

MAY

# TERROR TALES

15¢



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*TWO STRONGLY CONTRASTED NOVELETTES OF UNUSUAL TERROR!*

**MISTRESS OF THE DARK POOL**

*by* **RUSSELL GRAY**

**TEST-TUBE FRANKENSTEIN**

*by* **WAYNE ROBBINS**

# Is BALDNESS Necessary ? ? ? ?

**"NO"** in many cases, is the opinion of many leading scalp specialists and dermatologists. More surprising still is the ease with which aid can be obtained and baldness often can be prevented. All you have to do is practice elementary health rules which include cleanliness and exercise. Just as improper exercise will do more harm than good for other parts of your body, so will improper massage fail to sufficiently benefit hair growing on the scalp.

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VITEX TRIPLE ACTION HAIR TREATMENT includes the same products used with much success here at the Institute. The cleansing, stimulating and healthful effect of these preparations when used along with the scalp manipulations effect the greatest benefits.

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Remove foreign substances that clog the pores and choke the hair roots. When there is no crusty, scaly coating to interfere with circulation, hair has a chance to grow. Check up your own hair condition. Is your scalp itchy? Are you troubled with excessive dandruff? Is your hair dull, lifeless and brittle? Is your hair getting thin? Is your hair coming out excessively? These are generally healthy hair trouble makers. Use VITEX'S Hair Treatment to help create and maintain a healthy scalp condition that will encourage healthy hair growth.

### THERE IS HOPE FOR YOU

Don't despair because of excessive loss of hair . . . don't resign yourself to baldness, because there is hope for you. If your condition is caused by excessive dandruff or some other local disorder, VITEX Treatment will pave the way to keep your hair growing. Hundreds of unsolicited and enthusiastic letters received from users proves that VITEX is good . . . order today and start to correct your hair troubles right away.

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1. Stimulates growth areas: After applying VITEX you will note a pleasant tingling or "drawing" sensation. Evidence of how effectively your scalp is being stimulated in the areas where blood must nourish the hair roots.
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3. Purifies as it cleanses. After you have allowed VITEX to "work" it saponifies easily with water and rinses completely clear, leaving the scalp healthfully clean and the hair naturally brilliant.



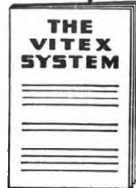
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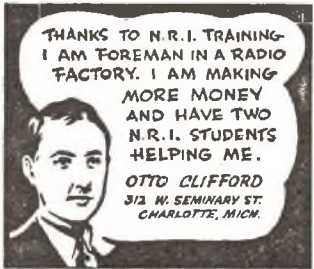
I WAS WORKING IN A GARAGE WHEN I ENROLLED WITH N. R. I. I AM NOW RADIO SERVICE MANAGER FOR M.----- FURNITURE CO. FOR THEIR 4 STORES.

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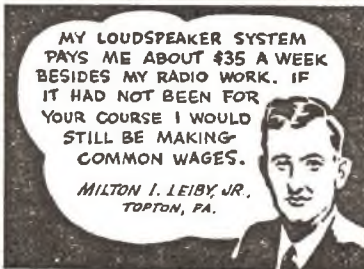
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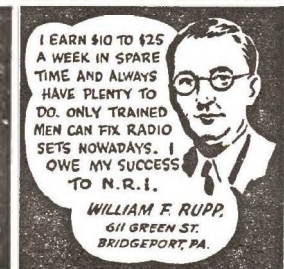
THANKS TO N. R. I. TRAINING I AM FOREMAN IN A RADIO FACTORY. I AM MAKING MORE MONEY AND HAVE TWO N. R. I. STUDENTS HELPING ME.

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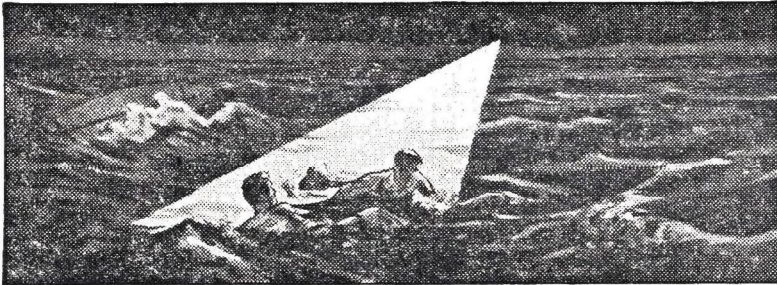
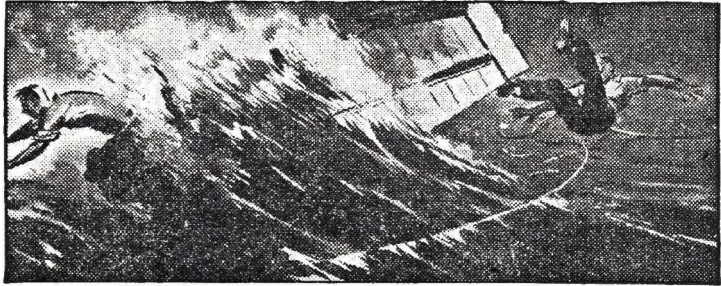
# "THE HEAVY LINE DRAGGED ME TOWARD ETERNITY!"

A true experience of C. J. LATIMER, Warren, Ohio



"ANOTHER FISHERMAN and myself had just finished setting a heavy trot-line in Lake Erie," writes Mr. Latimer, "when a sudden treacherous squall lashed out of nowhere and churned the water into towering waves.

"A WAVE SMACKED us broadside, and over we went! Then I felt a heavy drag on my leg. I was caught in the trot-line and was being pulled to my doom. In the darkness, my companion couldn't untangle me!

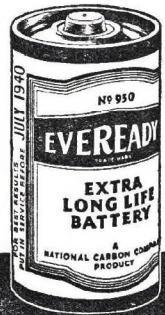


"BUT ONE OF OUR PARTY ON shore brought his flashlight into action. Its powerful beam cut the distance and darkness—and in a minute I was free. I shudder to think of what might have happened except for those dependable 'Eveready' fresh DATED batteries!

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# TERROR TALES



VOLUME TWELVE

MAY, 1940

NUMBER TWO

**A LONG NOVEL OF WEIRD TERROR**

**The Book of Torment**.....Harrison Storm **6**

How could anyone have believed me when I said I had not committed those horrible torture-murders? For they had read the gloating admission of the ghastly crimes—and the handwriting was my own!

**FOUR MYSTERY-TERROR NOVELETTES**

**Where Dwell the Living Dead** .....Wayne Rogers **28**

Old Jubel Tandy swore that until the end of time I would remain faithful to the spirit of his dead daughter—and now in that cavern of damnation, her corpse was rising up to claim me in the cold, white embrace of death!

**Mistress of the Dark Pool**.....Russell Gray **56**

I could not help but laugh when that ancient hag told me I would take the place of her dead lover. For had I not my own lovely Cara? Yet there came a night when I promised to kill—that I might have the love of a wrinkled, leathery crone!

**Prey for the Daughter of Hell**.....Conrad Kimball **78**

Death lay in my lips! I knew this, but some power stronger than myself forced me on to lure men to their destruction. Was I so accursed that even the one man I truly loved could not escape my frenzied madness?

**Test-Tube Frankenstein** .....Wayne Robbins **86**

I wanted to destroy that slimy, protoplasmic horror that fed on the flesh of the humans it sought to imitate, but even as I locked with it in a struggle of death, it changed into the lovely form of—my wife!

**A SHORT STORY OF FEARFUL MENACE**

**The Night Eternity Ended**.....Donald Dale **46**

The Blue Lady of the Sierras was the infinitely desirable embodiment of all man's longing and passion. Yet on one forbidden night of the year none could look upon her—and live!

**TRUE TERROR FEATURE**

**Monsters of Monarchy** .....Charles Boswell **73**

Egomaniac of Antiquity . . . the man whom all Rome feared. . . .

—AND—

**The Inside Story**.....The Editors **4**

Are writers men or geni? . . .

**Black Chapel** .....A Department **104**

A reader's complaint. . . .

THIS SEAL PROTECTS YOU  AGAINST REPRINT FICTION!

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# The Inside Story

**I**T IS fitting and just, we think, that we take a little time off this month to thank all you readers for your enthusiastic response to our request for suggestions and comment. Your letters of criticism as well as of praise are of tremendous help and encouragement—for a magazine that cannot arouse its readers is a very sick magazine indeed. Then, too, the editorial policy of any magazine is not a fixed, static thing. On the contrary, it is in a constant state of flux; for as the moods and opinions of every normal human being are ever changing, so, too, must the magazine which is but a reflection of its readers' desires. In short, your letters help us to give you the stories you want, when you want 'em.

One thing that gives us particular gratification is the rousing welcome you have given the short autobiographical sketches of our authors which we have recently printed. At first we were a bit doubtful about how much interest you would have in these brief, intimate glimpses into the writers' lives, but now it seems we won't be able to stop publishing them . . . Henry Chapman of Grand Rapids, Mich., writes in to ask for some dope on Donald Dale. D. D. must have been a regular hell-raiser, Henry thinks, to have acquired all the out-of-the-ordinary facts and knowledge he makes use of in his stories. Well, Henry, you shall have what you ask for. But prepare yourself for a shock. All is not as you seem to suspect—but we'll let Donald Dale do the talking:

**I** WAS born, I suppose. However, it cannot be proved, for the alleged event took place on a ranch in what was—and still is—the last frontier in Texas, and evidently nobody cared to ride the long miles to the county seat just to furnish me with statistics.

The next biographical question also proves embarrassing, for to "Where did you get your primary education?" I am forced to answer either (1) "I haven't never went to school, sir"; or (2) "On top of a windmill." The truth is that the ranch where I grew up, made up an entire school-district, and there was no school-house. Therefore, we had the doubtful privilege of having a state-paid teacher come out and live with us six or eight months of the year. He always was one of those second—or third-grade—certificate fellows, who knew absolutely less than nothing. (Patriotic note: The state evidently found out about this, for the breed is long since extinct.)

This poor teaching forced me to the windmill-top. President Garfield was no doubt right when he defined a university as a log with a student on one end and Mark Hopkins on the other. But there is no log in all West Texas and no Mark Hopkins. So I was forced to prove that a university could be made of an omniverous student with a windmill on one end and good texts in both hands. For that is how I got my introduction to Latin, plowing all the way through Caesar's Gallic Wars by myself; it was there I discovered that algebra is only a fascinating kind of puzzle and that Zanzibar, Tiboburra, Tanganyika, Popocatepetl, and Puerto Rico make beautiful sounds on the tongue and exciting thoughts in the head. The windmill was, of course, to keep away the rest of the ranch kids. Sometimes now I am tempted to take my typewriter and start climbing.

Later on, I went in for education more conventionally, taking a B. A. and an M. A. from Texas Tech, and was on the point of snaring a Ph.D. from Chicago when—to meet school expenses—I took a detour into fiction writing. Aware,

## THE INSIDE STORY

through academic research, of the long and honorable history of mystery-terror literature, I began writing for Popular, and my detour has long since become the main highway for me.

I have done a number of years of college-professing in English, Spanish, and French. Add to that a good deal of public-lecture work and a twisted, dirty knot of a sweater nearly half knit and you have the main features of my life-work. I divide my time between West Texas and New York, throwing in for good measure a few house parties in Dallas, Chicago, and good old Emporia, Kansas. I like all active sports—tennis, bowling, ping-pong, riding, hiking, dancing. And, oh yes, fun.

Somewhere I must make a soul-searing confession. I shall make it here and run: I am a female! Afore I stoled them cow-critters from the Bar-None Ranch, my name wuz plain Mary Dale Buckner. (Signed) Donald Dale.

Well, Henry, there's a portrait of Donald Dale. There doesn't seem to be very much abnormal about his—her—life, does there? It just goes to show what a vivid imagination a keen sense of the fitness of things—plus a real zest for living—can do for you.

The Editors.



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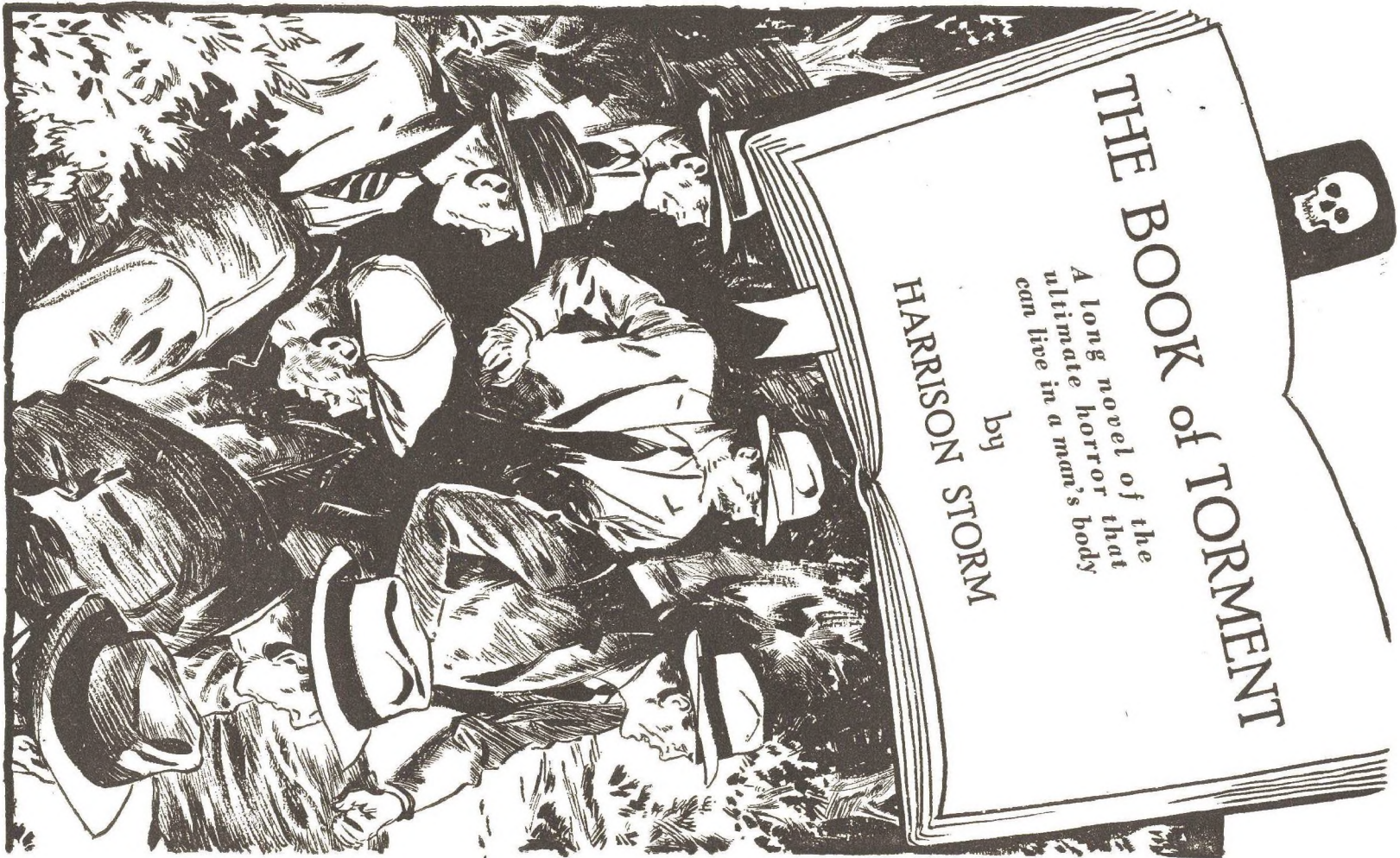
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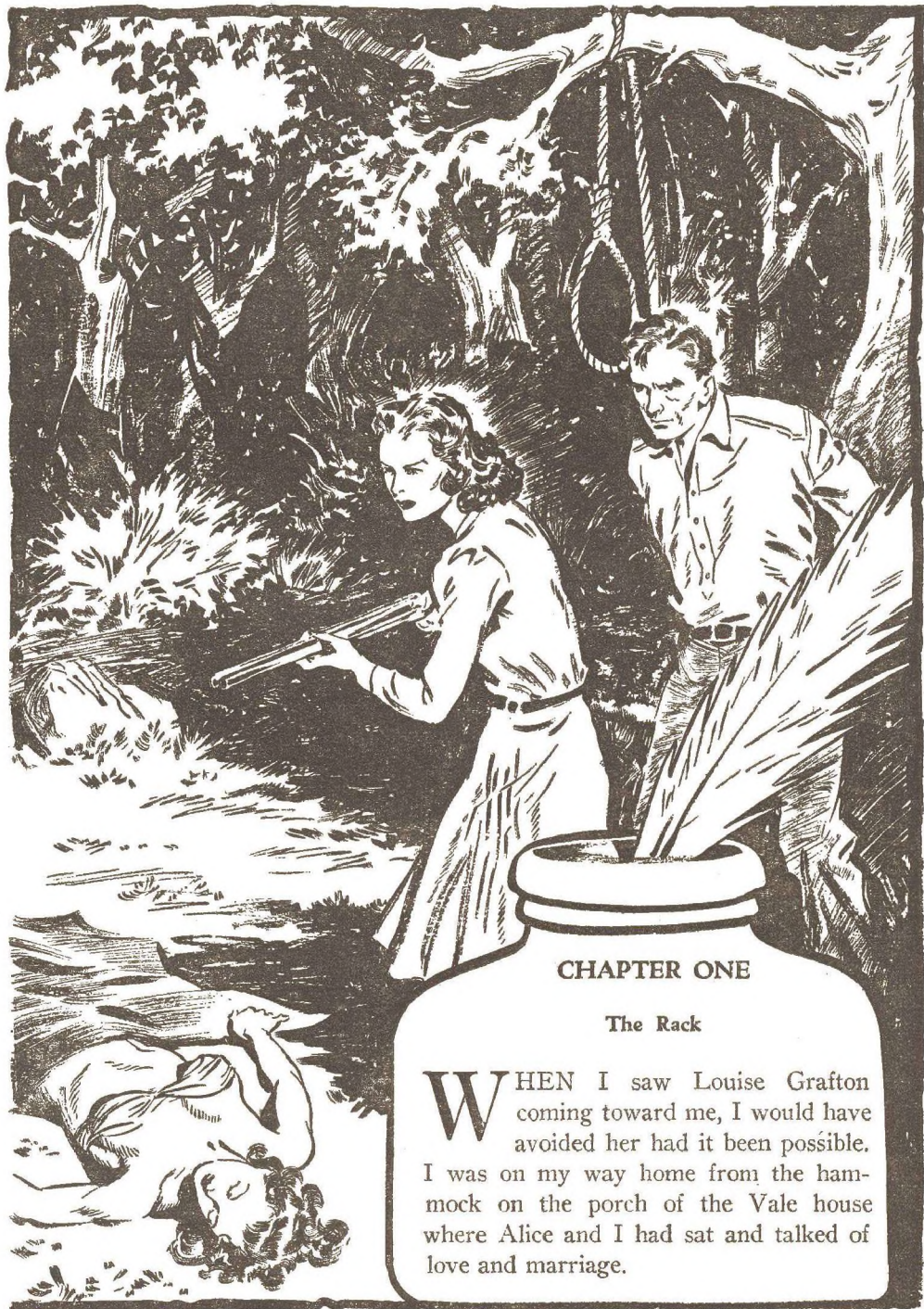
A long novel of the  
ultimate horror that  
can live in a man's body

by

HARRISON STORM



*Was I a monster? I could not remember having ~~written~~ those horrible recitals of torture and death—but I could not deny the evidence of my own handwriting. Only Alice Vale believed that I had not conceived and directed those two ghastly murders . . . and if she were wrong, then she, too, by my own hand was doomed to die!*



## CHAPTER ONE

### The Rack

**W**HEN I saw Louise Grafton coming toward me, I would have avoided her had it been possible. I was on my way home from the hammock on the porch of the Vale house where Alice and I had sat and talked of love and marriage.

And now on a lonely street an hour before midnight I confronted Louise whom I had once loved. The dim glow of a street lamp fell over her. She was more mature, perhaps, but otherwise unchanged. It might have been yesterday, instead of five years ago, that she had looked up at me with her mouth half-open, dark eyes flashing and breasts stirring under her tight bodice, and told me that she was going to marry another man. She still wore dresses which somehow made her seem unclothed. Although not as beautiful as Alice, she was still the most exciting woman I had ever known.

"Gilles Bodin," she said, extending a soft hand to me. "I really should be angry with you. You have been back in Wistfield for three weeks now and haven't come to see me."

Neither of us made any attempt to drop the other's hand. "I was too busy," I lied.

"But not too busy for Alice Vale," she smiled.

I let it go at that. "How is Wilbur?"

Her face clouded. "As always—good natured and very rich."

"And dull," I added. "You wanted that."

"Yes," she admitted readily. And I'm not sorry. I am the wife of a wealthy man. That's a lot—more, I still think, than being the wife of a college professor. I loved you, Gil, but love alone wouldn't have lasted as long as Wilbur's money."

At least she was being honest with herself and with me; as honest as she had been that day five years ago when I had been offered a job as an assistant professor of psychology at an Eastern university and had asked her to come with me as my wife. She had chosen, instead, the wealth of a man twice her age.

Looking at her now under the street lamp, what I had feared at the sight of her was happening. I loved Alice Vale, yes, more than I'd ever loved Louise; and

yet at the moment I was aware only of Louise's body. Without any conscious effort on my part, I moved toward her. My hands closed over her shoulders.

For a moment she swayed against me so that I felt the soft curve of her breasts on my chest. Then she straightened up and stepped backward.

"I must run along now, Gil," she said. "I'll be seeing more of you, I hope."

I watched the graceful motion of her body hurrying down the street as if she were anxious to get away from me. Damn her! Wouldn't I ever be able to get her out of my blood?

On the way home I tried to call up the lovely golden-haired image of Alice Vale, but remembrance of Louise's enticing body intruded. I hated Louise then as I had hated her when she had told me she had decided to marry Wilbur Grafton; and as a psychologist I know how slim is the line which divides passionate hate and passionate love.

I HAD returned to Wistfield after a five-year absence because of Alice Vale. I had known her since childhood, as I had known every resident in Wistfield, but she had been a gangling high school girl when I had left. Last spring I met her again at a university dance; met a young woman with hair like the sun and eyes the color of corn flowers and a figure which had sent both students and professors into a frenzy of attention. After one evening together, we had known that we were in love.

And so I had come to spend my summer vacation in the little cottage in Wistfield which had been left to me by parents. There was another reason: I was writing a book on the subconscious mind. But that was not important compared to the chance of spending an entire summer with Alice. And after the summer, I hoped, Alice would return with me to the university as Mrs. Bodin.

It was exactly midnight when I snapped on the light of the room I had converted into a library. On the desk were blank white sheets and a fountain pen, all ready for me to get to work on my book immediately after breakfast.

I remember looking at those sheets of paper with a kind of hypnotic fascination as if it were important that I immediately cover their whiteness with words. I wasn't sure what the words would be, but in back of my mind there was . . .

All of a sudden my brain went blank. The room, everything, vanished.

When I opened my eyes again, I found that I was in bed and that the sun was high in the sky. Loud, laughing voices were in the house. I slid out of bed and put on a dressing gown and went into the library.

Through the doorway I saw six people in the library, all dressed for tennis. They had come to pick me up on the way to the courts, and finding the door unlocked, they hadn't bothered with the formality of ringing.

Alice Vale was among them. She was clad in white slacks and a thin, knitted blouse which molded the roundness of her breasts, and her golden hair was gathered up on top of her head for coolness and comfort. Looking at her, I wondered how Louise Grafton could possibly have affected me last night.

There were two other girls: Marie Dexter, a delectable little thing with whom I had had a puppy love affair during my high school days, and Hermine Bauer, plump and jolly, who was engaged to stocky, red-headed Jim Warren, my closest friend during my youth.

Jim, now an up and coming lawyer, was saying to Chester Engles: "You have no business reading Gil's private papers like that."

Chester Engles was seated behind my desk with a sheaf of white paper in his hand. He was thin almost to emaciation—

had been since we'd been children together, with a bloodless bitter mouth and blazing feverish eyes sunk deep in bony sockets.

"It's probably part of Gil's book," Al McWilliams put in. He used to be the town's star athlete, and was now placidly achieving an oversized girth as a real estate agent. "I bet it's dull as hell."

"Not if it's anything like the abnormal psychology I took in college," Hermine Bauer declared. "It used to be our most popular course. All about sex perversion and sadism and what-not."

I remained unseen in the doorway, watching, trying to recall what I could have written last night after I had reached home. It was odd how my mind had suddenly gone blank.

"This'll interest you, all right," Chester Engles chuckled. "I glanced through the first page. Listen to this: 'I, Gilles Bodin, being appointed to the Inquisition of Carcassone in this year of our Lord, 1439, found to my delight that my first duty required putting to the question none other than the very beautiful Madame de Guibourg.'"

"I'll be damned!" Al McWilliams exclaimed. "The same name, only five hundred years ago."

Chester Engles nodded. "Gil once told me that he can trace his family back for centuries in France, and his own name, Gilles Bodin, as well. Maybe this is a bit of family history."

I found that my heart was pounding. Yes, there were family records, but not that far back. I had never heard of an Inquisitor of Carcassone who had borne my name. How in the world could I have written that?

**T**ENSELY I listened as Chester Engles continued to read from the manuscript:

"'It was my doing. I, Gilles Bodin, whom Louise had spurned because I was

but a lowly scholar, and had instead wed the powerful de Guibourg for wealth and position, now held her destiny in my hands. The Inquisition will never suspect that it was I who spread the rumors of Satanic rites in the cellars of the de Guibourg castle; that it was I who bribed Madame de Guibourg's servants to mutter of the blood of babies being spilled by their mistress for the glory of Satan and that she supped at the Devil's banquet whereat no salt was served. And when Louise de Guibourg stood before the judges of the Inquisition, she did not know me behind my black hood, nor how my eyes feasted on her beauty which she had denied me for the embraces of a man twice her age.

"Proud and tall, Louise de Guibourg stood before the judges, her dark-eyes flashing as once they had flashed for love of me. Oh, she was a fine lady as she denied the accusations, full of piety and spirit, even when I was ordered to put her to the question. Head high, step firm, she strode at my side to the torture chamber, brave in the knowledge that the purity of her faith would mitigate her agony.

"Not until we entered the dank stone torment chamber did her step falter. A moan trickled from her lips and a spasm shook her as she saw the dreadful instruments of torture. Then her head lifted again as she turned to me with a haughty sneer and said: "Do with me what you will. I am innocent."

"I dismissed my assistants, saying that I needed no aid for the questioning of one lone woman. When we were alone, I tore the clothes from her. She did not cringe, but crossed her arms over her bosom and raised her eyes to heaven and muttered a silent prayer. I laughed then and ripped the hood from my head. Her eyes bulged as if she were staring at Evil Incarnate when she saw who I was, and suddenly she shrank from me in the full

knowledge of what fate awaited her.'"

Chester Engles paused to clear his throat. There was not a sound in the room as they waited for him to continue. I took a single step forward to tear the manuscript from his hand, then I thought better of it. Louise Grafton, whom I had loved and who had married an older man; Louise de Guibourg who had been loved by a Gilles Bodin five hundred years ago! It had to be a hoax which Chester or one of the others were perpetrating.

Chester Engles went on:

"I caught Louise in my arms, and into a pink ear I whispered that at last she was mine to do with as I would. Her dark eyes flashed me a look of such hatred as would have shrivelled a less calloused soul than mine and she named me Satan himself; but I only continued to laugh and secured her to the rack. How I hated her as I turned the windlass! How I gloated as her body grew taut and elongated! She had spurned my embraces. Now let her be embraced by pain!

"All the skill at my command I employed. When she was about to faint so as to avoid the agony, I relaxed the chains and bathed her face, letting her rest so that strength would return to her in order to bring out her suffering to the utmost. Presently beauty left her form. The flesh of her thighs, once full and tapering, stretched tightly over cracking bones. Her face turned ugly. I brought the hot coals and placed them on her flesh. She writhed with the effort to shake them off, but her movements served but to increase the torment of her racked body. I heated irons and let the glowing metal linger against her armpits.

"It was then that she confessed to abominations of which she was guiltless. Screaming words tumbled from her swollen lips; confessions that she was a witch, that she had been the mistress of Satan. Did the learned holy judges of the Inquisition ever suspect that they them-

selves were serving the Devil in wrenching from tortured souls confessions of evil which never existed?

"Louise had been put to the question and confessed, and it was now my duty to turn her over to the Inquisition to be judged. But she had seen my face and knew my motives, and I could not afford to let her speak to the judges. When I was through with the white-hot irons, I took up a stout rod and broke her bones, one by one. I do not know when she died. But at last I was through and dropped from the rack the shapeless mass which had once been a beautiful woman. I leaned against the wall and laughed until my throat was raw!"

SOMEBODY cleared his throat noisily as Chester Engles tossed the manuscript down on the desk. Alice Vale turned and saw me standing there in the doorway. She stared at me with an odd half-frightened expression.

Marie Dexter shuddered. "I've never heard anything so horrible. Did Gil really write that?"

Jim Warren shrugged. "Well, Gil's a psychologist and that's right up his alley. Pretty nasty, though."

I strode into the room. They all looked at me.

"What kind of joke is this?" I demanded.

"There's nothing funny about it," Al McWilliams said. "I suppose you have to have a peculiar sort of mind to write anything like this."

I snatched the sheets of paper from the desk. I had convinced myself that the manuscript couldn't possibly be in my handwriting. But it was! And there were too many words for the whole thing to have been forged. There wasn't the least doubt that last night I'd written it.

Why? What on earth did it mean? Had the sight of Louise Grafton affected me with that perverted commingling of love

and hate which is called sadism? Had my sub-conscious mind put me in the place of an Inquisitor who'd lived five centuries ago so that mentally I could give vent to a latent sadistic streak in me? It seemed to be the only explanation.

"It's something I dashed off for my book," I muttered. "Trying to make a study of the mental processes of a professional torturer. As for the identical names, I couldn't think of any and so I used mine temporarily."

Nobody said anything. I returned to my bedroom to get dressed for tennis. I found them all outside on the porch, laughing and joking and swinging their rackets. They seemed to have forgotten about the manuscript. Alice tucked her arm cozily through mine and we all set out for the courts.

We cut across fields and woods. Jim Warren and Marie Dexter were leading, so Marie was the first to scream. The rest of us were still among the trees which flanked the courts. When we burst into the open, we found Marie with her face buried in Jim's chest, while he was staring with a kind of dazed unbelief at the large oak tree on the other side of the courts.

From the lowest branch dangled a red-and-white horror which had once been a young woman.

## CHAPTER TWO

### I—Fiend?

HOLDING the tennis racket like a club, Al McWilliams sprinted across the courts. Chester and then Jim followed. I stood holding Alice's trembling body against me and hadn't the power to move. I knew who was hanging from the tree.

Chester Engles cried out and turned to look at me. I had to go then or be forever branded as a coward or something a great deal worse. Gently I pulled Alice's arms

away from me, muttered, "Stay here," and started across the courts.

My three friends were standing a little to the side of the oak tree, watching me as I approached, horror stamped on their faces. Horror which I inspired as much as did the dangling corpse!

The sun slanted across the courts, its beams glittering on the scarlet splotches which practically covered the dead woman. The face, contorted as it was with hellish agony, was still that of Louise Grafton, but the body wasn't like any human body I had ever seen. She had been tied by her wrists to the branch and a heavy wire net had been fastened to her ankles. And as she had hung there naked, heavy stones had been piled into the net; as the weight had increased, her body had been stretched in that improvised rack.

That had been only the start of her torment. Her taut, sensitive flesh had been burned, and then her bones had been broken by a hammer or an iron rod. Sharp edges and splinters of bone which had pierced her stretched skin shone with a terrible whiteness in the sun.

"She's dead," Al was saying in a queerly hoarse tone. "We'd better leave her just like that till the police come. Poor thing can't suffer any more."

Jim put a big hand on my arm and swung me toward him. "Gil, how did you come to write that?" His eyes blazed with accusation. "Louise died the same way as—as that other Louise you wrote about."

I wet my lips with my tongue. "I didn't kill her," I said.

"But how in the world could you have written—" Chester began.

"Cut it out!" Al snapped. "We're not the police. Chester, you go for the sheriff. Jim, you take the girls away from here. Gil will stay here with me."

In every crisis one person will be found to take charge. In this case it was Al. It did not occur to any of us not to follow his orders. Jim and Chester walked off,

slowly, as if in a daze. The three girls were huddled together on the other side of the courts, and I heard Marie sobbing. Then Jim and Chester came up to them and the five disappeared into the woods.

I dropped down on the grass, not looking at what had been Louise Grafton. Al stood near me with feet wide apart.

Presently I burst out: "Go on, say it! You think I'm a monster."

"Are you?" he asked quietly.

"Look here, Al. We've known each other since we were kids. Do you think I would be capable of doing that to anybody?"

"Frankly I don't. But there's that manuscript."

**I** THOUGHT of the blank interval between midnight last night and this morning when I had awakened. Obviously I had written the manuscript—but what else had I done last night?

"I didn't do it, Al," I said.

I don't know if my words convinced him. I couldn't convince myself.

After another long interval of silence we saw a car come up the dirt road. The fleshy frame of Sheriff Tom Moyer piled out first, followed by a deputy and Dr. Seth Cross, Wistfield's coroner and most prominent physician.

All three of them cried out when they saw the body, and they continued to swear harshly as they cut it down. I couldn't see what they did because I kept my back toward them.

Finally Dr. Cross said: "She's been dead at least six hours. God, how she must have suffered! I'm a mild man, but I'd give a lot to get my hands on the fiend."

"After me," the sheriff grunted.

Tensely I waited for Al to tell the sheriff about the manuscript. He didn't.

When the sheriff said that we could go, I walked off without waiting for Al. I went into the woods and roamed around

for a while. I wanted to think this through, but always I stopped at that blank interval in my mind. As a psychologist, I know the spot of cruelty which exists in all of us. Sometimes it becomes dominant and we turn into homicidal madmen, temporarily or permanently. I did not doubt that a part of my subconscious mind yearned to torture the woman I had once loved; it had satisfied itself through the writing of that manuscript, much as our inhibitions seek outlets through dreams. But what if I had gone beyond that? What if I had translated what I had written into action?

And if I had turned into a fiend once, I could do it again.

Good heavens, in such thoughts lay madness! Perhaps I *was* mad!

I do not know how many hours passed before I found myself in front of my cottage. In the library were Sheriff Moyer and Wilbur Grafton, the husband of Louise. They were reading the manuscript which I had left on the desk.

When Grafton saw me, he shrieked wildly and started for me. Moyer threw his arms around him and held him.

"Let me at him!" Grafton was sobbing, trying to break away. "I'll tear him apart

with my bare hands! I'll kill him!"

I stood motionless. If the sheriff had released him, I don't think that I would have offered any resistance, although I was twice as strong as Grafton and fifteen years younger.

"He'll get his if he's guilty," Moyer rasped.

Grafton slumped down into a chair and buried his face in his hands. I had never liked the man, even before he had married Louise; but now I felt infinitely sorry for him.

Moyer picked up the sheets of paper which bore my handwriting. "Did you write this, Bodin?" he demanded.

Denial was useless. "Yes," I said.

His fat face twisted with rage. "Do you realize that this is a confession of murder? Of worse than murder?"

"I didn't kill Louise," I said hollowly.

Grafton raised his head and laughed crazily. Moyer stepped toward me and roared: "Gilles Bodin, in the name of the law, I arrest you for the murder of—"

"No!"

It was a new voice in the room. All of us turned to the doorway where Alice Vale stood. She put one hand out to steady herself against the wall.

