

A MAGAZINE OF THE BIZARRE AND UNUSUAL

# Weird Tales

REGISTERED IN U.S. PATENT OFFICE

Volume 27

CONTENTS FOR APRIL, 1936

Number 4

Cover Design . . . . .	M. Brundage	
<i>Asbosc and Aru (illustrating "The Ruler of Fate")</i>		
The Ruler of Fate . . . . .	Jack Williamson	386
<i>A romantic novel about a weird being that rules Earth from a cavern of horror on the Moon</i>		
Painted Cave . . . . .	Julia Boynton Green	403
<i>Verse</i>		
The Face in the Wind . . . . .	Carl Jacobi	404
<i>An eerie story of a beautiful but evil fate—a woman's face—that appeared one night in the storm</i>		
Son of Satan . . . . .	Arlton Eadie	419
<i>A posthumous weird tale of carnival time in Venice, by a late British master of eerie fiction</i>		
They Shall Rise . . . . .	August W. Derleth and Mark Schorer	437
<i>An uncanny tale of a dissecting-laboratory, and cadavers that would not stay dead</i>		
The Hour of the Dragon (end) . . . . .	Robert E. Howard	450
<i>A goose-flesh novel of a thousand eerie thrills—a tale of Conan the barbarian</i>		
The Druidic Doom . . . . .	Robert Bloch	472
<i>A gripping tale of a hideous horror beneath the Druid stone</i>		
The Sick Muse . . . . .	Charles P. Baudelaire	485
<i>Verse, translated by Clark Ashton Smith from the French</i>		
The Call in the Night . . . . .	Chandler H. Whipple	486
<i>An eerie horror-tale of two racketeers</i>		
The Seance . . . . .	Ronal Kayser	493
<i>A strange tale about the terrible doom that struck in the darkness of a seance-room</i>		
<b>Weird Story Reprint:</b>		
The Rajah's Gift . . . . .	E. Hoffmann Price	499
<i>A very popular story from WEIRD TALES of eleven years ago</i>		
The Eyrie . . . . .		506
<i>The readers express their opinions about this magazine</i>		

Published monthly by the Popular Fiction Publishing Company, 2457 East Washington Street, Indianapolis, Ind. Entered as second-class matter March 20, 1923, at the post office at Indianapolis, Ind., under the act of March 3, 1879. Single copies, 25 cents. *Subscription rates:* One year in the United States and possessions, Cuba, Mexico, South America, Spain, \$2.50; Canada, \$2.75; elsewhere, \$3.00. English office: Otis A. Kline, c/o John Paradise, 86 Strand, W. C. 2, London. The publishers are not responsible for the loss of unsolicited manuscripts, although every care will be taken of such material while in their possession. The contents of this magazine are fully protected by copyright and must not be reproduced either wholly or in part without permission from the publishers.

NOTE—All manuscripts and communications should be addressed to the publishers' Chicago office at 840 North Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Ill. FARNSWORTH WRIGHT, Editor.

Copyright 1936, by the Popular Fiction Publishing Company.

COPYRIGHTED IN GREAT BRITAIN



WEIRD TALES ISSUED 1st OF EACH MONTH

# The Seance

By RONAL KAYSER

*A strange tale about a spirit-seance held by a fake medium, and the terrible doom that struck from the dark*

**F**EAR. . . .  
Ever since it happened, these queer, maggoty thoughts have been crawling inside my skull, and I can't get rid of them. Did you ever stop to wonder what pure Fear—absolute, unadulterated—would be like? A man could quite easily go mad thinking about that.

I've come as close to such Fear as a living person can. And I don't know what it was like. None of us do, or ever will; because those who have experienced the supreme terror can't come back and tell us how it felt. . . . Or can they?

*Do the dead ever come back?*

God forgive me, but I was egotist enough to fancy that I might find out about that. That night, I thought I had my hands on the very veil of the Unknowable. And instead, I met up with this other thing. Fear, so pure and absolute that it killed! Like a noose around the neck. Like a knife in the heart.

