

## SATAN'S FUEHRER (excerpt)

by Frederick Covins

Doctor Keys, Sally Stuart, and one of the men who had been with him earlier tumbled out of the car. Sally stared at Ben as she ran towards him and then flung herself into his arms where she clung to him with a kind of desperation that threatened to crack his ribs.

"Hey! Hey!" he cried, "Steady on, love. I really will need Doctor Keys otherwise."

Reluctantly she let him go and stared up anxiously into his face, relief flooding her own green eyes with fresh tears. She reached with tender fingers to touch the gash on his forehead, but Ben caught her hand and shook his head, "A graze", he said and smiled down at her. She rubbed ineffectually at the tears on her cheeks, "Oh, damn!" she cried, "now you've made my make-up run again."

Her mock anger did little to cover the tremendous relief she felt that he was, or appeared to be, safe and well. Tenderly he placed an arm around her shoulders and turned to face Doctor Keys. The doctor just stared at him, his piercing glance missing nothing.

"You look a bit tired." was all he said.

Ben nodded, "Some"

"You fit enough to travel?" the doctor queried.

"Sorry, doc." Ben smiled, "No can do."

Sally stared up at him sharply, her eyes still wet with tears, "Why not?" she demanded, "Are you alright? Are you hurt? Where...."

Ben placed the tips of his fingers to her lips in order to stay her concern.

"It's alright and I'm alright. We just have to wait for someone else, that's all."

Sally scanned his face anxiously, but remained silent. Doctor Keys just nodded and said nothing. Long association with the department had taught them both never to question its operatives too closely. Despite the fact that both their curiosities were thoroughly wetted they kept quiet.

The Rolls Royce Phantom VI that slid smoothly into the curb Ben recognised as Sir Archibald's personal conveyance. However, the giant who stepped out before the chauffeur could get around to the door was certainly not Sir Archibald.

Ben's first impression was of a man of enormous height and girth with beetling eyebrows, short, cropped hair and the biggest hands he had ever seen. Without the clerical collar and alb gown he could easily pass as an all-in wrestler. From beneath the beetling brows that wriggled like two trapped caterpillars, twin hazel flares glared out at the small group on the pavement.

Without hesitation the huge man singled Ben out and marched up to within a couple of paces where he stopped and deliberately sniffed the air. The hazel eyes settled on Ben's.

"Anyone ever tell you," he said, speaking surprisingly softly, "that you've got an aura that fairly crackles with sulphur and brimstone?"

Ben grinned, his relief almost palpable, "Sir Archibald obviously got the right man," he said extending his right hand, "I'm Ben Cash".

The giant nodded, his hands still firmly clasped behind his back.

"Freddie Winter. Better not touch at this stage. Give you a bad time did it?"

"Like nothing I've ever known before" said Ben dropping his hand, "I was, I still am, scared witless."

"Surprised if you weren't" snorted the big man. His tone dropped, "Still a rough patch to go y'know."

Ben took a deep breath and exhaled, "I'm sure I'm in good hands."

The Very Reverend Freddie Winter smiled broadly and indicated the church of St. Margaret Pattens and asked generally, "Fellow got here with the keys yet?"

Almost simultaneous with the words an irate curate, black gowned and out of breath, puffed into view and a police panda car ground to a halt behind the Rolls Royce.

A young policeman stepped from the car and marched up to the group, staring suspiciously at Ben's torn clothing and bloodied face.

"Alright" he demand heavily, "What's goin' on 'ere?"

Doctor Keys insinuated himself between Ben and the policeman and held up an opened pocket book for the constable to read. The young man's eyes widened and he all but snapped to attention.

"Use your radio," said the doctor, "to check that code and then tell them that you will be on duty here until I say you can go. I want you out here and keeping any nose-parkers moving, right?"

"Yes, sir" said the young man eagerly and nearly ran to his panda.

The Reverend Winter's ruddy complexioned features broke into another broad smile, "Somebody's chucking a lot of weight about it would seem." he murmured to no one in particular.

The curate chose that moment to arrive in a veritable billow of outraged gown.

"I demand" trebled the curate in a piping voice, "to know what is going on?"

The Reverend Winter approached and literally towered over the tight-faced junior, "Have you got the keys, young man" he asked almost gently.

