

10 COMPLETE HORROR-THRILLERS

EERIE

FEBRUARY

15¢

MYSTERIES

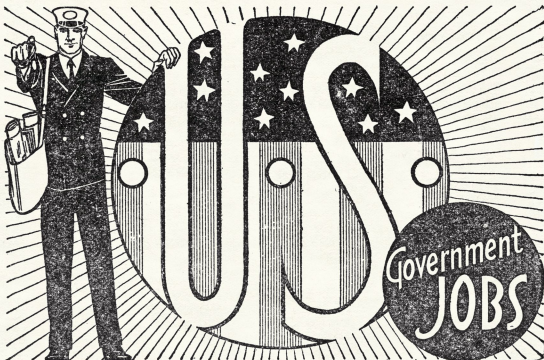


HORROR'S HANDSHAKE

Sinister Novel of Satan's Receptionist

By **RALPH POWERS**

And 9 Other Stories of Weird Menace



START

\$1260 to \$2100 a YEAR

Many 1939 Appointments Expected

Common Education Usually Sufficient

City Mail Carriers, City Post Office Clerk

Clerks and carriers now get \$1,700 the first year regular and automatically increase \$100 a year to \$2,100 and \$2,300. Open to men—women, 18 to 45.

File Clerk—Clerk

Open to Men—Women 18 to 50. Entrance salary \$1,260—\$1,440 year. Appointments as File Clerks and Clerks in the Departments at Washington, D. C., are made from this examination.



Railway Postal Clerks

Railway Postal Clerks get \$1,900 the first year regular, being paid on the first and fifteenth of each month. (\$79.17 each pay day.) Their pay is automatically increased yearly to \$2,450. Advance may be had to Chief Clerk at \$2,700 a year. (\$112.50 each pay day.) Open to men, 18 to 35.

Customs Inspector

Salary \$2,100 to start. Men 21 to 45. Work connected with examining baggage and merchandise entering the country from foreign parts covering boats, trains, roads, automobiles, etc.

Get Ready at Once

Many other positions are obtainable. Experience is usually unnecessary. Let us show you how to get a government job.

Free List of Positions

Fill out the following coupon. Tear it off and mail it today—now, at once. This investment may result in your getting a big-paid government job.

FRANKLIN INSTITUTE, Dept. E233, Rochester, N. Y.
 Gentlemen: Rush to me, FREE of charge, list of U. S. Government
 big paid jobs. Send me FREE of charge, list of U. S. Government
 positions, hours, work, and full particulars telling how to
 qualify for one of these jobs.

Name.....

Address.....

Please mention ACE FICTION GROUP when answering advertisements

EERIE

MYSTERIES

FEBRUARY
1939

10 Complete Horror-Thrillers

1. HORROR'S HANDSHAKE (Novel) . . . Ralph Powers 9
To trap that scourge, Mark Crandall must shake hands with the clutching fingers of doom.
2. MR. JUSTICE SITS IN . . . Arden Antony 27
A drab office building witnesses nightmare happenings.
3. ABYSS OF THE WAILING DEAD . . . Stephen McBarron 33
A tortured corpse walks out of its burial crypt.
4. TIME TAKES A HOLIDAY . . . Frank Airth 48
Time stands still when Martians invade the earth.
5. STREET OF GHOULS . . . John Clemons 59
Malformed, half-mad beggars terrify a whole town.
6. UNWILLING CORPSE . . . Edgar Allan Martin 73
She left her body willingly—but couldn't get back.
7. THE HOUNDS OF PURGATORY . . . Eric Thane 76
Mad beasts race across the badlands after—human prey.
8. THE COBRA STRIKES . . . Cliff Howe 86
The mark of a serpent leads Detective Terrill to—the grave.
9. REALM OF LIQUID DEATH . . . Chester Brant 95
A prophet foretells their doom—and it comes to pass.
10. FANGS OF THE SOUL . . . Robert C. Blackmon 103
He was dead, but he had to kill a man.

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WISH I COULD GET A DECENT JOB

WISH I COULD AFFORD TO DRESS BETTER

WISH I COULD AFFORD A NEW CAR

WISH I COULD MAKE MORE MONEY

WISH I COULD GET OUT OF DEBT

WISH I COULD AFFORD TO STEP OUT A BIT

WISH I COULD AFFORD TO SUPPORT A WIFE

STOP Dreaming START Earning



J. E. SMITH
President
National Radio
Institute
Established 1914

Learn to Make \$30, \$50, \$75 a Week

I will train you at home for good spare time and full time **JOBS IN RADIO**

Many Radio Experts Make \$30, \$50, \$75 a Week

RADIO broadcasting stations employ engineers, operators, station managers and pay up to \$5,000 a year. Fixing Radio sets in spare time pays many \$200 to \$500 a year—full time jobs with Radio jobbers, manufacturers and dealers as much as \$30, \$50, \$75 a week. Many Radio Experts open full or part time Radio sales and repair businesses. Radio manufacturers and jobbers employ testers, inspectors, foremen, engineers, servicemen, and pay up to \$6,000 a year. Automobile, police, aviation, commercial Radio, loudspeaker systems are newer fields offering good opportunities now and for the future. Television promises to open many good jobs soon. Men I trained have good jobs in these branches of Radio. Read how they got their jobs. Mail coupon.

Many Make \$5, \$10, \$15 a Week
Extra in Spare Time!
While Learning

The day you enroll I start sending Extra Money Job Sheets; show you how to do Radio repair jobs. Throughout your training I send plans and directions that make good spare time money—\$200 to \$500—for hundreds, while learning. I send you special Radio equipment to conduct experiments and build circuits. This 50-50 method of training makes learning at home interesting, fascinating, practical. I ALSO GIVE YOU A MODERN, PROFESSIONAL, ALL-WAVE, ALL PURPOSE RADIO SET SERVING AS INSTRUMENT to help you make good money fixing Radios while learning and equip you for full time jobs after graduation.

Find Out What Radio Offers You.
Act Today. Mail the coupon now for "Rich Rewards in Radio." It's free to any fellow over 16 years old. It points out Radio's spare time and full time opportunities and those coming in Television; tells about my training in Radio and Television; shows my letters from men I trained, telling what they are doing and earning. Find out what Radio does YOU! MAIL COUPON in an envelope, or paste on a postcard—NOW!

J. E. SMITH
President
National Radio
Institute,
Dept. 9AAS,
Washington,
D. C.



J. E. SMITH, President
National Radio Institute, Dept. 9AAS
Washington, D. C.

Dear Mr. Smith: Without obligating me, send "Rich Rewards in Radio," which points out spare time and full time opportunities in Radio explaining your 50-50 method of training men at home in spare time to become Radio Experts. (Please write plainly.)

Name Age

Address

City State

Please mention ACE FICTION GROUP when answering advertisements

FREE TUBE WITH ORDER 2 TIRES

GOODYEAR-GOODRICH-FIRESTONE-ALL OTHER BRANDS

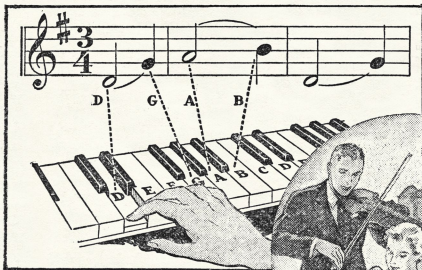
GET MORE FOR YOUR MONEY
Save 1¢ by buying from us under a positive LEGAL AGREEMENT to replace any tire that does not give 12 miles service at the published price. We can do this because STANDARD BRAND tires when recommended with our expert workmanship, finest material and new methods of the work, as proven by thousands of satisfied users all over the U.S. A. Convalescence. Offer Now, 12 Miles, 100¢ WARRANTY with each tire.

BALLOON TIRES **CORD TIRES**

20x4-40	\$2.15	20x5-10	\$2.90
20x4-50	2.20	20x5-15	2.90
20x4-55	2.20	20x5-20	2.95
20x4-75	2.40	20x5-25	2.95
20x4-75	2.40	20x5-30	3.00
20x5-00	2.85	20x5-35	3.00
20x5-00	2.85	20x5-40	3.05
20x5-10	2.90	20x5-45	3.05
20x5-15	2.90	20x5-50	3.10
20x5-20	2.95	20x5-55	3.10
20x5-25	2.95	20x5-60	3.15
20x5-30	3.00	20x5-65	3.15
20x5-35	3.00	20x5-70	3.20
20x5-40	3.05	20x5-75	3.20
20x5-45	3.05	20x5-80	3.25
20x5-50	3.10	20x5-85	3.25
20x5-55	3.10	20x5-90	3.30
20x5-60	3.15	20x5-95	3.30
20x5-65	3.15	20x6-00	3.35
20x5-70	3.20	20x6-05	3.35
20x5-75	3.20	20x6-10	3.40
20x5-80	3.25	20x6-15	3.40
20x5-85	3.25	20x6-20	3.45
20x5-90	3.30	20x6-25	3.45
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20x6-05	3.35	20x6-40	3.55
20x6-10	3.40	20x6-45	3.55
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20x6-65	3.65	20x7-00	3.85
20x6-70	3.70	20x7-05	3.85
20x6-75	3.70	20x7-10	3.90
20x6-80	3.75	20x7-15	3.90
20x6-85	3.75	20x7-20	3.95
20x6-90	3.80	20x7-25	3.95
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20x7-00	3.85	20x7-35	4.00
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21x9-00	4.35	21x9-35	4.50
21x9-05	4.35	21x9-40	4.55
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21x9-20	4.45	21x9-55	4.60
21x9-25	4.45	21x9-60	4.65
21x9-30	4.50	21x9-65	4.65
21x9-35	4.50	21x9-70	4.70
21x9-40	4.55	21x9-75	4.70
21x9-45	4.55	21x9-80	4.75
21x9-50	4.60	21x9-85	4.75
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21x9-60	4.65	21x9-95	4.80
21x9-65	4.65	22x9-00	4.85
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21x9-75	4.70	22x9-10	4.90
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21x9-85	4.75	22x9-20	4.95
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21x9-95	4.80	22x9-30	5.00
22x9-00	4.85	22x9-35	5.00
22x9-05	4.85	22x9-40	5.05
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22x9-50	5.10	22x9-85	5.25
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22x9-65	5.15	23x9-00	5.35
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23x9-85	5.75	24x9-20	5.95
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24x9-00	5.85	24x9-35	6.00
24x9-05	5.85	24x9-40	6.05
24x9-10	5.90	24x9-45	6.05
24x9-15	5.90	24x9-50	6.10
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24x9-25	5.95	24x9-60	6.15
24x9-30	6.00	24x9-65	6.15
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25x9-00	6.35	25x9-35	6.50
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25x9-80	6.75	26x9-15	6.90
25x9-85	6.75	26x9-20	6.95
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26x9-35	7.00	26x9-70	7.20
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26x9-50	7.10	26x9-85	7.25
26x9-55	7.10	26x9-90	7.30
26x9-60	7.15	26x9-95	7.30
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26x9-70	7.20	27x9-05	7.35
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26x9-80	7.25	27x9-15	7.40
26x9-85	7.25	27x9-20	7.45
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27x9-85	7.75	28x9-20	7.95
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28x9-00	7.85	28x9-35	8.00
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28x9-95	8.30	29x9-30	8.50
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29x9-05	8.35	29x9-40	8.55
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29x9-20	8.45	29x9-55	8.60
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29x9-35	8.50	29x9-70	8.70
29x9-40	8.55	29x9-75	8.70
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29x9-50	8.60	29x9-85	8.75
29x9-55	8.60	29x9-90	8.80
29x9-60	8.65	29x9-95	8.80
29x9-65	8.65	30x9-00	8.85
29x9-70	8.70	30x9-05	8.85
29x9-75	8.70	30x9-10	8.90
29x9-80	8.75	30x9-15	8.90
29x9-85	8.75	30x9-20	8.95
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30x9-05	8.85	30x9-40	9.05
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30x9-25	8.95	30x9-60	9.15
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30x9-35	9.00	30x9-70	9.20
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30x9-50	9.10	30x9-85	9.25
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30x9-60	9.15	30x9-95	9.30
30x9-65	9.15	31x9-00	9.35
30x9-70	9.20	31x9-05	9.35
30x9-75	9.20	31x9-10	9.40
30x9-80	9.25	31x9-15	9.40
30x9-85	9.25	31x9-20	9.45
30x9-90	9.30	31x9-25	9.45
30x9-95	9.30	31x9-30	9.50
31x9-00	9.35	31x9-35	9.50
31x9-05	9.35	31x9-40	9.55
31x9-10	9.40	31x9-45	9.55
31x9			

DOESN'T IT LOOK EASY?

Yet it's from the famous "Merry Widow" Waltz!



HERE'S PROOF

*that you, too, can learn to
play the piano or any
other instrument!*

JUST strike the notes indicated above and you will actually be playing the opening bars of one of the world's favorite musical compositions! And it's just as easy to play other famous melodies, too, when you use the wonderful "Note-Finder".

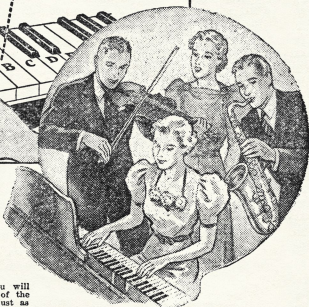
This invention of the U. S. School of Music takes the mystery out of the piano keyboard, does away with tedious study and practice, enables anyone to play a real tune almost from the start. And that's the way this modern method works. You learn to play by playing. Soon you will be thrilled and delighted to find that you can pick up almost any piece of popular music and play it at sight. And that applies to the piano or violin, the saxophone or guitar, the accordion or whichever instrument you choose for your own!

Takes Only Few Minutes a Day!

PICK YOUR INSTRUMENT

Piano Guitar
Violin Saxophone
Guitar Mandolin
Cornet Ukulele
Trombone Harp
Piccolo Clarinet
Flute Cello
Hawaiian Steel Guitar
Trumpet
Piano Accordion
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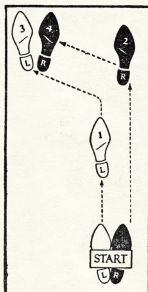
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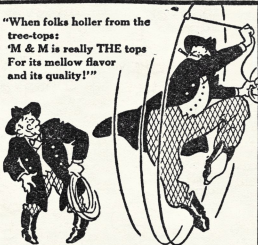
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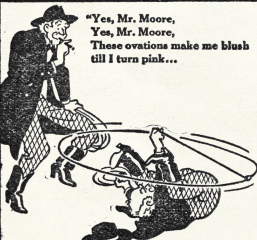
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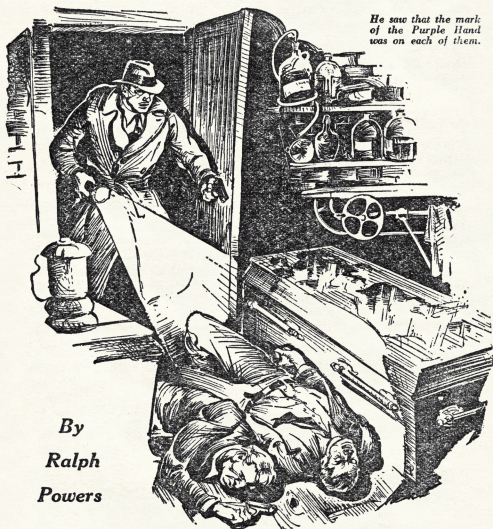
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Horror's Handshake



He saw that the mark of the Purple Hand was on each of them.

By
Ralph
Powers

Horror came to the party as an uninvited guest. And its unseen hand brought ghastly death to those it touched. Those clutching fingers of doom kept reaching out to claim more victims. Yet Mark Crandall, ace detective, could not lay that dread scourge until he shook hands with the Purple Hand, itself.

CHAPTER I SINISTER SIGN

AT ten o'clock the lights in the ballroom of Anson Derwent's palatial home winked out abruptly. Guests assembled in honor of the

American début of his ward, Thelma Price, paused in their revelries. Some gasped. Others crowded close to their neighbors. The darkness following the bright glare of the chandelier lights was uncanny and disturbing.

A second passed, and from somewhere

there came the sound of a window being raised. A breath of wind licked in out of the chill November night. A woman gave a nervous, stifled cry.

Then the orchestra scraped to a discordant stop. The dancing couples stood frozen in their tracks. With the suddenness of a lightning flash, the gloom of the room was ripped apart by a dazzling, blinding point of mysterious luminescence.

There was a crackle, a buzz like the whirl of a monster hornet's wings. A strange, sickening odor filled the air—identifiable as the pungent smell of burning human flesh.

As startlingly as it had come, the spark disappeared, leaving darkness again. The buzzing sound ceased and was followed at once by the thud of a falling body. Another brief interval of stunned silence, laden with the premonition of death. And then pandemonium broke.

Horror moved like a grinning ghoul through the dark chamber, stealing the gaiety away. Men and women forgot they were ladies and gentlemen. They fought madly, jostling, pushing, clawing at each other, trying to escape something they could not understand.

The savage human tide surged across the chamber. Expensive hangings were torn from their fastenings and trampled underfoot. The double doors into the adjoining dining room were flung open. Anson Derwent and his fear-stricken guests shoved through them, overturning tables and chairs in a wild stampede.

But there was a shaded light burning here. The sight of it had a calming effect. Some of the men, braver than the rest, and ashamed of the panic they had shown, moved back to the ballroom. One found the light switch and poked at it gingerly.

Then their newly-found courage quickly began to ebb. For a man's body was sprawled on the dance floor at the precise spot where that flashing mysterious spark had glimmered. It was the body of gray-haired Judge Horace Westland, a man who had pronounced sentence on scores of desperate criminals.

He lay on his back now, obviously dead, blue eyes opened and staring, veins on his forehead standing out starkly. His left arm was pinioned under his body. His right lay limply beside him, hand upturned as though in mute supplication. And Anson Derwent's guests stared aghast.

SOME stepped back, trembling violently. Others stood rigid in throat-constricting horror. They were not looking at the face of the murdered judge. They were staring at something on the palm of his upturned right hand. That something was a livid, purplish mark where other fingers had apparently gripped his own.

The imprint of these fingers was seared into the slain judge's flesh. The skin had been puckered and darkened as though by the heat of some hideous brand. And, because they understood the dread significance of the mark, those present seemed for a time too paralyzed for speech.

Then a guest who was a close friend of the judge found his voice.

"The Purple Hand!" he gasped. "That criminal—was here tonight and killed Westland!"

Others took up the cry. "The Purple Hand!" Amazement, terror, incredulity were in their words. The city commissioner addressed the room in a shaken voice:

"It's evident all of you read the papers today and saw that Stockbridge, head of our chamber of commerce, was killed under mysterious circumstances early this morning. The same murderer was apparently here just now. We must call the police at once, gentlemen!"

He had hardly finished speaking when the doorbell rang loudly. A servant bobbed across the hall and opened it, and a tall man in a belted ulster strode in. Hawkish features and alert eyes showed below his soft felt hat. The dark, pencil-thin line of a small mustache following the curve of his upper lip gave his mouth a grim look.

He stopped abruptly as he saw the terrified knot of people by the ballroom

door. Then he tossed his hat and coat to the butler and walked forward.

Thelma Price, Derwent's ward, at once detached herself from the group and went to meet the stranger. She spoke in a voice that was hardly more than a whisper.

"I was hoping you'd come sooner, Mr. Crandall. If you only had—" Her words choked off in a sound like a sob. Mark Crandall, free-lance investigator of crime, student of bizarre and ghastly homicide cases, stared into her eyes. The titian hue of her hair was complemented by the chartreuse gown she

plained what had occurred, urging the inspector to hurry.

Then he put down the phone and strode into the room where the murdered judge lay. Several others were there; among them a tall, gray-haired man in his early fifties who nodded to Mark. This was Anson Derwent, Thelma Price's guardian. Beside him was Rex Gerard, a close friend of the slain judge's. Also Park Commissioner August Brant, and a doctor named Parmelee. The latter seemed to take a more than casual interest in Thelma Price.

While the others listened, nodding

Sinister Novel of Satan's Receptionist

wore. But the colors made the skin of her face seem deathly white in comparison. Mark Crandall spoke, his own voice low and tense.

"I've been out of town and only just got back. I found your letter waiting for me. What's happened? These people look—"

"I didn't tell you in my note what it was that worried me and why I asked you to come," she breathed. "But our watchdogs were killed night before last. We found them out on the lawn with the hair around their necks singed queerly. The police could give us no explanation. I thought then that some criminal had designs on this house, possibly with the idea of robbing the guests at my party. But I didn't expect murder."

"Murder?"

"Yes—in there." The girl made a choking sound again. "Judge Westland is dead—killed a few minutes ago. And there's a horrible mark of fingers on his palm. It's like that other terrible murder last night. You must have read about it. The papers are calling the man who did it the 'Purple Hand.'"

Mark Crandall snatched the phone from the hands of a servant who was just about to call the police and put the message through himself. Inspector Wilson, head of the homicide squad, wasn't at headquarters. But Mark got in touch with him at his home and swiftly ex-

corroboration, Anson Derwent told Mark what had happened, how the Purple Hand had struck under cover of darkness and how the mysterious spark of death had been seen by all.

For long moments Crandall studied the position of the murdered judge, paying particular attention to the mark on his hand. Then he began asking questions of the guests until his one-man cross-examination was interrupted by the arrival of the police. Inspector Wilson, irritable and owl-faced, and Haas, the city medical examiner, strode in. With them were several headquarters experts including a fingerprint man and an official photographer.

While his subordinates went to work with grim efficiency, Wilson began rapid-fire inquiries. When he had finished, he shook his head.

"It doesn't make sense," he growled. "The window was raised, you say, after the lights had gone out. That means—"

Rex Gerard, the judge's friend, interrupted suddenly, a cynical gleam in his eyes.

"It means that the killer or his accomplice is one of us, inspector. It means that the murderer may still be in this house."

HIS words had a staggering effect. A second's stunned silence followed them. Then shudders of horror

passed through the group. There were gasps and angry exclamations. Thelma Price clutched Doctor Parmelee's arm. Mark saw Rex Gerard give the couple an intent and jealous look. He waited till the medical examiner straightened up from his careful scrutiny of the corpse, then stepped forward and asked an abrupt question.

"What's your opinion, doctor?"

Haas' reply was low-voiced. "Don't ask me to explain it, Crandall. I can't. But Judge Westland was electrocuted just like Stockbridge last night. I'm not crazy. All the evidence is here. Look at those veins."

Mark Crandall's eyes left the judge's distorted face and turned to the wall. Ten feet away a plug outlet showed in the baseboard; but he shook his head. The plug led only to a hundred-and-ten volt lighting circuit. Men didn't die on such a current. It didn't explain the seared imprint of those fingers on the judge's palm—the mark of the Purple Hand.

Tensely he stuffed shreds of brown tobacco in the black bowl of his pipe. He frowned and studied the group around Anson Derwent.

Rex Gerard spoke again, bitterness and suspicion in his voice. "I overheard what the medical examiner said just now. The judge was my friend. And I want to see the murderer caught. If the method he uses is electrocution—perhaps Doctor Parmelee can tell us something about it."

The doctor's thin face grew pale. His black hair, shot with streaks of premature gray, seemed to bristle. Thelma Price made a little gasping sound.

"What do you mean, Mr. Gerard?" she demanded.

"Hasn't the doctor told us himself that he specializes in electric treatment of disease? And if he can use electricity to cure, he ought to know also just how it might kill."

Rex Gerard smiled unpleasantly as he spoke, staring from the doctor into the white face of the girl.

Mark Crandall said:

"Just what's this about your using electricity, doctor?"

"Gerard has just told you," answered the doctor irritably. "Electrotherapeutics happens to be the field I work in. But if Gerard is trying to insinuate that I am this killer they call the Purple Hand he must be mad."

"The police may not agree with you," Gerard said with an ugly sneer.

Anson Derwent turned on him then, his expression contemptuous.

"I know the judge's death has upset you, Gerard. But you're going a bit too far. It may interest you to know that Parmelee and my ward, Miss Price, have announced their engagement to me."

"Engagement?"

"Exactly!"

Chagrin and anger tightened the skin of Rex Gerard's homely face.

Mark Crandall, watching and listening, sucked at his black pipe till the bowl grew hot. His eyes switched to Doctor Parmelee again. Smooth, sleekly groomed, with the poised air of the professional man, Parmelee was standing close to Thelma Price, proprietary fingers on her arm.

"I resent," he said harshly, "the insinuation that I am even remotely connected with this murder. The charge is insane—but even mad rumors can injure a man's reputation. You'll be sorry for this, Gerard."

A DETECTIVE came up to Inspector Wilson—one who had been detailed to search for tracks around the lawn. Crandall overheard the man's low-voiced report.

"Nothing doing, chief! The ground's frozen like a rock and the snow isn't gathering. It's blowing a mile a minute to-night. A dozen crooks and killers could have tramped around out there and we'd never know it."

Mark drew Doctor Parmelee aside suddenly. "I'd like a word with you," he said.

Parmelee stiffened. His voice was withering. "I suppose I am to be subjected to a police inquisition because of Mr. Gerard's stupid insinuations."

"Not at all, doctor. I just want to ask a few questions. Perhaps you, too, heard the medical examiner's report just now. He claims Judge Westland was killed by electrocution—and says the other man was murdered the same way. What's your opinion?"

Parmelee was silent a moment, then weighed his words carefully. "I didn't see the victim last night—but I've looked at Westland. The thrombotic condition of the veins and the color of the skin would suggest electrocution even to the greenest medical student."

"And have you any theories as to how the judge could have been electrocuted?"

Parmelee shrugged. "None whatever, It's utterly fantastic."

Mark put a match to the bowl of his pipe, dribbled smoke around the stem. "I'd like some figures, doc, as to just how much current a man of normal physique can stand. You ought to be able to give them to me."

The doctor gave an angry exclamation. "If malicious gossip has put me in the light of suspect—let the police deal with me on that basis. If you want information of the kind you say, I'll tell you where to get it. Go to Professor Hauptman of the Medical Academy. He's an old instructor of mine, and one of the world's leading authorities on electrotonus and electrotaxis. He can also vouch for my character."

"You're over my head, doc," Mark said, "but I think I'll take your advice at that."

He left the doctor and mingled with the other guests. For a half hour he followed every detail of the police inquiry and saw that it was leading nowhere. Then he got his hat and coat.

Pellets of sleet lanced his face as he stepped outside. Snow had driven through the side curtains of his roadster and streaked the leather seat. He started to brush it off, then stopped suddenly. In the shadows across the street sudden movement caught his eyes.

He straightened, stared through the driving white, and saw a figure duck out of sight behind a cedar hedge. Mark was curious at once.

In long-legged strides he crossed over and plunged in pursuit. The figure showed again as he broke through the hedge. It was a woman and she was running across a patch of windswept lawn. Light from a distant street lamp behind her revealed her in silhouette. Mark quickened his pace, caught up with her, and as he did so she whirled and drew a gun.

With a movement so deft that she barely had time to cry out, Mark chopped down with his right hand and knocked the weapon from her grasp. It clinked to the frozen ground. He caught her wrist.

The woman stood panting. Behind a fluttering dark veil he saw gaunt features and crafty eyes. She wasn't any beauty and she looked dangerous.

"What's the hurry?" said Mark. "And why the gun? I—"

He didn't finish. The words died in his throat. For a change in the woman's expression warned him—but too late. He turned as something hard and cold was shoved against his side. Then a harsh voice spoke close to his ear. "Leave the dame alone and raise your hands. Any tricks this time—and I'll give it to you sure."

CHAPTER II

DEATH STRIKES AGAIN

MARK CRANDALL didn't argue. There was cold assurance in the voice, menace in the pressure of the gun. He raised his hands mechanically, turned his head, and saw a man of bear-like proportions standing just at his side. Light eyes glared at him from an ugly brick-red face.

A moment of silence while the pale-eyed man studied him intently. Then the stranger spoke again, jerking his head toward Derwent's house.

"What's going on over there?"

Mark uttered one word softly. "Murder."

The big man came closer and increased the pressure of the gun. "Whose murder? Spill it, quick!"

"Maybe you saw the papers today," said Mark. "A killer they're calling the

Purple Hand murdered a man last night. And now he's struck again." As he spoke he watched the other's face. Uneasiness showed in the man's eyes suddenly.

"The Purple Hand! Who—who did he get this time?"

Crandall answered quietly. "Judge Westland—one of Anson Derwent's guests. He was electrocuted apparently—just like Stockbridge last night."

"Electrocuted!" The big man uttered the word harshly. For a moment he stood staring at Mark, breathing heavily. "Listen, fellow, how did you find out that? You're lying—trying to—" He jabbed the gun closer against Mark's body.

With a tightening sensation along his scalp, Mark answered quietly. "It's the medical examiner's verdict. I didn't make it up. Go in and ask him if you don't—"

The man uttered a hoarse curse. He shook himself like a great dog and suddenly thrust his jaw close. "To hell with your wild stories," he growled. "What I want to know is why you was chasing this dame. Answer me that!"

Mark Crandall's eyes bore into the stranger's. "I thought she was acting funny," he said.

"Just a smart dick, eh?"

For a moment he seemed on the point of sending a bullet into Mark's body. Then he turned and spoke sharply to the woman.

"Frisk him quick. We've got to get out of here."

Crandall caught a glimpse of the woman's homely, witchlike face as she came forward. It was uglier than before now. All color had drained from it. She seemed to be in a daze as she lifted an automatic from his pocket and handed it to the man. Her thin hand was shaking. Her eyes were wide with terror.

Holding both guns, the pale-eyed one spoke with cold deliberation. "We got to get rid of this guy somehow," he said.

THE woman tensed. She shook her head and made motions with her lips behind her veil. Ignoring her, the man clicked back the safety catch of

Mark's own gun. With a cry the woman caught his arm. "Fool—you can't do that! Do you want to spoil — everything?"

"You heard what he said! It may be too late now!"

It was almost as though the big man had struck her. She cringed back. "You—you don't believe it! It can't be true!"

The big man laughed mirthlessly. "When the dead come back to life—I'm ready to believe anything."

The woman gave a smothered cry that was like a moan. Then her voice grew venomous. "Shut up! Shut up—you fool!"

Horror seemed to press in on them out of the night. Mark Crandall's thoughts were reeling. "When the dead come back to life!" What did the pale-eyed man mean? Mark was given no time to speculate. The other shoved the gun close and addressed him harshly.

"Get going—and do as I tell you. If you don't, I'll nail you sure."

Mark walked ahead of the prodding gun. Instead of having a quiet talk with Professor Hauptman, he'd run full-tilt into menace. He sensed an undercurrent of tense emotion in this sinister pair; sensed mystery that intrigued him. Again and again the pale-eyed man's phrase repeated itself in his mind. "When the dead come back to life!" And, remembering the distorted face of Judge Westland and the strange mark on his hand the horror of it seemed to grow.

The man and woman appeared to know their ground. Keeping the gun against Crandall's spine the man steered him along a hedge that divided two estates. In its shadow, hidden by whirling clouds of powdery snow, he guided Mark through a back yard, then to another street a block away where a closed car was parked.

The woman slipped behind the wheel of this. The man sat in back with Crandall, holding the gun against his side. Crandall dismissed the idea of making a desperate attempt at escape. He must find out first who these two were and what motives lay behind their strange actions.

THE car lurched away from the curb, with the woman driving. She wobbled along the snow-obscured street, narrowly missing another car at an intersection. The man beside Mark swore under his breath.

But the car turned into a driveway in five minutes and rattled into a garage. The woman pushed the door of this shut, and the man ordered Mark Crandall to get out.

The car's headlights were still on. In their glow he got a better glimpse of his captors. The man looked like a gangster. The woman had a strange unwholesome air of decayed gentility. Her complexion was yellow and wrinkled, her eyes unnaturally bright, as though she might be a drug addict.

The man jabbed a gun against Mark's back and ordered him to walk through a door. This led from the garage along a boarded passage into a house. The woman clicked on a light.

"Open the cellar door, Trixie. We'll stick this bird down there."

With a shove of the gun muzzle that bruised Mark's flesh, the pale-eyed man thrust him through the door the woman had opened. Mark slipped and almost fell down a flight of stairs into a cold, damp and musty chamber.

A small light burned overhead. One side of the chamber was partitioned off with heavy boards, forming a bin. There was a padlock on the door of this. The man bawled loudly for the woman to come down and open it, fearing apparently some quick maneuver on Mark's part, and not daring to relax his vigilance even for an instant.

When the door of the bin was open, he pushed Crandall in and snapped the padlock in place. Faint light from the bulb in the cellar came through the cracks. The man's voice sounded a harsh warning:

"Don't try to get out, fellah. It won't do you no good to shout. There's nobody but us to hear. And if you make any noise I'll come down and take a pot shot at you. I could bury you in the floor of this hole and no one would be the wiser."

The man turned the overhead bulb

out and left. Mark heard him and the woman clumping up the stairs, heard the door above slam shut. Their footsteps sounded on the kitchen floor for a moment, then all was quiet as they moved to another part of the house.

Mark Crandall struck a match and looked around his prison. One window opened onto a yard apparently, but this had a heavy grating across it. He turned back to the wooden partition and saw that it was made of two-inch planks.

He drew a jackknife from his pocket, pulled up an empty barrel and sat down. Patience was all that was needed to get him out of here. The pale-eyed man hadn't known with whom he was dealing.

Moving the blade of the knife swiftly, surely, in the darkness, Mark went to work. The spot he attacked was at a point where the padlock was fastened to the door. He knew it would be a long, hard job; but this was the only way. Meanwhile the Purple Hand was at large.

Two hours of patient hacking brought blisters on Mark's thumbs and fingers. But he had a two-inch circular groove cut in the heavy wood. He gave the door a quick thrust, and left the padlock hanging in a segment of board. He tiptoed across the cellar and climbed the stairs. The door at their head was locked, but Mark took a gadget from his pocket. This was an adjustable key with a screw handle that would fit any tumblers, and a set of slender skeletons. One of these went in the old-fashioned lock. Mark turned and heard the lock click back. Then he made another discovery. The door was bolted.

His stubby-bladed knife came out again. The door was made of pine, and he cut along one of the panels close to the frame. He sliced till the panel hung by slender sections top and bottom, then pulled it toward him and it broke with a brittle snap.

He listened breathlessly for seconds, but there was no sound. Cautiously he reached in through the door and drew the bolt, then pushed it open. He was in the kitchen again. He took off his shoes, walked on stocking feet into a corridor,

followed along it till he came to another door.

Suddenly he heard voices. They were faint, but the rumble of them came plainly. A man and a woman were talking: Pale-eyes and his witch-faced companion. They were not in the room behind the door, but in one apparently still beyond.

Crandall opened the door and stepped in. Now the voices were plainer. He could hear them clearly, almost make out their words. The two seemed to be quarreling. He heard the patter of sleet on the pane, heard the mournful moaning of the November wind on the roof of the house. He moved across the room to the door behind which the voices were speaking, hoping to hear what their quarrel was about.

He bent forward to put his ear against the door, then stopped with a gasp. Another sound had risen above the noise of the wind. It was a woman's scream and was followed by a cry of fear in a man's voice. The crack of light which had showed under the sill of the door suddenly disappeared.

Mark Crandall clutched the knob and turned it, but the door was locked. As he felt for his skeleton keys again there came another sound. This was a strange buzzing note that set his teeth on edge.

Furniture crashed. A window went up. The bellow of stark fear in the man's voice came again. Crandall stepped back and banged his shoulder against the door with all his might. The panel cracked but held. He stepped back again. The buzzing noise ceased and he became conscious of a faint unpleasant odor in the air, something that made his scalp crawl. He lunged forward a second time, and sent the door crashing inward.

The room was dark. The sickening smell was in his nostrils cloyingly. His eyes darted toward the window and he stiffened. For a moment he had caught sight of a faint silhouette, against a background of whirling snow. Then, quick as the thrust of a knife, the beam of a flashlight stabbed toward him from the window, revealing him like an actor on some stage.

Crandall gasped and ducked aside, expecting momentarily to feel the impact of a bullet. But the flashlight followed him and there came a low, grating laugh instead. It was malicious, sinister. As quickly as the light had come on it was clicked off, and the room was plunged in blackness again. Mark could no longer see the silhouette.

He stumbled across the room, fumbled frantically along the wall for an electric switch, and found one. As he clicked it on his body grew taut with sudden horror. For the witchlike woman lay at his feet dead—and on her wrist was the death mark of the Purple Hand.

CHAPTER III

MOBQUE MYSTERY

THE WOMAN lay just as she had fallen under the destroying shadow of the strange death. Like Judge Westland, her life had been snuffed out by a means which had the fantastic character of some macabre nightmare. The imprint of those fatal fingers lay like a vivid brand across her withered skin.

Crandall swore harshly in his throat. In ten years of man-hunting he had never glimpsed anything like this. He leaped to the window, risking a shot from the murderer lurking in ambush, and stared out into the night. But no living thing moved. A distant street light made a single lurid slash across the snow.

He stared down, searching for tracks. But the ice-coated ground below the window had an unbroken glitter. Wind-driven flakes of snow peppered across it.

Mark thought of the pale-eyed man then. He turned from the window and went charging through the house. There were four rooms on the ground floor. Something in the last convinced him that the man was gone. A rear door was open here, leading to a small back stoop. And at the bottom of the steps he could dimly make out a man's track, broken through the film of ice and pointing away from the house. The man had fled,

EM

warned somehow of the horror that had overtaken the woman.

Grim-faced, Mark went back to the chamber where the murdered woman lay. No use to chase the murderer out there in the darkness. He was gone now; and he had seen Crandall, dared to taunt him with a laugh. The deathly fingers of the Purple Hand might be reaching for his own life soon.

