

Weird Tales

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Contents for November, 1924

- Teoquitla the Golden**.....**Ramón de las Cuevas** 6
Complete Novlette—Aztec Sacrifice
- The Brain in the Jar**...**N. E. Hammerstrom and R. F. Searight** 31
Astounding Surgery—French Spy in Germany
- Adventure of Souls**.....**Robert Lee Heiser** 36
Spirit Tale of the Sea
- Well, I'll Tell You, Ma**.....**W. McKeown** 46
He Wanted Adventure—and Got It
- The Desert Lich**.....**Frank Belknap Long, Jr.** 49
A Necrophilic Tale
- To a Dreamer**.....**H. P. Lovecraft** 54
Verse
- The Great Panjandrum**.....**Francis Hard** 55
African Voodoo and Chicago Spirit

(Continued on Next Page)

(Continued from Preceding Page)

The House of Dust (First Installment)	L. A. Borah	65
<i>Two-Part Mystery Serial</i>		
Six Bearded Men	Elwin J. Owens	88
<i>Bizarre Tale of Conscience</i>		
The Green and Gold Bug	J. M. Alvey	93
<i>Storiette of Weird Chinese Revenge</i>		
The Tortoise-Shell Cat	Grege La Spina	96
<i>Witchcraft and Voodoo</i>		
The Phantom Rider	Otis Adelbert Kline	105
<i>Western Ghost Story</i>		
A Soulless Resurrection		111
<i>Tale of Horror</i>		
A Suicide Complex	Robert Allways	116
<i>Strange Obsession of an Artist</i>		
The Purple Light	Ralph Parker Anderson	121
<i>Insane Jealousy—and the Death Ray</i>		
Weird Crimes: No. 7. The Human Hyena	Seabury Quinn	128
<i>True Story of a Parisian Ghoul</i>		
The Ghost of Liscard Manor	Walter Burns	134
<i>Rational Ghost Yarn</i>		
The Pelican	Charles L. Frederick	140
<i>An Ill-Omened Bird—Soul Transmigration</i>		
The Door	Henry S. Whitehead	151
<i>Death—and After</i>		
Thus Spake the Prophetess	Estil Critchie	154
<i>Haitian Tale—Crimes of Guillaume San</i>		
The Tower of Silence	Don Willis	158
<i>Fanatic Parsec Priests—Place of the Dead</i>		
John Caroll, Legionary of Rome	B. Wallis	163
<i>Can a Memory be Inherited?</i>		
The Eyrie		170
<i>A Talk with the Readers</i>		

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WEIRD CRIMES

By SEABURY QUINN

No. 7. The Human Hyena

MILLE TONNERRES!
Again?"

The prefect of police beat the polished top of his *bureau* with a furious fist and bent a stare of angry incredulity on the *sergent de sûreté* who stood at attention before him.

"It has happened again, do you say? *Nom d'un nom!* Is a policeman never to sleep again in this accursed city?"

"Even so, *Monsieur le Prefet*," replied the sergeant imperturbably. "Another of the poor ones has been dragged from her blessed rest—"

"And dismembered, ha?" the prefect fairly thundered.

"Yes, *Monsieur*; dismembered, even as the others."

"*Nom d'un p'tit bonhomme!*" exclaimed the prefect. Then, feeling that "the name of a good little man" was scarcely a strong enough oath for the occasion, he added, "*et nom de Dieu!*"

He drummed a moment on the polished surface of his desk with nervous fingers, regarding his companion thoughtfully. "*Eh, bien*," he said at last. "A way must be found to lay this sly one by the heels, not?"

"Perfectly, *Monsieur*," agreed the sergeant.

"Has a guard been placed in all the cemeteries?"

"Not all, *Monsieur*; the city is so unsettled, the *gendarmes* are sorely needed for patrol duty—"

"Yes, yes; I understand," the prefect interrupted. "We must decide upon some other way. Leave me, I will think this thing over. Something must be done at once. *Pardieu!* 'tis

getting so no man can sleep peacefully, even in his grave!"

The sergeant saluted, placed his right foot exactly six inches behind his left, swung round in a perfect about-face, and left the room, closing the door noiselessly behind him.

Alone, the prefect of the Paris police lighted a long, thin cigar and stared fixedly at his office wall, blowing clouds of rancid tobacco smoke from his nose.

The prefect's hands were very full. It was the autumn of 1848, and France was in such turmoil as she had not known since the days of the Directory. That summer the people had risen; Louis Philippe, the last of the Bourbons, had fled to England under the assumed name of Mr. Smith, and a second republic had been declared, with Lamartine, the poet-historian, as its provisional head. But reactionary plots were thicker in Paris than mag-gots in a cheese, and the *gendarmerie* were kept busy guarding the life of the infant republic.

