

THRILLING

MYSTERY

DEC.

1933
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10[¢]

FEATURING

THE FLAME DEMON

By **WYATT BLASSINGAME**

BLOOD IN THE NIGHT

By **JAMES DUNCAN**

**GHOULS of
the GREEN
WEB**

By **G. T.
FLEMING-ROBERTS**

**DEVILS IN
THE DUST**

By
ARTHUR J. BURKS

A THRILLING
PUBLICATION



**WEIRD, MENACING THRILLS
ON EVERY PAGE!**

AND JUST WHEN I'VE MET THE SWELLEST GIRL



A new crop of pimples was always taking the joy out of things!



WHAT'S WRONG TED? YOU LOOK ALL WASHED UP!

DON'T I KNOW IT! I WOULD HAVE TO GET A FLOCK OF CHIN BLOSSOMS JUST WHEN I WANT TO MAKE A GOOD IMPRESSION ON SALLY



IF THAT'S ALL - CHEER UP! I MEANT TO TELL YOU SIS SAID TO TRY FLEISCHMANN'S YEAST - 3 CAKES A DAY, AND PIMPLES VAMOOSE

HONESTLY? THEN IT'S FLEISCHMANN'S YEAST FOR ME - IN A HURRY

2 WEEKS LATER



HELLO, TED... WHERE HAVE YOU BEEN THESE PAST TWO WEEKS?

OH, JUST OUT LOOKING TO MAKE SURE THERE WERE NO GIRLS AS PRETTY AS YOU - AND THERE AREN'T!



GREAT LADY-KILLER - NOW THAT HIS FACE IS ALL CLEARED UP - FLEISCHMANN'S YEAST SURE IS A PIMPLE CHASER

Don't let adolescent pimples spoil any of YOUR dates!

From about 13 to 25 years of age, important glands develop, causing disturbances throughout the body. Waste poisons enter the blood. These irritate the skin, cause pimples. Doctors prescribe Fleischmann's Yeast for adolescent pimples. It clears skin irritants out of the blood, pimples disappear. Eat 3 cakes a day until the skin clears.

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clears the skin

by clearing skin irritants out of the blood

"Give Me Your Measure and I'll Prove in the First 7 Days You Can Have a Body Like Mine!"

No other Physical In-
structor in the World
has ever DARED make
such an offer!

I'll give you PROOF in 7 days that I can turn you, too, into a man of might and muscle. Just think of it! Right in the first week under my guidance you will see and feel the improvement! Then as my weekly instructions arrive in your home you continue to re-build, renew and "overhaul" your body. By the end of three months you are the owner of a powerful body that you will be proud to display anywhere! People will notice the roddy glow of health in your face, the sparkle in your clear eyes, your broad shoulders and they will seek your company. You will be the fellow who will walk off with the prettiest girl and do the best job while the others wonder how you did it!

Write your name and address carefully on the coupon below. I'll send you absolutely free a copy of my new book, "Everlasting Health and Strength." It reveals the secrets that changed me from a 97-pound flat-chested weakling into a husky fellow who twice won the title "The World's Most Perfectly Developed Man" against all comers! And it shows how I can make you an "Atlas Champion" the same way.

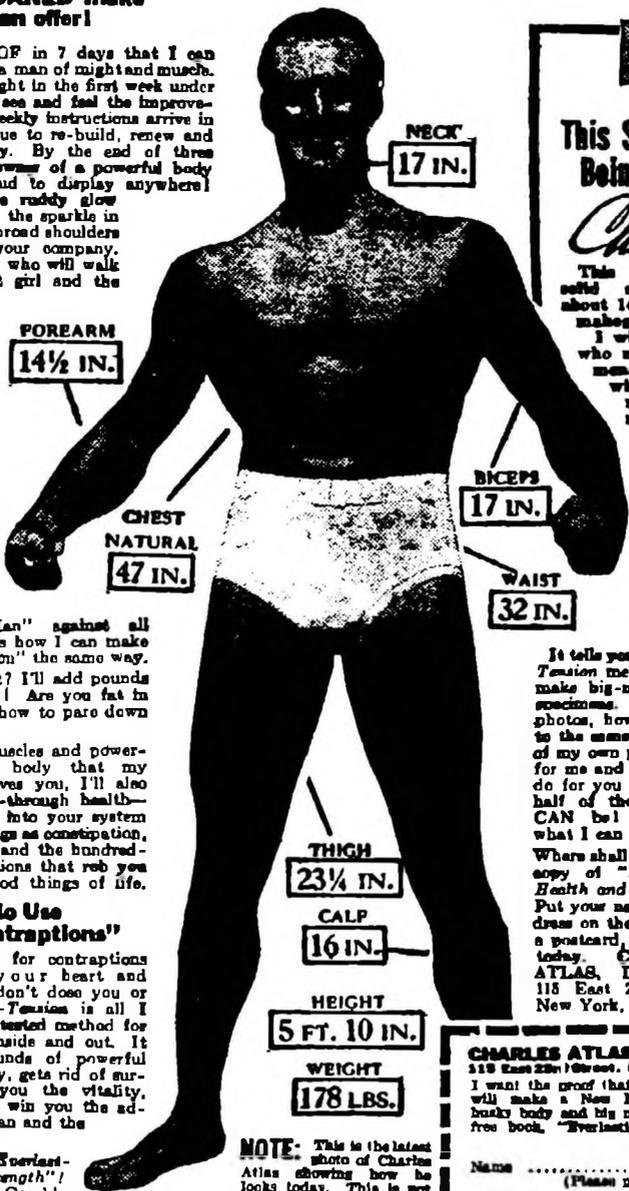
Are you underweight? I'll add pounds where they are needed! Are you fat in spots? I'll show you how to pare down to fighting trim.

And with the big muscles and powerful evenly-developed body that my method so quickly gives you, I'll also give you through-and-through health—health that digs down into your system and banishes such things as constipation, pimples, skin blotches and the hundred-and-one similar conditions that rob you of good times and good things of life.

I've Got No Use At All for "Contraptions"

I haven't any need for contraptions that may strain your heart and other vital organs. I don't doze you or doctor you. *Dynamic-Tension* is all I need. It's the natural, tested method for developing real men inside and out. It distributes added pounds of powerful muscles over your body, gets rid of surplus fat, and gives you the vitality, strength and pep that win you the admiration of every woman and the respect of any man.

Get my free book, "Everlasting Health and Strength"! Mail my coupon today. Gamble a stamp to prove I can make YOU a new man!



NOTE: This is the latest photo of Charles Atlas showing how he looks today. This is not a studio photo but an actual untouched snapshot.



This Sterling Silver Cup
Being Given Away by

Charles Atlas

This valuable cup, made of solid sterling silver, stands about 14 inches high on a black mahogany base.

I will award it to my pupil who makes the most improvement in his development within the next three months. Therefore, no matter what your measurements may be now, you have an equal chance to win this cup for permanent possession—and with YOUR name engraved on it!

48-PAGE BOOK
FREE

It tells you all about my special *Dynamic-Tension* method, and what it has done to make big-muscled men out of run-down specimens. It shows you, from actual photos, how I have developed my pupils to the same perfectly balanced proportions of my own physique. What my system did for me and these hundreds of others it can do for you too. Don't keep on being only half of the man you CAN be! Find out what I can do for you.

Where shall I send your copy of "Everlasting Health and Strength"? Put your name and address on the coupon, or a postcard, and mail it today. CHARLES ATLAS, Dept. 7712, 115 East 23rd Street, New York, N. Y.



CHARLES ATLAS, Dept. 7712
115 East 23rd Street, New York, N. Y.

I want the proof that your system of *Dynamic-Tension* will make a New Man of me—give me a healthy, husky body and big muscle development. Send me your free book, "Everlasting Health and Strength."

Name

(Please print or write plainly)

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Vol. 1, No. 2

December, 1935

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IN SPARE TIME FOR A

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"One week my business netted \$75.00 on repairs alone. And there were a lot of sales to be added. I have only you to thank for it. In my estimation, N. R. I. is the best home-study school in the United States."
—M. S. LEWIS, Box 514, Pittsfield, Ill.

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Act today for better pay. Act today to break away from a low-pay, no-future job—to get away from having to skimp, scrape to pay your bills. Mail coupon for my free 64-page book. It tells you how I will train you at home in your spare time to be a Radio Expert; about my training that has helped hundreds of men to make more money.

Many Radio Experts Make
\$30, \$50, \$75 a Week

Consider these facts—think of the good jobs they stand for. Over 20,000,000 Radio sets in use, over 600 transmitting stations, over 60 manufacturers of Radio sets; over 2,000 manufacturers of parts, over 100 Police Departments Radio equipped, airplanes and airports Radio equipped. Thousands of ships launching every seaport of the world, Radio equipped. Over \$5,000,000 stores selling sets and parts. Over 2,000,000 auto Radio equipped in recent years. Loud speaker systems wherever people gather, indoors and outdoors. Commercial Radio stations dotting our coast lines. Radio, a big industry—is growing bigger. A few hundred in \$, \$50, \$75 a week jobs—have grown to thousands.

Get Ready Now for Jobs Like These

A spare time or full time service shop; installing, maintaining, operating—broadcast, aviation, commercial, ship, television and police stations. A radio retail or service business of your own. Installing, maintaining, servicing, loud speaker systems. A service or sales job with a store or jobber. I'll train you for good jobs in many branches of Radio.

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

Every neighborhood can use a good part time serviceman. The day you enroll I start sending you Extra Money Job Sheets which quickly show you how to do Radio repair jobs common in almost every neighborhood. Get my book—see for yourself that many of my students make \$200 to \$1,000 in their spare time while learning.

Your Money Back if Not Satisfied

I'll make this agreement with you. If you are not entirely satisfied with my Lesson and Instruction Service when you finish, I'll refund your tuition.

Find Out What Radio Offers

Mail the coupon. My book of information on Radio's spare time and full time opportunities is free to ambitious men. Send what Radio offers you. Read about the training I give you. Read letters from graduates—what they are doing and earning. There's no obligation. Mail coupon in an envelope or paste it on a penny post card—NOW.

J. E. SMITH, President
National Radio Institute, Dept. 28700
Washington, D. C.



SAVE MONEY—LEARN AT HOME
My Special Equipment Gives You
Broad Practical Experience

Hold your job. Be ready to leave home and spend a lot of money to become a Radio Expert. I'll train you quickly and inexpensively right at home in your spare time. You don't need a high school or college education. Many of my successful graduates didn't finish grade school. My practical 50-60 method of training—half with lessons, half with Radio equipment I furnish—gives you broad, practical experience—makes learning at home easy, fascinating, practical and quick. There is opportunity for you in Radio. Old jobs are becoming more complicated—many need better trained men. New developments are making new opportunities. Short waves, loud speaker systems, police Radio, auto Radio, aviation Radio, television—Radio's newest uses are covered by my training. Here's a field that's growing. It is where you find growth that you find opportunity.

I have helped
hundreds of
MEN MAKE
MORE MONEY



MAIL THIS NOW!

J. E. Smith, President
National Radio Institute, Dept. 28700

Washington, D. C.

Dear Mr. Smith: Without obligating me, send free book about spare time and full time Radio opportunities and how I can train for them at home in spare time. (Please Print Plainly.)

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Address.....

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Are You STILL in the DEPRESSION??

Times are better. Business is out of the rut—well ahead of a year ago. Millions of men have gone back to work. There's more money in lots of pay envelopes. But what good is that to you, if your pay check is still written in depression figures?

You weren't so discontented a year ago. In fact, you considered yourself lucky to have a job. But now—you have begun to wonder and worry why the oncoming tide of prosperity hasn't reached you yet. The situation is getting desperate. Bills continue to pile up. You can't get along forever on a "shoe string" budget. You must win back those pay cuts. Other men are doing it—how can you?

Certainly, you can't work any harder than you have been. And it isn't a question of your intelligence, honesty or ambition. Those virtues do not solve today's problem—they are often insufficient to hold down a job, as millions unemployed sadly testify.

But there is a way to get back to the prosperity pay check. A way that's probably far easier than you have dreamed. A plan that has been "depression-tested."

During the worst period of the depression, this plan was helping thousands of men and women forge ahead. Today, during recovery, these same men and women—their ranks swelled by thousands more—are being picked for top positions. They are escaping years of monotonous, routine service—achieving their dreams while they are young enough to enjoy success in its fullest measure.

Since this plan brings results in bad times as well as

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I would like to know about your Success-Building Plan and service in the business field I have checked.

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Name _____ Age _____

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good, it absolutely works independently of business conditions. As unbelievable as that may sound, remember that success is largely up to the individual. Most men struggle through a depression all their lives. The few who forge ahead ride to success the same business tides that sweep the majority to failure.

The LaSalle Success-Building Plan is made for men like you—men with courage, ambition, persistence, who need expert guidance to make the most of their efforts. But LaSalle supplies even more than that. Not only individualized training and coaching to help you meet today's crying needs . . . but also the very steps you need to take to fill the job ahead, and force that pay raise quickly. Any

synopsis of this plan, which we might include here, could give you only a vague idea of this service. We suggest you mail the coupon for complete details on your own line of work.

Today's Danger

There's a real danger to accepting "depression pay" these days. A danger that lower wages will continue to dog you—for no employer will pay more until he is convinced you are worth more. Some day, some way, you've got to convince him. There's no time to lose. The sooner you begin, the better.

If the LaSalle Plan has fulfilled this aim for thousands, isn't it logical to expect it can do as much for you? This coupon can easily become your passport to better times. Mail it today.



LaSalle
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Follow this Man

Secret Service Operator 38 is on the job

FOLLOW him through all the excitement of his chase of the counterfeit gang. See how a crafty operator works. Telltale finger prints on the lamp stand in the murdered girl's room! The detective's cigarette case is handled by the unsuspecting gangster, and a great mystery is solved. Better than fiction. It's true, every word of it. No obligation. Just send the coupon and get—

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And the best part of it all is this—it may open your eyes to the great opportunity for YOU as a well paid Finger Print Expert. This is a young, fast-growing profession. This school has taken men and trained them for high official positions. This is the kind of work you would like. Days full of excitement. A regular monthly salary. Rewards.

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Are you of average intelligence? Are you ambitious? Would you give 30 minutes a day of your spare time preparing yourself for this profession? Answer "yes" and I'll show you how it is possible for you to attain all this. Send the coupon and I'll also send the Free Reports.

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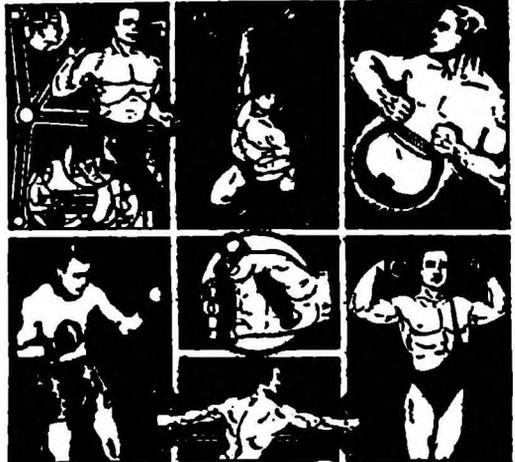
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Gentlemen:—Without any obligation whatever, send me the Reports of Operator No. 38, also your illustrated Free Book on Finger Prints and your low prices and Easy Terms Offer. Literature will NOT be sent to boys under 17 years of age.

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Age _____



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This new guide, "THE PERFECT BARTENDING HOST AT HOME" is really the largest authentic book on bartending which instructs you on how to mix several hundred delightful drinks—cocktails, highballs, rickeys, cordials, and other concoctions. Every person fond of entertaining guests at home will find this book very handy and popular and excellent amusement for his friends.

Send your quarter now while our supply lasts. Cash, money order or stamps. No O. O. D.'s.

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Good Pay Job
IN THE
Fast-Growing
AVIATION
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My famous course trains you right in your own home—gets you ready for one of the good ground jobs—or cuts many weeks and many dollars from flight instructions. Send for my big free book today.

Don't sit back and envy the men who are in the midst of the romance, adventure and fascination of Aviation. **YOU DON'T HAVE TO.** For right in your own home, in your spare time, I'll give you the training you need to get started in this growing, well-paid industry. Get my **FREE BOOK.** It tells all the facts.

Many Make \$40, \$60, \$75 a Week

Through the simple method I have worked out, I can train you at home to fill many well-paid jobs in Aviation. Naturally, before you can fly, you have to have additional flying instructions and practice. Even on that instruction I save you time and money. But when you graduate from my course you have the necessary foundation to begin such work as Airport Manager, Metal Worker, Assembler, Wing Doper, Transport Worker, Welder, Instrument Maker, Inspector, Wood Worker, Airport Worker, Mechanic, and scores of other well-paid positions. Some of my graduates have landed jobs paying \$40, \$60 to \$75 a week. Others with the additional low cost flying instruction I arrange for, have become pilots at \$600 a month or better. Send for my free book now and get the interesting particulars. Learn how I fit you to fill a good job in Aviation.

Aviation is Growing Fast

Get into Aviation now—when you can still get in on the ground floor of a new industry—when you have a chance to forge ahead without having to displace lots of older men. Aviation is a young man's industry, where young men earn real money. Most famous pilots are in

Here are just a few of the many well-paid jobs in the fast growing Aviation Industry:

- ON THE GROUND
- Airport Superintendent
- Instrument Specialist
- Electrician
- Shop Foreman
- Stynger
- Crane Chief
- Vehicle Manager
- Purchasing Agent
- Aerial Mail Clerk
- Motor Expert
- Radio Operator
- Airplane Mechanic
- Field Work

- IN THE AIR
- Air Express Agent
- Air Mail Pilot
- Aerial Photographer
- Airport Steward
- Taxi Pilot
- Aerial Passenger Agent
- Private Flying
- Weather Observer
- Pilot Instructor
- Commercial Pilot
- Field Steward
- Transport Pilot

their early thirties, or even younger. It is a young industry, which means that there are plenty of opportunities to forge ahead. But just because it is run by young men, don't get the idea that Aviation is a small business. Millions are being spent yearly to develop and improve always and planes. Thousands of men earn good livings from the business. And more thousands will enter it in the future. It is a great and growing industry, this Aviation, an industry that still brings romance, excitement, thrills—even while it is bringing big opportunities and good pay.

My Training is Thorough, Practical, Up-to-Date

I've put my eighteen years of experience—including five years of instructing officers and men in the Navy—into my thorough quick Training. And I've made it all so clear that almost anybody can understand it. My Aviation friends know that Hinton-trained men are well qualified to work for them.

Send For My Free Book Now

Now is the time to act. Don't sit content with a dead-end, no-future, low-pay job. Act now—to get yourself into Aviation—the industry that is quickly growing into a giant business. Get into Aviation. Study at home in your spare time for a well-

paid job with a real future. Mail the coupon for my free book today.

WALTER HINTON, Pres.
Aviation Institute
Washington, D. C.

Flight included!
"Give her the gun!" You're off! You're up, as soon as you complete my course. I assign a flight for you at an accredited air field. It doesn't cost you a penny extra. My graduation presents to you.

These Men Made Good With My Training

Accepted for Royal Canadian Air Force

"I sent your letter with an application for enlistment in the Royal Canadian Air Force and I received a letter stating that my application is accepted and I can enlist as soon as there is a vacancy." **JOSEPH J. BUNGO, Melville, Sask., Canada.**

Perfectly Satisfied with Course

"I am perfectly satisfied that the results obtained to date from your course have made its cost insignificant. Rest assured that you have a life-long benefit for Aviation Institute training."—**L. W. ANCHER, P. O. Box 58, Curacao, P. W. I.**



Mail Now for Facts

Mr. Walter Hinton, President
Aviation Institute of U. S. A., Inc.
1115 Connecticut Avenue, Washington, D. C.

Please send me a Free copy of your book, "Wings of Opportunity," telling all about my opportunities in Aviation, how you will train me at home for them.

Name
(Print Clearly)

Address..... Age.....

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

Announcing a Valuable Contribution to LABOR SAVING INVENTION

ONE GIRL
 doing in a few hours.
 work formerly requiring
 as many as several men



This announcement marks an important milestone in the national distribution of a unique device. Salesmen are wanted for this invention—now being placed on the market after exhaustive tests and noteworthy achievement under most exacting conditions.

THIS is the age of labor-saving invention. 200 men, just a comparatively few years ago, turned out 35 automobile frames a day. Today, 200 men, with a new-labor-saving machine, turn out 7,000 to 9,000 frames a day! It hasn't been so long since just one man could turn out only 40 electric light bulbs a day. Today, a machine turns out 73,000 bulbs in 24 hours.

On a steamship, today, three men, in spotless clean white clothes preside over automatic gauges, REPLACING ONE HUNDRED AND TWENTY COAL STOKERS who used to fire the boilers. Such inventions as these have made thousands, sometimes fortunes, for holders of sales rights. Now, again, a device yielding heavy savings in labor costs to offices, stores and factories opens another great money-making opportunity.

Millions of Dollars Again Involved

In the past, before the introduction of this device, the work has been done by "letting it out on contract" to outside firms. Each job is handled by one or more men. Sometimes the work passes through the hands of as many as five or six people. Now one girl may handle the entire job, from A to Z. And do it in a few hours, doing some jobs in minutes, instead of hours. What was done laboriously, slowly, even crudely, is done virtually automatically by the operator, following a simple, practically fool-proof routine.

A Multi-Million-Dollar Industry Facing Replacement

At the right is a table showing the enormous savings realized with this device—space for only a few cents being available. Over ONE HUNDRED AND THIRTY-FIVE lines of business are saving money with this fascinating invention!

Type of Business	Cost Could Have Been	*Actual Cost (Using our Service)
Clothing Wholesale Co.	\$1300.00	\$45.00
Wholesale Grocery Co.	1070.00	30.00
Sporting Goods Shop	800.00	43.00
Wholesale Fruit Co.	475.00	15.00
Steel Manufacturer	400.00	15.00
Hospital	350.00	15.00
Automobile Supply	115.00	15.00
Lumber Yard	513.00	15.00
Coal Dealer	300.00	15.00
Plumbing Company	308.00	30.00
Department Store	2350.00	15.00
Ladies' Wear Store	450.00	15.00
Men's Wear Store	400.00	30.00
Machine Shop	153.00	12.75

*Amount paid salesman only. Examples given show only random cases of average importance. Larger concerns show possible costs high as \$4,200 involved.

Wanted: Men Well Regarded in Their Communities to Apply for Franchises No Peddling

\$30 to \$80 a day, \$1,000 to \$1,500 a month—these are the actual net profits made by men cashing in on the hand-over-hat business done by this spectacular invention. Actual dollars and cents figures with every other interested \$20 and MORE in a single HOUR. \$200 to \$400 a week. We have the convincing letters and records of the men who have made these savings to them and can show them to anyone who desires to inspect our plan. You probably have never seen anything like this yet—perhaps have never dreamed of the existence of such a device. Merely a business firm is established even to hear of it. The opportunity for a tremendous saving appears as does the selling of this device the SMASHING sales-eliminating purchase of the ACTUAL DEMONSTRATION YOU PUT ON. YOU MAY GO THROUGH THE ROUTINE AND PRESENT THE CUSTOMER WITH A MAGNIFICENT SAVING, right before his eyes, and he can pay you out of the money he has just saved! If you can do THAT kind of selling, let us hear from you!

Hundreds of Prospects in Office Buildings, Business Sections and Industrial Areas

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CHAPTER I *The Living Fire*

“WHY every woman insists on getting into the most crowded store in town is beyond me,” Ard Fayson said, wrinkling his face in a terrific mock

scowl, as he followed the girl down jammed aisles.

Nell Matthews looked at him over her shoulder.

“It strains your brain to understand police reporting and to explain to the public why old man Tompkins from Wetumpka, well loaded with corn

A Satanic Spirit Spreads Havoc in



The glass seemed to pass directly through the hideous fire god's face

whiskey, should insist on shooting the Williams boy full of buckshot."

Fayson grinned, his dark eyes suddenly bright, his lean face breaking into good-natured lines.

"Anybody that's seen the Tompkins girl would understand why Williams didn't want to get married. But why a hard-boiled sob-sister—"

Nell pushed beyond three women and a man, reached the stocking counter, stopped, and looked at Fayson. She was slender, well built, good-

looking, with a clean cut, decisive chin, and eyes that were almost green. She wore a small, red-brown hat on hair of the same color.

"Don't call me hard-boiled," she said, grinning at Fayson. "I'm a model of femininity and my daily newspaper stories appeal to the feminine—"

Her voice stopped as though a hand had been slapped over her mouth. Her lips stayed parted and motionless. Her eyes began to grow wide

an Unholy Campaign of Destruction!

and bulge from her face as she stared.

"What the devil?" the reporter exclaimed.

But even in the second that he looked at the girl, before he began to follow her gaze, he felt the first cold touch of fear. The surge and rumble of human voices around him was dying as sharply as though silence was a wind blowing through the great department store.

Then he turned and abruptly his fingers were gripping the counter, white-nailed.

"Good God!" he cried in a hoarse whisper.

The tableau did not hold for more than two seconds, but it seemed to Ard Fayson that he stood there a long while, staring, his breath caught in his chest.

Fifteen feet from him, just beyond the end of the counter and between the stairs and the elevators, the Thing was standing. Fayson stared unbelieving, and he could feel his eyes blinking in amazement. Then, sharp as a blow, fear struck him.

THE Thing was shaped like a man, but it was not a human being. It couldn't be! It was holding great, pawlike hands shoulder-high.

Every finger was tipped by a living, wavering flame and the knuckles of his hands were burning like kindling wood!

Thick smoke swirled up around a face so gruesome that the sight made Ard Fayson sick at his stomach. The eyes were huge and lidless, and in them the flame leaped and danced. The nose was a rotting hole and the mouth a hideous gash across a face that was otherwise almost flat. The hair was as red as the fire which licked at it, but did not burn.

For one long second the Thing stood there, motionless. Abruptly a woman screamed, high and flat and terrified. At the same time the Thing wiped one burning hand across its face. Then its voice was bellowing, drowning out the scream of the woman, shutting out every other sound in the store, filling it like a black wave.

"A city of wickedness, a city of crime and misery! And I—the God of Fire, destroy it as Sodom was destroyed—wipe out its shame and sin with fire and terror!"

It stepped backward, swung one burning hand across the wall, stooped and slid it across the stairway.

Fire burst like an explosion along the wall. A great sheet of flame whipped upward. The stairs were a sudden inferno with white blazes rushing like madmen up them, sweeping over persons who stood there, frozen by horror. It was impossible for the wall and stair to have caught so quickly, but in that one instant they became a blazing fury.

Stark madness struck the packed store. Chaos and pandemonium whirled through the crowd like water through a broken dam. Women screamed, men bellowed curses, fought their way like wild animals for the exits. Persons caught in the flame of the stairway were shrieking in agony. Abruptly a woman came plunging through the fire toward Ard Fayson, her dress a smoky blaze, face blackened, hair burning, shrieking cry after cry.

The sight thawed the terror which had held him. He made a low, snarling sound deep in his throat and plunged toward the Thing standing near the elevators, its hands bursting with fire.

The Fire God moved swiftly toward the elevators, and Fayson swerved to cut him off. Another man was closing in from the left, mouthing unconscious curses.

The Fire God whirled and thrust out his hands. The left one was almost in Fayson's face when the reporter checked his rush, and jumped sideward, feeling the flame scorch his flesh, his eyebrows singeing. He heard the other man scream, saw him fall, pawing at the Fire God's hand, fall in the blaze which banked the elevators.

Instinct made Fayson beat at his face, crush out the fire that had touched his eyebrows, but there was no pain, because sheer horror had drowned every other emotion in him.

Madness struck with black wings at his brain. Through his fingers he saw the Fire God standing at the door of the elevator while flame whirled and snarled in leaping waves around him, standing there unhurt, his own hands blazing. Then he stepped back into the elevator and closed the door. Fayson heard the whir of the machinery as the lift went upward.

“ARD! Ard!” It was Nell Matthews screaming, tugging him back from the fire.

A man stumbled out of the blazing stairway, his face charred black, eyes glaring. He took two reeling steps and went down.

Fayson caught Nell by the arm.

“Come on,” he yelled. “We can’t make it that way!”

He began to drag her toward a partition separating one department from another. Through his blood a weird horror was creeping, and even as he ran he thought of the fiend who had started this fire and dread was a thick and eerie darkness within him.

“The fire’s going that way,” she yelled. “Those doors’ll be blocked.”

“Not the one I’m going to use,” he said.

He plunged into the next department and cut toward a blazing corner.

“We can’t!” she cried and tried to stop him.

“Come on, damn it!” Fayson cried. “It’s the only chance.” He whipped off his coat and wrapped it about the girl’s head. “Keep your hands under it,” he snapped. “I’ll lead you.”

He jerked off his shirt, paused for one moment staring at the wall which was a solid mass of fire. There were stairs in that corner which led down into the basement, but he could barely see the entrance through the flame. He stared at it, wrapping his left hand with a handkerchief. He caught the girl’s dress, flipped the skirt over his face, stuck his right hand in his pocket.

“Come on,” he said, and plunged forward.

The heat was like a great wind blowing him back, but he went in, running hard and dragging the girl.

For one second the flames were around him, searing. Then he was stumbling, his feet beat empty space and he was falling, rolling from step to step.

He was on his feet before they hit the bottom of the stairs. He jerked the girl erect, throwing away the skirt and coat, beating the small flames from her dress.

There was a window opening below sidewalk level and they ran toward it, climbed through and up to the sidewalk. Fire and police sirens were wailing.

Two trucks were already on the scene, firemen running forward with hose. From a door thirty yards away persons were pouring, piling over one another, blocking each other’s exit, fighting, clawing. The store was a bedlam of screaming terror.

“Come on,” Fayson said. “Let’s get across the street and watch. There’s nothing we can do to help.” He was once more a calm reporter working on a story. “How many persons do you estimate were in that building? Probably hundreds will get burned. They’ll want an extra on this. Call Hatson and give him what you know. The fire had evidently been planned because the wall and stair couldn’t have gone up like that naturally. That Thing that hollered about being the God of Fire—”

He stopped suddenly, conscious that his face was growing very pale, that he felt a cold, supernatural terror stirring through his blood. The Thing which had stood there in a wall of flame, whose hands had been living firebrands, how could it have been human? Why had it tried to burn hundreds of persons alive?

For a half second sheer terror struck him as he remembered the threat to destroy the entire city and in his leaping imagination he could picture flame, towering above the whole town, the screams of agony and horror and the God of Fire.

Abruptly a man close beside them was shouting, “Look! Look!”

And Fayson spun to look where the man was pointing. Over the whole of Court Square, on which the department store faced, persons were stand-

ing motionless, heads tilted upward. And then Fayson saw it, and his breath clogged in his chest, his brain reeled with terror.

Smoke was leaping from every window of the building, cascading up its sides, so that its roof, five stories up, was barely visible through the black clouds. And there, on the very edge of the roof, was the God of Fire!

His arms were raised toward heaven, legs spread. Smoke coiling and whirling about him made his whole body seem to writhe and twist like a boneless spirit in agony, and from his upraised hands yellow flames glimmered through the smoke.

For what seemed an eternity it stood there. In the Square before the building even the firemen had stopped, petrified by some weird and gruesome dread that poured down from the figure above them.

The store continued to vomit the roar of flames and the shrieks of persons being cremated alive, but in the street no one heard them. Every person stood like part of a tableau, head flung back, staring at the evil thing on the roof's edge.

The smoke coiled thicker. For a moment there was only the gleam of yellow fire from its hands, then nothing.

HEAR stalked like a living thing across the girl's face. Her lips moved mechanically as though some abnormal power were forcing the words from her.

"It—it's coming back because it didn't die. Fire *couldn't* hurt it! Nothing can hurt it!"

Fayson shook reason into himself the way a dog shakes water from his coat.

"Don't be crazy," he said. "Call Hatson. I'll meet you here after circling the building, seeing if anything else is likely to go."

He circled the building, working his way through nearby stores and came back. He tried to concentrate on the story he would write, but the thought of the monster, hands flaming, face unbelievably horrible, kept coming back to him. Only a salamander

could have lived in that flame, and yet this God of Fire . . .

Later he found Nell, her face still white with terror.

"Get on up to the court-house," he said. "Pick up the daily statistics for me and any stories you find. I'll be busy around here."

It was a town of less than sixty thousand, and the police reporter had to cover the court-house as well.

The girl looked almost sick. "I'll be glad to get away from here," she said. "I—I'm afraid."

Again Fayson felt her words jar deep into his stomach, felt the cold shadow of an unseen terror creep over him, but he tried to make his voice normal.

"Okay," Fayson said. "But the Fire God has scorched his own hide now. You needn't worry."

CHAPTER II

The Death of Flame

IN the bright light of the news room that night Fayson took the last page of copy from his typewriter and turned toward the city editor's desk. Hatson, the city editor, grabbed the story, flipped Fayson a long sheet of white paper.

"Look at that," he said.

Ard Fayson was halfway through the message before he realized what he was reading.

"Great God!" he whispered.

Sodom was destroyed for its evil, and now I, the God of Fire, shall destroy Vasairy and the lives of those therein, for there are no forty persons here untouched by wickedness. Tonight or tomorrow I strike again, once more burning their sins from the wicked!

Fayson wet his lips and tried to grin. "The Fire God sent that too early," he said. "He burned out his own wickedness in his first fire."

The city editor had never taken the pipe from his mouth. "That's what you claimed in the last edition," he said. "But look at the postmark on that envelope." He touched it with a tobacco-stained finger.

Fayson leaned forward and all at once he felt the blood drop from his head, clabber in cold, abnormal dread throughout his body. For the envelope was postmarked 6:30 P. M.

That was more than two hours after the fire!

Ard Fayson looked up. His face was pale and lean below the singed brows.

"That means he's still alive."

He was gripping the desk until his fingernails whitened, feeling the blood crawl sluggishly through his brain. He had seen flame leap and swirl around the figure on the roof, had seen its hands burning. No human being could have escaped from that store top—and yet this letter had been mailed two hours after the fire.

"Destroy the city," the demon had said, and he himself could not be hurt by fire! Why, great God! Fayson stared about him at the familiar, trash-littered room, the men pounding typewriters and editing copy. With this monster alive he might stalk in here at any moment and send the place up in a roaring blaze.

Every one of these men he looked at might be a charred corpse tomorrow. He himself, Nell Matthews!

"Great God!" Ard said, and his throat muscles were so cold the words choked in him.

The city editor spoke without looking up. "That guy says there will be more fires tonight or in the morning. You get on down to the fire station and hang around. I'll have Bob keep check on the hospitals and the morgue, and Tom can check on the Newtire Rubber Company plant. Even if they decided to come here nobody would be worried tomorrow with this fire to talk about."

"Okay," Fayson said, and went out.

The night was hot, without the slightest stir of wind, but climbing into his small roadster, Fayson could smell the charred, water-soaked wood of Hartsell's Department Store five blocks away, and there was another odor which made him shudder when it touched his nostrils.

"That's imagination," he said, half aloud. "I can't smell—those burned

bodies this far. It's quite impossible!"

A Negro passed, whistling "East of the Sun," and Fayson had the weird impression he was watching a man go toward his death—a burned and brittle corpse. With this fiend loose, every person in the city lived in constant danger. He thought of Nell Matthews and his hands shook on the steering wheel.

"I'm going nuts," he said aloud, kicked the motor into action, swung across Dexter and down North Lawrence Street toward the fire department's headquarters.

ASSISTANT FIRE CHIEF TURNER was in his office with two other men when Fayson entered. They all three watched the reporter take a chair near the wall and lean back.

"Any more of those in the hospital die?" Turner asked.

"Two within the last hour," Fayson said. "That makes fifty-eight dead."

"God! Fifty-eight!" one of the other men said.

Turner slammed a huge fist on the desk and his round face was redder than ever beneath his thin, blond hair.

"We coulda saved half those people," he said. "I wanted to turn in an eight alarm from the first, but Chief Innis said no. I wanted to use the chemicals on the south side of the building, but Innis would fiddle around with water until too late. He's the chief, but—"

His thick lips clamped together.

The tall, slender, grey-haired man sitting across the desk said, "You might like to know about this, Ard."

He handed Turner a white sheet of paper similar to that he had seen in the news room of the paper. The lettering was the same square, block work, impossible to trace.

Do not insure the homes of the wicked, for they shall be destroyed by fire.
THE GOD OF FIRE

Fayson grunted suddenly, straightened in his chair and looked at the grey-haired man. He knew Pete Hobdy—had known him since Fayson first came to the city three years be-

fore. A pleasant, likable, middle-aged man, he had very recently secured the agency for National Fire Insurance Company, an agency new to Vassery, but probably the biggest, most reputable firm of its kind.

Beside Hobdy was John Carr, a small, meek-faced man whose appearance belied the driving, relentless character with which he had built up and become President of Alabama Fire Insurers, the largest State Fire Insurance Company.

"AND you got one, too, Mr. Carr?" Fayson asked.

"Yes. Every agent in town got one. Mr. Hobdy and I have come down to ask for extra precautions on the part of the fire department. Hartsell's was insured by me. Mr. Phelps carried a quarter million in protection. That was more than the place was worth, I believe. I don't want to take many losses like that. I cover more property than any other company in the city, and now"—He picked the note from the desk and waved it—"this comes—"

"That's tough," said Fayson.

He was already reaching for the telephone. He gave Bob the story, read the note to him, and hung up.

Fayson went out of the office and toward the rear of the building where firemen were grouped about two pool tables. For several minutes he stood watching, but paying no attention to the game.

His brain was whirling. This thing called the Fire God was a human being. It had to be! Then it had to have motives and would follow some definite course of action. If he could only forestall—

Abruptly he snapped his fingers. The Fire God had sworn it would destroy the city because of wickedness. Well, the place to start would be at the Howling Monkey Night Club. Nobody would deny it was the town's number-one hot spot. Fayson turned toward the door, moving with quick, long strides.

"Hey, Ard! Wait a minute."

He paused, watching Lieutenant Peters, so dapper that even his

fire department uniform looked swank, come toward him. He and Peters went to the door together.

"I was in my office when you were talking to Chief Turner, and heard him," said Peters. "Don't let the old bull feed you any truck. He wants to be chief of the whole department; that's what's biting him. He wasn't even around when the alarm sounded. Probably down on the corner playing the slot machine. I didn't see him until I had been at the fire fifteen minutes."

"All right," said Fayson. "I won't boom his campaign."

He went up the street to where his roadster was parked and climbed in. He had backed into the street and was shifting into low when he saw Nell Matthews almost running toward the fire station. He leaned over the door and called to her.

She jerked to a halt and swung around, a half scream on her lips. Then she saw Fayson and ran toward him. Before she reached the car, Fayson knew that something was wrong; he could feel terror leaping out from the girl like an electric current, vibrating along his nerves, making his hands clench cold about the wheel.

Her face was pale against the night, and Fayson thought, "If something has happened to her—"

His fear-cold brain could not get beyond those words.

She climbed in beside him, put both hands on his arm. The dash light showed her face almost chalky white, and a nerve was twitching at the right corner of her mouth. Her eyes were wide and dark.

Twice she opened her lips and closed them, unable to speak. Then the words came, jerky:

"It—it's going to—*kill* me!"

"*What!* What the devil are you talking about?"

Fayson caught her shoulders and held her as though she were trying to run from him. His whole body was rigid and his lungs were crushing out against his ribs.

"I just got a note. Pat brought it to the office with the mail. It said I

could get out of town or be destroyed with the wicked who stayed here—that I only had a few hours to decide."

Ard Fayson's hands clenched on the girl's shoulders so hard she gasped at the pain, but Fayson did not hear. Dread was hammering mad fists against his brain, and in imagination he saw the flaming hands of the monster reaching for her white throat, saw the flesh grown black and charred.

"I'll take you to the station," said Fayson. "You can go to Birmingham for a few days."

Nell's mouth had ceased to tremble. "This afternoon you told me not to be sentimental," she said; "that I had work to do. We don't have many reporters, and I'm not going to run out just at the time we have the most work."

"I know, but you are a woman," said Fayson. "You've got no business messing—"

She interrupted him. "I may be a woman, but I work for that newspaper as well as you do. It's no more dangerous for me than it is for you."

Fayson argued frantically, and it came to him, sitting there in the roadster, that he loved this girl more than anything in life; had loved her a long while without admitting it even to himself. But he couldn't tell her now.

"All right," he said. "I'm going out to the Howling Monkey Night Club, and we've got to have somebody at the police station. You stay there."

THE Howling Monkey Night Club was a low, sprawling building, deep buried in pine trees a quarter of a mile from the extension of South Court Street.

It was nearly midnight when Ard Fayson followed the road winding between the tall, slender trees that spread their needles like black Spanish lace against the sky. Lightning-bugs twinkled silver and gold in the darkness.

The muted sound of an orchestra was barely audible above the hum of his motor. Then his headlights caught

the building. He swung in beside other cars, parked, and got out.

Fayson circled the place without going in. The downstairs windows were opened against the heat; so were the windows to the small private rooms upstairs, but they were heavily curtained.

The sound of the orchestra playing "The Isle of Capri," stirred the darkness under the pines. As well as he could tell, everything was normal. He came back to the front door, went in.

"Hello, Ed," he said to the grinning Negro waiter. "I want a back table, near the door, and a Tom Collins." He sat down, dark eyes searching the crowd, which was barely visible in the dim light, forefinger rubbing his singed eyebrows. The place wasn't as full tonight as usual. The effect of the fire, probably.

Eight couples on the dance floor, five more sitting at shadowed tables, probably three or four couples upstairs. Not more than thirty-five persons here altogether.

The waiter brought his Tom Collins and he sat drinking slowly. Might as well leave after this drink. If this afternoon was any indication, the Fire God couldn't waste his time on thirty-five persons. But this place would make a good fire. Those gaudy decorations of monkeys and women about the walls and roof would go up in a flash.

The steps leading to the second floor were close behind him, and he twisted to look at them, twisted halfway and stopped, one hand clenching the back of his chair, the other suddenly whitening around the glass. In that same instant a woman screamed furiously and the smooth rhythm of the orchestra became a jagged discord.

Blocking the doorway and the steps to the second floor was the God of Fire!

IN the dim light the flames from the monster's hands were a hellish red, tossing black smoke upward to curl about the hideous, flat face, the great lidless eyes which were like

glass with the light of the fire reflected in them, the red hair that swayed with the demon's gentle rocking.

For one second he stood there. The woman's scream had jerked to a halt, the orchestra had stopped and silence clapped like thunder in the room. Then a fiery hand moved across the God's face and a voice bellowed:

"More wicked than Sodom or Gomorrah, but the fires of Hell will purge you!"

