

Weird Tales

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*By Night He Plied His Revolting Quest, and
by Day He Trafficked With Ghouls*

The Fiend of the Seine

By DICK HEINE

Author of "The Jungle Presence"

ON THE banks of the Seine, not far from where a famous avenue crosses it on a famous bridge, there is a small stone house, gray and inconspicuous amid its surroundings. Here there lived, entirely alone, Jules Dérruil. He was about fifty years old and had a kind face covered with short, stubby beard. He wore rough, rivermen's clothes, a black cap, and smoked a straight, black pipe. His house, which faced the river, had a small boat tied up in front of it. By day, the boat was always there and Jules at home; by night, the boat was absent and Jules in it, paddling up and down the river, sometimes three miles from home. Before daybreak, he would return and tie up the boat; then he would carry into his house a big black sack, bulging with contents, the nature of which could not be told by looking at it. Only Jules Dérruil knew what was in the sack.

During the day, several fine automobiles with chauffeurs would stop in the street not far away, and men would come and enter Jules' house. After a few minutes they would emerge carrying something wrapped in old newspapers. The men were generally well dressed, and had sharp, neatly trimmed beards. Some wore eyeglasses and silk hats and looked distinguished.

The police had investigated these activities several times, but found nothing wrong about them. Once

they had held up Jules with his sack; it had contained firewood and old shoes and stuff he had been gathering in the river. Again they had accosted the visiting gentlemen and examined their packages: the packages had held lily bulbs and small plants in pots. So they did not bother Jules and his visitors any more. Moreover, since the men were all prominent, perhaps they had influence with the prefect, and the gendarmes were given secret instructions not to be too inquisitive.

Jules' strange doings went on for years before their tragic ending, and even the sharp-eyed neighbors had no clue to the mystery of the black sack.

ONE afternoon an automobile arrived, and a man got out. He was tall, handsome, and elegant. He entered Dérruil's house.

The room in which he was received was simply furnished. It was lighted by two windows which looked upon the river, the waters being just below outside. There was a fireplace and a bright wood fire. A small kettle hung near the fireplace. Some heavy sticks were piled near by for fuel. On the wall near the fire was placed a long, heavy knife such as is used for chopping up firewood. A shelf at one end of the room was lined with packages of something wrapped in newspapers. The bulging black sack stood in one corner. A table sat in the middle of the floor.

Jules Dérroil was smoking by the fire, and two empty chairs were close by.

"How do you do, Dr. Maune?" he said, as the man entered. "Sit down."

"Good afternoon, Monsieur Dérroil. I see I am earlier than our friend, Dr. Le Glé."

"He won't be long in coming. In fact, I think I hear his car now."

A minute later another man entered. He was shorter than Dr. Maune and less handsome, but looked distinguished.

"Good afternoon," he said, as he sat down before the fire.

"I suppose we three are alone, are we, Monsieur Dérroil?" observed Dr. Maune.

"Quite; we may discuss our business or whatever we like."

"I must say we are a bloody lot after all, we doctors," laughed Dr. Maune. "I can hardly say which is the most ungodly, our calling or that of Jules Dérroil."

Dr. Le Glé laughed, and Dérroil smiled and said nothing.

"There is another ungodly thing about you, Le Glé," continued Dr. Maune. "I hear you have disowned your daughter. Is it true?"

"True, indeed. I regret it deeply, but it was unavoidable. She was in love with a spendthrift. Her surreptitious conduct defied convention, and she would not even disclose the man's name. But I hear a similar tale on you. Is that true also?"

"It is," said Dr. Maune. "I have disinherited my son for spending his time and my money on a girl whom the family has never seen. He refused to introduce any of us and has never revealed her name."

"Very sad. We should both be ashamed of ourselves," said Dr. Le Glé. "And Jules Dérroil here should be ashamed of himself, too. Look at him. He makes his living by paddling

the Seine at night and gathering up the bodies of the suicides of Paris who die by drowning. He cuts off their heads, or cuts out their hearts or whatever we doctors want. He puts them into a sack and brings them home. We come and buy them to dissect and experiment with for the ultimate benefit of humanity."

"Bloody business for all concerned," remarked Dérroil.

"What did you find last night?" asked Dr. Le Glé.

"Four adult bodies and three cast-away babies."

"A good night's work. Did you bring them back?"

"I brought the four big heads and the three little bodies."

"Give us two heads apiece. We shall call tomorrow for the babies."

Dérroil arose and went to the sack in the corner. He stooped and took something from the sack.

"Let us see the heads before you wrap them," said Le Glé, rising.

Jules Dérroil handed him a woman's head, holding it out to him by the long, brown hair. Dr. Le Glé took it carelessly.

Almost at the same moment, as Dr. Maune rose, Dérroil handed him a man's head. Maune reached unconcernedly for it. Suddenly his face turned pale, his breath came in gasps, and he staggered against the wall by the fireplace, trembling in every limb. The rush of blood to his eyes was so great that for a moment he could not see. But when his vision cleared, he looked at Le Glé.

Dr. Le Glé stood in the middle of the floor with the head dangling in his hands. His eyes were closed, and he was breathing hard and swaying back and forth on his feet. He let fall the head and dashed his palms over his face. That instant Jules Dérroil knew what he had done. He had handed Le Glé his daughter's head

and Maune that of his son. The unhappy couple had committed suicide together. He looked from one doctor to the other.

The doctors felt almost the same reaction. They saw the utter horror of their whole lives, the far pit into which their minds had hurled them. The brutality of Jules Déroil also flashed home to them. They were seized with a simultaneous desire—to kill him.

DÉROIL was strong and his muscles hard from the daily paddling, but he was no match for the half-crazed and infuriated doctors. They banged him about the room, overturning the furniture and making considerable noise. One doctor held him by the throat. The other plucked a flaming stick from the fire and thrust it

into his face. Déroil screamed a horrible scream. The heavy knife by the fire was next in Le Glé's hands, and the head of the fiend soon fell to the floor. The body sagged and tumbled in a heap.

Scarcely had the murder been committed when the door of the house burst open and the gendarmes rushed into the room. They had been sent for by the nearest neighbors, who had heard the screams and sounds.

Dr. Le Glé and Dr. Maune were never tried for the murder of Jules Déroil. The grievous nature of the affair worked in their favor; the public was satisfied that the mystery of the numerous headless bodies found in the river was cleared up; and some newspapers even congratulated the physicians for ridding Paris of the fiend of the Seine.