

*A Five-Minute Tale
With a Powerful Climax*

The Survivor

By EDWIN G. WOOD

AS THE two men lay on the sand that night, it seemed to John Binns that he could reach up over his head and pluck a handful of the coldly glittering stars, so near did they seem.

They were bright tonight; they tortured him, seemed to mock his suffering. There was one star that fascinated him. It was larger and brighter than the rest, and he lay staring at it until his eyes smarted.

He licked his dry lips, running his tongue between them, and cringed at the filelike rasp. He stole a look at his companion lying near, and slyly drew the canteen, with its fast-diminishing precious contents, to his mouth. He had no thought for his weaker companion, Dick Webb. When Dick could not suppress a groan, Binns' close-set eyes narrowed and gleamed evilly, and he muttered imprecations against the frailer man.

He was angry with Webb. The two had had an argument concerning the world-old law of the survival of the fittest. He had contended that the law among men held the same as it did among the brute creation. The strong survived, the weak perished. Didn't all the big animals prey upon the smaller ones? Of course. Webb pointed out that brains were far superior to brute strength, and that brute strength frequently defeated its own purpose. His argument had been convincing enough to arouse the ire of Binns. He knew that Webb was his superior so far as intellect went, and it angered him. Well, he'd show the weakling that there was another way of taking care of yourself besides using physical strength—there was a foxlike cunning, that didn't require the brains that Webb seemed to think he had, either.

If it were not for that puny Webb, he, Binns, the stronger of the two, and therefore the more fit to live, might have a chance, a fighting chance, of getting out of the desert alive. They were lost. What food they had carried with them was gone, and the water running low. Water was the worst problem. The moisture of the body dries up rapidly in those hot sands.

Binns' tongue was rough, his throat beginning to ache, his lips to crack. The two men could not last much longer. One of them simply must be left there. Which one? Not Binns. He loved life too well to think of sacrificing it for a weakling, whom, in his opinion, the world would never miss—and Binns himself was normally a strong man.

Binns' fear of death was a morbid one. It was this fear that had led him from the beginning of their mishap to take craftily more than his portion of the water and give Dick less. It was all Dick's fault, anyway; for had he not gotten Binns into this fool's chase after gold? He cursed himself for having been so silly as to be led away from his former life where he had lived fairly well on what he could pick up by his wits.

The man at his side stirred, mumbled something in a half delirious way, then asked for water.

Table of Contents

The contents of *Weird Tales* is fully protected by copyright and must not be reproduced either wholly or in part without permission from the publishers. All communications should be addressed to the publishers main office at 854 North Clark St., Chicago, Ill.

DRACONDA -----	3
JOHN MARTIN LEAHY	
THE CRAWLING DEATH -----	18
P. A. CONNOLLY	
THE CLOSED ROOM -----	27
MAEBELLE McCALMENT	
THE PHANTOM VIOLINIST -----	32
WALTER F. McCANLESS	
LUCIFER -----	36
JOHN D. SWAIN	
THE SPIDER -----	39
ARTHUR EDWARDS CHAPMAN	
THE AMAZING ADVENTURE OF JOE SCRANTON -----	41
EFFIE W. FIFIELD	
THE IRON ROOM -----	46
FRANCIS D. GRIERSON	
PRISONERS OF THE DEAD -----	51
PAUL SUTER	
THE DEATH PIT' -----	57
OSCAR SCHISGALL	
THE WAX IMAGE -----	67
BURTON HARCOURT	
POISONED -----	69
FARNSWORTH WRIGHT	
THE MAGIC MIRROR -----	73
MARY S. BROWN	
THE INVISIBLE MONSTER -----	75
SONIA H. GREENE	
THE PEBBLE PROPHECY -----	77
VALENS LAPSLEY	
THE TELL-TALE HEART -----	80
EDGAR ALLAN POE	
WEIRD CRIMES -----	81
SEABURY QUINN	
THE EYRIE -----	85
THE EDITOR	
THE SURVIVOR -----	94
EDWIN G. WOOD	

For Advertising Rates in **WEIRD TALES** apply to **YOUNG & WARD**, Advertising Managers,
168 North Michigan Blvd., Chicago, Ill.

Binns sat up, his little eyes, that were set almost into the sides of his nose, glaring at Webb.

"You've had your share," he snarled.

"Water!" the weaker man croaked insistently, holding out a tin cup.

