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A Novelette of Evil Horror

By JOHN H. KNOX

A THRILLING
PUBLICATION

TWISTING DEATH

A Complete Novel of
Terror's Labyrinth
By WILLIAM
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Vol. IX, No. 1

January, 1938

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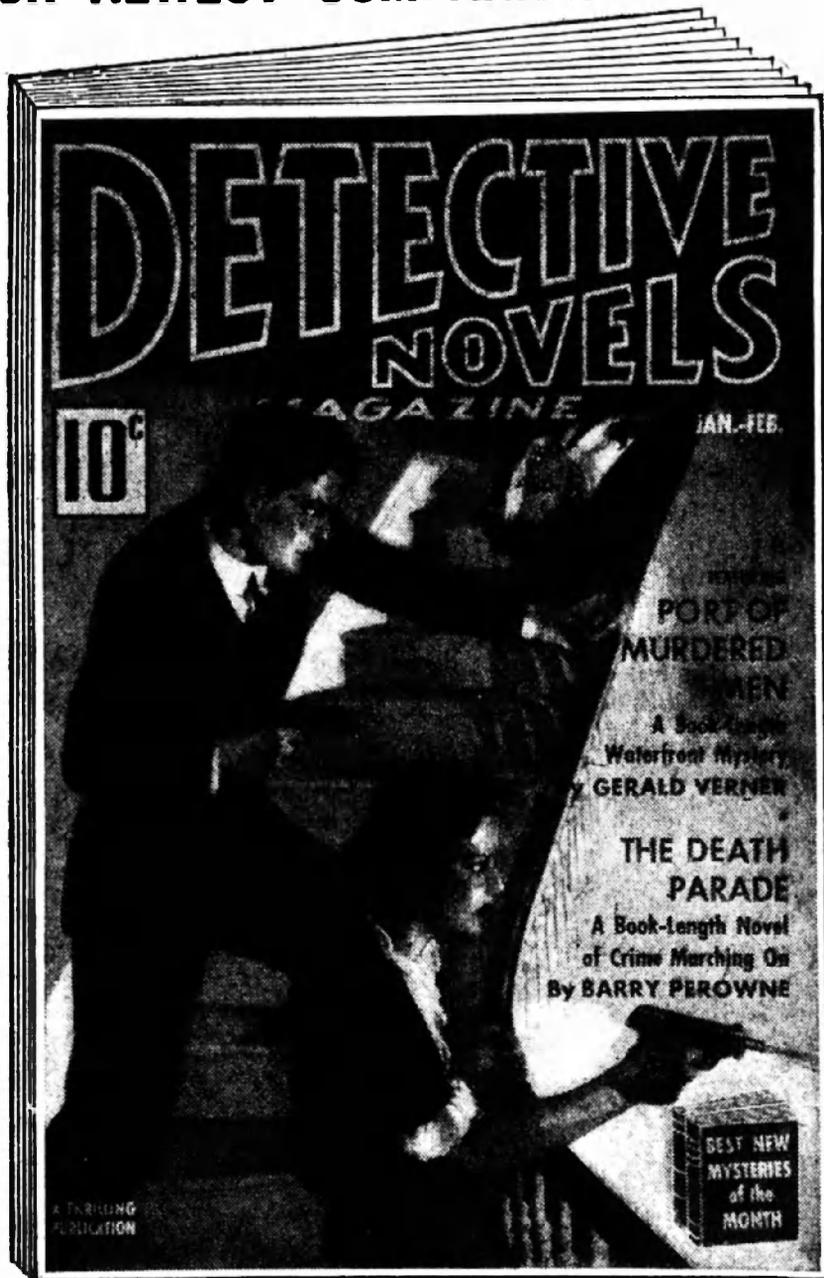
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BARKING DOGS

BETWEEN the East African coast and Madagascar there is a lonely island called Juan de Nova. It is supposed to be an island of dogs, for nothing but dogs live upon it. Sailors for years have feared to approach it. Some have tried, but always they are chased by wild dogs, which have the appearance of domestic dogs, but do not bark.

Seamen say that in the days of the East Indiamen, Portuguese barques and pirates of all nations, men would call at Juan de Nova for fresh water, fruit and turtles. Dogs of every breed—some from Europe, others from China—would escape on shore and were left behind.

But that is doubted by Marcel du Quin, a sailor from a French schooner who recently was ordered by his captain to approach the island and get fresh water. Quin and two others walked up the shore when suddenly a pack of dogs rushed at them. The two assistants fled and jumped in the boat. They looked around for Quin. Believing he had been devoured, they started to sail back to the ship, when they heard Quin call. They returned for him. He had a strange look on his face.

Quin had once owned a Great Dane, a monster of a dog. He had been very good to the dog and at death had buried the beast at the side of the sea near his home in Marseilles. The dog was called "Rod."

Here is what Quin told his captain: "As the dogs rushed me I saw that I was surrounded. I looked around, but my comrades

had gone. Then I glanced at the hill and, terror-stricken, I thought I recognized my dead dog, Rod. In fright I called out 'Rod, help me.' Instantly, this big dog descended on the pack and tore into the leaders. It was horrible. The other dogs turned and fled.

"I ran over to take Rod in my arms, but he was gone. Now I know why these dogs of Juan de Nova do not bark. They are ghost dogs."

(More HORROR-SCOPES on page 10)

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HORROR-SCOPES

(Continued from page 8)

EYES OF LIFE

CHARLES (CANNIBAL) MILLER, foremost authority on cannibals, explorer, and cousin of Hendrick Wilhelm VanLoon, dropped into the office of THRILLING MYSTERY a few days ago.

He had just arrived from Dutch New Guinea, having taken a motion picture at that location. He had a good story for HORROR-SCOPES, and although a bit longer than usual, it belongs in the Horror-Scope case-book. Here it is in Mr. Miller's own words:

I have just returned from Java. My previous visit was ten years ago. I had well remembered my Dutch friend Karel Van deBerg. He had married a native girl whose mother was Dutch and whose father was Javanese, of noble birth.

Ten years ago, Van deBerg's father-in-law had died. I remembered the expression in the old man's eyes as he had passed away. I will never forget those eyes. They spoke a language I could understand. It carried a feeling of peace and hope.

A few weeks later, Karel Van deBerg was stricken. The doctor attached to the Dutch military post attended him. But Karel's wife didn't trust doctors. This was typical of all Javanese. She had more confidence in the native holy man, Hadji Mohammed.

It was a foggy morning as I sat in Karel's home. The servant, Admo, was handing me a drink. I was waiting until the doctor came out of Karel's bedroom, so I could see my friend. I believed he would get well.

Suddenly I heard Madame Van deBerg scream. Then she opened the door and called to her servant: "Lakas Admo, panggil Hadji Mohammed." (Quick Admo, call Hadji Mohammed.)

I was in that room in a moment. I knew what had happened. The doctor had pulled a sheet over my friend on the bed.

"Is he dead, doctor?" I gasped.

"Yes—I have made every test. I have seen several cases of suspended animation caused by this fever—but this is death. I will stake my reputation on it. Here in Java we must be sure, because burial is made before sundown."

The doctor was not a young man. He had received his honored appointment in Java due to his splendid record in Holland. The Dutch Government respected him and had decorated him several times. I would never question his word as one of the most authoritative in the medical profession.

Someone entered the room. I turned. I heard Admo speak to his mistress: "Hadji Mohammed ada sini, Nonja" (Hadji Mohammed is here, Madame).

Then Madame Van deBerg rushed to the native minister and with tears streaming

down her beautiful face, spoke in her native tongue: "Hadji Mohammed, the white doctor says my master is dead. May Allah give you strength to bring him back to me."

The Hadji bowed and stepped over to the bed, slowly. He removed the sheet and gazed at the body. Still standing he began a mumbled prayer.

I looked at Madame Van deBerg. Her hands were clenched. Her eyes staring. Then she closed them and murmured prayers of her dead father's faith.

The doctor and I stood silent. There was no sound save the prayers of the Hadji and the wife.

Solemn minutes passed. Then I felt the doctor grab my wrist. I looked at Karel Van deBerg. His eyes were opening. Color was coming back to his face. I could see that the doctor was even more excited than I was. He rushed to Karel as the Hadji stepped aside. The doctor rubbed the "dead man's" hands. Then felt the pulse. With an expression of stark amazement he turned to me and said, "His pulse is normal." And with this, his wife threw herself upon her husband, weeping with joy.

One hour later, Karel Van deBerg was sitting up. His eyes were inflamed and he could not see very well. But he could talk in a faint whisper.

Three days later I left him. He was not yet the gay Dutchman I had always known, he was quite solemn. His eyes were still weak, and the doctor had given him dark glasses. But what could you expect of a man who had returned from the dead?

So I was glad to be able to visit Karel Van deBerg on my trip to Java this time. Ten years I knew would make quite a change in him.

As I stood at the door, a man opened it and extended his hand. "Charles!" he said.

I looked. Was this Karel Van deBerg, the gay, blond, blue-eyed Dutchman of my youth? Same face, same body, same smile—but those eyes, they were purple black.

He embraced me. His wife was still beautiful. Four children had come to them since my last visit. But were these Karel's children? Of course they were, they had Karel's physical characteristics—but the eyes of all of them—they were Javanese eyes.

And then it struck me. I remembered. The eyes of Karel's father-in-law, who had died a few weeks before Karel had had his strange experience. Of course, heredity. Nothing strange about children having the eyes of their grandfather.

But why should Karel's own eyes have changed? I couldn't explain that. Not until on the boat back to America I picked up a book on Java and read: "The Javanese believe the seat of the soul is in the eyes."

THE HEART OF A SOLDIER

THIS story happened about five years after the World War. Charlie Olmstead lived in a small town in the middle west. Ever since he was a small boy he loved sol-

(Continued on page 111)



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TWISTING

CHAPTER I

Jaws of Doom

DEATH hovered over the small backwoods clearing—grim, silent death as cold and relentless as the sharp wind that shrilled icily through Jimmy Parker's stocky body. The ominous silence of the desolate winter bush region blended grimly with the starkness of the bleak surroundings.

But Jimmy Parker was totally unaware of the sinister specter. He was bending wearily over the duffle bag on the frozen ground, unpacking slowly. His young, good-looking, ruddy face held no premonitory hint of the terrible doom the three immortal sisters of destiny had prepared for him.

One moment there was nothing but peace and the murmur of the brook nearby, and in the next there was the exploding havoc of an erupting volcano. All the notice that Death gave to young life-loving Jimmy Parker was a faint scraping noise behind him. A practically useless notice which only

