

The Vampire Master

*and
Other Tales
of Horror*



Edmond
Hamilton

Introduction by Hugh B. Cave

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The Vampire Master

and Other Tales of Horror

EDMOND HAMILTON

Author of "Horror Out of Carthage," "Three from the Tomb," "The Polar Doom," etc.

While primarily known for his adventures of terrestrial doom and interstellar peril, Edmond Hamilton also wrote a number of tales of mystery and horror. THE VAMPIRE MASTER AND OTHER TALES OF HORROR collects nine stories from pulp magazines such as *Strange Tales of Mystery and Terror*, *Thrilling Mystery* and *Weird Tales*.

Included are Hamilton's four tales of supernatural terror that appeared in *Weird Tales* under the *nom de plume* Hugh Davidson. Two of these stories, including the novel-length tale, *The Vampire Master*, feature the psychic detective, Dr. John Dale.

An introduction by Hugh B. Cave, recipient of the World Fantasy Award for Lifetime Achievement, provides a personal glimpse at the bygone days of writing for the pulp magazines.

Included as an afterword is an essay by Hamilton reflecting on the halcyon days of writing for *Weird Tales*.



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The Vampire
Master
and Other Tales of Horror

by Edmond Hamilton

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as editor

The Best of Leigh Brackett

The Vampire Master *and Other Tales of Horror*

EDMOND
HAMILTON

*Author of "The Horror Out of Carthage,"
"The House of Living Music," "The Man Who Returned," etc.*

*Illustrated by
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*Introduction by
Hugh B. Cave*



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Introduction

by Hugh B. Cave



ey there, you with this book in your hands. Yes, you. Do you know what a pulp magazine was? You're not sure? Let me tell you.

Back before television, when pulp publishing was at its peak, almost every drugstore in the land had a soda fountain and a rack of pulp-paper magazines. The "pulp," as they have come to be known, contained mostly fiction and sold for a quarter or less, sometimes as little as a nickel. (*Nickel Western*, for instance.)

More than a hundred of these pulp magazines were published. They were printed on rough wood-pulp paper—hence the name "pulp"—with bright, colorful covers depicting people in action of some sort—hard-

Edmond Hamilton

boiled detectives with guns drawn, cowboys riding horses, lovers looking into each other's eyes, or helmeted heroes in rocket ships flying to faraway planets.

Starting at age nineteen, I wrote several hundred such stories before moving on to books, and to magazines—*The Saturday Evening Post*, etc.—that were printed on slick, shiny paper.

I didn't know Edmond Hamilton personally, nor did I ever exchange letters with him as I did for years with pulp writer Carl Jacobi. But I read stories by Mr. Hamilton that appeared in some of the magazines I was writing for, such as *Weird Tales* and *Strange Tales*, and they were good stories. Very good stories. Indeed they were.

Read the story called "Dead Legs" in this volume you now hold in your hands. At first it seems to be a hardboiled detective or crime story in the style associated with *Black Mask* or *Dime Detective*. Then it turns into something that might have first appeared in Farnsworth Wright's *Weird Tales* or in the Clayton publication *Strange Tales*. Matter of fact, it did first appear in *Strange Tales*.

In this story you know something ghastly will deservedly happen to the master mobster, Dead Legs Dall. But you don't know what his fate will be until the final horrific lines.

That white rectangle of poured cement in the corner of the room. The legs of a murdered victim grafted onto the mobster chief's body. "You'll walk on them to hell!"

Something is going to happen. Some terrible form of revenge. But what?

That, friends, is suspense.

Now skip to the story called “Snake-Man,” which first appeared in a now-famous pulp called *Weird Tales*.

Ed Hamilton’s “Snake-Man” is truly a weird one. Take a Florida swamp with all its sights, sounds, and smells. Add an eccentric snake-hunter living alone in a nearby shack. Throw in the foot-wide trail or crawl-print of a monstrous reptile. And make sure the lights are turned up bright if you read this tale at night!

Thrilling Mystery magazine published Ed Hamilton’s “Woman from the Ice” back in August 1938. This remarkable story begins: “It was soul-sickening, but I had to admit it to myself. I was in love with a dead woman.” Then—

But hold on. We can’t discuss *all* the tales in this fine collection, can we? We just don’t have the space. So let’s wind this introduction up with a few words on how pulp writers—the good ones—acquired their skills.

Because many of them had skills to be proud of, make no mistake about that.

Schools didn’t teach “creative writing” back in those days. I don’t believe I even heard the term until years later. The men and women who turned out stories for the pulp magazines learned to write by reading, and most of us read the masters—Stevenson, Poe, Kipling, Conrad, Hemingway, and such. That’s why we gave our tales a beginning, a middle, and an ending.

And that’s why we did not dabble in the obscurity so common in some of today’s writing—the kind of obscurity that leaves some readers muttering, “Now what, for Pete’s sake, was that all about?”

You’ll know what the stories in this collection are

Edmond Hamilton

about, because their author, Edmond Hamilton, was one of the great ones. Indeed he was!

So then, go to it. Enjoy!

Hugh B. Cave
January 1, 2000

!

Dead Legs

Strange Tales of Mystery and Terror
January 1932



DALL was the calmer of the two who were waiting in the room. He sat in his wheel-chair with eyes impenetrable and face mask-like, his hands motionless on the blanket that covered his lower limbs. Carson, the other man, was patently nervous, glancing quickly toward the room's side door at the slightest sound.

The room in which Dall and Carson waited was a curious one. It had two doors, one at the side and one at the rear, and there were no windows. It was cement-floored, lit by concealed electric lights, and held only a few chairs, a desk and a squat steel safe. There came only the faintest murmur of street noises into it; and sounds from above indicated that the room was in the basement of the house. Both men sat in silence.

Dall might have been a sphinx of flesh placed in the wheel-chair, so motionless was his attitude, but Carson's

nervousness was visibly increasing. He jumped as there came finally a double knock at the side door.

Dall spoke briefly and a man entered who was younger than either of these two, and who had quick eyes and a panther-like build.

"Well, Dead Legs, we got Roper all right!" he addressed Dall excitedly. "He was trying to get out of town. Knew damned well that since we cleaned up his mob he hadn't a—"

"Not so much talk, Quinn," Dall interrupted crisply. "You've brought Roper here?"

"He's upstairs now—Burke and Spinetti guarding him," Quinn answered. "We had our taxi planted as you said and when he took it to the station we nabbed him right off without—"

"All right, that's enough!" Dall snapped. "Tell Burke and Spinetti to bring Roper down here."

QUINN departed, and when he returned a minute later three others were with him. Two hard-faced men were obviously the guards of the third, for their automatics were close against his back.

This third man was stalwart, with a bull-like face flushed now to deep crimson. His eyes, as he entered, fastened like twin flames of fury upon the man in the wheel-chair. His hands had been securely bound, but, nevertheless, Quinn and the other two watched him closely.

"So you got me, Dead Legs!" the prisoner said bitterly to Dall. "And you weren't even satisfied to have them put me on the spot straight but had them drag me down here to your hole for you to gloat over, eh?"

"I didn't have you brought here for gloating purposes, Roper," Dall answered evenly.

Roper seemed not to have heard. "It wasn't enough," he went on, "that you and your damned mob took my end of town and all my rackets from me, that you bought some of my men and had the rest shot—you had to get me here last of all and crow to me about it!"

"I've done no crowing yet," Dall said. "And you had your warning six months ago, Roper."

"Warning!" Roper's fury seemed to reach its climax. "A warning to give up the territory my gang had always had! A warning from a cripple, a man with dead legs, a man who's never walked!"

"And a warning that I've fulfilled to the letter!" Dall reminded him. "You know now that no one in this town can buck Dead Legs Dall."

"Then, damn it, why don't you get it over with?" demanded the raging Roper. "Why don't you give your guns the word?"

Dall smiled levelly. "Because you're not going to be killed so soon, Roper. Before you die you're going to do me a great service—the greatest in the world."

Roper's laugh was ugly. "You're dreaming, Dead Legs. I'd die in torture before I'd do anything for you, and you know it."

"But you're going to do this for me whether you want to or not," Dall said, still smiling coldly. "It's a service for which I particularly chose you, Roper."

HE leaned back in his wheel-chair, his cold blue eyes on Roper's furious face. Quinn was listening, Burke and Spinetti still standing with weapons against

their prisoner. At a little distance from the rest Carson was mopping his forehead, and his eyes had a nervous, desperate look.

Dall spoke again, more slowly, to Roper. "You know me, Dead Legs Dall, as every crook and almost every other person in this town knows me. You know that I've never walked, that I was born with these dead, shriveled legs, that I've sat in a chair like this for thirty years.

"They started calling me Dead Legs when I was a kid over there in the slums. Sometimes they beat me, too, because I was helpless. I soon saw that the only way I could stand against them was to be smarter than they were, and I was that. And because I was, Dead Legs was soon running a gang of kids, and as they and I grew up we became a gang of men and of tough ones, too!"

It was as though Dall had forgotten Roper and the rest as he talked, his eyes seeming to stare back into the past for a moment.

"Dead Legs Dall. . . . Yes, as that I've worked my way up, until now I and my mob have a mortgage on this town. I've broken up every other gang here—with yours the last, Roper. I've come to the top, fought my way up, until now I've got more money and more power than I used to dream of having.

"But what good are they to me the way I am? How can I enjoy money or power when I'm chained to a wheel-chair with these dead, useless legs of mine? They couldn't keep me from getting what I wanted, but they'll keep me now from enjoying it!"

"I'm glad you realize it, Dead Legs!" said Roper harshly. "When I pass out I'll be grinning to think how you hate those legs of yours that you'll die with!"

"But I don't intend to die with them," Dall said softly. "I've reached the top and all I need to enjoy life is legs—not dead, useless legs, but living ones, legs that I can walk and run and dance with. They're what I want and I've always found a way to get what I wanted."

He leaned toward Roper. "That's where you come in, Roper. You've got what I want, strong, healthy legs. And I'm going to take them from you for myself!"

"You're crazy!" Roper exclaimed. "You poor batty cripple, you've brooded over those dead legs of yours so long you're cuckoo on them!"

"Are you so sure?" smiled Dall. "Carson, come over here."

CARSON approached slowly, glancing nervously from one to the other, and Dall gestured to him without turning from Roper.

"Do you recognize Carson? Dr. Robert Carson, one of the three greatest surgeons in this country?"

"What's he to me?" snarled Roper.

"He's going to be very much to you, Roper," Dall assured him, mockingly, "and to me, too. He's going to take those healthy legs of yours off you and put them on me."

"You poor fool!" Roper snarled derisively. "You're cuckoo, sure. You were born with those dead legs, and you'll die with them."

"I'll not!" Dall's voice cracked with the emphasis of a whip. "You're the fool, Roper. You think because such an operation would have been impossible yesterday it's impossible to-day! But it's not! Scientists and surgeons have been removing animal limbs and grafting new ones

on for years, and now surgeons like Carson are beginning to do it with humans!

"Carson here has been able to graft fingers, hands. He can fasten the new limbs so that bone knits to bone; can tie and connect the nerve filaments, the arteries and veins; can graft new flesh to heal over the joint so that the new limbs are as usable as natural ones!

"Carson can do it, and Carson's going to—for I've got something on him that means death for him and disgrace for his family if I spring it. Carson's fitted up all he needs to operate with back in that room behind this, and has trained Burke and Spinetti here to act as his attendants while the operations are going on. And that's to-night!

"Yes, to-night! Carson will take off my dead legs above the knees. Then he'll take off your healthy legs and graft them at once onto my body. Then we'll bury what's left of you, Roper, under the cement floor over there in the corner. But why don't you laugh, Roper? Why don't you laugh at the impossibility of it?"

"It is impossible!" Roper cried hoarsely, beads of perspiration on his forehead. "I know you, Dead Legs—you're trying to torture me before you send me out! But the thing's not possible!"

DALL laughed. "You think it's not, Roper? But it is. Carson has done it many times with animals, and he can do it with humans. And then I'll be Dead Legs no longer. Think what it means, Roper; think of me able to walk and run wherever I want to, and on your legs!

"Why, it'll be rich, it'll be rare! Can't you see the humor of it, Roper? Everyone congratulating Dead Legs

Dall on the marvelous cure effected, everyone seeing him run and walk and dance, and none of them ever suspecting that he's doing it all on another man's legs, a dead man's legs, Roper's legs!"

"You hell-fiend!" shrieked Roper. "By God, you wouldn't dare do it!"

"Ah, you're beginning to believe now? I see you are. But be fair, Roper. Your legs would do you no good buried over there under the floor with you. And they can do me a lot of good. Why, even walking about on Roper's legs will keep me laughing all the time! Any pair of healthy legs would have been as good, but they wouldn't have the humor there would be in wearing Roper's legs!"

Roper lunged madly at the mocking Dall, straining at the bonds that held his hands, but Burke and Spinetti jerked him back.

From his chair Dall watched with eyes bright with interest, but beside him Carson was trembling violently.

"You demon!" Roper cried out. Then suddenly he broke down, and his tone became supplicating, almost craven. "Dead Legs, you're not going to do a thing like that? Not really? Why, it would be wrong, it would be devilish! I know we've fought and bumped off each other's men, but that's all in the game. But this would be different—hellish!"

"But the thing's impossible," Dall said, mockingly. "You remember that, Roper, you remember how sure of its impossibility you were just a little while ago. There's nothing to fear from a man gone cuckoo, is there? It's just poor nutty Dead Legs raving, so don't be afraid."

HE turned to Carson. "Everything ready back in the operating-room?" he asked swiftly, gesturing toward the rear door.

Carson managed to nod, still trembling. "It's all ready. But Dall, this thing—"

"Is going on, Carson!" Dall said with cold finality. "We've been over that ground." He turned back to Quinn and the two guards. "All right, boys, you can take Roper back there. Nothing to say before we start, Roper? No place you'd like to go afterward—on your legs?"

Roper raised his bound, trembling hands toward Dall as he was pulled away. "Yes, you can take my legs, Dall, but you'll walk on them to hell! You hear me? You'll walk on them to hell!"

Quinn had opened the rear door, through which could be glimpsed an operating-room with white tables and gleaming apparatus. The two guards were half carrying the struggling Roper, Carson following like a man in a nightmare and Dall coming last in his wheel-chair. And, as the little party went through the door, Roper's ghastly cry rose to a screaming imprecation of hate.

"To hell, Dall! You'll walk on them to hell!" he shrieked. He was still shrieking as the door closed after them all. . . .

DALL stood—*stood*—on the steps of his house with Quinn and Burke. It was night, and a few feet below them the city's ceaseless currents of people and vehicles flowed along the bright-lit street. Dall was trembling inwardly with excitement and exultation, but outwardly was looking coolly along the street.

"You're sure you don't want any of us with you?" Quinn was asking. "First time you've been out, you know."

"I'll not need you, no," Dall told them. "This is a walk I want to take alone, Quinn, a walk I've been looking forward to for thirty years."

"Just as you say, Dead Legs," Quinn agreed. "Though it'd be no trouble to go along in case you wanted us."

"There's no need," Dall repeated. "And why call me Dead Legs now? The name hardly fits me now!"

Dall stepped down to the street, and Quinn and Burke watched from the steps as he walked casually down the street.

Each step was savored by Dall as a long-starved man might savor food. It was his dream come true, he told himself. He who had sat thirty years in a chair was walking along a street. Dall thought that some passersby looked curiously at him, and he smiled to himself. It had been weeks since word had gone forth that the useless limbs of Dead Legs Dall had been miraculously cured at last.

It was worth it all, Dall told himself as he went on. Worth the ghastly night in that white operating-room, the gleam of instruments and smell of anesthetics and realms of cool unconsciousness in which only Carson's drawn white face intruded at times. Worth the red, aching pain of the weeks that followed, the utter immobility of so long and then the first stumbling attempts at walking, inside the house. Yes, worth it many times!

DALL had no objective as he walked along. It was enough for him to be merely walking, without aim or objective. Did any of these hurrying people about him, he wondered, know the true joy and pleasure of walking? They could not. They had not spent Dead Legs Dall's thirty years in a wheel-chair.

He was walking, and walking on Roper's legs. The grim humor of that still tickled Dall's sardonic mind immensely. Roper—or all of Roper but his legs—lay deep under the re-cemented floor in the corner of his basement-office. But Roper's legs were living still and walking still, carrying Roper's worst enemy. Dall's pride expanded. What Dead Legs Dall wanted he took! Even new legs!

The hurrying people that brushed by him and the automobiles racing in the street beside him he looked on with a new eye. He had preyed upon them and their city with his criminal organization even when he was prisoned in a wheel-chair. But now that Dead Legs Dall was dead of legs no longer, what might he not do! He could expand his organization to other cities, could expand it until—

Two women a little along the street screamed, their screams drowned in the next second by the squeal of brakes. Dall stood out in the middle of the street, and the taxi that had almost run him down when he had leaped suddenly into the street was skidding to a stop beside him. Its driver emerged red-faced with anger and bore down on Dall.

"What in hell's the matter with you, fellow?" he cried. "You saw me coming and jumped right out in front of me! Are you trying to kill yourself?"

Dall seemed dazed, bewildered, stupefied. "I didn't mean to do it!" he stammered, his eyes roving wildly now. "I didn't mean—my legs seemed just to jump out with me in spite of myself."

"That's some story, that you jumped in spite of yourself!" the driver exclaimed. "I ought to take a good sock at you for—" He stopped suddenly, recognizing the man before him. "Why, it's Dead Legs Dall!" His tone was abruptly respectful, apologetic. "I heard you'd been cured, but I didn't recognize you, Mr. Dall. Of course I didn't mean any of that stuff for you—"

"It's all right—all right," Dall said. His one desire was to get away from the fast-collecting crowd. "My fault entirely." He regained the sidewalk and started on. The driver stared after him, then returned to his cab. The crowd dispersed, and Dall walked on along the street.

BUT Dall was walking now in a daze. His mind was in sudden turmoil. What he had told the taxi driver was the truth: he had had no intention of leaping into the street until without command of his brain his legs had suddenly carried him directly in front of the onrushing cab! It was as though his legs had wanted to kill him, Dall thought.

Dall gripped himself. This would not do, he told himself. He was wrought up, nervous, and it was but natural that he should have made a misstep when walking, when legs and walking were so new to him. It was only that, could be only that. Yet back in Dall's mind persisted the thought that it had not been a misstep but a swift deliberate leap of his legs in spite of himself.

He thrust the thought back, and, as he walked on, he

became once more master of himself. Every step he took his legs obeyed him. He could feel the hard sidewalk under his feet, could place each step as he wished. Dall breathed more easily. Nerves, that was all! It was but natural: one didn't often try walking for the first time—and with another man's legs! Dall even smiled.

His first confidence had almost entirely returned. He stepped unhesitatingly along once more. At that moment Dall saw thundering along the street in his direction two heavy trucks, one trying to pass the other. Some instinct warned Dall or he felt the preparatory bunching of his legs under him. For as he grasped wildly at a lamp-post beside him, his legs shot out with him in a swift leap into the two trucks' path!

It was Dall's clutch at the lamp-post that saved him, for he managed to grasp it as his legs leaped with him and to hold to it until the trucks had passed. The effort of his legs to leap out stopped instantly, but Dall clung desperately to the lamp-post. He knew now! Undistinguishable sounds came from him.

PASSERSBY who saw Dall clinging to the post desperately, with face deathly white and eyes terror-haunted, thought him drunk, apparently, and stared at him. Some stopped, and then a blue-uniformed policeman shouldered through them toward Dall.

"What's this—another hooch-fiend?" he demanded sharply; then he recognized Dall. Respect tinged his manner. "What's the matter, Dead Legs?" he asked.

"Get me a taxi!" croaked Dall, clinging still to the post. "I've got to get home. I've got to get home!"

Wheeler signalled a passing cab. "What's the matter,

legs go back on you?" he asked. "I heard you were cured, Dall, but you must have tried walking too soon. Got to get used to it, you know."

Dall managed to nod. "That's it, I guess. I've got to get used to it."

The cab drew up and Dall grasped its door-handle, held it tightly until he was inside. There was no need, for his legs stepped up with him quite normally, making no involuntary movements.

While the cab darted back along the street Dall clung tightly to the assist-straps. He was breathing fast, and his mind swirled chaotically with horror. He did not know the cab had stopped until its door opened.

Quinn and Burke were still up on the steps, and at his motion came running down to the cab. Both looked inquiringly at Dall.

"Grab my arms and don't let me go until we're inside the house," Dall told them. At the blank expressions he snarled with sudden fury, "Do as you're told, damn you! Hold my arms till I tell you to let go!"

HELD on either side by the two he went up the steps into the house. His legs walked up with him quite naturally, obeying every command of his brain. There seemed no need of the two restraining men. Yet Dall did not tell them to release him until he was down in his basement-office with doors closed.

"Call Carson!" Dall ordered as he sank into a chair. "Tell him to come over here, and to come quick!"

While Quinn obeyed Dall sat in a chair, his mind aw whirl with incoherent thoughts. There could be no doubt of it, he told himself, his legs had twice that night

tried to bring death upon him, and chance alone had prevented it. It was his legs, and not he, that had each time sought to hurl him to death in the street! His legs? No, Roper's legs!

Dall's eyes sought the oblong of newer, whiter cement in the floor at the room's corner. Roper lay under that, he told himself. Roper could do him no harm. But Roper's legs? There came rushing to Dall's mind those last words Roper had shrieked as he had been dragged into that operating-room at the rear, his last yells of agony and hate.

"You can take my legs, Dall, but you'll walk on them to hell! You'll walk on them to hell!"

Dall's hands clenched his chair's arms until his knuckles showed white. He sought to command himself. This was all moonshine, superstitious folly into which he was working himself. Roper was dead, and how could Roper's legs retain the hate of their former owner? How could Roper's legs try to kill him?

But they *had* tried to kill him, and twice this night! The truth rose in Dall's mind and could not be smashed down by any effort of will. He was wearing the legs of Roper, of the man whose last cry had been one of hate for himself. And, though attached to him, the legs were not part of him, but part of Roper still. Part of Roper's being and part of Roper's hate!

"You'll walk on them to hell. You'll walk on them to hell—to hell—to—"

"Carson's here," Burke announced from the door.

"Send him in here at once!" Dall ordered.

CARSON entered, his face pale and his eyes straying despite himself to the oblong of white cement in the corner. With an effort of will he turned his gaze from it. "What's the matter, Dall?" he asked.

"Everything's the matter," Dall answered. "Roper's legs are trying to kill me." At Carson's stupefied expression Dall's inner madness burst forth. "You heard me! Roper's legs are trying to kill me!"

Carson managed speech. "Now, Dall, calm down. You've been out for the first time and naturally you're wrought up."

"You fool!" said Dall bitterly. "Do you think I'm a nervous woman? I tell you I walked out to-night, and without any will of mine my legs jumped with me out in front of a taxi! Only luck saved me! Five minutes later they tried to leap with me in front of two trucks, and if I hadn't caught a post and hung onto it, it would have been all up."

"Neither time did I have the slightest intention of making such a jump, mind you! And don't tell me they were missteps, for they weren't. They were deliberate leaps on the part of my legs. Carson, you know how Roper hated me. Well, his legs retain that hate. They're trying to kill me!"

Carson had paled further as he listened, but he was still the calmer of the two.

"Dall, listen to me. You've gone through a big operation, the biggest ever heard of, and you've lain for weeks recovering from it. Then to-night you go out to take your first walk in the street and because your new legs play queer tricks on you, you jump to the fantastic conclusion that they're still Roper's legs and trying to kill

you."

"But how explain it?" Dall insisted. "How explain that my legs acted without the slightest order from my brain?"

"Dall, if you had a tenth of my medical experience you'd know that even in normal persons the control of the brain over the limbs often has queer lapses. Why, when my foot goes to sleep, or when my legs cramp when swimming, what's that but a lapse of the brain's control over the limbs? Everyone's had such experiences.

"Then what of your case, in which you've actually had new legs attached to your body, new nerves knitting to nerves, and bone to bone? It stands to reason, Dall, that in such case your legs would play even queerer tricks on you than in normal cases. Why, in walking you're using motor-nerves of your brain you never used before, so that at present your brain has an uncertain control over your legs."

"But that just proves what I've been saying," Dall exclaimed. "They're Roper's legs, and my brain can't control them all the time. Roper's last thought was hate of me, and of you, too, and his legs are still controlled by that thought!"

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Carson. "Dall, get up and walk slowly along the room here. I'll show you I'm right."

DALL rose and carefully stepped along the room's length, Carson watching his movements closely from the side. Dall walked like a man at the edge of a precipice, but his legs seemed to move normally enough.

As Dall stepped more confidently back along the room toward the surgeon, Carson nodded. "You see, there's nothing the mat—" he was saying, when abruptly Daft's foot shot out and tripped Carson so that he fell to the floor! Instantly Dall's legs were lashing out in furious kicks at the fallen surgeon!

"My God, Dall!" cried Carson as he sought to rise against the shower of fierce kicks. "Get back. You're killing me!"

"I can't—the legs won't obey me!" Dall screamed, his face white and distorted. "Quinn—Burke—come here and get me!"

Quinn and Burke, bursting into the room, halted in stupefaction at the sight of Dall kicking with terrific savagery at the prostrate Carson who was shielding his head with his arms and trying to regain his feet.

"Pull me away!" Dall shrieked to them. "Grab me and pull me away from him! Quick, you fools!"

Bewildered, Quinn and Burke rushed forward and grasped Dall's arms and jerked him from the fallen man. For a moment his feet still lashed out in vain kicks toward Carson and then ceased their movements.

Dall burst into a high-pitched, hysterical laugh. "Do you believe now, Carson? Roper's legs nearly got you that time! You performed the operation, you know. Roper hated you almost as much as me. Do you believe now these legs of mine are still Roper's legs?"

Carson was staggering up, his bruised face ghastly in expression. "Keep holding him," he implored Quinn and Burke thickly. "Don't let him—don't let *them* get at me! Oh, God, don't let Roper's legs get at me again!"

Dall managed to get some grip upon himself. "Burke,

get Carson out to his car and take him home," he ordered his aide. "Quinn, you hold me here until they're gone and then go upstairs and get Spinetti."

Whimpering and shaking, the surgeon hastened from the room.

WHEN Burke and Carson were gone, Quinn released Dall and hastened up to the house's upper floors. Left alone, Dall paced back and forth, his head throbbing wildly. He tried to think.

It was true, then! Impossible, insane, but true! Roper's legs, attached to his body, were still Roper's legs, and had tried to kill him and to kill Carson, too! And if he went alone into the street, if he went anywhere near danger, Roper's legs would carry him into the path of death. He must not go out alone; he must keep his aides always within reach! But was this the freedom Dead Legs Dall had dreamed of in his wheel-chair?

Dall's legs seemed to obey him perfectly as he paced the room. But he knew—maddening thought!—they were but biding their time. When opportunity came they would try again to kill him. Was Roper laughing; laughing somewhere in the beyond? Was Roper still screaming the words that seemed to enter his ears: "—walk on them to hell—walk on them to hell—"

With a start Dall found that he had stopped pacing the room and was standing in a corner. He was standing on the oblong of new, white cement beneath which Roper lay! With a hoarse cry Dall jumped back, clutching a chair. His legs had taken him, without his knowing it, to the tomb of the man of whom his legs had been part!

Was Roper laughing at him this moment? Was he?

Dall set his teeth as Quinn returned with Spinetti. He was a fighter; he would fight this!

Quinn and Spinetti approached him with some awe. "My God, Dead Legs," Quinn was saying, "you were shouting there that these new legs of yours were still Roper's!"

Dall's cold eyes swept him. "What if they are?" he demanded bitingly. "My legs may be Roper's, but the rest of me is still Dall, and it's Dall's orders you obey, isn't it?"

Spinetti crossed himself furtively, his eyes fearful upon Dall, and Quinn's lean face was a shade paler. "I'm not bucking your orders, but this business kind of scares me," he declared. "When Roper's legs were put on you it was—"

"That's enough from you, Quinn !" snapped Dall. "You and Spinetti take my arms and help me up to bed—and keep a tight hold on me going up the stairs."

IT took several minutes for them to reach Dall's bedroom on the upper floor, Quinn and Spinetti gripping his arms tightly, though his legs made no untoward movements on the way. At Dall's command they stayed until he was in bed.

"Now I want you two to take turns sitting beside the bed here until morning," he told them. "If you see me make a move to get out of bed, grab me and hold me, do you hear?"

"Sure, we get it, Dead Legs," Quinn answered. At the name Dall's rage flamed. "And don't call me Dead Legs any more!" he shouted.

Yet, as he sank back, Quinn taking the chair for the

first watch, the name rang still in Dall's ears. Dead Legs! The name that had been familiar to him since childhood, but that had now a secret significance. Dead legs, yes, but not now the shrunken limbs that had won him the name. Dead Legs because now he wore a dead man's legs, Roper's legs!

Roper's face seemed passing before him in the darkness, a grin of triumph upon it. Other faces passed, too, Carson's drawn one and Quinn's, but always foremost was Roper's. He could not see whether the body below the face had legs, but Roper's face was clear—Roper's face—

Dall crashed to wakefulness to find himself struggling with Spinetti beside his bedroom window. Quinn was running in to answer Spinetti's shouts, and the two were holding him back from the window now. Then as Dall came to full wakefulness his struggles ceased.

"Sure would have thrown yourself right out this window if I hadn't been watching!" Spinetti exclaimed. "You sprang out and were almost to the window before I knew it!"

DALL managed to speak after a while. "Take me back over to bed," he told them, choking slightly. "Then you go down, Quinn, and call up Carson and tell him to come back here the first thing in the morning. You stay and watch me, Spinetti. I won't be sleeping again."

Despite Quinn's call it was not early morning but almost noon of the next day when Carson arrived. The surgeon's face was still deathly pale despite its bruises as he came into Dall's basement-office. This time as he

entered with Quinn he did not glance hastily at the white rectangle in the cement floor of the corner, but gazed at it with a fixed, fascinated stare.

Dall watched him from his chair, his eyes red from sleeplessness, like Carson's, and his face pale, but set. He smiled grimly as Carson, when he caught sight of Dall, shrank instinctively back with sudden terror in his eyes.

"Don't be afraid, Carson," Dall said. "I had Quinn tie me in this chair before you came, and he'll not release me until you go."

"I'm not afraid," Carson said hoarsely. "I think I'm past fear by this morning, Dall."

"Take hold of yourself, man!" Dall commanded him. "We're in a jam, but I'm in it worse than you, and I'm not whining yet."

Carson smiled strangely. "You call it a jam! Dall, we've done a black thing, a thing of evil. We've sinned! Don't try to pass it off as you're trying. I tell you we've done a thing of horror, and we're starting to pay for it! You're paying most, but even though you forced me to do my share of the thing I'm paying, too!

"Dall, I've been thinking, I've been remembering those last words Roper shouted to you. 'You'll walk on my legs to hell!' I see that you remember them. You've been thinking of them, too. Well, that's what you're doing. You've got Roper's legs on you, and, somehow, God only knows, they're doing what Roper wanted to do—they are taking you and trying to take me to death!"

"Carson, I told you to take hold of yourself. What we've got to do is to find some way of stopping this thing. You put Roper's legs on me. You've got to find

some way of stopping these attempts of theirs to kill me!"

CARSON stared haggardly. "Some way of stopping it? Dall, there is one way in which this can be stopped, and only one way."

"And what's that way?" Dall demanded.

Carson leaned tensely toward him. "That way is to take Roper's legs off you again!"

Dall exploded into fury. "Like hell! Do you think, Carson, I went through those weeks of aching pain to give up now? Do you think I'll surrender the legs I worked for and planned for and dreamed of having?"

"Dall, give them up," Carson urged. "It's the only way of saving you, of saving us both! I tell you, this thing has brought me almost to insanity. Roper's legs on your body, trying to kill you, trying to kill me—give them up. You'll be no worse off than before."

"I'll not do it!" gritted Dall. "What if they are Roper's legs and trying to kill me? I was never afraid of Roper himself, and I'm not afraid of his legs now even though they're on my body!"

Carson rose, his face a deathlier white than before and with a desperate resolve in his eyes.

"Dall, think! I'm the only surgeon living who will take them off for you! Any other would refuse and think you insane if you asked him to do it. And if you told your story they'd simply have you arrested and tried for murder. I'm the only one who can release you, the only one who can free you from these legs of Roper's that are trying to kill you.

"You're not fighting just Roper's legs, but Roper him-

self, man. Roper who, somehow, from somewhere out there, is trying to kill you with these legs of his you're wearing!"

"And I'll fight him!" cried Dall. "I took his legs and I'll keep them despite Roper and all the fiends of hell!"

"That's your last word?" Carson asked, his face strange, his eyes turning fixedly again toward the white oblong in the corner, and then back to Dall.

"My last word, yes. Dead Legs Dall keeps what he's got and has always done so!"

CARSON went out without another word, walking stiffly and strangely. Quinn and Burke entered in answer to Dall's call, a hint of horror in their eyes as they met his.

"Spinetti's gone!" Quinn announced. "Must have beat it just now. He was crazy afraid and babbling about devil's work this morning, and when I looked in his room now he and his things were gone."

"Damn him!" Dall exclaimed. "I'll show him he can't back on me, devil's work or not. I'll have him back here in two days!"

"Want me to go out and get the boys started after him?" Burke asked. Dall looked levelly at him and laughed harshly.

"You'd like to get out, too, wouldn't you, Burke? And you, too, Quinn? Well, you're going to stay. No matter what devil's work there is, no matter if I came out of hell itself, I'm Dead Legs Dall and nobody in this town forgets it. Come over here and untie me!"

When Quinn and Burke had released him from the chair Dall stood up and walked back and forth. His limbs

seemed to obey every command of his brain. Then suddenly like a flash they hurtled with him across the room to fling him with force against the wall!

Dall's outflung hands alone saved his head from crashing against the wall, but, as it was, he was jarred and bruised by the shock when Quinn and Burke reached his side and helped him up. He looked about him, half-stunned.

"Keep holding me!" he gasped to them. "They'll get me even in here if they can!"

"We can tie them together and put you in your old wheel-chair," Quinn suggested. "That'll keep them from jumping around like that, and you'll still be able to move about."

"Go ahead, then," Dall ordered, his face ghastly. While Burke went for the wheel-chair Quinn fastened his legs together.

When they had lifted him into the chair Dall lay back, breathing hard. The horror upon the faces of his two aides was now undisguised.

"Right back in the wheel-chair again," said Dall bitterly. "All I need is the blanket over my legs once more."

He shouted with sudden madness. "Are you laughing at me now, Roper, wherever you are? Damn you, are you laughing?"

"For God's sake don't talk that way, Dead Legs," Burke said. "My nerve's going as it is."

DALL lay back, the other two withdrawing a little from him. A succession of heavy notes of sound seemed beating in Dall's ears, methodical, steady. They changed from mere sounds into words, spoken words:

"You'll walk on them to hell! You'll walk on them to hell!"

The words seemed to be crashing upon Dall from all sides by thunderous voices, yet somehow above all those voices came the screaming curse of Roper. Then Dall put his hands over his ears, but he could still hear the words pounding into his brain. And as he turned his head he could see the white rectangle in the floor at the corner, under which lay Roper—Roper—

The hoarse exclamations of Burke and Quinn pierced his mind and he woke to the realization that a convulsive movement of his bound legs had almost thrown him out of the wheel-chair! He gripped the chair's arms just in time, holding on while his legs threshed wildly about. Quinn and Burke clutched the straining legs, held them, and in a moment they quieted.

For an hour following that Dall's legs were still, and then again they were kicking in wild efforts to throw him from the chair. Again Dall clung to the chair and fought them, with the other two aiding him. But when, in the half hour after that, the legs made two more attempts to hurl him out of the wheel-chair, Dall felt his mind breaking and giving beneath the horror.

He fought the threshing and struggling of his legs, clinging wildly to the wheel-chair from which they sought to throw him. It was only in an interval of this terrible struggle that he became aware that he was alone in the room, that Burke and Quinn had yielded to their terror and fled. In his struggle with his legs he had not heard the closing of the door.

"Damn you, come back!" he cried. "Quinn—you and Burke—I'll have you all bumped. I'm still Dead Legs

Dall." There came no answer.

No answer but the silence of the white oblong in the floor at the room's corner. Dall shouted to it. "You've not got me yet, Roper! Your legs haven't got me yet! I can still beat you. I can have Carson take them off."

HE wheeled himself to the desk, and, grasping the telephone, called a number. He shouted hoarsely to the man who answered, "Tell Carson that Dall wants him. Tell him Dall wants him over here at once!"

The voice that answered him was that of a well-trained servant, but it sounded strange. "But Dr. Carson can't come, sir. He's—"

"Tell Carson he's got to come!" Dall screamed into the instrument. "He's got to take Roper's legs off me, do you hear? Roper's here under the floor, but his legs are on me and he's got to take them off—take them off—"

"But Dr. Carson killed himself an hour ago, sir," the other said. "The police are here now. I'll tell them you want Dr. Carson if you—"

But Dall had hung up the receiver, was staring into blankness. Carson dead, Carson a suicide! He remembered Carson's white, strange face when the surgeon had left him. Carson was dead, the one man who could have taken Roper's legs from him! And even now those legs were again struggling, straining!

But there was a way out, even so! Dall wheeled his chair away from the desk, out into the room. Yes, a way out of the madness rapidly overtaking his brain! With legs still threshing and twisting he wheeled his chair toward the door of the operating room at the rear. He

turned there to shake a trembling hand at the white-cement oblong in the floor back in the office's corner.

"You've not got me even yet, Roper, you hear? I'll beat you even now—even now." There was a hint of determination in Dall's wild mutterings. . . .

THE policemen and reporters in the little crowd were talking in excited voices as they came down into the basement corridor of Dall's house and paused outside the door of his office. Their voices could be heard in snatches of sentences as they interrupted each other.

"—heard that Dead Legs had something on Dr. Carson for a long time, but never thought—"

"—butler said he screamed about Roper being buried under the floor in here and something about Roper's legs. We knew damned well Dall was the one who put Roper away, but couldn't pin—"

The police-captain in charge turned at the door. "Have your guns ready, there. We're going right in."

The door flew open from his kick and with pistols ready the policemen burst into Dall's office. A glance showed that he was not in it, but the door at its rear was open and in a moment they were through that. All stared about them for a moment at the elaborately-fitted little operating-room. Then they uttered cries of horror as they saw the wheel-chair that stood beside an instrument-cabinet.

Dall sat in that wheel-chair, his eyes staring blankly out of his dead, distorted face. His hands still held tightly a heavy, ax-like surgical implement, and his legs had been cut off by terrific strokes above the knees. In the

red pool around the chair lay the severed bonds that had held his legs, but the legs themselves were not near the chair nor anywhere in the operating-room. The men gazed at one another dumbly.

Then someone pointed dumbly, and all saw that red footprints led from the chair into the room they had first rushed through, the office. They followed the footprints back in there and from them came exclamations of an utter and deeper horror as they saw. On the oblong of whiter cement at the corner of the room's floor lay the two severed legs.

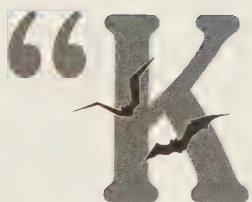
"Roper was buried under the floor there, he said," someone exclaimed in a choking voice. "And he said Roper's legs—"

But another cried what was in all their minds. "Roper's legs or not, Dall did it back there in the other room. He never moved afterward. . . .

"How did the legs get here?"

Vampire Village

Weird Tales
November 1932



NOCK again," I told Croft. "There's always someone up in these village inns, and it's not midnight yet."

"I've almost hammered the door down already," he replied. "Either these Transylvanians sleep like the dead or—what the devil!"

"What's the matter?" I inquired. He was shaking his hand ruefully.

"Bruised my knuckles on something on the door," he said irritably. He detached it from the door, then passed it to me. I saw that it was a little wooden cross. "A mighty inconvenient way of expressing religious fervor!" exclaimed Croft, as he knocked again.

I looked up and down the white road, gleaming in the

starlight. Along it were strung the score or so of high-peaked frame cottages that formed the village of Kranzak. Croft and I had counted, as we had swung through the Transylvanian hills all day and evening, on getting here for a late supper and lodging for the night.

But now Kranzak seemed to offer small prospect of either supper or bed, for from the shuttered windows of its houses showed no lights, and our hammering at the inn's door had produced no response. We had heard voices inside the inn as we had approached it but at our first knock they had become abruptly silent.

Croft, annoyed by hurting his hand on the cross, called out now in our defective Hungarian. "Let us in! This is an inn, isn't it?"

An elderly, tremulous voice answered. "It is the inn of Kranzak, yes, but it opens to no one tonight."

"Why not?" my companion demanded.

The same voice answered. "Because this is the night of vampires, sirs! The night of St. George, when all those who were in life vampires and servants of evil rise again to work evil until dawn. No door here in Kranzak will open until dawn."

"Night of the devil!" I exclaimed. "What kind of craziness in this?"

Croft laughed, turning from the door. "No use, Barton. We've run into their superstitions and it looks like no lodging for us tonight."

A different and shriller voice called from inside. "If you want lodging go on to Wieslant!" it told us, and was followed by a buzz of three or four voices within.

We stepped back into the road, baffled, looking along the village's houses. Each had some sort of cross at its

door and each was still dark and without invitation.

"Well, it looks as if we go on to Wieslant, wherever it may be," I said.

"Wieslant—I don't remember it on the map," Croft said. "But these villages are all pretty close together, so it can't be far."

"Forward march, then," I ordered, and we started along the road in the starlight.

"The night of St. George—night of the vampires," I repeated, as we swung out of the village and on through the dark pine woods. "Was that whole village sitting behind locked doors in fear of that old vampire superstition, Croft?"

He nodded. "It's a very deep belief here in Transylvania. These Transylvanians believe implicitly that when people die who have sold themselves to evil they become, not dead, but undead—become vampires who rise from their tombs by night to suck blood and life from others."

"I've read something of the belief, of course," I said, "but I thought vampires could rise any night between sunset and dawn. I didn't know this St. George's night was the only night in the year in which they could rise."

Croft laughed. "There's a distinction between vampires, Barton. All vampires can rise from their graves each night until priests have carried out over their graves the binding and exorcising rites that prison them there. But on this one night each year, St. George's night, even these prisoned vampires, who far outnumber the others, can rise and work evil until dawn."

"Which is why St. George's night finds them locked up back there at Kranzak," I said, shaking my head.

"And those crosses on the doors?" I asked, jerking a thumb toward the little wooden one Croft had passed me, which I had thrust into my breast pocket.

He smiled. "To protect them from the vampires tonight, of course. A cross is the one sure weapon against vampires, you know, the one thing they fear. It's all mighty interesting, this vampire superstition."

"And mighty inconvenient for us," I added. "If this Wieslant's people are as terrorized by vampires tonight as Kranzak's, we're out of luck for sure."

WE HITCHED our knapsacks higher on our shoulders and bent to the steady task of walking. The white road wound through dense forests up a long slope that seemed a pass between the big hills ahead and to the right. There was no moon, but the thin starlight outlined the road clearly in its windings through the dark pine woods.

As we swung on for steady mile after mile it came to me that the very gloominess of this somber Transylvanian landscape must be at the bottom of its people's fearful beliefs. It would be easy to believe, I speculated, that in the midnight darkness of the hills about us supernatural beings of evil were moving, loosed this one night from the tomb.

We could see once or twice black flying shapes of considerable size moving in the starlight low over distant woods. And while it was apparent enough to Croft and me that these must be hawks or owls searching the night forests for prey, I could well see, I thought, how any Transylvanians seeing them would believe them vampires abroad on this, their night.

Croft's voice at last interrupted my speculations. "There are the lights of a village down there," he announced. "Wieslant's I suppose."

We had reached the rim of a bowl-shaped valley some miles across that was encircled by the hills. Down in the darkness at this bowl's center gleamed a little pattern of lights, with at one spot the redder glow of fires.

"Nothing shut up about Wieslant, apparently," I said with rising spirits. "We may get supper and a bed tonight, after all."

"Looks as though there's a chance of it, at any rate," Croft agreed.

We swung down into the bowl-like valley toward the village's lights. Wieslant, it was apparent as we entered it, was a place unusually ancient, for the houses along its little streets were more antique in appearance than any we had yet seen. They had the grotesquely carved scrollwork and odd-shaped doors and windows common to the houses of the section a few hundred years ago.

These houses were illuminated with yellow candlelight but we could see no occupants in them as we passed among them. The reason for this was explained when we neared the open green at the village's center, for large fires were burning there, swift, gay music was audible, and gathered round the fire-lit green and dancing to the music were the people of Wieslant.

As Croft and I approached we could see these people only as black shapes dancing between us and the glowing fires. Their dark forms spun with such swiftness that to us, with the light in our eyes, they seemed to leave the ground and whirl through the air in the mad rush of the dance. Croft and I drew nearer and stopped in the shad-

ows outside the fire-lit green's circle, watching with astonishment.

A half-dozen fires spilled ruddy light across the green, and around each fire one of the strange dances was going on. The dancers were clad, the men in outlandish brilliant jackets and tight trousers, the women in similarly bright skirts and bodices, the festal attire of Transylvanian peasants. Yet these costumes were of an older and odder style than any others we had seen.

Around the green's edge in the firelight were a hundred or two villagers watching and applauding the dance. They were clad like the dancers, there being in fact no modern dress visible. At one place was a peasant orchestra of stringed instruments pouring out the wild, swift music. Beside this a tall, white-mustached and fierce-faced oldster was calling above the din to the dancers as they whirled and spun.

I had never seen such a strange picture of mad gaiety, and Croft and I watched marveling from back in the shadows. These anciently dressed villagers seemed flinging themselves into the merriment of the dance with utter abandon. The eyes of dancers and spectators alike glowed crimson, apparently from reflected firelight.

Suddenly one of the spectators glimpsed Croft and me back in the dark. He uttered a stabbing cry, and instantly all of them were rushing toward us.

IN OUR momentary stupefaction it almost seemed that they were hurtling through the air to attack us, a crowded vision of crimson eyes and white-gleaming teeth. But when almost upon Croft and me they stopped short as though struck back!

They encircled us, giving vent to a babble of excited cries in a Hungarian dialect that was almost beyond our understanding, while their excited, gleaming eyes held upon us. The din was immense.

"Excitable beggars, aren't they?" said Croft. "Can you make out what they're shouting about?"

"Not while they're all crying at once," I answered. "What's the matter with them? I thought for a moment they were attacking us."

"These Transylvanians are all an excitable bunch," he said. "This looks like the head man of the village coming, and he ought to be able to calm them down."

It was the tall, white-mustached oldster who had been calling to the dancers who now shouldered through the throng toward us. He was dressed like the rest in the brilliant ancient festal costume, which set off his tall figure well enough. He bowed to us, his eyes sharp upon ours.

"Welcome to Wieslant, sirs," he addressed us, in the oddly twisted dialect of the others. "We did not expect strangers here tonight."

"I'm sorry if we've intruded on your festal celebrations," Croft told him. "We didn't mean to do so."

The other waved the apology aside smilingly. "My people here—I am Mihai Hallos, headman of Wieslant—see but few strangers and so are excited when any visit our little village."

"Well, it's not by intention we came," Croft said. "Back at the last village, Kranzak, every one was locked up for fear of vampires. They must have been afraid we were vampires ourselves, for they wouldn't let us in but told us to go on to Wieslant. "

Hалlos' smile deepened and a laugh ran through the crowd. "Kranzak's people are much afraid of vampires on this night, it is true," the headman said, "for not far from Kranzak was located the vampire village."

"Vampire village?" Croft repeated interrogatively, but Hallos waved his hand. "It is a belief in this part of Transylvania—I will tell you the story later. It keeps many villages in fear on this night."

"Well, I'm glad at any rate it doesn't keep you of Wieslant locked up," I remarked. "We didn't fancy walking all night."

"You'll find excellent accommodations here at Wieslant," Hallos assured me. "Indeed, you could have come at no better time than tonight."

Again the chuckling laugh ran through the crowd, though I could see nothing humorous in the words. These gleaming-eyed, strangely dressed villagers were making both Croft and myself rather uncomfortable by their staring at us from all sides, and Hallos must have seen this.

"Our inn is over there at the green's edge," he said. "May I not lead you there?"

We protested against his taking the trouble, but with true Transylvanian courtesy he waved our protests aside. Hallos motioned the villagers to make way for us and was turning again toward us when I bumped awkwardly into him face to face.

To my surprise he staggered and fell to his knees, his hand on his heart and his face contorted by a spasm of agony. He regained his feet, though, before we had time to help him up, and I apologized as best I could for my clumsiness.

"It was not your fault," he said with hand still on his breast, "but I have a weakness here and the thing in your breast pocket prodded me when we collided."

I looked down and saw projecting from my breast pocket the little wooden cross Croft had handed me at Kranzak, which I had forgotten. "I'm very sorry," I said. "It was stupid of me to run into you."

Hалlos smiled and shook his head, but I noticed as we started through the crowd toward the inn that he kept Croft between him and myself. Apparently he did not intend trusting himself again to my awkwardness.

And as we moved through the gaily dressed villagers who parted to allow us passage I even thought that they shrank rather farther away from me than from Croft. It was a little discomfiting to me.

Hалlos talked on urbanely as he led us to the inn. The music behind us had recommenced and the villagers were again dancing by the time we came to the ancient-looking inn at the green's edge.

WE FOLLOWED the head man into the stone-paved, broad-beamed tavern room. A great fire flickered in a wall fireplace, and behind the small bar at the room's end the fat and white-haired innkeeper was serving bottles of queer, twisted shapes to a dozen gaily costumed men and women.

They had been engaged in wild talk and laughter as we entered but fell dead silent at sight of Hалlos and ourselves, staring toward us. I was struck again by the trick of the firelight falling upon these people's faces to make their eyes seem somehow crimson-lit.

The fat innkeeper came forward and Hалlos made in-

troduction.

"This is Kallant, innkeeper of Wieslant and as excellent a one as can be found in Transylvania," he told us smilingly. "He will be glad to see you, for it is not often he lodges strangers."

"Not often," admitted the fat Kallant, laughing in a strange way. "In fact, it is not often that I have custom of any kind. You will wish two rooms, sirs?"

"Oh, one room will do for both of us," Croft answered. "We're more concerned about supper than the room, right now."

"If you will do us an honor," Hallos interjected. "Our Wieslant festivities on this feast-night continue all night, and some of us leading villagers always have supper here at two o'clock. You would honor us by joining us."

"We'll be honored to do so," Croft said. "It's almost two now, so Barton and I had better brush up a little."

"I will show you the room, sirs," said Kallant, turning with a candle toward the narrow stair that rose back in the shadows.

We were entering the dark stairway with him when Hallos's voice stopped us. He was gesturing with an amused smile toward the wooden cross that still projected from my breast-pocket.

"That emblem of piety were best left in your room, sir," he told me smilingly. "On this night piety is forgotten here and we think but of merriment."

Croft and I laughed. "It's not really mine," I told the head man, "but of course I'll leave it. I don't want to be the skeleton at your feast."

As we went up the dark narrow stairway after the fat Kallant I heard a sudden babble of wild voices break out

in the tavern room we had just quitted. There cut across them and silenced them the sharp voice of Hallos, and I smiled at this evidence that our courtly host could play the tyrant over his simple subjects when so inclined.

The stair led up into a long hall dimly lit by one or two candles in wall sockets along it. There were doors but half visible in the shadows, and Kallant led us to one of these and opened it, gesturing inside as he placed his candle in a socket inside the door.

"This will suit you, sirs," he told us. "It's a little musty—we don't often have custom here—but should be comfortable enough."

"It's quite all right," we assured him. "Tell Hallos we'll be down in a few moments." He bowed and withdrew. We looked about us.

"Musty is right," I commented. "Looks as if it hadn't been used for centuries."

The room, in fact, was covered with dust that lay thick over the floor and furniture and old-fashioned wooden bed. Through the odd-shaped windows we could glimpse the green outside, where the fires still were burning and the dark shadows of the dancers whirling to the wild music.

Croft and I spruced up as well as possible and then left the room. When we emerged from the dark stairway into the inn's tavern room again we found the head man Hallos there with two dozen or more men and women. They were without exception dressed in the antique festival costumes to which we were now accustomed.

Hallos almost rushed to meet us as we entered the tavern room, his eyes alight. But a little from us he stopped, staring at my breast.

I looked down and saw that I had forgotten to discard the little wooden cross from that pocket. "Oh, I'm sorry," I said. "But I suppose having the thing doesn't really matter?"

"Of course not," he told me courteously. "Will you not meet some of our people? These are my own two daughters."

