

THRILLING MYSTERY

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A THRILLING
PUBLICATION

FEATURING

THE CYCLOPS' EYE

A Colonel Crum Novelet

By JOHN H. KNOX

NIGHTMARE ISLAND

A Complete Weird Novelet

By H. H. STINSON

WINGS OF
THE BAT
By HENRY
KUTTNER

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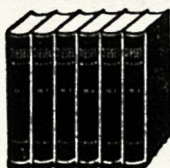
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THRILLING MYSTERY

Vol. XVI, No. 1

January, 1941

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A Complete Colonel Crum Novelet

THE CYCLOPS' EYE

By JOHN H. KNOX

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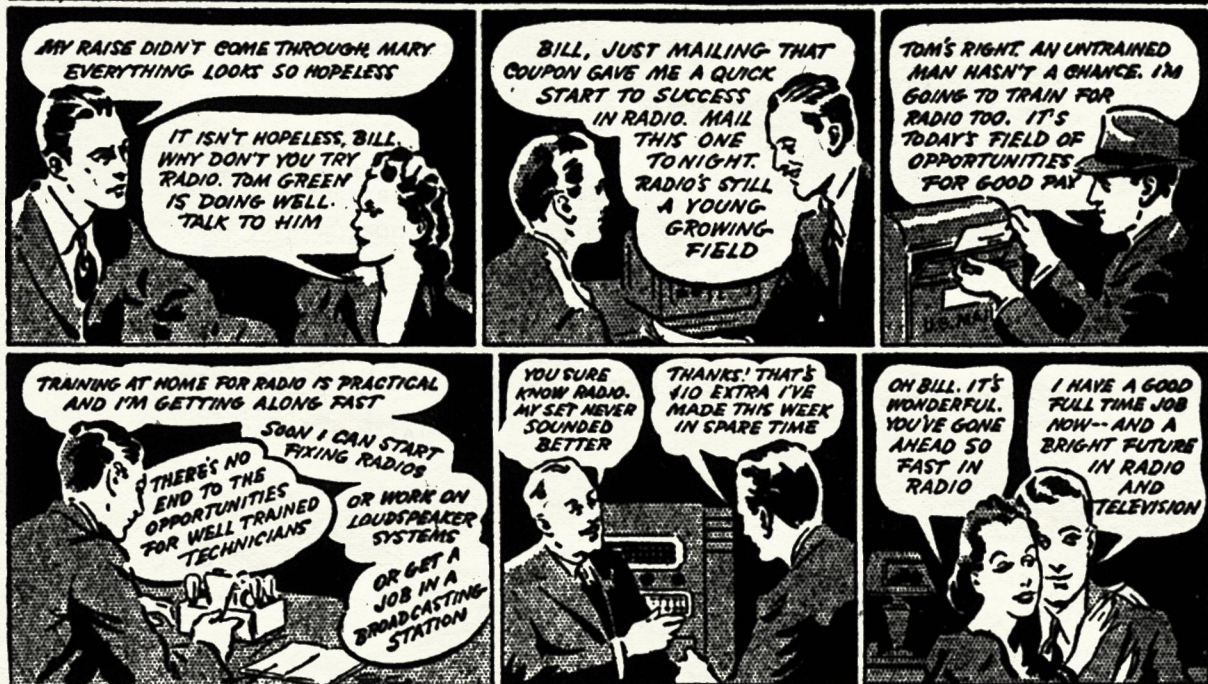
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HE THOUGHT HE WAS LICKED - THEN A TIP GOT BILL A GOOD JOB!



I Trained These Men



Chief Operator Broadcasting Station

Before I completed your lessons, I obtained my Radio Broadcast Operator's license and immediately joined Station WMPC where I am now Chief Operator.

HOLLIS F. HAYES
827 Madison St.
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I was working in a garage when I enrolled with N. R. I. I am now Radio service manager for the M— Furniture Co. for their four stores.

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146 Second St.
Fall River, Mass.



\$15 a Week Extra in Spare Time

I am doing spare time Radio work, and I am averaging from \$700 to \$850 a year. Those extra dollars mean so much—the difference between just barely getting by and living comfortably.

JOHN WASHKO
97 New Cranberry
Hazleton, Penna.



\$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.

ARLIE J. FROEHNER
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Goose Creek, Texas.



THIS BOOK has shown hundreds how to MAKE MORE MONEY

I WILL TRAIN YOU AT HOME in your spare time for a GOOD JOB IN RADIO

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

Radio broadcasting stations employ operators, technicians. Radio manufacturers employ testers, inspectors, servicemen in good-pay jobs. Radio jobbers, dealers, employ installation and servicemen. 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.

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The day you enroll, I start sending you Extra Money Job Sheets—start showing you how to do Radio repair jobs. Throughout your Course I send plans and directions which have helped many make \$5 to \$10 a week

extra 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. YOU ALSO GET 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.

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By **CHAKRA**

Famous Mystic

Strange stories will always be popular, especially when these strange stories are true. The person who has a number of odd and mystifying stories at his fingertip will always be the center of attraction in any conversation.

The purpose of this department is to furnish such entertainment. It presents true stories of strange happenings gathered from all corners of the earth and authenticated by reliable persons.

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Send in Coupon on Page 112

THE CAT ON YUKON HILL

"STRANGE are the eyes of a cat," so goes the old saying—but perhaps the strangest cat story ever reported is the one recently verified by a correspondent of this magazine.

In southern Alaska, some time ago, John Duncan, a gold miner, ran screaming into a saloon. He was bleeding badly. His face had been torn to ribbons, and his eyes were gouged—flesh was missing from his cheeks. As he fell in death, he cried:

"The cat on Yukon Hill."

No one seemed to know what he meant, but several friends investigated. From an old Indian, they learned that one moonlight night, a black object resembling a cat had been seen on an overhanging rock peering into a cave below. Its eyes reflected the glow of the moon like beads of phosphorus.

But it was not until months later that some explanation was found. Then a story was learned that a prospector, 25 years previously, had lived in that cave. His lone companion was a black cat.

One day, a friend had investigated when the old man had not been seen around, and as the friend had looked into the cave, he saw the cat eating the body of the dead prospector. Horrified and angered, the friend shot the cat.

The old man's partly consumed body was buried in the cave and the dead cat placed alongside of him. It was never known whether the cat had killed the man, or was eating the body after death.

Thus, had John Duncan, years later, while venturing near that eerie cave, been attacked by a Feline Phantom which came back from the dead to resume its ghastly feast of 25 years back?

No living cat had ever been reported in that vicinity from that day until the day of John Duncan's strange death!

THE DRUGGED FLIGHT

NARCOTICS are dangerous things. They sometimes release energy of the human brain which seems to carry an individual to a different realm of existence.

One of the strangest drug stories is told of an explorer in South America who encountered natives that had secret knowledge of the drug *curari*, which they used in various ways, even poisoning their arrows with one mixture which could cause instant death to a human foe or an animal.

One day a friendly native brought the explorer a wild pigeon, knowing that the explorer liked that kind of meat. The bird was still warm, having just been killed. Evidently the native had wrung its neck.

The explorer prepared a pigeon stew for himself and enjoyed it. But he no sooner sat down to smoke his pipe, when a strange sensation came over him. He seemed to be in a different state of being and he lost all realization of his own identity. He had a strange desire to fly.

He remembered distinctly leaving the ground and soaring above the trees. He

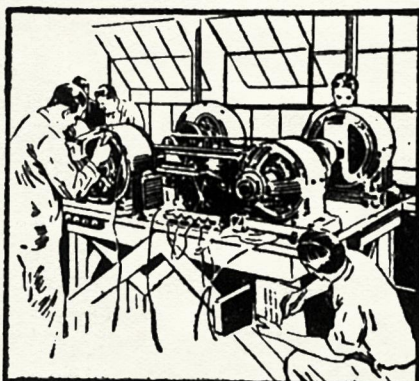
(Continued on page 109)

TRAIN FOR A BETTER JOB IN ELECTRICITY

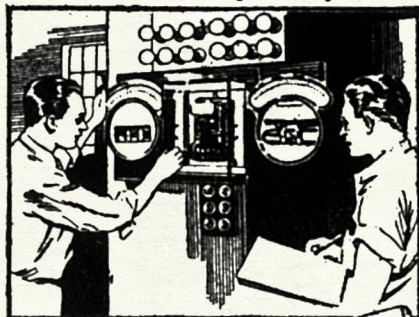
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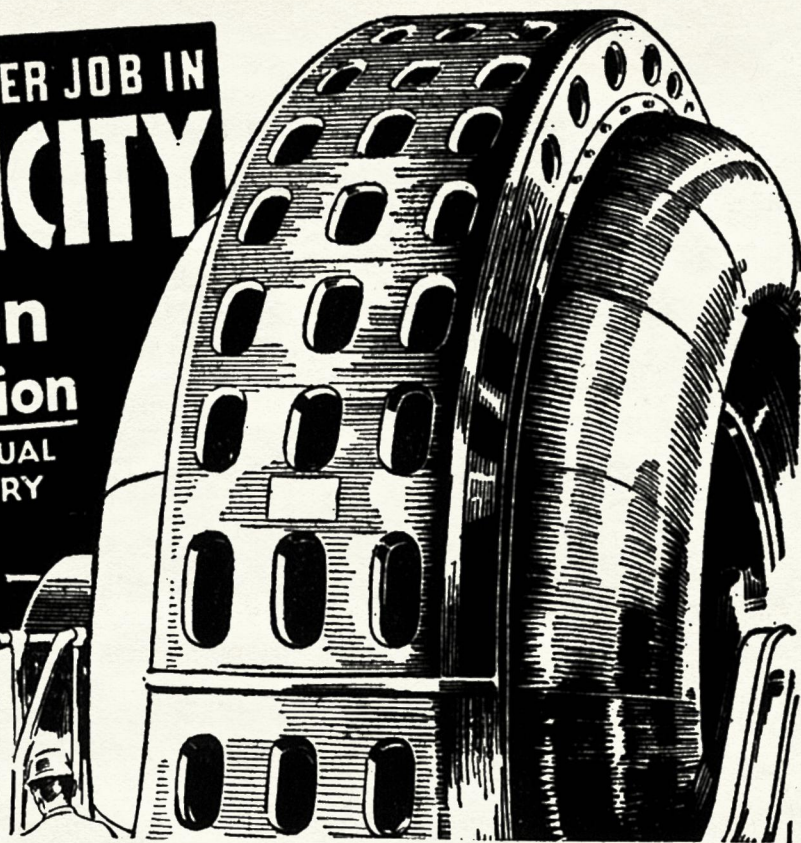
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Coyne
Electrical
School



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at a Fraction of the Expense**

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Now another change is taking place. An old established industry—an integral and important part of the nation's structure—in which millions of dollars change hands every year—is to thousands of cases being replaced by a truly astonishing, simple invention which does the work better—more reliably—AND AT A COST OFTEN AS LOW AS 2% OF WHAT IS ORDINARILY PAID! It has not required very long for men who have taken over the rights to this valuable invention to do a remarkable business, and show earnings which in these times are almost unheard of for the average man.

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Not a "Knick-Knack"—**

**It is a valuable, proved device which
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operators.**

Make no mistake—this is no novelty—no flimsy creation which the inventor hopes to put on the market. You probably have seen nothing like it yet—perhaps never because of the existence of such a device—yet it has already been used by corporations of outstanding prominence—by dealers of great corporations—by their branches—by doctors, newspapers, publishers—schools—hospitals, etc., etc., and by thousands of small business men. You don't have to convince a man that he should use an electric bulb to light his office instead of a gas lamp. Nor do you have to tell the same business man the idea that some day he may need something like this invention. The need is already there—the money is usually being spent right at that very moment—and the desirability of saving the greatest part of this expense is obvious immediately.

**Some of the Savings
You Can Show**

You walk into an office and put down before your prospect a letter from a sales organization showing that they did work in their own office for \$11 which formerly could have cost them over \$200. A building supply corporation pays our man \$70, whereas the bill could have been for \$1,000! An automobile dealer pays our representative \$15, whereas the expense could have been over \$1,000. A department store has expense of \$88.60, possible cost if done outside the business being well over \$1,000. And so on. We could not possibly list all cases here. These are just a few of the many actual cases which we place in your hands to work with. Practically every line of business and every section of the country is represented by these field reports which hammer across dazzling, convincing money-saving opportunities which hardly any business man can fail to understand.

**Profits Typical of
the Young, Growing Industry**

Going into this business is not like selling something offered in every grocery, drug or department store. For instance, when you take a \$7.50 order, \$5.85 can be your share. On \$1,500 worth of business, your share can be \$1,167.00. The very least you get as your part of every dollar's worth of business you do is 67 cents—on ten dollars' worth \$6.70, on a hundred dollars' worth \$67.00—no other words two thirds of every order you get is yours. Not only on the first order—but on repeat orders—and you have the opportunity of earning as even larger percentage.

**This Business Has
Nothing to Do With
House to House Canvassing**

Nor do you have to know anything about high-pressure selling. "Selling" is unnecessary in the ordinary sense of the word. Instead of hammering away at the customer and trying to "force" a sale, you make a dignified, business-like call, leave the installation—whatever size the customer says he will accept—at our risk, let the customer sell himself after the device is in and working. This does away with the need for pressure on the customer—it eliminates the handicap of trying to get the money before the customer has really convinced himself 100%. You simply tell what you offer, showing proof of success in that customer's particular line of business. Then leave the invention without a dollar down. It starts working at once. In a few short days, the installation should actually produce enough cash money to pay for the deal, with profits above the investment coming in at the same time. You then call back, collect your money. Nothing is so convincing as our offer to let results speak for themselves without risk to the customer! While others fail to get even a hearing, our men are making sales running into the hundreds. They have received the attention of the largest firms in the country, and sold to the smallest businesses by the thousands.

EARNINGS

One man in California earned over \$1,600 per month for three months—close to \$5,000 in 90 days' time. Another writes from Delaware—"Since I have been operating (just a little less than a month of actual selling) and not the full day at that, because I have been getting organized and had to spend at least half the day in the office; counting what I have sold outright and on trial, I have made just a little in excess of one thousand dollars profit for one month." A man working small city in N. Y. State made \$10,805 in 9 months. Texas man nets over \$300 in less than a week's time. Space does not permit mentioning here more than these few random cases. However, they are sufficient to indicate that the worthwhile future in this business is coupled with immediate earnings for the right kind of man. One man with us has already made over a thousand sales on which his earnings ran from \$5 to \$60 per sale and more. A great deal of this business was repeat business. Yet he had never done anything like this before coming with us. That is the kind of opportunity this business offers. The fact that this business has attracted to it such business men as former bankers, executives of businesses—men who demand only the highest type of opportunity and income—gives a fairly good picture of the kind of business this is. Our door is open, however, to the young man looking for the right field in which to make his start and develop his future.

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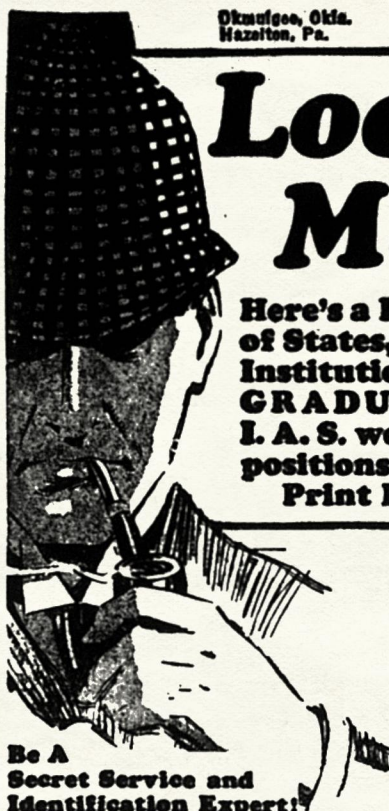
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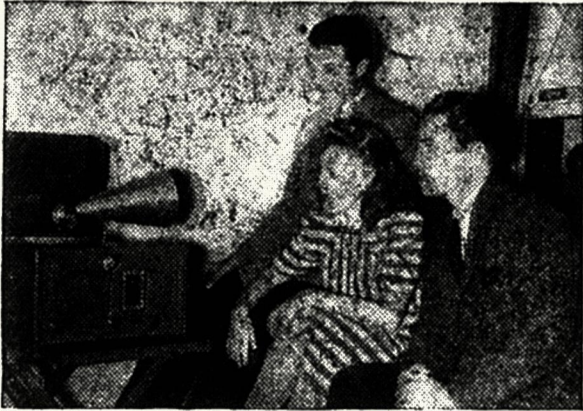
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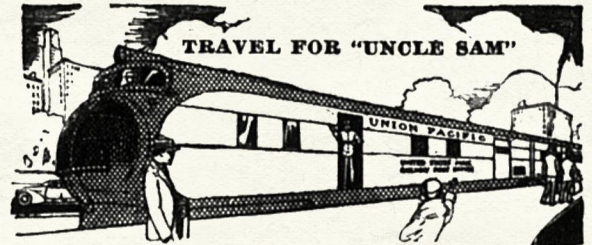


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CHAPTER I

Whom the Gods Would Destroy

INSIDE the big hotel there was gaiety. The banquet in honor of the famous party of mountain climbers was over and the regular Fourth of July dance was in full swing. But on the terrace, where the strains of *La Paloma* floated muted and dreamy, another world existed, a world of savage enchantment—the magic of an Arizona night.

The girl in the green gown stood rapt. Her glance, skimming the huddled lights of Eltonville, lingered where vast black battlements lifted a shadowy screen against the stars. When she spoke to the gangling, big-shouldered youth beside her, her voice

came like the unnatural whisper through a medium's trumpet.

"No, Mr. Maple, I'm not joking," she said. "I tell you there will be a death within the next twenty-four hours—at the latest."

The big youth shifted his weight. The outline of a gun showed briefly under his tuxedo.

"I wish," he said in a soft drawl, "that you wouldn't call me Mister Maple, Del—I mean Miss Byers. And who in heck is going to die?"

"One of the climbing party," the girl said softly. "Jared Ritter, his wife, Peter Barnaby, Elmer Culp—one of them."

"Heck, Miss Delia!" Deputy Andy Maple laughed. "Three months ago, when that party first climbed the Cyclops, such talk fitted in. At that time



"Don't move!" a hollow voice rumbled from the cave's depths

**The Trailer-Detective Probes
the Mystery of the Cave of
Snakes When Men Are Lured
to Tragic Death!**



people said the curse would get them sure. But the climbers went back East and nothing happened, and now they're back—"

"Now they're back," she repeated.

"Huh?" Again the young deputy chuckled. "You mean the curse drew them back? Nonsense! They came back because they accidentally spoiled the photos they made last time, and now that Barnaby's written an article about their climb, they've got to have new pictures to illustrate it."

"Accident?" The girl glanced quickly about the terrace, which seemed to be deserted. "It wasn't an accident those pictures were ruined. And it won't be an accident when death comes. You watch those people, Mr. Maple. Jared Ritter's already drunk, and he's quarrelled with his wife and Barnaby. There's going to be trouble—death. Go at once."

The deputy made a feeble protest, but the girl was insistent. He crossed the terrace and went back inside.

The girl remained where she was, staring out over the desert.

AND now a shadow near the base of a squatty potted cactus moved. It moved toward the girl so soundlessly that it was standing beside her before she noticed and gave a startled gasp.

The figure was not at first glance reassuring. A little man, less than five feet high, he had a trimly proportioned body, a poised carriage that suggested a cat-like coordination of trained muscles. He was dressed in immaculate evening clothes that even in the semi-darkness hinted of the most expensive tailoring. But it was his face on which the girl's eyes lingered. Longish, aquiline, there was such a sharpness in the bird-like eyes, such perfect suavity in the thinly smiling lips, that it was almost sinister.

"Who—who are you?" Delia Byers stammered.

"I think you know," a cultivated voice replied.

"Well, yes." The girl laughed nervously. "At least I can guess. You're the scientific trailer-detective, Colonel Fabian Crum. I heard that your trailer-laboratory arrived today. But

I never guessed that you were here to do some snooping."

Crum's gentle laugh reproved her.

"I didn't mean to eavesdrop just now. My size, you see, and the cactus there—anyhow, I couldn't keep from hearing. It made me wonder why you hadn't come to me with your startling prediction."

An evasive shadow flitted across the girl's face.

"They told me you were here for a rest. And of course you think my premonitions are silly. You don't believe in such things."

"But, my dear young lady, I do. Evil may outlive its human embodiment, and demons are but the thought-shells of evil men. As for mountain-demons, they have a long and interesting lineage."

He paused. The two looked out through the shimmering air. Beyond the small resort town, moonlight lay white on the sands, and up from this pale sea, dark shadows began to mount, climbing in black tiers against the metallic sky until they had reared the massive torso of a brooding colossus, complete even to the single dully gleaming eye in its bullet head. This last effect, caused by moonrays striking an exposed face of quartz, had given the sombre rock its name—the Cyclops.

"The Indians," the girl mused, "had another name for it."

"Yes," Crum said, "*Cabraken*. But he was simply an Indian equivalent of the Cyclops. All myths are related. I once investigated the Black Monk of the Harz Mountains as well as the haunted lake of Mount Carrigon in France—"

The girl looked at him sharply.

"You're only pretending to believe in such things!" she said. "You're teasing me."

"No," he answered, "I believe—in evil influences. It's you, Miss Byers who've been pretending. That's why you interest me. You wished to warn this young deputy of something, yet you wished to conceal the true source of your information. Am I not right in that assumption?"

The girl's eyes narrowed with real alarm. "If you're clairvoyant," she

said, "then you tell me—"

"Simple reasoning will tell me something," Crum said. "What interests women much more than legends? Why, love triangles. You meant to warn the deputy that Barnaby and Ritter will have trouble over the latter's wife, who certainly seems to be carrying on a flirtation with him."

"Well," said the girl, "what of it?"

"Oh," said Crum gently, "but that's not all. You spoke of photographs taken on the party's previous trip here and deliberately destroyed."

"Oh," she faltered, "but I merely suggested that the curse—"

"Yes," Crum interrupted, "you suggested the curse as a blind. Look here, Miss Byers, you're an intelligent girl. Your father is a retired archeologist who bought an interest in this place two years ago. The man who sold out his interest, Vince Elton, claimed that a curse drove him away. So you've been thoroughly familiar with the legends all along. Why didn't you give the young deputy this warning when the party was here three months ago, instead of waiting until their return?"

The girl started to stammer a reply, but Crum silenced her.

"Wait, I'll tell you. You must have noticed the affair between Ritter's wife and Barnaby before—they don't seem to try to conceal it. And the idea no doubt occurred to your ingenious mind that this mountain-climbing business would be an excellent way for a faithless wife and her lover to get rid of the husband—accidentally—some slight defect in climbing equipment, perhaps. But nothing happened when they were here the last time. So why didn't you rid yourself of that idea?"

"Well," the girl said defiantly, "why didn't I?"

"Obviously," said Colonel Crum, "because you learned something else since then, something which leads you to believe that Barnaby deliberately destroyed those pictures in order to get Ritter back here for a second try at murder!"

The last words had come in clipped syllables that rattled sharply in the girl's ears. She gave a little gasp of alarm and turned as if to escape those

probing eyes. But just then feet scraped on the terrace and Deputy Andy Maple reappeared. With obvious relief, the girl made quick introductions. Andy Maple grinned all over his good-humored face as he took Crum's hand.

"Say, this is a break for us," he exclaimed. "I heard you were here, Colonel, but my boss, Sheriff Sylvian Chipley back in Ocala City, said you were here for a rest and to leave you alone. But, gosh, I'm proud—"

"You've been watching those climbers?" Crum cut him short.

"Sure, but that's just a crazy idea of Del—I mean Miss Byers. Ritter's off somewhere drunk, and his wife and Barnaby are looking—"

He stopped. Below them in the street, a reeling figure had come into sight, careening along the line of parked cars. Almost at once two other figures appeared, coming after him—a man and a woman.

"Jared!" the woman called. "Where are you going?"

THE drunk whirled on her with a curse.

"Where's my car? What have you done with it?"

The woman, a voluptuous looking creature in a gown of daring cut, came closer, but the stocky man with her stood back.

"Why, Jared, you know the car's at the cottage where we left it. But don't try to drive—"

"Go to the devil!" Jared Ritter roared. "And you too, Barnaby. I'm leaving. To blazes with the damned pictures. Give me my keys!"

He lunged at the woman threateningly, and she stepped back.

"All right, they're in my purse—"

She went back into the hotel, accompanied by Barnaby, but returned alone about five minutes later and flung the keys down from the terrace to her husband. He picked them up and went lurching off, while the woman turned to the watching group with a cynical laugh.

"You must think I'm a fool," she said in a half whisper. "But the ignition key isn't on that ring I gave him. By the time he spends a half hour trying

to fit the trunk key into the ignition lock, he'll be sobered up a bit or will have passed out."

She turned and swept back to the dance floor. Presently the others followed. Young Maple claimed the next dance with Delia, but afterward Crum claimed her and they stepped back on to the terrace again.

"You don't intend to tell me the rest of it?" Crum asked.

The girl didn't answer at once. Both gazed at the towering bulk of the Cyclops. Suddenly the baleful eye seemed to wink.

"Night birds passing across it," the girl said huskily. "No, I've told you all I know. Why are you so interested?"

"I am peculiarly sensitive to the atmosphere of places," Crum said. "And from the moment I arrived, I felt some buried evil festering here. Suppose we take a stroll, over toward the cottage where Ritter's car is parked."

It was a walk of only three blocks. As they approached the cottage they saw the long, sleek car parked in the driveway. Nearer, they noticed a man's legs hanging out from the door on the driver's side.

"Gypsy Ritter was right," Delia whispered. "He's passed out."

Crum didn't answer. He stepped up and laid a hand on Ritter's body. The man lay inert. His shoulders seemed to be wedged under the steering wheel. Crum leaned in—

Even before there was any warning sound, Crum's preternaturally sharp olfactory sense caught the smell. Then the dry, buzzing rattle began—

Cat-like, the little man leaped back. Five feet of scaly lightning that lashed out of the shadows struck his wrist and landed with a fat, slapping sound on the curb. Instantly Crum's foot was on the reptile's pitted head, crunching down as the rattler wrapped writhing coils around his ankle. Presently he kicked it off.

"I don't advise anybody else to try that with a diamond-back," he said easily. "My size allows me to be somewhat quicker."

The girl hadn't screamed. Crum felt proud of her. She helped him pull Ritter out and stretch him on the grass

turf. Crum made her turn away as he struck a match and bent over the corpse.

It was a sickening sight. It wasn't so much the blackened, bloated mass that the face had become as the thought of how it had got that way—the thought of the drunken man opening the door, lurching in, wedging himself under the wheel, writhing there while the snake struck again and again, burying hypodermic fangs in face and throat.

The match burned out. Suddenly the girl stiffened with a cry.

Crum whirled, caught her arm. "You shouldn't have looked!"

"But I didn't," she choked out. "Not at him, I mean. It was there!" She pointed toward the corner of the house. "Maybe I imagined it, but it was awful. It looked like a small replica of the Cyclops itself! A great bunch of shapeless shadow, crouching there, watching us! It had one single, shining eye!"

CHAPTER II

Demon from the Past?

CCRUM quieted the girl, suggested a drink, sent her off to the hotel to notify young Maple and a doctor, and asked her to drop by his trailer and tell his assistant, Aga Aslan, to come at once.

After she had gone, he stood a moment, his sensitive nerves quivering to some indefinable aura in the silence, then turned and took stock of the situation.

The coupe was parked close to the curb. If the door had been left hanging open, the snake might have crawled into the car. Such things happen, as people who live in rattler-infested country know. On the other hand, since the glass in both doors was rolled up, there was a possibility of fingerprints—if someone had put the snake in. Ritter's own prints would be on the driver's side. He struck a match and looked at the other door-handle obliquely. It shone clean as a mirror. It had been wiped!

Encouraged in his suspicions, he waited for the young deputy and the hotel doctor to arrive. They came presently, followed by the three remaining members of the climbing party. Gypsy Ritter, her face haggard under its enamel of make-up, took one look at her husband's body and turned away with a choked cry to lean on Peter Barnaby's arm. Barnaby, a massive, stolid man with a rock-like face, seemed entirely unmoved.

It was Elmer Culp, the youngest of the group, who seemed most shaken. His boyish face looked positively green as he glanced at Ritter, then turned with a sick expression and leaned gagging against a tree.

DR. BRISTOL took one look at the dead man. The big rattler had struck him once in the jugular and twice in the face, and you can't put a tourniquet on a man's neck.

They picked Ritter up and carried him into the house. Gypsy Ritter followed, but she had already ceased to sob. Peter Barnaby stood aside, cold and detached, eyeing Crum with a wary glance.

"Well," said the little detective blandly, "accidents are to be expected in a mountain climber's life, I suppose. And now you won't be able to get those pictures, eh?"

"Why not?" Barnaby asked. "We can get them without Ritter. We didn't intend to make the whole climb again anyhow. We'll just go high enough to get a few shots of some dangerous climbing, and one shot on a ridge against the sky to represent the top. It won't take long."

"Very sad for Mrs. Ritter," Crum murmured gently.

"You think so?" Barnaby growled. "I don't. And if you're getting ready to ask where I was previous to Ritter's death, I'll tell you. I went for a walk—alone. But I didn't put the snake in Jared's car, and"—he pounced forward and caught the little detective's arm in a vise-like grip—"if you get any funny ideas and start worrying Gypsy with your suspicions, I'll—"

He didn't finish the threat, for the next instant he felt himself spun around as if the tail of a tornado had

caught him, and then something with the power of a locomotive's piston slammed him flat against the grass turf.

"Hey, what the hell—"

He started up angrily. But the big figure that loomed over him was a good two inches taller than his own six feet and he added quickly, "I wasn't hurting him."

"Luckily," Aga Aslan said quietly, "or I should have given you more than a tap. Now perhaps you have business elsewhere."

Apparently Barnaby did. He left just as Andy Maple came running from the house. Maple stopped short, staring at the burly young Asiatic who acted as Crum's chauffeur, bodyguard and technical assistant.

"I started," he said, "to ask if you needed any help, but I see—"

"Yes," Crum smiled, "Aga is usually quite adequate." He made a quick introduction. "And now, Aga, since there appear to be no fingerprints, we'll turn our attention to the snake. I want you to take it to the laboratory and give it a post-mortem. I'm curious about its insides."

Aga, the silent, merely nodded. He had followed the little detective through too many adventures on remote continents to be surprised at any order. But Andy Maple was frankly appalled.

"Autopsy a snake?" he gulped. "Say, you ain't taking that curse stuff seriously, you won't think it ain't a *natural* snake?"

"We'll see." Crum laughed, as Aga picked up the snake and went off. "But don't laugh at curses, young man. A curse is a malignancy that science itself is not yet able to measure. Now I want to learn more about this place and its cursed mountain. I suppose Ennis McCann and Clemon Byers, the owners, would be the men to talk to."

He found the two owners worriedly conferring at one end of the cocktail lounge in the hotel. Despite their efforts not to disturb the dance, news of the tragedy had leaked out and put a damper on the festivities. Many guests were leaving, others were clustered about talking in whispers. They eyed Crum with ominous glances as he sauntered in.

"Hello, Colonel," McCann greeted. He was a big, florid man with thinning reddish hair, a clipped mustache and the expansive manner of a promoter. "Hope this accident hasn't upset your plans for a rest."

Crum's eyes travelled from McCann to his partner, Byers, the retired archeologist. Byers was his partner's opposite. Thin, stooped, taciturn, he had the peering, pinched face of a flesh-eating bird. How he could be the father of the beautiful Delia was something that had puzzled others before Crum, who now said suavely in reply to McCann's remark:

"The word 'accident', gentlemen, lends itself to many interpretations."

"Eh?" McCann gave a start, his tone dropping to a whisper. "Say, you haven't fallen for this gossip about Barnaby and Ritter's wife?"

"I've heard it, of course," Crum answered, "but that wasn't what I meant. As you probably know, it is the mystery with a touch of the psychic that interests me. And frankly, even before Ritter's death, I sensed something of the sort here, an aura, shall I say, of something old and evil, some influence buried and hidden and terrible."

HE paused, noting that Clemon Byers' face had tightened with a curious intentness and that McCann's cheeks had blanched slightly.

"Gad!" McCann said, turning to his partner, "I thought this man was a scientist and here he is talking just like old Vince Elton."

"Vince Elton," said Crum, "is a man who interests me. He seems to be so much a part of the legend of this place. I understand that he filed on this land, prospected it, and later got you to invest your money in a resort here. But it's said that two years ago he sold out and left in a panic because of the curse that seems to hang about the Cyclops."

McCann heard him to the end, then broke into a laugh.

"Gad!" he said to Byers. "Imagine that little one-armed devil being driven off by a curse! But we fell for it all the same, eh, Clemon?"

"Then you mean it wasn't the curse?" Crum asked.

"That was *his* story," McCann

chuckled. "But listen. It happened two years ago, at a Fourth of July celebration just like this one tonight. Vince came into my office, half drunk, and pretending to be scared to death. He said he had to leave; the curse had caught up with him at last; he was ready to sell out for a fraction of what his interest was worth. Well, frankly, I didn't like it. I'd sunk all my money here, and things weren't going any too good. I told him he could go to hell. I'd give him a hundred thousand dollars and not a cent more.

"Well, I thought that would settle it. A hundred thousand! It was an insult, considering what we'd spent. But damn my soul if he didn't take it up. 'You get me that hundred thousand in cash before dawn,' he told me, and get me out of here in a fast car to Tucson, and I'll sign the deeds."

"Well, I was floored. He couldn't drive a car, you see, because he just had one arm, and his wanting to get away so fast somehow sold me on the idea that something really was after him. But I didn't have the money to buy him out. And that's where Clemon, here, came in."

He turned and glanced at the old archeologist. "Clemon was staying here at the time, pottering about with Indian relics, and well, I just happened to tell him about Vince's offer. He surprised me by saying that he had his life's savings in good bonds in a bank vault in Ocala City and that if we could convert them into cash, he'd buy Vince Elton out. Well, we managed to do it, waking up bankers and lawyers and getting the deeds all signed that night. Then I drove Vince to Tucson myself and put him on a train, and it wasn't until next day that the news broke and we were wised up to what that little scoundrel had up his sleeve."

"And what was that?" Crum asked.

"Oh, nothing," McCann said, "except that an old Mexican family in Phoenix filed suit for this tract of land. Their claim was based on an old Spanish land grant that knocked hell out of Vince's original title to the land. And they didn't want a reasonable settlement. They meant to blackmail me into giving them an interest that would have ruined me. So now you see why Vince

was in such a hurry to sell out and get away."

"But you didn't lose the place," Crum said.

"Oh, no," McCann answered, "and that was due to Clemon Byers again. The thing looked hopeless to me, and I'd have given up. But Clemon, being an archeologist, was a shark on early Western history. He started studying the case and damned if he didn't find a detail that knocked their case all to smithereens. We got off for a measly five thousand, which was peanuts."

HE finished with an appreciative glance at Byers, but the old archeologist merely looked glumly away.

"You don't," Crum said, "appear to find that victory amusing."

Byers stared at him a moment out of his wrinkle-edged eyes.

"Frankly, no," he said. "Vince Elton was known as a hard, mean, revengeful man. I've often wondered how he felt later, after he'd sold out for a song and the place wasn't lost after all. I've wondered how he felt toward me."

"Well, by Gad, he never came back!" McCann blustered.

Byers started. "No," he said, "no, not yet. Well, I'm off to bed. Good night, gentlemen."

He moved away with his soft, cat-like pace, and McCann glanced at his watch. "Well, I must drop by my office, if you'll excuse me—"

"If you don't mind," Crum suggested, "I'll go with you. I'd like to ask you one more question—privately."

McCann agreed and Crum followed him to the elevator. They got off on the mezzanine and walked to McCann's office. The latter inserted his key, pushed the door open, and then paused, staring at an envelope that lay just inside the door. He snatched it up quickly, but not before Crum's sharp eyes saw the name, *Ennis McCann* printed crudely on the envelope.

"Have a seat," McCann rumbled, turning away as he ripped the letter open and snapped on his desk light. He glanced at the contents, flung the wadded envelope into the wastebasket. The message itself he pocketed, then turned, trying with a ghastly smile to

conceal the sick pallor of his face.

"These guests and their complaints!" he muttered, trying to cover up. "Well, Colonel, you wanted to ask—"

"Just this," Crum said. "Did Clemon Byers really frame up that suit that drove Vince Elton to sell out and leave?"

McCann gave a start, blinked rapidly.

"Why, no, the idea had never occurred to me. I'm certain Clemon couldn't have done such a thing."

"That's all," Crum said. "Thanks, and good night."

He went out, strolled along the mezzanine until he met a bell-boy and drew the lad aside.

"I want the crumpled envelope that's at the very top of the wastebasket in Mr. McCann's office," he said briskly. "The one with his name lettered on it. Mr. McCann is in danger and I'm working for his protection. Get that envelope somehow and bring it to my trailer."

"But I couldn't, sir—" The boy shook his head. He glanced down and saw the numeral "twenty" on the folded bill in Crum's hand. "Well, sir, I might, Colonel—" He went on his way a richer man.

Crum rode down to the ground floor, strolled out of the hotel and across a vacant lot to the trailer park. The long chromium plated trailer behind his big car was lighted and the door hung open. He stepped into the gleaming laboratory—one of the most compact in the world—where every manner of instrument used in modern crime detection was crowded into a tiny space, and saw Andy Maple staring with fascination at Aga Aslan who was busy with the bloody carcass of the snake.

"Gosh, Colonel," the young deputy gasped, turning, "I'd heard about you, but I never dreamed you had an outfit like this. Say, if I was this kind of a detective, I'll bet Del—I mean Miss Byers—wouldn't high-tone me like she does."

Crum chuckled and spoke to his assistant. "Well, Aga, what did you find in the reptile's stomach?"

