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# Strange STORIES


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# The Terror Mummy

By

JACK B. CREAMER

*Author of "Horse Havoc," etc.*

*Hate and Revenge Plague Kirsoff  
for Twenty Years, but Greater  
Evils Lurk in the Egyptian Crypts!*

**T**HE rain had stopped at last, leaving the street a glistening black groove of shiny asphalt that rippled and quivered under the dim street lamps and the keen wind as though it were a snake come alive. It was a queer sort of street, anyway, as it seemed to force itself into this musty neighborhood, writhing by the moldering old flats and decrepit buildings of a departed era; and finally winding up in a baffled dead end overlooking the oily and ugly waters of the East River.

There was a three-story house near the end of this sinister street, an old brick and sandstone affair which can best be described as a house with a bad odor. A sign of tarnished and half-obliterated gold letters creaked dismally in the wind above the worn steps of the stoop. It read:

## KIRSOFF'S PRIVATE MUSEUM

But the old building was not as dilapidated within as it appeared from without. There were well-made locks on the strong doors, and serviceable shutters for the windows. Ivan Kirsoff



Kirsoff lived among his antiques

took no chances where it concerned his antiques and art treasures.

He stood now just within the door, peering out like a gnome at the deserted street.

Kirsoff was a short and rotund little man with a stubby gray beard and a pate as shiny and barren as the thoroughfare at which he looked. His eyes were a moist and watery brown, his nose bulbous, his teeth yellow and stained. Clothes always hung and draped themselves clumsily on his chubby body. On the hat-rack in the corner was the kind of faded green fedora one might associate with an impoverished poet or threadbare philosopher—certainly not with a museum owner.

Yet Kirsoff was neither poet nor philosopher. He was a dealer in curios and antiques. Collectors had implicit faith in his integrity and paid exorbitant prices for his curios and *objets d'art*. Nobody ever suspected that any of his pieces were fraudulent. His skillfully manufactured papyri delighted Egyptologists. Counterfeit scarabs, bogus manuscripts, and ancient cut-glass—imported from Bavaria—were snapped up eagerly. In fifteen years, Mr. Kirsoff had amassed a tidy fortune by bamboozling a select public.

However, Kirsoff had not always been so opulent, so respected, so clever in his forgeries. There was one bitter pill in his ointment. Some twenty years ago he had been caught red-handed in a swindle by a raw-boned young plainclothes cop, and Mr. Kirsoff had spent three years up the river in meditation on the theorem that crime does not pay. That, of course, was in the days when he was slender and bore the name of Ralsinsky. Now, nobody knew the antique dealer, Kirsoff, as the swindling Ralsinsky.

But Kirsoff remembered—with a bitterness that was almost appalling. He had never forgotten the young Irish policeman who had tripped him up by sheer luck. And Ivan Kirsoff, deep in his heart, had vowed revenge. The years had not blunted his hatred; rather, they had intensified it.

A man came along the quiet street, his dark topcoat buttoned up about

his burly figure against the clutching fingers of the wind. Kirsoff's face lighted up with an oily smile, and he quickly opened the door to admit this expected guest.

"Come in, Inspector Pancoast," he said heartily. "I was afraid the storm would detain you. Come right along to my private study where we can have a glass of wine while we talk."

"Weather never stops policemen and postmen," chuckled Pancoast, divesting himself of his damp overcoat.

Ensnconed in a big leather chair which had come from medieval Florence—all of Kirsoff's furniture and furnishings in his private office were authentic—the big inspector smacked his lips appreciatively over the mellow wine and came to the point.

"So you have an unusual object," he said. "A curio that you feel sure my brother will want to add to his collection."

"Exactly, Inspector," agreed Kirsoff earnestly. "Here, let me fill your glass again. Yes—Boyd Pancoast will be crazy to add this object to his Egyptian collection. I wanted you to see it first."

"I don't know much about this sort of stuff," Pancoast grated. "I don't know why you didn't send for my brother instead of me."

"Oh, I will, but I thought that you should see it."

"All right, Kirsoff. What is it?"

**T**HE art dealer waited till the inspector had finished his second glass of wine.

"The object is," he said slowly, "the mummy of Ptolemy, the Fourth."

"Which means little to me," said Pancoast drowsily. "It's warm and cozy in here, after that raw wind."

"Yes, isn't it? About the mummy, Inspector. You see, the story connected with it goes back some time—twenty years, to be exact."

The officer frowned. He was having difficulty correlating and focusing his thoughts.

"Twenty years?" Pancoast said. "An Egyptian mummy ought to go back twenty centuries, oughtn't it?"

