

*A Wild and Terrifying Adventure, but  
It All Happened in a Hotel Room*

# THE HAND

By H. FRANCIS CASKEY

**T**HE KEY fitted the door perfectly, so there was nothing to warn me I was mistaken in entering the hotel room I supposed was my own. I know not what mental lapse caused me to mistake my floor. It was presumably, a bit of absent-mindedness for my mind was full of the details of a business meeting just over in the Auditorium. I had delivered the address of the evening, and, like most amateur speakers, was revolving in my thoughts the things I had said and the many others I had inadvertently left unsaid. This room, into which I mistakenly made my entrance, was, as I discovered later, directly beneath my own. The sight that met my astounded gaze as I opened the door held me motionless in a paralysis of surprise.

The unbelievable thing I saw before me was too astonishing, too weird, too utterly monstrous for credence. It was like a horrible replica of some fantastic dream such as visits those who have sought their sleep with over-burdened stomach or troubled mind.

How many of us have waked from uneasy slumber with some terrifying unimaginable picture of stark terror seared for a moment on the retina of our eyes by the unfathomable magic of unconsciousness! How grateful we have been for the mysterious workings of nature which, with our complete awakening, erase these ghastly fantasies from memory's gallery!

Before me—facing me, in fact—from a chair on the farther side of the small

table such as are common to all hotel rooms, sat a huge man whose gaze for a moment held my own. A dominating man, this, whose well-trimmed Van Dyke beard lent a professional aspect to features strong and severe as those of any ancient Roman Emperor. He bulked large behind the table like some great figure of Buddha, impressive and awe-inspiring in its quiet forcefulness. He



was coatless, and his immaculate sleeves were turned back to the elbows on two powerful arms. The burning eyes that held my own seemed charged with actual physical force, some super-animal magnetism. My glance wavered to the bed, where his coat, carelessly tossed, assumed to my amazed vision the well-defined outlines of some hideous couchant animal, stark against the whiteness of the linen.

But that which held me spellbound, seeming by its horrible actuality to freeze the blood within me, inhibiting my powers of speech and motion, lay on the table, white in the brilliant light, clean and snowy, and, were it not for the ghastly story it told, even alluring.

I gasped, "Great God! I am dreaming!"

A low laugh, softly modulated, yet carrying conviction of sincere amusement, brought my startled gaze to the other end of the table. A girl sat there, a girl whose beauty beggars my powers of description, though I recall her every feature with a clarity of remembrance that will go with me to the grave. Faultless she was, in clear pure beauty that allows me no play of words on any feature that contributed to her loveliness. Hair of magic gold that glistened with inviting temptation to the touch; azure eyes, surpassing in their wondrous beauty Nature's own painting of the eternal skies; skin that gleamed like ivory-porcelain on neck and shoulders that would be models for some sculptor's everlasting fame. A fairy-woman, yet real enough as she smiled at me in unaffected mirth.

For the first time I became aware of two other occupants of the room—two men who sat at the other end of the table, slightly in the rear of the big man opposite me. My first horror-stricken gaze had so centered on what lay on the shining blood-red mahogany table that I had failed to notice them. Both were dressed and groomed with exceeding care. Both were likewise of professional aspect, and neither seemed moved by any emotion other than mild amusement at what must have been my grotesque, frozen attitude.

The calm matter-of-factness of these four people, and the smile on the face of the beautiful girl, terrified me with the fear my mind was leaving me. It was all too revolting, too ghoulish, too sickening for credence except to a dethroned reason.

On the gleaming, polished wood of the table, in almost the exact center, within reach of any of the four who sat about

it, lay—My God! can I ever forget it?—a woman's hand!

A woman's hand!

Cleanly severed at the wrist, a flashing diamond sparkling from the platinum mounting on the third finger, each well-kept nail gleaming pinkly in mute testimonial of much studied care, it was a grisly exhibit well calculated to stun the mind of any normal witness. My knees sagged and I dropped unbidden into a chair.

A woman's hand!

