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• **HARVEST OF DEATH**

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By FRANK BELKNAP LONG

A THRILLING
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THRILLING MYSTERY


Vol. III, No. 1

May, 1936

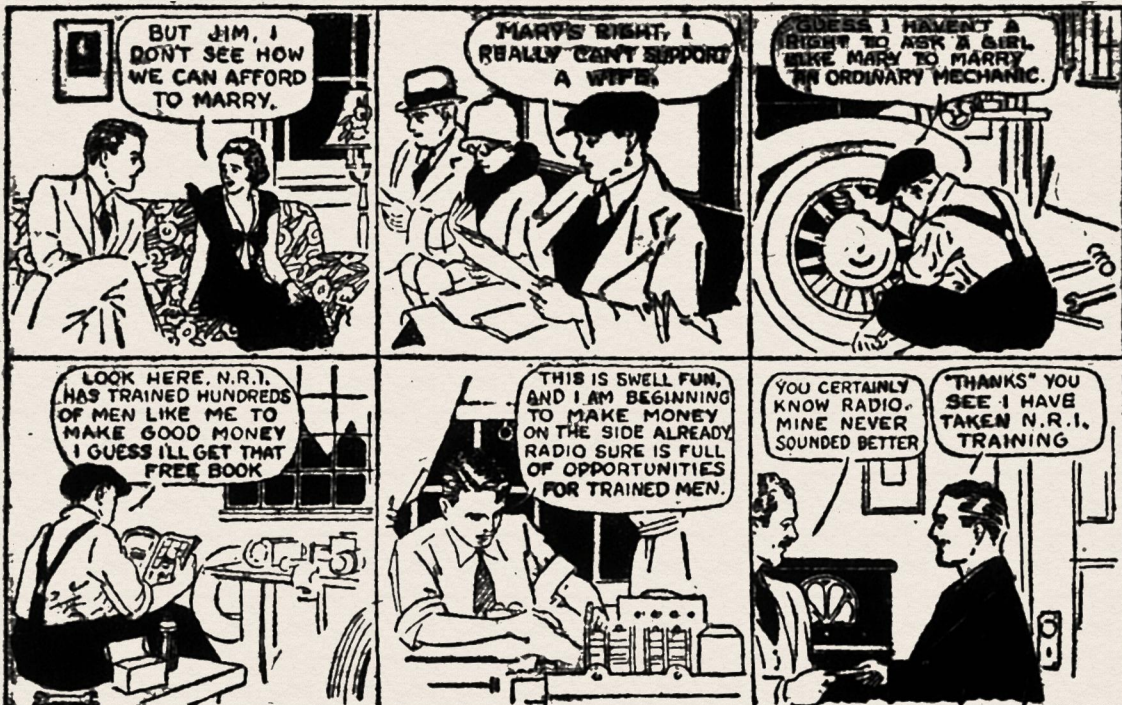
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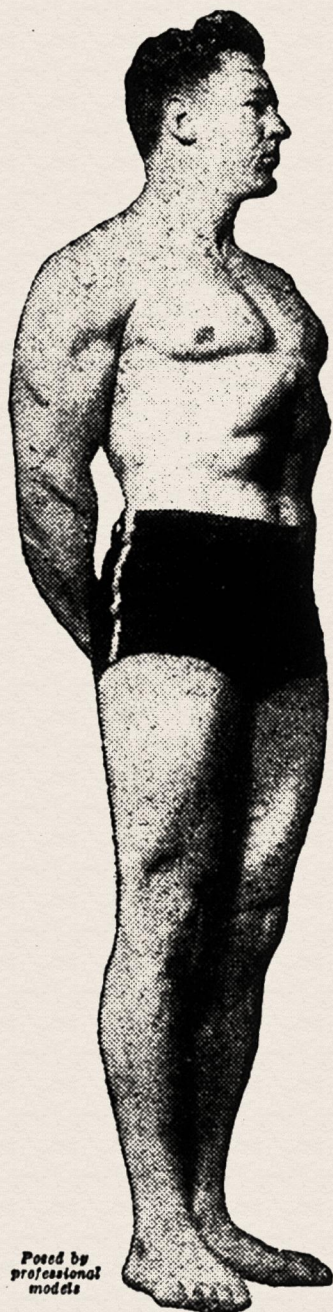


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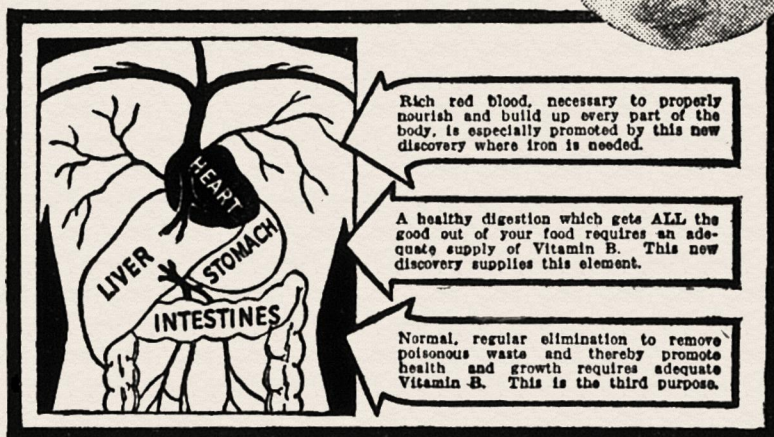
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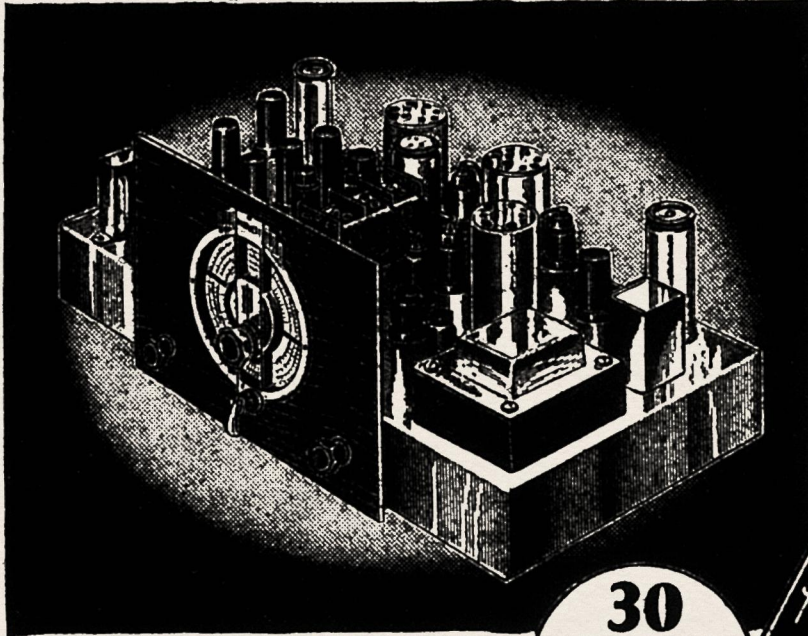
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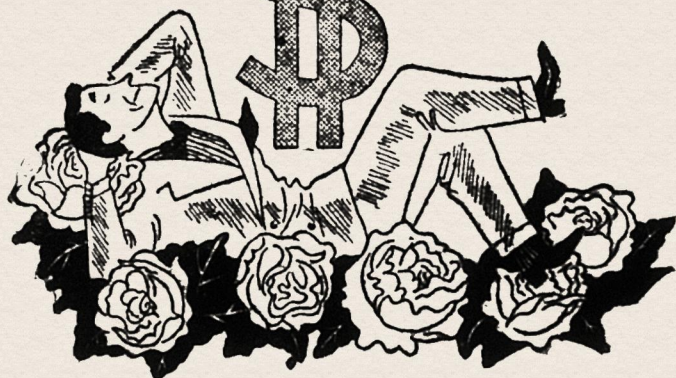
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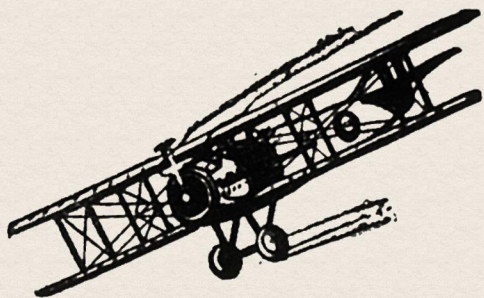
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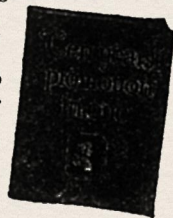
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I thought I had gone mad

CHAPTER I

Nameless Horror

THIS is not so much a story as a confession. It is not intended for squeamish stomachs. It is true and unbelievable. It has festered in my brain for years, and getting it on paper may be likened to cauterizing a wound. In every man's life there is an interval of nightmare. This is my interval.

I should begin, perhaps, with the incident within my uncle's house before the appearance of Tangora. Up to that moment, I had existed like a parasite, growing large of body and brawn but flabby of soul beneath the affection and opulence my uncle had lavished upon me. Upon my expulsion from college, because the learned doctors had discovered my unequalled ability to avoid work, I returned to my uncle's house looking forward with dull apathy to a winter of tormenting boredom.

My uncle was a strange man. Had this not been true the ghastly thing would never have begun its haunting dead-march. His sixtieth year found him so sternly erect that he quite measured up to me, and I have been told that if I die tomorrow it might be said that I was long for this world.

He had cruel, stabbing eyes; a tongue as keen as a lancet; a broad, profound forehead topped with close-clipped grey hair. It had never occurred to me as to where he had got his money. I do not know to this day.



The blue-black, worm-eaten flesh was actually quivering

But I know that many a man must have been ground beneath his heel before he discovered his Philosopher's Stone. He was that sort. Nothing greatly mattered but that he attained his wishes.

He scarcely spoke to me that evening of my return. It had been his wish that I become a doctor. I had thwarted this wish with my own indolence, and—well, I was still of his blood and therefore could be punished only by the frigidity of his attitude toward me.

Immediately after dinner, he had retired to his own rooms, and there was that tension within my brain that told me I would never rest again until I had made amends for what I had done—or hadn't done; I was not at all clear on that point. After half a package of end-on-end cigarettes, I was determined to apologize to the old man. Feeling absolutely contrite, I stumbled from the room and went toward that part of the house devoted solely to my uncle's private apartment.

I crossed his library, picking my way between stacks of old books with moldy-smelling covers. He was not there nor in the bedroom beyond. Returning to the library, I went to French windows opening on a little terrace. Across the terrace, whitened by snow that had been falling steadily since six o'clock, was a little outbuilding of brick and stone which my uncle called a workshop. Windows



were securely shuttered against the thrashing wind, but the keyhole in the door was a narrow eye of light.

I had been in this workshop only once or twice in my life. It had never been a source of interest to me. I remembered that it contained a conglomerate assortment of tools and instruments—chemical, medical, and physical. My uncle had made a hobby of even the most profound sciences.

I TURNED up my coat collar in anticipation of that whipping wind, opened the French windows easily enough, and struggled to get them out of the wind's teeth when I was out on the terrace. I hurried with lowered head to the workshop door and took hold of the knob, only to release it as though it had been charged with electricity. My heart stopped. A long sob of cold air sent it pumping again, pounding upon my ribs in a desperate attempt to tear itself from my body.

It was not the doorknob, but something that I could see on the door-sill. It contrasted darkly with the white of the snow; it moved sluggishly beneath the door to puddle lazily in a depression its own warmth had hollowed from the snow. Warm, dark, and viscous. Blood, crawling beneath the door of my uncle's workshop.

The first thought that crashed upon my mind was that my uncle had committed suicide because of my failure. For a moment, I felt like a murderer and then like a fool. My uncle was hardly the suicide type. He got too much pleasure out of making life an adventure. Murder was the only explanation.

Resolutely, I forced my fingers to close upon the doorknob to find that something on the floor directly inside the door offered dead, effortless resistance to my entrance. I braced my shoulder against the panel and pushed the thing aside far enough so that I could thrust my head through the opening.

Craning my neck around the edge of the door, I took a long and grateful gasp of air that was unpleasantly

laden with the flat smell of new-let blood. The thing on the floor was the body of a goat, its belly shaved and skillfully opened. I carefully stepped over the gory mess that flowed along the floor, entered the room and shut out the wind-driven snow crystals. The room was empty except for the usual litter. A white-topped table bore a large dissecting tray which had evidently served its purpose. The handles of scalpels and tweezers protruded from the basin of a sterilizer. Two glass jars of chemicals stood open on another table. A distilled water tap was still open.

Uncle James, then, was in the second room of the outbuilding. There were bloody smudges on the knob and the white panel of the enameled door of the next room. I wrapped my fingers in my handkerchief before taking hold of the knob. I entered quietly; it never occurred to me to knock.

A broad back and dejected, drooping shoulders presented themselves to me. Uncle James was sitting at a table, head lowered, and motionless. A glass-fronted cabinet directly opposite reflected his face. Undoubtedly it was some irregularity in the surface of the glass that distorted his visage, for never have I looked upon so hellish a countenance.

His cheeks looked sunken and furrowed by black, trench-like wrinkles. His lips were compressed until he seemed to have no mouth at all. A great bloated vein stood out upon his forehead. He looked something like Faust must have when he raised the Devil, and there was something of the Devil about him also. Had I acted on impulse, I would have turned and fled back through the snow. But I had entered the room with the man's-sized job of an apology before me, and I would not leave until the job was done.

I took a hesitant step forward. I cleared my throat. My uncle was too intent upon something on the table before him to notice me. I peered over his shoulders and checked a startled gasp. In a covered glass beaker, containing some clear solu-

tion, was a heart. Leading from the beaker top were tiny wires hooked to a coil and galvanic battery. That lonely heart, cleanly severed from tissue, fluttered impotently for a few moments, then gradually subsided.

MY uncle's face writhed. His hands clenched until his finger nails must have drawn blood. His mouth worked, forming words: "Can't do it, you damned old fool! The thing's dead. You killed it. You're not God!" And he buried his face in his hands, shutting his angry muttering from my ears.

"Uncle James," I began, for I thought I had played the spy long enough.

The dejected shoulders suddenly squared. He lifted his head. Then suddenly he was on his feet, those lancet eyes of his dissecting my brain. He did not need to raise his voice for me to feel the chill of it—a chill that would have put December's winds to shame.

"David, how many times must I tell you never to enter here without knocking?"

"Sir," I said humbly, "I did not know—"

"Nincompoop!" his voice rang like a cold, steel bell. "You did not know! You will never know anything! Get out!"

I hesitated. My heart was churning my blood to an angry froth. He had never spoken so to me. I knew suddenly that I could have thrashed him, and would have, had he been another man.

"Get out! Are you deaf as well as dumb?"

His long right arm swung back, scooping up the glass beaker on his table. There was a blue, blinding flash as wires from the ignition coil clashed together. With all his strength, he hurled the beaker and its contents straight at my head. I ducked instinctively. The missile crashed against the tile wall beside the door, burst into fragments, and dashed part of the salt solution down the back of my neck.

I took a step forward and was

stopped by a shadow that suddenly crossed my uncle's face. In a moment, I knew he had forgotten me. Wrath had drained from his face; had been supplanted by a look of awe and terror such as I had never seen his countenance reflect. His lips parted. I heard his strong teeth grind. Without moving his lips, he whispered a word at the same time backing until his left hand clenched the top of the table while his right climbed up to his collar. And the word he whispered was:

"Tangora."

I turned. The figure in the doorway reminded me instantly of Poe's raven. I don't know why. He was a man and there was nothing bird-like about him. Perhaps it was the somber garment he wore—a long cloak that swathed him like a shroud from his narrow shoulders to his boot-tops. Was there the smell of things long dead about him, or had my imagination awakened?

He held his flowing black right sleeve across the lower part of his face, and his eyes were shadowed by a grotesque sombrero-like hat of old straw, the peak of which rose like a mountain and was snow-capped, adding needed inches to his short, slight body. He lowered his right arm and I saw his face. His cheeks were thin and a sickly yellow. Twin, feverish blotches of red spread across his high cheek bones. His lips were blood-red, swollen, and peeling. His eyes were ice and green.

Without a word he took a step to the left, stooped, and picked up something. It was the heart of the dead goat that Uncle James had apparently failed to revive by means of electrolysis. It lay in his pale, cupped palm. And to my horror, I saw that dead heart beating!

A slow smile spread across the ragged, red lips of the man in the straw sombrero. He was looking into my uncle's face with those eyes of ice. Until he spoke, I never knew that words could come so rapidly from lips and still be perfectly distinct:

"Keeping a thing alive after it has

been torn from its proper environment is quite different from restoring life to the dead, my friend. There is little of God in the man from this frigid climate, I am afraid. In winter his mind must lie dormant. But farther south, where you would have me take you, God finds his equal in man."

A SPASM of harsh, ripping coughing checked him. When it had passed, he daubed at his ragged lips with his handkerchief, and I could see that the cloth was flecked with blood. He crossed to my uncle's table. Uncle James shrank from him as if he had the plague.

"Why have you come here, Tangora?" whispered Uncle James.

"Because you need me, Dr. Wynant," came the reply. And it was the first time I had heard my uncle addressed as "Doctor." Tangora laid the dead, beating heart on the table. It fluttered a little and lay still. "Undoubtedly," his words rippled keenly, "you used too strong a salt solution, or perhaps it was not enough current." From beneath his arm he took a cylindrical bundle wrapped in burlap and nearly a foot in length. He placed it on the table and removed his strange hat. His head, I saw, was entirely bald. "I have something to show you, Dr. Wynant." Tangora's icy eyes regarded me steadily and meaningly. I knew when I was not wanted and left—or tried to.

Then, I attributed my stealthy return to that very human weakness, curiosity. Now, I know that it was something else—some magnetism of the strange personality that was Tangora. I gained the outer room of my uncle's workshop, half smoked a cigarette, and threw it to the floor. I returned to the door of the room in which Tangora and my uncle were closeted. For the next ten minutes it would have been impossible for me to leave the keyhole.

From the moment I knelt in front of the door until the whole ghastly demonstration was over, I was conscious of that awful, nauseating effluvia of rotting flesh that I had

thought I noticed upon Tangora's entrance. I knew its source as I watched through the tiny aperture.

The bundle which Tangora had carried had been unrolled on the table top. It was made of alternate layers of closely matted dead grass and oiled silk. Uncle James had his back toward me so that I could not see what the bundle contained. His tall form was shivering like a sapling in the wind. Whether the cause for this discomposure was terror, awe, or horror, I did not know. But he watched with bowed head the contents of Tangora's foul-smelling bundle.

Tangora had removed his cloak and appeared now a thin pigmy of a man, more dead than alive except for his pale, glistening eyes. He had an unpleasant habit of sticking his tongue between his ragged lips and flickering it in and out like the tongue of a serpent.

"You see, my friend," came his keen, rippling words, "you are entirely wrong. We who have known the jungles of Haiti know the solution of the natural and eternal life. Life springs from death—and only from death. You will understand when you see my jungles. Without death, life is inconceivable. You would sustain life in unnatural surroundings, as you did the heart of the goat. That is merely *sustaining*; it is not *creating*. Here I show you absolutely dead and formless protoplasm. But watch it. Watch it closely, Dr. Wynant. Then tell me what you would pay for the power that is mine."

I saw my uncle totter backward, catch his balance by supreme effort. Then like a man pursued by a nightmare, he walked slowly backwards. I was certain that his eyes never left the contents of Tangora's bundle.

"My God!" he whispered. "It's—they're alive. Alive, I tell you!"

Tangora smiled slowly, his tongue flickering between his teeth.

"But no," he contradicted gently. "That is dead protoplasm endowed with life. There is"—a shudder coursed his thin body from feet to finger tips—"a most remarkable difference."

My uncle's strength seemed to have completely deserted him. He toppled backwards, out of my narrow vista, and I heard a chair creak beneath his weight. My gaze was riveted upon the table. And my stomach churned at the revolting horror within Tangora's bundle.

They were little formless things, as long as my longest finger and twice as wide. A grey yet pinkish color, moist and fleshy, they exuded a glistening slime from seemingly poreless flesh. The shapeless, embryonic things quivered and squirmed beneath the lamp light.

I staggered to my feet, reached the outer door, and fled into the chilly darkness.

CHAPTER II

Tomb of the White Mamaloi

TWO days later, we were bound for Haiti. It all happened as abruptly as that. I had not told my uncle that I had spied on his laboratory that night, and my mind was filled with secret horror as to the ultimate objective of our journey.

The boat was a Dutchman, Guiana bound with a heavy cargo, a motley crew, and a handful of passengers. No need to dwell on the journey. It began as any journey might in the chill, raucous-voiced fog of New York harbor and ended at the most opposite extreme imaginable.

I kept close to my bunk, possessed a large part of the time with the idea that the boat clung upside-down at the bottom of the earth and was pitching and tossing like an overturned turtle trying to get right side up again. But through all this agony of seasickness, I was conscious of an unholy presence on board the ship. I had not seen him with the crew nor among the embarking passengers, yet I knew Tangora was there with his shroud of a cloak, his absurd peaked hat, and his eyes of ice.

Uncle James was reticent as to who Tangora was. Only this he would tell me: Tangora had studied medi-

cine at the same college my uncle had attended. There he had said and done strange things, and after what I had witnessed in my uncle's laboratory I could well believe that.

The Dark Island came at us abruptly as our wallowing boat wrenched itself from the black fury of a tropical storm. Then all was calm and clear and shimmering with heat. We were carried on the glistening shoulders of wading Negroes from the ship to the beach before Cap Haitien.

Much to my surprise we were met by Tangora, his straw sombrero little the worse for its sojourn into our northerly winter. His hand clasped in mine was the only cool and clammy thing I had felt that day. His attitude toward me was that of a wise man patting a small boy on the head. Inwardly, I shrank from the man, fancying that there was about him the odor of rotting offal.

At Cap Haitien, my uncle prepared for our mysterious trip inland, and I learned that rum and water has something a Martini can never have. A small sailing vessel took us to Fort Liberty where Tangora had engaged a good-sized rowboat and six Negro lads to row it. Then our numbers were strengthened by a spectacled young Negro named Robert Marsaillis who had spent some time in Columbia University. At Fort Liberty, Marsaillis appeared a thoroughly cultured person, but once the jungle had entombed our party—well, that's looking a little too far ahead.

We set out for Manzanillo Bay, reaching there at about noon the following day. Where the bay fingers into the mainland the mouth of Massacre River spews its turgid black water into the sea. There were no banks to the river that I could see. Like bleached bones the trunks of hard-wood trees jutted from the sluggish water. The hot humid air was heavy with a musty odor that Robert Marsaillis told me was due to alligators. As the jungle closed in, vaulting us from the heavens, I knew what Tangora meant when he had said that life came only from death.

The jungle was a gargantuan parasite: life in gay and sickly hues teemed upon the rot of dead verdure, only to die and become host for virile young shoots.

By nightfall the silent, fetid air was disturbed by buzzing, invisible wings of insects large as bats; life was one continual round of slap and scratch.

The broad prow of the boat picked its way between mighty trunks until it burrowed into the mud. In this spot where it seemed white men had never been, Tangora said we would pitch camp. The man had the eyes of a cat, for without difficulty he found a clearing in the jungle that was like a great house of greenery, the walls of which sweated continually and were laden with the odor of decay.

After camp supper, I returned to my newly pitched tent to find it already had an occupant. Neatly coiled on my cot was a tiny snake of bright emerald green. I was startled, then possessed of the fury common to man when he sees a serpent. My one desire was to annihilate the little monster. I snatched up a rifle and took a step toward the cot. A hand arrested me—a hand that was warm and black. I jerked my head around angrily. Robert Marsaillis stood there, his eyes rolling behind his spectacles.

"Do not do that, Mr. Wynant," he said, a quiet note of awe in his voice. "The little green serpent is *Damballa*, sacred to Voodoo."

I flung down the gun. "My God, you don't believe in that rot, do you?" Until that moment he had been the university scholar.

Marsaillis looked embarrassed. "In America, no, I would not believe. But here, I believe what I have seen. You will not scoff at Voodoo after tonight, for we have come here to visit the tomb of the White Mamaloi."

"And who," I demanded, "is the White Mamaloi?"

"The only white woman ever to become a Voodoo priestess." And that was the only explanation I could get out of him. As for the green snake,

when I turned around it was no longer there. I retired beneath mosquito netting to swelter and doze and battle with a thousand crawling things that had found their way to bed with me in spite of all precaution.

I wasn't asleep when my uncle entered the tent. But the lethargy of the tropics had its hold upon me, and I did not stir until he had shaken me from bed.

"Dave," he said, and his voice was quivering with suppressed excitement, "we were going without you, but I hadn't the heart. Tangora has shown me things which I cannot believe, but which are so wonderful that I cannot deny you the privilege of witnessing what is yet to come."

"What's up?" I asked, not too eagerly. I recalled what I had seen in my uncle's laboratory—those dead, rotting things that Tangora had endowed with life. Wonderful it might have been, but so slimy and disgusting that I was loath to go through another such experience.

Uncle James was squatting beside my cot, his hand clenched on my shoulder.

"Life!" he whispered. "Tangora is going to show me the secret of it. Deep in this jungle is a burial ground where rests the body of a woman who died months ago. We are bringing her back to this world tonight. Here in the heart of Haiti is the cradle of a fearful science. You shall witness a miracle!"

THE sweat that exuded from my every pore was suddenly chilled. My uncle's excited quivering was transmitted to me, but I trembled with terror. Night in the jungle—it had all the horrors of premature burial. The darkness was suffocating. The cry of night fowl and the rustling of some unseen hunting beast in the tall grasses were like sounds that might have come from Hell waiting just beyond the grave.

How my trembling fingers managed buckles and buttons I do not know; but in a few minutes I left the tent fully clothed but not, I fear, entirely,

in my right mind. Our native boys were swinging in cobweb-like hammocks, like giant black worms in half spun cocoons. The green vaulted roof of the jungle closed out every star. The twisting tendrils of lianas that interlaced that leafy canopy were like snakes waiting to drop cold, stricturing coils upon my shoulders. My heart had begun a breathless hammering that lasted the long night through as horror mounted on horror, a mountainous pyramid of unholy filth that threatened to topple and crush my soul beneath its avalanche.

Things about me were unreal, illuminated by gasoline lantern clouded by swarms of mosquitoes bloated with my blood. Tangora was a living corpse of a gnome from deep underground. Robert Marsaillis, with his ridiculous spectacles, was like some native idol carved from ebony as a mockery to civilization. My uncle was a starved giant, consumed a cell at a time by a cancerlike passion to peer and probe beneath a forbidden curtain.

I joined them, trying to light a cigarette.

Not a word was spoken as Tangora with the lantern led off along an invisible path. My boots sank to the ankle with every step in slime that was the product of continual decay. I was loath to be at the rear of the file where the rays of the light reached clearly only when Tangora made an abrupt turn. But Marsaillis was in front of me, and I would not have told him of my terror by trading places with him. He had discarded his veneer of civilization with his shirt, and I could see primitive, savage grace in the muscles that rippled beneath his glistening black skin.

At the head of the column, Tangora was speaking rapidly, as though he feared to be interrupted by that racking, consumptive cough of his.

"She was of pure Spanish blood," Tangora was telling Uncle James. "As beautiful as the rose in her dark hair. For generations her family lived on the island. All the while their blood remained cleanly Euro-

pean. But by degrees the thought of Haiti—that controlling fear, the power that is Voodoo—crept into their minds. All this culminated in the last of their line. This woman became a *mamaloï*, the only white priestess in the Voodoo sect. You wanted proof, Dr. Wynant?"

My uncle's tongue was fuzzy as though he were drunk, though I had never known him to touch a drop of liquor.

"I have seen proof, Tangora," he husked. "There in my laboratory. How remote that seems now! But you said as much when we were in school together. I scoffed then. God! how you must have hated me for the way I treated you."

Tangora laughed. That was the strangest sound of all the weird noises in the jungle. A corpse cannot laugh. What right, then, had Tangora to laugh?

"Be thankful, Dr. Wynant, that I am not a Voodoo *papaloï* else I might have hated you even as you hated me. It is dangerous to hate a Voodoo priest."

How did Uncle know that Tangora *wasn't* a Voodoo priest? He was white, but had not he admitted that a white woman had risen high in the iniquitous cult? Why not a man? Why not Tangora?

"Tangora is leading you into Hell," a voice within me whispered. "There is magic in the jungles and Tangora knows the jungles like you know the palm of your hand."

I WANTED to cry out, to stop that procession that wormed deeper and deeper into the jungle—a sort of slow plunge into destruction of soul and body. I used to think there wasn't such a thing as a soul. You can't find the soul with a scalpel; therefore, it doesn't exist. But there was a soul within me—a whimpering, cowardly thing that was telling me I ought to go back.

I jerked a glance over my shoulder. The jungle had closed in like collapsing walls, crowding me toward a pit. The saw-edged leaf of a palm above my head was fearfully like

Poe's pendulum. One path lay open; it was marked by Marsaillis' swaying figure. I plunged on.

We stopped. As if by magic, the vine-interwoven wall of moist green parted before the rays of Tangora's lantern. In the clearing stood a hut, its palm-leaf thatch hanging low over the doorway. In front of the doorway was a ghostly thing that bathed my body in icy sweat—the skull of a horse bleached and polished until it was like ivory. It was mounted on a straight stick that was like the ghost of a neck.

Tangora held his lantern high.

"The *Houmfort*, Voodoo shrine of prayer," he whispered.

Marsaillis darted an embarrassed glance at me and ducked his head as though he had been struck. Then he was off, running like a streak of glistening black lightning toward the door of the hut. He vanished and a pair of duck trousers, like limp, severed legs, came whisking out of the doorway. Then Marsaillis' spectacles, last vestige of civilization.

"Marsaillis," Tangora was whispering, "is a Voodoo *papaloi*. You did well to treat him as an equal, Dr. Wynant. I only hope that your nephew has done likewise." He looked at me, ragged lips smiling—the grimace of a dead man—and his tongue darting between his teeth.

We crossed the clearing.

At first I thought it came from inside of me; but the thud was too slow for the beat of my heart. It was a drum, filling the blackness with its hollow, measured throb. We had broken again into the jungle—the three of us. Marsaillis was back in the *Houmfort*, a naked, savage thing that had once strutted the famous halls of Columbia. It was all crazy. I wanted to laugh; didn't, because I feared the echo of that laugh would come back to my ears the maddest sound of all.

We had stopped again. I was pressing close to my uncle, begrudging him the full rays of the lantern. Again Tangora had parted jungle verdure and with the lantern high above his head, he stood there pointing.

Suddenly I lost all sense of proportion. There was a small depression at our feet, like a basin at the bottom of a well, of giant, climbing green walls that towered up to meet a sky speckled with silver stars of the tropic night. And in this basin clustered miniature town of stone towers and peaked roofs crowded closely together. The tallest of the structures, looking something like a white stone corncrib with a church steeple, was not above eight feet high.

"Yes, it is a city," whispered Tangora, as if he had divined my thoughts. "A city of the dead. Your first glimpse of a Haitian graveyard, dear Wynant. The tombstones are always modeled after churches. Here and there you see a cross, but always you see the sight of the serpent, holy to Voodoo. They take no chances with their eternal souls. Unfortunate that we who lay claim to civilization cannot learn something from their precepts. The cross, you see, is just in case you Christians are right. That is tolerance. But see the tallest of the tombs—the one fitted with the glass-arched window? It is ornamented only by the serpent. It is the tomb of the White *Mamaloï*. Heavy is the stone upon her decaying breasts that she may not rise, a soulless thing to toil eternally among men."

Tangora turned abruptly on my uncle, his icy eyes piercing in the lantern rays. "You would see more, Dr. Wynant?"

My uncle's lips moved. No sound came. No sound at all in the jungle but the thud of the drum in the distance. Lord of all sounds that night was the drum, and my uncle might not speak above it. His trembling hand fluttered out, a mute gesture that said on—to the tomb of the White *Mamaloï*.

CHAPTER III

Life in Death

WE stood in silence, my uncle and I, awaiting the return of Tangora. He had left us the lantern

—thank God for that!—and had gone back to the hut where we had left Marsaillis. We stood living and breathing where we had no right. We were trespassers in a citadel of death. But had trespass been our only sin that night—God, what fools men are!

Tangora returned with a pick and crowbar. He looked a little paler than before, I thought, and those spots on his cheek bones burned brighter. Some of his self confidence had forsaken him, but he had boasted to my uncle, and Uncle James would call any man's bluff.

We trod warily among old graves to the tomb of the White *Mamaloï*. Through the glass-arched windows of the miniature stone church, I could see the black end of a wooden coffin. My uncle, seized with feverish energy, snatched the crowbar from Tangora's hand and smashed the glass window to atoms. The sound of the crash muffled for a moment the beat of the drum. Then that evil sound returned, throbbing like that lonely, dead heart I had seen in my uncle's laboratory.

"Not that way," came Tangora's rapid, hushed words. "The window is too small for us to remove the coffin through it."

"You—you're not going to—to—"

I could not get the words out. I watched, aghast, as Tangora struck a hollow note with his pickax on the sloping stone roof of the tomb.

"The Voodoo has two souls," Tangora whispered, digging the point of his pick into mortar that joined the stone roof with the sides of the tomb. "When death comes, one soul goes back to Africa. The other"—he shuddered slightly—"is here tonight, watching."

My uncle uttered a nervous, scoffing laugh.

"You can convince me of life from death, but do not speak of souls, Tangora." He drove the point of the crowbar into a fissure in the mortar and set all his strength against it.

"As long as decay has not completely ravished a body, it may live again," Tangora whispered mechanically, his lips moving piously as

though he recited a horrible litany.

There was a crack like the tearing away of old bones. I saw the veins on my uncle's forehead swelling into small snakes. His lips were tightly compressed. Every ounce of strength and will surged through his body in a tremendous heave that rocked the tomb on its foundation. With a crash like thunder, the whole roof of the tomb crashed from the walls. Then reverberations died away and the night belonged to the drum again. Foul, gaseous smells breathed from the open tomb. But my uncle was standing beside the wreckage, head bent so far forward, staring into the tomb, that he resembled a decapitated corpse.

"The coffin has handles," he said. Idiotic, that sounded.

Loath as I was to touch any part of the tomb, Uncle James goaded me into helping them raise the coffin. It was lighter than I anticipated. Perhaps, I thought and hoped, it was empty. But regardless of the lightness of our burden, its size and shape made it a cumbersome thing to get back through the jungle. I would have been as limp as a sack had we taken it all the way back to camp. But we didn't; we took it only to the palm-thatched hut where the horse skull gleamed in the lantern light, where the sound of the drum was closer and more terrifying.

THE jungle was hot, but the interior of that hut was like an oven. An open iron cylinder stood in the center and roared with the fire within it. Smoke wandered ceilingward to find its way out through the thatch.

As I entered the doorway, a shapeless thing fluttered soundlessly from the semi-gloom, its unclean wings brushing my cheek. Only a bat. If it were only a bat, I thought, and not some winged soul hell-bound! My hair brushed a spider web, and its hairy, bloated owner dropped to my shoulder. I watched it scuttle down my shirt to drop to the floor.

I looked about the room. Tangora had left the lantern outside; it be-

longed to things civilized. Inside the hut we were dependent upon the fire in the open cylinder and the staring red eyes of human skulls mounted on poles and illuminated by candles fixed within the cavities. An enormous thing of obscene grotesquery rose at one end of the room—a native idol carved from black wood and brilliantly painted. On the knees of the immobile, squatting thing, sat Marsaillis. He was perfectly naked, a lean drum clasped between his knees. He was no longer thumping on the goat skin head as we entered, but was scratching at it with the dried, shriveled wing of a bat. The sound of the hollow scratching was more ghostly than the beating.

We rested the coffin upon two dead logs and Tangora got busy with the fastenings of the lid. You think you have smelled death? At a funeral? Never! That is only that the perfume of flowers is too heavy. Not in any morgue was there ever such an odor as emanated from that coffin. The smell of death unadulterated by flowery perfume or disinfectants—the smell of rot and corruption and worm-eaten flesh.

The lid of the coffin was back. Marsaillis had laid aside his drum. He went to the cylindrical stove and poured into its open top a ladleful of something thick and red as blood. The flame sputtered. Dense smoke spouted upward. A sickening, sweetish odor filled the air. Then the flame brightened, grew fiercer. And we looked into the coffin.

It contained what had been the body of a woman. A dull black cushion pillowed the awful hair. All the various hues of decay were in the bloated, poisonous-looking flesh, varying from a slimy grey to a dried blue-black. Corrupted flesh had sloughed away from portions of the throat, and in a blackened hollow beneath the chin a white grub had found a home. Tangora caught the worm between thumb and forefinger and cast it aside with a shudder that shook him from toes to finger tips. Then from the pocket of his trousers he pulled something that sent my mind

racing back along the road it had traveled from civilization to this—this damnable thing we were doing. It was a physician's stethoscope.

"Dr. Wynant," Tangora said with cold mockery, "you are a scientist. Convince yourself this thing is thoroughly dead."

Uncle James dashed the instrument from Tangora's hand.

"Don't be a fool," he whispered harshly.

My uncle was right. Science did not belong here. In the jungle there was but one power. Its name was Voodoo.

Tangora shrugged. He turned to Marsaillis and took from the black man's hand a small vial containing some inky fluid. Then with pocket knife in hand, he stooped over the rotting corpse. He forced the blade of his knife between the dead, blue lips. I heard a grating sound as he forced the jaws apart. In the cavity that had been the mouth I saw dull, black teeth; one tooth had fallen from its socket and lay upon the blue, bloated tongue. Tangora opened the flask and poured the entire contents down the throat until the mouth was filled to running over.

THE heat within the hut was beyond description. I felt that any moment my flesh would become liquid and desert my bones. Yet in spite of the heat there was a cold and clammy feeling deep inside me as though icy, dead hands caressed my heart. Then my heart stopped beating altogether. I stopped breathing, too.

A faint, whimpering cry that was like a groan shuddered the frail walls of the hut. Marsaillis was chanting softly in a tongue foreign to me, accompanying himself with soft palm-taps on the head of the drum.

My uncle's eyes were feverish with excitement. His lips were parted in a ghastly smile that had something of ecstasy about it. Tangora was watching him through icy eyes. Then I looked upon that ghastly, rotting thing in the coffin. I thought I had gone mad. The blue-black, worm-eaten flesh was quivering. Small,

whimpering cries such as might come from a tongueless thing came from the parted lips. I clutched my uncle's arm.

"My God, if that—that *thing* comes to life as it is, I want to die!"

That was what I wanted to say, but I was beyond speech. A remarkable change was coming over the corpse. At first, I thought it the culmination of complete decay. Every particle of rotting flesh seemed to have the power to move. Then I saw that it was all a miraculous transition. The flesh was moving, giving place to new flesh—flesh that was faintly white at first, then coloring to pink. Then the whole form of the breast was moving, slowly, rhythmically breathing!

A harsh cry ripped from my throat. "It's alive! Alive, I tell you!"

