

Weird Tales

ALL STORIES NEW—NO REPRINTS

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The Statue



By JAMES CAUSEY

EROME WINTERS pursed his lips. "Young man," he said coldly, "a bargain is a bargain." "But can't you give me just a little more time!" The young man's eyes were dark and pleading against the pallor of his face. "Another two months. Another month! I could surely find some way—"

His voice trailed off. Winters was shaking his head from side to side, staring at him with his frosty blue eyes.

"Three months you were given," he said curtly. "Seventy-five dollars. You've had time enough, my good man. Plenty of time. Seventy-five dollars, with interest. And—you don't have it, do you?" His voice was faintly mocking.

The young sculptor buried his face in his hands. "No," he said hoarsely. "I haven't. But I could surely scrape up the money some way—if only—"

Winters looked queerly at him. He

Each night the chipping and shaping went on . . . and the only man who could have done it was dead.

stood up. He was a short, slight man, small and withered as an old persimmon, his blue eyes wearing a perpetually frosty gaze.

In the little town of Hammondville, Winters was by far the wealthiest—as well as the most hated. His loans bordered upon usury—and those who could not pay were given no mercy. He had caused more than one suicide, and a very appreciable amount of misery and suffering. A wizened, dried-up little spider he was, who spun his web carefully, showing not the slightest pity to those unfortunate enough to fall into it.

Just now, contrary to his usual satisfaction when foreclosing a mortgage, he felt curiously frustrated. Perhaps—he had not made enough profit this time.

"Young man," his voice was thin and sharp, "three months ago you came to me with a desperate plea for money—on my terms. As security, I was given a small bit of sculpture, unfinished at that." His voice hardened. "It is not my usual policy to be so generous—"

"Generous!" The young sculptor's face twisted. His voice was bitter. "You speak of generosity! The Dawn Child—my statue. Seventy-five dollars! Finished, I could very easily sell that statue for—"

"For some considerable sum, I suppose?" Winters' words dripped cold. "Remember. The statue is incomplete. I may have a hard time disposing of it, for that very reason."

He frowned petulantly.

The young man stared at Winters as if seeing him for the first time. Slowly Winters flushed, and his eyes fell under that penetrating gaze.

"So," De Roult said softly. "I might have known."

He straightened, drew a deep breath, and looked at Winters again. "It is absolutely useless to ask for more time, I see."

"Absolutely," Winters said, some of his poise returning to him.

"Then—" Two spots of color appeared in the young man's cheeks. "Then, sir, may I see the statue? May I? Just once, since it is for the last time."

There was no harm in letting him see it. Winters shrugged. "Why not?"

HE MADE his way toward the back of the study, where he opened the door to a closet. De Roult followed him slowly. In one corner of the closet stood a shapeless something on a pedestal, draped in a sheet.

"Your statue, young man." Winters turned sideways, and lifted the sheet. In spite of himself, a small glint of appreciation came to his eyes as he looked at the statue.

It was the nude figure of a child. Exquisitely carved, it was, in pink marble, life size. The statue stood on tiptoe, a smile on its rosy face—a childish, contented smile, both arms stretching skyward, as to greet the sun.

But the hands—they were unfinished. The fingers were crudely blocked out—rough, like marble mittens. Evidently, some work was needed before the whole was completed.

But even as it was, the statue was beautiful. Winters, in spite of himself, had to admit that. Unconsciously, his fingers caressed the marble in a possessive gesture. He turned to look at the young man.

De Roult was standing there, leaning against the door jamb, gazing at the statue intently. There was an odd expression on his face—a strained, rapt expression.

"But it is unfinished," he breathed. "It is unfinished."

"Eh?" said Winters sharply.

De Roult started. He turned slowly, and looked at Winters. He looked then, at the statue, caressing it with his eyes.

"I put my soul into that statue," he murmured softly. "I labored to produce a masterpiece, a work of art that would endure—" He broke off.

"Winters," he said, his face strangely white, his voice suddenly hoarse. "Could I—finish the Dawn Child. Her hands—they are incomplete. She—would not like that. It is hard to reach for the sun, when ones hands are—ugly. Would it be possible? Even though the statue is yours now. I could do the work in this room here. With chisel and hammer—" His eyes held the quality of a prayer, his voice trembled.

