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WEIRD TALES ISSUED 1st OF EACH MONTH

The Piper From Bhutan

By DAVID BERNARD

*An eery wailing floated from the pipe in the wizened old piper's hands,
and suddenly the corpse on the slab—but read the story for yourself*

I REGRET, gentlemen, the trouble I have caused; but I'm deeply grateful for this chance to tell my side of the story. And I believe I can show you that, despite the bitter remarks by Professor Du Bois, my action does not warrant my expulsion from this college.

I've studied psychology under Professor Du Bois for four years; my record and the testimony of my classmates will prove that, prior to the experiment the other night, my relationship with Professor Du Bois was mutually satisfactory. I say now, as I've said, that he's intellectually dishonest and untrue to the spirit of experimental science. The truth, gentlemen, is no insult.

It started with the wizened old man from Bhutan. He came to the college with delegates from some mystic society. He could play music, so they told Professor Du Bois, that could restore vitality to the recently dead, keeping them alive until he stopped playing on his pipe. I was working in the laboratory with Professor Du Bois; he told the delegates he was busy.

"Besides," he said, "I have tested at least a dozen individuals with similar claims in the past and unflinchingly showed them up as frauds or clever hypnotists. The thing is just physiologically impossible; when you're dead, as the old saying goes. . . . Good day, my friends."

Well, I won't repeat what the mystics said, but they left in a huff, taking the shriveled little man, in his outlandish cos-

tume, with them. And soon after we were again disturbed by a visit. It was the professor's brother-in-law, Detective-Lieutenant Crane, and he had bad news about Richford Mason, a friend of Professor Du Bois.

"Mason died early this morning," Lieutenant Crane said, "snuffed out by an overdose of morphine given to him as medicine." Then he went on to tell the shocked professor that Mason's partner, Rumster, was being held. "We know he's guilty as hell, but he's got enough of an alibi to beat conviction if we bring him to trial—unless we can break him."

And that, gentlemen, is how the experiment started: Professor Du Bois to demonstrate the power of suggestion, his special field in psychology; Lieutenant Crane to "break" a confession.

The professor called the mystic society, saying he had decided to give the old Bhutanese piper a scientific test. They apologized for calling him a closed-minded bigot, and other choice epithets, and said they'd give him all the space he wanted in the next issue of their magazine to report his findings. They, of course, had already "proven" the piper's magical ability to their complete satisfaction. They were disappointed when the professor said they couldn't have representation at the experiment, but after all, scientific recognition is scientific recognition.

Well, gentlemen, I accompanied the professor, Lieutenant Crane, and the little

old piper to the home of a radio impersonator, who had known the late Richford Mason. Professor Du Bois planned everything. He spoke to the radio artist, with the latter imitating Richford Mason's voice, while the Bhutanese played away on his pipe and Lieutenant Crane and I worked with a phonographic machine, making records.

The piper took it all deadly seriously, though he kept jabbering in his Tibetan or Chinese dialect, asking, I'm sure, where the dead body was. His music, well—you can't hear it now, for which I'm terribly sorry—but what music!

It wailed, seemed to be talking, pleading, in a weird melancholy voice that somehow seemed to beat right through you. No melody, as we know the term, just a haunting, lilting strain, like nothing I've ever heard before—or hope again to hear!

At Professor Du Bois' direction, we made two excellent recordings, and in a few hours everything was ready.

IN A secluded house at the end of town, the accused Rumster was made the subject of the experiment. We had the corpse of Richford Mason in one room; in another, the Bhutanese piper. In the room where the lieutenant, the professor and I sat with Rumster were the two records.

One was on a phonograph on the table. The other was on a phonograph hidden behind the sofa. This hidden machine had a catch protruding just a sixteenth of an inch from the corner of the rug. A tug with your shoe-tip would set off the record.

Well, first Lieutenant Crane gave Rumster the third degree; but no use. He looked guilty, his voice sounded guilty, and his story had a few frayed edges—but he denied the crime while admitting he had the best motive for it.