Taking advantage of the policemen's political preoccupation, criminals of all sorts and degrees were plying their nefarious trades, often in broad daylight; and no man's life or property were safe. Now, added to this ordinary, run-of-the-mill crime, a new scandal had broken out in the city and environs of Paris.

Several cemeteries within or near the city limits had been broken into during darkness, and many graves had been rifled.

At first the deprivations had been ascribed to medical students seeking cadavers for anatomical study, but

brief investigations by the police proved this theory unsound. Had body-snatchers been responsible, the bodies would have been carried away. As it was, the corpses were found lying about the opened graves and broken tombs in fragments.

"A wild beast! A hyena escaped from a circus!" people said; but here, again, the clue proved groundless. With characteristic thoroughness, such as ever distinguishes French police methods, the officers had visited every circus and zoological collection within twenty miles of Paris, inquiring if any of them had suffered a loss from their cages.

Once a clue seemed within grasp, for a circus owner admitted having lost an animal, but the missing beast was a panther.

"Had *Monsieur le propriétaire* ever possessed one of those so interesting beasts, a hyena?"

"Alas, *Monsieur le propriétaire* was desolated to inform the gentlemen of the police, it had never been his good fortune to include such an interesting exhibit of Asia's fauna among his collection. Lions? Certainly. Tigers? But of course. Leopards? Most assuredly. Panthers, jaguars, pumas? *Mais oui*. But a hyena? Ah, *non*; *mais non*. Monsieur the proprietor was grieved and shamed to admit it, but no such splendid animal as a hyena had he ever possessed."

The gendarmes shrugged their shoulders and proceeded with their quest.

ONE morning came an urgent message from the intendant of Père la Chaise cemetery. A most flagrant outrage had been committed the night before. The body of a young matron, buried in a five-year concession, had been taken from its coffin and literally hacked to pieces with a gravedigger's spade.

The gendarmes went to the cemetery, and, inured to shocking sights

though their profession had made them, their weather-beaten faces went gray at the spectacle of that poor, violated woman's body. Blows of brutal strength had sheared limbs from torso, the face was mashed to an unrecognizable mass with the spade's long handle, the top of the head had been beaten to a bloody softness with a board wrenched from the coffin's headboard.

And beside the grave, in the mud of last night's rain, were footprints, long, slender footprints, the sort of tracks a well-shod gentleman's boots might leave.

"A clue! At last, a clue!" the detectives exclaimed. But like all previous ones, this clue led nowhere. The soft, moist earth held the prints up to the cemetery's very gate; but the paving flints of the street outside had no testimony to offer. Even if the miscreant had left tracks of his muddy boots on the stones, the very rain that had made the footprints visible in the cemetery would have washed away all traces long before the officers arrived.

Hard pressed though they were by other duties, the police assigned guards to Père la Chaise, and the depredations ceased—at Père la Chaise.

But another cemetery, less than a mile away, was entered, and the body of a little girl, a child but two years past her first communion, was dragged from a three-year concession and shamefully maltreated.

Journalism, then as now, was avidly on the trail of scandal, and the Paris press began resting from its political tirades to abuse the police. Republican and Royalist papers were in harmony on this theme; one and all they called for the immediate apprehension of the monster who disturbed the repose of the blessed dead or the resignation of an impotent prefect of police.

Yet all efforts were unavailing. When all cemeteries were under dou-

ble guard, the human hyena never put in an appearance. Let the guard be relieved for but a single night, and some poor woman's body lay uncarthed and horribly mangled under next morning's sun.

All these things the prefect of police thought of as he smoked his acrid cigar in his *cabinet* and drummed upon the polished surface of his desk. "*Morbleu!*" he muttered. "We must seize this monster, this assassin of the sleep of the dead. We must; we must; we must!"

But how? The fellow's knowledge of preparations for his apprehension was uncanny. Almost, it seemed, some unfaithful member of the police establishment was giving him information. How else explain his absence from guarded cemeteries, his inevitable raids upon those not protected with gun and bayonet?

"Ah, ha, I have it!" The prefect sat suddenly forward in his chair and rang for his orderly. "Send for the armorer," he ordered, when his call was answered; "this assassin shall apprehend himself. We will set a trap for him. The plan is formed; now let us to work. *Nom d'un nom!* Why did I never think of this before?"

Rapidly, the prefect sketched his plan for the criminal's apprehension, the gunsmith he had summoned nodding understandingly at intervals. "Can you do it?" the prefect asked, at length.

"Yes, *Monsieur,*" the armorer answered, "I am quite certain it can be arranged."

