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The Phantom Drug

By A. W. KAPFER

THIS document, written in a clear, bold hand, was found in the burned ruins of an old insane asylum. The records of this institution had been saved, and upon investigation it was found that an eminent drug analyst was confined within its walls for one of the most horrible crimes ever recorded. He was judged and found insane after telling, as his defense, a fantastic story which was interpreted as a maniac's delusion. After reading his story, which coincides so well with the known facts, one can not help but wonder

IT'S night again—one of those threatening, misty nights that you see in dreams. I'm afraid of it—it returns like a mockery to goad my memory to greater torture. It was on a night much like this that it happened; that horrible experience that gives my mind no rest—that fear that gives shadows ghostly forms and lends an added terror to the scream of an insane inmate. They put me in a madhouse because they judged me insane—me, whose mentality is so inexpressibly superior to those that judged me mentally unbalanced.

They wouldn't believe the facts I told them—said my story was the fabrication of an unsound mind, as an alibi for the horrible crime I had committed. I swore on my honor that I had told the truth, but even my friends refused to believe me; so it is with little hope of winning your credulity that I leave this written document. But here are the facts.

I was at work in my laboratory analyzing some drugs that I had received in a new consignment from India. A tube, which contained a phosphorescent liquid, attracted my attention and I read the note my collector had sent with it.

He stated that it was supposed to have the power of transforming the mind of a human into the body of an animal; a superstition which the natives of the inner jungle firmly believe. They claim it is compounded from the brains of freshly slain animals, each brain containing an amount of this substance relative to its size.

I naturally scoffed at the claims for this drug, but decided to test it on one of my laboratory animals so that I could place it in its proper category. I injected a small amount into the system of a rabbit and watched closely the reaction. For a minute it was motionless except for the natural movements of breathing. Then its eyelids closed slowly until they were completely shut and it appeared in a deep lethargy. For half a minute more there appeared no change, then its eyes flicked open and I looked, not into the timid eyes of a rabbit, but those of a scared animal.

With a sudden spring it leaped for the laboratory light, which was suspended by a chain from the ceiling. Its paws, however, were unfitted to grip the chain or the sloping reflector, and it fell to the floor only to spring frantically at the curtain in a vain attempt to climb it. Another leap sent it to the top of a cabinet, where

it upset several bottles, which fell to the tiled floor and smashed.

This aroused me from my stupor and I endeavored to catch it. I might as well have tried to catch its shadow. From cabinet to mantel, from mantel to curtain, curtain to shelf, leaving a trail of spilled and broken bottles in its wake. As it sprang about, strange squeaky barks came from its throat.

Perspiring and out of wind I gave up the chase, picked up an overturned chair and sat down to ponder the matter out. I observed the rabbit's actions closely. Now it was on a shelf looking at its short stump of a tail and chattering excitedly. Then it rubbed its ears and seemed startled at their length.

I wondered what was the explanation of this. It flew around like a monkey. A monkey! that was it. The drug made animals act like monkeys. Then the claim of the natives was true and the drug did have the power of performing a transition! I wondered if the drug always had the same result and decided to test it again on a white mouse that I took from another cage.

I carefully injected a small amount into its blood-stream. After a minute had expired, during which it made no move, it began to twitch about. The blood was pounding in my temples and my eyes were glued to its quivering form. Slowly it roused from its stupor and then stood on its hind legs while it flapped the front ones by its side.

"What the deuce——" I began. Then I understood. The drug affected each animal differently, dependent on the amount of the dose. As I arrived at this conclusion I noticed the rabbit was hopping about in its natural way, all trace of its former erratic movements gone. Never before in my experience had any drug such a startling effect on the brain as to give it the complete characteristics of a different animal.

MY OLD and dearest friend, Rodney Coleb, was living with me and I went to his room to tell him what had occurred. He was lying on the bed covered by a heavy blanket which did not entirely conceal the hulking form, once the proud possessor of enormous strength, now robbed by sickness and old age. He was twenty years older than I. He liked to talk of the days when his prowess was commended upon where strength and courage counted. His voice still held some of its old timbre as he greeted me and noticed my excitement.

"Hello," he said. "Something interesting happen?"

With eager enthusiasm I detailed the effects the drug had had on the rabbit and the mouse. I could tell, from the expression on his face, that he was intensely interested, but when I had finished he lay back on his pillow as if in deep thought.

"Doc," he said quietly, "I think that at last I am going to have my wish fulfilled."

