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The Strangest

*Calloway had wronged a dozen women—
and gone unpunished. But when he stood
in the prisoner's dock, with his life hanging
in the balance, the Other World took its
weird revenge in its own way*



FROM the first I felt that there was something strange and sinister about the Calloway trial.

The prisoner was a big dark man, about forty-five—one of those swaggering fellows, handsome in a rough, masculine way. He had lived in the county only about four or five years, and he'd got in with a bunch of rum-runners that had a reputation for being dangerous. He looked like that kind: lawless, hard-living and ruthless. He'd lived all over the world, and when he was in jail, before the trial, he would spin yarns about the places he'd seen. The sheriff and I would sit there like boys, drinking it in, feeling how tame our lives had been, compared with his. He'd been with bandits in Central America, on tramp schooners in the Baltic, with opium smugglers in China. Everywhere he'd lived, there had been a woman, maybe two or three. Even while he held you fascinated with his tales, you shuddered. He mocked at everything—honor and hell and women.

"Never was a woman I couldn't get," he said with an evil grin, "and I never loved any of 'em. But love—there's no such thing, anyway."

That was the mistake he made, for love and hate are the two strongest forces in the world—as he was destined to learn in an almost unbelievable way. The full story is the most amazing tale that ever came out of a courtroom.

During the several months just previous to Calloway's arrest a nasty situation had developed in the county, but the officers had never been able to get their hands on the guilty parties. Lately things had got even worse. The rum-runners' gang had split—over dividing the profits, I suppose—and they fought whenever their paths crossed. Every once in a while a dead man would be found lying along the road or in a cornfield, with a bullet above his heart. The gangs never squealed on each other. They kept out of court and took the law in their own hands.

Calloway got the credit for the killings. His lawless life in wild parts of the world, his hard and swaggering character, made him the logical suspect. But you could never get anything on him. He'd come in town, after a shooting, and laugh in the sheriff's face.

But finally they got him. His old tricks led to his undoing.

One day a big farmer named Stephans caught Calloway as he was running out of his woods. Stephans wasn't afraid of anything. He told Calloway to stop and when he didn't, he knocked him down and tied him. Then he searched the woods—and found what he was expecting. The body of a dead man with a bullet above the heart! The man was a farm hand who had drifted in a few months before and had been working here and there, wherever he could get a few days' work. He was a rough sort, and the impression was that he had served as a go-between for the bootleggers.

There was only one flaw in the case. Calloway, when the sheriff and Stephans searched him, didn't have a gun on him and they couldn't find any, although they searched the woods and the lanes from one end to the other. But the prosecuting attorney said he wasn't going to let Calloway get off now that they had their hands on him, so he called the grand jury and they thought there was enough evidence to indict Calloway for murder.

Calloway hired the best firm of lawyers in the county and they built up a defense that was hard to beat. All the State had against him was circumstantial evidence: the dead man, and Calloway caught running from the woods. Calloway swore, and stuck to it, that he had been there to meet a woman and that her husband had got wind of it and had come to catch them, and he had run away so as not to get the woman into trouble.

When the trial opened, Calloway's lawyer caused a sensation by announcing that the woman who had been with Calloway that evening had offered to testify in his defense.

The courtroom was crowded with people, as it always is for a trial of that kind, and everybody stared with curiosity as the woman came into the room and took her place just inside the barrier. Her name was Flynn and she was the wife of a farmer who'd made a bit of money, but who was the rough, sullen, ignorant kind that would never be anything better than he was. The woman was handsome, plump, black-haired, with snappy black eyes that looked restless and frightened as she sat there feeling the eyes of the curious staring at her. Her husband had come with her. He sat glowering ahead of him, looking at nobody.

AS I said, from the first I felt there was something queer about this trial—something uncanny. Although I had seen a good many such trials, I felt excited and nervous, as if I were waiting for something to happen. Calloway sat beside his lawyers, staring at his finger-nails, or at the ceiling; once in a while he'd send Mrs. Flynn a sharp, glittering look. But most of the time he just stared down at his hands.

He watched indifferently the business of getting a jury, and at last lost interest entirely and looked away. Getting a jury in a case like this is a long-drawn-out affair. First one side excuses a juror, and then the other. Finally they had to go out on the street and pick up men to take the place of the challenged jurors.

