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Weaver, John V. A. Beyond Death.
Typescript. 19 pp. (incomplete)

Numerous corrections in Weaver's
hand?

The Living Dead.

Dead or alive.

Beyond death.

Officially dead.

~~After death~~

That these would dead - Flight

Quotation from Potions Same -

Come death, come then life in death.

BEYOND DEATH

by

John V.A. Weaver.

It is five years since I underwent these astonishing experiences and listened to this --to me-- amazing tale. Five years, and I am no nearer a solution than I was immediately after it happened. How much of the facts involved are impossibilities, how much of the impossible is true, I cannot for the life of me solve.

I have hesitated all this time to set down upon paper the peculiar narrative told me by Frank Watson, famous American ace of the Lafayette Escadrille; the story itself-- or rather the notes for a story-- as well as the circumstances surrounding the telling are too bizarre. I shall be called, I fear, a liar or a gull. Or both.

And yet-- the thing haunts me. Therefore, I shall report it all with what amounts to a stenographic faithfulness, since every detail of it seems engraved upon my memory; and I shall hope that someone will assist me in getting at the truth of the matter.

The press, at the time, advanced certain obvious

theories. Perhaps they were right. Yet-- how account for what I saw with my own eyes?

For a week I had been visiting with relatives in Winston-Salem, N.C. The local newspaper had seen fit to interview me, requesting my ideas concerning literature, the drama, the movies-- that sort of rot. A nice enough interview. They spelled my middle name wrong. However--

Some three days after the appearance of the piece, I received a note, asking me if I would do Mr. Frank Watson the honor of dining informally with him at his farm on Thursday evening at seven o'clock. A car would be sent for me. Apologies, since Mr. Watson was a stranger to me, but he felt sure that I would find the evening not without instruction, or at any rate, amusement.

"Is that 'Demon' Watson," I asked my uncle, "The Ace?"

"It is," he answered, "and he's a caution. Lives out there all alone, never says a nice word to anybody-- not even his own father. Got a couple of old planes out there, and flies around the country, scares folks by sailing under bridges, and such carryings-on. If you ask me, I think he's crazy as a June-bug."

"Should I accept the invitation?"

"Oh-- I would. Give you my word, that's the first time I heard of his inviting anybody out there for years.

"Stuck-up Watson", they call him around here. Hell, what's

he got to be stuck-up about? I suppose he was pretty much of a hero in the war-- but the war's over."

7 "Maybe he's just peculiar," I ventured.

"I think he got hurt," my uncle said, judicially, "Wait till you see his face. I never saw anybody that had so little expression. Doesn't move a muscle. Why-- it's like a mask."

"Maybe he's paralyzed," I suggested.

"No-- he can talk, they tell me. Talks to his servants, anyway. But the strangest thing is his eyes. Nobody's seen his eyes since he got back here."

"Blind?"

"Couldn't be that. How could he fly? It's just the glasses. Never see him without black, smoked specs. Very thick, and black as ink. Cover him from his cheeks to his eye-brows. Nobody knows what's behind 'em. Oh, he's a caution. Don't do a lick of work. Some say he's smart, some say he's a fool. Anyway, he's the mystery of the county."

"He sounds fascinating," I said. "I'm going to accept."

I did.

*Description of house - Magnolia, soft perfume
servants?*

The meal was delicious-- fried chicken, beaten biscuits, candied yams, charlotte ruses, served on Wedgwood, mostly. A pint of Veuve Cliquot of a pre-war vintage washed it down, and a nip of 1811 brandy-- the real stuff-- tucked

7.

anybody in the South comes -

-4-

in the edges.

pushed food around but I discovered

My host ate nothing. He sat across the small table-- a museum piece, like all of the simple but exquisite colonial furniture in the room lighted only by candelabra-- talking in a low, unaccented voice.

Eric atmosphere
He was much as my uncle had described him; not a muscle of his visage seemed to move. The face was a mask, the skin tight over the bones, and waxen. A little-- how shall I say-- frightening?--revolting?-- something slightly bordering on the two, and yet indefinable.

And the black, impenetrable lenses of his huge tortoise-shell-rimmed spectacles were continually disturbing. I could not keep my gaze from them, with a puzzled fascination.

Yet he was courteous, suave, interesting. He never ate dinner, he explained. Every ten minutes, I should say, he re-filled his liquor-glass with the brandy, then sipped it methodically. During the evening I drank two more glasses. He consumed the rest of what had been a full bottle when we sat down. It seemed to have no effect whatever upon him. His talk was all of writing, about which he questioned me politely, and of literature, which was obviously one of his hobbies. He was remarkably well-acquainted with the classics, especially in Latin, Greek and old French.

