

WEIRD TALES

THE UNIQUE MAGAZINE

EDWIN BAIRD, Editor

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**Also a number of odd facts and queer fancies,
crowded in for good measure**

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*Here's a "Creepy" Tale That
Ends In a Shuddering,
Breath-taking Way*

The Return of Paul Slavsky

By Capt. George Warburton Lewis

Author of "Trailing the Jungle Man," "Wine of the Wilderness," Etc.

FROM Petrograd came Paul Slavsky, with what his Nihilist associates might have styled a clean record and no bungled jobs, but what Larry Brandon classified as a criminal record *de luxe*.

It was natural that such a record should bring about Slavsky's early acquaintance with Inspector Brandon, of the Central Office and it followed, as day follows dawn, that the Terrorist should become the object of the shrewdest surveillance the Chief Inspector could design.

Whether Paul Slavsky actually discovered, or merely suspected, that he was being shadowed, matters little. A notation on an old blotter shows that he boldly attempted to pave the way for future criminal enterprises by calling at the Central Office in the role of a persecuted citizen, who had journeyed here from his native land to escape the hell which he declared the Russian Secret Police had made his life.

It took three months of intensive investigation to convince Larry Brandon that Slavsky was all the Secret Police had painted him and more, and that the Terrorist had not emigrated to America with even the remotest intention of reforming. It took the detective

three months more to satisfy himself beyond all doubt that Slavsky had, marvelously enough, established an active branch of his old order and was undoubtedly spreading the doctrine of Gorgias and Fichte under the very noses of the Central Office experts. However, the evidence necessary to a conviction was lacking, so nothing could be done.

A little later the men of the same nationality as the Nihilist, whom Brandon had used to great advantage on the case, began, one by one, to drop quietly out of existence. This was not only mysterious—it was uncanny. Finally the decomposed bodies of some of these operatives were found and unmistakably identified.

In each instance *the head had been completely severed from the trunk.*

Recollecting that the Terrorist order, to which Paul Slavsky had belonged, had signalized its outrages by decapitating its victims. Brandon was enabled to initiate definite plans which, in due course, culminated in his running his man to earth.

But Paul Slavsky never beheld the fatal Chair nor served time. He chose the other route. He had elected to live in rebellion against man's orderly in-

situations, and in this same unreasoning revolt he resolved to die. Like most of his ilk, the Terrorist in physical combat was a hard man, and he really fought a great fight, but he fought it with a master craftsman in the conquering of such as he, and inevitably he lost, with many of Larry Brandon's bullets in his great body and only life enough left in him to greet—and almost at once to take final leave of—his favorite sister, Olga, who had arrived in Europe, a little late as it transpired, to join her brother in his sinister calling.

Olga Slavsky, years younger than her lamented brother, was as pretty a little specimen of dark-eyed femininity as ever enchanted fastidious masculine eye. Yet so is the tigress beautiful.

Still, that is not quite the idea I wish to convey. If you can think of a woman in repose being as beautiful as a tigress and, in snoldering hate and loathing as repulsive, as hideous as a preying vampire, then you will get nearer my meaning. Olga like her brother, was a staunch exponent of the Terrorist doctrine.

What Brandon expected soon came to pass. The strange girl, whom men called beautiful and women envied, was promptly elected to her brother's place in what was known in the underworld of unlawful secret orders as the "League." In this way she immediately crossed swords with the man who had ended the career of her brother Paul, and ere long she became aware, through members of the League detailed as spies, that still another noted criminologist, Joe Seagraves, was unpleasantly hot on her trail.

But Olga was undaunted. For daring and ingenuity, she by far eclipsed her cunning and resourceful brother, who had blazed the path of her iconoclastic pilgrimage.

Since little could thus far be proved against Olga, Seagraves believed that it might be better to declare a sort of armistice and, if possible, gradually win her over to the side of law and order. To this end, he openly called and laid his ideas before her. She frankly flouted his implied interest in her well-being,

but showed a spirit of compromise by offering the crime specialist a cigarette.