"Could I—finish it, sir?"

Winters looked at him. A faint streak of perversity—which, incidentally, was to cost him his life, rose in his brain.

"I see no reason why I should," he snapped. "You have looked at the statue. It was enough that I should let you do so. Quite enough. I expect to have the statue disposed of by the end of this week, unfinished as it is. Of course, the profit will be negligible, but—" He spread his hands, indicative of his disinterest in the matter.

"Good-day, sir."

De Roult turned slowly ashen.

"Then—then you will not allow me to finish—" he said, almost childlike.

"Precisely."

The young sculptor walked slowly toward the door, his head bowed. At the threshold, he turned, and looked first at Winters, then at the Dawn Child. There was an enigmatic expression on his face.

"Nevertheless," he whispered, "the Dawn Child shall be finished. Soon. I asked you for but a week more, Winters. *I give you a week, now.*"

He turned and walked stiffly out.

Winters raised his eyebrows.

IT WAS, perhaps, thirty seconds later that he heard the crash. He hurried out of the house, his pale blue eyes curious

behind the glasses. There was a rather large crowd clustered in the middle of the street, muttering excitedly. The truck stood by, its fender rather badly dented, with a splotch of red. The truck driver was standing by, addressing empty air for the most part, and telling how, "He just walked right out in the street, front of my truck. Wasn't *my* fault. Can't help it if a man walks out'n the street in front of a truck, and doesn't even look where he's going. He walked out—"

Winters pursed his thin lips, then he turned back into his study, where he made certain entries in a large black ledger. On impulse, he checked up upon De Roult. The young sculptor had lived alone in a garret in the poorer section of town, and from what Winters could ascertain—seemed passionately devoted to his work. He was poor—very. Indeed, Winters wondered how he had ever managed to keep body and soul together.

It certainly was not *his* fault, if De Roult paid no attention to where he was walking, while crossing the street. The remainder of the day Winters spent in his usual pleasant fashion—that of figuring how to dispossess certain hapless clients.

It was late that night, around eleven-thirty, when Winters awoke suddenly, with the conviction that someone, or something was making strange sounds downstairs. He lay awake for some minutes, staring into the blackness, and suddenly he sat bolt upright in bed. The sound was repeated. It was an odd scraping, and scratching noise.

Muttering to himself, Winters got out of bed, put on his robe and slippers, and shuffled out into the hall. As near as he could determine, the sounds were coming from downstairs—in the general direction of his study. He shuffled downstairs, and into his study, where he turned on the light.

The glare of the light exploded whitely, throwing everything in the room into harsh

relief. Black ugly shadows. Dark corners illuminated.

There was nothing in the room.

Winters grunted, and reached again for the light switch. He froze. The sound had recommenced; it was distinctly audible, and it seemed to come from the closet.

Winters went over and opened the closet door. Probably rats, he thought, peering through the darkness of the closet.

No rats.

Winters frowned and looked more carefully. There was no corner where a rat might hide. Winters looked at the statue, standing there in the corner, and his breath hissed softly between his teeth. He distinctly remembered having draped a sheet over it, before going to bed.

But now the sheet lay on the floor.

Well, then.

Rats could drag down sheets.

Large rats.

Frowning, Winters picked up the sheet and stood staring at the statue, before covering it. The general appearance of the statue had changed; it was not quite right somehow.

Winters shook his head angrily, and went back to his room. Rats, no doubt. He was not the sort of man to be bothered by such occurrences. Perhaps half an hour after going to bed, he was roused again.

The same sounds. Grating, rasping, scratching noises. Oddly muffled they were. Coming from downstairs. Winters swore softly and tried to sleep.

The next day Winters examined the statue critically. There was, he observed, a peculiar quality to the Dawn Child's smile—an oddly unpleasant quality—and the arms of the statue did not look quite right.

And the hands, Winters could see—were changed. As if someone had been working on them. With a sculptor's chisel!

He did not bother to puzzle the matter out. Methodical and precise as ever, he cleaned up the shards of marble, and went about his business for the day.