He made introductions and we chatted as best we could in our halting Hungarian with the gay groups. I was somewhat chagrined, I admit, to see that they tended to gather around Croft and to avoid me. Recalling the head man's words, I supposed they judged from the cross projecting from my pocket that I was some strict and serious devotee.

Croft saw my isolation and shot amused glances at me now and then, for he was making great progress with the two brilliant-cheeked beauties Hallos had introduced as his daughters. Hallos himself talked with me, though at a little distance, until the fat Kallant appeared from another room to announce that the supper was ready.

We passed into the candlelit dining hall, where a long table laden with Transylvanian dishes and wines awaited us. Hallos seated himself at the table's end with Croft and the younger daughter at his right, and me and the elder daughter at his left. But before I could address a word to this elder sister she pulled her chair as far as possible from me and turned her back upon me to talk to her other neighbor.

THE supper was gay, and Croft and the younger sister opposite me were of the gayest, though I was feeling somewhat chagrined at the cold treatment these

people accorded me. I made up for it by attacking the spicy foods and strong wines with vigor, nor was Croft much behind me, since we had not eaten for a dozen hours.

The food and wines were as delicious as I had ever tasted but seemed strangely lacking in filling qualities; in fact, after disposing of a half-dozen dishes and several glasses I felt really as hungry as on beginning. Yet though Croft too looked a little puzzled, the others at table seemed not to notice it.

The room rang with laughter, chatter and clink of glasses, with echoes now and then of the dance music from outside. Kallant hovered about to see that all were served, and at the table's end Hallos was the picture of a courteous host.

During a lull in the chatter of voices Croft addressed him. "You said you'd tell us about the vampire village located near Kranzak," he reminded. "I'd like to hear the story if the rest don't mind."

Hallos smiled and I saw suppressed mirth on the faces of our companions, Kallant grinning in the background. "Why, all here know it well," the head man said, "but if it would interest you—"

At our quick assurance he went on, "We of Transylvania have for many centuries known that vampires do exist. We have known that men and women who sell themselves in life to the forces of evil do not when they die become dead, but undead, vampires. By day vampires lie as though dead in their graves, but by night rise as though living and suck blood and life from whatever unprotected people they encounter.

"We Transylvanians know also that against the cross

vampires are powerless. So whenever a vampire's grave is detected in this country, priests perform over it ceremonies of the cross that bind the vampire in his grave. Yet even vampires so bound and prisoned can on one night of the year, the night of St. George, still rise and work until dawn.

"Almost two hundred and fifty years ago there was in this section of Transylvania a village located not far from Kranzak. And this village near Kranzak came to be haunted by vampires as no village had ever been before. The forces of evil worked there until in the graves of that village lay some hundreds of vampires who came forth each night!

"It was, then, a vampire village! The living people left in it fled to Kranzak and other places, but the vampires remained. Each day that village lay deserted and untenanted beneath the sun. But each night the vampires rose to move through and inhabit the village as though alive, venturing often to attack people in nearby villages.

"So at last the people of the surrounding section came with many priests to put an end to this vampire village. Over each grave the priests carried out their binding rites, prisoning each vampire thus. From then on, though no living people ever again inhabited it, the vampires came forth no more by night save on that one night each year, the night of St. George, when all vampires are freed. On that night the vampire village again swarms until dawn with its undead inhabitants."

"And since the night of St. George is tonight," Croft smiled, "they feared back in Kranzak that we two were from the vampire village?"

"That is so," said Hallos, also smiling, "for despite the

centuries that have passed, they of Kranzak and the other villages still fear this night of the year when the vampire village wakes to life again."

"But you here in Wieslant tonight don't seem to have much fear of the village of vampires?" I said. They all laughed at that.

"It is because St. George is our patron, and so on his festal night we have his protection," Hallos explained, "and can give ourselves up to merrymaking without fear."

Croft shook his head. "Strange, the power of some of these beliefs," he said. "Yet they fit with your ancient houses and costumes, somehow."

The elder Hallos girl laughed. "These costumes we wear on this festal night, all of us, but they must seem very odd to you," she told Croft.

"They seem beautiful," he told her. "Yet they make me feel as though Barton and I had in some way strayed into the past."

"Our dances are ancient ones too on this night," she said. "Will you not come with my sister and me to watch them?"

Her invitation so pointedly excluded me that Croft shot a grinning glance at me as he accepted. "Coming along, Barton?" he asked as we all rose.

I shook my head. "I'm going upstairs and get some much-needed sleep," I told him. "It's almost morning, you know."

Our company passed back into the tavern room, Croft between the two sisters and I with Hallos at my side. It was evident to me that Croft had made an impression on the two gaily clad beauties, for their eyes and

little white teeth gleamed alike as they laughed up to him, their hands tightening on his arms in a caressing and almost possessive manner.

"I'll be up shortly, Barton," Croft told me as they turned to the door. "I could stand some sleep myself, all right."

"Sleep—there is enough of sleep in the world!" exclaimed the younger sister. "Tonight is a festal night and not for sleep but for life—for life!"

She spoke with astounding vehemence and with eyes really fiery, rather startling Croft, and myself also. Hallos, his own eyes crimson, shot her a furious look, and at that she dropped her lashes demurely.

As Croft went out with them I gave him a meaningful glance telling him not to make a fool of himself over the two Transylvanian beauties. Most of the company followed them and I bade them a general good-night. To Hallos and Kallant, who remained, I added my thanks before starting up the stair.

As I went up the dark stairway I thought I heard a quick step below and turned, but there was no one beneath. I heard Hallos's voice hissing to someone, evidently Kallant—"Not yet, you fool, he has it still with him!"

Kallant's muttered answer was inaudible, but their dispute was apparently no affair of mine and I went on up to our room. In the dim candlelight the musty bed was unattractive, but I sat down, yawning, glancing out the dusty window. The fires on the green still glowed red, but the music had stopped and the dark shapes of the villagers seemed clustered round some object of interest.

I LOOSENED my collar, tossing onto the table with a smile the wooden cross whose significance of piety had given the villagers such a distaste for me. I was tossing our fat little blue guidebook after it when it occurred to me to look up Wieslant's exact location in it.

Croft had said that Wieslant was not on the map and I found it to be so, there being no village at all marked there between that of Kranzak and the distant one of Holf. Somewhat puzzled, I turned to the book's text but found no description of Wieslant there either, and was giving up with disgust at the inefficiency of guidebook makers when the name "Wieslant" in a footnote caught my eye.

As I started to read this I was aware subconsciously of two things: of a rush and commotion among the dark crowd out on the village green, and of the rustling sound of someone moving in the hall outside my door. But had thunder detonated about me it could not have aroused in me the unutterable horror that was rising in me as I read the fine type of the footnote.

The words seemed dancing before my eyes—

"Wieslant . . . approximately midway between Kranzak and Holf . . . deserted entirely in 1683 through fear of vampires . . . still called in that section the vampire village . . . now almost wholly in—"

And even as the terrific truth smashed home to my reeling brain there thrust to my ears from the green outside an agonized scream in Croft's voice.

I leapt across the room and flung the door open. Hallos and Kallant stood outside it with eyes gleaming hell-crimson at me out of the faces of fiends. The two

shot as one through the air toward me and as they bore me backward I felt their sharp fangs at my throat, felt in my face their breath like airs of cold corruption from the grave.

But as I reeled backward with those two hell-vampires upon me, my outflung hand touched the table, and something on the table that my fingers closed on instinctively and that I thrust against them. It was the little cross, and as it touched them it hurled them back across the room and against the wall as though titanic forces had smitten them.

With eyes red flames of hell, Hallos and Kallant glared from there at me as I swayed to the door, Croft's scream stabbing again and weaker to my ears. I was flinging myself down the dark stairway with the two black, fire-eyed shapes of Hallos and Kallant after me, the cross still clutched in my grasp. I was reeling out onto the green to hear again Croft's muffled cry.

Croft was down and the madly whirling, scarlet-eyed vampire throng was upon him, white teeth sucking his throat. Half of them were rushing toward me, black fiend-shapes against the fires that were dimming as a faint promise of light showed eastward, black vampire-shapes that were about me and separating me from Croft.

They recoiled and parted as I stumbled forward, extending the cross. They raged about me like mad shadow-shapes of hell, their baffled shrieks in my ears. I was at Croft's side, and those upon him recoiled as I dropped beside him with the cross. He seemed senseless, and I felt my own senses going and the cross dropping from my weakened fingers as around us raged the

ghastly vampire horde.

They were closing upon us as the cross slipped from my nerveless hand—the fiend-faces of Hallos and his daughters and all the others spun closer in a mad vista of red eyes and avid lips and sharp white teeth—and then from the paling east struck a gray shaft of dawn. Instantly it was as though gray mist enveloped the vampire throng and all the village about us, a mist that darkened in my mind as I lost consciousness.

THE dawnlight eastward had changed from gray to gold when I came back to consciousness. Croft was stirring weakly, and as he sat up I saw and picked from the ground beside me, automatically, a little wooden cross. We staggered to our feet and gazed dazedly about us.

Ancient, weed-grown ruins stretched in the golden light around us. There were broken masonry outlines of building foundations, and in one place an enclosure of half-visible, time-worn tombstones, but there was no standing house or structure, or any sign of life. Croft and I stared, wordlessly, wildly, all the world silent about us in the light of the morning sun.

Snake-Man

Weird Tales
January 1933



I MET Hemmerick upon his first coming to Corala. Peter Winton and I were chatting that morning on the station platform, Peter bemoaning the general cussedness of the garage business and I wondering aloud why on earth I had ever thought this inland Florida village a good place for a young attorney to settle. The spur train that runs into Corala from the main line pulled in as we were talking, and Hemmerick was the only passenger to alight from it.

My first casual impression of him as he approached us, suitcases in his hands, was of a keen-looking middle-aged man with bright black eyes and a friendly face. He asked where he would find the village hotel and after a few more words introduced himself—Doctor John Hemmerick of Yates University and Eastern Zoological Museum. We took his cards and shook hands with him.

“This is Frank Rawlins, Corala’s rising young lawyer,”

Peter told him, "and I'm the local representative of the automobile industry, known as Winton, Pete."

Hemmerick laughed. "I hope we'll be friends," he said, "for I'll be staying in this district for some time. I've come to make some studies of this region's snake-life, in the Corala swamp."

"You've come to a good place then," Peter said, "for if there's one thing that swamp has, it's snakes. You're going to stay here in the village? The swamp's about five miles west of here, you know."

"My idea was to locate somewhere at the swamp's edge if possible," Hemmerick answered. "It'd be much more convenient—most of my work in the swamp will have to be at night."

"You could stay in the old Drowl place at the north end of the swamp," I suggested. "That is, if you wouldn't mind roughing it."

"Yes, the Drowl house would be convenient," Peter agreed. "It's been abandoned for years and is in pretty bad shape, but it's right at the swamp's edge."

"That would suit me fine, then, for I'm used to discomfort on these trips," Hemmerick said. "How would I get out there?"

"There's a road runs almost to the place," Peter said. "But look here—why not let Rawlins and me drive you out this afternoon?"

"I couldn't think of bothering you," Hemmerick began, but we cut him short. "No bother at all," I told him. "We'll be around for you at two."

Hemmerick thanked us and promised to be ready, then found a negro boy to carry his luggage to the hotel and thus left us. That afternoon we called for him in

Peter's roadster and drove out of Corala along the soft dirt road that leads in a wavering westward direction toward the swamp.

The country between the village and the swamp is only thinly inhabited, mostly by small farmers, white and black. There are marshy spots here and there and these become more frequent as one approaches the big swamp.

Hemmerick was not surprized when we told him that snakes, especially the big diamond-back rattlers, were the dread of the region. He had apparently pursued his studies and quest for specimens over much of the world, for he told anecdotes of snakes he had encountered in South America and Africa and Asia, hooded cobras and deadly mambas, coral snakes and fer-de-lances, giant pythons and boas and anacondas. Our conversation had certainly a snaky flavor as we drove toward the swamp.

THE road grew rapidly more marshy and soon we stopped the car and got out to go the rest of the way on foot. The dense green wall of the swamp stretched not far ahead, a tangled mass of scrub pine and palmetto and saw-grass, rising out of soft marsh and stagnant green pools and waterways. We were near the north end of the swamp, which is roughly oval in shape and almost twelve miles in length.

Hemmerick's eyes lit as he looked along it. "There'll be snakes here all right," he said. "It looks like a snake paradise."

"I can't imagine any paradise with rattlers and moccasins in it," Peter said. "But this path leads to the Drowl place."

In single file, with Peter leading, we followed the overgrown and half-visible trail leading along the swamp's edge. The rank breath of the marsh was sickening in my nostrils, a heavy musky odor of decay. Hemmerick seemed to breathe it in with zest.

In minutes we came to the rotting frame house known as the Drowl place. It stood at the very edge, a clear space of slimy green mud sloping down from it into the swamp.

I could think of no place where I would less like to live, the more so after we entered the damp and decaying front room of the house in time to see a good-sized snake writhe down into a hole in the rotted floor. But that only seemed to make Hemmerick the more enthusiastic about the place.

"It'll be the most convenient place imaginable for me while I'm working in the swamp," he said. "I can bring out enough stuff from the village to make it livable for the time being."

"Strange are the ways of scientists," said Peter. "I wouldn't live in this cheerful spot for enough specimens to fill ten museums."

"Nor would I," I agreed. "I don't fancy sleeping where snakes crawl in with you to keep warm."

Hemmerick laughed. "Every one to his liking," he said. "Besides, what sleeping I do here will be mostly in daytime—most of my snake-catching I do at night, with a bright light to dazzle them."

We drove Hemmerick back into Corala and the next day he arranged to have some simple furnishings and supplies taken out to the Drowl house. Hemmerick followed to take up residence in the place on the day after

that, thanking us for our trouble and promising to look in on us whenever he came into the village.

He did come in a few days later and when I met him he was enthusiastic about the swamp—already, he said, he had found some magnificent specimens and one or two odd variations of usual snake-species. The swamp's denseness made search in it somewhat difficult by night, but he was more than satisfied, he said.

In the ordinary course of events I would not have seen Hemmerick for some time, probably, after that, but an unusual event led Peter and me to make him a visit two days later. A negro named John Williams who had a small farm bordering on the swamp had come in to Corala with a snake story that had interested all listeners.

Williams was in a state of some excitement. His story was that a commotion among his small flock of goats down in his swamp-side corral had led him to investigate, before midnight on the preceding night. He had gone down to the corral and had seen in the moonlight the dark form of an incredibly large snake that had seized one of his young goats in its jaws and was gliding with it into the dark swamp.

He had, Williams said, watched the monster snake go in a sort of stupefaction, and only when it had vanished in the swamp did he think of his own peril and retreat hastily into the house. But with morning Williams had found the great snake's track in the soft mud to assure him what he had seen was no hallucination.

Williams' story led a number of men to go out from Corala that morning, Peter Winton among them, and they returned with assurance that there was certainly a snake-track of incredible size where Williams had said.

"Why, the snake that made that track must have been nearly a foot thick and heaven knows how long," Peter told me when we met that day at noon.

"Sounds impossible," I said. "No one ever heard of snakes that size around here, though one might have escaped from a circus or zoo."

"Wherever it came from originally, it came out of the swamp last night and went back in," he replied. "I'd hate to meet any snake that can take a goat like that."

A thought struck me. "Why not go out and tell Doctor Hemmerick about it? He could probably tell from its track what it was, and anyway would be interested in it."

PETER accepted my suggestion and that afternoon we drove back out the swamp road to see Hemmerick. We left the car in the same place as before and went on along the swamp's edge to the old, decaying house.

We had to knock for some time before Hemmerick, yawning, came to the door. He explained he'd been busy in the swamp each night but wouldn't hear our apologies for waking him, and invited us inside.

The front room of the old house now held besides a few simple articles of furniture, a dozen wire cages in which were twenty or more living snakes of various kinds and sizes. I recognized some unusually large diamond-back rattlers, two fat brown water-moccasins, some harmless water-snakes and some green and white reptiles I couldn't identify. The room had a bitter, slimy odor of snake I found repellent.

Hemmerick looked around the cages with some pride. "These are some specimens I've been able to get al-

ready," he told us. "Got a good many of them near the house here, too, by night."

"It'd give me the creeps to have them in the same house with me," Peter said. "But Rawlins and I came out to tell you about a snake that tops all these."

Hemmerick heard our news with swift-mounting interest. "Why, I'm grateful to you for coming!" he exclaimed. "Of course I'll go over to look at the track—though I can't imagine what kind of snake native to these parts it could be."

"We could take you over," I suggested. "I want to see the thing's track myself—Peter was there this morning."

HEMMERICK locked his sagging door and came with us to the car. We drove along another wretchedly soft road parallel to the swamp's edge, toward its southern end.

We reached John Williams' little farm, an unpainted frame house surrounded by a score of cultivated acres that at their western border met the swamp's edge. Williams' wife told us her husband was down at the scene of the snake's appearance, and we three picked our way along the edge of a cornfield to the spot when we could glimpse Williams and two other negroes standing.

Williams was in earnest conversation with the other two, and I recognized one of them as Uncle Wally, a negro of some age who had a reputation among the blacks around Corala as a conjure man. He was pointing to the ground and saying something solemnly to Williams and the other.

They broke off their talk as they saw us approaching, and at Peter's request Williams showed us the track the

snake had left. It was in the soft mud between Williams' little goat-coral and the swamp, leading up to the coral and then returning to the swamp. It was a groove in the mud some inches deep and a full foot across.

Hemmerick dropped to his knees and examined the track keenly. He looked up to us in a moment. "It's a snake track all right," he told us, "but who ever heard of a snake this size in this part of the world?"

"Sure is awful big," Williams said, shaking his head. "Grabbed that goat and went off with it right before my eyes—couldn't hardly believe what I was seein'."

"Did it have any markings you could see?" Hemmerick asked him. "What did it look like?"

"Jus' looked like big dark snake, all I got to see of it," Williams answered. "It's eyes were red, though—eyes shone jus' like red fire."

Hemmerick looked back at the track. "Rawlins said maybe the snake's one escaped from a circus or zoo," Peter told him, but Hemmerick shook his head.

"Circuses don't carry big snakes, and there's no zoo within several hundred miles of here. Yet how in the name of all zoological science did a snake that size get into this swamp?"

Williams spoke hesitatingly. "Uncle Wally say it wasn't a real snake at all," he said. "He say it was a snake-man."

"A snake-man?" Peter repeated. "What in the world's that?"

"Hit's a snake dat's a man in daytime," Uncle Wally told him solemnly. "Night-time comes, man uses devil-spell and turns into big snake. He crawl around all night as big snake, grab whatevah he sees, but daytime comes

'gain, spell change him back into man."

Hemmerick stood up. "I've heard that superstition before," he said interestedly. "When I was after mambas in Southern Africa I lived with tribes that believed utterly in snake-men. Their medicine-men told me lots about men who were men by day but whose compact with the forces of evil allowed them to take on snake form at night, and the spells by which it was done. I suppose the superstition here is a racial survival of that African one."

"Ain't no supahstition," Uncle Wally asserted. "Hit's a snake-man made dis track all right—some one round heah livin' a man in daytime, an' a big snake in dis swamp at night."

"For all we know it might be you, Uncle Wally," said Peter, grinning. "You're the only conjure man around here, and thus the only possible snake-man."

Hemmerick laughed and Uncle Wally looked strangely at him. "Mabbe you won't laugh at snake-man 'fore long," he told the scientist. "Mabbe you'll find out dat snake-man don't like man who captures snakes, an' dat snake-man'll come find dat man when he's snake at night."

"Well, snake-man or snake, I'd like to see the thing that made this track," Hemmerick said. "Maybe I'll meet it in the swamp some night—I hope so, at least."

We left the three negroes by the snake-track and went back to our car. As we drove Hemmerick back along the swamp road he was full of speculations about the snake's origin, and Peter and I were as puzzled and interested as he.

WE HEARD nothing more of the great snake, though, until three days later, when we learned

that it had appeared again by night. This time it was one of the white farmers near the swamp's end, one Hannon, who had glimpsed the great creature.

Hannon's experience had been much like that of Williams. A squawking tumult in his chickenyard had roused him by night and he had stepped out just in time to see a monstrous black serpent-shape glide off to the swamp. Hannon had run back into the house for his gun, but when he got back out with it the snake was gone and five of his hens with it. Hannon swore, like Williams, that the snake's eyes had been fiery red in the glimpse he had had of it.

After Hannon's story none of us could doubt that a snake of extraordinary size haunted the swamp. There were many speculations as to how it had got there, and Hemmerick's statement that judging from its track the snake was of a kind unknown to him increased discussion. But the negroes in and around Corala were unanimous in believing it a snake-man.

"Uncle Wally has the blacks so convinced there's a snake-man loose that it wouldn't take much to make them desert the county," Peter told me, chuckling.

"The old rascal's simply working up their superstitions for his own profit," I commented. "No doubt he's selling them charms against snake-men."

"They're looking up to Uncle Wally now, that's sure," Peter said. "They act in as much awe of him as if he were the snake-man himself."

"They'll get over it in a day or so. These superstitious scares of theirs don't usually last long."

I proved a poor prophet, for on the next day came news that not only intensified the terror of the negroes to

an infinitely greater degree, but alarmed the section's white inhabitants also.

The great snake had appeared again at the farm of a negro named Cralley or Crallie, whose land was not far along the swamp's edge from that of Williams. The snake had come this time not long after nightfall, Cralley himself being in Corala with a load of produce but his wife and little boy at home.

Cralley had arrived home about ten to find the door barred and to hear his wife scream hysterically when he tried to open it. He had to smash down the door to get in and found her, with the child, in a state of terror approaching insanity. It had taken him most of the night to quiet her and find out what had happened.

The woman, with the little boy, had gone into a small pasture between the house and swamp not long after nightfall, to bring in a two-weeks-old calf that had been tied there. They had untied it and were returning, the boy proudly leading the little calf, when the woman had heard a strange rustling and turning around had seen the great snake writhing toward them from the swamp, its huge dark body moving with incredible speed and its terrible head slightly raised as it advanced.

Screaming, she had grasped the child and run with it to the house. The snake had pursued and she had slammed the door almost in its jaws, piling table and chairs against it. It had remained outside the house for a little time, gliding around as though seeking entrance, and she heard its rustling crawl.

Then the sound ceased as though the snake were gliding away, and a minute later came a soft, strangled cry from the calf. She had not dared look out, but there had

been no more sound of the snake's presence. Yet she had been still too numbed with terror to admit Cralley when he arrived. Cralley had found the calf gone and the snake's track leading into the swamp.

WHEN Cralley came into Corala with this story, it aroused instant response. What had been before but a matter of interest was now one of alarm. The huge snake must be hunted down before some child fell prey to it. Ross Sanders, Corala's deputy sheriff, organized a party to penetrate the swamp in search of it.

As the only hope of finding the snake in the big swamp would be by following its track, Peter Winton suggested that in such trailing the help of the experienced Hemmerick would be invaluable. Sanders agreed, and Peter and I drove out to Hemmerick's place that afternoon, as the hunting-party was to start in the swamp on the next morning.

We found Hemmerick's rotting house silent, and while Peter knocked to rouse the scientist from his usual daytime slumber, I noticed in the stretch of mud between the house and the swamp some tracks like those the great snake had left at Williams' place.

I was calling Peter's attention to them when Hemmerick came to the door. "You've noticed those tracks already?" he said. "I'm certain they're of the same big snake that was at Williams' place. I wish I'd been here when they were made—three days ago I came in from the swamp at dawn to find the tracks had been made there in the night. And the next morning when I came back there were more tracks—the big snake had been here again in the night!"

"Why in the devil should it come here?" Peter said. "There's nothing here for it to get—nothing but you, Hemmerick."

"Maybe Hemmerick's what it was after," I said, smiling. "Uncle Wally would say that the snake-man's coming here after Hemmerick in revenge for his capturing so many of the swamp's snakes."

"But if it came twice, whatever its reason, it might come again," Peter said. "Why not lie in wait here for it with guns?"

Hemmerick shook his head. "That I wouldn't allow," he said. "If that snake—any snake—were killed here, all snakes would avoid the place by their strange snake-instinct, which would make my work here hard."

"I suppose you're right," Peter said, "but we've got to get the creature some way. You haven't heard of its latest appearance."

Hemmerick was serious when he had heard of the great snake's dreadful appearance at Cralley's farm. "Why, that's terrible!" he exclaimed. "I'm glad you're going to hunt the thing down—I'll be glad to help, for I'm keen to find out what kind of snake it really is."

"Well, I'll be satisfied just to see the thing killed," I told him. "We're meeting at seven in the morning at Cralley's place—come in your swamp-clothes, of course."

The next morning saw some fifteen or sixteen of us assembled at Cralley's farm, Sanders heading our group. We were all in hip-boots and rough clothing and almost all of us had shotguns. Hemmerick appeared shortly after Peter and I arrived, and we all tramped down to the swamp's edge where the great snake's groove-trail was

still clearly visible in the soft slime. Cralley was with us, and so was Williams.

We plunged into the swamp, and found the snake's track plain enough for a time in the mud and slime. But as we went on into the depths of the swamp, pools of green water lay more frequent in our path and the trail was much harder to follow. Hemmerick found it several times when none of the rest of us could do so.

HEMMERICK led the way, following the snake's trail in toward the center of the swamp. Though the sun blazed in the heavens, the light in the swamp was dim and pale, so dense the choked tangled vegetation. Hemmerick proved experienced enough in swamp-work, and more that once he pointed out quicksands we had not recognized as such.

By the afternoon we were well in toward the swamp's center. Peter and I were already well winded, but the trail was becoming ever harder to follow. Hemmerick scrutinized every inch of solid ground in search of it. Now and then we encountered snakes of various kinds, rattlesnakes and moccasins among them, some of unusually large size. But the great snake none had glimpsed.

At last even Hemmerick could follow the trail no farther. We stoppped, knee-deep in green water, a sweating, baffled group.

"Well, can't go no farther on this track," Sanders said. "One'd think the snake was taking care to hide its trail."

"Sure is the hardest I've ever followed," said Hemmerick. "The thing must have moved in the shallow water most of the time."

"We'll go back out to the Williams place and try following it in from there," Sanders decided. "It's an older trail there, but there's nothing to be gained hunting longer here."

We toiled out of the swamp and along its edge to Williams' farm, and started on the great snake's track there anew. This trail proved as hard to follow as the other, with the added handicap that in the several days that had elapsed since it had been made, rain had partly erased it.

Hemmerick again was the only one who could keep to the almost invisible trail. We plunged on after him, the rest of us having some difficulty at times in keeping up with the swamp-toughened scientist. We were heading in toward the center again, apparently, the light around us growing dimmer as the afternoon waned. At last, when the sun was setting and the swamp already darker, Hemmerick announced again that he could follow the trail no farther.

"It's too much for me," he said. "I've trailed far smaller snakes than this one through worse swamps, but they weren't so uncannily good in hiding their trail."

"Well, we've done what we can," Sanders said. "I guess we'll just have to give it up, and trust to the chance that some one will get the snake some time when it emerges from the swamp."

We tramped back out of the swamp for a second time, to Williams' place. Night had fallen by then and we found a knot of negroes in Williams' yard who seemed waiting for news of our hunt. Among these was Uncle Wally. When they heard of our failure Uncle Wally shook his head.

"Can't track down snake-man—snake-man know nuff

to hide his trail, all right," he said. "Nobody round heah smart nuff to catch snake-man."

"I'm inclined to think he's right," Hemmerick told us. "It was the toughest trail I ever followed, and the worst of it is I've got more swamp-work to do tonight."

"Be careful in there," Sanders told him seriously. "I'd hate to be in that swamp alone, with that creature somewhere in it."

"That doesn't worry me," Hemmerick said, as he turned away, our party splitting up by then. "I've met snakes as big or bigger than this one by night and had no trouble with them."

As he swung off into the darkness, Peter shook his head. "Well, cursed if I'd hurry home simply to get into the swamp again. I had enough swamp today to last me for a long time."

"Swamp's a bad place when dere's snake-man round," Uncle Wally said. "Dat man think he know all 'bout snakes, but when snake-man meet him some night he know different."

Uncle Wally moved off into the darkness too, and we saw that most of our party had already gone, the negroes dispersing. Sanders and Peter and I bade Williams good-night and started toward the road leading back to Corala.

"Sure hate going back without a chance at that snake," Sanders said when we reached the road. "I won't feel easy, knowing it's still here in the swamp."

"There's a chance we might find it at Hemmerick's place," Peter told him. "It came there twice in the night and might come again." He told Sanders about the tracks we had seen at the Drowl house.

"But Hemmerick said he'd not allow any one to lay for it or try to kill it at his place, Peter," I reminded him. Peter shook his head impatiently.

"What if he did?—he'll be gone into the swamp by the time we get there and it's the best thing to get that creature killed even if it does hamper Hemmerick's work by making snakes avoid the place."

Sanders thought, and then nodded. "It's worth trying," he said. "Hemmerick won't be there, and we can go before he comes back if the snake doesn't show up."

So instead of heading toward Corala we went along the swamp-road toward the north end. The moon had not yet risen and the swamp's dark wall was hardly distinguishable in the darkness beside us. Its rank odors seemed heavier at night than by day.

WE CAME finally toward the old Drowl house. As we had expected, there was no spark of light from it, Hemmerick having already entered the swamp on his usual nightly quest for specimens. The place was very silent, its odor of rotting wood mingling with the swamp's breath.

"All well," Sanders said. "Door's not locked, either—we can go right in."

"Be careful where you step," Peter warned him as he opened the door. "Hemmerick has some dozen cages of snakes in here."

We stepped up into the dark front room. The snaky odor was strong in the darkness and we heard from all about us a hissing and rustling that was blood-chilling.

Sanders struck a match and the flame showed us the room as Peter and I had seen it before, with

Hemmerick's collection of snakes all about us in their wire cages. Their unwinking eyes stared beadily at us in the light, some of them coiled and watching us with up-raised heads.

"Nice place," grunted Sanders. "Move those cages away from the window at the swamp side. Peter—we can open it and watch the edge of the swamp from there."

While he lit matches, Peter and I shifted the cages with our gun-barrels to make a clear space by the window. We opened the window and drew up three of Hemmerick's camp-chairs to it.

In the darkness again as Sanders' matches went out, we could sit in the chairs and with gun-barrels resting on the edge of the open window could look down on the slope of slimy mud that lay beneath, between the house and the dark swamp. The moon was rising now, showing this muddy space clearly.

"This'll do," Sanders said. "If the snake comes out of the swamp again for whatever brought it before, we'll see and can let it have it."

"We'd better do it or leave before Hemmerick gets back," I warned, "for he'll be pretty angry to find us here."

"Hemmerick will probably be in the swamp until morning," Peter answered. "It's not midnight yet."

After that we were silent, waiting.

It was a strange wait, there in the darkness of the rotting house, watching the dark swamp and the stretch of moonlit mud that lay between house and swamp. The only sounds, save when Sanders or Peter shifted restlessly, were the occasional rustling of the snakes in the

cages about us. It was a spine-thrilling sound to us, sitting in darkness.

Time passed silently, slowly, as we waited, the moon swinging higher. I felt my confidence in Peter's plan on the wane. Why should the great snake approach Hemmerick's house again? Why had it come before, even? Uncle Wally had said it was the snake-man coming to revenge on Hemmerick the swamp's snakes he had captured, an explanation I smiled to remember. Yet I was puzzled as to what attraction drew the great snake to Hemmerick's house.

I pictured Hemmerick out in the dark swamp, searching for his specimens with patient obliviousness to discomfort and danger. There was no movement in the swamp that I could see or hear, nor on the slimy shore beneath. Hours had passed. The moon had swung into the western quarter of the sky.

Peter spoke, his voice low. "If our snake doesn't show up before long we'll have no chance at him," he said. "Hemmerick will be back soon—it's near morning."

"We'll wait a while longer," Sanders answered, "though I don't want Hemmerick to find us here when he gets back."

We were silent again, watching, waiting. The occasional rustle of the reptiles in the cages was still the only sound. Time passed, and an almost imperceptible dulling of the moonlight showed that night would soon be over.

We still stared out. There moved nothing in the dark swamp—but suddenly now there did move something! It was a dark shadow of something, advancing out of the swamp in soundless, gliding movement.

I KNEW as Sanders and Peter straightened beside me that they too had seen. Our fingers were on our triggers as we raised our guns. And out of the swamp onto the moonlit mud between it and the house there writhed a huge dark snake-shape, gliding up toward the house with great snake-body and hideous head and red eyes clear in the moonlight. The next instant we pressed on our triggers.

The shattering roar of our guns split the night and we saw the great dark snake-body below coiling and flexing wildly, convulsively, then contracting and lying still. I cried out excitedly, and we leapt out through the window and down to that dark mass.

We bent over it and then there came a choking cry from Sanders, another from Peter. It was no snake-body that lay huddled there now but the body of a man, his rough dark clothing torn by our shots! He lay with body contracted terribly, and his face that showed pale and set in the moonlight was the face of Doctor John Hemmerick!

"Hemmerick! Hemmerick! God, and a moment ago he was the great snake!" cried Peter. "A snake-man—and we didn't believe!"

My brain seemed cracking. "Hemmerick the snake-man—the great snake! He told us he learned about snake-men in Africa, remember! He told us he'd learned the spells of the snake-men—and it was he in the swamp at night—" My voice choked into a whisper.

"Listen to me, you two!" Sanders, swaying himself, had gripped our arms. "Hemmerick was no snake-man—there's no such thing as a snake-man—we killed Hemmerick by accident, do you understand? By acci-

dent!"

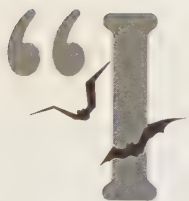
His voice broke. "My God, they'd hold us all insane if we told. Hemmerick was shot by accident, do you hear?"

"We understand—Hemmerick was shot accidentally, and there's no such thing as a snake-man," Peter managed to answer. "But when Hemmerick died the great snake died, and only we three will ever know that they died—together."

The Vampire Master

Weird Tales

October 1933 — January 1934



TELL you I must see Doctor Dale at once! I don't care what his rules about appointments are—what I have to see him about is vital!”

“But he never sees any one except by appointment,” I told our caller, whose card read “Dr. William Henderson, Maysville, New York.”

“I'm Doctor Dale's secretary, Harley Owen,” I added. “Couldn't you tell me your business with him?”

Doctor Henderson shook his head impatiently. “I came here to see Doctor John Dale himself and not any secretary,” he said. “And I'm going to see him!”

Before I could stop him he had pushed past me and was entering Doctor Dale's inner office. Doctor Dale was at his black desk, bent over a mass of open books. He looked up in surprise as Doctor Henderson made his hasty entrance, with me close at his heels.

"Doctor Dale, I apologize for forcing myself in on you like this," said Doctor Henderson, "but it's vitally necessary for me to consult you."

Dale looked questioningly at me. "It's a Doctor Henderson from Maysville," I told him. "He wouldn't state his business."

"But I assure you that my business with you is urgent," Doctor Henderson said, "utterly urgent, in fact."

Doctor Dale looked keenly at him, then closed the books on his desk. "Very well, Doctor Henderson," he said quietly. "Owen, will you place a chair for our caller?"

When Doctor Henderson was seated Dale nodded to me and I took pad and pencil and seated myself in the corner. Henderson looked sharply at me.

"The matter on which I wish to see you is a confidential one," he told Dale pointedly.

"It will remain so," answered Doctor Dale calmly. "Owen is not only my secretary but also my chief assistant."

Henderson seemed rather unsatisfied but said nothing further on the subject. He glanced around the office, at the huge window in its southern wall looking out across the clustered skyscrapers of lower New York, at the locked mahogany wall-cabinets that lined the western wall, and at the crowded book-shelves on the eastern side, with their multitude of volumes in calf, vellum, cloth, boards, and paper, books of every age and in every language, and all of them works on witchcraft, sorcery, diabolism, demonology and a hundred other phases of the supernatural.

As Henderson turned his gaze back to Doctor Dale, I

could not help mentally contrasting the two. Doctor Henderson was a perfect type of the elderly provincial physician who rather looks down on the business-like manner of medical men today. His thin, tall figure was clothed in a loosely-hanging black suit and he wore a stiff, old-fashioned wing-collar and nose-glasses secured by a narrow black ribbon to his lapel. His thin, graying hair was brushed stiffly back, his spare, clean-shaven face and blue eyes were austere, and the impression he gave was one of primness and preciseness troubled now by worry.

Doctor Dale was a complete contrast, even to his tweed suit and soft silk shirt the antithesis of Henderson's formal attire. Doctor John Dale is an attractive and to some people a handsome man. Though he is a few years over forty, his trim, compact figure is as muscular as a youth's, and his brown hair and short brown vandyke beard are unmixed with gray. His features are strong but rather ordinary, except for his extraordinary hazel eyes, which can at some times be cold and bleak as brown ice but at others can seem hot as brown flame.

Doctor Dale seems to see everything at a glance with those quick hazel eyes. He seems also in some queer way to be able to hear not only the thing you are saying but the thing you are going to say. This is no doubt due to the quickness with which his mind works, for few men can think and act more quickly.

DOCTOR DALE," began Henderson, "I've come to you for consultation and help on an extraordinary matter. I come to you because a former colleague of

mine once told me that among medical men of New York, Doctor John Dale had a reputation as a specialist of a unique kind."

"Just what kind of a specialist did this former colleague of yours tell you that I was?" asked Dale.

"He said," Doctor Henderson answered slowly, "that you were a specialist in evil; in other words, a specialist in cases where tangible forces of evil were encountered against which medical science was powerless, and to fight which occult science had to be used."

"That is the nature of my work," Doctor Dale acknowledged. "I take it, then, that you've come to consult me on some matter that has need of occult as well as medical science?"

"I have, yes," said Henderson still more slowly. "Doctor Dale, in your work against the forces of evil have you ever met with the phenomenon called vampirism?"

Dale's eyes flickered with quick interest but he showed no other sign of surprise at the question. "Vampirism? Yes, I have come in contact with it, though that was a number of years ago."

"But you know then that vampirism is a reality?" Doctor Henderson pressed anxiously. "You don't doubt that it exists?"

"Of course not," Doctor Dale replied promptly. "Vampirism is only too dreadfully real, as real as diabolism and voodooism and lycanthropy are real, as real as the benign forces that help humanity and the malign forces that prey on humanity are real. Vampirism is simply one of the ways used by those malign forces to prey upon mankind."

"But just what is vampirism—or a vampire—really?"

Doctor Henderson asked tensely. "I am asking you, Doctor Dale, because I wish to make sure we are not dealing in misunderstandings when I put before you the matter that brought me here."

Doctor Dale leaned back, stroking his short beard thoughtfully. "A vampire," he said finally, "is simply a dead person who can move and act as though alive. He can do this because through the malign forces of evil his dead body has been reanimated with life, not with real life but with a pseudo-life. Therefore, though the vampire is a dead person he is not of the truly dead and his body can exist indefinitely without dissolution while that pseudo-life imbues it.

"Because the vampire gets his pseudo-life through the malign forces of evil, he is himself essentially and unchangeably evil. He can think and act as in life, has immensely greater bodily strength than even he had in life, but his thoughts and actions are all evil. And like almost all things and forces of evil, the vampire is strongest by night and weakest by day. So weak is his pseudo-life during the day that from sunrise until sunset the vampire must lie stiff and unmoving as though really dead, in his coffin.

"But with night's coming the vampire's pseudo-life is strong and he can go forth during the night on his hideous quest. The vampire must have, to sustain the pseudo-life that activates his dead body, the blood of people still living. So by night he visits the living, usually at first those closest to him in life, and with his teeth punctures their throats and sucks their blood. And the vampire visits his victim again and again until that victim dies.

"Once dead, the victim becomes himself a vampire and his dead body is animated by the same evil pseudo-life! That is so because the taking of the victim's life-blood into the vampire's veins has formed a tie of evil between them that makes the victim also a vampire when he dies, unless he that vampirized him has been destroyed before then. The former victim, now a vampire himself, will go forth to find his own victims, who will in turn become vampires when they die. So widens outward the hideous circle of the vampire evil if it is not stamped out."

"But there are ways of stamping it out, surely?" exclaimed Doctor Henderson. "There are ways—if not in ordinary science, in occult science—of combating this vampire evil?"

"There are ways," Doctor Dale admitted, "by which the malign forces behind the vampire can be overcome by benign ones, but they are not easy ways to use. To destroy the vampire for good the pseudo-life of its dead body must be ended, and there is but one way to do that. That way is to find the body by day while it lies stiff and helpless, to drive a wooden stake through its heart and to cut off its head. That done, its pseudo-life departs and it becomes one of the true dead, a dead body and nothing more.

"That is the only way in which a vampire can be destroyed, though there are ways by which vampires can be kept from their victims. The cross, for instance, paralyzes and repels the vampire as it does every other thing of evil, since the cross is no mere token of a religious sect but is an age-old symbol that has been used by the peoples of the earth in all times to combat evil forces. It

is a symbol through which the benign forces of the universe can convey themselves to oppress the malign ones, and it is powerful for that reason.

"Branches of garlic are utterly repellent to the pseudo-living vampire, and so too are branches of the wild-rose. In some parts of the world, sprays of mayflower or of rowan are used instead of these. In still others, red peas and iron are held to form a barrier that the vampire can not pass. But there are many methods that have been used to repel the dreaded vampire in various sections of the earth and some of them are of no real value, just as there are many ideas concerning vampires and their powers which have no real truth in them. The final truth is that the vampire is a dead body reanimated by evil pseudo-life, and that the only conclusive weapon against it is the use of the stake and steel upon it which alone can make it truly dead."

Doctor Henderson had listened intently. "And you say then that vampirism is one of the rarest of the evils that prey upon humanity?" he asked.

Dale nodded. "Yes, and that is well, since it is perhaps the most terrible of all and the hardest of all to fight. As I told you, it has been long since I have had contact with any case of real vampirism."

Henderson's hands trembled slightly as he asked, "What would you say, then, if I told you that vampirism had broken out in Maysville?—that a vampire or vampires were at their hideous work in my village?"

"I would say that it was surprising, at least," Doctor Dale answered slowly. "Is that the matter on which you came to consult me?"

Doctor Henderson nodded tensely. "It is. Doctor

Dale, I know how incredible it sounds, but I am certain in my own mind that vampirism is going on up in my village, and I must have your help to combat it!"

2. Henderson's Story

DOCTOR DALE showed no surprise at Henderson's astonishing statement, though his hazel eyes were alert.

"Suppose you tell me all about it," Dale suggested to the overwrought physician. "Remember that I know nothing of Maysville or its people, and any information you can include may be helpful."

He turned momentarily to where I sat in the corner of the office. "Take notes on Doctor Henderson's information as usual, Owen," he said, and I nodded, my pencil poised.

Doctor Henderson, still in the grip of strong emotion, sat back in his chair. "There's so little to tell that sounds sane," he said. "Yet what there is——"

"You say you don't know Maysville? Well, it's a village of seven or eight thousand people up north of here in New York state, lying west of the Hudson River and close to one of the northeastern spurs of the Catskill Mountains. It was one of the earliest-settled places in that region and there still live there some fairly wealthy families who descend from the early settlers, and who have estates between Maysville and the hills west of it.

"Those hills are the outer hills of the Catskill Mountain spur and lie about eight miles west of Maysville in a range extending north and south. They and the valleys be-

tween them are so thickly wooded as to be almost impenetrable. There are in these hills a good number of old Colonial manor-houses that go back to the early Eighteenth Century, but they've been long abandoned and only one of these old manors, the old Geisert place in which Gerritt Geisert is now living, is inhabited.

"But in the rolling country between the hills and the village are the estates of the wealthier families I mentioned. The biggest of these estates belongs to James Ralton, whose family is one of the most important in the region. Of course I know almost all the people in the other estates, the Harmons and Moores and Wilseys and the rest, but know the Raltons best; for I tended James Ralton when he was a boy, brought his daughters Olivia and Virginia into the world, and attended Allene, his wife, in her recent last illness.

"It was about four weeks ago that Allene Ralton first sickened. Her health had always been good, but she began suddenly to lose weight and to exhibit a marked paleness and weakness. Soon her weakness was so pronounced that she was forced to stay in her bed. I diagnosed her case as secondary anemia but was rather puzzled by it; for secondary anemia, as you know, results from a direct loss of blood and I could not understand how Allene Ralton could be losing blood so suddenly.

"But it was clear that Allene was actually losing blood, and strength with it, with the passing of each day. Her blood supply was steadily failing. To correct this condition I gave her injections of the Klein-Lorentz solution, the new improved form of the iron-arsenic compounds used in treating secondary anemia. While the Klein-Lorentz solution can not replace blood that has been

lost, it aids the body to produce more blood to replace that lost, if the body has enough time to do so.

"In this case it had not enough time, for Allene Ralton grew more bloodless and weak with amazing quickness. Within ten days after her first sickening she was in a critical state, and sinking lower and lower before our eyes. James Ralton, of course, was nearly frantic about it and I was almost as bad. For here was Allene Ralton dying before my eyes and I could do nothing to save her!

"It is true that I had noticed on her neck two small red punctures, located above the junction of the internal jugular and subclavian veins, but these punctures showed no sign of bleeding and of course I didn't give them a second thought. Neither did I, at the time, attach any significance to the strange things that Allene kept saying in her deliriums of weakness; for I didn't dream then what was the dreadful truth.

"Two weeks after she had first sickened, Allene Ralton died, having despite my injections of Klein-Lorentz solution into her, become so lacking in real blood and consequently so weak that her heart simply stopped beating. James Ralton was like a dazed person during the funeral, while the two daughters, Olivia and Virginia, were absolutely grief-stricken.

"In fact when Olivia, the eldest daughter, became ill and weak a few days after her mother's funeral, I thought at first that her grief was responsible. I did what I could to cheer her up, and so did her father and young Edward Harmon, her fiancé. But it had little or no effect, for in a few days Olivia Ralton was so weak that she stayed in her bed. And then I saw for the first time that she was showing all the symptoms of the same condition of sec-

ondary anemia which had been responsible for her mother's death.

"I was profoundly shocked. Here was the strange illness that had baffled me and killed Allene Ralton, now attacking Olivia! In my alarm I wondered if this could not be some hitherto unknown contagious form of blood-disease that was attacking her as it had her mother. The same thing was suggested by James Ralton, who naturally was terribly worried by this illness of Olivia's coming after her mother's sudden death, as was young Harmon, her fiancé.

"In a few more days Olivia was visibly worse from loss of blood, her pulse irregular and her breath short; in fact, all the symptoms that her mother had exhibited. Again I used injections of Klein-Lorentz solution to try to build up new blood in her body, but it seemed useless; for Olivia was losing blood faster than her body could replace it, even aided as it was by my injections.

"IT WAS while making one of these injections yesterday that I noticed two small marks on Olivia's neck, two punctures exactly like those I had seen on her mother's neck. I examined them carefully, for I had begun to suspect that even though they showed no sign of bleeding these marks were connected in some way with the loss of blood by Allene Ralton and now by Olivia. Could it be, I asked myself, that some poisonous creature or insect had bitten first Allene Ralton and now Olivia? Something that had sucked blood from the mother and now from the daughter?

"Then as I asked myself that question, long-forgotten and half-learned knowledge rose in my mind. I remem-

bered all the features of Allene's strange illness, her progressive bloodlessness, the lack of any sign of real disease, and as I reviewed mentally the things I had heard Allene babble unknowingly in her deliriums of weakness, I knew the answer to all that had happened in a blinding and terrible flood of light.

"The thing that had made those marks, the thing that was preying upon Olivia Ralton as it had preyed upon Allene Ralton, could only be a vampire! I had heard of such cases, of dead men and women who had come to take the blood of the living; but because I had not had any direct contact with them, I had not taken much stock in them. Yet here was the dreadful evidence of their reality before my eyes! A vampire was draining away Olivia's life-blood as her mother's had been drained, and unless it was stopped she would die as Allene had died!

"My mind was in turmoil after I made this dreadful discovery. I was certain it was actually vampirism that had killed Allene Ralton and now was killing her daughter. But who was the vampire or vampires responsible for it, the dead who were coming back to take the blood of the living? And how could I, a medical man with only orthodox medical training, combat this dark horror?

"It was then I remembered how a colleague of mine had once told me of a specialist in evil, a Doctor John Dale of New York City, who had made his life-work the fighting of the forces of evil which many physicians encounter in their practise. I determined to go down to New York to get the aid of this Doctor Dale to fight the vampire horror that seemed to have come into being in Maysville.

"So I told James Ralton and Edward Harmon that,

told them that it was my belief Olivia and Allene were victims of vampirism and that I meant to get aid that could stop the vampire's hideous work. Of course Ralton and Harmon were astounded and horrified. Like myself they had heard of the dreaded vampire evil without ever dreaming they might themselves come into contact with it.

"I told them to say nothing of it to Olivia Ralton, or to any one else, for that matter, but to make sure that nothing visited Olivia during the night. Her father said he would watch with her through the night each night; so I felt she was safe for the time being. This morning James Ralton told me on the telephone that she had not been disturbed during the night; so I took the first train to New York.

"When I arrived here I came straight to your office, Doctor Dale, and forced myself in despite your secretary, Mr. Owen. For I believe that this thing is terribly important, that unless the vampire menace up in Maysville can somehow be stopped, Olivia Ralton will die a victim as did Allene Ralton. And that is why I have come here to beg you to come up to Maysville and combat this terrible thing!"

DOCTOR HENDERSON'S brow was damp and he was leaning forward tensely in his chair as he finished, his voice hoarse with emotion. Doctor Dale had listened to him with silent but intent interest, while my pencil had been flying over my pad as I recorded what the physician told.

"Doctor Henderson, I admit that what you have told does point directly toward vampirism," Dale said. "Yet,

as I have told you, vampirism is not frequent, and there may be another explanation."

"But you'll come up to Maysville and see for yourself whether or not it's vampirism?" Henderson asked him quickly. "I assure you that any fee you might ask James Ralton for your services——"

"Let us first go further into the matter," Doctor Dale interrupted. "You say, Henderson, that besides the marks on the throats of Allene and Olivia Ralton, it was the delirious wanderings of Allene Ralton that led you to suspect the presence of vampirism. Just what was the nature of those wanderings?"

"They were fearful," Doctor Henderson told him. "They occurred mostly during the last days of Allene's illness, when she was so weak as to be delirious most of the time. She would toss restlessly to and fro in bed, muttering inaudibly, and sometimes her mutterings were loud enough to hear.

"Most of them were about a face she seemed to feel watching her. She would whisper fearfully of red eyes looking in at her, of gleaming teeth. She would mutter also of dogs howling, and moan as though in terror. And once as I sat beside her bed I saw Allene in her delirium shrink as though from something terrible, and utter in a hissing whisper, 'My throat—my throat—he again——.'

"At the time, as I told you, I made nothing of all this, for as you will know from experience, patients in delirium utter the most weird and unlikely sort of things, stuff that floats up from their subconscious minds. But later on, when I had seen the marks on Olivia's throat and remembered those on Allene's, I remembered her ravings too and they made me suspect vampirism."

Doctor Dale nodded thoughtfully. "But during Allene Ralton's conscious period?" he asked. "Did she tell you then of any night-visitant such as her wanderings would indicate?"

Doctor Henderson shook his head. "No, she didn't. She wasn't conscious much in those last days, you know. She did tell me that she had been having terrible dreams and felt a dread of night's coming. She also said that the howling of the dogs down at the lodge, which they had been doing a good bit lately, by night, somehow oppressed her."

"What about your present patient, Olivia Ralton?" Doctor Dale continued. "Have you heard anything of the same nature from her?"

"Well, of course Olivia hasn't been delirious," Henderson said. "She's told me also that she has oppressive nightmares and that she dislikes the way the dogs at the lodge howl at night, but that's all."

Doctor Dale seemed to consider that, his brow wrinkled in thought. Then he asked Doctor Henderson, "You say Allene Ralton's decline in blood and health was first noticed a month ago?"

"Yes, about four weeks ago," answered the Maysville physician. "It was the first week in September that I noticed it."

"Just who, can you tell me, had died in or around Maysville just previous to that?" Dale asked.

Henderson drew in his breath, looked fixedly at Dale. "I see what you mean, Doctor Dale. You are trying to find out whether some one who died about then became the vampire in question, are you not? Let me think—the first week in September."

Henderson thought a few moments, then looked up. "The only persons to die in Maysville in the days directly before that were three, an old lady of ninety who died of sheer senility, a young farmer killed in a tractor accident, and an infant that died in birth. Surely it's inconceivable that any of them became vampire after death."

