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WEIRD STORY REPRINTS

No. 4. *The Severed Hand**

By WILHELM HAUFF

I WAS born in Constantinople; my father was a dragoman at the Porte, and he also carried on a fairly lucrative business in sweet-scented perfumes and silk goods. He gave me a good education; he partly instructed me himself, and also he had me instructed by one of our priests. He at first intended that I should succeed him in business, but as I showed greater aptitude in my studies than he had expected, he destined me, on the advice of his friends, to be a doctor; for if a doctor has learned a little more than the ordinary charlatan, he can make his fortune in Constantinople. Many Frenchmen frequented our house, and one of them persuaded my father to allow me to travel to the city of Paris in his native land, where such learning could be best acquired, and free of charge. He wished to take me with him gratuitously on his journey home. My father, who had also traveled in his youth, agreed, and the Frank told me to hold myself in readiness three months thence.

I was beside myself with joy at the idea of seeing foreign countries, and eagerly awaited the moment when we should embark. The Frank at last concluded his business and prepared himself for the journey. On the evening before our departure my father led me into his little bedroom. There I saw splendid clothes and weapons lying on the table. My gaze

was chiefly attracted to an immense heap of gold, for I had never before seen so much collected together.

My father embraced me and said: "Behold, my son, I have procured clothes for your journey. These weapons are yours; they are the same which my grandfather hung around me when I went abroad. I know that you can use them aright, but make use of them only when you are attacked; on such occasions, however, defend yourself bravely. My property is not large; behold, I have divided it into three parts: one part for you, another for my support and spare money, but the third is to me a sacred and untouched property—it is for you in the hour of need." Thus spake my old father, tears standing in his eyes, perhaps from some foreboding, for I never saw him again.

The journey passed off very well; we soon reached the land of the Franks, and six days later we arrived in the large city of Paris. There my Frankish friend hired a room for me, and advised me to spend wisely my money, which amounted in all to two thousand dollars. I lived three years in this city, and learned what is necessary for a skilful physician to know. I should not, however, be stating the truth if I said that I liked being there, for the customs of this nation displeased me; besides, I had only a few chosen friends there, and these were noble young men.

The longing for home at last possessed me mightily; during the

*Translated from the German.

whole of that time I had not heard anything from my father, and I therefore seized a favorable opportunity of returning home. An embassy from France left for Turkey. I acted as surgeon to the suite of the ambassador and arrived happily in Stamboul.

My father's house was locked, and the neighbors, who were surprized at seeing me, told me my father had died two months ago. The priest who had instructed me in my youth brought the key; alone and desolate I entered the empty house. Everything was just as my father had left it, except that the gold which I was to inherit was gone. I questioned the priest about it, and he said, bowing: "Your father died a saint, for he has bequeathed his gold to the Church." This was, and remained, inexplicable to me. However, what could I do? I had no witness against the priest, and had to be content that he had not considered the house and the goods of my father as a bequest.

This was the first misfortune that I encountered. Henceforth nothing but ill-luck attended me. My reputation as a doctor would not spread at all, because I was ashamed to act the charlatan; and I felt everywhere the want of the recommendation of my father, who would have introduced me to the richest and most distinguished persons, but who now no longer thought of the poor Zaleukos! My father's goods also had no sale, for his customers had deserted him after his death, and new ones are only to be got slowly.

Thus when I was one day meditating sadly over my position, it occurred to me that I had often seen in France men of my nation traveling through the country exhibiting their goods in the markets of the towns. I remembered that the people liked to buy of them, because they came from abroad, and that such a business would be most lucrative. Immedi-

ately I resolved what to do. I disposed of my father's house, gave part of the money to a trusty friend to keep for me, and with the rest I bought what are very rare in France: shawls, silk goods, ointments and oils; then I took a berth on board a ship, and thus entered upon my second journey to the land of the Franks.

It seemed as if fortune had favored me again as soon as I had turned my back upon the Castles of the Dardanelles. Our journey was short and successful. I traveled through the large and small towns of the Franks, and found everywhere willing buyers of my goods. My friend in Stamboul always sent me fresh stores, and my wealth increased day by day. When at last I had saved so much that I thought I might venture on a greater undertaking, I traveled with my goods to Italy. I also employed my knowledge of physic, which brought me not a little money. On reaching a town, I had it published that a Greek physician had arrived, who had already healed many; and my balsam and medicine gained me many a sequin. Thus at length I reached the city of Florence in Italy.

