

# Weird Tales

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WEIRD TALES ISSUED 1st OF EACH MONTH

# The House of Ecstasy

By RALPH MILNE FARLEY

*This happened to you, this incredibly strange adventure in the house of the hypnotist. Don't you remember?*

**T**HIS actually happened to you. And when I say "you," I mean *you*—holding this magazine now, and reading these very words. For I know something about you—something deeply personal—something which, however, I am afraid that you have forgotten.

You're puzzled? You don't believe me? Read on, and I'll prove it to you—you'll see that I am right.

To begin with, where were you at eight o'clock on that warm evening of August 4, 1937?

You don't remember? Oh, but I hope you will, my friend. For, as you read on, you will realize the importance of remembering every detail of that eventful night.

The weather was warm and muggy. It made you restless in the house, until finally you went out for a little walk—down to the store at the corner, to buy a package of cigarettes—to take the air. Nothing of importance, you thought.

A young fellow stopped you, asked for a light. Undoubtedly you have forgotten this too, for you are so often asked for a light. And in the dusk of that muggy evening there was nothing to stamp this young fellow as any different from hundreds of others.

You gave him a match; and as the match flared up in the darkness, you studied his clean-cut whimsical features. Rather attractive, he seemed to you.

You said to yourself, "Here is a man I'd like to know."

Then you lit your own cigarette, and noticed that the young fellow was study-

ing you. You hoped that he too was favorably impressed by what he saw.

"Rather a warm night," he said in a pleasing voice, as he fell into step beside you.

So the two of you discussed the weather for a few moments, walking aimlessly along.

Having thus broken the ice, the stranger asked, "Are you doing anything this evening?"

Somehow this question put you on your guard. What was his racket, anyway? You glanced sharply at his face, at that moment illumined by a street-light which the two of you were passing. But what you saw completely reassured you.

"No," you replied. "I'm not doing anything. Why?"

He laughed a bit embarrassedly.

"Well, you see, there's a clever seer and mystic, who lives just a couple of blocks from here. I was on my way to his house for a séance, when I met you. I'd feel a little less creepy if you'd come along."

It sounded intriguing. But—

"What does he charge?" you asked.

The young man laughed—a pleasant friendly laugh. "No charge at all," he replied. "A *real* mystic doesn't prostitute his weird abilities by making money out of them. Only charlatans do that!"

"Okeh," you said, relieved that there was no fee. "I'll try anything once."

"Come on," he invited.

**H**E LED you to one of a block of identical three-story brownstone fronts—no one would ever have imagined what it held. A massive butler answered the door. He looked you suspiciously up and down; then stepping aside, he solemnly ushered you and your friend into a small reception room, where a hunchbacked dwarf of indefinable age arose to greet the two of you. His hairless yellow skin was stretched parchment-like over his skull. His eyes were quick-shifting, black and beady. His slit mouth leered, first at your companion and then at you.

"Well?" he asked in a high-pitched querulous voice, shifting his eyes back to your companion.

"Master," the young man replied, bowing stiffly, "here is the person whom you directed me to bring."

"You have done well, my pupil," quavered the dwarf, his hunched shoulders shaking slightly as at some concealed jest. "You may go."

Astonished and indignant, you turned quickly to confront your guide. But a subtle change seemed to have come over him. In the bright light of the reception room he did not look as pleasing as he had looked on the street.

His dark eyes were set at a decided slant. His black brows were thick and tufted. His ears, nose and chin were pointed. And his sleek black hair was brushed up on each side of his forehead into two little peaks, almost like twin horns.

"Why, you said——" you began indignantly.

"What I *said* is of no matter," he replied with a shrug and a nonchalant wave of one slender hand. Turning on his heel, he stalked out of the room.

You wheeled to follow him; but behind you a sharp voice croaked, "Stop!"

Invisible hands seemed to reach out and grip you, and turn you around, and

march you back to the toad-like squatting Master.

He smiled a slitted grin, evidently intended to be ingratiating.

"Why should you flee, my dear fellow?" he murmured. "I am about to do you a favor."

"But—but——" you began.

"Silence!" he snapped. His face was stern. His claw-like hands, on the ends of scrawny arms, reached out toward you in a fluttery gesture as he crooned, "Sleep! Sleep! You are in my power. You will do as I command. Sleep! Sleep!"

A delicious languor spread over you; and, although your mind remained abnormally clear, all control over your own body gradually slipped from you.

The Master's parchment face relaxed into a friendly grin once more.

"You are going to enjoy this," he croaked gleefully, rubbing his taloned hands together. "The ecstasy is going to be all yours. For, alas, my poor crumpled body cannot thrill to the pleasures of the flesh, except vicariously. So I have summoned you here, in the hope that a few crumbs may drop from the table of your enjoyment, for me to pick up."

"Yes, Master." The words came to your lips through no volition of your own.

The little dwarf grinned delightedly, and his hunched shoulders shook with suppressed chuckles.

"This is going to be good!" he chortled. "Come. Follow me."