"Raw beef," said the Asiatic. "Undigested chunks of it."

"Good," Crum said. "No snake in the wild state lives on beef. It proves that the snake was kept in captivity."

"And now," Andy Maple put in excitedly, "all we got to do is find who kept snakes and— Say! I know one guy who does. Old Windy Phillips. Owns a photographic studio and curio shop. Reptile museum in back."

"Get him," Crum said crisply, "and bring him here."

Andy Maple went off at a lope. Aga began cleaning up the bloody mess of the snake's carcass. "You think, *Effendi*," he asked, "that perhaps there is something in this curse?"

Crum had produced a long cigarette and sat smoking thoughtfully.

"At least I know, Aga," he said, "that a man has died, that it was not an accident. Yet so far, I have not proved a human agency. If the killer is human, I suspect he is diabolically clever."

The minutes ticked silently away. Then Crum sat up with a start as feet came pounding across the vacant lot. A moment later Andy Maple's excited face appeared in the doorway.

"He's dead!" the youth panted. "Old Windy's dead. Layin' by an empty snake cage. Looks like he died of snakebite, too!"

Crum was on his feet in a trice, snapping an order to Aga to wait, following Andy Maple across the vacant lot. They came to the main street that fronted the canyon, turned in at an alley and reached the reptile museum, which was under a shed behind the photographic studio.

Windy Phillips, his stubble-covered face a bloated horror, lay on his back, his glazed eyes staring up at the open mesh-wire cage on a platform just above him. Crum snapped on a flash.

"Struck only once," he said, "but in the jugular. There must have been more than one snake in that cage. Well, go get the doctor."

Andy rushed off and Crum straightened to his feet. If a snake had shot enough poison into this man to kill him instantly, he thought, there wouldn't have been enough venom left for Ritter. And it was strange that this man who knew snakes could have been taken unawares, should have died without a cry, unless something held him—

He glanced at the back of the shop, noticed that the door hung ajar. Poking the light ahead of him, he went in. Instantly his eye fell on a cabinet in the small room. Its drawers were out and a mass of negatives and prints had been spilled upon the floor. He started toward it, but a sound caused him to whirl, duck, as a cushion sailed through the air, struck his arm and knocked the light from his hand.

It crashed to the floor and went out, but not before Crum had caught a glimpse of the Thing emerging from the curtained doorway—a massy something that seemed a part of the darkness itself, a shadowy blot, deepening by degrees to a black nucleus, and in its shapeless head there was only one shining eye!

The next instant he had quickly leaped sideways to avoid the rush which he knew would come, but even his quick agility was not enough. The Thing swept on him like a half-solidified cloud. Tenuous filaments enmeshed him, and suddenly he felt himself crushed with constricting force against the monster's solid core.

Strong as he was for his size, he was no match physically for this shadow-beast that tightened on him like an amoeba absorbing a stray particle of matter. Writhing and fighting, he sought release for his flattened, burning lungs, tried to cry out from a dry and swollen throat.

Then dimly, to his wavering consciousness, came a sound of voices. Dazedly he felt the pressure relax, felt himself drop, his knees buckling as he slid to the floor in a faint.

CHAPTER III

The Cyclops Strikes Again

ANDY MAPLE and the doctor were bending over him, and the glare from a ceiling light blazed in his eyes. Crum stirred and the doctor helped him to his feet.

"What happened, Colonel?" the young deputy stammered.

Crum smiled, wiped his brow. "Why, I must have stumbled against the cab-

inet in the dark. Have you examined the dead man?"

"Not yet," the doctor said, and led the way out. He knelt a moment by the corpse. "Andy tells me two snakes were kept in the cage. One may have struck Phillips when he opened the cage and the other may have found his way to Ritter's car. This man was dead before Ritter was. However—"

"He was paralyzed instantly by the venom?"

The doctor frowned. "It's barely possible, but—"

"Anyhow," Crum said, "you'll hold this body for a post-mortem, Andy. We'll see if we can find evidence of any force holding him while the snake struck. Have the ambulance come and

once before the fixative weakens its intensity. I'm going to bed now."

A great part of Colonel Crum's success was the result of the care with which the little detective had learned to conserve his energies, both mental and physical. Hence, as soon as he had retired to his bunk in the other end of the trailer, he wiped all problems from his mind and was almost instantly asleep.

He woke early, completely refreshed, and not until he had finished his coffee did he accept from Aga the small photograph which was the result of the latter's night's work.

"Luckily," Aga explained, "the ink was gallotannic and the printed letters came out beautifully."

The "Lucky" Winners Draw Death

IN

THE DEVIL'S LOTTERY

Another Colonel Crum Novelet

By **JOHN H. KNOX**

COMING IN THE NEXT ISSUE



take the body into Oceola City with as little fuss as possible. I'll see you tomorrow."

He returned to his trailer where Aga greeted him with the news that a bell-boy had delivered a wadded envelope to him.

"Good." Crum took the envelope and glanced at it. "There's a bare chance of bringing out some fingerprints, but what I'm chiefly interested in is the possibility of contact marks on the inside of the envelope. If the writing was on an unfolded sheet, the Ermel method should bring it out. Treat it under the red light with the usual solution of silver nitrate, citric acid, tartaric acid, nitric acid and distilled water. Use an ordinary fixative, but photograph the developed writing at

Crum's eyes lighted with pleasure as they glanced over the ominous message which his science had salvaged from the bare envelope.

"The Eye sees all," read the words, lettered in crude capitals. "The Eye knows all. You cannot escape the Eye. Midnight tomorrow is the absolute deadline. You know what this means."

"That will be tonight," Crum muttered. He looked up as a knock sounded on the door and Aga opened it to admit Deputy Andy Maple.

"Well, the rest of the night was quiet," Maple announced. "Maybe there won't be any more deaths to worry about."

"Look at this," Crum invited. He handed the photograph to the youth and explained how he had obtained it.

MAPLE read it and let out a whistle. "This makes it look like something is killing off that climbing party and threatening McCann, too?"

"Yes," Crum said. "Let's consider. I find the use of the term 'Eye' most significant in this message. Aside from its obvious reference to the quartz ledge in the Cyclops' head, it carries the added suggestion of *seeing*, of something *seen*, perhaps recorded. That brings us back to those photographs which were so mysteriously ruined."

"Yeah," Andy said, "but Del—I mean Miss Byers—said that Barnaby destroyed them so he could get Ritter back here to kill him."

"But suppose," Crum suggested, "that the pictures were destroyed on their own account. Suppose they revealed some secret on the Cyclops—"

"Say!" Andy interrupted. "That gets back to the old treasure legends. Vince Elton was always looking for hidden Indian treasure. And Mr. Byers—" He stopped.

"Yes? What about Clemon Byers?"

"He potters around looking for Indian relics," Andy said quickly. "Don't get any ideas about him. That treasure stuff's all rot."

"I think so, too," Crum agreed. "But there doesn't have to be any treasure, so long as some unscrupulous person thinks there is and believes that someone else has tumbled on the secret, too." He paused. "I wish you'd ask Miss Byers to come here for a few moments."

"But she's gone to town," Andy said. "They told me she left the first thing this morning."

Crum stood up suddenly, startled apprehension in his face.

"Gone, is she? Look here, young man, you rush to town and get that girl back at once. Don't let her out of your sight until you've delivered her here to me. If she knows as much about those photographs as I think she does, she's in danger of her life!"

Andy Maple didn't wait for more. He was off like a flash, and a few moments later his battered flivver went sailing past in a cloud of dust.

Crum went into his tiny dressing room, slipped into a suit of dark flannel,

and this time stretched across his vest front the watch chain from which dangled the curious little pistol-charm. Aga noted this and took it for a signal of danger. For the little pistol was no toy. It fired a single tiny bullet no larger than a match head, but loaded with enough of the deadly arrow-poison, *curare*, to stop a jaguar in his tracks. It was the final card that Crum always held back to play only in the deadliest emergency.

Fully dressed, fresh and debonair, the little detective strolled out.

The Cyclops, sunning its granite shoulders in the morning light, still wore in its dark gullies the shrouding veils of mystery. Crum strolled to the bridge that crossed the canyon at a narrow spot and followed the road along the opposite side.

He had already noted, farther down and just opposite the Cyclops itself, the three remaining members of the climbing party sauntering along the canyon's sheer rim. But as he approached, Gypsy Ritter and Peter Barnaby moved away, leaving Elmer Culp alone.

"Good morning," Crum greeted him. "I suppose you heard that there was another death last night. But this man was killed before Ritter, so let's hope that Ritter was the only member of your party under the spell of doom."

CULP answered hoarsely. "The spell of doom?" He was hatless and the sun beating upon his boyish face accentuated its unnatural pallor. "No, no, you don't believe that. We know what you believe—that Barnaby killed Ritter to get his wife, that Phillips was killed when Barnaby got the snake. But it's not true. I work in Ritter & Barnaby's brokerage office and I know all about the affair. Ritter was a louse and his wife's quite frank about her affair with Barnaby. But Ritter wouldn't give her a divorce. If they had wanted to kill him, they'd have done it long ago."

He broke off, staring sullenly at Crum who was gazing down into the canyon's depths. About two hundred feet below them was a shelf-like ledge abutting from the cliff's face, and in this face the dark mouth of a cave was

barely visible, slanting down. The shadow of the Cyclops falling across the canyon made its blackness even deeper.

"Interested in Indian relics, legends, treasures?" Crum asked.

Culp gave a start. "Why, no. Why do you ask?"

"Oh," Crum said vaguely, "I thought perhaps you might like to explore that cave down there. They say no one has ever been into it—impossible to reach. But not, of course, for a mountain climber."

Culp laughed nervously. "But you see, I'm just that—a mountain climber. Indian relics, legends, caves don't interest me, and even a mountain is just a rock to be climbed."

"Of course," Crum agreed, "but if you should stumble on something—for instance, that cave down there." He picked up a rock, dropped it over the cliff's edge. It struck the ledge, bounced into the cave's mouth and sent back a ringing echo. "Hear that ring? It's deep. Even from across the canyon you can't see into it very far. It might be another Carlsbad cavern. Wouldn't you like to discover something like that?"

He paused, looked up blandly to meet Culp's angry stare.

"Quit beating about the bush," the young man said. "It's not caves you've got in mind. It's the Cyclops. You think maybe we stumbled on some secret up there—Indian treasure or something. But it's rot. We didn't find a thing but just rocks to climb on."

"And yet—those pictures so mysteriously destroyed!"

"Mysteriously!" Culp laughed. "Nothing mysterious about it. The first batch was in our big camera when we reached the top. I was staring out across the landscape with my field glasses when Barnaby, who was standing behind me, saw an eagle and let out a yell. It startled me. I dropped the glasses, and in trying to grab them, knocked the camera off. It was smashed all to hell."

"Hmm," Crum murmured, "Barnaby startled you. But you had other pictures?"

"We had another batch in a smaller camera," Culp said. "We thought they

would do. But when Barnaby took them to be developed that night, we found that the film had been defective and they were all black—a total loss. So you see it was pure accident both times."

"Pure accident," Crum repeated slowly. "And when do you intend to take the others?"

"Right after lunch," Culp said. "The sun will be just right."

CRUM strolled away, went back to his trailer. He kept watching the road to town, impatient for Andy Maple's return with Delia Byers. But hours passed and they did not come. Crum ate lunch at the hotel, watched the climbers and a crowd of spectators leave for the Cyclops rock, and returned to his trailer. It was another hour before the dusty flivver drew up and Andy Maple sat gasping.

"Lord, but I had a time! First finding her, then persuading her—"

"Persuading!" Delia Byers cried. Her face, angrily flushed under the tossing gold curls, was more beautiful than ever as she turned to Crum. "Why, this young ape carried me off by main force, and now I want to know why you—"

"You don't like cavemen?" Crum asked. "But my methods are more gentle. Will you step inside for a moment, Miss Byers?"

The girl got out of the car and came in. Andy followed. Crum closed the door and offered the girl a seat. She took it and sat glaring. But her expression changed when Crum, in a tone as clipped and authoritative as the rattle of a telegraph key, said:

"Miss Byers, tell me all you know about those pictures. This is a serious matter and I want no evasion!"

"Pictures! But I don't know, I don't have them. I—"

"Then you *did* have them!" Crum shot at her in a tone that made young Maple bristle and glower. "Speak up, girl. This is a murder case!"

She was trembling now, all the color gone from her face. Her wide eyes begged for pity.

"But I can't, I'm afraid—but . . . Yes, I had them. They were found by a maid in the room Culp and Barnaby

occupied when they were here last—a roll of film wadded up in a newspaper. She asked me what she should do with them and I took them, and just out of curiosity had them developed. They were perfectly good. So I knew then that Barnaby had hidden them there, after substituting bad ones in the camera, and had then forgotten—”

Crum was on his feet. “Where are those pictures now?”

“They were burned!” the girl sobbed. “I gave them to father and he burned them. He told me never to say anything about them. Now he’ll be dreadfully angry when he knows I’ve told!”

“Angry!” Crum growled. “His emotion will be something else when I’m through with him. Andy, get Mr. Byers and bring him here!”

Andy looked uncertainly at the girl, then met the stern glance of Crum’s eyes and stumbled out obediently.

“Now, Miss Byers,” Crum said, “what did those pictures show?”

“Show?” she asked. “Why, nothing unusual that I could see—just pictures of the climbers on the Cyclops and shots of the landscape.”

She stopped as Crum made a move toward the door. He had seen Andy Maple stop halfway between the trailer lot and the hotel as a man came running toward him. There was a brief, excited conversation and then Andy turned and came running back. His hair blew about his flushed face as he panted up, calling out:

“Barnaby’s dead! Fell from a cliff while they were making the pictures. Body battered all to hell. They’re bringing him in!”

CHAPTER IV

The Secret of the Eye

THE next hour moved with confusing swiftness. Crum and Andy Maple met the party as it came in bearing Barnaby’s body. Two men held Gypsy Ritter who struggled, screaming with hysteria. The facts of the accident seemed commonplace enough. Barnaby had been making a traverse across a dangerous face of rock, and Gypsy

Ritter had been snapping a shot of it, when Barnaby, trying to lift himself over a ledge, had suddenly lost his hold. He had fallen three hundred feet to the screen-covered floor of a chimney, and he wasn’t a nice sight to look at now.

“Where was Culp at the time?” Crum inquired.

Culp, he was assured by a dozen witnesses, had been thirty feet below, holding to Barnaby’s safety rope which was run through the carabiner in an anchored piton. It wasn’t Culp’s fault that the sudden violence of Barnaby’s fall had torn the rope from his hand.

Crum and Andy Maple rode into Ocala City in the ambulance that carried Barnaby’s body to the morgue, and there were met by the County Medical Officer and Sheriff Sylvian Chipley, Andy’s boss. The sheriff, a big, bald, easy-going man with long rusty mustaches and a sleepy manner, laughed good-humoredly at Crum’s show of concern.

“Why, hell,” he said, “I don’t see no connection between this and the other deaths at all. Barnaby just lost his hold and fell in plain sight, though maybe the other deaths had made him nervous.”

“No, Sheriff,” Crum said emphatically. “They are all a part of one pattern. And the pattern isn’t complete. Tonight the horror will come to a head, unless it is prevented. For that reason, I want you to grant me emergency powers—complete charge of this case, with the authority to do exactly as I please.”

“Pheeew!” breathed the sheriff. “You’re asking a lot, Colonel. Now, if you was to show me that Barnaby’s death had any connection with the others, that it wasn’t just a plain and simple case of losing his grip, well, then I’d take a shot and do as you ask.”

Crum stepped toward the slab where Barnaby’s battered body lay. His face was an inscrutable mask. He was faced with three consecutive murders, so cunningly done that not one could be proved even to be a murder.

Standing near the slab, he drew all his resources to his aid. Barnaby had been reaching up for a hold, they had said. Had his hand struck something

—a snake perhaps, coiled there? He picked up the corpse's hands and examined them. Nothing but the scratches that might be expected.

He was about to turn away when his delicate nostrils, with which Nature seemed to have endowed him in compensation for his size, quivered to a queer odor which rose even above the smell of blood. He bent, sniffing, and his eyes fell on a suede jacket which had been ripped from the dead man's body.

He picked it up. The smell was stronger. He lifted it higher. It had come wrongside out in being pulled from the corpse, and suddenly, with excitement flashing in his eyes, Crum pointed at a spot near the jacket's armhole. There, flattened against the suede, was the crushed body of a longish, crab-like creature with a forked and jointed tail.

The sheriff looked and gasped: "Vinegaroon!"

So it was—one of those vicious Mexican whip-scorpions which derive their name from the peculiar smell of vinegar they exude.

IN a flash the sheriff and the doctor had rolled the corpse over, and there, sure enough, on Barnaby's right shoulder, was the red, swollen mark of the venomous creature's bite.

"Damn!" the sheriff swore. "That certainly explains why he lost his hold. But look here. Say the thing was placed there. How was it done, and how could the person who placed it there be sure it would bite at the right time?"

Crum's agile brain had been working fast. Now he pointed to the sleeve of the jacket. Just at the elbow was a large hole where the suede was worn through. A leather patch sewed to the outside formed a loose pocket.

"The scorpion may have been placed there," he said, "hours in advance. Cold and sluggish, it would have lain there until warmed by the heat of the climber's body, and then crawled out. And now, how could the killer know it would strike at the right time? There is the devilishly clever part. He knew that as long as the climbing was easy, the folds of the jacket would hang loose and the creature be undisturbed. But

what would happen in a dangerous place, in a place where muscles strained to pull a heavy body up? Why the jacket would be drawn tight, the creature would be crushed and would strike—as it did!"

"Well, damn my hide!" the sheriff said. "If that ain't good! You still ain't proved it was put there, but three men in a row killed by the bite of pizen critters is too many. Okay, Colonel, I'm good as my word. What all do you want done?"

Crum hesitated a moment. His eyes were on Andy Maple as he spoke.

"First," he said, "I want a warrant for the arrest of Clemon Byers and his daughter."

All three men jumped as if struck. Andy Maple went white, then red.

"You ain't serious?" he managed to cough out. Then, with fists doubling: "Why, by grabs, you ain't gonna accuse Delia—"

Crum faced him with cold eyes.

"You're a deputy," he said. "Either you act under orders or you hand in your badge. The sheriff has given me his promise. Now"—he turned to Chipley—"the warrant will charge them with concealing evidence bearing on a murder. I suggest that you go for them yourself, Sheriff, and bring them quietly to town without any fuss. Don't let it be known they are under arrest. Just bring them to your house and hold them there without bond. I'll be there to question them."

The sheriff swallowed a couple of times.

"Man, this will cost me votes," he complained. "But I give my word, and that's that."

When the sheriff had stalked out, Andy Maple turned to Crum, and the latter saw that fear and anxiety had supplanted the anger in the young deputy's face.

"Look here, Colonel," he asked, "do you really think—"

"I think," said Crum, smiling, "that that girl ought to be a little nicer to you. In the meantime, just remember that she's in grave danger and will be safer under arrest than anywhere else. And now I've got a job for you. New light has dawned. I wonder why I didn't realize before that those scat-

tered pictures in Windy Phillips' studio were important. But I was thinking then only of photos of something on the Cyclops. Now I want you to go through that pile of prints and negatives and pick out any that show the Indian cave across the canyon. No questions now! I'll see you there later."

ANDY went off and Crum, finding a telephone, had a message relayed to Aga from the Eltonville hotel. Then he walked to the sheriff's house and waited for the prisoners to arrive.

They were an angry pair as they were herded into the sheriff's parlor, and Clemon Byers was breathing threats about false arrests. The girl, silent and defiant, merely glared. Crum came straight to the point.

"Mr. Byers," he said, "I understand that you destroyed certain photographs that have a bearing on three murders. What was there about those pictures that caused you to do so?"

"I don't know," Byers answered sullenly. "I couldn't see anything unusual about them. Three were pictures of the party climbing the Cyclops. Two were snaps of Eltonville. One was a picture of the cave across the canyon."

"Ah," said Crum, "the cave. What about that one?"

"I couldn't see a thing—"

"Yet you destroyed them!"

Byers dropped his eyes. "I did. I destroyed them because I believed that to keep them would imperil my own life and my daughter's. That's all. I will not say more if put to torture."

The old man's face was twitching, but his jaw was firm.

"Keep them under guard," Crum snapped and went out.

Aga, in answer to the phone call, was waiting outside in the big car. Crum got in and was whisked swiftly back to Eltonville. His car stopped in front of the studio of the dead photographer. Inside he found Andy Maple on hands and knees among the prints and negatives.

"Well, what have you found?"

"Not much," Andy said, "just one faded old picture taken a couple of years ago, showing the Indian cave and the ledge."

The little detective took the picture and glanced first at the white date mark in its corner. "July 5, 1938," it read. Excitedly he studied the picture, which showed the cave and the ledge photographed from the Eltonville side. You couldn't see into the cave at all; it was just a black blur, with white rocks around it, on which were perched a cluster of great black birds. But Crum's usually steady hand shook as he thrust it into his pocket.

"My theory is confirmed by this, I think," he said. "Now the case is complete except for the finishing stroke. Tonight, Andy, we will exorcize the devil that is terrorizing Eltonville!"

Andy Maple gaped bewilderedly at this strange talk, but the instructions Crum gave him seemed commonplace enough. He was to say nothing of the arrest of Byers and his daughter, he was to act as if nothing had happened, and he was to keep Gypsy Ritter and Elmer Culp under constant watch.

Returning to his car, Crum gave orders to Aga to return to Ocoola City and buy pulleys for a block-and-tackle and several hundred feet of rope.

"Rope?" Aga asked.

"Rope," Crum said, "A man is going to hang himself tonight."

CHAPTER V

The Pit of Snakes

THE night came black, moonless, and the hours dragged slowly past as Crum, seated beside his lightless trailer, with only the silent Aga for company, waited for the fateful hour. At the hotel all appeared to be calm and quiet.

But Crum knew that evil forces were astir, and his faculties were gathered for the final struggle.

Suddenly there was a scrape of feet, and around the edge of the trailer Andy Maple came sneaking.

"He's gone," the youth gasped. "I let Culp get past me. I was watching Gypsy Ritter's room and had a bell-hop watching him, and the kid let him get away by the fire-escape."

"How long ago?"

"An hour or so, I reckon," Andy said miserably. "I been looking everywhere for him. I was ashamed to tell you—"

"The devil!" Crum swore. "I know where he's gone. But you should have told me at once. Come, Aga, bring the ropes and pulleys."

The big Asiatic lifted the burden that would have loaded a horse, and the three sneaked silently toward the canyon bridge, crossed it and followed the canyon's edge to a spot above the Indian cave. Here they crouched while Crum inspected the cliff's rim.

"Ah," he said presently, "here it is!"

"What?" Andy Maple husked.

"The rope ladder Culp used to go down," Crum said.

"Culp!" Andy grated. "Then Culp is the—"

"Culp," Crum whispered, "is the author of the threats. He is the man who discovered the cave's secret while staring through field glasses from the top of the Cyclops. He is the man who destroyed the photographs to keep the secret from falling into other hands. Okay, Aga, rig up the block-and-tackle. Culp may trust to a rope ladder to get back up, but he's a mountain climber. We shall take precautions."

"We're going down?" Andy Maple jittered.

"Not unless you want to," Crum replied.

"Who said I didn't?" the youth growled, and set to work helping Aga rig up the rope and pulley arrangement, which was fastened to a stout juniper tree and dropped over the cliff's edge.

"Now," Crum directed, "fasten a sling to the lower pulley and straddle it, Andy. I'm lighter and will go down by the ladder. Let him down easily, Aga, and then keep the rope in your hands and be ready to pull it up in a hurry the moment I give the signal of three sharp jerks."

Aga grunted an affirmative and Crum started down. He went like a monkey, trained muscles supporting his slight weight with ease. He passed Andy Maple swinging breathless in the black gulf and clambered down, down, into the giddy and apparently bottomless darkness. It was a good two hundred

feet, but presently his feet reached the ledge and he crouched silent, waiting.

A wind whispered in the depths of the canyon and above its opposite rim, the black mass of the Cyclops leaned, portentous against the lesser darkness of the sky. The pulleys had made scarcely any noise and only Andy's jittery whisper broke the unnatural hush as he asked, "What now?"

"Silence!" Crum hissed. "Now we wait."

WAITING can be a terrible ordeal when one does not know what one waits for, and Andy's breath grated hoarsely as he crouched, listening to the faint night noises. The black mouth of the cavern was some fifteen feet down the ledge, and as the wind came past it, a soft sound of rattling reached their ears. Faint at first, like a signal, it spread its rustling whisper until the whole foul darkness of the cave seemed to be alive with snakes. Then another sound obtruded—a sound from above that caused both Crum and Andy to look up.

Both clutched their guns. Someone was coming down the rope ladder! Against the cliffs the figure was invisible, but as it swung out with the wavering rope they could see that it was a human shape, a shape with skirts! A moment later a soft voice called:

"Colonel Crum! Colonel Crum!"

"Great Jupiter!" Andy swore. "It's Miss Byers!" He stood up, and a moment later was helping the shivering girl down to a footing.

Crum was angry. "What are you doing here?" he hissed. "How did you get past Aga?"

"I followed you," the girl said with a nervous laugh. "I heard you tell him not to let go the rope, so I jumped past him and started down the ladder before he could grab me. You see, I've been watching you. I got away from them in town by pretending to be sick and getting Mrs. Chipley to put me to bed. Then I slipped out the window."

"But why did you come here?"

"Well," Delia Byers faltered, "I got to thinking that father and I were maybe responsible for some of this, and if I could help you out, you'd overlook

our destroying those prints. So I—"

"You dizzy young fool!" Crum grated, trying to keep a certain sly admiration out of his voice. "Don't you know there's death down here?"

He paused. The onimous rattling had begun again, and now a rising moon, invisible from where they crouched, was painting its first greenish flush on the Cyclops' towers, causing the baleful eye to burn and smoulder.

"Yes," the girl whispered, "but I know things you should know. I know who's in there—"

"You know!" Andy rasped. "Who?"

"Vince Elton," the girl said quietly. "You see, father's been afraid of him all these years. He always believed Vince would come back to take revenge on him and to guard the secret of some Indian treasure that he believed in. Father believed those pictures revealed something about that treasure, though we couldn't figure out what. But he thinks Vince is back and that he killed Ritter and Barnaby on account of the pictures, and that he would have killed us if we kept them. So if Vince is in there—"

"Is he, Colonel?" Andy Maple asked.

Crum didn't answer.

"We've made too much noise," he said. "We may as well go ahead now. Andy, loop the rope around that girl and I'll have Aga draw her back up."

"But I won't go!" Delia Byers said stubbornly.

"All right then," Crum said impatiently. "But loop the rope around yourself anyhow for safety, and stay behind." He began moving forward in a crouch toward the cave's opening.

THE moon was rising rapidly and its rays reflected by the Cyclops' bulk made a faint luminescence on the ledge. The hissing of the snakes grew louder now and at the cave's opening Crum halted, sniffed the air.

"Smell them snakes!" Andy gulped.

"Not the snakes," Crum said in a low mutter. "Blood."

Holding his flashlight far to one side, he snapped it on. The white beam lanced into the cavern's gloom and the girl behind him gave a choked cry.

Steps slanted sharply down into the cave's depths, steps carved long ago by vanished races and now half buried in debris and the droppings of countless bats who fluttered now in the shadows.

But what had caused the girl to cry out was something else—the sprawled shape that lay motionless on the ancient stairs!

It was Elmer Culp. Dressed in his climbing togs and with the safety rope about his waist straggling up the steps to some anchorage outside, he lay with his throat cut from ear to ear and his blond hair floating in the puddled blood.

Instantly Crum flashed the light off. But no sound had come save the hissing of the snakes. No movement had disturbed the cave's gloom.

"Did Vince Elton kill him?" Andy Maple's voice quavered.

"Vince Elton is here," Crum said softly, "but he did not kill Culp. Keep your gun leveled on the depths of the cave."

He did likewise, snapped on the light again, and this time swung its beam a little to the right. Here, at the edge of the steps, was a deep pit caused by some cave-in, and as they stared they saw the writhing bodies of the snakes, hundreds of them, their scaly coils writhing like demons in torment. Then, as if disturbed by the light, they began crawling deeper into the shadows, and a whitish something began to emerge beneath them—a skull with staring eye sockets, the bleached white cage of fleshless ribs, shoulder blades, *the bones of a single arm!*

"God!" Andy Maple breathed. "One arm!"

"Yes," Crum said, "there lies Vince Elton. This is the buried evil. This is what Culp saw through field glasses from the Cyclops' top when the light happened to be just right to slant into the pit. And Culp, realizing the possibilities—"

"Don't move!" a hollow voice rumbled from the cave's depths.

And from those depths, something seemed to materialize that defied the sanity of the mind. Shapeless at first, as it emerged slowly into the light, it was like a creature of some dark elemental substance, a massive body, a

bullet head in which a single eye seemed to smoulder through veils of shrouding smoke.

Only Crum uttered a sound, and it was an oath, the oath of a man who despite the most careful plans has been taken by surprise. The demon laughed then, and at the same time they saw the black barrel of the shotgun protruding from the folds of his disguise.

"Thought I wouldn't linger here, eh?" a human voice now inquired. "Thought I'd skip after killing Culp, eh? Well, drop your guns in the pit. And don't reach for that little pistol, Colonel. A blast from this shotgun will kill not only you but the girl behind you."

It was undeniable, and Crum obeyed, tossing his revolver into the snake pit and ordering Andy to do likewise.

"And now what, Mr. McCann?" Crum asked.

AT the sound of the name, Andy and the girl started, but the shrouded figure merely laughed again and began shedding its costume of black gauze, which, fold on wadded fold, had been sewed together to form a robe. Underneath, and still holding the shotgun steady, stood Ennis McCann in dark overalls and with a circlet about his forehead set with a crystal to reflect the light.

"Next," said Ennis McCann, "you die."

Crum shook his head slowly.

"It seems an awful waste of life," he said. "If you could only have guessed that it was Culp who was blackmailing you in the first place."

"But I didn't," McCann said. "He had such a baby-face. First I thought it was Ritter, and I had to kill old Windy while I was getting the snake to kill Ritter. Then I got another blackmail threat and thought it was Barnaby, so I killed him. But today I guessed it was Culp and followed him here. He was going to take Vince's skeleton out for proof, since I hadn't paid the money he demanded, but I beat him to it."

"Strange you didn't get the skeleton out before," Crum remarked.

"Before what?" McCann asked. "I never thought about it being seen from

the top of that rock. I knew it couldn't be seen from anywhere else. And that little devil Culp didn't start the blackmail until they came back here this time. Clever, all right, guessing the whole thing as soon as he saw that skeleton."

"That was easy," Crum said. "The story was widely known. And anyone who saw the one-armed skeleton and guessed it was Vince Elton would know that you were the killer, since you claimed you took him to Tucson that night. I guessed it as soon as I came to the conclusion that the secret was here in the cave instead of on the rock. And then, when I got that photograph from Windy Phillips studio it told me—"

"You got a photograph?" McCann jerked out.

Crum nodded. "You came back and rifled his cabinet last night just to be sure, didn't you? Well you missed it. It didn't show anything in the cave, but it told me enough. It was dated July 5, 1938, just the day after Elton disappeared, and the ledge was covered with buzzards.

"Yes, you knew how a rock dropped from the cliffs would bounce down into this place beyond sight, and the body did likewise—but not out of sight of the buzzards. And the hundred thousand you stole from Elton won't do you any good in the gas chamber, McCann."

"Gas chamber?" McCann laughed. "Not for me."

"But you can't escape. My assistant is waiting above."

"But I won't go that way," McCann said. He had been coming forward, and now he stepped up and over Culp's body, facing them at close quarters. "I brought enough rope with me, and I'll let myself down into the canyon's bottom. I'll take Vince's skeleton with me and we'll see if Sheriff Chipley can puzzle your deaths out."

Utter silence fell at these words. Crum, as much as the others, realized the awfulness of their predicament. Even if he dropped the light he was holding, made a desperate fight, the quick blasts of the automatic shotgun would wipe them out. And he couldn't risk that girl's life.

Standing dazed by this impasse, Crum's eye suddenly fell on the safety rope, which, tied about Culp's middle, straggled up the steps between their feet. That body lay just below and behind McCann's own feet.

"Mr. McCann," the little detective said, "I am not afraid to die and neither are these others. But it's a shame for this girl to be mangled by a shotgun blast. You probably have a pistol. Will you let her step forward and take a shot in the heart?"

MCCANN hesitated. "Well, of all the delicacy! But I don't care. Only, I'll keep the shotgun on you anyhow. Come on forward, Delia."

"But first," Crum interpolated, "I'll have to release her from the rope that's tied around her. It won't take a moment and you know that I can't do a thing as long as you keep that shotgun leveled—"

He turned quickly before McCann could reply and stepped behind the girl. Andy had made a move but a quick wink stopped him. Now, as Crum's hands swiftly freed the girl's waist from the pulley's sling, he fished with one foot for the rope attached to Culp's body, lifted it, tied it quickly to the pulley and turned back.

"All right, Delia, go down—"

As he uttered the words, he gave the rope three sharp tugs, and shoved the girl forward so violently that she fell

below the shotgun's range. Instantly McCann's finger pressed on the gun's trigger, but at the same instant the rope, tightening as Aga pulled from above in response to the signal, jerked Culp's body violently forward and pulled McCann's feet from beneath him.

The shotgun blasted ceilingward as McCann fell back with a cry, and then Crum was leaping forward, the deadly little watch-charm pistol between his fingers. It made no more than a faint *sput*, but its deadly bullet found its mark. And as McCann reeled backward into the snake pit, he collapsed instantly and lay strangely still among the writhing rattlers savagely lashing their bared fangs into his lifeless body.

"Don't look!" Crum warned the girl. "He doesn't feel it."

But as he turned, he saw that she wasn't looking anyhow. Andy Maple had lifted her from the floor, and holding her shuddering body in his arms was trying to kiss the pallor from her forehead.

Crum turned away with a smile, just as the body of Culp, still being pulled by strong tugs from above, vanished upward like some levitated zombie from the cave's opening. He wondered what Aga would think when he drew up that burden, and decided he'd better call up and tell his faithful assistant that another adventure was finished.

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THE THING IN THE BOTTLE

By **RAY CUMMINGS**

Author of "The Purple Head," "The Midnight Fiend," etc.



The swirling purple mist oozing from the bottle seemed to assume a menacing form

John Kent Spends a Mystifying Night in the Catskill Mountains Combating Arab Magic!

"IT'S a Jinn," the old man said with a senile chuckle, "and it lives in this bottle most of the time. Look ye, I guess I could bring it out if you want to see it."

He was ignoring his staring group of relatives and grinning at me. He had brought the bottle from a glass

cabinet in a corner of the living room. It was a brown, pot-bellied vase, its glazed surface covered with a tracery of grotesque Persian figures. He set it on the table before us.

"Want to see him come out?" he demanded.

"Grandfather, don't be absurd,"

Mary Harkness murmured.

"Absurd, Mary?" He chuckled, exposing toothless gums. He was an old man, nearly ninety perhaps. But his shriveled figure was wiry; his movements spry. "What's absurd about it?" He waved a finger at me. "Look ye, John Kent—you're new among us, but you're a smart young fellow. You might as well know about this thing."

Was he a little cracked? I really didn't think so. He seemed to take an impish delight, making these members of his family uneasy. His grinning gaze went to each of them—the slim, brown-haired Mary Harkness, his great-granddaughter; Arthur Marks, stalwart, grim-looking forty-year-old cousin of the girl; and another cousin, young Tom Blake, a pale thin, sullen fellow in his twenties, with a chronic hacking cough that suggested consumption.

It was a queer family that lived here in Harkness Hall perched among these desolate crags of the Catskills at the canyon top. They were all—except Mary—doubtless hanging around here waiting for this rich, crabbed old man to die. Ezra Harkness knew it; and he gloated in making them uncomfortable.

I felt the saturnine, middle-aged Arthur Marks twitch at my sleeve.

"Grandfather's a bit eccentric, Kent," he murmured as he leaned toward me. "Don't let him bother you."

The old man stood fingering the bottle.

"We've got a Jinn in the Harkness family, Kent," he explained ironically. "We're a bad lot, look ye, and when one of us gets too rotten, the Jinn comes out and kills him off. The family purger! He killed my nephew, Robert, two weeks ago."

I had heard about the tragic death of Robert Harkness. On a night as sullenly dark as tonight, eerie with the puffy wind that always moaned around these lofty crags, Robert Harkness had gone out onto the terrace. He had been drinking too much and had lost his footing, or the wind had blown him over the cliff—a fall of several hundred feet into the gorge and the boiling river of Kicking Horse Canyon.

THE pallid young Tom Blake coughed reedily.

"You better quit that kind of talk, Grandfather," he warned sourly. "Mr. Kent's our family lawyer now. You say you're going to change your will, and if he thinks you're of unsound mind—"

"If there's any insanity around here, it ain't me," old Ezra retorted testily. "Robert was a drunken sot and a loafer. You, Tom—you saw the Jinn push him off the terrace. So did you, Arthur. Ask 'em, Kent. I didn't see it, but they did."

I turned to Arthur Marks. His heavy-featured, slack-jawed face had taken on a queer expression as he tried to look lugubrious.

"Did you think you saw a Jinn committing murder up here?" I asked, my words and serious tone sounding idiotic to me. "By the way, exactly what is a Jinn?" I added.

The old man answered me.

"It's an evil spirit, or benign one, accordin' to what it does and which side the fence you're on." His toothless grin was gone. But in his eyes there was a sardonic gleam. Was it irrationality? I shifted uneasily in my chair.

"We're an old British family," Ezra Harkness added. "We got the Jinn attached to us a long time ago when one of our male ancestors was in the Indian Service. Want to hear the tale?"

"Yes," I said, frankly curious.

