

Weird Tales

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D. McILWRAITH, Editor

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Everyone knows the traditional price you pay when you sell your soul.



The Imitation Demon

BY ROBERT KUTTNER

JAMES TIBBETS had no need for the services of a demon. He had everything an educated young man of good family could desire: a beautiful fiancée, a promising career in advertising, a fine game of tennis, some fame as an amateur yachtsman and a rich uncle. At the last count, however, he was short the rich uncle. Old Eric Tibbets yielded one morning to a tired heart and sought his rest in another sphere. James, as favorite nephew, received at once the benefits that are inherent in all rich but sickly relatives. The bank attended to

those details too worldly to engage the attention of a grieving nephew. James himself made the sacrifice of spending one evening away from his usual haunts to go through the personal effects of a man who had lived eighty years and had spent most of that time collecting personal effects.

TIBBETS MANOR presented a weedy appearance to the motorists who passed it on their way along the Hudson. It had been built when millionaires still indulged the whimsies of classic-minded architects. The natural

beauty of the region had proved too strong a rival for the manor and the building soon took on a dark, sulking atmosphere that grew in intensity through the years.

To Tibbets' eyes, the interior of the building offered no improvement over the brooding exterior. Nevertheless, in common with the motion-picture trained public, he accepted as a truism that wealthy eccentrics always lived in tomb-like houses on run-down estates.

The long drive up from the city had been very tiring. Tibbets found the liquor closet and poured himself a refresher several times the volume old Uncle Eric would have approved of. A glance about the halls convinced him that it would take more than one night to examine all the treasures accumulated by the old man. Tibbets had sense enough not to disturb the gun collection or to open the many glass gem cases. The woodcuts and paintings also escaped his touch. He had been in enough museums to suspect that such things had value. Drink in hand, he wandered into the library. First editions and rare books were somewhat beyond his ken. A pile grew at his feet as he swept several shelves free of their contents.

He had no particular need for money but on impulse wished to

see if perhaps the books weren't masking a wall safe. Library safes, he knew, were common enough. Handling the dusty volumes reminded Tibbets of his thirst. He found his way back to the sitting room. One thing he would never sell was the rare brandies and old wines that filled the cellars and service cabinets. No connoisseur could appreciate the contents as well as he could. He smiled to himself as he filled his glass.

After more dreary work in the library and more trips to the liquor closet, Tibbets sat down and surveyed the ruin. Faded, torn books were scattered on the floor, empty shelves leered at him—and still no wall safe. He was mildly disappointed. At his elbow on an antique table lay several heavy tomes. Piqued at his failure, he hurled the books at their companions on the floor. One volume, however, stayed in his hand. The touch of it under his fingers had filled him with a sudden, cold revulsion. It was as if he had touched a living, squirming thing. The texture of the cover was soft and fleshy. He drew the book close to his face and felt sick again. The faded yellow binding was like parched human skin. Looking closely he could make out a few coarse black hairs that seemed to be growing from the cover.

Then he laughed weakly.

What was there to be alarmed about? Dead protoplasm was simply so much inert chemical. Protein matter, if he remembered his college biology correctly. Didn't they make his shoes from tanned cowhide? Tibbets laughed more strongly—pleased with his control over himself. He had reasoned away blind panic like an educated man. Now he examined the book with interest. Faint blue lettering traced out a pattern on the cover that seemed at first to be the aimless wanderings of subcutaneous veins. Then he found the tracings formed a word—he recognized one or two letters from the Greek alphabet. Tibbets cursed. This mysterious book was written in Greek—a language he had never mastered in school. Then looking again, he saw the title in English—in conventional newsprint capitals! "The Conjur-ation of Demons." He chuckled. A most obliging book. If you couldn't read it, it translated itself. The blue vein-like letters pulsed faintly on the page. Tibbets had the positive conviction that if he scratched the book deeply it would bleed an appalling amount of blood.

Some instinct of survival sent a hesitant shiver through his body. There was no more question in his mind that he was handling a supernatural object. For a few seconds he paused,

then swiftly drained his glass and opened the book. The brandy had extinguished what little prudence he had. It came as a slight relief to find that the inside lettering was something other than living capillaries and that a fairly ordinary grade of parchment constituted the rest of the volume.

