

# Weird Tales

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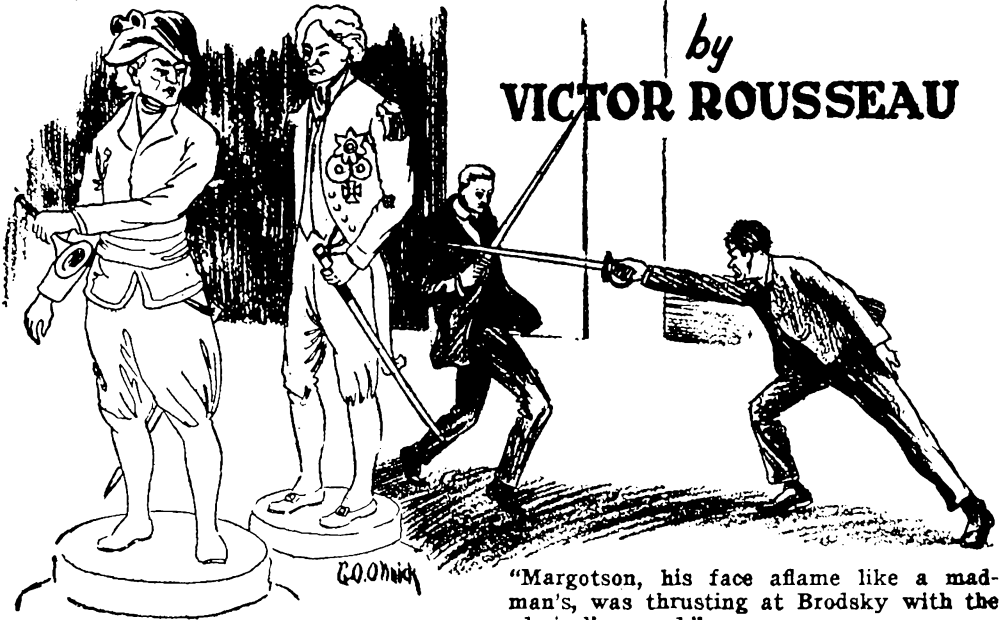
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# The FETISH OF THE WAXWORKS

by  
VICTOR ROUSSEAU



"Margotson, his face aflame like a madman's, was thrusting at Brodsky with the admiral's sword."

**P**AUL DUPUY, Frenchman and patriot, more Yankee than the native-born, since he took out naturalization papers, wears the British flag in his buttonhole on Independence Day.

A story hangs upon this, the story of a dead hero to whom the presence of Paul became an outrage and abomination. And it was Brodsky who saved Paul from his post-mortem vengeance.

The psychical investigations of Dr. Ivan Brodsky, and the marvelous results which he had obtained in his warfare against the hosts of evil, some of which I have previously recounted, had by this time made him known to a large circle of those to whom such things as spiritual possession are facts rather than theories. In hospitals, in prisons, wherever we find pain and sin congregated, occult manifestations are a commonplace of

NOTE.—This is the sixth of a series of stories, each complete in itself, dealing with Dr. Ivan Brodsky, "The Surgeon of Souls."

existence, though fear of ridicule debars the inmates from making any mention of them. It was in such institutions that Brodsky's reputation spread broadcast. But there are prisons for the dead as well as the living, as I shall show.

Neither Brodsky nor I was greatly surprized when a visitor entered his study one evening and implored his aid in the unraveling of a mystery which had, he was convinced, a supernatural explanation. "At least, I can't help thinking so myself, sir," said the man, speaking fluently, but with a slight foreign accent. "Although I am not a believer in such things myself."

Brodsky's brows clouded; that was the stock phrase that he detested.

"If you do not believe in such things, how dare you make the suggestion that they exist?" he cried. "Be honest with yourself and with me, man, or go elsewhere. Do you believe in them or do you not?"

"Yes, sir, I do," replied our visitor. "But when one makes such an admission one is ridiculed—it's hard——"

"Humph!" grunted the doctor. "Go ahead with your story."

The visitor sat down and fingered his hat nervously. He was apparently a man of the laboring class, to judge from his appearance; yet he showed signs of intelligence superior to that of most of his kind. I could account for his mental disturbance only when he had finished his story.

