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THE BEAST WITH TWO BACKS.

**Killer! Dope fiend! Ravisher of women!
No crime was too heinous for Aleister Crowley!**

By Jackson Burke.

The wildly scrambling figure of a man in flowing opera cloak and deerstalker cap clawed upward from rock to rock toward the crest, now only a few agonizing yards further. With him were three women, grotesquely misshapen creatures—a hunchback, a balloon-headed hydrocephalic, and a hare-lipped albino. He pulled them after him from crag to crag, powerfully tugging them and pushing them up to the summit, where at last he stood with them on the Swiss side of the frontier.

The man shook his fist at their pursuers, far below on the Italian slopes. They stopped climbing, raised their rifles and fired rapidly. While the three strange women cowered around the man's knees. He ranted and roared at the policemen below, ignoring the bullets that ricocheted off the rocks. His face was contorted with rage.

Judge Learned About Evil from Him

One bullet, splattering on a granite boulder, caught him in the groin, and he doubled to the ground, clutching himself, blood oozing through his fingers. The three women uttered frightened little sounds as they crouched over the fallen man, tearing at his trousers . . .

The man writhing on the ground was Aleister Crowley, also known as the "The Beast with Two Backs," although some called him a saint. The facts are that Aleister Crowley was guilty of a double shooting, at least one rape, violation of narcotics and smuggling laws, bastardy, and no doubt a host of other crimes. Yet he was never indicted for any offense nor spent a day in court except to bring suit for libel against a bookseller.

Crowley lost the libel suit. The London Magistrate in the case found for the bookman, who had advertised some of Crowley's pornographic poetry in his window with large placards claiming the books to be by "The Worst Man in Britain" and "The Wickedest Man in the World." It might appear that the bookseller had proved his point, for the magistrate stated publicly in summing up the case, "I thought I knew of every conceivable form of wickedness. I thought that everything which was vicious and bad had been produced at one time or another before me. I have learned in this case that we can always learn something more."

And yet Crowley's friends declared he had been deeply wronged and profoundly misunderstood. When he died in 1948, he was mourned by individuals from all over the world. But, there were more who rejoiced and would have spat upon his grave.

I met Crowley toward the end of his life. I was to record a radio interview with him for later broadcast from a San Francisco station. This took place in his hotel suite, shortly before World War Two.

"Mr. Crowley, may I ask you . . .?" I began.

"Of course, my boy," he cut in, "ask me anything you like. But first permit me to fill you in on my background, a few personal details . . ." And he forged ahead like a steamroller, his clipped British speech sharply punctuating his carefully formed sentences. It sometimes happens like that in radio. An interviewee takes over the interview.

"On October 12, 1875, I was born in a pure and holy dream my mother was having, not in the common manner at all, for my parents hated the flesh in all its forms. I was not even properly conceived, not even imagined by my parents. My father was a wealthy brewer who grew rich and became a preacher in a religious sect known as the Plymouth Brethren. This was in Leamington, Warwickshire, I might add.

Chose Name of Beast as a Child

"Before I had even been slapped by my first tutor, I had secretly changed my name of Edward Alexander to simple Aleister. It happened that my baptismal name did not please me, and I did not feel that a person should be required to bear a name he did not like—an opinion I still hold. When my hell's-fire, Bible-thumping ex-brewer of a father read me passages from the New Testament's apocalyptic *Book of Revelations* and

I learned upon whose horn she rode, I decided to adopt the name of *The Beast* for my own. Ever since that time, this has been my proper name, though you may continue calling me Crowley if you wish."

"Thank you."

"Don't mention it. Next we come to my first true baptism, the day I became a man. I was 14 and rather big for my age, also not a little precocious, as you will see. We had a scullery maid. She was a lusty wench of 19, and she had been tormenting me for a long time. She would spy on me in the bath, sneak into my bedroom early in the morning and tickle me under the covers, lift her skirts at me, and in general do her best to arouse the young man in the boy of 14. She succeeded. I took these gestures to be frankly insistent invitations, and I attempted to accept. But she played coy and shoved me away. After a few such rejections, and her tantalizing fraud continuing, I caught her alone one morning in the scullery when all the house were away somewhere. What I was unable to accomplish by sheer muscular power, I managed by the ever-so-gentle pressure of boning knife to throat, and thus this lecherous lass of 19 got her come-uppance from a mere stripling of 14—and atop the meat-chopping block, at that.

