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"All his days had been given to unspeakable rites and unholy practices."

The Man Who Died Twice

By ELI COLTER

Strange is the story of the human monster who was known as Tartar Kellidreyfuss, and the murder of one who was already dead.

MAKE haste, Rodolfo, my best beloved of brothers; fetch to my bedside paper and pen and ink, and write down this dark record which I shall dictate to you. It is imperative that

we succeed in transcribing all, to the last horrescent detail, before I die; lest your own life pay the forfeit for our failure. I am young to die, am I not, Rodolfo? Only twenty-five years old yesterday, yet before

this day will have waned—I shall be dead.

But you are too young to die also, my brother. We always thought it so felicitous a circumstance that we could celebrate our birthdate anniversaries together, having been born on the same day but one year apart. Henceforth you must commemorate that anniversary alone, for I shall not allow this decree of death to be executed upon you who are guiltless of all offense and unanswerable for any responsibility in the matter. Fetch the writing-paraphernalia. You must obey me unquestioningly, as you have always obeyed me because I was the elder. Make haste, Rodolfo, while I have yet remaining sufficient strength to render articulate the appalling secret which burdens my brain. Make haste! Already the sweat of death creeps at the roots of my hair. . . .

Ah—back so soon? You are ready to begin? Considerate and obliging, as always.

There is so much about you that is commendable and admirable, Rodolfo. I have tried to evidence my affection and concern for you as we grew up, my brother, though I have not been inherently a loquacious or demonstrative man. I have striven to guide and guard you whenever there was the slightest need or opportunity for guidance and guardianship. In pursuit of that course, I would shield you now from shock and horror, if I could. I would write with my own hand this chronicle of base revelation, and spare you the odious task; but I cannot even do that.

Already my sight is beginning to dim, my strength is beginning to ebb from me. I must conserve all my physical stamina and mental capacity for the purpose of reciting to you with undeviating clarity this section of our family history.

Over two hundred years ago, Rodolfo, there was born into our family line a monster. You will know his name well; the accursed name of Tartar Kellidreyfuss.

Even his name was an abortion. What sort of name is that? Kellidreyfuss! What can be its genesis or its genealogical significance? None knows. It is of mongrel breed. And the name Tartar! His mother bestowed that name upon him, Rodolfo; because, as she said, in his father she had caught a Tartar, and she considered the boy doomed to be an ill-favored duplicate of his father.

There might have been more in her saying than met the ear, I have sometimes thought. It is possible that in declaring she had caught a Tartar she meant most literally what she said, that old Tartar Kellidreyfuss was descended from those Moslem and Turkish inhabitants of the Russian Empire who were remnants of the Mongol invasion of the Thirteenth Century.

What do you say, Rodolfo? You puzzle over the etymology of the word Tartar, or Tatar? But there is no riddle in it, my brother. It roots from the Ta-Ta Mongols of the Fifth Century, then extant in the northeast Gobi. The Khitans subjected them in the Ninth Century, and they migrated south to found the Mongol empire under Jenghiz Khan. Under the rule of his grandson, Batu, they moved westward toward the plains of Russia, driving with them numerous branches of the Turkish Ural-Altaians. So that, if old Tartar descended from the Tatars, one traces his lineage easily enough. True, if existing likenesses of him are faithful to their subject, there was no hint of the Mongol in his features. But the ethnographical features of present Tatars in European Russia show scarcely any trace of Mongolian blood. Old Tartar bore more resemblance to the Turks. So do the Tatars, Rodolfo.

But Tatar or no, whatever race or breed was in him, he lived and died a monster; and though he has been dead for over a hundred years, I want this statement to go down at the head of your record, Rodolfo: the statement that Tartar Kellidreyfuss is

solely and wholly the man at whose door all guilt and shame for this hideous offense lies.