"I have" snapped the curate, "And who, sir, might you be? I cannot go opening this church to just anyone."

Doctor Keys approached with his pocket book, but the Reverend Winter waved him away, "Forget it, my good sir. This young man would not recognise your authority if we spelled it out in words of one syllable."

He turned back to the curate who looked about ready to explode with indignation. Patiently, like a father to a very young child, the big man spoke to the curate and punctuated each word with a cannon-like finger that thudded hollowly upon the curate's thin chest.

"I...am...the...Very...Reverend...Frederick...Winter...and...your...Dean...has...instru cted...you...to...open...this...church...as...a...matter...of...some...urgency. Now, kindly

do so and stop behaving like a little prig. If I allow you to stay you might actually learn something about the faith that employs you. Now open up, there's a good chap."

More in the interests of self-preservation than understanding, the curate retreated fearfully and rattled the keys nervously in the lock of the church door.

Pausing only to retrieve a small briefcase from the Rolls Royce, the Very Reverend Freddie Winter herded his small, bemused flock into the church of St. Margaret Pattens. Built in 1689 and designed by Sir Christopher Wren, said the plaque just inside the church.

With the exception of the polygonal lead covered spire it was a relatively plain building. It had a rectangular interior with a flat ceiling, circular clerestory windows and galleries north and west separated by the tower. It had a low chancel screen and the altarpiece 'Christ at Gethsemane' was a colourful work by Carlo Maratta. The original woodwork remaining, by Cleer and Poultney, helped to give that entirely individual feeling or atmosphere that all churches convey to each person. To Ben, St. Margaret Pattens gave him a feeling of serenity, an ineffable peace that after the rigours of the night came like a warm, refreshing shower.

Efficiently but without undue haste or apparent effort, the Reverend Freddie Winter seated them all in the leading pews, with the one exception of Ben whom he left standing in the aisle.

From his case he took his chain and crucifix and his stole, both of which he donned. He also put on a gold ring engraved 'scutum Davidis'. Lastly came a rod of Rowan wood and a lump of chalk.

Despite a gasp of indignation from the pale-faced curate, the gentle giant proceeded to the altar, bowing briefly before rolling back the carpet and very swiftly chalking a rough pentacle of two interlocking triangles within a circle on the floor. The spaces between the points he filled with obscure symbols. He placed the Rowan rod within the circle and returned to his very attentive but puzzled congregation.

The young curate whose sensibilities were being outraged every second that passed rose from his seat, but was transfixed by a glare of basilisk proportions that deflated him like a pricked balloon.

Indicating for Ben to stand at his side the Very Reverend giant addressed his tiny congregation in ringing tones as though he wanted the world to hear what he had to say.

“We are here” he boomed, “to deal with a case of Satanic possession.”

He paused for the sharp intake of breath that followed the shock of his words. Sally gave a soft moan and stared helplessly at Ben.

“Our friend” continued the big man, “is, by evil intent, possessed by a satanic power. I do not intend a discourse on the source of that power except to say that it was, and still is, imposed to kill. Fortunately for our friend his torturers could not resist playing as a cat does with a mouse. Quite by accident, or by a divine intervention beyond the knowledge of all of us, our friend, afflicted and without control of mind or body wandered, or was led, into the only spot in this city where he would be temporarily safe. Here, in the holy triangle of God, formed by the three churches of St. Dunstan, St. Mary and this, St. Margaret Pattens. Because at any moment his enemies might choose to cut off the threads of life remaining in his alter ego and thus kill him, I propose to begin this rite of exorcism immediately. The prayer of our childhood, the Lord’s Prayer, is the most powerful of its kind and I ask you, on our friend’s behalf, to repeat it out loud over and over again until we are done. Do not stop, do not falter. It is only with your prayers and your strength that this man might live.”

The Reverend Winter turned his back upon his dumbfounded congregation and indicated for Ben to proceed him to the altar.

Behind him there was a pregnant silence broken by Sally’s tremulous voice saying, “Our father, who art...”

Slowly, one by one, the others self-consciously joined in.

Gently the big man got Ben to stand within the pentacle and circle. Ben immediately went icy cold and felt sick. The giant cleric, watching his face, warned him not to move.

Taking holy water from a flask, which he produced from beneath his gown, the Reverend Winter sprinkled a few drops at each point of the pentacle blessing it as he did so.