Something along the baseboard caught Mark's eye. It lay on the floor, partially hidden by the shadow of a chair. It was a glinting square of metal and he picked it up. A silver cigarette case lay in his hand. He snapped it open. Four cigarettes were still inside. They were a special Turkish blend. They stirred quick memories in his mind.

With hands that trembled a little Mark turned the case over and saw the initials on the outside. They were done in fine engraving, almost worn away from the soft metal. But they were still legible. "R.P." He remembered now. Doctor Parmelee had been smoking cigarettes like these. This was the doctor's case he held in his hand.

THE discovery shocked him. With tingling pulses he held the case by its edges, threw his handkerchief around it and dropped it in his pocket.

He continued then to make quick search of the room. There was a shabby

desk with a drawer open over by the wall. Mark walked to it and looked down. His own gun lay in the drawer, put there by pale-eyes apparently.

A yellow, folded piece of paper was in the drawer below the gun. Mark pocketed the weapon, glad to have it back, hesitated a moment, then drew the paper out. Unfolded, it proved to be a map—and a brief scrutiny of it sent fresh tingles of horror along his scalp. The pale-eyed man's strange words echoed again in his mind:

"When the dead come back to life!" For the map was marked "Hillside Cemetery," and, though it was old, some one had recently traced a thin pencil line from a side gate to a spot in the map's center where a freshly inked cross showed.

The marked spot bore only a number. It must, Mark thought, correspond to a family plot or vault. Tensely he continued to search the desk, unearthing a sheaf of receipted bills marked A. A. Benjamin. This would be the pale-eyed man, and the address on the bills would be the house he was now in.

There was a telephone on top of the desk and Mark quickly reached it. It was nearly midnight, but when the desk sergeant at police headquarters relayed his call the barking voice of Inspector Wilson answered him.

It took Mark nearly a minute to ex-

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plain why he had dropped out of sight. Wilson was inarticulate when he heard the Purple Hand had struck again.

While he waited for the inspector's coming, Mark paced the room where the murderer had claimed his third victim. Now and then he cast glances at the still figure on the floor, then at the map he had discovered. A pall of mystery and horror lay over this murder chain that was like a sinister and imperturbable cloud. "When the dead come back to life—"

A police siren wailed thinly in the chill November night. Crandall heard the soft crunch of tires, heard a car door slam, and feet clump on the porch. Wilson and two husky headquarters men entered.

Solemnly they stared down at the murdered woman while Mark gave a brief summary of the facts. Two things he left out—the finding of the cigarette case and that enigmatic sentence of the pale-eyed man. These he wanted to think over for a while.

Inspector Wilson barked quick orders, and a detective grabbed the telephone and talked fast, setting in motion a police dragnet that would attempt to track down the pale-eyed man.

Mark hadn't touched the body of the woman. He was too well-trained a man hunter for that. He didn't trespass on the law's own territory. When the medical examiner arrived five minutes later he turned the woman over and held up a small leather purse which Wilson opened eagerly.

Some coins, a wad of bills and a string of keys were inside. The inspector looked disappointed, grunted and shook his head. He handed the things to Mark who fingered the keys intently. Suddenly Mark bent close. One key, of old-fashioned heavy design and made of brass, interested him. He turned it over quickly. There were letters stamped in the metal, letters that carried an overtone of horror. They said "Hillside Cemetery," and a number was below the name. Mark Crandall strode across the room.

He stooped over the yellowed man

again, then held it out and spoke sharply to Wilson, tense excitement in his voice.

"Here's a lead, chief. Maybe we can find out who the woman is. She or the man with her made this mark within a day or two. Look at the ink—it's fresh. There's something in that graveyard some one's after. This looks like the key to a vault. This dame or the man with her must have had a good reason for marking the spot. Let's find out what that reason is."

"I'll send a man out there tomorrow," the inspector said.

"Tomorrow may be too late! The Purple Hand's mixed up in this, and he moves fast—you ought to know. I'm going out tonight—right now."

Wilson shrugged resignedly and growled:

"I'll go with you then. I can't have you dropping out of sight again. But I'm damned if I see—"

Crandall didn't see either, but his hunch told him it was time to move. They went to the headquarters car parked at the curb and Mark got behind the wheel. He sent the big police sedan roaring over the icy pavements till Wilson howled a warning. On a long straight avenue he held the siren down, making the night hideous. Hillside was one of the biggest cemeteries in the city. It wasn't hard to find. They reached it in twenty minutes of fast driving.

UNDER the lash of the November wind, with thin snow whipping like a winding sheet, the high wall around the cemetery looked forbidding.

Mark went to the main entrance and got out. The gate was locked, but one of the skeleton keys fitted it and he quickly pushed it open. Flashlight in hand, he plunged through, with Wilson following. Snow had gathered along the inside of the big wall. Suddenly Mark Crandall darted to the right. A small stone building stood here—the office where the cemetery records were kept. Mark had seen fresh tracks along the snow. He stabbed his flashlight forward, said:

"Look here, chief!"

The beam was focused on the door. A black opening gaped in the center of it. The glass in the door's front had been smashed. It was unlocked and Mark pushed it open quickly. Inside, puddles of melted snow showed darkly on the floor. A row of steel files stood against one wall. The drawer of the center file had been pulled out and cards were scattered over a table.

"What the hell! Some one broke in," said Wilson. "He must have been here ten minutes ago—and went through that file."

Mark nodded grimly. "Right, chief. Let's get going!" He strode from the raided office and struck off away from the cemetery gate, following a maze of paths. It grew blacker as they got away from the the street lights beyond the wall. Pines bent and moaned in the wind. Mantling snow made them ghostly. The white faces of gravestones thrust up everywhere. Holding his light cupped in his hand, Mark flashed it on the map and led the way. Wilson followed. They were silent, tense, as they strode along.

Three minutes' brisk walking and the ground began to rise. Mark consulted the map again, struck off to the left. A ridge rose here. Its top was set with mausoleums like teeth in a giant jaw. He walked past two, stopped at the third, and Inspector Wilson spoke quickly at his side.

"Some one's been here, too—the door's open!"

In the blustering wind an iron hinge groaned like a soul in agony. They stabbed their flash beams forward and ran to the big vault. "Radson," Mark saw, was chiseled across the granite front. He plunged inside and stopped.

His flashlight swept the chill interior. A half dozen morguelike doors with bronze plates on them showed. One was open and an empty cavern yawned behind it. That meant a coffin had been taken out. At every step the pale-eyed man's words seemed to carry new weight. "When the dead come back to life!"

Breath hissed between Mark's teeth. He dashed outside and began examining

the ground. Fresh tracks showed plainly in a patch of snow. Two men, carrying something heavy, had taken short, quick steps downhill. Mark stared into the darkness and suddenly cried out.

A faint light glimmered beyond a sea of tombstones. It was somewhere by the wall. He called to Wilson and broke into a run. The nightmarish trail of mystery seemed to have no end.

The light didn't show again, but fifty feet from the wall Mark heard auto gears whine. A heavy vehicle of some sort purred away. He swung to the right instantly, leaping over graves, covering the frozen ground in long strides, heading for the main gate where their own car was parked. He had the engine running when Wilson came panting up, and as the inspector tumbled in he sent the police car lurching ahead.

Far down the street, at the corner of the cemetery wall, a red tail-light showed for an instant, then whisked out of sight. Under Mark's clamping foot, the big police car increased its speed, the engine mounting to a roar.

The red tail-light showed again as they turned the corner. But the car ahead was making good time, too. As it streaked under a pole light and rounded a curve they got a good view of it. Long and black, with shiny sides—it was a motor hearse.

Wilson swore harshly. Mark drove on. He couldn't explain what this mad maneuver meant—a coffin being whisked out of a cemetery in the dead of night. But behind the mystery and horror of it he seemed to sense the deathly fingers of the Purple Hand.

The hearse wasn't heading back toward the city. It was streaking for the suburbs, and Mark Crandall was amazed at its speed. It hurtled like a black demon through the night-shrouded streets. He wished now he had his own swift roadster. In the police sedan he could barely hold his own. But he drove with daring skill, rocketing after the black car, following the red eye of the tail-light like some grim nemesis.

Snow-covered fields and lightless

farms were flashing by now. Then they entered the streets of a small suburb. Suddenly the black hearse turned off and Mark heard its tires screech as it swung around a corner. The red tail-light disappeared from sight.

He reached the corner, slowed and turned, too. But the hearse was no longer in view. Baffled for a moment he slammed brakes and brought the police car to a stop. Fresh tire marks showed in a narrow drive between two stores. The hearse had swung in there. He drove in slowly, entering the drive, and braked again as his headlights almost rammed into a closed gate. He leaped out and saw that the gate was chained and fastened with an old-fashioned padlock.

THE drive continued on toward the rear of a row of buildings on the street parallel. But it would take precious time to open the gate. He swung a leg over, stepped across and beckoned to Wilson. Twenty feet along the drive and he grabbed the inspector's arm and pointed. In the rear of one of the buildings, two men came into view carrying something long and heavy. As Mark watched they staggered through a door in the building's side and disappeared. The door banged shut.

Mark leaped forward, gun in hand. But the door through which the two had passed was made of sheet metal and showed no trace of any lock on the outside. Crandall swore. Then he turned quickly and raced along the building's side toward the street front. A pole light was burning here. Its rays fell on gilt letters. "Cole Funeral Parlors."

There were no lights showing inside the establishment and the front door had a heavy lock. Mark Crandall snatched the adjustable key from his pocket. While Wilson stood by, he dug feverishly into the lock. Snow had driven into the keyhole. This hampered things, and it took nearly five minutes to get the door open.

As he pushed in, a musty, unpleasant smell filled his nostrils. There were chairs, tables, potted palms inside, a

plush carpet on the floor that deadened footfalls. Another door showed at the room's rear.

Mark stepped toward this and heard a bolt suddenly pushed shut. Inspector Wilson called out hoarsely:

"What's that?"

A sound came from behind the bolted door that made Mark's face blanch. It was an eerie buzzing, like a huge hornet's wings—the same noise he had heard in the room where the witch-faced woman had died—the mysterious sound of the Purple Hand at work.

Mark picked up a heavy chair, stepped back and crashed it against the door. There was no time to use the key now. The sound inside continued, seeming to mock his efforts. The door held fast. He crashed the chair at it again, and the piece of furniture broke in his hand. He continued to strike with the heavy wooden seat, until a panel splintered. As it did so the buzzing noise ceased.

Like a madman, Mark beat at the door. It was tough oak, and not till he'd splintered another chair did the panel spring inward. As he fumbled to find the bolt, the pungent, sickening smell of burning flesh struck his nostrils again.

Tense-faced he opened the door and plunged inside, flashing his light as he did so. This was the workroom of the establishment. Jars of embalming fluid stood around on shelves. Caskets were stacked along the wall. One stood in the center of the floor, fresh moisture of melted snow glistening on it. Then Mark Crandall gasped.

Two men were sprawled beside the casket. One was about fifty, gray haired. The other was younger, not more than thirty. And under the bright beam of the flash fresh horror showed. The mark of the Purple Hand was on each of them—on the younger one's wrist, and across the other's face—like a hideous birthmark, seared into the flesh. Two more victims had been claimed by the unknown killer.

Wilson stood aghast, too amazed to speak. Crandall, cursing, leaped to the rear of the room. His gun was in his

hand, ready to blast death into the darkness if that sneering laugh should sound again. The Purple Hand must be close now. But a breath of cold air struck his face. He saw then that the metal door was open. The murderer had escaped.

Outside the yard was dark and cluttered. His questing flashlight disclosed a dozen sheds and several branching alleys. A jumble of tracks showed. He ran in circles for a moment, then saw the hopelessness of it. The killer knew his ground, had had ample time to make his get-away.

His face granite hard, Mark returned to the embalming room. He found a wall switch, bathed the place in light and pointed grimly to the coffin on the floor.

"Let's open it, chief, perhaps—"

He didn't finish the sentence. No man could predict what mystery the casket held. It seemed to play some vital part in the horrors of the Purple Hand. For it the fiend killer had murdered twice again tonight. There was the dust of years on the lid. The job before him was a gruesome one. But Mark's eyes burned with a hunting light.

The two men on the floor were dead, beyond all human help. They were apparently the owner of the establishment and his assistant. The Purple Hand had used them for some mysterious purpose, then killed them ruthlessly when their living presence threatened to be a menace to himself.

Mark attacked the screws on the coffin lid. These and bronze clamps held it down. He worked swiftly, tensely, Wilson helping. Neither of them spoke. Horror seemed to hold them in an icy grip.

The lid came up at last. Inside was a stained and torn silk lining. Mark Crandall pulled it gingerly back, expecting to see withered human remains. Then he stood amazed, and Wilson breathed a smothered curse.

For the coffin held no skeleton, and nothing that any one could seem to want. Inside was an old burlap bag, crumbled apart. And tumbling from it were a few gray rocks.

CHAPTER IV

REACHING HAND

BLANK amazement showed on Inspector Wilson's face. He poked at the stones dazedly, then turned to Mark. "What's it mean, Crandall? What crazy thing's this?"

"I wish I knew, chief. We've got to get the lowdown on the Radsons if we can."

"Radsons? Who the hell are they?"

"That was the name on the vault where this box came from," said Mark pointing to the coffin. The chain of events was becoming closely knit at least. The Purple Hand was somehow behind it all.

"The cemetery people can give us the dope," said Wilson quickly. "I'll get a dozen men on the job."

Crandall shook his head. "Don't forget, chief, that some one swiped the records. It may take time, and—"

He left the sentence unfinished. Wilson knew as well as he the need of action. He turned to the empty coffin again. It must have lain in the Radson vault holding those rocks for years. Now the murderer, known as the Purple Hand, had hired these men to get it. If only their dead lips could talk, the killer's identity would be known.

Mark remembered the silver cigarette case then, Doctor Parmelee. His face grew grim. Wilson was already on the funeral parlor's phone, summoning the medical examiner and others to this latest murder scene. As the inspector banged the receiver up Mark spoke quickly.

"I want to borrow the squad car again, chief."

"Okay. Where are you going now? You seem to know all the answers."

"I've got to go alone this time. I'll get in touch with you later."

He sped off in the headquarters sedan again, stopping at a drug store telephone directory long enough to get Doctor Parmelee's address. The number proved to be an old-fashioned house in the suburbs, used evidently as a combination home and office. There were no lights

showing when he reached it. The doctor had retired or was still out. Mark pressed the bell, but there was no answer. Echoes resounded through the big house.

Mark took out his skeleton keys once more. One of them fitted the antique lock. In a moment he was inside the hall. The doctor's waiting room was at the left in front. Behind it was Parmelee's private office. Farther still toward the rear of the house was a larger room, containing the special equipment Parmelee used in his electro-therapeutic work.

Curiously Mark Crandall turned the beam of his flash this way and that. He saw static machines, induction coils and elaborate galvanic batteries. Close by was a table of odd-shaped electrodes, insulators and rubber gloves. Mark had a sense of foreboding. Parmelee had protested his innocence, but—

He drew his automatic out, held it in his right hand and shifted the flash to his left. The room was large. Dark shades were drawn across the windows. Tall screens stood against the wall. Even in the daytime this room, he guessed, was dark. Another screen rose in a corner, hiding some sort of sink.

Crandall walked toward it, anxious to tabulate every piece of equipment that the strange room held. Such knowledge might prove useful later if—

Abruptly he stopped and stiffened. It seemed to him the tallest screen against the wall had moved. Then he gasped and tried to whirl. But in the space of a split second something struck his right arm as chopping blow.

There was a booming report as reflex action made his finger jerk the trigger of his gun. The weapon went spinning off into the darkness. Mark swung his flashlight swiftly, but there came a sudden, disconcerting crash as its lens struck an upright steam pipe that paralleled the wall. The glass and the bulb inside shattered. Crandall stood in utter darkness.

Horror moved along his spine as a low laugh sounded in the gloom. It was the same laugh he had heard earlier in the evening in the room where the woman had been slain. The laugh of the Purple Hand.

There was a gloating note in that evil laugh. It was nearer now. The Purple Hand was advancing toward him. Mark had stepped away when the blow that disarmed him had been struck. Now every muscle taut, he moved still farther back, keeping his face toward the killer that he couldn't see.

He tried to remember the spot where his gun had fallen. A swift sweeping clutch along the floor might recover it. But a board creaked somewhere close in front.

HE had an impulse to hurl himself forward then, to grapple with this nightmare killer. But he recalled the death mark of that searing hand. One touch of it and the nauseous stench of his own roasting skin would fill this room.

Air stirred near him suddenly. Like a dancer executing a pirouette, he turned aside—and knew that death had come close in the space of a second. The other was the master of this hideous game. He could afford to hunt Mark in the darkness. Contact was all the killer needed. One swift move, and Horror's handshake would have its way again.

Mark brushed one of the big static machines, passed it. The sinister footsteps following him crept on. A sudden bright spark leaped in the darkness at the place where Mark had been. The killer had merely brushed the machine with his hand.

Again that low laugh sounded. Mark Crandall shuddered. The man had nerves of steel, sure of his power, certain of his prey. Mark reached toward the wall at his left to steady himself and grope for the door. Instead his fingers encountered the edge of a shelf—and suddenly he paused. While the killer stole upon him, his own hand felt feverishly along this shelf.

His fingers came in contact with the knobs of insulators, a glass jar. Then something soft and yielding was beneath them. A pair of Doctor Parmelee's rubber gloves. Mark snatched them up, drew them on swiftly. Here was a mad hope.

Still as death, one arm thrust before him, he waited as a man waits for doom.

Something came out of the darkness and touched him. It was the groping fingers of a hand—the Purple Hand. With the strength born of desperation Crandall clutched them. Sweat stood out on his face. His heart was pounding fiercely.

He heard a hiss in the darkness close by. Then a choked curse came. Mark's other hand reached out as he held on. He dared not get too close. Dim understanding was in his mind. He was holding death at bay.

Fingers pressed through the darkness toward his face. His fending left hand warded them off. One touch on bare skin and the Purple Hand would send him to the grave.

He knocked the hand away, struck with his own clenched fist. The killer laughing like a fiend a moment before, fought like a madman now to get away. Mark struck again. In a frenzy the other jerked his arm free. Something remained in Mark's fingers. He could feel it through the rubber gloves. At the same instant he heard footsteps running, heard a door open and shut, and the sound of the running feet diminish.

Breathing like a man who has had a reprieve from death, Crandall waited. He was trembling now, fighting down the weakness born of fear. Presence of mind had saved him. He groped for the light switch now, found it, and flooded the room with light.

The thing in his hand was another glove. This was not of rubber. It looked like cloth at first. Then he saw it was closely woven metal—copper tarnished to a rusty brown. The glove of the Purple Hand. A conductor of electricity.

Something else on the floor caught his eye. He tensed when he saw it. It was a length of slender electric cord, fitted into a plug outlet behind the screen. It trailed across the floor like an evil black snake. Brass terminals at its free end had evidently pulled loose from some sort of socket when the Purple Hand had fled. Mark coiled it up and put in in his pocket.

He recovered his gun next, then made a search through the hall where the running footsteps had sounded. Once again

a door swung open into the black night. Once again the Purple Hand had made good his escape.

CRANDALL left the doctor's house. After what had happened the killer surely wouldn't return. He drove back to his own apartment. There was something there he wanted to see before he got in touch with Wilson again.

For ten years Mark had kept a criminal file. It was a passion with him. Here, in brief, were records of every murder case for a decade. Some were cases he himself had figured in. Others had been taken from newspaper accounts. Section "R" of his private file yielded results that made his pulses quicken. Ten years ago a man by the name of Arthur Radson had been caught, convicted and electrocuted in the city for the murder of a business partner. A wife only had survived him.

The clipping was maddeningly brief. Mark stared at it frowning. For minutes then he paced the den of his apartment, black pipe clenched between his teeth, forehead wrinkled. His mind wandered along strange and fantastic channels, till the jangle of the telephone cut through his thoughts.

He picked the instrument up wonderingly. It was nearly one o'clock. Perhaps it was the inspector to report some new development.

But the voice that spoke over the wire wasn't Wilson's. It was that of Rex Gerard, friend of the murdered judge, and Gerard sounded excited.

"You seemed intelligent, Crandall—that's why I'm calling you," he said. "I know you want to catch the murderer of Judge Westland—and I advise you to come where I am. That's the Phoenix Club. I'm here with Thelma Price and Doctor Parmelee. The doctor's drinking like a fool—or like a man whose conscience hurts him, and he's talking wildly. Just now—here's a tip for you—I heard him mention that he might skip town."

Mark listened tensely while Gerard continued.

"You may think I'm horning in on what's none of my business. But I've

got a reason. I followed the doctor when he left Derwent's house after the police had gone. He was nervous then and I was curious. I made up my mind to watch him. He came to the Phoenix Club and began drinking like a fish. Tony, the manager, tried to stop him; then he called Miss Price to come and make him leave. It seems he's done that sort of thing before. She, like a fool, came. I tried to reason with her and get her to go, but she only abused me. Then I made up my mind to call you and tip you off—before Parmelee decides to skip."

"Thanks, Gerard," said Mark quickly. "Thanks a lot. I'll be there. Just hold everything."

He drove to the Phoenix Club thinking fast. Gerard was jealous of Thelma Price and out to get Parmelee if he could. That Mark knew. But Parmelee was a man he wanted very much to see.

Gerard met him in the club's front room. There was a malicious gleam in his eyes, a twisted smile of triumph on his lips.

"You may think I'm jealous, Crandall—and I admit I am—but that isn't all. I'd like to save Thelma from throwing herself away on such a scamp; but more than that I want to catch the man who killed Judge Westland. In my opinion the doctor's acting mighty queer."

Crandall nodded and followed Gerard inside. Fear was written on the doctor's hatchet face. He got up at sight of Mark, leaned across the table and said:

"So—you've come to lock me up! All right, get the bracelets out! Get it over with! But I'll hire the best lawyer in town and make a laughing stock of you and the damned police. I'll show you I'm not guilty."

"You're drunk," said Mark. "Sit down—and take it easy."

HE lit his pipe, went to the telephone and called headquarters. That was something he'd meant to do before—find out whether the police were making any progress. Now he must know before he dealt with Parmelee.

Inspector Wilson was back at his desk

again. There was to be no sleep for him tonight apparently. But his voice sounded elated.

"Hello, Crandall! We think we've got the bird you wanted caught—the guy with the pale eyes. Some of my men picked him up trying to get out of the city. I had them stationed at the bridges and it worked. He's just been brought to headquarters and we're waiting for you to come down and identify him."

Crandall spoke quickly. "Swell, chief; but I've got a better idea. Bring him out to Derwent's house. We'll have our show-down there."

"What the hell for?"

"I've got another suspect. He'll be there, too."

Mark took Rex Gerard into his confidence then. He told him briefly about the pale-eyed man. There was a chance, he said, that Doctor Parmelee might be able to identify him.

The doctor drunkenly agreed. "Frame me if you want to," he said. "I'll get my lawyer tomorrow."

With a grim face, Crandall steered the three of them out of the Phoenix Club into the police sedan. In silence they drove back to Anson Derwent's house.

The guests had long since gone. But Derwent and most of the servants were still up. The murder of Judge Westland had made sleep impossible. To Derwent, Mark explained what had happened. Then they waited tensely for the police to come.

In the great silent ballroom the presence of death seemed still to linger. The sound of the police car made them jump. Mark's eyes grew bright as two headquarters dicks led the pale-eyed Benjamin in. The man scowled as he saw Mark, and Mark's gaze switched to Doctor Parmelee.

"Ever see this man before?" he asked.

"Never." Parmelee spoke firmly, and his face showed no recognition. But the tenseness in the room seemed to have sobered him. Rex Gerard was leaning forward. Crandall addressed the whole group suddenly.

"Sit down," he said, "all of you." He sucked his black pipe for a moment, then

began at length: "Five people have been killed by the Purple Hand. When the killings first started I thought it was the work of some homicidal nut. There seemed to be no motive—but now I've changed my mind. I think there is a motive now. A lot of things have happened. Some you know about, and some you don't. I went to Doctor Parmelee's tonight and was attacked by the Purple Hand. I had the good luck to escape. When I got back to my place I went through my files and found some dope on Radson."

Mark paused and the inspector leaned forward in his chair. "Yeah? My men are still on the job, Crandall. They got the cemetery people up, but they don't remember, and there's a lot of graves out there."

Mark nodded and continued speaking. "You'll be surprised when I tell you a theory I have, chief. I think the killer is a dead man."

The inspector's eyebrows snapped up. "You like to spring stunts; but what the devil do you mean now?"

Mark took from his pocket the black electric cord he had found in Doctor Parmelee's office. He held it up.

"Haas, the medical examiner, claims the victims were killed by electrocution. I think he's right. And when I say the killer's a dead man, I mean officially dead, not actually. The murderer, Radson, should have been in that coffin we found tonight. He wasn't. It was full of rocks instead. My file says Radson was survived by his wife. I figure his body was turned over to her after he was electrocuted years ago. That's the way it's done. But Radson wasn't dead. He'd survived the shock he got in the hot seat. That's happened once or twice before. And they didn't have any autopsy then, the way they do now."

MARK turned to Doctor Parmelee suddenly. "Isn't it possible, doc, that some people can stand more shock than others? Don't you have to give different doses in your work?"

The doctor gripped the arms of his chair. Completely sober now he an-

swered quickly. "Yes—but if you're trying to—"

Crandall cut him off. "Wouldn't a man get toughened to electricity just as he would to cold or heat? Don't you give some of your patients more volts as time goes on?"

The doctor's face became convulsed. "By damn—I knew—"

Again Mark interrupted him. "Sit down, doc. Keep your shirt on. I'm not accusing any one yet. Don't forget we've got a prisoner here—a man, who, if he's not the Purple Hand, is up to some crime of his own."

The pale-eyed Benjamin glared angrily as Mark went on:

"I've seen this man earlier tonight. He and his woman friend kidnaped me. They were watching outside the house when Judge Westland was killed. Or at least they were there after he was killed. They figured I suspected them and knew too much. After I got out of the cellar in a house where this man locked me, the Purple Hand came—and killed the woman. This man tried to make a getaway; but the police collared him from the descriptions I had given. But—" Mark spoke with sudden vehemence—"I don't think he's the Purple Hand. I've figured out his reason for acting as he did. He's a crook, a blackmailer. He and the woman knew something—and wanted to cash in on it."

"What did they know?" demanded Inspector Wilson.

"They knew the identity of a man who couldn't be killed in the electric chair. They didn't know he was the Purple Hand—but the woman who was killed had been his wife. Her name was Mrs. Radson."

Crandall stared around at the circle of faces. Fear was on them all. Slowly he put his hand to his pocket and drew out the envelope which held the clipping from his file.

"A man never quite lives down his past," he said. "He may change his name, may even get his face doctored up by plastic surgery. But, if he's got anything to hide, he still lives in fear of people who once knew him. He thinks always

they may give him away. I've a record here of the man, Radson—and a photograph will show—"

Crandall got no further. There was a quick movement in the room. A chair fell over. The lights went out as some one pressed the switch. But, as the room was plunged in darkness, Mark's automatic spoke. There was a scream, a thud, then Mark's flashlight stabbed a writhing figure on the floor.

"Turn on the lights, inspector," he said harshly. "I had to wing the murderer, Radson. It will surprise you—but there's the Purple Hand!"

Anson Derwent lay on the floor, his face convulsed with pain and fury. A long cord, like the one Mark had picked up in Parmelee's office, trailed from his fingers. He'd been about to plug it in. Mark's voice was ironic as he waved the envelope.

"You'd have tried to kill us all, Radson—after this scared you! You misunderstood me, though. I didn't say I had a photo of you here. But I thought you'd think I had. And now I'm going to tell you a little more about yourself. You didn't fear your friends when you were poor. But when you got rich, and came back to America, you began to wipe them out—and you used the thing that once saved you from the chair.

"You can stand lots of current, can't you, Radson? Open your coat and show us what sort of vest-pocket transformer you use to step-up the lighting circuit so it will kill. With that, all you had to do

was plug in, wear your copper glove—and shake hands with an old friend. You even tried it on your own dogs to make sure it was okay before you went ahead with humans. That had me puzzled for a while; but I've figured out a lot of things, Radson.

"The woman you murdered tonight was your wife, of course. You left her after she'd helped get you out of the country, with a coffin full of rocks put in the vault instead of you. She wasn't above trying to blackmail you after you'd become rich. She had a nice scheme figured out with her friend, Benjamin. But neither of them knew how tough you'd got to be.

"She held the coffin full of rocks over your head as a threat if you didn't come across. All she had to do was produce that to make folks believe her story, so you decided to get rid of the coffin and hired a couple of undertakers to grab it out of the vault. Then you killed them when we came along.

"That was the beginning of the end for you. You'd already thrown suspicion on Parmelee. He was the logical suspect because of his electrical work. I suppose you wanted to get him out of the way to marry your ward. That's only a hunch, but I think I'm right. You tried to kill me in Parmelee's office to clinch the case against him. And now I'm wondering, Radson, whether you'll stay alive in the chair a second time. Now they perform autopsies on men taken from the chair. Your chance doesn't look so good."

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Mr. Justice Sits In

By Arden Antony



*He had made it
look like sui-
cide or an acci-
dent.*

Mr. Ramsey owned that office building. But nothing went right in it. His beautiful secretary fell down the elevator shaft. Then Mr. Justice moved in across the hall, and things grew worse. And by the time Mr. Justice moved out again, Mr. Ramsey was—beyond help.

HE WAS such a quiet looking, shabby, little fellow, I thought he must have wandered into the Ramsey building by mistake. Then he said he wanted to rent the front office suite—the three hundred a month one across from Mr. Ramsey's own offices—and I felt awful sorry for him. I could see he'd made some kind of a mistake and didn't know where he was.

"Them's fine offices now," I says to him, kind-like, "but the devil's own price—three hundred a month."

"Yes, I know," he says and looked straight at me.

All of a sudden I didn't feel sorry for him no more. I felt sort of scared, like I was looking at royalty or something like

that. I don't know why I felt that way, for he was sure a shabby dresser.

"Here's my card," he says.

I looked at the card. It just read: "I. M. Justice—Adjustor of Affairs."

I wondered what Adjustor of Affairs was, for I knew it must pay pretty good if he could afford them fancy offices up in front. Maybe he was an escaped loony, I thought. But just as if he knew what I was thinking, he says, quick-like:

"I'll pay three months in advance. If I finish my work here before the three months are up, I'll forfeit the balance as my notice of vacating." When he says that he reached in his pocket and pulled out a roll of bills. "Count it," he says. "You'll find it's all there."

I felt chilly all over, because the bills were all twenties, and it made a big roll—big as I could close my hand around. I could have sworn that the pocket he swished them bills out of, so careless-like, had been flat as a pancake the minute before. There was nothing I could say, though, for the nine hundred dollar rent was all there, just like he said.

He walked over to the big, fancy elevator doors and stood there looking at them a long time. It made me uneasy, because ever since the accident, them elevator doors had been a sore spot with me.

"This is the one, isn't it?" he says, looking at me again with that peculiar smile of his.

I FROZE up inside, because I didn't want to talk about Helen Leslie to a stranger. I can see her yet, the morning I found her laying on the floor of that elevator shaft with her bones all broke to a jelly and her pretty face turned up with that scared look, and one long gash across her forehead.

Nobody had ever figured how she fell into that shaft. The police talked about suicide, but I knew it wasn't no such thing. Miss Helen was the happiest girl. Why only the morning before I found her dead, she was saying to me:

"Tom, you're the best superintendent the building has ever had. Tomorrow I'll have something to tell you that will make

you happy. You've been like a father to me, Tom."

I was that tickled, for of all the girls that ever worked in the building, Helen Leslie and her friend Lois Lee was my favorites. I'd always tried to do little things for them that the job didn't rightly call for, and they knew it too.

That's why I couldn't stand to see this here Mr. Justice being curious about her death. I didn't like nobody being so curious about them doors, for nobody ever had decided how they came open and Miss Helen fell in.

So I just says, "Yes, Mr. Justice," and went on about my work, after giving him his key. I took the roll of bills in to Mr. Ramsey. He was as surprised as I had been and acted a little uneasy and says that I ought to called him out to see the man before I rented the offices.

I never rightly knew when Mr. Justice moved in. I don't know yet just what his work was. When we cleaned his offices every day, they were never mussed up any. And if he used his desks or filing cabinets, I never could tell it. He didn't have no help at all that I ever seen. I never seen him going to his meals or going home so I guess he must have come and gone while I was busy in some other part of the building.

I didn't have much time to think about it, anyway, for I never in all my born days seen any one get as mean and unreasonable as Mr. Ramsey. He kept me jumping, I can tell you.

It was: "Tom, for damn's sake what's the matter with the ventilation system in here? I feel like I'm choking to death." Or: "Tom, what in heaven's name are you using to clean these rooms? It smells just like a morgue in here. It's awful! Clean that damn stench out of here."

And I didn't rightly know what to do about it because things weren't no different than they'd always been. Then too, I was worried about him. He sure was looking bad and getting thinner than a split rail. Not that I liked Mr. Ramsey—he wasn't a man a person could like—but he was my boss and I liked my job.

The first time I seen Mr. Justice outside his offices, he was standing there

at the elevator doors, just looking. It gave me the creeps, for he never says a thing to me, but just stood there. Pretty soon, Lois Lee came out of Mr. Ramsey's office and when she walked out he whirled around and spoke to her.

"Good morning, Miss."

"Good morning," Lois answered and I could see that there was something about Mr. Justice that made her uneasy, same as it done me. I stepped up and says:

"Miss Lee, this is Mr. Justice, your neighbor in the offices across the hall."

Lois nodded and smiled and Mr. Justice says in that soft, queer voice of his:

"Do you like working for Mr. Ramsey? Have you been with him long?"

Lois looked like she felt like telling him it wasn't none of his business, but she speaks, real polite.

"I like working anywhere that I can make a living for myself and my sister, Mr. Justice. I've been with Mr. Ramsey ever since—" she paused, for after all Helen Leslie had been her best friend—"ever since his former secretary died."

"You should have a day off now and then," Mr. Justice says. "You look tired."

Lois just stared at him. I could see she thought he was a queery, same as I did. She went back into her offices and Mr. Justice stood there looking after her for a minute and went into his own door.

IN a few minutes, before I'd finished shining all the brass around the doors, Lois came out again. She was all smiles.

"What do you know, Tom," she sings out. "Mr. Ramsey has given me the entire day off. Now I can spend it with Sally."

I was glad, for I knew all about Sally, her little crippled sister that she was taking care of. But I kept thinking how odd it was that she got a day off just after Mr. Justice said she ought to have one. I didn't say anything about it though, and Lois hurried off.

It was right about noon when I heard them blood curdling yells from Mr. Ramsey's offices. The walls were all sound-proof and I wouldn't have heard him at all if I hadn't happened to be in the fan room, setting the cooling system. I got upstairs as fast as my legs would carry

me, which is pretty fast, even if I am sixty years old, and opened his front door with my master key.

There wasn't anything in the outer office rooms, but I could hear him moaning and yelling inside the private office. I got the door open and there was Mr. Ramsey, crouched in the corner with the most awful look on his face! I started toward him and then I stopped dead still.

The hair on the back of my neck stood up in a stiff bristle and I got a whiff of the worst smell I ever smelt in my life. It was just like some one had opened up a musty vault and it was full of decayed flesh—sort of sickish sweet . . .

Then I saw her.

Helen Leslie. Laying on the floor of his office, just like she was laying on the bottom of the elevator shaft that morning, her body all soft and sprawly, and her sweet face turned up with that big gash across her forehead. I don't lay no claim to being a praying man, but if I ever prayed in my life it was then! I even forgot to help Mr. Ramsey, or to even notice him much.

"Can I help you?" says a voice right behind me, and I liked to have jumped clean out of my skin I was so scared. But when I turned around, it was only Mr. Justice. "I thought I heard sounds of distress," he says.

As scared as I was, I wondered how I'd happened to leave the door unlocked. And I wondered how Mr. Justice heard anything through them soundproof walls. But I was so all-fired glad to see another human that I never said nothing. I just turned and pointed to the place where Helen was laying on the floor like she'd been killed that morning, instead of being in her grave four months and over.

"Look!" I says. Then, so help me, there wasn't a thing on the floor where I pointed but a shadow from the high-backed chair!

"You are terribly upset, Tom," says Mr. Justice. "Perhaps you had best help Mr. Ramsey. I believe he has fainted."

Sure enough, there was Mr. Ramsey, out as cold as ice on the floor. I didn't have the nerve to tell Mr. Justice what I'd seen on the floor. I figured no one

would believe me. So I just helped Mr. Ramsey up onto the couch and washed his face with cold water and got a stiff drink of scotch out of his Rathskeller bar and poured it between his lips.

After a while he began to come alive again. Mr. Justice stood there and watched him. After Mr. Ramsey got up, he sure looked sick and shaky.

"I must be crazy!" he says, sort of dazed-like. "Tom, I swear I saw a body laying over there by the desk. Who moved it?"

"Nobody moved anything, Mr. Ramsey," says Mr. Justice, and Mr. Ramsey shivered again. "Perhaps it is the peculiar smell in here that made you ill. Don't you notice it?" Mr. Justice asked.

"Notice it! Hell, man, I've been living with it for—" Mr. Ramsey stopped yelling and looked kinda sheepish. "I'm sorry I let my nerves get away with me like that, Mr.—"

"Justice—your neighbor across the hall," says Mr. Justice smiling. "If there's nothing further that I can do to aid you, I will go."

He left. Somehow I didn't like that smile of his. It gave me the creeps.

Mr. Ramsey called his car and left for his club. He stayed drunk for three days and nights.

I never told a soul about that body on the floor. I didn't want people to think I was a looney.

IT was a week before it happened again.

