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# Weird Tales

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1953

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Published bi-monthly by SHORT STORIES, INC., 9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York 20, N. Y.  
W. J. Delancy, President & Treasurer, R. M. Cogan, Secretary. Reentered as second-class  
matter January 24, 1940, at the Post Office, New York, N. Y., under the Act of March 3, 1879.  
Subscription rates: One year in the United States and possessions \$2.00; two years \$3.50.  
Canadian: one year \$2.25; two years, \$4.00. Foreign: one year \$2.30; two years, \$4.10.  
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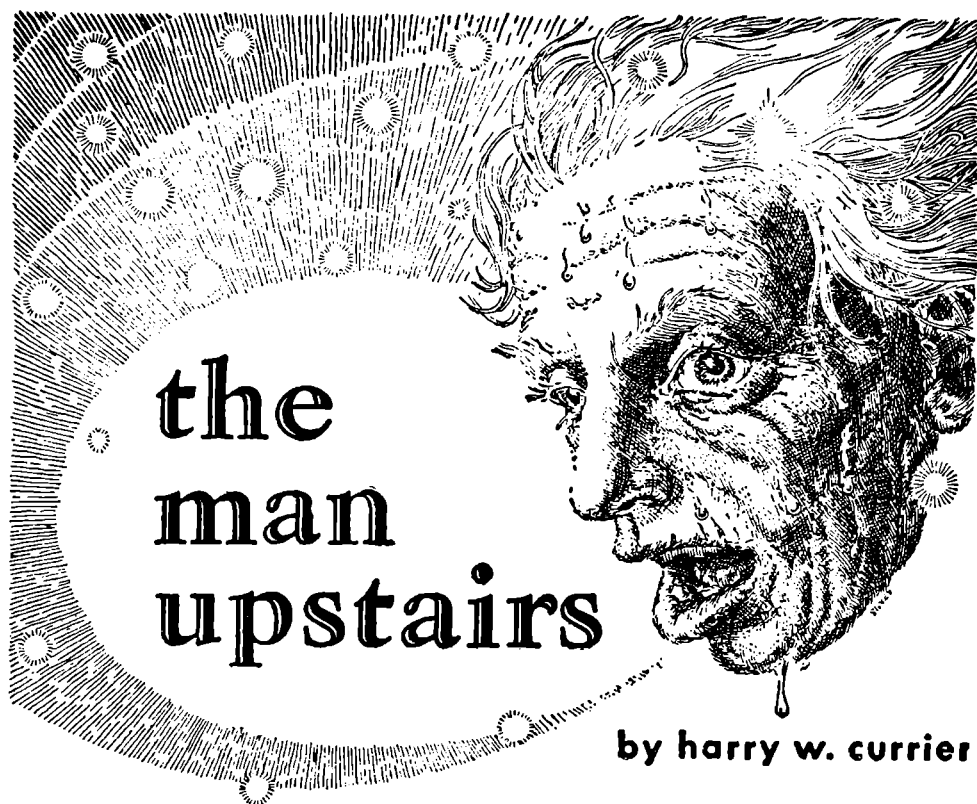


Printed in U. S. A.

Vol. 45, No. 5

D. McILWRAITH, Editor

*It was the same man; I recognized the scar across his left cheek.*



I

PROFESSOR DORE

THE first time I ever saw him was the day I moved into the apartment directly above his. I passed him in the lower corridor on my way to the stairs—a small elderly man with thinning gray hair and a stoop to his shoulders. As he looked into my eyes, he stopped dead in his tracks. All the color drained from his face. He cowered against the

wall. I thought he was going to faint. I wondered, and wondering, passed on.

"Queer old bird," I mused. I began unpacking and, as I tossed a soiled straw hat on a closet shelf, dismissed the seemingly unimportant incident with a shrug. Had I known what shocking events were to follow that chance meeting, I should not have taken the matter so lightly.