"Well, this illustrious ancestor married a Mohammedan girl. Her name was Tamari. Quite a little beauty, look ye. This bottle came down to us from her. The Jinn lives in it. You see, he was Tamari's Jinn. When she was a child she had befriended him, so he swore that he'd devote himself to befriending her and all her seed. He started right in. He killed George Harkness' brother—so the story goes—who wasn't too brotherly toward Tamari one day.

"And he's been at that sort of thing ever since. Sixty years ago—I remember it very well—he came out and killed a Harkness who damn sure deserved killing. And now, just two weeks ago, he killed Robert—"

"Please don't think, Mr. Kent," Mary put in tremulously, "that Grandfather really believes this."

"Damn it, why shouldn't I?" the old man retorted angrily. "What about what Tom and Arthur saw that night two weeks ago?"

"A purple ghost thing," young Tom Blake burst out suddenly. "I saw it out on the terrace—Uncle Robert was fighting with it. I heard him scream, and I looked out my bedroom window and saw it. So did Arthur. He was here in the living room, and he saw it through that window over there."

Marks nodded lugubriously.

"I thought I saw something like that," he agreed. "A big purple apparition that had George in its clutches, shoving him over the abyss. A trick of the window light on the mist outside, is my guess. We told the police, but they just laughed. Why wouldn't they?"

"But us Harknesses don't laugh at it," the old man said. "We're all afraid of the Jinn. Except me. So I'm offering to bring him out of the bottle right now. The first time he's ever been out in public, so to speak."

"Hell, go ahead and do it," young Blake burst out. "Let's see the damn Jinn. It'll be a relief, instead of hearing about him all my life."

"You think I can't do it?" the old man jibed. "You watch me."

WITH a lusty puff he blew out the table lamp. Shadows leaped to engulf us. Over in a corner of the somber room a silver candelabrum with six lighted candles sent a wavering illumination, making big shadows of us and of the pot-bellied bottle spread on the opposite wall. In the silence there was only the puffing and moaning of the crazy outside wind, gusting at the leaded panes of the closed windows.

Then from behind me in the eerie room I heard a sudden gasp. In the portiered doorway leading to the dim hall two other figures stood peering. The Harkness servants. One of them was Annie Green—big, raw-boned, hatchet-faced spinster of sixty-five or seventy. I had noticed her at supper—a weird, gaunt figure. Glow-

ering and sullen, she had seemed to eye me suspiciously as an interloper here.

Behind her now in the doorway the houseboy, Hassan, stood clutching at her. Erect, swarthy, Indian youth whom one of the Harkness men had brought from India, he stood staring, fascinated, at the old man and the pot-bellied bottle.

Old Ezra looked up, saw them in the eerie candlelight, and chuckled sardonically.

"All right, you two can stay and watch if you like. Get ready—here he comes!"

He raised his hands over the bottle. In that breathless instant I saw the candlelight painting his seamed old face, his thin lips parted in a jibing grin, his sunken eyes gleaming. Was there something malevolent about him? I suddenly felt it.

"Come out, Jinn!" he intoned. "I command you to come out. I'm not afraid of you—these others are all damn cowards, but not me."

I heard young Tom Blake struggling to suppress his cough; it sounded like a strangling gasp. Then I gasped myself. From the broad neck of the brown bottle a thin purple wisp was oozing! In the flickering eerie candlelight it spread upward.

The Jinn! Or was it my own imagination that made the swirling purple shape seem just for an instant to assume a monstrous, menacing pseudo-human form? For a second or two, oozing from the bottle, it spread out over us—arms and fingers like claws waving down as though about to seize us—a face, monstrously leering.

Mary Harkness screamed. Beside me, big Arthur Marks shoved back his chair with a grinding clatter and staggered to his feet. Even old Ezra himself seemed to gasp. Then the terrifying purple shape was fading. As though a little draft of air in the room had caught it, I saw it whirl, turning upon itself, losing its form.

"My God—get it back into the bottle!" young Tom Blake gasped.

But none of us heeded him. No one moved, save that now we were all on our feet. The purple shape of the Jinn, almost formless now, had

floated back to the portiered hall doorway. Hassan and Annie Green had fled. I stared, numbed, as the purple thing oozed silently through the door and was gone into the drafty dimness of the big outer hall.

FOR a moment we were all stricken into numbed silence. Then old Ezra Harkness, chuckling again, lighted the table lamp.

"Well, how'd you like him?" he gloated. "Told you I could get him out. He'll roam around now—he likes to spread himself a bit. But don't worry, by morning he'll be back in his bottle."

Whatever astonishment and perhaps fear the old man may have felt at his prowess in summoning the Jinn, he had recovered himself now. Again he was ironically jibing.

"Go on, get out of here, all of you," he ordered. "I've got to have a business talk with young Mr. Kent. My will needs rearranging." He was herding them unceremoniously to the door.

"Damned if I ever saw the old man like this before," Marks muttered to me.

"Go on, out with you. Mary, if you're frightened, go out to the kitchen with Annie and Hassan. But don't be afraid of the Jinn. Tell them I guarantee he won't hurt any of us." He laughed as though pleased with his private little joke. "The Jinn's a friend of mine—he does what I tell him."

Surely this old fellow was irrational. How could I draw a new will for him when it seemed that he must be of unsound mind? But when the door closed presently and he and I were alone in the living room, as though he had been an actor, his assumed role dropping from him, he grinned at me.

"Sit down, Kent," he said genially. "I'll give you my ideas on how I want to draw my will in this new version. Tomorrow we'll go down to town and have James, Livingston and James fix it up for us. Only sent for you—sentiment of the thing, look ye—your father and I were pretty close friends, boy."

I was only twenty-four. My father,

who had died six months ago down in Albany a hundred miles away, had for many years been Ezra Harkness' friend and counsellor.

"All right, sir," I agreed. I sat facing him. Then I burst out: "But, Mr. Harkness, that thing in the bottle—"

His impish grin came back. "I like to see 'em squirm. Look ye, young Kent, it's no great pleasure being a man well past eighty, with your relatives waiting like vultures for you to die. Mary's all right. But what are the others? Robert was a sot and drunkard. Arthur Marks—we call him Mary's cousin, but he's not even that. And I wouldn't trust him with a plugged nickel. Damned surly brute. And Tom? There's a worthless boy for you. You think that cough of his is consumption? It ain't. I've had him examined. Most of it's a fake, so's he won't have to go to work like I tell him he should, 'stead of sittin' around here moonin' over Mary."

"The Jinn—" I said.

"That got you, too, didn't it? My own little joke. I went to a chemist the other day. He looked up some dope in a conjurer's book." From his vest pocket the grinning old man produced a little white pellet. "I dropped one of these in the bottle," he said. "A little water in there, and up comes a purplish, odorless gas. Harmless enough."

I STARED at him. The imagination can play one such queer tricks! My own tense fancy had conjured arms and a face—had made the harmless rising purple vapor seem a monster.

He evidently guessed my thoughts. "Look ye, it was damn realistic, wasn't it? I had no idea it would seem so real. But anyway, that's what caused it."

"Then all you told me about the bottle, and Tamari—"

"Oh, that was all true enough. A legend of our family." He shrugged. "You can believe it or not as you like." He suddenly leaned toward me, placing a hand on my knee. "You know it struck me as damn queer, Kent, that both Tom and Arthur should have thought they saw a purple apparition

pushing Robert off the terrace two weeks ago. I never really believed in the Jinn myself. And yet—"

His voice trailed off. I could think of nothing to say. He shook himself slightly, and went on.

"Well, let's get to work. I'm an old man—won't live very long now. Guess this'll be the last will I'll ever draw."

He had been a clever businessman in his day, and an even more clever investor. He was worth nearly a million and a half now, in carefully liquid assets. His present will left it in equal shares to such of his relatives as might survive him. This included the aged servant Annie Green, but it did not include Arthur Marks.

"He's just a protégé of my dead brother, so I have to support him for life," Ezra explained. "And he won't work. Imagine a man content to loaf around here, lettin' me support him, and him with no chance of inheritin' anything."

There was a fairly substantial legacy for Hassan, the Mohammedan houseboy. Ezra's new will, which he now proposed to draw, was in keeping with the man's ironic nature. So far as the main features were concerned, he was making no real changes. But he wouldn't let his squirming relatives know it. The only major difference was that now he had become interested in a home for crippled children. Some of his less liquid assets—his long-term investments which he now succinctly itemized for me—were to go to this charity. It was hardly a tenth of his estate; but with ironic glæ he swore me to secrecy.

"Mary by rights ought to have it all," he said, as though that were something to be regretted. "She will, too, look ye, if she survives the others. With Robert dead, there's only Tom and Annie Green—"

He checked himself. We both stiffened; leaped to our feet. From outside the living room window came a cry, an oath, then a scream of terror. Momentarily the puffing wind around the house was silent, so that the cries came clear.

"Good God!" the old man gasped.

I rushed to the window, he following me. The scene outside was al-

most black—sullen clouds, a dim vista of crags and stunted trees, and the ground descending a few feet of sharp declivity from the house terrace to the brink of the gorge. The weather seemed breathless out there—breathless upon the verge of a sudden summer storm. And suddenly lightning split the sky, with an almost simultaneous thunder crack.

A SHAFT of light from our window and another, perhaps from the kitchen, merged on the terrace. At its edge, young Tom Blake and Arthur Marks were struggling with a ghastly purple shape! The Jinn!

Then Marks staggered back, with a wild oath of terror stood flailing his arms. But the Jinn had seized young Blake! Incredible, so that for a moment all I could do was stand gasping, numbed. This was no trick of my imagination. The monstrous purple thing, much as it had looked a while ago when old Harkness with his chemical trickery had brought it from the bottle, was wrapping itself around the panic-stricken Tom Blake. Marks had staggered back in terror. He made an effort to rush forward now.

"Tom!" he screamed.

He jumped from the terrace to the rocks, himself in imminent danger of going over the lip of the precipice. But he was too late. Blake was reeling down the steep declivity as his flailing arms fought with the Jinn, dispelled it. But it came again. Then he was on the brink of the jagged rocks, staggering, losing his balance. A puff of wind must have come over the crags, for the ghastly purple shape split and dissipated.

At the lip of the brink the staggering, screaming Blake for a second was poised. Then he was gone—down into the abyss where the Kicking Horse River roared toward the falls a mile away. They'd find his body down there in the morning. Another like Robert Harkness. . . .

The violence and swift onslaught of the summer storm was common to this mountain neighborhood. It burst upon us now as we gathered in the Harkness living room, a leaping crazy wind enveloping the house, lightning

bolts for a time—then nothing but a driving, torrential rain and a roar of steady wind.

The pallid, shaken Marks had come in from the terrace. Annie Green came running from the kitchen. Mary had previously left the kitchen, was in the hall when the commotion made her join us at once in the living room.

Where was Hassan? The thought occurred to me. Then from the hall side doorway, the Mohammedan came. He was bareheaded and wet from the rain, his swarthy face almost green with terror.

"The Jinn!" he gasped. "Him I saw out there. Mr. Tom fought with him—fell—"

"Yes, we saw it," old Ezra said grimly.

At my suggestion we tried to telephone the village to notify the authorities. The storm had broken down the line; the telephone was dead. It would be dangerous for any of us to attempt the precipitous rocky road in a storm like this.

"I'll attend to this in the morning," old Ezra said. "Nothing we can do tonight. Annie, you and Hassan go to your rooms. I guess that's about all any of us can do."

I stared at the old man's grim face and his gleaming eyes. What was in his mind? We were marooned here for the night. Marooned with a murderous Jinn, bent on ridding this family of its unworthy members? Surely that was incredible. Some ghastly mystery was here in this weird household, but was it a rational murderer—or at least a human murderer, demented perhaps, with trappings of the supernatural?

"I think we should go to our rooms," I said. "I agree with Mr. Harkness—nothing we can do tonight."

I HAD a small loaded revolver in my suitcase upstairs. Somehow it gave me comfort. Surely this murderous thing was something that a bullet would stop!

Alone in my room a while later, I dropped the weapon into my pocket. I had no intention of going to bed. For a long time I sat in darkness. The house had quieted. Perhaps everyone

but myself was asleep now. The storm was still raging—a heavy, driving rain and gusts of wind that frequently rattled the old house, making it seem to shudder.

I must have dozed in my chair beside the bed. My thoughts blurred. A rational murderer here? Or was I faced with the supernatural? You couldn't kill a Jinn with a bullet. Was there really an avenging Jinn in this weird family?

Something snapped me to alertness. I found myself sitting bolt upright in the darkness. An hour or more had passed. Despite the rattling of the old house, distinctly I thought I heard a patter of footsteps passing my door. I was there in a second.

The upper hall was dim with heavy shadows. There was just a small night-light on the wall to the right of me at the head of the front stairs. It seemed that I saw a brief shadow on the ceiling over there, as though someone—or something—had just passed and was now descending.

A purple shadow? The roaming Jinn? The crazy thought made me hesitate, my heart pounding. Then, weapon in hand, I padded swiftly to the stair-well. There was nothing but empty stairs and a dim vista of the empty lower hall. I turned back toward my bedroom. In this wing, I knew, there were only my room, old Ezra's and Mary's. The sudden realization made me stiffen. One of those two must have passed my door and gone downstairs! At the girl's closed door I hesitated. Then I knocked softly. Evidently she was not asleep.

"Yes? Who is it?" I heard her murmur instantly.

"John Kent."

The door yielded to my touch, and I went in. Mary was sitting on her bed, negligee over her pajamas.

"Oh—you!" she gasped. She stiffened with a new terror as she saw the weapon in my hand.

"It's all right," I murmured. "Wanted to see if you were safe here. I heard somebody pass my door."

She was on her feet, clinging to me. "I heard that, too! Was Grandfather going downstairs? Oh, I'm so frightened. I don't understand all this.

Grandfather acting so queer—"

"You stay where you are. I'll go to his room and see."

But she followed me. The old man's bedroom was at the end of our little hallway. The door was closed, but it opened at my shove. Ezra Harkness was gone. Why would he get up and go downstairs?

"Wait here," I whispered to the girl. "Or go back to your own room. I'll go down after him."

Again she clung to me in terror. "Oh—don't leave me—let me come with you."

I could not blame her for not wanting to be alone.

"All right," I agreed. "Come on, but don't make any noise."

A JARRING bump here in the bedroom froze us. But it was only a loose shutter of the bedroom window, banging in the wind. I went there, shielding my eyes as I peered through the closed, wet pane. This was toward the back of the house. The shutter had blown open. I had a dim vision of the rocky back yard. And something was moving out there! An upright blob was faintly visible—a man dragging something big and oblong from the house, out toward the curving edge of the cliff!

Momentarily the wind and rain had eased; the sky seemed a little brighter. Was that figure dragging a corpse? At first I thought so. And then it looked more like a narrow oblong object the size of a coffin. As I stared, he tumbled the thing over the brink, into the boiling river far down in the canyon. Then the moving figure vanished among the crags.

"What is it?" Mary murmured anxiously. "What do you see? I—oh, I feel—so queer," she gasped. "Something—the matter with me—"

I gripped her as she staggered. She was panting now, as though she couldn't get her breath. Something the matter with her? Good God, I felt it myself! My chest seemed bursting. Wildly, my heart was racing. I knew that something far more tangible than terror was making me feel like this! Something was in the air of the small, closed bedroom—something odorless

which we were breathing and which was killing us.

Like a man strangling I clutched at my throat with one hand and shoved the girl with the other. We staggered to the hall door, all but fell through it, closed it after us. In the hall, gasping for breath, we quickly revived. Presently I felt almost normal.

"Some gas in that bedroom!" I murmured. "We had a narrow escape! In another minute we would have—"

An eerie voice from downstairs made me bite off the words. Faint, blurred and muffled, the voice floated up to us.

"Jinn, come out! If you exist, come out and let me see you."

The old man's voice! The wind outside was blasting again, a gust shaking the house. With the numbed and now terrified girl clutching at me, I went downstairs. At the living room door we stood transfixed. One small candle in the chamber was lighted. Its faint, flickering glow struggled with the shadows. The table, near one of the closed windows, still held the pot-bellied Mohammedan bottle.

And before it stood Ezra Harkness, exhorting, pleading with the Jinn! He was a weird, eerie figure in his white nightgown, his spindly bare legs like pallid sticks beneath it. His wispy white hair was tousled. The faint candlelight painted his seamed face and gleamed in his eyes. He waved his thin arms.

"Come on out, Jinn! I won't use tricks this time. If you really exist, let's see you."

The pot-bellied bottle stood there motionless.

"Jinn, please come—" he pleaded. "I guess you're needed. Some damn murderer is here in our family. You're needed, Jinn—"

A sudden blast of the storm-wind struck the house wall. The puff abruptly loosened the fastenings of the old-fashioned window casement by the table. The small sash swung inward, out over the table and hit the bottle, knocking it to the floor. The crash as the bottle broke into fragments mingled with old Ezra's gasp of dismay. Then he looked up and saw us in the doorway.

"You, Mary? And Kent? Look ye, I been tryin'—"

The girl ran to him. "Grandfather dear—"

I took a step, and then I stood stricken. The bottle had crashed into a hundred scattered fragments. But from down there on the floor a purple shape was rising!

"The Jinn!" the old man squealed. "I didn't fake him this time, Kent! I didn't put anything in the bottle—not this time! But, by God, there he is! Look at him!"

Was it a little of old Ezra's chemical, still remaining in the bottle, mixed now by the crash with a little remaining water? Was it just my imagination, as now I breathlessly stared, that in the eerie candlelight the rising purple shape seemed to take on a monstrous travesty of human form?

It wavered over us here in mid-air. A draft from the window swirled it. There was nothing in a second or two but a thin stream of purple oozing out over my head through the doorway into the lower hall. The Jinn, going where? I was hardly conscious that I was following it into the lower back hallway toward the kitchen. Was the purple thing leading me somewhere?

I saw suddenly a slit here in the wall, a hidden panel that had been slid aside, leaving an inch crack as though someone had passed through here and failed to close it fully. And as though by suction of moving air, a faint, remaining stream of purple was oozing through.

I slid the panel farther open. Fetid air greeted me. There was a dim vista of moldering, steeply descending narrow stairs. Far down—much below the cellar level of the house—a faint radiance of light showed. With revolver leveled, cautiously I went down.

When I had stared out that bedroom window, seeing a man's figure out on the rocks dragging something, I had thought it the demented old man. Obviously, it hadn't been. Who, then? The burly, saturnine Arthur Marks?

I saw him now as I reached the bottom of the long staircase. A big, rocky subterranean chamber was here,

partly under the ancient house. A grotto opened off to one side, a narrow slit at the brink of an abyss. Marks was near there on the dim and rocky declivity. Beside him, in the light of a candle I saw an upright, cylindrical metal tank. Another was a few feet from it. Pipes led upward from them.

A rational murderer! I charged angrily toward Marks where he stood puttering with his murderous, mysterious, apparatus. Here was something that my bullet would stop!

"Up with your hands!" I rasped. "I've got you!"

HE started violently and dropped the dangling length of metal pipe he was clutching. Vaguely I was aware of a puffing hiss.

I saw Marks stagger as though he had been struck. Then he screamed. His arms flailed as he fought empty air. I did not fire. Twenty feet or so from him I stood numbed, my weapon sagging to my side. You couldn't fight a Jinn with a bullet.

Was it only my imagination, that as Marks staggered wildly down the rocky slope, I saw his flailing arms were futilely trying to ward off an attacking purple shape? It seemed to envelope him as he tottered at the brink. It seemed to go down with him as, with a last scream of terror, he fell. . . .

The police, when they came next morning, prowled until they found the rest of Marks' weird apparatus. The old house, before the Harkness family bought it, had been connected with this secret grotto. Apparently no one but Marks had ever stumbled upon it. The murders of Robert Harkness and Tom Blake now were obvious. Marks had installed under the house terrace a motor-pump and a big tank for compressed air.

Released through a vent on the terrace, the air had blown his victims over the abyss in a single high-pressure blast—the sudden releasing of the entire contents of the pressure-tank. There were controls so that Marks could work it from the terrace or from the living room. It had been one of his tanks which I had seen

Marks throw into the river. With open top, it would fill with water and sink, never to be found.

In the grotto, that tank had been filled with compressed, pure oxygen which he had piped up to old Ezra's bedroom! It was the over-stimulation of oxygen which had raced Mary's heart and mine. The old man, had he been there asleep in his habitually closed little room, would have died of that excess stimulation! Dead of heart failure. The oxygen would evaporate from his blood; no autopsy would have disclosed that it had been there!

Marks was an ingenious criminal indeed, devising two weird methods of murder necessary to accomplish his purpose. Tom Blake and Robert Harkness, being younger men, might not have died in their sleep from the oxygen. And conversely, old Ezra seldom went outdoors. It would have been nearly impossible for Marks to lure him out there, and have him blown over the brink, with witnesses who saw it to say that it was an accident.

"Look ye," the old man told the police and me that morning, "it's easy to see how that damned villain thought he was safe. He doesn't inherit anything."

Marks was the skeleton in the Harkness family closet. Ezra's younger brother, long dead now, had been Marks' father—and Annie Green, dour, hatchet-faced housekeeper, was

his mother. Perhaps he would have killed Mary Harkness later this night. In any event, before the old man could change his will, the housekeeper would have got the bulk of the estate—and Marks well knew that his dotting mother would not keep it from him.

"What do you say about that purple Jinn?" the police captain inquired. "I guess Marks mixed some purple chemicals with his wind-puffs on the terrace."

"But why would he do that?" another man objected. "All he wanted was to make it look like a normal accident. Why fake something supernatural?"

WHY, indeed? But he must have used a purple gas—there was no Jinn, of course. Down in the grotto, my sudden onslaught had startled Marks. Inadvertently he had released the pressure in that tank beside him. Its puff had made him stagger, and he had fallen down the declivity and gone over the brink. My imagination had conjured that purple shape, I told myself.

"Guess that's right," the police captain said. "Everybody knows there's no such a thing as a Jinn."

"Suit yourself," old Ezra said stubbornly. "But, look ye, I'm believin' we got Tamari's Jinn attached to the Harkness family. He swore he'd kill any of us who needed killin'. And Marks sure needed it, didn't he?"

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CHAPTER I

Death on the Beach

THE uproar dragged me out of a sleep in which I'd been dreaming that two-thirds of the lions in Africa were chasing me down Hollywood Boulevard, each of them roaring like a Thanksgiving football crowd. When I sat up in the darkness, wide awake and with sweat beads prickling out on my spine, it still sounded as though lions were serenading me.

I could distinguish the deep-chested barking and snarling of the mastiffs that Jonas Curry kept in pens near the

tip of the island. Every once in a while one of the hounds would hit high-C with a weird savagery that sent icicles sliding through my veins. Closer to the house a gorilla—I'd been told his name was Clarence—rattled the bars of his cage and roared a challenge to someone or something.

Jonas had a miniature zoo there, including apes, South American cats, snakes, a couple of bears, and most of them seemed to be going nuts for some reason. Underneath all the pandemonium was the steady pounding of the wild surf on the seaward cliffs of the island.

Not much chance of sleeping. I

ISLAND By H. H. STINSON

Author of "Morgue Fodder," "A Killer Needs Brains," etc.



found the bed lamp and snapped it on. My watch on the night stand said five minutes after one. A wet, salty wind whipped the curtains at the window, driving in off the dark Pacific. I kicked the covers off, found a robe and slippers and sat on the edge of the bed, lighting a cigarette and listening to the infernal hullabaloo outside.

"A nice restful spot for a week-end," I muttered and decided I needed a drink.

I went out into the hall. Jonas Curry's place was big, rambling. At one time San Benito Island, twenty miles off the California mainland, had belonged to a Spanish family who had raised a lot of sheep and a lot of children on it. Their house had been no small potatoes even then, and when Jonas used some of his millions to buy the island, he had built a couple more wings to the place. Living on the island between exploring jaunts, he had put a lot of money into housing the animals he brought back, and on experiments and inventions he was somewhat reticent about.

Although I'd been one of his battery

of lawyers for a couple of years, this was the first time I'd visited the island. If this night was a sample of the quiet week-ends he'd mentioned, I decided it would be my last visit.

There was a dim night-light in the hallway. I shuffled toward the stairs. I hadn't got there when a door opened at my right and something very good-looking in a peach-colored negligee appeared.

"Top of the morning to you, Patsy," I said. "And is that concert outside the usual thing here?"

Patricia Sully shivered. She had the blackest hair, the blackest eyes and the reddest lips any woman had a right to. One of the mastiffs let go with a high, wicked keening and Patsy went white.

"I've never heard them carry on like that," she said. She looked puzzled, faintly alarmed. "I can't imagine what's upset them so."

"I wouldn't know, either," I said. "But I would know a drink might keep me from going nutty from all the uproar. Where does Jonas keep his very hardest liquor?"

We went downstairs together, Patsy sticking close to me and wincing every time the pandemonium outside rose in volume. I didn't mind how close she got to me. She happened to be Jonas Curry's cousin but they weren't anything alike. In contrast to Jonas' millions, she didn't have a nickel of her own, and she certainly didn't resemble lanky, slab-sided Jonas. But she did rate high with me.

When we got down into the sprawling, lower hall, we could see light inching out under the door of the big room Jonas had fixed up as his study. Jonas looked around at us, startled at our entrance. He was fully dressed. The polished spectacles that made his pale, bony face look like that of a professor, flashed at us.

"Next time I come out here, Jonas," I said, "I'm bringing some sleeping powders for your menagerie. What's the matter with them?"

He was standing by one of the windows. Beyond the glass, moonlight sifted through flying scud and made the night a faint, ghostly white. The yelping and roaring went on outside.

"I don't know what's wrong with

them," Jonas said. But there was something in his eyes that told me he was half-lying—and frightened. "Throw some clothes on and we'll have a look around."

When I came back downstairs, Jonas had a hand sunk in the pocket of his flannel coat.

The added bulge told me there was a gun in the pocket.

"I don't like the sound of that out there, Gerry," Patsy said worriedly. "Will you be careful—both of you?"

"You never knew a McTavish yet that wasn't careful," I said. "Mix me that drink while I'm gone."

Jonas said nothing.

The island is only a mile long, maybe half a mile wide. The house is on the flat land at the northern tip, and all the other buildings, including Jonas' laboratory and workshop buildings, are there too. Toward the south the land rises into hills and canyons where Jonas grazed a herd of sheep. We turned through the uncertain moonlight for the kennels where the mastiffs were raging.

"Keep a sharp eye out, Gerry," Jonas said, his voice husky.

"For what?" I said. "What do you think's wrong—that perhaps one of your animals is loose?"

"I don't know what's wrong."

The mastiffs, about twenty of them, were kept in a double row of wire pens. Jonas had knocked off dozens of blue ribbons with them. Ordinarily the beasts didn't know what fear was. But they were frightened now.

We went down between the pens. The huge animals padded up and down nervously and howled and roared. The flash in Jonas' hand swept around the pens. Everything seemed in order. He then led the way a hundred feet farther on where the gorilla, Clarence, was rumbling behind the bars of a cage. From there we went past a couple of dozen cages. Ocelots, leopards, mountain lions, jaguars, stared back at the flash with green eyes, spat or howled. In a big cage at the end of the row half a dozen apes scrambled around and chattered at us hysterically.

"Any of the animals missing?" I asked him.

"No."

Jonas headed toward the greenhouse where he raised tomatoes the size of cocoanuts and other vegetables just as huge by means of this new-fangled water culture. Shrubbery rustled behind us and Jonas jumped two feet. His sigh of relief was like an explosion when the flash showed that the shrubs had only moved in the wind.

"Jonas, you've got a pretty good idea what we're looking for," I said. "What did you think that noise was? Have you any idea?"

"I tell you I don't know. Come on."

We prowled through the greenhouse where tomato vines were a dozen feet high and cornstalks towered above that. The water tanks in which the roots were immersed stretched in long, gleaming aisles and we went up and down between them without finding anything wrong.

The greenhouse is down near the beach. We started along the shore path for the clump of buildings that were a combined laboratory and workshop. The beach there—the only real beach on the island—runs down a gentle slope to the surf. We could see the white sand glistening softly in the dull moonlight.

But not quite all of it glistened. Just ahead of us, just off the path, there was a dark splotch on the sand. We got closer, and the finger of the flashlight picked up the dark splotch, turned it into a bundle of sprawled limbs, disheveled clothing.

Jonas faltered, stopped. His breath came out in a stifled groan. The flashlight jerked with his hand and the light swung off the crumpled figure. I grabbed the light from him and took half a dozen steps that brought me out on the sand, above the body.

The light turned the thing into a horrible nightmare. The body was that of a woman, a woman whom only a few hours before I'd been facing across a bridge table. I'd met her for the first time that night—she'd been introduced as a Mrs. Gail Haskell, a friend of Patsy Sully—and she had seemed a jolly, attractive sort who played a good game of bridge and could hold her own with anyone.

But she wasn't jolly or attractive now.

CHAPTER II

"I Killed Her"

IN the harsh light of the flash, her eyes stared lifelessly upward, terror stamped in them and in every line of her contorted face. She had been wearing a suede jacket over a sports dress, and over her abdomen and bosom both jacket and dress had been ripped and torn and shredded to expose her flesh. The body had been horribly mangled.

Yet, despite the terrible rending, there was little blood about.

Jonas was standing beside me. I looked at him in the glow of the flashlight and he was staring downward dully. He had been apprehensive before, but now it was impossible to tell what emotion lay behind his gaunt face.

"Jonas, in the name of Heaven, what's going on out here on your island? Who—or what—could have killed her in this ghastly fashion?"

Jonas said nothing, his thin lips compressed tightly. He took the flash from me, swiveled it around in a wide circle that showed nothing moving or alive.

"Is one of your animals loose? Is that it?"

"No," said Jonas flatly. "Come back to the house."

"But we can't leave her like this!"

"We can't help her now. We've got to get back to the house." His voice was harsh, peremptory.

I caught Jonas Curry's thoughts. With death, fiendish and horrible, loose on the island in the darkness, it was better to be back at the house where the others needed protection.

Patsy Sully came out of the study, holding a long drink in her hand. She looked at us as we entered the hall, and apparently my face didn't mask the experience I'd just been through. Patsy halted.

"What is it? What's happened?"

There were quick, light footsteps behind her. Quentin Keith, the chemistry instructor whose brilliance at Southern Tech had attracted Jonas' attention and who had been brought to the island to work with Jonas, came through the study door. His glance caught Patsy's

white, startled face and he put his hand on her arm soothingly.

"Now take it easy, Patsy," he said. "I told you they'd be all right, that there wasn't anything to be frightened of out there. Isn't that so, Mr. Curry?"

"No," Jonas said. "Quentin, see that everyone in the house—servants and guests—is brought down here. I want everyone together—everyone!"

"Quite," said Keith. His face changed, became puzzled. But he didn't question the order. He was a good-looking blond man in his twenties with serious gray eyes and a world of gray matter behind the eyes.

He went quickly up the wide, curving stairs and disappeared. Jonas, Patsy and I went into the study.

"I can use that drink now, Pats," I said. "And Jonas could probably use one, too."

Jonas shook his bony head. "No. I've got to think." His voice was low and faraway, almost as though he were talking to himself.

He sat down at a big desk, let his forehead drop into his hands, stared at the desk. After a moment he picked up a pen and began to write.

"Keep hold of yourself, Pats," I said. "Mrs. Haskell's been killed."

Patsy stared at me, nodded. "I was afraid of something like that. I went to her room while you were gone and she wasn't there. How did it happen?"

I told her. Even though I made it brief, I couldn't keep the horror out of my voice, and I saw horror grow in her eyes. Outside there was a crescendo of howls and roars from the animals, but it had been going on so long that I scarcely noticed it.

"Pats, you said you were afraid of something like that. Why? Have you any idea what happened to her or what's going on out here?"

Jonas didn't look up, but he spoke.

"Patricia, any explanations that are made, I will make."

Patsy looked at me, shrugged her shoulders, and was silent.

I got on the outside of my drink and was fixing myself another when Keith came back. With him was the huge, bearded man who had been introduced to me at dinner as Dr. Hugo Kordic. I'd recognized the name as that of one

of the country's most noted gland specialists.

He blinked his eyes sleepily and yawned in the bushy, black beard.

"Something amiss, Curry?" he asked. "Someone ill?"

"No, doctor," was the reply. "I have something to tell you as soon as the others come. Will you sit down, please?"

The others were there almost on Keith's heels. There were the Mexican couple who took care of the house, and another Mexican who worked outside and helped with the animals. Bess Bennett, the famous woman photographer who has shot pictures of everything from sinking ships to the birth of polar bears, showed up in a black negligee that was eye-filling. Besides Bess, there were James Colfax, a youngish-looking fellow who had a name among chemists for all his youth, and his flaxen-haired wife, still rubbing sleep from her eyes.

Bess Bennett took the drink out of my hand.

"I don't know what time it is, Gerry, but it's time for me to have one of those," she said lightly.

Jonas stood up at the desk, let his eyes run over the group as though he were checking each person off mentally. There was a somber relief in his gaze.

"I'm sorry to have wakened you at this time but I thought it would be safer if you were all together."

"Safer?" Colfax echoed. "Safer? Curry, I don't quite understand."

"There's grave danger," said Jonas. "Mrs. Haskell has been killed and there's grave danger to the rest of us."

Nobody was sleepy any longer.

Jonas went on: "I don't find myself able to go into details at this moment." His voice was dull, dreary. "It's enough to say that I've brought it on all of you through my own carelessness. However, if you will all stay together in this room—behind closed windows and doors—you will be safe until I can get you off the island in the morning. Meanwhile I'm going to see what I can do to make up for my fatal negligence."

He stepped from behind the desk and went toward the door, astounded stares following him. I could see terror grow-

ing in the blue eyes of Mrs. Colfax, and Bess Bennett's sun tan was a sickly yellow.

"But, my dear Curry," Dr. Kordic said, protestingly, "you can't leave us in ignorance like this. You've got to give us some explanation, you've got to tell us what threatens us—"

"Later," Jonas said. "There will be no danger to you if you will remain in this room until morning. There might very conceivably be a threat to someone's sanity if I were to go into details at the moment."

He paused at the door and jerked a finger at me. "I want to see you for a moment, Gerry."

When I was out in the hall with him, the door closed behind me, he pulled a slip of paper from his pocket, handed it to me.

"If I'm alive tomorrow," he said, "I'll tend to this matter myself. If not, I want my executors to arrange it."

I glanced at the slip of paper. It read: "This is a codicil to my last will and testament. In the event of my death, one half-million dollars of my estate is to be placed in a trust fund, the income from which shall be divided equally between the surviving children of Mrs. Gail Haskell."

It was signed and dated.

"I feel morally and legally responsible for Mrs. Haskell's death. I understand she has two children and this is the only way I can think of to make amends," Jonas explained.

"Jonas," I said, "this is all very screwball and I think you owe us—me, anyway—an explanation. And don't worry about my sanity. I can take it. Who—or what—killed Mrs. Haskell?"

Jonas looked at the floor for a moment, his long, bony face stiff and sober. He said finally:

"Gerry, I killed her. I killed her five years ago in the South American jungle. I killed her with an idle, useless idea. More than that I'm not going to say right now."

He swung away from me and went toward the room where he kept a collection of weapons that was famous wherever arms collectors foregathered. But the weapon he emerged with was no antique. It was a gleaming, long-barreled shotgun. He went to the front

door, opened it and looked back at me, his long face set in drawn lines.

"Don't be a fool, Jonas," I told him. "Don't go blundering out there in the dark by yourself if you feel that you absolutely have to go. Let me have a gun and I'll go with you. If it's one of your animals that's escaped and killed Mrs. Haskell, two guns are better than one."

He shook his head. His voice was stubborn. "Do you know of any animal in my collection that could have killed a human being in that fashion?"

"No."

"Anyway, the carelessness was mine," Jonas said doggedly. "If there are any further consequences, I'll take them. Go back and keep everyone together until daylight. If I haven't returned by then, have the men arm themselves and escort the women to the cruiser and get away from the island."

The door slammed and I stood there, my mind churning.

What had Jonas meant by that screwball stuff about South American jungles and having killed Mrs. Haskell five years ago with an idle, useless idea? And if an animal hadn't killed Mrs. Haskell, what had? Certainly not a human being.

After five minutes of tramping up and down the hall, I gave it up. Jonas was the only one who had the explanation and his refusal to explain had been as mysterious as the mystery itself.

Then I thought: Jonas isn't the only one who knows. Patsy Sully knows—or suspects. And certainly Quentin Keith knows.

I went back toward the study.

CHAPTER III

Monstrous Shape

THERE'S nothing in the world, apparently, that will make a bridge fiend forego a chance for a game.

When I stepped into the study, there was a game going on, with Colfax and Bess Bennett pitted against the doctor and Mrs. Colfax.

"Three spades," Bess said, looked up at me and shivered. "Did you find out

from Jonas what this is all about?"

"No."

"Very strange, very strange," Dr. Kordic said. "I don't mean your bid, Miss Bennett. I bid four hearts."

The game went on and I crossed the room, sat in a chair opposite the divan where Keith Quentin sat close to Patsy Sully, patting her hand comfortingly. Patsy turned to me.

"Gerry, where's Jonas?"

"He went out."

"Out?" exploded Keith. "Good Lord—what for?"

He looked horrified.

"He went out with a shotgun," I said. "Maybe he's after ducks, but I doubt it." I looked hard at Keith and then at Patsy. "Listen, here—you two know what's going on out there. As Jonas' lawyer, I ought to know, too."

"But, Gerry, if Jonas didn't tell you—"

Keith cut in. "Exactly," he said. "If Mr. Curry had wished to make an explanation, he would have done so."

Patsy nodded slowly, almost unwillingly.

"I'm afraid Quentin is right, Gerry. We'll have to let Jonas make what disclosures he sees fit."

I got a little sore. "Okay, okay. But it'll come out eventually."

Keith shrugged, looked at Patsy. I caught the very complete approval in his gaze. I didn't blame him for approving of her—I approved of her myself—but I wasn't too pleased with the way she was shutting me out from information I should be having.

