

# Weird Tales

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FARNSWORTH WRIGHT, Editor.

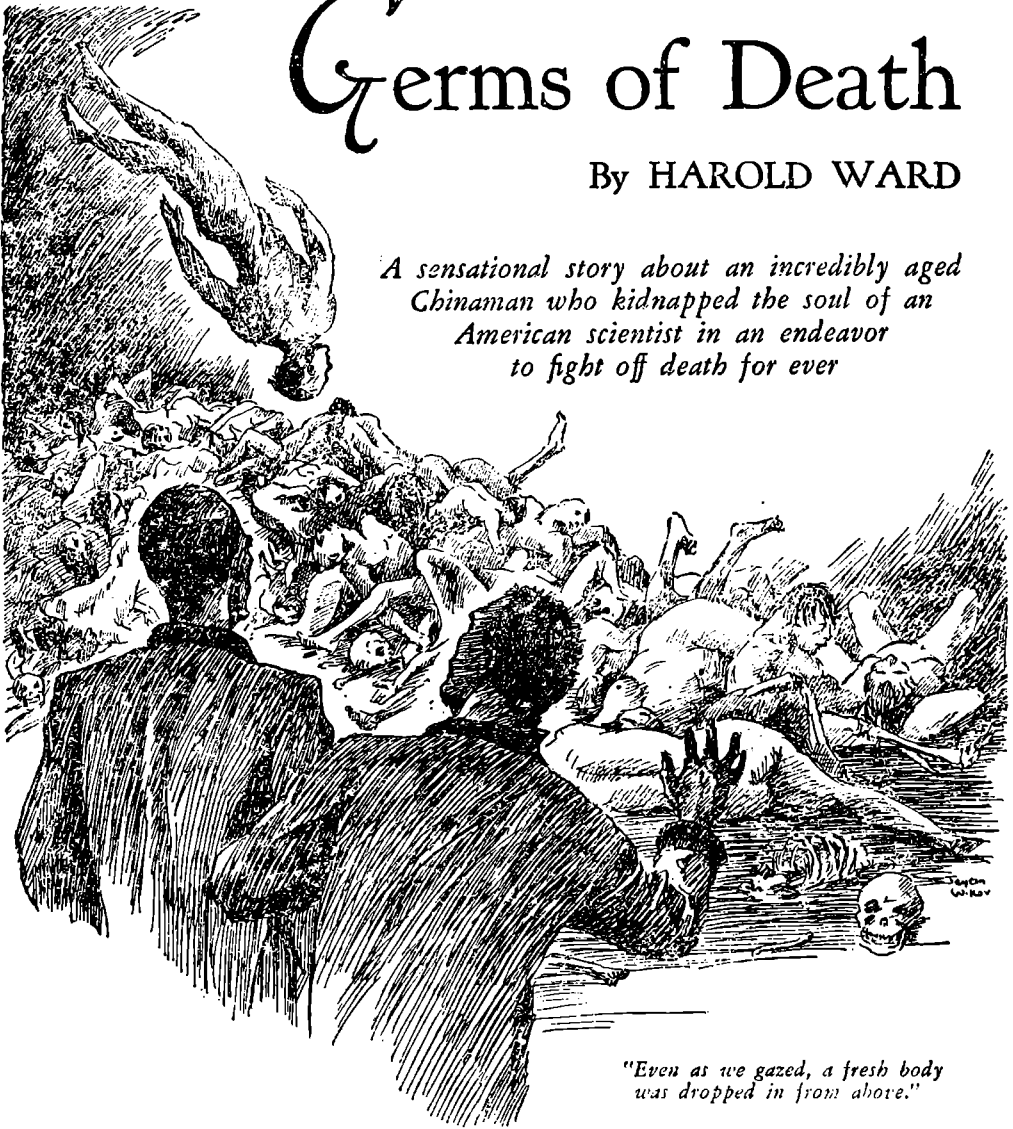
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# Germs of Death

By HAROLD WARD

*A sensational story about an incredibly aged Chinaman who kidnapped the soul of an American scientist in an endeavor to fight off death for ever*



*"Even as we gazed, a fresh body was dropped in from above."*

**I**T HAD been a hard day at the laboratory and every nerve in my body shrieked for rest. I drowsed through dinner like a man in a trance, attempted to read afterward and, catching myself napping, finally threw down my book in disgust and retired.

I awoke with a start. An alien presence seemed to permeate the room. Shuddering, I attempted to reach the cord on the reading-lamp by the side of my bed, but some strange power held me back.

