

The Man without Nerves

By E. Phillips Oppenheim

The Story Thus Far:

SAM JESSON, resident of the village of Sandywayes, Sussex, is found dead. At the coroner's inquest, James Huitt, Jesson's banker, amazes the villagers by testifying that his friend, generally regarded as wealthy, died almost penniless! The verdict is suicide.

To the village's leading residents—Andrew Cresset, Timothy Sarson, Roland Martin and Lord Milhaven—it seems incredible that Jesson should take his own life. But they accept the jury's verdict. Not so "Mr. Tyssen," an inquisitive young stranger. Announcing himself as a novelist in search of material, he takes lodgings in the village, asks innumerable questions and, according to rumor, spends the midnight hours wandering about the place!

To Huitt, the newcomer seems an odious fellow. But to Sybil Cresset, Andrew Cresset's daughter; Pauline Sarson, daughter of Timothy Sarson; and Timothy's son, Anthony, he seems a charming, if somewhat eccentric, young man.

Mysterious episodes follow Tyssen's arrival. Huitt, preparing for a dinner given in honor of Sir Julian Bott, financier, by Lord Milhaven, slips a revolver into his pocket. . . . A "Madame de Sayal" takes two bungalows near Huitt: one for herself, one for an old Roumanian servant. Puzzled by her aloofness, the villagers wonder who she is, why she is in Sandywayes. . . . Pauline and Anthony Sarson find Tyssen practicing golf shots—with the skill of a truly great player—late at night! He implores them to say nothing of the incident. . . .

Returning from a dance, Anthony and Sybil Cresset encounter a motorist in the darkness, near Madame de Sayal's bungalow. The man (who seems to be wearing a uniform of some sort) draws a gun, orders them to move on. They obey. Later, Anthony returns—alone. He slips up to Madame de Sayal's window. As he does so, he sees a man—outside. Then—"Come in, quickly!" says a low voice; and he is pulled gently through a door. Madame de Sayal confronts him. She gives him a revolver. Anthony examines it, notes that one cartridge has been fired. "Now go," whispers the woman.

Anthony leaves the bungalow. Something strikes his head. *Blackness!* . . . He comes to in the bungalow. Madame de Sayal makes him promise to say nothing of his adventure. Again he leaves. The village is in an uproar. A stranger has been murdered—shot through the heart—within 20 yards of the spot where Anthony (according to his own story, given the police) had slipped and lain for hours unconscious. And in the young man's pocket is a revolver which has been fired just once!

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ANTHONY was astounded. "It's a coincidence, of course," he gasped. "But as I was unconscious from the moment my head struck the ground till I got up and staggered down here I wasn't likely to see or hear much!"

From outside came the hoot of an automobile. The sergeant glanced through the window.

"It's a police car," he announced in a tone of relief. "Penny from Scotland Yard. I shall hand this business over to him."

Inspector Penny was a short, rubicund-looking person, resembling more a country farmer than a detective. He shook hands with the sergeant and was briefly introduced to the two young men. Then he stepped over and looked down at the body.

"Recognize him?" the sergeant asked eagerly.

"To the best of my knowledge I never saw him before in my life," Penny replied. "A city gentleman, I should think, by the look of him. Extravagant too. Fond of a bit of show. Well, well. He got it from someone who knew how to shoot. . . . Now, Sergeant, I will hear from you in your other room, if you please, everything that you can tell me about the case. Then I shall be glad to

receive statements from anyone with whom you think I ought to talk."

"You two gentlemen won't be far away, I suppose," the sergeant observed. "Not that we are likely to want you, Mr. Tyssen. It's Mr. Sarson that the inspector would probably like to have a little conversation with," he added, with a faint note of impending trouble in his tone.

"I shall be at home," Anthony announced. "I am just beginning to realize that I have had no breakfast and no lunch."

Inspector Penny glanced at him keenly. For a good-looking young athlete Anthony was certainly not appearing at his best.

"I should hate to keep any man from his food," he remarked cheerfully. "You get along to your lunch, sir. The sergeant and I will have plenty to talk about."

The two young men left the shaded and melancholy apartment and stepped out into the brilliant sunshine. As soon as the door was closed Penny turned to the sergeant.

"Who is the young man?" he demanded. "The good-looking one, I mean."

"Name of Sarson," the sergeant replied. "Popular young fellow—son of Mr. Timothy Sarson, one of the principal residents here."

"Any connection with this affair?" "Couldn't have, I should say, sir," was the sergeant's dubious reply. "All the same, as you will discover by questioning him, he has been out all night. Didn't get back till half an hour ago in his evening clothes."

"Have Tom watch his house," the inspector ordered quickly. "If he leaves it tell him to let me know. You are too near the railway station for my fancy here."