**A SKEPTIC IS CONVERTED**



**ANN:** I dread taking this awful-tasting medicine. It leaves me weak as a kitten.

**RUTH:** You're foolish to take a cathartic like that. Try my stand-by... Ex-Lax.



**ANN:** Why, this tastes just like fine chocolate! But will it really work?

**RUTH:** Yes, indeed! Ex-Lax is effective—yet it doesn't upset you.



**LATER**

**ANN:** Thanks to you and Ex-Lax, I feel wonderful this morning.

**RUTH:** I *knew* you would! In our family we all use Ex-Lax! It's so dependable.

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

**10¢ and 25¢**



"He didn't kill her," she said. "I came here to tell you that."

"Yeah?" the sheriff grunted. "What do you know about it?"

She said: "I've just spoken to Dr. Cross. He told me that Louise had died at about six o'clock this morning. I've been with Gil continually from about eight o'clock last night until past six this morning."

**F**OR long moments there was no sound but the thumping of my heart. Her slim shoulders drooped as, with hands clasped tightly before her, she stood waiting for the reaction to her statement. Her face was devoid of color.

"So?" the sheriff breathed. "And you say you were with him every minute? Where?"

"We were at my house until about eleven. Then Gil left me and—"

"Hold it," Moyer interrupted. "Mrs. Grafton was last seen at eleven. She'd been visiting a friend who lives only two blocks away from your house."

"Please let me finish," Alice said quietly. "I went up to my room after Gil left and pretended to go to bed. I waited about ten minutes until I was sure my parents were asleep, then slipped out of the house and came here to Gil. That was less than half an hour after he'd left me. In that time he couldn't have taken Louise all the way out to the tennis courts and— and have done those things to her. I was with him constantly until six or seven this morning when I left to slip back into my house."

Grafton laughed again in a way that chilled my spine. "She's lying, Sheriff. I've known Alice since she was a tot, and she isn't the kind to spend the night in a man's house."

I took a deep breath and decided that it was time for me to speak. It wasn't easy because Alice's story might make the difference between my life and death.

But I couldn't allow her do this for me.

"She's talking nonsense, Sheriff," I said. "She's trying to provide an alibi for me."

"I thought so," Moyer grunted. "I don't understand you, girl—throwing away your reputation for the vilest murderer I ever heard of."

Alice straightened her shoulders, and her beauty and courage twisted my heart.

"Gil is innocent," she declared. "I told you how I know that he is. Gil might try to save my reputation by denying that I spent last night with him and you might say I'm lying to save him; but a jury will believe me. That manuscript isn't evidence. It's an historical fact about one of Gil's ancestors."

Moyer was licked and he knew it. He hadn't a legal case against me. He looked long at Alice and said: "God help you, girl, if Bodin is really the fiend! Having tortured once, he might do it again—this time with you as the victim."

"You can't frighten me," she told him.

Moyer shrugged. "Your father wouldn't like this, but for your sake I hope you really spent last night with Bodin. . . . Let's go, Mr. Grafton."

"He did it!" Grafton cried. "Good Lord, you can't let him go!"

"We only think he might have done it," the sheriff said. "To convict an innocent man of that crime would be as horrible as the crime itself. That's why I have to take the chance of not taking him in."

Dazed and uncertain, Grafton permitted the sheriff to lead him out of the cottage.

I turned to Alice. "You shouldn't have," I said weakly.

"Your life is more important than my reputation, darling." She came to me and put her hands on my shoulders. "Gil, tell me: you didn't do it?"

"I don't know," I muttered.

She stiffened and horror crawled in the blue depths of her eyes. "Gil!"



I said hollowly: "I wrote that manuscript after I returned home. That much I am sure of, although I don't remember having written it. There's no doubt it's my handwriting and my style. You've read some of my papers on dual personality. It might have been my other self, a fiendish, sadistic self, that attained possession of me and tortured Louise. The sheriff is right—I might torture and kill again, and the next time the victim may be you."

She shuddered, but did not draw away from me. "No, darling. You couldn't harm me."

"I would not know what I was doing. Alice, I'm going away. You might be in frightful danger if I stay."

**S**HE held me tighter. "If you were to run away now, it would be a confession of guilt. You didn't do it. I would know; I would feel it somehow. I believe in you. Believe in yourself."

"If only I could. Yet the fact is—" Suddenly my heart started beating furiously as a thought crossed my mind. "I have it! Listen to this, Alice. Louise left her friend's house last night at the same time that I left you. I came home and wrote the description. All that would have taken at least an hour, perhaps longer. Yet it is obvious that Louise was intercepted and carried off to the tennis courts at eleven o'clock."

"That's it," she said eagerly. "It proves your innocence."

"I could have written the manuscript after the event," I went on, "but I'm sure I started writing as soon as I arrived home because I remember being drawn to the clean sheets of paper on the desk as if in a hypnotic trance."

Alice kissed me ardently. "So now there's nothing more to worry about," she said, a sob of relief mingling with the laughter in her voice.

Wasn't there? Possibly, instead of con-

tinuing homeward, Louise had come to me here. She had loved me and had never loved Wilbur Grafton. I recalled how for a moment in the dark street she had swayed against me before she had regained self-possession. She could have come just as I had finished writing, and my dual self, my monster-self, had carried her or enticed her to the tennis courts and . . .

God, no! I must believe in myself as thoroughly as Alice did.

Half an hour later the front bell rang. I went to the door. The gaunt form of Richard Vale, Alice's father, stood on the porch. He stalked into the house and glowered at me.

"Where's Alice?" he demanded. His hands were fisted; I wondered what I would do if he made an attempt to strike me.

"She's in the library." I tried to make my voice sound casual. "Won't you come in?"

Alice entered the foyer. She blanched at the sight of her father. Ignoring me completely, he went to his daughter and gripped her arm roughly.

"You shameless hussy!" he spat out. "Everybody's talking about how you were here all last night."

Her little chin thrust out, she faced her father defiantly. "Gil and I are going to be married."

"I'll have something to say about that," he shouted. "I ought to kill him, but it seems like the law will do that for me. Come!"

I stepped forward.

"No, darling," she told me quietly. "I'll handle this my own way. I'm of age. He can't keep us apart."

Through a window I watched her leave at the side of her father. She turned to smile at me, and then they were out of sight.

For the rest of the afternoon and evening I puttered around the house, not

having the courage to step out and face any of my neighbors. The horrible murder of Louise Grafton must be the sole topic of conversation in Wistfield, and with it, my name was no doubt coupled.

Later I started a fire in the fireplace and burned the manuscript and selected a light novel. After a while the words were blotted out by a haze before my eyes. I put down the book and stared into the fire. The dancing flames captured my attention and held it. My eyelids began to droop, and suddenly I was asleep.

### CHAPTER THREE

#### The Pinchers

**I** AWOKE with a start. I was in my bed, clad in my pajamas, and daylight streamed in through a window. Ten or twelve hours ago I had fallen asleep in a chair in front of the fireplace; I did not remember having undressed and gone to bed.

A hollow ball formed in the pit of my stomach as I quickly got into my clothes. Foreboding gripped me. I went directly downstairs to the library. Sheets of white writing paper lay on the desk blotter; and as I moved toward the desk on strangely stiff legs, I saw that the top sheet was covered with my neat thin script.

Last evening I had burned the manuscript containing the story of Louise de Guibourg's frightful death. Good Lord, could this be another?

It was!

With a numb sense of horror, I dropped into the leather chair behind the desk and read what I must have written some time during the night:

"I, Gilles Bodin, having tormented the lovely Louise de Guibourg, continued to carry out the judgments of the Inquisition of Carcassone. Satan, said the Inquisition, was becoming increasingly bold

and many were his converts. Those who would not confess were handed over to me and my assistants to loosen their tongues, and we did not fail. Strong men were turned into children whimpering for death under the ministrations of my racks and irons and pinchers and boots and knives and whips. Old hags suspected of witchcraft endured longer, but finally they too uttered the words which led them to the stake. And there were young girls whose white bodies were sounding boards for our instruments of anguish—fair girls among them, but none as beautiful as had been Louise de Guibourg.

"On an afternoon I came upon Marie Davot bathing her feet in a stream. Standing unseen behind a tree, I watched the water lave over her marble-like limbs as she held her skirt above her dimpled knees. Years ago in my youth we had loved each other in the passing manner of the young, and I recalled the tenderness of Marie Davot's delicate little body and the warmth of her ardor. Truly one who would suffer exquisitely!

"The following day a devastating hail storm struck the countryside. And ere the sky had cleared, I had caused a rumor to be spread that Marie Davot had been seen, immediately prior to the coming of the storm, to have her eyes raised in the direction from whence the storm cloud had come and to have been heard to mutter incantations to Satan. Forthwith she was hailed before the Inquisition, charged with being a creature of the Devil, having obtained the power through an unholy pact to bring down the destructive hailstones on her righteous neighbors.

"Piteously she grovelled before the judges, sobbing her innocence. It was to no avail. I was ordered to put her to the question. She swooned then and I gathered her slight weight in my arms and bore her down to the torture chamber. When we were alone, I bathed her face with water and forced between her lips a

drink which would strengthen her heart.

"She opened her eyes and stared at me in bewilderment. I had removed my hood and she saw a face she remembered well. 'Gilles!' she cried. 'You have come to save me, to take me away from this place of madness?' I laughed so wildly and loudly that the terror returned to her face. When I pulled her up to her feet by her hair, she made no struggle, sagging in my arms and gaping at me as if she could not believe her eyes.

"Then, like a sack of meal I dragged her over to a massive wooden chair. I secured her hands in two iron clamps on the arms of the chair, and her ankles I fastened in other clamps on a sort of footstool attached to the chair, so that her legs were held straight out from her hips. Then I thrust my favorite pinchers into the hot coals of a brazier.

"SHE sat as one dead while I blew on the coals. From her throat issued a thin sound I have heard made by a hurt kitten. But when I approached her with the glowing pinchers, a scream at last broke forth from her lips. And that scream rose higher and higher when the teeth of the pinchers gripped a nail of her right hand. Countless screams of agony had clashed against the sweating stone walls of that chamber, but none had been as eloquent of unadulterated agony as was the voice of Marie Davot.

"When the five fingers of her hand were mangled, bloody stumps, she burst out in confessions of witchcraft of which all the beldams in history would be incapable. Aye, the Inquisition could have another witch to give to the stake. My pinchers could make as many witches and warlocks as would delight the heart of the most relentless foe of Satan. But Marie Davot would be reserved for my own pleasure.

"And so I heated the pinchers again and drew out the nails of her remaining

five fingers. That having been accomplished, I set to work on the nails of her toes.

"I have always wondered how a frail girl can endure more torment than the hardiest of men. All the nails of her fingers and toes had been drawn out, and still her delicate body, covered with a mantle of sweat, continued to writhe and thrash, and her eyes, though misted with pain, were open, and they bulged with madness as I heated the pinchers yet again. Once more she shrieked—what music to my ears!—as I let the white-hot jaws of the pinchers feed on her soft white flesh. And then, suddenly, she was dead. With a sigh of infinite relief she sank back in the chair and her eyes closed. . . ."

The sheets of paper fluttered from my lifeless hands. For a time I sat motionless, bathed in cold sweat, trying by sheer force of will to pierce the veil between the time when I had fallen asleep before the fire last night and when I had awakened in bed a few minutes ago. I was futile.

Then I became afraid. All that had connected me yesterday with the death of Louise Grafton had been a manuscript in my handwriting. Here was another. It must be destroyed.

In a frenzy I gathered up the papers and threw them into the fireplace. Stooping, I tried to apply a match to them, but my hand shook so that the tiny flame went out. As I struck another match, the back door leading into the kitchen slammed. Feet hurried into the library.

Crouching in front of the fireplace with the second lighted match in my hand and my head twisted over one shoulder, I saw Sheriff Tom Moyer and his deputy burst into the room. The sheriff moved with amazing rapidity in spite of his weight. He struck me on the side of the face with his arm, knocking me over. As I rose to my feet, I saw him gathering up the sheets of paper. The deputy held a sawed-off shotgun pointed at me.

"Tried to burn it," Moyer grunted. "Got here just in time."

The creases of his face twisted into a mask of fury as his eyes skimmed over the papers. "Marie Davot—Marie Dexter!" he muttered, and read on.

I found my voice at last. "Is she—has anything happened to Marie Dexter?"

"Don't pretend you don't know," he snapped savagely.

He folded the sheets of paper and stuck them into his pocket. Then he took two steps over to me and smashed his big fist into my face. My shoulders hit the wall; I stumbled about, trying to maintain my balance. He hit me again and my legs folded up.

The deputy put his shotgun on the desk and joined in. They lifted me to my feet and knocked me down and kept repeating the procedure. I offered no resistance. I wouldn't have cared if they had beaten me to death.

But when, after a few minutes, I was so weak that I fell without a hand being laid on me, they desisted.

"That's enough," the sheriff grunted. "We've got to save enough of him to get to jail."

**T**HE deputy fetched a pail of water from the kitchen and threw it over me. Then each of them got me under a shoulder and half-carried, half-dragged me out to the car parked in front of the house. In the windshield mirror I saw a swollen blood-smearred face I did not recognize as my own. Without success I tried to wipe off the blood with a wet sleeve.

Everybody in Wistfield was in the streets, all moving in the same direction. In five minutes we were at the outskirts of the village. At the edge of a copse of trees a crowd had gathered. The sheriff stopped the car and he and the deputy pulled me out. I had recovered sufficient strength to move under my own power.

The crowd parted as we approached, and I saw the blanket which covered something on the ground.

Al McWilliams, looking twice as old as he had that morning, asked the sheriff hoarsely: "What happened to him?"

"Nothing much yet," the sheriff replied grimly. "We found him about to burn another set of papers. It was all about a fiend named Gilles Bodin torturing a girl named Marie Davot. He pulled out her nails with hot pinchers."

An animal howl of fury rose from the crowd. Al McWilliams hurled himself at me. Quickly the sheriff interposed his bulk between Al and myself.

"None of that now," he barked. "He's my prisoner. . . . Del, let him take a last look at what he did to that poor girl."

The deputy whipped off the blanket. I had known what I would see. Hadn't I written about it? But the sight itself was worse than any pen could describe.

"What have you got to say now?" Sheriff Moyer demanded.

What was there to say? I turned my head away. The deputy covered the body.

The howl rose once more from that crowd of grim-faced men. Men who had been my friends since childhood, but who now regarded me as a human monster who had no right to remain alive. Jim Warren and Chester Engles and Al McWilliams were bunched together, looking at me as if they had never seen me before. Richard Vale, Alice's florid-faced father, was trembling with rage. Wilbur Grafton, who had reached the depths of suffering yesterday, stood as if frozen stiff.

Moyer gripped my arm. "Let's go, Bodin."

"No you don't, Sheriff." Wilbur Grafton had at last roused himself. "He's not leaving here alive."

Moyer whipped out his revolver and the deputy brought up his shotgun. "Boys, I know how you feel," Moyer said evenly.

"But I'm the law here and it's my job to see that he gets a legal trial."

"Trial!" Grafton said bitterly. "He's guilty, isn't he? We all know it. And we also know that the law will never hang him; they'll call him insane. No, Sheriff, we'll settle this right here."

Agreement was roared as if by one voice—the voice of the lynch mob.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### The Third Manuscript

**T**HE attempt of the sheriff and deputy to save me from a lynch rope was a farce. They were armed and the mob was not, yet they didn't even go through the motions of threatening with their guns.

I didn't much care what happened to me. Weak from the beating and sick with horror, I couldn't bring myself to hate the men who sought to kill me. One couldn't look at what had been done to Louise Grafton and Marie Dexter and remain normal.

Moyer and his deputy were caught up in a swirl of furious humanity and hurled aside. Then Al McWilliams and Grafton and several others had their hands on me.

None saw the lone girl dive among the men. Somehow she managed to snatch up the deputy's shotgun.

"Take your hands off him or I'll shoot!" her voice rang out clear and bold.

Every eye turned toward Alice Vale

as she stood a little to the side of the mob with finger curled over the trigger of the shotgun. It was her magnificent poise and the frantic determination in her eyes which showed them that she meant business. She stood there slim and small and lovely, facing a score of kill-mad men, and it was the men who were afraid. Two blasts of that sawed-off shotgun could do a lot of damage.

"I'll shoot," she repeated.

The tall gaunt figure of Richard Vale stepped toward her.

"Give me that gun, Alice."

"Stay back, Father," she cried tautly. "If you come near me, I'll shoot at the others."

He stopped. Alice's beauty and devotion and courage brought back to me the desire to live. I could think of nothing save that she loved me with as great a love as ever a woman had had for a man. I shrugged away from the men who held me. As if hypnotized by the gun in her hands, they let me go. I stepped to her side.

"Don't any of you attempt to follow us." And for the third time, as if to convince herself as well as them, she repeated: "I'll shoot."

Chester Engles was the first to find his voice. "My God, Alice, do you realize what you're doing? He'll kill you like the others as soon as he gets you alone."

"Gil isn't a murderer, and you'd realize-



it if you had any sense," she said dully. "I can't prove who really did it, but I know who he is."

Al McWilliams laughed harshly. "Now I suppose you'll try to pin it on somebody else. Does Gil deny that he wrote those manuscripts?"

Alice and I had started to back away. None of them attempted to follow. I saw that Sheriff Moyer still had his revolver limply in his hand; he would have used it on me readily enough, but not on Alice.

**A**S WE approached the many cars which were parked on the road, I said: "Why didn't you let them hang me? I don't deserve to live."

"You more or less proved that you couldn't have killed Louise, and whoever murdered her, also murdered Marie."

"Not absolute proof," I muttered.

"I have an idea who the real murderer is," she said. "I might be all wrong, but I doubt it."

My heart lifted with sudden hope. "Who?" I asked.

She shook her head. "I mustn't tell you, darling. You'd only come back to Wistfield, trying to get proof. You'll have to get away and stay hidden. Take one of the cars. I'll cover your escape."

"And leave you here to face them alone?" I protested.

"Nothing will happen to me. After all, I didn't violate any law. All I did was save you from a lynch mob when the sheriff didn't do his duty. They wouldn't dare do anything to me."

We had reached the road. I got into the nearest car and stepped on the starter. The mob was moving toward us slowly. Alice pointed the gun at them and they stopped.

"Go as far as possible," she said. "Don't do anything rash. Remember, darling, how much I love you."

We kissed quickly and then I stepped on the gas. Glancing back, I saw the sun

mingling with her golden hair as she continued to hold the mob off. Something choked me. Even if she turned out to be justified in thinking me innocent, would I ever be able to deserve her?

Several miles out of Wistfield I ran the car into some bushes and plunged into thick woods. The pursuit would probably go right past. After a while I flopped on a pile of fallen leaves and lay there, so weak that I could not move. The strain and the beating and the fact that I hadn't had anything to eat had sapped my last ounce of strength.

Hours later I managed to rise and continue. I came upon the edge of a farm and stole tomatoes and melons which filled my stomach somewhat; and later on I passed a spring from which I drank deeply.

The setting sun found me lying on soft ground at the side of a great rock. I could no longer stir. I lay flat on my back and let a heavy sleep of exhaustion overpower me.

My eyes opened to a white moon directly above me. According to my watch it was a few minutes after midnight.

Groggily I sat up, and something slid from my chest to my lap. It was a notebook which I carried in my pocket to jot down ideas for my book. As I picked it up, I noticed my gold pencil on the ground.

Suddenly a dreadful thought passed my mind. I leafed through the notebook. Straining my eyes, I could barely distinguish the script in the moonlight. Toward the back of the book I came across pages of writing which had not been there before.

Somehow my bloodless fingers managed to strike a match. A name leaped up at me. Alice Vitry. Dear God, no!

**B**Y THE light of matches I read what I must have written within the last few hours:

"I, Gilles Bodin, gazed upon the incredible beauty of Alice Vitry. The glory of her golden hair and the depth of her blue eyes and the erect grace of her figure shamed even my memory of Louise de Guibourg. Not even in my most exalted dreams had I dared hope that such a girl would be handed over to me to be put to the question.

"Then I found myself quaking with fear as the Chief Inquisitor read the long list of charges against her, the mildest of which being that she had offered herself to the Devil. What if she should confess here and now before the Inquisition? She would be given directly over to the stake, depriving me of the unbounded joy of putting her to the question.

"But I need not have feared. Sweeping the hooded faces of the Inquisitors with defiant eyes, she did more than deny the charges. Scornfully she named the Inquisitors as wicked old men whose evil hearts drove them to torture and kill in the name of righteousness. More than one saint had been burned by the Inquisition, and if ever a saint had stood before the judges, Alice Vitry was that person. Certain I was, however, that they could not distinguish saint from sinner, and her words served only to rouse their fury. I was ordered to take her away.

"I led her down to the chamber. When the great iron door had closed behind us and I had dismissed my assistants, the scorn was still in her eyes as she looked at the instruments of torment. And when I stretched out my hands to strip her, she brushed me aside haughtily and herself removed her garments. The splendor of her beauty as she stood naked and contemptuous before me was matched only by her courage. It would take a long time for me to break her spirit—but sooner or later it would break. Strong as her spirit may be, it was after all but encased in flesh and blood.

"I suspended her from the ceiling by

a wire about each thumb so that her toes were above the floor. Then each of her feet I enclosed in a dreaded iron boot and tightened the screws only so far as to give great pain without crushing the bones. Her torment must be the most exquisite of which my art was capable; it must last a long, long time, an eternity if necessary. Whereafter I took a short thin whip and skillfully applied it to her body. She swayed, the weight of the bone-compressing iron boots pulling down on her thumbs, but no sound passed her lips. Indeed, there was a scornful smile on her red lips as if forever fixed there.

"When I was finished with the whip, I laid out knives and pinchers on the table and blew up the coals in the brazier wherein irons heated. Her eyes seemed loose in their sockets as wildly they followed my motions; and although her voice remained stilled and the smile stayed on her face, I could see the dawning of maddening terror deep in her pupils. A little more administration of my playthings and she would turn into a shrieking, writhing, mindless bundle of agony.

"I picked up the keenest of my flaying knives, determined finally on the soft flesh of her abdomen. I inserted the point. A thin semi-circle of blood appeared on her white skin. The blade of the knife slid under the skin, working it slowly away from the flesh.

"A strange, inhuman moaning came to my ears. I looked up at her face and saw that her mouth was opening slowly, as if on a rusty hinge. Then the scream started to gush out, ear-splitting. Not the scream of a woman, but of nerves agonized beyond. . . ."

THE sentence broke off in the middle. In a stupor I stared at the writing until the match I held burned my finger. One thing was clear and saved me from going utterly to pieces: in the three or

four hours since I had fallen asleep it would have been physically impossible for me to have gone all the way to Wistfield, tortured Alice, returned to this spot and have written in my notebook.

Alice must be as yet unharmed. Dear God, she had to be!

There should be more to the manuscript. This description of torture should end, as had the other two, with the death of the victim. Yet there was no more in the book.

Suddenly the sweat which covered my body turned icy as it struck me that perhaps my thoughts written out while in some sort of trance were transferred to the mind of a second person who put them into effect. No, as a student of the mind I did not believe in mental telepathy or thought communication. And yet if something like that were possible, had actually happened, Alice was now going through the hellish torments depicted in my notebook.

I leaped to my feet and started running. After a few minutes I had to slow down to a walk; I was still weak and had at least six miles to go.

The period that followed is hazy in my mind. Several times I had to rest, I remember, but always I jumped up after a few minutes and forced myself to stumble on.

At last I was among the darkened houses of Wistfield. Time and again I fled to cover as men with rifles and shotguns under their arms passed me. The search for me was still on; the state police must have sent out a far-reaching alarm for me, while villagers patrolled the streets to protect their loved ones in fear that I might return.

Many windows in Alice's house were lit, but not the windows of her room. Was she asleep? I had to know. As I slunk along the side of the house, I heard her father's voice.

"Alice hasn't come home yet," Richard

Vale was saying. "She left the house at about seven this evening and nobody has seen her since. My God, suppose she had arranged a meeting place with that monster, Gilles Bodin!"

I slid along the hedges which bordered the house. Standing on the steps of the porch were Richard Vale and Jim Warren.

"I bet she went right into his clutches," Jim said bitterly. "That poor deluded girl!"

I slipped away. Dear God, let me be in time! The fact that the third manuscript had stopped before its completion might be a portent that it was not yet too late.

Avoiding the street, I made my way to Hermine Bauer's house. No lights were on. Having known her and her family for so many years, I had a thorough knowledge of the house. I clambered up a drainpipe to the window of her room on the second story.

By moonlight I saw Hermine's sleeping form in bed. Noiselessly I swung my feet over the sill. I clamped my hand over her mouth and sat down on the bed.

Her eyes shot open, and such terror appeared in them as I had never seen before. She must have thought that I had come to torture her. Her torso arched up from the bed; her fingers clawed at my face; her teeth strove to bite into my palm. I threw my weight down on her.

"I'm not going to hurt you, Hermine," I whispered. "I came to you for help. Alice is in terrible danger and only you can save her."

She dropped back on the pillow, every muscle in her face crawling with fear. Her mouth worked against my palm.

"Listen, Hermine," I said. "I'm innocent. Whoever murdered Louise and Marie has Alice in his power, and you know what he's doing to her. Listen. Louise and Marie and Alice were your close friends. Who is the man who has recently



been in love with each of them and was turned down by them? Is there such a man? The girls would have taken you into their confidence."

She lay very still now and I saw doubt cross her face.

"I'm going to take my hand away now," I told her. "If you scream, Alice is doomed and so am I. I'm willing to take that risk for Alice."

Her mouth opened when I removed my hand, but she did not scream. She drew in a deep breath and pulled the cover up to her throat.

"You can't mean that he's the one?" she murmured in bewilderment.

"So there is somebody who loved all three girls?"

"Yes," she said.

Some minutes later I slid down the drainpipe.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Horror's Disciple

WHEN my feet touched the ground, I had to lean against the house to keep myself from collapsing from fatigue. Knowing the identity of the sadistic killer wasn't enough to save Alice. It would be a waste of time to look for him at his home.

Exerting my will, I tried to force my weary brain into logical channels. Louise Grafton and Marie Dexter he had taken or lured to the wooded sections at the outskirts of the village where he had been able to torture them without interruption. Tonight, with many of the villagers searching for me, that would be too dangerous. But where else—

And then I had it. My cottage, of course, where he could leave her mangled body to irrevocably pin the crime on me. He would be certain that I would not dare return tonight.

I stumbled forward, praying that I had

reasoned correctly, that I would not be too late, that if Alice still lived her beauty would not have been forever destroyed.

As I approached my cottage, I saw that the window shades in the library were drawn. They had been up when I had left with the sheriff that morning.

I made for the back door, and as I passed the library window I heard a trickle of sound like somebody humming far back in his throat. There was a sharp crack and the humming took on deeper vibrancy.

I maintained sufficient self-possession to enter the cottage soundlessly. I went through the kitchen and living room and pushed the library door open a few inches. And what I saw through the crack momentarily froze me.

Alice hung suspended by her thumbs from two hooks screwed into a wooden ceiling beam. The light of the reading lamp on the desk—the only illumination in the room—sent a mellow glow over her taut body; revealing nerves and muscles twitching and throbbing under the stretched skin which was marred by cruel welts along which globules of blood sparkled like scarlet jewels. A strip of cloth was tied about her mouth to keep her from crying out.

Standing with his face to me, a man was swinging a short whip. Alice's bulging eyes were fixed on the whip as a bird watches a snake. The whip swung back in his hand, then snapped forward, biting into her soft flesh. Her body jumped in midair, tearing at her thumbs, and her scream pushed through the gag in the form of that hideous humming.

Save for the setting, it might have been a scene from the torture chamber of the Inquisition five hundred years ago—the scene I had described in my notebook.

I think that I shrieked as I shoved in the door and plunged into the library. "I'm going to kill you, Chester!" I sobbed, and threw myself at him.

Chester Engles whirled. His whip smashed across my face. Pain and blood blinded me. He became a misty blob for which I groped. He danced out of my reach, and again I felt the burning pain of the whip, this time on the back of my neck. Then he closed in and sank a fist in my face. I went down.

Ordinarily I could have broken his thin frame in half with my two hands. But I had gone through too much during that day to have the strength of a kitten left. And when he realized that, he laughed crazily. There were not many men he could master with his bare hands. He got down beside me on his knees and pumped both his fists into my face.

Several times during that beating I slid in and out of unconsciousness. At last the punishing impact of his fists stopped and I lay inert and battered, feeling as if

my face were swollen to ten times its size, and feeling nothing at all in the rest of my body.

I HEARD Chester laugh as no man has a right to laugh and remain at liberty among normal people, and I heard also that hideous humming of Alice through her gag.

"I was sure you wouldn't come, Gil," Chester Engles said, his bloodless, bitter mouth in a slack smile. "But now that you're here, so much the better. I'm not fond of witnesses, but you're in a different category. See how well I carry out your descriptions of torture. Of course I read what you wrote about Louise and Marie, and so I had only to follow out your instructions. Where Alice is concerned, I suffer under certain handicaps. I don't know if you wrote anything about what



the medieval Gilles Bodin did to a girl named Alice, but I'm doing the best I can."

Maggots of horror crawled in my mind. In my pocket was the notebook in which earlier that evening I had written how a girl named Alice Vitry had been hung up by her thumbs and then whipped. Chester couldn't possibly have read it, yet here he was doing the same thing to Alice Vale. There were no iron boots on her feet because they would be unobtainable, but knives were available. God, was I really the instigator of his madness? Had my latent, sub-conscious thoughts been transferred directly to his conscious, demented mind?

I attempted to get up to my feet, but he simply kicked me in the head and I fell back. Any other man would have tied me up or killed me then and there, but he was gloating over his new-found physical power over me and his ego couldn't resist leaving me where he could beat me down again if I offered any opposition.

"And now for the knife," he whispered madly.

It lay on the desk, a thin razor-edged blade. He picked it up and stepped toward Alice, his feverish eyes blazing from the depth of their bony sockets.

It would be futile to reason with him or plead with him. The veneer of civilization had been stripped from his mind, and it was now the mind of a savage, of an Inquisitor. Indeed, even in youth it had not been like the minds of other boys. There had been something ugly and brooding in it, and bitter.

In spite of the agony any movement shot through her body from her thumbs, Alice's torso jerked. I knew where that blade would bite. I had written about that, too.

And it did. The point of the knife trailed a thin line of blood on her abdomen. Her body was writhing now and her

face was contorted with agony. The blade went under the skin. Soon, in a matter of seconds, the skin would be stripped from her living flesh.

I was not aware of movement on my part until I had almost reached him. Confident that he had battered me into helplessness, he did not realize that there is a reservoir of strength in the human body which only desperation can tap. And he was too engrossed in what he was doing to pay any attention to me.

I managed to push myself up to my knees and fell against him. One shoulder, with the weight of my dropping body behind it, struck his legs. He fell on top of me.

Even so I would have had no chance against him if he hadn't dropped the knife. It fell near my hand. I snatched it up. His hands were jabbing into my stomach as he tried to push himself up. I swung the knife into his side.

He grunted and his chin hit my legs. I jabbed the knife into him again and again. . . .

It took minutes before I found the energy to roll him off me. I crawled to the wall, pulled myself up, staggered over to where Alice hung and cut her down. She dropped down on me and we both lay in a tangled heap on the floor.

It was another almost insurmountable task to crawl to the desk and reach for the telephone. Through swollen lips I mumbled words I do not remember to the operator. . . .

**S**HERIFF MOYER, accompanied by a number of grim-faced men, found us there on the floor, Alice moaning and myself lying at her side and feebly trying to stanch with bits of her clothing the blood which flowed from the wound in her abdomen. Gentle hands lifted us up. . . .

Late the following afternoon I had recovered sufficiently to be able to sit up

in bed. A private nurse attended me. My face looked like a shapeless lump of clay from the punishment it had received from Chester Engle's fists. Alice, I learned from Dr. Cross, was resting easily. Within a few weeks she would be perfectly healed.

My first visitors, aside from the doctor, were Sheriff Moyer and a captain of the state police.

"Think you can talk?" the sheriff asked. "From the few things you mumbled last night when we carried you upstairs and from what Hermine Bauer told us, the picture is beginning to straighten out. A pretty ugly picture, if you ask me. Let's get your angle."

I said painfully through puffy lips: "Alice was the first to figure it out as soon as she heard that Marie Dexter had been the second victim. Possibly others beside Alice knew that Chester Engles had been in love, at various times, with Louise, Marie and herself, and everybody knew that he had always been a peculiar kind of fellow; but Alice was the only one who didn't blandly assume that I was the killer, so she could think it through. It wasn't until midnight of last night that I also began thinking about who, if not myself, the fiend could be; and I concluded that only a certain type of mentality with a certain background could fit into the pattern. Chester had the mentality, all right, but I wasn't sure of the background until I spoke to Hermine Bauer.

"Chester Engles had always been a morbid, super-sensitive fellow, more or less unattractive to girls. Because Marie was kinder to him than most of the other girls, he misunderstood his feeling and tried to make love to her. She simply laughed at him. Next he fell for Alice, but couldn't reach first base. The first response he ever got was from Louise Grafton. Perhaps it was his brooding intensity that attracted her, or, more likely,

she was simply bored with her husband whom she'd never loved. Anyway, she led Chester on, never quite giving in to him, tantalizing him, until his moody desire for her turned to hatred—not only against her, but also against the two other girls who had scorned him."

I PAUSED to give my weary jaws a rest. Then I went on: "Three nights ago, some time after midnight, he must have passed my cottage. I had left the library light on; Hermine told me that she remembers having switched it off when she and the others had come in the next morning. Thinking that I was still up, Chester entered, and on the desk he saw the manuscript I had just written. When he read of the torture of a girl named Louise, the violent madness which was latent in him overwhelmed his rational mind.

"I can't tell you where Louis had been between the time she had left her friend's house at eleven that night and the hour or two which must have passed before Chester read the manuscript. Perhaps she had gone to bed unobserved and Chester, on some pretext, had called her out to him through the window. There is even a possibility that she came here to my cottage because— Well, the reason isn't important, but Chester might have met her here. Anyway, you know what he did to her.

"Having once crossed the borderline of sanity, he was no longer quite human. He hoped for a repetition of the pattern, for a similar document from my pen to again whet his appetite, and he came here the following night and found it. So Marie Dexter was his second victim. When Alice announced publicly yesterday morning that she suspected who the murderer was, although she had not as yet any proof, he decided to kill her."

Wearily I leaned back on my pillow. The police captain coughed loudly.

Moyer shook his head. "But what about those manuscripts of yours? The similarity of names? The fact that the two girls you wrote about were also the two girls he'd loved in his own devilish way?"

I stared at the ceiling. "I don't know," I said. "Call it coincidence. Or possibly his brooding hatred of the girls trickled into my own mind so that sub-consciously I expressed his fiendish desire on paper."

The explanation didn't satisfy them, of course, but they had to let it ride because there was no proof that I had been in any way involved, and Chester Engles certainly had been. In addition, I had almost given my life to save Alice.

What would have been their reaction if they had known that there had been a third manuscript written by me which had described the torture by whip and knife of a golden-haired girl named Alice?

All day I tried to think of an explana-

tion which would completely clear me in my own mind; and even now, months later, I spend troubled hours trying to hit upon the answer. I have said that I don't believe in thought communication, but how far can coincidence go?

And why, in the first place, did I write those manuscripts? Can it be that, like Chester Engles, I have a latent streak of fiendishness in me?

Appalling thought! Because Alice is now my wife, and we are supremely happy in the little red-brick house on the edge of the campus of the university where I teach. Sometimes, when we prepare for bed and the breathless beauty of Alice is revealed to me as she drops off her clothing, I find myself wondering if ever a bestial, other-being lurking within me will break through to the surface.

Is it strange, then, that often I spend sleepless nights in terror of myself?