Every faculty was paralyzed. I wanted to shriek—to summon my servant—but my vocal cords would make no sound. My tongue clove to the roof of my mouth. Only my brain seemed alive and it was a seething mass of panicky terror—an inferno of overmastering horror of the unknown.

What was it? What evil spell was oppressing me like an incubus? I was lying on my side facing the window. The night was dark and starless; even as I gazed

into the blackness the room commenced to fill with a soft, phosphorescent light. It grew stronger and stronger. I tried to tell myself that it was the moon filtering through some fleecy cloud, but my fear-filled subconsciousness refused to swallow the lie.

Slowly the strange, weird glow divided itself into two rays. They darted here and there like beacon-fires, circling and dancing from place to place until they finally settled full upon my face. My eyes glared back at them unblinkingly, for their peculiar brightness had no effect upon my pupils. It seemed as if I could trace them on and on through the starless sky to where they found birth on a mountain peak protruding above the clouds.

Somewhere outside a night bird shrieked raucously. The grating sound startled me out of the panic which gripped me. I tried to bring cold logic and reasoning to bear upon my condition, but in vain. The very atmosphere seemed filled with evil.

Slowly the scene changed. My vision, following the twin beams to their source, saw the rocky eminence dissolve into a human face partly hidden behind a mass of black, scurrying clouds. A human face, I say, but what a face! Hard, ruthless, crafty, age-weathered, demoniacal, it glared at me through slanting, almond-shaped eyes, that glittered like fires of hell, piercing the darkness like projectiles of molten metal. I tried to close my lids against them, but in vain. They burned themselves into my pupils until they seared the very core of my brain.

An urge crept over me—an overmastering desire to hurl myself through space. Invisible hands seemed to tear me from my bed. I fought against them with every bit of will-power at my command; but those glittering, menacing orbs

dragged at me, pulling at me as a magnet attracts a bit of iron. I felt myself lifted . . . I was floating. . . .

The window-screen was jerked from its hooks by strange hands; they were my hands—I noted my seal ring on one of the fingers—yet they were the hands of some one else. How can I describe my sensations? I was myself, John Dolby, yet I was another person. I was like a man who sees his own figure projected upon the screen.

I dropped. Down . . . down . . . down. . . .

Then sudden blackness engulfed me.

I OPENED my eyes and gazed wonderingly at the crushed and bleeding figure that lay upon the cold, hard pavement beneath my window. I knew that it was I—that I had succumbed to the urge of those cruel eyes and had committed suicide. Yet—and here comes again one of the strange oddities of my fantastic tale—*it was not I*. I was divided again; I was two separate and distinct entities. I was lying, a battered heap, upon the stones of the street, yet I was standing beside my own body looking at myself as one gazes upon an old suit of clothes that he has discarded. A huge policeman came running up; he muttered a startled curse. Then, jerking his whistle from his pocket, he shrilled for help. He paid no attention to me. It was my body that attracted his attention. I floated around him like vapor. . . .

Again I was drifting through space, dragged onward and upward and yet held to earth. I felt myself stretching like a rubber band. Two attractions were at work, one holding me back, the other pulling me upward. . . .

Next I was standing by the side of a rude bed. Around me danced those hard, cruel eyes. There were thousands of them now; they filled the space, it seemed,

for millions and millions of miles. Yet there was a man upon the bed. And he, too, was twain, for he stood beside me, a tall, wraith-like figure in flowing robes, his saffron face convulsed with fury.

"Back! Back!" he shrieked. "I will not die to make a place for you!"

I gazed down at the quiet form upon the bed. I knew that it was not I—that it belonged to this lemon-skinned man who sought to hold me away—yet it was also I. The dancing eyes pulled me closer. A quiet voice whispered in my ear that I must claim my own. The vaporish figure gnashed his teeth. His hands were against my shoulders. He attempted to push me away. Slowly the pressure relaxed, and he dissolved into nothingness. . . .

Again I awoke with a start. For a moment I lay stretching and yawning, wondering at my strange dream. I was still weary, and for an instant I was tempted to roll over and go to sleep again. Then, remembering the task that I had left unfinished at the laboratory, I forced myself to open my eyes. I sat up with an exclamation of surprise.

God in heaven! It was not a dream!

The morning sun was shining through the window. The room was strangely unfamiliar—a huge, Oriental-appearing chamber with stone walls. It was overflowing with lavish trappings and rare draperies. Even the bed was not my own. What had happened? Where was I? Had I met with an accident? Was my fantastic nightmare the result of an ether-fuddled brain? Was this a hospital?