"I'm a Frenchman by birth, sir," he began, "and I've been seven years in this country. Dupuy is my name. I'm a naturalized citizen and proud of my adopted country. I learned my trade in Paris; it's a queer trade, and there's not many throughout the whole world follows it, so that it pays well, especially as it requires a certain amount of artistic ability, though less than you would suppose. I am a maker of wax figures for the waxworks theater on Fifth Street. You may not know the place, gentlemen, for people seem somehow to have lost interest in that form of entertainment, though it used to be the craze in years gone by. My task is to model life-size wax figures of all people of prominence. We've got the famous murderers, of course, and the presidents, and the heroes of the revolution, and all the famous kings and queens of England, the great soldiers and sailors—Wellington, Napoleon, Nelson——"

"Faugh!" said the doctor. "Let the dead rest in their graves. Don't you know that every time you set up an image of the dead you form a focus in which all that remains of his personality on earth concentrates? That commandment against making replicas of life in stone—which would have included wax, my friend, had wax figures been known—was the wisest and most spiritual of all. Go on."

"Well, sir," said our visitor, "as I told you, I'm constantly at work fashioning these figures for Mr. Margotson, the proprietor. We didn't have any of naval officers up to a few weeks ago. But Mr. Margotson is always looking out for something new, so he says to me, 'Dupuy, let's have a few statues of naval officers of history. Do you remember any?'"

"Sure!" said I. "There's Ville-neuve and St. Page and——"

"Quit talking French," said Mr. Margotson. "What about John Paul Jones and Nelson?"

"So I set to work and made replicas of them. The one of Jones was fair, but the Nelson statue was first-rate, I did it all from his portraits, and there he stands in the gallery with one arm and one eye, and everybody who comes in recognizes him at once. And that brings me to the point."

"Ah, you've had trouble with Nelson?" cried Brodsky.

"*Mon Dieu!*" said Dupuy, lapsing into his native tongue as he wiped his forehead; "he's trying to murder me."

The man broke off and eyed us furtively. I had long learned to keep guard over my face, but incredulity was in my heart. As for the doctor, he said nothing, and the man continued:

"It must have been a week ago that the first thing happened. I was adjusting the scabbard of his sword—we use real swords in our scabbards—and the point flew through and went right into my wrist—just missed a large artery. Look!"

He held his hand up for our inspection. There was a ragged out, half-healed, along the base of the hand.

"And I'll swear that the figure pushed the sword through the scabbard—pushed it violently, for it cut clear through the leather. But I didn't catch on just then. Then, four

days afterward, as I was passing it, the thing flew from its pedestal and keeled me over. My head just missed the iron radiator by two inches. And I tell you it didn't fall, it fairly threw itself at me."

"What does Mr. Margotson say to that?" asked Brodsky.

"He laughs at me. I don't know what to do. I've half a mind to melt it and let Margotson discharge me; and yet I have my wife to think of, and there's no demand for such men as me, the business having fallen off so. And if I stay there, one day the thing will kill me."

"Enough," said Brodsky. "We'll go there at once. Can we get in?"

"I have the key," answered the Frenchman, putting on his hat.

**WE** THREE left the house together. We caught a car on the main road, which ran past us one block away, and, half an hour later, stepped out at the entrance to the waxworks theater, which stood in what was now the heart of the business section of the city, and was, in consequence, almost completely deserted at this hour of the evening. Our companion pulled out a key and opened a side door. We went up to a great hall, round which were ranged statues of celebrities, life-size figures of strikingly human aspect.

"And yet," mused Brodsky, stopping to regard a group of cleverly arranged heroes of our civil war, "the men who erect these think they have nothing more than the external shells. How ignorant they are of the psychic qualities of their actions! Indeed, what do they dream of anything beyond the material? Yet this gallery is almost a breeding ground of souls. Who can measure what influences such beings draw down to them? Well, at least no evil spirit would be attracted hither among these men who offered up their lives for their country!"