THE END

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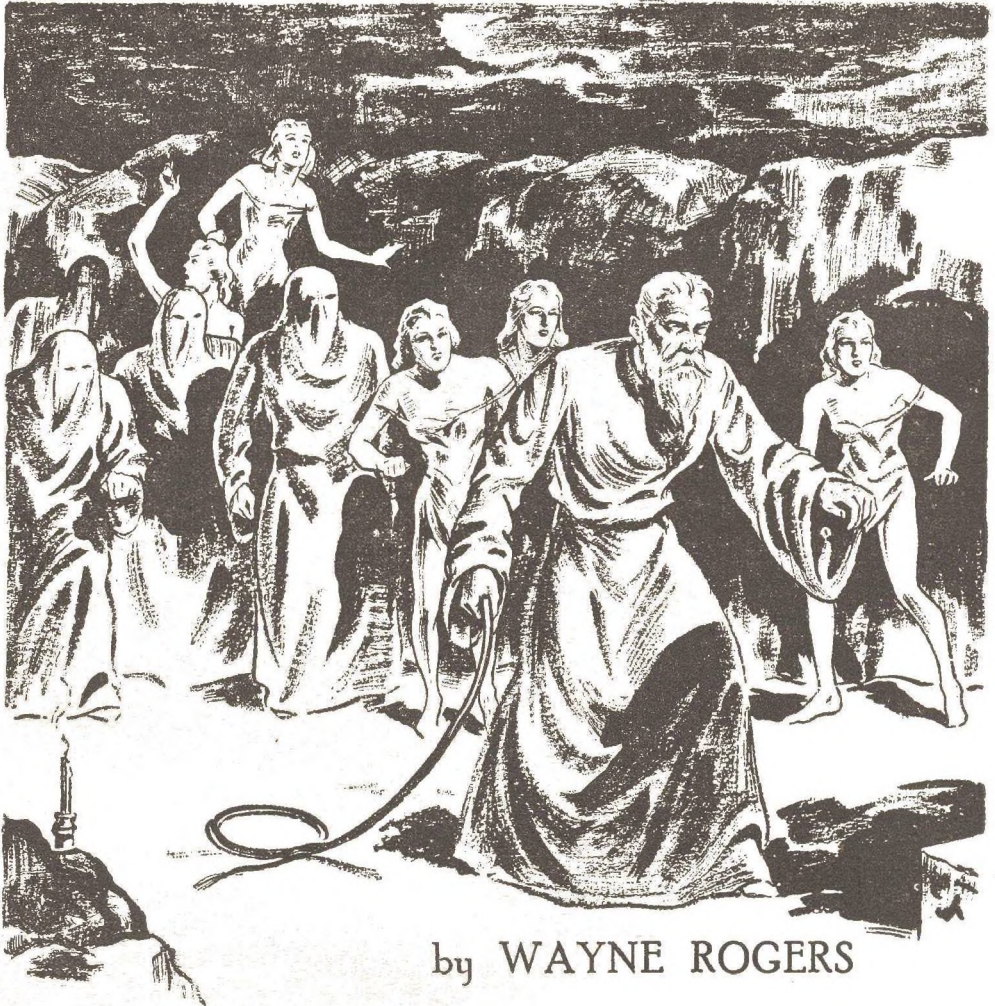
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# Where Dwell the Living Dead



by WAYNE ROGERS

*I had never loved Leona, but when she died, old Jubel Tandy swore that never should I marry another; that for all eternity I belonged to the spirit of his daughter. And now in that cavern of the damned I watched her long-buried corpse rise up to claim me in the cold white arms of death!*

## CHAPTER ONE

### Vow of Doom

I HAD NOT intended to ask Betty Crandall to marry me that night. I wanted to more than I had ever wanted anything in my life—but I was

not worthy of her, and I knew it. For years my scapegrace escapades had made the name of Wesley Harrison a delight for the tabloid reporters: the irresponsible society playboy who could always be counted on for columns of sensational copy when news was scarce.

And there was my marriage to Leona

*A novelette of the Devil's vengeance upon the  
two who disobeyed his commands*



Tandy. That "juke joint" romance had ended with Leona's tragic death, but the disastrous mesalliance was still vivid in my memory—and in the memory of all my acquaintances.

I had no right to ask Betty to marry me, I had told myself a score of times—but the bright North Carolina moon was making a fairyland of the Fayette Valley, and strength of character never had been one of my foremost qualities. I was standing beside her on the wide porch of

our hunting lodge, and suddenly words came unbidden from my lips. Words which she answered incredibly.

"Of course I will, darling," her soft voice throbbed in my ears and set my nerves atingle—and then she was in my arms, and I knew that I had reached the happiest moment of my life; had started

upon a new life that would be dedicated completely to Betty's happiness.

We seemed utterly alone in the world as we clung to each other there in the moonlit darkness. With her soft body held tight in my arms and her blonde head nestling against my shoulder, I looked out across the valley and silently made my pledges. The delicious fragrance of her hair was in my nostrils, titillating my whole being; the thrilling closeness of her had set my blood on fire; my heart was full to overflowing—when suddenly a shaft of memory came out of the night and drove like an icy spear into my very soul.

Across the valley the moonlight was bright on the side of Lawton Lodge, the mountainous outcropping that split Fayette Valley like a great V and divided its western end into two parts. And now the daylight-simulating illumination had reached a point from which the beams were reflected from blocks of spectral marble. The Fayette cemetery.

Those marble blocks were the front of the big Fowler family burial vault—and a few hundred yards away from the vault was the spot where Leona lay in her grave.

As I stared with riveted eyes at that baleful reflection, voices were ringing in my ears, voices that chilled me to the marrow of my bones and covered my limbs with gooseflesh.

"Nothin's ever goin' to part us, darlin'—never. You're mine as long as we live—an' after that we'll sleep together up there on the ridge." That was Leona's voice, in the first hectic days of our romance. And my own maudlin voice was answering her, mouthing thick-tongued promises that meant nothing as I uttered them.

But there was another voice, clear and sonorous.

"We mate only once here in the hills, Harrison!" That was patriarchal old

Jubel Tandy's bitter benediction on my marriage to his daughter. "She is gone from you for a little while, but you belong to her for all eternity—and I will know if you fail her!" And that was the last sentence I had heard him utter, as the earth clods thudded down dismally on Leona's coffin. . . .

JUBEL TANDY was a hillman to the core; a white-haired, white-bearded oldster who was so busy looking after the souls of his neighbors that he had no time for his daughter. That was why Leona had haunted the roadhouse in Fayetteville, at the eastern end of the valley, that served as a rural night-club. I had met here there and had conceived an alcohol-inspired infatuation for her that ended in a mad, spur-of-the-moment elopement.

Too late Tandy had tried to prevent that. He had arrived at the preacher's home when the ceremony was finished. Like a venerable patriarch of Biblical days he had suddenly materialized in the doorway, his white beard almost covering his face and trailing down over the black cassock-like robe he wore. Like the knell of doom his grim benediction had boomed out over us—and when I glimpsed the fanatical gleam in his cold blue eyes, unreasoning fear of the man had seeped into me.

The four weeks of my marriage had been a constant nightmare. Once I had sobered up I realized what a ghastly mistake I had made—but then it was too late. Leona had moved into the hunting lodge with me, and I waited for the storm to break when my family should hear of my latest and maddest escapade.

What they might do was very important to me because my mother, by the terms of my father's will, controlled the fortune which eventually would be mine. She could have made it very tough for me had she wanted to, but Emery Wilson, my step-father, went to bat for me



in great shape. That wasn't the first time he had gotten me out of a mess, but this time he could not get me out; he could only help by smoothing things over with mother and by coming down to see that Leona and I got straightened out some way or other.

Leona tried, I'll say that for her; but the gulf between us was unbridgeable. We were both miserable. And then, a month after our marriage, she drove to Fayetteville in my coupe and went off the road at a treacherous turn. She was dead when the wreck was discovered a hundred feet below the broken railing.

The burial was swift. Jubel Tandy lowered her into her grave on Lawton Ridge the next day—and like an implacable avenger he glared at me across the newly built mound.

"Remember your pledge, Harrison," he warned me solemnly. "She is gone from you for a little while, but you are hers for all eternity—and *I will know if you fail her!*"

An icy trickle ran slowly down my spine as his fanatical eyes bored into mine. For an instant it was as if I stood before a judge and heard him pronounce my doom—and then Tandy was gone, melted into the wilderness that surrounded the little graveyard. But the reverberation of his thinly disguised threat never entirely left my brain—and now, as I held Betty Crandall close in my arms, it echoed again and conjured up before me an eerie foreboding.

I had not seen Jubel Tandy for three years—and yet I was strangely certain that he would know that I intended what he would consider a betrayal of his daughter! In this moment that should have been the happiest of my life a wave of inexplicable fear engulfed me!

I was pledged, shackled for life to that rotting corpse on the ridge—and a fanatical madman would see that I kept my vow. . . .

IT WAS a disturbance in the brush a short distance from the porch that snapped me out of the paralyzing trance that gripped me. A glance revealed that it was only old Duncan Fowler, our caretaker, on his way to his own quarters in a small building at the rear of the lodge. Once Fowler's people had owned all of Fayette Valley; now he was penniless. A hunting club with headquarters on the opposite side of Lawton Ridge controlled the southern spur of the valley, while my family owned most of the northern prong—and Fowler was no more than custodian of the acres that once had been his.

Fowler passed without noticing us, but a moment later a voice hailed us from the lodge living room, and Ted Ballard, my cousin, came striding out onto the porch.

"Don't tell me—I know!" he laughed, as he came up and gripped my hand. "I heard everything—and there could be only one explanation for such a clinch. Congratulations—you pirate!"

It was Ballard who had introduced me to Betty. At that time he had been courting her himself, but he had taken his elimination good-naturedly. Now he led the way inside and whooped for attention so that he could announce our engagement. There were half a dozen other guests, besides my mother and Emery Wilson, and in a few moments Betty and I were the center of a laughing, gayly toasting circle.

In that congenial atmosphere the stark, fanatical gleaming eyes of Jubel Tandy faded, and the haunting resonance of his warning words was drowned in the tinkle of glasses. Long before bedtime I had forgotten all about him—but sleep hardly had come to me when I suddenly was wide awake, every muscle tense, while my scalp drew tighter and tighter on my skull.

There was someone at my window! Someone was stepping in from the roof of the porch. The almost vanished moon-

## CHAPTER TWO

## The Grave Yawns

light fell momentarily on his face—on a nimbus of snowy white hair that seemed to float free of the black-gowned figure beneath it.

Jubel Tandy!

Almost soundlessly he walked across the room and stood close to my bed, his arm uplifted, his accusing finger pointing at me.

"Here in the hills we mate only once," his sepulchral voice intoned. "You belong to Leona and no other shall have you. Send that woman away—alone! Send her away lest the judgment of the hills be visited upon you both!"

He was threatening—threatening Betty!

He had broken into my room to hurl his arrogant warning in my face—and I was lying there and taking it! Hot anger and chilling fear clashed within me as I strove to raise myself and leap out of bed; but my muscles had become numb, leaden things that would not move, even though my desperate efforts brought out beads of perspiration on my forehead. I seemed chained there on the bed, utterly helpless—and Jubel Tandy seemed to know it. Contemptuously he turned his back on me and walked to the window. Gradually he merged with the darkness—and my straining lessened, relaxed, until the fog of sleep came down over me. . . .

It was bright morning when I awoke. For a moment I lay there, swiftly recalling what had occurred during the night just past.

I thrust myself upright and glanced swiftly around the room—and what I saw seemed to freeze the blood in my veins, to make each hair at the nape of my neck stand up straight on end.

There on my bureau, in the frame from which Betty Crandall's lovely face had smiled at me, stood a photograph of Leona I had not seen for years! Leona's dark, accusing eyes reminding me of my lightly-given pledge!

COLD sweat bathed me from head to foot when I climbed out of bed and lifted that photograph in my trembling hands. In it I read an omen, a harbinger of what was to come, a forecast of the fate that was closing in on my Betty. Now I had no doubt of her danger. That white-bearded maniac would go to any extreme to enforce his made dictum—and even as I fabricated a dozen plans for fighting him I sensed that they were useless.

Betty was too helpless, too vulnerable, too infinitely precious to risk her life against such a fanatic. Flight was our only hope. I must get her away from there as quickly as possible—but I would go with her. In New York she would be safe. There I could laugh at this madman and his threats of a hill judgment.

I must get her away from there quickly—for already I sensed that I was being watched, sensed that unseen eyes were following my every move. I must get her away—but how? How should I explain what must appear to be a strange, capricious whim?

I must see Betty before she went downstairs, must stop her and somehow prevail upon her to trust me and do as I asked without explanation. At the narrowly opened door of my room I waited and watched, stepped out to intercept her the moment she appeared in the hallway.

My face must have betrayed my anxiety, for I saw her cheeks lose their color as she came to me and clutched my arms with both hands.

"What is it, Wesley?" she whispered. "What is the matter? What is going on here? I knew there was something wrong last night out on the porch, when your arms became as hard as steel around me. I saw your face, and it frightened me—and now—"

"It is nothing—nothing that I can explain now," I gulped. "I want you to leave here with me, darling. Today—as soon as we can get away. Never mind why. Please trust me and just go with me."

"Then it was you who was in my room last night?" Her eyes widened in surprise. "You packed my bags—"

"Your bags?" I heard my own voice echo her words tonelessly—but the icy fingers that were closing around my heart gave the answer to my question even before she spoke.

"Someone was in my room last night," she repeated with lips that were bloodless. "This morning my bags were all packed and standing beside the door—everything but my traveling clothes. What is it, Wesley? If you didn't pack them—"

I read the fear that was kindling deep in her hazel eyes—but how could I tell her that Jubel Tandy had packed her bags? How could I tell her that this madman of the hills had risen up to forbid our marriage, to rear the specter of a dead woman in the way of our happiness? I took her in my arms, and my feverish kisses stopped her questions—until suddenly I whirled around, every sense alert.

Again I had felt eyes boring into my back, had heard a sound close behind me. . . . But it was only Ted Ballard stepping out of a side-corridor; Ted Ballard grinning like a loon when he saw my discomfiture. . . .

It took no coaxing to persuade Betty to leave with me; she was even more anxious to get away than I. But taking our leave of the others was more of a task. Emery Wilson would not hear of our going, and Ted Ballard swore that it was only unreasonable jealousy that made me snatch my fiancée away from him. They argued and protested, and it was well into the afternoon before I finally was able to bundle Betty into my coupe and start up the valley.

At last we were getting away; at last we were leaving Jubel Tandy and his hills behind, I told myself with grim satisfaction as I unconsciously pressed down harder on the accelerator. Betty, too, sighed with relief as she sank onto the seat beside me and thrust her hand beneath my arm.

Wordlessly we rolled along the rutted road, and soon I saw that she was beginning to doze. Her head was dropping forward on her chest, and her hand had slipped from under my arm. Her eyes were half-closed—and my own were becoming heavy. . . .

I shook my head and gripped the wheel more tightly—but my fingers felt thick and strangely numb. That numbness was spreading all through my body. I could hardly feel my foot on the accelerator, even when I pressed it down hard. Nor could I lift it from the floor.

**T**HAT is all I can remember distinctly. The car seemed to be going faster and faster, and my eyes were closing. I struggled to keep them open, but there was no feeling in the lids—no feeling in the eyes. I knew that I ought to stop, but my fingers, groping for the switch, were no longer a part of me. They were numb, lifeless adjuncts over which I had no control. . . .

The crash came in a thick fog that blinded me. Dimly I could hear the whine and squeal of rending metal. Like blows delivered with pillow gloves, I could feel the impact as I was hurled forward against the windshield and tumbled about in the overturned car.

After that, my senses cleared. I knew that the car had gone off the road, bounced down a stretch of hillside and overturned. Somehow I managed to crawl out through the window, but I could not take another step. I sank to the ground, completely helpless. I seemed to be paralyzed. No matter how I struggled, I could

not move a muscle—and Betty was somewhere in that wreck, perhaps bleeding to death!

Hours seemed to pass while I lay there, writhing in mental agony, Hours of helplessness—but at last my straining ears caught the sound of approaching footsteps. Thank God, help was coming at last!

But in the next moment my eager hope died still-born, throttled by the tentacles of icy terror that wrapped around my heart. Into my line of vision strode the newcomer—Jubel Tandy!

For a moment the old man stood over me, gloating. Not even my lips would move, not even my tongue to voice the despairing cry that welled up into my throat—and he knew it.

“So you did not heed my warning; you disobeyed,” his voice knifed into my despair. “Instead of sending the woman away, you were going with her. You were going out of the hills to marry her. You cannot be trusted to keep your pledge, so you are going to Leona—now!”

Going to Leona. . . . The madmen intended to murder me! With helpless fascination I watched him—and what I saw was like a knife thrust into my heart, a knife that stabbed and twisted until my whole being was convulsed in agony.

For an instant the black-robed figure bent over the car, and then he lifted Betty from the corner in which her body had been wedged. Her eyes were open, and there was no blood on her face. Thank God, she apparently was unhurt! But the unspoken prayer of thanksgiving was stifled when I saw that, like myself, she had no control over her limbs.

Jubel Tandy propped her up against the top of the overturned car and held her there with one hand while the other stripped off the jacket of her tweed suit. Her jacket—and then his fingers fastened in the neck of her blouse and tore it away in shreds.

For an instant I caught a glimpse of her eyes, pleading eyes that begged for mercy as his clawing fingers reached for her skirt.

My tortured brain reeled away from the horror that I could not shut out of my sight. Cold sweat beaded out on my forehead and on the backs of my hands. The surging, pounding blood threatened to burst from my veins—and suddenly the invisible shackles that bound me snapped. I got to my feet and lurched toward the devil; my hands reached out for him—but his fist smashed into my face, and my knees gave way beneath me.

Billowing black clouds rolled in smotheringly upon me as I dropped to the ground, but merciful unconsciousness was slow in coming. Through half-closed eyes I could see that devil standing over my darling. Above the roaring din that filled my brain I could hear his sonorous voice.

“Those whom God has joined together no man—and no woman—shall put asunder!” he pronounced. “You have interfered, and for that you will be punished—but your punishment will come later.”

As he finished, he picked her up and carried her to a thick clump of bushes and stretched her out beneath the shielding branches. Then he came back and took hold of me, grabbed me by the shoulders and dragged me off toward the road—and my swooning senses lapsed entirely. . . .

**I**T WAS dark when I came back to consciousness. Night—and the moon was just beginning to rise, shedding only the palest radiance through the branches of the trees above me. I was lying on the ground beside a low mound—beside a grave! This was a cemetery, and that scraping, clinking noise that had been registering on my half-conscious brain was the sound of a pick and shovel digging into the earth.

My head swam dizzily and weakness

threatened to overpower me when I sat up, but at least I had regained control of my limbs. Now, as my eyes became accustomed to the darkness, I began to recognize my surroundings. I was in the Fayette burying ground—must be close to Leona's grave. . . .

There it was, some twenty feet away from me; that open grave with the freshly turned earth piled on all sides around it! Someone was opening Leona's grave—and as I stared in dawning horror the digger came up from the newly excavated hole. For an instant, as he hovered on the grave's brink, the moonlight fell squarely upon the white mane of Jubel Tandy!

That madman was disinterring his daughter's long-dead corpse! His deranged brain had conceived some incredible scheme for reuniting me with Leona! But no—that was not his object. Not until he stood over me and fastened his fingers in the collar of my coat did I realize his horrible intention.

"You are Leona's, and no other shall come between you," he gritted, as he started to haul me toward the grave. "Now you will go to her—and stay with her."

He was going to bury me alive with Leona's corpse!

Stark horror suffused me with new-found strength, galvanized me into action. I fought him desperately, swung my fist at his bearded face as I struggled to tear loose from his grip; but my blow never landed. He side-stepped easily and lashed out at me with punches that rocked my head and sent me floundering backward. Instantly he was after me, closing in and fastening his grip upon me relentlessly.

My frantic struggles were useless; his strength was far too great for me. Unheeding, he dragged me to the grave, pushed me up over the mound of soft earth. For an instant I teetered on the brink, and my horrified eyes stared down into the excavation. In that split-second

I glimpsed the opened top of the pine box that was Leona's coffin, glimpsed something white stretched out in it—and then I was pitching down into the hole, while an involuntary scream tore from my lips!

Hands first, I landed in the coffin—and queasy horror convulsed me as I felt the dry bones of the corpse snapping under my impact! Frantically I tried to scramble to my feet, but Tandy was upon me in an instant. His fist clubbed down on the base of my skull, and I sprawled headlong upon the desiccated corpse. Quickly the pine top fell back into place, and Tandy's hammer drove home nail after nail.

Buried alive! I was being entombed with Leona's corpse, to die horribly, slowly smothering as I fought wildly for the last precious breath of air! Maddening terror swept through me at that ghastly prospect—but there was another horror even more poignant stabbing at my brain.

Betty would be this demented fiend's next victim! While I lay there struggling in my living tomb, she would be at Jubel Tandy's mercy—to face God only knew what indignities and torments!

"Betty! Betty!" Her name burst from my lips as my last grip on sanity slipped. "Betty! Betty!"

But the only answer was the hollow boom of earth clods thumping down on my coffin. Thuds that were becoming fainter as the grave filled and the earth piled up above me!

Tandy's demoniacal task was nearly completed. The endless silence of the grave was closing in upon me, fairly driving into my ears as I lay back, panting, on the desiccated corpse that shared my tomb.

Betty. . . . God have mercy upon her; deliver her from that fiend's hands or let her die quickly, I prayed fervently. Suddenly I tensed, every nerve sharpened, my breath caught between my teeth, as I strained my tingling ears.

There it was again. It was no figment of my hysterical imagination. That was Betty's scream—a thin, smothered scream that came from somewhere beneath me—*from the very bowels of the earth!*

### CHAPTER THREE

#### Home of the Living-Dead

**B**ETTY down there somewhere under the ground! Did that mean that Tandy had buried her also—that she was smothering to death in a living grave? Resolutely I clung to the last shreds of my sanity. To give way to madness now would mean the end; would mean the extinguishing of the last faint ray of hope that still flickered while I lived.

My body was quivering, my limbs twitching with the almost uncontrollable desire to thresh and writhe in raving madness, but I grimly held them in check. There must be a way out; Betty *could* not be left to die like this, I told myself—and methodically I began to explore my narrow tomb.

Breathing as slowly and as lightly as possible, I tested the sides, the top, the bottom and then the ends of my coffin. Nowhere did the boards yield. The top I knew was securely nailed down; the bottom hardly echoed the sound of my blows, so solidly was it imbedded in the dirt. The sides gave not a particle when I used all my strength against them, even though I jackknifed my body for leverage.

Panting and already struggling for breath, I sank back. It was utterly still—until my startled ears caught the soft rumble of settling dirt just beyond my head! Settling dirt. . . . That might mean nothing—and yet—

With newly fired hope I went to work on the head of the coffin, pressing against it, pounding it with my fists, twisting myself around so that I could reverse my

position and stamp my feet against it—and the boards started to give! Little by little, the nails were driven outward, until the boards were free! Frantically I drove my hands into the soil beyond—and a thrill of impossible hope electrified me.

The earth beyond those boards was loose—not close-packed as it should have been after three years of pressing against the coffin!

Using one of the boards as a shovel, I began to dig into it, drawing the loose soil back into the coffin as I tunneled. Straight ahead I bored—and the soil continued loose and readily yielding! I was going somewhere; perhaps only deeper into the bowels of the earth—but at least I was escaping from that fearful tomb-prison!

If only the air would hold out—that was my most immediate problem. I tried desperately to conserve it, but the oxygen was almost exhausted. My breath was already coming in gasps; my lungs were aching intolerably, and my head felt as if it must burst. But I *must* go on! Close to the soil I pressed my face and tried to draw the life-giving air from the earth itself—but I was becoming weaker and weaker. Now my hands were digging of their own volition their movements hardly directed by my reeling brain.

Twice I dropped flat in the narrow tunnel and thought I could not go on, but the memory of Betty's helplessness spurred me back to my task, got me up onto my knees and drove me ahead. Digging, tearing at the soft earth with my board, burrowing through it with my bare hands, flat on my belly and nosing my way like a human mole—I had no idea how long I labored before the earth in front of me suddenly dropped away and I crawled out into emptiness; out into free space where I could fill my aching lungs with great draughts of delicious air! Space where I could get off my knees and stand on my feet!

Minutes must have passed before I thought to light one of the matches in my coat pocket. The yellow flame played upon earthen walls all around me, walls supported at intervals by pillars and shafting like the tunnels of a mine. I was standing in a tunnel that extended in both directions and was joined at intervals by others from both sides.

**N**URSING my matches carefully, I started to explore and soon discovered that in one direction the tunnel terminated in a dead end. Retracing my steps, I followed it in the other direction. Now it was becoming wider and more solidly supported. With two other tunnels, it opened into a small, cavern-like pocket from which a fourth opening led upward.

The way to freedom! Eagerly I made my way up the incline. It seemed to end against a solid wall, but another of my precious matches revealed a lever at one side—a lever that silently moved a heavy block of stone inward when I drew it back. On my hands and knees I crawled through the opening and got to my feet in stygian darkness; blackness that was heavy with the musty staleness of a long-closed vault.

A burial vault—that was what it was. The match I held over my head revealed rows of marble slabs with the names and dates of generations of Fowlers upon them. The old Fowler burial vault—it served as an entrance to the amazing labyrinth of tunnels beneath the Fayette graveyard.

Quickly I turned to the entrance—and my heart sank. The ponderous door was of heavy iron, and it was locked; locked so securely that I could not hope to get it open. To try to attract attention by pounding on it was equally futile; I might hammer away for weeks, even months, before anyone would hear me. Behind that solid door I was trapped just as

effectively as if I were still in Leona's coffin.

There was no hope of escape here; no hope of getting help to go to Betty's rescue. . . . Not until that moment did I remember that her cries had seemed to come out of the earth itself. She was down there somewhere in those tunnels—and I would have to find her alone.

Swiftly I crept through the opening in the rear of the vault and hurried down the incline to the lower level. From there I tried another of the tunnels. This led off in the opposite direction from the one which I had first entered, and soon the shafting ceased as the passageway debouched into a natural cavern.

Now the going was more difficult. My matches revealed a maze of stalagmites and stalactites, with a web of paths lacing between them. Which one I should take there was no way of determining, but they all seemed to run in the same general direction. Choosing one which seemed fairly central, I pressed on as rapidly as I could.

How far I walked before I heard the first sounds I do not know; it seemed miles, seemed that the underground workings must go on forever into the bowels of the earth—but suddenly I brought up short when I caught the distant rumble of a man's voice.

Jubel Tandy's voice! The mad devil was down there somewhere in that fantastic catacombs—and with him must be Betty!

Anxiety drove me on frantically. Match after match I used prodigally, while I cautiously tried to cup the flame so that it would not betray my presence. And now the voice I had heard was becoming louder. I was getting closer and closer—until it seemed to be just ahead of me. Yes, it was—there, just ahead, I caught a flicker of light that seemed to come up from the floor!

Carefully I approached it, while Jubel

Tandy's voice boomed out in a strange litany.

"I am the resurrection and the life!" I heard him proclaim. "Wake up, my pretties—it is time to live again!"

On my hands and knees I crept close to that crevice through which the light was coming—and stared down at the most amazing scene I had ever beheld; stared down into a cavern room that might have been a chamber of hell itself!

That cavern was lower than the level on which I was standing. The crevice through which I peered seemed to be at one side, in an upper wall near the stalactite-hung ceiling. It was like a great hall, with benches ranged along its sides and with a dais-mounted throne at one end. On each of the benches sat the withered corpse of an old man, stiff and erect in moldering grave clothes—and beside each of these gaunt specters sat a nude young woman!

It was to the women that Tandy was speaking. From one to the other he went, bending over each to jab a hypodermic needle into her left side just beneath the breast—and in every case the effect was astounding. In little more than a minute those naked figures that had been sitting there as still and lifeless as their corpse partners stirred and came to life! One by one, he helped them from their benches!

"I am the resurrection—" droned from his lips as he bent over one of the nude bodies—and when he straightened up I almost yelled aloud in amazement.

*That naked woman who was languorously coming back to life was Leona, my dead wife!*

**L**EONA there in that cavern—but that was impossible; I had just been confined with her desiccated corpse! Leona coming back to life—that must be madness! But my eyes could not be mistaken, could not be deceived in her face, in her

full, voluptuous figure. That *was* Leona—fawning upon Tandy, kneeling before him.

There were eight of the women whom I could see; young women in the full bloom of youth, all of them. Women who seemed to have been handpicked for their physical attractions. And as I stared at them my amazement became incredulity. I recognized nearly all of them—recognized girls who had been dead for as long as five years!

There, just beyond where Leona had sat, were the Clarke sisters, Eula and Jane, and beyond them Molly Hutton—the three girls who had been drowned two years ago in Long Lake. That dark-haired little beauty was Rhea Sutherland, old Stuart Sutherland's daughter, who had been stricken with a heart attack only last year. Clara Burden, who had been killed by a fall on Lawton Ridge. . . . They were all Fayette Valley girls—all girls who had died and been buried in the Fayette cemetery.

Dead girls, whose bodies should have been decomposed horrors, stepping back from the grave into life! Vainly my stunned brain tried to grasp what I beheld. For a moment I thought that I really must have died back there in the grave where Tandy had buried me. This must be a hell, a purgatory, some strange nether-world where anything was possible!

But where was Betty? What had this madman done to her?

Jubel Tandy answered that question for me even before my anxiously seeking eyes discovered her. Beside a stalagmite near the dais that dominated the room she crouched; sat listlessly on the floor until he came to her and lifted her up—lifted her to stand before his appraising eyes. Instead of cringing from that hellish gaze, she seemed to revel in it. Like those resurrected dead women, she turned adoring eyes on the white-bearded



fiend and sidled mincingly toward him.

What had the monstrous devil done to her? That was not my Betty—not the sweet, modest girl I adored! I was staring at Betty's incomparably beautiful body, but the inhuman devil had worked his diabolical magic upon her; he had murdered her soul!

Bitter curses came welling up to my lips—and were frozen there before I could utter them. Frozen there while my incredulous eyes goggled with amazement. Tandy had reached down beside where Betty had been sitting and had dragged another figure into view, had propped him up on the edge of the dais.

*Another Jubel Tandy!*

But this one was battered and disheveled. His hands were tied behind his back, his black robe was soiled and torn, and his whiskers were half-gone. What was left of them was tattered and stained with blood.

Tandy fastened his fingers in the blood-stained beard and pulled—and a handful tore loose; another and another. Savagely he ripped and tugged until the whiskers were all torn away, until the crown of snowy white hair was yanked from the half-bald head of—Emery Wilson!

Emery Wilson, my step-father! Masquerading as Jubel Tandy!

"Now we are ready to give you our attention, Wilson," Tandy snarled at him, as he loomed over his whimpering victim. "Your little murder scheme was very clever—but unfortunately I could not allow you to use me as a scapegoat."

**W**ILSON'S quivering lips moved and attempted to frame a whimpering defense, but Tandy silenced him swiftly.

"I know all the details," he snapped. "You wanted to get rid of young Harrison because you were afraid that your wife would turn over a good part of his fortune to the lad, now that he was about to marry. You wanted to keep control of

that money yourself, and for that you were ready to commit murder. Murder that would be perfectly safe for you—because you schemed to throw the guilt upon me.

"Last night you impersonated me and went to Harrison's bedroom—after you were sure that the drug you had given him would make him harmless. You threatened him and the Crandall girl. You frightened them into starting back to New York, and then you rigged up a poison-gas generator in their car so that they would be overcome before they got out of the valley—just as you murdered my daughter! You made sure that the Crandall girl got a good look at you before you left her to take Harrison away and bury him alive in my daughter's grave.

"The story she would tell the authorities would bring them down on me and probably would uncover Harrison's body. He would be dead and permanently out of your way, and I would go to the gallows—leaving you completely safe and free to enjoy your wife's millions without interference for the rest of your life. Very excellent, Mr. Wilson—but you should not have staged your murder scheme here in the hills. In New York you might have succeeded—but here we mete out hillmen's justice!"

My step-father was the one who had buried me alive! That realization staggered me, but the abject terror that convulsed his face left no doubt of his guilt.

Instead of trying to defend himself, Wilson cowered there and slobbered whining pleas for mercy—this callous murderer who had condemned me to a ghastly death for fear that I might take out of his control part of the fortune that was mine!

"You are going to die, Emery Wilson," Tandy's voice cut into my racing thoughts. "Now up on your feet. March!"

Savagely he jerked the broken man

upright and delivered him to two of the girls. With torches taken from niches in the rocky walls, they led the way out of that cavern of the dead. Without an order from Tandy they seemed to know their roles, and each took her place silently in the bizarre procession.

All except Betty. She stood by uncertainly until Tandy came to her side and wrapped his arm around her shoulders.

"You, too, my sweet one," I heard him say as he drew her close against him. "I hate to let anyone else have you, even for a little while—but I will bring you back and keep you here always. You will be my favorite and will wait for me up there on the high seat."

A few moments ago I had been thanking my lucky star for Jubel Tandy, thankful that he had frustrated Wilson's cold-blooded villainy and rescued Betty from the murderer—and now I realized that she had only leaped from the frying pan into the fire! Wilson had plotted only for my death, but this conscienceless devil planned to reduce her to the status of a living corpse; planned to keep her there underground, for God knows what devilish purposes were in his mad brain.

And Betty was going willingly into his arms. She did not know what she was doing! She did not realize that she was condemning herself to a living death in that unholy grave-world!

Blindly I hurled myself into that narrow crevice, desperately trying to squeeze my way through and leap down into the cavern below—but the opening was too narrow. The dazing smash of the hard stone against my forehead flung me back on all fours and restored my sanity. Barely in time I smothered the half-uttered shout that would have warned Tandy of my presence.

To take the fellow by surprise was my one gossamer hope—and even as I clung to that the naked procession vanished, the cavern was plunged into blackness.

Betty, alone and helpless, was on her way to a fate on which I dared not let my horrified mind dwell—and I was trapped, side-tracked in that endless subterranean labyrinth so that I could not even follow her. . . .

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Gravelings' Revel

**T**IME ceased to have meaning for me as I wandered through that fantastic maze, running like a crazy man, stumbling and falling, crashing into low-reaching stalactites, creeping on my hands and knees, hardly conscious of my injuries or of the blood that flowed down my face as I sought frantically for an entrance to Tandy's gruesome throne-room. At last I stumbled into it and panted across it in the direction they had gone, but then my quest had hardly begun.

From there the underground workings ran on endlessly, a weird maze of catacombs that penetrated deeper and deeper into the stony structure of Lawton Ridge. I had despaired of ever reaching the end, had dully resigned myself to plodding on and on through that eternal silence, when suddenly the stillness was broken by a hoarse shriek of terror and a muffled groan, so distant that they sounded unreal, like echoing memories in my brain.

But they spurred me on to a burst of renewed speed that carried me into another artificial tunnel like the one at the other end of the caverns. This terminated abruptly at a closed door—a door from beyond which the babbling moan of Emery Wilson's voice came in a steady stream that was interrupted only by his agonized groans.

The ghastly threnody of his suffering made my blood run cold—but at least those tortured moans were not being wrenched from Betty's lips. I had reached her in time. Now, if only I could take

Tandy by surprise—could leap upon him before my advent was discovered—

With infinite caution I slowly drew the door outward—and peered in at what looked like a temple of the dead; a low-ceilinged, stone-walled room that was lit by brackets of funeral candles. In the center stood a low bier on which Emery Wilson lay spread-eagled. Around him was gathered as weird a company as man could conceive—those revenant women in the arms of ghastly, black-robed, black-hooded figures.

One look at those grisly death-masks was sufficient to strike gelid horror into my soul—and yet those women accepted their caresses with no evidence of revulsion! Ghastly corpses that seemed to have stepped fresh from their tombs—for now I saw that the room was lined on two sides with narrow doorways that must lead to individual burial vaults. . . .

What sort of monster was this Tandy that he could bring the dead back to life? What sort of unholy diablerie did he exercise over these gravelings that they could desert their tombs at his will?