I THINK he was born a monster, from the spawn of monsters that frequent some godless sphere beyond our human ken. He first saw light as human flesh in the ancient *schloss* crowning that dark forested mountain above the Rhine. Ah, the noble Rhine, Rodolfo! All along its seven hundred miles, from the Alpine glacier that cradles it, to the open sea that waits to receive it after its weary journey through thundering gorges, through that inland sea called Lake Constance, past cities and peaceful meadows and towering mountains, it is haunted by two thousand years' legends and memories of turbulent days and dark deeds. Along its banks once rolled the war cries of Teutons, Romans, Normans, Franks and Gauls. It viewed the passing pomp and plunder of chieftains and conquerors, from Cæsar and Attila to Napoleon and Charlemagne. But none of its whispered legends of dark deeds can compare with, let alone surpass, the unspeakable history of Tartar Kellidreyfuss.

It is said that on the day he was born that forested mountain shivered in the wild downpour of icy rain, that the ancient *schloss* groaned hollow echo to the deafening thunder which rocked and crashed about its moss-scarred stones, that the river boiled and hissed vain protest at the lightning bolts that tore its waters. Fitting advent for old Tartar, if the tale is true.

You remember the *schloss*, do you not, Rodolfo? Our ancestral castle. Our ancestral sepulcher, rather! Our ancestral reminder of what might have been a noble line had Tartar Kellidreyfuss never been born. You will remember our trip abroad with our father, the year before he died; when you were eighteen and I was nineteen. The interim is not a long period

over which to remember. I can see the enormous ruin still in my mind's eye, huddled there among the encroaching vines and trees on its mountain top, with the Rhine roaring past far below. I remember to this day the peculiar shrinking feeling I had as we followed our father through the outer gate, and through the several similar portals which opened beyond.

It was like passing through the successive doors of a safety vault, and I wondered whether we would ever emerge sane again. I remember our father's saying that a handful of men could have repelled an army there, and his pointing to the ponderous gates and the loopholes piercing the massive walls. I could hear the clang of arms and the clatter of horses' feet there in those roofless corridors. I could vision a mailed watchman standing guard. I shivered inwardly as I regarded the donjon keep, that grim old blood-washed tower; and the torture well, half filled with fallen stones bathed in a dank stench. Horrible! I felt that all the evil of time lurked there.

You say you had the same inarticulate terrors besetting you then, Rodolfo? I am not surprised. I had the impression at the time that you shared my vast unease inside that sinister ruin, and my speechless relief when we emerged from it in our father's wake and hurried recklessly down the mountain. Did you carry with you a vision of old Tartar there in all his ruthless power, when the *schloss* was intact and flourishing, my brother? So did I.

But it fell lamentably short of the grim reality. The old robber barons of the Rhine were kindly and benevolent citizens compared to him, Rodolfo; though (and the *schloss* was too thoroughly isolated and secluded for there to be any wonder in the fact) he did not betray his devotion to ghastly outrages until he was already old. He had never been considered an ordinary man, you understand. He was credited

with the powers of the occult, was regarded as what one would now term a mystic.

Mystic! That is far too humanitarian a term for the status old Tartar Kellidreyfuss had achieved, Rodolfo. He was superhuman and inhuman, though he was sly and cunning enough to prevent his fellow human beings from learning fully what manner of monster he was.

You have heard how he fled from the old *schloss* to America, bringing with him the fortune he had acquired and his one living relative, his great-grandson, then a small child. But I think you have not heard that the reason for his sudden flight was the whispered intelligence that all his holdings were to be confiscated. He had no mind to countenance what he considered so unfounded an outrage upon his person and his liberty. He knew well enough why such a ruthless course of retribution was to be leveled upon him.

He had acquired control over the forces that regulate life and death. He did not die at the age of a hundred and seventeen because he could not continue to live longer, Rodolfo. He simply passed out of this existence voluntarily because he had wearied of it, he had exhausted all its potentialities, and it no longer had any capacity to amuse him. All his days had been given to unspeakable rites and unholy practises. His guards and vassals had been faithful to him because they feared him, and because they were as foully evil as he. But no vile degradation can be concealed forever—on a mountain top! Too much was being whispered about his mystery-shrouded activities. He had nearly run his course if he would continue to be unmolested.

