

# THRILLING MYSTERY

10¢

JAN.



## CONSIGNE TO HELL

A Novelet of  
Eerie Revenge  
By MARTIN KERSEY

## WAKE NOT THE DEAD

A Novelet of Weird Orgies  
By JOHN H. KNOX

## BLACK DOOM

A Novelet of  
Haitian Horror  
By DAVID  
V. REED

A THRILLING  
PUBLICATION



# I'll trust you



**A. \$2995**  
5 diamonds arranged nicely. New style ring. 14K yellow gold. \$2.90 a month



**B. \$2950**  
7 diamond Cluster; half carat size. 6 other diamonds. 14K yellow gold. \$2.85 a month



**C. \$3250**  
Bridal Set with 10 Diamonds. Both rings 14K yellow gold. \$3.15 a month



**D. \$50**  
Sworn Perfect Diamond; 2 other diamonds. 14K yellow gold. \$4.90 a month



**E. \$1695**  
Man's Initial Ring; 2 initials and diamond on black onyx. 10K yellow gold. \$1.60 a month.



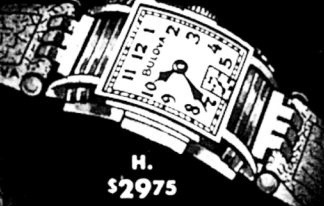
**F. \$1995**  
Newest style 17 jewel Heart Watch in 10K yellow rolled gold plate with bracelet to match. \$1.90 a month



**G. \$2975**  
Ladies' Bulova watch, 17 jewels; 10K yellow Rolled gold plate case and bracelet. \$2.88 a month



**H. \$2975**  
17 jewel Bulova Feature for men. Beautifully designed 10K yellow rolled gold plate case with leather strap. Exceptional value. \$2.88 a month



**I. \$1995**  
17 jewel curved watch; fits snug to wrist; 10K yellow rolled gold plate case; leather strap. \$1.90 a month



## 83-Piece TABLE ENSEMBLE

Consists of  
73 Pc. SILVERPLATE  
Complete with CHEST  
8 Pure Linen NAPKINS  
LOOM FILET LACE  
TABLE CLOTH (60" x 80")  
ALL FOR **\$1995**

Send \$1  
PAY ONLY  
\$1.90 A MONTH  
(Small Carrying  
Charge)  
on This  
FEATURE  
Only

My great feature  
—an exquisite 83  
piece Ensemble.  
Service for 8. Silverplate service that includes such extras as additional teaspoons, salad forks and serving pieces. All pieces pure silver on 18" nickel base. 8 pure linen napkins and a gorgeous loom fillet lace tablecloth, 60 x 80 in. All these I offer at only \$19.95. Don't miss it — send order today.

**"SEND ME \$1 and I'll send your choice of these Features I picked out. I'll give you a 10-DAY TRIAL and 10 MONTHS TO PAY or Money Back if you're not satisfied" . . . . .**

Our founder, Leonard Wheeler Sweet, won the friendship of thousands of folks everywhere by making it easy for them to own fine jewelry—by giving good, honest value. I'm following in his footsteps—I'll help you own a diamond or watch and give nice gifts. Here are some special values I selected for you—would you like to examine any of them under my Money-Back Guarantee?

I'LL TRUST YOU—tell me what you want—simply put a dollar bill in an envelope with your name, address, occupation and a few other facts about yourself. This transaction will be between you and me—everything will be confidential.

I'll send your selection for approval and 10 days trial. If you're not satisfied that you received good, honest dollar for dollar value, send it back and I'll promptly return your dollar. If satisfied, you pay in 10 small monthly amounts you will never miss.

Just a few words about the suggestions that I show here. Take ring (A), for instance. Imagine—only \$29.50 for this pretty ring. And the Cluster Ring (B)—it looks like a half carat solitaire when worn on your finger. It's a beauty—I'm sure you would like it. The Bridal Ensemble (C) is really two rings for the ordinary price of one. If it's an Engagement Ring you want, I recommend (D)—it's a perfect diamond—I'll give you an Affidavit sworn to by a diamond expert before a Notary Public. Initial Ring (E) would delight any man. It's extra heavy and beautifully designed. My watch suggestions I am proud of. Bulova Watches are fine timekeepers and great values. The Kent Watches I show are priced exceptionally low and are the latest styles. My great feature is the Silverplate Set with Tablecloth and Napkins. I expect this to be one of my popular sellers—because of its exceptionally low price.

These are just a few of the many values I have. Choose here and send your order today, or send for my complete 48-page catalog showing hundreds of diamonds and watches, jewelry and silverware, all offered on my 10-months-to-pay-plan.



*Jim Feeney*  
Sales Mgr.

**L.W. SWEET**  
MAIL ORDER DIVISION  
OF FINLAY STRAUS  
1670 BROADWAY  
DEPT. 720-AN-NEW YORK



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# NOW

YOU DON'T HAVE TO  
SEND ONE PENNY TO  
GET THIS BIG

# MONEY MAKING OUTFIT

# IT'S FREE!

## OWN A FINE PAYING NEIGHBORHOOD FOOD ROUTE

If you want to better yourself—if you want cash to spend—money to save—the means to live in comfort—let me show you your big chance! To an honest, reliable man or woman in any open locality I will give—FREE—everything needed to start a fine paying neighborhood Food Route, with profits your very first day and all year 'round. You don't send me one penny! You must realize that I certainly would not offer this big expensive Outfit FREE unless I had complete confidence in the splendid money-making opportunities of my remarkable Plan!

You need absolutely no experience. My simple, proven Plan offers you a wonderful opportunity to make good money right from the start in a simple, dignified business of your own. You handle fast-selling, quick repeating home necessities—things people must buy, such as coffee, teas, delicious foods and over 100 other necessities—all guaranteed to satisfy or money back. Your home is your headquarters. You have no investment for store rent, light, fixtures or big stocks of goods. You handle all the money and keep a liberal share for yourself. In fact, your average gross profit is from 30 to 40 cents on every dollar you take in. Once you start, under my liberal credit plan, you can operate on my capital.

### Splendid Cash Profits

You owe it to yourself to write and see what wonderful success so many others have enjoyed with this time-tested money-making Plan. Let me mail you full particulars—then you can judge

whether you want to start right in making money at once.

### I Send Everything

I not only give you free the Complete Outfit shown here, containing a big assortment of full-sized packages, but also give you a sample, sure-fire Plan. I give you advertising material, trial-size samples to give away, and everything else you need to start earning money your very first day.

### Get Full Particulars!

This is a sincere offer made by a big, reliable, old-established company operating from Coast to Coast. Write at once for full particulars. Unless you take advantage of my remarkable Free Outfit Offer now, you may be missing the very money-making opportunity you have been looking for. Strike out for yourself! Be independent! Make money! Enjoy life! Remember—you don't send me a penny. Just fill out and send the coupon and I will mail you full particulars. Do this TODAY!



### RUSH COUPON for FREE OFFER

Mr. E. J. MILLS, President  
1510 Monmouth Ave., Cincinnati, Ohio

Without the slightest obligation on my part please mail me full particulars about your offer of a Complete Free Outfit, and how you will help me get started at once in a fine-paying neighborhood Food Route.

Name.....

Address.....

(Please Print or Write Plainly)

E. J. MILLS, Pres., 1510 Monmouth Ave., Cincinnati, O.



• EVERY STORY BRAND-NEW •

# THRILLING MYSTERY

Vol. XIV, No. 1

January, 1940

Price 10c

## Three Complete Mystery Novelets

- CONSIGNED TO HELL** - - - - - Martin Kersey 12  
*A Sinister Fiend from Hades Unleashes a Corpse Cavalcade—and the Dead Live Again when Ghouls Pillage the Graves of Slain Cadavers!*
- BLACK DOOM** - - - - - David V. Reed 54  
*Amid the Awesome Hush of the Dark Haitian Jungle Depths, Death Stalks with Bloody Sword—Creating a Grim Feast of Horror!*
- WAKE NOT THE DEAD** - - - - - John H. Knox 88  
*Willis Payne, Mortician, is Suddenly Plunged into a Baffling Maelstrom of Mystery that is Far Beyond Human Understanding*

## Five Thrilling Short Stories

- MUMMIES TO ORDER** - - - - - E. Hoffmann Price 29  
*Murray Deane is Confounded by the Vengeance of Dead Gods*
- DEALER IN HUMAN PARTS** - - - - - Noel Loomis 41  
*The Man Was Dead—but there Were Fresh Footprints in the Snow!*
- DANSE MACABRE** - - - - - John Easterly 51  
*Rand Wade Invades a Spider-Mesh of Primeval Horror*
- GRIM EVIDENCE** - - - - - Don Joseph 69  
*Murder Makes a Million—and the Wind, the Snake and the Flame Take Over!*
- DEATH HAS THREE SISTERS** - - - - - Kelvin Kent 79  
*The Three Fates of Ancient Greece Spin a Fiendish Web of Doom*

## Special Feature

- HORROR-SCOPES** - - - - - Chakra 104  
*Special FREE Crystal-Scope Reading Offer! Coupon on Page 111*

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PRINTED IN U. S. A.





## I Trained These Men



Chief Operator Broadcasting Station

"When I completed 20 lessons, I obtained my radio Broadcast Operator's license and immediately joined Station WMPC, where I am now Chief Operator."

HOLLIS F. HAYES  
327 Madison St.  
Lapeer, Michigan

### Service Manager for Four Stores

"I was working in a garage when I enrolled with N. R. I. In a few months I made enough to pay for the course three or four times. I am now Radio service manager for the M— Furniture Co. for their four stores."

JAMES E. RYAN  
1543 Slade St.  
Fall River, Mass.



Over \$1,000 Before Graduating  
"Before completing half the N. R. I. Course I was servicing sets, and I made \$1,000 to \$1,200 before graduating. I am doing Radio service work for myself now."

ASHLEY G. ALDRIDGE  
1228 Shepherd St.  
Petersburg, Va.



\$200 to \$300 a Month in Own Business  
"For the last two years I have been in business for myself making between \$200 and \$300 a month. Business has steadily increased. I have N. R. I. to thank for my start in this field."

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300 W. Texas Ave.  
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## I WILL TRAIN YOU AT HOME in your spare time for a GOOD JOB IN RADIO

Radio is a young, growing field with a future offering many good pay spare time and full time job opportunities. And you don't have to give up your present job to become a Radio Technician. I train you right at home in your spare time.

### Why Many Radio Technicians Make \$30, \$40, \$50 a Week

Radio broadcasting stations employ engineers, operators, technicians. Radio manufacturers employ testers, inspectors, foremen, servicemen in good-pay jobs. Radio jobbers, dealers, employ installation and service men. Many Radio Technicians open their own Radio sales and repair businesses and make \$30, \$40, \$50 a week. Others hold their regular jobs and make \$5 to \$10 a week fixing Radios in spare time. Automobile, police, aviation, Commercial Radio, loudspeaker systems, electronic devices are other fields offering opportunities for which N. R. I. gives the required knowledge of Radio. Television promises to open good jobs soon.

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

The day you enroll, I start sending you Extra Money Job Sheets which start showing you how to do Radio repair jobs. Throughout your course I send plans and directions which have helped many make \$200 to \$500 a year in spare time while learning. I send

special Radio equipment to conduct experiments and build circuits. This 50-50 training method makes learning at home interesting, fascinating, practical. I ALSO GIVE YOU A MODERN PROFESSIONAL, ALL-WAVE, ALL-PURPOSE SET SERVING INSTRUMENT to help you make money fixing Radios while learning and equip you for full time work after you graduate.



J. E. SMITH, Pres.  
National Radio Institute.  
Est. 25 years

### Find Out What Radio Offers You

Act Today! Mail the coupon for my 64-page Book "Rich Rewards in Radio." It points out Radio's spare time and full time opportunities and those coming in Television; tells about my course in Radio and Television; shows many letters from men I have trained, telling what they are doing and earning. Read my money back agreement. MAIL COUPON in an envelope, or paste on a penny postcard—NOW!

J. E. Smith, President  
Dept. OA09, National Radio Institute  
Washington, D. C.

## Mail this to get 64 page book FREE

J. E. Smith, President, Dept. OA09,  
National Radio Institute, Washington, D. C.

Dear Mr. Smith: Send me FREE, without obligation, your 64-page book, "Rich Rewards in Radio," which points out Radio's opportunities and tells how you train men at home to be Radio Technicians. (Write Plainly.)

NAME..... AGE.....

ADDRESS.....

CITY..... STATE.....



THIS BOOK has  
shown hundreds how to  
MAKE MORE MONEY



**THIS MAN DIDN'T BELIEVE HE  
COULD LEARN MUSIC BY MAIL**



**THIS MAN DECIDED TO TRY THIS  
EASY, SHORT-CUT METHOD!  
(P.S. You should hear him play now!)**



# Do *You* Smile at the Idea of Learning Music by Mail?

## *Here Are Some Facts That May Surprise You!*

**YOU HAVE** undoubtedly heard of the U. S. School method of teaching music by mail. This remarkable system of instruction has been in operation for over forty years and more than 700,000 people in all parts of the world have enrolled for it. Men, women and children of all ages and from all walks of life have taken up their favorite musical instruments this convenient, money-saving way. They have studied the piano, violin, guitar, accordion and, in short, every kind of popular instrument.

### *No Special Talent Required*

Many of these pupils did not know one musical note from another when they enrolled. Many had previously tried other methods of instruction without success. And not a few were frankly skeptical. They doubted whether it was possible to learn music by mail, just as you may doubt it.

To some of these "Doubting Thomases" it came as the surprise of their lives when they actually heard themselves playing. Simple popular melodies at first, then more and more advanced pieces, all the way to Grand Opera.

One after another, pupils testify to the amazing ease with which they learned, and the fascination and pleasure they found in the lessons. They say it was "easy as A. B. C."—so simple that a child could understand—that "with all the wonderful photographs and diagrams to guide you, you simply cannot go wrong"—that "it's really fun to learn music this easy, fascinating way."

### *Will You Accept This Challenge?*

The experience of thousands upon thousands of people should be proof positive that you, too, can learn to play your favorite instrument by the famous print-and-picture method of the U. S. School of Music. Is it not a pity, then, to deny yourself all the enjoyment, the good times and popularity that music offers? Do you not owe it to yourself, at least, to examine all

the facts, and to decide, once and for all, whether you can afford to pass by this opportunity to enrich your life with music?

If you really want to play a musical instrument—if you are willing to devote just a few minutes a day to learning, not through tedious, old-fashioned practice, but by actually playing real tunes, then you should mail the coupon at once. It will bring you an interesting illustrated booklet that tells all about this wonderful way to learn music at home—without any special talent—without any previous knowledge of music at amazingly little cost. Read it carefully and earnestly and act upon it. If interested, tear out the coupon now, before you turn the page. (Instruments supplied when needed, cash or credit.) Address: U. S. School of Music, 2941 Brunswick Building, New York, N. Y.

(Established 1898)

### **CHECK THE INSTRUMENTS YOU'D LIKE TO PLAY HERE'S FREE PROOF YOU CAN LEARN!**

U. S. School of Music, 2941 Brunswick Bldg., New York, N. Y.

I am interested in music study, particularly in the instrument checked below. Please send me your free illustrated booklet, "How to Learn Music at Home."

Piano	Cello	Cornet	Drums and Traps
Violin	Hawaiian	Trumpet	Ukulele
Guitar	Guitar	Harp	Organ
Piano Accordion	Banjo	Clarinet	Modern Elementary
Plain Accordion	Mandolin	Flute	Harmony
Saxophone	Trombone	Piccolo	Voice Culture

Name ..... Have you .....  
this instr. ?

Address .....

City ..... State .....



# What Diseases may accompany PILES

## and other Rectal Afflictions?

These ailments tend to undermine the health in many ways. Thousands of sufferers from such common complaints as Headaches, Nervousness, Constipation, Stomach and Liver Disorders, Bladder Disturbances, Heart Troubles, Despondency, general "Tired Out" feeling have found their condition to be closely connected with Piles or some other rectal trouble.

## This Free Book gives you the facts!

### 50,000 SUFFERERS RELIEVED

Send for FREE Thornton & Minor book which explains how other ailments may develop if rectal troubles are neglected. You'll receive, also, a Reference List giving names and addresses of former patients, with statements telling how they were relieved without serious loss of time, hospitalization or use of ether, chloroform or radical surgery.

## Clip and mail today!

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Suite 2156, 926 McGee St., Kansas City, Mo.

Please send me, without charge or obligation, in plain wrapper, your Free Descriptive Book and Reference Literature. I am troubled with

- ☐ PILES ☐ FISTULA  
☐ OTHER RECTAL TROUBLE

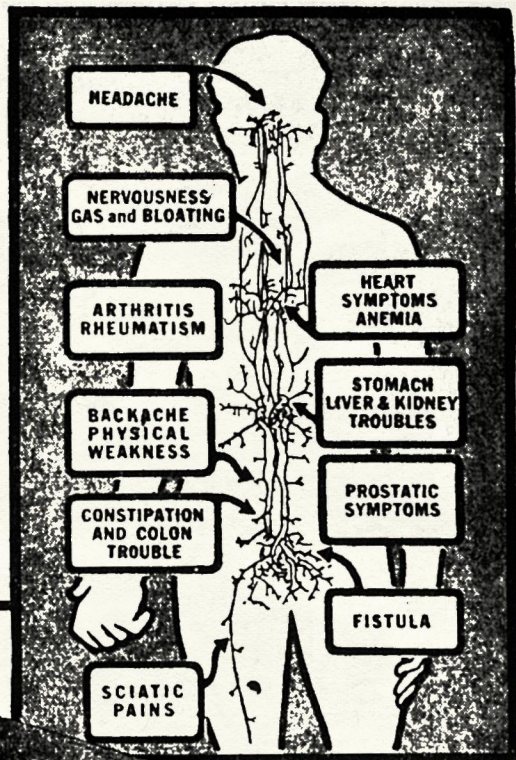
Name.....

Age..... Nationality.....

Street or R. F. D.....

City..... State.....

Please mark X indicating your trouble.



## Many Common Ailments Relieved By Proper Rectal Treatment

If you suffer from any of the disorders on the chart and nothing gives relief—don't neglect your rectal trouble—minor as it may seem, it may be the cause. The Free Illustrated Book tells of many cases where patients had teeth or tonsils removed, or abdominal operations without benefit—but found relief only when given proper rectal treatment. These facts, based on 62 years' experience in the world's oldest known rectal clinic, may save you from long suffering, worry and heavy expense. Feel free to ask any questions that occur to you. There is no obligation, and FREE literature comes in plain wrapper.

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Coupon Brings Book **FREE**





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You'll get a real thrill of HOME RECORDING. Surprise your friends by letting them hear your voice or playing right from a record. Record a snappy talking feature. Record jokes and become the life of the party. Great to help train your voice and to cultivate speech. Nothing to practice . . . you start recording at once . . . no other mechanical or electrical devices needed . . . everything necessary included. Nothing else to buy. Just sing, speak or play and HOME RECORDO unit, which operates on any electric or hand-winding type phonograph, will do the recording on special blank records we furnish. You can immediately play the records back as often as you wish. Make your home movie a talking picture with HOME RECORDO. Simply make the record while filming and play back while showing the picture. You can also record orchestras or favorite radio programs right off the air and replay them whenever you wish.

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**OUTFIT ONLY**

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Send entire HOME RECORDING OUTFIT described above, by return mail. I will pay postman \$2.98, plus postage, on arrival. (Send cash or money order now for \$3.00 and save postage.)

Send . . . . . blank records at 88¢ per dozen (24 sides).

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City & State . . . . .

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Here's a Partial List  
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Institutions in which  
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I. A. S. were placed in  
positions as Finger  
Print Experts!

Be A  
Secret Service and  
Identification Expert!

State of Wash.  
State of Michigan  
State of Utah  
State of Ohio  
Duluth, Minn.  
Detroit, Mich.  
Pueblo, Colo.  
Idaho Falls, Idaho  
Ogden, Utah  
Lorain Co., Ohio  
St. Paul, Minn.  
Pittsburgh, Pa.  
Lincoln, Neb.  
Birmingham, Ala.  
Columbus, Ohio  
Havana, Cuba  
New Haven, Conn.  
Great Falls, Mont.  
Galveston, Texas  
Pensacola, Fla.  
Stillwater, Okla.

Calgary, Alta., Can.  
Houston, Texas  
Waterloo, Iowa  
Victoria, B. C.  
Baton Rouge, La.  
Atlantic City, N. J.  
E. Lansing, Mich.  
Globe, Arizona  
London, Ont., Can.  
Henryetta, Okla.  
Seattle, Wash.  
Ferndale, Mich.  
McAlester, Okla.  
Negaunee, Mich.  
Lawton, Okla.  
Crown Point, Ind.  
Bay City, Mich.  
Reasaka, Va.  
Glendale, Calif.  
Hawaiian Islands  
Drumright, Okla.

Miami, Florida  
Orlando, Florida  
York, Pa.  
El Paso, Texas  
Everett, Wash.  
Schenebady, N. Y.  
Alhambra, Calif.  
Livingston, Mont.  
Baginaw, Mich.  
Fort Collins, Colo.  
Bedford, Ohio  
Huntington, W. Va.  
Salt Lake City, U.  
Taft, California  
Jamestown, N. Y.  
Phoenixville, Pa.  
Rochester, N. Y.  
Media, Pa.  
Dayton, Ohio  
East Chicago, Ind.  
Green Bay, Wis.  
Nocona, Texas  
Neenah, Wis.  
Kingfisher, Okla.  
Centralia, Wash.  
Bismarck, N. D.  
Bloomington, Ind.  
Cuyahoga Falls, O.  
Rock Island, Ill.  
Philadelphia, Pa.  
Astoria, Oregon  
Pendleton, Ind.  
St. Joseph, Mo.  
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State of Iowa  
State of Idaho  
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Name

Address

Age





*Beautiful Looking  
Natural*

**FALSE TEETH**  
BY MAIL - LOWEST PRICES  
90 DAYS TRIAL

WORLD FAMOUS

**TRU-FIT**



WRITE  
TODAY

**PROOF**

"Dear Dr. Cleveland:—I received my plate and it fits fine. Thanks for the wonderful service to me. Being a minister my teeth mean much in being better able to speak properly, also in appearance.—  
Rev. J. S. Washington, D. C."

**WEAR THEM, TEST THEM, EXAMINE THEM** for BEAUTY, FIT AND COMFORT. You **MUST BE 100% SATISFIED** or your money will be refunded any time within your 90 days trial. I am a dentist of 30 YEARS' EXPERIENCE. I supervise the making of your plates from start to finish.

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EXCITING STORIES OF THE WAR ON  
ESPIONAGE IN AMERICA  
IN

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HEAVY DUTY  
INDUSTRIAL WELDER**

**WORKS OFF 110 VOLT  
ELECTRIC LIGHT CIRCUIT**

For this unheard of price, you can get the marvelous Dynamic Super-Charged Welder complete—all ready to plug into your light socket. The Dynamic does both metallic arc and carbon arc welding.

**WELDS CYLINDER BLOCKS, FENDERS, AXLES, BODIES, BUMPERS, FARM MACHINERY, CAST IRON RADIATORS, ETC.**

With the Dynamic Super-Charged Welder, a man without previous welding experience can make for himself as much as \$5.00 on a repair job that can be done in less than one hour. Many welders make as much as \$15.00 to \$20.00 a day. Dynamic Welder costs less than 6 cents a day. Instructions Free. Open a welding shop now. Despite its serviceability, the Dynamic Welder is light and easily portable—can be carried around by hand and set on the running board of any car you are working on.

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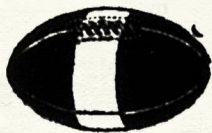
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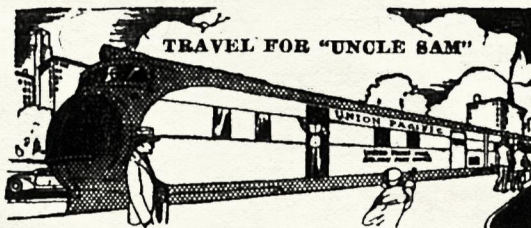
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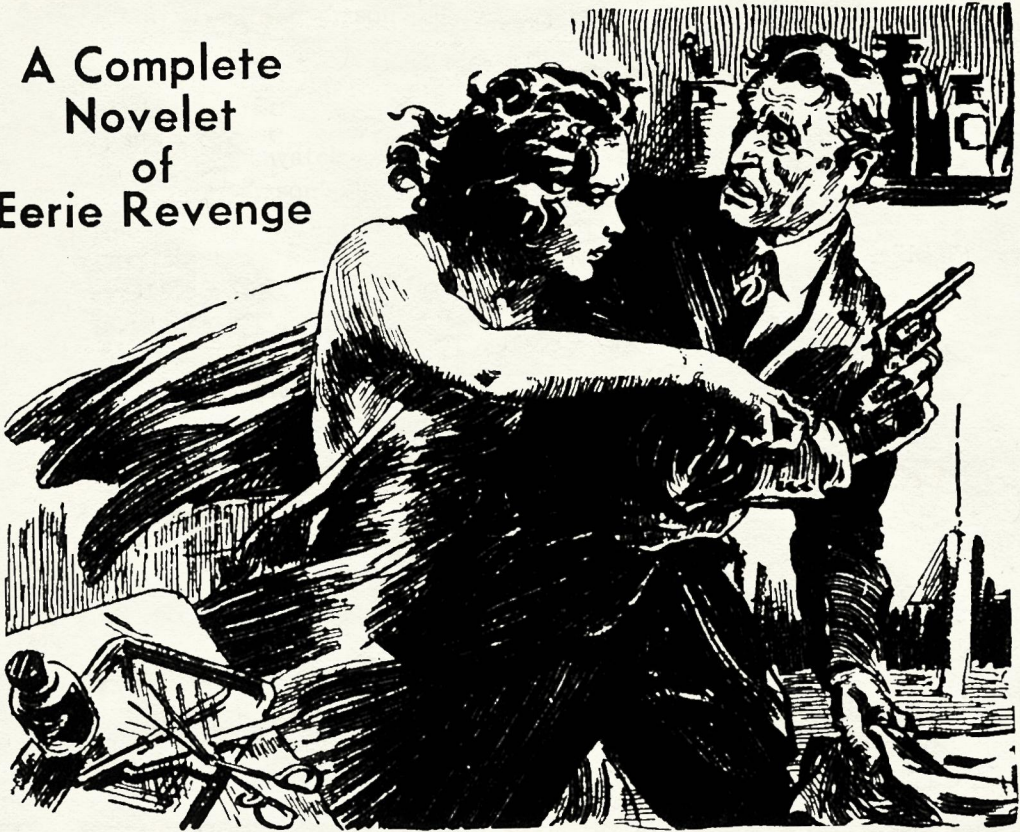


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## A Sinister Fiend From Hades Unleashes a

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A Complete  
Novelet  
of  
Eerie Revenge



*With my one free hand I reached for the*

# CONSIGNED TO

## CHAPTER I

### *Coffin for the Living*

**C**LIMBING into the second floor window of the undertaker's establishment was a risky procedure. I had to break into a back window of the hardware store next door. From the storeroom upstairs I climbed out over the roof of a back porch to the edge of the undertaker's house. Here, clinging to a drain pipe, I could barely reach one hand to the sill of a second floor window.

A heavy fog masked the arclight of the street across the empty lot, but the sickly glow revealed a delivery wagon parked in the alley somewhere below me.

Just as I climbed over the sill soft footsteps marched along the floor of the funeral parlor downstairs. That was the undertaker. He was going out into the yard to meet that delivery wagon. As the door closed behind him I realized that I was the only living soul in that house.

There was enough light from a gas jet in the hall to show me my way

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## The Dead Live Again When Ghouls

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# Corpse Cavalcade That Strikes Terror!

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By **MARTIN  
KERSEY**

*Author of "Food for the  
Ghoul," "Mirror of  
Doom," etc.*



*undertaker's weapon*

## HELL

down the stairs. The dim hall smelled of flowers and formaldehyde. Apart from the natural uneasiness anyone would feel entering a house of corpses, I had reasons of my own for a special horror. On every side of me were the tools of the grim trade—the embalming apparatus, rubber tubes, bottles, receptacles for the drawing of blood, the long service baskets for transporting the dead and that new coffin.

I passed the couch in the front room where the dead were laid out, stumbled over a box of wax flowers and

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## Pillage the Graves of Slain Cadavers!

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lurched against the framed undertaker's license on the wall. I was certainly jumpy. With a steadier step I went to the coffin. The lid was closed, but I had no trouble unbolting it. I lifted the lid as noiselessly as possible and it seemed that all the dim light in the room focused on the ghastly face that stared up at me.

It did not actually stare, for the corpse's eyelids were closed and bluish-stiff. But the flickering gas jet made the illusion real and nerve shattering. The pressed lips of the man, twisted in the last throes of death, had not been tampered with by the mortician's grim art of make-up.

Evidently the dead man had been poor, for the coffin was cheap, the burial clothes old and shabby. The waxen hands, which now clutched at the empty air, were hands that in life must have clutched pick or shovel.

I did not pause long to study that bloodless, death-stiffened visage. I had my work to do and no time to waste, for the undertaker would be back any moment. I could see him now, through a window, standing at the opposite end of the back yard revealed in the light of the delivery wagon. I turned to the coffin.

Putting my arms under the stiff body, I lifted it, and lugged it to a dark corner of the room. There, I hid it behind the couch. I took out a small hand drill, which I had bought in a hardware store. Quickly, I bored two holes in the coffin's side just under the handles, where they would be least likely to be noticed. Then I repeated the process on the opposite side, making the bore as large as the circular part of a keyhole. Next I tilted the lid on the rim, holding it with my hand so that it would fall down into place when I let go. Then I got in, stretched myself out in the coffin and let the lid close slowly and softly.

**A**S the lid came down to within the last inch, a cold shudder gripped my stiffened back. In that final second before the lid shut me off from the outside, living world, I realized that I was going mad.

I had not known it until then. The acts of the insane may be preceded by

a normal pattern of motives and reasoning. Up until this dreadful moment I was certain that I had full possession of my faculties, that my reasoning powers were normally acute, that I had arrived at this act of mine by a series of apparently lucid and strictly logical steps. But then as the lid closed and I heard the bolts automatically click shut with the weight of the lid, I knew I had gone crazy!

The realization of my mental disaster came in one swift horrifying vision. It was a vision of that corpse which I had laid behind the couch. As nearly as I could remember I had set the corpse out under the couch with legs stretched, arms at its side in the same position as I had found it in the coffin, stiffened in rigor mortis. But the last sight I had of it revealed its head twisted somewhat so that it was peering at me from under the couch!

The light from the single gas jet shed a flickering bluish glow on the ghastly face. The eyes were open and staring at me, and the mouth was twisted not in pain—but in a grin!

This dead thing, this stiffened cadaver whose place I was taking seemed to see the joke.

It was a macabre joke that I—a madman—had played upon myself!

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## CHAPTER II

### *Mystery Murders*

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**W**HETHER I was mad or not, this chronicle will testify. I said I had motives, crystal clear, steel sharp. I shall give them now.

Two hours before I committed the insane act described above I was sitting with Dr. Joseph Blessant and Mellicent Martin, his office nurse, in the doctor's private parlor. Dr. Blessant, a portly, handsome gentleman in his fifties, was head of the City Hospital and an important figure in civic and charity work. It was not surprising that the horror which had beset the city should have broken this powerful and well beloved man so completely. For the blight had struck in ghostly fashion at the doctor's home.



The reason for his almost hysterical fears became apparent as we sat together in the subdued light listening, tense, waiting for the horror to come again.

Mellicent was twenty, slender, pallid of skin, lovely in her white uniform. As soon as my law practice would allow, Mellicent Martin and I were to be wed. It was she who had asked me to help Dr. Blessant in his hour of dreadful need. My actual motive for helping, however, was unknown to him. I had a definite fear that Mellicent, as a member of the doctor's household and a distant relative of his, might be the next victim.

In describing this horror I do not know how to begin. It was too vague, hovering, intangible. But in some way it was connected with some normal deaths in Dr. Blessant's clinic.

He looked at me, rubbing his high white forehead in despair.

"Is some unnatural force demanding revenge for my mistakes?" he cried.

"Just because the patient died does not mean you made a mistake," I said soothingly. "A doctor of national reputation certainly can't reproach himself."

"I've gone over the case records carefully, Tom Hurley," the distracted man said, "to see if there might not have been one mistake, one dose too much, one stroke of the scalpel that slipped, one blunder of the nurse or intern in charge. Since they were charity patients a certain carelessness might be suspected. But I can swear before my God I did all in my power. So why this retribution?"

The retribution, as he called it, might have been merely a delusion on Dr. Blessant's part. He was suffering from a psychosis, from overstrained nerves, working ten hours a day for his charity clinic, another six hours for his wealthy clients.

"There simply can't be any connection between the deaths of your patients and the horrible things that have been happening to your family," I argued.

"But look here!" the doctor argued, facing me, the lampshade pouring a lurid light on his haggard eyes. "How

can you explain the brutal murder of my brother? Abandoned in the park with his chest badly mangled, the heart torn out—cut out of course, but with such inexpert butchery that I say torn out. It happened right after one of my charity patients had died of angina!"

"Your patient dies of heart disease," I commented. "Then your brother's heart is torn out! Strange!"

"Tom sees the connection!" Mellicent put in excitedly. "And it happened again—the same way. Another patient died of brain tumor—"

She covered her face with her lovely white hands. The hands, writhing, looked suddenly old.

The doctor finished what she had started to say.

"I did all I could. It was a poor grocer's clerk. His family wanted me to operate, even though I said the chance was very slim. The boy died. Then, two days later, my nephew Jack was found in the woods above Blake's Hill, his skull sawed and chopped open as if by a carpenter. The brain was gone!"

**I** FELT the shiver in Mellicent's wet slim hand as it kneaded my palm. She knew the next case:

"Then my cousin, Bob Turbell," the doctor moaned. "You see, I'd just lost a case of tongue cancer. What chance has any doctor to save a tongue cancer patient? One out of a million perhaps. Cousin Bob was found in the turnpike woods, his face horribly mutilated, the tongue—" The doctor broke off, put his shuddering hands to his head and nodded, dazed with horror.

"Can't you see what it all means?" he cried. "Someone thinks I neglected my charity patients. And what a grim revenge they are exacting! I must pay each time with the same physical part from some of my own kin! And who is to be next?"

We were all thinking about that! Dr. Blessant had lost a tuberculosis patient that morning from a hemorrhage, a young girl.

"I begged her father to send her to an institution," he said, "but he had no money. I offered to pay the ex-



penses out of my own pocket, but it was too late. I suppose her relatives will think that I have my rich patients well cared for in institutions, and that I deliberately let this girl die in her squalid home."

"Are the relatives of these patients being watched?" I asked.

The doctor nodded.

"The police started checking up on everyone just this morning. It was Miss Martin—he nodded to my fiancée—who went down to Headquarters and told them of our theory. They agree that it's obviously the work of some murderous crank." He wrung his hands. "If I could only have warned Jane before she went out tonight!"

I knew Jane Blessant, the Doctor's young niece.

"Where did she go?" I asked, alarmed.

"The death of her brother has horrified her so that she left town right after the funeral," Doctor Blessant answered. "She went to visit an aunt. I phoned her aunt to watch for her. I even advised the Highway Police to watch for a coupé with a young girl driving. I don't know what route she took, or I'd be out hunting for her myself, even though I've had an exhausting day at the clinic."

"Why do you think it'll be your niece, Doctor?" I asked.

"She is the last of my kin."

"I'm worried about Dr. Blessant himself," Mellicent said to me.

The doctor waved his hand distractedly.

"I have no fear for myself—if I can only be sure Jane is safe!"

The buzz of the phone made all three of us jump. Mellicent, in her capacity of office nurse, answered. Bravely, she tried to keep her voice steady. But I knew well enough that her heart was pumping as fast as both the doctor's and mine.

We saw her cheeks, always slightly pale, drain of the last flush of color. Her hand went to her breast and I dashed to her, fearing she was going to faint. The doctor snatched the phone.

The news wasn't very unexpected. Jane Blessant's body had just been

found near a clump of pine on the north turnpike.

It took us nearly an hour to get there, the three of us riding in the doctor's car. Motorcycle police and a crowd of curiosity-seekers stood around a ramshackle farmhouse where the body had been taken. A police surgeon had already arrived and his examination of the body indicated that death had occurred only a few moments before the mutilated corpse was found.

No wonder Dr. Blessant and Mellicent had felt the uncanny telepathy of violence working. For while the three of us had been sitting in the doctor's parlor, the fiendish mutilation of his niece had been taking place!

She had been a beautiful girl, I remembered, but now her face was gray and twisted by those last moments of an unspeakable death. They had found her lying with a deep gory hole cut in her chest, the ribs hacked away as if with a butcher's knife.

I stared at the waxen face, sick with horror and likewise with the pungent and indescribable odor which seemed to fill the farmhouse room—the odor of formaldehyde.

Dr. Blessant's forehead was crinkled and wet, his gentle eyes bulging and hardened to the glint of agates. We all heard him gibbering.

"The fiend sliced out a lung!" he sobbed. He looked away from the crowd of policemen and stared at Mellicent and me.

"That patient of mine who died this morning—she was the same age, a young girl! And it was her lung that. . . ."

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## CHAPTER III

### *Charnel House*

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**WE** drove home. What usual arrangements there were to be made, the nerve-shattered doctor left to his assistant who was summoned from town.

By this time I was convinced, as were the police, that these horrifying crimes were acts of revenge and "re-



tribution" directed at the hapless Dr. Blessant. Each time one of the doctor's charity patients died a rich patient paid the penalty. And to make the payment perfect, the rich patient was always one of Dr. Blessant's relatives. Never in my life had I heard of crank "justice" being perverted to such an extent as to victimize such an innocent and honorable and well beloved man.

My anger, however, was subordinated to my fears. Either the doctor or the loveliest member of his household, my fiancée, would be next. It was in the ordained course of the maniac's schedule. My mind jumped wildly. Dr. Blessant had lost another case that morning—a poor, bedraggled young woman. My stomach twisted as if wrenched by an icy claw as I pictured what might happen to my Mellicent. She would be found abandoned at the side of some lonely turnpike, dead and hideously mutilated.

Those were my grim thoughts as Mellicent said good night to me when I left her at the doctor's house. I did not leave, however, until the Police Chief had sent three patrolmen to act as a bodyguard for the doctor during the night. A cordon was set about the house with orders that no one was to enter before morning. I wanted to stay, but both Mellicent and the doctor preferred that I go down to Headquarters.

The night was murky and chill as I walked down the street. I still shuddered with the memory of that first vision I had had of Jane Blessant's body, and of that repugnant odor with which my sense of smell vivified the fearful after-image of her.