My blood ran cold as I saw their bony, purple-blotched hands upon Betty—as I saw her smile into their repulsive caricatures of faces; but before I could fling the door wide and leap recklessly into their midst Tandy's voice cut through Wilson's delirious babble.

"We have had enough of this," he decreed. "This man has committed murder, and for that, his life is forfeit. It is time that he should pay the penalty."

He waved his arm toward the bier—and with that gesture a veritable hell broke loose. With that gesture those creatures were transformed into savage beasts. Like hungry animals they swarmed over the bier, ripping and tearing at the bound man, slashing at him with nails and teeth—while their corpse companions stood back and watched with gleaming eyes and hideously leering faces.

Wilson's moans rose to screams in a livid crescendo of excruciating agony. His clothing was ripped from him in shreds, and then his living flesh was stripped from his bones in great, bleeding chunks. In a few moments those white bodies were crimson, splashed from head to foot with running blood. Like red demons they fought and tore at him—while their graveling audience urged them on to more horrible excesses.

All except Betty. She alone hung back, despite the efforts of the corpse-men to force her up to the bloody bier. Her face was ashen, and I could see the nausea in her staring eyes.

**N**OW was the time to spring to her rescue, I told myself; but caution held me back. Once I plunged into that bloody shambles I would be one against a dozen, one unarmed man against a dozen bloodthirsty devils who would gleefully welcome another victim. I would be overwhelmed, and with my capture Betty's doom would be irrevocably sealed.

No, I must wait. Somehow I must take them by surprise, must reach her and get her away from them before they had a chance to seize me. Inch by inch I drew the door wider, safe from discovery now for every eye was turned on Jubel Tandy.

He had grasped Betty and was trying to force her up to the bier. Her refusal whetted his anger to seething rage. Snapping a sharp command, he drove those naked savages away from their prey, left the twitching horror that was Emery Wilson writhing and palpitating on the blood-spattered bier—and forced a long, keen-bladed knife into Betty's hand.

"Now it is your turn," he ordered as he shoved her forward. "He has suffered sufficiently. Now you shall administer the *coup de grace*—through the heart!"

"No—oh, no!" I heard Betty moan, as she tried to draw back; but Tandy had anticipated that.

He had leaped to one side and snatched up a heavy blacksnake whip. Around his head it whirled, whistled through the air—and wrapped itself around Betty's soft body. Again and again it cut through the air, banding her body with bloody welts. Again and again, while she cowered in helpless terror—and while Jubel Tandy walked closer and closer to her, his blazing eyes gripping hers and holding them fast.

"Now is the time—through the heart!" he repeated, his voice lashing out like the snap of the whip in that deathly silent room—and Betty strode forward to obey.

Like an automaton she stepped toward the ghastly bier—to commit murder and damn herself for all time. But that was more than I could stand. Throwing caution to the wind, I leaped through the doorway.

"No, Betty—no!" I shouted. "Don't let them—"

But that was as far as I got. My rush was checked almost before it started, checked by a barrier that came up out of the floor and rose almost knee-high the moment the door opened. It threw me headlong, sprawled me at full length on the floor—and before I could scramble to my feet four of the gravelings were upon me, pinning me down so that I could scarcely move a muscle.

In another moment they were swarming around me, those ghastly-faced living dead men and their bloody consorts—and through their midst strode the patriarchal figure of Jubel Tandy, to stand looking down at me with eyes that were alight with hellish satisfaction.

"Wesley Harrison," he mouthed my name with relish. "So you have attained resurrection without my aid. But you are dead; you were buried alive. A man has paid the penalty for killing you, so it is only fitting that you take his place to atone for the mistake."

Swift orders crackled from his lips, and I was dragged upright, was stripped to the waist. Emery Wilson's mangled body was taken from the bier and callotishly dumped on the floor, and I was stretched out on the bloody stone surface, my ankles and wrists securely-lashed so that I was helplessly spread-eagled.

Tandy walked to where Betty stood like one in a trance and lifted her face so that her eyes stared straight into his.

"This shall be your task—yours alone," his sonorous voice filled the suddenly quiet room. "You will execute our judgment—and you will do it slowly so that he suffers as the one who died for him was made to suffer. Slowly and carefully."

THE devil was hypnotizing her, was bending her to his fiendish will—and Betty was succumbing! I read the dull expression in her half-glazed eyes, saw her turn and start toward me like an automaton. Without the slightest change of expression she paused beside the bier, and her hand raised the gleaming knife.

"Betty—listen to me, Betty!" I tried my utmost to break down the wall he had erected around her consciousness. "Don't do it, darling! Look down at me—I am Wesley. Betty—"

But she did not seem to hear me. Her face was blank. The knife came down, to stab into my shoulder like a white-hot spear. Doggedly I smothered the groan that gurgled in my throat—and then that wicked blade came down again and sank into my arm. I could feel the warm blood pouring out of my wounds; I knew that my voice was desperately babbling pleas, frantically trying to snap the spell that held her powerless—but my eyes were fixed steadily on that blood-smeared blade.

It was coming down again, and this time it bit into my right wrist—but before it whipped clear it had cut through the

rope that held me! A tug would free that arm, but I held it there rigidly in position while a groan of agony issued from my tightly clenched lips. Unbelievably I stared into the expressionless face—but now there could be no doubt of Betty's intention.

The knife came down again with lightning speed and whipped across the rope that held my right wrist, flashed downward to my ankle. . . .

It had happened so swiftly that for an instant the onlookers did not seem to realize what had happened. All except one of them—but her eyes were more alert than the rest, her interest in my suffering more keen. Out of the arms of the corpse-man who held her, Leona sprang—to hurl herself like a leaping tigress at Betty!

Swept off her feet by that sudden onslaught, Betty was forced back over the bloody bier on which I lay. Like a maddened thing, with round, staring eyes and slaving lips, Leona was upon her, clawing and tearing, snatching purposely at her throat. Even with the knife, Betty had all she could do to defend herself and regain her footing.

Then began a battle that held those blood-thirsty fiends spellbound, a battle such as they had never seen. Love was in that battle, and hate as well—love that fought with utter desperation to free me, and hate that flung forth recklessly, disregarding the keen blade of the knife in berserk determination to thwart my release.

Every eye was riveted on that primeval struggle—and for the moment I was ignored. That moment was all I needed, that moment which Betty was striving so desperately to prolong for me. A preliminary tug assured me that my wrists were free. A few twists of my right leg freed that ankle. Then I tensed every muscle, gathered every ounce of strength that was in me—and suddenly heaved myself upright on the stone bier.

Feverishly my fingers went to work on the knots that still held my left ankle imprisoned. Split-seconds counted now. The blood-maddened women were swarming about me before I was able to free myself; their fingers were tearing at me, ripping my face, scoring my arms and back. One after the other I hurled them back with punches and wild sweeps of my arm, but my body was covered with blood and my face felt as if it had been through a meat-chopper.

And Betty. . . . Her body was blood-smearred and covered with livid scratches. Leona's fingers were fastened in her throat, were bending her backward—just as the knife-point plunged deep into her bosom. . . .

For an instant stunned silence greeted the end of the battle. Then, with yells of rage, the women turned on Betty. But in that moment I had freed myself. Leaping down from the bier, I thrust Betty behind me and bent over Leona's dead body. It would serve as a shield—but no, there was no more time for a shield; they were almost upon us, coming on in a rush that would not be denied.

Where I found that sudden surge of strength, I do not know. Suddenly I swept the dead body up from the floor and lifted it over my head, to hurl it straight into their slaving faces. In the same instant I grabbed Betty and held her close to me as I leaped clear of the bier and flung myself at Jubel Tandy in a running dive.

I caught the old devil just as he was about to reach a door at the farther end of the room; caught him and brought him down in a bundle of threshing arms and legs. From somewhere he had gotten hold of a knife. I felt it bite into my shoulder, felt it send searing agony stabbing into my back—but I did not even try to wrench it from his hand.

My fingers closed around his throat

and I banged his head down upon the stone floor, beat a tattoo against it with his skull.

Those tactics were effective—amazingly so. Tandy's eyes bugged out of his head and he gasped for air. He tried desperately to wrench himself free—and succeeded only in tearing half of his white beard from his face!

For the second time that night I gaped incredulously as the hairy countenance of Jubel Tandy disintegrated—and revealed the fear-stricken face of Duncan Fowler, our caretaker! Fowler, his blue eyes gleaming with utter madness as terror unseated the last of his reason in a hoarse scream.

"Let me go, Wesley!" he pleaded. "Let me go! Don't let them at me! They'll kill me, Wesley! Come with me—you and Betty. There is still time to get away from them. Up this stairs, Wesley—there is a fuse-box at the top. I have the key here. We'll pull the levers in that box and they will be trapped down there. There is still time—"

But there wasn't time. The gravelings were closing in on him from all sides. With knives and clubs they charged us, and I had all I could do to protect Betty with the knife I had snatched from her hand, while she reached the door for which Fowler had been heading and pulled it open. Fowler went down under their rush. I saw clubs beating down on his skull, saw knives stabbing into his flesh—and then I was through the door after Betty and sprinting up the stairs ahead of us.

Those stairs were several floors deep, and before we had reached the top the human wolf-pack behind us was close at our heels. They were yelling to one another, yelling warnings that we must not escape, and they were less than a flight below us when I dragged Betty through the doorway at the top—and saw her sink

to the floor in a dead faint of exhaustion and terror.

To attempt to carry her was hopeless; just as hopeless as trying to stand off our blood-thirsty pursuers.

And then I remembered the key I had snatched from Fowler's pocket—the key that I still clutched in my hand. I jabbed it into the lock of the fuse-box, yanked open the door, pulled every lever in sight—and was flung half-way across the room as the very earth beneath me seemed to disintegrate in a series of thunderous explosions.

I must have banged my head against something as I toppled backward. All I can remember is that thunderous roar filling my ears—and then a heavy darkness, deep and impenetrable, swept over me. . . .

**B**ETTY was kneeling beside me and bathing my bloody face with wet cloths when I came back to my senses. We were in a room of what proved to be the hunting clubhouse on the far side of Lawton Ridge, and we were alone. The clubhouse was deserted—and it was never more to know the tread of a member's foot. Its entire roster lay entombed under tons of wreckage far below the level of its basement.

In the next few weeks I learned a great deal about that club—and about Duncan Fowler.

The club property was the last of his family's once extensive holdings that he still owned, and with it he was desperately attempting to rebuild his fortune. The members were no huntsmen; they were wealthy degenerates who paid him lavishly for the unholy entertainment their wilderness clubhouse had once provided.

But money was not Duncan Fowler's only desire. Embittered by the loss of his family fortune and prestige, he dreamed

of the day when he would again be able to lord it over his neighbors. One by one the old-timers were slipping away before he could realize that ambition—and so he lorded it over them in death. Burrowing under the Fayette cemetery, he took the corpses of the old men from their graves and propped them up in his private throne-room—and then added to his audience by virtually kidnaping the most attractive girls that could be found in the entire valley.

By trapping them in faked accidents and innoculating them with a drug that simulated death, he insured their burial—and then stole their bodies from the graves and revived them, to keep them drugged prisoners in his underground chamber.

“And if you had not escaped from your

coffin, I would be sitting there with them now,” Betty whispered, when the full story of his madness was revealed. “I can’t understand how you were able to do that.”

But I can.

When Fowler divined Emery Wilson’s intention of burying me alive in my wife’s grave, he had to work fast. Leona’s body was not in that coffin, and when it was opened that fact would be discovered. To avoid such a possibility, he hastily reopened the narrow tunnel by which he had originally robbed the grave and placed a withered mummy in the coffin. In his haste he was not able to pack the earth back into the tunnel as tightly as it had been—and to that lucky circumstance Betty and I owe the fact that we are alive and happy today.

THE END

**Bad Breath Travels Far!**

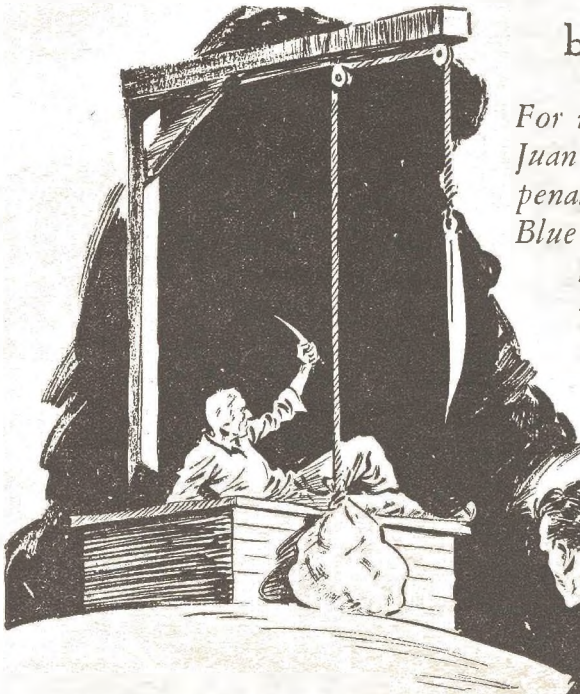
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# The Night Eternity Ended

by DONALD DALE

*For more than four hundred years Juan Pérez had been paying the penalty for daring to look upon the Blue Lady of the Sierras during those hours when the cold stone was transformed into warm, human flesh!*



**R**AMON FERNANDEZ' business was to search out true stories stranger than anything that could be hatched in the hectic imagination of a tale-monger. This time he had traveled for many days away from the city, southwest past the Sierra de las Cruces and on into the Serrania de Ajusco. And his quest had brought him to this filthy *choza* at the edge of the village of Oxtaca.

Through the broken window, the young searcher after strange truths could see the slumbering volcano, Matsohuitl. The red sun was fast falling toward the horizon and would soon sink behind this mountain whose three peaks formed the unmistakable outline of a sleeping woman—the feet, breasts, and head of *La Mujer Azul*, the Blue Lady of the Sierras. The lowering sun seductively gilded the three peaks with mystic gold.

Inside the ill-smelling mud hut, there was barely room for the dirty straw pallet and the low stool beside it, where

Ramon sat. For a confusion of strange objects crowded every inch of the dirt floor and covered the dingy walls.

It was an incongruous collection of pre-Cortez fetishes and Christian relics. Petrified deer-eyes hanging on a scarlet string beside the pierced body of Christ on a fragile crucifix. Carved serpent canes



from Apizaco propped in a holy chalice, like umbrellas in a rack. Enormous sheets of virgin silver, hand-chased with Indian picture-writing, hung around with dim ascetic saints. Fierce stone lance-heads, from which dangled dried insects to guide them infallibly to their marks, lying upon rich, leather-backed prayer-books with exquisite illuminated texts. And everywhere, the egg, that ever-efficacious agent of magic and mystic power; eggs in every size, every color, and of every age.

Those and many stranger articles unknown except to the initiate. Everything from the mind and store of the *curanderos*, or witch-doctors, together with every exorciser of the Devil known to orthodox and apocalyptic Christianity; every remedy created by modern science together with every potion concocted by primitive skill.

But the hideous nucleus of this weird room was the old man who lay on the straw pellet beneath a filthy grey blanket. It was this creature who called himself a man that Ramon Fernandez had traveled long, arid miles to see. But after one glance, the young man turned away in quick revulsion from the scorched, hairless skull, the rolling, sightless eyes, and the face contorted by never-ending agony. He fastened his gaze upon the votive smoke that rose from the Copal burning in a heavy silver brazier and, forgetful of his purpose as a supplier of newspaper features for sensation-greedy readers, listened.

Indeed, handsome, tense, smouldering-eyed, he might have been the very young man whose story the old man was now beginning.

WHEN I was young—the old man said—I was tall and very handsome and all the señoritas turned to look at me as I passed. No, don't apologize for your ill-suppressed exclamation of doubt. Blind though I am, I know how repellent I

must look. My face would terrify Harpies from hell and, though I am considerate enough to keep my body covered, I cannot prevent the everlasting seepage of blood from showing through.

Do you know how long I have borne the pains of old age and this torture that afflicts me? Do you know how long since I was young? Four hundred years. Yes, at precisely this hour on precisely this day four hundred years ago, I enjoyed the last of my youth. Another grunt of disbelief? That is stupid. You came for a story, and then you doubt? That could be offensive. But if you have the courage—or the insane rashness—to stay with me, I shall not only convince you of the truth of my story that has endured four hundred torture-filled years without surcease, but I shall let you witness its ending.

Ending—what a wonderful word. And tonight, as soon as that swift-sinking sun is hidden and the magic night is begun, I shall write *finis* to this tale of eternal suffering, *el termino de las angustias de Juan Pérez*.

Yes, you may see the finish, but I warn you that the ending I have planned for my story is like to destroy the whole world, for I well remember the prophetic volcano of blood in Hewanja's egg-glass. But that will not stop me. *Dios de los cielos*, if it will only destroy me, put a period to my eternal agony!

According to our Christian priests, Eternal Life is the *summum bonum*; but they forget that life is also eternal in hell. Do you know how long eternity is? Eternity, young man, is something that is endless. As you can see by the things that crowd this room, I have tried everything. Year after year, century after century, I have endured, until at last under the sharpness of my torture, I have worked out a solution. Tonight, I shall do the impossible.

Are you afraid? You should be. Will you stay? *¿Que dice?*—what do you say?

You cannot leave? *Bueno*, I shall proceed with my story. During this waiting hour, I shall unburden my soul with its telling and then—I shall end eternity!

YES, in those golden days of my youth, any señorita in this village was mine for the asking. And I asked many times and of many girls. And they all said yes. Sometimes with soul-shame for what they were doing, and sometimes with remorse for the pain they were causing others; but they could not refuse me. For I was the handsome caballero, Juan Pérez, whom no woman could resist.

Perhaps you do not know that among our people, one does not trifle with the heart. One casts his eyes upon a girl to like her, and, perhaps, if one is sufficiently continental, plays the bear outside her window a few nights, asks her parents for her hand, and marries her.

But such naivete was not for Juan Pérez. For I, Juan Pérez, had been to the bright cities, and learned the pleasure of sipping lightly from many cups instead of taking the fill from one.

There was a little Rosita, with mouth like a ripe pomegranate. Her father owned the candleshop on the corner of the square, and she was to marry Manuel Ortiz. And then, because love had made her beautiful, my eyes found her. Before a month was gone, I had tired. She stabbed herself. I saw her, lying on her father's doorstep, the red blood staining the whiteness of her bared bosom, and I was sorry.

Constancia was, unfortunately, a lover of theatrical effects. So when I stopped meeting her in my love-cave beneath the hill, and walked the streets laughing and talking with María, Constancia said she would jab her own eyes out to keep from seeing me with another. And she kept her threat. It broke my heart to see the lovely *niña* thus mutilated.

And that same María, when she found

herself with child and deserted by me, was whipped to death by her *novo*. 'Twas a pity, but all that a poor, disgraced fiancée could do. Miranda Flores cast herself into the flames. I saw her shining black hair drop off and the scalp shrivel like a burned meat-skin. If all this seems absurdly melodramatic, remember that I told you that heartbreak is not taken lightly among our people and a disgraced girl has only one course—self-destruction.

There were others and, month by month, the joy of conquest rose in me like a tide, chortled in my gay, infectious laughter, blazed from my insolent black eyes, burned in my irresistible love-making. But at last, a cankering restlessness began to torment me; a corroding dissatisfaction ate my soul.

You see that mountain? *La Mujer Azul*, the Blue Woman. Still and quiet and mysterious, she lies there, a cold heap of earth and stone, all the days of the year—except one. On that one day, *El Día de Los Difuntos*, just as the sun dips beneath the horizon, she stirs. And from that moment until the sun peeks over the hill the next morning, she is alive and warm and active. Then, no one dares raise his eyes to the Blue Woman.

And today, as you know, is the Day of the Dead. And soon the sun will set.

There are always, even in our simple village, profaners of the sacred. And once, Pedro Caredos, whose huge pudgy hands were so greedy for gold, looked upon the Blue Woman during her night, and his hands—right in front of the people who stood around him with becomingly lowered eyes—withered and shrank to useless claws. That was in my great-grandfather's time.

And long before I was born, a certain Jimena Moreno, the worst gossip of the village, defied the taboo and, at her first glance, her slanderous tongue grew,

within the space of a minute, until it sprouted from her mouth and grotesquely dragged the ground beside the *metate* in which she had been pounding maize.

Only one person ever dared to try it again. Ricardo Franco, stuffed to stupidity, absent-mindedly squinted his little pig's eyes toward the sacred place, and his stomach rose like a balloon—rose and rose, and burst with thunder in the face of his wife who walked beside him on the way to the mission. For he was the village glutton, and the Blue Woman deals out retributive justice, with never an error. The fate of Ricardo Franco was enough. Years passed, and no one ever dared again to violate the fearful privacy of the Blue Lady of the Sierra on her night of nights.

Never again, until, as I said, Lupe of the fiery heart put into words the cause of the undefined restlessness that was driving me insane. It was like an appetite that, satiated, still was not satisfied. When Lupe knew that my interest in her had guttered out like a candle in the wind, she cried out, "You are inhuman! You cast us aside as the bread-maker's son would throw away a tortilla, while others starve!"

"Perhaps," I taunted the beautiful little wild-cat, flashing my fine white teeth at her, "I am tired of tortillas. Perhaps I am too good for such prosaic nourishment. Perhaps the only fit food for Juan Pérez is the ambrosia and nectar of the gods. Am I not a—?"

"You fool! You fanfarón! No girl can satisfy you! We are all too easily won. Perhaps the Blue Lady of the Sierras would be good enough for you!" she spat at me. "This is her day, you know, All Souls' Day. Perhaps the great Juan will go up to her!"

I crossed myself, aghast at her blasphemy. "Lupe! You must not say such—" Suddenly my remonstrance died away, and excitement swept over my brain like

a fire through dry grass. My voice sank to a whisper. "The Allwoman. The Everywoman. *La Mujer Azul de las Sierras*. Remote. Unapproachable. Transcendental!" How often from my adolescence had my imagination been intrigued by thoughts of what she did on this, her night.

During that afternoon, the insane thought grew in my mind. Arrogance, vainglory, self-esteem sprouted and spread throughout me. I felt mighty and buoyant. My feet hardly touched the ground. "The Blue Woman of Matzohuitl!"

There were only a few hours until sundown would release the Blue Lady to life, but those hours were confused centuries to me. At times, little buzzing insects of fear swarmed in my brain and nibbled at the edges of my arrogant thoughts. But, I brushed them aside, impatiently. For had I not proved my power—my superiority—over all earthly creatures? And I had already decided. No, not decided, for I came to feel that this had been foreordained from the beginning of time.

I should go up to the Blue Lady that night.

I COULD have slipped out secretly at sun-down, but that was not the way of Juan Pérez. So, I walked up and down the dusty *calle* in front of the mud huts, and boasted. "Tonight, I, Juan Pérez, shall not only look upon the Blue Woman in her magic hours of animation, but—I shall go up to her! And she will not punish! She will permit!"

At my vaunting, terrified counselors filed into the khiva. The people betook themselves to the temples and fell upon the altars, crying out their terror. My mother cast herself at my feet, groveling, begging. But I threw back my head and laughed.

Medicine men and priests tried to exhort me. Even old Hewanja, the most

ancient of the Indian *curanderos*, older than the memory of anyone who then lived, came down out of the hills to remonstrate. When I refused to listen, he finally took forth from its careful wrappings of many layers of straw one of his sacred eggs. Squatting, he broke this egg into the glass of clear water he had set upon the ground. I gazed fascinated; the future would roll before me in that glass.

The contents of the glass first became a milky whirlpool, shot with opalescent lights. A form began to appear, round like a globe, turning like our earth. Then a swirling torrent out of nowhere poured upon it, blood-red, covering it over. The globe trembled, sank, and in a moment all lay at the bottom of the glass, a chaotic, confused, meaningless mass.

Enraged by fear that chilled my ardor and deflated my vainglory, I profanely kicked over the sacred glass, letting its contents sink into the earth of the dry street. Then I cried out, for while we had talked, time had passed. "Look! The sun is gone!" The terrified people turned their eyes fearfully toward the ground.

Defiantly, I threw back my head, and looked!

Like a criminal before a death-dealing judge, I waited. Fear pounded painfully in my breast, but my head was arrogantly erect.

Nothing happened.

Yes, I looked upon the Blue Lady at the taboo hour, and no punishment fell upon me. And her justice was, from time immemorial, infallible.

I must be then—I was!—of all mankind approved of her. Perfect in her eyes!

**T**HE sun's after-flame was dying slowly behind the magnificent form of the recumbent goddess-woman. It faded through a kaleidoscope of color—amethyst, rose, heliotrope, lavender, violet.

But I could perceive no movement. With my whole being aquiver I watched, waited. My heart had become an unendurable thundering drum. Had we, the people of Oxtaca, feared and revered a stupid pile of stone all these years? Had I, by my blasphemy, released us from superstitious terror—and robbed us of beautiful faith? I could not bear it. If the Blue Lady did not come true, I . . .

And then she stirred. Lazily, languorously, as a woman awakening from a deep sleep. Still, her infallible castigation fell not upon me. She was awake, and no fault of mine was brought to horrible, instantaneous infliction. So—I had no fault! My vainglory was no longer vain, for my perfection had now been finally acknowledged, approved, by the Blue Woman of the Sierras. That was my thought. I was a fool.

Heedless of those who groveled in fear around me, I started up the foothills of Matzohuitl. It was as if I wore seven-league boots. I have no remembrance of the way, no feeling of time, until I came upon a queer, horny cliff that rose abruptly before me.

Straining feverishly, I finally scrambled upon it, moving through the rare turquoise atmosphere along a narrow stretch and then up a swift, spongy incline to a narrow escarpment that lay along the edge of the mountain. The way beneath my feet was soft and velvet-smooth, and a strange dream-like blue. From it emanated a languorous, sweet warmth.

I was moving up the smooth, upcurving ridge, which on all days of the year, but one, was simply the easiest approach to the mountaintop. Now it was a woman's fingers, wrist, and arm—throbbing with warm life.

Self-glorification swept me along. And a confusion of strange thoughts washed through my mind. I thought of how Don Juan—idol of all romantic Spaniards

—had insolently tweaked the stone beard of the statue of the dead Comendador, whose daughter his irresistible love-making had brought to shame. For his audacious profanation, the Comendador had pulled the pillars of the world down around the youth and tumbled him into hell. Once I had gone up to the city to see the story dramatized in *El Teatro Nacional*.

Don Juan Tenorie seemed now a puny idol. For he had boasted only mundane conquests. Juan Pérez, too good for earth-woman, was favored of the transcendent *Mujer Azul*.

In my self-cannonization, I felt kinship with Popocatepetl, Smoking Mountain, majestic lover of Ixtaccihuatl, the White Woman. At times, he stirred from his stone aloofness and awakened her, while in the puny valleys below, strong men shuddered, children whimpered, and women's shrill voices sank to fearful whispers. Godlike I was, like him, and far above the weak ones of earth.

Swept on by swelling thoughts, I rounded the smooth, pulsing curve of the shoulder and pressed upward toward the crest of the left breast. Look, you can see from here the tantalizing smooth mound; it is the nearest. And as I mounted, I could feel beneath my eager feet the ever-waxing beat of a great heart. The heart of *La Mujer Azul*! The sense of my own conquest made me dizzy. My

head spun in delight too great for the heart of mortal man. But for me, Juan Pérez—

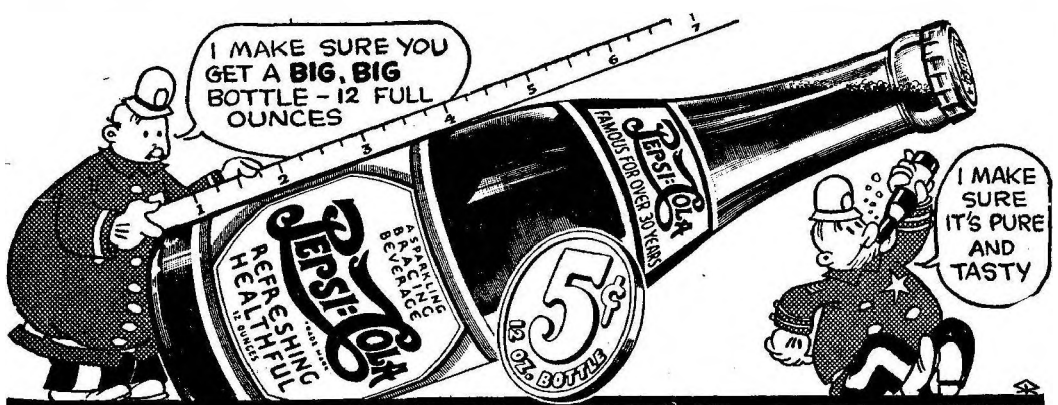
**I**N INEFFABLE exaltation, I paused upon the rosy zenith, my soul rocking with the throbbing beneath me, and imperiously surveyed what was mine. That dark mat of trees there was a shadowy swirl of silken tresses to entangle the mind and lead the soul astray. And so it will be again, now in a few minutes, as soon as the sun has hidden itself.

The twin mountain lakes were eyes, slate-blue, restless, unfathomable. You see that ruddy bar, which you would call, prosaically, an outcropping of red sandstone? That was—and will be tonight!—warm, full lips, curving disdainfully.

In a haze of self-glory, I turned my enraptured eyes to all the charms of this wonderful Everywoman, while beneath me the mighty heart pulsed. I was the Anointed! The Superman! I would—

Then the full, red lips moved! A voice filled the air around me, cool and smooth and faraway, like old silver in some dim, shadowy cavern. Only one word: "Rosita!"

Rosita! The name of the lovely candle-maker's daughter echoed and reechoed through the thin violet air. And a cry of agony was torn from me. I clutched my breast, fighting the unendurable pain that stabbed me. I felt the wet blood flowing.



I saw the deep, deadly wound that—without touch of weapon—had opened through my heart, exactly as the broken Rosita had pierced hers when I had tired of her. Deadly wound, I say; but I did not, could not, die. And deep within me I began to know the meaning.

But there was no time to contemplate. The weird transcendental voice pronounced "Constancia!" With that name, my eyes became blazing coals of pain, jabbed cruelly with unseen dagger. And I was blind! Then, with awful finality, the certainty of vengeful justice came home to me, for Constancia, you remember, shamed and cast aside by me, had jabbed out her own eyes to keep from seeing me promenade gaily with another.

And all at once, the scourges, the agonies, which, in my cruel arrogance, I had caused to be visited upon others descended upon my body—the body that, a few moments before had been inflated with the imperiousness of a god-erect.

"María!"

The death-dealing lashes rained upon María by her incensed *novo*, her sweet-heart, now fell upon me, raised great, unbearable welts. But I did not die.

"Miranda!"

The flames that had destroyed Miranda Flores seared my flesh, burned my hair away, and made my scalp a shriveled cap of agony. But I did not die.

"Felicia!" "Celestina!" "Ramona!" More and more. Excruciating suffering created by me now returning to its creator. Not only the physical suffering, but shame, jealousies, the bite of unrequited love, made my mind and heart an unbearable chaos inside of my bleeding, burning, tortured body.

"And thus forever!" the voice intoned.

I begged, pleaded, groveled upon the great, white breast beneath which the relentless heart throbbed, insistently. And always, the answer came back, "And thus forever!"

Forever!

I do not know how I dragged myself down from the mountain to the village through which I had often swaggered, plucking what flowers caught my eye and throwing them aside as soon as they drooped under my withering, demanding touch. But now, I crawled in, whimpering, pleading. And the people turned aside, uttering oaths, or prayers. I became a pariah. My family lived their allotted years and died. Centuries passed and I lived on.

I sought all manner of relief—the medicine-men, the priests; charms, unguents, supplications. But there is no relief. I tried to kill myself, but I cannot die. For what is another wound to a man who already bleeds from his riven heart, night and day? Or what avail fire, or gun, or poison? I suffer them all, every minute of my unbearable existence. And I cannot die. For four hundred years, I have endured. Four hundred years! Look! Don't turn your eyes away! Look upon me! You wanted a story! Look!

THE story was finished. The old man fell back, throwing the filthy covers from him to disclose his naked body. The young man cried out, in terror and repulsion. For he looked upon a sight to sear men's souls. Shrunken, tortured skin, whip-flayed in raw strips, and every stripe that might have been whole, fire-scorched. Blood welling constantly from a cruel wound in the ancient heart. The infinitely agonized eyes and the flame-shriveled scalp, which had so repulsed the young man, were fit crown to this being of torture. Everything the man had said was true.

"I can endure it no longer," the old man said, shrouding himself again in the blood-sodden blanket, "now that at last I have found a means of escape. Every minute of these long, long years, I have suffered beyond the endurance of man.

And every year when the sun goes down on *El Día de los Difuntos*, my torture increases a hundred-fold—surpassing the unsurpassable. I shall not need eyes to know when the sun sets this evening. The crescendo of pain that will seize me, will mark the time. And when the last ray dips behind the horizon, a sharp, climactic chord will rip through. It can't be long now. And when it—"

A scream of agony cut his speaking in two. His body jerked spasmodically. The

with difficulty controlling his pain-hoarsened voice, "when you have finished."

The dirty-bloused peasants brought a litter and laid the old man upon it. "You wanted a story," Juan Pérez said again to the young man. "Will you come?"

To the Allwoman, the Blue Lady of the Sierras? Would he come? Fear greater than he knew could exist, shook the young man. But he had to go. For as a snake lures its bird-prey, that fear lured Ramon Fernandez.



sun was down. "But wait! Wait!" he whispered. "This time I have plans."

The minutes passed. The world grew unreal to the youth, as he watched through the window the lights change, fade, and blend on ancient Matzohuitl. And he almost forgot the writhing, whimpering human animal on the straw pallet as he seemed to see the smooth white breast-peaks begin to rise and fall softly, with rhythmical breathing. He could have sworn that the lips curved sweetly, as those of a waking woman, still half-dreaming of her lover. At the Blue Lady's taboo hour, he gazed, rapt, upon the one whom no one looks with impunity.

Sometime later, the door of the hut was thrown open and two huge, stupid-looking peons stood in the door. They only half-looked upon the hideous form on the pallet as they spoke. "We are here. Where is the gold?"

"You will get it," Juan Pérez answered

THE way seemed long to Ramon Fernandez, through' the fast-deepening twilight up the slope of Matzohuitl. The soft-sandaled peons spoke not a word. The old man, between sharp, almost-stifled cries of pain, babbled of the plan he had to end his suffering. He had worked upon it for more than a year now, his brain directing the strength of these two stupid brutes who now bore him upward. He was blind and helpless, but, through them, he had been able to accomplish his purpose. And always, he speculated fiendishly about the *curandero's* egg-magic that showed a confusion of blood. What did he care for destruction, if only he could destroy himself?

Ramon felt a strange fear clutch at him as they at last came to a queer horny cliff—strangely like a finger-nail. They scrambled over it, and the way beneath him became spongy—like flesh!—and warm with the sweet, alluring warmth of

a woman. As they walked in uncanny silence along the curving escarpment, and at last were circling southward, Ramon could hear his own heartbeats, like a triphammer, answering the magnificent throb that was beginning to sound somewhere deep in this weird mountain of the Blue Lady. And as they mounted it filled his being and he was one with it.

It was useless to tell himself that all this was impossible, that this magnificent Everywoman was beyond the ken of mortal man. Useless, because her breast was soft and warm beneath his feet, and the beating of her heart made mad drums of his ears. Everything had a dream-like quality, but he knew it was not a dream. It was as real as unbearable pain, unspeakable death, and cosmic destruction.

A little more than half-way up the slope, they came upon a strange, monstrous device—the thing upon which old Juan Pérez had been working for so many long months. Out of place it was on the mystic, ivory hill. A large platform, or derrick. Suspended above the derrick and pointing downward was a huge, shining, razor-sharp blade, a dagger so long that it stretched the wildest imagination. This giant's weapon was held by a primitive pile-driving device—a large bag of stones, on a rope pulley.