But I told it to the jungle, for I could no longer remain in the Voodoo hut. Near the edge of the clearing, I dropped on my knees exhausted. My eyes found the stars in the black heavens. I clasped my hands and prayed.

I prayed that God would stop this awful thing. I wanted death—the real death that I had always feared. I wanted death a reality—an end of all earthly things. Sobbing out my prayers I lay there in the grass. I was weeping like a child who, wandering in dreamland, has met his first nightmare.

CHAPTER IV

Zombie

THAT was what they had made of her—a *zombie*, a soulless thing condemned to live and toil to eternity. I lay in the grass, watching the hut. I had helped in the ghastly experiment. I had disturbed the blessed dead. I was damned.

A shadow crossed the orange-red doorway. A man staggered into the opening. It was Tangora. Then followed my uncle. Then Marsaillis. Next—next it would come. I waited, watching intently. The light of the lantern had gone with my uncle and

the others. They had forgotten about me. I didn't care. I wanted none of them.

A swollen, tropic moon climbed above the tree-tops and shed sad, silvery light upon the clearing. Still I lay there, dozing a little with complete mental and physical exhaustion. Mosquitoes were devouring me piece-meal. I didn't care. Mosquitoes were at least living things, living upon the living. I felt like a scavenger that had preyed upon the dead.

Suddenly, I started up. Some sixth sense had warned me. My gaze fastened upon the door of the hut. The fire within the crude building had faded. There was no light but the moon, but that was enough for me to see the *thing* as it came through the doorway. Had I only taken to my heels then! But I couldn't. Never in my life have I seen a thing so utterly beautiful as this woman raised from the dead!

Some filmy thing draped a perfect figure. Lustrous dark hair was loosely tucked back of delicate ears. A white orchid nestled in her hair. Orchids, I thought! How appropriate was the flower of death. Her flesh was creamy white, and as she drew nearer so that I could catch the gleam of her eyes I thought they rivaled the stars.

I believe the *zombie* knew I was there, for she came directly toward me with swaying, effortless steps that gave the rhythm of seductive music to every muscle of her body. Her lips were blood-crimson and parted, showing perfect, gleaming teeth. Her smile was more alluring than any smile I had ever seen and at the same time there was something so damnable chill and inhuman about it. Paradoxical? Why not? Wasn't she or it a paradox of life in death?

I got to my feet. My heart was in my throat, stifling me and pounding off a furious pace. Terror must have had its part in that alarming pulse rate. But there was another stimulus—*passion*. There in the jungle, we two alone with the tropic moon—it was all I could do to keep from crushing her in my arms. But it was not

will power that reined me in. It was fear.

"Why do you stare at me so?" Her red lips caressed every word that rippled softly from her tongue. "I have waited so, so long in the cold. And I have waited for you to come and awaken me."

"I—I didn't do it. I—I swear I didn't!" I was screaming like a man condemned to the electric chair.

HER hand touched mine. Fingers delicate, soft and warm as velvet. My whole body quivered as a torrid wave swept over me. Yet I shrank back. I still saw that worm-ravaged corpse in the coffin. I knew this lovely thing was dead—or should have been. I shrank back.

"Why do you fear me?" she whispered. "You have called me back from so far—farther than the moon."

"Zombie!" I spat the word, yet could not force enough disgust into it. "She is beautiful," my mind whispered. "She is dead!" my lips shouted.

Her face was close to mine again, red lips puckering slightly. She was whispering, "Will you see if I am alive? Dare you?"

I swayed forward, felt the sweet warm breath of her parted lips close to mine. Then something snapped in my brain. Harsh, mad laughter rattled in my throat. I don't know what I called her then—probably everything that was vile. I tore myself from the embrace of her eyes. Then I ran, crashing through the jungle like a beast maddened by a wound, direction, destination unknown.

The jungle was upon me and all the horrors of its invisible, hydra-headed death lurked in the shadows. I ducked things I couldn't see. My eyeballs strained in their sockets in an effort to see things I feared. I kept glancing back. For all I knew I was running in circles. A bleached white tree trunk reminded me of the zombie's graceful form and I twisted about to run in the opposite direction. I feared and desired that thing from the grave—soulless, defiant of

decay, and cloaked in the subtle allure of a Lorelei.

I gained a clearing and doubled my pace crossing it. But Nature, fearful guardian of jungle secrets, had conspired against me. I flung myself against a wall of twisted lianas that wove a giant spider web of green before me. I could not break through. I backed, lowered my head, and charged. Something soft and cold dislodged from some overhanging bough and dropped upon my neck. I brushed it off, thinking little of how close I must have been to death. But nearer than death was madness. I seized the network of lianas, shaking them as if I were a beast in a cage. The green bars snapped.

Pain of a dozen fiery wounds sent me jerking back. I looked at my hands. They were bathed in blood. The vines had broken away before my attack to reveal a hundred needle spines that had riddled my flesh. There was no escape. I was trapped in that web of jungle. I dropped on all fours, craning my neck to peer up at the heavens. Through the jungle roof I could see the tropic moon sailing placidly in the dark sea of sky. Across the clearing a little way was a hut. I crawled for it, dragging my exhausted body in one desperate effort to gain shelter and sanity.

I dropped on my belly as the shadow of a giant bat darted at my head. I waited, breathless, until the silent, winged shadow was gone. Then I crawled inside the hut and lay still, eyes closed. I fought with sleep and lost.

I was awakened by a sensation that the blood in my veins had turned to fire. It was thrilling, agonizing. Warm, hungry lips were fastened to mine. Lips of a soul-leech! Small, strong fingers were interlaced in mine, working rhythmically like the claws of a contented kitten. She was there in the hut with me, close to me, kissing with the lips of a vampire.

The zombie raised her head and I could feel her eyes fastening my mind with invisible tentacles.

"You could not escape me, could you?" she whispered. "Here in the

jungle there is no escape." She sighed, a sound like a breath of lazy, tropic breeze, then relaxed to pillow her head on my extended arm. Her dark hair was pressed close against my cheek. I smelled the perfume of the white orchid like the bouquet from heady wine. And then it was my lips that sought hers.

"It is the *Ouanga*," she whispered some time later. "Love fetish of the Voodoo. You make it with two needles bound together with wool and medicine leaves and sewed into a leather pouch. Tonight I wore the *Ouanga* for you alone. Tonight, if never again, you belong to me."

"Don't say that," I mumbled. I was trying to kiss her and talk at the same time. "Never say, 'never again'."

SHE laughed very softly. Somehow that reminded me of Tangora. He had had no right to laugh, I thought, because dead things shouldn't laugh. And what was this in my arms? I had known it when it was a corpse. Now it was woman, living but soulless.

Light came gradually into the hut—cold white light coming through the door. I thought it was the moon, stooping from the skies. Eagerly my eyes sought that lovely, shadowy face—eagerly and fearfully. What if it had returned to the decaying, fleshy thing I had first seen? That I could not have borne. I held her tighter lest death snatch her from me. And the light brightened.

I raised by head, turned it toward the door. A man stood there, a lantern in his hand. It was my Uncle James, tall and gaunt, his horror-filled eyes staring from his haggard face.

"Dave!"

There was agony in my name as he pronounced it huskily. He sprang forward, seized my arm, and dragged me to my feet. The strength of desperation possessed him. I fought impotently as he hauled me from the hut. I wanted to go back to her. He had no right to interfere. This was love such as I had never known. I struck my uncle squarely across the

mouth. He released me and for a moment stood there quivering with rage and spitting blood.

"I'm through with you!" he said hoarsely. "I've tried to save your eternal soul. You're a damned necrophile!" He turned and stalked off through the jungle.

I stood there, trembling with the fear that he had suddenly brought me. Necrophile. That was as vile a name as he could have called me. But it had been truthfully applied. I loved the dead. But I was powerless in the passion that possessed me. My feet, like leaden things, dragged me back—back toward the hut. I gained the door. Something within squeaked shrilly. A bat dropped out of the night, its foul soft wings brushing my cheek as it passed. And that was terribly like the caress of the *zombie* woman.

I stood there, staring about the hut. It was as empty as the grave that we had rifled that night.

CHAPTER V

Drums in the Night

IT came again, beating like a fevered heart. Marsaillis was somewhere in the forest, beating his drum, conjuring up some new Voodoo horror. I stumbled on, following the sound. There was nothing else to guide me. I must have been traveling in circles, for a few minutes later found me in the clearing where stood the *Hounfort*, Voodoo house of worship. There Marsaillis had risen the dead with drum beats. What was he doing now?

I approached the hut with utmost caution. The lamps that were human skulls shed their baleful light about the room. Marsaillis was squatting beside his graven black god, thumping the head of his drum. His hand rose and fell in measured rhythm. He was naked. His eyelids drooped. Still he thumped, head swaying forward now and again upon his chest. A dark liquid splashed on the head of the drum and crawled like a giant

amoeba across the taut skin. And then I saw its source. There was a cleanly drilled hole in Marsaillis' breast—a bullet wound. And from it, as if propelled by the throbbing drum itself, came blood. Marsaillis was dying.

The only firearms in our party had been my rifle and my uncle's revolver. Then—

I gulped at hot, humid air. Suddenly I had realized what had happened. And I knew why with his dying strength Marsaillis beat the drum!

I turned and ran back, plunging into the jungle, spurring fagged senses to recall the direction of our camp. I didn't know what I could do to check the awful power of that man who crouched in that hut and drummed life away. As I ran haphazardly on I mumbled prayers that death might snatch Marsaillis before it was too late.

My boots sank into fetid ooze. Ahead was the somnolent sound of sluggish Massacre River. Moonlight glistened on its placid surface and I smelled the musky smell of the great alligators. I turned sharply to the right, walking warily, listening to the sound of the black sorcerer's drum, beating slower and slower in the distance. Marsaillis was cursing life away. I had seen him raise the dead. He could entomb the living. I goaded myself to better speed, thrashing through the six-foot grasses, watching the river, searching the gloom for the light of our camp.

I came suddenly upon the clearing and saw the wedge-shaped roofs of our tents in the moonlight. From my uncle's tent came a man. Tangora. In his hand was a bit of white paper. He said something to me, but I paid no attention. I thrust back the flap of my uncle's tent and the mosquito netting that hung like a coffin veil over the doorway.

"I . . . always fulfill my . . . bargains . . . Tangora. You have . . ."

The voice straggled off. In the dim light I saw my uncle sitting upright on his cot, looking fixedly at the canvas wall. He had aged perceptibly

in the last hour. His cheeks were shriveled, his keen eyes dimmed.

"Uncle James," I began.

His head turned and for a moment there was life in his eyes.

"Get out," he whispered. "I want nothing from you."

I approached resolutely. "I'm sorry," I said hoarsely. "I—I don't know how to put it into words—"

"Don't try. Get back to your grave-wife if you love her so much!"

"UNCLE, she's gone. In the hut there was only a bat—"

He laughed horribly. "You *think* she's gone. She'll haunt you to the ends of the earth. And haunt me these last few minutes. . . ." His voice tapered. His fever-shaken fingers were groping for me. "Dave," he whispered, and kindness was back in his voice; eagerness, as he asked: "There's a death, isn't there, Dave? A real death from which no one can call you back?"

"I nodded, speechless, knowing that he had wanted an affirmative answer.

"You hear that drum, Dave? Marsaillis—I shot him. It was murder, but he had no right to live. He had brought the dead thing back. And when I saw what it had done to you, I shot Marsaillis as I would a mad dog. He crept away, bleeding. You know what he is doing now?"

I shook my head. I knew, but there was no need for him to know.

"He's dying, Dave. He doesn't want to go alone. No one does. He holds my hand, dragging me down to his hell. But I'll not die that way, to be yanked from the grave a soulless thing like that we saw tonight. God, what a fool I was! Meddler with the dead! I've seen too much and know too much. But Marsaillis shall not take me with him. He shall not—"

My uncle stopped suddenly, sat up straighter, his eyes riveted on the flaps of his tent. His hand groped beneath his collapsible cushion. Delirium burned in his eyes.

"So she's gone, eh?" he chuckled harshly. "Turned into a bat, you think. She will haunt me to the end

of my moments, but you, Dave, mustn't—"

I pivoted. In the doorway was an exquisite feminine silhouette. The *zombie* had returned!

I knew what my uncle was looking for under his pillow. I shouted and spun around. But it was too late. I saw the long polished barrel of his revolver sprouting from his clenched fist.

"Back, Dave," he said between clenched teeth. "I would sooner have you a corpse than the prey of *that!*"

The revolver roared. The *zombie* woman backed quickly, sucked her dead breath between her teeth. She was standing just outside the tent, the moonlight full upon her. Her lips were laughing silently. She stood erect and graceful, and I thought of the orchid plant rising gracefully, rooted in things long dead.

Again and again the revolver roared. The gloom was lanced by its fiery spittle, and the walls of the tent shaken with its thunder. Still the *zombie* stood there, laughing the laughter of the damned. Then the flap of the tent rippled back into place. She was gone. Bullets had no effect upon her. I was to see her once again consciously, but always I must see her in my dreams.

I turned to my uncle. The revolver had dropped to the floor. He was quivering like the last leaf in December's wind. His eyes roved around the tent, seeking escape from God knows what phantasmal thing. In the distance, drum beats grew fainter and slower. And suddenly my uncle's eyes brightened.

A shadowy little monster of a thing crawled along the wall of the tent. And there he saw hope. I tried to stop him, but like the talons of a striking falcon, his hands darted out toward the tiny, moving shadow. He snatched it from the wall. I heard a fibrous, crunching sound as his fist closed over the thing. His body leaped convulsively on the cot, then fell back. He lay quite still.

"I've beaten him, Dave," came his whispered voice. "Beaten Marsaillis,

the sorcerer. You'll have to go it alone now." Slowly, his fingers unclenched and I saw lying in his palm the struggling form of a half-crushed scorpion as long as my finger.

Walking softly, Death entered the tent.

In the distance, seeming far, far away now, came the muffled beat of the drum. Then, it, too, gradually tapered into silence.

CHAPTER VI

The Return

THE next morning, Tangora would have buried my uncle in the jungle with a heavy stone upon his breast lest his body rise again. I stoutly maintained that that would not do. I had seen the ghastly work of grave meddlers and that my uncle should be a soulless thing, toiling indefatigably through the darkness, was too great a risk to run. No, his body must be embalmed and he must be given a decent burial.

There is little of the return to civilization to be told. Our boat drifted down the swollen river, and Tangora, at the helm, was like Charon of the river Styx. A German doctor at Fort Liberty attended to the embalming of the body. Then once again we were back in the boat, plowing the blue Caribbean homeward.

There was no parting between me and Tangora. He simply went as he had come, wrapped to the eyes in his cloak against the cruel lash of the winter wind.

A month passed. I was growing thin and pale from the lack of sleep. For when I did go to sleep I was eternally haunted by the horrors I had witnessed. I felt again the warm, dead lips of the *zombie* woman pressed close to mine. God, I preferred the lonely, sleepless vigil of the night to that!

Spring brought me a letter:

Dear Mr. Wynant:

In our hospital here at New York is a man who calls continually for you. His name is Tangora, and the

poor fellow is quite gone with tuberculosis. He tells me that he has something of the greatest importance to tell you.

Very truly yours,
Dr. Lamont.

A day and a night on the train brought me to Tangora's bedside. They had to give him a hypodermic to still his coughing long enough for him to speak to me. Then he asked to be left alone with me.

"I'll not trouble you long, David Wynant," he said, words rippling from his ragged lips. "Nor trouble anyone else," he added with a smile. "I am dying a rich man, Wynant, thanks to the most damnable thing a man ever conceived. When your uncle's will is probated, you'll find there isn't much more than about half the money you expect. He paid me a great deal to show him how to find life in death."

I told Tangora coldly that I had never given the matter of my uncle's money any thought. He smiled insolently and hurried on:

"It all goes back to college days. I was extremely poor but a brilliant student—so brilliant, in fact, that all the others in the class were jealous to the point of hating me. You know the snobbishness that can prevail on a college campus. Well, I was the pariah of them all because of my brilliance, my poverty, and the mixed blood in my veins. Your uncle was my chief tormentor. I hated him above all the others and vowed I would have my vengeance. Years later, I conceived a plan by which I could bring him to his knees. I knew a good deal of the experiments with which he amused himself. His mania was wanting to create life.

"In college, I had often spoken of the mysterious powers of the Voodoo sect in Haiti. I had spent many years on the island. I was scoffed at generally, but I cloaked myself in mystery, so that I believe some of the students were a little afraid of me. I knew of a way that I could humble your uncle and at the same time enrich myself. So I persuaded him to go to Haiti.

"I never meant to drag you into it.

"Robert Marsaillis was a Voodoo sorcerer, but he knew a great deal of his religious rites consisted of just so much mumbo-jumbo just to inspire fear in his fellow natives. I took Marsaillis into my confidence and he agreed to do what I asked for a price.

THERE was a young Irish dancer in the night club at Port-au-Prince. She was very beautiful, and I brought her into the plot. She was to take a boat and precede us up Massacre River to that burial ground in the jungle. She waited there until I joined her at the time you and your uncle were pitching camp. She was a plucky little girl, with more nerve than lots of men. I fixed her up to look like a half-decayed corpse. That rotting flesh was chiefly wax of various colors which I molded over her living flesh. A harmless, easily soluble dye made her teeth look decayed. That one tooth that appeared to have dropped from her 'decaying' gums was her own idea—one of her baby teeth that she had saved from childhood. That grub worm was the master touch. I carved it from a potato and planted it in the wax on her throat. It was that matter of an hour or more that she had to lie inside that old tomb that required nerve!

"Had your uncle accepted the offer of my stethoscope that night, the jig would have definitely been up. I knew he wouldn't. That smell of death? A rotten smelling unguent the natives prepared from I know not what offal. There are still many things in Haiti you can't explain.

"Remember the terrific heat inside the *Houmfort* that night?"

I told him I was never to forget it.

"It was part of the plan. It melted the wax on our *zombie's* body, caused it to flow down into the coffin, revealing her perfect flesh beneath. Sally acted her part splendidly. That is the girl's name.

"It was my plan to make your uncle appear as ridiculous as possible, then publish the whole hoax. I was going to have our home-made *zombie*

make love to him. She's rather good at that sort of thing. Sally, poor girl, unfortunately got a little mixed up. After we had left her in the hut—I had told your uncle that she might have uninterrupted rest after coming back from the dead—she fixed herself up just as alluring as possible and turned her romantic attack upon you, thinking that you were the man I intended to fool.

"That's about all there is to it. Your uncle was delirious that night. Jungle fever. Too bad he took it out on Robert Marsaillis. After he had shot the poor devil, I slipped blank cartridges into his gun so that if he went on the rampage again he'd do no harm. Your uncle committed suicide by catching that scorpion. If there was any justice in this life, I suppose I would be his murderer. But there isn't anything like justice anywhere. Your uncle handed me his check just before he died."

"But," I interrupted, "those formless, pink, dead things I saw living in my uncle's laboratory that night before the damned adventure began—what were they?"

Tangora laughed a little. "More of the hoax. I had to convince your uncle of my powers. I took little live lizards, wrapped them in soft, warm mud—their natural habitat. Then I enclosed those formless little bundles in envelopes of greyish rubber. Each one was smeared with that foul-smell-

ing salve I was telling you about. After the heat of the room warmed them up a little—they must have been nearly frozen after the trip to your uncle's house in spite of the insulation I had about them—they began to move about. They tried to wriggle out of those envelopes of rubber. Your uncle was too horrified to do much investigating, fortunately for me."

Tangora was seized with a fit of coughing. After he had spat blood, he waved me toward the door.

"You'd better go. You don't like things dead, and it won't be long until I'll be even more disagreeable to you as a corpse than as a man."

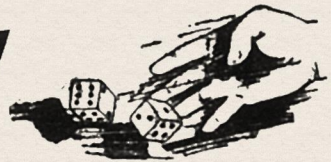
"But the *zombie* woman," I muttered. Her loveliness still haunted me.

"Oh," he chuckled, "you'll find her in a black and tan night club in this city. She does a dance that brings down the house. But you're a rather clean, dumb boy. I've never done anyone a kindness. I'll try to make up for it now. Keep away from her!"

I didn't take Tangora's advice. I went once to the club and saw my "*zombie*" dance. It was a vulgar, nude orgy, damnably barbaric. New York has its rotten spots, but even this was not as rotten as the jungles in Haiti. Somehow, when I saw her dance, it left me cold all over. I hurried out without her seeing me, I hope. I've never seen her since.

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CHAPTER I

The Black Shape

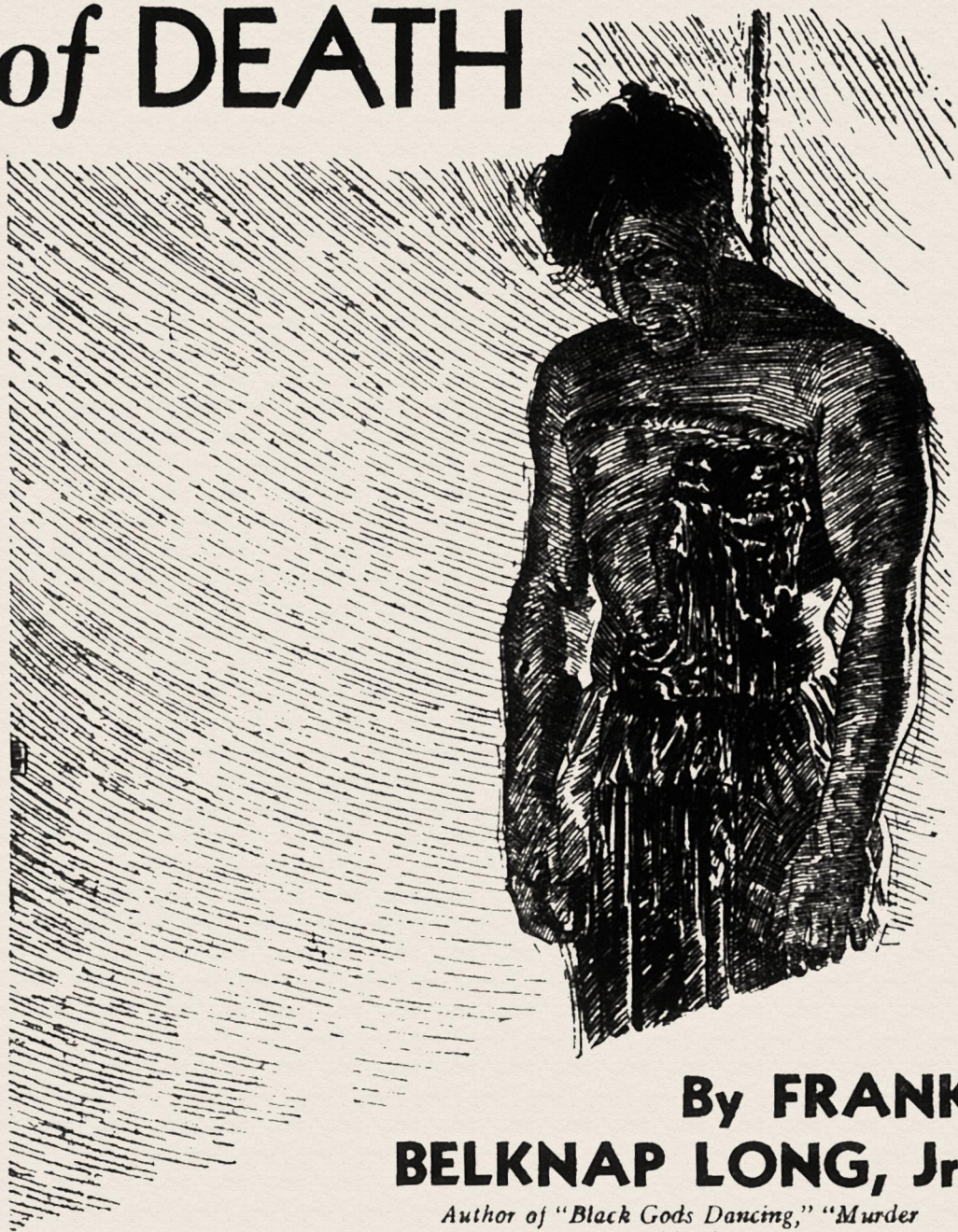
THE thing came out of the doorway before young Willie Stuart could light his cigarette. Stuart had stepped into the darkened

entrance of a hardware store a few feet away, and the thing ran past him with a sobbing moan. He was so startled that the match he was holding seared his thumb.

The cigarette fell from his lips as he stared after the fleeing shape. In

Gruesome Death Bares Vicious Fangs to

of DEATH



By **FRANK
BELKNAP LONG, Jr.**

*Author of "Black Gods Dancing," "Murder
at Midday," etc.*

heart out!" She sobbed

the dim glow of the street lamp he saw a hunched dark form that seemed to have no head. It was below medium height, and as it fled down the street it wavered like a bat in flight. Wing-like extensions of ebon hue sprouted from it, billowing and flapping on

the night breeze. As it turned the corner of the block it seemed to leave the ground.

Young Stuart was slightly plastered. But this ghastly thing was certainly no unwelcome present from the gin he had killed. He could kill

Victims of a Malevolent, Sadistic Madman!

eight Martinis in a row, and still distinguish between reality and illusion. This thing was *real*.

It was a horrible hour and place to encounter so horrible a thing. The more unsavory streets of the French Quarter of New Orleans are often depressing in broad daylight. If grim spectres from a dim and buried past walk anywhere at high noon in American cities, they walk here. But now the *Vieux Carré* was mantled in the miasmal black vapors of the small hours. The dull glow of the street lamp dissipated only a portion of the darkness, leaving uncharted and shadow-haunted areas in every direction. Anyone stopping a lead pipe with his skull here would likely fall back into the shadows and disappear until the dawn came with rosy fingers to pluck away the blackness.

Young Stuart shivered. Being an artist, Stuart was susceptible to the impressions of sense. He had just come from a studio party, where all had been light and gaiety. Now he was up against a contrast that jittered his body from crown to toe. From his position in the entrance to the doorway store he could see the dark doorway from which the bat thing had emerged. It was simply a square ink smudge in the Oxford grey darkness.

Stuart moved out into the center of the pavement, and advanced with wavering steps toward the dark square. As he came abreast of it a faintly unpleasant, slightly musky odor assailed his nostrils.

He stopped before the door and peered intently into the darkness. He could see nothing. He blinked apprehensively, shook his head, and opened his mouth to say a few words under his breath.

"Something damned funny," he addressed himself. "Something cock-eyed strange about this."

His knees were wobbly. His good-looking, boyish face was twisted with apprehension, with fright. Despite a defiant jauntiness of manner, and a comic unsteadiness, he was a scared kid. He ceased his muttering, and fished for a pocket flashlight. His hand wavered in a tremulous arc as he

trained the light on the dark doorway.

For a second he was so startled by what rested there that his countenance froze. His lean body ceased to sway, shed its mobility. Then swift horror flamed in his eyes, spread outward till it engulfed his features. The muscles of his jaw began to twitch.

THE man in the doorway was staring out at the black vapors and sinister shadows of the *Vieux Carré* with unseeing eyes. His body was bunched and twisted. Most of it rested on the lowermost step of a stairway that spiraled upward into blackness, but a flexed knee rested against a dirty yellow wall and a long right leg extended across the doorsill. His arms were extended, his hands upraised and splayed.

He was neatly attired in grey tweeds, white shirt, polka dot, batwing tie, and Scotch grain shoes. The tweeds were marred by great crimson splotches. The white shirt-front was streaked with banners of fresh blood. The batwing tie was so sodden that the polka dots scarcely showed. There was blood even on the rich brown grain of the shoes.

From the center of his chest there protruded the handle of a sturdy knife. Stuart's gaze passed swiftly from the knife to the man's throat. From ear to ear there gaped a dark chasm that gleamed wetly in the narrow beam of the electric torch. From the hideously mutilated throat the blood was still welling.

So extensive and terrible was the mutilation that even the stilling of the murdered man's heartbeat had failed to stanch that flow of gleaming gore. The bright fluid flowed in rippling cascades over the batwing tie and white collar, and snaked down the crevices of his shirt to his belt. From his waist it dripped in slow rhythm upon the floor, forming a little repulsive pool at the base of the stairs.

Stuart gulped, choked. The wavering cobwebs in his brain shriveled up, as though a red-hot poker had passed through his cerebral lobes and cauterized the festooned interiors in one flash. He became dead sober all over

and all at once. And with sobriety came sickness, a retching at the pit of his stomach.

But he couldn't tear his eyes away from the awful thing that lay huddled in the doorway. The knife that protruded from the slain man's chest had apparently played a subordinate rôle in the tragedy. The flesh of the throat had been cruelly torn, ripped as though by the fangs of some rabid animal.

It was ragged, raw. Stuart moved closer, trained his flashlight on the serrated edges of the ghastly mutilation. The flesh was torn over a wide area which extended from a point immediately under the chin to the base of the Adam's apple. It seemed inconceivable that cold steel could work such gruesome havoc.

As Stuart stood there, swaying, sick with terror and revulsion, his mind leapt back to the dark shape he had seen emerging from the doorway. Had something unspeakably malign fastened on Robert Craugh's throat, and viciously attempted to gnaw his head off? A great *vampire* bat? The supposition was insane, monstrous. No man in his senses could entertain it seriously and retain a shred of respect for his own intellectual processes. A bat as large as a small man, running, skimming down a nighted street in the *Vieux Carré*, disappearing into the night? A mad, wild thought. Stuart spewed it from his mind with vigor, straightened in desperate pride.

He was scared, yes, and this thing was awful. But he wasn't going to turn infantile just yet, not even to please all the crouching, clutching shadows in the *Vieux Carré*. A bat? Preposterous. And yet Robert Craugh, the sur-realist artist, was dead, unnaturally, horribly, in a doorway in the *Vieux Carré* in the grim hours preceding dawn. Something malignant had torn his throat; something bestial and beyond sane conceiving.

The horrible welling blood that ran down the crevices in his shirt and formed into a pool at the base of the stairs would have filled the heads of

less emotional men than Willie Stuart with wild, incredible thoughts. Stuart was an imaginative artist and as sensitive as an old Stradivarius. It was to his credit that he fought superstition tooth and nail, and emerged victorious.

THERE was no doubt in his mind as to the identity of the slain man. Robert Craugh's face had appeared too frequently in art journals to permit of uncertainty. His had been an unusual face, ravaged by genius and what an English novelist has called "the strange disease of thought," but now it was so distorted by fright that it looked almost idiotic in the bright radiance of Stuart's flashlight. The lips were swollen and rimmed with blood and froth, the cheeks had assumed a purplish cast, and the eyes protruded.

It was easy to see that the poor wretch had been horribly wounded in mind before cold steel and something more alien and sinister than the weapons of men had hacked his flesh, maiming and killing him. The posture of his body revealed stark fright and terror as unmistakably as his distorted features.

Beside him in the doorway was one of his creations, a small painting in oils. The little square of canvas was lying across his extended right leg, and the figures on it seemed more palpitant and alive than the man who had created them.

Stuart played his flashlight on the canvas for an instant, sucked in his breath sharply at what he saw delineated there. All the diabolic and bestial drawings of a Dali or a Goya, all the sombre Satanisms and hellish monstrosities that defile the canvases of the most decadent of the sur-realists were surpassed and outmoded by the leering malignancy, devilish cruelty and cunning that shone in the faces of *The Torturers*.

There were six inflictors of pain. Gaunt-visaged, with curling malevolent lips, and cheeks as shriveled and yellow as old parchment, they stood in a circle above a long table and inflicted, each after his own hell-

ish fashion, a unique variety of torment on the slim, white body of a young girl.

The girl's body was taut with agony. Upon her small, almost childish face was an expression of such unutterable torment that Stuart sickened as he stood there staring, then tore his gaze away. Hot indignation filled him, a vast fury, intense and unreasoning. Here was sinister sadism and monstrous cruelty, but it was after all the artist's privilege to depict the basest impulses of the human psyche. Yet so terrible was this representation of the unregenerate in man that Stuart instinctively ascribed to Craugh a certain decadence, a certain evilness of mind. To merely visualize such a thing and put it on canvas was—

Terror returned again, engulfing his faculties, swamping his perhaps unjustified moral indignation. Craugh was now clearly beyond good and evil. The immense battlefield of the human mind where passions rage with fury during conscious life was filled for poor Craugh with nothing but corpses. He had been a decadent artist perhaps, but so had been Gauguin and Van Gogh, and half the world's great. Looking upon the poor devil now, brought so low by one of life's brutal mischances, it was impossible to experience anything but pity. Pity and terror and a black misquiet.

YOUNG Stuart switched off the flashlight, thrust it deep into his coat pocket and turned from the doorway. His heart was behaving queerly. It functioned with slow, muffled thuds that beat against his ribs. He stood swaying for an instant, then crossed the street to the row of unlighted stores and houses opposite.

The farther he got from the scene of grisly tragedy the more rapid his stride became. It was as though distance lent strength to his legs and drove some of the fright from his mind. In walking swiftly he was not dominated by a desire for flight. He merely wanted to find a store where lights still shone, where he could summon help and fortify himself with

the sight of friendly human faces.

He found a lighted store about two blocks from the sinister doorway. Behind a counter containing jars of colored candy and a row of newspapers and magazines sat a little Creole with a black waxed mustache and sleepy, stupid eyes.

When Stuart saw how stupid he looked he became violently averse to telling him anything. Instead, he found solace in the single phone booth. He dialed and got the Commissioner of Police.

Willie Stuart could call the commissioner by his first name and escape being sat on. The commissioner happened to be young Stuart's uncle. At first the young man got the sleepy, impatient voice of the commissioner's housekeeper. Then he got the commissioner's valet and finally, after an interval of nerve-racking suspense, the commissioner himself.

Commissioner Bayne was so exuberantly indignant at first that Stuart couldn't get a word in edgewise.

"Wha'd'ya mean, ringing me up at this hour?" he stormed. "You blank-blank-blank monkey. Are you tight again? Are you? By Lord, if you weren't my sister's kid and a blank-blank genius I'd put you in a big cage with bars on it. Why, you young purple-backed baboon, you blank-blank—"

"Listen, Uncle Andrew," said Stuart, in grim despair. "This is important. Do you know Robert Craugh, the artist? Well, he's lying in a doorway down in the *Vieux Carré*. About three blocks from the *Calaboza*. He's dead—murdered, I think. Somebody stabbed him and left him lying in the doorway. I'm telling you the truth, Uncle Andrew."

The commissioner made a peculiar sound in his throat, a kind of tonsil coughing, indicating amazement, furious doubt.

"Look here, Willie," he exclaimed, "are you plastered? So plastered you've got to rib me at four in the morning?"

"It's true, Uncle Andrew. I was there when it happened. I saw it. He's been killed, mutilated."

There ensued a silence at the other end of the wire. Then the commissioner said: "All right, Willie. I believe you. Give me the address, then grab a cab and come on up here. I'll send a couple of men down to take charge of the body."

CHAPTER II

Concerning Vampires

WHEN Willie Stuart arrived at his uncle's house there were lights in all the ground floor windows. The young artist's cab came to a halt with a squealing of tires before a display of Spanish architecture that filled its driver with awe.

"One buck, mister," said the cabman, swinging the door wide on Stuart's white face. "The guy who lives in that toy palace must have walker's cramp."

"The Commissioner of Police is a big man," said Stuart. "He stands six feet two in his stocking feet. He needs a lot of room."

The cabman's eyes reflected a deepening respect. "The commissioner, eh? Well, well. I thought maybe it was some ritzy guy who was born with a silver spoon in his mouth."

"No," said Stuart. "The commissioner had a gold one."

He smiled feebly, laid a dollar and some change on the driver's palm, and sprinted down a long walk between flower beds to a stuccoed façade that towered greyly above him in the early morning darkness. There was no hint of dawn in the eastern sky. A few stars glittered in the black celestial vault above him, and insects chirped in the flower beds while he waited for the door to open.

The door was opened by the commissioner's valet. He scowled at the commissioner's young reprobate of a nephew disapprovingly. Willie Stuart scowled back at him, pushed his way inside.

He met Commissioner Bayne at the foot of a wide stairway at the end of a big waxed floor. The commissioner was wearing black silk pajamas, and

his hair was uncombed. He seemed relieved when he saw how steady Willie was on his pins.

"All right, boy," he said, taking Willie by his coat sleeve. "Come into the library and tell me all about it. You look like something from the morgue."

"I feel like a whisky and soda," said Stuart, feebly.

"All right, boy. I'll get you one. Hope it jibes with the other poisons you've got under your belt."

Ensconced in the library, with a tall glass in his hand and the commissioner's friendly face opposite him, young Stuart felt much better. He felt like talking. The words poured from him in a torrent.

The commissioner heard him out in silence. The expression of his face changed a little now and then. One word predominated in Stuart's conversation. The word *bat*. It recurred again and again. Stuart had smothered his superstitious fears, but they seethed in his subconscious, and cropped up in his talk.

When the young man had concluded his grim recital Commissioner Bayne rose slowly and walked across the room to a section of the built-in bookcase which usurped the wall space on three sides of the library. He pulled a massive tome from its moorings, crossed back to where his nephew was sitting.

"What you need is a little shut-eye, my boy," he said. "But first, just listen to what it says here about vampire bats. It will relieve your mind, do you more good than that poison you're swilling."

"IT'S good Scotch, Uncle," said Stuart. "I can taste the heather."

"Heather, my eye," said the commissioner, opening the book and thumbing a few pages. "It says here that the common vampire bat, *Desmodus rufus*, which inhabits tropical Central and South America, is precisely three inches in length—about as big as a large mouse. Get that? The only other known species, *Diphylla ecaudata*, inhabits Brazil and is even

smaller! And listen to this, boy. The vampire bat does not tear the flesh of its victims. It simply scrapes off a little skin and applies its mouth to the severed capillaries."

Stuart nodded, emptied his glass. He felt more relieved than he cared to admit.

"I saw something ghastly, a black shape that seemed headless," he said. "But I didn't think it was a vampire bat."

"Yes, you did, boy," said the commissioner. "Your eyes are haunted yet. You look sick."

The slow, sympathetic smile which was spreading over Commissioner Bayne's face hurt Stuart's pride. He straightened in his chair.

"Listen, Uncle. I've an angle on this thing already. Make me a deputy again, will you?"

The commissioner became grimly serious. The young monkey was getting ready to impose on his good nature as sure as sin. He glared at him.

"You keep out of this, boy. It's a nasty, black mess. I've given you a few little cases to keep you out of mischief, but this goes to the lads down at Headquarters. All of it."

"This is right up my alley," pleaded Stuart. "Craugh was an artist. Do you know where he was exhibiting last week?"

"You can keep that for my busy flatfoots," said the commissioner.

"Craugh was exhibiting at the New Independents. The director of that piquant and sadistic shebang is a man named Bailey. They put on a show every year for jaded society people that would give your puritan soul the willies. Brutal, gruesome, horrible pictures. Some of the sur-realists go the limit."

"So what?" said the commissioner.

"I'd like to talk with Bailey. In fact, I intend to talk with him. This thing is red-hot now. Am I a deputy, Uncle?"