A Complete Novel of Terror's Labyrinth



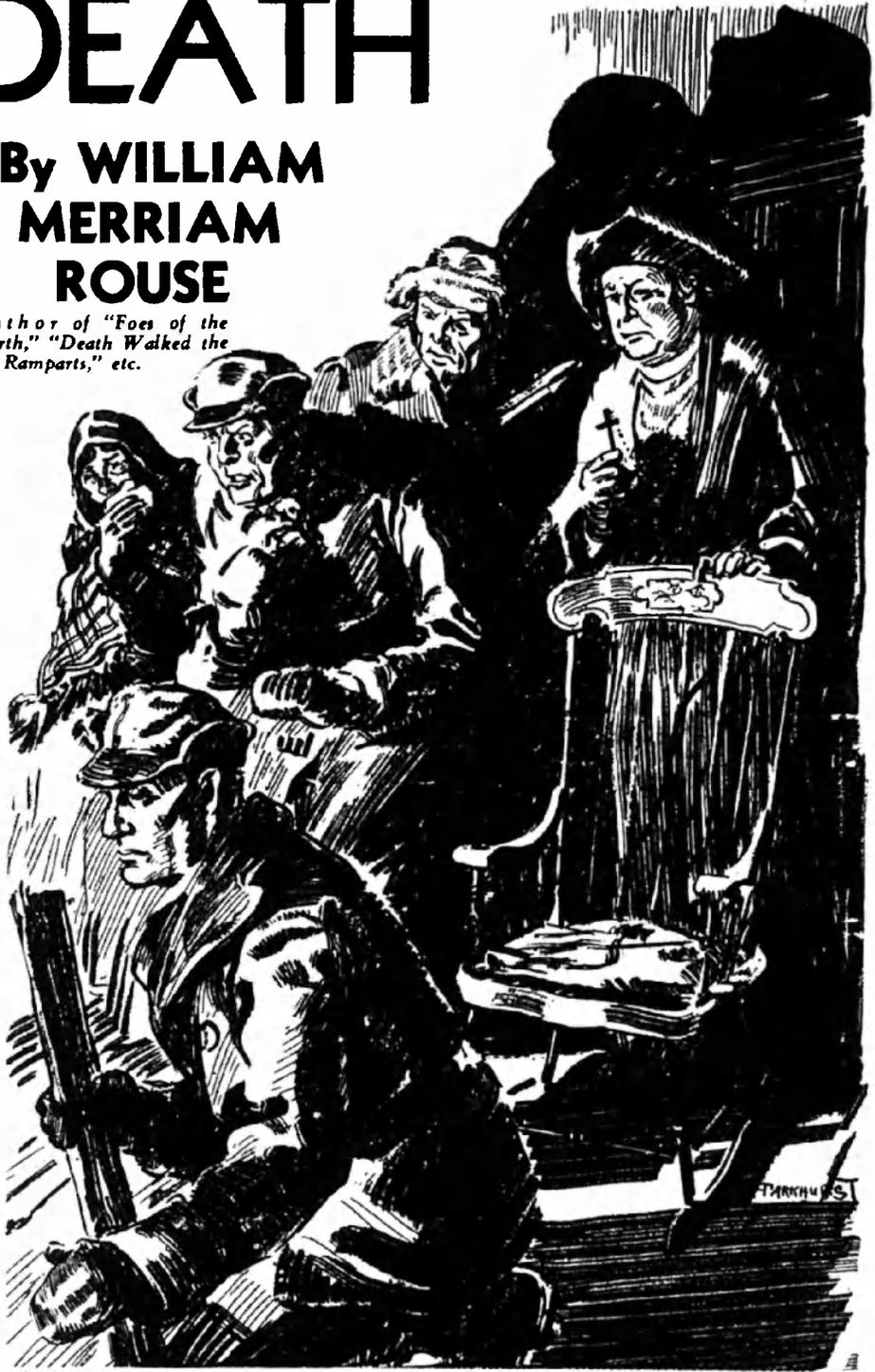
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A Fiend of The North Woods Adds

DEATH

By **WILLIAM
MERRIAM
ROUSE**

*Author of "Foes of the
North," "Death Walked the
Ramparts," etc.*



convulsion of agony

New Outrages to His Record of Depravity!

a steam-rolling, jeering monster would mockingly wave under its victim's nose.

For as Parker quickly straightened up and half turned around, some devilish substance out of the unknown sprayed his eyes, his nostrils, and penetrated his whole being. He gasped, choked, as his lungs constricted and his eyes burned with agonizing fire. A powerful, overwhelming odor assailed his senses with a suffocating vehemence that was almost unbearable.

Parker's arms groped and swung wildly around him. One fist glanced harmlessly against something rough. For one lightning-like instant his eyes were washed partly clear, and he had a distorted, blurred flash of an enormous, misshapen monster looming over him. A gurgling cry issued from Parker's tightly-drawn throat. And then twin bars of iron were grasping his head, gripping it like some gigantic vise.

An unholy troupe of imps were holding a jubilee inside of Parker's head. All of them were armed with crowbars and they were waving them around gleefully. And each time they waved, the points of the crowbars bit viciously into Jimmy Parker's skull. In regular rhythm they waved—a grim prelude to death.

For suddenly the jaws of the vise wrenched sharply in a short arc. There was a grinding snap and crunch—and Jimmy Parker's knees collapsed like a deflated tire, as black oblivion claimed his last spark of life.

And like the proverbial calm after the storm, peace and quiet once more reigned over the small clearing. The forest brook babbled cheerfully only six feet away, but Jimmy Parker would never hear it again.

MINUTES passed and the dead man lay on the frozen ground where he had fallen with legs drawn up. His head was twisted gruesomely to one side and his tongue hung from between blackened lips. His bulging eyes stared without seeing.

"Jimmy! Where are you? Jimmy Parker!"

Through the winter bush came the

cry, repeated, nearer and nearer, echoing strangely among the stark skeleton branches that rimmed the little clearing. All at once a young man, big, hatless, burst into the open.

"Jimmy!"

His shout ended in a gasp of horror at the sight of what lay on the ground, almost at his feet.

For thirty seconds Donald Harding bent over the distorted form of his friend. Grief and horror gripped his throat. His fingers, sticky with sweat, worked convulsively inside his mittens.

This, he thought dully, then with stabbing realization, was murder! Murder, stark and unaccountable, yet horribly evident!

A gust of fury shook him, jerked him to his feet with pounding arteries. Jimmy Parker, his best and closest friend, murdered! And the murderer had gone free.

Free, but only for the time being! Harding made the vow solemnly, looking down at the dead man's swollen features; and as he gazed, rage cooled into grim purpose. Gradually the realities of air and light and frozen ground resumed their place. The naked bush, the dark warmth of the evergreens, the tinkle of brook water against shell ice, impinged on his senses with sudden clarity.

It was then that he noted two sharply significant things. There was in the heavy air a hint of some strange odor. And there was a gentle prickling of his neck-hairs which told him that another living presence occupied the clearing.

With a whip-like reaction of smooth muscles, Harding whirled, his hand dropping to the pistol in his mackinaw pocket. Motionless he stood, except for the darkening of his grey eyes, a slow tensing of his jaws.

Twenty feet away stood a man, huge, weatherbeaten, grizzled, with black eyes glittering under the edge of a bushman's knitted *tuque*. At Harding's first motion, he had thrown his rifle forward, his unmittened finger slipping inside the trigger guard.

"What are you doing here?"

Suspicion edged Harding's voice. No

rifle bullet had killed Jimmy Parker; yet this scowling stranger who had crept up silently from behind—

"I am Jean Jacques Perron, hunter, of St. Charles de Bellechasse." Like the great body from which it issued, the man's voice, speaking in patois, was strong and deliberate.

"You, monsieur, who stand there with a dead man at your feet, can you answer as well?"

Harding's eyes widened at the clear challenge, then narrowed as they met and held the bushman's.

"My friend, here," he replied in rapid French, "my friend and I came from New York to hunt. We were just making camp. Our guide said it was going to snow, and picked this clearing because it is sheltered and close to the brook. He said we might have to stay here two or three days, and had better get up a lot of firewood.

"We went off in different directions, leaving my friend to unpack our duffle. A few minutes later I heard a queer cry. I couldn't locate it at first, so I called. There was no answer. And when I got back here, you see what—what I found!"

SLOWLY Perron lowered his rifle, and came forward to stand with Harding over the broken thing on the ground.

"Truly, I see, monsieur," he said at last. "And I have seen another like that, not five minutes ago. It is your guide, I think, who lies dead of the same malady, about a hundred yards away."

"Our guide?" Harding's teeth clicked on the word. "Achille Morin? And like this?"

"*Oui!* If that is his name. He is very dead." Perron tamped dark, strong tobacco into the bowl of a short pipe he had taken from his pocket. "It seems that the Twister has taken two at once, this time!"

For a long moment Harding stared thoughtfully at the bushman's impassive profile. How much did the man know, or guess, beyond what he himself had learned, of this weird business which had brought him and Jimmy Parker from far-off New York to the

backwoods of St. Charles de Bellechasse, and which had just now cost the lives of his two companions?

Perron had named the Twister, but that in itself was nothing to hang suspicion on. All the North Woods knew of this fiend whose killings had terrorized the neighborhood of Bellechasse for six months past.

Many otherwise unimaginative natives had openly linked him with the supernatural. The police, after months of bafflement, were approaching the same state of mind, according to the letter Harding had received two weeks before from Sergeant Pierce.

That letter, strictly unofficial, had told of the excellent hunting to be found in the neighborhood, and had mentioned only casually the Twister's deadly record. Actually it had been the appeal of an old friend in need to the firm of Harding and Parker, Private Investigators.

"Well, monsieur! You stare at me as if you thought me a little mad!" Perron's deep voice recalled Harding to the present with a start.

"But the affair is all crazy, is it not?" the grizzled bushman continued, between fierce puffs from his pipe. "The Twister—no one has seen him and lived, so he has no other name—he has killed five men within ten miles of this place, in as many months. And these two, your friend and your guide, make seven. Always it is the same—the head twisted until the neckbone snaps like a rotten twig. And never does he leave a trail the police can follow!"

"Doesn't he?" retorted Harding, his glance probing behind Perron's black eyes. "But perhaps that is because the police arrived too late, when the trail was cold. This time it should be different, with an old hunter right on the spot to pick up his tracks. There must be some sign hereabouts."

"No, monsieur!" Perron's tone and gesture were emphatic. "The ground is frozen hard, and as you see no snow has fallen yet. You may be sure the Twister will have left no tracks, and besides it will be getting dark in a few minutes. We should only be wasting time."

Donald Harding's jaw set stub-

bornly, then relaxed.

"You're right," he conceded. "We'd need time to search, even with good light. But we'll have that in the morning."

Again the big bushman shook his head. "*Non!* It is better that we make a litter now, and carry the body of your poor friend to St. Charles. In the morning we can send men back here to bring in the corpse of Achille Morin. There will be expert trackers with them, and if the Twister has left any trail at all, which I doubt, they may pick it up.

"But let us hurry now, while there is still light enough to see by! *Mon dieu!* We bear tidings which will make the good people of St. Charles shiver under their blankets tonight!"

CHAPTER II

In the Clutch of Fear

DONALD HARDING sat in a room which, after the gloomy hours just past, seemed like a corner of some material heaven. There were candles on a broad shelf above the fireplace. Pots and kettles hung from cranes above the crackling heat of four-foot logs. An old fashioned roasting spit stood beside the poker and tongs at one side of the clean-swept hearth.

But more wonderful than the room itself was the exquisitely human angel who graced it. She was polishing the last of a row of shining copper pots, and from time to time she glanced up a little timidly at Harding.

He noted for the tenth time that her hair was cloudy-black; that the skies of Quebec were never so blue as her eyes; that the skirt of bright blanket cloth failed entirely to conceal her slim grace, and that her soft, beaded moccasins only emphasized the daintiness of her little feet. As he watched, a dimple appeared in the cheek which she kept turned toward him.

Suddenly the vision spoke, in a voice that matched the softness of her blush.

"It is a great honor, monsieur, for my father and me to have you as our guest! I trust you have eaten well?"

"If I had not," he replied gravely, "the pleasure of your company, mademoiselle, would have made a crust of bread seem like a banquet."

Pink deepened to rose in the cheeks of Mlle. Denise Lafleur. But before she could find a reply there was a sturdy knock on the door through which Harding had entered.

The girl sprang to her feet, then, stepping to an inner doorway, she raised her voice.

"They arrive! Father, here are the gentlemen for the consultation!"

An elderly man appeared through the doorway, nodded courteously to Harding, and crossed the room with easy, erect carriage. As he swung the front door wide, four men entered, bowing with old-world dignity to Lafleur, who in turn introduced them to his younger guest.

There was the venerable Father Michaud, who patted Denise on the shoulder before seating himself by the fireplace, with his cassock wrapped around him.

There was Dr. Hermann Benoit, burly and ruddy, with eyes that lanced quick gleams from under his bushy brows. He took Harding's hand in a grip like a bear's.

Juste Vanasse, mayor of St. Charles de Bellechasse, puffed and bowed again, and would have made a speech if Father Michaud had not lifted a discreet finger in protest. Probably, Harding thought, that unspoken oratory would have been a relief to this half pompous, half pathetic individual, on whose stout frame anxiety or fear seemed to weigh cruelly.

The fourth man was the notary of Bellechasse, Alaric Labreche, whose greeting was stiffly formal, and whose costume suggested that he had just stepped out of a Quebec office. It was he who, after an impressive pause, opened the conversation.

"Monsieur Harding," he said crisply, "you are aware, I think, that my village has been menaced for six months by an enemy which no human power has thus far been able to combat. My people have been grieved and terrified by five successive murders, all committed by the same mysterious hand.

"Now they are in a state almost of

panic, having learned what has just happened to your friend and your guide. We are here tonight in hope that your advice may show us some as yet undiscovered means of protecting ourselves against further killings, not to mention the robbery of the dead."

