

# WEIRD TALES

## THE UNIQUE MAGAZINE

EDWIN BAIRD, Editor

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Also a number of odd facts and queer fancies,  
crowded in for good measure

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*Read of the Frightful Thing  
That Came from*

*The*

**Extraordinary**

**Experiment of**

**Dr. Calgroni**

**By Joseph Faus and James Bennett Wooding**

**T**HERE is much concerning the queer Dr. Calgroni that I can not give to the world.

It should be remembered that I had never been inside his house until after I beheld him frantically emerge from its big front door, that rainy night, his wizened face as white as death, and, scantily-clad, rush headlong for the depot.

That he was a surgeon of extraordinary ability I readily acknowledge. But Belleville was the last place where one would expect to find a man of such surgical skill, and, most undoubtedly, the last place one would choose for the scene of the startling events brought about as a result of the doctor's purchase of the ape "Horace" from Barber's World-famous 3-Ring Show.

Had the doctor merely put up at the hotel I might have believed him, like myself, merely summering at Belleville.

For it was a restful hamlet, situated in a mountainous valley, something like a day's run from New York. But his renting of the Thornsedale place aroused latent suspicions in my mind, probably instilled there by that strange article I had read in *The Surgical Monthly*.

Large enough for a hotel or boarding-house, but out-of-the-way located—also because of the enormous rent demanded by its heirs—the Thornsedale place had stood vacant since the last of the Thornsedale line had died ten years before. Its doors had been closed and padlocked, and its windows barricaded.

It had been the finest residence in the old town in its day, but was now regarded as a sort of historic oddity. On the whole, it afforded a formidable appearance, crouching behind its great elms, looming huge and weather-beaten, with its board-shuttered and frowning windows. But just the sort of place the

eccentric Dr. Calgroni could work in, unmolested.

I saw the peculiar doctor one morning as I was leaving the small post office. It was just after train time, and many of the villagers were loitering about the place, among them a young man named Jason Murdock.

Murdock was of that type one always hears of in a small community—the village “devil.” He came of a good family, and had plenty of money and all that; but had succeeded, despite rich heritage-blood, in igniting more fire and brimstone than all five of the village preachers had in their imagination conceived. He was coarsely good-looking, and big and husky.

Aristocratic hoodlum though he was, all rather secretly admired the fellow, probably because he injected “pep” into the lazy old town.

I beheld Jason Murdock pointing to a shriveled-up figure of a little man, stooped of shoulder.

“There he goes—that Dr. Can-groan-ee, who’s movin’ into the Thornsedale place. I wonder if there’s any good liquor in his cellar? That old Thornsedale dump has a good wine cellar.”

Dr. Calgroni paid not the slightest attention to Jason’s insolent babble, but walked hurriedly along, his clean-shaven, dried-up countenance turning neither to the right nor left.

“Who is that man?” I asked the post-master, who had now come to the door for air.

“I duuno, excepting his mail is addressed Dr.—I’ll have to spell it—C-A-L-G-R-O-N-I—and it is mostly foreign, out of Vienna, forwarded here from New York.”

“Sort of a man of mystery, eh?” I hazarded.

“I should say he’s sort of a fool for rentin’ that old Thornsedale rat-trap, for God-knows-what, that’s stood vacant these ten years.”

I nodded and left in the direction taken by the doctor.

Here was an element of mystery; for I alone, of all the villagers, knew that this eminent surgeon’s presence in Belleville boded ill.

I SOON caught sight of the doctor. For a man of his age and physique, his gait was exceedingly fast—as though propelled by a nervous dynamo.

Stretching my legs, I kept a safe distance between him and myself, until he swung open the tall wooden gate and quickly vanished through the wilderness of tall bushes and low trees into the Thornsedale house. I halted safe from observation and lighted my pipe.

Leaning against a tree there, I ran over in my mind the odd significance of that remarkable article I had recently read in the staid and ever-authentic *Surgical Monthly*.

This Dr. Calgroni, it appeared, had stated to the interviewer that he was here from Austria on a vacation—and to feel out the opinions of American surgeons anent his new theory. One Herr von Meine, a noted surgeon of Vienna, he added with some asperity, had scoffed at the absurdity and unorthodox idea of the unprecedented theory advanced by him, and had declared that his Calgroni’s operation was extremely impossible, not to say foolish—that it would never be a success.

Dr. Calgroni claimed that he could prolong a human life indefinitely by the insertion of a live thigh gland from a young quadrumanous mammai, such as the *Pithecoïd*.

Much discussion and argument had been provoked throughout the entire medical world by the famous doctor’s *The Extraordinary Experiment of Dr.* theory, and consensus was that he was an impracticable theorist gone mad.

