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WEIRD TALES ISSUED 1st OF EACH MONTH

# The Suicide in the Study

By ROBERT BLOCH

*A short story of dual personality*

TO SEE him sitting there in the dim-lit darkness of the study, one would never have suspected him for what he was. Wizards nowadays are not garbed in cabalistic robes of silver and black; instead they wear purple dressing-gowns. It is not required of them that their eyebrows meet, their nails grow long as talons, and their eyes flame like emerald-imprisoned dreams. Nor are they necessarily bent and furtive, and old. This one was not; he was young and slim, almost imperially straightforward.

He sat beneath the lamplight in the great oak-paneled room; a dark, handsome man of perhaps thirty-five years of age. There was little of cruelty or malice visible in his keen, clean-featured face, and little of madness in his eyes; yet he was a wizard, just as surely as if he lurked over human sacrifices in the skull-strewn darkness of forbidden tombs.

It was only necessary for one to survey the walls of his study for corroboration. Only a wizard would possess those moldering, maggoty volumes of monstrous and fantastic lore; only a thaumaturgical adept would dare the darker mysteries of the *Necronomicon*, Ludvig Prinn's *Mysteries of the Worm*, the *Black Rites* of mad Luvéh-Keraph, priest of Bast, or Comte d'Erlette's ghastly *Cultes des Goules*. No one save a sorcerer would have access to the ancient manuscripts bound in Ethiopian skin, or burn such rich and aphrodisiac incense in an enshrined skull. Who else would fill the mercifully cloaking darkness of the room with curious relics,

mortuary souvenirs from ravished graves, or worm-demolished scrolls of primal dread?

Superficially, it was a normal room that night, and its occupant a normal man. But for proof of its inherent strangeness it was not necessary to glance at the skull, the book-cases, or the grim, shadow-shrouded remains, to know its occupant for what he was. For James Allington wrote in his secret diary to-night, and his musings were far from sanity.

“TONIGHT I am ready to make the test. I am convinced at last that splitting of the identity can be accomplished by means of therapeutic hypnosis, provided that the mental attitude conducive to such a partition can be induced.

“Fascinating subject, that. Dual identity—the dream of men from the beginning of time! Two souls in one body . . . all philosophy is based on comparative logic; good and evil. Why, then, can not such a division exist in the human soul? Stevenson was only partly right when he wrote *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. He imagined a chemical metamorphosis varying from one extreme to the other. I believe that both identities are *co-existent*; that, once they are separated by auto-hypnotic thought, a man can enjoy two existences simultaneously—his good self and his bad.

“They laughed at my theory in the club. Foster—that pompous old fool!—

called me a dreamer. Dreamer? What does he, a petty scientific chemist, know of the basic mysteries of Life and Death? A glimpse into my laboratory would shock his smug soul into insanity. The others, too; mob-catering writers, pedantic fossils who call themselves professors, prim biologists who are shocked at the mention of my experiments in synthetic creation of life—what do such as these understand? They would shudder at the *Necronomicon*; burn it, too, if they could; burn it as their pious ancestors did three hundred years ago. Witch-baiters, skeptics, materialists all! I'm sick of the whole silly pack of them. It is the fate of the genius to dwell alone. Very well, then, I'll dwell alone—but soon they will come cringing to my door and beg for mercy!

"If my work tonight only succeeds! If I can succeed in hypnotizing myself into dual personality, physically manifested! Even modern psychology claims it can be done. Spiritualism credits its possibilities. The ancients have furnished me the key to the problem, as they have done before. . . . Alhazred knew many things—it was only the weight of the knowledge that drove him mad.

"Two bodies! Once I can achieve that state at will, I shall hold the key to powers for ever denied to men. Immortality, perhaps; it is only a step further. After that there will be no need of skulking here in secret; no necessity of passing my researches off as a harmless hobby. Dreamer, eh? I'll show them!

"I wonder what the *other* shape will look like? Will it be human? It must, otherwise—but I had better not think of that. It is quite probable that it will be an ugly-looking customer. I do not flatter myself. I know that the evil side of my nature, while concealed, is undoubtedly dominant. There is danger, though—evil is an uncontrollable force in its purest form. It will draw strength

from my body, too—energy to manifest itself physically. But that must not deter me. I must make the test. If it succeeds I shall have power—power undreamt of—power to kill, to rend, to destroy! I shall add to my little collection here, and settle a few old scores with my skeptical friends. After that there will be other pleasant things to do.