At last the jury was sworn, and as I was getting the names I noted particularly the seventh juror. He was a gentle, rather weakly man named Arthur Clark—a real-estate agent. I knew him slightly and I thought to myself that the State had made a mistake in leaving him on. He'd never

Murder Trial—

By a COURT BAILIFF
*Who Would Lose
His Job if His Real
Name Were Given*



convict a man of murder. He was too mild and easy-going.

All of a sudden I felt a strange cold shudder go over me. It was the sort of feeling you have when you say someone is walking over your grave. I thought to myself, "Something terrible happened just then," but when I looked around the courtroom everything was just the same as usual. The lawyers fussed around with their papers, the judge yawned, people in the back of the courtroom strained their necks and stared. The sun poured in at the dusty windows. I went over and stood in the sun, trying to warm myself out of that deathly chill but it wouldn't leave me. My hands were icy cold, and I was afraid; I didn't know what of, but I was afraid.

Finally my eyes wandered to the seventh juror and stopped there in horrified amazement. He was a little, pale man slouched down in his chair like the others. I told myself I was crazy, letting my imagination get the best of me. But all the time I argued with myself, I knew that something had happened to him. This wasn't the gentle, smiling man who had been sworn in a few minutes before.

HE was naturally pale, but his color became ghastly, the white waxy color of a man who has lain in a hypnotic state for a long time. His face, its smiling good-nature erased as if with one stroke, became stern and cold. Somehow his eyes sent a cold flood of fear over me again. They were empty and sunken—like the hollows in a skull. When he looked at the prisoner, I saw a light glow in them as if someone had just thrown a torch into a pit.

Calloway had begun to feel as I did, without knowing what it was that affected him. He grew restless and nervous. Once he shuddered and pulled his coat closer about him. I believe he thought the woman was trying to give him the evil eye. He'd told the sheriff and me that things like that happened in strange parts of the world—he said it had happened to other men, but not to him. He was too strong.

His eyes kept darting to the woman, angry and suspicious. The sweat broke out on his forehead. He stood up once, but the judge rapped sharply for him to sit down. After that, he sat with his fists clenched, as if he was resisting with all his strength the thing he felt beating about him, like bat's wings. And no one but me saw the cavernous eyes of the seventh juror, with the light in them like a torch flung into a bottomless pit, resting on the prisoner with terrible intensity.

I couldn't keep my eyes away from Clark; they kept going back to him with the fascination of fear. What had happened? I asked myself, trembling.

Suddenly I wanted to shriek at Calloway and warn him—against what? I did not know.

A lawyer asked for a book, and when I went to get it, my hands were trembling so that I couldn't control them. My knees were so weak I could hardly stand.

No one else seemed to sense anything unusual. At recess Calloway went out with the sheriff, sending the woman another desperate, vehement look, not even glancing towards the jury. I had to speak of it to somebody, so I went up to the judge as the jury was filing in.

"Judge," I said in a low tone, "look at that seventh juror.

How white he is—he's queer——" I paused uncertainly. "It's the poor ventilation," the judge answered sensibly—"lack of fresh air. Some men are affected more than others. He's the pale type, too."

He studied Clark for a few minutes. Apparently he didn't see anything wrong with his appearance. "He's healthy enough, I think, Dan," he said, and dismissed the matter.

They had put a character witness on the stand, and Calloway turned to look at him. At that moment his eyes met those of the seventh juror. He sprang to his feet and gave the most terrible shriek I have ever heard.

"My God," he screamed, "that man's dead——" Then he crumpled up on the floor in a faint. I never saw a man faint like that before.

We carried him into the judge's room and called a doctor, and after a while he came to.

"He's all right," the doctor said carelessly. "Too much poison liquor, that's all. It makes them see things."

When Calloway got to his feet, he tottered like a man who had been through a long sickness. His eyes were blank with fear.

"Rest a few minutes more," the doctor told him. "They'll wait for you."

He sank into a chair and sat there for at least ten minutes, his hands on his knees, his eyes staring ahead of him at nothing. When he got up finally, he was still white, but the horror had gone out of his eyes.

"WELL," he said with careless roughness, "we're holding up the show. I'm all right now, Doc."

I watched him as he entered the courtroom, and saw his eyes meet those of the man in the jury box, grimly and defiantly. He had his own code of courage, Calloway had. The other simply stared back at him with horrible, unchanging eyes.