That smell of formaldehyde bothered me for the simple reason that it did not belong in that picture of sudden death. I felt, reasonably enough, that it might be a clue. I had even mentioned it to the police surgeon. He had made a note of the point. It might mean something to the homicide boys, he said.

Walking down the gloomy and almost deserted street I tried to weave this elusive thread into the pattern. What would the killer be doing with

formaldehyde, I wondered.

I dropped into the nearest drugstore while waiting for a street car to take me down to Headquarters. Briefly, I told old Sam Winkle, the druggist, what was on my mind. He had heard of the last blow which had befallen Dr. Blessant and was most distressed and concerned. The doctor was one of his best friends and clients.

"Formaldehyde is used as a preservative," he said.

"I know that much, and it's given me a hunch that the killer was saving these definite parts of the bodies of his victims."

"You mean some day he can present them to the doctor?" Old Winkle glared over his thick lenses. "Listen, Mr. Hurley," he said to me suddenly, "something happened today which got me thinking. A fellow came in here—a queer looking bird who buys lots of drugs. Had kind of a small head, but his body was long enough to make him a giant. I could see right away from his talk that he knows lots about chemicals. He'd never have the stuff sent to any address, which is what I always ask when they want a prescription. He always waited. Well, he uses that phone in there and today I just happened to be in the next booth and heard him say 'I'll call for it at half past twelve. Sure, in back.'"

"CALL for what?" I asked.

"That's just it. I checked up the call with central. He'd phoned an undertaker."

"Which one?"

"Cheap one down on Center Street. Name of Titus Gambril. And maybe you know, Mr. Hurley, that undertakers use formaldehyde."

Instantly I went to the phone. I called up the coroner's office asking them to look up the death certificates of the last four patients of Dr. Blessant. Since all death certificates record the funeral director, I asked them to check this also. The four burials had been in charge of Titus Gambril.

I decided to delay my visit to Headquarters. I took a street car for the Gambril Funeral Parlors. It was located in the poorer section of town.



The street was deserted, although one or two stores were still open—bakery, a hardware store, and four corner saloons. A small globe of light hung above the mortician's like a spot of marsh fire. I rang the bell.

I confess that I might have been more covert in my entrance but by now my nerves were twitching, my brain whirling. It would have been wiser to have sent a detective. But I was too eager to do some detective work myself. If that strange chemist Old Winkle had mentioned was getting his supply of formaldehyde from Gambriel's undertaking parlor I resolved to shadow him. I would shadow him that night—and by myself.

A thin man in black with a fixed smile opened the door. He had no reason to doubt that I was just another customer. But he asked what I wanted before inviting me into his office.

"Do I have to tell my business out here in the drizzly street?"

Mumbling that he was busy, he let me enter the little office. I could see the parlor through the door. I saw the couch with the wax flowers on a table, on chairs, in boxes on the floor. I saw the coffin.

My eyes snapped back to the undertaker. His glare was fixed on me.

"Well, sir?"

"I see you are working on a case. Who is it?"

He stiffened, standing in front of me so as to mask my view of that coffin. He showed a definite suspicion.

"What has that to do with your business, sir?"

I was too excited to be diplomatic. He saw my hands shaking with excitement as I lit a cigarette.

"If you are already working on a job I can get another undertaker."

This got him. He wheedled, rubbing his manicured hands that smelt of strong soap.

"I assure you, sir, that does not matter. If you will sit down and tell me the name of the deceased, the address—"

I made up the first lie that popped into my head. "My uncle died at nine. Dr. Bessant signed the death certificate—"

I watched the effect of the Doctor's name on him, but found he was watching me with the same steady fixed stare—like a cat's.

"I suppose that is one of Dr. Bessant's unfortunate cases?" I pointed to the coffin.

**T**HE undertaker jumped up.

"So that's it!" he snarled, showing huge false teeth, which gave me the impression that this man was himself falsely human. "So! You come here to ask about Dr. Bessant's patients. You're a detective! I knew the police would jump at that—with no reason except that all these fiendish deaths have a counterpart in the bodies I have prepared for burial. It's a damnable outrage. My reputation is ruined! And a young snip like you dares to come here and ask me about Dr. Bessant to my face!"

He did not raise his voice although he gave the impression of shouting madly. Indeed, each successive outburst was softer, more malignant than the rest. "Get out of here, you young swine! Or I'll—"

He picked up a chair and in his monstrous rage swung it up as if to bring it crashing on my head.

But I swung first, cutting him easily on the mouth. His false teeth clacked and he fell headlong. He rolled and lay on the floor, the most hideous misshapen thing I have ever seen. The false teeth were partly out, giving him the look of a snarling baboon, and his dazed eyes flickered and fixed on me with a murderous greenish light.

Then he drew a gun! I had not come here for any such combat. I was an intruder, and defenseless. I decided it was time to retreat.

But I wanted to go back.

I could not very well ring the doorbell again. I might have asked for police help. But if they sent a detective in, the undertaker would surely suspect.

Whatever transaction he had with the strange chemist would be called off. I would learn nothing.

I resolved not to bother him again, but to wait out in back for the arrival of the chemist. It was two hours before the chemist, according to his



phone message, was "to call for it." I went home and came back with a gun and the hand drill.

At midnight I hid behind the funeral parlor, between two ash cans, securely hidden in the thickening fog. At half past twelve I heard the chug of a motor, the rattle of an old delivery wagon which backed up in the alley against the board fence of the undertaker's yard.

I saw the driver let down the back-board of the wagon and shoot his flashlight over the floor. He was abnormally tall, gaunt, with long bony hands. I saw his hands shoving aside a pile of stuff to make room for the freight he had come to collect. Was he making these preparations merely for a bottle of formaldehyde?

I doubted it. And with good logic as I soon found out. From the back door of the funeral parlor the thin black form of Gambril stepped into the yard. The gaunt giant came toward him.

"Is it ready?" he asked sharply.

They were so close to the cans behind which I hid that I could hear every word.

"It's in a coffin. Been dead two days," the undertaker said. "But keep your voice down. A fellow came here. Looked like a detective, except he didn't have a gun. If I ever get my hands on him—"

"Let's get the corpse and go."

"Not yet. I saw some one out in

front snooping around. I want to have another look. If anyone finds out where we're taking that cadaver they'll know who's been murdering and butchering those victims on the Turnpike. It'll mean the pen for us all. You walk around the block and see if anyone's spotting us."

**I** WAITED until they had gone their separate ways. I was determined to shadow these ghouls to the very ends of the earth. The disposition of that corpse, as I had just learned, would unearth the secret of the reign of terror that had gripped our city. But how was I to find out where they were taking that corpse? In another minute they would be gone and the secret would vanish with them. A secret that might mean the safety of my beloved Mellicent.

What I did was mad, but what else could I have done? I had no car with which to track the ghouls. Nor had I time to call the police. I resolved to play my own hand.

Needless to say, the undertaker had locked all doors even though he had gone out for just a moment. But I got in by the method told before.

A moment after I had closed myself inside the casket I heard the steps of men—two men. I felt my grim prison being slid along the floor, tilted, then wheeled along. The smell of dank mists oozed through the holes I had

[Turn Page]

## THE GIRL WHO PUNISHED HERSELF



BETTY: I don't know which is worse . . . constipation or the remedy!

SALLY: You're silly to punish yourself that way. Why don't you try Ex-Lax?



BETTY: Ex-Lax? You expect that to work for me . . . a little chocolate tablet?

SALLY: Don't let its taste deceive you. Ex-Lax is thorough and effective.



LATER

BETTY: No more strong, bad-tasting laxatives for me! Ex-Lax fixed me up fine!

SALLY: What did I tell you! We're used Ex-Lax in our family for over 30 years.

The action of Ex-Lax is thorough, yet gentle! No shock. No strain. No weakening after-effects. Just an easy, comfortable bowel movement that brings blessed relief. Try Ex-Lax the next time you need a laxative. It's good for every member of the family.

10¢ and 25¢





bored with the drill. Needles of light crossed my face as I lay stretched in the straight rigidity of a corpse.

I felt myself tilted again, then shoved. The smell of mists gave way to the smell of gasoline. My coffin vibrated with the chugging of the car. I was on the way not only to some leathsome corner of hell—but on the way to madness.

**T**HE car stopped. The motor's chug gave way to the chant of frogs. Palm fronds thrashed and moaned in the strong wind. I could smell musk and slime and rotting hyacinths. I judged from this that they had brought me down into the swamp.

Evil voices mingled with the lament of frogs and hoot owls as I was carried inside the house. I could not see the house. I could only hear the creaking age of its floors, the wind whistling through tumble-down eaves, the squeak of rusty bolts.

The instant that I was set on the floor I heard men talking in grim excitement. There were three voices, but I only saw two of the speakers. Through the small holes I had bored in the coffin's side I could see a part of the room framed in a tiny circle.

By pressing my eye against the hole I could see more. An eye pressed close against a keyhole can see almost an entire figure, even though the aperture extends through a thick door. A hole through a single board may be much smaller to reveal the same sector of the room. A part of the visible wall showed a shelf on which were some jars of preserved specimens—hideous gory objects, like tumors.

I caught one glimpse of the undertaker, his lips still swollen from that blow I had dealt him back in town. Then I saw someone else!

It was just the face, haggard and gray with eyes burning in the throes of what seemed a hallucination mania. At times I could see his abnormally long fingers stained red and blue and green. This no doubt was the chemist and experimenter about whom I had heard from the drugstore keeper.

In a shaking voice which came from deep in his throat he spoke.

"Who is this dead man?" he asked.

"The brain tumor case," someone behind my coffin answered. Because of my coffin the voice sounded muffled and distant, but I could barely make out the words. "We will take out his brain and replace it with a new one. You have a brain ready?"

The chemist pointed his bony fingers in a direction beyond and above my coffin, evidently to the wall.

"In those jars I have every part you've ordered."

"Before we try the first experiment," the voice behind me said, "I want one more healthy specimen—the entrails of a young woman."

I saw the chemist's face twist suddenly with repugnance.

"What, another! A young woman!" His fingers locked and intertwined.

"It's for the sake of science, Peter Quills! Surely you aren't faltering!"

**T**HE chemist's hollow eyes burned with a terrible fire.

"Science! Yes, for the sake of science I have become a fiend. I was human once—that first time I stuck a needle into a corpse's heart and shocked it into renewed pulsation. I was still human when I saved another man with alpha loblin and adrenalin. But then I wanted to raise men after the cadaveric spasm. This undertaker here brought me the bodies—"

I saw his yellow skin wrinkle horribly in an expression of untold misery, the agony of the damned.

"That was my next step. Slowly I became a fiend. I raised a woman who had been dead ten hours. I raised a negro who had been buried. Rigor mortis had begun at his head and worked down as it always does. But I brought the man back to life. He was changed. It was not the man who had died. He had the same body, yes, but that was all. He got up right in this room and wandered off into the swamp—a corpse that walked, a body without a soul!"

"But think of your fame—"

"That's it—fame! I wanted to go farther. You told me I could not resurrect the dead if there was any organic lesion. Then you told me the answer—get the organ from a living



and healthy patient. What matter if it caused one death in order to cancel another? It will be for science!" I saw the chemist's face a mask of repugnance. "I thought you would need only one specimen—one heart, or perhaps one brain. But you've demanded too much. And now you want the entrails of a young living woman!"

He got up and went to the wall, reaching for those jars of specimens. He crashed them down one after another against the floor.

"These specimens I hacked out of perfect bodies—they are things of hell. What sort of loathsome creatures will I bring back? What would I create—corpses with a horrid semblance of life! No! I've done enough!"

The jars shattered in bits, spilling the vile smelling liquid. Inasmuch as my coffin was on the floor, I saw the contents of one—a repugnant mass of tissue—roll out like something alive.

Gambril the undertaker moved into my vision.

"But this dead man at our feet," he said.

"I will not open the coffin! I will not tempt myself—or you. This is a corpse. It stays a corpse! It shall be buried—deep down in the earth where it belongs!"

I could not hear the answer to this. But I thought I heard a sardonic laugh.

My heart stopped a beat, leaving a cold creeping chill over my whole body. I tried to shriek but the wind howling across the swamp and all about the house drowned what miserable sound my cramped lungs could make. I tried to reach for my gun so I could fire a shot through the coffin and thus announce that I was not a corpse but a living man.

I had put my gun in my inside coat pocket under my arm, never for a moment anticipating that I would have to fire it while cramped inside the coffin. And now I found I could not possibly reach it!

I tried to lift the lid of my coffin. But it did not budge. The undertaker had evidently screwed it tighter. I was trapped.

And I was to be buried alive!

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## CHAPTER IV

### *Buried Alive*

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I TRIED again to shriek, but I was half suffocated by now. My shrieks were moans. The wind moaning in the rotten eaves drowned me out. I knocked frantically with my knuckles but the rattling shutters masked the sound perfectly. No one heard me. And even if I had been heard I knew perfectly well they would bury me alive notwithstanding!

My hysteria was heightened by a sardonic argument about my grave. Someone suggested that the undertaker, Gambril, take me back to his funeral parlors, from where I would be taken to Potter's field on the morrow. But the undertaker, Gambril, refused.

"A young fellow came to my parlor tonight," he said. "I think he was a detective. If I get caught taking this casket back, they'll be asking why I took it out in the first place. This isn't my funeral! Bury this stiff here in the cypress slash. Play safe."

It was at that moment that I saw something through the peep holes in the coffin's side.

A girl banged open the door and rushed in. She stood there panting for breath, staring wild-eyed at the room, then at the coffin on the floor. Somehow, by what strange miracle I could not guess, I had been followed—by the one person in the world who would be most anxious about me. The girl was Mellicent Martin!

The demented chemist had turned, his long bony jaw dropping astounded.

"You!" he gaped. "What are you doing here? How did you get here?"

She did not answer, for her eyes had darted down to the coffin so that she seemed to be looking straight at my face. Then she saw something that made her pallid cheeks drain to a dead white. She stared at those broken jars and the hideous bloody specimens scattered over the floor. A wild scream tore from her throat and she swayed forward.

"Milly! Milly!" I cried piteously. And this time I howled with the last



breath in my lungs. But Mellicent's shriek was the louder. She did not hear me. Nor did anyone else.

The next instant a powerful, steady hand reached out so that it came just within my vision. Mellicent had crumpled limp in a faint, and I saw the hand clutch the apron of her nurse's uniform and seize her with a ripping of cloth. She must have come out of her faint quickly for I heard her screams as she was carried off, the frantic call dwindling, merging into the moan of the wind.

I choked hysterically. I knocked and squirmed. Even though I knew it was hopeless. I spent my last breath. I must have lapsed into a faint—a long one, long enough for the digging of my grave. For when I came to I felt my coffin being lowered deeper and deeper.

There was a hard thud and clank of rock as the coffin reached the bottom. I heard the knock of stones, the thump of clods pouring over me, burying me, one shovelful at a time, an eternity between each shovelful as my burial was accomplished.

**I** WAS really buried. There was no doubt about that. But the grave itself was not as yet filled up to the brim. Although the shoveling of earth seemed to take hours, only a few moments had actually passed. No more than half a foot of earth covered the lid, as I soon found out.

During that horrifying rhythm of dumping, I fought with the strength of a maniac. No man knows his strength, for his mind releases the muscles when the agony of fatigue becomes unbearable. But no agony could be too great for a man who heard the clods falling one by one on top of his coffin!

I shoved up against the lid with my shoulders, my arms, my knees, my whole arched body. The wood split, the earth began to dribble in. Bolts loosened. The lid cracked open. With a last frenzy of convulsion, like a landed fish, I poked my head through six inches of soil.

I heard a howl of dismay from the three grave diggers. I was up on my knees now, buried to the waist, rising

from a grave!

Two men fled, for I heard the clump of their feet, the horrified yell from the crazed chemist, like the howl of a wolf calling to the moon. But the third man stuck to his post. The hollow blade of an irrigating shovel whacked down on top of my head, making a resounding crash inside my skull.

I came to the slowly, dreaming of eternal torture, of blackness, of a crown of thorns on my brow, of a coffin cramping my arms to my side, of worms eating out my eyes.

But when I came to after that murderous bash on the head I was lying not in a coffin but on something perhaps just as bad. Or worse.

I was on a table which was covered with a sheet. Even though the dank swamp air was by no means cold, I shivered because of the nervous sweat which bathed my nude body. I was in the same room, I noticed, as the one where I had lain in my casket a short while before.

Above me stood a thin man with a long face, expressionless except for a fixed smile on a swollen bruised mouth.

Doubtless for the first time in the undertaker's professional career that fixed smile meant something. He was going to repay me for that blow I had given him in his funeral parlor—and he was going to pay me well.

I saw his clothes smirched with the earth of the grave—my grave. I shuddered with the memory of his false teeth loosened with the plate half out under his drawn lip. The lip was tight again, bringing back that same horrid grimace.

I tried to squirm free, which brought back the feeling that I was caught by the everlasting bonds of a coffin. No wonder I had dreamed I was still trapped deep in a grave. For my arms and legs were bound to the table, as a dog is strapped for vivisection.

It was not vivisection, however, that I was to endure, for I could see the materials with which this fiendish undertaker was working. There was a jar of an evil-looking liquid, another empty jar with a rubber tube leading to it. The full jar contained embalm-



ing fluid, the other was ready for my blood.

"The Chief says you posed as a dead man," the undertaker chuckled, "so we may as well treat you like on. Embalming fluid will kill you without any mark of violence—in case your body is dug up for an autopsy." He gave a throaty gasp of a laugh like a horse and I caught a sudden whiff of the alcohol on his breath. There was a bottle of alcohol on the chemist's sideboard which the undertaker kept sampling. But my eyes were fixed on the jar of embalming fluid and every nerve in my body recoiled. I only hoped that when the burning stuff was poured into my veins death could come quickly.

**B**UT when my eyes slipped away from the abhorrent grin I saw something that changed my mind. I did not want to die. I must live—and fight!

I saw another table across the room and a form lying on it. It was a slim lovely shape covered by a sheet. Mellicent's face was uncovered except for strands of her reddish gold hair tousled about her death-white forehead. Her eyes glowed with fear, fixed with the mute horror of a tortured dog gazing at the master whom it loves. That is to say, Mellicent's eyes were clinging to mine!

Obviously she had been drugged, for she did not seem to know me except in a dazed bewildered way. She did not answer when I gasped out her name. She had been drugged so thoroughly that her captors had not found it necessary to bind her, as they had

bound me. One lovely arm hung down limp, naked, listless.

"Do whatever you want with me!" I cried, turning my face up to the undertaker. "But if you fiends touch that girl—"

"I'm not going to touch her. But the Chief says she knows too much, so she's got to join you—out yonder under the ground!"

"The Chief!" I gasped. "You mean that maniac chemist! If he dares—"

The undertaker's teeth clacked with a drunken yap of a laugh. My inane threats did not impress him. He went for another drink of alcohol and water. "The chemist isn't the Chief. He's only a crazy old loon. He's back in his laboratory now breaking up his bottles and test tubes. He's through. A padded cell for him, and a nice comfortable grave for you—"

With that he stepped to the side of my table and reached for my arm, unstrapping it. He held it upward with a twist, his hand clamped about it like a vise. He jabbed into a vein in my arm and inserted the rubber tube.

I was completely oblivious to the pain. The metallic grip of his hand was far more terrifying than the tube. As I tried vainly to twist my arm free, I caught sight of Mellicent watching me. I saw a faint flicker of horror and recognition come to her eyes. Her lips gibbered soundlessly as she watched the blood pouring from my vein into the empty jar.

Motes began to dance before my eyes. Lights dimmed and wheeled crazily. I tried to jerk my arm free

[Turn Page]





of the human vise but my strength was going fast.

It was right then that the undertaker stiffened, hearing footsteps. He listened. I listened. There was a tussle in some back room. The undertaker's grin faded. Obviously he was anxious about this intruder. The footsteps were not like those of the chemist. They were more resolute. The boards squeaked.

I tried to remember if I had heard a car coming down that shell road and turning into the yard. I tried so hard that I actually imagined it had happened. Had someone followed Mellicent? Had Mellicent picked up my trail back there at the drugstore? The druggist, Sam Winkle was the only one in the world who know that I had gone down to the Gambril Undertaking Parlors.

Perhaps the druggists had phoned her while she was waiting with the distracted Dr. Blessant for my telephone call. I reconstructed the whole tragic series of events as I lay there with my blood flowing out of my veins.

**M**ELLICENT must have obtained a car and somehow traced me. Then the doctor, frantically worried for the girl's safety, had followed her in another car.

The proof of this wild theory came the next moment.

The door burst open and a man stood there—portly, big-shouldered, obviously worn out with fatigue. No face in the world filled me with such utter relief or assurance. It was the strong, benign face of Dr. Blessant!

"Doctor!" I shouted in a frenzy of triumph. "You got here just in time! Mellicent—over there! Save her! Save her, Doctor, for God's sake! This fiend is going to kill her—and he's killing me. He's going to embalm me and bury me!"

I had time for all this outburst for the simple reason that Dr. Blessant just stood there. He stood while the undertaker burst out out in a big neigh of laughter. Dr. Blessant did not laugh. But I saw a queer gleam in his kind old eyes. I saw a slight curl to his strong brave mouth.

And I saw something else.

His hands—the delicate but powerful hands of a surgeon—had just been washed. But there was a ring of dirt about the wrists. He looked as if he had been digging in the earth, not only because of his fatigue, but because of his clothes. They were covered with dirt! It was the same claylike soil and mud which begrimed the undertaker.

Dr. Blessant was one of the men who had dug my grave!

## CHAPTER V

### *Fiend Unmasked*

**I** KNEW the truth. The doctor had not only helped to dig the grave and to heap the earth over my coffin, but it was he who stayed after I poked my head and shoulders above the grave. The demented chemist and the undertaker had fled, but Dr. Blessant had waited long enough to bash my head with his shovel.

That was only part of the truth. The rest came in quick terrifying flashes. The doctor was the "Chief," the man to whom the chemist had been talking before my burial. He was the real criminal in the series of deaths which had horrified the countryside. The lunatic chemist was only a cat's-paw. True enough, it was the chemist who had attacked and butchered the victims found in the turpike woods. But by reason of insanity he could plead not guilty before God and before man.

I remembered the chemist's words: "I thought you needed only one heart, one brain, but you've demanded too much!" From that one statement, the full crime of Dr. Blessant and its fiendish subterfuge flashed upon me. He had hoodwinked the chemist, working on his insane delusions. The latter apparently had had some success in resuscitating victims of sudden death, a feat common to modern science. Dr. Blessant fed his ego-mania to mad heat. He persuaded the crack-brained creature to attempt the miraculous. If he could raise a dead man, he would be world famous.



This could be done—so the doctor must have said—if the cancerous liver could be replaced by a healthy one. The doctor could do the transplanting, being a skillful surgeon. Likewise, he could supply the deceased cancer patient. All that was needed was the healthy liver. The chemist must obtain that! That was the glib story Dr. Blessant had told the chemist.

Thus Dr. Blessant sent him out to slay certain victims. The doctor could specify just which victim he wanted. He could pretend to need a definite specimen according to sex, age, health, compatibility of blood. As for the organs which the demented slayer

understand what was happening to me and what was going to happen to the girl whom I cherished and loved. I was obsessed not with motives or past events, but with the present—the handsome, stern face of Dr. Blessant smiling at me with a strange twist of the lips, once wistful and benevolent, now covertly murderous.

And I could hear his calm voice which had soothed many neurotics.

"That chemist is a beautiful case of dementia praecox," he said to the undertaker. "I've just fought with him and chained him. But I'll have to give him another hypo. He's strong as a grizzly." He stalked to the door, his

*Coming Next Issue*

## THE MAKER OF IMMORTALITY

A Complete Novelet  
of Satan's Surgery

By

D. L. JAMES

PLUS MANY OTHER STORIES OF EERIE MYSTERY



hacked from the bodies of his victims, the doctor had no use for them at all. What he really wanted was a prescribed list of persons murdered!

The deranged chemist, obsessed with fame, obsessed with advancing science no matter what the cost, was willing to go out and kill someone in order to obtain the necessary brain or lung or liver. As everyone in the countryside feared, it was indeed a fiend that was rampant!

Much of this flashed through my mind in a kaleidoscope of wild surmises. I could not straighten it all out until later. Right now I could only

great shoulders held back in his well known military fashion. For the moment he was almost jaunty. As he went out he said: "If the girl wakes up, call me. I've got to find out how much she's talked to the police before we get rid of her."

My eyes slipped over to Mellicent and I was astonished to see that she had dropped off to a deep, breast-heaving sleep. Her wild attempt to fight off the drug had evidently failed.

**B**Y now I was too weak to struggle any more than a drowning kitten. The undertaker held my arm,



grinning at its feeble quivering when I tried to jerk it free. How much of my life had drained into that bloody jar I did not know, but I knew that the end was a matter of seconds.

The room was strangely dark except for those motes of light in their orgy of dancing. Then I saw more light which seemed to emanate from a human arm that lifted and moved. Mellicent had only feigned sleep when the doctor had come in! And now she was playing her last desperate card to save me.

The arm, her arm, moved, reaching to the sideboard where a tray of operating instruments must have suggested a pitiful hope for a weapon.

But the undertaker heard the rustle of the sheet and turned to look. The astonishment that passed through his thin body shook his hand—the hand that gripped my arm.

At that instant my hand tore away, free. I reached for the knife with which he had made that incision in my vein, and as he turned on me, the knife caught him a glancing rip in the chest.

He staggered back with a groan, then fumbled frantically for the gun he wore on his hip. It came out clumsily, slowly, so slowly that Mellicent had time to leap from her table and throw her nude body on his back like a tigress. He whirled in an attempt to ward off her wild onslaught. Drugged as she was, Mellicent had no chance. But in that first lurch, the undertaker had backed up close against my table, lifting his gun to use it as a club on the girl's head. With my one free arm I reached for the weapon. And I got it.

When Dr. Blessant came rushing in at the sound of the shot he saw his henchman, Gambril the undertaker, lying on his face knocked down by a slug that had parted his hair. He also saw the girl slicing my straps with a knife.

And he saw the gun I held, lifted, shaking weakly, pointing at him.

But I myself could see nothing!

With so much loss of blood, I had but the momentary glimpse, dim and devoid of outline, of the doctor when he entered. Then a cloud of blackness

smothered my sight. But I held the gun up, as if ready to bring it down with a squeeze of the trigger the moment the doctor took another step. I ordered him to hold up his hands. Whether he did so or not I did not know. I knew only one thing for certain—that Mellicent had come to me.

I felt her shoulder pressed against mine, partly supporting me as I leaned against her. I felt her fumbling with my bleeding arm. I heard the squeak and twist of the strap she had cut from the table. She was making a tourniquet above my wound. And during those helpless moments of blindness I tried to face the doctor and pretend that I could see him!

My pretense failed. I heard a low sardonic laugh. It was Dr. Blessant's voice, but it had changed. A malignant and bedeviled note had filtered in, making an eerie discord to a voice that we had all loved and obeyed.

"Don't let him go!" Mellicent screamed. "He's put down his hands! He's coming to you to kill you! Can't you see!"

"No, I can't!" I moaned. "I can't see!"

**M**ELLICENT snatched the gun from me, and the doctor must have stopped. The next moment I felt a bottle held to my lips. It was that medicine bottle of alcohol from which the undertaker had been swigging. The first deep gulp choked me, burned my lips and throat. The next brought a roaring to my ears. I could not understand the strange reaction until I realized that there was actually a crashing clanging sound somewhere in back of the house. As the drink revived me I began to see a whirl of flaming motes dancing before my eyes. Then forms emerged from the darkness.

When my dizzy eyes steadied, I saw the most ghastly picture of all that hideous night. The deranged chemist staggered in, dragging a big pot-bellied stove to which he had been chained. That was the racket and clang that had all but deafened me.

Gibbering in the guttural growls of a mad dog, he reached out his manacled hands — massive, long-boned



hands, stained red and green and blue, and clamped them about the doctor's neck. It was the doctor, I remembered, who had tried to quiet him with drugs and then chained him.

One twist of those hands would have broken the neck of a horse. But, to my utter astonishment, the doctor was not hurt. The monstrous hands let loose, then gripped the scruff of the victim's neck. The doctor was thrown to the floor and the chemist fell on him, fumbling in his clothes for a key.

"Kill him! Shoot him!" the doctor screamed at me. "If he gets the key, he'll tear us all to pieces!"

I could focus my dazed eyes now, and I reached to Mellicent for the gun. But I did not fire. The maniac had the key out but he was unable to use it on his own manacles.

"You're the one he'll tear to pieces, Dr. Blessant! You tricked the poor wretch into thinking you were working for science. You never intended to use those human parts this maniac supplied. You egged him to a frenzy so you could send him out to murder any victim you picked out!"

The demented giant lifted his head. It rocked crazily, his eyes glaring. He began to gibber, his throat lifting with a doleful howl. The key dropped from his hand.

I jumped for it before the doctor could squirm free of the man who was still kneeling on him. Steadying my voice as well as I could, I said, "I'll unlock your hands, my poor fellow. Hold them out to me."

The lunatic stared at me, his eyes rolling, bulging. In a dumb, half-witted way, he must have understood what I was doing, even though the words meant nothing. He was like an animal that vaguely senses the meaning of a voice and gesture. He let me slip the key into the lock of one of the cuffs.

The doctor stared up from the floor.

"Have you gone stark mad!" he yelled at me. "You don't intend to free this killer!"

"You are the real killer," I said calmly, as I slipped the cuff onto the doctor's wrist. "I'll leave you two chained together. You and your ma-

niac partner. You can argue it out among yourselves as to which of you is going to pay for these crimes."

The chemist looked down dazed, too stupefied to realize what had happened. The drugs with which the doctor had tried to soothe him were evidently beginning to work. The flaming eyes dulled. The gaunt head rolled sleepily on the massive shoulders. The great form slumped heavily.

**D**R. BLESSANT meanwhile lay on the floor, his neck veins bulging, the blood puffing his eyes. For that moment he looked the more dangerously insane of the two.

"An almost perfect crime, Doctor!" I said. "No one in the world would suspect you of killing off all your relatives when you made up a motive we all believed. If this poor imbecile had been caught and sent to trial you could still explain that he was matching each death of your charity patients with the death of one of your relatives!"

Dr. Blessant did not answer. He still lay there, chained to the Frankenstein monster which he himself had built.

"What I would like to know is this," I said. "How did you make this poor wretch go to a certain victim every time?"

"I can answer that!"

I looked at Mellicent who had mumbled these words. She was still dazed from her drug and spoke loose-lipped, almost incoherent. But her words made sense.

"Dr. Blessant kept phoning his relatives hour after hour," she said with growing excitement. "He pretended to warn them!" She shook her head in a lost distracted way. "He wasn't warning them. No! I see it all now! It's clearing up—He was keeping a check on everything they did! He knew when each one was alone and where he could send that old maniac of a chemist to hold them up and kill them!"

Mellicent raised her voice hysterically.

"Tonight, I began to suspect his scheme. When you left, you didn't ring us up from Headquarters, where



you said you were going. The doctor said he was going out to see what had happened to you!" She was fairly screaming now. "But I noticed he called one of the patrolmen guarding the house and gave him a drink, then slipped out through the police cordon. I suspected him and followed. He took the big car. I followed in the coupé."

While she talked I kept my eyes on the fiend lying bound on the floor.

"They're all dead now, Doctor—your relatives!" she cried. "All of them slaughtered—one by one!"

Her hysteria affected me.

"And you'll get the entire Blessant fortune, Doctor," I shouted. "It would have been divided, but it all goes to you! Unless you hang! And then it goes to your distant kin—Mellicent Martin!"

Mellicent tried to pull herself together. She knew that she was fighting off a terrible drug, devastating to her nerves, her will, her whole being. She won out.

She came to me and I felt her soft arms as she threw them about my bare shoulders, begging and pleading with me to say no more.

IN THE NEXT ISSUE

## THE DEAD WHO WALK

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Murray Deane Had Unveiled the Secrets of Many Egyptian Tombs—But He Was Confounded by the Vengeance of Dead Gods!



*The men caught him from every side as he lunged at the priest*

# Mummies to Order

## By E. HOFFMANN PRICE

*Author of "Scourge of Allah," "Snake Goddess," etc.*

**T**HE overhead lights beat down on the mummy stretched out on the broad table, and picked the premature gray from Murray Deane's averted head. His deep-set eyes glowed, and his tanned face was set in squarish angles. A frown of con-

centration puckered his forehead as he bent over the dried flesh and the leathery skin stretched over ancient bones.

Deftly, he plucked the crisp, brown linen from the throat of the mummy, exposing a carnelian amulet, engraved



with sacred symbols. Deane nodded, rolled his camera tripod into place, and switched on the flood lights. Their heat brought sweat to his forehead, and it trickled down his cheeks. But he did not notice the glare, nor the bitter dust that settled on his lips.

Slowly, patiently, he was unveiling the secrets of old Egypt. An American museum trusted his judgment and his skill, and had sent him to Cairo as director of operations.

Deane muttered wrathfully when he heard the persistent tapping at the laboratory door. Hassan, his Arab servant, was at the threshold.

"*Effendi*, two gentlemen wish to speak to you. It is urgent."

Deane irritably smote the mummy dust from his hand.

"Who are they?"

"That red-faced Crawford *Effendi*, and the fish-eyed grave robber."

"Heyl?" Deane grimaced. He had met the two, and he disliked them both. One was a loud-mouthed amateur collector; the other, Gunther Heyl, a dealer in outright fakes, as well as genuine antiques illicitly purchased from native tomb looters. "All right, send them in!"

Both wore white tropicals. Heyl, who followed the red-faced man into the laboratory, had a receding chin and protruding blue eyes. Apparently he never saw enough of the Egyptian sun to become tanned. Crawford mopped his forehead, and spent a moment glancing about the room.

**T**HERE were mummy cases, their gilded masks staring inscrutably at the visitors. Embalmed cats filled a cabinet. Several shelves were cluttered with human skulls and withered limbs. These human relics testified to the violence of grave looters who had dismembered the dead, seeking jewels and amulets.

Crawford shivered. He did not like the fixed stare of that woman's head. The artificial eyes were uncanny, and the luxuriant black hair made the flattened nose, the sunken cheeks with their scraps of adhering wrappings all the more gruesome. Deane chuckled, then said:

"Hullo, Heyl. Do you think you can do as well as the old-time Arab vandals? What's on your mind?"

Crawford stood there, a pudgy hand vainly extended. Heyl, however, was too smooth to take offense at Deane's insinuations.

"You've met Mr. Crawford, I think."

"I have. And I told him that everything I discovered was subject to the Egyptian government's orders, and my museum's. Nothing for sale."

"But we don't want to buy," Crawford cut in. "Not this time. As I told you, I've made a hobby of Egyptology. Ever since I retired from plumbing supplies."

Deane spat. Curio hunters, not students.

"And finally," Heyl resumed, "I found something choice on my own account. The mummy of Bint Anath, the Eighteenth Dynasty princess who married—"

"And you had to find her! Or is this another fake?"

"I wouldn't ask you to convince Mr. Crawford that the stuff is genuine Eighteenth Dynasty, unless it were real. I couldn't risk it, could I?"

"Won't he take your word?"

Heyl shrugged. "There are so many frauds, I can't blame him for being wary."

"It isn't that, Mr. Deane," Crawford added. "It is just that you're the foremost living authority on that period. Anyone else might make a mistake. And I'm paying a stiff price for the mummy, the furnishings, the tomb frescoes—" He winked, and his face looked like a wrinkled harvest moon. "Delivered in New York."

"One thousand dollars, Deane," Heyl said, edging closer. "For your opinion on the genuineness."

"Get out! I'm not here to help any tomb dredger cheat the Egyptian government. Look at all this stuff I have here, working on it, making records. My museum gets only a small portion, the government takes the rest. Do you think I'd help you rob them and science in general?"

"Now, Mr. Deane — er, Doctor Deane, rather—I'm handling the actual smuggling. You won't be responsible."



Deane raised his voice. "Hassan! These gentlemen are leaving at once. Call a cab for them."

Crawford became redder.

"See here," he sputtered, and shook his fist. "I know how you get tips from the natives! How that helps you make all your discoveries. If you think you're going to find Bint Anath's tomb yourself—"

Then Hassan approached. "*Effendi*, the cab is outside."

They left, cursing and muttering.

"Follow those fellows," Deane said to Hassan. "That's your job from now on. Find out what natives Heyl is working with."

Hassan bowed until his white turban was almost level with his waist.

"On my head and eyes, *Effendi*!"

The native quarter of Cairo was an old story to Deane, and to Hassan also. Gossip and rumor would uncover the back trail of the grave looter and his customer. More than mere loyalty to the museum and the Egyptian government moved Deane. Illicit pillaging and curio hunting had hopelessly ruined many a precious find, had obscured many secrets of the past.

It was not for any personal advantage that he was trying to uncover Heyl's supposed find. It might be genuine, and priceless.

Deane went back to his work. He turned on the X-ray machine, which enabled him to photograph the skeleton and internal structure of the mummy, without disturbing the wrappings. When inscriptions were obliterated, when mummies had been moved from one tomb to another, thirty centuries ago, Deane could identify their true period from the kind of amulets, the way the body had been prepared, the way it had been bandaged.

Deane grinned a little and said to himself:

"Maybe I scared Crawford out. In which case, Heyl has to find another customer."

A week later, Hassan's investigations brought results. The wrinkled servant handed Deane a slip of paper, all written in spidery Arabic script.

"*Effendi*, this is from Nefeyda, the

Coptic girl who dances at Quasim's coffee house."

Deane had heard of Nefeyda, and seen her. She had a good act, and it drew crowds of tourists to the café.

"How does she fit into this?"

"She would not say, except that she knew something of interest to you."

**H**E glanced at the note. The message was as vague as the report. As Deane removed his stained smock, Hassan said:

"*Effendi*, better take your pistol. I saw Heyl and Crawford at Quasim's, once or twice, before I got a chance to talk to Nefeyda."

Deane laughed. "Heyl's not dangerous. He doesn't want to be conspicuous. Not Heyl, and not with what the authorities think of him. He was probably showing Crawford the sights and trying to sell him something just as good!"

"Allah is the knower," Hassan said, noncommittally.

Half an hour later, Deane parked his car on the Muski, and went on foot, for the streets of the native quarter were too narrow for vehicles.

Not far from the spice bazaar was the yellow horseshoe of light that marked the entrance of Quasim's place. The second floors of the houses overhung the narrow street, so that they almost met in the center. It was a tunnel whose further end opened into a shadow kingdom, and the robed figures that stirred vaguely in its depths reminded Deane of the dead who had lost their way.

Egypt's ancient dead were serene and orderly, in their homes west of the Nile, and Murray Deane was at ease among them. But living Egypt, that night, made him feel as though he walked among those who should be buried. The reeking alleys, the heaped offal, the sickening sweetness of cassia and oilbanum and musk exhaled by the shuttered bazaars made him think of corruption that had not quite been embalmed.