"Robbery?" Harding echoed. "Yes, of course. A considerable sum of money was taken from our packs. I noticed it, naturally, before we left the clearing. Tell me, Monsieur Labreche, are the Twister's victims always robbed?"

"But certainly! And that is why I have no use for all this superstitious talk about a creature who can neither be seen nor caught. We are not dealing with a *Windigo*, or anything superhuman. What terrifies us is that we make no progress even toward defending ourselves against this murderer."

Harding nodded. "Messieurs," he said, "James Parker was my best and oldest friend; and on that account alone I should spare no effort to bring the Twister to justice. Be assured of my help, whatever it may be worth to you!"

THERE was a brief silence. Then Dr. Benoit cleared his throat and half turned in his chair.

"Monsieur Harding, I think that what we need most is cleverness, not so much of the eye or of the hand, but of the brain, for the murderer has so far been cleverer than any of us. With your permission, let us analyze this menace, point by point, much as I should have to do with a puzzling malady. Do you agree, monsieur?"

"Go on, Doctor!"

"*Eh bien!* For every one of these killings we know the chief motive, robbery; and the other motive, to insure silence. Secondly, we know that the killer is a man of very great strength. Thirdly, he is as clever as the Devil his master.

"One more fact seems beyond doubt: he is a native of this village, and consequently knows everything that happens here, the movements of whatever victim he chooses among us. He observes, he strikes, he escapes without a



Mlle. Denise and Harding

trace, and remains unknown—because he is one of us!"

"A-ah!"

With a half strangled groan, the puffy mayor collapsed. Denise Lafleur, acting with quick understanding, filled and brought him a glass of old brandy, almost before Dr. Benoit had raised the fainting man in his chair.

"It is only his poor nerves!" she whispered, as Vanasse gulped the warming liquor. "Monsieur has borne the grief and worry of the whole village for so long. But he is feeling better now, isn't he, Doctor?"

"Yes, my little one! In some ways, I think you are a better doctor than I. Come, Monsieur Vanasse! You are feeling like yourself again?"

With an effort the mayor sat up straighter, nodded.

"That brandy has made a man of me again. Your pardon, Monsieur Harding! Please continue the discussion."

After one keen glance about the room, Harding nodded to Benoit.

"You have made your points very clear, Doctor, and I think that on the whole they are well taken. But let us go back a bit. You mentioned the murderer's abnormal strength. Are there any persons in this neighborhood whom that description might fit?"

Before Benoit could reply, Labreche spoke rapidly.

"That is just the difficulty, monsieur! There are perhaps half a dozen unusually powerful men between here and Notre Dame du Lac, the nearest village to Bellechasse."

"There are! Very well, messieurs. With that point settled, may I ask if there is any one of them on whom particular suspicion might fall?"

"There is one, I am sorry to say," replied Father Michaud, clasping his hands uneasily. "A man, known for years simply as Black Antoine, lives alone in a cabin not two miles from the village. He exists almost like a beast, in filth and rags, the year around; and that is not because of need, but because he prefers to do so. He is no more than middle-aged and as strong as a bull moose. He could earn good wages with the choppers.

"Three times since he came to this neighborhood, and that is ten years ago, I have tried to persuade him to a Christian way of living, but each time he drove me away with threats and foul curses. Monsieur the mayor knows that this is so!"

"Indeed it is, Monsieur Harding," Vanasse spoke up. "And more than once I would have had him arrested by the police, had not the good Father forbidden me! Many of us believe that Black Antoine is the Twister himself. But alas! There is no scrap of evidence against him, other than what you have just heard."

"Well, we shall need more than that," Harding began, and broke off as Denise raised her hand suddenly.

"Father! Messieurs! Did you hear that?" She rose and stood listening, with parted lips.

"I thought I did hear something," said Lafleur. "Only the howling of a dog, probably. But open the door for a moment, Denise, so we can hear better."

SNOWFLAKES drifted into the room on a gust of cold air, as Denise pulled the door wide.

"The storm is here at last," murmured Father Michaud. But his words ended in a gasp, as out of the night

came a shriek of abject terror, followed by another and another. The occupants of the room crowded forward. Then, into the light shining from the open doorway stumbled a frail, bent figure with arms thrown wide.

Hurrying out, Dr. Benoit caught the old woman in his arms and carried her inside. With tender hands he and the old priest supported her to a couch near the big fireplace, where she sat swaying and fumbling with her ragged shawl. Noises rather than sounds came from her blue lips.

"It is old Margot," whispered Denise into Harding's ear. "She keeps house for Donat Fabard, another old one. But what can have happened?"

"Dead!"

The old woman's banshee wail sent a shiver through every man in the room.

"Dead! Dead! Dead! There on the floor! With his head all twisted and his eyes popping like a frog's! *Oh, mon dieu, mon dieu!*"

"Who is dead, Margot?" The priest was the first man to speak.

The old woman gibbered, moaned, became finally articulate.

"Who? Who but Donat Fabard? The poor old Donat! *Helas!* Many a time I have called him miser, when I needed a pair of warm stockings and he would not let me buy them. But I weep for him now!"

Her old voice cracked. "Dead!" "Dead, with the floor ripped up and all the gold he kept there gone!"

"Where were you when he was killed?" the mayor blurted, his tongue thick with fear.

"Where was I, monsieur? Where but at the house of Pamphile Lambert? I was away no more than two hours. When I came back the door stood open with snow drifting in, and there lay poor Donat Fabard, dead! Dead on the floor. I knew that *Monsieur le Maire* would be here tonight, so I came, I ran—"

"Messieurs!" spoke Harding abruptly. "We had best go and see for ourselves at once. Some of us, at least. We can't afford to overlook any clues, and moments may count now. Monsieur Lafleur and Mademoiselle can look after the old one."

 CHAPTER III

Prowling Menace

THE front room of Fabard's bare little house was furnished only with meager essentials. Two rickety chairs flanked a table of similar decrepitude; a box of firewood stood in the chimney corner; a few iron pots and cracked dishes showed through the half open cupboard door.

To Harding's mind the place had all the look of a miser's dwelling. But his first swift glances discovered nothing else of significance except for the hole where two boards had been ripped up to expose Donat's hoard of gold, and the owner's corpse around which the doctor, mayor and the old priest were already gathered.

Fabard's patched boots were drawn up, as in a last convulsion of agony, and his eyes, now filmed over, held the same protruding stare that had marked Jimmy Parker's. Likewise there was, hanging faintly in the air, that same indefinable odor Harding had caught near the body of his friend.

The detective drew Father Michaud aside.

"Do you smell anything peculiar?" he muttered. "An odor that somehow doesn't belong in this lace any more than orange blossoms at the North Pole?"

"An odor!" The older man sniffed, his high forehead wrinkling in puzzlement. "Yes, now that you mention it, I do, Monsieur Harding. But it is something strange to my nose. Does it mean anything?"

"Only that there has been another murder by the same hand that killed Monsieur Parker. The scent was present when we found him—"

"Terrible, terrible!" the mayor's voice interrupted mournfully. "All Fabard's good money gone! They say he had nearly four thousand dollars, the savings of a frugal lifetime!"

"Not nearly so much as your own hoardings, *Monsieur le Maire!*" remarked a cool voice behind them.

Labreche, the notary, stood stiffly in

the doorway with Jean Jacques Perron at his shoulder. Vanasse gasped.

"I, *Monsieur l'Avocat?* I have no gold to tempt even a sneak-thief! I have only my living. But you, Alaric Labreche, you are not a poor man, and you had better take care. The Twister may have marked you already!"

Whatever the notary would have answered, it remained unsaid, for at that moment several of the village people crowded into the room, whispering, awestruck. Their blanched faces reflected the terror and fear which the eerily elusive, monstrous Twister had instilled in them.

Harding did not welcome their interruption, for the passage of words between the mayor and Labreche had begun to suggest interesting possibilities. Besides, clumsy feet and hands could obliterate in one minute such faint traces as might be left in the room to point the murderer's trail.

FIRMLY he shooed the curious white-faced villagers out. Then, with only the four from Lafleur's house, and Jean Jacques Perron, remaining, he closed the door and set to work. Of first importance was the task of keeping these others from blundering about the place, and at the same time avoiding all hint of professional manner. At any cost his business in Bellechasse must stay a secret.

"Please touch nothing, messieurs, until I have finished with a little experiment I wish to try," he said simply. "Dr. Benoit, you have been in this house before. Can you find me about a pound of white flour and a piece of tough paper? A paper bag would be even better."

"But certainly, Monsieur Harding! Naturally, I am a bit curious, but questions can wait. . . . Ah! Here we have the flour and the bag together, in this cupboard. There is just a pound left, I should say; poor Donat was always close with provisions. Now, what else?"

"Nothing for the moment, Doctor. If there is a trail of any sort left in this room by Fabard's killer, I hope my little flour trick may discover it."

"Yes, yes! I see it now!" cried Va-

nasse eagerly. "Monsieur looks for fingerprints, *n'est-ce pas?* The police did that, too, but found nothing. Of course, they were not greatly surprised, since three or more days had passed in each case before they reached the scene. But monsieur seems puzzled! Is it that the flour does not work so well as the special dust of the police?"

Harding's frown deepened as he dusted piece after piece of furniture with flour, blowing it gently through a tiny hole in the paper bag, then puffing away the surplus with patient care.

"No, monsieur," he answered finally, rising from a last dusting of the ripped-up floor boards. "The flour would have shown up really fresh fingerprints, had they been there. But there is not a fingerprint anywhere in this room, not even those of Fabard or his housekeeper!"

"Then someone—" began Labreche.

"Exactly!" snapped Harding. "Someone, either the murderer or an accomplice, has carefully wiped out the only evidence which would have certainly have put his neck in a noose."

"It is defeat!" babbled the fat mayor. "I knew it would be so, I knew it! Who can match wits with a fiend like that?"

"It is not defeat, messieurs!" Harding's flat tone struck back like a slap in the face. "This is only a setback to our hopes. Dr. Benoit, your remarks earlier this evening appear amply justified. This killer, mad fiend that he is, shows great cleverness; yet he has left evidence that he is a native of these parts, and his actions tonight confirm it. He knows that his fingerprints would give him away just as surely as would a photograph of his face!

"Thus far he has been very careful; but sometime he will slip up. Sometime he will lack time to erase the proof of his identity, or he will forget just where he left it. Remember, we are not beaten but only checked for the moment!"

"*Ba oui!*" The bushman's heavy voice rumbled. "We are checked, monsieur, but not the Twister! Doubtless he sees and laughs at us as we stand here croaking like so many crows when a hawk has passed overhead. It is not

to such things as clever talk and little dustings of flour that I trust myself tonight. But my rifle— Ah! That is different. *Bonsoir, messieurs!*"

Thick shoulders hunched, Je n Jacques Perron bent his head to clear the low lintel, and stepped out into the night.

IN a short while, the others followed his example. Harding was the last to leave, and as he stepped out, flying flakes, sharp as steel, blasted into his face on the wings of a bitter wind. Harding drew his mackinaw collar up protectingly and breathed the keen air in deeply.

A slight crunching noise to his left drew his eyes to the rear of the little house. His strong face tightened grimly as he saw a dark shadow moving swiftly away from the house. A giant figure, silhouetted now against the background of snowy whiteness.

"Who's there?" Harding called out sharply.

There was no answer, and the figure continued retreating toward the snowy slopes behind the house. Harding hesitated and then started swiftly in pursuit.

He didn't seem to be making much headway in overtaking the huge lumbering shadow ahead of him, and decided to use different tactics. He exhaled enough wind out of his panting lungs to yell:

"Stop—or I'll shoot!"

The giant fugitive reacted, but not exactly in the manner which Harding had hoped. The man turned his head and then started zig-zagging over the now uneven half frozen, half snowy surface. Still it was something, for Harding found himself closing the gap between them as he continued on a straight line.

Then abruptly the figure stopped, and with a rumbling growl, reversed his direction and came charging directly at the winded detective.

Harding didn't get a chance to ask any questions or say anything. He was conscious of a raggedly clothed Herculean figure, a dark shaggy face, fiercely gleaming eyes and bared white teeth. Then he had his hands full de-



"There is nothing to be afraid of," the girl said sharply

fending himself from the savage attack of the erstwhile fugitive.