Dupuy led the way toward an end of the great hall. Here I saw a group of figures attired in Georgian dress; evidently Nelson would be found among these. One of them, however, seemed singularly incongruous and out of place. It was a short, thick-set man in the costume of a mechanic of today. It seemed to move; I started; then I discovered that it was a living man.

"Mr. Margotson!" cried Dupuy in confusion.

— But the proprietor seemed still more confused than his assistant. He came forward sheepishly, and a mask seemed to have descended upon his blank face and blotted out some curious emotions which I had thought that I read there.

"Mr. Margotson—these are two gentlemen who are interested in what I told you about the statue," Dupuy stammered.

Margotson's face grew black with rage.

"Newspaper writers, eh?" he shouted. "Come to write up my museum, I suppose! I don't want your advertising; I've got all the customers I want and you can't do me no good. Damn your curiosity; this fool's been telling you some of his silly yarns about the Nelson statue, I suppose!"

This rage appeared so abnormal that my medical training induced me to examine Margotson from the pathological standpoint. But Brodsky looked into his face steadily and laid his hand upon his shoulder. Margotson's anger seemed suddenly to evaporate.

"They're only interested in the statue's turning into flesh and blood, sir," said the Frenchman.

Unluckily these words brought about a return of Margotson's frenzy.

"Flesh and blood? Rubbish!" he shouted. "Arrant nonsense, that's what you're talking, Dupuy. What's the matter with the statue? It's a

very good statue, one of the best you've made. It's new wax—green wax, we call it in the trade—and it ought to have had time to mature, only the public were so crazed over the naval officers that I didn't have time to let it lie. That's why it's hardening—because of the fumes from the leather factory across the street. They drift in here something terrible. That's all that's the matter with it. Look!"

He switched on an electric light upon the wall behind him, and for the first time I saw clearly the face of the great English hero. There were the irregular, thin, homely features, lit by a flame of patriotic enthusiasm. Yet, admirably as the artist had caught the inspiration of the painting from which he modeled it, there seemed something more, some hardly defined vein of cruelty, of caprice, that actually gave the face the property of seeming to reflect a certain change of emotions, an instability of mind as though the thing possessed some conscious life. And the skin—surely that was the skin of a man, with the blood mantling in the flesh beneath. Dupuy started back with a wild cry.

"Look at him! Look! I swear I never put that smile upon his face," he screamed. "He's changing. He's changing, I tell you. Lord preserve us all! Get rid of it, Mr. Margotson."

"If you hand me out any more of that nonsense I'll fire you on the spot," shouted the enraged proprietor. "You're going daffy, Dupuy, that's what's the matter with you. He's always had that smile. Examine the wax, gentlemen; it's hardened, that's all."

With horror and repulsion I laid my finger on the smooth surface of the cheek. So lifelike did it appear that I could have sworn the blood faded out of the arterioles beneath the pressure, blanching the surface

of the skin. And yet it was of wax. It was not flesh and blood. But flesh and blood differed less from it than it differed from the unreal and waxen figures around it. It stooped half forward, it seemed instinct with slowly dawning vitality. And surely its expression had changed; it had not smiled thus, with the cold malevolence of a conqueror, when first I had seen it.

Then suddenly Margotson seemed transformed. As though he adapted his mood to suit his mind, he burst into a wild peal of laughter.

"Good old Nelson!" he shouted; and the sounds echoed from the roof and rang through the hall, while for one dreadful moment I could have sworn that an answering emotion flitted across that waxen face. "Good boy, Nelson! A miracle of art, Dupuy. I can't tear myself away from watching him. I'll raise your salary. He makes me feel so good. He wants me to do something for him and I'll find out what it is and do it."

"You've given him a body and he's getting your reason, my friend," said Brodsky, somewhat shaken by this unexpected outburst.

"Come away, come away, gentlemen," cried the Frenchman, pulling us by the arms. "He's mad, God help him. I should have told you he'd been acting queer, but last night, when he laughed at me so much, I thought that it was only overwork. He's as mad as a loon."

We did not need to be urged, nor was there necessity of excuses. Margotson had already forgotten us and was standing before the statue alternately capering and grimacing.