At the moment I had more important matters to occupy my mind. I had signed a contract

Heading by H. W. Silvey

with the University to begin teaching duties the following September as a Professor of Chemistry, but owing to the sudden illness of my predecessor, had been prevailed upon to take over his classes in this, the middle of the Spring term. This, I assure you, was no mean task. I had but a short time to familiarize myself with a thousand and one things.

I was in one of those old mansions on a quiet, tree-lined, side street. It had been remodeled for income property, but a genteel atmosphere, redolent of a by-gone day, still pervaded the house and grounds. I smiled to myself as I spied the old-fashioned air vent in the living room floor near the center table. It obviously had been installed before centralized heating came into general use. Its purpose was to allow the warm air from below to penetrate the upper floors. It was now permanently closed; the house was heated from a basement furnace.

In addition to the living room, there was a comfortable bedroom with bath, and a kitchenette with every modern convenience.

I naturally assume this personal history is dull and uninteresting, but find it necessary to explain who I am and how I happened to move into these rooms above the man I . . . But I am digressing.

I saw him only once again. So

far as I know, it was the second time in my entire existence. It was the next evening and our meeting was much the same as the first. I was approaching the stairs and as I was opposite his door, it opened. He wore a hat and coat and apparently was on his to the street. When he saw me, the terrified expression returned.

He shrank back into the room and slammed the door. I heard him fumble the lock hurriedly into place. That is all I know except that is the night I brought home from the laboratory the fatal bottle of oxalic acid.

## II

### DOCTOR WELLS

I have met with another of those terrifying experiences. He has come back as I have always known he would. I could not be mistaken. There could be no two men in the world with the same beak-like nose and deep-set, burning black eyes; the same identical scar across the left cheek. I have seen him twice before and then only for an instant, but how the memory of each meeting burns into my very soul! I have seen him only twice before and each time one dear to me has suffered a violent death.

A million times I have conjured up in my mind the things

I would say and do when that inevitable third meeting transpired. I did exactly nothing. The suddenness of the encounter turned my blood to water. Oh, he was amiable enough! He merely stared at me curiously for a moment, and passed me with what was meant to be a pleasant smile. That was last evening, just twenty-four hours ago. Since then, I have been unable to eat or sleep or to think clearly. Otherwise I should not have been such a blind fool as to furtively enter his apartment.

After a nerve-wracking night, I had summoned courage in the bright light of day to glean from the housekeeper the information that he called himself Professor Dore and that he had been appointed to the Chemistry Department to replace Doctor Carlton. Innocently enough my informant enlarged on my inquiry by saying the Professor had requested his apartment be attended to in the afternoons as it would then be unoccupied. He would be in his laboratory from one until after five o'clock.

I sat thinking for a long time. I made a desperate resolve. He called himself Professor Dore. To me that only was a name. I, and only I, knew what a vile menace lay behind that name. And yet actually what did I know about the man himself? I contemplated going to the police and proving

to them the person I had seen on those two tragic occasions really existed and was not a figment of my imagination as they had claimed. But what evidence had I? I might point to any man on the street faintly resembling my description of four years ago and say, "That is he," but they would not believe me—any more than they believed me then.

It was at that moment, remembering the housekeeper's mention of his purported daily absence, the wild idea took possession of me. I would enter his apartment in search of evidence. I broke into a cold sweat at the thought of such action but stuck valiantly to my purpose. There was no other way.

**I**T WAS a little after three. Summoning every ounce of courage I possessed, I made my way up the stairs. The house was quiet. There was no one in sight.

Gaining entrance to his rooms was easy. Too easy! The door was unlocked. Had I been in a normal frame of mind, I might have wondered.

I entered stealthily and snapped the spring lock into place behind me. I could not risk being disturbed. I assured myself I was alone.

I began my search in the bedroom which had not yet been made up. I searched the clothespress, the suits on the hangers,

the bags. I looked through every compartment in the chest of drawers and the bureau. I searched the medicine cabinet. I even lifted the mattress. There was nothing except the usual articles one would expect to find in a man's room.

I looked at my watch. I had consumed ten minutes. I had plenty of time. I turned to the living room.

I searched the desk. There were papers, many of them, but nothing to indicate Professor Dore was anything but what he pretended to be. I was replacing the last drawer when. . . .

