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Strange STORIES


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The Vengeance of Hanuman

By HAMILTON CRAIGIE

Author of "The Man-Trap," "The Jailer of Souls," etc.



Bogash, berserk, hurled the organ-grinder through the window

IT WAS characteristic of "Brute" Bogash that, having served his time for a brutal assault that had almost done for the woman who had been his wife, he visited the monkey house in the zoo.

He had gotten off the train at the uptown station, near the park, because he had had it in mind to meet a man there, an ex-con, who might be able to put him in the way of some "work."

A Strange Curse Claims An Ex-convict When He Taunts the God of the Monkeys!

But at the saloon which was this man's port-of-call he was told to come back in an hour. And after a drink or two

—Bogash was not a drinking man—he had lumbered across to the park, and the zoo there. It was as good a place as any in which to spend an hour, and, in going there, he could kill two birds with one stone.

He had grinned at that, since it was not altogether to while away the time that he had gone into the zoo there, and then stopped in at the monkey house. He had already been there before. It was not that he was amused by the monkeys. It was attributed to the fact that seeing anything behind bars aroused a simmering, feverish feeling in him. Instead of being sorry for anything that was caged, Bogash experienced a sadistic satisfaction in coming to gloat over the prisoners behind their barriers, to laugh at them, to mock them—and more.

Bogash had come there at a time when the monkey house was all but deserted. He glanced covertly and carefully to right and left. Then, with a bestial grimace, he extended his hand. For a man of his immense bulk, although he was not tall, the ex-convict was as quick as a striking adder, and the dart of his hand was like a thrusting adder's tongue.

The monkey nearest him—a bearded Entellus—screamed, almost with a human sound, as the point of the sharpened stick jabbed into him. But the stick was back again, in Bogash's coat-sleeve. If there had been anyone standing at his elbow it is questionable if the lightning thrust of the sharp instrument would have been seen. It was with this single purpose of tormenting the monkey in mind that Bogash selected a sharp stick on the ground before going in to see them.

The monkey, a small one, had dropped to the floor of the cage, doubled over, and throughout the cage now there rose a bedlam of shrieks and screams.

A UNIFORMED attendant came running; but Bogash, his hands in his pockets, was standing there, mouth open. The attendant shrugged.

"They don't like you, maybe, Mister," he said. Then he began to walk away as Bogash, beginning to grin

again, stopped his grin as if it had been wiped off.

"Damn dirty monks—you'd like to get at me, wouldn't you?" he muttered under his breath. But it was not that altogether. To the ex-convict never in any sense an imaginative man, it seemed for a moment as if the apes there were making gestures at him. The screams had drifted to a queer silence. To a zoological expert that would have been most puzzling, but to Bogash it signified nothing. And now he grinned.

But the grin was an uncertain one. He shivered, and in the house of the primates it was extremely warm. Red-rimmed eyes alight with knowledge, they were all looking at him. Particularly the Entellus monkey, the Hanuman. And if he had been an imaginative man he might have thought that those gestures beckoned him. It was as if they were inviting him to come into the cage there, but that was nonsense, of course.

Bogash shrugged, hunched his huge shoulders and turned away.

Brute Bogash was feeling a little queer, but it was nothing that a couple of drinks and a good meal would not soon make right. The man that he had expected to see had been detained, he was told at the saloon, and would not be around till the following day. There was a restaurant that he had patronized very often in the past and he went there now, pausing in the entrance and grinning his sneering grin at the cashier inside her cage there.

In a way it was like a cell, because the cashier would be locked in it until quitting-time, and he, Bogash, was free. Free as air. Free to gloat over the cashier's plight just as he had stood and gloated over the caged monkeys, because he, Bogash, was outside there, with the cashier behind bars.

But for the tenth part of a second it seemed to the ex-convict that the girl inside the cage had looked at him queerly, with an expression of uneasiness. Uneasiness, and, maybe, a hint of shrinking—no doubt because he was a hairy and an ugly rascal, with long, simian arms.

But it was not like Bogash to think of anything, or to notice anything, for

a very long time. He sat down at one of the long tables, which, when full, seated a dozen people. The lights had not yet been turned on, and it was a little dark in the place, so that Bogash saw the man seated opposite as a shadowy figure, and then he saw something else.

