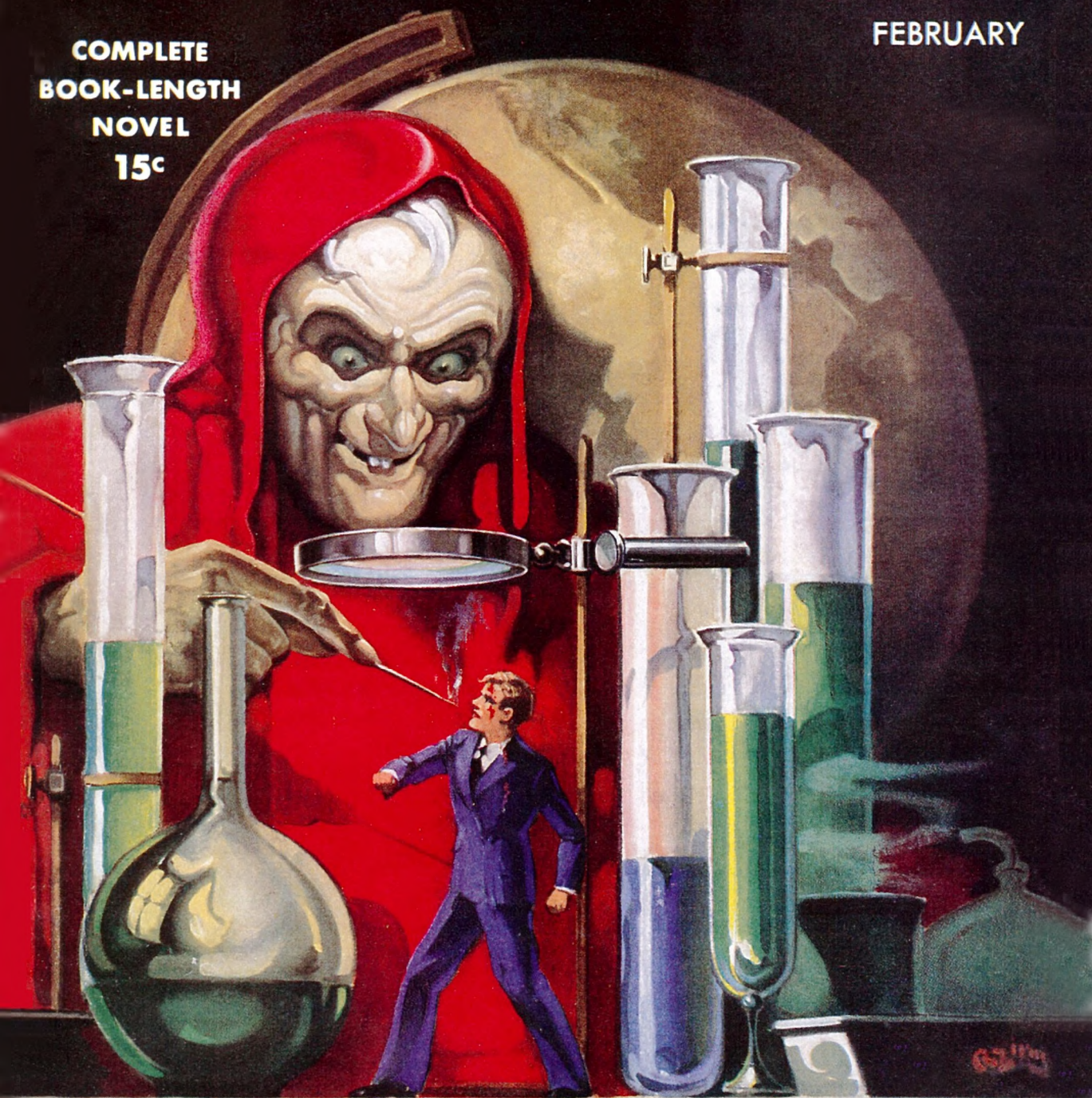


a Dell Publication

DOCTOR DEATH

COMPLETE
BOOK-LENGTH
NOVEL
15c

FEBRUARY



THE SINISTER DOCTOR DEATH IN "12 MUST DIE"



She Got \$400⁰⁰ for a Half Dollar

I Will Pay CASH for OLD COINS, Bills and Stamps

There are single pennies that sell for \$100.00. There are nickels worth many dollars—dimes, quarters, half dollars and dollars on which big cash premiums are paid. Each year a fortune is offered by collectors for rare coins and stamps for their collections. The prices paid are amazing.

It Pays to Post Yourself on the Big Values of Old Coins and Stamps

Knowing about coins pays. Andrew Henry, of Idaho, was paid \$900 for a half dollar, received in change. A valuable old coin may come into your possession or you may have one now and not know it. Post yourself.

HUGE PREMIUMS for OLD STAMPS

Some old stamps bring big premiums. An old 10c stamp, found in an old basket, was recently sold for \$10,000. There may be valuable stamps on some of your old letters. It will pay you to know how to recognize them.

Let Me Send You My Big Illustrated Coin Folder— It will open your eyes! Use the Coupon Below

Send the coupon below and 4 cents for my Large Illustrated Coin and Stamp Folder and further particulars. **WRITE TODAY** for this eye-opening, valuable wealth of information on the profits that have been made from old money. No obligation on your part. You have nothing to lose—everything to gain. It may mean much profit to you.

Largest Rare Coin Company in the U. S. A.

Established 36 Years.

\$200 FOR A PENNY

I paid Julian D. Martin \$200.00 for one old Copper Cent of the year 1793. There are numerous other Cents worth large sums in everyday circulation.



\$50 FOR A NICKEL

As proof that coins do not have to be old to be valuable, James Hense, Mobile, Ala., received \$50.00 from me for a 1913 Liberty Head Nickel (not buffalo).



\$100 FOR A DIME

Another comparatively recent coin for which I will pay a big premium is the 1894 "55" Mint Dime. I offer \$100 for any of these coins sent me in good condition.



\$150 for a QUARTER

There are many Quarters worth large sums. For instance, I offer \$150 for 1827 Quarters. There are quarters of other years for which I will pay up to \$100.



\$400 FOR A HALF DOLLAR

There are a great number of Half Dollars of many different years. I am seeking and for which I will pay large sums. I paid Mrs. Dowty of Texas, \$400.00 for just one Half Dollar.



\$1,000 FOR ONE DOLLAR

There are many Silver Dollars for which I am looking. There are Silver Dollars of different years that command big prices. For example, Mr. Manning, of N. Y., was paid \$2500.00 for just one single dollar.



I PAID \$200

to J. D. Martin of Virginia for Just One Copper Cent

"Please accept my thanks for your check for \$200.00 in payment for the copper cent I sent you. I appreciate the interest you have given this transaction. It's a pleasure to do business with a firm that handles matters as you do. I wish to assure you it will be a pleasure to me to tell all my friends of your wonderful offer for old coins." Julian D. Martin, Va.

Post yourself! It pays! I paid Mr. Manning, New York, \$2,500.00 for a single silver dollar. Mrs. G. F. Adams, Ohio, received \$740.00 for some old coins. I paid W. F. Wilharm, of Pennsylvania, \$13,500.00 for his rare coins. I paid J. T. Neville, of North Dakota, \$200.00 for a \$10 bill he picked up in circulation. Mr. Mehl paid \$1,000.00 to Mr. Brownlee, of Georgia, for one old coin. Mr. Brownlee, in his letter to Mr. Mehl, says: "Your letter received with the check for \$1,000 enclosed. I like to deal with such men as you and hope you continue buying coins for a long time." In the last thirty-six years I have paid hundreds of others handsome premiums for old bills and coins.

All Kinds of Old Coins, Medals, Bills and Stamps Wanted

\$1.00 to \$1,000 paid for certain old cents, nickels, dimes, quarters, etc. Right now I will pay \$50.00 for 1913 Liberty Head nickels (not buffalo), \$100.00 for 1894 dimes ("S" Mint), \$8.00 for 1853 quarters (no arrows), \$10.00 for 1866 quarters (no motto), \$200.00 each for 1884 and 1885 Silver Trade Dollars, etc., etc.

I Have Been Buying OLD MONEY for 36 Years

Any bank in Fort Worth or Dun & Bradstreets will testify as to my responsibility. My volume of business, built on fair and prompt dealings for 36 years, is such that I own and occupy my own building devoted to my coin business. You will find every representation I make to be true and not exaggerated. It will pay you to do business with me.



FILL OUT and MAIL NOW —and GET Large Coin Folder!

**B. MAX MEHL, 405 Mehl Bldg.,
FORT WORTH, TEXAS**

Dear Mr. Mehl:—Please send me your Large Illustrated Coin and Stamp Folder and further particulars, for which I enclose 4 cents.

Name _____
Address _____
City _____ State _____

B. MAX MEHL Director Numismatics Co. of Texas.
405 Mehl Building FORT WORTH, TEXAS.

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

MY RAISE DIDN'T COME THROUGH MARY—I MIGHT AS WELL GIVE UP. IT ALL LOOKS SO HOPELESS.

IT ISN'T HOPELESS EITHER BILL. WHY DON'T YOU TRY A NEW FIELD LIKE RADIO?

TOM GREEN WENT INTO RADIO AND HE'S MAKING GOOD MONEY TOO. I'LL SEE HIM RIGHT AWAY.

BILL, JUST MAILING THAT COUPON GAVE ME A QUICK START TO SUCCESS IN RADIO. MAIL THIS ONE TONIGHT

TOM'S RIGHT—AN UNTRAINED MAN HASN'T A CHANCE. I'M GOING TO TRAIN FOR RADIO TOO! IT'S TODAY'S FIELD OF GOOD PAY OPPORTUNITIES

TRAINING FOR RADIO IS EASY AND I'M GETTING ALONG FAST—

SOON I CAN GET A JOB SERVICING SETS— OR IN A BROADCASTING STATION

OR INSTALLING LOUD SPEAKER SYSTEMS

THERE'S NO END TO THE GOOD JOBS FOR THE TRAINED RADIO MAN

YOU SURE KNOW RADIO—MY SET NEVER SOUNDED BETTER

THAT'S 'SIS I'VE MADE THIS WEEEP IN SPARE TIME

THANKS!

N. R. I. TRAINING CERTAINLY PAYS. OUR MONEY WORRIES ARE OVER AND WE'VE A BRIGHT FUTURE AHEAD IN RADIO.

OH BILL, IT'S WONDERFUL YOU'VE GONE AHEAD SO FAST IN RADIO.

I'LL TRAIN YOU AT HOME
In Your Spare Time For A
GOOD RADIO JOB

Mail the coupon now. Get the facts about Radio—the field with a future. N. R. I. training fits you for jobs in connection with the manufacture, sale and operation of Radio equipment. It fits you to go to business for yourself, service gets, operate on board ships, in broadcasting, television, aviation, police Radio and many other jobs. My **FRANK** book tells how you quickly learn at home in spare time to be a Radio Expert.

[Many Radio Experts Make \$40, \$60, \$75 a Week

Why struggle along in a dull job with low pay and no future? Start training now for the live-wire Radio field. I have doubled and tripled salaries. Hundreds of successful men now in Radio got their start through N. R. I. training.

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

Hold your job. I'll not only train you in a few hours of your spare time a week, but the day you enroll I'll send you instructions, which you should master quickly, for doing 20 Radio jobs common to most every neighborhood. I give you Radio Equipment for conducting experiments and making tests. I teach you to build and service practically every type of repairing set made. **Walter T. Retter, 30 W. Beechwood Ave., Dayton, Ohio** wrote: "Working only in spare time, I made about \$1.00 while taking the course."

Find Out What Radio Offers. Mail Coupon

My book has shown hundreds of fellows how to make more money and win success. It's FREE to any ambitious fellow over 15 years of age. Investigate—Find out what Radio offers you. Read what my Employment Department does to send you get into Radio after graduation, about my Money Back Agreement, and the many other N. R. I. features. Mail the coupon in an envelope, or paste it on a 1c postcard TODAY.

J. E. SMITH, President, Dept. 5BP
National Radio Institute, Washington, D. C.

HERE'S PROOF that my training pays

Spare Time Jobs Earn \$15 a Week

"I have no trouble getting Radio work. I have the reputation of being the best Radio man in town, and average \$15 to \$20 a week for spare time only." **G. Bernard Gray, 151 Washington St., Bronson, Michigan.**

With R. C. A. Victor I am with R. C. A. Victor. I have been promoted several times. Louis F. Lyet, 17th & Hagan Sts., Kenderloo Apts., Philadelphia, Pa.

Over His Shoulders to Radio Training

"Since 1929 I have earned my living in Radio. I was my last three jobs in N. R. I. I am now in the main control room of one of the large broadcasting stations. **Serge A. De Somer, 1516 Library Ave., New York City.**



J. E. SMITH, President, Dept. 5BP
National Radio Institute, Washington, D. C.

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

NAME AGE

ADDRESS

CITY STATE

Please mention DELL MEN'S GROUP when answering advertisements

DOCTOR DEATH

Vol. 1

CONTENTS FOR FEBRUARY, 1935

No. 1

Book-Length Doctor Death Novel

12 MUST DIE

A horror mystery straight from the devil's notebook, as recorded
by **ZORRO** 8

THE STRANGEST STORY EVER TOLD

A mad old wizard with the power to summon loathsome gray horrors from hell's attic decrees that the country's 12 most famous men must die as carrion for his ghostly vultures. A whole nation is panicked at the sinister super-scientist's plan to change civilization. Only one man has a clue to the strange power of Doctor Death and that man faces torture and death to combat the master of carnage.

—31 chapters—

THREE THRILLING STORIES

THE BEAST THAT TALKED **Damascus Blount**.. 96
For vengeance he relinquished his humanity, then found that he must pay a beast's price for his primal rage.

THE BLACK ORCHIDS **Arthur J. Burks**.. 104
A human face was the soil for the noxious flower which flourished in Broadway's hothouse.

THE SKELETON SCREAMS **O'Casey Holt**.. 114
What strange killer can pick the bones of his victim dry one minute after the dying screams?

DEATH MIXES THE BREW OF DOOM **Rudolph Zirn**
(Cover design from Doctor Death)

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DOCTOR DEATH ON SALE THE FIFTEENTH OF EVERY MONTH

Year After Year!



The Standard of QUALITY

WRIGLEY'S FOUR
FAMOUS FLAVORS

- SPEARMINT
- DOUBLE MINT
- JUICY FRUIT
- P. K.



P-28

Please mention DELL MEN'S GROUP when answering advertisements

"SHARPEST BLADE

I've ever used"



says **DIZZY
DEAN**
of Probak

NOW!
**PROBAK
JUNIOR**
25 blades
for **59¢**

Also Trial Package
of 4 Blades For 10c
At Your Dealer

DEAR "DIZZY" DEAN:

Thanks for the compliment. And now that you're a Probak fan, you'll be glad to know about Probak Jr.—the wonderful new double-edge razor blade that brings you real shaving comfort at a record low price. Imagine getting 25 keen, smooth-shaving blades, backed by the Gillette name, for 59¢!

Probak Jr. is the product of unequalled manufacturing methods and skill. It is automatically tempered, honed and stropped to give you a degree of shaving comfort never before obtainable at such a low price. Get Probak Jr. today—from your dealer. See why millions of men prefer them.

*Probak Junior is a product of
Gillette and fits all Gillette
and Probak razors*

**DO
YOU LIKE
MYSTERY
?**



THE mysterious and unknown have always interested man. A scientist will spend years in seeking out the truth in some obscure experiment. When he finally succeeds, the satisfaction and enjoyment of conquering the unknown often outweigh the worth of the discovery.

But he has been entertained and has a definite sense of accomplishment which is highly enjoyable.

This same keen enjoyment of accomplishment is felt by the reader of good mystery stories after he has worked with the author in solving the baffling tricks of man and fate.

This fact is in a large measure responsible for the popularity of mystery fiction among all classes of people. Presidents stay up late to read mystery stories. Housewives read them. Business executives find in them a relaxing pleasure. Clerks, salesmen, outdoor workers and school children read and enjoy mysteries.

That is why our announcement is vital news to millions.

For we are publishing a new mystery-detective magazine featuring a new and strange character. Both magazine and character are more thrilling, more interesting and more gripping than were ever combined before.

Imagine a super-scientist, a doctor, with all of modern science's powers of destruction at his finger tips! Then imagine this man in full possession of all necromancer's secrets of the mysterious east! Suddenly this man turns on the civilization that bred him, announces he will destroy it.

That man is Doctor Death. Each issue of the magazine contains a 100-page novel featuring this master mind of menace.

The title of this new magazine is:

DOCTOR DEATH

**MEET HIM THE 15th OF
EVERY MONTH AT ALL
GOOD NEWSSTANDS**



Thousands find new way adds pounds *quick!*

Astonishing gains in a few weeks with new discovery. Richest imported brewers' ale yeast now concentrated 7 times and iron added. Gives 5 to 15 lbs. quick!

FOR years doctors have prescribed yeast to build up health for rundown men and women. But now, thanks to a new scientific discovery, you can get far greater tonic results than with ordinary yeast—regain health, and in addition put on pounds of husky flesh—and in a far shorter time.

Not only are thousands quickly gaining solid, good-looking pounds, but also clear skin, freedom from indigestion and constipation, new pep.

Concentrated 7 times

This amazing new product, Ironized Yeast, is made from specially cultured brewers' ale yeast imported from Europe—the richest yeast known—which by a new scientific process is concentrated 7 times—made 7 times more powerful.

But that is not all! This marvelous, health-building yeast is then ironized with 3 special kinds of iron which strengthen the blood, add pep.

Day after day, as you take Ironized Yeast, watch

gawky angles fill out, flat chest develop, skinny limbs get husky. Skin clears, new health comes.

Results guaranteed

No matter how skinny and weak you may be, this marvelous new Ironized Yeast should build you up in a few short weeks as it has thousands. If you are not delighted with the results of the very first package, your money will be instantly refunded.

Only be sure you get *genuine* Ironized Yeast, not some imitation that cannot give the same results. Insist on the genuine with "IY" stamped on each tablet.

Special FREE offer

To start you building up your health *right away*, we make this absolutely FREE offer. Purchase a package of Ironized Yeast at once, cut out the seal on the box and mail it to us with a clipping of this paragraph. We will send you a fascinating new book on health, "New Facts About Your Body", by a well-known authority. Remember, results are guaranteed with the very first package—or money refunded. At all druggists. Ironized Yeast Co., Inc., Dept. 852, Atlanta, Ga.

RIGHT NOW, WE ARE SAVING

\$50 a month



"It's not as easy to save now as it was three or four years ago, because our income has been reduced. But Dorothy and I decided, when I got my first raise after finishing that International Correspondence Schools Course, to save something each month — and it's fun! Once we had the amount up to \$100, and we will get it back *there one of these days.*"

"If I had not taken that I. C. S. Course I probably wouldn't even have a job today. That training has been a life saver to me. It gives me a sense of security, to say nothing of a few promotions and raises in pay. The truth is, I expect to capitalize on it the rest of my life."

Is making both ends meet one of your problems these days? Then you must make yourself more valuable, and nothing will help you more than an I. C. S. home-study course. Mail the coupon for complete information.

INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS

"The Universal University" Box 3940-T, Scranton, Penna.

Without cost or obligation, please send me a copy of your booklet, "Who Wins and Why," and full particulars about the subjects before which I have marked X:

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Name..... Age.....

Address.....

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

Occupation.....

If you live in Canada, send this coupon to the International Correspondence Schools Canadian, Limited, Montreal, Canada



**SUGGEST A SONG FOR
BING CROSBY
WIN A PRIZE
OVER
\$500.00
CASH PRIZES,
PLUS ROYALTIES
... SEE DETAILS
IN THE FEBRUARY
POPULAR
SONGS**

Magazine, Now on Sale, 10c

A Money-Making Opportunity for Men of Character

EXCLUSIVE FRANCHISE FOR
AN INVENTION EXPECTED TO REPLACE
A MULTI-MILLION-DOLLAR INDUSTRY

Costly Work Formerly
"Sent Out" by Business Men
Now Done by Themselves
at a Fraction of the Expense

This is a call for men everywhere to handle
exclusive agency for one of the most
unique business inventions of the day.

Forty years ago the horse and buggy business was supreme—today almost extinct. Twenty years ago the phonograph industry ran into many millions—today practically a relic. Only a comparatively few foresighted men saw the fortunes ahead in the automobile and the radio. Yet irresistible waves of public buying swept these men to fortune, and sent the buggy and the phonograph into the discard. So are great successes made by men able to detect the shift in public favor from one industry to another.

New machine changes in taking place. An old established industry—long and an important part of the nation's structure—in which millions of dollars change hands every year—is in thousands of cases being replaced by a truly something, 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 occurred very long for men who have taken over the rights to this valuable invention to do a remark able business, and show earnings which in these times are almost unheard of for the average man.

Not a "Gadget"—
Not a "Knick-Knack"—

But a valuable, proved device which
has been sold successfully by business
men in various countries as well as seasonal
retailers.

Make no mistake—this is no novelty—no flimsy creation which the inventor hopes to pass on the market. You probably have seen something like it yet—perhaps your friend of the convenience 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, newspaper publishers—schools—hospitals, etc., etc., and by thousands of small business men. You do not 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 sell 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 you down before your assistant 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 one man \$70, whereas the bill could have been for \$1,000. An automobile dealer pays one representative \$15, whereas the expense could have been over \$1,000. A department store has expense on \$60, possible cost if done outside the business being well over \$2,000. And so on. We could not possibly list all cases here. There are just a few of the many actual cases which you place on your hands as you wish. Practically every line of business and every section of the country is represented by these field experts which hammer across districts, convincing money-grubbing opportunists 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 often in every grocery, drug or department store. For instance, when you take a \$7.50 order, as much as \$5.43 may be gone almost. On \$100 worth of business, you show may 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 an order's worth \$4.70, on a hundred dollar's worth \$67.00—in 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 an 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 use 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's part, eliminates the handicap of trying to get the money before the customer has really convinced himself 100%. You simply call 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 has actually produced 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 an offer to let your client 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 practicing (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 Georgia man made \$802.50 his first two weeks. A Connecticut man writes he has made \$55.00 in a single day's time. Texas men net 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 \$3 to \$50 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.

No Money Need Be Risked

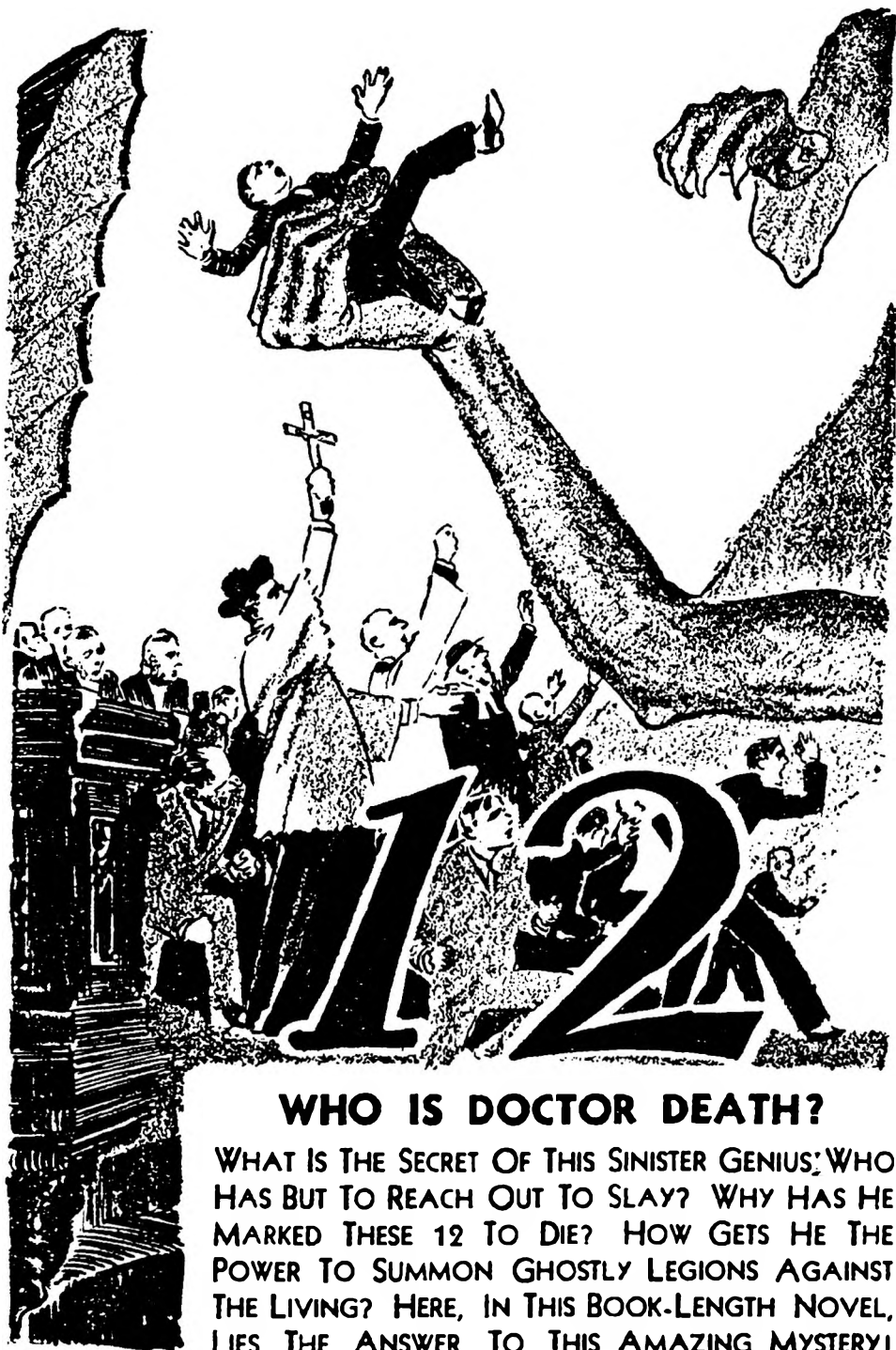
In trying this business out. You can measure the possibilities and not be over a dollar. If you are looking for a business that is not conventional—a business that is just coming into its own—on the up-grade, instead of the down-grade—a business that offers the buyer relief from a burdensome, but unavoidable expense—a business that has a prospect practically in every office, store, or factory into which you can get access—regardless of size—that is necessary but does not have any price tag—on a contract with as other necessities do—that business you control the sales in exclusive territory in your own business—the price more on some individual sales than many men make on a week and sometimes in a month's time—such a business looks as if it is worth investigating, yet no rough work at all and for the riches in your territory—don't delay—because the chances are that if you do wait, someone else will have written to us in the meantime—and if it turns out that you were the better man—and it'd be sorry. So for convenience, get the coupon below—but send it right away—or write if you wish. But do it now. Address

F. E. ARMSTRONG, President
Dept. 340-B, Mobile, Ala.

**RUSH FOR EXCLUSIVE
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F. E. ARMSTRONG, Pres., Dept. 340-B, Mobile, Ala.
(Without obligation to me, send me full information on your proposition.)

Name or Name _____
Save or Send _____
Box No _____
City _____
State _____



WHO IS DOCTOR DEATH?

WHAT IS THE SECRET OF THIS SINISTER GENIUS; WHO HAS BUT TO REACH OUT TO SLAY? WHY HAS HE MARKED THESE 12 TO DIE? HOW GETS HE THE POWER TO SUMMON GHOSTLY LEGIONS AGAINST THE LIVING? HERE, IN THIS BOOK-LENGTH NOVEL, LIES THE ANSWER TO THIS AMAZING MYSTERY!

Here Is a New Kind of Thrill and Chill—



MUST DIE

From the Devil's Notebook

by Zorro

MYSTERY—ACTION—HORROR

SERGEANT Ryan and Officer Mulrooney watched the big limousine speed along the boulevard.

"That's Colonel Atherstine," Ryan said of the distinguished looking gentleman lounging in the back. "He invented that centrifugal gun that is doing away with gun powder and high explosives and—"

The sergeant's voice sobbed out of him in a wild shriek.

"Did you see it?" he screeched, pulling at Mulrooney. "Did you see it?"

"Holy Mary, protect us," Mulrooney was muttering, watching where the big car had swerved, jumped the curb, and smashed into a tree. "It's gone! It's gone!"

Ryan, staring at the empty space where the car had suddenly vanished, was tugging at his whistle with leaden hands.

"It's gone!" Mulrooney kept sobbing. "Holy Mary, protect us!"

"Somebody'll have to protect you if you don't shut up that wailing! Come on." The other man's terror steadied the sergeant and he shrilled a blast on his whistle.

Half dragging the choking officer, Ryan ran toward the vacant spot where the limousine had been only a moment before.

From down the block came the shriek of an answering whistle as the traffic cop at the corner leaped to the rescue. From all sides the crowd surged in, hurling questions.

The two officers reached the spot where the car had leaped the curb. They stopped, their eyes bulging. There they stood, gaping, until the lieutenant piled out of the riot car.

"Now what happened?" he growled.

"'Twas a huge thing," Ryan babbled. "It was a man, higher'n the buildings roundabout—a man with a frightful shape and eyes! Dark he was and indistinct—just like a puff of smoke. I saw him grab the car and lift it up and throw it through the air like a kid throws a baseball . . ."

"Nonsense," snapped the lieutenant. "Let's get this straight. There were a lot of people on the street. Did anyone else see this thing? Did you see it, Mulrooney?"

The officer shook his shaggy head.

"I did not, sir," he responded. "But I did see the car disappear. Headed right for the tree it did, all of a sudden as if the driver had lost control. Crashed into it. Then—puff! It was gone. As for the other thing that Ryan's talking about, I—"

"Curse it, man, I'm psychic!" Ryan roared. "We've a banshee in our family and—"

"It's the heat," the lieutenant volunteered. "A day or two in the hospital will put you all right again."

"But, I'm not crazy!" Ryan howled as two burly attendants pushed him into the wagon. "I'm—"

He was still raving as the wagon shot around the corner, siren shrieking.

The lieutenant turned to Mulrooney.

"The heat and the sight of the accident—"

Mulrooney scratched his head again.

"There's the busted glass, sir. And there's plenty of us saw the car disappear, just like it had dissolved in air, sir. How you going to get around that?"

The lieutenant shook his head.

"Maybe the heat's driven you nuts, too," he growled, taking out his notebook. "Grab off a bunch of witnesses and let's get their names."

CHAPTER II

Gray Things of the Dark

HIGH above the city streets, a man leaned out of a window overlooking the boulevard, his deep set eyes taking in every detail of what had happened. He shook his head sagely. Then, stepping back, he pulled the window down and seated himself at a desk piled high with typed papers and penciled memoranda.

"Number one," he muttered to himself, his sad eyes wearing a strained, far-away look. "But no. Atherstine was of too small caliber to be number one. He was more in the nature of an experiment. Now I must revise my list."

He took a small memorandum book

from a drawer and thumbed its pages carefully, making changes and alterations here and there. Finally he tossed it back into the pile. Again his eyes took on a sad, weary expression.

"John Stark," he muttered. "It has to be him. There is no other way. He is my friend—the best of them all. But because of his money, his position, his philanthropies, he can do more damage to the world than all the others."

A newspaper lay among the papers atop the desk. On the front page was the picture of a man with iron gray hair and the rugged, clean-cut face that goes with the highest type of manhood. The seated man picked it up and gazed at it for a moment, a look of agony creeping over his countenance.

"Farewell, old friend," he said sadly, laying the paper down. "When next we meet it will be—death."

He strode across the room and, opening the door, stepped into the hallway and pressed the elevator button. A moment later he was on the sidewalk mingling with the throng.

The newsboys were selling extras on the streets—extras telling of the strange disappearance of Colonel Robert B. Atherstine and his chauffeur before the very eyes of two policemen and hundreds of on-lookers.

The thin man purchased a paper from the stand on the corner and, leaning against the side of the building, glanced over the glaring headlines.

"They make much over this," he muttered to himself. "What, then, will they say when the *real* news breaks—when they learn that the death of Atherstine was but an experiment?"

Folding the paper, he stuffed it into his pocket and moved silently through the throng. There were those who turned to gaze at him a second time, so gaunt and cadaverous did he look and so weirdly glaring were his deep-set eyes.

"He looks like Death, itself," whispered a woman to another, turning to look back at him.

Her companion shuddered.

"The thinnest man I ever saw," she responded.

BEFORE the great fireplace in the drawing room of his magnificent home. John Stark, America's greatest financier, philanthropist, backer of a thousand ventures in the field of science and invention, sat brooding over a letter. Laying it on the table at his elbow, he gazed searchingly into the fire as if seeking in the glowing coals the solution of his problem.

"Somehow, this doesn't appeal to me as the work of an ordinary crank," he said, gazing frowningly at the printed page again.

John Stark:

The world has gone too far. It is time that we returned to the simple life of our forefathers. I am sending a letter similar to this to a number of other men—scientists in the main—whose brains have made this country what it is, a nation of machines. One by one, they must go. The great buildings must crumble into dust. Factories must cease their activities and man must again live by the sweat of his brow.

I have selected you as the first to go. Others have preceded you; they were but experiments. I have nothing against you personally. In fact, I esteem you highly as a man. But because of your money and position I must make an example of you that the others may know that I do not threaten in vain. Perhaps, when I have shown my power the world will take heed and cease its madness.

I am the possessor of a mighty force so weird, so sinister, so extraordinary that you, like every other man, would scoff if I but mentioned it to you. Yet with it, I am as great as Jehovah.

For obvious reasons, I must remain unknown. Therefore, I merely sign myself.

Doctor Death.

P.S. You have my permission to show this to the police if you wish. All the standing armies of the world could not prevent me from carrying out my resolution.

John Stark arose and paced the floor; his brow corrugated in thought. In the fireplace the logs crackled merrily. He loved the open blaze. It always reminded him of the days of his youth—days spent on the plains, under the clean, blue sky

Even in the summer, he always had a fire laid in the evening. Tonight, for some reason, the smell of the burning wood brought no solace. He stopped his nervous pacing for a moment as a log toppled and fell, shooting a shower of sparks chimneyward.

"The man is right," he muttered. "Whoever he is, he speaks the truth. The world has gone mad—money mad—mad on science and invention. God, if we could but return to the days of our fathers. But it can never be."

"I am glad that you agree with me," a quiet voice interrupted.

Stark whirled on his heel, a startled look on his face.

Just outside the circle of light cast by the burning logs stood a shrouded figure, tall, masked, clad from head to foot in somber black. His eyes gleamed sinisterly through the slits of his mask.

"I am Doctor Death," he introduced himself. "Again let me say that I am glad that you agree with me, although I cannot grant your statement that we can never go back. We can, we will, and we *must*. Nevertheless, your remarks make my task the easier, knowing that you are in full accord with my views."

John Stark smiled in spite of himself.

"May I ask how you gained entrance to my house?" he demanded.

The sinister figure shrugged his shoulders.

"You may ask, but I need not reply," he said with a low chuckle. "Are you ready to die, John Stark?"

Stark leaned forward, his every faculty alert. Something told him that this calm, cold figure garbed in the habiliments of the grave was no bluffier. His fingers stole toward the row of buttons beneath the desk, but the other halted him with a gesture.

"It will do you no good to ring," he said quietly. "Your servants are all asleep—put out of commission by a method known only to myself."

John Stark was a man of action. For an instant he poised, then leaped.

He halted, staggering back, his hand before his eyes as if to shut off the light.

"God!" he murmured.

The sinister figure had merely extended his hand. From the long, bony fingers leaped sparks as if from an electric dynamo. Around the figure of John Stark danced a yellowish-blue flame; his body covered with it. A change came over his face—a look of astonishment, of deadly fear. His ruddy cheeks grew pinched, his great body seemed to shrivel and shrink.

His legs buckled and he sank in a little heap to the floor, pitched forward to his face, twisted and lay upon his back, arms outspread, eyes staring straight at the ceiling.

THE masked man made no move. For what seemed ages he stood there, arm extended, his gleaming eyes pensively watching the sparks that shot from his finger tips and the dancing flames that surrounded the huddled figure on the floor.

His robe rustled as from a gust of wind. He whirled. The cowl dropped from his head, revealing a thin, cadaverous face, a great hooked nose and sunken eyes that gleamed from beneath their brows like the twin fires of hell.

"Back!" he roared. "Back, you devils!"

In the background hovered a myriad of shadowy things—monstrous, deformed, twisted, indistinct shapes. They covered before him, their gangrenous jaws slavering, their long, talon-like fingers twisting and untwisting. They seemed about to launch themselves at him, yet they retreated before his advance.

"He was my friend, you spawn of hell!" the man who called himself Death snarled. "When I am gone you may satiate yourselves. But while I am here, keep your distance. I have left him—for you."

Slowly the dancing flames died down. The worm-gray things in the background drew a bit closer, glaring at him with their sulphurous eyes. Shrugging his thin shoulders, the robed man turned away. For an instant he bent over the desk, search-



"Back, you devils!" Doctor Death cried to the grotesque monsters. "He was my friend, and he is not your food—yet."

ing among the papers for that which he sought. It was the letter. Picking it up, he laid it upon the breast of the dead man.

"Number one," he said in a hollow, subdued voice. "Number one—and the best of them all."

He turned sadly away. The hell-pack swept over the body of the murdered man. They pawed at him, pulling his hands, his arms, his body, satiating themselves in the vitality that still remained before *rigor mortis* set in. The library reeked with a hellish charnel scent . . .

CHAPTER III

The Living Dead

DETECTIVE INSPECTOR JOHN RICKS was a policeman of the old school. His broad shoulders slightly stooped, he had worked himself up from a humble beat to the position of head of the greatest detective force in the world. He was a "copper" from the soles of his square-toed shoes to the top of his head. His cold, gray eyes glared at an unfriendly world from under a thatch of graying brows, his mouth was hard and uncompromising, his mustache, cropped short, seeming to accentuate his bull-dog jaw.

His general attitude was one of distrust and antagonism. He had clubbed and fought his way to the top, was honest to the core, a disciplinarian, a driver, beloved and feared by his subordinates—a man who demanded obedience and who was willing to enforce it, if need be, with club and fist.

Just now he was glaring across the big desk in his private office into another pair of eyes as cold and gray as his own. The name of Hezekiah Spafford was one to conjure with in the world of science. He was an LL.D., an F.R.S., an M.D., a Ph.D., and innumerable other things, most of which, accumulated during a more than ordinarily busy life, he had forgotten himself.

A Vermont Yankee by birth, he had forged his way through the field of educa-

tion until there were no other worlds to conquer. Loaned to Oxford University, he had spent several years in England and, upon his return to America, had devoted himself to chemical research.

Hezekiah Spafford was the man who had discovered the process of making dress goods out of corn silk. It was he who had demonstrated that radium exists in considerable quantities in ordinary water and that synthetic coal can be manufactured at a much less cost than the real article can be extracted from the ground. His services had been sought by the financial magnates of the nation; his word was law in research and discovery.

"The work of a crank," Ricks snapped, tapping the letter he held in his left hand with the blunt forefinger of his right. "I'll give you a couple of guards. They'll take care of you."

Hezekiah Spafford leaned forward, his lantern jaw outthrust belligerently.

"I disagree with you," he said bluntly. "Crank though he may be, the man who wrote that letter is dangerous."

The sudden jangle of the telephone halted Ricks' tart reply. He crooked his elbow, shifted his half-smoked cigar to the opposite corner of his mouth and pressed the receiver to his ear. For a moment only did he listen. Then, replacing the receiver with a bang, he pressed a button on his desk, leaped to his feet and jammed his hat atop his head, seemingly at a single motion.

"Maybe you're right, after all," he snapped. "John Stark has been murdered. One of those letters was lying beside him."

He turned on his heel as a dozen men rushed into his office. His eyes were glowing with suppressed excitement.

"You, Hanson!" he roared. "Assign two good men to guard Spafford! Tell 'em that I'll hold them personally responsible for his safety. Tell them to stick with him day and night. The rest of you come with me. John Stark has been killed—murdered!"

He charged out of the office at the head of a squad of picked men,

"Whatever it is, it must be a damned big case," Desk Sergeant O'Rourke whispered to Lieutenant Piquot as he watched the cavalcade dash to the cars waiting, motors running, at the curb. "The old man's taking charge himself."

An instant later the air was split with the doleful wailing of the sirens.

Ricks knew what to expect before he entered the door of the Stark mansion at the head of his men—knew before the white-faced butler, shaking like a man with the palsy, led him to the library where the lights were now turned on in every socket. Yet, hardened policeman that he was, he was not prepared for the sight that met his eyes—the sight that brought him up with a cry of astonishment at the threshold—the sight of the horrible thing that lay stretched upon the carpet.

In life John Stark had been a strong, robust, middle-aged man. In death he was but a semblance of a human being—a thing of dried skin stretched over a framework of bones. He resembled a toy balloon from which the air had been removed, his skin wrinkled and parchment-like, as if he had been dead for many years.

Ricks recoiled from the sight as if from a blow. He stared down at the stiff, contorted figure, the outspread arms doubled unnaturally, the fingers clenched.

"That's Stark, all right," he said, half to himself. Then to the men who grouped around him: "But, what the hell happened? What killed him? He looks as if he'd been dead for months. Yet it was only this afternoon that I saw him, talked with him, and he was as healthy and robust as—"

He stopped in the middle of the sentence, sniffing the peculiar odor that filled the room.

"What do you say, doc?" he demanded of the medical examiner who was kneeling by the dead man's side.

The physician looked up with a startled expression.

"You say that you talked with him today?" he asked.

Ricks nodded.

"Just before three o'clock," he answered.

The medical examiner shrugged his padded shoulders.

"Yet I'd be willing to swear in any court in the land that he's been dead for at least a week," he said stubbornly. "And what killed him? There's not a mark on his body. Who said he was murdered?"

"I did," Inspector Ricks answered, sniffing the air again. "Do you get that awful odor? It's like sulphur and something musty—like a tomb that's been closed for a long time and—"

"I've heard of the odor of death," the medical examiner said, rubbing his sleeve across his sweating forehead. "But this is the first time I ever actually smelled this. It's the smell of death mingled with the brimstone of hell."

Ricks whirled and confronted the trembling butler.

"Who found him?" he roared. Then to his own men: "You fellows listen to this. Take it all in. For we're going to get the man who killed Stark. Get that? Stark was a friend of mine."

FOR a full five minutes the Inspector quizzed the servant, cross-examining him with the skill of a veteran. And through it all the man's story remained the same. For the first time in his life he had gone to sleep at his post. Suddenly he had awakened. The house was quiet. John Stark was a childless widower and kept but a few servants.

There was a feeling of death in the house. Something—some vague, sixth sense, had told him where to look for it. Rushing to the library, he had found his master—dead. There was nothing more to be told. He had immediately telephoned to the commissioner before waking the other servants.

Inspector Ricks turned on his heel and

**They Stared, Yet Couldn't Believe, As The Blood Of Every Veteran
Ran Cold In His Veins!**

faced the squad of plainclothesmen under his command.

"Get busy," he snapped. "You, Casey and Harrigan, talk to the servants. Conners and Gillespie, go over the locks; you heard what this man said about everything being fastened up as far as he knew. You fingerprint guys do your stuff. The rest of you comb the house."

"Got to perform an autopsy, chief," the medical examiner said, rising from where he had been kneeling beside the body. If he was murdered it must have been with some subtle poison. There isn't a sign of a wound on him that I can find."

Ricks grunted disdainfully.

"Did you ever see or hear of a poison that would leave a man looking like him?" he questioned. "No? Well, neither did I. So that's out."

He whirled and faced his men again.

"Yet we know that he was killed—killed in some bizarre, outlandish fashion," he said. "He didn't die a natural death." He picked up the letter that had been found on the dead body and tapped it significantly with his finger. "Here's an open-and-shut confession of the crime. It's up to us to find this killer—this man who calls himself Doctor Death. He—"

HE stopped for an instant, his startled eyes glaring at his subordinates. Detective Conners had dropped to his knees, tearing at his breast for his crucifix, his eyes bulging from their sockets, his lips mouthing prayers. The others had, with one exception, fled shrieking from the room. The one exception, Inspector Jimmy Holm, pointed a dramatic finger at something behind the Inspector's back.