I was told what to expect. But, you see, I thought Swami Singh's warning was just part of his act, like his costume and make-up. He wore a dirty yellow

silk turban and had a faded red dressing-robe swathed around his fat, squat body. Artificial dye, or maybe berry juice, stained his round face the color of mahogany. Beads of Mascara sooted his eyelashes. When he spoke, you couldn't help catching the faked, stagy way he whistled the s-sounds.

"There iss sso great a danger," Swami Singh intoned, "when we sstand on the threshold of Death. . . . And Death is mosst jealous when we peer into hiss realm! Perhaps Death will claim one of us—it hass happened sso before, in the sseance."

One of us! Which one did he mean? My eyes jerked to June Darling, the gorgeous girl swathed in a fur cloak; to Henri Patou, a frail and elderly man tapping his cigarette with a nervous, almost transparent, beautifully tended finger; to Larry Stevens, the picture of a solid, successful business man. Or did he mean me, the hard-boiled reporter?

Then I remembered that Singh was putting on an act. Hell, he'd never seen India. His real name would be as or-

dinary as Smith or Brown or Jones. And his act wasn't even a good fraud.

You may wonder why I bothered to go to the seance at all, then. I'll tell you. I sensed that Swami Singh was something more than just a bum actor. Behind the mascaraed lashes, his eyes were blackest carbon. Beneath all this cheap, faked make-up lay a core of reality.

Psychic power. Maybe Singh didn't even know that he had it. Possibly he didn't know how to use it, or maybe was afraid to; but he had it.

There was another angle, too. Suppose Myra Desola could come back from the grave—she had promised to try. . . .

I had a hunch that Myra could do this thing, if anybody could. She'd spent her life doing the things everyone else called impossible.

Can you imagine a woman *without any fingers on her right hand* becoming the most famous dancer of her time? Myra did. And for twenty years, no one ever guessed that her famous shawls were clutched by pitiful, maimed stumps. . . .

We, the very few who did know, never told. Because there is something about deformity—especially deformity in a beautiful woman—that turns the public away. That's why Myra led a life more lonely than Garbo's. The very people who worshipped her would have turned on her with hate, if they'd known.

I can't tell you anything more about Myra Desola, for fear you'd guess her real name. . . .

But I did have this hunch: that she'd be able to use this power of Singh's, even if he couldn't.

**M**OST horrible and awful peril for all of uss," Singh hissed. "Death, perhaps. . . ."

We had tied him into the grandfather's chair behind the table in the seance room. We knotted his wrists to its wooden arms

with our handkerchiefs, and bound his ankles to the chair-legs with our neckties. We had wrapped leather straps around the bottom rungs of the chair and had nailed the straps onto the floor.

On top of that, I was to sit in a chair behind his, and hold his arms throughout the seance.

And on the other side of the table, Patou and Stevens and June Darling sat in ordinary kitchen chairs.

"There iss a key on the table," Singh whispered to me, "and the sswitch iss on the wall behind uss. Turn out the light."

I picked up the key and walked to the back of the room. It isn't necessary to go into details about this room, except to say that we had made sure there was but one possible entrance—the door, and we had pasted brown paper over that.

This wasn't an ordinary switch, though. One had to have the key to turn the lights on or off.

"Hell!" I blurted.

I don't know why I shivered, then. I had turned the switch, and the chandelier blinked out, leaving us in darkness. Any kid would have expected that. . . . But they ought to invent a special name for this kind of utter, absolute dark. It was as if my eyeballs had been painted with ink—ink the color of fresh lampblack, drear, caliginous, soot-black.

It wasn't until I had fumbled my way through that solid murk, not until I was crouched in the chair behind Swami Singh and had my hands on his arms, that I realized. I, with the key, alone could switch up the light again. And the swami alone knew where I was—by the grip of my hands on him. Now I knew why he had insisted on our bringing no matches into this room!

I knew then that he was a fake.

And I knew that he wasn't.

How could that be? Surely a man can't have two absolutely contradictory

emotions *at the same time*. You can't believe a thing, and not believe it, with the same thought.