"Well, did any strangers come to Maysville about that time?" Doctor Dale asked. "I mean any one who came then to stay."

"No one but a new telegraph operator at the Maysville railroad station, named Fellowes. And of course Gerritt Geisert came to Maysville about then, but one would hardly call him a stranger."

"Gerritt Geisert?" repeated Doctor Dale. "Isn't that the person you mentioned as living in the only one of the old manors back in the hills now inhabited?"

Doctor Henderson nodded. "Yes, the Geisert manor is one of the oldest of the old places back in the hills, goes back to the early Eighteenth Century. I understand the original Geisert, whose first name also was Gerritt, left the whole region about the middle of the Eighteenth Century when for some reason nearly all of those manors in the hills were abandoned.

"But a month or more ago one of his descendants, also named Gerritt Geisert, came back to the region, arriving one night in Maysville. He notified authorities he was taking possession of the old manor in the hills, showing them the old family deeds. I understand he's engaged in studies of some sort out there, for he comes into the village only now and then in the evening."

"Geisert—Gerritt Geisert," murmured Doctor Dale, frowning in thought. "I suppose this Gerritt Geisert is

acquainted with you and the Raltons and the others?"

"Gerritt's become acquainted with most of the older families, the Raltons and Moores and others, yes," Henderson said. "He only comes in on infrequent evenings, as I said, but all of us like to have him call, for he's a courteous and highly interesting fellow."

"What about this Fellowes who came to Maysville about the same time?" Dale asked. "What's he like?"

"Why, I've only seen him occasionally around the station where he has the night shift," Doctor Henderson said. "He seems rather an ordinary young fellow."

Doctor Dale nodded, sat back in his chair for a time in thought, while Henderson watched him anxiously.

Finally Dale looked up. "You say you told no one but James Ralton and Edward Harmon that you suspected vampirism and were coming to get me to fight it?" he asked.

Doctor Henderson nodded. "Yes, and as I said, I asked them to tell it to no one else. I was afraid that if Olivia Ralton heard what I feared about her case it would make her much worse."

"It's well you did so," Dale told him. "It would be the worst of handicaps if I went up there with every one in the village knowing what my mission was."

"Then you're coming up to Maysville?" Doctor Henderson said quickly. "You're going to take the case?"

Doctor Dale nodded decisively. "You can expect Owen and me on the first train in the morning. For if it is actually vampirism that is going on in your village, the sooner it is stopped the better for all there."

The Maysville physician paled. "I know," he said.

"I've been almost out of my wits about this thing. But now that you're coming to work on it, I feel immeasurably more confident."

"Yes, but remember," Doctor Dale told him gravely, "that if this is really vampirism I can not guarantee that I can overcome it. For vampirism, as I said, is one of the most terrible of all the forms of evil and one of the hardest to fight."

"It will help us in that fight, if fight it is that lies ahead," he added, "if none in Maysville save those who must, knows what purpose brings Owen and me there. I rely on your silence therefore."

"You may to the utmost," Doctor Henderson assured him quickly. "Then I can expect you tomorrow?"

"On the first train tomorrow morning," Dale told him. "That will give Owen and me time to assemble the equipment we'll need. If James Ralton watches over Olivia as you say he means to, she should be safe tonight, and tomorrow we'll be with her."

Doctor Henderson nodded, and with a clasp of Dale's hand and a bow to me, he walked out of the office.

DOCTOR DALE quickly rose then and selected from the crowded bookshelves on the office's eastern wall a battered calf-bound quarto. He ran through its pages, read intently when he found what he sought.

He put the book thoughtfully down on his desk, then, and turned to me.

"You got all he told, Owen?" he asked. "Well, what do you think of it all?"

I shook my head. "Looks like as strange a case as we've taken yet. We've had some queer ones, but this is

the first time that we've ever come up against vampirism."

"The first time since you've been with me, Owen," Doctor Dale corrected me. "I've had some experience myself in the past with the vampire evil, as I told Henderson. And I confess that of all the forces of evil I've met so far, I'd least rather have to fight this dreadful one of vampirism."

"It may not be really vampirism at all," I suggested. "This Doctor Henderson may simply have mistaken the indications and become fearful."

Dale shook his head. "No, Owen, from what he told me I am certain that, terrible as it seems, vampirism of the most dreaded sort is going on up in Maysville. For he told me, Owen, more than he knew himself. I mean when he told of this Gerritt Geisert who so recently reached Maysville."

"I thought you'd struck on something there," I said, and Dale nodded, picked up the old calf-bound quarto he had been looking at.

"This is David Newell's *Remarkable Cases of Wizardry*, published here in New York in 1767. It's a plain account of some of the outbreaks of evil forces experienced in Colonial days, and here's the passage from it that I remembered when Henderson mentioned the name Gerritt Geisert.

"Also it has been told that a man dwelling in New York province near the northern Kaatskill Mounts, Gerritt Geissart by name, did plague and afflict many of his neighbors by taking by night their blood and life in a most dreadful way. Some said this Geissart was really dead, and finally went many with weapons and

clerics to slay the wizard. But they found him not, dead or alive, since he had fled. And since then has none lived in his house or in those houses near to it whose occupants he had afflicted.

"That's what I remembered when Henderson mentioned the name Gerritt Geisert," Doctor Dale said, closing the book. "And that, Owen, is how a Gerritt Geisert lived a hundred and fifty years ago and how he left the region. And now a Gerritt Geisert has returned!"

I stared at him. "Dale, you can't mean to say that you think this Gerritt Geisert who has come back to Maysville is——"

"I think nothing, yet," Doctor Dale interrupted. "save that as I told Henderson, the sooner we get to Maysville the better. For terrible as vampirism is, I think it is more than ordinary vampirism going on there, and that somehow, by us or by others, it must be stopped!"

3. A Vigil for a Vampire

"MAYSVILLE!" called the conductor as the train slowed.

"Our stop, Owen," said Doctor Dale. We grasped our cases, Dale taking the black case that held the occult equipment he had brought; and as the train stopped, we stepped down in the bright October sunlight onto the platform of Maysville's small frame station.

"There's Henderson," said Doctor Dale, and I saw the tall, thin figure of the Maysville physician hastening toward us.

Henderson greeted us and led the way to his car. As we drove away from the station he told us, "You'll stay with me while here, of course."

"Thank you, doctor," Dale answered. "I'm anxious to get out to see these Raltons as soon as possible."

Doctor Henderson nodded. "After lunch we'll drive out there."

Maysville seemed a typical New York village, the main street that held its business blocks extending northward and southward into an avenue of old houses, mostly of stone. On the short side streets were smaller frame houses painted white.

West of Maysville we could glimpse rolling country that extended to the Catskills' dark wooded foot-hills. These ran north and south in a range some miles west of the village and had a forbidding wildness of appearance, but the rolling countryside between them and the village was one of sleek fields dotted with the pretentious homes of large estates.

Doctor Henderson's own home proved a stone one of some size, presided over by a stout housekeeper. After we had lunched there and stowed our personal effects in the room Henderson designated, we set out with him and drove westward.

The countryside was even more idyllic at close range, with its well-kept fields, hedges bordering the roads, and stone gateways and lodges at the entrance of estates. The mellow October sunlight fell warmly on all. Henderson, though, was patently too nervous to appreciate the scene's beauty, and Dale was not observing it but looking thoughtfully toward the dark hills westward.

Henderson soon turned in from the road through an

entrance beside which a stone lodge squatted. A winding driveway led through stately grounds with great trees toward the half-glimpsed gray-stone mass of a large building. This, the residence of James Ralton, was a stone mansion of semi-Gothic style impressive in its massiveness and size.

A few moments later, inside the luxuriously furnished mansion, Henderson was introducing us to James Ralton himself. He was a middle-aged man with gray-sprinkled dark hair and cultivated face, and with fine gray eyes that held a mixture of anxiety and relief as he shook hands with Doctor Dale and me.

"Doctor Dale, you can't know how glad I am that you and Mr. Owen are here," he said. "Henderson has told me enough about you to make me sure that if any one can stop this ghastly business you can."

"What is your own opinion of the business?" Dale asked him. "Doctor Henderson believes it a case of vampirism—do you also believe that?"

Ralton whitened. "Doctor Dale, I don't know what to believe! Vampirism going on here seems so incredible, yet it does seem that my wife and now my daughter have been victims of such a hideous thing. Whether or not it is really vampirism that killed my poor wife and has now attacked Olivia, I am sure it is something of terrible nature. And I'll be eternally grateful if you can check it in my daughter's case."

Doctor Dale nodded. "I suppose we can see Miss Ralton now?"

"Of course," Ralton said. "This way. Virginia, my other daughter, has been staying today with Olivia."

He led the way up a broad formal stair with Doctor

Dale, carrying his black case, and Henderson and I following. We passed along a wide-panelled hall on the second floor and into a spacious corner room quite evidently a girl's room.

A GIRL who had been sitting by the bed in the corner rose as we entered. She was under twenty and very pretty, with dark brown hair and the gray eyes of James Ralton. Ralton introduced her to us as his younger daughter, Virginia, and then went over with us to the bed in which lay another girl.

"My daughter Olivia," he said, looking down at her with a sort of anxious pride. "Doctor Dale and Mr. Owen, dear, who I told you were coming."

"The doctor that Hendy went to see in New York?" asked Olivia Ralton weakly. "I am so glad to see them."

I was shocked by Olivia Ralton's appearance. She was beautiful, her hair dark, eyes large and dark also, with semi-oval face. But it was a wasted beauty, her unnaturally white skin drawn too tightly over her bones, her eyes too tired and listless in expression.

There was on the dressing-table near her bed a large framed photograph of a woman of middle age, sweet-faced and with dark hair and dark eyes like those of this girl. It was not hard to guess that the picture was of her dead mother, Allene Ralton.

Doctor Dale took a chair beside the bed. "Miss Ralton, I and Owen are here to help you," he told her, "to combat your illness."

"It doesn't seem really like an illness at all," she told him. "I just feel terribly weak lately, and without any real energy."

"When did you begin to feel this way?" Doctor Dale asked her.

Olivia's brow wrinkled. "About two or three days after mother's funeral, I think."

"Just what do you feel? Can't you describe it more fully?"

"Well," said Olivia Ralton hesitatingly, "when I wake some mornings I seem to feel weaker, as though part of my strength had gone somehow during the night."

Doctor Dale glanced significantly at Doctor Henderson and me, then turned back to the girl in the bed.

"Doctor Henderson has told me of certain marks on your throat," he said. "You'll not mind if I examine them a moment?"

Without waiting for her permission Dale deftly pulled back the silk coverlet, exposing Olivia Ralton's white neck. Upon it near the left side of the throat were two tiny red punctures, about two inches apart. Dale touched them gently, and we saw Olivia wince as he did so.

"When did you get these marks?" he asked. She shook her head.

"I don't know, doctor. I didn't even know I had them until Doctor Henderson saw them. Some insect must have bitten me."

"Tell me," said Doctor Dale, "have you ever felt at night that something was fastening upon your throat, upon these marks?"

Olivia Ralton hesitated. "I've dreamed of something like that."

"What did you dream?" asked Dale.

"Why, it was just silly like most dreams. But I seemed to hear the dogs down at the lodge howling—they howl a good bit now at night for some reason. And perhaps hearing the dogs in my sleep made me dream of teeth, long sharp white ones. For I seemed to see such teeth coming down toward me, teeth and a bright red mouth from which came hot, bitter breath. I think there were red eyes somewhere there too, like those of an animal, and a sort of pain in my throat that hurt and yet was at the same time delightful,"

"You've dreamed of that more than once?" Doctor Dale asked.

"Yes, isn't it silly? But somehow it made me feel bad—I know the mornings I felt worse were after I'd had nightmares like that."

Doctor Dale rose calmly, but with a gleam in his hazel eyes that I knew from experience to denote interior excitement.

"I think we can stop the nightmares for tonight," he told Olivia. "I've a sleeping-powder here that will stop them."

Dale placed a powder beside the water-carafe and glass on the night-table. Then, with a few cheery words to Olivia, he terminated his visit, James Ralton and Henderson and I leaving the room with him, Virginia Ralton remaining with her sister.

We four passed downstairs, unspeaking. It was not until we had reached the library, a splendid room with tall book-rows and massive stone fireplace and mullioned windows, that James Ralton broke the silence with an anxious question to Doctor Dale.

“WELL, doctor, what did you learn? Is it——”
“It is vampirism, yes,” said Dale. “Ralton, beyond doubt your daughter’s life and blood are being drained from her by a vampire, and it is certain that your dead wife died from the same thing.”

“Allene victim of a vampire!” exclaimed James Ralton. “Good God, Dale, what are we to do? How can we protect Olivia from this horror?”

“We must know first what dead person is vampirizing her,” Dale said. “Once we know that we can act. All vampires, though they can roam abroad at night in their hideous work, must lie from sunrise until sunset stiff and helpless in their coffins. When we have found who this vampire is we can go by day to its coffin and end its activities in the one way in which vampires can be destroyed, by driving through its heart a wooden stake and severing its head from its body. Then it will be truly dead and not one of the terrible dead-alive.”

“But we don’t know who this vampire may be that preyed on my wife and now on my daughter!” Ralton said. “And how can we find out?”

“We can find out,” Doctor Dale said, “by lying hidden in Olivia’s room tonight and waiting for the vampire to appear. Olivia will be unconscious from my sleeping-powder and will know nothing. If the vampire does visit Olivia again tonight we will be there and may be able to overcome it. But even if we can not, we will learn its identity and go by day to where its body lies and destroy it.”

“Doctor Dale, I’ll do it—I’ll watch with you!” said James Ralton, his face pale but determined. “I rely on your advice, for in this terrible matter I’m entirely help-

less."

"I'll watch with you too," Doctor Henderson said. "And we'll probably have a fifth, young Edward Harmon, who will be here."

"Olivia's fiancé?" Doctor Dale said. "That should make enough."

"Then you'll be staying for dinner here," Ralton said. "Of course we'll say nothing to Olivia or Virginia or the servants."

DINNER that evening was not very cheerful in the big and somewhat gloomy Ralton dining-room. All of us but Virginia Ralton were oppressed by the dreadful vigil ahead of us, and even she seemed rather subdued, no doubt by her mother's recent death.

Doctor Dale managed to carry on with her and James Ralton a certain amount of conversation, relative to Maysville and its people. I pricked up my ears when I heard the conversation touch on Gerritt Geisert, whom James Ralton knew and seemed to like.

He told Dale in answer to a question that he could not imagine why Gerritt Geisert lived out at his old place, the roads into the hills being long unused and almost forgotten, and he having no car. I gathered that Gerritt Geisert had been a caller welcomed by both Ralton and his dead wife.

Night had fallen when we left the dining-room. Virginia was upstairs with Olivia and we were in the library when Edward Harmon arrived.

Harmon was a tall, serious young fellow of thirty, his anxiety concerning Olivia Ralton very evident. He seemed more than a little disappointed when Virginia

came down with word that Olivia was already sleeping under the influence of Doctor Dale's powder.

We carried on a desultory and somewhat nervous conversation until Virginia Ralton retired. When she had done so Edward Harmon turned to Doctor Dale at once with the question uppermost in his mind.

"Doctor Henderson told me what he suspected, doctor. Was he right?"

"You mean, is Olivia's case one of vampirism?" Dale asked. "It is, and we are going to begin fighting the vampire tonight."

Harmon listened intently as Doctor Dale explained our plan. "Then we're going to wait up there for this vampire? What if it doesn't come?"

"Then we'll wait tomorrow night and every night after until it does come," Dale said. "It's our best method of fighting it."

Harmon shook his head. "It's a ghastly business. But I'm with you in anything that will save Olivia from this hideous thing."

Dale looked at his watch. "I think we'd better get up and take our places in Olivia's room now," he said. "It's after ten, and Miss Virginia and most of the servants seem to have retired."

Doctor Dale, still carrying the black case he had brought from New York, led our silent little group as we started upstairs. The lights we snapped out behind us save for a few hall lamps, leaving most of the big house's first floor dark. The second floor also was dark and there was only dim moonlight in Olivia Ralton's room when we softly entered.

Doctor Dale looked quickly around. There were

broad French windows in the room's northern and western sides, the northern window having a balcony outside. The bed on which Olivia Ralton lay in deep slumber was in the northwest corner, with its head against the western wall, there being a few yards of space between it and the northern window.

The darkness was deepest around the windowless south and east walls, and it was in the shadows there, at Doctor Dale's whispered directions, that we took our places. I was in the southeast corner with Dale at my right and James Ralton, Edward Harmon and Doctor Henderson at my left. Before crouching down in the shadows Doctor Dale took from his case two small crosses, one of which he handed me without comment.

In a whisper he impressed us with the necessity of making no move or sound until he gave the word. Then, crouching down in the shadows, we began our strange vigil. The only thing plainly visible in the room beside the moonlit windows in the north and western walls was the blur of white that was the bed in which Olivia Ralton lay sleeping.

Darkness and silence. I could just make out Doctor Dale's form as a deeper shade in the shadows to my right, and my other companions were as dimly visible at my left. The occasional scraping of a shoe showed me they were moving nervously, and I could hear the rapid breathing of James Ralton beside me, and of Henderson and Harmon beyond him. Somewhere downstairs a clock struck eleven with long, slow notes.

I found my thoughts on the girl sleeping in the bed, on Olivia Ralton and on her mother and all these Raltons stricken so suddenly by a visitation of evil. In the dark-

ness that evil, that had taken the life of Allene Ralton and now was preying on Olivia, assumed darker, stronger proportions. What had Doctor Dale told me—that vampirism was terrible enough but that he feared here was vampirism more terrible?

DALTON started a little beside me as there came from below the long notes of the clock striking midnight. Silence was again descending upon the big darkened house when it was broken again by a sound which startled all of us but Doctor Dale into betraying movements.

The sound was the howl of a dog, a long, quavering cry that came through the night half in anger and half in fear. At once two or three other dogs howled in the same way, a long, barking chorus that came strangely to our ears as we crouched in the sleeping girl's room. The howls changed rapidly into short barks, a furious barking that grew louder and louder.

"The dogs are barking at someone—something——" whispered James Ralton beside me.

Dale whispered swift warning: "Quiet now, above all!"

The dogs' barking reached a veritable frenzy, and then suddenly with a few panicky yelps they were silent. Their tumult was broken off as sharply as though by a blow, and the silence that followed seemed ten times more intense than before.

We had not long to wait. There was a soft sound from the balcony outside the north window, and my heart leapt uncontrollably as I saw out on that balcony an erect figure dimly visible in the moonlight. From Ralton's convulsive clutch on my wrist I knew he and the others had

seen also.

The figure moved closer to the window and we could see that it was white-clad. It pressed its face against the window, peering into the dark room in whose shadows we crouched. We saw that face against the window clearly, and it was a woman's face—a face that would have been beautiful in a mature way had it not been distorted by a diabolic expression of cold cruelty. The face seemed somehow familiar to me, with its well-formed features and dark hair hanging loose around the shoulders. Against that dark hair this woman's face was deathly white.

Her dark eyes as she peered in seemed filled with crimson light. Her lips were brilliant red in her dead-white face, parted enough to disclose the white teeth. She wore a single flowing white garment that I recognized with an unconscious shock as a shroud. She seemed not to see us in the dark room as she gazed in with crimson-lit eyes.

There came a choking whisper from James Ralton. "Good God, it's Allene! It's my wife!"

"Allene Ralton—Olivia's mother!" Doctor Henderson murmured dazedly. "And I pronounced her dead—she is dead!"

4. Gerritt Geisert

QUIET!" whispered Doctor Dale. "For God's sake make no sound!"

My brain seemed whirling as I clutched tighter the cross in my hand. This weird visitant of the night was,

then, the dead mother of the girl sleeping here, the dead Allene Ralton! She who had died herself as a victim of vampirism, coming back from the dead by night to her daughter!

Allene Ralton's eyes had made out the sleeping girl on the bed and her face lit with unholy pleasure, a smile of gloating cruelty illumining her features as though flames of hell had suddenly flared high behind the alabaster mask of her face. With that gloating smile unchanged she reached up toward the outside window-handle.

The handle clicked and the window swung open. Allene Ralton stood in its opening clearly visible to our eyes, a white-shrouded shape as solid and real as any of us. Her eyes still red-lit, she glided from the window toward the head of the bed and bent over Olivia.

She seemed deliberately gloating over her daughter's sleeping form, bending slowly down. Slowly Allene Ralton's red mouth approached the white uncovered neck of the girl, the brilliant lips forming a round red circle. I felt unbearable tension. Would Dale never act?

James Ralton, his self-control snapping, leapt to his feet beside me. "Allene!" he cried. "For God's sake, what are you doing?—why have you come back from the dead?"

With an unhuman screech of fear and anger Allene Ralton bounded back from the bed to the window-opening as Dale and I reached our feet.

"So you waited here to trap me?" she cried, her voice stabbingly shrill. "You fools! Fools, all of you!"

Ralton made as to leap toward her, but Doctor Dale grasped him, held him back. "Allene, it's I—it's James!" Ralton was crying madly. "What has made you come

back? Let me go, Dale!"

"No, Ralton!" Dale cried. "Stay back—help hold him, Owen!"

Allene Ralton's laughter rang diabolically. "You need not hold him, I do not want *him!*" she mocked. "I and he whom I serve have better victims—see!"

She stretched her hand toward the bed, and Olivia Ralton, without waking, emerged from the bed and moved toward Allene as though called by irresistible forces.

Allene Ralton's eyes flared red in triumph. "She comes at my call! Come, dearest—it is your mother, Olivia—come with me——"

Doctor Dale sprang toward her, the cross extended in his hand. Allene Ralton's mocking smile vanished and she recoiled out onto the balcony as though struck by terrific forces.

"Allene!" screamed Ralton. "Don't go—Dale, don't——" He tumbled in a dead faint.

"She will be ours yet—will be one of us yet!" screeched the thing that wore Allene Ralton's shape, in hellish fury. "One of us yet!"

With the words, as Doctor Dale advanced with his cross upon her, she whipped back out over the balcony. Dale and I rushed out after her, Henderson and Harmon lifting up Ralton.

Allene Ralton was gone from the balcony and we saw her white shape gliding off through the trees of the dark grounds. She looked back to see Dale and me on the balcony, her white face moved as though in devilish mirth, and then she was gone into the darkness.

DOCTOR DALE spun round and hastened back into the room, snapped on its lights. Olivia Ralton still stood sleeping by the side of her bed. Doctor Henderson and young Harmon were bringing James Ralton out of his faint, his horror-widened eyes gazing dazedly about.

He clutched Doctor Dale's arm. "It was Allene! What happened?—where did she go?"

"She has gone back for tonight, I think, to her coffin," said Doctor Dale grimly.

"To her coffin? Dale, she can't really be dead! She must have been living—yet she wasn't like Allene at all!"

A sudden thought struck him. "Dale, you don't think that Allene is the dead person you say has been vampirizing Olivia?"

"I know that she is!" Doctor Dale said. "Ralton, the vampire that has been sucking Olivia's blood is undoubtedly her own dead mother!"

"It can't be so!" cried James Ralton. "Dale, Allene was a saint on earth and she couldn't have become such a thing of evil as a vampire!"

"It is so!" Doctor Dale told him. "Ralton, your wife died as the victim of a vampire. Now it is one thing known to be terrible truth that whoever dies from the sucking of his blood by a vampire, becomes by reason of that horrible transfusion, when he dies, a vampire himself.

"He may have been the most saintly of people while living, yet if he dies as a vampire's victim he will inevitably become a vampire himself when dead—will have in his coffin a horrible kind of corpse-life and will go forth by night for blood to sustain that life. Always, too, a vampire chooses its first victims from its own family.

And that is what Allene Ralton, become a vampire after death, is doing."

"It's impossible!" cried James Ralton again. "Allene couldn't do such a thing! She'd have died gladly for Olivia and Virginia!"

"I do not doubt it," said Dale, "but that was while she was living, Ralton. Dead, she has become vampire and like all vampires is cruel and evil as a fiend. She will remain so until we end her vampire activities and make her one of the truly dead.

"And we must do that for Olivia's sake as well as for her own. For there is a tie now between her and her daughter whose blood she has sucked. You saw how she could command Olivia even in sleep. And if Olivia should die before Allene Ralton's vampire-life is brought to an end, Olivia too will become vampire!"

Dale turned from the stunned Ralton to Olivia, whom Henderson was helping back into bed, still sleeping. "She's all right for the present," he said after examining her, "and will know nothing of all this when she wakes in the morning. I think that you, Harmon, had best watch here with her for the rest of this night, however. And I will put protections here for her that Allene Ralton can not pass if she dares come back again tonight."

Doctor Dale took from his black case a number of sprays of dirty-looking white blossoms with withered leaves, garlic flowers that he had procured before leaving New York. These he arranged over the door and window-frames, first locking the latter securely.

Dale even crushed some of the blossoms and rubbed them along the cracks of the window and door openings, and placed others around the head of Olivia Ralton's

bed. Then leaving Edward Harmon seated beside the sleeping girl, with but one lamp glowing, we went downstairs.

WHEN we reached the library, James Ralton sank into a chair as though still stunned by what had taken place. Henderson stood with white face by the cheery blaze in the stone fireplace, while Doctor Dale faced us with features grave and determination in his hazel eyes.

"We have discovered the identity of the vampire preying on Olivia," he said, "and our next step is clear. That vampire must be destroyed—we must go tomorrow to Allene Ralton's tomb and do that."

James Ralton paled. "You mean to use what you said was the only way to destroy vampires, to——"

"To open the coffin and drive a wooden stake through the vampire's heart and cut off its head—yes!" said Dale.

"But to do that to Allene's body!" exclaimed Ralton. "I can't bear to think of her being mangled so."

"Would you rather her dead body retained the horrible corpse-life it has at present?" Doctor Dale asked him sternly. "Would you rather that she went forth from her coffin each night imbued with that life, preying upon her own daughter and later perhaps on others? No, Ralton, your dead wife must be so treated, for only when we have done that to Allene Ralton's corpse will her vampirism cease. Then we will be free to attack the one behind this, the master vampire who first vampirized and killed Allene and who still is spreading evil here if——"

He froze suddenly, all four of us motionless as from outside came a heart-chilling sound. It was a sudden

barking chorus from the dogs at the lodge, howls rising in a crescendo of fear and fury.

"The dogs!" exclaimed Henderson. "They're howling as when——"

"Upstairs, quick!" cried Doctor Dale. "Allene Ralton was here once tonight and may have come back!" We were hastening to the door, Ralton with us, when Smart, the butler, entered.

"A caller has just arrived, sir," he told James Ralton. "It is Mr. Gerritt Geisert."

"Gerritt Geisert!" Doctor Dale's exclamation was unconscious.

Relief showed on James Ralton's face. "Oh, Gerritt," he said. "It must have been he who stirred up the dogs coming in. Show him in."

Doctor Dale's eyes were narrowed, and my heart beat faster as we waited for Smart to bring in the caller. When he did so, James Ralton greeted him with outstretched hand.

"You're rather a late caller, Gerritt. And you gave us rather a scare just now."

"A scare?" repeated Gerritt Geisert softly. "How could I?—but I am very sorry if I did."

Gerritt Geisert, whom Doctor Dale and I were watching closely, was tall and almost bony, a commanding figure in dark clothes. His age would have been hard to guess. From his straight black hair and brows, his pallid white unwrinkled face and erect bearing, one might place him as not much over thirty. But something in his commanding black eyes and in the expression of his features would have given pause.

There was about him, indeed, an atmosphere of im-

mense experience and self-control and self-confidence. They were hinted in the high forehead, written plain in the long straight nose and pointed, saturnine chin, and almost too plain in the straight red line of the lips, straight almost to cruelty. His white skin was drawn tightly as though stretched over the bones of his face. The longer one watched, the less certain one became of his age but the more aware of his over-mastering personality.

"I'm sorry if I gave any one a fright," he was saying in a soft, almost silky voice. "I was returning home late from the village, saw your place still lit up and thought I might drop in——"

"Oh, it's no fault of yours—it was just that you set the dogs at the lodge howling as you came in," said James Ralton nervously. "Let me introduce Doctor John Dale of New York, and Mr. Harley Owen, his assistant. They've come up to help Henderson in Olivia's case."

Gerritt Geisert bowed and it seemed to me that as he faced Dale his black eyes crossed and clashed Dale's hazel ones in sudden question and challenge. "How is Olivia?" he asked Ralton with the right touch of courteous solicitude. "Not worse, I trust?"

Ralton hesitated. "Not exactly," he said, "but her case has taken a strange turn and Henderson thought it advisable to have the help of Doctor Dale and Mr. Owen."

He turned to us. "I think I'll go up for a moment to make sure she's all right—I'd feel easier after what just happened. You won't mind for a moment, Gerritt? Or you, Doctor Dale?"

"Of course not," said Dale, Gerritt Geisert bowing agreement.

Ralton went out and we heard him ascending the stairs.

ATENSENESS seemed somehow to drop upon the library as he left. Gerritt Geisert was standing near the fireplace, regarding Doctor Dale and Henderson and me with a smile that had hidden mockery in it.

"I shouldn't think," said Doctor Henderson to Geisert, "that you'd care much about walking back out through those lonely hills this late."

"I do not mind," Gerritt Geisert smiled, "though it is true that my ancestral mansion is rather isolated."

"I've heard quite a bit about it," Dale told him, "and about you."

"What could you have heard about me?" Geisert asked smilingly. "I'm just a rather indolent student leading a half-hermit existence."

"I've been told that," Doctor Dale said. "But part of what I heard or rather read was about a different Gerritt Geisert than yourself."

"A different Gerritt Geisert?" repeated Geisert, his black brows drawing together. "Whom do you mean?"

"I mean the Gerritt Geisert who almost two hundred years ago had to flee this region as a wizard of a particularly diabolical kind," Dale told him. "When Docor Henderson mentioned your name I remembered that."

Geisert's black eyes were not smiling now, but deadly. "So you know about that?" he said ominously. "Well, what of it? I am not proud of having that wizard Gerritt Geisert as my ancestor and namesake, but one can not choose one's ancestors."

"Then he was your ancestor and name-sake?" Doctor

Dale said. "But how is it there is no mention of that Gerritt Geisert having descendants?"

"Dale, what are you getting at?" asked Henderson bewilderedly. "You're surely not questioning Mr. Geisert's identity, are you?"

"It does not matter—I have no objection to answering him," said Gerritt Geisert contemptuously. "My remote ancestor Gerritt Geisert, who left this region two centuries ago under charges of wizardry, went to another part of the country, married and left descendants, of whom I am the last. The deeds of the old Geisert estate here were passed down in the family and I came back here with them and took possession."

"That explains everything nicely, of course," said Doctor Dale. "Yet there is another explanation that would fit as well."

"And what is that?" asked Geisert with sinister softness.

"It is that you are not the descendant of that ancient Gerritt Geisert at all, but are that same Gerritt Geisert yourself!"

Geisert's eyes flared momentarily redder and then he laughed softly. "Doctor Dale," he said, "you do not flatter my appearance when you accuse me of living two hundred years."

"I did not mean," said Doctor Dale softly in turn, "that you have been *living* for those two hundred years."

The shaft of bitter meaning in his words went home through Gerritt Geisert's mocking mirth, and his eyes flamed hell-crimson again.

"So *that* is what you think?" he snarled. "I know now—you're no mere medical specialist Henderson

brought here!"

"I am a specialist," said Doctor Dale, slowly, bitingly. "A specialist in combating and in destroying evil!"

Gerritt Geisert retreated a step. His white face was diabolical, twisted in infernal wrath, his eyes blazing scarlet with fury as he and Doctor Dale faced each other. And Doctor Dale's own hazel eyes were flaming with purpose.

I had risen to my feet and Doctor Henderson was staring amazedly at the two, but Geisert and Dale ignored both of us. Geisert had stepped back into shadow, and the shadow seemed somehow thickening about him.

"And what have you, the specialist in evil, discovered since you came here?" he asked Dale sneeringly.

"I've discovered that Olivia Ralton is the victim of a vampire," Doctor Dale told him steadily, "as was her mother, Allene Ralton."

Gerritt Geisert shook his head mockingly. "Victims of vampirism? It sounds too medieval, doctor, really."

"It is only too real," said Dale, "but I am going to stop it by destroying the vampire master who has loosed that black evil here."

"And who can that vampire master be?" asked Gerritt Geisert, moving almost imperceptibly sidewise. "I take it that you know?"

"Yes, I know, and what is more you know too!" Doctor Dale exclaimed; "know that the dead-alive master vampire who has come back from the past to wreak hideous evil here again—*help, Owen!*"

Gerritt Geisert had sprung toward Doctor Dale in a flashing leap that took him across the room with flying shadows about him that seemed in the firelight like mon-

strous wings! His eyes were flaming crimson, his sharp teeth gleaming, as Dale went down beneath his rush. He seemed seeking Dale's throat with his teeth.

But at Dale's warning cry I had leapt forward, jerking my pistol from my coat-pocket and levelling it at Geisert. It roared twice as I pulled trigger, but though its muzzle was but a few feet from Gerritt Geisert's side he seemed unaffected by the shots. He flung Dale back with terrific force, and with a snarling cry of rage leapt and seized me.

His grip was rib-crushing, his eyes gleaming red like those of a mad animal, his bitter offensive breath almost overpowering me as his teeth swiftly sought my throat. I felt sudden giddiness as the sharp teeth touched my throat, heard amazed cries from James Ralton and Edward Harmon as they dashed into the room, then glimpsed Doctor Dale staggering up and extending toward us the cross from his pocket.

Gerritt Geisert was knocked loose from me as though by a terrific blow from the cross. He was hurled back against the library windows, that jarred open from the impact. For a moment he stood thus against the outer darkness, a diabolical rage on his face, his eyes blazing hell-red in that white mask, dark cloak wide like great black wings behind him.

"So you have found out so much!" he cried furiously to Doctor Dale. "Then find out this also, that you creatures of a day can match me neither in strength nor in craft! Allene Ralton was mine and is mine, do you hear? So shall Olivia be mine and hers, and so shall you all one by one, and others after you, come beneath my mastery!"

In a flash he was gone into the darkness outside. There was a mad tumult of frenzied barking from the dogs at the lodge.

"After him!" I cried, leapt to the window and Edward Harmon with me, but Doctor Dale grasped and held us back.

"No, Owen!" he exclaimed. "We'd be helpless out there against him—he was too strong for us even here!"

"Geisert—Gerritt Geisert!" James Ralton was exclaiming. "Then he is the——"

"He is the vampire master who has loosed this curse of vampirism here, yes!" Doctor Dale said. "He is the Gerritt Geisert who plagued this region as a vampire two hundred years ago, who fled then to escape destruction and who now has come back to begin his unholy work again!"

"Gerritt Geisert the vampire master!" cried the white-faced Henderson. "Then he was the one who preyed on Allene?"

"You heard him boast it," Doctor Dale said. "After being forced to flee from here two hundred years ago, Geisert must have lived in many parts of the world, lying by day in his coffin, which he could transport from place to place at night, and going forth by night to suck the blood of his victims. Now he has come back here, to vampirize this region again!"

"His coffin he probably placed in the old Geisert house you told me of, or in one of the other old untenanted houses back in those hills. There he has lain by day in death-like state but by night has been free to move, coming openly into the village or visiting his victims by stealth. Allene Ralton was first of those victims,

and when she died as a vampire's victim and became vampire herself she came back to prey on Olivia, the circle of evil thus expanding endlessly outward from the vampire master, Gerritt Geisert!"

"But now that we know he's the master vampire we can go out by day and search for his body to destroy it!" cried Edward Harmon.

Doctor Dale shook his head. "Not yet! Our first task must be to end Allene Ralton's vampire activities by using stake and steel upon her body. That will release her from the dead-alive and halt her preying upon Olivia. Once that is done we can attack Gerritt Geisert himself."

He turned to Ralton. "Have you still any objections to us using the methods I described on your dead wife's body?"

"No, I can't have any objections now," groaned James Ralton. "Anything that will release Allene from that terrible state and save Olivia——"

"Very well," said Doctor Dale swiftly. "Tomorrow morning, then, we'll go to the cemetery and use the stake and knife on Allene Ralton's body. Once she is truly dead we can attack Gerritt Geisert and destroy or try to destroy him.

"Until then, say nothing of the truth to any one. The law can not help us in this, nor can mere numbers, and the fewer who know, the better. It is on our own knowledge and powers we must rely to defeat Geisert's two-centuries experience of evil and his powers, and——"

He was interrupted by the sudden hurried entrance of Virginia Ralton in hastily donned negligee.

"Dad, what happened?" she cried. "I heard shots and cries—and the dogs all barking——"

"There, Virginia, it's all right," James Ralton told her, his arm about her. "A gun was fired accidentally and we had some excitement, but nothing to worry about. Run back up to bed."

When she was gone, Ralton turned to Doctor Dale, his white face tragic. "Dale, we can stop this horror can't we? We can overcome Geisert before he makes more innocent people into hell-fiends like himself?"

Doctor Dale's face was grave. "I do not know," he said. "We face here an embodiment of evil stronger and more terrible than any I have ever before faced. Whether that evil may prove too strong for me and for all of us—I do not know."

5. The Bodies that Walked

"THERE'S the cemetery ahead," said "Edward Harmon. "See the gates? And that's the caretaker's lodge inside them."

Doctor Dale nodded. "Better stop at the lodge a moment," he said.

Harmon was driving the car in which Dale and James Ralton and Doctor Henderson and I had travelled north-westward from Maysville through the bright sunlight of early morning.

In that sunny countryside, so pleasant everywhere to the eye except for the dark hills westward, our encounters of the preceding night with the vampire Allene Ralton and the master vampire Gerritt Geisert seemed more like a dreadful dream than reality. But the green, monument-dotted expanse of the cemetery through

whose gates we now were passing was a reminder of the reality of that and of our mission here.

Harmon stopped the car before the caretaker's stone cottage, and a tall, iron-haired man who was sharpening tools came forward to us.

"We've come to enter my family vault, Farley," James Ralton told him. "Doctor Dale here is working on my late wife's death."

Farley looked queerly at us. "You won't be opening Mrs. Ralton's sepulcher, will you?" he asked anxiously.

"That is our intention," Henderson told him. "Why do you ask?"

"Well, it doesn't seem like a good thing to do," said Farley stumbly,

"That's for us to say," said Henderson sharply. "Drive on, Edward."

Harmon seemed to know his way through the cemetery's winding drives, for in a few minutes he halted the car at the foot of a green slope at whose crest stood the Ralton tomb. We got out, I carrying the clanking bag of stakes and tools, and climbed silently up the grassy slope toward the vault.

It was a small square structure of gray stone, windowless and with two heavy iron doors closing its front. Over the top in deep-cut letters was the name "Ralton." We stared a moment in silence, James Ralton's face pale and Doctor Henderson more than a little nervous. Then Doctor Dale turned to Ralton.

"It might be best, Ralton," he said gravely, "for you to stay outside. The rest of us can do what is needed to your wife's body."

"No, I'll go with you," James Ralton said. "I'm not

afraid to see."

"But it will be rather terrible," Dale told him. "The sight alone of your wife in the dead-alive state would be enough, but when we drive the stake through her heart and sever her head it will be ghastly."

"I know that it's for Allene's own sake we're doing it," said Ralton. "Don't worry, doctor—my courage won't fail me."

"Then let's get started," Dale said.

Ralton nodded wordlessly and with a hand that trembled inserted the big brass key into the heavy lock of the iron doors.

There was a grating click and then the doors swung open. We all hesitated for a moment save Doctor Dale, who stepped confidently inside the vault. I followed with the bag of tools, Ralton and Doctor Henderson and Harmon behind me.

The vault held on each side a tier of four stone shelves or slabs, with a narrow space between them in which we stood. The four shelves on our right held four stone sepulchers, a metal nameplate on the side of each, while in the tier to our left was but one sepulcher, in the lowest shelf.

James Ralton pointed to it and we saw that on its metal plate was engraved the name "Allene Ralton," followed by two dates. Doctor Dale examined the sepulcher, testing the weight of its heavy stone or artificial-stone lid, then nodded to me to produce our tools.

I did so and he selected two metal bars, which we inserted under the edge of the sepulcher's lid. I saw that Ralton was very white, and my own heart was beating faster as Doctor Dale and I pried up with the levers. The

heavy lid rose, swung back against the wall. We five gazed tensely into the sepulcher.

Then from all of us came exclamations. The sepulcher was empty! There was in it no sign of Allene Ralton's coffin!

EMPTY!" Doctor Dale cried. "You're sure that Allene Ralton's coffin was placed in this sepulcher?"

"Of course it was!" said James Ralton dazedly. "I saw it put inside at the funeral! Her coffin—her body—has been stolen!"

"Stolen?" exclaimed Henderson. "You mean that body-snatchers——"

"No!" said Doctor Dale, his eyes snapping. "It was not grave-robbers who took Allene Ralton's body and coffin! It was Gerritt Geisert!"

"Geisert?" cried Edward Harmon. "But why should he——"

"Can't you see?" said Doctor Dale. "Gerritt Geisert had vampirized Allene Ralton and knew she would be vampire and subject to him after she died. He feared that when it was discovered she was vampire some one might come here with stake and steel to end her activities. To prevent that he must have come here and taken her coffin to hide where none could find it!"

"Gerritt Geisert did that?" Henderson cried. "Then what can we do? If we can't find Allene's body we can't——"

"We can't release her from the vampire state!" Dale finished for him. "We *must* find her body if we are to free her of this dreadful bondage and save Olivia from her!"

"Wouldn't Gerritt Geisert have taken her coffin out where his own must lie, out at the old Geisert place in the hills?" I advanced.

"It seems probable," Doctor Date admitted. "But the first thing to do is to find out how and when he took Allene Ralton's coffin from here."

"Farley!" exclaimed Ralton. "The caretaker! He acted so queer there when we came in about this tomb—he must know something!"

"You must be right," said Dale, alert. "There's nothing we can do here now—we'll go back out and question him."

We locked the vault and drove back out through the cemetery to stop again at the caretaker's lodge. Farley seemed to have been awaiting us, for he jumped up nervously as we got out of the car.

"Farley, there's no reason for wasting words," said Doctor Dale incisively. "You knew Allene Ralton's body was gone. Who took it and when?"

"Doctor, I swear I had no hand in it!" said Farley hoarsely. "If I could have stopped it I would have, but I couldn't!"

"When was Mrs. Ralton's body taken?" Dale asked him keenly.

"The night after the funeral," answered Farley. "And the body wasn't taken—*it walked out of here itself!*"

"What do you mean? Did you see this happen?"

"Yes, doctor, I did," Farley said. "The night after the funeral I was awakened before midnight by a sound outside. I looked out of the window and in the moonlight saw two figures going out the cemetery-gates. One of them was a tall man in black whose strength must have

been prodigious, for he carried unaided a coffin that I recognized as Mrs. Ralton's.

"The other figure was Mrs. Ralton herself, dressed in her white shroud, walking out with the man as though obeying him implicitly, her face deathly white in the moonlight and her eyes gleaming red in her white face. They passed out into the road and disappeared from sight.

"I was so stunned that it was morning before I dared go to the Ralton vault. I found it open and the coffin and body of Mrs. Ralton gone from her sepulcher. I was frantic, for I knew no one would believe me if I told them what I had seen; so I closed the sepulcher and vault in the hope that no one would open them and find coffin and body gone."

Doctor Dale thought a moment, then asked Farley, "You didn't recognize the man who carried the coffin of Mrs. Ralton?"

"No, doctor—he was just a dark, tall shape in the half-darkness, and I only saw him a moment."

"You've not seen him again? There's been nothing else strange happened here since then?"

Farley hesitated and Doctor Dale seized at once on his hesitation. "What happened? You'd best tell everything, Farley, for your own good."

Farley came to a resolution. "Doctor, I *did* see that man again, a week later. *He came back here and went out with another coffin and body!*"

"What?" cried Dale. "Another body besides that of Mrs. Ralton? Whose body was it?"

"Young Arthur Newton's," Farley answered. "He died a week after Mrs. Ralton, and the night after his

funeral his body went the same way!"

"Arthur Newton?" repeated Dale. "Who would that be?"

"Why, Arthur was the last of the Newtons, an old family here," Henderson said. "He was well liked and was engaged to marry Alice Wilsey, daughter of Mrs. Wilsey whose estate is not far from the Ralton one. But he died of some illness two or three weeks ago. Doctor Jackson was physician in the case."

"And you saw this Arthur Newton's coffin and body go in the same way as Mrs. Ralton's?" Dale asked Farley.

"Yes, I did. I had not slept well after that first business, as you can imagine, and the night of Newton's funeral I was sure I heard movements outside. I looked from the window, and though the moon wasn't up I could make out in the starlight two shapes again, coming through the cemetery toward the gates here.

"One was the tall, dark man I had seen before. He was carrying another coffin, Newton's coffin, and this time I could see his eyes too were crimson-glowing. And so were Newton's, for the other figure walking with him was Arthur Newton, who had been buried that day! They passed out of the cemetery. In the morning I found Newton's grave had been dug open. I filled it in again and told nobody, for the same reason as before."

Farley's face was deathly pale as he finished. Doctor Dale's features were as grave as ever I had seen them.

"Farley, you did wrong to say nothing," he told the caretaker, "but it's understandable. We'll say nothing at present, and you're to keep these things entirely to yourself. You understand?"

Farley promised silence and we got back into the car.

"Drive back in to Maysville, Harmon," said Doctor Dale. "We're going to see this Doctor Jackson who attended young Arthur Newton in his last illness."

DOCTOR JACKSON was just dismissing a patient when we reached his office in Maysville. He was a hearty middle-aged man whose genial manner sobered a little when Dale explained that we desired a little information about Newton's illness.

He could tell us only that it had seemed a sort of acute anemia that had wasted Newton's strength away until he died. He had noticed two punctures on Newton's neck but had thought them insect-bites. He had heard Newton rave of red eyes shining and some dark being he feared, in his last weakness.

"It was tragic for a young fellow like that to die so suddenly," Jackson said as we were leaving. "We all felt badly, and this Alice Wilsey who was his fiancée was terribly broken up over it."

"No doubt," said Doctor Dale. "Well, thank you a lot for the information, doctor." We went back to the car where Ralton and Harmon waited.

"Well?" asked Ralton anxiously.

"Arthur Newton died as a victim of vampirism, all right," Dale said. "He was one of Gerritt Geisert's victims, without doubt, and after death Geisert came to the cemetery and took his coffin and led Newton, now of the dead-alive, out with him as he did your wife."

"Then that makes two vampires subject to Gerritt Geisert's will!" Henderson whispered. "Allene Ralton and Arthur Newton, besides Geisert, the master vampire himself! Dale, what are we to do?"

"We must act at once," Dale said decisively, "to find out where the bodies of Geisert and his two vampires lie by day, and end their activities."

"What do you mean? That you're going——"

"I mean," said Doctor Dale, "that there is no time to lose. This afternoon Owen and Harmon and I must go out to the Geisert place!"

6. Geisert Manor

HENDERSON paled, and James Ralton's eyes widened. "Out to the Geisert place?" he repeated. "Then we'll go with you!"

Dale shook his head. "We three will be enough, if we can find the coffins and bodies of the three vampires, and if we can't find them it would be no better to have two more in our party.

"Besides, there is work for you here. I want you, Henderson, to try to find out through this Doctor Jackson and any others you know whether there are any more cases of supposed anemia around here, any more people who might be victims of vampirism.

"As for you, Ralton, you had best stay at your home and watch over Olivia in case we are not back by to-night."

Harmon nodded. "He's right, Mr. Ralton. I'll feel better if you stay to watch Olivia."

Ralton gave in at that. We let Doctor Henderson out of the car, receiving his tense admonition to be careful, then drove out of Maysville westward to the Ralton estate.

When Ralton had got out there, Harmon headed the car toward the hills westward. It was well into the afternoon by then, and the sun was almost half-way down from the zenith, when Harmon stopped the car at the edge of the hills.

The little-used road had been getting much rougher and that portion ahead that led into the hills was overgrown and impassable to a car. Harmon had driven the car off the road into a nook of trees, and now we started on on foot.

The half-obliterated road led for a mile westward into the hills, then turned southwestward down a long, narrow valley. On either side of this rose steep forested slopes, somber masses of pine and hemlock interspersed with oak and elm.

We glimpsed a clearing, partly overgrown, back up on one of the slopes, and the decayed wooden walls of an ancient, high-roofed building.

"The old Van Broot place," Edward Harmon said. "There are a dozen or more old manors like that along this valley—no one's lived in them for a century or more. The old Geisert place is down near the valley's end."

As we progressed down the valley Harmon pointed out nine or ten more such ancient and decaying manor-houses, perched on the steep sides of the valley and some almost hidden by clinging vines and wild vegetation. The names of their original owners Harmon told us recalled Colonial days—the Elphin house, the Growder house, the Ten Eltt place and the Salton place and a half-dozen others.

Absolute silence brooded over all of them. I remembered what Doctor Dale had read to me from the old

book on wizardry, how after Gerritt Geisert two hundred years before had preyed evilly upon the people of this district, none would live in its houses. These, then, were those houses deserted two hundred years before.

And they had never been inhabited since—the dark shadow Gerritt Geisert had cast across this valley clung to it even during his absence. And now that he had returned, his vampire-life sustained elsewhere in the world during the long interval, that black shadow was reaching out again, out beyond the valley this time.

MY THOUGHTS were interrupted as Harmon stopped. He pointed to a structure half visible in a clearing up on the wooded slope to our right.

“The Geisert place,” he whispered.

“All right, let’s get up there,” said Doctor Dale, his voice low. “We’ve not too much time—sunset will be here in a few hours.”

We left the overgrown road and struggled up the slope, through the underbrush that choked the steep slope’s surface under the trees, moving in semi-shadow due to the thickness of the branches overhead.

Scratched and with clothing torn we emerged finally into the hundred-yard circle that long ago had been cleared from the thick forest on the slope, now overgrown with brush and small trees. The site had been selected because there the slope was less steep, a small level ledge on the hillside, in fact.

At the center of this overgrown clearing stood a long, thick-walled manor-house of rotting wood. It was of one and one-half stories in its central portion and of one story at each end, the high, pointed roof decayed but

intact.

Rotting shutters closed the window-openings and the massive wooden door was closed. We could glimpse ruins of outbuildings farther back in the clearing but our main interest was in the house. It lay utterly silent in the late-afternoon sunlight as we stared at it.

Doctor Dale led the way across the clearing toward its door, Harmon and I following closely. He turned at the door.

"If Gerritt Geisert and Newton and Allene Ralton are really here," he said, "they will be lying in the death-like state of vampires by day, and we can destroy them. But we must do so before sunset, for with sunset, wherever they are, they'll surely awake."

I looked up at the descending orb. "We've at least two hours," I said. "It ought to be plenty."

Dale pressed on the old-fashioned iron latch and the heavy door swung inward with a harsh creaking of hinges. We stepped inside.

We stood in a long room lit by narrow rays of sunlight that entered through cracks in the window-shutters. There were in it a few ancient-looking pieces of rude wooden furniture, a table and chairs, and nothing else. The place had the musty smell of extreme antiquity.

The room went up to the peak of the roof, unceilinged, save that at one end was a storage-loft of the old-fashioned type made of boards laid across the rafters at that end of the room. There were doors to the extremities of the house at the room's ends.

"Nothing here, anyway," I said. "Where would the coffins of Gerritt Geisert and the others most likely be?"

"Heaven knows," Doctor Dale said. "We'll have to

search the place—that loft first.”

Harmon and I hoisted him up and he investigated the loft briefly, then lowered himself again to our side.

“Nothing up there—we’ll search the rest of the house.”

We went thoroughly through the long room, even peering up into the ancient fireplace, but it was evident the coffins and bodies we sought were not in it. Nor were they in the smaller room of the house’s northern end.

We went back and investigated the other small room at the southern end of the structure, but it too held nothing but a few rotting fragments of ancient furniture. Dale, though, found in it a trap-door leading to the cellar, and laid it back on the floor.

A flight of decaying wooden steps led downward into the cellar, which was so dark that instinctively Harmon and I recoiled from it. Not so Doctor Dale. He drew a flashlight from his pocket and sent the beam quivering down into the cellar’s darkness.

“The coffins and bodies would be down in this cellar more likely than anywhere else, I think,” he said. “Come on.”

Gently he descended the rotting steps, and Harmon and I followed him. Once on the cellar’s floor he flashed the beam about.

THE cellar extended under the whole main or central portion of the ancient house. Its walls and floor were of massive blocks and slabs of rough-hewn stone. Large square wooden posts still in fair preservation supported the beams of the structure overhead.