Ricks whirled. Then he sucked in his breath and staggered back as if from a blow.

"Almighty God!" he said tensely.

John Stark had risen to his feet!

Dead though he was, he was standing in the middle of the room, one emaciated hand resting on the edge of the desk, the other extended unnaturally in front of him. The light from a bridge lamp struck

him squarely in the pupils, reflecting from his glassy eyes glitteringly.

Ricks' heart constricted, jumped a beat, then burst into activity again as the goose flesh chased itself up and down his spinal column. He took a step forward, his fists doubled.

"We were friends in life and I'm not afraid of you now!" he snapped.

He stretched forth his hand and touched the fingers of the other. Again he shuddered. For the parchment-like skin was cold with the awful chill of death. Yet John Stark had risen from the floor and was now standing before him.

Conners gave a horrible, screaming cry and, leaping to his feet, rushed from the room in the wake of the others.

John Stark was moving!

Slowly, automatically, he lifted a foot and thrust it forward, dragging the other after it. Every movement was stiff and mechanical. His dead face turned neither to the right nor to the left, his lifeless eyes gazed unblinkingly straight ahead. Across the room he moved, raising each foot stiffly, setting it down again, dragging the other after it. He reached a chair. His body doubled at the joints and dropped into it, his eyes still staring to the front.

"Zombi!"

Ricks whirled on his heel to the man who had made the ejaculation. Tall, slender, dark, keen-faced, Jimmy Holm was leaning forward, his eyes taking in every detail.

"Meaning what?" the Inspector demanded, his brusque voice shaking in spite of himself.

"The voodoo curse," the younger man answered. "The man who killed him won't let him sleep in his grave. He's a slave to his murderer. I saw the same thing in Haiti. Dead men working in the cane fields."

"Huh!"

Ricks cast another glance at the awful thing that sat, glaring icy-eyed, straight ahead. Then he stepped to the door and roared at his subordinates.

"Come back—if you've got the guts!" he thundered.

Shamefacedly, they trooped back into the room, casting fearful glances at the dead thing in the chair—the thing that was dead and was yet alive.

"Cowards!" the Inspector snapped, a world of sarcasm in his tone. "Examine him again, doc."

The medical examiner stepped forward and touched the dead man's wrist with fingers that trembled. Then, jerking a stethoscope from his pocket, he applied it to the chest over the heart and to the jugular vein. His task completed, he straightened up, a puzzled expression creeping over his beefy face.

"In spite of what we saw—what I saw myself," he said slowly, "the man is dead—as dead as he will ever be until the resurrection comes. He's—"

He leaped backward with a startled scream.

For again the dead thing was rising.

"Oh, God, stop it!" Conners, the devout, exclaimed in a hoarse whisper.

Ponderously, laboriously, John Stark came to his feet. For a moment he stood there swaying as if seeking to gain his balance, his one arm thrust stiffly forward, the other hanging by his side. Then from his gray lips came a sound as from a great distance.

"*I am Doctor Death,*" a hollow voice said. "*I speak through this, my chosen instrument. I have demonstrated my power. Now I relinquish my hold over him, for I have no wish to punish this man who was my friend.*"

The living dead man toppled forward and fell, as stiff as a board, to the floor at their feet.

CHAPTER IV

From Beyond the Veil

FOR a moment there was a tense, awed silence. Then Ricks reached forward and, seizing the whimpering Conners by the coat collar, jerked him to his feet.

"Be a man, you nound!" he roared.

He turned to the others, glaring at them with cold gray eyes.

"Policemen!" he snarled. "Women! Babies! Scared of a dead man. You're a disgrace to the force—all except Holm."

He turned to the one man who had remained by his side.

"You were wished onto me. Jimmy Holm," he said in a more kindly tone. "I'm making no apologies when I tell you what you and all the rest of the department already know—that I didn't want you. I've got as much respect as the average policeman for scientific methods of detection—fingerprints, ballistics and the like. But when it comes to telling me that science can go farther than that, I say now, as I told the mayor to his face, that it's bosh, flappedoodle and poppycock."

"And yet," he continued, "I've seen what I've seen. I've seen that which I never expected to see on this earth. I've seen a dead man walking and talking. And I'm man enough to acknowledge that I'm licked. I, the senior member of the force, am willing to admit my inability to cope with this crime. I'm asking you, the newest member, what the hell it's all about? Can you answer me?"

All eyes were focussed on Jimmy Holm. He flushed slightly. Then he nodded.

"I thank you for your confidence, sir," he replied. "If I may venture an answer to your inquiry, I would say that this is an occult crime—a murder that can only be solved by occult methods. Has it occurred to you, sir, that this man might have been killed by the power of suggestion?"

Ricks scratched his stubby chin reflectively.

"Power of suggestion?" he said wonderingly. "You mean that—that he was hypnotized into thinking that he was dead—that he isn't dead, but just imagines that he is? Or do you mean that we—me and all the rest of us—are hypnotized and that we're just dreaming that we're seeing what we've seen?"

Jimmy Holm smiled in spite of himself.

"Neither, Inspector," he answered. "It is not the first time that men have been killed by the power of thought. There are

death cults in India who kill by concentrated thought. Right here in America, according to the press reports, an organization of strange people was recently uncovered in one of the large cities—Boston, I think—which, for a certain stipulated sum agreed to make way with a person. The man who killed Stark is, in my opinion, a master of concentration—a thinking machine, if you will. *In plain words, he thought John Stark to death.* And he retained his hold over him, dead though he was, until he had served his purpose.”

“Meaning—what?”

“That when John Stark was being killed—thought to death, certain things were impressed upon his dying brain. At a certain time he was to rise and walk across the room. At a specified moment he was to say certain things. His dead brain cells still obeyed the dictates of a master mind in spite of the absence of life.”

FOR a long time there was silence. Inspector Ricks paced the floor nervously, his huge teeth clamped upon a cigar. His men, unused to seeing him in this mood, gazed at him wonderingly, their gaze shifting from his face to that of the young man who had made the startling statement.

Every instant they looked for Ricks to explode. Under ordinary circumstances his withering sarcasm would have been turned loose upon the head of any man who dared make such a suggestion. And, too, they knew that Holm was far from being a favorite with the martinet who ruled the detective bureau.

It was as Ricks had said: Jimmy Holm had been forced into the bureau against the wishes of the man who commanded it. Left an orphan at an early age as a result of an automobile accident, his father, dying, had placed his guardianship in the hands of his closest friend and attorney, the man who afterward became mayor of the great city.

From childhood, the boy had shown an inclination toward the occult, the bizarre, the scientific. He had rounded off a career in college, distinguished by his achieve-

ments in chemistry, psychology and occult research, by taking a trip to far off lands. There, for several years, he had delved in his hobby to his heart's content. Returning to America to take over his fortune, he had astonished his guardian by asking for a place in the detective bureau. And the mayor, after considerable argument, had finally acquiesced.

And now Jimmy Holm, several times a millionaire—a man who might have dined through life to at least a comfortable old age without turning a finger—found himself, less than a month after his appointment, being consulted by the man who ruled the department with a mail fist. A man who, under ordinary circumstances, would never have even noticed his existence was asking his advice.

Ricks slowly lighted his cigar, the wrinkles around his eyes growing deeper. Turning, he gazed down at the body of his dead friend again. Then he whirled and once more faced Holm.

“His condition?” he snapped. “Does that go with this voodoo curse you’re talking about? And what about Sergeant Ryan’s story? The yarn about the giant ghost that sucked up the automobile with Atherstine in it. Do they all go together?”

Holm shook his head.

“I’m puzzled, sir,” he said frankly. “There seem to be three elements entering into this case. Have you ever heard of elementals, sir?”

Ricks shook his head.

“No,” he said savagely.

“An elemental,” Holm said calmly, “is a spirit form that has not evolved. They exist along with other spirit forms on the other side of the veil that divides the spirit world from this in which we live. Sometimes it becomes possible for a spirit form to break through this veil and manifest itself on the human plane.

“Because of their inferiority, elementals hate humans. But they must draw their sustenance from humans in order to exist. Usually they establish contact with someone whose vitality is at a low ebb—the

**"It's A Devil That Did It. Listen! Here's A Letter From Him
And Look What He Says!"**

sick, the weak, the injured—drawing their vitality from their victims somewhat as a vampire draws blood.

"That appears to have been the case here. This man was stricken down in a manner unknown to us. Afterward, although still alive to a certain extent—for certain organs continue to function after the dead are made Zombi—he was turned over to the elementals. You see the result."

"Am I daft?" Ricks growled.

"To get to my case of Atherstine," Holm went on. "There are many elementals. Among them are air elementals—vast things that extend as high as the clouds. What are they? I do not know. Possibly there was a race of giants here on earth in days gone by. If so, these air elementals are their lost spirits wandering through the maze. They are said to suck up human beings—to lift them from the ground as a magnet picks up a pin. There are hundreds of people in the north woods who can vouch for this and for the fact that anyone who has ever gazed upon one of them dies before the next sunrise."

INSPECTOR RICKS leaned forward. "Sergeant Ryan passed away just before we left," he said. "I thought that it was the heat. And I'm beginning to think you're a bit cracked yourself, Holm. Where does this Doctor Death come in? There's nothing ghostly about his letter."

"Elementals are ghosts in a malignant form," Holm said quietly. "Just as a spiritualistic medium can materialize those who have gone to the other world, so are occasional humans able to materialize these wandering spirits. Doctor Death may be one of these people who has developed his uncanny ability to an incredible degree."

Ricks grunted. Suddenly he bestirred himself. He glanced down a second time at the body of the murdered millionaire, then at a little knot of reporters who had

entered the room in the wake of the police and who had been listening intently to the conversation.

"You've heard him, boys," he snapped. "For the first time in my life, I'm willing to admit that I'm stumped. Maybe Holm's theory is correct. Maybe it's all wrong. In any event, it's as good as any for the present. I'm playing along in the regulation way and trusting to luck and God Almighty to help me solve this mystery. And, meanwhile, I'm giving Jimmy Holm a free hand. Get that. If he can figure out the solution by means of his knowledge of the supernatural, I'll be the first to take my hat off to him."

"Holm, the supernatural detective," someone sneered in a loud whisper.

"I'm telling you that the man who killed John Stark is going to be caught!" Ricks snarled. "I'm going to fry him, damn him—this man who calls himself Doctor Death—if I have to break down the doors of hell to get him."

The sudden entrance of the butler halted his tirade. Plugging in the extension telephone, the servant handed the instrument to the burly policeman.

For a moment Ricks barked into the receiver. Then, handing the instrument back to the other, he turned to them.

"They've got Spafford," he said, his voice dry and husky, his face drawn. "Got him in his own door yard while two of my men looked on. That was one of them now—scared to death. Says that the professor simply disappeared—vanished into thin air. Just as Atherstine did."

"There's no human agency in the world that could snatch Spafford away from the two men I had assigned to guard him," he went on. "I'm trailing along with your air elemental, Holm. Trailing along, I say. For if the spirits of hell are turned loose on this world, there's no chance for an ordinary copper like me."

Inspector Ricks was his own blustering self when he faced his men at the roundup next morning. For a moment he said nothing, gazing from one to another as if seeking in their faces an opportunity to single out some one offender more guilty than his fellows.

"And you call yourselves detectives!" he said finally. "Detectives, bah! Two murders have been committed within the last twelve hours. Both of them big men—not only the biggest men in this city, but the nation as well. And not a clew turned up. Not an arrest made. And this man, Atherstine. When the matter was first reported to me, I thought that Mulrooney and Ryan had been drinking. From indications, Atherstine and his chauffeur were killed the same as the others.

"I told you last night," he went on, "that I'd string along with Jimmy Holm. He's the only one of us that knows anything about the supernatural. But that's not saying that this is a supernatural killing, just because we don't understand it. You'll agree with me that the chances are a million to one that when we get at the bottom of it, it will be so simple that we'll be ashamed of ourselves for not thinking of it in the beginning. And there's no excuse for any of us laying down."

CHAPTER V

Death Calls to Jimmy

HE paced back and forth for a minute, his bulldog jaw outthrust, his big fists doubled belligerently.

"There's a devil loose in this town, boys," he said finally in a more kindly tone. "A devil who is bent upon the wholesale destruction of the big men of the nation. Since the death threats received by Stark and Spafford got into the papers, several other men—men of prominence, scientists mostly—have appealed to me for protection. I've got half the harness bulls on the force guarding them. Meanwhile—"

He stopped and turned at the entrance of a sergeant bearing a letter.

"Pardon the interruption, sir," the latter said, bringing his hand to his forehead in a brisk salute. "But this letter just came, special delivery, sir. It's addressed to you, as you'll notice and marked, '*Important information in re. the Stark murder*'. I thought it was best that you should have it immediately."

Ricks seized the envelope from the sergeant and tore it open. For an instant his eyes took in the contents of the page. Then he turned to his assembled detectives again, his face livid with rage.

"Listen to this!" he roared. "It's from him—the man who calls himself Doctor Death. Listen:

Inspector Ricks:

The body of John Stark was not destroyed as were those of Spafford and Atherstine because, had he, too, disappeared, you might have imagined my letters merely a hoax. I left his body to demonstrate to you that I have the ability to perform miracles.

I am, as I stated in my letters to Stark and Spafford, as well as several other gentlemen who have probably already consulted you, bent upon the destruction of the world of science. We have become a nation of machines. We must return to the old fashioned simplicity in order to survive. I am the chosen weapon of this generation to bring this about.

Within the next few days I will kill others. I will continue until every scientist and inventor has been wiped out, or until the hum of the factories ceases and the grass grows upon the streets as it did in the days of our fathers.

The next to go will be Doctor Karl Munson of New York University. He is number three. The others already selected are, in order of precedence, as follows:

- No. 4. Amos Bosworthy, financier.
- No. 5. Thomas Whipple, the airplane magnate.
- No. 6. J. P. Hamilton, the automobile king.
- No. 7. Professor Phineas Drexell of Yale University.
- No. 8. Professor Levi Henworthy of Harvard.
- No. 9. Professor William Munz, the electrical wizard.
- No. 10. Dr. Daniel Darrow, chemist of Philadelphia.
- No. 11. James Peabody, head of the experimental dept. of Eastern Electric.

No. 12. Herbert C. Hallover, head of the department of chemistry of the same company.

Respectfully yours
Doctor Death.

P.S. It may be necessary that others be killed, too. I sincerely hope, however, that the deaths of these twelve men will prove sufficient.

For a moment there was an awed silence. Munson, Bosworthy, Whipple, Hamilton, Drexell, Henworthy, Munz, Darrow, Peabody, Hallover! The brains of the nation. And all marked for slaughter! It was astounding. Incredible. A grizzled captain forgot discipline and gave vent that which was uppermost in the minds of all of them.

"My God!" he exclaimed. "He's liable to strike at the President himself."

There was no answering rebuke from Inspector Ricks. Instead he shook his shaggy head.

"And what the devil can we do to prevent him?" he questioned.

Detective Jimmy Holm was puzzled. Scientist though he was, delver in the occult, the weird outrages already performed by the uncanny creature who called himself Doctor Death surpassed belief. Was there such a man? Or was he of the spirit world? No. The letters he wrote were those of this sphere, insane though the writer might be.

What reason did he have in murdering the best brains of the nation? Was it jealousy? Or was he telling the truth when he said that he was inspired solely by a desire to force the world back to the simple life? Was there some other unaccountable purpose behind this wholesale murder plot that was driving the police force of the country frantic? Already every man of prominence was under a heavy guard. And Holm knew, as did his colleagues, that a guard meant nothing. Doctor Death was a monster—a fiend. But he was possessed of some strange power which enabled him to kill at long range—to cause those at whom he had pointed the clammy finger to disappear at will.

The soft whirl of a motor close at hand drove the problem momentarily from his brain. He looked up with a start.

"Jimmy Holm!" a woman's voice drawled. "Don't tell me that you intended passing me without speaking."

HOLM raised his hat with a smile and gazed into a pair of amber eyes that filled him with a sudden thrill. She was, he decided, a more than ordinarily pretty woman. A taunting smile rested upon her full, red lips. Watching her as she half reclined against the cushions, the thought flashed over him that Sappho or Aspasia must have been such a woman as this.

Her smooth skin was slightly tinted—the color of ivory, he decided. The eyes, which gazed into his own, seemed filled with knowledge of the buried past, yet they were brimming over with life. Slightly inclined to the oblique, they set off to full advantage the delicate oval of the rest of her face—a face that was filled with strength in spite of its beauty. She was attired in the height of fashion from the tip of her tiny shoe, above which appeared a glimpse of a delicately turned ankle, to the top of her smoothly coiffured black hair.

Suddenly he recollected that he was staring at her. His gaze shifted from her face to the hand, delicate as the petals of a rose, that rested lightly on the wheel.

"Don't tell me that you have forgotten me," she exclaimed with a tiny pout.

Holm smiled whimsically.

"I've a rotten memory for names," he told her. "I recall your face, however."

"Think hard," she smiled, leaning forward and opening the car door. "Climb in and I'll take you where you're going—wherever that is."

Jimmy Holm stepped into the roadster obediently and settled himself beside her. He was playing a hunch—a hunch that told him that this girl was, in some way, linked with the mystery he was seeking to unravel.

"Which way?" she asked.

He shrugged his shoulders.

"To be honest about the matter, I was merely taking a constitutional," he answered. "What about driving down Broadway until we strike a boulevard, and then a spin into the country?"

She nodded and stepped on the starter. For a moment she busied herself threading in and out of the traffic. Then, when they were in the clear, she glanced at him from the corners of her eyes.

"Confess that you don't know me," she demanded.

He grinned back at her cheerfully.

"Oke," he answered. "And now tell me something, please. Who are you and what's your game?"

"My game?" A puzzled expression crept over her beautiful face.

She was driving with one hand now, fumbling, as she did so, with the ring on the third finger of her right hand. Holm watched the movement of her slim fingers out of the corner of his eye. They fascinated him.

Half turning, she laid her hand upon his own.

"Doctor Death," she said quietly, "has read of your theories in the morning paper. He has taken a sudden fancy to you. It is his wish that you visit him."

He felt a sudden pain in his hand as of the prick of a pin. He attempted to jerk back, but his entire arm was benumbed. He noted that they were passing a policeman. He tried to open his mouth to shout an alarm. His throat was paralyzed.

Then a feeling of lassitude and drowsiness swept over him. He saw everything, realizing what was going on as in a dream. Finally, with a tired sigh, he leaned back against the cushions.

Then consciousness left him.

CHAPTER VI

In the Power of Death

CONSCIOUSNESS returned to Jimmy Holm slowly. He was dazed. The thought came to him that he was dead. He was in a tomb surrounded by Zombi—

gibbering, shrieking, howling corpses. He had never heard of Zombi talking, yet these dead men were dancing about him, chanting a weird, runic rhyme as they gazed at him with blood-lustful eyes. He was one of them, condemned to a living death. Yet, strangely, movement was denied him. He wondered why. And they hated him. That much he knew.

A woman came into the picture—the girl who had tricked him so neatly. She moved toward him as if to protect him from the charnel horde. He felt that she was only an image—that her smooth body was a carving made by some great artist. Yet she seemed real as she drove back the living dead things that gibbered and cavorted around his pall, striving to reach him with their talon-like hands. She bent over him, her amber eyes gazing down at him. Her cool, slim fingers touched his forehead lightly—caressingly, he thought.

Then came awakening. And with it a flood of memories.

She was standing beside him, her ripe, crimson lips smiling down at him.

"He is coming out of it," she said to someone behind her.

She was speaking to the dead men. Holm could see them in the background again, lurking just at the edge of a circle of light, waiting to pounce upon him. He covered back. He tried to seize her by the hand, to hold her . . .

Somewhere a gong struck.

Something whimpered. He wondered if it was the dead men crying because the girl had robbed them of their prey. They whistled and moaned. No, it was not the Zombi. Zombi did not make such noises. And this thing gurgled like the slobbering breathing of some inhuman monster. Holm shuddered. It must be the Zombi. They were talking to each other . . .

"Doctor Death!"

He opened his eyes at the call. The girl was standing close to him. Behind her were grouped a horde of bloated, misshapen, verminous, gray creatures—dead things—things from the grave; grotesque caricatures of humanity; they grimaced

and slavered, gazing at him with eyes that glittered, their slobbering jaws dripping slime. She was warding them off, it seemed.

"Back! Back, you devils! This man is not for you!"

The voice was sharp, snarling. At the command the horrible creatures shrank back . . . disappeared.

He closed his eyes again. Then fell asleep. When he awoke his brain was clear. He was lying on a low davenport, unbound, yet when he tried to move, his limbs felt like leaden weights. He managed to twist his head slightly and noted that he was

in a vast room, simply furnished, lighted by several shaded bridge lamps scattered about the floor. In the distance he caught a glimpse of an open door and of a brilliantly lighted room painted a dazzling white; upon the shelves were rows

and rows of bottles; innumerable scientific instruments, chemical paraphernalia and test tubes were upon the table. The odor of ether was in the air.

He heard the strange whimpering, whining noise again. Then a sharp yeip of pain. It came from the other room. The girl frowned and, stepping to the open door, said something in a low voice to someone inside. A man answered in rumbling tones. Then she returned to him.

"Close your eyes again," she said with a smile. "A drug unknown to science—related to *cannabis indica*—was injected

into your veins. Its after effects are its worst feature. It will wear off shortly."

He shut his tired eyes again, noting as he did so that she was attired in a scarlet lounging robe of so fine a texture that it revealed the seductive curves of her body as she stepped away.

"You are feeling better, I trust."

Holm opened his eyes. He must have dropped into a dreamless sleep, for now the girl was seated in a chair some distance away, her lips still curved in that same mocking smile. Over him was bending a tall man, gaunt almost to the point

of emaciation. He was clad in a white surgical coat while over his thatch of snow white hair was drawn a knitted cap of white such as surgeons wear; below it the long, straggling locks hung in disorderly array.

"I am Doctor Death," he bowed as he

introduced himself in a low voice.

"You are Doctor Rance Mandarin," Holm corrected, his voice suddenly returning to him. "I heard you lecture once, several years ago, on 'The Ceremonies and Mysteries of Conjunction'."

A smile crept into the tall man's sad, sunken eyes. He laid one bony hand on Holm's chest in a gesture of approval.

"I am pleased that you have remembered me so long," he said. "However, in this place I prefer to be known by the title I have assumed—Doctor Death."

He turned to the girl.



the mysterious, exotic assistant of Doctor Death, Nina Fererra.



Jimmy Holm, "Supernatural Detective," and—

"My assistant you have already met," he said with a kindly smile, "although not by name. Mr. Holm, my assistant, Miss Nina Ferrera."

The girl acknowledged the introduction with a slight bow, then moved back out of the circle of Holm's gaze again.

For a moment the old man stood there gazing down at the detective. Then, drawing up a chair, he seated himself at the other's side.

"I read in the papers your solution of the murder of John Stark," he said quietly. "It struck me as peculiar that you, out of a whole city filled with people, were the only one capable of solving the puzzle. I made a hasty investigation of your past, found out who you were and what you have been doing. I have need for another assistant; the work is too great to rest upon Miss Ferrera's shoulders alone. I sent her for you and—you came. We need not go into the details of your coming; the fact that you are here is sufficient."

HOLM clenched his fists and attempted to pull himself erect. He dropped back against the pillows with a groan.

"Am I to understand that you are offering me a position on your staff?" he snarled.

Doctor Mandarin nodded.

"Exactly."

"Then," said Holm angrily, "you can go to the devil! If the effect of this hellish stuff your assistant pumped into me wears off, it will give me more than ordinary pleasure to turn you over to the executioner."

Doctor Mandarin chuckled.

"The anesthetic which Miss Ferrera gave you was merely to put you in my power," he said slowly. "That was followed by another and more subtle dose which, after considerable experiment, I derived from an obscure genus of Indian hemp. Its effect is far more lasting. In fact, you will remain paralyzed for the remainder of your life, unless I see fit to administer the antidote . . ."

He stretched forth one lean arm to the table and, selecting a pipe from the bowl at his elbow, filled and lighted it. Leaning back in his chair, he gazed at Holm quizzically through the smoke.

"I am," he said finally, "the greatest scientist the world has ever known. Compared to me Einstein is a pigmy in intellect. I say this, not in the spirit of ego, but as a statement of fact. And I, peer of all scientists, am about to destroy all other men of science—all scientific inventions. Let me illustrate."

Rising he stepped out of Holm's range of vision. A moment later he returned, pushing ahead of him from the white enameled room a small operating table on which was strapped a dog on which he had evidently been experimenting, for the lower part of the animal was covered with a light rubber blanket. The dog stared up at him, a pathetic look in its liquid brown eyes, and moaned. Now Holm knew whence the sounds had come that he had heard in his delirium.

"You—devil!" he gasped.

Doctor Death paid no attention to him. Placing the table within the range of light, he turned to Holm again.

"Watch!" he said. "You are about to witness that which no man has ever gazed on before and lived."

Jimmy Holm's skin tingled. It seemed to him that his bed heaved dizzily like a ship in a storm. He fought off the vertigo.

There was no magic involved, no spell, no pentacle. Yet out of nothing evolved a great shape—a formless, indistinguishable shape like a grotesque statuette. It seemed to come from nothingness like a vast cloud of smoke, growing bigger and bigger until it filled the room. Shapeless though it was, it had the semblance of a man—a man with flapping, widespread arms. It was colossal, diabolical, uncanny. The dog shrieked.

The thing hovered over the wailing puppy, bending lower and lower. Its great mouth drew closer and closer to the little animal.

Then, suddenly, it struck. Dog and table disappeared. Gone, too, was the monstrous thing.

Jimmy Holm gazed with startled eyes at the spot where the table had been.

Doctor Mandarin chuckled.

"Did I not promise to show you something that no other man has ever gazed upon and lived?" he demanded. "It is an air elemental. I have an army of them under my control. You know, now, what happened to Atherstine and to Spafford. With these things I can destroy the world if I desire. What government would not be prepared to offer, not millions, but billions for my services? The nation that I elected to serve could rule the globe. But I will never sell my services."

to aid me. I am an old man. Soon I will be taken to my reward—perhaps. On the other hand I may stumble upon the secret of everlasting life.

"Men have sought for it before and some have come close to finding it. Be that as it may, I must have young people to assist me now and, if it is fated that I should die before my task is finished, they must carry on. To that end I have commenced the task of forming a small group. Miss Fererra is the first. You the second."

"But," Holm gasped, "I told you that I am against you—that I am sworn to nip this preposterous thing in the bud."

Doctor Mandarin shrugged.

"Did I not say that I am the world's greatest scientist?" he exclaimed petu-

**"Together — The Three Of Us — We Shall Change The World."
Jimmy Agreed: He Was A Puppet.**

Mandarin sat down beside the couch and smoked for a moment in silence.

"I am master of the occult," he said finally. "I could, if I so desired, turn my great knowledge to base uses. Instead, I have elected to devote it to my work of remodeling the world. But, I think I hear you say, is not murder base? I answer, bah! What is human life? Nothing. We are but cogs in the Creator's vast machine.

"God gave us a world on which to live—a beautiful world. He made it perfect. And we, His creatures, have attempted to improve upon His work. Millions of men have died fighting for a principle; nations have gone to war over a scrap of paper. Think you, then, that the deaths of a dozen—yes, a hundred men—will be counted against one who seeks to bring the world back to its original state?"

Again he hesitated, seemingly lost in thought. Then:

"I, the greatest of all scientists, know that I have been given the brain with which to accomplish these things. I am but an object to the end. Alone I can do great things. But with the help of others, I can do more. I have already commenced the work of recruiting a group of people

lantly. "Do you think, then, that I would be fool enough to overlook any contingency?"

RISING, he walked slowly into the white enameled laboratory again. When he returned there was a small leather case in his hand. From it he extracted a hypodermic syringe filled with a dull, brownish liquid.

"The antidote for the paralysis serum which I injected into your veins," he said. "In a moment I will use it. You will sleep for a few hours. When you wake up, you will be entirely normal in every way."

He drew back Holm's sleeve and, rolling up his shirt, pierced the flesh of the forearm with the needle point and drove the plunger home.

A feeling of lassitude swept over Holm. He was suddenly transfixed by the glare of the cavernous eyes. They seemed to hold him in their awful power. They dissolved and in their place appeared a face. A human face. Hard, crafty, ruthless. He tried to close his eyes against it, but in vain. It danced before his vision. The lips were speaking. As from a great distance he heard what they said:

"Sleep! Sleep! I command you to

sleep! I, Death, will it! When you awaken all memory of your past will be gone. My thoughts are to be your thoughts. My ideas will be your ideas. Only that which I will to remain will remain . . . sleep . . . sleep . . ."

Jimmy Holm slept.

CHAPTER VII

Death Claims an Ally

HOLM stretched and yawned. Then came true awakening—and memories—vague, indistinct, yet memories, nevertheless. He sat up with a start, his every nerve tingling with suppressed excitement.

Who was he? What had happened to him?

Something told him that his name was Jimmy Holm and that, at some time in the past, he had gazed into a pair of greenish eyes that bored into his brain like gimlets of hell. There was a man . . . an aged man . . . He had said that Jimmy was to forget. Forget what?

Obviously, then, it was his duty to obey . . . He must concentrate his mind in an effort to subjugate himself to this man's commands . . . This man was the master and obedience was essential. For some reason he felt no curiosity regarding himself. He was but a tiny cog in a great wheel, subservient in every way to the master mind.

Doctor Death! He remembered now that: this was what the man called himself. It was a splendid name, even though a grim one. Doctor Death killed people in many curious ways. Well, why not? Doctor Death was the master. His brain was the brain of all brains. His word was law . . .

Who was Doctor Death? But did that matter since Doctor Death was everything—the beginning and the end? Doctor Death was the mouthpiece of the Almighty, the leader of God's hordes upon this earth. It was an honor to work with him . . .

What was it that Doctor Death had said

about the world? That it had moved too fast, that it had violated God's laws, that it must return to the days of hand-made simplicity . . . Doctor Death was right. Airplanes, automobiles, electricity—the thousand and one things that were in daily use—wrong. All wrong. They must be eliminated. The men who made them, the men whose brains made them possible, must die. He, Jimmy Holm, was one of the chosen instruments to bring the world back to normalcy. He was glad. Doctor Death had so stated and was not Doctor Death always correct?

He gazed about curiously. The room was strangely unfamiliar. It was a huge, Oriental-appearing chamber with stone walls, covered with lavish trappings and rich draperies. On the table in the center of the vast room was a huge vase of freshly cut flowers. Rare books were in the cases along the walls, rugs of exquisite workmanship were spread upon the floor. Light came from a cluster of concealed globes in the ceiling.

A movement beside him brought his meditation to a sudden close. A man walked into the room carrying a tray. His movements were jerky, lifeless, automatic. He stared straight ahead unwinkingly, his eyes glassy.

The man was dead. Holm knew it, yet he had no fear. It was the most natural thing in the world to be waited upon by a corpse. Doctor Death had so willed it and Doctor Death's commands were immutable. He was merely filled with interest as he watched the Zombi jerkily lay the table by the side of the bed. He munched the buttered toast and the crisp bacon and eggs, swallowing the coffee leisurely, vaguely wondering whether the cook, too, was a cadaver. The thought intrigued him. He was amused, rather than horrified. Doctor Death was a wonderful man . . . And he was to be Death's assistant . . .

The Zombi prepared the bath and laid Jimmy's clothes neatly on a chair. Now, as the detective shaved, the dead thing removed the breakfast dishes, put the room in order and left, carefully closing the door

behind him. Holm completed his toilet, selected a cigar from the humidior on the table, lighted it and picking up the newspaper gazed at the headlines.

The paper teemed with the name of Doctor Death. Various articles told of the activities of the mysterious murderer, of his methods and of his threats. The entire police force of the continent was searching for him. The President had ordered the Department of Justice and the United States Secret Service to drop everything else in an effort to apprehend him. There were interviews with the big men of the world. They were a unit in their declaration that the man who called himself Death was a deadly menace to civilization—yet the most dangerous maniac that had ever walked the globe.

Played up in the feature column was the story of the disappearance of Detective James Holm. Holm, the supernatural detective, the writers called him. The theories of the young detective were given, together with a statement in bold black letters from Inspector Ricks advancing, as his belief, that young Holm had been removed by the same method that had snatched Atherstine and Spafford from life. Why? Because the mysterious Doctor Death had recognized in Jimmy Holm an antagonist to be feared. With Holm alive, he was in danger.

Holm chuckled as he read. He understood vaguely that it was himself who was referred to—that it was his picture that smiled back at him from the printed page. Yet he did not understand. Detective— he a detective? Had he not always been linked in some unfathomable way with Doctor Death?

He frowned and tossed the paper aside. What he did not understand was not to be questioned. Somewhere, deep within his subconscious brain, Doctor Death had so willed. And the will of Doctor Death was his law . . . It amused him to think that the papers believed that Doctor Death feared him. Why should Death be afraid of him? Was he not Death's assistant?

"Good morning!"

Holm turned quickly. Doctor Death had entered and was standing before him. There was a cold smile on the aged scientist's cadaverous face; his sunken eyes glittered like those of a snake as he pointed to the newspaper that Holm had tossed aside.

"You read?" he asked.

Holm nodded.

"Without understanding," he answered. "There is something vaguely familiar about it all—something that I cannot comprehend. It is as if I had lived another life and that now I am dreaming about it."

Death chuckled low, mockingly.

"Time is but a fleeting thing at best," he answered. "Eternity is everything."

He leaned forward, his voice vibrating with energy.

"I needed you. What I need, I take. You are a scientist. I, too, am a scientist. Science, as you know, recognizes no law except the law of truth. You pleased me because you, of all the world, had brains enough to recognize the truth. And that is why I seek to destroy the so-called scientific world. Let me read you something."

HE selected a book from the pile on the table and, turning the pages rapidly, found that which he sought.

"I quote from a statement made back in 1933 by L. A. Hawkins, executive engineer of the research laboratory of the General Electric Company. Listen:

"Labor has been taken away from human beings and given to machines to do. That change is an important new factor in the depression of the last four years, but we are not going back to muscles instead of machines. The human race never has known happier times than in Athens of old, when slaves did all the work. Now we of today must learn how to get used to our slaves—the machines . . ."

"Wrong—all wrong," he said, laying the volume down. "The same erroneous impression that the entire world is laboring under. A generation ago Jack London,

one of the greatest of the Socialistic fraternity, shocked people by his romance, *The Iron Heel*, in which he pictured a tyranny of organized industrial plutocracy which lasted for centuries. London was wrong and yet, to a certain extent, he was correct in his surmises. An industrial plutocracy is being swiftly erected, but it is a plutocracy of machinery. A plutocracy brought about by science. The world is already staggering beneath its yoke. It is the iron heel of this plutocracy that we must battle.

"Science—and I am a scientist, remember—has reached a stage where it is as malevolent as a harpy, eating into civilization like worms into a dead body, drooling with poisonous hunger for more civilization to destroy. We are nearing the end. The world must either be set right or die. I am the chosen vehicle to bring this change about."

He leaned forward, his eyes gleaming.

"You see, the Almighty's plan has gone wrong," he said. "The devil and I have a better one. My mind possesses the power to raise the dead. You have seen it demonstrated. There, my young friend, is your answer. I have no hatred in my heart for these men whom I must destroy, I am merely fulfilling a mission. Have I made myself clear?"

Holm nodded.

"You have made yourself clear," he answered, parrot-like.

Doctor Death leaned forward again and touched him on the knee with his bony forefinger.

"Together we can work wonders—the three of us—you and Nina and myself. Is it not so?"

Holm's eyes glistened excitedly.

"We can change the world," he said. "You will be in supreme command. Miss Fererra and I will execute your orders."

Doctor Death nodded benevolently.

"With two assistants such as you, I can win on every front," he said solemnly.

Holm leaped to his feet, his face tense with excitement.

"Let us get to work!" he exclaimed. "There is no time to be lost."

CHAPTER VIII

The Cave of Death

DEATH rose slowly to his feet, a look of triumph in his cavernous eyes.

"Come," he said. "There is much that I must show you, since you are to be my assistant. Miss Fererra cannot handle everything herself and these dead people—these Zombi—have no intelligence. They follow a beaten path. You majored, I understand, in chemistry. It was one of your favorite studies."

"Was it?" Holm answered dully. "I seem to have a knowledge of it, yet I cannot remember where I acquired it."

Doctor Death chuckled again. For an instant he gazed at Holm, a look of interest in his deep-set eyes. Then he asked him a number of questions, each meant to test the memory of the younger man. Satisfied, at last, that the detective's amnesia was complete, he made his way through the narrow door with Holm in his wake.

Entering a narrow passage, he stepped into a room which seemed strangely familiar to the detective, yet he had no recollection of it.

"You recognize this place?" Death asked.

Holm shook his head.

"I seem to know it, yet I cannot remember of ever having seen it before," he answered. "It is like gazing upon something of which, some time in the past, you have dreamed."

Death smiled grimly.

"It is the room where you awakened last night," he said. "See? There is the little room beside it. It is where I pass my leisure time. It is a well-equipped laboratory. However, compared to that which I am going to show you, it is nothing. And now for a sight that you, as a chemist, should be able to appreciate."

He threw open a narrow door and pressed a switch. A thousand lights sprang into life. Stepping inside, he made way for Holm to enter.

The detective gasped.

It was a huge cave in which he found himself—a cave as vast as the interior of a great cathedral. And, like a cathedral, it was arched, for scattered here and there were gigantic pillars of clear, translucent stone—stalactites. They were colossal like the place itself, some of them ten or fifteen feet in diameter at the base and wrought with a delicate tracery baffling description. In every direction the great aisles stretched almost as far as the eye could reach, while the reflection of the thousands of lights, dancing and scintillating, gave the huge cavern the appearance of a gigantic fairy grotto.

Out of the vast main aisle, there opened, here and there, smaller caves or grottos. Death led the way to one of the larger of these and waved his arm at its contents with an air of ill-concealed pride.

Even this side room was big—larger than the average hall used for assembly purposes in great municipalities. Scattered about it were innumerable tables and benches, carved for the most part out of the solid rock. They were covered with flasks and bottles and beakers of every description and size. Around the great columns which supported the roof, shelves had been cut; these shelves were filled with bottles.

Holm drew closer and examined them. Here were chemicals of which he had no knowledge. There were test tubes, too, microscopes of the finest quality, Bunsen burners, pipettes—everything needed for research work down to the finest detail.

His face betrayed the excitement under which he labored. Death smiled broadly.

"You like it?" he asked.

"It is wonderful!" the young man exclaimed. "It must have cost thousands to assemble all this apparatus."

"Say millions, and you will come closer to the mark," the old man answered. "And it will be yours in which to work. Here,

in company with Miss Ferrera—as clever a chemist as ever manipulated a test tube—you will spend your days carrying on my experiments. I have many things in view. Chemistry is my hobby—my one relaxation."

Death's saturnine face lighted up with a happy smile. For a moment he was like a little child who has been praised by its elder.

"Ah, but you have not seen half," he said. "Let us hurry."

He led the way down the big aisle to another cave. His long, bony finger touched a button and another battery of lights sprang into life.

"Look!" he exclaimed.

ON every side were *fungi*—mushrooms, toadstools, foul-looking, fetid-smelling growths. The huge cave was filled with them; some of them were of enormous size, bloated, puffy monstrosities of the vegetable world, unclean looking, venomous. They filled every nook and corner of the gloomy cavern. Their odor was overpowering, nauseating.

"Some of them are deadly poison, even to the touch," Death said with pride. "I gathered them from the four corners of the earth. It has taken me years to propagate some of them, crossing them, nourishing them as one nourishes a baby. From them I have made many weird potions. From them I expect to make many more. Some day I will explain them to you more fully, for I expect you to use them in your work. They fill a different place in the scheme of things, however. They seem to know me. Note how they lean toward me, waiting, child-like, for me to caress them. They realize that I love them."

For an instant he fluttered here and there amidst the loathsome growths, petting, fondling, caressing. Finally, straightening up, he gazed at Holm benevolently.

"Now for something different," he said. "Watch and, watching, fear not."

He turned out the lights. Holm drew a long, tremulous breath.

Where, but an instant before, there had

been only empty space, now something was moving in the darkness around them!

He felt it, sensed it. Yet he could not see it. He knew that it was monstrous, devilish, sinister, unclean. It seemed to be reaching out for him—stretching its mighty arms toward him. It was of the blackness—a part of it—and yet apart; something that was striving with all the force at its command to break through the veil, yet fearing to do so.

Doctor Death chuckled.

"It is where I incubate my elementals," he said. "They require the darkness—foul, unclean places. They come from nowhere—from beyond the veil—fearful, loathsome things, viewing all humanity with an unquenchable hatred. Yet I am their master and so you need have no fear of them. They come only when I call and the aura of my protection surrounds you like a mantle. The very air inside here is filled with them. At a word from me they would cover the earth. Within a year life would be extinct, living as they do upon vitality. But there are other wonders. Let us go."

AGAIN he led the way down the wide aisle to another great cavern. A bat fluttered past them, almost brushing Holm with its great wings. The place was dreadful, uncanny. Yet so strong was Death's hold over Holm that he had no fear.

Then, as Death touched a hidden switch in the wall, the semi-darkness was dispelled and he gazed up on the weirdest, most ungodly sight that human eyes ever rested upon.

"Skeletons!" he exclaimed. "Human bones! Dead bodies! A charnel house!" Death shrieked with laughter.

"Bones! Bones!" he chortled. "Millions of bones! All that remains of strong men and fair women. In their day many of them achieved prominence. Others were but common clay. Yet here they lie—preacher and harlot, honest man and thief,

society women and creatures of the streets—upon a common level."

He pointed to a great pile of bones. It extended almost to the ceiling. Even as he spoke a bat brushed against it. A dozen skulls came tumbling down, leaping and bounding. One of them brought up with a crash against Holm's feet. Death kicked it contemptuously aside.

"The ancient and the modern," he gurgled. "Once this great cave was the burial place of a great nation—a race that must have existed before the Mound Builders. When I found this place, I put my Zombi to work bringing other bodies here—the bones of modern men and women. I needed them. And of what avail are marble tombs and costly sepulchers to one whose life is extinct? Now here they lie in a common heap."

He gazed at the pile of skulls speculatively.

"I discovered this cave by accident," he went on. "Where do you think it is located? The entrance is through my residence. My house is a scant quarter mile from Lake View cemetery. But why, I hear you ask, do I mention this? Come, I will show you."

He led the way into another cavern. Then, as Holm stared wide-eyed, he understood the answer to the question.

All along the walls were piled other dead bodies—newly dead: some of them seemed barely to have parted with this life with no signs of dissolution having set in. Men and women, clad in the ceremonies of the grave, were stacked, like cordwood, as high as the arm could reach. Zombi, straight-faced, glassy-eyed, were constantly bringing more in, placing them in fresh piles.

Doctor Death was speaking.

"It is thus that I recruit my Zombi," he said. "A Zombi, as you are perhaps aware, is a soulless human corpse, still dead, but taken from the grave and endowed by sorcery with a mechanical sem-

Animated Corpses, Knowing Only The Will Of The Doctor, Are Deadlier Than The Worst Humans, Because They Cannot Be Killed!

blance of life. It is a dead body that is made to walk and act and move as if it were alive. People who have the power to bring this about—and there are few, I assure you—must obtain a body from a fresh grave before it has had time to rot, and galvanize it into movement by the power of thought.

"I am anticipating the future. When the time comes that all mechanical activity ceases, there will be need—for a time at least—for additional labor. It will be hard for man to adjust himself to changing conditions. Nor is it the Creator's desire that humanity should become a race of slaves. These Zombi, then, must do the drudgery."

He took his battered pipe from his pocket and filled it thoughtfully.

