

# Weird Tales

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# WHEN THE DEAD RETURN

By PERCY B. PRIOR

**W**ITHOUT a doubt it is very disconcerting to meet a dead man, particularly if he chances to have been your husband.

In the circumstance it is no wonder that Marian screamed.

As it was midday and on Broadway, the scream attracted a good deal of attention and, with one exception, everyone in the vicinity rushed toward Marian, who was charming enough to merit the fullest sympathy. The one exception walked quickly round the corner of John Street and vanished. He had a reason for doing this. He was a dead man.

Normally Marian might have thought there had been some mistake regarding her late husband's demise. But this was hardly possible. He had died in bed and in her presence. Furthermore, the medical man, Dr. Henry Delaware, who had also been present, could doubtless swear that the dead man had shuffled off his mortal coil.

Marian was twenty-two when she became a widow. It was a year later when she screamed on Broadway, and by that time she was no longer Mrs. Creed, relict of the late Mark Creed.

She had become Mrs. James Turner.

That was one reason why her scream had such a stricken note. It becomes really embarrassing to encounter a dead husband when one has no further use for him.

What made the matter more disconcerting, and argued against the chance of delusion or of the dead man's having a double, was the fact that the newspapers had recently contained a number of circumstantial accounts of dead people having been seen. There was a veritable epidemic of apparitions.

A psychic committee had formed itself to collate and record the evidence and had investigated such incidents as that of Arthur Johnson, age twenty-four, who had died suddenly in a public city park. Some six months later he had been seen by both his mother and sister near their residence, and when they had tried to speak to him he had fled and boarded a street-car post-haste.

Then there was Mrs. Turnley, seen by her son leaving her favorite seat in a well-known New York picture palace. He had tried to trace her in the crowd but had failed. That was four months after her death.

Strangest of all, however, was the case of Felix Malheur, the French chef, who had been fatally stabbed in the neck by Henri Marzot, a malicious deed for which Marzot went to the electric chair.

Some seven months had elapsed when a man, convincingly identified as Malheur, and having a scar on his neck exactly similar to the fatal wound, was arrested for vagrancy. He swore that he was not Malheur,

but would give no particulars of himself. The one point of doubt in this case was the fact that the arrested man had a scar on his chest, whereas no such mark was mentioned in the description of the deceased Malheur.

With these circumstances in mind, it is not surprising that Marian Turner screamed when she caught sight of her dead first husband, whom she had married when she was but eighteen, and whose doglike devotion she had found irritating rather than otherwise, and whom she had done her best to forget since she had been married to her wonderful James Turner.

The instant she screamed, however, she realized that the position contained embarrassments, so when the passers-by crowded around her she apologized.

"It's all right," she explained, "I'm sorry to be so silly, but I was sure that car was going to run over that little child." And she pointed to the scene of a fictitious narrow escape.

That evening she told her husband of the apparition, and together they consulted Dr. Delaware as to possible pre-natal effects of such a shock on a child-to-be. He reassured them, but they were still a little troubled as to the legal status of children if dead first husbands were going to make a practise of returning to life.

**I**T WAS at the same time that the authorities, in further investigation of the Malheur affair, decided to exhume the murdered man's body. The grave was opened. It contained an empty coffin. Malheur was missing.

This made it look as though Marzot had been executed under false pretenses, though it was admittedly rather late to make amends.

Even after this, the arrested "va-

grant" still denied that he was the dead man, and he was released after a short detention. Thereupon he vanished.

Following this exhumation, the undertaking firm of Interments, Inc., which had carried out the last rites on the murdered man, was interviewed by Detective Bowler, who had charge of the case. Mr. Marlow, who seemed to be the whole firm, could offer no explanation.

But it so chanced that this Mr. Marlow was unpopular among the undertaking fraternity. A short while previously he had been struggling along, small, suburban, and almost bankrupt. Then without apparent reason he had burst forth in a blaze of advertisements as Interments, Inc., and had taken a large establishment in the heart of New York. It was then that he became unpopular. He gave cut-rates for funerals, and a facetious competitor even remarked that he would next be introducing a cash-and-carry system to the profession.