In such a mood Olga became a docile and purring tiger kitten, only one never quite forgot her claws. She was highly superstitious, Seagraves discovered; but then her whole character was so anomalous and so replete with unexpectedly outcropping traits and wildly illogical beliefs that it was almost to be expected she would believe in ghosts.

She clung tenaciously to the belief, so Brandon told Seagraves, that some day Paul would return and end the life of the man who—the Terrorist had told his sister shortly before his death—had done him to death.

"Do you still believe, Olga, that Paul is going to come back one day and carry Brandon away with him into the Unknown?" asked Seagraves.

Olga's dark eyes grew suddenly darker as she slowly removed a cigarette from between her too red lips.

"Not only is he coming," she answered, "but he is coming soon. Only night before last I talk with him. I tell him hurry. You see his spirit cannot rest until his murder is—ah, my very bad English!—avenged."

"You're a very foolish woman, Olga," admonished Seagraves. "If you refuse to listen to my warning you're going to find yourself in lots of trouble. I want you to understand that."

Then the drowsing tigress put out her claws.

"You threaten me!" she fairly hissed, tossing away her cigarette and rising. "I am a free woman. You are, after all, like my own people. You would make slaves of all who cannot buy their freedom of—of thought and action."

She glanced about queerly before she concluded:

"Don't interest yourself too far. You may be great, but remember—I am no longer to be despised. You have waited too long. Should I choose, for example, I could have shot you where you sit."

Joe Seagraves leaped out of his chair, an automatic in his experienced hand and menacing the mysterious woman steadily.

But already the allegorical vampire,

which the detective had seen reflected in Olga's piercing eyes and heard in her studied but crisp and stinging words, had spread its skinny wings and flown. Olga was laughing in such sincere, or well-feigned, mockery at his alarm that the dignified detective momentarily felt abashed.

He put his weapon away, nevertheless, only after a searching glance about the very ordinary little room in which the extraordinary woman had received him. He recalled that the last victim of Olga's brother, mutilated, headless and repellant, had been found in this same neighborhood, if not in this same house.

"Please—*please* forgive me," the strange girl was pleading. "You see, I forgot that you are not like—like Brandon. For him there is no forgiveness. He must perish. But we—you and I—why must we be enemies?"

"There's but one reason, Olga," replied Seagraves seriously, "and that is a strong one. It is simply the nature of our respective callings."

"Then I can only be sorry," she said in a low voice. "Still, my principles are more—what word?—more sacred than your friendship."

As the woman paused, Seagraves could have taken an oath that he caught the sound of whispering voices through a door standing slightly ajar not three paces from his elbow. Of a sudden, he stepped forward and flung the door wide with a resounding *bang*.

A gray-walled room, quite empty, was all that rewarded his examination. He turned and found Olga smiling again.

"Did you surprise them?" she inquired sweetly.

"Surprise whom?" demanded the detective.

"The rats," she said ingenuously, still smiling.

"I've seen but one rat here," murmured Seagraves in an impersonal tone: "I see it now. It has wings that fold up like an umbrella. It is called a vampire."

Olga smiled on placidly, even after Joe Seagraves had closed the door on her and was gone.

IN THE language of the man who knotted the noose, Olga, as her kind are certain to do, came at last to the end of her rope.

Conspiracy, blackmail and extortion were at last brought home to her; and it chanced that the same eminent crime expert who had hurried the career of her brother to an inglorious finish was likewise destined to be the instrument of fate in the undoing of Olga.

In time the pursuit narrowed down to the end of a most imperfect day for both quarry and hunters. Then all night, as Brandon and Seagraves gradually drew their web closer and ever closer about the elusive Terrorist, she tricked them at every angle and turn with the cunning of a fox, and it was not until three sleepless days and nights that the two renowned sleuths effected her capture more than five hundred miles distant from the field of her long-continued operations.

"She'll be as slippery as an eel," Brandon warned Seagraves, when they were ready to start back with their prisoner. "I'll never consent to any Pullman for her, even though we ignore the law and handcuff her to the seat. One of us is going to have to keep his eyes on her constantly."

"Only one of us could sleep at a time, anyhow," said Seagraves; "and surely we can stand it one more night, don't you think? Suppose we both sit it out with her."

