

Weird Tales

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WEIRD TALES ISSUED 1st OF EACH MONTH

Mordecai's Pipe

By A. V. MILYER

If Pettigrew had obeyed that inner warning and refused to smoke the pipe, the weird catastrophe would not have happened

JANUARY 7—McNally sent the pipe today. I found it waiting when I returned home from the office this evening. Oh, it's quite an ordinary-looking pipe; a four-inch stem, badly chewed around the mouthpiece, and a large, round bowl, worn smooth and dark from constant handling. One would never think to look at it that it had had such a gruesome past.

"But McNally swears that it was the one cherished possession of old Peter Mordecai, the fellow they executed at the state prison last week. And what a malevolent old devil *he* must have been! Seems that all the other prisoners shunned him as they would a plague—but then who wouldn't shun a man who's killed four children and used their bodies for God-only-knows what crazy rites? Not that the absence of fellowship worried Mordecai, though; for they say that he even refused to speak to guards, silencing

their attempts with that wolfish snarl that the newspapers made so much of.

"Oh, how plainly I can see him—smoking his pipe as he grins over the mangled bodies of his victims; smoking it throughout the endless days at the death-house; even smoking it as he takes that last, brief walk to the gallows. I can see him on the very scaffold, shoving his pipe at McNally with a muttered 'Here, Warden,' and a rotten, knowing leer as though he were in possession of some filthy secret.

"Is it any wonder that McNally didn't want it? Is it any wonder that, knowing of my bad taste for gruesome curios, he sent it along to me? I'm sure that no one, however morbid, could desire a more macabre souvenir than this, the pipe of Mordecai.

"It's odd how past events can cast a sinister light upon perfectly innocent objects. This pipe, now—just because of

old Mordecai's devilish malevolence, his unearthly hate of all mankind—it repels and fascinates me at the same time. Oh, the power of the human mind is unlimited.

“But enough of this! First thing you know I'll be seeing old Mordecai himself in one of the shadowy corners of my little study here. Too much imagination is a bad thing. . . .”

PETTIGREW laid down his pen, pushed back the voluminous diary that was his sole emotional outlet, and gazed fixedly at the battered old briar that lay on the desk before him. He quivered perceptibly as the odd little thought grew in his mind; the thought that told him to smoke the pipe.

With a wry half-smile at his own queer-ness he tried to dismiss the thought, but it persisted. Smoke the pipe—the pipe that a madman's lips had last caressed; the pipe that murdering fingers had last fondled. How novel it would be! How utterly fantastic! The normal element in Pettigrew's mind whispered “No!”; the morbid strain shouted “Yes!”

Pettigrew found himself reaching slowly for the humidior that rested at his left elbow. He picked up the battered briar and carefully packed the hard-coated interior of the bowl with his private mixture of fragrant tobaccos. Then, with an involuntary shudder of disgust at his audacity, he thrust the bitten mouthpiece into his mouth and carefully applied a match.

As he expelled the first blue smoke-cloud from his lungs, Pettigrew reflected

with amusement upon the shocked amazement his friends would register if he told them of his rather ghastly experiment. He was suddenly brought back to the present by a momentary twinge of pain. He had, it seemed, pinched a portion of his soft mouth-tissue between stem and teeth so that it bled. With a grimace at his own nervousness, he replaced the pipe and again inhaled deeply. Odd that the pipe should seem so unwieldy, almost as if unseen fingers were tugging at it!

The blinding suddenness of the flash of red-hot agony brought Pettigrew to his feet in a mad leap that upset his chair with a crash. Like a puppet on a string he caromed madly about the room, knocking over lamps and furniture in a sudden fight for breath. His throat was gripped by a constricting band of fire that filled it with hellish, strangling pain—a grip that made his brain spin and roar in an insane cacophony. His clawing fingers were tearing wildly at his contorted mouth when he finally crashed to the floor.

DOCTOR CLAYTON, from his crouched position over Pettigrew's sprawled body, beckoned to Sergeant McCullough.

“Of all the damn-fool ways to die!” growled the doctor, pointing to the gaping jaws that helped make a grotesque mockery of the empurpled thing that had once been a human face. “It's a pipe—you can barely see part of the bowl there at the top of his throat. But how in God's name could a fellow possibly swallow a pipe—stem first, at that? McCullough, if it weren't all so damned ridiculous I'd swear that someone *rammed* it down the poor devil's throat!”