SO HE thumbed his nose at the Government that would confiscate his holdings, took his great-grandson and his fortune, and fled—leaving the Government's insolent executors nothing to find

but a gaunt and silent *schloss* whose echoing stone corridors were strewn with the mutilated corpses of the servitors who had bowed to and done his will so long. There were found, too, in that gloomy old structure, bones and half-preserved remains of his kin; since all his long line of posterity had been tortured and done to death by him for the sheer entertainment brutal murder afforded him, all but the small great-grandson he took with him, Lambeth Kellidreyfuss.

Why he had permitted little Lambeth to live is scarcely any mystery, when you realize, Rodolfo, that it could have been but for one reason—in the anticipation of visiting upon Lambeth sundry new methods of torture and indignities he was hatching in his monster's brain. And they were atrocities which would lack complete fulfilment if perpetrated on any human being less than a man of full maturity, in sound health. Therefore he took Lambeth with him when he fled, and watched over Lambeth and made certain that he was nurtured and guarded well as he grew up.

Yet he was of no mind to hasten his assault upon Lambeth: rather he delayed it, savoring, during his lengthening procrastination, all the ramifying possibilities of his diabolical scheme; like a slaver-jawed tiger ready to pounce, waiting, waiting.

So that, my brother, this situation had developed; here in these mountains of Arizona, near this desert town you and I love so well, old Tartar Kellidreyfuss, exile from his own country, lived in his big adobe house sheltered behind its high walls and its towering live-oak trees in an isolated canyon—the same stone and adobe house in which our great-grandfather lives now. He had reached the age of a hundred and seventeen. He was possessor of ten million dollars. He had acquired a mere handful of fear-ruled servitors. And Lambeth Kellidreyfuss had now become a mature man of twenty-five.

But Lambeth was not stupid. You realize that, Rodolfo. You have seen enough of him to know that the exact opposite is the case: Lambeth is, and was, infinitely shrewd and keen of perception. He was too intelligent to live so long with old Tartar, under the regard of old Tartar's veiled eyes and plotting brain, not to sense some hint of the old man's horrible intent toward him. Fear was born in Lambeth, and grew and increased until he was beside himself with dread and repulsion. He was watched so closely that no opportunity ever was granted him to escape from the old adobe house. In sheer desperation he turned to the only course left him. He determined to kill old Tartar, quickly, before old Tartar could lay obscene hands on him.

He did not know that old Tartar could read his mind. We can't ever search the minds of those who can read our own, can we, Rodolfo? They are too clever for us; they erect between us and themselves a mental wall of defense. And Lambeth was helpless as well as doomed. He was also not guiltless of avarice and selfishness. He wanted to live, but he wanted as well to live royally on the fortune old Tartar had amassed. He plotted cold-bloodedly to kill old Tartar, then: to search out and destroy whatever will old Tartar had made, so that he as sole heir would without delay or hindrance come into that vast inheritance.

But old Tartar foiled Lambeth's attempt with ridiculous ease, and laughed in his face, and cloistered himself in his most private quarters to ponder upon the insulting transgression of his great-grandson, and to decide what course of retaliation upon Lambeth would suit him best. He intended to maneuver a revenge which should prove fitting to the occasion and adequate to the offense. And when he had conceived it, he sat and laughed for a day and a night.

Then he made out his will with a great

show of disdainful secrecy. He slew all his faithful servants and buried them in the canyon beyond the adobe house. He grimaced contemptuously at the law that would bring him to account for his overt homicide. Then he lay down and died.

What do you say, Rodolfo? Wherein did such an apparent capitulation to defeat wreak revenge on Lambeth? But wait, my brother. Wait!