The lawyers went ahead with the case, arguing over points of law, making a big fuss over technicalities, while all the time a strange and terrible conflict was going on between the prisoner and the seventh juror. Nothing you could put your finger on. The smile on one man's lips, the transparent whiteness of another's face. Little enough to base a tragedy on. Little enough to cause that weak sense of terror that gripped me and made the whole trial seem one long night-

mare. It wasn't strange, perhaps, that younger men—strong with life, warm-blooded, living in the present—didn't see what was going on then. But I am an old man and maybe I am a little nearer to that strange spiritual world that surrounds us.

They examined Stephans, whose evidence was damaging to the prisoner, and then they put Mrs. Flynn on the stand. Calloway hung breathless on her testimony. He sat still, looking at her with eyes that never wavered. Her evidence meant life and death to him, and he knew it.

ALL the time she spoke, Calloway's eyes were on her face, and the seventh juror's gaze never shifted from Calloway. An uncanny hate glowed in those deep-set eyes, and although I did not like Calloway, or anything he stood for, I felt sick with fear and pity for him.

Mrs. Flynn glanced at Calloway when she started to tell her story and I saw that he still had his way with her. She was telling the truth, shaming herself before her husband and her neighbors, for the sake of this man to whom she had been merely another plaything for an hour or two. She told the truth, because she loved him and would make any sacrifice to save him from death. Her husband leaned forward heavily. His eyes, like Calloway's, never left her face, except when he looked at the prisoner, and I saw a look of helpless hate smoldering behind the coarse mask of his face.

The woman answered all questions clearly and without hesitation. No one had any doubt that she was telling the truth. She was a good witness.

"I had gone to the woods to meet Mr. Calloway," she said. "I went there every evening while my husband was doing the chores. He never bothered where I was, but that evening something must have made him suspicious. He followed me. There were a lot of dry twigs and leaves on the path and he made a noise as he walked. We heard him coming.

"I told Mr. Calloway, 'For heavens sake, go away. That's my husband.'

"At first he laughed. He said he wasn't afraid of any husband living. But I begged him, for my sake, to get away before we were caught. My husband was pretty close then and Mr. Calloway turned and ran. I went on home. My husband said he had been looking for a lost calf and went on through the woods, but after about ten minutes he came back. I didn't see Mr. Calloway again, until I saw him here." Her dark eyes stared unseeingly at the crowd.

"You and Calloway had been pretty intimate, hadn't you?" cut in the prosecutor.

She moved in her chair, twisted her handkerchief and finally said, "Yes," in a low tone. I saw her husband clench his big fists.

"Did he ever tell you where he got the money he spent on you?"

"No," she replied.

"As a matter of fact—" the lawyer stood up and shook his finger at her—"this man is a criminal character, and is accused of rum-running and robbery as well as murder. You know that, don't you?" His voice rose to a harsh snarl.

Calloway's lawyers were on their feet objecting.

Mrs. Flynn said firmly. "I don't know about that. He was always good to me."

I saw Calloway's tensely clasped hands relax a little. He shot one look at the man in the jury box—a jeering, taunting look that would have made any human being want to leap at his throat. But the eyes of the man in the jury box never changed.

Mrs. Flynn went back to her place beside her husband, and he gave her a smoldering, angry look. She would have a bad time ahead of her, that poor woman. All for the sake of a man who would laugh at her, when he was free, for being such a fool about him.

Calloway was in high spirits when they led him back to

prison at the close of the day's trial. His fear was gone.

"He can't beat me," he laughed excitedly. "Even dead, he can't beat me."

The sheriff looked at me. "Do you suppose he's going off his head?" he asked. "He keeps talking about some fellow that's come back to life to get even with him."

"I expect there are a lot of them would come back if they could," I said. "That woman's going to get him out of this."

"It looks that way," he returned. Neither of us doubted that Calloway was guilty. He had too much against him. His record with the bootleggers, his reputation for gaudy sin, his wandering nature—

The case went to the jury the next day. Calloway laughed with his lawyers. He was too confident. Things always went his way, he said. "I believe in my luck." He offered to bet that they'd return their verdict in an hour.

But they didn't come in all night, and next morning when I took them out to breakfast they hadn't come to any decision. I noticed one thing. They had begun to look at Clark as if they were afraid.

At noon I let them out again and still they hadn't come to any decision. The other jurymen avoided walking with Clark, and I found him beside me. Once his sleeve brushed mine, and my flesh crawled. I don't know how I ever got down the street without shrieking and running away, as I wanted to do. When we got to the restaurant the other men crowded together at two tables and left me and Clark to eat alone.

"I don't believe I want anything to eat," I said.

He smiled. It was the first time he had changed expression since the trial began. When he smiled he looked like a skeleton. The cold sweat stood out on me.