Then Professor Du Bois, introduced to the accused as a friend of the late Richford Mason, went to work. It made me laugh sardonically to hear the professor build up a case for "the subtle revivifying effects of music, that is, the vibrations we call music."

In his book, *Backgrounds of Psychology*, Professor Du Bois calls the ancients "misguided and misleading interpreters of natural phenomena, with no just claim whatsoever to science." But to Rumster he said:

"The wise men of the ancient world, Asclepiades and Pythagoras, taught and demonstrated the profound effect of music upon the body. The sages of Egypt, indeed, went so far as to bring life to the dead, so it is reliably reported." He went on and on, citing the reports of travelers in the orient, and after that sank in, he mentioned the Bhutanese piper.

"One wise old man, who has astounded observers by his ability to infuse life into the recently dead with the magical music of his pipe, has been brought to this country." And he showed Rumster clippings from the sensational press, which of course had been inspired by the unscientific "experiments" of the mystic society.

Well, as the professor kept on, Rumster scoffed, but he was getting uneasy, perspiring, wondering. Then Professor Du Bois said, "Last night, after hearing of the marvelous success of this piper from Bhutan, we brought him to the bier of Richford Mason—to try him out——"

"And it worked!" Lieutenant Crane cut in.

"It worked?" Rumster yelled, and Lieutenant Crane growled:

"Yeah! That's what I said, and we got his word that you did it, murdered him!"

While Rumster chafed and squirmed,

the lieutenant calmly fished a typed confession from his pocket and gave it to Rumster to sign. But Rumster whimpered, "You can't f-fool me like that."

"This is no joke, Rumster," Professor Du Bois said very gravely. "We made a phonographic recording of what happened last night, when the strange music of the Bhutanese piper lured the soul of Richford Mason, your late partner, back to his dead body. I know, Rumster, I spoke to Mason!"

One thing I can't take away from Professor Du Bois; he is a master of suggestion, and he demonstrated it that night. Rumster forced a laugh, but fooled nobody. He was scared; still he would not sign the confession.

At Professor Du Bois' signal, I walked to the phonograph on the table; and after a few more questions, the professor said, "Go ahead."

You should have seen Rumster's eyes pop as the record started. The music started faintly, the piping gaining strength and abruptly breaking into a wild interblending of notes and octaves utterly bewildering in its harmony. Over and over the haunting music repeated, sad, wailing, mysteriously appealing—and then a new note lilted into it, and the music faded off a bit and suddenly there sounded—a voice!

Ho!low, throaty, the groan of one awakening uneasily from deep slumber. Sonorously it spoke:

"Who calls me? Why do you wake me? What do you want?"

"M-Mason!" Rumster wheezed. And from the phonograph came the voice of Professor Du Bois, quivering:

"It is I, John Du Bois."

"Oh," came the monotonously dull voice, "why am I called back?"

"A matter of justice, Richford. A question to ask."

Then silence, save for the weird wail of the pipe.

Again the voice of Du Bois:

"Please, Richford, do not sleep, just for a while. Please. Do you hear me?"

"I do. I hear you. But this pains. . . . What do you want?"

"Tell me—who killed you?"

"I am not dead."

"I know——"

"You do not know. Not until you are where I now am will you know. Now I know the meaning of what men fear. Merely the body——"

"Yes, Richford, who killed your body?"

"Him I pity, not hate. What a fool! Did he know what I now know, what I now see, never would he have done it. But here all things are clear; into the innermost heart and thoughts of those left behind does one see, and I know the anguish and torture that possess his guilt-burdened soul——"

"Who, Richford, who was it?"

"Rumster, Marvin Rumster. The moment I took that medicine he mixed for me, I knew. For my cough, he said. That terrible choking cough; but now, of all that I am now free——"

The record ended abruptly. I halted the machine, and Lieutenant Crane pushed the confession into Rumster's lap. I got a wink from Professor Du Bois because it was certain that Rumster couldn't stand much more. He sighed and gulped and played with the confession, but at length he stiffened and started denying all over again.

"I didn't, I didn't, I didn't, I tell you!"