Dale flashed his little beam all around the dark place, I standing beside him and Harmon, with the sack of tools still in my grasp. My heart sank as I saw that the cellar was quite empty, Our search was definitely a failure.

"Nothing here, it seems," said Doctor Dale finally.

"What about those ruined outbuildings?" Edward Harmon asked.

Dale nodded. "We'll go out and look through them."

We reascended the stair, closing the trap, and went out to the rotting ruins of the ancient outbuildings. For almost an hour we searched through them, but in them was no sign of the coffins we sought.

We went back into the house, looking helplessly about. The sun was now declining westward, its level rays searching through the shutter-cracks, to illumine the musty room in which we stood.

"The coffins and bodies can't be here," I said. "But God knows where Gerritt Geisert has hidden them."

"Maybe in one of the other old deserted manors in this valley?" Harmon suggested. "The old Van Broot or Elphin place?"

Doctor Dale shook his head. "I still think the coffins and bodies of Geisert and Allene Ralton and young Newton are somewhere here. And there's a way we can find out for sure."

"What is it?" I asked. "We've looked everywhere."

"We can hide here in the house, up in that loft," Doctor Dale said, "and wait until after sunset! If Gerritt Geisert's body and the others are actually hidden somewhere here, they'll wake and come forth after sunset. We can wait until they go back to their hiding-place as they must before sunrise, then go there after sunrise,

uncover their bodies and use stake and steel upon them!"

The blood drove from my heart at such a plan. "Dale, what if they discovered us in the loft—if Gerritt Geisert saw us?"

Dale's face was grave. "In that case I doubt whether any of us could save himself. Even with our crosses to defend us, the three vampires would be too much for us, since they need only to suck a single drop of blood to make us their victims, subject to their will. That is what Geisert tried to do when he attacked you and me last night.

"Nevertheless I think it the best plan for us to follow. There is no reason why they should suspect our presence here or discover us, and it may be that their bodies are not hidden here at all."

"I say to do it!" said Edward Harmon eagerly. "No risk is too great for a chance at that devil Geisert!"

I nodded agreement. "I'm with you too, Dale."

"Remember, though," Doctor Dale warned, "no matter what happens, if the vampires do appear here, you are to make no movement against them. That would lose all for us—only when morning comes can we act."

As we assented he said, "Then let's get up into that loft now. The sun will be setting within a half-hour."

Dale and I lifted Harmon into the loft, and he then helped both of us to scramble up, I taking with me the clanking sack of tools. Once in the loft we drew as far as possible back into its shadow, crouching back against the room's northern wall.

From there we could see almost all of the big room below without ourselves being seen. Warned by Doctor

Dale, we took positions as comfortable as possible to prevent our making any betraying movements later. Then we lay waiting in silence, watching the level shafts of sunlight that entered the shutter-cracks slowly fade and darken as the sun set.

Utter silence held all about us as the room darkened with the setting of the sun. The silence and gathering darkness made unearthly our wait there in the dark loft of the ancient house—a wait for the master vampire who had inhabited this place two hundred years before, and for Allene Ralton and Arthur Newton, whom he had made vampires evil as himself.

As darkness fell outside it was relieved by the light of the moon, already in the sky, and the darkness of the room below us was broken by bright shafts of moonlight that slanted down through gaping apertures in the eastern window-shutters. The moon-shafts were brightening, the contrasting darkness deepening, when we heard a sound.

It came from the cellar below, a grating, clashing sound as of stone scraping against stone! Harmon quivered, half raised, but Doctor Dale's warning hand made him crouch down again with us. We listened with nerves taut. Some one was moving about in the cellar!

There was a momentary silence and then came the sound of slow steps, ascending the rotting stair that led up from the cellar! They paused for an instant, an instant in which we crouched even lower in the dark loft's shadow. Then from the room at the house's southern end came a loud jarring sound as the trap-door into the cellar was thrown back.

7. The Master of the Dead-Alive

WE WAITED with hearts beating rapidly. There came steps from the southern room, echoing loudly through the ancient, long-dead house. I felt Doctor Dale and Harmon tense beside me, then felt Harmon move involuntarily as Gerritt Geisert stepped into the moonlit room below us.

His tall dark figure, cloak hanging black around it, paused. His white face was clear in a shaft of the moonlight with that dread crimson light in his eyes and the white, gleaming teeth half-visible behind the red lips. He looked around intently, and for a moment his eyes surveyed the shadows of the loft in which we crouched.

But he turned as two other figures stepped into the room after him. One was Allene Ralton, still dressed in her white shroud, her dead-white face still holding its expression of mocking cruelty and evil. The other was a fair-haired young man in dark clothing, who would ordinarily have been handsome but whose face had the same unhuman evil as Allene Ralton's. I knew that this was Arthur Newton, the dead youth who was now as much vampire as Allene Ralton or Geisert himself.

Gerritt Geisert looked from those two around the room again, his brows drawing together. "It comes to me that some one has been here," he said. "I feel the presence here of powers inimical to us."

"Maybe, O master, some of those fools from the village have been here?" said Allene Ralton.

"I do not think they would dare come here," said

Geisert frowningly. He laughed silently. "They've learned that it was not for nothing that Gerritt Geisert was feared two centuries ago."

"You will let us go forth tonight, master?" queried Allene Ralton pleadingly, ingratiatingly.

"We can go, can we not, for the blood—the life?" asked Arthur Newton, his manner toward Geisert fawning.

"Yes, you can go, and I go partly with you on business of my own," Gerritt Geisert said. "But beware of entering a trap, Allene, when you visit your daughter. That Dale who almost trapped us last night is dangerous. I think. And you, Newton, be careful too."

"We will, master," they answered eagerly together.

"Then come—we go," said Geisert. "And see that you are not too long in returning here."

He opened the door and passed out into the darkness, the other two following him like hounds following a huntsman. We heard their steps receding outside, and then silence. In that silence we crouched, making no movement, daring not even to whisper to each other, since at any moment Geisert might return.

My thoughts were in a whirl. The coffins and bodies of the three vampires had been hidden in the cellar, after all! That was indisputable now, but the cellar had been empty when we searched it. Had Gerritt Geisert contrived some cunning hiding-place there? It must be—I remembered the clashing of stone we had heard when they emerged.

Where now had they gone? Geisert on some business of his own, as he had said, perhaps to reconnoiter some new victim for himself in the village, perhaps even to spy

on our own movements. Allene Ralton was headed toward the Ralton estate, without doubt, to prey upon Olivia Ralton and suck the blood we had interrupted her in taking on the preceding night. I could feel Edward Harmon tense beside me from that knowledge, but remembered the protection we had put at Olivia's windows, and the watch her father had promised to keep upon her.

But where had Arthur Newton gone? Had he then some victim of his own in the village, upon whom he was preying? He was now a vampire like the others, so that too must be. What hapless person in the village was young Newton sucking blood and life from?

THE shafts of moonlight in the room circled slowly in an arc as the hours passed. Time seemed endlessly drawn out. Now the moon-shafts came through the western windows and I knew the night was fast passing. In a whisper I suggested to Doctor Dale and Harmon that they watch while I descended to the cellar, to investigate, but Doctor Dale shook his head. Any moment now might see the vampires' return.

The night would soon be over, indeed, and I was estimating that not more than an hour remained before sunrise, when a step sounded outside and the door opened. Gerritt Geisert entered, alone. He looked about for the other two, then paced back and forth in the room as though awaiting them, a strange black figure in the broken moonlight.

Geisert seemed uneasy and I guessed that somehow he sensed our presence, was still aware of inimical forces near by. I prayed inwardly each time I saw his red eyes

glance restlessly this way or that, that no idea of searching the place would come to him. He seemed becoming definitely uneasy, though, when there were other steps outside and Allene Ralton and young Arthur Newton entered.

The woman vampire's face was stormy, hellish. "They were on the watch for me!" she cried. "They had safeguards of garlic about Olivia's room and two of them sat in that room with her!"

"That is this Dale's work," Gerritt Geisert said. "Well, Olivia shall be vampire and one of us yet, despite his foolish safeguards. But you, Newton, how did you fare?"

Newton smiled and with creeping horror I saw that his lips were red-smeared. "I fared well enough," he said.

"You drank your fill of blood?" Geisert demanded.

Newton seemed to hedge. "I did not get very much," he said complainingly. "I was afraid of discovery—I drank but little——"

"You lie!" Gerritt Geisert told him. "You drank deep of blood tonight and now you try to cheat me, master of both of you, of my due!"

He was towering in anger and both Arthur Newton and Allene Ralton shrank from him in terror, for with eyes blazing hell-crimson and white face distorted he was truly a terrific spectacle.

Gerritt Geisert stretched out his hand imperiously toward Newton. "Come!" he commanded. "You know well that as master I have my due to take of you!"

Newton came slowly, whiningly. "But I got so little—we are always thirsty because you take it from us—we get so little——"

Geisert silenced him with a look, grasped Newton's

neck and tore open his collar, exposing two red marks on his throat. He plunged his head downward, his mouth on the punctures in Newton's throat, and sucked strongly. Newton drooped forceless in his grasp.

A haze of terror held my mind at that awful sight. Geisert, the master vampire, sucking from the vampire Newton the blood that Newton in turn had sucked from his victim! In truth Gerritt Geisert was the vampire master, who needed not to seek victims now for himself but sent these vampires of his forth and when they returned with the blood of their victims, sucked it in turn from them!

The spectacle was terrible. Geisert sucked on and the transient color that had filled Arthur Newton's face faded as the blood that had given it to him was taken from him. Allene Ralton stood by and watched Geisert feed on her fellow with her face an inferno of unholy, frustrated desire.

Geisert at last straightened his hand from Newton's throat, his own face swollen and red while Newton as he staggered loose was again white and waxen.

As Geisert straightened, a few drops of the blood on his lips dripped to the floor. Like a cat Allene Ralton darted down to lick them up! And Newton was after her, the two fighting like snarling beasts for those few ruby drops, while above them towered Gerritt Geisert, gorged with blood, his eyes crimson lights of hellish, satisfied desire.

"Enough of this!" he snarled at the quarrelling two, and Allene Ralton and Newton straightened fearfully. "There will be blood in plenty for you soon."

"But what good does the blood do us when you take

almost all of it from us?" complained Newton.

"There will be more of you to go forth for victims soon," Geisert said, "and then I will leave each of you more blood for himself. And as time goes on we will become more and more numerous, will do what I was prevented from doing here two centuries ago, will spread our power over all this region.

"Yes, I will be vampire master of all this region!" There was a strange splendor in Geisert's bearing. "I will have victims by hundreds, thousands—will have vampires going forth in scores and hundreds to bring back to me, their master, the blood of their victims. The blood of thousands—for me!"

His face was so awful that even Dale quivered involuntarily beside Harmon and myself, all else forgotten in the terrible spell of this hell-fiend.

"But enough," said Gerritt Geisert to the two vampires. "Back to your coffins now—it will soon be sunrise."

"You will let us forth again tomorrow night, though?" asked Allene Ralton wheedlingly, and Geisert nodded.

"There will be work for all of us tomorrow night," he said. "And victims in plenty later—blood in plenty. But now to your coffins."

With Allene Ralton and Arthur Newton going ahead of him, Geisert moved out of the room into the room at the house's southern end. We heard them descending the rotten stairs into the cellar, heard Gerritt Geisert closing the trap-door after them.

Then a moment later came the grating clash of stone against stone again. Then there was silence once more, a silence in which Dale and Harmon and I lay still in our

loft without daring to move. The moonlight shafts were fading now and we sensed the approach of dawn. At last its pale light began to enter.

In moments more, bright fingers of rosy light were entering through the cracks of the eastward shutters as the sun rose. Then only it was that we moved, stirring our cramped limbs and dropping stiffly down onto the floor from the loft. There was no sound of any kind from below, but outside birds were noisy with the sunrise.

“THEY'RE in the cellar somewhere!” “Doctor Dale exclaimed. “They've some secret chamber or hiding-place down there that holds the three coffins and bodies—you heard the stones moving!

“Once we find that hiding-place we have them!” he said. “Come on—bring the tools, Owen.”

He opened the trap-door and led the way down into the dark cellar. I confess that my skin crept to enter the dark place into which the three vampires had retreated so short a time before, even though we knew that they must be lying in the death-like state of the dead-alive by day.

Dale flashed his beam around, but the cellar was empty as before. “We must tap the walls and floor to discover where there is a cavity behind them,” Dale said. “We know it's somewhere here.”

Taking the short metal levers and the hammer from my sack we started a round of the cellar, Dale and I tapping upon the heavy stone blocks of the wall and Harmon upon the floor-slabs.

We worked without result, the blocks by their dead sound indicating solid earth behind them, until we came

to the south wall of the cellar. The central part of that wall rang hollow.

"They're behind here!" Dale exclaimed. "See, this whole section of the stone wall must turn somehow. We don't have the secret of it, though—we'll have to break through it."

With the hammer and our metal levers we began work upon the massive blocks constituting that part of the cellar's wall. We tried to pry out blocks by driving the levers between them. It was hot work in the close cellar, and with only the flashlight-beam to guide us.

Our light implements made hardly any impression on the massive stone blocks, yet we worked on, unheeding the passage of time, for hour after hour, Dale and Harmon and I taking turns at the harder work of hammering. For hours we sweated at our toil, spurred on by our knowledge that behind the thick stone wall must lie Gerritt Geisert and the two other vampires in their coffins.

But we could do no more than chip off the edges of some of the blocks, and our light tools were bent and battered, our hands scratched and bleeding. We straightened, panting, baffled.

"We can do nothing in this way!" Doctor Dale said. "We'll have to have heavier tools—crowbars and sledges."

"But if we go in to the village for them it'll be sunset by the time we get back out here," Harmon said. "'We'll have no time to work."

"I know," Dale said. "We'll have to wait until tomorrow morning and come back out then with everything we need. We can break through this wall then and end

Geisert and the other two for ever.

"Geisert and they may go forth again tonight," he added, "but we'll be on the watch for them in the village, and tonight will be their last night of activity—tomorrow we'll destroy them,"

So, effacing as completely as possible the traces of our attack on the wall, we ascended from the cellar, closing the trapdoor, and left the house. The sun was well up by then. We pushed our way down through the thick brush to the ancient road, and headed back through the long valley and out of the hills.

8. At the Wilsey House

WE EMERGED from the hills and reached Harmon's hidden car without mishap, and drove at once eastward. There was no need to stop at the Ralton estate to make sure of Olivia's safety, since we had heard Allene Ralton herself tell Geisert she had been unable to reach Olivia in the night that had just passed.

So Harmon drove Dale and me back into Maysville, leaving us at Henderson's home with a promise to see us later at Ralton's. It was almost noon by then.

Doctor Henderson's face expressed mixed emotions as Dale related to him our terrible experiences at the Geisert house.

"Then there is no doubt that Arthur Newton is as much a vampire as Allene Ralton!" he exclaimed, and Doctor Dale nodded.

"Not the slightest doubt. But tomorrow morning we'll go out there early with tools heavy enough to break

through the wall, and enter that secret space where the bodies of the three lie by day."

Henderson nodded. "Dale, you asked me when you went to try to find out if any one else around here was suffering from supposed anernia or loss of blood, any one else who might be a victim of vampirism."

"Yes. Did you find out anything?" asked Doctor Dale quickly.

"I did," Henderson said. "There's a girl who seems to be showing the same signs of loss of blood that Olivia Ralton exhibits."

"Who is it? Where does she live?"

"Her name is Alice Wilsey. She lives with her mother, a widow, Mrs. Beatrice Wilsey, on an estate near the Raltons'. It was her mother who told me of Alice's condition."

"Alice Wilsey!" Dale exclaimed. "The girl to whom Arthur Newton was engaged when he died?"

"The same," said Henderson. "Do you think Newton is——"

"Newton had no family, you said?" Dale interrupted. "No immediate connections?"

"No, he was the last of the family. But what bearing has that?"

"Didn't I tell you," Doctor Dale reminded, "apropos of Allene Ralton, that one who becomes vampire after death returns always to prey first upon his own family or those closest to him in life?"

Doctor Henderson was white-faced. "Then you think that Arthur Newton is vampirizing his own former fiancée Alice Wilsey?"

"I think it possible, anyway," Dale said. "We'll have to

go and see this Alice Wilsey. But later in the day—Owen and I need a few hours sleep now.”

IT IS possible that Doctor Dale slept soundly in the next few hours, but I will admit that I did not. The terrible scenes through which we had passed had so strongly imprinted themselves on my brain as to recur again and again in my troubled dreams.

I felt rested, though, when Dale woke me in the late afternoon. We ate a lunch that seemed more like breakfast, then waited a short time for Doctor Henderson to return from a patient he was visiting. When he did so the three of us headed westward again in his car.

Dale wanted to visit the Ralton place before going to investigate Alice Wilsey, so soon we were driving up to the entrance of the Ralton mansion. James Ralton himself met us at the steps.

“Everything’s all right?” Dale asked him. “I mean Miss Olivia.”

“Olivia’s feeling much better,” Ralton said. “She slept well last night and feels a little stronger.”

“There was no disturbance that you heard last night?”

Ralton shook his head, his voice lower. “No, I watched Olivia all night; and though the dogs howled once and there were some sounds of movement outside, she—I mean Allene—didn’t appear.

“Edward Harmon was here a moment at noon,” Ralton continued, “and told me what you three saw out at the old Geisert place. You saw Allene there with Geisert and young Newton, he said.”

Doctor Dale nodded. “We did, and tomorrow morning if all goes well we’ll be able to get at their bodies,” he

said. "Courage, Ralton—this horror can not go on for ever."

"And now we'll go up and take a look at Miss Olivia, and then be off," Dale said. We started up the steps.

There came out of the house just then Virginia Ralton, the younger daughter, and a laughing youngster in tennis clothes.

"This is Hugh Rillard, one of Virginia's ardent admirers," Ralton introduced, with a little smile.

"Sure glad to meet you, Doctor Dale," said young Rillard. "I hear you're curing Olivia already."

"We're trying to, anyway," Dale said. "We're going up to see her now—good morning, Miss Virginia."

As we passed into the house Dale shook his head, almost pityingly. "If those youngsters—or Olivia herself—knew what a hell-spawned evil is preying on Olivia!"

When we entered Olivia's room we found her sitting up in bed. She greeted us cheerfully and seemed to have a little more color in her cheeks.

"Any nightmares last night?" Doctor Dale asked her by way of greeting, and she shook her head smilingly.

"No, I didn't even dream. Oh, yes, I did dream once of dogs howling, but only for a moment.

"I do wish, though, doctor," she continued, "that you'd take down those withered branches you put up all over the room. They smell just like garlic to me, and the smell was so repellent that I was going to take them down myself."

Doctor Dale's face became grave instantly. "Do not think for a moment of taking them down," he warned her. "You do not take me too seriously, Miss Olivia. But

it is true the branches have a strong therapeutic effect in your case and must not be removed."

"Of course they'll remain if you say so," Olivia said mildly. "I really don't know why I dislike their smell so much."

Dale examined the twin marks on her throat. "A little healed," he said. "Well, they may be all healed soon if all goes well."

"I don't mind them," Olivia smiled. "They don't really hurt."

"Yet the sooner healed, the better," said Doctor Dale. "Well, I'll be in again tomorrow, Miss Olivia, and expect to find you well. That is a command."

ONCE outside Olivia's room Dale's lightness of manner vanished.

"See that whatever happens the garlic branches are not taken down by Olivia," he told James Ralton.

"But she said she wouldn't——" Ralton began.

Doctor Dale shook his head. "She said so and meant it, but people who are victims of vampires sometimes find their wills not so strong as the vampire's will. Give her no chance to do it."

"Edward Harmon is coming tonight to watch in her room," Ralton said. "I'll tell him what you said about it."

"We'll be back tonight or tomorrow morning," Doctor Dale told Ralton as we left. "Remember to observe every precaution."

We drove out from the Ralton estate and Doctor Henderson headed in a northern direction between the beautiful estates in this region. It was not long before we had turned off the road again and were driving through

the grounds of a small estate toward a beautiful Georgian brick house of considerable size, the residence of Mrs. Beatrice Wilsey.

Mrs. Wilsey accepted Doctor Dale and me at once on Doctor Henderson's introduction. She seemed of rather chatty nature, but in her face were lines of worry.

"Doctor Dale is here as a specialist in Olivia Ralton's case," Henderson explained, "and as you said Alice seemed suffering a similar illness I thought you might like him to look at her."

"Why, I'd be very glad to have him do so," Mrs. Wilsey said. "I've really been terribly worried about Alice's condition—she has grown gradually weaker and weaker but she absolutely refuses to allow me to send for a doctor."

"She does?" Dale exclaimed. "Why is she so unwilling to have a physician?"

"I'm sure I don't know," answered Mrs. Wilsey. "I've pointed out to her that she was getting weaker and more bloodless all the time, but she says she is all right. I'm sure she'll be very angry at me for letting you see her, but after all I'm her mother and it's best."

"Miss Alice is upstairs?" Dale asked. "We can see her there?"

"I'll go up first," Mrs. Wilsey said. "She'll probably make a scene, she's so set against having a doctor."

She went, and in a few minutes returned with flushed face. "She was very angry, but I overruled her," she said. "We'll go up now, doctor."

We went upstairs, entering a silken and feminine room furnished with ivory French pieces. Upon a chaise-longue in a negligee reclined a girl who had the

same fair hair and blue eyes as her mother.

She was startlingly white and bloodless-looking, but looked at us with a half-angry and half-fearful expression.

"Miss Wilsey, I'm sorry that we intrude on you, but it is only to help you," Doctor Dale told her.

"But I don't need help!" she exclaimed passionately. "I tell you I'm quite all right."

"Now, Alice, any one can see that's not so," her mother reproved. "You've been getting weaker and weaker and you know it."

"Your mother is right," Dale said. "It's evident that you're very ill—why do you hesitate to admit it?"

"There's nothing to admit," the girl said desperately. "I feel all right, no matter what you say."

"Tell me, Miss Wilsey," said Doctor Dale, "have you been troubled by bad dreams lately?"

"Bad dreams?" she said, and he nodded.

"Yes, nightmares as of some one visiting you by night. Did you ever dream that some one came through that window, or that red eyes stared in through it at you?"

The girl's face, already white, became deathly. "No!" she screamed. "I never did! What makes you ask such questions? I never did!"

We looked at her in surprise. She had been absolutely impassioned in her denial.

"You've never dreamed that some one was bending over you, that something had fastened on your throat?" Dale pressed.

"No, of course not. What a silly question!" she said.

Doctor Dale reached to her negligee and before she could prevent uncovered her neck. Two little red punc-

tures stood out against its whiteness! "Where did you get these marks?" he asked her sternly.

Alice Wilsey went crazy with rage.

"What business is it of yours?" she cried. "They're pin-pricks I made by accident—why do you torment me about them? I won't have you torturing me with questions, do you hear, I won't have it—won't have it——"

She sank back fainting upon the cushions with strength fled in her access of rage. Her mother hastened to her side.

9. A Lover from the Dead

DOCTOR DALE stood up, his eyes fixed firmly upon the girl, who seemed half in convulsions as her mother bent over her.

"Come," he said to Doctor Henderson and me. "We can do nothing more here now and we'll only make her worse."

We followed him bewilderedly down the stairs and paused in the drawing-room. Doctor Dale's face was serious.

"What does it mean, Dale?" asked Henderson. "That girl is surely a vampire's victim, so bloodless and with those marks on her neck."

"I am sure myself that she is one," Dale said.

"But why does she deny it then?—why does she lie, as she did just now, about what she must at least feel?"

"I have an idea why, though I may be wrong," Dale said. "We'll try to find out—but here comes her mother."

It was a much-agitated Mrs. Beatrice Wilsey who entered the drawing-room. "Doctor Dale, I had a terrible time calming Alice!" she exclaimed. "What on earth is the matter with her?"

"The matter with her," Dale said calmly, "is vampirism! Mrs. Wilsey, a vampire is undoubtedly preying on your daughter."

"A vampire?" repeated Mrs. Wilsey, stupefied. "A person who comes back from the dead?"

Doctor Dale nodded. "Yes, one who comes back from the dead to suck the blood of the living. Is it any wonder that your Alice is so lacking in blood that she is perilously near collapse?"

Mrs. Wilsey seemed stunned. "But it's incredible, horrible! Who that is dead would prey upon my child?"

Dale's face was very grave. "I fear that it is one who has not long been dead and who knew her well in life. I mean Arthur Newton."

"Arthur Newton? Her late fiancé? Good heavens, such a thing can't be possible!"

"It can and is," Doctor Dale said. "But there is a way, Mrs. Wilsey, by which Henderson and Owen and I can find out the truth, tonight. That is for us three to hide in Alice's room, unknown to her, and see whether Newton or any other visitant does come to prey on her.

"Do not refuse!" he said as Mrs. Wilsey started to speak. "It means life or death to your daughter, I think, for she is now so bloodless and weak that to lose any more blood might cause her death at once. It is to protect her tonight that I propose this."

"But how could you hide in Alice's room without her knowing it?" Mrs. Wilsey asked bewilderedly.

"When you take up her dinner, as I suppose you do," Dale said quickly, "we three could slip in while you distract her attention and hide inside the closet I saw in her room. We could watch from there."

Mrs. Wilsey looked from Doctor Dale's grave face to Henderson and me, then made decision. "I'll do as you say! I'm sure you're working to help Alice."

"Good!" said Doctor Dale. "You won't regret it, Mrs. Wilsey. It's but a few hours until night—we can impose on your hospitality for dinner?"

DINNER proved excellent but a rather somber meal. for Mrs. Wilsey was patently oppressed by our dread information, and Doctor Dale was thoughtful and silent. Henderson hardly touched anything, and I will admit that my own appetite was spoiled by the prospect of another vigil like that we had carried out two nights before in Olivia Ralton's room.

By the time dinner ended it was already becoming dark and was time for us to install ourselves in Alice Wilsey's room. Mrs. Wilsey led the way upstairs, carrying a tray of dainty and tempting dishes prepared for her daughter. We followed, Dale carrying his black case.

With a nod to us she went into her daughter's room with the tray, leaving the door a little open. We heard her speaking to Alice and inquiring about her condition. When she coughed, the signal we had agreed on, Doctor Dale softly opened the door.

Alice Wilsey's head was turned away from us, toward her mother, who was engaging her attention by a question. We slipped in noiselessly, over the silken rug, and into the closet whose door Mrs. Wilsey also had opened

under some pretext. Dale drew this door almost shut once we were inside, leaving a crack through which we could look out.

The chaise-longue on which Alice Wilsey reclined and the windows in the room's outer wall, outside which was the roof of a porch, were in our line of vision. So was Mrs. Wilsey for a short time, but in a few moments she withdrew, after a nervous glance at the closet in which we were hidden. She left one hooded lamp burning in the room, which was otherwise in darkness.

We three sat silent in the closet and watched. Alice Wilsey lay back as though sleeping, her eyes closed, but stirring slightly now and then. Doctor Dale and I had ready in our hands the crosses which we had found to be the most potent weapons against Gerritt Geisert and his vampires.

Time passed, and as the night grew on the sounds about the Wilsey house lessened as the servants retired. Alice Wilsey, though, was still awake, for now and then she moved restlessly and opened her eyes. Would our watching be fruitless for that reason, I asked myself? If Arthur Newton came and found her awake, would he enter to his victim despite that?

The minutes went slowly by. Dale and Henderson and I crouched silent in the closet, and nothing changed. But gradually the conviction grew on me that Alice Wilsey was staying awake deliberately. She was looking with a sort of nervous anticipation toward the window and porch-balcony beyond it. Her face, as much as we could see it, held combined eager expectation and a shrinking dread.

She was patently waiting, as we three waited also,

Dale and Henderson as tense and silent as myself. The radium dial of my watch told me it was after eleven. Alice Wilsey lay facing the window, her back toward us. Somehow this weird waiting attitude of hers made our own vigil more tense.

There came a sound from outside. The low shuffle of a step on the porch-roof balcony, a form moving there. Doctor Dale's hand closed on my wrist to bid me to be silent as we saw, through the glass, a hand reach and unfasten the window-latch, and swing the window open.

It was Arthur Newton who stood in the window-opening—Newton as we had seen him on the preceding night in Gerritt Geisert's ancient manor in the hills, dressed in the same dark clothes he had worn when buried. His face was as white and waxen as then, his eyes lit still with the red vampire-light!

I EXPECTED a wild scream of horror from Alice Wilsey as he appeared, for the girl was looking straight toward the window. But she did not scream. Instead she stretched out her arms toward Newton and on her face was a look of strange, dread-tinged happiness.

"Arthur!" she murmured. "You've come again—at last!"

Newton stepped into the room, the red vampire-light in his eyes seeming to soften as he looked at her. "I came as soon as I could, Alice," he said, bending over her.

"Dale!" It was Henderson's choking whisper. "Dale, she's welcoming him—she knows he's dead but——"

"Quiet, Henderson!" hissed Doctor Dale fiercely. He

was staring out with me at the incredible scene in the dim-lit room.

Arthur Newton had stooped beside the chaise-lounge and Alice Wilsey was looking at him with an expression of utter love. Her weak, white face seemed illumined by it. Newton was supporting her in his arms, and she ran her white fingers lingeringly through his dark hair.

I think the most dreadful element of that scene was that Newton's own face showed his love for her. It was visible even through the diabolic waxen mask of his features, forcing itself outward on them.

"Alice, you know I am not now my own master," he was telling her. "*He* rules me now and I can not come to you at will as when I was living."

"When you were living!" Alice Wilsey repeated those terrible words in a sadly reminiscent manner. "Arthur, when you were living you could not have loved me any more than you do now. I know it."

"It's true." Through Arthur Newton's vampire-mask showed a strange sincerity. "I do love you, Alice, the same as then. And I know you love me. For had you not loved me utterly you'd surely have shrunk from me in horror when I first came back this way to you—dead."

"I was horrified, Arthur," the girl told him, "the first time you came. You remember, it was the second night after your funeral, when I woke here and found you bending over me. I wanted to scream and call for help; I was terribly afraid, but all this was weaker than my love for you, and I loved you dead as well as ever I did when you lived.

"And in the times since then you've come, even up to tonight, I've felt dread too, but it's been weaker than my

love for you and my hope of your coming. But soon this will be over, soon we'll be together, won't we? I will be like you and we'll come and go together?"

"That will soon be," Arthur Newton affirmed. "You grow weaker each time I come, Alice, and before long you will die. But it will not really be death, for after it you will be as I now am."

"To be as you are," said Alice Wilsey dreamily. "I am so glad that it is I who have kept you living after death, Arthur—that it is my blood that you have taken and not another's."

It was horror insupportable to hear her utter those words. Terrible as had been the vampirism of Olivia Ralton by her own mother, this willing submission of the girl before us to her vampire-lover was more terrible. Doctor Dale was tense as iron beside me, and Henderson was shaking.

"Yes, my blood that has kept you living after death!" Alice Wilsey exclaimed exultantly. "And I've been only too glad to give it to you."

"The blood," said Arthur Newton in a low tone, his white mask changing now, eyes deeper red. He bent his dead face closer to the girl's living one. "Alice, I must have it again tonight! *He* takes from me almost all that I get from you—I thirst——"

"Take it, Arthur," said Alice Wilsey, throwing her arms wide in a sort of terrible determination. "Take it all if you thirst for it! Every bit, every drop!"

Newton's hand pushed aside her negligee to expose her neck and the red punctures on her throat. The hellish vampire-lust was crimson in his eyes as he bent down toward her neck, lips parted and showing his white

teeth, his breath coming in panting sobs of anticipation.

The girl in his arms closed her eyes as though in a very ecstasy of dread anticipation. Newton's head plunged to her throat, his mouth fastening on the punctures there! His eyes flamed with dreadful pleasure as there became audible a sucking sound, as with the fainting, submissive Alice Wilsey in his arms he drained her life-blood!

I COULD stand that dreadful scene no longer, but at that moment Doctor Dale bounded out into the room, I following instantly, toward Arthur Newton and his willing victim.

"Back from her, Newton!" Dale cried, the cross in his hand outstretched. "You'll get no blood from her tonight!"

With a hoarse yell Newton sprang at us but bounded back as he struck the cross's influence. Eyes blazing now with rage, he reached the window. "You!" he yelled. "What brings you here?"

His eyes shifted to the petrified Alice Wilsey. "So you brought them here?" he cried accusingly. "You hid them here to trap me?"

"Arthur, I didn't!" she screamed, struggling up. "I didn't know they were here!"

Doctor Dale made a leap to get behind Newton, to prevent him from escaping into the night, but Newton saw his purpose and jumped backward,

"You'll not trap me so easily!" he cried. "And I thought you still loved me, Alice!"

With a bound he was gone into the darkness. "Arthur, come back!" screamed Alice Wilsey. "I didn't know they were here!"

Edmond Hamilton

She flew at Doctor Dale in a wild fury. "You've driven him away!" she cried madly. "I lost him once when he died, and now I'll lose him again and it's your fault!"

She clawed at Dale like a veritable tigress, then went suddenly limp and sagged in his grasp, her strength gone. Doctor Dale deposited her on the lounge, as Mrs. Wilsey burst into the room.

"What's happened?" she cried, "What's the matter with Alice?"

"Plenty," said Dale succinctly. "Owen, get my case. She's lost a little more blood and we've got to give her a Klein-Lorentz injection."

Swiftly we worked with Henderson, shot the brown fluid into her veins. She stirred a little.

"What happened," Dale told Mrs. Wilsey then, "was that the person vampirizing her came again tonight, and that person was, as I feared, Arthur Newton. She knew all along Newton was really dead, but loves him so that that makes no difference to her, and has been giving her blood willingly to him to maintain his pseudo-life."

"It's too horrible!" Mrs. Wilsey exclaimed.

"It's horrible enough," Dale said, "but I think we can prevent it from going on."

Doctor Henderson, who had gone out of the room a few minutes before, burst back in with white face.

"Dale, I called the Ralton place and they need us!" he cried. "James Ralton said they have been trying to get us—something terrible has happened to Olivia Ralton!"

10. What Olivia Told

“WE’LL get over there at once!” Doctor Dale cried. “But we can’t leave her without making sure of this girl’s safety.”

“Doctor, for heaven’s sake don’t let there be any chance of Arthur Newton’s coming again!” said Mrs. Wilsey.

“I don’t think he’ll come back tonight, but we’ll make sure he can’t get in,” Dale said. “The case, Owen.”

From the case he took garlic branches, which we arranged hastily around the doors and windows of the room.

“Mrs. Wilsey, neither Newton nor any other vampire can pass these safeguards if they’re left in place,” he told her. “See that they’re not removed for any reason.”

“I will,” she said tremulously. “You’ll be back, doctor, won’t you? I can’t fight this terrible thing by myself!”

“We’ve got to go now to others who need us,” Doctor Dale said, “but we’ll be back before tomorrow night if it’s at all possible. Come, Owen!”

We hurried out, Doctor Dale carrying his case, to Henderson’s car. Henderson took the wheel, and the way the elderly physician whirled the car out from the Wilsey estate and over the roads toward the Ralton place showed how much fear the message from the Raltons had inspired in him.

The moon, well toward the west, was hidden almost wholly by clouds and only a feeble light filtered down on the sleeping countryside through which our car raced.

That light was enough to show the dark hills brooding westward.

"James Ralton told me only that something terrible had happened to Olivia," Henderson shouted over the motor's roar. "He seemed half crazy."

"We saw that Arthur Newton is out tonight, and that means Gerritt Geisert and Allene Ralton must also be abroad," Dale said grimly. "But Harmon was supposed to be watching Olivia tonight."

The stone pillars at the entrance of the Ralton estate showed in our headlights' glare. Our car shot in between them. The lodge was alight, the dogs barking furiously, and as Henderson whirled the car through the grounds we saw that the big Ralton mansion also blazed with lights.

The butler, Smart, admitted us, and the first person to meet us inside was James Ralton, clad in a dressing-gown, his face again white with fear. Virginia was clinging beside him.

"Dale!" he cried, gripping my companion's arm. "It's Olivia! She's terribly worse—something awful has happened!"

"What has happened, Ralton?" snapped Doctor Dale.

"We don't know yet!" Ralton answered. "Edward was watching Olivia tonight and I had retired to get a little sleep. I woke again an hour ago and being nervous about Olivia went in to see if she was all right.

"She was lying in her bed white and terrible-looking, the window was open and the garlic branches torn down, and Edward Harmon was asleep in a chair. It took minutes to rouse him, he seemed in a sort of stupor. Then we tried to get you."

But Dale was already running up the stairs, Ralton, Virginia, Henderson and I following. We burst in, Henderson keeping Virginia outside, and found Harmon bending over Olivia, trying frantically to revive her.

OLIVIA RALTON lay with her face and skin an absolute waxen white. Her lips were blue and were drawn back in a sort of grin from her teeth. She was breathing slowly, heavily.

"Dale, those hell-vampires have been here again!" Edward Harmon cried. "I was watching Olivia, and a sort of stupor descended on me that made me unconscious, though I fought against it."

Doctor Dale bent over the girl, examining lips and eyes and throat, listening to her heart. Then he straightened.

"You're going to give her a Klein-Lorentz injection?" I asked.

A strange chill came over us at Doctor Dale's answer. "Olivia Ralton is dying," he said solemnly. "No treatment now can save her and maybe we can not even bring her to consciousness before she dies."

"Dying?" repeated Edward Harmon stupefiedly. "Dying? You can't let her die! You've got to keep her living!"

"Dale, don't let her die!" choked James Ralton. "For God's sake don't let her die!"

"I am not superhuman," Dale told them. "Allene Ralton has drained almost the last of Olivia's blood from her, and her heart is steadily slowing. But if we can bring her back to consciousness before she dies we can at least find out from her what happened."

Doctor Dale swiftly took a box of capsules from his case, broke two beneath Olivia's nostrils, then with a hypodermic made an injection above her heart. She stirred weakly as the powerful drugs coursed through her dying frame, and looked dazedly upward.

In that look was the bitterest fear and horror I had ever seen, a horror that struck home to my heart. She looked at Doctor Dale, seemed to recognize him; her eyes flickered as they made out James Ralton, and a faint smile crossed her features at sight of Edward Harmon.

"Mother!" she whispered almost inaudibly. "Mother came here tonight, from the dead—I remember now!"

Dale bent beside her. "Try to tell us what happened, Olivia," he said gently.

"I feel so weak, so strange," she whispered. "Yes, mother was here and it was terrible, what she did. And some one else was with her—it was one of father's friends—Gerritt Geisert."

"Gerritt Geisert!" Dale's exclamation was a groan. "He came with your mother? How did they get in?"

"They came after the dogs barked," she whispered. "I was lying awake and Edward sitting across the room, and then the dogs howled and a moment later Edward went to sleep as suddenly as though some one had commanded him to do so. Somehow I felt terribly afraid, and lay there as though waiting for something.

"In a moment I heard some one moving on the balcony outside my window and with an effort I turned my head and looked at the window. Two shapes were outside it. One I recognized as Gerritt Geisert, but with a terrible look now on his face that made me shudder. The other was mother, dressed in her shroud as I last had

seen her in her coffin.

"Mother and Geisert were looking in at me. Their faces were white and strange and evil and their eyes red as fire. They saw Edward sleeping in a stupor in his chair and laughed at the sight, and I knew that somehow they had cast that stupor on him from outside. And as they looked at me it seemed that on their faces was a terrible desire.

"Geisert reached up to open the window but his hand recoiled as though repulsed by the garlic branches you had put around the windows and between them. They both tried to open the window and could not, nor the other windows, since they could not pass the branches. All that time I lay in a kind of helpless dread, unable to move a muscle or to scream at the top of my lungs as I wanted to do.

"Geisert and mother seemed foiled by the branches and a sort of hope sprang in me that they'd be unable to get in after all. But then Geisert pointed at me and said something to mother. Mother laughed evilly and nodded, then fastened her crimson-lit eyes full upon my own eyes.

"I seemed instantly to lose my own will and to have its place absolutely usurped by my mother's will. I knew she wanted me to take down the branches and open the window to them, and I found myself getting stiffly out of bed, walking mechanically to the window and taking down the branches, and then opening the window and going back stiffly to lie down again in bed.

"I heard mother and Gerritt Geisert laugh as they came in. 'So they tried to keep us out!' Geisert said mockingly. 'So much for their precautions!'

"He and mother came and looked down at me with red-lit, gloating eyes. Mother was bending down over me, her face alight with an evil eagerness, but Geisert thrust her aside.

"‘Your master comes first, Allene,’ he said. ‘I can take this blood in person tonight and not through you.’

"‘But she is my victim!’ hissed mother furiously.

"‘Never fear, I’ll leave you some,’ Geisert said. ‘She has just enough left for both of us.’

"Geisert bent with the words, his crimson eyes on mine, his face working terribly and his bitter, hot breath strong on my own face. I sought to scream and still could move no muscle. His head plunged downward and his lips fastened on the punctures at my throat!

"I felt his lips, sucking, and as a terrible giddiness and weakness rushed over me I felt the blood draining out of my veins. It was horror beyond thought and yet somehow at the same time it was also delight, a strange joy mixed with loathing!

"I was losing consciousness entirely when Geisert at last straightened up, his lips dripping blood, his eyes blazing with hideous satiation.

"‘It is your turn now, Allene,’ he said, turning. ‘I think I have left enough in her to satisfy you.’

"Mother leapt to my side, bent over me. ‘Do not fear, Olivia,’ she said mockingly. ‘After tonight you’ll be one of us and will know yourself the taste of young rich blood—warm blood——’

"Her mouth fastened hotly upon my throat and then she too was sucking. I felt the last of my strength going, and as consciousness left me the last sound I heard was Gerritt Geisert—laughing——"

Olivia Ralton's whisper ceased, and she lay back motionless. Dale hastily broke another capsule under her nostrils. Her eyes re-opened.

"Mother dead—and coming back," she whispered. "Dead and evil—taking my blood with Gerritt Geisert! And they said that I would be one of them, like them!"

"You'll never be one of them, Olivia!" said Doctor Dale solemnly, rising. "Your mother has been caught in Gerritt Geisert's dark web of evil, but she will be released from it and Geisert destroyed!"

Olivia Ralton looked fixedly at him. "I am dying, am I not, doctor?" she asked in her weak whisper.

Dale lowered his head. "Yes, Olivia."

"I want to see father and Virginia—and Edward," she whispered.

As Dale stepped back I saw through the open window that streaks of gray were lighting the dark sky. Dawn was at hand. Henderson brought Virginia into the room. She flung herself upon her sister's bedside in an agony of sobbing. "You're not dying, Olivia—you can't be!" she moaned.

Olivia's hand rested on her hair, then on James Ralton's trembling hand. "I'm not afraid," she whispered. "It will all come right, I think—about mother, I mean."

"Olivia, child!" cried James Ralton. Henderson, his own face deathly, helped him back.

Edward Harmon was bending, over the girl, his expression wild. "Olivia, don't die! I'll send those hell-fiends to hell's lowest pit for this!"

"Edward, you heard him say it was not mother's fault," whispered Olivia. "It's Gerritt Geisert's but don't

risk yourself——”

She stopped, struggling up almost to a sitting position, and for one dreadful instant it seemed to me that Allene Ralton's crimson eyes looked out of her face toward the first sunlight now streaming in through the northern windows.

“Gerritt Geisert!” she whispered, that dread light in her eyes, then fell back and lay motionless.

11. The Quest in the Hills

DOCTOR DALE drew the sheet slowly over her face. James Ralton stared dazedly at him, while Henderson led the sobbing Virginia from the room. Edward Harmon's face was wild, passionate, terrible.

“She named Gerritt Geisert as she died!” he said chokingly. “Dale, I'm going to destroy that hell-fiend if I live!”

“That is what we must do, yes,” Doctor Dale said with voice steely. “But first we've work here with Olivia.”

“With Olivia? What do you mean? She's dead now!”

Dale shook his head. “You forget that Olivia died here as a vampire's victim and is now vampire herself! Did you not see her eyes as she died? Tonight unless we prevent it with stake and steel, she will rise and seek victims for herself!”

“You want to drive a stake through her heart and sever her head now?” Ralton cried, and Doctor Dale nodded sternly.

“It's the one sure way to prevent her becoming vampire.”

"Dale, you can't!" Ralton cried. "Dale, think how our hearts are torn now—that would crush them, to see her body so treated! Wait until after the funeral, at least, for heaven's sake!"

"Don't kill us all by doing this thing now!" Harmon pleaded. "I'll watch Olivia's body tonight, Dale, to make sure it doesn't rise. Tomorrow we can hold the funeral and after that you can do it."

"It would be better to do the thing now and be sure," Doctor Dale said, "but I know how you feel. Well, Owen and Henderson and I must get out to the old Geisert place and break through that stone wall behind which lies Gerritt Geisert and his vampires in the day, and use stakes and knives to end their activities for good.

"You, Harmon, can watch over Olivia until we return, to make sure she does not come to vampire-life tonight. Then after the funeral tomorrow we can end her pseudo-life also and, please God, the vampire menace here will be over."

THE next two hours were hurried ones, for there were preparations and arrangements before Doctor Dale and Henderson and I could start out to the Geisert place.

A hurry-call to Maysville brought out from the village one of its two morticians with a coffin for Olivia Ralton. She was placed in it and it was placed in the Ralton library, which became thus the funeral chamber for the next day's ceremonies.

Doctor Dale fastened the coffin securely shut, rubbed garlic leaves around the crack, and laid a cross on top of the coffin. Another cross he gave to Edward Harmon,

whom he instructed to keep strict guard over Olivia's coffin and not to open it for any reason.

While Dale was making these arrangements I had been getting from the village the tools we would need to break through the stone wall in the cellar of the Geisert house, heavy crowbars, chisels and sledges.

It was mid-morning when we were ready to start. We drove off in Doctor Henderson's car, James Ralton looking after us from the steps of his ill-fated house with a dazed expression on his white face that wrung my heart.

Henderson, who himself looked more or less stunned by the terrible sequence of events that had been unrolling so rapidly, drove westward at high speed over the bumpy roads, at Doctor Dale's urging. The sacks containing our tools and stakes clanked in the car's bottom at each lurch.

We left our car where we had hidden Harmon's on our former visit, and with Dale and me carrying the sacks, pressed at once into the hills. Greatly as we hurried, though, through the dark hills and down that long narrow valley of ancient, deserted manors, it was well after noon by the time we pushed through the brush into the clearing which held the old and rotting Geisert house,

Doctor Henderson looked with trepidation about the rooms as we entered, but wasting no time we descended at once into the dark cellar.

The stone wall at the south was unbroken as we had left it, but well we knew that it had opened since we left it to allow the three vampires to go forth, Gerritt Geisert and Allene Ralton on their fateful visit to Olivia, and Arthur Newton on the visit to Alice Wilsey that we had

overseen and interrupted.

Doctor Dale and I began work at once on the wall. Our plan was to pry out one of the massive blocks near the floor, which would make an aperture large enough to permit us to crawl into the secret space behind, which must hold the coffins of the three vampires.

Dale held the chisel while I swung the sledge. It was monotonous and tiring work, and the blocks were of hard native granite that resisted our steel stoutly. The cellar rang with my sledge-blows on the chisel's head, Henderson standing by and holding the flashlight on which we depended for illumination.

After some minutes of this I was forced to let Dale take the sledge while I rested in holding the chisel. We alternated thus for some time, and soon both of us were sweating despite the dankness of the cellar. But what worried us was not the hardness of the toil but the slowness of our progress. At the end of two hours' steady work we had not cut a third of the way through around the big block.

Dale glanced occasionally at his watch in a nervous manner as we worked on, and I knew what was in his mind. The afternoon was waning and we must break through before sunset; for at sunset the three who now lay inside stiff and helpless would awake to all their hideous vampire life. We drove our tired muscles to greater efforts as the afternoon drew near its end.

We were almost through around the block but it was evident that on its inner side it was faced with some hard cement, and we guessed that this joined it to the blocks around it so that they could move together when the secret method of opening was used. At last, though, our

chisels drove through this also and the block had been freed completely from those around it.

Using the chisels and the crowbars we had brought as levers, we sought to pry the great block out of its place in the wall. Henderson lent his aid and the three of us tugged desperately at the bars. With a slow grating, the great stone slid outward, then tumbled to the cellar floor. A dark recess was disclosed behind!

We straghtened, panting, and Doctor Dale glanced quickly at his watch. "An hour yet before sunset!" he said. "We'll have time enough—give me the light, Henderson."

He flashed the beam inside the recess, which was itself stone-lined and about ten feet square. We stared.

"There are no coffins or bodies here!" I cried. "Dale, it's empty!"

Doctor Dale was thunderstruck. He flashed the beam back and forth around the empty recess. "But they must be here!" he said desperately. "We heard them go down in here yesterday morning!"

A thought struck me. "Dale, you remember we chipped at the stones here yesterday morning trying to get in!"

"Yes. But that doesn't explain why the coffins and bodies of Geisert and Allene Ralton and Newton aren't here."

"It does!" I said. "When Gerritt Geisert came forth from here last night at sunset he must have seen the marks we left on the stones, despite our efforts to efface them. He'd know that some one knew where their bodies lay by day and was trying to get at them, and he'd——"

"He'd take his coffin and have the other two take theirs to some other hiding-place!" Dale finished. "You're right, Owen, it's what's happened! Geisert has been too much for us again!"

"But what are we to do?" asked Doctor Henderson tensely. "It will soon be sunset."

Doctor Dale thought. "We must search for Geisert's new hiding-place," he said, "must find where the coffins of the three now lie. It can't be terribly far from here."

"What about the other old deserted manor-houses in this valley?" I suggested. Dale's eyes lit.

"I believe you've hit it, Owen! Any one of them would make a good hiding-place for the three coffins and bodies."

"But which one?" Henderson said. "Dale, there are a dozen of those old places along this valley."

"We'll search the nearest ones—the ones at this end of the valley," Dale said. "If we don't find the coffins in them we'll go on to the others—we can't give up now."

We hastened up and out of the ancient Geisert house. The sun was sinking toward the western horizon, and sunset, the awakening time of the three vampires we sought, was not far off.

THE nearest of the other deserted manor-houses was one on the other side of the valley and a half-mile or more nearer the village. We headed toward it, still carrying our sacks of implements, Doctor Dale leading at a rapid rate and Henderson and I close behind him.

We pushed through brush and briars, across the overgrown road at the valley's center and up the opposite

slope toward the old house. When we arrived there we found it a rotting structure in even greater decay than the Geisert place.

Rapidly we searched through its rotting rooms and damp cellar and the broken ruins of its outbuildings, Dale even flashing our beam down the old, dried-up well. But there was no sign of the coffins we sought. The sun was setting as we headed northeastward up the valley toward the next old place.

Henderson pointed to the crimson sunset. "Dale, even if we find the coffins now, Geisert and the rest will have awaked!"

"I know," Doctor Dale said grimly, "but we'll know where the coffins are and can wait until they come back to them, can wait until morning and then end the three."

Twilight was darkening as we reached the second old house, and we had to use the flashlight to search its ruins. Its wooden walls had fallen in several places and we pulled aside enough of the decaying debris to make sure that what we sought was not concealed there, then went on up the valley to the next place.

Night lay black and heavy over the valley by then, the sky clouded and hiding the moon. We plunged on through the night, fighting through the thick brush with clothes and skin torn, having difficulty even in finding the places we sought, and more difficulty in searching them. And our search was the more tense because we knew that now Geisert and his two vampires must be fully awake and possessed of all their hideous powers.

More than four hours had passed and we had searched five of the valley's deserted manors, those in its southwestern half, when Doctor Dale halted. We were

out of breath, reeling from fatigue, with clothing in tatters and skins bleeding from countless scratches.

"There are still seven places we haven't searched," Doctor Henderson said. "The Van Broot and Salton and Elphin places and four others."

"We're not going to search them now," Dale said. "It's near midnight and I think we'd best get back to Ralton's and the village. I'm uneasy."

"Why? You think something's wrong?" I asked quickly.

"I don't know," Doctor Dale said. "But we know Geisert and the other two must be awake tonight and abroad. We've not seen them in the valley here and if they've gone in again——"

"You're right," I said. "We'd better get back. We can come back in the morning and search the other places."

So we headed out of the long valley, using our flashlight to guide us along the half-obliterated road. We looked continually about us for sight of the three vampires we knew must be abroad, but saw nothing of them.

In the darkness we could not hurry much, and it was after two in the morning when we finally emerged from the hills and reached Henderson's car. Dead-tired as we were, we wasted not a moment but started eastward, Doctor Dale driving.