I looked at him uncomprehendingly.

"You know," he said, growing excited, "you know how I've longed to have my old strength back again, or at least to be active for a time; well, there you have the substance that can perform that miracle."

"What do you mean?" I gasped.

"Why can't I take some of that drug," he reasoned, "and control the body of some animal for a while?"

"Rodney, you are crazy," I cried, aghast. "I will not consent to your doing such an insensate thing. It would mean your death within a few minutes. Can you imagine yourself as a monkey, hopping and swinging about, with that old body of yours? It could never stand the strain."

"You forget something," he smiled.

"What?" I asked.

"My mind would no longer control this body, but that of some active and healthy animal."

"I should say not——" I began, then stopped and reasoned the matter out. The rabbit had been controlled by a monkey's mind; what happened to the rabbit's mind? It was only logical to suppose that they had been exchanged and that some monkey in far-off India had been hopping about like a rabbit during the transition.

"It is probable," I admitted, "that you would be controlling another body, but you forget that your body would be controlled by an animal's mind. That would be far more risky, as was proved by the rabbit's antics in the laboratory."

"You can take care of that," he argued, "by giving me a potion to numb the motor area of my brain, and by giving me a sleeping powder. Then, no matter what impulse is aroused, it can not be carried into an action."

I pondered his words carefully, and had to admit to myself that his reasoning was plausible. Rodney pleaded his cause with desperate earnestness.

"Here am I, an old man, chained to a bed for the rest of my life—a year or so at the most. Life holds little attraction for me, handicapped as I am. My body is weak, but the spirit of adventure is still strong within me. Surely you can not deny me this favor; if not to gratify the wish of an old man, then on the claim of our friendship."

"I have but one thing left to say," I replied, "and that is—if you take some of this drug, then so will I."

Rodney hesitated at involving me in his rash wish.

"It is not necessary for you to do so," he said. "You are healthy, and in the name of your profession, you owe the world a service. Nothing claims me."

"Nevertheless, that arrangement stands," I said. "Do you think I could ever bear to have anything happen to you through this enterprize, without my sharing it? Never. We have stood together in all things in the past and will continue to do so until the end."

Rodney placed his hand on mine. Neither of us spoke for a few minutes, but we felt the bond of friendship more closely than ever before.

"I can't ask you to risk it," he said huskily, and tried to hide the disappointment that his voice betrayed.

"And I can not refuse your wish," I replied. "Besides, it is in a way my duty to undergo an experience that may prove of value in research. I must admit that I feel thrilled at the prospect of this adventure too. When shall we try it?"

"I am ready now," he replied. "What preparations are necessary?"

"Hardly any," I said. "I'll go down to the laboratory to get the sedatives and a hypodermic needle for this drug. I may as well bring my safety kit along."

Before I locked the back door I glanced out into the night. The air was surcharged and oppressive, and the uncanny stillness that precedes a storm sent a chilling premonition over me. I locked the door, gathered the articles I needed and returned to the bedroom.

"An electrical storm is coming up," I said.

Rodney did not answer. His eyes were on the tube containing the phosphorescent drug. He was breathing faster and becoming excited and impatient.

"Better quiet down a bit, Rod," I admonished. My own heart was pumping strangely and the air seemed exceedingly warm; I thought it best to hide my perturbation from him, however. An unexpected crash of thunder made our nerves jump.

"We're as nervous as a couple of kids on their first pirate expedition," laughed Rod. His voice was high-pitched and taut.

I mixed a sedative and a sleeping potion for him and a stronger mixture for myself. These we drank. Then I took off my coat, bared my left arm and bade Rod roll up his pajama sleeve.

"We shall not feel the effects for a minute or two," I told him, "and by that time the potion we drank will start its work. Just lie quiet."

I forced my hand to be steady as I injected the drug into his arm, then hastily refilled the needle chamber from the tube and emptied it into my own arm. Rodney had put his hand by mine as I lay down beside him and I clasped it fervently. A drowsiness crept over me as the seconds slipped by, then—something snapped, and I knew no more.

AN UNFAMILIAR atmosphere surrounded me when my mind began to function again. Slowly the haze wore away and I stirred restlessly as strange impressions flooded my brain. I was amongst a heavy growth of trees, rank grass and bush. My nose felt peculiar to me, then I cried out in wonder. It was not a faint ejaculation that came from my throat, however, but a roar—a volume of sound that made the very earth tremble, and with good cause; for I, or rather my mind, was embodied in an elephant. My nose!—it was now a trunk!