"Looking for something, Doctor?"

I whirled. He was standing with his back to the closed entrance door, smiling cynically.

"How—how did you. . . ." I stammered inanely.

"How did I get in without you hearing me? I live here. Remember?"

"But I thought you. . . ."

"Yes, I know. You thought I'd be busy for the rest of the day. Very nice of you to call on me—when I'm out."

I sank weakly down on the settee near the window.

"That's right, Doctor. Relax and we'll have a sociable little chat. I've been looking forward to this visit."

He moved a straight backed chair from the wall, placed it not

more than four feet in front of me and sat on it reverse-wise. He gazed at me meditatively for a long moment.

"You seem shocked, Doctor. But don't be frightened. I'm not going to hurt you. Let's discuss this matter from the very beginning, shall we? I think you'll see how preposterous the whole thing really is." His voice was soft and soothing, a tone one might use to allay the fears of a frightened child.

I did not answer. There was nothing for me to say even though I had been capable of speech. He seemed perfectly at ease. When he spoke again his voice still carried that low insinuating quality.

"It will be four years ago this August, will it not, Doctor, since you, with your wife and very lovely daughter, drove up to Lake Forest to spend that hot, sultry afternoon at the lakeside resort. You'd had your picnic lunch and the three of you were sunning yourselves on the sandy beach when suddenly your daughter rose and said it was too stifling, that she was going to swim to the raft a quarter of a mile out in the lake. There was no one swimming at that particular moment but the beach was lined with sun-bathers. Many a head was turned admiringly to watch as her beautiful body plunged into the water. You and

your wife had also been watching proudly, when suddenly a man dashed past you toward the lake—a man in bathing trunks. You did not think much about it at the time but one-half hour later you were giving his description to the police.

"You had seen a tall man with dark curly hair, deep-set black eyes, a hawk nose and most important of all, a vivid crescent-shaped scar on his left cheek. You had seen this man enter the water directly behind your daughter. You had seen him catch up with her. You had watched through your binoculars until they were almost to the raft. You saw the man dive. Immediately your daughter began thrashing about and screaming for help. The fifty-odd people on the shore dashed to the water's edge. Several expert swimmers rushed to her rescue. But they were too late.

"When they recovered the body some time later, she was beyond help."

**I** WAS speechless. I sat as in a trance, living again the grief of that tragedy. The low voice went on.

"You told the police what you had seen. They questioned the other bathers, who swore no one had entered the water with your daughter. Even your wife, grief-stricken as she was, made an em-

phatic statement the girl was alone.

"The verdict of the coroner's jury, that one Jean Wells had come to her death by accidental drowning, officially closed the case. But not for you, did it, Doctor? You knew what you had seen and you were frightened. Because why should a man be visible to you and only you—a man whom no one else could see?" I felt a cold sweat oozing from my body.

"A year and a half went by. Then the blow fell again." He paused and lit a cigarette, never taking his eyes from mine. He inhaled deeply and blew a thick cloud of smoke toward the ceiling. He was enjoying himself immensely.

"It was mid-December. You and your wife were at your summer cottage high up on the mountain. You had gone there because you wanted quiet while you prepared an important paper for the Psychical Research Society. But now a snowstorm was threatening and, though it was late in the afternoon, you thought it advisable to return home before the one narrow road was blocked and you were trapped by the snowfall.

"Your wife was driving. You were half way down the mountain when the car went out of control. It smashed through a guard rail and plunged a hundred

feet down into the canyon. When they found the wreck, your wife was dead. You were unconscious for hours, but when you were able to talk, you told what the police later described as a wild and fantastic tale.

"But you knew what you had seen, didn't you, Doctor? You knew that the man who was with your daughter when she drowned, and the man who reached over your wife's shoulder and wrenched the wheel from her grasp, were one and the same. You were certain now such a man existed.

"But there was one thing about the car you had forgotten. You had forgotten you were using your wife's single-seated coupe. That's why the police wouldn't believe you—because there was no back seat. There was only a two foot covered space where it would have been impossible for anyone to have hidden and performed the murderous act you claim to have seen.