OUTSIDE the police station the tiny garden was crowded with masses of homely but sweet-smelling flowers. Anthony, pausing on the tiled way, drew in several long breaths and shivered as he thought of the unwholesome atmosphere in the apartment which they had just left.

"See you later, Tyssen," he said, as he started forward. "I am going to get some lunch."

"You wouldn't like a gin and bitters at the Rose and Crown first?" Tyssen asked with awkward eagerness. "To

tell you the truth, there are one or two more questions I should like to ask you while the whole thing is fresh in your mind."

"No, I'm hanged if I would," Anthony replied irritably. "It's bad enough having to answer questions from the police without amateurs like you butting in."

Tyssen pushed back his mop of hair in worried fashion.

"I say, that's too bad," he complained. "Couldn't you try to remember, Mr. Sarson, that we all have our absorbing interest in life and my story writing is a passion with me? All this material—being actually in touch with detectives and the dead body and someone who has been out all night close to where the murder was committed. It's wonderful! It's giving me just the atmosphere I want."

Then Anthony Sarson, for a well-behaved young man with whom manners were rather a point, became very rude.

"I don't care a damn about your atmosphere," he said savagely, "and if you ask me any more questions about last night I shall punch your head!"

Tyssen showed no resentment at his late companion's violence. It seemed indeed to have left him entirely unaffected. His yellow stained fingers flashed through their task of rolling a fresh cigarette, which a few seconds later was alight in his mouth. He



"If you publish a book and I recognize myself," Anthony threatened, "I'll beat you into a jelly"



He cast only one glance at the pallid face. "Certainly, Inspector, I can tell you who this is!" he exclaimed

hunched his shoulders, thrust his hands in his trousers pockets and made his way towards the post office.

AFTER luncheon and a pipe the elasticity of healthy youth reasserted itself and Anthony Sarson felt a different man. He knocked at the door of the police station and was promptly admitted. The sergeant showed him into the front room where Inspector Penny was seated before the table and Dr. Anderson, the local medical man, was standing upon the hearth rug looking a little worried.

"What about this fall of yours last night, Anthony?" he asked. "I don't like to hear of young fellows of your age being unconscious for four or five hours. Where did it happen?"

"Just at the top of the by-way. I see you are smoking, Inspector. Mind a pipe?"

"Not in the least," was the hearty response. "This is all quite informal. The doctor, by the bye, was saying he would like to have a look at your head."

Anthony Sarson, who was well over six feet, stooped down. The doctor's fingers ran carefully, but with lithe, active touch, over the top and the back of his head. The result seemed to leave him puzzled.

"Mind coming a little nearer to the window?" he asked.

Anthony did as he was requested. The doctor adjusted an eye-glass and examined him more closely.

"Well, you are wonderful, young man," he pronounced. "There is no skin broken, no bruise, no sign of any injury whatever."

"I've still got a headache."

The doctor nodded.

"You ought to have more than a headache. I cannot imagine how you came to fall on your head with force enough to make you unconscious and yet get over it the way you seem to have done. You realize, of course, that it could not have been the bar of the gate?"

"I believe it was the road," Anthony confided. "So far as I can recollect my impressions at all it seems to me that I fell on the road head first."

"That is the most reasonable theory," the doctor observed dryly. "But, as I said before, you are a very lucky young man. When the inspector has asked you any questions he wishes to I should like you to take me up to the spot where it happened."

Anthony scowled.

"It seems to me it's making a fuss

over nothing. I slipped and fell down on the back of my head. I can show you the spot, of course, but I'm not going through the performance again for your benefit."

"I shan't ask you for a complete reconstruction," the doctor promised curtly.

"You must remember, Mr. Sarson," the inspector told him good-humoredly, "that you are a great disappointment to us. You must have been within a few yards of this murder, if it was a murder, and yet a fine, strong young fellow like you goes and falls down and remains unconscious all that time, so that you heard nothing of what was going on. Very disappointing."

"Well, I couldn't help it. No fun for me, I can assure you," Anthony replied, unpleasantly conscious of a sense of vague hostility.

"Tell us about the motor car," the inspector continued.

"WELL, that's a very simple matter and quite straightforward," Anthony explained. "I was going home on my motorcycle from Godalming, and one of those new spotlights flashed on me from right up by the side of the hedge. I slackened speed, and directly afterwards there was a blinding blaze of light from a very powerful headlamp. I stopped then, and a man came up and spoke to me. Seemed to be in a sort of uniform. It might have been a chauffeur's, but it looked more like that of a police inspector. He asked me what I was doing up there—seemed to resent my presence—and warned me off. It's my impression, although I could never swear to that, that when he discovered how curious I was about the car and didn't show much sign of moving, he brought out a revolver. It looked like it, but it was a filthy dark night and I couldn't say for certain."