His hands swung out to touch the walls on either side of him, and the flame burst like a shell, roared upward, swept across the roof, around the walls in one blazing flash.

And there in the middle of the flame stood the Fire God, his burning hand moving across his face!

Chaos struck with the fire. Men and women went mad. Cut off on every side by the fire, they plunged and screamed like trapped animals. Tables crashed over, glasses breaking, women shrieking high and thin, fighting for the windows, the flame-covered back door.

In that first second Ard Fayson sat motionless, left hand clutching the back of the chair, right hand tight around his Tom Collins glass. It seemed to him that he moved very slowly when he got to his feet. His muscles seemed heavy, weary, and he felt like a man walking in his sleep. Half erect, he staggered, caught the table with his left hand, stood there wavering.

The sound the Fire God made wasn't a human sound, but muffled, hollow laughter that beat against invisible walls, as gruesome as the chuckling of a corpse within its grave. And then the demon stretched out its flaming hands and started toward Ard Fayson!

The reporter wanted to scream, to turn and run madly, blindly, anywhere away from this thing, but his muscles were aching suddenly, strangely, and he could scarcely stand. His hand seemed to move with infinite reluctance as he raised the glass. He was like a man half asleep, fighting for consciousness.

His arm swung forward, slowly,

slowly. His fingers relaxed about the glass and he could see it in the air, see the liquid spilling from it as it seemed to float featherlike toward the Fire God's face.

Whether the Fire God swayed to one side or whether the glass passed directly through the hideous, smoke-covered face, Ard Fayson could not say. Then he was going forward, straight at the God, driving his weary legs in one last, desperate rush.

The chuckling, hollow sound swirled round and round. Fayson saw clouds of smoke spew from the God's mouth and ears, shoot all around him as though hell had opened. And then Ard Fayson was driving, reeling, straight through the place where the God of Fire had stood, touching nothing, choking on smoke, feeling his eyes burn. He saw the flame-sheeted doorway, ducked his head and kept going.

Somehow he was out in the still air under the pines, staggering, running crazily, his legs giving away weakly. He could hear the screams of men and women behind him. Persons were rushing past on every side, shouting frantically, mad with the terror they had barely escaped.

Fayson's knees wobbled and he went down. His lungs ached, but he seemed unable to cough. It must have taken him three minutes to stand erect again, and then he could hear the wail of police and fire sirens in the distance.

He was leaning against a tree near the parked automobiles when he heard the woman scream, "Look! There on the roof!"

He looked upward. Smoke was swirling from the building, flames breaking from the windows, but not yet from the roof. And there on the roof, visible only from the waist up, was the God of Fire. He stood calmly in the thick, whirling smoke, hands at his sides, motionless, his great lidless eyes as dull as smoked glass.

A GUN roared almost in Fayson's ear. He twisted sharply, saw a man standing beside his automobile, a little wisp of smoke curling from

the revolver in his hand. The man's face was white.

"Well, I'll be damned," he whispered, and raised the gun again.

His aim was slow, careful, and the gun muzzle did not waver. The gun roared, jumped in his hand.

On the roof the God of Fire did not move. He stood perfectly placid, quiet, and there was an unutterable contempt in his very lack of motion.

"God!" the man said. "I couldn't have missed him! *Couldn't!*"

Suddenly his lips were working, drooling saliva across his chin. He swung up the gun and began to fire wildly.

A moment longer the God stood motionless on the roof. Yellow flame was flickering through the smoke about him now. The police sirens were wailing on the pine-bordered road that led to Court Street.

The smoke grew thicker about the God. The loud blasting of the gun jerked to an empty clicking as the cartridges gave out.

Then the God of Fire melted into the smoke and was gone.

To Fayson's left a woman was screaming hysterically. The man with the gun was slobbering, staring at the roof, whimpering over and over:

"It ain't human. It ain't human! I couldn't have missed him!"

CHAPTER III

Hands of Fire

DURING the next five minutes Ard Fayson did not move from the tree against which he leaned. Firemen fought bravely but futilely with the blaze; police held back the gathering crowd, circled the entire building to prevent any possible escape of the demon.

Fayson, leaning against the tree, knew they would not catch him.

He had seen the Fire God standing in a blaze where no human being could have stood and lived; had seen his hands burning like timbers, and had felt the strength of his own body

turn to water at the mere approach of the figure. Even now he felt dazed, weak. But one thing stood horribly clear before his brain:

The God of Fire had made a special effort to destroy him!

Out of all the persons present the demon had come straight for him, paying no attention to the others. This was the second time he had seen this monster. The God of Fire was following him, purposely trying to kill him!

He pulled a deep breath into weak lungs. Nell Matthews had been warned. Perhaps it was her this devil wanted, and sought to find her with Ard Fayson. He'd rather it was himself than Nell.

But why should anyone, human being or devil from hell, want to kill either of them? He shook his head.

"Gee! I'm glad to see you!" Nell had come up behind him, was holding his arm with both her hands. "I—I was worried. I came out with the police."

Fayson had a wild desire to throw his arms around her, hold her against him, defy devil or man to touch her while he was there. And then he remembered the terrible weakness that had come over him when the God of Fire approached, remembered the way he had reeled drunkenly to fall through smoke, touching nothing.

What protection, then, could he offer this girl? For a moment he stared at her, biting his lips in frenzied, desperate helplessness. But at least he could make sure she took no chances.

"You stick with Lieutenant Powell," said Fayson; "find out how many persons were hurt, or if the police got any clues. And don't get away from the police! I want to find old man Mason Phelps; he owned most of this building."

"This God of Fire is hitting him hard. He owned the Hartsell's, too," said Nell.

Fayson did not answer. It made him sick to think of harm coming to Nell, and how helpless he might be to prevent it.

He turned away from her and began to circle the building inside the fire

lines. John Carr had told him Phelps carried more insurance on the department store than the place was worth. If Carr's company insured this place, too, and heavily, it would go hard on them. The depression years and national insurance companies had hit his State company rather hard.

Two heavy losses and the threat of others would drive his stock down to nothing. A man could have cleaned up selling short, if he had known what was coming.

He found Mason Phelps at the rear of the building, fat hands folded complacently over his paunch as he watched the flames, which threw dancing shadows across his round face.

"Hello, Mr. Phelps," said the reporter. "I'm Ard Fayson, of the *Times News*."

The fat man turned and his face lost its complacent look, became suddenly worried.

"What is it?" he asked. "But I don't feel much like talking now."

"This fire devil has hit you rather hard, hasn't he?" said Fayson. "Hartsell's this afternoon. Now this place. And both of them went up like they had been prepared ahead of time." His eyes squinted as he watched Phelps' expression.

"It's terrible. Terrible! I'll be ruined if this keeps up."

"About how much was this place worth, Mr. Phelps?"

The fat man hesitated. "I—er—the building only cost about five thousand dollars, but I have a lease on the ground here. That's costing money, and there'll be no return on it."

"You had the club insured, of course."

Phelps' eyes squinted, and again he paused before answering. "Er—yes. It was insured, but—er—I'm busy now, I wish you'd see me some other time."

He walked off.

THE city editor shifted his pipe to the left corner of his mouth without touching it. "I got another note from this God of Fire this afternoon," he said. "He promises to burn

more of the wicked, and this time he's going to have a special sacrifice. He's going to make a show of it."

Fayson felt sudden terror clutch at his chest. A special sacrifice! And the Fire God had sent Nell Matthews warning! He saw her hands move and clutch at the city editor's desk, but she did not speak. Her face was so white that her rouged lips were ghastly against the paleness, but her chin was set.

Hatson chewed his pipe a moment, then went on.

"You say you want to keep working, Miss Matthews, despite your warning. Well, we've got to have somebody at the police department this afternoon, and that's the safest place for you. There's a meeting in the City Hall at nine tonight, to protest the lack of efficiency on the part of the police and fire departments. The City Hall's a fire trap, but it's going to be heavily guarded and should be safe. You can cover that."

He shifted his pipe across his mouth again, struck a match and held it over the bowl while he pulled heavily.

"Ard," he said, "you go by the court-house for a few minutes and see if the New Tire Rubber Company has bought up any property for their plant. It's not likely, and nobody's interested in that right now, anyway, but check. Then stick with the Fire Department. Both of you call the moment anything breaks."

Hot afternoon sunlight spilled on the long steps leading up to the court-house. Fayson was halfway up when he met Pete Hobdy coming down. The insurance agent smiled pleasantly, pushed a slim hand through grey hair and said:

"I guess this Fire God keeps you pretty busy."

"Right," said Fayson. "But he's let you off and burned Carr's property so far."

Hobdy's smile widened. "He's been a god to me, all right. I've sold more insurance today and last night than I would have in a year without him."

"It's working you no harder than it's working me," said Fayson; "but

you are getting well paid for it."

Hobdy laughed. "How do you check on a fire at the court-house? I saw Miss Matthews here yesterday."

"It's my regular beat," Fayson said, "but I sent her up because I was busy with the fire."

"It's an ill wind—"

The insurance man grinned and was gone. Fayson went on up the steps, but his brain was rushing ahead of him. Here was a man who might have a good motive to set these fires. But hell, he wouldn't make more than twenty or thirty thousand out of it. Anyone who had money enough to live on wouldn't take a chance at the electric chair for that.

Fayson finished his work at the court-house, telephoned the office, then drove to the fire station on Hull Street.

Twilight was a murky greyness outside the Assistant Fire Chief's office when both John Carr and Pete Hobdy came in. Chief Turner did not pause in his nervous pacing. Sitting with his chair tilted back against the wall, Fayson watched.

"Sixty-one dead altogether from Hartsell's, and four burned last night," said Turner. "A lot of those lives are on Chief Innis's head. If I was running this department—"

"I don't give a damn who's running it," John Carr cut in. His face looked as meek and quiet as ever, but his voice rang, "I want more protection for property I insure than I'm getting."

"Somebody should be able to figure out where this fire demon stays," said Hobdy. "There should be some way of catching him."

THE Fire Chief spun suddenly and the color began to drop from his big face.

"Nobody's gonna catch that Thing," he said. "I tell you, it—it ain't human. It'll keep on burning things, people! We may all be dead tomorrow—burned!"

His voice had risen to a half shriek.

"Bunk!" Hobdy dug a cigarette from his pocket and lighted it.

Fayson wet his lips. Deep inside

him he could feel that black shadow of doom, growing larger.

"I've seen it, twice," he said. "I tried to touch it, and there was nothing but smoke. I saw a man shoot at it, time and again. He couldn't have missed, but the thing never moved. It just faded into smoke."

"I don't give a damn what it is," said Carr. "I want it caught."

"They should be able to catch it," Hobdy said again. "It's got to live somewhere."

"Yeah," the Fire Chief sneered. His face was getting red again. "Where would you go looking for it?"

"I don't know. Any number of places. The thing seems cracked on the subject of religion. It might use that old cabin where Crazy Abraham used to live. An insane person would probably think that was the holiest spot in these parts. Or that old quarry over—"

Ard Fayson did not bear what else he said. The reporter was sitting bolt upright in his chair, jaw muscles bulging.

Crazy Abraham! Why hadn't he thought of him before? The old Negro had preached the destruction of the city for years from Vassery's street corners, talking incessantly whether or not anyone listened.

A few months ago the old man had disappeared, and persons took it for granted he was dead. Probably he was, but—

The reporter sucked a deep breath into his lungs. He didn't want to face this devil again. He was afraid. His whole chest hurt when he thought of coming on the thing alone. If he found it there in that small, swamp-hidden cabin, what could he do? But Nell— He started getting to his feet and his muscles ached with terror as he moved.

"I'm going," John Carr said suddenly. "I'll find Chief Innis some other time."

He stood up and went out.

Turner looked at the reporter's drawn face. "What the devil is wrong with you?" he asked.

Fayson said, "Nothing. I'm going out for a while." He could feel the

Fire Chief's gaze following him as he went through the door.

TWILIGHT was a thick greyness into which headlights stabbed feebly and faded. The highway was a pale white bone between the darkness of fields on either side. Three miles outside the city Ard left the highway and plunged into the small dirt road that led toward Cyprus Swamp and a quarter of a mile farther he parked the car.

The cabin was still three hundred yards away, but there was only a small path leading through the murky ground. Fayson kicked open the car door and got out. He took the flashlight and a heavy wrench from the car pocket, then started down the trail.

Cypress trees raised their pale, gaunt trunks against the blackening sky. Underneath them it was almost too dark to see the path. Off to the right a whippoorwill started its lugubrious, three-noted cry that came out of the gloom like the sobbing of a bodiless spirit lost in a dark and impenetrable swamp.

Lightning bugs tossed their eerie fires into the air, and faded. Far away a cricket struck with bony fingers against his flagging mandolin.

Ard Fayson scarcely heard the small, wild noises of the swamp thickening about him. He listened to the sucking, oozy sound his shoes made against the damp ground. He had the vague and yet terrifying impression that the swamp was drawing him, *breathing* him deep into itself, and that the shadow of some personal horror was closing about him with the trees and the night.

He wanted to turn and rush from under these trees back to the city and the lighted streets, and it seemed to him that he could not turn because of the power of the swamp, sucking him deeper into itself.

The ground tilted upward slightly and became firmer under his shoes. The trees circled out to leave a raised clearing in the center of which, black against the sky, was the one-room cabin of Crazy Abraham.

The feeling of impending terror, of a crowding, unavoidable doom rushed down on Fayson. He stood at the edge of the clearing, feeling the muscles of his back jerk, and his spine was suddenly cold and stiff. He wet his lips, tried to still the loudness of his breathing.

Slowly he went across the small clearing to the cabin.

The door leaned inward, held by one leather hinge. Inside there was utter darkness as if the very bowels of the earth opened their black and bottomless maw beyond this door. Off in the swamp a whippoorwill cried mournfully.

"The bird of death," Fayson whispered.

He gripped the wrench in his right hand until his fingers hurt from the pressure. His left thumb moved on the flashlight and a white spear stabbed the darkness showing a dirty, board flooring, a few piled rags near the left wall, a broken chair near the rear.

The light swung to the right, across a rickety cot on which was a filthy quilt. Fayson swung the light around the room again, saw nothing else, and stepped inside. There was an old hat on the floor near the back of the cabin and Fayson went toward it.

The sound stopped him as though the very darkness had petrified around him, holding him like a fish caught in freezing water. But thick through the blackness, shaking it in small, heavy waves, came the muffled laughter of the God of Fire!

It seemed to Ard Fayson that he was long hours in turning, that the muscles of his body would not move and that it was some outside force that turned him slowly, inexorably. He saw the white tunnel dug through the darkness by his flashlight, saw it move across the back wall of the cabin, along the side, over the pile of rags.

And then he was staring at the door where the figure of the God of Fire stood silhouetted against the lighter darkness of the night, his blazing hands shoulder high, throwing a

weird and furious gleam across his face.

Fayson heard the choked, growling sound that came from his own throat. He felt his muscles begin to draw in upon themselves, his elbow bending as he raised the wrench—and in what seemed the same instant he felt watery weakness run through his body!

He tried to hurl himself forward but his legs moved slowly and he staggered. The wrench was held waist high and he could raise it no farther.

Some invisible power held him and he seemed like a man trying to run through deep water. He cursed and fought at his own muscles, reeling toward the door. He heard the heavy thud of the wrench on the floor and knew it had slipped from limp fingers. The figure of the Fire God seemed to weave and whirl like a dervish.

Then Ard Fayson was falling, going over on his face, plunging into darkness.

CHAPTER IV

Human Sacrifice

FAYSON'S eyes had been open a long while before his brain began to record the things he saw.

He knew instinctively that an hour or more had passed while he lay wrapped in blackness, and even before his eyes had grown accustomed to the blinding light he recalled that blank-eyed monster in the flaming doorway, the dark earth swaying up to his face.

He blinked against the light, but it only made whirling balls of fire spin before his eyes. There was something tight about his chest choking him. He wriggled but the pressure did not lessen. It was strange how his body seemed to be suspended in air, swaying—

He was looking up to a great circular dome studded with electric lights, with a dark hole in the center.

Fayson kept blinking his eyes, expecting to see the vision change. Very slowly he became conscious of

the rope that led up to the center of the dome. He wriggled his body, trying to lessen the choking tightness about his chest.

Reality struck him like a sudden blow, jarring consciousness through his entire body. He was hanging by a rope around his chest on the inside of a building!

His eyes turned downward and suddenly he was sick with terror, staring straight below a hundred feet or more to a vast lighted auditorium in which persons seemed crawling figures dwarfed by the height at which he hung suspended above them.

"Great God!" he gasped and jerked unconsciously.

The movement set his body swaying slightly from side to side.

He knew in that gruesome second that he hung swaying, half choked by the rope about his chest, where he was and why he had been brought here. This was the mass meeting in the City Hall. That hole in the dome, ordinarily covered by a trap door, had been put there to aid in repairing the ceiling lights.

There was a stairway leading from the back alley up to the dome which everybody knew about but which was generally 'called the "secret stair," never used. He could have been brought up that even after the meeting was in progress.

He had been brought because— Suddenly his blood was like a thick acid in his veins. His throat muscles were so swollen he could not breathe and his heart struck heavily at his ribs, then stopped for a long moment.

The God of Fire had promised a special sacrifice. And he, Ard Fayson, was to be that sacrifice!

The scream floated up to him like a feather caught in a soft current of air. After it there was a long second of intense stillness before other shouts and cries rumbled up into the great dome of the building.

Fayson looked down past his feet swaying in space, far down to where a wave of white, upturned faces showed in the light. Persons were shouting, pointing upward. Then a voice roared that drowned out all

their cries, booming like thunder through the auditorium, rising audible to where Ard Fayson hung swaying.

Even before he saw the figure he knew what it was and the knowledge broke the chains of terror that had held him. He knew that he had been fully conscious only a few seconds, but it seemed to him that he had hung suspended for hours.

Now he flung his hands upward, caught the rope and began struggling, fighting his way toward the top. Evidently the demon had not expected him to regain consciousness, and so had not tied him.

Far below he could hear the voice booming:

"The God of Fire shall destroy your city as another God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah! And I shall burn sacrifices on my altar of fire!"

There was the sudden bursting roar of flame!

Fayson looked down. The Fire God was standing at the back of the stage, his outstretched hands in the living wall of fire roaring up behind him. Then he faded backward. There was the sharp crack of pistols, but the door leading into the back of the stage had shut.

FAYSON kept struggling upward. The grass rope bit into his fingers and the slack between hands and chest got in his way. The strain of the night had left him so weak that before he had climbed three feet he was gasping.

There was a trip-hammer against his skull with every heart beat. Weights seemed tied to his feet, and the muscles in his arms and shoulders ached so he wanted to scream against the pain.

He tried to rest, circling his legs about the rope, clinging with his hands. But there was no time for rest. The fire was sweeping up the back wall, and already he could feel the hot currents of air coming to him in waves. His blood beat in his ears, his head ached so that he never heard the sound of the fire, never heard the screams of persons far below in the

auditorium. But he could feel the air growing hotter—hotter around him.

The raw marks about his wrists were turning red with fresh blood now. His fingers ached as though they had been beaten with a hammer. He sucked long breaths through his open mouth, but could not still the pain in his lungs as he went upward, six inches at a time.

The black mouth in the dome was close above him. Only two feet, four times to lift one hand above the other and pull up his body. The air was hot and stifling and he could not breathe. Smoke clogged his lungs.

He got his right hand up. Then his left one. He turned loose with the right to raise it again.

A heavy wave of smoke rolled over him and he choked, coughed. The fingers of his left hand trembled on the rope, slipped loose.

Ard Fayson screamed, but the sound was no more than a whisper. He clawed at the rope with both hands, caught, and hung jerking. Then with that same frenzied energy he went up, arm over arm twice, got his right hand on the line just inside the hole. He took a long breath, pulled himself up once more. His chest was against the edge of the trap door.

The dome room was dark and clogged with smoke. Ard Fayson could see only a few feet of dusty floor, before blackness shut in. He pulled himself up six inches higher. Once more he could get his knee up.

Hollow, maddening laughter rumbled through the smoke. Fayson half screamed, swinging with legs and feet over the hole, as he stared at the hideous face lighted by the fire of its burning hands.

The God of Fire was less than three yards away, his body hidden in the dark, the burning hands shoulder high making the face seem to float in black, thick air. Then it came toward Fayson, swaying.

Horror froze the reporter. He was no longer conscious of the terrific strain on his arms, of the way the wood flooring cut across his chest.

He could feel nothing except Death

sweeping toward him across the floor. Then the figure was close to him, its foot drawn back to kick him in the face, send him plunging back through space. He hung there, unable to move either hand, waiting . . .

A VOICE burst like a pricked balloon in the darkness beyond the God of Fire—a woman screaming: "Don't! I'll shoot!"

It was Nell!

The Fire God whirled and that laughing sound slithered into silence. Beyond him Fayson saw the blurred outline of the girl, the smoke writhing about her, heard her cough. Then the God of Fire was plunging toward her. Fayson knew instinctively that she had bluffed about the gun.

Somehow he was moving again. His right hand went up the rope, pulled. His right knee was over the edge of the trap door and he was staggering to his feet

He heard Nell screaming, "Help!"

The voice was slightly below him on the stair leading downward. The God of Fire was going toward her but suddenly he whirled. The flame from his hands leaped and guttered. The great lidless eyes glowed. He plunged straight toward Ard Fayson and in that same instant the reporter felt his muscles turning into water, the strength sliding from his body, his eyes closing.

It was only his reflexes that made him stagger back from the God's charge, back toward the gaping hole. He was still holding the rope, one end of which was tied around his waist but with all the slack below his hands.

The demon was almost on him, flaming hands thrust out through the darkness, reaching.

The strength was draining from Fayson's body and when he swung the heavy grass rope it seemed to move like a feather through the air. Dully he saw it strike the God across the face, wrap half around him like a snake.

In that same weakening lethargy, with unconsciousness closing on him, Fayson saw the God reel under the blow, stagger toward the trap door,

lose his balance, and shoot like a flaming meteor from sight.

Ard Fayson reeled toward the sound of the girl's voice.

His legs were buckling under him and he knew he had no strength to fight his way through the fire below. He was choking, but he didn't care. He wanted to sleep. He reached the top of the stair, stumbled, half fell and hung. The rope was still tied around him!

How he got the knife from his pocket and cut the rope he did not know. He felt himself plunge forward, head over heels. He seemed to fall through a dark eternity, turning over, drifting downward, sleeping . . .

ARD FAYSON'S left arm was in splints and he stood on one foot to relieve the pain in his right ankle. His face was bandaged so he could scarcely talk, but he wanted to get this over as soon as possible. Nell was waiting for him outside. He thought about that and grinned, but the burns about his mouth hurt.

Hatson, the city editor, shifted his pipe to the left side of his mouth.

"All right," he said. "Let's have your idea about all this and I'll write it myself."

"Pete Hobby didn't have anything but a slight income," said Fayson. "He was starting from nothing and aiming to make a fortune. He got advance dope that the Western and Great Northern Railroad was certain to build a new road through here and property values, would, of course, go up to five or ten times themselves. I don't know how he got the information on Western and Great Northern, but I know the rest.

"He got the agency for this fire insurance company, then started these fires and everybody rushed down to buy insurance. He kept the full first payment, thinking he would turn it in to the company after making a fortune—he knew which places were going to burn anyway. With that money he could buy options on property the railroad company needed for their lines.

"Buying the options cheap, he

would have made a pile of money before it was all over. He wanted to get rid of any reporter covering the court-house because they could check on what he was buying."

Hatson chewed on his pipe. Out one side of his mouth, he said:

"Sounds good, but why on earth didn't he burn up?"

Fayson let his right ankle bear part of his weight. It hurt. He said:

"Our fire demon was an expert at pyrotechnics. Any chemist that knows his business can prepare a solution from liquid styrax, camphor, quicksilver, aquavitae and pulverized red stone which, if properly applied and rubbed over the body will make a person completely immune to fire. Of course, it is only effective for short periods—but it was adequate for Hobdy. Getting that chemical formula wasn't hard at all—the spiritualist fire faker here last year did his stunt on the same principle. With that stuff rubbed on your skin you can handle a hot iron with impunity.

"Hobdy had abestos gloves with oil sponges attached which burned, and he had evidently planted his fires ahead of time. He treated his clothes in a special styrax solution and also wore a gas mask to cut out the smoke. I thought there was something funny about the way he moved his hand across his face before he spoke.

"He had to shift the mask. That mask let him use a knockout gas on anybody that came near him. He had

a special suit which, by turning the coat inside out he could make into a fireman's. Nobody worries about a fireman coming out of a place that's burning. I got the stuff about his clothes—and the certain information about who he was—from the cops after they examined the body. That coat had bullet holes in it where he had stood it up for the shooting on top The Howling Monkey Club.

"No wonder those bullets did no harm, with nobody inside the suit. But I was pretty sure by then. In the probate office I saw a record of the options he'd bought. He purposely suggested I go to the cabin. He wanted a chance to do me in. Nell saved me at the City Hall. She happened to be backstage waiting to interview one of the speakers and she followed Hobdy up the stairs."

"Well, that about clears it up," said Hatson. Get on out and take a rest. I'll call you if I need you."

Fayson said, "Don't do it. I'm going to be busy the next few days. So is Nell."

The editor had swung towards his typewriter. "Why?" he barked.

"We're getting married."

Hatson did not turn. "Well, tell the society editor on your way out," he said. "It's worth a stick, but no more."

"Aw, go to hell," replied the reporter and went limping toward the door. Outside Nell was waiting, and he forgot the pain in his right ankle.

Next Month: — **BAAL'S DAUGHTER**, by **CORNELL WOOLRICH**

You Gamble

WHEN YOU BUY THE *unknown*



Games of chance may be all right in their place—but why risk your money when you buy razor blades! Probak Jr. is produced by the world's largest manufacturer of razor blades. Here is known quality—a double-edge blade that "stands up" for shave after shave—sells at 4 for 10¢!

PROBAK JUNIOR

VOICE from HELL

The Mystery of a
Message from the
Grave!



"Where did you
get that?" he
shrieked.

Ezra Zahm, Long Dead, Cries Out with a Shout Like
the Trumpet of Doom Against the Hand
That Struck Him Down!

By **JACK D'ARCY**

Author of "The Madhouse Murders," "The Scarlet Scimitar," etc.

THE room smelled of death. The wide-canopied bed in the center of the room resembled an ancient bier. The mustiness of the tomb itself assailed the nostrils. And if the Reaper himself was not present, the dank atmosphere pre-saged his coming.

Ezra Zahm lay motionless in the bed, his yellow face like a nicotine stain against the whiteness of the sheet. Age had laid a heavy hand upon him. Almost five score years passed over him, each leaving its mark, on both his face and his soul.

A tree may grow old gracefully, the

passing years maturing it, leaving a mellowness upon it which enhances its beauty. But a flower dies shriveled and rotten, its petals decaying, its stalk cankered. Thus it was with Ezra Zahm.

The living flesh upon his cracked frame was rotten with age. His organs functioned wearily, keeping a modicum of life in his gnarled body. Disease crawled within him, attacking not only his body but his mind. For, even as he clung on with repulsive grimness to life, Ezra Zahm lay in the shadow of a terrible fear.

For the past forty years he had been subject to cataleptic fits. Without warning, the frenzied strictures would seize his body, contort it frightfully, strike him down as if he were dead. Ezra Zahm was in dire fear of being buried alive. Despite the reassurances of his physician, he clung to his phobia.

Notwithstanding Ezra Zahm's proximity to the grave that he feared so much, all emotion was not dead within him. At this moment, in that dank room, anger stirred his sluggish pulses. Like a yellow Oriental God he lay back on his pillows. One eye flashed flaming wrath. The other stared blankly at the ceiling.

That second eye was glass, artificial and unexpressive. But in his right eye unmistakable rage flared. Like Cyclops, he focussed his single eye upon the pasty-faced young man who stood sullenly at the foot of the bed.

"No," he croaked in a voice that seemed projected from the tomb. "No, Arthur," he said. "I mean it this time. You are the last of the Zahms. You are the end of the rotten stock. But you don't get a penny of the estate."

Arthur Zahm, nephew of the old man, stared at his uncle with hate written upon his weak countenance. For three years now he had lived here in the cavernous halls of the Zahm estate, expecting daily that the old man would die; that the Zahm wealth would be his. And now, in a single sentence, Ezra was denying him that for which he had devoted three whole years.

"For three generations," the old man went on, "the Zahms have been worthless. But you, Arthur, are worse than them all. You're weak and vicious. Cruel and dissolute. The Zahm money shall go to charity. I shall change the will tomorrow."

Arthur Zahm did not reply. For a long time they stared at each other in complete silence. Then gradually, the anger in the younger man's eyes evolved to a quiet cunning. His lids lowered a trifle. His weak mouth moved slightly as the flicker of a smile crawled across his lips.

"There, there, Uncle," he said in an oily, hypocritical voice. "Don't excite yourself. It's too late. You should be asleep. We'll discuss things in the morning. You don't really know what you're saying now."

Trembling with rage Ezra Zahm shook his head.

"There's nothing to discuss," he flamed. "You can't stop me! Now get out—get out—"

Ezra Zahm's emaciated breast rose and fell spasmodically beneath the sheets before he could complete his sentence. He gave one convulsive twist, then lay still on the bed.

"Good!" exploded the nephew. "That's what I wanted him to do. The old guy worked himself into another of his fits." He eagerly thrust out one hand and felt the old man's heart. He stepped back and cursed. It was still beating, feebly.

"Damn! It'll take more than a fit to kill off old Ezra Zahm," Arthur said bitterly.

Suddenly his eyes lit up malignantly. He walked briskly down the stairs to his own quarters. The expression he wore upon his face was a mask of triumphant evil.

NARLTON, the doctor, and Mark Graves, lawyer and executor of the Zahm estate, sat with Arthur Zahm in the gloomy living room of the mansion.

"I was standing in the bedroom talking to him," said Arthur Zahm. "He got excited, then suddenly closed his eyes. He lay there motionless. I thought at first it was merely a re-

currence of his catalepsy. When he didn't come to after a while I realized that he was dead."

The doctor nodded.

"It's not surprising," he commented. "The miracle is that he hung on so long. Well, the death certificate will be mailed to you, Mr. Zahm. I suppose you'll remain for the funeral, Mr. Graves."

Graves nodded thoughtfully. "Yes," he said. "I'll remain for the funeral."

"You know," said Narlton, "while the probable cause of death was heart failure—and that is what I shall designate it upon the certificate—I can't be positive without a post-mortem. Old Ezra was prey to so many diseases, it's hard to say what actually killed him."

"No," said Graves. "No post-mortem, doctor. As a matter of fact, Zahm did not want that. It is specifically stated in his will that his body must remain untouched after death. He is most positive on that point."

A flickering light lit up Arthur Zahm's eyes.

"Is there anything else of importance in that will?" he asked.

Graves eyed him oddly for a moment.

"You get the estate," he said quietly. "If that's what you're interested in. As for the rest, all funeral details are to be handled by me. He's to be buried on the eastern end of the estate where the family's been interred for years. We shall hold the funeral tomorrow."

Arthur nodded.

"What about the undertaker? The embalming?"

Graves raised his eyes. They were clouded; the eyes of a man who does not speak what is in his mind.

"There'll be no undertaker," he said shortly. "I'll attend to the burial. And there'll be no embalming."

Arthur Zahm looked bewildered.

"But why?" he asked.

"That concerns only me," said Graves. "You get the estate according to the terms of the will. The will also specifies that I am personally to attend to the burial. It specifies further that the reasons for those in-

structions are to remain a secret."

Arthur shrugged. "Okay with me," he said.

Doctor Narlton put on his hat and raincoat.

"Well," he said. "I'll run along. I'll be over for the funeral. I'll bring the death certificate with me. I guess that there's no danger of old Ezra realizing his most potent fear, that of being buried alive."

Arthur grinned. "I doubt it," he said. "He's dead, all right."

Graves shot him a swift glance.

"And even if he isn't," he said slowly, with an odd significance in his tone, "even if he isn't, no harm will be done. Ezra Zahm provided for that contingency. He was so afraid he might be interred before he was dead that he prepared for the worst."

Arthur's eyes narrowed.

"How? What do you mean? What did he do?"

Graves rose, unsmiling.

"That is one of the things regarding which I am not permitted to speak," he said. "The funeral will be held at four o'clock tomorrow afternoon. Until then, good-bye."

The two professional men left the house together. For a long time after they had gone Arthur Zahm sat silently in the room. Then he rose suddenly and jerked the old-fashioned bell-rope on the wall.

"Whiskey," he said to the stooped old servant who entered. "A whole bottle of it, Stevens, and hurry."

The old man nodded and shuffled off into the gloomy recesses of the ancient house.

THE rain drizzled down from the heavens, saturating the earth with a damp mustiness. Clouds crawled slowly across the face of the sky, obscuring the sun. The darkness of dusk was upon the earth three hours before it was due. And through the gloom and murkiness, the body of Ezra Zahm was carried to its grave.

A miserable funeral cortege escorted him. Unloved in life, he remained unloved in death. Four laborers, hired for the purpose, bore the heavy, silver-handled coffin. Be-

hind it walked Nariton, Graves and Arthur. Bringing up the rear came half a dozen old retainers of the estate.

A jagged flash of lightning ripped through the clouds, casting a halo of eerie light around the coffin. Like a harbinger of the hell which waited for the soul within the box, it danced a rigadon on the polished wood of the coffin.

Arthur Zahm shuddered as the plodding procession made its way toward the desolate stone crypt at the eastern end of the estate. Graves stepped forward and flung open the heavy iron doors of the mausoleum. He beckoned the pall bearers forward. Reluctantly they went.

Arthur Zahm was aware of a cold, dank passage of air in his nostrils as he stood for a moment upon the threshold of the stone cell in which lay the rotting bodies of his forefathers.

A sudden inexplicable cold fear breathed in his heart at that moment. The blood suddenly seemed water in his arteries. With desperate effort he forced himself to enter the tomb.

The roar of thunder reverberated through the vault. Arthur blinked nervously. Graves' eyes scanned the young man's face for a moment. Then the lawyer turned away, indicating to the laborers the final resting place of their burden. Eight powerful arms lifted the coffin, thrust it back in an empty niche far, far back in the cavernous depths of the stone edifice.

There was no funeral service. Ezra Zahm had eschewed his God in his lifetime; and it seemed that his God had forsaken him in death. The coffin grated on its stone resting place. At his side, Arthur heard the doctor mutter the name of the deity, intone to himself the familiar phrase, "Ashes to ashes—"

Outside the wind howled with a whine like a banshee's wail. The thunder rolled a Gargantuan obligato. Lightning danced, flashing against a grey sky.

And Ezra Zahm went to his grave unwept, unhonored and unloved. Not even the bony arms of Death, it

seemed, held welcome for the miserable old man who had lived too long.

The rambling Zahm estate had changed little during the hundred years that Ezra Zahm had lived. Its gloomy interior had known no new furnishings. Its dusty hallways had been woefully neglected. Its once lush gardens had gone to seed. Rot and decadence hung over the estate.

But now that was changed. Miserliness was not among the vices which Arthur Zahm possessed. Particularly with money he had not earned himself.

MONEY flowed from the estate as it had never flowed before. The house had been renovated. New furniture, compensating in cost what it lacked in taste, sprawled all over the house.

For the first time in a century the laughter of women sounded through the ancient halls. Ice tinkled in glasses. A roulette wheel spun, as Arthur Zahm dissipated his inheritance.

And yet there was a note of hysteria in his gaiety. He drank as a man drinks who seeks to escape some black thought of his own. He flung himself into pleasure as one smirched with pitch flings oneself into a pool.

And at times there was no gaiety at all within him. His face would suddenly pale. A shadow would creep into his eyes. It was as though some evil spell had come over him. Despite his mad orgy of spending and devotion to the fleshpots, it was evident that Arthur Zahm was neither a peaceful nor a happy man.

Ezra Zahm had been dead for two long years now. For eight seasons the flesh had rotted from his bones, the tomb had held him. In the house where he had lived for so long, there was nothing to bring him to mind. No photograph, no relic which had once been treasured by him.

Arthur had been insistent upon this point. Ezra had scarcely been cold in his grave when the nephew had ordered every personal belonging of the old man disposed of. But even now there were times, dark, ugly times,

when hateful thoughts of Ezra flickered through his nephew's brain.

IT was the eve of Arthur's twenty-fourth birthday. The old house was filled with his profligate companions. Drunkenness and lewdness were rampant. In a corner of the old living room, Graves, who had been invited through sheer courtesy, and had come out of curiosity, watched the revelers with a disapproving eye.

Laughter and shrill feminine voices rang through the house. Arthur was the center of an admiring throng downstairs, when he heard a high-pitched laugh on the staircase.

"Arthur. Look, Arthur!" cried one of the women. "Look at the funny old tintype I found in an old trunk upstairs."

Silk rustled down the staircase and the girl joined the group gathered about her host. She held out an old-fashioned tintype for them to see. Their chuckle at the absurdity of it was stopped abruptly. Arthur snatched the photograph from her slim fingers.

His face was a horrible thing to see. The laughter had frozen upon his lips. His eyes were glazed and ghastly. His mouth contorted in an ugly grimace.

"Damn you," he shrieked, "where did you get this? What do you mean by snooping around my house? Curse you! Stevens! Stevens, you fool, where are you?"

He was speechless with an awful rage as the old servant shuffled into the room. Arthur glared at him, then found his voice.

"You!" he roared. "Didn't I tell you to throw out all this sort of stuff? What the hell is this doing in the house? By God, I ought to fire you. Here, throw this damned thing away!"

He pressed the photograph upon the frightened old man. Stevens shuffled away. Arthur turned abruptly on his heel, left his companions and disappeared into the study.

Graves watched this scene, an odd expression on his face. As Stevens shuffled past him toward the kitchen, he held out his hand.

"Let me see that, Stevens," he said. The old man looked at him for a moment, then held out the tintype in his hand. Graves took it and studied it carefully.

There, staring back at him from the yellowed old paper was the face of Ezra Zahm. It was not a pleasant thing to behold. The camera had captured all Zahm's ugliness. His one good eye stared, lifelike, back at Graves. His glass eye was dull and expressionless.

Graves dropped the picture in his pocket. His eyes were narrowed. His brow was wrinkled in thought.

"I wonder," he muttered softly to himself. And then as if in direct answer to the query he had mentally propounded to himself, a howling, screeching voice ripped through the night.

It was the voice of Ezra Zahm!

Arthur Zahm sat over a half tumbler full of whiskey in the study. His face was white and his fingers trembled slightly as he lifted the glass. The sight of the old man's photograph had upset him, caused the black secret in his heart to poison his nervous system.

He cursed himself for a fool, lifted the glass to drink. But the whiskey never touched his lips. The glass was held suspended in mid-air, as into his ears there came the hammering accents of a man who had been dead for two long years.

"Ezra Zahm is not dead. He has been buried alive. Dig up the coffin at once. Ezra Zahm is not dead. He has been buried alive. Dig up—"

Arthur Zahm sprang to his feet as if a coiled spring had been released within him. The whiskey dropped from his nerveless hand. From the direction of the Zahm crypt his uncle's voice sounded again and again through the night, repeated the same mad screeching words.

"Ezra Zahm is not dead. He has been buried alive!"

Arthur, livid, with white fear in his eyes, raced from the room. He smashed into Graves in the hallway. He clutched the lawyer's arm.

"Graves," he shouted, and his voice

broke two points this side of hysteria. "Do you hear that? God, man, do you hear it?"

Graves looked at him strangely.

"Yes," he said quietly, evenly. "I hear it."

"What does it mean? It's coming from the graveyard."

"It means," said Graves calmly, "that perhaps your uncle was buried alive."

Arthur jerked his arm in panic.

"It's impossible," he cried. "He was dead. I know he was dead. Besides, he's been buried there for two years. Damn it, he's got to be dead!"

As he stopped speaking the voice from the grave still howled without cessation.

"Ezra Zahm is not dead. He has been buried—"

"It's his voice," shrieked Arthur. "It's his voice, Graves. My God, is he coming out of his tomb? The swine, he's coming to haunt me! He's coming to get me for what I did to him. Stevens! Stevens!"

THE servant, trembling with fear, thrust his head through the doorway.

"Go to the tomb," cried Arthur. "Have the servants block it up. Roll rocks against the door. Don't let him out. He's trying to get out. He's—"

"Shut up," said Graves harshly. "I'll handle this. Get me the gardener, Stevens."

"What are you going to do?"

"Open your uncle's grave."

"No. No! For God's sake, no!"

Graves' eyes narrowed. "And why not?"

"I'm afraid. I'm afraid of him. I—"

A husky Irishman walked into the room. He ignored Arthur and spoke to Graves. "You wanted me, sir?"

Graves nodded. "Yes, O'Brien. Come out to the vault with me. Let's get going."

The pair of them left the house; slinking behind them, almost overpowered with fear, came Arthur Zahm. Through the night ripped the terrible voice from the grave.

"Ezra Zahm is not dead. He has

been buried alive — buried alive!"

O'Brien, stolid and unimaginative, opened the iron door of the tomb at Graves' command. The two of them entered. Arthur essayed to cross the threshold, then stopped dead. The blood in his veins was cold. His heart hammered against his breast.

"Don't, Graves," he cried. "For God's sake don't let him out. Don't do it, I say!"

"Ezra Zahm is not dead," screeched the voice from hell. *"He has been buried alive!"*

Graves' hand touched the silver handle of the coffin. With the aid of the Irishman he lowered it to the cold damp floor of the vault. His fingers fumbled with the hasp.

Arthur Zahm watched him with glazed eyes. Again and again the howling voice of Ezra Zahm sang its weird threnody through the night. Arthur's blood had turned to water. A terrible fear was upon him. His throat was arid.

Graves lifted the lid of the coffin. Now, it seemed to Arthur, the voice grew louder.

"Ezra Zahm is not dead. He has been—"

At that moment something cracked in Arthur Zahm's brain. He fell to his knees, sobbing like a child. His voice, high-pitched with horror, sounded above the voice of the grave.

"Don't let him out," he shrieked. "I'll confess I killed him! I did it, Graves. Don't let him out! I did it. He's coming back to kill me—"

Graves glanced up at O'Brien. He seemed strangely calm for a man surrounded by horror.

"Hold him, O'Brien," he said. "I'll look into this."

The Irishman rose. His strong hand gripped Arthur's arm, lifted the other to his feet. Graves flung back the coffin lid. He took a flashlight from his pocket and pressed the button.