The commissioner shook his head. "Not on your life. You stay out of this."

"Tell Paul to get me a cab," said Stuart, firmly. "I'm going right over now and have a talk with him."

Many thanks for the badge, Uncle."

"You're not getting one," exploded Bayne. "You're not— Besides, how the hell can you call on this Bailey at five in the morning?" he finally gave in.

"I'll make out I'm the milkman," said Stuart.

Fifteen minutes later Willie Stuart sat in a speeding cab and watched old houses and new ones, some French and some Spanish and a few American with Colonial interiors, sweep past in the dim light of early dawn. The commissioner's home was in the New Creole quarter, and Bailey lived in the American quarter close to Lafayette Square. It was a long, tedious ride from the neo-Spanish mansion where Stuart had acquired his deputyship to the equally imposing greystone dwelling of Mr. John Bailey. But Stuart was so busy getting ready a verbal questionnaire that he didn't fret much.

WHEN the cab halted before Bailey's home, Stuart paid the cabman and moved up into the shadows of an imposing doorway. He pressed a bell and waited. A light flashed in one of the groundfloor windows. He heard vague movements within the house and someone fumbling at chains inside the door. The door opened a crack and a bearded face peered out.

"Who are you?" said the bearded one in a harsh voice that grated disagreeably on Stuart's ear. "What's the idea, getting me out of bed at this hour?"

"Sorry, sir," said Stuart. "But I've got to talk to Mr. John Bailey. One of his friends has met with a serious accident."

Above the beard steel-blue eyes sheathed in thick-lensed spectacles flamed with sudden interest.

"Who is he? What's his name?"

"I'll tell that to Mr. Bailey," said Stuart. This damned brusque menial made him sore.

An ironic smile creased the bearded man's face.

"I am Bailey," he said. "What in hell is the matter with you, young

man? Are you drunk? This is a fine hour to get a man up!"

Stuart wasn't pleased. If this was Bailey, he didn't like Bailey. Still, the man was distinguished; an art connoisseur. Stuart was still young and naïve enough to be impressed by worldly success. He ceased to glare.

"It's about—about Robert Craugh. I'm not sure, of course, that he was your friend, but I knew that you—"

Bailey cut him short with a wave of his hand. "Craugh, eh? Come in, son. We can't talk out here."

Stuart followed him into a dark room. Bailey switched on a light and an immense interior leapt into view. Bailey led the way across it, over animal rugs and between urns on pedestals to his study and library, paneled in oak, and even more impressive than the library of Commissioner Bayne. Huge tomes in ornate bindings towered from floor to ceiling. One wall contained an immense fireplace, a built-in curio cabinet, and Algerian and Moorish swords in crisscross formation.

Bailey beckoned to a chair, and crossed the room to the fireplace. Stuart seated himself reluctantly. It made him nervous to have anyone standing over him.

Bailey's face wasn't reassuring, either. He had rather thick lips, gaunt cheeks, and eyes that bored like gimlets through the thick lenses he was wearing. His unusually large ears were flattened against his skull. His beard was of reddish tinge, scraggly and thin. He looked disturbingly like a satyr as he stood by the fireplace staring down at the young artist.

"Craugh, eh?" he said, suddenly. "What about Craugh?"

"He's dead," said Stuart.

The satyr face remained impassive. "And you thought that would interest me?"

Stuart nodded. He was shocked. Robert Craugh was a brilliant artist, a man of genius. The world sneers at genius in the flesh, but to sneer or remain indifferent to the death of genius was somehow inhuman. Stuart felt afraid of a man who would

react like that in the face of such news. Bailey was a connoisseur; he had exhibited Craugh's paintings at his own expense. Yet now no muscle of his face moved. His eyes bored into Stuart with a cold curiosity that held no hint of shock.

"He has been murdered," said Stuart.

A slow smile spread over Bailey's face. "So," he murmured, "he has been murdered." All at once, his face became convulsed. Dark blood suffused his cheeks; his eyes narrowed in terrible fury.

"There are degrees of degradation," he spat out. "From the heights of sanity and decency there is a ladder leading down into the depths. Men on the upper rungs can sometimes be saved from themselves. But Craugh was on the lowest rung, in the slime of the pit, down where vermin seethe. Whoever killed him rid the world of a black abomination, a walking sink of corruption unfit to be called a man."

CHAPTER III

Death Behind Curtains

STUART had never seen such cold fury in human eyes. He stared, speechless, with features that must have reflected a mental perturbation as great as that of the man facing him.

He was in the grip of amazement bordering on terror. But before he fully awoke to the significance of the profound and terrible change in the other's attitude there occurred an incident which filled him with such overwhelming horror that his blood congealed.

Behind him the curtains of the alcove which separated the library from the spacious drawing room beyond were agitated as though by a faint breeze. Then from out the trembling arras there protruded a thin human arm. Unbelievably emaciated, and saffron in hue, it wavered backward and forward before the curtains. Long fingers, tapering and slime-

encrusted, curved about an object more shocking and hideous than the dead face of the artist, Craugh, or the picture which had rested beside his revoltingly mutilated body.

The object was wet and gleaming. The size of a closed human fist. As the fingers tightened about it, it spewed its liquid substance like a pressed orange. Blood dripped from the gory relic to the polished hardwood floor before the arras, formed into a little pool which widened into a miniature lake with little estuaries of scarlet.

Stuart cried out, and started toward the moving curtains. A ghastly premonition tensed his body, sheathed his limbs in ice. But though he moved in a horrorstruck daze his agitation carried him swiftly across the floor.

"Stop, you mad fool!" shouted Bailey. "Do you want to die horribly, like Craugh?"

Stuart didn't stop. He reached the curtains and tore them furiously apart. The hand had vanished, but as the curtains divided something black and wavering hovered for an instant beyond the trembling drapes. It retreated so rapidly that Stuart caught only a shuddering glimpse of it as it faded into the shadows at the far end of the dimly illumined drawing room.

Stuart experienced a sudden, violent reaction then. His flesh broke out in sweat. Nausea clawed at the pit of his stomach. He stood clutching one of the drapes, swaying groggily. As he stood there in sick terror Bailey drew close to him, laid his hand firmly on his shoulder.

"It would have torn you as it tore Craugh," he said. "You were fortunate, my young friend."

The young artist felt something jab into his shoulder. With a startled cry, he swung about. Bailey was smiling coldly and inscrutably. He removed his hand from the back of Stuart's coat, and held it up so that the latter could see the long, thin needle which gleamed between his fingers.

"That hurt you," he said. "Sorry."

Stuart's face went corpse-white, "You devil!" he exclaimed. "If that needle is poisoned—"

Bailey shook his head. "Do not be alarmed. It will merely put you to sleep."

Still smiling, he turned and walked slowly back into the library, taking up his former position before the fireplace.

"Sit down," he said. "I want to talk to you before you get chummy with Morpheus. . . ."

Stuart discovered that his will-power was in abeyance. Awoke to the realization with horror. Either the soporific was swift acting, or Bailey's voice had an hypnotic quality which lulled him into obedience. With wavering gait he crossed to the chair he had occupied, sank down in helpless despair.

Bailey nodded. "You were wise to obey," he said. "Now listen carefully. You will only have a few moments to listen."

BAILEY'S bearded face was twisted into a leering mask, capricious and frightful. Madness looked out of his pale eyes, and the mouth at the apex of his coppery beard twitched spasmodically before words poured forth in a voluble stream.

"Craugh was vicious and perverse beyond all conceiving," he breathed. "You are young, and have probably never contended with the primal beastliness that is man's primitive heritage. There was something in Craugh very ancient and very horrible, instincts that most modern men have outgrown."

"A morbid psychologist could perhaps look with detached tolerance upon the vagaries of such a man as Craugh. Because hundreds of thousands of years ago, when man was red in tooth and claw, nature set a premium on cruelty. Only the more ruthless and energetic human animals survived; the rest perished. But with the rise of civilizations the old instincts atrophied in most men. Here and there, of course, monsters, freaks survived. It is unscientific to

call such men degenerates. They are simply primitives born into a civilized milieu, men still swayed by strong instinctive desires. But it is equally unscientific to show mercy to such primitives. They should be swiftly and painlessly exterminated, just as one would exterminate a poisonous snake or a man-killing tiger."

Bailey sighed, wet his lip with the tip of a red tongue. There was something gloatingly evil and inhuman about his expression as he resumed:

"Unfortunately I am not very scientific. And the primitive instincts are latent in all of us. Once I was a humane man. I am so no longer. You see, Craugh, in order to satisfy his devilish curiosity, inflicted horrible torments on someone very dear to me."

Stuart's limbs were turning cold. Bailey's voice seemed to come from an immeasurable distance.

"He tortured my sister, who trusted and loved him. Watched her slow, lingering agonies, embodied his observations in hellish paintings. I could not kill him mercifully. I let Dagathon kill him. Dagathon, the most terrible of all primitives, the mindless one, who is as swift as that death which came to the Egyptians on swift wings."

His glance rested on Stuart's drowsy face with a gloating, inhuman joy.

"Dagathon is my servant," he said. "I called him out of the void, from beyond the stars, the cold night of space. Thousands of years ago, before even Memnon and Osiris reigned supreme in the Memphian night, Dagathon walked amidst the dead, feasting on the slain, tearing the throats and breasts of his victims. Dagathon, who feasts on fresh blood."

STUART saw Bailey's leering face through a thick veil of greyness. He heard his voice faintly, so faintly that accents blurred and mingled with a swelling crescendo of pain and confusion within his skull. His limbs would not respond to his efforts to move them. For a moment he strug-

gled with his whole being against the maddening spell. Then he went limp. His head fell forward with a jerk and darkness came rushing in upon him.

When he opened his eyes again he was conscious of dim lights and a cold that froze his vitals. He stared at vague forms and appalling shadows, blinking his eyes in dazed incomprehension.

He was trussed up against a cold wall. His hands and legs were securely bound with heavy cord. A leather strip crossed his waist and entered heavy staples set in the wall a few inches from both sides of his body. He was trussed up so securely that he could not move any portion of his body.

As his faculties slowly cleared, he could distinguish objects and shapes. He was in a large room destitute of furniture. The floor beneath was of a greyish stone, mottled and discolored by great, circular stains with uneven edges. The walls were also of stone, of a uniform grey except where cobwebs hung in festooned masses from the slightly uneven blocks of massive granite which towered from the floor to the ceiling. The room seemed to have no door. Judging from the dampness and fetid odor the place was a cellar.

But dismal, cold and depressing as the chamber was, one of the occupants of that underground prison was far more provocative of terror, revulsion and sick fear. Directly opposite Stuart, in the center of the festooned wall with his feet barely touching the stone floor, a man was hanging. He was nude to the waist. His arms hung limply at his sides and his head rested on his bosom. His firmly muscled torso and chest were things of horror.

Bright blood drenched him.

Sweat streamed over Stuart's face. He choked, sank his teeth into his underlip. A red cavern yawned in the hanging man's body, which had been laid open hideously. Beneath the dangling feet on the stained stone floor a pool of blood glistened brightly.

CHAPTER IV

The Room of Torture

STUART tore his gaze from the hanging man to the girl who was pinioned in a far corner of the chamber. Her nearly nude body was limp with terror and exhaustion. Her long, rust-colored hair descended in double plaits to her bare knees, which were flecked with little blobs of blood. Unlike the hanging man, her body bore no single gory disfigurement. The flesh of her arms, thighs and legs had been torn slightly as though by teeth, but none of the wounds were serious.

As Stuart stared at her in infinite pity, she raised her head and looked at him. He had never believed any woman could be so lovely. Her eyes were dark, wide and radiant with pain and torment. But despite the unearthly pallor of her skin, her haunted eyes, and the moisture which glistened on cheek and brow, supernatural loveliness was in that room.

"Who are you?" she asked. Her voice was vibrant with wonder. "Why did Bailey bring you here?"

Stuart tried to speak, failed. He wet his dry lips, closed his eyes in silent torment. When he opened them she was still gazing at him, with the same look of tortured wonder and disbelief.

"I—was drugged," he said at last. "Bailey drugged me. He must have carried me here while I was unconscious."

"But why? He has nothing against you," she murmured. "You are not a Craugh."

"A Craugh!" exclaimed Stuart. "What do you mean?"

The girl was bound as securely as the young artist, but despite the tightness of her fastenings her young body straightened a little and her head went back.

"I am a Craugh," she said. "I am Robert Craugh's cousin. Robert Craugh was one of the kindest, most gentle men who ever brought beauty into an ugly world. Beauty and ter-

ror. They are akin, you know. Craugh was not an artist of sweetness and light. He plumbed the depths. He was a great genius, misunderstood.

"Only the great and good can depict evil vividly. Robert Craugh's vision was ruthless and terrible. But only his vision. He was gentle, kind. He married John Bailey's sister. She died of an incurable malady. Craugh adored her, worshipped the ground under her feet."

"But Bailey thinks he tortured her," Stuart exclaimed. "I know. John Bailey is himself diseased. He saw Craugh's pictures, and leapt to unjustified conclusions. He is consumed with a desire for vengeance, implacable and merciless. He told us Robert Craugh is dead—gloated over it."

Her body went limp again. For a moment she had been carried beyond the chamber and its gruesome occupant by the intensity of her emotion. So strong had been her resentment at the injustice meted out to Craugh that she had forgotten the dead and mutilated man whose blood-drenched form dangled amidst shadows a few feet away, forgotten her own awful peril and torment.

"Who is that man?" said Stuart, nodding toward the hanging figure.

"Thomas Craugh, my brother," the girl choked. "John Bailey invited us here last night. We came, hoping we could distract his mind from thoughts of vengeance toward Robert Craugh. But Bailey is demented; and anyone defending Robert, united to him by bonds of blood, is as guilty as Robert in his sight. He plans to inflict on me all the tortures he believes Robert inflicted on his sister. Thomas has already—"

She choked again. "—already endured unspeakable torments. I am glad, for his sake, that he must endure no more."

"Robert Craugh was found in a doorway in the *Vieux Carré*," said Stuart. "I found him. I am William Stuart, nephew of Police Commissioner Andrew Bayne. I came here to question Bailey."

"Ah," she murmured, "now I understand. You did not know you were dealing with a madman. Bailey will not tolerate any prying into his affairs. He thinks himself a god. You are here because you denied his god-head."

"No," said Stuart. "I am here because I saw—"

"What?"

"Dagathon. The thing that killed Craugh. I saw it escaping from the doorway, saw it again in Bailey's library. It was holding something bright and wet, a small oblong mass that looked like a piece of raw liver."

STUART saw the girl's face go ghastly white. She moaned and her eyes widened in hopeless agony.

"Look at my brother," she sobbed. "*Dagathon tore his heart out.*"

Stuart felt his scalp prickle. He turned his gaze toward the encrimsoned figure that dangled against the opposite wall and perceived with sickening horror that it had been ravaged by knife and teeth. It was a bright and gory chasm of outraged flesh between encrimsoned ribs.

Cold sweat drenched his body. Then he tore his gaze away, and looked at the girl again. Her head had fallen forward upon her chest and when he spoke to her she did not respond. Stuart knew she had fainted.

He strained futilely at his bonds, gazed in appalled desperation about the chamber. Two dim electric light bulbs supplied the only illumination. With faculties heightened by horror Stuart noticed certain grim and macabre trivialities, the fact that the rope which sustained the dead man dangled from an immense hook which cast a shadow vaguely like a skull. He noticed a huge spider amidst fleecy masses of web in the corner where the girl sagged, and the unevenness of the stone slabs in the wall.

Something about the irregularity of the wall's masonry drew and held his attention. He was staring at the out-jutting blocks when he saw them move.

The largest block directly across

from him withdrew slightly into the wall. Then the smaller blocks above and beneath it moved outward slowly, jerkily, an inch or two at a time. He heard a faint scrapping sound, and the wall seemed to fall away, revealing a six foot aperture rimmed with a faint, bluish phosphorescence.

For a moment the aperture loomed untenanted, a dark oblong of nebulous darkness. In its depths Stuart fancied he could dimly detect blocks of stone set in receding formation. The base of a stairway, perhaps. He tried to pierce the shadows beyond the opening.

Suddenly movements were visible within the oblong of light-rimmed darkness. Something white that fluttered filled the space between the slabs and flowed into the chamber.

And out from the wall stepped John Bailey attired in the habiliments of some mysterious and secret cult. From his shoulders to his sandaled feet flowed a white robe which billowed as he advanced. Upon his head he wore a red skullcap surmounted by a silver half-moon which shone with a phosphorescent radiance. His sandals were blood-red, and the slim leather girdle which loosely encircled his long robe glittered with rubies and garnets. In his hand he carried a triple-thonged scourge.

In silence he advanced to the center of the chamber, stood facing the aperture. He did not glance at Stuart. His eyes were deep-sunken, withdrawn. He stood utterly impassive, like a man in the grip of some overwhelming mystical emotion.

For a moment he remained impassively immobile, head slightly upraised, eyes fastened on the aperture. Then he called:

"Dagathon, Dagathon, come to me. We will complete the sacrifice. Come to me, little-headed Dagathon, as you came long ago out of the black night."

STUART felt a cold chill encompass his heart. Beyond the aperture he could discern movements again, but this time the billowing was of ebon hue. Nearer to the dark portal of stone the wavering shape came,

with a faint rustling like a bat in flight.

Bailey's voice was cold, impersonal. "Come to me, Dagathon. Feaster in darkness, I will place upon her flesh the marks of Min's thorn and the deep red weals of the moon-god Ioh, god-head of the Theban triad."

The dark shape filled the aperture now, but before it emerged into the chamber its shadow leapt about the damp stone walls, soared and swooped in the dim light above the head of the unconscious girl, cut across the body of the hanging man. Sable shadows that danced and wavered, like the wings of some enormous bat.

Stuart squirmed as the thing leapt clearly into view, and floundered across the floor toward the white-robed figure whose will it obeyed. It was a shape demoniac and ghastly. Four feet in height, with a little bobbing head and bared yellow teeth, it stood slowly swaying by Bailey's side. It was cowed and caped like some medieval monk, but the little tapering head would not stay in the doll's cowl of black satin which hellish whimsy had provided for it. It bobbed in and out and malignantly forward on a scrawny neck. When the head emerged the little cowl was immersed in a billowy summit of a black cloak, thus giving the sinister dwarfed figure an appearance of headlessness.

"Together," Bailey intoned, "we will bruise her flesh with Min's thorns and you will tear her heart in honor of Huitzilopochtli."

Horror flooded Stuart, tensing his muscles. Frantically he strained at his bonds, twisting and turning in the dimly illumed crypt.

Bailey seemed oblivious to the young man's presence. With slow steps he advanced toward the pinioned girl and his hand, holding the lash, went back. The cruel thongs swept downward with a sickening swish, and a red trickling stream sprang into sight on one of the girl's white limbs.

The little nameless shape quivered like a lynx about to spring. A trace of foam appeared on the lips that

worked epileptically beneath the eager, bulging eyes.

Stuart could stand no more. With a febrile frenzy transcending all normal strength he lunged blindly forward from his fastenings, carrying belt and wall staples with him, hurtling through the air like a living projectile. Then he was on the little frothing horror, toppling it over as he struck. The two rolled and writhed on the floor. Bailey stood paralyzed, lash in hand. Then the tiny demoniac head of the nameless thing darted forward and the yellow, froth-flecked fangs sought Stuart's throat. Once, twice, the little head struck, like a rattlesnake's. One more time and the bound man's jugular would have yielded, but that time never came. There was a step on the stairs beyond the aperture, but they had not heard it. Then came two sounds they did hear. The mad priest tottered and fell. The little monstrosity collapsed and lay twitching on the floor. Felled by shots from Detective-Lieutenant Walsh's smoking automatic.

CHAPTER V

The Sur-Realist

STUART enjoyed explaining to his uncle the angle that puzzled the newspapers. He sat in Commissioner Bayne's library, sipping a Montreal cocktail, feeling very warm and comfortable.

"Never let anything that an artist does surprise you, Uncle," he said. "Bailey, although he never painted a picture, was artistic to his fingertips. He didn't put on his sur-realist exhibitions for sensational reasons at all. Maybe the press and the purity leagues thought so, but if he wasn't sincere I'm a married man with fifteen kids.

"Bailey knew half the sur-realists in America and Europe, was familiar with all their works. He was a connoisseur, a collector on a vast scale. He had more money than he knew what to do with, two or three million berries.

"Money, and too much imagination, plus an artistic temperament, and an encyclopaedic knowledge of morbid and decadent art. That's a neat little double equation that always adds up to something interesting. In Bailey's case it added up to something frightful.

"The sur-realists are exotic, mystical, eclectic, and as morbid as a Russian novel. The best sur-realist paintings as a rule totter on the brink of insanity. Mystical and ferocious divinities from all the religions of the past, Babylonian, Egyptian, Aztec, figure prominently on their canvases. Also incredible cubes and spirals, mathematical insanities, modern scientific concepts, objects from medieval myth and fable, hydra-headed gods, griffins, cowed monks. And scenes of brutal violence, sadism and cruelty.

"Bailey was approaching the dangerous years of late middle age. He simply cracked up. But being John Bailey and not just some ordinary goof, he cracked up *sur-realistically*.

"Went mad in complex and terrible fashion. He suspected all of his friends of harboring malicious designs against him, thought them sorcerers and fiends, or psychopathic degenerates.

"We know now that he tortured and killed eight men and three women in his underground room before that microcephalic idiot stabbed Robert Craugh."

The commissioner cut in crisply. "Cut the cataloguing, Willie. It's too gruesome. What I can't understand is this. A microcephalic idiot is supposed to have virtually no brains at all, and yet—"

Stuart nodded. "But you can condition animals to perform remarkable feats when certain instinctive stimuli are withheld. Bailey conditioned that idiot so that he became a cannibal. Blood excited, maddened him. He could follow simple instructions, and was infinitely more competent in action than a trained dog or monkey."

The commissioner shuddered. "And of course Bailey imagined the terrible tortures he said Craugh inflicted

on his sister. You're sure of that?"

"Of course," said Stuart. "The girl died of cancer a few months ago. Bailey in his madness saw the face of his sister in all of Craugh's pictures. Craugh's pictures were pretty horrible, but would you call Shakespeare a sadist because he wrote Titus Andronicus and Macbeth? Don't be a philistine, Uncle."

The commissioner sighed. "I can't get the picture out of my mind," he said. "Bailey inviting that boy and girl to dinner, regaling them with wine and music, then—torturing and terrorizing them in the black night. Horrible!"

"YES," said Stuart. "Strange and horrible, like a sur-realist painting. And don't get the idea that it wasn't planned painstakingly, that Bailey neglected any of the trimmings. He could have tortured and killed Robert in the underground room along with his cousin, but that arrangement would have lacked finesse. Bailey wanted Craugh to be found in a sordid doorway in the *Vieux Carré*, with his painting beside him. There was no rational reason for that, but Bailey wasn't rational. He was sur-realistically mad and devilishly artistic. Nothing but a crime that would be blazoned in headlines could satisfy his mad thirst for vengeance. Beyond doubt my arrival at Bailey's home interrupted his gruesome 'sacrifice.' He probably instructed the idiot to remain in the cellar when he ascended to the living room to admit me, but for once the creature disobeyed. Apparently the little abnormality took a grim and terrible pride in his handiwork. Lurking furtively behind the curtains like some coy maiden or bashful school-boy he displayed the gory relic he had torn from Thomas Craugh's breast, thrust it through the curtains so that Bailey could see it." Stuart smiled wryly. "I'm plenty glad you had Walsh trail me. Walsh is a human ferret. When no one answered the door, he did some breaking and entering, and eventually found that underground chamber."

Stuart's face set in grim lines. "Diabolical cleverness and great wealth endowed Bailey with a sort of hellish omnipotence, Uncle. It's amazing what he achieved without anyone suspecting he was insane. He even persuaded the directors of the Casa Calvo home for the feeble-minded to allow him to adopt that idiot, built the stone chamber beneath his mansion at enormous cost, and arranged weird lighting effects, phosphorescent displays, etc., as a background for that damnably hideous masquerade.

He combined all the hellish and incongruous rituals of a dozen dead religions in his sadistic orgies, including the heart-sacrifice of the awful Aztec war-god, Huitzilopochtli. He

imagined himself, I have learned, to be a reincarnation of two Egyptian divinities, Chons, who wears a skull-cap surmounted by a half-moon, and Min, who carries a many-thonged scourge. And he rigged the idiot up as a kind of gargoyle figure from medieval myth."

The commissioner nodded. "I understand, my boy. To outward appearances he probably seemed perfectly sane. Only a portion of his mentality was warped. Amazing how deceptive appearances can be. You look perfectly sane too. But you and I know that you're so completely nuts about red hair and blue eyes that you are going to wear heavy chains for the rest of your natural life. If you're sane, son, I'm a gigolo."

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A GOOD GUIDE



TO GOOD WHISKEY

The Evidence Seemed Plain: Dr. Robine's Experiments
Had Wrought a Horrible Change, Transforming
Men Into Prehistoric Monsters!



The apelike man sent Ned crashing back against the wall

Beasts That Once Were Men

By EDMOND HAMILTON

Author of "Murder at Weed Key," "The Accursed Galaxy," etc.

"**W**HO is this?" cried Ned Felton into the telephone. "I want to know who's speaking!"

In reply there came again over the wire the voice that had chilled his

blood when he first answered the call. A thick, hoarse, brutish voice that was almost a howl! It was uttering mumbling sounds that became a barking chattering when it tried to speak faster.

It was, for all the world, as though some animal was trying to talk over the telephone. Ned Felton listened with nerves prickling strangely to that incoherent, beastlike voice.

Then he began to recognize the words it was speaking. He could barely identify them as words.

"Felton!" It was his name that unholy, animal-like voice was mumbling. "This is Francis Lester—"

"Francis Lester?" cried Ned into the instrument. "My God, man, what's happened to you? What's wrong with your voice?"

"I'm changed—changed!" croaked the voice. "Gone back to the beast! And going farther back each hour!" Then the brutish voice mumbled hoarsely, "Take care of Ruth and say good-by for me. I'm going to end this horror before I go back farther."

"Francis!" yelled Ned Felton frantically into the telephone. "For God's sake don't do anything rash! Wait until your sister and I can get to you and—"

He heard the click of the receiver placed at the other end of the wire.

Ned hung up frozenly and stood paralyzed for the moment. Every nerve in his body was still vibrating with eldritch horror from the shock of hearing that awful, beastlike voice in which Francis Lester had spoken to him.

FRANCIS, the brother of the girl he loved! And something had happened to him, something terrible, unearthly. Something that had changed his voice into that animal-like mumble and that had made him determine to kill himself.

Ned Felton broke out of his paralysis and sprang to the door of his apartment. He had to tell Ruth—at once. If Francis had not yet committed suicide they might have time to save him, but they would have to hurry. Felton's strong, tanned young face and grey eyes were strained with the urgency of it as he hastened down to the street.

It was two miles from his apartment to the big house where Ruth Lester lived with her aunt. The early

evening theater traffic was cluttering the city's streets, but Ned drove his roadster through it with utter disregard of risk, and in a few minutes was stopping in front of the sedate suburban mansion.

When he ran up onto the porch of Ruth's house he found her just coming to the door, stopping in surprise as she saw him.

Ruth Lester was almost childlike in her smallness of figure; it was no child's form, but the sweet curves of ripening womanhood that her straight white silk sport suit outlined.

Her soft, oval little face, beneath her smoothly brushed black hair was astonished. Her serious, dark eyes were a little worried as she met him.

"Why, Ned, you're hours early tonight! What brought you so soon?"

Felton clutched her arm. "Ruth, where's your brother? Is he still at that scientist's house back in the hills?"

Ruth Lester nodded, staring surprisedly up at him. "Yes, he is—Francis has been out there working with Doctor Robine for most of the last few months. I've not seen him for three weeks."

Ned pulled her abruptly toward the door. "We've got to go out there, Ruth, at once. Something's happened."

Her face went white. "To Francis? Ned, what is it?"

"I don't know yet—I only know that something is terribly wrong," he told her tautly.

Pale with alarm, Ruth Lester hurried with him out to the roadster. In a few minutes he was driving at high speed through the quiet suburb, heading toward the country of wild, wooded hills that lay south of the city.

As he drove, Ned told the girl rapidly of the weird telephone call from her brother. Her hand went to her soft throat in fear as she heard.

"What could have changed his voice like that?" Ned Felton asked. "And what did he mean by the things he mumbled? 'Gone back to the beast!' What has Francis been doing out at this place anyway?"

Ruth said, "He's been working with Doctor Robine on some scientific experiments. Francis specialized in biology at the university, you know, and he met the doctor soon after graduating. He told me that Doctor Robine was one of the most brilliant biologists alive.

"Several months ago Francis said that Doctor Robine had started an experiment which would change the whole world if it succeeded. He said that he was going to finance the doctor and was going to help him and his assistant, a scientist named Mattison, work out the experiment."

"What was the nature of the experiment?" Ned asked her sharply.

Ruth's clear brow wrinkled troubledly. "I don't remember much of what Francis told me about it—I know so little about science. It's a big thing, for he's spent most of his inheritance financing it.

"Oh, yes, I do remember now!" she exclaimed. "It was something about atavism, whatever that is. A means of producing artificial atavism, Francis said, was part of it."

"Atavism?"

AS Ned Felton repeated the word, he felt a chill as though an alien wind of horror from the unknown was blowing on him.

Ruth looked at him anxiously in the hooded glow of the dashlight.

"What does it mean, Ned?"

He kept his voice steady as he answered: "It means a reversal of the course of evolution, a return to the low, brutish forms out of which life developed in past ages. If Doctor Robine has really found a way to produce artificial atavism in living things that means that he can turn back the clock of evolution at will. That he can change human beings back into the animalistic forms out of which the human race evolved!"

Ruth Lester's dark eyes were wide, her little hand grasping his sleeve tightly as she said, in a horror-laden whisper, "Ned, you told me that Francis' voice sounded like that of an animal, that he said something about going back to the beast—"

"No!" exclaimed Felton loudly. "A thing like that isn't possible. Don't imagine it for a moment, Ruth."

But the crawling horror at his spine persisted as he drove tensely onward.

They had long before this left the last fringes of the city and had, for the last half hour, been driving deeper into the thickly wooded, sparsely inhabited hills.

The black outlines of the low hills humped against the brooding, clouded night sky. Only at rare intervals did they pass a lighted house. Their headlights showed hardly more than a patch of the white gravel road ahead of them.

They came to a narrow dirt road branching from the gravel highway, and Ruth motioned him to turn.

"Doctor Robine's place is about four miles down this dirt road," she said. "I was out here once, weeks ago, with Francis."

The road paralleled the course of a small stream that ran down a valley between the dark, long hills. They passed one farm-house soon after leaving the highway, and after that there were no more houses—nothing but black, silent woods.

Gaunt elms leaned down with drooping branches and clawed the top of the roadster as it lurched past. The glowing eyes of small wild creatures watched them from the dark forest. It began to rain, a soft drizzle falling from the brooding sky and pattering on the canvas top over them.

Despite the windshield cleaner, Ned Felton had a hard time seeing through the misted glass. As the car rocked around the narrow turns, that crawling dread persisted in his mind. Over and over in his brain hammered those mumbled words: "Gone back to the beast! Gone back . . ."

Ruth was suddenly pointing ahead. They had rattled over a shaky wooden bridge and rounded a square turn. A hundred yards from them glowed the yellow-lighted windows of the house.

It was a neat, modern bungalow, built a little up the steep slope of the valley wall. There were behind it some smaller buildings and wire-fenced yards, apparently designed

for the keeping of animals. A short lane led up from the dirt road to the bungalow.

NED stopped his car outside the house and leaped out. As Ruth started to follow, he held her back, his hands on her shoulders.

"Better wait here, Ruth," he said urgently. "Until I can look around."

Her face was very white, but her dark eyes were steady as she shook her head.

"I'm going with you, Ned. I—I can't stand it, whatever has happened."

They climbed onto the porch of the bungalow. The front door was wide open, but there was no sound from inside.

Ned stepped ahead of the girl, into the lighted living room. Then he stopped, uttering a choked exclamation.

Upon the floor of the living room, in the corner by the telephone desk, lay an incredible thing.

It was an ape, the size of a man, and *it was dressed in a man's clothes*. The hairy body wore a grey jacket and trousers, shirt and necktie—socks and shoes upon its prehensile feet. All of the garments seemed too small for the creature.

Its round, hairy head projected from the shirt collar, looking weirdly horrible. Its eyes were open, staring blankly, and its big white fangs half showed between parted lips. There was a bullet hole in its temple, and its black, long ape-fingers clutched a revolver.

Ned Felton had instinctively clasped Ruth close to him and could feel her small, soft body shuddering violently against him.

He managed to speak. "It's—it's probably just some ape which Doctor Robine had here for experimental purposes, and which has killed itself playing with that revolver."

"Ned, those are Francis' clothes!" cried the quivering girl. "That creature must be—"

Felton fought against the black horror that was surging higher in his mind each moment.

He muttered, "That thing can't be Francis—it can't! Nothing on earth could turn back the course of evolution like that, change a man back into an ape."

An idea flashed across his brain. "I'll prove to you it isn't Francis!" he exclaimed. "Francis had his left little finger taken off by that college laboratory accident, didn't he? Well, then!"

She stooped quickly over the weird, hairy body of the dead ape and lifted its left arm.

He and Ruth stared at the hand. The fifth finger of that hand was missing.

"It *is* Francis!" cried Ruth in blind, mind-shattering horror. "He killed himself because he'd changed into—this!"

"Atavism—a return to the beast," whispered Felton hoarsely. "Good God, how *could* it have been done? How could it happen that it was done to Francis? And where's Doctor Robine and his helper, Mattison? They're concerned in this unholy business!"

He held Ruth's sobbing, horror-shaken little body close to him, his hand smoothing her dark hair numbly as he looked down at the horrible travesty of mankind that lay dead on the floor.

Ned's gaze fell upon an object in another corner of the room, a big metal boxlike thing with quartz lens in its face, connected by wiring to batteries and transformers. Beyond this weird mechanism was a door in the wall which hung on shattered hinges.

He ran to this door. A strong oak bar had secured it at one time on the outside, but it had been burst open from within.

"Ruth, someone or something's been confined in this room!" he exclaimed. "And whatever was in here has escaped."

"Ned!"

She was staring in horror at the open door that led out onto the porch.

A MAN stood crouched in the door opening. But Ned Felton's brain sensed something queer about him.

The face of the creature, snarling a little at him, was a brutish countenance bristling with short hair, its jaw a jutting, prognathous one, its thick lips baring sharp teeth and its eyes blazing greenly in animal ferocity.

The creature's long, simian arms dangled at its sides. Dressed in its ill-fitting man's clothing, it looked like a semi-human, semi-ape thing of humanity's dawn, come from out of long dead ages.

Ruth Lester, paralyzed by the creature's appearance, whispered, "It looks like—like Mattison. But he's changed—"

The blazing animal eyes swept toward the girl, and a screech of inhuman laughter came from the loathsome thing.

"Yes, I've changed! Changed!" The thing spoke with difficulty in a thickened, heavy voice, slowly as though its brain found difficulty in forming the words. "I was Mattison—I remember—"

Abruptly it stopped. There was a new light in the feral eyes as they fastened on the shrinking form of the terrified girl, taking in the soft curves of her body which the white silk suit revealed.

"A woman!" muttered the thing that had been Mattison. "Long time—since a woman was here—"

The creature moved forward toward the girl, its bristly face twitching with sudden passion, apelike hands reaching.

Ned Felton sprang forward between the two, raising his fist to strike.

With one sweep of its simian arm the apelike man sent Ned crashing back against the wall! He bent over the girl.

Felton heard Ruth scream. He was on his feet and leaped wildly upon the creature, tearing the hairy form away from his sweetheart and raining blows upon its misshapen head.

Howling in bestial rage, the thing that had once been Mattison gripped Felton's throat with its long, apelike fingers. The fingers tightened like steel bands in a choking grip. The creature was talking as it throttled

Felton, mouthing thick, incoherent words.

The world began to go black for Ned. He tore vainly at the strangling hands. He heard Ruth Lester scream again and then the roaring in his ears became deafening, drowning all else as consciousness left him.

WHEN Ned came back to awareness of his surroundings his head was aching violently and his throat was a burning soreness. Someone was helping him to sit up, working to revive him.

It was a man of fifty with iron-grey hair and a strong, scholarly face. His features were horrified.

"I'm Doctor Robine," he told Ned. "Who are you, and what in God's name has been happening here?"

Ned struggled up, and cast a frenzied glance around the room. Both his attacker and his sweetheart were gone. He clutched the scientist's arm wildly.

"Ruth!" he cried. "That creature has taken her—that half-ape that was Mattison!"

"Mattison?" cried Dr. Robine, paling. "My God, has he been here? I've been hunting him for hours," the scientist continued. "Early this evening he broke out of his room and I've been searching the woods for him. He must have doubled back to the house.

"But Francis!" Dr. Robine exclaimed. "Where is he—" The scientist's eyes, roving around the room, fell upon the dead ape in human clothing. He stiffened. Then he walked over to the hairy body and stooped over it. Tears glistened in his eyes.

"Francis killed himself," he said. "I never thought of that when I left him alone here tonight—yet he's been threatening to do it for the last few days. Maybe it's better so."

"Then that—that ape is Francis Lester?" cried Ned Felton. "You changed him into that, as you changed Mattison?"

ROBINE shook his head. "It was not I who changed Francis—he did that to himself. But, God forgive

me, the guilt for it all is on my head."

He pointed unsteadily to the weird, boxlike apparatus with the quartz lens.

"That apparatus did it—a projector that generates a ray which induces atavistic change in any living thing it is turned upon. Turns back the course of evolution, throws back into the past forms of the race any human who submits to it. I've spent months perfecting that projector, with the help of Mattison and Francis. I finished the thing a few weeks ago and we turned it first upon Mattison, with his consent, for a trial. We thought it would have only a slight effect upon him.

"But a brief hour's exposure to the ray took Mattison back ten thousand years in evolutionary development! He became a creature such as all men were ages ago, his body changing into a distorted, heavy primitive one, his mind warped and retaining only fragments of his former knowledge. We had to lock him up for safety's sake."

Dr. Robine's hands were shaking violently with the awful memory.

"I was horrified, wanted to smash the apparatus at once! But Francis wouldn't hear of it—he said he wanted to make some more experiments with it. He was afire to learn all that it would do. One day, when I was away, he turned the ray for two or three hours upon himself. When I returned I found Francis—an ape! Just as you see him there now! He had been flung millions of years back to the apehood that preceded humanity.

"He still had enough mind left to realize the horror of his condition. He wanted to kill himself, but I tried to talk him out of it, telling him I would surely be able to find some way of bringing him and Mattison back to manhood. But I worked in the last weeks, unable to find such a way. Tonight when Mattison escaped and I went searching for him, Francis must have seized the opportunity to end it all."

Robine pointed tremblingly to the hairy form in man's clothes.

"That was Francis Lester. That is what my accursed meddlings with the secrets of nature made of him."