"I see," murmured the inspector. "Then you rode off home and, not feeling satisfied about the car, you climbed the hill again and met with this accident?"

"Precisely."

The inspector had the air of an unhappy man. He leaned back in his chair and looked thoughtfully at Anthony.

"You were alone, of course, on this night ride from Godalming, I think it was you said?"

"Nothing of the sort. I had Miss Cresset—the young lady who lives in the next house here—with me."

"What! At that time of night?"



Illustrated by
George Howe

"Why not? We had been over to a dance at Lady Amfraville's at Godalming Hall. You can find out all about that if you want to. If it hadn't been that Miss Cresset was so frightened I think that I should have tried to satisfy my curiosity about the motor car the first time."

The inspector was a different man. He smiled as though he had just heard delightful news. He turned towards the sergeant reproachfully.

"That's quite right, sir," the latter admitted. "Sorry if I forgot to mention it. I remember now Mr. Sarson did say that the young lady was with him, and I even saw them starting off together earlier in the evening."

"Capital! Could we have a word with the young lady?"

"Why not?" Anthony replied. "I'm sure she will come with pleasure if you send in for her, but she can't tell you

any more than I have just told you." The inspector smiled in curious fashion.

"Perhaps not. But two people telling the same story are better than one, you know, Mr. Sarson. Have you seen Miss Cresset this morning?"

"Not yet. I was going in to see her when you finished with me."

"Better and better," the inspector applauded. "The young lady was in some sort of side car, I suppose?"

"It's a very good sort of side car. Best type going. She was half asleep when the light woke her in the lane."

THE sergeant slipped out. Inspector Penny's manner became more and more friendly.

"Do you happen to know any of the tenants of the bungalows in the Wilderness, Mr. Sarson?" he asked.

"I just know Madame de Sayal very slightly. She let it be known when she came that she wished to be left alone, so I do not think that anyone called."

"Rather unusual, that, eh?"

"I believe she is supposed to be rather an exceptional person," Anthony replied. "One sees her painting every day and I think that she has written books too."

"A foreign lady?"

"I should imagine so. She speaks English quite perfectly but with a slight accent."

"There were no signs of life about her bungalow either time when you passed, I suppose?"

"None at all."

"And the other bungalows?"

"One is occupied by her servant, and the other is not finished."

"Not much that way," the inspector observed. "This motor car of yours seems to be the apex of the mystery, Mr. Sarson. It is a pity that you could not describe it a little more closely."

"That's not my fault," Anthony pointed out. "It was pitch dark the whole of the time."

The sergeant reappeared, ushering in Sybil Cresset. She nodded to Anthony and the doctor and acknowledged the inspector's salute.

"What's all this terrible business?" she asked. "Is it true that they found a dead man up on the by-way? I told you, Tony, that that car was not there for any good."

"Then you too saw the car, Miss Cresset?" the inspector inquired.

"I saw it as well as one could see anything on such a night. It was as big as a small omnibus. The chauffeur, or whoever it was who spoke to us, was horrid."

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He will Never Know

A Short Short Story complete on this page

By Richard Sherman

WHEN William Rennel's wife left him a year ago, he announced with characteristic generosity that he was entirely to blame and that Janet had been, was now, a saint on earth. "I don't know why she went," he said, "but she must have had a reason. The only thing that puzzles me is what that reason was."

Other people were puzzled too. At thirty-five, with three excellent novels and many short stories to his credit, Willy was not only a success but also an unusually pleasant person, agreeable and human. He and Janet had been married six years, apparently happily, when she took their three-months-old son and went to California. Without a word of explanation.

And now I know why, although during that first hour when I met her last month for a casual lunch in a San Francisco restaurant, we talked about everything in the world except Willy. Finally she remarked that she wasn't working.

"Want a job?" I asked. She had been a copy writer.

"No, thanks," she said. "Not yet at least. I'm resting now, just living."

So that was it. That Willy should continue to support her didn't strike me as exactly fair, and my silence showed how I felt.

"Don't you think he should send me money?" she asked.

"Well. . . ." I was definitely hesitant. "Of course you do have the baby."

"It isn't the baby," she said. "I take Willy's checks because I've earned them."

And that's the way it started, the story of her life with Willy Rennel.

"**I** FELL in love with Willy on first sight," she began. "And in a way I'm still in love with him. He was a perfect husband except for one thing. And that's the thing that got me in the end."

"We met seven years ago just after 'Sea Without Waves' had been published and before he'd written either 'Trouper' or 'Life.' 'Sea Without Waves' had been an outstanding first novel, but like most firsts it was autobiographical. It was just Willy's life—the record of an average boyhood, but told as only he could tell it. He *can* write, don't you think?"