They at length did decide to "sit it out" with their prisoner, and with that understanding they took her aboard the train.

At the moment of entering the train, a telegram was handed to Brandon, and as soon as the three were comfortably seated in their section the inspector read it with lips compressed and eyes oddly squinted. Then he handed the message to Seagraves, who read:

"Police record Olga Slavsky arrived. Wanted in three countries for complicity in murder nine counts. Escaped Russian Secret Police three times. At present fugitive from justice. Keep close watch on her. Renfrow, Chief Inspector."

Seagraves returned the telegram to Brandon, winking an eye disparagingly and smiling at what the Chief Inspector had evidently considered a necessary precaution.

The afternoon waned. Early evening found the train three-quarters of an hour behind time. If this kept up they would not arrive before two in the morning.

Olga sat besides Seagraves facing Brandon.

"I would give much for a cigarette," she announced out of a long silence at ten o'clock, addressing herself to Seagraves.

"This isn't a smoker," observed the crime specialist, glancing around, "but there are only two other passengers in the car. Try it."

He offered her his box, and she took one and lighted it. Filling her lungs with the comforting smoke, she exhaled it in a great cloud and, after a meditative pause, murmured:

"At last I am to see poor Paul."

She looked Seagraves steadily in the eye and added in a queer tone that she felt her brother was very near tonight.

It was a mixed train, and the day coaches appeared to have much the better of the sleepers as to occupancy. Seagraves noted casually that, besides themselves, their car boasted but two other passengers, and though they might have been snugly asleep in their respective berths, they had apparently elected to sit out the short run, evidently preferring reclining to rising and dressing at 1:30 or 2 o'clock A. M.

"Do you see the man sitting all alone in the last seat with the handkerchief over his face, to keep the light out of his eyes?" Olga's ruminant voice finally broke in upon the monotonous *clackety-clack* of wheels upon rail-joints.

"Yes—what about him?" asked Seagraves.

"Nothing, only he—he looks like Paul," she answered in a guarded voice, as though she feared Brandon, cat-napping now, might overhear her strange language.

"Olga!" ridiculed the detective, "get a grip on yourself."

Having thus counseled the prisoner,

Seagraves was thoughtful for a long space; then he looked over at Olga, saw an odd, uneasy expression on her pretty face and quickly said:

"Here—have another cigarette, Olga. Burn 'em up!"

AT MIDNIGHT the conductor passed through the car.

"We'll make the city a little before two o'clock," he said in answer to a sleepy-voiced interrogation from Brandon, who seemed to have banished sleep and was blinking about the car.

"What—we all alone?" he asked Seagraves. Then he caught sight of the two lonely passengers at the far end of the car. "No; two others," he murmured, answering his own question.

He was turning his gaze away from the man with the handkerchief over his face when something Seagraves noted, drew his eyes inquiringly back to the sleeper's hunched figure. The movement caused Seagraves to follow Brandon's scrutiny. He marked the fact that the handkerchief had fallen from their fellow-passenger's face, and—was it because of Olga's suggestion, or was it merely a silly midnight fancy?—he assuredly seemed to trace a certain vague resemblance between the solitary sleeper and the notorious Paul Slavsky, long ago dead.

The idea brought with it a queer, though distinct, sense of unpleasantness. The booming voice of Brandon, breaking in upon his wholly disagreeable train of thought, was highly reassuring.

"Huh!" laughed the Inspector, "I thought I recognized that chap."

At a quarter to one, Seagraves shook Brandon out of a doze and said, "Keep the lady company for a few minutes. I'm going into the smoker."

"All right, Joe," drawled Brandon, opening his slightly reddened eyes and seeming to be perfectly wide awake.

Seagraves disappeared into the smoking-room, returning some ten or fifteen minutes later. To his surprise he noted that Brandon, evidently not caring to take a chance on Olga's diving out of the open window, had handcuffed her fast to the seat and had once more

fallen asleep. Olga herself appeared a trifle more cheerful. She even smiled, though somewhat wearily, as Seagraves resumed his seat beside her.

"I told you it would be Paul," the woman whispered to Seagraves, as though determined to share no part of her secret with the despised Brandon. "See," she insisted, growing almost jubilant, "it is my brother Paul—come back to me at last!"