Not even the flare of yellow light gave him any sense of reality. The plucked strings of an *oudh* and the mutter of a little drum lent no more



than eerie animation to Quasim's coffee house. Deane shivered, and stepped into the arched doorway. He stood there for a moment, then shrugged. This was all prosaic enough. Quasim, greasy and wearing a top-heavy turban, was explaining to some tourists that cream is not served with "Turkish" coffee.

He seated himself on one of the upholstered benches that lined the wall. He liked his coffee bitter, so he said to the proprietor's son:

"*Wahad murreh.*"

A blonde tourist laughed nervously and said to her companion:

"Why did we come here? That fiddle squeaking makes me think of ghosts gibbering!"

"Wait till you see Nefeyda. The guide said she wears . . ."

They went into a huddle about that. Deane was certain they would be shocked, but not in the way they anticipated. As he sat there, skilfully sipping the foam-topped coffee without scalding his lips, he watched the blue curtain at the further end of the paneled room, and listened for the first tinkle of Nefeyda's heavy anklets. He wondered if she would know him.

Then the drum muttered, and she glided from behind the curtain.

Nefeyda's face made Deane think of the high-bridged nose and piquant cheek bones of an alabaster statuette he had found in a tomb at Biban ul Mulouk. There was more to the illusion than the slow pace and statuesque postures of her dance. The jangling notes of the *sistrum* in her hand were echoes from some long-buried temple, and she herself seemed something that had stepped from a painted fresco. She had tightly curled hair, and her frail gown gave her the antique silhouette.

**T**HE tourists leaned forward, eagerly watching every gesture. But when the music ceased, and Deane went toward the blue curtain that separated the coffee room from the rest of the house, he saw that they were eyeing him, nudging each other, and whispering.

"If they only knew what the date

is about," he said to himself, "they'd not be so thrilled!"

Nefeyda was following him, anklets jingling.

Deane turned as the curtain rippled into place after her.

"My servant said you had word for me," he said, and dug the crumpled note from his pocket. "But he didn't tell me any more than that."

Nefeyda looked up with mysterious, almond-shaped eyes.

"I wasn't sure how far I could trust him."

"I'd trust him with my life."

Nefeyda shrugged. "One hears things whispered about. There is more buried than has ever been dug out."

The Copts, who were descended from the ancient Egyptians, often had bits of lore from the old days, but they were usually wary about telling what they knew. Though Christians, many of them still feared the vengeance of the dead gods.

Deane watched Nefeyda flash a furtive glance over her shapely shoulder, and toward the blue curtain. During that moment of silence, he fancied that something had come out of a tomb to speak to him. He stepped nearer, and his voice shook a little when he repeated:

"Your message. You had some word for me."

"I've heard of you," Nefeyda whispered. "You've always been kind to our people when they worked for you, digging. But that fish-eyed man wasn't. So I'm telling you—"

"Heyl? Gunther Heyl?"

She nodded.

"How do you know? How much do you want?"

She reached for a black cape and flung it about her olive-tinted shoulders. Arms folded under the trailing garment, she stood there, studying his tanned face.

The scrutiny was mutual. As he returned it, he was more certain than ever that she was of that ancient race, undefiled by any foreign blood. With her small hands and feet, those almond-shaped eyes with lashes so closely spaced that the lids seemed



smudged with black, she was old Egypt, living again. And all that made her answer seem natural:

"Whatever you say is fair. Rather than have Heyl desecrate the bones of our ancestors, I'll tell you. I'll go now. My act is over."

Deane drove to the Nile, and crossed the Abbas II bridge. The moon rose and silvered the flat expanse that the river inundated every season. Miles ahead, rocky bulwarks rose from the Libyan Desert. Nefeyda said not a word as he swung south to skirt the outer canal. The twenty mile trip ended near the village of Sakaara, where cubical houses were half hidden by tall palms.

Somewhere in the desert, a jackal howled, eerily. Just beyond the huts of the Fellahin was one of the cities of the dead. The wind wandered over the sand, making it whisper and hiss. The hollowness of hidden tombs enticed the breeze, and the underground emptiness muttered. The dust blown to Deane's lips was bitter from the dead that tainted the everlasting dryness.

When he pulled up, under a cluster of palms that were some distance beyond the village, Nefeyda shivered, and pointed toward the nearby house.

"Many of our people believe it is sacrilege to desecrate tombs. I'm almost afraid to go on. Sooner or later, a curse destroys robbers. I'm betraying a secret to you. You'll take the things which Heyl hasn't moved. It'll be on my head."

**T**HERE was something in her voice that made Deane share her qualms for a moment. Then he forced a chuckle.

"As long as none of Heyl's gang is hanging around, I'll risk curses!"

She recoiled a little at his words. Her almond-shaped eyes reproved him for blasphemy. Then she said:

"That house over there. They were digging a well, and cut down into a tomb. One of the passages is just beneath the house. I know where the key is hidden."

He went with her to the gate, and watched her lift a flat rock from the

sand. She took out a key, and opened the way to the courtyard. Then Deane remembered the headlights of his car.

"I'd better turn them off," he said. "Someone in the village might wake up and see them."

"Give me your matches. I'll light a candle inside."

It was not more than fifty yards back to the palms and the car. But on his return, Deane was strangely uneasy. He was certain that someone was watching him. The same sense that makes animals restless before a storm or earthquake now warned him. He ran toward the courtyard. White-wash mirrored the moonlight. Inside, a yellow light flickered. Without knowing why, he croaked:

"Come out of there, Nefeyda! Someone's snooping."

There was no answer. All he heard was a cry of dismay, suddenly choked and ending in a cough. There was a sound as of furniture legs shifting over the floor; a thump, a whispering rustle, a wheezing gasp. Deane was bounding forward when this happened. Even before he rounded the end of the passage, he knew what to expect. Death, the presence he had so strongly felt, must have struck.

A curious odor now tainted the air. The smell was like quince blossoms, and bitter almonds. Nefeyda lay crumpled on the hard-packed earth floor, but there was no sign of any vial from which poison could have come.

Her olive-tinted limbs still twitched. Her eyes stared horribly, and her lips were drawn back in a frozen grin that made a mockery of her beauty. The candle flame wavered enough to make the profile of a mummy case dance on the bare white wall. There was a fine white film of dust on the floor, and only Nefeyda's feet had disturbed it.

Deane, standing there, noticed all those things as he told himself:

"This curse business. It's crazy. There isn't any such thing."

But there she was, rigid and staring. It was not until the liberation of those strange sweet fumes that she had fallen, choking. Dizziness made the candle flame dance before Deane's eyes.



He went toward the girl, having convinced himself that she had fainted. But there was no heart beat when he knelt and bent over, laying his ear against her breast; nor could his fingers at her wrist detect any sign of life. Her fingers were clawed, as though she had fought for an instant against an uncanny assailant.

The candle winked out, suddenly, as though snuffed by invisible fingers. Deane leaped to his feet, a hoarse cry on his lips. He bounded toward the hall which opened into the room.

There was a whispering creak of metal. The invading patch of moonlight became narrower. The door closed before he could reach it. He hurled himself against it, pounded until his fists were bruised. But there was no opening the door.

At first too shocked for thought, he slumped back against the panel, waiting for his sagging knees to let him slide to the floor. Then he recovered a little, and found his box of matches. After several fumbling attempts, he struck one without breaking it. However the door was secured, it was not from the inside. He went back to the candle on the stand, near the mummy case.

**H**E had some difficulty in getting the wick to light. Finally it sputtered, crackled, and a feeble flame rose. Deane paced up and down the dirt floor and tried to think it out. He was drenched with sweat. His lips were dry, his mouth was dust, and his knees shook.

A sudden rush of unreasoning terror made him hurl himself at the door, clawing, pounding, kicking. He did not feel the impacts that battered his body and exhausted his strength. He knew that he could not run away. He knew that he must finally tell a story that would brand him as a madman whose brain had been touched by too much tomb dredging. But he had to get out of that accursed house.

The subtle odor of death and decay which had at first made him uneasy now became stronger. His efforts kicked up dust, choking and bitter—the finely powdered myrrh and oli-

banum and the linen from long-dried corpses.

The candle, for some moments unwavering, now flickered violently. It winked out, and the darkness that stifled Deane became alive with presences. He was no longer alone with the girl whom invisible death had struck. The newcomers muttered and chirped and mocked him in a strange tongue.

He understood words that were identical in Coptic and in ancient Egyptian. They were cursing him, and Nefeyda. His sobbing breath could not quite blot out the eerie whispers, nor the soft padding of bare feet.

A hinge creaked as he lunged again at the door. It was yielding a little. He made another desperate effort to knock the bolt from its socket before those gibbering presences materialized enough to throttle him. But his own exertion overcame him. He sank, battered and half conscious. Cold hands caught his wrists and ankles. Stiffing folds of cloth cut off his breath, and tomb dust choked him.

When he recovered enough to renew his struggles, he knew that any effort would be useless. Broad-shouldered men with narrow hips and sloping foreheads stood about him, arms folded. All but one wore the tight-fitting kilt of ancient time. That one had a flowing robe, and his shaven skull indicated that he was a priest.

The room was one of several connected by passageways whose darkness gave no hint of the extent of the maze. The walls were painted in hieroglyphics. In one corner was a stone slab. On a trestle was a mummy case. Near it, on a table, was a mummy, wound with countless yards of time-yellowed linen.

Bit by bit Deane recognized the purpose of the implements and the urns and the vat which was in the shadows. This chamber of the tomb had been converted into an embalmer's workshop, and the obsidian knife that lay on the slab was used for making the first incision in a corpse.

The man with the shaven skull spoke, very slowly, so that Deane could understand:



"I am Anu the Priest, and I lived in this land before the first pyramid was built. I have come back, and reclaimed my body, having spent the required time in Amenti, that dim land where all men must go to atone for their evil, or be rewarded for their good. I have seen Osiris and his forty-two judges. They sent me back, and these others have come with me."

The kilted men said nothing, but as one, they nodded.

Anu spoke rapidly to them, and four of the six left the room. Deane could not answer. All were emaciated, as though their newly revived bodies had not yet eaten enough to fill out the desiccation of the grave. And each had the scar of a knife on his side.

"There are hundreds who should be with us," Anu went on, "but they cannot come, since their bodies have been destroyed by robbers and looters. They wander and cry in the dark, being only living shadows."

Deane could neither disbelieve nor accept. Coming after that succession of shocks, Anu's words made a final and numbing impact. He sat up and croaked:

"Why am I here?"

**T**HE priest stared blankly. Deane repeated the question in Egyptian, and pronounced the dead language as best he could.

"You will see, in a moment," Anu answered. "There is a way in which you can atone for sacrilege."

That noncommittal reply sickened Deane almost as much as the odor of death and the grave. He had opened many a tomb, he had scoffed at curses. But now he shuddered at the implication of the embalmer's implements.

"By our old magic," Anu went on, "we can let a substitute body serve as a new home for one who is released from Amenti's shadows. We will have such a corpse, presently."

Deane yelled. His cry of horror did not make the three from the grave change expression. But as he flung himself to the slab and snatched the obsidian knife, they closed in, and it

was not necessary for the priest to lend a hand.

"There is no use struggling," he said.

They did not disarm Deane. Somehow, his fingers remained locked about the ragged blade of chipped flint, though there was no strength left elsewhere in his body.

"You can't carve me up! I'll—"

They ignored him. His incoherent defiance was mockingly echoed from the passages of the maze. Their icy hands had him secure. The odor of the tomb stifled him. Then Anu called to the others.

They came out, and for a moment Deane thought that they had arrived to bear him to the slab and use the knife. Then he saw that they were carrying Nefeyda on a litter. They rolled her from it, and to the stone that had supported so many of the ancient dead.

Anu smiled. "Your conscience was more vengeful than we are. It is not lawful for us to take life. But she is dead, so we need you."

When the shock of reprieve dimmed enough, Deane found his tongue.

"Why?" he demanded.

"None of us," Anu explained, "is a *paraschiste*, so we are not suited for the duty of making the first incision in a corpse. Neither are we embalmers. But you understand these things, and what you do not know, I can tell you—about the prayers and the ritual."

He gestured, and one of the men tore Nefeyda's gown to the waist. Another took a crayon of red earth and marked where the incision was to be made.

"She has died for her blasphemy," Anu resumed. "Being of the ancient race, and betraying the tomb of her ancestors, the gods damned her. There is no resurrection. Anubis must eat her accursed soul. But if the sacred ritual of embalming is performed, one whose body was destroyed by looters like yourself can come back and find a new home."

Deane was sickened from contemplating the lovely form that he would have to mutilate. Examining the



work of an embalmer, reading in old papyri how the work was done was one thing; the doing was another. When they let his hands go, he stood there, swaying dizzily.

Anu smiled. "You understand, and there is the mark. And there is the jar into which you will place her heart. There are the tongs with which you will extract the brain, through the nostrils, according to custom."

"Shut up!" Deane gasped, choking.

"And here are those who wait with stones which they will hurl at you as you run from your work," the priest went on. "They will curse you, as they cursed the *parachiste*, ages ago."

"I won't!" Deane turned. "You can't make me!"

For a moment he faced the living dead who stood there, each holding a pebble, each ready to hurl it, and to cry out the prescribed curses. The long-sustained tension, the terror of Ne-feyda's weird death, the struggle for escape had all shaken him so that what was before him became more horrible than death itself.

"I won't!" he croaked, and lunged at the priest, slashing.

**A**NU laughed, and the men caught him from every side, just as he stumbled in his attack. They crushed him to the floor. Their hands were claws that closed about his throat, cutting off his gasps of air that reeked of corpse dust, and linen wrappings pulverized in the struggle. The choking vault blackened, and red spots danced in the foul darkness. He heard Anu say:

"Leave him here. He does not eat or drink until he obeys."

As he lay there, panting, bare feet padded in the gloom, and somewhere a door closed. He was locked up with the woman whom a strange doom had stricken.

Later, Deane sat up and fumbled for his matches. From what he had seen of the masonry, he judged that the embalming equipment had been installed in a tomb. And while no two homes of the dead were ever identical, they followed a pattern that he could picture with his eyes closed. Somewhere

in the maze, there must be an outlet that was not closed.

His matches had been lost in the scuffle. His watch did not have a luminous dial, and he had no idea of the passage of time. Time ended in this vault which reeked of the long dead, and the musty spices which told of perfumed corruption. Slowly, Deane crept toward a wall, and followed it. He skirted a sarcophagus, which he recognized from its sculptured sides; a massive stone coffin, and not the vat he had noted during the moments of illumination.

Deane rounded its corner, and got back to the wall. There was an opening, and the floor dipped slightly down. As nearly as he could judge, he was at the mouth of a passage about two feet wide. As he advanced, the air became dense and musty. Dust rose from the paving and choked him. It was so fine that its touch to his palms was almost greasy. This was ancient dust, settled out of air long unstirred, and unlike the sand particles in the vault he had left.

Then debris began to block his path. He crept under a slab that had fallen from the ceiling. The paving was cracked, perhaps by a long-forgotten earthquake. And finally, Deane felt a breath of clean, cold air. Somewhere, there was an opening that led to the desert's surface. In a few moments of increasingly difficult progress, he reached heaped-up sand and chunks of rock. Overhead, he caught a leakage of moonlight.

Eagerly, he clawed at the crevice, ignoring the chance that a sudden slide might bury him. But the flinty debris tore his hands, broke his nails, and in a few moments, his fingers were raw and bleeding. The thing to do was to go back and get the embalmer's knife. By patient combing of the floor, he might find the weapon he had dropped during the struggle.

When he reached the starting point, Deane began his slow, blind search. Up and down, he worked his way from end to end. Once, finding the door through which the resurrected dead had gone, he spent some time tugging



and clawing at it, but it resisted his efforts.

Finally, he forced himself to calmness.

"Take it easy!" he repeated, and licked the dust from his lips, wiped the stinging sweat from his eyes. "Hang on. The dead can't come back. Those curses don't work. It wasn't the old gods that killed Nefeyda. Whatever it was, it's no curse!"

Muttering self-assurance that he could not entirely believe, Deane resumed his slow search, patting the floor as he crawled, sweeping it with strokes of his palms. Nefeyda's perfume, distinct in the musty darkness, made him shudder. Her dead presence shook him. In whatever uncanny manner she had died, they could do the same to him.

At last he found his matches. Seeking them had kept him from going mad in that oppressive gloom and silence. But for that one slender hope, Anu's prediction would have come true—Deane would have cracked.

He struck a match and found some bits of age-yellowed sycamore from a coffin. He tore some scraps from the mummy's wrappings. They were coated with bitumen, which burned with a smoky flame. By the light of this short lived torch, he found the flint knife. It lay near the slab.

He turned his eyes away, to avoid seeing Nefeyda's frozen face. Perhaps the old gods had less power over him than over one of her ancient race. But he cried out with relief when he snatched the knife and scrambled away, to take more scraps of resin and bitumen-soaked linen to tie to the torch.

**D**EANE hurried down the passageway. He did not know how he would account for Nefeyda's death when he escaped. His story would brand him as a madman. Her disappearance would make questioning inevitable. Horror left him not a chance of reasoning.

Once at the end of the passage, Deane thrust the improvised taper into a crevice, and set to work. The haft of the flint knife cut his hands and he

had to be careful lest the brittle blade snap and leave him helpless. Sweat-drenched, he dug at sand, until he got enough cleared away to give him a hold on one of the rocks that reached down. Then he put the knife into his pocket and began to tug and twist. But the leverage was not enough.

Finally he got a foothold, and arched his back so that his shoulder bore against the key to the crevice. Straining until red spots danced before his eyes, he endured the cutting of the rock through his coat. Sand trickled down, and fresh air followed it.

His feet slipped when the keystone yielded. He fell from his narrow perch, and rolled into a corner, just as an avalanche poured down. He was half buried, and the approach to the surface was blocked by yards of sand. There was no more light. He had only succeeded in imprisoning himself more securely. It would take hours for him to claw away the debris.

And then he thought of getting one of the Canopic urns, knocking off the neck and making a scoop. That would hasten his progress. But he had scarcely returned to the vault when the door opened, and the priest and his men came in. Anu noted Deane's torn coat and trousers, and said:

"You waste your time trying to escape. Do your duty, and you will go free."

Deane staggered forward a pace.

"I won't! You couldn't trick me with your talk about living dead. You're alive! I can see where your corpse skin is cracking. From fighting with me."

Anu's bronzed face twisted a little.

"It doesn't make much difference, after all. Someone will find the note this girl wrote you. Your car is outside. Sooner or later, the police will find you here, with a corpse floating in a bath of natron. Suppose one of us did the work—do you think that any story you can tell will help you?" He extended his hand, displaying the note.

They had him cornered. That much was clear. The reason behind it all was something that did not enter into



the gruesome situation.

"Go ahead! You killed her!" he croaked. His voice cracked, and he reeled. "Go ahead and see if they can prove me guilty!"

This sounded like desperate defiance, and Anu smiled indulgently. He did not suspect that Deane was pulling himself together, prodding the masqueraders into revealing more of their plans.

"That'll be easy, Mr. Deane," he said. "We'll just lock you up with the dead. You'll stay here until we want you to be discovered."

Deane's shoulders slumped. "If I do the work—"

"We'll turn you loose. There is still time for your car to be taken away, and the wind will wipe out the tire tracks. You won't be discovered. But you must embalm this woman according to the old rites. As you have guessed, we are alive, but there is very much about old Egypt that you do not know. Least of all why we want this done. The old beliefs are not dead. This proves their life."

Deane tottered forward a little. "Give me the knife."

The priest nodded contentedly. Another robed figure entered the room, and stood in the shadows, somewhat apart.

"Where's the knife?" Anu asked. His helpers muttered and glanced about. "Find it, you fools!"

Deane actually had the flint blade in his pocket, but he had to catch the ghouls off guard before he could risk using it. Bit by bit, the ghastly situation made sense. As he stalled for a breathing spell, he pieced his guesses together.

Hassan's investigations must have aroused suspicion, and thus the tomb looters had been prepared for Nefeyda's treachery. They had killed her and at the same time trapped Deane.

**H**EYL, he reasoned, must be behind all this. It was his illicitly concealed discovery that she had exposed, either for spite or for a reward. This was an Eighteenth Dynasty tomb; that mummy could be Bint Anath's.

But however that might be, the looters had Deane cornered. Nefeyda's corpse, embalmed and concealed, would be a club over his head. He would have to assure Crawford that the treasures were genuine. And from then on, Deane would have to authenticate all Heyl's offerings to gullible collectors, whether faked or real.

Deane now realized how useful he was to the looters. That gave him courage. They would have to protect him with perjured evidence, once Nefeyda's disappearance was traced to him, as it would be, for some of Quasim's customers had seen him leave with the girl. Also, these ghouls would not want to hurt him, unless in self-defense.

As they obeyed Anu, and sank to their hands and knees to find the missing knife, Deane muttered:

"I want to smoke. God, it makes me sick." He fumbled and found his pack of cigarettes. "Give me a light."

Anu graciously handed him the taper. He had taken it, and was holding it up so that his assistants could peer into the dim corners. Deane touched light to his smoke, and then he flung the taper at the mummy on the table. The inflammable linen burst into smoky flame. Anu yelled, and just then, Deane's hand came out of his pocket, armed with the flint knife.

The squatting helpers heard the cry, and saw the flame. They leaped toward the mummy to extinguish it. They did not know that Anu's cry was prolonged by anything but wrath. But a flint blade had ripped him, and he fell, clutching his stomach.

Deane launched himself at the men who were falling over each other in their scramble to smother the flames. He slashed, long, deadly strokes with the glass-hard blade. Taken utterly by surprise, they got in each other's way. Before they could realize what was happening, two of them were drenched with blood.

The flames rose, red and smoky. Choking black fumes thickened the air. The man who stood to one side closed in, but Deane whirled, butting him in the stomach with his shoulder.



Some had recovered, and were belaboring him, booting and kicking and choking as he slashed their legs. Someone was coughing:

"Don't kill him, you fools! Grab him—and hold him!"

This was a European's voice—the voice, now undisguised, of Gunther Heyl. Deane stabbed upward but the brittle blade snapped on a rib. He was unarmed, and the survivors were on him. Their weight bore him down, and the dense fumes, searing Deane's lungs, weakened him. His desperate outburst had taken his last remnant of strength.

"Open the door," one of the Copts gasped. "Open—we're choking."

A bit of fresh air thinned the smoke. Deane caught a glimpse of dawn from outside. Then that was cut off. They were lifting him to his feet. He had lost his chance. One had found a steel knife, and was approaching Nefeyda.

But that blow was not struck. There was a yell from the tunnel which had collapsed during Deane's vain attempt at escape. Hassan came in with several Egyptian police. Crawford, red-faced and puffing, followed them. His cheeks and forehead were slashed and battered.

That ended the show. Deane and the survivors were hustled up the stairs, and into the barren room. Two men carried Gunther Heyl outdoors. His macabre makeup was drenched with blood. He was groaning and half conscious. The flint blade, though breaking, had torn him.

There were two cars in front, but Deane's was not in sight.

**L**ATER, when the choking fumes of the burning mummy had thinned, Deane demanded:

"The girl! Is she really dead?"

"Beyond all hope, *Effendi*," the police official answered. "And we found you because your servant and Mr. Crawford helped us."

"*Effendi*, you remember I warned you," Hassan explained. "When you did not listen, I hid in the trunk of your car. All looked well, when we came here, so I did not come out. Then the girl screamed, and the door closed.

There was nothing I could do. By Allah, I cannot drive a car, so I ran. All the way to the Sugar Factory police station. They would not believe me. I was frightened, and they thought I was crazy."

"So," said the official, "when he told us about Heyl and Crawford, we drove into Cairo and looked for both. We found only Crawford, and your servant nearly killed him before we could stop him. Then he told us of Heyl and we believed your servant and came out."

"The house was empty," Crawford interposed. "We went around in circles until we found a hole in the sand. As if an underground passage had collapsed."

"That was where I was trying to dig out," Deane explained.

"Then we heard the yelling below," Hassan interrupted. "We dug in from the top, easily."

"But how did they kill her?" Deane demanded, shivering.

"Now that it is daylight, we can see what you missed," the police official said. "Those fine bits of glass on the floor. The surgeon perhaps can tell us what the little bottle contained before it broke. Perhaps a gas. Something like cyanogen, though I do not understand these things."

Deane shook his head. "But if I had followed her, I'd have been killed, and they wanted me alive."

"*Effendi*," said the official, "they seized you after she was dead. Now, had you gone with her into the house, they could have seized you first and taken you away, then poisoned her. But what I do not understand is, why did they do these things?"

"You can ask Heyl, if he's able to talk. Or his fake corpses. But I've got a good idea, already."

The official laughed. "A flogging will make them talk! But let me hear what you think."

Deane explained his suspicions: how Nefeyda had died for exposing the clique of looters, how Heyl had planned to blackmail him into helping sell illicit finds and outright fakes.

"Once I had embalmed Nefeyda," he concluded, "his possession of that



made-to-order mummy could at any time frame me as a madman and a murderer. But as long as I played his crooked game for him, he would of course protect me as a valuable ally. You see, he'd already started, by taking my car away. And his crowd would all swear that I'd never left Cairo with Nefeyda."

Quasim's presence among the conspirators clinched that. Deane had scarcely paused when there was a howling and yelling and cursing outside. The police official stroked his mustaches and smiled.

"My men seem to have gotten the prisoners into a confidential mood, Mr. Deane. Let us go out and have them confirm your opinions." He winked. "If they did roll your car into the Nile, doubtless they already

wish they had followed it."

Deane went out. When he reached the door, he saw that the police were beating the prisoners' feet with batons. They were all trying to speak at once, Heyl loudest of all.

"And they claim we have a third degree back home!" Deane said to Crawford. "Now, if there's anything I can tell you about Egyptian antiques, drop in some time."

Crawford shuddered. "I'm through! I'm looking for a safer hobby."

For a moment Deane would have agreed with him. That was when they put Nefeyda's body into the police car. Then he remembered his unfinished work, and the laboratory that demanded his presence.

There were still secrets of the past for him to unveil.



HELL'S HEADSMAN STALKS  
IN  
**OFF WITH HIS HEAD**  
A Novelet of Maniac Terror  
By **JOE ARCHIBALD**  
IN THE NEXT ISSUE

## CLOTHESPIN NOSE

Sensational extra help for colds—with Luden's! These famous cough drops not only help soothe throat, but release a menthol vapor—which, with



every breath, helps penetrate clogged nasal passages, helps relieve "clothespin nose!"





# DEALER IN HUMAN PARTS

By  
**NOEL LOOMIS**

*Author of "Murder Goes to Press," "Murder Beats the Drums," etc.*

**T**HE street lights were burning early tonight. A moist snow drifted down through the gloom, but only in isolated spots did the prints of human feet break the white surface that covered the sidewalks of Iron City.

The courthouse reared upward, blackened with age. The clock in the tower was entirely lost in the falling snow, and only one window among the hundreds showed a light. Inside, the big building was deserted. The corridors were in darkness. The marble floor gleamed faintly.

But up on the fourth level, behind a door marked "Assistant District Attorney," Leonard Gault paced his office. He was not seeing the falling snow or the grayness of the sky outside. He was listening.

"There'll be another one before midnight," he muttered. "He hasn't passed up a night like this in three years."

He stopped before his desk and lit a cigarette. Sometime between now and midnight he would hear the siren. The ambulance would race by. Po-

**The Man Was Dead—  
But There Were Fresh  
Footprints of Ghastly  
Horror In the Snow!**



LEOTIE MEY

"Just a moment, my boy"



lice headquarters would be deathly still, waiting for a patrolman to call.

"Shabbily dressed man found dead in the gutter," would be the report, and the commissioner, with dull fear in his eyes, would call the morgue and ask for an immediate autopsy. That was the only way they could tell about the bodies.

One more would finish Leonard Gault. There would be no marriage to Julia at Christmas, for her father was the richest man in Iron City—and Leonard would be out of a job by Christmas. Julia would marry somebody else. Perhaps it would be the district attorney himself—W. L. Bishop, sleek, fat, prosperous.

Bishop had been smart. After these mutilated bodies had been turning up for two years and the entire city was afraid to go out after dark, Bishop had called Leonard into his office one day.

"Do you want to make a name for yourself?" he asked.

"You bet your life," said Leonard eagerly.

"All right. I'm turning the Mad Mangler case over to you. It's the kind of a case that can give a man a big reputation." He smiled paternally. "Of course it could break you, too."

"I'll take it," said Leonard. "I'm not afraid of it."

He wished now he had been afraid.

Leonard suddenly stopped his pacing and stiffened. He heard the siren now, like the moan of a lost wind streaming down from the black mountains. It went by on the street below. He heard it die fast as the ambulance stopped. He walked to the telephone and waited. It rang.

The desk sergeant's voice was husky. "I guess we've got another one," he said.

"Call me as soon as you get a preliminary report from the medical examiner," said Leonard.

**H**E put the instrument back in the cradle and stood there a moment. He was just about through. His career was to be sacrificed to save the reputation of the district attorney. Somebody had to be the goat.

He phoned Julia.

"I won't be out for dinner tonight," he told her.

"Surely you won't have to work late again, dear." Julia's soft voice was a little impatient.

"I'm terribly busy," he told her.

"But everything is planned. It's—"

"I'm sorry. I'll call you later."

"You don't need to—ever," she snapped, and hung up.

Leonard opened the door and went out to the hall for a drink of ice-water. It was almost dark now. Everyone else in the district attorney's department had gone home early, glad to get away and leave him to fight it out alone.

Maybe he could find this Mad Mangler if he dressed like a bum and went wandering down Third Street as bait. Sometimes the murderer struck twice on the same night.

The phone jangled inside.

"I got a report on that last D. O. A.," said the sergeant's voice. "Both kidneys cut out."

Leonard groaned. His face was pinched in the darkness.

"Here's more," the sergeant went on. "Two small boys reported seeing what looked like a ghost driving a car in the vicinity of Third Street and Harrison Avenue, where the body was found."

"Listen, sergeant." Leonard's voice was pleading. "Do ghosts drive cars?"

"Don't put me on the spot, Mr. Gault." The sergeant's voice was pleading, too. "I don't know anything about this except what I'm tellin' you."

"Did the boys give any description?"

"They said it looked like a wisp of snow behind the wheel."

"Okay. I'll—"

He stopped, twisted his body until he faced the door. An icy wave swept over him. He heard something that sounded like the rustle of sheets. He tiptoed to the door, jerked it open. There was movement in the hall, the gritty sound of something scraping on the marble, then a swirl of white at the far end.

"Stop! Come back here! I'll shoot!" But he had no weapon in his hand, and the thing was gone. He raced for a phone.



"Send a dozen men over here at once. The Mad Mangler is in the courthouse!"

"Good God," said the sergeant.

**T**HEY came within a moment, but it was too late. They searched the big building without finding anybody or anything.

"I guess," said Leonard heavily, "he got away. He could have slipped out."

"Yeah," said a cop. "Or maybe he don't have to slip out that way."

Leonard said nothing. He went back to his office. He stopped at the door to turn on his lights. He saw something on the floor. He reached down and picked it up in trembling fingers. It was a surgeon's scalpel, the short blade crusted with blood.

He held it by the edges of the blade and looked at it dully, then gave it to the sergeant and asked him to have it examined for fingerprints.

Putting on his coat and hat, he walked out into the night. He went to Harrison and Third, a shabby part of town. A knot of half a dozen persons huddled together in a doorway, watching Leonard's arrival with dark eyes staring from white faces. Three policemen formed a semi-circle on the sidewalk. A car drew up at a distance from the curb; a man stepped out with a white bag.

Leonard did not need to look, then. The moulage expert from the department was on the case. That meant but one thing: footprints.

The snow here was an inch deep, and through it were the unmistakable prints of bare feet. Two lines of prints, one going to the spot where the body had lain, the other leaving. They showed plainly; the outer edges were well indented and faded away toward the inside. A human being had walked through this snow, on icy concrete, with bare feet. Or was it a human being? The question was in the eyes of the policemen around him.

He looked again, singled out the right foot, saw the huge, misshapen blotting where there should have been the print of a great toe.

The moulage man spoke.

"Not much use to try a cast," he said. "It's the same thing, Mr. Gault.

I've examined them now for three years. It's the Mad Mangler's track again. You can't mistake that big toe."

This was the one damning feature that made Leonard's stomach go soggy and sent a dull coldness through his veins. It would bring personal shame to Leonard, and professional disgrace. That horrible, overgrown toe, like a monstrous fungus on a human foot.

**L**eonard took a taxi to the morgue. The coroner was not in the office. Leonard heard voices and pushed open the thick door to the cold-room.

"Hello, Doctor," he said, and then he stopped. It didn't take two men to perform an autopsy. Murgala was running water over his hands. The sink was stained dark red. And Dr. Harris was there also, stripping rubber gloves from his long fingers.

"What are you doing here?" Leonard asked.

"Why—I—ah—" Harris floundered and stopped.

"I called him over from the hospital," Murgala said belligerently. "I wanted a witness."

"A witness to what?"

"To—well—" Now even Murgala seemed at a loss. "I wanted him to see what I knew I would find."

"You see," said Harris, suavely, "this is an unusual situation. Dr. Murgala didn't want to accept the responsibility by himself."

"What's unusual?" Leonard demanded.

"This body. You see, Leonard"—Harris spoke as an old friend—"the man was badly mutilated. Both kidneys removed, most of the liver, the heart—"

"Good Lord." Leonard sank weakly into a chair. "Why should anybody—"

"That isn't the really strange feature of this death. The man died on the operating table—before any of the parts were removed."

"How do you know that?"

"There was very little internal bleeding."

Leonard looked at what was left of the corpse on the slab. "But he was sewed up."



"He had been a dead man for some time before that," said Harris.

"Why did they—"

Harris avoided his gaze. He shook his head slowly. But Murgala spoke up, pugnacious again.

"Look here, Mr. Gault, let's quit beating about the bush. You know your father wasn't sane. If you'd face the facts you might get somewhere with this Mad Mangler business."

Leonard's face whitened.

"My father has been dead ten years," he said in a low voice.

"Sure, it's all right for you to say that, but what about these poor devils that come in here all cut up inside? What about the people in this town? Nobody knows who's going to be next."

"And my father wasn't crazy," Leonard said in a far-away voice. "Was he, Dr. Harris?"

Harris cleared his throat. "No, I don't think he was."

**M**MURGALA glared at him. "You were partners with old Dr. Gault for fifteen years and you stand there and say he wasn't crazy?"

Harris drew a deep breath. "He was eccentric, but hardly a psychopath. We're all eccentric, you know, in different ways."

"Eccentric, hell. A man who operates in his bare feet is a nut."

Murgala was grim and intent. He spoke like a man driving home nails in a box.

"And do you know any other surgeon that ever went ahead and sewed up a patient that died on the operating table, just the same as if they were alive?"

"No." Harris shook his head miserably.

"And you examined the knots in that gut. Weren't they tied just the way old Dr. Gault used to tie them? He wouldn't let anybody tell him how. He had his own special knot."

"But—" said Harris.

"But hell. You know Gault was always experimenting with parts, trying to figure out ways to replace diseased ones with good ones. The only trouble was, he couldn't get the good ones when he wanted them. He had to wait

till someone died in an accident or something." Murgala looked at Leonard's pinched face and turned defensive for a moment. "This is no time for monkeying around. We've got to face facts. Somebody—a surgeon—is killing people and taking away their vital organs."

"For what?" asked Leonard.

"We don't know that yet. But your father was called the Mad Mangler behind his back for years. You know that as well as I do. I was an interne in the hospital then—"

"That doesn't mean anything," said Harris. "Most of us are called something like that."

Leonard pushed himself out of his chair. "You both seem to forget that my father is dead."

"There's a lot I don't understand about what happens to a man's soul after he dies," said Murgala hesitantly, "but I'm ready to swear on one thing: if that job of cutting on that corpse isn't your father's work, it was done by his ghost! And Harris will back me up."

Harris studied his hands uncomfortably.

"And another thing," Murgala said. "What does he do with the parts he takes out? They never turn up. There's some grewsome business back of this."

"The miners say it's the ghost of old Dr. Gault," said Harris.

"You're just speculating," Leonard told them bitterly, but he did not feel sure at all. They had proved all the things he had been denying to himself for two years. The evidence of his father's work was so strong it seemed as if old Dr. Gault was there in the cold-room with them, unseen, waving bloody arms.

"You're laying this horrible business onto a man who has no chance to defend himself," said Leonard very bitterly.

"You'd better spend your time finding out what's at the bottom of this, and stopping it—if you can," said Murgala. "Me—I'm not going out by myself on any snowy night, I can tell you that."

And very few others were out alone by themselves that cold, bleak night



in Iron City, Leonard discovered. He cruised the streets in his own car, getting farther and farther into the residence district until finally he was near the edge of town.

The snow had ceased falling. There wasn't a street light in this district, and even the kids didn't play around the vacant houses, because no one knew when the entire district might fall into the earth and leave a gaping hole.

Leonard drove to the fence at the edge of the big open pit. There his car-lights shone over six hundred feet of space. But nowhere was there any sign of a ghostly white figure that walked in the snow with bare feet, one of which bore a monstrous growth on the great toe.

Old Dr. Gault had had much trouble with his feet. That was why they first started calling him eccentric—because he sat in his bare feet at the office. He put on loose slippers to make his calls, but in the operating room he kicked them off and worked without anything on his feet.

That hadn't been so bad. Eccentricities were common in the operating room, but along toward the last, when Dr. Gault's great toe had produced that nauseous growth and when his heart would no longer stand the shock of operation, he discarded all attempts to be conventional and walked the streets in his bare feet. It was then he had drawn more into himself and had pestered the morgue for the privilege of extracting the vital organs from fresh cadavers.

He never told what he did with them. His laboratory in the old Gault house across Cherry Street was secured with a big padlock, and Dr. Gault himself had refused to move out when the area was condemned. But the thing on his foot had poisoned his blood-stream soon after, and following his death the laboratory had been sealed without inspection, as provided in his will.

Leonard turned the car and started back to town. Along here he had played, had been pointed out as "old Dr. Gault's boy." It was odd, how his father had seemed always old, but Leonard had not minded. There had been

no mother in their home, but every afternoon old Dr. Gault had slipped away from his laboratory and gone fishing along the creek with Leonard or hiking over the mountain. Very few people knew about that, and Leonard had never told them. It was something between him and father, not for the public.

He threw on the brake. The dark out there was waiting for him, trying to speak to him. He jumped from the car and examined the snow-covered pavement in his lights. The tracks of a car. Not his own tracks. He hadn't come this way.

