, so that it was no longer considered the sign of a charlatan to make use of them, I found that I possessed unusual faculties for curing ailments of consciousness and reviving lost personalities by hypnotism. One day a woman called on me, in company with a little girl.

"The child suffered from some slight nervous ailment, common among girls of that period of life—listlessness, 'blue studies,' as the laity calls fits of abstraction, and nervousness. I prescribed some child's remedy. But when I came to look into her pupils for the examination, for just one fleeting instant the eyes of Marion seemed to look back at me. Could it be anything but hallucination? Marion's eyes were the most beautiful I have ever seen in their intelligence, their gray liquid softness. Fearfully I looked again. But only the sleepy pupils of the ailing child looked back at me.

"'I see you do not remember me, Dr. Brodsky,' said the woman, when my investigation was ended. 'Nevertheless, I know you well, and I came to see and consult you partly out of interest. Do you not remember Marion Strickland?'

"I started involuntarily. Yes, that was the name of the man whom she married; this was a Mrs. Strickland who had brought the child to me. She was the second wife of Marion's husband, and this was her daughter. My heart leaped in my throat. Thank God, in this new marriage he had forgotten Marion; at last I might now have the right once more to turn my thoughts upon her; she was as much mine as his!

“ ‘Her end was curiously sudden, poor thing,’ said the woman in gossiping fashion. ‘She died quite unexpectedly, you know.’

“ ‘Yes,’ I murmured, though I had been told nothing.

“ ‘We thought it was nothing but a congested chill until she died in Florida. Strangely, too, her last words seemed to be about you. We fancied that she tried to leave some message for you, but we could not understand her. It was some phase of the delirium, I suppose.’

“ ‘A new phase of my life opened up on that day. Marion had thought of me at the end; then she had always loved me.

“ ‘I might have known her better than to have doubted that her love could change. That her married life had been neither happy nor unhappy I had suspected; clearly this was not one of those unions that seem to transcend the limitations of our mortality, that are not severed by death. And at the end her thoughts had turned back to me. Thenceforward I had a new impulse of joy in my work; from that time, too, I began to look forward to the day when much that is hidden from us will be revealed and death will no longer sever. That was the beginning of my psychical work.

“ **T**HE years slipped by and found me still steadily at work, and with an increasing amount of patients and of reputation. I had sought in vain to communicate with Marion through all the recognized mediums. Though her inspiration remained with me, once again her outward memory had grown weak.

One evening a young man called upon me in my consulting room.

“ ‘I do not see new patients,’ I informed him, for at that time I had already begun to withdraw from active practise in preparation for the professorship which had been offered

me for the succeeding year. But he was insistent. It was not for himself, he said, that he wished my services, but for his fiancée, a girl of twenty-five. Always liable, since childhood, to nervous attacks of obscure origin, these had developed, during the past three months, into fits of imbecility, during which she became almost an automaton and manifested the most extreme aversion for him. Her friends and family had even spoken of the necessity of placing her in some institution unless she could be cured. He happened to have heard of me; would I assist him?

“ ‘The young man’s earnestness, his solicitude for the girl impressed me, and I consented to take her case in hand. To my surprize I found that my patient was none other than Ethel Strickland, the girl whom I had treated some dozen years before. I looked long and I fear unprofessionally to discover whether I could discern Marion’s unforgettable expression in the eyes, but the heavy pupils merely stared back at me listlessly and indolently. They were not Marion’s. As the young woman was at that time in the enjoyment of normal health I left instructions that she was to be brought to my office immediately if a crisis occurred, and I went away.

“ ‘It must have been two weeks later, just as I was about to close my office and go to bed, that a loud peal at the bell startled me. The servants having retired, I opened the door in person, and ushered in the young woman. It had been raining hard and her outer garments were soaked with water. She did not attempt to remove her coat, however, nor respond to my proffered assistance, but advanced into the center of the room and stood staring at me blankly, as one bereft of reason.

“ ‘I had seen similar cases previously and diagnosed it instantly as temporary aberrancy of personality. It

was one of those rare cases in which a portion of the consciousness becomes submerged, so to speak, leaving the patient in forgetfulness as to the most simple matters connected with her daily life. Usually such cases submit readily to mild hypnotic treatment. I placed Miss Strickland under hypnosis, to which she readily yielded.

“ ‘Who are you?’ I asked her.

“ ‘Why, Doctor, I am Ethel Strickland,’ she answered in some surprise, mixed with a slight resentment.

“ ‘Why have you come here?’

“ ‘Doctor, did you not leave instructions that I was to come to you as soon as I experienced one of my attacks?’

“ ‘And all the while I was staring into her eyes, searching into the depths of them. But they were not Marion’s eyes.

“ ‘You did quite right,’ I answered her. ‘You are well now. You will never have another of your attacks. Wake up!’