"But not every dead person can be made Zombi," he explained, striking a match and applying it to the tobacco. "In fact, there is not one out of fifty thousand that can be so changed. I must, therefore, experiment on many before I succeed. And where is there a better place to obtain the dead bodies than in a cemetery?"

He chuckled reminiscently.

"So my Zombi search the graveyards nightly," he went on. "They bring all of the newly dead here. At my leisure, I work with these bodies, constantly augmenting my army of Zombi. I already have several hundred at my command.

"And there is still another use for these carcasses." His brow clouded as he spoke. "My elementals. Ah, my friend, there is my problem. Elementals, as you are probably aware, must draw their sustenance from humans. Obviously, it would be unfair for me to turn loose upon the human race this horde of creatures from behind the veil. Yet I cannot allow them to starve—and starve they will unless I can secure for them a certain amount of human vitality. And when they are hungry, they are unruly.

"Death," he went on, "is a slow process. We say a man is dead when the last breath leaves his body and when his heart has ceased to beat. Not so. For hours, days—sometimes even weeks and months—the

soul still lingers about the form of clay it has quitted as if reluctant to leave its earthly home. And surrounding the body, then, is an aura of vitality. It is upon this vitality that I let my elementals feast.

"You saw John Stark," he went on. "My elementals were half starved. They fell upon him, sucking him dry. For Stark, my friend, was not Zombi when he walked and talked to Inspector Ricks. He is not the stuff of which Zombi are made. He was simply obeying an impulse that I had implanted in his brain just as he passed away. He responded to my commands. Then, this done, my will ceased to rule his body and he became, once more a dead thing.

"But come," he ended abruptly. "I have shown you enough wonders for one time. And we have much work to do."

CHAPTER IX

Attack of the Zombi

"TONIGHT," said Doctor Death at the dinner table, "I will unleash the forces of hell against the world. Doctor Karl Munson must die. I had thought that, perhaps, there had been enough deaths—that those who are in high places would take warning. Instead, the wheels of industry continue to spin as they have spun in the past. There is no let up. The police, according to the papers, have merely doubled the guards about the men who have made this possible and have increased their activity in searching for me. I must strike again."

They were dining in a huge room just across the passage from the library. It too, Holm guessed, was built inside the cave. The walls, apparently of concrete, were paneled, while the ceiling was beamed. They had completed their repast, the plates had been whisked away by the solemn-faced Zombi. Now Death, toying with his wine, leaned back in his chair and surveyed his two assistants quizzically through the haze of cigar smoke that surrounded him.

Nina Ferrera shuddered. She raised her

glass to her crimson lips and sipped deeply. Holm noticed that the jeweled fingers with which she held the thin stem trembled.

"Is it necessary?" she asked. "Can't it be postponed?"

Death shrugged his shoulders.

"I have warned them enough," he said gruffly.

Holm turned to Nina.

"You have been with the doctor long?" he questioned.

It seemed to him that it was ages before she answered. Yet the same enigmatical smile that he had noticed before hovered around her mouth as she made reply.

"For years," she said finally. "I was formerly his secretary. Later—when he decided upon his present course—I became his assistant."

"She helped me plan it, in fact," Death said musingly. "Her assistance has been invaluable."

Holm imagined that the girl shuddered again. She gazed at him queerly as the aged scientist leaned forward and looked him squarely in the eyes.

"I will need your assistance tonight," he said. "You are quite willing to aid me?"

"Quite willing," Holm responded.

Nina Ferrera rose slowly to her feet. For an instant Holm gazed at her, imagining that she was about to speak. Then, with another shudder, she turned away and left the two men alone.

INSPECTOR JOHN RICKS was sitting alone in his office when the telephone suddenly rang. Shifting his cigar, he leaned forward and picked the receiver from the hook.

"Yes!" he snapped.

The reply that came back to him caused him to sit up with a jerk.

"This is Doctor Death!" said a cold metallic voice. "My warnings have been in vain. The world still goes on as usual. Tonight I strike again. Doctor Karl Munson will, as I told you, be the next. It would please me if you would double your guards about him and invite the newspaper

men to be present. And, as an added feature, will you please take command yourself . . ."

The metallic voice suddenly died away. Ricks leaped to his feet with an oath, galvanized into action. Jiggling the hook up and down for an instant, he placed the receiver to his ear again.

"Trace that call!" he commanded of the officer at the switchboard.

"What call, sir?" the other demanded.

"The call that just came to me, you idiot!" Ricks shouted.

The switchboard operator gulped.

"I beg your pardon, sir, but there was no call," he answered. "There hasn't been a call for the past ten minutes. I—"

But Ricks had hung up with an oath.

From every direction policemen were moving toward the palatial home of Doctor Karl Munson, American's number one scientist and the man marked for assassination by the sinister being who called himself Doctor Death. Sirens shrieked and rent the air with their raucous wails. Motorcycle policemen halted traffic and patrolled the streets for blocks in every direction. Little squads of blue-clad men filled the yard, the alley, the side streets.

Inside the spacious drawing room Detective Inspector Ricks sat, revolver drawn, by the side of the white-faced scientist. With him, coldly alert, was the Commissioner himself, summoned from a theater party to see that no stone was left unturned. The room was filled with uniformed policemen and detectives all armed to the teeth. In the hall stood two sergeants, a box of tear bombs on the little table before them.

"This is once that the devil will be foiled," Ricks growled. "He made a mistake in telling me what he intended doing."

Munson's teeth chattered.

"Nevertheless, I must confess that I am frightened," he said whimsically. "I feel like a condemned man must feel just before the execution."

"Brace up," Commissioner Quigly said kindly. "I have personally gone over the defenses. Nothing has been left undone.

*In the face of bullets and clubs, the
Zombi advanced, crushing all in their
path.*



Even the other houses in the block have been searched. Their occupants have been sent away. The rooms are filled with guards. A thousand armed men are within a block of us, all waiting for a chance to get a shot at this fiend. A fly couldn't get through the cordon that we have placed around you."

"Is there nothing else that we can do?" Munson asked, his voice quivering.

Ricks glanced at him contemptuously. Because there was no fear in his own make-up, he loathed it in others.

"We've got every available man on the force here now," he growled. "Do you think we ought to have the regular army, too?"

"Yes-s," Munson gulped. "If this creature is what reports say he is, even that would not suffice. I feel—feel, gentlemen—that I am as good as dead."

"Bunk!" Ricks roared. "Leave it to the police!"

EVEN as he spoke there was a shot. He leaped to his feet with a startled exclamation and rushed to the window. Then another shot. Shouts! A fusillade!

"My God!" he exclaimed, gazing out at the panorama that spread before him.

Down the sidewalk marched a group of men. There were half a hundred of them at least—strange-acting, peculiar things, their faces white and pasty, their eyes staring straight to the front. They walked with a slow, jerky motion, lifting their feet carefully, their legs acting as if hinged. From another direction came a second group. The sound of shots at the rear of the house told him that still a third party was there.

His men were firing rapidly, turning loose a hail of lead from machine guns, rifles and revolvers. The bullets had no more effect on the oncoming horde than the spray from a hose. Tear bombs were thrown. But still the strange, weird beings came forward. He saw a bullet strike the head of one of them—saw the black mark that appeared on the white, putty-like skin as the slug entered. The thing

staggered, thrown off balance, then straightened itself and continued its onward march.

They made no movement in defense. Instead, they walked with arms hanging stiffly by their sides, charging steadily forward like a tank upon a battlefield. The policemen fell back, firing as they ran. And still the horde pressed on.

Now they were inside the yard. The policemen grouped to meet them. They plowed through the massed ranks of the bluecoats like a football team on a scrimmage field.

"You can't kill 'em!" a sweating policeman shouted up to his superior. "They are like putty. Bullets bounce off from them, curse 'em! What the hell are we going to do?"

"Club 'em!" Ricks shouted. "Give 'em the wood. Knock 'em over. And stop giving ground, damn you! Stand up and fight 'em like men!"

"You can't fight dead men," the bluecoat retorted doggedly. Nevertheless he turned to the others.

"At 'em with the wood, the boss says!" he shouted, dragging his own club from its holster.

Ricks heard the dull thud of wood as it crashed against flesh and bone. Some of them went down. But they got up immediately, fell in behind the others. And always their advance continued.

Clomp! Clomp! Clomp! They were on the porch now. They swarmed into the house, pressing the bluecoats back by sheer weight.

"It's ghosts we're fighting," a policeman shouted as he hurled his club into a pasty face and broke for cover.

They were in the room. Ricks fired his last shell, then dropped his gun and charged at the oncoming horde like an angry bull. The dead things went down like tenpins before his mad rush. They arose and continued coming. He was trampled on, crushed beneath the weight of their feet. He caught a glimpse of the Commissioner, his dress coat torn from his back, his white shirt in shreds, battling like a fiend.

In the background Munson cowered in a corner. They were on him now . . . Dead hands encircled his throat . . . He shrieked . . .

When Ricks recovered consciousness the Department doctor was working over him. The house was filled with bruised and maimed bluecoats. They were scattered about like wounded men on a battlefield. In one corner the Commissioner lolled back in a big overstuffed chair, his clothes nearly torn from his muscular body.

On the floor lay Professor Karl Munson, America's greatest scientist. His eyes protruded from his head. His tongue lolled from his mouth. His face was mottled and black.

Doctor Death had kept his word.

Ricks pointed at the body, too horrified for utterance. The great form was losing its shape. The skin was growing wrinkled and parchment-like—like a lemon that has been sucked of all its juices . . .

There was a chill in the air—a feeling of horror and loathsomeness. They sensed some sinister thing about them. A sturdy bluecoat, dying, gasped and struggled, his huge hands clutching at his throat.

"It's got me!" he shrieked. "For God's sake, take it away. I feel its . . . arms about . . . me . . . Sucking me . . . dry . . . Drawing the life and vitality . . . from me . . ."

He died, shrieking and struggling like a man who sees himself on the brink of hell.

And over everything was a peculiar odor—the horrible stench of death and decay. It choked them—overpowered them . . .

CHAPTER X

Public Enemy No. 1

"PUBLIC Enemy Number one!"

The words glared at Doctor Death from the newspaper. They were printed a second time beneath his picture. "*Scientist Is Evidently Crazy*," they said. Professor Rance Mandarin scowled. To be branded as the arch-enemy of mankind was bad

enough; to be dubbed insane was worse. It was something that he had not anticipated.

"Orders were issued today to every police agency in the country to get Doctor Rance Mandarin, alias, Doctor Death."

He crumpled the newspaper angrily.

"The devil! The clever, clever devil!" he snarled.

"Eh?"

Jimmy Holm looked up, a perplexed look on his face.

The old man's mood changed. His face lighted up with a smile.

"I merely remarked that your Inspector Ricks is a very clever man," he said quietly.

"Ricks?" Holm's face wore a quizzical expression. "The name has a familiar ring about it. Yet I do not seem to remember anyone by that name."

"You worked for him—once," Doctor Death said with a low chuckle.

It was as he had said. Inspector John Ricks was the man who had pointed the finger of suspicion in his direction and had definitely linked him up as being the sinister Doctor Death. Identification was the one contingency that Mandarin had not anticipated. He imagined that he had left nothing undone. Yet Inspector Ricks had uncovered him.

For days the search for Doctor Death had gone on relentlessly. Spurred on by the press, the police of the nation had waged a war such as they had never fought before. Petty politics, graft—everything was forgotten in the frenzied search for the mysterious killer who called himself Death.

The underworld had been combed. Men were being arrested by the hundreds, only to be turned loose again for lack of evidence. The newspapers had assigned their best men to the case. Everything else was forgotten in this, the biggest piece of news that had come their way in a lifetime. The presses couldn't keep up with the demand for news.

The President had taken a personal hand in the affair. Under his direction the cream of the Secret Service and the best

men of the Department of Justice had been called in from important cases and put to work on this, the sensation of the century. Postoffice Inspectors were assigned to it to the sacrifice of everything else. Even the narcotic men and such prohibition agents as were left had been ordered to drop their work and give the regular police their assistance.

COMMISSIONER CANFIELD, head of Scotland Yard's Big Four, had come to America to assist his fellow detectives on this side of the Atlantic. The Paris *Sûreté* had sent Hercule Bloc, its star operative, on the lame assumption that a Frenchman might be at the bottom of the affair. Germany and Italy had loaned their best men. For, they argued, if the wheels of industry were closed in America, the whole world would suffer.

Yet, in spite of all this array of brains, it was Inspector Ricks, the least scientific of them all, who had finally settled upon the man and set the pack aright. And his discovery was due more to accident than to deductive ability.

Yet it was deduction, nevertheless, that had brought about the solution of the problem. The capture of Doctor Death had become an obsession with Inspector Ricks. Day and night it was never off his mind. The bringing into the case of the star operatives of the nation and the world irked him, angered him.

"I'll beat them all," he growled to himself in the solitude of his own office. "I'll beat them all. But how? That's the question: how?"

For the thousandth time he went over every detail of the case in search of what the Scotland Yarders call "the essential clue." Suddenly it came to him.

"Some scientific sharp is jealous of the rest of them," he said, sitting suddenly erect. "The question is—who?"

He jammed one of the many buttons on his desk. A sergeant responded.

"Beat it to the public library and get me a copy of *Who's Who in the World of Science and Invention*," he commanded.

The book spread out on the desk before him, he had carefully, painstakingly checked off the names Stark, Munson, Bosworthy, Spafford, Whipple, Hamilton, Drexell, Henworthy, Munz, Darrow, Peabody, Hallover—and several score of others—all were there. Looming at the head of the list—a leader in many lines—was the name of Doctor Rance Mandarin. Mandarin, he remembered with a start, had not been among those whose frenzied appeals for help had come his way.

"Now why the hell hasn't he received a letter?" Ricks asked himself.

Picking up the telephone, he put in a call for Sneed, head of the Sneed string of newspapers.

"Who the dickens is Doctor Rance Mandarin?" he demanded, once the newspaper magnate was on the wire, "and where is he? Where does he live and what does he do?"

"Your first question is easily answered," the newspaper man replied. "You've probably heard of him, but can't place him. He's the world's greatest occultist. Years ago he occupied the chair of psychology at Yale. Left that to go on a lecture tour. Traveled in Egypt and India and studied occult science with the best of them. Afterwards—"

"Hell's bells! *Who's Who* tells all that!" Ricks roared. "Where is he now? What's he doing and where does he live?"

For a moment there was silence at the other end of the wire.

"I'll have to find out," the newspaper man finally cut in. "You don't think, do you, Ricks, that he's—"

"It doesn't pay to think in my business," Ricks interrupted. "I'm just a dumb copper and coppers are not paid to think. Get me the dope and ring me back."

Half an hour later the information came across the wire that Doctor Rance Mandarin had sailed for Egypt several weeks before, accompanied by his secretary, one Miss Nina Ferrera. State Department officials confirmed the information. A passport had been issued to each of them.

But, said the Egyptian government when

appealed to, no such persons had landed in Egypt. A search of the passenger lists of the larger boats sailing for Egypt had disclosed the two of them as booking passage on the *Transatania*. The ships' officers remembered them; they had landed at Alexandria. Where, then, had they gone?

Someone remembered a small boat that had been waiting at the dock. It had sailed within an hour after the *Transatania* had docked. A man and woman answering the description of Mandarin and his secretary had been seen going aboard. The Alexandrian police so reported to Inspector Ricks. And Ricks, wise old man hunter that he was, nodded his head and issued several hasty orders. Whereupon the detective bureau, which had already been stirred to a pitch of frenzy, was galvanized into renewed activity.

is linked with this," Jimmy Holm said, gazing down at the picture on the printed page from which the beautiful eyes of Mandarin's secretary smiled back at him.

The old man nodded.

"True," he said. "But, when the time comes that the world is free, these papers will be priceless because they will show martyrdom at the start."

He read the description of himself aloud, chuckling at some of the phrases.

"It had to come some time," he said.

"Yet I had hoped to stave it off. I presume that it is natural to fight the inevitable, just as we, knowing that death is only around the corner, cling to life as long as we can. Nevertheless, it was careless of me to leave that torn letter in the wastebasket. However, water that has gone over the dam cannot be recalled. It

**"It Will Be Necessary To Remove Ricks," The Doctor Said.
Jimmy Nodded. "Ricks Must Go."**

That night Inspector Ricks, armed with a search warrant, headed a party of picked men which surrounded the residence of Doctor Rance Mandarin. Receiving no response to their repeated rings, they broke in. The place was deserted.

In the bottom of an overturned wastebasket was a bit of paper. It was only a scrap, torn half across and thrown away—a part of a letter written weeks before and for some reason, never mailed.

But the paper on which it was typed was similar to that upon which had been written the letters signed by Doctor Death.

Experts in the department confirmed the evidence. The same typewriting machine that had written the Death letters had been used to type the words on the paper.

Whereupon Inspector Ricks issued his famous order—an order which went thundering over the wires to every city and hamlet in the civilized world:

"Get Doctor Rance Mandarin, alias Doctor Death!"

"Get Doctor Rance Mandarin, Public Enemy, Number One!"

"It is too bad that Miss Fererra's name

merely means that we must place more work on your shoulders since neither Miss Fererra nor I can show ourselves again until our noble purpose is achieved. But no; you, too, would be recognized. Now they believe you dead."

"Do you know anything of the science of metempsychosis?" he said, changing the subject abruptly.

The young detective nodded.

"It has to do with the transmigration of the soul, does it not?" he asked. "I seem to have read up on it at some time, but remember paying little attention to it."

"Probably thinking it the idle dream of a diseased mind," the old man chuckled. "Then let me enlighten you, Jimmy. Metempsychosis as a lost art has been revived. Several years ago while I was in Egypt, I had occasion to dabble in the subject a bit. It intrigued me. I searched the records. The ancient Egyptians were, as you are probably aware, experts in the Black Arts. Necromancy, sorcery, demonology, divination—all were as open books to them. But of all the arts, metempsychosis was developed to the highest degree."

He stopped suddenly. Leaning back in his chair he smoked in silence.

"There is no such thing as death," he said finally. "The Egyptians proved that. In the beginning the Creator made a certain number of souls—entities. There are just as many today as there was in the beginning—no more and no less. What we call death is merely a passing on. Metempsychosis is merely the borrowing of a body—a shell—just as we borrow an article of clothing. You and I can exchange bodies at will."

"Do you mean that?" Holm asked excitedly.

Doctor Death chuckled.

"You will have an opportunity of witnessing a demonstration—of taking a part in it—soon," he said. "For I tell you, thought is everything."

"You mean," Jimmy Holm said excitedly, "that I can be made to occupy the body of someone else—that they can occupy my shell at your command?"

Death nodded.

"Not alone that," he answered. "So strong is my power of concentration that I can remove my own soul, entity—call it what you will—and float through space. When I so desire, I can return and reoccupy my framework. That is why, sooner or later, I believe that I can stave off death. How? Merely by transferring my soul on and on and on. How would you like to live forever, Jimmy—forever with Nina by your side?"

Holm's jaw dropped.

"I—I do not understand," he said.

"Look at me!" Doctor Death commanded.

Holm looked up at him. The instant their eyes met, a peculiar feeling came over him. His head swam. He felt himself being drawn apart. He was sinking . . . sinking . . . sinking . . . Down through an endless void he seemed to drop . . .

He saw himself as in a mirror. He was sitting in a chair. Doctor Death was standing before him . . .

Something seemed to snap inside his

head. For an instant everything was blank. Then he found himself gazing into deep-set orbs of Doctor Death again.

"You see what I can do?" the old man said, chuckling.

"Sometime," he said, changing the subject abruptly, "I will be hailed as the savior of the world. And you and Nina will go down in history with me.

"But," he added as an afterthought, "this man, Ricks, is showing a brilliancy beyond my calculations. It will be necessary, I fear, to remove him from my path."

Jimmy Holm nodded assent.

"Ricks must go," he echoed.

CHAPTER XI

The Woman of It

THAT Nina Fererra and Jimmy Holm would fall in love was inevitable—as certain as fate itself. Both were young, susceptible and, thrown together as they were, nothing else could be expected. Wise though he was, skilled in the sciences and the higher arts, the machinations of the chubby little god, like the episode of the scrap of paper left in the wastebasket, was a contingency that Doctor Death had overlooked.

Following the assassination of Professor Munson came a long period of inactivity on the part of Death. For days at a time he locked himself in his room, holding converse with nobody, brooding in moody silence. He had expected this Munson coup to be the final one, believing that it would bring the world groveling at his feet. Instead, came the renewed activity of the police, then Inspector Ricks' broadcast that he, Doctor Rance Mandarin, was the sinister Doctor Death.

Insane though he undoubtedly was, his mind disordered from too much reasoning, the man was sincere—a fanatic. Like John Brown, he believed that he had a mission—that an All-seeing Creator had sent him to this earth to do certain things and that the mantle of sanctification made it impossible for him to commit a wrong.

And so, brooding, thinking, his mind seemingly in another world, he wandered about by himself, seldom eating, saying little, his eyes wearing a strange, far-away look.

During these periods of inactivity he would spend days and even nights in his gloomy caves, caring for his *fungi* or, in all probability, communing with the spirits of his strange, weird gods. Jimmy Holm and Nina Ferrera were thrown constantly into the company of each other. Occasionally the old man would lay out work for them to do—experiments in the laboratory, the bringing up to date of his notes. But for the most part, he left them to their own devices.

Yet not a word of love was spoken by either of them.

It was one evening when, wearied by a hard day in the laboratory that Nina Ferrera, half asleep on the couch, with Holm seated close beside her reading, suddenly sat up with a startled gasp, her lithe body twitching nervously, a strange fear clouding the loveliness of her amber-colored eyes.

"Oh!" she said in a suppressed scream.

"Dreaming?" Holm asked, looking up from his book.

Another shudder rocked her slim figure and, for an instant, she shook as from a chill.

Rising, she seated herself on a stool at the feet of the man she loved.

"Jimmy," she said shudderingly, "it was a warning. You've got to cut it out—leave before it is too late."

Holm gazed at her wonderingly.

"Leave?" he said quizzically. "I—I don't understand. What do you mean, Nina?"

For an instant she made no reply, her liquid eyes wearing a strange, far-away look.

"Ricks," she said in a hushed, awed whisper. "It was of him that I dreamed. He was pursuing you. He caught you. I saw them leading you to the electric chair. I—it was then that I woke up. It was a warning, I tell you."

"Ricks?" he said questioningly. "The detective? What have I to do with him? The name is strangely familiar, as I told Doctor Death. He said that I once worked for him."

"You mean then that—that you cannot remember?" she interrupted.

"Nothing. My past is a complete blank. You know that."

She nodded. Then she leaned forward, her slim, white hands clasping his knee, her face upturned to his.

"You were his assistant—once," she said. "Death captured you, caused you to forget—made you a traitor to those who fought by your side. Your hands are clean—now. Tomorrow they may not be. Think—think hard. Try to remember."

HOLM'S face twisted into a troubled frown.

"I seem to have some recollection of a past life," he said. "Whenever the name of Ricks is mentioned it strikes a responsive chord in my subconscious mind. I have noticed the same strange stirring within me when I read certain things in the papers. Yet, try as I will, I cannot remember.

"From the day, a few weeks ago, that I found myself here, my mind is a blank. He—Death—mentions things to me—things that he says happened in the past—probably to test me. It is as if I were hearing of someone else—some stranger. Even things that happen here—now—I forget them, it seems. I seem to live only a day at a time, knowing nothing of the past and caring naught for the morrow. Really it is a happy condition."

Her eyes clouded.

"You remember what he wants you to remember and forget that which he wants you to forget," she said sadly.

Rising, she stepped across to the table and, picking up a cigarette, lighted it with fingers that trembled slightly. Then she pulled up a chair and seated herself again.

"You've got to go," she said with finality. "Death is planning another coup—a coup so monstrous, so gigantic that

the whole world will tremble at his name—a thousand times more than they do now. You will be forced to assist him.”

“Doctor Death is a great man,” Holm answered parrot-like. “He is the world’s greatest scientist, the—”

“Bosh!” she snapped. “He is a half-crazed old dotard with the ability to do things that the average man cannot do. I frankly admit his ability as an occultist. But his learning has driven him insane. Can’t you see that? Don’t you understand it?”

He looked at her strangely.

“I—I do not understand,” he said.

“You were a leader in the movement to stop him,” she went on inexorably. “Instead of halting his career of crime, you fell a victim to his wiles—thanks to me,” she ended bitterly.

Jimmy Holm leaned forward excitedly, his face twitching with emotion.

“You?” he gasped. “Thanks to you! What do you mean?”

“I mean,” she said, speaking distinctly, making every word count, “that I, the tool of Doctor Death, lured you here so that he might use you. I did not know you—then—Jimmy. And, too, my hands are tied as your hands are tied. I could not help myself. Will you forgive me?”

“I have nothing to forgive,” he responded. “I am happy here, Nina, with you and him.”

SHE doubled her little fists in her excitement.

“But you must go! *Must*, I say. You must tell Ricks everything—everything that you can remember. This thing—this monstrous, awful crime against civilization must be stopped.”

She stopped suddenly and held up her finger for silence.

“He is outside,” she said. “I feel his presence. I am as psychic as he. My power in some ways is greater than his and yet I am his slave.”

Her eyes glistened with tears. She dried them hastily and lighted another cigarette.

The door opened and Doctor Death

entered. There was a strange, insane glitter in his eyes and his body trembled feverishly as he faced them.

“My mind is made up,” he exclaimed harshly. “I strike tonight, at midnight, when graveyards yawn and tombs give up their dead. I have given the world fair warning. There are ten more left. They die in a body—die, I tell you, every one of them. The world shall learn that Doctor Death must be obeyed. It will be the final warning. If it has no effect, then I will turn loose every devil at my command. The entire world of science will be wiped out at a single stroke.”

He paced the floor excitedly, his pipe glowing, his whole body tense with suppressed activity.

“I shall have need of both of you!” he snapped. “Hold yourselves in readiness—at the stroke of twelve. Meanwhile, you must rest. As for myself, I have much work yet to do—many preparations to make.”

Whirling on his heel, he strode from the room.

For a moment neither of them spoke. Then Nina leaned forward.

“It must be tonight—of all nights,” she said excitedly. “You must go, Jimmy. Go back and take the leadership again. Fight to throw off this horrible thing that he has placed upon you and resume your place in the world. It is up to you to save the nation—the world.”

Jimmy Holm seized her white fingers in his own big hand.

“And you will go with me,” he said.

She shook her head sadly.

“You—do not understand,” she said in a whisper. “My place is with him. I am tied to him by bonds that death alone can sever. But you—can’t you understand, Jimmy? It’s because I love you that—that I’m asking you to do this—to save yourself?”

Jimmy Holm shook his head. Placing his arm around her slim shoulders he drew her to him. And she did not resist.

“If you stay, I stay,” he said stubbornly.

He pressed his lips to hers.

For a moment she yielded, returning kiss for kiss, embrace for embrace.

"You love me so much?" she said brokenly.

He nodded. Then he kissed her again.

"I love you," he said hoarsely. "Love you, Nina, as a man has never loved a woman before. I won't leave you."

For a moment she nestled to him. Then the same enigmatical smile hovered over her face. She drew away from him.

"We have no time to lose," she whispered, glancing down at her wrist watch. "It is already past ten. And he will strike, he said, at midnight. My thoughts will be your thoughts for the nonce. My mind will fight against his mind. To a certain extent I can restore this stolen memory of yours—help you to find yourself. But only to a certain point can I go. The rest you must do for yourself. Come!"

Hand in hand, they stole like shadows from the room.

In the white enameled laboratory which Mandarin called his study, he was bending over a test tube, his brow furrowed in thought. Close beside him stood one of the strange, weird living dead men whose master he was.

He did not look up as they passed the door.

CHAPTER XII

Vassals of Death

INSPECTOR RICKS sitting alone in his office, a half-smoked cigar between his teeth, his eyes closed in meditation, looked up as the door of the outer office crashed open and a man and woman rushed in. He leaped to his feet, his eyes bulging, his huge jaw dropping.

"Jimmy Holm!" he gasped. "Am I seeing a ghost? Where have you been? We imagined that you were dead—wiped out like the rest of them. We—"

"I've no time for explanations!" Holm snapped. "He—Death—strikes tonight—at midnight. It will be wholesale slaughter—a massacre!"

"God! We must stop him!"

Ricks' fingers leaped to the row of buttons on his desk—the buttons that would summon a small army to his aid. A small hand was laid on his arm, restraining him.

"Wait!" she snapped. "What is your plan?"

"Call out the reserves," he snapped. "I'll put all of these men under guard—"

"As you guarded Munson."

"Humph!" Ricks growled. "Why rub it in?"

"To call your men would be useless," she went on. "Ordinary methods will not do in fighting this man. There are other things. You have a list of those he has sent threatening letters to. Put your men to calling them. Center upon a church and have them come to it. Have it open so that they can get as close to the altar as possible—"

"Who are you?" Ricks questioned, half angrily. "You appear to give orders rather freely."

"I am Nina Ferrera," she answered.

"Nina Ferrera!"

He took a step forward. "Then I arrest you—"

"Cut out the foolishness, Inspector," Holm snarled. "Miss Ferrera is here to help us."

"But she is wanted. There is a warrant for her arrest—"

"All right," the girl said wearily. "That can come in good time. Our task now is to save these men." She glanced down at her wrist watch. "We have less than half an hour left. Some of them are probably a long distance away from any sacred place. Don't you—won't you understand that you are dealing with a power greater than that of any human?"

For an instant Ricks was nonplussed. He dropped into a chair, motioning the other to do likewise.

"I—I have had enough experience with this devil who calls himself Death to realize the truth of your remarks," he said slowly. "Yet, at the same time—"

He stopped and gazed at Holm quizzically.

"Explain yourself!" he commanded.

"You are Inspector Ricks, are you not?" Holm asked.

The Inspector looked at him savagely.

"You know damned well that I am," he snarled. "Why ask such a question?"

"Because," Holm answered, "I am not sure whether I am Jimmy Holm or someone else. I have no recollection of you, although there is a vague, familiar look about you. Your name is on the door. They say I worked for you. If so, from the moment I left this office a few weeks ago, my memory ceased—thanks to the machinations of this man who calls himself Death—"

"Doctor Rance Mandarin," Ricks interrupted.

"Doctor Rance Mandarin," Jimmy acquiesced. "He threw me into a condition of amnesia—dulling my brain so that I knew nothing and know nothing now save what he has allowed me to know. This girl, his assistant once—but no more, thank God!—came to my rescue. To a certain extent her thoughts are my thoughts. She has never seen you, so she cannot be certain that you are Inspector Ricks."

"Well, I'm damned!" Ricks ejaculated.

"It was she who pleaded with me, asking me to come to you, not only to save myself from becoming more deeply involved, but to prevent the wholesale slaughter of the nation's brainiest men—"

RICKS gazed at Nina Fererra quizzically.

"Thanks, young lady," he said briefly. "Perhaps I was a bit abrupt. But I'm a common, everyday policeman. This occult stuff has got me beat. I'm much obliged to you for bringing Jimmy back—although the story would have sounded like hokey to me a few months before—until I ran afoul of this rascal who calls himself Doctor Death."

"For God's sake, listen to me!" Nina Fererra interrupted.

Ricks nodded.

"You can't hurry a policeman," he said. "Now what's this about churches and the like?"

"You must get them into some sacred place—immediately," Nina Fererra said breathlessly, driving home her words with her slim forefinger. "Remember, here is no ordinary mortal, but a devil incarnate—a man who believes that he has a mission and who will leave no stone unturned to carry it out. Tonight—at midnight—all the forces at his command will be turned loose. The fiends of hell will be unleashed. Get them—these condemned men—get them, I say, into churches, as close to the altar as possible.

"Summon every churchman—every preacher, every priest, every rabbi—that you can find on this short notice. Put a dozen—a hundred men—to telephoning if possible. Have these holy men surround the condemned, crucifixes in hand, throwing the protection of God's mantle over them. Let them pray in unison. They will be surrounded by evil on all sides. Warn them that, whatever they see, they—these men of God—need have no fear. Death's fiends will not touch them. But you must move fast."

Ricks jerked the telephone receiver from the hook and roared his commands into the mouthpiece.

"St. John's church!" the girl said, a sudden thought coming to her. "I remember that there is a splinter from the true cross there. Have them gather there. That holy relic will help and every bit of assistance that can be secured will be needed."

Ricks nodded and continued issuing his commands. The task completed, he turned to the girl again.

"Hamilton and Munz?" he said. "Both of them live too far away to get here in time."

For a second she thought deeply, her

"The Forces Of Evil Are Gathering For Battle. See Ominous Looking Clouds With The Strange Colors."

shapely white teeth biting into her lower lip.

"There is only one thing for them to do," she said, her face paling. "Let them get to sanctified ground and stay there until daylight comes. I doubt if even that will save them, but it may help to a certain extent."

His work completed, Ricks dropped back into his chair again and mopped the perspiration from his steaming face.

"You? You will go with us?"

Jimmy Holm looked at Nina Ferrera.

"If you so desire," she said in answer to his unspoken question. "In fact, it would be my wish. I have no fear for myself. But Jimmy—Doctor Death is liable to wreak his vengeance on him. He, too, must be given a place in safety. He means more to me than all the others combined. Remember, Inspector, that Jimmy is still under the sinister influence of this weird man. He must be restrained—kept in a place of security at any cost until the storm has passed. Let that be a part of my bargain with you."

Ricks nodded agreement.

"And Doctor Death?" he snapped. "Would not this be the time to get him?"

Nina Ferrera smiled.

"It is evident that you do not know Doctor Death in spite of your recent encounter with him," she said. "Neither you nor your entire command could reach him tonight. A thousand unseen forces will be surrounding him, guarding him at every hand. As well try to capture the devil himself as this sinister being. Later, perhaps, when he is resting and sleeping—for he does rest and sleep like all ordinary men—you may be able to catch him off his guard. But tonight it would be useless."

"The preachers?" Ricks growled. "What's the big idea of them? I'd rather trust myself with a single squad of my flatfeet than a regiment of sky pilots."

Nina Ferrera smiled in spite of her anxiety.

"It is apparent that you are not psychic, Inspector Ricks," she answered. "Perhaps I

can illustrate: Giving forth a current of evil and sinking from that current of evil into a state of bestial ignorance, man has enveloped himself in clouds of darkness which provide a dwelling place for these elementals. To disperse these, his own spiritual mind must send forth the light reflected from sources of light—omniscience.

"The average man, intent only upon the pursuit of the almighty dollar, has given little or no attention to this source of light. But the man of God walking with his head in the clouds thinks not of this life, but of the one beyond. Therefore, he is safe from the attacks of the powers of the darkness. And by his holiness he can protect others. Have I made myself clear?"

Ricks shook his head sadly.

"No," he said bluntly.

"Every evil thought of man passes into another world the instant that it is evolved," she went on hurriedly. "It becomes an active entity by associating itself with an elemental. Thus Doctor Death, or Rance Mandarin, if you will, has by his power of thought conjured these foul things out of the darkness. It will take the united thoughts of spiritual men—many of them—to ward off the evil which this one man has done. Now do you understand?"

Ricks' face was a study.

"I—I guess so," he said finally. "In any event," he added hastily, looking at his watch, "it's time to go. You will kindly come along."

IT was an order rather than a request.

The girl nodded. The blank look on Jimmy's face indicated that he had not yet succeeded in orienting himself to what was transpiring. He was the center of a gigantic plot, one of its working parts, yet so dulled was his intellect for the time being that he failed to recognize it. But Nina Ferrera! It was she who ordered, and he knew that he loved her. Therefore, he would obey her commands.

"We must hurry," she said to Ricks. He nodded.

Outside the air was split with the shriek of sirens and the howls of horns as the police reserves rushed to the post of action. Ricks' car was waiting at the door, its motor softly purring. They stepped inside and he gave the order. It glided out onto the smooth pavement and down the street in the wake of the others.

The sky was filled with peculiar clouds—dark, ominous looking, tinged with a greenish-yellow. A feeling of hushed expectancy was in the air.

"The forces of evil are gathering for the battle," Nina Fererra said with a shudder, glancing up toward the heavens.

"Yeah," the matter-of-fact Ricks responded. "Looks like a thunderstorm to me."

CHAPTER XIII

The Elementals Attack

THE crowd around St. John's Cathedral was vast—almost terrifying in its size. Thousands of people were packed in the streets surrounding the big church. Curiosity seekers largely, brought to the spot by the police cars, they blocked traffic in every direction. Cars were tied up; after-the-theater crowds poured by the hundreds into the already jammed thoroughfares.

Around the subway kiosks the jam was so great that the people could get neither in nor out. Street cars stood in a solid line for blocks, their clanging bells adding to the noise and confusion. Taxi drivers, stalled, cursed and swore. Police clubbed and fought in an effort to get humanity to moving again.

A spirit of panic hovered over everything—a nervous tension, unexplainable, tense, strained. It was like a great army waiting for the zero hour. The crowd knew not what was coming, but there was a fear—a fear of the unknown.

"What if a fire were to break out now!" whispered one man to another, gazing

down from an elevated platform over the heads of the gigantic throng.

"Couldn't get the apparatus through," the other answered. "What's it all about, anyway?"

The other shook his head.

"I wonder, too," he said.

Inside the great cathedral was all light and color and activity. A midnight mass had just been celebrated. Now, grouped about the altar were half a dozen men—the world's leaders in science and invention. Churchmen of every denomination stood about them, crucifixes—the badges of their office—held aloft. For the moment theological differences had been forgotten; Protestant, Catholic and Jew had joined hands in an effort to thwart this evil that menaced the nation.

Ricks was the guiding spirit of it all. He stood in the center of the little group, giving his orders like a general on the field of battle. Beside him stood Nina Fererra and Holm. The former made her suggestions in a low voice to the big Inspector. Around them stood a picked squad of men, tall, broad-shouldered—giants all of them. Nina Fererra gazed at them admiringly.

"Husky brutes, eh?" Ricks said with a note of pride. "They would go to hell and back for me."

"If you filled the church with them they could not prevail against a single one of Doctor Death's weird monsters," she answered.

He shrugged his broad shoulders.

"I found that out when they tackled Munson," he said shortly.

The organ was softly pealing. Upon the altar lay the *Missal*. Acolytes sprinkled holy water upon the heads of the throng. The air was redolent with the pungent odor of incense. In a niche in which candles burned was a great glass case beneath which was a golden box in which lay a tiny piece of wood—a splinter from the true cross on which the Savior had died.

*Bong! Bong! Bong! Bong! Bong!
Bong! Bong! Bong! Bong! Bong! Bong!
Bong! . . .*

Twelve o'clock! Midnight!

The organ burst into a great swell of music—triumphal music. It ended with a crash as the organist, shrieking, ran out of the loft.

"Something touched me! Something cold! Clammy! It was like the finger of death!" she cried, throwing herself into the midst of the throng of clergy.

There was a shrieking, howling noise. The interior of the church was filled with a great wind. The candles blinked and fluttered. The temperature suddenly changed. Where it had been warm and comfortable, now the place was cold and chill.

An odor of death and decay assailed the nostrils. It was as if a tomb, long closed, had been suddenly opened.

Then the lights went out!

Even the candles were extinguished as a great puff of wind swept through the building. The great cathedral was as dark as a tomb.

"The crosses! Elevate the crosses!" Nina Fererra shrieked.

"The crosses! Elevate the crosses!" Ricks echoed in his booming bass.

The darkness was filled with eyes. They were on all sides. Great glaring eyes—gleaming eyes. They danced and gyrated, burning, it seemed, into the very souls of the brave men who stood protectingly about the little group at the altar.

Came another surge of hate. It was heavy, overpowering. It settled over them, almost stifling them.

Strange wild noises assailed the ears. They came from above, below, from all sides—squeaky, snarling noises. The sound of devils unleashed from the confines of hell.

Then, out of the darkness, came shapes. Sinister shapes, exaggerated, deformed, menacing. Things like shadowy men, faceless, grotesque, bloated, filled with evil. Formless faces out of which gleamed those horrible, malignant, glaring eyes filled with unbelievable fury.

From all sides they charged, these sinister things—charged and retreated, charged and retreated, spurred on by the tremendous will of the creature who called himself

Doctor Death. With inhuman speed they darted in, snarling, twisting back as they met the great ring of crosses, charging again. Each time they touched a crucifix it flashed forth sparks like two electric wires suddenly meeting.

Time after time they were hurled back—these sinister shapes—only to reform and charge again, squeaking, shrieking—filling the air with their malignancy, ever seeking for a tiny break in the ranks of the men who opposed them.

Then it came!

What happened? Who knows? Someone, weaker than the others, gave way. The ranks of the men of God broke. They fell back toward the altar.

THE sinister things closed in. A fresh surge of malignancy and hate enveloped the defenders. The air was filled with the raucous, triumphal squeaks of the elementals.

"Pray!" Nina Fererra shrieked. "Pray!"

Above the pandemonium her voice rang clear and true:

"Our Father which art in heaven . . ."

A man's voice took it up. Then another and another:

"Hallowed be Thy name. Thy Kingdom come. Thy Will be done. On Earth as it is in Heaven."

The great building rang with the thunder of the voices:

"Gives us each day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses."

The gleaming eyes were losing their power. The hideous, shapeless bodies were falling back . . .

" . . . as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation . . ."

It was the Lord's prayer intoned by half a thousand throats now. It roared through the cathedral like a psalm of victory.

" . . . but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen."

Then they were gone. Gone in a rush of malignancy and hate.

The lights came on.

From outside came shrieks! Curses! Groans! Men fought and battled with fist and fang—anything they could lay their hands on—in an effort to escape the surge of hate and malignancy that swept through the doors of the church like the back-draught of a fire. The sky was filled with black, sinister shapes—twisting, whirling, gyrating, malformed things in hideous caricature of human semblance. Their horrible mouthings rang out above the noise and tumult of the crowd. Mob spirit held full sway. The weak went down, crushed beneath the feet of the strong. The groans and shrieks of the wounded filled the air.

Over the wires came the story of another tragedy. The newspapers told it in their stories next day:

HAMILTON AND MUNZ
VICTIMS OF SHAPES

Automobile Magnate and Electrical Wizard.
Caught While Fleeing City.

Onlookers See Black, Formless Thing Settle
Over Doomed Men—Bodies Not Yet Re-
covered.

Ricks, the work of reforming his stalwart battalions ended, returned to his post of duty.

"I imagine, now that the first attack was a failure, that there will be no second one," he said, puffing heavily from his efforts. "It was a close squeak, though. And you, young lady, saved us. If it hadn't ben for your quickwittedness in starting that prayer, we'd all been goners by this time. Meantime—"

He stopped, his keen eyes gazing from side to side.

"Where did she go?" he demanded of Holm.

The young man looked at him dazedly.

"Go? Nina?" he said.

Ricks bellowed an order and a hasty search was made. But it was of no avail.

Nina Ferrera had disappeared.

Where had she gone? Someone re-

membered seeing her fitting through the crowd packed around the sacristy.

There was every indication that she had left voluntarily. But why?

CHAPTER XIV

Inside the Wizard's Lair

THEN hell broke loose. The clouds opened and the floods descended. Forked streaks of lightning split the sombre sky in every quarter; the rumble of thunder was incessant. Throughout the land elementals danced, cavorted and held ghoulish revelry, sweeping down over the nation in the form of hurricanes, cyclones and tornadoes—black, funnel-shaped devils, darker by far than the bleak skies—things with the vague, indistinct forms of men—men with widespread, flopping arms. They screeched and howled, uprooting trees, demolishing buildings, twisting, gyrating, leaving death and destruction in their wake.

And, inside the church, a madman raged. For Jimmy Holm was little better than insane when he found that Nina Ferrera was gone.

"We've got to find her!" he cried. "We've got to find her! Don't you understand what will happen when that fiend discovers that he was thwarted through her efforts? She did it for me, Ricks—for me. And it's up to me to save her!"

He had thrown off the lethargy that had marked his demeanor during the earlier part of the battle. Seemingly the hold that Death held over him had passed away and he was his old, normal self again—a fighting male battling for his mate. It came to him now that he loved this woman more than he had even imagined. To visualize her in the power of the aged scientist caused every nerve within him to tingle and come to the surface.