Lieutenant Crane came back at him: "All right, then, you tell that to *him*. We didn't want to hurt him, but I see we got to do it."

That was the cue for Professor Du Bois' ace. The lieutenant and I wheeled the cadaver into the room, right next to

the gaping Rumster. That worked on him for several minutes, and after we gave him smelling-salts, and he still weakly refused to sign, Professor Du Bois brought the Bhutanese piper into the room.

THE wizen old man's eyes lit up when he saw the corpse; he tuned up his pipe with several sharp squeaks and waited eagerly for the signal from Professor Du Bois.

"Ready?" the lieutenant rapped at Rumster, gripping him by the collar to keep him from turning away from the corpse.

That was my cue. I sidled over to the corner, so that catch just barely protruding from the rug would be in easy reach of my toe, to set the second record going.

"Ready?" repeated the lieutenant, shaking Rumster."

"Wh-what f-for?"

"To talk to Mason, as soon as he comes back. To tell him——"

Rumster cried that he couldn't, wouldn't.

"All right, then, sign that confession!"

I had the idea that Rumster sobbed out "Yes!" But Lieutenant Crane nodded to the professor and the professor signaled to the Bhutanese, who proceeded to fill the room with his eery music. Low, weirdly wailing, precisely as on the first record, it gained strength slowly, somehow beating through you, gripping you. Fascinated, I stared at Rumster's blood-drained, open-mouthed face. I saw him gain control of himself abruptly, leaping a full yard off the sofa, bolting madly for the door.

Screaming, "Let me out!" he was colared at the door by Lieutenant Crane. And he signed the confession there, scribbling his name as if his life depended on it, and was pushed out, into the arms of a waiting detective.

I saw Professor Du Bois walk toward the grinning lieutenant, while the Bhutanese wailed away—and with startling suddenness, there broke into the weird strain—a voice!

The voice of Richford Mason, groaning ghastlily! Horrified, I whirled on the corpse. And as God is my judge, gentlemen—the explanations and skeptical remarks of Professor Du Bois to the contrary—I swear I saw those thin blue lips part, the eyelids of that yellowish waxy face flutter.

Maybe I did go temporarily berserk, but, what I saw—and heard—I rushed headlong for that piper, bore him into the sofa, ripping the pipe away from his mouth and smashing it over my knee.

The professor and the lieutenant grabbed me, crying out if I had gone stark crazy. I yelled out what had happened.

"Why," the professor said, while the lieutenant guffawed, "you yourself set the record going."

I fell back when he said that, for the second record was designed just that way; but then I fairly leaped at him, telling him the truth, gentlemen:

"In my excitement, I completely forgot to tug the catch!"

Professor Du Bois' face went pale at that. He stooped behind the sofa, examining the phonograph. He emerged with the record in his hand.

"You're wrong, dead wrong," he said slowly, huskily. A look a little bit like fright was on his face. "You *did* set this record off. That voice we . . . you heard was from the record."

"Why sure," Lieutenant Crane put in, "only a guy as guilty as Rumster would believe this music humbug. When you're dead——"

But I looked down at the catch protruding from the rug. Not a centimeter

more than the sixteenth of an inch at which it had originally been fixed was it protruding.

The professor laughed when I showed that to him; and he laughed again when I asked him why he hadn't shown the record to me to prove I was wrong instead of so hurriedly taking it from the hidden phonograph. Then I asked him why the ghastly groaning had stopped precisely when I ripped that pipe from the Bhutanese; and he called me a gullible, sophomoric fool.

"When you threw the old man into the sofa the impact jarred the phonograph, halting the record."

That forced upon me how the mind of a scientist, no less than the zealous religionist's, can become grooved and open only to orthodoxy. But as I turned angrily to leave, I saw one more thing. And what I saw, coupled with the furious outburst I got from Professor Du Bois when I mentioned it, made me fly off the handle and tell the professor the strong but true words for which he now would have me expelled.

I saw the arms of Richford Mason, the lifeless arms which had been folded across his chest in a posture of serene repose—I saw them hanging limply, almost trailing to the floor from the sides of the table bed.