Mr. Ramsey was alone in his rooms when he rung for me. I got there in time to catch him as he pulled his collar off and fainted. And there—right in the same place—I saw Helen again! Only her eyes were open this time and it looked like they was following Mr. Ramsey around the room. It was awful, I can tell you.

Mr. Ramsey was a wreck. I've never seen a big strong man lose weight and go to pieces so fast like he done. That day, he moved up to the seventh floor, to a small back office. He claimed there was something—some sewer gas or something—in his ventilation system that choked him.

As soon as he moved out, it seemed the

smell sort of faded away and the workmen couldn't find so much as a dead rat in the blow pipes to explain it.

Everything was all right for a few days, only Mr. Ramsey was drinking all the time and he was as mean as the devil himself. I worried a lot about Lois, being up there with him, but he never bothered her none. He didn't pay much attention to his business at all, which was queer, for he loved the almighty dollar better than anyone I ever knew.

Saturday afternoon, he let Lois go about four o'clock. She told me good-bye as she left and says that she was going out to the hospital. She was so happy because the doctor had sent word that Sally was going to walk a little that day. I was glad for her. I loved Lois like a daughter.

Pretty soon I heard Mr. Ramsey's signal, so I went up to his rooms. He met me at the door and I never seen such a look on a man's face.

"It's followed me, Tom!" he says. His face was as gray as putty. "It's followed me up here. Tom, what will I do?"

It seemed sort of queer for a big, smart, rich fellow like Mr. Ramsey to be asking his janitor what to do. But I knew what he was talking about all right, for that same musty, decayed smell was all over the place.

A funny breeze came through the hall, and made a kind of whispering noise. That puzzled me, because this new down-draft ventilation system don't have no air currents or draughts.

Mr. Ramsey stood there with his hand up to his collar like he couldn't breathe none too good, and acted just like he was listening. Pretty soon he says real low:

"All right—all right—I'll do it."

I heard him plain as day. His face looked a little more alive then, and he says to me:

"You may go now, Tom. I won't need you after all."

I thought he looked like he needed somebody. But Mr. Ramsey was never a person to argue with, especially when he was in one of his tempers. So I started to go. When I turned around, there was Mr. Justice getting off the elevator.

"Good evening Mr. Ramsey," he says with that funny smile of his. "I see that you are feeling much better now."

Now this seemed like a dumb thing for anyone to say. It didn't take no very smart person to see that Mr. Ramsey was all shot to pieces. I thought he'd bawl Mr. Justice out like nobody's business. But he just looked at him and drew a deep breath—like it was the first good one he'd had in a long time—and says:

"Yes—you are right, Mr. Justice—I'm feeling lots better now."

He went into his office and shut the door. I gave Mr. Justice a dirty look and went down the hall to clean some rooms. I wondered what he was doing up on the seventh floor. He hadn't made no friends in the building that I knew of.

It must have been nearly an hour later when I heard Mr. Ramsey's signal. I finished what I was doing and went down



to his offices. Just as I opened the door, the shot sounded. I got there just in time to see Mr. Ramsey slump over in the big desk chair—as dead as a door nail!

I RUNG every bell on that desk. It wasn't no time at all until all the other people who officed there, that was still in the building, was gathered around. They all began asking was it suicide or murder. I couldn't tell them, for I was too befuddled to think straight.

Mr. Justice was the one who found the letter. He read it out loud before the police came. I tell you, it made my blood run cold to hear it.

Mr. Ramsey told in it how he'd murdered Helen Leslie. Opened the doors to the elevator shaft with the emergency key and pushed her in to make it look like suicide or an accident. Says he done it because he had to. He'd been making love to Helen and staged a fake wedding and made her think it was the real thing. He'd begun to get pretty tired of her and wanted to marry the daughter of a rich client of his. He never could resist money.

Then, when Helen found out she was going to have a baby, and wanted him to make a public announcement of their marriage, he knew he was in bad any way he went. So he'd promised her they'd announce it the next day. That night, after everyone else had left, he killed her.

That was all the note said. He'd laid his will there beside it, and shot himself.

After the excitement begun to die down, I started worrying about Lois being out of a job. I knew how bad it would be for her and Sally if she couldn't get another one.

After the police left, I was still thinking about it. I opened all the ventilators

in Mr. Ramsey's rooms to get shed of that smell. I was still thinking about Lois when Mr. Justice came in. He walked so quiet, you never could tell he was coming till you'd turn around and there he'd stand.

"I was looking for you to tell you that I'm vacating my offices tomorrow, Tom," he says. "My work here is finished." He looked at me a minute with that queer look of his that made me feel like he was looking right through me. He says:

"Don't worry about Miss Lee. The new owner will keep her on—first as his secretary and then as his wife."

He walked away, after he laid his key down on the table. I was so upset over everything that had happened that I never gave what he said no thought at all, right then.

I don't know when he moved out. He moved out just like he moved in, so quiet that no one heard or saw him.

A few days later I found an old tailor's manikin laying on the basement floor with its wax face nearly melted off. It really gave me a turn, for it looked for all the world like the thing I'd thought was Helen Leslie, laying on the office floor. If it was, I don't know how it got in and out of the rooms. I don't know what that smell in Mr. Ramsey's rooms was neither. We've never had it in the building before nor since.

The thing that puzzles me most, though, is how did Mr. Justice know that the new owner would be a young nephew of Mr. Ramsey's and that he would keep Lois Lee on to help straighten out his uncle's business and fall in love with her and marry her within a month?

Nope, I just can't figure that out.

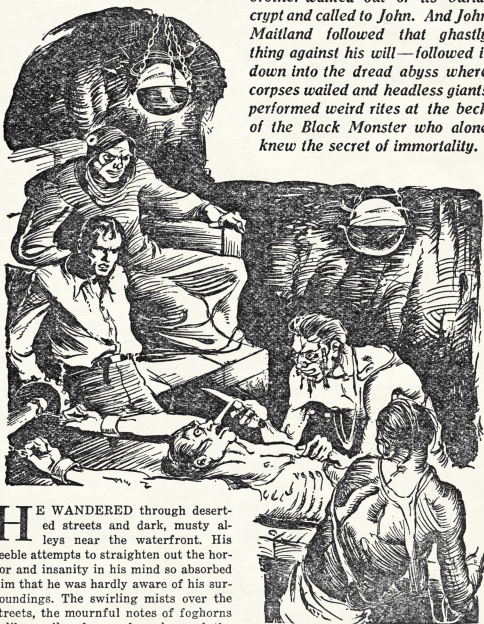
I don't try very hard, for I don't like to think about Mr. Justice. He always gave me the creeps.



Abyss of the Wailing Dead

By Stephen McBarron

Dead for two weeks, yet the tortured corpse of John Maitland's brother walked out of its burial crypt and called to John. And John Maitland followed that ghastly thing against his will—followed it down into the dread abyss where corpses wailed and headless giants performed weird rites at the beck of the Black Monster who alone knew the secret of immortality.



HE WANDERED through deserted streets and dark, musty alleys near the waterfront. His feeble attempts to straighten out the horror and insanity in his mind so absorbed him that he was hardly aware of his surroundings. The swirling mists over the streets, the mournful notes of foghorns—like wails of cursed souls—and the ramshackle buildings with their spiritless black eyes, were all lost to him.

He saw two corpses torturing a third on a medieval rack.

The only thing he clearly saw was a picture indelibly etched in his mind's eye—an emaciated, gray-green face above the putrid-smelling corpse-body of a man who was somehow horribly alive. A man who he knew had been dead for two weeks. No, there was no doubt about that. The animated cadaver he had seen and conversed with in the Carlton Cemetery was *his own brother!*

He had been at the burial two weeks previously. He had kept vigil throughout the night over the thin face of William Maitland that reposed, as he then thought, in blessed, everlasting peace among the silken ruffles of the coffin. He had seen the casket lowered into the damp earth. Had seen the shovels rise and fall until only a long low mound remained to mark the last resting place of the deceased. He had *seen* all this. There had been other witnesses. And yet, only a half hour ago . . .

He had been sitting alone in the library of the Maitland mansion, reading. The huge old house was deathly quiet, empty save for the manservant and himself. Trees touching the outside walls of the house, moved by low, sighing breezes, caused eerie whispers to penetrate the husk of the house and wander aimlessly through the many unoccupied rooms.

And out across the moor, which could be seen from the library windows, the pale moon shone, making the grotesquely twisting shadows of the trees writhe in a slow-moving, insane dance.

But lost to the eerie night sounds, Maitland read from a notebook he had found among the effects of his deceased brother. He had known his brother to be a dabbler in occult things, but never did he think him to have reached such heights — or depths — of unholy knowledge.

The black looseleaf book in John Maitland's hands was a mine of information about the brother he now realized he had never really known. He reached the last written page. It read:

At last I have found my answer. I stumbled upon it at the dance of the Headless Ones of the Tu-Nul. And I owe my success to H.F. It was he who taught me the incan-

tations that are the passwords to that wonderful place; that other dimension where the Headless Ones dance with the Nymphs of Nioom and spawn the horrors of the Dread Abyss. That place where the dread corpses howl. I owe to him and to the Black One who presides over the dance my secret of immortality.

From my knowledge of the Occult, I found the clue. At the dance of the Headless Ones, in the ritual of the Black Master, I, unknown to the other devotees, found the answer. . . .

Tonight, I shall weave the spell and drink the elixir that shall untie the thread that binds body and soul. And when that is accomplished I will know that I need fear death no more. For then, unbound, my soul may roam where it will, and always, if it wish, return to its original habitation.

And when this fragile vessel that is my body succumbs to earthly decay, my spirit shall wing its way to another younger, vital body, dispel the other entity and enter its new abode.

Tonight I shall accomplish this. But first I must tell H.F., my true friend. Perhaps I shall give H.F. the means of immortality. The powers of Life and Death are mine . . . I am like a god. . . .

That was the last entry in William Maitland's notebook, dated October 27. He died on the night of that same day.

JOHAN MAITLAND lowered the book to his knees and stared at the smouldering logs in the giant fireplace. Unable to unravel the maze in his mind, he sighed and laid the book on the table near him.

From beside the book he picked up an amulet, an oval-shaped piece of jade that dangled from an exquisitely worked gold chain. Carved on it, in horrible life-likeness, were the nude figures of a man and woman.

The woman was beautiful, her round limbs imbued with a languorous, serpentine grace. Her minutely appointed face had the evil, almond-shaped eyes and the full lips of a nymph. The man stood a full proportionate foot above her, despite the fact that his beautifully muscled body was headless.

Maitland gazed at the trinket. What horrible occult rite did that engraved stone symbolize? "The Headless Ones of the Tu-Nul . . . The Nymphs of Nioom, spawning the Horrors of what insane gibberish? And who is H. F.?"

His thoughts were cut short by a terrific clamor from the hall. Footsteps—frightened, hastily stumbling footsteps—thundered up the basement stairs. The basement door slammed and the footsteps pounded on toward the library. And as Maitland jumped up from his chair, a hell-born scream rent the still atmosphere of the house.

Nelson, the servant, stumbled with fear-paralyzed muscles into the room.

"The *thing*—behind me!" He stood a moment before the astounded Maitland, his clothes awry, his small body shrunken with fright. Then he moaned, his eyes rolled upward, and he slumped to the floor.

Maitland stepped forward. But just as he started to bend to the unconscious servant, he heard a sound in the dark hall outside the room. The hair bristled on the back of his neck and his stomach became hollow as he froze.

And then it came again. A footstep. Another—one firm one, one dragging, sliding, lame one—a gait the sounds of which he had been hearing all his life, *until two weeks ago!*

He stared horror-stricken at the dark maw of the doorway, waiting breathlessly. And on it came.

Out of the gloom of the hall swayed a pale, sunken-eyed corpse-face. It came nearer, over the threshold of the doorway where it stopped. And tentacles of freezing terror clutched at Maitland's soul as his tortured eyes surveyed the thing before him. His contracting throat muscles managed somehow to move.

"What—who are you?"

Dull, lifeless eyes looked at him from a pallid, decayed face. Bloodless, disintegrating lips writhed, and a voice, as from the dark depths of the tomb, droned: "I am your brother, William."

John Maitland's face was deathly pale. The sweat of fear and horror dampened his body. He tried to laugh, but a brittle choking came instead.

"You!" he said. "It can't be!"

"I am your brother, William Maitland," said the dead face. "And it is true that I died two weeks ago."

MADNESS struck at Maitland's brain. Here, standing before him, actually putrefacting, was the man at whose funeral he had officiated two weeks before. The same man, unmistakably, even down to that lame gait that had always annoyed him during his brother's life. He remembered vividly the waxen face reposing in the coffin. And yet here . . . Was this really madness? An insane hallucination?

"But," his teeth managed to chatter out, "you can't be my brother—shouldn't be! You—he is dead."

The lips of that stony corpse-face muttered in tones without cadence, "You have nothing to fear from me; I am your brother. I have come to you with a purpose of which I must tell you."

The dead face, above its raggedly clothed, fetid body, moved slowly on its withered neck; its bleared, dull eyes scanning the room. "But not here. It is the atmosphere. . . . I have lived here It stifles me. Come."

The gaunt, scarecrow figure turned and walked into the darkness of the hall. Maitland did not want to go. He'd do anything but follow that walking, rotting corpse. It was insanity to even believe in its existence. But an unheard imperative command took hold of his horror-frozen mind and forced him to follow.

They went through back ways, behind the occasional suburban houses, over empty fields. Not very far. And their direction, Maitland saw, would soon bring them to a gap in the high iron fence of the Carlton Cemetery.

Struck with this new terror, he wanted to scream his disapproval, but his vocal chords were paralyzed. Why in heaven's name couldn't he shake off this fearsome lack of will? Why did he have to stumble along in the wake of a thing that should have been held fast in the grip of the grave? What horrible sequence was in store for him in the companionship of his brother's corpse? His brother who was leading him to the city of the dead—for what ghastly purpose?

They walked on the soft loam of the graveyard, between squatting, gray, stone ghosts. Clouds veiled the

moon, and from far off in the distance, through the damp, misty haze, came the eerie cry of a night bird.

Horror battered at Maitland's soul as his trembling legs carried him along in the footsteps of the walking, tattered-malion corpse. He wanted to turn and run, but some force that seemed to come from outside himself glued him to the trail of his dead brother.

They came to a high, square mausoleum. And standing bewildered before it, Maitland let escape from his lips a long, shuddering moan. It was the tomb of William Maitland.

But his reason cried out that all this could not be. He must be insane! Doctor Vorger had warned him against undue mental stress. Had hinted that the disease that was at that time devouring his brother's mind might at any time attack him.

Doctor Vorger it was who had corroborated William Maitland's insanity before his death. William, of course, had rigorously denied it. William had been moody, solitary and hypochondriacal, with a definite psychic tendency.

William thought he saw things beyond the realm of matter. That was one of the reasons, the main one, why Vorger had warned John about his brother; and to be careful himself because of the weak hereditary strain in the blood.

And now, here he was, sharing the fate of his brother. This was the first hallucination, caused by constant brooding over the queer manner of William's death and over his own impending insanity.

BUT no, he wouldn't accept the apparently obvious fact. This was not an hallucination; he would not believe it. Why, there was even the odor of death wafting to him from the spectral figure of his brother. All together, there were the hallucinations of sight, hearing, and smell. He could never suddenly have become *that* insane!

But, coming to that conclusion was enough to make him totter on the brink of lunacy. If all this were not a dream, and if it were not an insane fiction of

his mind, then this walking corpse of his brother's, standing before its own burial place, was alive in some unnatural, ungodly way.

But he had no more time for conjectures, for the ghastly figure that was the resurrected William Maitland gestured for him to follow. Through the open, heavy metal door they entered the fetid darkness of the mausoleum. Quaking with terror in that abysmal, deathly blackness, John Maitland heard the metal door clang shut.

He stood still, too frightened to move, possessed with a mind-shattering fear that the corpse whose presence he felt beside him might reach out and touch him with its rancid, decaying fingers.

A match flared and its light was applied to two large candles, one of which stood on either end of William Maitland's coffin. The light flickered on the damp, glistening walls of the tomb and on William Maitland's horrible corpse face. Deeply sunken, dead eyes gazed out somberly from under the old battered hat at John Maitland.

Then it was that he saw clearly, for the first time, the double horror of that face. The face was shrunken, the flesh stretched over the bones horribly and marked with the beginnings of putrefaction.

But it was not that usual condition of a two-week-old corpse that shocked him. It was that which he had thought were mouldering, spidery festoons of the tomb—long, narrow strips of skin which he could plainly see had been deliberately torn, to hang dangling, from that pallid face.

Those thin horrible lips were moving. "John Maitland," the sepulchral voice said, "it is by the will of another that you have been brought here this night. It is the will of the master that I, your brother, show you the way to the Pit of the Tu-Nul."

Maitland started at the mention of those words. Tu-Nul—what in heaven's name did those two words imply? He remembered the sentences scribbled in the black looseleaf book. The Headless Ones of the Tu-Nul. . . . the Nymphs . . . the

howling dead. Had his brother indeed found an entrance into another dimension, another world? Had he found his elixir of immortality?

Was that ghastly, mouldering human form before him an example of the effects of that elixir? Was that what William Maitland called "eternal life"? He shuddered at the horror of it.

The leaden words of the corpse flowed on in that dismal chamber of death. "You must do as I say, that you may come with me to where the Headless Ones await. That you may be initiated into the ranks of the wailing dead."

Maitland's pent-up horror turned half to anger. "And what if I do not? What is this insane gibberish, William? You are my brother! You are not dead, or you wouldn't be here, breathing, seeing, staring at me!"

The dead lips flickered slightly. "You shall learn only too soon how it is that the dead rise again."

A white bony hand with sunken veins outlined horribly on it, rose to the corpse face, almost touched it, then dropped back again. "You shall hear the wailing of the corpses, and see what it is that makes them wail."

Conversation with that spectral figure of his brother gave Maitland temerity. Corpses don't talk. Ghosts don't breathe.

"But what if I refuse to go with you?"

"You must come. It is the master's wish. If you refuse, he will have your life. He will know immediately of your refusal."

THE matter-of-factness of those words shook Maitland's new-found courage. But no, he mustn't falter. He mustn't even once enter, with his own will, the realm of occult power or his soul would be accursed forever.

"Who is your devilish master? What is he—or his commands—to me? No, William, I refuse!"

The dead man stared steadily at him for what seemed hours. Then there seemed to come an added relaxation into that corpse-face. A frown of mental pain, of mental confusion, appeared on the

high pale brow, and William Maitland put his bony hand to his temple.

"He has heard you. My mind is clouding. Hurry away, my brother . . . Hurry, John. . ."

Suddenly that dreadful corpse-face began moving swiftly from side to side, as if its owner were trying to clear his head, as if trying to awaken from a nightmare or stupor. Words grated from between the dead lips, words that made John Maitland shrink with apprehension.

"No, no, I won't do it! I won't!"

The stony face twitched with the terrible struggle that was going on within. The dead eyes centered on John's face, and words tumbled out of that decaying mouth.

"Quickly, John—go away—quickly. He is telling me to kill you."

John's body grew cold. And he, too, thought to hear a voice, like an echo in a distant cavern, laden with depravity. A voice that egged on William Maitland to the sin of Cain.

John's body seemed to burst. His brain exploded. With one wild sweep, he brushed his brother's pallid form aside, tore open the heavy door of the tomb, and dashed into the graveyard. He ran on madly, the clanging of the tomb door as it closed after him, ringing in his ears.

Breathless, he reached the gap in the cemetery fence. Outside it, he slowed to a walk, despite his intense wish to get as far away as possible.

His clothes were damp on him from his heated body. His eyes unconsciously bulged and great dents were bitten in his lips. Horror had temporarily frozen his brain. He walked onward like an automaton, not clearly aware of his destination.

He walked through the city, in a large aimless circle, past the waterfront, then back to the suburbs where he lived. Near the horrible cemetery that had spawned the awful living dead.

He came to Margaret Fane's house. Slowly his mind was clearing and his strength returning. But a sense that had come over him of a new impending danger, and the need for speed to avoid it,

became more than a cloudy intuition. It became a lucid and compelling idea.

He knocked on the door and waited, hatless, his clothes dishevelled, his eyes wild, his face strained. He had seen the light in her room and knew she was up, reading probably. Margaret had lived alone in that house since her mother's death. But soon she would leave it forever; they would soon live together in blissful happiness.

As he waited there on the dark porch, once he started nervously, thinking he heard, somewhere among the shadowed surroundings of the house, the stealthy, swishing gait of his dead brother. He wiped his hand across his sweating forehead; then, getting panicky, he rapped louder.

He heard a movement, footsteps, a chain tinkled, and the door opened slightly. Margaret Fane's pretty face, her thick, dark hair mussed, appeared in the crack.

"John!" she gasped. "What on earth are you doing up at this hour?" She unloosened the chain and let him in.

He stalked into the living room and sat down. Frowning, Margaret pulled her revealing negligee closer to her and looked anxiously at him.

"For heaven's sake, John, what is it? You're as white as a sheet!"

His haggard eyes looked up, found comfort in her tender blue ones.

"Margaret," he said, "tell me frankly. Am I—do you think I am insane?"

She caught her breath and stared at him. "John!"

His head slumped. "I know," he said. "I shouldn't even think it. But I am afraid—afraid of what Doctor Vorger said, that I might lost my mind."

"Oh, John, please!" she entreated. "You can't go on like this. You mustn't think of such things. You're nervous and distraught. And that Doctor Vorger. I hate him. You shouldn't have anything to do with that man. He's—he's a monster."

JOHAN MAITLAND'S head jerked up, his body stiffened, and his eyes stared horribly at the door. "Margaret," he breathed, "*what was that?*"

Suddenly frightened, she listened. "Why, it's nothing, John—leaves falling."

"Are you sure? Are you sure it wasn't footsteps — my brother William's footsteps?"

"Of course not. What makes you say that? Good heavens, your brother is dead!"

"No, Margaret, no. He is alive! Ghostly, sinfully alive. I saw him tonight."

He felt her body tauten, edge away. He couldn't blame her.

Before she could voice her horrified thoughts, a knock sounded on the door.

"That's strange," she said, "It's so late."

But her mind wasn't on her words. She took one worried look at John and walked to the door.

He wanted to stop her. His whole being screamed against it. What loathsome, undead thing stood waiting out there—waiting to be let in, to loose its fetid stench and horrid presence into that cleanly house? His throat rasped, "No!"

But she was at the door, opening it, letting some one in.

"Doctor Vorger."

Footsteps sounded in the hall. Then, in the doorway of the room, glaring down at him, was a tall, dark, savage-looking man. The newcomer was over six feet, every inch of which was packed with brawn and muscle. Somber clothing stretched over the huge frame, looking out of place on it, like clothes on a gorilla. The man's eyes, steely, penetrating, mirroring a tremendous will, frowned down at Maitland.

"You have done something again against my will," the doctor said, his deep voice rumbling up from his great chest. "I need not be a physician to see you are very much overwrought. What has happened?"

Margaret's small, pale face appeared from the darkness of the hall.

"Nothing has happened, doctor," she said. "John is quite all right, aren't you, dear? And I am sure you need not fear for him while he is here."

He turned to her and there was something savage in his gesture. "He is safe

nowhere. His trouble is within. He can't run away from it."

He wheeled his ponderous frame around to Maitland. "I am glad I found you. I called at your home and saw you had gone, quite hurriedly it seemed because you left without your hat and coat. On a night like this. And I found your butler unconscious on the floor of your living room."

"John!" said Margaret, her face mirroring her sudden anxiety.

Maitland nodded wearily. "I was about to tell you, Margaret—" He stopped suddenly.

He had just been about to tell them everything that had happened, when the horrible realization struck him that if he did, there would no longer be the slightest doubts in their minds about his sanity.

But then, after all, he was too poor a liar to readily invent some other story to cover up the true one. And anyway, in his tired, worn-out condition, he didn't much care what anyone thought of the state of his mind. He was heartily sick of the whole thing. He spared no detail in the telling.

Margaret stared at her fiancé with wide-eyed horror.

"Your—your own brother?" stammered the doctor. "And you could swear to it?"

"It was William Maitland. None other." The way John said that, as if he didn't care whether they believed it or not, assured them that he was sincere.

MARGARET was pallid, her eyes round with questioning terror, herself looking like a beautiful dead thing, then.

Suddenly the doctor leaned toward John. "Tell me. Do you know what experiments it was your brother had intended before his death?"

Startled, John said: "How did you know about that?"

"That black notebook. You left it open on your living room table."

John nodded slowly. "No, I don't know. He must have been mad."

"I thought so once," said Doctor Vorger. "Now I have my doubts."

John laughed sarcastically. "But about me, I suppose there's no question."

"On the contrary," the doctor replied, much to Margaret's and John's surprise. "I believe you have spoken the truth about your experience tonight."

He looked up, saw their amazement. "I have been making inquiries. Others, it seems, have seen corpses that walk. Your butler, for instance—I brought him to consciousness. His physical condition was proof enough of the terrible shock he suffered when he saw what he did. Travers, the caretaker of Carlton Cemetery, is another who came to me with a wild tale of the walking dead.

"Jeffrey Blaine, Margaret's cousin, is another. He said he saw something prowling around his house on the other side of the grove. Something he could swear had the dead face of Harvey Wells, my own valet who died of heart disease a week ago!"

The doctor hesitated and frowned. "And that black book." Suddenly he shot a tight-eyed glance at his listeners. "Who is H.F.?"

"Why," cried Margaret impulsively, "that's—"

They had been watching her face. John saw that she was staring at the window, her eyes frozen with horror. Her words had broken off as her hands flew to her throat. Just before she slumped in a faint to the floor, John twisted toward the window.

Outlined there against the bluish night-light, was the ghastly dead face of Harvey Wells, Doctor Vorger's former valet!

The next thing John knew, the lights were out, and he was staring at that window, now without a silhouette. There came a cool draft, and over everything spread the terrible stench of rotting corpses. Dark shadows flowed in through the door. The stench became unbearable. A rancid hand touched John Maitland's horror-tortured face, and he flailed out furiously, maniacally, struck a punk corpse-body that staggered out of his reach with the impact of the blow.

"Doctor!" he yelled. "Doctor Vorger, help!"

Then he saw the doctor's huge form bent over Margaret. In the dim moon-glow seeping in the windows, he saw the doctor's saturnine face grin down at the girl's white body. He saw a gnarled giant paw reach toward her soft white flesh. . . .

"Vorger! Damn you!"

He rushed forward. A bony corpse-body stepped in his way. The odor of mouldering things, of dampness and decay caught in his nostrils. And then something crashed down on his head.

As he sank to the floor, he was dimly aware of the chief characteristic of that last corpse-face that had risen before his own. It had long, narrow strips, deliberately torn from the flesh, hanging like mouldering festoons from its face.

MAITLAND came to consciousness quickly. The room was silent, and over it hung the heavy pall of death stench. He rose, stumbled about. He was alone there, alone in the house, and they had gone.

Unstrung and shivering in the darkness with horror and helplessness, he called out, "Margaret!" When only a ghostly echo rolled back through the silent rooms to him, he called her name again, wildly, hysterically.

They had taken her! Those horrible, undead corpses had taken her, intending her innocent white body for some vile orgy of the dead. What were they doing to her—those putrid, unclean, leprous hands? Maybe even now, in some loathsome den beneath the cemetery, they had her. . . .

He could stand it no longer. After rushing from the house, he stood panting outside, peering frantically in all directions. There! Beneath the trees on the other side of the field were shadows, slithering, loathsome shadows. And there was the moon, glinting on a snowy white body, making it a silvery wraith among the dark ones. It was they! It must be, prowling stealthily off in the direction of the cemetery.

He ran across the field, his hair flying, his coat flapping.

"Stop! Stop!" he cried. "Don't take her! It's me—me you want! Don't touch her again!"

And even as he ran, hearing no answer, he shrilled forth awful invectives, damning unmercifully the unclean things that stalked abroad that night.

He came to the trees and he heard only the low rustle of the leaves, like sibilant, mocking laughter. He ran on madly in the darkness of the grove, cursing, screaming, tearing himself and his clothes on the branches.

He stumbled and fell prone on his face as he reached the other side of the grove. He hastily picked himself up, ran a few steps more, and then, seeing no one, stood still, dazed and undecided.

They were gone, vanished into the still night air. And Margaret with them. What now? Where would he search? Had he lost them in the grove? But no, the group of trees was too small; he couldn't have slipped by them.

As he stood there under the mocking moon, a scent came to him. His nose twitched, and the hair prickled on his scalp. There was a house, there ahead in the direction of the cemetery—Jeffrey Blaine's house. From over it, a breeze was coming toward Maitland. . . .

And on that breeze floated the fetid odor of rotting corpses!

They were taking her to the cemetery. They had probably just passed Margaret's cousin's house as he had emerged from the grove. That was why they had disappeared so quickly.

He dashed toward the house, new hope stirring in him. There was a light in a lower window. Jeffrey Blaine was home, all unconscious of the dreadful things that had just shambled past his home. Jeffrey Blaine would help, and John Maitland would need help, if mortal aid was not futile. Blaine would be sitting in his living room, writing now. Perhaps he would be glad to see some one, even if that some one wanted his assistance to track the dead.

Maitland flew up the three steps to the porch, knocked on the door. There was a delay that seemed to the frantic Maitland to last hours. Then a rustling behind the

door, and it opened. A blond, well-built man with incongruously deep-sunken eyes stood there, stepped back to let Maitland in.

"Hello, John." And seeing Maitland's white, set face, Blaine gasped: "What's the trouble?"

"Hurry, Jeff. We can't wait. You must help me—come with me immediately. Margaret—something, some one has taken Margaret!"

Blaine stared in astonishment in the dimly lit vestibule. "Taken her! You mean kidnaped?"

"Yes, yes! In heaven's name, come quickly, before it's too late. They just passed by this house with her."

BLAINÉ turned suddenly toward the inner house in desperate, spontaneous haste. "All right, John. I'll be right with you. I'll get a flashlight. You can't see out there."

He turned again, anxious. "Good Lord, John, you're white as a sheet. You can hardly stand. Here, come into the house—just a second while I get the light—and have a drink. Brandy is on the table."

John stumbled into the house, into the lighted study while Blaine rummaged somewhere back farther in the dark hall. "Hurry, Jeff!"

Yes, he needed a drink. It would steady him for the coming struggle with the powers of hell.

He found he was sitting down, drinking. Not one glass, but two, three. Blaine's face was there before him across the paper-littered table. He saw Blaine's mouth move, but he heard no words.

Then the room began to spin slowly, sickeningly. Everything revolved, everything but Blaine's face which had become misty, a white thing in a whirling darkness. The white thing became clearer, then fainter again, coming to within an inch of his clammy perspiring face, receding to great empty dark distances.

The face came again—close, very close—and it was no longer the face of Jeffrey Blaine, but a horrible, leering corpse-face, whose sunken, blazing eyes beat into his brain; whose bloodless lips gibbered unheard.

A dim, green glow overspread everything. Maitland rose and automatically followed a dreadful, black-robed corpse. They moved ghostlike through mouldering passageways, through dank, fetid air, with only a small lamp in the skeleton hand of the thing ahead shedding its green rays over cobwebbed, slug-infested, glistening walls that reeked of dampness and decay.

Once they passed a horrible thing that dangled by a rope from the unseen roof of the tunnel. Maitland saw it was the nude body, suspended head down, of a mutilated woman. He thought he heard a whisper from ahead. "A traitorous nymph."

They passed another nude body of a woman stretched horribly across the passage, so low that Maitland and his guide had to bend their heads. Blood dripped—splattered on his cheek. He wanted to scream, and could not.

Green-glowing darkness. Down, down they went, into the bowels of the earth. Among slimy, rubbery things whose pale eyes glistened malevolently; among spidery things that brushed against the hands and face, torturing the mind with unutterable loathing. Weird sounds—rats scurrying. And over all was the horrid odor of dead things, of decay, of the grave.

A scarlet glow appeared ahead in the passage, outlining the fearful figure of the striding corpse. A glow that brought with it the odor of sulphurous warmth.

They came out on a ledge that looked down on a huge, bowl-shaped cavern. And through Maitland's numbed mind went the seething, white-hot realization that he had reached the dread abode of the Evil One. Below him stretched—hell!

The cavern was lighted by a weird, red luminescence that came from copper bowls, filled with liquid fire, that were suspended at intervals from swivels attached to the damp walls. At one end of the large, high-domed place was a pulpit on which stood a figure, cowed and robed in red flannel, who read something in a funereal voice from a scroll in his scrawny talons.

Before the pulpit were placed three

coffins, side by side. And past these, circling around what looked like medieval torture instruments clustered in the middle of the rock floor, were a dozen dancers doing a bizarre, unholy dance.

He thought of the little jade amulet his brother had owned—of the figures on it. *They were down here—alive!* Beautiful, evil nymphs whose eyes shone with a cynical, unearthly fire! Giant men whose muscled, severed necks dripped red!

Maitland's soul was sick. But he could make no physical protest. He and the tall corpse-figure waited silently on the ledge, in the shadow of the ledge itself.

THE sepulchral voice of the red-robed one in the pulpit droned on, easily heard above the primitive tom-tom beats whose source was not discernible, above the whisper of swirling, naked feet. . . .

"And these dead who shall rise again, shall come forth from their coffins in the name of the Evil One, in the name of the Unmentionable Name, in the name of him who lives on the Path of the Left Hand, of him who is our master—the Great Black One—the lord of the Tu-Nul!

"And having risen and found life again, they shall know no name but his, no word but his, no command but his."

The voice stopped. It was the end of a long incantation which had preceded the arrival of the newcomers to the cavern. The red-robed figure laid down the scroll and made a gesture with his left hand. The dancers stopped their wild gyrations, and stood ringed about the gruesome torture instrument. A headless giant strode toward the pulpit, stopped beside the coffin to its extreme left.

The droning rose again. "Let Lawrence Haines be brought forth, that he may rise again to live in the name of the Great Black One!"

Maitland saw a movement in the figure beside him. The Great Black One! Was this thing beside him the evil one in whose name these hellish rites were being performed? He was robed in black. And he showed satanic leer of pride as

the dead were invoked. Yes! That living dead thing at his side was the lord of the Tu-Nul!

What could all this insanity mean? Was he, John Maitland, dead? Was this some other world where the spirits of the dead were come to life again? Was Margaret here, too? Yes, they must have her; though he could see no sight either of her or of the other putrescent corpses.

Yes, this must be their noisome lair. The thing beside him was one of them—the master of them all. But he must wait to find out, must control his anguished impatience.

Why did he have to remain stock-still there on the ledge, unable to move unless at a gesture from his horrid companion?

His terror-laden soul watched through glazed eyes. The headless giant was bending beside the last coffin, lifting off the heavy cover. Maitland could see the face that was exposed—a grayish-hued, hollow-cheeked corpse. The giant took the limp body from its resting place, brought it to within the circle of waiting dancers, and propped it against a ponderous thing of wood, steel and hemp—the medieval rack, that most dreadful of torture machines!

Maitland heard the figure on the pulpit call two names—and one of them was Maitland!

How could they know his name? How could they ever expect him to respond in his paralyzed condition? But no, it was not he who was meant. He saw two figures emerge from a partitioned enclosure at the other end of the cavern. One of them was his dead brother!

The voice from the pulpit droned: "The Great Black One is here, watching. He is there"—a bony finger pointed to the ledge. "You cannot see him, but know you that he is there, presiding."

The two corpse-figures stood motionless, side by side, below and before the ledge. Maitland's brother's pallid face was all too familiar, despite the mouldering flesh that hung from it in strips. The other thing who was his brother's companion was Doctor Vorger's dead valet.

They waited, looking upward with

dead eyes. Then they received a gruff command from the now blazing-eyed thing beside Maitland. They turned and walked stiff-legged to the corpse propped against the rack.

Maitland watched horrified as they tied the dead man's arms and legs to the slanting machine. Then the torture began.

THE sinful dance of the Nymphs of Niroom and of the Headless Ones began again, even as those horrible things, one on either side of the rack, began to turn the windlasses at feet and head of the corpse that lay on it.

What dreadful profanation of the dead was this? Torture the dead! Was there rhyme or reason to the idiotic sacrilege? And his brother—actually participating.

Maitland would have laughed hysterically, madly, if he could have laughed at all, at that sight. Two corpses torturing a third on a medieval rack while creatures from some abysmal nether world cavorted deliriously in a lurid light that shone from hell. And beside him stood Sathanus himself, disguised in the acquired body of a putrefacting corpse.

For a moment the unholy humor of a maniac glowed in his eyes as he looked downward. Then it was gone, replaced by staring horror.

Below him ensued the most terrible orgy imaginable as the tom-tom beat faster and faster, louder and louder, until Maitland thought his head would split with the clamor.

He could not hear the creaking of the rack, but he could see those horrid dead ones turning—the corpse on it lengthening—growing taut.

They stopped when they had the dead man stretched horribly, and tied the windlasses. They took other instruments. They placed hot coals, in pincers equally hot, against naked feet. They dug long needles into the flesh.

Then finally there came to Maitland a horrible realization when he saw his brother take a razor-sharp scalpel to that hollow-cheeked face on the rack, and begin peeling off the skin in long strips.

Then this was what had happened to

William's face. He had been as dead as was that new still corpse on the dreadful machine. And they had tortured his body. Why?

All the while the pandemonium of the dancers continued. But Maitland was concentrating his half-numbered faculties on the thing on the rack, his eyes riveted to the sunken face.

Was that a flicker of an eyelid? Had that thing begun to breathe?

There was no mistaking it. The corpse's chest, even stretched as it was, was rising and falling—gasping for air. And then the pallid eyelids opened, gazed at the dome of the cavern in frightful pain.

A scream lashed high over the bedlam. Another. And Maitland felt himself tottering, the paralysis at last leaving him, unable any longer to resist the force of his pent-up insanity. For the screams had come from that torn, stretched thing on the rack that had been dead!