And now here was Dr. Calgroni, living in the quiet little town of Belleville, where none was aware of his sensational hypothesis, renting this immense old ramshackle place, and his remarkable intent known to no one but himself.

I had taken a seat on a tree stump, in front of the gate, which had a ring stapled to it, used it former days as a hitching post. Time hung heavily upon me in Belleville, but this new element of mystery promised some possible interest and excitement.

Having sat there until my pipe was empty and cold, I was aroused by the

noise of the gate opening behind me, followed by the *tap-tap* of a hammer. I turned.

There stood the doctor in his shirt sleeves, tacking a sign to the gate post. Crudely painted in black on white cardboard I read:

**POSITIVELY NO ADMITTANCE!**

*Anyone entering here does  
so at his own risk.*

*T. Calgroni.*

Without even casting a glance my way, the doctor closed the gate behind him and seemed about to depart up the weed-grown gravel walk, when, glancing down the dusky street, he checked himself.

My gaze followed the direction of his eyes. A wagon was approaching. It drew up at the stump and halted. Loaded with big boxes, the mules were sweating after the pull. Their surly-faced driver stopped twenty feet away and turned to the doctor:

"I know I'm late," I overheard him grumble, "but I handled the boxes carefully as you said. Shall I drive in?"

"You'd better," returned Calgroni in crisp English, still not noticing me. "And remember, if there's a thing broken not a cent do you get." And he wheeled up the path.

"Dam' him!" swore the teamster, turning to me. "Did you ever see such an old crab?"

"Glass inside the boxes?" I suggested.

The fellow looked at me suspiciously, then his lips contracted like a vise and he turned to his mules. I watched him drive through the wagon gate, and on up through the moss-covered trees to the house.

## II.

**THE NEXT** morning I arose early, with the intention of strolling pass the old Thornsedale place. I found Main Street lifeless, except for two men busily engaged in posting up the glaring announcement of the coming of:

**"BARBER'S WORLD-FAMOUS  
3-RING SHOW"**

Pausing, I watched them swab the long multi-hued strips of paper with

their paste brush and sling them upon the billboard. A small crowd of big-eyed youngsters and loafers gradually congregated about the busy circus advance men.

The most glaring and conspicuous poster represented two gorillas peering angrily out from behind the bars of their cage. Beneath it was lithographed in huge, red letters:

**"MIMMIE AND HORACE  
"ONLY WILD GORILLAS IN  
CAPTIVITY!"**

I turned to leave—and, momentarily startled, faced what seemed to be one of the gorillas at large! Only it wore clothes. Gazing at the poster with a look of blank curiosity, was a man, short in stature, immense of shoulder and deep of chest, his hair thatching his forehead almost to his bushy eyebrows. He was hideous to look upon. I recognized him, though, after an instant, as the village half-wit, known as "Simple Will."

I had seen him before, a poor, weak-minded creature, wandering helplessly about the village, pitied, but spurned except when someone needed the help of powerful hands and a strong back.

Drooling and muttering, Will followed the circus men as they started off.

I idly strolled down the first street; then, reaching the outskirts of town, I found myself in the rear of the Thornsedale place. To my surprise, I beheld another warning notice similar to the one that Dr. Calgroni had tacked to his front gate last evening. Not only in one but many places, on trees and the high fence, I saw the warning signs of "No Trespassing." The doctor himself was nowhere to be seen.

A week slipped by and nothing happened further than gossip concerning the queer doctor. Occasionally Dr. Calgroni, in person, purchased supplies and called for his mail. Although I contrived to be near him whenever possible, he seldom uttered more than half a dozen words—and never to me. Once, though, I thought I caught him peering surreptitiously at me in a queer manner.

Obviously, the doctor was his own servant, housekeeper and cook. No one took the risk of entering his place—not even the daring Jason Murdock.

Several days before the circus arrived, I noticed what I considered a peculiarly significant happening — Dr. Calgroni walking toward his abode, with Simple Will tagging, doglike, a few paces behind.

At discreet distance, I followed them. Arriving at the Thornsedale place, I was surprised to see the doctor close the gate behind him, leaving Will standing outside. The half-wit stood there until Dr. Calgroni disappeared.

The day before the show came, I saw the doctor clapping Will on the shoulder and talking to him.

That night such a terrible conclusion shaped itself in my mind as to the meaning of the singular boxes, the hostile notices, Will's attitude toward the doctor, and the latter's interest in him, that it kept me wide awake.

In ill humor at myself, I rose at the first appearance of the sun. Remembering the circus, I strolled over to the tracks to watch it unload.

Some villagers had gathered about the few wretched travel-scarred cars that made up the second-rate circus train, and particularly in front of the car containing the cage of Mimmie and Horace.

Doctor Calgroni was there, and, at his heels, Simple Will. The doctor was talking very earnestly to the trainer.