Juan Pérez' wild laughter screeched out above the resistless throbbing of the great heart of *La Mujer Azul*, which was now directly beneath them. At last, the young man knew the plan and fear such as he had never known before, seized him.

The moon, new-risen, was a theatrical searchlight. Ramon looked wildly around him. Across a soft, smooth valley, beyond a firm, beautifully-rounded cliff, red lips smiled sardonically. Yes, lips. Warm, live lips. And eyes, deep and mysterious, hid ineffable secrets in their depths.

"You can't do this thing!" Ramon protested to the old man. "She's really alive!

She's really the magnificent Everywoman!"

"Of course. That's what I've been telling you. Did you ever doubt it?"

And the young man knew that until this minute, he had not believed the story of Juan Pérez. But now he could doubt no longer. He sprang toward the old man. "You can't—I won't let you!"

"Seize him!" And one of the powerful peasants grasped Ramon's delicate wrists in his huge vice-like grasp. The other, at Péré' command, lifted the old man close to where the pulley rope awaited severance and handed him a keen blade, so sharp it would serve even a weak, palsied arm.

**B**OTH the servants were breaking under the strain. They pulled their sarapes close about their shoulders and began babbling fearfully. "You promised to pay us and let us go! We won't stay! We can't stay! You promised to wait until we were all the way down."

The old man clawed from under the ragged cover of the litter a bag of gold. "Take it and go! And take this searcher for stories with you."

Down the smooth spongy slope the two peons started swiftly, roughly dragging with them Ramon Fernandez, who kept twisting around looking back. The old man rocked his bleeding, eternally-suffering body in gleeful anticipation of what he had come to do. Fear urged Ramon down the mountain, but something stronger than himself tempted him back.

"Turn me loose," he growled.

"No." His captor's huge hand tightened upon his arm. "The master said take you away."

Regretfully, but almost with relief, Ramon let himself be led a few more steps away from that thing up there. It was none of his business. He was well out of it.



A hundred feet. Another hundred, their steps making no sound on the soft way to disturb the magnificent beat of the goddess-heart. Fifty steps more. And the thing within him grew until suddenly he snatched away from his now unsuspecting captor, and dashed back up the mystic slope until he came to the scarred, deformed old man, sitting beside the pulley-rope, holding in his twitching hand the keen-edged blade.

"I shall not let you do it!" Ramon called out.

The old man perceived his intent to grab the knife, perhaps bear him away. And the ancient eyes glittered with fierce resolution. Yes, he had promised the peons to give them time to go down the hill, out of the way of this thing he meant to do. But he had not foreseen that anyone would try to interrupt him.

As the young man lunged at him, old Juan Pérez raised his withered arm, sliced the rope which held the heavy bag of stones. The stones smashed to the ground. The dagger plunged downward toward the great beating heart. It cut deep into the smooth, white breast-slope. A weird, piercing cry rent the sky. There was a hissing, steaming, swishing, and a fountain of blood shot upward, folded over itself and descended upon the old man, upon the young man who had searched for a story stranger than any

that had even been written, upon the two peons who had, for gold, done the bidding of the blasphemous Juan Pérez of Oxtaca. And swept down the slope of Matzohuitl in a boiling, hissing cataract. And the magnificent throbbing stopped, and left a silence like death. . . .

The people in the village heard the thundering, hissing sounds from the top of the mountain. But they could not look up. More fervidly they told their beads, bowed to their altars, or fingered their charms. And so they did not see that mile-wide cataract of scarlet tumbling down the mountain side, deluging everything in its pathway, rushing down resistlessly upon their village.

It was only when it was almost upon them in man-high waves, that they began running. Only when they felt its warm stickiness, smelled its sweetly sickish odor, saw the crimson of its color and one terrified shriek rang out from all throats: "Blood!"

Oxtaca was no more. . . . But there is a queer, rust-red lake of cooled "lava" in the little cup of a valley at the foot of Matzohuitl. The few who pass that lonely way speculate about the hardened stream of unique red lava that flows from the left breast of *La Mujer Azul de las Sierras*, who lies so cold and pale and still, even after sundown on *El Día de los Difuntos*.

THE END

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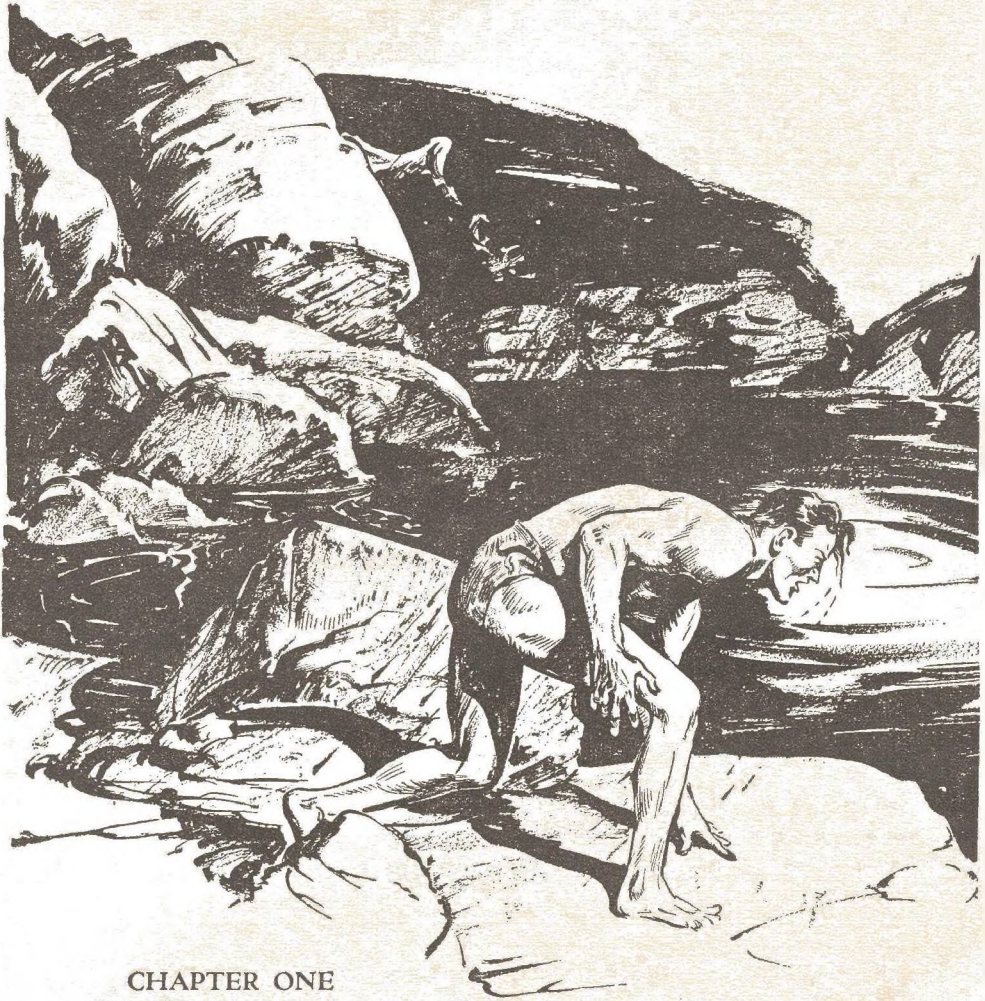
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# MISTRESS OF THE DARK POOL

*A novelette of a horror  
that could not be*

by

RUSSELL GRAY



## CHAPTER ONE

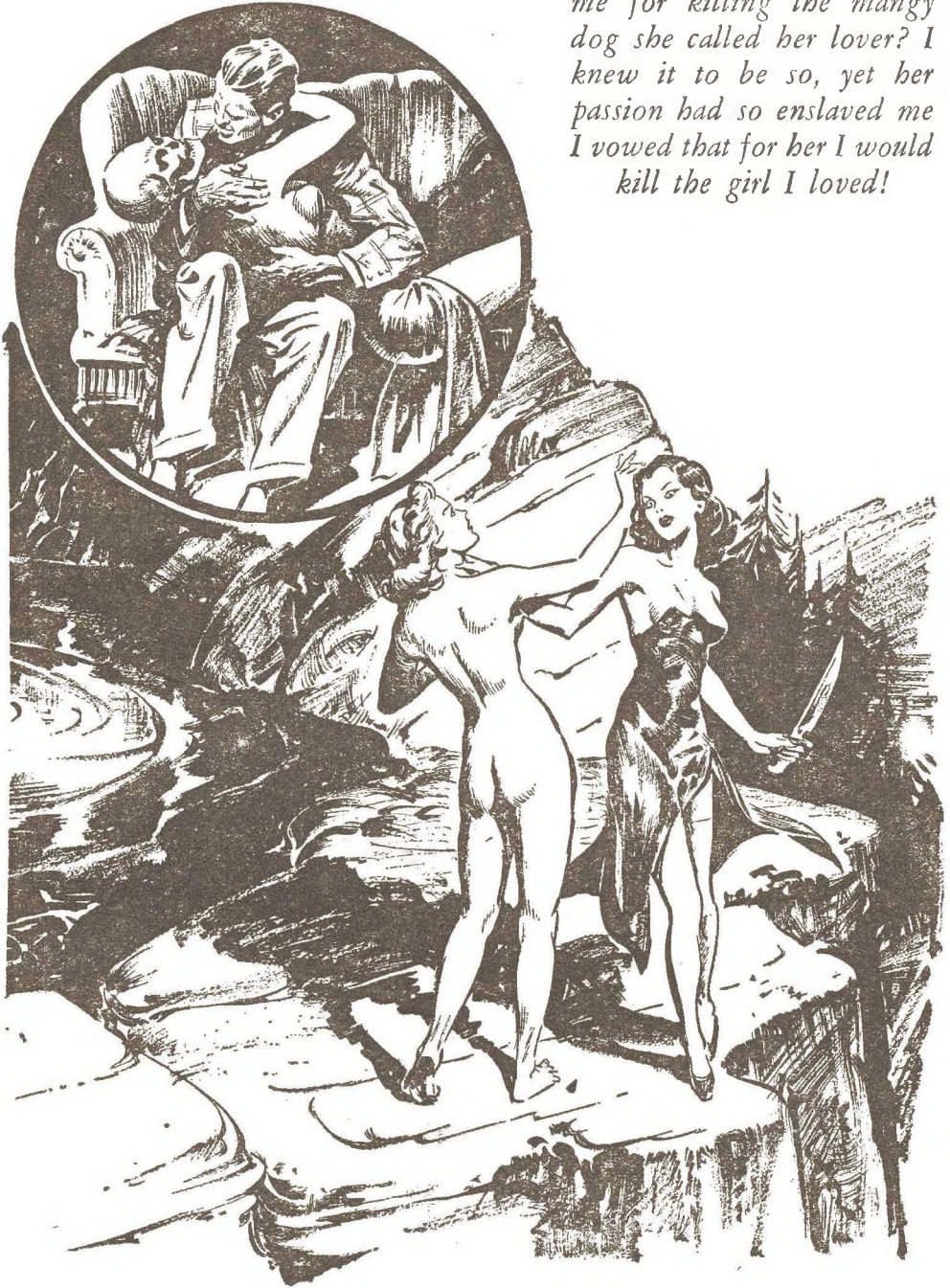
### The Hag of Castle Hill

CARA and I had been married three years, yet I gasped with delighted admiration as she stepped out of her clothes and dove into the dark, mountain pool. Heated though I was by the climb to this isolated spot, I paused to watch her tan-and-white body cutting

through the limpid water. She came up to the surface, shaking her short brown curls and laughed with sheer exuberance.

In another moment my own clothes were piled on the rock and I felt the shock of tingling water close over me. We were like two children in the water—splashing and diving and playing tricks on each other. When at last we climbed

*Was this beautiful and desirable woman, whom I held in my arms, actually the same being as that wrinkled and evil crone who had reviled me for killing the mangy dog she called her lover? I knew it to be so, yet her passion had so enslaved me I vowed that for her I would kill the girl I loved!*



out and lay side by side basking in the sun on a large flat rock, I told myself that life was as nearly perfect as it ever would be.

The pool, formed by a spring, was at

the very summit of Castle Hill. It was enclosed by solid rock formation almost at the edge of a cliff which took an abrupt drop of a hundred feet. The hill itself was a good eight hundred feet above the

surrounding country, and the vista from where we lay was breath-taking.

Indeed, the view from our snug little summer bungalow nestling among the pines halfway up the hill was almost as magnificent. A week ago, Cara and I had rented that bungalow. Isolated, seven miles from the nearest village, it was an ideal place for me to finish my novel without interruption. The only thing it had lacked was a place to go swimming. That morning, when I had driven into the village for mail and supplies, Tom Anderson, owner of the general store, had told me about this pool at the very top of Castle Hill.

"A good four hundred foot climb from your place, but it's worth it," he had said. "The water's so clear you can see every pebble on the bottom."

"Does anybody use it?" I asked hopefully. There's nothing like swimming as nature intended.

Tom Anderson shook his head. "Too far away. And by the looks of that old witch and her man, I reckon they ain't been near water in years."

"Witch?" I said, interested. There always seemed to be stories of witches or curses or ghosts about out-of-the-way places. "You don't mean to say we've really inherited a witch?"

Tom Anderson nodded gravely. "Name of Hulda. Never had no other name, far's I know. Got a man with her—maybe her husband, maybe not—called Amos, a skinny, dirty little runt with a face like a bad dream. They never come to town nor go any place, but folks who climb the mountain see 'em now and then."

"And what makes her a witch?" I asked eagerly.

He shrugged. "Talk, I reckon. I don't take stock in witches myself, but there are folks around here that do. It's said there's some who climb up to her shack on top of Castle Hill to get charms and such-like stuff from her."

AS CARA and I lay on the rock, I told her about the witch named Hulda. We exchanged jokes about the possibility of buying a charm from her which would make my novel a best-seller.

Suddenly Cara frowned. "I hope her boy-friend Amos doesn't snoop around here. I'd hate to have to wear a bathing suit."

I raised myself on one elbow to look at her. She was like a wood nymph as she lay there stretched sensuously in the sun—slim and lithe, yet gracefully and excitingly curved. My blood ran suddenly faster. I reached out a hand and touched her. She turned to me, smiling, her eyes reflecting the brilliancy of the sun.

And then she was staring at something over my shoulder, and a half-startled, half-puzzled expression came into her face.

I twisted my head.

It was only a dog standing at the edge of the pool—a skinny, mangy cur with a brownish-yellow scabby pelt. As ugly a specimen as I had ever seen.

The cur whined in an oddly vibrant voice which I had never before heard issue from a dog's throat. Slowly he came toward us. I felt Cara sit up and lean against me. She was actually frightened.

"It's only a dog," I said.

"But look at his eyes! The way he's staring at me!"

It was true. There was something almost human in those liquid, blood-flecked eyes. The expressions of men who look at women they desire are not greatly different.

The cur sprang on the rock, and in another moment he was snuggling his grimy, scabby body against Cara's hip. With a little screech of revulsion, she bounded to her feet. I rose also, planting myself between Cara and the dog. He tried to skirt around me to get to her.

Not to attack her, certainly, and not even to be petted.

What *did* the dog want? We couldn't be sure, but the fact is that Cara cringed and attempted to cover her nakedness with her arms—because a dog stared at her!

The cur got past my guard. Cara cried out again. I leaped forward and caught him in the soft part of the belly with my bare foot. The kick wasn't hard, but it lifted him like a football and dropped him off the rock. Whining, he rolled over on his feet and started for Cara again. I picked up a small stone and hit him on the shoulder with it. He yelped, but maintained his ground.

"Beat it!" I said. "Get away from here."

I reached for another stone, this one as big as my fist, and as I raised it in a throwing position, the cur backed away. As if he had eyes in back of his head, he stopped with his hind legs just at the edge of the cliff and stood there.

"His eyes!" Cara whispered behind me. "I can't stand the way they're looking at me."

Neither could I. "Beat it!" I said again. And to show that I meant it, I hurled the rock.

I hadn't planned to hit the cur, and anyway I threw it too lightly to do any damage. But it did strike him, right between the eyes, and there was just enough force behind it to send the dog backward a foot or two. The brownish-yellow body dropped over the cliff. For an instant the forepaws clawed at the edge, and then they also disappeared. And we heard a scream of terror which no dog could have uttered—or so, at the moment, it sounded to us. It was filled with a quality which was almost human.

I walked to the edge of the cliff and looked down. There, on the jagged rocks below, I saw a brownish-yellow splotch.

"Dead," I said turning to Cara. "I

didn't mean to kill it." I could not understand why I felt like a murderer.

She was trembling. Wanly she attempted a smile.

"How silly we were," she said. "All the dog wanted was some affection. Let's go into the water again."

She dove and I followed. This time the water wasn't any fun. We stayed in only a couple of minutes.

I was stretching out my hand to help Cara out of the pool when a shrill cry of anguish cut the air. A very old woman in a black dress was peering over the edge of the cliff.

The first thing I thought of were my clothes. As quickly as I could I got into my slacks, then turned to the old woman.

I don't think that I have ever seen such hatred as was stamped on that wrinkled face which was the color and texture of old leather. Her gnarled body quivered with rage as she pointed an accusing finger at me. "You killed Amos!"

CARA stood at the edge of the pool with sunlight glistening on her wet skin and hair. She was like an artist's dream of beauty, save for the strange rigidity which had come into her face, robbing it of its vivaciousness. And I—all I felt was a vast emptiness within me.

Amos! The name of Hulda's husband or lover, according to Tom Anderson. No doubt this harridan was Hulda.

And then sanity returned and I was laughing inwardly. What in the world had come over me since the appearance of that dog?

I said: "I assure you that it was an accident. If there's anything I can do—"

"Do!" she burst out shrilly. "Bring back my lover to me. Can you do that?"

There it was—Amos, her dog; Amos, her lover. Were we all mad, or was it only the hag, who, living in loneliness on top of Castle Hill, had identified the dog with an unattainable lover?

Her coal-black eyes were fixed on me as I stood there in only my slacks. She started hobbling over to me, chuckling; and there was something about that sound which was more nerve-chilling than her rage had been.

"Yes, you can do something," she wheezed. "You can take Amos' place. You can come with me."

Madness can reach a stage where it becomes simply funny. I laughed aloud.

But Cara didn't think it funny. She snatched up her clothes and, holding them in front of her, came over to my side and tucked her hand through my arm. Her features were still set in that frozen mask.

The old woman had mounted the rock, and, hobbling on her cane and wheezing, she approached me. The laughter died in my throat as she reached out a withered hand and tapped my chest with crooked fingers.

"A fine figure of a man," Hulda mused. "A better body than Amos had. You'll do."

Her touch made my skin crawl. If she had been a man, I would have knocked her down. As it was, all I could do was brush her hand roughly away from me.

She did not take offense. Muttering, "Even better than Amos," she turned and hobbled off the rock. Cara and I watched her in silence until she disappeared among the pine trees.

"A crackpot," I said. "I suppose so many people have told her that she's a witch that she's come to believe it."

Cara didn't say anything. She was getting into her clothes. I slipped on my shoes and put on my shirt and then we started down by the path which curved around the hill at the side of the cliff.

Cara didn't speak until we reached our bungalow. Then she put both her hands on my shoulder and said: "Darling, I'm afraid."

"Of that harridan?" I scoffed.

"I don't know of what. But there was the way that dog looked at me and the sound of his voice as he fell down the cliff and the assured manner of the old woman when she said you would have to take its place."

I tried making wisecracks about the hag, but they had no effect on Cara. She only said: "Hold me close, Lane, darling."

That was something which was always a pleasure, and in the feel of her against me I forgot about the dog named Amos and the old woman. Later that afternoon I sat down at my typewriter, but none of my work went right. It took me a long time to get started, and when I did I tore up everything I wrote. It was not so much worry about what Hulda could possibly do to us as a strange restlessness which possessed me.

In the evening that restlessness grew stronger. Cara and I played two-handed rummy, and it was only with the greatest difficulty that I could keep my mind on the game. I brought out a bottle of rye and put it on the table beside me and took a drink after each game. Disapproval was on Cara's face, but she didn't say anything. Not that the whiskey had any effect on me. It was as though I were drinking water.

We went to bed early. For a long time both of us stirred uneasily. Presently Cara fell asleep, but I continued to lie wide awake. What in the world was the matter with me?

After a while I slipped out of bed and padded noiselessly out of the bedroom.

I'm not sure why I did that. Perhaps to get another drink. Perhaps to read until I was sleepy enough to return to bed. But I don't think so. Somehow I must have known that I would find the girl waiting for me in the other room.

## CHAPTER TWO

## Daughter of the Witch

I HAD never seen her before. She was lying on the sofa in the direct flood of the moonlight, and her face was turned toward the bedroom as if in expectation of my entrance. Her ankles were crossed and her hands were linked behind her raised head, lifting her breasts high.

I cannot tell you what she looked like, except that she was beautiful in a way which was not like that of any other woman I had ever seen. It may have been because the moonlight was deceptive, but I cannot be sure of that. Her dress was raven black, smooth and tight as skin. The skirt was slit, parting over her thighs.

Her face? I don't know. Lips blood-red; thick long hair blue-black and eyes the same color. And her skin—it wasn't that of a white woman or a black woman or a yellow woman. It was rather, I think, a mixture of all the races that had ever inhabited the earth.

She removed one hand from behind her head and held it out to me. "I have been waiting for you, Lane Butler," she said in a voice which was oddly low.

It did not occur to me to wonder how she knew my name. My mind was so overwhelmed by her presence that it did not even grope for an explanation as to who she was and what she was doing here. I simply stood there looking down at her curious beauty.

She slid off the sofa and came to me. I was a little surprised that she was not taller; the top of her head scarcely reached my shoulder. She was not anything like Cara, I thought: shorter, without Cara's flowing grace of movement and slender loveliness. And then all thought of Cara was wiped from my mind as she undulated toward me and stood against me.

Automatically my arms went about her. The material of her black dress had looked like skin and now it felt as smooth and warm and alive as skin. And when I touched the richness of her flesh, a thousand darts of fire tingled in my palms.

She allowed me to hold her for only a moment before she slipped out of my embrace. She took my hand in hers.

"Come," she said.

I hesitated. Again I thought of Cara—the woman I loved sleeping peacefully in bed in the other room. Cara, who loved me as ardently and who was more beautiful than this woman or any other woman.

"Come," she repeated.

I went.

Barefooted, clad only in my pajamas, I let her lead me out of the bungalow. She took the path up to the top of Castle Hill. As we walked side by side, I felt the movement and the warmth of her body against me, so that a fever mounted in me and I hurried.

I didn't think about where we were going. It did not matter.

Not until we reached the mountain pool where that afternoon Cara and I had swum did doubt cross my mind. I stopped.

"Who are you?" I demanded.

Her red lips smiled. "They call me Hulda."

I stared at her, trying to force thoughts through my numb brain. Hulda, the name of the old witch who had sworn that I would take the place of the lover whom I had killed! The lover who was a dog.

YET this girl, save for the color of her hair and eyes and the shortness of her stature, was as unlike the harridan as two women could be. Her daughter? That was it—her daughter. Suddenly I laughed as if it were a great joke. The hideous old mother wanted me, and I

was taking the beautiful young daughter instead.

"You must be old Hulda's daughter," I said.

She smiled again and, without answering, took my arm. I continued to laugh, and there was something crazy and unreal in my laughter. Far back in my mind I was afraid. In the dead of night on a desolate hilltop, my insane laughter would have frightened any normal woman. But Hulda only pressed my arm closer to her.

We entered a pine wood which blotched out the moonlight. I could see nothing, not even Hulda; but I could feel her at my side, and that was enough.

Presently we came to a shack in the center of a little clearing. The boards were unpainted and rotten and part of the roof sagged crazily where ancient beams could no longer hold the weight. There was no glass in the windows. Hulda pushed open a creaking wooden door and I followed her inside.

The shack consisted of a single room, furnished only with a rickety table and a rocker and wooden boxes for chairs and a single disheveled bed. One bed for old Hulda and her daughter and the man named Amos. But Amos was dead; he had fallen over the cliff. No, that had been a dog, in spite of the wild ravings of the harridan. My thoughts were in chaos and then I didn't bother about them as Hulda stopped at the bed and turned to me.

"Suppose your mother should walk in on us?" I whispered as I took her in my arms.

"Don't let that worry you."

I felt rather than saw that her dress was no longer on her. Flame leaped from her as she pulled my head down to her blood-red lips.

Later I fell into a heavy, haunted sleep in which the horrible aged face of old Hulda mocked and leered at me. I was awakened by somebody shaking me; and

as I felt a head nestling in the curve of my shoulder and the soft length of a feminine body along my side, I told myself that I had dreamed about Hulda's daughter and that I was at home in bed with Cara. A vast load lifted from my chest.

And then my eyes were open, and etched in moonlight at my side was the strangely beautiful form of the young Hulda.

"You must go now," she said.

Feeling her in my arms, I could not be sorry that she was not Cara. I kissed her.

"Go before it is light," she insisted urgently.

She was right. It was wisest that I reach home before Cara awoke, and before the old witch returned from wherever she had gone.

She followed me to the door. "Tonight I'll come again," she said. "Now please hurry."

It was still dark among the pines, but when I reached the pool I saw the orange glow of the sun in the east.

I had almost reached the bungalow when I met Cara coming up the path. She had slipped a housecoat over her nightgown and was hurrying. A gasp of relief came from her and she flew to my arms.

"I woke up and you weren't in the bungalow," she quavered. "I was so worried. I thought—well, I had a crazy notion that that horrid old witch had somehow lured you up to her place."

**R**EMORSE filled me. God, how could I have betrayed Cara for any woman on earth! "I couldn't sleep," I said. "I thought a swim would do me good and so I went up to the pool."

She believed me until we reached the front of our bungalow. Then she went suddenly rigid as she gaped at me with something like horror.



"You went up there barefooted and in your pajamas?" she muttered.

"I guess it was silly." I tried to laugh it off.

"Your hair, Lane—it's dry. You weren't in the water."

Her logic angered me unreasonably. "Don't try to play detective," I snapped. "I went in feet first, and the water was so cold that I rushed out without ducking my head."

She didn't believe me. It wasn't only as if as good a swimmer as I would go into a deep pool any other way but diving; it must have been something in my expression as well.

"Lane!" she moaned. "That old woman!" The back of her hand covered her open mouth.

Old woman indeed! An exotic, passionate girl who made Cara appear dull and pallid by contrast. Almost I shouted that information at her, but I managed to check myself.

I strode past her and into the bungalow. In the bedroom I stripped off my pajamas and reached for my clothes. Weariness overcame me, and I flopped down on the bed and fell asleep.

It was past noon when I awoke. Cara was seated on the sofa on which Hulda had been outstretched last night. Her hands were folded on her knees and she was staring at nothing at all. She was wearing shorts and a cool white blouse. I stood there looking at her, wondering what madness could have possessed me to have left her for the embraces of another woman.

"Cara!" I said hoarsely and stepped toward her.

Without looking at me, she stood up and evaded my arms and went into the kitchen. Five minutes later she came out. "Your breakfast is on the table," she said dully, and left the house.

Later through the window I saw her seated under a pine tree, not reading, not

doing anything. Her face was strained, her eyes red. My heart went out to her, but going to her would only make it worse.

I tried to work, but my fingers were numb on the typewriter keys. A single thought kept drumming through my mind: Hulda had said that she would return tonight. I would drive her out of the house. She wasn't worth Cara's little finger. God knew I didn't want Hulda!

Didn't I?

I returned to the whiskey bottle and emptied it down my throat, then broke open another. Again the whiskey didn't do any good. Damn it, couldn't I even get decently drunk?

With the coming of night, a tense expectancy came over me. A vein throbbed in my throat. Good heavens, I was eagerly waiting for Hulda!

The meal that evening was as gloomy as it could be. Cara and I did not exchange a single word. We did not look at each other. After we finished the meal we sat around, doing nothing. And Cara's presence in the room became increasingly less important.

I was waiting for the coming of Hulda.

Presently Cara stood up and spoke to me for the first time since noon.

"Are you coming to bed?"

I nodded. It would simplify matters if she fell asleep before the arrival of Hulda.

Cara did not put on a nightgown that night. She dropped off her clothes and stretched languidly before slipping into bed. She must have guessed that I had another rendezvous on the hilltop that night, and she was using the breathtaking enticement of her body to keep me with her. To save me. And she failed.

I scarcely glanced at her as I pulled off my shoes, my mind filled with anticipation of Hulda. With a sob of mingled despair and defeat, she slid between the covers.

For the second night we lay sleeplessly

in bed. At my side I could hear her agitated breathing. At long last sleep overtook her. I rose on one elbow, watched the regular rise and fall of her bosom, then noiselessly got out of bed. This time I put on sneakers—the stones and twigs had been hard on my feet last night—and a bathrobe.

There in the moonlit room Hulda lay on the sofa.

### CHAPTER THREE

#### Creature of Night

**B**ARE feet pattered behind me. I looked over my shoulder. Cara stood in the doorway of the bedroom. One hand was clutched at her throat as she gaped incredibly at Hulda lying on the sofa; her lips were working, but no sound issued from between them.

Hulda's husky laughter rang out. She rose from the sofa and put an arm about me possessively.

"Come, Lane Butler," Hulda said.

"No!"

Cara's voice had at last broken past her paralyzed throat. She ran over to me, grabbed my arm and clutched it to her breast. "Lane, who is this woman?"

"Go away," I told her roughly in a voice which did not sound like my own. "Can't you see that I have no use for you?"

It wasn't quite what I meant to say. I retained enough love for her not to want to hurt her more than necessary, but the words came out by themselves.

Cara looked at me with such terror in her eyes as I had not believed a human being could endure and remain sane. My heart twisted within me, and for fleeting moments I was torn by indecision as I stood between the two women.

"Come," Hulda urged.

And Hulda won. It didn't make sense, but her lure—her will perhaps—was

stronger, while I had no will left that could be called my own.

"Lane, darling, you mustn't!" Cara cried. "I'm more to you than a hundred women like this creature can be. Stay here with me."

I tried to push her off, but she clung to me, her voice and eyes imploring. Brutally I broke her grip. With a moan she slumped down to the floor. Sobs wracked her torso.

And those sobs were drowned out by the laughter of Hulda as arm in arm we left the bungalow and started up the path to the top of Castle Hill. . . .

Once again Hulda woke me just before dawn. "It is time for you to leave," she whispered.

I crushed her to me. "I want to stay with you always, to live here with you."

"And your wife?" she mocked.

My wife was somebody I had known in the remote past. Cara did not matter. Nothing on earth mattered any longer save to be with this woman.

"It is nearly dawn," she told me. "You must go at once."

She had said something like that the night before. Odd. Why didn't she want me to remain until daylight?

"I'm staying," I declared.

I sought for her mouth. She protested, struggling, but as my lips burned against hers she succumbed with a little sigh.

I must have fallen asleep again, because when I next opened my eyes the rising sun sent shafts through the window. Hulda was still in my arms, but somehow she felt different. Where my hand touched her shoulder, I did not feel rich, smooth flesh. The skin was tough and cracked. She must have put on a leather jacket, I thought dully, and turned my head to look at her.

**I** SCREAMED with revulsion. In my arms lay the body of the old witch—the shrivelled, twisted, leathery body! Her

coal-black eyes glinted mockingly up at me and shrill laughter poured from her aged, bloodless lips.

I pulled away from her, leaped over her off the bed, and rushed out of the shack. I didn't stop running until I reached the pool. There I ripped off my pajamas and dove in.

The water was icy and sent tingling shocks through me. I went under again and again, but the water couldn't wash away the uncleanness from my mind and soul.

I climbed out of the pool and lay in the sun. That didn't help either. The old witch had had her vengeance for the death of her dog or lover or whatever he had been. She had sent her daughter to lure me up to their shack, and with the coming of dawn they had changed places while I lay asleep. God knew that I had been punished for what I had done to Cara!

When at last I roused the courage to go down to the bungalow and face my wife, I found her anxiously waiting outside the door for me. There was no anger in her face, no recrimination; only infinite pity.

"I'm not going to leave you, Lane," she said. "I suppose you expect that, are even hoping for it. Perhaps sooner or later I will, but first I have to get you away from the spell of that creature."

I fell at her feet and sobbed like a child. "We'll leave here, Cara, at once."

Her hand strayed through my hair. "No, Lane. Flight wouldn't break her hold over you."

"It's broken," I said. "I swear it."

And I believed my words. How could I ever again bring myself to touch that dissolute, evil daughter of a witch?

All morning Cara hovered near me, as if to let me draw strength from her courage and love. The bitter contempt she had felt for me yesterday was gone; in its place was compassion and perhaps un-

derstanding. And yet abstracted, brooding, I hardly noticed her. Chilling thoughts were pricking through the fog in my brain.

Why had young Hulda insisted that I leave before dawn if she had planned to let her mother exchange places with her? And why had she waited until the second night?

I had to find the answer.

After lunch I started down the hill to my parked car. "Lane!" Cara called after me in a voice filled with fear.

"I'll be right back," I said. "I'm just driving into town for mail."

I'm not sure that she believed me. As I got into my car, I noticed her figure among the trees. She'd come down after me to make sure that I really drove off instead of cutting around to the uphill path. She didn't trust me—and who can blame her?

Tom Anderson was alone in his general store when I entered. I got my mail out of my box, bought cigarettes, then said nonchalantly: "You didn't tell me that old Hulda had a pretty young daughter."

"Daughter?" He studied my face. "She's got no daughter."

"I saw her last night," I insisted. "She said her name was Hulda."

His thin mouth twitched in a weather-beaten face "What'd she look like?"

"She's—well—" I paused. I couldn't describe her save to say that she was curiously exotic and that her flesh was warm and exciting. I had seen her only in the moonlight—deceptive and vague. "She looks a little like her mother," I said. "She's short, only much fuller, of course, and as beautiful as her mother is ugly."

ANDERSON shook his head. "I lived in these parts all my life, Mr. Butler—forty-seven years. For thirty years and more I've been seeing Hulda on and off. Always she's lived up there alone,

except the last few years with Amos. Never heard of her having a daughter and neither has anybody else. We'd know."

"But I tell you I saw her."

"Did the girl say she was Hulda's daughter?"

"Not in so many words," I said. "She told me her name was Hulda, so I assumed—"

My words broke off and we stared at each other. My knees were so shaky that I could hardly stand.

Anderson spoke slowly, each word separated. "Maybe she was Hulda herself."

"But that's impossible," I argued, as much with myself as with him. "She was young and beautiful."

"Maybe it was Hulda," he repeated doggedly.

A damn superstitious yokel, I told myself savagely. But now I was trembling all over.

I said: "You told me about Amos who lived with her. Did you mean that Amos was a man or a dog?"

"Dog?" he echoed. "Old Hulda never had a dog. Amos is a mangy little runt who went up to Castle Hill one day a couple of years ago and stayed. Saw him two days ago when I went hunting. Never heard of no dog around Hulda's shack. . . . What's the matter, Mr Butler, ain't you feeling good?"

"Headache," I muttered, passing a cold palm over my forehead.

I made my way out of the store, got into my car and sat behind the wheel, motionless, so tired that I could not move a muscle. Tom Anderson was peering out at me from the store window.

Finally I roused the energy to start the car and drive away. Two names for four creatures. Hulda the old witch; Hulda the seductive young girl. Amos the old woman's lover; Amos the dog I had killed. Why had I never seen the two

Huldas or the two Amoses together? That didn't mean anything—but other things did. That mangy cur had looked at Cara's nakedness out of human eyes and had cried out with a human voice when he had fallen off the cliff to his death. And the harridan had said that the dog had been her lover and that I was to take his place.

God in heaven, had I actually become her lover? Were the two Huldas the same creature—with the strangely voluptuous body only a creature of the night, reverting to her natural ugliness with the coming of daylight? That was why I had seen her only at night; why she had been so anxious that I leave her before dawn.