Maitland crumpled to the ledge. The Black One beside him looked down, leered.

"Loud wail the dead," a voice said. "But it is not for mortals to see and hear these things. Come. I shall lead you into the land of the dead. You shall have a resting place for awhile." A bony finger pointed to the row of coffins before the pulpit. "Then you too shall wail, and live again."

Somehow Maitland's body was on its feet again, following the Black One down an incline into the pit where the mad ones danced and the dead wailed.

When they reached the bottom, a sten-torian voice boomed through the cavern. The voice of the Black One. "That is enough," it said. "He lives again. Un-loose him."

The thing that was now miraculously imbued with life was taken off the rack, held limply. The Headless Ones and the Nymphs crowded in. Then Maitland saw what they were doing. They had taken him from his torturers and were playing with him.

THEY pushed that live corpse-thing from one to another, laughing wildly, drunkenly. The Black One watched,

his shrunken lips grinning in brutal sarcasm, his stretched, parchmentlike skin wrinkling in silent laughter.

But then they stopped, and William Maitland and Vorger's valet took the newly resurrected corpse away to the enclosure at the rear of the cavern.

The untiring dancers swung into their rhythm again, their beastly, insatiable, paroxysms of motion. The Black One gestured imperiously for Maitland to follow, and they walked to the pulpit where the cowed one stood, to turn facing the three coffins—one empty now—and the dancers.

The red form on that devil's pulpit signaled for silence. His voice droned out, in representation of the silent master.

"Let Margaret Fane be brought forth, that she may die—and live again in the service of the Great Black One."

Maitland's soul screamed for bodily utterance. Margaret! They had her here, in this unholy place! Yet he could not move a muscle, with his own will, to protect her—to do *something*?

The headless giant was walking toward them, toward the second coffin. Maitland watched with unmoving countenance, though inwardly he suffered twenty hells. If his body were only self-articulate! But what would he have been able to do? The headless giant was fully seven feet tall and built in proportion, and there were others. At least, though, he would have had the satisfaction of knowing he had tried his best for Margaret.

Yes, it was she. That headless fiend, that grisly monstrosity, gifted with some uncanny instinct to find unerringly what it searched for, lifted her soft, limp body from the casket. How beautiful she looked in the arms of that hideous, unearthly giant.

She was carried to the center of the floor and propped against the rack as her predecessor had been. Maitland's whole being surged forward, everything but his stubborn body which could not shake off the dreadful lethargy induced by the Great Black One. Did he have to stand there immovably while they befouled with their putrid touch that innocent

young body? His soul threshed in anguish at the husk that held it captive.

Then a thing happened that gave Maitland back his sanity, that started a chain of logical ideas, and made reason paramount once more. The whole bizarre experience became startlingly clear, save for some minor mystifying details.

The headless giant who had carried Margaret to the torture instruments within the circle of fantastic dancers, turned and faced the pulpit, waiting for an order. The cowed one on the pulpit no longer mattered. The Master was there now, presiding in person. He raised his hand in signal. And the Headless One turned toward Margaret Fane.

Maitland gazed, horrified, but his mind was coming alive. A question was running like liquid fire through his brain. That headless giant had turned to the Black One to await the signal. *Why did he have to turn if he had no head, no eyes to see?*

This then, was no phantasmal scene of the dead come to life. This was nothing but some degenerate cult mimicking the powers of hell.

The trend of his mind toward sanity brought his old strength back into his body, and he knew that it was his horror and numbed mentality that had aided the Black Master in overpowering his mind.

He felt the blood begin to course furiously, pounding through his veins. An intense joy surged in him, even as the weird dancers again struck up their rhythm. He could move. His will was his own again!

EVEN as he stood there a moment, fiercely, exuberantly contemplating destruction to everything within his reach, he saw a movement. And he gazed in new-born horror as the lid of the third coffin slowly raised. A hand crept forth from it. There was a massive emerald ring on a finger of that hand. A ring that had fascinated him every time Doctor Vorger had come to visit him.

Doctor Vorger must be in that coffin. Alive! A wave of relief surged through Maitland. He glanced warily around. The

ghoulish, black-robed thing beside him leered with its decaying lips at Margaret's lovely body wilting before the rack. The cowed one was as obviously entranced. The time was come to destroy, to wash away these unclean things.

Maitland whirled fiercely, sending all his one hundred and eighty pounds, in one iron fist, to the head of the Great Black Master. His knuckles cracked through that hideous face to flesh and bone within. The Black One went down as if struck in the head with an axe. Immediately pandemonium ensued.

The red-cowled one on the pulpit snarled viciously. But Maitland stepped up to him, clutched strong fingers around a scrawny throat, and threshed the red figure about him as if it were a rag doll. He dropped the inert mass to the floor and leaped toward the dancers who were staring spellbound.

Even as he passed the third coffin, its lid flew off, and the giant, dishevelled figure of Doctor Vorger flailed after him.

Maitland, his body damp with the comfortable sweat of exertion, strode unhesitatingly toward the Headless One that crouched by Margaret, its neck dripping red. His fist shot out.

His bunched hand, traveling with terrific force and weight, crackled through and sank to the wrist in the abnormally broad chest of the giant. The awesome creature slumped to the ground, a horrible sight with that torn, gaping hole between its powerful shoulders.

Doctor Vorger stood for a second to look down at the figure at his feet. "I thought so," he said. "Hell, but they had me fooled!"

The nymphs were huddling together, whimpering. The five remaining headless giants stood in stupefaction for a moment, then turned and ran. Maitland and the huge doctor caught up with and felled two of them, then another, and the remaining two not far in a dark tunnel.

Returning to the still unconscious Margaret, Maitland covered her as best he could with his coat, after ascertaining she was merely sleeping off the effects of a drug. Then he and the doctor stripped the ropes off the torture rack

and used them to bind the two robed figures and the giants who were horribly sprawled about the cavern. As they took special precaution with the tying of the black-robed one, Maitland ripped off what remained of a hideously leering, *papier-mâché* mask.

Maitland said: "Drugged and hypnotized as I was, that damned thing had me awfully worried. I might have known it was Blaine."

"Yes," said the doctor. "He is the H.F. mentioned in your brother's black book. H.F.—Harry Ferris—that's the pen name under which he wrote for periodicals, the initials of which your brother used to keep his dark association with Blaine a secret."

BEYOND the partition at the end of the cavern, they found the idiotically staring corpse-figures of William Maitland and Harvey Wells sitting on either side of the newly "resurrected" corpse.

Looking down at them, Doctor Vorger shook his head sympathetically. "Maybe," he said, "we can make Blaine give them back their minds. Maybe it is too late."

After they threatened the six cowering girls with exposure and arrest if they should ever again return to the cavern, Maitland, carrying Margaret, and Doctor Vorger, left that place of awful memory.

When the Doctor reached his home, not long after, he telephoned the police and sent them to the cavern.

The next day, Maitland, his bride-to-be, and the huge, dark doctor sat together in Maitland's library, Margaret's face bright and cheerful now, though a dark shadow still lingered on it. The doctor was speaking.

"You made a mistake, John, when you misunderstood my merely professional attitude toward Miss Fane when they came after us in her home. I heard you curse me, just before those creatures slugged me. I had stooped in sudden concern for Margaret's life, after she had fallen—felt for heart-beats."

John knew that it was true, and he was embarrassed. But the doctor mercifully continued.

"After they slugged me, they took Miss Fane and me to Blaine's house on the other side of the grove, intending to go back for you later. There I came to my senses but feigned unconsciousness that I might overhear the conversation between Blaine and another, who we afterward learned was the cemetery caretaker, Travers—a brother dabbler in occult things. William Maitland, I am sorry to say, was, before his supposed death, their third partner.

"This cult of the Tu-Nul was a brain child of the half-mad Blaine which, some years ago, actually became real. Some of this I learned while Margaret and I lay on the floor of Blaine's study. The rest came from Blaine's lips when I went to see him today in his cell.

"The cult, as I said, eventually became real. Blaine found a half dozen rich young men from the neighborhood, all of them under-sized weaklings, and gave them their headless, papier-mâché torsos to put on for the dance. The women were jaded members of various fast-living sets, looking for a new thrill which they found in the Pit of the Tu-Nul. The pit which is, as you now know, a cavern in the cliff wall back of your own, Miss Fane's and Jeffrey Blaine's houses.

"About the risen corpses—that is a different, more horrible matter. Your brother stumbled upon something he was positive would insure eternal life. Whether he had the truth or not we will never know. He confided his secret to Jeffrey Blaine who saw a means to power in it for himself. He apparently murdered your brother, using the newly discovered elixir, while they were conducting the final experiment. Then he stole the elixir and its formula. You can see for yourself that he never achieved what William Maitland intended—eternal life.

"It was your brother's belief that with his elixir—and certain rites which Jeffrey Blaine never learned because of his haste to do away with his friend—he could loose his soul and send it away into another healthier, younger body, and continue the process indefinitely. All Jeffrey Blaine had was the elixir. But that was enough for him.

"He injected it into Harvey Wells, besides your brother, and that other poor creature. They died presumably of heart disease, and were buried. They were really only in a state of suspended animation.

"Then came Blaine's first disappointment. He worked on the first cadaver he had exhumed by his paid ghoul, Travers, but failed to revive it. Then he hit upon a plan. He knew that the subconscious mind of the corpse was alive. William Maitland told him that was the only thread that linked those apparent corpses to life. His alternative was, then, to reach that subconscious mind. You know how he finally achieved success—by torturing dead men.

"It is a well-known psychological fact that though a body in a very deep coma will not respond to painful stimuli, the subconscious mind, nevertheless, receives and records such impressions. Blaine's stimuli were so powerful he actually forced the subconscious mind to respond through the body. But to his surprise he found he had nothing but idiots on his hands.

"However, an accident brought to light dormant possibilities. In a fit of anger at the apparent failure of your brother's elixir, he told one of his resurrected corpses to 'go out and jump in the river.' Imagine his astonishment when the ragged figure rose and walked out of the house toward the cliff overlooking the river.

"Blaine caught him in the act of jumping off. To have a slave, or slaves, that would unhesitatingly do even *that* for you . . . It is very obvious what a man like Jeffrey Blaine could do with such power. He could send his walking dead on any mission he wished—to steal, to kidnap, to murder!"

"But why," asked John, "did he want to kill us?"

"He knew you, at least, had read that black book of William's. He was afraid you might have seen something in it that might have brought suspicion on him, and that you would have confided, or did confide, your information to us. He wasn't sure. But with this new horrible

force he had with which to satisfy his greed and lust, he wasn't taking any chances. His best bet was to murder all of us and move to another state, unless it could be so arranged that no suspicion would fall on him, in which case he would have stayed."

Margaret Fane shuddered, but found solace in John's comforting arm.

"Do you think," said Maitland anxiously, "there is any chance of recovering the mind of my brother—and of the other two, Doctor?"

The doctor compressed his lips and shook his head. "You might as well know now, John. They will have to be sent to an institution. It would have been better if they had been, and remained, truly dead."

After the doctor left, Maitland stared haggardly into space.

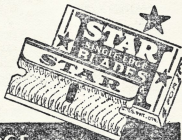
Margaret pulled his face down, kissed him, and he found nepenthe.

"Anyway," she said, "we loosed them from the slave-chains of that insane creature of the devil."



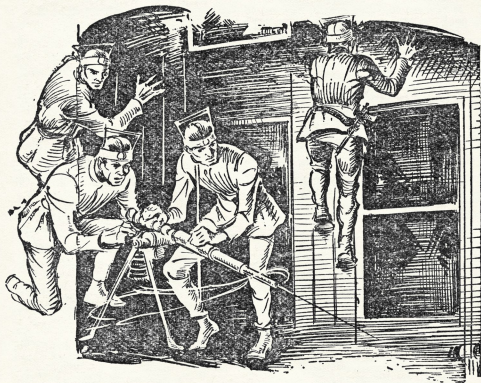
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Time Takes a Holiday



Bill Shakespeare got the shock of his life that day at fifteen. But when he recovered, he got an even worse shock. For there was no sound, no motion, no human activity. Not even the sun moved. Somebody had played a dirty trick on the world. And it made Bill jittery, then it made him mad. And he swore that he'd discover who had stolen—time.

I FELT the shock, hot but not too hot. But I couldn't understand the peculiar cracking noise that seemed to continue for a second or two. I got up from the concrete floor of the power plant expecting to be ribbed for falling. There was a flat silence, an absence of all that was sound, and for a frozen interval I thought the shock had left me deaf. Then I heard my foot scrape on the floor as I turned around.

My cripes, what a sight! I might have been in a wax museum.

The chief was, or had been, walking toward me. He was like a long, slim wax figure. His left foot was ready to be put down, his right hand was in front of him, a faint trail of cigarette smoke scribing the swing of his arm.

I blinked foolishly and looked toward the big Diesel engine. It was not running. The operator was coming

When a strange race from Mars invades the earth.

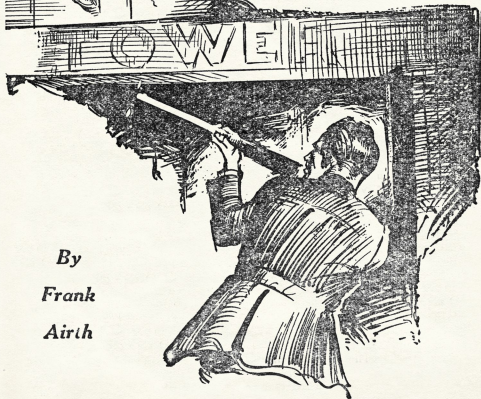
down the ladder, his feet together and lifted clear of the steps, his hands open and supporting his weight on the hand-



rails like slides. Even from that distance I could see that the speed of his descent had pushed the hair back from his temples. But he was a wax figure, motionless. And the two maintenance men, hauling up a piston with a chain fall, were museum pieces, too.

And that flat absence of noise! It was unholy, a nothingness such as I had never heard before. I moved my foot again, and I heard it make a noise, I said "Ah," like a patient before a throat specialist. My throat said "Ah" and my ears heard it. I put my hand out and touched the exciter of the little two hundred KW generator set near the MG set that had shocked me. I felt the oilstained green paint of the exciter smooth under my troubled hand.

They lifted their feet off the sidewalk and scooted up the side of the building.



By
Frank
Airth

SOMETHING was wrong. The big Diesel had stopped. The motor-generator set was still. And the four men of the crew were as motionless as figures in stone. It didn't add up right.

I thought I was crazy and I high-tailed it out of the plant. But my feet slid to a quick stop for on the ice plant platform, "Less" Forty, my buddy was upending a three hundred pound block of ice—and together they made a figure still as wax. The iceman in his old Model A truck was another bit of sculpture work. And there was no noise except noise that I made. I said "Ah" again; and my ears heard "Ah," but nothing else.

By now I was really jittery; my hands shook violently when I fired up a cigarette, and I felt my teeth chattering as if I were freezing cold. Something was decidedly wrong.

It was the same everywhere I looked. I might have been strolling through a wax museum. I *was* in a museum. But I was not strolling, and the figures were not wax. I was walking in an instant of life cut out of the flight of time.

The automobiles on the streets should have been moving. Speedometers were registering; thin fogs of smoke could be seen at the exhausts of the oil hogs. But they were standing still.

I saw the wax figure of a boy scampering from the front wheel of a truck; with the driver, his face twisted from his whole-souled effort, pulling hard on the steering wheel. I lifted the boy and put him on the sidewalk. He felt as real as life, but he held whatever position I put him in. I folded his arms and left him standing there like an Indian.

I ducked into Gyp Miller's bar. It was the same thing there. "Horse," Biff, Wayne, and "Gyp" had their heads together at a table—in the act of concocting ways and means to make a pile of dough in three weeks without being too crooked or working too hard, I supposed. For that was what they usually did at a table. And it made me blue suddenly for they did not look up and

shout, "Hi, 'Shake'! Come on over—and bring an idea!" Wax people don't talk.

I went behind the bar and mixed myself a Panther's Kiss, feeling the need of something strong. My cigarette was smoked up. I took another one, gulped down that scorching beverage, went out and climbed into my car—Horse had been using it—but when I stepped on the starter nothing happened.

For the next few minutes I ran about trying starters, horns, lights, and all with the same result. It was no sale. I could push a car and it would move, I could turn the motor with a crank; but no battery had any juice in it.

All through our little town it was the same thing. Everybody and everything was caught like a painting or a still shot.

In a drug store, I noticed the soda sleet filling a coca cola glass. The glass was about half full and the water was running; but it was all in wax, a still shot, so to speak.

I broke the water stream with my finger. It felt exactly the way water always feels, and after I had broken that stream the glass promptly filled up and ran over. I shut off the pump and the water stopped.

A man at the fountain had flipped a cigarette away, and the cigarette hung in the air not far from his fingers. It was still burning but it was not being consumed by the fire. I picked it out of the air and it appeared normal. I took a drag on it and it began to burn up. I let it go and it dropped to the floor in the regulation manner. I stepped on it and it mashed flat and went out.

So what? And why was I left in a suspended world? Or was only our little town turned into a wax museum? I left the store.

THIS THING was getting on my nerves. "You're dreaming, Shake," I said aloud as, looking back at Hannah Dale getting out of a car parked at the curb—the gal has legs—I bumped full speed into a telephone pole. But the *bong* that rang in my head told me that I was not dreaming.

I went back to the drug store, got a cigar and put it in Hannah's mouth, and I put a match in her hand, then went on about my business.

At The Bear And Buffalo, the blonded blond was putting a cup of coffee before a customer—some traveling man, a stranger to me—and she was spilling a little of it, as usual. But coffee lapping over the side of the cup was not falling to the saucer. And in the kitchen, the eight-ball was flipping a flapjack, and it was half over and hanging in the air.

The search for a living, breathing person lasted until what my dollar-twenty-nine ticker said was midnight. But every other time piece I looked at read somewhere around 5:15—which was the moment that such of the world as I could see was robbed of its race with time.

My watch had made me hungry, and the idea came that perhaps no food would be forthcoming. But I recollected the slug from Gyp's bar and the cigarette that had burned up after I had touched it.

A bicycle furnished transportation back to The Bear And Buffalo. There I drank the coffee meant for the stranger and put the empty cup in his hand. I hauled down the pancake the eight-ball had flipped, put it with the two he had already cooked, and ate them. I scouted around, packed my stomach as full as I like to feel it and then went on home with no particular purpose in mind.

I remember that, for what the blazes could I do? I kept wondering. There was no breath of air, no passing of time. The sun was right where it was when the thing happened. If I touched anything it came back to normal; if I broke a stream of smoke by walking through it, the smoke bent out to let me by and stayed in its new place. The whole world had gone screwball.

I stayed at Ma Herring's place. Dollie, the big, fat, black maid was in the front doorway, the broom in her hands on the outstroke. She was so big I

couldn't reach around her to pick her up. So I hung one arm over my shoulder and dragged her like a sack of meal out on the porch. Then I stood her up, put the broom in her hands like a boat and aimed it at a row of flower pots on a shelf that decorated the banister railing. I don't know why I did it, but I did. I went into the living room then and sat down.

The hard adjustment necessary to face this strange reality had brought back my common sense. I had just about whipped the jitters, and my nut was churning itself upside down as it fumbled for reasons why. Not that I entertained any notions of rushing out and fixing a world so all the clocks could tick again. I was just curious, if you'll pardon an understatement.

I didn't know much about crazy people, but I thought I missed being off my base by a wide margin. How could I be crazy when the fact remained that I could do the same things before this happened. I could reach out and touch proof that it had happened, and I could bring any man-made force into play, any tool at all except one that called for. . . .

Did I sit up with a jerk!

Electricity! That was the answer.

Anything that called for a current, for any kind of current, rang up a no sale. But anything that did not need a current could be—how would you say it?—started again, or would take up where it left off, if I touched it.

I beat it back to Gyp's bar, mixed another Panther's Kiss, then went to Horse's radio shop which was right behind Gyp's place. We had fooled around a lot, monkeying with electrical things, Horse and myself. So now I tried every experiment I could think of to produce a current. And I rang up a no sale.

I went back to the plant and started one of the old-style, type Y Fairbanks engine, the kind you had to preheat with torches, I wasn't sure it would start, but it did. But I couldn't get a current of any kind from the belt-driven exciter. Another no sale.

SO WHAT? So here I was stranded in a suspended world. Somebody or some force had seemingly swiped all the electricity save what I had raising merry hell in me at the instant I got shocked.

There was nothing I could do but accept the fact. I had been shocked with a double dose of juice by the MG Set—direct and alternating current running through me—and they don't mix—at the very instant somebody, or something, took all the rest of the juice from the world. It didn't seem possible that I was the only guy shocked at that instant, and I thought I ought to look around for somebody else—perhaps in four or five hundred years we'd meet by chance.

It looked pretty bad. I left the plant. In cutting across a vacant lot to the street I stepped on a short length of iron pipe. That pipe swung under my feet and pointed like a bird dog.

I spent several minutes trying other iron pipes and bars, and they all pointed the same way. A little east of north.

Now at least I had an object: to see why a bar held in my hand pointed so strongly a little east of north. I would go up in that direction. . . .

My enthusiasm waned. Even a short walk is work when you're in a hurry. And I couldn't use a car because they needed current. And I didn't know of a Diesel motored truck anywhere around.

A bicycle would also be slow. But there was a sawmill four miles the other side of town, and I could use one of their engines—maybe.

I got another bicycle and rode through town, stopping at the drug store for a pack of cigarettes. I put my watch cap on Hannah's head. I like that dame.

Out at the mill it developed that I couldn't use a locomotive that already had steam up.

Since thinking about it, I've come to believe that such current or electric energy as I possessed was not sufficient to restore the *kinetic* energy—

the force at work—of anything in action at the time our world was robbed.

But I could start from scratch and *raise* steam. I could use the *potential* energy of anything that did not use any form of AC or DC current.

So I fired up a little old-fashioned balloon-stacked engine. It was slow, but by and by the gauge began to wiggle upward, so I got a switch key from a mill trainman's pocket and ran the engine back to town.

Even when I was a kid I wanted to be a railroad man. Now I was one. And I had all the track of America to play on. But it wasn't fun, not exactly. I was seventy-five miles out of Jacksonville. Before I got there I had switched trains onto sidings so I could get by until I was tired of it. I'd shut the throttle and put the brake on after I had the engine on the side track. And I remember hoping that if the world got born again those trains wouldn't come to life with a sixty mile an hour rush. Things would happen if they did.

Jacksonville was a heartbreaking search; a still, utterly soundless museum. And I found no Diesel truck there. An iron bar made the usual point for me, so I swapped the little puffing billy for a big eight-wheel switcher—and fell asleep while I was raising steam. It was my first sleep since I had got left alive when time was stolen. I needed it.

When I got rolling, I kept watch for trains ahead of me. When I came on one, I would shunt it in the nearest siding. Always I'd shut the throttle of its engine and center the quadrant. And frequently that meant walking the length of a long freight to its engine, then walking back to mine. I made slow time, but I followed the point of any iron bar that I held in my hand.

I stopped in a little hamlet for a cold bottle of beer after clearing the track of a long, through passenger train. Back of the general store I took a knife away from a man about to stab another man in a fight. I stood them on their heads a few feet apart and left them there.

IN Columbia I chanced to glance into a mirror. The wild-eyed hermit I saw almost made me take to my heels. But I got a pair of scissors and trimmed some of the hair around the back of my neck. I was making very slow time. I couldn't believe I was the only person left alive. And no town was too small, no town too large for the torture of a search.

I lost track of—shall I say days? There was only one day, only one instant in an infinity of timeless time. I lost track of the revolutions of the hour hand of my watch. It was better that way. I ate when I was hungry, slept when I was tired and let it go at that.

The lonely journey lasted until I had trimmed my hair a second time. And I saw white at my temples that was never there before. I know what it is to be alone. I can guess how it feels to die and go to hell.

It was weird; this business of living in 5:15 with the sun in the same place all day—or rather all of the time—with no change of any kind in any one place. I ran through cloudy skies, I ran through showers—water hanging in the air in drops that would wet me and I walked through it, and outline my path. But any iron bar that I picked up pointed for me, and I followed it.

The world was mine so I helped myself to anything I wanted. But all I really wanted was for somebody to speak to me. Nobody did.

I reached, finally, the entrance of the tunnel to the Pennsy station. I wondered if I should run that Seaboard eight-wheel switcher on into New York, or get out and walk to the Hudson river and row across.

Far off, the Empire State tower and mooring mast was a blinding white light. And an iron bar that I held drew a perfect bead on it. I had a right to think that there was the answer, although I didn't know of anything I could do about it. But there was something cockeyed over there, and wrapped up in that building somewhere was the

answer to what had happened to our electricity.

I sat in the cab of that switcher and debated for awhile. I had been doing a lot of what I'd call tall thinking since this thing had happened. And it boiled down to this. There is no top without a bottom, no right side without a left side, no light without darkness, no heat without cold. In other words, everything in the natural order of things is balanced, and at the bottom of all the wondrous workings of electricity is the same little item of balance—no positive without a negative.

So what would happen if somebody swiped *all* the current? There'd be no evidence of *anything* left, would there? The world would simply vanish, for it is known that ions of electricity are the basis of all matter, whether living or inert.

But how explain this suspension of time, this suspension of life, of law? And how was I able to go on when all the rest of the world hung like a still-shot on a movie screen?

Suppose either the positive or the negative ions were bottled up somewhere by some time-thief. Would that cause the world to stop? It would throw everything out of balance; it would cause everything to break down. Wouldn't it *suspend* activity?

And I thought, there in the cab of that switcher, that, if this thing ever got fixed, our scientists and our big-wigs of all learned departments would have some explaining to do to show why our sky did as our world did. For, if the sky was an infinity of space filled with stars and planets far beyond our sphere of influence, it should have gone on about its business of day and night even if the world had stopped.

BUT I shrugged that question off for the more pressing one. Should I leave the engine, or run it through the tunnel. I couldn't resist the idea of running it through the Pennsy tunnel, for no steam engine had ever made that run. And there was nobody to kick if I wanted to try it.

So I got a carbide light from a truck parked at a warehouse a couple of miles back. Then I ran my trusty switcher back to the tunnel, lit the carbide light and started in. The smoke got pretty thick, but we made it, and were lucky enough to stumble onto a clear track to the station.

I felt kind of lonely when I had to leave that engine in the station. And I laughed at the joke we had played on ourselves with that carbide light. For we hadn't needed it. I had lived in this suspended world a long while. I'd forgotten that in suspension even the lights kept their glow. The tunnel had not been a dark place, although it was ghostly.

I hadn't much more than got out of the station before I began to see sparks; little spluttery sparks that you doubt having seen. I was some distance away from them; and the sidewalks were jammed with wax images and the streets were thick with traffic. Remember, it was 5:15—knocking-off time.

It's a good thing I'm not a heavy drinking man, for I saw those sparks coming toward me. I saw two half-people dressed in white tunics. You could see right through them the same way you can see the double exposures on a movie screen. They wore a thing on their heads like a tiara, and that was what was sparking.

It was screwy. They were there and they were not there. I watched them, not knowing whether to run or not. I pretended to be a wax figure. They came closer and closer, walking around the men and women of this world, weaving through them, and paying them not the slightest bit of attention.

I watched them. I could see their faces moving as they talked, but I could hear no sound. And yet they were built like people and they looked like people—except for being semi-transparent.

When they were right up to me, I moved.

"Say," I began, "are you from Mars?"

I don't know if they heard me. But I do know that they saw me because their faces took on a look of wild terror and

their mouths were screaming, whether I could hear it or not. They jerked off those tiara things and—pfffft! They disappeared right before my eyes.

I still claim it's a good thing I'm not a heavy drinker.

I stood there like a bump on a pickle for about five minutes before I reached down and picked up one of those tiara things.

This thing had a metal head band made of silver, pure silver. It had two poles about the size of those "strike anywhere" matches in thickness but over twice as long. And it had a fine wire mesh about half an inch wide and three inches long which stretched between those two silver poles. The thing was an antenna.

Obviously they were to pick up current. But I didn't feel any, even when I put the thing on my head. Then I remembered that I was being knocked down by plenty of juice when the current was stolen. So I probably had more than my share, and couldn't feel this.

I began walking again, a little cautiously; glad of the hefty weight of the automatic I had picked up long before—attracted to it, I suppose, because I thought it would protect me against the goblins of the questions I wanted answered. I walked, and wondered just what form of life was this that vanished when the antenna was turned loose.

I KEPT seeing sparks. But every time one of those half-people saw me, that ant ana either hit the street and the person vanished, or the person stared until I got close and then beat it. They were fleet-footed things.

I suppose they spread the word about me. Anyway, when I approached the Empire State building, a sort of phalanx of those people spread out as best they could across the street. Then two big-shots, dressed in fancier tunics and fancier antennas that looked like horned crowns, put down a sort of tripod a couple of paces in front of those half-people.

I could see then that, although they could touch that mass of still life on

the sidewalks, they didn't like to do it—and wouldn't if they could help it. While they could touch, their touch went right through clothes and all. But such metal as a man or woman wore—like a watch or a ring, and money, too—caused a spark that made those half-people squirm. And if their antennas touched anything metal, it all but knocked those half-people down.

I watched curiously as they brought out something that looked like an insulated telescope about four feet long and about three inches thick and put it on that tripod. The mogul with the fanciest antenna crown seemed to be talking a lot—although I could hear nothing. And the other mogul drew a bead on me with that telescope gadget.

I fell heir to a bad case of fright and ducked behind a car while I wondered what the hell was coming. I peeped out.

That instrument got white hot and it glowed, even in the unholy glare from the Empire State tower. And every time a smoky fire showed for an instant at the muzzle, the end pointed at me, I'd get a shock. But it felt like a dry 220 volts—not enough to make a muscle twitch.

It was pretty definite that we weren't going to be friends, so I took out the automatic and fired. I got down close to the street and shot upward so the bullet would hit the side of a building. I didn't like the idea of hitting one of my own folks, even if they were wax.

Nothing happened. We walked on the same world, but we were two kinds of life. While I could feel their weapon shock me, they couldn't feel the bullets from my gun, although I thought I could see the tiny flash of a spark as the bullet went through them. Then I took a good aim and fired at the big-shot's crown. *Pfffffft!*—and no mogul.

Of course it was just a lucky shot because I'm not that good. But you should have seen those half-people scatter. They even left that shocking gun on the tripod. I went up and touched it. The minute my hand came in contact with it, the thing began to melt.

It's a good thing I'm not a heavy drinking man.

Perhaps it was the suggestion of a shadow that made me look up, shading my eyes with both hands to protect them from the awful glare of the tower. I saw a long bullet-shaped thing taking form. It seemed about the size of an early dirigible, but it had many things like fins all over it. It appeared to be hooked to the mooring mast but I was too close to the building to be sure.

I watched until it became a definite object with mass and tear-drop lines of its own. It backed into plain view, turned on end, seemed to glow—then shot straight upward and out of sight before I could even catch my breath.

On glancing around me, almost doubting what I had seen, I found any number of those half-people peeping at me. The more daring ones seemed to be shaking their fists. I was sure then, that they had come down from Mars in that dirigible to capture the world. I had crossed them up by being alive, and they were sore at me.

I TOOK a package out of a car and threw it at some of those half-people. The package sailed over their heads and hit the side of the Empire State building. Then that package floated to the sidewalk, not a package anymore but ashes. I threw other things against the building—ashes floated to the sidewalk. So any little notion that might have been in the back of my head about trying to investigate the top of that tower was out.

I fished around in a store until I found a shotgun and shells. I began to shoot antennas off their heads when I could shoot without hitting any of my own folks. That wasn't often. Then I stopped.

Those half-people were all racing to the side of the Empire State. They put their right fingers against it, sprang up on their toes and lifted their feet off the sidewalk. Then they scooted up the side of the building and out of my line of vision.

"What the hell?" I asked myself. I

dropped the shotgun and sought out a bar. I felt the need of a Panther's Kiss.

The Panther evidently kissed me pretty hard. I woke up in a swanky eating house on Fifty-Seventh street with brand new clothes on, my pockets stuffed with bills, a gold watch in every vest pocket, and four fishing rods and reels on the floor beside me. And I'm sitting at a table with a pretty girl who has a lot of jewelry around her neck.

I would have sold my world for the pleasure of hearing that girl speak to me. Even hearing her say: "Sir, will you please endeavor to act the part of a gentleman and get the hell away from my table?"—that would have sounded like the dulcet voice of love.

I guess I must have put all that jewelry on her because there were price tags still on it all. She reminded me of Hannah Dale with the easy grace of her figure and the proud way she held her head. I got up and left, feeling pretty blue.

By looking through thick dark glass, I could study the tower. I could make out the framework of that finny bullet that had shot out of sight on me. I supposed it was back. That framework was all that was visible. It was metal, of course, somewhere within the range of our earthly vibrations.

I supposed those half-people were above or below our vibration range. That was why they were semi-transparent. But now they were seeking to become of earth and conquer this world. Bottling up the current had enabled them to halt us, and to exist on our planet. But they still had a long way to go before they could use anything we had made.

But it was my world and I wanted them out of it. Only, how?

I don't know when the idea first came to blast that tower with an army or navy gun. But I do know that when I thought of it I started acting without any more debate. Those half-people probably gave me the idea. They had brought back from wherever they went

a bigger, screwy-looking shock-gun. They kept pointing it at me. And it kept knocking me down with the shock. It got me pretty mad. Then I glued rubber on the soles of my shoes and could hardly feel the shock.

You'd be surprised how hard it was to find anything. I couldn't ask anybody. I had to look through offices, records, files. I had to chop doors down, shoot locks off—then read about guns after I had come across one that I thought would do.

I was out in Brooklyn then, at a big army post. It was too far away, I decided, for my uncertain aim with a field piece. So I pulled that gun—it was on wheels—though that still-life traffic all the way to Fulton Street at Smith, if you know where that is. By that time I had more than enough of threading through stalled traffic. The flow of traffic is wonderful the way it never jams. But standing still it clutters up the streets. So I had to move plenty of things to get that field gun by.

I kept calling myself a fool. But I kept wondering what would happen if I blasted that tower with an exploding shell. If those half-people had our current—the negative or the positive ions—captured and bottled up in something up in that tower, and I broke something there with an exploding shell, what would happen?

IT was time to find out, and I pointed that gun down that wide canyon of a street and over its rim and fired. The gun went one way, I went the other, and a lot of windows fell out of buildings. That little rascal was noisy dynamite.

I hadn't thought about nailing it down. So I blocked it against a small but loaded truck, drew another bead on the tower and tried again. It was too bad about the windows.

There was an awful mob of people on the sidewalks, and a lot of cars on the street. In fact I had to move a couple of cars to get the bead I wanted. But I couldn't hit that tower. I ran out of shells, and I kept running out of shells until there were eight empty wheelbar-

rows—and a ninth one with a full load by that gun.

I was plenty tired and dirty by then, so I called a halt to my private war. I looked around for a Panther's Kiss, a bath and a change of clothes.

I didn't let that panther kiss me but twice that time. So it wasn't long before I was back at the gun, bathed, shaved, in brand-new clothes and with my pockets all but lousy with dough. I liked to keep my pockets full of bills so I could pay for everything I picked up. But I realized, of course, that if our world ever got started again, somebody was going to have some tall book-keeping to do to balance books at those places where I happened to drop in for a visit.

I missed that tower a few more times. When I fired the next to the last shell I wasn't looking for it when it happened.

The tower seemed to swell to enormous size. The blinding light got brighter. And joining with the echoing roar of that field gun came the cracking noise that I heard when I got shocked. Then the tower, exploding as it was, showered all the sky that I could see with flaming sheets of fire.

I felt the shock, hot but not too hot. I jerked and twisted, falling back on the sidewalk, banging against a pretty hefty dame who fell back against other people.

Ever see a still shot in a movie change to show slow motion? That's the way it looked. A foot beginning slowly to move. An arm starting a swing. A woman's mouth, open, as usual, beginning to form words again.

I watched it, sprawled as I was on the sidewalk. Before I could get on my feet, life was back as if nothing had happened. Then, no more than a second later, a complete case of pandemonium broke out.

Those people which the shock had knocked me against bumped into one another. They began to fall like pins at a bowling alley. Cars I had moved out of place began colliding with other cars. More cars plowed into that field gun and those empty wheelbarrows.

People began screaming because that gun and those empty wheelbarrows and empty shells were not there when they had stopped moving. And then they were there without the passing of any time. To them, I mean.

Don't ever think that when people mean business they can't open their mouths, scream, and make a noise. But it was music to me. I suppose that if a man can beam at anybody, then I was beaming at them. I was glad.

I wanted to celebrate. The best way to celebrate that I know of is to down a Panther's Kiss. So I ducked and searched for a bar. And within the short walk of a block I found normal people who were merely slightly curious about all the noise up the street where that field gun was.

I had to tell the barkeep how to mix a Panther's Kiss. He stared at me with his eyes bulging when I bent the elbow. I saw myself in the bar mirror, and from the way I needed a haircut I didn't blame him. So I went to a barber shop and got one.

The radio was putting on special broadcasts before I left there, reporting evidences of things hard to explain. The Empire State tower and part of the very top floors had entirely disappeared. The Pennsy Railroad wanted to know how a Seaboard switch engine from Jacksonville could get into their New York station. And it wasn't three hours before the public knew of the clear track that reached from the Pennsy Station down through Jacksonville and to the sawmill where I had found that balloon-stacked puffing-billy.

The area around the Empire State building was blocked off. Learned scientists were struggling to define the charred framework of the ship those half-people used. They were trying to find out what those antennas were. There was, in short, hell to pay. The country was getting excited.

I was all wrapped up in watching the clocks ticking, in watching the sun behave and go down and make way for night, and in watching the world being alive. It was good to live.