Do you not see why it was that my soul grew ill and I doubted my own sanity? Have you thought, perhaps, that mine must be a lightly balanced, hysterical temperament that I should so easily grow horror-stricken over what was so surely but an anatomical specimen, on display before these evidently scientific gentlemen for some legitimate purpose? A woman's hand! Surely this was not the first time such an object had served the purposes of science.

True—all of it true—but never such a hand as that at which I stared. Never such a hand, plump, unshriveled and pink with glowing life as was this. Never such a hand, so cleanly amputated *with never the loss of a single drop of blood*. Never a victim of so horrible a loss as she who smilingly raised a rounded wrist from which the hand was missing.

Was it a dream? No! Except for a numbed horror, I was never more fully awake. The sound of the elevator reached me as its doors slammed on some distant floor. From the street came the roar of passing street cars, and the occasional blast of a motor horn. No, it was not a dream! Would to God it were, that time might erase the sleep-destroying memory from my brain.

Unnerved, weakened, sickened, I sat and stared in unbelieving fascination at the huge man who held my gaze and on whose face a slow smile began to creep. The sight I have just described had taken but the briefest moment to stamp itself upon my consciousness, and his easy gesture of casual welcome seemed to follow immediately upon my entrance into the room. None of those present seemed surprised or alarmed at my intrusion, and he who dominated the small assembly now spoke in a quiet, assured voice that reached me with all the emphasis of a command.

"You are just in time, Mr. Ferrell, to witness a revolutionary performance in modern surgery."

He held up a peculiar S-shaped tube in which a greenish liquid seemed to move sullenly.

"This preparation is the most complete and marvelous anesthetic ever

dreamed of. Applied externally, it instantly kills every nerve, halts every drop of blood, so that an amputation may be performed under the eyes of the patient with never a sense of pain nor feeling. Applied immediately afterwards to the wound, it seals it hygienically and almost immediately transforms itself into skin, so that any operation may be performed and recovery assured within an hour. As a matter of fact," (he waved his hand negligently toward the grisly thing on the table) "that extremity was removed only five minutes before you came."

I stared in speechless wonder at the girl, who again raised the severed wrist for my inspection. The stump was as though nature had planned a perfect woman but stopped short of perfection by failing to endow her with a hand. The skin seemed to grow smoothly around the end of the wrist. I could discern no evidences of recent surgical treatment. From the other end of the table one of the men spoke.

"Perhaps Mr. Ferrell would care to make a closer examination of the subject before witnessing the next operation."

I shrank back in my chair, my voice squeaking with excitement as I shrilled, "Another operation? My God, no! I will not be a witness to such monstrous malpractice."

Yet in my soul I knew I could not move from where I sat. Some unseen force gripped my heart. Its horrible restraining fingers held me inert in this charnel house of infamous trickery.

The big man spoke smoothly, ignoring my protest as if my voice had failed to reach him.

"Mr. Ferrell, being a layman, would doubtless prefer to remain seated, where he can witness what is done, unaffected so far as possible by his obviously morbid imagination."

The others nodded their agreement, and he turned to the girl, who moved closer to the table with apparently fanatical interest. Her gruesome efforts to use the hand, once a part of her beautiful body, and the fumbling ineffectiveness of the pitiful stump, brought a curse to my lips, but the callous heartlessness of the others seemed unaffected. The big man spoke.

"Freda, your consent to this operation, which is to some extent a mutilation of your physical charms, is most gratifying, but I have decided the second operation need not affect your appearance. You are not suffering any effects from the loss of your hand?"

The girl, Freda, as he called her, smiled reassuringly. "None whatever,

Dr. Menostique. As yet I have not even missed it."

I shrank back in my chair. My reason rebelled against the things my eyes and my hearing were telling me. What mysterious power was this in which the terrible doctor held this beautiful girl? With my own sight I had beheld her piteous fumbings with the wrist as she had moved closer to the table. What prompted her colossal untruth? I forced myself to speak, but the same horrible clutching fingers seemed to forbid my rising.

"This is a hoax," I croaked, my voice strange and unrecognizable in my own ears, "What are you trying to do? What monstrous trick are you playing with me?"