But I did, as if there were *two* brains, entirely separate, inside my skull, each grinding out entirely different ideas—like two radios, tuned in on different stations, playing in one room.

"Bunk!" one brain sneered.

"*God, this is real!*" the other brain whispered.

Five minutes passed; ten.

Every few moments, Swami Singh jerked. And after each jerk he got more rigid. I suddenly dug my fingers into his biceps, hard, and felt the muscle flinch. So this trance of his was a fake.

And underneath was something else. Power. It beat through the silk sleeves of his robe in hot, weird waves. Not like the prickle of a concealed electric battery. These emanations of his were psychic, occult. That some people do have such "influence" is a scientifically provable fact. Many of the early saints had it, so powerfully that it fairly shone through their flesh.

Every few moments he fetched a long, stagy groan, like a ham Romeo dying with one eye cocked open to see how the audience was taking it.

Rasputin had power like this, I remembered. In his case, it was evil. I didn't think it could be either good or evil in Swami Singh . . . because he couldn't harness it. The "influence" simply blew through him like wind through a tree. Or it was like juice in a high-voltage wire. He couldn't any more switch it on or off than the wire can.

"It'ss coming!" he suddenly yelled. And I knew that he lied; there was nothing.

*But there was something.*

Now a whitish speck swam into sight. It had a very dim and faint phosphorescence—an earthly phosphorescence, I felt

sure. It hovered some eight or nine inches above the floor, possibly three feet to the left of us.

The thing which I felt had nothing to do with this whitish speck.

I would say that this luminous speck had about the size of a walnut when I first noticed it. It very quickly swelled to the largeness of a baseball; though it didn't resemble a baseball, being very wrinkled.

"The firsst materialization iss very difficult for the sspirit," Swami Singh hissed. "A full figure at the firsst, iss sso rare. . . ."

**T**HE wrinkled shape smoothed out as it elongated into form. It became a woman's face; dim and blurred and scarcely visible, it might have been taken for almost any woman, of any age. But it wasn't Myra Desola.

*All the same, Myra had come into this room. I felt her watching us. I couldn't be mistaken.*

"Who are you, sspirit?" the swami hissed.

"It is I," came a soprano reply. "It is Myra."

Bunk! Her voice had been contralto. I knew what was going on here. The swami changed his voice and threw it down toward the face—ventriloquism.

"Do you recognize anyone here?" Singh asked.

"Yes," the soprano hesitated. "There is June. And it's Glen, isn't it?"

Glen meant me; and that was more bunk. Myra Desola would have spoken to Patou first. Lord, she'd been his mistress for twenty years. She would have greeted June next, because she'd raised the girl from a street waif to womanhood; and then, Larry Stevens, for he'd managed her tours.

But our precious swami didn't know all that. All he had to go on was our

names, and the fact that we wanted to talk to a certain "Myra".

He played it smartly, though. "Would any of you folks like to ask her some questions about the Great Beyond?" he inquired.

Yeah. He would like to answer questions about that. Something we couldn't check up on.

June Darling's voice floated through the intense dark. "Myra, will you tell me the brand of perfume you always used? I've forgotten, and I wanted to buy some."

*Perfume. Myra's perfume. God, it was in this room. That trail of strange, glamorous scent. . . .*

Singh was trying to wriggle out of it. He had the soprano voice saying, "I do not remember—it seems so long ago—"

*That beady draft of perfume in the darkness! It didn't come from the face. It had nothing to do with the face.*

By this time, I had pretty well deduced where that face came from. He couldn't be using his hands, for I had a grasp on the arms. It didn't come from his garments, for Stevens and I had searched through those. It had to be the chair. The rungs of the chair. He could press against them with his legs.

Instantly I saw what the layout must be. One of the rungs at the front of the chair would be hollowed out. There would be a piston inside the rung, and a spring to shoot it out. This rung could not be made to fit into the chair-leg on the left side, but only appeared to do so. The pressure of Singh's legs would release it, move it back an inch or so, and finally allow the piston to slide forth.