Possibly some prankster—or his imagination. Or it might be the rats. Gnawing. No matter. He would make sure.

A substantial remainder of the morning, he spent in setting rat traps in likely spots throughout the house. Later, he would see about selling the statue.

That afternoon, Winters called several dealers in antiques, and *objects d'art*. There was, it seemed, little or no demand, of unfinished statues. No, he could find no buyer anywhere. After the dozenth call, Winters hung up, disgusted, and sat meditatively staring into space for several seconds. His thoughts were not pleasant. It was probably the first time in his life he had failed to come out winner in a business transaction.

The remainder of the afternoon, he brooded over it. Mentally he kicked himself a dozen times for having failed to take advantage of the young sculptor's offer. He should have let De Roult's finish—

Winters' brows furrowed. Had not De Roult's said something about—*about finishing the statue!*

But—De Roult's was dead.

Mentally Winters kicked himself again.

THAT night, before going to bed, Winters investigated the entire study thoroughly. Everything was in perfect order. The statue was covered, the closet was locked, the windows and the doors were all barred.

Winters grunted in satisfaction and then went to bed.

Three hours later he was roused suddenly. He could hear nothing now, save the faint echo of a somehow familiar sound, seeming to echo in his ears. Possibly one of the rat traps going off, he de-

cided in some satisfaction, and so deciding, turned over again on his side.

Abruptly he raised himself on one elbow and glared through the darkness toward the hall. The sound had been repeated. He could hear it now—the same chipping sound. Winters cursed silently, and got up, taking care not to creak the bedsprings.

Very stealthily, he tiptoed downstairs. He opened the study door silently, and quite suddenly snapped on the light and stood on the threshold blinking.

There was no one in the room.

Winters looked around. The closet door was still locked. Muttering querulously to himself, he opened it, and looked inside. For an instant he wondered if his eyes were beginning to play tricks on him.

Then he took a step backwards.

The statue's hands were beginning to take definite form. Moreover, the arms had moved. Moved a good three inches.

Winters rubbed his chin doubtfully, and wondered how he could have ever thought the face of the statue beautiful. The lips were not smiling at all, and the whole face seemed to have a definitely unpleasant cast.

"Humph," said Winters.

He retrieved the sheet and placed it upon the statue. He looked around the study carefully, and into each corner of the closet, more than once narrowly escaping the sticking of his foot into a rat trap.

Before going back to bed, he eyed the tiny pile of marble chips around the pedestal of the statue, and though his lips moved queerly, he said nothing.

Jerome Winters got very little sleep that night. He heard the chipping, scraping sounds from downstairs quite audibly, no matter how hard he tried to bury his head underneath the covers.

NEXT day, business did not go well at all. Every little thing seemed to go wrong, his papers were not where they

should be, and he forgot several important matters relating to interest payments and debts.

But he would not admit, even to himself, that he was worried. Toward noon, Winters received an unexpected telegram. He scowled at it, and pursed his lips.

This was decidedly unfortunate. He had planned to get rid of that statue today. To take it to some antique dealer, and—and give it away if he had to.

What was he thinking of! Give something away that had cost him seventy-five dollars. And for that matter—two sleepless nights. But after all—De Roult had said that the statue would be finished within a week. And the look on the face of the statue last night—possibly there was something to the young sculptor's threat, after all.

Winters dismissed the thought.

At any rate, he would be out of town for the next four days on business. A piece of property he had acquired from some poor debtor must be appraised. Well, he could get rid of the statue in the city. At some small profit, of course. It would be comparatively simple, since the statue was almost finished.

So it was that while away from Hammondville, Winters saw and interviewed the manager of a certain prominent antique shop, one Sir Arthur Manwell, in regard to coming out to Hammondville to see a very valuable statue he possessed.

Yes, the statue was easily worth five hundred dollars. Exquisitely carved, it was. By a young sculptor named De Roult. What? Oh no. The young man had met with a very tragic accident. Yes. Too bad.

And he would come out to Hammondville today, to appraise the statue? What? Not until tomorrow. But the week would be up then. What? Oh nothing. Nothing at all. Tomorrow then.