**L**IKE a sleep-walker, you followed him out of the little reception room, down the broad hall, up a flight of stairs, and into a large room with softly carpeted floor, and pictures and mirrors on the wall. The only article of furniture was a couch.

On that couch sat a beautiful young girl, clothed in a gown of some filmy blue

material. Her skin was a creamy olive shade, her hair blue-black and lustrous, her face piquant and oval, her lips full and inviting, and her figure slenderly mature.

But her eyes (so you noted) almost spoiled the picture. They were lusterless and dumb, like those of a stunned animal. You momentarily wondered if your own eyes were not the same. And, when she moved, she moved slowly, swimmingly, as in a slow-motion picture.

"Get up, my little dear," croaked the hunchback, rubbing his hands together, and grinning with anticipation.

The girl arose, her sightless sleep-walking eyes on his penetrating ones.

"Yes, Master." Her tones were flat and dead, and yet they carried the hint of a bell-like quality.

"Here is your partner, my little dear," he continued, with a leer, waving one skinny talon toward you, as you stood sheepishly, striving to free your paralyzed muscles from his hypnotic spell. "Stand up, my little dear."

"Yes, Master."

She rose obediently, and faced you. Somehow, in spite of the dull animal look in her wide eyes, there was something intensely appealing about her. So young. So soft. So virginal. And so alone!

Fascinated, you stared and stared at this vision of loveliness. No longer did you strain to escape, for now your every effort was to break the Master's hypnotic spell, not so as to leap *away*, but rather so as to *go forward*.

As you ran your eyes appraisingly over every line and curve of her perfect figure, the girl mechanically seated herself on the couch, lifted up one shapely leg, crossed her knees, unlatched the slipper, and let it plop to the floor.

Its sudden sound seemed to shock the girl almost into consciousness. Her wide,

unseeing eyes narrowed, and her expression became momentarily human — the one touch needed for complete perfection.

But only for a brief instant. Then the Master waved one taloned hand in her direction. "Sleep!" he crooned. "Sleep, my little dear. Sleep."

Her vacant stare returned. She unfastened and took off the other slipper.

The hunchback, grinning fatuously, held up one hand, and said, "My little dear, that will be enough for the present." Then, turning to you, "All right, my boy. She is yours."

Released from your paralysis, although still under his spell, you stole slowly, eagerly forward. Your feet seemed planted in shifting sands. Interminable ages elapsed. Would you never reach her?

Behind you the cracked voice of the Master squeaked. "Welcome him, my little dear."

In response to this command, the girl held out her arms to you. A dumb eagerness suffused her piquant oval face. You in turn held out your arms to her, with an intense yearning to clasp them tightly around her.

At last, after countless ages it seemed, you almost reached her, your fingertips met hers, just barely brushing them, and a tingling thrill swept through you. With one supreme effort, you leaped forward.

But an invisible hand seemed to clamp itself upon one of your shoulders, pulling you backward. And behind you sounded the croak of the Master, saying: "Bah! You are mere automatons! There is no vicarious pleasure to be had by me from such puppet amours as this!"

Then his invisible hand spun you around to face his toad-like leering features.

"Master!" you implored. "Master!"

His slant eyes narrowed, and his slit mouth broadened into a grin.

"I am going to be kind to you," he announced, in his high-pitched, cracked voice. "To the two of you—and to myself. I shall remove my hypnotic spell, and then see if you two cannot react to each other like normal human beings."

He waved one taloned hand imperiously.

"Awake!" he croaked. "It is my command that you both awake."

The invisible hands upon your shoulders relaxed their hold. A shudder passed through you. You lifted up one hand and brushed the cobwebs from your eyes. You drew a deep breath. The sluggish shackles slipped off of your mind and soul. You were free. Free!

Wheeling eagerly, you confronted the beautiful, olive-skinned girl.

But now she drew away from you—her eyes, no longer dumb, now pools of horror. Her two little hands fluttered up in front of her, as if to ward you off. A dull, red flush, commencing at the rounded hollow of her slim young throat, crept slowly up until it suffused her entire face, as she cringed back against the couch.

And you—your eagerness to clasp her in your arms now changed to eagerness to protect her. You halted abruptly.

From behind you there came a cackling laugh and the words, "She does not seem to relish you, my friend. Well, I shall leave the two of you alone together for a while, until you and she become better acquainted. *Adios!*"

A door slammed, and there was the sound of the turning of a key in the lock.

The girl was now seated on the edge of the couch, with one hand raised to her eyes to blot out the unwelcome sight of you.

But by now you were in complete command of yourself, once more a gentleman. "My dear young lady," you breathed, moving forward, "there's nothing to be

afraid of. I want to help you; I want to be your friend. Trust me, and I'll try to get you out of here. That dwarf is a dangerous madman, and we've got to forget everything except how to outwit him."

SHE smiled, and nodded. "I *do* trust you!" she exclaimed, rising and gripping your arm.

Hurriedly you made a circuit of all four walls of the room, carefully inspecting them. It was a room without a single window. There was only one door, and that was of solid oak, and locked.