"But enough of such musings. I must begin. I shall lock the study doors; the servants have gone for the evening and there will be no one to intrude upon my privacy. I dare not risk using an electrically manipulated machine for fear of some untoward consequences in removing the hypnosis. I shall try to induce a hypnotic trance by concentrating intently on this heavy, polished paper-knife here on my desk. Meanwhile, I shall focus my will on the matter at hand, using the Soul Chant of Sebek as a focal point.

"I shall set the alarm for twelve o'clock, exactly one hour from now. Its ringing will break the spell. That, I believe, is all I need bother to do. As an added precaution, I shall burn this record. Should anything go wrong, I would hate to have all my little plans disclosed to the world.

"Nothing shall go wrong, however. I have used auto-hypnosis many times before, and I will be very careful. It will be a marvelous feeling to control two bodies at once. I can hardly control myself—I find my body trembling in eagerness and anticipation of its forthcoming metamorphosis. Power!

"Very well. After this report is reduced to ashes I shall be ready—ready to undertake the greatest experiment man has ever known."

## 2

**J**AMES ALLINGTON sat before the shaded lamp. Before him on the table lay the paper-knife, its polished blade shim-

mering. Only the slow ticking of a clock broke the sable silence of the locked room.

The wizard's eyes were glassy; they shone in the light, immobile as a basilisk's. The reflection from the surface of the knife stabbed through his retina like the fiery ray of a burning sun, but his betrayed gaze never wavered.

Who knows what strange inversion was occurring in the dreamer's bewitched brain; what subtle transmutation generated from his purpose? He had fallen into his sleep with the fixed resolve of severing his soul, dividing his personality, bisecting his ego. Who knows? Hypnotism does many strange things.

What secret Powers did he invoke to aid him in his fight? What black genesis of unholy life lurked within the shadows of his inner consciousness; what demons of leering evil granted him his dark desires?

For granted they were. Suddenly he awoke, and he could feel that he was no longer alone in that nighted room. He felt the presence of another, there in the darkness on the other side of the table.

Or was it another? Was it not he, himself? He glanced down at his body, and was unable to suppress a gasp of astonishment. *He seemed to have shrunk to less than a quarter of his ordinary size!* His body was light, fragile, dwarfed. For a moment he was incapable of thought or movement. His eyes strayed to the corner of the room, trying vainly to see the gloom-obscured movements of a presence that shambled there.

Then things happened. Out of the darkness nightmare came; stark, staring nightmare—a monstrous, hairy figure; huge, grotesque, simian—a hideous travesty of all things human. It was black madness; slavering, mocking madness

with little red eyes of wisdom old and evil; leering snout and yellow fangs of grimacing death. It was like a rotting, living skull upon the body of a black ape. It was grisly and wicked, troglodytic and wise.

A monstrous thought assailed Allington. Was *this* his other self—this ghoulish-spawned, charnel horror of corpse-ac-cursed dread?

Too late the wizard realized what had befallen him. His experiment *had* succeeded, but terribly so. He had not realized how far the evil in his nature had outbalanced the good. This monster—this grisly abomination of darkness—was stronger than he was, and, being solely evil, *it was not mentally controlled by his other self.* Allington viewed it now with new fear in his eyes. It was like a creature from the Pit. All that was foul and obscene and anti-human in his make-up lay behind that grinning parody of a countenance. The beast-like body hinted of shadows that creep beneath the grave or lurk entombed within the deepest recesses of normal minds. Yet in it Allington recognized a mad, atavistic caricature of himself—all the lust, the greed, the insane ambition, the cruelty, the ignorance; the fiend-spawned secrets of his soul within the body of a gigantic ape!

As if in answer to his recognition, the creature laughed, and tentacles of terror gripped the wizard's heart.

The thing was coming toward him—it meant to destroy him, as evil always does. Allington, his tiny body ludicrously struggling to move quickly while impeded by clothes now ridiculously large for his diminutive frame, raced from his chair and flattened himself against the wall of the study. His voice, curiously treble, shrieked frantic supplication and futile commands to the approaching nemesis.

His prayers and curses turned to the hoarse gibberings of madness as the huge beast lunged across the table. His experiment was succeeding with a vengeance . . . *vengeance!* His glaring eyes watched, fascinated, as one great paw grasped the paper-knife, and fearsome laughter riddled the night. It was laughing . . . laughing! Somewhere an alarm-clock rang, but the wizard could not hear. . . .

THEY found James Allington lying dead upon his study floor. There was a paper-knife imbedded in his breast, and they called it suicide, for no one could possibly have entered that locked and windowless room.

But that did not explain the fingerprints on the handle of the knife—the terrible fingerprints—*like those left by the hand of a gigantic ape.*