I resolved to remain in this city for some time, partly because I liked it so well, partly also because I wished to recruit myself from the exertions of my travels. I hired a vaulted shop, in that part of the town called Santa Croce, and not far from this a couple of well-appointed rooms at an inn, leading out upon a balcony. I immediately had my bills circulated, which announced me to be both physician and merchant. Scarcely had I opened my shop when I was besieged by buyers, and in spite of my high prices I sold more than anyone else, because I was obliging and friendly toward my customers.

THUS I had already lived four days happily in Florence, when one evening, as I was about to close my

vaulted room, and was examining once more the contents of my ointment boxes, as I was in the habit of doing, I found in one of the small boxes a piece of paper, which I did not remember to have put in it.

I unfolded the paper, and found in it an invitation to be on the bridge which is called Ponte Vecchio that night exactly at midnight. For a long time I sat and wondered as to who it might be who had invited me there; and not knowing a single soul in Florence, I thought perhaps I should be secretly conducted to a patient—a thing which had often occurred before. I therefore determined to proceed thither, but took care to gird on the sword which my father had once presented to me.

When it was close upon midnight I set out on my journey, and soon reached the Ponte Vecchio. I found the bridge deserted, and determined to await the appearance of him who had called me. It was a cold night; the moon shone brightly, and I looked down upon the waves of the Arno, which sparkled in the moonlight. It was striking 12 o'clock from all the churches of the city, when I looked up and saw a tall man standing before me completely covered in a scarlet cloak, one end of which hid his face.

At first I was somewhat frightened, because he had made his appearance so suddenly; but shortly afterward I was myself again and said: "If it is you who ordered me here, what do you want?" The man in scarlet turned round and said in an undertone: "Follow!" At this, however, I felt a little timid about going alone with this stranger. I stood still and said: "Not so, sir; kindly first tell me where; you might also let me see your countenance a little, so that I may convince myself you mean me no harm." The red one, however, seemed to pay no attention to this. "If you are unwilling, Zaleukos, re-

main," he replied, and continued his way. I grew angry. "Do you think," I exclaimed, "a man like me allows himself to be made a fool of, to be forced to wait on this cold night for nothing?"

In three bounds I had reached him, seized him by the cloak, and cried still louder, whilst laying hold of my saber with the other hand. His cloak remained in my hand, but the stranger had disappeared round the nearest corner.

I became calmer by degrees. I had the cloak, at any rate, and it was this which would give me the key to this remarkable adventure. I put it on and continued on my way home. When I was at a distance of about a hundred paces from it, someone brushed very closely by me and whispered in the language of the Franks: "Take care, Count; nothing can be done tonight." Before I had time to turn round, this somebody had passed, and I merely saw a shadow hovering along the houses. I perceived that these words did not concern me, but rather the cloak; yet it gave me no explanation concerning the affair.

On the following morning I considered what was to be done. At first I had intended to have the cloak cried in the streets, as if I had found it. But then the stranger might send for it by a third person, and thus no light would be thrown upon the matter. Whilst I was thus thinking, I examined the cloak more closely. It was made of thick Genoese velvet, scarlet in color, edged with astrakhan fur and richly embroidered with gold. The magnificent appearance of the fur put a thought in my mind which I resolved to carry out.

I carried it into my shop and exposed it for sale, but placed such a high price upon it that I was sure nobody would buy it. My object in this was to scrutinize everybody sharply who asked for the fur cloak;

for the figure of the stranger, which I had seen but superficially, though with some certainty, after the loss of the cloak, I should recognize amongst a thousand.

There were many would-be purchasers for the cloak, the extraordinary beauty of which attracted everybody; but none resembled the stranger in the slightest degree, and nobody was willing to pay such a high price as two hundred sequins for it. What astonished me was that when I asked if there was not such a cloak in Florence, everybody answered, "No," and all assured me that they never had seen so precious and tasteful a piece of work.

EVENING was drawing near, when at last a young man appeared, who had already been to my place, and had already offered me a great deal for the cloak. He threw a purse with sequins upon the table, and exclaimed: "Of a truth, Zaleukos, I must have your cloak, even if I should turn into a beggar over it!" He immediately began to count out his pieces of gold. I was in a dangerous position: I had exposed the cloak only to attract the attention of my stranger, and now a young fool came to pay an immense price for it. However, what could I do? I yielded; for on the other hand I was delighted at the idea of being so handsomely recompensed for my nocturnal adventure.