"It is no use, Galahad," said the girl, in a rich liquid voice, but with a touch of mocking sadness. "The Master has us safely imprisoned, and there's nothing we can do about it. Of course, when he is through with *you*, he will probably let *you* go. But I am to be kept here for good."

"I will come back with the police, and raid the place, and rescue you," you asserted.

She smiled sadly. "I wonder," she said.

"Why do you wonder?" you asked, surprized. "If that crazy dwarf is fool enough to let me loose, it ought to be a simple matter to come back here and break in."

"I wonder."

"Why do you keep saying, 'I wonder'?"

"Because other men have been brought here to me by the Master, and they have promised, just as you are now promising. And yet none of them has ever come back."

"But I will."

"I wonder."

"Stop it!" you stormed. "Stop parroting those words! I'm a gentleman, and I keep my word. Besides I—er—I admire you very much," you continued

lamely. "I've never seen a girl quite like you. *Of course* I'll come back!"

"The Master is a skilful hypnotist. Before he lets you go, he will hypnotize you into forgetting everything."

"He couldn't make a man forget *you!*"

"Yes, even me. Yet perhaps——"

"Perhaps what?"

"Perhaps—if you were to hold me in your arms——"

Eagerly you clasped her to you, and covered her upturned flower-face with kisses, until finally your lips met and she returned your passion in one soul-searing embrace.

As you released her, you exultantly exclaimed, "Now let the Master do his worst! I shall never forget that kiss!"

A cackling laugh echoed through the vacant reaches of the room.

Startled, you sprang to your feet; but there was no one in the room. No one except you yourself and the dark-haired, olive-skinned girl.

Again the cackling laugh. It seemed to come from everywhere—from nowhere.

"Where are you, Master?" you cried.

"Aha!" spoke his cracked voice out of the air. "I see that you have learned respect, and that you address me by my proper title. And I thank you for a very pleasant evening; I enjoyed that kiss! You too ought to thank *me.*"

"I don't!" you stormed. "Let us out of here! Let us out of here, or I'll call the police! Where are you, anyway?"

"I am behind one of the mirrors in the wall," he croaked. "It is what is known in the glass trade as an 'X-ray mirror;' that is to say, a transparent one. From *your* side you can see nothing but reflections, whereas from *my* side it is merely a slightly grayed window-pane. And so I have been able to enjoy vicariously your little moment of bliss."

"But your voice?" you asked, incredulous.

"I am talking into a microphone," croaked the invisible dwarf. "There are loud-speakers behind several of the pictures.—And now I am coming in to join my two little playmates."

"If you enter this room, I shall wring your neck!" you raged.

"I rather think not," rasped his high-pitched voice, trailing off into nothingness.

You turned, and placed one arm comfortingly around the shaken girl.

The key grated in the lock. The door opened. The repulsively leering hunchback came hopping in.

Now was your chance. With cool determination, you charged across the room!

But, grinning unconcernedly, he held out one arm in your direction, with the flat of his hand toward you. A mighty invisible blow smote you squarely in the chest, flinging you back upon the couch, and upon the pathetic little figure there.

**M**AKING passes with his hands, the obscene frog-like Master approached you.

"Sleep! Sleep!" he murmured. "Sleep, my friend."

Your veins filled with water, and you slumped helplessly.

"Get up!" he commanded, not unkindly.

You arose.

"Follow me!"

Like a sleep-walker, you followed.

Behind you, there sounded the pleading voice of your sweetheart, imploring, "Oh, my lover, be sure and make a note of the number of this house when you leave it, and come back and rescue me!"

Love is strong! In spite of the invisible hands which sought to restrain you, you turned and cried, "I will! I promise you!"

Her sweet eyes filled with gladness; then shot a glance toward the Master, a glance filled with scorn for his thwarted powers, then back to you again, welling with perfect confidence.

"I believe you," she cried happily. "I shall be waiting."

Then you turned and followed the hunchback out of the room. Dazedly you were led to the street door.

On the threshold the Master transfixed you with his penetrating gaze, and commanded incisively, "You will now forget all that has happened in this house of ecstasy this evening! Do you hear me? You will forget *all* that has happened! Go down the steps, turn to the right, and walk away. When you reach the corner, you will awake. But you will remember nothing. Good-night, my friend, and I thank you for a very pleasant evening."

The door closed behind you.

Ringling in your ears was the insistent command of the wistful girl who had given you her love. "You must not forget! You must not forget."

Already you felt stronger and more free. The spell was beginning to lift.

The vision of a piquant oval pleading face was before your eyes.

"I will not forget!" you stalwartly promised, as you went down the steps. Then, before you turned to the right as commanded, you took careful note of the house-number.

**Y**OU returned from your walk that evening with a vague idea that something was wrong, a vague realization that you had been out of your house an hour or so longer than you could account for.

You consider yourself to be a man of your word, don't you? And yet you have never returned to the house of ecstasy to rescue that girl, although you solemnly promised her that you would.

I have now told you all that I myself know of the episode. But unfortunately I do not know the address of the house of ecstasy. You need that address. You have to have that address, if you are ever to rescue the girl who loved and trusted you.

Try hard, my friend, try hard.

*Can't* you remember? You *must* remember!