This accounted for the position of the face, its distance above the floor, and its distance from the chair.

*But what accounted for the perfume,*

*and the feeling that Myra had come into the room?*

The logical part of me refused to believe in the perfume. I concentrated on the fake face. There would be a hollow chamber in the end of the piston. A rubber bag, painted to resemble a face—painted with luminous paint—would be firmly cemented there. And a concealed air chamber would supply the pressure to force this mask out at the piston's end. . . .

Abruptly, I snatched my hands away from Singh's arms, and I dived. Damn! There wasn't any face. I sprawled on the floor.

The swami had been too fast for me. Obviously, mask and piston shot back into place the instant he released the pressure of his legs against the rung. But wait! I'd switch on the lights and tear that chair to pieces with my bare hands. . . .

*A soft, woman's laugh bubbled through the dark. A contralto laugh! A contralto voice said: "But I haven't forgotten, June. The perfume was called 'Spring Breeze', and it was put up for me specially by Lodi, in Paris."*

And this was the real thing. I knew that even before I twisted over on the floor and saw her. (There was only one mind, then, from the moment I looked on her. I had no doubt at all.)

"Myra!" came Larry Stevens' sob. "God, it is Myra!"

There was a sound of feet stumbling on the floor, and somehow I knew that would be Patou groping toward her.

Of them all, I was closest to her, so close that I could almost have dipped my fingers in the luminous, azure haze that clothed her.

It was as if a radium thread limned her nude limbs and magnificent breasts. About her face the glow thickened to a positive halo. The wide lips smiled.

Curiously, this ardent blue aura made no impression whatever upon the pro-

found darkness. It shed no pool of radiance upon the polished floor, nor could I see the table—or the chair, where Swami Singh sat and fetched great, racking breaths. The illumination seemed to turn *inward*, so that it gleamed upon the marble-white of her flesh and the vivid scarlet of shawl wrapped around her hips and caught loosely over the right forearm.

And this, I sensed, was the way she would have chosen to come back. In costume. Ready for the show to go on. . . .

"Myra," Henri Patou whispered. "Will you give me your hand?"

I COULD not see him at all. But her arm rose in its luminous flowing line, and then her hand vanished—was blotted out—as he fondled it.

There was no sound now but the harsh, hurried breathing of Swami Singh in his chair.

Then Patou laughed; or perhaps he wept.

"It is Myra," he said. "Come, Larry—and you, Glen, and June—*take her hand*. . . ."

I got up from the floor. I went to her, and I took her hand. Dread rushed through me; I trembled; my knees weakened. You see, I had somehow expected or thought that her flesh would be *warm*.

And it wasn't. No—cold, and limp; but I touched it, and there couldn't be any mistake. My hand groped over the pit-*eous stumps* where her fingers had been hacked off—close to the palm, with less than an inch of each remaining.

"Do not cry, my poor Henri," she said tenderly. For he wept, now—the terrible tears of a man who cries without shame. "It does not matter any more," she said. "The sickness and the pain, the loneliness, not even Death. . . . All that is behind me. It is gone, quite gone."

This was nothing for me to hear. Nor Larry, nor June. But we could not do

otherwise. We knew somehow that to have opened the door and let the faintest ray of light into this room would have shattered the spell. . . .

"It is gone," she said. "Like those poor fingers of mine for which you once wept such bitter tears."

Behind us, in the tenebrous lamp-soot black, Singh cried out in a broken voice of terror: "The light! In God's name, turn on the light!"

I groped toward his chair, and slapped—twice—with my open palm against his bleating mouth. "Shut up!" I said. "Leave them alone—those two."

The feel of his flesh against my hand was snaky, lizard-like. I hated him for this power that he had, and we could not ever have—the power to call *her* back from Death.

And I hated him, that he should hear these words. "I loved you, Myra," cried Patou. "And you would never marry me. You never told me—why——"

So I knew why he wept. It was for his memory of her, and the single flaw that made the memory less than perfect.

"I will tell you now." The contralto voice throbbled. "There need not be any secrets between us, any more. My poor Henri, but did you never guess?"