She hurried on, not waiting for my answer.

"And now he was at the difficult stage, because he hadn't an idea in his head for a second book. 'Make up things,' I'd tell him. 'I can't make them up,' he'd complain, 'and even when I do they don't sound real.' I worried him, and he drifted along until he began to think he was just a one-book man. I knew he wasn't, though, and after we were married I was even surer, because he began to work on a novel and kept at it instead of throwing away the first couple of chapters. When the manuscript was about three quarters finished he let me see it."

She poured herself more coffee.

"Was that 'Trouper'?" I asked.

"Yes. And it was also the story of my father's life. He'd been a song-and-dance man, and Willy had woven the yarns I'd told about him into a book."

"After that the magazines began wanting his short stories. He sold two or three, but they weren't very convincing and he knew it. They weren't like

'Trouper.' Then, mostly as a joke, I suggested that there might be a story in our honeymoon. We'd gone on a motor trip through the South, and had got stranded for two stormy days with a Negro farmer's family. I thought maybe he could do something with it."

She paused and looked out of the window at the passing traffic.

"He did something with it, all right. Do you remember the story? It was called 'Overnight.'"

I gasped a little. "Overnight" had won a short-story prize for its year. But there were no Negro farmers in it. The only two characters were a man and a woman, and the story was a frank, sensitive portrayal of their wedding night.

"Yes," she said. "That was our wedding night. I never saw the story until it was in proof, and then it made me sick, physically sick. Willy couldn't understand why. . . ."

"After a while I forgave him, though he didn't see that he had done anything for which to be forgiven. But I felt—well, not quite safe. And with reason, too, for he began to sell story after story—and almost all of them were about me. From then on I was a monkey in a cage. People said he was a master at drawing feminine character. He should have been: he photographed it from life. After a time I began to think I was getting morbid or egocentric. All those women can't be me, I'd say to myself; if they were, the effect would be monotonous. But Willy was enough of an artist not to make all his pictures the same. But their base was the same—things I'd said or done or told him I had felt."

"Then, after he had run through my normal reactions, he began to experiment. One night at a party he got me drunk. I felt myself getting tight and said I didn't want any more. 'Go ahead,' he said. 'We'll both get soused.' Well, I got that way—but he remained perfectly sober. The next morning he followed the course of my hang-over like a hawk."

She didn't have to tell me the outcome of that episode. It was there for all the world to read, though framed in a different setting and with a plot, in "The Binge."

"**H**E WANTED me to have a love affair, too," she continued. "You don't believe that, do you? But it's true. He didn't come right out and say, 'Janet, why don't you and Wayne Ferguson have a little fling together, so I can see how a woman acts when she's deceiving her husband?' but he did almost everything else. It worked with Wayne. I

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Al Parker



"I realized that I was being made to serve as human copy"

was dangled on a string before his eyes until his reflexes told him he ought to jump. But I wouldn't jump with him. For two weeks afterward, Willy would hardly speak to me, because he felt that somehow I had cheated him."

Janet smiled for the first time; then the smile faded.

"When we were married I wanted a baby. Willy didn't. Well, after I realized that I was being made to serve as human copy, I began to talk about the baby again. It seemed to me that having one might save us. If I gave Willy a child, perhaps he wouldn't demand material for fiction."

"At first he was still against the idea, but finally, all of a sudden, he changed his mind. He said that he had been a fool."

"You know what's coming. 'Life.' That book is me—me and the baby and Willy."

"Before the baby came, I was never out of Willy's sight."

"My nurse said she had never seen such a tender husband. She thought he was wonderful and that I was a very lucky woman. 'You know, Mrs. Rennel,' she said, 'we just couldn't keep him out. And I was glad that we didn't, because he really wasn't a bit of bother. He just sat in a corner watching; and every now and then he'd try to divert

himself by scribbling on a pad of paper he had with him.'

"By what?" I asked. I couldn't believe it.

"By scribbling on a pad of paper. Being a writer, I supposed it eased his mind."

SHE ceased talking and I began to remember "Life." It was easily the best of Willy Rennel's novels, and also the most successful commercially. No one had understood how a man could have written it.

"So that's why you left him?" I said. Janet began gathering up her gloves and bag.

"No," she replied. "I would have stayed with him even after that, because I loved him, if it hadn't been for something else."

"Do you mind if I ask what that was?"

She smiled. "No. It was something in my mind—a fear. Perhaps I was wrong, perhaps not. But it was a chance I couldn't afford to take."

She was standing now. The restaurant was empty save for the two of us and a waiter who shifted expectantly in the background.

"You see," she said, "Willy had seen me in almost every human emotion except one. He hadn't seen me die."