A movement beside me brought my ruminations to a sudden close. I turned my head, expecting to be greeted by a white-clad nurse. Instead, a man was sitting by my bedside. He looked up from the book he was reading and greeted me with a slight nod.

"Good morning!" he said. The voice was harsh, stilted and metallic.

I gazed at him wonderingly. His face, distinctly Mongolian, was thin, seamed with age, ruthless. He was unusually tall, emaciated; his yellow skin as dry as parchment; his eyes, sunken into their sockets, black as coals; they glittered like those of a snake. His left arm hung useless by his side. I noted, too, that his left leg was withered and twisted and that the side of his face twitched and jerked spasmodically. A crutch leaned against the chair. He was clad in a loose, flowing garment of white, and a black skull-cap adorned his hairless head.

There was something strangely familiar about the fellow. I knew that I had seen him before. I strove to recollect.

Then, suddenly, it flashed over me. His was the face that I had seen in the night—the face behind the mass of clouds high in the heavens. His were the eyes—those cruel, evil-filled eyes—that had dragged at me. . . .

## 2

**H**AD my senses tricked me? Was I still dreaming? For an instant longer I lay there gazing at the hideous face. Then I pulled myself to a sitting position.

"Where the devil am I?" I demanded. "And, by the same token, who are you?"

The aged yellow man chuckled low, mockingly.

"I am Yah Hoon," he rasped. "Doubtless the name is unfamiliar to you, but fame is only a fleeting thing at best; so what matters whether you know me or not? We will grow better acquainted as time goes on. As to your whereabouts—you are in Tibet——"

"Tibet?" I gasped.

He nodded. Then he went on, his rasping voice fairly crackling with energy.

"I needed you; what I need I take. Like yourself, I am a scientist. And science, as you, a scientist, must admit, refuses to be bound by the so-called human law."

I leaped out of bed in a spasm of fury.

"What chicanery is this?" I roared. "I——"

He held up his gaunt right hand in a gesture of impatience.

"Dress!" he commanded curtly. "And cease arguing." He indicated a loose robe similar to the one he was wearing. "Unfortunately I could not transport your clothes through the ether, so you will have to content yourself with those you find. The man whose body I borrowed for you did not find them uncomfortable, I assure you. At least, he was loth to give them to you."

He chuckled grimly at his jest. Then, with a jerk of his thumb, he indicated a long mirror set into the rocky wall. I took a step toward it, only to leap back with an exclamation of horror. The man who stared back at me was a Mongolian—a slant-eyed, yellow-skinned creature with high forehead. It was he whose body I had seen lying upon the bed. It was the wraith-like thing who had tried to drive me back.

My brain was whirling. Who was I? I knew that I was Doctor John Dolby, the man who had discovered and segregated the previously unsuspected paranoiac germ and made it possible for medical science to combat that dread disease successfully. I knew that I was a well-known figure in the world of medicine and science because of my researches in the field of bacterioscopy and pathogeny. Yet how could I be Doctor John Dolby when I was this strange being whose reflection scowled back at me from the glass? I turned to Yah Hoon, my lips drawn back over my fangs in a wolfish snarl.

"Explain!" I demanded, a wave of anger surging over me.

He spread his right hand out, palm up, in a gesture of impatience.

"You, one of the world's greatest scientists, asking for an explanation?" he mocked with an amused glitter in his snake-like eyes. "All right, my friend, you shall have it. You are in Koko-Nur, a lost city on an island in the Chaidam marsh in the province of Tasidam in Tibet. A glance through the window will prove my statement. As to how you got here—there you have a question more difficult for me to answer."

He arose and, leaning on his crutch, pointed down to his crippled side.

"I am old—very old," he said with a touch of sadness in his voice, "so old that death long ago marked me for his own. I fear death—hate it! Only by force of will have I staved it off. And I will cheat it yet, even though it creeps upon me like a wolf in the dark, seeking to catch me unawares."

He cackled mirthlessly at his own words.

"You ask me how you got here," he went on. "You demand an explanation. Listen: Broken and withered though my body is, within this skull of mine is stored the wisdom of the ages. With the power of thought man can do anything, even fight off death for a short space of time. But with your help, my friend, I will renew my life. I will live for ever!

"I have heard of your work," he went on. "For even here in this God-forsaken hole news seeps in; my agents are everywhere seeking out that which they think will aid me in my experiments. There are thousands of other scientists, any one of whom would make me an efficient laboratory assistant. But you—ah, my friend, I have not forgotten your out-

standing work in pathogenic bacteria. It has made you an outstanding figure in the world of vaccinotherapy. No one else has the technical learning for my advanced needs. I, crippled and pain-racked, could not go to you. So I willed that you should come to me. You answered my call."