I became intoxicated with the thought of the strength I now possessed, seized a tree with my trunk, and with a mighty tug, pulled its roots from the ground and hurled it aside. My cry of satisfaction was a boom that rolled like a peal of thunder.

A low growl sounded behind me and I swung my huge bulk quickly around. A tiger lay crouched in the undergrowth. I raised my trunk

threateningly and stamped angrily, but the beast did not move. Then I looked into its eyes and understood. It was Rodney! He had possession of a tiger's body!

He was overjoyed at my recognizing him, and although we could not talk to each other, we showed our pleasure plainly enough. He gloried in the agility and strength that were now his, and took prodigious leaps and flips in a small clearing.

Finally, tired and winded from his play, he came to me and rubbed his back against my leg, purring like an immense cat. With a flip of my trunk I swung him on my back and raced through the jungle for miles. A river cut its way through this wilderness and we drank our fill—a gallon of water seemed but a cupful to my stupendous thirst. I was amusing myself by squirting water on Rodney when a roar came from a distance, accompanied by heavy crashings.

We faced the direction of the disturbance and waited breathlessly. Over the top of the waving jungle grass there appeared the head of an angry elephant. That its temper was up was all too plain. Its ears stuck out from its head like huge fans and its upraised trunk blasted forth a challenge as it charged along.

I looked anxiously at Rodney. The light of battle was in his eyes and I knew that he would be a formidable ally. It was too late to flee. My opponent was too close and the river was a barrier which, if I tried to cross, would give my adversary the advantage of firmer footing. My temper was aroused also, and as it was not my own body that was at stake, I did not fear the coming conflict.

The huge elephant facing me charged, and I met him half-way. Two locomotives crashing together would not have made that glade tremble more than it did when we met.

My enemy gave a scream of fear and pain when we parted and I soon saw the reason why. Rodney had waited until we were locked, then had launched himself at the throat of my rival. He had sunk his teeth deep in its tough hide and was tearing the flesh from its shoulder and chest with his bared claws.

All this I had seen in an instant, and as the monster turned on Rodney I charged it from the side, driving both tusks deep in. Almost at the same instant Rodney severed its jugular vein. The elephant trembled, swayed, and toppled to the ground.

I was unhurt except for an aching head, the result of that first onslaught, but Rodney had not fared so well. As we turned from our fallen adversary I noticed that one of his legs had been crushed. The light of victory was in his eyes, however, and he seemed happy despite the pain he must have been suffering.

It was then that I noticed a change coming over me; a sort of drowsiness. At first I thought it was due to the exertion I had just gone through, but as its effect became more marked and insistent, I realized with a tremor of terror what it really was. The elephant's mind was trying to throw me out of possession of its body!

I glanced at Rodney apprehensively to see if he was undergoing the same change. He was still in complete control. Then the truth dawned on me. The immense bulk I had been dominating had absorbed the power of the drug faster than the body Rodney controlled!

I hurried to his side and tried to make him understand that he should crawl into the jungle and hide until the effect of the drug had worn off. It was of no use. The more I stamped

and raged, the more his eyes smiled at me as though he thought I was trying to show him how pleased I was at our victory.

More and more insistent and powerful did the elephant's mind become. It began to get control of its body and fixed its eyes with a baneful glare on Rodney's recumbent form. I struggled desperately to wrest control from that conquering mind, but in vain. The drug's force was ebbing fast.

One last warning I managed to blast out, and Rodney faced me. Horror of horrors! He thought I was calling him! Slowly and painfully he crept toward me. My thoughts became dim, and I struggled, as if in a dream, to conquer again the huge bulk he was approaching, but it was too late. The monster I had once controlled was in almost complete possession now, and I was but an unwilling spectator viewing things through a veil that grew steadily heavier.

When Rodney was but a few feet away the body under me reared in the air—a flash of fear showed in Rodney's eyes as he realized the awful truth—and as his shrill scream rent the air, I was swallowed into blackness.

I DON'T know how long I lay in a daze, in Rodney's bedroom. Consciousness came back slowly. As events crowded themselves into my mind, I felt for Rodney's hand. It was not by my side. I sat up in bed, weak, and trembling all over.

At first I did not see him, then—I screamed in livid terror!

Rodney lay beside the bed, *every bone in his body broken as though something weighing several tons had crushed him!*