

CARL & JERRY



By John T. Frye W9EGV

“The Hand of Selene”

from the November, 1960

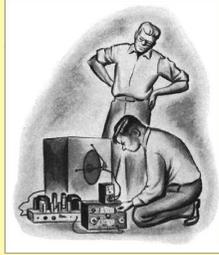
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CARL & JERRY

Their Complete Adventures
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By John T. Frye W9EGV

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Carl and Jerry

November 1960

The Hand of Selene

IT WAS almost five o'clock in the afternoon when Carl and his parents returned from a Sunday visit with an uncle and aunt in a neighboring town. The boy shed his tie and coat as he passed through the house, and then he headed straight out the back door and across the lawn to the entrance of the electronic laboratory he and his chum, Jerry, had fixed up in the basement of Jerry's house.

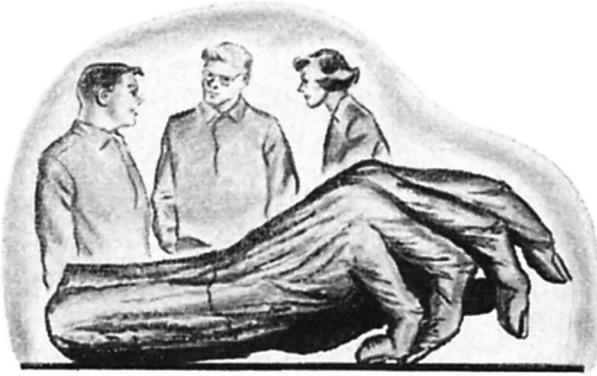
As Carl clattered down the outside basement steps, he could hear the murmur of voices through an open casement window; and when he opened the door, he saw Jerry and Norma busy at the workbench. Norma was a very pretty neighbor girl in her early twenties. Because of her "advanced" age and the fact she was what the boys called "a good Jill," she escaped the suspicion and disdain Carl and Jerry affected toward girls their own age.

"Come on in," Jerry called to Carl, who had paused in the doorway.

"Yes," Norma seconded, "but what's the idea of goofing off visiting relatives when we need your brains and brawn?"

"It's nice to feel wanted," Carl said with a grin as he looked down at the object she was holding in her hands. "What have you two been up to? Grave robbing?"

"In a matter of speaking, yes," Jerry answered, taking what looked like a wrinkled, mummified, feminine human hand from Norma and placing it on the bench. "Here's the scoop: tomorrow night, which is Halloween, as you know, Norma's going to entertain her sorority with a party at her house, and—"



“And,” Norma interrupted, “after you boys fixed me up with that talking skull at last year’s party, I attained quite a local reputation as a witch. In fact, some of

my cattier friends say it’s perfect casting. Anyway, the girls are expecting something pretty special tomorrow night, and unless I give them goose-bumps the size of ant hills, they’re going to be disappointed.”

“We decided to put on a séance in which a severed human hand raps out answers to questions,” Jerry resumed quickly when Norma stopped to catch her breath. “A couple of weeks ago, after that windstorm that blew in several store-front windows, I was passing through a downtown alley and saw the remains of a damaged dress dummy in an ash can. The right forearm was intact; so I brought it home with me. I’ve had an idea about this rapping-hand thing for some time, and the dummy’s arm was just what I needed. It’s made of light, tough plastic; and the fingers are curled just right for my purpose.

“First, I ground out the end of the middle finger and imbedded a piece of soft iron in it. I used plastic wood to anchor the iron in place and to conceal the operation. Notice that as the hand rests on the table this middle finger clears the surface by only a quarter of an inch. The wrist has been carefully cut off to act as a counterbalance so that the hand stays in that position normally; but a slight downward pull on the metal in the finger causes the hand to rock forward and down so that the fingers strike the supporting surface smartly.”

“I get it!” Carl exclaimed. “You’re going to put an electromagnet under the hand and send pulses of current through its windings to make the hand rap. But one thing bugs me: you say that hand is from a dress dummy. That’s hard to believe. All the dress dummies

I ever saw were plenty good-looking; but if the appearance of that hand is any guide, the dummy it came from must have looked like Dracula's kid sister."

"That's a compliment to my art work!"

Norma explained with a giggle. "I intend to say the hand is from the mummy of Selene, an Egyptian moon goddess. To give it the shrunken, wrinkled look, I painted it with latex and allowed the liquid rubber to dry in the rough, seamed form you notice. Then I sprayed it with a dark stain. Now it looks so real I'm almost afraid to touch it."

"It's plenty grisly looking," Carl agreed; "but was I right about how you intend to work the hand?"

