

A VERSE OF NECROMANCY

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"Lieutenant Arthur Jamison." A stocky middle-aged man with black hair streaked with gray looked up at me.

I handed him my card. "Miss Rose Anderson said you had no objection if I discussed with you the disappearance of her fiance, Homer Rosswell."

He motioned and I sat down in the chair beside his desk. "Normally, we like to keep things within the Department. But in this particular instance there really is no evidence of wrongdoing, and with our backlog we don't have the time or manpower to pursue it any further. If I tell you the little I have, perhaps, you can get Miss Anderson off my back."

"What did you find?"

"Miss Anderson called the Department about her fiance being missing. Normally, he would call her every day, but after she hadn't heard from him in three days, she called him. There was no answer. She went to the apartment house where he lived and persuaded the building manager to unlock the only door to his apartment. The manager opened the door but was stopped by the chain-bolt. He refused to cut the chain, so she called us. I went there and had the manager cut the chain with a hacksaw." He paused.

"And?"

"Nothing." That is, there was no body. Just an empty room with the two windows closed and bolted. The lights were still on, and a small wall fan still oscillated. It was a one-room efficiency with the bed in a hide-a-bed sofa. There was a small kitchenette with a refrigerator and a small range. A small bathroom was off the kitchenette. It only took two minutes to complete the search. No body."

"How could Homer close the door and chain-bolt it at the same time?"

"I don't know. Perhaps he was a magician."

"Any indication he was working on something?"

"He must have been. His desk across from the fan was pushed against the wall. Two opened books lay on the desk. An envelope had blown against the wall, but the envelope was empty. I looked for the letter but couldn't find one. So I just left things as they were."

"Is that it?"

"No, there was his clothing. It was piled on the chair before the desk, and his shoes and socks were on the floor."

"Don't you think that was strange?"

"I sure do. And that is why I don't mind you investigating. If you find anything, please let me know."

Miss Rose Anderson was a young woman in her mid-twenties, of medium height and weight, and average features.

She wasn't too happy with my report.

"Please tell me about Homer. It might give me a clue."

"Homer was a fantasy and science fiction fanatic. He was always giving fantastic explanations to mysteries like the Maria Celeste, Stonehenge and the Bermuda Triangle. Are you familiar with Charles Fort?" I shook my head. "Homer often quoted from 'Lo' and 'Wild Talents' about strange appearances, disappearances, and occurrences Fort had clipped out of newspapers, and the strange theories Fort had had."

"Did Homer believe in those theories?"

"As much as he did in those of H. P. Lovecraft."

"Who is he?"

"Another author. His stories dealt with mind transference, time displacement and other things I don't understand."

"But Homer understood and believed?"

"Yes."

"Did you and Homer have a fight?"

"No. Most of the time he was off in his private world."

"Was there anything that disturbed him?"

"Now that you mention it, it might have been Ron Devi."

"Who is he?"

"He is a mentalist. He appeared at the Paramount Night Club two weeks ago. Homer insisted we view his act."

"Why?"

"Homer had read Devi's book 'The Occult Belief' and was eager to see the man."

"How was the act?"

"Mysterious. Before Devi came out, a punchbowl was passed around the room and people placed personal articles in the bowl. When Devi came on stage, he not only pointed out the owner of each article but stated the name as well. He then asked for a volunteer and Homer insisted I raise my hand."

"What happened?"

"I don't know. When I got on stage, Devi made several passes in front of my face and looked deeply into my eyes. I can still see those dark brown eyes. He whispered 'Believe' and that is all I remember. Later, when Homer took me home, he said Devi had pierced my arm with a needle and that I had not flinched from the pain.

"After the performance, Ron Devi came to our table. He thanked me for being such a fine assistant. He said he would be in Philadelphia the week of December 12th."

"Was Homer jealous of Ron Devi's attention?"

"No. What are you going to do next?"

"Check his apartment. Perhaps, I can find something the police didn't."

I opened the door with the key Rose had give me. The room had a musty odor so I flicked on the wall fan after I had pressed the light switch.

I searched the place thoroughly, even opening the refrigerator and oven doors and knocking on the walls. Nothing.