Like the development of a photographic plate, something seemed to be materializing on the man's shoulder. At first it was as if a hand or a paw were laid there. And then he saw that there was a small monkey sitting there. Its outlines were blurred a little, save for the red, glaring eyes.

THE beast was staring at Bogash in a malevolent concentration of hate. Tough-fibred as he was, Brute Bogash felt an icy fear clutch at his heart. He leaned forward, and the man opposite did likewise. Then Bogash knew. He was at the end of the long room, and there was nobody opposite—*because he had been looking into a mirror.*

Further along, and on the opposite side of the table, there was a man sitting, and he was a real man—no doubt about that. And just as the lights went on at that moment, Bogash could see that this man—this real man—was looking at and through him. But no sign of surprise showed on his face.

The ex-convict, with a heart that was just a taut muscle, felt himself trembling. His hand shook as he put it up to his shoulder. Seeing the man in the mirror reach up, he shook all over. There was nothing there! There was nothing, now, except his own reflection in the mirror, either. Perhaps he'd had one drink too many, he thought, not being used to it.

Bogash breathed deeply then directed himself to the meal before him, but looking again at the man—the genuine man—who sat opposite him further along. But the man was paying him no attention. He grinned sourly, turning again to the food like a famished wolf. And then the flesh and blood man opposite Bogash looked up in surprise. He saw Bogash rear up, overturning his chair, saw him wheel and lurch away from the table, to smash into a woman customer who

was threading her way among the tables.

A moment before, in the act of raising his napkin to his mouth, Bogash felt something stirring on his shoulder. He had put up his hand—to feel a something furry, something that moved and was alive there, in a hideous fellowship! It had been too much for him.

The woman he had knocked against was wearing a fur neck-piece. And, of course, it might have been that. But with the lights full on, there was the woman, with Bogash shoved up against her.

"You—you clumsy idiot," she snapped. "You—you big a—"

The last word would have been "ape" only that in the middle of it the girl gasped as if the breath had been knocked out of her, pressing herself backward against the wall. Bogash, looking neither to the right nor to the left, went lunging onward past the tables, and then past the cashier's cage, to be brought up short by the cashier's detaining call.

He swung round with a snarl, fumbling in his pocket. There was a mirror behind the cashier's stool, and he could see himself in it, eyes blood-shot, mouth open. But there was nothing else in the mirror and the cashier's expression said merely that she thought him drunk.

Bogash, outside now, hesitated for a moment, his head swinging from side to side like a bear's. Or like the huge mandril he had seen there in the primate house, and which had gnashed its long teeth at him when he had thrust the stick at the Hanuman monkey behind the bars.

TENTATIVELY, standing there on the sidewalk, he raised his hand to his shoulder. He felt nothing, but it did not reassure him. Maybe—maybe he was going insane. He laughed.

But the laugh was hollow. He had spent a pretty long time in jail and that was what it did to you, sometimes, he knew. Grinding his teeth into his thick lower lip, he began to steer an erratic course through dark side streets, stopping at times for

whiskey, and then eventually finding himself in a waterfront dive with which he was familiar. The knight of the apron stared at him as if he saw a ghost.

"Hello, there, old-timer!" the bartender greeted him. The man's stare seemed to go on and through Bogash, who, ordinarily, would have cursed the barman at the drop of the hat. Instead, looking past the man and into the flyspecked mirror, he mumbled:

"You—you see anything wrong with me?"

The words seemed to come from him with an effort. The bartender gave him a queer, measuring look. He shook his head, still staring at Bogash, who shakily put up his hand. And at what he felt there on his shoulder he cursed weakly, turning and diving out again into the night. He went on now at a stumbling run, hearing behind him the *pad-pad* of running feet. The sounds rose, like the hiss and scurry of dead leaves out of the blackness. But there was no wind. And there were no leaves there. And, again, they came like the *pad-pad* of naked feet.