Finally Ended Education

"The scullery maid called it rape, and my father packed me off to Malvern, a private school. Here I was fortunate in having a highly unusual tutor, a young man who undertook to instruct me in the world's ways. Together we visited gambling halls and houses of ill repute. I became quite clever at manipulating a deck of cards, and among the ladies of easy virtue I was seldom asked to part with my money. Modesty forbids me to explain.

"My education was eventually ended. I did not say completed. But I felt that since I could read perfectly well, I really had no further need of teachers but could read the masters in each field of learning, and so I left school as soon as I was able, which was the day my parents died. If I say I did not regret their passing, believe me, they had never wasted any love on me, either. Our dislike was mutual from the start. They were sanctimonious prigs, and I was in love with life in all its forms .

.."

Expert At Water-Pipe

I had to interrupt the old man for two reasons: First because I could not reconcile the two shootings I knew about with his statement that he loved "life in all its forms," and second because he had just pulled an oriental water-pipe from around the end of a sofa and appeared to be about to light it. I had already seen him drink three ponies of brandy in the half hour since I arrived at the hotel. He prepared the *narghileh* with expert hands, then touched a flame to it. The water-pipe bubbled and chuckled as if a genie were inside.

"I must interrupt, sir. Do you actually smoke hasheesh in that thing?"

"Naturally," he replied. "Like to try it?"

"Certainly not!" I said. "Some sort of drug, isn't it?"

"Precisely," was the matter-of-fact answer. He inhaled deeply.

"Another thing," I went on, "if you love life, why did you commit at least two shootings that I know of?"

"Which two, my boy?" He drew again on the water-pipe. "But I imagine you mean those two *Thuggee* chaps in Calcutta . . .?"

I had not in fact known the victims of Crowley's notorious shooting in Calcutta were members of *Thuggee*, an ancient oriental murder cult.

How Reputation Started

"Some years ago," he continued, "I was walking up a back alley in the red light district of Calcutta late at night when I grew aware of two white-garbed figures trailing me. Suspecting them to be robbers, I ducked into a doorway, but there were two others waiting for me there. I pulled a little Derringer I always carry and shot one of them. The other ran back down the corridor, and I let him go, for my pursuers were charging into the doorway. I shot them both, dropping one, while the other man ran off screaming like a stuck pig. I trained my small electric torch onto the two huddled figures at my feet and I saw that each carried a thin, powerful garroting cord which the *Thuggee* murder society use for their ritual stranglings."

"I had the idea these shootings were a couple of murders," I said, "and I must apologize for sharing the general opinion."

"I am not unaware of my reputation, young man," chuckled Crowley. "What do you think now about the rape they say I committed? . . . Help yourself to the bourbon."

"The scullery maid?" I asked, pouring myself a liberal drink.

Had Harem of Freaks

"Yes, she, the baggage! Perhaps you know that courts of law have rendered many decisions casting doubt on the complete guilt of an ardent male caught in a situation like mine with the scullery maid. Women have been murdered for less than I endured before I lost control and permitted the fire that she had kindled in me to burst forth and consume us both. *If there is justifiable homicide, as many laws state, then there must also be justifiable rape!*"

I did not comment on this but decided to pursue the mystery of Crowley's harem of freaks.

"I have often been a victim of slander," asserted Crowley, taking another long pull at the water-pipe, then shoving it once more behind the sofa. "In Italy, or rather Sicily, where this trouble you speak of all began, it is quite true that I had a harem of freaks. Well, I was younger then and had a lot of energy and I could keep three women happy very easily, and from time to time four or five, depending on who was resident at my villa. The three steady ones you refer to were a hunchback, a hydrocephalic girl, and a hare-lipped albino, and it was they who crossed the Alps with me during my escape from Italy. They had gone to Sicily with me from New York."

"Excuse me," I said, "but I got lost between Sicily and the Alps.

Three Favorite Freaks

"It happens that way sometimes with hasheesh, young man," Crowley said, smiling.

"But I'm not smoking the drug, *you* are!" I exclaimed. "I'm just drinking this whiskey!"

"Precisely the point, lad, you should use the pipe, you really should! . . . Ah, let me see, where were we? . . . My three favorite freaks. I got them in New York through a newspaper ad."

Crowley passed me a clipping, which read:

WANTED

Dwarfs, Hunchbacks, Tattooed
Women, Harrison Fischer Girls,
Freaks of All Sorts Only If
Exceptionally Ugly or De-
formed. To Pose for Artist

"May I ask *why* you placed such an ad, Mr. Crowley?"

"I like them ugly," was his explanation.

"And did you paint any of these freaks?"

"Most of them, yes, but some refused to pose in the nude," he said matter-of-factly.

"In the nude! Those monsters?" I nearly choked on my drink.