His preparations complete, the big man stepped boldly into the pentacle with Ben. Picking up the Rowan rod the giant cleric startled Ben by encircling him from behind with his powerful arms. With the Rowan rod clasped between his enormous hands he began his prayer of exorcism in Latin.

Only the strong grip of those powerful arms prevented Ben from being catapulted right out of the pentacle.

Even as the Very Reverend Freddie Winter uttered the first words of his prayer, Ben's body convulsed with pain and a white-hot needle pierced his brain. Something slimy and evil stirred in his guts and he screamed aloud in mortal terror.

His scream hung near the ceiling and a stunned silence fell upon the congregation.

"PRAY!" thundered the giant cleric.

Her face dead white and furrowed with fresh tears, Sally began again, almost shouting so great was her fear for Ben.

"OUR FATHER..." she cried aloud.

The young curate was on his knees and peering wide-eyed over tightly clenched hands and babbling his own prayers to his own gods.

Doctor Keys, his associate and the Rolls chauffeur prayed pale-faced and loud.

At the rear of the church the young constable, who had entered in response to the scream, backed himself against the doors and wished devoutly that he hadn't been so keen.

Despite the fact that the doors were shut and a policeman leaned against them a cold, clammy wind blew through the building. The young constable felt the hair at the nape of his neck begin to prickle with fear and he tried to press himself right through the doors, only the fear of drawing attention to himself kept him rooted to the spot.

With the wind came a stench so foul as to make their stomachs heave.

Louder and louder they prayed, their voices reaching a new pitch that now bordered upon hysteria.

The electric lights flickered and dimmed. Ben arched his back in a new fresh paroxysm of convulsions and the Reverend Winter's voice boomed on, even seeming to gain in timbre and authority.

"Out, foul being!" he demanded, changing from Latin to English, "We in the name of the Holy Trinity abjure thee! The Lord of Hosts abjures thee! Get thee gone from this body and servant of our Lord Jesus Christ."

"Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done..." the others shouted.

"Our...our...Father which art..." stammered the young policeman.

Thunder rolled with a cannon-like clap in the night sky.

#### **NEAR MUNICH:**

Mahler stiffened into sexual climax, his seed anointing the satanic altar.

Bringing down the glittering spear he collapsed in spent force over his human altar now transfixed by the bloodied spear.

"Your death with his death, Together as one." he gasped hoarsely, "QUANTO, GINO, GAROCO!"

#### **LONDON:**

Ben arched his back in one final cyanotic agony and slumped into a dead weight in the big man's arms.

"NO!" Sally screamed and made to go towards the altar.

Doctor Keys, his own lined face grey and haggard, caught her arm, "Keep praying" he rasped, "for Ben's sake, keep praying."

Gently, but without ceasing his own exhortations, the Reverend Winter lowered Ben's ominously limp body to the ground where, still supporting him in a sitting position with one arm and kneeling behind Ben, he gripped the Rowan rod in his right hand and held it to Ben's lips.

"The sorrows of Hell are compassed about us," he cried, "Gird me with Thy strength unto the battle O Lord." Ben's head fell loosely back and his mouth dropped open.

"Hear the right, O Lord, attend unto our cry, give ear unto our prayers. Satan persecutes his soul; he hath made him to dwell in darkness, as those that have been long dead. Therefore is his spirit overwhelmed within him and his heart is laid desolate."

Holding the Rowan rod poised above Ben's open mouth he cried aloud, "With this, the Holy Wand of God, I exorcise thee!"

Down into Ben's mouth he plunged the rod and deeper into Ben's throat.

The Reverend Winter's hazel eyes bulged with some mighty inner struggle as he slowly withdrew the rod.

Sweat stood out upon his brow and the knuckles of his right hand showed white from the force of his grip, as he appeared to exert all his strength upon withdrawing the slender rod. Exhorting all the while, "In the name of the Father, in the name of His Son Jesus Christ and in the name of the Holy Spirit I command thee to depart this tabernacle of light into the darkness from whence ye came!"

The cold, clammy wind that chilled the air changed suddenly and terrifyingly to a stertorous snuffling sound as that of an animal sniffing around.

The putrescent stench deepened to an almost suffocating level.