He stopped stock still—and the sounds ceased, as if a door had been opened and then closed on something. The air, dead, heavy, lifeless, took him by the throat. There was a dim light just ahead, and he made for it at a stumbling run. He was hungry. He had no more than begun his meal back there at that restaurant when he had been interrupted by sheer terror. Terror of what he had seen, and what he had felt and not seen. The Thing was riding on him now, because he felt it even if he could not see it on his shoulder. That unspeakable, damned, clinging furry Thing!

The cheap dive that he entered was an eating-place, of a sort. He slumped into a seat at a table, looking at the bill-of-fare, and then at his arm, with a queer expression, and at his hand. And then, with his hands pressed flat on the table-top, he stared, mouth open, at a figure seated opposite him—a man with a dark face. It was almost black and on the man's shoulder there was a small monkey, bearded, and, with a long, curling tail.

The sight was just a little too much

for Bogash. But, as he jerked upward from the table, with the remnant of his sanity he was able to perceive that it was another man like himself who sat there with the monkey, a real monkey. It wasn't a reflection. He sank down again, giving an unkempt waiter his order, and he could see no look of surprise in the waiter's face.

The ex-convict, wolfing down his food, paused for a moment, putting his hand to his shoulder in a surreptitious gesture—and there was nothing there.

"You want that thee monkee he sit on your shoulder, yes?" the dark-faced man opposite him asked.

Bogash stared, as if not comprehending. "Hell, no!" he exclaimed hoarsely. "No—no— Keep it off!"

BUT the beast had sprung down from the organ-grinder's shoulder, and, for the first time, Bogash saw that it was the same kind of monkey, a Hanuman, as had been the one in the monkey-house. But what he did not notice was that the organ-grinder was not an Italian, nor was he a Greek.

The animal, mincing delicately toward Bogash, put out its paw.

"You call him back, you hear me?" yelled Bogash.

But the man's smile was his answer. Then, "He wants to make friends with you, sar. . . . *He knows what he is doing. It is your chance.*"

It seemed to Bogash, although he did not formulate it even in thought, that the monkey's expression was almost human. And in the back of his mind he dimly sensed that the beast was making overtures to him. And from somewhere a voice seemed to be telling him:

"*If you make friends with him it will be all right.*"

Dimly he recalled what it was that the dark-faced organ-grinder had said. It didn't make sense, though. And he hated monkeys, and he wouldn't "make friends" with anybody, let alone a damn monk!

He heard the voice of the organ-man in a kind of patter, and out of it words:

"Ees varyy good monkee, sar. While I have him I make many rupees. . . . And other monkeys they do not come

near him, you see? He is the boss of them, you understand. Me, I do not know how it is—I do not ask. . . . Perhaps it is because he is a Hanuman, *the Hanuman*—”

The words ended abruptly in a scream.

Because the monkey, approaching Bogash, was holding out its paw. Its eyes, red-rimmed, were fixed on the man's eyes—and then Bogash struck.

His huge fist, curving in a short arc, took the monkey behind the ear. And then Bogash went berserk. Up-ending the table, in two strides he was upon the monkey's master, lifted him up. Snarling viciously, he hurled the little man through the restaurant window. Panting, Bogash wheeled to face the policeman who had arrived on the run from across the street.

For five seconds he stood there, swaying, as the officer, appraising his bulk, took handcuffs from his pocket. They clicked on the giant's wrist, with the ex-convict manacled to the policeman—and then Bogash went mad.

The feel of handcuffs on him roused a hatred in him as much as prison bars. And he had the strength of a gorilla. There came a wrench, a twist, a furious sustained explosion of movement—and the ex-convict was free. There was the whine of a slug passing his ear as he stormed into the dark maw of an alley. He ran furiously now, turning and doubling out of the alley and into and through a brightly-lighted thoroughfare. Behind him, fading and then increasing, the sounds of pursuit droned in his ears.

He ran as a beast runs, in great leaps, so that as he swung round a street-corner he nearly knocked down a woman who had just come out of a store. The woman, her mouth open but with the scream dead in her throat, saw him and fainted. Bogash, hurdling her prostrate figure in a bound, leaped frenziedly forward. An alley with its high board fence loomed in his path.