Was Adored Like a God

"But of course, young man, naturally. In the absolute nude. How else could the artist show the distorted vertebrae of the hunchback, the strangeness of the women with four breasts? Imagine, if you will, a lovely face, ripely sensual lips, amorous eyes, a delicate neck, shoulders which refuse to be covered, a bosom large but firm and a slender waist tapering out to hips which descend straight down in two great leg-trunks hugely bloated by elephantiasis . . ."

"How horrible!" I exclaimed.

"How horrible of you to say so!" said the old man sharply. "Her life had been a tragedy because young fools like you said 'How horrible!' when their most persuasive seduction had removed her clothes and revealed, to *their* horror, those huge fat clunks of legs. But it was *their* horror, not hers. I loved the girl, and she became my mistress. She adored me with the total devotion of a priestess for her god. I became ten times the better man because of the strength of her adoration. And all because I loved her! A fantastically beautiful woman! I was desolate, absolutely desolate, when she died.

Ugly Women Are Nicer

"There's an old Calypso song of advice that goes:

"If you want to be happily all of your life,
Always make an ugly woman your wife!"

"And indeed, I believe it. You see, my boy, a woman whom men call beautiful feels that she is maybe just a little too good for you, but a woman whom few men desire will be so grateful to you that if you happen to be a lazy man you will never have to work again.

"You might imagine my hare-lipped albino girl to be far too hideous to paint. Well, I did a tall full-length nude portrait of

her. Her skin was as the palest alabaster, and she had long slender legs and slim hips, small breasts and then that terribly gashed upper lip . . . Her hair was kinky and as white as a sheet of paper. Her eyes were pale pink like a rabbit's. She looked rather like an animated marble statue, as if she had just stepped off a pedestal, which is the way I painted her. I was living in Greenwich Village then . . ."

Took Mansion in Village

Crowley had set himself up in a luxurious 18th-century mansion on Bank Street in Greenwich Village, and his several models lived with him. He was well known as *The Beast* by then. And everyone also knew that he and Yeats, the great Irish poet, were heading up a strange mystical cult called the *Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn*.

No. 72 Bank Street was a beehive of people busy at various activities such as preparing opium for smoking, filling capsules with powdered *peyote*, making hasheesh fudge in the kitchen, or perhaps rearranging mirrors and candelabras so that they would have the maximum hallucinating effect when one or another drug took possession of its cloud-floating user.

Lived on Crowley's Bounty

These people lived at No. 72 on Crowley's bounty. Several of the women were his regulars, for he always had a harem composed mostly of his various freaks and one or two Harrison Fisher girls for contrast.

A Harrison Fisher girl it was who threatened to file a charge of bastardy against Crowley, whom she declared before numerous lawyers was indeed *The Beast*—or worse!

Harrison Fisher girls, named after the artist whose models they were, were just about the prettiest things that ever came down the pike. Nice, clean, fresh-looking girls, wholesome, and desirable as ripe peaches.

Staged Black Mass

One of them lived with Crowley about six months. She had a room of her own, the run of the house and anything she happened to want and cared to mention to *The Beast*. She was uncommonly pretty by ordinary standards, but Crowley claimed she was hideous: her face grotesque with its avarice for gold.

He visited her as often as he did the other women and she became pregnant.

"Marry me," she demanded.

"Very well," he agreed, and he promptly arranged for the ceremony. The ceremony was unique and such as had perhaps not been performed since the Dark Ages of medieval Europe. And it violated whole chapters in the law books.

What Crowley did that night could easily have landed him in Sing Sing. He staged a Black Mass. An authentic Black Mass, complete with the *virgo veritas*, or "true virgin," which is required by all ancient and medieval manuals of black magic. Of course he also had the usual black goat and the defrocked priest, a half-mad creature who had once been a Spanish Carthusian monk but had forsaken the convent when he could not master the manifold temptations of the flesh.

Enlisted Young Poetess

The *virgo veritas* was a young poetess who had been visiting No. 72 Bank Street for some months, enjoying *The Beast's* hospitality, and attending occasional séances.

On the second floor at No. 72 there was, and no doubt still is, a large salon especially designed for sizeable groups of people. This was the chapel of the Black Mass.

The Beast's entire harem of freaks and Harrison Fisher girls were present at this rite. There were eleven women living at the house as Crowley's mistresses. They were all dressed as his priestesses, and he was garbed in a long gown of gold cloth and wearing a kind of hat with a mystic symbol on it. Candles burned at each end of a very large, out-sized coffin-shaped box, draped in pink, and containing the *virgo veritas*.

