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WEIRD TALES ISSUED 1st OF EACH MONTH

The Interview

By H. SIVIA

The young reporter obtained a long interview with the Vandervere heir, but an astonishing surprize awaited him when he returned to the newspaper office

DAVE FRENCH wound his way in and out among the scattered desks in the city room of the *News-Telegram* to one corner where a thin, cabinet board partition separated the office of Davis, the city editor, from the news writers.

Without hesitating, he strode through the half-open door and faced the huge, red-faced man who sat behind a desk covered with telephones and scattered sheets of copy-paper.

"You wanted to see me?" he asked, looking down at the man.

Davis rapidly scrawled words on a sheet of paper. He stopped, picked up a lighted cigar from the edge of his desk, and puffed out a cloud of smoke. Then he looked up at French.

"Tomorrow," he said slowly, "is the fourteenth. And, being a reporter, that wouldn't mean anything to you, would it? But it so happens that Judson Vandervere comes of age on that day. Know what I mean?"

French's face lighted up.

"The steel millions!" he exclaimed. "The boy comes into the money!"

"Exactly. And we want a story. Get out to the house and see him. If he won't see you, burn the house down. He'll come out then. Get an interview. Earn your pay!"

French left the office and made his way back to his desk. He got his hat, trench coat, and a memorandum pad, and left the building.

Outside it was raining. French pulled the trench-coat collar up around his neck and turned the brim of his hat down to shield his face from the rain. Then he hailed a taxi and headed for Shore Oaks, where the Vandervere estate was located.

All during the ride, while the taxi rolled in and out among the heavy downtown traffic and finally passed into the suburbs, French turned over in his mind what he knew about Judson Vandervere. He did not know very much.

Right now, he thought, the heir to the steel millions was twenty years old. Five or six years before, he had been just an undersized kid going to some exclusive country day school and thinking nothing at all about his father's money. Then one day he had quit the school and come to town to study under a private tutor at his home. Shortly afterward, his father had died, leaving him an orphan with several million dollars.

It had dawned on young Vandervere then what his very generous allowance could do. And overnight he had become the nucleus of a mad bunch of playboys and girls who made the night spots, played polo, insulted reporters sent to interview them, got drunk and drove expensive foreign cars, and all of that. . . .

Life for Judson Vandervere had become one series of drunk driving and disorderly conduct charges after another. The perfect example of what happens to a spoiled brat with too much money,

French concluded as the taxi turned into Drury Road, deep in Shore Oaks.

"Stop at the Vandervere entrance," he directed the driver, and the cab rolled on for several hundred yards more and came to a halt before the entrance to the stone wall that surrounded the mansion.

FRENCH got out, told the driver to wait, and walked through the heavy, iron-grille gate that stood half open. He went along a wide flagstone walk for about thirty yards, climbed steps up a slight terrace and stood in the rain on a small concrete porch. He rapped on the huge oak door several times with the metal rapper, and waited.

Presently the door opened, and a very tall butler dressed in a black tie and coat confronted French. His hair was extremely white, and his face was even whiter. It seemed to French that the man had the most death-like appearance of anyone he had ever seen.

But it wasn't so much the paleness of the man's skin, nor the solemnity of his appearance, as it was the gash in his forehead that amazed French. It was a deep, jagged cut, from which a thin trickle of blood had run down the man's temple and caked there. Apparently it caused no pain, although it looked painful enough and was sorely in need of dressing.

The butler looked down a long, thin nose, and his deep-set gray eyes bored into French.

"Yes?" he queried.

"I'd like to see Judson Vandervere, please," French answered.

"Who shall I say is calling?"

"French. David French. Perhaps he won't recognize the name. I'd like to see him for a short while on a business call."

The man hesitated, then: "Oh, I see. You're a newspaperman. I'm sorry. Mister

Vandervere never gives interviews to the press."

French suddenly felt cold all over. He had known it would be hard, but he had to see Vandervere. For a moment he started to protest, but decided: "What's the use?" Then he turned to go.

The door was almost closed behind him when he heard a youthful voice call out from inside:

"Who is it, Felton? Why don't you show them in?"

"It's a reporter, sir," French heard Felton reply. "I didn't think you'd care to see him."

"Oh, yes, by all means. Show him in. It's about time I let the public in on my goings-on."

French, so happy that he trembled, turned and strode through the great door as Felton, the ghost-like butler, holding out his hand for the reporter's hat and coat, opened it wide to receive him.

Inside he came face to face with a young man whom he took to be Vandervere. The man was small in stature and had an old-looking face, even whiter than the butler's skin. His head was twisted to one side, and he kept rubbing the side of his neck with his palm.

"I'm Jud Vandervere," he said. "Sit down and tell me what it is you want. Perhaps I can give you a little help anyway. I'm awfully tired. Had quite a shake-up in the auto a few hours ago. Cut Felton up a bit, as you probably noticed, and twisted my neck pretty badly."

FRENCH sat down in an immense sofa, made a few brief remarks about automobile accidents in general, and got out his notebook.

