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UNHOLY EYES

By

Monroe Karasik

She was neither beautiful nor alluring—that girl with the haunting black eyes which commanded him to "Kill!" . . . But she was the incarnation of evil, and her powers drove Ralph to murder and to worse. . . .

IT'S all over now, and even in this place I can breathe easily and call my soul my own. The rules and regulations here are not binding. Even if they were, they'd be nothing compared with that weird, torturing sense of an independent intelligence existing within myself, compelling me to act against my will.

Oh, yes, it's freedom for me now, and relief. That is, during the day. At night I sometimes dream, and wake, screaming. Then I see Her again. Her—and Them!

I was no different from thousands of others—ordinary, everyday men—when it began. Still young, of average height, in appearance like countless other men who work in city offices. There was nothing to distinguish me in a crowd; in a subway rush I was a mere unnoticed item of humanity.

I guess, now, that was why She chose me. . . .

I'd finished work that day and was go-

ing home. It was an ordinary day, and I was thinking ordinary things. I remember that I had a date with Helen that night, and I was wondering what movie she'd want to see. Poor little Helen! Sometimes I—but no matter.

I went into the subway, down to the very end of the platform, to catch the last car. The station was crowded, as usual during the rush hour. Everyone intent on going home; no one concerned with anyone else.

I'd been standing there for only a few seconds when I became aware of a strong, almost irresistible impulse to turn my head. I did. There was no reason, then, why I shouldn't have.

I sometimes speculate on what would have been if I hadn't turned my head then—if I'd left the office half a minute later; if I'd stopped to buy a newspaper.

But I had done none of these things. I turned my head, then, and looked into the most extraordinary pair of eyes in the world.

Black they were, with a queer sort of amber light in the depths of them. There was a force, a power, in them that reached through mine, to the very back of my brain, to the inmost recesses of my soul.

I felt myself sinking, subsiding, and the evil waves of another personality flooding inside me. But the terrible thing, then as later, was the feeling that I, the *real* I, stood powerless inside myself, watching, while this other mind went about its actions, using my body to carry out its dictates.

I turned my head away. Down the track a train was rushing toward us—a long train, speeding and heavy-laden. In front of me, on the edge of the platform, was a fat little man with a derby, gold-rimmed eyeglasses and a scrubby mustache.

The train came closer. When it was within five feet of me, I pushed the little

man—pushed him clear onto the tracks!

I heard a pitiful, rabbit-like squeal, saw the scrubby mustache quiver. Then my view was shut off by the train. I turned my head to meet those compelling eyes again. But this time they had another look in them. A look of blood and satanic pleasure. Then they vanished.

I became one of the crowd again, watching, waiting for what was to follow. It seemed hours before the train dragged to a stop; days before the milling mob awoke to a realization of what had happened; years before the emergency crew cleared the way, and the train was started again.

I was in a sick daze when I got home. I lay on my bed in a semi-stuper, seeing over and over again that scene in which I—or my body—had played the chief actor.

My landlady roused me, her strident voice calling me to the phone.

It was Helen. "Ralph," she began, "do you realize what time it is? We'll never get anywhere tonight if you don't hurry over."

"I'm awfully sorry, Helen," I stammered. "I—I've had a very hard day at the office, and I'm tired. I'm not—I'm not feeling well, either."

"Oh!" her voice was all concern. "What is it, dear? Do you want a doctor? Maybe I'd better come over and see what I can do."

"No, no," I expostulated. I didn't want to see anyone then—Helen least of all. "It's only a slightly upset stomach. I'll probably be all right in the morning."

"Oh. Sure you don't want anything?"

"No. Goodbye, Helen."

"Bye, darlin'."

I WENT back to my room and tossed about on my bed until morning. At about two or three o'clock I began to realize my position, apart from the horror of the situation. Had anybody seen me push

that man? A thousand times I told myself "no!" and a thousand times the awful possibility reasserted itself.

I slunk into the office like a hunted criminal that morning. The paper contained only a one-inch paragraph on an inside page about the "suicide" in the subway. There was no reference to it in the paper I bought at lunchtime. An even briefer repetition of the morning's paragraph was hidden in the late evening edition.

That night I caught the train at the next farther subway station downtown.