She was calling to him. Through the air came her voice. It beat upon his eardrums as plainly as if she stood by his side.

"Save me, Jimmy! Save me! Save

me, Jimmy! Doctor Death is trying to recapture my mind! Help me, Jimmy!"

And Jimmy Holm, hearing that voice, went berserk. It took a dozen men to hold him as he charged at the lines of police and clergy. Ricks, busy handling the tumult within and without the church, yet found time to argue with him.

"There is nothing that you can do now," he counseled. "With all this confusion—"

"She is with him!" Holm raged. "And I am the only man equipped mentally to cope with him. Give me a squad—even a single man—and I will beard him in his den."

Ricks pressed him into a chair.

"Sit there!" he roared. "I'll not be a party to you or any other man committing suicide. When this riot subsides, we'll go after him—you and I. Not until then."

Dawn was just breaking in the east when a dozen cars, filled with detectives armed to the teeth, closed in on the deserted house where Professor Rance Mandarin had made his home.

"He told me several times that the cave where he has his den is located beneath this house," Holm asserted. "I'm certain that I'm right, for I have a vague recollection of this place when Nina and I made our escape last night, although my memory of that mad flight is still somewhat confused. It is only since she disappeared that I have become my normal self again."

He stopped, his eyes lighting up.

"Her influence against his!" he exclaimed. "She is willing with all the power at her command that I should recover my memory. I sense it—feel it! God bless her; even in trouble, she is with me."

The great house was in darkness as the officers gathered in, covering every door.

"There is but one exit from the cave, he told me," Holm assured Ricks.

The plans were already made. The men rushed to their places. Then they charged. Ricks led the assault; it was his big shoulder that smashed in the door. It was he who led the dash through the empty rooms, Holm by his side. They were

empty. So far as they could ascertain, things were just as they were on the day the officers had made their last search. Even the wastebasket in which the vagrant scrap of paper had been found, still lay overturned on the floor beside the paper-littered desk.

They spent but little time on the main floor, however. After a perfunctory search, Ricks led the way to the cellar. Revolvers drawn, he and Holm stood in the center of the room while two skilled men, experts on hidden passages and locks, sounded the walls on every side. And, after half an hour's work, they were compelled to admit themselves baffled.

"We have been foiled again," Ricks growled.

HE was about to lead the way back upstairs when Holm suddenly laid a restraining hand on his arm.

"She has been here—lately," he said tensely. "I—I feel it. Wait."

For an instant they stood there while the young detective's keen eyes darted from place to place. Suddenly, with an excited cry, he darted forward.

On the floor, partly hidden behind a pile of boxes, and firewood was a woman's handkerchief. He held it up to the Inspector's gaze.

"Look!" he exclaimed.

In the corner was the letter "N."

"Nina's!" he said.

"But," Ricks argued, "that may have been dropped weeks—even months—ago. Living here with him as she did, she had the run of the house naturally."

Holm's face was drawn with excitement.

"The place is covered with dust," he said excitedly. "There is dust everywhere except on the floor. Isn't it probable that if it gathered elsewhere some of it would settle on the floor—the most logical place of all? And, too, there is no dust or dirt of any kind, on this handkerchief. If it had been here any length of time, it, too, would have gathered an accumulation of dirt. Note the top of these boxes, a thin coating everywhere."

Ricks let the beam of his flashlight play over the empty cartons.

"By George! You're right!" he exclaimed.

"And, too," Holm continued, "the odor of the strange, exotic perfume she uses still lingers on this bit of lace. Would such be the case had it been laying here all these weeks?"

FOR a moment no one spoke. Then Holm's quick eye discerned what appeared to be a narrow crack in the floor, just at the edge of one of the boxes. Seizing the carton, he shoved it to one side.

"Look!" he exclaimed.

In plain sight now was revealed the corner of a door in the floor.

A dozen husky policemen made short work of the pile of débris. Within a moment it had been moved. Where it had been were the outlines of a door of considerable proportions. To one side a ring was set in the stone. Holm seized it, but Ricks stopped him.

"Wait a minute," he said gruffly.

"If this man, Doctor Death, is down there—if the girl recently was taken through this door—if there's no other entrance, then how the devil did he get this pile of lumber and stuff back over it? Wizard though he is, he'd have to be the devil himself to be able to reach through solid stone to replace those obstructions."

His question was soon answered. For, as Holm applied his weight to the door and swung it open, revealing a dark, narrow opening into which an iron ladder led, one of the policemen gave a cry of alarm. Then his gun crashed. The report filled the cellar with its echoes.

From somewhere out of the darkness walked a Zombi. Gazing neither to left nor right, the walking dead man approached the opening with slow, mechanical steps and stood, hand on the door, ready to close it at the word of command.

"Leave it alone!" Holm cautioned. "It is dead."

"God!" Ricks whispered, gazing at the horrible creature that stood, staring

straight ahead, giving no heed to what was going on about it. "It's awful! Horrible!"

"Trained to do just that one thing—just as all of the others are trained to do certain things," Holm answered. "This one is the guardian of the door. As soon as we have entered, he will close it behind us and arrange the wood in place again. It knows nothing else; it is motivated only by the thoughts of its master."

He took the lead down into the black hole, Ricks and the others following close behind. As the last man disappeared in the darkness, the door fell behind them with a dull crash. They could hear the Zombi as he dragged the boxes and crates back into place.

It was a long, narrow dark hall in which they found themselves—a passageway apparently carved out of the solid rock and sloping steadily downward. They followed it. Finally they came to a steel door like that of a safe. It opened to their touch into a small chamber from which led half a dozen passages.

"Which way now?" Ricks inquired.

Holm scratched his head.

"I recall vaguely coming through this place," he answered. "But my impressions were so blurred—so indistinct—that I am confused."

The Inspector turned to the nearest door and cautiously opened it, allowing the beam of his light to play into every niche and corner.

"This is a *cul de sac*," he said. "It is through one of the other entrances that we must look for our man."

Holm jerked open another door.

"Quick!" he said. "This is the way. I remember it now. A surge of memory comes over me. It is Nina. She is calling me. She is inside there, somewhere—telling me to go back."

Ricks looked at him queerly.

"If I didn't know you so well, I'd think that you were turning yellow," he snapped.

For an instant there was silence. The other men gathered around their superiors, waiting for orders. Jimmy Holm shook his head sadly.



No one was safe from the diabolical rage of Doctor Death, after his warnings had been ignored.

"You don't understand, Inspector," he said finally. "I'm telling you that she is trying to warn us. There is danger ahead—serious danger. What it is, I don't pretend to know. But she knows and she is trying to tell us with all of the forces at her command that we will meet with trouble. We must watch ourselves—watch every turn. Remember, this man Death is not an ordinary criminal. He is a superman—a man who stands out even in the midst of the greatest man of our nation."

"Nevertheless," said Ricks stubbornly, "if I get the nippers on him, I'll bet ten dollars that he'll come like any other crook."

Shrugging his shoulders, Holm led the way through the door.

CHAPTER XV

Orgy of Death

SINGLE file, they crept forward. Holm took the lead. Ricks followed. Then came the rest of the squad, single file, for the passageway was still narrow, sloping gradually downward at an angle of about ten degrees.

Finally Holm brought up in front of another steel door. He stopped.

"Go on!" snarled Ricks. "What are you stopping for?"

"Wait a minute!" whispered Holm. "I think I hear someone moving about inside."

For a full minute they stood there, not daring to stir, listening, every faculty alert.

Then came the sound of a subdued voice.

"Death!" Holm whispered again, his scalp tingling.

"Can this man be killed by ordinary bullets?" Ricks whispered. "Seems to me I've heard somewhere that it took a silver bullet or something of the sort to kill a being like him."

Holm shook his head.

"He's an extraordinary man gifted with more than ordinary intelligence," he responded. "But you'll find that he's just as susceptible to lead as the commonest thug that walks the streets."

His fingers were on the latch. Holding up a warning finger, he pressed it gently. The door swung open a tiny crack. He peered into the brilliantly lighted interior.

The burly Inspector, leaning forward, peered over his shoulder. He gave a sharp intake of breath.

"Holy Mary," he breathed in an awed whisper.

Doctor Death, clad in robes of somber black, was standing in front of a small altar covered with three linen cloths, upon which burned six black candles.

In the center was an inverted crucifix upon which was the figure of the devil. The

**"Let Me Go, You Monster! You Cannot Use Me As You Have
Used the Others!" Still Doctor Death Came On.**

vestments which covered the robe were all of black, the cope being of white silk embroidered with fir cones.

The black-clad scientist was chanting an invocation to the devil.

The acolytes were Zombi. One of them brought the Host to the altar; a hissing sound came from the lips of the living dead men as it was elevated.

Doctor Death seized a knife from one of the black-clad acolytes and stabbed the Host. Then, with an angry gesture, he threw it to the floor and trampled upon it. From another Zombi he snatched a chalice of gold and poured its contents over the Host, muttering abominable execrations. At the close of the horrible ceremony, the celebrant made the sign of the cross on the floor with his left foot. Then, turning to the group of Zombi, he muttered an order. Immediately they commenced a sort of weird dance, keeping time in a stiff mechanical manner. It was horrible—more than horrible, it was abominable, revolting.

Death snapped a command. Instantly the dancers ceased their gyrations and turned to him. He said something to them again. Single file, moving like automatons, they marched out of the room.

A MAN can shed the husk of civilization as easily as a snake can shed its skin. Inspector Ricks threw off his veneer that night. There was a touch of fighting Irish in his blood that, when it welled to the surface, made him forget himself and his position. He should have waited—disposed of his forces to better advantage. Instead, as he gazed upon the unspeakable orgies that were being practiced before his eyes, he became as primitive as the fiercest cave man that ever fought for possession of a Paleozoic belle or howled a challenge to an opposition tribe.

Seizing Holm by the shoulder, he thrust him aside and leaped inside the room.

"Up with your hands, you filthy old devil!" he roared.

"Back! Jimmy, back! I told you not to come!"

It was Nina Fererra speaking. She had appeared in the little doorway leading to the sacristy. Upon her face was a look of sorrow, of deadly earnestness.

"Back!" she shouted. "Back if you value your lives!"

For an instant the policemen halted. Then Ricks bellowed an angry order.

"Forward!" he shouted. "Seize him, men!"

Death turned, his eyes blazing, his long angular arms extended. From the ends of his bony fingers leaped sparks. Ricks, his arm outstretched in the act of seizing him, stopped short in his tracks, a look of indescribable fear creeping over his ruddy countenance.

"God!" he said in a hoarse whisper.

He staggered back.

It was as if he had been struck by a thunderbolt. The blood seemed to congeal in his veins. A great ball of light appeared before his eyes, blinding him, striking him dumb. He was paralyzed. His arms dropped uselessly to his side. His legs crumpled, unable to bear their weight.

Jimmy Holm leaped forward, only to fall by his superior's side.

"Back, Jimmy!"

She was too late.

The other charged into the chamber. The same fate overtook them all. They went down in a pile, sprawling like dead men.

Nina Fererra saved them from total annihilation. Leaping across the room, she seized the shoulder of Doctor Death and jerked him back. He whirled.

"What do you mean?" he roared.

"My magic against your magic, you fiend!" she snapped. "If you kill them, just as surely as there is a God in heaven, I will kill you."

Doctor Death chortled.

"You love this boy—this cub, eh?" he asked.

Nina Fererra nodded.

"Enough to kill you if you have harmed him," she said.

"Have a care what you are saying," he screeched.

She stepped forward to where Holm lay. Her white hand was extended to him. For an instant he stirred.

Doctor Death roared angrily. Seizing her about the waist, he dragged her back through the door. She struggled in his grasp, but her efforts were futile.

"Let me go, you monster!" she cried. "You cannot slay my mind as you have slayed the minds of others, I . . ."

She went limp in his arms.

"I hated to do this, little wonder-child," he said softly. "But naughty children must be punished. And these men must die. With them constantly hounding me, I can never achieve my mission."

His hand darted to a switch placed high upon the wall. His fingers grasped it; jerked it.

There was a dull, rumbling sound. Then a crash. The passage through which the intrepid officers had entered seemed to disintegrate. The rocky walls leaned forward. The roof sagged. Then came a second crash as the rocks fell, filling every outlet.

Death chuckled. Leaning forward, he surveyed his work of destruction with a sardonic grin. His eyes shifted to the huddle of men on the floor.

"Damn them," he said.

He pressed another switch. A huge slab of stone fell with a jar that shook the ground, closing the only entrance left.

Picking up the unconscious girl as if she had been a child, he carried her through another door into a larger room.

"There was no other way," he said sadly.

CHAPTER XVI

In Death's Depths

INSPECTOR RICKS was the first to regain consciousness. For a moment he lay, staring out into the darkness, wondering what had happened. Then, as recollection came back to him, he cursed himself for his folly. For the first time in his long

and brilliant career he had grown careless.

Instead of protecting himself and his men, he had charged into the room with a result that they had all fallen into the trap. Blusterer and sometime bully that he was, he was yet no fool. Nor was he lacking in common sense. He realized that he had underestimated his opponent. And, worst of all, he had underestimated him with the full knowledge of his uncanny power.

"Why the devil didn't I bring a preacher or two along?" he muttered to himself. "Or a priest? A little holy water and a crucifix might have worked wonders. But it's too late now."

He pulled himself to a sitting position and found a box of matches in his pocket. He struck one. His flashlight lay where it had fallen. He picked it up and pressed the button. Recovering his gun, he took stock of his position.

Holm lay in a crumpled heap just behind him. The others were back a little way. A pair of legs protruding from beneath the pile of rock were mute evidence of the tragic fate that had befallen at least one of his comrades.

"My fault," he said sadly. "Brainless idiot that I am."

As the light fell upon his face, Holm yawned, stretched himself and opened his eyes. For an instant he gazed up blinking owlishly. Then, as recollection swept over him, he, too, pulled himself to a sitting position.

"What happened?" he demanded. Then: "But I remember now. We charged in at Death. He turned on us—"

"And would have killed us, without a doubt, had not the girl distracted his attention," the Inspector interrupted.

Holm nodded.

"I remember hearing him tell about his power," he said. "He killed Stark that way—by the power of thought. It is hypnotism developed to the highest degree."

Ricks rose to his feet and flexed his muscles until the circulation was restored. Holm followed suit.

"It felt like a shock from a 2,200 volt wire," the burly policeman grunted. "When

it hit me I went down like an ox in a slaughter house."

"That was practically what it amounted to," Holm said soberly. "Tremendous forces are tied up in the human system. It is merely a question of being able to use them."

"It would be a great asset to a policeman," the practical Ricks assented, turning to his men. Several of them were already coming out from under the influence of the thought-wave. He assisted them to their feet and then, flashlight playing over the walls, he made a minute inspection of the little grotto in which they were confined, Holm assisting him. At the close of the inspection, the two men were forced to admit themselves baffled.

ON two sides the walls were of smooth stone, the chamber evidently having been carved out of the solid rock. The third side was where the avalanche had taken place, closing the passageway. From the amount of stone that had fallen, they knew that escape by that way was impossible. This left only the side where the door had been.

Nor was an inspection of this reassuring. The door, about eight feet in height by six in width, was fitted tightly into solid grooves at top and bottom. Nor, search as they would, could they locate the mechanism by which it was manipulated.

Knife in hand, the Inspector tried every crack and crevice in the place. Clearly, there could be no chance of digging themselves out. They were trapped, sealed up for eternity inside that great pile of rock unless, as Holm suggested, Nina Fererra was able to free herself from the domination of the man who called himself Death and come to their rescue.

"And there is little chance of that," he ended. "She has been able to thwart his plans twice. I doubt if he, cunning as he is, will let there be a third time."

His remarks were brought to a sudden close by a slight grating noise in the stone door. The two men whirled, the Inspector's flashlight playing up and down the

smooth, stone surface. For an instant they saw nothing. Then they discovered a small block of stone, perhaps an inch square, that had appeared close to the top.

Ricks held up his hand for attention and whispered a warning to his men to say nothing.

For a long time there was silence. Then, through the opening—sounding as if it came from a long distance—came the voice of Doctor Death.

"Listen, Jimmy, and you, Ricks," he said raspingly. "Only the interference of my assistant saved your lives. Why should I save you, only to have you thwart me at every turn? But she loves you, Jimmy—fool that she is! And for her sake I am willing to make terms. Are you listening?"

"We are listening," Jimmy Holm answered. "And, if Miss Fererra is within hearing, thank her for me—for all of us."

"Bah!" Death shouted. "My time is too valuable to listen to the asinine vapourings of a pair of fools in love. Love has no place in my plan of things. Here are my terms. You can take them or leave them.

"In the first place, you are sealed inside this block of stone like sardines in a can. There is only one exit—this door. Give me your words of honor; you first, Ricks, that you will withdraw from this case and keep your men out of it to the end that the great work that I have planned can be carried to a successful culmination. You, Jimmy, are to come back to me. I will restore you to your old status. And, in addition, Nina becomes yours. Do you agree?"

"Did Nina tell you to give me that message?" Jimmy Holm demanded.

"Nina knows nothing about this conversation," Doctor Death answered. "Come, what is your answer?"

"As for myself and my men, you can go to hell!" Ricks snarled. "Jimmy can answer for himself. I never yet gave ground an inch for a criminal and I'm getting too old to start in now."

"Bah!" Death snarled again. "I am not a criminal, Inspector. I am, as I have

tried to tell you often, a man with a mission—”

“Nevertheless, you can go to thunder!” Ricks interrupted. “Jimmy can speak for himself.”

“Ricks’ answer goes double,” Holm asserted.

“Then,” said the voice of Death angrily, “you die. Locked up inside this tomb, you will slowly starve to death.”

The tiny opening was closed again and they were left with their thoughts.

“I have an idea,” Holm exclaimed excitedly, speaking in a low voice.

“Thank heaven for that!” Ricks said fervently. “I’ll confess that I haven’t.”

“Standing as I was, slightly to one side of the opening, I had an opportunity of seeing the bit of stone as it was shoved out. It was fastened to the end of an iron rod. From my observation, the slab of stone in the door—provided, of course, that it is the same width as the bit of stone that composes the opening—is less than six inches thick.”

“It might as well be six feet thick, for all the good it does us,” Ricks grunted.

Holm shook his head. Dropping to his knees, he let the ray of the flashlight play over the bottom of the stone slab.

“Here is my idea,” he said. “We will take turns drilling into the crack. When we have enlarged it sufficiently, we remove the gunpowder from our revolver cartridges and, by tamping it down, make a charge sufficient to enlarge the opening. By doing this several times, we will eventually have a hole big enough for the smallest of us to crawl through. Once on the other side, we can search for the hidden mechanism and open the door for the others.”

Ricks’ eyes lighted up.

“It’s worth trying at any rate,” he said. “Anything is better than being cooped up here and dying like rats in a trap.”

The little band went at the task like beavers. Without proper equipment, the job seemed almost hopeless. Yet, with jackknives, they managed to extract the bullets from the brass revolver shells, placing the powder, as they got it out, into an

envelope which the Inspector found in one of his pockets. Meanwhile, they took turns at enlarging the crack at the bottom of the stone panel, chipping the stone bit by bit with their knives as chisels, using the butt of a gun for a mallet. Finally, when it was large enough, they carefully poured the powder into the opening, tamped it down, made a fuse out of a bit of cloth torn from a handkerchief filled with powder and were ready for the trial.

Holm touched a match to the fuse. For an instant it spluttered and fizzled, seemingly about to go out. Then there was an explosion that made the interior of the little cavern ring, filling it with harsh, acrid smoke.

THE result was disappointing. The greater part of the force had gone downward, making a small hole in the floor while only a tiny corner of the door was broken off.

Holm looked at the result of their efforts sadly.

“At this rate it will take weeks to enlarge the opening sufficiently to allow the passage of a man’s body,” he said. “And, even if we could survive that long, we haven’t enough powder left for over another charge or two.”

Ricks cursed roundly. Suddenly, he stopped, his eyes bulging from his head.

“Look!” he said hoarsely.

Holm whirled.

The door was slowly rising.

An instant later they charged through the opening and stood in that part of the chamber where they had witnessed the devil’s mass. Here, for a moment, Ricks halted them while his flashlight played into every nook and corner.

“Ah-h!” he said, his breath coming hissingly.

The beam of light fell squarely upon the face of a Zombi. The dead thing’s glassy eyes glared back unblinkingly. Its hand grasped a lever which it was manipulating to lower the stone gate again. In its other hand was a bit of paper which it held out to Jimmy. Stepping forward he seized it.

Then, while Ricks held the flashlight, he read:

Jimmy: We are leaving. I have implanted in this poor dead thing the thought of opening the door. Follow the guide that I have provided and leave the cave as soon as possible. God alone knows what horrible thing Doctor Death will do next.

NINA.

P.S. I love you.

"But," Ricks snapped, "I thought that the entrance through which we came was the only one."

"So did I," Jimmy responded. "But there is evidently another one or she would not have said so. Come, let us hurry. Nina Fererra has saved us again. She may have no opportunity to do so next time and, as she says. Heaven knows what heilish atrocity Doctor Death has already plotted."

CHAPTER XVII

Journey of Horror

THEY found their way out of the cave. How? Not even Jimmy Holm could tell, and he assumed the leadership when Ricks confessed himself baffled. It could have been nothing else but the thought waves of Nina Fererra which, attuned to the brain of Jimmy, carried them to safety.

Nor was Inspector Ricks allowing himself to be taken by surprise again. He agreed with Jimmy that every step of the journey should be scouted. Two good men were sent a pace ahead, two walked behind in the capacity of rear guards, while the main party stuck together, every faculty alert, the men keeping a constant watch for possible trouble again.

Unerringly, Jimmy directed their course through the suite of rooms. For a moment they stopped while Ricks, ever the policeman in spite of danger, searched hurriedly for evidence that might be used once the sinister doctor was under lock and key. His efforts were fruitless. Doctor Death was not to be caught napping again. Not

even a scrap of paper was left to tell of his participation in the weird crimes that were shocking the nation.

Nor was Jimmy able to find any traces of Nina Fererra. Her personal belongings had been removed as thoroughly as had those of Doctor Death.

The living rooms ransacked, they hastened through the great cave of stalactites. They glistened like diamonds under the lights which Jimmy turned on as they entered.

Even Ricks, the stolid, was moved by the sight.

"Wonderful!" he exclaimed.

Suddenly a Zombi appeared before them. Jimmy laid a restraining hand on the arm of the man ahead.

"Wait," he whispered.

Mechanically, lifting each leg as carefully as though walking on eggs, the dead thing approached them. Stopping in front of Jimmy, he extended his hand.

In a little box were several crucifixes and a tiny bottle labeled "Holy Water!"

"Nina! God bless her!" Jimmy exclaimed. "She has provided this to protect us against the elementals with which the cavern is filled."

"She thinks of everything," Ricks ejaculated. "Jimmy, if you get out of this fix alive, it's up to you to find that girl and get her out of the clutches of the fiend who now holds her. And, doggone you, if you don't marry her, I'll make love to her myself."

"Leave it to me, Inspector," Jimmy Holm said grimly.

Now came the second stage of the journey. Here their work was not so easy, for the air was filled with the harsh, musty, overpowering odor of hate. With every step it grew stronger until it almost suffocated them. The wind howled and shrieked, sweeping down through the great chamber of emptiness, whirling, gyrating, almost lifting them from their feet. They walked against it with difficulty. Around them, but always keeping in the shadows, were sinister black things—nauseating, vaporish shapes—always keeping pace with

them, but never coming out of the darkness.

Suddenly Jimmy was seized with an idea. Uncorking the bottle of Holy Water, he advanced toward a spot where the darkness was heavier than elsewhere; the spot drew back. He sprinkled a drop of the blessed water upon the floor. Instantly the wind died down . . . the atmosphere cleared . . .

"Humph!" Ricks said.

Yet there was a perplexed look on his ruddy face as he followed Jimmy Holm, his men edging in close behind.

As they reached the cavern where the dead lay piled like cordwood, Holm halted.

"Wait!" he whispered, his hand on Ricks' arm.

Ricks, gazing in at the horrible sight, gasped.

But it was not at the charnel house that Holm pointed. Walking toward them was a second Zombi. Holm recognized him as he who had officiated as butler.

"The guide she mentioned," he whispered to Ricks.

Swinging around at their approach, the living dead man led the way through the remainder of the big cave into a series of smaller caverns. For what seemed miles they followed him. They had long since left the lighted part and were traveling in darkness now, only their flashes illuminating the way. Even the elementals had dropped behind and the journey was made in silence save for an occasional whispered order or a warning when some obstruction blocked the path.

The pathway sloped steadily upward now. The air, too, became damper and heavier. The walls, when they allowed the rays of their flashes to strike them, glistened with moisture. The atmosphere was cold and chill. Their teeth chattered.

A sense of eeriness walked with them. It was not a feeling of danger such as they had experienced earlier, but a feeling of death and decay. It was like walking in a graveyard on a dark night.

Ricks looked at his watch.

"What time was it when we entered this devilish place?" he demanded.

"Close to four o'clock," Holm answered.

"And it's only eleven o'clock now. Seven hours and it seems like an eternity."

"We've been walking almost that long," Holm responded. "How long were we unconscious?"

Ricks looked at the timepiece again.

"Thunderation! It has stopped," he growled. "You're right, Holm. It was four o'clock yesterday morning that we entered this place and I'll bet money on it. We've been in here all day yesterday and last night. My watch is good for twenty-four hours and I wound it just before we started for the church. The question is, is it morning or night?"

"Night, I'd venture to say," the other responded.

THE Zombi guide stopped. Beside him were the steps of a staircase cut out of the rock and leading upward. He waited until they had reached it. Then, turning, he marched stiffly back again and disappeared in the darkness.

"His tour of duty evidently ends here," Holm grunted. "It's up to us to see where this leads to."

He mounted the stairway. It opened onto a sort of tunnel—a continuous arched vault of rotting brick and mortar so low that, at times, they were forced to crawl on hands and knees. The darkness was so thick that they seemed to breathe it. It weighed them down, pressing against them on every side. Even the rays of the flashlights failed to penetrate it. To make matters worse, the batteries had commenced to burn out. One by one they grew weaker, flickered and died until finally they were in total darkness, unbroken save when they occasionally stopped to strike a match and get their bearings.

"Do you think that this is another trap?" Ricks whispered to Holm as they cautiously groped their way.

Holm answered: "I seem to hear Nina telling me that it is all right. And, damn it, man! We can't go back."

Now another odor assailed their nostrils. They were all only too familiar with it. It

was the horrible stench of decomposing animal matter. The damp walls glittered with phosphorescence. From the low ceiling water trickled down on them. They walked ankle deep in sticky, foul-smelling mud. It clung to their feet, retarding them at every step.

Finally they came to the opening. Far ahead they saw it, an oasis of light in the desert of blackness. It cheered them on, reviving their flagging strength. It had been long since they had enjoyed nourishment. They were almost famished, their mouths parched for lack of water. Yet the sight of that tiny beam of light ahead acted like an intoxicant. They were almost running when they reached it.

It was a deep, circular vault in which they found themselves — a vault with bricked up sides, bottle shaped, the light coming through a small, round iron cover in the top. At least eight feet in diameter, the bottom was strewn with broken pots and earthen vessels. In one corner was a great heap of withered flowers. On three sides were openings similar to the one through which they had entered; through them the water trickled in tiny rivulets of oozy mud.

"A sewer manhole!" Ricks ejaculated. "And the question is," Holm responded, "how to get out of it. The bottle neck precludes climbing the sides, even though we had an instrument with which to pry out an occasional brick."

The burly Inspector stooped and, making a stirrup of his hands, hoisted one of his smallest men to his shoulders. For an instant the policeman stood there getting his balance.

"I can touch the sides," he called down to them. "If you can get Holm up—he's the lightest of the bunch—he can stand on my shoulders and pry off the top."

Jimmy Holm went up like a circus acrobat. His muddy feet maintaining a precarious hold on the shoulders of the other, he balanced himself and, raising his hands to the iron manhole cover, gave a mighty heave. The cover moved, then fell to one side.

"Quick! I'm slipping!" the man on Ricks' shoulders yelled.

Holm's fingers caught the edge of the opening as the second man fell. For an instant he hung there, gathering himself together. Then, with a mighty effort, he dragged his shoulders through the opening and, a moment later, had pulled himself to safety.

The sun was just sinking in the west. Around him on all sides were tombstones, marble shafts, grated sepulchers.

They had come out in the midst of a cemetery.

Calling down to the others, Holm made a hasty survey. A little distance away was a tool shed. It took him but an instant to break the lock. His first glance revealed the ropes with which the coffins were lowered into graves. He seized several of them and, knotting them together, hastened back to the gaping hole through which he had emerged.

Fastening one end of the rope to a nearby tree, he tossed the other through the opening.

Five minutes later, the entire party was by his side.

CHAPTER XVIII

The Choking Terror

DOCTOR RANCE MANDARIN, alias Doctor Death, hated Inspector John Ricks. It was the Inspector who had unmasked him, making him a fugitive from justice, causing the hand of every man to be turned against him. Yet there were some who secretly sided against the law. Doctor Death had commenced a single-handed warfare against society. There are many people who, gnawing at the vitals of civilization, long to see society crumble and governments fall.

Ricks knew this. So, too, did Jimmy Holm. They realized that, given an opportunity, it would not be long before the man who called himself Death would be at the head of a powerful organization of criminals. His weird power, aided by their knowledge of the underworld, would make

The Grisly Thing Reaching For Him Was A Dead Man, And His Bullets Could Not Stop It.

the combination an even greater menace than was the wily scientist alone.

Consequently, Ricks increased his activities. His men were everywhere. The underworld was combed for traces of Death's agents. The residence of the scientist was watched day and night by picked detectives. Another group was selected to guard the cemetery exit to the cave.

At the head of half a hundred men—a great group of churchmen chanting prayers, surrounding them—Ricks had led a second assault on the cave. With dynamite and crowbar, he had secured the body of his dead comrade, crushed beneath the avalanche of stone. He had left not a nook or corner unexplored.

Oddly enough, he found nothing. Not a Zombi was left. There was no flutter of elemental wings. Even the pile of dead had disappeared from the dingy niche where Holm had first seen them. In short, the cave had been dismantled. Only the pyramid of bones remained. The skulls grinned mockingly from a thousand angles as if chuckling at the grim jest that had been perpetrated upon the Inspector.

Acting upon the Inspector's advice, the men of science marked for slaughter had been scattered to the four winds. Closely guarded, they had been sent to secret spots known only to a few. Then Inspector John Ricks settled in earnest to the task of running down the man who was responsible for the holocaust of death.

Ricks' doings were chronicled to the world by means of the press. Never a modest man, the Inspector saw no necessity for hiding his light under a bushel now. And, as a result, Doctor Death was able to keep apace with him. Hating him as he did, he swore a horrible oath of vengeance.

To the Inspector came a note. In it Doctor Death informed him of his intentions. Then the Doctor disappeared. Search as he would, spurring his men on to increased activity, the Inspector could get no track of him.

To all appearances, he had disappeared from the face of the earth.

Accustomed to looking after the interests of other people, the big Inspector rarely gave a thought to his own safety. Thus it was that he left himself open for attack.

Two weeks after the escape from the cave, he sat in his library at home reading. He had an appointment with Holm and, weary after a hard day's work, had specified that the young detective meet him at his house instead of at the office.

It was a typical man's den, this library of Ricks', a room in which he spent practically all of his leisure time. The chairs were huge and comfortable, a bowl filled with his favorite pipes and a humidifier which kept his cigars at just the proper degree of moisture were on the table.

A widower, Ricks' household was small, consisting merely of his housekeeper and a man-of-all-work. Both were engaged about their duties in another part of the house.

SUDDENLY there came a terrified shriek. Ricks leaped to his feet, his hand reaching for the gun he always carried beneath his left arm. He took a step toward the door, only to stop as it was crashed open and Mrs. James, the housekeeper, rushed in, her face white, her eyes bulging with horror. An instant later Riley, the other servant, a pensioned policeman, followed.

"Did you see it?" Mrs. James exclaimed pantingly. "It peeked in at us through the kitchen window."

"It was a devil!" Riley explained. "I saw it myself. I had no gun, but if I'd had one, 'twould have done no good, since you can't kill such things—"

"A great giant with glassy eyes and a putty face like a dead man!" Mrs. James interrupted. "I—" She screamed. "There it is again—there at the window!"

Ricks whirled. Staring in at him was a bloated, grisly mask with pasty, mottled skin. Larger than an ordinary head, hair-

less, its glassy eyes deeply sunken into cavernous sockets, it glared unblinkingly into the room.

Ricks fired. The report of his gun roared as the leaden slug crashed through the glass. The grisly thing glared back at them for an instant. Then, as Ricks fired again, it disappeared.

The detective rushed to the broken window and, raising it, thrust his head through and stared into the darkness. There was no sign of the thing for which he sought.

"Missed, curse it!" he growled.

Then the truth came to him. It was a dead man they had been shooting at. Even though he hit it, his bullets would have no effect.

RILEY was standing like a man frozen in his tracks, his teeth chattering. Mrs. James had collapsed into a chair.

Ricks turned to the ex-policeman.

"Get a bit of pasteboard and fasten that window shut where we broke it," he snapped. "I've had enough experience with my friend, the Doctor, not to leave any openings for him to get his weird tools through."

The ex-policeman stared at the window with terror-stricken fascinated eyes for a moment. Then he turned slowly and ambled out of the room.

Ricks looked down at his sobbing house-keeper.

"Pull yourself together!" he snapped. "There's nothing—"

He was interrupted by a shriek of terror—a blood-curdling yell.

The lights went out!

Something dashed past Ricks. He swung at it. His fist collided with flesh. Then he went down in a tangle of legs and arms.

Then the lights suddenly came on again. It was Riley with whom he had collided and with whom he had been tussling. He jerked the former policeman to his feet with an oath.

"What ails you?" he roared.

"He's in the other room!" the frightened man howled. "I ran right into him. He—"

He stopped, his face turning an ashy gray. Ricks whirled, his gun belching fire.

The thing stood in the doorway, slobbering and snarling at them. Ricks pulled the trigger until every chamber was empty. His bullets had no effect. The horror charged. Hurling the empty gun into the bloated, mottled face, Ricks plunged forward to meet it, his fists striking out like pile drivers. He felt himself seized in an iron grasp and thrown across the room. He brought up, bruised and battered, against the table. Gasping for breath, he saw Riley leap forward, only to go down in a senseless heap, his jaw broken.

Again Ricks charged. The senseless, gaping mouth mumbled something. An iron fist crashed against his temple, the concussion jarring him from head to toes. Then consciousness left him.

He was seated in a chair, bound, when he regained consciousness. In front of him sat the terror, its cold, glassy eyes glaring at him. Riley lay where he had fallen. Instinctively Ricks knew that the ex-policeman was dead. In another chair sat Mrs. James, bound like himself, a cloth tied over her mouth. Her terrified eyes gazed at it piteously.

"Metempsychosis, my dear Inspector," the giant said slobberingly. "Pardon me if I do not speak plainly, but I have not yet entirely mastered the knack of using this uncouth creature's body. Metempsychosis is, I might say, one of the forbidden mysteries—Black Art—of which I am, as you have already discovered, a past master. It has to do with the transmigration of the soul into the bodies of other men and lower animals. In the distant past it was practiced extensively but gradually became a forgotten art until, today, I am probably the only living man who understands it.

"I found this thing, whose body I am now inhabiting for the nonce, in a lunatic asylum. By methods known only to myself, I separated his soul from his body, then seized upon the empty shell for my own use. The frail form of Rance Man-

darin is hidden away where I can regain it when I so desire. But the spirit of Doctor Death lives in the framework of this thing you see before you.

"I hate you personally," he went on, "but chiefly, you are constantly interfering with my plans. Had you been out of the way, the men of science whom I sought to convert to my way of thinking would long ago have ceased to oppose me and the wheels of industry would have stopped. It is you who have kept the world where it now is instead of allowing it to go back to where it was in the beginning—as it was intended to remain."

He got up and loomed over the bound man.

"That is why I am going to kill you," he said slowly. "Understand, I bear you no malice. But it is necessary that you be put out of the way in order that destiny be fulfilled."

He stopped, noting that Ricks' glance stole to his chest where several steel-jacketed slugs had entered.

"You wonder why you did not kill me," he chuckled. "Simply, my dear Inspector, because I am already dead. By that I mean that the body I inhabit is that of a dead man. And of what avail are bullets when sent against flesh that is already putrid?"

He took a step forward, his huge hands reaching toward the bound man.

"The body I selected is muscular enough to make short work of a squad of your best men," he went on. "That is why I picked it out. Not long ago I passed a lunatic asylum. In the yard were a group of men—imbeciles, all of them. I noted the bodily development of this mad thing whose frame I am now occupying, the breadth of his shoulders, the play of his back muscles, his enormous hands. I knew your own strength and I wanted to handle the job of killing you myself. I called to him and he came to me. Little by little, I won his confidence. And then, when the time came, I killed him, laying his body aside until I needed it. Now that time has arrived. My tools have already botched

several tasks. There will be no botching here."

He gave a maniacal chuckle. His huge fingers encircled Ricks' throat. They closed down. They were like a huge collar being slowly drawn taut. His hands tied, Ricks could not struggle. Only his heels played a devil's tattoo on the carpeted floor. His breath was shut off. His eyes almost bulged from their sockets, so tight was the grip. Deeper and deeper, the great fingers dug into his windpipe. Over him he saw the bloated, senseless face, the mouth twisted into an imbecilic grin. He felt himself going. . . .

As from a great distance he heard a shout. The head seemed to leap from the body. For a moment it was in the air, apparently without support. Then Jimmy Holm's face appeared. The pressure around his throat relaxed for an instant. He sucked a mouthful of air into his tortured lungs. Then the grip was tightened again.

ARRIVING to keep his appointment, Jimmy Holm had found the door unlocked. Something—some sixth sense—had warned him of danger and he had entered the house on tiptoe, every faculty alert. He had reached the library door just in time to see the final act of the tragedy, to hear the sinister Doctor's words.

Even while he stood there, his mind was working at lightning speed. His gun was in his pocket. He knew that ordinary bullets would not prevail against this monster, this insane thing who, master of the dead that he was, killed by the very power of his thought.

His eye suddenly lighted upon the rosette of swords hanging above the fireplace. Walking on tiptoe, he dodged into the room so furtively that Doctor Death, mouthing his dread words to his victim, failed to hear him. Not even the terrified old woman, her eyes taking in every detail of the murder of her master, noted his entrance.

Slowly his hand stole up until it grasped the hilt of a huge cavalry saber. He jerked it from its place and swung it with a side

stroke that severed the elephantine head from the gigantic body.

He leaped back, the saber uplifted again. For, even as the head—the eyes still open and glaring balefully—dropped to the floor, the great fingers tightened again around the Inspector's throat. The powerful will of Doctor Death remained in the gigantic body of the idiot, even though that body was chopped to pieces.

Headless, the body of the bloated dead thing still leaned over the form of the unconscious Inspector, the fingers locking themselves about his throat like the jaws of a bulldog.

The saber fell across the huge wrists, severing the hands from the arms. For an instant longer the body stood balanced upon its huge feet. Then it swayed dizzily and landed with a thud upon the floor.

But the cold, dead fingers retained their iron grip about the throat of the dying policeman. Jimmy Holm seized them and pried them apart. It required all of his strength to pull them from the bull-like throat.

Inspector Ricks slumped back against the cushions, the air sucking into his lungs in great gasps while Jimmy Holm, jerking his knife from his pocket, cut the throngs which bound the big detective's wrists.

On the floor where it had fallen, the bestial face of the dead thing gazed up at them, a deadly hatred in its eyes. Its thick lips opened and it spoke.

"You win, Jimmy!" it gurgled. "Again you win. But my time is coming. When next I strike at you it will be through someone else—through someone you love!"

"I am not dead," the bodiless head went on. "I merely confined my spirit within this body for the nonce in order to carry out my purpose. You have destroyed the body and now my spirit goes—to come to you again in another guise. . . ."

A fog-like vapor filled the room. For an instant it circled and gathered itself into a compact mass—a gray, opaque, formless wraith. Then, like a puff of smoke in the wind, it disappeared.

Jimmy Holm sat in the back room on

the upper floor of an obscure hotel in a tiny eastern village and sucked moodily at his pipe. The room was a large one. In the center was a big table around which were placed twelve chairs. The curtains had been pulled down and every bit of light excluded. There was but one door. In the hallway in front of it several grim-faced men were grouped. In spite of their efforts to make themselves inconspicuous, there was a certain something about them that marked them for what they were—policemen.

Another knot of men lingered beneath the windows. Upon the roof was mounted a machine gun. The squad of men who served it lay face downward, only their heads protruding above the coping. Half a hundred more were hidden in the basement; the grounds were filled with them. They lurked furtively in the shadows, taking advantage of every tree and bush. Yet the casual passerby would have noted nothing unusual, so carefully did they keep from sight.

CHAPTER XIX

The Secret Twelve

SAVE for the fact that more tourists than usual seemed to have been in the little town during the day, the inhabitants knew nothing of the honor that was to be bestowed upon them that night. Only the proprietor of the little hotel knew—he and his most trusted help. For the building was the property of a man high in the circles of the nation. On several occasions in the past meetings had been held here which, had news of them leaked out, might have upset the balance of the nations of the world.

One by one, two by two, men had drifted into the little town and, apparently, left again. In reality, they had driven to a certain seldom frequented place, their lights extinguished, parked their cars in the darkness and after night had fallen, furtively returned to their posts of duty.

Jimmy Holm looked up as the door opened and a man, his coat collar pulled up,



Frenziedly Jimmy slashed again when the loathsome thing kept choking the Inspector after his head had been severed.



the brim of his black hat drawn down over his eyes, entered. He shook hands, then seated himself at the table. As he turned his head, his profile showed, shrewd, direct, a man with a bulging brow and a hooked, predatory nose. It was Amos Bosworthy, the financier.

As he seated himself, he glanced down at his wrist watch.

"Two o'clock," he muttered. "The others?"

"Should be here immediately," Holm answered.

An instant later Thomas Whipple, the airplane magnate, and Professor Phineas Drexell of Yale University came in together. Like Bosworthy, they were muffled to the eyes. They were followed by Professor Levi Henworthy of Harvard, who came alone. Then came James Peabody and Herbert C. Hallover, both of the Eastern Electric. Doctor Daniel Darrow, the great chemist, whose home was in Philadelphia, was the seventh.

EIGHT of the twelve chairs were filled. The eight men smoked in silence, only their occasional glances toward the door showing that anything out of the ordinary was about to transpire. Again the door opened and a bulky man entered. They nodded. He was known by sight to all of them as Milton David, head of the David Detective Agency, the greatest private detective bureau in the world. As he seated himself a small swarthy, black-eyed individual slid through the half-opened door and seated himself without a word.

"Tony Caminetti!" David whispered to the man seated beside him. "Uncrowned king of New York's underworld."

The eleventh man to enter was a tall, thin individual well past the prime of life. He nodded briefly and glanced at Holm. It was Charles W. Blake, one of the heads of the United States Secret Service.

"Are we all here?" he asked.

Holm nodded.

Blake stepped to the door and opened it to its full width. Then, as the twelfth man

stepped into the room, the others, recognizing him, leaped to their feet.

"Gentlemen!" said Blake, "*The President of the United States!*"

For a moment no one spoke. The President nodded and took his place at the head of the table.

"Gentlemen," he said, "be seated, please. We have much to do tonight and little time in which to do it. We will proceed to business immediately."

Again they seated themselves. They were all alert now, all eyes focussed on the gray-haired, kindly faced man at the head of the table. He looked at them sadly, his fingers strumming lightly on the arm of his chair.

"I have called you gentlemen together for the purpose known to all of us," he said. "The very foundations of our government are threatened. Murder runs rampant throughout the nation—murder different from that to which we have been accustomed—and God knows the shedding of blood at any time is horrible enough. Some of you have been threatened, are fugitives from this man who calls himself Doctor Death—forced to hide away like criminals in order to protect yourselves. To you I have no excuses to offer for this gathering. To such of you as have not been threatened, I have this single excuse: gentlemen, the country needs you."