I went to the Pennsy Station to get a ticket home, but I found the place jammed with people in a fast hurry to go away somewhere. A loud speaker was giving more reports of things hard to explain. Then I heard:

"Will Bill Shakespeare get in touch with us? Mr. Bill Shakespeare, of Lake City, Florida, disappeared at five-fifteen before the eyes of four men. Certain evidence leads us to believe him still alive. Miss Hannah Dale, while getting out of a car, found his cap on her head, a cigar in her mouth and a match in her hand. The Negro maid at his boarding house was sweeping and found herself knocking a row of flower pots off a shelf. She says he was always one for jokes.

"A logging engine flits at the bat of an eye to Jacksonville; no one knows how. There were many trains on the tracks, but in the bat of that same eye those trains were uncoupled and put on sidings. Suddenly there was a clear track to New York and a Seaboard switch engine in the Pennsylvania station.

"Mr. Bill Shakespeare's Social Security card was found in a suit of overalls hung over a bellboy's arm in the Bilt-

more Hotel, New York City. The overalls are grease-stained from the grease of that switch engine."

"In addition, a field gun suddenly appeared, with its muzzle smoking at Fulton and Smith in Brooklyn. And the Empire State tower has completely vanished."

"Please, Mr. Bill Shakespeare, get in touch with us and explain what happened to our troubled world at five-fifteen, P. M., today."

I hadn't thought of that side of it, and I must have looked guilty, for a man came up to me. He had a wire foto of my mug.

"You look ten years older than twenty-six, Bill," he said, showing me a government badge.

"You people are fast, mister," I told him. "But I'm only three haircuts older—about two months. Let's phone a radio station that everything is okay and for people to stop being panicky. Tell 'em I said so. Then we'll go somewhere and I'll spill such beans as I know about. And while we're talking I'd like to be somewhere so I can see the sky move and where I can see people move. You don't know how nice it is to see the world behaving as it should."

Coming**In the Next Issue****Coming****of**

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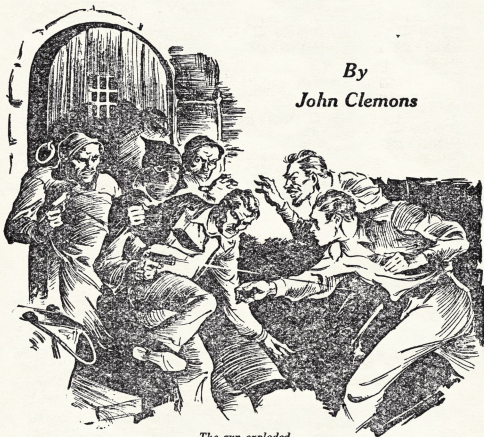
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Watch for It**IN THE NEXT ISSUE****Watch for It**

Street of Ghouls

By
John Clemons



The gun exploded.

They lived in hovels and begged for a living, that strange band of malformed, piteous, half-mad creatures who called one man Master. And until Kent Kearney could penetrate this horrible veil of mystery, no man and no woman was safe. The town lived in terror, for one by one, friends and loved ones—disappeared.

THE "Street of the Beggars" was aptly named, Kent Kearney thought gloomily. A mile from town, the cobbled street was all that was left of an ancient sub-division that was never completed. Remnants of half-finished houses, now long in decay and ruin, let pale moonbeams play through roofless tops and gaping, glassless windows. The wind seemed always angry here as

it ceaselessly tore at broken, banging shutters and viciously plucked at flailing clapboards. Like toothless broken hags, shapeless in the white moonlight, ominous and grimly forbidding in the sharp black shadows, the staggered wrecks of houses sprawled.

From a safe point of vantage in the black shadows, Kent Kearney watched the slobbering, doddering, nondescript wrecks

of humanity as they straggled in, their begging done for the day. On crutches they came; on jerky, paralyzed limbs. Crawling they came, inch by convulsive inch. The sightless with their patient ever-present dogs, and the plaintive, lost, tap-tap-tap of their sticks. Singly they came and by twos and threes, the lame, the halt, the blind; odorous, filthy, cracked and drooling, they were hopelessly lost in life's harsh scheme.

At least two hundred filed past the hidden special investigator for the Missing Person's Bureau. Yet at no time did the crooked street appear crowded, for they quickly filtered into dark doorways and were swallowed from sight. This was the third night of Kent Kearney's vigil, and he began to think that his chief was right. Certainly it was a fantastic place to expect to find petite and beautiful Edith Morton, darling of the stage-door Johnnies. Chief Bartlett had laughed at the idea.

BUT two things had happened which gave the incredible idea impetus in the mind of Kent Kearney. The first was when, soon after the disappearance of Edith Morton, Doctor Arnold, who was known to be in love with the actress, had also mysteriously dropped out of sight.

When Kearney went to search the doctor's premises, he uncovered signs of strange experimentation in the doctor's laboratory—oddly misshapen guinea pigs that crawled and stumbled as if bereft of all natural sense or instinct. That the doctor had been conducting strange experiments was sometimes whispered, but just what they were nobody seemed to know.

The second thing had happened only three or four nights ago. He had looked in the piteously twisted face of a slovenly beggar girl and turned away haunted. Haunted by something in the tragically misshapen body, in the mournful mewing for alms, that stirred up pictures of the doctor's dreadfully twisted guinea pigs. It was not till much later that he put the two together. By then the girl was gone.

At a secret meeting of the Citizens' Committee directors who employed him,

Kearney told of his suspicions. Doctor Arnold was using his vast scientific knowledge to create beggars for his own profit! The accusation exploded like a bombshell.

"Preposterous!" roared Everett Green, president of the committee, the wealthiest man in town. "I've known Doctor Arnold for many years. It might surprise you to know I knew all about his experiments. In fact I financed many of them. Doctor Arnold was a man of high ideals. His experiments were conducted in the interest of humanity."

Kearney looked at the thin, sallow Green, took in the jumpy, twitching facial muscles, and was secretly glad to know that Green knew about the doctor's experiments. Kent didn't like Green's shifty eyes. Especially when he thought of the twisted guinea pigs.

Will Gelden, who knew a little about politics and made the most of it, cried out: "Fire him. Fire him! The Committee is paying this fathead's wages—not the Missing Person's Bureau. Don't forget that."

Then Booth Milbank, who, together with the missing doctor comprised the rest of the Committee's directors, got up. He calmed everyone in the board room with a look. He glanced down on big Will Gelden and the petty politician quivered in his three chins. That he was Gelden's master was well known to all. Without Milbank, Gelden wouldn't have sense enough to get in out of the rain. Gray and stern-faced, Milbank looked like a man of granite, yet, oddly, he had never been able to forge beyond a minor membership in Green's firm. The canny Green had always proved Milbank's mental superior.

"Gentlemen," he said, "I deplore the fact that Kent Kearney, the investigator hired by this committee, is suspicious of a fellow member of our board. I am as sorry as anyone. But remember; we hired him to find out why so many persons have been missing lately. If he brings the fault to our very door—and proves his point—he has done the job for which he was hired. It's easy to dismiss him; there's plenty of time for that. I move

we give him more time. Meanwhile, it might be better to keep this a secret. We mustn't hamper the investigation that we, ourselves, demanded."

"Let him do it on his own time then," Green snarled. "If the Committee's funds are going to be drafted for any such fantastic idea, I intend to withdraw my financial support."

Chief Bartlett shook his square-cut head sadly, scratched his graying hair with a blunt and calloused finger. He appeared undecided. Gelden jumped up. "Milbank's right," he shouted. "Give this bull more time. We can always fire him if he doesn't deliver."

On the bandwagon with Milbank, as usual, Kent thought. The fat man had no will of his own. As far as Kearney was concerned, Gelden didn't count. If Milbank told him black was white, the politician would be sure to agree.

"Just the same," said Bartlett, "I wish the dang fool would show more horse sense and less imagination."

But was it imagination? Was it imagination when the Street of the Beggars showed an increase in its witless population closely corresponding with the increase in missing persons? Was it imagination that when Kearney caught recurring glimpses of a grotesquely crippled and gargoyle-faced beggar girl that the nape of her neck reminded him of the beautiful Edith Morton?

The beautiful actress had been missing a month. At first it looked like a publicity stunt. When the doctor, too, disappeared it took on the aspect of an elopement. But when the missing girl's effects were searched, letters were found which proved beyond doubt that though Doctor Arnold had begged Edith to marry him, she had consistently refused. That put an entirely different light on the matter. Kearney had offered his services not for the money involved; he was engaged to marry Barbara, Edith Morton's sister. He knew the missing girl well.

WARILY, stiffly, he moved from his hiding place. No cop, no citizen, went to this vile spot alone in the dead of night. A man's life here was worth

whatever he had on him, even if it was only the clothes on his back. For the third successive night Kearney had failed to spot that tragic beggar girl. The gruesome parade was ended.

Cautiously he slunk out of hiding. And abruptly he paused. Two blind men stood outside the little cubicle he had used for a hideout, quietly smoking. The sickly moon lighted up their gaunt features, glinted on the black glasses and the placard suspended from their necks. There was perhaps a yard of space between them. Kearney could either retreat into the cubicle and wait for them to go, or he could sneak between them.

He decided to go ahead. What if they did feel him breeze by, he thought. They couldn't see who it was, and if they called to him, he could reassure them with the muttered growl of the witless.

Kearney couldn't suppress a shudder of revulsion as he stepped between them. Then abruptly he stiffened. From either side strong hands gripped him, twisted his arms behind him so that struggle was impossible. Quickly his gun was stripped from its holster. Not a word was spoken till his captors had marched him out of hiding, into the pale glare of moonlight in the middle of the cobbled street.

That the men were not blind was all too obvious. Their black glasses were off now; they stared intently at the investigator. Both were powerful fellows, Kearney saw at a glance. Their lean and wolfish faces had none of the dimwit vacant stare of the others who had passed by tonight. Their bleak eyes were merciless. Probably bodyguards for the less fortunate beggars, Kearney decided. All the more reason to believe that there was shrewd organization behind the Street of the Beggars.

"Well, flatfoot," one of them snapped. "Have you seen enough? What are you doing, spying around here the last few nights?"

"Let go of me," Kearney said. "I have a little book on me that will explain everything." The "little book" was his good right fist.

"Let you go? Like hell! You had your chance, and you came back again. We

know who you are! Yeah, and we know what you're here for, what do you think of that?"

The other man said: "Shut up, you fool. Now we *can't* let him go."

His partner gave a low, trilling whistle. To Kearney's horror, all the crooked, broken human wretches that had previously toiled homeward as to a sanctuary, now appeared. They scuttled toward the prisoner in the street—two hundred or more. Their vacant minds followed the bidding of the two who held Kearney prisoner. With strange, taut, unemotional silence they scrambled and struggled, dragging themselves along like queer, prehistoric reptiles, or hopping on crutches and canes like giant locusts on a rampage.

Kearney felt the little hairs stand up on the nape of his neck. Sweat began to cascade down his face like water. These men had an iron grip on him and were standing behind and a little to one side, on the lookout for trickery. And in thirty seconds more this human horde of depravity would be on him.

"The book," he said, wetting his lips. "I thought I could make a deal with you." He had no book; he was bluffing. But these others couldn't know it. They might be curious.

"Bah!" one of his captors exploded. "When they get through with you we'll have the damn book."

"Maybe. And maybe they won't have sense enough to give it to you. Or maybe it'll fall into the hands of some one with too much sense—like you fellows. A man could do quite a bit of shaking down with that book." Kearney was talking without thinking, now. His mind, his fascinated gaze, was on that queer, crawling, mindless mob. Fifteen seconds more and . . .

"Well it's too late now," the talkative one said. "They're here."

They were here; a sea of sorrowing souls, most of them without minds, all of them with broken bodies—jealous of the straight and strapping figure held up for slaughter. It would be a pleasure to kill this man-thing who could walk and talk and think.

Kearney felt that age-old hostility of

the doomed for the strong. They would rob him as a matter of course, but their greatest pleasure would be in crippling him—and then ending his life. They would derive some sort of vicarious thrill in showing their superiority over this strong and well-built being; some inner instinct, relic of the dim past, would be somewhat satisfied.

He was beyond shuddering; beyond breathing. His muscles were paralyzed by terror, horror, at the fate that so surely stared him in the face. His eyes grew wide, staring, as he glimpsed the grinning face of Death. Yet it was not Death he feared, but the manner of his dying.

THE first sere claw reached for him. It was a tentative movement, no more than a questioning brush, but it reacted on Kent Kearney as if it were charged with electricity. He tried to struggle backward, away from that dread army of the damned. His captors held him firm as a vise.

A pair of flaccid hands raked Kearney's face, drawing warm blood. Another pair of hands tore at his clothes. Still another pair grabbed his ankles—a legless cripple with a pock-marked face. Kearney cried out hoarsely, tried to kick him off. But the human beast held on like a leech, both arms wrapped tightly around Kearney's legs.

"I want his feet," the beast-man shouted hoarsely.

"I want his hands!" another shouted. "His hands, his hands," some one moaned. Then fifty voices took up the cry and sang it in a horrible refrain. "Give me his hands, his strong, strong hands."

"His eyes," the blind began to wail. "Give me his eyes," they wept. "His eyes, his eyes, his eyes . . ."

The surging tide swept against Kearney's captors. They had to let him go. "The book," one of them whispered. "We better get the book."

Kearney was struggling now. He broke away from a dozen human rats that were clawing at him. He grabbed the pseudo-blind man by the throat, lifted him high with insane strength, shook him over the

heads of the rabble. It teased the motley mindless crowd exactly as a hungry terrier is teased with a succulent bone. It took their little remnants of mind off the investigator.

"A spy," Kearney yelled frantically. "He's a spy! He can see! The Master sent me to catch him. He's a traitor! He can see!"

"His legs!" some yelled. "Give me his legs!" "His hands," others shouted. "I want his hands!" "His nose! His nose!" "His heart! I am paralyzed, I need a new heart!" "His skin! I was burned. I need new skin . . ."

Two hundred voices were shouting now, begging, crying, pleading. Two hundred pairs of hideous hands were trying to reach the fake blind man who, unconscious now, was being pulled apart like a bundle of straw.

Panting, ready to drop from mental shock and physical hurts, but knowing that the first sign of weakness invited instant slaughter, Kearney crept through the maze of arms and legs. He crawled across writhing bodies that could not stand by themselves. They, in turn, took him for one of their own, for he looked in reality like a gigantic land crab, scuttling away to lick his hurts. His clothes were in tatters, his body a mass of welts and cuts and bruises where weak hands had torn at him—weak hands made strong by their great force of numbers.

Behind him the rabble raved; then he was free. Kearney paused in the shadow of a low porch and lay gasping. When he recovered, his first impulse was to crawl away in the dark while he could yet get away. For as soon as those near-human scavengers had finished with their victims, they would search for him.

Then he thought of Edith Morton. He thought of the fate of others before her, the possible fate of still others to come. And he stayed.

He crept up the dark porch on all fours—it was safer that way. Through greasy front doors he crept, closed them behind and struck a match, shading it with one hand. There were tin cups, pencils, placards reading "Blind" lying around the entrance foyer; white sticks with

red tips, black spectacles, all the paraphernalia for the professional blind beggar.

This must be the house where they lived, Kearney decided. He quickly extinguished the match. He felt in the dark for a placard, hung it on his neck by the greasy string. His fingers sought and found a pair of dark spectacles, found a stick. Then he got up. Now he was safe on his two feet.

Relaxed for the moment, he realized all at once that the place smelled like a stable. The blind beggars must sleep packed together like rabbits in a warren. The obnoxious odor stifled him. He started for the door. Then he remembered; he was blind, now. What if he ventured into some other house where the blind did not belong? He thought of the fate of that other fake blind man, and shuddered, cold sweat breaking out in a wet rash on his wounded skin.

He decided it was all too risky a venture for one man. And yet, a band of men would likely have far less chance of success here. They would never learn the identity of the person who controlled these beggars, exploited their misery for personal profit. That some one did, Kearney felt positive. The references that had been made to the "Master" definitely pointed to that.

KEARNEY heard sounds of feet on the porch; then on the stairs outside the front door. They were coming back! Fresh panic seized him. And then the door opened. He froze. Escape was out of the question now. Whatever the fates held in store for him he would soon know, for at least two score men were crowding into the place.

They paused, all at once. Kearney stopped breathing. Too late he remembered that the blind do not need eyes to see. They see with raw nerves tensed to top pitch. They see with their hands, with that inherent instinct native to everyone and brought to perfection after years of blind reckoning. And now they sensed something hostile, something different, something new in the place of the blind.

They began to circle him warily, slowly closed in. Kearney's face was a drawn mask, his breath seemed to have stopped forever midway between his sinking stomach and his tight lungs. They began to sniff around him like a pack of shaggy dogs. But Kearney knew that even dogs were far less dangerous.

"It's a new one," some one ventured.

Dark there? What difference did it make to them? They were always in the dark. Too late did these thoughts crowd Kearney's mind. And then a large man shouldered through to the besieged investigator.

"New here?" he queried nasally.

"Yes," Kearney whispered hoarsely. "I'm new."

"Know the countersign?"

"I didn't know I needed any."

"M-m-m. How'd you get here?"

"Followed another blind man."

"Hm-m-m. You want to join up?"

"Yes."

The other sniffed around him, felt of Kearney's arms, his face, his legs—pressed hard on his optic nerve. Kearney didn't wince. He knew it was fatal to show fear, terror, or even concern. Blind men didn't fear the blind. Nor did they wince because of brutal pressure on optic nerves that were supposed to be dead.

The brief examination finished, the big man grunted. "All right; you'll do, I guess. Fork over your take for the day."

Some one said: "Wait a minute, George. Hadn't we better take him to—"

"Never mind," George growled. "I'm in charge here. Let me tend to it my way." And to Kearney. "All right, brother—the take."

Kearney pulled out a few crumpled bills. All the change he had did not amount to much. But if this made George suspicious, the blind man didn't show it. He put it into a big canvas bag that was hidden under his ragged coat. Then: "How much y'got there?" he demanded suddenly.

Kearney gritted his teeth. He couldn't remember whether there were two fives mixed up in the bills or three. "Twelve

ninety-five," he guessed desperately. George only grunted.

There was a sudden buzzing as if a hundred bees were loose in the place. Everyone froze into instant immobility. "It's the call," some one said.

George repeated: "It's the call. A special meeting. The Master himself must be here tonight." To Kearney he said: "Stay close to me, brother. I'll have to initiate you sooner than I expected. The Master is here tonight."

Kearney, a moment ago feeling fairly secure by comparison, knew again the meaning of fear, fear of a horrible death. Whoever the master was, whether Doctor Arnold or some one else, there was no doubt he could see. It was very likely he would recognize the investigator. And even if he didn't, how could Kearney hope to elude detection when whatever test they made would soon prove that he could see?

His heart felt like a frozen weight pumping ice-water to his veins. He thought of lagging behind and running for it, of going for help and coming back with an army. Then he realized that they would find only a harmless bunch of beggars; nothing more. Nothing more had ever been found in previous raids.

It was strictly a one-man job. Slim as it was, it was the only chance for a complete investigation of the infamous Street of the Beggars.

Kearney didn't want to take this long chance. Then he thought of Edith Morton, he thought of Barbara, and he knew that he must. He would have to pass every test they gave him—even blind himself if he had to. He hoped only that he would not be recognized before he could learn the identity of the inhuman person deriving income from them.

He wanted a chance to prove his theory that some diabolical monster in human form was, with the aid of scientific knowledge, deliberately capturing the youth of the land in order to destroy their brain tissue. Was sending them out on the streets, hopelessly crippled in mind and body, to beg for money to fill the Master's coffers.

EM

IN the pitch black darkness underneath the house, Kearney moved with the rest of the pack. The stench of unwashed flesh made him try to hold his breath. Big George guided him through what appeared to be a series of catacombs.

A shaft of light pierced the distant gloom and Kearney could see the misshapen husks of humans as they piled by in small packs like animals on a jungle trek. Something slithered and squealed under his feet and Kearney stifled a cry of revulsion. He had stepped on something not quite human which was crawling in the dark on paralyzed limbs. A paralyzed mind in a paralyzed body, he thought gloomily. He shuddered, but kept on.

They emerged in a brightly lighted room underground. It was of such immense proportions that Kearney decided they were in a specially constructed sub-cellar that took in the whole street. At the far end of the room he saw a cage of stout iron bars. A single door in the back of the cage led out somewhere.

Then the door opened and a man came into the cage. He was wearing a robe like a monk's, with the hood pulled well over his face. Identification from that distance and in the disguise affected was impossible. But it looked like Doctor Arnold.

There was a low murmur from the crowd of beggars as they recognized the familiar cloak; the man himself they had never seen. The man opened a small window in the cage. "The donations," he cried. "The leader of each house will drop his money bag through the window. Quickly!"

Standing close beside him, Kearney could see big George shake. Whoever the Master was, he had certainly thrown fear into these hapless humans. Together with a dozen other "leaders," George made his way to the cage. He dropped his money bag into the aperture without groping, as if he had done it many times before. Then he stood to one side.

Kearney guessed he was going to tell the robed man about the new member. He felt the approach of trouble as surely as if it was already on him. And then

some one came up to the cage and whispered a moment to the robed figure.

Kearney caught his breath sharply. It was the partner of the fake blind man who had been killed. The man had escaped the fate of the other.

The robed figure began to rave like a madman. "You blasted idiots have killed the wrong man!" he shrieked. "Damn you. My experiments must have gone wrong. You haven't any sense at all."

He raged in the safety of his iron cage, and presently George came sidling over, whispering words through the bars. The robed man stopped his angry pacing. Instinctively Kearney began to edge away, nearer the gaping exit to his left.

Then he heard the words that sealed his fate, sealed his doom, sentenced him to death as surely as a court of law: "Bring the new brother here!"

Hands fell on Kearney. He tore away, knowing that now he hadn't a chance, for the dead man's partner would identify him even if no one else could. Opposing two hundred halfwits was a foolhardy thing to try. But it was foolhardy in the first place to take the chance of coming here alone.

Kearney lashed out, smashing at stinking, half-dead flesh. At least four men toppled. Had there been only a dozen, or even twenty of the horrible man-beasts, Kearney might have fought free. But two hundred or more!

From the first wild shout of surprise they set up, Kearney knew there wasn't a chance. He fought on because he was spurred by the memory of that other who was killed—and pulled apart.

Queer half-dead man-things broke before his terrific assault, squealing and terrified. But the one-legged cripples were far less helpless, and the blind men were doubly dangerous in spite of their unseeing eyes. The side of a crutch caught Kearney on the head, slowing him. Then some one clubbed him with a stick and he went down. The howling horde pounced on him, but feebly he fought on, until the last spark of sense flickered from his mind.

Dimly he heard the man in the cage. He was howling above the shouts of all

the others. "The little book," he was shouting. "Kill him and be damned—but save the little book for me, or . . ." The rest was a meaningless blur of whirling words.

Kearney felt himself being mauled unmercifully, felt some one searching through his clothes. Probably for the little book. But there was no little book. It was a convenient invention that had saved him once, but now, it would finally kill him.

WHAT made Kearney open his eyes was that he thought he was breathing fire. But when he blinked his eyes open he saw that there was some one standing over him with a bottle of whiskey in one hand. He sat up quickly: the man was Doctor Arnold!

"So it *was* you," Kearney swore. "I knew it all the time!" He staggered to his feet. "If it's the last thing I do in this life," he grated, "I'm going to kill you, doctor."

"Just a moment, my boy. You're a bit hasty. Has it occurred to you that perhaps we are both—prisoners?"

Kearney stared. He whirled quickly. They were in a small square room, lit by one dim electric light. It was bare of any furnishings, dank with earth smell, musty with mould. There were no windows. He tried the door. It was closed. It looked as if they were prisoners all right.

"Then—if it isn't you, doctor—who can be doing this?" Kearney faltered.

The doctor shrugged. He was not a big man. Nearing middle age; suffering was plainly etched in his esthetic features. "Even if we knew—what good would it do us? We'll never get out of this alive. I'm sure of that!" He scratched his two weeks' growth of beard speculatively.

Kearney realized suddenly that he was a mass of bandages. He looked up inquiringly.

"Orders from the big shot," the doctor explained. "Taking damned good care of you—for the time being." He held up the bottle of whiskey. "I owe this to your injuries also. Picked me up remarkably. Have another?"

Kearney refused.

"Wants something from you, I take it," the doctor went on. "Well, as long as you don't give it to him, you're safe for a while."

There was the grating noise of wood sliding. Both men jumped. A small opening was revealed in the upper panel of the door. The hooded man was there.

"The good doctor is right," he said hoarsely. "As long as you don't give up the little book, you're safe. But something tells me you'll divulge its hiding place before long."

A sudden, terrible howl went up. It was like the concerted cries of a hundred hounds in hell. Human, yet lacking the quality of humanness; alive, yet lacking lustre, lacking life.

"Hear them," the hooded man jeered. "They're restless. They've tasted success tonight. I've had to promise them more victims."

As suddenly as it had opened, the little panel was closed.

Kearney whirled on the doctor. "Do you recognize the voice?" he asked.

The doctor gave a negative shake of the head. "I'm afraid not. He's obviously disguising his voice. Does it sound familiar to you?"

"Only vaguely. Quick, doctor, we haven't much time: Who was closely associated with you in your experiments? Who was a bit too interested? He must be a member of the Committee, for he expected me."

"There was no one closely associated in an experimental way. Everett Green helped finance me on occasion. He was sufficiently interested for that. But, of course, he would be beyond reproach."

"No one is beyond reproach. Tell me, did you send reports of your experiments to him?"

"Oh, yes. Naturally. In great detail."

Kearney said quickly: "Ah." A queer light shone in his eyes, he breathed a little heavier. A strange half-smile played on his battered features. He said finally: "Some one has found a very profitable thing in your experiments, doctor, by practicing on humans."

The doctor stared aghast. "Preposter-

ous!" he exploded. "Why it would make them hopeless idiots. Misshapen half-wits!"

"Yeah," Kearney said dryly. "Swell beggars."

He feared to tell Arnold of his suspicions—that the beautiful Edith Morton, with whom the doctor was known to be in love, had been made the victim of just such an experiment. He thought of Barbara, and shuddered, glad she wasn't involved.

THE DOOR was suddenly flung open.

Some one was spun into the little room and at once the door was slammed shut. Kearney caught the flying form and almost dropped it when he saw who it was.

"Barbara," he breathed. "What the devil!"

"Well," said Barbara Morton, with more cheerfulness than she felt. "They told me you needed me, and I guess you do. You look as if a truck had sat on you. Oh, you're here too, doctor. What is it all about? That awful street . . ."

All Kearney could do was stare.

The doctor asked quickly. "Have they found your sister, yet?"

Kearney groaned as Barbara shook her head. "No," she admitted. "And more bad news; Everett Green is missing."

"Green," the men mouthed, and looked at each other meaningly. It could be Green after all, they were thinking.

There was a terrific babble from outside all at once. Shrill screams filled the air outside the door. Two hundred half-mad voices were raised in clamorous demand: "His eyes! I want his eyes!" "His lips!" "I want his heart!" "His head! His head! Mine aches all the time!" "I need a leg. . . !"

"What's that?" Barbara whispered in terror. She shrank close to Kearney, her body trembling. Kent held her tightly; almost as frightened as she. It would soon be their turn! Who was the idiotic rabble tearing to bits now?

The little panel was drawn back. The hooded man at the grilled opening enlightened the doomed trio. "That was the end of Everett Green," he informed them.

He grunted. "Too skinny. They want more . . . Ah, but not the girl; she'll make an appealing beggar."

Barbara stifled a scream. Terrible sobs shook her.

"If that was Everett Green,"—Kearney told the hooded man—"I say if it was Green, then I know who you are now."

"That's what you think—"

"You've got to be Booth Milbank."

The robed figure threw back his head and laughed—and the monk's hood slipped off, revealing the fat sweating face of Will Gelden. He quickly slipped the hood on again, banged shut the panel with a curse.

The three prisoners looked at each other questioningly; they'd all seen that face. But it didn't add up! Green yes, for Green was interested in Doctor Arnold's experiments; he received the doctor's full reports in secret; with a little study and application he could put this knowledge to use. Milbank yes, also, for Milbank was Green's partner; he could steal the Doctor's secret reports from Green's safe, put the knowledge contained in them to his own nefarious use for financial gain. But the little, stepped on, continually harassed Gelden! Why he hadn't the nerve and he hadn't the brains for such a gigantic deal!

But—hadn't he? Here he was doing it.

"It doesn't make sense," Kearney insisted. "Milbank must be back of this. Gelden never did do anything without Milbank's finger in the pie somewhere."

His words were cut off suddenly as the door flew open. Some one was hurled into the room and the door quickly slammed shut again. A man lay in a moaning heap on the dank earth floor. The three hurried to him and Kearney lifted him to his feet. They looked at his face and then stared at each other. It was Booth Milbank.

"I guess I owe you an apology," Kearney snapped. "A minute ago I suspected you of being the whole works here."

"Do you know who that monster is, out there?" Milbank whispered querulously. "Would you believe it if I told you?"

"We know now," Kearney assured him.

"Your worm has turned on you." He sighed. "And I suspected you."

"Me? You suspected me?" Milbank fell into a spasm of weeping. "We'll never get out of this alive," he wailed. "Or if we do, he'll make halfwit beggars of us all!" Milbank's collapse was awful.

The little door panel was shoved open. Gelden, the hood still covering his face, shouted: "You're damn right you won't get out of here alive! But if you don't want to go the way Green went, you'll persuade Kearney to tell me what he did with that damn note book of his."

When he paused, they heard the unholy chant from the mindless creatures somewhere outside. "Legs; we want legs . . . A hand . . . A head . . . *I want a new face. . . !*"

The prisoners shut their ears to the cries; their pulses racing like mad. Observing this, Gelden snapped an order to some one behind him. A moment later a twisted creature was lifted to the iron grill of the door.

KEARNEY cried out in alarm. It was the same pitiful beggar girl who had excited his curiosity a few nights before. The one he had been seeking ever since. The one he believed to be the thing that was created from the missing beauty, Edith Morton!

Gladly would Kearney have told then where he had hidden his note book—if there had been such a book. He knew it was too late now to tell Gelden that it was all a trumped-up story. Whether Gelden believed it or not, the outcome would now be the same. He hid Barbara's face in his ragged coat; she mustn't see.

"See that?" Gelden snarled. "Look close. Can you see who this is? Do you recognize Edith Morton, the great stage beauty? Ha, she's not beautiful now; she's just a beggar girl, working for me like the rest of these idiots. It's thanks to the doctor's secret reports to Green that I know how to make idiots. I stole them, if you want to know." He began to laugh like a mad man. "I think I'll deform all of you!"

At the name "Edith Morton," Barbara had jerked around. And as she stared at

what had once been her sister, she realized all at once that it was true. One single piercing shriek left her throat, then, mercifully, she fainted.

Kearney eased her to the earthen floor. Half expecting the revelation, he had been more insulated against the mental shock. But the doctor still stared incredulously at the wreck of a woman Gelden was holding up for them to see. Once he had loved this woman deeply. Now he realized that his experiments, made in the hope of advancing science, were the innocent cause of Edith Morton's present condition—and how many others he could only guess.

Doctor Arnold's brain snapped, suddenly, under the realization. He became no less an idiot than the wreck of Edith Morton, except for one thing: his desire for revenge. Instead of futilely snarling his rage, he stood with bowed head, crying into his matted whiskers. To outward appearances he was calm, except for that simple show of emotion.

"Think it over," Gelden advised. "Better go to work on Kearney, doctor. You're next to quiet the pack—unless he comes across." The panel slid shut.

Kearney went over to the doctor. "There's something you've got to know," he told him. He looked over at the motionless form of the girl; mercifully still in oblivion. He spoke to the huddled Milbank. "You too, Milbank. You might as well know. Our case is hopeless; there is no book."

Milbank leaped to his feet. "What! You mean that. . . ? Guard, guard. Gelden! Gelden! Open up! Let us free! There is no—"

Kearney grabbed the shrieking man, pressed a hand to his mouth. "Shut up, you fool! Let's figure this out," he rasped.

But Milbank was like a crazy man. He tore away from Kearney's grasp. "Free us!" he shrieked. "Let us out, Gelden. There is no book!" He seemed to have lost control completely, out of his mind with fear.

Again Kearney grabbed him, clamped a hand over his mouth. The little panel slid open.

"What's all the hollering?" Gelden yelled.

Then he saw Kearney with a strangle hold on Milbank. It was evident that Milbank was trying to say something—something that Kearney didn't want Gelden to hear. A moment later the door creaked open on ancient hinges. Gelden swept in with a .45 automatic glinting darkly in the voluminous sleeve of his monk's robe. Behind him stood two others with guns in their hands. One of these Kearney recognized as the fake blind man who had captured him earlier.

"Let's hear what Milbank has to say," Gelden said harshly. "Come on. Let him go, or I shoot!"

"Oh, yeah?" Kearney swung Milbank around so that the man shielded him with his body. "Shoot!" he invited. "*I dare you to shoot Milbank!*"

Gelden fell back, thrown completely off his guard.

"This rat's still your boss, Gelden; you're not fooling me. I thought so before, and I'm sure of it now. It made me suspicious when he popped in here right after I had accused him of being the big-shot around here. Fresh as a daisy, he was, too. But so soon after I mentioned his name that he must have been close by all the time.

"Now, when he finds out about the book—which is what he's here for anyway—he begins acting like a mad man, instead of thinking the thing out rationally. That's what an innocent man would do in these circumstances. Instead he hurries to tattle the news—so he can get out, leaving us here. Shoot, Gelden. Ha! You're not going to, I see. Then I'm right, Gelden, I'm right. And I'm going to choke this rat to death." His strangle hold tightened on Milbank's throat.

The three gunmen took another backward step. "The hell with this!" one of them cried. "Let's get the hell out!"

Milbank jerked his head free. His terror was real now, not put on, as he cried: "Don't leave me, you rats! Gelden! Gelden!"

IT had long ago become automatic for Gelden to obey Milbank's orders. He swung in again, forcing the two other gunmen back also.

Meanwhile the doctor had stopped his quiet weeping. He had edged nearer and nearer the door, nearer the gunmen. He was waiting his chance. Whether he got Milbank, or Gelden, or either of their two helpers, it was all right with him. His suddenly warped brain cried, "Kill!" But he knew his friends from his enemies.

With a last desperate heave, Milbank pulled free. Now Kearney was exposed to fire. Gelden lifted his pistol. His hood was down now, there was no further need for pretense. At that short range he couldn't miss. But he took no chances, he aimed slowly.

Kearney watched Gelden's trigger finger slowly stiffen, fascinated in spite of himself. Too late he prepared to leap.

The gun in Gelden's hand exploded. But simultaneous with its choking roar, the crazed doctor lunged forward. He caught the huge .45 slug in the side. But that didn't worry him; he didn't even know it. For he had his hands on Gelden's throat. The force of the doctor's lunging body knocked Gelden off his feet. The two men rolled desperately, thrashing the dirty floor in a life and death struggle.

While the two gunmen stood with gaping eyes, for the moment too taken by surprise to know what to do, Kearney once again grabbed Milbank. But this time he didn't hold on to him. Instead he whirled him bodily off his feet, sent him spinning into the closely grouped pair with guns in their hands who were guarding the open door. Milbank catapulted into them. The three went down in a heap, arms thrashing, legs mowing air. Their guns went flying.

Kearney grabbed up a gun and stepped back. When the three got to their feet, they were covered.

When they saw the turn events had taken, their breath came in sobbing gasps. The fake blind man lost his head entirely. He chanced a bullet from Kearney's pistol as he dropped on all fours and scrambled out through the open door.

Kearney didn't shoot. He would not let anything distract him from his aim at Milbank. But a moment later they heard those horrible screams: "An arm . . . A leg. . . His eyes. . .!" They knew

what had happened; the man had not escaped death after all. He had walked right into it most horribly.

"They've got him!" Milbank whispered. He licked his lips. He seemed to comprehend for the first time what a terrible death it was to be torn limb from limb by half-starved, half-human idiots. "Let me go! Let me go!" he whispered.

Kearney paid no attention to him; he was busy taking in the conflict at his feet out of the corner of his eye. Gelden was quite still now. The doctor was calmly hammering his brains out in the soft turf of the floor. Then he threw the body from him and got up. Gelden was dead as he would ever be, his monk's robe soaked in blood. The doctor picked up Gelden's .45, staggered weakly. His side dripped blood.

The gunman standing next to Milbank suddenly saw the glint of metal at his feet, noted his lost gun. Kearney turned his head a fraction, said to the doctor: "You're hurt."

The gunman dived. He scooped up the gun, and Kearney whirled on him with a quick fusillade. The gunman dropped in his tracks with a little sigh. Milbank jumped a yard to get out of the way of the falling body.

Of a sudden, the abysmal chant was close at hand—outside the door of the cell. "An arm A leg *I want his life. . . .!*"

All eyes turned to the door, terror-stricken. They were here, the mad horde! It was the end for all of them! And as they watched with fear-filled eyes, the body of the gunman, lying in the doorway, suddenly began to move! Then plainly everyone saw six pairs of deformed hands pick it up, saw six mad, leering faces for an instant. Then body and faces were gone!

"They're loose!" Milbank shouted. "We're all done for. They got out! That damn fool gunman left the door open out there!"

He leaped for the cell door to shut it. But no sooner did he reach the threshold than a pair of horrible claws grabbed him; a grinning, idiotic face, terribly scarred as if burned by acid, peered into

his. Milbank screamed, and the next instant was jerked out of sight.

Kearney jumped for the doorway. He dashed out in the corridor. Milbank was being borne off by a swiftly moving group of the obnoxious halfwits, screaming pitifully. Kearney fired and one of the cripples dropped.