This unpopularity led to gossip and it was then noticed that quite a number of the alleged apparitions were of people who had been inanimate patrons of Interments, Inc. That fact, combined with Malheur's empty coffin, furthered the police investigation, and eventually established the fact that not merely several, but every one of the apparitions had been buried by Interments, Inc.

Among other people interviewed by Detective Bowler during these inquiries was Marian Turner, not because there was any suspicion that she had seen her dead husband, but because his funeral had left the mortuary chapel of Interments, Inc., instead of his late residence.

Mrs. Turner stated that she had actually desired the cortege to leave the house, but that Mr. Marlow had been so insistent that in the end she

had agreed to its leaving his premises.

Following this, Detective Bowler consulted the register of companies, and found that Marlow was only a nominal shareholder in the firm, virtually all the shares being in the name of one Henry Delaware, medical practitioner. . . .

Before doing anything further, the officer decided to consult his chief, but about 11 o'clock that night a telephone message asked him to call immediately at the residence of Mr. James Turner.

There he heard that Mrs. Turner had seen her first husband, supposed to be dead, as a very substantial apparition in Broadway, a few days previously. Also that a second apparition had occurred scarcely an hour since. Mr. Turner, explaining this, stated that he and his wife had retired about 10 o'clock, but had not switched off the light. It was a sultry evening and although the blinds were drawn one window had been left open. Suddenly Mrs. Turner had screamed and pointed to this window. Her husband, looking quickly round, had seen the blind move. Jumping up, he had rushed outside to see a figure vanish through the side gate, but though he gave chase the figure eluded him.

THE morning papers recorded nothing of this. They had something much more startling:

## MYSTERIOUS CRIME

Dr. Delaware Murdered

ASSAILANT ATTEMPTS SUICIDE

The details showed that the doctor had received an urgent call toward midnight at his residence, and going down had admitted someone to his surgery. A few minutes later his wife heard a strange voice, loud and

angry, and two shots had immediately followed. Running downstairs she found the doctor lying on the floor, dead, and a strange man lying beside him with a terrible wound in his neck. The doctor had been shot through the heart. Detective Bowler, it was stated, had the case in hand.

The evening papers were able to go one better and print verbatim, in cold, official phrases, the dying depositions of the wounded man, who had since succumbed:

My name is Mark Creed. About a year ago I died. That is, I became unconscious, and awoke to find Dr. Delaware standing beside an operating-table on which I was securely strapped. He had previously been attending me in my home. He told me I had died and that he had brought me back to life. He made me swear that I would not reveal myself to anyone, not even my wife. He said his experiments must be secret for a while yet. He said he would not let me live unless I promised. I promised.

After that he treated me for about six months in a sanatorium. It took about an hour's ride to get to it. I don't know where it was. The car was closed. When he discharged me from there he made me promise again I would not see my wife. He told me she had married again and that she was now very happy.

A few days ago I saw her on Broadway. After that I could not keep my promise. I loitered about the house hoping to see her. Last night I peeped beneath the window-blind. That made me mad. They saw me and a man gave chase. I got away among some trees. I then went to Dr. Delaware. I cursed him. I cursed him for bringing me back to such a life of torment. Then I shot him."

The man had died almost immediately after signing this statement. Subsequent investigation at the doctor's surgery seemed to confirm quite clearly that he had been resuscitating the dead, apparently by the hypodermic injection of some unknown drug soon after death, followed by a surgical operation and actual massage of the heart, probably under an electrical impetus.

The reason for his association with Interments, Inc., is plain. He had financed the company and attracted

business by reduced rates in order to get possession of subjects for his experiments, one of the most grisly business associations on record.

The various apparitions were thus explained, and some strange reunions resulted.

But they are not likely to recur. Dr. Delaware's astounding secret died with him, and Marian Turner at least will probably agree that it is just as well.

A dead husband is such an embarrassing thing to be at large.