The detective felt a tingling sensation crawl up his spine as the thought flashed across his mind that this gigantic growling person might be the gruesomely murderous Twister! It put strength into his punch as his fist smacked against a rough cheek. The giant didn't seem to mind, though, and retaliated with a vicious haymaker. Harding winced as the blow glanced off his right ear and numbed it completely. He was dodging and parrying as best he could. One solid blow from this powerful giant would be the end.

His lungs were hot furnaces now, and he felt that he couldn't hold out much longer. He fainted skillfully with his left and then threw everything behind a right uppercut. It landed and he grunted with satisfaction as the other staggered backward. Harding started toward him with the firm intention of finishing the fight.

But his foot slipped on a hard, icy patch of ground and he pitched headlong into the giant. The latter growled savagely, and then a battering blow in the face sent Harding tumbling sideward down a steep bank to the left of them. An avalanche of sliding snow almost smothered him, and he struggled weakly to his feet.

By the time he regained the top of the bank, the mysterious giant had disappeared. Harding frowned. Who was he? The Twister? Then what had prevented him from claiming the detective as another victim of his regime of terror?

From the direction the giant had seemed to be taking, and his ragged appearance, Harding figured that it might very well have been the wild man, Black Antoine. In that case, what had the man been doing near the Fabard house? Had he merely been scouting around, trying to find out what all the commotion was about? Or was he the Twister, a cunning, devilish madman prying around, gloating over the consternation and terror he was creating among the panic-stricken inhabitants of St. Charles de Bellechasse?

Harding shrugged. 'He'd find out to-

morrow. He trudged wearily back to the Lafleur house. A bed just now loomed up as a comforting objective.

FROM small signs, Harding knew that Denise Lafleur had given him her own chamber, without doubt the best in that marvellously neat home. Bows of ribbon held back white curtains at each window. On a dressing table stood a colored glass lamp with precious kerosene oil in it. On the wall opposite hung a little silver crucifix.

Harding threw his clothes at a chair and fell into bed, but he couldn't fall asleep. In spite of the fatigue that numbed every muscle and sinew, his mind would not let him rest. For, limned against the darkness, he still saw the dead face of Jimmy Parker, and behind that face the ghastly, imagined forms of the Twister's other victims.

He was too tired to think clearly of the problem ahead, but his nerves remained keyed to a pitch that made them responsive to the least stimulus. He heard the swish of snow against the window panes blending curiously with the distant gnawing of a mouse. Then, all at once, he realized that some other sound was beating an even rhythm against his eardrums.

A soft murmur of air was pulsing back and forth like the breathing of a great animal. Was it his own breath? He sat up in bed and listened. And then, with a shiver, he knew the sound came from under his own bed.

The breathing continued, took on a more raucous note. Harding put a tentative foot on the floor, then bounded to the chair where he had hung his hunting belt. His fingers closed around the hilt of a thin-bladed skinning knife. Long seconds passed. At last, reaching with his left hand, he found the lamp and matches, and a moment later the room filled with yellow radiance.

Under the bed appeared an enormous *botte sauvage*, or homemade shoeopac, that could fit only a giant. With a quick lunge, Harding grasped the boot just above the heel, heaved, and leaped

back against the wall.

The bed rose and settled down as the *botte sauvage* was replaced by a tousled human head which turned up vacant, staring eyes. Slowly a body of herculean build emerged, pulling itself along the floor with huge, knotted hands.

The clothing of this grotesque being was incredibly patched, but clean. Shaggy hair fell about a round, childish face whose expression of dull wonder told its own pathetic story. The creature was an imbecile.

Harding flung open the bedroom door.

"Mademoiselle!" he called. "Mademoiselle Lafleur!"

After a moment the girl came running swiftly along the hall, in a blue dressing gown that made her eyes startled pools of beauty.

"Yes, Monsieur Harding? You called?"

"I found *that* under my bed just now. What is it?"

The girl gasped. Then she turned to the crouching giant and leveled an accusing finger at its nose.

"What do you mean, Gilles Milot, by coming into the room of monsieur?"

One of the great fists went up; the slack mouth quivered.

"*J'ai peur!* I am afraid!"

The monster began to sob.

"Stop crying, Gilles!" the girl checked him sharply. "There is nothing to be afraid of. Go to the kitchen quickly, and be quiet or you will wake my father."

Cringing, the imbecile slipped past her and padded heavily out of the room.

"*J'ai peur!*" His blurting cry echoed back from the staircase.

At a sign from Denise, Harding followed her down to the big kitchen, where they found Gilles hunched trembling in a corner. The girl went to the pantry and returned with a generous slice of cake which she put into the wretched youth's hands.

"There, *mon pauvre!* Everything is well now," she soothed him. "There is nothing to fear, Gilles; and if there were, you shouldn't have gone into monsieur's room. Why didn't you come to me?"

Gilles rolled his eyes gratefully but made no reply beyond an animal mumbling as he bolted the cake. The girl turned back to Harding.

"You must forgive him, monsieur," she pleaded. "Poor Gilles Milot isn't responsible for what he does. Something must have frightened him, and he simply came for protection to me—that is, to your room." She blushed prettily at the slip which betrayed that she had given her own chamber to her father's guest.

But Harding scarcely heard her. His thoughts were following a grimmer trail.

"Has it never occurred to any of you," he asked bluntly, "that this fellow Gilles might be the Twister? He is as strong as a bear, and though he acts harmless now, his mind may have sudden flashes of murderous cunning."

The girl paled, then flushed as she moved protectingly in front of Milot.

"*Mais non! Mais non!*" she cried, with tears of anger welling suddenly. "How can you even think such things of poor Gilles? He has never harmed anything in his life!"

"How do you know that?" the detective pursued coldly, yet hating himself for the words. "Has Gilles always lived with your family?"

"No, monsieur!" With an effort Denise Lafleur controlled her voice. "He lives with anyone here in St. Charles, as it pleases him. We know him too well to trouble about where he goes or what he does, and I cannot see what reason you have to do so. Everybody will tell you that poor Gilles is not like other men. In his mind he is but an infant, sweet-natured and obedient."

She paused, breathless, conscious all at once of her vehemence. Her hands fluttered out in a conclusive little gesture.

"He would not hurt a kitten, our Gilles! And as for money, he would not have the sense to take it. *Enfin*, monsieur, I fear your suspicions do little credit to your intelligence!"

"Mademoiselle Denise," replied Harding stubbornly, "I ask your pardon. But after what I have seen in the past twelve hours, I am ready to suspect anyone possessed of the

strength to wring a man's neck like a chicken's. And your Gilles, to judge by appearances, is the strongest man I have ever laid eyes on!"

Steadily the girl returned his gaze, a little smile twitching at the corner of her mouth.

"You have yet to see Black Antoine, monsieur," she murmured. "Here in the North Woods we grow men of a surprising bigness!"

CHAPTER IV

Black Antoine

DONALD HARDING lay curled down in the snow behind the roots of a mighty forest pine. Before him the ground sloped rapidly into a tiny cup-shaped valley, where a cabin of unpeeled logs lay half buried in white drifts. Fresh snowshoe tracks led straight to its door and smoke spiraled from the chimney.

It had been agreed that Harding and Jean Jacques Perron were to corner Black Antoine for questioning. They had followed this trail from a wood-road near the village, and now they were waiting for him, one on each side of the cabin clearing. Because no more than suspicion rested on the wild man as yet, they were prepared to meet whatever resistance he might offer at first with only warning shots.

As Harding rose to shift his position, a fragment of pine bark tore at his cheek. A rifleshot echoed through the forest stillness, while slowly a blue feather of smoke dissolved before the cabin's single window. In swift reply Perron's rifle spoke from the clearing's opposite rim.

Another bullet laced through the snow two inches from Harding's shoulder, and he realized with a queer tingling of his spine that Black Antoine was shooting to kill. He emptied his magazine at the cabin roof, while at the same instant a tinkling of window glass told where Perron's bullets were striking. Then both men ducked for shelter as Antoine returned their fire viciously.

There was a brief pause in the fusil-

lade from the cabin. Jean Jacques shouted, bounding to his feet. Puzzled, Harding rose likewise and found himself running down the slope to intercept his companion. They had nearly reached the cabin before he realized that no more rifle slugs were coming in his direction.

"*Allons!*" yelled the bushman, taking a three-foot windfall without a break in his pace. "The rascal jumped through the woodshed wall—went into the bush. Run, or he'll get away!"

They ran until Harding thought his lungs would burst, but their fleeing quarry was swifter. Once they saw him far ahead, racing in the direction of St. Charles.

"Look!" cried Perron. "The wretch is making for that pile of rocks, up above. If he goes in there, we shall have him like a wolf in his den!"

HARDING plunged on, too out of breath to reply. Below, the roofs of outlying houses came in sight, and immediately in front a tumble of frost-split rock whose mass rested on a ledge overhanging the village.

At the base of the pile a triangular opening showed, into which Black Antoine's ragged bulk disappeared with a suddenness that would have been laughable in other circumstances. It was as if the mouth of a stone dragon had opened and swallowed him.

The illusion was sharpened when a loud bark and a puff of smoke issued from that same mouth.

Perron's *tuque* was snatched from his head. He dropped, burrowing deep in the snow with Harding beside him. And then, with hot anger exploding their previous restraint, both men opened fire with deadly intent. Shot after shot they poured into the hole from which Antoine's bullet had come, until their magazines were empty.

"Can he get out of there some other way?" gritted Harding as he reached for more cartridges.

Perron, the calmer of the two, shrugged.

"I don't know, monsieur. Nobody has been very far inside that pile for fear of falling rocks, but I know of no other way out. Sooner or later, I think, An-

toine must show himself or starve."

"Then, it is only a matter of keeping guard?"

"*Oui!* And one rifle is enough by daylight. *V'la, monsieur!* I have re-loaded. Now, while I send a few shots up there to keep our man quiet, do you crawl backward until you can make a dash out of his line of fire. Go around to the village, monsieur, and tell the others. Then bring me out some food and some hot tea. An empty belly makes cold watching."

Harding hesitated, though realizing that Perron spoke only common sense. The bushman grinned at him.

"Thanks, monsieur! I know what you are thinking; but I shall be quite safe here. Go now, if you please, and be assured that our rascal will not escape!"

As Harding ran ziz-zagging down and away from their exposed position, Perron's steadily maintained fire at his back was admittedly comforting. At any rate, no bullets seemed to be coming from Black Antoine's direction. At the end of fifty yards' descent he looked back to find that the cave mouth was out of sight.

During the ten-minute walk to St. Charles, he indulged in a bit of self-congratulation. There seemed little doubt now that the mad killer who had worked such havoc in this peaceful little community was finally trapped. Except for his grief for Jimmy Parker he would have felt almost content.

But as he entered the village's single street it became obvious that some new alarm had struck its inhabitants. Little knots of men and women stood in front of the houses, their faces marked with every degree of terror. From one of the groups Father Michaud looked up, and at the sight of Harding came to meet him with nervous steps.

"Please come with me, monsieur," he said in a low voice, "to the house of Juste Vanasse. The Twister has tried something new, and I am not sure that it may not prove to be worse."

HE turned, and the detective followed him with a wordless nod. Questions could wait until he should learn to what new outrage the priest referred. Though what could be worse

than ghastly murders and robbery he could not well imagine.

Arrived at the mayor's home, he seemed to have entered a house of mourning. Neighbors sat in the little *salon* on the ground floor, talking in awed whispers, but elsewhere silence hung about like a grey pall. Harding found himself treading on tiptoe as he followed the priest upstairs.

Juste Vanasse sat at an old-fashioned desk in a room that was half chamber and half study. He did not move as Michaud stepped to his side, nor did he look up. All the rich color had drained from his face, leaving the skin grey and pouchy. His eyes remained fixed on a square of paper clutched in his hand.

Denise Lafleur stood behind him holding a glass into which Dr. Benoit dropped medicine from a vial, while stout Henriette Vanasse caressed her husband's shoulder with trembling fingers.

"Regard, Juste!" she quavered. "Here is the good Father Michaud again, and the young American with him. Surely they can do something—"

The mayor made a whimpering sound in his throat. With a hand half paralyzed he lifted the piece of paper. The priest took it from him and handed it to the detective.