Hurried preparations took place in the *matériel* department of police headquarters all next day. Before twilight faded into night, the walls of every cemetery throughout Paris bristled with spring guns so cleverly arranged that any one attempting to enter the graveyards except through their gates must necessarily come in contact with concealed wires which, touched never so lightly, would dis-

charge the cocked and doubly loaded muskets. With these automatic sentries on duty before the city's graves, the prefect was able to reduce his human guards to one or two men for each burying ground, leaving some score or more gendarmes free for patrolling the troubled city's streets.

AUTUMN ripened into winter. Louis Napoleon Bonaparte, nephew of Napoleon the Great, was chosen president of the new republic by an overwhelming vote and was triumphantly inaugurated on the twentieth of December. With a relative of the "Little Corporal" at its head, the young republic felt assured of continued existence, and the Paris police were able to turn their attention from sedition hunting to thief catching. The palmy days of crime were ended, and the press ceased its abuse of the police. But the human hyena was still at large.

Almost with the establishment of the spring guns in the cemeteries, his nocturnal raids ceased, and the prefect was about to relieve the graveyard guards and dismount the guns when—

On a rainy, dismal night in March, 1849, the gendarmes stationed at St. Parnasse cemetery huddled for shelter beneath the pentice of the chapel. The rain, wind-driven between the leafless branches of the poplar trees, beat dismally down upon the age-stained marble tombs and the rough, unsodded mounds of the ten-year concessions. Off by the further wall of the cemetery, beneath their ghastly white wooden signboards, the five and three-year concessions seemed to cower from the storm. These were the graves of the poorer dead, for in France there were four classes of burials besides those of the Potters' Field. First were those rich enough to own their tombs or grave lots in perpetuity. They slept the long, long sleep of death undisturbed. Next

came the ten-year concessionaires, whose relatives had bought them the right to lie in moderately deep graves for a decade, after which they would be exhumed and deposited in a common charnel-house, all trace of their identity lost. The five-year concessions graves were scarcely deeper than the height of the coffins they enclosed, and their repose was limited to half a decade, while the three-year concessions (placed nearest the cemetery walls) were merely mounds of earth heaped over coffins resting on the surface of the ground, destined to be broken down and emptied thirty-six months after their tenants' burial.

"*Pardieu!*" one of the gendarmes swore, sinking lower under his waterproof cape. "What a night—and what a place. Better a thousand times the battlefield than such a patrol. The shout of conflict, the crash of musketry—"

Bang! The report of a discharged rifle cut through his words, and a streak of yellow-red fire tore the rain-drenched darkness above the wall beyond the three-year concessions.

"*Nom d'un coq!*" exclaimed the startled gendarme, leaping to his feet and grasping his sable hilt. "It is he; the *canaille* has come!"

Together the officers raced across the boggy graves, their drawn swords glistening dully in the rain. Impeded in their progress by the mud and darkness, they were in time to see a dark figure in a military mantle leap the wall and disappear in the gloom.

Marks of blood, however, gave evidence the spring gun's bullet had struck its mark, and a scrap of blue cloth clinging to one of the iron spikes with which the wall was topped afforded an added clue to the ravisher of the graves.

"*Un soldat!*" the elder of the gendarmes pronounced. "Alas, that a follower of that noble profession should sink to such a crime!"

Next morning the search was on in earnest. From barracks to barracks the gendarmes went, inquiring if any of the military personnel had reported himself suffering from gunshot wounds.

Almost immediately they found their man in the person of Lieutenant Bertrand, a junior officer of an infantry regiment stationed in the capital. Not only did this young man show such a wound as would match the spring gun's ball, but his cloak was ripped by some sharp instrument, and the fragment of cloth in the gendarmes' possession matched the rent. Their circumstantial case was complete.

The wounded man was confined under guard at Vale de Grâce hospital till his wound was healed, then placed on trial.

In England or America his hearing would have been before a civil tribunal, for (during time of peace) in these countries the civil power is separate from and superior to the military; but France, though a republic, was still imbued with continental European ideas of jurisprudence, maintaining one general law for the citizenry and another, or administrative system, for the military and official classes. Consequently, it was not a civil criminal court, but a court-martial, which heard Bertrand's case.

The judge advocate was relieved of the necessity of proving his case, for the young lieutenant made a free confession, revealing one of the most amazing stories ever detailed before a judicial inquiry.

He was twenty-three years of age, excellently educated, having been a student at the theological seminary at Langes from early youth until, at the age of twenty, he had entered the army with a junior lieutenant's commission. He was a young man of retiring habits, frank and cheerful to his comrades in arms, and beloved by every member of his regiment from

the colonel to the newest conscript private. Numbers of his brother officers testified to his almost feminine delicacy of refinement, and to the fact that he was, at times, seized with inexplicable fits of depression and melancholy, none of which, however, led to sullenness with his superiors or equals, or churliness with his inferiors.