"But Ruth!" cried Ned agonizedly. "That creature Mattison must have dragged her out somewhere into the forest!"

"God help her!" breathed the scientist. "Mattison's mind has become half-ape, along with his body. We must find them—quickly!"

He took a flashlight from a table drawer and thrust it toward Ned Felton.

"Here's a flashlight—I've only one pistol," he said.

They stumbled out into the darkness, where the fine rain still was falling. The dark woods around the bungalow was wrapped in mournful silence.

"You search north of the house and I'll look through the south woods!" cried Ned. "If you see anything of them, fire your pistol!"

FELTON plunged into the thickets, flashing his light ahead. He crashed through underbrush, blundered around fallen logs and the big trunks of great oaks, seeking desperately for some trace of the two.

His brain was wild at the thought of Ruth, the little smiling girl he loved, out somewhere in these black forests in the hands of the apelike thing that had been Mattison. A creature lower than man, a hairy thing like a visitant out of humanity's dead past.

He shouted at intervals, his voice high and raw with the agony of his emotion. There was no answer but the gentle patter of the rain on the canopy of leaves overhead.

Felton suddenly stumbled on a half-invisible trail through the underbrush. It looked to his desperate eyes as though something or someone had been dragged along that way, crushing down small weeds and briars.

His heart cold with terror, he rapidly followed the dim trail through the forest. It seemed leading toward the steep hillside at the west edge of the valley. In a few minutes it brought him to the rocky, vertical face of the hill.

He flashed his light over the rock wall. A black opening yawned at its bottom, a cave in the rock eroded by

a tiny trickle of water that ran out of it.

Ned Felton rushed into the mouth of the cave, flashing his beam ahead. It was terribly still inside, and every muscle of his body was ready for the leaping onslaught of a snarling body from the dark.

"Ruth!" he cried, and the echoes came back to him loudly from the farther reaches of the cave. "Ruth!"

Two minutes later Ned came bounding out of the cave, his face white.

He had not found Mattison or the girl inside, but he had just heard the unmistakable crack of a pistol shot from the north!

"Robine, I'm coming!" he yelled, and broke into a crashing run through the woods.

He hurled himself northward, regardless of the cruelly raking briars that tore at his clothing and the branches that whipped and stung his face. There were no more shots.

But in a few minutes Ned saw the gleam of a light through the trees. He crashed in that direction, and reached in a few moments the edge of a large clearing amid the dark trees.

He stopped, paralyzed momentarily by what he saw. Dr. Robine lay against the base of a tree, moving feebly and groaning, as though he had been flung there by irresistible force. His pistol and flashlight had dropped to the ground, the latter's beam lighting up all.

Near the center of the clearing the hairy, simian creature that had been Mattison had turned from the scientist and was stooping over a limp, motionless, white form on the ground.

It was Ruth Lester, senseless from horror. Her soft face was white and still, and her silk suit had been ripped to rags by the briars through which she had been dragged. Her sheer silk stockings were torn to tatters, and her white knees and thighs showed through them, scored by long red scratches from the brambles.

Her monstrous abductor was picking her up, tearing angrily at her tattered suit. It was suddenly ripped off her. Ruth's small, soft-limbed body, bare except for two wispy silk gar-

ments, drooped supinely in the simian creature's arms.

THE creature's blazing eyes gloated upon her creamy limbs, one apelike hand clutching her. Then abruptly the monster spun around. Ned Felton, his face set, was running across the clearing toward the pistol which lay on the ground!

With incredible rapidity, the creature dropped the half-nude girl and bounded toward Felton.

Ned, his fingers already touching the pistol butt, was knocked back through the air by the rush of the charging brute.

Again the feral eyes blazed into his and the steely fingers encircled his throat. But this time, with an access of desperate strength, he raised his knee and drove it into the chest of the creature as it bore him backward.

With a hoarse, animal grunt, the monster was jolted back out of breath. Ned scrambled up and smashed at the hairy, prognathous face, putting everything he had into the bone-crunching blows.

The creature's blazing eyes blinked, but it did not fall. Its semi-human face now bloodied and bruised and even more horrible, it reached out again for Ned with an animal roar.

Felton eluded the clutch of the simian arms, and smashed in three more blows on the creature's chin. Still it charged after him and he knew, with a sick feeling akin to terror, that its semi-human body was not to be downed by any blow of his.

He cast a swift glance behind him, smashed swiftly again at the bloody mass of the monster's face, and then whirled and dived toward the pistol.

Before ever he reached it the creature was on him, flattening him face-down to the ground. An arm encircled Ned's neck, and he felt teeth bury themselves in the back of his neck.

His outflung hand was touching something cold and hard, and he gripped it more by instinct than by conscious design. It was a stone bigger than his fist.

The feel of it gave him impetus for

a last desperate effort. He squirmed wildly around in the thing's grip, and then batted the stone crazily upward at the creature's head.

The rock rang loudly off the skull of the monstrous Mattison. His grip around Ned's neck suddenly relaxed.

Felton managed to crawl out from under its senseless weight and stagger to his feet. He got the pistol, but saw that it was not now needed—the beast that had once been Mattison was cleanly knocked out.

Dr. Robine was staggering to his feet as Ned bent wildly over Ruth Lester.

"She's not hurt!" cried the scientist. "I found Mattison here with her, but he was too much for me—knocked me down before I could fire more than one wild shot."

"I'll tie him up to make sure he doesn't get away," Ned said. "Then we'll get Ruth to the house."

It took but a few moments to lash the monstrous thing that had once been a man, using its own belt and strips torn from its clothing.

Then, with the shaking scientist following, Ned carried Ruth's unconscious form toward the bungalow.

BY the time they entered the house and laid Ruth upon a couch, she was beginning to revive. Her dark, horror-dazed eyes looked up and then she stretched up quivering arms.

"Ned!"

He held her, comforting her. "It's all right now, Ruth. We've got the thing safely tied."

"But—Francis!" she sobbed.

"Francis is dead, and nothing can bring him back to us now," Felton said soberly.

"If he'd died any way but—but like that," she choked, averting her eyes from the hideous ape form lying dead in the corner, "I'd not have minded so much, but to die an animal—"

"No one will ever know," the pale-faced Robine reassured the girl. "I can sign the death certificate—and we can bury him without letting anyone see his body."

The scientist walked toward the big quartz-lensed projector in the corner.

"And as for this diabolical creation of mine that made Francis an ape and Mattison a half-ape, I'll destroy it here and now, so that such a horror shall never be repeated."

Robine picked up a heavy bar that lay in the corner and raised it to smash the bulky projector.

Ned's voice halted him. "Don't do that!"

Robine turned. His eyes bulged with amazement as he saw that Ned was covering him with the pistol.

"What—what do you mean?" the scientist faltered. "This thing should be smashed before it turns someone else into a beast as it turned Francis."

"Francis was never turned into an ape at all," Ned Felton said, his eyes like grey steel gimlets.

"But there's his body there in the corner! You see it for yourself!" cried Robine.

"No, that's not Francis' body," Felton said. "That, I should say, is the body of an ape whom you kept here for experimental purposes and whom you dressed in Francis' clothes tonight and then shot, putting the gun in its dead hand. You even cut off and fixed up one of the ape's fingers so we'd be convinced that it was Francis' body."

"Francis' body isn't here," continued Ned, "it's out where you left it, in a cave a half mile from here. I found the trail where you dragged it through the woods and I found the body itself inside the cave, shot through the heart. I suppose you meant to get rid of it completely, later, and just hid it there temporarily."

Dr. Robine strove to speak, but his stiff lips uttered no sound. Ruth was looking at Felton with her soul in her eyes.

"Ned, it's true? That that thing in the corner isn't Francis?"

"It's true," Ned told her. "And it's also true that Doctor Robine killed your brother. It's easy enough to see why he did it. Francis had advanced Robine big sums, nearly all his inheritance, to finance his impossible experiments. The experiments were obviously a mere fake devised by

Robine to swindle your brother—nothing under the sun can ever turn the course of evolution backward.

"Francis must have discovered the fake recently and demanded an accounting. You killed him when that happened, to save yourself from prison, didn't you, Robine? You killed him and put the ape in his clothes and called me up in a faked voice, figuring that when Ruth was convinced that her brother had died an ape she'd let you hush the whole thing up and there would never be any investigation. It was part of the fake, too, to change Mattison into the pitiable deformed madman he is, wasn't it?" Felton added. "How did you do that, anyway?"

Dr. Robine's face had become dull, old, grey. Staring down at his hands, twisting a heavy ring on his finger, he answered in a dead voice:

"I gave Mattison stuff in his food for weeks—drugs that affect the glandular secretions of the human body. If you upset the functioning of the thyroid and pituitary glands, a human being changes bodily and

mentally, develops acromegaly, cretinism, hairiness, and many other beast-like characteristics. That's what I did to Mattison, and then told Francis it was the effect of my ray upon him. Francis caught me putting the drugs in Mattison's food and saw all. He threatened to prosecute me—I had to kill him. Let Mattison escape tonight—to give me alibi for being out of the house—"

ROBINE stopped speaking and slipped quietly to the floor, lay still. Felton sprang to him and found a purple stain widening on his hand from a wound beneath the heavy ring he had been twisting.

"A poison ring! Then Robine was afraid at that that he might get caught!" he exclaimed.

He came back to Ruth Lester, wrapped his coat around her and helped her up.

"We're getting out of here, Ruth. The police can come and take charge of Mattison, and I'll come back for Francis' body. He's dead, just as we feared—but he died a man."

Next Month's Headliners:

DEAD HANDS ON THE MOON, by John H. Knox

MINE HOST, THE HANGMAN, by G. T. Fleming-Roberts

THE DEATH KISS, by Arthur J. Burks

BLOOD IN THE HOUSE, by Hugh B. Cave



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FIT GEM AND EVER-READY RAZORS

KURDA'S

CHAPTER I

Dead Woman in the Dark

VAGUE whispers, down the years, had come out of Kurda's Corridor, a deep ravine leading back from the Entiat, west of the Columbia River, into the misty Cascades. Nobody around the Corridor feared it, from the outside. But not one would have entered it for the wealth of a kingdom.

Odd things had happened. Les Casmer, two years before, had followed a wounded bear into the Corridor, and had been heard of no more. Even animals, grazing on the slopes, had wandered into the place and never emerged. No more, of course, for the farmers and orchardists had fenced off the Corridor's entrance. That kept stock animals out, but human beings, especially strangers on the Entiat, still went into the place occasionally, and stayed there.

Residents hated to tell strangers of the whispers, for their livelihood depended largely upon them. But the whispers kept coming, and people who heard them developed faces that didn't smile, and hearts that were hardened.

A Complete Novelette of Weird Thrills

In the Eerie Lair of a Brute, Jimmy Battles

CORRIDOR

By **ARTHUR
J. BURKS**

*Author of "Who Live by the
Sword," "Crimson Blight,"
etc.*



*Jimmy fought
with the big cat*

Evil Forces to Avenge Hideous Death!

James Fram, out of Seattle, had gone into the Entiat because of boyhood memories—which hadn't included the whispers because he had been too little to be told about them—to show an old farm to Hedda Fyfe, the girl he wanted to marry.

The old house had belonged to a man named Cas Logan. He had died, there had been no heirs, and the place could be bought for the back taxes. It was just about as Cas Logan had left it. Jimmy Fram got the keys from the agent in Entiat. He went into the place with Hedda.

"It's lovely, Jimmy!" she exclaimed. "I could move in right now!"

"I'd like to be sure we can make a living on it," he said, grinning. "I'll have a look at the land that must feed us. Turn the house upside down while I'm doing it, if you think it'll be fun."

James Fram had been out for an hour. His tall frame moved majestically through rows of apple trees which needed only care to make them bear gorgeous fruit again. Berry bushes in plenty, on the far side of the orchard. A rambling barn into which he could put horses, his ramshackle but homey car; a cowbarn. It was a place made to order for a honeymoon.

Hedda had felt it at once. Jimmy felt it. He felt like a conqueror as he doffed his hat and ran his fingers through his curly brown hair. He ran back to the house, bolted through the door.

"Hedda!" he shouted, "Hedda!" The echoes ran through the huge two-story house, as though it had suddenly been peopled by a party of joyously riotous shouters. "Hedda! Hedda!"

He expected to see her come dashing down the dark stairs. But she didn't come, and she didn't answer. He went to the outside door, and shouted her name again.

Entiat River was walled on either side by the high shoulders of the Cascades. His shout raced for miles along the valley of the stream. It would have reached her anywhere—that is, anywhere she could have got

to since he had last seen her. Unless she were in somebody's house, nearby. But the shout could have been heard in almost any of them.

And he could have heard her answering shout.

"Funny," he thought.

He ran upstairs, went through all the rooms, opened every closet. Hedda wasn't there. Something akin to terror began to course through him when, continuing to shout, he still could get no answer. Downstairs he spent ten minutes in fruitless search before he decided she definitely was not in the house. It was the queerest thing he had ever experienced.

Maybe she was in the orchard, hunting him. But she'd have heard, and answered. A new fear gripped him. There was an open well in the yard. He went and looked into it, his heart in his mouth. No result. He even went so far as to lower the bucket to the bottom, and feel around underwater with it. He wasn't relieved when he could find nothing. It simply added to his fear.

No telephones in the house, and he didn't know any neighbors anyhow.

He went into the yard again, seeking her footprints. Nobody visited Cas Logan's place, so there wouldn't be many prints. He finally found them, leading up toward the northern slope of the valley. His brow furrowed in puzzlement.

THERE was a road. He'd overtake her faster with the car. He crawled in, jammed his foot on the starter. For the first time since he had owned the car it refused to respond. The battery seemed to be dead. He cranked the car without result. He went over it swiftly. He was an excellent mechanic, but he could find nothing wrong. Yet it wouldn't start.

Terror was mounting. Now and again he paused to shout.

"Hedda! Hedda!"

"In trouble, stranger?" Jimmy Fram whirled, as the unexpected voice sounded in his ear. A tall man, taller than Jimmy himself, with the look of the farm on him, weather

wrinkles in his neck which made Jimmy think of a turkey gobbler, stood beside the car.

"I came here," said Jimmy, trying to control his voice, "with a lady. I left her in the house while I looked the place over. I'm planning to locate here. Used to live here when I was a shaver. I came back to the house, and she's gone. Her footprints lead along that road. I was going to follow her. Strange, though, that she didn't answer me."

"When folks can hear, and don't answer," said the farmer gloomily, "they's usually a reason. I come to see what I could do."

Jimmy noticed that the man carried a well-cared-for Winchester in the crook of his arm. He stared off in the direction Hedda seemed to have gone, and Jimmy watched the changing expression on his face. It became hard, a little white, and the eyes widened as though with a growing terror. Jimmy grabbed him by the arm.

"What the devil is wrong? There's something . . ."

He shook the farmer roughly. The man turned slowly to face him, looking stupid, as though he were being aroused with difficulty from a sound sleep, or from a hypnotic trance.

"Used to live here, you say? Name?"

"James Fram."

"I know, used to be a Fram here, five miles up. My name's Parsons. Look, Bud, I'm not one to go scaring people, but if I was you I'd get along after my girl the fastest way I knew how."

"But why? What's wrong?"

"Nothin', except this: that road leads, if you follow it, to the animal barrier across Kurda's Corridor."

"Kurda's Corridor? Never heard of it."

"Reckon not. You was a kid. Kids are only warned not to go near the place. You wouldn't remember."

Then Parsons told Jimmy something about the whispers. Jimmy heaved a sigh of relief.

"Superstition!" he snorted. "Nothing will happen to her, if that's all."

"Didn't answer, did she? Hadn't

been gone long enough to get too far away to hear, had she?"

It was a wall of truth, against which Jimmy was butting his head.

"If we hurried, we could get to the barrier before dark," said Parsons. "Your car—we could overtake her, mebbe."

"It won't start. There's nothing wrong with it, but it won't start."

Parsons nodded. "You see?" he said. "The Corridor's got her already."

"But what is it?"

"Just a deep valley, almost a coulee, far back. Named by somebody fifty years ago, nobody knows who or why. The whispers began then, I think. Come on."

Parsons walked Jimmy Fram breathless along that steeply slanting road. The footprints led straight ahead, and they were widely spaced, as though Hedda had been running. Hedda, thought Jimmy, couldn't have run so fast, so far. He couldn't have done it himself. Yet there were the prints, unmistakably hers. High heels, such as local women didn't wear.

Near sundown they came to the barrier, a tangle of barbed wire fence. Ahead was the gaping mouth of the Corridor. The footprints led right to it—and went on beyond.

"This is as far as I go," said Parsons quietly.

"But you know the Corridor! I'll pay you well."

"Isn't enough money to get me into the place, nor anybody I love well enough to make me go for nothing. Better take this rifle, though, just in case. It'll be twenty dollars."

"But I'll bring it back to you!"

"You may not come back," was the ominous answer, "and I wouldn't come in hunting it."

JIMMY FRAM, beside himself, paid Parsons for the rifle and a pocketful of cartridges, flopped on his belly and eeled through the wire. He stared at Parsons for a moment, offered to shake hands. But Parsons put his hand behind him.

"Bad luck," he said, "for me!"

Then he turned his back on Jimmy, walked away, broke into a run down the road. Now and again he glanced back as though afraid the mouth of the valley would swallow him, or as though afraid he had covered himself with the wrath of Hell by taking someone into the forbidden Corridor. Cold that was not that of approaching evening descended over Jimmy, like a huge wet cloth suddenly enfolding his body.

These were Hedda's prints. He knew it positively. Again he shouted: "Hedda! Hedda!"

The name fairly screamed along the Corridor, bounced back and forth between the steeply rising walls of black basalt. Fear rode with the scream, and something nameless and dreadful came back with the echoes. Nothing that could be put into words, but a distinct impression, like a composite shout of: "Stay back!"

But Hedda was here somewhere. Jimmy started straight into the Corridor. Night flowed out of it, into his face, like drifting black fog. There was an aged path under his feet. He caught glimpses, in the fading light, of deep black gorges, almost like tunnels, or the mouths of Gargantuan caves.

He gripped his lips with his teeth when he wasn't shouting. He clutched the rifle with hands that hurt with the strain. The rifle! Maybe she would hear that. He elevated the muzzle, pulled the trigger. The explosion was a cannonading in the place, ear-splitting.

When it died down, and nothing in the Corridor, he thought, could have failed to hear it, there was no answer. What might have been an answer came from deep in the bowels of the mountains, dead ahead. He recognized the sound. A boulder, rolling downhill, hitting other boulders, creating an avalanche. Had his shot done that, or had human hands rolled the boulder by way of fantastic answer?

He was half mad with worry and terror as he raced into the maw of the Corridor. Twice, within the next fifteen minutes, he stooped, lighted a

match, looked for the prints. And every time he found them, pointing deeper into the Corridor. He could have sobbed aloud.

He stumbled, fell headlong. He was traveling too fast through the darkness, in unknown territory. His hands, as he fell, losing his rifle, came in contact with something strange, and horrible. He fumbled for a match to see what he had found.

A human body, partially devoured, a red horror. The flesh he had touched was all that was left of a human face, a woman's face! And it was still warm.

Frantically, he fumbled for his rifle. He spent ten maddening minutes looking for it before he came to the conclusion he had lost it—impossible as that seemed. He had known, when he dropped it, right where to find it.

The match had gone out before he had been able closely to study the face of the ghastly dead. If it were Hedda . . .

He struck another match. Then, with a mad cry of terror, he turned and started running, back out of the Corridor. The dead woman hadn't been Hedda, whose footprints led straight on beyond the corpse.

God, had Hedda seen that horrible thing?

CHAPTER II

Gloved Feet

BACK in Entiat Valley, a long car drew up to the door of Herman Flack's farmhouse. Three men stepped out of it purposefully. They wore stars on their coats. Their eyes were grim, savage, under their broad-brimmed Stetsons.

Herman Flack and his wife, who lived about half a mile from the Logan place, were about to retire. Dour-faced, hard-working people, childless, they had little patience with anyone but each other.

Flack, his spare gray hair ruffled, went to the door, blinked when he saw the stars. The big fat man of the

three, whose voice rumbled deep in his throat, spoke swiftly:

"I'm sheriff of this county. I want some questions answered. These two are my deputies."

Flack allowed them to enter the kitchen. His wife came out with a long coat over her nightgown, her eyes wide with curiosity.

"Who is it, Hermie?"

"Sheriff and two deputies, Ma."

"What they want of you?"

"Ain't said yet."

"Both of you listen," said Sheriff Murfin. "We're gunning for something and we don't know exactly what. During the past week seven women have disappeared in Chelan County, while hunting or picnicking in the mountains. Leads point in this general direction. We've asked people all the way here from Entiat, and nobody knows anything, or don't seem to. But it seems to us like they know things they ain't sayin'."

"We don't know nothin', neither!" said Mrs. Flack sharply.

"I heard some hollerin', late this evening," said Flack, before his wife could head him off. "Man calling a woman's name, Hedda."

"And he wouldn't be calling her if he knew where she was, would he, now? Where was this?"

"Hermie!" snapped Mrs. Flack.

"You'd better tell," said Murfin. "I'll put you in jail for obstructing justice. I'm tired of being hoorawed."

"Cas Logan's place," said Flack. He went to the door and pointed out the black road which led to it.

Ten minutes later the sheriff and his deputies stopped in the yard, noted a car. No light in the house. They searched it to make sure. They looked at the car. One of the deputies noted the license plate and such matters. Experimentally he stepped on the starter. Instantly the car purred into smooth action.

"People been here, all right," said the sheriff, half an hour later. "The car proves that, as well as what that hick said. But will one of you gents kindly explain, since they're plainly gone, and ain't in the well, where they've gone to? And tell me like-

wise how two people, the one that hollered and the one that didn't answer, left here without making any footprints? They've got to be somewhere, and we're circling this place, wider and wider, until we find 'em, if it takes from now until Hell freezes over. This is the first hot lead we've had."

Murfin and his deputies, Leyson and Zoar, started hunting, like bloodhounds seeking a scent. They were experienced in following trails. It was certain that no footprints, large or small, led away from the house of Cas Logan.

JIMMY FRAM gathered up two stones in place of the rifle he had mysteriously lost. Flimsy weapons, but the best he could manage.

He saw two lambent balls of flame, in the dark, like great cat-eyes. He hurled his rocks at them. They vanished without sound.

His heart almost stopped; he almost bit his teeth through to keep from screaming, before his feet finally struck other rocks to take the place of the two he had thrown.

It was an appalling, hideous screaming which suddenly sent him headlong into a run. It was a woman's scream, and it went crashing through Kurda's Corridor as though it fled on bat's wings. There was no way of telling the direction whence it came for a certainty, or how far. The echoes were confusing. Rocks again rolled down the mountainsides, somewhere along the treacherous, mysterious course of the Corridor.

The scream was bitten short off, as though a hand had closed over the woman's mouth. It *must* be Hedda; but why hadn't she screamed before? There must be some reason—and certainly a hideous reason why she screamed now.

Somewhere a head, because her steps led on, Hedda was in the hands of whatever monstrous thing ruled Kurda's. Jimmy Fram ran until he could taste his own blood on his lips. He kept sobbing her name, and getting no answer.

The scream again, just for a second, and a few choked words.

They came in tones of frightened despair. A woman's voice, but he had never heard Hedda's voice in the throes of terror. He could not be sure the voice had been hers.

"Oh, God," he whispered, "don't let it be Hedda!"

He didn't want it to be *any* woman, but if it must be some woman, let it be anybody but Hedda. He rushed on.

The scream did not come again. It had ended with horrible, fearsome finality. But another sound did come—that laughter, which he had thought was the echo of his own in the depths of hysteria. But this time he knew it was not.

He was gasping for breath. He had one desire: to reach whatever it was that had caused that scream, smash at it with the two rocks, until—

But what was it? Beast or human? The laughter smacked a little of both human and animal.

Then it stopped. Minutes passed without sound, save that which his feet made as he scrambled over the rocks, dashed through brush. He fell over boulders. He was a mad thing, racing into the night, to battle demons of a maniac's nightmare.

The walls of the Corridor seemed to mock him, black monsters against the night sky, with all sorts of possible horrors in their shadows through which he ran. He didn't see the eyes again. Cat-eyes, he thought, but what sort of cat would be prowling in here? Cougars, perhaps, but a cougar would attack him, or make some sound.

With devastating suddenness the screams came again, soul-piercing. But this time they broke off, not as though a hand had closed over the woman's mouth, but in angry, savage snarls!

A cat, snarling over its food! A great cat, like a cougar, sometimes sounded like a woman screaming. Such sounds, he remembered, had often keened through the mountains when he had been little, and lived along the glorious muddy banks of the silvery Entiat River.

If it were a woman who had screamed, she had gone stark, raving mad. The snarls proved that. If it were a cougar, over what did it snarl?

He raced on. He expected a great cat to drop on him, and clenched his fists tighter over the rocks. What puny weapons against a cougar! But how often did cougars attack human beings, even at night? And this was summer, when they were not ravenously hungry. If only the cat—if it were a cat—would attack, and have done with it. If such a cat had destroyed Hedda—

His mind whirled, his brain spun, when he thought of the possibilities, and remembered the corpse of the woman he had seen.

On and on, racing against time, feeling even as he ran that he was too late, Jimmy Fram gave the best that was in him. Terror chased him, came down the Corridor to meet him, flowed out and over him from the black walls.

"If Hedda is dead," he told himself, "I'll stay in this damnable place until the end of time, to finish off whoever or whatever did it! But she *isn't* dead, *can't* be dead!"

And yet he couldn't escape one horrible fact: the woman he had seen had been dead.

"Hedda! Hedda!"

No answer. Not even the hideous laughter. Not even the snarls.

HE had fixed the spot in his mind, he thought, near the end of the screams. He went straight toward the spot. He searched the darkness with straining eyes for the twin balls of lambent flame he had seen. He was ready at any moment for battle. He only hoped it would come soon, so that he could rend, and maim, and destroy. Not even a cougar, he told himself, could last against his present fury—even as reason told him how useless were man's puny hands, with rocks for weapons, against such an animal.

A scurrying sound, dead ahead. He stopped. He couldn't have kept on running to save his own life or Hedda's life. Not at the moment. He

licked his dry lips. Sobs bubbled in his chest. His lungs ached with the agony of his superhuman efforts. He could never have driven himself so without Hedda at the end to spur him on—Hedda with her life, or something more precious still, at stake.

He forced himself, trying to keep from thinking or feeling—an impossible thing to do—to go forward. The rocks were poised. He would have hurled one of them at the scurrying, rustling sound. But that would leave him partially weaponless again. No thrown rocks again, unless he could see what he must hit.

And what good was a rock, thrown, against a great cat? Might not the great cat be a figment of his imagination anyhow?

The odor gave him the next clue. An odor he had smelled when he had been in the service, fighting in the trenches—the odor of human blood. It was close about him, acrid, biting his nostrils. He moved forward, feeling with his feet, dreading to find what he felt sure he would find.

The strange, eerie sounds had ceased. He didn't look again for the eyes. Something told him if he did that he would see them.

He stopped. He stood trembling, knowing he must light a match again, to see. It would make him a target for—God knew what. But it had before, and nothing had happened to Jimmy Fram. Maybe he wasn't meant to die now. Maybe only women were supposed to die!

He found it, as he knew he would, when he struck the match.

Another woman, a stranger! She must have been beautiful once. She was almost nude. Her body had been horribly scratched, as though, like Jimmy, she had run endlessly through the dark, striking against sharp rocks and bushes. Her eyes were deep-sunken, her cheeks drawn in. She looked as though he had been on the verge of starvation.

And the ghastly wounds he had seen on the body of the first woman were on the body of this one!

Sooner or later, he knew then, this same thing would happen to Hedda.

He stooped, hands trembling around the cupped match, to feel of the woman's flesh, to find it warm, like that of the other woman. He forced himself, because he must, to study her carefully.

In the end he knew one thing: whatever had done away with part of the woman's flesh, a monster in man's form moved furtively, demoniacally through Kurda's Corridor!

He stood over the woman's dead body, lifted his head, extended his arms above his head, his hands still grasping the rocks, and shouted so that echoes rolled and rocked through the black night.

"Damn you to Hell, whoever and whatever you are! If this happens to the girl who came in here this afternoon, not even the devil himself can keep me from tearing you apart with my bare hands!"

Echoes flung his words back into his face. There was no answer. But just for a second he thought he heard the chuckling laughter again. One thing seemed certain: whatever it was, it had been here within the last few seconds. It couldn't have gone without leaving a trace.

There were prints of a sort about the dead woman. They were like no prints he had ever seen, or could catalogue. He tried to figure out, though his brain seemed numb with the horror of the whole mad night, what the prints were really like.

He came to this conclusion: that the prints might have been made by a man, wearing awkward gloves upon his feet!

No cougar's spoor could be so large, so strangely shaped. So he thought of a man, walking on his hands—and knew that that way led to insanity.

Feet; it had to be feet. Feet wearing strange, awkward gloves.

CHAPTER III

Voice at Night

AS he started to follow the amazing prints, he had the feeling that eyes in the dark saw everything

he did, knew even his secret, murderous thoughts. Why had whoever or whatever it was, run from him? That rifle! It had been sneaked away. Why didn't a bullet strike him as he followed the prints?

He knew as he advanced, following, striking matches, that though he seemed to be moving to the attack, he probably was walking into a trap, while whoever had set it waited and chuckled. With each step he said to himself:

"I'll get it myself. They just happened to be women."

But remembering other things he knew one reason why they might be *only* women.

He tried to force his mind off his terror by thinking of the second woman victim of the Corridor. Her sunken eyes, her bony cheeks, her scratched body.

"She's been in here a long time. She's been hiding, or running from whatever it is for God knows how long! Is *that* why Hedda does not answer? Does she know I am here, and is afraid to answer? Does she know what has happened to these others? God Almighty, those women have been hunted here in this Corridor like wild beasts!"

Hedda was being so hunted at this minute. Whether Jimmy found her or not, once he was downed, Hedda must go the same way.

Now there were brief intervals of darkness, when his matches went out. He nursed them, having few. There were intervals when he could follow the horrible prints. And then, all at once, the prints vanished.

They vanished at the base of a broad, bare expanse of rock. The enemy, not from fear, but for his own purposes, had taken to the rock to hide the prints, after luring Jimmy Fram this far.

The expanse seemed miles wide. There would be shale around it—As the thought came Jimmy heard rocks roll, and knew he had guessed correctly. This smooth expanse of rock had been made by sliding shale, which for centuries had slid over it from the cliff above.

But he couldn't go out on that bare expanse! The enemy might have circled, be stalking him now. He whirled, looking for the glowing eyes, but not finding them. The rock rolling he had heard might be the natural shifting of the shale, might have been caused by careless movements. But the enemy would never be careless! If he had done that, it had been done purposely—perhaps to lure Jimmy further out onto the rock!

Cursing himself for a coward, fighting with all his reason, he couldn't make himself go out onto that rock. Nor could he stand there another minute without going mad, and running, screaming, down the Corridor again. But where could he flee? In any direction he might dash straight into the arms, or tentacles, or fangs, of the enemy.

To his right was the cliff, circling down from the broad expanse of rock. Sobbing, he whirled, dashed straight up the slope, hands held before him, again grasping rocks he had picked up at the base of the rocky expanse.

His hands struck against the cliff base, almost broke because he held those rocks. But he scarcely felt the pain.

He turned, back against the rock. It felt somehow comforting. It reached hundreds of feet above his head. Now, nothing could reach him from the rear. Attack had to come from right or left, or from straight ahead.

HE made sure of one thing: that there was no cave above him, from which attack might be launched. He felt over the rock-face as far up as he could reach. Bare, cold rock.

There he stood, panting, his legs trembling, his whole body an agony, staring down into the Corridor. He didn't know the shape of it, for the night hid it, which made it all the more terrifying. *Anything* might be hidden by the night.

The minutes sped. He came to a decision. Sometime, Hedda must make known the location of her hiding place, or prison—if she were still

living. He would wait for a sign. He could search throughout a dozen nights without success. So he treated with his cowardice, substituted reasoning for blind courage—and knew he was fooling himself, yet could do nothing about it. He couldn't do anything but stand there, and wait.

Silence, deep, abysmal, hung over the Corridor. Wind sighed through it, part of the silence. It whispered of death, of destruction.

And then, far down to his right, he saw the eyes again, twin balls of lambent flames. A great cat, obviously, but no cat had made those prints he had seen.

The eyes were angling toward him, shifting, moving. A cat, with fine feline precision, was coming toward him, picking its delicate way through rock-patches, around brush, between towering boulders.

The eyes were blotted out. He thought he had heard a hiss, just before that. Then, the eyes again. He knew the answer instantly: the cat had turned its head to look back.

Cold chills played along his spine. That hiss had been a signal to the cat! Something, or somebody, was in control of the native ferocity of that animal! Where in hell were his thoughts leading him? It was fantastic, impossible.

The hissing sound again, almost like whispered words, and the eyes came on. Eons had passed since he had placed his back, in desperation, against the face of the cliff.

The eyes were within fifty feet of him, moving almost in silence. Then he heard the warning snarl, from the spot where the eyes were: baleful, savage eyes.

A wild cry broke through the Corridor.

"I can't stand it! I've got to know!"

Those words, in a woman's voice, a voice he could never mistake, came out of the Corridor from the direction of the coulee's mouth. Hedda's voice! She was alive, but wild with terror.

He tried to shout to her, but words would not come.

"Jimmy! Jimmy! I'm coming to you!"

The eyes had vanished. He heard a rock roll.

"Stay back!" With all his power he shouted it. "Stay hid wherever you are, until I reach you. If I don't make it, try to get out over the cliffs."

From below, where he had last seen the eyes, sounded a chuckle, filled with maniacal derision. He hurled his rocks at the sound.

Then he started running. It didn't matter if he stepped into a crevasse, or fell on the rocks, or broke bones. He had to reach Hedda. Maybe then he could fight off the incubus.

That hissing, whispering sound again. The words were distinct: "Get him!"

And as he ran he knew he was pursued—by something to which he couldn't give a name. It was closing in on him. He ran with vast strides, not knowing where his feet would touch, but always, as they did touch, he leaped again. He had never run so fast before, probably never would again.

He heard scuffling, lumbering sounds. *That* wouldn't be the cat. It was closer; rocks were rolling under its talons. And Hedda was shouting again.

"Whatever happens, I've got to come to you! I'll go crazy—"

She was coming, and he was leading death to her. Still, death together, however horrible, was better than to spend a lifetime in this black hellhole, seeking one another.

HE groaned as he kept on running. But how could a man hope to outrun a great cat?

He knew he couldn't do it. The cat was no longer following. Its monstrous master had called it back, else it would long since have overtaken him, dragged him down.

In his mind was a picture of a stooped, hulking monster of a man, striding beside a cougar, holding it in check with queer whispers, with a hand fastened in the scruff of its neck. And the monster and his imp, Jimmy knew very well, were still fol-

lowing, and taking his time because he knew that no man, or woman, could escape them in Kurda's Corridor.

Hedda called. Jimmy Fram answered. He heard her desperate sobbing. It was as though their hearts had called to each other through the night, for they loomed in the Corridor, two shadows, and went straight into each other's arms.

"I've been hiding. I heard you come," she whispered. "A cave. I ran to it, to get away from the thing. I was afraid to warn you, for I had heard another woman's screams—and then, another. I was too frightened to shout a warning, though I knew it was you! What horrible—"

He put his hand over her mouth for silence. It, or they, were closing in. Hedda led him aside, guided him, until they were in a small cave.

"A fire!" he said. "Animals are afraid of fire!"

"I know, but there is something else here that isn't afraid of fire."

"I can handle anything but a cougar. The fire will keep him away. There may be rifle shots, though."

"The cave bends a little, well back. I stumbled all around in it. There is brush in here. Others have been in this cave!"

He nodded, remembering the two women, as he touched a match—almost his last—to the brush he kicked hastily together.

A great flame flashed, filling the cave with its heartening splendor. Then, Hedda and Fram stepped around the bend of the cave.

Jim edged around to watch the mouth of the cave, a black maw against which the light dissipated, like spume against a cliff.

The thing came in. It was coal black. No cougar this, though the size was right. And no person living had ever heard of a black leopard, running free in the Cascades. Slaving jaws. Blood on the black coat, under the mouth. Eyes that flashed in the flame from the fire. Horror gripped Jimmy Fram. This cat was not afraid of fire!

It kept a respectful distance, as a

man would have done, circled the fire, heading straight for the two in each other's arms. Ten feet away it crouched, belly against the floor of the cave, tail lashing, snarls coming from its throat.

As it left the ground in its terrific leap, Jimmy Fram did the automatic thing. He hurled Hedda away from him, and stood alone to meet the charge.

CHAPTER IV

The Corridor's Black Familiar

HIS feet were braced, but the weight of the animal knocked him back ten feet, flat on his back. The animal was on top of him instantly, gaping jaws reaching for Jimmy's throat. He hammered at the slaving jaws with both fists. Taloned feet dug at his belly, raking the clothing off him. The fetid breath of the beast played over his face.

He hooked his fingers in the animal's hair, to hold back those great tearing teeth. His hands slipped off. Over the brute's head he saw his hands—and they too were black as coal!

This brute was a cougar, blackened for a purpose. Again the brute's stout body drove his teeth to the assault.

But before he could rip out Jimmy's throat, a chuckle sounded in the mouth of the cave, and a man's hoarse voice said:

"Tsick! Tsick! Take it easy, Nig!"

Fram managed to twist to see the cave opening. Long, lanky, bearing a rifle—one Jimmy knew—came the familiar of the Corridor. Parsons!

"So," screamed Jimmy, "it was you! Scared Hedda into running into the Corridor, sending me after her so you'd know where I was!"

The cat was sprawling on Jimmy's stomach, holding him down. Parsons laughed.

"Smart, ain't you? Like all men that women like! Well, I like for the smart ones to know I'm smart, too.

Hold him, Nig! Rip him up a bit, but don't kill him!"

Parsons talked to, and controlled the sooty cougar as though the brute understood him. Licking his lips and with a glow in his eyes more baleful than that of the cougar, Parsons set his rifle against the wall of the cave and advanced on Hedda.

"Damn you!" shouted Fram. "I'll tear you apart."

"You'll get away from Nig first, and no man has ever done that, nor woman either, less'n I said so! Smart of me, wasn't it, to live in the old Logan place? Nobody ever came there. And smart to tell you a story, and run away like I was afraid. But nobody knows short-cuts through these mountains like Luke Parsons knows 'em."

He was edging toward Hedda. She fled, but the back of the cave would spell the end for her. Knowing what had happened to at least two women, Jimmy knew she hadn't a chance.

She screamed, again and again. That seemed to drive the cougar mad. Parsons knew that, and kept talking to the animal.

"Take it easy, Nig! Take it easy!"

Jimmy Fram fought like a madman. Even as he fought he tried to see what was happening to Hedda. The cat mauled him. Great cuts were slashed from his stomach. He fought to keep from being disemboweled.

Once, with a tremendous heave, he got free of the cat, whirled, darted toward Parsons. But he hadn't taken two steps when the cat struck him from behind. He cursed, sobbed with futility.