**T**HE two trails came from the blackness back toward the pit. Leonard got back into the car. He started off in low, following the tracks. He passed block after block until in the distance he saw a dull glow on the snow that signified an automobile. He turned off his own lights and coasted to a stop. The car ahead stopped, also, and then the skin crawled on Leonard's neck when he saw the house—the old Gault home.

A door opened and a man alighted from the car ahead. A man who walked with a severe stoop. Leonard gasped. Julia's father, rich old Mr. Seymour, down here at this time of night, in this district, *entering the old Gault home!*

Mr. Seymour went through the sagging gate by himself and the car moved on. When it turned the next corner Leonard drove forward slowly, his lights off.

He went carefully to the front door and tried to look in. It was black inside. He tried to open the door. Mr. Seymour had passed through it quickly, but now it was locked.

Leonard stood there a moment, the wind snatching at his overcoat. He tried to calm the jumping of his pulse. Old Mr. Seymour was practically an invalid. Some kind of stomach trouble. Julia thought it was cancer.

Leonard remembered this, then he went swiftly down the steps and started around to the back. But abruptly, under the living-room windows, he halted. Seymour was chairman of the



mining company's board. It was his business if he chose to inspect his own property at midnight. Leonard suddenly felt very silly. He was overdramatizing an old man's whim—and Seymour had never favored Leonard's suit with Julia, anyway. If he interfered in the old man's business now—

He went back to the car and drove off slowly. There was a drug store across Cherry Street. He stopped and telephoned the Seymour home, asked for Julia.

"How is your father tonight?" He was surprised at the shortness of his breath.

"Leonard, I'm so glad you called," she said. "Something is terribly wrong!"

"What?" His pulse jumped again.

"Father went out late tonight in the car, and I'm worried frantic. His stomach has been causing a lot of trouble lately and about a week ago he quit calling Dr. Harris to the house and started going out somewhere by himself. He refused to tell me anything about it, but I know something is wrong. I—"

"Has he had any unusual visitors in the last week?" Leonard waited tensely for the answer.

"**ONLY** Mr. Bishop—and I think he really came to see me."

Leonard hesitated.

"Is that so?" Leonard was bitter for an instant, but then he snapped another question. "Who drove your father's car tonight—Paul?"

"No—but oh, Len, that's something else. This evening, after dark, Paul got a note by special delivery. He glanced through it and then turned white. He threw the letter into the fireplace and went out at once."

"Do you have any idea as to what was in the letter?"

"I found a scrap that fell on the floor after he left. I could make out two words, 'Gault house.' What do you think—"

"Nothing. Nothing. Call the police and send them to our old house across Cherry Street. Tell them it's an emergency! Something is happening out there—something terrible—and we've got to stop it!"

"Wait, Len!" Her voice trembled. "I'm coming, too. I—"

But the last words trickled into the void of the phone booth. Leonard had thrown the receiver at the hook and ran back to his car. An unearthly cold began to creep through his veins. He swung across the middle of the block and shot around a corner. Two blocks from the Gault house he turned off his lights and drove within a hundred yards.

Just as he stepped over the fence in front of the house, a car shot around the corner, its lights full on. They flooded the house and caught him, then swept past, stopped. A slim, dark figure jumped from the front seat, left the lights on. Leonard met her.

"You little idiot," he said harshly. "You've ruined everything. They'll know we're after them. I told you to call the cops."

"Len," she sobbed. "I knew you were coming here. I'm sorry, but dad and Paul and you—we've got to stop it some way, Len." Then she drew off a little. "But maybe you don't want—"

"Cut it," he said jerkily. "My feelings don't count in this. Whoever or whatever is behind this, I'll break it up. Now you go call the police."

"No, Len, I'm coming with you."

"You're carzy," he said through his teeth, and started for the rear. "I can't stand here and argue. There is no time to waste."

He left her. Still there was no light in the house, no sound around them but the soft purring of Julia's motor, hardly audible as far as the house. At the rear he drew his breath sharply. The open pit had caved in until now its edge was not over ten feet from the back door. He walked gingerly along the narrow concrete strip, went down a short flight of steps to the old basement door. It also was locked, but he got in with a knife. He started to close the door and heard a rustle at his back.

**H**E wheeled and threw up his arm with the pistol, but the movement brought him against the soft body of a girl.

"Julia," he groaned in a whisper.



"I had to come. I couldn't let you go alone. It's my father and brother, Len."

"Stay behind me. There's no chance to go back now. We'll have to do our best."

They climbed the stairs, reached the first-floor hall. Leonard stopped ahead of her and a violent chill started at the back of his scalp and shuddered down the length of his spine. He tiptoed forward, holding out his left hand to keep touch with Julia and to prevent her getting ahead of him.

He started up the stairs to the second floor. The boards were old and dry and creaky. It was impossible to walk quietly. But he couldn't go back.

He moved warily to the door of the laboratory that had been padlocked for ten years. A tiny streak of light came from underneath. The lock was there but hanging loose. He grasped the knob.

"Just a moment, my boy."

Leonard froze. Julia screamed and fell against him. It was a man's voice at his side, and a gun made a hard round spot in his back. His own pistol was jerked from his hand. He was pushed ahead. The door swung open on old Dr. Gault's hidden laboratory. But it wasn't old and dusty and mouldy. It was scrubbed and clean, lined with shining instruments, flooded with brilliant light. He blinked his eyes. The door closed softly behind them, and Leonard turned to face an old man with pain-wrinkled face, a crazy light in his eyes. A surgeon's operating gown, blood-stained but dry.

**T**HE muscles knotted in Leonard's cheeks. Slowly he followed the line of the gown, fighting against what he should see. The bare feet, with one great toe degenerated into a monstrous growth. Leonard choked. He tried to speak, but the pain in his throat was too great.

"You are shocked, Leonard, my boy," said old Dr. Gault. "You didn't expect to see me here, did you?"

Julia collapsed at that. From somewhere an attendant came forward and picked her up, laid her on a couch. He snapped a handcuff on her wrist and

locked the other about the iron framework of the couch.

Leonard drew a deep, painful breath. He tried to face this man before him. He tried to speak, but gave it up. The pain was mounting in his chest until his throat throbbed with rawness.

The man before him began to talk slowly.

"They called me the Mad Mangler," he said. "Perhaps I was, but there was method in my insanity. I knew what I was doing all the time."

"You're dead," Leonard croaked at last.

"Far from that," said the man in the operating gown. "One dies, true, but if one's will is strong enough, one's body is quite unnecessary. The will itself can materialize, can carry on the work for which the puny body was too weak."

Leonard shook his head a little. He must be mad himself.

"You cut into them," he said. It was barely a whisper. "You took men's vital organs out of their bodies and left them dead in the gutters. You—"

The Mad Mangler laughed, a croaking, guttural sound.

"You're harsh, Leonard, my boy."

Leonard's eyes narrowed suddenly.

"You don't appreciate the value of my experiments to humanity," the Mad Mangler said. "You never did, as a matter of fact. But long before modern medical science announced successful transplanting of the cornea of the human eye, I had seen the possibilities of replacement of human parts. Eyes are an old story to me. I have a refrigerator filled with them. I have my own private stock of blood of the four types. I started saving this long before the Russians did. As a matter of fact, I am fifty years ahead of medical science itself."

"You're not my father," said Leonard hoarsely. "You can't be!"

The Mad Mangler laughed.

"What difference does it make? I was once, and you don't claim me now. But perhaps some day, when you are in need of a new liver, a new stomach, a new kidney, or even a new heart, I shall be able to take care of you. I have the only stock of live human parts in the world!" He chuckled, a



ghostly sound. "And all guaranteed genuine."

"You're crazy."

"Oh, no, Leonard. Just progressive. Just look around you."

Leonard stared in horror at the rows of jars that filled the shelves of the laboratory. He could make out forms now, of hearts, of kidneys, one of a dark mass that must have been a liver.

"SOME of these," said the surgeon, "have been here for years. I have not as a rule been able to transplant directly because of differences in metabolism and blood, but I can keep an organ in my solution for a month or so, keep it aerated with my mechanical heart and toughen it up by gradually changing the constituents of the serum. Then I can transplant to any other person."

"But who wants to sell his liver? A man can't live without—"

The surgeon nodded. "That's just it. I tried at first to devise a legal way of obtaining the parts. But it was too slow and uncertain. So I—borrowed, you might say."

"You murdered!"

"Tsk, tsks. The men I operated on were all down and out, no good to themselves or to society."

"I have eighteen human hearts in stock just now, and I expect within a few months to use them in replacement. Take an old man with a weak heart. When my method has been worked out I shall be able to provide him with a brand new heart for, say a hundred thousand dollars. And what wealthy man would refuse to pay a hundred thousand for a new heart?"

"That's impossible."

"Not at all."

"You couldn't do it. The blood—"

"Quite simple. A number of different men have devised apparatus for switching the human blood-stream and running it through a mechanical pump and aerator instead of through the heart during the course of a severe operation. While one is doing this, he could remove and replace the heart itself. It is merely a matter of perfecting the replacement process to the point where it can be accomplished in thirty minutes, so the new

heart does not have time to deteriorate before the blood-stream is turned back into it. Already I can remove a heart in ten minutes, but the new heart must be placed and connected within twenty minutes, and that I have not quite achieved."

"As soon as I get back to town," Leonard said between stiff jaws, "I'll have this place destroyed."

"You're not going back. You and Julia have learned too much to leave here alive."

He pushed Leonard to the couch where Julia lay with wide, blankly staring eyes. A handcuff snapped on Leonard's left wrist and the other cuff to the bed.

"I'll keep you awhile. A very important operation is scheduled and I think I shall permit you to be my audience in this amphitheater. Later I can use your two fine young bodies to replenish my stock."

Leonard could not answer. The cold was creeping around his heart. Julia was clinging to him, sobbing. He put his free arm around her. In a few hours her lovely body would be cut apart and installed in those horrible glass jars. They—

THE surgeon had changed his gown and put on sterilized rubber gloves. An operating table was wheeled into the room. The surgeon put a gauze mask over his face. The form on the operating table was already anaesthetized. A second masked man seated himself at the head of the table and grasped the patient's pulse. A cluster of lights was lowered from the ceiling. The patient's midsection was bared, painted with iodoform. The surgeon held the short-bladed knife posed an instant, made a swift slash near the breast-bone.

Leonard heard the cutting sound of a knife in gristle. Julia's fingers dug like claws into his arm.

"What are you going to take out now?" Leonard asked hoarsely.

The surgeon worked fast and deftly, pinning the edges of the cut with forceps and throwing them back away from the incision. He started talking as he worked, without looking up.

"This will be the first operation of



its kind," he said. "I am about to provide this patient with a new stomach."

Julia's fingernails dug into Leonard's flesh. She stared at the figure on the table. Leonard watched the surgeon's bare feet, the malformed toe that made it almost impossible to wear a shoe. Then a thought came home to him with stunning force.

"You didn't take the stomach out of any of those bodies we found," he said. "Where—where are you going to get a new one?"

The surgeon grasped the knife and made a deeper cut.

"I discovered some time ago that a stomach was more difficult to preserve. So it is a matter of finding a subject and having him on hand at the proper time. That"—he snapped a pair of forceps on a blood-vessel—"I have provided for."

"But the blood and—"

"I have had occasion to type both these subjects, and since they are father and son—"

Julia shrieked. From the far door was wheeled a second table. The victim was not anaesthetized but he was strapped down securely. The twisting head and wild, staring eyes were those of Paul Seymour.

"Good God!" moaned Leonard. "Father and son! You can't do it. You can't—"

"Why not? The old man Seymour doesn't know anything about it. I won't tell him until later, when I am sure the operation is a success."

The surgeon turned to Paul with the mad glitter in his eyes. "Too bad," he said. "I shall have to remove your stomach, but I can't spare a man to give you ether."

Paul cursed him but the surgeon grinned. He bared Paul's torso and reached for the knife.

**L**eonard was numb. His senses shimmered but he saw one thing. The surgeon had only two helpers. Leonard surged to his feet. He reached high with his free arm and made a wild sweep at the shelf above. He caught the warm roundness of a glass jar in his fingers and pushed. The jar clinked against another and

dropped heavily. It crashed. Liquid cascaded over the floor. A dark mass lay quivering among the ragged pieces of glass.

The surgeon started toward him with the short-bladed knife gleaming dully in his hand. His bare feet scuffed on the floor. Leonard tried to fight him off with his one arm, but he couldn't stand upright. He got to his feet on the couch, above Julia's head, and tried to pull the handcuff loose. Its edge cut into his wrist, but it didn't give. His head struck the shelf above. The surgeon's knife seared his arm, made a bloody arc toward his throat. He had backed as far as he could. This was the last—

But the second jar on the shelf above had been pushed close to the edge by Leonard's first movement. Now it teetered for an instant and then came down, thumping heavily on the side of the surgeon's head and then sliding to the floor. It broke with a muffled crash, and a red mass that had been a human heart lay quivering on the floor.

The surgeon hesitated an instant, stunned just a little. His arm wavered. Leonard's hand shot out and snatched the knife. He drove it into the madman's breast as far as he could, again and again.

The man at old Mr. Seymour's head had hardly looked up. He was watching the bag, swelling and flattening as the patient breathed. The other helper came at a run as the surgeon sank to his knees, his mad eyes glassy. Leonard swung the knife—the second man turned and ran. The man at the ether tank looked up, jumped to his feet and followed. The cone was still on Mr. Seymour's face, the gas hissing into it.

Leonard seized the couch with both hands, pulled it across the floor in desperate jerks. He snatched the ether cone from Seymour's face, pushed the table away and fumbled at the straps that held Paul down.

"There's a car in front," he shouted at Paul. "Go get a surgeon!"

Fifteen minutes later a man who had had no time to put on a white robe was sewing up the cut in Mr. Seymour's body.

"He'll be all right," he said. "Some



shock, I imagine, but I think not dangerous."

"How about his stomach?" asked Paul. "He won't live long anyway, will he?"

The physician hesitated.

"Why not? I see nothing wrong with his stomach. If he thought so, he was misinformed."

"It's strange," said Paul, "that I couldn't find Doctor Harris. He's father's regular—"

"That isn't surprising," Leonard said grimly. "Dr. Harris is there on the floor, dead. The man who used to be my father's partner made himself up to represent my father so his organ-snatching activities wouldn't be traced."

**P**AUL ripped off the mask from the features of Dr. Harris. They were suave no longer. It was the face of a mad, cornered rat, frozen into death. The makeup came loose from the great toe.

"I don't see—"

"I did," said Leonard, "when he started calling me Leonard. My dad—he swallowed—"always called me Lenny."

"But Doctor Harris—"

"Doctor Harris has spent ten years capitalizing on the infirmities of rich old men in Iron City, and perhaps he

had even developed transplanting to the point where he actually hoped for success. Perhaps this experiment would have proved it. Who knows? It may be that other old men have already had such work done on them. We'll never be able to ascertain. At any rate, Harris wanted money—a lot of it—and he was in a good way to get it. Whether or not these replacements would have been successful, everything was secret, and this laboratory would be convincing to any man who feared he had only a few years to live because of a bad liver or diseased organ of some kind."

"We never know where scientific development will lead," observed the physician from the operating table. "I wonder what happened to the two who were assisting Harris."

"I heard it on the car radio," said Paul, who had just come back in. "They were picked up at the bottom of the mine-pit—what was left of them."

"Which wouldn't be much at the end of a six-hundred-foot drop. They must have run in the wrong direction. Probably they were quacks that Harris got hold of somewhere. Well"—Leonard drew a deep breath—"Julia is waiting in the next room. I don't think anybody will object if I take her home now."

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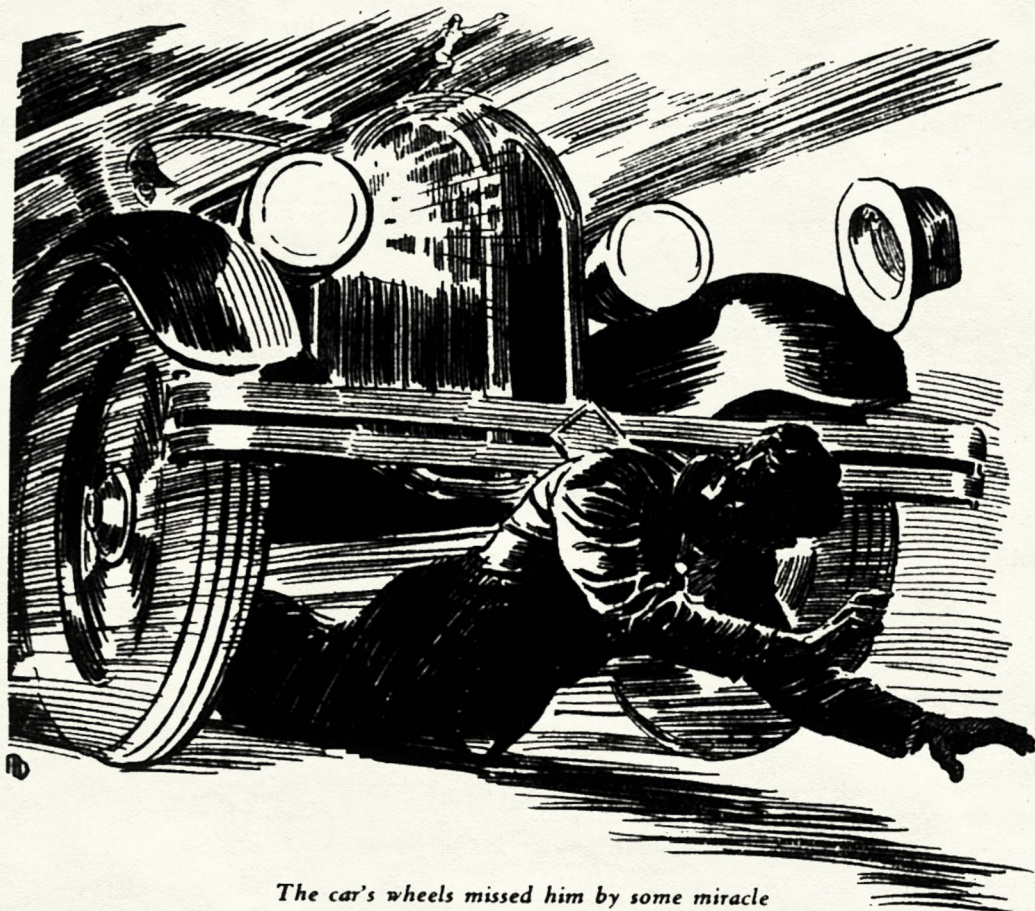
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# DANSE MACABRE

By **JOHN EASTERLY**

*Author of "Corpse of the Jungle," "Mystery Knife," etc.*



*The car's wheels missed him by some miracle*

**B**LACK darkness shrouded the old country road in dismal gloom. Rand Wade felt a warning of impending disaster sweep over him as he trudged along. There was something evil, even horrible, about the hot breathless hush of the summer night.

The low hum of a speeding auto came from behind him. He glanced back. The headlights cut a white swath through the darkness, revealing his figure as he stood waving for the speeding car to stop.

It was traveling fast and the man at the wheel made no attempt to decrease his speed. Wade had no chance to leap back out of the way. He flung himself down flat as the car came roar-

**Rand Wade Invades a Spider-Mesh of Horror When Men Go Back to the Primeval Ooze!**

ing at him. It passed over him, its wheels missing him by some miracle, the car's chassis brushing him like the wings of a bat. He aged ten years in that one instant. Then the Juggernaut of death was gone like the wind, leaving him sprawled out in the darkness.

Weird, hellish laughter drifted back to him. The tail lights of the car were two sardonical red eyes vanish-



ing into the gloom.

"Nearly got me!" Wade flexed arms and legs, found he was bruised but not seriously hurt and got slowly to his feet. "A madman was at that wheel!"

Norma Payne's words echoed in his ears as he hurried on. Again and again he seemed to hear her low frightened voice as she urged him to come at once to the old Potter farm—and then the sudden silence over the wire, which was more fraught with dread than the panic in her voice. Something was wrong at Mark Potter's farm—something was terribly wrong.

It seemed hours before he finally reached the place, a big rambling old farm house some distance back from the seldom used country road. It brooded amid the shadows of tall trees, its white painted walls looming eerily in the darkness.

Wade discovered a faint light coming through a heavily barred cellar window at one side of the house. He went closer and peered in, then uttered a startled curse.

Sprawled out on the top of a huge oak chest was Norma Payne. She was lying on her back, her head hanging over the edge of the chest, her luxuriant dark hair cascading down toward the floor. Her eyes were closed and her lovely face was pale. A yellow silk negligee only half concealed her slender young body.

Wade's eyes narrowed as he saw the tank of anesthetizing gas standing close to the girl's head. Norma was unconscious—someone had placed her under an anesthetic. Why?

Abruptly a figure leaped at Wade out of the darkness. Talon-like fingers caught him by the throat. Desperately he tore at those choking hands, as he writhed and twisted, trying to shake off his unseen foe. Again he heard that weird diabolical laughter—the same as that which had been emitted by the ruthless fiend at the wheel of the speeding car.

From somewhere within the house came the strains of music—the weird cadence of "Danse Macabre"—the Dance of Death by the composer,

Saint-Saens. A man shouted, a woman laughed hysterically, and then everything went black to Rand Wade as those cruel fingers strangled him into unconsciousness.

**Y**EARS later, it seemed, Wade opened his eyes. At first he thought he had been left in some slimy swamp. In the dim light he could see ferns and wet green leaves scattered all about him—then he saw the moving figures that were twisting and crawling all about him.

They were men and women, clad in scant garments, their flesh a hideous green. They moved about on the floor of a big room like the spawn of paleozoic mire, like crawling creatures existing before the dawn of history. Then one of them spoke, almost in echo to Wade's thought.

"That's it," shouted a green clad man. "We are the paleozoic people—crawling through mud and slime—faster, faster." Abruptly he snatched up a whip and began to lash those about him. A woman screamed and crawled away like an alligator.

Unnoticed by the others, Wade sat up. He was still fully dressed and his hat was lying beside him. The place where he had been lying was in deep shadow beyond the green light.

Was Norma Payne still in the cellar unconscious? That was all that mattered to Rand Wade. These sadistic fools with their mad game—it must be a game—meant nothing to him. They were as loathesome as the squirming crustaceans they were trying to represent! They were worse—they were human beings trying to act subhumanly. They were degenerate.

Wade managed to sneak out of the room without being observed. He hastily searched through the rest of the house until he found the stairs leading down into the cellar. He descended swiftly. Lights were burning in the cellar and he found himself in a small room. Beyond this was a low arch and in the room on the opposite side Norma was still sprawled out on the oak chest.

But now a tall man clad in a red lounging robe was standing beside



her. A handkerchief masked the lower part of his face and in his left hand he held a small water glass.

"I'm very clever, my dear," he said slowly, as though believing the unconscious girl could hear him. "Those fools upstairs going through their insane ceremonies—nasty, jaded souls seeking something different."

He laughed and it was the same weird laughter Wade had heard twice before that night.

"They don't know that everything that Mark Potter does has a purpose. Even this paleozoic cult I started for them."

Horror swept over Rand Wade as he crouched against the side of the arch, watching. Potter had opened the upper part of Norma's negligee, revealing the soft whiteness of her neck and shoulders. The man in the red lounging robe then shook the glass in his hand. A squirming creature dropped from the glass and began to crawl across the girl's flesh.

It was a vicious black widow spider!

"You see, I plan everything," said Potter. "Tomorrow when they find your body they will learn that you died from the bite of a black widow spider. They have been kept too busy to know what has been going on down here. That is the way that I wanted it."

"Get away from that girl!" snapped Wade, suddenly appearing in the doorway. His gun in his hand, the gun which he had retrieved from the place of concealment on his person. He fired as Potter snatched an automatic from inside his lounging robe.

**F**OR the last time that insane laughter issued from Mark Potter's lips. Then he crumpled to the floor, to sprawl there motionless, a

bullet in his heart.

"Rand," Norma murmured weakly, unable to see him. "Is that you?"

"Yes, don't move." He leaped to her, brushed the black widow spider off her and then crushed it to death beneath his foot. He saw a second spider crawling across the floor and killed that also. Wade shuddered as he looked at the girl.

"If you had moved, that thing would have bitten you—but they won't touch a motionless body. I guess Potter wouldn't have worked it the way he did if he had known that."

"He—he knew," said Norma raising her head. "He was waiting for me to come out of the anesthetic—that's why he did not put the spiders on me until just now. He planned the whole thing. As my cousin, he was my only close relation—he would get the half million in my estate if I were dead."

From upstairs came the sound of excited voices. Mark Potter's other guests had heard the shot.

"We've got to get rid of those fools," said Wade. "Police! Police!" he shouted. "Get out, the place is raided."

From upstairs came the trampling of feet as Potter's guests, tried to get away as swiftly as possible. No one stopped to question, to see if the police were really there.

Motors roared and soon the place was silent.

"You know, Rand," said Norma sitting up weakly. "I didn't realize until now how good it is to be engaged to a private detective, particularly a rich one—who doesn't want my money."

"Right," said Wade, smiling as he kissed her.

"But I'm afraid that if we should see a spider while we're on our honeymoon, I'll scream!"

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# BLACK DOOM

Amid the Awesome Hush of the Haitian Jungle Depths, Death Stalks With Bloody Sword—Creating a Grim Feast of Horror!

## A Complete Novelet By DAVID V. REED

Author of "Drums of Death," "Where Is Roger Davis?" etc.

### CHAPTER I

#### *Courbet's Sword*

**T**HE blistering noonday heat of the Haitian sun filtered through the trees and struck the stairs on which Tom Duane sat. In the grassy yard before him, more in the shadow of sheltering *mapou* trees, several blacks worked slowly, piling boxes, emptying huge tins, filling saddlebags.

Duane closed his eyes and tried to feel a breeze. There was none. He turned toward the house and whistled; it was too hot to shout. A whistle answered from inside, cheerfully. It

was the only cheerful thing in the fetid, overpowering humidity of the day, and probably, Duane thought, the only sign of life anywhere on the baked land of that southern part of the island. The quiet seemed to him to be filled with foreboding, the whole sunlit landscape treacherous in its apparent docility.

A moment later, Harry Chadwick emerged, carrying a loaded tray.

"Scotch and soda," he grinned. "Wonderful idea, getting an electric refrigerator down here. Take a last look at these ice cubes before they go up in smoke."

Both men sipped their drinks thoughtfully, watching the natives.







*A tall white faced man stood there*

After a time, Duane pointed to a large wooden sign standing near them. It read:

JONATHAN ROGERS COMPANY  
LUMBER EXPORT  
HAITI AND NEW YORK  
JACMEL BRANCH OFFICE

"Paint's peeling again," said Duane. "Must be over a hundred and ten." After a moment he added, "Wonder what it's like in the interior?"

"We'll know soon enough," said Chadwick dryly.

The sound of a motor came to them,

a powerful roar seldom heard among the ancient vehicles on the island. Duane listened a moment and shrugged.

"Trouble's back from Port au Prince," he observed. "Here it comes at sixty per."

AS he spoke a sleek maroon phaeton appeared several hundred feet away, making the turn from the Jacmel road to their own rutted path. Its motor eased and it glided up to them and stopped.

At the wheel sat a young girl, her long dark hair flowing to her shoulders in a handsome contrast to the cool linens she wore. As she stepped jauntily from the car, almost posing for a brief instant, pointing a red sandaled



toe and arching her slender young body, Duane looked at her and felt disgusted with himself. Disgusted because he had to admit the sight of her was pleasant. He didn't like it.

"Afternoon, gentlemen," she smiled. "You look comfortable."

"Hope you don't mind," said Duane.

"Not if I can join you."

"Harry," said Duane, "get up a Scotch for the boss." He added as Chadwick mumbled and started in: "And don't poison it."

"The boss," said the girl reflectively. "I can't get used to it. Don't you think Miss Rogers would sound better? Or even—Kathy?"

Duane grunted. He had learned not to answer her. Not when those blue-gray eyes of hers looked at him that way, waiting to snap at him, to leap into another of the arguments she always started, and usually finished.

**S**HE was the boss, a wisp of a girl who came from the aristocratic precincts of Boston, down to Haiti to administer the estate she had inherited from her uncle. And of course, there was her brother Ralph, younger than she by a year, stalking about in a cork helmet and convinced that he could learn the business in a few weeks, between drinks.

Duane had slapped him the week before in an argument. He couldn't bear arguing with a silly youngster in that heat. What had it been about? He could hardly remember. Some nonsense about not looking after certain stands of mahogany. And they hadn't fired him. They couldn't. Duane ran the whole show south of Port au Prince—six long, tough years.

Chadwick came out. "Here's your drink, boss," he said. For a while the three sat quietly drinking, saying nothing. Then Kathy Rogers spoke.

"Your natives seem to be a leisurely lot," she said.

"We only hire men," said Duane. "We don't kill 'em for a buck a day."

"It costs the company five hundred dollars to pump that electric line here," said the girl, "so you could make ice cubes in a refrigerator."

Duane saw then that something was brewing, that there was something

else beside a minor dissatisfaction nosing around.

"The Jacmel Branch," he replied evenly, "gave the Rogers company a quarter of a million last year. This is no Boston Turkish bath—there's something vicious about the heat here, something. Your lipstick, by the way, is melting."

"If you don't like the electric line," said Chadwick, "take it and—"

"Never mind, Chad," said Duane. He turned to the girl. "Anything special on your mind, boss? What are you driving at?"

"Poetry," said Kathy, "just poetry. Let me give you an instance. A certain company gets an option on a valuable stand of mahogany. A clause in it says that within two years, ten trees have to be felled and sections removed for the option to hold."

"That's the option we hold on Courbet's land," said Chadwick.

"Correct," observed the girl. "Now, the owner of the company dies, and by the time the new owners arrive, the two years have about six weeks left. The men in whose district the mahogany stands have done nothing about the option."

"Maybe," said Duane, playing the game and wondering, "there were reasons. It might have been that the property was useless because the proposed government roads hadn't yet penetrated that far in. And that being a year off, perhaps the place had a reputation so bad that it scared the pants off the natives, and only a few would ever dare venture near it, and then only out of extreme loyalty."

"Poetry," said Kathy Rogers, "just poetry. When the new owner asks about it, she is told a story, a wonderfully poetic story. More than a hundred years ago, she is told, a brilliant native named Dessalines rose up and together with thousands of slaves, destroyed Napoleon's troops in Haiti.

"The freed slaves massacred every French colonial slave holder on the island—all except one, a certain Francois Courbet who defended his land deep in the interior against all invaders. And, if one is to listen to the sorcerers, Courbet still lives, wreaking his vengeance and destroying



every black who sets foot on his land.

"The last touch is most charming. When Courbet dies, they say, his black heart and black deeds will in death turn all of him black—Beautiful homespun poetry."

"Get to the point," said Duane.

"Anderson, in our Port au Prince office, doesn't put much stock in a legend of Francois Courbet. Then there is the matter of the Galloway Company, who bid against Rogers for the option. A few questions brought out the fact that the Courbet legend, dormant for years, sprang to life again shortly after we got the option. Significant, don't you think?"

"Tom thinks it's Galloway," said Chadwick, "taking advantage of the Courbet legend and using skillful terrorism to keep us off."

Kathy Rogers arched her brows.

"Afraid?" she asked.

"It isn't a question of being afraid," said Duane. "It's merely—"

"Merely," she interrupted, "that a man known as fearless stayed away and let a valuable option almost expire. It wasn't fear, you say. But there couldn't possibly be a bribe in it somewhere, could there?"

Slowly, Tom Duane put his glass down and just as slowly he rose.

"Say that again," he said, "and I'll kick your teeth out."

Kathy Rogers sipped her drink.

"Get out, Duane," she said quietly.

"You're fired. And you'll be finished on the island when my brother returns from Courbet's."

"What?" Harry Chadwick's voice was a whisper. "He's *where*?"

"He left yesterday morning from Leogane, in a motor launch alone with half a dozen natives. We'll keep that option."

"So you sent your brother to see what he could do against a little terrorism?" said Duane.

He stood quite close to the girl, close enough for her to see the clamped muscles of his jaw.

"Take a look at those leisurely natives," he rasped. "Since I told them they've had no heart to sleep or eat—but they're packing saddlebags. Packing them because we were leaving to go to Courbet's land in two days!" He

turned and shouted. "Miro! Theot! Michel! Zo! *Fini vos sac-pailles!* Get the burros—*vite*. We're leaving now. *Tande moin?*"

Kathy Rogers was looking from Duane to Chadwick. Something in their tense, angered manner, and in the evil breath of hot wind that came scorching from the north where Courbet's lay, brought her a fleeting alarm.

"You don't really—" she wanted to say.

But Duane had brushed past her and run up the stairs.

**N**EAR Point Garonne, ten kilometres from where the Fouribe turned its swollen waters to run to the Caribbean, a fierce tropical storm that had hung all day in the heavy air, broke and trapped six men.

Now and again as lightning flashed its white brilliance over the dark earth, two white men could be seen working with the four blacks who were their party. In those galvanizing instants of light, men would stagger forward, tightening the ropes that tethered their burros to trees.

Red and purple and deep blue the whole world had become, a world without life, a world of anger and biting wind, where the rain hammered down in a fury, groaning as it smashed the earth, and the trees roared with anger when the wind went through, or groaned in agony together with the rain.

Then high over the mingling sounds of the gale and the downpour, a single clear scream. Fantastic, thought Duane. Not here in the wilderness—and then he heard it again!

Chadwick's hand was on his arm, pressing it in the only message he could convey. Duane fumbled in a saddle-bag and withdrew a flashlight. Once again the scream came and Duane ran toward it, stumbling through the spiny tall grass.

His light was a pale arrow piercing the pitch that engulfed him, showing perhaps three feet ahead. At the edge of the clearing where he had camped, Duane saw them—a black man and a white girl!

Petrified, he stood before them. Kathy Rogers and an old, bent na-



tive—miles from where he had left her thirty hours before. With one motion he heaved the girl across his shoulders as if she had been a sack. Then he clutched the old man's hand and forced his way back to the camp site.

And then, like every Haitian storm, as abruptly as it had come it died and departed. The rain ceased, the wind whimpered and became a strangely warm, gentle caress. Over the treetops a thin crescent moon appeared, a pale scimitar illuminating the clearing with its ghostly light.

Chadwick roused the natives, and under the yellow glare of torches, the men were digging deep under the dead leaves in the woods, finding dry brush that even the storm had been unable to reach. Soon, in the blaze of the fire, the animals attended, the men sat down to dry themselves.

Duane looked at the drenched girl. Lord, he thought, what a sight she was in her jodhpurs and expensive cashmere sweater, drenched and pathetic and frightened, surrounded by blacks in the heart of a jungle.

"What are you doing here?" he said to her.

The flickering light of the fire played on her ivory skin.

"I couldn't stay behind," she said. "My brother is all I have." She paused a moment. "I got this old man to help me follow you until you'd be too far out to turn back. And then, the storm came. . . ."

Duane gave her some black coffee.

"There aren't any spare clothes," he said. His own denim trousers, the open shirt called a *vareuse*, his soft boots, all were soaked. "You'll go back in the morning."

His lean jaw was set. It wasn't easy for him to fight the sympathy and admiration he suddenly and unaccountably felt for her. How many girls, even without her sheltered background, would have had the courage to venture the trail alone with an old black man. For a moment as he looked at her he thought she was going to cry. Instead she looked at him. "You're forgetting I'm the boss," she said.

"Try and remind me," said Duane. "I was fired yesterday."

**S**UDDENLY the old man who had guided the girl tottered erect and began speaking, the French *patois* that was the language of Haiti pouring out in shrill, cracked tones.

"We must go back! The white lady forced me to continue!" He weaved uncertainly on his feet, his withered old eyes sparkling in fear. "Courbet stands sentinel tonight as he has for one hundred years, killing—"

"That'll be enough!" Duane called sharply.

He saw his blacks crouching closer to the fire, their faces bright with fear, staring into the darkness that hemmed them in. He threw a handful of coins to the ground. The aged black bent and hastily retrieved them. A moment later he had slung his leathern sack over his old shoulders and the sound of his movement through the soaked grass was growing fainter.

"Pay attention to the fire!" Chadwick called. "Zo, Michel, there's wood here. *Prends yo!*"

The blacks moved slowly, never out of the little ring of light. Their fright was nothing to have trifled with.

Duane found a blanket that was fairly dry and he tossed it to the girl. He busied himself stirring a huge pot of soup and then from the fire he withdrew a taper and lighted a pipe. He wondered how Kathy Rogers would react to her first taste of goatmeat. He would have little difficulty sending her back with Theot after that.

Restlessly, disturbed by his wandering thoughts and the insidious night noises of the wild country about him, he looked into the dark heavens toward the northeast. Somewhere there stood an ancient ruin of French colonial days, the bloody subject of many a folk *mystere*.

It lay between Ralph Rogers and Duane now, and though Rogers was heading south with a day's start, nursing a motor launch through crazy waters would hold him for awhile. Duane tried not to think about it, glad that the aroma of his pipe quieted his nerves.

All at once a small round shape hurtled into the light from the darkness. It fell with a soft thud against one of the uprights over the fire and as it



slowly rolled back the great pot tipped and spilled on the object.

It was a worn leathern sack, and as it rolled a horrible stench of boiling leather and something else arose. Its short flap fell open. There was a human head in it—the head of the old black man who had left them so short a time before.

Things happened quickly after that. A single shriek burst in the quiet, the contorted faces of the natives were before Duane, lips bubbling with froth, eyes closed in terror, beating the earth with their fists.

The head lay with its bulging, sightless eyeballs streaked with blood, a ghastly thing in the flickering light of the fire. Over everything hung the odor of the cooking goat stew.

Duane felt Chadwick beside him. In that instant, while they were still stunned and nauseated, more paralyzed by its suddenness than frightened, a voice called from the darkness.

"Return if you wish to live," it said, so softly that one could scarcely hear it. "Go no further. My land is inviolate."

The very air seemed filled with the hushed malice in that voice.

**T**HEY saw it before them, at the very edge of their small lighted circle. A tall man stood there, his face as white and cold and dead as the moon. In the darkness none of his features could be seen, but there were hanging bags of skin, as if age had taken even his identity away. Only jet black eyes stared from under a powdered wig.

Duane sucked in his breath as he saw that the man wore silk knee breeches, a lace fringed coat of peach came to his knees, and his silver buckles glittered in the firelight. As the words ceased, the figure raised a saber whose edge was dark, sheathed it, and moved back into the darkness from which it had come.

Twice the automatic in Duane's hand roared and spat its crimson fire into the night. With the sudden release of tension he and Chadwick rushed forward. Nothing. The figure had vanished. The terrible unbelief

and fascination in that apparition had lasted a split second too long.

Duane looked quickly to the girl and turned his attention to the natives, quieting them. Chadwick had taken the leathern sack and its burden away. When he returned, he unpacked flasks of *clairin*, a raw liquor of fermented sugar cane juice. In the stillness, broken not even by a whisper, the natives drank in hoarse gulps, their throats constricting with effort.