"Now, I'll give you my advice and shortly; you can follow it or not at your peril," said Brodsky. "Get your employer home in safety and then slip back and chop the thing to pieces before a tragedy supervenes. No, that's all I've got to say

to you except just this: give up your trade and learn something that won't bring you into conflict with all these vital forces that hang round such places."

And with these words he fairly hurled himself out of the place, leaving me to follow him as best I could.

I THINK I mentioned once how sensitive the doctor always was to the morbid things of life. Perhaps it was a certain sensibility to those invisible influences which accompany moods and invest those places where any violent emotions have been at play. At any rate, having seen so much of the darker side of life, Brodsky was strenuously insistent upon cleanliness and wholesomeness.

"We've got to leave such things alone and work in the sun," he used to say. "This is our working day; when the night comes at last, may our good deeds be our protective armor against all the host of devils on the night shores that we shall pass through."

"You believe we have to pass through some place of purgation?" I asked.

"We'll have to clean up somehow, in this life or the next," he answered. "We can't get into heaven with dirty fingernails."

So, on this occasion, I forebore to question him when we got home. Brodsky went to a closet where he kept many relics of his earlier life, and came out with a small Union Jack upon a moldering staff.

"The flag of the vessel that bore me from Poland, where the Czar's emissaries were seeking my life," he said sadly. "To what better use can it be put?"

Then he explained the mystery.

"It is a fetish," he said, filling his pipe and puffing at it slowly. "It is exactly similar, in every particular, to the idols of the West Africans—or, for that matter, to any idol. The

savage makes some dreadful idol to worship, sacrifices to it until the thing becomes instinct with life and filled with all the passions of the worshipers; then a devil has been called into existence whose evil influence is incalculable. I tell you, it was no mythical devil that the early Christian missionaries had to face, nor those of today.

"After death the pure spirit flies to its appointed resting place, leaving its two bodies moldering behind it. One is that earthly body that we all know; the other is the soul body, the body of desires, a semi-conscious force that survives for months or years, according to the condition of the dead being.

"Do not mistake me; this is not Nelson. That great admiral is unconscious of this replica of him there in the waxworks theater. It is a group of emotions such as possessed Nelson, a man of strong feelings, yet not necessarily his. The warm enthusiasm of the crowds that have visited that place have focused these emotions, much as the burning glass focuses the rays of the sun. Remember, as yet this creature is only half conscious. It vaguely, as in a dream, feels this life within itself; it is rising toward a conscious existence. And that fool Margotson is the tool by which it means to wreak its enmity upon Dupuy."

"But why does it hate the Frenchman so much?" I asked.

"Do you not recollect Nelson's motto?" the doctor asked: "'Hate a Frenchman as you would the devil.'" This elemental being that has attracted these emotions that made up the great admiral's soul-body has necessarily the identical feeling. What does it know of the time that has elapsed, or the changes of history? There is the Frenchman, and it will have his life—by itself, if possible. If it can not kill him, as it tried, it will certainly do so through Margot-

son. Well, it's none of my business," he added. "I've warned Dupuy."

And he went to bed, while I forgot to ask the purpose of the Union Jack, which I saw him stuff into his pocket. But I knew that Brodsky could not dismiss his own responsibility so easily. He did not undress, for from my room, which adjoined his own, I heard him pacing the floor with short, quick footsteps, the greater portion of the night.

I fell asleep at last, and had hardly closed my eyes two minutes, as it seemed, before I heard the front door-bell jangled violently. I started up in bed, filled with horrible presentiments of evil, and began to dress myself hurriedly. A few moments later Brodsky tapped loudly upon my door.

"Dress yourself as quickly as you can," he called. "There's work on foot for both of us before the morning."

As I hurried on my clothes I heard an agitated voice in the sitting room outside, which I had little difficulty in recognizing as that of the assistant at the waxworks theater. My judgment was correct; when I emerged I found him seated in a chair in a condition of collapse, and Brodsky standing over him, holding a glass of some stimulant to his lips. The doctor was fully dressed, even to his hat, and from his pocket there protruded a small corner of the British flag. We went out together without any explanations. Luckily the cars ran at intervals, and we reached the corner of the main street. We clambered in; it was empty, and, during the ride, I learned in broken ejaculations from the man the cause of his visit.