Yellow light shone down into the coffin, revealing a ghastly sight. A horrible odor filled the crypt. Rotten flesh lay at the bottom of the box. The whiteness of Ezra Zahm's skull showed ghostly in the beam of the electric torch.

A grim smile was on Graves' face. He stooped down, thrust his hand into the putrescent mass. When he stood up again he held a tiny object in his palm. Trembling and afraid, Arthur stared at it.

"So," said Graves. "You killed him, eh? With a small-calibered bullet. That bullet's from your gun, isn't it?"

"Yes, yes, I killed him," screamed Arthur Zahm hysterically. The gruesome sight had cracked his brain. "He was going to disinherit me. I took out his glass eye and shot a bullet through that eye socket into his brain while he was unconscious from a fit. The bullet didn't penetrate. I had calculated the angle carefully so that it would hit a skull bone. I washed the blood away and replaced the eye. I killed him. I'll tell you everything—but, for God's sake, close that coffin. Don't let him get out and kill me! For God's sake, stop him from screaming—"

THE eerie voice still shrieked its message to the world.

"Ezra Zahm is not dead. He has been buried alive!"

Graves stooped down again. His hand reached once more into the coffin. His fingers moved. There was a dull click.

The screaming voice from hell stopped as abruptly as it had begun.

Graves turned again to Arthur, held fast in the huge hand of the gardener.

"So you killed him, Arthur," he said slowly. "You killed him by shooting him through the eye socket. It's poetic justice. Ezra, as you know, was violently afraid of being buried alive. It was a contingency he provided against. A hundred yards from

here is hidden a repeating phonograph record attached to an amplifier. On that record is Ezra's voice repeating the words which you heard so often—too often tonight.

"In his coffin was a sensitive electrical device, which even the slightest contact would set off, thus starting the phonograph record. Ezra thought that if he recovered from an unconscious state, he might be too weak to press a button, so he was buried with that ring on his finger. By merely letting the metal ring contact any side of the coffin, the device would go off. But he didn't use the ring, Arthur. Because he was dead."

Arthur gibbered and slavered in the Irishman's arms. O'Brien raised a bewildered face to Graves.

"Then, sir," he said, "what set off the phonograph?"

Graves smiled quietly.

"The bullet," he said. "The steel bullet dropped from the rotting brain. Small though it was, it was efficient enough to cause a contact with the electrical device, making the phonographic contact. The device which Arthur used to kill the old man is the very device that brought his crime to light. Do you understand now, Arthur?"

But at that moment Arthur Zahm understood nothing. His eyes held no gleam of intelligence. The vacuous gaze of the madman was in them. His arms hung limp at his sides. His lips moved, but no sound came from them.

Graves turned to the Irishman.

"Take him back to the house," he said, "and telephone the police."

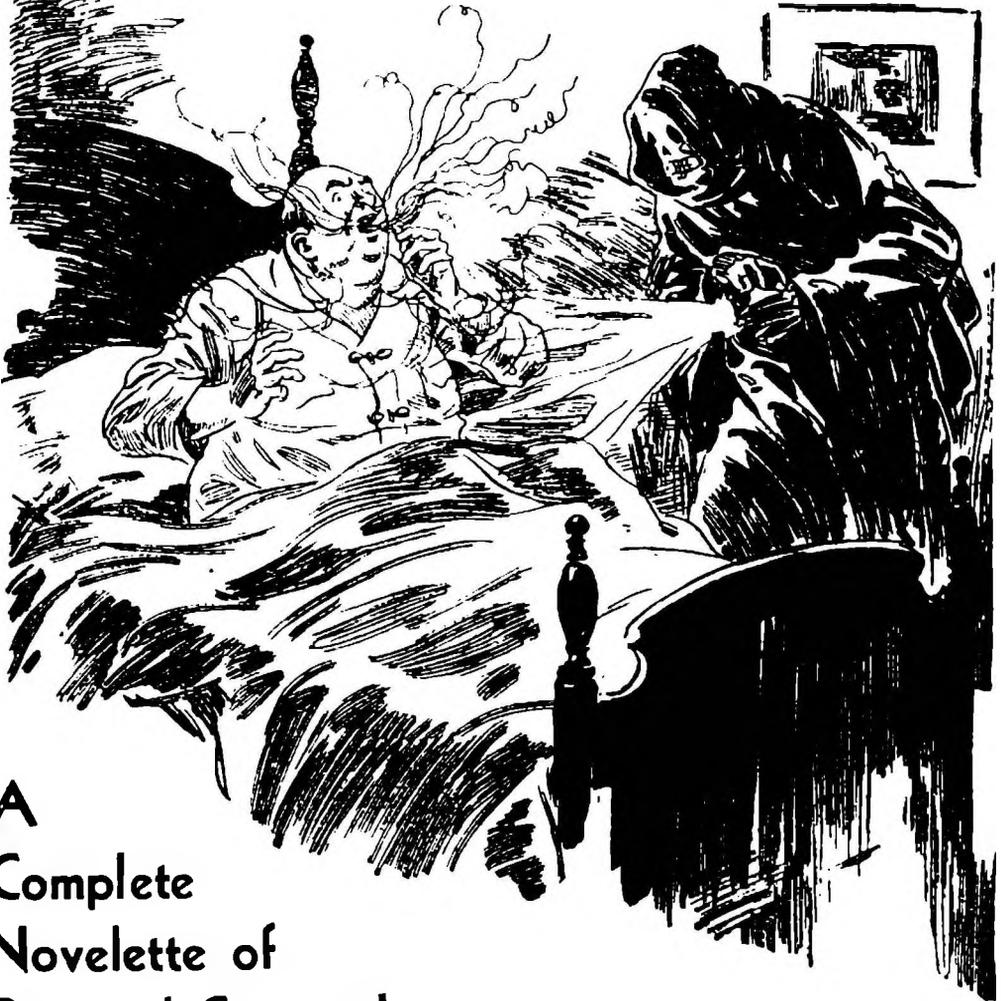
There was compassion, tinged with horror in the lawyer's eyes as O'Brien dragged away the thing that had once been a man.

NEXT MONTH

Weird Thrills in **WHEN DEATH COMES CRAWLING**,
a Novelette of Spine-Tingling Horror
by **G. T. Fleming-Roberts!**

Ghouls of the

From his mouth, thousands of green-yellow tendrils spewed



A Complete Novelette of Bartered Corpses!

CHAPTER I *Fresh Flesh*

OUTSIDE in the freight yard, a gaunt figure of a man moved slowly against the cracking wind. The collar of his coat was turned up, though God knows it was

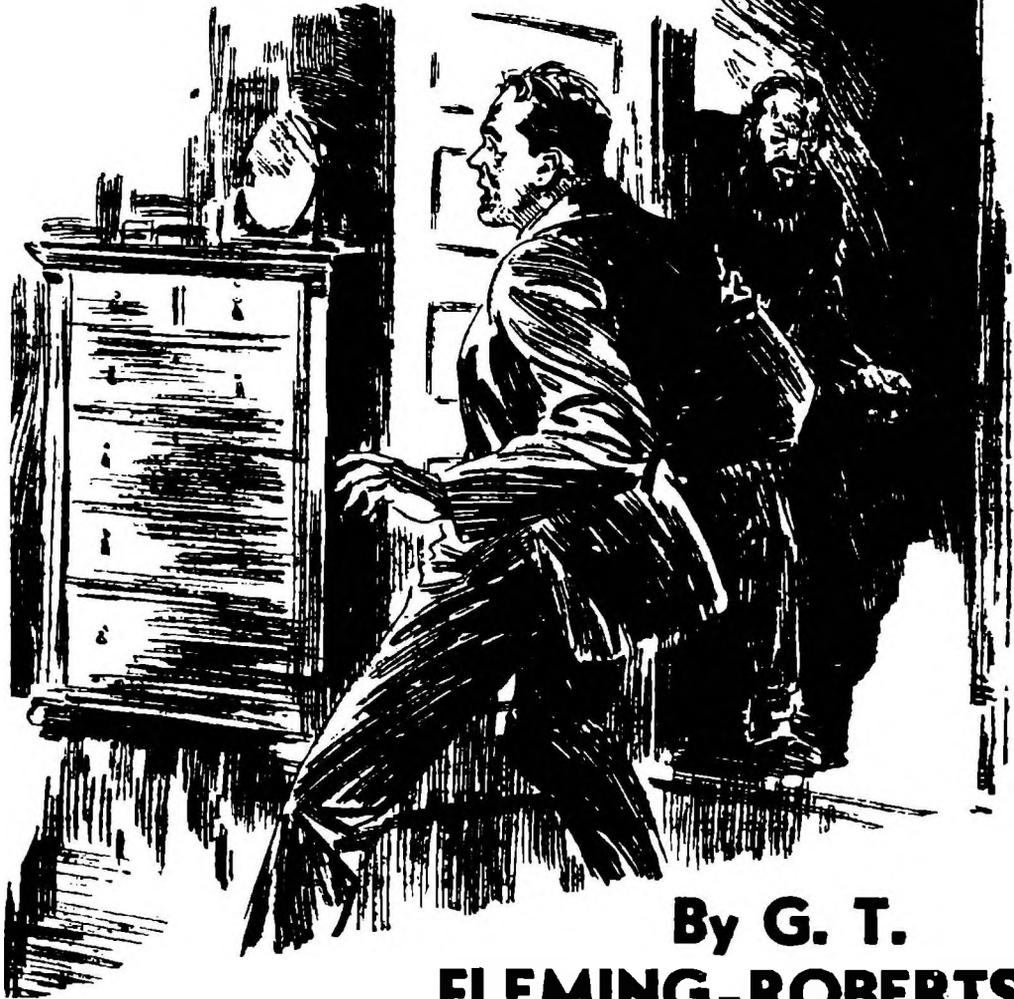
hot enough! He limped slightly, for his legs were cramped by the position he had been forced to endure aboard the freight. Jerry Sanders was down on his luck, broke, and—why not admit it?—just a bum.

Crossing Missouri and Kansas beneath the pall of the black blizzard

A Monstrous Thing From Another World

Green Web

Jerry stood as if made of stone



**By G. T.
FLEMING-ROBERTS**

Author of "The House of Dreadful Night," "Blood on Black Knoll," etc.

hadn't brightened Jerry Sander's horizon. But now that he had at last arrived in Prairie City there was a wee candle of hope burning for him. He would see Joan, anyway. And if there was a job, he'd get it.

He was in the same town with Joan Sinclair! For a moment, he forgot

about the dry, hot wind, the eye-clawing dust, and the brown and dismal streets of Prairie City with their street lamps sickly as December suns. He was going to see Joan!

Jerry tumbled over the rail of the freight yard fence and struck across Front Street. Though it was still

Snares Human Victims for Its Fodder!

about supper time, stores and business houses were dark, doors and windows were closed and their edges taped. But the doors and windows rattled like flimsy skeletons. That was the wind that had made Kansas an arid brown hell.

How the devil was he going to find Dr. Bell's new that he was here? Jerry looked up and down Front Street. Joan had said it was a big house. Probably it was outside the business district. Dr. Bell had plenty of money. He could afford to live anywhere. Why had he picked Prairie City?

Jerry, head low, legs fighting to keep him on the sidewalk, ducked up a side street and ran head on into two men who were huddled in front of a lighted window. One of the men cursed. Jerry saw that he was thin and small-boned with a brow like Shakespeare's and a chin as sharp as Satan's. The other man wore a black cloak that seemed to magnify his proportions. A broad-brimmed hat was pulled down over his eyes.

"Sorry," apologized Jerry. "Can either of you gentlemen tell me where Dr. Thornton Bell lives?"

The small, thin man started slightly forward. Pale light from the dusty window caught on the beads of his eyes. Jerry saw that the part of his eyes that wasn't bloodshot was bright green, like cold sea water.

"Get out!" It was the cloaked man who snarled at Jerry. "Can't you see I'm busy? No time to waste answering foolish questions."

Jerry's blood warmed. His fists clenched. Answers like that during miles of travel hadn't made him forget that he had once had money in the bank, good clothes, and had been called "respectable."

"Maybe the other gentleman would know," Jerry persisted, looking straight into the man's green eyes.

But the cloaked man swung half around—not far enough for Jerry to see his face, though. His powerful, grimy hand clutched Jerry's biceps until it hurt. Jerry saw a carved onyx, diamond-set ring on the man's finger. "Go 'way from here, can't

you? Or do I have to call the police?"

Jerry Sanders turned slowly, round the corner of the building and stood still. He waited, listening. Two pairs of shoes shuffled softly through the dust on the sidewalk. A doorknob rattled. Jerry ventured a look around the corner of the building.

The little green-eyed man had climbed three wooden steps. His hand was on the doorknob. The cloaked man leaned far forward, his massive figure a mere blot of blackness in the thick brown haze.

"Fresh flesh, Malloy," came the cloaked man's husky whisper.

The green-eyed man nodded gravely. "Fresh they'll be. I'll have a nice little tidbit for you tonight. But I've got to have more money—say five hundred for each—"

"Shhhhh!" the cloaked man checked him. "You'll get your price. Not a cent more!"

The green-eyed man opened the door and walked in. Jerry waited until he was clear of the door, then he stepped from his hiding place. The cloaked man was standing at the door of a black sedan, fumbling with his keys. Jerry strode up to him. The cloaked man turned sharply. "Well, what do you want?" he growled. Jerry still couldn't see his face.

"Listen, mister," said Jerry firmly, "I've got to get to Dr. Bell's place quick. You must know where he lives. If you could give me a lift, if you were going that way, I'd appreciate it."

The cloaked man snarled. "Appreciate this, busy-body!" And before Jerry had a chance to duck, the cloaked man's fist was flying up to connect with Jerry's jaw.

IT was a hard, jarring blow; but Jerry was a hard man. He took the full force of the blow, staggering slightly backward. Then he led a fast one straight at the cloaked man's middle. He had to pull in that punch fast. As it was, he bruised his knuckles against the door of the sedan. For the cloaked man, with speed that told of the power in his

great body, had flung himself into the sedan and closed the door.

A motor roared. A swirl of dust, the dry, hot wind churned with the acrid odor of burned gasoline; then only the dry, hot wind and the brown murk that you could feel. Darkness swallowed the red tail lamps of the black sedan. Jerry turned from the curb to cross the sidewalk toward the building entered by the green-eyed man. There was a sign out in front, half visible in the light from the window. Jerry wiped brown dust from black letters and red:

THE MALLOY MORTUARY

For the first time since he had entered that arid waste of grinding dust, a cold draft passed along Jerry's spine. Yet the wind was the same—like a draft from an oven.

The chill came from within.

CHAPTER II

The Green Web

A MOMENT later, Jerry Sanders was knocking at the door of the Prairie City police station. The man who answered was in his shirt sleeves. A badge was pinned to one suspender.

"Dr. Bell's? Well, yes," he replied to Jerry's question. "I can tell you where Dr. Bell's place is." A damp cloth that he held over his mouth made his speech fuzzy. He pointed out the route Jerry was to take. "You can't miss it. It's a big stone house like a fancy jail. Always said that when Prairie City got progressive enough to have a crime-wave, we could use the doctor's house for a jail." He regarded Jerry's ragged clothes a minute. "Just what you goin' there for?" he asked.

"I think I can get a job," Jerry replied. "I've got a letter—"

"Goin' to work for the doctor?" The officer's voice dropped. "I'm warnin' you, man, I wouldn't do that. He lost his last two assistants in the past month. I wouldn't—"

A dust cloud, swirling like a typhoon, swept up the street. The

chief of Prairie City's police force sprang back and slammed the door against the dust that the wind was already whisking under the sill. He was shaking his head in mute warning when Jerry turned in the direction of Dr. Bell's house.

Ten minutes later, he knocked at a great brass-studded oak door that had weathered the prairie winds for fifty years and looked capable of weathering them for fifty more. Dust clung to every cranny of the ornately cast knocker and fell in soft brown snow on Jerry's hand as he clicked it.

He jerked his hand sway as though he had touched something foul with decay. He laughed nervously, but managed to straighten his face when he saw the door opening.

The man who opened the door was lean-jowled, coarse-featured, and powerful looking. There was a slight cast to his right eye that made you think he was looking beyond you. His skin was the color of a molatto's.

"Yes—" He paused, voice up in the air as if he was uncertain about adding "sir."

"I would like to speak to Miss Joan Sinclair. I understand she is living here."

"One moment," replied the dark man woodenly. He closed the door quite solidly against the dust and against Jerry.

For perhaps a minute, Jerry waited. Then he was looking into the slightly puzzled, dear, sweet face of Joan Sinclair. He had never thought of her in just that way before—dear, sweet. They had been pals back in New York, working in the same office. Then Joan had inherited money, and a great barrier seemed to have arisen between them. The barrier was of Jerry's own building, not Joan's.

Then she recognized him. The frown was gone. Blue eyes were merry beneath sunny hair. She extended both slim hands. "Jerry Sanders! You *did* come after all!"

JERRY started to wipe his dirty hands on his dusty trousers. Joan laughed. "Silly!" And she dragged him into the hall.

She turned to the swarthy, evil-eyed servant. "Emanuel, tell Guardy that I'm bringing Mr. Sanders right in. And have him put on a smile, if possible."

Emanuel moved silently through folding doors. Joan's voice dropped to a whisper. "I do think you can have a job, Jerry. Not a very elevating one, perhaps, but you won't care, will you?"

Jerry laughed. "Me? Just being around you would be enough for me. Gosh, Joan, you're a sight for sore eyes!"

"Sore eyes? Right! The dust makes them that way," she said. "But come." Still holding one of his hands, Joan led Jerry toward the folding doors. Then she stopped. Jerry saw a tiny frown creeping across her brow.

"Matter?" he asked.

"Nothing, only— Well, Jerry, try to understand Dr. Bell if he should take you on. He's strange, getting stranger every day, I'm afraid. He—he doesn't give one a very favorable first impression."

"He's always all right with you?" Jerry felt that the girl was a little worried. Their emotions had always been closely keyed.

"Oh, always. All that a guardian can be. Remember the gay old days when I was poor and didn't need a guardian?"

JERRY smiled. "The gay days when I was richer," he said. Then suddenly he felt it—an electric, vibrant something that shook his soul.

Joan was worried, afraid, *deathly afraid*.

"What is it, Joan?"

"I—I'm just glad you're here, Jerry. Awfully glad." She drew a deep breath and placed her hand on the folding doors. "Come and meet my great lion of a guardian." And she stepped resolutely into the room.

It was indescribably dismal, that room. Perhaps it was the somber drapes, or heavy, gilt-framed pictures, or the little photos depicting the ghastly secrets of the operating room. Or then perhaps it was the forbidding

presence of the doctor's mounted skeleton. No, it was none of these things. It was Dr. Bell himself that made the room a morgue, lacking only the sheeted corpses.

Never had man hair and beard so dark, and face so pale. Thornton Bell's eyes gleamed from bluish pits over-shadowed by curling brows.

So dominant were those eyes that you scarcely noticed the pink scar at one side of his mouth—not until he tried to smile, anyway. Then his mouth became a lopsided, pink slit clear to his right ear. His voice, as he welcomed Jerry, was in the modulated tone of a man who does not want people to know that his voice is naturally a snarl of a coarse file against metal.

"Good evening," said the doctor. He towered above Jerry as he shook his hand. Behind the doctor's chair stood the silent Emanuel. A little to one side was a tall, broad-shouldered young man. Jerry felt a little pang as he saw the young man. He was so blond, so clean, so immaculately dressed that Jerry felt the tramp he was.

"So you're the man who wants to take Calvert's place." Dr. Bell's voice gained a little more of its natural harshness. "Calvert's place, eh?" He beamed his eyes around at his servant. "Laugh, damn you! It's a joke!"

Emanuel gave a ghastly imitation of a laugh. The clean-looking young man smiled slightly.

"Guardy, where's your manners!" Joan reprimanded. "Come here, Fred. I want you to meet an old friend of mine."

The blond man came forward, hesitatingly. Joan introduced him as Fred Barthel, Dr. Bell's nephew.

"And that's about all the family except Uncle Dale, Guardy's brother. You'll love Uncle Dale, Jerry. He lives alone in the great frame house across the street—" Joan's voice jagged off suddenly. Again, fear came shining into her eyes. "And—and—"

Joan turned like an automaton. Jerry followed her with his eyes; then turned toward the door.

A man stood there—a tiny man of five feet two. He was narrow of shoulders and head, and his eyes windowed neither soul nor mind.

Jerry felt the doctor's iron hand on his shoulder.

"Mr. Sanders, I want you to meet my son—" ironically. "Moxin, say hello to Mr. Sanders. You really must meet all the family, Mr. Sanders!"

Jerry took half a step forward, his hand slowly extending. Dr. Bell's son opened his mouth and a low, mewling sound came out of it.

"Why, he's—he's—" Jerry checked himself.

"Yes," growled Dr. Bell. "Crazy. He's no good. His mother before him was no good. Can't breed good stuff from rotten stock." The doctor's laugh roared out. He pounded Jerry's back. "Laugh, damn you!"

Jerry didn't laugh. He looked at Joan. Her lower lip was quivering slightly. Jerry's jaw was suddenly thrust forward. She didn't have to stay here with geniuses and half-wits and half-breeds. She was old enough to get married. . . .

HIS eyes skated toward Fred Barthel. Cold, clean, unruffled, Barthel stepped to the mewling half-wit. He took the tiny man by the hand. "Time for bed, Moxin," he said softly. Then over his shoulder, "Come along, Emanuel. We'll put Moxin to bed."

Nephew, servant, and half-wit left the room.

Jerry turned toward the doctor. "I hope," he said, "that I will be perfectly satisfactory to you."

Again came the doctor's gash of a smile. "You'll have to clean apparatus and move things around a bit." His eyes were like dissecting needles as he looked Jerry up and down. "No, you won't have to take care of my son. Fred does that. That's about all Fred's good for besides spending money."

"Really now, Guardy, you're hard on Fred," Joan remonstrated.

The doctor reached out his arm. His great fingers smoothed Joan's shimmering hair. Jerry frowned as

he saw that she repressed a shudder.

"I'm hard on everyone, Joan," said Dr. Bell softly. "Everyone except you." He turned abruptly toward Jerry. "I don't want you falling in love with my Joan, boy. I'll take you on, feed you, and pay you something. But remember—"

A keen, high-pitched scream tattered the dead, dry air. Jerry saw a gleam light in the doctor's eyes. He swung around.

Joan standing straight, head thrown back, right arm pointing toward the window, her slender body vibrant with the terror note; Dr. Bell crouching like a starving panther waiting to spring; then Jerry's eyes found the window.

Again Joan's scream. "That face! Oh!" And it was Jerry's and not her guardian's arm she sought for protection.

Protection from what?

The face at the window was one of glassy, goggled eyes and featureless, clinging white veil. The latch of the French windows rattled.

"Joan!" All the doctor's pent-up harshness crashed out in that one word. His tone softened immediately. "If ever you scream like that again, I'll shake the teeth out of you!"

"But what is it?" Jerry's eyes were riveted on the face at the window.

"Didn't you ever see a dust mask before, boy?" growled the doctor as he crossed the room to the window and unlatched it. "Come in," he ordered.

A man wearing large, round dust goggles and a mask of saturated cloth stepped into the room. He tried to talk, but his words were muffled by the mask until Dr. Bell grew impatient and snatched the man's mask away.

"Don't do any good," Bell snarled as he flung the rag away. "Out with it, Captain Newcomb. Don't tell me we've a crime-wave as well as a dust storm!"

Beside Jerry, Joan sighed deeply. "The chief of police," she whispered.

Jerry recognized in Captain Newcomb the man who had advised him against coming to work for the doc-

tor. Captain Newcomb got his breath and shut the French windows against the drifting dust.

"It's your brother, sir," he said.

"Not dead!" gasped Dr. Bell.

"Dead? No. Why should he be?"

"And why should he live?" growled the doctor. "Does no good for anybody. Hell of a digestive system."

"Your brother, sir," continued Newcomb, "has found something. It's in his backyard. And—and—" he moistened parched lips—"it's God-awful!"

"Eh?" Bell pricked up his ears. "Well, what is it, man?"

"I—I don't know, sir. But I think it was Calvert, your helper."

They filed out of the door behind Captain Newcomb—the doctor, Jerry, Joan, and Fred Barthel, with the silent Emanuel bringing up the rear. Wind whipped up the dark street, and tiny, invisible particles of dust stung Jerry's face like a thousand needles.

"Your brother was just going to bed when he sees the *thing* against the alley hitching block," explained Newcomb.

"Better eyes than digestion if that brother of mine can see anything through this," growled Dr. Bell.

"And I can't be none too sure what it is," Newcomb went on. "So I came over for you."

"Is it murder?" Fred Barthel whispered.

"It's—it's death, Mr. Barthel," Newcomb breathed. "That's all I know."

"Joan, you shouldn't be here," said Jerry. "This won't be anything for you to see."

Her arm trembled in his grasp. "Anything's better than that house alone with—with—"

Their shoes scrunched gravel as they rounded Dale Bell's great frame house. Newcomb was lagging back now with the doctor pushing impatiently forward.

COMING into what had been the rear lawn and was now a tiny Sahara of driven dust, Jerry saw through the gloom something that glowed ever so faintly with a greenish-yellow phosphorescence. It wasn't like a man at all from a dis-

tance—just a glowing, weblike cocoon that might have housed some giant worm.

Newcomb's flashlight clicked on. Its ray, definitely cone-shaped by the suspended dust, trembled upon the greenish object propped against a great hitching block. Tiny, weblike tendrils hugged the body, formed a spidery netting over it all. Feeble little wisps that somehow were strong as death hung from the gaping jaws and dilated nostrils and crawled over filmy, protruding eyes.

Jerry snatched Joan to him and piloted her head against his shoulder. Her breath was coming in quick, frightened sobs.

Jerry stared at the pale, green web and the ghastly corpse it half enshrouded. Every strand of that silken web—every frail, silken strand—lived and grew! A pulseless, obscene mockery of life it was—parasitic, nauseating.

And within the web was the corpse of John Calvert, the man whose place Jerry Sanders had come to take.

The back door of the old frame house opened. An obese, bathrobed figure wallowed across the sand, shouting, "Thornton! What do you suppose? What do you suppose?"

Dr. Bell drew a deep breath. He turned his brilliant eyes on the fat man who had just put in his appearance.

"Dale," he said, "this man has been strangled. But by no human hands, do you understand?"

Pop-eyed with horror, totally unable to understand anything at the moment, Dale Bell bobbed his bald head. "Yes, yes. But by what if not human hands?" He tore his gaze from his brother's magnetic eyes and looked around the circle. "Joan, child, you here! Thornton, you're a brute to bring that poor child here!"

Joan didn't raise her head from Jerry's shoulder. There was a moment's tense silence. Then Fred Barthel laughed gently. "She seems to be doing quite all right, Uncle Dale."

Dr. Bell's teeth cracked together, chopping at nothing. "I want every man and woman in bed inside of half

an hour. Dale, you're to go over to my house tonight."

"Why?" gasped the fat man. "You don't think I'm going to be the n-n-next?"

"Next? What rot, man!" Dr. Bell snapped. "Mr. Calvert simply met with some terrible sort of accident."

"Really?" from Fred Barthel.

"Newcomb," shouted the doctor, "get hold of the county coroner. Calvert's no kin of mine. I'll have nothing to do with this."

"Perhaps," said Captain Newcomb deliberately, "you'll have more to do with this man than you've a mind to."

CHAPTER III

The Cowled Man

JERRY SANDERS couldn't sleep. That sense of dreariness about the Bell house and the contrasting nervous tensivity about all who were in it did not make for peaceful slumber.

Yet it was not until eleven o'clock that he gave up the idea of sleep entirely. He got up and pulled on his clothes over the pajamas Fred Barthel had lent him. There was a hushed murmur of voices beneath his room like the rustle of ghosts in a basement. He had wondered about those voices for hours, lying perfectly rigid to still the crackling of straw in his tick. He wanted fresh air and there was none to be had. Nothing but dust. Staunch as was the house, the old casements rattled like old bones in the wailing wind.

Jerry went to the door. It creaked when he opened it, but no one could have distinguished the sound from a thousand others like it. He tiptoed down the hall, found the back steps, and started down.

There was a little hall at the end of the steps connecting kitchen and living room. A thread of light marked the bottom of the kitchen door, and a yellow cat's-eye was the keyhole glowing in the gloom. Muffled voices beyond.

Jerry crouched, eye to the keyhole. It wasn't the thing to do, but he

salved his conscience with the idea that whatever he did was for Joan's protection. And she needed protection, he was certain of that.

On one side of the kitchen table was Emanuel, a cigarette in his fingers painting the yellow air with a wisp of pale blue. Opposite the servant was a paunchy man with a bloated, blotchy face and mean little eyes. Jerry recognized the man immediately. What could he be doing in Prairie City? For the puffy face with its innumerable eruptions belonged to "Toots" Gantner, Chicago's number-one menace!

Jerry Sanders jerked in breath and held it, listening to Gantner's words:

"Lookee, Spig, I've come here for my health. Kansas dust is a damn sight healthier for me right now than Chicago bulls. And who does I bump into yesterday but my old pal, Spig Emanuel. Where Spig is, I says to myself, there's bound to be easy sugar." Gantner leaned across the kitchen table. "I'm after my split, Spig."

Emanuel shrugged. "I have told you," he spoke carefully, "that I have gone straight. I have a good job, yes. But it is straight."

Gantner winked. "I ain't sayin' no. But you and the doctor and that other queer fish are up to something. And I want my split!"

Emanuel shrugged again, turned in his chair, and blew smoke toward the door where Jerry watched.

Jerry could have warned Emanuel seconds ahead of time. He saw Gantner pull out his blackjack, but Jerry was too startled to cry out. The next moment, Emanuel was slumping across the table, lying still.

GANTNER'S fingers were not clumsy as they frisked over Emanuel's clothes. Then the bloated-faced mobster reeled toward the door which hid Jerry. Jerry had only time enough to get to his feet and duck part way up the stairs before Gantner entered the little hall. Then the living room door opened and closed behind Toots Gantner.

Jerry breathed again. He stood for

nearly a minute debating with himself. He decided that if he wanted to make an impression on Dr. Bell, he'd better try nailing Gantner alone.

Heart drumming at his temples, Jerry opened the living room door. Darkness within. He proceeded cautiously, groping for chairs, feeling for the study door. The door was part way open and the room weirdly aflight. Dr. Bell's big old-fashioned safe, guarded only by the mounted skeleton, was open.

A little electric lantern hung inside. Gantner's fat fingers were busily rifling the safe. Close beside Gantner lay an ugly blue automatic.

Jerry knew that he must give no warning. Only by a straight knockout could he hope to capture Gantner.

He tensed himself, and as Gantner pried open a steel cash drawer, he sprang. His movements were perfectly timed. His outthrust right foot sent the blue automatic skating across the floor. As Gantner bobbed upright, Jerry swung a wide haymaker.

Gantner's stab for his gun that was no longer there took him just beyond the reach of Jerry's fist. Jerry's spent blow sent him reeling backward to keep his balance. Then Gantner was gone, smashing through the French doors, to disappear into the darkness beyond.

Jerry would have followed, but something at the edge of the safe halted him. He dropped in front of the safe. The thing that gleamed up at him was the ornately carved ring he had seen on the finger of the man outside Malloy's Mortuary.

Had Gantner dropped it? Jerry's eyes searched the safe. No, the ring was not Gantner's. A little plush-lined box made to fit the ring exactly was in one corner of the safe. Dr. Bell must have been the cloaked man who wanted to buy *fresh flesh*—from Malloy, the undertaker!

A fever of excitement seized Jerry. His fingers trembled through scraps of paper that Gantner had discarded. A few letters, then three short notes scribbled with a coarse pencil. He read one of them:

Don't think I don't know what filthy work you're up to. I'll prove what I know one of these nights. Then you'll agree you'd better come across with the money.

There was neither heading nor signature, but the meaning of the note was clear. Someone was trying to blackmail the doctor. Hastily, Jerry stuffed the notes back into the safe. As he did so, his eyes lighted upon a black bound diary. The name "John Calvert" was lettered in gold on the outside.

Jerry opened the book and hastily leafed through it. Vague, personal notes that had no meaning, mostly; then on the last page containing writing, Jerry found something that sent chills racing up and down his spine. The entry was that of April the fifth:

Another dust storm today. Am convinced that this man is a fiend. He has brought life from another world, he says, and I believe it. Hellish life that feasts upon God knows what obscene food. Can stand it no longer. They are all mad here except Miss Joan and that drunken nephew. Will leave the house tomorrow, but will stay in town. Something might turn up.

"FINDING what you're looking for, Mr. Sanders?"

Jerry dropped the book and spun around on the balls of his feet. In the door stood Dr. Bell. A heavy revolver in his hand was centered on Jerry's forehead. Behind him stood Emanuel, holding a wet cloth to his bruised head.

"Thief, ingrate, tramp!" shouted Dr. Bell. "Get out of this house while you're alive!"

Jerry drew a deep breath. "I think I can explain, Doctor," he said, working his voice to maintain a steady monotone. "I came downstairs to find a dangerous man inside your house. It was the gunman, Toots Gantner. I followed him in here and saw him going through your safe. I saw him knock out Emanuel. Isn't that so, Emanuel?"

The servant stopped dabbing at his forehead. He stared past Jerry.

"Dr. Bell," he said, "the man is lying. Why, how would I know anyone by that name? I have never even heard of this Gantner."

The doctor's ugly smile gashed across his face. "The door, Mr. Sanders!"

A moment of tense silence was shattered by a scream—terror-mad, high-pitched, ear-bursting. The shriek of a woman. It mounted to an hysterical pinnacle that echoed from wall to wall in fearful cadence.

Joan screaming!

Jerry hurled himself toward the hall door. The doctor's long arms slapped out, seizing him. Jerry sent a driving blow to Bell's noxious, paper-white face. He squirmed free. He sprang into the hall and bounded up the steps.

A grateful sob from Jerry. He saw Joan, a vision of perfection in filmy night-dress, standing in the hall. Her naked right arm was extended, pointing down the hall.

"Joan!" Jerry cried. "For the love of God!"

Joan turned and fled to his arms. "Jerry!" she choked out. "The awful cowed man! Like a monk! A purple light in Uncle Dale's room!"

Jerry forced her to release him. He started down the hall.

"No, Jerry. Don't go in that room! Don't!"

But it was too late. Jerry burst through the half open door and stood there like a thing of stone, watching the horrible monster and its still more horrible prey.

Dale Bell sat half up in bed. His eyes, naturally protuberant, were frozen on the cowed thing that hovered over him. A ghastly, purple light seemed to originate in the monster's black garment. The light bathed Dale Bell's terrified face.

Then Dale Bell stiffened. His breath came in agonized gasps, then stopped short in a muffled cough. From his wide mouth spewed thousands of green-yellow tendrils like tiny, fragile worms. The green web, faintly phosphorescent, squirmed and twisted like a nest of serpents. And it grew and grew and grew—crawling

across Dale Bell's bloated face, twining in his ears, weaving a stricturing net about his throat.

Dale Bell's spasmodic coughing threw him at full length on the bed. The purple light was gone. The cowed monster turned. Its face, within the shadow of the cowl, was the white of old bones.

"*He has brought life from another world.*"

Words from the dead Calvert's diary screamed across Jerry's mind. He sprang at the cowed thing, now a swiftly moving shadow. His hands clutched thin air. His toes encountered something that tripped him up.

He recovered himself in a moment. He lurched toward the door through which the thing had passed. He encountered cold, clinging arms. Seized with a loathing, he flung his captive from him and reeled against the wall.

THE light in the room switched on. Dr. Bell and Emanuel were standing near the door. At Jerry's feet, was the doctor's half-wit son, Moxin. The idiot gurgled and rolled on the floor. Jerry's eyes darted about the room. A casement was flung wide. He sprang to it and looked out. A sheer drop of fifteen feet—nothing more.

"What the hell's the matter with you?" shouted Dr. Bell.

Jerry wheeled. "Your brother! That *thing* got him!"

"What thing?"

Jerry brushed past the doctor into the hall. "I guess you know!"

Joan came in and grasped her guardian's arm. "Where's Freddy?"

"In bed, I suppose." Dr. Bell strode out into the hall and to a closed door. He opened it. "Fred—are you safe?"

No answer. Emanuel switched on the light. Fred Barthel lay still as death on the bed. The room reeked with the sickening, sweetish odor of chloroform. Barthel's face was pale, clean. His eyes were rimmed with pink circles.

"He's been chloroformed!" shouted Bell. "Coffee, Emanuel! Quick!"

"Anything I can do, sir?" asked

Jerry. He waited for the reply. The doctor turned. His powerful shoulders shook with wrath. "You can get to hell, you dirty tramp!"

"Guardy!" Joan voiced an agonized appeal.

The doctor's eyes flashed on the girl's scantily clad form. "You get to bed, Joan. I'll do what I want in my own house. This fine friend of yours is a thief—maybe worse. He'll get out of here or I'll butcher him!"

"I'll do nothing of the kind!" cried Jerry angrily. Then he felt Joan's moist, warm fingers seeking his.

"Go, Jerry. He—he's terrible when he gets in a tantrum. Go, but please stay close—close to me."

Jerry glanced at the still, handsome face of Fred Barthel; then back to Joan.

"All right," he said. "I'll go."

CHAPTER IV *Corpses For Sale*

WHY hadn't Dr. Bell called the police? For over an hour Jerry had huddled in the shadows of the great house and asked that question. There was but one answer. Dr. Bell *dared* not call the police.

The wind had abated somewhat. There was a rainy moon up there in the sky—a sort of worn place in the velvet blackness. The house was silent and tomblike from the outside.

Joan had told him to stay close to her. His hiding place against the west wall of the house was as close to her as he could get without being inside the house. He felt utterly alone. His eyes were sore from the dust, yet he dared not close them for an instant. He had tried it once—closing his eyes. Then the hideous vision of Dale Bell spewing the green web of death from his gaping mouth came to haunt him.

The clock on the village bank boomed one shuddering stroke. Along the street, two fuzzy spots of light moved. A quiet motor purred. Jerry's nerves tensed; his senses became alert. The car, a light delivery

truck, turned into the drive and backed to the side door of the house not far from Jerry.

A man got out of the cab, rounded the truck, and approached the door. Jerry listened to the tap of the knocker. The man waited impatiently. Then the door opened. A dim lamp was lighted.

In the door stood Dr. Bell, fully dressed. Light shining through the door illuminated the Shakespearian brow and Satanic chin of Malloy, the undertaker.

"What are you doing here?" Dr. Bell whispered.

"I told you I was coming tonight," replied the other. "You said you'd pay me five hundred apiece for them. If this lobar pneumonia holds out, I'll be able to retire by the first of the summer."

"I'm through, Malloy," whispered the doctor.

Malloy laughed unpleasantly. "Oh, no, you're not—not through with *me!* I'm selling corpses to you. Either you pay me for the corpses or pay me the same amount to keep still!"

Dr. Bell looked past the undertaker's truck. "It's fresh?" he asked.

"Died this afternoon. A nice specimen. Plump, too."

"All right, all right!" Dr. Bell exclaimed. "Bring it in and be quick about it." Dr. Bell stepped back to clear the door. Malloy walked out on the truck and dragged a long, gruesome bundle to the door. The bundle was a sheeted corpse.

Perhaps five minutes later, the two ghouls returned to the doorway. And Malloy was carrying another stiff, sheeted form!

Dr. Bell passed the undertaker a roll of bills. The latter chained up the rear panel of the truck, and started for the cab. Dr. Bell went inside and closed the door.

The drive was on a slight grade. Malloy evidently wished to avoid the snarl of the starter drive; for he removed the brake and started the truck by coasting.

Then Jerry Sanders moved. He ducked from his hiding place and ran

on tiptoe. Just as the truck's motor started with a jerk, Jerry's fingers closed over the rear panel of the truck. He ran three steps and sprang over the back of the truck. He dropped full length on the bed of the truck beside the gruesome stiff.

Five minutes of nerve-racking jolting that pitched him up against the truck's grisly burden, and Jerry found himself at the back of the Malloy Mortuary.

The undertaker alighted and went to open the garage door. Jerry steeled himself and raised one corner of the sheet that covered the stiff. He forced his trembling fingers to touch the face.

COLD, stiff, glass-smooth features. He shuddered, sat upright, threw one leg over the rail of the truck, and dropped to the ground. He stood, waiting.

Malloy's sharply indrawn breath whistled. "Who's there?" he whispered tightly. With hesitant steps, he rounded the truck.

From the shadows, Jerry launched himself in a spring that carried him to the undertaker. He seized Malloy's shoulders and forced him back beneath the searing truck lights. There was the gleam of fear in Malloy's green eyes.

"Now!" Jerry said with an air of finality. "You're going to tell me the whole truth if I have to thrash it out of you. Why have you been selling corpses to Dr. Bell?"

Malloy frowned. It was feigned puzzlement, Jerry knew.

"Corpses? *Selling corpses?* You must be mad. I'm an undertaker. I embalm bodies. That's how I make my living."

Jerry swung the flat of his hand to Malloy's face. The undertaker reeled. His left cheek burned scarlet.

"What's that thing in the truck?" Jerry snapped.

"It is not a corpse," said Malloy doggedly.

"Lord! I know that. I've touched it! It's not a corpse. But what is it? What are you doing with it?" He seized Malloy's collar and dragged

him until Malloy's nose was but a few inches from Jerry's face. "Come on!" Jerry husked. "What filthy game are you and Dr. Bell playing?" Jerry balled his right fist.

At that moment, a powerful hand closed on Jerry's arm. Jerry twisted his head, relaxing his hold on Malloy's collar. Half-stiffed, the undertaker cringed back against the garage doors. Jerry stared up into the face of Captain Newcomb of the police.

"Come along, my fine lad!" Newcomb ground out. "I knew when I first laid eyes on you, you was a trouble maker. We don't allow your sort in Prairie City unless they're locked up in jail!"

An unpleasant laugh sneered from Jerry's lips. "No, you don't allow bums, do you? Yet Toots Gantner can come here. And you allow worse things than that!"

Newcomb raised his night-stick threateningly. "You coming along peaceable?"

For an answer, Jerry's left fist swung in a short arc to connect with Newcomb's jaw. The police captain staggered. Jerry broke away from Newcomb's hold, sprang around the truck, and vaulted into the front seat.

Gears snarled. Jerry crowded gas and swung the car in a short circle to straighten out and head for the street. Newcomb fired twice. Shot struck steel wheels and burred off into the night. Jerry swung around the corner and raced to the next block. Then he pulled to the curb and jumped out.