"God will strike you dead, Parsons!" cried Fram.

"He ain't yet, and the things I've done—endurin' the last ten days or so! Luke Parsons, the crusty old bachelor, that no woman would have because he wasn't good enough, wasn't handsome enough, or didn't have enough money. The man that men laughed at because he couldn't get married! The man other men took women away from! Well, they're paying now, the women and the men. Hold him, Nig!"

As he spoke, Parsons was an abysmal brute—a brute wearing wadded gunny-sacking on his feet, for silence, and to blot out footprints.

Parsons' face was convulsed as he spoke of his hatred of women. His lips drooled and murder stared out of his bulging eyes. Plain enough that his avowed hatred of women had toppled his sanity. He was a maniac on the subject—with hatred of women who had laughed at him, thwarted him.

There was no limit to what such a monster might do.

HEDDA was against the back of the cave. She suddenly rushed forward, tried to duck under Parsons' long arms. They moved with the speed of a darting serpent. Hedda was hurled back against the rocks to fall to her knees. There was a red weal across her cheek, and most of her blouse was clutched in one of Parsons' hands.

Luke Parsons had no eyes for anything but Hedda's creamy white flesh. Queer animal sounds came from his throat.

Jimmy Fram was almost nude. But as the cat fought him, keeping him from getting to Hedda or Parsons with uncanny surety, Jimmy found, deep down inside him, wells of vitality on which to draw. Parsons was clutching again at Hedda.

Jimmy screamed at him. The cougar was clawing him, snarling. There was derisive laughter in that snarl.

Fram struck at the big cat's teeth, and cut the skin of his hands. He tried to break one of the legs across his knee, but he might as well have tried to break a piece of the rock which upheld the cave roof.

The cat knocked him down with a sideswipe. It turned Jimmy clear around, to show him Hedda, struggling, with blood streaming from her face where Parsons' nails had scored her, in the monster's arms, which held her like a python's coils.

Fram's skull rang like an anvil. Hell could have no torture like this. Blows of the cat's paws were increasing in violence with the loosening of

Parsons' control over the huge brute.

"Jimmy! Jimmy!"

Hedda's voice was roaring in his ears, and he couldn't do a thing about it. She was pleading, praying for death. Then he realized that it wasn't her voice that roared. Revolvers were roaring. The weight on his chest, as he sprawled supine, was still Nig. But Nig wasn't moving. Instead his blood was running over Fram's face.

Dizzily, he crawled out, saw three men with stars, and a fourth man with unholy fear in his white face, a man he didn't know, who wore no hat over his tousled hair.

He turned, fighting to stay on his feet, to see both Parsons and Hedda on the floor. But Hedda was getting to her feet. Parsons was not.

Somehow Fram reached Hedda. Both staggered back, to lean against the side of the cave. They looked down at Luke Parsons, with a dozen bullets in him.

The sheriff and his deputies, crack shots, hadn't shot to miss!

"Luke Parsons! Luke Parsons! I can't believe it!" said Herman Flack, whom Murfin had forced to lead the way into Kurda's.

"Why not?" asked Murfin, heavily.

"Why, he was burned to death, two weeks ago, in his shanty, up-river. His body was dug out of the ashes.

We all thought his cougar had just run away. He's had it from a cub."

"That body you found must have been some woman's husband," said Fram hoarsely. "The woman herself, probably—or her bones—will be found somewhere in the Corridor!"

"Along with six or seven others," said Murfin, staring in horrified unbelief at the monster he and his men had slain.

Flack was saying: "He was a woman-hater, mostly because he couldn't get a woman. Couldn't even get a housekeeper to stay, no matter what he paid her."

"And he took advantage of the tales whispered about Kurda's Corridor to use it as a place of retribution against women—all women," said Fram. "To think I didn't even sense he was a monster. He told me he'd seen you go into Kurda's Corridor, Hedda, and that I'd better go after you. I ran to find you . . ."

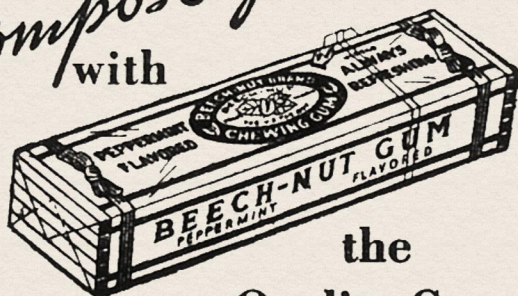
Hedda didn't look at either Nig or his master again, and tired as all were, it was a tribute to the sinister reputation of Kurda's Corridor, that the further they left the cave behind, the faster they walked.

The men with the stars spoke little, and dread emanated from them like some evil aura; for they, at least, must return to the Corridor in the morning.



When you hit the pavement an awful smack
There's a comforting taste in that yellow pack!

Compose yourself
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VIRUS OF VENGEANCE

Death is a Boomerang
in a Madman's Hands!

By H. M. APPEL

Author of "Hooks of Death," "Picture Frame," etc.



AM about to die, and this is why. For days my head had been feeling queer, so I came here to the home of Doctor Harrison Brownlee this afternoon, seeking the only possible relief from torment.

There was no one on the porch where I had thought Laura might be sitting. I walked indoors without knocking and entered the doctor's study. Brownlee was seated at his desk, in the act of affixing a gummed label to a round, dark bottle. Seeming startled by my appearance, carefully he stood the vial beside a somnolent black cat that dozed on the desk-top and sat back in his chair.

"Eh, Clausner!" he exclaimed. "How did you—that is, well! The poor head—it troubles you no more, eh? Of course, you are cured—"

"There can be but one cure!" I flung the words at him violently. "You know that, Brownlee."

He knew what I meant, and his fat, red face beneath the bald dome of a high forehead betrayed the instinctive denial that his lips repressed. Masking deceit with an air of heartiness, he admitted:

"I've often thought it might come to this. But you must give me a little time to prepare—"

A woman's voice called from the hallway:

"Doctor, are you there?"

I whispered: "Laura?"

He shook his head. "A patient come for her prescription. Laura is out of town."

I followed him toward the door, but he waved me back, saying:

"I'll send her away. She must not know—"

There seemed nothing else to do. Dropping into his chair at the desk, I listened to the murmur of their voices, considering the thing that must be accomplished to assuage the anguish which made my every waking hour unbearable.

When the woman had gone, I heard Brownlee whispering into a telephone. Part of his "preparation." My lips curled in derision. His subterfuge was futile, because I had resolved upon immediate, final action.

My eyes focused upon the bottle which he had been labeling. A choked cry of delight burst up in my throat. "Mad Dog Virus," he had marked it. His flair for research was a thing of common knowledge.

My brain functioned with the speed of light. No Borgia could have conceived a more appropriate vengeance than to kill, with his own poison, this man who had stolen my wife. Instead of the abrupt and easy death I had planned for him, in the grip of rabies he would know tortures almost equaling the awful suffering I had endured.

EXULTANTLY I smashed the bottle, seized the sleeping cat, drenched its claws with the terrible virus. When Brownlee came through

the doorway, I hurled the squalling creature fairly upon his bald and shining head.

The ensuing struggle was ludicrous. Blindly surging about the room, Doctor Harrison Brownlee overturned furniture, smashed bric-a-brac, and cursed the frenzied animal which clung to his scalp with the persistency of malignant Fate. In dodging here and there, keeping out of their way, I tripped over some object and fell across the desk at the moment when Brownlee found the door and ran outside.

Only when the intoxicating joy of victory had subsided did I realize that in falling I had cut my wrist upon a fragment of the broken bottle—had let into my bloodstream the virus of madness—had doomed myself to the appalling end which awaited my enemy.

For a space, the delirium of terror convulsed my brain. I recoiled from the mental image of a red and slaver-ing mouth, rabid gnashing teeth, bloodshot eyes glazed with the horror of approaching death. To accentuate the despair which suffused my reeling senses, came the galling thought that Brownlee might find salvation in the Pasteur treatment if he had fled to the office of a fellow practitioner, while for me, the perpetrator of this crime, no one would raise a hand.

With this conviction came a measure of calmness. Life, after all, is but an inconsequential moment in eternity. Why should I fear death, which in the end must come to all? Such will to live as I possessed hinged only on the wish to achieve my vengeance. Now, that is done.

As I write, recurring qualms of doubt warn me that Brownlee, through prompt treatment, may yet

escape my wrath. I am depressed and I know what I must do. Only a fool would cling to a few fleeting hours of existence, knowing the hideous sufferings soon to come. These lines I leave that all may know the truth. If, as I pray, Brownlee also dies, it will be the work of my hand—of a husband betrayed. . . .

DOCTOR HARRISON BROWNLEE entered his office cautiously, followed by a uniformed guard from the State Hospital for the Insane. Both men paused at sight of the still form sprawled across the sodden desk top. The guard sniffed inquiringly.

"Drunk?"

Brownlee hurried forward, rolled the body over.

"Dead!"

He recoiled a pace, reached to pluck a knife from the corpse.

"So this was his weapon. I feared he might be armed with a pistol."

"Where would he get one?" The guard's tone expressed mild sarcasm. "Of course, he could steal a thing like that out of the kitchen when escaping—"

"Thank heaven," the physician muttered, "that Laura wasn't here. She suffered enough brutality at his hands before they took him away."

He saw the red-stained sheet of note paper and leaned over to scan the scrawl.

"Well! This explains the cat!" His lips twitched grimly. "Fate's irony. As he came in, I was just labeling a bottle of excellent whiskey, 'Mad Dog Virus,' to save it from the pilfering of my janitor. Had not Clausner's nerves been all strung up for murder, his nose would have warned him of the fake."

Next Month: Eerie Thrills and Weird Mystery in

BLOOD IN THE HOUSE

A Complete Novelette of Stalking Doom

By HUGH B. CAVE

VILLAGE of DOOM



Through a blur of pain, I looked at the weird figure before me

**Madness Holds Mortonville in its Paralyzing Grip as a
Raging Inner Fire Burns Out Men's Souls!**

By SAUNDERS M. CUMMINGS

Author of "Dead Man's Bluff," "Veiled Prophet Murders," etc.

AS I turned off the highway and slid my roadster into Mortonville's main street, I heard the wild, mindless shriek for the first time that night.

I put my full weight on the brakes and slid to a stop. But the shriek was not repeated, nor could I tell from what direction it had come.

I pushed my fedora back off my hot brow and stared around me with won-

der. What had happened to the busy little town I had left just three days ago? Where were the blazing lights, the chatting, laughing crowds? Main Street was peopled only with drooping shadows. Shop windows were dead eyes, some boarded up, some glaringly empty of merchandise. Here a door hung crazily by one hinge; there a flight of steps was splintered and broken. And the sidewalks were

filthy with accumulated wreckage.

Then I saw a light. It was a flickering candle in the window of the Palace Hotel, half a block away. As I pulled up to the hotel I put my head out of the car.

"Hello," I called, and shrank back involuntarily from the empty echo that bounded around my ears like something with a horrible, vigorous life of its own.

Then a white form appeared in the doorway. I felt strangely relieved. There was someone here. As the figure approached I made out the features in the glow reflected by my car's headlights. I jumped to the sidewalk.

"Ann!" I called. "What on earth has—"

Then I broke off sharp and gulped. This girl was Ann Clarke—I had nearly married her, before I met Gloria. Her once lovely face was twisted and her eyes were vacant—mad! I saw, too, that her dress was crumpled and soiled, hanging in a droop from one shoulder.

I stood like a stone man as she shuffled up to me. She put her distorted face close to mine.

"I'm on fire," she hissed in a ghastly whisper. "Help me. I'm on fire!"

I put a steadying hand on her arm—and jerked it away again. Her flesh was blistering hot! Some awful fever must be coursing through her veins.

At my touch, she shrank away. Her head snapped back and she screamed. A file rasped against my soul. It was that same, mad scream I had heard once before tonight.

Still screaming, she whirled and tottered down the street. I had started after her when the thunder of footsteps on the hotel's board porch spun me around. I gasped with relief as I recognized Sheriff Clarke, Ann's father.

He paid no attention to me; but ran, grim faced, after his staggering daughter. He was carrying a Winchester .40-60.

Ann must have heard the pounding of our steps behind her, for she in-

creased her speed. A shrill gibberish floated over her shoulder. Her hands began to claw at her clothing. Her dress ripped away, then her single undergarment and she ran—naked. Ann Clarke running down Mortonville's main street stark naked!

Then some twist in her tortured brain caused her to turn. She crouched facing us, hands clawed, mouth spitting like a cornered wild cat's.

In a single movement, Sheriff Clarke stopped, jerked the Winchester to his shoulder and fired. Fired at Ann!

I saw the black hole appear in the center of her left breast. She sank to her knees, thudded forward on her face. The slug had gone clear through, tearing a terrible hole in her back.

Aghast, I whirled to face Sheriff Clarke. He was in the act of firing again, into her body. I dove for the rifle.

Clarke snarled and backed away, training the muzzle on me.

Breath caught in my throat. The vermin of madness were crawling in Sheriff Clarke's bloodshot eyes!

I REMEMBER shaking my head and telling myself that this was the stuff of nightmares—that it couldn't really happen. I stood looking down the rifle barrel, transfixed with horror and dismay. I saw the sheriff's finger tighten on the trigger. My life depended on swift movement, and I could not move.

The rifle barked. A tongue of flame licked out at me and a stinging pain came to my left arm. Then I realized that two shots had sounded, almost as one—and the sheriff was sagging to the ground.

I came alive then, and snatched up his fallen rifle. I spun to face a tall figure that was shuffling towards me out of the shadows. He carried a smoking gun.

I lowered the weapon with a sigh of relief. It was Ray Locke, a friend since schooldays. He was general manager of the Stewart Electrical Manufacturing Company, Morton-

ville's largest industry. And Ray's eyes were sane! He wore a huge bandage, like a Hindu turban, around his head.

I rushed forward and clasped his hand.

"Hurt?" he cried anxiously.

I peeled off my coat and twisted a handkerchief around the scratch on my left arm.

"It's nothing," I assured him. "Thanks to you!"

I noticed that Ray's fine, sharp features were furrowed and haggard. He had aged a lot in the last three days.

He was gazing deep in my eyes. "It hasn't started on you yet, has it?" His hand was like a vice around mine. "Then get out of town—get out before it gets you!"

"What is happening?" I pleaded. "Where is Gloria?" Gloria was my fiancée. I had been driving with reckless haste all day, in order to get back in time to see her tonight. Tomorrow we were to be married!

"Gloria is safe," Ray said. "She's at Stewart's."

Stewart was Ray's employer. He was all scientist, interested only in his electrical inventions, and leaving the firm's manufacturing and marketing details in Ray's hands.

"At Stewart's house!" I cried. "What is wrong?"

"Madness! The whole town is going mad. It began the day you left. Everybody complained of feeling strange. At first there were only quarrels, then fights. Then there was a murder in the motor department of the plant. Now, ninety percent of the people are mad, or have fled from town. A few sane ones are staying, barricaded in Stewart's house. They're trying to control the mad ones, salvage the town."

"How do you explain it?"

"Nobody does. Autopsies show nothing, so they say. No germs, no drugs. The drinking water and the food is pure. Maybe this unseasonable heat wave is causing it."

I shot him a quick glance. Was his mind slipping? A heat wave in late October! Then I realized I was

mopping my wet brow. I was hot, stifling hot!

"What infernal—" I began.

Ray cut me off. "Run to your car!" he shouted frantically, giving me a push. His gaze was fixed over my shoulder.

I SPUN. A low rumble was coming from around the corner. As it grew louder I realized it was the thunder of voices. Suddenly a pack of people flung into sight. They were disheveled, bloody, bestial. A shudder ran through me as I recognized, beneath the masks of madness, faces of persons I had known all my life.

When the pack saw us, they set up an insane yell and stamped in our direction. How can I describe the horror of watching the drooling, idiotic faces of friends and acquaintances as they moved toward us with a deadly blood-lust in their mad eyes. I stood and stared in a paralysis of horror.

"They'll tear us to pieces!" Ray shouted. "Run!"

I forced my muscles into action. We gained the car and spurted away from the howling mob with but a second to spare.

"There are packs like that roaming all over town," Ray said in a flat, resigned voice. Then he noticed my gaze on his huge bandage.

"Nearly got a fractured skull in a fight with a madman," he explained.

We kept a grim silence as we drove to his employer's house.

The Stewart estate was imposing, for the plant had made a fortune for its owner.

I started to swing the car into the long gravel drive, and was forced to slam on the brakes. A crude but formidable barbed wire fence stretched across our path.

"Forgot to tell you," Ray muttered. "Have that all around the place to keep out the mad packs." He stepped from the car and whistled strangely.

Presently a form materialized on the other side of the barrier and swung part of it open. We entered and the man stepped up on our run-

ning board, heavily, lumberingly.

He was Kane Bulwar, a great, hulking town loafer with a simple sort of mind. I wondered then why *he* hadn't gone mad—since he had been but a step away from it all his life.

Bulwar moved his thick lips in a surly greeting to me. He had hated me since the day I beat him up for insulting Gloria.

The monstrous old house, crouched behind its guard of gnarled maples, was made more weird by the sickly yellow candle light which flickered behind skinny, old fashioned windows.

I vaulted from the car and leaped up the steps. Not until Ray had repeated the strange whistle did the big door swing open for us.

Then, at last, I saw Gloria.

For a moment all the horror of the night was blotted out as I held her in my arms. She turned up her lovely, oval face with its frame of dull bronze hair. Her eyes, usually a sparkling blue, were dull and cloudy. She tried to smile, and failed dismally.

"I tried to warn you not to come back, Glen," she cried. "Back to this inferno. But I'm glad you're here. I need you so. Mother and Dad were out there—mad. They've gone now—we found their bodies this morning."

I pressed her head against my shoulder and tried to still her sobs.

THE hall grew bright as a man approached carrying a candelabra. He was Dr. Lee, a nervous, fiery little man with eagle eyes. I had always pitied him, as he had been practically ostracized in Mortonville since the time he had been accused of stealing the funds of the State Medical Society of which he was treasurer. The accusation had been enough to ruin his practice.

With uncharacteristic gentleness, he pulled Gloria away from my shoulder.

"Glen's here," he jerked. "Too bad. But he's here. We'll have to inoculate him. At once!" Dr. Lee habitually punctuated his jerky sentences

with violent blinkings of his eyes.

"What do you mean?" I asked.

A new voice rasped in my ear. "We can thank Lee for keeping us sane, here," it said. "He has a drug that somehow wards off the madness."

This was J. Morton Stewart, leading citizen. He was an intense, vivid man of powerful build. You would have labeled him a ruthless business executive; he had none of the noble dignity of the traditional scientist.

Dr. Lee was busy over his little black bag. Presently he turned toward me with a large hypodermic full of a milky fluid. For a moment before he plunged the needle into my arm I felt a qualm. Was this drug so innocent and helpful? Something was causing this plague of madness, perhaps some drug. But while I hesitated, the needle pricked my arm and the milky fluid did its work.

"Glen!" Gloria gasped. "You're hurt!" She was gazing at the bloody handkerchief around my left arm.

"Just a scratch," I assured her, and told them how I'd received it.

"Get me some hot water," Dr. Lee jerked out, "Will you, Gloria?"

As Gloria went for the water we moved into the huge, shadow-draped living room. I was introduced to the rest of the refugees. Alvin Scratch, a gaunt and bald religious fanatic, was in one corner shaking his hands at heaven and mouthing a prayer that was more blasphemous than supplicating.

I was also introduced to a shifty-eyed little man named Plank. It seemed he was an accountant, come to audit the Stewart plant books. But, he told me mournfully, the madness had begun before he arrived and a roving band of madmen had destroyed every record at the plant. It seemed to me that Plank was exceedingly near to madness himself—and I made an excuse to go to the opposite side of the room at the earliest possible moment.

As the minutes ticked by and Gloria failed to return, a morbid uneasiness welled up in me.

"Does it take this long to heat water?" I asked.

"Perhaps we'd better see," said J. Morton Stewart. Taking up a candleabra, he led the way into the kitchen.

Gloria wasn't there. A pan of water was boiling over on the stove. The ice box door hung open, and some food was scattered on the floor.

"Some madmen must have broken in for food and taken Gloria too!" Ray ejaculated.

I CAME near to insanity myself at that moment. My fiancée kidnapped under my very nose the instant I arrived!

I darted out on the back porch. One of Gloria's little slippers lay there. I whirled and rasped out a volley of orders.

Soon we had flashlights and guns and were searching the grounds. But Gloria was not to be found.

"They've taken her out into town," Dr. Lee clipped, at last, blinking furiously. "We'll have to organize search parties. Try to find her before it is too late."

I did my best to force out the mental pictures of Gloria, helpless in the arms of some drooling maniac; I tried to do it with action. But I wasn't successful. Through a veil of terror I heard myself arranging search parties. J. Morton Stewart and Scratch, the fanatic, went west; Ray Locke and Bulwar were scheduled to go south, but at the last minute I called Ray aside.

"You say the people in the south part of town, near Stewart's plant, went mad first?"

"Yes."

"Then let me take that part. Perhaps that is significant. And I have a feeling Gloria may be there."

Ray agreed and set off to the east. Plank and another man went north.

Dr. Lee and I trudged toward the squalid south side of town. Each of us carried a rifle and flashlight.

The night was a smothering pall of blackness, pressing around us. I had a sense of moving in a dream. There was something unnatural and unreal about the very atmosphere. Then I realized that there were no sounds of

birds or insects—nothing. Nothing but the dull clump of our footsteps and, occasionally, off in the distance, a mindless shriek.

I felt strangely hot and feverish, but I put it down, at the time, to an outgrowth of my anguish.

Presently the monstrous bulk of the Stewart Electrical Manufacturing Company loomed before us. As we moved to within the shadows of its towering walls a new dread swept over me. Nothing seemed normal, anywhere. Each dark window was an eye, balefully staring. I stared about uneasily. Then I jumped, startled, as Dr. Lee mumbled something.

"What did you say?" I asked.

Lee yelled, "You can not live!"

His voice was piercing, shrill. For an instant I stood aghast, not realizing the significance of his words. Then he turned, and I knew. It was too dark to see his eyes, but from the grotesque twisting of his features and his wiry body I could tell that Dr. Lee had cracked. He was going mad!

I slapped his face. "Pull yourself together, man!" I cried.

The slap was a mistake. It turned him into a snarling beast. He sprang away. His gun flew up, held like a club. With startling speed he sent it whizzing toward my head.

I ducked the gun and came up under it with a stout left to Lee's chin.

A lurid oath spewed from his suddenly foam-flecked lips. He hurled himself forward. The strength of a madman was in the blow he landed on my jaw.

Through a star-studded haze, I struck back at him. With that he turned, shrieking horribly, and ran into the shadows.

BEFORE I could even start after him, he had disappeared. I spent many moments in futile search. Then at last I gave up and returned to the plant.

I was not surprised to find the door unlocked. When I pushed it open, a blast of cool, musty air blew out into my face.

I swung the white beam of my flashlight over the desks and chairs of the

front office. Dust lay thick on everything, furniture was overturned, and papers were scattered in a chaotic litter.

Suddenly I tensed. A shuffling sound had come from behind the door which led into the manufacturing department. I snapped out the light, and stood stone-still, trying to stare through the surrounding pall of darkness, and listening.

But the rapid thump of my heart and the throb of blood in my ears were the only sounds I heard. Gripping my rifle, I felt my way toward the manufacturing department. Then, screwing up my nerve, I flashed the light on and flung the door open.

The huge room was deserted. But I became conscious of a soft steady buzzing sound coming from some distant part of the building. It was my concentration on this sound that nearly cost me my life.

Just in the nick of time, I sensed a malevolent presence behind me. And at that instant, a mindless scream ripped through the air, right in my ear.

IN the second before the flashlight was knocked from my hand, its light outlined three mad, evilly distorted faces leaping toward me.

With the descent of darkness I became the center of a maelstrom of snarling, clawing madmen.

It must have been then that the madness began to take me for its own. For I remember fighting with an abandon that bordered on mania. I returned scratch for scratch, bite for bite, kick for kick. And above the din of the madmen's screaming, I heard my own voice, laughing wildly.

A blood-lust rose in me. It was in a red mist that I continued my vicious fight. I was next conscious of sitting astride a body, beating on a face that was already nothing but a bloody pulp.

Then my head cleared slightly and I became aware of the awful thing I was doing. I realized, with unspeakable self-loathing, that I was *enjoying* the brutal mutilations I was inflicting.

I FORCED myself to stop. I struggled to my feet and found my flashlight. With the return of light some degree of sanity returned. I sent it toward the floor, and shuddered as I gazed upon the bloody, ragged bodies stretched there.

Then I busied myself with attending to my own hurts. I suddenly remembered the buzzing sound I had been listening to just before the attack.

I turned and crept into the manufacturing department. When I opened a door at the far side the buzzing grew louder, more ominous.

A flight of steps led down into a sub-basement. At the bottom was a long hall. My heart pounded harder when I saw a flickering red light far down the hall. With utmost caution I picked my way over the floor. Suddenly I burst into a room that was lighted with the eerie glow.

A great lump of apparatus in the center of the room was capped by a series of long, glass tubes that swelled out into globes every few feet, like huge soap-bubbles. The flickering pale red light danced through them. A dynamo in one corner made the buzzing sound.

I stepped forward. A foot scraped behind me. A black-gloved hand clamped over my eyes before I could turn. Something cracked against my skull. . . .

I don't know how long I was out. I was next conscious of floating up under a vast weight where my head should have been. The weight began to throb and transmit the pain to me. Then I realized that the weight was my own head.

Slowly, it cleared. A snarling voice rasped in my ear. I jerked my eyes open.

I was bound to an upright support, facing the machine. My hands were tied together behind the beam and my feet were bound at the ankles. A weird figure stood beside me, clothed from head to foot in something resembling a deep-sea-diver's costume. The eye lenses were of thick, dark glass. The man's voice, coming from the helmet, was muffled and strange.

"So you were smart enough to discover my machine! Well, you are the only one. Nobody else has realized that there might have been a reason for the people in this part of town going mad first. And you shall be rewarded! You shall be made more mad than any! So mad that none will believe your story when you leave—not even your sweetheart!"

I twisted against the ropes that bound me. "What do you know about Gloria?" I shouted.

"Never mind that. Some mad fool has her now, but I'll get her—and keep her for myself!"

HE went on, explaining gloatingly that this apparatus had been originally a small artificial fever machine which they had been planning to manufacture in the plant. It broadcast an ultra-short electromagnetic wave which was generated in thermionic valves. While experimenting with it one day he had effected an accidental change in the circuit and had generated a wave that affected the mind as well as setting up the usual fever-producing oscillations in the body tissue.

"There's a fortune in it," he gloated. "In small doses it will cure certain types of insanity. Only in large, continued doses does it warp a sane mind!"

The bizarre suit, he went on to explain, was a protection from the rays which he wore while working on the machine in this laboratory he had built in what had been a little-used store room.

"Why did I build this machine large enough to drive the whole town mad?" he chuckled in answer to the question in my eyes. "You figure that out—if you can, in the few short moments of sanity left to you!"

Then, with malevolent laugh, the fiend whirled and merged with the shadows.

I turned my frantic thoughts to escape—escape from the terrible menace of the machine. The ropes that bound me were of thick hemp. I could never hope to break them; the beam to which I was fastened was solid.

I tried to concentrate, and found it impossible. Already the awful rays were affecting my mind. The blood, pumping furiously through my veins, was scalding hot.

The room began to waver and blur, bits of outlines running together like melting wax. My eyes were bulging. I felt hot saliva drooling from my lips. Pain crawled through my body, boring into every nerve. The floor billowed under me. My mind was slipping, slipping.

I felt my head droop on my chest. I slumped forward, hanging by my bound arms.

It was then that I saw something which made my heart leap. Perhaps this was my salvation! It was a steel tool, a wrench of some sort. It lay at my feet. If I could manage, somehow, to throw it or kick it into the glass tube I would be saved from insanity. Perhaps, then, I could find a means of getting out of my bonds.

I set to work. It is hard to describe the excruciating pain that shot through my fever-racked body as I twisted about the beam, seeking to clutch the tool up between my feet. I failed time and again. But desperation made me persevere and at last I held it firmly.

Now came the crucial moment. I must fling both legs out before me in such a manner as to hurl the tool into the glass tube. And there would be no second chance!

Unconsciously, I bit down on my lip and felt hot blood spurt. Then I kicked.

The kick jerked my arms cruelly against the beam, but I paid no heed. My thoughts were riveted on the shining bit of metal hurling through the air.

Like something in a slow-motion film it seemed to float along, slowly twisting, but heading directly towards the tubes. A glad shout rose in my throat—then died away into a groan of utter despair.

The tool had fallen short. It clanged against the machine a foot below the tubes. It came to rest across some wires.

My exertion began to take its toll.

Waves of red swam across my eyes, like thin blood on a glass plate. I sagged against the wooden beam; my eyes fluttered shut.

WHEN I awoke I was in a crimson inferno. I stared, bewildered, at the roaring, leaping tongues of flame that filled the room. Then comprehension came.

A lurid blue light sputtering and crackling in the center of the machine. It was a short circuit, caused by the tool I had kicked there.

The flames danced across the floor, curling around my feet. The blasts of heat were killingly intense.

If I could just burn through these ropes, I might escape in time. By grotesque and painful twistings, I got low enough to place my hands against the floor. Now to find a flame over which I could hold the rope. Since my hands were behind me I was forced to rely solely upon my sense of feel. I had to burn myself in order to find a flame!

At last I succeeded. I felt the vicious fire lick up over my hands and bite into my bonds. My coat sleeves and pants legs caught fire. I tugged against the ropes with all my might, striving to shorten my ordeal of torture. Each second seemed an eternity. There came a time when I felt I could endure the agony no longer; I decided to resign myself to a fiery death.

Then the rope gave! The fire had done its work. In another moment I was free.

How I got out of that pit of hell and back to the Stewart home, I cannot tell you. I remember only the blessed feel of cool air against my tortured flesh. After that my mind was a blank until I came to, lying on the couch in the Stewart living-room.

Thick bandages swathed my hands, arms and legs. And mad devils of pain played beneath those bandages. Then I saw Gloria's sweet face bending over me.

I struggled upright. "Gloria! You're safe? You're all right? What happened?"

She forced me down gently.

"I'm all right," she soothed. "The madmen who took me got into a fight and I escaped. After that I went slightly mad myself and I don't remember anything until I got back here, sane again. They say they found Dr. Lee carrying me through the streets. It seems that everyone of the searching parties became separated."

"But Lee?" I broke in. "Is he here?"

"Not now. You were raving about the machine in the plant while you were delirious. The men have all gone to make sure the fire has stopped it. They think it has, because our fever is leaving."

FEET tramped across the room. I twisted my head and saw that the men were returning.

"The machine is stopped," clipped Dr. Lee, blinking at me furiously.

"Yes," put in J. Morton Stewart, his vivid face intense. "You have saved Mortonville, Glen Curtis. Fortunately the fire destroyed only a small part of the plant, stopping at my concrete fire-walls."

Ray Locke came to my side, he was still wearing that huge, turban-like bandage. "Feel better, old boy?" he asked, his sharp features softened with concern.

I nodded.

Bulwar's hulking form appeared over me and he sent down a surly smile. Gaunt old Alvin Scratch began a bizarre prayer of thanksgiving. And Plank, the little accountant, stood there smiling down.

Some tormenting thought was twisting in the back of my mind. Something important, very important. Then I realized what it was.

I *knew* the fiend behind this plague of madness! Something one of these people had said to me to-night had given him away. What was it? Who was he? Perhaps the answer would come to me if I talked. I began:

"One of you is a devil! One of you caused all this!"

They all crowded over me. Fighting the dizziness in my head, I hurried on.

"Who bought the property from those people who left town?"

There was a tense silence, then:

"I did," said J. Morton Stewart. "I bought it in an attempt to bolster people's morale, to keep them from deserting the town by showing that I wasn't afraid!"

I swung myself up. Talking *had* succeeded in crystallizing my thoughts. Coming to my feet I stepped between Stewart and Dr. Lee.

"Here's the fiend!" I cried.

And with a swift movement I snatched the bandage from Ray Locke's head. The bandage, just as I had thought, was abnormally heavy. I found later it was insulated with lead—a protection from the rays.

FOR a moment the entire group, even Ray, stood petrified. Then Ray's sharp features twisted evilly. He spun and hurled himself toward the door.

A gun appeared in the doctor's hand. Before Ray was half across the big room, the gun was spitting flame. Ray stumbled and crashed to the rug. He writhed in agony for a moment, then lay still.

We crowded over him. His shirt-front was crimson. Dr. Lee examined him and got up shaking his head.

"I should have known it was Ray," I said. "While he was disguised in that weird outfit, talking to me in the plant, he credited me with the remark about the insanity starting at a certain point being significant. I had

made that remark to no one but Ray. I was too horrified then to realize it, and—" I broke off as Ray began mumbling. His eyes were closed, but his lips were moving.

"Confess," he croaked. "I needed money badly—gambling. I'd been stealing it, lots of it, from the plant. Then Stewart sent for the accountant and I was frantic. He would discover my thefts, bring me to disgrace and prison."

I stared at him incredulously. "You mean you deliberately drove the whole town mad, just to be able to blame the madmen for destroying the books?" I gasped.

"No! No!" Ray groaned. "At first I didn't realize that my experiments with the machine were causing the madness; I always worked in that insulated suit. When I *did* realize what I was doing, it was too late to stop. Then I saw that it was my salvation, my destiny. So I kept on. In a few more days, Stewart and all the stockholders would be dead or mad. The machine would be *mine*. I'd make a fortune curing insanity. Money—fame—" He stopped, choking on his own blood.

"He *must* have been mad," Stewart ejaculated, "to have thought—"

His words were drowned as Ray coughed horribly—and died.

I sank back on the couch. Peace came to my body. I could go to sleep now and forget my pain. And peace came to my soul, also, as Gloria bent down and pressed her lips to mine.

In Next Month's Issue: The Chill Story of the Year—
Suspense, Surprises and Exciting
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THE DEATH KISS

A Complete Novelette of Eerie Terror

By **ARTHUR J. BURKS**



DEATH RIDES



A Complete Novelette

"Run, Lucia," I cried.

CHAPTER I

Figures from the Grave

AS I look back, the horror seemed to cast its first shadow upon us when we reached the summit of the cliff and stood gazing out over the plateau. Beside me Lucia, my wife of three days, lowered her binoculars and shivered slightly though the air was warm and humid.

"It's beautiful, Paul," she said. "Beautiful. But all the same I don't like it. There's something strange, something repellent about this place."

Two hours before we had been carefree honeymooners driving aimlessly. A bridge under repair, a choice of detours, and we had wandered onto this plateau. Entranced by the beauty of the landscape, we had left our car in the village and climbed this higher rise to obtain a bird's-eye view before night set in.

But rich and fertile though the district was, a breath of evil seemed to cloud it like fog on a mirror. Far below us the farms were trim and clean, but the houses were falling to decay. Even in Blairville the few country people in wretched clothes we had

A Greed-Crazed Maniac Sets the Stage

THE PLATEAU



By
**CARL
JACOBI**

*Author of "Dead Man's River,"
"Bodies Without Heads," etc.*

"For God's sake, run!"

seen had passed us by with sinister looks and no word of greeting.

To the left, in a shallow depression at the foot of the cliff, three large derricks, like three monstrous spiders, reared their black bulks. About them was other machinery, wooden shacks and wagons. A mining camp of some kind, I judged.

The sun sank below the hills as we stood there. Once again my wife shivered.

"Let's go down, darling," she said. "We don't want to be caught up here in the dark, you know."

I nodded. We turned and made

for the nature-formed staircase that led down the cliffside. But at the first step we stopped, stood rooted in our tracks.

Far off a faint ululation had risen in the twilight air, wafted to our ears by the wind. It came again as we listened, a soul-chilling wail that probed deep into my brain. The howl of a wolf!

Along the nape of my neck hair bristled, and a cold ripple passed up my spine.

"Hurry," Lucia said. "It's a long way back to the inn."

We began to descend. As I

for a Horrifying Orgy of Human Sacrifice!

worked my way around the crags I told myself that once back at the car I would turn about and head for the county road again. Pride objected. After all, I was being absurd. The district might be a bit forlorn, even austere, but there was no reason for the clawing fear that was creeping into us. With two more weeks of our honeymoon left, we might just as well spend the night in Blairville as not.

Yet my brain continued to review the dark impressions I had gathered earlier in the day. At the inn where we had paused for a few minutes—Reller Tavern, it was called—the deformed proprietor, John Reller, had looked at us with suspicion and answered our questions about directions grudgingly. Nor did I like Calvin Reller, the innkeeper's son, a tall, saturnine man, who had filled Lucia with a vague dread and unease. A woman there I had heard called Sandra Markoff had been cordial enough. But there had been something about her that made me think of a jungle cat waiting to make its kill.

DARKNESS closed in on us by the time we reached the road. Here was a long line of wheelbarrows, left by workmen, filled with some kind of black slag.

"Paul!" Lucia abruptly drew her body close to mine. "Do you hear it? Listen—"

I turned my flashlight toward her lovely face.

"The wolf again?" I said. "Not exactly pleasant. But it doesn't—"

"No. Not the wolf. It was a whisper. A whisper as if a man had lost his voice and—was trying to laugh."

Her face was ashen in the torchlight. I stood motionless, listening.

"You mustn't be so impressionistic, sweetheart," I told her. "There's nothing wrong here but our imaginations."

Yet as I led the way forward again I found myself quickening my pace, looking nervously to either side.

It happened as we came upon a low bridge that spanned a black, bawling creek. The bridge planking was old

and filled with dangerous crevices, and I strode ahead to light the way.

Midway across the structure I stopped. From somewhere below a sound had drifted up to me. A whisper, it was. Muted and eerie, it fell upon my ears like a death tocsin.

Automatically my hand reached out, gripped Lucia. Together we stood there rigid while I held the flash over the rail. Then my wife uttered a terror-stricken scream, and I saw.

Crouched close to the farthest shore-pile of the bridge were six figures. Six figures from the grave! Clad in long, sweeping monk-cowls with hooded heads, their faces were turned away from me—all save one who seemed to be the leader. And where his face should have been was a white, grinning skull.

One instant they poised there. Then silently they raced up the embankment to the bridge and bore down upon me.

With a hoarse cry of warning I thrust Lucia back, brought up my fists. In a moment of horror I saw that skull face leap through the air as if propelled by some unseen satanic power. Claw-like fingers ripped and tore at my clothing. I struck out frantically, felt my fists smothered before they could hit.

"Run, Lucia!" I cried. "For God's sake, run! I—"

A triphammer blow crashed into my jaw, sent me reeling backward. A cruel kick, and I fell to the planking. Feet stamped upon me.

I seized the guard rail, forced myself up and lunged forward. In maddened fury I flailed my arms out, struck three times in quick succession.

Again and again I sought to slip free, reach Lucia and escape. Each time my path was blocked. The assailants were on all sides. Like prehistoric bats they came at me, talons gouging at my eyes.