Binns would not permit the other to drink from the canteen; the risk of his getting more than his share was too great. Binns had carried through the bluff at economizing by pointing out to Dick that it was better to measure his allowance. He was scrupulous in doling out his own portion when Dick was looking, then later he always tapped the canteen on the sly. He carried the canteen containing what was left of the water, himself, under an apparently generous impulse—he was the stronger

of the two, therefore the one to shoulder the most of the burden.

Dick again held out his cup in a trembling hand and demanded a drink.

"Hell!" snarled Binns.

He moved his hand impatiently toward the canteen, paused. Why should he waste the precious life-sustaining fluid on this half-dead man? He couldn't last, that was evident. Every drop that Dick drank now lessened Binns' chance of getting out. It was a sinful waste to pour water down the throat of a man so nearly gone. It would be much better to let the poor devil die and be done with it. It would be really a mercy to put him out of his misery. Of course it would. Nobody'd ever know the difference, and then Binns would

ground, falling again and again; up again and on and on, until he fell exhausted.

He lay panting for some time, he did not know how long, with eyes wide open. After awhile he began to doze fitfully, only to awaken each time with a start, for the figure with the cup was always before him. He reenacted the scene time and again—the pleading man, the flash of the gun, the slow sinking to the ground of his companion.

At last he became calmer, got up and started on again. He hadn't any idea of which way he had been running; it might have been in a circle. That would never do. He must find something to go by. There was that bright star over there, the one that had fascinated him so, hanging above the horizon. If he kept toward that, he could at least keep a general course. Good old star! He'd follow it as long as it shone.

He staggered on. If only he could get rid of that infernal thing before his eyes, that huddled thing on the ground— But wouldn't he have been a fool to give away the water— wouldn't he? He had as good a right to his life as any other fellow. Sure! A better right than that thing he had left back there. It would have died, anyhow.

He stopped and stared, beginning to sweat. The faint shadows cast by the sand dunes assumed grotesque shapes. One of the smaller sand heaps looked like that thing—He leaned forward, peering intently. He could have sworn it moved. He laughed aloud. He was a fool to get the jumps that way. Then he stumbled on again. In his horror he had forgotten to drink, although his throat was torturing him. He imagined another one of those damnable shapes moved. He went forward and kicked at it savagely.

He went on again, staggering, half delirious, and growing weak in the knees. Suddenly he again stopped and stared. Still another shape. Well, he wouldn't be fooled this time. He staggered forward to kick it—The thing sat up and held out that intolerable cup.

Binns plunged forward and fell on his face. The shape crawled to his side, felt over him, searching for the canteen, finally found it, raised it to its lips and sucked at the contents, then tried feebly to turn the fallen Binns over to pour the few remaining drops of water down his throat. . .

At daylight a party of men found two bodies lying on the sand. A man stooped over one of them.

"This here guy," he said, "is breathin' yet. Looks like he'd been burnt with a bullet side o' his head. Ain't nothin' much the matter but starvation, though. Reckon we c'n bring him 'round all right. What about t'other one, Bill?"

Bill turned the other body over, face up. Two close-set little eyes stared up at the sky which they did not see.

"Couldn't be any deader," announced Bill. "'S funny, too," he went on musingly, "that this guy should be the first to peter out—he's a whole lot huskier'n t'other one."

have a chance, a small chance of pulling through.

He had never killed a man. The thought of murder made him creepy. But this feeling was not born of any value he placed on the life of a fellow human. It was rather of the dread of punishment and a superstitious fear. He had heard of men who had taken life being ever after unable to sleep, the victim being always present in the slayer's imagination. All rot, of course, but this thought made his scalp prickle. But this would not be murder; it would simply be the old, old law of self-preservation—

Dick was becoming impatient in his demands for water.

"You haven't been playing fair, you swindling thief!" he finally cried out in a weak voice.

At the thought of his having been discovered, Binns' hot anger flared up as though the accusation had been unjust. Hate filled him, and his hand moved back, shot forward. A spurt of flame leaped out, and the pleading Dick slumped to the sand.

Binns, deathly sick now, mopped his face with a shaking hand, and stood staring dazedly at the thing on the ground; then he backed away.

"God!" he mumbled, as he looked in fascination at the huddled form. At last tearing his eyes from the horrible object, he turned and ran frantically, stumbling over the uneven