"I've been thinking, Owen," Dale said as he drove, "that what handicaps us most in our fight against these vampires is that we have no offensive weapon against them when they come against us by night in their pseudo-life. We can keep them out with the garlic repellent to all vampires and can repel them with the cross when they attack us, but have nothing to use against

them in return.

"It's occurred to me that we could use the powers of the cross more effectively against them by casting cross-shaped bullets, firing them from regular cartridges and regular pistols. The vampires would not be proof against them as against ordinary bullets, and if a cross-shaped bullet entered their bodies it would, I have no doubt, paralyze them completely and make them helpless."

"It's an idea, Dale!" I cried. "It would give us a chance against them by night, even if we could not find their coffins and bodies by day."

"We'll try it," Dale said. "God knows we need all the weapons we can get; for so far the score in this struggle has been all on the side of Geisert and his vampires."

IT WAS after three when our car turned in at the Ralton estate again. The big house was quiet, only a few lights glowing.

A sleepy-looking Smart admitted us and James Ralton was just coming down the stairs into the dim-lit hall as we entered.

"You succeeded?" he cried eagerly. "You found the coffins and bodies?"

Dale shook his head, and Ralton's haggard face became more drawn as he heard how Geisert had eluded us.

"We came back in because we feared Geisert might have come again," Dale said. "Nothing's happened, though? I mean to Olivia's body?"

"No, Edward has been watching it and hasn't left the library," Ralton said. "I looked in on him two hours ago and was just coming down again when you came."

He walked back with us to the door of the library and opened it. We started through the door, then cried out together.

The window of the dim-lit library was swinging open to the night! The coffin of Olivia Ralton was gone from the stand that had supported it! And Edward Harmon lay in a crushed, crumpled heap near the window, blood flowing from his mouth and nose.

We sprang across the room to him, Dale bending over him and raising him in his arms. Harmon stirred a little in Dale's arms and opened his eyes. His lips moved, and from them came a choking whisper.

"Sorry—got me," he whispered. "Came an hour ago—Geisert—Olivia——"

"Gerritt Geisert took Olivia's body and coffin?" Dale asked him fiercely. "He did this to you?"

Harmon's head nodded weakly. He seemed to gather his strength to speak. "I was watching Olivia's coffin," he whispered. "Had a cross in my hand, and another cross lay on the coffin where you'd left it. I was thinking of Olivia as she'd been when alive, when I heard Olivia speaking, inside the coffin!

"She was crying out faintly to me from inside the coffin. 'Edward, let me out!' she cried. 'I'm smothering here!'

"I sprang to the coffin. 'Good God, Olivia!' I cried. 'Is it you that's speaking?'

"Her faint voice came from inside. 'Yes, Edward—you must let me out, at once!'

"My hands flew to open the coffin when I remembered suddenly what you'd said about Olivia becoming vampire and waking tonight after death, and your orders

not to open the coffin in any case.

"‘I can’t let you out, Olivia!’ I cried. ‘You’re dead—Dale said you were dead!’

"‘He was wrong!’ her voice answered. ‘Edward, I’m as alive as you are—I woke just now in this terrible thing and I’m stifling, suffocating! Edward, if you love me, save me, let me out!’

"I could stand it no more, for it was Olivia, whom I had loved, crying to me to save her from a horrible death. I unfastened the coffin’s bolts, flung open the lid, the cross on it falling to the floor and my own cross dropping from my hand in my haste.

"Olivia sat up in the coffin! She seemed as alive as ever and in better health than I had seen her for weeks. her cheeks flushed and her eyes brilliant. Holding me with her eyes, she stepped to the floor. Then she put her arms round my neck, her face close to mine.

"‘Edward, my love, you have saved me from a terrible end,’ she said.

"‘Olivia, is it really you?’ I asked, dazed. ‘Are you really alive?’

"‘Of course I am,’ she answered with a silvery laugh. ‘See, I will kiss you and prove it to you.’

"Her mouth met mine, and it was icy cold! And somehow at its touch my strength seemed to leave me. I was aware that she was holding me in her arms and that her mouth was now on my neck, that her teeth were denting the skin of my throat as though to bite in the next moment.

"But at that moment came an interruption. The window was flung open and Gerritt Geisert and Allene Ralton entered, just the same in appearance as when we

saw them out at the Geisert place. Olivia turned to them at the interruption, her eyes blazing.

“So you have awakened already and found a victim!” Geisert said. “But there’s no time for that now—later you will have victims in plenty but now we must be quick and get out of here with your coffin.”

“But his blood is mine—I won’t go until I have it!” cried Olivia, still holding me, in a sort of daze, in her arms.

“I say no and I am master!” thundered Geisert, his eyes hell-red. “You will learn now to obey me as the others do.”

“Olivia cringed before his glare and let me go. Geisert closed her coffin and seized it. At that my daze left me and with a cry I sprang at him. He grasped me, hurled me like a doll toward the floor with terrific force, and I heard my bones crack as I struck.

“I lay there with consciousness going as Geisert again seized Olivia’s coffin, carrying it unaided, and then with Olivia and Allene Ralton following him, and a fiendish laugh from the two women, he was gone with it out the window! And I lay, unable to call and with my life going, until you came but now!”

12. Stake and Steel

EDWARD HARMON’S eyes closed and an instant I thought that death had come. But his eyelids flickered, opened again.

“Dale, I know I’m dying,” he whispered. “I felt my spine crack when I struck the floor. I wouldn’t care so

much, if I were not leaving Olivia——”

“Leaving Olivia one of Gerritt Geisert’s vampires,” Doctor Dale finished for him. “We’ll release her from that, Harmon, never fear, and end Geisert.”

“But be careful with Geisert,” warned Harmon in his weak whisper. “He is more powerful than we thought—is——”

Blood welled suddenly anew from his lips, he quivered violently, then lay limp in Dale’s supporting arms. Doctor Dale lowered him gently, then briefly examined his throat. There were no punctures in its skin.

Dale stood up. “At least he did not die as Olivia’s victim,” he said, “and is now of the truly dead and not the dead-alive.”

“Harmon dead?” Ralton seemed unable to comprehend. “And Olivia’s body and coffin gone!”

“Yes, Gerritt Geisert’s subservient vampires now number three!” Dale exclaimed. “First Allene Ralton, then young Arthur Newton, now Olivia Ralton, and now some one else soon if we do not destroy this ever-widening circle of evil!”

He turned to Ralton. “You heard no disturbance an hour ago? Surely the dogs must have barked when Geisert and Allene Ralton came?”

James Ralton shook his head. “No, Dale, they made no sound, and I can understand that. For yesterday afternoon the lodge-keeper came in to tell me that the dogs would not leave their kennels and made no sound but continual low whines of terror.”

“They’ve been cowed to silence by these recurrent vampire visits,” Dale said. “That means we can no longer depend on their warnings.”

"Dale, what are we to do?" Doctor Henderson demanded desperately. "Olivia vampire—Harmon dead—is this horror to go on and on?"

"We can do nothing but keep fighting it," Dale said sternly. "Our best course is to try the idea I spoke of as we were returning, the cross-shaped bullets. We'll make some and as soon as we have them will start out there into the hills, by day or night, and hunt down Gerritt Geisert and his vampires.

"In the meantime," he added to James Ralton, "before leaving here I want you to call Miss Virginia. She must be told everything that has happened."

"Everything?" Ralton said. "Dale, we can't tell her how her own mother vampirized Olivia, how Olivia is now a vampire too?"

"We must," Doctor Dale said firmly. "Don't you see what I'm thinking of? Didn't I tell you that the vampire comes back always to prey on its nearest kin? Allene Ralton came back to prey on Olivia, and what if Olivia now came——"

"To make a victim of Virginia?" Ralton cried. "Oh, Dale, this horror is unhinging my mind! But you're right—she must be warned."

When Virginia Ralton came she was so stunned to find Harmon dead that it took minutes for her to appreciate the horror of what Doctor Dale, as clearly as possible, told her of the way in which her mother and now her older sister had become vampires.

"So if you see Olivia seemingly living from now on you'll know it is not really Olivia but a thing of evil in her shape," Dale finished, "a thing infinitely to be feared.

"Keep crosses and sprays of garlic over all this house's

doors and windows from now on," he added to James Ralton. "I'll leave them here for you to put up—they only can repel vampire visitations."

"Dale, the servants know that something ghastly has been going on here, and they're whispering," James Ralton said. "I'm afraid they'll leave, they're so fearful."

"Well, if they do, get some one else here at once," Dale said. "That young Hugh Rillard would come, no doubt, and of course we'll come any time you want us."

"Henderson and Owen and I are starting back to the village now, and we'll arrange to have them come for Edward Harmon's body and take it to his home."

"Dale, on the way back hadn't we better stop at the Wilsey place?" I said. "If Geisert and Allene Ralton were here it means that Arthur Newton too must have been abroad!"

"You're right!" Dale exclaimed. "In the horror here I'd forgotten the Wilsey girl. We'd best get started now."

DAWN was breaking as our car turned out from the Ralton grounds and the sun was rising by the time we drove into the Wilsey estate.

Twice Doctor Dale rang without answer at the door and was reaching to ring again when the door was flung open and Mrs. Wilsey was disclosed, her face white and wild. She literally fell upon Dale.

"Doctor Dale!" she cried. "Thank God you've come! I didn't know where I could get you! Alice——"

"She's worse?" Dale said, and then without waiting for Mrs. Wilsey's answer, dashed up the stairs, we following in haste.

We burst into the girl's room to find Dale bending

over Alice Wilsey. One glance at her made my heart stand still—she was a replica in whiteness and waxenness, in the way in which her lips were drawn back and in her slow, heavy breathing, of Olivia Ralton when we had found her dying on the morning before!

Her blue eyes stared up at us unrecognizingly, her lips moving soundlessly. Doctor Dale swiftly tested her heart and lung action, then cast a glance around the room, noting as I had already done that the window giving on the porch-balcony swung a little open and that the garlic sprays that had hung upon it had been torn down. He looked back down at the girl.

"She can live but for minutes," he said slowly, heavily. "Her blood too has been drained almost entirely from her body."

"Doctor, you can't mean it!" cried Mrs. Wilsey, but Dale motioned silence suddenly as Alice Wilsey's efforts to speak became faintly audible.

"Arthur," she was murmuring in the faintest of whispers, "came in the night—I took down branches and opened to him—still thought I had tried to trap him the night before and was still angry.

"Still angry——" As her voice failed a moment I wondered what terrible scene here in the night between the girl and her vampire-lover those words covered. "Said he'd—take all my blood this time—took and took—strength—Arthur——"

Her body jerked, then lay still, eyes closing, drawn bloodless face settling almost at once into more natural lines.

Mrs. Wilsey flung herself on the dead girl, sobbing, crying, striving futilely to restore her.

Dale stood up, his face like iron. "Get the sacks of tools from the car, Owen," he said between his teeth.

"Dale, you're going to——" Henderson began.

"We're going to use stake and steel at once upon this dead girl who died a vampire's victim!" Doctor Dale rasped. "We're going to take no chance of her escaping us as Olivia Ralton did!"

"You're going to mangle Alice's body?" cried Mrs. Wilsey. "No, you can't—you can't!"

"We must and we will!" Dale exclaimed. "Unless we do, your Alice becomes tonight a fiend of evil like Arthur Newton himself, and goes forth dead in a terrible mockery of life!

"Get the sacks of tools, Owen!" he directed again, and I sped down to the car and in a moment was back with them.

"Take Mrs. Wilsey to another room, Henderson," Dale ordered, and the physician, as though glad himself to escape, supported the half-conscious woman and led her from the room.

"Now, Owen," said Dale, removing his coat and rolling up his sleeves, which example I followed. "One of the stakes and the sledge—you hold the stake and I'll drive it."

I handed him the sledge and then took the heavy wooden stake, one of the several Dale had prepared before. It was four feet in length, sharpened to a point at one end and that point hardened.

At Doctor Dale's direction I set the point of the stake against the body of Alice Wilsey directly over the heart, holding it upright. An irrepressible shudder ran through me.

Dale placed a chair beside me and then stood upon it so that he was at a height at which he could effectively wield the sledge on the stake's head. He paused with the sledge upraised, looking down at the motionless form. Alice Wilsey lay with closed eyes and peaceful face as though sleeping.

"Remember to hold the stake firm no matter what happens," he warned me. "It must go through the heart."

"I will—go ahead," I said.

Dale swung the sledge back over his shoulder and then down with terrific force on the top of the stake. I felt the stake in my hands drive down through flesh and bone for inches into the girl's body.

No blood streamed from that terrible penetration, but Alice Wilsey's eyes opened, blazing up at us, and as her body writhed in mad, snake-like convulsions there came from her a terrible scream!

I held the stake steady despite her wild convulsions, and again Doctor Dale's sledge fell upon it to drive it deeper. The girl twisted at the second blow so that I could hardly hold the stake, her body writhing like that of a snake transfixed by a spear! Steady screams, curses, entreaties came from her lips, her blazing blue eyes widened as though in utter agony.

Dale struck again, and this time the stake's sharp end penetrated clean through her body. At once Alice Wilsey's mad movements ceased, she lay motionless again with closed eyes, and with peace, a real peace this time, upon her drawn white face.

With the implements from our sacks we cut off the stake level with her breast, then severed her head. That

done, Doctor Dale covered her motionless form, and with our sacks of tools, beads of sweat standing out on our foreheads, we went out of the room.

Mrs. Wilsey waited with Henderson downstairs, and Doctor Dale placed his hand on her shoulder.

"It's done," he told her simply, "and your Alice is now of the truly dead and not of the hideous dead-alive as she would have been.

"Do not go to look at her," he said. "I'll send an undertaker in from the village and explain things to him. But there is nothing further to fear—here."

We left her like a woman stunned, and drove through the morning sunlight to the village.

As we got out of the car at Henderson's house, Dale swayed a little. "I've got to have sleep," he said thickly, "and you too, Owen. We'll have to put off the making of the cross-bullets until tonight.

"You see the undertaker, Henderson," he said. "Explain by any plausible story the condition of Alice Wilsey's body, and also that of Edward Harmon's. You'll have to tell them something to account for the disappearance of Olivia Ralton's body, too—tell them the funeral is being postponed or something like that."

Doctor Dale and I slept heavily for hours that day, as much exhausted by the mental strain of the horrors through which we had passed as by the physical exertion of our watch two nights before at the Wilsey house, our dash to the dying Olivia Ralton, our toilsome expedition to and search through the valley in the hills, and our return to the Ralton and Wilsey places.

In fact I was still sleeping deeply when Dale woke me, at six in the evening. He had already been up a few

hours, I found, and had already begun the fabrication of the cross-shaped bullets which we hoped would prove a more effective weapon against Gerritt Geisert and his vampire crew than any we had hitherto had.

13. Called Forth

DALE showed me the plan upon which he was proceeding. He was fashioning a little copper mold. Bullets cast in it would be cylindrical at one end, to fit into an ordinary cartridge, but at the other end would be shaped like a small cross, the cross-end smaller than the cylindrical end so that the bullet could be fired out of an ordinary pistol-barrel.

The fashioning of the little mold was extraordinarily difficult by reason of the shape, and while Doctor Dale worked at it, Henderson and I prepared heater and lead and ladle for casting the bullets when the mold was finished. We worked on at this in Doctor Henderson's white-lit little laboratory, hour following hour.

It was a little after eleven when the telephone-bell rang. Henderson answered, then handed the instrument to Doctor Dale.

"It's Ralton!" he said. Dale took it quickly.

We could hear James Ralton's excited voice from the receiver. "Dale, the servants all left us hours ago! They sneaked away—Virginia and I just discovered we're alone in the house. And we just glimpsed shapes of some kind out in the grounds!"

"You have the crosses and garlic-branches at all the doors and windows as I said?" Dale asked sharply.

"Yes, but we may have missed one or two, there are so many. Virginia and I are here in the music-room—we tried to get Hugh Rillard but couldn't locate him, so we called you. Wait a minute!" There was a moment's silence and then Ralton's voice again, more excited. "Virginia says she hears a sound at the back of the house! I hear something there, too!"

"We'll be out there as fast as we can come!" Doctor Dale cried. "Don't go out of the house for any reason nor——"

"Dale, there's something in the house!" Ralton's frantic voice interrupted. "Some one got in the back and is coming through—coming along the hall——"

From the receiver came faintly a terrible scream in the voice of Virginia Ralton! Then a cry from James Ralton, not to us, though he must have still held the telephone, since we heard it—"Oh, God——!"

There was a crash and then silence. Doctor Dale jabbed the receiver-hook fiercely but no answer came. He leapt hatless for the door, Henderson and I with him.

"The car!" he cried. "Something terrible has happened out there——"

In a minute our car was roaring out of Maysville's dim-lit streets westward into the night. Dale drove with utter recklessness, the car rocking and swaying as we rounded turns at unchecked speed, Henderson and I crouching in the seat beside him.

Our speeding machine with its fan of yellow light preceding it split the night like a meteor. The miles between the village and the Ralton estate unreeled in the darkness behind it with dizzying velocity.

THE gates of the Ralton estate were open and as we dashed through them we saw that the little lodge beside them was dark and deserted by its keeper. The big Ralton mansion too was mostly dark, but there were some lights on its lower floor.

The car stopped with brakes squealing, and we burst out of it and up to the door, whipping crosses from our pockets.

The door was locked! Dale leapt to one of the windows and shattered the glass with a kick. We plunged through into the drawing-room.

In a moment we were in the hall and raced down it to the music room opening from its rear end.

The music-room was alight. James Ralton lay sprawled in its corner over the fallen telephone, his face distorted and body unmoving. Virginia Ralton was in a heap at the room's center, motionless, too.

Doctor Dale bent first over Ralton, but one look at his motionless body and his terribly distorted face and staring eyes was enough. "Dead!" Dale said. "No injuries or marks on his throat. But Virginia——"

We raised Virginia Ralton in our arms. Her face was deathly white but she was breathing, in long sighs. On her white throat stood out two crimson punctures, a tiny trickle of blood still flowing from them.

"She's lost blood, and we'll have to give her a Klein-Lorentz injection at once!" Doctor Dale exclaimed. "The case is in the car, Owen."

I ran out and in a moment was back with the case. Swiftly we made the injection, Henderson too dazed to help us, and as the stimulating solution shot through her pillaged veins, Virginia Ralton stirred.

In moments her eyes opened, she stared up at us for a second, then screamed. Again and again she screamed.

It took many minutes of hard work on Doctor Dale's part before her awful terror quieted in any degree. Doctor Henderson had gripped himself enough to examine James Ralton, and came over to us.

"He died of shock, I think," he said. "There's no sign of any other cause."

Virginia Ralton nodded unsteadily. "Yes, I saw it. Father just gave an awful cry and crumpled up—when he saw them——"

"Saw whom?" Dale asked her swiftly. "Who was here, Virginia? Who made these marks on your throat?"

She shuddered violently. "It was Gerritt Geisert and with him were—mother and Olivia! They all—were at my throat——"

In minutes more she was able to speak coherently. "We had found that we two were all alone here, the servants having sneaked away in fear sometime this evening, and we thought we saw moving shapes approaching the house through the grounds. We were scared and tried to get Hugh Rillard but couldn't locate him. So father at once called you.

"While he was talking with you on the telephone we heard some sounds at the back of the house, like those of a window being forced open. We had placed crosses and garlic at the windows and doors as you said—that's what scared the servants into leaving—but must have missed one of the windows at the back, there being so many.

"There came steps along the hall and in a moment Gerritt Geisert and mother and Olivia entered the room!

Their faces and eyes were—terrible, mother and Olivia as terrible-looking as Geisert. Father, when he saw mother and Olivia together like that, cried ‘Oh, God!’ and choked as though trying to say something, then crumpled to the floor.

“Mother and Olivia laughed at that! And so did Geisert! I stood petrified by utter horror, and then Olivia leapt at me, grasped me! I screamed as her sharp teeth penetrated my neck, but as I felt my blood draining into her sucking mouth I was unable to resist. She was torn from me in a moment by mother. But mother then fastened her own mouth on my throat!

“The horror of it was causing my senses to fail when mother in turn was pushed from me by Gerritt Geisert. Holding me, he said to the other two—‘You get no more tonight. A little for myself and then we must be gone, for Newton is waiting outside and I think some one will be here soon. There will be plenty of time in the future to take her blood.’

“Saying that, Geisert plunged his own head down against my throat. And as I felt more of my blood streaming from me, my senses gave way completely and I became unconscious. I knew nothing until I woke just now with you over me.”

“It is what I feared!” Dale groaned. “But I thought they could be held off until we made the cross-bullets and could meet them!”

“Doctor, will I be like Olivia—and mother?” Virginia Ralton asked unsteadily. “Will I die and yet not be dead, be as they are?”

“You’ll not, I swear it!” The exclamation was wrung from the depths of Dale’s feelings. “Virginia, if Gerritt

Geisert and those others are destroyed, this vampire-taint will pass from you; and they are going to be destroyed, they must be!"

THERE sounded quick steps in the hall, and we sprang erect. But it was a young man with wondering expression who entered. I recognized him as Hugh Rillard.

"What's been happening——" he began, then saw the girl and leapt to her side. "Virginia! What's the matter?"

She put a hand over her face, but did not answer. Rillard looked bewilderedly at us, then with widening eyes at James Ralton's body.

Briefly Doctor Dale recounted to him the dark evil that was pursuing the vampire-haunted Raltons, that had made vampires of Allene and Olivia Ralton, had taken the lives of James Ralton and Edward Harmon, and that had now fastened upon Virginia Ralton.

"But isn't there something we can *do*?" burst out Hugh Rillard when Dale had finished. "Some way of fighting this Gerritt Geisert and the rest?"

"There is a way, yes," Dale said quickly, "and we were preparing it when Ralton called us."

He explained how we were fabricating cross-shaped bullets for use against Geisert and his vampire-satellites. "And it may be that this vampirizing of Virginia, terrible as it is, will give us a way of striking at the vampires."

"What do you mean, Dale?" asked Doctor Henderson.

"I mean that it is almost sure that once having taken some of Virginia's blood, Geisert and the rest will come

back to vampirize her again. Very well, we will take up headquarters in this house from now on and each night will lie in wait for the vampires with pistols loaded with cross-shaped bullets. And with those bullets we can destroy them,”

“Count me in with you on this!” said Hugh Rillard determinedly. “I’m not going to leave here while Virginia’s in danger.”

“Good, that will make four of us and we can guard all sides of the house at night,” Dale said. “And we’ll not leave Virginia unguarded until Gerritt Geisert and the rest are destroyed.

“Owen can go back into the village to get the mold and implements we were working on,” he said, “and before tomorrow night—tonight I should say, as it’s almost morning—we’ll have some of the cross-bullets ready to use. They may not come so soon again as tonight but if they do we’ll be ready for them.

“And it will be a far better chance of coming to grips with Geisert and the other vampires than if we were to go out into the hills to search for them, as there is no telling where in that valley their bodies lie by day, and we might search for weeks without finding them.”

DOCTOR HENDERSON and I drove back into the village and procured the bullet-making equipment which Doctor Dale wanted, also the sacks of stakes and tools and some other objects he specified. When we returned to the Ralton estate we brought also a coffin to hold temporarily the body of James Ralton.

It was well into the morning when we returned. Virginia was sleeping, young Rillard guarding her though

she was safe enough by day, and Dale and Henderson and I placed James Ralton's body in the coffin and set it in the library, upon the same stand that so short a time before had held Olivia Ralton's coffin until Geisert had taken it.

Then we went at the work of making the cross-shaped bullets. Doctor Dale finished his little copper mold, and after some trials and errors we succeeded in casting bullets that were cylindrical at one end like any other bullet but that at the other end, the nose, were shaped like little crosses. We made several dozen of these and fitted them into cartridges from which we removed the ordinary bullets, then tested them from each of the four pistols we had brought.

The cross-bullets seemed fired as effectively as any other bullet from the pistols. We loaded the guns with them, Henderson and Dale and Rillard and I each taking one, and then our preparations were complete. Only actual test could show whether they would be as effective against Gerritt Geisert and his followers as we thought, though it seemed certain that they should be.

Dale and Henderson and I got some sleep then, it being midafternoon, telling Rillard to wake us before sunset. The sun was just setting when he did so.

We ate a somewhat sketchy dinner which in the absence of servants we had to prepare ourselves, and then Doctor Dale outlined to us his plan of action.

"I want you, Miss Virginia, to wait inside the house," he said, "with enough lights going to show that you are here.

"We four will lie hidden in the shrubbery around the house, each of us guarding a different side of it. If

Geisert and the rest come tonight to prey upon you, as I think they will, we'll be ready for them with our pistols, and our cross-bullets will end all these vampires."

Virginia Ralton was very white. "You're sure—sure—that they won't be able to get in at me?" she asked.

"I am sure!" Doctor Dale said emphatically. "You will be quite safe, Virginia, but will be acting as a bait to lure these vampires to their end.

"It's dark now," he added, glancing from the window. "We may as well take our positions, though I do not expect them to come much before midnight."

The next minutes were busy ones. Dale snapped on a few lights in the lower floor of the house, just enough to show that the house was still occupied. He then had Virginia take her position in a big chair in the drawing-room, near a floor-lamp that would show her clearly to any one peering from a distance through the window.

That done, we four proceeded to take our own places. Doctor Dale chose to guard the house's northern side, Henderson taking the south, Rillard the west and I the east. We secreted ourselves in the thick shrubbery at the base of the house, and Dale inspected our locations before taking his own. He told us that any cry or shot from any side should bring us all to that side at once.

Doctor Dale spoke to me last before going to his own place at the house's northern side.

"Take no chances tonight, Owen," he warned. "The moment you see them approaching, fire. Try above all to get Gerritt Geisert."

"I will," I promised. His face was very grave.

"This is the best chance we may ever have to end the black devil's work Geisert has been spreading here. We

must not fail!"

Dale left me, and then the silence of the night was unbroken around the big house at whose four sides we crouched.

Hidden uncomfortably in the thick shrubbery, I waited with pistol ready in my hand, gazing out into the estate's grounds. I could not see for any great distance, so dense was the darkness under the great trees of the grounds, the moon having not yet risen.

In the dark bulk of the mansion behind me glowed the few illuminated windows we had purposely left lit. I wondered how this dreadful, silent wait was affecting Virginia Ralton inside, who had most to fear of any of us.

And dreadful enough was that watch in silence and darkness for all of us—a watch for a vampire crew and a vampire master whose evil powers we had come to know well. The trembling Virginia in the house, with the taint of the vampire's victim already on her, the dead James Ralton lying in another room, bore witness to their powers.

And so too did Edward Harmon, lying crushed and dead in his own home, and Alice Wilsey, lying in hers with the marks of our dreadful but necessary work upon her body. And even three of those for whom we now waited, Allene and Olivia Ralton and Arthur Newton, bore witness to the hellish power of Gerritt Geisert, who had drawn them into the dark web of evil of which he was the center.

I clutched my pistol tighter, crouching, waiting. Upon these pistols and their cross-shaped bullets depended all tonight. I listened constantly for some sound of alarm from the other sides of the house, for it was wearing on

toward midnight; but no sound came and I waited on like the others. Was Geisert not coming this night after all? Now I saw that the moon was rising.

TIME passed slowly in that tense wait, hour following hour. The radium dial of my watch told me it was almost three hours past midnight, and no alarm yet had been sounded, when I heard a low call from the northern side of the house, from Doctor Dale.

At once I hurried to him, and found Doctor Henderson and Rillard hastily answering his summons also.

"You three have seen nothing?" asked Dale tensely. "They surely would have come by now if they were coming."

We shook our heads. "Strange!" said Dale, "I was certain they'd come again to prey upon Virginia tonight. I hope this terrible waiting isn't making her too nervous."

"Didn't you see her a few hours ago?" Rillard asked in surprise. "I thought she came back in through the northern door."

"Came back in?" Doctor Dale gripped Rillard's shoulder with sudden fierceness. "What do you mean? Did Virginia go out of the house?"

"Why, yes, before midnight!" said Rillard bewilderedly. "She told me she was going to walk around the house for a breath of air when she went out the west door, and when she didn't come back in that door I supposed she'd reentered the house through the north door."

Without a word Dale dashed into the house. We followed hastily. The drawing-room was empty of Virginia

Ralton and neither did a swift search through the whole house find her.

"She's gone!" cried Doctor Dale. He turned on Hugh Rillard. "What did she look like when she came out? Was there anything strange in her manner?"

Rillard looked at us with anxious eyes. "Why, she did seem a little strange in manner, she spoke and moved in a way that seemed to me rather stiff and mechanical. But I thought she was just wrought up by the tenseness of the waiting, as she might well be."

Dale groaned. "Why didn't I look for this? Gerritt Geisert has been too much for us again. Instead of coming in with his vampires to prey on Virginia tonight, as we thought he would, he has called her out to them, wherever their new lair is in the hills!"

"Called her out? But how could he——" Rillard attempted.

"Easily enough!" Dale exclaimed. "She is a victim of Geisert and the others and as their victim can be controlled by their wills, even from a distance, just as Olivia Ralton when still living was controlled from outside her room by the wills of her mother and Geisert.

"Quick, to the car! We've no time to lose here now—if Virginia Ralton left here before midnight she must have reached that vampire nest out there some time ago! We've got to go out there after her!"

14. The Struggle

OUR car shot out from the Ralton estate and headed toward the hills. Hugh Rillard drove, and the speed

at which we raced through the moonlit countryside and his white face were evidence enough of the self-accusing anxiety he felt at having let Virginia Ralton go forth.

Doctor Dale leaned forward. "Heaven knows whether we can find Gerritt Geisert's new lair at all!" he exclaimed. "Henderson and Owen and I searched the whole lower end of that valley night before last without locating it."

"We've got to find it!" Young Rillard flung the words back jerkily without turning. "If they've killed Virginia—"

"She had blood enough to stand their vampirism to-night, I think," Dale said, "though there's no telling about such matters."

The dark hills loomed close ahead in the moonlight, and as the road grew narrower and bumpier and finally impassable. Rillard stopped the car and we hastily emerged and pressed on on foot.

As we stumbled along the unused road into the first hills, faint streaks of dawn were showing in the sky behind us, gradually creeping across the heavens and paling the moonlight.

We had gone about half a mile into the hills by the old road and were about the same distance still from the valley of deserted manors, when we halted at sight of a figure approaching us from ahead. Exclamations burst from us as it came closer. It was Virginia Ralton!

She was walking toward us as stiffly and mechanically as though she were some puppet moved by clockwork. Her face and skin were marble-white, her lips colorless, and her eyes stared straight ahead unseeingly as she came on. Her dress and stockings were torn by brush

and briars and her slippers were stained by dirt and dew.

"Virginia!" cried Rillard and sprang toward her, but Doctor Dale grasped him and held him back. The girl took absolutely no notice of him or any of us.

"Do not wake her now!" Dale warned. "She is still under the vampire's spell, but when the sun rises she will wake of herself. We will follow her until then."

We let Virginia pass us, then walked on directly behind her. Her unseeing eyes never wavered in our direction; she walked on stiffly.

"Dale, what does it mean?" Henderson cried. "She's heading back toward her home!"

Doctor Dale nodded. "Geisert and the rest called her out to them so as to avoid the risk of coming in to visit her. That of itself shows they are not too confident of their invulnerability. They took from her what blood they wanted—you see how white and bloodless she is—then sent her back home so that her visit to them would not be discovered."

Hugh Rillard turned, his face passionate. "I'm going out there and search them out now!" he cried, but Dale held him.

"Not now," Doctor Dale said. "We've Virginia here to care for now, and besides, I have a better plan than that. But look—the sun is rising!"

It was true. Ahead of us the sun's golden disk was lifting and its rays were bright in our eyes.

As the sun lifted, Virginia Ralton's mechanical walking forward stopped. She hesitated a moment, then went suddenly limp and would have fallen to the ground but for our catching her.

"Quick, we've got to get her to the car and back to her

home!" Doctor Dale said. "She's released now from the vampires' will and has lost much blood!"

HUGH RILLARD and I carried the unconscious girl between us and we all hastened out of the hills and to the car. Then while Rillard held her in his arms, I drove back toward the Ralton estate as hurriedly as we had come.

Virginia had not come to consciousness by the time we reached the estate, and her face was still alarmingly white, her breathing slow and labored.

We placed her on a sofa in the drawing-room and Doctor Dale swiftly injected into her again the Klein-Lorentz solution which, while unable really to replace lost blood, acted as a powerful stimulant as it coursed through the wasted veins.

We all breathed more easily when the girl sighed and weakly opened her eyes. She looked bewilderedly up at us, then must have felt her own weakness, for terror suffused her face.

"They were here again?" she cried weakly. "They got in at me, then?"

"No, Virginia," Dale answered. "They did not come at all, but they called you out there to them."

Briefly he told her what had happened, and the terror on her face deepened as she heard.

"I remember now!" she exclaimed. "I was sitting here in the drawing-room, waiting and terribly afraid even though you four were watching outside. Then as I waited a strange force seemed to descend on me—I felt my limbs moving without command of my will, *against* command of my will! It was as though another will had

stepped into my body and was taking command of it

"I seemed to lose consciousness but was dimly aware that I was walking out of the door, was making some explanation to Hugh, and then walking rapidly out through the grounds and along the road—walking—walking. . . .

"Then the only thing else I can remember is faces around me, cruel, white faces with gloating red eyes. Mother's face and Olivia's swam among them somehow, and clearest of them all was Gerritt Geisert's. I was dimly aware of a pain in my throat, and then knew nothing more at all, as though my own will had been completely overpowered."

Doctor Dale rose, his eyes intense. "Virginia, you've had a terrible experience," he said, "but I'm afraid that one as terrible lies still ahead of you."

"What do you mean?" she asked. "Surely you can keep them from calling me out there again, doctor? You must—you can lock me up or tie me up or something!"

Dale shook his head. "On the contrary," he asserted, "if Gerritt Geisert and his vampires call you out there again this coming night, we are going to let you go!"

Hugh Rillard got to his feet, his face flaming. "Like hell we are!" he cried. "It's my fault she went out to that hell-nest of vampires once, but she's not going again!"

Dale's eyes were like brown ice. "Rillard, she must go again! Don't you see what I'm driving at? If we let her go at their call and follow her, she'll lead us straight to Gerritt Geisert and the rest, and with our pistols and cross-bullets we can end them once and for all!"

Doctor Henderson nodded eagerly. "He's right, Hugh! Geisert and the rest will undoubtedly call her out

there again, and we might search out there ourselves for weeks without finding them."

"But what if Geisert were too much for us again?" cried Rillard. "He was tonight and could be again, and we'd have sacrificed Virginia's life—more than her life—for nothing!"

"Rillard, I don't say that there's no risk of that," Doctor Dale said gravely. "Yet we must take that risk. Think! We may be able by keeping constant watch over Virginia to keep Geisert and his vampires from getting at her again, but what will be the result? Those four fiends will turn to new victims!"

"They will vampirize new victims whom we may not even know of, and who can become vampires in turn after their deaths. So this circle of evil will widen still further, and will become so great that it will be beyond our control. For Geisert aims to be vampire master of hundreds, of thousands, and unless we take this chance to destroy him and his satellites, he will be!"

"But I can't let Virginia go!" groaned Rillard. "I'd go gladly myself, but she——"

Virginia interrupted him. "I am going to do as Doctor Dale says!" she said, her face pale but determined. "He's right, Hugh—it's the only way in which this thing can be stopped, and mother and Olivia made truly dead!"

Dale caught her hand. "You are a brave girl," he exclaimed. "I know what terror you must feel at the idea of repeating last night's experience, Virginia, but it will not be the same. We four will be close behind you, and Geisert and the others will not have time to harm you before we attack them."

"But what will we do?" asked Hugh Rillard, his face working. "Just wait here tonight until Virginia is called out there and follow?"

"Just that," Dale said. "But we must have everything ready when night comes.

"I think," he added solemnly, "that tonight will decide this terrible struggle one way or another. Either we will conquer and destroy Gerritt Geisert and his minions once and for all or he will add another to the list of his vampire-victims and show that he is too strong for us to hope ever to overcome."

The knowledge of this held us tense through the hours of that day. During the morning hours Virginia lay in exhausted sleep, Rillard and I taking turns in watching over her while Doctor Dale and Doctor Henderson got some sleep.

In the afternoon we reversed the procedure and while Henderson watched the still-sleeping Virginia, and Doctor Dale busied himself in his preparations for the night, Rillard and I snatched some troubled sleep. Even in my sleep the knowledge that we soon must face Gerritt Geisert and his satellites in decisive combat dominated my mind.

DOCTOR DALE woke Rillard and me an hour before sunset. Virginia had wakened, and Rillard prepared a hurried meal for all of us.

I noted that Virginia wore a skirt of white flannel and a white jacket, and Dale saw my eyes upon her garb.

"I told Virginia to wear white clothing," he said, "as it will make her easier to follow tonight."

The girl whitened but said nothing. "We will act as

follows," continued Doctor Dale. "Before sunset we will tie Virginia's hands and feet. If the vampires out there order her to come to them before midnight, as they did last night, we'll not let her go but will wait a few hours before releasing her.

"The reason is that then she, and we who will be following her, will get out there to wherever the vampire nest is in that valley, not much before sunrise. That turns the time-element in our favor, for even should Gerritt Geisert and the other three be too strong for us, they will hardly have time before sunrise to seek a new hiding-place for their coffins and bodies.

"When we follow Virginia out there we will take with us, besides our pistols with their cross-bullets, the sack containing the stakes and tools and also garlic-branches. With all these we should be able to overcome Geisert and the rest, or at least prevent them from escaping. If we can not—but we must not think of failure!"

We rose from the table. "The sun is hanging over the western horizon now," Dale said, pointing at the window. "It is time we secured Virginia."

We went into the drawing-room and the girl seated herself in a chair. Then Doctor Dale quickly bound her hands and feet securely with thin rope, not so tightly as to hurt her but too tightly for her to make any movement out of the chair.

The sun set rapidly after we finished, and as twilight's dusk invaded the house Dale snapped on the lights, and drew chairs around that of Virginia. The sack containing the tools and stakes and garlic lay close at hand.

"We'll wait here around you, Virginia," he told the girl. "There is a possibility that instead of calling you out

there, Gerritt Geisert and the rest may come in here again, but I do not look for it. I am confident that all will be as last night."

"I'm not afraid with you all around me," Virginia said, but her face was very pale. Hugh Rillard took her bound hands in his, and she smiled bravely at him.

OF ALL the terrible vigils that had been ours since Dale and I had come to Maysville to fight the vampire menace, that was most terrible. A watch and wait it was for the dread vampire-summons to come to this girl in our midst, a summons from her own dead vampire mother and sister and from that dread vampire master, Gerritt Geisert, whose black nets of two-hundred-year-old evil had made of three innocent people after death hell-fiends lusting for the blood of their kin and kind.

And as time dragged slowly on, our watch was made the more terrible by the presence with us in the house of the dead James Ralton, lying still in his coffin in the library. So aware of his presence I was that as I seemed to hear with strained ears slight sounds from the library, I began to wonder whether or not even James Ralton, though not a vampire victim, might not arise from his coffin at some outside command, to work against us.

Doctor Dale looked constantly at his watch, and every few minutes walked around the room, peering out its windows, but never leaving the room. The rest of us sat unmoving in our chairs around Virginia. Doctor Henderson was as white almost as the girl, and I wondered inwardly how much more of this horror the elderly physician could stand. He was an altogether different-looking person from the Henderson who had visited

Doctor Dale and me in our New York office.

It lacked an hour of midnight when our wait was first rewarded with results. Virginia suddenly stiffened in her chair. Her eyes expanded and her whole face was shadowed by a series of swift changes. An unfamiliar listening expression dropped on it, and her gray eyes became strange.

She strained at her bonds, sought to rise. Her ankles and wrists were cut by the thin ropes as with all her strength she sought to break them. Her eyes blazed in alien hatred at our own, and her face was utterly unlike the normal Virginia's; her mouth was a cruel red square.

"They're calling her!" Doctor Dale exclaimed. "Gerritt Geisert's will has hold of her now!"

"Let me go!" Virginia was crying, almost screaming. "I want to go!" Her body thrashed wildly in the chair.

"Hold her in the chair!" Dale directed, and Rillard and I held her down as he ordered. Her strange eyes glared into ours, and in her fury she spat at us!

For minutes she struggled wildly, then subsided and lay bound in the chair with hate blazing from her eyes.

Then again she was struggling furiously, screeching, screaming, the call from out there in the vampire-haunted hills strong upon her. Her efforts to free herself were so wild that it took three of us to hold her in the chair. Dale watched with stern determination.

These periods of alternate raging struggle and breathless subsidence went on, past midnight and past one o'clock, while still we held her. Then abruptly she seemed to collapse in her chair, and hung limp in our grasp.

In a moment she stirred weakly, and opened her eyes.

The savagery had left her face and it seemed normal. She looked in wondering fashion at us.

"Did something happen?" she asked. "But I'm all right now. Only these ropes hurt my ankles—loosen them, Hugh."

Rillard with an exclamation of relief bent to do so, and was knocked aside by a sweep of Doctor Dale's arm.

"No!" cried Dale. "Don't you see it's the vampire will holding her still, shamming? Look at her!"

The animal-like fury was again on Virginia's face at seeing her ruse thus balked. She struggled madly again, striking us with her bound hands until, panting, we again held her tightly.

"In a half-hour more we'll release her," Dale said. "She'll make straight for the hills."

Virginia had become quiet. She was not looking at us now but was looking past us, head erect, a strange listening expression on her face. Her eyes glinted with a hint of triumph.

I could not understand this new change, but Rillard and Henderson and I continued to hold her. Doctor Dale glanced again at his watch. It was almost two. We were all utterly tense.

A window crashed behind us and Virginia screamed exultantly. We spun around—Arthur Newton had crashed through the window and was lunging toward us. His eyes were hell-crimson, his face a white vampire-mask of evil.

With abnormal strength Newton brushed Doctor Dale from his path and grasped Virginia's bound form. Hugh Rillard leapt at him with a snarl but was knocked back by one hand as Newton leapt with the girl toward the win-

dow.

But as Newton half-turned to knock back Rillard, I fired at his exposed left breast. Newton stopped dead, his face for an instant agonized and ghastly as my cross-shaped bullet tore into his breast. Then, dropping Virginia, he fell in a limp heap to the floor.

Doctor Dale had staggered up with his pistol out. "Dale, it's Newton!" I cried. "The cross-bullet ended him!"

"He was trying to take Virginia out!" Dale exclaimed. "You see what it means—Gerritt Geisert, when Virginia did not answer their call, sent Newton in here after her!"

"Quick!" he cried. "The sledge and stakes! We'll make sure that Arthur Newton is truly dead, even though the cross-bullet appears to have made him so."

Hurriedly we set one of the sharpened stakes against Newton's breast and drove it down through his heart, Rillard and I wielding the heavy tool, Newton's body unstirring.

Dale and Henderson then swiftly severed Newton's head. Upon his face, though it showed now the appearance of several-weeks' death which formerly it had not showed, was a naturalness and peace I had never seen there. We then wrapped Newton's body in a sheet, and placed it on the sofa. One of Geisert's vampires, at least, was destroyed!

We turned then to Virginia, but stopped appalled. She was not in the room! She had been lying bound by the broken window where Newton had dropped her, but was not there now!

"She's gone!" Dale cried. "Newton must have broken or loosened her bonds when he grasped her, and she's

headed out to the hills to answer Gerritt Geisert's call!"

"After her, then!" yelled Rillard. We leapt to the window, I grasping the sack of tools and stakes, and out into the night.

We reached the road, looking westward. A white object visible in the light of the rising moon was fleeing toward the dark hills.

"There she goes!" Dale cried. "We must overtake her!"

We ran at top speed along the road, after Virginia's fleeing white form. The girl seemed to fly through the night, so swift was her progress.

The hills loomed bigger ahead and still she kept well in front of us. Our pistols were in our hands, gleaming in the moonlight, as we followed. The tools in the sack that I carried clanked with each stride.

WE HAD drawn a little closer to Virginia's white form but were panting hard by the time we ran after her in between the first of the frowning black hills. Henderson was sobbing with each breath as he ran, behind the rest of us, and I knew he must be almost winded.

Through the hills after the running girl we sped, and turned after her down the long narrow valley of deserted manors, whose deep cleft now was illuminated by the silver of the lifting moon. In that illumination I could glimpse on the valley's sides the ancient houses Edward Harmon first had pointed out to us—the Van Broot house and Elphin house and Salton house and others.

Virginia was heading toward the ancient Salton house, had left the road and was flitting up through the

brush of the valley's steep side toward the rotting old structure. We glimpsed her white figure momentarily in the brush; then it was hidden from us.

"The Salton place!" panted Rillard. "She's heading for the old house—Gerritt Gelsert and the others must be there!"

"We'll be up there in a few minutes!" Doctor Dale exclaimed. "Keep your pistols ready!"

We struggled up the slope through the tangled brush and briars, heedless of their tearing fingers. We emerged breathless and bleeding into the moonlit clearing on the slope that held the rotting high-roofed manor-house, just in time to see its door close upon Virginia.

Rillard was throwing himself toward the house, but Dale held him back a moment.

"Wait!" he exclaimed fiercely. "We must be sure that Gerritt Geisert does not escape this time!"

He tore the sack from me, drew swiftly from it the garlic we had put in it that day.

"Each of you take some of these, go around the house and place them outside the doors and windows!" he said. "Quick!"

"But Virginia's in there with those vampire-fiends!" Rillard cried crazily.

"Do as I say!" Doctor Dale said, his eyes blazing. Rillard with a groan grasped some of the withered branches, as the rest of us had done, and we ran silently across the moonlit clearing to the house.

Its decaying doors and window-shutters were closed, but we heard high and wild voices from inside. Swiftly and with thumping hearts we placed the garlic outside the sills of doors and windows.

The sky eastward was paling a little. Dawn was close at hand, I saw, as I joined Doctor Dale and Rillard and Henderson at the front of the house. The voices inside were now passionate, furious. We pressed against the loose-hung rotting door and through the crack between it and its frame we could look into the room inside, bright-lit by the moonlight streaming through innumerable crevices in rotting roof and walls.

Gerritt Geisert stood at the room's center with Virginia Ralton's white-garbed figure in his arms! She lay with eyes closed and without power of resistance in his grasp, her jacket-collar open and exposing the punctures on her throat.

But Geisert was not looking at her. He was confronting, as he held her, the two others in the room, Allene and Olivia Ralton. The two women-vampires, in their white shrouds, were terrible in aspect, their red eyes burning with infernal fury.

"I say you get none!" Geisert was exclaiming to them in high, rasping voice. "It will be sunrise in minutes, you fools! There is no time for you to take her blood—hardly time enough for me!"

"But why should you be the one?" cried Olivia Ralton with unholy passion. "She is my victim as much as yours, and my sister also! Her blood belongs more to me than to you!"

"And more to me than to either of you!" cried Allene Ralton. "She is my child and her blood should be mine!"

"I say no!" thundered Geisert in hellish rage. "Down to your coffins! Sunrise is almost here!"

"We won't!" screeched Allene Ralton. "Who are you to take the victims and the blood that belongs to us!"

She and Olivia darted forward like twin attacking furies at Geisert. Without releasing Virginia, Geisert raised his hand, and though he did not touch either of the two women vampires, they recoiled as from a blow, and shrank to the moon-lit room's other side.

"So you find out again I am master!" cried Geisert in diabolical mockery. "And that as master the blood of this girl is——"

"Not yours!" yelled Doctor Dale as we four crashed in through the rotted door. Dale and I fired together at Geisert.

We missed, and Geisert, red fire blazing in his eyes, swung Virginia Ralton's limp white form between himself and us so that we dared not fire. He backed to a door and stairs leading down into the dark cellar, dropped Virginia and sprang into the darkness as Olivia and Allene Ralton, screeching in fury, sprang at us.

DALE and Rillard and I shot at the two women fiends as they leapt but in the wild flurry we missed. Olivia Ralton bore Rillard down and was seeking his throat with sharp teeth when Dale and I fired together at her. She fell limp as the cross-shaped bullets struck her.

Allene Ralton was upon us as Rillard scrambled up. Before we could turn our pistols upon her Gerritt Geisert burst up again out of the cellar, eyes a red flame, a black coffin of antique design held in his grasp. We had not time to fire before he was across the room, one arm holding the coffin like a feather while with a sweep of the other he knocked Rillard and Henderson and me from his path.

He and Allene Ralton leapt to escape through the

open door, but at its threshold they recoiled from the garlic we had placed outside. Dawn was painting the sky grayly and rosy beams eastward showed sunrise was at hand. With an inhuman screech Allene Ralton fled downward into the darkness of the cellar while Gerritt Geisert, his white face awful in its rage, sprang to one of the windows.

But as he tore it open, as he recoiled from the withered branches outside its sill, Dale and Rillard and I shot together. The coffin dropped from Geisert's grasp as our cross-bullets tore into him. He swayed a moment with the raging red hell-fires in his eyes dulling, then fell and lay motionless.

A bright shift of golden light struck in through the open door from the rising sun.

We staggered, looking wildly at one another. "It's over!" Henderson sobbed. "Oh God, it's over!"

"Dale, what of Allene Ralton?" I cried thickly. "She went down there!"

"She fled down there to her coffin when she saw sunrise coming," Dale said. "She's down there in it now, stiff and helpless—but Virginia——"

Hugh Rillard had dropped beside Virginia's limp form. "Virginia, it's I!" he choked. "It's Hugh!"

She stirred a little, and opened her eyes dazedly. "But I'm all right—what happened——"

"Take her outside, Rillard," said Doctor Dale. "Owen, you and Henderson help me take these bodies down to the cellar."

As Rillard helped the still-dazed girl out we took first Gerritt Geisert's body and then that of Olivia Ralton down the stairs into the dark cellar. Doctor Dale flashed

the beam of his flashlight around and the light fell on three coffins. Two of them were open, one closed.

"The coffins of Allene and Olivia Ralton and of Arthur Newton," Dale said. "See——"

He opened the lid of the closed coffin. His beam fell on the face of Allene Ralton, lying stiff and unmoving with closed eyes.

"Bring Geisert's coffin down, too," Dale said, "and the sack of tools."

When we had done so we placed Gerritt Geisert's body in his antique coffin. Soon a terrible odor of long-deferred decomposition arose from Geisert's two-hundred-year-old body as we staked it.

The body was already disintegrating, in fact, and when we had finished driving a stake down through its heart and severing the head, it was not much more than bones and dust. We closed the coffin. Gerritt Geisert, master of the dead-alive, was at long last truly dead.

Olivia Ralton too lay motionless in her coffin as the cruel but merciful stake drove down through her heart and her head was severed, her vampire-life already paralyzed like Geisert's by our cross-bullets. But when we used stake and steel upon Allene Ralton's body her convulsions and writhings were a repetition of those of Alice Wilsey. At the end of those terrible few minutes Henderson's hands were shaking violently, but as we closed Allene Ralton's coffin her face held the peace of the truly dead.

We left the coffins and bodies in the cellar, awaiting their return to the cemetery where they would now sleep undisturbed, and went back up out of the dark cellar, and out of the house into the bright sunlight. The world was

brilliant in that early morning light, even the long dark valley suddenly fair and smiling to our eyes.

Virginia Ralton came toward us with Rillard as we emerged. "Doctor Dale!" she cried. "The marks on my throat have gone completely! See!" And she showed us her unmarred neck.

Dale nodded wearily, a faint smile in his eyes, as Doctor Henderson and I leaned forward to see. "Yes, Virginia," he said, "they passed with the passing of the black vampire-evil that caused them.

"There is nothing more to fear now, for that evil is gone as utterly as though it had never been, as utterly as all evil must go in time, even though for a while it works untold ill."

"Then everything is over?" cried Virginia.

Dale looked past her at Rillard and shook his head. "No," he said. "For you, everything is beginning."

The Earth Dwellers

Thrilling Mystery

April 1936



CHRISTA THORNE, lying on her cot in the dark tent, fought the unreasoning dread that oppressed her. Her slim young body was taut with fear as she stared through the tent door at the nearby moonlit cliff, and at the round, black opening in its base.

That opening was the entrance to a great labyrinth of unexplored caverns here in the New Mexico mountains. For a week, the party of Doctor Thorne, Christa's geologist father, had been exploring the caves. And that gloomy, dark gateway was the focus of the girl's crawling fear.

What black horror lurked down in those sunless depths, she asked herself. What things of that lightless underworld had done away with those two laborers who had vanished somewhere in the caves? *Something* was down there, something whose weird howls and distorted, semi-human footprints had puzzled them all for

days. But what?