Patou whispered, "That there was someone else? I guessed *that*. There was a time when I suspected Larry. . . . And afterward, I thought perhaps, the stage—your art——"

"None that I loved but you," said Myra. "Not since that day in the old Greatnoble Theater—the day when you took me into your arms. . . . Do you remember, Henri? You kissed my hands—my beautiful hands, you called them. Can you remember the words you said then? You talked of hands. You said you could not love a woman whose knuckles were red and ugly. . . . You spoke of the slender, trailing fingers of

Eleanore Duse, and you said that mine were yet more beautiful. There was a song—'Pale hands I loved'—and you called it *my* song. . . .

"You thought we were alone in the theater, Henri. But there was one other—hidden backstage—my husband——"

**T**HE silence! The blackness of the room!

"Husband!" cried Patou. "I never knew. . . ."

Through the haze of blue the wide lips smiled sadly. "No, I never told you. I was young when I married Hugo Singer—young, and stage-struck, and not knowing what marriage meant. He fascinated me in some strange way. . . . But I had learned to hate him—as he must have hated me.

"For, that night, he forced his way into my dressing-room. *You* were on the stage at the time. There was a New York theatrical agent in the audience; and it meant much to you—a successful performance, that night."

Her low, sad contralto laugh!

"I did not spoil it for you, Henri. I did not cry out. Not even when I saw the knife—the butcher knife—in his hand! Not even when he seized me. He was drunk—intoxicated with his rage. 'Pale hands that he loves!' he said, between his teeth. 'I will fix your pretty hands!'

"There stood a great, metal-bound trunk in the corner of the room. I fought, and he was too strong for me. He placed my hand on the edge of the trunk, and he struck——"

She sobbed. All the horror of a woman's mutilated beauty and wasted years curdled in that sound. Hearing it, I felt my skin knit up into points of exquisite dread. God, how she must have hated that monster of a husband—with a hate that not even the grave had been able to quench.

"I would have killed him, if I had known!" Patou said. Abysmal rage stirred in his voice.

"Yes, you would have ruined your career—and mine," said Myra. "I couldn't tell you, then. But now it is different. . . . I have no career, now, and they can't lock up a dead woman."

Something flashed in her hand. Something that she had snatched from the folds of her shawl—a *knife*. A huge; ugly butchering-knife. . . .

She moved swiftly, and her luminous limbs swam as a bird in flight, the knife shining as she raised it before her terrible, glowing eyes.

A scream! A most horrible, ghastly, and unhuman scream!

I shuddered as I lurched toward the back wall. In the darkness I could not find the switch. The rough, unpapered plaster rasped my fingers as I sought for it.

There was a sound of wild, contralto laughter. Frantically, I pawed the wall as another shriek rang out. It reverberated, as the last cry that goes up when a great ship with all on board is swallowed into the sea. It gibbered, like the wild wail of an alpinist hurtling down a thousand-foot cliff. So First Man must have cried out when the claws of the saber-tooth tiger ripped his flesh. There was agony in it, and terror, and despair.

Often now in the night I live over that unendurable instant before I found the switch, and my numbed finger forced the key into it, and the light in the chandelier flashed up.

I turned, then, and stared. There was the solid, small room and the door we had pasted shut with brown paper. . . .

And the lingering fragrance of an exotic perfume. . . .

And the four of us—Patou, Larry Stevens, June Darling, and I—peering at the man trussed in the chair.

The swami was dead. We knew that. His eyes, wide-staring and bulging like fat prunes in their sockets, were sightless; the fat face had the grayness of death under the mahogany dye; and his mouth hung open and slack.

Blood dripped from his manacled hands. . . . And for a crazed moment I thought that his fingers had been hacked off. Actually, the blood came from the palms, lacerated by the nails of those

fingers which were so tightly curled up that the mortician had to scissor through the tendons to open the hands.

I SAW the name which was written on the death certificate; and it was not Singh, but Singer. On the next line below, for cause of death, they wrote *heart failure*.

I know better.

It was Fear. . . .