

Weird Tales

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The Unearthly

By DON ROBERT CATLIN

JIM HOWARD was astonished at what his friend had proposed to do, and attempted to put him right.

"See here, Jerry; I can tell you that you'll only be making a fool of yourself! I happened to be present at that affair at the Crawfords', and I saw the thing with my own eyes. It may, as you say, be unearthly—but I saw it!"

Jerry Newman laughed at his friend's fears.

"You *think* you saw it," he said ironically.

Howard shrugged expressively. "Then, if I can't dissuade you, I suppose I may as well accede to your request. Thursday night, you said?"

Jerry nodded shortly. "Yes. I've heard so blooming much about that Egyptian's prowess that I am determined to put an end to his fame once and for all. I met him the other day, and, as I have already told you, I told him to his face that he was a faker of the worst kind; and that, without his preparations made, he couldn't duplicate his feat. In other words, that in a room selected by myself and at a time named by me, he could not do what he did at the Crawfords'. And I wagered an even five thousand dollars that he would fail under the conditions I have named."

Howard's face showed his concern. "That's going a bit strong, Jerry. Laugh if you wish, but I tell you that I saw the thing with my own eyes—and I was looking for flaws at the time. The Egyptian, Mohamet Ali,

will most certainly win your five thousand."

Jerry Newman waved his friend's objections aside. "Your arguments are beside the matter at hand," he said. "You've given me permission to use your studio next Thursday night; and I shall inform Mohamet Ali only at the last minute of the scene of his performance; which will make it virtually impossible for him to arrange any properties or stage effects. It is my contention that without any prearrangements, the Egyptian will fail."

The other shrugged again as though to wash his hands of the matter. He had seen Mohamet Ali——

THURSDAY evening came, and with the darkening of the skies a group of Jerry Newman's closest friends gathered in Howard's studio. Some of them had, like Jim Howard, been present at the demonstration at the Crawfords' and all of them were certain that their friend was to lose his wager. One's eyes do not lie, you know; what one had seen one had seen!

A few minutes after the last of the group had arrived, the door opened to admit Newman; closely following him came the Egyptian, a lean, swarthy, yet rather handsome-looking fellow for all his swarthinness. At the Egyptian's heels trotted an urchin who was quite evidently either an Egyptian, as was Mohamet Ali, or an Arab.

"I think that you have met most of these gentlemen," said Jerry, indicating the small gathering. "I've asked them to be present, as witnesses."

"Quite naturally, one would wish witnesses," murmured Mohamet Ali politely, a smile touching his mouth.

Jerry Newman bowed. "Billy Weaver is the stakeholder, as you know, and the wager is to be paid immediately upon a satisfactory or—pardon me—unsatisfactory conclusion of your feat. And now, we may as well——"

The Egyptian bowed. "At your convenience, sirs," he said. "If you will arrange yourselves——?"

The group gathered in a semicircle. And then, as the Egyptian drew the urchin close to him and advanced to the center of the improvised stage, an almost blindingly intense blue-white light illuminated the room. From overhead came a soft fluttering, a faint hissing, as the huge Cooper-Hewitt photographic lights settled down to a steady glare.

"Pardon me for not informing you that the lights were to be turned on, Mohamet Ali," Jerry Newman spoke up. "I'd almost forgotten them. You see," he went on disarmingly, "the room is quite gloomy, and—well, you are quite aware of the fact that I am looking for trickery on your part. This studio, you see, belongs to friend Howard, who is a photographic illustrator for several magazines; and the Cooper-Hewitts are used to light his sets. As you may see for yourself, they illuminate every nook and corner of the studio, and—well, tonight your every move will be clearly visible!"

"As you will," the Egyptian acceded smilingly. From somewhere about his person he drew a short, ugly-looking sword, and a small ball of twine. The sword he laid upon the floor. "Now, gentlemen, if you will follow me closely——"

With the words he grasped the end of the twine and tossed the ball upward, quickly. A gasp went up from the little audience as they saw the twine seemingly vanish through one of the great skylights . . . indeed, the skylight seemed to have vanished, for they could see out into the heavens. Overhead the rolling evening clouds passed in stately array, and into them the twine disappeared.

At a word from the Egyptian the small boy clutched the twine in his hands and began climbing upward. The astonished Jerry gazed open-mouthed as the urchin wriggled and squirmed his way up that twine, continuing on until he, too, was swept from sight by the low-hanging clouds.

Mohamet Ali stood at the base of that slender ladder to the heavens. After a moment he called out: "Come down!"

The twine wiggled a bit, as though the urchin had commenced his downward flight; then all movement ceased.

Mohamet Ali was incensed. "Come down!" he shouted. "Come down!"