I got up and wandered around the room, stopping by the window where I'd first seen Jonas standing. The moon had been swallowed up in the clouds, and I couldn't see much except the reflection in the glass of a lantern-jawed lawyer named Gerry McTavish. He didn't look like any prize to me. His face was sore and not a little apprehensive.

Outside, vague patches of gloom moved and swayed in deeper darkness. They were probably just trees and shrubs moving in the wind. I drew away from the window just the same and pulled the draperies shut. The animals seemed to have quieted a bit, but every now and then one of them would

loose a long, mournful howl.

My watch said it was twenty after two. After I'd walked fifty miles around the room, kibitzed on the bridge game a while, and walked fifty miles more, I looked at the watch again. Fifteen minutes had passed.

I went back to watching the bridge game. If they could keep their minds off things with a deck of cards, it might help me. Mrs. Colfax had five hearts from the king and not much else, but she bid five hearts. She was too good a bridge player to bid like that. So I knew she didn't have her mind on bridge, any more than I did.

She got no chance to play the hand out. Bess Bennett had her mouth open to double the bid but the words never emerged.

From south of the house there came the loud, sharp explosion of a gun. It was followed instantly by a faint scream, and everyone in that room froze for long seconds.

After that lone, crashing shot and the scream, there was nothing, nothing except the moan of the wind about the corners of the house, the rhythm of the surf pounding the cliffs. Even the animals were completely quiet, and inside the room none of us seemed to breathe.

Suddenly Dr. Kordic put his cards down on the table. He rose, his beard flaring about his face.

"I—for one—can stand this blind suspense no longer." He looked around and his eyes fastened on me. "McTavish, may I speak with you outside the room for a moment?"

Quentin Keith said worriedly: "What are you going to do, doctor? Mr. Curry asked that we all stay here together."

"Are you prepared to tell us what's behind this mystery?" Kordic asked.

"That will have to come from Mr. Curry."

The doctor moved toward the door and I followed him into the hall. He closed the door.

"McTavish," he said, "I can't let poor Curry be out there alone to face whatever this danger is. He's too valuable a man to science to let him risk his life just because he feels a responsibility for something having gone wrong here. Have you the courage to go with me

and bring him back?"

Remembering that solitary gunshot and the scream that had followed it, I wondered if perhaps it wasn't a little too late to be of much help to Jonas. But I said: "I'd rather do anything than sit around and wonder what's going on. Incidentally, have you any idea just what is going on?"

He frowned. "Not the slightest. Curry said something when he invited me out here about having some unusual results to show in the way of glandular experimentation. He invited Colfax for the same reason, I understand, and had Miss Bennett here to make some pictures in the same connection. It was late when we arrived, and he told us he'd go into the matter tomorrow. Whether that has anything to do with what's happened tonight, I don't know. Where does Curry keep his guns?"

I led the way to the gunroom and there we found a shotgun, the mate to the one Jonas had gone out into the night with, and a rifle. Kordic took the shotgun. I could see by the way he handled it that he was no stranger to guns. I wished I'd felt as much at home with my weapon as he did with his.

We went out the front door into the windy darkness and slammed the big door firmly behind us. The breeze coming in from the sea was growing stronger.

"The shot and the scream came from the south, toward the hills," I said.

We turned that way, elbow to elbow.

The animals were at it again, worrying their fear and apprehension the way a dog worries a bone.

Kordic spoke in a low voice, as though the mysterious menace might be there beside us.

"Whatever happens, McTavish, we stay close to each other. Understood?"

"You couldn't pry me away from you."

We angled around the house, past the dark bulk of the laboratory and workshop. Our feet grated on the gravel of a path that, I'd noticed on my arrival during the afternoon, led toward the hills to the south.

Once Kordic halted and his voice rang out.

"Curry!"

There was only silence, and the doc-

tor tried it again. The wind whipped his voice away into nothingness.

The path climbed beneath our feet. In a matter of minutes we were on the crest of a hill, well above the house. Up there the night didn't seem so black. The ocean showed a wave, tipped with phosphorescence here and there, and the buildings at the tip of the island were gray blocks against a black earth. Above us the sky was faintly gray.

We paused there, looking downward.

"If the shot had been fired beyond this point, doctor, I don't believe we'd have heard it—"

Kordic put fingers onto my arm. They bit into my flesh like iron.

"Quiet—listen!"

I listened, scarcely breathing. At first I could hear nothing but the steady, whining sweep of the wind through the shrubs around us and above the path. Then it seemed there was stealthy movement, almost soundless movement. A tiny stone was dislodged from somewhere and bounced down toward us.

It happened without further warning. A thing compounded of black bulk and writhing limbs seemed to soar out of the brush above us, to blot out the whole sky for a moment as it descended.

Kordic cried out and jerked the shotgun upward, jolting me off my balance as he did so. I staggered sidewise, my feet found only empty space and I plunged off the path, dropped into darkness.

There was no gunshot but I heard a single, muffled scream as I whirled down in a fall that seemed endless. Branches and rocks clawed at me—and suddenly the whole world exploded inside my head.

CHAPTER IV

Jungle Spawn

DAWN was just slipping over the horizon from the California coast the next time I knew much about anything. I was huddled beneath a bush with my head against the trunk of a stunted oak tree. There was dried

blood on my face. I lay there a moment after my eyes opened, trying to think why I was there, trying to remember what had happened to me.

Then I remembered—plenty. I could recall that writhing shape that had seemed to spring out of the sky at us, I could remember slipping off the path into space, and I could still hear the muffled scream of Dr. Kordic. I shuddered, the movement sending pain all through my body.

I crawled to my hands and knees, staggered weakly to my feet. I was stiff and sore in every joint but otherwise unharmed. Whatever it was that had stalked us in the night had passed me by unhurt.

A hundred feet above me up to the steep side of a little canyon I could see the rim of the path.

Halfway up I found the rifle that had spun out of my grasp in the fall. I picked it up and felt safer for having it. I made sure there was a cartridge in the breech and scrambled up toward the path, ready for anything.

The thing that was there called for no use of a weapon. That thing had been Dr. Kordic, and even before I caught more than a glimpse of his legs, sprawled out beyond the rim of the path, I instinctively knew what to expect.

When I looked down at him, I was shaking with horror and also with rage, rage that any human intelligence, that of Jonas Curry or anyone else, could have let such loathsome destruction loose upon a fellow creature. Kordic's whole chest cavity had been crushed in, mangled, and blood and bone mingled with bloody cloth. Once again I noted how, in some way, the vital juices of the man's body had been sucked away, leaving the body like a pallid shell.

I turned away, sickness at the marrow of my bones, and stumbled down the path toward the house. I held my rifle at the ready, starting at every imagined sound and every movement of the brush in the wind.

I went across the fields, past Jonas' workshop buildings and on toward the house. When I was still twenty feet from the front door, it was flung open—Patsy stood there.

She looked at me for a moment as though she couldn't believe her eyes, and then ran toward me, put her arm in mine to keep my stumbling steps going toward the house.

"Thank God, Gerry! I thought you—you were—"

"Dead, Pats? Not quite."

Keith appeared at the doorway.

"Thank heaven you're safe, Mr. McTavish. After what happened to Dr. Kordic, we hadn't much hope for you."

"You know what happened to Kordic?"

He nodded. "Mr. Curry and I went out searching for the two of you—and found him."

We were inside the big hall.

"Since you know what happened to Kordic, you'd better let me know, too. Because if I don't find out blasted soon what's behind all this, I'm going to blow the lid off in a big way. Jonas Curry could have twenty times the dough he has, and I'd still blow the lid off."

Jonas' voice said, "You're quite right, Gerry."

I turned my head. He was standing at the other end of the hall, gray-faced and quiet.

"Will you come in here with me, Gerry?" he said.

I walked the length of the hall and through the door he held open. He came in after me, closed the door.

We were in a room I hadn't seen before, a long room that looked halfway between a chemical laboratory and a greenhouse. There was a long table, upon which there were retorts, Bunsen burners, test tubes, flasks. Shelves above the table held dozens of jars, filled with fluids of various colors. At the end of the room there was a desk, and beyond that a window which looked out upon the buildings of the workshop.

Jonas shoved a chair at me and I sat down.

"Spill it, Jonas. I'm waiting."

Instead of speaking, he pulled open a drawer of the desk and brought out a sealed jar. He put it on the desk. I felt the blood chill in me in spite of the fact that the thing inside the jar had been long dead and was preserved in alcohol.

Even dead, it was loathsome—a furry, eight-legged creature with two beady eyes back of its mandibles—eyes that seemed to fasten on me as the body swayed and moved in the fluid.

"All right," I said. "It's a tarantula—and what's that got to do with it?"

"Everything," Jonas said. "And it isn't a tarantula, Gerry. It's what is called a bird-eating spider, although people confuse it with the true tarantula. It's fairly common in South America."

"I'll take your word for it. But I still want to know what this has to do with Mrs. Haskell and Kordic being killed. This thing is perhaps a foot in diameter—the thing that attacked Kordic was as big as a calf. I saw it for a moment before Kordic upset me and spilled me off the path. If it wasn't ten feet across, I'm crazy."

"No," said Jonas, "you're not crazy. It was closer to twelve feet in diameter from the tip of one set of legs to the tip of the other set. I know—because I created it."

I stared at him. "You created it?"

He nodded wearily. "I played God, Gerry. And sometimes it isn't wise for a mortal to play God. It can end in disaster."

"Go on," I said.

He looked down dully at the spider floating in the alcohol.

"A few years ago," he said, not looking at me and speaking as though to himself, "I became interested in endocrinology—the science of the ductless glands, the glands that control the development and size of the body and our behavior—"

"I know about them."

"Well, I had several interesting theories I wanted to prove, and since I couldn't experiment on humans, I tried animals of various sorts. I had no luck with any of those I tried, so I gave up the experiments for a while in favor of an exploring trip to South America.

"These bird-eating spiders interested me. I had a small collection of them brought back, thinking that I hadn't tried Arachnidae—the spider family—in my experiments, and that these bird-eating spiders would be ideal for my purposes, since they were large enough to work on, and lived sometimes for

several years.

"There's no need going into details but I've had astounding success with these spiders. They breed rapidly, and by cross-breeding and inoculations of pituitary and other glands, I succeeded in increasing their size to a diameter of from ten to twelve feet."

"And what for?" I asked.

"Why," said Jonas, apparently astonished, "just to show it could be done."

"You're a clever man," I told him, "and a fool, Jonas. A careless fool, too. What right had you to bring anyone here while those things were wandering around loose. Perhaps the law will say those two deaths were accidents, but you know in your heart—"

"They weren't accidents, Gerry," he said, his lips thin. "They were murder."

"Murder?" I breathed.

"Exactly. The spiders naturally were not allowed to wander around loose. They are kept in cages beneath the laboratory. I knew Mrs. Haskell had gone for a stroll last night, and after we had found her body, I thought—feared—that I had carelessly left one of the cages unlatched after feeding my collection their customary meal of a live sheep apiece during the evening. When we returned to the house, I checked the cages and found all but one securely fastened. Yet later another one of the beasts was released, and that one killed Kordic."

"How do you know it wasn't the first one that got loose, the same one that had already killed Mrs. Haskell?"

"Because that one was dead before Kordic was killed. I shot it. And when I returned to the house and found you and Kordic gone, I went at once to the laboratory and found a second cage empty. I went out again at once with young Keith, and we found the second spider still gorging on Kordic's body. It came down the trail to attack us, and the blast of the gun blew it off the path and into the canyon. There's no doubt that this was murder, and that it was directed at me, even though we may never be able to prove it."

"Directed at you? What makes you think that?"

"Because the first one was loosed be-

tween the time I fed the spiders and the time I customarily take a walk up and down the beach before retiring. That Mrs. Haskell also decided to take a walk, and that she was the person killed, is the only accidental part about it."

My eyes dwelt on the spider in the bottle and I shuddered, thinking of one a hundred times that big.

"But who'd want to kill you, Jonas? There's certainly no one on the island who would have any motive."

"Think again," Jonas said, his face drawn and ugly. "There's one person here, just one, who was familiar with the spiders, and who also had an excellent reason for wanting me dead."

"Who?"

"Patricia Sully." The words came out slowly.

"Pats?" I said. "Jonas, now I know you're crazy."

"Patricia," said Jonas tonelessly, "is penniless except for what I give her. On my death she would inherit the bulk of my estate. She knew a good deal about the spiders. From time to time, she's helped me with them."

"I still think you're crazy."

"Furthermore, I've found out that while you and I were gone from the house the first time, she disappeared for a few minutes, ostensibly to get ice for the drinks she made. She could have managed to unlatch the cage of another spider in that time. I'm afraid that so far as the law is concerned, there is no way it can be proved or disproved, but I am convinced of her guilt, and to-day I want you to draw up a new will for me."

"Have you told her what you suspect?"

"No. But since I've come back from killing the second spider, I've kept her under my eyes constantly so she would have no further opportunity to do anything. And I've made sure also that all the remaining spiders are securely caged."

He stood there silent for a moment or two, finally went to a corner of the room where he poured fluid from a demijohn into an enameled pail. He put the demijohn back on a shelf, and from another shelf took a cardboard box.

"What are you going to do?" I asked.

"The thing I should have done long ago—destroy the spiders. This liquid is sulphuric acid and in the box is cyanide."

"Lethal chamber stuff, you mean?"

"Exactly. In ten minutes, every one of them—there are eleven left—will be dead."

The pail in one hand, the box in the other, he left the room. I sat there, still stupefied. The horror of the loathsome things he had created was only surpassed by the horror of the thought that Patsy Sully could have freed them on defenseless and unwarned human beings. I didn't believe it.

After a while, I saw Jonas walking across in front of the window where I sat, heading toward the laboratory. A shaft of sunlight struck out over the ocean and threw his figure into sharp relief against the mass of the building. I saw him glance toward the laboratory, suddenly hesitate, slow his steps and, following the line of his glance, I saw what had caught his eye.

The door of the laboratory was open. That didn't mean anything in particular to me—for a moment. Then it did.

The door edged open a little farther, suddenly swung wide under pressure from within. Two long, hairy legs jutted out past the opening, then two more, and then a blunt, hairy body came into sight.

Jonas flung the bucket from him, the cardboard box another direction. He spun and started to run. I gaped through the window, unable to move. A huge, rounded bulk came through the door. It moved across the ground like lightning, flowed rather than ran.

If Jonas had only clung to the bucket of acid, thrown it at the creature, he might have had a chance. But in his panic he'd thrown away his only hope.

I spun, ran for the rifle which I'd leaned against the wall a dozen feet away, ran for the window again. The spider was within a dozen feet of Jonas as I battered glass from the window. Then it launched itself through the air in one tremendous leap and Jonas went down, vanished beneath its clutching legs, its great hairy body.

Without knowing it, I was shouting curses, incoherent words. Then I was

pumping lead into that horrible body fifty feet away. The thing gave one weird, whinnying scream, the same sort of shrill sound we'd heard the night before, and slumped, its legs sprawling aimlessly. But I went on firing until the rifle clicked and went silent in my hands.

I battered more glass out of the window and got through to the outside somehow. I ran toward the horrid bloody mass that had been spider and man only a moment before, but Quentin Keith was there before me, rounding the corner of the house from the front door as I clambered from the window. He was white, glassy-eyed with horror, but he shoved at the carcass of the spider, rolled it aside and knelt by Jonas' body.

But it was too late to do anything about Jonas. I'd known it would be too late even when I'd snatched up the rifle.

CHAPTER V

Killers Unleashed—Killer Unmasked

THE trim cruiser that Jonas had used for communication with the mainland rocked gently at the wharf in the morning sun. James Colfax helped his flaxen-haired wife aboard. Bess Bennett jumped aboard, disdaining my hand.

"Even if I'd been willing to take pictures of them, Gerry, nobody would have believed them," she said.

The three Mexicans were huddled in the cockpit of the boat and the motor was turning over rhythmically, but I didn't help Patsy Sully aboard. She and Keith Quentin stood on the dock beside me.

"We'll be with you in a few minutes," I said to those aboard.

Turning, I took Pats' arm in one hand, Keith's in the other. Pats looked at me.

"Before we leave," I said, "we're going to do what Jonas failed to do."

"Destroy the spiders?" said Patsy.

"Right," I said. "And you two are going to show me how to get in at them without any more—accidents, shall I

call them?"

"Good idea, Mr. McTavish," Keith said. "I've been frightened of the beasts for months."

We went back into the house where Keith found sulphuric acid, cyanide pellets. We went out of the house and toward the laboratory, passing through the door where the horrifying shape of the great spider had emerged for its spring on Jonas. Keith snapped on a light, and we went down a stairway. He clicked on another switch.

The light showed us a long row of cages, fine-screened. Behind the screens, abominable hairy bodies moved. Long, hairy legs writhed and hooked into the meshes of the screens. Beady eyes caught the light and fixed themselves on us.

"This is a job I'll like to do, Mr. McTavish," Keith said. "And then get off this island of horror forever."

"Ah," I said, "but you're not going to do exactly that, Keith. Not immediately, at any rate."

There was complete silence in the laboratory for a moment.

"I don't understand," Keith said.

"Pats," I said, "there's just one thing I want to know. Have you ever encouraged Quentin Keith to think you might marry him?"

Pats looked at me steadily for a moment.

"I think I know what you mean, Gerry. Yes, I've liked Quentin. I—I'm afraid I've let him know it. It wasn't anything more than that, but he might have misunderstood."

"That makes everything clear then," I said. "Doesn't it, Keith?"

The blond man spoke in a husky voice.

"I don't know what you mean."

"Here it is in short words. If Jonas should die, Pats would inherit his fortune, and you had an idea you could marry it. Jonas was convinced that Pats had let these beasts loose, and she did have the opportunity to let the first two escape—but not the third. I know that, because he told me he'd kept his eye on her for hours. There's only one other person who has worked around the spiders, and only one who could have freed the third spider, the one that killed Jonas. That was you!"

Keith's face was pallid, twisted into strange lines that made him look old, tired.

"You lie!" he breathed.

"I don't think so," I said. "I think my summing up is very close to correct. At any rate, you're staying on the island until I can send out some law to take charge. Those lads have ways to make a man talk. Now get busy and put that poison together."

He put the pail of acid on the ground, dropped the package of pellets on the ledge before the cages. Suddenly his hand went to his hip and came back, holding a small, gleaming gun.

"No, McTavish," "it isn't going to wind up in just that fashion. Get outside—both of you!"

"Dimwit, you can't get away with shooting us. You know that."

"Get outside!"

There wasn't much else to do. I backed out, trying to cover Pats from the gun. Keith followed us, stood at the doorway.

"Keep going—up the path there. One moment of hesitation, one backward look, and I'll let you have it."

I turned, pushed Pats ahead of me. I was thinking that Keith was a fool. At two hundred yards, we'd be well out of revolver range. There'd be nothing he could do then, as long as those people were down there on the boat, a quarter of a mile away.

But I was underestimating the man, underestimating his brains and his cunning.

We got two hundred yards away, where the path was leading up between overhanging, steep banks of soil, and I stole a look backward.

Keith wasn't in sight, but at the doorway of the laboratory a bulky, hairy body poised! An instant later it was outside, moving slowly, tentatively along the path. Even as I hesitated there, fascinated by horror, a second spidery body appeared, a third.

Keith must have opened the doors of all the cages. How he had done it, I didn't know, but he had done it. The killers were unleashed upon us.

And we were cut off from the boat as definitely as though the earth had opened between it and us. If we attempted to come down that path, nothing on

earth could save us from the doom that had claimed Jonas and Kordic and Mrs. Haskell!

Pats turned, looked over her shoulder. She staggered and I caught her.

"Keep going, Pats," I panted. "It's our only hope. If we can outdistance them to the other end of the island, reach the water somehow—"

But I didn't think we had a chance.

Already two of the huge, abominable bodies were questing up the path. I didn't know whether they scented their prey or depended upon eyesight. But they moved with incredible rapidity.

Patsy had what it takes. She made no sound, just ran, with me behind her. We gained elevation and I looked back for an instant. I could count eight of the horrible bodies, legs flickering in the early morning sunlight. Whether they had sighted us or not I couldn't tell, for they came on in spurts, some of them lagging for a moment only to run forward again with that peculiar gliding speed. But all were mounting the path behind us.

I concluded it must have been sight rather than scent that they depended upon, for the wind was blowing on our backs, from them to us, so that scent could not have carried to them.

It gave me an idea.

I grabbed Pats by the arm. "Detour ahead, Pats."

I dragged her off the path, down the steepness of the hillside and into the narrow canyon below.

"Maybe we can outflank them," I gasped. "They're coming up the path. If we can get by them, get down to the flat again while they're up here, we could make it to the boat."

Patsy managed a grin.

"Trust a Scotchman to think of the close ones. Lead on, McTavish—and while I've still got breath to say it, I think you're swell, Gerry."

"You're something yourself, Pats. Remind me to enlarge on that when we have more time."

We were struggling down the dry bed of a winter stream, the brush thick about us, rocks turning under our feet, the walls of the canyon high above us.

We came out on a slight rise that let us look down the sloping course of the canyon.

"Look, Gerry!" Patsy cried. "It's—it's no go."

Down below us, a quarter of a mile or so, I could see humped hairy things picking their way up the canyon bottom. There were three of the loathsome creatures below us, others on the path above.

Pats sat down on a boulder.

"I can't run any longer. Oh, Gerry, it's no use—"

"Pats, we can't give up—we've got to make a try anyway. Get up—come on!"

"I can't, Gerry. Go on—maybe you can get away."

I sat down on the rock beside her. We sat there thirty seconds and Patsy jumped up.

"It's happened, Gerry! It's happened!"

"What?"

"The wind—don't you feel it? It's turned, it's coming from the other direction."

"All right."

I could look down the canyon and see those crawling shapes, a few hundred yards away now.

"Don't you see what it means?" Patsy cried.

"No."

"Haven't you got a match, a cigarette lighter, something?"

I jumped up, yelled.

"I have—and what you have, Pats, is brains!"

I found matches, lit a whole book of them at once, tossed them into a clump of dried grass beneath dried brush. The grass flared up as though I had dynamited it, the brush burst into flame. The wind, coming over our shoulders, caught sparks and flung them a hundred yards in an instant. Flame jumped up where the sparks hit, and other sparks danced down wind. In a minute, two minutes, the canyon was aflame below us for a quarter of a mile.

Flame and smoke hid from me what was happening below us, but I didn't need to see. I knew. The most gigantic spiders in the world wouldn't have been able to outrun that snarling blast of fire, whipped by the wind that came in a downdraft through the canyon.

After a while Patsy stood up, and we

waded downward through hot ashes that stung our soles and our ankles. We came out of the mouth of the canyon, down through the last seared spot where the fire had burned itself out on the edge of the flat land.

Ahead of us the laboratory lay, silent, untenanted for all we knew. But we approached it cautiously, quietly.

We got within twenty feet and I grabbed Patsy, pulled her back.

"What's the matter, Gerry? Is there still danger?"

"Do you smell bitter almonds?"

She sniffed tentatively. "Yes, I do."

"Stay here."

I put my handkerchief over my mouth and nose, held my breath and made a run for the open door of the building, got halfway down the stairway.

I got one look at the room there, and in that single look I took it all in.

White vapor floated above the pail of acid that Quentin Keith had put down, and the package of cyanide pellets was missing from the ledge in front of the cages. A door swung open where the pellets had been, and I could read what had happened.

In another cage, the door of which was closed, there slumped a blond-haired figure. Keith had opened the cage, had crawled into an unoccupied cage himself. The pellets had been shoved off into the acid as one of the spiders had pushed open his cage door.

My heart began to labor, my lungs to choke up. I couldn't hold my breath any longer. I spun, headed for clean air, and fell through the doorway where Pats dragged me well away from the aura of bitter almonds.

"Pats," I panted, "you saved my life a few minutes ago when you thought about the wind changing—and again just now. According to all the rules of romance, you've got to marry me now."

"I might, at that," she said.

So she did.

She got Jonas' fortune, too. But we gave most of that away to scientific institutions. The only stipulation we made is that they don't do any research on spiders. Flies, maybe—but spiders are out.

THE HOOFS OF DOOM

By JOE ARCHIBALD

Author of "Monster of the Storm," "The Swamp Thing," etc.



Jarl caught hooked fingers into the shaggy mane

THE bleak brick house in the bottoms was centuries old. It was a vast, forbidding structure set in a great dip in the ground not many miles from the Cornish coast. It had great rounded gables and high chimneys that had become warped by the drive of the winds.

The great oak trees crowding close to its decaying sides possessed twisted, blasted, dead branches with only a handful of leaves to make ghostly music in the rush of the wind. A stretch of sandy, almost shrubless ground separated the house from a cluster of out-

Stark Fear Stalks Kelch's Meadows When the Black Stallion of Evil Speeds Through the Night!

buildings with sagging roofs.

They called this place and the desolate terrain surrounding it, Kelch's Bottoms.

Old Kelch sat in a wheel-chair near a great, blackened fireplace in the

kitchen of the brick house. He seemed as old and twisted and gnarled as the rotting trees outside. His bony left hand, criss-crossed by ugly swollen veins, held tightly to a dirty shawl that was drawn around his sloping shoulders. His right hand seemed broken at the wrist, and it was held clawlike against his chest.

There was a sardonic upward twist at the right side of his slit of a mouth, and his right eye was twisted, too, and was half-closed. Bitterness toward his lot was stamped plainly on Kelch's face. It fairly glittered in his rheumy eyes.

"Push me to the window, old woman!" Kelch cried out in the halting speech of a paralytic. "I heard that sound ag'in!"

A thin, bent woman with stringy gray hair got slowly up from her place in a dimly lighted corner of the room and shuffled across the unpainted wide boards of the floor. She looked at the huddled figure of a man sitting on a stool not far from Kelch.

He had a small, peaked, whiskered face, and he sipped at gin and bitters. His name was Swarler, and he was the old woman's husband. They had been with Kelch for thirty years.

The woman sniffed audibly and expressibly.

"No wonder ye hear things, you two," she muttered. "Sittin' listenin' for things here every night—things that ain't there."

"Hold your tongue, woman!" Kelch lashed out. "I heard it. That stallion's loose again. That black devil!" Kelch's eyes lost their bitterness for a moment, and they began to burn with a wild, strange light.

Outside the wind washed creepy sounds out of the branches of the oaks. Their dead branches beat against the window panes like the impatient tap-pings of skeleton fingers. Above the other sounds stirring out in the black night, there came a shrill, piercing blast. Kelch leaned forward in his invalid's chair and let a curse drop out of his thin mouth.

"It's him, I tell ye!" Kelch screeched. "I'd know that sound anywhere. They've let him loose. Them two worthless fools!"

KELCH had no sooner spoken when there came a fumbling at the latch of the kitchen door. It banged inward and a tall man clad in rough, baggy tweeds swung to face the old man near the window. His rugged features resembled those of old Kelch. His eyes were black and were sunk deep in their sockets. His hair was thick and black, and grew well down over the nape of his neck.

"That devil got loose!" the man cried hoarsely. "Must of broke its rope."

Kelch's face blanched and the side of it that was alive twitched horribly.

"Go after it, you blitherin' fool!" he said raspily. "If that beast falls into a hole an' breaks its leg you an' Jarl will be beggared. Ye hear me, Martin! That stallion's worth the lot of ye." Saliva trickled down a corner of his mouth, and mingled rage and terror churned in his eyes. "If that stallion breaks a leg, or anythin' happens to it—I ain't ready yet. I—"

Martin Grote went out, slamming the door behind him. Fear made his gait uncertain. Out in the yard, with the wind driving tiny particles of sand against his face, he paused a moment. A figure loomed up out of the dark shadows, hugging a large, spiky hawthorne bush.

"Come on, Jarl," Grote said. "You heard what the old devil said. Get the lantern."

The light from a dirty window of the brick house barely reached the face of Jarl Grote. The man did not bear the slightest resemblance to his companion. His face was broad and solidly muscled, and his flattish nose and firm, thick lips were not those of a man of Norman origin.

"Yeah, I heard him," Jarl said. "The lantern's out by the stable. What did he mean he wasn't ready? He's gettin' out of his mind. Well, let's be gettin' on."

They struck out across the yard, heads bent against the wind's steady drift.

"The old hellion," Martin Grote said when they reached the stable. "Too bad that stroke didn't get the side of him closest to his black heart. We'd be away from this crazy place then."

Jarl's face was close to the lantern

when he lifted it up and raised the lowered wick. The lurid yellow light played on his face and showed the shock in his eyes.

"Don't act up with me, Jarl," Martin ground out. "I know what's been goin' on inside your head. Even if you do fawn over Kelch's old carcass like a sheep dog. Yeah, he picked you out of a London gutter an' brought you here an' give you the name of Grote. You hate him though, blast you. The same as me."

"We'd better start now," Jarl said thickly.

"You'd like to have half his money right now so's you could get away, Jarl," the other went on. "Away from that old devil who will make us all mad if we stay. He ain't human, I tell ye. How did he know about us clubbin' that stallion that time? Nobody saw us, Jarl. He was in the village, Kelch was. But he said he felt it. You hear, Jarl? He said he felt us doin' it. An' that watch that hangs around his neck by a chain made of horse—"

"You got to stop talkin' like that," Jarl interrupted fearfully. "You got to."

Martin laughed icily.

"Why don't he die? He's half dead now."

The Grotes climbed up the sloping bank of a great sand dune pocked by half-dead scrub. On its crest the wind hit them squarely, and there was a taste of storm in it. Jagged cloud masses were sweeping over the land, blotting out the strange gray light that had bathed the barren fields. It was an eerie glow that only comes from a blending of dew and moonshine, or frost and starlight. Drops of rain began to fall.

FROM far to the left, came the faint, shrill cry of a wild thing. Martin Grote stopped and bent his head that way.

"That's the stallion, Jarl," he said.

"Maybe. Sounds play tricks in the night," the square-faced, husky man said. "We'd better go in different directions, Martin. If he breaks through that fence next to the moor, we'll be hunting for days." Jarl had his face turned away, and the darkness hid the

quick gleam of his big white teeth. The wind sent a whining blast across the wastes and snuffed the lantern out.

"Throw the club away," Martin Grote said. "It would only scare that beast. I'll go that way, Jarl."

"Yes, I'll let out a yell if I come up to the stallion," Jarl said. He lowered his head then and plodded toward a high stone wall, the rocks of which looked bleached out against the blackness of a string of pines.

The rain began to spatter the bleak reaches. The wind beat Martin Grote's tweed coat flat against his chest and flared his trousers out. He swore as he groped through the darkness, pausing at intervals to listen for the sound of hoofs beating against the ground. He cursed his Uncle Kelch and longed to drive a bullet through the skull of the black stallion.

For years he had felt afraid of it, ever since the day Kelch had brought it to the bottoms. He had bought it from a gypsy caravan, Kelch had said. He had liked the fire in its eyes. He had bought it cheap too. That was strange. Gypsies were known for their shrewd trading.

Martin began to circle when he came to a snaky wire fence with its posts leaning drunkenly. Following that fence, he would meet Jarl coming from the other direction. If the black horse were still within the boundaries of the bottoms, he and Jarl would flush it out.

The rain was churning the ground to muck, and Martin's shoes made dreary sucking sounds as they slogged through it. The silence drove down upon him, shortening his breath and giving him a dread, expectant feeling difficult to isolate. There was a crawling at his flesh, and the sweat pouring out of him came to meet the rain that seeped through his outer garments.

Martin Grote suddenly stopped dead in his tracks. From a dark thicket came a nervous stamping, a low whinnying sound. The black stallion! Martin's flesh went cold against his bones.

It took courage to walk in there and grope for a dragging halter rope. A will that was not his own pushed him forward. Old Kelch's will. The old devil possessed fifteen thousand

pounds. If anything happened to the black beast—

Grote reached the edge of the thicket and the blackness there was as thick as tar. It brought a harsh cough from Grote's throat. He stepped into slimy weeds up to his knees, lifted a leg that had struck against a rotting fence rail. He saw it then!

The terrible apparition loomed up out of the gloom. Its eyes burned through him, shook the stomach out of him. He lifted his arms, but it was too late. A great iron shoe slammed down upon his skull.

He sank deep into a well of dark terror and pain. He couldn't breathe. He felt like a fly immersed in aspic. Another terrific blow crushed him deeper into the slimy earth, and from a long way off he heard the cry of a horse. It trailed away and was gone. Martin Grote felt and heard no more, for he was dead. . . .

Jarl Grote stood in the woods like a thing turned to stone. He heard the blood-chilling blast of air come out of the black stallion's nostrils, heard its iron shod hoofs pounding along the lush earth. He groped his way forward, his body reeking with sweat. He ploughed through weeds that were thick and slimy, and his foot struck against something that he knew would be there. He fumbled inside his coat for a match.

Kneeling in the muck he struck the match-head against his thumb-nail, cupped the resultant flare of light in his palms. Martin's face was a pulpy mass. The print of a horseshoe had been stamped into the flesh on one side of his face. The blood poured out of it and reddened the muddy water of the swale.

The other hoof had bashed Martin Grote's head in. Jarl got up, his knees shaking under him. He stumbled out of the grim shadows and started running when his muddy boots got to firmer ground. . . .

ILD Kelch sat by the fire, talking to his barn-man, Swarler. There was a fiendish gleam in his one healthy eye, for he knew the things he was saying to the little hireling frightened the old woman. He would often sit

like this and tell them that night was darkest in Kelch's Bottoms, darker than in any other place in the world.

He would tell them about the souls of men and women who had died and what had become of them. He would express his contempt for the men of the cloth, voice his doubts as to their supremacy over the devil.

"Ye've heard of the fox-woman of Callagh?" Kelch grinned, baring his yellowed teeth at one side of his mouth. "'Tis true, every word. She'd appear in the dead of night when the mists were thick around an old abbey, an' that was where she murdered her man. Her eyes would shine with that greenish light ye see in the depths of the sea. An' when a bullet was driven through that she-devil's heart she set up a cry like she had when she felt the gallows rope around her neck."

Kelch glanced out through the window, and his one good hand shook noticeably. An ashen color swept over his sweating face. He set his jaw as if fighting against a sudden chill.

"There was the wolf of Gothberg, an' I knowed a man who saw it of a cold winter's night," Kelch went on. "It sat by a new-turned grave an' howled like it was callin' a corpse to the surface. Maybe it did. Ha-a-ah! Maybe it knowed it was goin' to be shot awhile later, huh? It was, for a fact. The night after that it was runnin' loose again, an' folks knew it by the limp in its right leg. Ye haven't heard of the hyena that was caught in Africa. It had gold earrings, it did. Ha! Ha-a-a-a-a!"

"Shut up, Kelch!" the old woman howled. "The devil gets in ye. Maybe that's how you got your money, sellin' your soul to the devil, huh? Like Faust." The woman's cackling laugh broke out of the dark corner where she sat. There was a note of fear running through it.

"Things are here in Kelch's Bottoms that ye can't see, ye old witch," the old man said, laughing shrilly. "Like an old crow ye seem, sittin' there. A beaklike one. No wonder them crows flock to ye when ye go out into the field. Ha-a-a-a-a!"

"Listen," the woman's husband said, and took his gurgling pipe out of his

mouth. "I hear somebody callin', Kelch."

"The wind, Swarler, ye old fool. Voices in the wind. I like t' listen to 'em." Kelch bent his hoary head toward the window. "This is a part of the world that's left out of the sun. Even when its shinin' high there's shadows here. Ye notice that, old woman?"

There was a dull thump against the door, a fumbling at the latch. Jarl Grote stumbled inside the dimly lighted room. His eyes were wide and filled with an unholy light.

"Blood! There's blood on him, Kelch!" the old woman screeched.

Old Kelch, his face pasty, tried to get his half-dead body out of the wheel-chair.

"Ye—ye killed him, ye blasted devils! Ye an' Martin. N-no, ye couldn't have. I'm—Ha-ha-a-a!"

"It's M-martin," Jarl gasped out. "It killed him. Beat his brains out with its hoofs. The marks are on him. That beast out of hell killed M-martin!"

KELCH fell back in his chair, a long intake of breath making a weird sawing sound in the terrible stillness. The sudden spasm of terror that had gripped him fell away, and he forced a vague smile to his half-dead face.

"He tried to beat him, Martin did," Kelch said. "Serves him right." He laughed. "W-what am I sayin', old woman? N-no, I didn't w-want him killed. But he beat the stallion, he did. Get up, you old sot!" he screeched at Swarler. "Jarl, you help me up an' get ready to carry me out to the wagon. Harness that mare in the cart, Swarler. Where's the stallion, Jarl? You see him?"

"He ran like a beast out of hell, Uncle," Jarl said. "Broke through the fence and streaked out to the moors." He pawed blood and slime from his sodden tweeds. Then he swung his head to the side and looked into Swarler's eyes. They were porcine, probing eyes that sent a chill through Jarl.

The eyes held to him for several torturous moments, then dropped away. Had that tobacco-smeared mouth of

Swarler's grinned at him? With the Grotes out of the way, Kelch's money would doubtlessly go to Swarler and his wife.

"That black devil won't come back if he gets out there, Kelch," Swarler flung over his shoulder as he shuffled out.

The old man laughed, a short weird laugh.

"He'll come back, he will," Kelch said. "Certain folks better look out if he does. Folks that kicked an' beat him an' stoned him. He won't never forget."

"Like it was human," the old woman said huskily to Jarl. "That's the way he talks about that beast. I wish I was out of here. Martin's dead. He won't be the last. I can feel it."

Swarler's voice boomed through the gloom outside, telling those inside the house that the cart was ready. Jarl Grote picked up the wasted frame of Kelch, fighting off a feeling of revulsion. It was like picking up a skeleton.

He could feel the rub of Kelch's bones against his own crawling flesh. His breath smelled like something that had been dead for a long time. Then Jarl remembered that Kelch had picked him up from a London gutter.