When I returned to the bungalow, I saw Cara at work on the little garden she was planting in back. I slipped through the front door without letting her see me. In the kitchen I found a sharp carving knife. I stuck it in my belt and sneaked away from the house.

I didn't want to let Cara know what I had planned to do. This was between myself and the old witch. Tonight might be too late. I knew that under the spell of the young Hulda's body I would be powerless. But it would not be too hard to bring myself to kill the repulsive harridan who was Hulda during the daytime.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### The Two Are One!

OLD Hulda sat amid the squalor of her shack in the dilapidated rocking chair and, as she swayed back and forth, crooned a song which contained no melody. It was more like a shrill jabbering incantation than anything else.

Did she know that I had come to kill her? Was she asking the devil, her master, for help?

I turned away from the window. Not yet. There were still three or four hours

of daylight left, and before I killed I had to be sure that the two Huldas were really one.

In the next couple of hours I covered, I imagine, every square inch of the crest and upper slopes of Castle Hill. I saw no other being. There should have been two others—a young girl whom I had seen only at night and a skinny, mangy-looking man. Had either of them been on Castle Hill, I would have come across him or her. Both might have gone down the hill for the day, but that would be stretching coincidence too far. And Tom Anderson had said that Hulda had no daughter.

I returned to the shack. At the side I came across a low mound of fresh dirt at the head of which was a slab—no cross, of course—on which “AMOS” was printed in black paint. The grave was at least six feet long. Would she have dug a grave that size for a dog?

I was convinced. I took the carving knife out of my belt.

There was a vast vacuum under my ribs, and yet I felt no horror at what I was about to do. I couldn't think of myself as a man bent on murder. There was a creature that had to be exterminated for my own safety and Cara's and perhaps for the safety of others.

I pushed the door open and stepped into the shack.

The hag was on her feet, leaning on her gnarled cane, as if expecting me. In her black eyes and on her withered lips there was the same mocking expression I had seen that morning when I had found her in my arms. And because she showed no fear of me, it was I who became afraid.

“Put up that knife,” she ordered in her cracked voice.

I tried to pull my eyes away from the steadiness of her gaze and I could not. It was an effort for me to take two steps toward her, and then I had to stop as if a wall had come up in front of me.

“Where's your daughter?” I demanded.

She laughed. “I have no daughter. You killed my lover. It is right that you should have taken his place.”

With a choked cry I leaped at her. No, leaped isn't the way to put it, although I had gathered my muscles and thrown myself at her with upraised knife. To my surprise and horror I found my movements sluggish, as in a nightmare.

She did not step back; no hint of fear crossed her face. She waited until I was almost on her; then her cane flicked out with remarkable speed and dexterity for a woman her age and struck me across the wrist. The knife fell from my hand.

I stood staring at her, trapped by the power of her intense, hate-filled eyes. I didn't need the knife; I could have wrung her scrawny neck like a chicken's; yet I continued to stand there as if rooted to the spot.

“You killed my lover and now you tried to kill me,” the old witch spat. “For that you must be punished. Now get out.”

I obeyed her. I wandered out of the shack as if in a dream. When I reached the pine wood, I started running and did not stop until I was inside of my bungalow.

CARA was still working on the garden in back. I saw the half-filled bottle of rye on a table—all that remained of my supply—and attacked it. I was downing my third hooker when suddenly the glass stopped halfway to my mouth. It was the whiskey that had done it! I dropped the glass, then lifted the bottle by the neck and dashed it against the wall. The bottle shattered.

“Lane!” Cara came running into the bungalow. “Lane, what's happened?” She looked at me and then at the broken bottle.

“The whiskey was drugged!” I cried. “While we were out of the bungalow, Hulda sneaked in here and put something in the bottles. Good God, it has to be

that, or else I'm stark raving mad!"

She put an arm about my waist and gently led me to the sofa. I buried my face in her lap while she patted me.

That was when I told her everything. She winced when I put into words how I had spent two nights in the shack with the young Hulda and she cried out when I told how I had tried to kill the old witch.

"They are one," I moaned. "In the daylight she is an old hag, her natural form. At night the devil permits her to assume the guise of a desirable young woman."

But Cara was more rational than I. After all, much as my unfaithfulness had hurt her, she had not gone through my harrowing experience.

She said: "You mentioned that the whiskey was drugged. That's possible. And when you tried to—to kill her before, why were you so helpless? Your mind must have been undermined by the drugs and so it had been easier for her to hypnotize you."

"That's it," I agreed eagerly. "And it's the same reason why I went with the young Hulda—drugs and some hellish form of hypnosis." Suddenly my voice went low and hoarse again. "But that doesn't explain the essential horror—the two being one or the one being two."

Cara said: "They say the Indian fakirs do impossible tricks through hypnotizing individuals or groups into seeing things which aren't so. Like a rope standing up in thin air and then disappearing. You never saw this young Hulda except in the vagueness of moonlight. Could you—" there was a catch in her voice—"have imagined that she was young and beautiful?"

I sat up and gaped at her. Having made love to a creature of hell was horrible enough. But to think that it had really been the old harridan whom I had kissed and embraced!

I slid away from Cara, as if I were so unclean that my touch would forever soil her. But she moved after me and held me in her arms, and for a long time we sat like that.

Presently she spoke. "You were right this morning, darling. We'll leave at once."

"No. You said we have to face her and defeat her right here. It is the only way I'll ever be able to call my soul my own again."

I uttered the words, but they weren't really mine. They seemed to come from outside myself. The sun had sunk below the hill and twilight lay in the bungalow. Soon it would be night, the time when the curiously exciting creature with whom I had been the last two nights would again come into being.

I buried my face in my hands. I didn't want to leave. I wanted the night so that Hulda would come to me. I was doomed and there was nothing I could do about it.

Cara's eyes were on me, frightened once more. She knew that I had not told the truth.

"Darling, come now," she begged. "Before it's too late."

I stood up, the movement tearing her arms from me. I walked back and forth like a caged animal, not saying anything, and Cara left off her pleading. She must have known that it would be futile.

NIGHT came. We went through the motions of sitting down at the dinner table, but neither of us really ate. Then we returned to the living room. I slumped down on the sofa and stayed there a long time with my hands between my knees. Cara was curled up on a chair, her eyes never leaving me. Both of us waited for the coming of Hulda.

And I wanted her to come. Whether she was really the old hag seen through a drugged hypnotic spell did not matter.

as the night lengthened. Cara's loyalty and love and devotion did not matter either. I wanted Hulda if it meant going to the depth of hell for her.

Neither of us went to bed. Cara stayed there in the chair, keeping me in the bungalow by her presence.

Only once she spoke. "Fight it, Lane. Your will can be stronger."

My will? I had none. It was the drugged whiskey, I told myself dully; but knowing that really didn't make any difference.

Glancing over at Cara, I noticed that her eyelids were drooping. She had not slept the night before, waiting for me to return, and now drowsiness was overcoming her. Breathlessly I watched Cara nod and then jerk her head up.

Eventually she was fast asleep. I tiptoed out of the bungalow. If Hulda would not come to me, I would go to her.

She was waiting for me near the pool. The path of a white half-moon streamed over her left shoulder. She was wearing that same, skin-tight black dress. Moonbeams danced in her blue-black hair and her velvet skin of undefinable color.

I put my hands on her. This was not the body of a withered hag. It was young skin and flesh. She shrugged me off and her blood-red lips twisted in a scowl.

"Do you think you can try to kill Hulda in the afternoon and embrace her at night?"

"Forgive me," I pleaded. "I didn't know what I was doing."

"It's your wife," she said. "She comes between us. You must get rid of her."

I wasn't myself. The being I had become cried: "I'll send her away."

She shook her head. "That won't do. You must kill her."

The shock of her words brought me back a little way to normal. I flinched away from her. She moved after me, stood so close to me that her breasts brushed against me. I couldn't keep my arms from closing about her.

"Last night you said you wanted to stay with me always," she said. "This is your chance."

I swayed as if drunk or very ill and said nothing.

"Listen to me," her voice went on. "Go down to your bungalow and ask her to go swimming with you in the pool. When she is in the water with you, hold her under. You can say that she was drowned by accident."

"No," I moaned. "I'll send her away. I'll make her hate me so that she'll no longer come between us. But I can't kill her."

She slid away from me and there was contempt on her face. "I thought you wanted me. Don't come near me until she is dead."

I tried to look away and found it im-



possible. Her body was all I could see or think of.

"And you'll be waiting for me?" I asked. "You'll be mine forever?"

"Yes."

It was somebody else—or something else—possessing my body who turned and started down the hill.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Death on the Cliff

CARA was still asleep, her head stirring fitfully on the arm of the chair. I strode quickly over to her and shook her shoulder. The sooner I got this over with, the sooner I would be able to return to Hulda.

She awoke with a start. "Lane!" she cried with a voice of fear. She sat up, rubbing her eyes, and gripped my hand. "I had the most awful nightmare, darling. I can't recall what it was, but—"

"Cara, you've got to help me," I cut in. "I'm going mad. That woman is drawing me away. I thought perhaps a swim in the pool would help; it's icy-cold at night. But I don't trust myself to go up there alone."

"But the pool's on top of the hill, so near to—" She couldn't bring herself to mention Hulda's name.

"That's why I want you to come with me," I said.

Her face swam before me through a mist. She wasn't my wife or even a woman, but only an obstacle I had to eliminate in order to obtain Hulda permanently. My words may or may not have fooled her, but my impatient and at the same time abstracted manner did not. She must have known that I had been out of the bungalow while she slept. For a moment the outline of her features became clear, and they were twisted with something worse than horror and despair. Almost I was jerked back to my former

self, but the mist returned, coming again between her and myself.

"All right, then, I'll go alone," I snapped.

"No, wait." Her voice was thin and very tired.

She took my arm and silently we walked up the path. When we reached the pool, she stepped out of her clothes and waited for me. She stood where several minutes before Hulda had stood, and the moonlight also lay over her shoulder, and moonbeams reached out to caress her brown curls and the glory of her body. But I scarcely glanced at her. I ran past her and dove.

The night-cooled water sent myriad tingling knives into my skin. But it could not cool the fires burning within me or blot out the image of Hulda.

I broke through to the surface. Cara was still standing on a rock, looking past me as if she were searching the pool for something.

"Come on in," I called impatiently.

Her white body cut the surface cleanly. I ducked my head and saw her form swimming gracefully under water toward the opposite side.

Now, a voice that was not my own penetrated my brain. Get it over with quickly!

I reached her when she was starting to come up. My arms flung themselves about her waist, pulling her down. She thrashed, trying to fight her way up, but I held on. My lungs began to burn. If I tried to hold her down this way I would drown as quickly as she did. My hands moved up her slippery body, frightened on her shoulders, and with the weight of my body I pushed myself up at the same time that I shoved her down.

A terrific blow crashed on the top of my head, jolting me to the spine. Every muscle in my body went numb. Cara squirmed out of my grip. Too late I realized that Cara and I had been beneath



a rock shelf which hung four or five feet over the pool and the bottom of which was under water. Blackness closed in over me. I did not know that water was filling my lungs. For the next few minutes I knew nothing at all. . . .

WHEN I opened my eyes again, I was out of the pool, lying on my stomach on the huge flat rock. I felt Cara astride my back; felt her palms on my ribs as she pumped water out of me. And with every forward motion of her torso I heard a sob tear from her throat.

I had recovered more than consciousness. I had recovered my soul. And when I thought of how I had tried to murder the woman I loved, I regretted that she had not let me die.

Febly I twisted around so that I faced her.

"Cara!" I moaned. "I tried to kill you! I don't deserve to live."

Through a mist of tears she smiled. I tried to sit up, but weakness sent my head back on the rock.

She stretched out at my side, put an arm over my chest. "Lie still, darling! You're all right now."

"You knew that overhanging rock was there?"

"Yes," she said simply. "That's why I swam to it. I had to take the chance that it might kill you. If—if you had murdered me in the pool and gone to that creature, you—well, you would have been better off dead."

"You should have let me die!" I cried. "I'm no good. You can't save me. That witch will come again and then—"

"No! I won't let her."

A screech as of a wild animal rent the night air. Cara sat up and I saw her face go taut with terror. Then she was on her feet and running off the rock.

It required all my strength to rise on my elbow and turn my head. And then I too was screaming as I saw the young

Hulda come rushing from the pine trees, her long blue-black hair streaming behind her, her thighs flashing between the slit of her black dress. And in her upraised right hand she clasped the carving knife with which I had attempted to kill the old witch that afternoon.

She must have been watching us from the trees; had seen Cara drag me out of the pool, had heard our words. And she must have known that Cara had defeated her.

"Cara, don't!" I yelled. "Run away!"

But Cara was running straight for Hulda, to intercept her before she could reach me with the knife. Desperately I got to my feet, and could do no more than totter there as the two women met.

Again I screamed as the knife drove down at Cara. She swung her body aside, and the blade sliced skin from her upper arm. Then Cara had both her hands clamped over Hulda's knife-wrist, and she brought her knee up into Hulda's stomach. Hulda fell backward, dropping the knife amid the weeds.

Weakness sent me down on my knees. Hulda had bounded up again and both women were grappling, gouging, biting. The blood from Cara's wound flowed over her white body and splotted Hulda.

On hands and knees I was crawling off the rock. Hulda was screeching, not in her own voice, but cracked and shrill with the voice of the old witch. Her black gown had been ripped off by Cara's tearing fingernails and now she was also naked. Blood which did not come from Cara's knife wound spotted both their bodies as teeth and nails ripped flesh.

Hulda was weakening more rapidly. Cara was taller and more supple and she was fighting for the man she loved. And, crawling, I had almost reached them to add what little strength I had to Cara's.

"The cliff!" I shrieked suddenly.

Neither of them knew that they had moved nearer and nearer to the edge of

the cliff until now they were only two or three feet away.

**S**OMEHOW I found myself on my feet, stumbling toward them. Hulda's heels were at the very edge now. She cast a frantic glance behind her and pressed herself against Cara. It was too late. Her heels came down on nothingness; she tottered backward. With a wild cry she gripped Cara. Her weight pulled Cara after her.

But by that time I had reached them. I lunged, flinging my arms about Cara's waist.

I felt her falling away from me.

Then Hulda was gone. Her scream keened out thinly, and was abruptly cut off. Cara's legs were over the edge. I dropped to my knees, hanging onto her. In my weakened condition her weight was too much for me. Both of us would slide over.

Suddenly the tug of Cara's body eased. She had pressed her torso against the ground, lessening the drag of her weight. After that it was not hard to pull her up to firm ground.

I left her there and fetched my shirt and tore it into strips and bandaged her wounds. After that we lay in each other's arms on the ground, waiting for strength to return to us.

"What was she, Lane?" Cara muttered.

"I couldn't have been drugged; I tasted none of that whiskey. How could the old hag have hypnotized me into seeing her young and beautiful? How could she have kept me under the spell while I fought her? There must have been two of them."

I said nothing.

Presently we were strong enough to make our way down to our bungalow. Sheer exhaustion closed our eyes with sleep as soon as we hit the bed.

The next morning we quickly packed our belongings and carried them down to the car. At last we were ready to leave forever the spot where we had anticipated a joyous summer and which had been turned into a section of hell.

"Wait here, Cara," I told her. "I'll be right back."

"I'm going with you," she said quietly, understandingly.

So together we crashed through underbrush to the foot of the cliff. Hulda lay crushed on the rocks.

Not the young, hellish, exotic girl whose lure had almost overcome me. Clutching each other, Cara and I stared at the nude, withered body of the old witch. Crooked lines of dried blood ran over the leathery skin where Cara's fingernails had ripped flesh last night. We did not speak as we slowly walked back to the car. There was nothing either of us could say. . . .

THE END

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A long novel of one man's struggle against a master of murder!

by **Ray King**

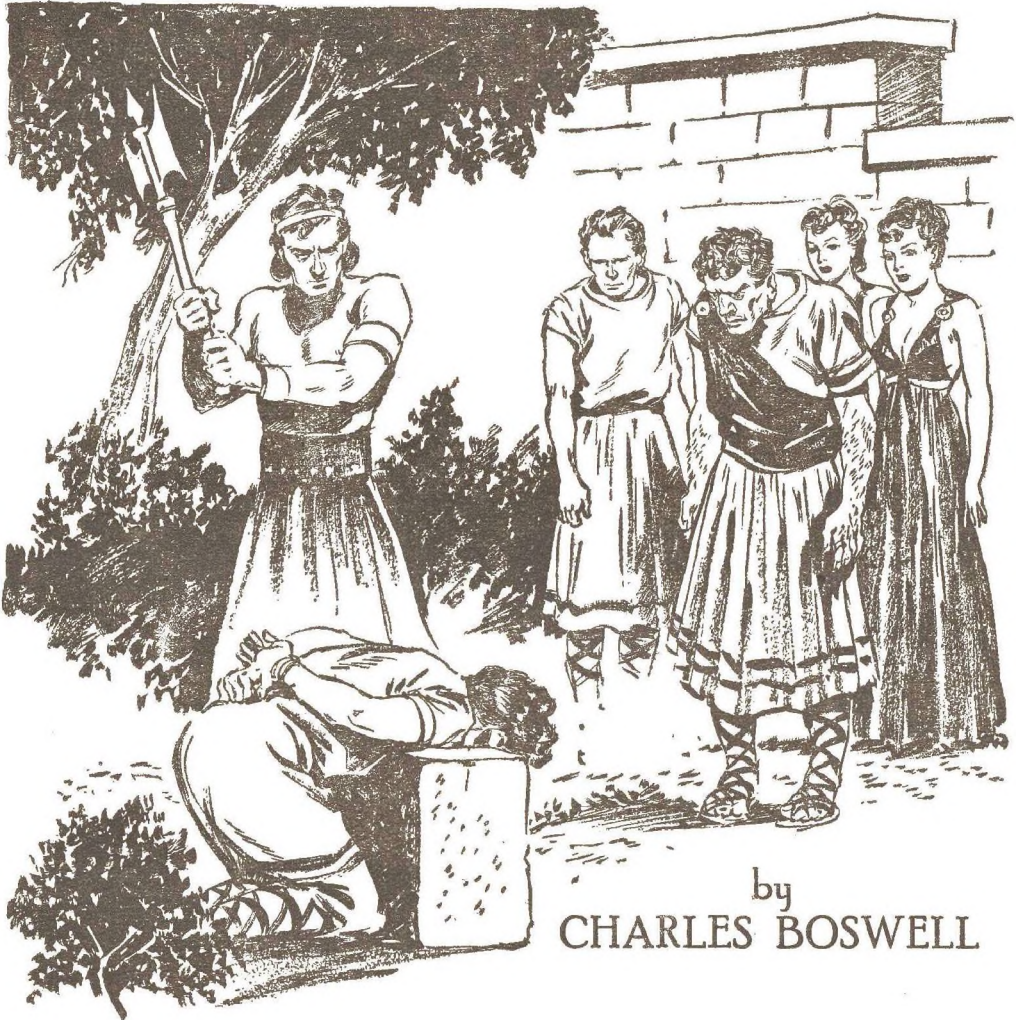
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# Monsters of Monarchy

No. 3—Egomaniac of Antiquity



by  
CHARLES BOSWELL

*The Emperor Caligula—the cruelest Roman of them all. . . .*

CASSIUS CHAEREA, captain of the Praetorian guard, had the honor post as sentry at the Palatine, Roman palace of the Caesars. Born of a noble, patrician family, war-worn and decorated for bravery in battle under the beloved Emperor Tiberius, Cassius was proudest of the proud—a fit man to wear the plumes and helmet and carry the shield and sword of empire.

But now, in the year A. D. 37, the pride of Cassius was tinged with sorrows, for Tiberius was dead and another was about to ascend the throne. Woe be it, this other was not Germanicus, the appointed of Tiberius, for Germanicus, alas, was dead as well. Both fell gallantly before the Gauls—so ran the public announcements. But the sorrow of Cassius was of a more morbid turn, not the right-

eous, almost joyous weeping of a soldier for an honorably slain hero. For rumors reached Cassius, well founded rumors from the lips of those who'd talked with the lictors recovering the two immortal bodies, that the death wounds suffered by Tiberius and Germanicus were wounds in the back and the arrows inflicting them were not Gallic but of Roman manufacture.

Caligula! Caligula now in ascendancy to the laurel crown! As son of Germanicus, this individual was naming himself Emperor of all Rome and there were none to stop him.

And Cassius was right, for Caligula, of Tiberius could but know, he would twist in his tomb!"

And Cassius was right, for Caligula, of all the heirs of Tiberius, was the most hated, the most despised—the most feared. It was for this reason that the youth now coming into power had spent the major portion of his life far from Rome. Repulsive in appearance, indecent in his talk, not to be trusted with arms that were the right of every citizen, Caligula had hitherto resided in practical confinement at Capri, the summer palace of the Caesars.

"He killed them!" the guard captain muttered to himself. "Assassins in his employ murdered the Emperor—murdered his own father! From what I've heard it is an act typical of his spleen, so cruel is he, so greedy for the grasp of power!"

At that moment a trumpet sounded and in the distance the guard captain saw the first few units of an approaching procession. At its head was a prancing white charger and astride the massive animal could be made out the stooped, huddled figure of a man.

**CALIGULA!** Caligula come to claim the palace of the Caesars as his own! Cassius Chaerea had never seen the new

emperor but he recognized the twisted legs, hunched figure, and prematurely bald pate from description. Snapping to attention, resolving to serve his new master with the best that was in him despite his prejudices, the veteran guard officer saluted smartly. Such an attitude, he believed, was the duty of a soldier, such was for the good of Rome.

"Hail Caesar!" Cassius Chaerea cried.

But from Caligula there was no returning hail. Rushing his charger up the palace steps, he slid his horse's hooves to a stop dangerously close to Cassius Chaerea. Surly, frowning, Caligula ordered: "Off with your helmet!"

Obediently the guard captain removed his plume-festooned headgear and stood bewildered before the Emperor.

"Bah!" Caligula squealed and, pursing his lips, spat into Cassius Chaerea's unflinching face. "Hair! Hair on your head! You have hair on your head and the Emperor has none! No man shall have that which the Emperor hasn't!"

Caligula paused and with squinting, glaring eyes, watched for what effect his words would produce. Then he went on: "The next time I see you, if you still have hair, it may be that you will shortly no longer have a head on which to wear it!"

**NOR** was Cassius Chaerea the only one affected by the shaved head order. Such was Caligula's vanity that each and every male brought into any contact with him was forced, on penalty of death, to be shorn of his locks. The command did not stop with living persons. Rather, the great hallways of the Palatine being decorated with marble statues of the Olympian gods and likenesses of former Caesars, these were broken, chipped, and beheaded before the new Emperor had occupied the royal mansion a week.

So began Caligula's reign, his egocentricity taking turns for the worse by the minute. At a banquet given following his

coronation there was seated near him a young bride and groom, a couple of noble family married that very morning.

Eyeing the beautiful Livia Orestilla and becoming insanely envious of the possession her husband was soon to have of her virgin body, Caligula shouted across the table: "Stop hugging my wife!"

A dead silence followed the mad command. Caligula arose from where he was sitting, crossed around the table, and grabbed the shrinking bride by her wrist. "By imperial decree," he hissed, "your marriage is annulled! From this moment on you are married to me!"

So saying, Caligula, the woman over his shoulder, her husband still sitting dazed and dumbfounded and fearful of his life to protest, carried Livia Orestilla off to a nearby bedchamber. The next morning he declared himself divorced from her and banished her into exile. "I do not want her to return to her husband," he laughed to his intimates. "If she did, my prowess at the marriage bed might suffer by comparison!"

It was for this same reason that the Emperor, a month or so later, committed one of the first acts of barbaric and inhuman cruelty to later characterize his reign. Banquets nightly on the most expensive of foods, week long orgies in which all the courtiers of Rome had gotten and stayed drunk, were fast exhausting the imperial exchequer and it was up to Caligula to impose a new tax to raise additional funds. He levied on prostitutes, not even excepting his favorite, a flattering wench named Pyrallis. But she complained, claiming she couldn't pay her rent and the tax as well. Whereupon Caligula insisted that she pay the tax but dishonored the Palatine by supplying the woman with free, royal quarters.

At the time there was visiting Caligula a suzerain prince named Ptolemy. Allowed the run of the palace, he was likewise accorded the privileges of the glam-

orous Pyrallis. All was good and well until the ladies of the court began tittering that Pyrallis had expressed a preference for the company of the stalwart, muscular Ptolemy as opposed to shrivelled, bandy-legged Caligula.

The gossip reached the ears of the Emperor. He was infuriated. Condemning Ptolemy to the arena, he was forced to fight a professional gladiator. Much to Caligula's chagrin, Ptolemy won, slaying his adversary. Now the Emperor's despair was complete, and brooding, searching in the dark regions of his mind for what he thought a fitting, properly humiliating torture, he hit upon emasculation.

Nude and so mutilated, Ptolemy was paraded before the assembled beauties of the empire. "What good would he be to you now?" Caligula chortled. Afterwards he had Ptolemy led to the execution block, commanding the headsman to "strike so that he will feel himself dying!"

**C**ASSIUS CHAEREA, captain of the guard, watched these incidents, woe-fully shaking his head. Such dissipations, such cruelties, he knew, were fast contributing to the fall of Rome. Still, there was little that could be done about it. The populace of Rome held the Emperor in a kind of veneration that was tied up with their deep-seated religion. The Emperor's will was the will of the Olympian Gods; the Emperor's actions were privileged and divine. As far as civic revolt was concerned, Cassius knew that it would never come about. The people, as a mass, would never rise up and overthrow their brutal and insane sovereign. But one man, Cassius reflected . . . one brave man might . . . might be able to do something. . . .

In the meantime Caligula carried on with his inanities and his insanities. He married Lollina Paulina but shortly divorced and exiled her because she was

just like any other man's wife—only a woman. Casting about for something special as the fit mate for the mighty Caligula, he found the nearest thing to himself that might have been produced—his sister Drusilla.

This incestuous relationship, Caligula declared, was only legal for the Emperor—for Caligula! But it appears that the Gods frowned on the union for it was fruitless and within a year Drusilla died.

Suspecting that she had been poisoned, Caligula arrested every baker, butcher, fruiterer, and vintner that served the palace, together with their entire business staffs and the whole households of each principal and employee. These, lined up on the palace grounds, were inspected personally by the Emperor. There was no judge, no trial, no jury. "Each one of the dogs, from that cross-eyed fellow there to that cross-eyed fellow there," ordered the fuming Caligula, his hand sweeping down the line, indicating some two score quaking, fearful persons, "will be thrown to the lions and torn to bits! . . . As for the rest—they will be imprisoned!"

And Caligula's imprisonment meant the most frightful kind of torture. Cells, the size of coffins, occupied a dungeon beneath the Palatine. Cramped, barely able to move a muscle, in utter darkness, with hardly enough air to breathe, and fed barely enough bread and water to sustain life, the condemned were left to go out of their minds and die, perhaps in six months, perhaps in six years.

The Emperor married again, now to Junia Claudilla. On his wedding trip, a sea voyage, he invited his father-in-law, Silanus. The old man, a sufferer from sea-sickness, declined the invitation and thereby wrote his own death warrant.

"He wanted to stay home to wrest the controls of government away from me while I was absent," was Caligula's explanation of this killing. Disgraced, Junia

Claudilla was exiled and Caesonia, a woman of the streets, taken to wife in her stead.

This woman was the only one who utterly pleased Caligula. She was bawdy, lewd, and, what was more important, always eager to flatter him. During the course of stag entertainments which Caligula frequently gave, Caesonia was in the habit of dropping in and suddenly exhibiting herself naked and in lascivious poses to the Emperor's male guests. Arousing their desires, she would refuse to let them touch her. "I am for Caligula alone!" she would cry. "Caligula," she would go on, rather forgetting her past public history, "is the only man worthy of having the right to me!"

**T**HOUGH such things amused and puffed up the Emperor in his lighter moods, black depressions fostered by a subconscious realization of physical and intellectual inferiority sometimes caused him to resort to direr means of asserting his ego.

The arena sacrifice of slaves to ravaging, starved lions, tigers, and leopards were daily amusements. Public executions of the disobedient, the insolent, and those for one paltry reason or another out of imperial favor, took place frequently. Actually, and beneath a surface attitude of self-adulation, Caligula hated himself—and all the rest of the world as well.

Once at a banquet, attended by visiting ambassadors, he was laughing. Inquiring why, the Emperor told the emissaries: "It amuses me to think that if I should give the word your heads would be cut off."

Another time he remarked to a senator: "I would that all Rome had but one throat—it would be so much simpler to cut!"

In the last year of his reign, with a view to mass murder, he conceived the most abominable plot it has ever be-

hooved the mind of man to create. His wife, Caesonia, had recently been delivered of child. Caligula knew it was his, he said, because the infant when placed in the same crib with one of its baby cousins, tried to claw out the other child's eyes.

In honor of his paternity, Caligula threw a bridge across the bay of Baiae. It was a pontoon affair, 3,600 double paces in length. As soon as it was completed, Caligula, astride his horse, rode across and back alone and then invited the public to try out the span.

Several thousand started across the water. As soon as the bridge was filled, Caligula sprang to a lever device which opened sea-cocks in the pontoons and the bridge, with all its frantic, screaming visitors, sank.

"I crossed!" the Emperor cried, laugh-

ing madly. "I—I—I, Caligula—crossed without harm! Why couldn't they?"

It was that night, January 14th, A. D. 41, that Cassius Chaerea took action. Despite the horror enacted before their eyes, the Roman people were still submissive and the guard captain realized that if something was to be done, he alone would have to do it.

Caligula was in his bath, relaxing after a day of tense and gratifying excitement. Cassius Chaerea, creeping past special attendants, plunged into the colored tile pool with the Emperor, his dagger unsheathed.

"I live!" the Emperor cried as the steel struck into his vitals. "I live! Caligula—Caesar lives!"

But he didn't. He died, ego and all, just like any other man.

THE END

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# PREY FOR THE DAUGHTER

*The curse of the Praying Mantis was a madness in my blood—a raging fire that made me lure men to unholy love and horrible death. . . . For the men I kissed were found headless and hideously mutilated. My beloved Norman knew my frenzy, yet he took my yearning body in his arms in a desperate effort to cure me—or die!*

## CHAPTER ONE

### The Dawn of Passion

I HARDLY know when Jura Singh came into my life; he was so much a part of my early years that it seemed he was with us as far back as I can remember. But I will never forget the day he went away—for on that day





# OF HELL •

by CONRAD KIMBALL

*A novelette of a girl in whose blood were the seeds of madness*



all the old ways changed. That day the peace and happiness of my childhood was suddenly ended, and something sinisterly evil came over me that was to transform my life into a ghastly nightmare. That day, at the age of twelve, I became a woman—a woman with unholy passions and a Circe-like lure that beckoned irresistibly to the grave. . . .

Jura Singh's position in our household was unique. My father found him on

one of his numerous exploring trips in the Orient and brought him back to America. He was, I suppose, father's personal man—but he was far more than that. He was a servant without portfolio; almost one of the family—as helpful to mother as to father, and a fascinating man of mystery to the little tousle-head who listened eagerly to his strange stories and patient lectures.

He was a few years younger than father, a few years older than mother; a handsome, brown-skinned, dark-eyed man in his middle thirties. When he spoke, people turned to listen—and when he smiled his thin, inscrutable half-smile they forgot to turn away again until he was finished.

The bug-man, I used to call him, because he kept a marvelous collection of insects in one end of the greenhouse. Often I watched him as he tended them and told me amazing stories about their lives and the strange powers some of them exerted over humans.

And that was where he took me on the day that was to divert the course

of my life into a channel of stark tragedy. . . .

"Watch them closely, Miss Doris," he instructed, when I sat opposite him across a little wire cage. In it was a twig to which two praying mantises clung. "You know the little 'prophets'. That one nearer to you is the female. This one on my side is the male. It is their mating season, the time when they make love very much like human beings."

Something about the curious, half-erect insects fascinated me. Perhaps it was because they looked so human as they clung to each other. I watched them wide-eyed—and across the cage, Jura Singh watched them with eyes that were like great, dark magnets; eyes that furnished a background which reached out for mine and drew them to him irresistibly.

"Watch them now, watch them closely," his low voice seemed to be speaking inside my brain—and suddenly my mouth dropped open in amazement.

The mantises had changed their positions slightly. Now one—the female mantis—had the male locked in an embrace so that he could not move. And she was biting him. She was biting his head. Not only biting—she was *eating* him!

"Stop them, Jura Singh!" I gasped, as soon as I realized what I was witnessing. "Stop them before she kills him!"

But Jura Singh shook his head slowly.

"No, Miss Doris, we must not stop them," he said softly. "That is their nature—the nature of the world. When she has no more need of him the female mantis kills her mate and devours his body. That is the end of their love, just as it is with humans. I brought you here today because I am going away. I shall no longer be here to watch over you—so I am leaving you to the little prophets. You will remember what they have taught you. They will not let you forget—and they will watch over you."

The drone of his voice rang in my ears, but my eyes were riveted on the two insects—and as I watched them horror distilled within my brain. Terrifying horror and a vague sense of hideous evil that chilled my blood and turned my fingers and toes ice-cold.

How long I sat there I do not know—but that grisly feast was only half-finished when my taut nerves snapped and I burst into hysterical sobbing.

JURA SINGH was gone from the greenhouse when I recovered my composure, and he was gone from the big house in which we lived when I went to look for him.

He had left me to the praying mantises. . . .

That night my mother left me also. It was Nelly, her personal maid, who found her. Nelly came running down the stairs shrieking something that was hardly intelligible about Mrs. Bradley and poison. They telephoned for the doctor and would not let me go up to see mother until he came, and then it was too late. She was dead.

My father stayed only a week after that. For some months he had been toying with the idea of undertaking a dangerous expedition into Tibet, and mother's death decided him. He kissed me good-bye—and that was the last I ever was to see of him.

After our house was closed up I went to live with father's older brother, my Uncle Fleming. He and my cousin, Myron, who was fifteen years older than I, did their best to make me feel at home, but it was some time before I recovered from the shock of my loss and sudden transplanting. All that had been connected with my old life seemed to end with that stunning tragedy—all but the praying mantises.

For some strange reason which I could not explain I took with me the

cage with the half dozen mantises from Jura Singh's entomological collection. During the first night in my new home the little door of the wire container was unaccountable opened, and when I awoke in the morning the insects were gone—but as my eyes searched the walls of the room in which they had been left a curious feeling came over me, a feeling that they were not lost but were somewhere close by, watching me.

Jura Singh had left me to the mantises. He had said that they would watch over me, would not let me forget—and the memory sent a cold chill trickling down my spine. The memory of that female mantis greedily devouring the body of her mate. . . .

That ghastly sight remained vivid in my memory for months. It sent tremors coursing through me in the middle of the day and woke me out of a sound sleep at the dead of night. It seemed to be on my mind constantly, and I was aware of the effect it was having upon me. It was making me shy, making me self-conscious and anxious to avoid the society of boys—at the same instant that shocking impulses suddenly flashed into my mind and sent waves of hot blood surging into my cheeks!

Uncle Fleming seemed to realize that something was wrong. Many times I noticed him studying me with a worried expression on his face, and finally he decided that I should be sent away to a girls' school. That was better. There the memory of the mantises dimmed and gradually faded away. By the time I was sixteen I had all but forgotten about them.

That was when I met Paul Anderson—and for the second time my world came crashing down upon me as I realized the ghastly curse that was rioting in my veins . . .

Paul's father was the caretaker on Uncle Fleming's summer estate at

Marblehead. He was home from college, spending his vacation with his family, when we arrived to occupy the big house. Several days I stood near the edge of the bluffs and watched him as he swam off the float, hundreds of feet below; watched his lithe, sun-tanned body, naked except for swimming trunks, cut through the blue water of the Atlantic—watched him bound up onto the float and stand basking in the sunshine.