The technique for conjuring demons, as disclosed in the book, presented no unusual difficulties as far as methodology went. A few of the necessary magical ingredients were admittedly hardly obtainable in ordinary society but still not so rare as to deter a curious person. Near the end of the book he found a series of very life-like portraits which all bore signatures written in blood. The first pictures showed men with classic features, not a few of them wearing olive wreath crowns and appearing to be early Greek philosophers. Then came faces unmistakably Arab, then some Romans, one even with legion helmet and the look of an emperor; cowed monks followed, then kingly portraits, crowned and bearded, and finally faces that resembled modern makers of history—soldiers, writers, princes, scientists, bankers. On the very last page was the well-remembered features of Uncle Tibbets with his name spelled out neatly in caked blood. Tibbets roared with

laughter and stumbled out to refill his glass.

"So that's how the old boy got so filthy rich! I'll be damned if he didn't get damned in the process!" Then he laughed some more and returned to the book.

The last hundred or so pages were all illustrated. "A catalogue of satisfied users! What an advertisement—what a promotion scheme! Got to hand it to those devils. I'm ready to try a little magic myself." Tibbets shook with keen enjoyment over the situation. "That old demon is sure some salesman. If I had a little corpse fat I'd call him up and tell him so myself."

AS HE slammed the book shut a slip of paper flew out. It was a bookmark he hadn't noticed before. He picked it up and saw that it contained the neat handwriting of his uncle. The paper bore a list of substances and a reference to certain cabinets in the study. Tibbets sat up straight. This was a supernatural challenge! The ingredients were the ones needed to generate the most potent spell in the book. Already his shrewd mind was weighing the advantages of summoning a demon. He had not the slightest doubt about the effectiveness of the conjuration book. There were too many proofs presented in the book itself—in portrait form!

Tibbets raced into the study and began to search for the ritual materials. Some of the substances were obviously supplied by chemical houses, certain others could only have been procured by criminal means. From a lead cannister he poured a glowing powder onto the bare floor in the outline of a crude pentagram.

"Radioactive," muttered Tibbets drunkenly. "This is one modern demon! Real 20th century stuff."

His other preparations took three hours. The study had been fitted out partly as a laboratory and this allowed the rapid completion of many steps that would have occupied a medieval wizard many long days. Shortly before midnight he cast aside the last vestige of skepticism and began the incantation that climaxed the ceremony.

The response was almost instantaneous. A copper-hued individual of average size stood within the glowing pentacle. Tibbets had seen certain stained glass windows in European churches which professed to illustrate scenes from Hell. He had a new respect for those anonymous artists. What he had taken to be caricatures he now knew were mosaics modeled from life—exact down to the last goat-like detail. A few wisps of smoke carried across to Tibbets' nostrils the smell of burnt flesh.

This was no olfactory illusion since the demon had a very charred appearance. Tiny coals sparked on the creature's body and no amount of restless slapping could ever quite smother them all.

"It must be hot where you come from," said Tibbets in a flippant tone.

"Not at all," answered the demon blandly, turning to face Tibbets and giving up on a very persistent ember. "One can't burn up time answering a call without getting burned oneself. Friction, you know. That was a very urgent spell you used. I came as fast as possible."

"Are you—ah—in shape to do business?" asked Tibbets.

"Do not be concerned about me," said the demon. "What is it you wish for yourself?"

"First, tell me what are the conditions of any agreement we may draw up?"

"The same simple ones that are ascribed by legend and tradition to all supernatural pacts. For services rendered, we require the unconditional assignment to us of the one commodity humans possess that can be transferred to our continuum. The ego, soul, spirit—call it what you will. The natural resources of our own realm are too skimpy in this substance. We are forced to a blackmarket trade with humans for this material and as you can

see, the journey to this world entails no little hardship for us. I am roundly singed. I wouldn't be surprised if seeing me in this condition has led many traders, possibly even you, to visualize my habitat as one having an unfavorable climate. Nothing could be further from the truth."

Tibbets was not so drunk as to believe this propaganda. But he was still ready to bargain. "What must I do?" he asked.

"Sign your name to the last page of the book and you shall have whatever you wish."

"You must have forgotten," smiled Tibbets. "The last page bears a facsimile of my late, lamented uncle."

"Look again," commanded the fiend.

Tibbets opened the book. Another page had appeared after his uncle's picture. He also noticed that a tiny thorn in the book had pierced one of his fingers. This was to supply the appropriate ink. Tibbets signed with his blood.

"It is done. Now, what do you wish?"

"I wish the powers of a demon! I command you to give me the supernatural attributes of a demon! I want power greater than yours!"

"I can give you power only equal to mine. There are laws of economy even in my universe."

"Then give me such power!" demanded Tibbets. "I will be a god among men!"

"With our power comes certain weaknesses. Churches, for instance, will be barred to you. Many who trade with us like the consolations of religion—especially when they near their end. This will be denied you. I knew a bishop who told me that were it not for his prayers, he would have lost his mind long before I came for him. Then there are other hazards—."