The young man put the cloak around him and went away, but on reaching the threshold he returned; unfastening a piece of paper which had been tied to the cloak, and throwing it toward me, he exclaimed: "Here, Zaleukos, hangs something which I dare say does not belong to the cloak." I picked up the piece of paper carelessly, but behold, on it these words were written: "Bring the cloak at the appointed hour to-night to the Ponte Vecchio, and four

hundred sequins are yours." I stood thunderstruck. Thus I had lost my fortune and completely missed my aim! Yet I did not think long. I picked up the two hundred sequins, jumped after the one who had bought the cloak, and said: "Dear friend, take back your sequins and give me the cloak; I can not possibly part with it." He first regarded the matter as a joke; but when he saw that I was in earnest, he became angry at my demand, called me a fool, and finally it came to blows.

I was fortunate enough to wrench the cloak away from him in the scuffle, and was about to run away with it, when the young man called the police to his assistance, and we both appeared before the judge. The latter was much surprized at the accusation, and adjudicated the cloak in favor of my adversary. I offered the young man twenty, fifty, eighty, even a hundred sequins in addition to his two hundred, if he would part with the cloak. What my entreaties could not do, my gold did. He accepted it. I went away with the cloak triumphantly, and had to appear to the whole city of Florence as a madman. I did not care, however, about the opinion of the people, for I knew that I had profited after all by the bargain.

Impatiently I awaited the night. At the same hour as before I went with the cloak under my arm toward the Ponte Vecchio. With the last stroke of 12 the figure appeared out of the darkness and came toward me. It was unmistakably the man whom I had seen the day before. "Have you the cloak?" he asked me. "Yes, sir," I replied; "but it cost me a hundred sequins ready money." "I know it," replied the other. "Look: here are four hundred." He went with me toward the wide balustrade of the bridge, and counted out the money. There were four hundred; they sparkled magnificently in the

moonlight; their glitter rejoiced my heart. Alas! I did not anticipate that this would be its last joy. I put the money in my pocket, and was desirous of looking thoroughly at my kind and unknown benefactor; but he wore a mask, through which dark eyes stared at me frightfully. "I thank you, sir, for your kindness," I said to him; "what else do you require of me? I tell you beforehand it must be an honorable transaction."

"There is no occasion for alarm," he replied, whilst winding the cloak around his shoulders; "I require your assistance as surgeon, not for one alive, but dead."

"What do you mean?" I exclaimed, full of astonishment.

"I arrived with my sister from abroad," he said, and beckoned me at the same time to follow him. "I lived here with her at the house of a friend. My sister died yesterday suddenly of a disease, and my relatives wish to bury her tomorrow. According to an old custom of our family, all are to be buried in the tomb of our ancestors; many, notwithstanding, who died in foreign countries are buried there and embalmed. I do not begrudge my relatives her body, but for my father I want at least the head of his daughter, in order that he may see her once more."

This custom of severing the heads of beloved relatives appeared to me somewhat dreadful, yet I did not dare object to it lest I should offend the stranger. I told him that I was acquainted with the embalming of the dead, and begged him to conduct me to the deceased. Yet I could not help asking why all this must be done mysteriously and at night. He answered me that his relatives, who considered his intention horrible, objected to it by daylight; if the head were severed, then they could say no more about it; although he might have brought me the head to embalm,

yet a natural feeling had prevented him from severing it himself.

In the meantime we had reached a large, splendid house. My companion pointed it out to me as the end of our nocturnal walk. We passed the principal entrance of the house, entered a little door, which the stranger carefully locked behind him, and now ascended in the dark a narrow spiral staircase. It led toward a dimly lighted passage, out of which we entered a room lighted by a lamp fastened to the ceiling.

In this room was a bed, on which the corpse lay. The stranger turned aside his face, evidently endeavoring to hide his tears. He pointed toward the bed, telling me to do my business well and quickly, and left the room.