The figure with the skull face moved in, clutched my throat and pressed inward, forcing me slowly down. My breath was cut off. My heart labored against my chest.

And then abruptly in the distance a new sound rose up out of the blackness. Fighting an overwhelming nausea, I listened with reborn hope. It was the vibrating roar of an approaching car or truck.

The leader jerked his hooded head around. He peered down the road, hesitated. Whirling, he mumbled a low and guttural command. The six cowed figures turned. With the speed of the night wind they spread their robes and swept into the night.

The roar raced nearer. Two headlights, like the eyes of some gigantic carnivore, swept around a curve and cut the bridge in ghastly relief. The truck thundered onto the clapboards.

Vaguely I heard a klaxon screech its warning, saw as through swirling water a white, fear-contorted face leering out at me from the cab. Then it was past. Blackness and oblivion swooped upon me, and I knew no more.

HOW long a time passed before I returned to consciousness, I don't know. When I opened my eyes Lucia was bathing my temple with a handkerchief she had moistened in the stream below.

"They're—they're gone, darling," she sobbed. "Are you badly hurt?"

I lurched to my feet. Black maggot of creeping dread were surging through my brain now. Slowly I searched my pockets, found nothing missing. I groped downward, retrieved the flashlight.

"Lucia," I said, "there's something behind all this. I'm going to find out what it means. Going to locate the sheriff in Blairville and—"

I stopped my mad flow of words as I realized she was trembling.

"I don't feel able to go any farther tonight, Paul," she said huskily. "Can't—can't we ask to be put up at the first house and telephone from there?"

The first house loomed close to the road not far from the bridge. Printed letters on the post-box read: L. HAINES. God knows it was a commonplace structure, yet again that brooding air of depression reached

out and fell upon me like a material pall. In the yard was parked the same truck that had passed us a few minutes before.

I knocked loudly on the sagging door. Shoes scraped presently on the floor inside, and a drooling, hair-lipped face peered out at me.

"I'd like to use your telephone," I began. "A gang of ruffians attacked us, and I want to get in touch with the authorities."

"I haven't got any phone."

He said it in a strange, nasal voice that seemed bewildered and full of latent fear. A huge slattern of a woman, evidently the man's wife, thrust her moon-face over his shoulder.

"Can you put us up for the night then?" I asked. "I'll pay you well."

The man swallowed, then opened the door wider, and I stepped into the ellipse of light. Instantly he gave a hoarse cry and jerked rigid.

"The mark!" he screamed. "The mark! You can't come in here!"

I stared. Out of the corner of my eye I saw Lucia turn her gaze toward me and fall back a pace. Only the old woman seemed unmoved.

"Let 'em in, Luke," she said through fat lips. "They look like good folks."

With a snarl the man struck her across the mouth. He gave me a violent shove and slammed shut the door.

My fists clenched. For a moment I fought an impulse to rip the barrier open again. Then I turned, took my wife's arm and moved slowly down to the road.

CHAPTER II

Gloom House

THE air was black and still. But it was a pregnant stillness that seemed to speak of death. Gnarled oak trees lined the road. In the light of the flash they rose up in rotation like hideous malformed monsters.

Several times as we plodded on toward the village I saw Lucia glance at me in a strange way. At length

she stopped. She fumbled with her purse and drew out a flat object. A mirror.

"Paul," she said, and there was terror in her voice, "I want you to do something. I want you to look in this glass. If—if you see nothing, then I'm afraid I'm going mad."

A vague numbness crept over me as I took the mirror. I brought the flashlight up so that its white light flooded my face. Then I stared at my reflection. A hoarse cry spewed from my lips.

Outlined in flaming relief on the white skin of my forehead was a crimson mark! A design forming a cloven hoof. And it was embossed, upraised, as if it came from beneath the skin.

The mirror fell from my shaking hands. Cold sweat oozed out on me. What I said then I don't remember. Nor do I remember trudging mechanically down the black road until we reached Blairville.

But at length I became vaguely aware that Lucia had halted under the rusted sign that said RELLER TAVERN. Strength seemed to flow back to me then, and I led the way through the door.

The change from the night shadows to the interior of the inn was but relative. A smoking kerosene lamp spilled a dingy radiance over a low-ceilinged room. At a table to one side sat Calvin Reller, the innkeeper's son, and the Russian girl, Sandra Markoff, apparently a guest of the inn. Neither looked up at our entrance. They were playing whist.

Behind the counter in the rear stood the innkeeper, John Reller. He was deformed, bullet-headed, with a face repulsive in its bloodlessness. I crossed to the desk.

"I want a room," I said, "for myself and my wife."

Deliberately the man reached out, pulled the register book from the desk and closed the covers.

"Filled up," he said shortly. "We have no accommodations for prying detectives here."

The words came as a last straw. I slammed my fists on the mahogany. What did he mean, detective? I had

nothing to do with the police. But something was wrong here, and I meant to find out what. I said this and more, venting my feelings in a feverish outburst of terror-fostered anger.

And when I had finished, John Reller looked across at Calvin. Abruptly he hobbled toward the staircase.

"Baggage?" he wheezed. "Ain't you got any baggage?"

"Yes. It's in the car parked down the street. I'll get it."

"Calvin can get it," John Reller said. "Give him the keys."

Then Lucia and I were mounting the stairs after him. Up two flights into the gloom of a narrow corridor we paced. John Reller fitted a key into the lock of the first door and ushered us across the threshold.

It was a wretched room with squalid furnishings. Sleazy wall paper hung in ribbons.

THE innkeeper dropped his misshapen body into a chair, gazed at us a moment, then began to speak.

"You can stay here 'til morning," he said. "Then you must go. And while you're here I take no responsibility for what happens to you. Blairville isn't cordial to the police."

He cleared his throat and went on.

"All I can say is this. The people of this plateau have their own beliefs, and we want no interference from outsiders. All who come here and are not wanted by the Master develop the mark you have on your forehead, the mark of a cloven hoof. All who have it and do not leave—die."

He broke off, listening. He got up abruptly, crossed to the window and opened it. For an instant there was no sound save his hoarse breathing. Then for the third time that night I heard it.

The strained, pulsing whisper of a dumb mute who is trying to laugh!

The innkeeper jerked down the window-shade and turned. "You must leave at dawn," he said huskily. "At dawn, do you understand? Otherwise—"

Steps sounded in the outer corridor and Calvin Reller entered the room,

carrying my gladstone and my wife's bag. Behind him came Sandra Markoff, through curiosity, perhaps, but apparently for no reason at all.

In the light of the smoke-blackened lamp there was something sinisterly reptilian about this man and this woman. The Russian girl wore a tight-fitting dress of black silk that revealed every contour of her perfectly formed body. Her hair was black and sleek with oil. Calvin resembled his father only insofar as he had the same bullet head.

The innkeeper made to leave now. "If you want anything," he said, "call Calvin. Good night."

I nodded and busied myself with the storing of the bags. When I stood up it was to face the Russian girl who had advanced close beside me.

"You are Paul," she said in a slow drawl, and repeated it. "Paul. You are a very handsome man, Paul. Your wife is a lucky woman."

I gaped at her. Her naively unconventional and unexpected remark had come abruptly, almost to the point of rudeness, but for an instant a wild desire came over me to seize and draw her body close to mine. I fought the sensation off. Good God, there, a few yards away, was my wife whom I loved with all my soul. Was I mad?

But that was all. Sandra Markoff moved toward the door, and Calvin Reller followed. They stood there, a portrait in black in the door frame. Then the latch clicked and they were gone.

For hours Lucia and I lay there, discussing the situation, trying to find a logical answer to all that had happened. A clock ticking slowly somewhere in the outer corridor at length lulled us to sleep.

I awoke in a cold sweat of terror! I sat upright in bed, listening to that clock. Moonlight filtered through a rent in the window shade to reveal Lucia at my side, her lovely head motionless on the pillow. Her eyes were closed. She was breathing deeply and regularly.

But what was wrong? I left the bed, moved to the window and drew up the shade. Outside the grounds,

the bordering shrubbery, were huge monolithic images under a mantle of blue.

The inn was a vault of silence. And the room was the same as before. The bed with my wife, the chair, the dressing stand. There was nobody here.

Nobody? Again I felt that crawling fear well over me. A cold shudder ran up my spine. Palpable, definite as though I could reach out and touch it, I felt the nearness of another presence. Silent horror blanketed the room like a living miasma. And then a ray of moonlight fell upon the farther wall.

I stood rigid, powerless to move. Before me, motionless as though carved in onyx, were the six figures that had attacked me on the bridge. Hooded heads, cowed robes, and the leader who had no face but a death face, an enameled skull.

THEY came at me with deliberate, precise steps. I screamed and threw myself sideward.

It was six against one, odds had they been living men. But within me was a blind hope that the sounds of the oncoming struggle would arouse the other occupants of the inn. I threw the chair.

With a rush they were upon me. Back and forth I wove, receiving silent blows, answering them in desperation and terror. My arm struck the window pane, and it shattered with a deafening crash. The dressing stand toppled, thundered to the floor. Yet through it all Lucia, who usually awoke at the slightest sound, slept peacefully on and in the inn below there was no sound.

Once more that enameled skull face came close to my own. I looked into eyeless sockets, hell-holes of phosphorescent flame.

My arms were pinioned to my sides. Struggling, I was lifted, borne cross the room and out into the corridor. And the last thing I saw was my wife still asleep in the bed.

After that I plunged into a maelstrom of terror. I was carried down the stairs and out into the deserted street, blindfolded.

Eons later I knew we were descending below the earth's surface into what seemed a narrow, winding tunnel. Abruptly my captors halted. The bandage was torn from my eyes.

That underground chamber—how shall I describe it? It was an enormous cavern, the ceiling lost in spectral shadow, the four walls covered with thick hangings of black cloth. Rows of electric lamps extended on brackets from those walls, and in the center, upraised on a granite dais, was a statue.

The sight of that statue sent a wave of horror through me. The thing was huge, obscenely carved to represent a hybrid figure, half goat, half man.

The head had been painted in lifelike colors, adorned with glass eyes and long human hair. Horns projected hideously from either temple. The gigantic forelegs were upraised. Looking at it, held by its staring gaze, I had the impossible realization that it was alive.

The space back of the statue was clouded with a slow drifting fog of leprous white. Beside me stood the six cowed figures. And as I swayed there, the leader spoke.

"Why have you come here? You are not wanted on this plateau. Actions have been taken against you, but you have persisted in staying. We tolerate no investigation by outside police. The Master has caused the sacred mark to appear on you, and now you must die."

It was not the words but the fog as it suddenly lifted that brought a frantic scream to my lips. Revealed in the thinner mist was a crowd of living persons. Men and women, country people of the plateau. They stood shoulder to shoulder, watching me.

"Let the sacrifice begin."

From a doorway at the far wall one of the cowed figures came forward, dragging an old man. He was dressed like a miner. Hypnotically, he permitted himself to be led up the steps to the dais. Quickly he was lashed prone beneath the image's upraised legs.

The droning voice began to chant again:

"Behold what happens to him who defies the Master. Behold, swine, and let it be an example to you."

A strained hush fell upon the underground chamber. And then as I stared, I saw the cloven feet of the image begin to descend. Slowly, relentlessly, they lowered themselves toward the helpless man.

The statue's eyes in the tinted head seemed to gleam and glisten. A hideous mumble of anticipation rose from a hundred throats.

Suddenly the man jerked rigid and uttered a single agonized scream. The cloven feet had touched his chest. A coil of black smoke and the sickening stench of burnt flesh billowed upward. A moment later I was gazing at a motionless, fire-blackened corpse.

How I retained my sanity through those moments of madness I don't know. My eyes had shudderingly and involuntarily closed. When I opened them again, the body was gone. The cowed figures stepped forward, dragged me onto the granite dais and secured me to the still-hot slab.

I was to be the second victim!

CHAPTER III

The Mark of the Cloven Hoof

THE droning voice resumed, chanting words that were unintelligible to me. The electric lamps on the walls dimmed to a weird ghastly glow.

And then suddenly I became aware that one of the onlooking men had moved quietly to a position in advance of the others. A voice I seemed vaguely to remember whispered hoarsely in my ear:

"I'm cutting your bonds. In a minute I'll switch off the lights. The way out is a tunnel opening on the left wall."

I lived a year in the next twenty seconds. Above me the cloven hoofs began to descend—they were but six

inches away. And then the room was plunged in total blackness.

With a lunge I kicked aside my cut bonds, threw myself off the dais and leaped for the farther wall. Cries and shouts rose up around me. Clawing hands sought to cut off my escape. On to the black drapes on the far side of the cavern I raced. And there I clawed for the exit.

I found it. A last frantic blow at a crouching shadow, and I was plunging into the winding depths of the tunnel. I ran blindly, gouging my face and arms on the side walls. To the rear was bedlam, screaming excitement.

But the sounds faded as I raced on. Abruptly the tunnel widened, and a patch of moonlit sky showed before me. The next instant I emerged into the clean coolness of the open air.

The cliff was my guide now. Sick with horror, I turned east, crossed an open field and found myself by the road not far from town. I threw myself in a clump of underbrush and waited to quiet my pounding heart. For the moment I was safe.

Safe, yes—but what of Lucia alone in Reller Tavern? Had those fiends of hell attacked my wife, too? I lurched to my feet, stumbled onto the road. Fear swept through me like an icy hand, lent strength to my exhausted body.

Ten minutes later I was pacing through the shadows of Blairville's single street. I passed my car, parked silent and alone.

Then suddenly I leaped into the gloom of a near doorway!

Twenty yards distant the street door of Reller Tavern had opened to discharge a tall, gangling figure. It was the figure of a man, clad in a black opera cloak and black silk top hat. A cane in his right hand, he began tapping his way slowly toward me.

Hugging the shadows I watched him glide past. Even in the moonlight his face, coarse and bestial, pitted from some ancient disease, sent a cold shudder through me. He continued down the walk, turned in the doorway of a large barnlike build-

ing and disappeared from my sight.

For an instant I stood undecided. Then a blind, overpowering impulse came, and I moved in pursuit. The door of the building was unlocked. I slid inside and entered a large chamber.

Once a warehouse, the interior had been remodeled into a rude amphitheater. The center space was filled from wall to wall with rows of seats, fashioned from packing cases and long wooden planks. A single carbide lamp depended from the ceiling, threw down an eerie, yellow light.

THE man I had followed was at the far end of the room. He had removed his hat and was kneeling before an altar, surrounded by a row of flickering candles. To either side stood small images, each, in miniature, identical with the torture statue in the underground cavern.

In a flash I understood. Here was the temple where the followers of the plateau's strange religious sect gathered to worship, and the man before me was their priest!

But I had no desire further to investigate. I thought only of my wife, and, cursing myself for this unwarranted delay, I stole silently to the door and gained the street.

Two minutes later I was in the lobby of Reller Tavern. The flame of the lamp was turned low, but I saw at once that there was another occupant of the room. Seated in a huge fan-back chair, her voluptuous figure still clad in that black dress, was Sandra Markoff. Her raven hair was undone, hung in gleaming cascades over her shoulders. Her lips were two lines of vermilion.

"So you, too, found it difficult to sleep?" Her voice seemed to reach out and flow into me like a draught of old wine. "Come here, Paul, and sit beside me."

Slowly, like a man mesmerized, I felt myself drawn to a divan beside her chair. Slowly I lowered myself into it, unable to tear my gaze from her liquid eyes. She smiled then—a smile of victory, I thought. Rising, she came over to me.

But the spell was broken abruptly. Voices sounded outside the lobby window. I jerked back, listening. Unmindful of Sandra's restraining hand, I leaped up, moved to the open casement and peered out.

Five feet away two men stood. Their backs were turned toward me, but as I stared at them, one tall, one dwarfed and misshapen, I recognized them as the innkeeper, John Reller, and Luke Haines, the farmer who had refused us shelter at his house near the bridge. John Reller was speaking.

"The Master came for him," he said huskily. "But he escaped. He is back here now with the Russian woman in the lobby. His wife is upstairs."

Luke Haines nodded. "I know," he said. "It was me helped him escape. Me."

"You?"

"Yes, and I'd do it again. Two weeks ago the Master took my daughter, Mary. Took her from my home like the fiend he is. I haven't seen her since. But I'll have my vengeance. By the living God—"

"Silence!" John Reller cut him off. "Even now the Master may hear what you say. The woman is upstairs. She will develop the mark, and the Master will come for her."

For a split second I stood motionless while the significance of those last words slowly seeped into my consciousness. Then with a cry I turned and raced for the stairs. Fear knifing into my heart I stumbled to the second level, ran to our bedchamber and flung open the door.

Silence. The single window, blue with moonlight, loomed before me like an enormous eye. My steps were leaden as I crossed to the bed. A mighty ache probed my soul. Then I uttered a prayer of relief. Still sleeping, Lucia lay there.

BUT a moment later a slow doubt began to form in my mind. It had been strange enough that she should have slept through all the confusion of the struggle. But how quiet she was now! I couldn't even

detect the rise and fall of her breasts as she breathed.

Merciful God! My heart turned to stone as my gaze centered on her brow.

There, the same as upon my own forehead, was that hideous mark, the mark of a cloven hoof. And like my own, it was upraised as if it came from beneath the skin!

The clock in the outer corridor ticked a passing minute. I grasped my wife's arm and shook her. She did not move. Terror eating into me, I lifted her and carried her to a chair.

"Lucia! Speak to me!"

Over the sound of my agonized voice a new sound filtered into the room. The sound of slow-moving footsteps. The door to our room swung open.

Leering, John Reller stood on the threshold. I lurched forward, seized him. "You!" I cried. "You did this! Awaken my wife, or I'll—"

He shook his head. "I have come to help you escape," he said quietly. "You must hurry. Carry your wife down to the car, and I'll show you."

The softness of his speech jarred me back to reality. Escape? Of course. I had only to enter my car and drive to the county road again. Lifting Lucia, I followed the innkeeper.

His words came abruptly to checkmate my hopes.

"The road by which you came is being watched. The only way out is the old fishing road along the shore. Luke Haines will drive with you and show you the way."

He added in his strange, emotionless way: "You can trust Luke."

We had reached the lobby now, and the innkeeper stopped. Sandra Markoff had gone. Gone to her room, no doubt. But it was the two men who most greatly occupied my thoughts. How could I be sure John Reller was telling the truth? Why should I trust Luke Haines?

We waited. John Reller picked up the wine bottle on the table, drank till he was gasping. His hands trembled as he set the bottle down.

And then it happened! The latch-

handle turned, and the lobby door was ripped open wide. A huge, hulking shape staggered inside, lurched three steps and crashed to the floor. Luke Haines!

Even as I moved to the divan, laid the unconscious form of my wife upon it and turned toward the prone figure, John Reller's rasping voice came to me:

"He's dead!" he said. "And how he must have suffered!"

I bent down, horror settling over me like a black blanket. Luke Haines' face was contorted in a last death agony. It was a hideous gargoyle of excruciating pain. He was naked to the waist, and across the center of his chest was a horrible wound.

The mark of a cloven hoof, a foot square, had been branded upon him with a white hot iron!

One moment the innkeeper knelt there. Hoarse gurgling sounds rumbled from his throat. He got to his feet.

"I'll get Calvin," he said. "I'll get my son. He'll know what to do."

He paced across to the door, swayed a moment and stepped into the shadows.

WHEN he had gone I went back to my wife. A strange calmness had come over me. My brain, choked with horror, would react to no more.

Vaguely I was conscious of a lapse of time. The door opened, and Calvin entered the room. Before, I had disliked the sight of him. Now that dislike was magnified as tall, scarlet-lipped, he stood there quietly.

"My father has told me what happened," he said, glancing at Luke Haines' body. "You were going to escape by the shore road. I'll drive with you and show you the way."

I got up, studied his face deliberately. Nodding my assent, I moved toward Lucia.

"You've forgotten your bags," he suggested. "Hadn't you better get them?"

For the barest fraction of a second I hesitated. Then I turned and head-

ed for the stairs. The bags were where I had left them, by the dressing stand, in our room. But before I returned to the corridor, something, an indefinable urge, led me to cross to the window and peer out its shattered opening.

Below, to the left, Blairville's single street lay. Forty yards distant loomed the abandoned warehouse I had assumed was the plateau's temple.

I stiffened. The door to that building opened. Clad again in his tall hat and opera cape, the figure of the priest advanced down the walk. There was something sinister, something utterly evil in the way he glided forward, tapping with his heavy cane. I watched him until the tavern wall hid him from sight. Then I turned and made for the hall door.

But the dressing stand, when it had fallen during my fight, had broken the catch of Lucia's bag. It fell open, spilling the contents on the floor. With a growl of irritation I bent down and began to gather the strewn articles. Two minutes elapsed before I reached the lobby again.

On the bottom step, I stumbled to a halt with a hoarse, agonized cry. In a split second my eyes had telegraphed the facts, the impossible facts to my brain.

The corpse of Luke Haines still lay there on the floor. Next to it, sprawled grotesquely, though still breathing, was Calvin Reller!

And at the far side of the room, on the divan where I had left Lucia a moment were only soiled inanimate cushions. There was no sign of my wife!

Fear, like a slaving ghoul, whipped its tentacles about me. As in a nightmarish dream I lurched down, began to chafe the unconscious man's wrists.

"My wife!" I cried. "Where is she? For God's sake, man, talk!"

Moaning slightly, Calvin opened his eyes. He sucked in his breath, stumbled to his feet.

"It—it was the Master," he whispered. "I saw him. He came through that door, and his face was the face of a skull."

For an instant I gaped at him. A flash of suspicion swept through me. Then with a sob I seized Reller by the shoulder.

"We're going to find her," I screamed. "Do you understand? Not even the devil in hell can stop me. Come on!"

I dragged him to the door, ripped it open, pushed him out. With dead eyes I scanned the gloom. I shouted Lucia's name. Blairville's silent street stretched on and beyond, a shadow-flanked lane of mockery.

"Reller," I said, "she must be in that temple! You take the back, find a rear entrance. I'll go to the front. That priest—"

Reller nodded. He picked up a heavy rock and moved off into the darkness. I lunged forward, grasped the door of the warehouse and yanked it open.

CHAPTER IV

Into the Abyss

BUT in the temple I found nothing. From back to front I ran, yelling hysterically. I searched each aisle between the plank seats. Defeated, bewildered, I found myself again in the street.

Mechanically I turned toward the tavern. I saw no sign of Calvin. I reached the lobby door and staggered inside.

And then I heard it. Ricocheting through the walls of the inn came a long high-pitched scream. From below it came, from somewhere beneath the ground level. And distorted though it was, I knew that voice.

I leaped across the room, tore open a trap door next to the desk. The aperture revealed wooden stairs snaking down into a pit of blackness.

I was a mad beast then, an animal pursuing the thing that had stolen its mate. The staircase was circular. At the bottom step I thrust trembling fingers into my pocket, clawed out a match. A cement-walled corridor extended before me, angling deep under the rear of Reller Tavern.

Twenty feet on, the corridor turned. I lit another match. A huge oaken door barred my way.

And while the tiny flame flickered and flared I stood motionless. The match died. Edging forward, I pushed open the door.

The space beyond was a Stygian tapestry of utter blackness. Arms outstretched, I advanced slowly. Then the light came.

Blazing white light from an electric trolly in the ceiling. Four walls of plaster formed a rectangular room of eye-aching whiteness. In the center was a huge flat-topped desk. And behind that desk sat a cowed figure.

It was the same figure I had seen twice before, the leader of the six fiends who had attacked me on the bridge. Tall and gaunt, arms folded before him, his face was the face of a lifeless corpse, a gleaming enameled skull.

But when he began to speak, oddly his voice was familiar.

"Welcome," he said. "Welcome to my private study."

I swayed there, sweat oozing out on me. "You damned fiend!" I cried. "What have you done with my wife?"

He leaned back.

"Your wife? She is your wife no longer, my friend. The woman you so foolishly brought to this plateau is beyond human aid. At this moment she is being prepared for sacrifice to satisfy the fear-crazed population of Blairville. I had planned to hold her for my own amusement at first. But I have decided to let the granite image claim another victim."

A bomb burst within me. With a stifled cry I lunged forward. A revolver leaped into the corpse-like figure's hand, spat flame, and a hot sword of agony whipped into my left side.

But bullets could not stop me. I reached the desk, vaulted over it. Skull-face kicked his chair backward, brought his fists to meet the attack.

In an instant we were on the floor, rolling over and over. My fist reached his mouth, struck something yielding and brittle. But I was pounding an impregnable mountain

of bone and sinew. Steel-like hands jerked outward to fasten themselves about my throat. My breath was cut off. I felt myself falling, falling back into a pit of darkness. Yet even as unconsciousness closed in on me I saw the face of my opponent. Unmasked, it was the face of Calvin Reller!

WHEN I opened my eyes, the scene was the same as before. Nauseated, my brain still festering with terror, I was lying on the floor at the far side of the room, ankles securely bound. Ten feet away, Calvin leaned lightly against his desk.

His face was a hideous mask of evil triumph. His eyes held the gleam of madness.

"Let us talk facts, my friend," he began slowly and suavely. "Now that you have penetrated my disguise I will give you full credit for your cleverness. Posing as a man on a honeymoon and bringing that girl with you was a trick worthy of my own manufacture. Had it not been for the all-seeing eyes of my assistants I would not have known you were a detective, sent here by the police to investigate."

I writhed helplessly. "I don't know what you mean," I howled. "I have nothing to do with the police."

"No?" His slow smile mocked me. "You are too modest, my friend. But I have already admitted your cleverness. No doubt you also have begun to guess at the nature of my operations. You have seen our priest, our temple, our sacred image, and perhaps our mines. But what you have learned you will carry to the grave with you. Look below."

As he spoke, he thumbed a switch on the side of his desk. A large section of the floor rolled back on a concealed pivot to disclose a yawning opening. I leaned forward as far as my bonds would permit and looked down. A yell of horror escaped me.

I was peering into a funnel-shaped shaft, the bottom far below opening into a wide cavern. That cavern was the same underground chamber from which I had escaped a short time be-

fore. As a man staring through a telescope I looked again upon the assembled crowd of country people, mine workers, upon the black walls, the rows of electric lamps.

But there was more—and merciful God! I felt the blood slowly congeal in my veins as each detail outlined itself beneath me. A long iron bar extended from one side of the cave to the other. Depending from this bar by hooks jammed deep into the flesh of their shoulders were ten nude corpses. Corpses of five men and five women! They hung at spaced intervals, heads lolling backward, faces contorted, bodies burned and blackened. Five feet in front of them the granite image reared its bestial form. Close beside the image stood the Russian woman, Sandra Markoff. And upon the statue's torture slab, stretched full length, was the naked figure of Lucia, my wife!

Calvin Reller's voice began, a devil's litany that flowed across the room like liquid flame.

"The ten unfortunates on the bar have already been sacrificed. There is one missing, of course. Luke Haines was mad enough to cut your bonds and aid your escape. The fool rebelled simply because I took his daughter. But I discovered his treachery, and you have seen how he paid the penalty.

"You are wondering what profit I find in all this? I will tell you. The hills surrounding Blairville are of a peculiar volcanic formation. They are rich with an ore, a mineral which would amaze any geologist. I have called that mineral 'coronium', because it differs from all other known minerals and because it resembles the spectroscopic components found in the corona of the sun. It is almost as valuable as radium. So that I, alone, may profit from my discovery, you can probably see the necessity for keeping outsiders away. With the most effective of all available weapons—terror.

"But watch closely. In a moment Sandra will speak the word, and the image will act. That image is alive,
(Continued on Page 119)

HALFWAY



A Complete Novelette of Gripping Mystery

CHAPTER I

Dead Girl in the Canyon

IT was late afternoon when the blizzard struck us. The day until then had been a successful one, uneventful doubtless, judged by

the standards of veteran mountain climbers who toil at risk of life and limb to scale glacial heights. We had, certainly, done what we set out to do. The massive 13,000-foot serrated peaks of Mount Sir Joseph loomed white against the grey of the sky be-

A Grotesque Fiend Drives Victims to

to HORROR



We saw the
agonized
white face
of the
ghastly
body

By
RAY CUMMINGS

Author of "World of Doom," "Horror House," etc.

hind and above us. We had fought our precarious way to the summit, and now down again. Five of us, and our guide. Long-handled ice-axe in hand, roped together, with equipment packs on our backs, and amber goggles on our eyes against the glare, we

had made the trip without accident.

We were well down into timber line now, when almost without warning, the frosty blue of the sky clouded, a wind came roaring, and a blizzard was upon us. The snow soon was a smother of huge white flakes slanting

Insanity and Death in a Raging Blizzard

horizontally in a wind of such fury that upon the open ramps we could hardly stand up against it. And the comparative warmth of the brilliant sunlight abruptly was gone, with a zero blast whipping us.

We were on the lower reaches of the mountain now—stunted timber, evergreens piled with snow from the last storm, grey rock-ravines and crags, alternately snow-patched and naked where the wind had whipped them. For half an hour past we had discarded the rope; our guide carried it looped around his pack.

Except for this guide, a handsome dark-haired young fellow named Peter Trow who worked with parties around Mt. Rainier, none of us were experienced mountain climbers. We were, in truth, a strange little party—ill-assorted, thrown together by circumstances into this night of horror which to Tina James and me will all our lives remain a shuddering memory.

And I think that now it was as we fought our way forward through the whirling smother of the blizzard, that the first presage of horror came upon me. A tightening of the heart; a chilling sense of disaster, as though, after all the perils of the day, the real danger yet lay ahead.

But it could have been nothing more than a coincidental premonition. We were only a mile or two from Halfway House, a shelter equipped for such travelers as might pass this way. The rocky trail we were now following led directly to it. Peter Trow knew the place. No possibility of our getting lost, for all the fury of the blizzard. We could certainly reach Halfway House before dark. We would spend the night there, instead of going on to the village of Eagle Pass some ten miles further. Trow assured us we would find a fire-place; dishes, and cooking utensils; and bunks on which to spread our sleeping bags.

Yet still that sense of disaster was upon me. Tina and I were plodding together. Old Professor James, Tina's uncle and guardian, called back to us:

"Mighty lucky this shelter is here. I'd hate to try and make Eagle Pass."

The wind tore at his words and flung them away. He waved his staff with a gesture. His figure, twenty feet ahead, trudging beside Peter Trow, was a dark blob in the blurred murk. Ten feet behind him his gaunt, hatchet-faced wife, a foot taller than her rotund little husband, walked with young Professor Lee Carrington. Tina and I brought up the rear.

NO particular details about me are necessary here, save that my name is George Halton, age twenty-five, junior partner of an accounting firm in Seattle. I had met Tina James the previous summer. Perhaps, because I am blond and six feet tall—and Tina is small and beautiful in a darkly Latin fashion, we were quickly attracted to each other.

We became engaged. Then I met her family. I liked at once Professor Marvin James. And he offered no objection to our engagement. A likable little man—jolly, active and wiry for all his sixty years. He had been a professor of geology at a Pacific Coast university.

But if Professor James liked me, his wife did not. Grimness sat heavily upon the tall, gaunt woman. A sort of frustration, perhaps because she was childless. I thought at first it was a natural feeling that she should resent me—or any man—taking Tina away from her. But I soon found that could hardly be so. For I had had a rival of whom Mrs. James most distinctly approved. He was a handsome fellow, Professor Lee Carrington. About thirty, I judged, tall, dark and vigorous. I have a rough and tumble aspect. Lee Carrington was suave, debonair, with an adventurous, world-traveler look about him.

He had made ardent love to Tina, but she did not love him—a fact he finally accepted in his characteristic sardonic spirit. And had agreed always to be her good friend; nothing more. Such was our little mountaineering party in the wilds of Alberta, near the Saskatchewan line.

I am not naturally suspicious; I was

willing to have the handsome Carrington as my friend and Tina's. But there had been times today as we had precariously climbed among the frozen crags and fissures of Mount Sir Joseph when my alert fancy seemed to warn me that if Carrington could have caught me unroped, he might easily be imagined giving me a little nudge and sardonically smiling as he watched me slide and fall to my death. And certainly the grim Mrs. James would not have been sorry. But nothing had happened. Except that here we were enveloped by a blizzard—with the triumph behind us of our conquest of Mount Sir Joseph; and ahead, the comparative security of the Halfway House.

Amazing, the fury of this northland mountain blizzard. The glistening peaks of Sir Joseph, which had loomed above us, were gone; the tumbled terrain of these lower reaches of the broad mountain base showed only as a grey blur. Daylight was fading; night soon would be upon us—roaring zero darkness in which, off the trail, one might tumble into the luring warmth of a snowdrift and go to sleep, never to awaken.

I felt Tina pulling at my arm. "You think Trow can keep us to the trail?"

The wind snatched at her words so that she had to shout them. I was gripping her arm as we fought our way forward. Little snow-enveloped figure, the top of her tasseled cap hardly reaching my shoulder; slim figure for all the bulk of her short heavy mackinaw, her baggy woolen trousers, and the high alpine boots hobnailed for foothold on rocks and ice.

It seemed an eternity as we struggled on, with the wind roaring and the darkness coming like a threat of death.

At times Professor James and Trow were wading waist deep—Trow in front, and the rest of us following his canyon-like rut through the soft drifts. Then again we would come to places where the naked rocks were clear, wind-swept and black.

"Not much further," Carrington shouted presently. "Half a mile—"

THE blurring smother of the blizzard was a shroud. We could see barely fifty feet. Off to one side of the trail, down a declivity, was a canyon-rift with a frozen river at its bottom. And suddenly, ahead of us down there, we saw a human figure, which our forward movement brought into abrupt visibility.

It was a sight so startling that we checked our advance, gathering in a group with the gale-swept snow whipping us. The figure was hardly fifty feet away—a man garbed much like ourselves but without a pack. He seemed not to have seen us. He was bending low to the ground, scooping at the snow. Already he had dug a hole, a purple-shadowed little pit with a mound of loose snow beside it.

And then he became aware of us. He stooped, snatched his rifle from the snow beside him and jumped to his feet, stood stricken at sight of us.

And we were stricken—at the horrible sight before us. But though my every instinct shocked into shuddering revolt, I could not help peering at the grisly scene.

The man with the rifle was not alone, for beside him on the frozen river bank lay another figure. A stiff pink-white form—a nude young woman lying there, frozen, limbs stiffened and her dark flowing tresses congealed and matted with ice. Her face was set into a contorted grimace of agony and terror, with goggling eyes and opened mouth as though still a scream must be bursting from it. And on the pink-white beauty of her lithe young body, were ghastly crimson smears of frozen blood—gaping wounds in her breast and thigh—congealed gore so horrible of aspect that the sight swam before my gaze.

CHAPTER II

Lurking Monster

FOR a moment we stood numbed by horror. Peter Trow, the only one of us who was armed, slung his rifle off his shoulder, lifted it to sight down into the gorge.

A moment only. Then the man in the gorge seemed to gather his wits. He lowered his rifle; then he called, with his voice floating upward through the snowy shroud:

"Do not shoot! Come down here!"

"Stop!" Professor James gasped. "Don't shoot at him, Trow—"

The man down there called again:

"Come down here—"

The trail led us close past him. As we advanced, again he stooped. He had already tumbled the ghastly body into the little snowy pit and was shoving the snow upon it when we came up to him. It was a gruesome burial. That agonized white face peering up, and a curve of the rounded thigh, splashed with grisly crimson—then the last clod of snow hid it, and the man leaped to his feet, confronting us, panting from his efforts.

"You—you—" Professor James was gasping, wordless, almost incoherent from horror. "What are you doing?"

"Burying her," the man said with startling calmness. He gazed from one to the other of us—at Trow, with his rifle half raised; at Tina and me; at the gaunt and grim Mrs. James who was clutching Carrington's arm. "Burying her," he repeated with that queer poised calm. "Her I found jus' near here." He gestured with his rifle. "She was lying—jus' like that as you saw her." He added, "The wolves—they eat—I thought I better bury her—"

"Who are you?" I demanded.

His gaze darted at me, as though for all his calm he was startled at my aggression. He was a man of perhaps thirty, smallish and dark, with a two-day growth of beard on his lean face. He looked like a foreigner. "My name is Robert Arntz," he said. "I am hunter and trapper. In summer I work for the Department of Forestry—how you call it, a ranger?" He was smiling, as though confident of his credentials. "I have some pelts now in my leetle camp—"

He gestured toward where the peaks of the giant mountain were lost in the gathering darkness and the blur of the blizzard. "My camp," he

reiterated, "over there in the north foothills. I have bad luck today. I think to make Eagle Pass tonight, for supplies of food."

He seemed to be telling the truth. A French Canadian, he told us; from the Province of Quebec; but he was a settler here now, with his summer work as Forest Ranger. He had been heading for Eagle Pass when the blizzard overtook him. When he had come upon the body of the girl.

"I hear, in Eagle Pass," he said, "there were some young ladies of a school in Vancouver who come here the other day to climb the mountain Sir Joseph. An' one of them—she was los'. Never was she found."

This, of course, must be she. Then Professor James explained who we were and what we were doing here.

NIGHT was gathering deeply, a roaring, snow-drenched chaos of darkness. Peter Trow had his flashlight illumined now; its small beam swept with an eerie waver around us as we stood beside the grave in the snow.

"We thought we'd make Eagle Pass tonight," Professor James was saying, "but this storm—we've decided to take shelter for the night in the Halfway House. It's only a little way from here, isn't it?"

"The—Halfway House?" Darkness shrouded the face of the forest ranger, but his voice had a startled ring. "The Halfway House? You—" But whatever his startled emotions, he instantly controlled them. He added quickly, "I theenk you should go on to Eagle Pass. There are things queer around thees place we call the Halfway House. No one stops there now. I know—I travel here—I have hear—"

"What?" Carrington suddenly demanded. "Don't talk in riddles. We're cold and hungry. Why shouldn't we take the nearest shelter?"

"Things queer," Arntz reiterated stolidly. He made a vague gesture. "This dead girl—is that not queer? Something—never to be seen roams these mountains by night. I have hear' the tales—"

"**NONSENSE,**" snapped Carrington. "Superstition of ignorant trappers—" But certainly we had to go somewhere, and quickly. We turned from the grave and trudged down the gorge, following Arntz, who with Trow broke trail ahead of us.

Perhaps we might have decided to fight our way on to Eagle Pass, but the storm left us no choice. Once out of the gorge, the wind and snow of the open pounded us with new fury. Tina was game, fighting her way along; Mrs. James, with the grim brute strength of a man, trudged unprotesting. But how could we do ten miles of this? With the night a black murk and only futile flashlight beams to penetrate the vast raging darkness which was like a great unfathomable abyss?

Ten miles of this? We could not make it. I called suddenly.

"I don't think we can get to Eagle Pass."

It brought the whole party to a halt. Carrington said, "Thank God somebody's got some sense."

"Can we find that Halfway House?" Mrs. James demanded. "Whatever he says, any place is better than this."

Arntz suddenly yielded. "It is near here. I will go with you—if that you insist—"

We started again, faster now with the promise of shelter spurring us.