"Never mind! Power satisfies all wants. That is my choice. I have signed the book, you must give me what I ask. Power equal to yours!"

"It is yours," spoke the demon.

TIBBETS experienced no physical change. Doubt entered his mind. He pointed to a large desk. "Burn!" he commanded. To his incredulous eyes, every atom of wood and paint was instantly oxidized to ash. He gave a silent word of command and the ashes turned to gold.

The demon spoke. "Some things you cannot do, like creating life. Some things you dare not do, like taking life. Remember, this is a protected preserve. If you try to destroy it, powers greater than yours will dispose of you in a manner that even I find unpleasant to think of. And where I come from, unpleasant-

ness is the ordinary run of things."

"Demon, you needn't worry," answered Tibbets elatedly. "I'll live like a benevolent god. Then, when you come for me, you'll see a power equal to your own ready to resist you. I'm immortal, as you are, and strong enough to keep you from being too persistent a caller."

With these words, Tibbets launched a lightening bolt at the demon who side stepped adroitly and began to disappear. All that remained was a persistent laughter that followed the dissolving fiend's parting words: "I'll see you—soon!"

It took a minute for Tibbets to realize that the laughter was supernatural. He stopped it by preventing the air molecules from vibrating in the old house. This small triumph greatly encouraged him. In a vague sort of way, he realized that he drew energy from another sphere, where apparently it was more abundant, and that he could transmit it in any form to any place he could see, could remember, or could imagine. This energy also permitted considerable manipulation of matter—gross and molecular. He could transmute elements, levitate objects and even make solids condense into ether. The scope of his powers amazed him. He realized he still had a whole lifetime to ex-

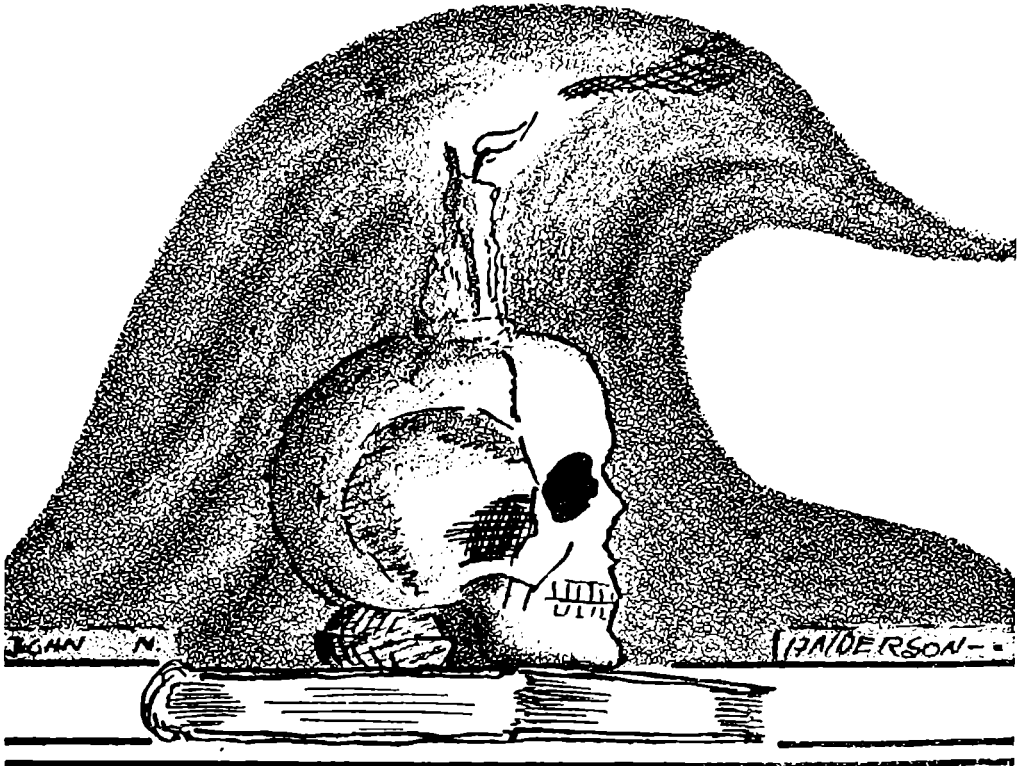
periment and further perfect his talents. This gave him confidence to believe he could survive the inevitable return of the demon.

"As a fledgling demon, it's only right that I go out and celebrate," Tibbets said to himself. "But first to remove the evidences of my little session in sorcery."