Eventually he said, "You must have wondered what particular object I had in dragging you out here this evening. It

can be expressed very briefly. I want to give you material which you might possibly use for a story. I think you will find it useable."

"But you--", I interrupted, "You have, if I'm any judge, a well-developed literary sense. Why don't you write it yourself?"

"I have ^{at times} ~~always intended to write~~," he said slowly, "But-- well, I've been busy with other things. It's too ~~late now.~~"

~~"Too late?~~ Oh, come--"

~~"No-- you can't teach an old dog new tricks. Put it that way. At any rate, if I may impose upon your patience,~~

~~I would enjoy suggesting a story to you. Of course, you're at liberty to use it or not, as you see fit. And how you see fit. Or never I leave it to you."~~

~~I settled back in my chair, saying, "That certainly seems fair. Go ahead. I never can get too much new material."~~

~~"This is new," he said. "It's-- wild, fantastic. You may finish by calling it crazy. Yet I don't know. Well---"~~

~~He filled his glass, sipped a moment, and began.~~

~~"It's about an aviator, since that's the sort of person I seem to know most about. He's the son of a wealthy manufacturer.~~

~~"Let's start when he's about four years old. That's when his mother dies, and his father re-marries soon after--"~~

takes unto himself a young widow with two daughters. Call the boy 'X'.

Well, then. Little 'X' grows up rather in neglect, since the step-mother expands most of her attention upon her own offspring. ^{old stuff I know, but then...} He is thrust into the background. He is a morbid, sensitive child, grows in upon himself, ~~as he develops,~~ ~~he keeps aloof from people; doesn't like them, and they don't like him.~~ He never finds out what friendships can mean, nor the wonderful relationships one can find.

"His father he worships, with a blind fidelity tinged more and more with jealousy, as he sees the affection he craves being turned to his step-sisters. His father disapproves of X's unworldliness; ~~is disappointed in him, and says so.~~ He had hoped for a son who would be a boy among boys, who would grow into a man among men. He is determined that X shall be the heir to his great business, and carry on the unflagging war against the Trust.

"Well-- X goes to college. He is no more hail-fellow-well-met there than he was as a child. He retreats into the seclusion of books. He makes few friends-- none close. He distrusts people-- and life.

"Strangely enough, he suddenly develops a passion for machinery. Perhaps his courses in physics, in chemistry, in mathematics start him upon it. No matter. The fascination of wheels, meshing in perfect order; the rhythm of gears, the beauty of pistons-- these become, like the rhythm and beauty of words upon printed pages, his obsessions.

"He scores high grades in his studies. All his spare time he spends sweating in a make-shift work-room, experimenting; especially in radio.

"Then, too, flying interests him profoundly. He endeavors to work out a primitive helicopter, for directly vertical flight. You know, they're still fooling around with that problem. He makes no great progress-- but it absorbs him.

"He is, in a mild way, happy. Then comes his first real crisis. During vacation, after his sophomore year, he secretly constructs a glider, which he tries out in a field on his father's plantation. The thing is an utter failure-- it crashes, breaking his collar-bone.

"That evening, his father and he become involved in a loud controversy. His personality and his tastes are denounced. He is to understand that his place in life is, one day, to succeed his father as head of the-- of the business. His love for mechanics is termed poppycock. He is ordered to abandon it. No more college. He is put to work in the home office, to learn his trade from the ground up.

"Did you ever have a taste of 'Big Business'?", he interrupted himself, suddenly.

"Well-- I was in an advertising office for a time," I admitted.

"That's hardly the same," he commented bitterly, "You can have no adequate idea of the hocus-pocus of routine, the

*Living on Borrowed Time
really dead for hours*

he and his pal, ^{tries to} ~~and~~ reality he loses in perpetual half-
drunkenness. ^{Bready} Whisky-- added mettle for the air, the waters
of Lethe for the earth. ^{Besides what difference does it make} So X and Y gain a name as the most
formidable aces on the flying-front." ^{Borrowed time}

"Look here," I said once more, "You're sure this has nothing to do with yourself?"

"Be reasonable, man," he replied. "X is dead. I'm coming to that at once. It's no great shakes, the manner of it."

"One day the two of them are jumped by a whole German circus.

"Seven against two. They knock down three of the enemy. But the odds are too much. X sees Y fall like a flaming torch. Then he feels a tearing pain in his left side, his hands hang limp upon the controls, the earth rushes up to meet him.