Milbank began to struggle as Kearney ran after them. Milbank fought free a moment. But, from dark passages all along the corridor, more of the idiots slinked in. They folded Milbank to them and began their awful chant as they fled down the corridor with their prize.

"**D**YNAMITE!" Milbank called out. "In the floor of the cell! Dig it up! Oh-h-h. . . .!" Then his cries were stilled by the far greater, far fiercer volume of the chanting halfwits.

Kearney dashed the sweat from his eyes as he whirled to turn back. A queer-looking beast-man slunk out of the shadows. Kearney shot. The malformed, malodorous thing fell heavily. He was not molested as he sped the few paces to the door. Then abruptly, silently, they fell on him. Kearney shook them off, shooting, cursing, ranting at them. He leaped inside the cell and closed the door with a bang.

Doctor Arnold was on his knees, the gun in his hands. His eyes bore a strange calm; he looked sane enough now. "I was waiting," he said patiently. "If they came in here, I was going to kill the girl."

Barbara was sitting up, only half conscious from her horrible ordeal. She appeared to comprehend none of this. Her brain was too dazed to grasp it, and Kearney felt grateful.

"Dynamite," Kearney told the doctor. "It's buried in the floor here. We're doomed anyway. It's a better way out." He began to dig with his hands. The doctor crawled over, began to help. Frantic fingers bent to the task. Ten minutes of industrious digging unearthed the cache. The doctor was weakening fast; he slumped to the floor.

There was a sudden banging on the cell door. The men stiffened. Could it be help at the last minute? The banging was

repeated. Then the door began to rattle violently. A moment later the small sliding panel was opened. A face peered in; but such a face as is seen in the most unholy nightmare. It had no lips, no mouth, no nose. "We come for you," it said.

Kearney felt a gnawing revolt of his stomach. "Quick," he said to the doctor. "Some matches; here's the percussion cap."

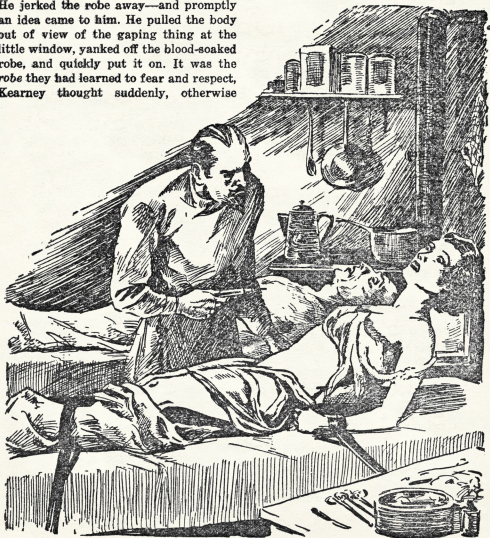
Gasping weakly, the doctor took the cap. "A match," he begged. "Hurry." Then he slumped over the cache, eyes closed.

Kearney searched his pockets without any luck. He went over to the fallen body of Gelden in its voluminous monk's robe. He jerked the robe away—and promptly an idea came to him. He pulled the body out of view of the gaping thing at the little window, yanked off the blood-soaked robe, and quickly put it on. It was the robe they had learned to fear and respect. Kearney thought suddenly, otherwise

they would not have carried off Booth Milbank!

The door began to rattle again. Then that same terror-laden chant went up. Furiously, bodies slammed into the door—they hadn't even sense enough to try to open it. The ancient hinges began to give under the steady, violent impact. Suddenly the door cracked, flew inward. In another moment Kearney would know about the robe. The chanting stopped.

The unholy terrors that started to come in halted in their stride. For, confronting them was the formidable figure they were taught to fear and obey, the man in the monk's hood and robe. They began to back



up in confusion. Noting this, Kearney lifted one arm majestically. "Get back!" he roared. "Back where you belong, every one of you!"

There was a bare instant of indecision. Then meekly they turned, silently slithered off. Kearney felt weak from nervous tension. He staggered against a wall. "Doc," he whispered. "We can get out now." The doctor didn't answer. Kearney bent over him, felt his pulse; he showed no signs of life. Kearney sighed. He brought the girl to her feet; her eyes were wide, unbelieving; she would be beyond feeling anything for many a day.

Kearney picked up the gun which had so recently belonged to Gelden. It was almost fully loaded and the doctor would have no further use for it. But Kearney wanted to be ready if a recalcitrant idiot got out of hand. In a pocket of the monk's robe he found a flashlight.

Slowly, cautiously, leading Barbara by the hand like a child, Kearney started forth. The winding way led them through a labyrinth of passages. But always Kearney steered away from the babble of voices that indicated the meeting room of the beggars. And then at last he found a staircase. From there it was only a matter of minutes till they reached the street—the Street of the Beggars.

Kearney jerked the bloody monk's hood off his head, yanked the clotted robe off his body. As if this were a signal, there was a sudden dull rumble below ground. Doctor Arnold had been not quite dead; he'd touched off the fuse!

In seconds, flame began to lick at the frail clapboard wrecks of houses that had been home to equally frail, equally hopeless wrecks of humans. Dense clouds of black smoke billowed upward to mingle with the pale moon rays.

A second, more terrific blast shook the ground on which they stood. Fresh flames crackled and reached fiery fingers to the sky, disconsolately clutching at moonbeams like the souls of drowning men. On either side of the street, houses crumbled into dusty red embers that glowed white and sparkled as if they knew their life was short. White-hot heat scorched their faces, torturing their lungs with each gulp of air.

Kearney threw his ragged coat over the girl's head to protect her from the flying sparks. He put up one arm for protection and pressed on doggedly.

Suddenly Barbara stopped. "Edith," she sobbed all at once. "We forgot Edith."

But recalling the glamorous creature Edith Morton had been, and remembering what a man's greed had made of her, Kearney sighed. "It is better so," he said.

Lighted up by the roaring red inferno, the Street of the Beggars took on a holy golden splendor that it had never known in its unholy life. It was as if the very cobbles of the ancient street welcomed this fiery form of spiritual release so that one day the street could rise, phoenix-like, clean and strong, out of the dead ashes of the past.

Out of danger in the center of the street, they pressed on to safety.



She left her body willingly, but couldn't get back. And her body became an

Unwilling Corpse

By Edgar Allan Martin

TRUE I am only an amateur in the art of hypnotism, but an amateur can learn many forbidden things from the pondering of forgotten books. Perhaps I did skim lightly the pages that gave the check for that horrible experiment. Perhaps—perhaps my mind was not strong enough. Though I do not believe that—for how could I have willed the hideous thing to happen?

True! I did not mean it as it seemed. It must have been the wording of that terrible command.

It is eleven-thirty. Speed is necessary to complete these notes. . . .

I had been experimenting with Helen for many months. She trusted me implicitly. And why shouldn't she? I loved her dearly, and she loved me.

After the first month of nightly experiments, she had no control over the matter. I could hypnotize her at will by merely willing it. So how can anyone say my mind is not strong? Strong, and sane. Definitely sane. In fact: too sane, too strong. If mine were a weaker mind, this astral nightmare might never have been a reality. . . .

I was visiting Helen at her little cottage close to my home. Soon we would be married. With her golden, drowsy head upon my shoulder and her full pure body in the curve of my arm, we talked of the wonderful times we would have. Well, not actually talked—we used no words, no sounds. Some call it telepathy. But still, it wasn't that; although the idea was the same.

I would hypnotize Helen, then raise

her from sleep until she was on the verge of waking, and hold her there. Then, slightly hypnotizing myself, we could converse freely and tirelessly. Our thoughts belonged to each other.

During one lapse in our thought-conversation, I remembered reading an ancient Persian book about an astral-body experiment. I remembered then, as I sadly do now, that I had never finished the volume. In fact, translating Iranian is so laborious for me that I had only studied the method for releasing the astral-body.

I willed Helen to sit up and carefully mind my thoughts. I told her to close her eyes, and picture in her brain the room about her. To picture before her closed lids the position of the furniture, and the lamps; the discarded book on the

floor, and myself.

A few moments passed while she struggled with this new and unusual command. But soon she saw the room clearly: could even through closed lids note the movement of a light curtain as it rustled with a faint breeze. I was exultant, and commanded her to gaze carefully about, without moving her body, until she felt a lightness; and then to arise.

A minute or two passed in silence. A heavy silence that I should have noted as the foreboding of doom. But I was much too interested to sense such things.

Finally she thought: "Now what do I do?"

I told her to arise as I had commanded.



"But I have," she thought.

Helen was still sitting on the couch. Her eyes were closed, and her full regular breathing rustled the low cut of her dress. Her hands rested gently on her abdomen. But her mind had risen to float in the air beside me. The experiment was a success!

I told her to turn and look at the couch. But hardly had the thoughts formed in my mind when a frightful change came over the shell that sat there. I knew it wasn't Helen, for her mind beside me sought a question.

The lids of Helen's eyes opened ponderously, as though the mind that controlled them wasn't sure of its power. Then the eyes, shockingly wise, and age-old and obscene, gazed up at me evilly, as though they could see Helen's shrieking mind. Shrieking questions—then pleading and begging me to give her back her body.

For a moment my dazed mind didn't grasp what had happened. Then I realized that a homeless wandering earth-spirit had found what he sought, a vacant body—a body with life, but no mind—and had entered it. Helen's body.

He was an old and evil spirit. And as I pleaded with him to leave, he laughed. Laughed mockingly! And I became mad and threatened him: and still he laughed. A triumphant cackle.

Perhaps I did go a little mad then. But who wouldn't who had to view the terrifying things that followed?

Helen's graceful hands twitched spasmodically, as a dope-fiend crazed for the want of drugs: and her pretty mouth, drooling and mouthing, choked sacrilegious invocations.

In the semi-gloom of the room it seemed that Helen's cheeks became hollow and sunken, and that the cheekbones rose. Dark lines appeared under her eyes and spread rapidly about the hollows of her face.

The eyes in the deep-sinking sockets became brighter and brighter, until I was certain they would burst into flame. Their brilliance seemed to add light to the hot room. Helen's lips twisted in a mocking smile, and suddenly I noted

that her face was becoming black and aged. Then her golden hair was turning to platinum—to a glowing silver. . . .

Within five minutes Helen had become an old woman!

But the transformation had not been finished. The brilliance in her eyes remained, but was dulled a bit as the eyes closed slightly and rose at their corners in an oriental slant. The face became young and beautiful in Asiatic type, almost cherubic, but the dark tint, like deep tan, remained. It spread quickly over Helen's throat and stopped there. As though an invisible hand had drawn a mystic line of demarcation about the base of the column, the spreading ceased. Helen's head had changed to that of a young pale-haired oriental.

Helen's lush body rose jerkily. Her innocent blue eyes, now mocking and inviting, were flecked with blood; and in their black depths was triumph over death.

YET Helen's mind still floated beside me. Her spirit still sobbed and pleaded in my brain while the demon gained control over her body.

From the depth of Helen's throat came a soft inviting purr, and her lips quivered questioningly. I backed around a table as the nightmare approached. The demon became angry and hastened after me with a hideous rolling stride that caused Helen's body to quiver convulsively.

With a triumphant roar the demon leaped upon me and we crashed to the floor. I thrust the horror away with a quick motion and leaped to my feet. The demon snarled and rose to a low crouch. Like an offensive snake, coiled, and tensed, sure of its victim, Helen's body crept after me.

Suddenly I knew what to do. I commanded the demon to leave Helen's body or I would destroy him. A mocking purr came from the oriental lips, and the eyes flashed dangerously. He, and I both knew that I had no control over his mind.

I side-stepped as the demon lunged,

and warned the horror that I still had control over Helen's body. Though Helen's mind was gone, the body from long association with my commands would obey me. It would obey my suggestions even more fully now than when resisted by Helen's subconscious mind.

But still the demon advanced.

So I acted. I commanded the nerves of Helen's body to repel the intruder. The exact words I do not remember. I meant that the body should cease action, and disregard the commands of the demon. But in the nervousness of the moment, I forgot the complete control I had over Helen's poor body. What I meant, and what I said were two different things.

Helen's body took my words literally. Suddenly, a horrifying change came upon her flesh. It bloated and split in a thousand places. The flesh became a flood of seeping blood. Her body was not only expelling the intruder; but its entire nervous system as well.

It was all over in a moment. There was nothing I could do. As the blood poured away I could see poor Helen's frightful face—a network of fine red lines. Her exposed nerves ran about her flesh like a surrealist dream of feeling.

It's ten minutes to twelve, now. Not much time is left. They say I had blood on my hands. Of course I had blood on my hands. Didn't I weep over her poor ruptured body an hour before I called the police? I loved her madly. Perhaps I was out of my mind, for I remember in my madness that I tried all sorts of artificial respiration—anything to revive my shattered love. Perhaps I was mad to do that—anyone could see that she was dead.

Even Helen seems to feel my tenseness as the hour draws near. "Thomas. Thomas!" her mind cries in my brain.

"Any body will do, Thomas. You could get me another body—that of a newborn child."

But how can I do what my beloved Helen desires? I am powerless!

They said at the trial that I had murdered my Helen in a manner unknown. I tried to explain, but they wouldn't believe my story. They called me mad! Momentarily insane, yes. I know I was—that's how I got that blood on my hands.

But I didn't kill her! It was a horrible mistake. Why should I kill her? Murder my love? It is all a dream: it must be! This couldn't happen. . . .

Two minutes to twelve. . . .

I hear their steps in the hall. Echoing gloomily on the cold walls. It will be a relief. True! if I were free, I could find a body for Helen whose now shrieking thoughts madden and torment me. She knows! She knows she is doomed to life everlasting. Life forever in a limbo between light, and shadow. But what can I do?

What can I do? What can I do? I know. I know! I have it! Why didn't I think of it before? Nothing to it! Yes, it dooms me too, but. . . .

Midnight. . . .

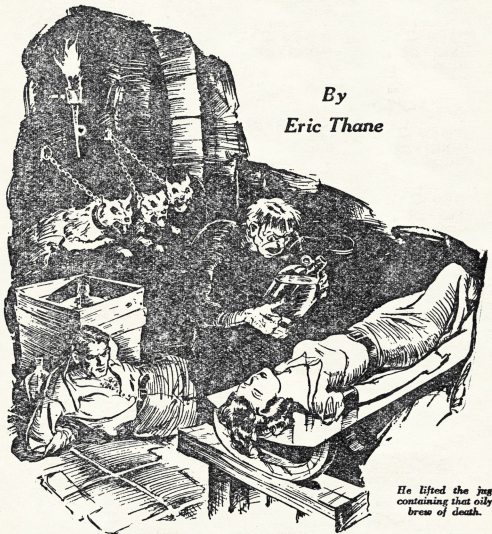
They are at the door now. Those hated men who will make certain that the laws of an ignorant court shall hang me by the neck until dead. They are fumbling with the lock. I have a few moments: barely enough—but I can do it. I can do it! I've hypnotized myself numerous times. Only a second is necessary. Merely dropping to sleep—as easy as that—and picturing the room. This cell, about me, and rising. . . .

In a moment I will be with Helen. Perhaps our astral bodies can find new homes, and live forever and ever with immortal peace and love. . . .



The Hounds of Purgatory

By
Eric Thane



*He lifted the jug
containing that oily
brew of death.*

LIGHTNING spilled from the ebony gloom of the midnight sky, and the whole length of the badlands shuddered to the following thunder, as to an earthquake. My scalp crawled strangely from the air which was so charged with electricity that my hair lifted like fur. And from another emotion, one which I was loath to admit, but which congealed my veins to ice, though desperately I fought against it.

Terror!

There it was again! In the tomblike silence that flooded the land after the thunder had ceased rolling, and before the next blob of lightning dropped, like crimson-hued blood flung from the corpse of the sky, came a low, low moan, neither man nor animal. The cry of some creature escaped from purgatory itself and left to roam this weird land of wind-eroded canyons and coulees and dry washes, in which stood the castle of Jonathan Corrigan.

Across the storm-lashed badlands that pack of mad beasts ran, teeth flaming, jaws slavering—bent on the kill. Behind them, a ghastly thing out of hell, came the master of the pack. And in their path, helplessly awaiting the grim doom that had been foretold, stood Edward Corrigan and the girl he loved.

But Jonathan Corrigan was dead now, his throat torn away by some beast such as only a brain wandering in a phantasm of terror could conceive. I, Edward Corrigan, his grandson, had fallen heir to this gloomy pile of stone which the great-grandfather Corrigan had built out here in the badlands of Montana.

It was a grim mansion in a canyon where the sun never touched, except at midday. Set deep back in a country so fantastically carved out of sandstone by the wind and rain of twice a million years that the Indians had aptly named it, in their language, "Hell Cooled Off!" It was a country fit for demons to roam in, and ghosts to dwell in, and the hairy beasts of hell to roam through.

"And it's the hounds of purgatory that are roaming here now," Locke said when I arrived two weeks ago.

Locke was the keeper of this castle in the shadows; a thin, bony man with haunted face and staring eyes. "They hunted out Jonathan Corrigan, and they tore his throat to shreds. They'll get you next, because you're the last of the Corrigans—the last of the blood that Ezekiel Corrigan made black with his evil deeds."

EZEKIEL CORRIGAN was great-grandfather Corrigan—as black-hearted a man as ever walked the world, though in justice to him I must say it was circumstances made him so. He had come from Boston to the Rocky Mountains in the early days of the West to trade. Promptly the Indians had tortured and scalped him. These ordeals had distorted his mind.

But before he died, from a renegade's bullet, he had made his fortune and built this gloomy castle in the shadows where only at midday sun struck—built it from the fortune gained through dishonesty, torture, blackmail and terror.

Just as Ezekiel Corrigan had died by violence, so his son died by violence, and his son, my father, died by violence. Now I alone carried in me the black blood of the Corrigans. From a renegade's bullet Ezekiel Corrigan had died; his grandson from an automobile accident; his son, who kept the castle, from hairy, fearsome things that tore a great, gaping hole in his throat. These hairy things, according to Locke, were now hunting me down.

All utter nonsense, I told myself now. I reined down the horse I was riding along the trail that led to Whitlash, the railroad town fifteen miles away where I was to meet Alice, my fiancée. The gloom of the shadow castle had touched Locke's mind, to color his version of grandfather's death.

"There he lay, his white head all bloody, and those things at his throat. A dozen of them—things from purgatory, I say. All shining in the night, and red with Jonathan Corrigan's blood. A hell pack from purgatory, I say. The medicine men of the Indians cursed this place, and now the curse is come true! The hounds of purgatory are loose, and they'll get you as they got Jonathan Corrigan."

As a matter of cold fact, Jonathan Corrigan had been found under a cut-bank near his castle, with his throat torn to shreds. He might have died of heart failure, and coyotes could have torn his throat. And again, Locke might be right. . . .

"I saw it all! He was walking, and all of a sudden the hell-pack, making a noise you've never heard on earth, came running toward him. A dozen hounds, all flaming with the fires of hell. They piled on him, and he didn't have a chance. And his blood, spattering all over their flaming coats, made red spots on the flame, or the shine, or whatever it was. . . ."

That was two weeks ago, and since then, in the nights, there would come at intervals a low, low moan of sound, like the bay of a hound. But no hound such as was of the earth—something conjured by a curse up from the nether world to destroy the black blood of the Corrigan. It was a sound which I ascribed to wolves, but Locke claimed there were no wolves in the badlands, only coyotes, and their cry was different.

Angry at myself for any superstitious thrill I felt, I cursed the thin man and went ahead making plans about the castle. Alice had shown an interest in it. It was her suggestion that we plan to spend the summers there after we were married, and live East during the winter. It was also her suggestion that we make a dude ranch out of it, since the Corrigan fortune had dwindled to almost nothing.

AND THEN, though I had forbidden her to come until I had thoroughly inspected the place, this afternoon brought a telegram informing me that she could not wait, but was coming at once. From the cowboy who delivered the telegram, I ascertained that the train was close to midnight. With no hotel accommodations in the station town, I knew I would be forced to bring her to the shadow castle at once. So here I was, riding to town on horseback, leading another horse for Alice.

And from somewhere back in the badlands came the bay of the hell-pack—those beasts of flame from an abode of fire, thirsting for my blood. The terror roused in me, but desperately I fought it back. After all, Jonathan Corrigan had been killed in a perfectly logical way, and coyotes had torn his throat.

Locke was an insane old fool whose distorted imagination caused him to see things, and whose unsteady ears made him hear things. Thus I fought back my panic, compelled myself, but with only indifferent success, to view circumstances in the cold light of reason.

Cursing the thunder, but dreading the silence that followed, I pressed on. As yet there was no rain, though an ominous

dampness in the air presaged a torrential downpour which would turn the dry washes to roaring streams. But since storms in this country were generally streaked and did not cover any large territory, I was in hopes the full fury of the rain would miss me.

The darkness of the station was disturbing. Evidently a thunderbolt had put the lighting out of commission. The train, which paused only briefly to discharge a single passenger, made a long, intermittent line of light that was comforting.

The one passenger was Alice. She rushed into my arms, and I held her tight against me. My heart roused to thunder at the pressure of her body, the tight force of her breasts against me, the long line of her thigh pressed hard against me. Her black hair, black as the night, swirled up and caught at my lips when I lifted my head.

"Ed, you aren't angry at me, are you?" she asked. "I mean, my rushing out here to see you. Oh, darling, I just had to see you—and that castle that we'll live in after we're married."

"You've come at a bad time," I told her. "This town is only a couple of shacks, and we'll have to ride back to the castle tonight."

"Oh, I'll love that," Alice thrilled. "Riding in the dark! And I won't be afraid—not with you along."

"I only hope it doesn't rain before we get to the castle. I have some riding clothes for you. You can slip into them here in the dark station."

"Don't go outside, please!" Alice begged. She spoke lightly, but I sensed that a shudder had run the whole length of her. "It's so—so lonesome."

Lonesome—that was a feeble word to describe the sensation that gripped me once we were out on the trail and headed for the castle of shadows. The storm had veered away, but now it swung back with all its destructive fury. Bloody forks of lightning, not sharp and jagged but crumpled as if with agony of some celestial kind, spilled at intervals towards the sullen land of canyons. The following thunder shook the earth.

Alice rode alongside me, so close that I put my arm about her slender waist to comfort her, though I knew that unlike most women she had no dread of lightning and thunder. She revelled in it, rather, and in the intervals of flame that hung from the heavens, I glimpsed her face, with eyes shining, cast upward.

"But the silence after the thunder," she said, in one of those moments. "It's so lonely—and it frightens me."

Though I had cursed the thunder in coming to town, now I prayed it would not stop. But stop it did, before any rain came to wet us. It swung away to the north with a speed that left the silence of the badlands the denser by comparison. And now, as I had cursed the sound, I cursed the silence under my breath, for it seemed to carry a menace which battered at my spine like ice.

We rode along, through a vast cavern of darkness. The trail ahead was only a dim ribbon of dusty gray, with our horses' hoofs the only sound in a land which a minute before had shaken to the burst of celestial warfare. We rode for I do not know how long. I judged we must be reaching the castle of shadows, when a low, low moan of sound, like a soul in the eternal agony of hell, drifted up from the trail ahead of us—that same sound which I ascribed to coyotes.

But I knew now, tonight, that it was not of a coyote. It was the tongue of some hairy beast brought up from the nether regions—to cleanse the world of the black blood of the Corrigans, if I was to believe Locke. And though I tried to tell myself that Locke was a fool, terror laid a cold hand around my heart and shook me through and through with almost physical force.

"What—what is that?" Alice gasped.

I made answer, as lightly as possible: "A coyote!"

But my tongue battered the roof of my mouth and I scarcely completed the word. For the sound was coming nearer, rising in force until it could be easily identified as not one tongue but a dozen or more. A hellish chorus such as might have been wailed by lost souls writhing in the agony

of flames, yet kept alive and destined to live and suffer by some satanic force.

"Oh, I—I'm frightened!" Alice whimpered.

Her horse gave a jerk of unease, and Alice, insecure in the saddle, fell to the ground. Her animal fled down the trail, away from the direction of the ghost pack. I dropped down beside the girl, but carelessly let the reins of my mount dangle. In an instant, the animal was in a mad race after its mate.

"Alice, are you hurt?"

"I'm all right!" Alice said to my great relief. I lifted her to her feet.

We were afoot now, to face the pack that raged ever nearer. I put my arm around Alice. All the way around her slender waist so that my hand was under the curve of her breast. Through the thin cloth of her riding shirt I could feel the warmth of her flesh and the pulsation which terror caused. I tightened my arm, so that she was hard against me, and together we stared into the dark whence came the diabolical chorus.

NUMBLY, I waited. It did not occur to me to flee, taking Alice with me. There were steep cliffs on either hand, and no matter how swiftly we retreated down the trail, the pack would overtake us sooner or later. Besides, I had the feeling that no matter where I went, the hounds of purgatory would hunt me down. They would tear my throat open as they had ripped the throat of Jonathan Corrigan.

One thing only I regretted, even in my terror, and that was that Alice was with me. Would the hounds of purgatory spare her who was to be my bride—or would they consider her as already the mate of one in whose veins ran the black blood of Corrigan?

Dumbly, hypnotized by the sound, we waited. But not for long.

They came towards us, big, slaving creatures aglow with flame—hounds bathed in eerie radiance, with flaming teeth. And behind them, holding each by some invisible leash, stalked the master of the pack.

Dead men's faces have I seen, many of them—on the battlefield, half shot away—in flames, withered into almost liquid masses—contorted by agony until they were no longer recognizable as the features of men. But never in my nightmares had I glimpsed a face such as that of this creature who was master of the hounds.

All aglow with a leprous light, scarred by raw grooves from which dripped the putrefaction of flesh long dead. It froze the blood in my veins, knocked my knees together in the rhythm of terror, and drained me dry of all the attributes of a man. I became, for the moment, a gibbering idiot. Then the quiver of Alice's heart brought me to myself. My reason, for an instant tottering, surged back to stability, and I hurled a curse of defiance at the Thing which had come for me.

A Thing! There was the leprous face, rotted away and all aglow, and the hands that held by invisible leashes the hounds. But between there was nothing. Just the face and the hands. Again my reason tottered, and only the flutter of Alice's heart, which I could feel against my palm kept me sane.

I heard myself say, in a high voice that surely could not be mine, but must be because my throat fluttered at the words: "You've come for me! All right, loose those dogs! But save Alice—let her go."

The Thing spoke, in tones from the grave of one long dead, "All must die. The last of the Corrigan—and his mate. Only then will purgatory have cleansed the black blood of the Corrigan. Only then . . ."

The dogs were silent now, squatting there on their haunches, with mouths open to reveal only horrible orifices of blackness in which there were no tongues. And the Thing, when it yawned wide, had no tongue—only a black blotch around which the lighted face glowed.

"The Corrigan must die! The black blood of the Corrigan must be cleansed by the hounds of purgatory, sent for that purpose . . ."

I do not know what rage swept me then, but the thought that Alice must die was like a spur. Even the devil and his hounds could not have kept me still. With

a powerful thrust, I pushed Alice away and charged forward, right into this demoniacal pack and its satanic master. I remember I screamed curses, threats. Even when the hounds reared like blobs of flame, higher and higher until they were above my head, I did not hesitate, but charged on. I flailed out, with all my might, and then the blackness that was in the mouth of the Thing, and in the mouths of the hounds, ripped jaggedly into my brain . . .

WHEN I regained consciousness my head banged like a cracked bell. There was the taste of brass in my mouth, but my brain was clear enough. I lay on a rock floor, my wrists bound tightly and my ankles laced across each other with a buckskin cord. I could not budge, try though I did. Above me swung three dim flares, and by their weird glow I made out that I was prisoner in a cavern of which the opening was walled in by granite blocks.

Instantly I comprehended. This cavern was dug out of the canyon wall next to the castle of shadows, and the granite blocks were the foundation stones of the castle. There were heaps of sand everywhere; and an arrangement similar to a giant cradle, except that it was flat, and covered with metal. Peacock-hued metal that changed from one oily rainbow color to another as the cradle rocked with ominous cadence. Rocked the still, white figure that was strapped to the center of it! "Alice!" I moaned in recognition.

The cradle swung back and forth on the rockers, and all around her the oily metal, under the eerie glow of the flares, changed colors and back again.

Apparently she was unconscious. Her white face and arms were like alabaster against the peacock hue of the brazen sheet. She seemed, in this hellish place, the one holy thing here. And my voice croaked out in terror at the being who hovered above her.

"If you hurt her—" I raged.

The Thing turned, and a mouth that was not a mouth opened to demoniacal laughter. I saw now that there was more to the being than that awful face and

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those hands. There was a suggestion of dark body, a Stygian, barrel-like shape that moved as if without legs to transport that head and those hands. This I noted. And I noted, too, that the dogs were gone. The veins on my face stood out with the effort I made to break free—a futile effort that left me panting and almost sapped of strength.

"Ah! You are conscious," the Thing gloated. "And you are just in time. Edward Corrigan. For I am sent from purgatory to cleanse the world of the dark blood of the Corrigans. First I shall rid the world of the mate, and then I shall rid the world of you."

I gasped out, stark fear cracking my voice into an almost unrecognizable croak, "Let her go! Take me—but let her go! Let her go!"

"Ah, no. The mate of the last of the Corrigans first. And then the last of the Corrigans. And then—back with me whence I came."

The unstable body moved, and that horrible head went rubbering around, searching for something. Terror gripped me that it would find what it sought. At last it fixed on a wooden box, and towards this the dark body glided. My eyes bulged with the effort I made to watch it, for I knew with grim certainty that within the wooden box lay the fate of Alice.

I was conscious, then, of a wetness on my back, and I discovered that behind me a small stream rilled, to sink away into the sand of the floor. Over everything in this grim cavern was a whisper of sound which I identified as falling water. I knew that the storm had come back with fury, to burst out with the torrential force which, earlier in the evening, I had been glad to escape. But now, while I waited to see what diabolical device this Thing would pull from the box, I prayed for a deluge to burst down.

THE THING lifted a big glass jug, which with effortless ease he carried back to the top of the cradle. With sinister cadence, unrocked by human hand, the cradle rocked back and forth, back and forth, gently, while the light played eerily over the rainbow colors of the metal top

and the white body strapped there as innocent sacrifice for black blood which was mine alone.

I raged out again, almost frothing at the mouth, biting my lips until they were red welts of agony. But the Thing only mocked my pleas.

"Out of purgatory I came, to rid the world of the black blood of the Corrigans! And the mate of the last of the Corrigans has the black blood in her."

"You—you thing out of hell!" I screeched, "she's not my mate. Not yet. Let her go."

"She must die."

One of those gleaming hands uncorked the jug. There gushed out a thin, choking mist that spread through the cavern like the perfume of hell—an acrid, retching odor as from a body long dead, given to decay and the ravens. I recognized that smell, and my senses almost left me. But desperately I rallied all my faculties.

Now was the one moment in which I could not afford to hesitate. Not while the girl I loved was doomed to die. Not while the Thing tilted the sinister jar-ready to slop forth a liquid which I knew to be the concentrated essence of all corruption. The liquid would move slowly down the cradle towards Alice. Would seep across that peacock-hued plate in a miasmatic mist that would burn out the rainbow colors to a flat gray, and change my beloved into something too horrible for my senses to contemplate.

"Not now! Not now!" I screamed. "Just a little while. Wait a while! And then—"

I had rolled over and over, until now I was near the Thing, my eyes in frenzy staring up into that awful glowing face and gaping mouth where there was no mouth. My desperate plea halted for an instant the hand that tilted the jug. The dead face swung to me questioningly, while the glass container rested on one corner of the cradle.

It was a chance, and I took it. The cradle had ceased to rock, and now I rolled hard against it. The jug tilted, jerked from the Thing's fingers, and shattered against the stone floor. An oily rill of death, lifting a mist, oozed toward me, but I rolled away.

"Fool!" screeched the Thing. "Do you think in this way to save one who must die? You have only delayed her death. Back, so that you may have a better look at her writhings and listen the better to her cries when she dies."

There were other wooden boxes near the first, and I understood at once that they contained the same hellish brew as the first. I had only delayed Alice's death. That was all. But delay gave me hope.

As yet, the girl had not stirred to consciousness, and of this I was tremendously thankful. Best that she was not aware of the death in store for her—slow and agonizing dissolution under the creeping mist of that devil's brew—a brew I recognized as sulphuric acid.

IT had pooled there in a depression in the stone, an oily, sinister blotch of it shining under the flares. And alongside it, rilling along the sand to disappear where the rocky floor of the place gave way to earth, was that stream of water, collected from the rain pounding overhead. I stared, and wild hope grew within me. Not an instant did I hesitate. I gritted my teeth, for what I meant to do was agony, yet no agony such as that in store for my beloved.

"You fiend," I gritted at the Thing, "I'll be a match for you yet."

I rolled over, and deliberately placed my bound wrists in the pool of sulphuric acid. Pain bit through me, into my brain until my senses reeled. But resolutely I kept to the course I was determined to follow. For a full half minute I held my wrists there. Then I jerked them away, to dig them into the stream of running water. I took care that the thong which bound them did not get wet. The water laved away most of the acid from my flesh, but the terror-brew clung there, on the hump of the thongs, burning away slowly.

The Thing returned with another bottle of the brew. But before those dead eyes set in flaming sockets stared at me, I dipped my wrists once more into the acid and washed my flesh, as far as I was able, with water. Even so, needles of pain jabbed my brain, so that I bit my

tongue until blood gushed from my mouth.

"So you are afraid to see her die?" the Thing jeered. "But die she will, for I must rid the world of the Corrigan's."

I gritted no answer. Behind my back, where the awful eyes of the Thing could not probe, I strained my wrists apart, hoping, praying that the acid would so weaken the cords that I could wrench my hands free.

"This time I shall take care of the mate of Edward Corrigan," gibbered the Thing as he tilted the opened jug above the white, still body. "This time she shall die. And then, Edward Corrigan, you die the same death. Or perhaps I shall throw you to my hounds. The hounds of purgatory. Then, the world will have been purged of the black blood of the Corrigan's, and I shall return whence I came."

And then Alice stirred. I could see the gleam of the flares on her black eyes as she opened them and consciousness came into her. I could see the comprehension in them, followed by the terror that seared through me and forced my wrists apart harder and harder until sweat ran from my face and it seemed that the fibers of the hemp must surely burst.

My beloved's white body tensed like a spring, tore against the straps about wrists and ankles, lifted a little way from that peacock-hued plate and held there momentarily, and then slumped back again. The Thing's wild gibberish gurgled out.

"You shall not escape. You shall die, dissolved into nothingness—as Edward Corrigan shall die, leaving no trace behind."

The mouth of the jug was dipping closer and closer to the top of the rocker. And now a thin, oily trickle dropped forth, upon the top of the peacock-hued plate, to roll with slow speed down the metal expanse toward Alice.

THE Thing, laughing wildly from the mouth that was not a mouth. He touched the curved pieces of wood on which the rocker stood, and thus imparted to the whole machine a slow, back-and-forth motion that washed the acid from

side to side but at the same time speeded up its course toward the girl.

A thin, hellish mist, so choking that it made my senses reel, lifted from the acid. There was a thin hiss of sound. And where the liquid had passed, on the metal behind, there was no longer a peacock-hue that glittered to terrible beauty in the flame of the flares. There was only a brassy expanse of copper sheet, burned clean of life and beauty. It was a change from life to death—such a change as that in store for Alice.

"She will die!" the Thing gloated, as if reading my thoughts. "She will die. She

will dissolve into nothing. But slowly, slowly, so that your ears may be filled with her cries, and you may feel a little of what is in store for you, yourself. She will die. Slowly, slowly—first her hair eaten away, then the flesh of her face, then her shoulders—those soft, white shoulders . . ."

His gap of a mouth gurgling to eerie mirth. He tilted the jug and sent a fresh flood of acid down the metal sheet, while his foot on the rocker kept the whole infernal cradle in a slow, sideways motion that swept the acid forward in tiny waves. Another instant now . . .

The ropes around my wrist parted. I rolled over again, as if in great excitement, and thus concealed myself partially below the lowered end of the cradle. My fingers plucked frenziedly at the cords about my ankles, twisted and tore until



blood spurted from my finger tips. Within the space of a few seconds I had torn the hemp apart. Free, and with fury throbbing like a wave through me, I jerked to my feet.

"She shall die," the Thing was intoning, when I came upright.

I seized the lowered end of the cradle, and with a terrific heave, lifted it higher than the other end. I kicked a rock under it, to block it permanently. The flood of acid halted only a fraction of an inch away from Alice's head, rolled back towards the Thing in an oily flood, and spilled over the edge with a hiss like the sound of flames in the nether regions.

"She shall die, and I who am come from purgatory—" the Thing had been chanting.

"You're a man, just as I am." I gritted out. "And I can tear you to pieces, just as I'd tear any man to pieces!"

I stooped to lift a rock, and went at the Thing. The jug of acid, which it lifted to swing at me, dropped away when my hurled bit of granite smashed through the glass.

"If you're from Hell, try to stop me now!" I taunted.

The Thing turned to run; fled out through a door in the foundation, and into a room dimly lighted by a candle thrust high in the wall. An infernal roar set up as I stumbled after him. From the corner of my eye, I glimpsed the hounds of purgatory leashed there against the wall. But their sinister import was gone. No longer was there anything in them to rouse terror, just as now I no longer feared their master—the being who ran from me, headed for a dim stairway.

I CUT across in front of him. When he turned, cornered, I glimpsed the glint of candle light on steel. He had drawn a long knife from somewhere in those dark clothes of his. I hesitated no longer, but lifted a long billet of wood lying on the floor and charged him. He thrust at me, and steel ran along my chest, pricked through the skin.

The next instant I had beaten him to death, and the knife dropped away from those gleaming hands of his.

It was only the work of a moment to free Alice, lift her off that rocker. We passed out through the room in which lay the Thing and in which were leashed the dogs of purgatory. Alice's slim shoulders, hard against mine, quivered.