"I do not understand?" I gasped, still bewildered. "One can not transport a body through the ether."

"No," he smiled. "But remember that there is no life, intelligence or substance in matter. All is mind—thought. I captured your intellect—your soul, as it were. I care not a whit for your carcass. By the power of my will I threw Huang, the man whose body you wear, into a death-like trance last night. Perhaps he is dead as we know death. Be that as it may, your thought—your intelligence—obeyed my command and took possession of his stalwart young frame. And it is your intellect that will finish this great experiment for me.

"Understand me," he went on, "after death intellect still functions, for it is the soul—the germ of everything. But I fear dissolution and do not wish to go that route. I would live for ever—on and on to the very end of time. Perhaps I may even allow you to taste the fruits of my discovery. Who knows?"

His face was twisted into a sardonic grin. He cackled mirthlessly in a cracked treble, his almond eyes narrowed and twitched. The effort was too great for him, and he dropped back into his chair with a groan of pain.

"Old age! Old age!" he shrieked. "God, what a tragedy! Power! I shall have power when death has ceased to be. The world will worship at my feet. Eventually I will rule the earth. Kings and dictators will bow to me; thrones will totter and fall. That is why I came here.

They would kill me rather than allow me to continue. That is why I buried myself in this forgotten hole, that I might work undisturbed. There was another reason, too, a reason that you will soon understand. But I must rest for a moment. The strain is too great for me."

He leaned back against the cushions, his breath coming in great gasps.

"Death!" he murmured to himself. "Death! God, what a filthy thing it is! I hate it—hate it with an intensity such as man has never had before. I——"

His voice died away in a tired whisper. He closed his eyes. For a moment I thought that he slept.

I STEPPED softly across the room to where a narrow window was carved out of the rock. For a moment I devoured the scene spread out before me. Then I, too, dropped into a chair with a groan. Great heavens! It was not a dream. Around me on all sides, as far as the eye could see, stretched a strange city—a city of quaint, box-like, white, almost windowless buildings—a city of distinctly foreign aspect. Men and women in outlandish garb walked its streets and jostled in the market-place: Mongols, Tibetans, Chinese, Burmese—a mixture of many nationalities.

Little wonder I gasped again as it all flashed over me. I, John Dolby, Master of Science, Doctor of Medicine, Bachelor of Arts, Doctor of Laws, possessor of many degrees, had gone to sleep in my own apartment in New York, only to wake up next morning in a strange bed in this far-off city. And, even worse, I was not John Dolby. I was some one else—a man called Huang—a saffron-skinned man with crafty, slanted eyes and cunning, tricky features.

Yet I was not this creature. I was John Dolby.

## 3

YAH HOON was mad. That much was apparent to me from the very first. Yet he was a genius—a Chinaman of rare intelligence who had, in some manner, found his way to this city hidden in the marshes, to use it for his own foul purposes. He was bewildering, horrifying, like a walking dead man with the face of a devil.

"Death is a disease," he remarked, leaning back in his chair and refilling his long-stemmed pipe from a bowl of tobacco at his side. He lit it from a brazier suspended from the ceiling and, puffing slowly, gazed at me cynically through half-closed eyes. His spasm of weakness had passed away and he was, apparently, himself again. "Death causes sickness. Wrong, did I hear you say? But I am not wrong. Let me explain. Stricken down with this accursed paralysis at the very height of my experiments, I have had plenty of time to reflect.

"The atmosphere which surrounds us is filled with germs of death. We draw these tiny bacteria into our systems with every breath. They are constantly at work seeking to undermine our bodies. Every blow we strike, every step we take, every thought that flashes through our brains is accompanied by the disintegration of a certain amount of muscular or nervous fiber. Thus each action of our corporeal life, from its beginning to its end, takes place at the expense of the vitality of a part of our organized structure."

He smiled at my look of incredulity. Then, with a gesture of impatience, he went on.

"These germs of death fill every lung cell. They course through our veins. They find resting-places amid our bones and tissues, waiting an opportunity to strike. Perhaps years pass before the chance

comes. But when it does come, they are lightning-like in their rapidity. Sometimes they strike in childhood; often not until we have reached mature years. But once they gain a foothold, disease invariably follows—a war to the finish between the body and the germ—a conflict in which the Grim Reaper is always the victor."

"Old age?" I interrupted, interested in spite of myself in his weird philosophy. "Your own case, for instance?"