"I *will* forget about it and go to sleep!" she vowed fiercely, forcing herself to breathe with calm regularity.

But her nerves quivered like harp wires. She imagined that she heard a slight stir of movement outside her tent.

"I won't look," she told herself desperately.

Yet a few minutes later she seemed to hear again that stealthy, rustling movement. That, and a low sound of husky breathing.

"I won't! I won't look!" she repeated madly, pressing her eyes closed, struggling frantically with her nerves. "It isn't anything."

Suddenly her heart gave a great leap in her breast, and seemed to die within her. She *smelled* something alien near her, a dank, heavy, earthy odor, that of an underground animal. And heard a soft step!

This couldn't be all imagination! She could stand it no longer—her terror was conquering her. Her eyelids jerked open.

There *was* some nightmare, monstrous thing inside the tent, approaching her cot! And another in the moonlight outside.

Their bodies were hunched, covered with thick, matted white hair. Even their faces were hairy. Enormous, shining eyes, three times as large as human eyes, stared at her.

Christa's throat was dry, her body frozen by sheer, unbelieving horror. Her stricken throat could utter no sound.

A hairy, horrible white shape rearing over her in the dark, saucer-like eyes shining, unhuman hands grasping

for her—

Christa screamed madly. All her black, primal horror found voice in that trapped cry.

Two misshapen creatures froze motionless an instant, and then darted swiftly out of the tent, running on all fours, scrabbling on the ground.

The girl stumbled from her cot to the door, glimpsed the running white shapes disappearing into the black entrance of the caverns. She was aware that she was sinking to the ground.

Then strong arms were encircling her, a frantic voice in her ears. David Strang's voice, his homely young face drawn and anxious.

"Christa, what happened? What is it?"

She clung weakly to him, cried hysterically, "David—creatures from the caverns! They came out tonight—tried to take me—"

THE young geologist held her tight. Two others were running up—Doctor Ferdinand Thorne, her father, and Sanders Andrews, the mining engineer who had been helping the scientists explore the caves.

Doctor Thorne's scholarly face paled when he heard. "Hairy, semi-human creatures from the caves?" he repeated. "They must be the things that made the tracks we found down there, and did away with the two vanished laborers. But such creatures are unknown to science—"

David Strang's homely face was deeply thoughtful,

"Yet life does exist in caves, many kinds of life," he said slowly. "Fish, bats, insects—why not larger creatures, that prey on the smaller ones? Cave-dwelling, ape-

like creatures, distantly related to the human family—”

He broke off.

“It’s true, science has never suspected anything like that. Yet Christa *did* see two earth-dwelling creatures of some kind.”

Sanders Andrews’ strong, square face was queer. “I’ve heard of such creatures before,” he said, “in gold and copper mines around here. Things glimpsed in the deepest, lowest galleries, things that were white and hairy and ran on all fours—but were men.”

“I’ve known more than one mine to dynamite closed galleries in which such things had been glimpsed,” he added, “and in which miners had strangely vanished from sight!”

Doctor Thorne was looking around distractedly. “But where’s Professor Merriam? Surely he can’t be sleeping through all this.”

“I’ll get him,” David said, and ran toward a tent.

Thorne, his arm round his quivering daughter, turned back to Sanders Andrews.

“Andrews, you believe we ought to halt our exploration of these caves? That it isn’t safe down there any longer?”

“I do think that,” the engineer affirmed. “We’ve gone down too far, opened up depths haunted by those unhuman things. They’ve already taken two of our laborers down there, and now they’ve even started coming up here by night, using our ladders, to reach their prey.”

“Yet I hate to leave when it took us so long to get legal rights to the caves, and when we’ve found so many fine formations,” the geologist said. “Still, if it isn’t safe—”

David Strang ran back up, his plain, strong face wor-

ried in the moonlight.

"Professor Merriam's not in his tent!"

Doctor Thorne started. "Did any of you see Merriam come back out of the caverns tonight?" he asked suddenly.

David and Andrews shook their heads blankly.

"I guess we just took it for granted he'd returned and was in his tent."

Doctor Thorne went very white.

"Then Merriam's still down in the caves! Something's happened to him."

"Good Lord!" cried David. "Those creatures down there—"

"Have perhaps taken him as they did the two Mexicans!" exclaimed Thorne. "We've got to go down and search for him."

Christa clung frantically to her father. "Don't go! They'll kill you, the way they did the others. You'll never come back—"

Sanders Andrews, his face grey, was saying, "I'll go with you if you go, doctor. But I think it's suicidal."

"We can't let Merriam vanish without even trying to find him!" Thorne exclaimed. "Get Pablo and the laborers here."

Andrews raced toward the distant tents in which the Mexican laborers were encamped. But in a few moments he was back, alone.

"They're all leaving!" he reported. "This thing tonight has frightened them so they've packed up and are getting out now."

"We'll have to go without them, then," Thorne stated. "Get dressed and get your electric lanterns—and your

revolvers."

Christa cried, "If you go, I'm going with you!"

"No, you mustn't!" her father exclaimed. "It's not safe."

"I'm going! I'll stick close beside David every moment. I'll do exactly as he says, but I *won't* remain up here alone!"

"She's right, doctor," exclaimed David Strang. "Heavens knows I hate to take her into the caves with us, but if she waited up here, those things might slip past us and come up here again and find her alone."

THE girl stumbled into her tent and struggled into her riding breeches and boots, then hastened back out into the moonlight.

Doctor Thorne and Andrews and David had hastily dressed and each carried an electric lantern. Young Strang took the girl's arm, and they hurried toward the black mouth of the cavern's entrance.

"I'll lead," said Thorne rapidly as they entered. The rest of you stick close behind me until we get down to the lower caves."

Christa clung to Strang's arm. The solid blackness crowded around their glowing lanterns. They picked their way between the boulders strewing the floor of the shaft, hurrying downward.

In ten minutes they emerged from the oblique shaft into a huge cavern, uppermost of the great caves. Their lanterns showed only vaguely the vast, looming rock walls, the fringed stalactites that hung from the domed ceiling, the ghostly white stalagmites rising rank upon rank from the floor.

Christa held tighter to David's arm as Doctor Thorne cupped his hands and shouted into the darkness.

"Merriam, where are you?"

Only a mocking echo answered from the cavernous gloom.

"He's not here!" Thorne exclaimed tautly. "Come on."

They started across the huge cavern, following the trail worn in the dust by the expedition's members in the past week.

Sanders Andrews pointed suddenly down to footprints in the dust, oddly distorted ones like those of misshapen hands and feet.

"The creatures came up through here to get to the surface tonight," Andrews said. "And now they've gone back down."

"Don't think of them, Christa," David told the girl as he felt her clinging arm tremble. "You're safe with us."

But as they pressed forward into the gloom, fear was a freezing agony in her breast. From everywhere in the darkness she felt huge, shining eyes watching her with lustful avidity.

They came to a chasm into which dropped a wire ladder. Tying their lanterns around their necks, they descended. In minutes they reached the floor of another colossal cave, and again yelled Merriam's name.

As before, only the ghostly echo-whispers answered.

"He must be somewhere in these caves!" Thorne said desperately. "We'll have to separate and search them. I'll take the right chain of caves, Andrews the middle ones, and David the left ones. When you find Merriam, fire a shot. If anything goes wrong, fire two shots."

They took separate passages out of that enormous cave, the glowing lanterns of the other two disappearing from the girl's sight as she and David Strang entered the left passageway.

It was a natural tunnel winding downward through the solid rock. Here and there it widened into larger caves, then became as narrow as before.

"Merriam!" cried David as they pressed along the way.

"He's dead," whispered Christa. "The things down here got him, as they did the laborers."

David suddenly stopped in the passage. In its rock wall at this point was a narrow crack, a vertical crevice not much more than a foot wide. David flashed his lantern intently into the cleft.

"Christa, look at the dust here! It looks as though something had gone in here and smoothed the tracks over to hide them."

The cleft was so narrow that they could scarcely squeeze into it. It wound inward through the solid rock.

The crack debouched into a dark rock gallery of considerable size.

David was flashing his lantern up at the jagged, gleaming rock of its roof, his eyes wide with wonder.

"Good Lord, that rock—"

A dank, earthy, animal smell came to Christa's nostrils at that moment.

"*David!*" she screamed, but even as he whirled around, hairy white shapes were leaping from the darkness beside him, onto him.

HE was knocked from his feet by the hairy, charging

creatures; his lantern smashed, went out. In the rayless darkness that clapped down, Christa heard sounds of struggle and the thud of a heavy blow. Then the struggling sounds ceased.

"David!" she cried again.

There was no answer. Then in the unplumbed dark beside her was the sound of soft, approaching steps.

Hands gripped her in the dark, and she was drawn against a cold, hairy, earth-smelling body. And as she struggled weakly against the thing that held her in loathsome contact, she felt her limbs grasped by another of the hideous things.

Christa could struggle no longer, her strength turned to water, her body drooped nervelessly. Like one in nightmare, she felt remotely the horrible handling of the things that held her.

Their misshapen hands were clutching her obscenely, tearing at her clothing. She felt her silk shirt ripped away; bestial hands clutched her breast and limbs—

Light suddenly crashed into the rayless gallery—the light of an electric lantern carried by a man who had just entered from the cleft.

The fainting girl felt herself dropped by the two creatures that held her. She saw them advancing, hairy, hunched shapes of horror, toward the man with the lantern.

Christa saw his face by the light he carried and she screamed his name in her frantic relief.

"Sanders Andrews!"

Andrews, his square face grim, spoke. And Christa doubted her sanity as she saw he was speaking to the two hairy earth dwellers!

"You fools, what are you doing?" Andrews hissed.

One of the hairy creatures answered. And his voice was the whining, apologetic voice of a Mexican!

"These two blundered in here, Señor Andrews—we stunned the man and were going to toss them in one of the chasms as you said to do with all who penetrated here, and as we did with the Professor Merriam."

Christa Thorne's dazed, incredulous eyes, seeing the cringing, hairy creatures for the first time in good light, stared wildly. These were not semi-human monsters, but men in monstrous disguises!

They had stuck masses of long animal hair over their bodies and had whitened their hair and skin to dead white by powder. They wore misshapen gloves and shoes. Over their eyes they wore huge glass lenses that in the dark would look like huge, shining eyes.

But they were men, and she recognized their features. The two Mexican laborers who had disappeared in the caves a week before!

"Quick, waste no more time!" Andrews grated. "We've got to take Strang and the girl to one of the chasms and toss them in. Doctor Thorne is coming back this way."

"You two take the girl and I'll take Strang. Quick!"

Christa felt herself lifted by the two weirdly disguised Mexicans. She tried to struggle, to cry out, but could not.

Sanders Andrews stooped to lift David Strang's limp body. And then young Strang came suddenly to life!

His feet dealt a lightning kick that sent Andrews reeling back against the wall. David leaped up at the engineer and smashed his chin as he sought to draw his pis-

tol. He tore the gun from Andrews' hand and whirled around. The disguised Mexicans had dropped Christa and were charging him. The pistol roared and one of the men dropped, the other cowering.

S "David, look out!" cried Christa from the floor.

ANDERS ANDREWS, his square face flaming hate, had raised a chunk of rock to smash down on Strang's skull. David dodged and then shot swiftly. The engineer crumpled to the floor.

Still covering the other Mexican, David bent anxiously to the girl.

"Christa, you're all right? I came back to consciousness just as Andrews entered the gallery, but I shammed for a few more minutes—"

She clung to him, sobbing. Then turned as they heard a hail. Doctor Thorne was entering the gallery, his face stupefied.

"What has happened here?" he cried. "I heard shots in here as I was coming back, and pushed in through that cleft." His eyes widened as they took in the disguised Mexicans. "The earth dwellers were just a fake, then?"

David nodded tightly.

"Sanders Andrews was behind the earth dwellers scare. His object was to frighten us all away before our explorations reached this particular gallery, which we hadn't yet explored.

"He got two of his Mexican workers, who supposedly disappeared, to stay hidden down in this gallery, and fixed up these weird, crude disguises for them.

"Merriam blundered into this gallery yesterday and the two Mexicans killed him and threw his body in a chasm.

Andrews had the two come up tonight and give Christa a real scare, figuring that would surely frighten us off before we tried searching for Merriam. When we did come down to search, in spite of his dissuasion, he came down with us. And he and his two followers would have killed Christa and me as they did Merriam."

"But I don't understand!" cried Doctor Thorne. "Why should Andrews go to such lengths, why should he even kill, to keep us from exploring this gallery?"

David Strang flashed the beam of a lantern up at the rock roof of the gallery. "That's why," he said.

In the dark rock of the roof there gleamed a broad vein of brighter rock, patches of it glistening dull yellow in the light.

"It's gold!" exclaimed Thorne. "A big vein of the richest kind of gold ore! It must run off into the solid rock from here!"

David Strang nodded.

"Andrews must have found that vein here when he first came down into the caves. He didn't tell us about it, for he knew that according to our legal mineral rights, the gold would belong to the institution we represent.

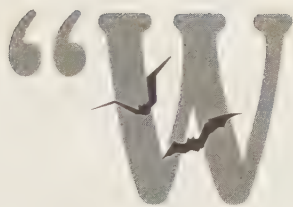
"He planned to frighten us away before we found this gallery and discovered the vein's existence. Then the gold would be his."

The young man's arm went tightly around Christa's shoulders.

"Come on, Christa, you and I are going back up to the surface. Together—now, and from now on."

Beasts That Once Were Men

Thrilling Mystery
May 1936



“HO is this?” cried Ned Felton into the telephone. “I want to know who’s speaking!”

In reply there came again over the wire the voice that had chilled his blood when he first answered the call. A thick, hoarse, brutish voice that was almost a howl! It was uttering mumbling sounds that became a barking chattering when it tried to speak faster.

It was, for all the world, as though some animal was trying to talk over the telephone. Ned Felton listened with nerves prickling strangely to that incoherent, beastlike voice.

Then he began to recognize the words it was speaking. He could barely identify them as words.

“Felton!” It was his name that unholy, animal-like voice was mumbling. “This is Francis Lester—”

“Francis Lester?” cried Ned into the instrument. “My

God, man, what's happened to you? What's wrong with your voice?"

"I'm changed—changed!" croaked the voice. "Gone back to the beast! And going farther back each hour!" Then the brutish voice mumbled hoarsely, "Take care of Ruth and say good-by for me. I'm going to end this horror before I go back farther."

"Francis!" yelled Ned Felton frantically into the telephone. "For God's sake don't do anything rash! Wait until your sister and I can get to you and—"

He heard the click of the receiver placed at the other end of the wire.

Ned hung up frozenly and stood paralyzed for the moment. Every nerve in his body was still vibrating with eldritch horror from the shock of hearing that awful, beastlike voice in which Francis Lester had spoken to him.

FRANCIS, the brother of the girl he loved! And something had happened to him, something terrible, unearthly. Something that had changed his voice into that animal-like mumble and that had made him determine to kill himself.

Ned Felton broke out of his paralysis and sprang to the door of his apartment. He had to tell Ruth—at once. If Francis had not yet committed suicide they might have time to save him, but they would have to hurry. Felton's strong, tanned young face and grey eyes were strained with the urgency of it as he hastened down to the street.

It was two miles from his apartment to the big house where Ruth Lester lived with her aunt. The early evening theater traffic was cluttering the city's streets,

but Ned drove his roadster through it with utter disregard of risk, and in a few minutes was stopping in front of the sedate suburban mansion.

When he ran up onto the porch of Ruth's house he found her just coming to the door, stopping in surprise as she saw him.

Ruth Lester was almost childlike in her smallness of figure; it was no child's form, but the sweet curves of ripening womanhood that her straight white silk sport suit outlined.

Her soft, oval little face, beneath her smoothly brushed black hair was astonished. Her serious, dark eyes were a little worried as she met him.

"Why, Ned, you're hours early tonight! What brought you so soon?"

Felton clutched her arm. "Ruth, where's your brother? Is he still at that scientist's house back in the hills?"

Ruth Lester nodded, staring surprisedly up at him. "Yes, he is—Francis has been out there working with Doctor Robine for most of the last few months. I've not seen him for three weeks."

Ned pulled her abruptly toward the door. "We've got to go out there, Ruth, at once. Something's happened."

Her face went white. "To Francis? Ned, what is it?"

"I don't know yet—I only know that something is terribly wrong," he told her tautly.

Pale with alarm, Ruth Lester hurried with him out to the roadster. In a few minutes he was driving at high speed through the quiet suburb, heading toward the country of wild, wooded hills that lay south of the city.

As he drove, Ned told the girl rapidly of the weird

telephone call from her brother. Her hand went to her soft throat in fear as she heard.

"What could have changed his voice like that?" Ned Felton asked. "And what did he mean by the things he mumbled? 'Gone back to the beast!' What has Francis been doing out at this place anyway?"

Ruth said, "He's been working with Doctor Robine on some scientific experiments. Francis specialized in biology at the university, you know, and he met the doctor soon after graduating. He told me that Doctor Robine was one of the most brilliant biologists alive.

"Several months ago Francis said that Doctor Robine had started an experiment which would change the whole world if it succeeded. He said that he was going to finance the doctor and was going to help him and his assistant, a scientist named Mattison, work out the experiment."

"What was the nature of the experiment?" Ned asked her sharply.

Ruth's clear brow wrinkled troubledly. "I don't remember much of what Francis told me about it—I know so little about science. It's a big thing, for he's spent most of his inheritance financing it.

"Oh, yes, I do remember now!" she exclaimed. "It was something about atavism, whatever that is. A means of producing artificial atavism, Francis said, was part of it."

"Atavism?"

AS Ned Felton repeated the word, he felt a chill as though an alien wind of horror from the unknown was blowing on him.

Ruth looked at him anxiously in the hooded glow of the dashlight.

"What does it mean, Ned?"

He kept his voice steady as he answered: "It means a reversal of the course of evolution, a return to the low, brutish forms out of which life developed in past ages. If Doctor Robine has really found a way to produce artificial atavism in living things that means that he can turn back the clock of evolution at will. That he can change human beings back into the animalistic forms out of which the human race evolved!"

Ruth Lester's dark eyes were wide, her little hand grasping his sleeve tightly as she said, in a horror-laden whisper, "Ned, you told me that Francis' voice sounded like that of an animal, that he said something about going back to the beast—"

"No!" exclaimed Felton loudly. "A thing like that isn't possible. Don't imagine it for a moment, Ruth."

But the crawling horror at his spine persisted as he drove tensely onward.

They had long before this left the last fringes of the city and had, for the last half hour, been driving deeper into the thickly wooded, sparsely inhabited hills.

The black outlines of the low hills humped against the brooding, clouded night sky. Only at rare intervals did they pass a lighted house. Their headlights showed hardly more than a patch of the white gravel road ahead of them.

They came to a narrow dirt road branching from the gravel highway, and Ruth motioned him to turn.

"Doctor Robine's place is about four miles down this dirt road," she said. "I was out here once, weeks ago,

with Francis.”

The road paralleled the course of a small stream that ran down a valley between the dark, long hills. They passed one farm-house soon after leaving the highway, and after that there were no more houses—nothing but black, silent woods.

Gaunt elms leaned down with drooping branches and clawed the top of the roadster as it lurched past. The glowing eyes of small wild creatures watched them from the dark forest. It began to rain, a soft drizzle falling from the brooding sky and pattering on the canvas top over them.

Despite the windshield cleaner, Ned Felton had a hard time seeing through the misted glass. As the car rocked around the narrow turns, that crawling dread persisted in his mind. Over and over in his brain hammered those mumbled words: “Gone back to the beast! Gone back . . .”

Ruth was suddenly pointing ahead. They had rattled over a shaky wooden bridge and rounded a square turn. A hundred yards from them glowed the yellow-lighted windows of the house.

It was a neat, modern bungalow, built a little up the steep slope of the valley wall. There were behind it some smaller buildings and wire-fenced yards, apparently designed for the keeping of animals. A short lane led up from the dirt road to the bungalow.

NED stopped the car outside the house and leaped out. As Ruth started to follow, he held her back, his hands on her shoulders.

“Better wait here, Ruth,” he said urgently. “Until I

can look around."

Her face was very white, but her dark eyes were steady as she shook her head.

"I'm going with you, Ned. I—I can't stand it, whatever has happened."

They climbed onto the porch of the bungalow. The front door was wide open, but there was no sound from inside.

Ned stepped ahead of the girl, into the lighted living room. Then he stopped, uttering a choked exclamation.

Upon the floor of the living room, in the corner by the telephone desk, lay an incredible thing.

It was an ape, the size of a man, *and it was dressed in a man's clothes*. The hairy body wore a grey jacket and trousers, shirt and necktie—socks and shoes upon its prehensile feet. All of the garments seemed too small for the creature.

Its round, hairy head projected from the shirt collar, looking weirdly horrible. Its eyes were open, staring blankly, and its big white fangs half showed between parted lips. There was a bullet hole in its temple, and its black, long ape-fingers clutched a revolver.

Ned Felton had instinctively clasped Ruth close to him and could feel her small, soft body shuddering violently against him.

He managed to speak. "It's—it's probably just some ape which Doctor Robine had here for experimental purposes, and which has killed itself playing with that revolver."

"Ned, those are Francis' clothes!" cried the quivering girl. "That creature must be—"

Felton fought against the black horror that was surg-

ing higher in his mind each moment.

He muttered, "That thing can't be Francis—it can't! Nothing on earth could turn back the course of evolution like that, change a man back into an ape."

An idea flashed across his brain. "I'll prove to you it isn't Francis!" he exclaimed. "Francis had his left little finger taken off by that college laboratory accident, didn't he? Well then!"

She stooped quickly over the weird, hairy body of the dead ape and lifted its left arm.

He and Ruth stared at the hand. The fifth finger of that hand was missing.

"It *is* Francis!" cried Ruth in blind, mind-shattering horror. "He killed himself because he'd changed into—this!"

"Atavism—a return to the beast," whispered Felton hoarsely. "Good God, how *could* it have been done? How could it happen that it was done to Francis? And where's Doctor Robine and his helper, Mattison? They're concerned in this unholy business!"

He held Ruth's sobbing, horror-shaken little body close to him, his hand smoothing her dark hair numbly as he looked down at the horrible travesty of mankind that lay dead on the floor.

Ned's gaze fell upon an object in another corner of the room, a big metal boxlike thing with a quartz lens in its face, connected by wiring to batteries and transformers. Beyond this weird mechanism was a door in the wall which hung on shattered hinges.

He ran to this door. A strong oak bar had secured it at one time on the outside, but it had been burst open from within.

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"Ruth, someone or something's been confined in this room!" he exclaimed. "And whatever was in here has escaped."

"Ned!"

She was staring in horror at the open door that led out onto the porch.

A MAN stood crouched in the door opening. But Ned Felton's brain sensed something queer about him.

The face of the creature, snarling a little at him, was a brutish countenance bristling with short hair, its jaw a jutting, prognathous one, its thick lips baring sharp teeth, its eyes blazing greenly in animal ferocity.

The creature's long, simian arms dangled at its sides. Dressed in its ill-fitting man's clothing, it looked like a semi-human, semi-ape thing of humanity's dawn, come from out of long dead ages.

Ruth Lester, paralyzed by the creature's appearance, whispered, "It looks like—like Mattison. But he's changed—"

The blazing animal eyes swept toward the girl, and a screech of inhuman laughter came from the loathsome thing.

"Yes, I've changed! Changed!" The thing spoke with difficulty in a thickened, heavy voice, slowly as though its brain found difficulty in forming the words. "I was Mattison—I remember—"

Abruptly it stopped. There was a new light in the feral eyes as they fastened on the shrinking form of the terrified girl, taking in the soft curves of her body which the white silk suit revealed.

"A woman!" muttered the thing that had been Mattison. "Long time—since a woman was here—"

The creature moved forward toward the girl, its bristly face twitching with sudden passion, apelike hands reaching.

Ned Felton sprang forward between the two, raising his fist to strike.

With one sweep of its simian arm the apelike man sent Ned crashing back against the wall! He bent over the girl.

Felton heard Ruth scream. He was on his feet and leaped wildly upon the creature, tearing the hairy form away from his sweetheart and raining blows upon its misshapen head.

Howling in bestial rage, the thing that had once been Mattison gripped Felton's throat with its long, apelike fingers. The fingers tightened like steel bands in a choking grip. The creature was talking as it throttled Felton, mouthing thick, incoherent words.

The world began to go black for Ned. He tore vainly at the strangling hands. He heard Ruth Lester scream again and then the roaring in his ears became deafening, drowning all else as consciousness left him.

WHEN Ned came back to awareness of his surroundings his head was aching violently and his throat was a burning soreness. Someone was helping him to sit up, working to revive him.

It was a man of fifty with iron-grey hair and a strong, scholarly face. His features were horrified.

"I'm Doctor Robine," he told Ned. "Who are you and what in God's name has been happening here?"

Ned struggled up and cast a frenzied glance around the room. Both his attacker and his sweetheart were gone. He clutched the scientist's arm wildly.

"Ruth!" he cried. "That creature has taken her—that half-ape that was Mattison!"

"Mattison!" cried Dr. Robine, paling. "My God, has he been here? I've been hunting him for hours," the scientist continued. "Early this evening he broke out of his room and I've been searching the woods for him. He must have doubled back to the house.

"But Francis!" Dr. Robine exclaimed. "Where is he—" The scientist's eyes, roving around the room, fell upon the dead ape in human clothing. He stiffened. Then he walked over to the hairy body and stooped over it. Tears glistened in his eyes.

"Francis killed himself," he said. "I never thought of that when I left him alone here tonight—yet he's been threatening to do it for the last few days. Maybe it's better so."

"Then that—that ape *is* Francis Lester?" cried Ned Felton. "You changed him into that, as you changed Mattison?"

ROBINE shook his head. "It was not I who changed Francis—he did that to himself. But, God forgive me, the guilt for it all is on my head."

He pointed unsteadily to the weird, boxlike apparatus with the quartz lens.

"That apparatus did it—a projector that generates a ray which induces atavistic change in any living thing it is turned upon. Turns back the course of evolution, throws back into the past forms of the race any human who

submits to it. I've spent months perfecting that projector, with the help of Mattison and Francis. I finished the thing a few weeks ago and we turned it first upon Mattison, with his consent, for a trial. We thought it would have only a slight effect upon him.

"But a brief hour's exposure to the ray took Mattison back ten thousand years in evolutionary development! He became a creature such as all men were ages ago, his body changing into a distorted, heavy primitive one, his mind warped and retaining only fragments of his former knowledge. We had to lock him up for safety's sake."

Dr. Robine's hands were shaking violently with the awful memory.

"I was horrified, wanted to smash the apparatus at once! But Francis wouldn't hear of it—he said he wanted to make some more experiments with it. He was afire to learn all that it would do. One day, when I was away, he turned the ray for two or three hours upon himself. When I returned I found Francis—an ape! Just as you see him there now! He had been flung millions of years back to the apehood that preceded humanity.

"He still had enough mind left to realize the horror of his condition. He wanted to kill himself, but I tried to talk him out of it, telling him I would surely be able to find some way of bringing him and Mattison back to manhood. But I worked in the last weeks, unable to find such a way. Tonight when Mattison escaped and I went searching for him, Francis must have seized the opportunity to end it all."

Robine pointed tremblingly to the hairy form in man's clothes.

"That was Francis Lester. That is what my accursed

meddlings with the secrets of nature made of him."

"But Ruth!" cried Ned agonizedly. "That creature Mattison must have dragged her out somewhere into the forest!"

"God help her!" breathed the scientist. "Mattison's mind has become half-ape, along with his body. We must find them—quickly!"

He took a flashlight from a table drawer and thrust it toward Ned Felton.

"Here's a flashlight—I've only one pistol," he said.

They stumbled out into the darkness, where the fine rain still was falling. The dark woods around the bungalow was wrapped in mournful silence.

"You search north of the house and I'll look through the south woods!" cried Ned. "If you see anything of them, fire your pistol!"

FELTON plunged into the thickets, flashing his light ahead. He crashed through the underbrush, blundered around fallen logs and the big trunks of great oaks, seeking desperately for some trace of the two.

His brain was wild at the thought of Ruth, the little smiling girl he loved, out there somewhere in these black forests in the hands of the apelike thing that had been Mattison. A creature lower than man, a hairy thing like a visitant out of humanity's dead past.

He shouted at intervals, his voice high and raw with the agony of his emotion. There was no answer but the gentle patter of the rain on the canopy of leaves overhead.

Felton suddenly stumbled on a half-invisible trail through the underbrush. It looked to his desperate eyes

as though something or someone had been dragged along that way, crushing down small weeds and briars.

His heart cold with terror, he rapidly followed the dim trail through the forest. It seemed leading toward the steep hillside at the west edge of the valley. In a few minutes it brought him to the rocky, vertical face of the hill.

He flashed his light over the rock wall. A black opening yawned at its bottom, a cave in the rock eroded by a tiny trickle of water that ran out of it.

Ned Felton rushed into the mouth of the cave, flashing his beam ahead. It was terribly still inside, and every muscle of his body was ready for the leaping onslaught of a snarling body from the dark.

"Ruth!" he cried, and the echoes came back to him loudly from the farther reaches of the cave. "Ruth!"

Two minutes later Ned came bounding out of the cave, his face white.

He had not found Mattison or the girl inside, but he had just heard the unmistakable crack of a pistol shot from the north!

"Robine, I'm coming!" he yelled, and broke into a crashing run through the woods.

He hurled himself northward, regardless of the cruelly raking briars that tore at his clothing and the branches that whipped and stung his face. There were no more shots.

But in a few minutes Ned saw the gleam of a light through the trees. He crashed in that direction, and reached in a few moments the edge of a large clearing amid the dark trees.

He stopped, paralyzed momentarily by what he saw.

Dr. Robine lay against the base of a tree, moving feebly and groaning, as though he had been flung there by irresistible force. His pistol and flashlight had dropped to the ground, the latter's beam lighting up all.

Near the center of the clearing the hairy, simian creature that had been Mattison had turned from the scientist and was stooping over a limp, motionless, white form on the ground.

It was Ruth Lester, senseless from horror. Her soft face was white and still, and her silk suit had been ripped to rags by the briars through which she had been dragged. Her sheer silk stockings were torn to tatters, and her white knees and thighs showed through them, scored by long red scratches from the brambles.

Her monstrous abductor was picking her up, tearing angrily at her tattered suit. It was suddenly ripped off her. Ruth's small, soft-limbed body, bare except for two wispy silk garments, drooped supinely in the simian creature's arms.

THE creature's blazing eyes gloated upon her creamy limbs, one apelike hand clutching her. Then abruptly the monster spun around. Ned Felton, his face set, was running across the clearing toward the pistol which lay on the ground!

With incredible rapidity, the creature dropped the half-nude girl and bounded toward Felton.

Ned, his fingers already touching the pistol butt, was knocked back through the air by the rush of the charging brute.

Again the feral eyes blazed into his and the steely fingers encircled his throat. But this time, with an access of

desperate strength, he raised his knee and drove it into the chest of the creature as it bore him backward.

With a hoarse, animal grunt, the monster was jolted back out of breath. Ned scrambled up and smashed at the hairy, prognathous face, putting everything he had into the bone-crunching blows.

The creature's blazing eyes blinked, but it did not fall. Its semi-human face now bloodied and bruised and even more horrible, it reached out again for Ned with an animal roar.

Felton eluded the clutch of the simian arms, and smashed in three more blows on the creature's chin. Still it charged after him and he knew, with a sick feeling akin to terror, that its semi-human body was not to be downed by any blow of his.

He cast a swift glance behind him, smashed swiftly again at the bloody mass of the monster's face, and then whirled and dived toward the pistol.

Before ever he reached it the creature was on him, flattening him face-down to the ground. An arm encircled Ned's neck, and he felt teeth bury themselves in the back of his neck.

His outflung hand was touching something cold and hard, and he gripped it more by instinct than by conscious design. It was a stone bigger than his fist.

The feel of it gave him impetus for a last desperate effort. He squirmed wildly around in the thing's grip, and then batted the stone crazily upward at the creature's head.

The rock rang loudly off the skull of the monstrous Mattison. His grip around Ned's neck suddenly relaxed.

Felton managed to crawl out from under its senseless

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weight and stagger to his feet. He got the pistol, but saw that it was not now needed—the beast that had once been Mattison was cleanly knocked out.

Dr. Robine was staggering to his feet as Ned bent wildly over Ruth Lester.

"She's not hurt!" cried the scientist. "I found Mattison here with her, but he was too much for me—knocked me down before I could fire more than one wild shot."

"I'll tie him up to make sure he doesn't get away," Ned said. "Then we'll get Ruth to the house."

It took but a few moments to lash the monstrous thing that had once been a man, using its own belt and strips torn from its clothing.

Then, with the shaking scientist following, Ned carried Ruth's unconscious form toward the bungalow.

BY the time they entered the house and laid Ruth upon a couch, she was beginning to revive. Her dark, horror-dazed eyes looked up and then she stretched up quivering arms.

"Ned!"

He held her, comforting her. "It's all right now, Ruth. We've got the thing safely tied."

"But—Francis!" she sobbed.

"Francis is dead, and nothing can bring him back to us now," Felton said soberly.

"If he'd died any way but—but like that," she choked, averting her eyes from the hideous ape form lying dead in the corner, "I'd not have minded so much, but to die an animal—"

"No one will ever know," the pale-faced Robine reassured the girl. "I can sign the death certificate—and we

can bury him without letting anyone see his body."

The scientist walked toward the big quartz-lensed projector in the corner. "And as for this diabolical creation of mine that made Francis an ape and Mattison a half-ape, I'll destroy it here and now, so that such a horror shall never be repeated."

Robine picked up a heavy bar that lay in the corner and raised it to smash the bulky projector.

Ned's voice halted him. "Don't do that!"

Robine turned. His eyes bulged with amazement as he saw that Ned was covering him with the pistol.

"What—what do you mean?" the scientist faltered. "This thing should be smashed before it turns someone else into a beast as it turned Francis."

"Francis was never turned into an ape at all," Ned Felton said, his eyes like grey steel gimlets.

"But there's his body there in the corner! You see it for yourself!" cried Robine.

"No, that's not Francis' body," Felton said. "That, I should say, is the body of an ape whom you kept here for experimental purposes and whom you dressed in Francis' clothes tonight and then shot, putting the gun in its dead hand. You even cut off and fixed up one of the ape's fingers so we'd be convinced that it was Francis' body.

"Francis' body isn't here," continued Ned, "it's out where you left it, in a cave a half mile from here. I found the trail where you dragged it through the woods and I found the body itself inside the cave, shot through the heart. I suppose you meant to get rid of it completely, later, and just hid it there temporarily."

Dr. Robine strove to speak, but his stiff lips uttered no

sound. Ruth was looking at Felton with her soul in her eyes.

"Ned, it's true? That that thing in the corner isn't Francis?"

"It's true," Ned told her. "And it's also true that Doctor Robine killed your brother. It's easy enough to see why he did it. Francis had advanced Robine big sums, nearly all his inheritance, to finance his impossible experiments. The experiments were obviously a mere fake devised by Robine to swindle your brother—nothing under the sun can ever turn the course of evolution backward.

"Francis must have discovered the fake recently and demanded an accounting. You killed him when that happened, to save yourself from prison, didn't you, Robine? You killed him and put the ape in his clothes and called me up in a faked voice, figuring that when Ruth was convinced that her brother had died an ape she'd let you hush the whole thing up and there would never be any investigation. It was part of the fake, too, to change Mattison into the pitiable deformed madman he is, wasn't it?" Felton added. "How did you do that, anyway?"

Dr. Robine's face had become dull, old, grey. Staring down at his hands, twisting a heavy ring on his finger, he answered in a dead voice.

"I gave Mattison stuff in his food for weeks—drugs that affect the glandular secretions of the human body. If you upset the functioning of the thyroid and pituitary glands, a human being changes bodily and mentally, develops acromegaly, cretinism, and many other beastlike characteristics. That's what I did to Mattison, and then

told Francis it was the effect of my ray upon him. Francis caught me putting the drugs in Mattison's food and saw all. He threatened to prosecute me—I had to kill him. Let Mattison escape tonight—to give me alibi for being out of the house—”

ROBINE stopped speaking and slipped quietly to the floor, lay still. Felton sprang to him and found a purple stain widening on his hand from a wound beneath the heavy ring he had been twisting.

“A poison ring! Then Robine was afraid at that, that he might get caught!” he exclaimed.

He came back to Ruth Lester, wrapped his coat around her and helped her up.

“We're getting out of here, Ruth. The police can come and take charge of Mattison, and I'll come back for Francis' body. He's dead, just as we feared—but he died a man.”

The House of the Evil Eye

Weird Tales
June 1936

“D

OCTOR DALE, I came to you because I was told that you were the one person who could help me.”

“Just why do you need my help, Mr. Carlin?”

“I need it because I fear that my son is being killed by the evil eye!”

Our caller, who had given his name as Henry Carlin of Tauriston, Massachusetts, leaned tensely toward Doctor Dale. He was a man late in middle age, with thinning gray hair, expressive features, and intelligent blue eyes. Only the expensiveness of his quiet dress bespoke the rich man in Henry Carlin's appearance.

Doctor John Dale was something of a contrast to Carlin. Doctor Dale is over forty but his trim, well-knit

figure, his close brown hair and short brown vandyke beard and his clean skin and clear hazel eyes make him seem but a few years older than myself. Doctor Dale sat at his desk while I, Harley Owen, his assistant, occupied a chair in the corner.

Dale was looking keenly at Henry Carlin. "Your son being killed by the evil eye? That is a serious statement, Mr. Carlin."

"I know, but I fear that's what is going on!" Henry Carlin said. "And the physicians in my son's case to whom I told my fears said that in such a matter you could best help."

"They told you the nature of my work?" Doctor Dale asked.

"Yes," answered Henry Carlin. "They said that you were a specialist in combating forces of evil whose manifestations lie beyond ordinary medical science. They said that you were known among physicians, in fact, as Doctor Dale, specialist in evil."

Doctor Dale nodded. "That is correct, Mr. Carlin. But this matter of the evil eye—are you sure you know what the evil eye is?"

"It's the power of some persons to strike people with sickness or death by the gaze of their eyes, is it not?" Henry Carlin countered.

"That is the core of it but not all of it," Doctor Dale told him. "The evil eye is, as you say, the name generally given to the power of certain men and women to injure and kill living things by gazing into their eyes. This power they hold because of potent forces of evil that possess them and work through their gaze just as hypnosis, mesmerism and similar forces work through the

gaze.

"A man or woman can assume this power of the evil eye by making deliberate compact with the forces of evil, which thereafter possess him and make his gaze deadly. Once assumed, this power of the evil eye becomes hereditary and his children will have it until he who assumed it revokes his compact. If he never revokes it, it will pass down from generation to generation inescapably; so that persons wholly innocent of evil intent will be born with the dread power of the evil eye.

"Unprotected people who meet the gaze of the evil eye sicken swiftly, for the forces in that malignant gaze strike in through eyes and brain to damage in some way the vital life-centers of the nervous system. If exposed too often to that damaging gaze, they die. The only protection against the evil eye is certain symbols which evoke benign forces to oppose the malign ones of the evil eye. Such symbols are widely used, for the fear of the evil eye's dread power is great."

Henry Carlin had listened intently. "Then," he said quickly, "if some one were sickened by the evil eye but recovered, when exposed again to the evil eye he would sicken again?"

Doctor Dale nodded. "He would, undoubtedly. Those once stricken by the evil eye are thereafter vulnerable to it even though they wear the protective symbols I mentioned. The first striking has made them victims."

"That is as I thought," said Henry Carlin. "And that, Doctor Dale, is what I fear has happened to my son."

Doctor Dale sat back. "You'll save time, Mr. Carlin," he said quietly, "if you tell me about your son's case from the first."

His calmness steadied Henry Carlin, for he sat back a little less tensely in his chair. As he prepared to speak, Doctor Dale glanced at me, nodding at my pad in signal that I was to record the salient features of what Carlin told, as I did usually with Dale's clients.

“**T**HE first of the thing,” said Henry Carlin, “was about two months ago. That was when Donald—my son—met this Rose Mione and her family. I ought to say, perhaps, that Donald is only twenty-three and has just been out of school a year. He graduated a year ago from the Harvard School of Business Administration and came back up to Tauriston to take a position in the Tauriston National Bank, of which I am vice-president.

“Tauriston is a fair-sized city, a textile center, you know, but it and his work at the bank were rather dull for Donald after Cambridge and Boston. My wife died a year after Donald's birth, and perhaps Donald found home with only myself and our housekeeper dull also. He didn't complain, but I could see that he was a little restless and dissatisfied in Tauriston. That is, until two months ago.

“Two months ago Donald came home one evening in high spirits and told me he had met that day the most wonderful girl he had ever encountered. Her name, he said, was Rose Mione, and she lived with her father and grandfather, Joseph and Peter Mione, in the western part of Tauriston, where there is quite an Italian-American population. Donald raved about this girl in the next few days and said he meant to marry her if she would have him.

"I began to see that Donald was really serious about this Rose Mione, and though I would perhaps have preferred a marriage more in his own set, I certainly had no intention of standing in his way, the more so as he described the girl as very fine and cultured. Donald said she was too shy to call with him on me as yet, and I would probably have gone over with him to meet her had not Donald's affairs, a week after his meeting with this Mione girl, undergone an abrupt change.

"Donald had become very pale and ill-looking during the latter part of that week and I had grown concerned over his health. Things seemed suddenly going badly with him and the Mione girl also, for he returned from his visits very soon and very dejected in appearance. I was about to speak to him on the matter when Donald suddenly suffered a complete collapse.

"The physicians I called said he was in serious condition, that though his body was healthy enough his vital nerve-centers or inmost life-forces seemed to have been injured in some manner. They said the cause of it puzzled them, but that he must have complete rest. That is not what Mrs. Grassia, my housekeeper, said about it.

"Mrs. Grassia, who is of Italian descent, and has been with me for a dozen years, averred that Donald had been stricken by the evil eye of some one. Of course, I told her that that couldn't be, but she was very much in earnest about it and said that when Donald recovered he should be kept away from whatever person whose evil eye had stricken him, the *jettatore*, as the Italians call an evil-eyed person.

"I gave little thought to her words, for I was engrossed in helping Donald back to health. It took four weeks of

complete rest before he was able to be up and about again, before his injured life-centers could recuperate from whatever hurt they had sustained. During those weeks Rose Mione did not come once to see him nor did she even telephone or write, and I admit that her indifference toward Donald's condition made me rather resentful toward her.

"But it did not change Donald, for as soon as he was able to get out he was over on the other side of Tauriston to see her. For three or four days he went, and each time came back downcast in appearance. I asked him bluntly what the trouble was and he said that Rose Mione seemed to have changed entirely in her feelings toward him. Then, only four days after getting out, Donald collapsed again!

"Just as before, the physicians agreed, Donald's vital nervous centers had suffered a mysterious hurt. He must have rest again, they said. But now Mrs. Grassia was much excited and told me that undoubtedly the evil eye of some one had stricken Donald again as she had feared. And this time I was not certain that she was wrong, for the doctors seemed wholly in the dark as to what force had so injured Donald's inmost life-centers.

"As Donald slowly recuperated again in the next few weeks I could see that his mind was on this Rose Mione constantly, and heard him utter her name once or twice in sleep. I determined at last to go over and ask her to come and see Donald, for I felt it would do him good. So two days ago I went over with that purpose in mind to the western section of Tauriston.

“**T**HERE in the Italian-American district I asked where I could find the house of Peter Mione, Rose’s grandfather. To my surprise, those whom I asked warned me volubly not to go to that house, making an odd gesture with their hands. They told me that the house of the Miones was a house accursed. For all three of the Miones, they asserted—Peter, his son Joseph, and his granddaughter Rose—possessed the evil eye and had already stricken more than one person in that district!

“I was astounded. The excited assertions of Mrs. Grassia that Donald had suffered from the evil eye recurred instantly to me. I remembered that it was directly after meeting this Rose Mione that Donald had become ill and weak and then had collapsed. And after he had recovered slowly, he had seen her but three or four days when he collapsed again.

“These people were firm in their assertions that the Miones all had the evil eye, were deadly *jettatori*. Instead of visiting them, therefore, I returned home determined first to find out if that were really so. I asked the physicians who had worked with Donald whether the evil eye could really be responsible for his condition. They said it might, but that such a direct manifestation of evil forces was outside their experience and skill.

“They told me that Doctor John Dale of New York, known as the specialist in evil, could best help me in such a case. So this morning I drove down from Tauriston to New York, Doctor Dale, and I want you to come back to Tauriston with me, today, now. I said nothing of my fears to Donald, but I want you to find out whether it is really the evil eye of those Miones that has stricken him

and is killing him, and if it is that which is doing it I want you to find some way to save my son!"

Henry Carlin's face was white and working as he stopped, his hands outstretched in unconscious appeal.

Doctor Dale had listened intently, his hazel eyes on Carlin's face as he talked, while I had been busy noting down what he told.

Dale pulled his short beard thoughtfully. "You say that your son after recovering from his first collapse had seen this Rose Mione for only three or four days before collapsing again?" he asked.

"Yes," Henry Carlin answered, "and it was the suddenness of this second attack that appalled me."

Doctor Dale nodded. "Having been already once stricken by the evil eye, if that it was, he would be even more affected when it struck him a second time. What about the gesture you say they made in Tauriston's Italian section when you asked about the Miones? Was it like this?"

Dale closed his right hand, so that it took on a horn-like shape, index and little finger projecting outward.

"That was the gesture exactly," Carlin said quickly.

"The sign of those who fear the evil eye," Doctor Dale commented.

He thought silently for a moment.

"Mr. Carlin, I'm going to take the case, and Owen and I will go back up with you now to Tauriston as you ask. I must have time, though, to select the equipment we'll want to take with us."

"Of course," said Henry Carlin. "And Doctor Dale, any fee——"

"We can discuss fees later," Dale told him. "If your

son has really been stricken by the evil eye of these Miones, the sooner we get up there the better. For those once stricken by the evil eye who escape death from it in the end are—few!”

Two hours later Doctor Dale and I were with Henry Carlin in his powerful coupé, driving northward from New York at a fast rate toward Tauriston.

2

TAURISTON, when we reached it just at the afternoon's end, proved the New England factory city I had expected. A century before, Tauriston had been a quiet little country town. But textile factories had sprung up beside the river west of the town, and there had been a mushroom growth there of tall-chimneyed mills, railroad sidings and warehouses.

The factories had brought to Tauriston an influx of foreign-born workers and their families who now inhabited the rows of dingy frame and brick houses in the city's western half. On the southeastern side of the city were neater residential streets with a few shaded and quiet avenues of pretentious houses. Into one of these avenues Henry Carlin drove.

He turned into the drive of a large Colonial-style mansion half-hidden by the green elms set closely about it.

“My home,” said Henry Carlin as Doctor Dale and I got out of the car with him. “And here's Mrs. Grassia to meet us.”

We went up the steps, Dale carrying his small black equipment-case and I our suitcase. A woman dressed in

black awaited us at the door, her hair cloudy white but her face smooth and her black eyes quick and bright.

"Mr. Donald's all right?" Henry Carlin asked her anxiously as we entered, and she nodded.

"He is much better, he says. He told me he wanted to go out but I told him you would not like that."

"This is Doctor Dale and Mr. Owen, Mrs. Grassia," Carlin introduced. "Please have their things taken upstairs."

"We'll go in and see Donald now, if you don't mind," he added to us. "He's in the sun room—down this hall."

Doctor Dale and I followed him down the thickly carpeted hall, whose walls were of paneled wood, my companion retaining his equipment-case. As we went around a turn I glanced back and saw the housekeeper looking intently after us.

Henry Carlin opened a door and we preceded him into a room whose three sides were of glass through which poured the waning evening light. There were fine wicker chairs and potted plants, and in one of the chairs sat a young fellow in a loose lounge suit, leaning back as though dozing.

He sat up, though, as we entered. Donald Carlin hardly seemed his twenty-three years in appearance, a youngster with rusty light hair and blue eyes that were attractive despite their weariness. For there were weariness and weakness plain in his pale face, as though deep illness had caused an ebbing of his vital forces.

"Donald, this is Doctor John Dale, whom I told you I would try to bring up with me," Henry Carlin made introduction, "and Mr. Harley Owen, his assistant."

Donald Carlin put out his hand to us with a half-an-

noyed smile. "I told Dad I didn't need doctors any more," he said, "but I couldn't convince him. I understand you're a specialist of some sort?"

Doctor Dale nodded as he took the chair Henry Carlin proffered. "Yes, you may call me a psychological specialist. I'm told that your illness has rather puzzled your physicians."

Donald Carlin made an impatient gesture. "Those doctors have tried to make a mystery of it because I felt weak. All I needed was a little rest, and I feel almost as well as ever, now."

"You felt nothing but weakness?" Doctor Dale asked him. "I mean, you've suffered no pain at all?"

"None at all," young Carlin answered. "That's what puzzled them, I guess—my feeling a loss of strength without any pain."

"You can't describe what you felt more accurately?" Dale asked. "There are many different kinds of weakness, you know."

Donald Carlin hesitated. "Well, it was a feeling as though something inside me, some very important part of me, had been hurt painlessly. Does that sound silly? Yet that's what it felt like most, a hurt that didn't give pain but that made me very weak."

"When did you first experience this painless hurt?" Doctor Dale asked him. "Can you remember?"

Carlin nodded slowly. "Yes, it was a day about eight weeks ago. I remember because it was the day I met Rose Mione, a girl I—a girl I became acquainted with then. I couldn't sleep that night, partly from excitement and partly because I felt that painless hurt."

Henry Carlin's breath came in with a sharp hiss and

Doctor Dale looked warningly at him. Then he turned back to Donald.

"You felt this weakness and hurt in the days that followed?"

"Yes, and a little worse each day," Donald declared. "I got so weak at last that I collapsed. For a few weeks I was pretty ill, I guess, but gradually my strength came back."

"You've had the feeling since, though?" Dale asked, and Donald Carlin nodded.

"Yes, the first time I went out. It got quickly worse again the next few days and on the fourth day I collapsed again. I'm just getting over that second attack now, as I suppose Dad told you."

"You had visited Miss Mione each of those three or four days?"

Donald Carlin looked surprized. "Yes, I had. What has that to do with it?"

"Nothing much," Dale smiled. "You had no other sensations than this painless hurt and weakness?"

Young Carlin hesitated again. "Yes, I did have another feeling, a sort of hallucination, I guess. It was a sensation during sleep of eyes fastened upon me, looking fixedly at me."

Henry Carlin whitened, and Doctor Dale bent tensely forward. "What kind of eyes?" he asked. "Eyes of some one you know?"

Donald Carlin was even more reluctant. "Well, they did seem like—this is pretty silly, perhaps—did seem like the eyes of Rose—the Rose Mione I mentioned. They were dark and beautiful and strange, like hers."

"The eyes of this Miss Mione are strange, then? In

what way?"

"Why, I don't know exactly," Donald said. "They seem so dark and with such depths, and somehow when you meet them they seem to give you a tangible shock. It's an inherited oddity, I suppose—her grandfather's and father's eyes are the same."

Doctor Dale stood up. His face was as calm and unmoved as ever but I knew that he was inwardly excited. He turned to Henry Carlin.

"I think we'll not bother your son further today," he said. "There's plenty of time tomorrow to go into the case."

Donald Carlin smiled. "I hope you're not wasting your time," he said. "I'm a pretty healthy patient, fit to go out now again."

"But you mustn't go out yet, Donald," Henry Carlin told him anxiously. "We don't want you to have another relapse."

"I don't promise," said Donald, smiling. "You're trying to keep me a sick man even after I'm well."

ONCE Doctor Dale and Henry Carlin and I were in the hall with the sun room's door closed behind us, Carlin grasped Dale's arm.

"Doctor Dale, you heard? The eyes of this Rose Mione—then it must be really what I feared!"

"It certainly indicates that the evil eye of the Miones has stricken your son," Dale stated. "But to be sure I'll have to see them, especially the girl. Owen and I will go over now to see them."

"But if they actually have this terrible power you'll be risking yourselves in visiting them!" Henry Carlin ob-

jected.

Dale shook his head, took from his black case some small objects he slipped into his pocket. "These protective symbols will shield us from that power. You said these Miones live on the other side of the city?"

"Yes, almost straight across Tauriston from here," Henry Carlin said. "The street is Cardell Street and I suppose any one on it can tell you where the Miones live."

"We'll get going, then," Doctor Dale said. "We'll be back in a couple of hours."

We went out, Henry Carlin looking after us in dumb anxiety and then turning to go back to his son, I guessed. Mrs. Grassia too looked after us intently as though she knew our errand.