"Only in a general way," Jerry answered. "We have to use something considerably more sophisticated than concealed wires running up table legs, and so on. The guests that will be at the party are pretty smart cookies—for girls, that is."

"Thanks loads!" Norma said sarcastically, making a face at him.

"This little table is the key to the whole operation," Jerry said as he placed his hand on the glass top of a small table with chrome-plated tubular legs. "The top part under the glass looks as though it were made of a solid two-inch-thick piece of walnut, but actually it's made of two one-inch-thick pieces fastened together. This metal trim around the edge conceals the joint. The concealed sides of both pieces of wood are hollowed out to form a cavity in the table top. In this cavity are mounted a powerful but compact electromagnet, a transistorized remote-control receiver, and a relay that closes the power circuit of the magnet when a signal is picked up by the receiver.



“Power for the receiver and for the magnet comes from flashlight batteries loaded into these tubular legs. There’s a coiled spring in the bottom of each leg to hold the batteries in firm contact. The top ends of the legs are let into the bottom of the table top so that the wires coming out the tops of the legs can pass through grooves between the two pieces of walnut into the cavity.”

“Why the glass top?” Carl wanted to know.

“In order for the magnet to be as close as possible to the metal in the hand, the layer of wood between the magnet pole pieces and the top of the table is very thin. The single-strength sheet of glass affords protection to this thin membrane of wood and prevents anyone from rapping on it and noticing that it sounds hollow.”

“You boys will be sitting at a darkened window here in Jerry’s house looking across into the room where I’ll hold the séance,” Norma explained. “A concealed mike will let you hear the questions the girls ask. Then you can use the transmitter to make the hand rap once for ‘yes’ and twice for ‘no.’ I’ll give you a secret signal so you’ll know which way to answer. Before I forget it, though, there’s one more thing. You’ll have to put a switch on that mike so I can keep it turned off until just before the séance begins.”

“Why?” Jerry asked in round-eyed wonder. “Why not let it run all evening?”

“Because I think it’s best that you boys keep your illusions as long as you can,” Norma said with an enigmatic smile. “You’re far too young to know what girls talk about when they think men aren’t listening. But let’s see how the gadget works. Then I have to scamper home, put up my hair, make up some party favors, and read those books on Egyptian magic I got from the library. I want my part in this thing to do justice to the technical excellence I know I can expect from you two.”

“Okay,” Jerry said, “but you can lay off the butter, Norm. Save that poor-dumb-little-me and big-strong-smart-you stuff for your boy friends. This is Carl and Jerry; remember?”

“I’m sorry, fellows; I had that coming,” Norma said quickly. “I know better than to try and feed you two a line, but I really don’t want to mess things up.”

“You won’t,” Jerry said with a reassuring smile. He placed the hand on the glass-topped table and picked up the radio-control transmitter. Every time he pushed a button on the latter, the hand rapped smartly against the glass. This was true even when he went outside and crossed the street with the transmitter. By the time they had assured themselves that the apparatus was working to perfection, both Carl’s and Norma’s respective mothers were calling them for supper; so the three friends parted company for the evening.

The following evening the TV weather map revealed a rapidly approaching low pressure system, and there was a warning of accompanying strong winds and heavy rain. As Carl and Jerry went downtown after supper to watch the Halloween parade, a warm wind from the south was already picking up. By the time they came home, around eleven, it was whistling through the bare branches of the trees and shaking Jerry’s tribander beam, which was mounted on a tower between his house and Norma’s.

Norma was saving her séance for the witching hour of midnight; so the boys settled down in the darkened room where they could look across at the curtained window of Norma’s house and keep an ear cocked at the mute intercom speaker in the corner. At ten minutes before midnight, Norma’s voice suddenly burst from the speaker, and the window curtains parted.

“All right, girls; it’s time to invoke the spirits,” she was saying as she stood between the open curtains looking up at the storm clouds moving swiftly across the face of the nearly full moon. A dozen girls could be seen crowding behind her and following her upward gaze.

“I can’t reveal how,” Norma continued, “but I’ve managed to obtain, just for tonight, the mummified hand of a person said to be an incarnation of the Egyptian moon goddess, Selene. Think on the questions you wish to ask while I bring the hand of the moon goddess from its resting place.”

Carl and Jerry could hear the girls whispering and giggling nervously while Norma was gone. Then they heard the girls gasp as Norma came back into the room with a measured tread, carrying before her on a white satin pillow the gruesome Hand of Selene. Each girl was required to touch the hand as Norma knelt in front of her.



“It’s so cold and clammy!” the first girl quavered as she recoiled from the contact. Inasmuch as the hand had been reposing in Norma’s deep-freeze for the past thirty-six hours, she was probably right!