"I suppose you'll want to know all about my wild life," Vandervere remarked casually. "How many cars I've wrecked; how many times I've been

pinched; who I'm engaged to now. All of that."

French thought for a second, then said:

"No, not exactly. You see, I thought I'd get a new angle and work it in around the fact that you are coming of age tomorrow. Something, perhaps, that the public doesn't know about. Something all your own. That is, if you don't mind."

"Oh, no. I don't mind. Fact is, I'd like the public to know some of the real things in my life. They were always so eager to gobble up the false stuff.

"First, I want to say this: I'm through with all the old wildness. You can quote me directly on that."

His voice seemed to float along, and his eyes gazed across the room through a French window into the slow rain outside.

"No more drunkenness. No more night life. I won't be making your headlines and your scandal columns any more after today. It's a new life for me. Yes, a new life."

A sort of dreaminess crept into the steel heir's weary, dark eyes as he paused in his speech to sigh and rub his neck some more.

French rapidly jotted notes on the memorandum pad and paused occasionally to watch the strange expression on the young man's face. Vandervere talked on and on, for an hour or so, giving intimate details of his life: small, half-forgotten incidents that lodge precariously, as it were, in one's mind.

Finally, when it was obvious to French that the interview was at an end, he arose from the deep sofa, thanked Vandervere for granting him the privilege, and got his hat and coat from Felton, who still had the dry blood caked on his temple.

At the door young Vandervere stood for a moment and talked with French,

and his last words to the reporter were: "Remember, no more wild times for me. You can quote me on that. It's a new life from now on."

For a moment it seemed that the flicker of a smile crossed the heir's face. Then Felton closed the great oak door, and the rain began to beat in French's face once more.

Somehow, he was glad to be outside in the rain again, away from the strange coldness that the inside of the great old mansion presented; glad to be away from the strange old butler with the gashed and bloody forehead; away from the white-faced young heir who spoke in such a dreamy way of his resolve to put the old life behind him.

The interview had not been at all as French had expected it to be. In his mind he had pictured Vandervere as a smug, self-satisfied young snob who would make insulting remarks to him and decline to grant an interview. It had been so different.

The taxi was still waiting near the iron-grille entrance gate. French entered it and was whisked back to the city, to the spot from which he had departed something like two hours before. He got out, paid the driver, and entered the *News-Telegram* building.

STRIDING rapidly through the lobby of the building, he reached the elevator and was carried to the fourth floor. He got out and wound his way through the city room, past his desk, to the cabinet-board partition that blocked off Davis' office.

Smiling broadly, the memorandum pad flopping back and forth in his hand, he walked through the door and faced the red-faced man inside.

"Boy, was that a cinch!" he exclaimed, beaming at the city editor, who had not yet looked up from the paper-littered

desk. "I can't understand why so many guys always thought that Vandervere fellow was hard to get at. I got everything I asked and more too. Why, the guy was a phonograph. And it's all in here." He tapped the memorandum pad.

Then, for the first time, Davis looked up, and the expression on his face frightened French momentarily. He recovered quickly, however, and said:

"Well, I'll get to work on writing it. Won't take long. I just wanted to let you know I got it okey."

Davis' red face became even redder as it slowly contorted in a rage that only city editors can summon up.

"You lunkhead!" he stormed. "You nitwit! You're fired! There's no place around here for men like you, who call themselves reporters. Get out!"

French was startled first, then frightened. He stammered:

"But b-boss, I—I don't under——"

"So you don't understand, huh? I thought you wouldn't. Hell, French, you knew Vandervere wasn't going to be easy to see. In fact, you would have considered yourself very damned lucky to get into his house. So when you couldn't see him, you decided to frame an interview for me, and you thought I'd be sucker enough to take it. But the funny thing, French, is this: neither one of us knew Jud Vandervere was out of

town and had been for the past three or four days."

"B-but w-wait. I did see——" French stuttered.

Davis interrupted him: "On the way out, while getting your stuff together, you can get your check. And you might read this, too. It came in on the teletype a few minutes after you left the office."

He handed French a sheet of typewritten paper, and the former reporter turned and left the office, reading the sheet as he wove in and out among the desks.

He sank in the chair at his desk, feeling queer deep down in the pit of his stomach. And it all came to him then: the butler with the gashed forehead, the white-faced young heir, the strange coldness about the house. But he thought, this couldn't be true! Things like this didn't happen! But it was there, all too clearly, on the printed sheet before him:

Alton, April 13.—Judson Vandervere, scion to the immense Vandervere steel fortune, and Henry Felton, butler at the Vandervere home in Shore Oaks, were killed instantly early today when the car young Vandervere was driving apparently skidded on the wet pavement and went over an embankment near here.

Vandervere's neck was broken in the crash, while Felton, who was thrown through the windshield, died when a piece of glass went through his forehead and pierced his brain.

The bodies were positively identified by Vandervere's uncle, who came along a short while after the accident. The three of them had been part of a group who spent the past several days at the Vandervere hunting-lodge on Moose Head Lake.

It is a well known fact that Vandervere was a very reckless driver and had been arraigned several times for . . .