He sprinted five blocks to the Bell house. Not a chance of Newcomb catching him now. When he saw the police captain, again, he would have something to tell him that would make him forget Jerry Sanders altogether. Jerry had resolved to find out what gruesome secret the stone house held.

As he ran across the dusty yard that fronted the doctor's house, he saw that the great brass-studded door was open. There was a little light in the hall and the red Turkey carpet was streaked with brown dust. Jerry crossed the threshold and stood for a moment in the hall, listening.

A GAIN that stifling feeling of loneliness. An aching in his lungs to cry out, to hear his own voice, to hear *anything*. He coughed, and the silence crowded in after the dying echoes. He crossed the hall to the steps on tiptoe.

A board creaked beneath his weight. Then a sound more hideous than silence—the scampering of feet.

A bed-spring groaned. Probably the idiot son of Dr. Bell was moving around up there. But how could the others sleep—those who had seen the consuming power of the green web? Perhaps they were all . . .

Jerry reached the upstairs hall. A door swung open. "Who's there?" a tight voice called.

Fred Barthel was standing in the open door, his eyes sleepy, his blond hair ruffled. "You, Sanders? I thought Uncle told you to get out?"

Jerry nodded. "I'm not that easily gotten rid of."

"Not that I blame you. Damned unjust. But if Uncle were here, he'd raise a great fuss."

"Where is Dr. Bell?"

A frown crimped Fred Barthel's forehead. "He and Emanuel are up to something." Barthel chewed his lower lip thoughtfully a moment. "You might as well know, Sanders. I've known for some time. Uncle Thornton is up to some pretty unsavory work. He's been buying corpses from Malloy, the undertaker. God knows what he does with them."

"But," Jerry objected, "how can he get by with that?"

Fred Barthel smiled slightly. "Emanuel used to run a wax museum a long time ago. He makes dummies of wax which Uncle trades for the corpses. During these dust storms, fatalities run high. He can buy all he wants." Fred yawned. "That damned chloroform. Wish I had that damned cowed thing that gave it to me by the throat. I'm still dopey."

"Where's Joan?" Jerry asked.

Barthel shrugged. "In her room. It's been a hard night for her with those ghastly deaths and Uncle Thornton storming about. I suppose the poor kid was so worn out that

she immediately dropped off to sleep."

"I'm finding out!" Jerry strode down the hall to the door that closed Joan's bedroom. He tapped gently and received no answer. He turned, listening intently, trying to hear Joan's breathing. Then he turned the knob and entered the room.

He switched on the light, but even before he did so, his mind pictured disaster. Bedclothes were thrown over the end of the bed. Dainty garments had been dumped from a chair. But Joan was nowhere to be found.

Jerry pulled open a closet. "Joan!" he shouted. His trembling fingers frisked through Joan's wardrobe to make sure she wasn't hiding behind the hanging dresses. Hiding? Why should she be hiding? What a damned idiotic thought! Joan was gone! She wasn't hiding! She needed his protection! His voice rose in a harsh treble.

"Joan!"

FRED BARTHEL, pulling suspender straps over his pajama coat, stepped into the bedroom. "She here?"

"Here?" Jerry brushed Barthel out of the way. "Do you think I'd be yelling my head off if I'd found her?"

Fred Barthel's jaw dropped. His mouth closed with a click. "God! You don't suppose—"

Jerry wheeled, seized Barthel's broad shoulders. "Suppose what?"

For a moment, Barthel's eyes were vacant. "Uncle Thornton is in love with her," he murmured. "But it's a different sort of love. The man's scarcely human. You don't suppose she's with Emanuel and Uncle Thornton? Down there where *it* is? You don't suppose Uncle Thornton would—"

Jerry shook Barthel furiously. "What are you trying to say?"

Barthel bit his lip. "And if Joan—" He swung around toward the door. "Come on, man! Good God! *It* has to feed some time!"

Fred Barthel sprang into his own room. He was out again, a pair of dust goggles swinging in his hand. "Got to go outside," he barked.

"Uncle's *real* laboratory. There's an old cistern and a sort of catacomb that a former owner used to grow mushrooms in. Let's go, Sanders!"

Jerry ran, stumbled, half-fell down the steps behind Barthel. Dr. Bell was insane—a genius, but insane. Geniuses, he had heard, sometimes required strange, ghastly outlets for pent-up emotions. To what horror would Thornton Bell subject his love-ly ward to break her will?

Out through the front door. Around the house, running beside Fred Barthel. Jerry's fagged muscles pumped aching legs up and down. Joan! What had he done to her?

"Little tool shed," Barthel shouted. "Opening to the catacomb."

Jerry saw the shed, and in another moment Barthel's shoulders had crashed the door. Lungs sucked dry, Jerry followed. His knees encountered Barthel's back. The latter was on his knees, fingernails scratching over a rough metal surface. A clang like a death gong.

"Manhole," Barthel breathed. "Watch your step!"

A moist odor like a draft from an old tomb assailed Jerry's nostrils. Then a blood-freezing screech.

"Sanders! *Look out!*"

Fred Barthel's shadowy form melted. Dank wind rushed up from the floor. A dull thud.

Jerry dropped to the floor, hands groping for the edge of the manhole. He stared down into damp, foul darkness that seemed to cling to his eyeballs.

"Barthel!" he whispered.

A ghostly echo of the name whispered hollowly from below. Jerry stretched out an arm, down through the opening. His fingers clutched nothing. He dropped flat, head swaying over vast nothingness, both hands groping.

Suddenly, he met clammy flesh and powerful clinging fingers. He tried to tear away. A titanic strength was brought into play in a mighty heave that toppled Jerry far over the edge of the pit. Knees, toes clung with primal strength to the floor that he felt was sliding out from under him.

The mighty, clinging grasp worked unalterable will. Jerry pitched head-first forward.

A high, macabre shriek came from his own throat. He was hurling through limitless space, snatched from the edges of the earth. Down, down, down into a crashing, glittering lightning that drummed him into oblivion.

CHAPTER V

The Monster Feeds

JERRY drifted out of oblivion, wondering, fearing what had happened. He was one great muscular ache, but he could move around. What then was the matter with him? Was he blind? Was that it? He asked himself. Did it mean that he was never to see Joan's dear face again?

He rolled over on his face, pushed against the floor with his hands, slowly doubled his legs under him, and stood up. That was agony!

Three dragging steps and he fell to his knees, arms falling across something that was like a narrow bed. His fingers began anxious exploration.

Suddenly, light—stunning, white and brilliant. The discovery that he was not blind, that he had simply been in absolute darkness, surged across Jerry's brain. Not blind!—he thought triumphantly.

But good Lord! What were his fingers doing? Trembling over the face of someone on the narrow bed. . . .

Slowly, one at a time, his fingers peeled away. When he could see the face, he recoiled, stood up, turned around. His eyes darted about the place.

The man on the bed was dead. Death was about him everywhere in the high cylindrical room. Corpses hung from the walls, were stretched on benches, or swung from the ceiling like ghastly pendulums. Dead eyes stared, unseeing. Jerry staggered from one side of the room to another,

looking up at the dead, looking down at the dead, dodging the fearsome shadows of the dead swinging from the ceiling.

There was the making of madness in this tall, cylindrical room. It was as if a madman had made it for the sole purpose of forcing others to join his deluded fellowship. Jerry shook his head vigorously, driving off thoughts that were not sane. He forced himself to look calmly about the place.

The floor was a perfect circle of soft, black muck. The walls, rising perpendicularly to a circular ceiling, were of rough, old brick. In the ceiling, near the iron-lidded manhole through which Barthel and Jerry had passed, was a hanging platform. Jerry knew that it was on this platform that the creature with the powerful arms had waited.

In the exact center of the ceiling was a glass, sphere-shaped envelope about a yard in diameter and enclosing odd-shaped, gleaming metal posts. Aside from the manhole in the ceiling, the only other means of exit was a door in the wall. And it was a door of solid steel.

Suddenly, Jerry became aware that unseen eyes were watching him, laughing silently at his bewilderment. A low, agonized moan, a supplicant wail. Jerry started toward the steel door. He stopped suddenly. It was opening slowly.

Jerry's jaw dropped. For through the door stepped Joan Sinclair, her lovely body quivering with terror, her face pale and drawn.

"**J**OAN!" Jerry sprang to her to gather her in his arms.

A moment of gladness in her eyes; then Joan wept quietly, head on his shoulder. "Jerry!" she sobbed out. "Don't let—don't let anything happen! Oh, don't let *him* come!"

"Darling! What is this place? How did you get here?"

She shook her head. "I don't know what this—this awful place is. Some terrible experiment of Dr. Bell's. How I got here—oh, it's like a nightmare! I was in bed, wide awake, lis-

tening for things I didn't want to hear. Then I knew there was someone in my room. I cried out. But that someone had me in his arms in a moment."

"Who, Joan?"

She shook her head and choked back a sob. "It—it was a man. He—he was dreadful. I struggled and clawed his face. He became infuriated. Something blanketed my head. I knew that this man lifted me and carried me somewhere. I cried out for you, Jerry. But—but you didn't come. Then I found myself in the dark—terrible, lonely dark. For a long time, I lay on the earth floor. Then I got to my feet and found that I was in a sort of rough passage. I remembered that Dr. Bell told me there was a sort of cavelike place somewhere on the grounds. I groped my way through the darkness. I found a door and opened it—*Jerry!*" Joan's voice broke into a sharp scream. "The door! *It's closing!*"

Jerry released Joan and flung himself toward the moving steel door. He flung himself against the cold surface. A bolt clicked. He pounded with his bare fists against the unyielding mass. He shouted, threatened, swore.

Mad laughter was the only answer.

Jerry swung around. Joan, speechless with horror, stared about the room. She motioned at the hanging corpses. Her eyes questioned, but Jerry had no answer. Only a whispered, "Be brave, dearest," passed his lips. For suddenly the electric lights went out.

The very air hummed with vibrant, electrical charges. Slowly, light returned—a pale, violet light emanating from the crystal sphere in the center of the ceiling.

Clinging closely together, Joan and Jerry stood, heads back, watching the witchery of pulsating, electrical charges of violet flame snapping between the metal elements within the great glass tube. The hum increased; the angry, violet light brightened—silent, colorful lightning within the vacuum sphere.

A choked cry from Joan. She

twitched convulsively, writhing from Jerry's arms. Face a mask of terror, she stared at the floor. Jerry saw it too—a twining, living web of sickly, yellow-green pursuing the girl across the floor. An obscene green strand twitched about one of the girl's naked ankles.

JERRY cursed, dropped to the floor, and tore at the flimsy, silken threads with his fingers. He recoiled involuntarily. The green web, unpleasantly sticky, had lodged on his fingers, was twisting its living tentacles about his arms. Visibly growing, seeking living flesh by which to sustain its crawling, parasitic life.

Jerry shook his arms. A thread of the weblike parasite floated up to his throat, lodged there, and immediately stranded out into half a dozen other life-seeking tendrils.

A hoarse, mad cry ripped from Jerry's throat. He looked up at the ceiling. Growing from the hanging corpses, spreading so as to form an ever lowering gossamer net, was the obscene green web. Occasionally, its own sticky weight was too much for it. A squirming strand dropped to Joan's shoulders, lodged there, and twined upward.

Joan's hysterical shriek resounded a hundred times from the cylindrical room. Jerry sprang toward her, and stopped. Already, more of the green web had sought him as its host. Going near Joan would only jeopardize her; for the frail, loathsome strands from Jerry's body would creep to Joan.

He knew now the reason for the stolen bodies. The green web was nurtured on human flesh—living or dead. Its spores had been planted in the corpses about the room. It multiplied with tremendous rapidity beneath the violet light. It was the same green web that had killed Calvert and Dale Bell. God! Why didn't it kill them?

Mercifully, quickly strangle them to death.

But instead, the green web crawled from its dead hosts to the living ones—frail, sticky, crawling, feasting,

thriving beneath the violet light from the orb above.

SUDDENLY, harsh, grating laughter. Jerry and Joan wheeled toward the steel door. A little shutter had opened, and on the other side Jerry could see the cowed head, the white, skull-face of the monster that had killed Dale Bell.

"Having a delightful time, love-birds? Rest assured, unless you will it otherwise, the green fungus will bind you tighter than a priest could do it!" Mad, hideous, rollicking laughter from the skull.

"Understand, Joan, it is within your power to save Sanders from the slow death that has been allotted him. This door is open to you. Yield to me, and Sanders' fate will be different."

Joan seemed to forget the slinging, parasitic web. She tore away from a thousand silken strands and ran across the slippery floor to the door. "Anything!" she pleaded. "My money? All yours. Only don't let anything happen to Jerry!"

"Joan!" Jerry cried harshly. "That monster doesn't want your money. He wants you!"

Joan recoiled from the door, her lips curling in an expression of disgust. "You beast!" she hissed.

The cowed creature laughed. "Poor foolish ones! You understand the green web lives on either dead or living flesh? Its living, crawling tendrils in this small room will soon drive you both to madness. The fungus thrives only on human tissue and only in the presence of certain rays, uncommon on this earth because of our planet's comparative distance from the sun. The ultra-violet rays and human flesh are its meat and drink. Outside of this artificial habitat, it would be harmless. Its tiny, scarcely visible spores are in the noses and throats of everyone in the village. Yet they do no more harm than dust particles until persons are brought beneath rays shorter than those within the room now—the penetrating purple rays."

"Monster!" shouted Jerry. "You

have deliberately loosed the fungus spores, knowing that when mingled with the particles of dust they would be unnoticeable!"

The cowléd head nodded gravely. "For a man on the brink of insanity, you have considerable lucid reasoning, Sanders. After this little job is done, I may work a very interesting extortion scheme with my portable purple-ray tube. You understand, of course, that should the vacuum tube above your heads radiate those shorter, more penetrating purple rays, the spores within your nose and throat would multiply as readily as those on the surface do now. Strangulation would be the result.

"Why have I gone so far into this explanation? Because by touching a lever, I can shorten the rays from that tube in the ceiling—turn them into the penetrating purple rays which would cause the spores in your nose and throat to multiply rapidly, throwing out the strangling green web."

Joan threw herself against the door. "Do it! Do it now! Kill us!"

The cowléd monster chuckled. "I shall kill Sanders very quickly as soon as you have passed through this door!" With a black-gloved hand, the fiend tore aside a tendril of green web that had grown across the shutter. "What do you say?"

JERRY looked about the room. It seemed to have grown smaller in every dimension, so rapidly had the green web grown. Soon, very soon, the great mat of living, ravening tentacles would press them to earth, twining them together, joining them with stark madness. Then it would consume them slowly, feeding from their flesh. Lingering, torturing death!

"Joan, come here!" Jerry's voice was taut, commanding.

Joan turned from the door and came toward him, her flesh creeping, longing to be rid of the delicate monster that fed upon her.

"Joan," Jerry whispered. "There is a way out. It depends upon you. You must pretend to do as that fiend orders. Get through the door. You

must get the key from him and fling it through the shutter to me."

"But he will kill you instantly!"

"No. I have a plan. Go quickly!"

Joan turned, ran back to the door. Her par lance with the cowléd man was in a low whisper.

Jerry, kneeling on the floor, pulled away great masses of the fungus that clung to his shoes. He found shoelaces and tugged at them.

"Very well," the monster cried triumphantly. "You shall come to me. Sanders shall die instantly."

The door creaked open. Jerry saw the flittering white figure that was Joan pass through the door. He heard the sound of the door latching. Instantly, he was on his feet, eyes straining against the clinging green web, staring at the violet-lighted tube above him.

Again, the monster's fiendish laugh. The electric hum increased. Jerry's eyes narrowed, watching the tube. In his hand, he gripped one of his heavy shoes. One chance—slender as the green web itself.

Through the living, growing ceiling, ever lowering, Jerry saw beams of violet light just beginning to deepen. Every nerve, every muscle must respond to that movement which might save him from strangulation. He drew back his right arm, gauging the distance. Then he threw the shoe with all his strength.

The frail web was torn asunder by the hurtling missile. There was a deafening report as the glass tube shattered. Instantaneous dark.

Jerry coughed, spat, and breathed deeply. He sprang toward the door marked by pale rays of light through the shutter. A snarl from the fiend. "Trickery, damn you!"

Jerry pressed against the unyielding door. Joan was struggling in the arms of the cowléd monster. The creature's ugly, bony face was close to hers. One gloved hand was on her throat; the other groped for her left hand, extended toward the shuttered door. In her white fingers Jerry saw an iron key. She was inches from the door, but the monster was slowly drawing her away from it,

"Don't throw the key!" Jerry cautioned.

But already the bit of metal had left Joan's hand. Jerry heard it tinkle against the shutter bars. Not a chance in a hundred that it had gone through. He dropped to the floor. Joan's scream for help sent his fingers scampering through the sticky fungus mat, searching blindly for the key that might not be there.

"Jerry! Darling—" Joan's cry wavered to a strangled whisper.

Then Jerry's fingers closed on something flat and cold. The key!

He stood up, trembling fingers searching for the lock. Seconds marched on toward agonizing minutes before the key thrust home. A quick twist, a heave against the panel, and Jerry, trailing the green web behind him, sprang through the door.

A SMALL hall, narrow steps leading upward. Jerry saw neither. He had only eyes for the cowled monster and the girl struggling in his mad embrace. With a snarl, the fiend threw the girl to one side. He turned on Jerry, yanking a revolver from his garb. Jerry launched himself in a mighty spring. Too late to change tactics now. If the revolver shot—

It did. The crash of the shot echoed through the room. The bullet burned Jerry's cheek, but failed to check him. His driving right fist connected with the monster's jaw, sending him reeling backward. At the same moment that he had swung, Jerry's fingers locked over the revolver in the cowled man's hands. It came away as the monster dropped back.

The cowled man crouched, ignoring the revolver in Jerry's hand. Then he charged like an enraged panther. Jerry pulled the revolver trigger once—twice—thrice.

The cowled man's leap carried him sprawling into Jerry to collapse on the floor where, for a moment, he lay twitching. Jerry and Joan stared at their mortal enemy. The cowl had fallen back, the papier-maché skull mask had broken. The face of the man on the floor was the white face of Fred Barthel.

"Fred!" gasped Joan.

"Yes," Jerry whispered. "I was just a little suspicious of him tonight when he was found chloroformed—or pretending to be chloroformed. Those red circles under his eyes—they had been made by dust goggles recently removed. I did not realize it at the time, of course, but Fred Barthel had worn dust goggles only a few minutes before we found him in bed. He had to have them when he killed Dale Bell. He had planned to escape through the mad Moxin Bell's room. He knew he was going to jump through the window, run around, and come in the front door to get back into bed—all while we were looking at Dale Bell's body. He dared risk no eye-scratching dust that might slow him up or make his movements inaccurate. The chloroform stunt was simply to make it seem impossible that he was the killer.

"Tonight, when he led me into this terrible place, he dropped through the manhole, stood on the platform, and yelled for help. I was foolish enough to fall into his trap. He dragged me through the opening."

"But I thought—" Joan began.

"That your guardian was the killer? No; Dr. Bell did buy dead bodies and rig up that ray tube in order to incubate the green fungus—whatever it is. Fred Barthel must have known what his uncle was doing, or may have found his notes. So Fred conceived the idea of loosing the fungus spores on the world. He saw how the fungus might be a deadly murder weapon. From your guardian's laboratory, he probably stole the small portable ray projector which would produce the penetrating purple rays which caused the spores to multiply in the nose and throat of his victims.

"I think he must have tried his murder scheme on John Calvert first, just to see if it worked. His idea was to wipe out the entire Bell family, with the probable exception of the helpless Moxin. He would have then controlled the entire fortune—and you. Where the green fungus came from in the first place, I have no idea."

(Concluded on Page 117)

BLOOD IN THE NIGHT

A Complete Novelette
of Eerie Thrills

By
JAMES DUNCAN

*Author of "Scourge of India,"
"Snow and Ice," etc.*

CHAPTER I *The Witch's Curse*

THE cold, hard rain beat with thumping insistent fingers against the window pane. Stephen Mogridge paced the big, bare-looking room, face muscles quivering with nervous impatience. He paused at the window a bare second to squint out at the tree-fringed private avenue that led to the house from the state road. There was no light anywhere, no sound save the monotonous hiss of the rain among dripping leaves.

He jerked about and strode back to the open fire, fists tightly clenched. Nervous twitching about his eyes provided mute evidence of the strain he

was under. He cursed himself inwardly for his own fearful state of mind; strove to relax. But five minutes later, when a minute sound detached itself from all others, he froze in his tracks. A moment later he was certain that footsteps were stealthily approaching the door.

With shaking hand Mogridge dragged a small-calibered, pearl-stocked gun from his coat pocket, trained the muzzle on the door. He saw the knob turn, saw the door slowly swing open. His choking cry was transformed into something very like



*"Where's
the crazy
fool that
dared to cross
this threshold?"*

In His Greed for Wealth, a Killer Creates



a whimper seeping from his bloodless lips.

Then the tense look faded from Stephen Mogridge's face and the arrested blood, pouring back, made it look feverish, luridly blotched. His dark eyes blazed at the girl who slipped into the room. She was dressed in an ankle-length satin nightdress. Her bare feet made whispering sounds on the rough boards of the floor. Her blond hair was loose, covering her white shoulders like a cloud of gold.

Her pallid face instantly arrested

attention. The classic purity of her features was marred by a look of utter blankness. Her eyes were wide open, but fixed in a glazed, white stare, blind and unseeing, awesome in its strained intensity.

"Veronica!" Stephen Mogridge screamed. "Wake up! Can't you hear me?"

The girl moved steadily forward, apparently staring through him as if he were invisible. She glided about the room aimlessly, as though searching for something that she could not find. The utter blankness of her face

Terror through Exotic Forces of Horror!

remained unchanged except for a troubled frown that flitted over her countenance and then vanished.

Stephen put forth a hand to take her by the shoulder, but it paused in mid-air, paralyzed to immobility. He himself stood rigid, every muscle tense, every nerve strained and taut. His tongue cleaved to the roof of his hot, dry mouth. He gulped, for he had caught a glimpse of the girl's beautifully tapered hands; he saw that they were red-stained. High on the bosom of her satin nightdress there was a similar ugly blot.

"Blood!" he whispered hoarsely. "Veronica, what is it—what happened?" Cold, unreasoning fear chilled his brain. Unconsciously he drew back a step from her, his red-rimmed eyes peering into her serene face. The girl gave no indication that she had heard his agonized question. She glided from the room as quickly as she had appeared.

He was still staring after her in a daze when, from outside, came the sound of a car stopping. A second later the ancient bell-pull tinkled. Stephen jerked nervously erect as a grey-haired, stooping man appeared in the doorway through which Veronica had disappeared. The newcomer had an indefinably brutish look about him. His piglike eyes glared sullenly at Stephen with animal cunning and unconcealed distrust.

"There be a feller just come as wants to see you," he stated. "Gave his name as Adam Vallant. Shall I let him in?"

Stephen jumped. "Of course, you fool! He's the private agent come up from the city to help us."

"Huh?" The man looked dubious, but he shuffled away. A few seconds later a tall, broad-shouldered man strode into the room.

"Vallant!" Stephen went forward with outstretched hand. "Thank heaven you could come!"

ADAM VALLANT grinned. Relief showed so plainly on Stephen's face that the detective could not help but be amused. He was a man in his late twenties, with bold, regu-

lar features, a square chin, and keen, piercing eyes. He was dressed modestly, but the perfect tailoring of his clothes could not conceal a suggestion of hard, springy muscle. Mogrige noted a single ornament—a dragon's head with two tiny blood-red rubies for eyes, beaten out of gold and used as a stickpin. Vallant had the habit of fingering the dragon's head when he talked.

He came into the room and relaxed into a chair, near the comforting warmth of the fire.

"That man who let me in," he said in his deep, slightly amused voice, "didn't seem to care much for me—or my kind."

"Oh, him?" Stephen's voice was harsh, bitter. "He's Joel Breed. He and his wife, Agatha, have been servants here so long that they feel they're part of the family. Always grumbling. He hates me, I believe. Sometimes I even feel afraid of him. But never mind that. I'd better begin by telling you something about what's been happening here."

During the next half hour Stephen Mogrige told Vallant how he had come up to this lonely Vermont farmhouse just a few days before the death of his aunt, Mary Mogrige. His brother George had arrived a day later with their cousin, Harlan Pratt, the lawyer. Veronica, their sister, had been living with the old woman for nearly a year. Last of the clan to gather had been old Jed Peters, Aunt Mary's brother, a queer, snooty old man, peering and curious as a thieving crow.

"Veronica was the old woman's favorite," Stephen explained, "and the only one who could get along with her. She managed that chiefly by renouncing any life of her own. Aunt Mary's influence over my sister was really amazing. She even seemed to think and feel for her. There was something almost diabolical about it. Veronica, though, has always been a strange girl. I've never pretended to understand her, although I'm devoted to her, of course.

"Aunt Mary," he mused, "was a queer old girl. The country people

around here called her a witch. Jokingly, of course. Yet there was something back of it. Aunt Mary had a pair of eyes that seemed to see right through you, as if she knew everything you were thinking, and hated you for it." Stephen smiled bitterly. "On her death-bed, she cursed every one of us, except Veronica. But in some queer way, I think, she trusted Harlan, whom I've always cordially detested, by the way. At any rate, she made him executor of her will."

Stephen paused. His haunted eyes jerked about the grim, ugly old room. Adam Vallant could feel the strange, driven tautness within the man, a strained intensity that made the detective listen very carefully to every word.

"Aunt Mary believed in ghosts," Mogridge continued. "Not spiritualism—something much worse. There may be a few books dealing with devils, black magic and spooks that she had not read, but I doubt it. Veronica used to have to read aloud to her. Not very healthy for a young, impressionable girl. And not only about ghosts, mind you, but about that weird vampire stuff."

Vallant watched a shadowy flame of fear glow brighter in Stephen's eyes.

"Cracked," he said coolly.

Stephen shrugged. "Possibly. But she used to swear to an intimate acquaintance with ghoulish spirits who possessed the power of batlike flight; demon corpses who glut themselves at night on human blood. And she believed that the dead can take possession of a living body—if they were close enough to the victim when they were yet living."

"So that," Vallant thought, "was the secret thing that Stephen Mogridge scorned with his intellect, yet feared with every instinct he possessed. Veronica? Could Stephen believe his sister was possessed?"

"I ought to tell you about the will, I suppose," Stephen added. "As a part of it, Aunt Mary left a letter saying that she knew how all of us despised her; been scheming to do her out of her money. Well, she would

know, when she was dead, which of us had really been as devoted as we pretended. So that not one of us can touch the money for a year. During that year, Aunt Mary declared, she would come back from the dead to strike down all of us who had not really loved her. The estate is to be divided among the—the survivors."

He broke off suddenly as the door flung back and a high-pitched voice filled the room.

"Where's that detec-a-tive feller? Where's the crazy fool as dared to cross this threshold? Ain't he afeared Mary's ghost will strike him down, same as she did—"

A spindly-legged, white-haired old man tottered in the doorway. He carried a Winchester .40-.60 in his shaking hands.

"Quiet, Uncle!" Stephen begged. He rushed across the room, shoving at the old man. "Keep out of here, will you?"

Through the closed door they could still hear the old man's querulous voice:

"Mary put a curse on this wretched house. Strangers ain't allowed!"

THE thin voice died away presently. Stephen paced up and down. After a time he jerked a thumb in the direction of the closed door.

"That was my Uncle Martin, Aunt Mary's husband," he explained. "Aunt Mary hated him. He was always shiftless and no account. He lived on her money. Since she died, he hasn't been right in the head. Not that he was any too bright before."

"You haven't finished telling me about Mary Mogridge and her notions," Vallant spoke soothingly.

Stephen subsided to a chair, drew a hand over his eyes, regained control of himself with an effort.

"So I haven't. Aunt Mary died Thursday night. Thursday—that's right. It seems so long ago. Harlan read the will Friday night. All of us except old Jed were here. He had gone up to his room earlier, saying he knew Aunt Mary wouldn't leave him anything anyway.

"I've told you about the terms of

that will. Naturally, we were all startled. We hadn't thought she'd go quite that far with her mad ideas. Harlan was her legal adviser, and we all wanted to know why he'd let her write such a will. He said he was just as surprised and shocked as any of us. Aunt Mary had given him her will already signed and witnessed just before she died. She'd had it drawn in Boston two or three years ago. Harlan suggested that we might contest the will on the grounds that Aunt Mary wasn't responsible. Veronica begged us not to do that. It seemed queer the way Veronica objected, almost as though Aunt Mary herself was talking through her. But that's nonsense, of course . . ."

Stephen's voice trailed off uncertainly.

"Friday morning," he went on, after a minute, "we found Jed lying sprawled in bed—dead—we think murdered. There were two gashes in his throat exactly like the marks of a—of a—"

Stephen Mogridge could not bring himself to name that word.

"I have never seen anything so terrible as the mask of horror frozen on Jed's face," he continued, almost whispering. "Of course, we had the sheriff out right away. He's not much use in an affair like this. So I sent for you. Last night, Vallant, I swear there were footsteps all through the house, as—as if she had come back and was prowling, spying on all of us. We all heard that! All except Veronica—"

Stephen's eyes were blank and staring. Vallant spoke quietly.

"Sounds ugly," he said. "That odd will, the curse, footsteps at night, bloody marks on Jed's throat—all the strange madness and mystery—"

His voice was suddenly interrupted as the front door slammed. Pattering footsteps were heard walking through the house. Five pulse-beats later, the startled detective turned abruptly, staring hard at the door. Another sound had invaded the house—a human cry that knifed through the closed door, pulsed through the big room. It began as a jangling scream,

mounted to an insane cackle, and chopped off abruptly a gurgling, gasping moan.

Stephen and Vallant looked in each other's eyes before Vallant flung open the door. The ear-splitting, mad laughter sounded again, coming from a room off the big, draughty hall, the door of which stood slightly ajar. Angry voices—men's voices—sounded from it, and then again that shrieking laugh.

Vallant paced forward swiftly, Stephen a stride behind. The detective pushed the door open wider. He saw a room as bare and cheerless as the one he had quitted. Three men stood with their backs to the open fireplace: Joel Breed, old Martin Mogridge, still clutching his Winchester, and a third whom Vallant had not previously seen.

Facing them was a lithe young girl who looked to be no more than sixteen, clothed in torn rags, covered with burrs and mud. Her face, which might have been pretty, was demoniac in its expression of snarling hate. She threw back tangled hair from her eyes, screeched madly, gesticulated with waving arms.

"Relax!" she screamed mockingly. "Relax! Going to sleep—sleep!" Her voice sank to a softer key, and now she spoke slowly, almost soothingly. "You will sleep—dream! Fear nothing! Rest—"

Mad laughter broke from her lips again, and with lightning swiftness she dashed out of sight through the open door.

STEPHEN sighed a deep sigh of relief.

"For a second I was afraid," he murmured. "Damn her! She must learn not to play her crazy tricks in here. Aunt Mary could stand for her. I won't!"

Vallant sucked in a deep breath.

"Who—what is she?"

"She's a daughter of Joel and Agatha Breed. Her name is Helen. She's quite mad, poor thing; roams the country like a wild beast. But, of course, she's harmless."

"What nonsense was she screech-

ing?" Vallant asked curiously. "Something about sleep and relax and dream?"

"Lord knows! She's not responsible. No one can handle her now that Aunt Mary is dead. She comes and goes as she pleases. Her parents are afraid of her. Oh, Harlan!" The third man whom Vallant had not yet met, stepped forward. "I want you to meet Mr. Adam Vallant. He's come up to help us. Mr. Vallant—my cousin, Harlan Pratt!"

Vallant shook hands with a solemn man of indeterminate years whose tired eyes peered out from gold-rimmed glasses.

Just then heavy steps pounded on the stairs. A hatchet-faced woman with iron-grey hair and twisted, bitter mouth came rushing in at them. She was sobbing under her breath. She caught Stephen by the shoulders, shook him, faced him speechlessly. He tried to get loose, but her grip was strong.

"Agatha!" Stephen stormed. "What's wrong? What—"

"George!" she blurted. "Upstairs!" Vallant and Harlan Pratt almost collided as they rushed for the staircase. Stephen shook off the woman; raced after them. At the head of the stairs, Vallant paused. Harlan led the way to a room on the left at the farther end of the cavernlike corridor. He shoved open the door, stood at the threshold staring, as Vallant came up behind him to look in over his shoulder.

THE detective saw a man lying on the bed, head and arms sagging in a curiously lifeless position. The disordered bedclothes were soaked with blood. Vallant stepped into the room, approaching the still figure. He put a hand against his chest, pressing hard.

"Dead," he muttered, straightening. His voice was peculiarly husky. "See those marks on his throat!"

He leaned over the dead man again. The marks were two gashes at either side of the jugular vein. Vallant's lean, dark face whitened slowly as if drained of all blood.

CHAPTER II

The Attic Room

SOMEONE screamed—a man. Harlan Pratt, in the doorway, looked ghastly as death itself. His eyes were round, fear-stricken, incredulous. He was staring, terrified, at the livid marks on the throat of the corpse. All color had drained from his lips; his hands trembled violently.

"Good God!" he shrieked. "The curse—and this can happen to any of us!"

Passing Harlan, Martin Mogridge pushed his way in. Behind him trailed Joel and Agatha. The old man turned away looking sick. Joel Breed's brutish face seemed to smirk. He pointed a lean, bony finger at Stephen.

"I warned yuh, didn't I?" the servant cackled. "I told yuh the old woman's curse would foller yuh. You'll die the same way an' so will Harlan. Mary Mogridge's work. She's restless in her grave—"

"Shut up!" Stephen Mogridge commanded.

Vallant was fingering his dragon's-head stickpin. Now stepping in, he took charge with complete authority.

"All of you clear out of here. You, Joel, go downstairs and call the sheriff, right away. The rest of you wait for me in the living room."

In two minutes he had the room cleared, shut the door and leaned against it, his dark eyes flicking about the room. It was scantily furnished. There was only the bed, a rough pine-wood table, a couple of broken chairs, a sagging dresser and a screened-off washstand. Vallant sat down abruptly, and stared at the dead man for a long time. Then he stood up, sharp eyes roving about the room. A low whistle escaped from his pursed lips.

Soiled towels hung on a plain wooden rack beside the washstand. One of the towels was stained crimson with blood, as if someone had wiped dripping hands on it. He left the bloody towel exactly as he had found it. In the washbowl, too, there

was a faint trace of blood where someone had washed his hands, but there were only badly smeared fingerprints. His eyes searched the floor. He stooped quickly, picked up a tiny object under the stand. It was a gold cuff-link, initialed S. M.—Stephen Mogridge?

The detective's frown deepened and settled. A clue so simple, obvious, direct, coupled with the bloodstained towel, created natural mistrust. Yet, not impossible. Anyway, someone, Stephen Mogridge perhaps, had rolled up his sleeves, washed blood from murderous hands.

Vallant slipped the cuff-link into a vest pocket, opened the door. He saw Joel Breed and Stephen standing at the head of the stairs, whispering, heads close together. When they saw him, Joel moved quickly away, narrow forehead wrinkled, piglike eyes aflame with cunning and hatred.

"I called the sheriff," he said sullenly. "He'll be out within half an hour. Anything else?"

Vallant eyed him sharply, shook his head. Joel turned and tramped slowly down the stairs. Instantly, Stephen moved close to Vallant.

"I want to talk to you," he said.

"Yes," Vallant fingered the stickpin. "And I want to talk with you."

"What?" Stephen was nervous. His bloodshot eyes did not look at Vallant directly. "About Veronica?" Stephen gripped the agent's arm convulsively. "Only a few minutes before you arrived, Veronica was downstairs. She was walking in her sleep. Lately, she does that often. She was in her nightdress!"

Vallant, tingling all over, merely said: "Where is she now?"

"In her room, I think. The one next to George's."

"What! She didn't wake up during all this commotion? Let's take a look."

Vallant moved quickly down the hall. The doorknob turned to his touch and the door opened. His hand groped along the wall, found the light switch, clicked it on.

Stephen choked back a stifled cry. Veronica lay full length on her bed,

her body strangely rigid, arms held stiffly at her sides. Her eyes were open, blind, starkly staring. Vallant leaned over her. Even under the sudden blaze of light, her eyes did not blink, nor did she seem to see him. He saw dried blood on her white hands, the stain on her nightdress.

A strange shiver tingled through the detective. He had the macabre premonition that something horrible, hidden, was being enacted before his eyes.

"Try to wake her up!" Stephen said through chattering teeth.

Vallant shook the girl. Her body moved but remained rigid, unbending. The open eyes did not blink. For a second Vallant thought that the girl must be dead, but the regular rise and fall of her beautifully curved bosom denied that first impression.

"Have you seen anything like this before?" he demanded at last.

"Don't you understand?" Stephen shrieked. "It's Aunt Mary's curse! The vampire—the marks on poor George's throat! The demon-spirit entered into Veronica's body. Good God!"

"NO ghost murdered George!" Vallant said. His fingers plunged into his vest pocket. "Recognize this?" He held forth the initialed cuff-link.

He watched Stephen wilt. His height seemed to lessen. His shoulders sagged. His eyes bulged.

"It's—mine," he breathed.

"So I thought. I found it under the washstand in George's room. I also found a towel and a washbowl stained with blood."

"But you don't think—you can't think— Good God, do you accuse me of murder?"

"Anything," Vallant said quietly, "seems likely to happen here. You could have killed George as easily as anyone else. Maybe you can explain the cuff-link there by the washstand?"

Stephen Mogridge pulled back one sleeve of his coat, baring the wrist. A cuff-link on the left was missing. He stared at the cuff incredulously. "I—I don't know. I hadn't missed

it—no, not until just this minute.”

Vallant glanced at him keenly. A bleak smile touched the detective's lips.

“Somehow, I believe you. You act more like a man afraid of being killed than like a killer. We'll see.”

VALLANT slipped the cuff-link back into his vest pocket. The local police were tramping across the living rooms downstairs.

Sheriff Abner Wood climbed the stairs with his group of three deputies behind him. Vallant made himself known, presented his credentials and then gave a concise account of what had happened. After Wood had viewed the body of George Mogridge, Vallant led him to the adjoining room where Veronica lay. The sheriff gulped, backed out hurriedly.

“Seems like a judgment of the Almighty,” he said in awed tones. “Ol' Mrs Mogridge always said she'd come back from the dead an' I reckon she did. That gal is witched. An' her always such a nice young thing, too!”

“I'm not ready, yet, to believe that a ghost can do murder,” Vallant said acidly.

“Young man,” the sheriff retorted hotly, “likely there's still some things you don't know. I seen the body o' Jed Peters an' I jest seen George. An' I know the ol' lady was sot to come back from her grave!”

Vallant saw that he could get little help from Abner Wood, who departed after first remarking that “he would have the corpses taken keer of soon as he could.”

In the morning Vallant was up and dressed before five. As the light increased he worked thoroughly through the silent house, where no one else stirred. Looking in once on Veronica, he found her sleeping quietly. The stark rigidity had left her body. Her eyes were closed, and she breathed easily, naturally.

Finished on the upper floor, Vallant found a steep, short ladder in a corner that led to the attic. He mounted upward into complete darkness and drafty cold. There, when his pencil flash shot out between trunks, boxes

and discarded household objects, his eye caught sight of a door held fast by a stout, old-fashioned lock. One of the staples looked wobbly.

Vallant grasped the lock with both hands, pulled hard. The staple came away easily. The door groaned as he pushed it open. He slipped through the aperture, and found himself in a closet, inky black.

There, presently, Vallant discovered an unshaded bulb that hung from the roof. He snapped it on, and found himself standing by a long knife-scarred table upon which stood scattered bottles of colored liquids. He sniffed some of them; chemicals of all kinds. At one side of the table were ranged a number of easels upon which painted canvases were placed. Some looked very old; others recently painted.

This, Vallant knew, must be the country workroom where Stephen Mogridge, an art dealer specializing in early American paintings, painstakingly cleaned and restored some, at least, of his purchases. The chemicals were used to wash the accumulated grime of years from old canvases. But this would mean that Stephen had been a regular visitor here during the old aunt's lifetime. It was strange that he had not mentioned it.

Vallant's shrewd eyes examined the stacked canvases, and one single darkened painting in a worm-eaten frame on the wall. That was certainly not American work. Italian, Vallant judged, probably old but not particularly valuable. A crazy thing, when subjected to closer inspection.

The dark canvas portrayed a vampire spirit hovering on batlike wings, over the bed of a sleeping child. The eyes of the dread spirit bulged horribly from the vulturine head, fixed on the bared throat of the child. Vallant shivered as he looked. It was demonic, terribly evil. He felt a rushing impulse to smash a heavy fist through the thing, completely destroy it, remove it forever from the sight of all men. And just then he glanced down, struck motionless.

The detective's eyes rested on a

heap of discarded burlap, old ropes and rags flung into a corner. From the tangled heap protruded a pair of feet clad in stout brown shoes and lighter socks with white clocks. The toes were spread-eagled far apart. The heels almost touched.

He thrust the heap of rags to one side. The body he saw was lying face down, the arms crumpled beneath it. Vallant gripped the shoulders and heaved it over on its back. The face of Harlan Pratt, the lawyer, stared sightlessly up at him.

An unmistakable odor of ether permeated the rags, seemed to emanate from every pore of Pratt's body. One of the bottles on the table, Vallant remembered, contained ether. When Vallant saw the vampire marks on Pratt's throat, his hands bunched into fists, tightened convulsively.

There were two jagged gashes matching in every detail the horrible marks on slain George Mogridge's throat—the same distinct, unmistakable marks of murder.

CHAPTER III

The Key

A SECOND elapsed, then Vallant started, became aware of hoarse, spasmodic breathing pumping through the lawyer's nostrils. His eyes widened. His eager hand sought Harlan's chest. Faintly, but regularly, he felt the heart beat. Still alive!

Vallant lifted the heavy body, stumbled for a step or two and then succeeded in balancing it on his shoulder. He got through the door without difficulty. The steep flight of steps presented a more difficult problem. Once he nearly fell, but finally reached the bottom without another mishap. There he shifted Harlan's weight and started forward. The corridor was a shadowed tunnel, leading into semi-twilight.

Vallant had barely taken three steps when a figure suddenly detached itself from the gloom, stepped in front of him. Old Martin Mogridge! On the old man's face was

curiosity, rather than deep concern.

"Dead?" he quavered, pointing a shaking finger at Harlan. "Serves him right, what I say! He's been a meddlin' fool ever since he put foot in this house."

"You damned old buzzard!" Vallant snapped. "He's not dead. Get help right away. If he lives to talk, we may have the murderer nabbed!"