"Father-- Mary-- friend-- struggle-- heartbreaks-- now it is all solved, it is all finished. That's the end of him, wouldn't you say?"

"And so it is. He is dead. Life has used him for some inscrutable purpose of its own. Shall we write-- 'Finis'?"

"Oh, but we can't, you see. He's dead, right enough. Crashed from seven thousand feet-- dead as an old cigar-butt. And yet-- the world thinks he's alive. Something, which they say is his body, wakes up in a hospital many months later, shattered but workable. Sane, too-- oh, yes, sane at last,

*The candles
flickered
silence
worked
ridiculous
outside
got on
business
at night
Watson*

*Memory
that
though
though
how
see
But
how*

after weeks of insanity. *hog's blood* -

"'Kept alive on alcohol' they keep saying. Alive!
To take up once more the intolerable burden of existence--
of going on without his friend and his love-- his only two
holds upon reality!

"And yet-- there are his duty and his opportunity.
He must provide for the children of Y; that is his oath.
And his father-- another chance; the possibility of seeing
in that stern face a look of appreciation-- perhaps, even,
he might hear words of praise-- 'My son-- I'm proud of you--'

"And all the while, he is so completely dead. What
a joke, isn't it? And here's another joke, pretty weak, I
suppose; a wretched pun on the word 'spirits'. You see--
he never eats. No food at all. Drinks, regularly, system-
atically, -- you get it? Spirits-- to keep the spirit within
the ruined body.

"Oh, well, it's too involved. The shell which is
called "X" returns to America, liquor-drenched, liquor-preserved,
you understand, grimly amused at this world which insists that
it is a living organism. Because this world still calls him
"X", let us continue also to do so.

"Now, I suppose, you anticipate the great welcome
home-- returning hero, acclamation, father's open arms--
'My son! My son!'

"Disillusion yourself. It is 1920, and already people
are trying to forget. True, some stir is made in the press

of X's home-state-- a few columns of laudation. These mean nothing to our upright corpse. It is the paternal blessing he craves.

"And he doesn't get it. Old X permits him to return. 'Permits'-- that's exactly the word. Says he's glad his son didn't disgrace himself-- that's the nearest to praise he bestows-- although from what he heard, the life led by flyers was hardly to be approved of. Wildness, drunkenness, debauchery. Oh, well-- let bygones be bygones. Now let's see if X can't settle down. He's to be given another chance in the business.

"That's the ultimatum. Reluctantly, X agrees to try. He makes one proviso-- he is to be given a separate house. There is much wrangling. Finally, his father consents to his occupancy of a small farm, a mile away from the big place."

By this time, my blood was jumping in my veins. Was this, as I had been warned, an insane man addressing such words crisply, monotonously to me?

"A mile?" I blurted.

"Yes, certainly. Why not? A little farmhouse, nicely furnished. And there the ghost of X settles down, trying once more to make itself a credit to the name. Crazy, isn't it? Why doesn't he tell his father to go to hell? Surely he has cause enough. Yet what is logic, anyhow? And what logic can explain the yearning of a son for his father?

"So there you are-- X practically a hermit, the world

*eric note
feels myself
grow cold
know?
a drunk*

about him simply a disturbing illusion; the body goes through motions in this Purgatory, this half-world. All contact with humanity is confined to the office-- and to servants. His father he seldom sees, and then only formally. Until he can 'make good'.

"Is it not devastating to him to look upon the fields, to tread the ways where once he walked in romance with his love? Why should it be? He's dead, don't you understand, dead like Mary, like his pal. These appointed tasks must be attended to, must be completed. Then, and only then, may he join them in regions not of earth.

"That's rather poetic, isn't it? But thoroughly unpoetic is his struggle in the business-- the accursed business. Two years he tries. And then he gives it up. Not by that path is he to come into his father's house.

"There's a scene-- similar to the scene before he fled for the front, but worse, much worse. He resigns. And now his father breaks with him, once and for all. 'Take your farm. I give it to you. Here's a check for twenty thousand dollars. Stay here, or go to hell, it doesn't matter to me. ~~You're a fool, a failure, and a disgrace.~~ Good-bye!'

"I only suggest this speech from the old man. Embroider it as you wish. That's the gist, ~~expanding it's your business.~~ How do you like the story so far?"

I pondered some moments before I answered. "It's-- it's certainly interesting. Impossible, of course. Rather

impracticable for selling, I'm afraid."