"I never eat," he said in a thin voice that sounded clammy. It wasn't Clark's voice. It was a voice unlike any I had ever heard before.

IF I had had the strength I would have got up and run from him, duty or no duty. But I was too weak to move. I sat in my chair staring at him with terror in my heart.

In those awful moments the whole truth flashed before my mind. With a deadly certainty I *knew* that I was face to face with some supernatural force stronger than any man! Every tingling nerve in my body was aware of the identity of the Thing, and stronger than ever before I could feel its black and terrible hate for Calloway—a hate so bitter that it had defied death itself and crashed through all the barriers between the living and the dead!

I was like a man in a trance as I whispered, "What did he do to you?"

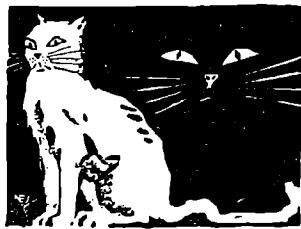
He saw that I had pierced the truth. "He took my wife," he said, "and she didn't want to go. When I found her, she had killed herself.

"And then," he added, "I killed myself, also."

All around us people were coming and going: eating, joking, arguing, dreaming of love and money, never guessing the terror they brushed against as they passed.

The seventh juror leaned toward me. "Then I was Benito Condi," he told me. "My wife was a beautiful woman—like a flower—like all the flowers in the world! Have you ever seen a woman like that? She loved me. She wouldn't look at that brute. Her kisses were all for me. Her sweet, loving caresses. He wanted her the more because she denied him. So one day, when I was gone, he carried her off—and took her—"

If possible, his unearthly pallor deepened. "Since that day I have been waiting for the day of reckoning. Fifteen years. But there is no time where I am. No common revenge could satisfy me—I wanted something that would make



him suffer all the hell that I have endured because of him."

He grinned, his terrible skeleton grin. "It won't be very long," he said, "not very long—they are turning."

"You mean," I stammered, "they thought he was innocent?"

He nodded and clapped his pale hands together as if he were enjoying a great joke. But he didn't make a sound.

When we went back to the courtroom, the sheriff told me: "Calloway's losing his nerve. I never saw a man go to pieces the way he has. All of a sudden. He was counting on an early verdict."

One of the jurymen told me afterwards what had happened in the juryroom while they tried to reach a verdict. He had to tell somebody—there had been something so queer and incomprehensible about the whole thing. Even now, he told me, he couldn't understand—

They had gone in, convinced of Calloway's innocence. The woman's story had rung true, and although they all felt Calloway was no good they didn't believe he had been guilty of the murder. The first ballot stood eleven to one for acquittal. To their amazement, when they talked it over, they learned that Clark was the one man who had voted for conviction.

"YOU'VE got to be pretty sure," the foreman told him, "when you hang a man."

Clark grinned.

The jurymen looked at each other queerly. They all knew Clark to some degree. A gentle-natured man, always taking in stray dogs and cats—easy-going to the point of weakness. This wasn't like Clark. His eyes looked strange. What was the matter with him?

They began to talk, arguing excitedly, as if fighting something. And yet Clark hadn't said anything, hadn't forced his opinions on them. He'd just sat there, and smiled.

Gradually, without seeming effort, he put doubt in their minds. They couldn't fight him off.

"The gun," he said with confidence, when they brought that up, "is at the bottom of the river. It was weighted and it sank in the mud. But it's Calloway's gun."

"How do you know?" the foreman asked him. "You're so sure—"

Clark grinned again. They said he grinned as if he knew everything in the world, all the evil and the horror—the things that decent men turn away from.

"I know," he said.

They were afraid of him now. They saw each other's hands trembling, and they wanted to get out of that place, away from him. The air felt stifling, cold and damp, as if they were in a cave somewhere. During those few minutes when they were let out for meals, they welcomed the sun like prisoners.

The vote changed slowly. Some of them, the stronger-minded and least impressionable, held out longest. As each

vote was taken, he stared at them with his horrible, cavernous eyes. When he moved closer, they shrank back. He bared his teeth, and his face looked like a skull.

"The man is guilty!" he said, in his voice that was like the touch of clammy fingers. "Do you dare to say he shall not pay the penalty?"

Two men still voted for acquittal: the foreman and the jurymen who told me what had happened. The man who stood there in Clark's body went up to them and touched them with his cold fingers. They had never known what terror was before, but they knew it then.

"You are doing wrong," he said gently. "The man is guilty."