His voice had grown crisper as he talked. Now his face settled down into stern lines. He leaned forward, his kindly gray eyes glittering with suppressed anger.

"For the first time in the history of this glorious nation of ours, our leading men have been forced to skulk in the dark—to meet in such obscure places as this, under guard. At the very beginning of our national existence our forefathers were forced to do the same thing. The enemy we face today is a thousand times more powerful. We face the greatest menace of all time. The forces of hell have been unleashed in our midst and no man knows where they will strike next."

His voice dropped. The others leaned forward in order that not a word be missed.

"This is a big job," he went on. "I summoned you here to this out-of-the-way place because I, the President of the United States, dared not take a chance of meeting you elsewhere, lest it endanger your lives and mine. The plan which I am about to propose to you is not my own. It's from the head of the detective bureau of the largest city of the land—Inspector Ricks—who even now lies on a bed of pain in a hospital as a result of an encounter with this fiend who calls himself Doctor Death.

"The job we have is a problem in surgery. We must remove a malignant growth from the body politic with as little injury as possible to the patient. Inspector Ricks believes that he has evolved such a scheme. Feeling himself incompetent to

ent from anything that I've ever experienced. I haven't got the faintest idea where I and the men and women under me come in.

"But, Mr. President and gentlemen, I pledge you my word that, from the moment I reach my quarters until this menace is killed, organized crime in these United States will cease, so that the officers of the law may devote their entire time to the task of saving the nation. I pledge you, Mr. President and Mr. Holm, the word of Tony Caminetti—the word that has never been broken to friend or foe."

His black eyes sparkled as he spoke. He rose to his feet, hands resting on the edge of the table, face turned toward the head of the nation.

The Dead Man Had Risen From The Mortuary Slab, Leaving Another Corpse In His Place.

handle the task himself, he has asked that it be turned over to another whom he believes better fitted by study and force of circumstances to cope with this menace than any other man.

"The person to whom he wishes to delegate the task of scotching this menace is our young friend here, Mr. James Holm. I, as the leader of this nation, pledge to him my unqualified support and the co-operation of the entire forces of the nation—including the army and the navy. I ask the remainder of you to do the same. What do you say?"

For a moment there was silence as all eyes were turned on Jimmy Holm. Then Blake, of the United States Secret Service, nodded with impressive solemnity.

"My men are yours to command, Mr. Holm," he said quietly.

One by one the others gave their promise. Tony Caminetti was the last to speak.

"Gentlemen," he said in an awed voice, "for the first time in my life I find myself on the side of law and order. I am accepted on the same plane with men who have been little more than myths to me. You can guess that the sensation is differ-

"The forces of the underworld will work hand in hand with the officers of the law," he went on. "I pledge you that, gentlemen."

"And when Tony Caminetti gives his word, by God, he keeps it!" Milton David said explosively.

All eyes were turned on Holm again. In a low voice, he briefly outlined his plan. They sat incredulous—open mouthed. Yet no one disagreed.

"God in Heaven! Who would have realized that we, a group of educated men living in the Twentieth Century, would be forced to go back to medieval methods in order to cope with this menace?" Thomas Whipple exclaimed.

"We are all agreed, then," the President said as he arose to go. "Daylight will soon be here, gentlemen, and the coming of the sun must find us back in our accustomed places if this plan is to be successful. The Secret Twelve—the strangest organization that has ever been formed in this beloved country of ours—will adjourn. Until further notice, we will take our orders from Mr. Holm. He becomes our chief. Is there anything else to come before this meeting?"

Jimmy Holm held up a restraining hand. "But one thing more, Mr. President," he said. "I have told you that the woman I love is in the hands of this monster. Of late I have had a feeling that she has been trying to break through the veil of space to talk to me. But, surrounded as she is, by the creatures of this man who calls himself Death, her thought waves have failed to reach me. Our first task is to find Death. Are we to wait until he strikes again or are we to carry the battle to him? I believe in taking the offensive.

"Nina Ferrera can assist us in carrying this fight to our enemy.

"But we must break down this resistance that has been built up against us—against the thought waves which she is trying to send to me. I suggest, therefore, Mr. President, that you proclaim next Sunday as a day of prayer throughout the nation. Ask every man, woman and child to send their thought waves hurtling through space against this monster. With millions of such emanations filling the air, it is my belief that the menace will be temporarily crippled and that, through Nina Ferrera, we will get in touch with Doctor Death."

The President bowed gravely.

"Your orders will be carried out," he said.

None noticed the strange glitter that came into the deep set eyes of Professor Levi Henworthy of Harvard. His fingers, resting on the arms of his chair, clinched until the knuckles showed white. Yet he gave no sign as he, like the others, nodded assent.

CHAPTER XX

The Stolen Body

IT was a barracks-like place, gaunt, devoid of architectural beauty, surrounded by a great open space, choked with weeds and overgrown with hazel brush and thistle. It stood on the edge of a muddy creek at the extreme edge of the town in which Professor Levi Henworthy lived. One of the twelve scientists marked for death, he like the remainder of those still

alive, was a member of Jimmy Holm's secret organization.

In Colonial days, according to tradition, the building had been an ale brewery. Three stories in height, built of the same rock with which the creek was lined, it had withstood the ravages of time and the Revolutionary War. Then someone had turned it into an inn. It had flourished for a few years. Lack of custom and its poor location had left it vacant again.

The Civil War had taken away the last of the family of owners. He had remained on a Southern battlefield, dying without a known heir. Then had followed a legal battle. It had finally fallen into the hands of one of the lawyers. He, too, had died. Tenantless, it still stood, a monument to the sturdy old pioneer who had built it, a hangout for tramps and a roosting place for owls and swallows—a cold, bleak, windowless pile of rock and mortar—shunned by the townspeople and slowly going to wrack and ruin.

The cellars were deep caverns of silence and stygian gloom, far below the level of sagging, rotting timbers and falling masonry. In recent years no one entered them except occasional small boys on a dare. The general plan of the huge, ruinous mass of stones and mortar might contain, for all the inhabitants of the town knew, or cared, a dozen dark secrets. A hundred murders might well be concealed within the height and depth of such a pile.

Within the confines of the town lived a man who was seeking a place in which to establish a business which thrived best far from the light of day. The tumbledown pile appealed to him. Quietly, for he was a man who seldom let his right hand know what his left hand was doing, he armed himself with a suitable flashlight the day following the formation of the Secret Twelve. Ascertaining that no one was watching, he dodged furtively through the tangle of bushes and trees with which the ruined building was surrounded and made his way inside.

Being a careful man, he went about his task of exploration cautiously. He crept

noiselessly down the rickety stairs into the cellar, feeling his way at first, stopping often to listen. Once he had reached the lower level, he dug a small flashlight from the recesses of his bulky pocket and continued on his way, often bending low lest he bump his head on some low-hanging beam.

Suddenly he stopped, every faculty alert, the beam of his flashlight turned down almost at his feet.

Someone had been in the cellar ahead of him. The marks of feet were imprinted in the sodden earth.

The flashlight in his hand trembled violently. He was a nervous man and one who frightened easily. He played the beam into the gloomy corners.

He heard a sound. It seemed to come from the deeper shadow that was between him and the corridor.

The goose pimples raised themselves on his back. Cold chills chased themselves up and down his spinal column.

"Who-o-o's there?" he said faintly, his voice cracked and trembling.

There was no answer. Yet he was certain that something in the shadow moved.

"Answer or I'll shoot!" he said bluffingly.

The answer was a shriek of maniacal laughter. His heart missed a beat. Then, with a wild yell of fright, his flashlight making queer, grotesque shadows ahead of him, he ran.

Something crashed against his head with force enough to fell an ox. The flashlight dropped from his hand as he went down.

He was stunned only for a minute. He opened his eyes and glared about, forgetting for an instant, where he was. The flashlight was still burning. Then he leaped to his feet, his eyes focussed on the thing the ray of the pocket lamp brought out.

For the infinitesimal part of a second he stood there. Then, screaming like a madman, he turned and ran from the building. Not until he was back in the sunshine again did he stop for breath. Then, leaning against a tree, he stopped and took counsel with himself.

There was a dead man in the cellar!

The question was whether to report the matter to the authorities or not. He finally decided that it would be best to make a clean breast of the discovery.

He ended the argument with himself by marching virtuously to the police station and telling his story. Two officers were detailed to accompany him back to the ruined building.

THEY found the body of a tall man, gaunt almost to the point of emaciation, his nose hooked like that of a great bird of prey, his eyes deeply sunken.

Yet, when he was exposed to view at the local mortuary, there was not a mark of any kind on him to show that he had met with foul play. That he had wandered into the cellars in a fit of mental aberration and died there was the opinion of the local police and the physician who made the perfunctory examination.

Who was he? There was nothing in his pockets to disclose his identity. Yet there was something vaguely familiar about the withered countenance—something strangely reminiscent. A photographer was called in and a picture was taken, for the police department of the little village at the edge of the college town was not equipped with photographic apparatus. The likeness of the dead man was sent to New York for identification.

The arrival of that photograph sent Jimmy Holm scurrying across country in an airplane, sent a hundred newspaper men in his wake and caused the wires to buzz like a swarm of angry bees.

The dead man found in the cellar of the abandoned ale brewery at the edge of the little college town was Doctor Rance Mandarin, alias Doctor Death!

Early on the morning following the day the body was found, the owner of the little mortuary which had suddenly found itself famous, unlocked the door and stepped inside. Then, as was his custom, he snapped on the light to look at the famous corpse.

What he saw caused him to turn and rush out of the room onto the street in search of an officer.

The body of Doctor Death had disappeared.

In its place on the slab lay the form of Professor Levi Henworthy, the town's most famous citizen.

Jimmy Holm, seeking to catch a few hours' sleep at the village inn, was awakened by the raucous jangle of the telephone on the table beside his bed. Yawning, he stretched forth his arm and, picking the receiver from the hook, called a sleepy "Hello!" into the mouthpiece.

An instant later he was wide awake.

The voice that came over the wire was that of Nina Ferrera.

"Jimmy!" she exclaimed, her voice agitated. "Watch yourself. He has circumvented you again. He killed Professor Henworthy. It was he who, in the body of Henworthy, attended your meeting and overheard your plot to beat him. . . ."

"Nina, for God's sake, where are you?" he demanded excitedly.

"I cannot—dare not—tell you," she answered. "Listen, for I must talk fast. He has gone to assume his own body again. Your plans are all for naught and—oh, Jimmy, he is getting ready to strike again! He is planning something big—some coup more terrible than all his others. He—but here he comes. . . ."

"Where are you, Nina? For God's sake, where are you?" Holm demanded.

But the telephone was dead. Nor could he trace the call. Central sleepily informed him that she had no recollection of having rung the hotel.

Dressing like a fireman, he had ran from the hotel and to the mortuary, only to meet the proprietor as he rushed onto the street.

Doctor Death had won again.

CHAPTER XXI

The Dead Hand

JIMMY HOLM was puzzled. Frankly so. And he was honest enough to admit it. Again the grim old man who called himself Doctor Death had taken the offensive and all the plans so carefully

made were thrown in the discard. The killing of Professor Henworthy and the assumption of his body had been a master stroke. The attendance at the meeting of the Secret Twelve had been nothing less than a stroke of genius.

How long had the sinister Doctor been masquerading as the dead professor? Had he killed Henworthy weeks earlier? How had the crime been committed? There was not a mark on the educator to show that he had died anything but a natural death. But Jimmy Holm, knowing the weird power that his enemy possessed, shook his head knowingly.

That Doctor Death was in full possession of all of the Secret Twelve's cherished plans was almost a certainty. Many of them had been discussed at the meeting. Prior to that gathering, Holm had visited the educator at his home and had talked them over fully. Henworthy had been one of the instigators of the society, working from the very beginning with the officials.

To Henworthy, Jimmy had disclosed the hiding places of the other men condemned to die. If, at that time, Henworthy had been Death in disguise, then the life of none of them was safe. He must move and move rapidly.

Racing back to his room, he called them—these men who had been condemned to die—one after another, on the telephone and told them what had happened. It was arranged that each should immediately change his base and that no one—not even Jimmy himself—should know where they had gone. When it became necessary to call them together, certain signals would be used. Until then, it was every man for himself.

That the sinister scientist was a master of metempsychosis Jimmy Holm knew only too well. He remembered, thanks to Nina Ferrera's assistance in restoring his memory, that memorable night when he had, for a moment, tested the powers of the aged Doctor. And the memory of that terrible encounter with the headless giant in Ricks' study was too vividly impressed

upon his memory to be so soon forgotten. Ricks still hovering between life and death in the hospital, his gigantic frame but a shadow of its former self, was still another proof of Doctor Death's ability to strike through the bodies of his victims.

The thought of Nina Ferrera flashed through his mind. Death had used her before. Might he not use her again? He shuddered at the thought of it. Yet she was tied to the fiend—chained by invisible links that even the power of love could not break.

"Next time I strike it will be through someone you love!"

He shuddered as he thought of the words mouthed by the bodiless head the night he had rescued Ricks from the crushing grip of those relentless fingers. Nina Ferrera. It was through her that the old man would strike next.

Ricks? He smiled in spite of himself. Ricks, the hard-headed scoffer who refused to believe in the occult, even though it had been demonstrated before his very eyes. He wondered, when this latest news of Death's activities reached the Inspector, whether he would change his mind. Or would he still growl that, sooner or later, there would be a logical explanation of everything?

One question continued coming to the fore: Why had Death left his body temporarily in the cellars of the abandoned ale brewery? Was there something about him, ghoul that he was, that required damp, dank places? If such was the case, it would be an easier task to locate him. But during his sojourn with the old man he had witnessed no such necessity. Yet Death had built his residence in the cave. But that had been the better to handle his Zombi and elementals.

Yet there must be some motive. For Doctor Death, canny old wizard that he was, never did things without a reason. It was that reason that he must search out. Once he had found it, the riddle would be nearer solution.

The more he thought, the more confused he became. Finally he gave up in despair

and, drawing the telephone closer, put in a call for Blake. To the Secret Service man he told his problem. But Blake, as much of a scoffer as Ricks, argued, like that hard-headed limb of the law, that sooner or later, all that had happened would be logically explained. Meanwhile, he said, there was nothing to do but wait.

As the days went by the sinister scientist was conspicuous by his inactivity, laughing up his sleeve while the police moved heaven and earth in an effort to find him. Night after night, Holm sat in moody silence, his brow furrowed in concentration, in an effort to commune with Nina. But the thought waves which, in times gone by, had been sent to him by the girl, were silenced.

In the end he was compelled to declare himself baffled.

MEANWHILE the suggestion made to the President had been carried out. The proclamation had been issued. Every church in the land had devoted a day to prayer and meditation in an effort to overcome the evil thought waves emanating from the brain of Doctor Death. That they were successful seemed to be demonstrated by the lack of activity on his part.

Then, like a bolt out of a clear sky, he struck—hitting in a thousand different places at once. Every part of the country felt the wave of hatred that surged over the nation. A deluge of elementals swept over the land. In the form of cyclones and tornadoes, they danced and gyrated, destroying property, taking lives, spreading devastation in their wake.

No man was safe. The farmer, plowing in his sun-baked field, felt the scourge as did the rich man, taking his ease in some air-conditioned office, high above the noise and tumult of the city. The humble housewife paid the same penalty as her wealthier sister of the gold coast.

Vainly did Holm, backed by the President of the United States and the Cabinet, implore the United States Weather Bureau to locate the source of these peculiar looking clouds which always appeared in the shape of a distorted man—a man with flop-

ping, swinging arms—dancing and thundering over the countryside. The officials could tell nothing. From the north, south, east and west, they appeared out of cloudless skies, giving no warning, striking—dodging back into the void from which they came.

It had been Holm's idea that, once the scourge was located even within a distance of several hundred miles, he could, by concentrating his forces, locate the Doctor. But now he was compelled to confess himself baffled.

Nor could the others high in the ranks of the Secret Twelve give him any assistance. They were as badly puzzled as he was himself.

Then Doctor Death struck in another way—a way so heinous, so diabolical as to surpass all understanding.

Sitting alone in his bachelor quarters, exhausted after a hard day's work, all of the lights extinguished save a small globe that

burned in a shaded bridge lamp, Jimmy Holm bowed his head in meditation in an effort to bring, by concentration, the thought waves by which, he felt certain, Nina Fererra would, if she still lived, try to communicate with him.

Suddenly something brushed against him. He opened his eyes. He sensed her—felt her presence in the room.

Every faculty was alert now. At last victory was his. Again he leaned his head against the cushions, his mind concentrated on communicating with the woman he loved.

Again something touched him. This time he felt it against his cheek. It was cold, clammy. It startled him. He opened his eyes.

Floating in the air was a human hand!

He leaped to his feet. For a moment he stood there gazing at the apparition, too stupified to move. Then it suddenly darted forward, its fingers working convulsively as if seeking to wrap themselves about his throat. He leaped back a step, striking at it, smashing it to the floor.

It lay there, palm upward, the fingers moving slightly. He had a feeling that it

was looking at him — that it had eyes that were glaring at him malevolently.

The fingers doubled convulsively. He almost shrieked aloud.

He recognized it now. Those long, slender fingers with the pointed, polished nails — fingers that were the color of ivory.

It was the hand of Nina Fererra!

He bent forward and picked it up. It was cold—chill and clammy. Dropping into the chair again, he held it under the light. The fingers bent lightly about his own, giving his hand a gentle pressure—a pressure that he remembered only too well.

The hand of Nina Fererra! He recalled that night in Ricks' library when other hands—the hands of the mad man—had been twisted about the Inspector's throat—the saber stroke that had severed them from the headless body; the head of the dead thing lying there on Ricks' rug had spoken to him. "I go now," it had said.



Jimmy was paralyzed with horror as the disembodied hand of the woman he loved reached for his throat.

"This time you win, Jimmy. But I will strike again—through someone you love!"

He realized now that he had felt all along—but had refused to admit—that Nina Ferrera was dead, killed by the monster who held her captive.

And Doctor Death, by means of some diabolical power known only to himself, had sent this proof to him.

He pressed the dead hand against his cheek. . . .

The fingers suddenly slipped from his grasp and seized him by the throat. For an instant he was startled—paralyzed with fear—fear of the unknown. Then, as he felt the fingers tighten, he tried to pull them off. They clung to him, leech-like. Tighter and tighter they pressed against his windpipe, the sharp nails cutting into his flesh. He tried to scream—to shout for help. The breath was crushed out of his body. He was weak from lack of it.

He was struggling desperately now, prying at the terrible thing, bending back the fingers, pulling, tearing. The sweat stood out on his brow in great globules. The room swam about him in ever-widening circles.

Finally, with a desperate effort, he succeeded in loosening the choking hold. He hurled the accursed thing from him and dropped back into the chair, his brain reeling.

For an instant it lay where he had thrown it. He arose and staggered toward it. It leaped away from him, moving like a measuring worm, the slender fingers stretching forth with a pulling motion, then humping up as the stump was drawn forward.

Cursing like a madman, Holm seized a book and hurled it at the gruesome thing. It leaped aside, dodging the missile by an inch. Then, before he could lay hands upon another weapon, it disappeared, vanishing in thin air.

He staggered into the bedroom and fell across the bed, his senses reeling.

The sudden *b-r-r-r-r* of the telephone at his elbow brought him up standing. Even before he picked up the receiver and

shouted into the mouthpiece he knew that Doctor Death had struck.

Nor was he disappointed. The news that came thundering over the wire was so astounding, so unbelievable that even he, knowing better than any other man alive the ability of the man he was pitted against, shuddered.

For Doctor Death had struck again—struck with a new weapon which, for want of a better title, the papers dubbed "The Dissolution Ray."

The dissolution ray! What was it? How was it generated? Scientific men debated the subject for days, advancing theories in the papers that in normal times would have seemed preposterous. But Doctor Death's sinister plans got attention.

CHAPTER XXII

The Dissolution Ray

THE watchman at the great Undermill Air Craft plant had finished his lunch and, feet upon the desk, was smoking a final pipe preparatory to making his rounds.

The telephone rang. Dropping his feet to the floor with an angry bang at being disturbed, he removed the pipe from his mouth. Pulling the instrument closer, he lifted the receiver from the hook and bellowed a stentorian "Hello!" into the mouthpiece.

"Is this the Undermill Aircraft plant?" a harsh voice demanded.

"It is," the watchman retorted. "What do you want and who the devil are yez to disturb a man when he's resting?"

"This is Doctor Death," came back the answer over the wires. "I have no quarrel with you. You are a poor man—a member of the working class. I am warning you, therefore, that I will commence wrecking your plant inside of five minutes. I—"

"Like thunder you will!" the watchman bristled. "Not while I'm on the job."

"Unless you want to be buried under a hundred thousand tons of brick, mortar and machinery, you will leave the build-

ing," the voice went on gratingly. "You will, therefore, quit your post at once."

There was a click. The watchman jiggled the receiver, but failed to get a response from the operator. The line was dead.

"Doctor Death!" he growled to himself. "The man the papers are full of. As if the old devil would stoop to warning the likes of me, the dirty—"

He stopped suddenly as a bit of mortar fell upon his shoulder. He turned his eyes ceilingwards. The plaster was cracking in a thousand places. Even while he looked, a huge chunk dropped, missing him by inches. The walls, too, were commencing to give way. A partition tumbled as he turned and, face white and blanched, rushed through the door and down the wide hallway to the street.

Stones were falling around him like rain by the time he reached the exit. He scampered across the roadway like a mad hare to where the fire alarm box was located halfway down the block. Smashing the glass, he pulled the lever and let it leap back into place. An instant later he heard the wild shriek of the sirens as the first apparatus left the nearby station.

He turned to the building again. A terrific crash greeted his ears. The entire front had fallen in. Even as he watched, one of the side walls buckled outward and fell with a force that rocked the earth.

By the time the first apparatus arrived, the building was a total wreck. Under the huge search lights of the fire department, they saw the huge pieces of masonry crumble like chalk and disintegrate into dust.

Machinery—great lathes, drill presses, woodworking mechanism of all kinds—masterpieces of iron and steel were dissolving into atoms. Finished ships, one of them the huge, fifty-passenger biplane that was being constructed for transatlantic travel—half a hundred smaller craft in

various stages of completion—crumpled and disintegrated.

Then, out of the bleak and somber sky, came a whirling, spinning cloud blacker than the surrounding atmosphere. It had the shape of a man—a legless man whose head was in the clouds. It whooped and shrieked in hellish glee as it bore down upon the doomed factory, leaping high in the air, touching the ground at infrequent intervals. Wherever it touched death and disaster followed.

The surrounding buildings went down before its onslaught like paper houses before a gale of wind. The air was filled with the shrieks of the injured and the moans of the dying. From every side police cars raced to the doomed area. In their wake came the ambulances.

It struck the spot where, half an hour before, a great factory had stood. Twisting, doubling, it bent over and sucked up the crushed and pulverized stone at a single breath as a vacuum cleaner lifts the dirt from a carpet. It shrieked fiendishly, howling and whistling like a mad thing. With the tail of its flapping garment of cloud-like vapor, it picked up a huge piece of fire apparatus and, carrying it through the air, hurled it through the top of a ten-story building.

Then, suddenly, it disappeared. And where the great buildings of the Undermill Air Craft plant had stood there now remained only cellars—a solid block of brick and masonry carried away almost in an instant.

The papers were filled with the story of the disaster. Edition followed edition as rapidly as the huge presses could turn them out. Business was stagnated. Dawn found the streets filled with milling, wondering people. Inspector Ricks, recuperating from his injuries, seized the first paper that came into the hospital and, reading, swore lustily.

**"The National Capital Will Be Crumpled Into Dust,
To Be Scattered To The Four Winds!"**

Bellowing for his clothes, he hastily attired himself. In spite of nurses and doctors, he staggered to a taxicab and hastened to the Central Detective Bureau where already a vast crowd was congregating, demanding action on the part of the police, cursing official inefficiency.

The story of the night watchman was told and retold. His picture, pipe in mouth, appeared on the front page of every newspaper in the city. The press associations ceased sending out any other news in order to load their wires with this, the culminating horror of all.

Then came a new sensation:

DOCTOR DEATH SENDS DEATH THREAT TO THE NATION

Thus did the Sneed papers play up the letter which followed the latest outrage. The letters appeared in five-inch wood-type across the front page of all of them. Every other sheet followed suit as the presses were again set in motion and editors, reporters, copy-readers, linotype operators and pressmen, weary after a gruelling day, started again on what was the biggest sensation of all. Death's latest letter read:

My patience is exhausted. I have given repeated warnings, none of which have been observed. When next I strike, it will be not at any particular spot, but at the nation as a whole.

Civilization as it now exists must cease. I have said this before. I say it again. The world must either go back to the simple life of its own accord or I will destroy it. The world knows I possess a power such as no man has enjoyed. I have been given a mission to fulfill. I intend to fulfill it.

Here, then, is my message to the world: The wheels of industry must stop. Scientists must cease their work. All patents in the United States Patent Office must be destroyed. The vast plants of trade and industry must be shut down and the machinery allowed to rust and crumple into dust. The cities must be emptied and men must return to the soil. Eventually I intend to wipe out all cities as I have destroyed this great plant of the men who disobeyed my commands. To do so now would cause the deaths of many innocent people. And I have no quarrel with the common man. I intend, therefore, to give the cities time to purge themselves before I level them into the dust.

I have demonstrated my power in other ways. Last night I tried, for the first time, what you have called my dissolution ray. I have the brain with which to create this great engine of destruction. I will create further weapons of destruction.

Two weeks from today, on August 14th, unless I see that steps have been taken to carry out my commands, I strike again. The national capital will be crumpled into dust and the dust scattered to the four winds of heaven. Following that, another respite of two weeks will be given. Then I strike for the last time. When I have finished, not a plant of any consequence, not a machine, not a building of importance will be left on this side of the Atlantic.

At the same time the missions under my command will commence the work of wholesale slaughter. The so-called great men of our nation will die—just as John Stark and Munson and Spafford and Henworthy died.

I have commanded.

Doctor Death.

CHAPTER XXIII

The Master Commands!

THE world was to be destroyed. Doctor Death had decreed it. Oddly enough, a majority of the people believed his statement. In some quarters, the news was received with rejoicing. Men were to be reborn on a common level; everyone was to start afresh. The wealthy would be brought down to a plane with the common men.

Doctor Death, over night, became a national hero with the working classes. Doctor Death clubs were formed with a Death's head as their emblem. Soap box orators sang his praises on street corners. The police broke up mass meetings of demonstrators in every large city.

It was a certainty that from these clubs and demonstrations Doctor Death was recruiting a small army. Already there was a feeling of tension in the air. It was whispered that mankind was to be destroyed with the exception of a certain few and that from this selected group a new race was to be started.

But Death himself, the head and brains of this impending disaster, was still a thing

apart. Once he was in their power, the police knew that they could handle his followers. To this end the men of the Secret Service and Detective Bureau combed the city. Thousands of sympathizers were arrested, only to be freed for lack of evidence.

It was Doctor Death they wanted. And Doctor Death could not be found.

The very life of the government was at stake, regardless of how great or small the peril might be to the general population. In the life of every nation, as in the lives of its people, come moments which because they are so colossal, so overwhelming, are beyond comprehension. Such was the case of the United States. A few thousand men—leaders of science, industry and government—recognized the terrible danger which threatened the world at large. These men were helpless.

Over them all, leaving no stones unturned in the effort to seize the diabolical fiend who had made this all possible, was the Secret Twelve with the President of the United States at the head and Jimmy Holm as the managing director.

IN a gloomy old house set down at the edge of a lake close to New York City, Doctor Death sat in moody silence, his deep set eyes wearing a strange, far-away look as he listened over the radio to an impassioned oration made by a high official of the United States. As the words died away, the old man leaned forward and turned the machine off. Then, settling back in his chair he touched a button on the table and, lighting his battered pipe, dropped back against the cushions and closed his eyes in thought.

It was typical of the man that he should select such a place for his lair after being chased out of his subterranean fortress. There was something about his makeup that required darkness—stygian gloom. Like a fungus growth, he flourished best far from the light of day.

The building was huge and rambling. It stood far back from the main road; the lane which led to it was weed-grown and

filled with ruts. A wall and a vast grove of spruce and fir trees shielded it from the pavement. The masonry was cracked and ruinous, covered with creeping vines and a peculiar growth of moss. The windows were tightly boarded, giving the place the appearance of being uninhabited.

The interior, in spite of the richness of its furnishings—for Doctor Death did not believe in stinting himself—was as dark and gloomy as was the outside. It was filled with rambling corridors, worn stairs, bleak, tunnel-like hallways and crumbling plaster. The suite of rooms used by the sinister Doctor were brilliantly lighted. The remainder of the place was as dark as a cavern, unfurnished and bleak.

Doctor Death made no movement as the door opened and Nina Ferrera entered. She dropped into a chair with a defiant attitude, her eyes sweeping his gaunt, emaciated form insolently.

"You rang?" she inquired.

Her gaze met his with a merciless, searching intentness.

"You are still in an evil humor," he chuckled. "It was time that you were taught a lesson. You have evidently not been punished sufficiently."

"I am not afraid of death," she said simply.

"You misunderstand me," Doctor Death said coldly. "I have no intention of killing you. You are necessary to me—more necessary now than ever before, even though you have ceased to assist me in my experiments. One man stands in the way of my success. You can aid me in outwitting him. Need I mention his name?"

"Jimmy Holm?" she said in a low, hushed voice.

Death nodded.

"Exactly, my dear. I know that you love this cub. Youth is pliable, flexible, bending under pressure. Had I killed him when I had the opportunity, I would be in control of the nation at this minute. Instead, I foolishly allowed myself to be swayed by you. I should have put an end to him. By this time you would already have forgotten him."

He smiled cynically, noting that her face was working with poignant emotion.

"Never!" she burst forth.

"It has been a battle between my magic and your magic," he went on. "As a result, you have restored to Jimmy Holm that which I took away from him—his memory. I need him now—need him because, without his leadership, my foes will be reduced to a state of confusion. Ricks knows only ordinary police methods. There are scientists—yea. But they are not policemen. Even by pooling their knowledge, they can get nowhere without this one man. Jimmy Holm must again be captured and his fangs plucked. This done, you may have him. It is through you that I must seize him. Will you accept the task willingly?"

"No!" she interrupted defiantly.

The sinister old man rose to his full height. Her face blanched as he leaned forward, his cavernous eyes glaring into her own.

"The time has come for a showdown!" he snarled. "For a long time now you have defied me—dared me because of this man—"

"I love him," she said simply, turning away.

"Love! Bah!" he snapped. "What is love? A mere matter of passion—here today, gone tomorrow. Do you think, girl, that I would allow an affair of the heart to interfere with my plans?"

"Were you never young?" she asked.

He shrugged his shoulders.

"That has nothing to do with the matter," he answered. "Frankly, I have forgotten, so busy have I been during my allotted span. But we are getting away from the subject. You must be disciplined—humiliated. Look at me, girl! Gaze into my eyes!"

"No! No! Not that! Not that!" she said with a shudder.

"We will exchange bodies," he went on relentlessly. "But since I dare not let you into this old shell of mine, your soul—your ego—must roam the world of space until I restore your body to you . . ."

"God, no!" she shrieked.

His glance, swift as lightning, seized upon her frail body. It blinded her, half stunning her, sending her reeling back against the table. She grasped it for support.

"Sorcerer! Necromancer!" she screamed. "You cannot . . ."

She was crouching on the floor now, her face buried in her slender hands, her shoulders shaking with suppressed sobs. He took a step forward and bent over her, touching her white flesh with his bony fingers.

"Look at me!" he commanded.

"No! No!" she shrieked.

Yet she turned her face upward and gazed at him out of wet eyes, her mouth quivering with emotion.

"Jimmy!" she sobbed.

"Your soul belongs to me!" he snapped.

"Jimmy!"

He was working rapidly now, every faculty alert as he bent forward, his gaunt arms outstretched toward her. His brow was covered with great globules of sweat. His deep-set eyes glittered like burning coals. She shrank back. She screamed . . . once. Then there was silence.

AN aura surrounded her—a thin, vaporish fog. Her eyes turned to Death pleadingly. For a moment the gossamer-like vapor hung over her, seemingly attached to her by a sort of umbilical cord. Then slowly, as if reluctant to leave, it separated itself and floated in the air like a tiny cloud of smoke.

Doctor Death chuckled sardonically. With a peculiar shrug of his thin shoulders, he pointed dramatically to an adjoining room. The smoke-like cloud drifted slowly through the door and lost itself in the darkness.

For an instant only Doctor Death stood there gazing down at the beautiful form of the girl upon the rug. Then, drawing himself to his full height, he shook himself. His whole body writhed and twisted like that of a soul in torment.

Suddenly he staggered back, seizing upon

the back of a chair for support. His gaunt form seemed to contract like a rubber balloon that has been deflated.

From him emanated the same fog-like aura that had been extracted from the body of the girl. It rose to mid-air, leaping, bounding, cavorting like a mad thing.

Then, as his bony frame collapsed in a little heap upon the floor, the foggy substance settled over the still form of the girl. For a moment it hung suspended. It dropped until it covered her body . . .

Slowly, it dissolved into the slender form. The languorous eyes opened. She stretched herself and yawned. Then she leaped to her feet.

"I am Doctor Death!" she chuckled, gazing at herself in the long mirror. "I am Doctor Death!"

She burst into a peal of shrill, fiendish diabolical laughter.

CHAPTER XXIV

Holm Turns Devil

THE nation had one more week to live. Seven days remained of the two weeks allowed by the sinister Doctor Death in his letter to the newspapers following the wiping out of the Undermill Aircraft plant by the now famous dissolution ray.

Jimmy Holm had reached a point where he was little more than a bundle of nerves. Night and day he was on the job giving orders, receiving reports, handling his gigantic army of detectives and Secret Service agents like the general of an army on the battlefield, barely allowing himself time to eat and sleep. No stone was left unturned, no clue too small to be run to its source.

From a thousand cities and hamlets scattered from Maine to California came reports of the sinister scientist's alleged activities. Each one had to be investigated, even though the officials were almost certain that they were untrue; all had to be tabulated and filed. A small army of clerks was kept busy.

The Secret Twelve had come out of hiding, now that the time was limited. Daily—sometimes hourly—conferences were held. The President had, for the nonce, quitted the White House and, taking over an entire floor in one of the largest New York hotels, was conducting the business of the nation from the metropolis in order that he might be in constant touch with the situation. The newspapers printed little other news than that devoted to the search for the most dangerous criminal the world had ever known.

Nina Ferrera was dead. Doctor Death had killed her. Of this Jimmy Holm was certain. And, in taking her life, the sinister being had stirred up a devil within Holm's breast that would never be quieted until he had paid the penalty in the electric chair. It was an obsession with him, this longing to bring the monster to boot. He thought of it by day. By night it filled his dreams.

Sending her dead hand to him through the ether was diabolical. He shuddered when he thought of it. God, what unlimited power the fiend possessed.

Ricks, far from well, but filled with the same feverish energy as his subordinate, was constantly by his side, spurring him on. Caminetti had kept his word. The underworld had ceased its activities at a word from him, leaving the entire Detective Bureau free to pursue Doctor Death unhampered. Save for the desk men on duty, the Central station was practically deserted.

The wolves of the underworld recognized the necessity of the police force of the nation devoting their time to the capture of this menace as much as did their masters. Caminetti had so decreed and the word of Caminetti was law. Proudly, the uncrowned king of crime met with the other members of the Secret Twelve, holding his thugs in leash with an iron band.

"If even a ten cent piece is stolen—if one single drop of blood is shed—the ax of Tony Caminetti will fall!"

This was the edict that went out and these were the orders that were obeyed to the letter.

"Until I say otherwise, even though the United States mint is left unguarded, it must not be touched," he snarled to his lieutenants. They, in turn, passed it to the others.

Holm had eaten a hasty dinner. Now, too nervous to remain in one place for long, he had strayed out into the lobby of the hotel where the unofficial White House had been established. Standing in the window, he gazed out into the drizzling rain, his brow puckered in thought.

Mechanically his hand sought his case and extracted a cigarette. He struck a match. About to apply it to the end of the fag, he suddenly stopped. The flame burned down to his fingers unnoticed as he leaned forward with an exclamation of excitement.

Nina Ferrera had just passed.

Common sense should have told Jimmy Holm to take no chances with so subtle an enemy as Doctor Death. But, for the nonce, caution was thrown to the winds. Turning, he elbowed his way through the throng about the exit and anxiously looked about. For a moment he failed to see her. Cars were constantly leaving the curb and he feared that she might have taken one of them. Then he caught sight of her again. She was halfway down the block, walking rapidly. He swung in behind her, closing up the gap as fast as possible lest she give him the slip.

He had gained half the distance when a picture house gushed forth its crowd. For a moment he was held back. By the time he had fought his way through the milling mob, she was out of sight again.

He broke into a run. Reaching the corner, he found that she had swung onto the side street. The rain was coming down in torrents now, obscuring the lights. He could barely make out her figure in the darkness. She was walking rapidly. Once she glanced back, evidently knowing that she was pursued.

Ahead of her was a dark alley. She dodged into it. Breaking into a run, Holm speedily covered the distance to where she had disappeared. For an instant he

stopped, gazing into the gloomy void. It was like a canyon, the tall buildings on either side looming up for countless stories until they seemed to meet at the top. In the middle of the block a single red light gleamed over an entrance; he was just in time to see her as she passed into it.

"Nina!" he cried.

She stopped, casting a frightened glance over her shoulder. Then she broke into a run and disappeared in the darkness.

Holm increased his speed, rapidly covering the distance to where he had last seen her. He brought up in front of an open door. That she had dodged into it was a certainty.

For a fleeting second or two he hesitated, realizing now that he had been lacking in caution. Then, squaring his shoulders, he threw common sense to the winds and, his fingers clasping the butt of his revolver, he took a step closer.

"Nina!" he whispered.

He was certain that he heard a movement far back in the darkness.

"Nina!" he said again.

Receiving no answer, he stepped inside the door.

Again he whispered her name. He was certain that he heard her low, tense breathing.

Something swept over him, engulfing him. It stifled him, taking his breath. His senses reeled.

MMUSCULAR arms were around his shoulders. Something was pressed against his nose. He tried to hold his breath—to fight it off—but in vain. The fumes surged through his head, intoxicating him. He would have fallen had not strong arms held him up.

The gun dropped from his nerveless fingers unnoticed.

He sat up and rubbed his aching eyes, staring about dazedly. His head ached. His legs felt heavy and numb. He tried to move them, only to find that they were like leaden weights.

He was lying on a low divan. He struggled to a sitting position and, with the as-

sistance of his hands, swung his feet to the floor. Then he made shift to stand erect. His legs crumpled beneath his weight and he toppled backwards upon the couch again.

A sinister laugh greeted his efforts. He turned his head.

Doctor Death was standing in the open doorway, a sardonic smile on his saturnine face.

THEN, for the first time, Holm saw, through the open doorway, Nina Ferrera in the other room. She was seated in a huge, overstuffed chair, her head resting against the cushions, her arms hanging limply, her face curiously white and waxed.

"Dead? Is she dead?" he demanded.

Doctor Death chuckled again.

"No such good news, my young friend," he rasped. "Perhaps it would be better for you if she were."

He took a step closer and surveyed Holm through half-lowered lids.

"I have no reason for deceiving you," he said coldly. "Your condition is such that you are practically helpless. Mean-while—watch!"

He turned to the girl. From somewhere a vaporish aura swept over the form of the recumbent girl. It settled over her like smoke, enveloping her in its sinuous, snaky whorls. She opened her eyes . . . stretched forth her hands in a gesture of appeal.

Death snapped his fingers.

The vaporish substance lifted. For an instant it hung over the slender form as the girl dropped back against the cushions again. Then it disappeared.

"Her soul!" Doctor Death said harshly. "She is dead now, but her soul still lingers with her, because I willed it so. It is up to you whether she lives again or whether, until the end of time, her soul—her ego—wanders through space, while her body, her shell, her framework, if you will, remains as you see it now. In plain words, she will become one of my Zombi—a living

dead woman, devoid of everything except the ability to move—"

"Horrible!" Holm exclaimed.

Death chuckled again.

"Poor, deluded fool," he said. "You—you thought that you could circumvent me."

The old man snapped an order. A Zombi returned a moment later with a decanter and glasses. Filling two of them, Death took a tiny vial from the drawer of the desk and let fall a few drops of a clear liquid into one of them. He handed it to Jimmy.

"Drink!" he commanded curtly. "It will clear the fumes from your head and make you conscious of what I am saying. Your legs will, however, remain paralyzed until I will otherwise. You need have no fear. You should know me well enough by this time to realize that, had I wanted to kill you, I could have done so long ago."

Jimmy Holm quaffed the amber fluid. It raced through his veins like molten metal, clearing his head in an instant.

He glanced again through the open doorway. Nina Ferrera! He cared little for himself. But this girl, condemned to this living death. God! It was unthinkable.

"You devil!" he roared. "Infamous monster!"

Death shook his head reprovingly.

"Harsh words will avail you nothing," he said.

"What is it that you want of me?" Jimmy asked, after a moment.

Doctor Death smiled benevolently.

"I knew that you would use your good sense," he chuckled. "What I ask is very little, Jimmy Holm. Give me your word of honor that you will not attempt to lay a hand on me—that you will return to me on your former status. In payment, I will give you back the use of your limbs and the life of Nina Ferrera. Otherwise—"

He spread out his hands, palms up, in a gesture of finality.

"I promise," Jimmy Holm said slowly.

**He Called For Nina But The Horrible Creatures Of Death
Edged Closer, Reaching For His Throat.**

There was a timid knock at the door of the huge penthouse atop the Quiller building where Tony Caminetti held sway as king of the underworld. A peculiar door it was, grained and painted so as to resemble wood. In reality it was chromium steel. Pulling aside a tiny slide, the guard on duty placed his eye to an almost invisible peephole and peered out.

CHAPTER XXV

Caminetti Shows His Guns

A WEASEL-FACED man stood under the doorlight, the rain dripping from the brim of his battered hat.

"Muggs Dent," the guard muttered to his companion who was lounging in a leather-covered chair beside a table on which rested a machine gun.

"Let 'm in," the other growled.

The guard unlocked the door and held it open just far enough to allow the weasel-faced man to step inside. Then he closed it and hastily shot the bolt.

"Wot the hell d'you want?" he exploded. "Y' know damned well the big boss don't want the likes of youse comin' here, an' him hobnobbin' wit' th' best men in the country."

The weasel-faced man nodded.

"I know all dat," he said in an awed whisper. "But I've got something—something big dat he's gotta know about—right now. Jeez! I'm tellin' youse dat it's important."

"Tell me!" the guard growled.

Muggs Dent shook his head stubbornly.

"It's fer d' boss' ear alone," he answered.

The big guard got out of his chair slowly and took a step toward the other, his huge fists doubled.

"Kick in wit' d' info, sweetheart," he growled, "or youse'll be takin' a ride dat you won't come back from. Get me?"

Dent's face paled.

"All right," he agreed. "But fer th' love of God get it to d' big boy quick."

He leaned forward and dropped his voice.

"Dey've got Holm!"

The big guard started.

"Meanin' jus' what?" he growled.

"S'help me God!" Muggs Dent said virtuously. "I seen 'm take 'im. Here's his rod. It dropped from his pocket when dey was tusslin' wit' 'im."

He jerked the revolver that had fallen from Holm's hand from his pocket and extended it butt first, to the other. For an instant the two guards gazed at him under lowered eyelids. Then the first nodded to his companion.

"Better get dis to Tony pronto," he said.

The other shook his head solemnly.

"Sure," he said. "Ain't we playin' wit' d' p'lice now?"

He hurried through an adjoining door and rapped softly on the panels of the master's room. A second later Tony Caminetti, his slender form draped in a figured silk dressing gown, stepped into the room.