We came at last to a trail on an upland patch swept almost bare by the fury of the gale. Dimly I saw that frozen river gorge to our right. Off to the left a few hundred feet was the brink of a great abyss down to one of the timbered valleys of the mountain foothills.

Upon this narrow upland reach, with parallel brinks closely crowding it, the low grey walls of Halfway House presently loomed before us through the lashing murk of the blizzard. A single story building, low and square and squat; crudely built of stone, yet fairly large. Once, I understood, it had been a base for government forest rangers, but it was deserted now to be used only by chance wayfarers.

It was set close to the brink of the fifty-foot deep frozen gorge. Behind it was an almost leveled area of crags and stunted tree growth some two hundred feet back to the lip of the great precipice that yawned above the far-down timbered valley. From the building a little railed wooden walk led across through the crags and trees to a small stone and wooden kiosk built on the valley brink. Like an eagle's nest hanging precariously with the broad reaches of the forested valley spread beneath it. An eyrie, doubtless, where in past summers rangers might have sat watching for the betraying smoke of forest fires.

The heavy beamed front door of the house was ajar, with a snowdrift piling the threshold, and the wind lashing and roaring around the building with a steady howl. We shoved at the door. And it was at that instant that, off in the dark woods nearby, I saw a figure lurking. A blob by a tree-trunk, formless, with snow enveloping it.

"Look!" I exclaimed. "Look there!"

But it was gone in that second; and no one else seemed to have seen it.

"What was it?" Carrington demanded.

A darting, vanishing shadow? How could I describe it to them? A man—gigantic? An upright animal?

"Someone—something," I gasped, "out there watching us."

Impulsively I had started toward where it had been, with Carrington after me. But with a bound Arntz was upon us.

"Do not! You—you could not catch it!"

I had my flashlight illumined, and its glow showed Arntz' face. It was pallid with terror.

"That—that roaming thing," he pleaded, "it is not human. You could not catch it. Or if you did—it would kill you!"

Carrington laughed. "Did you really see anybody, Halton?"

Had I? Or had it been my fancy? But Carrington's sardonic laugh aroused my anger.

"Suit yourself," I said. "Come on,

I guess we'd better go inside."

It was a dark and silent interior. Our lights showed a big bare room, rustic wooden furniture, and an empty black fireplace with a huge stone hearth-slab. A rustic room, with the gathered silt of years of disuse. An old lamp was on the wooden table. A mouldering, tattered bear-skin rug was on the floor. There were two windows; and two interior doors standing darkly open. We dropped our packs to the floor.

Carrington called from one of the doorways: "Here's the kitchen—dishes, pots and pans. We'll be comfortable."

We ran through the other door into a big bunkroom. Bunks in tiers were there. A single window was at one end of it.

WE gathered back in the big living room. The house obviously was empty of menace. Seemingly there was no cellar; no attic. Just this living room; the large bunkroom with its dozen or more bunks; the big kitchen, with a pantry adjacent.

The gaunt, dour Mrs. James was poking with a flashlight about the living room.

"Seems like oil in this lamp," she exclaimed suddenly. Her match flared. The big lampwick ignited. The table and the floor glowed with a broad circle of yellow illumination.

"Good!" said Carrington. "The last people here did us a favor. Try the kitchen, Mrs. James. Maybe there's also one out there. Arntz, suppose you and I make up the bunks? You didn't carry a pack of your own?"

Queer! No answer to Carrington's question came from Arntz. Then abruptly we realized that neither Arntz nor Peter Trow were here!

"Why, what became of them?" Professor James demanded. "They were here a minute ago, weren't they?"

In our haste of searching the dark house, we had only assumed they were with us. Peter Trow's pack, I saw now, was missing from our equipment. My startled mind flung back—that lurking Thing I had seen out-

side—could that have been Trow? Nonsense! He had been right with us at that time. And Arntz most certainly had been. He had leaped at Carrington and me, told us we could not catch the fleeing shape.

"Don't remember Trow coming in," Carrington was saying. "But Arntz was out in the kitchen with me a minute ago."

I took a quick look into the bunkroom and kitchen. But Arntz and Trow had vanished.

"Deserted us," Carrington said, and shrugged. "Oh, well, if they'd rather brave the storm than be comfortable here, they're welcome."

HE resumed his unpacking. I went to the living room door, opened it a trifle. The snow came at me like thrusting icicles through the slit of the door. I was about to slam it closed, when outside under the storm-lashed trees, a yellow shaft of light from the living room window caught my attention. Something was out there again, by a distant clump of trees!

Not my imagination, this time! The big oil-lamp in the living room sent a shaft through the window that for a distance penetrated the smother of falling snow. An upright Thing, out there by that tree! A man? It was so snow-blurred I could not tell. But I thought I was seeing a horribly tall, gaunt shape, bloated, with the snow upon it.

I whirled back into the room.

"It's out there again!" I gasped.

Was it Trow? Was it Arntz? Impossible! It was far bigger than either of them. Monstrous—shapeless—not human! A giant, weird animal? A Thing—gruesomely unnameable!

The others were hurrying to the door.

And simultaneously from the kitchen, we heard Arntz' voice.

"What is it? What is the matter?"

He came running. I saw again that look of terror on his face. And he was covered with snow. Evidently he had just come in the kitchen door.

"Where were you?" I demanded.

"I—I went outside. Jus' for a minute. I was looking—"

"Well, it's out there now. Look!"

I swung for the doorway where the others were crowding. But the damnable Thing had vanished again.

"You're an imaginative fool," Carrington sneered. "Come on—let's get unpacked. There's no lurking monster out there—forget it."

But I knew I had seen it. Trow's rifle, which had vanished with him, was the only firearm in our party. No—Arntz had a rifle! It was in his hand now.

I seized him. "You've got a gun! Come on out, I'll show you where I saw it."

I have never seen so startled a look as crossed his face. "It—it cannot be shot," he gasped. "A bullet would not harm it—"

But he came through the doorway with me; followed close as I went a few paces out into the howl of the gale. The wind whipped and shoved at us. Facing it, one could not breathe, or see anything. I shouted through the roaring wind:

"Over this way, Arntz! If you see it, shoot!"

But there was nothing at which to shoot. We had partly turned the house-corner. Suddenly Arntz was stooping, fumbling for his flashlight, and his gesture brought me to where he stood.

The discovery he had made was horrible. A trail in the new soft snow. From whence it came could not be told, though the edge of a bare, wind-swept patch of rocks seemed its beginning. Giant blurred footprints. Animal? Human? Horror numbed me. These monstrous, misshapen indentations were too big for either animal or human. Naked, gigantic feet had plodded here. And the trail was fresh. Whirling snowflakes already were blurring it as we stared.

And as I bent down over one of the huge indentations, Arntz' light showed that the pflnts were smeared with blood! Warm blood, not yet frozen in this zero air. What unnamable monster was this, with huge pulpy feet oozing gore?

CHAPTER III

Headless Body in the Snow

NO imagination could account for reality! Back in the living room we all stood grim, almost wordless. What good were words? Even Carrington's scoffing look was gone.

"Well, it's outside at any rate," he said. "We'd better bar the house and keep it there."

"We should go," Arntz insisted. He gripped me earnestly. "I am tell you once again—we mus' get out of here. There is death here for us all."

But to leave it in such a storm was unthinkable. Even inside the solid house the lash and pound of the blizzard was an incessant howling roar. The gruesome Thing—whatever it might be—was outside; and as Carrington had said, we should make sure of keeping it out.

The house windows all had heavy shutters. I banged them closed, and locked the window sashes. There were only two outer doors—one in the living room, the other in the kitchen, giving onto a ramshackle wooden back porch piled high with snow. Both doors had heavy inner bars, which rested in slots. Like barricades of some old Colonial fortress.

With everything locked, we seemed safe enough inside. Carrington and Arntz carried our equipment into the bunkroom. Tina, with her aunt and uncle, carried the provisions to the kitchen, preparing supper. I was left momentarily alone in the living room, building a fire.

My mind turned to Peter Trow. What had become of him? That lurking monster outside was a reality—a gruesome Thing with feet of bloody pulp. My imagination could not form any picture of what the damnable Thing might be. Could Trow be concerned in it? Had Trow really deserted us? Was he trying now to fight his way on to Eagle Pass? Or was he still lurking around here? Was he involved in this ghastly mystery? What, after all, did any of us know of Peter Trow, save that from

the beginning of our climb on Mount Sir Joseph he had mentioned—even urged—this Halfway House as a convenient stopping place!

Brushwood, kindling, and log chunks were on the hearth so that I had no trouble laying the fire. I was on my knees on the hearth. I touched the fireplace bricks. Queerly warmish. No fireplace, standing for days or weeks unused, would feel like this. Had another party of travelers recently passed this way?

Then as I laid the brushwood, I came upon something in the fireplace which made my gorge rise and a wave of nausea sweep me. It set my mind flooding with new wild conjectures. A little chunk of cooked meat, a scrap, discolored, half buried in ashes. Noisome little object. I picked it up with revulsion sweeping me. Abruptly I laughed. What tricks imagination and high-keyed fancy may play! This was none of the horrible things I was thinking. Only the tail of a piece of fried beefsteak. Beside it in the ashes was the husk of a baked potato. I smelled the bit of steak. Unspoiled. It had not been lying here more than a few hours.

How long I was alone at the fireplace, slowly laying the fire, pondering, I have no idea. Five minutes perhaps. Or more. I had applied a match. The little wisps of flame were licking briskly upward; the brushwood was crackling. And suddenly I was galvanized, transfixed with terror. Through the silent house a low suppressed scream sounded!

Tina's voice! Her shocked, horrified scream from the kitchen. Then she was calling me:

"George—George!"

I leaped up; ran in to her. An oil lamp was burning, dimly illumining the big kitchen. The doorway to the pantry yawned dark. The door to the outer back porch stood ajar.

"Tina, what is it?"

RELIEF swept me. She was unarmed. Bareheaded now; and her mackinaw discarded, with her grey flannel blouse tucked into the waist of the voluminous woolen

trousers. "What is it?" I repeated.

She held a battered aluminum saucepan in her hand; held it shakily toward me.

"Blood!" she gasped. "Blood—and it's all splattered around the pantry! A pool of it—"

I seized the saucepan, regarded its horrible dried and sticky interior of red glue. This ghastly house. And a murdered girl, buried in the snow up the nearby canyon—was it her blood strewn here in this pantry?

I flung the saucepan away. Tina's face was pallid in the lamplight. "George!" she gasped. "The storm seems easing up—we'd better get out of here!"

"Where are your aunt and uncle?" I demanded. "Tell me—did they see this?"

"No." She gestured to the kitchen sink beside which stood a rusty old pump with a pipe leading downward through the floor. "Uncle Marvin said that pump probably leads down to the stream in the gorge. Maybe it works in summer, but everything's frozen up now. Aunt Alice and Uncle Marvin took a couple of pails and went out to get some clean snow—we can melt it for water—"

Suddenly Tina and I were gazing at each other. In tense silence, with only the crackling of the fire she had lighted in the kitchen stove.

"Gone?" I murmured. "Outside?"

"Yes, just a minute ago. But they're right by the back door. I'll call them."

We flung open the door. The kitchen lamplight disclosed the snow-encrusted, ramshackle back porch.

"Professor James!" I called softly.

No answer. There was only the roar of the wind and the grey-white murky blur of the nearer tree-trunks.

"Professor James!" I called louder. "Where are you?"

My voice was lost in the lash of the storm. No answer.

"They may have gone around the front," I said hastily. "To the front door, perhaps."

We rushed back to the living room. No one was there. I opened the front door; no one outside. I banged the

door and slid its bar. There was no sound in the room except from the fire crackling eagerly in the fireplace. Where were Carrington and Arntz? They had gone into the bunkroom. We called. We rushed there. The big bunkroom was L-shaped. One of its wings extended the back width of the house. Our sleeping bags and the blankets were spread in some of the bunks. But Arntz and Carrington were not there.

The big room's single window showed where they might have gone. It was at the end of the distant angle of the L, looking out upon the woods on the same side as the kitchen. The shutter was open, and through the raised sash a blast of snow was sweeping in. Had Carrington and Arntz jumped out?

Tina was clutching at me. "George—what's happened? What—"

We were suddenly alone in the house. I called out the window. Nothing out there—empty, stormy darkness so fraught with the implication of tragedy that for a moment, like Tina, I stood shaking, unnerved. Then I closed the window shutter and locked it. Pulled down the window sash and locked it.

Tina and I ran back through the silent living room, and on to the kitchen.

"They must be close outside, Tina—getting clean snow—somewhere near—"

MEANINGLESS words. An old carving knife lay by the kitchen sink. I seized it.

"George! You—"

"Can't stay here—got to search for them—"

I had no wits to judge safety or danger.

"I'm going with you, George!" Tina gasped.

"Yes—of course."

My flashlight was still in my pocket. Tina's heavy mackinaw and her cap lay on a chair. I tossed them at her.

We ran out into the howl of the blizzard, fought our way around to the front of the house.

"Professor James! Lee! Lee Carrington!"

But my tense call still brought no answer. We went back. We crossed the boardwalk some fifty feet from the kitchen door. The snow was scuffled.

Blood! Again! I shrank back, holding aside my light, gripping Tina. The scuffled snow was crimsoned!

And then we saw the body. A dark blob in the snow, partly behind a tree-trunk, close beside the boardwalk.

I flung Tina behind me. "There—is one of them—"

It was the crumpled body of Professor James. I stood for a moment peering, gasping.

"It's your uncle, Tina. Go back to the kitchen! Get away from here."

Fascinated with horror, I stared at Professor James' cleft head. The body lay with a grisly, gory blob on the snow where the head should have been. The head itself was a few feet away, split in half as though by a single blow of some gigantic axe. I flung my arm across my face to shut out the terrifying sight.

CHAPTER IV

The Thing at the Window

FOR a moment I was stupefied by horror. Then I saw that, on toward the precipice that faced the lower valley, the boardwalk snow was scuffled and trodden. Under my light, the snow showed lateral streaks; smooth patches, worn down.

Had something been dragged along the boardwalk? Some other victim? I took a few steps, striving to pierce the raging murk with my flashlight. Then suddenly I saw ahead of me another body! Mrs. James. She lay half buried in a drift where the wind had piled the snow against the boardwalk. The throat was a horrible gash!

I stumbled past the crimsoned body. Was that a shout ahead of me? The wind tore it away, so I could not be sure. My light, flung out hori-

zontally, still could barely pierce the blanket of driving snowflakes.

The lookout shelter at the brink of the valley abyss was not far away. Dimly I made out its low rectangular blob. Something moved there! Then I saw a man coming toward me! I heard his voice.

"You, Halton?" His flashlight beam crossed mine, and landed on me. "Halton, come here!"

Carrington's voice. I ran forward. The lookout shelter loomed as a low, twenty-foot-long structure, with an open doorway. Carrington stood in the shelter of the dark door.

"Did you see those bodies?" he gasped.

"Yes. Where is Arntz?"

Carrington drew me inside.

"This horrible business—good God! The Professor and his wife both dead! And something queer here—I'll show you."

We did not have to shout against the storm-roar now. In the darkness Carrington was a dim, snow-covered shape.

"Arntz?" he said swiftly. "Arntz and I were in the bunkroom. Then suddenly Arntz was gone! I ran around the angle of that L-shaped room. The window was open, where he must have gone out. I heard a noise outside—like a scream. You couldn't tell in all the roar of the storm. I went out after Arntz—I found those bodies. Then I thought I heard a noise, over this way. I came here—"

Was he lying? Was it possible that it was he who had murdered Professor and Mrs. James? Possible, certainly. Or was Arntz the murderer?

Carrington had poured out his explanation in a breath. I saw now that this building was a mere shed; the front of it was open, with a low overhanging roof. We were at the brink of the abyss. Beyond a low wooden railing was a sheer drop, a thousand feet perhaps, to the broad wooded valley. But it was nothing but a howling blur of blackness now, with the soft snow piled up knee-deep in the shed, even, as we scuffled through it.

"Look!" exclaimed Carrington.

A ten-foot segment of the rail had been lifted out. Its cross-bars were like a ladder. It was a ladder, for my light showed the upper end of it standing upright against the platform edge. The ladder led downward, to some unseen projecting ledge.

"Somebody must have just gone down," Carrington declared. "From down there you couldn't replace the ladder."

What a witless fool I was to be so unwary! I had always mistrusted Carrington. I had never really believed he had given Tina up to me so easily! We were standing close against the rail, with the open segment and the descending ladder-top a few feet from us. I was still gripping the knife I had brought from the kitchen. And suddenly Carrington leaped upon me. He forced me backward with a blow that knocked the knife from my hand and flung my body against the low rail. In that one lunge he had expected to tumble me over.

BUT I had a vague second of warning. I remember choking, "What the hell! You fool—" as though his attack were a clumsy accident. But on the instant I realized that this meant death for me. I managed to grip an upright post so that I did not go over, but hung for an instant swaying backward with the rail hardly above my knees.

I heard him pant, "The end—for you—damn you—"

But it wasn't. I caught my balance, lunged from the rail to the icy snowy floor. We fell to it together, fighting, scrambling, in brief, panting combat. I was heavier, stronger than Carrington, and knew I was battling for my life. He tore away from me as we rolled, with my blows pounding his face. As he staggered to his feet, I was with him. His back was to the rail and as the lunge of my body struck him and my fist drove into his chest, he slipped and went backward. The rail struck his knees. For one horrible instant he hung, then he went over.

Panting by the rail, I peered down. He had dropped only some ten feet to the lip of a rocky ledge jutting out under the shelter platform. I saw him strike the rocks. Again his body hung, as he scrambled desperately. A scream burst from him as he felt himself going—then like a plummet he went downward, a little dark blob, turning end over end, lost in the raging blizzard darkness.

Weak and shaking I clung to the rail. Carrington—damnable villain at the root of this gruesome affair? Carrington, fiendish murderer of Professor and Mrs. James? Well—he was dead now.

And then, suddenly, mingled with the roar of the wind, I heard a long serie scream of agony! A human voice, agonized by pain. I leaned over the rail. It came again, weaker, ending in a ghastly moan. It sounded as though someone lay dying on the ledge under me, near the bottom of the ladder. I could see the lip of the ledge, some eight feet below the platform, with the bottom of the ladder resting there.

Again came that horrible groan of pain. Should I go down? I was starting for the top of the ladder, when abruptly I thought of Tina. Where was she?

The thought froze me. I had abandoned Tina, whose safety was a million times dearer to me than that of all the rest of the world. In the horror of seeing that grisly decapitated body of Professor James, I had sent her back to the house. Only a few minutes ago—but more horror had come swiftly. Ghastly death was lurking everywhere. And Tina was alone.

The horrible groans from the ledge under me were still sounding; but I turned and ran from the platform. Frantically I fought my way back to the house through the wind and snow.

"Tina!" I called. "Where are you?"

Insane fool, that even for an instant I had left her alone in this hideous darkness! My horrified mind envisaged her crumpled little body lying somewhere ghastly with blood—

"Tina!"

THERE was only the roar of wind and the thud of my footsteps on the boardwalk as I ran on. Then on the back porch of the kitchen I found her. Crumpled—

All my senses were swimming with torturing horror. But as I bent over her, trembling, I steadied. I saw no ghastly wounds. She lay still, pallid, but unharmed; breathing.

She had fainted. I gathered her up, her body like a child's in my arms.

"Tina dear—"

Faintly she answered me. "George—I—was so frightened!"

I slammed and locked the kitchen door. At the living room fireplace, I laid her near the hearth in front of the brightly burning fire.

"You're all right, Tina?"

"Yes—all right, now."

"I'll get a blanket." But I stopped. Not even for a second would I leave her.

Soon she was sitting up, with me beside her on the mouldering skin rug before the hearth. Then she was able to come with me as we searched the house. But we found no one. We went back to the living-room fire. We were safe now. The house was barricaded.

"George—where—are all the others? Uncle Marvin dead—"

"Don't talk now, Tina. Just get your strength."

In the silence of the room I gradually became aware of a low grinding creak. Tina heard it, too. She sat up tensely.

"George—listen—what's that?" she whispered.

It was a muffled, faint creak, mingled with the outside lash of the wind. Was it at one of the windows behind us? It seemed so. And as we both turned, breathlessly staring, the outer shutter was slowly swinging open, creaking on its rusty hinges.

"The wind—" I began.

But the wind would bang that shutter swiftly. Instead, it was being slowly swung. Then—a sight unspeakably terrifying—at the window a face briefly showed. A round head, seemingly hairless. Burning eyes; a grotesque face, scarred and twisted

with a blackish slit of mouth and a red tongue that seemed to lick the black lips with lustful anticipation at sight of us! Not Peter Trow! Not Arntz! That was a face ghastly—horrible travesty of a human!

In an instant it was gone. So quickly that we sat staring, incredulous whether the monstrous face could have been a reality. But a lurking monster had peered in at us—with a red tongue licking with eagerness. Was it the Thing with bloody, pulpy feet?

CHAPTER V

Lair of the Monster

“**G**EORGE, where are you going?”

I had leaped to my feet, pulling Tina up with me. The damnable Thing might crash through one of the windows.

There was a hatchet in the kitchen. “A weapon—I’ve got to have one!”

We rushed to the kitchen. I found the heavy, sharp-bladed hatchet lying beside the stove. I seized it. If the hideous Thing got into the house, I would put up a fight, sell our lives as dearly as possible.

In the lamplit kitchen, the fire Tina had lighted was burning in the stove. She had spread out our provisions. Only half an hour ago she had said, “I’ll have supper ready in a jiffy.” And what ghastly horrors had flung themselves at us in those thirty minutes!

Something in a corner on the kitchen floor caught my attention. I stooped, drew it out. It was a crudely made showshoe. And around its thonged wooden frame a great bloody rag was wrapped so that the whole showshoe was a shapeless crimson bundle.

I cast the noisome thing away. And saw another, just like it, partly under the stove. Was that more blood of the dead girl who had been buried by Arntz in the snow of the river gorge?

A portion of the gruesome mystery, at least, now was plain. These

snowshoes, wrapped in bloodstained rags, had made those repulsive prints in the snow outside the house! But who had done it?

Arntz! The hellish giant prints had been freshly made when I discovered them. Arntz had been mysteriously outdoors, just before that. He had come in—through the kitchen. He and I had run out to try and see that distant lurking shape. And Arntz had gone on around the house-corner and led me to discover the trail!

That much was clear. But why had Arntz done it?

Tina was bending with me over the snowshoes wrapped with bloody rags. We were both absorbed in the weird discovery, so that for the first moment we did not hear the vague sound behind us in the open doorway between the kitchen and the living room. We jerked up quickly to see a shadow moving there. Then before I could do more than reach for the hatchet on the floor beside me, I heard something whizz. I shoved Tina down behind me as something struck my temple. My head seemed to split with a roar. My senses went into a detonating chaos. And mingled with it I could hear Tina’s scream of terror as I fell.

How long I lay in that stygian blackness of unconsciousness I had no idea. Some time or other I felt myself struggling back, with an awareness that I was lying on the kitchen floor—and that Tina was gone.

It was a horrible realization, as strength slowly returned. A greater horror than the realization that I was alone in this awful place of death.

Beside my face lay a heavy, broken knife. That was the whizzing object which had struck my temple from which blood was oozing.

I staggered erect, shoving the knife into my pocket, seizing the hatchet which still lay on the floor. A frenzy was on me. Tina was gone! She was in the grip of that horrible lurking Thing with its red licking tongue and slit of mouth.

“Tina!” I shouted. “Tina, where

are you?" Silence mocked me. The kitchen door was still barricaded; the window was undisturbed. Frantically I rushed to the living room, shouting her name despairingly.

"Tina, where are you?"

The only sound was only the crackle of the log fire. And then I saw where Tina had been taken. The big stone slab of hearth before the fireplace now was not lying quite level with the floor. One end of it was tilted upward an inch; the other end was equally depressed. It was a swinging trap that pivoted at its middle!

Caution was a word forgotten—every instant must be an eternity of horror for Tina, carried down into what must be an ancient cellar. I flung myself to the floor. I pounded and lunged against the depressed end of the slab. It would not yield. With the hatchet I pried desperately. But the slab either was jammed, or barred underneath.

I tore at the unyielding stone like a madman. Tina was down there in the grip of that monster. A flash of sanity made me remember the ladder at the brink of the abyss on the platform of the lookout shelter. Had that ladder been a way used by the monster to reach his lair under this cliff-top?

I SNATCHED up the bar of the living-room door, rushed out into the roaring night. Zero winds lashed the snow more fiercely than ever. I leapt over the decapitated body of Professor James, ran past the crimsoned, slashed body of his wife, dashed through the door of the lookout station. The dark, storm-swept platform with the scuffled snow where only a few minutes before, Carrington and I had fought, was unchanged.

With an arm wrapped around a post of the veranda, I leaned far out and peered downward. A little section of the empty ledge was visible; the ladder had not been securely placed.

There was no sound from below.

The horrible groaning I had heard

had ceased. The dying person down there—was he dead now?

The sensation was weird as I hitched myself down the almost vertical outer side of the ladder, with the gale lashing at me and that thousand foot abyss directly under me. But in a moment I had safely scrambled to the ledge. I stood peering in the snowy, rocky darkness, hatchet in hand. And suddenly, close at hand, I heard another of those low, agonized groans!

The scene around me was only dimly visible. I was on the ledge-like lip of a natural undercut of the cliff-wall. A figure was lying here, crumpled. Groaning. Then mumbling words.

I bent down. It was Arntz, dying from a knife-thrust in his side.

"You—Halton?" he faintly gasped.

I was stooping over him, but suddenly I leaped erect as distant, approaching sounds reached my ears. A low gibbering, mouthing mumble—then a scream of anguished terror.

And from the blackness where a rift cut back under the cliff, figures emerged. Tina, in the grip of the monster! Tina, her garments partially torn away, her dark hair flying as she fought with the grisly shape dragging her forward.

For one breath I was frozen, transfixed by the sight of the horror. With the face we had seen at the window. It hung over Tina a leering travesty of a man—pawing with demoniac lust at his beautiful victim in his arms. A man, six feet and a half tall, perhaps, but so horribly emaciated he seemed monstrously gigantic. Thin, wide shoulders. That hairless head—face so horribly scarred; twisted shriveled skin. That slit of mouth, with red tongue licking out from between blackened lips!

And then Tina must have seen me. "George—" she screamed. The monster abruptly cast her away as he saw me. He leaped for me. A huge, bloody ax was in his hand. He was gibbering, mouthing with maniacal triumph. He swung the ax with a wild, demoniac lunge; but I ducked
(Continued on Page 128)

A Lovely Girl Leans for Support



The WELL OF DOOM

A Complete Novelette of Stark Horror

By **JOHN CLEMONS**

Author of "Enemies of Society," "Theft of the Crown Jewels," etc.

CHAPTER I

An Interrupted Wedding

AT the rate we were rolling along the dusty country highway, Pat should be in my arms in an hour. Or is that bad luck

just before the ceremony? Bah! Old wives' tales!

I was inexpressibly happy. It was now four in the afternoon. In two hours I would be wedded to Patricia Dunn. I, plain Peter Haley, would be married to that glamorous, raven-

Nameless Terrors Confront Pete Haley

on the Courage of a Youthful Heir!



*The huge brute held me suspended over
its black mouth—at a word from his
master dropped me in.*

haired beauty whom kings coveted,
for whom lords languished.

Pat— What Fairfield Follies was

in a Hidden Dungeon of the Damned

complete without her dark, brooding beauty? What man was not enamored of her, had not at some time entertained illusory dreams of winning her? And with the world at her feet she had chosen me!

Oh, I grant I am wealthy. But not nearly as rich as that young Lord What's-his-name who all but died of heart-break. Or that fabulously wealthy Indian potentate who offered her a throne and riches beyond the dreams of avarice.

I was so wrapped up in a fanciful world I had almost forgotten stalwart Jeremy Teal by my side. Teal was major-domo at my estate.

Glum and taciturn, hard and hatchet-faced, he was the soul of honor, loyal to the point of fanaticism. More a father, since the death of my parent earlier in the year had orphaned me, than a family retainer.

He was opposed to my forthcoming marriage. But Jeremy Teal would be opposed to anything where another threatened to usurp his place in my affections. Still, though the hard old husk betrayed no outward show of emotion, I had no doubt he was basking in a sort of reflected glory. After all, men fought for even a smile from Pat!

Our big limousine stopped so abruptly that Teal and I were hurled to the floor. When I pulled myself up I saw Sam, the chauffeur, struggling in the road with a brute of gigantic proportions.

I wrenched open the door. Teal was right behind me as I sped out of the car—to be confronted by the most extraordinary individual I had ever set eyes upon. He was small, spare. His thin, shrewd countenance was devoid of color. Young, yet not young. Old, incredibly wrinkled, yet somehow ageless.

Stranger still, over long, unkempt, straggly grey hair he wore a dust-covered, battered beaver of the vintage of 1800. From his bony shoulders trailed a rusty old Inverness cape. And the smell that assailed my nostrils! It reminded me of the dead smells in a mausoleum. The odor of death and decay.

He held two rusty pistols. And his bony claws were steady. Teal and I stopped in our tracks. As much out of sheer astonishment as from the fearsome sight of those ancient weapons.

The strange gunman snapped an order to his giant accomplice. The big man clamped the chauffeur to him in a bearlike hug and stared at us. And a viler face I've never seen! It was absolutely devoid of any human expression.

Great snaggly teeth jutted out of a cavern of a mouth. Small eyes, half-closed, without any vestige of primal intelligence. A coarse, seamed face with stout, square jaws and immense ears. Sandy, unkempt hair that seemed to meet the bushy eyebrows with not an inch between. Hardly any neck at all; just a great, misshapen head set on shoulders that would have taken a tent-maker to fit properly.

I guessed at once that the man-Thing was under the dominance of the smaller creature. That it had no more intelligence than a performing pachyderm. That it was incapable of speech.

I COULD not have moved for the life of me while Sam was getting the life crushed out of him. For that is what the man-brute was doing. Whether by the order of his snarling master, or by sheer accident, I cannot say. But suddenly Sam went grotesquely limp. His shouts ceased on a broken, tortured note of surrender. He was dead.

It was not difficult to force Teal and me back in the car. I was shaken and unnerved by the unalloyed brutality of the wanton killer. Teal, too, was too dazed to speak.

The caricature of a human took the wheel, drove the car. His master gave him terse orders in some heathen gibberish while he let us feel the hard snouts of his two guns in our ribs.

We drove for perhaps twenty or thirty minutes at a reckless rate of speed, in this tense atmosphere. Suddenly, on order, the brute swerved

into a rutted country lane. The powerful car hurtled up a steep grade and at the top I had a sweeping view of the surrounding territory.

In the heat of excitement, I'd failed to recognize my whereabouts. And we were on the rear approach of my own estate!

It had been little used in recent years, except by hunters. But as a boy I had played in this tangle of briar and elders. It was the only patch of wild woods left on the estate.

I turned to my abductor. "See here," I said, "if this is a kidnaping, how much money do you want?"

I'll never forget the man's avaricious grin. His thin lips fairly drooled at mention of money, like a starving man viewing a savoury dish. His colorless, wizened face lighted evilly.

"How much money have you?" he countered.

It was common knowledge how much I'd inherited. It would be useless to try to lie.

"I've more than a million," I replied noncommittally.

"That's not enough," he snapped with venom.

As if I'd even consider paying such an exorbitant ransom!

I looked at my watch, more because I wanted to be rid of the sight of that evil countenance than to be reminded of the time. It was getting on to five o'clock! Five o'clock! I was expected at Pat's at five. To be married to her at six.

If I could at least get some word to her! In a frenzy of despair, I tried again.

"Look here, old man," I said, "I've an important engagement at six—"

"You *did* have," he interrupted tartly. "Relax; you're going nowhere!"

THE big car stopped presently, with a jerk and a drag. We got out, with the great man-creature who had driven bringing up the rear. His strange master led the way up a rocky path, practically hidden by ripping, tearing brambles and overhang-

ing branches from the thick tree growth.

Bloody scratches were left on our hands as we sought to protect our faces from the probing branchlets which sought our flesh like evil, inhuman fingers.

Only the man-thing seemed not to mind the multiple scratches that, oddly, drew no blood from him! I came to the conclusion that he was not only without reason, but without human feeling.

Then I noticed that the man-brute's master seemed unconcerned also. As if he, too, were incapable of feeling pain, or of letting blood, of being annoyed by the waspish weeds, the troublous tendrils and the malignant mould.

We arrived shortly at what was once a little clearing, now overgrown with wild plant life. The ruins of a stone block-house stood in the center—a relic of the Indian-fighting days.

I knew the place, of course. I recalled that most people thereabouts shunned the spot, claiming it to be haunted by blood-red wraiths. I used to laugh at that. As a child I had played here often.

Many times we had seen ghostly red demons dancing at night in the haunted ruins. But investigation always proved the fearsome fiends to be strange hunters who had become lost in the darkness. It was the red glow from their fires that made them appear bathed in gore. Shadows thrown by the flickering flames made them appear grotesque, gyrating ghosts.

Yet, I was now remembering they had always been strange hunters; men we never knew. It was possible—too damned possible! Those seemingly "lost hunters" might have been—

All the grisly accounts I'd heard in my childhood came back to haunt me. An odd, prickly feeling started at the base of my skull and moved down my spine like an icy finger. My limbs were leaden, my body sweating, yet my skin was cold, quaking, crawling with gooseflesh.

CHAPTER II

The Dead are Alive

THE little, withered old man moved as if he knew the place thoroughly. He went directly to a flat, vine-covered spot, then, gun-toting arms folded across his narrow chest, stamped his foot authoritatively just once. And a door flew up out of that bleak ruins! A door of which I had not known the existence! A door, which, I swear could not possibly have been for the eyes of mortal man! The gibbering old fool motioned Teal and me to follow him below.

For the first time Jeremy Teal found voice.

"Take me if you like," he pleaded, "but let this boy be. Let him go. He'll never breathe a word of this."

But I shook my head. I could not let Teal think of this sacrifice.

I repeated my earlier offer of money, with the stipulation, of course, that both Teal and I were to be freed. But the baleful creature appeared not to have heard. He motioned again for us to follow.

Then Teal went suddenly berserk. With a shriek he grabbed up a heavy cudgel, leaped to an attack foredoomed to failure in the face of the loathsome one's weapons.

There was nothing now but to fight. And I, like Teal, preferred swift, clean death on the outside to the unknown perils in that putrescent place below. I lunged forward, my fists balled into hard knots.

But a swift word from the ancient fiend, and the lumbering idiot behind me had my arms pinioned. I struggled with the brute, but it was like trying to move a house.

Horror constricted my throat. Fear clutched at my heart like a tangible thing, while Jeremy Teal sped towards certain doom.

The vile wretch who had abducted us laughed shrilly—not as mortal man laughs. Rather as the wind laughs through the trees on a stormy night. As the shattering sea laughs as it

toys with a ship-wreck. Triumphant, disdainful, unholy.

Then a strange thing happened. He pointed a gun at the approaching Teal—merely pointed it. And Teal faltered in his tracks.

I hoped for a moment Jeremy had changed his mind. But he struggled on a step or two; slowed. Then he stopped altogether. As if he had been hit!

He put his hand to his head and withdrew it, stared at it. *It was covered with blood!* He was dying!

I do not know how I spent that first agonizing night. My wedding night! It was maddening.

I recollect being thrust into a barred aperture in the thick blackness. I remember falling in a huddled heap. And in that borderline state between madness and sanity, I was mercifully overcome by exhaustion of mind and body. I slept. It was more like the dissolution of death than the languor of the living.

It was still pitch black when I awoke. I looked at the luminous dial of my watch. Nine o'clock. But whether nine in the night or nine in the morning, I had no way of knowing.

I felt, rather than looked around. The space was large, crawling with vermin, smelling to high heaven of death and putrefaction. That same odor of rot had emanated from the clothes of my weird captor. Did he live here—in amity with the Devil himself?

Dank stone walls dripping with moisture, slimy to the touch, surrounded me on three sides. The fourth wall was of crudely-wrought, stout iron bars.

I noticed suddenly that my footsteps were soundless, and horror laid its icy hand on me. Had, I, too, become a loathsome creature of the dark? Then I realized that the stone floor was ankle-deep in dust and decayed matter, effectively stilling footfalls.

A FAINT light suddenly suffused the darkness. It came nearer, and evolved into my queer jailer,

carrying a lantern through the gloom.

He lifted the light high as he approached, peered at me. Centered in that eerie spotlight, cloaked in his ancient black Inverness and his tall, battered beaver, with the light making deep pools of his eyes and bringing his harsh features into bold relief, he looked like a page torn from a time-worn album. And terrifying in his agelessness.

"Ah!" he crowed. "Awake at last. Sound sleeper, eh?"

I surmised then that it was morning.

"What do you want with me?" I begged him. "You can have my money—"

"Money!" he snarled. "Every dollar you have! Every last farthing is mine for the taking, fool!"

He stepped closer. I looked into his lifeless eyes, frightened by what I saw reflected.

"What good is money," he breathed, "to the likes of—me!"

"Then what do you want?" I shouted. "What can you possibly want with me?"

"Vengeance," he croaked.

"But I've never set eyes on you before yesterday!"

"The sins of the fathers shall be visited on the children," he quoted solemnly.

I was shocked into complete silence. My father—associated at any time, in any way, with this gnome-like creature? Preposterous!

"Your father acquired this property long before your birth," the sallow creature continued. "But how? Do you know?"

I shrugged. "In the usual way, I suppose."

The thin, parchment skin crinkled in an evil leer. A bony forefinger was waved under my nose.

"Look behind you," he snapped. "There—in the center of the— Ah, you see it!"

I rushed toward the spot indicated. It was a well, with a three-foot stone parapet around it. As I leaned over, a bit of stone crumbled. A splash told me the well was filled with water, no doubt fed by underground streams.

"This," he went on, "as you probably know, is the ruins of an old blockhouse. Prisoners were kept in this sub-cellar. The early settlers also came here to seek refuge from marauding Indians. Therefore the well."

"But I don't see what—"

"In this well, your father drowned the real owner of this estate and usurped his property and position!"

My Father had been no plaster saint, certainly. But he was good-natured and easy-going. I had heard vague stories about his not having always been quite fair. But murder?

"You ancient liar," I ground out harshly. "You're trying to say that my Father killed a man? Who—"

"Me!"

My raving stopped instantly. My eyes popped out. What was this devil saying?

As if guessing my thoughts, the sepulchral voice intoned: "Your father drowned me in that well, forty years ago!"

I SLUMPED then. It took more effort to hold to the bars, and to listen.

He went on in the same voice from the tomb.

"I could not come back in your father's life-time. I had not earned the right. But his Satanic Majesty has been good to me. I come back on the eve of your marriage—to take my former place, to be master of my estate once more!"

I drew back. My head was whirling, and the nauseous face of the *undead* thing was whirling with it sickeningly when I heard him add:

"But Patricia Dunn shall still be mistress of this estate. I shall marry her!"

I shouted maledictions on his head, insane with loathing. I defied him in uncontrollable rage.