Someone jerked at the body on his shoulder. He whirled, confronted the pretty but repulsively twisted face of the crazed creature, Helen. Unholy joy was expressed on her features. Her sloe-black eyes shone like polished patent leather. Her mouth was open, lips drawn back over the gums, showing her teeth.

"Ha-ha! He's relaxed now," she screamed, jabbing viciously at Harlan's face. "He'll sleep, not dream!"

With his free hand, Vallant shoved her aside. She backed away crouching, reminding Vallant of a spitting cat with arched back and ruffled fur.

"Keep her free of me," Vallant snapped at the old man. He carried the body to a bedroom and was disposing of it on the bed when he saw Stephen standing in the doorway. Veronica, face white and distorted, appeared behind him. In a few words Vallant told Stephen how he had come across Pratt, unconscious, in the attic. While he was talking he watched Veronica's lovely face. The girl listened wild-eyed to every word, her face a battlefield of conflicting emotions.

"If we can get a doctor quickly," Vallant said finally, "he may have a chance. The ether seems to have affected him more than the loss of blood."

In a daze, Stephen left the room to telephone for the doctor. Vallant, left alone with Veronica did not take his eyes from her.

"Do you really think he will live?" the girl whispered.

"It's too soon to say," Vallant replied. "Now I must ask, do you remember going up to the attic last night?"

Her small white fingers flew to her throat. She put them down, looked

at them as if she still could see blood on them. Her eyes dilated, wide with stricken horror.

"No—o. I mean—I don't know—"

"You walked in your sleep last night," Vallant went on rapidly in a blunt, clipped voice. "Before George was murdered. Stephen saw you. When I went in to look for you, you were rigid, cataleptic. Your eyes were open but you did not see or hear us. Do you remember anything about that?"

HER shadowed eyelids fluttered. Vallant took a step toward her. She waved him off and forced herself to stand proudly erect. She seemed to be straining to remember. Her smooth brow was troubled with a deep, puzzled frown. A harried look battled in her eyes.

"I—I do remember something very vaguely," she said at last. "Lately, I have not been well. I dream dreadful things."

"Like what?"

She caught her breath, trained her eyes squarely on Vallant's. "I dream Aunt Mary is hovering over me, urging me to do terrible things. Oh, please believe me! I know it sounds impossible. I can't remember walking downstairs, but somehow—I did dream about being up in the attic last night."

Trembling with eagerness, Vallant morely said: "Go on! You were up in the attic. What did you do there? Why did you go?"

The girl frowned. "I—I can't seem to remember." She was silent a second, thinking hard. "No, if I was there, I don't know why."

"Did you see Harlan Pratt up there? Do you remember fighting with him, struggling?"

Vallant took a step toward the still girl. She was shivering but she managed to put some strength in her voice as she cried: "No, I—" Tears trembled in her eyes. "Why are you torturing me? What have I done?"

Before Vallant could answer, she fled from the room. He waited until he heard her door open and close. Then he strode after her. In front

of her door, he paused. Hearing no sound from within, he turned the knob and opened the door. Veronica was standing before her dresser, looking down at something she held in her hand—a shining key.

Seeing Vallant in the doorway, her face changed color. She retreated before him. He advanced toward her. Suddenly his hand shot out, snatched the key from her fingers. For a second she faced him angrily—and then all her self-possession collapsed. She threw herself on her bed, sobbing convulsively. Vallant looked down at her for a second, shrugged and went out into the corridor.

Stephen came up the stairs.

Vallant thrust out the key before his eyes.

"Ever see this before?"

Stephen paled. He put forth a trembling hand, touched the key. Then he nodded.

"Yes, it's mine. It unlocks the door to my workroom in the attic. Where did you get it?"

"Never mind that, now. The doctor hasn't come? We'll have to try to revive Harlan without his help. Get Agatha to make up a bowl of strong whiskey and coffee. Tell Joel to go after the doctor and not to come back without him. Somehow Harlan must be made to talk."

During the next hour, under Vallant's ministrations, Harlan rallied to a certain extent but remained in a semi-comatose, half delirious state. It was almost noon when at last he seemed to be resting more easily.

At Vallant's orders, the household settled down to a belated breakfast, a grim, silent meal. Veronica did not appear. Agatha Breed, grumbling, took a tray of food to her room. Even Martin Mogridge, usually too talkative, was silent, worried-looking. After breakfast, Vallant discovered him in another room, hunched over a book. The detective approached on tiptoe, glanced over his shoulder. The book was old, its pages yellow. Vallant read:

Through the early Renaissance period, Europe was much troubled by those ghouliah spirits which take up

their abode in living man and woman. The number of cases reached a total so staggering that the Pope gave permission to open graves of suspected vampires. One famous notable instance describes how Bernadino Perluzzi, grandfather of the artist whose little son was sacrificed to these devils, opened the grave of a certain Duke Messini whom he suspected as having taken the life of his son.

The Duke's eyes once closed by death, were wide open, the cheeks were flushed with rich color. The lips were red and full. Perluzzi had the warlock's heart pierced with an aspen stake. A great fountain of blood splashed in the air. Instantaneously, the touch of corruption to which flesh is heir came into the face. The false color faded to ashes and dust. The plump cheeks sagged, the flesh withered. Soon the corpse was no more than skeleton. The later Perluzzi is supposed to have painted a picture of this frightful scene.

Tensely curious, Vallant stepped forward. Instantly the old man closed the book with a bang; sprang to his feet.

"Here it is!" he screamed, pounding the book with his fist. "Everything written down. Mary Mogridge knew every page of it. Now she's come back from the grave to ha'nt us. And she'll kill every one of us afore she's through!"

VALLANT listened no more. He was surprised that he should feel disturbed by what he read. Nonsense and old wives' tales. Still . . .

When Joel Breed returned with the village physician, Vallant found them in conversation with Abner Wood, the sheriff. He escorted the doctor upstairs to Harlan's room. After an examination with stethoscope and thermometer, the doctor declared Harlan to be out of danger. He prescribed rest and quiet. When he spoke about the wounds in Harlan's throat, the doctor was doubtful.

"I wouldn't like to attempt any explanation of those marks," he muttered, shaking his head. "I've never seen anything like them before—except on Jed Peters and George. Maybe an animal's teeth could make them but—look at that mark at the left! Almost a quarter-inch wide.

And it looks pretty deep too."

Vallant nodded.

"Doctor, there's one question I've been wanting to ask you. In your opinion, how long had Jed Peters been dead when you saw the body Saturday morning?"

The doctor paused.

"About fifteen or sixteen hours, I'd say. It was about noon when I made the examination. Why?"

"That might help," Vallant said softly. "It fixes the murder about midnight. I'll check on that."

Hours after the doctor had gone, Vallant was still on watch at Harlan's bedside. Dusk was invading the house when the latter opened his eyes, recognized the private detective, and smiled feebly.

"Feeling better?" asked Vallant. "I've been waiting hours. Can you tell me what happened, now?"

"I can't remember much." Harlan knitted his eyebrows. "Seems to me I must have been delirious. I remember going to bed, all right, and I remember—oh, yes! It was the noise in the attic. You know, it's directly over my room. The attic, I mean. I heard the noise and went up. Something swooped down on me and—and that's all I recall."

Vallant nodded. "You were put out with ether. Didn't you see anyone, recognize a face?"

"No, it was pitch dark." Harlan's hand strayed to his throat. "It hurts like blazes. What—?" He felt a bandage and his eyes grew big with fright. "Could it—was it—"

"It was. You were attacked just like George and Jed. Luckily, you pulled through. The killer probably thought you were dead." He moved to the door. "Rest quietly now. Doctor's orders."

He left the room; but just over the threshold he stopped, for he saw, or thought he saw, in the semi-gloom, the door of Veronica's room closing. He listened but could hear no sound of any kind. After a while, judging that he might have been mistaken, Vallant went on downstairs.

He slipped out into the gathering dusk, circled around the house. Cool

evening air caressed his face gently. For the moment the terrors that lurked within the frowning old house seemed to retreat into the nightmare kingdom from whence they came. Vampires, possession, a dead woman's curse! Madness, all of that!

It was the old house with its queer, moody inhabitants that made such things seem possible. He glared at it balefully, as if it were his personal enemy, surveying with an absurdly venomous glance the rotting clapboards, weathered and cracked, the sagging roof and crumbling foundations.

Something he saw there, sent him running forward.

A wire dangled loose against the side of the house. Vallant glanced hastily at the neatly severed ends. So somebody was being very careful! Cut telephone wires! He began running back toward the front door.

CHAPTER IV

The Last Victim

VALLANT was surprised, anxious, when he looked in on the big room on the left and saw it was empty. Old Mogridge, Joel, Agatha, Abner Wood, Veronica, were nowhere to be seen. The house was rackingly quiet. He crossed to the other room.

Stephen was still sitting in his chair before the slowly dying fire. But Vallant was struck at once by something queer about his position. He looked as if he were sound asleep and yet

Vallant tiptoed across the room, bent over him. Stephen did not move. The agent stepped around him, looked into his face.

Stephen Mogridge's head had sunk to his chest. The nape of his neck was in full view. There was a minute drop of blood just below the hair line that looked as if it might have been made by a pin-prick.

Vallant lifted the head, brought the face into view. He drew back a step from the hideous thing before him.

Sightless, protruding eyes stared back at him out of a still face distorted with horror. Hardened as he was to violent death, Vallant felt shaken. Stephen's white collar was soaked with blood. There were the telltale gashes deep in his throat—the vampire teeth.

Vallant carefully picked off a strand of hair on the lapel of the man's coat. It was long, blond—Veronica's. Other hairs, the same, were clenched tightly in Stephen's closed fist.

Turning from the slumped body, Vallant stood before the fire, his mind a tangle of onrushing ideas. His thoughts went back with a rush over the ground he had covered since he came into this dread house. Suddenly he started.

In his mind, the odd pieces of the puzzle slipped into place as into fixed grooves. A grim grin came to the detective's lips and his hand drew up, fingered the stickpin dragon in his tie. He went out of the room to the kitchen.

Old Martin Mogridge was seated in a chair, whittling at a piece of wood. He blinked suspiciously at Vallant, but said nothing.

"Where's Joel and Agatha?" queried Vallant casually.

"Gone out, I reckon," the old man grumbled. Then pettishly: "Fact is, I don't know, don't keer."

Immediately Vallant went into Harlan Pratt's room. The lawyer was looking a little better, but he was irritable. As soon as Vallant entered, he shoved a bowl of broth under the agent's nose.

"Smell that!" he stormed. "Taste it!"

Vallant did so. The odor was faint, but the taste was slightly bitter. Vallant spat out the liquid.

"Who gave this to you?"

"Agatha Breed," Harlan replied. "I was suspicious of the way she acted. She insisted on staying with me until I finished very drop. I got rid of her finally. When I tasted the broth, I saw through the dirty plans. By heaven, I think she wanted to kill me."

"It may be poison." Vallant frowned. Then he told Harlan that Stephen had been murdered, watched a cloud of horror darken his face.

"Agatha!" Harlan cried. "She's behind the whole thing!"

Vallant shrugged.

"I can't explain this bowl of poisoned—if it is drugged—broth, but I'm positive I know the killer of Stephen and George."

"Who?"

Vallant refused to answer that question directly.

"Veronica is mixed up in it somehow. Perhaps, though, the real killer is using her."

Harlan smiled cynically.

"Don't tell me you believe in that stuff? It's absurd—impossible! The idea that Mary Mogridge could return from the grave, enter Veronica's body—"

"I didn't say anything about Mary Mogridge," the detective reminded him.

"You mean one of the family? But that's insane!"

"You suspect Agatha just because she isn't a relative?"

"She gave me that bitter broth, didn't she?"

"So you say. But anyone could have tampered with it. Besides, why should Agatha want to wipe out your family?"

"Because she hates us. She hates us all, I tell you."

Vallant shook his head. "Excuse me, but I'm not buying that one any more."

Harlan looked troubled.

"I feel it only fair to tell you, Mr. Vallant, that I shall act for any of my relatives whom you accuse. And I shall demand that you produce absolute proof."

"I'll have proof before I act, Mr. Pratt. Be sure of that. But now I want to talk with Veronica. Stephen Mogridge's death has bitten deep under my skin. It was my fault he died. I've had plenty of evidence concerning Veronica from the first."

"You mean—she's faking that sleepwalking?"

Vallant shook his head. "She's

faking nothing," he said quietly.

"But"—Pratt's voice grew shrill—"you don't think she commits those hideous crimes without knowing what she's doing? I know Veronica was always an odd sort of child—definitely neurotic, I'd say—and Mary's death may have affected her, but—"

"After each killing," Vallant asked. "whose hands were bloody? Who had the key to Stephen's workshop where you were attacked? Pratt, Veronica is in this thing up to her ears."

"In other words, you think Veronica is a blood-crazed monster—no, it can't be! This madhouse is doing things to your mind, Vallant."

The detective rose, wearily.

"Where are you going now?" the injured lawyer asked.

"To see Veronica. I'm going to make her talk!"

VALLANT entered the girl's room without knocking. Veronica was lying on the bed. Seeing him, she sprang up in wild alarm, began edging away from him. He came a few steps nearer and reached out his hand toward her. In it lay the strands of hair he had taken from Stephen's dead body. She checked a scream as she saw what they were: her own, and bloodstained.

Vallant began talking to her in a quiet, steady voice, soothing her little by little. The girl's tense body relaxed. She sat down on the bed, a docile, submissive expression on her face.

For twenty minutes he spoke without a break.

"But how—how could I do such things?" she shuddered.

"There have been similar cases, Veronica. Thank heaven they're rare. You are not to blame. You were not yourself. You were obeying something beyond your control—something stronger than your own will. Now you must listen, and do exactly as I tell you. Will you?"

"Of course," the girl said. "Even though I don't understand—"

"You will understand, Veronica. I promise. And you'll never regret

a single thing I ask you to do."

Veronica heard the detective's instructions attentively as a child learning an obscure lesson it does not entirely comprehend.

Fifteen minutes later, she stood on the threshold of Harlan Pratt's room. She went straight to the man on the bed.

"Harlan, I must speak to you," she said.

Vallant, concealed in the shadows behind her, could see Pratt's frightened face.

"Close the door, Veronica," he commanded.

She shut the door.

In the hall, Vallant started for the head of the stairs. He did not descend however, but doubled on his tracks and moved back on tiptoe. At the rear of the hall, he ascended the steep stairs that led to the attic. He moved now with quiet caution, squatted on his heels and waited. Minutes ticked by slowly.

A quarter-hour passed before he heard a faint outcry from below. Even then he did not stir. It took all his strong will power to keep from rushing down. At last, patience was rewarded with the sound for which he waited. It was a jangling scream of terror from a man's throat.

HE heard a door slam, then the diminishing sound of heels on the stairs. He was down the short flight in a twinkling, running for Harlan's door. There he stood, transfixed with horror. Harlan lay still, eyes glazed with fright. The bandage which had been wrapped about his throat had been torn away.

Vallant shook him. At last his frenzied eyes opened. As if in answer to a question leaping from Vallant's eyes, he nodded.

"She attacked me!" He shuddered. "She tried to tear my throat with her teeth. It—it was horrible. You were right Vallant—I—"

The lawyer sank back in a dead faint.

Vallant looked down at him for a second, then dashed from the room. In the downstairs hall, apparently

gathered by Harlan's screams, were old Mogridge, Agatha and Abner Wood.

"It's nothing," Vallant flung at them. "Mr. Pratt was asleep and had a nightmare."

They accepted the explanation without comment. Agatha returned to the kitchen. Vallant went out on the porch. His right hand fingered the dragon stickpin, angry because his hand was shaking. Fear, curiosity, a kind of nervous anxiety held every muscle tight.

He walked cautiously around the side of the house to the place where, this afternoon, he had noticed the severed phone wire. Then he saw Veronica, a white, ghostly shadow, standing quietly there, all absorbed as if she were working at something with great concentration. Her white hands held a knife whose blade glittered dully. Cutting phone wires! But the wires were already cut—had been cut for an hour, at least.

Was the girl automatically repeating a previous action? For a moment Vallant watched with prickling scalp as Veronica sawed intently at the end of a dangling strand.

"Veronica!" he called softly.

There was no sign of recognition in her blank face. Her eyes were glazed, staring. Suddenly a frown shadowed her still expression. Instinctively, as if he were faced by a wild cat, Vallant drew back. The girl stirred, took one crouching step toward him.

"Veronica!" he said sharply.

She flung herself at him without further warning. She moved as if on springs, covering the few feet that separated them in a flying leap. Vallant had a confused impression of her distorted face hovering over him like the face of an evil angel. Then he went down, sprawling.

Clawing fingers bit into his cheek. He saw her bloodstained lips, cruelly parted over white teeth, reaching hungrily for his throat.

There came the slight impact of a step behind him. Vallant fought clear of Veronica's clutching arms, tried to rise.

Cold steel of a gun muzzle pushed

hard against his neck froze the detective to immobility. A voice grated: "Quiet! Put your hands behind your back!"

There was an ominous undercurrent of threatened murder implicit in the words. Vallant obeyed promptly. He felt a rope loop about his wrists, tighten with a skin-breaking jerk. He gave a vicious twist, tried to get his hands clear. The rope held; the knot tightened.

A man stepped around him into his line of vision. In the uncertain light Vallant distinguished the face of Harlan Pratt!

CHAPTER V

From the Vampire's Mouth

PRATT no longer looked either fearful or good natured. His eyes were icily cold. He shoved Veronica roughly aside, snarled at her.

"Stand still! You're no longer needed!"

Instantly, like an automaton, Veronica stood stiff and rigid. The blank fixity of her face was unchanged. Her eyes, though open, stared sightlessly at Vallant.

Harlan pocketed his gun, but now the agent saw something else in his hand—a penknife with a mother-of-pearl handle. In place of a blade, there was a four-inch needle of steel, almost as fine and as thin as a hair!

Vallant's eyes widened.

Harlan caressed the gleaming sliver of steel.

"My little beauty secret leaves scarcely a mark. Just one drop of blood behind the ear—which can be erased. It probes into the brain, paralyzes, kills instantly!"

"The marks on my throat? How will you manage them?" Vallant tried hard to keep his voice steady.

Harlan flung a look at Veronica. He pressed a spring on the side of the knife.

A small tool, like a pair of pincers, shot out at right angles.

On each claw were projections of

sharp-edged steel arranged like teeth.

"You imagined it was Veronica," Harlan said scornfully. "But it was this darling made those vampire marks! They will make them on you, too, after you are dead!"

He took a darting step toward Vallant, needle extended, with the swiftness of an attacking snake.

For a single pulse-beat, Vallant's heart leaped into his mouth. If he failed now, he met death.

As if from nowhere a hiss sounded. A cloud of vapor shot out from Vallant's chest, enveloped Harlan's entire head. Harlan sprang backward with a fiendish scream, clutching and clawing at his eyes, his nose, blinded by exquisite pain. Thick, grey-blue vapor wreathed about his head like a strange, poisonous halo.

"Now, Joel!" Vallant shouted.

Joel Breed charged from the door, bursting into the barn like a lumbering dray horse, his piglike, red-rimmed eyes flashing fire.

"I heard him, Mr. Vallant! I heard every word the murderin' skunk said. I'm witness to it!"

"Good! But get me free before he recovers. There's a gun in his pocket. Get that and the knife in his hand, and cut me loose."

Joel did as he was told. Free, Vallant jumped to his feet. In a trice, he had a pair of handcuffs out of his hip pocket, snapped the steel bracelets about Harlan's wrists. By that time, Harlan had somewhat recovered. He was still partially blind, but he could breathe, and groan. A hundred questions trembled on the tip of Joel's tongue.

Vallant answered them by touching the dragon head stickpin in his tie. Then, Joel watching intently, he unbuttoned vest and shirt, and displayed a little rubber tube that ran from the back of the stickpin to a rubber bulb under his arm. Joel's eyes widened with keen astonishment.

"Wal, I'll be switched!"

"I was saving it for just such an emergency," Vallant explained. "The stuff inside the bulb was fluid chlorine gas. Given enough of it, Pratt

would surely have choked to death."

He strode over to Pratt now, looked directly into the man's eyes.

"Get Veronica out of her state of hypnosis," he snapped.

Pratt's face twisted into a grimace. "To hell with you!"

Vallant got Pratt's knife into evidence. "All right, act surly," he said. "I have means of forcing you."

He had not raised his voice, but some quality of deadly earnestness in it overcame Pratt's objections. With Vallant close behind him, he strode over within a few inches of Veronica. His voice was cold, menacing.

"When I give you the signal, you will awaken from sleep." There was a weighty pause. Then: "Awaken!"

VERONICA gasped. Her eyes blinked, the lids wavered. Color flooded her cheeks. She looked from one face to another uncomprehendingly. Vallant's deep voice was soothing, gentle.

"It's all over now, little girl. You've done your part." He glanced at Pratt.

"You hypnotized her, but it was I who sent her to you. You knew I suspected you, and you wanted to know what I told Veronica after I left you. But the girl had promised not to reveal it to anyone. She wouldn't speak. So you hypnotized her. And that marked you, Harlan Pratt. For whoever hypnotized Veronica tonight had hypnotized her before. And that person was the murderer!"

"But you couldn't resist trying to dodge suspicion by piling up more evidence against Veronica. You sent her down here to cut the phone wires—or at least to pretend to since you had cut them yourself this afternoon. By post-hypnotic suggestion, you ordered her to attack me if I confronted her. You were watching, of course, and when Veronica rushed me, you couldn't resist trying to finish me off.

"I first thought of the possibilities of hypnosis when poor crazed Helen screamed: 'Relax, sleep!' You had tried it on her. Didn't you know it is almost impossible to hypnotize the

insane? Your next most obvious victim was Veronica. You hoped to establish the idea that Mary Megridge was carrying out her curse by using Veronica's hand as a means of vengeance. The old woman's superstitions, her belief in vampires, played into your hand very well. But Veronica would not, even under control, do the actual killing. So you attended to that yourself. What you could make her do, again by hypnotic suggestion, was to go to the dead bodies and smear herself with their blood. Poor child, she didn't know what she was doing. Perhaps her subconscious mind believed that she was only washing her hands in water. When I told her this afternoon what I suspected, I saw at once she had no real knowledge of what she was doing. It was you—not dead Mary Megridge—who acted through her!"

"But how did he manage those marks on hisself?" Joel demanded. "An' the door locked on the outside an' all."

"Veronica again. The wounds weren't nearly so serious as they looked. Spilled some blood, but not really dangerous. He had Veronica lock the door of the attic behind her and take the key to her room. The teeth-gashes were self-inflicted. But that all came later. You made one bad initial slip, Pratt.

"Jed Peters, who had gone to his room before the reading of the will, did not die during the night. He was killed before the will was read. You had almost twenty-four hours to look that will over before anyone else knew about its strange provisions! You were going to kill off all the others—one by one. You intended to be the 'sole survivor.' If Veronica was arrested or put in a madhouse, I presume you would have murdered her. You should have been a little more patient. Your first mistake was when you killed Jed too soon!

"And it was stupid, Pratt, to try to put so many other people under suspicion. Did you hope to fool me with Stephen's cuff-link? Or with that silly story about how Agatha had
(Concluded on Page 128)

FOREST of FEAR

Two Honeymooners Fall into the Clutches of a Sorceress Whose Magic Wand Is a Scalpel Stained with Blood

By
SAUL W. PAUL

*Author of "Blood in the Desert,"
"Temple of Terror," etc.*

Of course there was really nothing to be so desperately alarmed about, Brent Anderson told himself. Eleanor was all right. He thought of his lovely young bride, tall, blue-eyed, brown-haired, glowing with health and vitality. How ecstatically happy their honeymoon trip had been—until they entered this dark forest!

Back at Actelon, miles to the south, where they had packed their outfit, the villagers had warned them. The forest was an unholy place, they'd whispered. Evil things went on in its black depths, things a man had better not see.

Nobody lived there any more except old Dame Harryot and her son, Doctor Eben. He wasn't right in the head—ever since his wife ran off with another man. He'd given up his practise at once, gone into the woods to live. And as for his old mother—well, even the most charitable admitted she had the "evil eye." And others went further, hinted at—witchcraft—and devil worship!

Brent Anderson had laughed at them. As long as the old cabin they'd directed him to was habitable, he wasn't worried about the evil eye. In fact, he'd added with a grin, a witch that insured privacy would be an asset to honeymooners.



The face had the eyes of an animal

They hadn't smiled at his little joke, only shrugged and shaken their heads. Then, just before he'd set out, the storekeeper had put a last furtive word in his ear. Three men had gone north into the forest during the summer, he said in hushed tones, and none had ever been seen again!

This had shaken Brent a bit, but he'd dismissed it from his mind impatiently. Now he remembered it, now that Eleanor had gone for a walk while he worked on the leaky roof of the cabin. Three hours ago, it had been, and she wasn't back yet. Of course, nothing was wrong. Eleanor was as much at home in the woods as he was himself.

He walked to the door, stood cramming tobacco into his pipe with quick, nervous fingers. Trees were all about him, endless serried ranks of them, pressing close around the tiny cabin. They loomed darkly against the slanting rays of the setting sun, and in their silence, their immobility, Brent felt a wordless menace.

Things seemed different out here

in the forest. Things like witches and devil worship, for instance—they weren't funny any more. Especially with that weird sound in the night—that mad laughter which they'd heard twice now. It was only a bird, of course—a loon, perhaps—though he didn't know of any lake nearby. It did sound like human laughter, though—hideous, insane laughter.

And then the face he'd thought he'd seen today at the window. A dark, bearded face, with wild, glittering eyes like an animal. Nothing was there when he looked outside. It just showed how his nerves were on edge. He'd have to get a grip on himself, or Eleanor would be calling him a tenderfoot.

Suddenly as he stood looking at the trees and reasoning himself out of his anxiety, a cold, overwhelming fear settled on him. He wanted to shriek Eleanor's name at the top of his lungs, to find her and flee from this accursed forest. He knew somehow that something horrible would happen if they didn't!

And at that instant, Eleanor's scream pierced the stillness, dim and far-off, yet unmistakably laden with agonized terror! He stared for a moment, rigid as stone, while his blood pounded unbearably in his ears. Then he darted into the cabin, emerged with a rifle in his hands, and headed into the forest at a dead run.

"Eleanor! Eleanor—I'm coming!"

Oh, God, why didn't she answer? What had happened to her? Something perfectly natural, of course—she'd sprained an ankle, or lost her way, or seen a bear. That was it, surely. Then why was he racing like a madman through the dark forest, blundering into trees, tripping over vines, lacerating his flesh on low-dipping branches? Why was his skin wet with clammy sweat, and his brain full of nameless horrors?

HOW long he raced on in blind panic he did not know. He only stopped when his straining breath wheezed and rattled in his throat, his pumping legs felt like weighted sticks, and his bursting

heart flailed weakly against his ribs. The forest was quite dark by now, full of inky, impenetrable shadows, only faintly dispelled by the moon just rising above the rim of the world.

Brent forced the crawling horrors from his brain, tried to think coherently. He realized quickly that he no longer had the slightest idea what direction the scream had come from. More than that, he didn't even know which way the cabin was! He was completely lost.

To attempt further search under these conditions was absurd, yet he could not be still while Eleanor was in danger. His strength somewhat restored, he stumbled on again. This was better than inaction, even though every step might be taking him further from his goal.

Accustomed as Brent was to night in the open, the forest now was a place of mystery and terror. Vague movements, rustlings and slitherings, came from the darkness. The moon, a great red-orange disk, like pale blood, rose higher, cast a leprous, eery radiance through the trees. Long, gnarled branches reached for Brent like skinny, withered arms. He shivered, and pushed on.

A weird feeling grew on Brent, the feeling that he was being followed. He felt unseen eyes upon him, fancied he heard soft, stealthy steps matching his own. But though he stopped in mid-stride and listened, though he turned abruptly and doubled back on his trail, he neither saw nor heard anything tangible.

His follower, if it were indeed anything more than a figment of his fear-distorted imagination, had the qualities of a spirit, of a sable-shrouded wraith.

At almost every step now, Brent swung suddenly to peer into the blackness behind him. He strained his ears, and confused the pounding of his own blood with noises from the spectral forest. He felt that the hinges of his mind were loosening, that they would collapse and plunge him into gibbering madness if he did not soon find his wife!

He entered a small clearing in the

trees, and the ghostly rays of moonlight picked out something white in the center. He moved closer, took a match from his pocket and struck it. The tiny flame flared up, etching a sight so gruesome that Brent stood frozen, failing even to feel the searing fire as the match burnt down to his very flesh!

Brent's heart strove desperately to thaw the ice that was the blood in his veins, and presently he struck another match, stared down at those grisly objects. They were corpses, three moldering heaps of bone and rotting flesh that had once been men. *And every one was headless!*

NAUSEA griped Brent's entrails, and he swayed dizzily for an instant. Then fresh horror steeled his nerves. From the black forest behind him, a peal of maniac laughter rolled forth, sending shuddersome ripples up and down his spine! Brent gripped the rifle in his sweating palms, gritted his teeth, and plunged into the forest.

The macabre laughter mocked him. First it came from one side, then from the other, one moment in front, next moment in back. Then, as suddenly as it had come, it ceased and left the stillness more oppressive, more menacing than before.

Doggedly Brent marched forward, refusing to let his horror-numbed brain dwell upon those decapitated corpses. Despite all he could do, a fearful picture kept creeping before him, a picture of Eleanor, his lovely, vivacious Eleanor with only a gory, mutilated stump where the white neck should be, a scarlet flood spouting from severed arteries, and that queenly head rolling crazily away from the trunk, its beautiful features contorted in the last, inhuman torment that preceded death.

This ghastly vision before him, Brent almost passed the tiny flicker of light. But subconsciously he noted it, and the impression pulled him to a stop automatically. He looked fearfully, afraid his nerves were playing tricks with him. No—there it was, sure enough, down a narrow lane in

the trees—just the merest pin-point of light.

Heart beating wildly, he stole closer on noiseless feet. The trees thinned out and presently he was staring at a small shack, a rough, dilapidated hovel, from whose single grimy window came a sickly, yellow glow. He crept up to it, and peered inside. His body shook as with an ague, and the rifle nearly dropped from his nerveless fingers!

The filthy interior of the hut held two people. One was an old woman, a dried-up husk of a human, busied over a black case in one corner of the room. The other was Eleanor. She lay outstretched on a rough table, bound to it by coils of rope. Her head hung down over the edge, and a crude gag was in her mouth.

The clothes were half-torn from her body, her eyes were closed, and for one awful moment Brent thought she was dead. But then he saw the rise and fall of her bosom, and new life flooded through him.

The filthy old crone turned from the black case, disclosing toothless gums and an incredibly wrinkled face, and moved to the table where she prodded the body of the bound girl, ran her gnarled hands over the satiny flesh.

Red rage descended on Brent's brain, and he sprang for the door! With a roar he burst through, reached the table in a bound, and hurled the old woman backward with a powerful sweep of his arm.

She crashed into the wall, slumped against it like a bundle of dirty rags. Brent swung back to the form on the table, cradled the drooping head in his arms and pressed eager kisses on the still face. Slowly her eyes opened, haunted by the shadow of anguish and horror. Then they widened as she saw Brent bending over her, and happy relief flooded their blue depths.

"Darling, thank Heaven you're all right!" Brent cried joyfully. "I'll have you out of here in a jiffy!"

He pulled out a pocket knife, snapped the blade open, and slashed at the ropes which bound her. Sud-

denly the old woman was on him, a screaming, cursing harridan. Mouth-ing foul obscenities and evil oaths, she clawed at his hands with talonlike fingers, fought to prevent his freeing the girl.

BRENT turned furiously, dealt the hideous creature a stinging buffet which sent her reeling.

"Back, you hag!" he thundered, "or, by God, I'll break your body with my own bare hands!"

She cringed by the wall like a crushed snake, mumbling to herself, her beady, black eyes glaring at Brent with unearthly venom. He bent to his task again, hacking at the tough strands.

A hideous cackle from the old woman brought his eyes back to her. She was gazing at the open doorway behind him, chuckling with evil satisfaction. Brent whirled, but only got halfway around when something struck his head with crushing force . . .

When the throbbing torment in his skull permitted Brent to open his eyes again, he was lying on the floor, tied hand and foot. A new figure was in the room, a tall, gaunt man, with hair and beard matted in an unkempt mass, garbed in dirty rags. His open mouth bore a loose-lipped grin, and his glittering eyes flickered restlessly, licking greedily along Eleanor's half-nude form, again securely tied to the table, then shifting to the preparations of the old woman.

As he took in those grisly preparations, Brent gave vent to a gasp of horror. The ancient creature had dragged the black case up beside the table, was opening it. Instruments gleamed inside; a physician's instruments, needles, scalpels, probes. But the thing the old hag grasped in her bony fist was none of these. It was a short, heavy cleaver, its blade discolored with a dark, sinister stain!

An anguished cry wrenched from Brent's tortured throat, and he strained at his bonds frenziedly. The gaunt man shambled over, grinned down at him as he writhed and twisted. The cords bit into his wrists

and ankles, but did not loosen. The old woman shook her vulture's head reprovingly.

"Don't fret now, stranger," she wheezed. "Just lie quiet and watch me make Eben well again."

She turned toward the shambling, loose-lipped creature, and devotion softened her features. "This one'll do it, Eben. The others were no good because they were men. You need a woman's brain, because it was a woman who made you lose the balance of your own."

The thin voice quivered, pitifully eager. "We'll have her brain out soon, Eben, cooking over the fire in its own blood, mixed with herbs like Mother Harryot knows how to do. And then the needle, Eben—remember how you used to cure the pox and all manner of ills with the needle? We'll fill it with the brain potion and it'll cure your brain sickness, Eben."

The gaunt man grinned vacantly at her, while his eyes lapped hungrily at Eleanor's body. The old woman dragged a huge, black pot over, placed it beneath the girl's lolling head. Brent's eyeballs started from their sockets, and the veins stood out like purple snakes on his neck and forehead as he strained at his bonds, flopping on the floor like a hooked fish. Dame Harryot and her son paid no further heed to him.

His frantic efforts brought him around facing the wall, and he caught the gleam of metal in the dark corner, not three feet away. His rifle! He continued his squirming movements, but now his progress was all in one direction!

At the table the eyes of the evil pair were fastened on the helpless girl. The wrinkled woman lifted the heavy cleaver, balanced it in her skinny hand.

"Don't be afraid, girl," she cackled. "I generally only have to chop twice. You won't even feel the second stroke."

Eleanor's body swelled in tortured agony until the ropes were buried deep in her flesh. With superhuman effort, she managed to raise herself

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DEVILS in



Two eyes leaped

CHAPTER I *Children of Darkness*

THE old weatherbeaten church built by our grandfathers was a place of utter gloom. No electric lights; only lanterns, candles, kerosene lamps, showered strange radiance on the moaning congregation. Our shadows were grotesque, demoniac, leaping upon the walls. Our people listened to the ranting of Marmer Hovis, the fanatic lay-preacher.

I sat stiffly holding the hand of

Norma Drake. When Marmer Hovis had finished his shouting we were to marry. I, Kelcey Fayne, was at last to have my childhood sweetheart as my wife . . . at last before dusty death overtook us.

"Listen!" shrieked Hovis, his hair wild in his eyes, his face streaked with dirty sweat. "Listen how they suffer—your own dumb brutes."

The sad moaning of our people ceased. For a few seconds the congregation ceased swaying. The sound Hovis mentioned came through the night to us all. Like the whirring of

Strange, Murder-Driven Creatures Prowl

the DUST

A Complete Novelette
of Spine-Chilling Thrills

By **ARTHUR
J. BURKS**

Author of "The Dead
Walk Softly," "Doomed
to Live," etc.



at the window like arrows

the dust-wind which, it seemed, would never stop. Pitiful whickering of horses. Mournful lowing of cattle. In my mind's eye I could see them, standing stark and bony on skylines formed by the awful, desolate dunes, crying to their beast-gods. Never to us! They must have known us—helpless brutes like themselves—impotent to serve them. Water and food? We had neither. Their ribs arched like curved sabers stretching hairy parchment skins.

"Oh, God," I breathed, "will this storm of horror never pass from us?"

Norma Drake and I—we approached the spieler when the congregation left. Outside the stark church the wind was rising higher and higher, shrieking, roaring like flame.

I looked to my left. Little ripples of dust sifted through the cracks in the old building, flowing like water over the floor. My heart sank, drowned in dust. I had thought that the dust would come no more; that there could be none left in whatever place of horror it had first risen.

"Marry us!" I snapped at Hovis. "I

the Evil Apocalypse of a Weird Storm!

will give you your fee later."

His face clouded. His eyes darkened, flashing with anger.

"Would you take a woman in hell?" he demanded. "Would you beget children in the midst of this evil plague of dust?"

I almost struck him. I trembled with desire to fasten my trembling fingers in his throat.

"Marry us, Hovis," I cried, "or by the living God . . .!"

I choked. Hovis answered:

"Thou shalt not take the Name of thy Lord in vain!"

"Marry us!" I repeated, raving. "How do you know the plague of dust will not pass? You have peopled the dust with devils! Why should you fill my people with greater fear?"

"You think I do not know?" he shouted. "Come to the window. Look! See for yourself!"

I went with him; looked out to the west, the direction whence the wind always came. And there, high against the night, high up under the roof of dark sky, sweeping the tortured earth with ebon skirts, there spread such a wall of abysmal horror as even stricken County Carlson had never known. I stared at the curling shape of it. It bowed over at the crest, like a vast sea billow rolling. The sound of it was as a flight of destroying locusts—a deadly, muted, softly slithering roar.

"You knew somehow!" I accused Hovis. "I do not believe in your professed gift of prophecy. But marry us now—"

Well, he made us man and wife at the brink of hell. I turned and looked back at him standing at the church door. He was peering after us, grinning, washing his hands with air. He shouted after us:

"Remember, the Devil is in the dust! Satan seeks his own through the plague he has brought to sinners!"

Had I stayed I must surely have closed with him, battered his leering, grinning face to a pulp. My whole body was burnt with desire to tear him. Held in my big, gnarled hand, Norma's hand trembled. It was so

terribly, woefully thin. There had been so little to eat and drink weeks on end. Now—nothing. Our wedding supper—the only guest would be famine.

"I'm afraid," whispered Norma.

"I will protect you," I told her, "against anything that comes!"

EVEN as I spoke, a flash of lightning tore through the sky-veil of dust. The roaring of the wind! The lightning showed us the black wall of the roaring dust storm, ebon across the night. It showed the doom cloud circling to encompass us in a whirling maelstrom. And the flame crackling from the dust struck the church. Great tongues of flames leaped high.

Aghast, I looked. I thought that through the dancing flames I could see Marmer Hovis, red-garbed in destroying fire. Marmer Hovis with horns and a tail; with the black beard of Mephisto, grinning satanically as he washed his bloody hands with air. Then the fancy, Devil in the dust—Devil of the flame. Dust of disintegrating earth.

"Come, Norma," I said. "We have only two miles to go."

We walked with the wind and dust in our faces. I had a car. Now it was buried beneath a sand dune which indicated the spot—no more. For weeks there had been no money for gas, no water to waste. Yes, there were horses—so gaunt with starvation that they could scarcely stand, whickering like pitifully broken children hungry for crusts of bread.

We walked, and held hands, staggering like dizzy drunkards.

"Kelcey?" said Norma, there beside me. Her voice came faintly through the wind which whipped her worn ragged garments tightly against her thin legs.

"Yes?" I said.

"Your face," she said. "I saw it in the lightning flash. It was covered with sweat, and something else, Kelcey."

"Yes, what?"

"Dust like a mask. I scarcely knew you, Kelcey! It is heavy in my

clothes. It's bigger than ever. Too big. I am afraid!"

"We'll manage somehow," I told her, though I was not sure.

We stopped within a quarter mile of home, the rambling farmhouse where Norma had always lived, now like a wooden mausoleum. We stopped because a new sound came down the wind: the ululation of hunting dogs. Dogs gone wild as wolves.

Dust was already banked before the door when we reached it. Norma and I looked at each other. I saw terror in her eyes.

CHAPTER II

Whispers in the Wind

AND the new terror? Simply this: We had battled almost an hour to walk those two miles home, and I had no home. The dust at last had reached my land. It was banking high like snow in a bitter winter, on the leeward side of the house. The blackness of the night was almost absolute.

I had the feeling that my house, low of roof, would be buried under the fine dust before morning. It would be like being buried alive in a mighty coffin of many rooms.

Norma entered with me. We closed the door. The dust on the sill grated as I forced the door open, and the sound was like the squeaking of many mice.

Wind tugged at the shingles, caught under the eaves, tried to rip the house apart. We had to shout to make ourselves heard.

Norma's face was very white. She darted small glances this way and that. I followed them, noting what she noted; that in spite of the packing in the cracks, little dunes of silt sifted across the floor from the western walls, hammered through every microscopic crevice.

"Hadh't you better do something for your horses and cattle, Kelcey?" said Norma.

I shook my head.

"Listen!" I said. "Do you hear horses whickering? Or cattle lowing?"

Shé listened. Our meeting eyes were filled with misery. Neither sound of horse nor cow could be heard. We understood the worst; that nothing remained alive on my farm, save ourselves.

The smaller creatures, ducks, chickens, pigs, were all eaten—the last of them yesterday. My parents had been with me up to four days ago. Both had died, their lungs choked by dust-pneumonia.

They were buried behind this house in which they had been married. A few of my neighbors had come to help. There had been no funeral ceremony. Eerie shadows seemed to creep in on us as the oil-lamp flickered. They darted away before gleaming lamp-light. Now, as though demons realized that there was nothing to fear, they were coming back.

We stood, facing each other. I took Norma in my arms. I could hear her heart beating against mine. I loved her to the depths of my being, as she loved me.

"I'm afraid, Kelcey," she whispered.

"Don't be," I said. "We've been through dust storms before. When this has passed we'll mortgage the farm, re-stock it, begin again—"

Outside there suddenly sounded a weird chorus of howling.

Norma's eyes grew big. We knew the meaning of those sounds. They were the baying of the homeless dogs of the country, creatures gaunt, terrible, many of them mad, perhaps. Masterless dogs, foraging now for food. The ululations died.

"They've found the dead horses and cows," I told Norma.

We listened, scarcely daring to breathe, at snarling hunger sounds from the ghastly night. I could see, in fancy, the dust in their hair being shaken off; I could see a score of dogs, all the same wolf-brown color because of the dust in their coats.

I lifted my head to listen. There was a scratching sound at the door, a thin whining.