"What was it?" she shuddered.

I leaned down, jerked away a phosphorous mask, grotesquely carved, and from beneath it there stared up at us the face of the keeper of the castle in the shadows. Locke!

"He discovered gold, or thought he had discovered gold." I told Alice later, as we sat before a roaring fire in one of the upper rooms of the castle. "The gold would have belonged to Jonathan Corrigan, of course, since it was on Corrigan property. So Locke had to get rid of him. He knew the legend of how the Indian medicine-men had cursed the Corrigans and this castle in the shadows. So he made up his story of the hounds of purgatory. The hounds were simply several dogs which he had painted with phosphorus."

Rain still pounded far above us, and lightning still shook the castle. But now it was a comforting storm, one that seemed to bring Alice very close to me.

"I inspected this castle, of course, but I hadn't had time to get down there in the foundation. And it was there that Locke thought he had discovered his gold. He'd built an *aperjero*—rocker affair covered with a copper plate used to collect flower gold. He knew very little about the metal, apparently, for he was experimenting. He had several different kinds of acids down there, and a lot of mercury which he used with the rocker, or cradle as it is also called. Evidently he was sure he had found gold, but did not know just how to get it."

"And when you were ready to inspect the basement of the castle—"

"He'd built up the story of the hounds, and had even turned them loose to bay. But tonight he determined on his master stroke. He determined to deck himself out as the Master of the Hounds, in his mask and gloves, and confront us. He thought it would scare us away for good. When I attacked him, he knocked me out. And then— Well, his mind was a little

distorted. He saw he couldn't scare us away, so he had to get rid of us, somehow. And he was taking the way that would leave no evidence."

Alice shuddered, and I tightened my arm around her. In silence, we stared into the comforting fire for a long time. At last Alice spoke softly in the way that made my pulses pound and lifted me to the heights of ecstasy.

"The black blood of the Corrigan. But it's run out, Edward. It vanished with the

Corrigan who began it. To me—it's not black blood. It never will be. I love you, Edward—and I want to stay here with you, here in this castle of the shadows, as we planned."

"And with you loving me enough to do that, there'll never be another ghost to stir in this land," I said.

And suddenly the castle of shadows did not seem so dark, so gloomy, for I knew that so long as I had Alice, terror would never again walk through the badlands.



STATEMENT OF THE OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, CIRCULATION, ETC., REQUIRED BY THE ACTS OF CONGRESS OF AUGUST 24, 1912, AND MARCH 3, 1933

Of *Eerie Mysteries*, published bi-monthly at Springfield, Mass.
for October 1, 1938.

State of New York }
County of New York } ss

Before me, a Notary Public in and for the State and county aforesaid, personally appeared A. A. Wyn, who, having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that he is the Publisher of the *Eerie Mysteries* and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management (and if a daily paper, the circulation), etc., of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the above caption, required by the Act of August 24, 1912, as amended by the Act of March 3, 1933, embodied in section 537, Postal Laws and Regulations, printed on the reverse of this form, to wit:

1. That the names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business managers are: Publisher, A. A. Wyn, 67 West 44th Street, New York, N. Y.; Editor, A. A. Wyn, 67 West 44th Street, New York, N. Y.

2. That the owner is: If owned by a corporation, its name and address must be stated and also immediately thereunder the names and addresses of stockholders owning or holding one per cent or more of total amount of stock. If not owned by a corporation, the names and addresses of the individual owners must be given. If owned by a firm, company, or other unincorporated concern, its name and address, as well as those of each individual member, must be given. Magazine Publishers, Inc., 67 West 44th Street, New York, N. Y.; A. A. Wyn, 67 West 44th Street, New York, N. Y.; C. & A. Publishing Co., Mount Morris, Illinois; E. L. Angel, Rockville Center, N. Y., and E. Campbell, Mount Morris, Illinois.

3. That the known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding 1 per cent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities are: (If there are none, so state.) None.

4. That the two paragraphs next above, giving the names of the owners, stockholders, and security holders, if any, contain not only the list of stockholders and security holders as they appear upon the books of the company but also, in cases where the stockholder or security holder appears upon the books of the company as trustee or in any other fiduciary relation, the name of the person or corporation for whom such trustee is acting, is given; also that the said two paragraphs contain statements embracing affiant's full knowledge and belief as to the circumstances and conditions under which stockholders and security holders who do not appear upon the books of the company as trustees, hold stock and securities in a capacity other than that of a bona fide owner, and this affiant has no reason to believe that any other person, association, or corporation has any interest direct or indirect in the said stock, bonds, or other securities than as so stated by him.

5. That the average number of copies of each issue of this publication sold or distributed, through the mails or otherwise, to paid subscribers during the twelve months preceding the date shown above is (This information is required from daily publications only.)

Magazine Publishers, Inc., Publisher
A. A. Wyn, Publisher

Sworn to and subscribed before me this 28th day of September, 1938.

J. A. HUGHES, Notary Public
Queens Co. Clerk's No. 3297, Register's No. 7862
Certificates filed in New York's Co. Clerk's No. 1067
Register's No. 9H663.
Commission expires 8/20/39

A sinister spotlight plays on a killer-düller dancer when . . .

The Cobra Strikes

By Cliff Howe



He swayed, and his knees buckled under him.

THE strident ringing of the doorbell brought Frank Terrill around in his chair with a jerk. He thrust a lean finger into the book he was reading to mark the place and stared across the den of his snug bachelor apartment.

His eye wandered past cabinets filled with curios, primitive weapons and pieces of pottery—mementoes of his many travels. Stuffed heads of big game, shot in the

far corners of the earth, stared back at him from the walls.

The doorbell sounded again. It was continuous this time, as though some one, out of patience, were holding an angry finger on it.

He shut his book with a snap, wrapped his silk-tasseled dressing gown around his tall figure and strode to the door with long, quick steps. His movements were

as poised and precise as those of some fast-running, well-oiled machine.

He stopped beside the door, touched the button operating the electric lock in the vestibule below, and waited. The button would spring the catch and afford his visitor admittance.

The ringing ceased abruptly, but seconds passed and no one came up the stairs. Terrill's long, lean face with its thin mustache line grew alert.

As a special investigator of crime, acting *sub rosa* in homicide cases, the ringing of that doorbell had often presaged a visit from Inspector Johnson, or from some stranger asking his help. Who could it be now, he wondered.

He waited another half minute, and a hard look came into his eyes. He had enemies in the underworld, friends of criminals he had sent to the electric chair. A time might come when some assassin's hand would reach out for his own life.

He crossed quickly to a table, opened a drawer and drew from it an automatic in a worn leather holster. It was a weapon that had been with him on many adventures when, as a newspaper correspondent and soldier-of-fortune, he had prowled the out-trails of the world. He drew back the safety catch and slipped the gun into his pocket. A moment later he opened the corridor doorway and went down the apartment house stairs.

It was raining outside. He could see the glow of a street light on wet pavements, hear the moaning lash of the wind. Somewhere a taxi honked dismally.

The night switchboard operator wasn't in sight. No one was visible through the glass of the vestibule door. But he opened it cautiously and stared out, then drew in his breath in a hissing gasp.

On the floor of the vestibule a human figure lay sprawled. The starkly pale face of a young man stared up at him; eyes wide, bloodless lips moving incoherently. He bent closer and stared in amazement. On the young man's face, stamped there with some sort of dark ink, was a hideous design—the head of a snake with open jaws and sharp fangs.

The young man made a gurgling sound

in his throat and lifted one trembling arm. He pointed back through the doorway toward the street and Terrill understood.

He leaped across the man's body to the front of the vestibule and looked into the night. Far down the block the red tail-light of a car was disappearing. As he watched, it was swallowed up by the rain-swept darkness.

He ran down the steps, crossed the pavement and stooped down. Tire tracks showed faintly where the water had been pressed back from the asphalt. The rain was obliterating them. There was no time for him to make a photo as an expert from the Bureau of Criminal Identification might have done. But he recorded the markings on the sensitive film of his brain. He would recognize them if he saw them again.

He turned back into the apartment building, running long fingers through rain-wet hair. The figure of the young man was still there, slumped flatter now. The staring eyes were closed, the bloodless lips still.

Terrill felt one of the stranger's hands, held it for a moment, and nodded to himself. There was no pulse beat. The young man was dead. Then he saw the bluish markings near one of the veins on the young man's wrists—and prickles of horror crept along his scalp. He bent closer and stared more intently. The markings had been made by the fangs of a snake!

IT was fifteen minutes later that a headquarters' car arrived in answer to his summons. In the meantime he had gone through the dead man's pockets and had established his identity. A wallet showed that his name was Thomas Bailey. A business letter indicated that he was employed by the Zeddler brothers, bankers who owned the controlling interest in the Central Savings Bank.

Terrill straightened up as Detective Murphy of the radio car patrol came through the door with the tails of his wet slicker flapping around his legs. Outside, a cop named Sullivan sat at the wheel of the police cruiser chugging at the curb.

Murphy said: "What is it, Terrill, what's the trouble now? Have—"

He stopped speaking as his eye fell on the dead form of Bailey. His big face assumed the alert expression of a terrier watching a rat hole. "Who's the guy and who bumped him?"

"That's what I'd like to know," said Terrill softly. "He was coming to see me. He must have had something to tell. But somebody got to him first. Look at his face, Murphy!"

Frank Terrill heard the big dick's sharply indrawn breath.

"It's a snake's head—what the hell—" his voice trailed off.

Terrill's voice was harsh. "There are marks on his wrist where a snake's teeth went in, Murphy. Telephone the medical examiner, and let Johnson know about it. I've found where he worked. I'm going up to get a coat and hat. You can leave Sullivan here—and when I come down we'll pay a visit to this man's bosses. They may know something about him."

All cars were the same to Frank Terrill. He sent the slim-bodied police cruiser roaring through the night streets till Murphy beside him gripped the top of the door for support.

"Take it easy, Frank—the pavement's wet."

Terrill's only answer was to send the car whizzing around the tail end of a lumbering milk truck. He spun the wheel, straightened out and went roaring down a long avenue. He was seeing the darkly despairing face of young Bailey as though it hung on a curtain before his eyes. He was seeing also that strange mark on his forehead and the disappearing tail-light of that mystery car.

The long avenue widened till handsome residences showed on either side. Elm trees dripped water from branches arching overhead. Terrill slid the car in to the curb and leaped out.

"Here we are, Murphy. This is where the Zeddlers hang out."

The house that they entered was large and built of brick, and a sleek butler opened the door. Terrill nudged Murphy.

"You do the honors," he said. "I'll

watch—and get the lay of the land before I begin asking questions."

The big headquarters dick opened his slicker and let the butler see his badge.

"There's been a murder," he said. "We want to talk to your bosses."

The butler's eyelids flickered and it seemed that his face grew a shade paler.

"Mr. G. C. Zeddler is ill upstairs. Go into the drawing room. I'll speak to his brother, Mr. A. J."

Murphy snorted and muttered under his breath.

"Why do these rich guys use all the letters of the alphabet, Frank?"

"That's another mystery, Murphy."

TERRILL lit a cigarette and smoked in silence till a step sounded in the doorway. A thick-set, broad-shouldered man entered. He had yellow eyes like a cat's and he stared at them sharply.

"What's this I hear about a murder?"

"I'm from headquarters," said Murphy showing his badge again. "Did a young man named Thomas Bailey work for you?"

A. J. Zeddler gave a visible start. He drew a nervous hand across his chin.

"Yes, we employed him as a secretary. Why, what's happened?"

"He was found dead. Somebody bumped him off."

"Good Lord!" The exclamation on Zeddler's lips seemed genuine. Terrill stepped closer and spoke quietly.

"I found him in the vestibule of my apartment, Mr. Zeddler. There was a mark on his face—a snake's head. Do you know anything about it?"

It was almost as though some one had struck Zeddler in the face. His heavy features paled and he stepped back.

"The Cobra!" he said. "Yes—I know. I got a threatening letter yesterday. Here, I'll show it to you—wait a minute."

He left the drawing room with hurried steps. Terrill turned. Murphy was standing silent, looking around. Rain beat a monotonous tattoo on the windows opening on the lawn. There were French doors between them with a balcony beyond.

Terrill edged forward to look out, and

as he did so he gave a sudden start. Murphy behind him cried out harshly—for at that instant the lights in the room had winked out.

It was surprising, spine-chilling. They stood in utter darkness except for the faint glow from the corridor outside—and Terrill was suddenly conscious of a draft of cold air on his face. It was like the touch of dead fingers and, as he realized its significance, his blood seemed to freeze. Some one had opened the French doors to the balcony!

In the brief second that he listened, there was the stealthy sound of movement in the room. He sensed that he was silhouetted against the light of the corridor doorway and he stepped aside with a sudden constricted feeling in his throat.

Some one made a grab for him then. Fingers of steel clutched his arm. He glimpsed dimly a ghostly, horrible shape moving down toward his wrist. Death seemed to be in the room with him. He twisted, struck out, and breath hissed through his teeth.

Murphy called out to him, hoarse with anxiety.

"Are you all right, Frank? What's the matter—what's happened?" He heard the big dick's footsteps pounding toward him. He could not seem to speak; those steely fingers were reaching for him again.

A sense of nausea gripped him as though the danger that faced him was unspeakably loathsome. His balled fist struck a human body and he heard a grunt.

Then he heard Murphy leap upon the unseen attacker, a snarl in his throat.

"What the hell! Here—hands up—"

Murphy's words ended in a choking, terrible cry. It was a cry that seemed to freeze Frank Terrill's blood. He heard the sound of bodies struggling; heard breath whistling through clenched teeth and a man making smothered, ghastly noises in his throat.

HE reached for a match paper, tried to light one. But something knocked it from his fingers. He drew out his gun and fired blindly at the spot. The shots seemed to rip through the darkness of

the room like the reports of a cannon and the walls beat the sound back deafeningly, into his ears.

"Murphy! Murphy!" he called.

He heard the French doors slam, heard some one go out.

Walking unsteadily, he crossed the room, groping for a wall switch. His feet bumped into something, something soft and yielding and the skin of his scalp tightened in horror.

He found the switch beside the door, pressed it and flooded the room with light. He saw then that there was another switch over by the French doors. But his eyes swung from it to the floor.

Murphy lay there, his face contorted and his eyes fast glazing. He tried to speak, tried to move his lips, but no sound came from them. On his forehead was the hideous mark of the Cobra and he was clutching his left wrist tensely, clutching it where tiny bluish marks showed on the skin.

Terrill ran to his side, stooped down. But Murphy's head fell back. The poison in his veins seemed almost as quick in its effect as a bullet fired from a gun. The death rattle sounded in his throat.

Frank Terrill rose and ran to the French doors, gripping his automatic in his hand. He flung them open, stepped out onto the balcony and felt the chill lash of rain in his face. A street light spread ghostly radiance across the wet grass of the lawn; but he could see nothing, no movement, and the water would destroy tracks. For seconds he stood there, trying to pierce the darkness while the rain beat against his face. Then he turned back into the room.

He saw A. J. Zeddler enter and give a gasp of horror at sight of Murphy's body.

"What is it? What's happened?" the banker said.

He held a card in his trembling fingers and on it Terrill saw some words printed and the mark of the Cobra's head.

"He came here," said Frank harshly. "He got Murphy. Where's your telephone?"

Zeddler jerked his thumb toward the outside hallway, and Terrill ran across

it, brushing by the butler who was standing white-faced near the door. He found the phone in the closet, called headquarters and turned in a report of the second murder. Zeddler was at his elbow when he came out. He spoke huskily.

"Doctor Vail, our family physician, will be here any minute to attend my brother who is ill upstairs. It's possible he can do something for that man in there."

Terrill shook his head.

"Murphy's beyond help now. The Cobra struck quickly, but it was me he was after. Murphy died saving my life. He was as fine as they come."

As he stopped speaking, the door bell rang and the butler, trembling still, opened it.

A TALL man with a pink face and a clipped blond moustache stood on the threshold. He entered with a black case in his hand and looked from one to the other, seeming to sense their strained attitudes.

"Doctor Vail," said Zeddler huskily. "This is Terrill, of the police. There's been a murder here—a detective killed. And our secretary, Bailey, was killed tonight, too. The Cobra's been at work."

A shadow drifted across Vail's eyes.

"What about your brother? Was there any noise when all this happened?"

Zeddler started as if he remembered for the first time that there had been shots.

"Yes—good heavens! Go to George quickly."

The doctor turned and took the stairs three at a time.

"What's wrong with your brother?" said Terrill.

"Heart trouble. He's been ill for days. Doctor Vail has been in constant attendance—just keeping him alive."

Terrill nodded and left Zeddler. He prowled through the rooms on the lower floor until a siren outside told him that the police had arrived. An instant later steps sounded on the porch.

He went into the hallway to greet Inspector Johnson, owl-like head of the homicide squad, who entered with three men and the assistant medical examiner. In

brief words he told what had happened and saw the strained look that came over the old inspector's face at mention of Murphy's death. Behind a blunt exterior Johnson hid a soft heart.

He turned, giving crisp orders to his men, then entered the drawing room to view the dead man, with A. J. Zeddler at his heels. Terrill, without asking permission, ascended the stairs and moved down a hallway toward a door that was slightly ajar and through the crack of which he saw a glow of light.

At sound of his steps, Doctor Vail suddenly appeared. His face was grave and he put a finger to his lips.

"Tonight's events may have serious consequences for my patient," he said, speaking in a hoarse whisper. "Mr. Zeddler is very low. I'm sending for a nurse."

Terrill looked past the doctor toward a bed where a man lay. He heard stertorous breathing and saw bluish lips in a white face. But the man in the bed suddenly opened eyes which fixed themselves upon him and beckoned with one pale hand.

Terrill entered the room, walking up to the bedside.

"Are you a detective?" asked the sick man.

"Unofficial," said Frank, "but I've helped the inspector more than once."

"Whoever you are," said Zeddler, "find this fiend who calls himself the Cobra. He sent my brother a threatening letter demanding money. And tonight I heard a man cry out downstairs followed by the sound of shots. What was it?"

Terrill glanced at the doctor and Vail answered for him, lying adroitly.

"Nothing much, Mr. Zeddler. A detective your brother called in to investigate the extortion letter accidentally discharged a pistol."

The sick man lay back with a weary sigh and Terrill turned toward the door. Then his eye was suddenly caught by something on Zeddler's bureau. It was a small thing, a paper of matches, but printed on it was the name of the Jungle Grove, a well-known night club. What member of the Zeddler household, he

wondered, patronized that gay resort. Could it be that the sick man on the bed had been there? With a swift movement he pocketed the matches.

He went downstairs and spoke to Inspector Johnson, but the chief of the homicide squad shook his head in discouragement.

"We can't find anything, Frank. No tracks—no clews. A man came through those French doors—but who was he and where did he go?"

"You've got me, chief." Terrill's voice was low and his eyes were bright. He wasn't ready yet to formulate any theory. The whole thing was a mystery.

TWO interesting things occurred within the next twelve hours. The medical examiner turned in a report that snake venom of super strength had been found in the blood of both Bailey and Detective Murphy. And at four o'clock in the morning of the night that the murders had taken place, Doctor Vail and the attending nurse announced the death of G. C. Zeddler.

His brother, A. J. Zeddler, was like a broken man when Terrill arrived to make an exhaustive search of the grounds by daylight.

"George will be buried tomorrow," Zeddler said. "At his request he has not been embalmed and the services will be brief and simple." His voice suddenly took on a metallic harshness and he leaned toward Terrill with blazing eyes.

"The Cobra is as responsible for George's death as though he had injected a dose of his foul poison into my brother's veins. Are the police imbeciles that they cannot find him?"

"We're doing what we can," Frank said.

He saw that the banker was close to the breaking point. The man's whole body was quivering; and yet he had the feeling that Zeddler might be holding something back—some secret information perhaps.

Frank saw the funeral notices the next day. The body of G. C. Zeddler was to be interred in the family mausoleum in Cypress Vale Cemetery.

Terrill picked up the French type telephone in his apartment, and with a frown of concentration on his face he called police headquarters.

"Terrill speaking. It might be a good idea, chief, to have a man shadow A. J. Zeddler. He won't talk, but I think he's got ideas about the Cobra."

"Just what do you mean?"

"That's all, chief. Keep an eye on him—it can't do any harm."

Smiling grimly at the inspector's profane rejoinder he hung up. He spent three hours reading up on poisonous reptiles and their venom. At four that afternoon he called the Jungle Grove Night Club to see when it opened.

At seven he presented himself at the door and drew the blonde hat-check girl aside. He pulled from his pocket the match paper he had taken from Zeddler's bureau and showed it to her. Her eyes were cold and she snapped her gum against pearly teeth, then parked it under the hat counter.

"Don't expect me to get excited over that, mister. They swipe lots of 'em here." Terrill grinned.

"Do you know the people who come in here?" he asked.

"Yeah, why?"

"I mean do you know them by name?"

"Some of 'em."

"Did you ever see one of the Zeddler brothers—the bankers?"

"Did I? Say—" The girl suddenly froze up on him and assumed a dead pan. "Who the hell are you, mister?"

Quietly Terrill pulled out his wallet and displayed his special investigator's card signed by the police commissioner himself. As quietly he selected a crisp five-dollar bill and slipped it into the girl's fingers.

"Gee!" she said.

"Which Zeddler was it?" he asked.

"The younger one. 'George' she called him."

"Who?"

For an instant the girl hesitated, looking at the five-dollar bill.

"It's real money," she said. "What the hell! I mean Marlene Lunt—you know,

the girl who has a dance act here. That old bird was crazy about her. He used to come to see her often."

"When did he come last and what time does she go on?"

"About a week ago. Her act doesn't begin till ten. Anything else you'd like to know?"

"No, sister. You've earned that five dollars. Just keep quiet and look pretty."

She unparked her gum again, and Terrill sauntered off. He got Marlene Lunt's address from the telephone book and sped to it in his roadster. It was a swanky apartment; but again he showed his special card and the superintendent admitted him. Miss Lunt didn't know she had a visitor till Terrill buzzed her door.

She looked startled and not too pleased when he pushed past her into her apartment. She was a smoky-haired brunette with a voluptuous figure and eyes that could do things.

"Who are you?" she asked.

Terrill stared around her apartment and saw a wardrobe trunk and three suitcases all packed up.

"Going away?" he asked.

"Yes, to the country."

He walked over to a table and picked up three steamship booklets setting forth the delights of European travel. He held them up.

"You were thinking of the water, weren't you?" he said.

"I changed my mind."

He moved up to the wardrobe trunk then and placed his finger on a big label that said: *S. S. Normandie*. He looked at the clock. It was Saturday. The ship sailed at midnight.

The girl, Marlene Lunt, had suddenly turned pale. Her fingers shook as she lit a cigarette, and she started across the floor toward a desk. There was something feline and sinister about the swaying of her lithe hips and the sidelong glance she shot at Terrill.

He stepped forward and caught her hand just as she drew a pearl-handled revolver from a drawer and tried to turn it on him. He twisted it from her fingers. She backed away panting, and breath hissed from between her teeth.

He caught her suddenly, thrust her into a closet and turned the key in the lock.

"Don't make any noise," he said. "Nobody will hear you anyway. I'll be back later."

Fog was creeping over the city as he went outside. It was almost as thick as the fog of mystery that surrounded the murder of Thomas Bailey and Detective Murphy.

Terrill called up headquarters.

"Any news of A. J. Zeddler?" he asked.

"No. A man's still on the job shadowing him."

He hopped into his car and drove toward the banker's house. There might be some way to make Zeddler talk. If not, a fantastic idea was forming in Frank's mind, a murder theory—but there were pieces missing. Some one must know the answer.

He parked his car down the block, and a man moved out of the shadows and hissed at him. It was the headquarters dick assigned to the case.

"Keep out of sight, Mr. Terrill. Zeddler's just coming out now—getting into his car."

It was true. Ahead, in front of the house, the broad-shouldered figure of A. J. Zeddler was getting into a big limousine. But there was no chauffeur. Zeddler was taking the wheel himself.

Terrill drew the detective, whose name was Van Brunt, back into the shadows.

"I'll handle this from now on."

He waited until the limousine rolled out of the drive and purred down the street. Then he caught Van Brunt's arm and pulled him forward. They sprinted for Frank's car.

Terrill sent it forward with silently meshed gears, and for blocks he kept Zeddler's car in sight.

"Where the hell's he going?" whispered Van Brunt.

Terrill didn't answer. His eyes were bright, staring ahead. They moved out of the city, out where houses were scarce and where there were lots of trees. Then Zeddler's car stopped in the shadows by a high wall. The lights flicked off.

"It's Cypress Vale Cemetery," Van Brunt said hoarsely, and Terrill nodded.

He turned off his own lights and climbed out. Ahead a key grated in a lock and the massive iron gate of the cemetery swung open. Zeddler's broad-shouldered form disappeared through it.

With Van Brunt at his heels, Terrill followed. Their rubber-soled shoes made no noise. They kept in the shadows. Zeddler didn't know he was not alone. After a time Frank spoke softly.

"You stay here, Van Brunt. Come if you hear shots."

He glided off into the darkness and his face grew tense. A faint light had shown for an instant far ahead. On all sides of him the ghostly white shapes of grave-stones rose. He picked his way among them toward the light that seemed to have no right to be there at this dark hour. It was ten o'clock and the cemetery had been closed since six.

Then he saw Zeddler again. The man was crouching now, creeping forward toward the light, his stocky form bent over like a great bear. There was something gleaming in his hand.

And Terrill saw now where the light came from. It was from the partly open door of a huge mausoleum. Prickles of horror ran up his spine. He was not sure what ghoulish work was going on inside.

HE waited, fingering his own automatic; and he saw Zeddler close to the mausoleum's door. Then the door opened wider and Zeddler went inside.

Looking beyond Zeddler he saw a man with a dark handkerchief over his face prying open the lid of a coffin. The man was intent, bending over. But he rose as Zeddler spoke.



"Who are you and what are you doing?"

The banker's voice was hoarse, his whole body was trembling. The man with the handkerchief over his face stared with the cold ferocity of a killer. Then Zeddler cried out and swayed like a drunken man.

For the lid of the coffin moved aside and a figure rose from it to a sitting position. It was the figure of Zeddler's brother, G. C. Zeddler, whose death certificate had been made out twenty-four hours before. His face was pale now and contorted, but he was alive.

A. J. Zeddler rushed forward furiously.

"What does this mean?"

He made a fierce clutch for the man in the handkerchief, but the man stepped back and drew something from behind him. Terrill gasped in horror.

On the man's right hand was a glove in the form of a Cobra's head. The jaws worked with thumb and forefingers; sharp fangs showing, and before Terrill could move he had plunged the fangs into the elder Zeddler's arm.

With a choking cry A. J. Zeddler staggered back. He tried to speak, failed and sank to the floor writhing. And at that moment the man sitting in the coffin spoke.

"You've killed him, Vail—you've killed my brother. I didn't intend that. You're a murderer!"

"Yes!" the single word hissed from behind the handkerchief, the snake's head on the man's right hand flashed out. But before it reached the figure in the coffin, Terrill's gun barked twice.

A cry of pain and fury came from the lips of the masked killer. The arm with the snake's head glove fell limply, crimson dripping from it. He backed into a corner, glaring. The handkerchief fell away and Terrill saw the blond features of Doctor Vail. Then, with a movement so quick that Terrill could hardly follow it, the doctor thrust his left hand between the snake's jaws and pressed them shut with his thumb.

A horrible, mirthless smile spread over his face. He looked at Terrill, swaying

slowly. Then his knees buckled under him.

The younger Zeddler was like a man stricken dumb. Then words came:

"I didn't plan for any killings. I didn't. It was Vail who did it. He would have killed me, too. I see it now. I'm a thief, but not a murderer. And see—here's the money. I can return it all."

Zeddler's voice rose wildly as he drew a satchel from between his legs in the coffin and held it up.

"The bank was failing—it would have crashed. I took the money from the vault—the last half million. I was going to leave America and go where no one would ever find me. Vail was paid for the part he played; the drugs that made it seem I was dead."

"What of Marlene Lunt?" said Terrill sternly.

Zeddler moaning covered his face.

"You know about her then. She was beautiful—her beauty maddened me, drove me to crime. She was to meet me on the boat tonight. We were going away together."

"I know it," said Terrill softly. "It's funny, Zeddler, what small things will sometimes trip up a criminal. That match paper on your bureau, for instance—I couldn't figure why a man with heart trouble would be going to the Jungle Grove. It made me investigate—started me on the right track.

"I hear Detective Van Brunt coming now. You'll stay in prison a long time, Zeddler. It's too bad you didn't put all that brainwork into building up your bank. But I'm glad the depositors aren't going to lose that half million anyway.

"And I'm glad, too, there won't be any more biting with that Cobra's head. Vail had distilled venom stuck in the fangs. He killed your secretary when the young man grew suspicious and came to me. It was Vail's car I saw disappearing that night. And when your brother began to figure things out and came here he killed him, too. He was a murderer at heart with a sense of the dramatic—and there's no telling how many more people he might have killed if he hadn't been stopped."

Realm of Liquid Death

By Chester Brant

The whole world seemed to shatter, and John Marchant found himself and the girl he loved engulfed in the slimy waters of Acheron, even as Zrinyi had foretold. Zrinyi was now in his element, was carrying out his evil designs, while Marchant could only watch—trapped, helpless.

THE highly polished boards under John Marchant's feet shivered almost imperceptibly, trembled with ominous warning, as though a mammoth Cyclops, afflicted with ague, had grasped them and was sending slight, convulsive shudders along their gleaming surface.

John Marchant paid no attention to the quivering. He drew his chair closer to Lorna's and let his hand cover her small ones. His eyes roamed over Lorna's lovely, red-gold hair, her wide-dark-blue eyes and the delicately rounded crimson mouth. The entirety of this exquisite girl, the golden tan of her skin where it was exposed by the smartly cut, tight-clinging linen sports dress, the lithe youth of her nicely made body and the long, slimly tapering, silken legs, held a deep, passionate allure for John Marchant.

The realization that within a few short weeks he was to marry her brought a pulse-stirring thrill of pride and expectation coursing through his veins. He had never known such complete happiness. And yet—

He frowned. Lorna was the ultimate, the consummation of all his desires. She loved him, was going to marry him. Why should an eerie premonition that he was to lose her, steal over him at this time? Something wrong. But what? He pressed her hand, stared at it. He prayed silently, fervently, that nothing would happen to disturb that blissful security. If he lost Lorna, if anything tore her away from him. . . .

Why was it so hot, so difficult to breathe? He found himself almost gasping for breath. If anything, *anything* took this girl from him he'd go insane. Insane!

"John!" Lorna smiled softly. "You're frowning terribly at my fingers. Do they displease you so much? What's the matter, dear?"

Marchant started, shook his head slightly, as though to clear it of treacherous, sinister cobwebs that had formed in his brain. He looked at the girl, attempted a smile.

"There's nothing the matter, adorable. There couldn't be. There never is when I'm near you."

Lorna stroked his hand, said thoughtfully:

"Positive?"

He nodded vigorously.

"Positive!" The vehemence of his voice startled him. He frowned worriedly.

Lorna smiled, glanced to see that no one was looking, and raised his hand to her lips, kissed it.

"It was a very strange sort of frown, beloved," she murmured. "I have never seen you frown that way before."

Marchant gave a cursory toss of his head.

"I was thinking how terrible it would have been had I never met you," he lied. "I hate the thought of it. The frown must have been one of rage. Unutterable rage." He managed a slight laugh.

Her solemn, dark-blue eyes did not

reflect the laughter in his brown ones. She pressed his hand against her cheek.

"John," she said slowly, "there was no rage in your frown. There was no hate in your eyes. There was only—fear."

Marchant caught his breath sharply.

"Fear of losing you," he laughed hastily.

But the words seemed to rattle falsely in his throat. For some unaccountable reason, he had suddenly become deathly afraid. A dismal veil of terror had wrapped abjectedly about him, seeming to grow tighter, to suffocate him with a lurking, ghastly fear.

The distant, jagged skyline of the downtown buildings reached its serrate outline into a cloudless, sunlit afternoon. The solidity of the structures, the buildings themselves, looked good to him—as though they were old friends he had not seen for weeks. The sky above him was blue and cheerful. Yet the dread which engulfed him persisted.

"John! What is it, dear?" Lorna's tanned, lovely face was close to his, her delicate lips trembling. "Tell me, darling. Is it so terrible? Or perhaps this strange heat—your face, your eyes—"

"It's all right. Nothing. It's all right." His tone was sharp, harsh.

"John, your face is ashen!"

MARCHANT passed a hand over his wet, sticky forehead. The atmosphere—that was it. It was fetid, hot as a searing blast, seeming to imbue his shuddering body with an uncanny, dreadful terror of the unknown. He felt that if he didn't move he would scream, would stand up and shout hoarse, vile blasphemies. . . .

"Lorna, I feel—I can't explain. Something is about to happen. Something dreadful. Something powerful and mighty—and evil. . . ."

"John!"

He could feel it, sense it. Whatever it was, it would tear Lorna from him. Lorna, his beloved! It would rend them

apart! His tongue felt dry and heavy, his lips parched. It seemed suddenly as though every particle of air in the universe had become static, becalmed. What little there was left to breathe was stagnant, foul. Sweat had broken out over his body, was trickling under his clothes in burning sticky beads.

Something was going to happen! It was in the deadly closeness of the atmosphere, was all about him. Aside from the burning heat that enveloped him, he could tell that danger was near—by the way the sky had suddenly grayed, the way hideous, writhing clouds were effacing the sun.

Something was coming at any minute, something weird, evil—something phenomenal, in which the earth and heavens would participate. A giant upheaval that would throw the worlds of the universe into an incipient eruption, a violent, appalling eruption that would never be righted, would go on for centuries, eons. Evil, loathesome, it was going to tear his blessed Lorna from him; something vile coming from the infernal, blasphemous regions which would take human form after it had wrecked its vengeance—would wrench Lorna away, submit her to—

"Lorna!" his voice was a gasping choke. "I can't breathe! It's going to take you away. Lorna, stay near me. I won't let it take—"

"John! John!"

A dark, heavy shadow fell across the girl's face. Her eyes glanced up, widened in fright. She shrank nearer to Marchant, her arms involuntarily crossing over her bosom, as though shielding it from evil, lusting eyes which could penetrate the soft linen of her dress.

Marchant rocked back in his chair, gasping, swiveling his burning eyes to gaze at a strange figure of a man who stood over him.

The man was uncommonly tall. His head was covered with black, wiry hair that seemed to stand straight on end, as though he were perpetually horrified by something only he could

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see. The eyes were as black as the hair, piercing sharply from the hollow socket cavities, and exuding a dreadful, revolting glitter as they gazed bleakly down the aquiline nose.

There was something mockingly ascetic, something weirdly and fanatically clerical about the huge ogre, who gazed licentiously from Lorna's quivering throat to Marchant's panting, sweat-streaked face. The man was reminiscent of those demoniacal, satanic priests, who practiced their wicked cult rituals a few centuries back.

The piercing eyes fixed intently on Marchant, the voice came hollowly booming:

"You act frightened, man. You might well be frightened. You are not prepared, not prepared—for your fate! The final day is here—the day of judgment has come—doomsday. Do you understand that? Look about you. It is in the heavens, in the air—it is in your face, your eyes. You are frightened. Not prepared. . . .!"

Marchant gasped aloud from the terrific heat that smothered him with its fetid breath.

"Go—away!" he muttered.

The huge, devilish-looking man swayed back and forth on his feet, seeming to maintain a weird rhythm with his monotonous intoning:

"The day has come. . . . No one is prepared for his fate. Today—today is the final day, the final judgment of mankind. It is coming, chaos and confusion, punishment for the wicked and vile. And all are wicked and vile. . . . Look at the sky! The sun is disappearing. The heavens and earth will be crushed together; the earth will open, and oceans will pour forth and inundate the universe. Man will live for centuries, tormented by a living death under rolling waters. The waters will purge him. He will walk in them, sleep and breathe in them. But never shall he rise from the water! He will be drowned, but he will not die. He will be immersed by water that will strangle and purge—strangle and purge. . . ."

THE black, piercing eyes were clinging greedily to Lorna's figure as the man swayed back and forth. His huge, veined paws were reaching toward her, fingers jerking spasmodically.

Marchant saw that Lorna's face had suddenly turned ashen. Perspiration was seeping from her forehead, dampening her red-gold hair, wetting her dress until the thin fabric clung limply to the curves of her body. He saw that she, too, was gasping for breath; the searing blast of uncanny heat had enveloped her as it had enveloped him.

"A goddess!" the huge man was rasping. "You will be saved—you will be saved! You will be Goddess of Sin. . . .!"

He grasped Lorna in his arms, lifted her bodily from her chair, pressed her limp body to his. Lorna's head had fallen back, her throat arching delicately, helplessly. The man's loose lips were kissing her throat, caressing her pale cheeks.

Marchant stumbled to his feet, the heat having sucked all energy from his body. His hands tore convulsively at the man's arms. The stranger released Lorna, who sank inertly at his feet. He turned, violently shoved Marchant back into the chair. The black, satanic face loomed over him. The hollow voice, booming as from a great distance, intoned:

"She will no longer belong to you; she will be mine! I, Zrinyi, can tell you that. I will ask for her! The chaos of the worlds will grant her to me while you struggle eternally through the waters—through the waters from which there is no returning. It is coming—now! The final day, the final hour, the final minute!"

With an effort that tore at the lethargic, scorched muscles of his burning body, Marchant lurched to his feet, lurched at the man, his fingers clutching at the thick, grotesque neck. Zrinyi laughed hideously, locked his sinewy arms about Marchant's flaccid body. Slowly the arms knotted, constricted, as they relentlessly crushed the struggling life from his chest.