He barked a swift order. The lumbering form of his massive retainer hove into view.

The ancient spectre barked another order. The wooden-faced brute moved across the narrow corridor. For the first time, I noticed that a

makeshift curtain covered the bars of a cell, directly opposite. And as I gazed, the curtain was whisked away.

There stood Patricia Dunn! Wide-eyed; terrified. Gagged; bound hand and foot.

The sight of Patricia's beauty sent the huge demon into paroxysms of wordless ecstasy. He shook the bars of her cell, voiced unintelligible animal sounds that chilled me to the marrow.

I cried aloud in anguish. I shouted words of encouragement across the narrow corridor. Our friends would search for us, I cried. They'd find us. Rescue us.

Then the little brute from Hades drew the curtain. A satisfied grin wrinkling his ancient, yellowed countenance, he lifted the lamp high, led his giant away.

The subterranean chamber was plunged in blackness, more profound because of the recent light from the lantern. I shouted myself hoarse.

No answer, of course. Pat, alone, helpless, in that repulsive place. At the mercy of things that crawled in the night; of inhuman monsters!

Impotently I beat my head with my clenched fists. It was my fault! It was my Father who had killed. My Father's son from whom vengeance was being exacted. But Patricia was paying the price for loving the son of a murderer!

I shook the bars, emitted howls of frustration, that instead of reassuring Pat, could only have made her more terrified. Brought madness dangerously near to us both.

CHAPTER III

In the Well

HOURS passed. I was weak from worry, from lack of food and water and from my own exertions. I was maddened, thinking of Pat's condition.

When next I saw that devil's lantern swinging through the gloom, the Cyclops was with him, carrying a silver tray laden with food and drink.

Ironically, I recognized the tray as from my own home. Had these devils already taken possession of my property?

I begged my shrivelled warder to allow me a glimpse of Pat. He ignored my pleadings. Soundlessly he stole into her cell. I heard him admonish her to silence as he removed her gag to allow her to eat. She uttered no word of protest. Was she, then, subjugated? Had she already become a vassal of these rabid wraiths?

The leviathan shoved a tray in the dirt under the bars to my chamber. I ate ravenously. It shocked me to realize it. Was I, too, turning into something unclean? It alarmed me.

The little one emerged from Patricia's cell, clanged shut the gate. He set the lantern down in front of me, passed a paper between the bars, then a pen and ink. His parchment skin face broke in a mass of repulsive puckers.

"Sign—and you go free," he leered. "Sign—or you'll soon be able to see in the dark. Like me."

The colossus picked up the dishes I shoved out to him. The two disappeared in the surrounding gloom.

I looked at the paper in my hand. It was a power of attorney. Lacked only my signature to give the holder full control of all my money, all my property, real and personal!

I dashed the paper from me. What ghastly joke was this? What preposterous fraud?

That barred gate kept me from Pat's cell across the corridor. I dashed to the well, looked down into its black depths. Oblivion—at that moment I craved it. I climbed to the stone parapet. A casual slip would be easy. Yet I could not. Not with Pat here. Suffering on my account.

Step by measured step I backed away from that well of death. I was suddenly more master of myself. It was the light, of course. Rational humans were not meant to dwell shrouded in miasmatic murk, the prey of supernatural schisms. I shouted new encouragement to Patricia.

Any moment my weird warder

might come to retrieve the lantern. I must work at top speed if I were to benefit by the light. I realized I was assured some measure of safety—for a time at least, so long as I refused to sign. I set myself to a systematic testing of each and every upright iron bar. They were old, I reasoned, and crude.

I kicked at each in turn; tugged, pulled. At length I found one that offered slight possibilities. I marked it with my handkerchief, went on seeking other vulnerable spots. But I had to return to that one forlorn hope.

I pressed the kerchief marker out of sight in the dirt at the base of the bar. Then I hunted about for some tool to work with. I found two long rusty old bolts. Then I waited in the gloom.

The afternoon waned. No one came. Still I feared to start work in the light. I continually whispered words of encouragement to Pat.

It was not till the evening meal was brought that the gnarled meal was brought that the gnarled old gnome returned with his giant companion. He thrust his scrawny paw through the bars for the power of attorney. The animal cries of frustration he emitted when he saw it wasn't signed, made me fear that he might seek revenge through Patricia.

He dashed my food to the dirt, struck his bony claws through the bars at me. I eluded him. Presently he calmed a little. I ventured to talk to him then.

"How could you hope to consummate this fraud?" I demanded. "My bankers would never give you a nickel of my money."

"Hah!" he snorted. "Perhaps by tomorrow you'll learn the answer in the well of death. Perhaps by tomorrow you'll be one of us!"

So I was to be thrown down the well of death. I had one day of grace. Oddly, the thought left me calm. But what of Patricia?

I WAS suddenly frantic. I begged for her. I pleaded, even threatened. It was no use. They left me there and stole off with the lantern.

I moaned as I fell to work, gibbering like an idiot as I hammered with my rusted old bolts at the stone base of the bar. But I felt I had the strength of ten men as the ancient rock chipped, gave slowly, surely. It must have been the extravagant strength of sheer madness that helped me to separate the primitive iron bar from its equally old stone. But it took hours. Hours of nerve-racking, painstaking toil.

My fingers were raw and bleeding when success came. My body was cramped with pain. But I tugged, I pulled. I moved that bar!

I wanted to shout exultantly when I stood out in the corridor. I wanted to roar a challenge. I wanted to go down fighting gloriously for Pat's freedom.

Instead I tiptoed softly to her cell, moved the heavy tarpaulin that served as a curtain. I strained my eyes and made out her lovely, frightened face, heard her struggles.

What a relief to see her alive. Bound, lying in filth and dirt. But living, breathing, hoping.

"Listen, honey," I whispered, "I've got a plan. I'm going to make them think I've been killed. That will give me the freedom of the place. Then I'll come back to set you free."

There wasn't much time. I tore a long strip from the tarpaulin. It made a rending noise and I flattened out against the bars. But no one came. I repeated the operation, my eyes boring into the darkness. But nothing happened. A third time I repeated the action, shrank back, flat against the bars, waiting. Then I whispered a hurried good-bye. With the three torn strips of heavy tarpaulin, I returned to my chamber.

I reset the loose bar carefully, went directly to the well. I made fast the ends of my strips of tarpaulin with stout square knots, forming a crude rope, tested it. It seemed strong enough. Then I loosened a heavy rock from the stone parapet. I took one of the bolts from my pocket, made fast to it one end of the improvised rope.

I leaned over the parapet, ham-

mered the old bolt in between two heavy stones with a rock. I drove the second bolt through the rope into a crevice a little farther down, then threw the coils over the side, heard the free end smack water. Then I lay back, exhausted.

I fought to remain awake. But I was badly spent. I fell asleep.

A light shining in my eyes awoke me. The evil little man-thing was standing over me, with his towering partner! I got to my feet. There was no food this time. Only the power of attorney in the smaller devil's hand.

Wordlessly, he thrust it in my hands, dipped a pen in a bottle of ink held in his partner's massive paw. He handed the pen to me. I had to make it look as if there was no ulterior motive in my sudden submission.

"Sign!" commanded my tormentor hoarsely. "Sign, or I'll let—this one—into the cell of Patricia Dunn!"

I FLICKED open the paper, in a sweat to put my name on it. And my haste was not bluff. I made valid the power of attorney, but by what legerdemain they hoped to profit by it, I could not guess.

Nor had they any intention of letting me live to find out. For, the paper signed, it was as I expected. The little one barked an order. The huge brute caught me in a merciless grip, pulled me to him in a bearlike hug that crushed the breath from me. The foul stench of his putrescent flesh gagged me.

I struggled. It had not occurred to me that I might be killed before being thrown into the well of death! I felt consciousness slipping from me. Then I stopped my futile struggles in order to conserve my strength. The giant relaxed his pressure when I went limp.

He carried me to the well, for a brief moment held me suspended over its black mouth. Then his master gave the word. The man-thing dropped me in!

The thought of Patricia forced my numbed hands to grope for the rope. I *had* to survive.

I was far gone when my fumbling fingers contacted the lifeline. I stopped my wild thrashings, rested in the icy waters.

Then from above came that hideous hyena laugh. Had my ruse been discovered? No, that was only my tormentor's laugh of triumph. He thought me dead.

The faint light was vanishing. My ghostly guard was leaving.

It was treacherous work, climbing up. Loose stones gave away, forcing all my weight on the improvised rope. I was not too sure it would hold. My dripping clothes added to my weight. Soft, slimy moss added to the insecurity of my footing. But I fought my way up, painfully, desperately.

I felt something whiz by me suddenly, land with a dull plunk in the water. Instinctively, I knew that it was one of my retaining bolts.

I grew hot and froze in the space of a breath. I climbed higher, expecting only certain doom. I came suddenly to the end of my rope, literally as well as figuratively. I felt for the remaining bolt. It was loose! I grabbed swiftly, caught the edge of the parapet as the bolt tore free. The rope snaked to the bottom. It landed with a sickening splash as I clawed my way over the top of the parapet.

I paused a moment to gain strength. Then I moved the loose bar, pushed through across the narrow corridor to Patricia's cell. I felt for the tarp. It was down. And Patricia was gone!

CHAPTER IV

Full Payment

I STUMBLED down that corridor bereft of reason. Followed the direction my captor must have taken. I stumbled, fell and rose.

Patricia gone! The words made a mad refrain in my brain. Buzzed till I fancied other, madder voices had taken it up.

I was a torn and dripping maniac. Three days' growth of whiskers on my face. Three days' rancor in my

heart. Three days' fester in my brain. Gaunt, emaciated, hollow-eyed. An unkempt lunatic with bloody fingers. Alone in a subterranean dungeon peopled with shuffling shades. Tentanted by laughing ghosts.

I could see their eyes in the blackness. I covered my face to be spared the sight and they laughed at me, for I saw them still. I must always see them, for they were the reflection of my own eyes across the river Styx.

I held my ears to shut out their lewd, mocking laughter. I staggered on. Those fiends had Patricia and I would find her if I had to become one of them in order to do so.

Then—a light. Suddenly. A slanting shaft of pale and dusty rays in the thick dirt on the floor. There was a door, too. The light was coming from there. On hands and knees I crept closer. That was where the laughter was coming from, also. That laughter had been no figment of a fevered fancy. It was real!

The chamber my red-rimmed eyes looked into was circular, down a long flight of steps, perhaps some ancient warder's retreat. Lying prone in the muck, I was like one of an audience reviewing a play.

And what a ghastly play. What a fearful phantasy. For within my line of vision sat Jeremy Teal!

A physical impossibility—yet there he was!

On the instant I knew that *they* had made an undead-thing of him. The blood from my Father's hands was on Teal's head, too.

They were laughing at him, not at me. They were not yet aware of my escape.

But Teal was laughing, too. Hideous, obscene laughter. Then I saw that there was a bottle on a dust-covered table by his side. What weird necromancy was this? Did these demons derive pleasure from earthly things? God, these things had Patricia! And their earthly desires were not dead!

Into my line of vision appeared the unclean creature whom death had claimed forty years before. He was bilarious, stumbling. He held a bottle

in one yellowed hand. He was drunk.

The immense idiot hove into view—and he was laughing, too. That dumb brute, the imbecile who could utter only animal sounds, was *laughing!* Roaring with undisguised amusement. Patently, he was, for the moment, of unimpaired intellect. He was drunk, too. Perhaps that explained it.

"I could have died laughing when that trap door sprang up and nearly scared the wits out of him," the little devil gasped. "Good job you thought of that snap-spring, Teal."

What was that?

"I never showed young Pete Haley the layout when he was a kid. That's what's a good job, if you ask me, Reilly."

That was Jeremy Teal talking. And young Pete Haley was me.

"And when you slapped that red paint to your forehead," Reilly continued, "and took a tumble—Did you see his eyes pop when you dropped without a shot fired? A master touch, Teal."

"Say, Sam didn't do so bad for a beginner, either." That was the former idiot's gruff voice. "I thought for a minute I'd really hurt him."

"Sam sure put it across," Teal put in. "A swell actor."

"Show Frankenstein how you filled out that power of attorney so you can get the dough, Jeremy," said the wizened gnome called Reilly.

I FELT weak, sick. I saw through the whole nefarious scheme now, of course.

Their raucous laughter filled the circular chamber, reverberated hollowly, like discordant monstrous drum-beats.

"Even if the body is ever found," Reilly gasped between breaths, "there'll be no fear of a murder investigation. It'll look like suicide."

"If the two bodies are ever found you mean," Teal corrected.

I shivered, and not with the cold. Good God! Had they done away with Patricia? The big man grunted: "You mean the girl?"

(Continued on Page 116)

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(Continued from page 115)

Teal took a swig from his bottle. "Exactly," he spluttered.

The pseudo-idiot raised his bottle. "Don't worry," he advised. "I'll take care of her."

THE smirk which distorted his features sent the blood through my veins like icy water. Patricia was still alive, but it was three to one, and the two smaller men were armed. I could only bide my time, watch desperately for a chance to rescue her.

Reilly took a long draught from his bottle and set it down. Then he divested himself of his ancient hat, his wig, his rusty Inverness and coat.

"Wait'll I take my make-up off," he said. "I look as old as Methuselah. But it saved our skin from scratches out there, eh, Frankenstein?" He placed a small, square bag on the table, opened it. "Makes me feel I was back on the tank town circuit," he said as he smeared his face with grease. "How about you, Frankenstein?"

The man-mountain emitted rumbling noises that made me think of a volcano preparing to erupt. "So this is the little paper, is it?" he muttered.

"Yes, sir," Teal said expansively. "That's the little paper that's going to make me a millionaire!"

The "faithful" Teal reached for the paper. But the ungainly brute crumpled it in a hamlike fist. "When you sign an agreement to pay off, mister. That's when you get back this paper."

Teal leaped to his feet, swaying unsteadily. "You don't think I'd double-cross you fellows?" he demanded with drunken dignity.

"I don't know, Teal." An idiot? The huge hulk was smarter than the two others together. "You've just doublecrossed a kid you had every reason to protect."

Reilly hurriedly wiped the make-up off his face. "That's right, Teal," he put in thickly.

"But I advanced you fellows ten thousand when I hired you," Teal protested drunkenly. "Five thousand apiece."

"What's that?" rumbled the giant. "You're going to get a couple of million!"

Teal pondered. "All right," he gave in, "I agreed to give you, Sam, and Reilly ten thousand apiece. To show you I'm not ungrateful, I'll double that."

"No," the big fellow boomed. "That's not enough."

Teal staggered close to the strong man, grabbed him by the arms.

"Look here, Big Boy, what are you driving at?" he yelled hoarsely. He was a little frightened.

The big fellow hurled him aside roughly. "I'll tell you," he said. "I say share and share alike. We're all in this. If we're ever found out we'll all pay. Till then—we all get paid."

Reilly rasped: "That goes for me, too." He fumbled in a side pocket, fingering a gun. "Well, what do you say?" he demanded. "Come on, Teal! I'm sick of this dunghole."

TEAL appeared to be thinking it over. They were reneging on their bargain already. What was to prevent them from blackmailing him for the rest of the swag? Yet he could gain not a penny without that power of attorney.

Teal moved ostensibly to reach for the bottle, but I saw his gun come out. He whirled swiftly. And in that instant the watchful Reilly's gun leaped into play. Spat flaming lead! There was nothing ghostly about those bullets. Nor the smoke that made a white haze. Nor the blood that was sopped up by the heavy dust-carpet.

Reilly and Teal fell to their knees, each drunkenly pumping leaden death into each other. Both guns were empty before they keeled over. Nor was there any fake about these deaths.

I leaped to my feet, hurtled down those steps like a demon from hell. The giant gave way before me, startled.

"I didn't do it!" he croaked. "Gawd! I didn't!"

He had taken me for a ghost. If he had a gun, he was too unnerved at sight of me to remember it. He circled.

(Concluded on page 118)

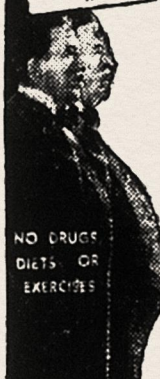
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THE BEACON

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(Concluded from page 117)

cled from me, slowly. I followed, my bleeding fingers out-stretched, greedy for his thick throat. He crashed into a chair in his backward stride, and stumbled. I leaped, caught his throat, bore him to the ground. I hammered his huge head on the stone floor with the intensified strength of near madness.

He fought back, feebly at first. Then I felt new strength surge through his big body. He shook me from him, gained his feet, swaying dizzily from the drink that fogged his brain.

But no one man, however strong, was a match for me at that moment. I caught up the chair and crashed it over his head. And with the splintered half in my hands I struck again as he fell to his knees. I hammered that repulsive face, battered that huge head. Blood obliterated the vile countenance.

I reeled away at last only because I could lift my arms no longer. I staggered around that circular chamber of carnage looking wildly for Patricia.

And I found her. Dirty, disheveled, still bound and gagged, she was unconscious.

Hastily I tore off her bonds. Pulled the filthy gag from her mouth. I chafed her cold wrists, massaged her pallid temples. I forced some of the vile whiskey down her throat. She opened her eyes.

"Darling," she whispered. "They came to me with a note saying you had been taken suddenly ill. They begged me to come at once."

"Hush," I whispered. I drew her close there on that incredibly filthy stone floor.

At length I lifted her up, steadied her on her feet. I set her in a dusty chair and went over to the dead giant.

I pried open his fist, and took Teal's power of attorney. Then I held out a hand for Patricia.

"Come," I said. "There's a fellow at the house named Sam whom I—and the police—will want very much to see."

DEATH RIDES THE PLATEAU

(Continued from page 91)

my friend, the sacred power of our sect. The forelegs will lower themselves slowly, descend until the cloven hoofs rest upon your 'wife's' body. When the flames have finished, she will join the others on the bar!"

MY brain went mad as I heard him, yet behind my back I continued the frantic struggle to free my bonds. In the intervening moments I had managed to loosen the main knot. It needed but a last twist now, and I strained every nerve and muscle. The rope parted. I came erect.

And for a split second Calvin Reller did not notice. He had advanced to the edge of the floor-opening, was gazing downward, lips curled in a gloating smile of anticipation. A single object burned in my vision—the revolver the man had left on the desk. I threw myself across the room, seized it. With an insane yell I charged!

Charged—with no thought that I might have stood my ground and pumped the slugs into him as fast as I could pull the trigger. I did not want to do that. My one overwhelming desire was to club his leering face to a bleeding pulp.

We struck together like blocks of wood. I lashed the revolver butt downward. Three times I struck. But Calvin Reller was a wolf at bay now, and his fists came back at me with lightning speed and power.

A hard blow jammed into my throat. A knee struck my abdomen.

And then I found an opening. Weaving sideways I charged from a new angle. My fist met Reller's jaw with piston force. A gurgling scream belched to his lips. He swayed, toppled and crashed to the floor.

Breath burning my lungs, I leaped to the floor shaft and looked down. I must get down there somehow—*must!* But to leap would be to break every bone in my body, still leave Lucia, bound and helpless, on that fiendish sacrifice block.

(Continued on page 120)



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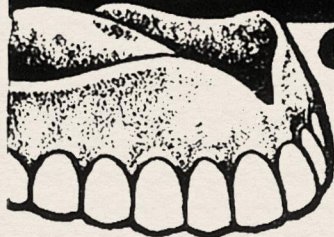
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(Continued from page 119)

Like some inquisition priestess Sandra stood by the granite image, arms upraised in supplication. Those cloven hoofs began to move downward toward Lucia's unclad body.

I swung the revolver around, aimed straight down the shaft and pressed the trigger. The Russian woman jerked rigid. She clutched at her shoulder and fell.

Then, as in a dream, I found myself climbing over the edge of the shaft, lowering myself by a small iron ladder my eyes had missed in my first wild searching, and on down to the lower level. In the cavern I hurtled by the gaping rustics, raced up to the statue dais and tore loose my wife's bonds. I gathered her in my arms and lunged backward.

The cloven hoofs reached the empty slab. A blinding wall of blue flame columned upward to merge with a thick coil of black smoke. The flame diminished, died, and I turned to the muttering crowd advancing on me menacingly.

"Go back to your homes!" I shouted. "The Master is dead!"

TO this day my passage from Reller Tavern, away from the plateau and back to the open county road remains a blank in my memory. I know only that I drove madly until the morning sun spread its welcome light about us. Lucia returned to consciousness then, and I halted for an hour to attend her. It was near noon before we reached Marchester, sixty miles away.

There I left my wife in the hands of a physician, received medical treatment for the flesh wound in my side, and went to the sheriff's office to make a report.

But there was much that my terror-strained brain did not understand. I know now, of course, what the state police found in Blairville, probably much more than the metropolitan papers later were able to ferret out and publish in a most astonishing case.

Calvin Reller, sadist that he was, had come to Blairville with his father

two years before. Thirsting for riches and power, he had discovered the "coronium" mineral in the hills. He had mined a little, sent it to a Japanese manufacturer and discovered its immense value for commercial and munition purposes. Thereupon he had played on the superstitious ignorance of the people of the neighborhood by creating a religious sect around which he drew a veil of mystery. Through his mysterious power over the plateau people he was able to command them to turn the greater part of their earnings over to him. He had forced them to work the mines. Refusal meant a horrible death by the torture image in the underground chamber.

The image manifested Calvin's fiendish genius. The thing was in reality an electric chair. Electrodes concealed in the cloven hoofs and in the slab waited the touch of a hidden switch to send a powerful charge of electricity through the victim.

The priest of the temple and the five cowed assistants were but hirelings of Calvin and were treated as such. Sandra Markoff, his mistress and high priestess, was sentenced to the penitentiary. John Reller, the innkeeper father, who only half guessed at the hideous activities of his son and who was in complete ignorance of Calvin's rôle of "Master," served a short term, then moved on, a saddened and broken old man.

The strange hoof marks which formed on Lucia's and my forehead—bewildering and terrifying as they seemed—had a simple explanation. They were made with a cellulose paste, a harmless combination of pyroxylin, camphor and other chemicals, which was applied to the skin with a stamp and allowed to harden.

Lucia and I live happily in a large city far from Blairville. But even now when night comes and I lie in bed with her at my side, sometimes I find myself suddenly tense in every muscle, listening. Listening to the slow ticking of a clock in the outer corridor and remembering every hour of that night on the horror-shrouded plateau.



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HORROR-SCOPES

By **CHAKRA**

Famous Mystic and Authority on Esoteric Lore

SINCE that long-forgotten day buried in the dust of countless centuries, when a group of men huddled about a fire in a smoke-filled cave and condemned one of their number to death, people have flocked to executions. Public executions always will be a spectacle—a macabre performance that attracts the attention of young and old, great and small.

Assault on the King

One of the most outstanding executions in all the pages of history is that of Pierre Damiens of France, condemned to die for assault on the king.

The place was a public square in the city of Paris. The time was spring in the year 1757. Every available space was occupied. Houses were filled to overflowing, balconies were overloaded, the streets were choked. Temporary structures that had been erected were crammed with people. Gorgeously gowned and bejeweled ladies of the Court of Louis XV sat waiting impatiently. Courtiers bent over their shoulders, murmuring solicitously. Cooling drinks, little tidbits were being served.

The scene was awe-inspiring. The populace had gathered to be entertained, to enjoy the program and relax from the giddy whirl of an over-indulged, luxury-loving aristocracy.

In the center of the square was a forge. Several towering, muscular giants lolled

around, poking at the pairs of pincers glowing red-hot among the coals. Nearby stamping and snorting, were four powerful horses.

A Pitiful Figure

A formation of soldiers appeared, pressed through the throng. A cheer burst from thousands of lips. In the midst of the armed group, accompanied by a solitary priest, staggered a bedraggled wreck of a man—Damien, the condemned—the half-witted, religious fanatic who, with a pocketknife in one hand and a Bible clutched in the other, had three months previously attempted to assassinate the king. But King Louis had suffered only a scratch; while Damien, after weeks of torture, was to pay for the act with his life.

The soldiers delivered the pitiful figure to the stalwart group at the forge. In an instant they had stripped him, flopped him upon a long table and bound him securely. Then, while moans of anguish burst from Damien's throat, the right hand that had held the ineffectual knife was slowly burned off, with hot irons. Next, the moans changed to shrieks as huge pincers tore gaping wounds in the pain-racked body. Molten lead and rosin were applied to the bloody holes.

The victim fainted. The executioners paused while the demented Damien was

IN HORROR-SCOPES, THRILLING MYSTERY presents an original department by CHAKRA, famous mystic, who gazes beyond the external scenes of mystery, taking readers into the power-house of life to watch the wheels revolve.

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To get the most joy out of life, you must know the secrets of life. So don't miss any issue of THRILLING MYSTERY, for that one issue may reveal the secret that has been puzzling you for a long time.

revived. The bonds were released and he was hauled to his feet.

The King's Horses

The four horses were brought nearer. Stout chains were fastened to the harness—the other ends were looped around each arm and leg of the pitiful creature. The big men mounted the horses. Whips cracked. Shouts burst from the spectators. Damiens was to be pulled to pieces in four directions.

But the horses were frightened. They could not realize what was expected of them. Whips rose and fell on glossy rumps. The beasts reared, then lurched in four directions. A piercing, agonized shriek shot from the parched throat of Damiens as chains tightened.

The horses dug their hoofs into the hard-packed earth, snorting, straining. The thin, emaciated body was spread-eagled over the ground. The bones cracked as they jerked out of their sockets, but the battered flesh and tautened muscles would not yield.

The riders goaded their mounts—but still the human body could not be rent asunder. The executioners requested to be allowed to cut the muscles of the condemned. Permission was refused. Again the horses were lashed. They leaped forward, jerking the chains.

Damiens' End

Scream upon scream spewed from Damiens' lips, but his distorted form still remained intact. The lovely ladies were getting bored. They cast impatient glances at their escorts. Permission was again requested to sever the muscles—and this time, granted.

Quickly the knives flashed in the afternoon sun. The whips rose—fell. Hoofs thudded and the horses leaped. One horse lurched forward, stumbled as a leg tore from Damiens' trunk. A second horse pulled savagely, yanking an arm from its socket.

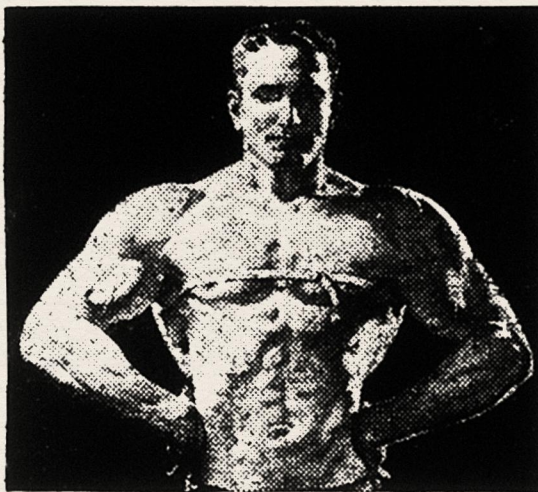
Blood gushed, and still Damiens lived. But his cries were weaker. The two remaining animals were spurred on. The second leg ripped from its roots, and the bloody, mangled thing that had been a man lay still.

The show was over. The people rose to go. Life had departed from the tortured body after an hour of unceasing torment. The assassin had paid his debt to France.

Death in Rome

For many centuries, the execution of a criminal was an excuse for a holiday. Men, women, and even children, hurried to the arena, scaffold, guillotine or market place, to witness the dying agonies of some poor

(Continued on page 124)



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—Signed: GEORGE F. JOWETT

THREE SOLID INCHES of muscles added to your chest and at least two inches added to each of your biceps, or it won't cost you a penny. I know what I am talking about. . . I wouldn't dare make this startling agreement if I wasn't sure I could do it.

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(Continued from page 123)

wretch doomed to death because he swore, stole a loaf of bread, or professed to be a follower of some new religion.

In ancient Rome, the people gathered at the Colosseum to witness the wholesale slaughter of slaves, prisoners of war or religious martyrs, often eaten alive by beasts. In England, at the gallows of Tyburn and Execution Dock, the crowds came early and stayed late.

The original idea behind public executions was the belief that if the populace was allowed to witness the punishment of the transgressor, it might cause others similarly tempted to think a second before jeopardizing their lives. However, the desired effect was sadly lacking; and crimes punished by death increased. Thieves and undesirables frequented the locality of the execution and even preyed upon the spectators.

Conditions became so deplorable in England that over one hundred and fifty offenses were punishable by death. In the reign of Henry VIII, seventy-two thousand persons were executed—an average of six a day.

The oldest actual record of the passing of the death sentence is found in the Amherst Papyri. The account deals with the trials of State criminals in Egypt about 1500 B.C. The condemned man was found guilty of "magic." However, there is no reference to the means of his demise, for the criminal was allowed to execute himself.

Various Methods

Hurling the condemned from a high rock was sanctioned by the Twelve Tables of the Romans; and other forms used in early times were the pouring of molten lead over the criminal, starvation, dismembering with hot pincers, and sawing the individual in pieces.

In Rome it was the custom to bury alive vestal virgins who had broken their vows of chastity. Crucifixion was very popular in the Roman provinces and was practised with many variations, several different shapes of crosses being used, and in some cases the victim was crucified upside down.

Throughout the ages, every manner of ingenious torture device was invented. And it was customary to prolong the agony and suffering of the condemned as long as a spark of life could be kept in the tortured body.

During the reign of Charles V, stakes were planted in the bottoms of graves, and the criminals were thrown into them, to hang torn and bleeding until death overtook them. Women were burned alive; hands were amputated; entrails torn out; people were boiled slowly in oil, suffering intolerably for several hours. In the old German army, the condemned was hunted by his comrades, finally captured and speared to death.

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Cruel Devices

In France, Philippe Auguste drowned those who swore; little children of nine were hanged for stealing; people were crushed to death by weights for refusing to testify; and so through the pages of history, executions became bloodier and more inhuman.

Today, hanging is the most common form of execution. It is practised in this country, the British Empire, Japan and other parts of the world. In France there is the guillotine; and in Germany the headsman with his axe. Decapitation is also popular in China, but a sword replaces the axe. In Russia, hanging, beheading and shooting were the means of inflicting capital punishment; but under the present government, shooting has become the prevailing method.

There are still, however, countries that impose painful and lingering deaths on those condemned. In Mongolia it is customary to imprison the individual in a metal cage, not unlike a bird cage, which is hung on a high pole. There the unfortunate is allowed to remain until he or she dies of starvation.

Another form of punishment in Mongolia is to imprison the criminal in a heavy box several feet long and about two feet wide. There is a small opening in the side, just large enough to permit the head to be poked outside, and possibly one arm. Just out of reach, food and drink are placed. The prisoner may stretch, plead, beg, scream himself into madness, but the food remains untouched—and finally the victim succumbs to thirst or starvation.

The Dreaded Garrote

In Persia it is the practise to place a cannon in a public place and fill the barrel with scraps of metal. The condemned is then lashed to the mouth of the gun, and while hundreds of people gather to witness the scene, he is blown to bits by the jagged, tearing pieces of iron bursting through his back.

Capital punishment in Spain is inflicted by the garrote. A metal collar is fixed to an upright post. In front of the collar is a shorter post on which the condemned is seated. The collar is tightened by a system of screws; and death is supposedly quick and painless. However, such is not always the case. Executioners often enjoy their jobs with sadistic glee.

Estonia, reverting to the idea of the Greeks, now allows a criminal, if he wishes, to kill himself by drinking hemlock. However, if he lacks the courage to do so, he is put to death by the State.

In New York State and certain others, the electric chair is used—presumably the most humane form of execution. But at

(Continued on Page 126)

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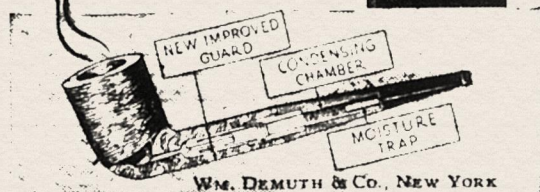
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(Continued from Page 125)

times this, too, becomes an instrument of torture, when it is necessary to subject the individual to several shocks before death occurs.

Another form in recent years is the gas chamber, which may be adopted more widely if it proves effective.

The Fate of Inventors

So it is obvious that man has come a long way in the infliction of death upon the criminal. However, the desire to know the thoughts of the condemned, to read of his last moments, his actions, his last words, still persists. The thrill, the curiosity and the terror of execution will probably never be fully removed from the brain of man.

It is a curious fact that men connected with the innovation of new death-dealing devices sometimes died in the manner they prescribed for others. Dr. Joseph Guillotine, after whom the guillotine was named, lived to end his days kneeling before the deadly engine, his neck in the collar, and the whirring of the descending blade ringing in his ears as it cut his head from his body.

The inventor of the Scottish Maiden, an instrument not unlike the guillotine, died under the dreaded blade. And likewise, the man who constructed the first electric chair perished in the grisly piece of furniture, a condemned victim of his own handiwork.

So capital punishment still marches on. Executions will ever remain front-page news.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

(Readers are invited to send their Thrill and Chill questions to this department for discussion. Confidences will be respected. Unusual thrill and chill experiences are welcomed.)

To HORROR-SCOPES: I have had three strange dreams. In each, a death's head came to my bed and floated over me, grinning in the most horrible fashion. After each dream, some member of my family died. First, an aunt—then a cousin; last, my brother. Is it only coincidence?

G. R. N.

To G. R. N.:

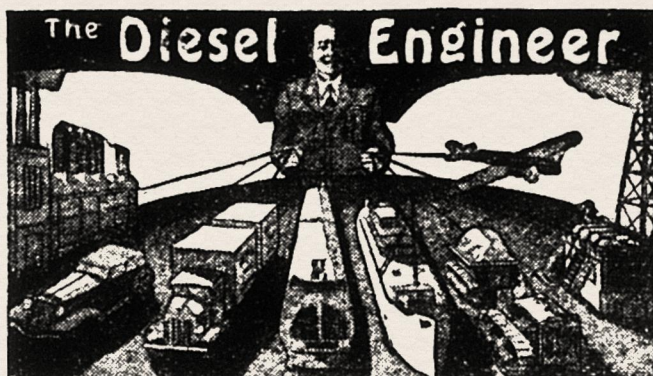
Dreams have been conjecture since the beginning of time. But premonition of death is quite common. It comes in various ways. We feel it intuitively, we dream deathly dreams, we see visions. Hundreds of cases have been recorded. There is something about the human make-up that subconsciously senses death.

When death was around you in those in-

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stances, you felt it mentally—your subconscious got the vibration. The only way your subconscious could register this on your conscious was by a deathly dream. Future events, especially death, cast their shadows before them. Those humans who are sensitive enough to catch the vibrations of these shadows can be forewarned often. Try to develop this sensitive faculty of yours. It can help you.

To **HORROR-SCOPES**: Is there any case on record of a man being swallowed by a whale and later being saved? I don't mean the case of Jonah. **H. L. W.**

To **H. L. W.**:

There is one story that persists. Several world adventurers declare it is true. A sailor on a whaleboat fell overboard just as a huge whale was being hauled aboard. He felt himself being swallowed. A few minutes later, the whale was cut open by the sailor's comrades, and the sailor was taken out alive, although he had been bleached white by the digestive juices still in the whale's stomach. The man was raving mad and died shortly afterward.

To **HORROR-SCOPES**: I am a detective. An argument arose at Headquarters recently about a certain dead body found at the bottom of a cliff. It was covered with strange bruises, claimed to have been made on the body by falling stones after the death of the suicide. Were those bruises caused in such a manner, do you think? **G. K.**

To **G. K.**:

You can't bruise a corpse. This is an established fact. There must be circulation of blood to cause a bruise. This was demonstrated recently at the morgue in New York City. Those bruises were not caused by falling stones. Maybe the case you mention was murder, not suicide. The corpse was alive when those bruises were made. **—CHAKRA.**

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HALFWAY TO HORROR

(Continued from page 105)

under it and it missed me. As he staggered from the empty swing, my hatchet descended.

There was a gruesome crack of that hairless skull as my hatchet, heavy and sharp, descended in that desperately frenzied blow.

I reeled backward from the noisome sight of the cleft skull. For a breathless instant the quivering body stayed on its feet. Then it spun; wilted; lay in the snow of the rocks, quivering like a giant, headless snake.

I lifted Tina, held her shuddering form in my arms. Then we heard a low groan, and I remembered Arntz, dying in the darkness. We bent over him.

"You, Halton?" he breathed faintly.

"Yes— You're better now?"

"I—want to talk—now before I die. He has—killed me. My own brother—at last he—killed me."

Dying words of this last victim of the fiend. His weak hands gripped me. His voice was choked by the blood in his throat. But something he wanted to tell me before he died. And his gasped confession—his few words—made the mystery plain.

"My—older brother—he inherits money from a Trust Fund this year. But he is not sane—sometimes, yes—but now he is murderous—lusting fiend. I have tried to keep him hidden— Oh, I forget you have killed him now. That is best, of course—"

HIS weak voice went on. His older brother had been disfigured in an explosion years ago. Perhaps that had started his spells of lustful madness. Arntz, desiring the money which his older brother would inherit this year, if sane, had hidden his brother. He had kept the insanity from becoming known.

Arntz had tried to warn us away from the Halfway House, afraid that his brother, in one of his maniacal spells, would kill us. Or that we would discover the secret. To frighten us, make us leave, Arntz had planted that bloody trail of mon-

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STOP ITCHING AND SCRATCHING

According to the Government Health Bulletin No. E-28 at least 50% of the adult population of the United States are being attacked by the disease known as Athlete's Foot.

There are many other names given to this disease, but you can easily tell if you have it.

Usually the disease starts between the toes. Little watery blisters form and the skin cracks and peels. After a while the itching becomes intense and you feel as though you would like to scratch off all the skin.

FOOT-ITCH (ATHLETE'S FOOT)

Send Coupon-Don't Pay till Relieved

Beware of It Spreading

Often the disease travels all over the bottom of the feet. The soles of your feet become red and swollen. The skin also cracks and peels, and the itching becomes worse and worse.

It has been said that this disease originated in the trenches, so some people call it Trench Foot. Whatever name you give it, however, the thing to do is to get rid of it as quickly as possible, because it is very contagious and it may go to your hands or even to the under arm or crotch of the legs.

Most people who have Athlete's Foot have tried all kinds of remedies to cure it without success. Ordinary germicides, antiseptics, salve or ointments seldom do any good.

Here's How to Treat It

The germ that causes the disease is known as Tinea Trichophyton. It buries itself deep in the tissues of the skin and is very hard to kill. A test made shows that it takes 20 minutes of boiling to kill the germ, so you can see why the ordinary remedies are unsuccessful.

H. F. was developed solely for the purpose of treating Athlete's Foot. It is a liquid that penetrates and dries quickly. You just paint the affected parts. It peels off the infected skin and works its way deep into the tissue of the skin where the germ breeds.

Itching Stops Immediately

As soon as you apply H. F. you will find that the itching is immediately relieved. You should paint the infected parts with H. F. night and morning until your feet are well. Usually this takes from three to ten days, although in severe cases it may take longer or in mild cases less time.

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