Instantly an expression of astonishment passed over her features. The waking soul had no memory of what had occurred during the period of hypnosis. She gave an exclamation of fear; then, recognizing me, seemed reassured.

“ ‘Dr. Brodsky!’ she exclaimed. ‘Where am I? How did I come here?’

“ ‘You are quite safe,’ I answered. ‘You had one of your attacks and by some providence wandered into my office. Now I am going to take you home.’

“ ‘I escorted her to her house, where I found the family in a state of alarm over the girl’s disappearance. They were grateful for her safe return and especially that she was again in her normal mind. I departed, assuring them that in the improbable event of any future attack I could cure her.

“ ‘And so, convinced that my impression as to the eyes had been a

hallucination, I took up my work once more. But I was to see my patient again. For a time the hypnotic suggestion was effective. Then ensued one of those little lovers’ quarrels which are apt to occur among the most devoted couples. It was a trivial matter enough and yet sufficient, in her weak state of mind, to induce in the young woman another of her attacks. One evening, about the same time as before, I was again about to close my office and retire for the night, when again the bell was pulled, and the girl entered in the same dazed and perplexed condition. Again I induced a slight state of hypnosis and questioned her.

“ ‘Who are you?’ I demanded.

“ ‘This time the young woman appeared perfectly indignant.

“ ‘Are you trying to make a fool of me, Dr. Brodsky?’ she asked. ‘You asked me that question not two minutes ago, and I have just told you that I am Ethel Strickland.’

“ ‘All her intermediate life had been wiped out; it was as though she took up the threads of this personality again where she had dropped them.

“ ‘And you have come to me because you had another of your attacks?’ I queried.

“ ‘Precisely,’ she replied.

“ ‘At least you should have got your fiancé to escort you,’ I rejoined severely. ‘Young ladies are not usually encouraged to go about at night alone, especially when in a distressed condition of mind. Why did you not ask his assistance?’

“ ‘Because I hate him,’ she replied hysterically. ‘He persecutes me and will not take “no” for an answer. I will never marry him—never. I can not endure the sight of him.’

“ ‘And yet you engaged yourself to him,’ I answered.

“ ‘She raised her hand to her forehead and appeared to ponder. The question threw her into a state of terrible agitation. The young fellow

had told me that she hated him when in her imbecile phase; yet here she was, still hating him, although I had restored her faculties under hypnosis. It seemed to me that this confusion was possibly due to an alternating personality, some deeper layer or stratum of consciousness which was endeavoring to thrust itself up into the normal life. I resolved, therefore, to make the hypnotic condition more absolute.

"'Sleep!' I said, passing my hand over her eyes. 'You have been dreaming; you have forgotten who you are. You are not Ethel Strickland. Sleep—sleep and remember. Who are you now?'

"Slowly the eyes opened. One glance and I was reeling backward, seeking to steady myself by gripping the edge of the study table. For the eyes were those of Marion Strong, clear and unclouded as on the day when I had seen her in the rose garden. If I had not seen her for a thousand years I could never forget their beauty, their quiet tenderness.

"She looked into my own; she came toward me, her arms outstretched, her face alight with ineffable happiness.

"'Who am I?' she murmured. 'Who should I be? Do you not know me, your love, who waited for you so long?'

"I could not speak. Silently I saw her draw near, a moment later, and I felt her arms enfold me. As in a dream, through tear-dimmed eyes, I saw my head drooping in the mirror on the wall. I sank upon the lounge, and there we sat, the living and the dead, stammering and babbling happily, like two young lovers but lately parted.

"'You have been gone so long,' she said. 'Sometimes I have despaired of ever seeing you again. How many, many years it must be since I began to fight my way upward, feeling at times that you were near

me. The first time that I got my eyes open I saw you through the body of that girl. I knew you remembered me. And ever since I have struggled to overthrow her dominion, that I might see and be near you. And at last I have gained you!

"'I should have had you always if I had not been so proud,' she whispered. 'Pride has ruined our lives. Do you remember that day I met you in the rose garden? How I longed to speak to you and could not conquer myself! And the next time at the dinner! I had to hasten away, or I could not have endured it. But now I have you with me, my love, forever——'

"WHAT answer I should have made, seeing her appealing eyes raised to mine, I do not know. But at that instant a thunderous knocking resounded on the front door and the door bell rang furiously. With a mighty effort I tore myself away.

"'Wait for me!' I whispered, leaving her there; and I went out. At the door stood the lover of the young girl. At sight of me he caught me by the arm frantically.

"'She is here? She is here?' he cried. 'Thank God, Doctor! I see it in your face. Let me see her! We had a foolish quarrel; we were both equally to blame, but she left me. Later I hurried to her house and found that she was not there. They hunted for her everywhere; at last somebody suggested that she might have come to you. Let me take her home!'