Once Duane felt a hand on him; Kathy Rogers was behind him, her face bloodless.

"Mind if I take a swallow?" She forced a smile. Duane handed her a flask. "Thanks," she murmured.

Wordlessly, Duane made her a bed of blankets, padded a saddlebag for a pillow. In the turmoil seething in his mind, there had remained a tranquil corner occupied by thoughts of her. He thought of her sitting there, looking at the gruesome sight, ready to faint—and pointing for him to pay her no heed, to care for the blacks.

"Good night, boss," he started to whisper but caught himself in time.

He sat by the fire a long time, watching his natives drinking themselves into a merciful stupor, drinking to keep their minds. . . .

When at last they had tumbled stiffly to sleep, Chadwick motioned to him. Together they moved away from the others. The wind had changed again and the night cold of the hills swept down. The beads of perspiration on Chadwick's upper lip flickered with reflections of the firelight.

"Tom, what was it?"

Duane shrugged. "Ask Galloway."

"You think—"

"I can't think. Not anymore tonight. Go to sleep. I'll take the first watch. They've made their first move."

---

## CHAPTER II

### *Toward Death*

---

**M**ORNING came and the party started forward with the first crack of dawn. Kathy Rogers was with them. Duane had taken her aside



to tell her she was going back, and he had lost.

"You saw what we're up against," he said. "There's no place here for you."

"Make a place," she returned. "My brother's in there."

He had had to let her come. There was something in her eyes that he couldn't fight. Courage—and more. Something he hadn't thought about before—devotion and love. Perhaps that was what moved him. She had said that her brother was all she had left. The thought hit Duane queerly. He had no one.

There had been times when he thought of a girl caring for him that way. He could not let her down. In his own way, he understood vaguely what it meant to love someone who was lost, perhaps forever— Riding along, he told himself that half the reason was that he had feared to ask for a volunteer to take her back, afraid lest all four of his natives should cry out. But he knew better.

Long before, their way had led them into the wooded mountains that rose up on the southern peninsula of the island, a dark forbidding barrier. Even the bright sun scarcely penetrated the dim, hostile recesses of the jungle.

There was no conversation as they hurried on, turning with an angry mountain stream, clinging to great, treacherous winding canyons, slipping over wet rocks in the shallow cascades. Gloom like a pall clung to the party, and dread—dread of the known and the unknown toward which they relentlessly advanced.

Now and again as they were lost in the brooding twilight of a vast canyon, Duane saw that the natives had come to shrink from the dark. Forever they seemed to hover on the brink of sheer panic—anything might have driven them wild.

Duane drove them ruthlessly, taxing their energies to keep them from thinking. He had only to see the way they started at meaningless sounds to understand the terror that gnawed away at them, hour after hour.

Always there were the eyes, the countless eyes of the jungle, mute and

all-seeing, peering at them from everywhere, sparkling and unwinking, the constant sentinels of a wild land. And the quiet, the unceasing, nerve-twisting quiet. Even the parrakeets hushed when these humans forged into view.

The jungle blossoms, delicate and brilliantly colored, choked them with the overpowering sweetness of their perfumes. The leafy tendrils of the vines brushed them softly, like the forgetful touch of death, waiting to crush them in its embrace.

Chadwick dropped back once to ride beside Duane.

"Much further?" he asked.

"We've got to get there by sundown, before another night."

They rode in silence for a moment.

"Think about last night?" said Chadwick. Duane nodded. "Still think it's Galloway's idea?"

"I don't know," said Duane. "I don't know anymore. It must be."

"But he looked so real—those clothes, the way he spoke—"

"We sound like kids," said Duane. "If this had happened anywhere else in the world, I'd laugh. But Haiti—I've been here too long, seen too much I could never explain. We've got to go faster."

On they went, driving through. The men ate while they rode, nibbling at dried fish, washing it down hurriedly with water from a clear mountain stream, while they looked hungrily at the lobster and tassards that abounded in its depths. And the heat, the stinking heat, choking them like a lethal gas, and the air like steam.

**I**T was late afternoon when they came at last to the fringe of the forest of mahogany, and saw before them the high plateau in whose center stood the ancient mansion of Francois Courbet. From where they were, the roofs of the old house were silhouetted against the reddening sky in the distance, rising over the tops of immense trees that surrounded it.

"We're here," said Chadwick.

"Won't be long now." Somehow Duane grinned. "If they didn't before, they know now that we didn't turn back."



They found a road still faintly visible through its choking weeds, and passing up this road, they came at length to the trees they had seen from far off.

Duane dug his nails deep in his palms as he saw them—elms!—tall, stately, they stood in two columns that formed an avenue to the house. They were trees from another world, planted a century before, rising in the midst of tropical land like forlorn ghosts.

Before they quite understood what they saw, they found themselves riding through a garden—a rose garden—wild and luxuriant beyond belief, filling the air with their exquisite nostalgic odor.

Duane caught Kathy Roger's eye. She was drinking in the scene as if she expected never again to see anything from home. He moved closer to her.

"Look at my leisurely blacks," he said. Their faces were filled with intense fright and resignation. "They didn't have a brother here," he said softly. "They don't own the option."

He was filled with gratitude for the blacks. Loyalty alone had made them follow so far. Even at that moment, with a hundred wild and uneasy conjectures flooding his brain, he had remembered to tell her.

And there they saw the house standing before them, around a slight bend in the road. It was as if the day had nothing in store for them but shock. It was nothing like the ruins they had expected.

The mansion was whole, sturdy. Even the paint on its firm timbers was fresh, the white doors and windows mingling with the deep ivory of the rest of the house in beautiful contrast. The gabled roof swung downward at a graceful angle, and from it five smaller gables turned to face the setting sun. Two wings stood at right angles to the main house, and a broad, circular piazza ran the length of the structure.

The stairs leading up to the door were spotless, and the huge white entrance door slightly ajar.

The red sun bathed the scene in bloody luminescence, and lost in his

thoughts, Duane turned to his companions and saw a speechless amazement on them. The house, with its elms and roses and the great tranquility, what did it all mean? Not a sound broke the stillness. A burro pawed the ground and Duane stroked its nose.

"Looks like we got here first," he said.

He had to say something. He felt it was a dream, fantastic and unescapable, and somewhere in it, death lurked. He knew that.

The next instant Duane felt a little trickle of cold perspiration on his forehead, and his eyes fastened on the white entrance door. It was opening by itself—an inanimate, mute welcome!

"The wind," Duane muttered, feeling his brow cool under a faint breeze.

Something lying on the threshold glittered brilliantly as a ray of sunlight struck it. Kathy Rogers slipped from her burro and ran up the steps. She stooped and rose slowly. Then she turned and faced Duane and Chadwick, running toward her. She held out a palm. In it lay a signet ring. The gold initials on the onyx field were R.R. Duane didn't need the initials to remember it.

"Here now." He had his arm under her. She had slumped against the door. Even as he held her, he glimpsed the body of a man lying sprawled on the floor inside. "Chad," he said quietly. "Take her down. Get a fire going. Keep them busy. I'm going in."

He watched Chadwick carry the girl down. The blacks were sitting motionless, watching him. He wheeled and stepped over the threshold.

**I**T was a moment before his eyes grew accustomed to the dark interior of the house. The man who lay at his feet was a Negro, dressed loosely in denim. Duane turned him over. There was a deep gash in his throat, a raw ragged wound whose edges were a corrosive green against the clotted red of the open throat. He had never seen a wound like that before. The sight tortured him.

He rose and saw looming before him a dark marble staircase that wound its



graceful way to the upper story. In the spacious foyer where he stood, the walls were hung with rich tapestries and paintings; the floor was covered by a heavy flowered carpet. In the quiet Duane could hear his own irregular breathing. He felt the open holstered gun at his side and started for one of the doors near him.

Then he heard the sound upstairs. A footstep perhaps, someone walking. Or the well-kept but ancient floorboards creaking of themselves. He went to the staircase and listened, then slowly, he started up. At the head, the high polish of a brass door-knob gleamed in the murk; the door was half open. He pushed it wide.

From an open shuttered window, the last rays of the sun flung their light on the deep rug that lay on the floor. Near the window stood a large desk, intricately carved, and a chair beside it. The walls of the room were lined from the floor to the figured ceiling with filled bookshelves.

He took one out and glanced at its title. *Oeuvres de Voltaire*—precisely what one might have expected to find in the home of a Frenchman. He had been thinking calmly of it—thinking that he expected a man like Francois Courbet to read such matter! Francois Courbet! He was dead, a corpse these hundred years and more! An exquisite chill went down Duane's spine as he realized how grotesque, how horrible his thoughts were.

Too late he heard the click. He wheeled to find himself staring into the barrel of a cocked revolver four feet from his head.

"Sit down on the floor," said the man who held it. "I don't want to use this just now."

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### CHAPTER III

#### *Dead Hands*

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**D**UANE sank down. The man who held the gun was short and round. His puffed cheeks were flushed. From a pocket in his soiled linens he took out an equally soiled

handkerchief and mopped his bald head, but his little blue eyes stayed fixed on Duane. The gun in his hand trembled a bit.

"Scared, Everett?" said Duane. "I won't jump."

"You bet you won't, Duane," said the little man. "Not more than half-way. The trigger on this gun goes off easy—some of Roger's blacks found that out."

"What's happened to them?" said Duane. "Is Galloway paying bonuses for murder? He used to include it in the wages."

"There's enough mahogany in these hills to make it up. Enough to bury Tom Duane in a solid coffin of the stuff. Now bring your voice down or you'll join the last of 'em—the one you saw downstairs."

Duane lapsed into silence. The man he had called Everett went cautiously to the chair, dragged it back and sat down to face Duane.

"Where's Rogers?" said Duane. "He dead too?" No answer. Then, in a while, "What are we waiting for?"

"You'll find out. Now shut up."

"If you shoot me, you'll have Harry Chadwick here. As a matter of fact, you'll be entertaining him if I don't show up pretty soon."

"He's being kept pretty busy," said Everett. His mouth was twitching. "Now for Pete's sake, shut up! I'm getting jumpy."

Looking at him, at the gun wavering unsteadily in his hand, Duane agreed. He held up a hand.

"Mind if I read?"

"Not if it keeps you quiet."

Duane slid his hand back to one of the bookshelves and fumbled long enough to withdraw a heavy volume. He opened it and ran through the pages.

"Too damn dark here," he mumbled, snapping it shut.

The next instant he had flipped it up and sailed it right at Everett's head. The gun exploded and smashed into the books as Duane dived flat for the chair, gripped one of its legs and yanked. Everett spilled out of it and fell flat on his stomach. The gun scudded across the rug together with a loud *oof!* from the man who held it.



Duane waited for him to get up before he kicked his rear and sent him flat again. The next time he only slapped him.

"Tom!"

"All over, Chad," Duane grunted easily. Life and spirit had returned to him the moment he had seen Everett. Now he knew who his adversaries were. The fight was evening. "You remember Blister Everett? I just discovered his weakness—French literature. Step ahead, Blister."

They went down the staircase.

"One of Roger's blacks," said Duane, pointing to the dead man lying there.

"Where is Rogers?"

"Everett wouldn't say when he had a gun. However, now we'll see. He said something about you being kept busy. Anything happen?"

Chadwick nodded, and as they went through the door, Duane needed no answer. Not far from where he had left them, the little group stood in the twilight, watching them advance. On the ground lay a large, dark shape, and as they drew closer, Duane saw the two dead burros that formed it. Chadwick picked up something and held it out for Duane. It was a tiny red and yellow shrub.

"*Matta caval*," he said tersely. "They didn't grow here, either. Someone strewed the ground with them."

**B**ITTERLY Duane looked at the dead animals. They had died quickly. *Matta caval*, the little flower that was harmless to humans, was instant death when eaten by horses, cows, donkeys. It was but another of the astonishing malevolent subtleties of a nature that blossomed so evilly and cruelly in Haiti.

Looking at the shrub, Duane thought of the strange wound in the black's throat, and uneasiness again stirred him. What else was there to learn?

"Get the fire blazing," he ordered.

He could feel the night closing in like a living thing, and with it, he sensed the rising fear in the natives. He shot a glance at Kathy Rogers. She was standing off a bit, her gaze intent on Everett.

Duane sat Everett down with his back to the fire. He took his automatic and leveled it directly at the little man.

"Start talking," he said. "That's the only chance you'll have to get back to Galloway on your own feet."

Blister Everett, his face dark in the shadow of the fire, moved an unsteady hand across his forehead. His eyes were half closed.

"I don't know much," he said querulously. "I ain't been here long."

"Where is Ralph Rogers?"

"The crazy guy who thinks he's Courbet—"

"What? Say that again!"

"He thinks he's Courbet." Duane felt his blood congealing as Everett went on. "He took Rogers somewhere the minute we spotted you coming. He don't like killing white men, he says. Rogers only got here about a half hour before you."

"Who is the man who says he's Courbet?" There was an unmistakable hesitancy in Duane's voice, as if he dreaded the answer.

"Nobody seems to know for sure. We found him here the first time we came. He'd been living here, taking care of the place and he said it was his. We told Galloway later and he figured it might be one of those people from near Arcahaie on the coast, where the descendants of a settlement of Poles had intermarried with the blacks. Galloway said sometimes black parents there have a white child, or the other way round, and he figured this might be one. He'd been up for years, it seems, crazy mad at the whole world, butchering every black who came near the place."

Duane seemed lost in his thoughts, his words coming as if he was speaking only to himself.

"A white son of black parents . . . or . . . the black son of white parents, a misanthrope — or — nonsense! — Courbet? There are vegetable dyes that could have easily colored his face white—" His voice died away.

"So you used him?" Chadwick took up the questioning, impatiently.

"Sure." Everett was shifting nervously, his eyes darting about. "Listen, don't ask me no more about him. He's



loco, nuts. He killed off Rogers' blacks like that." Everett's fingers were too damp to snap. "He didn't want help either. Said he would take care of things by himself, the way he'd been doing it before when he had to. If he found out we'd been using him"—his voice sank to a whisper—"so's we could get the option, he'd kill me. You can't get away from him. He's like a cat. He thinks we were helping him save this place."

"All right." Duane holstered his gun. "Now listen. You're going to help us get Rogers back—"

**T**HE blade glittered blue and yellow as the fire caught its edge. It moved in swiftly between Duane and the girl, and without hesitation plunged directly into Everett's breast. Everett had not even had time to utter a sound. Only his eyes had begun to open and then he sighed, and as he rolled over, the blade was cleanly withdrawn.

In the wake of that great cry of terror that was torn from four native throats, and the utter confusion that followed, Duane hardly knew that he had lunged and caught the hand that held the blade. Kathy Rogers had fallen to her knees. Chadwick stood beside her with his gun in his hand.

Duane looked at the face that confronted him, the deathly, sickening white of the features, the soft sheen of the beautiful silken clothes.

"I'm afraid," said the man, "he will not help you find your friend." His voice was softly modulated. His two black eyes shone with the dull luster of a predatory bird, but weakly, as if an inner fire that had once burned in them was now embers. "Tell the white man to put down his weapon. If I die, your friend dies with me. You will never find him."

Chadwick lowered his gun. He knew too well how true those words might be. The jungle was a blind dark world, its resources unchallenged.

"Who are you?" Duane said.

"Your curiosity is slow to be satisfied," came the answer. "I am Francois Courbet." As Duane released his hand, the man crossed it over his chest and bowed. "I am slow to kill white

men, but my hand can be forced. If I designed to use your noisy weapons, perhaps none of you would now be alive. But there is time—time without end."

Duane stood there, looking at him, slowly trying to restore order to the chaos in his mind. The moaning of the blacks rose up like a dirge. The chill darkness was a terrible force whose enmity cut them off from life. Duane was thinking how easy it would be to kill the man—and then he saw Kathy Rogers' face, looking up to him. The blade swooped out suddenly and in one soft stroke cut away Duane's holster. The gun fell to earth almost soundlessly.

"Please don't think of it again," said the man. He kicked the gun away.

"You act," said Duane, knowing it sounded senseless, "as if we were your captives, instead of you ours."

"Who can say? Yet I am not ungracious. I offer you the lives of your friends, all of them. You must promise not to return. And you must leave your blacks behind." His tone was measured, pronouncing sentence.

The fire caught a fresh twig and flared up. The man's chalky face was ghastly, darkened where innumerable wrinkles met. His whole bearing was satanic; his nose thin and sharp, his lips tightly closed and bluish.

Now he laughed for some reason, and the malice in his voice blended perfectly with the appearance of this aged, slender, cruel man. Irrelevantly, while he heard Miro cry out in a strangled voice, and he felt the hot torrent of rage welling within him, Duane's eyes fastened on the man's hands. He had thumbnails almost an inch long.

"You like my hands?" he heard the voice. "Or perhaps merely my thumbs? With a little poison applied on the tips, they make an excellent weapon. You must know something of the history of this accursed black island. Many years ago slaves used this device against their masters." Again his laughter rang out. "I see you understand the wound of the man you found in my home."

And then the whole insane scene had dissolved; the comic tragedy of



a man who said he was Francois Courbet talking quietly to men who had hunted him, was abruptly over. The haunted stillness of the night air quivered as a shot pierced it. The tall man clapped a hand to his shoulder, leapt past Duane, and with a stroke of his saber ended the life of Miro. He vanished, swiftly, soundlessly, into the black mire of darkness.

Chadwick stood over Miro. The dead hands still clutched the gun the native had seized from the open holster on the ground. Strangely, a calm had come after the moment's violence.

"Now it's done," said Chadwick. "There was no other way out. He shouldn't have missed."

Duane stood near the girl. Expressionless, she gazed at him, and then silently she lay down on the earth and sobbed.

## CHAPTER IV

### *Strange Dawn*

THE hours that passed were leaden eternities. On the border of the little island of light created by the fire, lay a mound of earth. Over it, a small wooden cross with two words. Miro. Everett.

The three remaining blacks huddled together around the fire. Now and again their voices quavered as they sang softly to the spirits of the forest, singing to the fire-hags and the *loup-garous*.

*"Pas bruler caille moin  
Pas tuer cheval moin—"*

In their hands they fingered little *ouangas*, small dark bags that held charmed objects; bat bones, black chicken feathers, striped candy, a pinch of sulphur. Fear had driven them to taking out the concealed *ouanga* bags they carried despite Duane's orders. Duane had intended to keep their superstitions quiet. That, it seemed, had been so long ago.

Duane himself, sitting with Chadwick and Kathy Rogers, was silent. His thoughts came as if from a mist, rising past the haggard face of the

girl, driving into his mind. Had it been Courbet, alive after a century? He remembered the face, grim and purposeful, the face of a madman. The cold air crept into his bones, a hostile element. There was nothing to do but wait. Wait for what? For the next move, for morning, for a gathering of themselves. A sheer, immense fright gripped him, a fear that was not for himself.

On and on the seconds dragged, the minutes crept slowly, time stood still. Drunk with fatigue, Duane stayed awake. The earth about them was alive—or did he imagine it?—he had heard sounds, feet. Someone, something else was waiting. . . .

It had to come.

When the first pale streamer of dawn showed against the spires of the ancient house, Theot rose suddenly to his feet. He gasped for air and sprang away from the dying fire. Then he began to run and his feet were muffled blows hammering on the earth.

So quickly had it happened that it was moments before Duane leaped after him. He followed the sound of the other, torn by fierce briars as he went through the rose garden. And then it seemed to him that he heard other steps—behind him. He wheeled and saw Chadwick.

Things happened with maddening swiftness after that.

"Go back," Duane gasped. "Don't leave them."

That instant they heard Theot, a single, clear wild plea. Duane rushed ahead to find him lying crumpled over, his throat a bloody red smear that was already changing color.

Then Duane heard Chadwick shout. A gun went off, once—twice. There was a vast roaring thunder in his brain as he ran back, a great searing noise that was made up of scarcely distinguishable masses of sounds, of all the things he had heard that night—a song, a soft cruel voice, a shot, a black man screaming, the wind sighing in pity. . . .

Only two men stood there. Zo and Chadwick. Michel lay sprawled on his face, his body across the fire. Kathy Rogers was gone. Duane didn't hear Chadwick say it—he couldn't



hear him anymore. He had to see it for himself. He stood there looking at the empty place for moments, and only then did he become conscious of Zo, whose eyes would begin at the fire and travel away until he forced them back.

"Zo!" Duane cried. "You can see the trail!"

The black shook his head savagely, his lips thrust back in denial. In the dawn the woods crackled with life awakening. To the night sounds of the insects slowly were being added the myriad songs of birds. Soon even expert trackers like Zo would have been unable to find a trail, however fresh. Duane was shaking his gun at the native.

"Zo," he said, hoarsely, "follow them. You've followed men through water."

**H**YSTERICALLY, the black tore his eyes away from the gun. He sobbed as he felt it close to his spine, and then he began to trot, never taking his eyes from the ground.

The three moved like animals. Chadwick and Duane heavily, blindly. But to Zo, like most Haitian natives, the earth with its invisible signs was a plain road. Every twig, every blade of grass, every stretch of dry ground told its tale. And Zo followed, his terror-stricken legs gliding along, with death before him and after. He had stopped thinking. His breath was flung out in stifled panting. Head down, he ran.

Thorny *bahond* tore at them, vines crawled and stretched toward them, the great underbrush of the jungle slowed them down to a walk. Once they stopped in a mire while Zo got down on his knees. They went on.

The day burst upon them overhead, with brilliant rays of sunlight striking obliquely through the density of forest life. The early morning chattering and screeching of birds had grown to a tremendous cacaphony, oblivious of the tragedy that ran underneath. Duane knew that the girl's voice calling him was a voice in his mind only; no sound could be heard now. There was too much life awake to hear anything of death.

A little stream purred before them, its peaceful eddies coolly withholding an answer. Zo seemed calm now, the calm of madness. He was tired and breathless, and he said not a word even when he was spoken to. But patiently he walked this way and that, his wild eyes ever seeking.

Then, without calling Duane or Chadwick who were a hundred feet away, he plunged ahead. They caught him and followed. Zo no longer knew where he was going nor why. He was following a trail, and its unseen markings called him on.

They were climbing now. The trees thinned out, the underbrush and foliage were less evident. Ahead loomed a sharp decline and beyond it, another hill. There was no grass now. They stepped out from the shelter of the darkened woods full into the blinding daylight.

But Zo was running faster now, his feet sinking into the soft earth that rose bare and bald toward a rock-bound wall of limestone from which the sun glanced in splendor. Suddenly, when Duane looked, he knew that he needed Zo no longer. There were solid prints in the earth now, leading in a line to the wall. It rose abruptly in a sheer rise of hundreds of feet, its sides scrubby and overgrown, with trees hanging horizontal from its sides, and great recesses in its irregular contours.

When the two whites passed Zo, he moaned and tried to keep up with them. Near the end of the climb Duane looked back once and saw him still coming, desperately running. They were all like that now.

The man who called himself Courbet stood in plain view. He had come out from somewhere among the rocks, and he stood outside the shadow of a huge boulder, his saber glistening.

Duane fired at him from twenty feet and kept running. Right at the top he stopped. The tall man stood ten feet from Duane, and a small expanse of water, a shallow pond of stale rainwater, separated them. Duane didn't understand why his gun wasn't working. Facing the man in silk, he leveled the automatic and emptied the magazine.



He could see the bullets striking home. They hammered into the man like blows from a mallet. But twisting, moving back slowly, he stood. The blood streamed from a red hole in his hand, it darkened the whole expanse of his light waistcoat.

When Duane splashed through the pond, the man advanced again, and the saber swung in a wide swift arc. Under it, Duane sprang and he felt himself flung to earth. Vaguely, he realized that Chadwick had jumped after him. He saw Chadwick's face beside him only inches away. But they were fighting.

Duane felt his arms enclosed by hands that were like bands of steel, pressing him close until his breath stopped. Sharp talons were shredding his flesh. And all the time Duane's arms were smashing away.

He knew by then that Chadwick was rolling crazily beside him, his cheek torn, both of them fighting the same adversary—a man with half a dozen bullets in him.

Then suddenly it ended. They had rolled close to the pond, and with a fierce twist, Duane moved and clutched at a pale throat. He sank his fingers deep into it, pushed the head slowly from him back through the soft ground until it was in the water. And then, underwater, he held the head until he could hold it no longer. When he rose to his knees, the limp body beside him thrashed once convulsively, then rolled down the slight declivity until all of it was in the water—

**T**HE sun was coming down obliquely over Kathy Rogers' shoulders when Duane opened his eyes. Her hands were touching his face, moving tenderly. It seemed strange and difficult to reconcile this with the last things he recalled.

He sat up painfully. There were cuts and gashes over his arms.

"Lie down, Tom, and rest," said Kathy Rogers gently. And when he wouldn't she added, "Please, boss."

There was a look in her eyes as she spoke that Tom Duane had never dreamed he would see.

He tried to smile at her and sank down. And then he saw Chadwick and

Ralph Rogers standing looking down at him. Rogers seemed drawn and tired, but otherwise sound.

"Don't say it," he said quietly. "I'll say it all for you when we get back."

Duane had wondered how the young boy would react if ever there came the time when he would learn humility. Now he knew. But reflecting at the terrible price that had been paid for it, he understood the haunted look in the boy's eyes. He would never forget the past few days.

"Aren't you going to thank me for saving you from a watery grave?" Chadwick had his arms akimbo and he was half smiling. "You fell in after him, you know." The smile departed as he took Duane's hand. "Tom, you probably saved my life when you knocked me out and pushed me out of that fight. I was too weak to go on."

"Knocked you out?" said Duane. "Pushed you away? Hell, I needed every bit of help I could get."

"You'll have a tough time explaining why you kept yelling for me to get away," returned Chadwick gravely. "Especially once when I think you noticed my eyes were about to pop out. He had my throat that time."

Duane shook his head. He remembered none of it. It was all fogged and dim. Then all at once he rose up and looked around. Sitting nearby propped against a boulder was Zo. He nodded his head as Duane approached.

"*Ca y est*," he said. "*Merci*."

"Zo," said Duane earnestly. "It's I who must thank you."

"*Ca y est*," repeated Zo, and this time he smiled.

"What do you mean—it's happened?" Duane didn't understand.

Zo rose and motioned for Duane to follow. He saw they were heading for the pond, from which they seemed to have moved for some distance. He saw the others follow.

Then, in the pond, he saw the body, the wet clothes clinging to the stiffening corpse, and the air reeking with stench.

"Black!" Duane cried.

"*Noir. Merci*," Zo muttered, and pulled back the still fastened white wig. Under it the bloated scalp was bald, and as black as the face. . . .



"It wasn't just a native," Chadwick said. "There must have been something in what you suspected. About him more likely being the black son of white parents than the other way round. He hated his kind too violently."

Zo shook his head and frowned.

"Zo," said Duane, "Take off his shoes." To Chadwick he said, "What was his kind, Chad?"

**H**E looked at the shoe in silence, then tore off the the large silver buckle. He shuddered. He looked down at the corpse. The two small eyes, wide open, were staring at him, black and shiny as agates. He handed the buckle to Chadwick. On it had been written in tiny, flourishing letters etched in the silver: Francois Courbet, Paris 1791. . . .

Later he spoke again. "In death, they said in the folk *mysteres*, his black heart and black deeds would turn all of him black."

"But if you were right about his being black, and using the vegetable dyes, it might just have been the water washing it off," said Chadwick.

Ralph Rogers spoke. "Everett told me he thought he was some kind of a renegade. He thought he lived by robbing."

"Robbing!" said Duane. "How much money have you on your person? How many people travel through here? But furnishings, rich tapestries, sold through the years, one by one—they might mean money."

A visible tremor went through Chadwick. "You don't suppose—"

"I don't know what to suppose. The

house was intact, if bare, and preserved by hands that must have loved it. We're a hundred kilometres from Arcahaie here in this wilderness, and the legend we know was local." Duane was frowning. "He was old, and white; a horrible artificial white, I grant. And he was wild enough and strong enough for two men in spite of it—even a gun didn't stop him for minutes. There might have been more than just the surface insanity in him. He might have been holding on to that hatred for a long time—a long time—"

He turned to Chadwick as they walked back.

"Still, if it were true, what do you suppose a hundred years would do to your skin in this climate? You ask me if I suppose. What do you suppose?"

He looked away from Chadwick's puzzled expression and said to Zo, "*Ca y est*," and smiled wanly.

Kathy Rogers was beside him, and then his eyes went to the clear blue vault of heaven, the unbelievably pure azure of a Haitian sky, in this land of unbelievable things. There was a soft wind caressing him and he remembered what he had thought days before. He had been in Haiti too long, and he had seen too much he couldn't explain.

"Let's hurry a little," he said. "Zo, *vite!* I've an appointment in the city with a man named Galloway."

"Yes, hurry," said Kathy Rogers. "There's a refrigerator waiting for us, going crazy making ice. Like me, unashamed, going crazy waiting to be kissed."

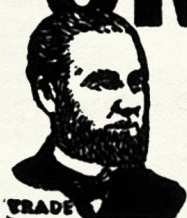
The refrigerator was kept waiting a minute longer.

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# GRIM EVIDENCE

By **DON JOSEPH**

*Author of "Soul of Terror," etc.*



*His face floated out of darkness*

**Murder Makes a Million—  
and the Wind, the Snake,  
and the Flame Take Over!**

And the thunderstorm didn't make it any easier. The lightning seemed to be flashing right outside the window, illumining his purple face in a purple glare. And the thunder shook the house. It had put the lights and telephone out of commission hours before Bell kicked off.

He died hard, George Bell did. The loosened rock from the chimney had crushed the lower part of his chest, but he hung on. Talking. Talking. Talking. That was worse than the thunder and lightning, the way he gabbed.

But he didn't know I had killed him. He didn't know that I had loosened that rock after he had made out his new will, after I had talked him

**"I** OFFER the following in evidence," said the witness in the inquest proceedings:  
JANUARY 3—Death bed scenes don't sit well with me. Particularly when I'm killing the man. But I had to sit there in that dark room of the grim old mansion and watch George Bell die. I had to sit there watching the flecks of foamy blood stain his lips when he tried to talk. He might have changed his mind if I hadn't been there beside him.



into making me the guardian of that harebrained brat of his up at Harvard. The boy had played right into my hands with his crazy escapades. After his third arrest in a brawl with a chorus girl it wasn't hard for me to talk old man Bell into making me Wilbur's guardian. Anthony Wilkes, that was me—from private secretary to millionaire.

The rock once loosened I put a cord from the rock to my window. I knew that I wouldn't have any trouble getting the old man. He always sunned himself in the deck chair right under the chimney. All I had to do was bide my time and pull the cord when the time was ripe. Oh, I fixed Bell right, all right. There wasn't a trace of murder. It was the perfect crime!

Psychiatrists say that a criminal is only caught because, subconsciously, he wants to be caught. He feels guilty, and unknown to himself he seeks punishment.

You have to be a hard and superior man to commit the perfect crime, so as not to let your subconscious give your hand away just when you think you're safest, with everything under control. That's why I'm keeping this diary. After I've died my natural death they'll open it up and read the story of the perfect crime. Then they'll know that the superior man once lived. They'll remember me for that.

**B**UT you don't get that hard all of a sudden. You're not born that way. You've got to work up to it. It takes time. I had come a long way when I attached that cord to a wedge behind the granite rock in the chimney. I came a lot farther when I pulled the cord and calmly heard old man Bell screaming in mad pain. When that rock rolled down the roof like thunder and old man Bell started bellowing I got up and went to the mirror on the other side of the room to look at my face.

I was that cool.

I could see that I had grown harder already. My eyes were still blue and unconcerned, as though there were no man crushed and howling beneath a stone out in the yard. My lips were

still firm and untrembling. In fact, there were almost no lips at all, just a slit in my face that gave nothing away. And my contemptible little bent body was still little and bent—and contemptible.

Then I smeared a look of anxious concern across my face and ran downstairs to help the cook carry the old man up to his room. By the time we got him to bed and thought of calling the doctor the wind was up and the phone wires were down. That showed fate was with me. You see, the rock hadn't landed on him as directly as I'd planned. A doctor could have kept him alive for several days. Long enough for that football-playing son of his to get back from college and have a talk with his old man. I was afraid for awhile that even at sixty-five old man Bell was too hard to be killed by a rock weighing a hundred pounds or more. Those years of prospecting, and working the mine after his discovery of the gold vein, had made him hard—nearly as hard as the rock that hit him.

But it was the mine that caused his death, too. If he hadn't struck it rich, he'd never have had to hire a secretary. If he weren't rich as hell I wouldn't have thought of killing him.

My final hardening process, though, was that damned death-bed scene. He gabbed and gabbed, and most of it didn't make much sense—not after the fever set in and he got a wild look in his eyes and his gray hair sprawled down over his forehead. But it was what he said then that was the hardest to take.

He got the idea, then, that someone had planned his death, but he didn't seem to suspect me. In fact, he made me sit on the bed near him where I could hear his whispers.

"I'm coming back, Wilkes," he croaked hoarsely. The fever had gotten in his eyes then and he seemed to be glaring at me. "After I'm dead, I'm coming back. You don't believe in reincarnation, do you, Wilkes?"

"I've never thought about it, sir," I answered him. And that was right, I never had.

"Well, it happens, man! There's no



doubt of it. I've seen them come back in the desert after they've been shot and robbed. I've seen them come back in the city. They always come back to see that justice is done. If they miss the first time, they come back again in another form until they've had their revenge."

"What form will you be coming back in?" I asked.

I had to keep his mind off the will. I didn't want him changing his mind about that even in his delirium. The way the storm was coming up, it wouldn't matter in a few minutes. The servants in the house wouldn't be able to hear him in the thunder and wind anyway. But it was weird and uncanny, watching a man die while the wind and the rain wove the chords to his funeral march in a ragged blue light.

"Well, I don't know for sure."

I jumped as I realized he was answering the question I'd forgotten.

"As soon as I die I'll know who killed me. Then, I'll probably come back as the wind. I'll get him the same way he got me."

**F**OR a moment I thought the old man would throw up the sponge then and there. His face twisted with pain and he gasped through his shrunken old lips. A thin red line trickled out of the corner of his mouth.

But he held on while I felt an itching in my fingers to seize his withered throat and choke him. Get it over with! The way he leered at me while he babbled his nonsense got on my nerves. But I held myself in check. One mark of my fingers on his throat and I'd be headed for the electric chair.

"If I miss that way . . . if I miss, well, I might come back as an animal. They often do. A snake, for instance. Snakes are treacherous. A snake . . ."

He chuckled with that mad gleam in his eye growing brighter. I'm hard as rock inside, but I felt myself shrinking away from him. The hair began to crawl on the back of my neck.

"A snake. You don't like snakes, do you, Wilkes? Most people don't. But, if I have to come back a third

time—it'll be as fire. Like that lightning out there. The third time always works, Wilkes. Then I can go back to my grave in peace."

There was something sickening about the old man's talking of his grave in his shrill, high voice. The room was so dark I couldn't see him, but I could hear his sibilant breathing down there on the pillows.

Then his breathing came closer to me. I tried to move away just as his clawlike hand grabbed my shoulder with a grip of steel. There was a gurgling in his throat—he was striving to tell me something while the blood choked him.

That mad face was coming closer to me in the dark, the blood running from its lips. A chill ran up my back as though the wind had reached me through the windows. I wanted to shout out to him to lie down and die like any other man would. But I couldn't. My throat was frozen.

A blinding blue glare flashed outside the window. In the purplish light I saw his slobbering mouth all red, the death mask of George Bell, not three feet from my face. The blood in my veins turned to ice. Was he going to get his revenge before he died? But, as the glaring light faded away, I felt his hand relax on my shoulder and heard him sigh. He fell back heavily against the pillows. The thunder rolled across the sky like the closing door of a tomb.

When the lightning flashed again, I saw that George Bell was dead.

MARCH 1—Well, the funeral's over and the will's been probated. I have to grin every time I recall the expression on young Wilbur's face when I was named administrator. Such a damned handsome face too. I've always hated him as much for that as for his wealth and his superior manner—lord of the manor style. He had some girl with him. Introduced her as Muriel Stokes, Boston society. Told me he wanted to marry her.

If she was ugly he might have a chance for my consent, but she's a beauty. Flowing red hair curled softly at her neck. Blue eyes and milk-white skin, with a firm jaw. She



tried to hide her shudder when he introduced me, but I didn't miss it. It cost him another ten dollars from his weekly allowance. Now we'll see how he can get along on forty dollars a week. Until I can get rid of him too. Then no one will laugh at my humped-back. They won't dare! And I'll have girls like this Muriel. All I want of them.

**I**'VE almost forgotten that death-bed scene and old man Bell's gossip about reincarnation. Once in a while I dream it over again, though. It becomes horribly real then. More real than it was when it happened. His face floats up out of the darkness, the wind blowing his scraggly hair, a snake wreathed around his forehead. Behind him there's a dull red glow as though the house were on fire. All the forms of return he talked about—wind, snake, fire. I wake up in a cold sweat, shivering.

I'm going to get out of this damned place and take a rest. I need one.

MARCH 15—An awful thing happened tonight. My hand's shaking so I can hardly scrawl this entry. Purely nervous shock, of course. I'm not superstitious!

These March winds in New York are dangerous though. On my way home from the library tonight I saw a flower pot blow off a ledge and nearly hit a man not ten feet ahead of me. Some of the fragments hit a store window, making it ring like a bell. Bell! The idea hit me then, and the wind seemed to howl like the one that haunted the house the night the old man died.

But that wasn't the worst thing that happened. If it were, I wouldn't be so nervous. It was just as I was rounding the corner to my hotel. I was leaning against the wind and suddenly its fingers seemed to clutch at me—to hold me riveted to the spot. Then I heard something moan above me and the cop at the corner started blowing his whistle at me. I looked up just in time to see the swinging sign of the cigar store start to tear away from the building. And I couldn't move. I couldn't move!

The same wind that was blowing the sign down was holding me there under it. I wanted to shriek madly, to call for help. But the wind wouldn't even let me do that. I don't know how I managed, but I tumbled against the side of the building just as the sign crashed at my feet. I know I was sobbing as the patrolman caught my arm and got me into the lobby of my hotel.

I must have fainted then. Imagine a tough guy like me fainting! But then, no one could blame me. If I'd been held there another second that sign would have crushed me to a pulp. A bloody, mangled pulp! When I opened my eyes I was lying on a couch in the lobby and the cop was saying, "Give him air." I must have talked some while I was still out, because the people crowding around were looking at me strangely, as though afraid.

I hope I didn't give myself away, because what I saw while I was unconscious was gruesome enough. It was George Bell's damned head, only some of the flesh was rotted away from his face and there were worms crawling over it. But the wind wasn't blowing his hair anymore, as it had in my dreams.

Nightmares, I should say!