For five days I avoided Helen and all my friends—five days during which I was tortured by the thought of arrest, as well as by the recollection of that horrible scene.

However, subconsciously, my apprehensions were becoming gradually relieved. At times I could almost convince myself that the whole incident was a dream.

Then, on leaving the office for home on the sixth day, I saw those eyes again. It was no dream.

As before, I felt my personality submerged; as before, I felt my body to be a mere shell controlled and inhabited by another.

But this time I could see to whom the eyes belonged. They were set on a slight, Mongoloid slant in a feminine face. Her skin seemed a smooth, even white, at first, but upon closer examination I noticed that it seemed underlaid with a greenish tinge, the unhealthy pallor of a plant from the hot-houses of Hell.

The brilliant, slightly dusky red of her full, cruel lips was the color of clotting blood; her hair, under a tight-fitting hat, the wicked amber of a poisoned wine.

I followed her, like a dog at heel, to the subway, down onto the platform, her full-fleshed body moving before me with a predatory suppleness.

This time it was a young, pimple-faced girl I pushed.

Again, after the deed was done, those eyes looked into mine; again I merged with the mob; again I arrived home sick and weak. The newspapers treated this occurrence with similar brevity, but my fear was greater than before. This could not be done forever with immunity.

It was fortunate that my work at the office was largely routine, for a man in terror cannot think. Again I avoided my usual associates, but this time I did not avoid Helen.

"Oh, my, Ralph, what's the matter?" she exclaimed when I came over the next night. "You look simply terrible. I think you ought to see a doctor right away!"

"Nonsense!" I dissembled, striving desperately not to let her get an inkling of what was wrong. "Just a little late work at the office. Rush season, you know."

I changed the subject abruptly. "C'mon, let's get going. I haven't been places for over a week."

When we got out on the sidewalk Helen started going toward the subway. I grabbed her arm. "Hold it, lady," I said, trying hard to be jocular, "we're going to do things in a little style tonight. Taxi!" I called.

"Don't be extravagant, Ralph," she said. "You know we've got to save."

"Just this once!" I pleaded. I wanted to take no chances—I didn't dare go into the subway with her.

She assented, and we climbed into the cab which drew up to the curb. Once seated in the hurrying vehicle with her, I began to feel safe. The outside world, all my fears, thoughts, memories were shut out in the sight of her blue eyes. Poor, dear little Helen!

I think that those were the only peaceful, forgetful minutes I had in all that terrible time. But they didn't last long.

FOR I saw Her again! We had just stopped for a red light when I turned to the window to see where we were. The street light shone in on us, and down on Her. My heart gave a terrific thump. For a moment I was immovable.

In that instant those eyes were directed toward me, and as the cab moved on again her lips curved in a weird, animal smile. Oh, yes, I had seen Her again! But what was worse was that she'd seen—*us!*

I was silent and restless all the remainder of the evening. I think Helen made some comment on my state—she must have—but I don't remember.

For now I was in a perfect agony of fear. No longer was it the numb horror of realizing my transformation and my deeds; nor was it the fright of capture and punishment.

It was terror of what might happen to Helen through me, for the look in that she-fiend's eyes had betokened nothing but evil for my companion. Nor was I far from wrong. But never could I have guessed the subtle cruelty, the diabolical ingenuity of that She intended.

It happened the very next day. I hadn't walked more than a block from the office at closing time when those eyes flashed at me again. I stopped. She made some sort of motion, some gesture, and I followed her, oblivious to anything else.

I don't know where she led me, through what streets and alleys. All I know is that I followed.

When at last I became aware of my surroundings we were in a room—Her room. She was seated on a bed; I, on a chair facing her.

She lit two cigarettes and handed me one. She took a deep breath, exhaled slowly. Then She spoke. "That girl you were with. She is your friend, no?"

Her accent was queerly foreign, her voice had an odd, metallic ring. I nodded.

"She is a *nice* girl, yes? And you—"

she took another puff, "you are a nice boy. *Nice* boy," she repeated with a gloating sneer in her voice. Then she laughed.

Sometimes, in my dreams, that laugh wakes me up. After that I don't go back to sleep again.