Norma shivered. I knew, then, as Norma did, that the hungry dogs had gathered in packs; that but for the locked door they must enter and tear us limb by limb—even old Bunt, my own dog, who had always loved me.

I went to the door to make sure of the fastening.

I peered out a window, into whirling black murk. Two balls of flame looked at me, two more, two, and yet other two. There were many dogs at the door. One saw me. Two eyes leaped at the window like arrows.

A gaunt beast struck the glass. It splintered.

The beast dropped, soundless, into the growling dust outside. His slaver smeared the windowpane. The slaver turned to dust as fine silt was hammered into it by the wind.

God, the terror that gripped me! Norma and I—prisoners in a mausoleum indeed. I knew why: my animals had been so gaunt, so skinny from lack of water and food that they had been slight food indeed for the dogs.

I paced back to Norma. She did not need to ask me anything. She knew. I searched the room for a cudgel. I found an ancient, knobbed walking stick which had belonged to my grandfather, a mighty weapon. My rifle would not serve, because dust would clog the bore.

The club must suffice, in case the dogs smashed through the windows.

Then, in the midst of terror, the light flickered and went out. There was no kerosene left. I might have lighted a fire in the potbellied stove, but there was no wood, save only the furniture. We sat very still. The bedroom, to which I had hoped one day to take my bride, became, oddly enough, a place of horror.

I could almost hear Hovis, chuckling softly to himself.

Norma stifled a scream.

I saw them—two pairs of glowing eyes against the western window, two gaunt heads of dogs with lolling tongues trying to look in, scenting us, eager to savor the flesh of our bodies.

I was thinking now, strangely, of something else, for to the west of the

house I heard other dogs howling. Were the dogs seeking the bodies of my father and mother? They had been buried without coffins in shallow graves because no coffins were procurable, even if there had been money with which to buy.

I wonder what made Norma say what she next said?

"I feel them close to us, Kelcey. Your father and mother! I can feel them in the room with us trying to tell us something."

I shivered at that. It was a strange comment to my own thoughts. Maybe my parents were close because the dogs were near to uncovering them? Now that Norma had spoken I felt it, too.

A voice seemed to whisper to me through the sound of the storm. My mother's voice:

"Leave us in the house where we were wed, my son. Then go with your bride . . ."

And my father added:

"Quarter the wind, Kelcey; quarter the wind! If Norma lives you will yet find happiness. Never here, my son; not in this desert."

DECISION filled me with queer exaltation.

"Norma," I said, "lock yourself in here. I shall not go far, but there is something that must be done. Wait until I call. Don't be afraid of the dogs even though you hear them snarling and think that they attack me."

I caught up the cudgel. I went to the outer door, swung it back with all my strength; held it until the drifting silt formed a stop to hold it open. I had scarcely done that, when a black shape, only less black than the night itself, hurtled at me. My eyes, used to darkness, were keen because of Norma's need of protection.

I struck with all my might. I heard bone crush as the dog crashed the silt. I knew it was dead. Two others charged, leaped, and were slain. Then, my mouth gritty with flying sand, I clutched the knobbed stick and circled the house going to the graves of my parents.

A tumbling, milling mass of creatures boiled about it.

In time! I saw dogs straining at a white garment—her white shroud—a sheet. Mad as the dogs themselves, I smashed in among them, striking with the stick, laying about me.

Both graves had been opened.

I dragged Mother home first, shutting the door after I had placed her on the floor in a dark corner. I worked with feverish haste. I went back for Father. The dogs had uncovered him. They snarled over him, a mass of writhing flesh. I was glad that I could not see too well.

I took Father to the house, dragging him with my left hand, fighting off the famished dogs with my right. Had I lost the stick they would have pulled me down. The dust from their coats stifled my nostrils. Three times I stopped, stood astride the corpse, brained dogs with the heavy stick.

I placed Father beside Mother. I was sickened at what had already happened to him. I shut the door. The dogs that were left leaped against the door. I called Norma out. We piled the meager furniture across the corner—a barricade. Norma asked no questions. I found matches, when I did not think any were left.

I fired the furniture; said to Norma: "Now we quarter the wind."

CHAPTER III

Marmer Hovis

I CAUGHT up a strip of canvas that had been used to pack the space between the bottom of the door and the sill, and strung it around my neck, so that it hung above my hips like a sling for a broken arm. I fastened a handkerchief about Norma's mouth, one about my own. The fire was rising, would soon disclose to Norma those whom I had placed in the corner, side by side. She must not see them. I would see them to the very end of my days.

I had cheated the dogs. Their bony bodies crashed against the walls,

against the windows. I gripped my stick fiercely.

At the door I told Norma not to look back. I helped her into the sling across my back, so that she faced to my left. Her back would be to the hammer and drive of the wind.

Now I had both hands free to use my stick; need not worry about losing Norma.

I pushed the door open. The dogs charged. I shouted at them, in savage exultation. The door shut behind me. I stood there, fighting the dogs.

Eerie lights came through the windows, painting ghastly, unreal pictures against the fall of silt which whipped over the roof of the house like drifting snow. Already the silt had piled up almost level with the windows. When it had, then the charging dogs could have driven their weight straight through. In my mind's eye I could see them, crashing glass to the floor, hunting us through the house with slobbering jaws.

I would fight them off now until the boards behind me were hot against the flesh of my beloved.

Whence had all the dogs come? I had not known there were so many in all the countryside. But then it came to me: they had started drifting with the dust-storm, trying to head it. They must have gathered ahead of the dust tempest for many miles, maybe all the miles the dust had traveled.

And dog packs, then, were probably trying to drag people down ten, fifteen, twenty miles from here, if they, too, had drifted before the wind and the black dust.

"It's getting hot, Kelcey," Norma shouted in my ears.

"All right, we're going, Norma," I said. "Be brave. Resolve to live. Hold fast to me. Before God, I'll get us both out of this horror. We travel south, dear. Watch the dogs behind us. Put your face against my neck, so that I shall know every minute that you are loving me."

"Yes, Kelcey," she answered.

I surged into the thick of the dog pack. Hunger, thirst, had no effect on me now. I was fighting for life,

and for love. Without love, life would not be worth having. If Norma died . . .

I shouted to her.

"Breathe through the handkerchief. Take care that it does not slip down. Clear its outside with your palm whenever you begin to choke."

I struck with savage fury. I felt bones break before the slash of my cudgel. The living tore the fallen. The dogs had reverted to the ways of their ancient ancestors, the wolves. They destroyed their own kind with cannibalistic fury. I knocked down more, and more. The rank odor of their thick blood was in my nostrils

I LOOKED back. Dimly, redly lurid through the curtains of dust, I could see the flames from the farmhouse, rising into black night. Pennants of flame, wind-blown, seemed to lie flat against the ground. Prowling dogs, black shapes against the blood-red glow, raced like ghostly shadows, driven mad by the smells which came out of the burning house.

Despite all the horror, I sighed with relief. My handkerchief slipped. Each breath sucked silt into my mouth, dry as dust already. I clenched my teeth.

Now, keeping the wind against my right cheek—driven sand and silt were ripping the very skin from my face—I set out to the south. If we fled before the wind we could never reach the end of it. If we traveled across it, there *must* be an end somewhere. Ten miles, even fifty—I could do fifty for the sake of my beloved if only she could endure the hunger and thirst that long.

She was so woefully light. I scarcely felt her weight.

My heart hammered with hope. I did not mind the loss of her home or of mine. Never again, in any case, could we live in either place remembering so much of sorrow and heart-ache.

I listened to the sounds.

The roaring of the wind; vast formless roaring, with all the fury of flaming hell in it. The drifting sand and silt reached to the very sky. If it did

not cease by morning we could not even tell night from day. No light could pierce the flowing plague of dust. Dust filled every fiber of my clothing. My ears were clogged with it. I gouged at my ears; I must hear for protection's sake.

Dust on the ground eddied about my shoe-tops, as though I traveled through dry quicksand. It was like swimming in a strange kind of water in which one could barely breathe.

Through the cataclysmic devils' drone of the storm came other clamorous sounds. More dogs, everywhere, though I knew I heard only those to the west, shrill yelping coming to me down the wind. To the east the dogs might be within a few feet of me not knowing we passed. The dust-filled wind would carry no scent other than that of dry earth. So I kept my streaming eyes to the left. Now and then dogs attacked. I brained one, or two, or three, and went on. I licked my dry lips. I thought of something. Their blood could be drunk, would sustain life. But not yet—oh, God, not yet—for they had eaten human flesh, many of them. There was a limit to which one might plumb the depths of horror, yet remain sane.

Other sounds—the lamentations of men and of women. Sometimes the glow of lamps in farmhouses, where women wailed, over their dead, perhaps.

I thought of Marmer Hovis, rubbing his hands and avidly grinning behind me. Devils in the dust, he had said! I felt, somehow, that he was the Devil himself, riding the dust, directing yet other devils.

Did he laugh and chuckle, hearing the lamentations of those who feared the black wings of the dust as they feared nothing else on earth or under it? I could feel his presence everywhere except in front of me where I could see him rubbing his hands and chuckling.

Hours passed. Maybe they were minutes which seemed like hours. I did not know. My skin was dust. Blinding, torturing dust filmed over my streaming eyes.

I heard, often, the shrill, birdlike

cries of women. Others were doing as I did, quartering the wind with their women, seeking escape from the horror of the storm. Had father and mother, loving their neighbor as themselves, bidden them, also, to "quarter the wind"? I did not know.

But this I did know: terror stalked among those who took part in the exodus to the south. Not dogs or wolves, not anything natural! It was always the young girls who screamed through the storm.

I came on one such girl, drifting like a phantom of dust through the dark. She fought with another apparition. I saw dust-powdered hands rip at her clothing, tear it from her: saw her fair skin become dust even as it was bared. Her dusty, loosened hair flung out on the wind, and she screamed continually.

I saw the other shadow clutch her, bear her back, fumbling at her body with his right hand. His left hand clutched her throat so that she could not scream again.

The two shadows fell. I needed all of my strength to save my Norma. But I could not pass when such devil's work was happening in the storm. I lunged forward. Above the girl the figure moved, a movement of horror. Once his left hand thrust out and a thin, piping scream came forth.

I scarcely paused in my stumbling, swift stride, thinking even as I lifted my cudgel:

"What shall I do with the girl?"

I struck.

A man's skull cracked—no dusty phantom.

I LOOKED down at the skinny woman—a stranger. But I saw the marks of the man's hand on her dust-grimed throat. I saw that her head rolled oddly. I stooped, while Norma clung, trying to see.

"Shut your eyes, beloved," I cried to her.

Then I straightened. The girl's neck was broken. Flying dust already covering her. To baffle the dogs—

I laughed hoarsely. I strode on, turned back for a moment, turned the

man over, rubbed the dust from his face.

He was Marmer Hovis!

I was glad, now, that I had stopped to slay him. I grabbed at his collar, dragged him to a little height swept bare of dust by the wind—where the blowing sand would not bury him quickly; where the girl would not, even in death, be near him. So I left him, to be meat for the dogs.

Then I went on, glad in what I had done.

An hour passed—or perhaps a minute—when once more, I came upon a girl. There was the man, too. The whole nightmare, if such a scene in such a ghastly setting could be anything but delusion, was the same as the first instance. The girl's clothing ripped off. Her scream. The hand at her throat. Two bodies, tightly locked, falling to the soft ground inches deep in silt, dropped here by the wind out of hell.

Once more I struck, but this time to save the girl's life. She screamed, rose, and ran staggering into the storm, drifting with it, very soon lost instantly to sight. There was madness in her eyes. Terror of myself as she vanished. She had seen Norma on my back. To her I must have been another foul demon of the storm. Devils in the dust!

Again I turned a dead man on his back. I stumbled back, dazed with fright, stricken with supernatural fear.

For the second man was Marmer Hovis likewise! It couldn't be, yet there it was, the lay-preacher—the dead prophet of the dust.

Marmer Hovis! Marmer Hovis!

Satan? Or were these two I had slain his imps, torturing the crazed victims of their storm? Now terror gripped me, for I remembered how, joining Norma to me in marriage, he had licked his red lips when he had looked at her.

I stumbled, staggered on. Norma's arms clung like dead stalks about my bowed neck. She was so light—but her weight crushed me so, that I stumbled.

Once again I struck and slew, and

the girl vanished fleeing before the wind. And the dead man was Hovis! Perhaps I was mad, utterly, completely mad. The howling storm seemed to chant mockingly the name of the spieler who prophesied punishment for our sins. Was this ghastly punishment? Torture for all sinners in thought or deed?

"Marmer Hovis! Marmer Hovis!"

And Norma screamed. I felt her being dragged away from me while her thin legs clutched my waist. As though hard hands tugged at her—tugged so savagely that I was dragged backward.

CHAPTER IV

Devils in the Dust

I TURNED, mad as the dogs. The sling in which I had carried my beloved was broken. I heard her scream dying away. I whirled, the club lifted, red lust to kill in my heart. There was a devil's troupe of Marmer Hovises behind us; how many behind the dust screen I had no way of knowing.

They all looked the same. I suppose I must have looked like them, too. They had no resemblance to anything human. If they wore clothing, all their garments were dust. The wind whipped powdery dust from them when they moved, so that they looked like men of dust disintegrating. As I look back at the horror now I wonder how I saw so much in the dark with my tortured eyes. Much, perhaps, I saw with the eyes of terror, exaggerated beyond all words to express.

Marmer Hovis—Norma! But no, never Norma . . . my beloved—!

A half dozen dust-devils were taking her from me. She was kicking, screaming. The handkerchief came off her mouth. Her face was white where it had covered her. Her mouth was open; she screamed. They passed her back among them.

Two came toward me with a rope. Two carried guns. Their faces writhed with murderous malice. If

they could be called faces, for they, too, were formed of dust. Only the eyes seemed alive, moist and muddy. Mouths that opened to scream foul oaths as Norma was passed back, further and further away from me while she kicked and screamed.

If I did not follow I would never know her when—if we met again. Nor would she know me. We had passed through the storm as strange, ghastly dirt creatures, all looking alike. But I would know Marmer Hovis anywhere, and the demons were Marmer Hovis or his carbon copies. They had tortured many women; now they were seeking Norma whom, I swore to myself, they should not have.

I think in those awful moments, with the wind howling madly, the dust thicker and thicker, choking eyes and throat, I became a superman, though my genius ran to destruction. Three men, now, were between Norma and me. Three men held my kicking bride.

I lifted my stick. One of the auto-matics spoke flatly. I saw the red flare, though the storm all but muffled the sound of it. I flung myself flat. The bullet passed over me. I rolled in the dust, and rose to my feet, my stick lifted. I struck. I struck so quickly that no human being could have dodged. I struck with all my power, and my power was great in the defense of my love.

Now more of her white flesh could be seen, because she was fighting madly, and leaving her clothing in their hands.

I heard the dull crunch of the stick against the skull of the first. He went down. I saw his skull cracked open—a hole into which I could have placed the edge of my palm. He was still as I jumped over him.

Another weapon spoke. As it spoke it disappeared from the hand of the man who carried it, exploding in his fist because its bore had been clogged with dust. He yelled in agony. The man with the rope hurled it. But I jumped into the wind; the rope followed the wind, and so it missed me. I struck savagely.

Dust powdered from the head of the man with the rope when my stick crashed. My hands held the stick as with fingers of steel. I dared not lose it.

Two men closed with me, trying to twist the clubbed stick from my hand. One succeeded. But no sooner had he grasped it than I was upon him, kicking, biting. The taste of his blood—God help me!—was like wine on my lips. I would, but for Norma, have drunk his blood like a vampire, for it was moist.

I remembered, then, that I was a man, not a fiend, and spat forth the blood. I think I was screaming—a ghastly figure. I doubt, even now, if Norma knew which of us was her man. If I had the stick she would know. Now another held it. I got it from him, turned, struck harder than before.

"Norma! Norma!" I screamed.

The men screamed, too, but their words were unintelligible in the chaotic maelstrom, as my words must have been meaningless. It was hellish, like a nightmare.

Devils? Imps?

God only knew, if God Himself could see through the heart of the driven dust.

But I was seeing Marmer Hovis everywhere, in every face. Even the face of Norma became his face. Only her bared flesh was white—but even as I looked it became dusty, black, like the others.

A STUNNING blow struck the back of my head. I fell. I felt a rope about my neck; struggled up, was yanked forward, falling on my face. Many hands laid hold of the rope; began to drag me. Looking for a tree, I supposed, in order to watch me choke out life dangling from a limb.

Even while being dragged I clung to the stick. When they paused, I managed to struggle to my feet. I hurled myself along the rope. It loosened, so that those who dragged me whirled to see why. I crashed into them swinging my stick. Two went down.

Norma, ahead of me, was being dimmed, erased by the screens and walls of the storm. God, I had to get to her!

I screamed:

"Marmer Hovis! Marmer Hovis!"

The men answered me with demoniac laughter. One of them shouted and I thought he said: "The spieler cannot help you now!"

As though I wanted his help! I wanted my fingers about his neck, about all his necks, choking breath from the throats of Marmer Hovis and all his imps.

I had slain several. Now if I lost Norma I would wander the rest of my life through the storm. I must follow the storm to wherever it blew, slaying, one after the other, the devils in the dust.

I was more than a little mad. I knew that those whom I had slain had risen again as soon as I had left them. The dogs could not feed on the bodies of the undead. They could not harry the supernatural unless they themselves were demon hounds of hell.

I was sobbing, sucking the dust into my throat where it became gritty, horrible slime.

I could barely see Norma. But I had freed myself from the rope. I could not cease sobbing, but I could hurry after, as I did, my club flailing. I must have looked, as I felt, a very incarnation of terror.

The others, to me, were not things of this earth or above it. Below? Perhaps. Who knows? Maybe Marmer Hovis had been right. Maybe he was trying now to make his words come true—

"Norma! Norma!"

Somehow, she worked free of her captors. She was almost naked. She came running toward me. Her hands touched me. She peered into my face.

"Are you Kelcey?" she asked.

Her dirt rimmed eyes were wide with terror.

"Kelcey," I said.

"Prove it," she cried.

"Remember the slaver of the dog upon the window of our house where I took you as bride?"

Then she knew me. I put her behind me, fought the demons, or men. They saw, then, that she wished to be with me. Some drew away. Others slogged along beside me, out of reach of the stick. Once more, after covering Norma with my outer garment—sand and dust hammered at my bare torso like needles driven by invisible guns—I fastened her against me with the sling.

The others staggered. They kept their distance. And finally, somehow, I lost them. We continued dragging our racked bodies through the endless storm.

We must have traveled many miles. It must have been within two hours of daylight. I spoke to Norma hoarsely.

"I can't go much further. You can't walk. Maybe we can find a farmhouse."

I felt her shudder against me.

"I'd rather die than enter any farmhouse," she said. "I am afraid. If we stop, let's lie down, tight in each other's arms. Let the dust cover us."

Weary, broken, bleeding, I wanted to do that. I wanted to die.

It would be so easy. Just to lie down, with our heads toward the wind, our garments wrapped around us. To await the end, our arms about each other. It would be an easy death.

I gasped.

"Let's, Norma."

Without motion, merely lying there close together, it seemed that we were still moving, for the dirt under us moved, squirmed, twisted, shaken as though we bedded on a tangle of countless writhing snakes. Above us the sky moved. We were still, and though it seemed that we moved, it was the screaming wind of night and the dust that moved.

With each cough more dirt sucked into my lungs. Norma was coughing, too. I turned her against me, put my lips against hers. Her lips . . . it was like kissing the dry dirt on which we lay, panting.

I would at that moment have given anything in this world, life itself, to have known the glory of Norma's

kisses, as I had known that glory since we had acknowledged love. It was that compelling desire, I think, which made me insist that we stand once more. I could scarcely move. Every bone and muscle cried protest in agony.

But I got Norma on my back again, the handkerchief in place over her mouth. I covered my own mouth with my left hand. My right held the stick which I would never relinquish.

Down the screaming wind came the cries of women. Down the wind came the hunting howls of the scourging dogs.

I stumbled on.

"We will not stop," I said, "as long as there is breath of life in my body. I must see your face again, kiss your dear lips once more."

"We must keep going," she said.

Hours passed. I did not stop, knowing that if I did I could not go on. My body was a living flame, flayed by the driven dirt. It ground into the wounds it had already made—so many that all my body was one open sore at which the wind imps were stabbing with metal barbs.

On and on, without end.

Finally, a glimmer of light to my left. At last dawn was breaking. But another hour passed, and it was no brighter. We had stumbled and staggered into dim daylight, and there was, really, no change at all. Pilgrims lost in hell, easier for the devils of the dust to find.

CHAPTER V

Muddy River

ALL that day, while the storm raged and shrieked, we traveled, quartering the wind. I did not stop once. I swear it. I knew that we had long since passed any landmark I could possibly know. My knowledge of the country in this direction was very slight, for I had loved the land of my fathers and had clung to it tightly. During those ghastly hours, I only knew that I

progressed at all by the wire fences which marked the boundaries of what had once been farms.

Now and then I would strike against the barbed wire. It would score and sear my flesh; bring me to a standstill. Then, slowly, painfully—telling myself that I hadn't stopped of my own free will—I would tear wire from post, and stumble on.

Sometimes we saw houses, black through the smother of dirt.

Now and again there were coursing dogs. Once we traveled behind a herd of mournfully lowing cattle, headed across the wind as we were headed. They were attacked by dogs, and stampeded down the wind, so we lost them. I was glad that in traveling with the storm which must slay them, they took the dogs with them—the dogs they would feed one by one as they were dragged down.

For hours, now, Norma had been a dead weight on my back, but I knew she lived because her body was warm against mine. I would have sworn that we traveled due south, for the course of the wind was not changed.

Was there never to be an end? Were we to travel through eternity, as no man and wife, even in purgatory, had traveled on honeymoon? Only to die at long last because the mountains of moving, roaring dust reached to the very end of the world?

Doggedly I told myself that this could not be so. Did I not see a glimmering of light, far ahead? I thought that I did.

Then I was sure that, for a few minutes, I saw the blood-red round disk of the sun opposite my right hand. I had traveled through the day, bearing with me the burden I loved. My tongue hung out coated thick with black dust. I could not close my mouth. My tongue was thrice its normal size. I could not speak the name of my beloved, though I whispered it in my heart:

"Norma! Norma!"

I spoke to Norma deep in my soul, because I had lost all faith in God. But one thing had gone with me, through hell; the words of my dead father, bidding me "quarter the

wind." Would there be no end?

Yes, thank God! Thank Siya, the many-armed destroyer! Or Vishnu, the preserver! Or any gods there were.

The dust was thinning! No longer a mountain through which one thrust like a burrowing mole. No longer a river of dust across the floor of which one walked like a weighted diver with clogging, heavy shoes on his feet!

I could not even croak.

I was afraid, terribly afraid now that I might still stumble and fall. As though the thought had fathered the fact, I did fall, and buried my dry, cracked face in the dust. I struggled—God, how I struggled!—to rise. Norma did not move, did not know that I fell, nor that I stood erect once more.

But she was still warm on my back, folded up, crouched in a knot.

WOULD I reach safety, beyond the hell dust, only to find that my beloved had died? I sobbed inside me. The sobs could not get through my swollen lips. But I heard my own sobs, bubbling, stirring inside me, so that I trembled inwardly as though filled with bees. That thought made me laugh wildly, hysterically. The hysterical laughter still sounded like the droning of bees within the walls of my chest.

I saw people!

To right and left, people quartering the wind. Strong, gaunt women. Bony, hard-handed men. All of them looked like Marmer Hovis. There were many men without women, who I knew had not come into the storm without them. The farmers of our country did not thus desert their wives.

There were no children. The children had been lost in the storm; never found again. The women—well, what of those men I had slain? The man Marmer Hovises?

I cursed savagely, remembering. There was a taste as of dried blood in my mouth. My chest hummed with fierce oaths.

I stumbled past many carcasses of

cattle and horses. All faced down the wind. The dogs had picked them clean of flesh. They had been at the very edge of the storm—how I could see the shapes of dunes and hills—but had died, as perhaps we would die.

Where were the dogs? In my dreams forever, I must hear their phantom howls whirled against the wall high sky, as they sought through dusty veils for living flesh on which to feast.

Then, I was through! Was it strange that although I had breathed, eaten, drank dust I fell on my face and kissed the soil? Rather, that I touched Mother Earth with my swollen tongue which protruded between cracked, blubbery lips. Strange enough, but stranger things came out of the storm which howled behind us.

Men and women—ten times as many men as women—figures of earth, marching, converging toward a winding stream that glistened in the dying sun.

I saw the stream; thought it part of a dream. I knew that if I fell but once more I could not rise again.

I reached the stream. I fell into it, face foremost. I wanted to writhe and twist and roll in it.

But there was Norma. I loosed her, let her down, a dead weight although so pitifully light.

Her nostrils quivered. I brushed her face with my hands.

I could not know that she breathed. I glanced about me. Men and women were stripping off their clothing, sliding into the muddy stream like white snakes whose heads and shoulders were dirt—dirt which had been hammered into their flesh by the wind.

The storm behind us still writhed upward to the sky. It roared as it had roared, as it promised to roar without end.

I stripped off what little was left of Norma's clothing. I stripped off my own.

I pushed her into the stream until only her face was above it. I watched the water turn her dark skin to muddy brown and white. I let my

own thirsty body drink the water.

God knows how I did it, but I managed to desist from drinking, while I held her mouth open, and dribbled water into it with my hand. I did not know what I had done with my stick. It no longer seemed to matter.

Norma stirred and moaned; opened her eyes. They were as blue as the sky above us. She lifted her head, saw the water, sighed, and croaked: "Drink, Kelceyl!"

I tried to drink. Water dribbled past my swollen tongue, so that my parched throat seemed to suck my hand dry.

Hours passed. I did not feel the pain of my broken body. Such pain would pass. I gloried in lying in the soft ooze of the stream, while the water flowed sluggishly over me; and Norma's body was close, wet against mine.

Then, when some of those who had been of the exodus came to us to say that a fire had been kindled, I managed to sit; managed to lift Norma from the stream; managed somehow to clothe us both with our dusty rags. The messenger said:

"Reverend Hovis commands us all to the fire, under that big tree, to render thanks to God for deliverance."

Marmer Hovis!

Things came flooding back. I said nothing to Norma. She did not, apparently, remember the horror which was hers when we had been captured, back there in the storm.

I lifted Norma. Like two old people, bent and broken, walking in sleep, we went to the fire.

Marmer Hovis had found a box somewhere to serve as a pulpit. I stared at him. His face was expressionless, immobile. He did not move as he waited for us to gather around him. He stood laving his hands with air.

"Move closer, that you may hear!" were his first words, "for the storm is still near so you cannot easily hear me."

I stared at him.

Two dirty, knotted handkerchiefs were bound like blood-soaked band-

ages about his head. Blood had come through them. I knew it was blood, though it looked like mud that had dried.

He washed his hands with air. I thought of Pontius Pilate, who gave the Son of Man to the mob to be crucified:

"Give me water that I may wash my hands of the Man."

Those were not the exact words, but . . . I thought of Judas, who had hanged himself on a thorn tree. I rose to my feet; screamed at Marmer Hovis.

"You! You!" I screamed. "Where are your imps? Where are the fiends you brought to Carlson County? It was you, Marmer Hovis, who frightened us into fleeing from the storm's judgment; you who wanted the women and girls to be separated from husbands, brothers, sweethearts!" I glared about wildly. "How many of you men know what happened to your women in the storm—back there? Speak, Marmer Hovis! Before we hang you to the tree behind you."

The men heard, stirred, began murmuring. The face of Marmer Hovis, which he had cleaned in the stream, was dirty-white. His hand went to his head. I screamed again:

"Hold him! If the wound on his head was made with a club, I made it! I show you the man who tortured many of your women; the false prophet whose imps out of hell maltreated yet others! Show your wound, Marmer Hovis! Show us your broken head!"

But he would not. He looked as though he were ready to flee. They charged him then—the silent, wifeless, sisterless men. They ripped off the bandage. Under it was a mark that only a club could have made.

Einer Svenson, a big Swede neighbor of mine, wept loudly:

"We were hunting the fiends who tortured our women. We thought you, Kelcey Fayne, were one of them, until Norma went to you. You killed two of us, thinking we were the devils. But there is no punishment, for those men had lost their wives;

perhaps they had preferred to die."

My hands were the first to touch the neck of Marmer Hovis when they brought the rope.

He confessed.

There were twenty of his fiends back there in the storm. With so many strangers among us how would they be known? He told us their names.

Then we hanged him to the tree. While his body dangled, before his kicking feet were still, Einer Svenson told off a dozen men to stand guard at the edge of the storm. They asked each newcomer who came to give his name; to prove himself.

Norma slept. She did not know. For a little while I lay down beside her. There were many others lying silently around us. I watched the swaying of Hovis' body in the wind before I went to sleep.

IT was dawn when I awakened. Others—several others—looking very much like their leader, swung from the tree.

I gathered Norma in my arms, and walked with her down stream. We came to a ford and crossed. I did not look back once. We walked out into sunlight, determined never to leave the stream which gave us life, until we came to some town, or village, where life could start again.

My body would be scarred, but my sores would heal. Norma was gaunt and thin, but food and drink would make her figure round again.

Her eyes were haunted. Her body often trembled, as her mind remembered horror. Her lips kept shaping a name.

"Marmer Hovis! Marmer Hovis!"

Why did he do what he did, he and his imps? Why did they all look alike?

I knew both answers, but all I did then was to soothe Norma. I would not tell her.

It was not only madness brought on by our terror in the dust storm. Not only delusion that peopled the dust storm with Marmer Hovisea. Not only nightmare hallucination, though that had its part.

There were, indeed, many of his kind with Hovis. And all did seem alike because of the dust. Fanatics who, under his teaching, had delved too deeply into old, forbidden religions, violent religions wherein the tenets of sadism, brutality and horror became fundamentals of faith.

I was glad I killed some of them;

that others were hanged. No more would they torture and slay our women. It was a good thing when their evil bodies became one with the dust.

And it was good to turn our backs against the horror, leaving it behind forever; good to face whatever might lie before us, together, hand in hand.

FOREST OF FEAR

(Concluded from page 75)

a fraction of an inch, to pull her head up against her chest. The toothless witch suddenly lost her temper.

"Quit your wigglin', damn ye!"

She grabbed the loose cloud of brown hair with her free hand, yanked Eleanor's head down cruelly until the soft white throat was arched in a taut, quivering bow. Brent's fingers had reached the rifle. In his awkward position it was tremendously difficult to aim accurately. But it was his only chance—he must take it!

The old woman lifted the murderous cleaver high in the air, and Brent swung the gun toward her. With a silent prayer, he pressed the trigger!

In that same instant, the maniac, warned by some animal instinct, whirled and sprang toward Brent. A round hole suddenly gaped where his right eye had been, and he crumpled in a lifeless heap.

The old woman stared at him dully for a moment, then with a shriek she dropped the cleaver and threw herself on the dead body of her son. Almost at once she jumped to her feet again, sobbing and wailing piteously. She ran to the black case, drew out a razor edged scalpel.

"BEN, you can't go alone! You need me!"

She plunged the scalpel to the hilt beneath her shrunken breast. A gentle smile touched the old lips as she fell, remained when the sightless eyes stared up at the ceiling.

It took Brent ten minutes to loose himself from the ropes. He freed Eleanor, led her outside. Then he slipped back, covered the two bodies with a tattered sheet before he went out to join Eleanor in the green forest, gold-tinted by the first rays of the sun.

Votaries of a Fantastic Cult Hold a Grisly Celebration Over the Arrival of a Betrothed Couple Lured to a Chamber of Pain-Fanged Death

----IN----

BAAL'S DAUGHTER

A Complete Novelette of Sinister Mystery

By **CORNELL WOOLRICH**

In Next Month's THRILLING MYSTERY

HOOKS of DEATH

*He saw corpses hanging
on hooks like
butchered carcasses.*



Deputy Sheriff Deeds Faces Grim Horrors that Make the
Blood Run Cold as He Pursues a Mysterious
Perpetrator of Grisly Crimes

By H. M. APPEL

Author of "Suicide's Brand," etc.

STUTTERING like a machine-gun, a motorcycle wheeled out of the sleepy village and headed down the dark slab of concrete. Ten o'clock. Four hours of patrol duty ahead.

Deputy Sheriff Ken Deeds hunched

his broad wrestler's shoulders deeper into a sheeplined coat, for the early spring air was raw. Settling himself behind the low windshield, he wondered if tonight might bring a change of luck—if he would encounter the "Shadow Man."

Closing the cut-out, he let his machine purr along at a moderate pace, alert eyes scrutinizing each wooded patch and crossroad. The breaks had better come soon! That county seat crowd needed a goat. If the mysterious criminal accomplished one more successful foray along Highway 50, a promising young deputy would be shorn of his star. Besides, Deeds worried for the safety of Rose Griffin. Suppose she were the next victim?

Five men had vanished within the month. Each the keeper of a lonely filling station or barbecue stand. The disappearances had not aroused much comment until three days before, when the Shadow Man had scored his only failure.

Deeds smiled grimly. Grouchy old Ezra Baines had proved too tough a customer. The bachelor tenant of a run-down farm had been sitting in the darkened front room of his shack near the road, nursing a toothache, when the queer missile crashed through a window. Despite a blinding cloud of gas which enveloped him, the hardy soul had snatched a shotgun from the mantel and fired at a shadowy figure previously glimpsed outside.

A neighbor, coming shortly after daybreak to borrow a tool, had found the old man stretched upon the floor but half alive, and had hurried him to the village doctor.

Of course Baines had talked. Immediately the Shadow Man became a topic of frightened gossip on every tongue. Deeds was showered with criticism by superiors and public alike, for not producing the monster forthwith. Inspection of the five places from which men had disappeared showed in each case a broken window, and the remains of a capsule in which liquid gas had been hurled.

Deeds had thoroughly considered the possibility of some village resident having embarked upon a career of terrorism, but there were only a few with sufficient knowledge of chemistry to handle the lethal fluid.

Rolling down the dark highway, peering ahead at each curve and turn,

he ticked off the list again, more certain than ever that some prowling maniac had invaded the peaceful locality.

There was Ira Bowen, who owned the fertilizer plant. Doubtless he knew something of chemicals, but could one suspect the richest man in town? Or Fred Baxter, who manufactured fireworks in tumbledown sheds near the tracks? Fred was a genial, easy-going chap who wouldn't harm a fly. Old Doc Fletcher seemed above suspicion. Young "Doc" Carter—jeeringly favored with the title when he came home to operate his dead father's greenhouse after being kicked out of medical school—might have a smattering of knowledge. There remained Justin Blake, the druggist, a scowling, silent man who had opened his shop a year before and, since, had made few friends.

DEEDS shrugged. None of them checked with his mental picture of the Shadow Man.

Topping a rise of ground, he smiled in the midst of his trouble. A light gleamed in the upper half of a cottage window, although the lower sash was shaded. It signified that the inmates were preparing for bed. He thumped his klaxon in a signal as he passed—two short and one long blast—his "good-night" to Rose. More than a good-night, for it conveyed assurance that he was on guard along the highway, safeguarding the slumbers of his sweetheart and her widowed mother. They lived in the roadside cottage, while tenants farmed their acreage.

Two women alone! The thought smote Deeds with added violence to-night, as he followed the beam of his riding light into the opaque darkness. They would be easy prey for the mysterious killer who suffocated victims with deadly gas and carried off their bodies. Savagely stamping upon the accelerator, he roared ahead at increasing speed until the needle hung at seventy. Duty demanded that he cover his full mileage, but he wished he might stay closer to the cottage.

Out of the tail of his eye, some

miles farther on, he thought he saw the dim bulk of a small truck pulled off the road near a clump of trees, but it flashed by so quickly that he could not be sure. Time enough to check up when he returned.

One of the numerous ramshackle vehicles, no doubt, that hard-pressed farmers managed to keep running part time.

He slowed a bit, to take the long curve leading to Foster Hill, noting that Scottie Allen's filling station, situated in a triangle of ground between the forks of a "Y" turn, was dark. No traffic tonight. Scottie would have gone to bed—with a huge Airedale on guard and a gun under his pillow.

A stout fellow, Scottie, boasting that he was no more afraid of a shadow man than one of flesh and blood.

Skimming the crest of the hill, Deeds stepped on the gas and a few minutes later was circling the Stop-and-Go pillar in Hale's Corners, the end of his patrol. Here it was that a group of rural enthusiasts held weekly wrestling bouts. Deeds, long champion of the county, seldom missed entering a match.

But tonight he did not stop to look in upon the boys. Starting back, his thoughts were chiefly concerned with Rose.

What a beautiful thing she was! Too nice for any cop—even for one whose skillful use of a scissors hold might some day earn him money and fame on the mat. June, and the great day only three months away! His smile faded into an anxious frown.

Three months. If he didn't lose his job!

When approaching the hilltop above the "Y" fork, he cut lights and motor, letting the cycle roll. Noiselessly, save for a sharp wind whistling past his ears, he descended the mile-long slope. One trouble with a motorcycle was that crooks could hear you coming. Several times he had tried this coasting stunt, hoping to surprise the Shadow Man in an attack on Scottie Allen. Even so, he was not prepared when a black shape

loomed against the pale ribbon of pavement and was barely able to brake to a stop before colliding with the bulky object.

Deeds heard Scottie's dog yelp twice, then all was still. As he ran forward, gun in hand, a queer form left the doorway of the building and hurried across the patch of white crushed stone. Deeds snapped up his revolver but held his fire.

It did not look like a man. Too big, too broad. But soon the strange outline resolved itself into that of one person carrying another. Of course! Carrying Scottie! Now he dared not shoot. Best to get close and try the effect of surprise.

"Drop him!" His command grated harshly when the Shadow Man was but ten feet away. "Hoist your hands!"

Deeds heard a muttered oath. There was a tense pause. Then a hissing report like that of an air gun. A stream of liquid struck him full in the face. He choked, gasping for breath, lungs afire, knees buckling.

In a last chagrined glimmer of consciousness he realized that he had been gassed by the man he had hoped to capture.

TIRES rolling at high speed made a buzzing sound in Deeds' ears. Bouncing and sliding on a hard board floor, he raised numb hands to his throbbing head and wondered where he was. The black truck! That had been the Shadow Man's.

He jerked out his flashlight, shot its beam against a closed rear door. He was boxed in a tightly walled space from which there seemed no escape. His hand touched something clammy which lay by his side. The light, stabbing downward, revealed a gray-faced corpse.

Deeds grunted, looked more closely, saw the twisted features of Scottie Allen. Hurling himself against the door, he sought to burst it open. The latch was solid. With heavy boots he strove to kick out the sides. The truck slowed. A gruff voice from the driver's seat commanded:

"Cut it out! Do I have to kill you?"

Deeds renewed his efforts, hoping to force a fight. A rattle sounded in the forward end of the truck body. The speaker snarled:

"Maybe this will quiet you!"

Again the hissing sound of gas shot from a gun. The suffocating cloud of chlorine was confined within the tight box. When Deeds fell to the floor, his parted lips came in contact with a crack through which cold air entered sparingly. Swiftly his consciousness waned. Life hung by a slender thread, depending upon the trace of untainted oxygen.

KEN DEEDS groaned and twisted his body upon a concrete floor. Cold! He trembled violently, and his very bones felt frozen. Desperately he tried to flex his numbed fingers. They felt like brittle digits of ice. A torpor seemed to have seized his brain. With a tremendous effort of will he sat up.

Dark!

The air was freighted with a faint, disturbing odor which he could not identify. Clumsily he searched his clothing for flashlight and gun. Both gone. The Shadow Man had left him not even a penknife.

Feebly he pawed at his breast pocket. There! A small electric torch, in the shape of a pencil. He staggered to his feet, sent the tiny beam of light probing into the sinister darkness. A shocked cry gushed to his lips and he fell back, eyes bulging with horror.

On the opposite wall, like chunks of butchered beef, five cadavers hung upon great iron hooks which pierced their backs. Two were clothed. Three were naked and horribly mutilated. Despite the shrunken lips, the staring glassy eyes, the lolling tongue, he recognized them all. They were the unfortunates who had disappeared. The victims of the Shadow Man.

Steeling his nerves, he looked about his cell more closely, noting that he was imprisoned in a narrow refrigerated room. Coils of frosted pipes covered most of the ceiling. Rushing to the door he found it tightly fitted, no latch visible. His inad-

quate light grew dim. He glanced at his watch. Midnight. For over an hour he had lain unconscious. Two more hours must pass before Bill Slade would report for duty and, perhaps, wonder at his failure to appear.

The light was dimming rapidly. Its yellow gleam revealed the dead features of Scottie Allen, whose body hung upon a hook across the room from those dead a longer time.

In mounting frenzy Deeds speculated as to where he might be. In the village? Who owned large refrigerators? The meat shop, the general store, the greenhouse where vegetables were grown through the winter, and the "chicken factory" where farmers sold their fowls? But surely this could be none of those! The place was empty save for the ghastly dead.

The light went out. His fear grew as darkness buried him in its ominous folds. Why had the killer left him alive? Or had the Shadow Man believed him dead? No! In that case, like Scottie, he would have been thrown upon the hooks. A conviction swept across his mind. The murderer had planned for him some diabolical torture or mutilation. For what other reason had his life been spared?

Panic seized Ken Deeds. The darkness seemed to fill his throat and choke him. That greatest of all terrors—a fear of the unknown—clutched at his heart. But soon his nerves steadied. He would have a chance when the man came back.

Of course, the fellow would be armed and on the alert. He groped about the icy chamber, searching for a club or any heavy object that might serve as a weapon. The iron hooks were bolted to wooden racks and he could not wrench one loose. Deeds even felt over the stiff, dead bodies. But nothing in their clothing rewarded his persistence. With bare hands alone he must meet the killer. His teeth clicked suddenly. A flimsy vegetable box seen in one corner brought an idea to mind. A desperate ruse! He might yet outwit his captor.

With a shudder of revulsion he lifted Scottie Allen's body from the cruel hook. Fingers fumbling awkwardly, he stripped rough garments from the corpse. Then, divesting himself of his uniform, he traded clothing with the dead man, pulling the collar of his sheepskin coat well up around the stone-cold face.

Somewhere outside he heard a sound. A latch rattled metallicly. He shoved the box beneath the hook on which Allen's body had hung and stood upon it, head bowed, back against the iron point, masquerading as a corpse.

The door was opened cautiously. For several moments no light was visible. Then the beam of a flashlamp shot forth to sweep floor and walls in one swift circuit. A man entered. Approaching the uniformed figure upon the concrete, he paused, muttering. The light lowered. A strong, long-fingered hand reached into the circle of illumination, seized one wrist and felt for a pulse. A sharp oath cracked as the lifeless thing was flung aside.