Harding noted that the paper was a sheet from a cheap tablet such as could be bought at any village shop. The message it bore was brief and printed in neat, pen-drawn letters:

YOU WILL HAVE FIVE THOUSAND DOLLARS READY FOR THE TWISTER WHEN HE COMES TONIGHT. OTHERWISE YOU WILL DIE AS THE OTHERS HAVE DONE.

That was all. The printing might have been made by anybody able to write grammatically. The ink was an ordinary kind. And Harding felt certain that the closet examination would show no fingerprints traceable to the writer.

He looked up at the little group of people that seemed to be waiting expectantly for his comment. It was evident that these simple village folk were counting on their city-bred visitor for some oracular statement. Feeling strangely embarrassed, he took refuge in a question.

"When did this note arrive?"

"Who can say?" Dr. Benoit spread out his hands. "Monsieur Vanasse found it on his desk this afternoon, an hour before you returned."

"I see. Tell me, who was in the house today besides the members of the family?"

"All the world, monsieur!" answered Denise, removing the empty glass from Vanasse's lips. "This is the house of the mayor, and in a time of trouble especially, people come to see him at all hours. Half the village has been in and out since early morning, no doubt."

"At least," said Harding, regarding her thoughtfully, "the imbecile, Gilles Milot, could never have written this message."

"That is true, monsieur," the priest put in tactfully. "Yet one can hardly blame you for considering him. Anybody with the strength for such killing as the Twister has done would naturally be suspect. Unfortunately that fact protects the murderer, for there are many strong men in Bellechasse."

"And that," broke in a precise voice, "is why we should lose no more time in sending for the police!"

LABRECHE, the notary, had just entered, his mink-lined great-coat unbuttoned to show the neatly pressed business suit beneath. Despite his apparent excitement, not so much as a hair of his glossy pompadour was out of place.

"*Oui*, the police!" he repeated as every head in the room turned to him. "At least we can demand that they give us protection as long as this frightful threat hangs over us. And there is another reason. Look, my friends! I found this message in my office fifteen minutes ago!"

Dr. Benoit glanced at the square of paper Labreche held out, and then handed it to Harding. In the same printed characters used in the note to Vanasse, it read:

OPEN YOUR SAFE AND GET FIVE THOUSAND DOLLARS READY FOR THE TWISTER WHEN HE COMES TONIGHT. IF YOU REFUSE YOU DIE.

"What are you going to do about it, Monsieur Labreche?" the detective asked quietly.

"I will tell you what I am *not* going to do!" cried the notary. "I am not going to be held up for five thousand dollars! In the first place I could not readily lay my hands on any such sum. And in any case, what I have I keep. From now on I shall go armed, and if the Twister comes, he'll find he has caught a Tartar!"

"Well spoken, Alaric!" applauded Denise Lafleur. "There is too little of that spirit in St. Charles."

Juste Vanasse stirred and spoke for the first time.

"I am afraid. I admit it! I do not want to die like those others. The Twister may take what little money I possess. Only let him spare my life! Is it not better so, Henriette?"

Madame Vanasse moaned.

"Is it possible, Monsieur Labreche," said Harding suddenly, "that the message you received could have been left in your office early this morning, or even last night?"

The notary frowned, hesitating.

"Last night? But no, monsieur," he said finally. "After leaving the house of poor Donat Fabard, I returned to my office and spent some time there clearing up my papers, because I knew that it would be useless to try to sleep. If the note had been there then, I should certainly have seen it. But it might have been left, I suppose, any time between midnight and half an hour ago, when I discovered it on the floor by my desk."

"Thank you, monsieur! And now, does anyone know whether or not this Black Antoine can read and write?"

Dr. Benoit grunted, as if something had struck him a blow.

"Strange that none of us should have thought of that!" he exclaimed. "Yet after all one knows so little about the wild man of Bellechasse. Personally I doubt if he could write his own name—"

"But again we forget, monsieur! Have not you and Jean Jacques been trailing him since morning? Could you not find him, or has he escaped you, so that you return?"

"One moment, Doctor!" Harding cut in. "Perhaps someone else here may be able to answer my question. It is more important than you think."

"It is indeed important, monsieur," the priest's quiet voice agreed. "For if it were known certainly that Black Antoine could not write, we should have to choose between his innocence and the possible existence of an accomplice. But I fear there is reason to believe the wild man does know how to write. At least I am sure he can read, for once when I went to his cabin I saw an old magazine lying open on his bunk."

Harding nodded slowly.

"In that case, messieurs, it is possible that we have our man penned up in the rocks above the cliff!"

CHAPTER V

Torture!

THERE was a moment's taut silence, broken by the mayor's hoarse cry.

"You have him? You have caught the Twister? Ah, monsieur, say that again!" Juste Vanasse rose shakily from his chair to clutch Harding's shoulders. But the next moment fear claimed him again, and he staggered back, moaning brokenly.

"Oh, but it cannot be true! Nothing can hold the Twister from his prey. He is in league with the Devil! He will escape and come for me tonight! I know it, I feel it! He will escape—"

"I think not," said Harding curtly. "Perron is on guard there now with his rifle, and I shall return as soon as I can get some food and hot drink for us. If some of you will go back with me, you may see for yourselves, and we can discuss means for smoking our man out."

"For smoking him out?" repeated Vanasse hysterically. "*Mais quelle blague!* He will come out when he chooses. He will come here, tonight, as he said. Tonight! No one can prevent him—"

"Silence, Juste!" cried Dr. Benoit, shaking the man roughly. "If you feel that way, we shall not leave you alone, after dark. Labreche and I will take turns staying with you. But now you must be quiet and say no more to alarm poor Henriette, do you hear? We go now with Monsieur Harding, but we

will soon be back."

"Thank you, Doctor," said Harding. "And, Mademoiselle Lafleur, perhaps you will be kind enough to come with us as far as your house and put us up a package of food? It will be dark soon, and we should hurry."

As the little group, including the priest and the notary, walked back to the *maison* Lafleur, sunset shadows were already lengthening across the street. The apprehensive villagers had vanished behind barred doors, and a bitter wind had sprung up with the approach of dusk.

Arrived at the girl's home, the four men followed her through the door.

"Gilles!" she called gently, as they entered the dim kitchen. "Oh, I see you, there in the chimney corner. Come here, Gilles!"

Milot raised his great body from the floor where he had been leaning against the warm stone of the chimney; but his empty eyes filled with fear as the others stepped nearer.

"He has lately become afraid of all men," the girl said, drawing the giant closer into the firelight. "And I think I know the reason. I found out when mending a cut in his shirt this noon. Look at this, Dr. Benoit, and tell us what you think!"

SHE opened Milot's patched shirt at the neck and peeled it down so that the mighty torso was revealed. The doctor whistled between his teeth.

Harding's first impression was of knots and ridges of muscle. Then he saw that the white skin was laced with fine, red scars, each one six or eight inches long. Just below the left shoulder blade was a jagged cut still black with dried blood. It was the detective's turn to whistle.

"A knife wound, eh, Doctor?" he muttered. "Not deep, but rather painful. How long, would you say, since this was done?"

"Not more than twenty-four hours ago, monsieur; and it is painful, as you remark. Gilles could not have inflicted it himself, of course, any more than he could have made those other scars. And none of them can be more than a year old. To me it looks— Ah, Monsieur

Harding! It is hard to say, one's stomach revolts at the thought, but it looks like—"

"Torture!"

The word, spoken quietly by Father Michaud, held somehow more bitterness than a curse.

"My poor Gilles!" the priest murmured, laying a white hand on Milot's trembling shoulder. "Who hurt you? Can you not tell me?"

The giant whimpered, shaking his head violently from side to side.

"*J'ai peur!* I am afraid!" he mumbled thickly.

"Oh, Father, he could not tell you even if he dared to!" cried Denise, with tears of pity streaming down her cheeks. "He can only say that he is afraid, and he has reason! Poor, poor Gilles! Some day God will let us find the fiend who has tortured you! And then—"

"But come, Monsieur Harding!" she added in a lower voice. "We must prepare the things you are taking to Jean Jacques. I am sorry to have delayed you, but I felt you should know at once about Gilles. Will you get what you need from the pantry, while I make the tea?"

Half an hour later, the four men approaching cautiously the hiding place of Black Antoine were halted by Perron's shout.

"This way, messieurs! If you will go around the cliff and come up from the other side, you will be out of the rascal's range. I am sitting on top of his den."

GUIDED by the bushman's voice, the four stumbled upward over snow-covered rocks to find that Perron had made a dangerous but clever move. As darkness fell, he had crawled in a wide circle, still keeping his rifle trained on Black Antoine's fort, and finally risked a dash to the rear of the rocky pile.

From there he had crept forward to a place just over the den's entrance, where he could prevent the wild man's escape without chancing a long shot in the failing light.

"*Mille diables*, but it is cold up here in the wind, messieurs!" he told them

through chattering teeth. "I hope you have brought me something hot to drink, yes? And a blanket? Ah! That is good! Just let me get warm, and I will tell you of a little plan I have made."

"A plan, Jean Jacques?" questioned Father Michaud. "But I hope it does not involve more violence. After all, we are not yet certain that Black Antoine is the murderer of our friends. To be sure, he shot at you, when he saw you creeping up on his cabin with rifles, but doubtless he thought he was acting in self-defense."

Perron downed a quart of hot tea and wiped his mouth noisily.

"*V'la*, messieurs!" he chuckled. "You see that big, round boulder just below us? It is too heavy for one man to budge, but five of us can handle it easily. If we roll it against the entrance to this hole in the rock, we have Black Antoine like a rat in a corked jug. One of us can even go to sleep on guard, for he cannot gnaw his way free without making much noise. And in a little time hunger will make him beg to be let out on our own terms."

"A capital idea, Jean Jacques!" agreed the dry voice of Labreche, who, absorbed in his own thoughts, had scarcely spoken during the past hour. "But whoever stands guard here tonight will need shelter and a fire. Now that we are all here it will not take long to cover this crevice where we are sitting with a roof of brush and snow, and gather enough dry wood for fuel."

"Then we three, Monsieur Harding, the doctor and I, can draw lots for the next watch. You, Jean Jacques, have done your part for tonight, and Father Michaud is an old man and a priest."

Perron wagged his head, as he munched a thick sandwich.

"You are right about the shelter and the fire, Monsieur Labreche," he answered. "But neither you nor the good doctor are fighting men; and who can tell what a wolf like Black Antoine might contrive? He is desperate, and would kill without mercy if he got loose! So it is better that Monsieur Harding stay here and finish my lunch, while I return with you for a few hours. I will take his place at twelve o'clock."

And so, despite a few protests from the others, it was finally arranged.

CHAPTER VI

The Twister on the Loose

RELIEVED at midnight by Peron, Harding had returned to the Lafleur house and turned in after a hot meal served by Denise. Snugly buried under many blankets, he had slept from the instant his head had touched the pillow, until some unnamed shock had roused him to sudden wakefulness.

An icy wind was blowing on his face from the square of window near his bed. Puzzled and half alarmed, he tried to remember—Yes! He had opened a single, hinged pane for air before retiring—but now the whole window sash was gone!

As he watched, the space grew a little darker, filled slowly by a form that rose silhouetted against the grey night outside.

Harding sat up, tossing back the blankets. And then something splashed into his face. His lungs were choked by a powerful odor, his eyes blinded as by fire. He groped and rolled helplessly toward the side of the bed.

A great weight fell upon him. An enormous body crushed him down, something that whined and growled, reaching with loglike arms for his head. His neck was being twisted, almost torn from his shoulders.

Somehow he contrived to get one arm free, to strike. The blow crunched against flesh, bringing a grunt of pain. The grip on his head slackened briefly, enough to permit one last, desperate struggle. There was a howl of animal agony as his teeth locked on a grasping finger. Then his chest was freed of the weight that had been crushing it. His body struck the floor with a force that jarred loose the grip of his clamped jaws.

As he lay, half conscious, gulping cold air into his lungs, the doorlatch rattled and he heard the voice of Denise Lafleur calling him as though from a great distance. Through smarting eye-

lids he sensed a glow of lamplight, and opened them after a vast effort. An arm was slipped under his shoulders, helping him to sit up.