She thrust her cigarette under my nose. "Look at my eyes through this smoke," she commanded.

I looked.

"Now," she said slowly, "tell me what is it that you see."

The smoke spread out, condensed, grew solid. It took on form, and I saw the flash of gold-rimmed spectacles, the quivering of a scrubby mustache, a mouth opened in a weak cry.

In a dead voice I told her.

She crushed out the cigarette, and turned her eyes away. I fell back in the chair, every muscle trembling. She turned back to me.

"Now there is no cigarette," she said. "Look in my eyes and say what is there."

This time the eyes seemed to widen out and I looked, as a bystander might, at myself pushing a girl with a pimply face into the track of a train.

She nodded when I told her. "Good. Very, very good, my *nice* boy."

She looked at me again. My body obeyed her will, and I watched myself take the smouldering cigarette from my fingers and crush it out on the palm of my hand.

I smelled the burning flesh, but I was conscious of no pain. Again she nodded approvingly.

I felt another impulse stir through my body. As through a spectator's eyes I watched the two of us disrobe. How can I describe what followed?

Our actions, our gestures were a foul mockery of decency and normality. What self remained to me writhed in bitter shame. But the worst agony was the satanic wanton's eyes.

FOR I saw Helen being ravished by a man with Her face; I saw Helen's body subjected to the loathsome indecencies which She, in this room, controlled, and in which She gloried.

With sadistic refinement she lengthened my anguish, contrived new subtleties of torture and sensualism. At length it was over.

I lay by her side, nerveless, trying to summon up the strength to rip her throat out with my bare hands. But I couldn't move. I was powerless to do anything to her other than her will while I was in her presence. She knew what was passing through my mind, and laughed that laugh again.

"Oho!" she exclaimed sarcastically, "nice boy! Too nice, maybe! He thinks he will do somethings. Pah!" she spat, "he will do what I order."

Soon we got up and dressed. She led me to a subway station, but went no further than its entrance with me. "I think," she said with a smile that was not pleasant, "I think maybe I see you soon again. Goodbye, my *nice* boy!"

Before I went to my room I bought a bottle of whiskey. When I got home I locked the door, then sat down to drink the liquor. I wanted to drink myself into a stupor, into a dead sleep free from thoughts and pictures of my imagination. But the drink had another effect. It numbed my apprehensions and my horror, and filled me with a fighting spirit.

I became determined to find a way out, to do something that would conquer Her dominance. No such solution came to me. After hours of almost insane scheming the only acceptable idea I had was that of flight. To go somewhere where She'd never find me—to escape!

I woke up the next morning with a heavy head, but with my determination unaltered. I was almost gay as I opened the lodging house door to go out. My

worries, I thought, were soon to be ended. I was mistaken. She stood on the sidewalk waiting for me. . . .

In utter silence, she led me to the subway. She remained at my side during the journey; she led me to the office building, and watched me get into the elevator.

God! Was I never to be rid of her? Would I never be free from that baneful, death-dealing influence?

During that day, my mind, when I could concentrate it, was occupied with plans to outwit her. I even remained in the office during lunch hour so that I'd have some extra time for thinking.

Late in the afternoon the head of my department came over to me. "Look here, young fellow," he said, "you've been looking pretty poorly lately. Now, if you want, you can leave early today. And you might as well take the next couple of days off, and set yourself right."

A wild hope surged up within me. This was my chance! "Thanks! Thanks," I said. "That's real good of you, sir. I will."

In the elevator, as I left a few minutes later, I began to assemble my thoughts. First to go home and get some clothes together, then down to the terminal for the first train West. Helen could join me as soon as I found a new job. Everything would work out all right. But the first person I saw as I left the elevator was Her.

She smiled when she saw me, and under the influence of those eyes I was again her slave. "So," she repeated as we walked, "he think he will do something?" We walked the streets until the height of the rush hour. Then inevitably, to a subway station.

This time the victim was a gentle, tired-looking old man. I shall never forget the look in his eyes as he fell without a word, his face twisting full toward me. He knew who had pushed him, and his silent

accusation rang as loud as an explosion in my ears.

BUT now there was a change in the customary scene. After She had disappeared, and after the emergency crew had gotten to work, I edged myself close to that knot of people where detectives were making inquiries.