He listened intently as if for an answer. None came. Frowning ferociously, quite obviously enraged at the boy's refusal to obey him, the Egyptian stooped and seized the sword.

"Spawn of Shaitan!" he snarled, grasping the twine in his brown hands. And then he, too, climbed upward.

Chin sagging, Jerry Newman watched the Egyptian follow the urchin into the clouds. Then the twine began to sway to and fro, violently. From above came weird shrieks, shrill implorings for mercy; then they were drowned out by the lower tones of the Egyptian's voice, snarling, vicious.

An unearthly scream split asunder the silence in the room below; a scream that set on edge each nerve in the bodies of the watchers.

Drops of blood spattered on the carpet; and a moment later an arm fell thudding to the floor. It was small, slender, dark-skinned. It was the urchin's arm!

Followed another cry, and the other arm struck sickeningly beside the first. Then, before the horrified eyes of the beholders, in quick succession they saw the urchin's feet—his dismembered legs—his *head*—and then the bloody torso striking before them!

Then, from above, Mohamet Ali came slipping down the twine. He landed lightly on his feet beside the horrible disarray.

"He would not obey me," he said simply as he glanced about him upon the gathering.

As if that ended the matter he extended his foot and kicked the dismembered body into a pile. The twine he grasped and, giving it a jerk so that it fell into his hands, rolled it up compactly. Then, glancing about, he seized a large rug from the floor and quickly threw the severed pieces of the body into it. Gathering the four corners, he lifted the horrible burden—and threw it at the feet of the men who were watching him.

The rug thudded on the floor—unfolded—and the urchin, miraculously made whole again, leaped lightly to his feet and salaamed deeply.

"That is all, I think," Mohamet Ali said easily.

A CHORUS of "I told you so's" dinned into Jerry Newman's ears. "You wouldn't believe, Jerry—and it's cost you exactly five thousand dollars!"

A sly grin touched Jerry's lips. "I haven't lost—as yet," he said slowly.

The Egyptian's brows lifted. "Did you not see with your own eyes, sir?"

Newman nodded. "Quite right, Mohamet Ali. I did see with my own

eyes—but my eyes are not infallible, you know—and so I brought along an eye with me that doesn't lie." He smiled into the astounded faces of the little group. "All right, Harrison!" he called loudly.

A door at the farther end of the room opened and a wiry, cigarette-smoking individual stalked into the room. In his hands he held a square, black wooden box, perhaps six inches across.

"I've seen some wild things, Mr. Newman, in my line of work, but this thing tonight surely had me going for a while," he grinned.

Turning to the scowling Mohamet Ali, Jerry Newman explained: "This gentleman is Mr. Harrison, one of the World-Wide News-reel motion-picture cameramen. I obtained his services for the evening with an idea in view to photograph your every action. Perhaps now you'll comprehend my reason for choosing Howard's studio—with its Cooper-Hewitt photographic lights. Mr. Harrison has been 'shooting' your feat through a small hole in the wall from the adjoining room. And if, as I believe, your demonstration has been a fake, the truth-telling camera-eye will prove it! I'll have this roll of film developed tonight, and printed; and in the morning we'll run the picture in some projection room. Perhaps, Mohamet Ali, you will think that I have taken advantage of you—but I warned you that I was a thorough skeptic, and you should have been on guard. And now, I think there is nothing more until we gather tomorrow morning to witness what Mr. Harrison has filmed."

The Egyptian smiled charmingly. "No apologies necessary, I assure you, Mr. Newman. One doesn't relinquish five thousand dollars without having, as you Westerners say, a run for his money." He beamed upon the motion-picture cameraman. "And you, Mr. Harrison; in that little

black box you hold an absolute proof of exactly every move my assistant and myself have made? Quite remarkable!"

The Egyptian took the little black box into his hands. Idly curious in manner, he carried it to the nearest light as if to survey it more closely. And, somehow, his foot caught in a rug and he stumbled.

The black box fell with a crash to the floor, and a creamy-white roll of film cascaded profusely from its confines.

"Really," Mohamet Ali gasped, "I must apologize for my clumsiness!" He stooped as though to gather up the film.

"That stuff's no good now!" shouted the cameraman. "The light has ruined it!"

"How terribly awkward of me!" murmured the Egyptian.

Billy Weaver left the group and, facing Mohamet Ali and Jerry Newman, waved two certified checks. "What'll I do with these, now?" he queried.

Jerry Newman's face was a mask as he bowed to the Egyptian.

"Give them to Mohamet Ali," he said evenly; and presently he was watching a magician, an assistant, one sword—and two certified checks for five thousand dollars each vanishing through the doorway.