"Monsieur! Monsieur Harding! Tell me what has happened! Why are you lying on the floor with your window wide open? And what is that odor in the room, like strong perfume? Oh, answer me, monsieur! Answer, or I shall go mad!"

"Perfume!"

He sat bolt upright, clutching the girl's arm with fingers that bruised.

"Perfume! That's what I've been trying to recall since the day before yesterday!" he choked, shaking her with the violence of his own emotion. "It's musk! It's used in certain perfumes, but this stuff is undiluted, strong enough to suffocate one—"

Speaking in English, he had been unaware that Denise could not understand. Now, catching her startled gaze, he laughed grimly and struggled to his feet.

"Pardon me, mademoiselle! But you see, it is the same odor I smelled near Monsieur Parker, when I found his body in the woods. And when we found old Fabard, both Father Michaud and I caught the scent still in the room. You realize what that means? We must find someone here in St. Charles who uses musk, or who has it in his possession. And then, we shall have the Twister!"

Denise stood trembling, unconscious of the arctic gale that was blowing through the open window. Her little hands were clasped tightly at her throat.

"The Twister!" she repeated. "You mean he was in this room? He attacked you? Oh, monsieur! I heard sounds, like men fighting, and then a frightful howl. I didn't, I couldn't think what it was, but I ran to your door. Oh, Monsieur Harding, you are not hurt?"

"Hurt, mademoiselle?" Harding's laugh answered her. "Not at all! It was the Twister who howled. I bit his finger. And that reminds me, there should be blood somewhere; and fingerprints. He had no chance to wipe them off this time!"

"Fingerprints?"

"Yes! Quick, mademoiselle! Go and get on some warm wraps while I dress, and then bring me some white flour in a paper bag. We shall see—"

FOR the first time both of them realized that Harding was standing barefooted in pyjamas, and the girl by his side was clothed in hastily donned negligee over which her hair fell in dark braids.

With a little cry of dismay, Denise clutched the throat of her blue peignoir and ran from the room, leaving an embarrassed but strangely thrilled young man staring at the door through which she had fled.

Harding threw on his clothes, after partly closing the window, and was just lacing his boots, when Gervais Lafleur appeared in the doorway, blinking sleepily.

"Ah, monsieur, I am relieved!" the old man muttered. "In my sleep I heard voices; I smelled a queer odor; and then I saw the lamplight in your room. I wondered— It is not yet time for you to go back to Perron? Is anything wrong?"

"Father!" Denise spoke softly at his shoulder. "You must prepare for unpleasant news. The Twister has just tried to kill monsieur."

"Denise, my child! You mean it?"

"Yes. But calm yourself, Father. By God's mercy, our guest was not harmed. And now, I have brought the things you desired, monsieur," she added, holding out the bag of flour.

With Denise and her father each holding a lamp, Harding went carefully over the entire window, from sash to sill, with a fine dusting of the white powder. Wind pouring in through the opening instantly removed all surplus. The main difficulty he found was the lack of light brilliant enough to show faint markings readily. But scarcely three minutes had passed before he gave a grunt of satisfaction.

"The prints are there," he said shortly. "And bloody ones, too. It seems I used my teeth to good advantage in more than one respect. The Twister has left a record here which will hang him. Set the lamps down, and I will show you!"

Three strides took him across the room to his duffle bag, from which he drew out two articles, a small, beautifully made camera, and a powerful electric torch. The others watched with eager interest as he adjusted the focus of both objects.

"Now, mademoiselle, please hold the torch just so. I want it to show up that little white spot on the window sash," he told her. "Hold it steady. I must make a time exposure of this fingerprint, and then of the others. The result will be interesting, I think—to a jury!"

In surprisingly little time, the job was finished. Harding tucked the exposed films away in an inner pocket. Then, after rinsing his face and smarting eyes at the washstand, he pulled on his mackinaw.

"You are going out, monsieur!" cried Denise, with a note of alarm that set warmth tingling in his veins. "You are going to see if anything has happened to Jean Jacques? Oh, but monsieur—"

"No, my friends," he answered gravely. "If Black Antoine has broken out of the hole we plugged up a few hours ago, I fear Jean Jacques is now past human aid. I am thinking of those others the Twister has threatened, the mayor and Labreche. I have a notion he will visit them shortly, or try to."

"But they may already be dead!" exclaimed Gervais Lafleur. "The Twister said he would take their money or their lives tonight, did he not, Denise? *Helas, helas!* I fear it is now too late!"

"I don't think so," said Harding, snapping home the clip of his automatic and replacing the weapon in his pocket. "Apparently the murderer is winding up his affairs. Those two extortion notes suggest it. But I believe that for some reason he thinks I am his most dangerous enemy, and therefore tried to put me out of the way first.

"Now that he has failed, there's no telling what he'll do, but in any case the others must be warned. *Au revoir*, my friends!"

"*Au revoir!*" the voice of Denise followed him as he ran down the stairs. "And oh, monsieur, be careful!"

AT Harding's second knock, Labreche opened the door of the mayor's house, and after a sleepy recognition led the way into the salon.

"All has been quiet, Monsieur Harding," he said, yawning. "You really need not have disturbed yourself to come, though it was thoughtful of you. Monsieur Vanasse is just the same. I relieved Dr. Benoit at midnight, when we tried again to persuade Juste to go to bed. But he would not listen to us, poor man! Ten minutes ago he was still sitting there in his study upstairs, with a bundle of banknotes on his desk, and beginning on his fourth bottle of wine."

"Ten minutes ago?" The detective's tone was sharp. "You have not been upstairs since then?"

"Eh? Why, no, monsieur! Why do you ask? I had just finished making the rounds of the house at his request, when I heard your knock. I assure you, all has been quiet up there. The wine, you know— But where are you going now?"

Harding was already half way up the stairs, taking three steps at a leap. On reaching the study, he flung open the door, only to stand rigid in the draft from an open widow. His next glance fell on the slumped figure at the desk.



Juste Vanasse was dead. His grey face leered grotesquely up at the lighted lamp, while his torso leaned breast downward. There was no sign of the pile of banknotes, but a wine bottle had overturned, and its last few drops were still splashing dully on the floor.

Rage swept Harding's brain, to be followed swiftly by remorse. If only he had not delayed for those ten vital minutes in Laffeur's house! The fingerprints could have waited—

But once more professional habit asserted itself. Snapping on his flash-

light, he played it carefully over the polished surfaces of desk and chair and letter file, and with no surprise saw that they had been wiped clean of tell-tale prints. Last of all he turned his torch beam on the corpse itself.

There had been little struggle this time. Although the now familiar odor of musk permeated it, the mayor's clothing was scarcely disarranged except where his coat had slipped from one bulky shoulder. Harding turned to the door.

"Labreche!" he called.

"Coming monsieur!" the notary's voice floated up from the darkness below. "Have you persuaded him to go to bed? Poor Juste! What a night he has passed!"

As Labreche reached the head of stairs, Harding stopped him.

"You may go in if you wish," he said briefly, "but Monsieur Vanasse is not going to bed. The Twister has come and gone already."

"Ah, *mon dieu!* The Twister! But it is impossible! Impossible! He could not have escaped?"

"Get hold of yourself, monsieur!" Harding's tone was icy. "We can do nothing here for the moment, beside seeing that Madame Vanasse is not disturbed until Dr. Benoit arrives. And Father Michaud, of course. You had better go for them at once."

"The priest! Then—then you mean, Juste is dead?"

"He is. You may see for yourself."

"*Non! Non!*" The notary shrank back. "I don't wish to see. He was my friend, and I don't want to see him, like that! I'll go now, for Benoit and the priest. Poor Henriette!"

He turned and ran down the stairs.

CHAPTER VII

Labyrinth of Evil

THE sun was not yet above the treetops when Harding emerged on the rocky shelf leading to Black Antoine's prison. There, vastly relieved, he halted to watch the smoke of Peron's campfire curling thinly up from

the bushman's little shelter. After the past two hours' horror, he had come prepared for more stark evidence of the Twister's work.

"Hello, there, Jean Jacques!" he called. "*Comment ca va?*"

Silence answered him. A vagrant breeze fluttered something lying outside the brush lean-to. It was the scarlet tassel of a knitted *tuque*. With a wild curse he clambered over snow and rocks to fall on his knees at the lean-to's entrance.

Inside were the smouldering embers of a fire, and a huddled corpse.

Jean Jacques Perron lay on his side, with head wrenched back over the right shoulder. His right hand held a long hunting knife whose point showed a crust of frozen blood. His rifle, with lock and stock shattered, stuck up from the snow outside.

At least, thought Harding, the man died fighting as a man should. And the killer, if not mortally wounded, would bear the scars of that fight until caught and hanged.

But if he were not caught soon, more men would die horribly, perhaps even women. With wounds and fear of capture exploding his mad wits, the Twister would slaughter like a rabid wolf. Even Denise would not be safe! Harding admitted this with a shudder; and never in his experience had he come so near to despair. If he himself lived long enough, he would see this fiend caught, but in the meantime—

Forcing his thoughts under more rational control, he got to his feet and picked up the broken rifle. One look at the smashed breech wiped out a half hope that he had conceived. For the magazine was full, and another cartridge remained unfired in the chamber. A bullet wound might have crippled or seriously weakened the killer, but as it was he had probably got off with a mere knife cut. Perron had had no warning.

And that meant that the stone plug must still be in place!

A brief scramble took Harding to the base of the rock pile, where he stood gaping stupidly at the cave's entrance. The huge boulder, which had taken the strength of five men to roll in place, now leaned drunkenly aside, leaving an

opening of fully two feet!

His first amazement conquered, the detective thought rapidly. No one man, reason told him, could have budged that rock without tools, not even a man as strong as Black Antoine.

Therefore one of two answers must account for the open cave: either the wild man had found a pry-bar of some kind inside, or someone had managed to supply him one during the night.

Flashlight in hand, Harding stooped and entered the dark cleft. There, as he had expected, were the marks of a heavy crowbar dented into the frozen ground, and a little to one side lay the bar itself. Beyond it jagged shadows leaped from the cave walls to swallow the torch's darting beam.

The place was scarcely more than a large den, now empty as Harding quickly determined. At its highest part he could barely stand without striking the jammed rocks which formed its roof; but its floor, being a part of the ledge itself, was fairly smooth.

Mere habit caused him to sweep each corner methodically with his light, his mind recording even small particles of moss and stone with photographic exactness.

ALL at once, he was on hands and knees, scratching with his hunting knife at a lighter colored area where floor and rear wall joined. Gritty dust led to a closer scrutiny of the oblong patch. Finally he attacked a single spot with the blade, breathing heavily in his excitement as the sharp point bit deeper.

"Cement!" he muttered. "And laid over boards with an even joint all around!"

Half crouching, he ran back to the entrance and returned with the crowbar whose point fitted loosely into the hole he had just dug. There was a slight splintering as the trapdoor tilted up.

Harding's torch beam shone into what had been a fault or crevice in the otherwise solid cliff, filled with leaf mold and small rock fragments. Recently it had been cleared and fitted with rough wooden stairs that led steeply downward into blackness.

The bright, unpainted pine lumber

suggested that the work was less than a year old. An iron bolt, torn from its fastenings, proved that the trap had been made to open from the inside only.

But the purpose of it all? Its connection with Black Antoine's escape? These questions could be answered only at the passage's other end.

In Harding's mind there was no question of returning to the village for help. At any moment the user of this elaborate bolt hole might appear and, on discovering the forced trap, vanish again with whatever evidence he might wish to hide. That this evidence bore directly on the orgy of murder and robbery now approaching its ghastly climax, the detective no longer held any doubt.

Gripping his automatic, he went down the steps, his soft shoepacs moving noiselessly from tread to tread.

The stairs ended twenty feet down, not, as Harding had imagined, in a wider passage, but at the entrance of a low tunnel barely large enough for a man to crawl forward on all fours. It was like following down an animal's burrow, not knowing when the owner might come up to dispute the way. To make matters worse, Harding dared not use his flashlight for fear of betraying himself.

The tunnel took a sharp pitch through rock and dirt for perhaps fifty feet. Then, after making a right angle, it continued on a level in the direction of the village.