"Dead! And I wanted a live one!"

Laying the torch upon the floor, its glare making his features invisible, the Shadow Man lifted the corpse and threw it upon a hook beside the other five, as a butcher might hang up a quarter of beef. Deeds sprang when he judged the other's back was turned. If he could clamp a killing hold upon the man—

But the rickety box collapsed with the force of his leap. He sprawled. Red flame lanced the darkness when the Shadow Man jerked out a gun and fired. Deeds scrambled for the door which swung partly ajar, felt a hand clutch at his shoulder, pulled free as the pistol roared near his ear. Then he was outside—the door slammed shut. A metal bar fell into its slot. Exultantly he cried:

"Caught! In his own trap. Now to find weapons or help."

There was slippery mud under foot. He located some matches in the pockets of Scottie Allen's pants. By their dim flare he discerned the small black truck parked a few feet from

the frame building into which the refrigerator was built. Jumping to the seat he switched on headlights and found himself in an unfamiliar country place.

The motor caught when he stepped on the starter. Slowly, because of deep ruts and bumps, he followed the track across rolling sod. Perhaps a quarter-mile farther on, a gate barred his way. Beyond, he saw the white gleam of a concrete pavement. Even then, in the dark, he did not recognize the spot.

Jumping down, he started forward to open the gate, but paused in mid-stride. A muffled moan seemed to come from within the body of the truck.

"Another victim!" he exclaimed. "The Shadow Man was busy again, while I lay knocked out."

A shrill, terrified cry made his flesh creep. He unlatched the truck door, blurring nervously:

"Who is it? Come out! Are you hurt?"

"KEN?" A girl's voice rose tremulously. "Ken Deeds! Oh, thank God it's you!"

He straightened like a man shot.

"Rose! Oh, my Lord! You!"

Striking a match, he stared as the girl climbed down. Golden hair tumbling about her shoulders, barefoot, clad only in filmy nightdress, Rose Griffin swayed into his arms.

"He threw a gas bomb through our window," she sobbed in answer to his excited questions. "Mother—I—I—believe she's dead, Ken. I was choking, fainting, when he rushed in—like a horrible monster with great eyes gleaming through a gas-mask. He carried me away. I lost consciousness. Just a little while ago I recovered, and nearly died of fright in that awful truck."

"Now," cried Deeds suddenly, "I know where we are! Carter's greenhouse is back there. That young devil, Paul, who was kicked out of medical school! Why—he must be crazy—"

Both wheeled at sound of a voice which raged:

"Get your hands up! You're the crazy one—gabbling there while I took a short cut and got here in time. Keep 'em up! I'll shoot the girl first, if you try anything funny. And I don't want to do it. I need a female body just now."

"You fool!" Deeds said hoarsely. "You'll never get away with these murders. Let us go. Take the truck. Escape while you can. It may be your last chance."

"I'll get away with it as long as I please—if they keep yokels like you on the job of law enforcement. Get into the truck—behind—both of you!" He gestured with the gun.

Deeds swept Rose Griffin aside and dove at Carter's knees. Luck was foul. A .45 bullet clipped the side of his head. Stunned by the glancing blow, he dropped. The girl's piercing scream could not stir him out of the coma into which he plunged.

A SEARING agony between his shoulder blades made Ken Deeds writhe and shudder. His eyes opened on utter darkness, and in the silence his ears seemed to ring. Again the deadly, penetrating cold. Again the racking pain. Instantly he knew that he was back in the refrigerator with the dead.

On the hooks! He could not move his body from the position in which it hung. That was it—he was *hanging*—crucified upon the hooks. The pain in his back grew. Why hadn't he died, transfixed upon the great steel point? Testingly he raised his arms, grasped the wooden bar to which the hooks were bolted, and found that he could lift himself. The pain was relieved. Cold perspiration broke forth upon his brow as he realized that, when hung up by the killer for freezing, the hook had caught in his belt, its point only gashing his back. After much twisting and straining, he got free and dropped to the floor.

With the clearing of his mind came an awful dread. Rose! What had Carter done to her? Was she— He cringed at the thought. Was she hanging there—on the hooks—?

Feverishly he fumbled for matches, and found them. But terror paralyzed his hand. Rose! On the hooks? He dared not look. Fearfully he went from corpse to corpse, counting them, feeling over each with shaking fingers, praying that she would not be there. Only six!

With a great sigh of relief he made a light, holding several matches together. Dead faces seemed to leer at his distress. The faint flare made shadows dance across the pallid features. Gaping lips seemed to move in mocking whispers.

He stumbled toward the door, groaning: "Rose! Rose! I've got to find her!"

Blindly he ran his hands over the unyielding surface of the portal. There was neither latch nor bolt inside. Yet, Carter had escaped almost immediately after being trapped. Had the man used a key? A last match disclosed no keyhole. Frantically, he pawed up and down panel and casing. Near the bottom he found a small projecting block. Pressure of his foot upon this knob sent the door swinging.

Rushing forth into the black night he rounded a corner of the building and found himself alongside the glass walls of a hothouse. The interior was dark as a tomb.

Where to start his search? Had Carter taken Rose away, or was she confined near at hand? He thought of breaking panes and sash, crawling into the building. Too much noise. He found a door. It was locked. Throwing caution aside he stuck his elbow through the glass, reached in and turned a key.

The air was heavy with the scent of warm, humid earth, of flowers and growing plants. He stood tensely poised, ears cocked to catch the slightest sound. But a pall of silence hung over the place. His heart sank as he realized that Carter might long since have murdered the girl.

Murdered her—or worse!

"I need a female body," the man had said.

For what hellish purpose? To what vile indignities had she been forced

to submit? The nails of Deeds' tight-clenched fingers bit into his palms. He breathed a prayer that he might find her in time.

A faint cry brought him up on his toes, listening breathlessly. A girl's thin, quavering scream deadened by distance or intervening walls. Hoarsely, he muttered:

"That's Rose! But where—"

Again the nerve-torturing call, cut short abruptly, as though a brutal hand had closed upon her throat. Confused, he turned this way and that.

"Where? Where? It seemed to come from under the floor!"

Dropping upon hands and knees, he crawled about, pausing frequently to listen with ear pressed to the boards. Was there a cellar? He could find no trapdoor. He cursed the loss of his flashlight, the lack of matches, and sprang up to search for an electric switch. Surely the place was wired. Near the outer doorway he found it—pressed the button—flooded the greenhouse with light. The room was radiant with bright blossoms whose very loveliness accentuated the horrors in which its owner engaged.

Ken Deeds made a quick inspection of the floor again, peering beneath tables full of growing things, racing up and down the length of the hothouse. Rose Griffin's call for help was not repeated. It was maddening to know that she was somewhere within sound of his voice, perhaps unconscious now, and at the mercy of the Shadow Man.

He flung open a door leading into the refrigerator, found it partly filled with cut flowers and vegetables. The rear wall looked new. Recently erected, no doubt, to leave a hiding space beyond for the cadavers which hung on the hooks.

Frustration had brought him to the verge of hysteria when his harassed eyes noted a faint trail of muddy footprints upon the floor. They led to a long, framed planting chart which reached to the baseboard. He studied it closely, seized a metal knob from which a pencil hung by a string.

Wrenching at this handle he felt the panel pull away. A dark shaft was disclosed, and a flight of steep steps. He could see nothing in the gloom below, save a faint streak of light that seemed to filter through a crack around a door.

A girl's low moan of fear moved him to impulsive action. Gasping with eagerness, Ken Deeds hurled himself down the stairway. It was much shorter than he expected. Striking the bottom with a jar, he stumbled and sprawled forward with hands outspread.

The inner door burst open. Paul Carter stood silhouetted against a brilliant light. He snatched up a heavy revolver and brought down its barrel in a slashing stroke that gashed the falling man's skull.

Ken Deeds sprang up, reeling. Blindly he groped for a wrestler's hold upon the powerful body. Carter struck again and again, beating him back to his knees. Deeds wilted beneath the punishing blows. Like a knife-edge of sound Rose Griffin's agonized cry cut through the haze of his fading senses. Fiercely he fought off the surging waves of blackness. He must not pass out! She needed him so. He must fight!

But the stricken body refused to function. Battered almost to insensibility, his muscles were out of control. He felt himself dragged like an inanimate thing across the floor, heard the door slam, stared into a glaring light upon which his eyes could not focus. Someone lifted him erect, pinned him against a solid object, shouted something that he could not understand.

He became aware of a choking sensation, felt a huge pulse throbbing in his ears, but—strangely—remained erect after the blurred figure of his assailant moved away.

WHEN his vision cleared, Deeds found himself fastened by a wide leather belt buckled around his neck and about an upright column which supported the ceiling. His hands were tied. He guessed that the crude chamber had been built by Car-

ter unaided. Small, gouged out of earth beneath the greenhouse floor, its ghastly purpose was instantly apparent.

From some source the Shadow Man had brought a second-hand operating table. Strapped upon it, clothed only in nightgown in which she had been abducted, lay Rose Griffin. Her face was terror-white beneath the powerful overhead light, and the weakness of her struggles proved her strength nearly spent.

Wide-eyed she gazed at the bruised figure lashed to the post. Paul Carter was laying out surgical instruments upon a rough pine table. Among the gleaming knives were numerous filthy ones which he sloshed in a bloody basin. The place resembled a slaughter house more than a doctor's operating room.

Deeds shuddered with instinctive understanding. This ex-student of a famous medical school need pay small heed to sanitation, since none of his victims were expected to recover!

"Good God! What are you fixing to do?" The words gushed up in his throat.

CARTER looked around, sneering. "Hard to kill, eh? The big he-wrestler, all brawn and no brain. You've been so damned persistent, butting into my affairs, that I decided to let you watch, instead of shooting you just now. You're going to enjoy this!"

"You won't"—Deeds' voice nearly failed him—"you won't cut that girl? For God's sake, let her go! Do your ghoulish work on the dead men upstairs! You're no surgeon. You'll kill her—"

Carter grinned. "Listen, my thick-headed friend! You placed your finger right on the spot. I'm not a surgeon yet, but I'll be a real one some day! I'll show those wishy-washy professors things they never dreamed of." His dark face fell into lines of hate. "They kicked me out! The best student in my class. And why? Because I operated on a worthless tramp without anesthetic—the only way in which one can note re-

actions accurately! I wanted to know what really happens to patients while you're cutting. After they're full of ether they can't tell you. Then you can only guess."

"You're stark crazy!" groaned Deeds. "Raving mad—"

"Don't be a fool!" Carter sneered. "I started out to be a surgeon and I'm going to be one. I'm too damned sane to suit those smug hypocrites at the university. I've got sense enough to know that only by trial and error can new methods be found. When I feel that I'm as good as the best, I'll beat it to South America or some other place, take examinations and practise there." He smirked. "Quite respectably, you may be sure. No one ever will know how I acquired my skill."

"Why," grated Deeds, swept by a feeling of nausea, "do you have to throw the bodies of your victims on those ghastly hooks? As though murder were not bad enough! It's horrible—heartless—senselessly cruel."

"Ah, you talk like a milksop. I'm not yet through using them; and what does it matter, once they're dead? Is it really so different from seeing quarters of beef hanging in a butcher's shop? But what can a man learn from a frozen carcass? A little, of course, but I need live ones, too. I wanted a live woman, especially. I'm behind in my work on female anatomy."

Carter doused a wad of cotton with alcohol from a can, perhaps more as a matter of technique than sanitation, pulled down Rose Griffin's nightgown, swabbed her bare torso with the fluid. She screamed and writhed, begging:

"Please don't—don't cut me! Oh, don't do it—"

He began making marks upon her white skin with an indelible pencil, talking as he worked.

"No guessing with me. This will be an operation on the heart. I want the marks there, so that I may study the case—afterward." There was evil satisfaction in his smile.

"Afterward!" The dread word slid across Ken Deeds' gritted teeth.

With the girl's pitiful moans ringing in his ears he struggled convulsively, held tight by the strap around his neck, unable to loosen even slightly the cord which bound his wrists together.

"You can't do it!" he shouted. "It is too horrible!"

"Will you dry up?" Carter turned, pencil in hand, to glower at him. There was ruthlessness, but not insanity, in his icy glance. "Don't get me wrong, you poor sap. I'm not trying anything fantastic. I'm *practising*—just learning my trade! Can you get that through your fat head? I want to *know* exactly how far a surgeon can go, before his patient dies. I've tried this same thing on each of the dead bodies upstairs. Now I want to note results on the nervous system of a living woman."

ROSE shrieked: "Ken! Oh, Ken—I don't want to die! Don't let him cut me—"

Carter wheeled toward her jerkily.

"I'll stop your squalling in a minute. You've got me jumpy now, with all your screeching. I'll give you a whiff or two, so that you won't squirm when I make the first incisions. Then the anesthetic will wear off, while I'm working in the chest cavity, and I'll be able to see just what happens." He reached for the ether cone.

"For God's sake, don't!" Deeds pleaded. "Think, man! Carrying off those fellows for your purpose was one thing—but to murder an innocent girl! Why—it will haunt you forever, even if your ambition is achieved. Let her go!"

Carter balanced a knife in his hand, frowning angrily. "How the devil can I, after going this far? And what's one life more or less, when in later years I shall save thousands? I'll bet many a surgeon with a big name has done this sort of thing plenty of times, in the course of hospital work and private practise. But once you've got a reputation, you can get away with anything. Even"—his lips curled ironically—"murder!"

Desperately, Deeds begged: "Then kill me first! Don't make me watch!"

Carter jeered: "Coward! Just a yellow cop! No nerve."

"You don't understand." Deeds' eyes gleamed with a peculiar light. "If you won't kill me outright, then open a vein in my wrist! I'll die slowly. I'll have to watch. God knows I'll suffer enough to satisfy you—but we'll go out together. She's my sweetheart! We were about to be married—"

Carter stared. Slowly across his thin, tanned face crept an expression of Satanic mirth.

"I didn't know. I'll do that much for you—and more. I'll try to keep her alive until you are at the point of death, and let you both go into the Whatever-it-is at the same instant. That ought to be the height of something or other in the way of professional service!" He laughed wildly.

Rose Griffin sensed the doom of her lover. Her poignant cry rose shrill in the confined space, rasping Carter's over-strung nerves. He snatched up a tiny scalpel and stepped toward the captive man.

Ken Deeds jerked both feet off the ground. Shooting forth his legs he snapped a scissors hold around Carter's middle. Hanging by the strap that lashed his neck to the post, he tightened huge muscles of calf and thigh—muscles trained by months of squeezing bags of sand.

Carter ripped out a frightened oath. He began stabbing and slashing at Deeds with the scalpel. But it was a miniature blade. Though blood spurted from many shallow wounds, he did not reach a vital spot.

Deeds hung gibbeted by the strap, gasping and choking. Inexorably his mighty legs tightened their crushing grasp, muscles knotted like cables, wringing sharp screams of agony from the Shadow Man.

Carter's stabbing strokes grew weaker. His face was twisted with excruciating pain. Blue veins stood out like cords upon his forehead. The blade dropped from his nerveless fingers. Deeds felt blood pounding in his brain. He choked until his cheeks were livid. But he dared not release

(Concluded on Page 116)

A Complete Novelette
of Sea Mystery

Grey Arms



*She clung to him
in terror*

CHAPTER I

Searching Tentacles

LIGHTNING washed the girl on the cliff. It showed her blue eyes wide, staring, terror-glazed. Her slender body was set stiffly against the tearing, maniac fury of the storm.

Again she heard it.

The sound set the horny feet of terror creeping along Robin Dell's spine. The thin scream cut through the roar of the ocean. It was like the

cry of a child in anguish. And its animal strangeness ripped her soul with the talons of eldritch dread.

Again, lightning shattered against the cliff beyond her. The storm-torn sea was a mad grey turmoil. Upon great black rocks, far below, green water was exploding into white clouds of spray.

And then fear closed on her white throat, like thick, cold serpent coils.

For she now saw a thing that moved. Some huge bulk loomed grey and slimy in the brief light. It

A Giant from the Depths—Half Man,

of Death

By JACK WILLIAMSON

Author of "Wolves of Darkness,"
"The Purple Death," etc.



swayed toward her, its movement boneless, flowing. It was monstrous—yet somehow, unmistakably, it suggested the human.

Obscenity leered from that hint of humanity, and horror beyond words.

Fear still paralyzing her, she sensed the nearness of the thing in the inky dark. Sensed its flowing, reptilian movement. A stone clattered. Then that scream came again. The sound was a baby's dying wail. But it lusted with an obscene eagerness, a savage, feral hunger.

Hunger! Robin suddenly knew that the trembling firmness of her own young body was the object of that nameless avidity. She was the helpless prey it stalked. New terror nerved her to convulsive effort.

Wildly, she stumbled back upon the narrow path, and began to run through the mad night. Icy rain plastered copper hair against her pale oval face. Her wet, clinging clothes betrayed the curves of her lovely body.

"Carter!" Unconsciously, the name

Half Octopus—Vents Its Sadistic Fury!

of her young husband was on her voiceless lips. "Oh, Carter, help me!"

And ever behind her, she was aware of the swift, reptilian movement of the thing—pursuing.

Lightning stabbed into the cliff. Against the storm's darkness, it etched the long house above the precipice. It was the rambling, vine-grown seaside residence of Justin Whipple, her wealthy host. If she could only reach the protection of its massive stone walls!

One blinding glimpse: then tempestuous darkness overwhelmed it.

Her breath was a sobbing gasp when she finally reached the door. She fumbled madly for her key, opened the door, darted through, and frantically locked it behind her. For a long minute, she stood leaning against the door, her heart pounding, her breath tortured, gasping.

Suddenly the heavy door behind her rattled furiously.

"Only the wind!" she breathed. "Merciful God, let it be only the wind!"

And then, above the savage fury of sea and storm, she heard again that infant wail, shrill and tremulous with unspeakable avidity.

The thing was on the other side of the door.

Her eyes darted about the huge, darkened living room. Why was no light burning? Why this dreadful silent emptiness, defying the storm? Where were the servants, and all the others? She ran to a light switch, clicked it on. The lights did not work.

"Carter! Carter!" she half-moaned. "Carter, where are you?"

The thick rug silencing her footsteps, she ran into the library. Justin Whipple's big leather chair, beside the cold fireplace, was empty. The chamber was a musty tomb, with its preserved and mounted specimens of strange under-sea life.

DR. JOHN THURMAN, Whipple's shriveled, gold-spectacled secretary, was also absent from his dusty, book-littered little office behind the library. Still gasping Car-

ter's name, she ran up the stairs. The room she and Carter used terminated the corridor upstairs. She almost sobbed her relief when she saw light showing through the transom above the door. A few seconds later, she flung the door open.

New dread checked her heart. A lighted candle flickered unsteadily, on top of a bureau, but the room was deserted. She stood a moment, swaying, staring into gloomy corners. The storm's mighty voice filled her ears. Lightning flashed against the window. The old house quivered to the explosive impact of quick thunder.

"Carter lighted this candle," she whispered. "So he must be near somewhere. I'll wait."

She locked the door, apprehensively twisting her handkerchief. Gingerly, she sat down on the edge of the bed. But she couldn't sit still. Where *could* Carter be? She unlocked the door, ran along the dark hall, and back down the creaking stair.

In the whispering darkness of the long living room, she stopped again. White teeth sank painfully into the redness of her full lip. She was afraid to go into the left wing. But where else could Carter be?

The left wing housed Justin Whipple's private marine museum. Hydrographic maps covered the walls. The rows of glass cases were ghastly with weird-hued, spined and tentacled monsters of the abyss. From the moment she entered the door, Robin always felt the slimy fingers of chill horror clutching at her out of the dark ocean.

But Carter might be here. He and Markham Dorn had been busy here every day of the week since their return from the South Atlantic expedition. Working with stooped old Dr. John Thurman, they had been classifying and cataloguing the strange specimens which the jointed metal arms of Carter's robot diver had brought up from the mile-deep abyss.

She opened the door, entered. And then a horny, foul-smelling bulk leaped out of the dark. A leathery

tentacle clutched at her wrist. From her lips bubbled a hysterical, voiceless scream. The thing was in the house! Pushing at it with feeble, nerveless hands, she staggered back.

A crisp voice said:
"Stop where you are."

The white ray of a flashlight fell across her.

She saw that the thing against her was a mounted octopus on a pedestal. She had blundered against it. In the white ray, she read the neat sign that Carter had placed beneath it: *octopus punctatus*.

And the voice was Markham Dorn's!

"Oh, Mark!" she gasped. "I'm so glad—"

"Robin!" He was amazed. "What are you doing here? I thought—Carter said you were staying in town tonight."

"I was so frightened!" She clung to his arm. "I got Carter's telegram. It made me afraid something was wrong, so I came out on the four-ten train. I wanted to be with Carter. And as there wasn't any taxi at the station, decided to walk, following the path along the cliffs."

"Robin, you shouldn't have!" his slow voice protested, deep with concern. "On such a night—that trail's dangerous!"

"I know—now!"

She shuddered. Her fingers tightened on his arm.

"I had the most dreadful fright, Mark. And I think—it may sound silly—but, Mark, something followed me!"

His voice was low with quick anxiety.

"What was it, Robin?"

"I don't know. Once, when lightning flashed, I saw it—or thought I did. It was big and grey and slimy. Like—well, like an octopus. Somehow, too, it was like a man! I just glimpsed it. It was crawling toward me. And it had the most horrible cry. Like a baby's, but somehow—hideous! It sounded hungry—for me!"

She had expected big Markham Dorn to laugh at her fears. His level, iron-grey eyes could look unflinch-

ingly into the cold face of danger. A hundred times, in Carter's robot bathysphere, he had plumbed the dark chasm of the sea, in stern contempt of peril.

But silence met her story, and a long, wondering breath.

"Part octopus?" he asked slowly. "And part man?"

The bright disk of the flashlight crept across the floor. It climbed a glass case filled with shadowy horrors, and came to rest upon a thing standing on a strong table.

It was an ivory squat image. Archaic horror oozed from every hideous convolution of its bulbous, eight-tentacled body. Above the writhing coils of the sucker-bearing tentacles rose a head.

A head which was hairless, flat-featured, singularly narrow. Thin lips snarled away from animal-like fangs. There was no nose. The eyes were cunning slits of evil. For all that, it was human—in its sinister travesty of man lay its crowning horror.

It was not large—no more than three feet high. The fine detail of its carvings inevitably proclaimed the faithful likeness of obscene reality. An accurate copy—of what unthinkable original? Before it lay a long, age-scarred knife of bronze.

ROBIN looked away from it. She tried to force its squat, twisting lechery from her mind.

"It was like that—the thing I saw!" she whispered. "But such things can't live. God wouldn't let them!"

"But they do," Markham Dorn told her, his voice queerly grave. "I've seen them. This image," he said briefly, "is the prize find of our expedition. I brought it up, with Carter's diver. It came from the bottom of the South Atlantic, over a mile down. And I saw creatures there, in the depths, like it. I beat off a mob of them with the metal arms of the bathysphere, and carried this, and the knife, away from a sort of shrine. I think it's their idol—"

Markham Dorn's voice broke off. He turned suddenly. His light darted about the long room.

"What is it?" Robin whispered fearfully. "Do you think—"

"Somebody—or something—has been in here," he told her swiftly. "Must have been an hour ago that your husband heard it. He called Dr. Thurman and me. When we came in, there was a window open. The intruder was gone. We all ran outside, and searched around the house. Didn't find anybody. Carter and Thurman went on, to look further. I came back to check things over. A few specimens were gone—one of *octopus punctatus*—but nothing of great value. Don't know why anybody broke in—unless he was after the image."

"Then Carter's outside?" cried Robin, terrified.

"Thurman is with him," Dorn reassured her. "And both are armed."

"Where are the others?" she asked anxiously. "Mr. Whipple? And the servants?"

"Whipple drove to the station, to meet the evening train," Dorn told her. "He was expecting the curator of the World Museum, Wickard Kidd. Kidd's coming down to look at the image, and the other objects I fished up. He'll make a good offer, I understand, if we can convince him that the find is genuine. It's a big thing, really, Robin—we're asking a quarter of a million. If it goes through, Carter can buy that little steel house he's always talking of."

"I hope it does," she whispered. Then her fears came back. "Why don't the lights work?"

"The generator, in the basement, is out of order," Dorn told her. "And the servants are gone. Something happened to day. Just what it was, I still have no idea. Thurman knows, though. And he's scared. Won't tell why. But he had Carter send that wire for you to stay in town. Said your life wouldn't be safe here. And I wish you had stayed, Robin."

"I didn't want to be away from Carter," she explained simply. "But what became of the servants?"

"Something frightened them. Village natives, you know. A close-mouthed clan. They wouldn't say

much. Muttering something about devil-fish crawling up out of the sea. Anyway, they all five went across to the village—all of them except the gardener. They're staying until the storm is over, they said. Whipple had to drive himself to the sta—"

His voice snapped off.

"What was that?"

Now Robin also heard it. First that avid, lustful wail, which had followed her up from the cliffs. And then a man's voice, shouting something. "The *thing!*" whispered Robin. "Or could it be—the wind?"

"That was Carter!" muttered Dorn. "His voice! I must help him. You stay—"

THE flashlight was in his left hand. He drew an automatic.

"No!" choked Robin. "I'm going—if Carter's in danger—"

They ran back into the dark living room. Robin unlocked the front door. Dorn led the way out, his shoulders looming massive and square against a purple sheet of lightning.

They ran across a rainswept lawn.

"It sounded that way!" called Robin. "Around the left wing."

"Thurman! Thurman!" The voice of Carter Dell rang out of the darkness. "Dr. John, where are you?"

Lightning picked him out for a static instant, as he leaped a dark clump of shrubbery. He was a big man, two inches taller than Markham Dorn, mighty of shoulder, powerful. Lightning etched in Robin's mind the steel-blue eyes, the firm mouth, the iron jaw, the rain-matted red hair.

She sighed with relief, to see him unharmed.

"Dear Carter," she whispered.

"Where's Thurman?" Carter shouted, as the dark swallowed him again. "I heard him scream—"

"Around the house, it sounded," said Markham Dorn.

They ran left. For weapon, Carter's great hand carried an axe.

"We saw something, down toward the cliff," Carter panted as he ran. "Big, grey, crawling! It was out of sight in a moment. I went to investigate. Dr. John stayed, with his gun,

to watch the house. I couldn't find what we saw. Then I heard him scream—"

They came around the end of the house. A gust of rain stung them. Pandemonium of storm and mad ocean hammered in their ears. Robin caught instinctively at Carter's hard arm. She clung to him, trembling.

And then another flash of lightning threw a merciless glare on the horror at their feet. What used to be a human form was now only a mass of raw, red pulp. Splintered bones protruded from it. Crimson oozed out of it, mixing with the rain as it flowed down into the grass.

"Thurman!" gasped Carter Dell. "Can it be?"

"His spectacles," Markham Dorn said hoarsely. He pointed, trembling. "His revolver. That rag—from his coat."

"Then—they've come," said Carter Dell, his voice incredulous, yet, at same time, solemn with overwhelming dread. "I still had hope. Only their tentacles could pulp a man so. Or," catching himself, "have we all gone mad?"

Staring at the scarlet sod, Robin was drowned in a sea of grey faintness. She pitched limply forward, toward the red horror.

CHAPTER II

They Dwell in Ocean

"ROBIN, darling," came Carter's anxious voice. He was tenderly lifting her from the red-splashed grass. "You all right?"

"Yes," she whispered faintly. "Yes, Carter."

She didn't let him see the object she was slipping into the neck of her dress. And she walled the mind-rending horror of it away from her consciousness. For it was the fatal germ of madness unthinkable.

"Where—where's Mark?" she gasped.

"He went after a rug—for poor old Thurman."

Carter released her. She stood

swaying on her feet. Lightning came again. Carter's blue eyes were peering keenly. His red, bare head was cocked, listening. One great hand clutched the axe. Then he stooped and picked up the dead man's revolver.

"You're in danger, Robin. Better take this. By the way, didn't you get my wire?"

"Yes. It frightened me, for you. I had to come."

He wiped off the blood-clotted gun and gave it to her.

"Don't hesitate using it, either," he said grimly. "Here comes Mark."

Markham Dorn laid the rug on the grass. Into it they rolled the bleeding pulp that had been Dr. John Thurman. Carter lifted the sodden bundle in his great arms, and they hastened into the building. Dorn had cleared a table in the living room, and Carter laid his ghastly, dripping burden there.

Robin's voice was a dry husk of dread, when she asked:

"What did this, Carter?"

He stared oddly at her, and then across at Markham Dorn. In the pallid glow of the flashlight, the two men loomed like gigantic, silent statues.

"Better tell her, Mark," Carter said slowly.

Markham Dorn nodded. His grey eyes looked at her solemnly.

"Must you know?"

"Tell me," she insisted.

"You saw the image," he began soberly.

She shuddered with remembered dread.

"That horrible thing in the museum, you mean? Man—and octopus?"

The big man nodded grimly.

"I told you that we found it on the bottom of the South Atlantic. Your husband, you know, would lower me over the side of the *Avalon*, in his robot diver. Then the ship would steam slowly forward, with me swinging along in the steel globe, a mile below.

"Mr. Whipple, you probably know, financed the expedition, on the understanding that we were to search for

the sunken ruins of Atlantis. And every day, for three weeks, I was dragged over the black, cold floor of the ocean, searching for remains of the drowned continent."

"Well, after three weeks of it I found—structures! Ruins, first, that clearly must have been the buildings of men. Crumbling, incredibly ancient. They must have been the cities of Atlantis. They're inhabited, though the buildings are like no buildings of men. And the inhabitants are monstrous! They are half men, half—octopus!"

Robin's eyes widened to the whispering horror of his voice.

"They are huge things, grey, powerful, hideous. They swarmed about the diver. They worked at the doorfastenings with their tentacles. They dragged at the cables. They brought metal bars, and began striking at the glass ports.

"The *Avalon* kept dragging me on. I turned the diver this way and that, to see as much as I could. Then I guided it into this shrine, where the creatures were sprawling about their idol. I wanted some proof of my discovery. So I steered the globe toward the image, and caught it, and the bronze sacrificial knife, in the robot arms.

"Then I phoned Carter to haul me up at full speed. In another minute the monsters would have broken the glass. The blade of water, stabbing through the smallest crack, would have cut me like a knife. A close call. Two ports were chipped. But the glass was heavy. I got up—with the loot."

"I meant to go down again. But we had a week of nasty weather, and a storm that carried us a hundred miles off the discovery. Then the coal ran low, and the captain turned back toward Pernambuco.

"And," he finished slowly, "well—it's just a week since the *Avalon* docked at New York, and we found Whipple waiting for the plunder, and you waiting to marry Carter."

HIS grey eyes flashed at Robin, disturbingly.

"How came those creatures to be?"

she asked, still clutched in the fascination of horror. "Half man and half monster?"

"I don't know," said Markham Dorn, deliberately. "But I've a theory. The Atlanteans were scientists. Their ruins prove that. Perhaps they were able to survive, as their continent sank. Perhaps they changed, adapted themselves to live under the sea. It may have been by some dreadful interbreeding with monsters of the ocean!"

Dread silence hung for a space in the long room. It was ripped with wild thunder. Distant windows shook. Robin started back from the sodden bundle on the table.

"You think those things have followed—here?" she whispered, fearfully. "Why?"

"The ivory image is their god," said Markham Dorn. "I tore it out of the midst of a crawling mob of worshipers. I believe that the things have come to take it back to the depths. And it may be to avenge the desecration of their shrine."

Robin shuddered. She turned to Carter, grasping at his great arm.

"Then they might," she whispered—"might break in the house? We must call the police!"

"We'll call them, of course," said Carter Dell. "But—"

His deep voice faded doubtfully, and Markham Dorn finished:

"But probably the police can't do much."

"Why not?"

"The things have strange intelligence, strange powers. Otherwise they could never have followed us so far from their abode in the sea."

"Call them, anyway," insisted Robin, nervously.

Carter Dell crossed the room, picked up the telephone on a side table. He frowned, and shook the instrument.

"Dead," he muttered. "Wires down in the storm, I suppose."

"Unless," began Markham Dorn, "they have cut—"

The clamoring doorbell cut him off.

The three hurried together to the door. Markham Dorn had picked up

Carter's axe. Robin nervously clutched the revolver. Carter Dell unlocked the door, pulled it open quickly.

A small man swayed into the room, behind a gust of rain. He shook himself like a terrier, and water flew off his black coat. He flung his head, and drops spun from his sodden hat. He stamped mud off his small feet.

Carter's flashlight showed quick, shrewd eyes darting at the apprehensive three, at the revolver, the axe. A thin mouth twisted oddly, about long, wolfish gold teeth.

"Hello," rasped a sharp, nasal voice. "This the Whipple estate?"

"It is," said Carter Dell. "Who are you?"

"I'm Wickard Kidd. I was to have been met at the station."

"Mr. Whipple himself drove to meet you," Carter told him.

"He didn't," clipped Wickard Kidd. "No car there. No taxi. Agent showed me a path. Half mile, he said. Horrible walk, along frightful cliffs. I came to look at some objects in Whipple's museum. But if he cares no more—"

"The objects are here," Carter Dell assured him. "And Mr. Whipple is very much interested in having you inspect them. We all are. It was Mr. Dorn, here, who brought them up out of the Atlantic."

"Dorn, eh?" Wickard Kidd nodded sharply. "You're Dell, the inventor of the diver, eh? What's going on, here? Why receive me in the dark—with weapons?"

"The lights aren't working. A frightful thing has happened here tonight," Carter Dell told him. "A man has been—murdered. We've all seen—and heard—a monstrous thing. And the museum has been robbed!"

"The makers of the image have followed us up from the sea," Markham Dorn put in soberly. "They have come for their idol, and perhaps for—revenge!"

"Humph!" snorted Wickard Kidd. "Somebody knows the thing's worth a fortune—if it's genuine. He's trying to steal it."

The doorbell whirred again. Carter

went to answer it. The others waited silently.

A HEAVY man surged into the flashlight's beam. He blew explosively through his nose, and began mopping the rain from his red face with a square of pale green silk. Mild blue eyes, under shaggy white brows, blinked at the light.

"Mr. Whipple!" Carter exclaimed. "You've had trouble on the road?"

"Trouble?" the other's deep voice boomed. "The damned car went off in the ditch. Mired over the fenders. I had to tramp back in this infernal storm. We'll have to phone to the station, because Kidd—"

He lurched forward, as his mild eyes suddenly noticed the small man in black.

"Dr. Kidd!" he boomed. "So you're already here? Sorry I failed you. Frightful weather. How did you make it out?"

"Walked!" snapped Wickard Kidd. "Wouldn't do it again for everything in your cursed museum."

Justin Whipple strode forward. He seized the curator's hand in a bluff attempt at cordiality.

"I'm sorry, Dr. Kidd," he apologized. "We shall try to make amends. But come! You must see our Atlantean finds, immediately. They are truly remarkable. The image alone is a milestone in archeology. . . . Mr. Dell, call Dr. Thurman. Send him to the museum."

"Thurman," Carter informed him, slowly, "is dead."

"What?" thundered Whipple. "Dead! How did it happen? Why didn't you tell me? Where's his body?"

His red face went a little pale. He mopped it again, nervously. Robin saw that his thick hands were trembling.

Silently, Carter stood aside, and played the flashlight over the table with its blood-soaked burden.

"They have come," solemnly whispered Markham Dorn. "The makers of the image! To carry it back to the shrine in the ocean. And to destroy us who desecrated it!"

"Nonsense!" snarled Wickard Kidd. "Some murderous thief, who realized the value of the image—"

Carter lifted the edge of the rug, to expose the shapeless scarlet mass within. Kidd's voice froze in his throat. He staggered back. His long mouth hung open, and the gold teeth gleamed wolfishly.

"Their tentacles are very powerful," Markham Dorn said pointedly.

"Dr. John!" muttered Whipple. "Merciful God, how did that happen?"

Carter replaced the rug over the body.

"We heard an intruder in the museum," he explained quietly. "Thurman and I followed it outside. We saw something grey and monstrous crawling down over the cliffs. I tried to follow it, but lost it in the storm. When I returned, Thurman was—as you see him now."

Whipple's big face was grey with fear.

"They've come—really?" he gasped, staring from Carter to Dorn. "But it can't be! This is all a ghastly hoax!"

He read his answer in their grim silence.

"Then we're all in horrible danger!" he croaked, suddenly ashen with terror. "They might have caught me, on the road! We must call the police."

"The line's down," Carter informed him.

"We must have help," he said, urgently. "Well, there's a separate phone in the gardener's cottage. It might be working. Will you try it, Mr. Dell? And have the gardener come back with you."

"No!" Robin cried, half hysterical. "No, Carter, don't go out there alone—please!"

Carter patted Robin's shoulder. With trembling fingers, she clung to him.

"Don't worry, dear, I'll be all right."

He took the revolver from her shaking hand; unlocking the door, he walked deliberately out into the storm.

"Hurry!" pleaded Robin, after him.

"Watch out."

"Mr. Dorn," said Whipple, "in my bedroom closet you'll find two automatics. Will you bring them down, and see to it that the windows on the second floor are all secure?"

Dorn went up the stairs, carrying the axe, and his flashlight.

WHIPPLE and Wickard Kidd stood apprehensively near Robin, until there was a quick knock on the door. She flung it open, and Carter Dell came in with his flashlight, drenched with rain.

"No use," he told Whipple. "The gardener wasn't in. His phone is dead, too."

And then Markham Dorn returned down the stairs.

"All secure," he reported briefly.

He presented two automatics to Whipple. The millionaire handed one of them to Kidd. He snapped back the slide on the other, to see that the chamber was loaded. His red face warmed with reassurance. He swung to Wickard Kidd.

"Well, Dr. Kidd, let me show the image, and the other relics of old Atlantis." His loud voice rang with forced enthusiasm. "The most remarkable find of this century. Of any century! It opens a new volume in archeology! And you'll find the objects genuine, too. Any fraud is impossible. I assure you. They're worth ten times the price we mentioned."

"A quarter of a million," Wickard Kidd said flatly, "is a large sum."

"The price is that," Whipple reminded him, "plus what I've invested financing the expedition, which amounts to an additional hundred thousand. The World Museum is a large institution; it can easily afford it."

The millionaire opened the door to the museum. He took Markham Dorn's flashlight, and advanced into the room. Then he recoiled suddenly, a hoarse, strangling cry bursting from his thick lips. He began stammering incoherently. The others crowded in after him.

Wind swirled into the room. Light-

ning flared through an open window. The walls writhed with grotesque shadows of the mounted octopus. Rigid monstrosities leered from their cases of glass.

"The image!" Whipple roared at last. "It's—gone! Also the sacrificial knife!"

Markham Dorn ran past the empty table, to the open window. "I'd repaired that catch. It's been forced again."

He picked up a twisted fragment of metal. "Just putty," he muttered, "against their tentacles."

"Tentacles!" snorted Wickard Kidd. "Behind these crimes is a man. His motive is a quarter of a million—"

His sharp nasal tones faded away from Robin Dell. For incredible horror was thundering in her ears. She had paused by the empty table, where the monstrous image had squatted. Her blue eyes were now staring at an object on the floor—a brown button. She stooped quickly, while Whipple's flashlight was on Wickard Kidd, picked it up, and dropped it into the neck of her dress. Her wide eyes went to Carter's coat. Yes, his buttons were brown. The upper one, upon which the strain might have come, if he had lifted the image in his arms, was gone. She gazed in mute agony at that tuft of brown thread.

Yes, Carter might have taken the image, when Whipple sent him to the gardener's cottage. And, too, Carter had been out in the darkness alone, when old John Thurman died. And armed with the axe.

An axe can make pulp of a man!

"MERCIFUL God!" she breathed. "It can't be Carter! I waited so long for him to come back from the sea. I love him so. It can't be! It—mustn't be!"

The thing she had found in the blood-stained grass beside the pulped body of Dr. John Thurman, the clue she had concealed, had been the familiar green-and-white fountain pen, stamped with the initials of Carter Dell!

CHAPTER III

Grey Tentacles Creep!

"THE police!" Justin Whipple's fog-horn voice was roaring. "Whether a man took it, or something else, we must have the police. That image is worth a fortune. I'll go get the police myself."

"The things!" warned Markham Dorn. "They are lurking—"

"I walked here, safely enough," Whipple said grimly. "I can walk out again. For a quarter of a million—"

He pulled down his hat, and stalked toward the front door.

"Should I go with you?" Carter Dell asked tersely.

"No!" thundered Whipple. "I'm going alone. And I'll kill anybody—or anything—that comes near me. I'm returning with the police. We'll find what killed poor Dr. John—and get back that image if it costs me every penny I own, and takes the rest of my life."

The door slammed behind him.

"Fool!" Markham Dorn was muttering. "He doesn't realize— If he had seen the crawling grey monsters, as we have!"

"Grey monsters!" barked the unbelieving nasal voice of Wickard Kidd. "What kind of nonsense is this. I still insist the motive of all this deviltry is the price of that image. His thin arm pointed startlingly at Carter Dell. "Tell me, how was the money to be shared?"

"Our contract stipulated," Carter informed him swiftly, "that Mr. Whipple was to receive seventy-five per cent of any profit from the expedition. He financed it, you know. Mark, here, was to have twenty per cent. He organized and led the expedition, and was really responsible for locating the site of Atlantis. And I was to receive five per cent, above the flat fee for the use of the robot diver."

"Only five per cent!" rapped Wickard Kidd.

His dark eyes flashed at Carter Dell. Robin's heart came up in her

throat. Five per cent was so little; he would suspect Carter of being dissatisfied. She shrank from his next words.

"Whipple's pretty shrewd, eh?" said Wickard Kidd. "I think *he* did it, while he pretended to be going to the station, after me."

"But," Robin whispered, "I myself saw a hideous grey crawling thing. It *couldn't* have been human. Nor were the sounds it made 'human.' And I heard it cry out, with a sound that wasn't human."

"The creatures are here," Markham Dorn's voice insisted, deep with dread. "We've all seen them."

"And anyway," Carter now put in sharply, "why should Whipple murder his secretary? And why should he steal the image? It was three-fourths his, already. And you were about to pay him—"

"Only one hundred thousand dollars," Kidd snapped, "which would just cover the cost of his expedition. He knew that—knew I would not pay a penny more. So he engineered this weird monster story to get publicity for his image, which will conveniently turn up somewhere." His dark eyes flamed. "And Whipple may not be alone in it!"

Carter and Dorn stared at him blankly.