"For God's sake, Olga," cried Seagraves disgustedly, "stop that foolishness. It gets on my nerves."

Stillness then for several minutes.

Of a sudden Seagraves felt cold. He turned up his coat collar and, somehow rather depressed, sat looking across at the muffled figure of Brandon who, also evidently having felt the night chill, had wound a great muffler about his neck and pulled his ample Stetson low over his face. Seagraves reflected that this would be a fitting case with which to crown a long list of his old friend's successes. Tomorrow he would congratulate him.

A long wild shriek from the locomotive startled Seagraves like an unexpected blow.

"Ha!" he said, "I must be developing nerves after all these years. Anyhow, we're getting in."

Then he raised his eyes and saw that the man, who, he had imagined, resembled Paul Slavsky, had disappeared. So had the only other passenger who had occupied a seat near him. It struck Seagraves as singular.

Another long wail from the locomotive blent dissonantly with the dreary *clackety-clack, clackety-clack* of the car-wheels, and at the same instant the vestibule door was smashed open. Through it came stumbling, covered with blood, clothing torn to tatters, the identical man who had resembled Paul Slavsky.

His hands were securely cuffed, and he was being partly shoved and partly dragged forward along the aisle for all the world as though he were a wax dummy. His captor was no other than the traveler whom the detective had seen sitting near the dead Terrorist's double.

"He fought like a tiger, Mr. Sea-

graves, but I finally got him. He's one of Olga's bunch—a second brother of hers, in fact. He heard that she was hard pressed and just landed from Europe to help her escape."

Joe Seagraves sat like one stupefied. Jim McLean, of the Central Office, cleverly disguised as an innocent-looking rustic, had captured a third Slavsky, but how—where?

"It's all right," McLean was explaining. "You see, Rensfrow got wind of this fellow's game, got hold of a picture of him and sent me out to ride back with you and Brandon and the lady. I fell asleep in earnest, while pretending to be, and waked up just as my man was slipping out of the car. I got a good look at his face then and, recognizing him, made the first move in a scrap that lasted through six coaches and clear up to the coal-tender."

"Why was the man slipping out?" demanded Seagraves, perplexed.

"Ah! that's it. I missed you from the car and suspected something wrong. Brandon seemed to be asleep and the woman was laughing. That was enough. I collared my man."

Joe Seagraves reached over and gently shook Brandon, who, still sleeping like a rock, had slumped low down in the angle formed by the seat and the window.

"Come out of it!" the detective bawled at his companion, "we're getting in."

But Brandon slept on. Seagraves waited a moment, then shook him again, almost violently.

"Come on, Larry!" he said, himself rising.

But Brandon did not stir, and Seagraves darted a questioning glance at Olga, still handcuffed fast to the seat. To his amazement and alarm the woman was smiling, triumphantly, terribly. A vague surmise, which had come into Seagraves' head hours before, was now confirmed.

There was no doubting that leering and awful smile. She had bitten the blood from her carmine lips. Olga Slavsky had gone stark mad!

In all the years that followed, Joe

Seagraves was never able to free his memory from the haunting horror of the thing he beheld when, Brandon not reacting to violent shakes, he grew suspicious and lifted his unresponsive friend's big hat off his head—or rather off—a *vacant-eyed and staring dummy head!*

PAUL SLAVSKY had not returned as Olga had predicted he would, but a last gruesome reminder of his own hideous handiwork was nevertheless present.

When the first shock of horror had passed, and Seagraves and McLean again focused their incredulous eyes on

Olga Slavsky, they knew that the woman, though handcuffed, had herself participated in this last act of terrorism in America. It was incredible, but there, before the detectives' eyes, were the facts themselves.

The blood from her bitten lips streaking her Patrician chin, Olga sat composedly folding and unfolding her daintily-patterned hands, quite as a vampire folds and unfolds its repellent wings; toying, as might a child, with the polished handcuffs which supposedly had held her a prisoner, and—before the amazed eyes of her beholders—*skipping the locked manacles on and off over her tiny, flexible hands!*