Harding could only guess at its length as he crawled along in darkness so dense that it could almost be felt. It might have been thirty yards or fifty that he penetrated before his head bumped into a wall of boards, and for a few seconds lights danced in front of his eyes.

One of those lights continued to flicker long after the others. Again and again Harding rubbed his eyeballs to make it go away, until a suspicion grew that it might be real. He put out an exploring hand and found empty space. The tunnel had taken another turn, he discovered, and on raising himself found that he could stand erect.

A few cautious steps solved the problem of the light. It came through a tiny

slit in some heavy drapery that moved in the fluctuating air of the tunnel. A finger inserted in the slit widened it enough to give a view of the lighted space beyond.

Two handmade tallow dips burned on a table which stood exactly in the center of a small, pine-boarded room. There was a door in each of two adjoining walls, while against the third an old-fashioned safe stood open. But these details registered automatically on the detective's senses. What gripped his brain was the identity of the man seated at the table. A suspicion that had previously flashed through his mind was coming home to roost!

UNDER the candlelight Alaric Labreche was adding columns in a clothbound ledger, and stopping now and then to dip his pen for another entry. The man was so completely absorbed that Harding's collision with the tunnel wall had not disturbed him. Probably even a much louder noise would have passed unnoticed.

For this reason, Harding from his peephole saw the opposite door opening, and recognized the three newcomers before the notary came alive to their presence. To be sure, the silent tableau they presented lasted no more than a few heartbeats after the soft closing of the door, but to Harding's amazed senses it seemed endless.

"Alaric! We've been searching the whole village for you! Where—"

"The devil!"

Galvanized, Labreche spun around, kicking shut the safe door. On his feet, snarling, he faced the wide-eyed look of Denise Lafleur, and behind her that of Benoit and Father Michaud. Then abruptly the man fell back into his chair, clapping a hand to his forehead.

"Pardon, Denise!" he murmured. "But you see how you startled me. And you, my friends! You find me in my homemade strong room, where no one has ever come.

"You see," he continued, smiling, as the others still stared wordlessly, "I had just returned from the house of poor Vanasse when the thought struck me to check up some private accounts. I am here perhaps an hour, my work is

almost finished, I am about to retire and get some sleep when, *pouf!*—you three appear like ghosts behind my chair!"

A weak laugh rattled through his teeth, dying away as his visitors' silence persisted. He stood again, with a gesture of upturned palms.

"But tell me, Denise—tell me why you have been hunting for me with such *empressement*, even to searching my own cellar? Has there been another murder?"

Dr. Benoit advanced to the table, slowly shaking his head.

"Self-murder, one may call it, perhaps," he replied. "Black Antoine has just been found dead behind the mayor's house—in the woodshed, to be exact. His rifle is clenched in his two hands, with the muzzle reversed. There is a hole in the roof of his mouth, and the back of his head is gone."

"Black Antoine? The Twister a suicide? Ah, ha, ha! But that is a good one, Benoit! The Devil turns philanthropist and gets rid of himself! *Salut*, Black Antoine!"

"Hush, my son!" The priest's thin hand lifted in horrified protest. "The death of a man self-condemned is cause for pity, not jest!"

Labreche bowed his head.

"You are right, Father! But I am hardly myself this morning. When poor Juste Vanasse was killed almost under my eyes, I think my nerve snapped; and now your news brings a different shock!"

"Ah, well, now that you have found me, I suppose we had best go upstairs and prepare our report for the police, eh? It will be a long and painful one to compose, I fear. But the good Sergeant Pierce will be relieved to know that the Twister is no more!"

"That sounds more like you!" smiled Denise, moving toward the door. "I had a shock, too, when you slammed that safe shut and glared at us like a man caught in a theft. You've nothing to hide, have you, Alaric?"

"I suspect he has, mademoiselle!"

Labreche whirled, his hand groping in a coat pocket. The others looked back in stark amazement at Harding, who stood tight-lipped by the curtained entrance. His pistol, casually lowered,

seemed to hold a dread fascination for all four of them.

"If I am not mistaken, Monsieur Labreche," he said harshly, "there are many things you might reasonably wish to hide. For instance, the means by which Black Antoine was spirited away from the cave up above here, and why he died. I believe you might name, if you chose, the perpetrator of other recent deaths, including—"

"Including your own, *Monsieur l'Americain!*"

CHAPTER VIII

Lair of the Twister

WITH the last word came a muffled report. Harding's body jerked sidewise, then toppled slack-kneed to the floor. Buried under a black wave of faintness, he retained enough sense to lie as he had fallen with eyes closed, barely breathing lest a second bullet should follow. There was already a dull agony spreading from his left shoulder.

Hard on the girl's terrified moan came the dry cackle of Labreche.

"What a pity! What a pity! Monsieur Harding was so eager to show his cleverness that he has forced me to shoot a hole in my coat pocket! And now, I fear, he is past apologizing for his bad manners. Ah, Denise my little one, your tears do credit to your tender heart! But comfort yourself.

"In a very little while you and the good doctor and the saintly Father Michaud will be looking down from a better world on such poor sinners as Alaric Labreche, who will then have no fear of your revealing his little secrets. You comprehend, my dear?"

There was a bleak silence, during which Harding fought desperately for consciousness. It ended with Benoit's hoarse shout.

"You! You, Labreche, are the Twister!"

"I? Am I the Twister? Oh, oh, *mon vieux*, that is to laugh!" The notary's giggle had a crazy pitch.

"But wait, Benoit! I must show

you the contents of my safe. Look well, but do not budge unless you wish to hasten the end!"

Through a haze of pain, Harding saw him step backwards and pull open the little iron door, while keeping his revolver trained on the other three. Labreche thrust his left hand inside and brought it out overflowing with yellow coins.

"There, my friends, is the gold of Donat Fabard! And here—" Rapidly he swept out a shower of paper mingled with more coins that tinkled dully on the earthen floor.

"Here are the hoardings of old Jean Couturier—the wedding *dot* of young Pierre Ladue—the price of Armand Dupont's new house! This little roll of banknotes reposed lately in the pack of that other American pig, James Parker. And this thick pile lay last night on the desk of Juste Vanasse, our lamented mayor. It is all here, you see, even to the few miserable *sous* from the pockets of our friend Jean Jacques Peron!"

"Spawn of the Devil, you have murdered him, too?" roared Benoit, and would have hurled himself at the other's throat had not the priest and Denise clung to his arms. Labreche gurgled with unholy merriment.

"Oh, no, my dear Doctor, you mistake me entirely! I did blow out the brains of Black Antoine, after putting

him to sleep with a cup of drugged wine. That was a nasty job, believe me; but it was necessary in order to make it appear that the Twister had killed himself in a fit of remorse. The real Twister, ah! He has no such feeling, as you will see for yourself."

Stepping close to the farther wall, Labreche gave a peculiar cough. At the end of a few seconds, the door beside which he stood began to open. Something within moved heavily. Then a hulking shape crowded the narrow space.

"Gilles!"

Denise's scream was echoed by the imbecile's broken cry.

"*J'ai peur!* I am afraid!"

"You see him?" chuckled Labreche. "He has neither conscience nor sentiment, but only fear. And I control that fear!"

"Be quiet, animal! Go over there and pick up that safe. That's it. Now, bring it here, and be careful not to drop it!"

MOVING like a great robot, Milot took a grip on the four-hundred-pound iron box, and lifted it easily. With short but steady steps he carried it to where the notary stood and lowered it carefully to the ground.

"All right! Back to the corner there and wait. To the corner, I said! And quickly, or you know what you'll get —"
[Turn page]

WHAT TO DO WHEN YOU HAVE A COLD



If you're nursing a cold —see a doctor! Curing a cold is the doctor's business. But the doctor himself will tell you that a regular movement of the bowels will help to shorten the duration of a cold. Also, that it will do much to make you less susceptible to colds.

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With the last words, Labreche drew from under his vest a thin, needle-sharp blade. The imbecile cringed, backed hastily away, whining like a terrified dog.

"Gilles, *mon pauvre!* Come here to me. I'll not let him harm you!"

At Denise's cry of pity, Milot started forward instinctively; but at the sight of the knife he shrank back again, blubbering. Labreche's laugh jarred on the close air of the little room.

"You see, my friends? He obeys me, whom he fears for good reason. You have seen those little scars I have cut into his thick hide from time to time, yes? It took a great many of them to teach him perfect obedience, but now I need give him only an occasional prick, or simply show him this little blade.

"He is especially meek today, having gotten a much worse cut from the knife of our lamented Jean Jacques, who objected somewhat violently to Gilles' caresses. You can see where the blood has dried on his shirt. His finger is sore, too, where Monsieur Harding tried to chew it. Poor Gilles, how he did howl over that!

"*Eh bien*, Father Michaud, what do you think of my *ame dame*, my great puppet that moves its clumsy feet and hands as I direct? Would you like to feel those hands on your head, twisting, twisting, grinding the neck bones until —"

"Enough, wretched man!" The old priest advanced a step, his thin, clenched hands trembling with passion. "Have you no dread of the awful punishment that awaits you, Alaric Labreche? You who have stained that poor innocent's hands with blood and his soul with murder! Oh, doubly damned shall be your soul, for all eternity—"

"Quiet, Father!" Benoit broke in. "Have I not told you many a time not to exhaust yourself? All this excitement is bad! Besides, on second thought it is evident that Monsieur Labreche speaks from a fevered imagination. As he said, last night's shock was too much for him. The money here is probably his own secret hoard, and for the rest we shall doubtless find an ex-

planation when the poor fellow is calmer.

"Our business now is to see that he gets some sleep. Come with us, Alaric. You will feel better upstairs in bed."

The notary tittered.

"Clever, very clever, my good Benoit! But I am not ill, as you pretend, and all I have told you happens to be true. One thing you say is correct, though: there are still certain matters to explain, and it shall be my privilege to satisfy your curiosity before I go away and leave you three—forever!"



He twitched the revolver suggestively, smiling at the swift play of emotions across Benoit's features.

"Ah! That little gleam in your eye, Doctor! You are thinking your absence will cause me to be questioned? But we all shall have disappeared simultaneously, you into the silent earth, and I into that wide, gay world of which the villagers of Bellechasse know nothing. The world where money counts more than stupid sentiments!

"Come! I will even show you the way I shall take. Monsieur Harding stumbled on it too soon, and that was his bad luck. The police will discover it too late to catch me, and that will be theirs. *Voilà!*"

HE moved to the heavy curtain and raised it, showing the cavellike space beyond.

"Black Antoine came this way, something over two hours ago. It communicates, you see, with that little hole which we plugged in the rocks above here last night."

Benoit stared, open-mouthed. Then his jaws shut with a click.

"Why did you kill Jean Jacques?"

he barked.

Labreche put out a hand in mock protest.

"Why did I have him killed, you mean, Doctor! But surely you understand? It must appear that the Twister had forced his way out unaided, encountering the faithful Perron as a matter of course. As for Antoine's supposed suicide, that was easier than faking a double killing at the den's mouth, and it appeals more to one's sense of the dramatic.

"But you have not said what you think of my secret tunnel, Benoit. Ingenious, is it not? Six months ago, Gilles carried away the last basket of earth from the digging; and behold! My road to the world beyond Bellechasse lay open."

Grinning, he stepped nearer to the astounded three.

"In an hour, my friends, all of you that is earthly will accompany me a few feet along that road. Then I shall leave you, and this end of it will be closed with the help of a little dynamite. The police, I fear, will be sorely puzzled, even angry perhaps that they cannot find us; but after all, one cannot hope to please everybody!"

The eyes of Denise and Father Michaud were closed, their lips moving silently as they stood hand in hand. Benoit, after one more grim stare at Labreche, turned his broad back.

"So? You do not seem interested in my plans?" The notary's voice took a higher note. "Then I shall have to provide you some livelier amusement, something I have had in mind for several minutes, to tell the truth. It will be the treat of a lifetime, I assure you, to see, and not only to see but to feel, the Twister in action! Ah, ah! That makes you open your eyes, does it not?"

Labreche had taken from his pocket a thin, wide-mouthed flask which he waved slowly back and forth. The others, now too horrified even to feel curiosity, watched without comprehending.

You cannot guess what I have here, *mes amis*?" he giggled. "Oh, but Gilles knows. Regard him now as he approaches. Come here, Gilles!"