I must do something to exculpate myself in case anyone had noticed me close to the old man. This was the third time, and I could no longer depend upon blind luck to keep suspicion from me.

"Officer," I said, summoning up all my courage, "I believe I was the last person to see this man alive."

"Oh, you was, was you?" said the detective. "Well, what of it?"

I was somewhat taken aback. "Well, I just thought I could throw some light on his death."

"Yeah? Well, what is it?"

"Well," I said, "just before he jumped he said: 'I go and meet my God!'"

"What'd you expect him to say, Lincoln's Gettysboig Address?" He turned to a uniformed man and said, "Frank, get this guy's tag."

Actuated by what motive I don't know, I gave a fictitious name and address. I figured, as I rode home, that I had at least done something to allay suspicion, and that the way would be clear for me to leave that night.

My encounters with Her always left me physically weak, but her influence never extended to those times when she could not use her eyes on me. And I had become more or less hardened by now, so that I had some capacity for independent thought.

As soon as I got to my lodging house I rang up Helen. "Darlin'," I said, "I've got to see you as soon as possible. I can't get over to your house; can you come over here?"

"Why, certainly, Ralph," she replied. "But what's wrong?"

"I can't tell you over the 'phone, but believe me, it's most urgent."

"I'll be right over," she said.

I sought out my landlady and told her whom I was expecting. I cautioned her that on no account would I see anyone else. Then I went upstairs and locked the door.

Here we would be safe. Had I ventured out to go to Helen's, She might have intercepted me, with that uncanny faculty she had of determining my movements. I knew that even She would stand no chance of getting past that Gorgon of a landlady of mine.

The minutes dragged by interminably before I heard a knock on my door. Wasn't it too soon for Helen? Had She succeeded in getting in?

I asked hoarsely, "Who is it?"

"It's me, Helen."

I opened the door and took her in my arms. I clung to her desperately for some moments, as if she were the last prop of my sanity.

Then, after having locked the door behind her, I began to speak, and speak rapidly. "Helen, darling, I've got to leave town. Leave tonight! Don't ask me any questions—I've got to!" I saw a strange expression come over her face.

"Oh, no, no!" I said hastily. "It's nothing—crooked; it's just—just—" I broke off, paused, began again. "Look here, you trust me, don't you?"

She nodded.

"Well don't ask any questions. I'll tell you everything later. Look—here's my bank book, and a withdrawal slip. Go down tomorrow morning and take everything out. I'm leaving tonight."

"But, Ralph—" she broke in.

"Helen, please. Do as I say. I'll write you in a few days."

Her stammered questions showed the

amazement she felt. However, I managed to override all her objections, and she finally left, acquiescent. I threw things into valises hastily. I was all packed in a few minutes.

As I got to the door of my room I paused. It was still daylight out, I remembered. Maybe it would be better to wait until it got quite dark.

I threw down my valises and went to the window. Nowhere was there a sign of Her.

Still, I decided to take no chances. Darkness would be best.

I PACED up and down the floor for hours, forcing all other thoughts out of my mind with the constant repetition of the phrase: "I've got to escape. I've got to escape."

Again and again I looked out of the window, each time assuring myself that the coast was clear, and as often persuading myself that the later it became, the safer I was.

Finally I decided that the time was ripe. I went out of my room and started going down the stairs. Just as I got to the landing I heard a swift patter of feet coming up. I stopped.

A girl came on a level with me and raised her face. Helen! "Oh, Ralph," she almost sobbed, "I was afraid you'd gone!"

"Not yet," I answered. "But I'm leaving in a few minutes."

"Don't go!" she pleaded.

"I must. You have no idea of the situation I'm in. I've got to!"

She was about to reply when footsteps warned us of a fellow lodger coming up. As the man passed us and continued further up the stairs, Helen whispered: "Let's go to your room, Ralph, I've got something to say, and I can't say it here."

I agreed grudgingly, and we went to my room. I locked the door and turned

to her. "Say what you have to, Helen," I said, "but my mind's made up. I'm leaving in five minutes."

"Ralph," she said, the tears welling in her eyes, "you're sick. You need me. Stay, Ralph, please stay! Tell me what it is, and let me help you."