A CAT, its green eyes lambent, spat at him and then, in a furry ball, shot outward, to disappear as the fugitive went up the ten-foot board-wall and then along it. Reaching up and grasping a water-pipe, Bogash made a

ten-foot swing to an inch-wide window-ledge, and from that outward along a clothes-line and down the clothes-pole. Then across a backyard, and through a door there, and so to the street.

Behind him he heard shouts and the pounding of running feet. Breath wheezing in his throat, he halted, flexing and unflexing his huge hands. Stooping forward a little, he snarled at a man who came running round the corner. The man, seeing him, slid forward as if trying to stop himself, and then turned. His face was ashen, his hands beat at the air as he ran. Bogash, whirling, lunged forward and then stopped. His huge hands were pressed flat against what seemed to be an invisible wall there.

It was a shop-window, and at what he saw reflected in it he went quite mad then, but with the strength running out of him in a gush. As in a dream he heard voices raised in a blasting chorus of wonder and disbelief. And then it seemed to him that he was trapped in a cage.

The hurry-up wagon, he guessed dazedly, but it was not the wagon. It was—but it couldn't be—a huge cage with steel bars that went up and up. And in there with him were such horrors as might be seen only in dreams. Eyes, red eyes. . . . They were coming closer, so that a weird, piercing scream was torn from his throat. . . .

The head-keeper of the monkey-house sprang up suddenly from his chair. He had been dozing, but now, at the spine-tingling sound that reached him, he found himself five feet away from his seat, and standing. It was a blood-chilling scream that cut short his slumber.

He shouted, and the assistant-keeper came running. His face, in the dim glow from the night-light, was paper pale. With the assistant at his shoulder the head-keeper raced for the great cage. The sound of that eerie scream was shut off suddenly as if it had been smothered, and a series of high-pitched inhuman outcries followed it. But the first weird scream had been that of a man—or at least it had sounded like it.

Shoulder to shoulder, the running

men heard, an indescribable tumult, with an undercurrent in it like that of a quarry worried by dogs.

Reaching the huge cage, the head-keeper switched on the full blaze of the lights, and then stopped short. He stared in disbelief, his mouth open, at what he saw. Outside, on the concrete as well as on the walls, blood had been spattered. But the inmates of the great cage were quiet, unmoving—all save one. The Hanuman monkey. It clung to the bars now, looking at the head-keeper and then sliding downward, went up on its perch.

The two men, standing there, turned their heads as a man toward a far corner. And there, as they went closer to investigate, was something at which the head-keeper, his gaze in a fixed staring, drew in his breath.

THERE was something that lay there, but for a moment it was difficult to tell whether it might be human or inhuman. Whatever it was, it had been ripped and torn apart so that it was no more than a mangled horror of blood and bones.

The head-keeper nodded, as if to himself. A glance at the cage's occupants was all that was needed to tell him that they were all there. All, that is, except the most recent addition—a huge beast that had been brought in not two hours before. It had been found, oddly enough, by a policeman in pursuit of a fugitive who had somehow evaded him; disappearing as if into a Fourth Dimension ready to hand.

And the huge ape appearing sud-

denly there in the street, had been subdued by the cop with the aid of some courageous onlookers. But the ape, the cop reported, had seemed to be in a daze.

The officer had phoned the zoo which had sent a car for the beast. And the head-keeper remembered that it had taken six strong men to force it into the cage. The ape probably wandered away from some private menagerie, the head-keeper had thought. But there were none nearer than five hundred miles. And how it could have, unseen and unreported, been found where it was. . . .

And Dr. Martenis, the curator, had shaken his head. Because the new arrival had, precisely, defied classification. It had the characteristics of chimpanzee and of baboon. The assistant, leaning forward to see better, was pointing at something. But for the moment the other man was remembering also something else that the curator had said:

"I don't just like it, McNally," Martenis had told him. "Because, did you happen to notice the way the Hanuman—the Entellus, you know—acted when this new one was brought in? Sometimes I'm certain that that little devil knows as much as a living man! And you know who Hanuman himself is supposed to be, don't you? The—the Monkey God!"

The head-keeper, at a whispered word from his assistant, looked up and saw the huge forearm, severed at the elbow; and on it at the wrist a metallic something that glinted under the light. A kind of bracelet with a short length of chain attached to it.