"Ah!" he snarled, his right hand resting on the arm of the chair closing until the knuckles showed white under the saffron skin. For an instant there was silence—dreadful, awesome. Then he leaned forward, his jet-black eyes glaring into my own.

"The natural decay of the organs brought about by these germs of death," he rasped. "That is my answer to your question regarding old age. My brain has been too active. I weakened certain cells by over-thinking. The bacteria were in my system; they found my weakness and commenced their accursed work. That is why you are here. You can do things, while I can only think, and think and think—of death."

He refilled his long-stemmed pipe again and relighted it with an almost defiant glance at me as if he dared me to dispute his statement.

"You have read Jenner?" he demanded.

"Naturally," I answered.

"Then you understand my theory. I propose to cope with death as Jenner coped with smallpox," he resumed. "With your help I will isolate these germs of death of which I spoke. After segregating them, I will prepare a virus from them for the prevention and treatment of death. Jenner's theory of vaccination has been extended to several other diseases, among them asthma, typhoid fever, pneumonia, hay-fever and others. Jenner

was right in his hypothesis, but he, to use one of your Americanisms, got off on the wrong foot. He sought to prevent the disease that caused death. He should—and he is not the first physician to err—have vaccinated against the death which created the disease. If we inoculate against disease, we have simply halted death for an instant; if we inoculate against death, there will be no disease. Have I made myself clear?"

I stared at him aghast.

"Then there will be no death," I said in an awed whisper.

He nodded.

"Once this bacterium is discovered and prepared in the form of virus, its injection will stop all human ills and life will be prolonged for ever," he answered.

He raised his clenched right fist and shook it in a sudden spasm.

"Life! Eternal life!" he shrieked.

"God, how I long for it! I feel the Grim Reaper creeping upon me. We must work fast."

The man's mood changed. He got up from his seat with an effort and, adjusting his crutch beneath his arm, indicated that I was to follow him.

"My efforts have, so far, been mere gestures in the right direction," he went on. "But let us start at the beginning. I will first show you the laboratory. It is best that you inspect the tools with which you will work."

A flush of anger mounted to my face at his tone and I doubled my fists until the nails bit into the flesh.

"I am not yours to command!" I snarled. "I——"

He turned his head slowly in my direction, his beady eyes glaring at me. A cold chill chased up and down my spine. I halted midway in my speech, my tongue cleaving to the roof of my mouth. A nebulous haze appeared in front of my face. I tried to fight it off, but in vain.

It seemed to me that the world was filled with age-worn faces and sulfurous eyes. They danced around me, dragging me forward against my will. The room swam in circles, the floor swaying up and down like the deck of a ship in a choppy sea. I swayed and would have fallen had I not clutched the carved back of one of the chairs.

"Fool!" Yah Hoon snapped. "Now follow me."

The mist cleared away. I rubbed my eyes sleepily. He was hobbling painfully toward a narrow door at the end of the room without giving me a second glance. And I, like a dog that has been chastised, followed in his wake.

He opened the door. From it a circular flight of steps led downward, ending in a passageway cut in the stone. It, in turn, led to a second door. Yah Hoon threw it open and, stepping inside, halted and waited for me to enter. I stepped past him, then paused in astonishment.

**I**T WAS a large room—as big, in fact, as that used for laboratory purposes in some of our best colleges—a compartment seemingly carved out of solid rock and lighted by braziers set in wrought-iron sconces fastened to the walls. Its shelves and benches and tables were also of stone; they were covered with flasks and beakers and bottles of every size and description. I drew closer and inspected them. There were chemicals of which even I, with my long experience, had no knowledge. Here, too, were microscopes of the finest quality, test-tubes, pipettes, Bunsen burners—everything needed for research work. Even my own workshop in the college was a paltry thing compared to this gigantic scientific array.

My face must have betrayed the excitement under which I labored, for Yah Hoon's countenance twisted into a wry smile as I turned to him.



"You like it?" he questioned.

"Wonderful!" I exclaimed. "To think that such a magnificent laboratory is buried so far from civilization."

"I am a Chinaman," he answered proudly. "From the beginning of time the Chinese have been the leaders in scientific research. I have been years gathering this collection. As I told you before, my agents have searched the globe for the latest in apparatus and chemicals. I am old, Dolby, much older than you imagine, and wealthy, too, beyond the dreams of avarice. Yet the greater part of my life has been spent in this very room. I have dedicated myself to the one objective—the search for eternal life. For what value has gold, and what does my more precious store of knowledge avail me, if my bones are moldering in the tomb?"