"'Hush!' I answered. 'She is not herself. She has had one of her attacks. It is more severe than before. I doubt——'

"'Tell me that you can cure her!' he cried. I wavered. My hellish designs were torn to shreds in face of his earnest plea. For, after all, this was his own life; and I had ruined

mine so many years ago. I led him into a room adjacent to my study.

"'Wait there!' I said. 'Perhaps I can cure her. But you must wait patiently till I come out.'

"'If you can cure her,' he said solemnly, 'I pledge my soul that I will guard and protect her for the whole of my life and hers.'

"Then I went in. I had half feared that my absence would have driven Marion away. But she sat there, she smiled up at me radiantly, and all my soul went out in a wild tumult of desire and anguish.

"'I may stay with you forever,' she whispered, raising her lips to mine. 'You will not drive me away, back into the darkness again? For after all, she is not really I—that girl—you know.'

"Even then, with all my soul given to hers, I heard the rapid tramp, tramp of the young man in the next room. If I yielded to her appeal; if we enjoyed the brief remaining span of life together—what then? What would be the fruits of such stolen happiness? And I wept blinding, hopeless tears. For I knew what I must do. Marion knew, too. She read it in my eyes. Her own took on an anguished appeal that wrung my heart.

"'Listen, Marion,' I said. 'We have had our own lives to spend and we have ruined them. This life is his. He is waiting here for her to come back to him. It is his right.'

"Even then she did not plead; that was Marion's way. If she had pleaded I could not have resisted.

"'And if I must go,' she murmured, 'what then? What will become of us when the weary travail of this life is spent?'

"'Why,' I replied, 'God has been so good to us. Suppose we trust Him a little longer. Suppose we do right and leave to Him the judgment?'

"She closed her eyes; she leaned closer to me, in hopeless resignation.

Another moment and I must lose her forever.

"'How shall I be certain afterward that I have really had you with me?' I cried. 'How shall I be sure that this was not some frenzied dream? Give me some sign or token to remember.'

"Once again she opened her eyes and smiled at me. 'Do you remember the rose garden?' she asked softly. 'Be there tomorrow at noon and I will give you what you ask for.'

"Once I kissed her upon the forehead in eternal farewell. Then I recalled the sleeping soul of the girl. And when she opened her eyes they were Marion's no longer. She started up, but I restrained her.

"'Miss Strickland, you are safe with me—Dr. Brodsky!' I said reassuringly. 'And I have cured you of your attack. You will never have another so long as you live. Your fiancé is in the next room, waiting for you. Do you want to see him?'

"I saw a girlish blush steal over her cheeks. There was no need of answer. 'Wait for me and I will bring him to you,' I said. Then I went in to him.

"'I am going to give you back the thing that you most desire in all the world,' I said, placing my hand upon his shoulder. 'But before I do so—have you forgotten your promise to guard and care for her always?'

"'I will!' he cried; and I knew by his tone that his was no promise vainly made or to be kept lightly.

"'Forgive an older man for preaching,' I said to him. 'Remember, love is the noblest and the greatest gift that God has given us. It is not lightly to be esteemed or easily to be thrown away. Many have spoken one harsh word and atoned for it through years of suffering. Come!'

"Then I led him in. And when they met I knew that I had not acted wrongly when I made my sacrifice.



"Next day at noon I was in the rose garden that adjoins the Common. It was July, but a few blossoms still lingered upon the trees. Deep in earnest conversation they were sauntering along the shadiest walk, her arm linked through his. I would have stepped aside, but she saw and beckoned to me.

"'Doctor,' she said, 'I can never even try to thank you enough for what you have done for me. I know last night I must have come to you during my attack; I do not remember that, but I know you cured me. And I feel that this cure will last, for I have something to live for and to remain well for.' She glanced at her fiancé shyly. 'So, as no words can thank you I want to give you a little memento of my gratitude,' she said. From the bosom of her gown she pulled a solitary flower. 'Wear this for my sake and in token of my thanks,' she said.

"I took the flower and fastened it to my coat. Then, feeling that her gaze was bent upon mine, I looked up. For one fleeting moment I could see the soft tenderness of Marion's eyes. Then they were gone, and

those of the young girl shone forth happily. I turned and went across the common, leaving them there. She married him soon after, I believe, but I have never seen them since."

NEITHER of us had stirred while Brodsky told us his tale. Once or twice I caught gleams of emotion in the stranger's eyes, but we had listened silently, absorbed by the simple story. And neither of us could have been able to doubt it.

It had grown so late that even the lights of the hotel had been extinguished. The night air blew softly upon us from the broad bosom of the lake and seemed to bear upon its breath some lingering odor of roses. The stranger rose, came toward the doctor, and took him by both hands.

"You have unwittingly given me back my faith," he said. "For I know now who it was that my wife called upon when she lay dying, and why, and who it was that called. You gave her to me. Ivan Brodsky, have you forgotten me?"

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The last story of this series, "The Ultimate Problem," will be published in WEIRD TALES next month.