Again the big man seemed not to hear me. His eyes were upon the girl, and the two at the end of the table leaned forward interestedly as he slowly withdrew a platinum-like stopper from the end of his peculiarly shaped retort. From a case which I had failed to notice, but which must have been on the table during all the time I had been in this awful room, he took several shining instruments which I recognized as surgical scalpels and knives. They fascinated me with their bright, sinister immaculateness.

Dr. Menostique turned again to the girl.

"It will be necessary to turn your chair, Freda, so your head will lie on its back, directly under this light. You are not afraid? The removal of an eye will take but half the time involved in the amputation of the hand. I have the artificial eye in readiness."

Her eye! They were going to remove her eye!

Again the girl smiled without a trace of fear.

"I am glad to submit to these operations in the cause of science," she said. The two men at the end of the table nodded owlily in agreement. They arose, as if actuated by a single brain, and walked to the other end of the table, passing me noiselessly, intent on assisting in the proper placement of the chair.

The girl, Freda, likewise arose, and the two turned her chair so that its back was against the end of the table, directly under the cluster of lights that illumined the room. The doctor casually arranged his instruments and the tube.

My soul struggled for the release of my body, but I was powerless to move. The huge man placed his instruments more carefully. The fearsome hand, still rosy in the white light, he shoved carelessly to one side, much as one might brush aside an unwanted pencil in

absent-minded indifference. My mind revolted at this sickening display of casual indecency. The hand trembled on the edge of the table, and while I eyed it in horrible fascination, dropped upon the floor at my feet. The doctor looked up and evinced neither surprise nor regret at the gruesome incident. He stretched forth his hand, making the request with nonchalant politeness.

"The specimen," he said smilingly, "there by your foot. Please hand it to me."

Some power beyond my own bent me to his request. For a moment I could not, and then, because it seemed I must, I picked the thing up. With a groan I dropped it instantly. Like some horrid revelation it came to me that I must be insane. The elevator clanged in its shaft and the street cars roared far below, while the constant screech of automobile sirens came plainly and clearly to my ears, but I was mad. I must be mad! Somewhere, somehow, my reason must have left me to become a whimpering scapgoat for ghoulish fancies.

*For the hand was warm to my touch!* Was I not mad? Was my mind not a shattered remnant of normality to imagine that this hand, this poor dead witness to an infamous quackery, carried within it for these many minutes since it had left the body of its mistreated owner the pulsating warmth of life? I shrank in utter terror.

But the quiet, commanding voice of the doctor reached me.

"Quiet, please! We are ready for the second operation."

The awfulness of that command! My God! the compelling awfulness of it. I had no choice. With racing heart and whirling brain I forced myself to hand the sickening object to him. He received it carelessly, and placed it with scarcely a look on the table before him. My soul shuddered with the consciousness of a profanation. I longed to flee from the room and all its horrid occupants, but the power of motion seemed to have left me. My eyes again followed the purposeful movements of the doctor. He was adjusting the table and carefully measuring the distance from it to the chair. The girl, Freda, stood waiting.

Finally everything seemed to be to the big man's liking. With never a glance at me or his colleagues, he motioned smilingly to Freda, who immediately took her place in the chair. Her uncanny willingness to submit to so unheard of an operation smacked in itself of insanity, yet her bearing and calm, untroubled eyes—those beautiful eyes, one of which was to be an offering to this inhuman god of chicanery—told all too clearly of

her perfect awareness of what she was about to do. I strove to cry out, to call to the world some warning of what was about to happen—what had already happened in that seemingly innocent hotel room, but though I tried mightily, no sound escaped my lips, nor did my manifest endeavors register upon any of the four who occupied it with me. Even now, on the morning following, I can recall with fearful vividness how frantic was my vain effort to shout.

And then, while horror held me paralyzed, the doctor, with shining scalpel in hand, nodded to one of the men to apply the greenish transparent liquid that moved curiously in the queer S-shaped tube.