He stopped suddenly.

"We scientists are all alike," he grunted with a shrug of his thin shoulders. "We are what you in America call 'nuts.' But enough. I have other wonders to show you—the reservoir from which you will draw your material."

He hobbled over to what looked like a solid section of the wall and pressed against one of the shelves. A portion of rock slid noiselessly to one side, revealing another flight of steps leading to the bottom of a narrow well. We followed them downward; the end of the shaft disclosed a tunnel hewn out of the rocks. Yah Hoon led the way along this tunnel, lighting braziers set in the walls from the taper which he carried. At the end of the defile was another set of steps leading downward. They ended in a cul-de-sac.

The Chinaman turned to me again.

"This workshop of mine is, like many others in Tibet, built into the side of a hill," he said. "I selected it from many when I came here because of its peculiar

location. The rocky mountain into which it is cut is hollow—perhaps a small, extinct volcano. Be that as it may, they have a curious custom of burial here—a custom I never encountered before. I brought many of my countrymen with me. Under my direction they hewed these steps and tunnels into the very womb of the hill. Later they died—for it is not well that too many should share my secret. So now you, of all the world, possess the knowledge of this entrance."

Again he stopped, a twisted grin creeping over his leathery face. I shuddered in spite of myself, for it was easy to guess the meaning of his words.

"As I just told you, because of the custom of the inhabitants of this place of burying their dead *en masse* in the hollow mountain, I picked this town for the center of my activities," he went on. "And, now, Dolby, gaze upon my treasure trove."

He chuckled mirthlessly as he stuck the lighted taper into a niche in the wall.

"Note where I press," he warned, touching a certain spot in the stone.

A slab of rock in front of us rolled away. I stepped back with an exclamation of horror as a draft of fetid air struck me full in the face. Then, at a sign from Yah Hoon, I drew closer.

We were standing at the edge of an enormous cavern, many acres in extent and towering upward several hundred feet. In the roof was a small hole through which the sun was streaming, bringing out the horrors of the place in curious highlights and shadows.

It was a gigantic charnel-house. The floor was covered with human skeletons—thousands of them. Upon them, piled almost to the ceiling, were corpses—men, women, children—in various stages of dissolution. They formed a huge pyramid caused by the slipping down of the bodies

from the apex as fresh ones were dropped in from above.

There they lay, the new-dead mingling with the bones of their ancestors, naked corpses with glassy eyes and twisted limbs. They glared at us from all sides—horrible, grotesque caricatures of humanity. Even as we gazed, a fresh body was dropped in from above. It rolled down at us, bounding, dancing, arms flopping like those of a scarecrow, bringing down an avalanche of other carcasses with it. Singularly, it ceased movement almost at our feet and, rolling on its back as it stopped, stared up at us icily, its lips drawn back in a leering grin.

"God!" I shrieked, dropping back with a shudder.

Yah Hoon cackled gleefully.

"Yet you wonder why I fear death," he said grimly. "Can you blame me, knowing as I do that I shall soon be as that thing unless I can find a way to stave off the king of terrors? How do you know, my friend, that you are not dead even now? It is in my mind that the body of John Dolby lies in some American undertaker's shop. Yet you are here, and the body you inhabit is that of another man. Explain that."

Again he chuckled. His voice echoed and re-echoed through the cavern.

The world was swimming before my eyes. I turned away, drawn by another will than my own. It seemed as if another man—the one whose body I wore—was standing beside me, warning me, trying to drag me back. . . .

## 4

**T**HERE is one puzzling thing about these memories of mine. The time element is vague, indistinct. I can only tell the passage of time by going back over the newspapers dating from my death up to the present. Sometimes it

seems as if I had always been Huang, a native of Koko-Nur; again I have misty recollections of a former life in Tibet. My only explanation is that, in inheriting the body of Huang, Yah Hoon's assistant, I also came into possession of a bit of his brain that had not died with him and that this piece of gray matter functions subconsciously.

And yet another thought comes to me. Was Huang really dead when I took possession of his framework? Or was he merely in a trance? Is it not possible that he, in striving to regain his mortal body, sometimes gains possession of my thoughts? Who knows? But why speculate? It gets me nowhere. I am a creature accursed.

Fear! God, what a reign of fear I went through in the great stone house of Yah Hoon the Chinaman in Koko-Nur—a procession of nightmares in which the parchment-like face of Yah Hoon was intermingled with the spawn of the charnel-house. Even now I wake up with a start, the cold sweat standing out on my forehead in great globules, imagining that I am back there in that huge laboratory hewn in the solid rock, a dozen dead bodies surrounding me, while on the other side of the door the carrion is piled high within the cavern. And over everything is the sickening stench of death and dissolution. Would I have these dreams if I had not passed through the horrors of which I write?