On the next vote he counted the ballots as they dropped into the box from hands that trembled. They said that the eyes of the seventh juror glowed like balls of spurting flame, as the last one fell.

When they rapped on the door to notify me that they were ready to return their verdict, I felt my flesh crawl. I had a feeling what it was going to be, and I knew that the dead had been victorious in his duel with the living. The judge came in and took his place. They brought in Calloway and he sank into a chair with his head drooping forward on his breast, his shoulders sagging. He looked twenty years older. I noticed a streak of gray in his hair.

THE jury filed in. I watched the seventh juror as he took his place and turned his eyes towards the prisoner. In that look there was a terrible triumph.

The foreman read the verdict: "Guilty of murder in the first degree."

Calloway leaped to his feet like an animal that has been shot. "You can't do that!" he babbled wildly. "He's not alive, I tell you. He wants to drag me over there with him. I won't go! I'm innocent!"

He fell writhing on the floor in a fit.

Conviction of murder in the first degree means electrocution in our State. All the time Calloway was in the death cell he raved like a man out of his head. He asked to see me, and they let him talk to me for a few minutes out of hearing of the guard.

"Dan," he pleaded, "you saw it. You know what that was! My God, why couldn't they all see it? That wasn't Clark in that chair. It was a ghost. It's not right—"

"To have him beat me like that," he raved on—"a fellow that couldn't do anything but play the piano and raise flowers! But I'm not dead yet! I'll beat him at the very door. Tell them I'm innocent, Dan! I didn't do it!"

To the very last he insisted that he was innocent.

They electrocuted him a month after his conviction. He raved all the way to the electric chair. The guards were as white as dead men themselves when it was over. They said they never wanted to go through such an experience again.

It was about a year after Calloway's death that Flynn, the husband of the woman who had loved Calloway, was shot

A Courtroom Thronged With Ghosts

"It has often occurred to me that if we could only know it, the courtroom must be thronged with the spirits of wronged and murdered people trying to break through the wall of silence to bring justice or revenge to their enemies.

"Has any one of them ever succeeded? This story is my answer; it is a tale of a passionate love and a burning hate that were too strong to die."

The above statement is made by a court bailiff who has spent thirty years in the courtroom.

in a hijacking battle, and made his confession before he died.

He declared that Calloway was innocent, not only of that murder but of any of the others.

Flynn himself was the killer. He was a perfect shot, and he had been in the rum-running game from the first. Calloway was just a bragger, Flynn said; he told what he did here and there, but he was yellow and a coward. Women—yes—he told the truth there. He was always after women who belonged to other men. Liked to show that he could take them away by snapping his finger.

Just as he had taken Flynn's wife.

Flynn knew they had been there together. He didn't find Calloway but his hired man had seen them and he came mocking at Flynn and sneering—and Flynn had shot him. When Calloway was arrested for the murder, he found that his wife's lover had been trapped and he kept still and hoped they would punish him for it. His slow, heavy mind wasn't able to make the most of the chance. He just sat back and waited for the others to act, and if it hadn't been for that other—his companion in hate—he would have had to watch Calloway go his way free and triumphant.

Calloway was cleared of the crime. But he was dead then. He had gone to answer for his sins, whatever they were. There were enough of them.

A strange thing happened on the day of the execution. I had gone to the prison, out of a feeling of pity, so that Callo-

way might have one friend not far away when he walked to his death.

As I stood outside the gate Clark came up and stood beside me. He looked worn and haggard, as if the spirit that had possession of him, so much stronger than his own, had almost worn out his frail body. He stood with his deep, cavernous, smoldering eyes on the great iron door—waiting.

Finally the door opened. The reporters who had seen the execution came out.

"Dead," they told us briefly, as they hurried away.

For one moment the eyes lit up in a terrible glow of triumph. Benito Condi had seen the end of his revenge.

I turned to go down the steps, then looked back. Clark was standing staring up at the somber gray walls of the prison, with a look of amazed repugnance.

"For heaven's sake," he demanded, shuddering, "what am I doing out here?"

He was once more the gentle, easy-going man whose mild eyes looked with friendliness at the world. Benito Condi had gone, leaving no memory of his strange tenancy behind him.

The doctors described what had happened as a nervous collapse. Clark had a lot of business worries, it seemed, and they said that sometimes such a condition makes queer changes in a man. I let them believe it, if they chose. None of them knew the truth. No one ever did know the truth but Calloway and me. And I never told it, until now.