And as I watched, strange, half-sensed desires began to well up within me. A strange, tingling excitement came over me. It set my pulses throbbing and made my breath come faster—until the palpitation of my bosom drove me back farther from the edge, as if his eyes could see and understand my reaction to his presence!

I wanted to be down there with him—wanted him with a tensivity that amazed me; but something held me back. It would have been a simple matter to meet him, a natural thing to join him in any of those dips—and yet a faint warning in the back of my brain restrained me.

For almost a week I avoided the water when he would be there—and then I deliberately went down the long stairway to the beach half an hour before I knew he would arrive. Resolutely I had told myself that morning that I would do no such thing—and yet my feet led me to the top of the stairs as if they were quite independent of my control.

I was swimming off the float when he came down the steps. My pulses pounded like miniature tomtoms when I saw him sprint across the beach and dive into the water—and I put every atom of my strength into a sprint that carried me much farther out than I had ever gone. Perhaps that was why I was panting for breath when I got back to the float—but that was not why I dropped one arm so that the shoulder-strap of my suit slipped down when he reached over the side to help me up onto the platform.

THAT innocent-appearing accident was deliberate—and yet I had nothing to do with it! Something within me had taken hold of me, something that gloried in the startled admiration that leaped into his eyes. I could feel the crimson stealing into my cheeks as he stared, but it wasn't a flush of shame.

And when he looked into my eyes I was certain that he could read what was in my mind! He knew that—and yet I didn't care!

"You—you must be Miss Bradley," he finally managed to find words that broke the tension.

"And you are Paul Anderson," I heard a voice answering; my voice, but one that I hardly recognized as my own—for it was husky and low, a voice that throbbed with emotion and with invitation.

We swam together after that; swam and then lay talking on the float—while I fought to restrain the wild, unreasoning desire to take him into my arms. It was I who suggested that we had had enough—I who led the way to the shore—and it was I who tripped and started to fall when we reached a point well hidden by the rocks.

Quickly he sprang to catch me—and then I was in his arms. Wild delirium rioted through my brain as his lips found mine and clung to them in a kiss that I returned a hundred fold. Madness seethed in my blood as I pressed close against his naked chest, as his hands caressed me. . . .

Suddenly something exploded in my brain. Suddenly his face blurred before my eyes—and in its place I saw a female praying mantis devouring the head of its mate!

"That is the end of their love, just as it is with humans!" Jura Singh's voice rang in my ears—and I knew that the mantises were not letting me forget!

They were not letting me forget that

I was one with them. They were not letting me forget that when I had enough of this man I would kill him! They were watching over me when I was in danger—when I was hovering on the brink of murder!

Terror froze me where I stood—and then a flood of revulsion deluged me. With an inarticulate gasp, I sprang back and broke away from his eager arms, hurled him from me as I ran for the stairs and raced up the hundreds of steps until my pounding heart threatened to burst. Not until I reached the house did I slow my frantic pace; not until I was locked safely in my own room did I drop to the bed and give way to the tears that were stinging my eyelids.

I had been deliberately shameless before a man! I had led him on to familiarities, had encouraged him like a wanton of the streets! I had cheapened and disgraced myself—and now the high tide of shame ran strong within me. I despised and excoriated myself; I reviled myself and swore never to look at another man—and yet that night I crept out of bed and slipped into a bathing suit.

The moon was bright as I carefully picked my way across the grounds toward the bluffs in a course that would pass within sight of the caretaker's house. My heart was pounding as I walked on toward the drumming of the surf—and then it leaped into my throat.

My straining ears had caught the sound of footsteps behind me. He was coming! Paul was coming! I glimpsed him as he came toward me. . . .

I stood in the moonlight at the edge of the bluff, the cold luminance bathing my slender body, turning it into gleaming marble—a marble statue that breathed and walked and throbbed with desire. I danced ahead of him—danced ahead of those hands that were so eager to reach me. . . .

His face was alight, eager with antici-

pation as he came running toward me. Utter madness raged in my brain—and then I knew no more. . . .

## CHAPTER TWO

### My First Corpse

I KNEW no more until I awoke in the morning and found myself in my bed. For long moments I lay there, thinking—desperately thinking; trying to reconstruct what had happened. Warily, like a trapped animal, I got out of bed and looked around me.

There on a chair was the wet bathing suit I had worn last night. So I *had* been down to the beach; that memory was no figment of my imagination. And there, in the center of my dressing table, lay *the half-consumed body of a praying mantis!*

My heart seemed to stop beating as I stared at my hands, at my body, at my face. They were clean—all except faint smudges of crimson at the corners of my mouth; and that was my lipstick. Nothing but lipstick. It *could* be nothing but lipstick!

I was repeating that over and over, drilling it into my brain, when I went down to breakfast—but the moment I stepped into the dining room my mental chant ceased. Something was wrong; I sensed that immediately. Neither Uncle Fleming nor Myron had been to breakfast, and the house seemed stripped of servants.

"They're all down at the beach, Miss Doris," one of the maids finally told me. "Something terrible happened there last night. Paul Anderson must have gone swimming and a shark got him. They found his body, but the head and one of the arms were gone—"

A man-eating shark off the Marble-head beach! That was impossible! I knew it was impossible—and so should every-

one else. They ought to know that Paul had been murdered! They ought to know that he had been lured to his death—by a murderess—by a hell-ridden cannibal!

Yet they did not know. They accepted the absurd theory of the shark, and my monstrous secret was safe, hidden from everyone—except myself. I alone knew what must have happened out there at the edge of the bluff. I alone knew the murderous mania that comes over the female mantis when her mate has fulfilled his mission. I alone must hide that hellish, soul-writing secret that would give me no peace day or night: I alone—

But that night I thought that I was not alone in my damning knowledge. My heart stood still, and cold, clammy perspiration beaded my face and limbs as I crouched in hiding and listened to Myron talking with Uncle Fleming.

"There is something I know about last night that I did not dare mention at the coroner's inquest this morning," my cousin's hesitant words pounded against my eardrums. "Doris had a rendezvous with young Anderson at about eleven-thirty. I was restless and couldn't sleep. I was standing at my window when I saw her leave the house in a bathing suit. Naturally, I followed to see what took her to the beach at such an hour.

"She went down past the Anderson house and Paul came out to her, and then—well, er—it was pretty raw. They were in each other's arms when Paul must have heard me. He warned her, and they darted off into the shadows toward the stairway—"

That was all he had seen. Thank God, that was all! I felt my knees buckling beneath me from sheer relief—but suddenly my uncle's grim voice stabbed through my moiling thoughts.

"It's in her blood—rotten blood!" he muttered in syllables that dripped with bitterness. "Poor devil, she can't help it—she inherited that from her mother.

Perhaps I ought to have told you this before, Myron—but Thomas was my brother, and I am proud of our family. The reason Evelyn Bradley committed suicide was because Thomas had discovered that she was having a beastly affair with that Hindu, Jura Singh! When they knew that the rotten mess was about to be exposed, the Hindu disappeared and she took poison—and poor Tom went off to his death.

“He made me swear to look after that girl when he made me her guardian, and I have tried—but her blood is rotten. There is no use having a row with her, Myron. As long as we are the only ones who know about this, we’ll keep it to ourselves—and from now on we’ll watch her like hawks. Poor Tom—maybe it is just as well that he never came back.”

My mother—and Jura Singh! Those words seared into my brain as if they were written there in acid. My mother—and a Hindu! My mother. . . . Now I understood what Jura Singh had meant.

“—*the female mantis kills her mate and devours his body,*” his words clarioned in my brain. “*That is the end of their love, just as it is with humans—*”

And now I understood. . . . He had fled because he feared for his life; because he was afraid she would kill him. And I was like her. Her blood was my blood; hot blood that leaped with passion—and then murdered! Poor Paul Anderson had not had time to flee. . . . I was worse than a wanton; I was a murderous lure that meant death to any man who yielded to my charms. . . .

**W**ITH that realization my cup of horror ran over. Somehow I managed to reach the foot of the stairs before I collapsed. For weeks I lay in bed, followed by weeks in a private sanitarium. From there Myron took me out West, to a ranch that was really another sanitarium. Gradually my strength returned,

and the horrible nightmare receded from my mind. Gradually I again became a human being—and realized that I could be around men without being metamorphosed into a murderous animal.

The doctors at the sanitarium, the hands at the ranch, the ranchman’s son—none of them started my blood churning. Grimly I had resolved to eschew any contact with men, but gradually that determination weakened and I began to feel that I was over-stressing what had happened to me.

Perhaps, after all, the shocking effect Paul Anderson had had upon me was only one of those peculiar quirks that often crop up in adolescent girls. Perhaps there *had* been no more to that fatal night than Myron witnessed. Perhaps Paul *had* fallen over the bluff and been battered on the rocks or had been gnawed by a shark. . . .

Myron helped my recovery greatly. He visited me frequently, stayed with me for periods and did all that he could to bring me back to normalcy. It was he who brought me home at the end of two years; brought me home to an uncle who greeted me as if nothing ever had happened.

“This is a gloomy old house for a charming young lady like you, Doris,” he grinned at me affectionately after I had been home about a week. “I have a better suggestion—the Moharney Camp in Maine. There you will have a chance to mingle with young people of your own age. Myron needs a vacation, too, so he has agreed to go with you and spend a while at the camp.”

A young people’s camp. . . . A cold trickle inched its way down my spine and I could feel the blood ebbing from my cheeks—but I resolutely fought off my trepidation. This was my chance to prove to myself that I was cured, my chance to assure myself of a wholesome, normal life. If I failed now—

But I would not fail!

And at the end of a week at Camp Moharney I knew I had not failed. I had entered into every activity with zest. I had been swimming, canoeing, fishing, dancing and just sitting and talking with men—and I had been like any other girl. I was cured; the madness was swept out of my life forever!

That was what I exultingly told myself as I was dressing on the fourth of August; and on that night the Moharney invitation dance was held.

The day was hot, sultry, one of those breathlessly humid days that can make even the Maine woods feel like a tropical jungle. I felt the heat far more than usual; felt it from the moment I got out of bed. By night my nerves were taut, on edge—and that was the night I met Ralph Sabin.

Sabin owned a private hunting camp half a mile down the lake. He was tall and good-looking; a man with an engaging smile and eyes that said more than his lips. Something seemed to pass between us the moment I met him—something that sent a frantic warning scurrying to my brain. Perhaps it was the thrilling tingle that crept up my arm when our hands met; perhaps the strange, half-formed impulses within me.

"Stop! Stop now, before it is too late!" the warning whisper stabbed into my consciousness; but then Ralph Sabin had me in his arms and was leading me onto the

dance floor—and after that I could not stop.

After that we were inseparable. We danced every dance; danced them subconsciously, for our thoughts were not on our feet. I wanted this man, I told myself again and again; I wanted him until the wanting became a livid ache. And his eyes told me that I did not want in vain.

"It's beastly hot here, Doris," he whispered at the end of one of the numbers. "My place is much higher and cooler. Let's go there for a while."

Now the warning to refuse was only a dim, scarcely audible echo. I wanted to go with him, and I went—while the rhythmic beat of the tom-tom began to swell in my pulses. We went to his camp and we danced; danced to soft music in his large galleried living room—and with each note madness crept into my brain. Desperately I tried to stave it off, but I was like a child struggling with a giant. The touch of his fingers maddened me, flooded my brain with impulses that were irresistible. . .

### CHAPTER THREE

#### *Damnation Owns Me!*

SOMEHOW my lips found his and clung to them avidly. Somehow my trembling fingers found the zippers of

*(Continued on page 105)*

# "I Talked with God"

(Yes, I Did—Actually and Literally)

and, as a result of that little talk with God some ten years ago, a strange new Power came into my life. After 43 years of horrible, sickening, dismal failure, this strange Power brought to me a sense of overwhelming victory, and I have been overcoming every undesirable condition of my life ever since. What a change it was. Now—I have credit at more than one bank, I own a beautiful home, drive a lovely car, own a newspaper and a large office building, and my wife and family are amply provided for after I leave for shores unknown. In addition to these material benefits, I have a sweet peace in my life. I am happy as happy can be. No circumstance ever upsets me, for I have learned how to draw upon the in-

visible God-Law, under any and all circumstances. You, too, may find and use the same staggering Power of the God-Law that I use. It can bring to you, too, whatever things are right and proper for you to have. Do you believe this? It won't cost much to find out—just a penny post-card or a letter, addressed to Dr. Frank B. Robinson, Dept. 151, Moscow, Idaho, will bring you the story of the most fascinating success of the century. And the same Power I use is here for your use, too. I'll be glad to tell you about it. All information about this experience will be sent you free, of course. The address again—Dr. Frank B. Robinson, Dept. 151, Moscow, Idaho. Advt. Copyright 1939 Frank B. Robinson.

# TEST-TUBE FRANKENSTIEN

by WAYNE ROBBINS

up for a week at a time, and give me the cure, and mumble whiskey fits. But it wasn't whiskey fits.

It was memory.

But that last time I was drunk—happily drunk. I was in a former haunt of mine called the Owl, when Chester Vermis came in. I'll say came, because I'd



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## CHAPTER ONE

### A Blob in a Jar

**I**F NOT THE LAST, at least that was one of the last times I was ever drunk. I've tried it a few times since, but only a few. Some may find forgetfulness in the vine; but not I. The things that writhe and twist within the alcohol-heated vapors of my brain—listen, I tried it a few times. But they used to lock me

get in trouble trying to express more exactly his particular way of getting about. He dreamed in, and while he dreamed he minced, and while he did these things his beastly inferiority com-





*They would have thought me insane had I told them what I knew; that this man was not my old friend, Chester Vermis, at all, but solely a mass of gelatinous plasm which could assume at will the form and identity of anything in the world . . . even the beloved and dear figure of my own June!*



plex was working right along, so that every movement seemed at once to seek unobtrusiveness and yet to want approving notice.



But if he should begin speaking—and he would—his first appearance would be immediately obscured, and the listener would conceive an immediate and violent distaste for the hunched, robust little gnome. It isn't uncommon, a shy person's attempting to cover up with hot air and braggadoccio. It's never a happy combination, though.

Watching Chester, I felt very unhappy, because I liked him. Chester and I had been drawn together at school, and had

remained close ever since. I could always feel sympathy for his timidity, because I was never any red-nosed bully, myself. I clenched my teeth, just thinking about it. Chester was smart. I mean he was one of the smartest, and could have wrapped any of the others about his little finger; except that he was always so eager to be wrapped about theirs.

He came immediately to my booth and sighed into the place opposite.

He sighed out an order for something light and soft, and then turned owl-eyes in my direction. They glittered, excited, like the time he was chosen water-boy—as a gag, if he had only been able to see it.

“Well, Mortimer,” he began, shying as usual from the odium of mouthing a nickname, “Mortimer, you’re intoxicated.” He pointed a carefully pruned fingernail at me. “You’re drunk, and right when I want to acquaint you with my success. I’m a genius,” he sighed. “From now on in the scientific world I am an important man.”

I twisted a thumb at a roving waiter and then shifted it into Chester’s ribs. He jumped. “You’ll never be important,” I grunted, “you imitation of a real man.”

**H**E DIDN’T mind. “Speak for yourself, John,” he smiled. “But what makes me this way, Mortimer, what does it? Why are some one way, some another? Why do some animals rush to attack blindly, while others slink and cower? Why do some choose to live sub-zero, others to seek hot rocks? Some to build nests, others to knit on tiny garments?”

“Another of the same,” I said to the waiter.

“I’ll tell you,” Chester said, “it’s instinct.” He and I nodded soberly, completely agreed that he had made a world-shaking pronouncement.

“You’re too tight to listen,” he com-

plained, “but I’ve got to talk. Well, so I began thinking about instincts and what causes them. I began seeking whatever glandular secretions it must be. Glands, I mean, must heighten whatever tendency is already there. Everyone has, to some slight degree at least, every instinct, to slink and to bully, to love and to hate—so the problem was simply to find what caused certain ones to become dominant.”

He breathed wearily into the too large collar of his immaculate shirt. “I found it,” he said, and I began wishing the last few had been left in the bottle, because something told me he was dead serious, and that I should be paying attention.

“Now, obviously,” he lectured in imitation of our old chemistry professor, “you have nothing at all when you have only a vial of sickly colored gland extraction. It’s got to work on something, and something with the particular instinct you seek.”

“If they’ll leave me alone, I’ll leave them alone,” I muttered truculently.

Chester said: “I started with worms. Their desires are few: to feed, to reproduce according to their own idea of the subject—division, of course, and to go on living, in spite of—er, heck:”

I arose. “Let’s go.” I knew with fatalistic certainty that eventually I would be dragged to his musty laboratory, so I wanted to save time.

“**Y**OU mean,” I was asking as I pointed at a jar, “that that gob of detestableness is alive?”

“Indeed, yes,” Chester Vermis simpered. “That is earthworm tissue, artificially fed. Not only alive, but growing—as such vivisected bits do quite often in labs.”

The gob, I could estimate, was nearly the size of a hickory nut. “What’s it good for. I mean, what’s its particular bag of tricks?”

“That,” he said, awed of himself, “is

as near as man has ever come to the pure, disembodied will to live." I stared at him sidewise as he continued. "I'd show you, except that too often isn't good for it. I can take it and crush it almost to shreds; I can immerse it in weak solutions of acids. But still it clings to whatever life it has in it. I built up that one instinct in it, practically at the exclusion of all others. Except hunger, of course; do away with hunger and you destroy life, so I have to build that up parallel with the major instinct. . . . "For instance, look at this—"

It was another blob. In a larger jar, this one was the size of an indoor baseball. It seemed to maintain a perpetual shimmering vibration. I watched fascinated while Chester prodded with sterile scissors through an air-lock. "I'll soon have a method perfected to keep them living right in open air," he murmured. His scissors neatly snipped the blob in two, and brought one of the still jittering halves out. It went into the incinerator.

"That shimmering—that's its method of eating, absorbing liquid. I have to keep him trimmed down, or he'd get beyond me." Apparently he hadn't noticed that he was making me just a little ill.

He had a dozen or so other jars. One curious one, incidentally, that kept dividing at the rate of once every few minutes. These—naturally many of them—were very small. He said they would have become too fine even for a microscope except for his continual weeding out.

All these jars were worm tissue. But there was one more, he said—his prize. What he had accomplished so far, he thought, was just a start. It wasn't any different to look at.

"This," he explained, "was started from a muscle in the hide of a chameleon. Pigmentation, you know, is controlled in that case by the manipulation of color-filters, as you might call them, which absorb all light rays except those desired

to imitate the background. But I have carried it even further than that. I have there the start of what will be the pure essence of imitativeness."

"All except shape, of course," I told him tolerantly. He smiled.

"This happens to be a hybrid. Instinct within him also is that motivation which causes certain tree worms to stiffen out to resemble twigs when danger is sensed, and certain acalephoids and jelly fish to turn to dangling bits of moss. Ever hear of 'keeping up with the Joneses'? How about all clothing styles? It's all the instinct to camouflage, to become an indistinguishable member of the herd and be safe."

**H**E LAID a marble near one wall of the glass jar. For a moment nothing happened, but when it did I had the impulse to rub my eyes. Because there were two marbles. The jelly thing on the floor of the jar had slowly gathered itself together, hoisted its center, pulled in its base, until it was round. And while this was going on the color was changing from milky transparency to grainy red. The marble was what I used to call a "meatie"!

Chester went on to say that the thing would keep that pose as long as it was frightened, or had any other reason to do it, and that when again disturbed it would probably revert to that form last used, until some newer form were presented.

"Remember that I'm building into these things something more than mere senseless impulse. It's driving instinct. Such tendencies, evolved amply enough, approach almost the effectiveness of a mind. Nature herself is nothing more than a universe of instinct—she evolved our brain from brute instinct. I have her help in this case—she always tries to make the best of a bad situation; only this one is ideal. Nature and science make a fine team. Ever hear the theory that eyes

developed from some Lower Palaeozoic creature's happening to have warts that were extra sensitive to the sun's rays?"

He laid a black cube near the jar. For a while the thing maintained its first form, the marble. But finally, reluctantly, it switched, and there were two black cubes. Chester did the same thing with a yellow eraser.

Some things it couldn't quite manage, such as the cigarette that I tried. "You can't expect too much," Chester protested. "Not at this early stage. But later, when it's larger, further developed . . ."

I didn't like it, and I think I told him so. It made my flesh crawl, somehow, to think that here in this row of jars were all the impulses that made us tick. Looking down the line, I could almost see into my own brain, the way it would be subconsciously seething with such things; to eat, to live, to reproduce, to ape. All except my present impulse, to get very drunk.

Here was a dumpy little guy in a dinky lab, and he was playing God, and I just didn't like it. I think that all my liking for Chester ceased with that moment.

I went and did get very drunk and nearly forgot it. And a lot of unimportant things happened between then and the day when I realized that had been my last time to see Chester Vermis alive.

I went to London, upon suggestion from my paper, and had a go at war-corresponding. But I came home because over there I picked up an American wife who had a loathing for cold rooms, dropped consonants and condescension.

Three months, six months—although it doesn't matter, it was nearer the latter. In the meantime, Chester, forgotten by me, had got further than merely a man playing God. He was a man doubling for Satan.

Of course I didn't know. I never will know it all. I'll tell what I can, but still: I never will know!

## CHAPTER TWO

### In a Police Station

**A**FTER our immediate concern of settling into an unprepossessing little house out on the brink of the Palisades, my thoughts naturally enough reverted to my old friend. I went to look him up.

The landlady who cared for his room and other worldly necessities—and stayed strictly out of his lab—knew me quite well. "Oh, Mr. Reed," she greeted with worried eyes, "I'm so glad you're back. I hope you can do something with poor dear Mr. Vermis."

"Why, something wrong?"

"I must tell you—I know it's none of my affair, but we all think so much of him, we who really know him. And to see him go this way—" She had me worried now, and I hurried along her apologies. "You'll see when you go up what I mean. You can't tell it at first—he's just the same. But then you start getting a queer feeling and you know he's—well, odd."

I asked in what ways.

"Well, he used to be such a talker. And now he just says the same things over and over, if he talks at all. Just a few things about his work—how well it's coming. And mercy knows what he eats, because he won't come down with the other boarders. It's a fact, Mr. Reed. He won't leave his flat daytimes. I do happen to know he's slipped out nights a time or two, but daytimes he just mopes around, and when you question him his eyes are bright and interested and normal, but he just shakes his head and insists he's eaten."

"How long's he been this way?"

"I'd say bad this way only a week and a half. He's been distracted like for months, sometimes happy and somehow triumphant, and sometimes almost frightened. And then he seemed to become

normal again, except for these other things he does, or rather won't do."

"His mind?"

"Mr. Reed—it's a terrible thing to say, but I think it is. He's—insane."

I went on up. Chester's voice called a come-in and I entered the one room, beyond which lay his thrown-together lab.

One look at Chester Vermis and my fears vanished like a puff on the horizon. He was his normal self, utterly. Timidly happy, he seemed about like a pleased terrier. He did seem quieter after a bit, with less of his former temptation to boast and bluster. But as I sat studying him, and him me, I could find nothing amiss, even in the eyes. Utterly and completely, he was Chester.

"How's the work?" I asked after telling him of my marriage, of the trip and such small talk.

"Coming remarkably," he smiled. "Remarkably. I'm experimenting with instincts."

"Yes—I knew. I was up, you know."

"Oh, certainly. Odd—I had forgotten."

It *was* odd, I reflected. Could he have forgotten so soon? I wondered why his eyes were suddenly so bright and wary. They oggled owlishly as ever, but beneath was a beady intentness.

AS WE talked he seemed determined to revert continually to his experiments. And I decided not to allow it. I didn't think, if indeed he had been working too hard, that I should aggravate the matter. But I simply couldn't keep him off it—his work. His gaze would go dull, almost uncomprehending, if I mentioned anything of the outer world.

Always was his rejoinder: "Odd, I had forgotten. But now you take the will to survive . . ." and he would be off on an interminable lecture, almost word for word the same things I had heard that first night. He had evidently gone over it so much with other people, the landlady

and the like, that it was all but memorized. "Why, even clothing styles—keeping up with the Joneses . . ."

I tried to get him to go to the corner for a coke so I could hoist a needed stein. He begged off. "Now the instinct to reproduce . . ."

Unaccountably I began sweating. I was surprised to feel something closely akin to terror creeping through my veins. I couldn't have said why; or rather, I wouldn't have let myself say why. I just sat there and studied this utterly normal little man, Chester Vermis, and became panic-stricken.

His every mannerism was there, just as it should be. When he spoke he sighed it, simpered it, or sometimes uttered it with that cock-sure braggadoccio. "I shall be a very great man . . ." I was fear-ridden because he was simply *too* normal; not an unexpected new word, or expression or manner of hitching his pants. You might have expected a little something new and interesting after six months. But all the king's horses couldn't drag him into a situation or speech wherein his reaction might have been at all uncertain, or of a wider latitude than his cloistered laboratory.

This was the very epitome of the little grinning scientist I had known. I peered once more into those brilliant eyes. I glanced on into the lab, and could only just make out the bulking shadow of some tin thing. A tank.

Back to Chester's eyes again. My skin frosted, my breath hung suspended in my lungs. Chester Vermis was utterly normal, and yet I had the sudden mad feeling that he was a deadly and alien thing. Somehow, he was *other*.

I backed to the door while he smiled agreeably. I crept without shutting the door to the landing. There my panic refused to be controlled and I ran down stairs and jammed through the door into the lower hall.

The astonished landlady was there, evidently awaiting my return. She had expected me to see that Chester was not right. But she hadn't expected this reaction.

"Why—what in the world . . ."

But I didn't answer; there wasn't a thing I could have said without branding myself as the madman she had thought Chester was.

She had thought Chester mad, but I knew better. He was a perfectly normal Chester up there. *But it wasn't Chester!*

**W**HATEVER the thing was that *'twasn't* Chester, this is the way it finally traced me.

Since my return from Europe, I had been assigned the night police shift as a sort of temporary punishment for throwing up the assignment. I was down at the station the night the boys got Max Shiller.

It was a sticky business, the kind a paper like mine handles very carefully, if at all. But I went in to have a look at Max. He had given himself up, the boys told me, and that seemed funny. We of the press had known for some time that the police were despairing of ever catching the man, whoever he might be. Such things are hard to trace—a crime committed in the dead of night, unpremeditated and unprovoked. You just see your young and tempting victim and you strike, and after consummating your grisly deed and making sure no living victim lingers behind, you skulk back into the greasy shadows that spawned you.

But Max had walked right in, and I wondered why as much as the police, so I went into the dark room where a blinding cone of light sprawled onto a chunky brute of a man. I got the immediate picture of a person so completely terrified that even thinking comes hard. He was readily admitting his crimes:

"Honest, something just comes over

me and I can't help it. I can't hardly remember even, afterwards. I'm always sick at myself. But—Gawd, never again. Lock me up, keep me there."

"Same like they all claim," one of the boys muttered to me. "Building up with 'I'm not responsible' to an insanity plea. Nuts."

But Shiller was hurrying on. "This girl, se—I seen her and something comes over me and I reach out to touch her . . ."

"Skip that," a surly voice barked. "We know what you did, and we know why you did it. What we want to know is how in God's name you killed this one. Usually you strangle them. But this one—we found her and she was awful, just like being thrown in acid, all eaten away. We want to know about that, and about why you came to us. What scared you?"

"Scared? Gawda' mercy, listen. I know what I done—pretty awful. I took her outer clothes off and threw her down and started on her underthings and—"

"Skip it, you swine!"

"Okay, okay, but listen. I didn't kill her. Honest, I hadn't even thought of killing her, yet, see—when all of a sudden I caught sight of this fellow standing and watching me. Not saying a word there in the shadows at the end of the park bench—just watching.

"But when he seen I had sighted him he came up all at once and began fighting. Well, I had to fight back." Listening, I couldn't help thinking of a jungle thing, crouching and snarling over its prey. "We fought like hell, and I had thought he'd be soft and easy. He was a short, dumpy little bird with big, glittering eyes that just bored right into you, but even while we were fighting—honest now, he was sort of smiling and looking friendly.

**"B**UT he sure wasn't friendly. I seen right away he was gonna kill me, because every time I'd knock him down he'd just come back for more. Pretty soon

## TEST-TUBE FRANKENSTEIN

I got winded and he seemed to wrap all around me. And so help me I had a feeling like I was drowning. His hands was still squeezing my ribs, but yet something came up and covered my face all cold and wet and sticky like and I couldn't breathe. Just plain hellish. I knew I'd better run, so I did."

"I see. So you didn't kill the girl and we'll just turn you loose!"

"No, listen. After only a few steps I knew he wasn't following me. I'd thought of course that he was saving the girl. But when I turned and looked I seen he chased me away—so *he* could have her!" My skin tightened.

"Listen," the sweating man repeated, "he wanted her! He'd forgotten me, so I stood and watched—too long. He sort of crouched down, and it seemed like he was gonna do—what you might expect. But listen, this's what got me. Here was this dumpy little guy sprawling down there, and you know what?"

"Well, what?"

"You won't believe me," Max Shiller groaned. "I know you won't. But listen: I watched and as he got to work on the girl he seemed to be all slobbering like. And I watched and it seemed like he was losing his shape. I kept watching and pretty soon it wasn't even a man! Honest, it musta been a ghost or something—he just seemed to melt right down on top of the girl and turn into a blanket of whitish stuff that reflected the moon and I ran."

"That all?" In the bitter question it was evident that Max Shiller hadn't encountered belief. The cops were all swearing softly.

"He isn't just acting crazy," the one with me said. "Boy, he really is."

"No, that's not all." Max went on. "This's the worst, reason I came here. I had watched just a minute too long. I had seen this thing sort of raise up again from the girl, from what was left of her.

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It seemed to sort of gather itself together, to raise up in the middle . . ." I thought here for some reason of a laboratory table, and a glass jar, and a thing in it rearing up to take the shape of a red marble—

"But I didn't see any more because I wanted to get away before the thing took shape. Only I was too late. When I looked over my shoulder here was a sort of lumpy shadow following, skittering along after me. I kept looking and every time he was taller and pretty soon he was the dumpy guy again. I couldn't get away and I kept thinking of him catching me and sprawling all over me and turning to white stuff and so I came here. I don't care—I'm not scared of you nearly so much as the dumpy guy. He'd be waiting if you turn me loose."

"Don't worry, we won't."

The cop said to me: "Crazy, all right. He'll cop an insanity plea for sure."

"Sure is," I said, trying to sound convinced. The way my thoughts were racing away with me I began fearing there were two nuts instead of one: Max and I. Or else there were two who weren't crazy: Max and—I.

I LEFT in a hurry, because I figured if I gave myself time to cool down and think it over I'd see things sensibly. The thoughts that were occurring to me—why, they weren't just mad. They were impossible. I had the overwhelming impulse to spill it all to the cops, but I knew I'd get laughed at.

I was just swinging around the corner from the station toward a cab stand when I sensed that someone had fallen in step with me. I looked and saw that it was Vermis, Chester Vermis, as life-like as day. "Oh, hello," I mumbled, noting in spite of myself how he might easily be described as a dumpy little individual, with glittering, boring, friendly eyes . . .

He smiled cheerfully and kept tagging



along. I had to say something. "Where you heading?"

He shook his head vaguely, and his smile broadened disarmingly.

"See here, Chester," I said suddenly, stopping, "I've got to have this out. My God, maybe I'm crazy—if I am I'll explain someday and you'll understand. But speak to me—say anything. Just convince me that everything is all right with you."

His head bobbed. "Sure, sure, coming along fine."

I tried again. "Tell me about your work, anything, man, anything. The old school days. Cuss, laugh, do anything except be such a damned normal edition of yourself."

"Nothing's wrong," he droned. "Everything's coming along fine." I kept trying, but it was always like that. There was a ready answer for everything I said, and there was nothing wrong with it that I could put my finger on. It just seemed as if they never quite fitted.

*You damned fool; quit kidding yourself. You know the answer to that one. The answers don't fit, because they're stock answers, made to fit any of a variety of questions, chosen from a limited stock.*

*No, God no . . .*

*It's true, though. He's learned a certain number of things to say, is learning them right along. He picked them up in the lab from—from Chester . . .*

"Who . . . who are you?" I breathed, and waited.

"Why," he responded, "Vermis—Chester Vermis." That was what the landlady would have called him. But I would have called him Chester.

He seemed suddenly to sense that he had made a mistake. A blank, wary look crept over his face. I went sort of out of my head and hit him in that grinning face, as hard as I could. I stood appalled a second, thinking what if I had it wrong, what if this were really Chester and not an imitation. I noted that the face didn't

seem angered; it still wore a sort of bewildered and overfriendly smile. And beyond that was a look of deep, undimmed affection.

But when the edges of the body and face began crawling in on themselves, melting together and turning paler, whiter, and when the clothing didn't fit at all—why I turned and ran.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Abomination in the Boudoir . . .

I REACHED home after a wild, all-over-town flight. I had been pursued by the terrible fear that the thing would follow me. I couldn't help thinking of it, a blanket of milky-white filth now, scrambling in pursuit, moving like some giant amoeba. It had an attachment for me—that was obvious. I sensed no direct threat, only a hideous, fawning friendship.

No doubt it had realized its mistake in killing Chester—well, it *must* have killed Chester. He must have worked with it, increasing its size and powers and not even have realized its awful danger, that it would become too much for him. He had hinted he could put almost a brain in it. It had used that near-brain to plot cunningly. It had killed him, existed awhile on the food he kept in the tank for it, but finally it had been driven out by starvation—out to discover how human beings fed. The old landlady had said Chester had gone out a few times recent nights.

It had witnessed Max Shiller at his frightful act and had taken over, imitating him as closely as possible. But still it hadn't found food, unless it reverted to its original form and absorbed this thing beneath it. . . .

Perhaps soon it would learn to feed as human beings did, to emulate every human act and trait to perfection. And

then how would any man ever find it, ever suspect?

God pity a profaned world.

That was what it wanted of me. It had seen me up at the lab, recognized in me friendship. It wanted me for a new master, someone to continue feeding it, teaching it.

I hadn't dared take any chance of its following, and felt reasonably certain that I had shaken it off before reaching home. Surely it wouldn't be equal to catching a cab, as I had done, even if it returned to Chester's form. It had been a horrified cab driver that had glanced into a rear-view mirror and had seen something whitish slipping along after us. It had been a pale, sickened face that had breathed, "God in heaven . . ."

I awakened June. I must have been a startling sight. She arose amidst a jumble of bed clothes and stared questioning at me. To study her exquisite body was to imagine it beneath that sprawling thing, to imagine it clothed in a cloak of nameless plasm . . .

"Listen," I began, "I can't possibly explain—you'd think me insane. But if you ever see a man around here, a little dumpy man or any stranger—why don't trust him. He's deadly. Call me at the office, or call Gwen Benning and have her come over for you. She'd be nearer and could get here first."

She nodded, but without understanding. "I wish—Morrie, I wish you'd explain. You're trembling all over." I just couldn't explain, though. Three weeks married, and to tell her such a madman's tale. She'd have thought herself married to a psychopathic case.

But within the sanctity of her arms, in the presence of her soothing rationality I began slipping back to my former state of mind. I began doubting again. Why, such things just didn't happen. Science was one thing, but to create such a supernatural horror was quite another. Ridicu-

lous. In fact, if I traced back I didn't have a single thing to go on, not really. Only my own idiotic impression there in the lab, and a tale told by an admitted pathological murderer attempting to escape from the chair. Back there when the illusion of melting occurred—well, it was only a trick of the moon.

Must apologize to Chester tomorrow . . .

*Poor fool, didn't you realize the thing might possess unsuspected senses, other senses? It didn't need eyes nor ears to imitate; why should it need them to follow?*

I WAS doing some rewrite stuff early the next night when the telephone girl switched a call to my desk. My mind was calmed, bemused by the rational world of stuttering typewriters and columns of international intrigue, so I wasn't prepared. I had convinced myself last night.