After each girl had forced herself to touch the hand, Norma placed it

carefully on the glass-topped table in front of the window so the moon could shine down on it intermittently between patches of clouds. All the lights in the room were turned out-except for a dim spotlight shining on the hand. Slowly she intoned:

“I, Norma, conjure you, spirit of Selene, Goddess of the Moon, in the name of The Feather, sacred symbol of Truth, to return into your hand and to answer truly the questions put to you!”

She paused, and the hand in the dim little circle of light twitched rapidly and beat a devil’s tattoo on the tabletop as Jerry worked the button on the transmitter. A murmur of fear came from the girls.

“Selene awaits your questions,” Norma announced in a sepulchral voice. “Let them be cast so that she may answer them with one rap for ‘yes’ and two for ‘no.’”

“Wi-wi- will Ted ask me to the Military Ball?” a faltering voice finally piped up from the intercom speaker in Jerry’s house.

The hand waited for a suspenseful few seconds and then rapped once. Emboldened by this good news, the other girls threw questions thick and fast, and the answers were tapped out quickly and decisively.

“How do you know whether to make the hand say ‘yes’ or ‘no?’” Carl whispered.

“If Norma turns her head a little to the right, that means ‘yes’; to the left means ‘no,’” Jerry whispered back, although there was no reason for whispering.

Finally there was a lull in the questions, and a tall, black-haired girl stood up in the flickering light of the candle and said, “This is lots of fun, Norma; but you’re not fooling me. Someone’s moving that hand with threads.”



“Let the unbeliever see for herself,” Norma answered, raising her voice as a blast of wind made the house shudder.

The tall brunette approached the table a little nervously and waved her long arms all around the hand in search of threads. Then she grabbed the table and raised it a couple of feet off the floor. As she did this, the hand began to tap on the table top.

Abruptly she set the table back on the floor and grabbed at the hand. But as she touched it, she shrieked and stumbled backward. “It is alive!” she cried; “I could feel it writhing in my hand!”

This experience, coupled with the gathering storm outside, broke up the party. Fifteen minutes later the girls were all gone.

The boys threw their raincoats over their heads and dashed through the beginning rain to Norma’s back door. She let them in, and the three went into the living room. They ate ice cream pumpkins and witch-shaped cookies while they laughed about the events of the evening.

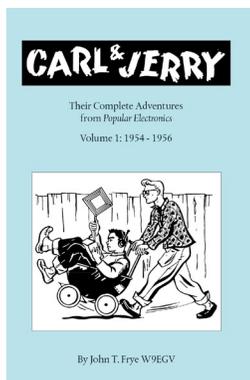
“I’d say Selene was a pretty successful spirit,” Jerry remarked as he looked fondly at the hand still resting on the table. “Maybe I should try a question. Selene, old girl, will my beam stay up in this storm?”

The indulgent smile froze on his face as the hand deliberately rapped twice, and at that instant there was a loud crash outside the window. The three of them dashed outside to discover the wreckage of Jerry's beam antenna lying between the two houses.

"I don't get it," Jerry said dazedly as they huddled there in the cold pelting rain. "Of course, someone *could* have swished an oscillating Citizens Band transmitter across the receiver frequency a couple of times and jerked the hand—"

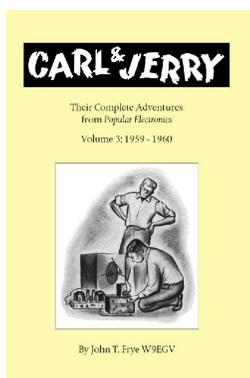
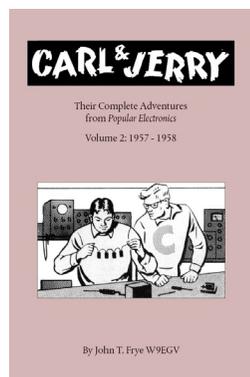
"Or it could have been just the Hand of Selene," Norma interrupted. "You get that thing this minute and take it home with you. I wouldn't be able to sleep a wink with it in the house!" ~~30~~

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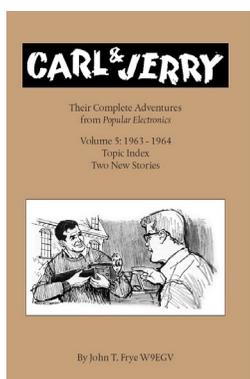
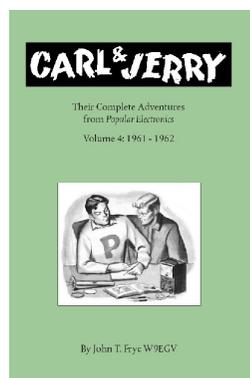
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