His hair was just hanging down to his shoulders, all grimy and stuck together as though dank. And it had grown, that hair. That was the funny thing about it. It had grown down to his shoulders.

I saw it all so clearly, I can't help shuddering now and looking around over my shoulder, even though I am safe in my room. The snake was still around his forehead, its forked tongue stuck out at me, quivering ominously. Behind him, I mean behind his head, the red glow had changed to flames.

I've already given notice at the desk that I'm leaving. The sound of a high wind now makes me shiver. I'm heading down to Miami where it's summer.

**N**EW YORK'S done something for me though. I've spent a lot of time at the Public Library at Forty-Second Street and Fifth Avenue read-



ing up on reincarnation, transmigration of the soul, and that sort of stuff. I've found out definitely that there's nothing to it, just as I had suspected. All the scientific books pooh-pooh it. There are some mystical authors who give it credence and tell a lot of stories that half-convince you while you're reading them. But to a cold, logical mind like mine, they're not worth a man's attention.

My mind would be completely at rest now, if I hadn't thought I saw young Wilbur Bell on Fifth Avenue the other day. He seemed to be following me, but when I slowed down and suddenly turned around he had disappeared. I know that he's up in Boston because I got a postal card from him yesterday. And he hasn't got enough money now to be running down to New York any time it pleases his spoiled fancy. No doubt it was just my nerves. I need a rest, and Miami will give it to me. If Bell's following me around though, he won't know where I've gone. Young Bell, I mean. I'm not leaving any forwarding address at the hotel.

**M**ARCH 18—A nice place, Miami, I've only been here a few days and I've found that money can buy anything—even beautiful women. I had dinner with a beautiful red head last night. She was something like that Muriel Stokes girl. This is the sort of life I've always dreamed about!

The hotel is swell too. All sorts of important people stay here. Big shots like me. But I had to make them change my room. They gave me a

bathroom with a full length mirror in it. When I got out of the bath I could see my spindly legs, long and shrunken. My pot belly, and my hunched up shoulders. Even my large curved nose and my pale lips were too ugly for me to look at. It's hard for a man to have to admit to himself that he's hideous, and there's no point in his driving the point home to himself in front of a bath mirror.

But the red head told me that women don't look at a man's face or body. They just like to feel he's important, and money will do that for him. Tonight I'm going to a society bazaar. I don't know how I got the invitation, but I guess they invite everyone who seems to have lots of money to give to their fool charities.

**MARCH 19**—I want to get this down before I go to bed. The bazaar was a huge success for me. The girls crowded around me, trying to get me to spend money. They led me around the booths, and I went in all of them, excepting one where there was a snake charmer.

I went into one of the tents to have my fortune told. There seemed to be something familiar about the girl's eyes, which was all I could see of her face. But I've been seeing so many girls. Anyway, she took one look at my hands and shrieked.

"Please go. Please go," she moaned.

There's nothing to fortune telling, but I couldn't help feeling as though something horrible were on my trail. My skin suddenly turned icy. When I asked her what was wrong, she just

[Turn Page]





begged me to go. I guess I lost my temper then and grabbed her wrist. She gave a little cry of pain.

"It's too awful!" she said. "Your past and your future! I can't tell them to you. Please do go."

I offered her a lot of money to tell me anyway, just to see what was in her mind. But she refused. When she threatened to run out of the tent, I left.

Before I went away from the bazaar though, I made a date with a little blond debutante. I let her understand I had plenty of money, and her eyes got big. There's even a golden key to society!

**M**ARCH 20—I'm writing this in a hospital—and in the psychiatric division too. I don't know if anyone will be able to decipher this god-awful scrawl, but I've got to get it down now—so I can forget it.

"Fear-induced psychosis. Course: Temporary." That's the diagnosis they gave after they found me screaming in my room with a dead cobra on the floor. Even the interne stopped around this morning to say that he didn't wonder I'd gone batty. The way the thing had me cornered would have driven anyone nuts, he said.

But he didn't know the whole story or he'd never let me out of here again. He'd never believe a word of it. That shows what fools these scientists are. He would have a "natural" explanation for it. Those bells ringing wouldn't make any sense to him. He'd say they were church bells or fire bells. He wouldn't know that bells mean **BELL**. The name of the man I killed. **BELL!**

But I heard them ringing as soon as I stepped in my room after I took the blond debutante home. She's a hard one too! She clung to my lips as though she liked ugly men. Maybe she does. But you can be hard as steel and cold as ice and that won't stop you from going soft inside when some things happen. I've found that out.

But it was the bells that warned me as soon as I'd closed the door. Even before I'd turned on the light and walked to the far corner of the room,

I knew that something was wrong—that something deadly was waiting in the dark for me. The bells told me that—and the way the flesh across my shoulders began creeping.

I fumbled tensely for the light and began to lose my head. The bells had stopped ringing by then and it was so quiet I could hear the surf on the beach. The only other sound was a strange rustling across the room—a noise I'd never heard before.

Something deep inside me echoed to it. Some primeval memory passed down in the darkness of mind when men were animals. I knew something was hunting me there and my lips curled back in a snarl while my heart quaked.

Then my cold curled fingers found the switch and I hurried across the room all in one motion. I shouldn't have, because when I got there and turned around for something to climb up on, something to get me way up off the floor where that damned loathsome thing was stalking me, there wasn't even a chair around.

If you've never seen a hooded cobra you don't know what terror is. Those relentless shoe-button eyes in a black scaly face, that hood that spreads out to show it's going to murder you—Coldly, like its cold body. You feel your body going dead from just looking at it weaving there—weaving and weaving until you sway with it, until you lose all power of motion. The poison starts coursing through your veins long before the deadly fangs have struck into your flesh.

That's what showed how really hard I was, caught in a corner like that. Any other man would have let himself die, trapped like a rat. But I thought of Bell, and how this was him after me. I thought of what a mistake it was in not killing him outright that night. And all the time I was thinking this, the damned thing was sliding along the carpet toward me—a black crawling death on a tropical green rug!

**T**HAT'S what saved me though, knowing how I should have killed Bell fast. I remembered I was carrying a gun and it was him or me this



time. I don't know how I got the damned rod out of my pocket, the way my fingers had gone numb. I don't remember.

All that sticks now is that unholy desire I had to climb up the wall when it reared up on its tail and sent out its flickering forked tongue with a long hiss. It was getting set to strike. The blood was beating madly in my temples.

And then there was a roaring rolling thunder in the room, and I kept pulling the trigger and yelling until I saw its head fly off and the rest of it collapse like a punctured balloon. It was still writhing on the floor when I was stamping it into the rug as though it was Bell I was grinding back into the dirt of his grave.

That's when they had to put a straight-jacket on me to get me over to the hospital. They found me there still stamping on it like a mad dervish.

Now they tell me that the reptile escaped from the snake charmer who was giving a show at the charity bazaar. He had the room next to mine, and the hotel didn't know he'd brought his infernal pets in with him because they were closed up in a valise.

He says the snake escaped and must have got in my room when the maid came in to clean up. But what I ask is how it knew it wanted to go into my room. Why *my* room? Me? When I ask them that here, they just smile at me as though I were a kid, and tell me I need a long rest. As though I needed a whole hospital staff to tell me that!

But they don't know what hell I went through while they thought I was just a raving maniac. They don't know that I was looking into old man Bell's cavernous eyes all night long. They didn't hear him croaking: "I'm coming back, Wilkes. After I'm dead I'm coming back," while his fleshless jaws moved up and down.

But I heard him—over and over again. I heard him sighing "... the wind ... a snake. Snakes are treacherous ... Fire."

And that ghastly, hollow laughter that came up from under my bed as if I were lying right over his grave.

That grim mirthless laughter that set me howling just so the nurse would come in, so I wouldn't be alone.

But what got me most was having to lie there and look at him when he came to visit me. Almost all the flesh was off his skull, but the worms were there. The white slimy worms were still there, crawling in and out of his bony nostrils, his empty eye-sockets.

Closing my eyes didn't do any good. He stayed there just the same, making me look at him through my eyelids. Wherever I turned my eyes. And I couldn't help focusing on one of those worms as it slid along a grinning jaw bone. When I'd watch it for a while I'd know what was coming. I'd beg it to stay away, to crawl on into the bony mouth that was gaping to receive it.

That's what I'd ask it to do. But it wasn't listening to me, tied down there on the cot. It'd turn into a snake, a cobra, right there before my eyes, and start coming after me, hissing and shooting out its forked tongue at me till it got right up to my forehead. Then it'd disappear, and another one would start swelling up and turning from a worm into a snake while I twisted and sweated.

But all the time I was outwitting them—and Bell too! I knew if I held out I'd lick them all. I knew it because the snake around Bell's head had disappeared. I could see it had disappeared by the crown of flames around his matted grimy hair.

**I** SHUDDER now when I think about it and my stomach flops over, but I know I'm in the clear now because it doesn't seem real any more. Even the snake in my room at the hotel doesn't seem entirely real. And I talk sense! The nurses and doctors listen to me without getting that queer look in their eyes, that look that says they have to humor me because I won't know what they're telling me anyhow.

I shouldn't be surprised if they let me out in a day or two, and then I'm heading for the other side of the ocean. He won't be able to follow me that far—if he really is following me. I can't believe that he is—not now I can't.



I'm no ignorant and superstitious native from Africa. I know it's all been a coincidence, that sign falling and the snake showing up in my room. Coincidence! I keep telling myself that all day long.

There's a small boat leaving from Baltimore for Cairo in a couple of days. I can catch it if I go by plane.

APRIL 20— I kept thinking all the way over here on the boat that I've nearly got this thing beaten. Whether it's inside me or really outside me, I've licked it twice. So, I've picked a modern hotel in Cairo, all stone and steel. And I've got me a room up on the top floor. If he can follow me this far, he won't be able to get at me now. And if he does, I've got enough fire-extinguishers around the room to put out a dozen fires. Not that I really take any stock in that business of his coming back.

As it is, I've gotten by easy. The only effect the whole nightmare has had on me has been to kill my sense of smell. I noticed it before I left the hospital. I knew something was missing all the time I was there, but it wasn't until the last day that I found out what it was.

I hadn't been smelling that hospital odor that always smacks you in the face as soon as you walk inside one of the places. The interne told me that hysteria often does that. He said I was lucky it hadn't left me paralyzed.

Well, I never liked roses anyway, and it's a small price to pay for a million bucks.

"Flame," Bell had said. Well, when he meets me it'll be on my own ground. I'm staying inside this fireproof hotel and if it's really him who's following me he'll show up soon. Bell had no more patience than a starving cat in front of a canary.

I did have to step outside today to go to a drug store, chemists, they call them over there. On the way down the street I saw a pair of shoulders ahead of me that looked something like Wilbur Bell. That started me thinking about him, and how the old man must be turning over in his grave like a top at the way his offspring is being treated. My last check to the kid

was for only a hundred and twenty dollars, less than thirty a week. I got the cleaning fluid and got back to the hotel without anything happening to me.

It's the idea that something might happen, is going to happen, that gets on my nerves. I took a trip last night to see the pyramids and sphinx in the moonlight. And there, above one of the pyramids, was the skull of George Bell! When I looked harder it was gone, but for a moment my heart stopped beating right there.

**A**PRIL 21—Now I know he's followed me over here!

His jabbering skull over the pyramid might have been my imagination. But the way that fire started up in the wastebasket, with just the sun shining in on the basket, isn't anybody's imagination. It started going while I was in the bathroom, and it set the curtains ablaze before I knew what was happening, since I couldn't smell the smoke. When I opened the door to come out into the room he nearly got me! I stuck my head right into the flames before I saw them.

But I fooled him. Those curtains and the wastebasket were the only inflammable things in the room. I waited for the fire to go out itself.

But that won't satisfy him, if I know George Bell. He'll try again, although I rack my head and can't imagine how. That's why I jump around like a hunted animal every time I hear a crackling sound. I think it's fire, even though I know it can't be, because there's nothing to burn. I've even sent the mattress out. Anyway, when he's ready to strike the last time, when he's not just trying to get on my nerves, I'll hear those bells ringing.

Then I'll need all the nerve I've got. I laugh out loud when I think of it, to convince myself that it'll be easy, that a smart guy can beat fire or flood or famine any day. But I know it's not so. You can beat an ordinary fire if you keep your head, but this is different.

There was something supernatural about that sign falling, and something from hell in the way that snake



found me. There's going to be damnation in those flames when they come.

I don't know why I'm writing all this down now. I guess it's like talking to someone. Keeps my nerves steadier.

The sun's gone out now. That lets me breathe easier. Even heat gives me chills these days. I can see the clouds out the windows. Big black fellows that cool the earth off like a damp rag. They're coming this way fast, like an express train. From the window here I can see the lightning playing across them. The distant thunder seems to shake the hotel, a little like distant artillery fire.

And the noises from the street that usually drift up here have suddenly shut off. It's like the country just before a storm, even the insects shut up, waiting. I'm writing this like mad now to keep my mind off what's coming. But I know I can't. There was a flash of lightning a second ago that must have hit on the other side of town. The building rocked like a tall tree in a storm. But there's no storm. No rain. Just the lightning and thunder, and silence in between.

I'm beginning to get the idea now. Each time the lightning hits it comes closer. I should never have tried to escape by coming to the near-East, where they knew about reincarnation before my ancestors learned to cook their food.

I've closed all the windows. It's stifling in here but I've got to keep the sound out—and the lightning. The muezzins are calling from the towers. Calling the people to prayer. Their voices float up here as though they were outside the window. I can hear some church bells ringing too, between the claps of thunder. Louder and louder they come. The bells!

**I**T was on a night like this that George Bell died. The thunder sounds like his laughter, sneering at me. Is he planning to kill me as he died? On the same kind of a night? Is he trying to add madness to my torture?

I wish I knew what to do! His mind's fixed on fire. I know that.

I've started the water running in the bath tub. Water is what I need. I'll get in there and wait. Fire can't touch you in water.

Why doesn't his skull appear? Then I'll know it's the last moment of the fight. To die or live! To live or die! It's going to be death. I feel it now. A horrible inhuman death with the flames burning the skin off my body. While I writhe and twist with the fear and the maddening pain, I can feel it now as though it were already eating at my flesh, the greedy flames of hell.

My chest is being seared. I try to beat them down—I can picture it all! But they creep up my throat. My face! My eyes! I'm going blind now. They're burning out my eyes!

A church steeple across the street was just hit. I can see the smoke beginning to rise from the belfry. It's that close now! I've got to get in the tub of water. It's my last chance. The next bolt might catch me unprepared.

If I come through this alive how I'll laugh at the world, at George Bell. At everything in the heavens. I'll be hard as granite inside like I thought I was. And I'll be mad, mad, mad with laughter!

\* \* \* \* \*

"I want to offer this in evidence," the witness repeated.

The medical examiner took the scrawled pages from the outstretched hand.

"How did you find him, Mr. Bell? Mr. Wilbur Bell, I believe?"

"In his bathtub, sir, burned to a crisp from the waist up. I understand they heard him screaming in his room for fifteen minutes before the bolt struck. He was my guardian, you know. I was on my way up to see him."

"And you didn't like him as your guardian, did you Mr. Bell?"

The medical examiner's keen gray eyes seemed to be boring into young Bell's soul.

"No, sir, I didn't. And I strongly suspected that he killed my father. Don't ask me why—I just knew it. I followed him around—I thought something might make him give himself



away. I wanted him to die. I wanted justice for my father. I... I was very fond of my father, sir. But it's all a mystery to me."

**T**HE bushy eyebrows of the medical examiner went up questioningly. He brushed his stubby calm fingers through a mop of graying hair. "What do you mean, a mystery to you?"

"I mean just this, sir," Bell went on tensely. "I mean I think that my father really was carrying out his threat. Oh, I know it may have seemed just like coincidence when the sign fell and the snake got loose. True, Wilkes was looking for things like that anyhow, and naturally would attach significance to events he'd have shrugged off ordinarily. Like that fire in the wastebasket here in Cairo."

"But what makes it add up funny is the way he died in the bathtub. The lightning couldn't have done that. The spark that broke the window might have electrocuted him, might have drilled a hole through him, but it couldn't have burned his skin off him."

"What about that bottle of cleaning fluid lying empty on its side with the cork blown out by the heat? Couldn't that have dripped into the water and burned when the lightning hit the tub?"

The medical examiner had a quizzical smile on his face as he asked the question.

"That could have happened," Bell said as his eyes sought the calm blue eyes of Muriel for inspiration. "That could be what happened, but it doesn't seem likely to me. The shelf seems to bend up at that point, so the cleaning fluid would run the other way. But even that wouldn't explain it all—"

Bell paused in embarrassment, his eyes catching Muriel's again.

"Go on," the medical examiner said.

Bell saw Muriel nod, smile reassuringly. His voice was throaty.

"Well, when you examine the bathroom—if you look at the hole in the window the spark of lightning made, you'll see that there's smoke around it, and that the smoke forms a perfect picture of a skull—a grinning skull with flames around its head."

Muriel got up, her lithe, smartly clad body moving smoothly to his side. She put an arm around his waist. The medical examiner continued to sit immobile, staring down at his desk. When he did move he spoke softly, a kindly expression around the corners of his eyes.

"When you've lived in the East as long as I have, young man, you'll cease to wonder at the things you don't understand. They won't even bother you."

He waved his hand at the door as the young man and woman stood before him.

They left quietly, understanding that the case of Anthony Wilkes was closed for all time.

Coming Soon: **BLACK WINGS OF DOOM**  
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# "I TALKED WITH GOD"

(Yes, I Did—Actually and Literally)

and, as a result of that little talk with God some ten years ago, a strange new Power came into my life. After 43 years of horrible, sickening, dismal failure, this strange Power brought to me a sense of overwhelming victory, and I have been overcoming every undesirable condition of my life ever since. What a change it was. Now—I have credit at more than one bank, I own a beautiful home, drive a lovely car, own a newspaper and a large office building, and my wife and family are amply provided for after I leave for shores unknown. In addition to these material benefits, I have a sweet peace in my life. I am happy as happy can be. No circumstance ever upsets me, for I have learned how to draw upon the invisible God-

Law, under any and all circumstances.

You, too, may find and use the same staggering Power of the God-Law that I use. It can bring to you, too, whatever things are right and proper for you to have. Do you believe this? It won't cost much to find out—just a penny post-card or a letter addressed to Dr. Frank B. Robinson, Dept. 711-I, Moscow, Idaho, will bring you the story of the most fascinating success of the century. And the same Power I use is here for your use, too. I'll be glad to tell you about it. All information about this experience will be sent you free, of course. The address again—Dr. Frank B. Robinson, Dept. 711-I, Moscow, Idaho. Advt. Copyright 1939 Frank B. Robinson.



# DEATH HAS THREE SISTERS

By  
**KELVIN KENT**

*Author of "Roman Holiday," etc.*



*The Crones came forward, clawing at Schacht*

**T**HREE gray women. . . . Together in the vast room, their shadows flung gigantically on the wall by the wan yellow lamplight, they huddled about the rickety, old-fashioned spinning-wheel and worked with curious intentness. They took turns spinning, and while one worked, the others watched, their sunken eyes gleaming.

To Tony Malvern, watching outside the window, there was something subtly repugnant about the spectacle. It was age personified and degraded. The women wore long, black gowns, stained and shiny; thin strands of colorless

**The Three Fates of Ancient Greece, Daughters of Night, Spin a Fiendish Web of Doom!**



hair clung to parchment-dry scalps. And why should these three be spinning alone in this ruined mountain house—a house supposed to be untenanted, save by legends?

Beside Tony Malvern a second man was watching—tall, broad-shouldered, but gaunt with the wiry toughness of the explorer. This was famous Bob Rockey, whose fantastic short film subjects—"Try and Believe it!"—were the sensation of Hollywood.

"Get it?" Rocky was whispering. "Clotho, Lachesis, Atropos—the daughters of Night! Spinning the thread of human destiny. They're crazy, probably, but it's swell theater. Tony, let's get back to camp, get your camera, and shoot some stuff tonight!"

"Ssss-sst!" The warning hissed sharply through the night. "They've heard us. Duck!"

It was the third man of the trio. Short, plump and energetic, Schacht was the studio representative of the group, Rockey's lieutenant. He repeated insistently, "Duck!"

**M**ALVERN promptly obeyed. But in the final instant before his eyes passed below the sill, he stared straight into the black, fathomless eyes of one of the hags and, causelessly, an unpleasant little shudder racked him. Those eyes were, he thought suddenly, not human. The eyes of a beast. And something more than a beast. A gleam of evil merriment lighted them as the crone deliberately reached out, gripped a thread, and snapped it.

Rockey was still standing at the window, but now he ducked quickly and followed the two others as they quietly moved away.

"Good stunt," he said under his breath. "Remember the legend? Whenever anyone sees one of the Fates break a thread, he dies. This'll be a sensation when we get it canned."

"I didn't see," Schacht grunted. "Did they—"

"I'm safe," said Malvern, chuckling. "I ducked just before she broke it. You're doomed, Rockey."

"Guess I am," the third man said—  
*And died.*

His voice trailed off into a fit of vio-

lent coughing. He staggered, clutched at his throat, and made hideous sobbing noises as he fought for breath.

He spun half-around, his glazing eyes staring back at the ruined house black against the stars—and toppled. Malvern, who had been walking slightly behind the other two, sprang forward too late to catch Rockey as he dropped.

Then silence, and a cold wind blowing down from the mountain tops. A wind that chilled the sudden sweat on Malvern's face. A wind that whispered of mysteries beyond the veil of life, older than mankind, older even than myth.

"Rockey!" Malvern cried. He dropped to his knees, felt vainly for a pulse that did not beat. Schacht was loosening Rockey's collar.

Malvern stood up. "No use," he said dully. "He's dead. Wait a bit."

He turned, sprinted up the slope. The window in the old house was still a square of yellow, but as he ran it abruptly blinked out and vanished. Panting, he drew a flashlight from his pocket, breathlessly finished the steep climb, and turned the white cone of radiance through the window.

The room was empty. The spinning wheel still stood there, but of the three hags there was no trace.

Malvern hesitated. He wanted to search the house, but reason told him it would be better to get Rockey back to the camp—to a doctor. Some trace of life might still linger. Adrenalin, perhaps, might help. . . .

Adrenalin—for a heart attack. And that was all it was, of course. Rockey's heart had been bad since that bout with fever in Venezuela. Yet, for all his logic, Malvern was oddly glad he hadn't seen the crone break a thread.

**B**ACK by the encampment, with the two automobiles and two trailers of the motion picture outfit drawn up almost in the form of a hollow square, there was tragic silence. The body of Bob Rockey lay blanketed within one of the trailers, and Tony Malvern had just finished explaining what had happened.

There were five members left in the



expedition. Malvern was the only cameraman, though some of the others could substitute in a pinch. Tony could have been one of the highest paid cameramen in Hollywood, but he had chosen instead the less lucrative but infinitely more exciting job of following Bob Rockey to the far corners of the earth, filming the bizarre, the unusual, the unbelievable.

Schacht, of course, was studio representative and advance man for Rockey's troupe.

The others were Frank Flashing, grip and general handy man; Carol Johnson, script girl, part-time housekeeper when the trailers needed a spring cleaning, and full-time sweetheart of Tony Malvern; and, last, Chocolate Charley, the gigantic negro cook.

For more than two years this little group had worked and fought and made sensational pictures behind Bob Rockey's leadership. His death left them dazed, uncertain. Few of them were aware of the weird implications of Rockey's death, for Schacht and Malvern by tacit consent had omitted anything but the barest facts.

But uneasy tension was an almost tangible presence in the group. They guessed, somehow, that matters were worse than Malvern had indicated. Charley, especially, was troubled; he rocked to and fro on a camp chair, moaning softly.

Schacht had already gone to Nugget, the little mining town that nestled nearby in the mountains, remote from civilization, self-sufficient. And presently he returned in his car, trailing the headlights of a dozen miners' jalopies and three times that number of morbid curiosity seekers.

The men were narrow-eyed, tight-lipped, stupid. The women were equally dull and close-mouthed, with fear in their eyes fighting curiosity. There was present an air of faint hostility toward the "foreigners" from Hollywood.

Malvern read the signs aright; this was a backwash of humanity with little contact with the outer world. Inbreeding and ignorance had made them suspicious, superstitious, slightly degenerate.

It was before this mob that Malvern

saw one of America's most famous men subject to investigation, inquest, and funeral service in the space of half an hour.

The town marshal, looking like a grim-lipped symbol of vengeance until he spoke stumbingly, broke the silence.

"Hear tell yer number one man died. That him?" He pointed at Rockey's body, from which the blanket had been removed. "Blue, ain't he?"

It was true. Rockey's flesh was tinged blue. His facial muscles had not yet relaxed from their dying grimace of agony, and the sight of it sent Carol into Malvern's arms.

"Okay, kid," he said under his breath. "Buck up. No need for you to stick around here, you know."

"I—I'd rather stay with you, Tony," she whispered, and he felt her shiver. The man's arm tightened about her soft shoulders. Before he could speak again there was an interruption.

A TALL, heavy-set figure in staid business suit stepped forward—Dr. Trombar, the coroner and local magistrate. Unlike the others, he seemed both intelligent and cultured.

"The bluish color sometimes follows heart attack," he explained. "Mr. Schacht tells me the dead man's heart was weak." He glanced around questioningly.

Schacht's eyes glinted. He was, Malvern thought, smoothing things over, stifling any hint of undesirable publicity. Which was his job, of course. Well, it made no difference to Rockey now. But—

Malvern came to a sudden decision. He said sharply, "That may be true. But the circumstances of the case haven't been told yet. I think they call for an investigation by the authorities."

"Eh?" Dr. Trombar's meaty face turned toward the speaker. "Something—more than heart attack?"

Malvern told the entire story, withholding nothing. And the tale created an ugly stirring in the mob. Eyes glittered askance, feet scuffled nervously, and presently the crowd began to thin away. The sound of autos chugging



down the road came clearly through the thin mountain air as the natives dispersed.

Even the marshal revealed an odd reluctance to listen. He waited impatiently, and finally decided, "So that's the way of it, eh? Wal, mought's well bury 'im now an' git it over with."

Malvern was astounded. Whatever reaction he had expected, this was not it.

"Bury him! But what about an inquest? The law demands that. And common sense demands an investigation. Can't you see—"

"See?" The marshal snorted. "Them three sisters been breakin' threads nigh onto twenty year around here, an' people been dyin' in accidents an' all sorts o' queer ways. We ain't got it figgered out yet, an' we got too much sense to try. Yer top man died o' heart trouble, ay, Doc?"

"Yes," Dr. Trombar said quietly. "That's right."

The marshal walked back to his car, calling over his shoulder, "You folks is marooned up here a couple o' days. Landslide wiped out a section o' road down below. Only way out is over a mountain trail till th' boys git the road fixed."

Marooned. That blasted Malvern's half-formed idea of taking Rockey's body back to civilization for an autopsy. The sun's heat was terrific in this thin mountain air; the body must be buried quickly.

Malvern turned to Dr. Trombar, and the physician met his gaze, smiling wryly. He said, "I know how you feel, young man. Bewildered, indignant, maybe scared, too, if you'll admit it. I was, first few times I ran up against this damned legend of the three sisters. But not now. We all just take it in stride. Maybe I can explain it a little.

"Nobody knows just when the sisters first appeared in that house, but it was years ago. The first person to see them was a ten-year-old lad coming home late from a fishing trip. He saw them break a thread, told his parents about it. Next day he died in a school-house fire that burned two or three others as well. Since that time every-

one who has seen the three break a thread—has died. Always in a natural manner. Mine cave-ins, auto accidents, drownings. When I became coroner I was leery about things, too. So I performed autopsies. I found out that the deaths were all natural enough. Like your friend's, here."

"But—I don't get it. Who are the three women? Where do they live? Why—"

**T**ROMBAR shrugged. "Not so fast! No one knows who they are; no one has ever seen them except through the windows of that house, at night. They do not live there; no one knows whence they come or where they go. Sometimes months will pass without a light in that house. Then the lamp will suddenly appear. And everybody in Nugget stays away from it, unless he's a fool or a drunkard, or too curious for his own good."

"Listen," Malvern said, "are you implying those three women are ghosts?"

"I am a medical man," Trombar said with quiet dignity. "I do not believe in ghosts. There must be a logical explanation, of course, and, personally, I believe hypnosis has a good deal to do with it. A legend was created; people—these credulous villagers—believed in it; there was auto-suggestion of a sort.

"Sometimes a man saw a thread broken, or thought he did. He decided he was doomed. In every man's life there are plenty of crises during which he has to think quickly in order to survive. It happens daily to anyone who drives a car. There are dangers in mines, in these mountains, in the lakes. Dangers which one would normally avoid by instinct.

"Now it seems to me, Mr. Malvern, that a man who has seen the three sisters, on meeting such a crisis, would see in it the hand of fate. He would be paralyzed with terror, unable to save himself as he would under usual circumstances. Panic-paralysis. I have made some cures, you see.

"One fellow came to me shaking with fear, saying that he had seen the sisters and that he would die within the



week. I fed him sugar-pills, gave him a luck charm, and mesmerized him slightly. I battled superstition with superstition. As a result, the man still lives. And there were others."

"Rockey wasn't superstitious," Malvern said.

The doctor had no answer. He turned to filling out the death certificate, and, presently, departed.

The next day dragged badly for the stranded picture troupe. The heat was still intense, and the sky clouded over around noon. Thunder bombarded the surrounding peaks, with echoes rattling interminably, though no rain fell.

Tempers were short, tongues sharp. Several arguments started over trifles. Schacht was all for asserting his authority in very certain terms, as the new leader of the expedition. The others resented it for no particular reason. They were all agreed that they should carry on as if Rocky were still with them, that it was what he would have wanted. But Schacht, though a good organizer, hadn't the personality of a leader.

**E**ARLY in the afternoon Malvern wandered away from camp with affected casualness, heading for the ancient house of the three sisters. It was only a short walk, and Malvern thought he had never seen a building that appeared so utterly deserted and forlorn, yet somehow imbued with a peculiar sort of life of its own.

It squatted near the base of a sheer three-hundred-foot overhanging cliff. There were no other houses visible. No trees grew, no grass, no flowers. There was only the ominous outthrust of the peak above—a great mass of weathered, crumbling rock, poised far above the house, Malvern thought curiously, like the hammer of Thor. There was danger here, he felt.

Landslides and avalanches were common in these mountains, and some had occurred, he saw, not far from the cliff itself. Once the pinnacle had been secure enough, but lightning-riven rock far above told him what had happened. The jutting peak hung poised, insecure, above the house of the three sisters.

Rain poured down in a cold, dreary

drizzle, trickling in little streams down the slope, carrying silt and small pebbles with it. Malvern made his way to the nearest window, peered through, saw nothing. The front door was unlocked; he opened it and went boldly in.

The huge front room was completely empty. Not a chair, not even the lamp that had burned there the night before. There was no trace of occupancy. Malvern grunted emotionlessly, lit a cigarette, and diligently began to search the house.

He found nothing. But on his way back to camp he discovered something very curious. It was not far from the site of Rocky's collapse the night before, on the same rutted track. Half-hidden among the weeds, where Malvern would not have noticed them save for their whiteness against drab background, he spied two little wads of rain-soaked, absorbent cotton. Retrieving both, the cameraman stared at them in perplexity. Further search revealed nothing else unusual—just two wads of white cotton where no cotton should be.

Malvern examined them with interest. They were about the size of his little fingertip. They were somewhat matted, showing they had been used. Finally he held one of them to his nose and sniffed. Nothing. He cautiously tasted the cotton with some hesitation. And then grim knowledge came to him. His lips parted in an unpleasant smile. Stuffing the cotton carefully in an envelope, he started purposefully back to camp.

The night came down, and with it the storm rose to raving intensity. The lightning flickered unceasingly behind jagged peaks; thunder growled ominously. Malvern had stretched out for a rest in one of the trailers, but he had not counted on his exhaustion. By the time he awoke, the sun had long since set. And, as yet, he had not decided what to do about his discovery.

**H**IS problem was solved for him. Carol was not in the camp, and Malvern learned from Chocolate Charley that she had gone across the valley.

"I was thinkin' 'bout goin' after her,



Mistah Tony," the huge negro said. "But I—I hadn't jest made up my mind to it."

Charley's eyes flickered; superstitious fear lay in their depths. He believed in the legend of the three sisters, Malvern saw—and the old house of the spinners of death lay across the valley where Carol had gone.

"Yeah," Malvern grunted. He looked up as thunder racketed behind the mountains. A flurry of wind-driven rain spattered his face. "I'll go. Adios, Charley." He turned and walked away, his boots crunching stickily through the mud. Hunching up his collar, he hurried on.

And, finally, he saw the black bulk of the house looming above him up the slope. Sheet lightning flared. Something drew Malvern's gaze up, and involuntarily he started and caught his breath.

The outthrust rock poised over the house was swaying—trembling like a bough, alarmingly, perilously! To Malvern's excited imagination it seemed like a clenched fist, shuddering and ready for a downward blow.

The lightning died; it was dark once more. A tiny avalanche of pebbles and loose dirt rattled past. If Carol were in the house, she was in serious danger. The huge cliff-top might be dislodged at any moment.

Malvern cautiously mounted the porch. He wished he had brought some weapon, but there was nothing in his pockets he could use. A flashlight, and a small, heavy, exposure meter. A gun would have been much more satisfactory.

The door creaked open under Malvern's cautious thrust. The great front room was midnight black. Malvern stepped over the threshold, closed the door silently behind him, and moved aside quickly. He waited.

Silence, utter and complete. No, there was a very low, scarcely audible sound which the man did not recognize. He found his flashlight, extending it at arm's length, and winked on the beam briefly.

The room was empty, as far as he could see. Only the spinning-wheel was visible. But the low murmur con-

tinued, unevenly. It was, Malvern now realized, a man's voice.

It came from below.

Stealthily the photographer moved forward. The flashlight probed the floor, and, at last, Malvern found what he sought. A trap-door, so cleverly concealed that it would have escaped any but the most painstaking scrutiny. The deep voice paused, rumbled a few indistinguishable words, and stopped again.

There was silence, broken only by the drumming of the rain on the roof and windows.

With his penknife Malvern pried up the edge of the trap-door slightly. He peered through the crack.

**Y**ELLOW lamplight illuminated a small cellar below. A ladder gave entry to it, and at the ladder's foot a man stood, his head bent as he contemplated the bound and prostrate girl on the ground before him. The girl was Carol, her hair disarranged in tumbling curls about her pale face.

Malvern could not see the man's face. Shadows lurked in the cellar's corners and veiled the walls.

Malvern lifted the trap-door cautiously, replacing the flashlight in his pocket. There was an eight-foot drop. He poised for a leap that would bring him down on the shoulders of the man below.

As he jumped, a cracked, shrill voice screamed warning. From the shadows leaped a bent, shriveled figure—one of the hags. The standing man sprang away. Malvern tried desperately to twist in mid-air; his clutching hands just missed their target. He smashed down painfully on the hard ground, and, before he could rise, a vicious blow sent shattering twinges of agony through his skull.

Then—nothingness.

Malvern could not have been unconscious for long. When he awoke, he found himself bound and prone on the floor beside Carol. Three crones waited by the ladder. Three gray women. . . .

But now Malvern, seeing them at close quarters, realized that they were flesh and blood. The dry, cobwebby



hair wasn't real; the women wore wigs. Their faces were cleverly grease-painted; their teeth had been blacked out, and collodion scarred and wrinkled their cheeks and lips. Clotho, Lachesis, and Atropos were fakes!

Carol was unconscious, Malvern saw, and an ugly blue welt on her pale forehead explained the cause. Standing above her was a man the photographer recognized.

"Schacht!" he said sharply.

The other turned. His round face was buttery slick in the yellow lamp-light. "Awake, eh?" he asked, and his eyebrows went up.

"What the hell's the idea? Do you think you can get away with this?" Malvern demanded.

"Why not?" Schacht asked. "There'll be no trace of evidence. You've only yourselves to blame. Carol came snooping here an hour ago, and found out too much. I followed her, and—well, my plans are changed now." He glanced at his watch. "In ten minutes a small charge of dynamite will explode in the cliff above. I had it planted for emergencies. It'll bring down an avalanche. This house will be destroyed, and everything in it."

Malvern's jaw set. He looked around sharply. The hags were busy with the removal of their costumes, under which they wore ordinary khaki clothing. The trap-door above was closed. The cellar was strangely quiet; the storm's noise scarcely penetrated here.

Some weapon—

**M**ALVERN thought of the exposure meter. It was dark in the vague lamplight, and he was lying in shadow. Deftly he brought around his bound arms till he could slide one hand into his pocket. His fingers touched the cool metal of the meter, slid over the thin glass covering its face. If he could only break it! His knife was in a pocket he could not reach, but his fingers closed over a key-ring.

Schacht took a step forward. "What are you doing?"

"Thinking," Malvern said. "Figuring out the angles."

Thunder rolled. Malvern smashed the glass of the meter, and the tiny

sound, muffled by cloth and covered by the thunder, went unheard. He found a thin sliver and went to work.

"Figuring out the angles . . . these three stooges of yours—"

Schacht glanced at his watch. "Well?"

"You got wind of the legend, and decided it was your chance to do what you'd always wanted—kill Rockey and take over control of the 'Try and Believe It' films. The hags—the spinners—are just extras you brought from Hollywood. You set 'em up here in this house, with a spinning wheel and a lamp, got Rockey to see a thread broken, and then burst a capsule of hydrocyanic acid gas under the chief's nose. You knew that if death wasn't attributed to heart failure, then the story of the three sisters would come out. And this is the one place in the world where nobody'd even try to investigate such a fantastic death. Because everybody around here is afraid of the three—afraid to ask questions."

The ropes were parting. Malvern went on swiftly, "But you made a big mistake, Schacht, when you didn't destroy your two cotton nose stoppers, soaked in a soda solution, or maybe calcium carbonate, to neutralize the hydrocyanide in case you got a whiff of it yourself."

"You're smart," Schacht said. "Too smart. But I can't wait. The dynamite—"

He went up the ladder like a cat. One of the hags called, "Wait a minute! Hold on—"

And Schacht, gripping the ladder's rungs with one hand, turned slightly and grinned down at the crone. Something in his face halted her words as though a hand had struck her mouth.

Malvern guessed what was coming. Frantically he worked at the loosening ropes. But they still held him fast.

Schacht said, "One of the first things I did was plant that dynamite in the cliff. I didn't expect to kill Malvern and Carol, but I planned to wipe out all evidence." He stressed the last two words.

"You don't mean—" one of the three women whispered.

"I mean—you're not going to talk.



For a very good reason. There's a lock on this trap-door—"

The crones screamed their terror and rage. They came forward, clawing at Schacht, their faces contorted, eyes gleaming with mad fear. They swarmed up the ladder—and Schacht was ready for them, with the butt of a Luger automatic.