I turned to the desk. Only three items lay on top, two opened books and the envelope which had blown against the wall. As I started to sit down, I noticed the clothing. The shoes on the floor had tied shoe-laces and the socks were inside the shoes. The pants were zipped and the belt was buckled. The shorts were inside the pants. The shirt was buttoned and the undershirt was inside the shirt.

I placed his clothing on a chair near the sofa hide-a-bed. I opened the sofa-bed. It was empty.

I sat down on the chair before the desk and pulled one of the books toward me. It was opened at page 76. I turned to the title page and read: "The Occult Belief by Ron Devi, Outre Press, 1974." I turned back to page 76. The following underlined words riveted my attention:

In any spell it is paramount that belief be pre-conditioned. It is mandatory that the captive mind believe that the doll fashioned with his nail parings and hair clippings is an extension, and that whatever happens to the doll will happen to the body. Cases have been documented where a captive soul burned to death at the same time his personal doll had been destroyed by fire. No matter how outrageous the spell, if the captive mind believes, then it will come true.

I turned my attention to the other book. It was a big book and hard to read because of the small type. I turned to the title page and read: "The Outsider and Others, by H. P. Lovecraft, collected by August Derleth and Donald Wendrei, Arkham House, 1939." I turned back to page 319 and read "The Whisperer in Darkness".

From what Rose had told me, this was the kind of story that fascinated Homer. It dealt with beings called Outer Ones who have a baleful influence on Earth mortals. The final scene described the disappearance of the main character with only the facsimile of his hands and head lying on a chair.

I picked up the envelope. It was addressed to Homer Rosswell, and the postmark read "Philadelphia, Pa., Dec. 13". The small wind from the wall fan finally penetrated. The desk wasn't exactly flush with the wall. There was a space of two inches. I pulled the desk away from the wall. A piece of paper caught behind the desk fell to the carpet. I picked it up. It wasn't a letter. It was verse typed in red letters. I read it several times but its sense eluded me.

"Good afternoon," I heard a voice say. Turning, I saw a handsome man. His smooth face had an oriental cast and his brown eyes hypnotized me. I knew who he was before he said his name. "Ron Devi. And you are the man Miss Anderson hired to find Homer Rosswell."

"Correct." I averted my eyes from his, as I seemed to be falling into space.

He smiled, perfect teeth sparkling white. "Sympathetic assistants are so hard to find, and Rosswell would have been a hindrance. I came for the verse but you may keep it."

"What if I should burn it?"

"And have a murder on your conscience. Remember, there is always a possibility he might refuse to believe. Keep the verse for such a possibility."

With that he left the apartment, leaving me with the verse.

I went back to Lieutenant Jamison. I told him what I had found and showed him the verse. He studied it for several minutes, then said, "Not as complicated as 'The Case of the Acro-Double'. In fact it is rather simple. Here, see how everything lines up. "

"You mean 'Quit This Vale'."

"More than that. See."

"Well, I'll be damned. I don't believe it."

"Rosswell is damned. He did believe it. It accounts for everything. However, it is not something that would hold up in court."

"What about Ron Devi?"

"You might call it a perfect crime. Who can prove you can make a person believe?"

I went back to Rose Anderson. I gave her the verse to read. I even tried to make her understand. She handed it back to me. "I hired you to find my fiance, not to show me a piece of poetry."

Several days later I sent Rose Anderson a bill. The envelope came back stamped "Moved. Left No Forwarding Address". I didn't have to be a mentalist to know she had gone away with Ron Devi.

Here is the verse. I must caution you, though - do not believe it.

Quaint capture of soul by sorcerer sad,
 Unlikely orderal of necromancy
 Invites duress; so believe and be clad,
 Transport spirit into mist and fancy:

Tolling cadence, toll bells from Gnor;
 Harmonies evoke siren call,
 Immure belief in cryptic thrall,
 Shroud being till bells toll no more.

Vagrant champion, believe mystic magic,
 Admit delusion of necromancy;
 Luridly chide spell and, in curse tragic,
 Endure random hell in mist and fancy.

For answer, see Answers and Solutions at the end of this issue.

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