"You say Mr. Barber has offered to sell either of these animals," the doctor was saying, as I drew up on the outer fringe of the curious crowd.

"Yes sir. He will sell one because they fight continually. They have to be carefully watched, or they might kill each other. You don't know what ferocious beasts gorillas are—"

The doctor smiled.

"I would like to talk to Mr. Barber," he interposed.

The gorilla trainer hesitated, then, pulling shut the sliding doors of the animal car:

"Sure; just follow me," he said.

The doctor, at the man's side, walked

to a coach ahead, the combination ticket-and-executive office of the Barber Shows. For an instant, Simple Will seemed to hesitate, but he didn't trail Dr. Calgroni—the unseen things inside of the gigantic cage nearby seemed to hold his hypnotic attention. Several big drops of rain splashed upon the cinder-strewn ground. The heavens hung black and dismal; the sun had completely vanished.

I watched Simple Will. He was ill-at-ease, hovering uneasily about the gorillas' car. The other people nearby paid no attention to the half-wit. Presently the trainer and Dr. Calgroni returned, accompanied by another man, who was counting a roll of bills.

"You say," the latter remarked as they passed me, "that you want 'Horace' delivered at once?"

"Yes," replied the doctor concisely.

"All right. Hank, call the gang, unload the cage and put Horace in that red single cage. Dr. Calgroni has relieved us of him!"

At this, Simple Will approached the surgeon and touched his sleeve.

"You buy hairy animal-man?" he mumbled.

The doctor laid his blue-veined and thin old hand upon Will's broad shoulder.

"Yes, Will, and I'm going to give you a job—a job as his valet!" The show men exchanged winks, and from the car rolled an empty, iron-barred cage. Will's expressionless features twisted into what on his idiot countenance registered pleasure.

Dr. Calgroni beckoned to the man whom I had seen deliver the strange-appearing boxes that first afternoon.

"Got your team?"

The fellow nodded.

A scene of bustle had sprung up about me. An excited and larger crowd of villagers had assembled.

The big cage containing Mimmie and Horace was lowered to the track side. They were two of the finest animals of their type I have ever looked upon.

Horace was transferred to the single cage and its strong door doubly pad-

locked upon him. The mule team drew up with the wagon.

"Here, Will," said the doctor to the half-wit, "climb into the wagon. We're going before we get wet." The doctor appeared highly elated.

Simple Will, who had stood by as if in a stupor, swung his heavy body up behind the gorilla's cage.

No sooner had the wagon drawn out of sight than the heavens seemed to loosen in wrath. Rain fell in torrents, driving the spectators in a wild rush for shelter. As I reached the hotel, the water dripping from my drenched garments, the storm increased its fury. All that day it rained—and the next.

As I lay on my bed that night and listened to the roar of wind and rain beating upon the roof and window panes, my mind kept drifting to the inmates of Thornsedale place—the queer doctor, Simple Will and his ward, Horace, the gigantic gorilla.

### III.

IT WAS three days later that I learned Dr. Calgroni had wired to New York, and on the next morning an exceptionally well-dressed stranger, whose goatee, bearing and satchel smacked of a medical man, stepped off the train.

Espying me, he asked:

"Will you kindly direct me to the Thornsedale place?"

I told him the best way to reach Dr. Calgroni's without wading in mud, and he departed, with a brief "Thank You."

The next night I saw the stranger, ashen of face and decidedly inwardly shaken, hurriedly purchase a ticket and leave on the 9:45 train for New York.

Immediately I sought the telegraph dispatcher.

"You are aware of the queer actions of Dr. Calgroni—"

"I should say! He's a nut."

"I can't say as to that, but to whom did he send the message the other night?"

"You won't let it out I tipped you off?"

I solemnly held up my right hand.

"Well," in a whisper, "he wired a

hospital for their best surgical man."

So the assistant had gone back, frightened. And why?

Several weeks later Barber's World-famous 8-Ring Show gave a return exhibition at Belleville. That night I wandered toward the Thornsedale place.

Again the clouds had banked for a storm, fitful rays of the moon now and then shifting through, only to be absorbed in mist.

Drawing around in front of the old homestead, looming dark behind the gloom-shadowed trees, I seated myself on the stump hitching-post. I was glad that in my coat pocket nestled a neat automatic. Why I lingered there in front of the quiet old place I do not know. Not a light glimmered in the house; not a noise issued from its muffled depths.

Then to my ears came a shriek and to my startled gaze a light flared in the house. I could dimly see that a figure appeared at its open door. It looked behind it for an instant, then madly bolted toward me.

Upon the wet gravel came the tread of rapidly-moving feet, and the gate in front of me swung abruptly back. In the hazy reflected light, I got one look at Dr. Calgroni who, hat and raincoat in his hands, the muscles of his face quivering, his face deathly pale, emerged and turned, running madly toward town.