Malvern turned his eyes away and worked desperately at the ropes. He heard shrill curses, gasps of pain, and the sound of vicious, thudding blows. And then a low moaning, and a coughing sob which subsided into silence.

**S**CHACHT laughed. Malvern looked up, saw the three hags crumpled on the ground. They lay motionless, dead or unconscious.

Schacht's gaze flickered to Malvern. "Good-by," he said. "You'll die in good company, Malvern."

The photographer's wrists came free suddenly. Schacht didn't notice. The killer was climbing the ladder, thrusting the trap-door open with a quick gesture. And Malvern knew that he couldn't possibly free his feet and halt Schacht before the latter had bolted the trap-door and made his escape. But Malvern's fingers found the pocket-knife, whipped it open, sawed the blade desperately across the thick ropes, while his eyes followed Schacht's squat figure to the ladder's top.

The killer's face was visible from below; lamplight slanted up across the plump cheeks, the thick lips, the pudgy nose. Schacht, oddly enough, wasn't climbing the ladder any more. He was standing quite motionless, his head just above the floor level, and his hands were gripping the rungs like claws. And Schacht's face wore an expression that was utterly inexplicable.

The man was startled—and afraid, horrified! He seemed to be staring, with bulging, glassy eyes, at something in the room above.

Quite suddenly, above the drumming of rain, Malvern heard a sound, a noise that was not born of the storm. Imagination, perhaps—or the trickling of sandy soil under the house. A low whirring drifted to Malvern's ears, and he caught his breath and went icy cold.

A spinning-wheel might make such a sound. There was a spinning-wheel up there, but not a soul to operate it.

Before Malvern could be sure, thunder drummed out, drowning all else. The photographer felt the last strands of the rope part under his sawing knife. He sprang up, and simultaneously Schacht, perched precariously at the ladder's top, thrust out a clawing hand and screamed: "*No! No! Don't—*"

And then Malvern had the killer, with a bear-trap grip around his legs. Schacht clung for a second; then Malvern's weight pulled him free, and the two men plummeted down to the ground. The impact was stunning. Malvern was underneath. His breath left him in a rushing gasp, and he choked and fought for air.

Schacht tore free, staggered back to the foot of the ladder, shaking his head dizzily. Malvern rolled over and crawled upright, grinning with pain.

Schacht pulled his heavy Luger out of its shoulder holster.

The first bullet went through the fleshy part of Malvern's left arm as the photographer weaved in. The next creased his ribs. And then the two men closed.

Malvern's lips were retracted in a harsh, bitter smile. His fingers were tingling with desire to throttle this killer—this wholesale murderer who had killed Rockey and sought to do the same to Carol. And Schacht fought like a bulldog, with dogged, silent tenacity. The Luger skidded away in a corner.

Schacht was strong. He forced Malvern, with his wounded arm, back and down, and the photographer felt a wave of hopeless desperation sweep him.

**T**HE blast went off without warning.

At first Malvern thought it was thunder. Then, slowly at first, and with increasing violence, little trickles of rock and soil began to whisper by outside the house. Pebbles rattled like shot on the clapboards above.

Schacht sucked in his breath. His eyes were suddenly those of a beast. He drove in, his teeth seeking Malvern's throat. Lightning filled the



square gap overhead; thunder bel-  
lowed.

The house shook and shuddered as  
the avalanche began.

Malvern smashed his head at  
Schacht's sweating face, and blood  
spurted from the thick nose. Schacht  
screamed with rage. His clawing fin-  
gers found the Luger. Malvern's hand  
closed over it at the same time.

The two rolled over across ground  
that trembled as though in the grip of  
earthquake. Above the rush of rain  
they heard the roar of the avalanche.  
From the overhanging peak high above  
bits of rock were breaking off and roll-  
ing down the steep slope, gathering  
force and momentum as they came. A  
splintering crash told of a boulder that  
had smashed through the roof.

A movement caught Malvern's eye.  
Two of the three hags had regained  
consciousness. They were emerging  
from a shadowy corner, and in the dim  
lamplight they looked like devils.

Cobwebs covered them—no, not cob-  
webs, but the gray skeins they had used  
for props. They trailed the webs be-  
hind them and came down shrieking on  
the battling men.

Through a haze of agony Malvern  
was dimly conscious that the two  
crones had flung their webs about  
Schacht, enmeshing him. They wound  
the gray skeins about his body, bind-  
ing his arms, prisoning his thrashing  
legs. The hags had turned on the  
master who had tried to destroy them.

The house lurched sickeningly; the  
floor tilted at a crazy angle. Windows  
shattered overhead. A deafening roar  
mounted above the thunder.

Schacht fought like an animal to es-  
cape the binding skeins. The two hags  
flung themselves upon him, bearing  
him down with their frail strength,  
clawing at his sweating face till it was  
a ribboned mask of red. Malvern  
sprang to his feet, took a step forward.

Again the house lurched. Straining  
timbers groaned sickeningly.

Malvern caught his breath, whirled,  
lifted the unconscious figure of Carol  
and flung her over his shoulder. He  
mounted the shaking ladder, staggered  
across the bare room, and through the  
door. His foot found nothingness.

The two of them went spinning down  
in the dark. Somehow Malvern kept  
hold of Carol. Scrambling for foot-  
hold, he found it at last. Flying rocks  
and shale bombarded him.

His left arm throbbed, dangled use-  
lessly. Striving desperately for bal-  
ance, he sprinted unsteadily through  
the night. Occasional lightning-  
flashes aided him.

**A** HUGE boulder, firmly embedded  
in solid soil, loomed ahead. Mal-  
vern dived for its shelter. Under the  
rock's lee he dropped, gripping Carol to  
him tightly. Here they were sheltered  
from the avalanche.

In the lightning that streaked across  
the black, flying clouds Malvern saw  
the pinnacle of rock above the house  
slowly toppling. It crashed down in  
thunderous ruin. The whole moun-  
tainside seemed to collapse.

The avalanche bellowed down like a  
tidal wave. It caught up the frail  
house, ripped it apart, ground it under-  
foot. Timbers flew like matchsticks  
through the air.

And it passed. Dust rose in a chok-  
ing cloud. There came at last silence,  
broken only by the rain.

Where the house had been was—  
nothing! The three sisters and their  
evil genius, Schacht, were gone, buried  
beneath tons of loose rock.

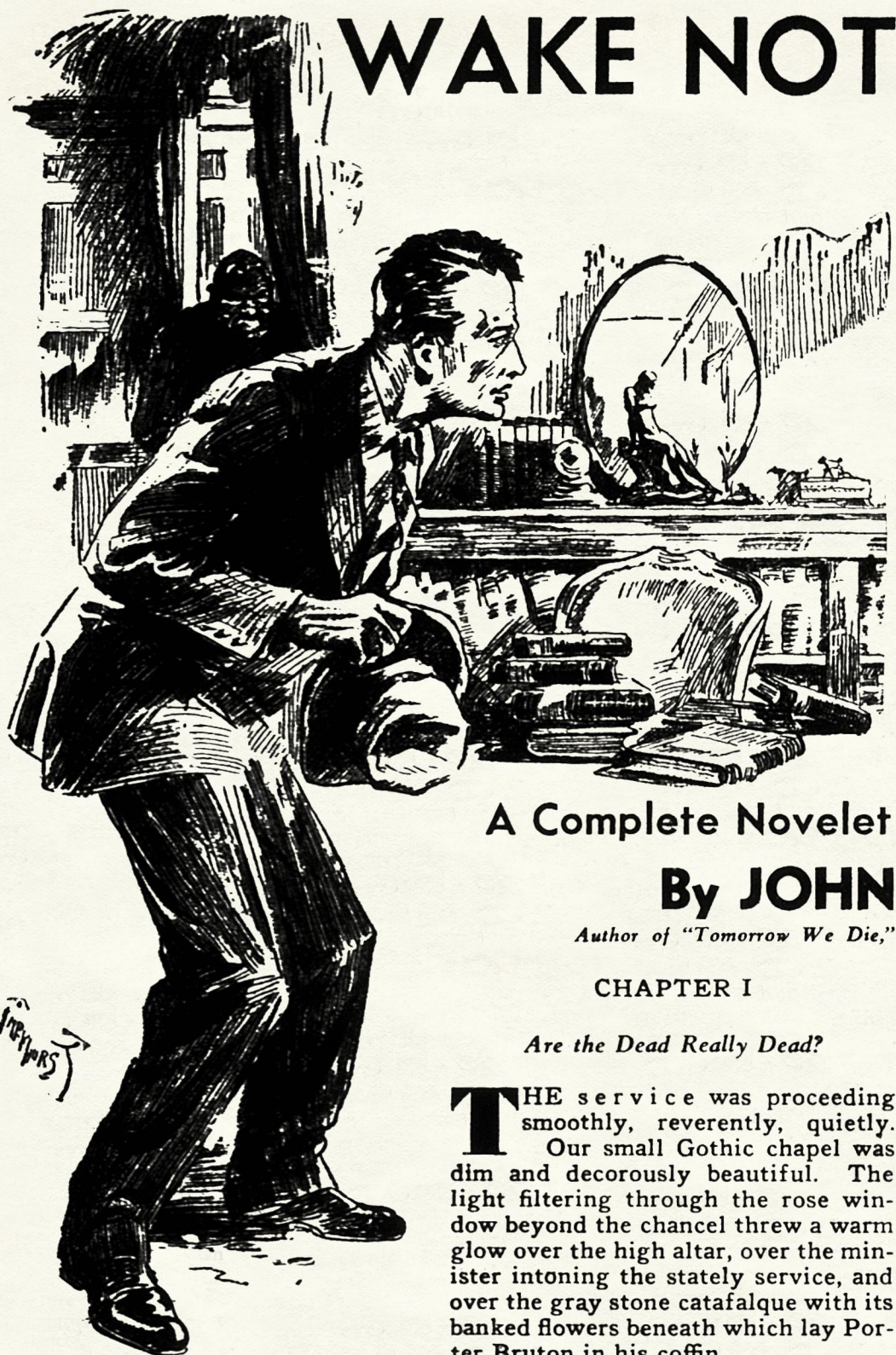
Carefully, Malvern stood up. To his  
left was solid ground; the path back to  
camp was clear. Swiftly he unbound  
Carol, and hoisted the unconscious girl  
to his right shoulder.

Malvern began to pick his way down  
the slope. Suddenly he shivered. An  
oddly unpleasant memory had occurred  
to him. A few words Rockey had said  
. . . *"Whenever anyone sees the Fates  
break a thread, he dies."*

Malvern was remembering that curi-  
ous whirring sound he had heard, and  
visualizing Schacht, perched on the  
ladder, hesitating long enough for Mal-  
vern to reach him, thrusting out a fran-  
tic hand and screaming, "No! No!  
Don't—"

What had Schacht seen? Malvern  
sighed; he didn't know. He'd never  
know . . . and, somehow, he felt glad  
of it.





# WAKE NOT

A Complete Novelet

By **JOHN**

*Author of "Tomorrow We Die,"*

## CHAPTER I

*Are the Dead Really Dead?*

**T**HE service was proceeding smoothly, reverently, quietly. Our small Gothic chapel was dim and decorously beautiful. The light filtering through the rose window beyond the chancel threw a warm glow over the high altar, over the minister intoning the stately service, and over the gray stone catafalque with its banked flowers beneath which lay Porter Bruton in his coffin.

Personally, I liked this solemn warmth of rite and ritual. As half-

*I didn't believe what I saw at first. Macklin's face drained of blood as he watched the horror mirrored in my eyes*

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**Willis Payne, Mortician, Is Plunged Into a**

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# THE DEAD



of Weird Orgies

**H. KNOX**

*"The Devil Wears Wings," etc.*

owner of the Sun Hill Crematorium, I was proud of the skill with which we helped to veil the raw harshness of death. But today, curiously, it did not seem enough. As I watched the pallid faces of that congregation of college students, teachers, and commonplace suburbanites, I was beginning to sense something of what my partner, Tom Carlin, had meant when he had said: "Watch them, Willis. With things as they are in Oakvale now, you can't trust people around funerals any more."

It had sounded absurd, far-fetched. For Oakvale had been an ordinary enough college suburb when the need

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**Maelstrom of Mystery Beyond Understanding!**

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for a serious operation had taken me away three months ago. Of course, I knew that during my absence the community had been somewhat upset by the suicide of Professor Grenfel, which followed the man's mad attempt to snatch at the dark secrets of life and death.

It was rather weird that only yesterday, on the very day of my return, Grenfel's young successor to the chair of bio-chemistry had followed his former chief in self-inflicted death. But was that enough to account for Tom's ominous hysterical and rather cryptic warning?

Bits of jumbled talk he had let fall came back to me now. Hints at body-snatching and some weird mania smoldering among the undergraduates at Oakvale. Dark references to Major Dennis Macklin and the two black men he had brought back with him from Africa. And this had seemed to connect in some way with a change that had come over Faustine Grenfel, the dead professor's daughter, who had been openly in love with the young assistant who now lay there under the banked flowers.

I looked at Faustine Grenfel now. She had always been eccentric, something of a poser, I thought. But she did possess an eerie and rather disturbing sort of beauty, a supple fluidity of slender limbs and serpentine white arms which, enhanced by her pallid and over-rouged face under the tight-clustered gold curls, gave her an unearthly, even a deathlike air.

**W**HAT shocked and repelled me now was the fact that instead of the black she should have worn on this occasion she was dressed in a scarlet gown of daring cut—as if she had come, not to a funeral, but to a rendezvous! Moreover, the avid fixity with which she regarded the coffin, leaning forward with delicate nostrils dilated and scarlet lips moving faintly as if in some unholy communion with the corpse of the man on whom she had lavished an unwelcome love, had rather more than a little of the horrible enveloping it.

**F**OR it was known that Porter Bruton had spurned her, had loved, hopelessly in his turn, Lilly Langburn, the daughter of the president of Oakvale College—the girl who had promised to become my wife.

It was with relief that I turned toward Lilly now, rejoicing that her lovely face, with its large brown eyes and tender lips, though sad, was as radiantly serene as the flower whose name she bore. Thank God, nothing of this stupid hysteria had touched her, not even though Major Macklin was her father's cousin, Faustine was her friend, and the dead man himself had been a suitor for her love. But then, nothing like that *could* touch Lilly!

Perhaps it was all exaggerated, anyhow. The service was nearly ended and nothing had happened yet. Even Faustine, sitting there with that awful look of expecting the dead man to rise at any moment, might manage to refrain from causing a scene.

"Earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust—"

There, it was almost over. Tom Carlin was solemnly sprinkling the dust and ashes over the coffin. With a deep breath of relief, I pressed the button and watched the casket sink slowly below the floor to leave only the flowers visible. Then, while the audience slowly rose, I turned and hurried down into the receiving room.

My partner followed me. We found old Dr. Bruton, the dead young teacher's father, waiting there with our superintendent, Sam Fleagle. Tom put a gentle hand on the old man's shoulder.

"You still insist on—staying?" he asked.

The aged doctor lifted his stricken but tearless face.

"Certainly," he said. "I watched him die, and I prepared his body for the last rites. I shall see him through to the last. It isn't in the trappings of funerals that we show our love for our dead, but in the ministering of hands."

It was a relief to see one Spartan at least in a crazed community. Tom sprang to help the old man as he raised



his gaunt frame and moved toward the coffin from which Sam Fleagle was removing the lid. I turned to close the door, but stopped. Standing there, a scarlet apparition against the dimness, was Faustine Grenfel.

It was a tense instant. I could still hear feet moving upstairs and I dreaded the thought of the scene she might cause. For though her face was as immobile as a death mask, garish with paint, her greenish eyes glowed with a febrile threat that I could not misinterpret.

"Faustine," I began soothingly, "you mustn't—"

I broke off as she moved forward and I suddenly rushed her. But like a streaking flame she slithered past me and darted toward the coffin.

"Stop!" she shrilled. "You shall not burn him! You shall not destroy that splendid body!"

**T**HE others whirled and stood speechless as the girl flung herself upon the coffin, pressing her breast against it as she clawed and tugged to drag it to the floor.

"They shan't burn you, Porter!" she sobbed madly. "I'll tear the coffin apart! I'll press my body to you, and life will come into you again!"

It was ghastly, revolting. In another instant she would have dragged coffin and corpse crashing to the floor, but Tom came to his senses and grabbed her. I sprang to his aid and we pulled her away by main force. We shoved her, fighting and screaming, toward the door.

People were crowding down the steps, but I yelled at them to go back. We began pushing her up the stairs, while she continued to scream.

"You want to burn him, Willis Payne! You want to burn him to keep him from getting Lilly. But the dead aren't as dead as you think! He'll come back—"

I flung a hand over her mouth and the next moment we had her in the chapel. Dr. Pelham, who had run to his car for a hypo, had jabbed the needle into her arm, and that part of the nightmare was over.

We went back down and found old

Dr. Bruton on the verge of a collapse. This had been too much even for him, and when Tom offered to take him home, he consented weakly.

Left alone with Sam Fleagle, I locked the door and set about helping him get the coffin into the crematorium oven. Then I left him to seal the chamber and close the gilded doors, and went back and sat down to get my breath.

Thank God it was over now, anyhow! How could a girl allow her nerves to make such a fool of her, I asked myself. And then I gave a start. It was only the first whine of the motor, the preliminary roar of the flames in the bowels of the masonry, but it sent a queer tremor through me. What was wrong? Was I letting that mad girl's words upset me?

*The dead aren't as dead as you think!*

Rot! I sat up and stared at the furnace. A sudden booming had begun as the oil burner in the combustion chamber warmed up. It rose to a roar as the flames spurted into the oven to embrace the casket. Suppose Porter Bruton was not really dead? Suppose—

Damn it, was I getting morbid like the others? Angrily I got up, walked over and stood at the peephole back of the oven where Sam Fleagle was watching the color of the flames.

"A corpse is just so much matter," I told myself steadily, "not a person at all."

Inside there the fire roared like hell. I saw a dark line creep down the center of the flame-enshrouded casket. It widened. The casket split like an eggshell and black smoke blasted angrily against the peephole.

"Porter Bruton's entity is not in there," I said, "just the lifeless husk of him."

Why were my palms so sweaty?

A tremor rumbled like an earthquake through the masonry and Fleagle snatched at the air valves to reduce the flame. Then soot on the peephole thinned and I saw the thing inside, melting as it were, in the white oxidation of the fire, shrinking, twisting. . . .



I started to turn away. It had never affected me like this before. But I seemed unable to withdraw my eyes from the shape that moved uneasily between the obscuring flashes of fire. It made me dizzy for an instant and it was then that I experienced the queer hallucination. For suddenly, rising above the flame's roar, wild and windy and remote as an echo thrown up from the abyss, there came a shriek:

"Lilly, Lilly, I'm not dead! They're burning me alive! Save me, Lilly!"

Despite the great heat, a sheath of ice froze round my limbs, and as my brain spun like something whirled on the end of a string, it came again—a distillation of intolerable agony, black despair and immortal hate that would have chilled a devil's blood:

"God curse you, Willis Payne! I'll come back!"

Then there was only the flames' roar, and with limbs atremble I turned to Sam Fleagle who was just straightening up.

"Did you hear something, Sam?"

He grinned. "Hear? Sure. Them flames makes all sorts of noises. Sometimes they seem to scream, sometimes to laugh."

"I guess so," I managed. "Well, I think I'll go now."

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## CHAPTER II

### *Unholy Visitant*

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I STAGGERED up the steps, through the chapel and out into the late afternoon sunlight, my brain still in a daze. Over and over I told myself it was all imagination. But I knew better; I had heard! And he had called, not Faustine's name, but Lilly's!

Now I wasn't quite a fool, even in my terror. I couldn't believe that a voice from the blazing coffin had come through the thick masonry of the oven. But I did know that telepathy is a proven phenomenon, that in the intensity of death's agony, the dying have been known to project not only thoughts, but actual apparitions that

stand before the eyes of the living—and speak!

I got into the roadster, fumbled with the ignition key, finally got the engine started, and drove to the apartment which Tom Carlin and I called home. Tom was seated in the living room, morose and haggard, with a drink in his hand.

"Well, Willis," he said, without looking up, "a little more of this and we're finished. People won't bring their dead out from the city to a place with the atmosphere of a chamber of horrors. And it's my fault for dragging you into the business, too. I sometimes feel that I ought to offer to buy you out—" He looked up, grinning wryly, and saw my face. "What's wrong? You look like you'd seen—"

"A ghost?" I asked. I looked him straight in the eyes. "Tell me the truth, Tom, do you *know* that Porter Bruton was dead. Do you *know* that the poison he took actually killed him?"

"What do you mean?" he exclaimed. But something evasive in his face told me he knew well enough. "Of course, he was dead. Dr. Bruton saw him die, signed the death certificate, dressed the body. You're not suggesting that the old man could have connived at his own son's murder?"

I poured myself a drink, sat down to gulp it, and then told Tom exactly what had happened. Once he tried to interrupt me with some weak protest about the state of my nerves, but I silenced him and went on.

"You've been holding back on me, Tom, probably because you think I'm still too sick to stand the shock. But you may as well open up. I want to know what in hell is wrong here in Oakvale," I concluded.

He chewed that over a moment. Then:

"I wish I knew," he said. "Some sort of weird traffic with the dead must be going on, for bodies have been stolen. As to who's behind it, I have only a guess. I may be wrong. Let's start at the first and see what you think."

"Start with Grenfel's death, you mean?"



"With the things that led up to it," Tom said. "First, the argument with Major Dennis Macklin. You've probably heard of their argument, of how Grenfel boasted that science would soon know how to bring the dead back to life, and of how Macklin, in his role of cynical, wealthy explorer, sneered, said the secret would never come from a test tube and that if he wanted to know it he would go to the savages who had guarded the forbidden secret for ages.

"Well, the argument got hot and resulted in a wager that sent Macklin chasing off to Africa, to the regions west of the Ruwenzori, where a tribe called 'The People-Who-Dance-With-the-Dead' are said to live. And Grenfel set up a secret laboratory and set feverishly to work."

**H**E paused and drew a breath. "It created a lot of excitement and talk. All day and night in the upper halls of the science building you could hear the hissing of those glass retorts of Grenfel's, in which hearts and other organs throbbed with an eerie, unnatural life. And Grenfel got leaner and wilder, until a day came when a crowd gathered under his third-story window to hear some promised, startling announcement.

"But what they saw was a white-haired, emaciated madman appear suddenly against the darkness of the room, wave his arms wildly and then plunge down with a scream to smash his brains out on the pavement below. And when they rushed to his laboratory they found his terrified assistant reading a brief document which Grenfel had left and which read:

"I have found it. A mere detail added to the usual artificial respiration and arterial injections of defibrinated blood, physiological salts and epinephrine, will do the trick. The horrible truth is that not half of our dead are really dead, until we kill them in graves, in ovens, or under the embalmers' knives. But to bring back the *thing* that comes back from death is a crime against God. No man who knows what I know can let death take him unawares.'"

I shuddered. "And that started the panic? Yet Porter Bruton insisted on going on with the experiments?"

Tom nodded. "He was like a madman himself, wild to get at what Grenfel had discovered. And he made no secret of his reason." He paused to look at me uncertainly. "He wanted Lilly, believed that the fame and fortune that discovery would bring would enable him to take her away from you."

I swallowed uncomfortably and wished that Tom hadn't brought that up.

"But the madness got him, just as it did Grenfel?" I asked.

"I wonder," Tom mused. "I think what got him was Dennis Macklin."

"Macklin?"

"Yes. He came rushing back from Africa by plane, bringing those black witch-men with him. That was when the ugly rumors started about Faustine Grenfel and those crazy college kids who call themselves 'Thrill-hunters'. It was said that Macklin and his black men were teaching them some devilish things that can be done with dead bodies. And bodies were stolen, Grenfel's among them."

"Grenfel's! And his own daughter—"

"I couldn't swear to anything except that I found his coffin in the mausoleum empty," Tom said. "Also another body is missing from a pauper's grave. I got suspicious of it and had it dug into before dawn this morning. The body had been taken out and the coffin re-buried. But what's worrying me now, since you told me what you thought you heard there by the oven, is a scene I saw in the graveyard last night. I'm almost afraid to tell you."

"Go on," I urged.

Tom poured himself another drink and swallowed it neat; there was a bead of fine sweat on his forehead.

"I'd been prowling about to see if I could catch any body-snatchers," he said, "when I heard voices and stole up behind a cypress to watch a strange scene. What I saw was Porter Bruton seated on a low tombstone with Macklin standing in front of him and



two Negro witch-men behind. And Bruton was pleading.

"'For God's sake, Dennis,' I heard him say, 'don't do that to me. Have mercy.'

"'You have your choice,' Macklin replied coldly.

"Then Bruton got up and went stumbling off, and presently Macklin and his witch-men marched off, too."

"Good God!" I gulped. It sounded exactly like descriptions I had read of death-curses in the jungle. "And right after that Porter Bruton went home and killed himself with poison—or did he?"

**T**OM grimaced.

"His father says he did," he said.

"But if Macklin put a witch-spell on him—" I choked it off.

"In that case," Tom said hollowly, "we'd better get drunk, because we've just burned a man alive."

I got up and took another drink, but it didn't seem to do me any good. Half of me was cold and the other half was hot and my palms were oozing a clammy sweat.

"I'm glad I didn't hear him scream," Tom said, "especially that about coming back."

"Oh, shut up!" I growled. But instinctively I glanced at the window. The sun was down and the blue dusk had flattened itself against the pane like some blind amorphous monster pressing for entry. "I can't stand any more of this. I'm going to find Macklin and have it out with him!"

"Better go easy," Tom cautioned. "He might put a spell on you. I'd hate to have to burn you, too. Anyhow, I believe I'd be thinking of Lilly. If Bruton did come back he'd come back for her."

"Go to hell!" I said. But I turned and stalked to the phone.

I called Lilly's house to see if she was there and also to ask about Macklin, who was a guest of her father's. It was Macklin himself who answered the phone, and he said that Lilly had gone out.

"Where is she?" I blurted.

"She left about an hour ago," his suave voice answered, "with Willy

Richmond and Faustine Grenfel. I think they were headed for the Clover Club."

"Willy Richmond and Faustine Grenfel!" I exclaimed, and hung up.

Tom stared at me. "She went out with those two? Good God, Willis, they're the ring leaders of those corpse-snatchers!"

I started toward him, fists doubled. "Don't you intimate anything about Lilly," I growled, "or I'll—"

The change that had come over his face caused me to pause. I couldn't believe I had scared him that badly, but his jaw had dropped down and his eyes were suddenly bulging from his head. Then I realized that he was not looking at me but at the window behind me. I whirled.

But the window was a murky square of blackness.

I turned back. "What the hell did you see?"

He had tottered upright and his blood-drained face still wore its look of imbecile terror as he passed a shaking hand across his eyes.

"So help me God, Willis, it was him—Porter Bruton. It was his burned corpse standing there and—and—" his agonized eyes sought my face, "he had something flung over one shoulder—something that looked like a body!"

I spun about and raced for the door. Outside it was almost dark except for a sickly yellowish glow still lingering in the sky. I rounded the corner and sprinted for the window. I almost stumbled on the thing before I saw it.

Shakily I went down on hands and knees and struck a match. It lay sprawled, face up, the body of a thin, sallow-faced youth. The bugged-out eyeballs, suffused with blood, the purple, swollen tongue protruding between the teeth, the livid marks on the throat all pointed to strangulation.

I bent nearer, staring at those marks. My nostrils caught an odor, and I turned sick. It was a smell of fire and death, of burned flesh, and over those discolorations left by clawed, strangling fingers there was a smear of slime, pustular and clouded with a char of black ashes.

The corpse was that of Willy Rich-



mond, the youth with whom Lilly and Faustine had gone out only an hour or two ago!

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### CHAPTER III

#### *The Corpse That Hell Rejected*

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**W**EAKLY I staggered upright, staring idiotically about into the silent dark which was vibrant with the muted voices of insects, pulsing, it seemed, in dirges for their own small dead. Tom's voice called from the front.

"Willis, what is it?"

That jarred me back to my senses. I turned and started running for my car.

Passing Tom, I panted, "Go and see for yourself," and ran on.

He could call the police or do what he pleased; the only thought in my mind was to find Lilly. I sprang into my car and stomped the engine into life.

The Clover Club was a small night spot not far from the campus. There had never been anything sinister about the place. At least I had never noticed it until tonight when I staggered in, waved a waiter aside and stood blinking while my eyes probed the dimness for a loved and familiar face. But now it was plain some sort of soul-rot had crept in here where once innocent gaiety had prevailed.

It was in the air, in the hectic faces that shone corpselike under the blue lights; something that glowed lewd and secretive in fevered eyes, that breathed obscenely in hot whispers from drunken lips. It was in the music, in the weird, mysterious, jerky notes that crept in above the muted crooning of the brasses. It was in the movements of the dancers who hugged close and slithered like zombies, smoothly, subtly, but with a slight roll, like the unsteady gait of things that slouch blindly through darkness.

But I could not see either Lilly or Faustine.

I swung toward a table where a thin, horse-faced youth was leaning drunk-

enly toward his painted girl companion. When I asked if they had seen either of the girls the youth laughed, raised his glass and drank sloppily.

"They were here," he said, "but they left about an hour ago." He rolled his drunken eyes. "I wouldn't follow them, though. A simple undertaker might get shocked."

I resisted an impulse to smash his teeth back into his throat, whirled and went back out, a cackle of drunken laughter following me. I got back into my car and drove to the cottage where Faustine had lived alone since the death of her father.

The place was dark, but I didn't let that stop me. When I found the door locked I slammed my shoulder against it and crashed it in. Then, snapping on lights as I went, I made a tour of the whole house.

But no one was there; the place was neat and in order. I paused in the kitchen, wondering if I was making a fool of myself. Certainly there was a killer at large, but that didn't prove that Faustine and her silly followers had any connection with him. Faustine was a nervous wreck, and probably Lilly had taken her home to look after her. Willy Richmond might have left them long ago.

I started to turn back, but noticed the steps leading down into the basement and thought I might as well search there before I left. I stumbled down into a furnace room and struck a match. The place was empty, but my eye was attracted to a small door on which there was a formidable-looking padlock. Why such a padlock as that? I had already smashed one door, so another wouldn't matter. I dropped the match, picked up a lawnmower I had spotted and slammed it like a battering ram into the door.

**T**HE thin panels crashed under the blows, and I pushed myself through the splintered aperture. Then I straightened up in the darkness and my blood began a slow process of curdling. It was nothing I saw or felt, it was a smell—the smell of formaldehyde!



I struck another match, and as it blazed against the smothering darkness I saw the coffin, a new one, against one wall. A horrible premonition laid strangling fingers on my throat then, but I forced myself forward and flung the casket open. The full impact of the horror smote me then and my last doubts and reservations crumbled away in my instinctive revulsion.

Stretched out in that casket lay the body of Professor Grenfel. That wasn't all. The clothing had been cut away, the torso and abdomen laid bare, and a gaping gash yawned from his sternum down, its horrible discolored lips curling over an empty cavity from which his vital organs had been removed!

I had to turn away then because I was physically sick. But as I staggered back through the door, the sickness in my brain made the mere physical reaction inconsequential. I had read enough of savage practices to know what sort of grisly traffic the evisceration of a dead body might mean. And this mad girl had butchered the body of her own father! And she had my fiancé with her—if Lilly had not already been delivered into the hands of a lust-mad killer.

I staggered back to my car and stood leaning on the door. Anger had mounted to bloodlust in me and I swore a terrible vow.

"If I find her, I'll strangle her. She's not human, she's got no right to live!"

But a second thought sobered me. Faustine must be insane. It was the fiend behind her madness, behind all the rest of this horror that I should think of. And who was that fiend but Macklin? He was the cancer, the seat of all the vile corruption that had poisoned the community and led finally to ghastly murder. He was the one I must deal with!

Now that I had a definite purpose, it steadied me a little. I reached the tall, ivy-covered Langburn house with a somewhat better grip on my nerves. The only light I saw was downstairs in the library. I was ushered in by one of Macklin's ugly black servants. I found the explorer seated under a

reading lamp with a book on his knees.

He was a small, compact, wiry man with a tanned, lean face, close-clipped black mustache and dark eyes that seemed to sparkle always with some sly, inner mockery. He rose and greeted me politely, then sat down again.

"Anything I can do for you, Payne?"

"You can tell me where Lilly is," I growled.

"But I told you that she left with Faustine Grenfel."

"But where are they now?"

He shrugged. "How should I know?"

Something was boiling up dangerously in my throat; I held it back as best I could, but my voice quavered when I answered.

"Because you're the devil at the bottom of all this madness, this vile, unnatural death-obsession, this—"

His laughter interrupted me. "My dear young man, a preoccupation with the dead is the most natural thing in human nature. In Africa, for instance, the natives bring their dead back to life and mingle with them familiarly—even dance with them."

"And that's the sort of rot you've been poisoning these students' minds with?" I grated. "Well, you went too far when you carried things to the point of murder!"

"Murder?" His eyebrows lifted. "Whose murder?"

"Porter Bruton's, for one," I said. "You didn't know it, but you were seen there in the graveyard last night when you put some sort of hypnotic spell on him. And he went into the oven today—alive!"

**T**HAT jarred him for a moment. He paled slightly, but quickly recovered his composure and laughed.

"What an idea! However, if he did go into the flames alive, he's unquestionably dead now."

"He screamed," I said, "when the flames hit him, screamed that he would come back."

"Really? I'm sorry I didn't hear it."

His words stunned me. There was a



curtained alcove behind his chair, and the light striking the plum-colored drapes, glanced off on his bony cheeks, giving them a cadaverous hue. Was this man human who had no human feelings? It seemed that God would strike a man dead for less than this, and so deep was that conviction, that when the curtains behind him stirred as to a faint breeze, I gave a violent start.

"Why do you jump?" The mocking smile was still on his lips.

"The curtain behind you moved," I whispered.

"The ghost of Porter Bruton probably," he jeered. "But no, though the dead return, the bodies of those who burn don't walk—"

His words broke off. He didn't jump or start, he simply went cautiously still. At the same instant it reached my nostrils, too—an odor in which burnt cloth was mingled with scorched flesh and hair—and my eyes riveted to the gap where the curtain failed to meet.

I didn't believe what I saw at first. It was so strangely still, so like what a fevered brain might build out of air and terror. For the thing in the darkness there had Porter Bruton's face, though now it was livid and blackened, with puffed greenish lips peeled back from grinning teeth and an ooze of some blood-streaked substance rolling down from raw eye sockets over flame blasted cheeks. It had a body, too, a shrunken frame from which hung the charred remnants of a black suit. The flesh that shone through was like the face, and a clawed hand was like a blackened root dragged from a fire.

Macklin's face was drained of blood now, and as he watched the horror mirrored in mine, he seemed too paralyzed to move. At the same instant it seemed to dawn on my dazed senses that the thing was real, but before I could move, or even scream, the blackened hand shot out to the light cord, and the smothering dark came down as the horror, shining with a greenish glow in the blackness, leaped. From Macklin burst a scream.

What I might have done, if left to my own inclinations, I don't know.

But at that moment the door behind me opened and the black man, summoned by Macklin's scream, came pounding in. I was the first object with which he collided, and taking me for the attacker, he flung his massive arms around me. I fought, pummeling his black face and body as I tried to wriggle free. But in my weakened condition I was like a child in a boa's coils, and suddenly, with Macklin's screams still blasting in my ears, I felt myself lifted bodily and hurled.

**I** STRUCK the glass of a window, and its crash echoed about me as the ground slammed up to smash consciousness from my brain.

I came to my senses, feeling like something that has crawled out from under a steam roller, and sat up. I was a mass of cuts and aching bruises, but my mind was beginning to clear. My first thought was to wonder if this was another stage trick of Macklin's, a ruse to divert suspicion from himself.

I got up, and with joints creaking, stumbled toward the shattered window through which faint light was again shining. I stared in and my senses reeled. In the circular pool of yellow light cast by the lamp, Major Dennis Macklin lay asprawl. Dead? He was worse than dead. His face, his hands, the whole upper part of his torso, from which it seemed invisible flames had eaten the clothing away, was a raw, blistered, viscous mass of cooked skin and tissue, which, while I looked seemed still to boil and crawl as with a living corruption.

"Burned alive," I muttered hoarsely. "Burned alive, like Porter Bruton, but not by any earthly fire."

There was no one else in the room, but the air reeked with an acrid smell like brimstone.

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## CHAPTER IV

### *Mistress of the Dying*

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**T**URNING, I ran toward my car. Whatever that revenant shape had been, I knew now that the Negro's



entrance was all that had saved me from Mackin's fate, knew what grisly doom awaited me when next I faced that apparition out of hell. Yet my mind did not dwell on that. The need to find Lilly swallowed up all other considerations.

But where to go, where to look for her? Instinctively I piloted my car back toward Faustine Grenfel's house, and this time, a block away, I saw a light. Pulling into the curb, I parked and sneaked up the rest of the way on foot. There was a light in the front and one in the back, and I stole up behind a trellis and peered into the living room.

A swift wave of relief swept over me, for Lilly was there, unharmed, seated on a divan under a bridge lamp. But the next instant a chill of apprehension crept into my blood. It was the queer look on her face, as leaning forward, with the light falling softly on her brown hair and creamy skin, she was staring at something in her lap, staring with a weird absorption at what I now saw was a photograph of Porter Bruton!

I turned and made for the front door, rushing straight in without knocking. Lilly sprang to her feet with a gasp, and I saw her drop the photograph with a furtive movement at the end of the divan. Then with a quick and patently false smile, she came toward me.

"Why, Willis, you startled me—"

I reached out, gripped her shoulders, and I didn't smile back.

"What are you doing here?" I demanded.

"Why," she stammered, "just waiting for Faustine to come in."

Why this fear of me, this evasiveness? Suddenly I noticed that one of her small hands was crushing tightly something which she seemed to be trying to conceal.

"What's that?" I rasped, and grabbing her hand, I loosened the tight-clenched fingers and pulled out a ball of wadded paper.

"Willis, please!" She tried to snatch it back.

But I swung toward the light, smoothed it out and felt the scalp

crawl on my neck as I read:

Faustine:

If I appear to die, know that I will not be dead. But do not let them cremate me. If they attempt that, you must come to the service, and if by the time it is over I have not revived, prevent their burning me at all cost. Keep my secret and do not fail me.

Porter.

I whirled back on Lilly who had sunk down weakly on the divan.

"Where did you get this?"

Terror was in her eyes and her voice came faint and hoarse from her throat.

"He mailed it to Faustine—last night before he took the poison. And oh, Willis, he did come back! I saw him. I've been looking at his picture and I know it was he—his face, there at the window at the Clover Club. And Willy Richmond went out to see, and he didn't come back—" her voice broke on a sob and her brown eyes were pleading. "But, Willis, you didn't have anything to do with it, did you? Faustine said—"

"That lying hell-cat!" I burst out. "What's she told you? Where is she now?"