"Yes, for the second time in the short period of a year and a half, the great Doctor Wells, the undisputed authority on the occult, had made a complete fool of himself before the police, the newspapers, and the general public."

I could listen no longer.

"I'm getting out of here," I cried childishly, "and you're not going to stop me."

I MADE a wild dash for the door. He did not move.

How I got down the stairs to my own rooms, I shall never know. It was hours later before my mind began to function properly. Who was this man? Why had he taken my daughter's life? Why had he murdered my wife and nearly murdered me?—I, who had never harmed a human being in my life. Why had the authorities not believed my story? Have I gone completely mad? I believe not. I am positive beyond any doubt whatsoever, I had seen that man at the lake and in the car as clearly and distinctly as I had seen him in the apartment above.

It is seven o'clock in the evening, now. A short time ago, I thought of making one last desperate effort to convince the police a murderer is at large. It was no use; he was in the corridor watching my door. There is no escape. I know now it is only a matter of time.

I have prepared a pot of strong, black coffee, thinking it might help quiet my nerves. I have been sipping it as I sit here at the table writing this chronicle.

I feel ill. It has been so long since I have eaten solid food, this coffee does not agree with me. I am having difficulty swallowing and my mouth is paining severely. Perhaps I burned myself with the hot liquid.

I HAVE returned from the bathroom, where I vomited blood. My lips and mouth feel stiff like clay, and I find it difficult to swallow. I am terribly ill.

It seems strange, but my mind is undergoing a lucid transition. Past events which seemed blurred and unreal, like a motion picture out of focus, are now becoming clear-cut and distinct. The lake—the man with the scar! The car coming down the mountain side—the man with the scar! And now upstairs—the man with the scar!

What a blind fool I've been! Now I know who he is. I know—I know! The man—upstairs—is . . .

### III

#### INSPECTOR JONES Of the Homicide Bureau

I WAS finishing dinner that evening, when I received a telephone message from headquarters, a death had taken place over at 1020 Oak Avenue in the University district. It was suspected homicide. Boyd and Roth, two of my ace assistants, had already been notified. Also, a patrol car had answered the call. Kissing my wife goodbye and telling her not to wait up for me, I got into my car.

The early evening cross-town traffic was heavy. It took me a

good forty minutes to reach the house.

As I entered the front door, the Medical Examiner was just completing his examination. The body of a frail wisp of a man was lying half out of the open doorway of a front apartment. After viewing the situation I turned to the Doctor.

"Well, Doc, what do you make of it?"

He rose and shook his head.

"Poison administered orally. I can't tell what kind until I make a more thorough examination."

"Maybe this would help, Inspector." Boyd stepped gingerly over the body and handed me a coffee cup with about an inch of the black liquid remaining. "We found this on the center table along with a percolator partially empty. Not only that, but . . ."

I held up a restraining hand. "Not so fast. Let's take one thing at a time." I gave the cup to the Doctor.

"I'll have the coffee analyzed," he said. "It shouldn't take long. If it contains the lethal dose, we can check that against the results of the autopsy and make a positive decision as to the cause of death."

Within a few minutes the ambulance had come and gone, and the Police photographers and finger-print experts had finished their work and departed. I was seated in the book-lined living



room of the apartment, which looked more like a study, listening to the details of the case from my assistants.

"I placed that piece of paper exactly where the cup and saucer were sitting on the table," said Roth in conclusion. "And these papers were lying beside them. You should read them immediately. They tell a whale of a story." He handed me a couple of sheets of paper covered with writing in long-hand.

While they busied themselves about the place in search of any type of poison or poison container, I read and re-read the amazing document. Their search revealed nothing, but this paper certainly did. It told a whale of a story, as Roth had put it.

"It seems this is going to greatly simplify matters," I said. It was a lead a homicide officer gets once in a lifetime. It would considerably shorten the investigation. I lost no time in following it up.