I took my instruments, which as surgeon I always carried about with me, and approached the bed. Only the head of the corpse was visible, and it was so beautiful that I experienced involuntarily the deepest sympathy. Dark hair hung down in long plaits, the features were pale, the eyes closed. I took my sharpest knife, and with one stroke cut the throat. But oh horror! the dead opened her eyes, but immediately closed them again, and with a deep sigh she now seemed to breathe her last. At the same moment a stream of hot blood shot toward me from the wound. I was convinced that the poor creature had been killed by me. I had no doubt that she was dead, for there was no recovery from this wound. I stood for several minutes in painful anguish at what had happened. Had the man of the red cloak deceived me, or had his sister merely been apparently dead? The latter seemed to me more likely. But I dared not tell the brother of the deceased that perhaps a less deliberate cut might have awakened her without killing her; therefore I wished to sever the head completely; but once more the dying

woman groaned, stretched herself out in painful movements, and died.

Fright overpowered me, and, shuddering, I hastened out of the room. But outside in the passage it was dark, for the light was out. I felt my way haphazard along the wall in the dark and descended the stairway. I found the door ajar, and breathed more freely on reaching the street. Urged on by terror, I rushed toward my dwelling place, and buried myself in the cushions of my bed, trying to forget the terrible thing I had done.

But sleep deserted me, and only the morning admonished me again to take courage. It seemed to me probable that the man who had induced me to commit this nefarious deed might not denounce me. I immediately resolved to set to work in my vaulted room, and if possible to assume an indifferent look. But alas! an additional circumstance increased my anxiety still more. My cap and my girdle, as well as my instruments, were wanting, and I was uncertain whether I had left them in the room of the murdered girl or whether I had lost them in my flight. The former seemed indeed the more likely, and thus I could easily be discovered as the murderer.

At the accustomed hour I opened my vaulted room. My neighbor came in, as was his wont every morning, for he was a talkative man. "Well," he said, "what do you say about the terrible affair which occurred during the night?" I pretended not to know anything. "What, do you not know what is known all over the town? Are you not aware that the loveliest flower in Florence, Bianca, the governor's daughter, was murdered last night? I saw her only yesterday driving through the streets in so cheerful a manner with her intended one, for today the marriage was to have taken place." I felt each word of my neighbor like a sword-thrust. Many a time my torment was renewed, for every one of my customers

told me of the affair, each one more ghastly than the one before, and yet nobody could relate anything more terrible than that which I had seen myself.

ABOUT midday a police officer entered my shop. "Signor Zaleukos," he said, producing the things which I had missed, "do these things belong to you?" I determined not to aggravate the affair by telling a lie, and acknowledged myself as the owner of the things. The police officer asked me to follow him, and led me toward a large building which I soon recognized as the prison. There he showed me into a room.

My situation was terrible, as I thought of it in solitude. The frightful idea of having committed a murder, unintentionally, constantly presented itself to my mind. I also could not conceal from myself that the glitter of the gold had captivated my feelings, otherwise I should not have fallen blindly into the trap.

Two hours after my arrest I was led out of my cell. I descended several steps until at last I reached a great hall. Around a long table draped in black were seated twelve men, mostly old men. There were benches along the sides of the hall, filled with the most distinguished personages of Florence. The galleries, which were above, were thickly crowded with spectators. When I had stepped toward the table covered with black cloth, a man with a gloomy and sad countenance arose; it was the governor. He told the assembly that he, as the father of the murdered girl, could not sentence, and that he resigned his place on this occasion to the eldest of the senators. The eldest of the senators was at least ninety years old. He stood in a bent attitude, and his temples were covered with thin white hair, but his eyes were as yet very fiery, and his voice powerful and weighty. He com-

menced by asking me whether I confessed to the murder. I requested him to allow me to speak, and related undauntedly and with a clear voice what I had done.

I noticed that the governor, during my recital, at one time turned pale, and at another time red. When I had finished, he rose angrily. "What, wretch!" he exclaimed; "do you even dare to impute to another person the crime which you have committed from greediness?" The senator reprimanded him for his interruption, since he had voluntarily renounced his right; besides, it was not clear that I did the deed from greediness, for, according to his own statement, nothing had been stolen from the victim. He even went farther. He told the governor that he must give an account of the early life of his daughter, for then only would it be possible to decide whether I had spoken the truth or not. At the same time he adjourned the court for the day, in order, as he said, to consult the papers of the deceased, which the governor would give him.

I was taken back to my prison, where I spent a wretched day, always fervently wishing that a link might be discovered between the deceased and the man of the red cloak. Full of hope, I entered the Court of Justice the next day. Several letters were lying on the table. The old senator asked me whether they were in my handwriting. I looked at them and noticed that they must have been written by the same hand as the other two papers which I had received. I communicated this to the senators, but no attention was paid to my statement, and they told me that I might have written both, for the signature of the letters was undoubtedly a Z, the first letter of my name. The letters contained threats against the deceased, and warnings against the marriage she was about to contract.