Jarl told himself he had to stop thinking about those things. He had worked like a dog for all he had received during the years that had followed. There was something coming to him.

Jarl put the bony figure of Kelch into the cart that was padded with old horse blankets, and then got onto the seat next to Swarler. The wheels of the old wain creaked and groaned as it went out of the yard and up the slope of the big dune behind the stable. The rain had stopped, but the wind was still whining. Winds never seemed to leave Kelch's Bottoms. That ghostly gray light was in the sky again, and flying foxes flitted across the face of the gibbous moon.

The place where Martin Grote lay dead was but a mile from the old brick house. Swarler yanked the old horse to a stop when Jarl pointed and said in a thin voice:

"Over there, right by the fence."

Jarl jumped clear of the cart, lantern

swinging in his hand. Swarler followed him to the corpse. He looked down on Martin's battered, bloody face. He uttered a low curse.

"Bring him over here," Kelch screeched. "Lift him up. I want to look at Martin."

Jarl and Swarler bent to the grisly task. They carried the remains over to the cart and placed them on the wet ground. Swarler held the lantern so that Kelch could see what the stallion had done to his nephew.

THE old man choked out an unintelligible word, and a terrible spasm came over him. The sight of Martin Grote's corpse had raised havoc with those nerve centers that were left functioning in his emaciated body.

Kelch's head hung over the edge of the cart. His right hand hung down and the bony index finger pointed toward Martin's face. The old man's lips tried to form words, but the muscles of his jaws were paralyzed. He worked frantically to get them back to life and the effort spread a livid hue over his bony face. His long finger still pointed at the corpse.

Jarl Grote leaned against the cart, terror having its way with him. Was that old devil going to speak? What was he pointing like that for? Had he seen something that no one else had seen? But he couldn't talk any more. Kelch was a good hundred steps nearer death than when he had left the house.

Jarl saw Swarler go into the weeds where Martin's body had lain, go into the woods beyond. Swarler did not come out for several minutes.

Kelch was a quivering thing on the floor of the cart. His finger did not point any more.

"We'd better get him home," Swarler said. "That shock'll just about finish him."

Kelch could not talk, but he could hear. His lips could not smile, but there was a crazy, gloating gleam in his filmy eyes. He heard something that the other two could not hear—the stallion's eerie whicker out there near the moor, the stamping of its feet. That sound was close to Kelch, a measured thumping against the floor of the cart.

Jarl carried old Kelch into the brick house when they got back to the farm yard. It was Swarler who removed the corpse of Martin, which was wrapped in a blanket. Somebody would have to get the coroner. Swarler got back into the cart and drove away from Kelch's Bottoms. It was eleven miles to the nearest village and the road was a bad one.

* * * * *

A terrible quiet lay over the bottoms. Martin was buried in an old cemetery in a glade a quarter of a mile from the house. Old Kelch was on his deathbed, and Swarler and his wife walked about like wraiths. Jarl Grote went into the stable where the black stallion was sprawled out on a filthy mat of straw. Its eyes were dull, and its sleek hide reeked with the sweat of sickness.

The beast had walked into the yard the day of Martin's burial. It had walked slowly, its head down and a dirty yellow spume had been dropping from its mouth. The veterinary from the village had said to Jarl:

"The horse got into some poisoned plants. It's contracted lupine or death camas. It ain't got a chance in a million."

Jarl shivered when he looked down upon the dying beast, but the sudden crawling of his flesh did not wipe the crooked smile off his big, square face.

"Both of you devils goin' out together," he muttered. "Old Kelch did this to you. He wants to have something to ride into hell on."

SWARLER came in then and there was a crooked smile on his face as well.

"Hello, Jarl," he said. "I been in to see old Kelch. He's dead, but his eyes won't die. He's hangin' on for dear life. He knows the stallion is dyin' an' seems to be happy about it. Figures the black devil got its just reward for killin' Martin, eh?"

"Yeah," Jarl said. He felt a little sick from the light in Swarler's eyes.

"Old Kelch sure wanted to tell us somethin' the other night, Jarl. I been tryin' to figure out what it was."

"It was just the shock," Jarl said. "What could he see that we didn't? What could he know about—"

"Martin's in the ground, Jarl," interrupted Swarler. "You'll get a big lump of money, eh? I seen his will. In case both the Grotes die me an' the old woman get everything. Why don't you die too, Jarl?" Swarler laughed mirthlessly and knelt down beside the stricken black stallion. He lifted the animal's head a little, and its eyes were partly dead.

"Won't last 'til tomorrer," the old retainer said in a low voice. "Neither will old Kelch. You'll want to get away from here as soon as you kin, Jarl?"

Jarl went out, his brain reeling a little. The night was absolutely still. Even the wind had died to a low, ghostly rustle as it washed through the dead branches of the oaks. It was always quiet wherever Death trod.

The old woman shuffled out of the brick house and crossed the yard to the tumbled-down chicken run. She halted in her stride and swung her little eyes on Jarl Grote.

"You ain't got long to wait, Jarl," she said, and laughed.

Jarl Grote felt cold, wiry fingers close about his sluggishly beating heart. What did they know, blast them! What could they know? He stumbled toward the big brick house and went inside. There was a doctor sitting by old Kelch's bed.

"How is he?" Jarl said, steeling himself.

"Just a flicker of life," the doctor said. "That paralysis has crept up to his heart, but it still beats a little. He's hangin' onto life with all he's got. Why, I don't know. Ye'd think—"

Swarler came in then, his wife behind him. Old Kelch's eyes opened and in them was a terrible feverish glow that struck horror in the hearts of those looking down upon him. Kelch's lips twisted in a diabolical smile, and that was the way he died.

Jarl turned and stumbled out of the brick house. Outside, a sudden rush of wind struck him flat in the face. The chill of it numbed his face and wiped the sweat from it. Almost as suddenly as it had come, the wind died and a silence that was suffocating gripped Kelch's Bottoms.

All that night, Jarl Grote tossed in

his bed. There was the silence of the grave in his room. Every night of the years he slept in that room, there had been the gnawings and the scratchings and the squeaking of rats in the old walls. But on this night, with Kelch's corpse stretched out on the bed downstairs, there was not the faintest sound of them.

At dawn, Jarl Grote got out of his bed and groped his way to the window. Out there on the dune a figure moved. It plodded slowly down the slope of it and was swallowed up in the crawling shadows hugging the sides of the out-buildings.

They buried old Kelch alongside his blood nephew Martin at dusk. They had had to bury him quickly for in his will there had been the insistence that he was not to be embalmed. A man of the cloth had come from the village for the funeral service.

AFTER the funeral was over and the grim black wagon had creaked slowly back from whence it had come, Swarler went out into the stable. He came running out of the tacky building, his legs buckling under him, a look of terror in his piggy eyes. He caught at the jamb of the kitchen door and cried out:

"That stallion—it's on its feet, Jarl!"

"What? You're crazy, you old fool! It was practically dead three hours ago." Jarl's heavy cup fell from his fingers and smashed against the floor. He kicked his chair back, got to his feet and went out of the kitchen toward the stable.

He swayed a little when he swung the heavy planked door open. He heard the stallion snort, heard its heavy iron-shod hoofs bang against the floor. Jarl pitched halfway around and seemed to grope his way across the yard.

"That devil's eyes," Jarl mumbled. "They looked like they knew everything th-there w-was to know. Like they was tellin' me that stallion didn't kill Martin." He stumbled into the house and suddenly brought himself up short, one big hand reaching for the corner of a table to steady himself.

Swarler stood there grinning at him in the sickly light from a smoky lamp.

The little whiskery man held something in his right hand. Jarl Grote's eyes gaped at it, and the blood in his veins stopped flowing for a few breathless seconds. Swarler held an old pick handle to which had been fastened a great horseshoe. There was mud and blood on the thing.

"I wondered who took the handle out of that old rusty pick that laid out there behind the barn," Swarler said. "Missed that big horseshoe, too, that had the winter calks in it. An' I got to wonderin', Jarl, when old Kelch pointed at a corpse an' tried to speak."

"You old hellion!" Jarl burst out, his world crumbling about him. He took a step toward Swarler, his great hands ready to strike. But a thin, deadly voice came from behind him. He spun around, and there was the old woman with a shotgun held in her bony hands.

"Don't move, Jarl," the old crone said. "I'll blow your stummick out."

"Maybe old Kelch wondered about there bein' no mud on a corpse's face," Swarler said. "That stallion had been runnin' through muck that the rain churned up. I went into the woods an' I didn't see where no branches was broken. That big devil wa'n't in the woods by the signs I read, Jarl. Like I kept sayin' to the old woman. Let the Grotes hang themselves. They hate each other. An' Jarl only makes believe he loves old Kelch."

Jarl Grote beseeched his swimming brain to show him a way out. Out in the stable the stallion blew air through its nostrils. It stamped the floor with its heavy hoofs and sent dull, booming sounds through the terrible stillness of the night.

"I see you put a heavy weight on the end of the pick handle holdin' the shoe, Jarl," said Swarler. "You let that horse loose that night. You was thinkin' of money, Jarl. Lots of money. Too bad you didn't throw this thing you killed Martin with deeper into the bushes."

"Look, Swarler," Jarl said. "We can divide that money." He waited for an answer, the sweat pouring down his face. The skeleton branches of the old oaks beat against the window pane. The wind out there was rising and shot through it with a weird whistling sound.

The old woman laughed crazily.

"Me an' Amos want it all, Jarl," she said. "We slaved fer that old devil thirty years. You'll hang, Jarl, you black-hearted ingrate. Move along t' that closet, Jarl."

The murderer cursed and took a halting step forward. Once inside that closet, he knew he would be as good as dead. He would be hung for what he did. The door was heavy and the key in its lock was heavy and rusty.

"Keep movin', Jarl!" the woman commanded.

THE stallion whinnied again. Its hoofs kept hammering out there in the stable.

Jarl saw his chance then, and took it. There was a whispering in his ear. It was as if the Devil stood close to him, urging him on, planning his every move. He bent low, slammed a table and the lamp standing on it against old Swarler.

The shotgun boomed and riddled the deathly quiet. Jarl heard the leaden missiles chunk into the floor, felt one bite into his leg. The room was in utter darkness when he got to his feet and plunged toward the door. The old woman was screaming like a banshee let loose from hell.

Jarl Grote laughed like a demented creature as he tore out into the yard. Suddenly he stopped short and let the evil presence that was dogging him whisper to him once more. The stallion was loose, and it was standing near an old gnarled oak, its mane flared out by the driving wind.

Jarl's eyes swung toward the brick house. The dirty windows glowed with a light stronger than any lamp could offer. He saw the old woman flailing at the flames with a broom. Swarler was coming out of the doorway, slipping shells into the shotgun.

The stallion blew a terrific blast of air out of its nostrils.

Grote's sanity was snapping. He laughed wildly and ran toward the black horse. Why, it was practically calling to him. It had broken loose and had been out there waiting for him. The black devil could run. It could take him miles away from Kelch's Bottoms by the time dawn would break.

He got close to the horse and leaped upward, caught his hooked fingers in its shaggy mane. The stallion was moving fast when he swung to its back. Grote laughed and dug his bony knees against the stallion's flanks.

The horse drove itself to the limit of its stride when it got beyond the crest of the great sand dune. Its moving shadow was a gigantic thing in the light of the moon. Grote could not see the beast's eyes, but they were green balls of fire.

The stallion swerved from its course and leaped a rotting fence. Its iron shod hoofs began to kick sparks up from hard-packed, rocky terrain. Low-growing, spiky scrub tore at its legs and the outthrust tentacle of a dead tree raked a bloody furrow the length of its rippling body.

Jarl Grote screamed at the stallion. His fingers wound themselves more tightly in the beast's black mane. He yanked crazily in an effort to turn the racing stallion's head, for up ahead there was a great, yawning hole in the earth. It was a quarry with a bottom of jagged, broken rock and slimy black water.

Grote tried to let go of the beast's mane, but something was holding his fingers fast. Horror swirled through him and made him retch. The stallion screamed and seemed to fly through the air. Grote could see it now—the edge of the black pit. Terror numbed him when the ground fell away from under the beast's hoofs and he went down and down and down into a pitch-blackness with the crazy screaming of the stallion ringing in his ears.

There was a terrible impact that Grote felt for the fraction of a second. He knew that death had struck him. Then he was dropping again—deeper, deeper into the black water. There was a great roaring sound and the laughter of demons.

Grote's black soul was falling now, falling into the depths of hell. . . .

Swarler was standing on the edge of the great pit. The dawn was breaking and the blackness down there was slowly disappearing. He had heard that terrible equine screaming hours before. When it had suddenly broken off he had been sure that Grote no

longer lived. Dread thoughts had been in his head while he had stood with the old woman watching the old brick house burn. Rats had scampered out of the inferno, hundreds of them.

WHEN it was light enough, Swarler made his way down the steep sides of the quarry. The broken body of the stallion had not dropped into the black water. It lay on the rocks close to the edge of the water, and its right leg was drawn up against its chest in such a position as to wring all the sweat out of Swarler's body.

That was the way old Kelch had held his paralyzed right hand. Then Swarler looked into the stallion's eyes. Trembling he fell to his knees and held his hands to his face to shut out the sight of those dead eyes. Kelch's eyes, just after he had died, had held that strange, ghastly, inhuman expression.

The old retainer huddled against a rock, his bony hands clamped to his head as if to hold his sanity in. Horrible thoughts crisscrossed in his quaking brain.

When Kelch had died, the stallion had thrown off the fatal illness that had held it in a mighty grip. After Kelch had been buried, the stallion had stood up again. Swarler's mind wandered back to those nights when old Kelch had talked of werewolves and fox-women. He saw the terror again, the terror that had been stamped on the old man's face when the stallion had broken loose, or had been turned loose by the murderous, scheming Jarl.

What had the old woman said last night when they had both heard that last unearthly scream of the stallion? She had said it had sounded like Kelch. Swarler started climbing the precipitous sides of the old quarry. Halfway to the top he had to stop, for his strength was spent and he had to shake black, evil thoughts out of his head.

"N-no," Swarler gasped fearfully. "No, I got to stop thinkin' like that. That's bein' crazy." But there was that fox-woman of Callagh and the werewolf of Gothberg. Now there was the Black Stallion of Kelch's Bottoms that he could never drive out of his mind.

"No man kin die twice," Swarler babbled. "Even old Kelch. Horses kin

git over a bad sickness. Just because Kelch had died before—"

There he was, thinking crazy again. He huddled against the rocks and clamped both of his bleeding hands to his head. Swarler was an ignorant man and ignorance and superstition go hand in hand along the dark roads.

Swarler finally crawled clear of the horrible pit and staggered across the desolate land. When he reached the crumbling ruins of the old brick house there were several people standing around his wife. The old woman's eyes were feverish and they showed no recognition of Swarler when he made his way toward her.

The old woman sat huddled on an old trunk, babbling crazily.

"He was out there waitin' for Jarl," she muttered. "He let Jarl get on his back an' he never did that before. When old Kelch died he had a knowin' grin on his mouth, like he knew he'd come back an' settle with Jarl. Like he was sure. He couldn't tell Jarl he knew he was a murderer because his tongue got glued to the roof of his mouth. Old Kelch was ready to go, when the stallion was dyin'. . . ."

"She's crazy," a native said, fright making him tremble. "Somethin' devilish has happened here."

"Y-yep, she's crazy." Swarler laughed. "That stallion just went stark, ravin' mad when Jarl got on its

back, an' it didn't see the edge of the quarry until it was too late. No, Kelch's soul couldn't go through the nostrils of a horse, could it? Look at my wife there, like an old crow. Crows fly around an' caw when she goes out t' feed the hens. Ha! Ha-a-a-a-a!"

THE weird neigh of a horse broke and ran along the bottoms suddenly. Old Swarler clutched the old crone by a bony wrist and pulled her off the trunk.

"Come on," he ordered. "We got to git away from here, old woman. That was Kelch. You hear him? He's out there yet!"

The two frightened creatures ran across the yard. To the watchers, the old woman looked like an old crow hopping along the ground, its wings flapping crazily as it tried to get up into the air.

"That'll be Bert Corley's black horse comin' along the road," a native said. "Well, we'd best git back to the village an' notify the constable. I been tellin' him for months there was bedlam here, that they was all crazy. We'll never know what took place here."

When the natives had gone, Kelch's Bottoms was nothing but a smoking ruin, a pall of smoke hovering over it. The air seemed cleaner now. There was no hint of evil in the souging of the wind.

A Heritage of Disaster Stalks
the Doomed Lear Family on an
Island of Mystery in

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COMING IN THE NEXT ISSUE



WINGS OF THE BAT

By
HENRY KUTTNER

Author of "Corpse Castle," "Cursed Be the City," etc.

**Tragedy Strikes Mercilessly in
the Depths of an Infernal
Mountain Sanctuary**

ANGER was boiling inside Les Allen as he came in sight of the cabin that was his destination. A two-day train ride from San Francisco and a three-hour hike under the blistering sun had not cooled his temper.

The young attorney's lean, square-jawed face was stained with perspiration, but his gray eyes were cold as glacial ice. He wanted to sock somebody on the jaw, and he knew this was impossible.

Then, again, maybe it wasn't. He couldn't hit Jean, even after the way she'd behaved; but there would be others. The girl hadn't come up here into the wilderness alone. A week of roughing it—yeah! Roughing it in her uncle's seldom-used mountain lodge, with all the comforts of home.

She'd certainly picked a fine time to do it. Simon Strombold, Jean's uncle, had hardly had time to cool off in his coffin.

From the steep mountain trail Allen

Allen had one
look at the
thing, then it
struck



saw the cabin far ahead, then lost sight of it as the path turned sharply to the right, beneath an overhanging cliff. He walked in the shadows now. It was suddenly cold. The limestone rock at

his side seemed to breathe out an icy chill.

It was sunset, anyway. Among these high crags the transitions from light to dark, and from heat to cold, were sharply marked. Allen looked down, and immediately wished he hadn't. At his feet the ground dropped sharply away, into a gorge far below. A silvery ribbon of water was at the bottom, reflecting the twilight sky.

Before Allen's eyes could accustom themselves to the dimness, he heard a faint rattle. It grew louder. It rose to the crashing of rocks bounding from the cliff.

Instinctively the attorney looked up. Silhouetted against the sky were flying specks that grew larger and larger. Far above they were, but falling fast from the cliff's summit. A landslide!

Hastily Allen looked around. The bare path offered no retreat; but, a dozen feet ahead, was a slight depression in the limestone that might possibly afford shelter. Allen dived precariously for it.

He swayed on the brink as a stone struck his shoulder. Then he flattened himself against the rock, his arms outspread, clawing for crevices, striving to push his body into the limestone. He tried hard but couldn't close his eyes.

ROCKS whizzed past him. Some almost touched his body. Most of them were no larger than his fist, but at that momentum they could have crushed his body into pulp. They ricocheted from the ledge and went crashing into the gorge. The echoes boomed up through the thickening dark.

Allen dared not move. The roar grew louder, then suddenly died. A few muffled reports drifted up from below. They died, also.

"Whew," the attorney gasped. "Talk about luck!" Involuntarily he shuddered as he glanced down.

Then he stepped out gingerly. Some instinct made him glance up. And, black against the sky, he saw a dark shape flashing down at him. . . .

No rock, this! For it did not fall—it glided, as though on wings. Sable wings were spread wide from the

thing's shoulders. Allen had one brief glance at the huge, misshapen being that rushed at him—and then talons were clawing at his garments, striving to wrench him from his foothold. The horror struck as it rushed past. Suddenly it disappeared into the murk; and Allen crashed down on the path, his body slipping into nothingness, feeling empty air beneath him.

Sickening panic seized the attorney. Near him he saw the rock of the path, and every tiny pebble impressed itself on his mind. He could feel the lip of the abyss scraping at his middle as he slid down.

Allen threw all his body into a straining contortion. He twisted in mid-air, striving to fling his legs back onto the ledge, and at the same time to roll his torso to the right. For one brief, agonizing second he hung unsupported above nothingness; then he fell heavily, and managed to roll in toward the cliff. For a time he lay motionless, breathing in great gasps—but he was safe.

He stared up. Nothing was visible but the steep, jagged walls of the ravine, and a ribbon of sky. Of the thing that had swept down out of the dark there was no trace. Had he imagined it?

"Like hell!" Allen muttered under his breath. "That creature was real enough." But what manner of being could rush down from the sky — as though on wings?

There had been wings. Of that Allen was certain. Otherwise he might have thought the monster a cougar or bear, falling to its death in the landslide. But it had not fallen. It had glided.

And now it was gone. Yet Allen kept a wary eye peeled on his surroundings as he continued his journey.

The cliff path gave place to a rising trail through a valley, surrounded by towering crags. Up through the pines Allen climbed. And again he saw the cabin. A man lighting his pipe was lounging in a deck chair on the porch. Allen saw a bristling moustache, a dark face that would have been handsome had it not been for a disfiguring white scar that twisted from ear to jaw.

THE man rose swiftly, shaking out the match.

"Hello!" he challenged. "Who's there?"

"The name's Allen," the attorney said, coming up the steps. "Where's Miss Strombold?"

"Oh!" The other laughed, a bit shakily. "I wasn't sure—after the stories we've heard. They told me I'd be taking my life in my hands to go outdoors after sundown."

Allen stooped to eye the dark man keenly. "Yeah? Who are you?"

"Worth. Heydon Worth, naturalist. But what business is it of yours?"

Allen remembered his mission. The other things could wait. Without answering he opened the door and entered the lodge.

A group was sitting about an open hearth, sipping highballs before the fire. Swiftly Allen's gaze ran over them. An attractive blond girl he didn't know. An oldish woman with gray hair and pince-nez, looking like an irate horse as she glared at the interloper. Two other men—and Jean.

Her remembered beauty caught at Allen's throat. Yet it was something he could neither analyze nor describe. He only knew that Jean's hair was dark as her eyes, that her lips were red against the ivory of her face, and that she was very lovely.

She stood up, setting down her glass. She came forward quickly, resting her hands on Allen's shoulders. He looked down at her silently.

"Les!" she said. "This is a surprise! I'm so glad!"

"That so?" Allen asked. Jean did not notice his odd behavior. She turned to the others.

"Folks, meet Les Allen, Uncle Simon's attorney. He's a swell egg. Used to pull my hair when I was in school." She chuckled. "Les, this is Betty Fielding and Mrs. Fielding." The blonde and the horse-faced dowager acknowledged the introduction. "This is Tom Burnleigh. He's a geologist."

A sinewy, emaciated, baldish man, with thick-lensed spectacles, bowed.

"And Art Kester—you know Art, Les. Uncle's secretary. He was here when we came."

Kester, blond and husky, said hello. He looked more like a college fullback than a shrewd, capable private secretary.

"Sit down and have a drink," Jean invited. "We've been drinking to keep our spirits up. Did you know there's a ghost here?"

Allen's pulse quickened. "That so?"

"Uh-huh? You know old Longacre—the hermit who lives in the mountains near here? He's been coming here, warning us to stay indoors after dark. Says we'll be eaten alive, or something." Jean chuckled, rather nervously. "But we're still alive, if not sober."

Something snapped in Allen then. He looked around at the half-drunk, amused group, and remembered Simon Strombold, the man who had first given Allen a chance, when the latter had been a ragged, hungry newsboy. It was due to Strombold's efforts that Allen was now a rising and prominent attorney. And the man's niece was drinking highballs with her friends—dancing on old Simon's grave, to put it melodramatically.

ALLEN got up. "I've got something to tell you, Jean," he said, in a cold, furious voice, "and your friends too. They're not as much to blame as you are. But I never thought you'd do such a rotten thing as this."

The girl quickly stood up. The puzzle on her face gave place to anger.

"Hold on, Les—" she began.

"I'm not holding on. I'm fed up. There's only one word for the lot of you—vultures! Cold-blooded vultures. You're old enough to know better, Jean—"

She slapped him sharply on the cheek. Briefly Allen stood motionless. Then his palm cracked resoundingly on the girl's jaw. She gasped, cried out, and staggered back, more shocked than actually hurt. Burnleigh and Kester sprang erect.

Allen looked at them intently, his fists balled. He was hoping they'd come on.

"You—you hit me!" Jean gasped, disbelief written on her face.

"Well, you deserved it. Your uncle's been dead only a few—"

"What?"

The shocked horror in Jean's voice could not be mistaken. Instantly Allen cursed himself for a hot-headed fool. She had not known, of course.

He was confused. He stepped forward, but Jean retreated, wide-eyed.

"Uncle Simon—dead?" she stammered.

"I'm sorry," Allen said flatly. "Three days ago. Heart-failure."

The girl sat down and quaffed her drink. "Tell me about it."

"There's nothing much to tell. He and Kester came up here for a hunting trip. Simon returned to town in a hurry. That night he was found dead in his study. Heart-failure."

Kester leaned forward. "Sure of that?" he asked queerly.

"Certain. The coroner—"

The secretary's meaty face looked oddly puzzled. "There wasn't anything wrong?"

Allen's eyes widened. "What makes you ask that, Kester?"

"Just an idea. Well?"

"As a matter of fact, there was one thing. The police found something under Simon's body. It was a bat."

"A — bat?" Apparently Kester had expected anything but that.

"Yeah. Dead, of course, and crushed a bit. But it didn't mean anything."

Till now Jean had remained silent. Suddenly she spoke up.

"Les, when you came up here, you thought—"

"I'm sorry," he said.

Heated anger blazed in the girl's dark eyes. "Well, I'm staying. With my guests. See how you like that!" Her hand went up to finger the scarlet mark on her cheek.

"Oh, but you can't do that, Jean," Kester put in. "We'll have to go back to town right away."

HER jaw jutted out stubbornly, though the gleam of tears was in her eyes. "We're staying. Unless anyone cares to leave—"

Allen didn't look at the girl. "Funny you didn't hear the news," he said. "No radio, eh?"

"No," said Burnleigh, the bald geologist. "I've been going into town daily, but I never bought a paper."

Kester stood up and caught Allen's eye.

The attorney followed the other man into the adjoining room.

"Listen," Kester said softly. "This is damn funny, you know. Simon and I came up for some hunting, and all of a sudden he packed up and went home. Told me to stay here till he sent me word. He seemed excited about something."

"Did he receive any messages?" Allen asked.

"None that I know of. Why?"

"His affairs were in bad shape," Allen said. "Plenty bad. In fact he was on the verge of bankruptcy."

"I didn't know," Kester muttered. "It's news to me. Longacre—"

"The hermit?" Allen interrupted.

"Yes. I didn't see hide nor hair of him till Jean and the others got here. Then he started to show up, talking about devils flying around in the dark. Warned us all to stay indoors after sunset."

"Yeah?" Allen asked. "Looks like your friend outside isn't taking his advice?"

"Who? Oh—Worth. The naturalist. No, he's pretty hard-headed." Kester pushed open a side door. "Worth!" he called out, but no answer came.

The secretary stepped out into the dark. After a moment he returned. "Not there. Went for a walk, I guess. I'd have heard him if he'd come back in the cabin. What had we better do, Les?"

"Nothing, tonight. Tomorrow I want to see this hermit of yours. Then we'll see about going back to town."

"All right. This is my room. You can bunk with me." Kester turned to the door. "Coming?"

"Not right away."

The blond giant went out. Allen lit a cigarette and went to the other door. He opened it and peered into the night.

Moonlight silvered the valley. The limestone cliffs shimmered ghostlike, towering toward the sky. Something passed before the moon, casting a flickering shadow. It was a bat! Another

of the creatures drifted toward Allen, wavering on delicate membranous wings. He blew smoke at it, and it retreated like a breath of wind.

An ominous chill touched Allen. Inexplicable it was, seeming to reach into his heart from the great, lonely mountains hemming him in, seeming to prison him in this forsaken valley. He shivered involuntarily and drew back, closing the door.

He had no wish to rejoin the others. He rested and smoked, while the hours dragged past. Finally he went into the great living room.

THE others were still gathered about the fire, but Worth was not among them. Allen caught Kester's eye, nodded.

"I'm going for a hike," he said. "Want to come along?"

"Oh—the hermit?" Kester asked. "Sure. Excuse me, folks."

He went out. Burnleigh rose, rubbing his bald head.

"Well, I'd join you, but I'm too sleepy. I'm going to hit the hay."

"So am I," blond Betty Fielding seconded.

Kester came back, bearing two heavy lumberjack jackets. He handed one to Allen as they left the house.

"Gets chilly in these latitudes," he said, grinning. "I brought a gun, too."

"Good," Allen applauded. "We may need it."

It was rough going in the moonlight. Several times they lost the trail.

"There's a short-cut," Kester said, "but I wouldn't tackle it at night. We'll get there soon."

But it was more than an hour before they came in sight of a weatherbeaten shack perched in a hollow of the cliffs. No light showed in its windows.

"Asleep, I guess," Allen grunted. "Wonder how long the old boy's been here?"

"Plenty long," said Kester. He banged sharply on the door. "Nobody home."

They waited awhile, shivering in the icy wind.

"I'm going in," Allen said, at last. "Keep your gun ready." He found a window that yielded to his tugs. Gin-

gerly he opened it and threw one leg over the sill. A musty, dead stench stung his nostrils.

In the cabin Allen lit a match. There was a candle on a ramshackle table, and he kindled it. Then he unbarred the door.

"No soap," he said to Kester as the latter entered. "Nice place, eh?"

It wasn't nice. It was filthy. A rat scurried to cover. A mess of dirty pots and pans lay in a corner. The blankets on the bunk were grimy and stiff with age. Allen examined the pots carefully.

"He doesn't believe in washing them often. Maybe he eats out of cans."

"Yeah," Kester said, half-heartedly.

They waited, not knowing what else to do. At last Allen shrugged and rose.

"We'll come back tomorrow. Let's scam."

But there was no need to wait till the next day. As the two emerged from the cabin a deep voice shouted:

"Well? Have ye tired of waiting?"

Allen looked up. Some distance away, perched atop a giant boulder, was a man. In the moonlight his white beard and furry cap looked ghostly. He wore stained khaki garments.

"It's Longacre," Kester said under his breath.

LONGACRE caught the words. "Sure! I've been watching ye since ye came."

"I want to talk to you," Allen said quietly.

"Well, ye won't. I've but one thing to say. Stay indoors at night. Something's abroad in this valley, and it's a beast with wings!"

The hermit leaped down and soon vanished in the shadows. Allen raced toward the boulder, Kester at his heels. But Longacre had disappeared without a trace.

"No use searching," Kester grunted. "This place is a rabbit warren."

Allen studied the tumbled slope of rocks below him and nodded. Silently they turned down the trail.

But the night was not over yet. The path ran steeply down, and for a space lay under an overhanging brow of limestone. Allen saw something ahead that he took for moss, or a distorted tree. It

hung from the crag over the trail.

As he approached it, it moved! A stir of weird motion shook it. For a second, superstitious fear crawled through Allen; then suddenly he saw that a horde of bats were taking flight from the object on which they had rested. The winged mammals fluttered about, cheeping shrilly, and vanished in the night.

After they had gone Allen saw that it was neither moss nor a tree. It was the body of a man!

"Good God!" he whispered under his breath, and ran forward, Kester at his heels. A man hung there, his feet six inches above the trail, dangling by one arm. His hand was crushed between two heavy rocks that were jammed together on the jagged slope above. His head lolled grotesquely on his shoulder, and a dark smear stained his breast.

Allen reached up and raised the dangling head. Immediately he wished he hadn't. The man's throat had been ripped out, as though by ravening fangs; and cartilage gleamed whitely against red raw flesh.

"It's Worth!" Kester gasped. "Hey-don Worth!"

The naturalist. The man who had gone for a stroll, ignoring the hermit's warning. And now he dangled hideously in death, a perch for bats. . . .

"Help me get him down," Allen said grimly.

There was an impromptu post mortem at the lodge. The women had been excluded, of course. The body of Worth lay supine on a table in a storeroom, and Allen, Kester, and Burnleigh were examining it.

It was not yet dawn. The lamplight made the corpse even more hideous than had the moonlight. Blindly, the dead eyes looked up, fixed in a wide stare. The lips were drawn taut, taut with fear. The evil-looking corpse was nude.

"No marks, except for the throat wound," Allen said. "And a bruise on the head. I wonder—"

KESTER, staring fascinated at the cadaver, interrupted. "I want to tell you something, Les. I didn't before, because it sounded so screwy. Re-

member what Longacre told us? About a beast with wings?"

"Yeah?"

"Well, I saw it. Last night. Only a glimpse, but it looked like an animal of some sort—not a bird. It had wings like a bat."

"You—you saw that?" Burnleigh asked. His bald head was glistening with sweat. "Thank God for that! I thought I was going crazy when I—"

"You saw it too?" Allen broken in.

"Yes," Burnleigh said, shuddering. "Last night, just before I turned in. I was looking out my bedroom window, and I saw this—this thing gliding down the valley."

Allen whistled, remembering his own experience on the cliffside trail. "Well," he said, "we'll file that for future reference. Meanwhile, let's see what Worth had in his pockets." He turned to the dead naturalist's disarranged garments, piled in a heap on a chair. One by one he searched them, placing what he found on the table.

"Knife . . . watch . . . compass . . . matches . . . Hello! What's this?" Allen dumped glittering specimens of rock on the table. "Looks like gold!"

"Gold?" The geologist leaned forward and picked up one of the chunks. He scrutinized it carefully.

"No," he said, his mouth twisting into a wry smile. "It's feldspar. Fool's gold. But many people have taken it for the real thing." He looked up suddenly and met Allen's stare.

"I thought it was gold," the attorney said. "And somebody else might have thought the same thing."

"Simon?" Kester asked.

Longacre!" It was Burnleigh's voice. The geologist sprang forward, nearly upsetting the table. He reached the window, jerked it open. "There he is!"

Allen reached the window, too late to catch a glimpse of the hermit. Burnleigh was already scrambling out.

"Get a gun," he snapped over his shoulder. "I haven't any."

Allen turned and raced into the next room. The women turned, startled; their faces pallid as they sat around the fire. The attorney paused only to

snatch a revolver from a gun-case, and then burst out of the house. He caught a glimpse of Kester disappearing into the shadows, having apparently exited through the window in Burnleigh's wake.

"The trail!" Kester shouted. "He's heading for his cabin!"

Suddenly there was a patter of running feet. Jean came racing out of the gloom. She gripped Allen's arm.

"Les! What is it?"

"The hermit," Allen hushed. "Stay in the lodge—and keep a gun handy."

"Les!" She tried to hold him. "Don't go!"

He tore free and sprinted up the trail. It was very dark, as it sometimes is before dawn, but a faint glow was brightening the eastern cliffs grayly.

IT was extremely difficult to follow the trail. More than once Allen had to light matches. Time seemed to drag past interminably.

He stumbled over a body. He knelt, and in the brief flare of a match recognized Burnleigh, pale and unconscious, blood oozing from a wound in the bald head. The man was still breathing, but there was nothing Allen could do for him. A mad killer was loose, and he must be caught. Allen kept his mind from the thought. He left Burnleigh and ran on.

It grew lighter as he passed the hermit's cabin. He caught sight of a figure running ahead. It was Kester.

The blond giant was panting. "He—I lost him, I guess. He's not in his cabin. I looked."

"Lost him?" Allen paused and stared around. The rocky slope beneath him was becoming visible in the dawn. There was a shrill whine, and a bullet spanged into molten lead on a boulder beyond the two men.

"Down there!" Kester shouted, pointing. "See him?"

A white-bearded figure stood atop a rise far down the slope. Another bullet shrieked past Allen's head.

"Come on," he grated. "Don't shoot yet. We're too far." He sprinted headlong toward the hermit, at risk of his life. Kester followed and by some miracle they did not break their necks.

The hermit waited. He still wore the fur cap, and his beard tossed in the wind. Now, Allen saw that Longacre stood on the brink of a chasm—a ravine that stretched across the valley.

"Wait a minute," Allen said, and halted. Then hailed, "Longacre!"

"Damn ye," the hermit snarled. "What?"

"The game's up. We know you killed Worth—and why."

"Ye do? What do ye know?"

"I'll keep him talking," Allen muttered under his breath to Kester. "Watch your chance to wing him." He called to the hermit, "You found gold here! Or you thought it was gold. You tried to scare us away by talking about a flying beast."

"Ye saw it! Ye saw the thing!"

"I saw you, in disguise," Allen snapped. "You stretched black cloth on a framework to resemble wings. As for flying—a trapeze artist can do that, with a thin rope or a good wire that's invisible in the dark."

The shot went home. "Well?" the hermit asked, after a pause.

"You thought you could scare us away, and then get the gold somehow. Only it wasn't real ore. It was a fool's gold, Longacre. You ought to know the difference, living in the mountains this long."

"Damn ye!" the cracked voice howled. Longacre raised his gun and fired at Allen. The slug missed. Kester's weapon barked in return. The hermit screamed, then he knelt, fumbling with something on the ground. Abruptly he slipped over the edge of the chasm. A high-pitched scream came up, dying away. A crashing thud was heard far below.

ALLEN raced forward and looked into the gorge. The bottom was hundreds of feet below, but a figure lay there, dwarfed by distance, crumpled and unmoving. It was gloomy down there, but the whiteness of the beard was unmistakable.

"He—he's dead?" a shaky voice asked. Allen whirled.

"Jean!" Allen said, startled. "What are you doing here?"

"I followed you," the girl confessed.

"I was afraid for you. I've been hiding behind a rock."

"It's all over," Kester said, sighing. "Feels funny—to kill a man."

"Yeah?" There was a queer note in Allen's voice. He was kneeling on the brink of the abyss. "Hold on a minute. I wonder—"

His probing fingers drew something to light. It was a rope, anchored securely to a rock, almost out of sight from the casual observer. The rope dangled down into the gorge.

"Oh," Kester said flatly. "He was trying to climb down."

"The rope isn't long enough to reach the bottom," said Allen, peering down. He looked carefully at the ground at his feet, then again into the pit. "I'm going down. Haul me up if I yell."