**F**IRST I had Roth phone the Medical Examiner and give him a detailed description of the symptoms suffered by the victim before death. Next I wanted to get a line on this mysterious man upstairs. The whereabouts of every tenant in the house would have to be checked for the hours in which I was interested, but that could come later. I had one of the

patrolmen bring in the house-keeper.

She was a refined-looking woman in her middle fifties. Her attractive face was molded in grief. Tears glistened in her eyes but otherwise she was quite composed.

"Now, Mrs. Estes, what about this Doctor Wells? What can you tell me about him?"

"Well," she began hesitantly, "there really isn't much to tell. After the death of his wife and daughter, he decided to give up his home. He came to me highly recommended as a quiet, studious type. That's the only kind of people I take—the quiet type. He seemed quite pleased with the apartment; he wanted a peaceful atmosphere in which he could study and write to his heart's content. He has . . ." She dabbed her eyes with a handkerchief and corrected herself. "He had been here over two years. He had few visitors, and though he was only across the corridor, I saw very little of him."

"He rarely went out, then?"

"Yes, I suppose so."

"Did it ever seem to you he appeared afraid of something or somebody?"

"To tell you the truth, I never thought about it one way or another. But since you mention it, it could be that his timidity bordered on apprehension. On the few occasions I came in contact

with him, his eyes were forever darting about like a frightened bird's."

"Did you see him at all yesterday or today?"

"Yes, I did. He came to my door this morning ostensibly to pay his rent. He asked many questions about Professor Dore, the new tenant."

I switched my interrogation.

"You say you rent only to people with excellent recommendations. By whom was this Professor Dore recommended?"

"The University, sir. I get mostly University people."

"My men tell me he is not now in his rooms. Do you have any idea where he might be at this time of night?"

"It so happens I do. The outside door is kept locked after ten o'clock in the evening and each tenant has his own key. I had forgotten to give him one. A few minutes before this—this dreadful thing happened, he knocked on my door to remind me. He said he and Dean Brownell were on their way to a faculty dinner at Memorial Hall and he didn't know how late he'd be out."

"Dean Brownell!" I exclaimed. "Do you, by any chance, mean the Dean of Chemical Engineering?"

"I do, sir. I know him well. He was a close friend of my late husband."

This was a break for me. I also

knew him well. In fact, we had both belonged to the same Country Club for years and had played many a round of golf together. He was held in high esteem by acquaintances and colleagues alike.

I immediately gave Roth orders to take the patrolmen and the radio car and bring the Dean and the Professor back to the house.

"And you might acquaint them with a few facts of the case," I added. "It'll save time."

I returned my attention to the woman.

"Mrs. Estes, did you see or hear anything unusual between three and four o'clock this afternoon?"

"No, I didn't. I was busy in my apartment and heard nothing. But perhaps Mrs. Small, the maid, can help you," she offered. "She's on duty at that time."

"Thank you, Mrs. Estes. That will be all. Will you ask Mrs. Small to come in, please."

MRS. SMALL'S personal appearance belied her name. She was a tall, raw-boned, incongruous-looking woman with thin gray hair, a large nose, a tiny red mouth and snapping black eyes. I sized her up as a very determined female, sure of herself, and with a mind nobody could change, once it was set. An excellent witness in any court.

"Mrs. Estes tells me you are on duty part of every afternoon," I began without preamble. "Is that true?"

"Yes, sir."

"Were you here this afternoon between three and four o'clock?"

"I was."

"Now, Mrs. Small, I want you to think carefully and tell me as nearly as you can what time you came on duty and what you did between the hours of three and four.

"That's easy. I live just around the corner. I get paid by the hour. I come to work at exactly three and leave at exactly four-thirty. I do the same things at the same time every day. I take clean linen to the apartments; I make the beds. I dust the furniture. I open the windows and air the place. I do what any other maid does. Anything else?"

I drew a long breath.

"But sometimes something unusual happens," I suggested helpfully. "Like for instance . . ."

"Like for instance the time I entered Mr. Birdwell's bedroom and found him standing stark naked in front of a full length mirror? Yeah, sometimes something unusual does happen," she agreed dryly.