"What's this I hear, Muggs?" he demanded. "The boys say that you have some hot information."

"Dey've got Holm," Dent said excitedly. "I seen 'em take 'im, boss. See, dere's his rod."

He pointed to the revolver on the table. Caminetti picked the weapon up and examined it closely.

"Police department gun, all right," he said. "Go ahead with your story. Did they kill him?"

The weasel-faced man shook his head.

"I don't t'ink so," he answered. "Here's d' dope: I'm in d' alley back of d' Antler building tonight watchin' fer a moll dat I know who's woikin' in a restaurant dere, when who does I see turnin' in but a gang of dem Reds. I knows one of dem; it was Rogeski, d' guy dat d' p'lice had d' trouble wid a while back. I knows dat he's got it in fer me, thinkin' dat I'm d' guy wot turned 'im in, so I quick looks aroun' fer a place t' do a fadeaway. Right beside me is an open door an' I dodges into it. I just gets back away from d' door when in dey comes, Rogeski at d' head. I t'inks dat dey's got me cornered an' I'm reachin' fer me heat when I sees

dat dey hadn't noticed me at all. It was somebody else dat dey was after.

"Sh-h-h!" I hears Rogeski whisper, 'here he comes.'

"A minit later who steps up to d' door but Holm. Dere's a red light close by an' I gets a square view of his mug.

"Nina!" he says, jus' like dat.

"Den he pulls out his rod an' steps inside an' dey mobs 'im. I hears 'im tus-slin' fer a minit an' den somethin' drops against me toe. It was Holm's rod.

"Let 'im down!" I hears Rogeski say.

"A minit laier dere's a truck pulls up at d' door and dey shoves Holm into it and pulls out. I waits till I'm sure dat dey are gone an' den I pulls my freight f'r here, knowin' how youse an' Holm is pals right now. An' dat's-the story, so help me, an' dere's d' gum to prove it."

THAT Tony Caminetti was a man of action had been demonstrated a hundred times in his climb from obscurity to leadership in the world of crime. He demonstrated it again now. For a few minutes he fired questions at Dent with the rapidity of one of his own machineguns. Then, satisfied that the man was telling the truth, he turned to the telephone and put in a call for Ricks. Five minutes later the Inspector, a dozen men at his back, was on his way to the penthouse.

Muggs Dent was interrogated a third time. He stuck to his story.

Ricks was puzzled.

"You say that he called the name 'Nina'?" he asked.

Dent nodded.

"Dat's wot he says. 'Nina!' he says, jes' like dat. Yet dere wasn't no dame dere. Nobody but d' Reds."

"You're certain about that?"

The weasel-faced man nodded indignantly.

"If dere'd been a skoit I'd a noticed her, wouldn't I?" he asked.

"And the truck? Did you get the number?"

The thin face of Muggs Dent lighted up.

"Jeez! Inspector, I mos' forgot dat," he exclaimed. "Now dat you mention it, I did. I could see it plain as d' nose on me face as it toined around under d' light t' back up. It was N.Y.-00-222-000. It's funny I didn't t'ink of it before."

The Inspector seized the telephone and called Headquarters.

Ricks' mind was racing with conjectures as he replaced the receiver on the hook and turned back to where Tony Caminetti was regarding him quizzically. The snatches of 'phone conversation the king of the underworld had overheard told him that the scent was hot. There was a grim look on the Inspector's face as he jerked his thumb toward the other room.

With a nod of comprehension, Caminetti led the way into his private parlor. Then, dropping into a chair and indicating another across the table, he shoved a decanter of whiskey and a glass toward his guest.

"Drink?" he asked. "It's the best stuff money can buy."

Inspector Ricks shook his head.

"Haven't the time," he growled. "Tony, you've picked up something big—biggest thing, I'm thinking, that's come our way so far in this case."

The Italian's eyes glistened with excitement.

"Splendid!" he exclaimed. "And may I ask what you have learned?"

For a minute there was silence. Inspector Ricks wondered just how far he dared trust this man, this enemy of society who, until a few weeks ago, had been his bitterest enemy, and who now was fighting by his side.

"I think that, perhaps, you have located the man we are after," he said finally. "For your private information, I'll say that Holm did disappear. He and I ate dinner together. He stepped out into the lobby. Five minutes later when I went out I found him gone. What your man says dovetails in with what I have just found out."

"And that is?"

"New York truck license 00-222-000 is

registered in the name of a man named Letowski," Ricks answered. "A Letowski, who is presumed to live somewhere near Lake Whatcum. And Ansel Letowski, my friend, was one of the gang of Communists that we had under arrest a few days back for indulging in one of those Death Club parades. It's my opinion, that we will do a little investigating up Lake Whatcum way."

CHAPTER XXVI

Slashing Torture

DARKNESS hung like a pall over the little town of Lake Whatcum as Ricks' big machine, its fenders covered with mud from the long drive from New York, its seats packed with husky policemen, swept through the main street. Ricks, slumped in the seat beside the driver, tired though he was, for he was still far from being a well man, felt a growing tension—the feeling that comes over the big game hunter when he first senses his quarry. Doctor Death was somewhere near him. He knew it—would have staked his life on it. He had had the same feeling before in his long career as a detective; it always came to him at the crucial moment in a case. "Ricks' hunch," his fellow officials called it.

Somewhere within a radius of a few miles lurked the menace that threatened the safety of the world—the man who was terrorizing the entire country.

"Slow up," he growled to the driver. "Let's see if we can find anybody alive in this burg."

Even as he spoke a man swung around the corner. The light of a street lamp glittered on the huge star pinned to his breast. It was the night watchman. Ricks hailed him and presented his credentials.

"Ansel Letowski?" the watchman said, scratching his stubbly chin reflectively. "Now I'm thinking that he must be one of that gang of Rooshins or Poles, or whatever they are, that bought the old Crum place a month or two back. Going

to start some sort of colony, I've heard it said, although I haven't seen any sign of it so far."

Ricks nodded.

"Where is it?" he asked.

He waited until the other had given minute directions how to get to the rambling old house on the other side of the lake. Then, with a word of thanks, he nodded to his chauffeur and they were on their way again.

The rain had almost ceased, but the sky was still moonless. They turned into the muddy lane that led through the tangle of brambles and scrubby trees, finally coming to a stop at the huge iron gate.

Ricks dismounted and gazed at the high stone fence which extended, as nearly as he could ascertain, around the whole place. Then, with a grunt to his men, he took a pair of nippers from the car and cut the chain with which the gate was locked.

The yard was overgrown with stunted trees and vines, but when they had struggled through the maze, they found themselves on the edge of a clearing along the lake in which stood a gaunt old house, rambling and vast, the windows boarded. To all appearances, it was untenanted.

Then, again, Ricks rushed in when caution should have warned him to move slowly.

Quietly, keeping within the shadows of the trees, they moved around the clearing until they were in the rear of the tumbledown old pile. Here Ricks halted them. Dropping to all fours, he moved forward cautiously, creeping from bush to bush, from shadow to shadow, until he stood within a yard of one of the tightly boarded windows. Satisfied that he could not gain entrance here, he moved a trifle farther to the right.

At the same moment the door opened and a man armed with a sawed off shot gun, stepped onto the rickety porch.

The fellow, evidently a guard, was almost within arm's reach of the Inspector. Ricks, his every nerve tingling with the feeling of Doctor Death's proximity, was anxious to get into the house. The guard

left the door open a tiny crack. For an instant he looked around. Apparently satisfied, he was about to turn back into the house. He stopped suddenly with an exclamation, his eyes peering into the darkness.

For Ricks, shifting his feet, had stepped upon a twig.

The guard leaped forward, his gun leveled. Now Ricks' years of experience, his amazing quickness of eye and accuracy of judgment, stood him in stead. Like a flash his gun arm rose and fell. The butt of the heavy police revolver caught the other on the temple. He stiffened, rocking backwards and forward dizzily.

Ricks jerked the shot gun from the fellow's nerveless grasp. At the same time the revolver descended again with crushing force. With a little grunt, the man's legs doubled beneath him and he would have crashed to the ground had not the Inspector's arm shot out and steadied him.

It was the work of but a second for the big policeman to drag the unconscious man back into the bushes and shackle him hand and foot. Then tying a handkerchief over his mouth for a gag, he wriggled his way back to his men and, informing them what had happened, led the way back to the house.

Stealthily, his gun out and cocked, Ricks stepped into the darkened passageway. He waited until his men were all inside, then carefully closed the door lest some vagrant current of air betray their presence. His sense of intuition—the feeling that he was close to his quarry—was growing stronger each minute. The silence was acute. The atmosphere was charged with tautness, an indefinable something, a sense of expectancy. Somewhere a plank creaked; their hearts stood still.

It was Ricks who first threw off the feeling of oppression that hung over them. Whispering a command to his subordinates, he stretched forth his hand. Finding the wall, he led the way down the passageway, finally ending up in front of a door.

With a whispered word of caution to the others, Ricks pressed his ear against the

panels and listened. Hearing nothing, his hand sought the knob. Finding it, he gave it a cautious turn. It responded to his touch. Opening the door he stepped inside.

The blackness here was even more stygian than it had been in the passageway. Again they listened, Ricks waiting just inside the door until they were all gathered around him. There was a musty smell about the place—a feeling of emptiness.

With a whispered word to the others to be ready, the Inspector took his flashlight from his pocket and pressed the button. The momentary glimpse they caught during the brief interval that the light was on showed the interior of a huge, empty room—a room entirely devoid of furniture, the plaster cracked, the paper hanging from the walls in shreds. On the opposite side was a second door. Ricks led the way toward it.

Then the floor dropped from beneath their feet.

JIMMY HOLM, waking from the dreamless sleep into which Death's draught had sent him, beheld the gaunt form of the sinister old man standing over him, a small glass of amber-colored liquid in his hand.

"Drink this," he commanded curtly. "It will relieve the paralysis in your legs and I have need of you. I take it that your word of honor still stands?"

Holm nodded. Then, taking the potion from the other's grasp, he downed it at a gulp. Then he dropped back against the pillows, his vitals burning as if filled with fire.

"You have poisoned me, you devil!" he shrieked.

Doctor Death shook his head.

"You wrong me," he said calmly. "The pain will pass away in an instant."

He spoke the truth. Within a moment or two the burning sensation was succeeded by a feeling of exhilaration. Holm's head swam dizzily. Then this, too, cleared away, leaving him his normal self again. He tested his legs, rising to his feet and



Suddenly the floor dropped. The Inspector and his men plunged into darkness.

taking a step or two gingerly. Finding that he could walk, he took a turn about the room.

Doctor Death, who had been watching him, chuckled.

"Soon you will begin to believe me when I say that my knowledge of drugs and medicines is as unlimited as my knowledge of the occult," he said. "But come. You are yourself again and I have a surprise in store for you."

He led the way through the room and down a narrow stairway into the cellar.

"Your assumption that I have recruited a number of men to assist me is correct," he said. "Without their aid, I would be unable to assemble the vast amount of paraphernalia that I find necessary within the short space of time allotted to me. I have several of these men here now. Their orders are to kill you—shoot without mercy—should you violate your parole.

"Two men," he went on, half to himself, "have caused me more trouble than all the rest of the world combined. Had it not been for them, I honestly believe that my life work would have been achieved and the nation ere now agreed to my demands. Those men? You can probably guess their names. One of them is yourself. The other is Inspector John Ricks. Now I have both of you in my power!"

"Ricks a prisoner!" Holm gasped.

Doctor Death nodded.

"You can see for yourself," he said, throwing open a door.

Inspector Ricks lay bound upon a low, flat table. He was conscious, for his eyes glared up at his captor. Then, catching sight of Jimmy, his mouth tightened.

"I came to rescue you," he said. "Now I find that you have turned traitor."

Doctor Death halted him with a gesture.

"It has long been my ambition to see this minute," he said. "It is needless for me to state that I hate both of you. You, Ricks, must die. As for Jimmy, I would kill him, also, but I need the help of Nina Fererra and with Holm dead, I could get no assistance from her—the lovesick fool! In

killing you. I will teach Holm a lesson."

His finger touched a button on the wall. There was a whirring sound and the table on which Ricks lay commenced to move slowly forward.

Then Holm saw something that caused him to shriek aloud.

Beside Ricks, so close that it almost touched him, was a small wheel edged with knives. The moving table was bearing him directly into it. In a moment it would be tearing into his vitals.

"Stop!" Holm commanded.

Death's finger pressed the button again. The machinery stopped.

The aged scientist chuckled. There was an insane glitter in his eyes as Holm took a step forward, his fists doubled, his jaw outthrust.

"Your word of honor!" he said. "Remember? And remember, also, that Nina Fererra has not yet been released from bondage."

Jimmy Holm stopped in his tracks, the sweat pouring from his face. The wheel, once started again, would tear Ricks apart in an instant. It was not six inches from him, while his body was so strapped to the table that it would sever him end for end.

What was he to do?

In spite of the sinister scientist's diabolical powers, he believed that in his present frame of mind, he could handle the old man. A sudden blow to the point of the jaw, taking him unawares, would turn the trick and save Ricks' life. But to do so would be to sentence Nina Fererra to a fate worse than death. For Doctor Death, thwarted, would never forgive him. Nina Fererra, her soul separated from her body, would be condemned to go on through to eternity alive and yet dead—a Zombi.

CHAPTER XXVII

The Diabolical Contrivance

HOLM had little time for reflection. For Doctor Death, seeming to sense his thoughts, gave a sharp command. Half a dozen men leaped into the room and sprang upon him. For a minute he strug-

gled. They overpowered him by sheer weight of numbers. Then, holding him prisoner, they turned to Doctor Death, waiting his orders. Huge, uncouth creatures, they were, bewhiskered, bestial. Holm recognized several of them as men who had recently been under suspicion of being part of the dreaded scientist's newly recruited army of Reds. That the recognition was mutual was demonstrated by the looks of hatred they cast at him.

"Charming little playmates, are they not?" Death said mockingly. "I need them, though. One thing about them, Jimmy, is that they will take orders. They lack the brains to think for themselves and they can do many things that my Zombi cannot do. And they hate both you and Ricks.

"It is fitting that you should have a part in the death of your friend," he went on. "It will give you something to think about

the man meant by his words. Where did he fit into the scheme? Then, as he saw the diabolical contrivance, his heart missed a beat.

Before him was a small windlass. From it ran a belt to the crank shaft overhead. And from this crank shaft ran a second belt to the mechanism which operated the knife-armed wheel. But the windlass operated in the opposite direction from the shaft.

"Watch!" Doctor Death commanded.

ONE of the grinning Reds dragged the table on which Ricks was bound a little farther from the wheel. Then he seized the handle of the windlass and commenced turning. The table moved backward and away from the gleaming blades. Death nodded. A second man pressed the switch. Instantly the table moved toward the whirling engine of destruction. By turning the windlass steadily, the table could be

"Rest For One Moment, And The Knives Will Creep Up To Rip Your Friend Limb From Limb!"

in the years to come. I am not a cruel man ordinarily, Jimmy; I do not care to witness unnecessary suffering.

"But of late I seem to have developed a new tendency. Perhaps it is my association with my charming allies here." He made a gesture toward the grinning Communists who were holding Holm prisoner. "I seem to get a sort of sadistic pleasure out of human misery.

"That, however, has nothing to do with the case at hand. Ricks must die. And you, Jimmy, must be taught a lesson—a lesson that you will never forget. The knowledge that Doctor Death is omnipotent must be impressed upon you. How can that be done more vividly than by allowing you to assist in the killing of your closest friend?"

He leaned his head back and shrieked with laughter.

"Bring him here," he commanded, moving across the room.

Jimmy was puzzled. As the Reds dragged him to where the insane scientist stood, he wondered for an instant what

held stationary. The moment he stopped turning, it moved slowly toward the revolving teeth.

"It is to be a test of your endurance, Jimmy," Death chortled, throwing off the switch. "I regret exceedingly that I have not the time to sit here and watch you. But I have other and more important work to do. The screams of John Ricks as the knives tear through his vitals would be a pleasure to me."

For a moment Holm was unable to believe his senses. Insane though he knew the man who called himself Doctor Death to be, he was unable to reconcile his character with this cruel being who stood before him. Doctor Death, the man who believed himself the mouthpiece of the Creator, was one thing. But this fiend, thirsting for blood, was different. Cold dread clawed at his soul.

Then, as his glance stole toward Ricks, he shuddered anew.

The table was covered with dried blood, clumps of matted hair, bits of what appeared to be human flesh.

"These Reds learned the art of cruelty in their mother country," Death said with a chuckle. "They practiced here recently with one of their fellows—a traitor to their cause. They die, who interfere with the progress of my plans. I reward, and I punish. I am all-powerful."

"You are a damned monster," Holm snarled.

Ricks, white-faced, shook his head.

"Don't even try the windlass, Jimmy," he said. "Sooner or later your strength will be exhausted and you'll have to stop, anyway. It may as well be now as half an hour later. And a man can die but once."

Death shrieked with laughter at the Inspector's speech. But Jimmy shook his head. Then, at a word of command, his legs were shackled to the floor.

"I must go," Death snapped. "I have spent enough time with you. Despite your actions toward me, however, I will give you a fair start. See? I move the table back to its full length. It takes just sixty seconds for it to move from where it now stands to where the saw will strike, Jimmy. Sixty seconds for you to rest when you grow weary . . ."

Turning, he stepped toward the door, his grinning followers close behind.

"Farewell, Ricks!" he snarled.

HIS hand stretched forth and touched the switch, throwing the machinery into motion. Slowly the table to which the Inspector was bound moved toward the whirling blades.

Jimmy Holm seized the handle of the windlass and turned. The movement of the table stopped. He worked faster and it moved backward.

Then commenced a test of endurance such as man has seldom been compelled to go through. Neither man spoke as the minutes passed slowly by. Holm found that by keeping up a steady turning, working neither too fast nor too slow, that he could hold the table stationary. In spite of this, however, the tedious, everlasting movement told on him. Within half an hour his arms ached from wrist to shoul-

der. Then came pains in his back. Every movement was a torture. Worse and worse grew the muscular pains. He swayed as he turned the crank.

Occasionally he was forced to stop for a moment. The table seemed to dash forward; each time he rested it was necessary for him to work the harder in order to drive it back to its original position. The sweat stood out on his body in great beads. Facing the Inspector as he was, the doomed man could see the suffering that he was going through.

"Let it go, Jimmy, old man!" Ricks called to him. "It will only be the matter of seconds. We've faced bullets together without flinching. This is the same thing. It means little more than a chunk of lead. Stop. Why prolong what we both know is inevitable?"

Jimmy Holm shook his head negatively. He was too exhausted to answer.

In spite of his every effort the devilish thing was gaining on him now. He was working like a man in a daze. His every muscle ached; each turn of the crank seemed to tear into his very vitals. It felt, he imagined, the way the knives would feel when they ripped through Ricks' flesh. He gazed at the Inspector through a haze . . .

Suddenly the wheel's shrill screaming took on a different tone. It brought him to his senses. He cursed himself for a laggard. Gaining ground as it had, the knives had reached the Inspector; the difference in sound was caused by the doomed man's clothing as it twisted about the blades.

Holm, summoning every ounce of strength at his command, threw his weight against the crank. The table slowly moved back again until, for the moment, the white-faced man was granted another respite.

Ricks, bound to the table, could see the condition the other was in. He realized that it was only a matter of minutes now—seconds, perhaps. Strangely, he had no fear. He had reached a state where his faculties were benumbed—where he almost welcomed death.

"Let it go, Jimmy," he said calmly. "No use trying any more. You've made a good fight, my boy, and God bless you for it. It will all be over in a minute. And, lying here facing death as I've been, I've had a chance to think of a great many things. It will not be hard; a sudden twinge of pain—then oblivion."

The voice seemed to come as from a great distance. Jimmy shook his head savagely.

"Not . . . licked . . . yet . . ." he heard himself gasp.

Again he put his weight to the crank and had the satisfaction of seeing the table slide back. The effort was too much for him. Once more it moved forward in spite of him. It was upon the wheel now . . . The blades were again cutting through the clothing. He tried to move a bit faster. But his arms were like dead things . . .

From outside came the sharp report of a revolver! A woman screamed as the door was flung open. The switch clicked and the machinery stopped with a low, singing whine.

"Thank God!" he heard Ricks say.

Then he slumped across the windlass,

CHAPTER XXVIII

Zombi to the Rescue

NINA FERERRA was bending over him. She dragged him to his feet.

"Quick!" she exclaimed. "I was forced to shoot the guard on duty just outside the door. The others probably heard the report of the gun and will be here in a minute."

Holm leaped erect. His body ached in every joint. Every muscle twitched. Yet the unexpected coming of the girl filled him with new hope. A feeling of intoxication swept over him like a stimulant lending him added strength.

He bent over the form of Ricks. In spite of what he had gone through, the Inspector grinned back at him.

"It's not on the cards that we should die yet, Jimmy," he said.

An instant later the ropes that bound the big detective to the table were loosened and they helped him to his feet. His legs were benumbed; he would have fallen had they not held him up.

"Go ahead!" he commanded. "Don't wait for me. Save yourselves. I'll get out of here some way."

Jimmy Holm shook his head savagely. Dropping to his knees, he attacked the Inspector's legs with an intensity that surprised even himself. For a moment he kneaded and massaged. Then, as the blood rushed back through the veins and arteries, Ricks was able to take a step or two.

Somewhere above them they could hear the sound of running footsteps. Excited voices were calling. Nina Fererra trembled as she looked at the two men anxiously.

"Doctor Death is gone," she said. "That is how I managed to get to you in time. He went to the city an hour ago. And they left me unguarded for a minute. There is no one here except those awful men. To fall into their hands would be worse than being in his power."

Ricks was moving about now, the circulation surging through his limbs by leaps and bounds. He took a little turn about the room.

Stopping in front of Jimmy Holm he seized the young detective by the hand.

"Thanks!" he said simply. Just the one word, but there was a world of meaning in it.

He turned to Nina Fererra.

"That's the third time that you've saved my life," he told her. "Let us hope that you will not be called upon again. Perhaps some time I can repay you. Meanwhile—"

He stopped, his head cocked to one side in a listening attitude.

The noises above had suddenly ceased.

Nina Fererra thrust the revolver into Jimmy Holm's fingers.

"You are a better shot than I am," she said. "They are coming."

Holm stepped to the door and peered out. There was no one in sight. With

Ricks between them—for the big man was still too benumbed to make any sort of progress unassisted—they moved out into the hallway. A flight of narrow stairs led upward. At the foot lay the body of the man Nina Ferrera had shot. She shuddered as she looked down at the crumpled form.

Holm's eyes lighted on the gun that lay beside the lifeless hand. Stooping over, he picked it up and thrust it into Ricks' hand.

"My men?" the Inspector demanded of Nina. "Where are they?"

The girl pointed down the narrow passageway that led past the stairs.

"They must be in the room at the end of this hallway," she said. "I can think of no place else. It is the room below the trap through which you fell."

HOLM raised his gun and took a pot shot at an evil face that was glaring down at them. Through the smoke from his gun he saw a small round hole suddenly appear in the other's forehead. The man's expression changed. Then he pitched forward and lay sprawled, head downward, on the stairway.

"Quick!" Nina said warningly.

They were in front of an iron bound door now. Ricks hammered against it.

"Are you in there, boys?" he demanded.

There was an answering shout from the other side. An instant later the bar was down and Ricks' men were pouring out.

There was no time for congratulations. Close beside them was another stairway leading upward. Nina pointed to it.

"This leads up the front way," she said. "Doctor Death used the front part of the house for his scientific apparatus and has it closed off from the remainder of the place. Unless they break down the door, there is no way for them to get at us for the time being."

They were halfway up when there came a shot from behind them and a bullet nicked the arm of the detective who brought up in the rear. Holm whirled and fired. The man who had shot dodged back around the corner. They could hear him in con-

versation with his fellows and knew that their retreat was cut off.

Upon reaching the door at the top of the stairway, they found it locked on the other side.

Luckily there was a small landing. For a moment they grouped themselves upon it. Then, as they heard the sound of stealthy footsteps behind them, Holm stepped back.

"Quick!" he snapped. "The strongest of you throw your weight against that door. Keep at it until you break it down. Meanwhile, give me that extra gun, Ricks. I'll cover your retreat."

His gun boomed as he spoke. At the other end of the passageway the Reds were forming for the attack. A hail of bullets fell around Holm as he stepped forward, both guns belching lead. Death's men dropped back, dragging one of their number with them.

For a moment the little party was safe again.

Behind him, Holm heard the grunts of the bulky policemen as they hurled their weight against the stout oaken panels of the door. The lock protested screechingly as a screw was torn from the wood.

"Once more!" Ricks commanded. "It's giving!"

They threw themselves against it again. The lock gave, precipitating them into the room in a little heap. Holm fired again as the men at the end of the passageway appeared in sight, shooting as they charged. His bullets stopped them. They halted. He fired another volley from both guns. They wavered and dodged back out of sight.

Turning, he dashed into the safety of the room above. The men beside him jammed the door back into place.

"God Almighty!" one of the detectives exclaimed.

Holm whirled. Standing beside the wall were row upon row of dead men, their glassy eyes staring straight to the front, their arms hanging stiffly by their sides.

"Zombi!" Ricks ejaculated.

A bullet crashed through the broken

door, lodging in the wall within an inch of his head.

Holm whirled, his gun spitting fire.

Their enemies had sneaked up on them and, standing on the landing, were firing at them through the broken door.

Holm's shots drove them back. He heard the rush of feet as they tumbled over each other in their haste to reach the security of the passageway again. Rushing to the door, he thrust his arm through the broken panel, and pulled the trigger.

The hammer clicked against the firing pin, but there was no answering report.

"Empty!" he snarled, tossing the weapons aside. "Every shell is gone. In a minute they'll realize it when we don't return their fire and they'll rush us!"

"The other room!" Nina Fererra exclaimed, leading the way into a second room opening off from the first. That Doctor Death used it for his study and laboratory was demonstrated by the amount of chemical paraphernalia scattered about.

At the same time another hail of bullets came through the battered door. Their enemies were on the landing again. Evidently realizing that the besieged were out of ammunition, they were growing bolder.

Ricks turned to his men.

"Form in front of the girl," he snapped. "Our only chance is to rush them when they come through the door. Maybe we can hold 'em off for a while."

He looked around for a weapon of some kind. Finding none, he seized a heavy chair and pried loose the legs.

"Better than nothing," he said calmly, handing the improvised bludgeons to the others.

Just then the door crashed in.

For an instant the bearded men stood in a compact group at the top of the landing. Here was an opportunity to take them by surprise and Ricks, wily old strategist that he was, seized it.

"At 'em!" he roared.

"Wait!"

It was Nina Fererra who spoke. She leaped to the table in one corner of the

room. On top of it was a small machine with a dial like that of a radio. Seizing the knob, she twisted it. There was a slight whirring noise.

"Holy Mackerall!" one of the detectives exclaimed excitedly. "Look!"

The Zombi were moving!

The men at the top of the stairway rushed into the room, their guns ready.

Then, before they realized what was happening, the Zombi were upon them. In solid phalanxes the walking dead men charged. They were between the Reds and the doorway, now—surrounded them, drawing closer and closer like the coils of a boa-constrictor. The Communists were fighting desperately, their guns belching fire. The bullets had no effect upon the dead things that closed in on them.

"It's like the day they killed Munson!" Ricks exclaimed with a savage oath.

The air was filled with the shrieks of the wounded and the moans of the dying as the Communists went down under the crushing weight of that horde of living dead. Then, when there were no more left to crush, the Zombi turned and, marching back like wooden soldiers, took their places against the wall again.

Nina Fererra twirled the dial a second time.

Then she dropped into a chair and burst into tears.

CHAPTER XXIX

Fury of the Elementals

JIMMY HOLM bent over the sobbing girl. His arm encircling her shoulder and, raising her face to his, he kissed her full upon the lips.

"You—you kiss me after what—after what you have just witnessed?" she said wonderingly.

His answer was a second kiss.

She cast a glance into the other room to where the bodies of their attackers lay, battered and bleeding, then back to the row of Zombi standing against the wall.

"Even though you knew that it was I

who—who made this horrible—this awful—thing possible, would you still love me?" she asked.

"I do not understand you, sweetheart," he told her, kissing her again. "But I would love you just the same—and always will."

Ricks cut their conversation short.

"Let's get out of here," he growled. "God knows when the old man will be coming back and we're none of us in a position to receive him, right now. We've got to get outside, Jimmy. Then, while some of us watch, the rest can go back to town with the girl and bring reinforcements. It's the chance that we've been waiting for—and we've got to take advantage of it. It is up to us to save the nation tonight."

Holm assisted the girl to her feet. She dried her eyes and led the way through the door of the laboratory into the wide, uncarpeted hallway.

A scream came through her lips.

The sinister figure of Doctor Death barred their way.

THERE he stood, tall, gaunt, saturnine, his arm outflung, batlike, glaring at them with seemingly bottomless eyes that seared into their very souls. He made no movement. Simply he stood there, his lean face twisted into a smile.

It was Ricks who broke the tension.

"Rance Mandarin," he said, "you are my prisoner. I arrest you for murder—for the murder of John Stark, Karl Munson, Levi Henworthy—"

Doctor Death burst into a peal of laughter—raucous, sardonic merriment. Suddenly it ceased and his boring eyes fixed themselves upon the Inspector's face.

"Really, you have as many lives as a cat," he snapped. "I presume that I have my niece to thank for your escape."

"Your niece!" Jimmy Holm exploded.

The old man bowed sardonically.

"Nina is my sister's child," he said. "Her father was a Portuguese nobleman who died when she was a baby. Her mother came to me as my housekeeper. I raised

Nina from infancy. Early in life she showed an aptitude for science and chemistry. I developed it. Later I adopted her; legally she is my daughter. For many years she was my assistant. She aided me, I might say, in perfecting some of the devices that I am using at this time. But for you, Holm, we might still be going along as we did before—"

"Can you not see, Jimmy, my reason for doing certain things that I did?" Nina asked. "It was because I loved him for what he used to be."

"Bah!" the old man snarled. "What has love to do in the eternal scheme of things? Now I must kill you—kill you the same as I killed the others."

There was a note of sadness in his voice.

Again it was Ricks who blundered in and broke the tension.

"Come!" he snapped. "Will you go willingly or must I—"

Doctor Death glared at him angrily.

"I'll kill you!" he screamed.

For a moment he seemed to lose control of himself as he lashed himself into a maniacal fury. Then he suddenly stopped and extended his long arms toward them in the gesture of death that they knew only too well. But no answering rays shot from the bony fingers. He took a step backward, a bewildered look creeping over his face—a look almost of fear.

"My power fails me!" he muttered.

"My magic against your magic," Nina Fererra said in a hoarse, strained whisper. "My magic against your magic. I am turning against you that which you taught me."

A breath of relief came from Holm's lips as he realized that the weird power of Doctor Death had vanished. He cast a glance at the girl. Her face wore a look of concentration, her eyes staring at the old man tensely. Her hands, too, were extended.

"This is once that you have not caught your victims off guard," she said: "The mantle of my protection is over them, warding off the evil that you would do."

Doctor Death passed his hands across

The Putrid Gray Deformities Charged, Snarling, Sweeping The Men On Their Faces Before Them.

his eyes. He was a broken, defeated old man. He took a step backward as if fearful of something the others could not see.

Ricks charged forward, his arms outstretched to seize him.

"Back!"

The big Inspector recoiled as from a blow. For an instant he was blinded—paralyzed. Then the sensation disappeared. Nina Ferrera leaped forward as if to ward off the evil, but too late.

Turning, Doctor Death dashed through a nearby door, slamming it behind him. They heard the sound of the bolt as it was shot home.

Ricks would have charged, but a white hand gripped his shoulder savagely.

"Quick!" she said. "It is growing dark outside!"

The Inspector looked at her queerly. She sensed his unspoken question.

"With the coming of night, he will turn loose all the devils of hell on us," she said quickly.

From the room into which Doctor Death had disappeared came noises—screaming, squealing, raucous noises. Nina Ferrera shuddered as she heard him.

"The elementals!" she said in an awed whisper.

Even as she spoke a sinister shape appeared before their eyes. For an instant it crouched in apparent affright, looming enormous before them. Deformed, exaggerated, shapeless, it was little more than a smudge, its formless eyes of slatey gray glaring at them out of a featureless face.

"God!" one of the detectives muttered.

The name of the Creator brought a squeal of rage from the monstrosity. Then it whirled and, twisting like a small tornado, disappeared.

Nina Ferrera led the way back into the room they had so recently quitted.

"Iron!" she said. "We must have iron. All elementals are afraid of that metal. And it will be but a moment before he will invoke their aid and surround us."

A thought suddenly came to Holm. With a shout to Ricks to follow, he turned and raced down the stairway into the cellar again. The Inspector followed without question, leaping over the pile of dead men on the floor.

Jimmy Holm turned into the room that had been their prison. A crowbar, left behind by some workman in constructing the mechanism which operated the saw and windlass, lay in the corner. Seizing it, he attacked the apparatus with a fury that caused Ricks to gasp.

Then he recognized the method in Jimmy's apparently senseless actions.

The windlass was made of iron.

In spite of the handicap of semi-darkness, working almost by sense of touch, it took Jimmy but a minute to pry the affair apart. Then, loading their arms and pockets with bits of iron, they raced back up the stairs again.

Nor were they an instant too soon.

THE hall was filled with weird, sinister, formless things—monstrosities neither of heaven nor of earth.

"Whatever happens, don't let these out of your hands," he commanded, handing each of them a bit of the iron.

Nina Ferrera sprang to the table. Lifting the white cover with a jerk that sent the contents to the floor, she tore it into long strips. Then, finding a package of pins in a drawer, she hastily pinned the white strips upon the breasts of all of them in the form of a cross.

"They fear the cross as much as they do iron," she said. "It will be an added protection for us."

Then the lights went out.

What seemed an eternity passed. Outside they could hear the subdued noises of the elementals as they raced through the hallway, gathering themselves for the attack.

Suddenly they came, formless, indistinguishable blurs out of the darkness. Gaunt

silhouettes they were, fantastic, grotesque. With inhuman speed, they charged, snarling, twisting, changing their speed, howling like a blizzard. Their irresistible force swept the little band off their feet.

Then came a sudden light!

How it came into his hand, Jimmy Holm never knew. Providence must have guided his fingers to where they found that single match buried deep in his pockets. As it flared up, dissipating the darkness, the squealing noises subsided. For a moment they caught a glimpse of the black, shapeless things glaring back at them out of the darkness with eyes that were filled with hate.

Seizing a bit of paper from the table Jimmy twisted it into a roll and applied the match to the end. For an instant it flickered, almost died. Then it sprang into life.

Holding it aloft, he walked boldly toward the sinister shapes. They drew back before the light, thinning out, spreading into formless blotches. Then they disappeared in the darkness of the hall.

"Paper!" he snapped. "Anything inflammable!"

While he held the improvised torch aloft, the others brought bits of paper, cloth, parts of the chair that Ricks had broken in anticipation of their battle with the Reds. They made a little pile atop the table and Jimmy Holm applied the torch to it. It flared up, lighting the whole room.

Somewhere in the distance, they heard the voice of Doctor Death muttering curses.

CHAPTER XXX

Death's Conflagration

FOR a little space of time they waited quietly, grimly, for some sign of the old man who called himself Doctor Death. That he would move against them again was a certainty. There was something sinister about his silence. It was as if he lay in wait for them like a great beast of prey, waiting to leap out at them when they least expected it.

Suddenly Ricks leaped forward, a cry on his lips. Into his limited vision something had shown itself in the darkness—a hunched, stooped shape creeping on all fours down the hall. It was Doctor Death. The old man straightened himself erect and leaped toward the door which opened from the hallway into the room adjoining that in which they were confined.

"The Zombi!" Nina Ferrera shrieked.

She dashed into the other room, the others at her heels. Stretching forth her hand and seizing the dial-like machine from the table, she hurled it to the floor. It crashed into pieces.

The dark, evil form of Doctor Death loomed over her, his face twisted into a look of diabolical rage.

"Damn you! You she-devil!" he roared.

Holm leaped toward him, but, whirling on his heel, he jumped over the pile of corpses and dashed through the broken door into the cellar.

"God, what a mess!" Ricks said. "Those infernal elementals out there in the darkness, ready to leap at us the moment the fire goes down and he—Death—waiting for us downstairs. 'We've got to—'"

He stopped, then turned with a sudden shout of warning to the others.

A tongue of flame, leaping high, had attacked the drapes which hung from the boarded windows, the better, probably, to hide their bareness. He seized them, tearing them from their rods, hurling them to the floor.

Unfortunately, unfamiliar as he was with the room, the very place he threw them was a spot where, not long before, in experimenting, Death had spilled some sort of inflammable oil. It had eaten its way into the dry pine boards. Now, as the flames touched it, it ignited, filling the house with smoke and flames.

There was no use trying to stop the fire now as it roared through the dry timbers. In a minute the room was an inferno, driving them into the hallway in spite of their fear of the elementals. But there was little danger from this source, since the light and

heat would drive them, too, ahead of it.

Down the hall they ran, turning the corner into the narrow side hallway which led to the rear doorway through which Ricks and his men had entered the night previous.

Ricks, in the lead, recoiled as from a blow. He leaped back just as a bullet embedded itself in the wall close to where he had been standing.

Doctor Death stood in the doorway, a gun in his hand. The light of the fire behind them threw his cadaverous, saturnine face into bold relief.

Racing down the front stairway into the cellar, he had located a weapon in some hidden cache known only to himself. Then, hurrying back up the stairway in the rear, knowing that the fire had blocked their retreat, he was standing in wait for them.

And now that his occult powers had failed him, he had turned to mundane weapons.

They were trapped. Just around the corner they heard his stealthy breathing and knew that he was coming. In a moment he would be in front of them, raking the hallway with bullets. Behind them the fire, roaring like a blast furnace, was drawing nearer.

Ricks, seeking a way to escape, chanced to see a door. There was something familiar about it. Then recollection came to him. It was the entrance to the room where he and his men had fallen through the trap.

It was their only chance. If the trap was still in working order they could drop through it into the cellar and there possibly find some other means of escape.

The thought was father to the deed. With a whispered word to his companions, he jerked open the door and leaped inside. He slammed it shut and shot the bolt just as Doctor Death rounded the corner, his gun belching lead.

For an instant Ricks thought deeply. He remembered that he was beside the door on the other side when the trap had sprung. Now, warning them to keep together, he groped his way through the darkness to

where he was certain the other exit was located.

For a moment he failed to find it. Death was fumbling at the locked door. They could hear him cursing under his breath. He was a maniac now—a homicidal maniac of the most horrible order. Forgotten was the idea that he was the viceroy of the Creator—forgotten everything in his desire to kill—to destroy.

Ricks could not locate the entrance. Shrieking like a madman, Doctor Death fired through the panels of the other door. The bullets whistled around them. The others dropped to the floor as the madman shot from every angle in his desire to satisfy his lust for killing.

THEN Ricks found that for which he sought. He gave a little cry of satisfaction. His hand groped along the wainscoting and located the knob. A sudden twist and the floor dropped from beneath their feet.

They were in the basement now, in the same room where Ricks' men had been confined when the Inspector and Holm and Nina had rescued them. They groped their way out of the open door and into the passageway.

But the windows were boarded shut.

"The crowbar!" Jimmy Holm gasped.

Above them the house was a roaring furnace. They could hear the roof crash as the burning timbers gave way. Soon the entire upper part would come tumbling into the cellar.

Holding hands, they dashed through the passageway to the little room where the two officers had had their harrowing experience. It took Holm but a minute to grope his way through the darkness to where the windlass had stood. On the floor beside it lay the crowbar that he had dropped when he dismantled it.

Now they must find a window.

The smoke was drifting down on them. The cellar was filled with it; it stifled them, torturing their lungs, making breathing almost an impossibility.

How they found an opening is a question.

Groping along the wall, their fingers outstretched, one of them located a pane of glass. Boards had been nailed on the outside. Jimmy Holm dashed the crowbar through the glass and, using all his strength, pried off the covering. With the board off, the light of the fire showed them their way clearly. It took but an instant to tear the window out. Then they lifted Nina Fererra through and the others followed to gulp great draughts of the pure air.

When they were on the outside, Jimmy Holm noticed that he still carried the crowbar.

The gaunt old house was a veritable pyre, its blazing timbers shooting flames to the heavens. In the distance they could hear the shriek of a siren as the volunteer fire department left the village of Lake Whatcum, followed by a horde of honking automobiles.

They dodged into the bushes beneath the trees, fearful of the bullets of the madman. That he had made his escape from the burning house was a certainty. They could hear him shrieking and howling as the flames licked their way through the dried wood of the ancient house.

Suddenly he discovered them where they had taken refuge in a little grove close to the lake. He gave an excited shout and emptied a clip of bullets at them. They dodged behind trees. Then, for a moment, there was silence. The flames lighted up their hiding place with the clearness of noonday.

A TREE close to where they were standing suddenly toppled and fell, bringing down another in its crash.

"The dissolution ray!" Nina Fererra exclaimed. "He keeps the machine in the little stone building by the side of the house."

Trees were toppling around them on all sides, now, several missing them by inches. At any minute one of the giants was likely to fall upon them, for Doctor Death was aiming the ray close to the ground; it was eating only the bottoms of the trees, leaving the upper parts intact.

Nina Fererra screamed as a falling limb swept across her shoulders, pinning her to the ground. Then it was that Jimmy Holm went berserk. Crowbar in hand, he leaped forward across the clearing towards the open door of the little stone house, his breath coming in great gasps.

Doctor Death shouted with joy as he saw the charging man. He pulled the trigger of his gun again and again until the hammer fell on empty shells. But Jimmy Holm miraculously came through the hail of bullets unscathed.

Through the door of the little stone building he dashed, his crowbar raised. The iron hovered for an instant above the great machine that buzzed and hummed like a live thing, throwing off sparks that lighted up the whole of the interior.

Death screamed madly as he saw what the other was about to do. He hurled his empty gun into Jimmy's face. Holm staggered. Then he brought the iron bar across the machine with a force that shattered its delicate parts into a thousand fragments. The humming suddenly ceased and he knew that he had won.

Weakly, for he had exhausted himself in his mad race across the clearing, he turned to meet the onslaught of the man who called himself Doctor Death.

But Doctor Death had disappeared.

The little fire truck came whirling through the gates, its siren shrieking, a long row of automobiles filled with villagers behind it. But they were too late. The tall, gaunt building fell with a crash that sent a shower of sparks far into the heavens.

From somewhere, far out in the forest, came a wild shriek. Then, a cry of maniacal laughter.

"Jimmy!" a voice cried. "Jimmy! Oh, Jimmy Holm."

There was a hushed awed silence—a silence unbroken save by the crackling and roaring of the devouring flames.

"Jimmy!" the voice shouted once more. "Oh, Jimmy! Listen to me! Goodbye. We will meet again—soon!"

Then came another burst of wild laughter.

It was the voice of Doctor Death.

The Secret Twelve were meeting again. Now there were more than the usual quota, for Ricks was present, while Nina Ferrera, looking more beautiful than ever, came in leaning upon the arm of Jimmy Holm. The men seated around the table leaped to their feet.

"God bless you, young lady, for what you have done for the nation!" the President of the United States said with the trace of a sob in his voice.

Nina Ferrera smiled.

"Jimmy—Mr. Holm," she said, "tells me that you wish me to explain certain things to you."

The President bowed low. Then, when she had seated herself, the others dropped into their chairs.

"Where shall I commence?" she asked.

"The Zombi!" Ricks exclaimed. "I've heard of such things being in Haiti, but I never believed the yarn, until I saw John Stark—and then the others."

CHAPTER XXXI

The Final Threat

"**D**OCTOR MANDARIN—or Doctor Death as he calls himself, is a past master of the powers of concentration," Nina said with slow deliberation. "Many people, like salesmen, have it to some extent, in their powers of what is called suggestion—making a person want something. Some orators can sway audiences by the force of their own concentration. You've all seen stronger minds dominate weaker ones. Well, Doctor Death's power is phenomenal. He has developed it to a science.