I drew back, automatic in hand, waiting for whatever might follow the doctor. Nothing happened. Obeying an impulse, I took out after the fleeing surgeon. Over soggy soil I followed him, around corners, down Main Street to the depot. I got there in time to see him swing on the platform of the rear coach of the 9:45 train, bound for New York.

Throbbing with excitement, scarce knowing what I was doing, I made my way back toward the Thornsedale place. Several blocks away, I caught a glimpse of a broad-shouldered, thick-set disheveled figure in breech-clout, running—or, rather, prancing and hopping—toward the circus grounds. The automatic in my hand, I followed.

A block from the circus grounds, under the street lamp, I saw a figure on horseback that I recognized as Jason Murdock, evidently bound for home.

Then, snarling, the Thing I had seen hopped out from behind a tree trunk, on all fours. Gaining its hind feet, it made a flying leap at Jason, knocking him from his horse. On the ground they rolled, the powerful Jason helpless in the Thing's clutch. Its fingers closed chokingly about the man's throat.

I tried to shoot, only to find my gun jammed; tried to shout, and could not.

At that instant the brass band struck up "There'll Be A Hot Time In The Old Town Tonight!" As the quick, dancing strains smote the night-air, the Thing suddenly ceased in the act of strangling Jason, looking attentively up. There seemed to be a responsive, obedient look on its horrible countenance. I could see its wild-eyes and bearded face—God! *It was simple Will!*

Bounding first on all fours, then half-upright on his feet, the crazed idiot was making for the show grounds just as the clouds broke in a downpour. To the rear of the big tent bounded Will, as the crowd scattered for home.

As if familiar with his surrounding, he made for a side-show tent in front of which sputtered a gas torch. The crowd, fleeing in the rain, had in the confusion failed to see the half-wit and myself on the mad run. But several men were following me, as Will tore aside the entrance flaps.

Inside, poorly-lighted though it was, I could plainly see the cage of Mimmie, the female-gorilla. Her trainer turned at the noise of our entrance, and hastily reached for his knife-pointed pole—but too late. Uttering a cry, piercing and antagonistic, Will flung himself at Mimmie's cage, who, with an answering cry of battle, reached both her long hairy arms through her cage, clawing and tearing at the fiercely struggling man on the outside.

The trainer rushed in with his prong, thrusting it at Mimmie. For an instant she drew back; then several of us quickly pulled Will, bleeding profusely,

back from the enraged animal, who again lurched forward as though recognizing in Will the reincarnation of her mate, Horace.

Foaming at the mouth, Will sank limply to the floor. From the hue of the blood, ebbing from the side of his neck, I saw at a glance that he was done for—Mimmie's claws had severed his jugular vein.

Among the men who had helped me thrust the poor fellow out of Mimmie's reach, was the sheriff of the county.

"What does this mean?" he demanded, grasping my shoulders.

"Follow me!" I cried.

A crowd of excited men, headed by the sheriff and myself, made for the Thornsedale place. The light still dimly illuminated the hall through the open door.

"I'll go in first, sheriff," I offered. "Have your men surround the place."

I stole into the hall. A terrible stench greeted me. I found it came from a door opening out into the hall. A feeble light burned within. About me stood several boxes, with the sides torn open, and excelsior hanging and strewn about them.

Before me, completely assembled in every detail, stood what the boxes had contained—an operating table and all its many surgical accessories. Out of a long box in the corner sprawled the hairy limbs of the fast-decaying Horace, the male gorilla.

Taking a small oil lamp from the stand, I turned to examine the dead body; and I noticed a paper, which fell to the floor. A quick look at the side of the beast's head revealed a great gash, rotting at the edges, through which, it was evident, the brain had been removed.

I hastily recalled Dr. Calgroni's theories. Could it be—

My eyes chanced to drop to the floor. Holding forth the lamp, I saw there was handwriting on the bit of paper.

I picked it up and read the note, which, even at the last stand, Calgroni had directed to me, Von Meine, chief disparager of his wild theories:

"Herr. Von Meinc. of Vienna, you said I could not do it. You berated me for my endeavors to alleviate the distress of the insane and feeble-minded. Yet I know now that I have accomplished it, without killing the subject as you claimed would be the result of such an operation. That's why I followed you here, to show you! It was successful, Von Meinc. I could tell by the way his eyes looked into

mine when he finally came to. But I could see the brain I had substituted for Will's atrophied one was too vigorous—that expression didn't belong to Simple Will. I am fleeing before he gains his strength. I admit my fear; for after this operation the former half-wit will be a dangerous customer, with the too vigorous and ferocious brain of the Gorilla Horace in his head!"

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