I was getting nowhere fast. I could see I'd have to pin her down with yes or no questions.

"Let's get back to this afternoon," I ventured meekly.

"While you were working on the second floor, did you notice anything you might wonder at?"

"Yes."

"Did you see someone who did not belong there at that time of day?"

"Yes."

"Professor Dore?"

"No."

"You didn't see Professor Dore?"

"No."

"Doctor Wells?"

"Yes."

"What was he doing?"

"He was coming out of Professor Dore's apartment."

"Let's go back to the beginning and start over.

"Tell me what happened and how."

She seemed to loosen up a little.

"Well, I was coming along the hall with clean linen over my arm. I was just about to fit my passkey into the lock of Mr. Dore's apartment, when the door suddenly flew open and little Doctor Wells whished past me like a cyclone. Small as he is, he almost upset me. But he didn't pause for an instant. I don't think he even saw me, he was that frightened. He rushed down the stairs. I passed it off as just one of those queer things, and entered the apartment. I thought sure Professor Dore would be there and that Doctor Wells had

been visiting him, but there was nobody in the whole place."

**I** SAT up at that.

"Do you mean to say," I ejaculated, "that a few seconds after Doctor Wells rushed from the room, you entered and there was no one there?"

"I do say it. And I thought it was funny like you do, that a man like the Doctor would be in someone else's rooms where he didn't belong, when there was no one home."

"Mrs. Small, I want you to think carefully. When you entered Professor Dore's living room, did you notice any article of furniture out of place, such as a chair? Or did you detect any odor of cigarette smoke?"

"It's part of my job to put misplaced furniture back where it belongs. Everything was already in place. I detest the odor of cigarette smoke, and would have noticed it immediately. There was none."

"What about the windows? Were they all closed?"

"Every one. I had to unlock them before I could open them to let in the fresh air."

The whole incident was unbelievable, and yet I had no reason to doubt her word. She seemed firm enough in her convictions.

"Then you say there was no one in the apartment; the win-

dows were closed and locked; there was no disarranged furniture; there was no odor of cigarette smoke."

"How many times do I have to answer that? That's exactly what I say."

"And you're absolutely sure of that?" I pressed, the dead man's last words before my eyes.

She bristled, and I could imagine the porcupine quills rising along her spine.

"Listen, Mister. I know what I know and I know what I see and what I don't see. When I say there wasn't any of those things in that apartment, there just wasn't any, that's all."

I was forced to agree with her. That was all.

A few moments after I had dismissed her, Boyd and the patrolmen arrived with Brownell and Dore.

**I** DECIDED it would be better to first talk to the scholarly Dean. There was perplexity in his mild blue eyes. After friendly greetings, I got down to business.

"You have already been informed as to what took place here tonight.

"Were you acquainted with Doctor Wells?" I asked.

"Only by reputation. He was an avid student of the occult and had written many books on the subject."

"How well do you know this Professor Dore?"

He smiled. "Very well, indeed. It so happens we grew up together in the same small eastern town, and became bosom pals. Later, we roomed together at college, and after graduation, obtained teaching positions at the same University. Eventually, I decided to come West; he preferred to stay in the East. That was ten years ago."

"Then until recently, you hadn't seen him for ten years?"

"Oh yes, many times. I usually spend my annual vacation in the East, so we managed to get together every year for a few weeks. When we weren't together, we corresponded constantly—at least twice a month."

"Had he ever visited you out here?"

"Not until now, when I secured for him the position he now holds. But why this interest in Fred? Surely, you don't think he had anything to do with this regrettable death?"

I ignored the question. I had Professor Dore brought in.

As he hesitated in the entrance, I scrutinized him carefully. Doctor Wells' description fitted him perfectly—except for one thing. There most assuredly was nothing vicious or sinister in his demeanor or attitude. Quite the opposite; he seemed shy and awkward in my

presence. He sat timidly on the edge of the chair I offered, and his gaze flitted nervously about the room. I came to the point immediately.

"Professor Dore, where were you this afternoon?"