The strange leaden motion that seemed to originate in the liquid was a terrifying manifestation of unreality. It did not boil; it did not bubble. Rather it seemed to oscillate within itself in a heavy oily manner, a satanic disturbance which affected me strangely. A vision of the infernal one seemed to come between me and the tube as I watched, and the idea struck me as singularly appropriate, since only the devil himself could conjure in so mind-twisting a fashion.

A strange fancy took hold of me. I was no more a mortal. In some mysterious manner I seemed to have passed on, and was now in the inferno. These things I was witnessing must be a part of the everlasting tortures I was to suffer in these lower regions. I writhed, but could not escape.

The S-shaped tube disappeared. For a moment I thought it had vanished into thin air, and then I saw the man to whom the doctor had nodded lift it from the table. With a tiny cotton-tipped rod he was about to apply it to the eye of the girl, who, with head thrown back over the chair, where the strong lights revealed her pure startling beauty, waited with patient unconcern.

Then for an instant my sight seemed to fail me. When I saw again, the man was setting the S-shaped tube back upon the table. The liquid was dull and strangely still. Only a small portion of it remained. The doctor spoke.

"Quiet, please."

Before my unbelieving eyes (I had not really felt within my soul that such a thing could happen) the big man calmly ran the scalpel under the eye of the girl, who neither winced nor gave any other manifestation of concern. No drop of blood flowed! *Great God! Not one drop of blood!*

Some untapped power within me gave me strength to spring from my chair. Powerless was I to speak, but I found myself on my feet, and in a frenzy of

fear I fled from the room. Even in the going I thought it strange that no one made to stop me, and I ran down the hallway as one possessed, fear of the unseen hard upon my heels. In a moment, during which I must have taken the single flight of steps at a bound, I found myself in my own room on the floor above. Familiar things were about me. My traveling-bag, overcoat, clothing, each easily recognized object, seemed a kindly rescuing hand, thrust forth to succor me from the awfulness of what had passed. With a sob I sank upon the bed and consciousness left me.

I awoke with the noon-day light streaming through the window. For a moment, such was the startling clarity with which the events of the preceding night came back to me, I thought it must have all been some hideous dream. I was still fully dressed, but possessed of a physical weariness that vouched in itself for a drain upon my mental energy. Clearly I recalled every step of the evening before: my supper, the business meeting at which I had spoken, its breaking up, the casual conversations that had their part in the adjournment, the handshakes of those who were leaving the

city, my own final leavetaking before starting to retire. Each detail stood forth clearly in my mind, and moved with logical sequence to the horrifying things I had by accident witnessed. I even recalled the fear and terror with which I had escaped from the room below. Even now, with the wholesome sunlight streaming into the room, I shuddered with remembrance. I looked at my watch. Stopped! I had not wound it. No, the whole thing had happened. A sudden impulse, qvermastering in its forcefulness, impelled me to write of the things I saw.

And so I have written. I have set down all that happened, exactly as it did happen. No fault of memory has permitted the escape of any trifle. All of it is still clear in my brain . . . and I am hungry.

I am back in my room after a hearty luncheon, which I thoroughly enjoyed. The desk clerk eyed me strangely when I asked, off-handedly as I thought, who had occupied the room directly under mine during the night.

"Dr. Menostique and his wife," he said, and added, with a curious look at me, "and his assistant. I think they were

in the room until about midnight. They all checked out this morning."

The name, though familiar enough to me as that of the man who had been the leader in the sickening drama of the night, meant nothing else.

"Dr. Menostique?" I asked. "Who is Dr. Menostique?"

The clerk was obviously bored and seemingly distrustful of my lack of knowledge of one who was apparently a celebrity. He eyed me pityingly.

"Dr. Menostique is the shark's shanks at this hypnotism thing," he said. "Nutty bimbo. Likes to put the spell on strangers and make 'em see snakes, or something. Rotten trick to pull on a man, but the guys that he work on never seem to mind it I understand."

Hypnotized? I do not know. I think I shall never know. It does not seem possible. Everything was too clear, too plainly convincing. The worldly wise clerk passed a final opinion.

"They say what that fellow can make a man see is plain hell. Hope he never picks on me. I'd rather take my chances on waiting."

And I.

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