When old Tartar's will was read, this is what it decreed: that his ten-million-dollar estate was left in trust; that Lambeth Kellidreyfuss was to receive the interest on that fortune as long as he lived; that, when Lambeth's oldest great-grandson should reach the age of twenty-five years, that great-grandson, whoever he might be, was to receive the principal in full. That was all. Simply and clearly stated.

Lambeth raged and tried to break the will, but nothing he could do was of any avail. The will stood. Lambeth was forced to accept the interest of the huge sum as his sole legacy. And now, if you will consider well, Rodolfo, you can begin to see the slow but inexorable working of old Tartar's revenge.

IN THE beginning, after the old man's death, Lambeth burned with hate and seethed with rebellion at such retaliation on him for his attempt on old Tartar's life. He realized with full clarity that it was the old man's method of punishing him. He, Lambeth, had committed the unpardonable sin of trying to kill his great-grandfather: for that gross effrontery he was to be deprived of the fortune he coveted and see it descend to his own great-grandson. He was to mature and grow old, hating more virulently every day the sly old monster who had cheated him. He was to dream continually what he could have done with that great amount of money. He was to grow so intolerably galled over the irretrievable loss of it that

he would attempt by every known means to end his life.

All of which, of course, old Tartar had foreseen to the last humiliating detail.

What do you say, Rodolfo? You are puzzled to discern how old Tartar could be certain of such problematic revenge? That Lambeth might have died, that even should he live to a great age he might never have had any great-grandchild? That by the very procession of the laws of human living, all of the old man's cunning might have come to naught?

Ah, but you forget, my brother! You forget that old Tartar Kellidreyfuss had power over life and death. He could make certain from the other side of that veil of the Unknown that Lambeth did not die! He could render abortive and futile any attempt Lambeth should make on his own life. And he did just that, Rodolfo. He hovered over Lambeth like a guardian angel, preserving his life and insuring his continued welfare. He even gathered about himself there on his spirit plane a select group of followers little less powerful than he, to aid him in molding and furthering Lambeth's earthly career in the exact channels he had decreed for it.

By this course Lambeth was rendered consistently helpless, Rodolfo. He was forced to live, willy-nilly, whether he would or no. He was forced to marry, and beget a daughter, and see her grow up and marry Creighton Lander, our grandfather. He was forced to watch, with the fifth-wheel feeling of an impotent bystander, as his line of progeny marched on; with children being born and growing to maturity and marrying and dying and leaving other children to grow up and marry, till there was nothing remaining of that line but old Lambeth Kellidreyfuss himself, and you and I, Rodolfo Grace Lander and John Hale Lander. And at no time in all that deathly monotony of years was he ignorant of the exact cause of the hor-

rible existence forced upon him. For it *was* horrible to him.

Consider, Rodolfo, being compelled to live when you wanted to die. Consider wanting to die because the galling realization of another's sly course of revenge upon you was never absent from your thoughts day or night, and the consuming bitterness and rebellion that inevitably would well in you tremendously must at all times avail you naught. Consider, worst of all, the unquestionable certainty that the entire process of persecution was merely prelude to the culminating climactic coup which was to come; that the real final stroke of revenge loomed ahead of you, that you had had no slightest intimation of what avenue it would take, but you did know indubitably that it would far outshadow anything that had gone before. Oh, it could be horrible enough, Rodolfo!

Not the least of the horror to Lambeth was the humiliating knowledge that old Tartar, ruling his life as ruthlessly and completely as he ever had in the flesh, was from his detached plane of existence gloating and laughing and reveling in the refined torture he was levying upon his great-grandson. And every day his hate of old Tartar grew till he was all but mad of it. But there could not be for him even the release of going mad, since old Tartar was on guard against that very eventuality and would not allow its consummation. Old Tartar was not to be cheated in any least iota of his revenge.

But wait, my brother. Do not express yet your dismay at such fiendish cunning. By far the most ghastly detail of old Tartar's scheming is yet to be revealed.