He seemed startled by the abruptness of the question.

"Why—why I was in the laboratory."

"You have classes at that time?"

"Yes, sir, from one until five o'clock."

I looked at the Dean. He nodded in confirmation. I turned back to Dore.

"I'm interested only in the hour between three and four. Do you have the names of the students who were present at that time?"

"Yes, I do. I wrote their names and addresses in my class-book. They are segregated according to hours."

"Where is this book now?"

"It is in the top drawer of the desk in my classroom office."

"Would it be possible for me to obtain it now—tonight?"

It was the Dean who answered.

"I'm sure it would." He glanced at his watch. "There are three janitors now working in the building. If you care to send for it, I'll phone and give orders to admit your men."

While he was phoning, I told

Boyd and Roth to get that book and check Dore's alibi with every student in that three o'clock class. They were on their way immediately.

The Dean broke the connection. The phone rang; I answered. It was the Medical Examiner. I listened carefully.

"Oxalic acid!" I exclaimed. "Are you sure?"

"Positive. There can be no doubt about it." I thanked him and hung up.

"Doctor Wells was poisoned with oxalic acid," I said.

Professor Dore's face turned a sickly yellow. The two men stared at each other in stark consternation.

"It couldn't be," muttered the Dean, more to himself than to anyone. "Why that's impossible."

It was my turn to be surprised. There evidently was something here I didn't know about. I followed his gaze to the air vent in the ceiling.

"I wonder," he murmured thoughtfully. He turned to me. "Inspector, if you'll come upstairs with us, I think we can solve this whole deplorable affair. If you'll have one of your patrolmen bring a screw driver," he added.

I learned early in my career that when a suspect or a witness wants to talk, let him talk without interruption; when he wants

to act, let him act without asking questions. I did so now.

Professor Dore was in a bad state of nerves. The Dean had to assist him from his chair.

Except for the book lined walls, the apartment above was almost an exact counterpart of the one below.

Professor Dore sat with his head in his hands. No one spoke. The Dean took the screw driver from the patrolman. He got down on his knees and removed the screws that held the grating of the air vent in place. He laid the grating to one side and bent over, scrutinized the inside of the opening carefully, and emitted a soft exclamation. He rose, dusted his knees with meticulous care, then looked up at me. He was slightly pale and his forehead was beaded with perspiration. He pointed to the opening.

"There it is, just as I suspected. If you'll get down and look closely, you'll see a hole in the corner of that vent."

I did as he requested. It was there, almost a quarter of an inch in diameter. Looking more closely, I could see, directly below, the paper on the table in the Wells' apartment—the paper which had been placed in the exact spot of the coffee cup from which the Doctor had drunk the lethal potion. But what did that portend? I had been patient. It was time to ask questions.

"What about it?" I asked. "I don't get it."

"You will," he answered weakly, "when I get through explaining. It's just one of those grotesque tragedies that might happen to anyone." He walked over and put a protective arm about Dore's shoulders.

"Regardless of what the general public thinks," he began, "we of the teaching profession do not receive enormous salaries. It is sometimes necessary to economize and cut corners where we can. That's what Fred had in mind when he brought home the oxalic acid."

He bent over his stricken friend. "Where is it?" he asked softly. The Professor nodded toward the bedroom.

**I** EXPECTED the Dean to return with a bottle of liquid, but he held in his hand a slightly soiled straw hat. He placed it on the table before me.

"I don't know whether you are familiar with the conducive qualities of oxalic acid, but it is used commercially as a straw bleach. To save the expense of professional cleaning, Fred was going to bleach that straw hat himself. When we came up here tonight, he had with him the bottle of acid solution. We were in a great hurry because we were already late for the dinner. As he passed, he removed the bottle from his

pocket and placed it on the edge of the center table. He tossed his coat over a chair and went into the bedroom to change clothes."

He paused and wiped his face with a handkerchief.