"Quite so, but this is an unusual mummy," answered Kirsoff, his moist

brown eyes seemed to flow clammy over the corpulent figure of his guest. "In this case, the story begins twenty years ago with a struggling Russian artisan who was trying to gain a foothold in this country. He was succeeding when a young pup of a copper luckily stumbled into a little deal which violated the silly laws of this country, and Ralsinsky was sent to prison.

"You look much surprised, Inspector. Would you remember that far back—to such an insignificant episode in the life of an Irish policeman? But, of course not! So I'll tell you. I was Ralsinsky. Queer—now that I think of it. That young cop's name was the same as yours—Pancoast."

The police inspector uttered a gurgling cry and tried to struggle to his feet. But he was powerless to move; every muscle in his body was paralyzed.

"It is the wine," sighed Kirsoff wearily. "Don't alarm yourself, my friend, or try to fight it. There is no use. It won't kill you for an hour, and meanwhile, there is no known antidote for it. So just relax and listen. I want you to understand my little joke."

The poisoned inspector's bulging eyes traveled to his wine glass and then back to the smirking, snarling face of his host. Only his eyes lived; otherwise he was utterly helpless.

"I was not tricking you, Inspector," Kirsoff went on, gloating, his voice edged with passion and venom as he talked. "I am really going to sell your brother that mummy. But how silly to offer the mummy of a Ptolemy. Just between you and me, I haven't a genuine one. But I can make a splendid imitation. After twenty years of hard work I have learned to duplicate a great many things. And I discovered and perfected a new liquid chemical that tans and grays and desiccates a body until it mummifies beautifully."

**H**E PAUSED, went on:

"I'm sorry we do not have the time for me to demonstrate it to you, because you won't live long enough. However, I want you to know that you are to be the mummy of Ptolemy! I

shall sell *your* body to your brother next week. Ironic and poetic, don't you think? Also, I shall be able to dispose of all evidence of murder at the same time."

The blood-suffused face of the police inspector almost quivered in his terrific attempt to burst the invisible bonds which chained him. He did succeed in unlocking his jaw the slightest bit.

"You—you—" he gasped hoarsely, expelling the last vestige of air from his lungs. And then his eyes set and he went completely rigid, staring glassily at his enemy.

Kirsoff smiled to himself. He drew forth a handkerchief and mopped his perspiring brow. It had been an ordeal, at that. He arose, stepped over to his victim and passed his pudgy hand across the man's face. Inspector Pancoast did not even blink. He felt for the pulse. It had stopped. Mike Pancoast was as dead as he would ever be.

Breathing easier now, Kirsoff set to work. Puffing and panting, he lifted his victim by the shoulders and then dragged him out of the office and along the first floor of the gloomy old museum to the stairs leading to the basement. Down these he tumbled the body. Then he removed his coat and followed.

Stripping Pancoast of his clothes, Kirsoff burned everything in the furnace. He clipped and shaved the head of the corpse, and then pried open the jaws with a steel tool and critically examined the teeth. Finding three which showed signs of modern dentistry, he took a hammer and a small chisel and knocked them out. Then he studied the profile of the rigid face and methodically used the hammer to smash the nose.

All these preparations done with, he opened a large old-fashioned safe in his workroom and took out a stone crock of vile-smelling, almost viscous, gray liquid. With a paintbrush he began painting the corpse with the fluid. Several times, as the devastating liquid instantly started pulling the skin dry and tight over the bones, the dead detective's legs or arms twitched in a cadaveric spasm.

Kirsoff wanted to scream and run from the house. But, biting his lip in sadistic determination, he forced himself to complete his gruesome task. And at last it was done. The body was visibly shrinking and turning a dull dun color. Within an hour it looked as though it had slept for centuries in an ancient crypt in Egypt.

Now came the artistic part. Kirsoff carefully wrapped the body in yards and yards of grave cloth he had taken beforehand from a worthless but genuine mummy. He added redolent spices and the debris from the mummy he had previously unwrapped, and then placed his new creation within an ornate sarcophagus which stood ready. Ptolemy the Fourth was all ready. All Kirsoff had to do now was wait a few days for his mummy to age.

Cleaning up everything carefully, burning all odds and ends in the furnace, Kirsoff placed the lid on the sarcophagus and went upstairs. He started violently and shivered as he thought he heard a hoarse, gurgling voice saying:

"You—you—"

Ridiculous, he knew. But he scurried up to the first floor like a frightened rabbit, locking the basement stair door behind him with trembling hands.