He had halted irresolutely at the entrance to the waxworks theater after we left him. Then he retraced his steps, determined to carry out the doctor's instructions as soon as he could get Margotson away. He saw

his employer standing before the statue, regarding it silently, as though in a trance. Dupuy crept up to him, passing the statue of necessity upon the opposite side. And then he realized that Margotson had drawn the sword from the scabbard of the admiral and stood in such an attitude that Dupuy could neither advance nor retreat.

At the same time he experienced a return of that deathly faintness that had possessed him on a previous occasion, as he described to us. As in a trance he saw Margotson advance stealthily toward him, while he remained incapable of resistance; then he recovered his senses and leaned aside as Margotson thrust. Running like the wind, he gained the street outside, and had presence of mind enough to lock the door behind him.

"But I don't come in," he insisted, as we gained the side door. "No, sir, I've seen enough for tonight. I don't go in."

It took all Brodsky's resolution to persuade Dupuy to come. Without his presence, the doctor said, he would be powerless. With him, he might still break this spell and bring back Margotson to sanity. And at last, very timidly, Dupuy crept in behind the doctor. As Brodsky unlocked the door the key fell from his fingers.

"The key! You must find it," he cried to me. "Under no circumstances may you follow us without it. To do so may be fatal. Remember!" And before I had time to answer I saw him spring lightly up the stairway, dragging the unwilling Frenchman with him. My immediate impulse was to dash after him; then discipline came to my aid and—I stooped for the key. The night was dark, and it was two minutes before I found it. Then suddenly, from within, I heard wild shouts and a stampede.



I sprang up the stairs and along the hall, running with sobbing breath and clenched fists till I gained the end, where I saw shadows hovering. Frantically I switched on an electric light. Then I perceived Margotson, his face aflame like a madman's, thrusting at Brodsky with the admiral's sword while the doctor parried him with admirable grace and ease. Dupuy came running up to me.

"He rushed at me," he cried, "with his sword drawn, and Dr. Brodsky snatched a sword from Paul Jones' replica and met him. Look! The doctor wins!"

Like every Polish gentleman, Brodsky was an adept with the foils. Certainly a clumsy mechanic such as Margotson could not have expected to overcome him. Yet, as I watched the tense interchange of sword-play, I was amazed at the skill shown by Margotson. It seemed as though the courage and prowess of the great admiral had descended upon him. Twice he lunged so fiercely that the point grazed Brodsky's arm; then, with a sudden twist, he sent the weapon flying from the doctor's hand, and rushed—not at him, but straight toward Dupuy. So swift was the impetus, he was upon us before we could stir. And then, just as the blade seemed about to pierce the Frenchman's heart, something came fluttering downward over his head and the sword fell from Margotson's hand and he stood still, his eyes fixed upon vacancy, his body immobile, while Dupuy released himself from the folds of the union jack that Brodsky had so admirably thrown over him.

"AND—you think I can go back to my job?" asked Dupuy the next morning.

"By all means," answered the doctor. "Margotson will remember nothing whatever of his insanity. So you'd better hurry up, or he will want to know why you are late. You need not fear the statue. It will have resumed its natural aspect, and, in case any remnants of its power remain, keep a small British flag in your buttonhole, especially on holidays such as Independence Day. Yes, that's your penalty, Dupuy, patriot as you say you are; the only alternative being the destruction of the statue, which Margotson won't allow. And, when you can, try to get another occupation.

"It was a desperate chance," confided Brodsky to me afterward. "Still, one can deal with these elemental forces much as the lunatics; the mad impulse of national hatred was shattered instantly when it perceived the flag of its country. When Margotson wakes up upon the floor of the gallery he will think that he got drunk the night before."

"But tell me," I cried suddenly, "why did you make me wait till I found the key?" Then the solution came to me. "You knew our lives were in danger and wished to save me from the possibility of injury," I cried.

"Pshaw!" muttered the doctor. "Just accept facts and don't put sentimental interpretations upon them."

NOTE.—"The Seventh Symphony," the next story in this series, will be published in WEIRD TALES next month.