"Sorry," he said, "I suppose so. But-- if you're entertained' Then you don't mind wasting a bit more time. I warn you, if what has gone before is incredible, then what I'll finish with-- fantastic, crazy--"

"But I want to hear it," I said, and smiled nervously.

"That's very good," he began again, "And I hope that somehow you can use it.

"We've got him now, cast out forever from the paternal roof. Good. So he becomes a recluse in the strictest sense. Few people see him. He remains secluded on his farm, engaged in some secret devices of his own.

"They're not secret to us, though, are they? We can determine what he is about, those long days and nights in a workroom. We remember his experiments of his youth.

"So that we are not surprised when we find his activities are principally three. From the government, he buys several second-hand planes. He also purchases supplies, of a mysterious nature, from time to time. Several hours a day he tinkers with flying-apparatus. One of the planes he uses for solitary flights-- disgusting the neighbors by jamborees of stunting. Death? What is death to one already dead?

"Radio, too, he fools with. He develops a set which catches stations far beyond the reach of any ordinarily known. A wireless telephonic principle is involved. I won't bore you with details.

Static translated

rewritten

"And thirdly-- he makes money. From his living room he communicates by long-distance directly with a large brokerage on Wall Street. His business is carried on entirely by correspondence.

"Yes, he makes money. This brain which somehow-- though he is dead-- continues ticking methodically, is keen. And he has luck. At first he is cautious. Content with three or four points profit. Seldom loses. Gains continually.

"The first fifty thousand is the hardest, and it takes him six months. Then, suddenly, he makes a coup. It comes simultaneously with his development of his radio to an efficiency enabling him to communicate with a station far removed from your WJZ's and your KDK's."

He leaned forward, and said, in a low voice, "A station which will never be found in any code-book. A station not on earth, *perhaps*"

"Oh, say--" I said, laughing, "Now you're going beyond the limit. How can I ever use---"

"You needn't," he replied, "Only-- somehow I think you will. If you use any of it. Let me finish. Incredible, impossible as it will sound, I must tell it.

"I'll leave off hints, now. I'll sail directly into fantasy.

"Within three months, X cleans up, on two deals, a total of a little less than a million dollars."

"Go on," I muttered disgustedly, "Make it a billion."

"You are perfectly justified in sarcasm," he said calmly, "Only-- save your best bon mots for the end.

"It isn't a billion. It's something over nine hundred thousand. And the strange thing about it is that it could be a billion. For he performs the operations on tips which cannot go wrong.

"You see-- he has to make that money, and make it in a hurry. Because now is his great opportunity. Not only can he amass enough to establish a trust fund for Y's children-- I forgot to say that he has been sending a regular remittance to the widow-- but his father is in danger.

"Yes-- his father, the financial wizard, is in a jam. The trust, so long plotting against him, has him against the wall. He needs funds-- needs them desperately. Only quick money, and no inconsiderable sum, can save him.

"At last! X to the rescue! And to the rescue he goes.

"How does he get the tips? Well, he sits before his radio, the earphones clamped to his head. And from out of the ether comes a voice-- 'Buy such and such', it says, 'Sell such and such'.

"A moment later, another voice speaks from the void. 'Come soon', it says, 'now your tasks will be done. Come soon. We'll meet you-- twenty miles up.'"

He paused, and rose to his feet. From the bottle, he poured out two drinks, one for me, one for himself.

"Twenty miles up- that's great!" I said, taking one.

"Is that the finish?"

"Almost," he answered, "Drink hearty." He turned the bottle upside down. "Empty," he said. "Let's drink to-- to love, and friendship."

"And our story," I added, grinning.

"Yes, -- and to our story."

We drained the glasses.

"Here's your ending-- more fantastic still.

"He disposes of the money-- enough for the kids, the rest to his father. That will save the old man-- a happy ending, hey? 'Saved by a Ghost'-- how's that for a title?

"And then, his task's performed, he goes to his reward.

"Now the poor, tortured spirit may shed its shell, may put on the incorruptible-- isn't that how they say it?

"On a moonlit night, X walks across the field before his house. A plane stands waiting, silvered, efficient. For months he has worked over it-- it will do the job.

"The motor hums. He is off.

"Up-- up-- up.

"Twenty thousand feet-- thirty thousand-- forty thousand---

"Oh, yes. This is no ordinary plane, you see. Endless patience, superhuman cunning have gone into its perfection. And knowledge not of this world has come to him, on ether-waves, aiding him.

"Into the realms of zeros below zeros he mounts--