NIGHT'S darkness had replaced the slow-dying evening light, as we struck across Tauriston. When we reached the business and amusement section at the city's center, shops and theaters were alight with their scrolls of colored light. We pushed on into the dingy foreign section westward. Northwestward from it the silent factories brooded blackly beside the river, but the foreign section's ill-lit streets were noisy with life.

Swarthy men and women sauntered singly and in groups in search of distraction after the day's work. Crackling Italian and musical Spanish and Portuguese, with undertones of guttural Balkan tongues and occasional bursts of shrill laughter, came from them. There were piercing cries from the dusty, bare-legged youngsters who ran in games under the street-lights, while through the hubbub could be heard the twang of a guitar

or the strident tones of a cornet.

We were directed, with much pointing and contradiction, to Cardell Street, and found it a short dark street running down a slope toward the bank of the river. It was of square, box-like frame houses, with street-lights only at its upper end. People sat on the porches of these houses and a few moved along the street, but there was much less noise and tumult here than in the streets behind us.

We stopped a little way down the street, looking about. "I'd prefer not to mention the Miones down here," Doctor Dale said, "but we'll have to find out where they live."

He walked up onto the porch of the house outside which we stood. Light streaming out from the window of the house's front room showed a stout Italian woman of middle age sitting on the porch.

She regarded Doctor Dale with unfriendly black eyes. "Sorry to bother you," Dale said politely, "but we want to ask where some one lives."

"Who is it that you want to know about?" she asked.

"A family named Mione," Dale told her. "I believe the name of the head of it is Peter Mione."

The woman's eyes widened in astonished terror. She made a sign with her hand so swiftly I could hardly follow it, the sign against the evil eye Doctor Dale had demonstrated to Carlin, and darted into the house, from which her voice came in a babble of excited Italian.

There were other voices in the same tongue within, male and female; then they broke off and a man shouldered brusksly out onto the porch to confront us. He was stocky, clean-shaven, black-haired and with smoldering

black eyes.

"What do you want with the Miones?" he demanded. "You are friends of theirs?"

"Not exactly friends—I've never met them," Doctor Dale said.

"Then do not meet them!" the other told us. "They are *jettatori*—they have what you call the evil eye! I, Domenic Millera, warn you of that!"

"Why do you think the Miones have the evil eye?" Dale asked.

"Think? I think not—I know!" Millera said passionately. "Come here and I will show you how I know!"

He grasped Doctor Dale's arm and pulled him through the door, I following closely. We found ourselves in a room lit by an unshaded gas jet. There was another man in it, and two women, one of them the one who had gone in from the porch, all three looking fixedly at us.

In the room's corner was a wooden bed, the only furniture save for a few chairs, and in it lay a girl of about seventeen. Her face was thin and weak, and from that pale countenance black eyes whose pupils were extraordinarily contracted looked incuriously at us.

Millera led Dale and me over to the bed, pointed down at the girl. "My daughter Julia," he told us, tragically. "She is why I know the Miones are *jettatori*."

Doctor Dale's keen gaze lifted from the sick girl to her father. "You mean that this girl was sickened by——"

"By the evil eye of that ever to be accursed old Peter Mione, yes!" cried Domenic Millera. "Wizard and *jettatore* he is like all his house, evil-eyed like his son Joseph and his son's daughter Rose. And Peter Mione I

angered when I said that he should be punished for killing the Safetta boy with his gaze as he did. Because he hated me for that, he struck my Julia with his evil gaze, she having no protection against it. Since then has she sickened here while the accursed Mione who made her so walks the streets still unpunished!"

Millera's hand made an imprecatory gesture, the others in the smoky-lit room nodding solemnly. The sick girl did not move.

"You say a boy was killed by Peter Mione's evil eye?" Dale questioned, and Millera nodded.

"Yes, the widow Safetta's son, Felix Safetta. The child's mother had angered Mione and that was his revenge. Should not such a family be blotted from the earth?"

Doctor Dale shook his head as he went out onto the porch again with Millera. "Such a thing would be terrible," he said. "But your daughter seems recovering."

"Yes, she recovers now that we keep her in where the evil eye of the Miones can not fall on her," Domenic Millera said, "but so slowly."

"And you can tell us where the Mione house is on this street?"

"You should not go there, but I have warned you what they are," Millera told us. "Their home is down at this street's end above the river——"

He stopped suddenly, looking up the street. A hush had descended abruptly all along it, the people on porches who had been talking becoming suddenly silent and going inside. Women farther down the street were hastily calling in children who had been playing. Those who had sauntered along the sidewalk hastily turned in at

houses.

A man was coming down the street from the illuminated upper end. He was a tall, straight black figure against the illumination, wearing a soft black hat and also a long black coat despite the evening's warmth, and carrying a stick. As he came close, Millera drew us back into the shadows. Now the man was passing.

He was old, I saw, for his face, half visible in the darkness, was wrinkled, and the hair at his temples was iron-gray. His eyes were hidden by his hat's shadow but we could see that his features were sardonic, strongly cut, powerful. He walked past with deliberate strides, and as he went on down the street those who had retreated inside their houses emerged again onto their porches, looking after his dark form until it disappeared in the darkness at the street's lower end.

"Who was that?" Doctor Dale asked, and Domenic Millera shook his fist passionately at the darkness that had swallowed the dark figure.

"It was the *jettatore*, the evil-eyed one you asked about! Yes, Peter Mione himself, head of that accursed house of the evil eye!"

3

MILLERA went abruptly back into the house, and Doctor Dale and I started down the street. It was quite dark in its lower part but we could see that there were fewer houses there, and could make out the dull gleam of the river beyond and below.

"It seems the Miones are well enough known here,"

Dale commented.

"Dale, was that girl really a victim of the evil eye?" I asked.

"She had all the symptoms of the evil eye's victims, Owen," he answered. "Whether—but this house ahead must be the one we want."

The slope of Cardell Street ended abruptly ahead of us in a sheer drop of thirty feet that was the bank of the river below. A stone wall ran along the top of this bank, and the last house on the street was built directly against this wall.

This house, which we knew must be that of Peter Mione and his family, was a darker square bulk in the darkness, a porchless frame structure whose front door opened directly onto the sidewalk. Cracks of light showed from under its drawn blinds. The two or three houses next up the street from it and the similar ones across the street were dark and untenanted, attesting that none in the neighborhood would live so near the house of the Miones.

Doctor Dale and I had stopped in the darkness a little up the street from the house. Now Dale took from his pocket two objects, one of which he handed me. I inspected it by the faint street-light from up the street, and made it out to be a two-inch silver disk on which was graven a curious device.

The design was a representation of a staring human eye, and around it were seven smaller designs of scorpion, dog, deer, arrows, serpent, lion and owl. On the disk's back was a pin-like clasp. As I held the thing I was aware somehow of strange energies acting from it, as though it were the container of an alien force.

"Put it on your lapel, Owen," said Dale, affixing his own in that place. "It's the most effective of the symbols that oppose benign forces to the malign ones of the evil eye."

I fastened it to my lapel as he directed. "You're going to call directly on these Miones, Dale?" I asked, and he nodded.

"We've got to find out whether they really possess the evil eye's dread power before we can act."

Doctor Dale and I then walked on down to the door of the house and he knocked on it. There was no answer and Dale was about to knock again when the door opened, light flooding out upon us.

A girl's slender figure stood outlined in the door's opening against that light. She was over medium height and clad in a simple dark blue dress. Her hair was a dark cloud behind an oval face that was faintly olive-tinged, with delicately chiseled features and a sad mouth. Sadness was in all that fine face, indeed, but one scarcely saw it in the first galvanic meeting with her eyes.

Her eyes were of soft velvet black and their pupils were abnormally large. In the moment that I first looked into those eyes it was as though I perceived in their dark depths the movement of something darker, a black stirring of force there. And it was, in the same instant, as though there smote out from those eyes at mine a tangible shock of force!

But it was a shock that did not reach me. It seemed not to strike me but to strike the alien forces that clung about me from the symbol at my lapel. Only a moment did it endure, that outthrust of deadly force from those dark eyes and its shock against the invisible shield about

me. Then it was gone and the girl was looking half fearfully at Doctor Dale and myself, seeing the symbols at our lapels.

"What do you want?" she asked, her voice low and unsteady.

"You're Miss Rose Mione, are you not?" Doctor Dale asked, and she nodded dumbly.

"I've come in regard to Donald Carlin," Dale went on. "I'm his physician at present—Doctor John Dale, and this is my assistant, Mr. Owen—and would like to consult you about his illness."

The girl's hand went to her throat. "About Donald? But I can tell you nothing about his illness—I know nothing about it!"

"Then you do not even know," Doctor Dale said, "why Donald Carlin has sickened after each time he has been down here and has met the gaze of your eyes?"

Before the terrified Rose Mione could answer there was an exclamation from behind her in a man's voice. "What is this about Rose's eyes?"

Peter Mione stood behind the girl, gazing out at us. He was bareheaded now, and under his iron-gray hair his saturnine, wrinkled face was like the ancient mask of some evil god in its consciousness of evil power. He glanced first at the symbols at our lapels, then swiftly into the eyes of Doctor Dale and myself.

The eyes of Peter Mione were like those of the girl, black and abnormally large-pupiled, deeply astir with dark force. And as Doctor Dale and I met those eyes, I felt again and even more strongly the shock of tangible and deadly forces darting out from them against the invisible protecting shield about me.

Rose Mione turned and disappeared back into the house, leaving Peter Mione confronting us at the doorway.

"What is this about Rose's eyes?" he repeated. "And who are you that come about Donald Carlin?"

"I'm Doctor John Dale and I came here because Donald Carlin got his sickness here when he was stricken by the evil eye of your granddaughter!" Doctor Dale told him calmly.

Peter Mione laughed coldly, considering Dale and me as though with amused contempt. "Another who thinks we poor Miones have the evil eye!" he mocked. "You have heard the superstitions of the people about here too much, Doctor Dale."

"Is it superstition that has stricken Domenic Millera's daughter, then?" asked Doctor Dale, and at that thrust Peter Mione's face became diabolical, his eyes terrifying in their black naked evil.

"What do you know of Millera's daughter?" he snarled.

Another man appeared at that moment beside him from within the house, less tall than Peter Mione and of middle age. His sensitive face bore more resemblance to the girl's than to the older man's. But his black eyes were like those of both the others, strange forces moving deep within them—forces that struck out as we met his gaze to hit with tangible shock against our protecting mantles of force!

"Father, what's going on?" he exclaimed to Peter Mione. "Rose said there were men here asking about young Carlin——"

"Be silent, Joseph," snapped Peter Mione. "They are

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but two fools more like those who live around here."

He turned back to us, his dark eyes demoniac in their fierceness. "Whoever you are that accuse us Miones of the evil eye," he rasped, "you would do well not to meddle here again. The evil eye's power might strike you when you were not wearing those things that you wear now."

"You do not frighten me, Peter Mione," Doctor Dale told him steadily. "Not the evil eye of yourself nor of all your house. There are forces greater than the forces of evil from which you get your power, and they can be used, if need be, against you!"

Peter Mione's face became so dreadful that for a moment I thought he was about to attack us physically. His black eyes seemed projectors of a force that beat almost irresistibly against the shield of force our symbols flung about us. Then he pushed Joseph Mione swiftly back and closed the door with a slam in our faces.

DOCTOR DALE turned to me, his own hazel eyes alight, as we started back up the dark street. "It's as I feared, Owen!" he exclaimed. "Peter Mione and his son and granddaughter all possess the evil eye! You felt the shock of forces from their eyes? Owen, had it not been for the benign opposing forces gathered about us by the symbols we wore, those forces of the evil gaze of the three would have struck us down where we stood!"

"But, Dale, how are we to fight a thing like that?" I asked him. "Resisting the evil eye isn't overcoming it."

"Yet it can be overcome," Doctor Dale said. "It——"

He stopped suddenly and grasping my arm moved quickly off the sidewalk into the deeper darkness be-

tween two of the empty houses beside us. A car with bright headlights was coming down the dark street toward us, its brakes squealing as it slowed.

The car, a long roadster, passed us and came to a stop a little above the house of the Miones. A dark figure got out of the machine, a man who walked toward the Mione house and knocked on its front door. The door was opened a little, cautiously, and in its light-filled opening we saw the girl, Rose Mione. And as the light fell out on the face of the man outside we saw that it was young Donald Carlin!

Rose Mione uttered an exclamation, tried to close the door upon him, but Carlin held it open and seemed entreating her, his voice reaching us only as a low, pleading sound. The girl seemed undecided, not looking at all at Donald Carlin's face, and then as he made as though to push inside, she came out, closing the door behind her.

"Dale, it's young Carlin!" I whispered tensely. "Shall we rush him and get him away from her? If her eyes hit him again——"

"No, Owen, wait!" Doctor Dale murmured. "She's not looking at him at all. I think he's safe with her for the time being, though I don't understand——"

In the darkness the forms of Rose Mione and Donald Carlin were coming up the street as though the girl was leading him away from the house a little. I could see that she was keeping her face turned away from him, as Dale said, though he was talking earnestly to her.

They halted on the sidewalk just out from the deep shadows between houses in which Doctor Dale and I crouched. We could see them more distinctly there, in the faint light from up-street, and could hear their words.

Donald Carlin had caught the girl's arm as they stopped.

"Rose, what's the matter with you?" he asked her anxiously. "You act so strangely—you aren't even listening to me!"

"I am listening, Donald," she told him, her voice low. "I've heard everything you've said."

"But you don't even look at me!" he said. "Surely you're not as angry as that with me for coming, are you?"

"I told you not to come," Rose Mione told him. "Had it not been that I didn't want you to come in the house where Father and Grandfather are, I would not have come out here with you."

"But why not?" Donald Carlin demanded. "Rose, I love you and I believe you still love me. What has changed you so?—what has come between us like this? I've felt it ever since a few days before my illness—until then we were so happy, but you changed suddenly and ever since have been putting me off and refusing to see me, without telling me why. What is all this mystery that has made you act so strangely?"

"I can't tell you!" Rose Mione said, a sob in her voice. "But you must go, Donald, and you mustn't come to see me again, ever."

"I won't do it!" declared Donald Carlin. "Rose, tell me, is it your grandfather and father who have objected to me? Is that it?"

"Yes—no—it's more than that!" the girl exclaimed. "I can't tell you, Donald, but you must do as I say."

Even then, as Doctor Dale and I could see from our concealment, Rose Mione did not turn her face toward young Carlin. She spoke wildly but looked past him al-

ways and not into his pleading face.

"Do as you say? Never see you again?" said Donald Carlin. "Why, I'd die first! Whatever is between us, I'm going to destroy it!"

"You can't!" cried the girl. "There's nothing you can do, Donald! You must go and not come back—I can never look into your face again!"

Donald Carlin looked amazedly at her. Rose Mione, still looking away from him, was sobbing. "Please go, Donald," she said; "go before something terrible happens."

"What could happen?" he protested. "Rose, you're so strange I think you must be ill. You don't even look at me. Look me in the face and tell me to go, at least!"

With the words Donald Carlin swung the girl around to make her face him, but she broke free and kept her face away from him.

"Donald, don't!" Rose Mione's agonized cry stabbed the darkness. "You don't know what you're doing!"

"But I only wanted you to look at me," Donald Carlin was saying stupefiedly, when the door of the Mione house farther down the street opened, a man's figure emerging and looking up the street.

"Donald, you must go at once—please go!" Rose Mione pleaded, her voice utter in its urgency. "They heard me—it's Grandfather and Father coming out, and if you meet the——"

"But I don't see——" Carlin began, then stopped. "All right, Rose; I'll go, but I'm coming back. No matter what you or any one else says, I'm coming back."

He got into the roadster, its motor hummed, and in a moment he had turned the car and it was heading back

up the street.

As it did so the man from the house reached Rose Mione and we saw now that it was her father, Joseph Mione.

"Rose, I heard you cry out and came out to find you! Who was that you were talking to?"

She did not answer, and his voice was stern when it sounded again. "It was Donald Carlin, then? Did you not say you would see him no more?"

"He came and insisted on talking to me!" she sobbed. "He would have come inside where you and Grandfather were, so I came out—but didn't meet his eyes——"

She clung to Joseph Mione, still sobbing, and in the faint light we could see that his face was strange as he held and soothed her. Then he walked back with her to the house and in a moment the door there closed.

DALE and I stood up from our crouching posture. I found that I was tense after what we had heard.

"Dale, what does it all mean?" I asked, as we stepped out again onto the sidewalk.

Doctor Dale's face was serious. "I wish I knew, Owen," he said. "It is certain that Rose Mione has the evil eye like her father and grandfather and that she struck Donald Carlin down with its power weeks ago. Yet tonight she seemed trying to save him from her deadly gaze."

"And according to what Joseph Mione said she had promised him not to see young Carlin again," I added. "It's too mysterious for me."

"Well, there's nothing more for us to do down here tonight," Dale told me. "We've ascertained beyond

doubt that it is the evil eye of these Miones that has stricken young Carlin, and we'd best get back to the Carlin house."

We started up the street. It was well toward midnight by then and Cardell Street was mostly dark. The front window of Domenic Millera's house still glowed with light as we passed, though, and I wondered if Millera were sitting there with his stricken daughter.

WHEN we got back across Tauriston to the house of Henry Carlin we found that Donald Carlin had already returned and retired but that his father was awaiting us. Henry Carlin listened silently but with white face intent as Doctor Dale told him what we had learned.

"So it is those Miones' evil eye that struck Donald, even as I feared," he commented when Dale had finished. "Doctor Dale, what are we to do?"

"The main thing," Dale told him, "is to keep Donald away from them. He escaped tonight, but only because the Mione girl kept her gaze turned from him."

"But how can I keep him from this Rose Mione when he's still in love with her?" Henry Carlin asked. "He slipped out tonight without letting Mrs. Grassia nor me know, and he will again. And if I tell Donald the truth about the girl he'll think it more reason to stick to her."

"Yet if he sees her again, if he meets the eyes of any of those three again, it may well be fatal," Doctor Dale warned. "I have in mind a way by which something may be done, but for the time being the all-important thing is to keep Donald away from the Miones."

Henry Carlin's pale face took on a certain resolution. "Then I will see that he does not go there again," he said,

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determination in his eyes. "I think I know a way to make sure of that."

"Well, we'll be seeing you in the morning then," Doctor Dale said, rising. "Owen and I could stand some sleep right now."

It was, in fact, after seven next morning when Doctor Dale and I rose. Before going downstairs Dale looked into Donald Carlin's room. Young Carlin was sleeping normally, so we went on down.

The housekeeper, Mrs. Grassia, met us in the hall below and before either of us could speak she had clutched Doctor Dale's arm excitedly, her eyes distended with fear.

"Doctor, he's gone—Mr. Carlin! I could not stop him!" she cried.

"Gone? Where did Mr. Carlin go?" Dale asked.

"To the house of the *jettatori*—to the Miones! He went but now, saying he would so threaten those Miones that they would never dare again to have Donald come there!"

Doctor Dale's face went white and he spun toward me. "Owen, we've got to head him off! Henry Carlin down there without protection facing the evil eye of those three! We've got to stop him!"

4

WE RACED out of the house to the garage behind it, and in a few moments I was driving Donald Carlin's long roadster rapidly across Tauriston. Traffic was not thick so early in the morning, and I did not need

Doctor Dale's urging to make me unloose all the roadster's power. We shot through Tauriston's morning-lit streets into the western foreign section at a perilous velocity.

As I turned the car down Cardell Street, Doctor Dale uttered an exclamation. Down at the sloping street's end, where the square black house of the Miones perched above the sunlit river, a big coupé had stopped and a man who had got out of it was standing at the door of the Mione house. It was Henry Carlin and in the door which had just opened Peter Mione was confronting him.

As our car shot down the street we saw that Henry Carlin was speaking rapidly, angrily, and that Peter Mione's face was twisted with fury. I stopped our car and we sprang out and ran toward the two. But as we did so Peter Mione thrust his rage-contorted face forward a little, his eyes full on Carlin's for a moment. Then he disappeared back into the house, slamming the door. And Henry Carlin, struck suddenly silent, crumpled to the sidewalk unconscious as Doctor Dale and I reached him.

"Owen, we're too late!" cried Doctor Dale as we bent over Carlin. "Peter Mione has stricken him!"

A few bareheaded people were running down the street, Domenic Millera among them. "The Miones have stricken another?" he cried to us. "The *jettatori*!"

We bundled Henry Carlin into the roadster. There was no sound from the Mione house, but the excited people in front of it were increasing rapidly in number. I could hear Millera's passionate voice among them.

I took the wheel again and with Doctor Dale holding

Henry Carlin's unmoving form I drove at an even faster rate up the street and across the city to the Carlin's house.

DONALD CARLIN sprang to meet us, Mrs. Grassia's fearful face behind him, as we carried his father in.

"What's happened to Dad?" he cried as we carried Henry Carlin into the library.

"The *jettatori*!" Mrs. Grassia was exclaiming. "They have killed him, then——"

"He's not killed!" Dale snapped. "Help us put him on that couch—that's right, straighten him out."

With Henry Carlin stretched on the couch, pale and unmoving, Doctor Dale sent the housekeeper for his equipment case. To Donald Carlin's excited questions he paid no heed for the moment, bending over his father.

Henry Carlin seemed in strange condition. His pulse had slowed alarmingly and his breathing was labored as though some force had strongly affected the respiratory nerve-centers. The pupils of his eyes were terrifyingly contracted to mere points of blue, just as those of the girl Julia Millera had been, but even more so.

Doctor Dale quickly took his case from Mrs. Grassia when she returned, selected a vial of clear liquid and made a hypodermic injection of it above Henry Carlin's heart. He broke two capsules also under his nostrils and Carlin stirred a little, his labored breathing seeming to ease somewhat. His heart action also began to accelerate.

Carlin's unconsciousness seemed to pass now into a

more or less normal sleep. The eye-pupils expanded a little. Doctor Dale stood up.

"He's out of danger for now," he said. "He'll probably sleep the rest of the day and is going to need a few weeks of complete rest."

"But what happened?" Donald Carlin repeated. "Did Dad have an attack of some sort?"

Dale looked at him and nodded. "A worse kind of attack than you think, Donald. But I'm going to tell you about it soon—I want you to stay here with your father now for Owen and I have work elsewhere."

We left Donald Carlin watching over his sleeping father. Once out in the car again Dale's face became grim.

"Back to Cardell Street, Owen," he said. "You're still wearing your protective symbol? Keep it on—we're going to visit the Miones again."

"Dale!" I exclaimed as I headed the roadster westward again, "you're going to——"

"Going to act in the way that will be most effective against Peter Mione!" Doctor Dale said.

WHEN we turned into the upper end of Cardell Street I stopped the car in surprize. Doctor Dale and I stared downward.

An angry crowd of several score men and women had gathered in front of the house of the Miones. There came up to us from them a babble of excited voices, and more of the Italian-American residents of the street were joining it each moment.

We stopped the car, and Doctor Dale and I started down the street on foot. We could see now that Domenic Millera was in the foremost of the crowd and

was shouting to them, pointing to the Mione house, which remained silent with doors and windows closed.

"How long must we stand this family of evil, this house of *jettatori*?" Millera was crying. "Must still more be stricken as one was but now before we root out these accursed ones of the evil eye?"

"Kill the *jettatori*!" went up a dozen fierce cries from the crowd. "Death to the evil-eyed!"

"Yes, kill them as Peter Mione killed my Felix with his evil eye!" screamed a wild-faced woman who was apparently the widow Safetta, whom Millera had mentioned to us.

The crowd was surging toward the house, Domenic Millera in its front rank, his face suffused with passion.

"Death to the *jettatori*!" went up the cry more strongly.

"Dale, there's going to be violence!" I exclaimed.

"No, look!" Doctor Dale said, and we stopped.

The uproar had abruptly broken off, the crowd's cries silenced as though by magic. The door of the Mione house was opening.

Peter Mione stood on its threshold. He wore his soft black hat and long coat, stick in his hand. He looked out on the crowd and on his face was a smile of sardonic amusement.

For perhaps a half-minute the men and women of the crowd stared open-mouthed at Peter Mione, standing there like some mocking incarnation of ancient evil. Then a woman shrieked "*Jettatore!*" and turned to flee.

Instantly her panic spread to the others and they too shrank back to avoid the eyes of Peter Mione, recoiled and then fled. Domenic Millera and the Safetta woman

were among them, Millera's face hate-filled but fear triumphing over his hate.

Almost incredibly swiftly the crowd melted. Doctor Dale pulling me back behind an angle of the house beside us, as those in the street hastily sought their own houses. Peter Mione watched from his door until the street seemed entirely deserted.

Then, calmly as though he had been watching only some concourse of animals that for a moment had blocked his way, Peter Mione closed the door behind him and moved coolly up the street. He passed the house behind an angle of which Doctor Dale and I shrank farther back, and disappeared when he turned at the street's top.

THE street remained silent deserted as Doctor Dale and I went out again to the sidewalk.

"It turned out as I expected, Owen," Dale told me. "Their fear of the evil eye was greater than their fury."

"Dale, are you going on down to the house?" I asked. "Peter Mione won't be there."

"I let him pass without seeing us purposely," Doctor Dale said. "I want to see Joseph and Rose Mione when he is not there—I have an idea about them that I want to prove or disprove."

We went on down the street, therefore, and Doctor Dale knocked at the door. He was forced to knock for minutes before it opened.

Joseph Mione confronted us, pale and distraught. But again from his eyes as we met them struck the same shock of tangible and deadly forces against the forces shielding us.

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"I've got to see you and your daughter, now!" Doctor Dale said.

"What do you want?" groaned Joseph Mione. "Has there not been trouble enough here today?"

"There has and that's why I'm here," Dale said incisively. "I think it will be much better for both of you if you see us."

Joseph Mione hesitated, then opened the door wider. As Doctor Dale and I entered he locked the door behind us.

Dale and I found ourselves in a comfortable room, with flowers, a few fine prints, an old piano. Rose Mione was in the room, even paler than her father. Once more I felt that impact of alien forces to which I was now almost accustomed, as I met her dark, deep eyes.

Joseph Mione put his arm across her shoulders, facing us.

"I am not going to waste words," said Doctor Dale. "Both of you know how Henry Carlin was stricken at your door this morning."

Joseph Mione nodded dully. "We saw—we were in here when he came. He threatened my father about young Carlin coming here, and Father——"

"Your father struck him with his evil eye!" Dale finished for him. "And because your father has that dread power of the evil eye, you and your daughter have it also, since the evil eye's power descends automatically from one generation to another once it is assumed."

"What I want to ask, though," Doctor Dale continued keenly, "and what I would not have thought to ask at all but for certain things I heard last night, is this: Would you and your daughter rather be without this power of the

evil eye?"

"Can you ask such a question?" cried Joseph Mione passionately. "Do you think such a power pleases Rose and me? Do you think it pleases us that we can not look even at those we love without our gaze blasting them? We never could have desired this terrible power of the evil eye, but because my father had assumed it by compact with forces of evil, I and my daughter after me were born with it. And we can not now escape it."

"I thought it might be thus," Doctor Dale said. "But if it were possible to lift this power of the evil eye from you?"

Rose Mione answered swiftly. "To have it lifted I would give almost my life!"

"It can never be lifted," Joseph Mione said hopelessly. "Only my father, by revoking his black compact with the forces of evil, can lift the evil eye from himself and us, and that he will never do."

"Do not be too sure of that," Doctor Dale advised. "But before going further, I want you to tell me when and how your father first assumed this power of the evil eye."

Joseph Mione motioned dumbly to chairs and as Dale and I took them he seated himself in another, Rose standing behind him.

"My father, Peter Mione," he said, "was in his youth Pietro Mione of the region of Napoli—Naples. There are no small number of men and women with the terrible power of the evil eye in that part of the world, and they are greatly feared; so that my father conceived the idea of assuming the evil eye himself, of becoming *jettatore*, and being himself powerful and feared by all.

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"Using the formulæ taught him by the evil *jettatori* he sought, Pietro Mione deliberately made compact with forces of evil that they possess him thenceforth and make his gaze deadly against all whom he turned it against. With that terrible power of the evil eye, Pietro Mione soon became known to all as a *jettatore*, and was feared and avoided by all, since those who offended him he turned his gaze upon.

"Finally those in the region got courage enough to rise against him and Pietro Mione would have been killed had he not fled hastily to America. Here he changed his name to Peter Mione, and living in Boston he met an Italian-American girl who married him without dreaming of his deadly power. In little more than a week she was stricken down by her husband's evil eye! Refusing to meet his eyes again, she lingered weakly until a son was born to her, then died.

"That son was me, Joseph Mione, and I had from birth the same power of the evil eye as my father, Peter Mione. My father was amused rather than horrified by this. He had acquired a certain amount of money by then, but every so often had to move to a different town, since sooner or later those about him discovered that Peter Mione had the evil eye and was striking down some of them with it.

"I grew up living only with my father. I never suspected that he, much less I, had the evil eye, since those who possess the power are of course not affected by it in another. In one town where I went to school I had a chum, a little boy named Antonio. We were close friends, and once when other boys shouted after me that I was an evil-eyed son of an evil-eyed father, Antonio

fought them. But soon after Antonio sickened and died. I did not dream that it was I who had stricken him.

"Young people avoided me as I grew older, whispering of the evil eye of Peter Mione and his son. I thought all this talk of the evil eye of my father was mere slander. It seemed to spring up anew in every town we moved to. Then at last I found out the truth.

"We had moved to Providence and there I met a girl, beautiful, wonderful. I was twenty, and I courted and won her. We were married, and my father laughed as though at some great joke. My bride said she did not like him. She sickened swiftly. I thought it was because she expected a child, but no, her weakness grew. She died as the child, my daughter Rose, was born. And in dying she whispered to me that it was the evil eye of myself and of my father that killed her!

"I WAS stupefied. I remembered how my father had always been reputed to have the evil eye, and how it was supposed to be hereditary. Had I, then, the evil eye also? Frantically I examined my eyes in a mirror. I seemed to see dark forces deep within them, forces not of me that yet possessed me and worked through my gaze.

"I remembered little Antonio, how he had fought for me and yet had died. I remembered others who had been intimate with me for a time and who had died, how my father had been charged with deaths, and how my wife had died, slain by me who loved her more than anything else on earth! Yes, and remembered how my father laughed when I married!

"I ran to my father, cried the question to him, and he

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answered yes! Yes, he said, he had the evil eye and so did I and my baby daughter and all who might come after her. Why not have it, he asked, when he with the evil eye was infinitely more powerful than other men? It was a great weapon, a great power, he boasted. One dared not offend the *jettatore* lest his deadly gaze avenge him. I should be glad I had it, he told me.

"But I shrieked my wife's name and took my father by the throat to kill him. He shook me off and reminded me that if I did kill him the evil eye could never be lifted from me and mine. Only he who had assumed it could lift it from himself and us by revoking his evil compact. I pleaded with him then, on my knees, that he revoke that compact and lift it from us, but he refused. And now I knew that like him I, Joseph Mione, was of the dread evil-eyed!

"Can you know what it means to have the evil eye? Can you know what it means to go forth into the streets and have all shun and avoid you in fear of your deadly gaze? To be afraid to meet the eyes of any person lest you kill them, to see even your loved ones dying from your own looks of love, and be unable to save them? To be of the dread company of the evil-eyed, loathing the power that is yours?

"Such was my life thenceforth. My father gloated in his power of the evil eye—I loathed it. I lived with him and moved with him from town to town. I did so because I still hoped that some day he might relent and revoke his compact, lift this dark power that lay on me and my little daughter Rose as on himself.

"For from Rose's birth I had seen in her eyes the same dark forces that were in mine and my father's. The he-

editary power had descended to her as to me! I cursed fate for making it so. I cared for Rose as she grew into childhood and youth, and did not tell her of the black power that was hers.

"I did not permit Rose to go to school, but taught her myself. I allowed her no playmates, though few children would have played with the offspring of *jettatori*. I was determined that though Rose must not know she had the evil eye, neither must there be any innocent victims to her power. My father watched my efforts with cynical amusement, heedless of my pleas to revoke his compact and lift this curse from us.

"So Rose grew up, knowing little outside her home. She heard us called *jettatori* sometimes, but I kept the truth from her. We came finally here to Tauriston, the last town in which we lived, Millport, having become too hot for us due to my father striking down several people with his evil power. And here that which I had feared for Rose happened.

"Rose met by accident young Donald Carlin. He fell in love with her and she loved him. For a few days he came to see her and I saw that already his vitality was diminishing as her deadly gaze worked on him. What was I to do? If I did not tell Rose, she would go through what I had, would see her husband die from her gaze, would see her child or children born with the dread evil eye! If I did tell, she would know what I had striven so to keep from her, that she was the daughter of a house of the evil eye!

"Then I saw that I must tell, and I did. Rose heard me in horror—heard how her grandfather had brought this curse upon our house, how she as well as he and I had

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the dread evil eye. She implored him then as I had done to revoke the thing, but he silenced her as he had me. Rose was stunned by the horror of it.

"But she saw now that she must give up young Donald Carlin. She told him not to come again. She could not explain the terrible truth to him. He insisted in coming for a day or two more, then collapsed, stricken by her evil eye. He lay sick for weeks, and Rose dared not visit him, as she would only make him worse. Yet when he recovered somewhat he came again.

"He managed to see Rose for a few moments only; yet that was enough in two or three days more to cause him to collapse again, and lie again for weeks recovering. Yet last night Donald Carlin again came, and Rose went outside with him lest he come in and meet the gaze of my father and myself. Yet she kept her eyes from his to prevent him from being stricken down again.

"Then this morning Donald's father, Henry Carlin, came as you know; and as I told you, it was Peter Mione, my father, who struck him down with his eyes. He should recover, since he met my father's eyes but for a moment. But young Donald Carlin must not come again, for if he does the evil eye will surely kill him!"

5

JOSEPH MIONE'S voice ceased. His face was very white and his hands were trembling. Rose laid her hand upon his and he drew her closer.

Doctor Dale's voice was vibrant as he spoke. "It is as I had begun to think, then," he said. "You two, like

many other innocent people, suffer from having the power of the evil eye without desiring it."

"We do, and while we do we can not mix and meet with other people," said Mione heavily. "It is a doom upon us."

"But one that can be lifted!" Dale said. "If your father revokes his compact this power will be lifted from both of you as well as from him."

Rose Mione spoke, her voice tragically calm. "He will never do that," she said. "I begged him, but he will stay so until he dies."

"And after he dies," her father added, "he can never revoke this curse and so it can never be lifted from our house. And that is why the house of the Mione must end here—with Rose."

Doctor Dale's hazel eyes snapped. "No, Peter Mione must revoke this thing! Even if he refuses to, there are ways by which he may be made to do it."

"What ways?" demanded Joseph Mione. "My father would die under torture rather than lift this evil eye from himself and us."

"I don't mean physical ways," Dale told them. "You know that the power of the evil eye in yourselves and your father is due to evil forces, deliberately invited to possess you by your father's compact?"

They nodded dumbly. "Well," Dale continued, "there are benign forces in the universe as strong as the malign ones. They can be summoned and directed by use of various symbols and methods—such as the symbols Owen and I wear now to protect us."

"These benign forces I could use, I think, to overcome the evil ones that possess your father, and make him

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revoke his compact even against his own will; just as hypnotism makes the subject do things against his own will."

"You mean these forces you summoned would work through your gaze," Joseph Mione asked, "as the evil ones do through his and our gaze?"

Doctor Dale nodded. "Yes, and with the forces in my gaze stronger than those in his, I could force him against his will to revoke this curse."

"But how would you do it? How go about it?"

"In this way," Dale answered. "We would take your father by surprise and bind him so that he could not escape or oppose us physically. Then, by the benign forces with which I can empower my gaze, I will undertake to overcome the dark forces that hold him and his own will, and make him revoke his compact with evil. Once he does so he will not be hurt physically, but the evil eye will pass from him and from you two."

Joseph Mione had listened tensely. "If you could do that!" he exclaimed. "Yet if you failed——"

"Father, it is a chance at least to escape this terrible thing," Rose Mione said. "No matter what the risk, let us try it."

"Remember," Doctor Dale put in, "that Peter Mione is an old man. He might die at any time from natural causes and then all hope of lifting this thing from you would be gone."

"You are right—we'll do it!" Joseph Mione declared. "When shall it be?—tonight?"

"Yes, the sooner the better," said Dale quickly. "Your father will go out this evening as last night?"

"Yes, each morning and evening he goes out for a few

hours.”

“Well, Owen and I will be here this evening before he returns. We’ll be waiting here for him when he does.”

He stood up, and so did the pale Joseph Mione and his daughter.

“We’ll get back now to make preparation—you can expect us at eight tonight.”

He took the girl’s hand. “You must not expect it to be easy, you and your father. It will be a struggle, but it is for the best.”

“I know,” she whispered. “We will be waiting for you.”

WE LEFT the Mione house at that and went up the street to our car. I saw faces watching us from windows all along the street.

As we passed Domenic Millera’s house we saw Millera in its door, but before we could speak he made the swift gesture against the evil eye with his hand toward us, then closed the door.

“These people think us friends of the Miones,” Doctor Dale said. “Well, if all goes well tonight they’ll have nothing more to fear.”

“And if all doesn’t go well?” I asked. “Dale, what if Peter Mione and his forces are too strong for you?”

“In that case,” said Doctor Dale slowly, “I would fall victim and be stricken myself by the power of his evil eye. But I think I can use forces that will be too much for him.

“I’m going to tell Donald Carlin the whole thing now,” he added as we drove back across Tauriston. “He has a right to know.”

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When we reached the Carlin home we found that Henry Carlin was still sleeping heavily but was no longer in the semi-comatose condition that had been his at first. Donald Carlin had been watching over him and came anxiously toward us as we entered.

"I want to know what happened to Dad," he told Doctor Dale. "He seems to have had an attack of illness just like mine."

"It was the same kind of attack, Donald," Dale said gravely. He went on then to tell Donald Carlin the whole story of Peter Mione and his family of the evil eye.

Donald was as astonished as I had expected. "And I was stricken by Rose's evil eye? It's incredible!"

"It's only too true," Doctor Dale affirmed. "Even though Rose and her father are innocent, their gaze can kill; and until her grandfather revokes his black compact with evil it will be so."

"And that's why she wouldn't see me!" Donald Carlin exclaimed. "If I had ever known that—Dale, I'm going to be there with you tonight when you do this!" he said. "I've got to be there with Rose!"

"You can't!" I exclaimed. "To meet the eyes of Rose and her father and grandfather—and no symbol like ours can protect you who have already been a victim——"

"Yet there's a way in which Donald might go, Owen," Doctor Dale said. "If we bind his eyes with a bandage faced with lead-foil—lead being impenetrable to supernatural forces—he can not meet the eyes of the Miones and will be safe from them for the time being."

"Then I'll do that," Donald Carlin told him. "And if you're successful tonight I'll not need to fear Rose's eyes."

"If we're successful, yes," Doctor Dale said. "And if we're not—but we mustn't think of that."

THE hours of that day were busy ones. After making sure that the sleeping Henry Carlin was slowly recovering, and giving Mrs. Grassia directions as to his care, Doctor Dale began preparing for the struggle that night.

He took from his equipment-case a number of unusual objects we had brought, selecting from them two curious silver symbols. These were like the ones we had worn in our lapels, with the eye and seven smaller symbols graven on them. But they were larger, five inches across, and had around the seven small symbols a border of interlaced wheel and crescent designs.

The two symbols had silver loops by which they could be fastened around the wrist like wristlets. Doctor Dale showed how they were to be worn on right and left wrist, and how so worn they summoned to the wearer the tangible and terrific forces by which he meant to overcome Peter Mione.

Dale also made ready a cloth bandage faced with lead-foil for Donald Carlin. When evening came, Henry Carlin still slept and Doctor Dale and young Carlin and I ate dinner silently.

IT WAS nearly eight and already dark when we went out to the car. Donald Carlin drove across Tauriston, halting the car at Dale's direction a block from Cardell Street. We walked on to that street and down to the dark lower end where loomed the dark house of the Miones.

Before knocking, Doctor Dale adjusted the lead-foil

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bandage around Donald Carlin's eyes. Then he rapped, and at once Joseph Mione answered. For still another time I felt the shock of his eyes against the shield from the silver symbols Dale and I wore in our lapels. Donald Carlin, blindfolded, experienced nothing apparently.

"Your father's not returned yet?" Doctor Dale asked.

"Not yet," said Joseph Mione, deathly white. "But he should be back soon now."

He held the door open and we went inside, Donald Carlin holding to my arm for guidance.

Rose Mione was in the soft-lit room inside, her eyes as she turned toward us again smiting us with that strange tangible force. She gave an exclamation at sight of young Carlin, blindfolded. "Donald!"

"It's all right," Dale told her. "The blindfold protects him."

Donald Carlin groped toward her, held her close. "Rose," he said, his voice low. "I heard all today—all of what you've been through——"

We were silent for a moment. Then Joseph Mione—"You're going to hide until my father returns?"

"Yes," Doctor Dale answered. He surveyed the room, then indicated the door-hangings of dark cloth separating it from the back rooms. "Owen and I will hide behind these until Peter Mione comes. Donald, you had better go with Rose back into the house."

Rose Mione hesitated, Donald holding her arm. "You're not going to—hurt Grandfather?" she said to Dale.

Doctor Dale shook his head gravely. "I trust not." He showed her the big silver wrist-symbols, attaching them

to his wrists so that their disks were flat against the top of the wrist. "With the forces summoned by these symbols I am going to try to make your grandfather revoke his compact of the evil eye, but that will be an ordeal."

She went back into the rear of the house then with Donald Carlin. I could hear their low voices.

"And what do you want me to do?" asked Joseph Mione. He was trembling.

"Just wait in the room here," Doctor Dale told him, "and try to get your father's back to these curtains. Owen and I will do the rest."

Joseph Mione nodded and then Doctor Dale and I took our places behind the door-hangings, invisible to any who entered the room from outside. We made ready in our hands short lengths of thin, hard rope that we had brought with us.

WE WAITED in silence. It was a tense wait that seemed very long. Minutes fled by and still Peter Mione did not return. Out in the room Joseph Mione was becoming increasingly nervous, moving restlessly about. There was no sound from Rose and Donald Carlin in the back rooms.

Then at last a steady step on the sidewalk outside! I knew it for Peter Mione's step even before I heard it stop and the door open. Peering with Dale through the crack between the hangings that concealed us, I saw Peter Mione step inside and close the door.

He was laughing! I had never seem him more evil in appearance, for the mirth in that mask-like face was demoniac. His terrible eyes seemed a little more dilated, the black forces in them stirring near their surface. Un-

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holy exultation was in every line of his face.

"Joseph, I think it will be very long before that fool Millera leads crowds against me again as this morning," he said. "Very long!"

"What do you mean about Millera?" Joseph Mione asked. Peter Mione, flinging hat and coat aside, was walking across the room within a few feet of the hangings behind which Doctor Dale and I waited.

"I mean," said Peter Mione, still gloating, "that Millera will know now what it means to——"

Dale and I sprang out on him. He gave a wild curse, but before he could resist, our ropes were about him and we had thrust him into a chair, in which swiftly we tied him.

Rose Mione, young Donald Carlin with her, came quickly into the room, the girl very white. Peter Mione looked from her and her blindfolded companion to the trembling Joseph Mione, then to Doctor Dale and myself. His gaze became dreadful, smiting at us with a force more than physical.

"So, you plan to trap your father, Joseph!" he hissed. "You and this Dale, this meddler from outside!"

"It's more than a trap, Peter Mione," Doctor Dale told him. "It's gonig to mean the end tonight of your power of the evil eye!"

"What do you mean?" Mione exclaimed, his fury diabolical.

"I mean that you are going to revoke tonight the compact that gave you that power and lift it from yourself and son and granddaughter!"

Peter Mione's terrible laugh rasped. "You fool, do you think you can make me do that? More than one I've

sent to death who tried to overcome me.”

“Yet it’s going to be done tonight,” Doctor Dale returned, his voice steely. He turned a moment to us. “Owen, see that no one enters and that we’re not disturbed. That is vital.”

Then Dale placed a chair to face that in which Peter Mione sat, and seated himself in it, face to face with Mione.

Doctor Dale extended both hands, making a series of swift gestures almost too fast for the eye to follow. Peter Mione snarled in defiance, yet as he glimpsed the big silver symbols on Dale’s wrists his face changed. Doctor Dale placed his hands on his knees, the wrist-symbols upward, and then stared steadily into the eyes of Peter Mione.

There began then the strangest of duels. It was a silent, deadly struggle between the eyes of Doctor Dale and Peter Mione. It was as though their eyes, their gaze, were but the channels by which alien forces far mightier than either of these two men were coming to grips, struggling in supernatural combat.

Tensely, silently, we watched this deadly struggle. Joseph Mione shaking, Rose hiding her face partly against the blindfolded Donald Carlin’s shoulder, I beside them. I felt my heart beating rapidly, seemed to feel the room electric with strange forces crowding it. Peter Mione’s black eyes were dilated now to a terrible extent, as though the forces working through them were too great for them, while Doctor Dale’s hazel eyes flamed with burning, tawny light!

Doctor Dale spoke, his voice low, monotonous. “Revoke your compact!” he said, his eyes gripping the

other's.

Peter Mione snarled. His face and hands now were bloodless, and Dale's too were unnaturally white.

"Revoke!" Doctor Dale repeated. Again Mione made no answer.

It was as though time were forgotten by us as the eyes of those two clashed on each other in deadly struggle.

Peter Mione's black force-filled eyes wavered a little. The forces in Dale's flaming gaze were beating too strongly against his.

"He's winning!" I whispered hoarsely to Joseph Mione. "Dale's winning——"

"Revoke!" said Doctor Dale in the same monotone.

"Listen!" said Joseph Mione to me, his eyes startled.

From outside, farther up the street, came a confused roaring sound, growing louder. We sprang to the door and looked out.

Up the street a mad mob of two or three hundred men and women was coming down toward us! At its head, carrying a girl's limp form, walked Domenic Millera. Many in the mob carried flashing lights.

"Revoke!" came again Dale's voice from where he and Peter Mione sat unmoving in their terrific deadlock.

"Death to the *jettatori*!" came the cry of the nearing mob.

"They're down here to kill your father and you!" I cried to Joseph Mione. "Get back in——"

I thrust him behind me as the mob surged down into the street in front of the Mione house in whose door I stood. I saw now that the girl Domenic Millera carried was his daughter Julia, her form unmoving in his arms, and that his face was insane with passion.

"Millera!" I cried. "What are you doing here with these?"

"We come to kill the *jettatore*—Peter Mione!" he yelled, his voice crazy. "To kill him as Peter Mione killed my Julia this night!"

My heart checked. "Killed your daughter? What do you mean?"

He held up the girl and now I saw her face was the waxen one of the dead. "But now he did it!" Millera cried. "Peter Mione was even more angry with me for leading the crowd here this morning, and as he came down the street to his home tonight he took his revenge upon my Julia. Yes, he came up onto my porch when none saw and looked in at her, the gaze of his evil eye again upon hers. And she, weakened already by his evil eye, died almost before she could whisper to us what he had done. So we come now to kill Peter Mione of the evil eye before more die!"

"Death to the *jettatori*!" roared the crowd about him, surging forward.

"Millera, for God's sake get them back!" I cried, but was not even heard in the bellow of the mob. Stones struck about me as they rushed forward. I leapt back, slammed and locked the door.

The mob hammered on the outside. I spun around to where Joseph Mione stood, white and trembling. At the room's center, heedless of all else, Doctor Dale and Peter Mione held still to their terrible duel.

"Get back and lock every door—push furniture against the windows!" I cried to Joseph Mione. "Donald, you help him—if they get in here before Dale wins, everything is lost!"

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"Revoke! came Doctor Dale's steady command to Peter Mione, louder now and more forceful.

AS Joseph Mione ran back to lock and bar the doors and windows of the rear of the house, Donald Carlin, still blindfolded, and Rose Mione hastening to help him, I shoved the room's furniture against the windows and doors as rapidly as possible. Already the smash and tinkle of glass sounded as stones shattered windows.

"Death to the *jettatori*—death to Peter Mione!" came the cry.

At the room's center Doctor Dale and Peter Mione still faced each other. Dale's eyes were as terrible now as Mione's, and seemed beating the other's down. The room was pregnant with mighty forces.

"Revoke!" came Doctor Dale's inexorable command again.

"Kill the evil-eyed—kill Peter Mione as he killed my son!" screamed the Safetta woman outside.

"Death to the *jettatore*!" came Millera's mad cry.

The door split beneath blows and now the mob was pounding upon the heavy cabinet I had shoved against it. I held against the cabinet.

"Carlin, they're breaking in here!" I yelled. Donald Carlin, blindfolded still, stumbled from the house's rear, where was pounding and smashing too, with Joseph Mione and Rose.

"We can't hold them out much longer!" Donald panted as he and Joseph Mione pushed with me to hold the cabinet against the door.

"We've got to!" I cried. "Dale is winning, but if they

kill Peter Mione now, it means all chance of lifting the curse of the evil eye is gone!"

The door and cabinet crashed further inward despite our best efforts to hold it. The mob bellowed triumphantly——

Doctor Dale and Peter Mione now had risen from their chairs, eyes still holding each other. Mione's wrinkled face now ghastly as with gaze still riveted to Dale's force-flaming eyes he struggled. He seemed gasping for breath.

The mob was breaking through! They were pushing us bodily back with the cabinet from the door. Millera's insane cry spurring them on, their shouts a confused roar in my ears. Rose Mione screamed and I heard over her scream the thunder of Doctor Dale's command.

"Revoke!"

The maddened mob burst in, Domenic Millera foremost among them with his daughter's limp body still in his arms.

They halted, transfixed by the sight of Peter Mione staggering at the room's center, face ghastly and contorted as he clutched the air, his eyes riveted on Doctor Dale's.

"*I revoke!*" screamed Peter Mione, then toppled side-wise in a heap.

Millera and his followers stared, petrified.

Doctor Dale, staggering himself, steadied and bent over Peter Mione. The face he turned up was lifeless, black eyes wide in death.

He turned to Joseph and Rose Mione. In their eyes was no longer that deep stirring of black forces, that outthrust of tangible evil force! Their eyes were

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cleansed, normal. Unbelievably, father and daughter stared into each other's eyes.

Doctor Dale turned to Domenic Millera and those behind him. "Peter Mione is dead and you heard him revoke his power of the evil eye before he died," he told them. "The evil eye is gone now from these two as from him."

Millera, like a man in a dream, nodded. "It is so," he said. Then as his eyes fell on the limp body in his arms, a sob of utter human woe came from him. "My Julia!"

He stumbled out, the mob withdrawing with him, slowly, awed.

Doctor Dale turned. Donald Carlin had ripped the bandage from his eyes and they sought Rose Mione's as he held her.

"Rose," he faltered. "Rose——"

"Donald, it's gone—you can look now!" she said. Then she was weeping. Donald held her close. Joseph Mione was still bemazed.

"It is gone, yes," Doctor Dale said, "the curse of the evil eye that Peter Mione brought on himself and his. The house of Mione can go on but the house of the evil eye is—ended."

Children of Terror

Thrilling Mystery
September 1936



IT came again across the night-shrouded woods, that ominous, long-drawn ululation like the howling of a wolf hot on the trail of prey. But there was something in it that struck my ears oddly, some strange quality unlike the cry of any animal.

I suddenly became aware that the body of my fiancée was pressing tight against me. I turned. Virginia King was staring into the chill, moonlit November night as I had been doing, her lovely face tense with listening, her liquid, dark eyes wide with fear.

"Paul, that howling," she whispered to me. "It's so weird—it frightens me."

I took her hands in mine and laughed down into her face. "It's only some farmer's dog taking a run through the woods," I told her. "You're such an incurable New Yorker that you expect to find wolves here in the Pennsylvania woods."

Virginia glanced apprehensively around the dark, deserted little country station at which the train had left us. It was just a lonely flag-stop, with no other building in sight. Then I saw her start violently as the silence was once more broken.

Once more through the somber chill of the dark oak woods was coming to our ears that hot, yapping howling that we had already heard. It ended abruptly in an explosion of snarling yelps.

"Why, Virginia, you're actually trembling!" I exclaimed, as I felt her hands quivering in mine.

I put my arms around her and drew her close to me. Her fur coat slipped back, and her soft, warm body clung desperately to me. The fragrance of her dark hair was in my nostrils as I kissed her yielding lips. She seemed seeking my arms tonight for reassurance, and when she drew back her eyes were pools of troubled darkness.

"Paul, do we have to go through this woods to your old home?" she asked.