I was a prisoner within that rock-bound cavern. Not a prisoner in the sense that I was guarded, for I was not; but nevertheless I was confined within the four walls as securely as if surrounded by a million armed guards, for I was tied down by the power of thought. Time after time I tried to break away—to get out—to shriek my fantastic story to the world; for even in Koko-Nur, in far-off Tibet, I believe that there were men of

brains—men who would listen to reason. Yet I was never able to combat the superior will of Yah Hoon—the will that ordered me to remain.

From the time I arrived until the fatal day when Yah Hoon died I never left that grim, stone building with its rear cut into the hillside. Yah Hoon, wise old fox that he was, sensed my feelings, without a doubt, yet he said nothing. Only many, many times I have seen him gazing at me from under his drooping lids, a cynical smile twisting across his wrinkled face. He reminded me of some huge gargoyle—some unclean monster carved out of the rock from which his dwelling was made. Yet he held me in a mesmeric spell, just as a serpent hypnotizes a bird. There must have been a touch of cruelty in his make-up, for I am certain that he got a quiet satisfaction out of watching me writhe beneath the pressure of his thought.

I am not going into detail. Suffice to say that day after day I bent over my test-tubes and burners, experimenting, testing, laboring like a work-horse at Yah Hoon's command. Under the impetus of his powerful will I carried on the work that he had started. But since I was under the dictation of Yah Hoon's mind, how was it possible for me to carry on my experiments independent of him? For had I not been allowed to use my own scientific knowledge—had Yah Hoon suggested every move I made—I would have been nothing more than a mere laboratory assistant. And, remember, Yah Hoon had seized me for what I knew. Perhaps I can explain, even though the task is a difficult one. Yah Hoon held me in his spell, he forced me to work; yet he merely presented the problem to be solved, never interfering with the methods used. Results were what he demanded, caring not how they were obtained. I was a machine which, started

in the right direction, went on and on and on until I reached the end of the road.

And the dead! Ugh! That charnel-house filled with stark, naked bodies, their fishy eyes glaring at me from out of the darkness. I was a ghoul, a despoiler of graves, the lowest thing that mortal man can sink to. I surrounded myself with cadavers. The tables were covered with them; they were stacked on all sides like cordwood. The great laboratory was permeated with their horrible stench.

And Yah Hoon—may his foul soul burn in hell!—forced me to do these things. His beady eyes were always upon me. Hunched up in his great armchair by the side of the dissecting-table, he watched my progress day by day. He drove me. He knew that his life was fast ebbing away—that he was living on borrowed time—and he was ever in a rush to finish the task and stave off death before it struck him down. There was a panicky look on his aged face at every failure. Under his direction I cut and experimented—wallowing like a hog amid the filth of the charnel-house. At his command I distilled, brewed, segregated and refined. He scarce allowed me time to eat and sleep. I became an automaton—a machine—my brain so dulled by loss of sleep that I worked in a trance.

Yah Hoon ate little. There were no servants. From some unknown source he obtained provisions of a sort for my use, and I prepared my own simple meals.

Guinea-pigs! The place teemed with them. Upon them we tried the results of our experiments, inoculating them with the virus we made. And the result was always the same—death. With each failure he pushed me the harder, forcing me on and on in his mad search for the germ that snuffed the divine spark, but

which, he believed, when properly prepared, would result in eternal life.

Time after time it seemed that success was almost within our grasp. Once a guinea-pig we inoculated lived for hours. It was only by sheer force of will that Yah Hoon kept from toppling over in the excess of his joy. From somewhere his powerful thought brought a man through the door—a poor, slinking creature of the dregs of Koko-Nur. He attempted to draw back when his terror-filled eyes fell upon the pile of dead. But Yah Hoon's will held him. Slowly, reluctantly, like a man walking in his sleep, he advanced until he stood before us cringing and fawning like a mongrel dog.

I leaped forward like a tiger that smells blood. I tried to hold myself back, but the urge was communicated to me by my master's will. I had no control over myself as I seized the frightened creature's arm and, jabbing the needle to the hilt in the flabby flesh, shot home the plunger that injected into his throbbing veins the virus we had made.

For a full sixty seconds the poor devil made no move. Then he gave a sudden shriek as the death vaccine struck his heart. He plunged forward and fell in a heap upon the smooth, stone floor. I turned my head to see how the guinea-pig fared. It, too, had died.