"When enough newspapers have headlined the horror from Atlantis, with pictures of Dr. Thurman's crushed cadaver, some fool will offer him a million. But that fool won't be Wickard Kidd!"

He started toward the door, pausing to throw over his shoulder:

"Whipple said he was going for the police. What he's really doing is hiding the image, and covering his tracks. And perhaps planting clues to lead us off the trail. I'm going to see the local police myself. He's not getting away with this."

HE flung the door open and hurled himself out into the wind-whipped rain. Robin nervously locked the door behind him, and wearily leaned back against it. She glanced at the open, tanned face of her hus-

band. He was staring at the sodden bundle on the table, and haunting dread lurked in his steel-blue eyes.

Robin felt the sting of sudden tears. She ached with desire to put her arms around his big shoulders and smooth his tangled red hair, and laugh away his gnawing apprehensions.

"Merciful God!"

She started at Markham Dorn's voiceless outcry. A muffled whisper, it was hoarse and terrible with straining dread.

"Listen!"

Blood drummed in her ears. She poised, trembling, on the balls of her feet. The crash of thunder jarred her above the ocean's endless roar and the monstrous bellowing of the storm. And then—she heard another sound, that ripped her flesh with the jagged spikes of utter terror. It was a high, plaintive wailing, which might have been made by the dying scream of an infant on the torturer's hooks. And it was keen with a feral lust, with an obscene and nameless avidity.

Reeling with the faintness of devouring fear, Robin stumbled across the room. She clutched at Carter's big arm.

"The voice of the *thing!*" The whisper husked from her aching throat. "The thing—that followed me!"

Markham Dorn let out a slow exhalation of dread. Deliberately he picked up the axe.

"They are here again," came his strained, hoarse rasp. "They are after Whipple and Kidd. The fools—we shouldn't have let them go out. But I must help them now."

He swung steadily toward the door.

Carter's voice was low and strained when he offered:

"I'll go with you."

Markham Dorn turned to shake his head.

"No," he said. "Thanks," he said, "but your wife—"

He smiled oddly, disturbingly, at Robin, and was gone.

Carter took a step toward the door. Robin clung to his arm.

"Go along, if you want to," she

whispered. "But I'm going with you. I can't stay here alone, Carter. I'm too dreadfully frightened."

His big hand tenderly caressed her damp copper hair.

"Then I'll stay, dear," he said. "I can't expose you to any danger. To me you're the most precious thing on earth."

She snuggled against his side. Then her upturned eyes saw the tuft of broken brown threads on his coat. She shivered with sudden doubt. But then again, how *could* it have been Carter. He and Mark had been with her when they heard the thing wail outside.

Carter was speaking again.

"That idea of Dr. Kidd's," she heard Carter saying—"if there's really a man behind all this, it might be old Thurman himself."

"But how?" demanded Robin. "When he's—there!"

Shuddering, she pointed at the red-soaked rug.

"Somebody is," said Carter. "But the—it couldn't be identified. There are only the spectacles, the gun, a few bloody rags. The idea just struck me: the gardener is missing. This—thing—may be he. Thurman might have killed him, thus faking his own death, and escaped with the image!"

"But why—" gasped Robin—"why should he—"

"He's a trained archeologist, a gifted marine biologist. He knew the value of the image. And he was desperately poor, or he wouldn't have served as Whipple's secretary—he hated Whipple. And Thurman *has* been acting oddly for a couple of days. Keeping something from us. Yesterday he had some difficulty with Dorn. He seemed afraid of something. Had me send you that wire. He may have just been preparing us for this monster scare."

"But the things are here," Robin protested. "We've seen them, heard them." She shuddered.

"I still hope," Carter said slowly, "it may be—something else."

There was silence for a few seconds. Robin listened to the pounding of the angry ocean, the eerie howling

of the wind hovering in the night.

"It was brave of Markham," she said impulsively, "to go out there—alone."

"A great chap, Mark." Carter's voice was warm with ringing admiration. "A keen mind he has, finely trained. And he made himself, too. His father was a sort of tramp actor, he told me once. Punch and Judy show, in vaudeville. Mark had to work his own way through college—"

His voice froze. His lean face went suddenly white. His steel-blue eyes expanded with fear. His great arm, about Robin's shoulders, went hard as iron. It drew against her with an unconscious, crushing pressure. Then he turned from her abruptly, he snatched the revolver out of his coat pocket, and started toward the door.

"**W**AIT, Carter!" Robin half screamed. "Don't leave me! What is it?"

He paused in the blast of storm through the open door.

"I must go," he said swiftly. "And now. To save a man's life! Explain when I get back."

The door slammed behind him.

She locked the door and ran up the stairs to her own room. With trembling fingers she also locked the bedroom door. The candle had burned out. In the dark, she sat on the foot of the bed, gripping its iron railing. The cold strength of it was obscurely comforting. And then suddenly her white fingers tightened upon it with maniacal violence. Into her ears poured the acid of consuming madness. For, near and eager, she heard the crying of the thing!

Shrill above the crescendo of the storm, it shrieked with the agony of a babe roasting on the coals of torture, and throbbed with a monstrous lust—for her!

Motionless, powerless to move, her glazed eyes stared at the dark wall. Her straining ears now caught a scraping sound, the papery rustle of deliberately gliding tentacles. Outside the window they were creeping up!

She sat bolt upright. Her eyes were

still fixed on the wall. She couldn't turn. She dared not look or she'd go mad—stark, raving mad!

Through the window gushed a violet beam of lightning. On the wall, where her eyes still rested, it burned the window's outline. Blackly, there, it printed a horrendous shadow.

A wild scream cleft Robin's throat. The cruel fingers of utter fear, contracting, choked it off. Her tense body was beaded with icy perspiration. She tried to stand up and run. But the bitter nausea of terror drained her strength. She could only sit rigid on the bed, staring into the darkness that had swallowed the shadow.

For the shadow had taken the shape of an octopus. The writhing web of its tentacles filled the window, like monstrous serpents. Above the dark blob of its body loomed a horrible head. The head looked flat and strange—and yet human!

Robin endured through an eternity of black silence. Weakly she dragged to her feet. Where could she take refuge? If the thing entered, it could follow anywhere. But surely . . .

Thunder fell upon her in a stunning avalanche. With it she heard the shatter of glass. Wind howled through the room. Cold rain stung her cheek. A heavy body writhed noisily on the floor. Her vanity table crashed before it. A nauseating, reptilian putrescence struck her nostrils.

Robin fled to the door. Wildly she snatched at the key. It came out of the lock and clattered on the floor. Panting with terror, she dropped to search for it.

"Carter!" she shrieked. "For God's sake, Carter—"

The thing fell upon her.

Great, slimy tentacles wrapped her fear-stiffened body. Wet, cold, sucking-disks rasped against her ankles, her tender throat. The writhing weight of the strange invader crushed her flat against the floor.

Her hands struck vainly at its cold, horny mass. She tried to squirm free, but the crushing weight on her hips held her powerless. The slimy embrace caught one wrist. With the re-

maining hand she strove to keep foul, malodorous horror from her face.

Cold, leathery tentacles writhed over her helpless, pulsating flesh. The ruthless pressure increased upon her body. The cruel grip constricted on her arm. Another horny tentacle wrapped her throat. The suction disks tore her soft flesh.

Horror and pain dragged her toward black oblivion.

Dimly she knew that her clothing was being stripped away. She heard the thin shredding of cloth. She felt cold, monstrous flesh against her half-naked body.

Mercifully her consciousness was swept away, as the foul embrace tightened. Faintly she was aware of the thing's voice. An infant's wail of agony, keyed high with an unspeakable avidity.

CHAPTER IV

Foul is the Bed of Death!

DARKNESS was pressing heavily upon Robin's eyes as awareness stumbled back. Was she blind? She blinked her eyes, and their blinking made no change in the darkness. Had the thing destroyed her sight?

Returning fear cleared her senses. She took stock of her surroundings. The endless thunder of the sea was near. Its salt dankness stung her nostrils. The wet breath of it chilled her naked body.

She stirred, tried to rise. Cold, wet rocks scratched her flesh. The dull, aching numbness of her legs was shot through with red, sudden pain. She fell back, gasping with agony. She couldn't get up. A great flat stone lay crushingly across her thighs.

Sharpness of pain spurred her dull wits. The darkness, the nearness of the roaring sea, the dampness of the stones—now she understood them. She was not blind. The thing had carried her down into the labyrinth of sea-caverns that wound through the base of the cliffs.

She was helpless, far from aid, at their mercy.

A retching sickness overtook her, born of fear and pain. She lay still for a little time, trying to ignore the dull, throbbing ache of her tortured limbs, and the chill of the slimy stones against her flesh.

Such horror couldn't be. It was some nightmare.

But the nightmare didn't end. She moved again, despite the renewed agony from her cruelly burdened thighs. She felt the wet roughness of the great rock upon them, as she tried in vain to push it away.

Endless, dull agony throbbed from her thighs. A strange, prickling numbness crept up toward her body. Chill seeped into her, from the clammy rocks. Her skin was rough with goose-pimples.

Again and again she tried to move, to escape. Always the pitiless talons of pain forced her to drop back.

She began screaming Carter's name. Her voice echoed eerily in the cavern. The sea's roar drowned it. It was no use. Carter could never hear. She would only bring back the thing.

Her thin, hysterical laughter went out into the darkness. The dark walls gibbered it back, insanely. She tried to stop it. The thing would hear, and come. But she could no longer control her mad laughter.

Panting, shivering, laughing in the darkness, she waited for the foul, crushing embrace of monstrous death.

Suddenly light was in the cavern. Dim and vague, it yet showed the low, dripping roof, the narrow, water-hewn walls. It shifted, grew stronger.

Surprise and sudden wild hope stopped her laughter. She twisted painfully, trying to see the source of the light. Her eyes fell upon the squat, ivory horror of the stolen image.

Above her prone body was a stone ledge, like a pedestal. The grey image loomed upon it. The flat horror of its head leered at her from the twisting maze of thick tentacles.

Her body lay below it, an offering upon the altar of unspeakable retribution. The ocean-god was being repaid—

And now a footstep drew her eyes.

SHE shrieked at the dark, twisting horror of a gigantic octopus, upreared in the cavern, at her glimpse of a wet human head, peering above its hideous body. It was swaying toward her. Then it divided. The grey, octopus part of it flung to the floor and lay inert, sucker-bearing tentacles sprawling lifeless. And a man, all human, stood in the low cave, holding a flashlight.

Robin's mind recoiled from the unthinkable truth.

There had been no monster. The thing had been a man, masked in dead tentacles. The specimen of *octopus punctatus*, stolen from the museum, had been his cloak of fear.

Who, the question rocked her numbed brain, who was the man?

His face was in shadow, above the flashlight. She couldn't see. Breathlessly she stared. Her heart beat a march of doom in her ears, and the time of each beat was a life-sapping age.

Then the light shifted.

Horror's dark chasm swallowed her sanity.

For the man was Carter Dell! Good God, it couldn't be! Her Carter, the killer!

He stepped quickly toward her. Robin screamed. Reckless of agony, she desperately writhed to escape. It was useless. The huge rock ground more cruelly into the bare white flesh of her thighs. She collapsed, gasping.

Carter was above her, silent, his face in shadow. In the broad flood of his flashlight she saw an axe, and the thin bronze blade of the sacrificial knife. They were leaning against the ledge, at the foot of the monstrous image. Both were red with blood.

Then it was Carter's axe that made red mush of living men!

Her mind whirled to the black verge of insanity. Hot breath hissed through her fear-parched lips. Her eyes closed. Her panting was choked off. Palpitating, her soft flesh waited for the axe's brutal impact. Or would it be the white, blinding agony of the ancient bronze blade?

The slow agony of time swept on.

No blow fell. Carter didn't speak. She heard no sound, save his muted breath, and a muffled click.

Then a cautious, approaching step. A man was coming along the winding cave. The glow of his flashlight came past a jutting angle. She recognized the tall, hard bulk of Markham Dorn. "Mark!" she screamed impulsively.

Reacting to her warning, the flashlight darted upward. It seized the crouching form of Carter Dell. Yellow flame jetted. Confined thunder shattered the cavern.

Carter Dell rose half to his feet. He gasped in the bitter smoke of powder. He staggered. A bullet struck fire from his revolver, tore it from his fingers. And Markham Dorn leaped down upon him, striking at his head with the heavy flatness of his automatic.

Carter fell heavily on his face across the narrow passage. Markham Dorn crouched over him. Whipping off Carter's belt, he buckled it tight around his ankles. Then he set his shoulder to a massive, age-rounded stone, and rolled it grindingly upon Carter's legs, imprisoning him the same way as Robin was, except that the girl lay on her back, and he on his face.

CARTER stirred. He groaned thickly as the boulder settled upon his bound limbs.

"For God's sake!" he whispered, in dazed agony. "Mark—"

Why, Robin asked herself, shaken with new dread—why the stone? It was so needlessly cruel.

Her voice was wild and husky, when:

"Mark!" she begged. "Mark, please release me!"

The giant figure of Markham Dorn loomed over her. On his hard face was shadowed a mocking, ironic grin. He played the flashlight, like a slow, obscene caress, over her naked slowness. Then he chuckled. It was a satyr's laugh, slow, lecherous, diabolical.

"Mark!" she screamed. "Mark, you must—"

The light burned into her horror-

strained face—a white mask of dread.

"You've been misled," said the thick, deliberate voice of Markham Dorn. "By a pen and a button, by a clever plan and a bit of good acting."

The lascivious satyr-chuckle came again. The obscene eye of the flashlight went back to her exposed, blood-stained body.

"What," she gasped fearfully—"what are you going to do to us?"

For answer Markham Dorn set his foot on her chest. The brutal pressure drove the breath from her lungs in a scream of pain. Her body was pressed cruelly against the jagged rocks beneath. A track was left on the satin of her flesh—a bruise and a stain of foul redness.

"Robin"—she was aghast at the sudden, terrible, sadistic passion that hissed through Markham Dorn's set teeth—"I've wanted you since the day Carter introduced us. Now you're—mine!" His voice was gasping with fearful lust. "More completely mine than you were ever his—for I shall take every shred of your body—with the knife!"

Through a red fog of despair and pain, Robin heard Carter's quick struggle. She heard the snapping of his straining muscles, his involuntary, suppressed outcry of pain.

The flashlight shifted to him. She saw his great body arched upward, big muscles bulging, as he fought to move the rock. He fell back, defeated, and lay prone, gasping. Every breath was a moan of agony.

"Patience, Carter—my dear friend." The terrible mockery of Dorn's voice was a little calmer, sardonic. "Your turn will come. But your lovely bride demands my first attention."

"Mark!" Carter panted. "Why have you done this? You're mad! Stop, Mark—think!"

"Why do anything?" Markham Dorn's voice was callously flat, unmoved. "Of course—for money. I had been a wet nurse of a college instructor too long. I wanted to—live! And I wanted Robin!"

Savagely he ground the hard, red-spangled toe of his shoe into the yielding softness of Robin's side.

Then he placed the flashlight upon the stone ledge, so that it burned down upon Robin's pulsating nakedness, picked up the bronze knife, and drew its keen point lightly across her bosom. She shuddered voicelessly from its cold sting.

"Money?" rapped Carter, in a queer, choking voice. "How does this make you money?"

Markham Dorn suppressed his panting eagerness.

"Delay me as much as you please," he said, ironically suave. "You merely prolong my amusement. Money. Yes," he confessed deliberately, "money was our object, from the first. Thurman was my partner. He was an expert in archeology and marine biology. And he also needed money—he'd taken a sleigh ride on Wall Street. I planned the thing. Dr. Thurman made the image and the knife, and sold Whipple the idea. He made the image out of ivory so that it couldn't be traced as not coming from the sea. Then you came along with your robot diver. Your stupid honesty was just what we needed to fool Whipple and the reporters. One night I hung the image off the Avalon, on a piano wire. Next morning I fished it up—and there we were.

"Well, we fooled them—all but Wickard Kidd. He was doubtful. He never came near offering the sum we wanted. He kept putting us off. And the other big museums were full of a lot of old fogies that wouldn't listen at all. Kidd was our only chance.

"Yesterday Thurman lost his nerve. He wanted to close out, at Kidd's own price. Whipple would have got the lion's share of it, for expenses. Just chicken feed left. Wouldn't have paid my debts.

"I thought it over, and hit on this little elaboration of the original hoax. If it went over, I reasoned, the image would belong entirely to me. And the publicity, the newspaper stories of invaders from the sea, will make it worth a quarter of a million, easy. Not to mention my signed articles on Atlantis, and lecture tours, and the movies.

"I've changed my plans, however.

I've decided for you to take the rap, Carter. I left clues pointing to you. You did it because you were discontented with your five per cent. I caught you here. We had a fight and—you fell to the rocks below. Of course you'll be dressed in the octopus suit when your body will be dragged up. Since I've already killed Thurman and Whipple, the image will still be all mine, of course. By the way, I caught you here just after you'd murdered and mutilated your wife.

"And now, Carter, if you will excuse me, a delightful duty demands my attention."

Markham Dorn dropped on his big knees beside Robin. He tried the point of the long bronze blade against her breast, then began whetting it upon a flat fragment of sandstone.

His grim face was leering over her, now a mask of hideous, perverted passion. The brightness of sadistic insanity glittered in his eyes. His thick nostrils dilated to his hot, panting breath.

ROBIN heard Carter struggling again. Heard his muted gasps of pain, the rending of his clothing, the contortions of his giant body.

But Carter alone, she knew, could never move the stone that pinned him down. All hope fled from her. She was too chilled, too sick with despair, to make any further effort.

She lay motionless, upon her cold stone couch, surrendering to the penetrating cold, to the numbing agony that mounted leadenly from the pitiless weight on her thighs. She could hear the swift, bestial breathing of Markham Dorn, his absorbed grunts and mouthings of sadistic satisfaction.

"Now!" Dorn panted over her. "Now I'll do what—"

Robin shrieked, shrinking from the burning blade.

She had heard the fall of a pebble, a rattle on the cave's hard sand. Carter probably putting up a last, desperate struggle. But Markham Dorn paid no attention to the contortions

(Concluded on page 118)

Kidneys Cause Much Trouble Says Doctor

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Dr. W. R. George

-Dr. Walter R. George, for many years Health Director of Indianapolis, says: "Insufficient kidney exertion are the cause of much needless suffering with Aching Back, Frequent Night Rising, Itching, Spasms, Burning, Painful Joints, Rheumatic Pains, Headaches, and a generally run-down body. I am of the opinion that the prescription Cystex corrects such functional conditions. It aids in flushing poisons from the urinary tract, and in fusing the blood of retained toxins. Cystex deserves the indorsement of all doctors." If you suffer from kidney and bladder dysfunction,

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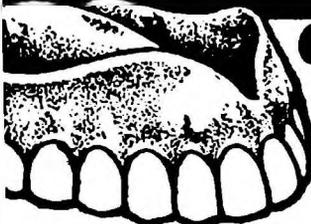
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HOOKS OF DEATH

(Concluded from Page 99)

the grinding grip of his legs. Instead, they clamped tighter in one enormous contraction that squeezed the last vestige of consciousness from Carter's body.

Rose Griffin, spellbound while she watched the terrible tableau, suddenly cried:

"Let go, Ken! Your face is black! You'll die—"

He was nearly out. Releasing the scissors hold, he tried to stand, but his knees collapsed. With bound arms pressed against the post at his back he managed to ease the weight upon his throat, and to suck in a whistling breath. Blear-eyed, he watched the still form at his feet, wondering if Carter would recover, if he could find strength to kick him down should the man revive.

"We'll die in this hole," Rose sobbed hopelessly. "We'll never be found—"

A gruff voice shouted from the top of the stairs:

"What's going on down there? What's all the yelling about?"

Deeds uttered a strangled yelp of joy.

"Bill Slade!" His drooping body straightened as the man burst through the lower door. "Thank heaven you came—but how did you find us?"

A lanky, wind-browned deputy stood gaping in blank amazement.

"Holy cow! Now, if this ain't something!" He removed the strap from Deeds' throat and untied his wrists. "Went hunting for you—saw lights blazing back here—came to look. To think that it was Carter! And he got the girl—" Slade rubbed his eyes disbelievingly. "Now, ain't this a sight?"

"You haven't seen half of it!"

Deeds staggered over to unfasten the motionless form on the operating table. With deliverance at hand, Rose had fainted.

"Put the cuffs on that guy," said Deeds. Help me get her out of here. We'll phone for Doc Fletcher and a

car. Then I'll show you the other victims of Carter's hellish ambition, hanging like frozen meat on the hooks of death."

GHOULS OF THE GREEN WEB

(Concluded from Page 55)

"I know," said Joan quietly. "It came from another world. Dr. Bell told me something about it. He said that he had found a few tiny spores of life inside a meteor that had dropped to earth near Prairie City. He said he was going experiment with those spores to see if he could find a way to make them reproduce. Evidently, the world from which the meteor came abounded in the natural violet light—and," she added with a shudder, "some sort of animal life to act as the parasite's host."

Slowly, they climbed the stairs together. Near the top, they found Dr. Bell and Emanuel—hideous, strangled corpses, victims of the hungry green web they had fostered.

Jerry led Joan up through the house to the doctor's study. He pushed back heavy drapes. Pure, brilliant sunlight streamed through the great windows—sunlight void of the ghastly purple rays that fostered the web of death.

Like rapid, withering plant life, the tendrils of the fungus that clung to their flesh and clothing dried and became dust. Outside, Prairie City was a sweltering Sahara. It had rained in the early morning—just enough to convert dust to brown mud which was rapidly baking in the sun.

Ugly, sterile land; yet Joan and Jerry saw none of the ugliness. It was the good, good earth.

Gently, he drew her to him. With infinite tenderness, he kissed her.

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HORROR-SCOPES

By CHAKRA

A Department of Mystic Thrills
(See Page 120)

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GREY ARMS OF DEATH

(Concluded from Page 115)

of Carter's great body. He held Rob-in by the throat now, with his left hand, the bronzed knife in his right poised over her.

And then she saw Carter's bleeding body behind her. Saw the axe handle he held gripped in both hands crash down on Dorn's head. The knife in the madman's hand clanged to the rocks. His body crumpled.

Carter's great muscles were cracking as he lifted the stone from her thighs. Tenderly he picked her up and lowered her again on the clean white sand further within the cave. Covering her with a coat, he began rubbing away the frozen numbness of her limbs.

She submitted gratefully. Incredible thanksgiving sang in her. For a time she was too weary to speak. Then curiosity prompted her to ask:

"Carter, how did you get free?"

Wearily he wiped the sweat off his bruised, swelling forehead. Then he showed her a string, with a pebble knotted at its end.

"Tore strips off my shirt to make it," he said. "Mark was too absorbed in his torture to notice me. The axe was leaning on the rock, there. I caught it with the string, dragged it to me. With the handle I managed to lever the rock off my legs. And then—I guess I hit him pretty hard. He's dead."

She shuddered. "Forgive me!

"And why were you carrying that octopus thing when you walked in here?"

"Oh, Mark's octopus suit, you mean? Why, I had just picked it up where he left it, further back in the

cave. Our missing specimen. I was studying the thing. It's a diabolical contraption. The tentacles are really flexible, hollow, springlike affairs that can be operated from inside the suit. The tips of them are barbed with sharp steel prongs which can easily rip the flesh. And the suction which gripped the flesh was caused by a small but powerful vacuum cylinder he had concealed within the suit."

"But," she said incredulously, "he was with us in the house when we heard that terrible crying of the thing—outside."

"That had me fooled, at first," Carter confessed. "Until I remembered his father's Punch and Judy act. Mark was a ventriloquist. He made those noises, apparently coming from outside, when he was standing beside us! He'd probably killed Thurman just before making his appearance as the 'thing' on the cliffs there, when you first saw it. And it wasn't Thurman whom we heard screaming near the house—it was Mark, putting on another ventriloquism act."

"But Whipple," she went on—"how was he killed? Wasn't he armed? He could have shot Mark."

Carter smiled grimly.

"Mark was clever, darling," he said. "Remember, he supplied Whipple with the automatic? I'll bet it was loaded with blanks. Let's get out into the daylight."

He lifted her again. Sighing with grateful relief, she slipped her arms about his neck.

"Into the daylight," she echoed happily.

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BLOOD always has been the symbol of life. The ancients believed that in drinking the blood of another person, you took on the life force of that person and acquired his knowledge. But, as mentioned last month—blood performs a different function than brain or body.

At one time it was the common belief that a taste of a suspected criminal's blood would reveal whether or not that man was guilty of a crime.

The official blood testers, like witch doctors, after drinking the blood would say "Guilty" or "Not Guilty." But they were only guessing. They might have thought they were right—but they were no more so than a person looking at a criminal and drawing a conclusion intuitively.

Will Not Impart Mentality

Blood will sustain life of course, but only as a food value. It will not impart mentality of the victim.

A test of students' reactions, was once made by a college professor. With a quantity of human blood he made each student taste the blood and record the reactions.

No two were alike. The result was entirely in keeping with each student's own inhibitions which the professor later proved by psychology test.

Blood has been used supposedly to bring men close together in fellowship, ideals, or other means of secret endeavor. In

China, Haiti, and various primitive countries, men who belong to the same cults, would drink each other's blood.

Even in this country there have been organizations where men desiring brotherhood of purpose would cut each other's palm of the hand and then hold hands until the blood of each had mingled and clotted. But in doing this—it was not the blood that made them feel a certain sense of brotherhood, but rather the state of mind stimulated by the blood ritual.

A Powerful Symbol

It is difficult for a primitive mind to realize that the human body of itself is nothing more than a material substance which follows certain chemical laws of activity and cannot of itself enter into the realm of emotions.

Without brain control, the body merely vibrates according to the laws of physical life—it cannot think. Only by joining together the thinking faculties, can men really become true "Blood Brothers."

However, ritual always has played a big part in the communion of ideals and stimulating emotions. And that is why blood from the very beginning of time has been such a powerful symbol.

Vampires

Any one who has read stories about vampires or has studied the history of
(Continued on Page 122)

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(Continued from Page 120)

blood drinking will realize that this peculiar activity has been associated with occultism. The so-called vampire is supposedly a dead person who can continue to live, provided he can secure enough human blood to give energy to his zombie-like body.

But in a case of vampires, the rays of the sun are supposed to destroy all power of the vampire, and his blood drinking must be done at night. So far, science has not been able to secure a vampire for experimental purposes.

The nearest we have come to it is the vampire bat, which is nothing more or less than an animal that lives on blood very much like the common mosquito. But science does admit that there have been and still exist, perverted human beings who have the mad urge to drink blood.

Strange tales are whispered of fiends who eagerly drink human blood knowingly, hoping to acquire superhuman strength. It is auto-suggestion rather than any chemical effect produced by the blood itself that excites them.

Love Potions

Throughout the world and especially in Haiti, love potions play a big part in the lives of people. Numerous cases have been reported where co-called witch doctors have prepared "black medicine" and strange potions of various kinds which have stimulated love in the heart of the one drinking the potion, toward the person giving it.

Wherever science has been able to learn the ingredients of such concoctions—blood, generally human blood, has been a part of the recipe.

Until proved otherwise, it cannot be taken for granted that blood can act as a drug. This theory still belongs in pseudo-science. But every day, science is advancing new theories along the lines of blood and gland activity in the human body. It is not an idle dream that the ordinary span of life can be doubled or tripled, and that soon the average man of sixty-five will be able to revive the energy and strength of his youth. Blood no doubt, will play a big part in this revolution of life.

Can Blood Kill?

There have been cases recorded where human blood supposedly was energized by emotion. While affidavits can be supplied

by witnesses, still such instances belong outside the realm of scientific fact. Nevertheless, they are interesting.

One case is of two men fighting in a hall with knives.

Hatred was in the heart of both of them; and as they cut each other to pieces, blood drained from their many wounds and flowed along the floor. A rat, attracted by the smell of blood, came upon the scene and started to drink this blood. The rat dropped dead. Apparently, its heart could not stand the stimulation that had been generated by the hatred of the fighting men.

Blood Slaves

Blood seems to control some people more than others. This is because the blood angle of that person's make-up is larger than the angles of either Body or Brain. It is believed that when the brain is unconscious and the body is passive, there is no likelihood of blood being affected one way or the other by emotion. Still, a person while asleep can experience a dream that will cause the heart to pound and even the flesh to show marks. And upon awakening, the person will be perspiring and even imagine he feels the pain in keeping with his dream.

In other words, a person believing he was shot in the leg will awaken and feel the imaginary bullet wound.

If you have had such dreams you can realize that your blood angle is a little above the normal; and you should not eat foods, drink beverages, or engage in activities that cause more than average stimulation to the blood. It is not wise to live in hot countries. Get plenty of exercise of the body and read good stories.

More Joy in Life

You will get more of a kick out of thrilling stories than the average person because your pulse responds more quickly. As a rule the person with a large blood angle gets a little more joy out of life. He enthuses more easily. He enters into activities of various kinds with more vitality and spirit.

The only danger to so-called "Blood Slaves" is that they must be careful of their temper and not hate people. They naturally make great lovers. You can usually distinguish a person with a larger blood angle not only by his energy but by the way he flushes in excitement; and his impulsive nature.

These are the people, however, who
(Continued on Page 124)

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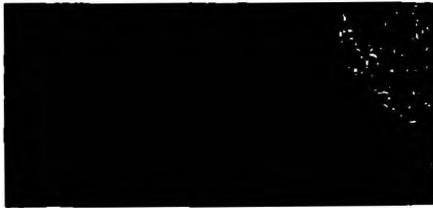
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(Continued from Page 123)

should count ten before jumping into anything. The "Blood Slave" who knows how to control his impulses and don't let them run away with him, can be a real master of men, for he has the personality of leadership that enthralls others and makes them want to follow him once he gives the command.

After all the joy of life is poise and moderation. A little stimulation now and then will bring greater happiness, than stimulation all the time.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

(Readers are invited to send their Thrill and Chill questions to this department for discussion. Confidences will be respected. Unusual thrill and chill experiences are welcomed.)

Did He See a Ghost?

To HORROR-SCOPES:

Last winter I was driving my automobile on a country road. The road wound around a mountain side and across several brooks. There was a light snow on the ground but I was driving fairly fast. Suddenly I came to a curve and was about to drive around it, when I saw an old lady standing at the side of the road. As I was about to pass her, she collapsed.

I immediately stopped my car and ran back to help her, but she had disappeared. There was no mark in the snow to indicate that she had been standing there at all. Mystified, I returned to my car.

Then looking ahead I noticed that the bridge a few feet beyond had caved in—and had I continued driving in the first place, I would not have been able to stop the car before I had crashed. How can you explain this? Did I see a ghost?

J. P. W.

To J. P. W.:

According to the spiritualists you did see a ghost—but according to scientists you did not. A spiritualist would say that the old woman was your guardian angel who appeared to warn you of the danger. But according to metaphysics you did not see the old woman with your eyes.

It was a vision caused by your subconscious which like a dream used this picture to make you stop your car in time to save your life. All of us can use our subconscious mind to advantage if we are sensitive enough to it.

(Continued on Page 126)

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(Continued from Page 124)

The subconscious is that part of our metaphysical makeup which can see beyond the ordinary range of the brain. Some people call it the soul. When our subconscious mind endeavors to register hunches in our brain, it takes various forms. Some people get this intuitive knowledge through dreams at night. Others, usually women, can sense a certain form of premonition. In other words they just feel it.

The human body is so constructed that it responds automatically in times of danger. People will blink their eyes when something is thrown at them even when they don't see it coming. And the subconscious automatically sends out a warning when coming events cast their shadows before them. The more pronounced your subconscious, the more danger you can avoid.

Every day, hundreds of lives are saved through this subconscious—but we don't realize it. You may be driving along a road and something will attract your attention so that you slow down. You never realize that had you not slowed down you would have had an accident when a certain car passed you a little further ahead.

If we only had second sight to see what would have happened had we done a certain thing we had planned to do or wanted to do, we would realize how lucky we are. While, of course, accidents will continue to happen—still somewhere along the line previous to an accident, had we followed a certain little hunch we had, the actual consequences could have been avoided. It pays to try to develop your subconscious and try to understand it. Those who are fortunate enough to have a natural development of it are very lucky indeed.

It is one of nature's gifts to man.

—CHAKRA.

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Can Killing Be Contagious?

To HORROR-SCOPES:

My brother-in-law for many years worked in a slaughter house. He killed thousands of animals. Recently he retired on a pension but my sister reports she is afraid of him for he is always talking about wanting to kill things, even people.

The other night he picked up a knife and rushed at her during an argument, but he seemed to come back to his senses just in time. Do you think the lust to kill has become so strong in him that he will have to continue to shed blood in order to keep his reason?

A. L. T.

To A. L. T.:

This is a serious problem. The shedding of blood does grow on some men. By repressing this habit that has been formed in your brother-in-law's impulses through years of slaughter—it may mean that it will suddenly break loose in a most ferocious manner. Consult a psychologist or a doctor at once. Unless your brother is a very strong minded man, he is not safe even to himself. Better to have him visit the slaughter house once a week, after explaining the details secretly to his former employer.

There is something about the sight of blood which dims the usual vision of intelligence and causes men to go mentally blind for a moment. These mental cata-racts have caused many crimes although the person who committed the crimes was not a willful criminal.

Such being the case—you should face your problem with intelligence and take steps to protect your loved ones.

—CHAKRA.

Are Bat Wings Lucky?

To HORROR-SCOPES:

Many people have told me that if I carry bat wings in my pocket I will be protected against evil forces. Is there anything in this?
C. C. L.

To C. C. L.:

This idea of bat wing protection is quite a common one, especially in Haiti. It is based on the old story that when God threw Lucifer out of heaven—God gave him bat wings to enable him to fly back in time to the angelic regions when Lucifer had learned his lesson.

In other words, bat wings are a symbol of aid in flying above evil environment. Like all lucky charms, a lot depends upon your belief in them. If your subconscious hunch seems to tell you that you will be safer by carrying a pair of bat wings in your vest pocket—by all means do so.

Confidence is one of the greatest aids in achieving desired results.

—CHAKRA.

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G-MEN**

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10c at All Stands

Every Month

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MY WAIST 8 INCHES
WITH THE WEIL BELT"**

... writes George Bailey



<p>"I suddenly realized that I had become a fat man". The boys kidded me about my big "paunch".</p>	<p>At parties I learned that I had become a "well known" (Nobody wanted to dance with me.</p>	<p>In a bathing suit... I was ignored. The day I heard some children laugh at me I decided to get a Weil Belt.</p>
<p>What a change! I looked 3 inches slimmer at once and soon I had actually lost an EIGHT INCHES off my waist... and 20 pounds off my weight!</p>	<p>I wanted to support the abdominal walls and keep the digestive organs in place... and best of all, I felt comfortable for personal</p>	<p>I have a new feeling of energy and pep... work better, eat better, play better... I didn't realize how much I was missing!</p>

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 You will be completely comfortable and entirely unaware that its gentle pressure is working constantly while you walk, work or rest... its massage-like action persistently eliminating fat with every move you make!

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 The Weil Banding Belt will make you appear many inches slimmer at once, and in 10 short days your waistline will actually be 3 inches smaller... 3 inches of fat gone... or it won't cost you one cent!

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4-16-18	2.40 00 25	6-00-20	3.48 11 25	9-00-16	4.28 11 25
4-16-20	2.40 00 25	6-00-21	3.65 11 25	9-00-18	4.28 11 25
4-80-18	2.85 00 25	6-60-20	3.75 11 25	9-00-20	4.28 11 25
4-80-22	2.85 00 25			9-00-22	4.28 11 25
4-82-17	2.90 11 18			9-00-24	4.28 11 25
4-82-18	2.90 11 18			9-00-26	4.28 11 25
4-82-19	2.90 11 18			9-00-28	4.28 11 25
4-82-20	2.90 11 18			9-00-30	4.28 11 25
4-82-21	2.90 11 18			9-00-32	4.28 11 25
4-80-17	3.25 11 18			9-00-34	4.28 11 25
4-80-18	3.25 11 18			9-00-36	4.28 11 25
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BLOOD IN THE NIGHT

(Concluded from Page 71)

tried to poison your broth, when, of course, she had no possible motive for murder? You took too much care to see that every clue pointed away from you—almost enough to convict you without anything else. Even that poor, mad Helen . . ."

It was as though mention of that name had called up an apparition. Wild-eyed, her hair tangled, she stood at the kitchen door with old Martin Mogridge's Winchester .40-.60 madly flourished in her hands.

She sighted the weapon toward the little group, laughing shrilly. Vallant leaped toward her. The barn shook to the heavy rifle's explosion. Harlan Pratt screamed. When Vallant jerked about, he saw Pratt swaying drunkenly, saw him pitch to the floor.

"Sleep!" the crazy girl yelled. "Sleep! Relax—dream!"

Still screaming, she flung down the rifle and ran into the night, her voice receding in the distance, an eerie cry on the rising wind.

Joel Breed's voice trembled as with palsy.

"He was always a-teasin' her," he said. "Heerd him once tellin' her to go t' sleep—looks mighty like a judgment o' God A'mighty."

"And of man, at the end," Vallant soberly amended. "Coming, Veronica?"

He took the girl's hand. Together they walked out into the wind-swept night.

NEXT MONTH

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By G. T. FLEMING-ROBERTS

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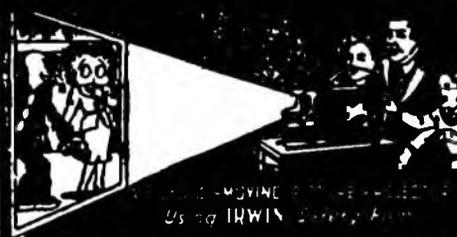
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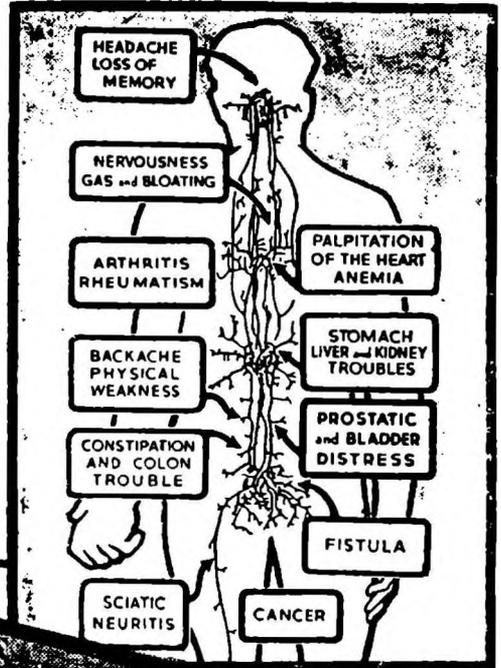
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 Cincinnati, Ohio

RING SIZE

Enclosed is photo. Please rush me individually made Portrait Ring and starting equipment. Will pay postman \$1.00 plus few cents postage. It is understood that if I am not entirely satisfied I can return ring within 7 days and you will refund my money in full.
 () Send full details only.

Name

Address

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

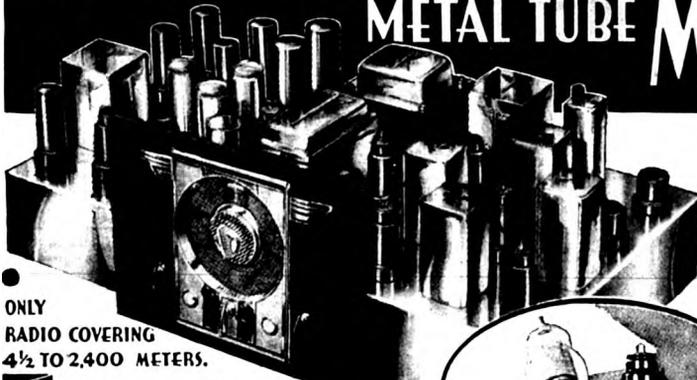
YOUR RING SIZE: Wrap strip of paper around second joint of finger. With no weight. Measure strip down from top on this chart. Number 28 seen in your photo.

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Now, Push Button Silent Tuning is offered for first time! Simply pushing Silencer Button hushes set between stations . . . suppresses noises. Pressing Station Finder Button automatically indicates proper dial position for bringing in extremely weak stations.

Acousti-Tone V-Spread Design
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Establishes new radio style overnight! The V-Front Dispersing Vanes were developed by Midwest engineers as a result of a study of directional effect of the Midwest Full Scope High Fidelity Speaker. These Vanes appear the beautiful lacework of the "highs" throughout the entire room in a scientific manner . . . directing the High Fidelity waves uniformly to the ear. Send for new FREE 40-page catalog. It pictures the complete line of beautiful 1936 Acousti-Tone V-Spread consoles . . . and chassis . . . in four colors.

FULL SCOPE HIGH FIDELITY

Brilliant

Concert Tone

Now, get complete range of audible frequencies from 30 to 16,000 cycles, being transmitted by four new High Fidelity Broadcasting stations—WIXBS, W9XBY, W2XR and W6KAL. Glorious new Acousti-tone is achieved assuring life-like, crystal-clear "concert" realism.

V-FRONT

EVERYWHERE, radio enthusiasts are praising this amazingly beautiful, bigger, better, more powerful, super selective, 18-tube 6-tuning range radio. They say it is a tremendous improvement over Midwest's 16-tube set, so popular last season. It is sold direct to you from Midwest Laboratories at a positive saving of 30% to 50%. (This statement has been verified by a Certified Public Accountant who conducted an impartial survey among representative Ohio, Kentucky and Indiana radio retailers.) Before you buy any radio, write for FREE 40-page 1936 catalog. Never before so much radio for so little money. Why pay more? You are triple-protected with: One Year Guarantee, Foreign Reception Guarantee and Money-Back Guarantee! This super Midwest will out-perform \$200 to \$300 sets on a point-for-point comparison. That is why nationally known orchestra leaders like Fred Waring, George Olsen, Jack Denney, Ted Fio Rino, and others use Midwest sets to study types of harmony and rhythmic beats followed by leading American and Foreign orchestras.

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Scores of marvelous features, many exclusive, explain Midwest super performance and thrilling world-wide all-wave reception . . . enable Midwest to bring in weak distant foreign stations, with full loud speaker volume, on channels adjacent to locals. Only Midwest offers so many features . . . only Midwest tunes as low as 4½ meters . . . only Midwest gives the sensational new Push-Button Tuning feature, etc. See pages 12 to 21 in FREE catalog for description of the 80 features. Read about advantages of 6 Tuning ranges . . . offered for first time: E, A, L, M, H and U. They make this Super De Luxe 18-tube set the equivalent of six different radios . . . offer tuning ranges not obtainable in other radios at any price!

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