The governor seemed to have given extraordinary information concerning me, for I was treated with more suspicion and rigor on this day. To justify myself, I referred to my papers, which must be in my room, but was told they had been looked for without success. Thus at the conclusion of this sitting all hope vanished, and on my being brought into court the third day, judgment was pronounced on me. I was convicted of wilful murder, and condemned to death.

ON THE evening of this terrible day which had decided my fate, I was sitting in my lonely cell; my hopes were gone, my thoughts stedfastly fixed upon death, when the door of my prison opened, and in came a man, who for a long time looked at me silently. "Is it thus I find you again, Zaleukos?" he said. I had not recognized him by the dim light of my lamp, but the sound of his voice roused in me old remembrances. It was Valetti, one of those few friends whose acquaintance I had made in Paris when I was studying there. He said he had accidentally come to Florence, where his father, who was a distinguished man, lived. He had heard about my affair, and had come to hear from my own lips how I could have committed such a crime.

I related to him the whole affair. He seemed much surprized at it, and adjured me, as my only friend, to tell him all, so that I should not leave the world with a lie behind me. I confirmed my assertions with an oath that I spoke the truth, and that I was not guilty of anything, except that the glitter of the gold had dazzled me and that I had not perceived the improbability of the stranger's story. "Did you know Bianca?" Valetti asked me. I assured him that I had never seen her. Valetti now related to me that a profound mystery rested on the affair, that the governor had

very much accelerated my condemnation, and now a report was spread that I had known Bianca for a long time and had murdered her out of revenge for her marriage with someone else. I told him that all this coincided exactly with the man of the red cloak, but that I was unable to prove his participation in the affair. Valetti embraced me weeping, and promised me to do all he could to save my life.

I had little hope, though I knew that Valetti was a clever man, well versed in the law, and that he would do all in his power to save my life. For two long days I was in uncertainty; at last Valetti appeared. "I bring consolation, though painful," he said. "You will live and be free with the loss of one hand." Affected, I thanked my friend for saving my life. He told me that the governor had been inexorable in regard to having the affair investigated a second time, but that he had at last agreed, in order not to seem unjust, that if a similar case could be found in the law books of the history of Florence, my punishment should be the same as the one recorded in these books. Valetti and his father had searched in the old books day and night, and at last found a case quite similar to mine. The sentence was: that his left hand be cut off, his property confiscated, and he himself banished forever. This was my punishment also, and he asked me to prepare for the painful hour which awaited me. I will not describe to you that terrible hour, when I laid my hand upon the block in the public market place and my own blood shot over me in broad streams.

VALETTI took me to his house until I had recovered; he then most generously supplied me with money for traveling, for all I had acquired with so much difficulty had fallen a prey to the law. I left Florence for Sicily and embarked on the first ship

that I found for Constantinople. My hope was fixed upon the sum which I had entrusted to my friend. I also requested to be allowed to live with him. But great was my astonishment when he asked me why I did not wish to live in my own house. He told me that some unknown man had bought a house in the Greek quarter in my name, and this very man had also told the neighbors of my early arrival. I immediately proceeded thither, accompanied by my friend, and was received by all my old acquaintances joyfully.

An old merchant gave me a letter, which the man who bought the house for me had left behind. I read as follows: "Zaleukos! Two hands are prepared to work incessantly, in order that you may not feel the loss of one of yours. The house which you see and all its contents are yours, and every year you will receive enough to be counted amongst the rich of your people. Forgive him who is unhappier than yourself!"

I could guess who had written the letter, and in answer to my question the merchant told me it had been a man whom he took for a Frank, and who had worn a scarlet cloak. I knew enough to understand that the stranger was, after all, not entirely devoid of noble intentions. In my new house I found everything arranged in the best style, also a vaulted room stored with goods, more splendid than I had ever had.

Ten years have passed since. I still continue my commercial travels, more from old custom than necessity, yet I have never again seen that country where I became so unfortunate. Every year since, I have received a thousand gold-pieces; and although I rejoice to know that unfortunate man to be so noble, yet he cannot relieve me of the sorrow of my soul, for the terrible picture of the murdered Bianca is continually on my mind.