According to his own statement, made under oath, in February, 1847, as he was walking with a friend in the country, he came to a churchyard, the gate of which stood open. The day before a woman had been buried, but the sexton had not completed his melancholy task of filling the grave, having been interrupted by a sudden storm of rain.

Bertrand had noticed the spade and pick lying beside the partially filled grave, and, getting rid of his friend by a ruse, he caught up the spade and began hurriedly to unearthe the coffin.

To quote from his statement :

"Soon I dragged the corpse out of the grave and began to hash it with the spade without well knowing what I was about. A laborer saw me, and I laid myself flat to the ground (*ventre a terre*) till he was out of sight; then I cast the body back into the grave.

"I then went away, bathed in a cold sweat, to a little grove, where I reposed for several hours, notwithstanding the cold rain which fell. I was in a state of complete exhaustion. When I arose, my limbs were as broken and my head was weak. The same prostration and sensation followed each attack."

The prisoner had suffered no further attack during the subsequent four or five months, and had begun to regard his rural experience as a fit of temporary madness—indeed, he sometimes wondered whether it had not been simply a sort of waking nightmare, and had actually never occurred at all.

In the summer of 1848 his regiment was ordered for duty to Paris, and among the sights he visited was the cemetery of Père la Chaise. While walking through the shadowy alleys of this great metropolis, the irresistible craving to mutilate a corpse swept over him like a flood.

That night he scaled the cemetery's wall, disinterred a body and cut it to pieces.

This was the beginning of the mysterious cases of ghoullism which had so baffled and puzzled the police of the French capital.

At first, Bertrand stated, the morbid fits followed an overindulgence in wine (his life at the seminary had been most abstemious); but later they came upon him without exciting cause.

Though police records failed to disclose so great a number, Lieutenant Bertrand stated he had unearthed twenty-five bodies, several of them being men. These last he had "gloated over," but never dismembered, this fiendishness being exercised only upon female corpses.

Army physicians and several eminent civilian practitioners subjected the young man to such tests as science of that day afforded, and pronounced him sane. The finding of the court was, therefore, that he be shorn of his buttons and insignia of rank and his sword broken in the presence of his regiment, after which he be confined in a disciplinary barracks for the period of one year and be dishonorably discharged from the army.

The sentence was carried out.

THE case of this unfortunate young man presents many interesting questions for the medical jurist. Taking his early life and training into account, and remembering how he must have lived almost entirely in unworldly surroundings, apart from wholesome feminine society, it is

not very difficult to imagine the basis of his original perversion. To use a good, though much over-worked and loosely employed term, he was the victim of a "complex"; that is, a series of emotionally accentuated ideas in a repressed state.

Like Gilles de Laval, the Sire de Retz, whose case has already been discussed,* the celebrated "Jack, the Ripper," whose crimes mystified the London police a generation ago, and the infamous Marquis de Sade. Lieutenant Bertrand unquestionably suffered from that form of mental derangement known to modern psychiatrists as *algolagnia*, coupled, perhaps, with what is called *coprophilia*, or a pathological liking for filth, this last being shown by his desire to associate with interred corpses.

His periods of great excitement while indulging his disgusting mania for the mutilation of dead bodies, and the following periods of profound lassitude, all point plainly to this in the light of modern psychiatry, though these same symptoms were the cause of some odd speculations by several observers of the case.

* See Article I of this series, "Bluebeard," October, 1923, *Weird Tales*. (This magazine was the first to have the courage to make public the shocking revelations of the original "Bluebeard's" trial.)

The late Dr. Sabine Baring-Gould, a profound student of folk lore and anthropology, naively suggested Bertrand to be the victim of demoniacal possession; while Elliott O'Donnell believes (or affects to believe) him a werewolf!

To substantiate this surprising theory, he tells of a young French woman, one Constance Armande, who was suddenly seized with an uncontrollable desire to enter a house of mourning, seize the body lying in its open coffin, and eat portions of it. Two cases of lunacy cited to prove one absurd superstition!

Whatever the facts of Bertrand's case, it is not to be denied he suffered a great injustice through the sentence of the court-martial, since the crimes he committed were obviously of a pathological origin, and by his own statement committed under the urge of an irresistible impulse. His moral sense told him he was doing a wrong, but, able though he was to distinguish the criminal nature of his acts, he was unable to resist the dictates of his mania.**

** In these circumstances, a perfect defense of insanity might have been legally raised. See Clark, or any other standard work on Criminal Law.—S. Q.

Seabury Quinn, author of this series of "Weird Crimes," has prepared for you a startling series of "Noted Witchcraft Cases." Watch for them in
WEIRD TALES