TIBBETS stepped up to the chalked pentagram and tried to erase it with his heel. He was very surprised to find his feet would not penetrate the mystic diagram. Then he understood. No demon could pass the magic chalk—in either direction. He

shrugged. A small matter. It merely proved he really was a demon. The second small disappointment came when he saw the conjuration book was missing. The demon had recovered his property before vanishing. Fair enough, Tibbets granted. Demonic power for a useless signature. He laughed some more as he restored the study to order. Then he drove back to the city at a speed greater than the manufacturer of his car would have believed possible.

New York City, as Tibbets rightly knew, contained places where even the damned were welcome. And if you weren't



damned when you went in, you were by the time you left. He parked his car on the sidewalk, made it transparent, and walked into a very questionable den. He leaned on the bar and watched the dancers through the smoky haze. The small band itself was almost invisible in the dimly lit room. Sipping drinks which the bar man never realized he was pouring, Tibbets finally settled his gaze on the girl with the lowest-cut evening gown. She had green eyes, blonde hair and a form designed from blueprints hijacked from heaven. Her companion, suddenly hearing a large number of whiskey glasses tinkling in his stomach, rushed from the room and fainted. At the emergency hospital he was considered a prodigy by the operating room staff.

The girl eventually found herself at the only vacant space at the bar—next to Tibbets. A bottle appeared at her elbow and poured automatically into a glass.

"Soda or ginger?" asked Tibbets politely.

The girl gulped the drink quickly. "Did you see that?" she asked.

"Yes," said Tibbets calmly as the bottle poured another drink.

The girl gripped the edge of the bar tightly. "Am I drunk or are you a magician?"

"The latter," admitted Tibbets.

"Hypnotism! You should be on the stage."

"The stage? Oh, no! I think I'll become president first. Or maybe king of New York—with a harem, of course. How would you like to be the first queen?"

"You're drunk."

"Let's dance."

"No. Let's wait for that new Cuban rhythm. The Ghumba. They'll play it next."

"The Ghumba? Never heard of it," said Tibbets. "How do you dance it?"

"You'll see," answered the girl. "They're getting ready to play it now."

"This Latin-American music never made much sense to me. Can't make head or tail out of it."

"It's really very simple. Most of the music is really African. So is the rhythm. The slaves brought it with them. It sort of fermented in Haiti and Cuba for a while. Some of it has changed but a lot of it is still played like it was in Africa. Listen, don't those drums sound like tom-toms?"

"Yeah, thanks for the information. Let's try the step."

THE girl shook his arm off. "Wait! Listen first. Isn't it fascinating? Can't you just see natives in some tribal clearing doing this dance? Maybe they're

celebrating a wedding. Or bringing rain. Maybe its evil music. Voodoo music! That band leader, he's real sinister looking, just like a witchdoctor! I bet it's a dance to ward off evil spirits—to drive devils away from the village feast."

"Say, do you always get like this when you hear drums and a couple of rattles?" said Tibbets very disappointedly. He had seen education do this to a lot of nice-looking girls.

"Don't you see things when you hear music?" asked the girl.

"Are you sick?"

"No, Mr. Tibbets, are you sick?"

"No, say, how did you know my name?"

"I've been waiting for you all evening. And you should be feeling sick—or at least very dizzy. The band has been playing a very potent demonical composition for almost two minutes. That Voodoo chant is one of the strongest things against our kind this side of the Atlantic. A genuine Bantu purification rite—almost unchanged from the original. I'm used to exorcisms, of course, but I don't pretend to like them. Sort of wilts one, don't you think?"

Tibbets was now hanging from the bar. His knees had experienced a sudden weakness and

every nerve tingled and burned. The demon, as usual, was lying because he didn't feel dizzy or sick. Just weak. He materialized a stream of silver bullets which he projected at the grinning fiend, now no longer camouflaged as a female. The bullets melted and silver-plated the demon's body. This armor protected the creature when Tibbets launched a shower of sharpened hickory stakes at the heart region of the fiend. Tibbets slipped closer to the floor and extravagantly sent the rest of his silver bullets, ordinary lead would have done as well, in the direction of the still chanting musicians. These also failed to reach their targets. By now the club was empty—the fleeing patrons confirmed teetotalers before they reached the door. One completely intoxicated customer stumbled into Tibbets' transparent automobile, drove it off by sheer reflex and later sold it to a circus.

The demon was bending over the half conscious Tibbets. "When the strain is too great, you will slip from this continuum into a region more suitable for an imitation demon. There you will be my sole concern for a very long time." The demon laughed cruelly in a way best described as demonic and vanished after Tibbets.