Winters arrived home that afternoon

with a curious feeling of mingled relief and apprehension. The very first thing he did was to open the closet door. There was absolutely no doubt about it this time. The arms of the statue had moved downward to an almost horizontal position. The hands—they were nearly completed! But they had changed. The fingers were bent as if to grasp something—they looked like small pink claws.

The marble dust, Winters saw, was thick about the base of the statue. One foot was poised, with knee lifted high *as though the statue were about to step off the pedestal!*

Winters slowly raised his eyes and looked at the face. It was twisted in a rather frightful leer. Winters shut the closet door and leaned weakly against it. He locked it carefully and walked out of the study, mopping his damp face with a handkerchief. His mouth was strangely dry, and his face was pale.

Tomorrow would be the seventh day.

LATE that night, he heard the now familiar chipping of stone. The noise this time, was fast and furious, almost—eager. Winters did not get out of bed. He knew it would be no use. After a little while, the sounds ceased. The statue, then, was finished.

Winters did not venture downstairs next morning until almost noon. When he did, he stayed as far away as possible from his study. In an agony of dread and apprehension he waited for the arrival of Sir Arthur, from the city.

Sir Arthur did not come.

By mid-afternoon, Winters was almost frantic.

Finally, he tiptoed into his study. There was a telephone on his desk.

Swiftly he dialed the operator, and staring fixedly at the closet door, waited for his call to be put through.

Sir Arthur Manwell, dealer in antiques

and *objects d'art* answered. Yes, he was sorry, he was desolated, but he had not been able to keep the appointment. No, he would not be able to come down to make the appraisal until tomorrow. Some-time in the morning— What? What was the matter?

But it was impossible. An important matter had come up—he had to remain at the shop—and—

"I don't care!" Winters shrieked into the mouthpiece, suddenly panic-stricken.

"You've got to come down! Today, you hear? I've got the damned thing locked up in the closet, but the week's up, I tell you. The week's up!"

Sir Arthur informed him politely—and frigidly, that he would arrive tomorrow morning.

"But the statue!" shrilled Winters. "*The statue!*"

There was the audible click of the man hanging up.

"Operator, operator!" Winters dialed frantically.

Abruptly he froze.

Behind him. The sound of a splintering wood. A door smashing open . . .

The closet door . . . ?

Involuntarily, Winters dropped the receiver on its hook, and trembling, stared straight ahead.

A soft thud of something striking the carpet. Then the quick pattering of footsteps across the floor.

Winters worked his mouth convulsively, but before he could scream, he was seized by the throat.

Like Winters, Sir Arthur Manwell was a very punctilious man. So it was that he arrived in Hammondville early the next day to see Winters on the matter of the statue. It so happened that when he arrived, there was a rather large crowd of people clustered about Winters' house. Managing to get in, he saw the police and the coroner probing about Winters' study.

Winters had been found in his overturned chair, and the studio in his immediate vicinity was somewhat messy. His head had been almost torn from his body. Indeed, the coroner was quite puzzled.

"Strangled," he murmured gravely. "Um—handprints like those of a small ape. Or possibly those—of a child."

Manwell was extremely shocked.

"Yes," he explained. "I came out here to see the poor chap about a statue he intended to sell. Any idea how it happened?"

The coroner had no idea.

As he turned to leave, Manwell caught sight of the closet door at the back of the room. The lock was ripped away, and the door hung loose on its hinges. Manwell frowned, puzzled.

"Winters mentioned the closet," he murmured under his breath. On sudden impulse, Manwell looked around to see if he were being observed. Everyone's in-

terest was focused upon what lay in the center of the room. Manwell went slowly to the closet door. He opened it. He drew a slow deep breath of awe.

"Superb," he breathed.

The Dawn Child stood on tiptoe, both arms stretching high, its face smiling in contentment. Manwell looked at it for a long minute. Quite suddenly he stiffened. He glanced back toward where Winters lay.

He looked again at the statue.

Then, his face very white, and his hands shaking, he shut the closet door softly. His lips were a jagged thin line, as he strode slowly outside. He recalled again, the words of the coroner.

"Very tiny handprints. . . ."

He remembered Winters' frantic shrieking over the phone.

And on the soft pink of the statue's hands, he had seen a deeper, more ominous stain of red.