It wasn't as difficult as it looked. The rope was knotted every few feet, and Allen descended carefully. Before he reached the end something caught his eye.

He looked into the opening of a cave. It was out of sight from above but easy to reach. Without difficulty Allen swung from the rope; his feet felt solid ground beneath them.

He shouted up his discovery to the others. "I'm going in! Wait for me!"

Without waiting for the objections he knew would come, he plunged into the darkness of the cavern. A flashlight would have come in handy, but he had none. Employing matches, however, he soon discovered a few fagots on the floor which had obviously served as torches. One of these he lit.

The cavern went straight in, slanting down somewhat. Right through the limestone it probed. Dripping water sounded faintly.

On and on he went. Abruptly the passage ended. Before Allen loomed a vast expanse, a tremendous cavern. Something hit him on the head. There was time for only one bitter curse at his own stupidity; then Allen fell, unconscious. . . .

Presently he woke up, cramped and uncomfortable. His arms and legs were bound, he soon discovered. He was lying against a cold wall, and staring into the depths of the great cavern.

Torchlight illuminated it. A dozen

flambeaux were set here and there, making the place a wonderland of beauty. The gigantic grotto glowed and sparkled like a million jewels. Stalagmites and stalactites reflected the gleams. The ceiling was spiked with thousands of sharp rock-icicles, formed by centuries and eons of dripping water. Some of the clusters looked precarious enough as they hung there, trembling faintly as though about to fall. From one of these Allen's gaze drifted down.

HE saw a man standing beside a pit. A black hole gaped in the cavern's floor. The man was peering down into it. It was the hermit.

A moan at Allen's side made his head turn sharply. Jean was lying there, also tightly bound! And beyond her was Kester, similarly fettered.

"Jean!" Allen grated hoarsely. "You little fool! Why—"

"Why did I come?" she asked, her blue eyes steady. "Because I love you, Les. That was why I acted as I did after you slapped me. You were the only one who could hurt me."

"I told you to stay with Kester!" he shouted.

"I insisted on coming after you. Art was armed." Jean looked at the motionless blond giant. "He and the hermit shot it out. Art was wounded. Then Longacre tied us both up."

There was a sardonic chuckle. The tall form of the hermit loomed ghost-like before them.

"You're too inquisitive," the man said. "All of you. Too inquisitive for your own good."

Allen rolled over. He felt something hard against his hip. The gun! Incredibly, he had not been disarmed. But his hands were tied. If he could keep the killer talking—

"You know," Allen said conversationally, "you were pretty clever. But why keep on that beard now?"

"Eh?" A lean hand reached up to the hairy chin.

"Take it off, Burnleigh!" Allen snarled.

There was a dead stillness. Then the killer laughed, and the beard came away in his hand. The furry cap came

off, revealing a bald head, caked with dried blood.

"When did you guess?" the geologist asked.

"When I saw the rope," Allen said. "And when I noticed there was no blood on the ground where you'd stood. It was clever, but not clever enough."

"Les!" Incredulity was in Jean's voice. "What—"

"Tell her," Burnleigh interrupted, grinning sardonically. "Let's see how clever you are."

Allen spoke slowly, as though in thought, while his hidden hand sought to reach the gun in his pocket.

"Well," he began, "Simon Strombold came up here with Kester. His affairs were in bad shape, and he needed money. Longacre had discovered something pretty valuable up here, so he told Strombold about it, knowing Simon was square, and would cut him in on the profits. Simon owned this land, of course."

Allen's fingers touched the cold metal of the gun, then he continued.

"Strombold didn't even tell Kester. He left him here, rushed back to town, and died of heart failure before he could tell anyone of his discovery. That wasn't murder, Jean. Your uncle died a natural death. But right after that you came up here with Burnleigh and the others."

Burnleigh's eyes narrowed, and Allen froze, unmoving. Had the killer noticed his furtive struggles to reach the gun? Hastily he went on.

"You met the hermit and talked to him. Perhaps you noticed he was excited about something. Somehow you wormed the truth out of him, and then you killed him. His body has been lying in that gorge for days, I'll bet. You gambled that nobody would notice it—and you were right, because there's no attraction to bring people up to this part of the valley."

THE geologist's thin lips twisted in a smile. "So?"

"You admitted going to the village daily, and you saw the news of Simon's death in the papers. You might have told Jean, then you'd all have gone back to civilization. But your game was

deeper than that. You planned, eventually, to buy this land from Jean, perhaps by proxy. And you wanted to prove to her that it was worthless, except as a vacation resort. Otherwise she might have become suspicious and investigated. So you disguised yourself as Longacre, warned everyone about going outdoors at night.

"You tried to kill me when I arrived here. You killed Worth because he discovered your secret, and you planted the fool's gold in his pocket. That was clever, and yet it was a mistake. If Longacre had actually been the criminal, and had thought he'd found gold, he'd have killed you, Burnleigh, because you're a geologist! And a geologist would notice the presence of gold ore before anyone else!"

Allen's fingers closed around the butt of his gun. He hurried on, trying to shield his movements.

"When I found you beside the trail tonight, you weren't unconscious. You were faking. The wound on your head was self-inflicted, though. After I'd gone on, you put on your disguise as Longacre, took a short cut, and caught our attention. You pretended to be shot and fall into the gorge. Actually, you slid down the rope and came here."

"But why, Les?" Jean said suddenly. "If there wasn't any real gold—"

"There was a treasure," Allen said quietly. "Not gold, no. The bat found crushed under Simon's body was the real clue. Burnleigh tried to hide the significance of that with a lot of mumbo-jumbo about flying beasts. Do you notice anything peculiar about this cavern, Jean?"

"No," she answered shortly.

"Longacre found it and no one else ever suspected there was such a cave. But there have always been many bats in this valley. That's why we were warned to stay indoors at night. So we wouldn't notice the flight of the thousands of bats that nest in this cave. Ever been in Carlsbad Caverns, Jean? They've taken a fortune out of it."

The girl's eyes widened as comprehension came to her. "You don't mean that—"

"Yeah! Guano! It ranges from \$25 to \$95 a ton, more than an equal weight

of average-grade gold ore. This cave holds a fortune in guano—the best and most expensive fertilizer in the world. People pay fantastic prices for it. That was your treasure, wasn't it, Burnleigh?"

"Yes," said the geologist quietly. "And the gun in your pocket will do you no good. Before I left the lodge I had taken the precaution of inserting blanks in all the weapons."

A SICK feeling of hopelessness shook Allen. Somehow he knew that Burnleigh was not lying. That was why the killer had dared expose himself so much as a target. That was why no blood had been found on the brink of the chasm.

A grim smile touched Burnleigh's thin lips. "If you are quite finished, Allen, I shall proceed. Do you see that pit? It goes down a long distance, to an underground river, I suspect. I doubt if your bodies will ever be found."

In fascinated horror Allen's eyes dwelt on the blackly gaping hole, then lifted to the shivering, unstable stalactite-group above it.

"You can't—" Allen choked out.

"But I can. Kester first." Burnleigh stooped above the blond giant's bound body. He hesitated, and made a quick examination.

"He's dead," the geologist announced. "Bled to death. I had real bullets in my gun." He lifted the limp form. "He shall be first. After him, our amateur detective. Then the girl." The man's cold eyes dwelt on Jean's face, swept down over the curves of her slim body. "But perhaps not too quickly. Perhaps—"

"Burnleigh," Allen said suddenly. "I'm giving you just one chance. Let Jean go. Because, if you don't, I swear that I'll kill you."

The murderer hesitated, looked down at Allen. Then he laughed, and his foot thudded into the attorney's side. Deliberately he bent; his lean fingers trailed down the smooth skin of Jean's white throat. She shuddered at his touch.

Then Burnleigh turned, and, bearing his burden, hurried toward the pit. He dumped Kester's body to the ground.

Swiftly he pushed the corpse toward the abyss. . . .

Allen's gun was out of his pocket now. Though his hands were still bound, he gripped the pistol in one of them. There was one chance left, and only one. It was desperate. It might fail—and it might succeed too well.

"I love you, Jean," he said. "Remember that." Then he squeezed the trigger.

He kept on squeezing it.

The thunderous, booming reverberations of the shots re-echoed through the vast caverns. Blank cartridges only, but the sound was magnified tremendously by the acoustics of the place. And above the crashes rang the mocking laughter of the man who was rising from the lip of the chasm.

A splintering crack sounded. Then another. A stalactite had fallen from the roof. More were falling, loosened from their precarious perches by the tremendous roar of the vibrations.

Abruptly, unbelieving fear crept into Burnleigh's face. A crackling thunder sounded above him. He looked up.

The nest of stalactites above him was falling.

He gave one scream, agonized and despairing, like the death-cry of a beast. He stretched up. His clawing hands strove to fling himself aside—and then hell broke loose!

Down upon the screaming man crashed the sharp deadly icicles of rock. One spike pierced him through the brain. And still they fell, a deadly rain of stone. The cavern roared and resounded with echoes reinforced by crackling crashes. The body of Burnleigh toppled back hung on the lip of the abyss. Silently, he fell into the pit, after the corpse of the man he had slain.

The roaring grew fainter. After a time it died out. Allen turned his face to Jean's.

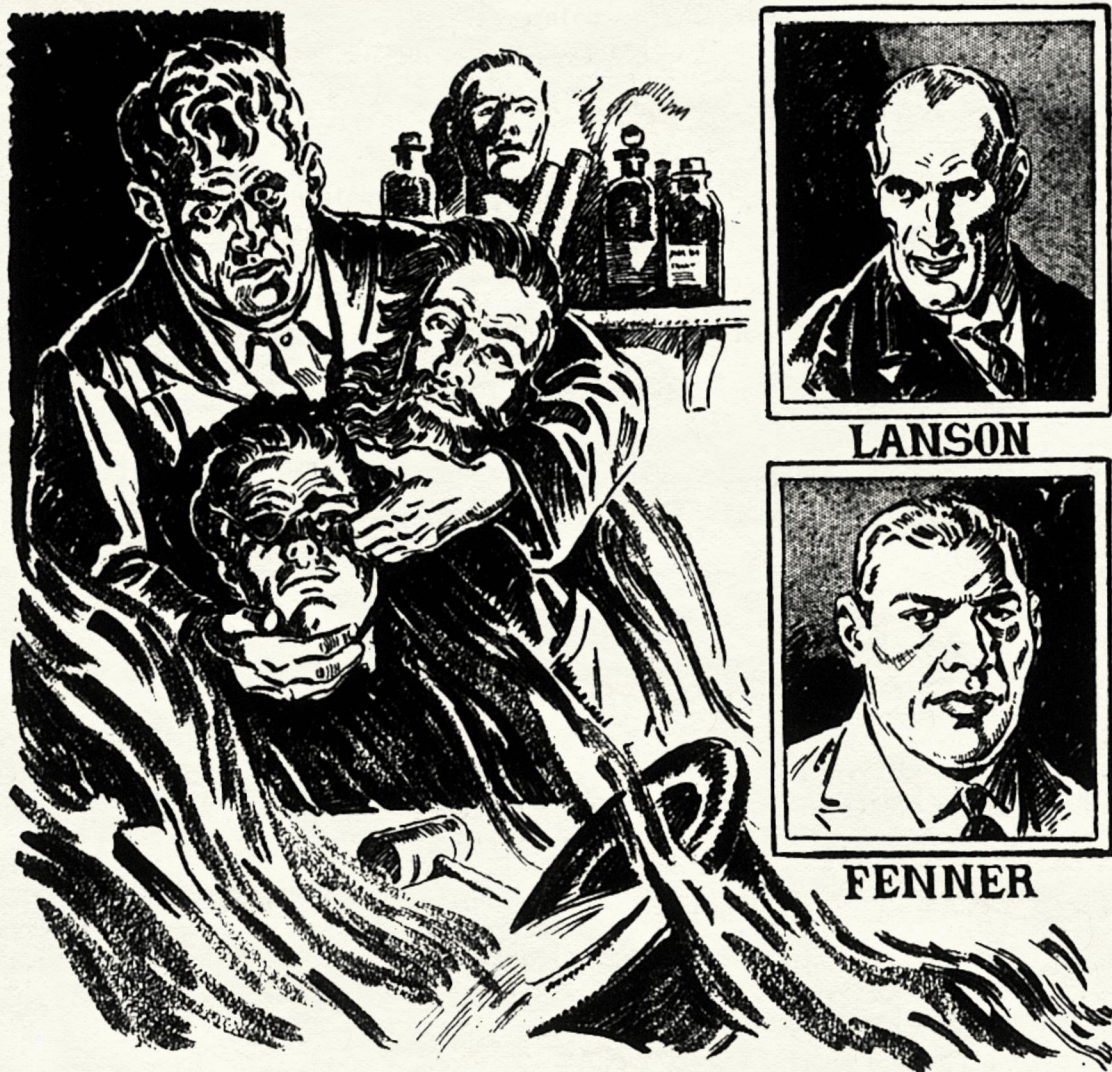
"Lucky we were up against the wall," he said. "Or I wouldn't have dared to try it. Well—roll over. Let's see if I can untie those knots."

Silently she obeyed. Allen found his lips only a few inches from the nape of Jean's neck.

It wasn't a bona fide kiss, of course, but it was an excellent substitute.

A Complete Novelet of Hate's Havoc

MUSEUM



A roaring cauldron of blazing wax lay overturned

**Doom Reigns Sky-High in the Tower of a Skyscraper When a
Mystery Killer Plans a Diabolical Design for Dying
—and Metes Out Murder a la Carte!**

CHAPTER I

Memories of Murder

Leonard Byrnes looked at the letter he was holding in a trembling hand. The suggestion of a snarl turned his lips. It was not the snarl of a hunted creature that grimaced his mouth, but rather that of the hunter. His usually frank gray eyes narrowed to slits and his forehead furrowed in thought.

Byrnes always felt this way when

anything involving his father, the late Auguste Byrnes, came to his attention. His father had been a great man, a great sculptor, and he had died a horrible death. Leonard Byrnes blamed certain men for that death. He called it—"murder." He believed it amounted to that.

The letter he was now holding, in a hand that shook with an old anger, was signed by Malcolm G. Lanson, a lawyer. The name meant nothing to Byrnes. But everything other than the signature did mean something. The letter informed him that he had been

OF DEATH By DON JOSEPH

Author of "Death in Evidence,"
"The Shadow of the Valley of Death," etc.



BARKLEY



RHODES



MAXWELL



He picked Felicia up in his arms, prepared to run up the aisle

mentioned in the codicil to the will of the late Felix Siddon, owner of the Museum of Capital Death. It said further, that the codicil's contents would be revealed, to him and Siddon's business associates, at a reading in the Museum on the following Sunday.

"That will be Brock Fenner, Pascal Rhodes, Morgan Maxwell, and Vincent Barkley," he told himself, scowling. "I'm glad—glad to know that Siddon is

dead! I hope he suffered the tortures of the damned, dying!"

Even in the intensity of his bitter hatred, Byrnes couldn't close his mind to the melancholy that flooded his being as he remembered his father's tragic end. The wound that time had partly healed was open now—and bleeding.

Auguste Byrnes had been one of the kindest of all men. Of Irish extraction, he had been through the Balkan wars as

a child. The misery and mass slaughter he had seen there in his early years had burned themselves so deeply into his mind that his great genius as a sculptor had been warped in a peculiar way.

Happiness and security in America had restored his innate humanity and kindliness, but his statues inevitably revealed the haunting scar on his soul—they were always of twisted, misshapen bodies. And so, Auguste Byrnes had made capital of this dwarfed talent. He had turned to the making of wax figures for a museum of his own. He prospered, and gradually the Institute of Deformed Art expanded to five floors, each one being a museum in itself.

He had picked Siddon, Fenner, Rhodes, Barkley and Maxwell from the gutters of poverty. In time, he left the business of running the museum to them and devoted himself to the carving of these tortured, living figures. But, in the end, the five assistants had ousted the original owner, leaving him impoverished.

The lurid light of Auguste Byrnes' last night on earth flashed before his son's mind. Leonard Byrnes' face paled, and he felt a cold sweat break out all over him as it had a hundred times since that night.

Byrnes had gone back to sculpturing, the only work he knew, after he had been squeezed out of the business. If anything, his work had increased in its brilliant horror because the new bitterness had ripped open that old scar of hate on his soul. But he had to work with a cheap grade of wax, inflammable and dangerous.

One night young Byrnes had heard his father's screams echoing from his workshop. Leonard Byrnes rushed in. But he was too late. His beloved father had become a great molten statue himself, writhing in the hissing, crackling light of his own flames. At his burning feet, a roaring cauldron of blazing wax lay overturned, feeding the fire that was burning him to a crisp, twisted corpse.

By the time he had extinguished the flames, the young Byrnes found his father burned beyond recognition, only charred bones remaining. And as he sat beside the corpse, shuddering huge sobs, he thought of the many times his

father had said that the death he feared most was death by fire. Ironically, his father had died an even more horrible death than the physical torture implied. His agony had been of the soul as well as of the body. That was why Leonard Byrnes called it murder; these men, by fleeing his father, had been directly responsible for his death.

Byrnes stuffed the letter in his pocket and started out the door. He wanted, suddenly, to see some of his father's work again. It would make him feel close to the Old Man. As he caught a bus for the Museum of Corporal Agony, he hoped that Brock Fenner wouldn't be there. Byrnes didn't know how well he could control himself, if he were.

A SHORT time after his father's death, his five former assistants had divided up the five floors of the Auguste Byrnes' Institute of Deformed Art into five museums. Fenner had taken the Museum of Corporal Agony, which featured famous methods of torture through the ages. Siddon took the Museum of Capital Death, with its portrayal of capital punishment in all times and places.

Morgan Maxwell acquired the Museum of Frightful Murders. Pascal Rhodes gained the Museum of *Felos-de-se*, which revealed the more gruesome aspects of suicide, and Vincent Barkley, the Museum of Ritual Sacrifice. All five of these museums had been removed to separate roofs, and a huge profit realized on the sale of the old property located in the heart of the city.

As Byrnes entered the low gray building on the waterfront, he was surprised at the number of people visiting the gruesome place. He knew that his father's Institute had been phenomenally successful, but he had wondered whether five separate museums would share equal prosperity.

As he went through the door into the dull gray light of the interior, Byrnes turned up his coat collar, hiding his face. He didn't want to be recognized. Byrnes had seen a mousy little man give him an odd look, then go on into the museum. Byrnes bought his ticket, stepped into the museum.

He waited a moment for his eyes to

accustom themselves to the subdued light. Then, suddenly, he started, froze in his tracks. Directly before him the little mousy man was lying bound on the floor, his eyes wide open, staring. A red-hot iron had already burned one eye completely out of its blackened socket. The crimson-tipped rod was descending again to take the other eye.

Byrnes choked, wondered why the man didn't scream. The victim's mouth was strained open in the agony of his torture. His body twisted and writhed before the feet of the Arab whose cruel hand was holding the gleaming hot iron.

And then, just as suddenly, Byrnes relaxed, broke into an embarrassed laugh. The whole scene, so vivid and lifelike, was an exhibit. His father's works had always affected him like this when he met them unexpectedly. No matter how often he saw them, they always seemed living, seemed to carry a part of the vital spark of Auguste Byrnes within them. This one before him was one of his father's masterpieces. No wonder it had fooled him for an instant!

Farther down the aisle, he saw the figure of the real, living mousy man looking at the other writhing statues. Byrnes could see now that his resemblance to the victim of the exhibit was accidental.

A dark, squat figure loomed up beside him noiselessly. A harsh voice addressed Byrnes. He whirled to look at the sullen, coarse features of Brock Fenner.

"I see you've come back to us," the voice grated, while Byrnes stuck his fists deep in his overcoat pockets, the better to control them.

Byrnes looked down at the flat nose, the thick lips, the pock-marked skin. Brock Fenner was well-dressed, and rich, but he was still ugly as sin. Byrnes started to move away without answering, but Fenner reached out a hairy hand and caught his arm.

"Let me go!" Byrnes exclaimed. "I'll never come back to you or your crowd—not if I have to starve."

"I'll pay you a lot if you do," Fenner said. "And you're broke, I know that. You need the money. And you're a sculptor. In fact, we've never been able

to get any sculptors to equal your father's work. Something dead and lifeless about their statues. You've probably inherited his talent."

"Look, Fenner," Byrnes said, and he grabbed the lapels of Fenner's coat in one hand, pulling the man up toward him. "Even now my father's death haunts my work. My most beautiful statues still have something hidden and morbid about them, something you can't quite put your finger on. I want to suppress that, not bring it out. I wouldn't make a statue for you, even if you hadn't murdered my father."

The charge left Fenner untouched. His heavy grin just became a little broader.

"I know. I know," he said. "But this place is my hobby now. I don't need it any more for the income. And there's just one statue missing, just one I'd like to add to my collection. Listen, Byrnes"—he leaned closer, dropped his voice to a whisper—"I'd give five thousand"—Byrnes shook his head—"maybe ten thousand dollars for that statue."

THAT made Byrnes stop. Ten thousand dollars was a pretty sum of money for a starving artist. With ten thousand dollars he could live for five years. Five years in which to do the work he loved, without worrying about how he'd keep alive. It would make some amends to his father, in a sense.

Fenner grinned. Fenner had always obtained everything he had ever wanted with money. He worked on the theory that a man would sell anything, even his soul, if enough gold were offered. He pulled Byrnes over to a dark corner, his hand heavy on the younger man's arm.

"The statue I want," he whispered, "is one of a man in intense agony. You've got to get supreme pain in it! Beside the man is an overturned pot, its contents seething on the floor. The erect figure of the man is a writhing, twisting mass of flames, consuming him—I want—"

But Brock Fenner never finished the sentence. With a low cry of rage, Byrnes hurled himself at the man, swinging blindly. A mad joy flashed through his trembling body as he felt

his fist crash sickeningly against that ugly face. Blood streamed from Brock Fenner's nose.

"You devil!" Byrnes cried. He swung again from the shoulder, his jaw taut.

Fenner backed away quickly, a dark scowl on his beaten face. Then, he launched his short-muscled body at the anger-blind man, butted him in the stomach. But Byrnes didn't feel it. He was immune to pain now; he felt nothing but an overwhelming desire to kill Brock Fenner.

Then, he felt men holding his arms. He heard excited voices about him. As his eyes cleared, he saw that the museum attendants gripped him. Fenner was standing back apace, staunching his bleeding nose with a red soggy handkerchief.

"I'll get you for this," he half-sobbed at Byrnes. "I'll make you remember what you've done."

"That's all right with me," Byrnes shouted back as the struggling attendants dragged him toward the exit. "Because next time I see you, I'll give you your due, you devil!"

Once thrust outside into the street, Byrnes started to walk home. He needed a walk, a long walk to get calm again, to work off the seething, boiling anger inside him.

By the time he neared his apartment, he was thinking about the invitation again. He felt certain that he should avoid the Museum of Capital Death, regardless of what might be bequeathed to him in that will. Beside, he couldn't imagine why Felix Siddon would want to leave him anything. It would be pointless to go. There was only hatred between him and his father's killers. And hatred, Byrnes knew, would inevitably lead to tragedy, grim tragedy.

CHAPTER II

The Weird Choice

IT was nearly four o'clock in the afternoon, Sunday, when Byrnes shouldered his way down the crowded avenue. The tangy weather had lured many people to the street. They

strolled along lesiurely, chattering like gay magpies.

Byrnes looked around him at their animated faces—and felt alone. These people were not a part of the world he was entering, a world where death and agony reigned in a ghastly imitation of life's ending. He was already within its shadows.

From the bus window, he could see the gaunt form of the Graves Insurance Building rising like some gigantic skeleton above the avenue. Its seventy stories, including the tower, cast a lengthening penumbra down the avenue, across the top of the bus. The blood-red sun shone from behind it through a multitude of windows. For a moment, Byrnes had the feeling that the building itself had just died, and stood over the city, a ghastly and magnificent monument to bleeding Death.

Then, he shook his head, tried to dispel the morbid fumes from his brain. It was all his imagination, anyway. He had only to look at the young girl with the sparkling eyes and laughing mouth across the aisle, to realize that he alone was entertaining such black-hued phantasies. Nevertheless, he wished he had been able to stay away.

High up in that seemingly narrow tower, on the sixty-fourth and sixty-fifth floors of that building hanging over him, was the Museum of Capital Death. It was the only one of the five museums that had been streamlined, kept up to date with the changing times. Byrnes remembered the free publicity the museum had received when it moved into that towering structure, the busiest, most crowded skyscraper in the world. The two factors, publicity and central location, had brought crowds to the Museum's doors. "The Skyscraper Scare," the papers had dubbed it. Once again Byrnes wished he had had the will power to stay away.

But he couldn't! He had fought with himself ever since that moment of mad rage at Brock Fenner. Something dark within him seemed to crawl every time he thought of the approaching engagement. He had even made a date with a friend to go up in the country for the week-end. But, at the last minute, he had broken it. What would Felix Siddon want to leave him—Felix Siddon,

who had hated his soul? There was really no reason for going, no reason at all.

Yet, here he was on his way. He looked out the window to watch the life on the street. A maroon roadster swung up near the bus, rolled evenly alongside it. He glanced at the driver, caught his breath. She was a honey. Her hair was jet black, her skin a glowing white. Over slim shoulders, she wore a deep red sweater. Just the color to set off her hair! He took in her even, softly rounded features, her gently parted lips, and the long slim fingers that held the wheel so deftly. And then, her car scooted ahead through an opening in the traffic.

THE bus screeched to a stop and Byrnes barely had time to gather his wits and scramble out. He had been so occupied studying the strange girl he had almost missed his stop. The next moment he was striding down the empty foyer of the skyscraper. There was only one elevator running on Sunday. He could see its illuminated dial all the way from the entrance. And he also saw someone, a slim figure, standing under the dial, waiting. He caught his breath for the second time that day—and for the same person. It was the girl, the driver of the maroon roadster!

Inside the elevator, the girl called, "Sixty-fifth, please." The elevator man nodded and punched the button with a stubby finger. Byrnes started. What could she be doing up there? Probably a secretary to the lawyer. But even while the explanation popped into his head, he knew it was false. That one large diamond ring she wore on a delicate finger was worth more than a secretary could earn in a year.

As the elevator doors slid noiselessly shut, he felt a cold draft of air beating down on him. It was as though the doors to the world, to life, had suddenly closed him out. The elevator man, he thought fleetingly, looked like an expug. The girl looked as though she were modeled from some of his father's clear wax, lovelier than he had ever dreamed any image could be.

As they stepped out onto the deep pile of the rug, into the museum

entrance, Byrnes saw a tall, bald-headed man coming to greet them. His clothes hung loosely about him, as though there were no flesh on his bones, an effect that was heightened by his deep-set, dark eyes. He covered the room in a few strides.

"I'm Malcolm Lanson," he said to the girl, smiling a thin smile. "I may assume that you are Miss Felicia Siddon. And you"—he turned to Byrnes—"must be Leonard Byrnes, since all the others have arrived."

Byrnes gasped, nodded coldly to the girl. Felicia Siddon! Then she must be Felix Siddon's daughter. No matter how beautiful she was, she must have an ugly soul. The daughter of one of his father's enemies! While she smiled almost irresistibly at him, in acknowledgement of the indirect introduction, he tried to hate her.

"I suggest that you take one of these booklets," Lanson said, "while we make the inspection of the property involved in the will and codicil of the deceased. That is customary, you know, in such cases as this. The booklets will serve as an inventory of the physical property. They used to be given to all visitors here."

He pushed a black folder into their hands. On the cover, in white letters, Byrnes read the name of the museum. Then, down the cover, he saw, in what was evidently an engraving from a man's handwriting:

As a matter of interest, the Management suggests that each visitor name which death portrayed here is the most horrible in his eyes. Please write it on the enclosed card and hand it to the attendant as you leave.

Felicia Siddon made a wry face as she read it, and smiled up at Byrnes. She took his arm as though she needed reassurance, as though she had never even heard of the feud between her father and himself.

"You know," she said in a soft voice, "this is the first time I've ever visited my father's museum. He never let me come here while he was alive, never told me much about it. I wonder how he ever got this horrible idea anyway?"

So, she didn't know about the old hatred! Byrnes felt he should shake her light fingers off his arm. But the

warmth of her heart-shaped hand was seeping through his sleeve, and he liked it. Against his own wishes, he found himself liking her. What's more, he found himself resenting the way Lanson was walking along with them, trying to play up to her.

And then, they were approaching the others. Byrnes saw them standing just inside the large dusty room of the museum. He couldn't distinguish them clearly in the dying light that drifted down through the high windows. Most of the large room was in deep shadows.

The short, squat figure in the dark suit was, of course, Brock Fenner. Then, there was the older, slightly stooped figure of Pascal Rhodes, owner of the Museum of *Felos-de-se*. On the far side of the group, Byrnes could see the still-brawny form of Morgan Maxwell, owner of the Museum of Frightful Murders, and next to him, the unnaturally tall and unnaturally thin body of Vincent Barkley.

He loathed them all. And, as they turned at the sound of his footsteps, he could see fear shining back at him in their eyes. He was glad they were afraid of him.

BUT they greeted him politely, trying to hide their emotions. Maxwell even took his arm as they started walking up the aisle—the *Aisle of Death* it was labeled in neat handwriting. It was well-named!

The dread figures on each side of them stirred ancient memories within Byrnes. In the dusk, they seemed to writhe in their mortal torture, seemed to throw out appealing hands for mercy, for release from the grim shadows of death that fluttered about them. Ahead, Byrnes saw Felicia cling closer to the withered arm of old Pascal Rhodes.

Suddenly, she uttered a little scream—a tiny scream, but it stopped everyone dead in his tracks. A slim finger, white against the shadows, pointed tremblingly ahead of her.

"Look! It's closing. It's killing her!"

All eyes swung to a deep mound of shadow. In the dusty depths of the museum they could see an oval box lined with huge spikes. Slowly, it was

closing on the body of an old woman whose wild eyes stared up at them in the agonies of her exquisite pain. The spikes had already penetrated her bloody cheek. When the box had completely closed, the spikes would have pierced through her head and body.

Byrnes felt his skin crawl. Even though the statue was faintly familiar, he had an overwhelming impulse to rush to the old woman's aid, to pull that lid open with main strength. Somehow, he found himself beside Felicia, holding her cold damp hand firmly.

"Humph," Fenner snorted. "A nice effect! I suppose, Miss Siddon, that this represents your choice of the most horrible death—the Iron Maiden?"

Felicia Siddon looked up at him, trying to force a smile. She nodded silently, against her will it seemed. Byrnes felt her trembling silently beside him. The lifelike scene, her scream, it all had put everyone's nerves on edge. There was something malignant in the very atmosphere of the Museum of Capital Death.

"Since Miss Siddon is so upset," Lanson said slowly, as though he were seeking her attention, "suppose we try to make a game of this inspection—the game on the catalogue cover here. Before he died, Mr. Siddon intended clearing this overcrowded floor to the floor below, and setting off the best statues more dramatically. You will probably want to carry that plan out, and your choices made now, could serve to identify the best, or the worst statues—the statues of most dreadful death."

Everyone looked at Lanson stonily. Everyone, except Fenner, whose eyes flicked at Lanson rapidly, almost gratefully, Byrnes thought.

"A good idea," Byrnes added, sweeping them all with a bitter glance. "After all, you gave my father that opportunity, didn't you?"

Almost instantly, he regretted blurted that out. He felt Felicia pull away, as though she had suddenly discovered the well of hatred inside him. But deeper within himself, he felt a vague premonition of alarm, some sense of the sinister seeming to come awake below the levels of his consciousness.

Brock Fenner laughed deeply. His

sardonic chuckle seemed to add to the heavy gloom about them.

"So we did, Byrnes, if you insist on looking at it that way. At any rate, there's my choice."

Byrnes knew the man was taunting him, and only the presence of Felicia made him control his temper. Fenner was pointing to a twisting figure whose agony even made Byrnes feel sick to his stomach. In the shadows, he could see the blood drain from Felicia's cheeks.

It was the body of a man lying in contorted agony on a platform. His eyes started from his head, as though in the ultimate pain of death. And around his neck was an iron collar with screws on it that were slowly being twisted into the throat by a second wax figure in uniform, the torturer. There was the very essence of mortal pain in the writhing horror of the condemned man's body. Underneath the scene was a card neatly written in Siddon's handwriting, explaining the scene:

The Garrote. A peculiarly Spanish mode of execution by strangulation.

But few of the party read the explanation. All seemed in a hurry to get on. Byrnes could understand why Felicia was horrified by these statues. She had never seen any like them before. But the rest of the group, the men? They owned museums themselves, with sights just as horrible. Why should they shudder?

AND suddenly, young Byrnes realized what it was. The thought made a fine sweat break out on his forehead. There was something about the place, something about the dull sounds echoing back to them, the flitting shadows, that made everyone feel that these gruesome deaths had happened here—that they were witnessing reality, not subtle man-made imagery.

Rhodes was trying to be gay when he chose the guillotine, but the whiteness of his cheeks betrayed the fear that was on him. He peered at the bound wax figure lying on the swivel-table, its neck in the collar under the poised blade.

Barkley shook his head in disagreement.

"It's my long neck," he mumbled with a wry smile, "I suppose, that's always made me fear hanging more than any other death." He pointed at a white figure that hung from the end of a rope. "Your neck stretches and stretches and—it breaks the spine, you know? That lets the neck stretch even more."

"No," Morgan Maxwell said, his growling voice breaking imperceptibly. "I think the Oubliette here, is the worst. The card says it was very popular with the kings of France during the Middle Ages for disposing of their enemies."

They trooped inside a cell that seemed to be cut in solid rock. In the floor of the dungeon, a hole had been cut large enough for a man to fall through a vertical chute down twenty feet below onto the barbed spears concealed under water. Peering down the long shaft, they could see a body impinged on the spikes, lighted by hidden electric bulbs.

"You see, some poor devil would be pushed into this cell. The door closing behind him would shut out all light. Then, he'd start feeling his way along the wall. Foot by foot he'd slide along, getting closer and closer to this ghastly hole. Suddenly, the guard outside the iron door would hear a mad scraping, a long scream of sheer terror as the body rattled down the chute to the spikes below. Then, silence, and the gurgle of the bloody water underneath the castle. The victim was lucky if one of those spikes down there went through his heart," Maxwell explained, ending with a barely suppressed shudder.

But it was as they were leaving the St. Catharine's Wheel, where a body was being broken to pieces, that Byrnes noticed how much darker the hall had become. The rectangular glass squares in the skylight, through which the last dregs of the dying day had seeped, were now black. The only light to be seen was far in the distance where the office door stood open. The twisted wax figures were now only blobs in the heavy gloom.

Byrnes' choice had been the St. Catharine's Wheel, but he wasn't thinking of that now. Quite suddenly he stopped, felt his throat grow dry.

He was sure he had seen a ghostly figure flit by the lighted doorway, as though one of these grim torturers had come to life and was now stalking them through the dim alleys of the museum.

He tried to forget it, shake it off. Then a scream behind him made the hair creep along his neck. It was a wild scream of fear verging on terror. He wheeled in his tracks, saw Felicia trying to scream again. Her mouth wide open, she was pointing to the shadows in the *Aisle of Death*.

"I saw something move," she gasped as he took her outstretched arm. "Something ran across the dark space there. Don't tell me it was my imagination! I saw it. It was horrible, like one of those awful statues—"

Byrnes caught her limp body in his arms. Perhaps it was just as well she had fainted. A heavy ominous clank behind them made the six men whirl. In the semi-darkness, they could see the heavy blade of the guillotine plunging downward, saw it shear through a bared neck. A human head fell heavily to the floor.

Byrnes looked around him quickly. He counted the five other men of the party, all near him, frozen in attitudes of fear. He sighed. It had been a wax head the guillotine had cut off! But



who had released the trigger, sending the deadly blade thundering on its downward course? Had he really seen someone down by the office door? And now that he thought of it, who had started the mechanism of the Iron Maiden going when they first entered the hall? Perhaps, it had really been Felicia's eyes and not her imagination that had seen a grotesque figure running in the shadows.

Beside him, he heard Brock Fenner venting a weird chuckle.

"Frightened you, Byrnes, didn't it?"

"Nevertheless," Lanson said in a hollow voice, "I still think the electric chair is the worst death. I-I think it's terrible."

CHAPTER III

A Dead Man's Hand

BROCK FENNER had sneered and twisted his bulky figure in the armchair when Rhodes had locked the office door behind him.

"Scared?" Fenner mocked. He seemed to be the only one of the group who wasn't.

This room was comfortable in itself. It was more like a room for board of directors meetings than an ordinary office. The light seemed good, reassuring. It brought the color back to Felicia's cheeks. Her set lips, the sharp thrust to the ordinarily soft line of her jaw, told Byrnes that she didn't intend to let herself be frightened again.

No one talked much while Lanson fumbled in his briefcase for the codicil to the last will and testament of Felix Siddon. But the angry glances that were cast Byrnes' way showed that the men here suspected him of having something to do with their fright.

He found his old grim hatred rising within him, found himself wishing he had frightened them, as Lanson pulled a long typewritten sheet out and placed it on the table.

"I'll read this later," he said in a professional manner. "For the moment, I'll sum it up by saying that the deceased leaves his entire estate to his daughter, Felicia Siddon, with the exception of this Museum of Capital Death. This he leaves to his daughter, his former partners, and to Leonard Byrnes, all to share equally. When any partner dies, his share is redistributed among the remaining partners."

"I had heard," Rhodes interrupted hesitantly, "that he was going to leave it to the city, as a sort of educational exhibit. I guess he changed his mind in favor of this plan."

"That's a step in the right direction," Maxwell said immediately. "The five museums have never made as much apart as they did when they were together."

"What's the difference?" Fenner asked heatedly. "Haven't we all re-

ceived offers of purchase? But we made enough from the old single property, when real estate values went up, to fix us all comfortably for life. Now we run our museums as profitable hobbies, even though our wives don't appreciate them, and Siddon was the only one of us who had a child. We had the foresight to make the first museum a success. Now, we might as well enjoy our money in our own way."