"Listen, Morrie—" It was June's voice, softly modulated. It was even softer than usual, like that of a person looking over her shoulder to see if someone else were hearing.

"Yes?" I questioned tensely, while my nerves seemed to go on end.

"Listen, Morrie. You got me scared last night about a—a short, dumpy man. Remember? Well, I wouldn't have thought so much about this, only for that."

"Yes? Well?"

"I think he's here."

"There? Where?"

"I have to speak softly. I saw him at least two hours ago—seemed to be passing out along the dirt path and I didn't think anything about it. Then I thought I saw his silhouette come back by . . ."

"That all?" I prayed it was.

"Well, I'm not sure. But it's been so warm—you know I keep the French window open. And I have a feeling he's out there, in the shadows. I thought just now that I caught a shifting movement out

there—not more than ten feet from here at the telephone.”

“I’ll be right out,” I said. “Don’t get too scared—maybe it’s your imagination . . . and mine . . . but be careful!”

“Yes, Morrie, I’m certain now.” Her voice was taut, threatening to rise. “I caught another movement, and I can see one shoulder faintly. Oh, Morrie, I was never so scared. I can’t see his eyes, but I have the feeling he’s looking right in, watching me. . . .”

“Don’t move,” I shouted, not minding that all eyes in the office shifted to me while the clatter of typewriters ceased. “Listen—call Gwen Benning. I’ll try to beat her there. But call her.”

“I will. I don’t think he really can see me here. My red robe is dark at night. But I will . . .”

“It doesn’t have to see,” I groaned and hung up on her gasp.

I flung out and after a minute’s frantic search was pushing on the floorboards of a cab, dreading the snail-like half-hour the trip was bound to consume.

The business district slipped behind, outskirts thinned became wooded country. At last I could see the light through shifting trees. Lights—it could mean anything, or nothing. I left the driver without paying him and went around to the French window, the quicker way of reaching the bedroom. I hopped across the sill. There was no form in the dense shadow to the left.

“Oh, thank heaven,” I whispered as I adjusted my eyes to the interior. The lights were ablaze and June stood carven to attention over near the telephone. I had frightened her, evidently, vaulting in.

“I was so horribly scared,” she whispered as I drew her against me!

“It—he must have gone,” I said. “Didn’t you call Gwen?”

She shook her head slowly. “I—I thought it wouldn’t see me . . .”

I went back out, paid off the driver

and sent him back to town, alone. Some one else could finish my rewrite. Hell with it—I’d stay with June.

She still stood rigid, great moist eyes wondering and frightened. Brilliant with doubt and indecision. Her lips moved, fighting for words.

“WHAT—” she began. “Morrie, I wish you’d explain. You’re trembling all over.”

“Let’s forget it,” I said, fighting for a return of common sense. “If you ask me, I think I’m as looney as a jaybird. I won’t try to explain—I’m sure no one was really there. I got you all excited, that’s all.” I dropped my shoes on the rug. “Come on, let’s tumble in.”

Automatically she began to obey, while her worried eyes sought mine. Her hands loosed the belt of the sheer, wrap-around negligee, began slipping the garment from one shoulder.

In spite of me, my breath caught in anticipation. This utter loveliness—God, if it were threatened. Clammy, alien hands, crawling over this fragile flesh. Human defilement at first, until the thing changed, melted. . . .

I must forget it, must concentrate all my attention on the pale dream of June’s nearly unrobed figure. Here lay forgetfulness. Here was heaven, however narrowly saved from the taint of hell.

With some quirk of modesty she had half turned her back while slipping the pink negligee lower. It crumpled about her waist. I gasped with near pain at the beauty of her. She hadn’t even a night-gown beneath. I had only just time to think again of the color of that night-gown, only a shade darker than her own flesh. Odd—she had said red robe. . . .

And then she turned round.

Wherever Chester Vermis may be at this moment, I hope he is writhing in the hell of innermost hell, to recompense me for that ghastly, fearful moment.

June swayed round, the subtle willowy bend of her body so familiar, so normal, so dear to my every sense. And my eyes swept involuntarily over the gentle swell of her abdomen, up to the mellow contour of her breasts.

There should have been a shy blush of pink at the tips. But there was nothing. I cried out; my eyes crawled from their sockets. No; smoothly ivory over their entire surface, her breasts were without sign of nipple!

I flung upright, screaming mindlessly. My hands crushed at the sides of my head. "You!—Oh, God, I'll . . . I'll . . ."

A weapon—anything. A knife, to tear this unnameable abomination into reeking shreds. . . .

## CHAPTER FOUR

### How Horror Feeds . . .

**I**T KNEW something was wrong, even as it had sensed its other mistake while in the form of Chester back there last night. Its eyes strayed over the figure it had stolen. Stolen—from June, wherever she might be.

It cowered back, this thing, and while its eyes never lost that look of pin-point brightness and pleading and above all that nauseating attachment, still fear came into them, an indescribable and alien fear. It had almost succeeded in getting into my home so that it would have a keeper. But somehow it had erred—it must be watchful, now—very watchful. . . .

It couldn't have known, of course, studying June and her every contour and mannerism and even the things she had said over the phone—it couldn't have known what lay out of sight beneath her robe. Her *red* robe. Instinctively, without thought or conscious effort, easily as a tree toad flattens its barklike hide to the trunk of a tree or a chameleon flickers to a new color, it had sensed a thing to

imitate and had accomplished it. It had come in and known without knowledge that it must clothe itself. A pink negligee had been handy to the hands of the girl-thing. . . . Thank universal goodness that it hadn't found utter perfection, or I would never have known!

I reached for it with my bare hands. But it uttered a cry like nothing on this earth—yet only a faint sigh, and it fled. It evaded me and turned on its gracefully fleet feminine limbs. It raced through the living room, down the hall, and a dreadful change was coming over it. I followed fast as I could, but my legs were dragging and my stomach was churning with nausea.

I reached the outer door just after the thing reached it. I have never been certain just what I saw. It was quite dark there, mercifully dark. But there was something just slipping under the door, just the dragging end of a sort of milky-white blanket. A ghastly blanket of mind-rocking filth that left a faint dew of ichor on the floor.

I remained crouched there before the door, hands still extended as if to clutch something that I felt it would have meant insanity itself to touch. My eyes were fixed on a point remotely past that door, out somewhere in the night, where a sloping, billowing thing of amoeboid formlessness would be fleeing through the dark.

What would its next move be? Where would it strike next? There could be no fathoming an answer; human psychology couldn't be applied to such alien life. Its own psychology—well, poor Chester had said it would tend when frightened to revert to some previous form, to repeat possibly some former series of actions. What next—

The door opened before me and June came in.

I felt certain it was really she and cried out my relief. But even as I looked again

## TEST-TUBE FRANKENSTEIN

a great doubt engulfed my soul. The other had been so lifelike, so normal. The thing didn't only imitate; it reflected, like a mirror.

**I** PICKED her up like a sack of wheat. At least, I realized, she was warm. Would that other thing have been able to imitate warmth as well, or would it have in spite of itself a reptilian and unearthly coldness? Could it, while creating for itself a human mechanism, assume normal function for its sham body and mock parts?

I bore June into the bedroom, threw her onto the bed and began ripping the clothing from her body.

I tried to sob some word of explanation to her. "If you're June I'll explain. . . . If you're that other thing I'll—I'll. . ." Fool!—you'd what? Didn't you know that the thing probably couldn't be killed, that it would cling tenaciously to its fiend-inspired life until every fibre of its being were riven?

The red robe—thank heaven for red!—sundered beneath my crazed fingers. Buttons showered.

"Morrie, no—you're mad. . . ."

She lay sprawled on the bed, her great moist eyes pleading and fear-tinged, aching up to my own. My hands managed to part the shreds of her garment, to find the one beneath and tear it in turn, on through the fragile sleeziness of the night-gown.

Then I breathed a thousand thanks to a thousand nameless gods. No longer afraid, she seemed to sense that something horrible had occurred. Whimpering with pity she began stroking my fevered head. I lowered my head, cushioned it in her arms. My June . . . my own, real June!

"What—" she began. "I was safe—Gwen came in five minutes and I went with her."

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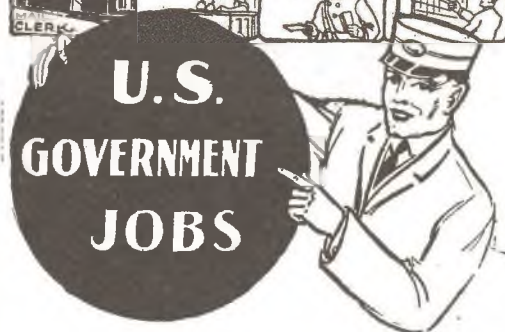
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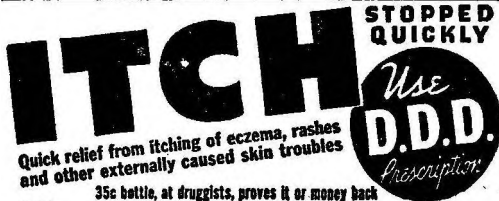
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## TERROR TALES

I struggled to right my chaotic thoughts. Inevitably they took up where they had left off when June had appeared. What would the thing's next move be? Was this phase of the horror really over? What would happen next, possibly even during this very moment. . . . Human psychology. . . . The psychology of instinctive duplication. . . .

It was clever. It had followed me last night, found where I lived; it had sensed that ideal security for itself lay in June's own likeness. But it had to be canny, careful to be sure that June was first gone before it attempted the fraud. Then—it had known where June went before it risked alarming me.

Did that mean anything? It meant that likely the thing had followed her, then come back the quarter mile to this house. All right; bewildered and frightened as it now was, what would its reaction be? Why, to repeat, to return to Gwen's, and with that same fraudulent form. . . .

"Great God!"

I clutched June tensely, shook her. "June, listen to me. Did you come back with Gwen? Was she all right?"

"Why—why of course!"

"She let you out at the gate? She drove off immediately after you both saw I was here?"

"Yes. I heard her car start. Morrie, for heaven's sake tell me—"

"But *it*—it would follow," I whispered as if she would understand. "It would take your form again and go back to her, imitate all the things it saw you do and say. Perfectly normal, until—"

"Morrie! I did—I remember now I commented to her that it must only have been a loitering tramp, because we passed someone passing back up the road—a short, dumpy figure!"

"Listen," I gasped, "I've got to hurry—no time to lose. Lock all the doors, the windows. Gwen—poor Gwen. . . ."

THERE wasn't time to take June with me. I ran, still shouting orders, from the house and turned through the stagnant breath of the night toward the Bennings home. Gwen would be there alone—her husband was still pounding a typewriter down at the office, doing my own rewrite stuff. No, not alone; with Gwen would be a thing smiling happily, a thing exactly in the image of my old friend, Chester Vermis!

The door to the modest little home was locked. Yes, she would have locked it after her. She wouldn't have known that danger had already entered, and was waiting.

The third lunge of my shoulders and the hinges groaned protest; the fourth, and I could enter. There was still a hall light on. She wouldn't yet have turned off any lights; she would have encountered a dumpy little gnome of a man, smiling affectionately, before she had the chance.

Her door would be somewhere down this hall. The second door was it.

One glimpse brought me clutching at the door-frame, praying that the lights might go out.

I couldn't stand to look at what the thing had done to her. It had been—hungry. Still not feeding like the human beings it aped, it had reverted, slid back down the scale of its distorted, damnable evolution, back to the semi-fluid milky-white fester of its original tissue. Then it had fed.

Just as Max Shiller had seen it, God pity him for that fate; just as the police had found that other victim.

Horror had killed her, the unthinkable horror of being encircled and lapped at, digested by oozing tides of hungering filth. It would have slipped about her head, just as Max had described it; it would have dribbled into her mouth, poked into her eyes, alien digestive juices functioning frightfully. It would have

been scintillating all over, glittering and shimmering in the pleasure of gratifying its cosmic instincts.

Evidently it had caught her while it was still in man shape, subject to the mortal whims it aped. Because she had been stripped; what pitiful fragment was left of her wore no clothing. The thing had learned to do that from Max Shiller. Whatever other unthinkable attempts at human acts, it had made upon her—no; I'll stop before thinking of that ultimate horror. . . .

But it had seen her naked, before killing her. It had seen a woman naked—*finally!*

Before I had even time to think more of that I was moving, running. Back, back to our house where June waited unprotected. The one thing to save us before had been the thing's ignorance. Now it was no longer ignorant.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### A Moon and a Girl and a Horror

THE very hint of a breeze had sprung up to drift through the night-clothed oaks. It whispered with me my wordless prayer to an unrelenting fate. It moaned with me my curses to a jibbering moon. It sobbed out with me the knowledge of black damnation.

The house hunkered with its back close to the brink of the Palisades. Beyond, beneath I could see the steely ribbon of the Hudson River as I came along the path and rounded into the gate. . . .

Yes—it would be so; surely I hadn't expected to find that nothing had happened.

A short, dumpy figure was brushing through the French window. Apparently I hadn't yet been sensed. He—it—turned toward the sheer, tree-fringed bank of the river. Once before tonight it had made the mistake of leaving June alive to ap-

pear and confirm its fraud. Now it would hurl her down the banks and into the river, wanting nothing from her save her identity.

That was what it was going to do with the still, unstruggling form slung over its shoulder.

It hurried faster when I screamed. Its machine-like, unfathomable mind would have but one fixation of purpose, to get rid of June at all cost.

I tore along after the duo through the tangle of clutching ivy, through battering branches, through the subtle complicity of the moon's pagan shadows. I caught up at the very brink.

There wasn't much light. That's what in the end made things so bad. But I could make out the thing's face, the fixed and friendly grin there. "No," I heard him mouth, "everything's all right—coming along fine. . ." Words gleaned from back when it was spying on its master, preparing to take over this present dumpy form.

"You nameless . . ." Even as I fought with it my mind struggled for things sufficiently blasphemous to curse it with. But it wouldn't have appreciated, because it wasn't a thinking and rationalizing being. It was only a reflection. Only a blob in a test tube.

For a time it battled using its human form, bunching something that answered for muscles and sinews to meet my crazed blows.

I became aware at length, and with the sense that I had heard it all along, of June's sobbing voice encouraging me from the shadows. She had revived from that darkness the thing's vile touch had flung her into. I couldn't tell where she was.

"There—at your feet, a butcher knife. I saw him at the window breaking in. I got the knife but couldn't—"

A knife at my feet. But I couldn't pause to reach it. Unhuman, unanimal hands were gouging at my face, seeking my

throat. My own fists were battering into grinning, familiar features until great goutts of red pain seemed to dangle from my wrists. My arms jarred to the elbows. Could I ever win? Could I make it suffer pain?

Finally I saw that I was accomplishing something, after a fashion. "Don't—don't look at it . . ." I panted toward June, wherever she might be.

**I**T'S outlines had just begun to blur, the grin still implanted to grow hazy, and a whitish coating to film its exterior and to take on a shimmering translucence from the moon—when that moon dipped blackly beneath a cloud.

I think—I'm *sure* there was no pause, not even an instantaneous pause in the conflict. I was fighting it, practically gripping it, all during the blackness.

But then the cloud released the simpering moon and icy sheathes of light torrented down. And the utterly naked thing that I was fighting was June, my wife!

Hellishly cunning, it had chosen another and safer form, even as a tree-worm freezes instantly into the semblance of a twig.

Involuntarily I stopped, stepped back. "June—for heaven's sake, where are you? Tell me—speak!"

Two voices spoke, one trailing the other only belatedly enough for mindless senses to have registered and mimicked the words. "Here—I'm here, Morrie . . ."

The first voice came from on back in the shadows. I know it was the first, the genuine one. I stooped, sent my fingers scrambling over the ground until they found the butcher knife. As I straightened I looked back and saw her behind me there, June.

I know it was June back there.

So I went after the thing in front of me, the thing that had slipped the likeness of June's soft body about itself. I went after it with the knife.



## TEST-TUBE FRANKENSTEIN

I thought the thing would never die.

I had to hack the head clear from the body. I had to tear the limbs entirely from the torso before they would cease flopping. If only the thing had possessed the mercy to revert once more, it wouldn't have been so bad. I could have relished mangling its test-tube form. But God!—not *this* form.

A LITTLE heap of twitching parts sprawled at my feet. A shocked moon watched as I shoved them off the cliff.

Then I turned and took June's blessed body into my arms. That's all. . . .

Any one hearing these things naturally might think even as I sometimes do: that I was stark, staring mad. That alcohol fumes had mounted to my brain, leaving me in the constant clutch of horror.

An even easier explanation would be that it is simply an alibi that I have prepared in case of need. That I, like Max Shiller, have concocted a fairy-tale to cover the brutal and callous murder of my old friend, Chester Vermis.

These things don't bother me, because I *know*. That is, I know all except that which would be knowledge as dear to my soul as cool droplets to a desert-parched tongue.

Will June someday forget herself? Is she perfectly normal and—human? Or did I make a terrible mistake out there on the cliff and let the thing make its awful substitution?

Was it really my wife I killed out there and hacked to pieces?

The creature that I sometimes hold in my arms, so soft and warm and alluring—will she someday forget herself? Will she melt at the edges and trickle through my arms and sprawl on the floor, a great pool of shimmering, milky-white detestableness? Unless that should happen—

Merciful God, sir, *I'll never know!*

THE END

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**BLACK CHAPEL**

**A**S WE look over the mail that came in this morning, we find several letters of more than passing interest. We'd like to print them all, but unfortunately we haven't the space. However, here's a note from Albert Zarko of Elizabeth, New Jersey, that cries aloud for publication. Mr. Zarko, being an intelligent man, forwards us both a complaint and his suggestion as to a remedy:

Elizabeth, N. J.

Dear Sirs:

I agree with Mr. Wood of Austin, Texas, about having stories to do with foreign countries. Many places such as Egypt, China, India and some of the South Sea Islands have strange rituals and beliefs. I think the readers of this magazine would like to know what's going on in other parts of the world from the fiction standpoint. I, myself, am getting tired of these stories of debutantes. All I ask for myself and many other readers is a change. I think Charles Boswell could do a good job on these tales. Many of my friends agree with me.

I hope I have not been knocking the mag., but it certainly seems to me that the way you pick your stories is an art in itself.

Yours truly,

Albert Zarko.

No, Albert, you're not knocking the mag. Any time any reader has something to say, we want to hear it. That, in general, is what we're in our office for. And we've got some good news for you and others of the itchy foot brigade. Several of the stories that we've just bought for publication in the near future, and others that are still in preparation, have scenes set in distant and exciting parts of the world. Of course the main thing we ask of a story is that it be a good story; the setting is of secondary consideration. However, in future issues there will be a varied mixture of stories with both foreign and domestic settings.

(Continued from page 85)

my strapless gown and drew them downward. And then I danced; danced as I had never danced in my life, as I had never seen anyone dance. I danced in front of him, while the thrills that coursed through me were transmitted to every movement of my body.

His eyes upon me were like potent liquor in my veins.

Suddenly I was in his arms, avidly seeking his lips as I pressed against him. The frenzy of my rush carried him backward—but something must have warned him then.

"No—no!" I heard his startled cry ringing in my ears. "No—no!" And now the exclamations vibrated with fear.

He tried to thrust me away, tried to beat me off—but he was mine, mine. I would not let him go—even though the noise of his frightened yelling filled my whole brain; even though darkness was closing in upon me and wrapping its numbing folds around me. . . .

That darkness did not lift until the light of morning greeted my opening eyes. I was in bed in my cabin at the camp; I knew that at once—and then I knew what had awakened me. It was Myron. He was there in the cabin, bending over the floor with a rag. Through narrowly opened eyes I watched him, while my heart seemed to freeze into deathly stillness.

He was scouring the floor—wiping bloodstains off the boards! My evening dress lay in a little heap beside him—and I could see the dark, damning stains upon it. Blood! Blood on the floor, on my hands, on my pillow! And my hesitantly licking tongue met the salty taste of dried blood on my lips!

The moan that wrenched from my lips was torn out of my very soul. It brought Myron erect immediately, and instantly he came to the bed. His upraised hand cautioned silence as he read the hysteria

that was dawning in my agonized eyes.

"Stop it, Doris!" he snapped. "This is no time for a breakdown. Get out of bed and wash your hands and face. Scour them well, and be sure that the water all goes down the drain."

"But—but this blood?" I managed to gasp. "Ralph—?"

"I don't know a thing about this blood—and neither does anyone else," he pronounced doggedly. "I saw you go off with young Sabin last night, but I don't think anyone else did. When you hadn't returned an hour later I went after you—but I was too late. Sabin was alone—lying in the woods near his— doorway. He was dead. His head was gone, and his arms were gnawed off at the elbows—as if an animal had been at work on him. That's all I know—do you understand?" He drilled his words into me.

"Sabin's body hasn't been discovered yet—and before it is we must get rid of this—" he motioned toward the bloodstained sheets and pillow—"so that nobody will start getting crazy ideas. This is the best plan. I'll get out of here, and you set fire to the bedding. Be sure that the bloodstained parts are in ashes before you shout for help. They will assume that a cigarette set the bed afire."

I hardly heard him, but instinctively I started to obey. Wrapping the sheet around me, I stepped out of the bed—and something crunched under my bare foot. Something that sent a spear of livid horror driving into my tragedy-numbered brain.

*It was the half-consumed body of a praying mantis!*

**M**YRON caught me or I would have fallen to the floor. For a moment he held my nearly naked body in his arms, held me tightly, while his eyes looked deep into mine—and his breath came faster.

"Please, Doris," he whispered. "Buck

up and help me carry this thing through."

Somehow I controlled myself. I did as he told me, and the fire I started was extinguished before it had done much harm. It was almost ignored in the excitement that followed the discovery of Ralph Sabin's mangled corpse. Bear tracks had been found in the woods close to his camp, and that was the answer they finally decided upon to account for Ralph's death. He had been killed and chewed by a bear.

But I knew that they were wrong. I knew how Ralph Sabin had died. I knew that no man was safe alone with me—that no man could live once he yielded to my love. I knew that I was doubly damned—damned with my mother's bestial blood and damned by the spell of the mantises her embittered lover had put upon me. . . .

That appalling knowledge drove me to the verge of madness. It gnawed at my brain, wormed into my soul; it was with me every hour, day and night. I was not a fit person to be at large, I told myself again and again; I belonged in an asylum—if not in jail. An asylum—that was my answer. Unless I could be completely cured, unless I could be thoroughly cleansed of this damning taint, I wanted to be put away where I could do no more harm.

To aid me in that purpose I cast about for help and decided upon Dr. Franklin Hewitt, an eminent psychiatrist of whom I had heard. Resolutely I started out for my appointment with him, but on the steps of the building that housed his office and his home I faltered and almost lost my courage. I was about to turn back when the door opened and a man came down the steps, a young man who looked at me—and sent a thrill that was like a charge of electricity through my whole being!

That sensation was nothing like anything I had ever experienced. It was not

at all like my reactions to Paul Anderson and Ralph Sabin. This was clean and fine, a sensation that made me expand, that set my heart to fluttering. That man, I knew instinctively and with certainty, was the man I could love—and in the same instant I remembered that I could love no man. Love was not for me, because my love was death!

I almost fled from him. Suddenly my previous hesitancy vanished, and I rushed up the steps and into the vestibule. He was still looking after me as the doorman admitted me, but I resolutely put him out of my mind and concentrated on what I would tell the doctor.

I told him every thing—except about the murders. Aided by his understanding encouragement, I laid my soul bare to him; and when I was finished he patted my hand and assured me that my trouble would yield to treatment. When I left him I took with me a little box of tablets—sedatives he had said they were—but I was far more conscious of something else that went with me. A vision of a pair of laughing brown eyes, of a square-jawed, clean-cut face with a nose that was too broad and snubby.

Again I drove such thoughts from my mind—until the next time I visited Dr. Hewitt; and then there was no avoiding them. *He* was there at the door to admit me, and a few moments later I knew that he was Norman Hewitt, the doctor's son.

Fear such as I had never known took hold of me as we sat talking while I waited to see his father. Now I was certain of it—this was my man, and I could not have him! I could not let him come near me. I could not trust myself with him.

Again and again and again I told myself that. I tried with all my will-power to cling to that determination—but what chance had I? Norman would not let me. I tried to tell him that I was ill, that it was dangerous for me to see him—but he

## Prey For the Daughter of Hell

laughed at me and would not listen. He found a score of excuses to see me; he would not let me avoid him. He insisted—and soon he became a part of my life; the most precious part.

I loved him completely. I knew that even before the first time he kissed me, but the ecstasy which filled me then left no shadow of doubt. That kiss was heavenly; was clean and wholesome—and even as it lingered on my lips I realized how different it was from any other kiss I had ever received. Dr. Hewitt's treatments had succeeded. I was cured; I was normal! I was free to love—

But in the same instant my love caught me by the throat and warned me that I must be vigilant. I must watch myself, watch my every reaction, must be constantly on guard—for Norman's life depended on it!

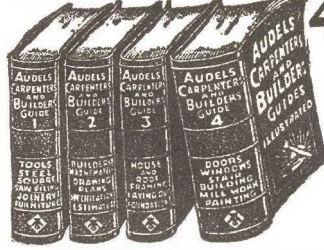
And I was true to that trust, I was vigilant; so vigilant, for weeks afterward, that I knew the moment a change came over me. That night I was feeling nervous and out of sorts—and Norman's kiss awoke strange, half-forgotten memories within me. All evening, at the theater, his close proximity bothered me.

**T**INY fear tendrils began to crawl into my brain; fear tendrils that became full-fledged, encompassing tentacles when we sat in a nightclub and I caught my fingers deliberately lowering the neck of my dress.

Cold terror closed like a vise around my heart and checked me then, but when I kissed Norman good-night the feverish passion that raced through my tingling veins warned me that I must never see him again! I was damned, irrevocably damned! I had been living in a fool's paradise—and now it had been transformed into a hell!

But I would put an end to it. I had seen the last of Norman, I swore to my-

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## TERROR TALES

self. We had an important engagement for the next evening, but I would break that. I would plead illness, anything to keep him away, and then I would persist in refusing to see him.

All night I rehearsed that plan, and all the next day. In the afternoon I telephoned him to make my excuse—but he was not at his office. By evening I was desperate. I tried his home; tried to contact his father, to confess what had happened and warn him but Dr. Hewitt was out of the city. I could not reach Norman, but that would not stop me. I would go away, I resolved quickly. I would pack a bag and leave the house, leave the city—but when I tried to do that *I could not get past the front door!*

My legs would not obey my will. Desperately I tried to drive myself to carry out my purpose, but something stronger than my will-power had taken control of me. Instead of leaving, I told Warner, the doorman, that I had changed my mind and was staying in for the evening. I told him that his services would not be needed and he could take the night off!

And then I went up to my room and stared at myself in the mirror; stared at eyes that were wide with horror and the realization of impending tragedy; stared at a body that was—too lovely to be hidden beneath clothing. . . .

I took off the clothing and slipped into a sheer negligee, and when Norman rang I went to the door and received him. All that was decent and fine, all that I had been building up for months, was being strangled within me, but I led him upstairs to the sitting room of my own suite—the room next to my bedroom.

Behind that bedroom door, alone, I fought the battle of my life; fought until my whole body was wet with perspiration. But the madness that raged within me could not be denied. Then my feet

carried me toward the doorway. . . .

He must have seen the madness in my look. I caught the widening of his eyes—and the mania that possessed me swept everything before it. I wanted him to look at me like that! Frantically my will fought its last losing battle—and then I walked through the doorway and up to the man I loved!

How I came to be in his arms I do not know. Perhaps I threw myself into them. Perhaps he seized me and tried to shake me back to sanity. All I know is that my arms closed around him, that my lips found his—and that his voice was shouting in my brain.

"No, Doris darling! You can't do this!" I heard him pleading. "This is madness! Please listen to me!"

## CHAPTER FOUR

### The Man I Love Must Die!

**M**Y FINGERS were tearing at his clothes, ripping them from him, but suddenly something stabbed into my side. Only for a second, and then he was pleading, pleading—and at last my faltering will rallied! My wild struggling slackened, weakened, and a flood of tears came rushing to my eyes—burning tears that scorched my very soul as I realized the enormity of what I had almost done.

"Go away, darling—go away and leave me!" I begged through my sobs. "I am no good. I am a murderess. You escaped this time, but I will kill you just as I killed two other men—after I was through with them. Please do this for me!"

But he would not listen. He shook his head and stopped my lips with his hand.

"There is nothing the matter with you, Doris," I heard him saying earnestly. "You are perfectly normal, but you have been drugged. You have been victimized heartlessly for your money. Six years

ago your uncle's brokerage firm was headed for certain bankruptcy—"

I hardly realized what he was saying, but a glimmering of the truth began to penetrate my dazed brain. Could my Uncle Fleming—

Before the thought was completed my eyes suddenly flew wide, and a half-scream burst from my lips. In that split-second I had seen a figure materialize in the hall doorway—a man's figure with a black hood over his—head; had seen him come leaping toward Norman with an upraised club!

What happened then all merged into a bewildering kaleidoscope. I saw Norman whirl, saw the club come down over his head, saw him locked in that hooded man's arms—and then swirling darkness closed in around me, and I felt myself falling into unfathomable blackness. . . .

Someone was bathing my forehead with cold water when I came back to my senses. At first I could see only a blood-smeared face above me, but when the mist before my eyes cleared I recognized Myron—Myron with his cheek red with blood that ran down from a nasty cut on his forehead; but Myron, thank God! I sobbed with relief and reached out for him—when Norman's voice halted me. Startled, I glanced around—and then I saw him; saw him tied hand and foot and lashed to a chair!

"There is the answer to all your troubles, darling," he gritted bitterly. "That so-called man leaning over you! I knew that you were being diabolically victimized, but I thought your uncle was responsible for it. I have been investigating the Bradleys very carefully the past few weeks. I discovered how close to ruin they were six years ago—when your mother's death and your father's departure so conveniently placed your fortune in their hands. I discovered more than that; I discovered one of the rottenest pieces of murderous thievery anyone

could conceive—and now I know whose twisted brain schemed it.

“Your precious cousin, Myron, could not face the prospect of the poverty he saw staring him in the face, so he took steps to prevent it. He knew that your father wanted to take a trip to Asia but was staying home because of you and your mother, so he plotted with Jura Singh to make your father believe that the Hindu had been familiar with your mother. Jura Singh was paid well for his part in the filthy deal. He disappeared so as to make his guilt look certain, and when your mother was faced with the shocking structure of lying evidence, her husband’s lack of faith in her was too much. She killed herself.

“After that your father went to Asia and left you and your fortune in your Uncle Fleming’s hands—where clever Myron could control it and use it for his own purposes through the family brokerage house. But he had no intention of letting your wealth slip out of his hands when you grew up and married. He had taken care to prevent that by conspiring with Jura Singh to work devilishly on your already hypnosis-conditioned mind—to plant a psycho-neurosis in it with his praying mantis exhibition; a neurosis that would make you dread the thought of what loving a man might make you do to him.

“To strengthen that and drive all thought of marriage out of your head, you have been drugged with intensely powerful aphrodisiacs. Under their influence you have been helpless, have had no idea of what you did—especially when you slipped into unconsciousness. Then it was simple to commit murder and make you believe that you were guilty of the atrocious crimes—but you aren’t, darling! You aren’t!”

“No, as a matter of fact, she isn’t,” Myron laughed in a way I had never heard. “You missed your vocation,

Hewitt; you ought to have been a Sherlock Holmes. There is just one point you missed. I intended to have Doris committed to an asylum for the criminally insane after the Sabin killing, after which the stewardship of her estate would have remained permanently in our hands. But it seems I am a weakling like most men. The close-up view of her body overcame my better judgment. I decided to postpone her committment for a while—until I should have had ample opportunity to enjoy her exceptional charms. Then you came into the picture and upset things badly for all of us, yourself included. Now, you understand, there is nothing for me to do but butcher you and let Doris go to an insane cell for the crime.”

I HAD heard so much during the past few minutes that I could scarcely make head or tail of the revelations, but out of it all some startling truths loomed. My mother was not a wanton! My blood was not damned! I was not a murderer! Those revelations were singing in my brain when Myron’s words knifed through my overwhelming relief.

“Now I shall have to send you away, darling, but first—” He smiled, as he cuddled me in his arms. “As I was reviving you I gave you two more of the capsules I switched yesterday for those Dr. Hewitt prescribed for you. They should make you appreciate me—don’t they?”

His hands were stealing over my flesh, and my whole physical being was responding to him! Liquid fire flowed through my veins; my limbs trembled and my body writhed—but my mind was enduring insufferable agony. This time I knew exactly what I was doing; I hated and loathed myself for every thrill, for every responsive gesture—*and I could not stop myself!*

Even while I mentally cringed in shame and drew back from him in re-



## Prey For the Daughter of Hell

vulsion, my body tingled to his touch!

God in heaven, I prayed, was there nothing that I could do? Must I send the man I loved to his grave with this soul-searing scene etched into his dying brain?

My agonized eyes turned to him—and an incredible hope leaped into being! Norman was desperately battling with the ropes that bound him. He had gotten his arms free of the chair. His wrists were still tied together—but at least he could move his arms. That would *have* to be sufficient. . . .

With that I abandoned my last effort at resistance. I cradled Myron in my arms and covered his face with kisses. When his grip relaxed I wriggled my way upright to my knees, to my feet, and swayed into the undulating motions of a dance of the damned. A dance that held him spell-bound, wide-eyed, totally unconscious that I was desperately using the only weapon I had to pit against him.

On his knees he stared up at me as I glided closer and closer to him, until I was no more than a foot away—and then I threw myself into his arms in a lunge that carried him off his feet, that swept him backward and dropped him almost in Norman's lap!

Desperately I prayed that Norman would understand—and he did. His wrist-bound arms raised high and came down over Myron's head, to encircle him in a noose of flesh and bone that closed inexorably as my own fingers fastened in the murderer's throat. How long we struggled there I will never know. Myron tugged and strained, threshed and kicked.

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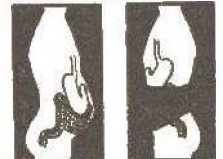
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## TERROR TALES

until the chair went over and we floundered on the floor, but our grips were steel-fast. My fingers became numb, but still they sank deeper into his throat. Norman's face became mottled, but still his arms pressed inward—until Myron's ribs snapped and his head lolled back.

When we released him, the murderer of Paul Anderson and Ralph Sabin had paid for those crimes and for the death of my mother. . . .

"I knew what you dreaded, darling; I wormed it out of Dad," Norman told me as I untied him. "Last night I recognized the symptoms. When you were not looking I took one of the capsules Dad had given you out of your handbag. I had it analyzed and found it had been switched for a devilish aphrodisiac that would drive you out of your mind. I got an antidote for that and brought it with me in a hypodermic—"

"That was what I felt stabbing into my side," I recalled. "Oh, darling, but if it had not worked! The chance you took, coming to me when you knew what I would be like!"

"I wonder—was that such a long chance as it seems," the man who is now my husband said thoughtfully, as he looked deep into my eyes. "It's a strange thing, but even the female praying mantis, who eventually devours her mate, will fight to the death to protect him against all others."

THE END

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(Continued)

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29x4.75-20	2.50	1.25	
29x5.00-19	2.85	1.25	
30x5.00-20	2.85	1.25	
5.25-17	2.90	1.35	
28x5.25-18	2.90	1.35	
29x5.25-19	2.95	1.35	
30x5.25-20	2.95	1.35	
31x5.25-21	3.25	1.35	
5.50-17	3.35	1.40	
28x5.50-18	3.35	1.40	
29x5.50-19	3.35	1.45	
6.00-17	3.40	1.40	
30x6.00-18	3.40	1.40	
31x6.00-19	3.40	1.45	
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33x4	2.95	1.25	33x5	3.75	1.75
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36x6	8.95	4.45			

### TRUCK BALLOON TIRES

Size	Tires	Tubes	Size	Tires	Tubes
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