**I** PAUSED. A sound had reached my ears. It came from the dark hall, a low monotonous murmur, a woman's voice muttering weirdly in coaxing, reiterated commands, and a man's voice replying in a throaty half-whimper—an eerie mumbling like something forced by necromancy from dead lips.

Instantly I turned, but Lilly clung to me.

"Willis, Willis, you mustn't—"

"Mustn't I?" I grated, rudely shoving her back. "You stay here and keep quiet or I'll tear the roof off this damned place!"

Then I strode softly into the hall and crept toward the door of Faustine's bedroom, from which the queer sounds were coming. Stooping, I applied my eye to the keyhole, and though my range of vision was limited, what I saw was enough to curdle my blood and conjure visions of the witches who dragged the dying from battlefields to use them as horrible



mediums of communication with the dead.

For on Faustine's bed, stretched out as if for burial, lay the bulky form of Sam Fleagle, utterly still. His flabby face, the color of a spoiled oyster, was beaded with death sweat, his glassy eyes staring unseeingly at the she-monster poised above him.

Crouched there in loose negligee, Faustine was like a feeding cat. Her vampire-face was thrust forward and down, small teeth gleaming as she articulated words in a husky, commanding whisper.

"Speak, speak, I tell you! What did he say? What did Porter Bruton say? Speak up, or I'll beat you black and blue while you lie there helpless."

And feebly, the thick blubbery lips of Sam Fleagle began to move. "Don't . . . leave me in peace . . . I don't know . . ."

"You do know!" Sudden savagery blazed in her. Her clawed white hands shot forward, long pointed fingers burying themselves in the gray folds of his throat, while a look of fiendish hate transfixed her painted face. "Tell me, or I'll—"

She got no further because I had stood all I could stand. Kicking the door open, I lunged in.

She whirled, agile as a startled cat, and sprang to meet my rush. White arms shot round me and all the lean, warm, supple strength of her body was exerted against me. The smile that wreathed her face was horrible in its wild, fawning appeal, as her hot breath laved my face in frantic whispers.

"Willis, Willis, go out! You can't interrupt—you mustn't, not now. I'll explain—later—but leave now. Go back to Lilly. Don't leave her alone."

Lilly's name coming from her lips broke my spell of madness. I pushed her off, grabbed her thin shoulders instead of her throat, and shook her.

"You won't trick me, you hell-cat!" I snarled. "What have you done to Sam? Poisoned him like you and Macklin poisoned Porter Bruton?"

"But I didn't, I didn't! Oh, Willis, give me time to explain. Go back to Lilly now, and—"

"I'll go when I've choked the truth out of you, when I've—"

**S**UDDENLY I stiffened. From the front of the house had come a shrill scream—Lilly's voice in a pulsing jet of terror. Releasing Faustine, I whirled, saw instantly that the front of the house was dark now, heard other sounds mingled with Lilly's cries. Staggering toward the door, my nostrils caught a whiff of that brimstone odor, and as I lurched into the hall, a glowing blotch that seemed wreathed in greenish flame catapulted from the living room into the hall, bearing a wild, screaming bundle that I knew to be my fiancée.

"Lilly, I'm coming!" I yelled and charged toward the monstrous thing now vanishing through the front door of the house.

I reached it before the screen had time to slam back on his exit, but my rashness cost me dearly. As I shot through, I saw too late the black shapes lurking at the porch edges rise and surge toward me.

The next moment I met the impact of their giant, muscular bodies, slammed my fists madly at a swimming nightmare of black gargoyle faces, and then collapsed weakly as a huge fist, like a club covered with brine-soaked leather, smashed against my temple in a blow that hammered me into oblivion.

I woke up in darkness to find myself the core of what seemed to be a bristling, tight-wrapped cocoon, and which proved to be a stout rope wound in galling coils about my body. I rolled over and saw a penciled line of light under a closed door. I made out a whitish bundle near me.

"Lilly?" I whispered hoarsely.

"I don't know where she is," it was Faustine Grenfel's voice that answered.

"Where are we?" I asked, recovering from my surprise.

"In your crematorium, in a closet off from the furnace room," she answered. "The black men brought us here."

My brain was a whirling confusion; I couldn't make sense out of anything, least of all why Faustine was here,



tied and imprisoned too.

"That's odd," I said, "because I thought the black men were your pals—yours and Macklin's. How do they happen to be working with this devil masquerading as Porter Bruton?"

"Masquerading?" she asked. "I wish I thought so. The Negroes don't. That's why they obey him in terror. They knew he was dead and burned, yet they saw him come back and kill their master. They don't understand a magic that terrible. I no longer have any influence over them at all."

"Then you admit you were Macklin's accomplice in whatever it was he did to Porter Bruton?"

"Of course. And I'll tell you why. Porter Bruton murdered my father!"

"Murdered your father?"

"Yes. Poisoned him with nitrobenzine, and when that didn't kill quickly enough, shoved him from the window."

"But I thought you were in love with Porter."

"So did he," she said. "And I was, until I began to suspect what he had done. You see, he wanted to steal Father's secret because he was in love with Lilly and hoped to win her from you."

"Yes," I said, "but what's that got to do with this madness you've been spreading among those crazed students?"

**F**AUSTINE sighed.

"Oh, they aren't crazed," she said. "They're just a lot of silly sheep; they'll come out of it. What I did was done to discover the witness to my father's murder. You see, I was the first one to rush up to the laboratory after he had fallen from the window and, as I reached the upper hall, someone—I couldn't identify him—went scuttling away from the keyhole. Later, when I suspected Porter of murdering Father and faking that note, I remembered the incident."

"So when Dennis Macklin came back and I told him, he suggested the scheme to find out who the witness to the murder had been. With his help, I treated those kids to a lot of faked witch-craft, and I got the boys I sus-

pected off one at a time, doped them with sodium amytal—you know it's used sometimes as a truth serum—and while they were half-conscious, questioned them until I found the one who had seen it.

"It turned out to be Willy Richmond. He'd seen the crime, but had been too scared of Porter to tell. We had already slipped Father's body out of the mausoleum and had had his vital organs chemically analyzed and found the nitrobenzine. But, of course, that wasn't proof enough."

"But once you had Richmond's confession, why didn't you go to the police?"

"The testimony of a spy at a keyhole," she said, "might not have sounded convincing to a jury. We were taking no chances with Porter's paying for that hellish crime. Once we had the proof, Dennis got him into the cemetery and delivered an ultimatum. Porter, of course, didn't know that I had helped get the proof. Dennis told him that he would give him the chance to kill himself—otherwise, he would stand trial for the crime. By killing himself he could save not only his own name, but his father would be spared the scandal. Porter agreed to take that way out."

"But what *did* he do?"

"I don't know," she said. "When I saw his face at that window tonight, I suspected some sort of trickery. That's why I lured Sam Fleagle off, drugged him and questioned him. I thought maybe he, and even you and Tom Carlin might have aided in some hoax. But I got nothing out of him. But Porter must have intended some trick, or he wouldn't have written me that note. Thinking I was still in love with him, he counted on me to interrupt that cremation—"

"Wait a minute!" I said. "It could have been done—granted that his father and Sam Fleagle were working with him. While Tom and I were taking you out, he could have crawled out of the coffin and substituted that body that was stolen from a pauper's grave last night. I suppose he figured that if you failed him, his father could still cause some scene to get us away."



Then later, of course, Sam Fleagle faked his voice to scare me—"

"But old Dr. Bruton," she interrupted, "can you believe that he would have—"

Her voice broke off as a sound from the outer room reached our ears. It was the opening and closing of a door, and then muffled voices, one which I recognized as Sam Fleagle's.

"You tricked me into it, lied to me. Now there's been murder, and by God, you'll answer—" Fleagle was growling.

Worming myself forward, I butted my head against the door. It must not have been closed tightly, for it swung open a few inches, and I stared out to see Sam Fleagle, wild-haired and with a dazed look from the drug Faustine had administered still in his eyes, holding old Dr. Bruton by the collar as a terrier might hold a rat.

"But I didn't know, Sam," Dr. Bruton was gasping. "I didn't know—"

"Sam!" I called. "Come here and get these ropes off me!"

The crematorium superintendent whirled, goggled a moment, then released old Bruton and started toward me. But he hadn't taken three steps when the door behind him swung open. Framed in its dark rectangle stood the grisly specter of Porter Bruton. Behind him loomed the shadowy forms and white-eyed faces of Macklin's witch-men.

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## CHAPTER V

### *Burning Doom*

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**S**AM had heard it, and he heeled round again, as the fiend followed by his fear-enslaved henchmen, stepped into the room. I saw him clearly then, and knew that there could no longer be any doubt that he was really Porter Bruton. I could see now that the burning and blackening was not real, being a skillful camouflage of colored putty, greasepaint, collodion, and phosphorescent paint to cause the glow. But there was no comfort in that. The fiend alive was

more terrible and dangerous than his ghost might have been.

With a curse, Sam Fleagle sprang at him. But quick as a flash, the murderer whirled, snatched from the hands of one of the witch-men a fire extinguisher, and leveled it at Sam's rushing figure. At a pressure of the plunger a white jet leaped out, caught Sam Fleagle in mid-rush, and as the murderous spray spurted against his face and chest, he fell back with the scream of a tortured animal, flailing his thick arms, stumbling, crumpling to the floor, a writhing, burning mass of agony.

Deliberately then the killer stepped nearer, aimed another blast at his shrieking victim, and at the same time I identified that acrid, brimstone smell and knew what had happened to Macklin, too. That fire extinguisher was loaded with sulphuric acid!

The stark brutality of the act had apparently stunned old Bruton, but now he came out of his daze, made a stumbling step toward his son.

"Porter, Porter," he quavered, "are you mad? When I was forced into helping you, it was only to save your life. And even though I suspected that your story that Grenfel's death was the accidental result of a struggle was a lie, my father's love could not deny you.

"I helped you fake death with that drug, and signed your death certificate. I guarded your body from observation, bribed this poor man you have just killed to help me substitute the stolen body for yours and later fake your cry from the flames. But you swore that once your life was saved, you'd leave and never come back. Is this my reward—this orgy of murder?"

Porter stared at him coldly, his travesty of a face twisted in a sneer.

"This orgy of murder, as you call it," he said, "was as necessary as the other. These people knew too much, and I couldn't leave tattling tongues behind me. But I'm nearly through now. I've got money and a car ready to carry me to the border, and most important of all, I've got locked in my head the secret that Grenfel died for.



In another land, under another name, that secret will make me the greatest scientist in the world. I'm perfectly safe, because I'm officially dead. And the only ones who knew my secret are dead, too—or soon will be. All but Lilly who shall go with me."

"My God! You won't take her?"

Porter Bruton leered. "She's drugged and safely hidden in a coffin in a certain locked mausoleum, waiting like the sleeping princess for me to come and carry her away. And don't think she won't go; she won't be able to help it. She'll stay with me, too, if it means drugging her for the rest of her life."

For a moment the old man stood aghast. Then a wild look came over his quivering face.

"You beast!" he shrilled. "I'll strangle you with my own hands!" And he sprang.

Agile as a bullfighter, Porter Bruton leaped aside, and as his father lurched past him, brutally slugged him with the fire extinguisher, coldly watched him crumple, twitching, to the floor.

**I** CURSED under my breath. Through it all I had been fighting with the coils of rope that bound me. But even the burst of savage strength which the revelation of Lilly's doom inspired, was not enough to free me. And now the monster turned to lock the door and bark a command at his black slaves, one of whom started toward the closet where Faustine and I lay helpless.

Rolling over on my back, I flung myself upright and with a desperate heave got my knees under me and straightened to my feet. But swaying there, I realized that I was still as helpless as ever. Then I thought of the switchboard on the left wall. Maybe if I could switch the lights off there would be some bare chance to escape in the confusion.

Blindly I lunged toward the switchboard, felt my head butt a handle, felt the blue flames crackle in my hair. But it wasn't the right switch; the lights stayed on. And now the big Negro sprang in and dragged me back.

I struggled, writhed, butted at him with my head, but it was no use. Flinging me over his shoulder, he carried me out and dumped me to the floor. There I lay, panting, staring up into Porter Bruton's leering face. Death was only moments away, I knew, and a fight was not even possible. Wildly I began pleading with him for Lilly.

It was futile. The deadly coldness of his eyes told me that, and when a sudden scraping sound on the cement floor caused me to fling my head around, I realized the doom that awaited me. One of the black men was dragging a coffin from the store-room!

Blind panic gripped me then. As the second Negro darted toward me I began to squirm and heave and pitch like a caterpillar in an ant bed. Now the other Negro joined his mate, and the two of them laid hands on me. But my last buckling leap had thrown me across the corpse of Sam Fleagle, and my hands, behind my back, seized his coat and clung.

The acid with which his clothes and corroding tissues were saturated burned into my wrists and arms. But I didn't mind; it was the thought of that coffin, of where it was going that drove my brain toward madness.

But Bruton grew impatient.

"Get him in there! We've got the girl to deal with, too!" he growled, and striding over, he slammed the empty extinguisher against my head.

It didn't knock me out. I don't believe anything could have knocked me out then. But it stunned me for the moment necessary for them to lift me and fling me into the coffin. When they slammed the lid tight and I felt myself lifted, felt the carriage moving beneath me and suddenly heard the motors begin to sing their weird tune and heard the flames blast into the oven chamber, I tasted hell.

Then I felt it—the first blast of that terrific heat. Bruton had started the fire before shoving me in, wanting to hear me scream, I suppose. And scream I did. Yet even then, the thought of Lilly, lying drugged at the mercy of this fiend, was more agoniz-



ing than my own fate.

The carriage slammed against the front of the oven; the awful heat, blasting through the coffin walls, set the blood in my head boiling. I shrieked, beat my head against the coffin lid; and as I heaved up, the coils of the rope, eaten through by the acid, parted. My arms came free—came free too late to help me, adding instead a final fillip of ironic horror to what seemed my certain doom.

**B**UT something had happened. That last heave must have jolted the coffin sideward, for hands lifted it to steady it, and in the brief instant in which I felt them tense for the forward shove, I flung my whole weight sideward and slammed head and shoulders against the coffin's side.

It tottered—and fell! Crashing edgewise to the floor, the catches of the lid came loose, and I was scrambling out, flinging myself upright to meet Porter Bruton's charge.

He swung at me with the fire extinguisher, but I ducked the blow. My weight thudded against him and my clawed hands caught his throat. He fell backward and I went down on top of him. Before the Negroes could spring to his aid, I bellowed into his purpling face.

"Keep them off or I'll strangle you before they can drag me away!" I shouted.

I let up a little on the throat pressure, and he gasped a command that caused the blacks to freeze in their tracks. Then he snarled at me.

"All right, kill me! But they'll kill you then, and Faustine, too. And what will happen to Lilly? Think of her, waking up buried alive in that coffin in the locked mausoleum!"

My hands, my whole rage-quivering body went rigid at that. It was the most horrible moment of all. To have miraculously escaped the flames, only to be faced with this ghastly choice! But then, was there a choice? Even if Lilly died in the shrieking delirium of the buried-alive, it was better than a lifetime of drugged slavery to this fiend.

With an animal snarl, I fell on him

again, and this time my hate-steeled fingers sank to the bone in his throat. He screamed, and the black men sprang. I ducked, pressed harder, knowing it was the end, knowing I must kill before I was killed.

But before they reached me, four rapid blasts of gunfire punctuated the din, followed by high-pitched howls of pain. I straightened, saw with incredulous eyes the witch-men groveling on the floor while Tom Carlin, smoking gun in hand, was lunging toward me.

"Tom, how did you happen—" I began.

"The lights," he said. "Didn't you mean to signal?"

"Lights?" I blinked. "I tried to cut them off, but—"

"But you got the wrong switch," Tom said with a flash of sudden understanding. "You idiot, I'm talking about the lights that flood the grounds and building. I saw them on and came to see what was wrong."

Things got a little shaky and confused after that, but one thought was still dominant in my mind. Tom told me later how I stumbled up with a mumbled, "Get Faustine to explain—" and staggered out.

I'm glad no one saw me then, for I must have looked the part of a mad ghoul, roving through the dark graveyard with an axe I had picked up somewhere. But I found what I sought—in the Grenfel vault—and when I smashed the coffin-lock and lifted her limp body out and held it against me to feel that faint heart-beat, sanity seemed to return to me for the first time in hours.

**S**HE came out of it all right, though we never learned exactly what he had used to drug her—perhaps the same drug he used on himself. Dr. Bruton hinted of some African drug which Porter had mixed with other chemicals. But Porter never told because he took cyanide before he could be brought to trial—and this time he really died.

Old Dr. Bruton was excused for his part in the plot. He had not dreamed,  
(Concluded on Page 113)





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### APPLE OF DEATH

ON a farm near High Point, New Jersey, a young man, William Smith, was walking down a lane which ran beside an apple orchard. A field-stone fence separated the orchard from the lane.

On the opposite side was an open field where a young colt was gallivanting beside its mother. The young man smiled as he watched the antics of the colt, but continued walking along the lane.

Suddenly something landed in front of him with a splashing thud. Smith stopped short and looked down. A large, soft apple had dropped and smashed not two feet before him. But then his eyes glanced at an object just beyond the apple. In terror, Smith backed away. There in his path, where he would have stepped without looking, was a copperhead snake, one of the most deadly reptiles in America. Its bite means death unless serum is obtained at once.

Smith grabbed a stick and killed the copperhead. It was three feet long. Then he began to realize what had happened. The falling apple had warned him just in time. He looked up to see what tree it had fallen from, but to his surprise the nearest apple tree was 30 feet away. The only way he could account for it was that the apple must have dropped on an inclined stone and glanced off to the lane—one chance in a million.

He appreciated his lucky break as he went back to the farm house to tell of his experience.

The old farmer smiled strangely.

"Son," he said, "you are not the only person who has escaped a copperhead by a falling apple. My own niece had the same experience just two years ago while playing behind the barn. Her father, my brother, hated snakes. His death was indirectly caused by them. In clearing out a nest of copperheads in the orchard, he fell on a boulder and hurt his spine. Until his death it was almost a mania with him to wipe out all the copperheads in this section of Jersey. Maybe his great will still lives. I have often thought so."

### THE STRANGE RESCUER

A YOUNG college girl of New York State, upon her return to America having been in the *Athenia* sinking, told a group of friends of her strange experience when she plunged into the water before being dragged into a life boat. She does not wish her name made known to the public—but this is her true story:

"When the lights went out after the explosion, I tried to find my way to the deck. I stumbled and bruised my arms badly, but finally I reached the railing and tried to slide down a rope into a lowering life boat. But my bruised arms were too weak and I plunged into the sea.

"Although I can swim, I was frantic in the cold water—and I felt my strength waning as I tried to reach a life boat a short distance away. In anguish I called for my father to help me, forgetting that he was

*(Continued on page 106)*





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It is seldom that any one becomes a writer until he (or she) has been writing for some time. That is why so many authors and writers spring up out of the newspaper business. The day-to-day necessity of writing—of gathering material about which to write—develops their talent, their insight, their background and their confidence as nothing else could.

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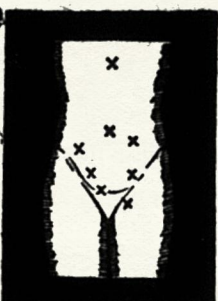


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(Continued from page 104)

dead—but during my childhood when I had  
bad dreams at night, I used to call for dad.  
My mother had died when I was a baby.

"So instinctively I called: 'DAD!' And  
then I must have fainted for I remembered  
no more until I came to in the life boat.  
An elderly lady was holding me in her arms  
and patting my shoulder to comfort me.

"How did I manage to reach the boat?"  
I said as I sat up. 'I thought I was a  
goner.'

"The woman answered. 'The man in back  
of you carried you to the boat and we pulled  
you up.'

"I turned around to thank the man, but  
saw no man there at all—only several  
women.

"I don't see any man,' I said to the  
woman who also turned and looked.

"That's strange,' said she. 'I noticed him  
plainly by the large checked coat he wore,  
and his white hair. I thought he had  
climbed in. I even noticed a scar across his  
brow.'

"I gasped! This description fit my dead  
father perfectly — his distinguished white  
hair—his favorite checked coat—and the  
scar he had carried since the World War  
until his death one year ago.

"Was it coincidence that the man who  
saved me and disappeared—resembled my  
father? I don't know—but somehow I want  
to believe that it WAS dad. The thought  
gives me a strange happiness."

## THE VULTURES OF RIO

**T**HERE is something uncanny about vul-  
tures, those monster buzzards that feast  
upon dead bodies of man or beast. But a  
vulture's eyes are most fascinating and in-  
teresting. They seem human.

Willard Murray, who recently returned to  
America from Rio de Janeiro, where vul-  
tures are protected by the government, tells  
a weird experience which seems to prove  
that vultures are more than mere birds as  
big as men.

One evening, Murray found a young vul-  
ture lying in the road near his home in Bra-  
zil. The bird uttered a strange cry and  
looked up at the American as though ask-  
ing for help. Murray picked up the crea-  
ture and noticed that a piece of barbed wire  
was caught in the bird's wing and one sharp  
edge was sunk into the leg. He carried the  
bird to his cellar where he was able to prop-  
erly remove the wire—and in a few days  
the bird was well. Before releasing it, he  
put a loose metal band around its leg.

Three years later, Murray was trying to  
get some photographs of strange formations  
in a swamp some miles beyond Rio de  
Janeiro; but in getting out of the swamp he  
lost his way—and suddenly he found him-  
self in quicksand. He tried to reach a small  
tree for support, but it was just inches away  
from his arm.

Death faced him. His strength was wan-  
ing as he struggled. Although he knew it  
was useless to call out in a lonely swamp,



he cried for help. The slime was up to his waist as he continued to sink with each movement.

He looked up. A huge vulture was circling overhead. He shuddered. These birds can sense death, he knew. But even as he thought it, a strange calm sensation came over him. In a momentary vision he was back in his cellar helping a wounded baby vulture—and then the vulture took on the form of a child.

His senses cleared as the bird swooped down close to his head. Instinctively he raised his arm—grabbed the vulture by the leg as it hovered over him.

It all happened so quickly. The heavy bird flapped its wings desperately. Murray held on.

Up—up—out of the quick-sand Murray rose. The vulture seemed to have the strength of a horse. He felt himself being dragged to a nearby bog. His strength gone, he let go and dropped to safety on solid ground.

(Continued on page 108)

## MYSTERY HEADLINERS

IN THE NEXT ISSUE

### THE DEAD WHO WALK A Baffling, Weird Novelet By RAY CUMMINGS

### THE MAKER OF IMMORTALITY A Novelet of Satan's Surgery By D. L. JAMES

### OFF WITH HIS HEAD A Novelet of Maniac Terror By JOE ARCHIBALD

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(Continued from page 107)

Recovering his breath, he looked up at a nearby tree. The big vulture peered down at him with strange beady eyes. On the bird's leg was a small metal band which Murray could plainly see as the vulture screamed, stood up slowly, and then with macabre dignity floated off into the murky sky.

Was this the same vulture Murray had saved three years ago? He is not sure—but he wants to believe it WAS.

## THE WRITING SPIDER

**P**EOPLE in Tennessee, especially near Knoxville, are well acquainted with "writing spiders"—those big two-inch yellowish insects that spin their webs in strange markings often resembling free-hand writing or penmanship flourishes. Sometimes actual letters are formed in the webs.

Anna Perry, of Tennessee, lived with her step-mother on a large estate. Her father had died some months previously and Anna, not able to warm up to her unaffectionate step-mother, was lonely. Her best friend was the aged gardener whom she really loved, for always he would advise her and comfort her—had done so for years.

Then came a cruel blow. The old gardener, John Olson, died suddenly—and Anna grieved as though he had been her own grandfather. She now felt more lonely than ever. About this time, her step-mother introduced her to a young man, Max Baker, who started making love to her. Before that, her step-mother had never let any man call on her.

More for companionship than love, Anna was attracted to Max—and finally she con-

# 13

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sented to marry him the following June. Great plans were made for the wedding—the step-mother favored the match.

But as the wedding day, which was also Anna's 21st birthday, approached, she began to have a change of heart. Something seemed to tell her that she was doing the wrong thing. If only old John Olson were alive. He could advise her, she knew.

The afternoon before the wedding, Anna went to the sun-house at the far corner of the garden to meditate. She could almost feel the presence of the old gardener. She felt a breeze pass her shoulder and as she turned, she noticed a large yellow spider spinning a web between two cedar posts. She watched the insect intently. Then suddenly she gasped. Plainly woven in the web were the letters "NO—XX."

She didn't know what XX meant, but instinctively she felt that the word NO—was a warning. She must not marry Max Baker. She became so obsessed with the decision, she ran to the house, packed a valise and went to a neighbor, begging the friend to hide her until she could contact her aunt up North. She would leave her step-mother's house for good.

Naturally there was great excitement at the wedding when Anna didn't show up. And Max Baker, angered, turned on the step-mother accusing her of double-crossing him. In hot words, the plot came out. Max Baker was a rotter. The step-mother had agreed to force Anna to marry Max who would give the step-mother half of the inheritance Anna was to get from her father's will on her 21st birthday. The step-mother had never told Anna about the will which the lawyer was holding for the girl to surprise her.

Later when Anna told her strange story of the spider and the message "NO—XX"; the lawyer shook his head and said: "Why, XX was the signature of old John Olson. He always signed his name that way because he could not read or write—the only words he knew were Yes and No."

## THE DOG OF DEATH

IT has been the policy of Horror-Scopes not to give the addresses of people whose true stories are related in this de-

(Continued on page 110)

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(Continued from page 109)

partment. And we have also reserved the right to edit such stories to make them clearer and more easily read.

But now and then we get letters from skeptical readers, questioning the veracity of certain stories, inferring that we do not have the actual data on these strange cases. But it is only natural for some people to find it hard to believe that "truth is stranger than fiction."

So for the sake of these doubting readers, we will publish, now and then, the full name and address of the person who experienced the story, and make no editorial changes whatsoever.

The following story, which has been verified, was sent to us by Mrs. J. F. Past of R. F. D. No. 3, Asheville, N. C. It is presented exactly as written in an unsolicited letter from Mrs. Past. We have not changed one word of it. We want to thank Mrs. Past for volunteering this story. Here it is:

I noticed with interest a small article in Horror-Scopes about animals sensing disaster and danger. I would like to give an experience which recently happened in my family, if I may.

I had a nephew of whom I was extremely fond. He had always lived with us, and so naturally we were very foolish about him. Some years back, I came into possession of a fine Spitz puppy which I raised, and we all played with him from the time he was small. All except my nephew. For the dog always seemed to avoid him for some reason. No matter how he tried to make friends, the dog was never friendly. It would avoid my nephew at all times.

We never allowed the dog in the house at all, having kept him outside all his life. He was rather hard to coax inside. One night I visited my mother who lived very near my home. We stayed until about 10:30 and when we started to leave we found the dog cowering just outside the door. He ran by us into the house and back under the piano and hid. His eyes looked fearful and his tail was tucked down. He was very scared and upset. We tried to coax him out, but he would not move. We all thought it was very strange—so mother decided to

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leave him in the house that night. I went straight home and to bed.

At eleven o'clock, a message came that my nephew had been hurt and was calling for me at the hospital. I rushed there at once and found that he had just died. He had been murdered that evening—the murder having occurred at 10:30, the exact time that the dog ran cowering into the house.

## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

To Chakra:

What is the so-called "candle conversation" with ghosts that I have heard certain psychics tell about?

WILSON GREEVES

Dear Mr. Greeves: Candle conversation is an age old means of getting ghosts to give messages to the living by means of candles. A group of people assemble in a haunted house or tomb where ghosts have been reported. Twenty-six candles are lighted on a large table or board, and beneath each candle is a letter of the alphabet. Then the ghosts are asked to put out one candle at a time to spell out words. As soon as one candle is put out, it is lighted again so the letter can be used over again, but words are recorded as they go along. Sometimes fewer candles are used, with questions written under each candle for ghosts to answer. It had long been believed that ghosts can put out candles more easily than any other manifestation. If there is a haunted house in your town, why not arrange a candle conversation party some night from midnight to 3 A. M. and see if you can get a message? This department would be glad to hear of any successful results. It has been reported that numerous candles have

(Concluded on page 112)

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For quick relief from itching of eczema, pimples, athlete's foot, scales, scabies, rashes and other externally caused skin troubles, use world-famous, cooling, antiseptic, liquid D. D. D. Prescription. Greaseless, stainless. Soothes irritation and quickly stops the most intense itching. 35c trial bottle proves it, or money back. Ask your druggist today for D. D. D. PRESCRIPTION.

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Work home or travel. Experience unnecessary. DETECTIVE Particulars FREE. Write NOW to GEORGE T. H. WAGNER, 2640 Broadway, N. Y.

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for pile suffering FREE! If you are troubled with itching, bleeding or protruding piles, write for a FREE sample of Page's Combination Pile Treatment and you may bless the day you read this. E. R. PAGE CO., Dept. 421-E2, Marshall, Mich., or Toronto (6) Ont., Canada.

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Go as rapidly as your time and abilities permit. Course equivalent to resident school work — prepares you for entrance to college. Standard H. S. texts supplied — Diploma. Credit for H. S. subjects already completed. Single subjects if desired. High school education is very important for advancement in business and industry and socially. Don't be handicapped all your life. Be a High School graduate. Start your training now. Free Bulletin on request. No obligation. American School, Dept. H-158, Drexel, at 58th, Chicago



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To harmlessly flush poisons and acid from kidneys and relieve irritation of bladder so that you can stop "getting up nights" get a 35 cent package of Gold Medal Haarlem Oil Capsules and take as directed. Other symptoms of kidney and bladder weaknesses may be scant, burning or smarting passage — backache — leg cramps — puffy eyes. Get the original **GOLD MEDAL**. Don't accept a substitute.

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**TREATMENT** mailed on **Free Trial**. If satisfied send \$1; if not, it's **Free**. Write me for your treatment today.

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## THE TRUTH ABOUT

# Stomach Ulcers

## Caused by Gastric Hyperacidity

**FREE** Booklet on simple home treatment. Many report they were saved from expensive operations. Learn all about this amazing inexpensive home treatment. Pain relieved from the start. No rigid or liquid diet. This valuable booklet sent **FREE** with information as to guaranteed trial offer. **TWIN CITY VON CO.**, Dept. 209, Saint Paul, Minnesota.—Adv.

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**ORIGINAL SONG POEMS** any subject. **YOU CAN** write the words for a song. Don't delay—send us your poem for immediate consideration.

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## Action-Packed Crime Stories in

## POPULAR DETECTIVE

10c AT ALL STANDS

(Continued from page 111)

been seen burning at midnight in Hitler's castle.

To Chakra:

Did any mystic predict the European war?

**DICK TOO HILL**

Dear Mr. Toohill: An astrologer from California last April predicted the European war would break out about August 31, 1939.

To Chakra:

I understand that the Pyramids in Egypt have foretold great dates of history in accordance with measurements of certain stairways. What is the date of the next great event?

**DORIS GOOD**

Dear Miss Good: At the time of this writing, the next epic date is November 27, 1939. Pyramid predictions of the past have been 95% correct.

To Chakra:

In most cases where ghosts have been seen by persons, what has been their apparel—or how were they dressed? Was it the burial costume?

**MILE DONOVAN**

Dear Mr. Donovan: Not always—usually dressed as they appeared in life, especially in some costume they liked best. Although some ghosts, reported seen by two different persons, were dressed differently—but in a costume more familiar to the person seeing the ghost. Evidently they dress for the occasion.

To Chakra:

Why are seances held in the dark? Isn't it because mediums are afraid of being revealed as frauds?

**MARY DALE**

Dear Miss Dale: Not always. It is because light disperses ectoplasm. True mediums will consent to infra-red photographs of seance activity where pictures can be taken in the dark. If your medium will not consent—then dismiss him as a fraud.

**CHAKRA.**

Read Our Companion  
Magazines of Science  
Fiction Thrills

## THRILLING WONDER STORIES

and

## STARTLING STORIES

EACH **15c** AT ALL STANDS



(Concluded from Page 103)

And Porter Bruton may have deduced himself into believing it, and that he knew the secret, too. But that's not the point. The point is that if you can't quit thinking about it, you'd better get out of the business I'm in. So it's pretty likely that I'll sell out my interest to Tom Carlin, and try my hand at something else.

## IN

THRILLING  
MYSTERY

**EVERY ISSUE**

**SEND ONLY \$1.00 DEPOSIT** on each tire ordered. (\$3.00 on each Truck Tire.) We ship balloons C. O. D. Deduct 5 per cent if cash is sent in full with order. To fill order promptly we may substitute brands if necessary. **ALL TUBES BRAND NEW - GUARANTEED -**  
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**ORIGINAL POEMS, SONGS**  
for Publication and Radio  
and for submission to motion  
picture, record and trans-  
cription markets.

**Westmore Music Corporation, Dept. 44F, Portland, Ore.**

**25,000,000** HOUSEWIVES ARE WAITING  
FOR THE *Superlux* **CLEANER**



**Makes Mopping and Wall Cleaning Easy**  
At last, a discovery that supplants the old-fashioned type of cloth, fiber and rubber sponge with the amazing new, practical du Pont Cellulose Sponge that holds 80 times its weight in water. So soft, wet, it cannot scratch or mar delicate surfaces. Can be sterilized by boiling. The new Superlux Cleaner with its unique mechanical wringing feature, keeps housewives' hands away from dirty water. Its light in weight and easy to operate Removable head is perfect for window and car washing.

**AGENTS!** Housewives buy on one minute demonstration. Make big money supplying them. Write today for full particulars and learn how you can get your mop free for demonstrating purposes by helping introduce it to others.

**THE LUX COMPANY** Dept. M-59, Portland, Ind.

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Write for free folder explaining above and my easy-to-take palliative home treatment used in aiding hundreds of cases in past 80 years. Glowing praise from every state in the U.S.A. **Dr. PADDOCK**, Box 5805, Desk T, Kansas City, Mo.

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THIS FINE SUIT—**



**Will You Wear It and Show It to Friends?**  
I need a reliable man in your town to wear a fine, made-to-measure, all-wool DEMONSTRATING SUIT—advertise my famous Union clothing—and take orders. You can make up to \$12.00 in a day. My line contains over 180 quality woollens, all sensational values, guaranteed. You need no experience or money. Supply everything, including FREE of cost. Write me today for FREE details. **W. J. GRAVES, STONE-  
FIELD CORP., 1300 W. Harrison Street, Dept. S-977,  
Chicago, Illinois.**



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**GRANDPARENTS, PARENTS, CHILDREN, AGES 1-75  
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This amazing policy was created after our actuaries found that if all members of the family were insured in one policy, we could save enough on policy costs, clerical costs, mail, stamps, etc., to materially reduce insurance costs. Further savings are made by eliminating agents who often get up to 50% of the premiums . . . savings are also made by eliminating medical examination fees.

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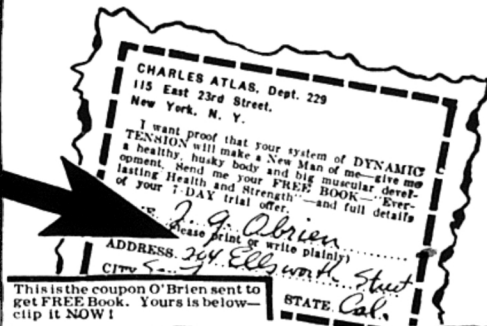
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# HE Mailed This Coupon

**J. G. O'BRIEN**  
Atlas Champion  
Cup Winner

This is an ordinary snapshot of one of Charles Atlas' California pupils.



## ...and Here's the Handsome Prize-Winning Body I Gave Him!

**J.** G. O'BRIEN saw my coupon. He clipped and mailed it. He got my free book and followed my instructions. He became a New Man—and also won one of my Atlas-Champion, Sterling Silver Cups for his physical improvement. NOW read what he says:

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### Let Me Prove I Can Make You a New Man

Would you like to have a handsome build — greater physical development — a strong, muscular body? Then listen to this:

I, myself was once a skinny weakling of 97 lbs. I didn't know what real health or strength were. I was afraid to fight, ashamed to be seen in a swimming suit.

Then I discovered the secret

that changed me into "The World's Most Perfectly Developed Man," the title I won twice and have held ever since, against all comers. My secret is **Dynamic Tension**. It is a natural method. Its purpose is not only to give you the powerful, rippling muscles you'd like to see in your own mirror, but also for those whose systems are sluggish from lack of proper exercise to help them tone up their entire body, inside and out.

### Accept My 7-Day Trial Offer

Do you want a better build? Are you dissatisfied with your present physical development? All I ask is a 7-DAY TRIAL. Just one week! In even that short time you will notice your chest hardening and filling out with solid muscle — or the 7-Day

Trial costs you nothing. Surely this is proof that by continuing with my "Dynamic Tension" method I will make you a **New Man**—give you bodily power and drive, and put you in magnificent physical condition which wins you the envy and respect of everyone.

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Let me show you the results produced for other men! I'll send you FREE my famous book, "Everlasting Health and Strength." It shows actual photos. Write your name and address carefully on coupon. Mail to me personally today. I'll rush your free copy to you AT ONCE! Charles Atlas, Dept. 771, 115 East 23rd Street, New York, N. Y.



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I want the proof that your system of **Dynamic Tension** will help make me a **New Man**—give me a healthy, husky body and big muscle development. Send me your **FREE** book, "Everlasting Health and Strength," and full details about your 7-DAY Trial Offer.

Name .....  
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City..... State.....



# "Uncle Sam Helped make tobacco better than ever!"

...and Luckies have bought the 'cream' of the better-than-ever crops!" says Billie L. Branch, a tobacco auctioneer for 21 years.

Suppose you talked with this independent expert about Luckies:

**You:** "In recent years, you say, tobacco crops have been better than ever?"

**Mr. Branch:** "Yes, even though crops vary with weather conditions, new U. S. Government methods have worked wonders for farmers."

**You:** "Do Luckies buy this better kind of tobacco?"

**Mr. B:** "Yes, and they always have bought the choicer grades. That's why I've smoked Lucky

Strikes for the last 15 years."

**You:** "What do the other independent experts like you smoke?"

**Mr. B:** "Among the tobacco men I know, Luckies are by far the favorite!"

Try Luckies for a week. You'll find that the "Toasting" process makes them easy on your throat—because it takes out certain harsh throat irritants that are found in all tobacco.

You'll also find out why—**WITH MEN WHO KNOW TOBACCO BEST—IT'S LUCKIES 2 TO 1!**

Ollie Mangum of Rougemont, N. C., proudly shows Mr. Branch his new tobacco seedlings, raised with the help of U. S. Government experts.

Have you  
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lately?

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STRIKE**  
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