"He can kill by the very power of his thought—as well as reduce people to unconsciousness. He taught me his strange power. At times my power of concentration was as strong as his, as witness his inability to blast you last night in the hallway of the old house."

"But for Zombi—" Ricks interrupted.

Nina hesitated for an instant, then went on.

"Perhaps I should start at the begin-

ning," she said. "Doctor Death took me when I was young and impressionable. He implanted into my youthful mind the idea of rebuilding the world. It was not until later that I realized that he was insane. He taught me science—a smattering of the black arts. He conceived the idea of taking fresh bodies and, by injecting a metallic solution into their veins, make them susceptible to certain thought waves. Just as sound waves are sent through the air, so could he send thought waves through the air by means of a small condensing set which caused these dead men, filled with the liquid I have just mentioned, to respond up to a certain point. It was this condensing set that I turned on when we were attacked by the Reds. Then the Zombi responded to my thoughts."

She shuddered.

"I afterward turned it off," she said. "It is awful to kill, even in self-defense. Doctor Death was attempting to reach it, to turn it on again so that he might have the Zombi attack us, when you saw him in the hallway. I got to the machine just in time and destroyed it, thus circumventing him."

Ricks nodded.

"For which we are duly thankful," he smiled. "And what about the elementals?"

Nina Ferrera shrugged her shoulders.

"Frankly, I do not know," she answered. "Doctor Death never took me into his confidence on that score. It has always been my idea that they were scientifically constructed electro-magnetic vortices—whirlwinds having a rough resemblance to the human form—generated by Doctor Death by some means unknown to me.

"On the other hand, as you are all probably aware, it is the popular belief that every thought of man passes into another world and becomes an active entity by coalescing with one of the semi-intelligent forces of the nether world. Thus, good thoughts become beneficent powers and evil thoughts become demons. Whether that is right or whether my idea of the electro-magnetic vortices is correct is something that I cannot answer."

The President nodded and smiled.

"Personally, I am interested in the mundane more than in the supermundane," he said. "I am anxious to know what sort of machine, or device, it was that Doctor Death used in destroying the aircraft plant—the machine with which he threatened to reduce the world."

Nina Ferrera's brow clouded.

"I can only explain it in the broadest terms," she said. "Doctor Death did not go into details to me. I attempted to dissuade him, hence he refused to give me any information. Roughly speaking, this dissolution ray machine—as the newspapers called it—gave off certain vibrations. Doctor Death was able to localize these vibrations in certain areas as well as concentrate them on certain materials, which is the reason they did not destroy animate as well as inanimate substances.

"As I understand it, these vibrations communicated themselves to the electrons, neutrons and protons of the matter on which they were concentrated, stepping up their speed of revolutions so tremendously that their orbits were enlarged toward infinity.

"Thus the atoms themselves were torn apart and reduced to nothing but positive and negative charges of electricity and unattached atomic nuclei which were blasted into space. In other words, the matter completely disappeared, leaving no trace whatever—not even of the electrical charges of which its atoms were composed. Have I made myself clear?"

The President's eyes twinkled.

"You have made it clear to me that you understand such things far better than I do," he answered.

"What about the hand—your hand—that I saw?" Jimmy demanded with a shudder.

Nina paled. "If that is what I think it is, it is the worst of all. He has been working on a new machine which he claims can disassemble the human body, by using the same atomic principle on animate objects as does the dissolution ray machine on inanimate. Since I turned against him, he stopped taking me into his confidence.

He has just finished the machine—that much I know—because he told me he was going to use me in an experiment. I was given a sleeping potion with a hypodermic needle. When I awakened, he chortled fiendishly and said it had worked—dissembled and reassembled. But I've never seen it."

Ricks groaned. "I can't believe it, and yet—how about this metempsychosis?"

Nina Ferrera shook her head.

"Frankly, I don't understand that," she answered. "There must be some explanation for it, if we could proceed scientifically and not lose our heads at the things happening."

RICKS scratched his grizzled head, a perplexed look in his eyes.

"I still believe that good old-fashioned police methods are better than the new-fangled ideas," he growled. "But, I'll admit, when it comes to this new stuff, you've got to have somebody on the job who understands it. Jimmy is my bet for that. I'm having him boosted to a captaincy. But even Jimmy got captured in some screwy way. Jimmy swears that he followed you that other night. On the other hand, Muggs Dent, the gun from Caminetti's mob that saw him laid out, says that there was no skirt present. How do you figure that out?"

"That must be hypnotism," Nina Ferrera answered. "Doctor Death wanted Jimmy, so he used his concentrative powers to make Jimmy see what he wanted him to see. He impressed upon Jimmy's mind the thought that I was passing the hotel. Jimmy followed what he thought was me and became an easy prey to Doctor Death's men."

Ricks shrugged his shoulders.

"Police methods will have to be revolutionized if that menace isn't scotched pretty soon," he said thoughtfully.

For a long time there was silence. Then the President of the United States arose from the table and, clasping the hand of Nina Ferrera, shook it heartily.

"Again I say that the thanks of every man, woman and child in the United States

are due you, Miss Fererra," he said. "It has been hard for us to realize what we have gone through. But when realization does come to all of us—as it has come to a few of us—"

He hesitated.

"I shudder when I think of what almost happened," he finally went on. "The United States of America, the greatest nation on the globe, a prey to a maniac. It is horrible—unthinkable!"

"Doctor Death may be a maniac, but he is the most dangerous man alive today," Ricks interrupted. "The chap's uncanny—devilish. Sometimes I'm of the opinion that he can read the minds of others."

"He has demonstrated that to me on innumerable occasions," Nina Fererra said.

The President held up his hand for silence.

"My friends," he said, "I understand that Miss Fererra is about to change her name—that, before the sun goes down tonight,

she will be Mrs. James Holm. I, therefore, on behalf of the nation that she has saved, wish to present to her something that she can always cherish. I pin upon her breast—The Congressional Medal."

Nina Fererra smiled happily.

Suddenly there came an interruption. One of the President's secretaries entered, a telegram in his hand.

"For Mr. Holm," he said, handing the wire to Jimmy.

Holm tore open the yellow envelope and glanced at the typed sheet. His face paled. Then he handed the message to Ricks. The latter glanced at it, then passed it to the President, who read it aloud.

CONGRATULATIONS ON YOUR APPROACHING WEDDING. TAKE WARNING, GOD GAVE ME THE RIGHT TO DESTROY AND THE WEAPONS WITH WHICH TO WORK. THE WORLD MUST BE SAVED FROM ITSELF AND I AM THE INSTRUMENT. I GO BUT I WILL SOON RETURN. DOCTOR DEATH.

The sinister Doctor will return next month with his diabolical powers, with new and deadlier devices conceived by his maniacal brain of fiendish genius, and accompanied by his hellish horde—the empire of the dead.

DOCTOR DEATH

**WILL BE LOOKING
FOR YOU!**



**WATCH FOR HIM ON ALL GOOD
NEWSSTANDS ON
FEBRUARY FIFTEENTH**



"He has been appointed to death," the loathsome beast slavered, as he swung his enemy above the horrified guests.

THE BEAST THAT TALKED

by **DAMASCUS BLOUNT**

THE MONSTER OF THE AGES HE MADE OF HIMSELF FOR VENGEANCE, BUT VENGEANCE WAS NOT ENOUGH FOR THE PRIMAL RAGE OF THE THING HE BECAME.

Like a great bat, Criggley squatted over the still form of the bull ape. There was no sound in the subterranean room except the hum of the dynamo and the rasping breath of Criggley. He stared at the ferocious fangs revealed by the gaping

hideous mouth of the ape that had died yesterday in the zoo. Tomorrow the brute would walk again. Those bestial lips would slaver with rage, and he—Kelsman Criggley—would be the most famous scientist the world had ever known.

He laid aside his stethoscope and placed his ear on the matted chest of the inanimate hulk. No tremor yet, but soon this mighty chest would be stirring with savage life again. By all his tests, it was near the time when the Criggley Ray—his secret treatment of the cosmic spectrum—would disintegrate the atomic structure of the heart and its surrounding tissues into a gaseous vapor.

He laughed maniacally as he leaned back to gloat over that grisly ape face.

"They called me crazy," he chortled. "Wait until you shake your bars again, my beauty, and then they'll see who's crazy! That—" he pointed to the conically shaped head of the monstrous tube which projected from the dynamo, "will change the whole world, and I shall go on living eternally as the man who changed it. And I'll be the richest man alive, because they'll have to pay me for it."

He shoved his face almost lovingly against the cold coarse chest. The dissolution must have happened by now. He glanced at the double rays weaving from the glass head. The second was the right color. That second, his final masterpiece, his aqueogenous process would reshape, re-integrate the vapor which had been this beast's heart into new and *living* atomic formation.

Criggley leaped. There was a tremor! His hands trembled for the stethoscope. How clumsy were his usually deft fingers; they seemed all thumbs. In a frenzy of impatience he lifted his head to more quickly insert the knobs. Then, his own heart stopped beating.

His eyes bulged as he stared at his hands. Covered with thick hair, thick and blunt and wide, they were the hands of an ape. His horrified gaze traveled up his arm, from the wide powerful wrist, to the heavily corded muscles of his forearm. On seeing his elbows, a dry sob gasped from his contracted throat. Above the elbows were his own emaciated arms.

He realized, even in his moment of terror, that it was the part of his body that had contacted the ape. Even then, his

scientific mind told him that the ape had acted as transmitter between the ray and himself; and it was he, with his more vital atomic matter, who was being reshaped. Then, creeping across his mind like a skulking rat, came the thought: *that part of his body that contacted the ape!*

Slowly, like a man on his walk to the electric chair, he forced his clublike ape's hand toward his face. His breathing stopped as his hand neared the face that had lain so closely on that filthy chest. He couldn't move his hand any farther. Then, with a groan of mortal despair, he thrust his hand against his face. Wildly, he moved it all over, trying not to believe that he felt that thick hair, that coarse skin. Then, his hand struck against the heavy bone of prognathous jaw. He was feeling his own face in the structure of an anthropoid.

Shrieking like a madman, stumbling, his heavy arms sagging him down, he rushed to the washroom. A strangled cry tore from his face as he looked at the mirror. The ghastly bestial face of an ape leered back at him. His mouth gasped open in horror; the obscene mouth in the mirror snarled back over wicked fangs. Criggley staggered away, leaning against the door frame, hoarse sobs racking his body.

"My God," he blabbered, "the face of an ape! Half an ape. Half . . . an . . . ape . . ." The turmoil of his mind quieted slowly, as a grisly thought gradually assumed form. His drooped eyes were resting on those massive hands. Slowly he lifted that club of a forearm and clenched the fist. What a murderous weapon. How he could mangle, torture, destroy . . . Spencer Blane.

IT was smooth-looking Spencer Blane who, in jealousy, had him fired from the Ormsby Laboratories. Blane it was who had him hounded out of his profession, until he was forced to beg, borrow, do loathsome work to scrape together the material for his world-shaking experiment while he himself existed in squalid obscurity.

All these last ten years he had lived like an animal because handsome Spencer Blane

called his idea crazy; made scientific men believe he himself was crazy. How would Blane like to see the idea he called crazy come to life before his eyes, come to tear him to loathesome death? A grisly drooling came from Criggley's mouth as he chortled in speculation.

Not half an ape. A whole ape! Shrieking again, but now in fiendish glee, he rushed back to the dead hulk. He threw himself bodily upon the coarse carcass, rubbed his own hairy face against the snarling face of the brute, dug his hands into the matted hair. He pressed his body, chest to chest, in foul passion upon the dead beast. He hugged, he squeezed, he squirmed to get closer and closer to the cold animal.

"I shall be like you, my beauty. I shall walk like you and have the crushing strength in my arms." He lifted his arms. They had changed. From sloping shoulder to blunted finger the brutal muscles swelled. Criggley screamed in morbid ecstasy. "Oh, to crush the life with these arms—which I made—out of Blane's proud body. To hug him close, to"—he broke off with an agonized shriek.

SCREAMING in anguish he was hurled from the gross body by a violent wrench. He lay on the cement floor, feeling the wracking pain subside. Then he felt no pain, only a welling power like nothing he had ever dreamed.

He leaped up, tearing from his body his ridiculous clothes.

"Now for Blane," he growled in a guttural voice.

He started walking toward the washroom but a surge of brutish vitality sent him bounding toward the mirror. Thrilled by this feeling of power, which he had never enjoyed in his oppressed life, Criggley beheld his image with fiendish admiration.

He was delighted at his grimaces, as he thought of Blane. To be able with his bare hands to crush the life out of the man who had ruined his life was better than if he had first resuscitated the ape without this mistake. He remembered reading during the day—he always read of the society

which ignored him—that Blane was giving a big party tonight, at which it would be announced that he had been elected to the board of the Ormsby Laboratories. All of Criggley's old enemies would be there. He leaped to look at his watch. He must hurry over now, for it was a goodly walk.

First dousing all the lights on the floor of his bungalow, he crept silently out onto the shadows of his vine-covered porch. There was no moon and a light breeze sighed through the trees. It stirred something in his body, something primordial, predatory.

He jumped lightly to the ground and chortled horribly at the sensation of these mighty muscles springing over the turf. He kept along in the grass and shrubbery beside the road, and it seemed natural, as though he had glided like that long ago. His rolling gait devoured the distance. He sprang to the top of the wall around Blane's grounds and dropped lightly to the other side. He trotted softly through the trees and shrubbery to the side of the house.

A narrow balcony with French windows loomed above him. He saw shadows of figures moving against the curtain. He heard the faint music of the orchestra. Suddenly he was conscious of sniffing a strong and strange odor. Criggley had never been sensitive to smells. Now his nostrils quivered, sending violent surges through his body. This great body surged to some terrible action which the man's brain did not comprehend.

Criggley determined to get inside the house through the window above the French window. No sooner had his brain decided, than the huge body, without his direction, sprang upon the railing at the side of the balcony. An easy leap and his great fingers clutched the ledge above the French windows. As the great body swung back and forth several times to gain momentum, Criggley no longer felt like himself. The ape was carrying him.

One mighty heave and his toes gripped their precarious hold and the body swung erect. Criggley's brain felt a spark of fear

at the narrow support, but the body heaved upward and scrambled inside the window. Criggley stood in a sumptuous bedroom, panting hoarsely, quivering with a mounting rage as the odor assailed his nostrils.

God! He realized it was the odor of man and the ape was possessed with a primal hatred. The hateful odor drew him irresistibly along the hall toward a balustrade at the end. It overlooked an open lighted space, from which arose the chatter of human voices and music. Criggley remembered hearing that the house plans specified a two story living room. As he neared the sight of the humans, he was shaken by a rage like nothing he had ever known.

With nauseous panic rising in his brain, Criggley fought for control over this obscene body. He told himself, "I came here, to kill Blane. My brain must conquer this ape's body."

Reaching the balustrade, he squatted and peered through the railing. So sweeping a rage shook his body that Criggley was terrified. He thought of returning; but then his cruel eyes fastened on the white shoulders and golden hair of the beautiful women dancing, the smartly dressed white-skinned men holding themselves erect. He drooled, shook the railings.

Then he saw Spencer Blane! He was with Harold Ormsby. Memories flooded through his brain, and for the moment the beast in him was forgotten. Those searing memories of hate were stronger than the primitive rage in his breast. He growled with satisfaction as he saw Ormsby approach the orchestra leader. This, then, was the great moment in Blane's life. The growl rumbled deeper.

The song faded; there was a second of silence as the couples stopped dancing; then the drum rattled. Every one ceased talking, and turned expectantly toward the raised platform for the orchestra. Blane climbed upon it, stood beside Ormsby with a complacent smile on his handsome face. He fairly glistened with prosperity and self-satisfaction. Human hate boiled in Criggley's brain as he watched the pompous Ormsby raise his hand.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said in his unctuous voice, "in our pleasure at being together, I want to add to that a deeper and more lasting happiness by having you share in the pleasure that has come to me through my friend and associate, Mr. Spencer Blane." He paused dramatically, while the crowd pressed forward expectantly. Blane stood with a pleased smile on his handsome face.

At sight of them, Criggley uttered a bestial growl, as the man's hate and the beast's primal rage merged into one fiendish fury. He swarmed over the balcony, poised himself to leap downward.

"I have the honor to announce," Ormsby continued pompously, "that Mr. Blane's achievements in chemistry have won him a place on our board."

THE burst of applause broke off into a terrified gasp, pierced by one prolonged scream, as the great ape, slaving at his hideous mouth, dropped between the two men. One hairy arm shot out to snatch Blane by the throat and lift him clear of the platform. Shaking the squirming man's body as he held him at arm's length, the revolting beast worked his gleaming fangs horribly as a guttural blood-chilling babble slobbered from his mouth.

"His achievements win him a place with death," the thing bellowed. "I am the world's greatest scientist. This puppet is the world's greatest faker. I am greater than death. I am death and life after. And I claim for death, for eternal darkness, this, my enemy!"

His rage shook the terror-stricken man as the crowd, frozen for one dumfounded minute, shrieked into an hysterical cacophony of sound as they milled about like cattle.

There was a crash and clatter as the musicians surged from the platform carrying Ormsby with them to be trampled by the fear-maddened feet. Several of the younger men rushed forward, shouting, and the musicians and the guests lunged together in a frightful mêlée. Women seeking to flee, were hurled aside, some falling.

Their screams added to the ghastly din as feet surged back and forth over them.

Criggley was only dimly conscious of them, as offering no present menace. Slobbering, he drew Blane's shrinking body toward him, gloated over the pallor in his well-fed cheeks, the revulsion in his arrogant eyes. Slowly he pressed the cringing body against his, grinning down in grisly glee as a horrified moan broke from Blane's contracted throat.

"Blane, you don't recognize me, eh?" he growled.

Blane's body convulsed and he babbled through distorted mouth.

"I'm your old friend, Kelsman Criggley," the beast snarled into Blane's maniacal face. "I'm here to show you how crazy my idea is!"

"God . . . Oh, God . . . Criggley—if you are Criggley—let go of me . . . Let go-o-o . . ." He sobbed droolingly.

"I'll let go after I've killed you, my handsome friend," Criggley snarled. "You hounded me from my profession by calling me crazy. Crazy, eh? Well, now you see working my aqueoigenous process for reshaping through reintegration of atoms . . . you see it working on you!"

"No! No! For the love of God, help . . . Oh, help me!" His insane shrieks cut through the babble of the crowd, and Criggley saw that the younger guests had gotten through the panic-stricken ones and armed themselves with chairs and fire tongs.

BLANE was fighting and clawing like a maniac. Criggley started a slow pressure on Blane's revolted body. He had only a minute left now before the others would be on him, a minute to taste this sweet cup of revenge.

"Your last memory, Blane," Criggley slobbered gutturally, "will be of my crazy idea crushing the life out of your handsome body. Feel the bones crunch . . . feel the breath gasping . . . feel . . ."

The tortured man, writhing like a snake, twisted enough to get one gulp. His blood-curdling shriek was torn out of him.

"It's not an ape! It's—o-o-oh!"

The last choked off in a shuddering gurgle as a savage lunge of Criggley's arms snapped the vertebrae. The breath oozed from the dying body. Criggley slavered as he let the mangled creature slide down to the floor.

Then he raised to face the aroused crowd that had reached the platform. His pig eyes darted toward either end of the platform upon which several men had climbed. Directly in front they were beginning to wave and shout to attract his attention while the others closed in.

"Fools!" He roared in his bestial voice. "You think to trick me!"

He surged along the platform, bellowing a primitive challenge, and the men tumbled off in a panic. He threw back his hideous face and chortled in a laugh that turned the people to stone. Then he saw two things at once. A lovely blonde woman had pushed through the crowd to Blane's broken body. At the doorway three policemen entered with drawn revolvers.

Even as the cops shouted: "Get back, folks, and give us a shot at him," Criggley scampered along the platform again, snatched Mrs. Blane up in one sweep. The men gasped and the woman fainted.

"Back!" the cops yelled hoarsely.

The crowd stumbled out of the way, as Criggley grasped the woman's supine body by one arm and held her in front of him.

The three policemen moved forward warily, separating. Criggley shuddered with a surge of hate. Beastlike blood, inflamed by the kill, pounded at his brain. But he forced himself to think of escape. His purpose was accomplished.

Suddenly he whirled, holding the woman as a shield, and ran along the platform. At the end he gave a mighty leap, the woman in his arms. Over horrified heads his great body catapulted through the air. Turning sidewise as he plunged downward, he struck the French windows with his tremendous shoulders. Glass and thin wood crashed in a harsh wave of destructing sound and Criggley stumbled out on the balcony with his inert burden.

Directly below him, a cop with a tommy-

gun gaped with wide eyes and another held his frightened face still with grim effort as a revolver trembled in his hand. Feeling the primal surge of the beast in his power now, Criggley, not relinquishing his clutch on the woman, vaulted over the balcony's iron railing and crashed upon the cop holding the tommygun. Bones crunched beneath him.

A bestial bellow of triumph issued from his slavering mouth at the tortured groan from the crippled human. Clinging to the woman, he squatted over the unconscious body and fixed beady eyes on the other cop, circling for a shot.

"God," Criggley thought, "I'm losing all control of this body. My brain . . ." A guttural sigh sounded through his throat as he looked at the tense face of the policeman. "I don't want to kill this man, but . . ."

Crack!

Fire burned along his cheek from the cop's chance shot. His brain forgot. Uttering a blood-chilling cry, he lunged at the man, now wholly the beast fighting for self-preservation. With one fierce swipe he struck the cop's arm, knocking the gun aside as it flamed in his face. The choked grunt of pain from the retreating man inflamed his beastlike rage. With his free hand he pulled the courageous man toward him and sunk his horrible fangs in his throat. The strangled cry of mortal terror goaded him to rip and tear. Dimly he heard the three cops shouting inarticulately as they leaped from the balcony.

It was the beast that darted angry eyes at them. The lust to destroy possessed him. Releasing the throat of the dying policeman, he dragged the heavy man off the ground, hurled him into the three advancing men.

Cries behind him spun his bullet head. He saw half a dozen of the guests advancing determinedly, armed with chairs, fire tongs, a battle ax from the wall.

"That's it, fellers!" One of the cops yelled. "Close in on him until we can get a shot without hitting the lady."

The lady. The idea filtered through the human brain of Criggley. He must spare

her. He was in the open and could make it without endangering her. The beast had done enough . . .

A sharp flash, a bitter bark, and a sting along his neck aroused the animal again with a half-bestial cry. But it retained a human urge to drop Mrs. Blane. That done, he was again the primitive beast rampaging against his hated enemy.

So startled were the two policemen, still standing after the human catapult of their companion, that Criggley's bull-like rush carried him upon them before they could move. Two terrible blows of his arms crushed their heads together. One slumped to the ground with a low groan. The other staggered back, trying to bring up his gun. But the ape-thing swarmed over him, shaking the gun from his hand, the breath from his body.

Then he whirled, holding the limp man aloft. The frightened guests circled around him, trying to pen him in. The man with the battle ax stood in the center.

"I'll rush him," that man said "then you fellows close in from the side and back."

A GHOULISH chortle issued from the ape's mouth, freezing them. Criggley's mind communicated those words to the berserk rage of the beast. Roaring, he hurled the policeman into the face of the ax carrier and sprang ahead. The ax carrier stumbled back, the ax falling. The ape swooped it up, whirling it around his head. He started babbling as Criggley tried to say, "Stand back!" But the white-faced men fell away, eyes horrified.

In the distance was a wailing sound, which Criggley's brain recognized as a police siren. He dropped the ax, turned suddenly and ran through the shrubbery. Immediately the pack was after him. He heard cries directing the police. He vaulted over the wall, crouched in the road shrubbery, as the police riot car chugged past. In the black backwash, he scuttled across the road. From the shadows of the other side he saw several men atop the wall trying to find him. With the silence of the animal, he crept away and raced across the lawns.

over hedges. A dog bayed mournfully close to him.

A shudder went through Criggley. Away from the man odor, the blood lust was receding. The powerful beast surges to his brain lessened with the blood lust, and Criggley began to think again. He sobbed a slobbering ghastly sound as he remembered. In the distance he heard the siren again, faint shouts. They were on his trail. He was beginning to pant in great nervous gulps. On top the rise of a lawn he saw his house.

His house. Criggley the ape. Thinking clearly again, he clambered onto his porch, slid through the door. He locked it. There were no lights. They would pass. Oh, God, to get out of this ape shape. He was shaking like a clumsy bear as he padded downstairs to the subterranean room. Gone was the thrill of his power. His brain remembered his killing, destroying, and Esther . . .

WHEN he opened the door, he fell back, terrified. Facing him was the great bull ape he had left bound to the slab. While Criggley was gone, the rays had resuscitated the ape and the beast had broken his bonds. A low snarl came from twisted lips.

Criggley heard a guttural snarl of challenge issue from his own throat. The animal he was responded, over his brain, to the other beast. For a moment they glared, and Criggley knew that he had to fight this thing. He could feel the primordial lust beginning to resurge through his veins.

No, oh, God, no! It was the whimper of his brain. But then the ape charged. His brain directed his ape's body to dodge. He felt the impact as his enemy spun off him. Then Criggley leaped, his arm shooting under the crotch of the beast, his other hand grasping the side of the neck, and lifted with all his brute strength. But it was not a human thing he was fighting now. The ape was heavy, twisting and struggling, kicking his chest with painful blows. Criggley saw the thing would fight free before he got him raised high enough to hurl him to the cement floor.

From the half-raised height, he threw the thing, leaped straight at him. The ape struck on his back, rolled so that Criggley's feet struck his side, knocked Criggley stumbling over him. Criggley grabbed a chair, whirled as the ape charged. The chair splintered over the ape's head, checking his rush. Then Criggley became all animal. Bellowing, he rushed in, knocked the ape's arm aside like a boxer, and sunk his strong fingers into the throat. Subconsciously his intelligence guided those fingers into the wind pipe and he pressed.

All over the room they lunged. The ape beat and clawed and kicked. He tore at the hands. Criggley held on, panting gutturally. His own great strength was beginning to falter. But so was the ape's. His hands pulled frenziedly, then stopped. Then the bull beast surged up with one final desperate charge.

Criggley felt himself hurled backward. Growling bestially, he fought to keep those slipping fingers in that hairy throat. Back he stumbled, swaying and pitching, as the great ape clawed at his hands, snarled as he tried to sink those gleaming fangs into Criggley's wrists. One fierce lunge of those fangs tore his flesh and Criggley screamed fearsomely, shaking his great arms in fury. They plunged sidewise together.

A sharp blow struck Criggley from behind, cutting deeply through his thick hide, and erupting a frightful bellow from his throat. He pitched forward, wracked with pain. The ape, staggering, collided off balance. They crashed to the cement floor in a deafening clatter. Criggley squirmed, with another growl of pain, away from the thing that cut him again. He spun upright to face it, his lips drawn, rage in hideous snarl.

For a full minute he stood there, like a statue of an enraged beast. Slowly the beast's blood drained away from his man's brain and he stared at the wreckage of his projector. Glass was scattered in all directions. From the broken end of the tube, discolored flames sputtered. As Criggley began slowly to regain control of his brain, the only thought that pounded through was

that it was ruined, hopelessly, completely ruined. Hopelessly . . .

He spun suddenly at a sound. The ape was raising himself slowly. He glared again with that primordial hatred, with venom, as though he saw through Criggley's apehood. One red rush of rage catapulted Criggley toward that beast, knocking him down. His clumsy hand snatched a side of thick glass and with one savage slice turned the beast's throat into a gushing splutter of blood. Criggley cut and cut again. He slashed the body from head to feet!

It was only when he was exhausted that he dropped the bloody glass and himself collapsed. The rage had burned out and he was, at last again, all the human—in an ape's body. He shuddered. What could he do? He raised himself slowly and stood swaying, sick, staring at the wreck of his life's work.

For a moment his brain was unable to grasp its full significance. First he thought of the years ago to remake the projectors for his Criggley ray, for his aqueoigenous process of reintegration. Only slowly he realized that with these thick fingers, for strength and not deftness, he could never handle those delicate instruments. Never could he hope to rebuild. *Never!*

What could he do? Wild ideas darted about like a rat in a maze. Pay some one? He was impoverished now and it would be impossible to get money in this hideous guise. This hideous guise . . . it was him, doomed to live as an ape his remaining days . . . skulking and hiding . . . a human ape!

A pitiful cry was torn from his loathsome body. What? Oh, what? Suddenly his nostrils quivered. It was the hated man odor. God, Criggley whimpered, must he be turned into a ravaging beast every time he smelled a fellow human. No, no! Life would be a ghastly living death—for him who had worked for eternal life. His soul retched at the thought. He couldn't endure that! Anything was better. Even the death he had fought against.

He crept up the stairs to the hallway. He heard voices on his front porch. His body

shook with rage as the smell grew stronger. Criggley shuddered.

"I'm sure these are his tracks," a voice said. Then a beam of light reflected on the glass of the door. "See, here's dirt where his foot scraped."

"Do you suppose he got old Criggley?"

"We'd heard screams. Are you sure—"

"That man whose dog barked saw him coming this way, and here's—"

SHAKING with his primordial rage to get at the men, yet filled with the reason of his own doom, Criggley had to get it over with. With a grisy snarl of frustrated beast and tragic human, he threw open the door, stood there, clinging to the frame to hold in check the bestial rage beating up in his chest.

Five policemen and two guests from the party, all with revolvers, fell back before him.

"Don't shoot first," a sergeant said. "Let's try to capture him."

"I wonder what he did with Criggley," one said, edging to the side.

Criggley could stand no more.

"I am Criggley," he roared in his slobbering snarl. "And shoot, for the love of God, shoot!"

The sergeant stepped back, crossing himself. One of the guests staggered, the gun slipping from nerveless fingers. The other men stood as if turned to stone.

The blood was pounding in his brain, the great body was twitching to rend and tear. As the blood lust sent him hurtling out on the porch, Criggley choked out a soul-searing animal cry.

"Shoot, damn you, or I'll tear you apart!"

A gun blasted at his head. He felt as if the top of his head was lifting off. He felt himself falling, the great strength oozing from his body. He tried to speak and only ghoulish slaverings foamed from his mouth. He felt blow after blow strike him, racking his body with pain. Then a heavy blow and all was dark. The pain stopped. He knew that he, who tried to destroy death, was dying . . . as an ape.

THE BLACK ORCHIDS

by
**ARTHUR J.
BURKS**

*Lannihan fell back when
the orchid victim swarmed
alive like a madman*



IT GREW ON A HUMAN
FACE, OUT OF THE PORES, THIS
FLOWER OF DEATH WHICH TURNED
BROADWAY'S NIGHT-LIFE INTO A SINISTER
HOTHOUSE.

Even case-hardened Michael Lannihan was shocked when he entered the room of death. In his five years on the force, in which he had risen from the pavement to be detective lieutenant attached to the Homicide Squad, he had never seen anything as horrible. Even the face of the coroner, who had looked on the dead for twenty-five years, was as white as the cerements of a tomb.

"Mother of Saints!" said Lannihan. His

great hand trembled as he ran them over his suddenly sweating face. The whole six feet of him, topped by a face which was a harsh map of Ireland, shook as though he had just been slugged on the jaw. "The Furies are in it somewhere," he added.

"It wouldn't surprise me, Mike," said the coroner. "Look at his face."

"But I can't see his face!" Lannihan objected.

"You will in a minute," said the coroner grimly. "And if this isn't a case to delight your Irish soul, then I never saw one."

"Deliver me!" said Lannihan. "I've seen some things in me time. I've harkened to talk about fairies and the wee folk. I've heard the whisperin' o' th' elves at Michaelmas, but never really believed in em. This, now, gets my nanny, and I ain't aither foolin' anybody!"

In times of stress Lannihan's brogue was as thick as the soles of his heavy shoes. But none of the others in that ghastly room blamed him. They all felt the same repulsion.

For the manner of Murgatroyd's death had been horrible. They did not need the explanation of the coroner to prove that to them. Four of them were ordinary coppers, who might almost have been brothers of Lannihan. Two were newspaper men, startled out of their blasé calm by the horror of what they saw.

MURGATROYD, playboy of Broadway, with more millions than he would have been able to spend had he lived, sweetheart of enough chorus girls to keep the tabloids filled with his own private scandals, rested in his bed, flat on his back, utterly and completely dead. That in itself would not have troubled them—for there were some who believed that Murgatroyd had death coming to him. But never this! Never this horror which had caused Lannihan to cross himself and wish that he had gone to church oftener than once in fifteen years.

Murgatroyd was dead.

His face was invisible—for a gruesome reason. It was covered from chin to forehead by a ghastly black flower which seemed to be growing right out of the flesh.

"What kind of a flower is it, Doc?" asked Lannihan, mindful that it was his duty to find out details like that.

"It's an orchid, Lannihan, but the strangest kind I ever heard of. It's black, see? I've heard of some queer flowers out

of southern Panama, of one particular orchid which drives men utterly mad, but never of any orchid, and a black one at that, which murders!"

"Orchids," whispered Lannihan. "Orchids! And he must have spent fifty thousand dollars on orchids alone during the last ten years for little chits that were cheaper than the cheapest flowers! And there may be something of justice in this, some idea I should lay hold on . . ."

"You gents with weak stomachs," said the coroner, "had better haul tail out of here. I'm going to take this gadget off his face. I don't know what may happen, but I don't feel any too good about it myself, and I've seen a thousand stiffs where you guys haven't seen one, any of you!"

"I'll blow out," said one of the coppers.

"Me too!" said another.

"The coppers'll stay!" snapped Lannihan. "I may want your testimony at court one of these days."

"And I guess that sort of ties us down," said one of the newspaper men. "I've seen forty-seven men and four women electrocuted, hanged or gassed, but I never felt like this before. Go to it, Doc. Get it over with."

"I reckon I have to stand close," said Lannihan, "though by the Saints, I'd rather be walking a beat in the lights of Broadway."

They gathered around the dead man, whose flowered pajamas, scented with vague perfume, which might have come from the orchids for all they knew, showed above the coverlets. The coroner's hand trembled as he extended it for the flower which covered the face of the dead. His hand was covered with a rubber glove, over which he had slipped a heavy rubberized mitten, like those used by men who handle high voltage.

"Well," he said, "here goes!"

He fastened his thumb and forefinger in the flower near Murgatroyd's chin. He pulled. They could all see the flesh follow his pull, lift upward with the black flower.

"I told you it had grown out of his pores," said the coroner.

"You have to jerk it off, like ripping off sticking plaster that's held fast by hair," said Lannihan. "Even a fool can see that."

The coroner's sweat dripped down to the rich coverlet which shut off most of the view of Murgatroyd's body. But now he fastened his hand more firmly in the black flower and yanked swiftly. None there had ever heard such a strange sound. Sticking plaster gives a ripping sound when it comes free. This gave off a sound something like it—yet far more awful in its significance, because it spoke so eloquently of a kind of murder none here had ever dreamed of before.

THE flower came free, and it seemed to sigh, somehow, with awful regret as it came free. All eyes were turned now on the face of the dead. They made a horrible discovery. Much of the skin of the face had come free with the ebon orchid! Every man present had seen the face of Murgatroyd while he was alive, either in the flesh or in the tabloids. But now, after the freeing of the orchid, there was nothing human about the face—for the skin of it had come free with the flower and clung to it, curling back, horrible, like a parasitic growth on the black parasite, a sort of orchid growing on still another orchid.

"The Saints preserve us!" said Lannihan again.

Then he regained control of himself. He stared at the newspaper men.

"I'm glad," he said softly, "that all of you saw it. You would have called me a blasted liar if I had even thought of handing you such a story. Now you have to believe what you see."

"I'm not so sure of that," said Martin of the *Globe*, his voice barely above a whisper, "and I'll be doubly damned if I'm going to touch the stiff's face to see for myself. What a scare this will throw into New York City if our bosses let us run the story—which they probably won't."

Lannihan stared for a long time into the face of the dead. Little by little the color came back into his face. Faced with the awful emergency, he would prove himself

equal to his job. He always had. He had run up against some terrible, gruesome things in his time, but this topped the list. He addressed the dead man, oblivious to everything else.

"I wish," he said, "that you could talk. You'd give me some handle that I could swing this deal with. I wonder if you knew who scragged you, and how."

The telephone rang. Everybody in the room jumped and paled again. The sound was eerie in that silent chamber. Lannihan gulped and swallowed. The coroner paled anew, stepped back from the dead as though a serpent had struck at him, or as though the pealing of the telephone had come out of the gaping mouth of the dead. Lannihan went to the telephone, took down the receiver, held it to his ear. He hesitated about answering, and brittle laughter came over the wires to him.

"So!" said a rasping voice after a moment. "You wished to know how he died, eh? Well, I'll tell you in my own good time. He's only the first. There will be three others. I'll let you look at all of them. All but the last face, for it you will not see, since it will be your own!"

The far receiver clicked up. Lannihan's face was calm now. He had been challenged. Something of the eeriness of the whole thing left him with the injection of a human voice into the case. He said nothing to the others. The newspaper men looked at him queerly.

"That's a funny thing," said Martin. "You take down the receiver and don't say a word. Who called? What did he say, or was it a she?"

"He didn't say much," said Lannihan, "but it was too much at that. Murgatroyd, here, is only the first. Three more are to go in the same way. Split *that* story wide open and see what it does to people's nerves!"

Glad of any excuse, the newspaper men fled. This one time they had no need of making notes. Every detail of the case to date was written on the retinas of their memories in letters of fire—fire that flamed in grisly horror. Lannihan looked at his watch.

"I'm going it blind, doc," he said. "This is murder, of course. I don't know where to look, except among Murgatroyd's intimates. That's the floozies of Broadway, and they won't be getting up until three this afternoon. I'm taking a squad of men and covering the theaters tonight. It's a nut we're looking for, a nut with a scientific turn of mind—and when I find him, well, he'll wish he'd taken some of his own medicine."

Lannihan himself was glad to leave the place of death, for the face of Murgatroyd would not leave his memory this side of the grave—the dead face in which a black flower of horrible significance had grown, whose ripping free had robbed the dead face of all expression because the skin had been jerked off with the funereal blossom.

Lannihan almost gathered up the flower, but he had no gloves, and he knew that somehow there was death in the touch of the black orchid.

At nine o'clock that night Lannihan was at Times Square, watching the theater crowds, wishing he had second sight, or could read minds or something, because there wasn't the slightest chance of finding out anything in such a vast mob. He was jostled by the seething crowds. In plain-clothes, he looked like anyone else—though he would never be mistaken for anything but an Irishman.

How should he proceed? Where should he start?

Someone brushed against him with more than usual violence. He felt a hand shoved violently into his side pocket, withdrawn again before he could grab at the wrist, or even turn and see the face of the pick-pocket. He whirled, saw a yellowish face vanish into the crowd, and shrugged.

"I'm not after pickpockets tonight," he said to himself. "Imagine one of 'em tackling a copper!"

But he ran his hand into his pocket anyhow, and encountered a piece of paper. He brought it forth, wondering. A message of some sort, but why was it given to him? Had the messenger known his identity? He opened the paper—and cursed himself

for everything in the book that he had not followed the yellowish face he had glimpsed, now vanished forever into the milling crowds.

The paper read:

"At nine fifteen Lowry goes the way of Murgatroyd!"

There was no signature, but none was needed. Lannihan rushed to the nearest cigarstore, and to a telephone beside a booth, looked up the Lowrys. There were eighteen of them listed in Manhattan. He ran his finger along the names swiftly—stopping at one which gave him food for thought. There might, of course, be unlisted Lowrys, which he could get from "Information." The one which intrigued him was a man whose first name was "Ucal." It was a strange name, and Lannihan knew it instantly. Ucal Lowry was of the same kidney as Murgatroyd had been—a man who played the stage-door Johnny, spent thousands on the cuties, got himself in the tabloids almost every morning. Lannihan dashed into the booth, dialed the number of Ucal Lowry.

A MAN'S cold voice answered, and it was the voice of the man who had spoken to Lannihan at the house of Murgatroyd! The laughter was the same.

"Hello, Lannihan! You're just too late. The seed has been planted and Lowry dies before you can reach him!"

The receiver clicked up. Lannihan raced back to the telephone book, snapped a glance at the address, raced out to the curb. He grabbed a taxicab.

"Break all the speed laws, fellah," he rasped. "You're hauling the law tonight!"

The cabby looked back.

"Any shootin'?" he asked. "I've got kids."

"I don't know, but you're moving anyhow. Drop me at that address and you can be on your way in the same breath. Step on it, mister. We're too late already."

The cab careened uptown, turned right toward Park Avenue at the first eastbound street, squealed to a stop at the address Lannihan had given. Lannihan leaped

from the cab, entered a high priced cooperative apartment, snapped at the colored elevator man.

"Lowry's apartment and give her the gun."

"He expecting you, sir?"

"The law's talking right into your face, black boy!" said Lannihan. "Don't waste time."

Nor did the man. Lannihan raced to the door number the boy gave him, knocked. The door was ajar. He rushed in, calling Lowry's name. From a bedroom came a sleepy voice.

"Who the hell is it?"

"Lannihan, of Homicide."

"Who did I kill while I was drunk last night?"

LANNIHAN waited for no more. In two strides he was in that bedroom, had found the light switch and snicked it on. In the bed was a young man with tousled hair. His face was covered with cold cream. Lannihan's lips twisted with contempt. Cold cream was for women. Men who used it were sissies.

"Murgatroyd's dead!" said Lannihan. "Murdered! I was tipped off you were next."

"I don't look very dead, do I, copper? Look, fellah, I'm glad you called me. I can catch the second act at the *Tivoli*. Shut the door as you go out. I'm taking a quick shower. Where's my valet?"

"I didn't see anybody when I came in, and nobody answered me but you. I think we're alone here. Is that funny or isn't it?"

"Not funny," said the playboy, wrinkling his forehead, "but strange, to say the least. I didn't give my valet any time off. But you needn't worry. I look all right for a corpse, don't I? And listen, copper, it must be hot as hell in here or I have a fever or a hangover or something. I'm hotter than the devil. You notice it?"

"The room seemed like an oven when I came in," said Lannihan, "but I don't know. . . ."

"Neither do I. So long, copper, and thanks."

Whistling, his forehead furrowed in a frown, Lannihan stepped back into the reception room. His eyes narrowed as he stared at the door. It had been open—and Lannihan couldn't get that rasping voice out of his mind. And now there was no way of tracing it, unless the operator remembered. He dialed the operator.

"Anybody call from here during the last ten minutes?"

"Who wants to know? Mr. Lowry?"

"No. This is the law, sister. Try and remember."

"There were three calls. . . ."

Lannihan waited to hear no more. He had closed and locked the door. He was sure that save for Lowry he was alone in the man's apartment, yet he had the odd feeling that others were here, too. And then he heard a strange knocking sound. It came from behind a door he hadn't yet opened. Now he raced to that door, snapped it open. Out, almost into his face, toppled the figure of a man. He was dressed in livery. There was a gag in his mouth, under eyes that were wide with terror. The man's arms were bound at his sides by ropes which almost encased his body from shoulders to knees. Lannihan caught him before he struck the floor, knowing that the man was the missing valet.

Then fear such as he had never known gripped the very soul of Lannihan, for simultaneously with the fall of the valet, a scream of terror came from Lowry's bathroom, followed by the thudding sound of a body falling. Lannihan took time only to slash swiftly at the valet's bonds. Then he was through the bedroom door, slamming his weight against the door to the bathroom, in which he could hear the gurgling of water.

"Lowry!" he shouted. "Lowry! Open up!"