He had left, unknown to any man save the officials of the trust company which was keeping his immense fortune in holding, two sealed envelopes. One of these envelopes was addressed to whatever man should be head of the trust company at the time when the envelope was to be

opened. The other was addressed so: "*To the oldest great-grandson of Lambeth Kellidreyfuss, to be delivered to him and opened by him on his twenty-fifth birthday anniversary.*" Both envelopes were to be delivered and opened upon that great-grandson's twenty-fifth birthday anniversary, and not under any consideration before. And I, John Hale Lander, being that oldest great-grandson (the older, speaking properly, since there is no other but you, Rodolfo), upon opening that envelope was to read the document enclosed. This is what I was to read:

"Young man, whatever your name may be, these are your instructions which follow. If you would receive the fortune left by me in trust for you, there is this condition which you must fulfill: within one week of your receipt of this document you must kill your great-grandfather, Lambeth Kellidreyfuss. Under no consideration can you avoid obeying this command. To do so is to forfeit your inheritance. I have left with the head of the trust fund a document which reads so:

"If, within one week of the twenty-fifth birthday anniversary of the oldest great-grandson of Lambeth Kellidreyfuss, Lambeth Kellidreyfuss should die of natural causes, the said great-grandson is to inherit my entire fortune without any condition whatsoever. If Lambeth Kellidreyfuss should still be living at the end of the stated period, or should the young man die, my entire fortune is to pass to the next of kin."

"Have no fear of any reprisal, young man, for taking the life of that evil old man, Lambeth Kellidreyfuss. No one will ever have the slightest suspicion that you are responsible for his death. He will appear to have died of natural causes. You have but to call on him and dine with him, and drop into his coffee the thin flat wafer enclosed in this envelope. He will die slowly, but he will know that he is dying. He will know that he, who once tried to kill his great-grandfather, is paying

for that deed by dying at the hand of his own great-grandson. He will know that this death at your hands is the final act in my long-drawn pursuit of vengeance upon him. And henceforth you shall live in luxury and peace.

"Signed,
TARTAR KELLIDREYFUSS."

WHAT do you say, Rodolfo? That you smile to think how signally his evil revenge must fail, that I could not even countenance so terrible an act? Ah, but you are wrong! I did not hesitate for an instant. Last night I went to have dinner with our great-grandfather, old Lambeth Kellidreyfuss, now past his one hundred and seventh birthday anniversary. I dropped the thin wafer into his coffee when he was out of the room.

But he—he was too shrewd for me, Rodolfo. When I was not looking he changed the cups, giving his to me and taking mine. Too long he had been suspicious of old Tartar's probable attempt at final retaliation through me. Intuition warned him of my intent. And after we had eaten, and I, feeling unaccountably queer and light-headed, said I must be going home, he laughed in my face and told me what he had done.

So I have come home to die, Rodolfo. And only this morning, with old Tartar's grim hold on him released, old Lambeth *did* die of natural causes. And even though it shall appear that I also have died of natural causes, you will be suspect, Rodolfo. Because you are to receive the fortune as next of kin, you will be suspect in the eyes of a law that sees too many people, who stand between an inheritance and a legatee, die apparently from natural causes but actually at the hand of the impatient inheritor-to-be. And if I did not leave you in such a position as to stand absolutely clear of all suspicion, God knows what perverse concomitant circumstances might

serve to convict you of a crime you did not commit.

And now I come to the most hideous aspect of this grim revelation. Do not look at me, Rodolfo. I cannot bear the clear and honorable light of those steadfast eyes upon me now. I cannot endure seeing their affectionate concern turn to repulsion and horror. I cannot bear to see you shrink from me in abomination and loathing, which you must inevitably do before I have fully expended my next breath.