Paralysed with horror but still croaking the Lord's Prayer the congregation watched the harrowing scene with blanched faces and their flesh clammy with the smell of fear.

For those observers who had seen and suffered so much already the culminating horror, when it came, pushed each person to the very edge of insanity.

Clinging tenaciously to the Rowan rod as it was slowly withdrawn was a slimy, black amorphous thing that squirmed sluggishly and was at once both scrofulous and obscene.

Despite the rivulets of sweat that poured from his corded forehead, the Reverend Winter never once removed his gaze from the discarnate and nauseous object that continued to issue with the stick from Ben's mouth.

Sally gave a little mew of terror and fainted dead away. Doctor Keys caught her and lowered her gently to the ground, grateful himself for the chance to avert his eyes.

Lowering Ben's still limp body to a lying position, The Reverend Winter rose to his feet. Holding the black, pulsating obscenity well away from his body he uttered the words, "To that foul nest from whence ye came I now return thee thou foul and evil spectre."

Instinctively everyone flinched and raised their arms to protect themselves as the big man flung the Rowan rod and its evil adherence beyond the protection of the pentacle and towards the crucifix upon the altar.

With lightening speed the black slug grew to enormous proportions and seemed to snatch at the minds of everyone present as if searching for a haven and to prevent itself being dashed against the crucifix.

Hysterically the small congregation screamed the family prayer out loud and Doctor Keys stood astride Sally's limp form protectively.

The Rowan rod struck the crucifix and the huge fiend vanished with a roar of sound and a distinct smell of burning.

The electric light came back to full power and the silence was audible.

Nothing remained but the slumped, exhausted figure of the Very Reverend Freddie Winter and the still, death-like figure of Ben Cash.

Not speaking, scarcely daring to look at each other, Doctor Keys and the chauffeur helped a very groggy Sally Stuart to sit back in the pew. Sally shook her head in a slow, shocked and bewildered fashion, "Ben" she whispered, "Ben, Ben...", sudden comprehension flared into her eyes and her head came up sharply. Her green eyes focused on Ben's still inert figure.

"BEN!" she screamed.

Incredibly, with heart-wrenching slowness, Ben moved his legs, got his arms under himself and weakly levered himself into a sitting position. Blearily he peered at the congregation and then smiled palely.

Within seconds Sally was with him on the ground and hugging him tightly, "Oh, thank you! Thank you!" she sobbed to the Reverend Freddie Winter over Ben's head. The giant man just nodded exhaustedly, his eyes tired and his features lined.

Doctor Keys, his associate and the chauffeur now glanced at each other nervously and with slightly hysterical smiles and gestures tried to make light of what they had all seen and heard, but failed miserably.

The young curate still knelt at his pew, his head buried in his hands and convulsive sobs wracking his thin frame.

The young constable at the door had the grace to blush for the fear that had stained his trousers, and hurriedly absented himself to the relative safety of his panda car and an earnest reappraisal of his future in the force.

Tiredly, the giant cleric rose and moved to stand over the sobbing curate, "Get up" he said gently. The curate was, however, terrified of this giant who fought real demons and gave a startled cry at the sound of the Reverend Winter's voice, cringing even deeper into the pew.

Sighing heavily and resignedly the big man reached down and his huge hands wrapped themselves into the front of the curate's gown hauling that terrified individual to his feet. "No!" the young man screamed hysterically, "No, no, please....". To a shocked audience the Reverend Winter's right hand rocked the curate's head as it connected with his cheek and stopped the curate dead in mid-voice. The curate's staring eyes cleared and he drooped visibly in the big man's grip.

The Reverend Freddie Winter gently released the young man and solicitously brushed his gown straight. "Go" he said quietly, "and fear not. I suggest you seek an interview with your bishop and discuss your future in a faith for which you have none. Go."

Sanity restored, but utterly abject and humiliated, the young curate walked disconsolately out of the church to, like the constable, re-appraise his future.

At the insistence of the Reverend Freddie Winter, Ben was installed in the Rolls Royce and persuaded to take his leave of a happier, though still tearful, Sally Stuart, promising faithfully to call her at the first opportunity. He was then whisked away with the Reverend Winter to that gentle giant's vast Edwardian eerie high on Crouch Hill where, on a rainy day, it was possible to avoid seeing the metropolis.