He was dully conscious of people hurrying by, their faces twisted and blanched with terror. Some turned wide, horrified eyes on the struggling men, but did not stop. Others kept glancing at the darkening, weird sky: a German, his stolid, square face contorted with stupid fear, stumbled awkwardly along; a swarthy Italian and his dark little wife screamed as they pressed their hands in front of their eyes; still others were shouting hysterically, running this way and that—wild, livid terror spreading rampant among them.

With the last breaths in his body, Marchant shrieked vile blasphemies, raised his bloated face to the ominous heavens, and cursed. The ghastly face of Zrinyi came closer, grinning malevolently, triumphantly.

"It is here!" he screamed hoarsely, his huge body trembling with delight. "The end of the world! The beginning of chaos and confusion! The purging waters will come! They will come!"

As though from a very great distance, beyond some far horizon, Marchant heard a dull, booming explosion. It was as if something phenomenally huge were tearing the heavens and earth apart, and the terrestrial matter shrieked in protest and agony. The world was rocking beneath his feet, a yawning abyss opening to swallow him, to suck all living things into an infinite, horrible black chasm. A blinding flash seared across the sky, bringing momentarily into stark relief the agonized faces of many people, who shrieked and fell on their knees, distended eyes staring in ghastly panic, as the earth erupted.

Something painfully hot and hard scraped across Marchant's forehead. He was conscious of persons seeming to float past him, their features twisted in gnawing fear and dismay. Things were covered by a greenish-black veil through which it became more and more difficult to see.

Frantically he groped about, searching for Lorna. He could see her nowhere. The horrible, greenish-black

veil swirled about him, bringing objects close, carrying them away. Faces drifted towards him—leering, ghastly faces that gazed curiously at him with set expressions. The faces receded as he moved close to them. None of them resembled the beloved features of Lorna. Hopelessly he made the motions of walking, seemed to get nowhere. He was in a void and could only move as the nebulous channels directed.

The scorching fire in his body had ceased aching, to be replaced by a cold clamminess that seemed to penetrate to the very marrow of his soul. The dark green film had become heavier, more intense. It was difficult to step through it, difficult to see through it. It completely enveloped him, clinging to his eyes and mouth, his body and feet. His steps were leaden, mechanically slow, as though he were walking under water.

Water! Marchant screamed aloud as he recalled Zrinyi's words: water that would immerse everyone, through which they would grope eternally—living, yet dead!

SLIMY worms of horror crawled over his heart, as he realized he *must* be walking through water! What else could this vile stuff be? He looked at his clothes; they appeared soggy, heavy. Yet, they did not appear to bubble or drip. And he was alive; he could not be walking through water—alive. . . .

He turned his eyes upwards. Far above him he could see a distorted, feeble glow of light. Perhaps daylight! He tried to move his arms in a swimming motion that would propel him upward toward the glimmer of light. It was useless; he could not ascend. He continued to sink, to drift almost imperceptibly downward.

Objects swirled and drifted slowly about him. Objects that when they came closer turned into people walking as he walked, slowly, methodically, hands extended as though searching wearily, dejectedly for something they had no hope of finding.

Marchant shuddered.

"Lorna!" he shrieked. "Lorna, where are you? This is John, darling. I'm trying to find you!"

People, strange, grotesque people, drifted near him, stared at him with futile, searching eyes, wandered on past him into the cold, eddying black depths.

Marchant closed his eyes, groaned. How far into this dark pit of Acheron would he continue to sink? Were these lost, groping souls about him the ghoulish inhabitants of some hellish, inundated pandemonium, which existed far under the bowels of the earth?

The earth! Marchant shivered. There was no longer an earth. What had that satanic fiend, Zrinyi, said? The end of the worlds, of everything, had come! He passed his hand over his aching forehead. Grimly he thought of Atlantis, that continent west of the Pillars of Hercules, which had been swallowed by the ocean, had sunk, no one knew how many fathoms, under dark, cold water.

It had happened once—it could happen again! These ghastly, cadaverous persons drifting slowly by him through the greenish-black abyss, were they some ghoulish remnants of the ancient *Atlantides*, dwellers of Atlantis, who had been condemned to live on for centuries, tortured in this foul, enveloping mass of slime?

Terror struck deeply into his heart as he moved. He laughed and then checked himself. It was easy to go insane when your mind was on the yawning verge of horror. He struck out, making hardly any progress except that inevitable downward motion. He had abruptly lost all sense of time. It might have taken him an instant to make that last step, it might have taken a century. . . .

"Lorna! Lorna!" he called. "I'm trying to find you! Can you hear me?"

A misty form materialized from the black depths. The form was a little below him, was walking, drifting slowly towards him as it ascended. It maddened him to realize that this figure could rise, while he himself was compelled to descend. The figure came

closer, arms outstretched, tortured face twisted into convulsive lines of stark horror.

It was a man. Marchant remembered the stolid, square face of the German who had hurried by, when he had been struggling with the huge body of Zrinyi.

The German gazed at him dully, drifted past. He saw that the man's eyes were closing, with a seeming finality, only the upraised, imploring arms apparently having life. The heavy boots of the German drifted past his head; the figure disappeared.

"Lorna! Lorna, dearest! Where are you! I will come to you, if you will let me know where you are!"

He had stopped descending at last. He was resting on what apparently was the bottom of the abysmal profundity. Black, reeking mire sucked at his feet, made his leaden steps even more difficult, slower. Other figures wandered dimly around him on the filthy, steaming bottom. They were groping, searching. . . .

"Lorna! Lorna, where are—"

He saw her. She seemed miles away, her vague figure merging distantly with the black mists. Yet he could see her face, a white blotch that drifted closer and closer.

Sluggishly, with maddening deliberation, his feet carried him towards her. He could see another figure, a huge, distorted figure bearing down upon the girl from above. It was Zrinyi.

The hideous man was nearing the girl, descending upon her with greater speed than Marchant could summon into his lagging legs.

Lorna held out her arms to her lover, her terrified eyes beseeching him to hurry, even as she endeavored to move to him. He cursed his deadened legs and their maddening sluggish motions, tried to run, and found that he could move no faster.

"Lorna! Lorna, darling, run to me! Beloved, there is some one trying to come near you. From above. Look above you!"

As though she were unaware that

Marchant was shouting to her, warning her, Lorna called to him:

"John, dear! Come to me, please. Hurry, John. *He* is coming!"

Marchant felt the uncanny throb of her voice in his brain. He knew that he had not heard *Lorna* call, something in his mind had telegraphed him she was pleading with him.

"Lorna, darling! I'm coming as fast as I can!"

But he knew he could not hope to reach her before the black, sinister form of Zrinyi would descend upon her. Even as he watched, the hulking man reached out, his huge arms encircling Lorna's waist, pulling her to him. The diabolical face was twisted in a terrible expression, as it pressed near Lorna's white one.

THE girl and the clutching monster were locked for a moment, struggling with lethargic, sluggish movements. Lorna succeeded in pulling away from his grasp, her dress being torn away as the man's huge fist held on to it. Zrinyi reached out, caught her again, his hands tearing at her flimsy, soggy undergarments. Lorna slipped slowly to her knees, head bowed, almost as if she were kneeling in prayer.

Zrinyi's paws slipped up from her rent undergarments, locked their fingers convulsively in a death grip about her slender little throat. The fingers tightened, Lorna's head was forced back, a horrible expression of pain and fear etching across her white face. The huge devil kept on choking, choking. . . .

A black mist of futile rage swam before Marchant's blurred eyes, a dull roaring of his own brain pounding in his ears. If only he could make his leaden legs move faster. . . .

It was too late now. Lorna lay limply on the sucking mire of the bottom. The fiend was bending over her, staring at her. . . . The black mist clouded Marchant's vision again. Rage and frustration clamped as a vise about him.

The mist cleared, and he saw the ghastly form of the monster coming toward him, the face black and demoni-

cal with a bitter rage. His fingers were extended, clutching towards Marchant. Marchant moved as fast as he could to meet him, horror and revenge stirring his half-mad brain.

Lorna! Where was she? He gazed about as he moved. Shapes, grotesque and horrible, still drifted aimlessly about him, above him. But Lorna had gone. She had disappeared. A moment ago—or was it a century?—she had been on her knees, then on her back, her white throat in the grasp of the ghoulish Zrinyi. Now she had been spirited away, was nowhere. Had Zrinyi killed her, and had she, in death, dissolved into nothing?

A murderous fury consumed Marchant as he suddenly closed with the horrible spectre of Zrinyi. This man had killed Lorna! Had brutally throttled her white, delicate throat. . . .

At first his rage lent him strength, and he seemed to overpower the malicious, inhuman thing with which he was fighting. But Zrinyi's maniacal force soon wore him down. He was suddenly fighting a hopeless, losing battle for what remained of his life.

He felt himself, still struggling weakly, sink into the slimy mire at his feet. Gasping, he tore feebly at the hands about his windpipe, tried to loosen them. The fingers remained incredibly firm, with the grip of a madman. Then blackness slowly stole over him. He felt his body relax, go limp as his back sogged into the mire.

"Lorna, Lorna! Darling—I'm dying. I will be—with you—beloved."

He lay perfectly still.

He was vaguely aware that there were no hands about his throat. He seemed to be floating through time and space. He was ascending. Far above, he could see the glimmer of light. It appeared a little stronger. If he were dead, and drifting toward Elysium, then he would soon be with Lorna.

His head and lungs were suddenly splitting, as though they had been a long time deprived of air. He could drag no air into his searing body.

HIS eyes opened, became accustomed to the light. The first thing he saw was the beloved face of Lorna. He gasped her name, heard her murmur his. Her features were contracted at first in fear, but as he moved, she broke into a tired, relieved smile, pressed her wet face against his, sobbed:

"John! John! Thank heaven!"

A man's heavy, uniformed body was

life-giving air into his lungs by means of artificial respiration.

"You're okay now, buddy," the sailor muttered. "And you're lucky."

Marchant looked about him. He was in one of the large lifeboats of the *Arcadia*. There were six or seven seamen in the boat. The others, some fifteen or so, were, like himself and Lorna, passengers on the *Arcadia*. They were



crawling off Marchant's aching chest and stomach. The man, he realized, was a member of the *Arcadia's* crew, and had been working over him, restoring

huddling together under blankets, trying to warm their wet, chilled bodies. The sailors were pulling at long oars, weaving the boat in and out of the débris and wreckage which floated about on the surface of the oily water. From time to time the boat stopped and the crew fished exhausted human beings out of the water.

One of the bodies floated near, arms fluttering slightly. Marchant saw when the crew had helped the man into the boat, that it was the stolid-faced German—half drowned, gasping hoarsely as he sucked air into his bursting lungs.

Marchant turned to Lorna, pressed her cold cheek against his, kissed her.

"Thank heaven you're all right," he breathed.

He could see no sign of the *Arcadia*, the huge passenger liner upon which he and Lorna had been returning from a tour of Europe. Nothing but an oily, turbulent surface remained where the big ship had been. He saw distantly the skyline of New York's Lower Manhattan. There were the buildings he had been so glad to see again. They were almost within sight of the harbor. He saw tugboats and fire-boats steaming toward them, their sirens blasting.

"The *Arcadia* sank?" he asked in a low voice.

Lorna nodded.

"Yes. One of the engine rooms caught on fire. The boilers burst, blowing holes through the bottom of the ship. She went down almost at once. Only a few of us were saved."

Marchant remembered the ominous trembling of the polished salon deck, it should have warned him that something was wrong. Then the terrific heat coming through the bulkheads and a ventilator—he had ignored that also, until too late. The explosion—that had been one of the boilers going. The flash of fire, and the sharp blow on his head when he had been hurled against the suddenly slanting deck rail. . . . It all came back to him now, vividly, rapidly. He had been unconscious—*must* have been—had sunk probably to the bottom

of the river along with some of the other passengers. Lorna had gone down too, had risen to the surface before him, after struggling with—

He started as he gazed upon Lorna's throat. The soft white flesh was horribly inflamed, there were ugly, livid welts—*finger marks*.

"Lorna!" he rasped. "That man! Zrinyi! That inhuman beast who talked about doomsday, just before we went down! Your throat? Who was he?"

The sailor who had worked over him, said:

"Yeah, buddy, your girl friend asked about him, too. That guy was a nut. We've taken him across before. Some kind of foreigner who went around preaching about how the day of judgment's always coming. He just happened to be spouting it to you when the boilers busted and tore us apart. He went down, too."

"But her throat—the marks—"

"Yeah," the sailor said. "Your own neck's scratched up some, too. That guy was drowning. A drowning man who can't swim will grab anything he can get his hands on. First clothes, then neck-stranglin'. When he grabbed your neck and the young lady's, it practically knocked you both out, I guess. When you lay still, you sank—and when you sank you wasn't no more help to the drownin' guy. He let go. He got onto somebody else, and they both come up eventually. If you twist your head, you can see what happened to that nut."

Marchant looked at the body floating near the boat. It was the body of Zrinyi. The ghastly, leering face was purple and bloated in death. Marchant turned his head away, a little sick. He held both Lorna's small hands tightly in his.

The sailor looked grimly at Marchant, said:

"Jeeze, your girl friend and I thought you was never coming up. It *musta* taken you ninety seconds."

Marchant looked into Lorna's eyes, drew her closer to him.

"No," he said slowly. "It took ninety years."

Fangs of the Soul

By

Robert C. Blackmon



He handed the pen to
Maida.

He was stricken, dying.
And he saw too late that
his wife and daughter
would be pawns to his
partner's evil design. He
was helpless—unless the
dead could kill.

“GO then, fool, and tremble beneath the sword of Death. Tremble and quake at the talk of fools, in quivering anguish list to the foolish prate of the crowd, as if thou wert nothing. Nothing in sooth but the dust of the earth, and a clod from the fallow. Is not thy body for ever transformed, and flows it not ever into the river of Time? Doth it not cast off the old for the new, ever losing and gaining?”

Those words, penned by a poet dead for hundreds of years, now rang in my ears, even as the cold fingers of the death which had claimed him now reached for me.

I could feel its chill touch upon my feet and legs, ever creeping upward, slowly

and without ceasing, as a flood tide upon the shore. Soon that chill would seize upon my vitals, stop the pulsing of my heart, the movement of my lungs. Then the tall body which people knew as John Poyne, broker, would become cold and dead flesh. I would slip over the edge and plunge into that dark and unknown abyss which mortals call eternity. Only a few minutes remained before I entered the Realm of the Dead.

I was dying.

Though I could neither move nor speak, my mind was clear—clearer than ever in my knowledge. I could hear. My vision was perfect.

I COULD see the heavy drapes drawn over my bedroom windows, closing out the sight of my last dawn among the living. I could see the little mantle clock, and hear it busily ticking off the remaining seconds of my life. I could see the starched nurse beside my bed, her young-old face drawn in the presence of death, though she must have seen it before.

My dog, Major, was stretched upon the rug at the side of my bed, faithful to the last. I could not see him, but I could hear the stirring of his big and shaggy body, his occasional whining. With the instinct of animals, Major *knew*.

Maida and my nineteen year old daughter, Louella, were at the foot of the bed, sobbing and comforting each other, as their husband and father was slowly enfolded in the cold arms of death.

I was sorry to leave them, but the Grim Reaper leaves no choice to mere mortals. I was dying, and unafraid.

Beside Maida was Henry Romal, my business partner. As tall as I, but gaunt and dark, Henry Romal had never married. His only passion was making money. The firm of Poyné and Romal had made money. Henry Romal had promised to care for Maida's interest in the firm after my death. That and my insurance would provide everything that Maida and Louella could want. Knowing they were safe helped me to face death unafraid. I even wondered what I should find in the Realm of the Dead.

Would death end all conscious existence for me? Or would my soul, as the ancient bard wrote, flow ever into the river of Time, casting off the old for the new, ever losing and gaining?"

Dante's words flashed into my mind: "We are but worms, born to become celestial butterflies."

I thought of the gondoliers of Venice, who claim as their father a huge white pigeon which, they say, returns each year

to the Square of St. Mark. I thought of Irish legends which say that maidens return to an earthly existence after death as graceful swans. I thought of St. Gertrude, one of the Norse war Valkyries, with whom the departed souls reputedly spent the first night before entering Valhalla. She is represented as a spinning woman with mice running up her distaff. Those mice were souls.

Would *my* soul enter another living creature at the moment of my body's death? Would I live another earthly existence in other than human form?

Those thoughts burned in my mind.

The Tlascalan Indians of Mexico, I remembered from my extensive reading, believed that the souls of distinguished men entered great and singing birds and the stronger and nobler animals after death. The souls of lesser men inhabited meaner animals and insects.

My travel in Madagascar had taught me that the native tribes believed that the specie of animal to be inhabited depended upon the person's station in life before death.

The ancient Egyptians believed the soul entered another living creature at the moment of death. That it passed through all the animals of the earth and air and sea, then returned to human form at the end of three thousand years.

American Indians believed the souls of their warriors entered animals, and held them as totems. India's code of Manu, Egypt's Book of the Dead, the Upanishads, or Brahman philosophical scriptures—all spoke of reincarnation.

Would I, then, live on in other than human form? Had others before me existed in other living creatures?

I looked at my wife and Louella and Henry Romal.

Maida and Louella might well have been fawns before assuming their present human form—mild, soft-eyed, and trusting. Helpless and defenseless in the bodies of these dainty animals, they might have ended that period of existence under the ruthless fangs of wolves and panthers.

Henry Romal . . .

A SUDDEN, numbing shock coursed through my chilling body as I met Henry Romal's eyes. Black, close-set, and bright, they stared at me fixedly. Approaching death sharpened my vision. I saw in those eyes a mad and greedy purpose. Each line of his narrow, bony face shouted the fact that he *wanted* me to die. The thin white slash of his mouth, the set of his long head on bony shoulders, everything about him revealed to me what Henry Romal intended to do after I was dead.

Already, he was counting my share—Maida's share—of the brokerage firm as his own. His only passion was making money, and I was leaving money to Maida and Louella. I read the mad urge in Henry Romal's eyes. He intended to have that money as his own, regardless of what happened to Maida and Louella. Mild, soft-eyed and trusting—human fawns—they would fall easy prey to Henry Romal. The aura of a vicious and ruthless human wolf surrounded him.

A boiling surge of anger rose within me. I tried to shout a warning to Maida and Louella. I tried to tell them what Henry Romal planned. I tried to call upon the nurse as a witness. I tried to fling myself from the bed, to get my hands about Henry Romal's lying throat.

Then a strange sense of change enveloped me.

I heard the nurse's voice, calm and grave, with a strained undertone.

"I—am sorry. He is—gone."

Maida and Louella started sobbing wildly and calling my name. I heard Henry Romal's deep voice, comforting them, lying in smooth tones.

I tried to shout to Maida and Louella and tell them I was still living. Then I realized that I was looking at their feet and ankles—Maida's slightly thick with middle age; Louella's slim with youth; Henry Romal's gray trouser cuffs and narrow black shoes beside them. The feet were almost on a level with my eyes!

For a moment, my mind failed to grasp the significance of what I saw. Then I knew I must be upon the floor. I could feel the springy nap of the rug beneath

me, though I did not remember falling from the bed, striking the floor.

"He—he's *gone*, Mother!" Louella's choking voice reached me clearly. "What are we—going—to do—without him?"

"There, there, dear." It was Maida's voice, bravely calm. "We still have each—"

I tried to call to them and tell them that I was still living. To place me upon the bed. A low, rumbling whine left my throat, a sound that could never issue from human lips. None of them made any move to help me from the floor. I lifted one hand to help myself, and the hand came within my vision.

It was massive. There was no human shape to it. It was covered with shaggy brown fur.

Then the maddening truth struck into my consciousness with the shattering force of an exploding grenade.

I was no longer human. John Payne no longer existed, except as a tall and rapidly chilling corpse upon the bed. My soul was no longer encased in that corpse. My body was dead. My soul had entered the big and shaggy body of Major—my dog!

Stark terror forced a cry from me—to issue from a fanged mouth as a whining growl. I tried to scream the awful truth to Maida and Louella—and the whine lifted to a beastlike roar, a howl.

"Nurse!" It was Henry Romal's deep voice. There was a grim note in it. "Get that animal out of here! Major! Get out!"

Maida and Louella sobbed louder. I saw Henry Romal's gray trouser legs and narrow black shoes coming around the corner of the bed. I tried to crawl under the bed—beneath the corpse which had once been *me*.

THE nurse's slim fingers laced in the shaggy fur about my neck and she held me. I tried to explain to her what had happened, what Henry Romal was planning, but the words came from my mouth as unintelligible whines.

Then Henry Romal reached me. His long fingers twined in the heavy leather collar about my neck and he started to drag me to the bedroom door.

The touch of his hand sent raging fire

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through my veins. This man planned to strip Maida and Louella of all that I was leaving them. Instinctively, I struck at him with my hands, trying to knot my fingers into fists. Then I realized that I had no fingers, no hands—nothing but the paws of a dog.

The knowledge stripped all resistance from me. Henry Romal dragged me on toward the door, away from Maida and Louella and the chilling corpse which had been me.

"I'll teach you to growl at me! Cur!"

The sharp pain of a stinging blow on the side of my head jerked a yelp from me. The salty taste of blood shot through my mouth and instantly I knew why. Henry Romal's hand had driven my lips against my teeth—the fangs of a large and powerful dog.

I had seen Major crush beef-knuckle bones with those teeth. I had seen him tear open the throat of another fighting dog with those fangs. Those crushing teeth and ripping fangs were now mine. I was Major!

All of my seething rage returned. A snarling roar tore from my throat. My huge and shaggy body lunged, losing Henry Romal's grip from my collar. I spun about and faced him. My canine lips were drawn back, baring the white fangs which I meant to drive into Henry Romal's lying throat. I could feel powerful leg muscles tighten in the animal body which was now mine, flexing for the lunge at Henry Romal's throat.

He crouched, long arms held protectingly before him, and backed across the room. I followed, measuring the distance, picking the spot upon his throat where my fangs would do the most damage. I saw the faint pulse of his jugular vein, and saliva dripped from my mouth.

"He's mad!" Henry Romal's deep voice shook with terror. All color had left his narrow face. His long white hands were jerking as he went backward across the room. "Maida, Louella, nurse! Get out of the room! Close the door!"

Then Romal's back touched my bedroom dresser. One arm still crooked before him, as protection against my leap.

The other arm was behind him, the hand fumbling.

I braced each shaggy paw, setting myself for the leap that would carry me high enough to reach his lying throat with my fangs. Only one thought burned in my mind—kill this thief before he harmed Maida and Louella.

Then suddenly, Henry Romal's other hand was no longer fumbling. He whipped it around in front of his tall body. Triumph flared in his black eyes, sweeping away the fear. His right hand held the gun which he had taken from my dresser drawer—my gun! The gun barrel slanted, the muzzle seeking my shaggy body. Kill! Just flamed in Romal's eyes.

"No! No!"

Maida's scream cut through my growling. I saw her small figure dart across the floor and come between Henry Romal and me. Louella was almost beside her. Both were sobbing hysterically.

"You shan't kill Major! John loved him! He's not mad! He—"

"Major!" Louella's small warm hand patted my head and smoothed the shaggy hair along my neck. Her voice was still choked with grief over my death. "Go out into the hall. Please, Major." She urged me toward the door.

I WENT. There was nothing else to do. I couldn't turn on my daughter. Henry Romal had my gun. He would shoot. The mad gleam in his eyes told me he would never let the life of a dog—or of my wife and daughter—stand between him and the small fortune my half of the brokerage firm represented.

I heard Romal talking to my wife, grimly.

"All right, I won't kill the cur this time. But I'm keeping this gun in my pocket, and if he jumps me again . . ."

The door closed behind me. Louella and Maida were in the room with Henry Romal, with the chilling corpse that had been John Payne.

I prowled the hallway on Major's padded feet, planning, then rejecting each plan. They were all made with the mind of a man—in the body of a dog.

Morning came. My old, human body was

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taken away to the mortuary parlors to be prepared for burial. Henry Romal went away for a few hours, posing as my closest friend taking care of everything for my widow.

I went to Maida and tried to explain trying to kill Romal. Tried to tell her that I, Major, was her husband. Nothing but unintelligible whines came from my fanged mouth. And Maida patted my head, sobbing that she missed me, too. Louella took my shaggy head in her arms and sobbed brokenly. Both thought that I was Major, grieving over my death.

The funeral was that afternoon. I could hear the rites from the storeroom in which Henry Romal had locked me. I did not try to kill him as he drove me into the storeroom. He still had my gun in his pocket, one hand upon it the entire time. I wanted to live on as Major, near Maida and Louella, where I could help them. Killed as Major, my soul might pass on into another form, another body with which I would be powerless. As Major, I had his powerful muscles, his deadly fangs and bone-crushing teeth.

Lying upon the floor of the storeroom, I heard the choir singing hymns over my old, human body downstairs. And as I listened, I planned.

Henry Romal, in his role as close family friend, would probably stay here tonight, near Maida and Louella. My plan depended upon that.

Night came. I was released from the storeroom. Maida and Louella, still sobbing over my death, retired. The big house became silent. Then I tried to carry my plan into execution.

On Major's padded feet, I crept through the hallways, red hate of Henry Romal burning in my mind. I had already located his bedroom, on the same floor as my old room—the room where I had died. The rest of my plan was simple. I would slip into his bedroom without waking him, then before he could reach the gun, I would tear his throat out with my fangs. Dead, Henry Romal could offer no harm to Maida and Louella.

I reached Romal's bedroom door. The shaggy hair rose on the back of my neck. I could feel my lips curling back from

my fangs. Within seconds, those fangs would be buried in Henry Romal's lying throat. Maida and Louella would be safe.

I pressed one shoulder and my head against the door. Then all but snarled aloud in bitter defeat. The door was closed, latched. I had nothing but shaggy paws and fangs with which to open it. I reared up on my hind legs and tried to grasp the door knob with my teeth. My front paws slipped on the varnished panels, making a loud scratching noise.

"Who is there?" Henry Romal's deep, ruthless voice came from beyond the panels. I heard him come toward the door.

I dropped to the floor and ran. Romal still had my gun.

NEXT MORNING, Romal was up early, a smug look upon his narrow face. His black eyes were gleaming, and I knew that today he would make the first move to take from Maida and Louella the money I had left. He was over-attentive to my wife and daughter at the breakfast table. Neither Maida nor Louella ate much, and their eyes were red from grieving over my death.

Breakfast over, Henry Romal started talking, more smoothly and persuasively than I'd ever heard him talk before. The gleam was brighter in his black eyes.

"I dislike to bring this up, so soon after John's passing." He licked thin lips. "It's a mere formality, but necessary. Just a paper to sign. If you and Louella will come into the library for a moment, Maida"—his bony hands laced together in a slow, washing movement—"we'll get it over quickly."

My wife and daughter rose passively and followed him from the room. I trotted behind, clamping my jaws together to keep from trying to shout a warning to Maida. Nothing but snarling growls, I knew, would come my lips. I would be put out of the house.

They went into the library. Henry Romal seated himself at my desk and drew a folded paper from his pocket. He was smiling, wetting his thin lips, as he spread the paper on the desk top. He took a fountain pen from a holder on my desk.

"Now, Maida, if you and Louella will

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Curved, "shockproof" GOLD PLATE FRONT watch with all the color and charm of natural yellow gold. Stainless back. Accurate. GUARANTEED by a famous \$1,000,000 FACTORY enclosed. Watch is yours FREE of extra charge with every ring ordered NOW and paid for promptly on our easy two monthly \$2 payment plan. (Total only \$4.) Remember... the cost of the watch is included in the price of the ring... You Pay Nothing Extra for the watch! No Charge for Credit... We trust you! No red tape. We'll ship at once. TEN DAY FREE TRIAL. Send No Money with order! Mail Coupon or Postcard NOW... your package comes (postage paid to your door) by RETURN MAIL.

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Caused by Gastric Hyperacidity

FREE Booklet on simple home treatment. Hundreds report they were saved from expensive operations. Learn all about this amazing inexpensive home treatment. Pain relieved from the start. No rigid or liquid diet. This valuable booklet sent FREE with information as to guaranteed trial offer. TWIN CITY VON CO., Dept. 206, Saint Paul, Minnesota.

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just sign here," Romal's voice was persuasively low. "It's just a formality, but necessary if I am to carry on as John wished. John was my closest, dearest friend, Maida. I am thinking only of his wishes. He wanted me to carry on for you, and I shall. I dislike to do this so soon after. . . ." He let his voice trail away and handed the pen to Maida.

Sobbing, she bent over the paper on the desk.

Something snapped in my mind. Maida was signing away all that I had left her and Louella. Henry Romal had prepared that document to strip them of everything. I knew it. All of it was in his eyes. Within weeks, or months, Maida and Louella would be penniless—two mild, soft-eyed and helpless fawns at the mercy of human wolves.

The pen in Maida's small hand touched the paper.

Powerful leg muscles shot my big and shaggy body from the floor in a plunging leap for my desk; for Henry Romal behind it. The roar of a maddened animal filled my ears, and I knew it was coming from my own throat. I knew my lips were curled back from needle-sharp fangs as I streaked through the air toward Romal.

He jerked to his feet behind the desk. Maida dropped the pen and screamed: "Major! Down!" Louella screamed, too.

But no screams could stop me. Nothing could stop me. Romal dead meant security for Maida and Louella. Alive, he would get what he was after. He had been my business partner, I knew.

My death as Major meant—I knew not what, I was in the Realm of the Dead, no longer among the living, humans. Maida and Louella must be protected, no matter what the cost would be.

As I plunged through the air, I saw Henry Romal's bony right fist dart to his right coat pocket. My gun was there, I knew. I saw the early morning sunlight glint on blued steel as the gun came up. Then I crashed into him.

We went over the desk chair and to the floor. Every muscle in my shaggy body was driving those needle fangs towards his throat. He screamed, hoarsely, in stark terror. Then the battering roar of the gun

when answering advertisements

hammered at my ears. A stunning something crashed into my chest and made a ripping agony within my body.

But those needle fangs—Major's fangs—mine now—were slicing into Henry Romal's throat. The quick gush of jugular blood filled my mouth and stilled my savage growls. Romal's hoarse scream stopped abruptly. He had no throat.

I rolled from his still body, each movement sheer agony. Already I could again feel the cold touch of death upon my limbs. I was again dying; in the Realm of the Dead.

Louella, I saw, had fainted. Maida had dropped into a chair, her face in her hands, sobbing wildly, hysterically. I would have liked to speak to her, to explain Romal's death.

But I knew I couldn't. With Major's mouth I could only whine and growl. Perhaps in another body . . . later, I could! . . .

The chilling grip of death moved swiftly toward my vitals. And I wondered in what form I would again exist as man . . . as beast . . . or as . . .



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Send me, without obligation, your 64-page book, "Rich Rewards in Radio" FREE. (Please write plainly.)

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"Thank!"

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Holder of the title
"The World's Most
Perfectly Developed
Man" won in open
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only national and in-
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No other Physical Instructor in the World has ever DARED to make the offer he makes in this announcement!

DON'T get the idea that it takes a lot of time and hard work for you to get smashing strength and powerful muscular development! And don't fool yourself into thinking that you need dumbbells, stretchers or any other such contraptions.

Both of these ideas are all bunk—and I have **PROVED** it. All I need is 7 days to prove what I can do for you! And I don't need any apparatus either. In fact, I have no sympathy with apparatus at all—don't believe in it. It is artificial—and it may strain your heart or other vital organs for life!

NATURAL Methods Are All I Need

On this page you will see an actual photo of how I look today. This picture has not been changed in any way. No muscles have been "painted on." This photograph is the camera's latest proof of what I have done for MY body. I myself am ready to prove what my secret of **Dynamic Tension** can do for you!

To look at me now you wouldn't recognize me as the same man I used to be. Then I was a physical wreck, a 37-pound weakling—flat-chested, spindly legs, arms like pipe stems.

I was worried—and I had a right to be. I decided to study myself, to do something about my body. Then I made a discovery. I found a new way to build myself up. A way that was simple, natural, quick and sure! "**Dynamic Tension**" is what I called it. I put this secret to work. And in a short time I had the kind of body you see here—the body which has twice won the title of "The World's Most Perfectly Developed Man."

This Secret Has Helped Thousands

Thousands of other fellows now know this secret, too—and know from their own personal experience what **Dynamic Tension** has done for them. When they turned to me for advice, they were just as frail and puny as I once was. Now they are life-sized examples of what a man can and ought to be—with mighty energy, tireless endurance and muscles that stand out like bridge cables all over their bodies.

I have written an interesting booklet, filled with pictures, which tells my story—and theirs. I would like to send you a copy of it entirely free.

Let Me Send You My FREE BOOK

I'd like you to know what **Dynamic Tension** has done for me—what it has done for others—and what it can do for you! This little coupon will bring you my free book which tells all about it. There is no cost or obligation of any kind—and no one will call upon you.

I just want to put into your hands proof that I can do for you what I have done for so many thousands of others: give you broad, powerful shoulders, biceps that bulge with smashing strength, a chest which stands out solid and muscular, and an evenly-developed body that will make others look like dwarfs next to you.

Will you gamble a stamp to win a body like mine? Then mail this coupon **TODAY**. **CHARLES ATLAS**, Dept. 49A, 115 East 23rd Street, New York.

CHARLES ATLAS, Dept. 49A,
115 East 23rd Street, New York, N. Y.

I want the proof that your system of **Dynamic Tension** will make a New Man of me—give me a healthy, husky body and big muscle development. Send me your free book, "**Everlasting Health and Strength**,"—and full details of your **7-DAY TRIAL OFFER**.

Name
(Please print or write plainly)

Address

City State

FREE BOOK

Gamble a stamp today. Mail coupon for free copy of my new book, "**Everlasting Health and Strength**." It shows you from actual photos how I have developed my pupils in my own perfectly balanced proportions. Where shall I send your copy? Write your name and address plainly on the coupon. Mail it today to me personally.



THE STERLING SILVER CUP BEING GIVEN AWAY

This valuable cup stands about 14 inches high on a black mahogany base. I will award it to my pupil who makes the most improvement in his development within the next three months.



The Story of 2 MEN who NEEDED CASH



THIS MAN DOUBTED:

He said: "Yes, I am broke, I am really terribly hard up. I haven't a cent of extra money for anything. I wish I knew where to get some. I haven't a bit of faith in anything. I am a failure and my luck is terrible."

RUN A LOCAL COFFEE AGENCY

Make Up To \$60.00 in a Week

I'll help you start at once and back you up to the limit. Here's a bona fide cash-getting idea you may never have heard of before—a unique and utterly different way of getting the cash you need. With my plans I have "sated the greed" of hundreds who were at their wits' end. Not just another clock-punching job, no back-breaking labor. Even spare time

nets up to \$5.00 in a day... full time up to \$60.00 in a week. Brand-new Ford Tudor Sedans given as bonus to producers besides cash profits. Good opportunities open. You don't require any previous experience and you don't risk any of your own money. Think of being prosperous again! Just send me your name for free facts.

Enjoy Big Cash Earnings

If you are tired of slaving for small pay, here's your chance to break away and make big money. You can even start in your spare time—see, the business grows—have cash in your pocket—he inde-

pendent. Think of the joy of being a successful business person in your own locality with big year-round earnings of your own. Earnings begin at once, the very first day.



STARTED PENNILESS
6½ Months
Later
Was Worth
\$1,200

"Only six and a half months ago I started with my company without a penny in my name, and today (I just finished my balance) I am worth a little more than \$1,200.00. I can hardly believe it myself—such a success in so short a time! But it's the truth. Many a day I made from \$15.00 to \$20.00 clear profit."—Your Happy Hunter, Hans Goehde, Neb.

LOOK AT THESE UNUSUAL EARNINGS

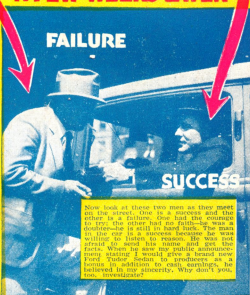
I have a flood of glowing letters from prosperous, successful men and women telling of unusual earnings they have made with my plans. Norman Geisler, of Michigan, reported \$129.00 clear profits in a week! Mrs. Ella Ehrlicher, Mo., \$85.00; Ganson H. Wood, N. Y., \$82.10; W. J. Way, Kansas, \$19.10 in one day; Adolph Pickney, New York, \$60.00 in one week, just working evenings! I don't say everyone makes that much; some are satisfied with less. But it shows your big possibilities! Get the free facts! See for yourself!



THIS MAN ACTED:

He said: "Yes, I need money. I am tired of penny pinching. Your generous offer sounds good to me. It costs nothing to investigate—I have everything to gain. I am going to send my name and find out just what you have to offer me."

A FEW WEEKS LATER



Now look at these two men as they meet on the street. One is a success and the other is a failure. One had the courage to try; the other had no faith—he was a doubter—he is still in hard luck. The man on the right is a success because he was willing to listen to reason. He was not afraid to send his name and get the facts. When he saw my public announcement stating I would give a brand new Ford Tudor Sedan to producers as a bonus in addition to cash earnings, he believed in me sincerely. Why don't you, too, investigate?

TEAR OUT—MAIL NOW

Albert Mills, President
9219 Monmouth Ave., Cincinnati, Ohio

Rush me free facts. Tell me how I can start at once and make up to \$60.00 in a week with a permanent Coffee Agency of my own. Also send me your Ford Automobile offer. This will not obligate me.

Name

Address

(Please Print or Write Plainly)

SEND NO MONEY—JUST SEND NAME

I send everything you need. There is nothing complicated or puzzling about my money-making methods. You will be the judge and decide for yourself if the earning possibilities are satisfactory. Just give me a chance to explain the facts. It costs you nothing to find out. Send name on coupon or penny postcard. DO IT NOW!

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9219 MONMOUTH AVE.
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NEW FORDS
Given as bonus