"It's only two miles," I told her. "If Dr. Blaine had got my telegram, someone would have been here to meet us, but it won't take us long to walk it."

"I wish—I wish we'd come in daytime," she said. And then quickly she added, "I'm being silly. Of course we can walk."

"You'll like it there, Virginia," I told her eagerly. "Dr. Blaine is the best guardian a bunch of fatherless kids ever had. I've been beyond the guardian stage some years now, and Roger and Leigh and Martha, my brothers and sister, will be all grown up. Lord, Martha will be seventeen!" I added quickly, "But if you don't like it, why we can leave whenever you want to. I *did* promise Dr.

Blaine, though, that I'd come home and see him before I got married. And I'm eager to see them all anyway, after the four years I've been away."

We started down the moonlit, frozen dirt road. In one hand I carried our two handbags. Virginia's gloved hand was in my other hand, and she made a valiant effort not to stumble in the ruts.

THESE dark, somber Western Pennsylvania woods were a different world than she had hitherto known. But they were home to me. The gaunt trees that waved skeletal arms in the moonlight, the smell of rotting leaves on the cold air, the brooding black hills—I loved them.

Suddenly, when we had walked less than a mile, the wolfish howls rang loud on the frosty air from close ahead! I felt Virginia's gloved fingers tremble in mine as the ululation came rapidly nearer.

"Paul, whatever it is, it's coming this way!"

"Wait here a minute, darling," I said quickly.

I set down the bags, stepped hastily to the woods at the side of the road, and wrenched off a short, thick club. The feel of it in my hand was comforting as I came back to my fiancée.

"This will fix Mr. Stray Dog if he decides to take a snap at us," I told her. I was stooping to pick up the bags again, when her cry of horror ripped the night.

"Paul!"

I straightened instantly. Around the bend of the road, plainly visible in the cold moonlight, came a running creature, a crouched, nightmare shape. It was a man running on all fours. A man loping toward us, raising his

white face in the moonlight as he ran and uttering those inhuman, wolfish howls. He saw us, stopped, stared with blazing eyes.

Then the—Thing—growled deep in his throat and came slowly on toward us, still on all fours, walking stiff-leggedly. Approaching us like a growling wolf about to attack.

"It's human—" Virginia's choking cry stopped there.

I said rapidly, "Stay behind me, Virginia. It's going to attack us."

The shape in the moonlight came closer, crouched to spring. I raised my club, keeping the girl I loved behind me. The wolf-man was about to leap—

Interruption came suddenly. A rabbit bolted abruptly from the brush where it had lain hiding, across the road in front of me. The wolf-man sprang! Not at me, but after the fleeing rabbit, his attention instantly diverted by sight of the fleeing prey. I saw the man's face clearly now as he sprang across my path, a few feet away. And my mind throbbed with utter, dazing horror. This man with blazing brute eyes, who ran wolf-like beneath the moon for prey, was my younger brother, Leigh Randall!

"Leigh!" I yelled hoarsely at the running, wolfish shape, but he did not stop. He was diving upon the fleeing rabbit.

We heard the rabbit squeal agonizedly, then heard crunching sounds in the brush. My brother, crouching there, was devouring the living body of his prey.

Virginia was half fainting from horror. Somehow I retained enough presence of mind to press forward along the road, partly carrying her.

"Quick, Virginia! The house isn't far ahead."

We rounded a turn in the road, losing from sight and hearing the dreadful shape behind us. Ahead beckoned a yellow spark.

"That's the house! Try to keep going, darling!"

And all the time we stumbled forward in the moonlight, horror unutterable was hammering at my brain. What had happened during my four years' absence? What had made a wolfish brute of my brother Leigh?

WE heard the howling start again behind us, receding now. My brother, or the Thing that had once been my brother, was ranging the woods for more prey. God—it couldn't be! It couldn't!

Then we were stumbling across the unkempt gardens and up onto the porch of the old square brick house. I held the semi-conscious Virginia with one arm while I pounded desperately on the door.

"Dr. Blaine! Let us in!"

The door was opened. In a familiar, lamp-lit hall inside, a dark-haired, pretty young girl confronted us. Martha, my kid sister. I started forward, then stopped, staring frozenly at her.

God, she, too, had changed! Her slim body was drawn back in a feline crouch, her black eyes shone at us like those of a surprised cat. She spat at us, and from her lips came a hissing, snarling cat-cry.

I stared dumbly at her. Into the hall came a hulking, heavy-footed shape, a big, powerful young man—my other brother, Roger. Or rather, it had been my brother Roger.

For he had become as animal-like, in a different way, as Leigh and Martha. His shock head hung downward

from his stooped shoulders, swaying a little as he stared at us with contracted eyes that had no light of human intelligence in them.

He dropped to all fours, lumbered toward us like an ambling mastiff. As he passed close to Martha, she snarled again and her hand flashed out like a cat's paw and clawed his cheek. I saw blood start from the scratch, and heard a roar of canine anger as he swung toward her, for all the world like a great angry dog.

My mind seemed collapsing from the successive impacts of horror. I think I would have turned and fled with my fainting fiancée, had not Dr. Blaine himself hastily entered the hall. His grey, gentle, elderly face was a strained mask, his eyes startled and unutterably anxious, as he ran toward us.

"Paul, boy!" he exclaimed. "Good heavens, I wasn't expecting you tonight!"

I pointed unsteadily at the two creatures that were my brother and sister. "Doctor, what—what—" I couldn't finish.

He turned, told them in a sharp, high voice: "Back! Go back!"

They stared at him and at us, rebelliously. Then Martha darted out the open door on all fours, as lightly as a running cat. Roger lumbered slowly, heavily, outside after her. My former guardian's face had a terrible, aching misery on it as he turned back to me.

"Paul, if I'd known you were coming, I'd have met you—prepared you. . . . But who's that with you?" he asked suddenly.

"My fiancée," I told him, my horror-dazed mind torn with anxiety for her as I lifted her half senseless form.

"Help me revive her, please, Doctor."

"Your *fiancée*?" he repeated in a whisper, staring at Virginia's drooping figure with wide, fixed eyes.

"Yes. I planned to surprise you with the news, bring her here to meet you and get your consent, as I always promised," I cried. "She saw—Leigh. Help me with her!"

Dumbly he helped me carry her into the soft-lit living room and lay her upon a couch. I unbuttoned Virginia's coat, brushed aside her little hat, chafed her pale face and her wrists.

"DARLING, you're all right now! Everything's all right," I told her, as she began to revive.

Her eyes were pools of remembering horror. She grasped my hand weakly with hers.

"Paul—that Thing in the woods—"

"It's all right, darling, you're safe here," I repeated. "Just lie still and rest."

She closed her eyes. I straightened, and turned to Dr. Blaine. He was still staring down at Virginia, and the misery in his face was stronger. He turned slowly to me.

"You say you met Leigh?"

"We met a Thing that wore Leigh's form!" I exclaimed hoarsely. "Good God, Doctor, what's happened to my brothers and sister? They're like—*animals*!"

His hands were shaking. He said, "Paul, I'll explain everything. It's a horror that's come upon them in the last months, one I can't control. It's been hell here, getting worse."

"But for God's sake, what is it?" I cried.

He took my arm with trembling fingers. "I can't tell

you here. We'll go back to the laboratory."

I stopped, looking anxiously down at Virginia. Her eyes were still closed.

"She's dozing," Dr. Blaine told me. "She'll be all right. And back in the laboratory, I can—explain."

I let him lead me down the corridor to the back of the house. My whole mind was still frozen, numbed, as though I was living through a dream. We entered the brightly lit laboratory. I looked around the big room with its microscopes and flasks and burners, familiar to me since childhood. The biological workshop where the father I hardly remembered, Dr. Carl Randall, had worked with Blaine years ago.

Mechanically I sat down in the chair the man who had been my guardian held out for me. The shuddering, aching misery on his face was terrible.

"What happened to my brothers and sister?" I repeated. "You said it was months ago?"

Dr. Blaine nodded. "Yes, it started four months ago. But first, Paul—I must tell you. Leigh and Roger and Martha are not your brothers and sister. They are no relation to you."

I stared. "What are you saying, Doctor? Why, you've always told us that we were all four Dr. Randall's children. And my father's will left his money to us in equal shares."

"I know, I know," he said achingly, "But though your father wanted the others to be known as his children, they are not."

"Then whose children are they?" I demanded.

Dr. Blaine's thin fingers clenched tight, and his eyes were fearful and haunted as he slowly answered.

"Paul, they are not children of any human beings. They are *the children of animals*."

I leaped to my feet. "God Almighty, have you gone crazy, Doctor?"

"I did go crazy once—crazy with the lust for scientific experimentation," he muttered, staring past me. "And Dr. Randall did too, and Leigh and Roger and Martha are the horrible result."

"But they're *human*!" I cried. "How could they be the children of animals?"

He put his face between his hands, and looked up at me with those haunted eyes, awful eyes.

"Paul, we brought that about, your father and I. It was a biological experiment, an epoch-making one, we thought. An unholy, blasphemous one, I know now, but it's too late."

He spoke slowly from stiff, trembling lips. "Paul, there is a time in the life of each animal, of a wolf, let us say, when it is a mere tiny embryo cell, as yet undeveloped. It could develop into almost any bodily form, but hereditary factors cause it to develop into wolf form.

"But suppose you do not let that embryo cell develop naturally? Suppose you put it in an incubator and control its development, making it develop along the lines that you, and not Nature, wish. Then, if you have sufficient knowledge and skill, you could develop that wolf embryo into a dog, a panther, a pig—or even a *human being*!"

"Paul, that was the audacious experiment your father and I attempted twenty years ago. Your father, Dr. Randall, was the greatest embryologist in the world, and I—God knows I am not boasting—was almost as great. We determined to rear animal embryo cells in artificial

incubators, and control them so they would develop into human beings.

"We took three cells—one from a mastiff, one from a wolf, and one from a leopard. We raised them in separate incubators, watching them, controlling their growth, warping the life-stuff itself to our will! Thus we raised three human infants, Roger and Leigh and Martha. Roger from the mastiff cell, Leigh from the wolf, and Martha from the leopard." Dr. Blaine's voice was thick with shaking emotion. "Randall raised those three brute-born infants as brothers and sister of you, his own young son. He gave them his name for he, like myself, felt a horror at what he had accomplished, a sense of awful, overpowering guilt.

"'Before Randall died he told me, 'Blaine, we should never have forced those animal children into human shape. It was a sin against Nature. But since we did it, they must never be told. I am giving them my name, am leaving them equal shares in my fortune with my own son. Never tell them, but never let them marry ordinary humans.'

"That was twenty years ago," Blaine continued. "God knows I never repeated the experiment after Randall died. I raised Roger and Leigh and Martha as your brothers and sister, guardian to you all, educating you all alike from Randall's money. They grew up like normal children until a few months ago, when they approached maturity. Then"—his face was deathly white—"then they began to change. The animal heritage in their fibers began to creep into their brains, to rule their minds. Nature, whom we thought we had thwarted, was beginning to claim her own. Their bodies remained human

but their minds were becoming the minds of the animals from which they sprang!

"Paul, when I saw that, I nearly went mad with horror and guilt. Your father and I were responsible for them. In the last months I've worked with them until I nearly cracked, trying to get the animal taint out of their minds. But instead it grows stronger, stronger each day. They are animals—wild animals in human bodies!"

Dr. Blaine's voice was a hoarse whisper as he said that. His whole body was trembling violently. I sprang to my feet, struggling against the black horror that overwhelmed me.

"Good God, it *can't* be true! Roger and Leigh and Martha—sprung from animals—"

HIS shaking fingers took a thick packet of cards and photographs from the desk.

"These are the records of the original experiments, kept by your father and myself, Paul," he said. "Records, from the very first day we placed the embryo cells in the incubators."

My eye took in the top card, the written words: "Wolf cell placed in incubator, 9.10 A.M. Temperature, 94.6, humidity—"

I brushed the cards aside with a groan. Dr. Blaine was leading me to an apparatus on a nearby table, one of three glass boxes, each a yard square, each with double glass walls.

"Paul, this is one of the incubators we used in the experiment. See for yourself—"

He snapped on a little light inside the thing, and I stared into it frozenly. I saw a rubber mold, shaped like a

human infant, around it electric heating coils, channels for chemical solutions.

My head was reeling from horror. The little light in there was whirling and whirling in front of me. Staring, I lost awareness of my surroundings, my dazed, fogged vision only taking in that brilliant point of light until Blaine's voice broke my paralysis.

"You see, Paul, it is true! God knows I wish now that it wasn't, that your father and I had died before we did the thing."

My brain felt dimmed, confused, unable to think clearly, that brilliant point of light still seeming to whirl before my eyes. I said thickly, "But what are we going to do with Leigh and Roger and Martha? What *can* we do?"

"We've got to keep them secluded here, fight to overcome that inherited animal taint in their brains!" Dr. Blaine exclaimed. "You and I must do it, Paul. If outsiders saw them, they'd be thought insane and would be confined."

"But I can't stay here!" I cried. "Virginia and I are going to be married—I can't ask her to stay here with those horrors."

"You must give her up, then," Dr. Blaine said desperately. "You must send her back, and stay here with me."

I felt a wild anger at his words. "I won't do it!" I shouted. "I'm going to take her out of here and stay out. It was you who produced those three monstrosities! You can take care of them now!"

He cried, "Your father was responsible as much as I was, Paul! You've a duty here with me. You must do it."

"I tell you I won't stay here and give up Virginia for any duty in the world!" I yelled, feeling a fury at the sug-

gestion such as I had never felt in my life. "You can't make me do it!"

Abruptly on the night smote a terrific burst of snapping, snarling animal voices outside the house. As though great animals of prey were in combat out there, one of them growling deeply and thunderously, the other one yelping furiously.

Dr. Blaine went whiter at the sounds, and sprang to the door.

"It's Roger and Leigh fighting again!" he cried. "We've got to stop them—they're likely to kill each other."

My brain was in a fog of utter horror as I stumbled with him out of the laboratory, toward the front door. Virginia, her face deathly, was in the hall, and her hands grasped at me frantically.

"PAUL, wait—I want you to—" But I brushed her aside as I ran to the door after Dr. Blaine. "No time now, darling—stay in here till I come back—"

I burst out after Dr. Blaine into the moonlight. Out there in the unkempt front yard I saw a horrible sight.

Leigh had returned from his hunt in the woods and had brought back more prey with him, another rabbit. He was crouched down in wolf fashion, with the furry thing between his hands. He was snarling, baring his teeth in warning menace, his eyes blazing. And Roger, his hulking body moving on all fours, was approaching him, growling threateningly deep in his throat as a great hungry mastiff might do, his eyes fixed upon the bloody rabbit. Martha was circling the two felinely, her eyes also

fixed upon the game, uttering little whining leopard-cries of excitement.

"Roger! Leigh! *Back!*" cried Dr. Blaine, running toward them.

They paid no attention to him. They closed in battle at that moment, fighting like two wild animals over prey. Roger crouched before he sprung at Leigh as if to sink in his fangs. Leigh snapped back at him wolf-fashion, striving to sink his own teeth savagely in some vital spot.

Their eyes blazed ferally as they fought, they uttered snapping growls and yelps so that with closed eyes one would not have known but that it was two animals who battled. And still Martha feliney circled the fight, watching them with hot eyes!

"Leigh! Roger!" cried Dr. Blaine futilely. And then to me, "Stop them, Paul! For God's sake, stop them!"

I sprang toward the struggling two, and sought to separate them. I felt teeth sink savagely in my hand and looked down to see blood streaming on my fingers. My own blood. Leigh had bitten me.

Terrific rage exploded inside me at sight of my own blood. I sprang back into the fight, roaring in inarticulate fury. I knew nothing except that these two had dared oppose me—me, whom none should dare oppose!

I struck at the two with terrific strokes of my open hands, strokes that sent them reeling from each other. Leigh bunched and snarled at me, and, still roaring in crazy rage, I sprang on him.

His teeth snapped again at me. I avoided them by a lightning movement that was all instinct, and I snapped back at him! I sought to sink my teeth in his throat!

He recoiled with yelps of panic, scrambling away from

me. I turned, still voicing my shouting roar of fury, toward Roger. But he, too, was backing away from me, growling. Martha was darting with cat swiftness toward the rabbit.

I uttered another shout and she whipped off with a startled squalling screech. I strode to the rabbit and bent toward it. It was warm and bloody and alluring—

God in heaven, it was I, Paul Randall, who was doing these things!

Frozen at the spine, with all my crazy rage momentarily smothered by horror, I stared down at the prey I had been about to pick up. Then I whirled around to Dr. Blaine. There was such ghastly horror on his face as I had never seen on any face before.

I GRASPED his arms, screamed hoarsely to him, “I was an animal there just like them! I felt like an animal! In my brain I was one! Doctor”—the words stuck in my dry throat—“are you *sure* that I—that I am really Randall’s son?”

He tried to speak, his stiff lips working, his face awful. But I read what was in his staring, agonized eyes.

“So *that’s* why you insisted on me staying here with the others!” I screamed. “That’s why you fought to keep me from marrying Virginia! I’m not a man! I’m an animal like the others, an animal in human form!”

“Paul, for God’s sake get a grip on yourself,” he choked. “Don’t let this thing get you, change you as it has the others—”

But I hardly heard him. I was gripping his shoulders with human horror and animal ferocity mingling in my rioting brain.

"Tell me the truth!" I yelled. "I *am* one of them?"

He gasped, "Yes, we reared four embryo animal cells, not three. The fourth was you, an embryo cell from a lioness. You didn't seem to be affected like the others, tonight. I meant never to tell you—"

I staggered back from him and I think I uttered a strange scream of laughter. "Then I'm a man whose parents were lions—a lion in a man's body! At least, I'm the king of animals!"

"Paul—Paul—" His voice was an agonized prayer as he sought to grasp me.

I brushed him from me, sent him reeling away. I felt that awful rage, that hideous animal ferocity that I knew now was heritage of my lion blood, surging up in my brain. I felt that I would kill someone in a moment if I stayed there. I could *feel* the animal in me mounting higher in my brain each moment, and I stumbled drunkenly toward the trees.

"Paul!" That was Virginia's cry of agony. She was running out from the porch, her face white in the moonlight. "Wait, Paul! You *must* wait! There's something I must tell you—"

At the sight of her, the part of my brain that was still human was torn with anguish. I loved her—and she was human and I an animal. Yes, despite my human body, I was of the brutes!

I saw Dr. Blaine trying to restrain her. I staggered into the trees and then suddenly I was running in the darkness, running wildly and unseeingly into the woods, into the solemn checkered moonlight, my mind a whirlpool of such emotions as no man had felt before.

A brute! A brute! It hammered time in my throbbing

ears to my own swift running footsteps, thrust home to my brain in burning truth. I was not Paul Randall, not the man beloved by that girl. I was an animal disguised as Paul Randall, as a human.

And, most horrible of all, a part of my brain was *glad* that I was an animal. A part of me felt such wild delight as I had never known before, as I rushed through the woods and darkness. This was my heritage, my real one.

A FOX barked far across the woods. I raised my head and shouted back a roaring, wordless answer. All the forest around hushed at my challenging shout, and I knew that this was right and that I was the lord of all animals that were, I, the son of the lion.

Running—running! Through the woods, in the chill moonlight, shouting madly and challengingly, ever and again. I was becoming more and more animal, I dimly sensed. But I cared not, for I was Paul Randall no longer, human no longer. Paul Randall was gone—gone. . . .

“Paul!”

Even through my brutish exaltation, my animalized brain, that faint and far-off cry reached me. I stopped, listening. It seemed to me that I ought to pay attention to that voice, that it was something urgent to me.

“Paul—help—”

It was a scream for help, from far behind me. Someone was screaming to Paul Randall for help, to *me*!

No, I was not all animal yet! For dim remembrance somehow galvanized my brain and sent me running back in the direction of that cry. There was someone there I must help—someone. . . .

I tried wildly to keep that uppermost in my thoughts as I ran. I prayed to remain human enough that I might save this someone whom it seemed so urgent that I save. Yet even as I ran, the animal part in me exulted in the wild lope through the darkness!

I heard that cry again from ahead of me, Virginia's cry. Her voice was making me remember—Virginia! That was who I was running to aid, that much at least my dazed brain clung to.

I saw her in the checkered moonlight ahead, running wildly toward me. And after her other things were running on all fours. I did not know them now as Roger and Leigh and Martha. My brain saw them only as other animals chasing this prey which I wished to save.

Virginia tripped and fell. Roger sprang toward her—and I uttered a mad roar of warning! He stopped, straightened, staring at me with blinking eyes, his head swaying in great dog fashion. I took three crouched steps toward him past the girl's body, sprang at him.

Roger's great arms battered at me in terrific blows as he sprang to meet me. But I didn't even feel them. I was on him and clawing him with my hands while my teeth sought to get into his jugular.

His arms hugged me in a terrific grip, his teeth snapping. But I knew no fear, only the wild joy of animal battle as I struggled with him. He might be son of the king of dogs but I was son of the lion! I glimpsed Leigh and Martha watching, snarling.

I had him down—my hands were tearing at his throat. Battle-fury blinded me to all else in the world. Yet something was tugging at my arm—something. . . .

"Paul, don't! Stop it, for God's sake!"

That was the voice that had cried to me for help, the voice of the girl Virginia who was somehow important to me. Yet it was not imperative enough to divert me from my hold upon my enemy's throat. I was hot with the brute lust to kill.

"Paul, you're killing your brother! *Your brother!*"

THAT was louder in my brain, that cry. Somehow through my animal blood-lust penetrated remembrance that this creature I fought with *was* someone whom I should not kill.

That weak yet potent clasp was pulling me back from his prostrate form. Soft hands were touching my face frantically. A frenzied voice was in my ears.

"It's Virginia, Paul! Virginia!"

The red mists of animal fury were lifting a little from my brain. Virginia was clinging to me, agonizedly trying to bring me back to awareness of what I did.

"Virginia!" I uttered thickly, holding her to me. And then an awful remembrance came, I pushed her back. "No!" I shouted. "Get away from me while you can! I'm not a man, not human. I'm animal—"

"Paul, you're *not!*" she cried. "Dr. Blaine told you that, but it's not true. You're a man, a human, and so are your two brothers and your sister."

"But they are animal—see!" I cried hoarsely, pointing to the snarling Martha and Leigh, and brutish wolf-like Roger.

"No, they've simply been hypnotized and *told* that they're animal!" cried Virginia. "Paul, you've seen people in theaters hypnotized and told that they're dogs, have seen them bark and bite and behave like dogs under

the hypnotic command. That's what Dr. Blaine did to your brothers and sister. And he was starting to do it with you, Paul! I looked into the laboratory when you were in there with him, and I saw you staring into a glass box at a little whirling light such as hypnotists use! I heard Dr. Blaine telling you over and over, 'You are child of animals, of lions! You want to do things that animals do, to fight and hunt and run the woods. You want to roar and rage as a lion does in fight!'"

Virginia was shouting it to me. "That's what he was telling you, Paul, under the hypnotic spell! You've been under the influence of it ever since. I tried to tell you but you wouldn't wait, and when I ran after you, Dr. Blaine knew that I knew the truth and he pursued me, with these three running along—"

Crack! Virginia's words were interrupted by the report of a gun. A bullet tore the tree beside which we stood. Another bullet grazed my coat sleeve as I turned wildly. I saw the dark figure in the moonlit trees, shooting desperately. Madly I charged him, as Virginia screamed.

As I bore down the man who was shooting, he was just pulling trigger. His gun, bent back against him, exploded with a muffled report. He jerked and lay limp, and I rose from off him.

It was Dr. Blaine, and his thin face was strangely distorted. A bullet from his own gun had torn into his own breast. He looked up at us from pain-warped eyes.

"Thought—thought I'd gone so far I had to kill you two, now you knew the truth," he choked. "I could have said you murdered the girl in a crazy fit, and then killed yourself."

"Dr. Blaine!" My mind was a whirling daze of horror as I stooped in the moonlight beside him. "For God's sake, why did you do this thing? Why did you hypnotize my brothers and sister, making them believe themselves animals, and try to do the same with me?"

"**T**HE reason," he gasped, "is the reason for most crimes—money. Your father, Dr. Randall, left his money to you four children. It was in my charge, to be given you when you were twenty-five, as you know.

"I—I spent the money. Squandered it on wild stock gambles—the last was gone more than a year ago. You, Paul, would soon want your share, and the others shortly after. I'd be sent to prison when it was found I'd spent it.

"I thought of murdering you all in some ingenious fashion. But that wouldn't do, for I'd be required to present accounts of your estates. But if you all four became insane, I would continue as guardian. Would never have to account for the stolen money.

"That was the root of the plan. To make you all four seem insane, and blame it on hereditary insanity. By hypnotic command, for weeks repeated, I made the other three think and act like animals. Started on you tonight—when you were like them, I could publish the fact that you all four had become insane—"

His eyes closed, his head drooped. Mercilessly, I seized him, shook him until he opened dying eyes again.

"My brothers and sister!" I cried. "How can they be restored to normal?"

He whispered, with eyes slowly closing again, "It will be—easy—any good hypnotist can erase my commands from their brain in a few treatments. You—had but one

experience—are already normal again now you—know truth. . . .”

With a gurgling sigh, his breath escaped his lips and he lay still.

I stood up and took Virginia in my arms. My distracted, brutish brothers and sister, soon to be made normal again, stared at us.

“Don’t cry, Virginia,” I said, holding her tight, against everything, against the world. “Don’t cry.”

And was aware, as I said it, that I, too, was crying.

Woman from the Ice

Thrilling Mystery
September 1938



It was soul-sickening, but I had to admit it to myself. I was in love with a dead woman.

I could no longer conceal from myself the unholy passion that had gripped me ever since this evening, when we had dug the woman's body from the ice. She was dead, and I knew it, yet I was in love with her. I wanted to hold in my arms that alluring feminine body that had slept in the ice so long. I wanted to kiss that exotic, beautiful face.

Wythe Borrow and I had found the girl's body. Borrow was a young artist, one of the guests at this old resort hotel in the Cascade Mountains. I, Dick Morris, Seattle bond salesman, was another of the guests. There were only a few of us. This old place had once been

very popular for snow sports, but Sun Valley and other new resorts had stolen its patronage, and it was badly run down now.

Borrow and I had gone for a tramp through the snowy mountains. We were trudging over the Rawls Glacier, whose river of solid ice flows from between two white peaks, when suddenly Borrow stopped, looking down into the ice. He uttered a sharp cry.

"There's a body down in there! Morris, look!"

"You must be seeing things," I said as I came up to him. "Why—"

I fell silent. There *was* a dark human form, frozen in the solid ice under our feet. A woman's body, dressed in a dark, flowing gown. Even through the ice we could glimpse her still white face.

"Good Lord!" I gasped. "She's four feet inside the ice. She must have been in there for years and years."

"Decades, more likely!" Wythe Borrow declared. His dark, handsome face was quivering with excitement. "Go back to the hotel and get the others, Morris. And bring tools to dig her out," he cried.

I ran back over the snowy slopes, my brain whirling with excitement. It was two miles to the hotel, a huge, rambling log structure set amid tall pines, facing the mountains across a white plain. I was panting for breath when I burst into the lobby.

James Marsten, the owner and manager of the old place, was there giving orders to one of his few half-breed Indian servants. He was a gray, elderly man with an habitually worried expression on his lined face. I told him what we had found.

"A woman—in the glacier?" he repeated incred-

lously, his jaw sagging. Then he hastened to help me find pickaxes.

When we ran outside, the other guests stopped us to learn what had happened. There were only four of them—Fred Kerr and his pretty blond wife, Janice. John Gaines, a lanky mining engineer, and Daniel Holt, an aggressive-looking business man of forty. They had all come up the other day for the skiing. All, that is, except Daniel Holt, who, we understood, had been trying to buy the old hotel from James Marsten.

THEY followed Marsten and me out across the snow, greatly curious. Wythe Borrow was waiting for us, in eager impatience. And when he pointed down into the ice at the dark, imprisoned form below, the others uttered exclamations of amazement.

In less than a minute, our pickaxes were tearing into the ice. We worked with furious haste, although we were certain that the woman, whoever she was, had been dead for years.

"Go slow!" said Wythe Borrow sharply as our axes began to get close to her. "We don't want to mutilate the body."

We had dug almost four feet deep now. I jumped into the cavity and broke off the pieces of ice that still adhered to the body with my bare hands. Finally it was all uncovered. We stared, so silently and rigidly that one would have thought we too were frozen.

We saw now that the woman was dressed in a queer, fur-trimmed gown of heavy brown silk, under which swelled a shapely bosom and slim, long limbs. From a silver chain around her neck swung a little silver-hilted

dagger. Her dress was tattered and stained, and the inadequate slippers on her tiny feet were scuffed and broken. But her body was as perfectly preserved as though she had died a few minutes before.

She was young, with a face still duskily beautiful despite its cold pallor. It was an exotic, strangely lovely face whose features were purely Slavic, with slightly high cheekbones and a low, broad brow. Long black eyelashes rested on her pallid cheeks. The nose was straight and finely chiseled, with flaring nostrils. The faint blue lips had a heavy, languorous droop. Her masses of wavy black hair were uncovered, unchanged.

Something caught my breath at sight of that frozen loveliness. As I studied her frozen features I knew without question that if she were living, I would fall desperately in love with her.

"She's beautiful," whispered Wythe Borrow, his handsome face strangely taut. "The most beautiful woman I ever saw."

I didn't know why, but I resented what he said.

His words stirred in me a feeling that was almost jealousy.

I reached down and reverently touched the girl's cheek. It was as cold as glacial ice and frozen as hard as stone.

"She's been in the ice a long time," I murmured.

Wythe Borrow nodded.

"That costume—nothing like it has been worn for several generations."

"What are you going to do—leave her here in the ice until burial can be arranged?" asked John Gaines, the lanky engineer.

"No!" I said indignantly. "You can't leave her lying out here like this. We'll take her body back to the hotel."

James Marsten stirred uneasily, his gray, worried face troubled.

"I wouldn't like to have that body in the hotel," he said.

"What are you afraid of?" demanded Daniel Holt, a sneer on his aggressive face. "This girl's been dead a long time."

"All—all right," Marsten said. "We can put her in one of the unused rooms, and notify the authorities in the morning."

Wythe Borrow reached down into the ice and carefully, almost tenderly, it seemed, lifted the stiff, frozen body.

"I'll carry her," I said quickly.

Borrow shook his head.

"I'll take her myself," he said shortly.

"But you've no right—" I started to say angrily, then subsided as I saw the others looking queerly at me.

But as Wythe Borrow strode off, the stiff body cradled in his arms, the dead woman's pallid, beautiful face against his breast, I felt an unreasoning jealousy and anger I could not down seething in me.

The rest of us strung after him, the others talking excitedly. The sunset shot rays of blood like splendor across the snow, staining it wildly. Against the glowing western sky, the squat log hotel and its surrounding pines stood out blackly.

WHEN we entered the hotel, the half-breed servants looked with bulging eyes at the body Wythe

Borrow carried. The artist took her into one of the musty, unused bedrooms—there were a score or more in the rambling old place that hadn't been used for years. He laid her down on the bed, and we all stood staring at her.

"That's the traveling costume of a Russian lady of a century ago," Borrow said. "I studied costume enough to know that."

John Gaines looked up incredulously from his scrutiny of the stiff form.

"You mean she was in the ice a hundred years?"

"She must have been," Borrow asserted. "There were lots of Russian travelers in the northwest a century ago, remember."

"I remember something!" James Marsten exclaimed. "Back in eighteen-forty there was a small party of Russians lost in these very mountains, and there was a woman with them."

Daniel Holt stared unbelievably.

"I never heard any such story as that," he declared.

"It's in a state history book I have," Marsten affirmed. "I'll show it to you."

We followed him out of the room. I went last, lingering to look at that pallidly beautiful face. I was feeling a sick, strange sense of loss. If I had only met this girl in her lifetime—

In the lobby, a red fire in the hearth dispelled the gathering darkness, casting a flickering glow over the rough log walls. Marsten went to a bookcase and brought out a big leather volume.

"Here it is," he said excitedly as he thumbed through its pages. "A schooner sailed in eighteen-forty from the

Russian fort at Sitka to one of their California posts. It was wrecked, and the only ones to get ashore were three sailors and the wife of an official who was going to join her husband. They got lost and only one of the sailors ever reached a settlement. He said that the others had perished of cold in the snow and ice of these mountains."

"And you want me to believe that this dead woman in the glacier was that Russian lady?" Holt scoffed, "Why, that's ridiculous."

"Are you trying to call me a liar?" demanded James Marsten angrily. "Just because I wouldn't sell my place at your beggarly offer—"

Marsten's thin hands clenched in impotent anger, his faded eyes, lit with rage. I took the volume and read the soiled, torn page. The story was there, substantially as he had told it.

The others read it, too. I noticed John Gaines' lean, rugged face tightening strangely as he read.

"Then she *has* been lying in the ice a hundred years," I said broodingly. "A sleeping beauty—"

Strange emotion held me. I was heartsick to think of that girl, perishing a century ago, vainly trying to reach her husband.

"This will make a great newspaper story!" Fred Kerr was saying enthusiastically. "And think of the crowds her body would draw if it were exhibited in a museum."

"Exhibit her to a curious, gaping mob?" I cried, stung, "Why, you can't do that!"

"Good Lord, Morris," broke in Kerr, "you sound as though the lady meant something to you."

"Don't be ridiculous," I managed to say. "But she's—"

she's too beautiful to be made into a cheap spectacle."

They all gazed at me in surprise. Wythe Borrow looked at me suspiciously, his handsome face hardening. I felt uncomfortable. Then James Marsten came back into the lobby from the kitchens, where he had gone a few moments before.

"The servants have all left!" Marsten declared worriedly. "Those half-breeds are plenty superstitious. They told me that anyone dug out of the ice, human or animal, would come back to a kind of life as soon as it felt warmth. They wouldn't stay."

I NOTICED that they all seemed somewhat depressed. Yet I felt differently. For a moment, just a moment, a wild thrill of hope had shot through me at what Marsten had said. If by some magic miracle that dead woman could come back to life—

I told myself that my imagination was getting the best of me, and helped Marsten and the others in the task of preparing our own supper. Throughout the meal we were silent. We were all thinking of the cold, beautiful form in the dark bedroom. I was glad when there was a general movement on the part of all to retire.

Lying in bed in my chill room, I could not sleep. I kept thinking, as the slow hours passed, of the frozen girl down the hall. I kept wanting to go and look at her again, to touch her flowing black hair with my hand, to kiss her icy lips. I told myself that the thought was morbid, ghastly, but I couldn't overcome it. I loved her—even if she was dead.

Finally I could stand it no longer. I had to see her again. Silently, I rose and dressed, and tiptoed down the

long, dark hall toward the room at its end where her body lay. The door of that room was open. Yellow lamplight spilled from inside. I ran forward into the room, then cried out involuntarily.

Wythe Borrow was lying on the floor, dead, murdered! In his throat stuck the little silver-hilted dagger that had been about the dead woman's neck. The dead woman herself was gone from the room. A window swinging wide open in the wind showed how she had left.

"Dick Morris!" cried a sharp voice from the door. It was Fred Kerr. Behind him crowded the others, drawn by my cry. "Dick, why in the world—"

"I didn't kill Borrow, Fred!" I cried hoarsely. "I don't know who did—I found him like this."

When I pointed out that it was the dead woman's dagger that had been plunged into the artist's throat, and that she was gone, they paled.

"The woman from the ice!" Marsten muttered shakenly. "She came back to life just as the Indians predicted she would. She killed Borrow—he must have been in here, looking at her—"

Marsten went to the open window, then pointed wildly out into the snow. There were tracks there, leading from the window into the maze of other footprints and ski-tracks under the pines.

"She's fled back to the ice!" he cried hoarsely. "We've got to hunt her down."

John Gaines looked out at the tracks, perplexedly.

"Someone killed Borrow with that knife, all right," he muttered. "Marsten's right—we ought to go out and search."

"A wild-geese chase in the snow for a walking corpse!" Daniel Holt snorted disgustedly. "I'm sick of this whole crazy place—I'm glad now you didn't sell it to me, Marsten."

"I'll get guns," Marsten said feverishly, his hands shaking. "Bullets may be no good against that—thing—but I'd feel safer."

"You won't hurt her?" I cried. "If it really is that girl, you won't shoot her?"

"Shoot a dead woman?" Fred Kerr exclaimed dumbfoundedly. "Good Lord, this sounds like a nightmare."

But he got into his mackinaw and cap like the rest of us, and we followed Marsten out into the moonlit night. The dark pines whispered mournfully in the freezing wind. Far away through the trees glimmered the vague, unreal white ridges of the mountains.

"We'll separate and search different quarters of the grounds," James Marsten told us, his hands shaking, his voice hoarse. "If you see that—that woman, shoot at once."

"No!" I exclaimed, but they paid me no attention as we separated, moving out in different directions from the hotel.

MY nerves were strung to harplike pitch as I trudged through the moonlit snow under the pines. Somehow, Borrow's murder didn't seem important to me. The only important thing was that maybe that frozen girl had by some miracle come back to life. I told myself, as I went on, that that was crazy, impossible.

And just then I saw her! Yes, in the moonlit snow just

ahead of me, coming out of the shadow of the pines, I saw that woman whose frozen body I had helped dig from the ice. The wind whipped her dark silk gown against her graceful body. Her head was bare, black masses of hair tumbled behind it.

Her face was grimly beautiful in the moonlight, every lovely feature of it clear in the silver light. Her flesh was white, without a tinge of color. Her eyes were dark, wide with strange apprehension as she looked this way and that. But she showed no fear of *me*. She came straight on toward where I stood rooted to the frozen ground, speechless.

She stopped only when she was a half-step from me. I felt my reason reeling. Her bare hand reached and clutched my arm. She spoke to me in a swift whisper, her wide, dark eyes fixed on mine.

I could not understand a word she said. She was speaking in Russian, a swift, tumbling flow of strange syllables. She saw that I did not understand, and grasped both my shoulders. Ghastly, impossible scene in the moonlit pines—a dead woman whispering wildly to me!

“Tanya! Tanya!” she whispered, pointing to herself, then toward the hotel, then back toward the mountains.

Tanya—that was her name. I recognized that much. But numbed as my brain was, I did not even try to understand her gestures.

I was too entranced by the spell of her strange, cold allure to feel even fear. As her hands gripped my shoulders, her eyes blazing with strange emotion, my arms went around her. My face bent toward her wild, sensuous lips.

Cold, icy cold, were her lips when I kissed them! I

shivered. She drew her head back, tugged my arm, pulling me after her. She was leading me away from the hotel, out into the snow.

Wham! The sharp crack of a shot broke the spell in which I was gripped. The bullet flicked up snow a yard from us.

Tanya uttered a cry of fear, turned and fled. She ran like a deer into the pines, while I stared wildly after her.

Then I saw James Marsten running out into the clearing, raising his gun to shoot again. I struck the barrel aside.

"Don't!" I cried wildly. "Don't shoot her—"

I twisted the gun away from him. The girl had disappeared behind the dark trees. Gaines and the others were running toward us.

"Give me that gun!" Marsten was panting. "I'll put an end to the unholy life of that creature. She's a zombie—a vampire witch who has come back to life. The Indians were right—"

Gaines and Daniel Holt and Fred Kerr listened in amazement as Marsten told them what he had seen. Me, in the arms of the dead woman—

"A dead woman, reviving?" Holt cried. "Impossible!"

"Maybe—maybe she wasn't ever really dead at all," I faltered. "Animals have been frozen into a state of suspended animation and then have revived when exposed to warmer conditions. Maybe this is the same thing."

"Nonsense!" Daniel Holt declared, though without conviction. "A thing like that couldn't happen, after a century."

"Let's go back inside," John Gaines said, eyeing me queerly.

"We've got to hunt that creature down," James Marsten muttered fearfully. "None of us are safe—"

But he came along with the rest of us, apparently unwilling to be left out alone in the cold moonlight and pines.

GAINES built up the fire in the hearth once more. Janice Kerr, pale and frightened, looked at me with dawning horror in her eyes when she heard what had happened.

"That dead woman—in your arms?"

"We ought to get the sheriff!" Daniel Holt exclaimed. "There's been a murder here."

"No one can get to the village tonight—it's miles over drifted roads," Gaines said. "In the morning, I'll go."

They were all looking at me intently, horror stamped strongly on their faces. I knew that they thought there was something ghastly about my attraction for the dead woman.

But I didn't care! Dead or living, vampire or ice-witch, I loved Tanya. I couldn't help it.

"I'm—I'm going to bed," I said stumblingly.

No one broke the silence as I stumbled out of the lobby and back to my own dark bedroom. Once in the bedroom, I quickly went to the window, opened it, and lowered myself into the snow. Then I started back out through the pines.

Crazy? Yes, I guess I must have been a little crazy. I was compelled by an overpowering fascination. I had to find Tanya again, and that was all I knew or cared about.

Once away from the hotel I started calling softly to her. My voice echoed eerily through the dark pines.

"Tanya!"

Calling a dead woman out of the snow! It was fantastic. Yet I went on, drawn like a moth toward an icy flame. On through the freezing moonlight.

"Tanya!"

Then I saw her again. She was watching me from the shadow of a tall hemlock, her face a white blur.

"I knew you'd hear me!" I cried, and ran toward her eagerly.

We met. My arms clasped about her. Weird picture we must have been in the checkered moonlight, man and ice-girl locked together.

She was still icy cold to my touch. Her wide, dark eyes leaped with strange gladness at my coming. Then she looked toward the hotel, fearfully, and once more started to lead me in the other direction, out through the solemn, snowy grove.

I went with her, my hand clasping her little, icy one. I didn't care where I was going, or to what fate. I was like a man moving in a trance—conscious only of her lovely, pallid face, of her incomprehensible whisper of Russian words in my ears. Farther and farther from the hotel she led me, then stopped beside a big snowdrift under a tree.

She pointed at the white drift excitedly, words I could not understand rushing from her lips, her eyes flashing.

"Tanya, what is it?" I asked tightly. "What are you trying to tell me?"

She pointed again at the drift, then desperately started to dig at the snow with her bare hands. Stiffly, bewilderedly, I started to help her dig.

My fingers touched something cold and hard, hidden in the snow. Then as we uncovered the object, I re-

coiled.

It was the nude white body of a woman! A stiff frozen form with swelling breasts and long, suave limbs, and masses of black hair. And it had the face of Tanya herself—of the girl beside me.

"My God, it's you, Tanya!" I cried wildly, looking down at that exactly identical nude figure. "But who—what—"

TANYA grasped the arm of the lovely, naked white figure. She wrenched hard. The arm broke off at the shoulder.

I gasped in horror. Then I suddenly saw that the broken arm was of solid composition material. The naked, beautiful body was only a dummy, a composition statue modeled after Tanya herself!

"Tanya, what does this mean?" I cried amazedly. "This figure—*it* was the body we dug from the ice, then? But that means this was all a hoax of some kind—"

"Yes, Morris, a hoax," said a cold, hard voice. "One whose discovery is going to cost you your life."

We spun around. Ten feet from us, in the clear moonlight, stood James Marsten, covering us with his rifle. His lined, aging face was white and remorseless, desperate in the silver light.

"Marsten!" I cried incredulously. "This thing—a hoax devised by you. You killed Borrow—"

"Yes," said Marsten tightly. "And I've got to kill you and the girl, now, or have you accuse me of the murder of Borrow."

Tanya had shrunk to my side with a little cry. I still couldn't believe my senses.

“But this crazy, purposeless hoax—”

“There was a good purpose behind it,” James Marsten told me. “You see, my resort here has been running down, for years. People went to newer, more glamorous places. I was near the end of my rope, would have to sell out to Holt or someone else at a ruinous figure. So I decided to work some publicity stunt that would bring people here in crowds.

“I got Wythe Borrow, a skilful artist and sculptor down on his luck, to help me stage it. You see, that story of the lost Russians gave me the idea. If a woman dead for over a century were found frozen in the glacier, and if after being dug out, she came back to life and vanished, it would make a newspaper story that would give my place publicity from coast to coast. That’s what Borrow and I planned.

“He brought up this girl, Tanya Durak, from Seattle. She spoke no English – she’s a refugee of some sort—but he spoke a little Russian and convinced her it was all an innocent publicity hoax, which in fact it was. He made a replica of her, that figure there, in composition. We kept the girl hidden in an unused wing of the hotel, and Borrow and I buried the figure out in the glacier one night, by chopping a hole in the ice, putting the figure in, then filling the hole up with water which quickly froze. The plan was that tonight I would get rid of the figure, and then Tanya, dressed in its clothes, would let herself be glimpsed by you people. You’d all swear that the frozen woman had come back to life.

“But it didn’t work out that way,” Marsten concluded bitterly. “Tonight, after I’d brought the figure out here and concealed it, and the girl had put on its clothes, Bor-

row tried to blackmail me. I'd promised him a thousand dollars later, for his help. But he demanded that I sign over a half-interest in the hotel to him, or he'd expose the whole hoax right then. I guess I saw red at that—spoiling my schemes. I had no weapon, but I snatched the dagger out of the sheath around Tanya's neck and stabbed him, before I knew what I was doing. Before I could catch her, Tanya had fled out the window in terror. She was afraid to come back to the hotel then, but tried to explain to you what had happened, and couldn't, for lack of English. So she led you out here to the buried figure. I'm sorry, Morris—it means both your lives—"

James Marsten raised the rifle slightly. I saw death in his eyes. I swung Tanya around behind me, desperately.

SUDDENLY, from the dark trees behind Marsten, burst a human projectile, a dark form that tackled the murderous proprietor even as he whirled. He crashed to his knees. The newcomer wrenched away his rifle after a swift struggle, then got up and covered him with it.

"Stand up, Marsten," he said in an edged voice. "And don't try anything—I just heard your interesting disclosures, and I'll not hesitate to shoot."

"John Gaines!" I cried, as I saw the newcomer's face in the moonlight. "You suspected, then—"

The lanky engineer nodded.

"Sure, I suspected Marsten almost from the first, of the hoax and then the murder. That's why I kept trailing him tonight, and followed him when he slipped out here."

"How could you suspect from the first that it was all a

hoax?" I cried.

John Gaines grinned.

"If you'd used your eyes when you looked at that body from the ice, you'd have seen that it was a fake. That body was supposed to have been in the ice ever since eighteen hundred and forty. Yet the dress on it, and also the slippers, were *machine-sewn*. Hell, man, the sewing machine hadn't been invented in eighteen hundred and forty!

"I knew then it was a fake of some kind," Gaines finished, "and when I read that history Marsten showed us, and saw how the pages about the lost Russians were soiled and frayed from much re-reading, I guessed Marsten had got the idea from there and built the whole hoax around it. I figured that if I watched him tonight, he'd give himself away."

I found myself still holding Tanya tightly in my arms.

"Tanya," I cried, "you're living, after all! There's nothing wrong!"

"Hardly looks like it, the way she's snuggling up to you," grinned Gaines.

Tanya didn't understand my English words. But she didn't need to, the way I held her and looked at her. And she wasn't trying to get away, but was nestling shiveringly against me.

"Get moving, Marsten," Gaines said grimly, motioning toward the hotel. "In the morning you're going to town, to see the sheriff."

"And in the morning," I told him, "I'm going to town—to get a Russian dictionary!"

Afterword

by Edmond Hamilton



WO or three years ago, I went to a newstand and suddenly got one of those “remembrance of things past” shocks. There, on the rack, after all these years of absence, with its name exactly the same style of type, was *Weird Tales*!

It only lasted for a moment, and then I realized that this was a paperback anthology of stories from the old magazine, edited by Leo Margulies. But it did take me sharply back, and made me realize how big the magazine bulked in my memories.

Not just because I sold my first story to it, forty-two years ago this week. To a lot of us, who wrote for it and read it, *Weird Tales* was not just a magazine. It was a Club.

I didn't realize that I had joined a Club until I had been writing for the magazine for five years. Then, in 1931, I

traveled to Minneapolis to meet Jack Williamson—we had gotten into correspondence and had lightheartedly decided to make a trip down the Mississippi River in a skiff. That was to be quite a trip but I was rather timid and naive, and never supposed that the editor of a magazine would be interested in meeting a writer. On the last day I was in Chicago, though, I hesitantly telephoned the office of *Weird Tales* to say hello. Bill Sprenger, the business manager of WT, was alone in the office and insisted I must come right over. When I did, he told me that another of their writers, E. Hoffmann Price, was in town from his then-home in New Orleans and we must go to Farnsworth Wright's apartment, where Otis Adelbert Kline would also be. I did, and had a wonderful time.

On my return from the Mississippi, I found awaiting me a letter from Julius Schwartz, who had read my *Weird Tales* stories and other work. And that was the beginning of another friendship.

Last fall, almost thirty-seven years later, Leigh and I started on a trip around the world. The night we left New York, Julie Schwartz and his wife gave us a magnificent send-off. When we arrived in San Francisco, just before Christmas, there to meet us was E. Hoffmann Price. And that night, at his home, Ed and I sat up into the night, summoning up the ashes of all those in the Club.

So that you can understand, perhaps, why when I think of *Weird Tales*, I don't think of a magazine, or of stories, but of people. People like Wright, earnest, grave, utterly devoted to literature and trying to get as good a quality of it as he could into the magazine.

I think of sitting, with Price and Jack Williamson, with Clark Ashton Smith on his hilltop near Auburn, for all one long summer afternoon in 1940, drinking beer and watching the sunset while we talked of anything and everything.

And the night later, that same year, when I went with Julie Schwartz and Mort Weisinger to meet for the first time C.L. Moore, who had recently married Henry Kuttner. I told Henry that I had been looking in my old files of WT and that when he had been in high school, he had written the Eyrie that I was his favorite author, and that only a few years later, he had changed and written that C.L. Moore was WT's best author, and why had he done this?

And a year later, when Schwartz and I spent a summer in Los Angeles, renting a cottage-court bungalow and using it as a sort of welcome-center for all fantasy and s-f writers in the area, Leigh Brackett used to come by occasionally in the afternoons, and we always gave her cake, not thinking it would be quite the thing to, offer her booze. When stocking up for an evening's gathering, Julie would always include a few bottles of Coca Cola for Ray Bradbury, who was very young and didn't drink anything, but who was earnestly hoping to sell a story—maybe even to *Weird Tales*!

I could go on with this, but nostalgia is starting to rise above the typewriter, and I'd better stop. But you can see why I always think of *Weird Tales* as a club of wonderful people.

As to the magazine itself, I think its strength was the catholicity of Wright's taste. He never type-cast his writers. You could write a certain type of story for years and

then suddenly send him a completely different sort of yarn, and far from being upset, he would applaud you, if the story was good.

After Wright left *Weird Tales* (banished into outer space, is the way he wrote me about it), I happened to be in New York. I found out that he was living out at Jackson Heights, so I went out to see him, and was always glad I did, for he died only a few weeks later.

I recall that on that last occasion, Wright, though busy with a new project, did talk for a while about all the years of *Weird Tales*. He expressed a hope that some of the stories he had published in it, which he thought were good, would someday be reprinted. And how that had come true! I wish he could have been here to see it.

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Publishing his first story, "The Monster-God of Mamurth," in the August 1926 issue of *Weird Tales*, Edmond Hamilton (1904-1977), along with John W. Campbell Jr., Jack Williamson, and E. E. (Doc) Smith, was one of the earliest pioneers of that branch of science fiction known as space opera.



Called the "World-Wrecker" and "World-Saver," for his early science fiction tales of "strange terrors from beyond" attacking the earth, Hamilton also contributed many stories of fantasy and the supernatural to the pulp magazines of the 1930's.

After the collapse of the magazine science fiction market in the mid 1950's, Hamilton turned to writing scripts for comic books such as *Superman*, *Batman*, and *The Legion of Super-Heroes*. Hamilton continued writing science fiction for the remainder of his life, publishing some of his best work including *The Haunted Stars* and stories such as "Day of Judgement" and "Requiem." His last published work was 1972's "The Iron One."

Forthcoming from Haffner Press by Edmond Hamilton will be *THE STAR STEALERS—THE COMPLETE ADVENTURES OF THE INTERSTELLAR PATROL*.



A sampling of cover art from the pulp magazines that featured the author's strange, unusual, and menacing stories.

About the Artist

Prior to his career as a commercial illustrator, Jon Arfstrom provided many works to the fan magazines of the 40's in addition to several covers and illustrations for *Weird Tales*. Now retired from commercial work, he spends his time creating personal pieces and select commissions. His most recent work is for the Haffner Press edition of Edmond Hamilton's *KALDAR—WORLD OF ANTARES*.

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