I felt myself weakening. I started to tell her everything, but the words choked in my throat. Instead I said: "Oh, Helen, Helen, nothing, nobody can help me."

"Maybe I can, Ralph. After all, you know, I—I love you."

I walked over to the window, thinking. Maybe she could. Maybe it wasn't so bad. Maybe the two of us—

My eye was caught by a patch of vivid green outside, under the street light. A green blouse. My gaze wandered up toward the face. And then—I saw two small circles of reddish light! Even as I looked at them, they seemed to come nearer and nearer with startling rapidity. Finally they were less than two feet away, on a level with my eyes.

I knew what they were even before I felt that familiar, odious, sinking feeling, but I was powerless to turn my head. *Her eyes!*

The message came: "Kill! Kill! Kill!"

Slowly, like an automaton, I turned.

Across the room was a small figure. Something in the back of my brain whispered that it was somebody called Helen, but I knew no Helen. All I wanted to do was to dig my fingers into that figure, rend out handfuls of that soft flesh. Slowly I advanced toward her.

I saw her eyes widen in sudden terror as she made out the expression on my face. She started backing away.

"Kill Kill! Kill!"

My hands were out straight before me, my fingers slowly flexing themselves as they came nearer that white throat. Now her back was against the door. Her lips

opened, but no sound came out. One more step—Now!

As my hands went out toward her, she suddenly darted under my arms, and ran across the room. Rage filled me. This person dared to evade me! I would seize her and twist her throat! I would trample her bleeding body under my heels!

"Kill! Kill! Kill!"

Again I advanced. She swallowed, tried vainly to lick her dry lips.

Oho! She was frightened, was she? Good! I'd like to feel the swift fluttering of her heart under my fingers as I tore the flesh from her body! I laughed. . . . She started moving away faster. I jumped, grabbing at her.

My fingers fastened on something. I pulled; something ripped. As it did so she shrieked—a frightened, piteous cry that rang shrilly through the room.

Momentarily I stopped, glanced down at what I had torn away. I almost burst with anger as I saw that I held a fragment of her dress. I threw it from me, spread my arms wide, and strode toward her. This time she wouldn't escape!

Her hands were spread on the wall in back of her, her chest rapidly rose and fell as she gasped for air. On her bosom were the marks of my finger nails, the long scratches showing drops of blood that still further frenzied me.

"Kill! Kill! Kill!"

Again I leaped toward her, and again she slipped past me. But this time I had her. She had stumbled on one of my valises, and fell sprawling on the floor.

I drew myself together to leap upon her prostrate body, and at that instant, the door burst open!

I saw a man's figure, that was all. Then something inside me seemed to break, and there was a rumbling sound in my ears—and a blackness before my eyes. . .

YES, it's all over now. They say, here, that in six months more I shall be completely cured. Everybody has been very sympathetic. My old boss says he understands, and that I can have my job back.

Helen, too—dear Helen!—thinks she understands. She was overjoyed when they told her that my cure would be effected in such a short time. Already she's begun to hunt an apartment for us, when we get married.

But nobody really *does* understand, and it's just as well. They think that the doctors have cured me, that I had some sort of neurosis or something, and that their treatments made me well.

It's true that being here, and feeling safe from any more persecution by those dreadful eyes helped me. In fact, after I recovered from my coma I could discuss as much of the matter as I felt was safe with the doctors, quite normally.

But it was Helen who gave me the news that really cured me. One day when she visited me she seemed downcast. I asked her what was the matter. At first she didn't want to tell me. I insisted.

"I don't know whether I should, Ralph, but—. Well, you see, when that man who passed us on the stairs that day came into the room and saw you fall, he went to call an ambulance. And naturally, when it came, quite a little crowd gathered outside.

"It was while they were carrying you out, on a stretcher, that it happened. Some poor, silly girl who wanted to rubberneck started to cross the street and was hit by a taxicab. She was in the hospital for weeks, badly injured, and unconscious.

"They tried to find her friends or relatives, but nobody knew who she was. Her condition got worse and worse. Today she died. Maybe you might have seen her in the neighborhood, somewhere. Did you, Ralph? She wore a green blouse—"