"When he returned to the room, he grabbed up his coat and was putting it on while on his way to the hall door. Somehow, as he passed the table, the tail of the coat swished around and knocked the bottle, with a crash, onto the grating of the air vent. We got a towel and sopped up the liquid as best we could, but most of it had run through the grating. He said he'd clean it up when he returned. Of course, had we foreseen what was to happen . . ." His voice broke slightly. "And that's the way it was," he finished lamely.

**W**ELL, there was my case all wrapped up in a neat little package with a pink ribbon around it, and handed to me on a golden salver. Or was it? I knew what poison had been used; I knew how it had been administered. I knew who the killer was; I knew it was an apparent accident. But I was far from satisfied. I still had the last written words of a dying man burning a hole in my pocket—words that could not be ignored.

After Professor Dore had been lodged in a cell for the night,

I entered my office as the phone was ringing. It was Boyd.

"We found twelve of the fifteen students listed, Inspector, and Dore's alibi stands up. He wasn't out of anyone's sight for more than two or three minutes at a time."

"Somehow, I wasn't surprised. I told Boyd and Roth to go home and get some rest.

AT TEN o'clock the next morning, I was in the District Attorney's office. I placed all the facts before him.

He read and re-read the Wells document.

"Seems incredible," he said, "do you suppose the old boy could have been screwy?"

"If he was, it was because of fear. He was a brilliant man—a student and an author."

"That's no criterion. Many a brilliant mind has been known to snap under the strain of overwork and for other reasons."

"That's true," I countered, "but he was sane enough to know he was going to die and who was going to do away with

him. He practically named the killer."

"What about this Professor Dore? Could he possibly have staged the whole thing?"

"Absolutely not. Although the heads were clean and shiny, the screws of that grating were rusted in place. It took all of Brownell's strength to remove them. That grate hadn't been lifted in years; I'll guarantee that."

"And this hole? Was it easily discernable?"

"It was not. It was so located that when the grate was replaced, it was impossible to see it. I tried it. Anyhow, how would Dore know a cup of coffee would be in that exact spot at that precise moment?"

He could see I was becoming angry at his doubts of the thoroughness of my investigation.

"Keep cool," he admonished. "I don't question your ability. It's up to you to do the investigating and get the evidence, not I. But there's certain legal angles to this case I'll have to look up. I'll call you later."



AT ONE o'clock that afternoon, the coroner's jury brought in a verdict that Doctor Wells had come to his death by accidental poisoning. There were no recommendations.

At three o'clock, the Prosecutor phoned me.

"Due to certain legal technicalities in this state," he announced judicially, "there is absolutely no charge on which we can hold Professor Dore responsible for the death of Doctor Wells."

I ordered the prisoner's immediate release.

I sat for a long time after that, gazing at the ceiling. I had a restless, dissatisfied feeling. Homicide cases ordinarily are from a cut and dried pattern. We follow a patterned investigation and reach a logical conclusion. I had followed that pattern up to a certain point; beyond that, events had taken charge of themselves. There were too many loose ends; too many unanswered questions. Somewhere there was something I had missed. I felt it; I knew it.

I started at the lake and went over the case again. The man with the scar rushing past the little Doctor to the water's edge, yet no one else could see him; the same man with the scar leaning from the back seat and twisting the wheel of a car from

a woman's grasp—a car which had no back seat; the man with the scar sitting in a room talking to another man—a room which the maid declared had been empty; the frightened Doctor Wells, alone at the table in his book-lined living room, writing what proved to be his obituary and drinking the poisoned coffee. His book-lined living room; books pertaining mostly to the occult! The occult!

IT HIT me like a blow between the eyes. I had the solution. It was the only answer to every unanswered question. And yet I was awed by its very import. It couldn't be, but it was; it fit every phase of the case like the proverbial glove.

We of the police are required of necessity to be a hard-headed, practical, down-to-earth lot. We go after cold, hard facts and we get them. I am no exception, but in this instance I was forced to accept as fact, a fantastic and illogical fantasy.

Had Doctor Wells been allowed to finish the last sentence before being overcome by the effects of the poison and groping blindly for help, beyond doubt that last sentence would have read . . .

"Now I know who he is. I know! I know! The man upstairs is—Death."

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