He didn't sleep any that night. In fact, there wasn't any night left. The first pale gray of a haggard dawn greeted him as he climbed to his living quarters on the third floor. But he was happy. After twenty years he had consummated a clever and diabolical revenge.

**I**T WAS five days before Kirsoff dared contact Boyd Pancoast. During the interim he watched the newspapers for information about the missing Inspector Michael Pancoast. There was only one brief item that stated that the inspector seemed to have left town for a few days. It was a disappointment, but such was fame. Pancoast wasn't even missed—not even by his brother.

On the fifth day Boyd Pancoast came, at Kirsoff's request, to view his mummy. Kirsoff had prepared care-

fully for this occasion. He had taken two of his hired attendants to bring up the sarcophagus from the basement and place it upright against the wall in the midst of the Egyptian relics in the left wing. It made an effective looking museum piece.

But Ivan Kirsoff wasn't as happy as he had been. Like a miasmic fog, an unseen but distinctly felt cloud had been slowly gathering about this weird old building on the dispirited, snaky street. The days weren't so bad; there was the help around. But at night Kirsoff was alone with all these relics of the moldering past and the grave.

He felt that a ghastly familiar, growing stronger day by day, was dogging his footsteps wherever he went. That was ridiculous, of course. Many a man had been killed in thousands of ways, and nothing like this ever happened. But Kirsoff couldn't shake off this unseen shadow which settled more closely about him and seemed to strangle him a little more each day.

Kirsoff hadn't removed the lid of the sarcophagus since the night he had placed it on the mummy case. This morning, as he waited for the arrival of Boyd Pancoast, he dismissed his helpers and removed the lid himself. He screamed, trembled like a sapling in a high wind, almost letting the lid crash to the floor.

The shaven-headed and gray, battered features of Inspector Pancoast, altogether unrecognizable now, were twisted in a hideous, leering grin—as though Pancoast knew a secret Kirsoff didn't. It was too late to try to change the features; they were set in a mask like iron. An indefinable, fetid odor emanated from the case.

"By the sacred icon of St. Peter!" whispered Kirsoff. "I'll be glad to get rid of this thing quickly."

And a ghostly echo seemed to burst into being within his brain, like a bursting star shell expands in the sky.

"You—you—"

The arrival of the Egyptologist brought Kirsoff out of his jitters. The big man, older and grayer, but an unpleasantly close counterpart of his dead brother, examined the mummy

carefully. Kirsoff regained his composure and rattled off his prepared story about how this mummy came into his possession. It was a good story and the trappings were authentic.

"All right," agreed Boyd Pancoast at length, sniffing as though he smelled something, too. "I will purchase this mummy. What do you ask for it?"

"Three thousand dollars," said Kirsoff. "And it's a bargain at that price."

"There's no doubt that it is genuine," said the Egyptologist, "but isn't your price a little too high?"

"I didn't get the mummy for nothing, Mr. Pancoast," replied Kirsoff with dignity.

"No, no, I suppose not. I never saw a mummy with such a facial expression before. Well—I'll take it. I'll write you a check, and I'll send a moving van to pick up the sarcophagus the first thing in the morning. I'll come myself—just to take care of things, you know."

"Of course," agreed Kirsoff craftily. "But why don't you have your—your brother come or send a couple of policemen to guard it?"

And in the back of his mind—or was it loud in the middle of the chamber—there sounded the strangled words, "You—you—"

But Boyd Pancoast was deaf to this.

"I don't know where the inspector is," he admitted. "He's disappeared temporarily."

**T**EMPORARILY, was good. Kirsoff led the way to his office, smiling to himself.

After the Egyptologist had departed Kirsoff began wishing he had taken his purchase with him. It gave him an eerie, ugly feeling to have the thing remain here another hour. And it was such a good joke. After a few more days of the inspector's "temporary" absence the police and his brother would begin to get frantic.

Kirsoff could imagine the search. Boyd Pancoast would eventually offer a reward, of course—he was a wealthy man. The Bureau of Missing Persons would tie itself into knots. The rest of the police department would

run around in circles. And all the time the corpse of the frantically sought man would be grinning in a sarcophagus in the anxious Egyptologist's own private collection. What a perfect finale to a twenty-year-old revenge! The only trouble was that nobody could enjoy the grim jest save Kirsoff and Mike Pancoast—and Mike Pancoast was dead.

A sudden idea came to the demoniac little antique forger. Why not write the police an anonymous letter throwing suspicion on himself? He would like to see what they would do. It certainly would bring them running. But, no! That was a foolish, dangerous thought. They might unearth and uncover his real identity as Ralsinsky, and that might prove fatal. Instead, he must content himself with silent laughter. So he pulled the musty green fedora down over his bald head and trotted off to the bank to deposit Boyd Pancoast's check.