Yah Hoon filled his pipe with fingers that trembled.

"Another failure!" he snarled, applying a lighted taper to the soothing weed. "Another failure—and my time is almost up. I feel it—sense it."

From that time on he worked me harder than ever.

## 5

**T**HE time element was entirely lacking in my life in Koko-Nur. I was there for ten years. I learned this upon my re-

turn when I checked through the files of the newspapers from the time of my "death" up to the present. Time existed for me only as a hazy, misty fantasmagoria of horrors, each one more dreadful than the preceding. There are great blanks in my memory. I recall only the highlights of what happened in that inferno of Yah Hoon's. The details are missing.

There was never a time during my stay there that I was not John Dolby. My thoughts were those of John Dolby. It was his brain that directed me in the final act of the tragedy, even though my body was that of Huang, the Tibetan.

What caused me to attempt suicide? That is a question I am unable to answer. I only know that I ran amuck—that something in John Dolby's brain finally snapped under the strain. A man temporarily deranged can not be hypnotized, nor can an unconscious man become a hypnotist. There are but two solutions: either I was mad or Yah Hoon had suffered another stroke which, for the nonce, caused him to lose his mental hold over me. The preceding events are missing from my memory and, strive as I will, I can not recall them.

I know that I found myself standing in the middle of the great laboratory. That is my first recollection of what happened. Around me was the wreckage of the costly apparatus that Yah Hoon had accumulated through the years.

We had completed an experiment a short time before. How long before I do not know, since, as I have already stated, I have no remembrance of details. The body of our latest victim—a pink-nosed guinea-pig—lay upon the table. Beside it was a cadaver from which we had extracted the poison for the virus sealed in the test-tube almost at my elbow.

The door opened and Yah Hoon hobbled in. As his beady eyes viewed the

scene of destruction, he gave a gasp of astonishment. For the nonce I was free from his domination. The thought made me wild. I shrieked with maniacal laughter as I hurled a beaker at his snarling face. It crashed against the stone wall. Seizing the syringe, half filled with the vaccine we had made, I jabbed the needle into my arm and pressed the plunger home.

The eyes of Yah Hoon danced around me. They dazzled me. I felt my senses slipping. My ears rang with the command to desist. As well argue with the devil as with me just then. I believed that I was to die; I leaned against the stone dissecting-table and waited for death to strike.

But instead of death came a renewal of life. We had succeeded at last. Something—some one of the elements we had used—needed only time to develop. As the virus ranged through my veins a sense of exultation surged over me—a peculiar feeling of lightness. I seemed to be floating in midair.

"At last!" Yah Hoon shouted gleefully, forgetting in seeing me still alive the destruction I had wrought. "We have succeeded! Life is for ever mine! Mine!"

With his words came recollection again. The thought flashed over me that Yah Hoon would, after all these years, inherit eternal life—that he would be free to work his hellish will upon an unsuspecting world.

Already his palsied hand was stretched forth to seize the test-tube. I jerked it from him and hurled it to the floor. It broke into a thousand fragments.

Yah Hoon shrieked. God, how he shrieked! It was the wail of a lost soul. A look of grim despair came into his

face. For an instant he stood swaying; then the crutch dropped from his nerveless grasp and he sprawled in a heap at my feet. The shock had killed him.

Then recollection left me.

**H**ow did I return to America? I do not know. I only know that I am here and that I am John Dolby. I did not die in Koko-Nur, nor did I die in that fall from the window ten years ago. I can never die. The virus I injected into my veins that mad day will force me to live for ever. I must spend an eternity behind the bars of this dreadful place. . . .

Huang is with me again. He is standing beside me as I write, reading each word as my pen puts it down. He whispers that I am wrong—that freedom is mine if I but claim it. He has told me the way. He waits to claim his body. . . .

But the intellect never dies, Yah Hoon claimed. I do not understand it all. Why should Huang wish his mortal body, since he can live in it but a few short years, while his soul goes on and on? Why does something keep drawing me to the crypt in the mausoleum at Riverview Cemetery wherein the body of John Dolby lies?

Huang bids me hasten. . . .

\* \* \* \* \*

*NOTE: A Mongolian known as Huang, a patient in this institution, believed to be a native of Tibet, committed suicide in his cell this morning by opening a vein in his wrist. The foregoing manuscript was found hidden beneath the blankets of his bunk.*

(Signed) **ROBERT MONTGOMERY**,  
Managing Officer, Stateville  
Hospital for the Insane.