Incense braziers smoked thickly with hemp and opium, and the air was heavy with the pure essence of these drugs so that everyone came under their spell and was possessed by them. The Beast pronounced certain Greek phrases, drew mystic signs in the air, and handed a knife to the defrocked Spanish Carthusian, who slit the black goat's jugular and caught the blood in a stone basin.

Then, while the priestess chanted rituals and beat out the rhythms with clapping hands, and while the Harrison Fisher girl who had insisted that *The Beast* marry her was still trying to figure out what was happening, Crowley climbed into the casket with the *virgo veritas*, and the defrocked Spanish Carthusian lowered the lid on the ritual about to take place.

After Crowley emerged, he announced that the ceremony was completed and all the women in the room were thereby and henceforth his wives.

Got Away From "Wife"

Thus he married the demanding Harrison Fisher girl, but she was not satisfied. As she put it to her lawyers, "Somehow I just don't feel married. And then all those other women in the house, well really . . .!"

To get away from her, Crowley went to Sicily, taking his three favorites with him, the hunchback, the hydrocephalic woman with the immense head, and the hare-lipped albino. Even less than the citizens of New York did the superstitious peasants of Sicily understand *The Beast's* diabolical antics. It shocked the country folk to happen upon Crowley and his monstrous harem dancing naked in the moonlight while a black goat pranced nearby. When young women of the village, not all of them unmarried began sneaking up to Crowley's villa to join in the festivities, the days of *The Beast's* paradise in Sicily were numbered. One day, the villagers descended on his household with ropes and pitchforks.

Had to Flee Sicily

Crowley and his freaks fled Sicily for Rome and from there sped toward the northern frontiers with the police hot behind them. And thus we find them atop an Alpine pass, the raging Crowley huddled on the chill rock, the leaden splinters of a bullet in his groin and his three Harpy-like women crouched over him and tearing at his trousers . . .

Blood squirted through his clutching fingers, and one of the women knew it was a cut femoral artery. Death could come in seconds if the bleeding wasn't stopped. Crowley was already losing consciousness.

"Tear his pants off!" the balloon-headed hydrocephalic ordered. And when she saw the wound and knew she could save him, she said to the hare-lipped albino, "Go and get a doctor, and run both ways!" With a cord from her waist, she twisted a tourniquet. After many hours, a doctor arrived with clamps and sutures and tended Crowley's wounds. It had been close, but he would live.

Later borne out by documents, police records and talks with the people involved, these are the stories told me by Crowley

during my interview with him. It was really a unique interview. A tiny Chinese girl perhaps three feet high and dressed in pale gray silk pajamas of such sheerness that I could see quite clearly she was not a child but a small woman, a perfect mid-get—this little creature kept coming in and out of the room, bearing small trays of delicacies, all drugged in some way, Crowley happily informed me.

Met Unusual Gypsy

There was also a fascinating young woman, presented to me as a Roumanian Gypsy, who was not otherwise unusual except for her large eyes. They were immense, at least twice the circumference of normal eyes; huge wells of darkness. She sat staring at me, the sucking end of a water-pipe held pressed against her lips so that she breathed an almost pure atmosphere of hasheesh smoke. She sat motionless, those vast owl-like eyes engulfing me.

“No, she’s not mad, my boy,” Crowley explained, observing my discomfiture. “She is staring at you because you interest her, and she sees you not in any way you imagine. She lives in another dimension. Time doesn’t exist for her.”

Some time during the course of the evening, the bourbon and the doped goodies took effect on me. There was a wild dance with Crowley booming a tub-drum and the tiny Chinese singing shrilly and the saucer-eyes Gypsy whirling about me while he stamped his feet and hoarsely shouted.

Never Forget Next Day

I don’t remember leaving Crowley or how I got home, or much else about the rest of that wild night. But, I’ll never forget the next day, when we played what I had recorded. There was not one part of it suitable for broadcasting. The angry Program Director ordered me out of the studio at once, and the bookkeeper gave me my week’s pay.

As for *The Beast*, he died a few years later, in 1948, and cremated at Brighton, England. He was 73 years old when he died, his reputation as a monster, rapist, killer, dope fiend and sorcerer intact.

But, there were those who looked upon him as a friend of the friendless, the only hope of hopeless women, lover of the lame and the halt and the blind, of weirdies and nitwits, poor tender broken flowers and leering beggars—girls of all races, a

legless Swede, a wall-eyed Negress, a lunatic Mexican, a four-breasted Russian, hunchbacked half-castes and even "basket" cases . . .

To these *the Beast* was a Saint!