Long before Fenner finished, Byrnes felt his blood boiling. He wasn't thinking anymore of what was lurking out in that darkened hall beyond the lights, of the haunted shadows that had made Felicia faint. These men were claiming credit for the success of the museum!

"You made a success of the museum?" he repeated ironically. "First you robbed my father. Then, you practically murdered him. Now you claim the credit for his genius."

He knew he was shouting in his blind hatred. He felt his eyes blazing with rage. In front of him, he saw Felicia Siddon staring at him horrified. But he couldn't stop. These were the moments he couldn't control himself, when he hardly realized what he was doing.

He saw Maxwell's face growing pale with fear. Maxwell had been the brains behind the whole maneuver to oust the elder Byrnes. He hated Maxwell the most. And now, while Lanson was striving to quiet the meeting, Maxwell was getting up, his hat and coat on his arm. He was frightened and angry.

Byrnes climbed to his feet unsteadily, clasping and unclasping his knotted hands. He followed Maxwell into the hall of the Museum. He wanted to take the man's fat shoulders, shake him furiously. He wanted to pour out all his wrath in a venomous torrent of words.

Far down the aisle, he saw the shadow of Maxwell moving in long strides. Byrnes started running after him. He had to catch him before he reached the elevator. Behind him he heard Felicia calling his name, but he didn't stop. But when he reached the elevator doors, Maxwell had disappeared. The elevator couldn't have come that quickly. Byrnes figured that Maxwell must

have heard him, despite the silence of his crepe-soled shoes, and had slipped into the protection of some dark corner.

Furious, Byrnes began searching for him. He had to get all the fury dammed up within him off his chest! He began working backward, searching through the dark. When his hand touched the cold rigid body of some wax corpse, he shuddered. Where was Maxwell hiding? As his search progressed, a new idea began to haunt him. The flame of his anger slowly died. Had something happened to Maxwell?

The thought had hardly flashed through his mind when the dead silence of the dark hall was set vibrating with a muffled scream. Startled, Byrnes stood rigid, his hands still holding the wax head lying below the guillotine.

"Get me out of here," a frantic voice was crying. "Someone, please, get me out of here!"

IT was Maxwell! His voice was coming from the direction of the Oubliette. And then, Byrnes understood why it sounded so far away although it was really just across the hall. Someone had pushed Maxwell inside, slammed the dungeon door shut. Or, he had hidden there, the door latching behind him.

There was a shrill scream, then the sound of a body slithering into emptiness.

With a mad curse, Byrnes stumbled over a wax body and dashed for the Oubliette. Irrelevantly, he remembered that *oubliette*, in French, meant a place where one was forgotten. If he hadn't heard the scream, they might not have found Maxwell's body for days. He was not angry now. He was grimly serious.

In the cell, he lay down on the cold floor and crawled along on his stomach. Maxwell had fallen down that hole, then someone must have removed the guard rail. As he inched his way forward, Byrnes tried to remember who had been the last one to leave the place when they visited it.

And then, he could see it. Far down the lighted shaft he saw a body impinged on the cruel steel spikes—only this body was clothed in modern dress.

Byrnes lay tense as he sucked in his breath. The body, he could see clearly now, was Morgan Maxwell. The water that covered him was already turning a blood red.

Had Maxwell stumbled in here accidentally while trying to hide? Or had that guardrail been deliberately removed by someone? And was it an accident that this man had died by the death he had considered the most horrible? Byrnes felt an icy chill creep up his back at the thought.

A step grated on the floor behind him. He leaped to his feet, pushed back quickly against the wall. He could hear his heart pounding. Someone had but to push him and he would hurtle down the shaft after Maxwell.

A match flared in the hands of Fenwick. Behind him Byrnes saw the pale faces of Felicia, Brock Fenner, Barkley and Rhodes. They, too, had heard the screams.

"Don't move," Byrnes said. "Don't move, or you'll go down there. Someone took the guardrail away. Morgan Maxwell's lying dead on the spikes down there. I-I heard the screams and found him like—like that!"

Lanson walked over carefully, peered down the shaft. The two other men followed. Behind them they heard Felicia saying quietly:

"And that was the death he dreaded most! Do you suppose. . ."

But she didn't finish. All eyes except hers were turned accusingly on Byrnes.

"That Maxwell was killed by the death he was most afraid of?" Byrnes finished the thought for her.

"One might suppose," Brock Fenner hissed, swaggering up to him, "one might suppose a lot of things. Isn't that the idea Byrnes has been harping on all evening—with his crazy references to our *murder* of his father?"

"Good God, man! You don't suspect me of killing Maxwell!" Byrnes gasped.

"Don't I, though?" Fenner mocked. "You called us all murderers. You threatened, at my museum, to get me. You were out here chasing Maxwell. I think the police will agree with me, and I'm going to call them now."

While they trailed behind the deter-

mined figure of Brock Fenner, Byrnes finally realized how his hatred had trapped him. Only Felicia's presence gave him the courage to face the ordeal before him. For he didn't doubt that the police would come to the same conclusion that Brock Fenner had reached.

But the suspicion persisted in the back of his head that Maxwell's death wasn't an accident at all. The thought wracked Byrnes' mind. If it wasn't an accident, who could have done it? He studied the others and realized it might have been almost any one of them. But why would any one want to kill Maxwell? Why?

Inside the office, ahead of them, they could hear Fenner shouting into the phone. As they came into the room, they saw him hang up the receiver limply, his face a dead white.

"Someone's cut the wires," he whispered harshly. "Somewhere in this awful place there's a maniac killer loose!"

CHAPTER IV

Murder by Choice

BYRNES heard five audible gasps, including his own. He saw five pale faces. He knew his own was pale too, by the cold sweat on his forehead. Dazed, he wiped it away with a clammy palm.

"You wait here," he told them, "I'm going out and get a cop."

He wheeled on his toes and strode from the room into the outer darkness. Behind him, in the lighted office, he heard Fenner's hoarse voice shouting:

"Don't let him get away. He's not going after a cop at all. He's trying to escape."

Over his shoulder, he saw Lanson come dashing out of the room, the light glinting off his dome-shaped head. He started down the aisle, running, but Byrnes knew he couldn't see him—just as Byrnes hadn't been able to see Maxwell. The thought made him check his pace tensely. Maybe something was waiting in the horrible writhing darkness there, to seize him, too. He doubled his fists to give him cour-

age and strode on.

He was thinking about Fenner and his charges. Brock Fenner had been in too much of a hurry to convict him. And Brock Fenner was the only one who didn't really seem frightened, who kept his composure, even up to the discovery of Maxwell's body.

Behind him, Byrnes could hear Fenner shouting to the others.

"Well, he's got away by this time. Let's go over to the Oubliette. Come on back, Lanson, there might be some clues there to convict him. All of us stick together."

Byrnes smiled grimly. Then he felt a pang of anxiety. Was Felicia safe, even with four men around her? Suppose Fenner wanted to kill off his partners—to add this collection to his, perhaps?

His feet glided noiselessly across the floor to the elevator bank. He pushed the button. None of the dials moved. He pushed again, and again. As the significance of the dead dials struck him, he felt the skin on his back crawling, as though something were creeping up on him from the outer darkness behind.

"Of course," he told himself. "If anyone had gone to the trouble of cutting off the telephone and exhibit lights, he'd see that the elevators weren't accessible, too. He turned and rushed to the door where the dull red exit light glowed. The door was locked!

Byrnes went tense, choking back his breath. Trapped! From somewhere in the shadows a man's voice was calling, cursing wildly. There was the cry of scattered, answering shouts. Then, a long terrified scream.

With a curse of his own, Byrnes launched himself into the darkness. He sped up the aisle past the shadows of other bodies in the attitudes of screaming. But this hoarse scream was real—so real it made his hair stand up, made the muscles in his scalp tug at his ears with fear. It was coming from the direction of the gallows tree!

Yet, when he was within strides of the instrument of death, he stopped short. There was only a dim white statue hanging from a noose—another statue that resembled a man so closely

it was difficult to detect the deception. But a statue couldn't utter that terror-stricken scream! He looked behind him quickly. Out of the corner of his eye, as he turned his head, he thought he saw the statue at the end of the rope give a last, convulsive shudder. In two quick strides he was up on the platform beside it.

Then, he discovered that it wasn't a statue at all. It was the still warm body of Vincent Barkley. The neck was stretched horribly, as the victim had feared it would be, the head tilted to one side. Hands tied behind the back, the feet of the corpse now hung below the level of the sprung trap-door.

Another victim of the death he dreaded most! Byrnes gritted his teeth, clubbed his large hands into knotted fists. The others would be murdered in the same fashion, were doomed to die by their innocent choices—and he would be blamed for it.

A HAND seized his shoulder, jerked him around roughly. He found himself looking into the dark, blazing eyes of Brock Fenner.

"I thought you were going for a cop," Fenner questioned accusingly. He added sardonically, "Maybe that wasn't the reason you left in such a hurry. Maybe you know more about this than you've told." He pointed at the elongated neck that looked like some loathsome white serpent in the gloom.

Byrnes felt his face flush, his knuckles go white as he stepped within swinging range of Fenner's face. Only Felicia's intervention stopped the brewing fight.

"Why didn't you go for a cop, then?" Fenner insisted.

"Because," Byrnes said evenly, "because I couldn't get out of here. The devilish fiend who's planned this, didn't overlook the elevator and the stairs' exit. We're isolated here, sixty-five stories above the city—as isolated as though we were a hundred miles away from civilization. Someone, something, has turned this into hell's heaven. Look, we're even up in the clouds." He gestured toward the windows.

Eyes swung mechanically, saw a white luminous mist drifting outside.

A fine drizzle beat against the panes. A new, clammy chill seemed to penetrate the vast hall like the damp hands of a new death. They shuddered together, looked into each other's faces.

"Are you absolutely sure you tried the exit door?" Lanson questioned incredulously. As Byrnes nodded, Lanson dropped his gaze to his feet.

Suddenly, Felicia started swallowing hard, as though she had to say something and didn't have the time to say it.

"Pascal Rhodes," she whispered faintly. "Where's Rhodes? Where's he gone to?"

Byrnes stared in amazement. Rhodes had been there only a moment ago. But this time they had little doubt where they'd find him.

"He feared the guillotine!" Fenner exploded.

He started to lead the way, then dropped back. They moved forward in a group. No one knew who would be next to disappear—and everyone was under suspicion.

Byrnes groped frantically in the darkness of the museum and in his own mind at the same time. By choosing the death he feared most, everyone had outlined his plan for dying. But, whoever was trying to tie it on him, whoever was really carrying out the plan, must know of his hatred for the partners. That included everyone present, except, possibly, Felicia and Lanson.

They heard the muffled echo of a desperate scream. The small knot of frightened people stopped, their eyes drawn toward the ceiling by the sound of a heavy clank. Then, frozen with fear, they watched the heavy shadowed blade of the guillotine hover for an instant near the ceiling, plunge madly down the shafts of the deadly instrument.

They didn't have to look, to know that yet another, Pascal Rhodes, had died in the way he feared most. Grimly, Fenner and Byrnes untied the headless body with its still spouting stump of a neck. Hastily they laid it out in a corner, placing the head where it belonged and covering the dread sight with a piece of canvas. Out in the aisle, Lanson and Felicia were trembling.

Byrnes turned away from the canvas-covered pile, sick. He was raging inwardly at the fiend who had planned this orgy of death. If this was Fenner's handiwork, he was going to settle it now. This had gone beyond fear, beyond ever terror. A vulture, in human form, was hovering about them, chuckling in the shadows as it meted out ironic death. There must be some clue, some definite indication of the identity of the killer. Had there been a time device on the trigger of the guillotine? Byrnes looked around him, found the others had retreated to the office, leaving him alone.

There was a clue, there must be one! He forced himself to stand still and think, although his heart was telling him to go off in a frantic search for Felicia.

Then his eyes dropped to the card on the post of the guillotine. In his hand was the twisted remnants of the museum catalogue. And suddenly, he realized that the clue might be right there under his eyes—if he could only force himself to stand still another minute, there in the darkness, and think it out.

No one could plan something like this slaughter so carefully that he wouldn't make one slip. Abruptly, he snapped his fingers, said aloud:

"I've got to ask—"

But he didn't finish. A dense shadow loomed out of the darkness beside him. Before he could move, he saw something rising above his head, descending. A thousand lights seemed to be bursting in his head. His legs went numb, and he sank slowly to the floor.

CHAPTER V

Death and Redemption

BYRNES tried to put a hand to his aching head. As his mind became clearer, he realized that he was bound to something. He smiled wryly. By all rights, if the killer worked on schedule, he should be tied to the St. Catharine's Wheel. For a moment he struggled furiously against the ropes that held his wrists around a post.

Then he stopped, limp, as he realized that it was the post of the guillotine that was pressing into his back. He could feel the cold metal of the track down which the blade ran against the inside of his wrists.

That could mean only one thing—that he was being kept out of the way while the other murders were being committed. Later, he would be released—to accept the blame! He struggled frantically to loosen the tight ropes at his wrists, then sank to the ground panting, momentarily exhausted. In the gloom, he twisted his head, saw that something was wrong, changed. A frown creased his forehead, and then a mad smile twisted his lips. Maybe he wouldn't have to writhe crazily here while Felicia's death screams rang out in the sticky air.

Above him, he could see that someone had lifted the blade back to the top of the guillotine, for future use, perhaps. He struggled to his feet, felt behind him until he thought he had his wrists placed on each side of the track, only the rope over it. If he was right, the plunging blade would pass between them. With choking throat, he bent his head upward, slowly, caught the trigger-rope of the machine between his teeth—tugged. It would be his hand lost or freedom gained—

The next instant, he tumbled forward on his face, his wrists free.

The following moments were a blur of action in Byrnes' racing mind. His hands were fumbling at the gag around his mouth. Then, he was standing in the office above the trussed-up figure of Brock Fenner, looking down into Fenner's terrified eyes. The lump on Fenner's forehead held him what had happened.

"I haven't got time to untie you, Fenner, even if it means your life. But there are several questions you've got to answer fast. You said . . ."

Fenner's thick lips had hardly stopped mumbling when Byrnes was plunging out the door again, ignoring the pleading cries behind him. Maybe, there was still time to save Felicia. There had to be!

He found himself stumbling crazily over the wax statues as he raced along, searching for the Iron Maiden. His

body ached as he fell against hard objects, but he forced himself on, desperately.

His breath was coming in sobs as he spotted the box in the semi-darkness. He staggered toward it. He could see the whiteness of a face there among the murderous spikes. Only, now, the lid was really closing on a living person. This was no optical illusion. He thrust his knee between the box and the closing door as a dark figure went gliding away down the aisle.

In an instant, he had forced the door open. Felicia fell out in his arms, a gag over her mouth, terror in her wide eyes.

She tried to talk and sob as he tore the bandage loose, but he silenced her. She'd need her energies, and he hadn't time to listen. He remembered how he had left Brock Fenner tied up in the office. If he was on the right track now, Fenner would be bound at the Garrote. With a swoop, he picked Felicia up in his arms, started running up the aisle.

She struggled free, ran alongside of him. The light from the office doorway fell eerily across the body of Brock Fenner. Behind him, Byrnes saw the face of the elevator man. Byrnes leaped across the space, swinging. But the man stepped aside, caught him with a thundering right on the jaw. Byrnes felt himself falling into space. When he hit the floor the man was on top of him, choking him.

He beat madly at that flat nose, at those beady eyes. But the man's grip was like iron. Lights danced in front of his eyes, as those fingers tightened relentlessly. Foolish thoughts raced through his spinning mind. What was Felicia doing now?

Out of the corner of his eye, he thought he saw her figure rising up beside him. But it was too large for a woman. It must be Lanson—and Byrnes knew he had lost. The figure seemed to be raising something in the air. There was a loud crunch, and the fingers at Byrnes' throat relaxed, the body above him rolled off his chest.

After the first few gulps of air, Byrnes saw that it was Brock Fenner who was weaving crazily above him. It was Fenner who had crashed something against the elevator man's head.

Felicia had freed him, so he could aid Byrnes.

Another figure glided into the circle. Byrnes grabbed madly at Lanson's ankles as a gun thundered in his face. He heard himself shouting:

"Get him, Fenner! He's the one we want!"

He saw Brock Fenner swing and miss while Lanson tried to club Byrnes with his gun. Byrnes squirmed free, holding Lanson's gun-wrist. He put all his remaining power into a short right hook, felt Lanson go limp.

IN the office, they watched Lanson come to. The elevator man's wrists were tied behind him, and he was covered by Brock Fenner with Lanson's gun. The dull face of the elevator man looked disconsolate and frightened now. Lanson's shoes were soaked red, probably from the pool of blood at the guillotine. They sloshed sickeningly.

"A damn clever scheme for a rat like you, Lanson," Byrnes said as the lawyer raised himself to one elbow weakly. "And, if I hadn't caught on through one little slip of yours, the plan would have gone through so smoothly that I'd have been convicted, sentenced and executed in double-quick time."

Lanson sneered.

"You needn't try to shove your crimes off on me," he said derisively. "You're guilty as hell, Byrnes, and you know it. Revenge is bitter medicine, Byrnes, but your scheme went even farther. You thought you'd get back the museums that you believe rightly belong to you. That, and the other evidence, will convict you before any jury."

Byrnes looked at Lanson in amazement, his cheeks coloring with anger. He shook his head.

"You've got nerve, Lanson! That evidence was planned by you to convict me. The only trouble was, that in producing the codicil to the last will of Felix Siddon, you had it typed out and forged the signature. In investigating the life of the deceased you overlooked the fact that he always refused to have anything important written in typewriter script. You thought he had written the will in longhand, just because it was the most convenient method

available at the moment, knowing that men make wills under strange conditions sometimes.

"But it was the titles to these statues here, all written in longhand, that made me think something was phony. It really didn't hit me as having anything to do with the will until after you had performed that fine act of cruelty on Pascal Rhodes. My suspicion was confirmed when Fenner told me of Siddon's superstitions about typewriting—that, and the fact that you had only been Siddon's lawyer a short time before his death and probably didn't know of his peculiarity.

"Then, I remembered Rhodes' comment, which both Fenner and Miss Siddon tell me is true, that Siddon intended leaving this museum to the city as an institution. The will probably contains those terms, and you simply added the codicil to supersede that clause in the will."

Lanson's self-assurance slipped a notch. It showed in his eyes. But he kept up the same front, the smile plastered across his face.

"What's my motive, Byrnes?" The note of irony was still intentionally heavy. "I don't go around changing wills and murdering people for the fun of it. Now, if it were revenge I was after—"

"The same motivation you partly ascribed to me," Byrnes answered coldly. "To get all the museums back together. You know that the sum of their profits, although not insignificant, never amounted to the huge sum of the days when the five museums were together. But the men wouldn't sell—the museums were their hobbies. You knew that the wives of these men would sell cheap, once their husbands were dead. The museums meant nothing to the women. And Miss Siddon's share, according to the forged codicil, would be lost with her death—the grisly death you planned for her. You'd have become a very rich man, a millionaire, Lanson, if it had worked out that way—and I'd have become a dead one."

Byrnes turned on the elevator man, whose head was hanging despondently. The man broke down, struggled for words as the full danger of his position became clear to him.

"It's true," he moaned. "Everything you said about him was true, and I'll testify to it first. Only, it wasn't my fault, all this. That rat found I'd been stealing small sums from the ticket window, when I was cashier for the museum here, found it out after Sid-don died. He threatened to send me to jail unless I'd bribe the regular elevator man, take his pace, and follow orders. B-but he didn't let on there'd be murder. He got me in deeper then, by pushing the first man down that chute and saying I'd be blamed for that too unless I'd do the rest of the things he told me. I guessed he could too, because he was a lawyer.

"Please don't let them electrocute me. I'll tell everything, and—Oh, God, Mr. Lanson!"

BYRNES spun around as Lanson lunged through the doorway. A hollow laugh taunted them from the darkness of the hall as Byrnes and Fenner sped in pursuit. Again the laugh taunted them from the direction of the museum exit—it was a mad, triumphant laugh.

"He's got the key," Brock Fenner panted. "He'll get away." Byrnes clenched his teeth, answered by spurring harder.

They lunged into the foyer as Lanson reached the door, grabbed it. Suddenly there was a blue flare, a hissing like the discharge of a spark gap—and the nauseous smell of burning flesh. Around the room echoed the death scream of Lanson as the current destroyed the life from his brain.

"God!" Fenner groaned, his face pale. "He chose his death, after all."

"Yes," Byrnes murmured. "He over-looked too many things. That death was in store for any of us who might try to break down the door. The steel plate there at his feet, and the door knob, were the contacts. His rubber-soled shoes were to protect him, as mine happened to protect me. But, when Lanson stepped in the blood there by

the guillotine to raise the blade for possible future use, he lost the insulation. In the final analysis, Rhodes revenged himself for his death."

Driving home in Felicia's car, Byrnes realized that, for the first time in many years, he was completely calm. Deep within himself, he was calm. He was in love with Felicia, no doubt of that. But it was the awful ordeal they had just gone through that gave him this quiet feeling—or rather, what he had learned from the ordeal.

He had seen, as in the glaring light of a blazing pyre, the havoc that greed and hatred could wreak. Lanson's greed had left four dead in its path, and hatred between himself and the others had, in a sense, brought it all about. Fenner still hated him, he knew, but he didn't hate Fenner any more. He despised him, perhaps, but he had lost all feeling of hate.

When Byrnes kissed Felicia good night, the whole new truth came to him. He rang the door bell, brought her back to tell it to her, he was so excited.

"You know, darling," he said breathlessly, "up until tonight, I've always lived by hatred. I hated Fenner, and Rhodes, and Maxwell, and Barkley, and your father too." He looked at her squarely, saying that, admitting it honestly. "Even in my most inspired statues, there was always something morbid, something angry that spoiled their beauty. That's why I never became a fine artist.

"Well, tonight, I learned that you can't hate people and be sensitive yourself. Love and friendship are so much more important than anything else. That's what I learned tonight. Now, I know I'll be a great artist, if you'll only help."

"I will help you, Leonard," she whispered. "You can count on that."

He turned and walked down the steps, knowing that he was striding into a new world. Even the rain felt good on his cheeks. The nightmare of the museum had vanished with his past.

Next Issue: MEN DIE ALONE, an Exciting Novelet of
a Baffling Curse by HENRY KUTTNER—Plus Many
Other Thrilling Novelets and Stories

TRIPLE REVENGE

By
MICHAEL O'BRIEN

Author of "Ice Bound," "Dread Ecstasy," etc.

When a Mad Killer Vows Grim Vengeance, the Mills of the Gods Grind Sane Minds to Tattered Shreds!

IT was a house of death. Young Tom Saunders lay in his coffin, in an alcove shut off from the huge living room by old-fashioned portières. A stiff-bosomed dress shirt hid the wound that had taken his life. He had died—by the knife!

Every person in that living room had the same thought.

The knife!

"Philip," Meg Charteris pleaded, "do stop your pacing and sit down. You're making Bess nervous."

Philip Pearson, administrator of the Saunders estate and fiancé of Bess Saunders, obediently sat down.

"I'm sorry, Bess," he said contritely.

Bess Saunders tried to smile.

"It's all right, Phil. Meg has mother-henned me ever since we were little girls together."

She reached up to pat the hand Meg Charteris had placed on her shoulder. Sheldon Saunders, brother of the dead man, got up and poured himself a drink. He sat down again, silent in his overwhelming grief.

"Knife, gas and bullet," Pearson said heavily. "That was the promise your cousin Myron made. Maybe it would be less painful not to talk about it, but we've got to *think* about it. That vengeful promise of your cousin, coupled with his escape from the asylum, leaves no room for doubt about Tom's murderer.

"A poor, deluded wretch is loose and bent on vengeance. His is a madness with a method to it. Do you re-



The assailant glared down at his victim

member how he barricaded himself here after the judge signed his commitment papers? He had the unconquer-

able delusion that he was a gangster. And like a gangster, he was finally captured with guns and tear-gas."

Sheldon Saunders, younger than his dead brother but prematurely bald, spoke for the first time in over an hour.

"Guns and tear-gas. Tom was killed with a knife."

"You forget," said Pearson, "how Tom used to throw knives at the archery target. A deranged mind such as Myron's makes queer associations. The mind of Myron Elder probably associated his capture with Tom's knife-throwing ability. That was why, ever since his commitment, he swore triple vengeance by triple means—knife, gas, bullet. But who could take such a threat seriously? There he was, safely put away in the asylum. But now he's loose, and Tom—Tom is dead—by the knife. . . ."

The constant mention of the weapon which had killed her brother must have been the final straw for the almost unnerved girl. She slumped out of her chair in a dead faint. Instantly Meg Charteris was on her knees beside the recumbent figure, taking her pulse.

"She's all right," she said a little breathlessly. "I'll get Doctor Jim over here, and he'll give her a sedative. Meantime you men get her up to bed."

MEG went to the telephone. She did not have to refer to the directory for the number she wanted. The man she was calling was the man she was going to marry.

"Doctor Morley, please," she said, when she was connected with the hospital.

"Doctor Morley is on his way to the operating room," came the reply. "Is it important?"

"Yes! This is Miss Charteris. It won't take long."

"Very well. One moment, please. I'll see if I can find him."

After a short pause, Jim Morley's hearty voice came over the phone.

"Hello, Meg. I can't spare much time."

"Jim, can you come over to the Saunders place? Bess is all upset. She just fainted for the second time. Tom's death—the escape of Myron Elder from the asylum—"

Jim Morley's voice interrupted, calm but firm.

"I'm just about to scrub up for the operating room. I can't be with you for at least an hour and a half. Put Bess to bed and give her some warm milk. I'll be there as soon as I can. You can call somebody else, meanwhile, if you feel that it's necessary. They're calling me now. Good-by, honey."

Meg hung up with an overwhelming sense of helplessness. She would feel so much better, so much safer, if Jim were only with her. At the thought of the lunatic at large, she shuddered. Then she straightened her shoulders, went to the kitchen and warmed a pot of milk.

Bess Saunders was out of her faint by the time Meg arrived upstairs. Smiling weakly, she refused the milk.

"I feel a little sickish," she said, "but I think I can get to sleep. That'll be the best thing. Please stay with me, Meg."

"Of course, dear."

Meg followed the men to the door as they left. She said to Sheldon Saunders:

"You need sleep, too. Why not turn in?"

The brother of the dead man shook his head.

"I'm going to take a turn around the grounds. The air might do me good." Then, on seeing the fear in her eyes, he added: "Don't worry. I only hope Myron is lurking about. He won't get me the way he got Tom. I'll get him first! Want to come along, Phil?"

Philip Pearson shook his head.

"No. I'll go down for a drink, then come back here to stay with Bess. By the way, Meg, is Doc Jim coming?"

"Not for at least another hour and a half," she answered ruefully. "He's operating."

"Well," said Pearson philosophically, "you're finding out in advance what it's like to be the wife of a doctor. Hope you all get some sleep tonight."

SHELDON SAUNDERS walked out into a moonless and starless night. Moving along with his shoulders slumped, he pondered the strange tricks life played. Thomas Saunders, Sr., had died, leaving the Saunders mansion and a considerable estate to his

three children. His will had contained the injunction that their orphaned cousin, Myron, should continue to live with them and receive a modest but comfortable yearly income from the estate.

Myron had always been diffident, shy, self-effacing. What quirk of the soul had suddenly transformed him in his own mind into an underworld character? Why had he begun to have these delusions of being a gangster hunted by the police? In his conversation, he had begun to use the very lingo of the underworld.

The three Saunders children had never felt any malice toward him. It was with the deepest regret that they had testified at his sanity hearings. Then had come that terrible scene when Myron had barricaded himself against the men who had come to take him away. They had merely fired guns to frighten him into submission. The tear-gas had been brought into play only as a last resort.

But Myron Elder had identified his captors with his cousins, Bess, Sheldon and Tom. He had shouted venomously his vow of retribution. And the reports from the asylum had invariably stated that the madman's mind was still obsessed with "the knife, the gas and the bullet. . . ."

Now Myron Elder had escaped. Tom had died by the knife. Did that mean that poor, insane Myron Elder was his killer? What else could it mean?

But the very essence of madness is thought, not action. A madman can think in complicated ways, make intricate plans. But could a madman carry through a complicated act? And what could be more complicated than a triple vengeance by three separate methods? Yet madmen were reputed to assume a cleverness and a power for deviltry beyond any normal man's capacity. Of course Myron Elder was his brother's killer!

Involuntarily Sheldon Saunders was moving toward the grove of elms where his brother's body had been discovered the night before. Perhaps some vagrant thought of the murderer always returning to the scene of his crime drew him there. As he approached it and became aware of his destination, a premonitory

shiver ran through him. He almost expected to meet the mad killer face-to-face. His fists clenched, his muscles gathered against shocking surprise.

There was no moon, hence no shadow. No sinister shadow was cast by the arm descending behind him. The blot of an arm that was not his own met the blot of a head that was his! A flashlight came on for an instant. The assassin glared down at his victim.

Sheldon Saunders was unconscious, but not yet dead. He had said that Myron Elder would not get him the way he had got Tom. He had been right. . . .

DOCTOR JIM MORLEY drove up to the porch of the rambling house an hour and a half from the time he had spoken to Meg on the telephone. The place was almost entirely dark. A dim light burned below and in Bess Saunders' room on the second floor.

Doctor Jim knew the house well. He had grown up with the Saunders children. From force of habit, he turned the knob without ringing the bell, opened the door and entered.

It was only an instant later that he realized it was strange. An open door with a lunatic supposed to be at large? There was no one downstairs. Walking toward the steps, he stopped short and sniffed.

His face suddenly drained of color as he ran to the kitchen. He barged into it, holding his breath. Quickly he slammed open the windows, switched on the light.

Sheldon Saunders lay on the floor. All the jets of the kitchen stove were wide open. Morley banged them shut. He plumped himself down on his knees beside Sheldon. Too late—Sheldon was dead. But he had not died from the blow he must have received on his head. Gas had killed him.

Morley's eyes roved vacantly around the room. There was broken glass on the floor, and a liquid that looked like milk. He sped out of the room and up the stairs. When he reached the hall landing, he slowed. He must look and act calm. Bess could not be told yet. He paused on the threshold of the bedroom.

Meg saw him, rushed to him.

"Oh, Jim! At last! Bess is sick, really sick. She has a pain—says she had it before, the first time she fainted. She didn't say anything about it then because she didn't want to worry Sheldon. What can it be? Do you think it's—"

"Myron Elder didn't include poison in his promise," Doctor Jim replied in a low voice. "I'll have a look at her. Hello, Phil. Would you mind stepping out for a moment?"

Pearson obeyed docilely.

"Where's the pain, Bess?" Doc Jim asked, his fingers on the girl's pulse. "I see. Any nausea? Yes? Did the pain come first?" Aside to Meg he demanded sharply: "Did you give her anything?"

"No. I made some warm milk but she wouldn't take it."

"What became of the milk?"

"Why"—Meg looked at him, puzzled by the apparent irrelevance of the question to his medical task—"why, I went back to the kitchen with it, and—"

"And?"

"I put it on the table," she concluded bewilderedly.

"All right. Go to the phone and get the hospital. Tell them to send an ambulance out."

"Why—what—"

"Appendix," he said in a low voice. He bent to his patient. "I'm taking you out of here, Bess. You're going to be all right, but you need the care a hospital can give you. Don't be frightened."

She looked up at him, her eyes wide with pain.

"It hurts," she moaned.

"I know," he said soothingly, "but we'll soon fix that. Just you trust your Uncle Jim." To himself he was muttering: "The knife, the gas—and the bullet. There's not going to be a bullet if I can help it."

ONCE again that night, Dr. Jim Morley scrubbed himself for an operation. He held his hands out in front of him. They were steady. He had to think of his patient. He must force himself to believe that this was just one more appendix case. He must lock out of his mind all memory of Tom Saunders, dead by a knife, of

Sheldon, dead by gas.

In the operating room that night, on Doctor Jim's tray of instruments was an instrument that never before in medical history had appeared in such surroundings. An automatic that had been sterilized, like all the other instruments, lay close to his hand.

Bess Saunders was under the ether. Doctor Jim made the first incision. He kept his mind on the task, but far back in his consciousness were other thoughts—things he had noticed at the Saunders house. He had already done something about that.

He worked swiftly, deftly. He did not pause even when he heard a noise that suddenly penetrated the operating room from outside. The door of the surgery swung open, abruptly crashed against the wall.

Framed in the doorway was a man with a gun. Meg Charteris was struggling with him! Morley let the surgical instrument fall to the floor. His left hand dipped swiftly toward the other instrument that was so strange in an operating room. But he did not have to use it, even though Myron Elder's gun belched flame.

The madman's aim was deflected by Meg's struggle with him. The bullet flew between Morley and the anesthetist. Another shot blasted from behind Elder. The insane killer slumped to the floor.

Phil Pearson, his face contorted and white, appeared with a smoking gun in his hand.

"We saw him come in," he panted. "Meg was quicker than I. He tried to play it out to the end—with a bullet, as he promised."

Doctor Jim turned to his patient and did not reply. Without looking up, he continued the operation. The nurse motioned them to leave. Morley heard the door close, but his hands went on working deftly. At last he nodded and straightened. The nurse's eyes smiled over her gauze mask. The operation was successful.

Doctor Jim strode to the surgery telephone, called the hospital laboratory.

"Got that report for me yet?" he asked.

He listened, his face grim.

"Thanks," he said at last.

He went to the instrument tray, took from it the instrument that was so ominously out of place in an operating room.

He found Meg and Pearson outside, standing and peering past a ring of police around Myron Elder's body. Meg started toward him. Pearson opened his mouth in a greeting that did not emerge. They watched in astonishment as Doctor Jim pushed through the police to the captain. The officer looked up, started when he saw the gun leveled.

"Arrest that man for murder!" he ordered, pointing the gun at Philip Pearson.

"Me?" Pearson blurted. "You're crazy, Doc Jim!"

"NO," Morley replied tersely. "Look at the back of your jacket, Pearson. You'll notice that a piece was cut out of it. I cut it out back at the house. I wanted to check up on something. You were in the Saunders kitchen tonight. You were in there with Myron Elder—murdering Sheldon by gas! A glass of warm milk was knocked over. Some of it spilled and dried on your coat. You didn't know that, but I noticed it.

"None of us ever approved of you as a husband for Bess. We knew that

she closed her eyes to your debts, gambling, expensive tastes. Marrying her for a third of the estate wouldn't have been enough for you. You needed it all. So you seized on Myron Elder's mania to carry out your ambitious plan. You meant to let Bess live so you could marry her. But you intended to kill Myron in the final act. You did, only you couldn't foretell that the scene would be an operating room.

"The laboratory test showed the milk stain on your suit. It showed more, though. It proved that the milk had been boiled. Meg hadn't turned off the flame in time to prevent boiling. If that isn't enough for you police, take a look at his face and see if he's innocent!"

Philip Pearson's features, at that moment, bore the same marks of madness that had been on the face of the man whose escape from the insane asylum he somehow must have engineered. There was in him now only one thought—not to escape but to kill! He tried to raise his own weapon, but the police captain smashed a big, hard fist against the base of his skull. He fell like a stricken ox.

Doctor Jim and Meg left the hospital together. The moon had come out. Soon it would be morning, and the dawn of a clearer day.

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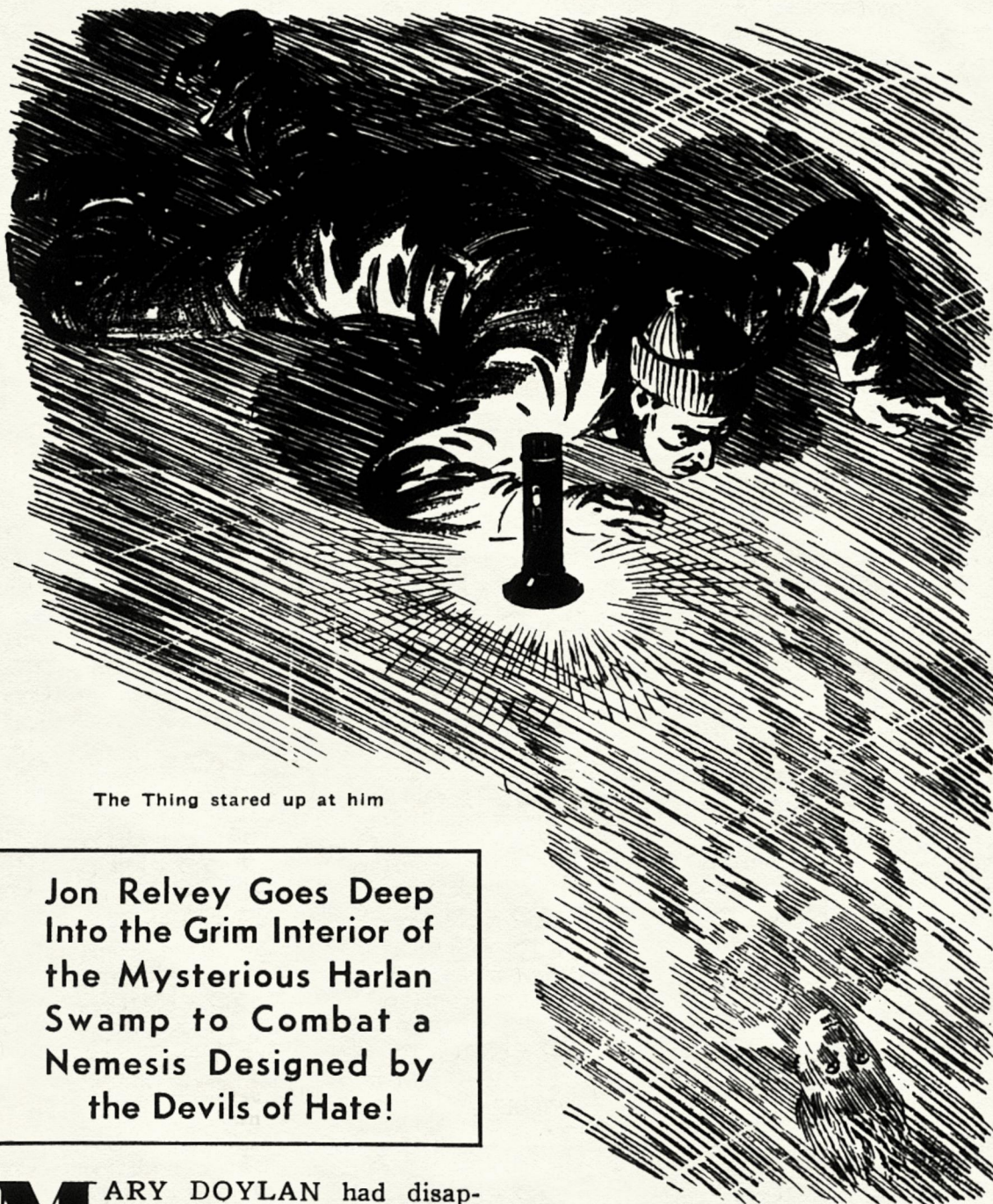
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THE WHITE SEAL

By **ARTHUR J. BURKS**

Author of "Kanaima," "Heads for Sale," etc.