The sky was overcast, lowering, when he returned home late in the afternoon. There wasn't much business—he did most of his transactions by appointments, anyway—and he closed the museum early. A little before six o'clock he had to start turning on lights all over the place. It grew dark with a positive vindictiveness that was almost personal. And, turn on lights though he did, the electric bulbs seemed to do little more than push the gloomy shadows back toward the corners of the various rooms where they seemed to lick their chops and slink in wait to leap out upon him.

Fantastic! It was rubbish! But Ivan Kirsoff felt stifled and terribly uneasy. After a lonely supper which he prepared for himself, his frugality finally overcame his newly acquired reluctance toward the dark, and he slowly made his way downstairs to turn out the various lights. Such extravagance was idiotic.

He avoided the left wing until last, slowly turning the first floor into an ocean of darkness, leaving only that last island of light to be flicked out just before he turned tail and scurried back to his quarters upstairs. Intensely disgusted with himself for such

childish fears, he finally came to the wing of Egyptian curios and went about turning off the lights.

As he was passing the alcove where the sarcophagus of the bogus Ptolemy the Fourth leaned against the wall, he glanced furtively over his shoulder at the thing. With a start he saw that he had forgotten to replace the lid, and the hideous, mutilated face of Inspector Pancoast leered straight at him. He gave vent to a little yelp of fear as he rested his hand on the light switch.

"Curse you!" he snarled. "You'll be out of here before noon tomorrow, damn you. So grin all you like."

He flipped down the switch, plunging the room into Stygian blackness. There was just a faint glow of light from the bulb out in the corridor. He whirled to run for the dubious safety of that wan refuge, when his eyes fell once more upon the Egyptian casket of his dead victim.

And then Kirsoff was too paralyzed to run.

From the sarcophagus came that taintful effluvia of evil, a stifling odor which seemed to catch him around the throat and throttle him where he stood. But it wasn't this that caused his panic. A ghastly greenish glow emanated from the figure of the bogus Ptolemy, a visible aura which outlined the body perfectly. It was—good God!—it was the spiritual entity, the *ka*, of Mike Pancoast!

**K**IRSOFF nearly went mad with fright.

"No!" he screamed aloud. "No! It isn't so! My reason knows better. I won't believe it! You're dead, do you understand? You're dead, and you'll stay dead. You can't harm anybody!"

Drawn by his own rage and a deadly fascination, he crept slowly forward to confront the phosphorescent figure within the inclined mummy case.

"Laugh!" he snarled. "Laugh from your place near the throne of Thoth, Ptolemy. But I have the last laugh, after all. Three thousand dollars your brother paid me for you—a thousand dollars for each year you caused me to spend in the penitentiary, and—"

He broke off in a strangled, gur-

gling scream as the vapor of the miasmatic odor—or something quite as intangible—clamped down terrifically upon his throat. He fought against invisible bonds to escape, kicking and struggling madly—like a person in a nightmare who cannot escape inevitable doom, although unbound. In a few moments even the sound of Kirsoff's clawing and scratching nails upon the sides of the mummy case ceased, and silence—like that of the crypt—fell upon the dark chamber. . . .

It was broad daylight when the police found Ivan Kirsoff. Summoned by the attendants who could not arouse their employer, the police smashed down the front door and entered. They were almost overcome by the evil smell from the left wing and their subsequent discoveries were even more horrifying.

Commissioner Enfield summed matters up for Boyd Pancoast when he got the Egyptologist down to his office a couple of hours later.

"It's horrible beyond words, Mr. Pancoast," he said. "The medical examiner had to perform his autopsy on the mummy with a hammer and chisel, but—but we found your brother. Kirsoff had turned him into that mummy, somehow. You have the written report in your hand. Kirsoff was stone dead when the squad got there, of course."

Boyd Pancoast read through the report without a muscle of his face changing.

Then he looked up.

"The ways of Providence are very strange," he said gravely. "Embalm- ing a human body in this fashion, Kirsoff imprisoned all the gases and liquids within. No wonder there was a generation of gas and a sort of miasmatic fog such as your men describe. I imagine Kirsoff must have thought the ghost of Mike was after him, and he simply died of heart failure."

"Yes," said the commissioner very gravely. "That's what is written in the report for the record. It explains things satisfactorily. But it doesn't explain how the hands of the—mummy came to be clamped around Kirsoff's throat when he was found."