But there was no answer, and out of that moment of suspense Lannihan thought he could hear the rasping laughter of the unknown. Inside he could hear heels, kicking a tattoo on the bathroom floor. Lannihan stepped back, hurled all his weight against

the door. The lock was not made which could withstand the full weight and power of the mighty Lannihan. The door went down with a crash, ripping out lock and hinges. Lannihan fell full length across the floor—his face was within a foot of that of Ucal Lowry. Lannihan almost screamed in hideous terror. Never in his life had he been so horrified. Lowry was already dead. And something that was not whiskers was growing out of his face. Lannihan knew what it was on the instant—and he was watching it, with horrible fascination, in the process of growing. Little stamens came out of the pores of Lowry's cold-creamed face. The stamens rose, drew together, united into one ghastly plant. Out of the plant, even as Lannihan watched, unable to move or cry out, came an ebon stalk. It opened, burst into hideous bloom.

And over the face of Lowry, growing out of his skin, was a black orchid!

Lannihan staggered to his feet.

"Why in hell," he asked himself, "didn't I ask him if he knew anybody who acted like Murgatroyd, and who his closest friends were?"

But there was no use asking such questions now, for the dead answered nothing whatever. Things came back to Lannihan. The face of Murgatroyd, ripped raw when the coroner had yanked the hideous flower free. So would Lowry's face look when the coroner had finished with him. He remembered the heat of the room, of Lowry's complaint about it. He staggered to his feet, raced into the reception room, where the valet was just releasing himself from his bonds, his fingers all thumbs as he struggled, in a palsy of fear, to get free.

"What's your name?" snapped Lannihan.

"Fenner, sir."

"Then listen, aside from Murgatroyd, who was your master's best friend? Give me all the names you can remember. I am Lannihan of the Homicide Squad."

"Homicide?" said Fenner stupidly. "The master?"

"He has just been murdered in horrible fashion—as his friend Murgatroyd was

murdered sometime last night. Who was with Lowry last? Who tied you up?"

"I went to bed early. I had been up all night. Mr. Lowry had in a dozen friends last night. I didn't see the man who hit me. The doorbell rang. Something leaped at me. I thought I saw a lemon colored face. Then I was hit over the head. When I came to I was in the closet. The names, sir? There were Paget, Logan, Hennessey, Noonan, Holly. . ."

"That's enough. I remember the names of Paget and Holly were mentioned in a recent story about Murgatroyd and Lowry. Tell me, Fenner—do you know anyone that would want to kill your master? Speak up! If it's a man or a woman, tell me!"

Fenner hesitated, hanging his head. Lannihan jumped at him, grabbed him by the shoulders.

"You can't hold back because of loyalty to your master, Fenner," he said. "He's been murdered. You're out of a job. We've got to get whoever wanted to kill him. Do you know of any threats? Of anybody who was just a little cookoo?"

"They all seemed cookoo to me," said Fenner with surprising vehemence. "He had plenty of enemies, girls he was finished with, their past sweethearts, their husbands, their brothers. . ."

"Any of them explorers that you know of? Any of them just back from Panama, Venezuela, Colombia or the West Indies?"

"There was a chap named Kinney. . ."

"He have a sister or a sweetheart, on the stage, radio, or the screen?"

THE telephone shrilled savagely. Lannihan started as though he had been struck a blow on the back of the head. He turned stiffly toward the instrument. Finally, as though his legs weighed tons, he crossed the room to it, took up the receiver. He had known all along what to expect.

"Well, Lannihan? What do you think of my hothouse, eh? Listen, I don't intend to run away from justice, except just long enough to get the other two I promised. It will be a lesson to men with money who don't care what happens to the sisters and

the sweethearts of loyal men. Paget is next! I'll give you an hour to do something about him—but in sixty minutes, no more, no less, Paget dies!"

The phone went dead.

Lannihan whirled on Fenner.

"What's Paget's given name?"

"Morton, sir."

LANNIHAN leafed through the directory. He telephoned the home of Morton Paget, seven blocks further north along Park Avenue. This time a woman answered, told him that she was Paget's sister.

"Where is Morton Paget?" asked Lannihan.

"Who's talking?"

"This is a police officer, madam. His friend Lowry has had a bad accident and I want to get in touch with him . . ."

"Oh, I'm terribly sorry," she said though her voice indicated that she wasn't sorry in the least. "Is it serious?"

"To be truthful, ma'am, Lowry's dead. Listen, don't hang up. Do you know an explorer friend of your brother and of Lowry, someone who has hunted orchids, let us say, in southern Panama, in Cuba, Central or South America or the West Indies?"

"There was a chap named Kinney—well, you'll be able to find him when you contact my brother, for they often went out together."

Lannihan's heart went cold in his breast.

"What did this Kinney look like, sister?" he asked hoarsely. "Was he a small man? Did he have a yellowish face?"

"Why, yes. He had Chagres fever his last trip to Panama. Morton financed that trip."

"Is that so? Now, another question, just so I won't have to waste time by coming out to your place. Did Kinney have a sister?"

"Why do you use the past tense? He *has* a sister. Morton has looked out for her during recent months, though I haven't seen her for weeks. She's proud. She's been out of a job, up against it . . ."

"Thanks," said Lannihan dryly. "I'll be calling you again, sister. Goodbye."

He clicked up the receiver, stared for a long moment at the instrument, while bits of the puzzle, bits that were fantastic and would have been unbelievable but for the fact that Lannihan had seen so much already, began to click into place.

He could guess what had happened. Murgatroyd, like Lowry, probably used face-cream. He slept under the influence of liquor. Both men were known to be tipplers, probably slept soundly. The murderer, who would probably have been received without suspicion by the servants of the two victims because he was well known to them, had entered. Then he had dropped something on the face of Murgatroyd. But did the black orchid flower grow so swiftly one could see it? Was it poison? How was the murder actually done? And why orchids? There was a hideous significance here somewhere.

Well, suppose, just to start from somewhere, there were spores of the black orchid which could be dropped on the hot skin of a sleeping man—from which contact they instantly began to grow, sending their roots into the open pores? Sleeping men, under the drugged power of liquor, perspired. Not enough to see, perhaps, but they perspired just the same. Lannihan believed it was the nearest anything in the temperate zones came to tropical conditions. By the mere act of starting to grow, if the orchids were poison, their lethal dose, like the venom of reptiles, went into the bloodstream, to the heart.

After that death was a matter of seconds. Murgatroyd had died without waking. The orchid had continued to grow after his death.

Lannihan had come to Lowry before the spores had started their ghastly growing but, unsuspecting because he did not know the answer, he had done nothing for Lowry, who had seemed to be all right. He had thought he had arrived before the murderer could do his job. But he hadn't. Lowry's body-heat and the steaming heat of running water in the confined bathroom had done the job—and Lowry was dead. Lannihan took down the receiver again, dialed Paget's

number. The same woman's voice answered once more.

"Did your brother leave in a taxicab?"

"No, in Morton's car."

"Is it comfortable? Can it be heated to body warmth?"

"It's a Franchini," she answered proudly. "It can be turned into an oven if necessary. You have me worried now. What in the world is wrong?"

"Just this: Murgatroyd—you know him?—was murdered tonight under horrible circumstances. Lowry was murdered in the same way, almost under my eyes. And now, your brother—I'm afraid. You might as well be prepared for the worst unless I can do something to stop it. I'm ringing off now, and prowl cars will probably start bothering you."

He rung off, dialed headquarters.

"I want every prowl car, every copper on beat, every traffic officer, to look for Morton Paget's Isotta-Franchini. Paget is in it, with the murderer of Murgatroyd and Lowry. Yes, Ucal Lowry! He was killed in exactly the same way Murgatroyd was killed, and the murderer telephoned me to say that Paget would die in sixty minutes, no more, no less. Get out that broadcast!"

Almost instantly, from all over the city, came the startled wailing of many sirens as the prowl cars got under way. The force wasted no time whatever. Lannihan grunted with satisfaction, telephoned the coroner, waited for the arrival of the coppers and slipped out.

He hailed the first prowl car he encountered, asked the extra officer in it to vacate his seat, snapped on the radio. He didn't explain. There was no need for explanation. He had left one brief word with headquarters when he had asked for the broadcast—that police guards be placed at once around the homes and the persons of the other men whom Fenner had named. Holly was next!

"Take me to the home of Caleb Holly," said Lannihan tersely. "And don't spare the horses, fellow. We have time to save Holly, because the murderer is working with Paget at the moment."

The radio began its monotonous blaring. But in a brief second it didn't sound monotonous—and the driver and Lannihan were electrified with its message.

"Paget's Franchini seen going south on Fifth Avenue at top speed, breaking all laws. All cars take notice. Turn it aside, catch it, do anything. Danger!"

"Okay," said Lannihan, "let's get going."

He looked at his watch. Forty-five minutes ago the voice had come to him. If the murderer kept his promise, Paget would be dead in fifteen more minutes. Lannihan ordered the driver to pause for a moment when they had driven down Fifth Avenue for five minutes. Everywhere sounded the blaring of sirens. The chase seemed to have converged on Washington Square by the sound, and the rest of traffic appeared to have fallen silent, as though all Manhattan waited for the death of Morton Paget.

"Down the Avenue," said Lannihan, "and step on the gas."

The sixty minutes were up long before they had finished the run to Washington Square. Lannihan knew, long before he reached the crowd about the huge car that had careened onto the sidewalk near Eighth Street, what he would find. Coppers, their faces filled with horror, were keeping back the crowds. He knew why. The crowd would go mad if it saw the face of Morton Paget. Lannihan leaped out, raced to the huge foreign-built car, looked into the back seat. The front seat was empty, as though the driver had gone mad and fled.

IT was not till three days later the driver was found wandering along the Hudson, his mind a blank, his face set in a mask of horror.

In the back seat of the Franchini sat Morton Paget—and the black flower of death covered his face. Lannihan could see it all. The murderer asking to drive the car. A sponge of chloroform over Paget's face, so that he wouldn't protest, the spores planted on his face after the murderer himself had smeared the face with some oil or other to make the spores stick. Then the

perspiration of the body of Paget himself, and the heat of the car, had done the rest.

One to go—and the next one was Holly!

Back into the car again, racing for Holly's address. No possible communication from the killer now. Ten minutes and Lannihan was in the house of Holly, who was a bachelor, living alone. Like most men of his stamp, Holly slept late. His house was surrounded by coppers who hadn't disturbed the millionaire. Lannihan did not wait for the amenities of polite society. He entered the house, went to Holly's apartment, to find it empty.

He turned out the lights, sat down, waited.

FINALLY two men came in. Lannihan heard them coming down the hall, knew that they were drunk. He slipped into a closet. The door opened. He knew the lights were snicked on. He heard two men enter the bedroom.

"You can't go home. Kinney, ol' boy," said a drunken voice. "Fancy running into you like this, right in front of my home. Wasn't looking for you to come back for a week yet."

"Been wanting to see you, Holly. Pure luck I found your house."

That voice! Lannihan would never forget it this side the grave. He waited yet a moment longer. The light in the main room went out. He didn't blame the coppers for allowing the murderer to pass. After all, he had come in with Holly, and they had no description of the murderer.

Lannihan slipped out of his hiding place, stepped to the door of the bedroom. Holly was in bed, already raucously breathing, as men did when they had imbibed too freely. The other man was standing over Holly now. Holly's face glowed with the sheen of face-cream.

Now the other stepped back. His hand seemed to be hovering over the face of Holly. Did Lannihan imagine it, or did something, like fine sand, drip from the hand of the standing man to the face of Holly?

The man was muttering:

"You, Holly, and men like you, drove my sister to suicide. None of your friends even suspected, Holly, but I know that you and Murgatroyd and Lowry—maybe all of you—had a hand in what happened to her. She fell for your money; but no girl ever will, again."

Lannihan knew the man was Kinney because he saw the yellowish face before Kinney stepped back and snapped out the lights in the bedroom, causing yet another light to glow in the room. Lannihan went into action when he saw it; saw the harsh, brilliant light start along the coverlets toward the face of Holly.

Lannihan wasted no time. Horror gripped him as he leaped forward, brought his automatic crashing down upon the face of Kinney, who thudded heavily to the floor. His flashlight fell with him. Its light concentrated on a circular spot of paper on the wall. Even before Lannihan had reached Kinney, the paper at that spot was turning to a full yellow with the heat.

"Powerful battery," muttered Lannihan as he snapped cuffs on Kinney, binding his wrists behind him, "with microscopic lens capable of concentrating the rays on a given spot—and there's the answer as to how the heat was generated; not much, but enough to start the black orchids growing; black orchids whose very roots were more poisonous than the venom of the coral snake! Holly, you deserve to die, if what this lad said was true. But you are a human being, with no crimes really charged against you, and the law says that any man who murders you must die! Again, I'm sorry, for all that you probably had it coming."

Holly merely snored heavily and loudly as Lannihan, stepping over Kinney, entered the bathroom, came back with a hot cloth and began to wash the face of Holly.

Horror froze Lannihan in an instant. Holly came to life as though under the drive of an electric shock. He was out of the bed, fighting like a savage against Lannihan. With his left hand he rubbed his own face, covering his hand with the face-cream, which he smeared, in the fight, on the face of Lannihan. He screamed like a madman

as he did so, baring his teeth. With his right hand he tried to rub something into the cream he had managed to smear on Lannihan.

"So!" grated Holly. "The cur managed to tip you off, eh, copper?" His voice rose shrilly, his eyes red with a madness intensified by the alcohol in his system. "Couldn't handle it himself!" he shrieked. "Thought he was avenging his sister's honor—when she didn't have any to avenge! Too bad that between the two of you, you couldn't save Murgatroyd, Lowry and Paget, the double-crossing, robbing rats!" Holly ended in a demoniac rush of wild laughter.

Lannihan staggered back, fighting to keep the hand of Holly from smearing the seeds of black death into his now sweating face. In the midst of his horror, the detective jerked his gat and let drive, for a hunch had told him that Holly was the distributor of the ghastly death he had witnessed that day. The gat spoke. Holly went down, his fleshy, characterless face went gray. His arms hung wide. The hands opened—and the grisly black terror was growing in the palm of the right one! Lannihan whirled as he heard a noise, looked down in the face of Kinney.

"But it was *you* who did the telephoning!" Lannihan accused.

"Right, copper," said Kinney softly. "I was afraid you wouldn't believe me if I told you the straight story. I put it on strong to bring you."

"But that mad laughter!" Lannihan shuddered.

"It kept you traveling, didn't it? I had

to do something to make you come. I knew Holly would murder the other three. He was cracked on women and the three guys too often moved in on his girls. Murgatroyd, Lowry and Paget had got him to gamble what money he had left on a fluke corporation. No girl would look at him, without money. My sister was the only one of the lot who really believed in him, and he had ruined her."

"But that damned black orchid," Lannihan muttered.

"I accidentally gave him the secret of that. He used it, knowing the blame would be laid on me. I was right behind him every step, but couldn't quite catch him."

"And I'll never know," said Lannihan thoughtfully, as he unfastened the manacles on Kinney, "whether my bullet or the black orchid in his hand killed him!"

"Not even bullets," Kinney informed him somberly, "could outspeed the death of the black orchids. I'm glad you kept on the job, for if he had attacked me instead of you, he'd probably have nailed me and disposed of the only fatal witness against him."

"You intended to kill him with the black orchid—because of your sister—when I came in this room?"

"No, I only wanted to make him suffer as his victims suffered, while I laughed at him. I know how to prevent death by the orchid, too, even after it starts to grow. I'm glad you don't need the antidote, Lannihan!"

"If you're glad, Kinney," said Lannihan grimly, rubbing his face, "how do you suppose I feel?"

DOCTOR DEATH Returns Next Month!

More menacing than ever. His Zombi, his elementals, again attack the living; but he has a new terror—he resuscitates the hordes of Egypt in their tombs.



He had tried to get out of the tub of horror.

THE SKELETON SCREAMS

by **O'CASEY HOLT**

ONE MINUTE AFTER THE LIVING MAN SCREAMED,
THEY FOUND HIS SKELETON, AS CLEAN AS IF BUZZARDS
HAD BEEN AT IT FOR WEEKS.

CLARK HAZEN, newest of the Homicide dicks, got the job of finding out what had killed Louis Rhone. He was met at the door of Rhone's apartment by the owner of the building. The man's

face was white. His hands trembled as with the ague. He was scared half out of his wits.

"It can't be!" he blurted hysterically. "It simply can't have happened that

quickly, for I heard him scream the minute before I went in, something about a 'tiger'."

"What couldn't have happened," snapped Hazen, staring down at the pudgy apartment owner from his brawny six feet.

"You'll see, copper. You'll see. Of course it might be a joke or something, though old Louis Rhone never went in for jokes as far as I know, and he's been with me fourteen years. But where did he get the skeleton, and how did he get it in without me knowing it? Besides, he never drank." Owner Maillon Cox's voice shook.

"What skeleton?" Hazen was annoyed by the man's terror.

"I been trying to tell you . . ." the man babbled.

Hazen pushed past the owner into the suite of rooms Louis Rhone had occupied, turned when he couldn't see what he sought and said:

"Well, where the devil is it?"

"In the bathroom, like I told you."

"You didn't tell me anything, except a lot of chatter about a skeleton that didn't make sense, and a tiger that was worse."

"But that's exactly what I'm trying to tell you! The skeleton in the bathroom."

OBVIOUSLY there was nothing coherent to be got out of the fat man. He moaned, in between incoherencies, about his place getting a bad name, he would never be able to rent Rhone's apartment, that Rhone had always been good pay and now he was dead, and a lot more of it. But Hazen didn't hear him. The whole world of normal things was blotted out when he saw the thing in the bathtub.

It was a skeleton.

As the houseowner had said. It was complete too. Not so much as a wisp of hair remained of it. Hazen stared at the thing, then whirled on the man who had sent in the call.

"You say *that* screamed a minute before you came in?"

"Yes, that's what I've been trying to tell you."

"And you say it's Louis Rhone?"

"Of course, don't you suppose I know my

own tenants? Look at that mouthful of teeth. I've seen 'em every first of the month for fourteen years, right on the dot to the minute. It was a pleasure to deal with Mr. Rhone. He always smiled. That's how come I would know his teeth anywhere. Besides, they're all gold, like his. Sure that's him, I say."

Hazen stared at the little man.

"You mean to tell me," he said slowly, "that you got inside here one minute after you heard Rhone scream, found this in the tub, and now positively identify it as the man who screamed?"

"I do that. Don't coppers bring in dentists, in cases like this, or take fingerprints, or something?"

"Dentists, maybe," said Hazen grimly, "but I'm afraid this boss's fingerprints would leave a lot to be desired. Get out of here, will you?"

The pudgy little man got. Hazen could hear him talking to coppers in the outer, main room. He shut the door, then stood over the tub, staring into it. As he stared it came to him more and more that the pudgy man knew exactly what he was talking about. This skeleton, impossible as it might seem, was that of Louis Rhone.

One minute he had been a living man, capable of screaming. Next minute he had been a skeleton. It wasn't possible, yet Hazen knew it had happened. But how?

Acid in the tub? No murderer would try that. Besides, Rhone would have escaped with his feet destroyed, for he would have managed to fall out of the tub before the acid had got his whole body. Obviously the scream he had emitted had been the first touch of pain. And the pudgy man had mentioned just one scream!

"God Almighty!" said Hazen, the sweat suddenly beading his cheeks and forehead. "He had time to scream just once, before this happened to him. Not even a second scream. A *real* tiger couldn't have done this!"

Hazen looked around the bathroom. The skeleton's clothing was all prepared for his use. His trousers, immaculate, finely creased, hung over a chairback. His

tie had been laid out. His underclothing was on a chair beside the tub, within reach.

"He didn't have the slightest idea what was going to happen to him," Hazen muttered. "Maybe it *was* acid. His heart might have failed him on account of the pain, and he fell into the tub. It's possible that's why he didn't tumble out of the tub. But who turned the water out?"

The tub was almost dry. Hazen looked further, to find a gruesome relic of what had happened. Rhone himself had pulled the plug out of the tub, for the bony forefinger of his left hand still was encircled by the plug's ring!

"That puts out heart failure," Hazen muttered thickly. "He'd never have reached the plug."

He started backing out of the bathroom. Obviously the death which had overtaken Rhone had pulled him into the tub, until his head was submerged under the water, for his skull was as white as though it had been bleached on a desert for years.

Hazen stepped into the main room, looked around at the two coppers and the plainclothes men, several of whom had seen the thing in the tub before his arrival. Even the faces of the hardboiled harness bulls were white as with a strange, unearthly terror. Hazen looked at each man in turn, and at the pudgy house owner, who was wringing his hands and moaning.

"I'll be next, as sure as anything!"

"I've got the very best evidence that's exactly the truth," said Hazen grimly, meaning nothing of the sort, but desirous of snapping the pudgy man out of it long enough to get intelligent answers to the questions that must be asked.

"You what? Oh, my God!" said the pudgy man. "I knew it. I knew I was marked for death the minute I looked at Mr. Rhone."

"Shut up," said Hazen, "and maybe we can save you if you'll answer some questions. How long will it take you to get your plumber?"

"He's working in the house right now," said Mailon Cox, the property owner. "I had some things for him to do."

"That's a break, anyhow. Have him in here. I've got to have the connections of the drain tested, especially the elbow. I don't expect to find anything, but you never can tell."

Cox went outside and yelled.

"Murtha! Murtha!"

"Damn!" said one of the harness bulls. "It sounds like he's yelling murder!"

Hazen jumped to the door. Never do to pass up anything in a case like this.

"What's that you're yelling?" he demanded. There was always a possibility that the word was a code word of warning. Hazen suspected everybody in a murder case. Cox's story was so wild and improbable it might very well be a lie from start to finish. And Cox himself might have shoved that plug ring over the forefinger of the skeleton.

"Murtha," said Cox. "That's - the plumber's name. He's done my work for five years."

"Okay, have him in here."

THE plumber arrived. Hazen stared at him. Murtha was as big a man as Hazen himself, and much broader. Hazen expected somehow to see a big, oldish fat man. This fellow wasn't over twenty-five, with the roses of rampant health in his cheeks. He looked able to kill a bull with a blow of his fist.

"Your stomach stand for looking at a corpse?" asked Hazen abruptly.

"My stomach stands for plumbing," said Murtha, grinning. "I could sit on a corpse and eat my lunch. Why?"

Hazen took Murtha into the bedroom, pointed. Murtha stared. Hazen watched the man. Murtha wasted little time on the skeleton. He looked at Hazen.

"Initiating somebody into a secret society?" he asked.

"No," said Hazen. "This man was murdered, something like fifteen minutes ago. Ah, I thought that would make you *think* a minute. Still want to sit on him to eat your lunch?"

For Murtha had gone as white as the coppers or Cox, and his great red face was

covered with sweat. He flung it away with the back of his forearm.

"And you want me to take out the drain joint and save whatever is in it, eh?"

"Exactly."

Grimly, saying nothing, Hazen watched while Murtha did his work. Murtha was an excellent, fast workman. It took five minutes. Murtha held up the joint and shrugged.

"Sorry," he said. "I haven't had occasion to touch this in years. The elbow is so filled with dirt that scarcely a drop of water would stick in it."

"I'll save the silt, just the same," said Hazen. "And thanks. Let pudgy pay for this job."

MURTHA left hurriedly, again flinging the sweat from his forehead. Hazen grinned grimly. Now the bathroom had become a place of eerie horror. Acid or no acid, something ghastly had happened here to Rhone. A man didn't change from a living man to a skeleton in the batting of an eye. Hazen closed his eyes, trying to call up a picture of what might have happened.

He had a ghastly image of a man's foot bones showing through his feet, then the feet becoming skeleton, the flesh being erased from his legs so swiftly it looked like a fadeout in a picture. It was horrible to contemplate. Why, Rhone himself must have watched his own dissolution for a few seconds at least. Sure he had, else he wouldn't have reached for the plug ring. Why hadn't he, since he knew enough to reach the ring, flung himself out of the water?

"That's easy, too," said Hazen to himself. "He had nothing, by that time, to raise himself on. His legs and hips were nothing but naked bone. Then he fell backward into the water, his head came under—and that marked the end. His eyes must have seen terror before they went, too."

Hazen shivered. It was so unreal. And yet, alone there in the room where Rhone had died in such a horrible fashion, utterly unable to conjure up what had been the manner of death, Hazen had never been

more frightened in his life. The room seemed to be filled with death. If Hazen had looked down at this moment, to see his own lower limbs as those of a skeleton, he would scarcely have been surprised. He turned and literally flung himself from the room.

His men didn't laugh at him. Their faces were still white. They knew, as Cox knew, that horror had stalked through Rhone's bath, and when least expected. Hazen had dumped the silt from the drain into a piece of paper. He now gave it to his chemist, for whom one of his men had telephoned.

"Make it snappy, Mac," he said. "There's nothing I can do until I find out if there's any acid."

"Okay. I'll call you here."

The chemist looked at the number of the telephone. Hazen sat down. The silence became oppressive. The coppers shifted, did not look at one another. Now and again they looked toward the bathroom door, and finally one of them, with an oath, went and closed it savagely.

"I wish," said Hazen softly, "that Rhone had screamed while you were closing that door. We're all in a blue funk. Cox, did you say Rhone was wealthy?"

"Yes."

"Where'd he keep his dough?"

Cox's eyes lighted. "That's a question," he said. "I wonder who it would belong to, now he's gone. He hadn't kin of any kind, so he told me, and he always kept a lot of cash around. He kept several thousand, that I know of, in that drawer there."

"Good of you to remember it," said Hazen, narrowing his eyes. "You weren't, by any chance, waiting for us to go so you could get your hooks on it?"

"Certainly not! I wouldn't . . ."

"Well," said Hazen grimly, running his hands about in the drawer as he spoke. "somebody did! If there were ever any money in this drawer, it's gone now. That gives us the motive for the killing. Now, Cox, what did you do with the jack?"

"I didn't have to mention it, did I?" asked Cox, suddenly sullen.

"That's right, you didn't. I'm sorry," said Hazen. "But it has been taken. Hello, doc. Well, here's something for you to sharpen your teeth on, mister. Have a look."

He took the coroner into the bathroom. That official took a look and threw up his hands.

"How old is the skeleton?" asked Hazen.

"God knows," said the coroner. "What do the facts say?"

"That that skeleton was a living man about half an hour ago."

The telephone rang.

"I haven't got a complete report, Hazen," said the chemist irritably. "But I know what it'll be. Fresh water, mixed with various grime from the human animal, and various soaps, such as a man might use over a long period of time."

"No acid?"

"Nothing but the acid of meanness; but that wouldn't kill a man."

"Thanks," said Hazen grimly. "You're a big help."

Hazen told the coroner to do whatever he had to do, asked Cox for the address of the plumber, and left the room of strange death. Cox's last answer to a direct question was that Rhone had usually kept five thousand dollars, in fifty dollar bills, in the drawer he had indicated.

Hazen ran into the plumber on the stairs. Murtha's heavy brows were furrowed in a frown of perplexity.

"I was just thinking, copper," he said, "that if there were an acid that couldn't be detected . . ."

"No good. Murtha," said Hazen briefly. "Science can detect anything. Though right now science, meaning the science of the law, would like to know where to find one hundred fifty-dollar bills. A man would do a lot for that much dough, wouldn't he?"

"Yeah," said Murtha, "but I'd hate to be in your shoes, knowing what happened to Old Rhone, if whoever got the money you're talking about knew you were after it! I'd sure hate to go out as Rhone did."

"I wouldn't," said Hazen, "if I knew I

had to go anyhow. It didn't take more than a few seconds. It would be better than dying a lingering death in bed."

"You think you'd like it?" Murtha cocked an eye at Hazen.

BEFORE Hazen could answer a horrible scream came from the room he had just left. Stretcher-bearers were on the stairs with the skeleton of Rhone covered by heavy cloth. They set the stretcher down with a gruesome rattling sound. Hazen whirled up the stairs in great strides, taking the steps three at a time. He burst into the room to see Cox actually weeping in a chair, holding his right wrist with his left hand. The right hand was strangely white.

Cox's right hand wasn't a hand at all. It was the hand of a skeleton!

Hazen jerked Cox to his feet.

"How did that happen?" he demanded hoarsely.

"I didn't want to waste any time," wailed Cox. "I have to keep my places rented or go to the poorhouse. As soon as the skeleton was taken out I started to clean up. The first thing to do was to wash out the tub . . ."

"Well, and what happened?"

"I drew a couple of inches of water in the tub, meaning to mix cleanser with it, to remove all traces of . . ." Cox shivered, then remembered his own predicament, stared at his hand and screamed again. Hazen grabbed the hand, looked at it. The wrist was bleeding horribly, but the flesh wasn't disappearing from it. "I stuck my hand into the water," Cox went on, "and before I could say anything, this is what happened to me. It was like a thousand ants eating me!"

Hazen rushed back to the bathroom, stared into the tub. It was almost empty. A thin trickle of water was just disappearing into the drain.

"You didn't put the plug in," he snapped at Cox, returning. "Swell job of cleaning you did on your tubs, wasn't it?"

But Cox was beyond hearing. He had fainted. His face was dewed with the sweat

(Turn to page 120)

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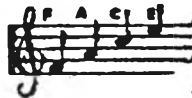
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(Continued from page 118)

of pain. He had fallen to the floor on his face. Hazen snapped at the nearest plain-clothes man.

"Get an ambulance. I'm going to have another crack at that plumber. There must be something in the drain. By the Lord Harry, he cleaned out the elbow. There'll be something in it this time!"

Hazen went to the head of the stairs to yell down.

"Murtha! Murtha!"

But there was no answer. Grim of face, Hazen went on downstairs, where a police car with driver stood patiently at the curb.

"I've got to have that plumber, Ike," he said to the driver. "He's the only man with opportunity to use 'tigers!'"

"Of course you have, son," said Ike soothingly. "Everybody has to have a plumber, but for different reasons. If I had some idea what the hell you're gassing about, with a face like grandmother's ghost, I wouldn't be so much in the dark. And did you say 'tigers?'"

"My face?" said Hazen grimly. "Well, look at your own in the rear-vision mirror when I've finished with the story I have to tell. And while you're listening, make tracks to this address, and don't spare the horses."

H AZEN, more to refresh his own memory by listening to his own recital, a practice to which he was addicted because he found that the sound of his own voice often gave him ideas, told Ike what he had seen, what had been done, everything. When he had finished Ike twisted the rear-vision mirror and looked at his face.

"You win, son," he said grimly. "I've been a copper since Heck was a pup, but that beats me. Any idea what done it?"

"No, damn it! No!"

"Well, don't bite me. I didn't do it, and if I did I'd say so and save you a lot of trouble—and I'd kill you as soon as I'd told you, if I had something like that on my mind."

Hazen grabbed Ike's arm.

"Meaning?"

"That whoever did that didn't intend for anybody to guess how it had been done; that whoever that party was, was plenty hard, without a trace of mercy in him. If he did it, he knows you are on the job. I wouldn't be in your duds for almost anything. Fact is, I'd feel better, even, if I weren't driving you! Are we going now to grab the killer?"

"No, merely to get a plumber, the plumber who knows the most about Cox's apartment house."

Ike sighed with relief, stepped up the speed of the car, heading cross-town at Fourteenth Street toward Second Avenue. He knew exactly where to go. It was probable that Ike knew every street in New York City. He stopped before the address Hazen had told him. Hazen jumped from the car and went in.

There was a hard-faced, gum-chewing girl behind a desk. Her eyes were the blackest Hazen had ever seen. Hazen looked out before he went up to the girl. Ike had pulled away from in front of the plumber's shop.

"Murtha in?" asked Hazen.

"No, copper, he ain't," said the girl.

"How'd you know I was a copper?" asked Hazen.

"'Cause coppers ride in coppers' cars," said the girl. She didn't smile. Her eyes were utterly cold. "What do you want of Murtha?"

"Want him to do a job, over on Fourth Avenue, 164½."

"He's over there now."

"You mean he was. He isn't now."

"Well, he's got a working schedule. He'll go to the next place. You can find him there. It's," she thumbed through a spindle of papers, "at Washington Square South. What did you want him to do?"

"Take out the elbow on a bathtub drain. I just wanted to see what sort of stuff was in the water that killed Louis Rhone and ate all the skin off Mailon Cox's right hand!"

The girl gasped. Her gum-chewing ceased for a moment. That was her only sign. She didn't ask any more questions.

But Hazen had a queer feeling; that he stood at the threshold of momentous events. He could feel menace roll between the girl and himself.

"Look," he said, "you try to get him on a phone. If he's left Washington Square South, you'll know where he goes next. It'll be better than for me to start trailing him, I'll look around a bit while you do it."

She agreed. She kept her eyes on him as he walked to the back room of the place. That back room was filled with all sorts of gadgets, all sorts of plumbing supplies. And there was a strange incongruity, too. The back room was decorated with flowers in pots. There were two cages in which canaries sang, several glass tanks filled with goldfish of various kinds, one in which guppies swam, and a bed in a corner. Obviously a woman's hand was in this somewhere.

"Murtha go in for domesticity, sister?" Hazen called. When she didn't answer he turned to see why not. He almost jumped out of his skin, for she was standing right behind him. Her hands were slightly raised. Her eyes were colder still. She smiled when he noted her, and there was no mirth in her smile.

"Outlandish taste, Murtha's," said Hazen, trying to make his voice sound natural. "I can't imagine a bathing pool in the floor of a plumber's back room."

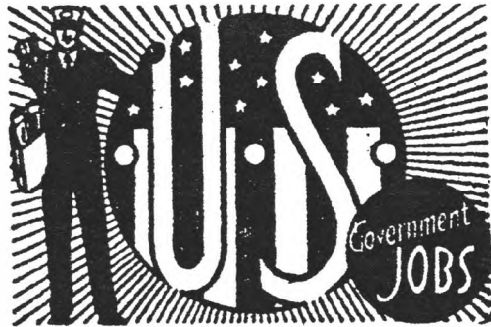
"It's my taste, copper!" she said tartly. "The pool is his idea. He's working on an invention and he needs the pool for his experiments."

Hazen was standing on the edge of a pool about eight feet square and some five feet deep. It was filled to the brim with clear, apparently cold water.

"Funny, sister," said Hazen, "I don't know how I got the idea, but I had a hunch, when I looked around at you, that you were about to push me into the drink. Or wouldn't you be that playful?"

"What else were you wanting?" she asked, ignoring his pleasantry. "I got Murtha. He'll be here in a few minutes."

(Turn to next page)



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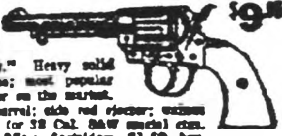
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(Continued from page 121)

"Why here? Why didn't you tell him where to go?"

"You said you was waitin', didn't you? Then why couldn't he come here, pick you up and take you to the place? That's what he's doing, anyhow, whether you like it or not."

Hazen shrugged. He felt queer. He felt as though he stood on the brink of something frightful, something ghastly. He felt, he told himself, as Rhone must have felt when he knew he had mere seconds left to live. He wiped the sweat from his brows. The girl grinned tightly. A car braked to a squealing halt outside the door.

"That's Murtha now," she said. "I'll go tell him you're here."

"Yes," said Hazen softly, "do that."

Hazen leaned against a sort of bench on which there were so many fish pools, and waited. He hitched his gat around until it would come close under his hand if need be. He didn't know why he did it, but that feeling that he was in deadly danger would not leave him. Death was close, warned his subconscious mind, and he must be prepared to resist its onslaughts when they came.

Murtha came stalking into the back room. He stopped, shut the door, put his back against it. Hazen heard a key grate in the lock. And with that he became as cold as the eyes of the girl—who hadn't come in with Murtha—had been. He knew in that instant who had murdered Rhone, knew that Murtha probably had the five thousand dollars still on him. But he didn't know yet how it had been done.

What would Murtha do?

"I was just admiring your pool, Murtha," said Hazen quietly. "The young lady was telling me why you built it. I thought maybe you'd tell me something about it. I'm always interested in unusual innovations."

"Even plumbing?" asked Murtha.

"Right now I'm greatly interested in plumbing," said Hazen. "Plumbing fits in, somehow, with Rhone's murder, you know."

And besides, let me tell you what happened to Maillon Cox . . ."

He watched Murtha's face as he told his story. It didn't change in the slightest. Murtha, he decided, would have made an excellent poker player and, back in the Dark Ages, he added to himself, a perfect executioner, even to the black cowl over his head. His swart face suggested that.

"About the pool now," said Murtha unemotionally, "I'd like to tell you about it. I'm a nut on fish, you know. Maybe Lida told you? Well, even if she didn't, I'll tell you now. You see, this pool's a good place for fish, too. Lida lives here. She's an orphan or something. My home is over on the East Side. This pool never gets used much, only sometimes I experiment with my fish in it. Want to watch?"

"Yes," said Hazen, knowing exactly what the man was driving at, and fearful of the weird light in Murtha's eyes.

"Watch," said Murtha, "how crazy the little shavers get when they realize they've got a lot more room than they had."

Murtha stepped to the bench, not too close to Hazen, lifted one of the glass pools, in which half a dozen brilliant-hued goldfish swam, and carried the glass container to the pool, where he upended it. The contents spilled into the pool. The fish swam about the pool, which must have seemed as large as the world to them, like crazy things.

Murtha stepped to the next glass container, which contained fish that were gold fish size, but almost jet black, carried those to the pool and dumped them in. Hazen watched with interest.

He was staring into the pool, wondering what had happened to one of the goldfish, or if he had miscoumuted them, when Murtha came back with another container, which he started to tilt over the pool.

"There are no fish in that one, Murtha," said Hazen.

Murtha grinned.
 "I need the container," he said. "I'm just dumping the water out. Besides, maybe it's filled with invisible fish," this as the water in the container splashed into the

(Turn to next page)

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(Continued from page 123)

pool. "You know that gag? Some window has an empty container, except for clear water, in it, with a placard outside it saying 'invisible fish,' with a crowd around it debating on whether there are really fish in it or not?"

"No," said Hazen, staring into the large pool. "I'd never heard that gag."

Then Hazen froze in his place, even though he expected this, for he had just witnessed a terrible thing. In the twinkling of an eye he had seen one of the goldfish and one of the blackfish, become fish skeletons, and sink slowly to the bottom of the pool. Even as he noticed this the other fish, one by one, were becoming skeletons, sinking to the bottom. Hazen lifted his head to stare at Murtha—and just in time.

For Murtha took advantage of his surprise and amazement to make his bid. He flung himself at Hazen. His great right fist cracked to Hazen's jaw, and for an infinitesimal instant the detective paused on the brink of the pool, his knees buckling. Over his shoulder as he did so he noted that not a living fish remained in the pool.

And he knew, what he had shrewdly guessed before, what had happened to Rhone and Cox, and would happen to him at the hands of Murtha, if . . .

He battled like a Trojan as Murtha roared and lunged at him, swinging his great hands like bludgeons. The fists landed time and again. Hazen could have gone for his gat, but he hated to use it against such a man as this. Murtha didn't merit such an easy death. A man who would devise the ghastly thing he had, for a mere five thousand dollars, had probably committed other murders and got away with them, for even less money. They clinched, struggled for grips, locked, swaying.

"You could, in the other cases, Murtha," he gritted, "have carried the skeletons out in your tool kit."

"I figured you was wise, copper," Murtha panted in a low, savage voice. "And you're right, too. A lot of good it will do you! Yes, and I'll take you out in

my tool kit. You never guessed, did you, what chances a plumber has for committing the perfect crime?"

"Not entirely perfect," said Hazen, "for I'm not dead yet."

"No, but it's just a matter of seconds. One minute from now and *they'll* have you!"

"Yeah?" Hazen suddenly took the offensive, without so much as lifted brow or staring eyes to warn Murtha that he was anything but scared within an inch of his life. He flung himself out of the clinch, lunged forward with a vicious right, then left, then . . .

The girl, Lida, chose this moment to come in behind Hazen and crash the muzzle of an automatic down atop his skull. Hazen, as he fell toward the pool, heard her hard laughter. And illuminating words:

"Five grand don't slip through my hands *that* easy, copper!"

Murtha turned Hazen on his side, so that his face was over the pool.

"See?" he said. "Since you know so much already, take a good look! I told you about invisible fish. Well, they're *tigres*, from South America, so small you can't see 'em. They can eat a man in less than a minute, see? Only when they get to you you won't see. How do you like that, Hazen?"

"I don't," said Hazen hoarsely. "Yeah, I was wise. I remembered seeing a picture once. A pig was held in a stagnant pool in South America somewhere. He was gone, all but the bones, in no time. I'd hate to have your dreams, Murtha."

"So? But you'd like to have the money I can make with this gag! I've got lots of business. I fix bath-tubs, special containers filled with *tigres* to empty into the tub when the cold water's turned on. It's simple for a plumber, which you've guessed or you wouldn't be here—which makes it just too bad for you! See, all the fish are gone, and the *tigres* are still hungry, so out you go! Nobody else will get wise to this—at least

(Turn to next page)

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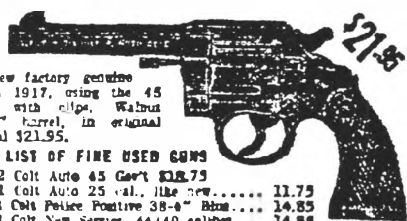
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(Continued from page 125)

not until Lida and me have got what we need!"

The cold sweat of utter horror bathed Hazen's face. There seemed nothing he could do. The girl would shoot him if he offered resistance. Why not? The tigers would destroy all trace. Murtha was laughing.

He came to Hazen's feet. His intention was obvious, to grab Hazen by the leg and hurl him into the pool, among the tiny, microscopic fish. Hazen allowed terror to show in his face. Murtha laughed. His face was filled with bestial gloating.

Murtha knelt.

Hazen suddenly shot his feet upward to Murtha's chin. His toes crashed to their mark with terrific force. Murtha fell toward Hazen. Lida couldn't shoot now for fear of hitting her man. Hazen doubled up his knees, caught the falling man on his shoes, grabbed Murtha's tumbling shoulders, kicked out with his feet, pushed with his arms even as he half rolled toward the pool, and the killer vanished with a loud splash.

A scream of terror and dismay bubbled from a woman's lips. Even as Murtha began to vanish as Rhone had done, and as the gold- and black-fish had, Hazen turned to face her. She was falling toward him. The revolver was slipping from her relaxing hand. Hazen caught her, lowered her gently, his narrowed eyes fixed on the sheaf of fifty dollar bills which her position in falling showed him, inside her waist.

Lida had fainted, but whether at sight of the horror which Murtha had become, or because in that last second she saw the yawning doors of the death-house in her imagination, Hazen would not know until she came to in a prison cell.

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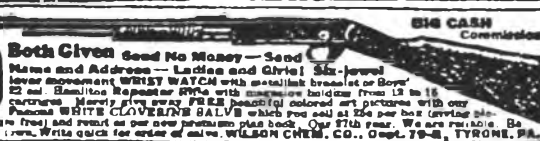
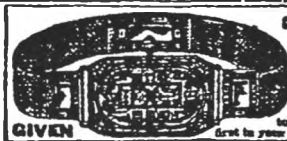
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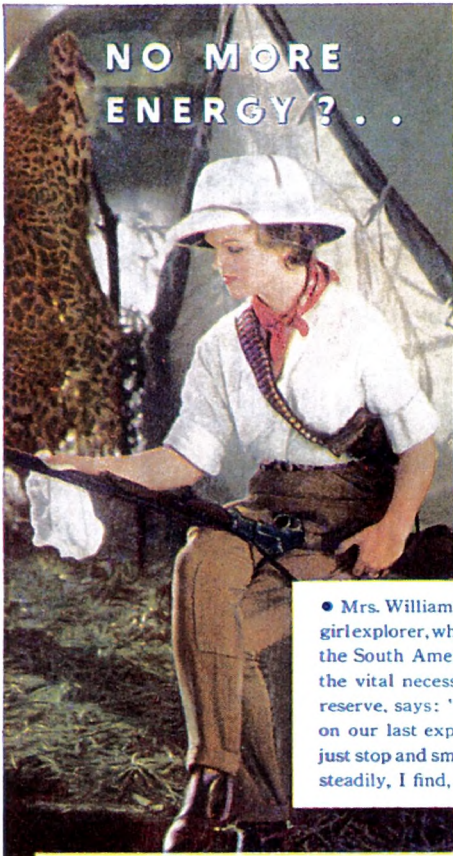
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