The Thing stared up at him

Jon Relvey Goes Deep Into the Grim Interior of the Mysterious Harlan Swamp to Combat a Nemesis Designed by the Devils of Hate!

MARY DOYLAN had disappeared under very unusual circumstances. But it wasn't so strange to those natives that lived around Harlan Swamp. If Mary had mingled more with her neighbors, she might have known of the terrors that the lake held. But she hadn't, and she had disappeared just like those others.

Mary was a newcomer to the vicinity. She had been a shy, retiring person and kept to herself a great deal. She was like all the rest that didn't know about Harlan Swamp. There were others, too, that had disappeared and were never heard from again.

Those others, like Mary, had happened upon the lake in the dead of winter. Enchanted by its sheer beauty as the frozen ice gleamed dazzlingly in the sunlight, they had gone ice skating, just like Mary. And disappeared.

Mary's picture had been found in the cottage she rented close to Harlan Swamp. It had been flashed to all parts of the nation. But she hadn't been found.

Jon Relvey's face was a grim mask as he sat immobile in the only decently comfortable chair in the small living room. He had been in love with Mary Doylan, and blamed himself for what had happened to her. And it didn't help any to know that all this had occurred because of a silly quarrel.

Relvey was living in the house she had rented. He thought it would aid him in the awe-inspiring task that stood before him like some immovable barrier. He had to find out what he could alone, unassisted. None of the natives would help. They didn't trust strangers, especially inquisitive ones. All that he had gleaned from them was that Harlan Swamp was a ghastly place when it wasn't frozen over, that it was always swallowing pigs, horses and cattle, and even a few stray tramps who had blindly stumbled into it during the night.

Jon Relvey's gigantic mastiff, Nero, refused to accompany his master to the lake. When he whined, it sent the icy shivers of death racing up Relvey's spine. There was death in Nero's howl. And whenever the dog's large eyes looked at the lake in Harlan Swamp, they were filled with the bright flame of terror.

"Stay by the door, then, Nero," said Jon Relvey softly, "until I come back."

Obediently the dog squatted before the door. But when Relvey started off he came bounding after him, whining. He caught him by the sleeve, tried to hold him back. Jon Relvey wanted to stay, but he couldn't. He had to find out what had happened to Mary Doylan. That she was dead he hadn't the slightest doubt.

He shied at the thought of going into the swamp, but on just such a night as this, and alone, Mary had gone in. So

why shouldn't he? But then, she had not known of those others that disappeared, nor anything of the reputation of Harlan Swamp.

CURSING softly, Jon Relvey started on, sharply commanding Nero, a second time, to go back. This time the dog did not run after him again. His habit of obedience was stronger than his nameless fear for the safety of his master.

"Stay out of Harlan Swamp is my advice to you," Frank Loeb had warned Jon. "It never gives up its dead. To the dead, where they lie doesn't matter."

"Frank is right," grizzled old Job Hector had said. Old Job had lived in the town of Gilfil since people could remember. If anybody knew the swamp, he did. But with hunger in his heart for Mary, Jon Relvey would listen to no one.

He walked across the solidly frozen swampland, which now was like any other part of the countryside, frozen to great depths. He carried a pair of keen-bladed skates in his right hand. As he walked he looked ahead of him, where a dim moon bathed the eerie landscape with vague brilliance, through which the jagged arms of trees stood out like skeletons. In the depths of his mind he could see men hanging to those limbs. The limbs threatened him, beckoned him to go back, commanded him to return.

Every so often he thought he could see a white-cloaked figure running away through those trees. Mary, he remembered, had worn a white cloak when he had last seen her, and her white cloak was missing from the clothing hanging on the pegs in the cottage. But was it Mary running in and out among the trees, thirty days after her disappearance? Impossible, fantastic. No, he hadn't seen her, except with his heart.

Jon came to the lake itself, and stared at it in amazement. It appeared to have been swept clean, as with a wire broom. There was no snow on it, no drift. Even the marks of ice skates were absent. The lake was like a mirror under the moon. Jon Relvey could see into its depths, down to utter blackness. At

least, he thought he could see weird things.

"Nonsense," he said aloud, his voice shaky. "It's just that the ice is black, or that the water is black. I don't know what to think any more."

He hesitated before sitting down on a log to put on his skates. He should have brought a flashlight, he scolded himself. Still, if he could send the beam of one down through the ice, examine the bottom of the lake. . . .

But he knew in that instant that he would have been afraid to do that. Afraid of what he might see. He got up, and stepped onto the black ice. The cold of the swamp ate through his thick garments, through flesh and muscle and bone. No mausoleum in mid-winter could have been colder. Fine, misty clouds were sweeping low through the trees, making them more spectral than ever. They were blotting out the dim lights of Gilfil, too. He began to circle the lake slowly. His skates rang strangely on the ice. There was no give to it. The ice was thick.

He kept his eyes glued to the ice under his skates, and yet as he moved from side to side in long glides, he had the feeling that he was being watched. No matter which way he turned, the unseen eyes were somewhere behind him, watching his every move.

He halted swiftly, thinking of Mary skating here alone, exactly as he was now. And for just a second, cold chills that were not of the night or the swamp played over his body. He thought he could hear the ringing of steel skates on thick ice. But the sound was gone immediately. He felt he must have imagined it, or that it had been the echo of his own skates coming back from the banks of fog, or back from the thick walls of trees. Echoes often played strange tricks on human ears.

IT did not help that, at that moment, Nero broke into a mournful howling back at the cabin. A long-drawn, weird howling, like that of a coyote baying at the moon. Jon Relvey swore at himself again, and made a swift, flying circuit of the lake. He judged the distance from starting point to starting point at something over a mile. There

had been nothing to see. He might have known there would be nothing.

He almost went back for his flashlight then, but knew that if he did he wouldn't have the courage to come back. There was something nameless, indefinably menacing about Harlan Lake, in the midst of notorious Harlan Swamp. Jon promised himself to find out what it was.

He started straight across the frozen waste then, from one end to the other, bisecting the lake. Again there were no patches of snow to impede him or cause him to stumble. Everywhere, the lake was as smooth as glass, as though fresh water had been sprayed over it long enough ago for it to freeze solidly.

He kept peering down through the ice.

"I probably don't see more than an inch into it," he thought. "It's just my imagination."

But right there he snapped up short, came to a dead stop almost in the middle of the lake. He *had* seen through the ice. There was no doubt about it. Moreover, he had seen something moving under the ice. It had moved at an oblique angle across his line of skating, from left rear to right front! It had looked like. . . .

But he couldn't possibly put into words what it had looked like, without questioning his own sanity. It had looked like a naked man, swimming as swiftly under the ice as a seal—a white seal. For a long moment he hesitated. It couldn't be anything of the sort, that was obvious. There couldn't be a man swimming under the ice. It might be a big fish, though.

With the thought that he had been dreaming the whole thing, that the ice had played tricks on him, and that he wouldn't overtake it after all, he skated swiftly along the line the swimming thing had taken. There wasn't any living thing here under the ice, he told himself. Of course, it was something else. Something, even a sheet, moving under the ice.

But it wasn't. It was, to all intents and purposes, a naked man swimming! Jon couldn't miss the expert movement of the legs and the arms. He could

even see the movement of the hair in the water. But it was impossible. Jon was sure of that. No swimmer, however expert, could possibly swim this far out into the lake from the nearest shore point, without having been numbed by the icy water, or having drowned from the long time spent under water without air.

And yet, there it was!

Carefully he followed the swimming impossibility. His heart was in his mouth. He felt himself pursued, felt eyes watching him from the rear. Yet he was afraid to take his eyes off that swimming Thing. With steady strokes, while the black hair waved in the water, the Thing swam toward the far corner of the lake. It did not pause to rest, did not hesitate. . . .

And Jon Relvey, staring wide-eyed, had no sooner told himself that it was impossible to swim even one one-hundredth of that distance without taking a breath, than the swimmer calmly turned over on his back, his face against the bottom of the ice, and rested!

Horror such as he had never known before penetrated the marrow of Jon Relvey's very bones. He waved at the Thing under the ice, half-believing that that was somehow his own shadow cast by the moon.

TO add horror upon horror, the right hand of the Thing under the ice half-moved—in the travesty of a salute! Jon Relvey dropped to his knees, until his face was only a couple of feet and the thickness of the ice from the face of the swimmer who rested beneath him.

The eyes of the other were wide open, glassy, staring. They did not blink, Jon Relvey noticed. The skin was so white and waxen—and bloated! Jon Relvey knew at last that he was staring into the face of a corpse. But how long had the Thing been a corpse? Had he seen a man die under the ice? Had he by accident, trying to solve the mystery of the disappearance of Mary Doylan, discovered another victim of whatever fiendish Thing inhabited the swamp?

No sooner had he asked that ques-

tion than the corpse turned slowly over on its belly again, and started swimming. Now it went deeper and deeper into the water, until it vanished into blackness too deep for Jon Relvey's eyes to penetrate. He rose, frozen where he stood by the horror he had seen. Mentally, then, he marked certain spots in the woods, along the shores of the lake, by which he might find this place again.

Then, at top speed, he skated back to the log where he had donned his skates. But he did not stop to take them off. Almost sobbing, he ran back to the house, where Nero was still howling with mournful persistence. The dog stared at him for a long moment, as at a stranger. Then the mastiff put his tail between his legs and vanished around the house. Out of sight, he again set up a dismal howling that ripped at Jon Relvey's very soul. Inside, Relvey snapped on the electric lights. He stepped out and looked again across the swamp to Harlan Lake—and the fog enclosed it all, shutting out its mystery. He went inside again, and locked the door securely behind him.

He telephoned old Job Hector, who had insisted he do that if he discovered anything strange or frightening.

"Job!" he said, panting. "Job! It simply can't be, yet I saw it!"

"Saw what, son?" Job asked in a soothing voice.

"A naked man swimming under the ice in the middle of Harlan Lake. He turned over on his back and looked up at me. The man was dead—yet he turned back on his belly, and swam away!"

He could hear Job's fearful intake of breath over the phone. It was almost a minute before Job spoke again.

"Boy, don't go back on that lake if you value your life!"

"But why, Job? Why?" Relvey demanded.

"Tell me something, son," Job said excited. "Did you notice anything familiar about the face of the corpse?"

"No. I thought the whole body looked like a white seal. . . .

A strangled sound came from the other end of the line. Old Job was

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talking wildly, apparently to himself.

"A white seal!" Job shrieked. "Always the same description! Always I tell them not to go back! Always they do, and they never come home again!"

"What gibberish are you talking, Job?" Relvey asked fearfully. But even as he asked the question, he was trying to answer the one Job Hector had asked. Did the face of the corpse look familiar? "Job, just a second!" he said. "I've got to make sure I'm not crazy—about the face of the corpse looking familiar, I mean."

JON RELVEY darted to the mirror, looked into it. By some trick of the feeble light, or by some means he could not understand, the face that looked back at him from the mirror was the same face that had looked back at him from under the ice of Lake Harlan!

And Mary Doylan must have looked into the mirror the same as he was doing now.

But nobody would have told her what

(Continued on page 102)



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(Continued from page 101)

to expect, for nobody had called on Mary Doylan, nor had she called on anyone. Naturally, automatically, she had reversed the process. She looked at herself in her white cloak before going out to skate, and saw the Thing under the ice, with her own face!

But all that was nonsense, and yet—What about the white cloak, and the fact that the Thing under the ice had appeared unnaturally white, even for a bloated corpse?

Impatiently he ran back to the phone.

"Job?" said Jon Relvey urgently. "Job Hector?"

"I'm still here," Job said.

"You mean, did the face look like my own? It's nonsense, of course, but the face under the ice did remind me of my own face. Not much, probably, or I would not have had to look in the mirror to check up on it. I would have seen at once, and been scared to death!"

"You would have been scared to death, Relvey," said Job Hector grimly. "For it was a sign, an omen. Tell me exactly what happened."

Relvey did, from the first strange behavior of the dog, Nero—a fact that Job grabbed at—to the present. It was the actions of the dog that particularly impressed Job.

"Dogs," said Job Hector, his voice sharp, "know a lot of unknowable things—unknown to us, because the dogs can't tell us. They know death, for instance, and when it is coming, if it is close—"

"That's a lot of rot," said Jon Relvey. "I'm going back to the swamp and see what's going on. I won't let local superstition—"

"Three young women have died in Harlan Swamp," Job Hector interrupted him grimly. "Or at least they disappeared and were last seen on the lake. Your Mary Doylan was one of them. You've had better luck than most. You've received warnings you understood from people—me—that know what the other warnings mean. My advice, young man, is to get back to New York, and let the authorities find out what happened to Mary Doylan. But nobody ever will!"

Job Hector hung up his receiver angrily. Jon Relvey returned his to its cradle more slowly. He looked about him. Mary was very close to him now,

he thought, perhaps closer even than she had been in life. She seemed to be warning him of some cold, deadly danger to himself. Heaven knew enough had happened that was fearful. Yet when all was said and done, so what? Nero had howled. He was still howling, in front of the house now.

Jon had seen a corpse under the ice, which had behaved strangely. That was easily explainable. Currents under the ice, the ebb and flow of the streams and springs which eternally fed the dismal glacial swamp had moved the body. But the face, so like his own—

"The ice was smooth, like a mirror," he told himself. "It was my own face I saw. But it was probably a reflection."

Jon Relvey still wore his skates, and they made a hollow, clumping sound on the floor. He spoke aloud in the room just before he turned out the lights.

"Mary! Mary!" he moaned. "I love you for warning me, but if danger will take me to you, even in death, I am not afraid!"

NERO was whining and scratching at the door, yet when Jon Relvey opened the door, the dog ran away from him, as from a stranger. And by the time Jon Relvey had vanished into the fog which shrouded Harlan Swamp, Nero was back before the door, baying at the now invisible moon.

Jon Relvey was determined to find some sort of answer to the enigma of Harlan Lake. He had taken the flashlight with him, a pocketful of bulbs, and some extra batteries. He would, he promised himself, solve the mystery if it took all night.

He looked at his watch. It lacked fifteen minutes of midnight.

Midnight, he thought, when ghosts are supposed to walk. But he didn't believe in any such nonsense. And yet, how many men and women and children had gone to their deaths in Harlan Swamp? Did they leave nothing behind them when they died? Nothing of themselves? And why did he feel Mary so close to him? It was almost as though she were, this very moment, ahead of him, pushing him back toward the house, as strongly as she might have had she actually been there.

Her hands on his chest were like a

strong, cold wind like a wall against his every movement. But he bent against it doggedly, and went on. When he came to the black ice, he stepped out upon it.

He played the beam of the flash upon the ice, but it seemed to flatten at the surface of the ice, showing him nothing below it. He sighed with relief. The whole thing, then, had been imagination—his belief that he had seen a corpse under the ice.

He must try yet another thing, however. Jon stood the flashlight on its lighted end, face down on the ice, and moved a little away from it. The angle at which the light went into the ice played strange tricks on his eyes, but he could see below the ice at last. And right here the bottom of Harlan Lake was alive with water-lilies, which waved violently to and fro, as though before a high wind.

But how could they? They could bend in one way, with the current that went toward the drainage stream. But not back and forth, as they were doing. There was something inexpressibly eerie about the behavior of the water lilies, or the tall, skeletal grasses—whatever those waving things were under the ice.

He hurried to the light, carried it out to the middle of the lake. He had to get away from that spot, he knew, for that feeling of being watched haunted him. All the time he had been studying the strange things the light had shown him, he had been fully expecting some monstrous something to attack him.

Nothing had. And out in the middle of the lake, before he put the light down as before, he turned all the way around slowly and searched the surface of the lake as far as he could see. But there was nothing to be seen in those moving piles of fog that were creeping out from the direction of Gilfil, then going back again, as though retreating because he had discovered something grim and ghastly.

Again he moved away from the light.

This time the stream of light speared down and down, widening out. There was no mistaking that the light actually went through the ice. He did not know what it should have done, but only what it seemed to be doing.

(Continued on page 104)



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He was suddenly conscious that Nero no longer howled from the house.

The shining scales of swiftly swimming perch flashed in the light that went down like an inverted funnel into the black depths. The fish flashed through the light and back into darkness, with a speed which made Jon Relve suspect that something was chasing them!

JON RELVEY, chilled to the bone, rose to his feet and started back toward the light. As he did so he heard a growl from somewhere in the fog to his right, which made his hair shift all over his head. It was the savage, warning growl of Nero! Jon Relve looked in that direction, and saw Nero moving toward the light, stiff-legged. It was as though he dreaded to approach the light, yet was doing it.

Nero's eyes glistened like huge snowflakes under a bright moon. The mastiff, Jon Relve thought grimly, must have gone mad with terror. Now, the dog came closer. He had dropped to his belly and was inching himself forward, as though afraid the ice would give way under him. His ceaseless whining was a spine-crawling thing to listen to. Just before he reached the up-ended flashlight, Nero did a queer thing. He darted forward, appeared to grab at something. Then the dog suddenly turned around with a vicious snarl and began tugging, tugging. . . .

Staring wide-eyed at the animal, Jon Relve could see nothing. What was the animal struggling so angrily with?

But as Relve moved toward the flashlight, the ice began to crack under him! He had been all over this part of the lake, and the ice seemed thick enough to hold up a truck. Yet now it was cracking. Nero heard it, too, for his whining was suddenly urgent, fearful, as he kept tugging at an invisible object, hurrying whatever it was that he thought he held, to safety.

Nero went into the fog and vanished. And his whine died out in the thick of the white, forbidding wilderness.

But Jon Relve was not finished. Before he could go back to the flashlight he saw the hideous bloated Thing come swimming up from the depths with its head tilted back, as though it were studying the light.

Relve dropped flat, not only to spread his weight over as much of the ice as possible, but to get a better view of this queer thing that was happening. He stared in amazement. Now and again, doing it swiftly lest he miss something, Jon Relve looked behind him, where the fog seemed to be creeping closer all the time. He could not help feeling that something menaced him—something that would cause his disappearance as surely as Mary Doyle had disappeared.

If this white Thing was the same that he had seen before, he realized that it might have been a woman in a white cloak, as well as it might have been a man. When a corpse was bloated, how could one tell the difference? And how could he be sure that that was not the corpse of Mary Doyle?

It floated on its back now, directly under the flashlight, and a monstrous shadow floated far below it in the depths of Lake Harlan.

Jon Relve knew that there was nothing he could do—except one thing. Job Hector knew so much about this swamp. He knew more than anybody else living about the mysterious swamp. He'd go see Job, late as it was.

He skated to the south shore of the lake, took off his skates, hung them on a limb where he could find them tomorrow if he should care to do so, and hurried swiftly through the spectral trees toward Gilfil—and the house of Job Hector. He had no doubt about finding it, for it had been pointed out to him by the first person he had asked as to who could give him the most reliable information about Harlan Lake.

He reached the house a short time later.

Relve hesitated, but finally hammered on the door. A booming sound went through the house. But there was no answer. No moving footfalls sounded inside, no anything. He hesitated before knocking again. Maybe the man slept hard, deeply. People went into other people's houses out in this country, he knew, if a matter were urgent. He found that the door was open, and went in.

SOMETHING big and black and monstrous almost knocked him down. It was a dog, a mighty dog, that attacked him in silence. But when

he grabbed the animal, it licked his hands, whining softly, as though afraid of being heard.

"Nero!" he said, greatly surprised. "What are you doing here? How could you get here ahead of me, and into the house?"

The answer was obvious, but unbelievable. He couldn't believe that Nero, no matter what the provocation, would run away from him, as the dog had done several times tonight. And his behavior, out there on the ice. . . .

Again cold chills froze Jon's spine, and the unseen danger that had menaced him all evening seemed closer than ever. He must, however, see Job Hector before he left. Softly he called the man's name. No answer came to his ears. There was a glowing log in the fireplace, however, and now it fell apart with a shower of sparks which made Jon Relvey snap, whirl around, and look in that direction. It sent more of a light about the room, too.

Over to the left Jon Relvey saw a bookcase, or what he had taken to be a bookcase when he had seen it this afternoon. But then the curtain had been drawn across the face of it, and now the curtain was shoved back to either side. The case wasn't really a bookcase. It was a tiny stage, a tiny theater. . . .

And on the stage of that theatre, in all sorts of postures, were tiny figurines. Rising out of their heads, and from their legs, their knees, feet, hands, elbow—were black threads which glistened oddly in the dim glow from the fire. A puppet show of Job Hector's own making!

A swift glance around him told Jon Relvey that Job Hector was not a married man. Too much rubbish was scattered everywhere. Even the untidiest of women would not have tolerated such a mess in the house in which she lived. He again stared at the tiny stage.

A puppet show, set up by a recluse, a strange man who knew more about Harlan Swamp than any other living person! Something weird and terrible clicked in the brain of Jon Relvey. Why could not a tiny puppet show become a monster puppet show?

Feverishly, his terror mounting, Jon Relvey went through the house of Job

(Continued on page 106)

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Hector. There were pieces of rope everywhere, coils and piles of it. Clothesline, thick twine, braided ropes—enough to reach almost anywhere, if tied together. There was enough rope to have accomplished what Jon Relvey suspected.

In the clothes closet, he found—a white cloak! The cloak of Mary Doylan, he would swear to it. Some of her perfume still clung to it, together with the odor of slime!

A monster lived in this house, a monster puppeteer! A master fakir, who played grim games with life and death as the stakes, to amuse himself.

Nero rose from the floor, turned swiftly toward the door, his hackles rising.

"Down, Nero!" Jon Relvey ordered sternly.

Nero sank down. Jon Relvey, whispering, called the great dog to his side, whispered to him to be quiet. Nero obeyed instantly, as he always did. Jon Relvey stood just behind the bedroom door, listening to the sound of approaching feet outside. He heard a low growl from beyond the door, and there was silence after that, for a long time.

Then the door opened, and a great dog came bounding in, a shadowy, tremendous creature. His eyes flamed, his hackles were lifted, and straight as a die he hurled himself through the dark at Nero—who might almost have been his twin!

"Take him, Nero!" Relvey shouted. "I'll get his master!"

NERO moved like a snake striking. His teeth sank into the throat of the other mastiff. He clung, little growls of satisfaction forming in his throat. Job Hector approached the fire, as though noticing nothing, and flung something wet and horrible on the hearth, to dry it.

It made a clearly skeletal sound. It was the corpse from under the ice! Job Hector sat down, rubbing his hands together. He stared wearily into the fire. Jon Relvey came out of the bedroom, spoke grimly in a low voice.

"Your little game of murder is all through, Hector," he said coldly.

Job Hector looked at Relvey, and grinned evilly. That he had known that Relvey was there all along was evident.

"Good evening, Jon," he said, smirking. "Won't you sit down?"

Relvey didn't move. His face was working with all the pent-up anger that was stored in his heart. Hector shrugged.

"You think I'm mad, don't you?" he said evenly. "But they'll never get it, none of them!"

Relvey was perplexed. What was Hector raving about? The old trapper went on tersely.

"That's all they wanted from me. My money. That's all they ever thought about. Wait! I'll show you."

He stood up nervously, walked quickly to the center of the room and opened a trap-door, which was concealed beneath a rug. Breathing hard, Job Hector lifted five large sacks from his hiding place.

"Now I'll show you," he told Relvey. "There's millions here in gold. Millions! They all wanted to kill me for it, but I fooled them. I killed them, made puppets out of them to dance to my bidding!"

With an insane cackle he opened one of the bags and emptied its contents on the floor. Relvey stared dumfounded. It was sand, not gold! He looked upon Hector with horror. That the man was mad was obvious. He had built up the illusion that everyone was after his "gold" and had killed them to protect it.

"I know what you're thinking, Jon Relvey," Job said, and chuckled. "You're wondering who 'they' are. I'll tell you. First, there was that niece and nephew of mine. I killed them. Then there were two young cousins, girls both of them." His eyes took on a vacant stare as he spoke. "I wanted to stop, but I kept on killing. I wanted human puppets. Thousands of them!" He chuckled mirthlessly, went on: "But I was clever. Too clever for the dupes that lived in Gilfil.

"You're wondering who that corpse was in the lake—the one that looked like you. That was my nephew, the greedy swine. He did look like you—when he was alive. No one goes by the swamp, except me. I set my beaver traps there. But if those fools had ever looked close they'd see that they are more than traps. A great deal more. I tied my ropes there—ropes to which I

(Continued on page 108)

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(Continued from page 107)

attached my human puppets! And whenever I get lonesome I go out to the lake and have them amuse me!"

He broke off in a mad laugh that sent icy chills racing through Jon Relvey.

"What about Mary Doylan?" Relvey demanded savagely, scarcely restraining his wrath.

"Ah, yes, Mary Doylan," Hector said with a snicker. "I had to have a leading lady for my puppet show, and you know how attractive she is." He lifted his hands expressively. Then he frowned darkly. "And I also need a leading man, Jon Relvey!"

LIKE a hungry tiger Hector bounded up from his chair and went for Relvey. But Jon was not unprepared for that rush. He lashed out viciously at the oncoming killer, smashed him just over the eye. Hector reeled back drunkenly, mouthing foul oaths.

His hand reached into his coat pocket, came out clutching an ugly automatic. Heedless of the danger, Relvey hurled himself at Hector. The fiendish killer fired once, but missed. Then Relvey was all over him, smashing out lefts and rights like a man gone berserk. Hector crashed to the floor under that merciless onslaught.

But Relvey wasn't to be denied. He leaped on Hector as a lion does when it is set for the kill. His fingers dug deep into Hector's throat, deeper. In his blinding desire for revenge, he didn't consider what he was doing. His fingers dug still deeper into Hector's neck. The murderer was gurgling strangely, his face was turning blue. But Relvey didn't relax his death-grip.

Then Hector ceased to struggle, and lay still. He was as dead as any man could be. Then all at once Relvey realized what he had done. But there was no remorse etched on his tense face, only thankfulness. He had evened the score for Mary, at least.

A few minutes later, Nero, whimpering happily, followed his grim-faced master out into the night, back to the cabin where Mary Doylan had once lived.

"I've avenged you, Mary dearest," Jon whispered into the quiet room. "But who can comfort me for losing you?"

For the first time in weeks, Jon Relvey smiled. He patted Nero fondly on the head. The dog whimpered its glee. Each, after his fashion, was satisfied.

Mystery-Scopes

(Continued from page 6)

saw places on the ground he recognized—the Indian village, the river, the mountain—and with delight he flew above them. Finally he alighted on the peak of the mountain and looked down at the valley below. He saw a strange rock formation on the mountain top.

Then his vision faded. He awoke as though he had fallen—and when he opened his eyes, his two white companions were bending over him—one holding a glass of liquor which they had been trying to make him drink.

"What happened?" he asked.

"That's what we want to know. When we came back we found you perched in this tree—and as you jumped, we caught you, breaking your fall."

When he had regained his full faculties, he checked up on the pigeon he had eaten, and just as he expected, the bird had been killed by an arrow containing *curari*. In eating the pigeon he had consumed some of that drug.

But why had he dreamed of flying to the mountain? To satisfy his curiosity, the next day he climbed to the peak—and to his astonishment it was just as he had visioned it in his strange delirium—the same rock formation—and the view of the valley was identical. Some part of his mind had been there, he was sure.

Had some psychic counterpart of his brain been released under the spell of the magic drug? Or had he taken on the consciousness of the bird he had eaten and for a moment seen the things that the bird had once visioned. No man knows.

LETTER OF PROPHECY

A PROMINENT editor related this story at a recent gathering of friends.

Since the second World War started in September, 1939—this editor had been writing many editorials on the progress of the conflict, analyzing various problems and sometimes making predictions as to future developments.

Many readers had written to him, some letters being intelligent, while some were from cranks, many of whom condemned the editor for favoring one side or the other.

One letter he remembered particularly well. He recalled the receiving date on it which his secretary had stamped—March 13, 1940. This letter contained the bold prediction that Hitler would start his real attack on May 10th—and that by June 10th, Italy would be in the war and France would be licked.

The editor, amused at the prophecy, re-

(Continued on page 110)

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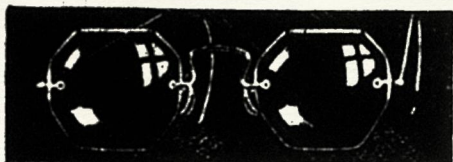
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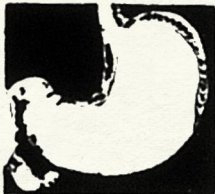
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(Continued from page 109)

membered filing it in his private memo cabinet, making a notation not only of the date as he placed it there, but the hour, 11 A. M., March 13, 1940. In a half-hearted way he intended to take the letter out on June 10th and write an editorial on wild predictions.

Then for some reason he forgot about it, and it was not until Italy declared war on June 10th and France was defeated that he remembered the letter. Anxious to give credit to the writer of that letter containing a prediction which had come true, he went to his cabinet to take it out and discover the name of the person who had sent it. He hadn't made mental note of the unknown writer at the time of receipt.

But he couldn't find it. He called his secretary and asked her if she had been in his private file. She said she hadn't. He grew angry:

"I remember putting that letter away on March 13th at 11 A. M. Somebody has taken it!"

The secretary, stung by the implication that she had gone through her employer's private file against the rules, looked in her diary to see if she had made any record of the letter, for perhaps he had given it to her. But she couldn't remember seeing it or even recording its receipt.

Startled, she looked up from the diary into the eyes of her employer.

"Why Mr. B—," she said, "you were not in the office on March 13th. Don't you remember? You were home ill all that week, from March 11th to the 17th."

And this was a fact. He had not been in the office on March 13th, for on that day at 11 A. M., he was in sound sleep, having been given a sleeping potion by his doctor after his fever had broken early that morning. He had evidently dreamed the entire thing! No wonder the letter could not be found!

What strange force of extra sensory perception had registered that prophecy on his sleeping brain? Who knows?

THE STRANGE RECOLLECTION

SCIENTISTS can give no explanation for the strange story of Lady Nancy Dorvin of England. One day she visited a friend in central England for the first time, and met the five-year old daughter, Patricia.

The moment the child laid eyes on Lady Nancy, the little tot ran to her and became exceedingly affectionate. The child's mother couldn't understand it, as Patricia had always been very shy with strangers.

The child cried when Lady Nancy departed, but the gracious lady promised to return shortly.

Several weeks later, the child was fatally stricken by fever, and while dying, called for Lady Nancy. As soon as the woman was notified, Lady Nancy went to the child's bedside—and as she walked in the room, the child in delirium reached up its tiny arms and exclaimed, "Naneena."

Automatically, Lady Nancy embracing Patricia, replied: "Penny!"

When asked why she called the child, Penny—she couldn't explain. It had come

out involuntarily. The child died with the word "Naneena" on her lips.

For weeks, Lady Nancy pondered the strangeness of Naneena and Penny, until one day an old relative told her that Naneena was the name of her great-great grandmother who had lived in Scotland.

Thereupon, she investigated and learned that a portrait of Naneena and her child still hung in the castle in Scotland now owned by a distant relative named Macrae.

To satisfy her curiosity, Lady Nancy journeyed to the castle, but learned that old Mr. Macrae had died a week before. The housekeeper in charge of the estate invited Lady Nancy in to see the portrait.

Great was her astonishment when she viewed the large portrait in the hall. It was that of a woman embracing a little girl—and the woman resembled Lady Nancy, while the child was the image of Patricia who had died in Lady Nancy's arms.

From the old housekeeper, Lady Nancy learned that the child in the portrait was the woman's daughter, who had been taken from its mother when the parents had quarreled, and the mother had died years later without ever seeing her darling daughter again.

"What was the name of the child?" asked Lady Nancy. "Maybe there is something written on the back of the portrait."

The housekeeper shook her head.

"No," she said, "I cleaned the portrait only yesterday and washed it back and front."

But Lady Nancy insisted on looking, and then to the astonishment of both, they saw plainly written: "Naneena and Penelope."

"Penny!" gasped Lady Nancy—"a pet name for Penelope."

"But," said the housekeeper, "I can't understand it. That is the master's handwriting—but it wasn't there yesterday—and he has been dead for a week."

Had the souls of grieving Naneena and Penny been reincarnated in Lady Nancy and Patricia, and at the child's death, broken through the psychic veil with a moment of recollection of previous existence and emotion? And had the soul of the old master of the house come back to record the name of the child so that Nancy Dorvin would be comforted?

IDENTICAL TWINS

THERE have long been mysteries associated with identical twins, and some people believe that such twins are a physical manifestation of a dual soul of single destiny.

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After graduation they parted for the first time. Ronald went to Singapore and Richard to British Honduras—both on engineer-

(Continued on page 112)

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(Continued from page 111)

ing projects.

Then, years later, came the fatal day of Feb. 28, 1910. Richard, in Honduras, was supervising a blasting job. But the explosion was too heavy. A piece of rock blew up and before Richard could get out of the way, it had hit his head, and he died a few minutes later.

The day his body was shipped back to Australia, a friend revealed a secret to his employer in charge of the construction company. He said:

"I don't know whether I had a touch of fever or not, but last night when I visited Richard's coffin to pay my last respects, I swear I saw a double ghost. Richard and his image were standing side by side on the porch looking in at me and smiling."

The employer laughed at this. "Either the fever or too much liquor or both. The fever makes you see a ghost and the liquor makes you see double."

However, the smiles on both faces faded when weeks later the employer handed the other a clipping from an Australian newspaper which read as follows:

"Twin brothers killed the same day in the same way—one in Singapore and one in Honduras—both victims of a blast on engineering projects!"

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1-41

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Dear Chakra:

Are twins likely to meet the same fate?
Mike Dennen.

Dear Mr. Dennen: This question is answered in the story in this department this issue. And here is another case reported on May 15th, 1940, by the United Press: "Francis Con-ton, 41-year-old railroad clerk of Norwood, Mass., died of heart attack as he sat in a chair at his home. Two hours later his twin brother Raymond who went to the house to make funeral arrangements, fell dead of a heart attack beside the same chair."

Dear Chakra:

Do some people have a premonition of the day they will die?
Helen Hillman.

Dear Miss Hillman: Yes. Here is a report from the United Press files dated July 29, 1940: "Dunn, N. C. For 25 years Carson C. Surles had been telling his friends that he was going to die the last week in July, 1940. Saturday morning he told his employer that he wanted to go home because this was the day he was dying. Without apparent cause he died at 2:20 P.M. He was buried July 28, 1940, in a plot arranged for and with a stone inscribed with the date of his death. He had not committed suicide. His death was from natural causes."

Dear Chakra:

Is a person born with a veil protected from lightning?
Horace Nevins.

Dear Mr. Nevins: It seems so. Here is an outstanding case which happened at Parishville, N. Y. A girl was struck by lightning and killed while sleeping between two sisters both of whom were unhurt. These two sisters had been born with veils. The dead girl was not.

Dear Chakra:

I have heard that the angel of death sometimes strikes a person through a dream—the dream being the direct cause of death. Is there anything on file to substantiate this?
Hazel Gordon.

Dear Miss Gordon: Yes. Mrs. Fanny Pearcey of West Tarring, England, was killed by her dream. She dreamed that a mirror was falling on her. The fright woke her up and she jumped out of bed, falling over a fire-screen. She died a few hours later from a fractured skull after revealing her dream. The mirror she had visioned was that hanging near her bed and over the fireplace.

Dear Chakra:

How can a person who is being bothered by ghosts in his own home, escape them?
Beatrice Waxman.

Dear Miss Waxman: Psychics declare that running water protects one from poltergeists, or evil spirits. Some people have reported protection by going in their bathrooms and turning on the shower until the disturbing phenomena have left. Whatever vibrations cause psychic disturbances, running water seems to reduce their power.

—CHAKRA.

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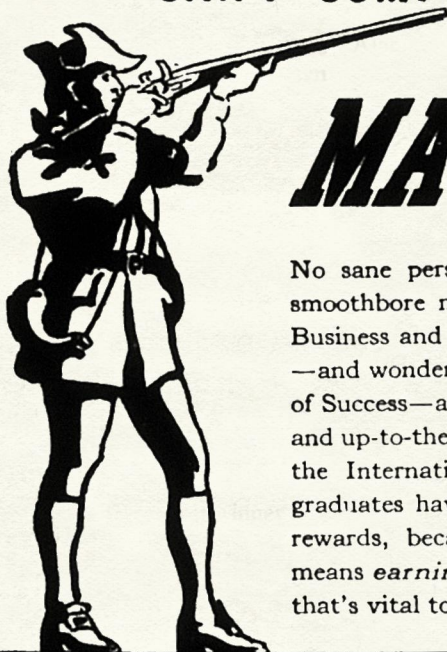
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