For I—John Hale Lander—I am Tartar Kellidreyfuss reincarnated. It is so that I know all which went before in unerring detail, Rodolfo, most beloved of brothers. When I awoke yesterday morning to my twenty-fifth birthday anniversary because I myself had willed it, I remembered without lack or deviation the entire pattern of my abhorrent life. I remembered how, with diabolical exultance, I had anticipated how I should at last kill with my own hands (since my hands made the wafer) the great-grandson who had attempted to take my life; how I, reincarnated in his own great-grandson, should gloat to see him die, and throw in his face the taunting revelation of my identity; how I, young and strong in the flesh again, with a long and promising life ahead of me, should place in my own hands far in the future the very fortune he would have filched from me when he himself was young.

But I reckoned without the human element, Rodolfo. For twenty-five years I have lived the upright life of John Hale Lander, your elder and affectionate brother. Not all the evil of old Tartar Kellidreyfuss can nullify completely the redemption I have gained in this short human passage. There is highest in me now the determination to atone for the monstrous thing I have been, by recording this revelation, and ascertaining that you shall be placed beyond all danger of suspicion, free to make wise and commendable use

of old Tartar's money through a benevolent and judicious life.

Bring the document that I may sign it, Rodolfo.

What do you say, my brother? Look at you? Do not keep my eyes averted and my face lowered? How can I raise my gaze? How can I bear to see your abhorrence, your revulsion? How can I bear—why, what is this I see in your face, in those steadfast eyes I have loved so long? No condemnation? No shrinking? Nothing but pity, and that indulgent affection which was always there for me! Compassion and forgiveness. God bless you, my brother, it is easier to say the rest now.

This you must realize. The law will demand proof. The wielders of the law will be reluctant to believe so weird a statement as I have made, so incredible a chronicle. They would condemn as insane the assertion that I, who have been dead for over a hundred years, have been murdered by my great-grandson who is at the same time my great-grandfather—unless they have proof that the assertion is true. They shall have their proof, Rodolfo.

See, I will sign my name: John Hale Lander, in the chirography you know. Beneath that I will sign the name Tartar Kellidreyfuss, in handwriting no man now living ever has seen but which will prove identical with that signature appended to the two documents left with the trust company.

WHAT is that you say, Rodolfo? You are persuaded that I have some mad delusion in my brain? My birth-date anniversary does not come until tomorrow? You know of no document being delivered to me?

Partly you are in error, my brother. When we were very small children, I wanted my birth-date set three days ahead, that you and I might always celebrate to-

gether. Our mother humored me. No one is now living who was cognizant of that fact, no one but me. My real birth-date anniversary was yesterday; and because I myself had willed to remember upon that day, I remembered everything and had no need to see any documents. I recalled only too well exactly what was in them both. I had no need to possess that wafer of death. I made it. I knew what was in it. I made another.

Again, in part you are correct, Rodolfo. No document has been delivered to me. In that fact lies the last proof you need, the indisputable proof, of the validity of this record. I have signed this record with the handwriting of Tartar Kellidreyfuss, and the only specimens of it which exist are signed to those documents. I have given you the precise wording of those documents in this record. And the documents lie securely locked away in an ancient safe which was delivered to the trust company by old Tartar himself and has remained there untouched all these years. No one ever knew the combination to that safe but Tartar Kellidreyfuss. The trust company is instructed to break open the

safe in order to secure the enclosed documents on the appointed day: on my twenty-fifth birth-date anniversary, which all who know me believe to be tomorrow, and which only I knew to be yesterday. When the officers of the law break open that safe and compare those documents with this record, they will have incontestable proof that all I have said is valid and true.

I die, Rodolfo. I, John Hale Lander, go from this world in the performance of a deed that is offered in atonement for the base activities of the monster Tartar Kellidreyfuss. Sometimes, my brother, remember me; kindly if you can, for all I was to you, forgetful, if you may, of the demoniacal thing I did not dream I was. Good-bye, Rodolfo. Tartar Kellidreyfuss is hoist with his own petard. Ashes to ashes, dust to dust, evil returned to the vileness that spawned it. And somewhere, on some far dim plane beyond all perception of man, but noted and recognized by the God who rules, the spark of a better life begun.

Good-bye, best beloved of brothers. Good-bye!