CHAPTER IX

A Frankenstein's End

A FRIGHTFUL change had come over the imbecile youth. His mouth slavered, half open to expose the big, white eyeteeth. In the candlelight his eyes glowed redly. Alternate growls and whimperings came from his throat. Yet as he advanced, crouching, there was evidently in his clouded brain some agonizing fear.

Labreche rocked with savage amusement.

"See? He knows what is in this little bottle of mine. It is musk, a powerful tincture, and he hates it. He associates it with the most painful of all those scars I have given him, and he attacks whatever bears the scent. At first it was a canvas dummy, and he tore off its silly head. I never had to teach those big hands of his—instinct did that well enough, once the brute rage possessed him!

"You comprehend? I merely toss a few drops of this stuff on the three of you, and stand aside. Gilles, our gentle imbecile, will do the rest! It will be interesting, *mes amis*, to see him at play with three victims together. Before, he had only one at a time, and it was done too quickly, but now—"

Carefully drawing its stopper, Labreche raised the flask breast high. There was a gleam of white teeth below his neatly trimmed mustache.

"Why should we delay, dear friends? I am anxious to behold this last little drama of the Twister's career. I see you are prepared, Father, and the little Denise. And you, Doctor, are you ready for Gilles' embrace? *Adieu*, then—"

But even as Benoit tensed, there came a blasting report. Glass fragments reddened with blood dropped from the notary's clenched left hand. There was a choking odor of musk.

During the few seconds it took Harding to claw himself upright against the wall, Labreche stood gaping at his bullet-smashed hand. Then with a hoarse oath he whipped around, his revolver blazing.

Two shots barely missed the detective, but before his own still smoking weapon could reply a hurtling bulk tossed Labreche across the room. Two more reports came queerly muffled from beneath Gilles' heaving body. They were followed by a dull crack, like the breaking of a rotten stick.

Milot's growls died away in a last, deep sigh, and for a long moment there was deathly silence. It was Harding who broke it.

"Don't you think we had better take Mademoiselle Lafleur upstairs, Doctor? They are both dead, over there."

"*Mon dieu!* You are right, monsieur! But wait—you are badly hurt yourself! Here, drop that pistol and put your good arm over my neck. Denise! Father Michaud! Take his other arm, gently and help me. Can you walk a few steps, monsieur?"

Schooled in the emergencies of his profession, the burly doctor took charge with an energy that made even Denise forget temporarily the horror of a few minutes past. Half carrying the younger man, he got him up the cellar stairs and thence to a couch in the notary's office.

There his examination was brief, and his orders, sending the priest for surgical instruments and Denise to the nearest house for hot water, were quicker still.

HALF an hour later, Harding lay propped against deep pillows and heard Benoit answer the girl's worried question.

"Calm yourself, my little one! Monsieur suffers from the shock of a splintered collar bone and much loss of blood, but there is nothing which a few weeks of rest cannot mend. See! Here is the bullet I have extracted along with some threads of clothing which would have caused infection. There is no danger now, if our patient can have devoted nursing—and we will see to that, eh, my dear?"

Old Gervais Lafleur did not see the blush with which his daughter met the doctor's twinkling glance. Since he had come in on the priest's heels, he had had no eyes for anyone but the young American.

"Rest? Nursing? *Mais, bien entendu!*" he exclaimed with outflung hands. "Is not my home and all it contains at the service of monsieur, who has saved my little Denise from death? And she is a good nurse, Doctor Benoit! I know, because—"

A knock turned every head toward the door, which opened at Father Michaud's "*Entrez!*" to show two men in scarlet tunics. Sergeant Pierce came directly to the couch and seized Harding's hand.

"Heard just now that you were hurt," he growled, biting off the words. "Heard a lot more that didn't make sense! Speak up, man! What's it all about?"

In a few minutes the police sergeant's trained mind had grasped the story's essentials, and he with his constable had examined the contents of the cellar room. His face as he returned was eloquent of mixed feelings.

"Can scarcely believe it!" he snapped. "Most amazing climax of the most unheard of series of crimes! Er, Harding—awfully sorry about Parker, you know! Can't bring him back. But you've saved the police a jolly black eye over this business.

"One matter I don't understand yet: the attack on you last night. It wasn't money the fellow was after that time?"

The detective smiled, wincing slightly as he moved his head.

"I guess Labreche felt we were due to get somewhere on our manhunt, and picked me as his hottest danger," he murmured. "Perron and I had cornered Black Antoine, and if we'd been allowed to starve him out the wild man of Bellechasse would have been proved innocent after all. Even dead, An'pine might have been cleared, and that would have narrowed the search.

"Labreche was crazy, but he was keen enough to see that, and a lot of other things. I think the fingerprinting stunt at Fabard's cottage made him nervous and anxious to clean up in a hurry. Given much more time, he'd be likely to make a slip, and he knew it."

"In other words," nodded the policeman, "it was your rushing that forced him to a change of plans, and together with your spotting of his bolt hole

brought about the finale! You suspected him from the start, I suppose?"

"Not from the start, Sergeant. Of course, it was plain that the lettering of those notes he wrote to himself and Vanasse had been done by a man of precise mind and habits. Also the meticulous erasure of all fingerprints at Fabard's indicated the same characteristics. And Labreche happened to be the only one I had met who would fit that description perfectly. Then, of course, his presence at Vanasse's house when the mayor was killed certainly made me suspect him.

"He recalled that he hadn't even heard anything—and that was too pat. But my getting him in the end was pure luck."

"And pure grit!" barked Sergeant Pierce, picking up his gloves. "Leave

you now with your friends, and made-moiselle. I'll see you again shortly!"

The outer door closed smartly behind him, but the crisp flavor of officialdom lingered in the room until Benoit's warm, soft-spoken French absorbed it as the sunlight melts frost.

"*A la bonne heure, mes amis!* It is difficult, even for us who have seen it, to believe that both the brain which schemed murder and the hands which killed lie dead at this moment beneath our feet. And for two of us—" He glanced slyly at the slim figure of Denise bending over Harding's couch. "For two of us, I think it is the beginning of something else, *d'une affaire bien heureuse!*"

"*Oui,*" murmured Father Michaud. "The law of life is not broken: 'Out of evil shall come great good!'"



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With demon strength he raised the body

I STOPPED my car at the bottom of the cliff, and stared up at the old house which loomed on the summit with the dark sky behind it. Lights were in several of its windows, little yellow eyes winking in the night.

Against the sullen, cloudy sky of the autumn evening, the outlines of the big frame building were a blurred silhouette. It was an ornate old-fashioned structure of four stories, with a peaked and gabled roof, balconies outside some of its upper windows; and below, to one side, a huge veranda.

A lonely, brooding, darkling sort of place, this old house which was Nan Somers' home. I had never been here before; had driven up from New York today in answer to her telegram urging me to come.

The road from the bottom of the cliff wound up around the rocky promontory. Then I was upon its flat top, with the wind lashing in a blast and the dark outlines of the decrepit old house looming ahead of me. I ran my car under the porte cochere, and suddenly out of the darkness a figure materialized at the running board.

"Bob Raleigh?"

"Why yes," I said.

"Nan told me she expected you. I'm her cousin, Karl Gruen. We're glad you could come." He was a young fellow; tall, stalwart, bareheaded, his black hair tousled by the wind. "Come up on the veranda a minute," he said. His laugh seemed nervous. "Did Nan—tell you anything about our affairs here?"

Weird, this reception of mine. "Why no," I said wonderingly.

The porte cochere door opened. It was Nan; her slim figure framed in the doorway.

"You, Bob! I knew you'd come. I'm—so frightened. I wanted you—Uncle's been acting so queer. We don't know what to do about it." She was breathless; almost incoherent.

"Where is he now, Nan?" Gruen asked.

"Locked in his room, I guess. Peters told me I'd better not go near him."

"Nor had I," Gruen said with a nervous, lugubrious laugh. His hand went to my shoulder. "You must think we're crazy, Raleigh, receiving you like this. The truth is we're worried—puzzled. It all came so quickly. I've been in town all day. Nan sent for Dr. Carter this afternoon, but Uncle chased him away."

He closed the door so that we stood in the wind-swept darkness. "Nan says he's much worse now than when Dr. Carter was here," he added. "I suppose by tomorrow we'll have to have him taken away. Nan's afraid of him now."

AN insane man here? That gave me a shiver.

"I—love him; he's always been so gentle with me." A note of hushed horror was in Nan's voice. "If we send him away—that would surely drive him insane. He might—kill himself!"

"We can't talk inside," Gruen said. "He roams around, listening. You explain, Nan. . . . Have you had supper, Raleigh?"

"Well—"

"Nan will get you some. We've had ours." He stood with his hand on the doorknob. By the dim light I could see that he was no more than twenty-one;

worried at this sudden responsibility. "I'm glad you're here," he repeated. "After supper, we'll decide something. We ought to phone Dr. Carter again I guess. I'll be in my room if you want me, Nan. Or I'll join you in the kitchen."

He closed the door. Nan and I went to the veranda.

"Tell me," I said. "And I'll do what I can."

The wind and the black shadows enveloped us as she told me the details of this weird household in the big old mansion. And I sat wordless, listening. Gruen, her young cousin, her only close relative, had been living in California. Nan lived here with their rich, eccentric widower uncle, old Eli Somers. There was no one else of the household but Peters, valet, butler, and general servant.

Old Somers was a recluse. Several years ago, the explosion of an oil stove had seriously burned his face—scarred, disfigured it, so that he shunned everyone, believing they would be revolted, or laugh at him.

He had always loved Nan, but suddenly today he had turned against her.

"I'm afraid of him now," she was saying tremulously. "Afraid—he might want to kill me. And just a little while ago he began ranting. Fire and flames—Peters says that's all he talks about."

An old man brooding over his burned, disfigured face, ranting of fire and flames. . . .

For half an hour, perhaps, we sat there talking of it and I agreed with Gruen. We would send for Dr. Carter.

The wind every moment had been increasing in strength. Exposed on the cliff-top, the decrepit old building creaked and rattled under the gusts.

"Shall we go in?" I said at last. I put my arm around Nan. "Don't you worry, Nan. It may be just something temporary. Maybe if I talk to him. . . . Sometimes a stranger can do more than a loved one."

My words were far more confident than my feelings. Never in my life had I met an insane person. I found myself wondering if this old man might have a gun or a knife hidden about his person.

We went in the porte cochere door. The big old hallway was dim with yellow glow. There were half a dozen yawning dark doorways. No wonder Nan, and Gruen also, were frightened. I found myself tense as we moved along the musty hall, with the feeling that from any one of these dark doorways the maniacal man might leap upon us.

And at once I was aware of a queer odor. The smell of smoke was here. I mentioned it.

"Peters made fires in some of the fireplaces," Nan said. "It's chilly tonight."

A log fire was burning in a big fireplace down the hall. The windstorm outside might cause the chimneys to back-draft.

"Oh, yes," I agreed.

But mingled with the smell of smoke, what Nan didn't notice, was the vague smell of sulphur!

We had gone only a few feet when a step sounded; and abruptly from a doorway a blob appeared, materialized into the thin figure of a pallid-faced man in black.

Nan clutched at me; then she relaxed. "Oh, you, Peters. Where is he?"

"In his room, Miss Nancy."

"Just the same?"

"Yes, I think so. He was still mumbling to himself."

Instinctively they spoke in furtive undertones, as one does in a house of desperate sickness, or death.

Peters was a man of about forty, smooth-shaven, noticeably pallid, inscrutable; with the look of a trained domestic servant.

"Mr. Raleigh has luggage in his car?" he asked.

"One suitcase," I said.

"The bedroom next to mine, Peters," Nancy told him.

He nodded and suddenly he moved closer to us.

"Where are you and Mr. Raleigh going now, Miss Nancy?" He spoke still more softly; furtively; and the gaze he flung around the hall had obvious fear in it.

"To the kitchen," she said. "I'm going to prepare Mr. Raleigh some sup-

per. Peters, what—"

He was gazing at me now. "I'll come there," he murmured. "Something I—"

He checked himself, and all three of us stood stricken. From the top of a nearby staircase an eerie voice sounded.

"Fire to warm me—I'm cold—this cursed house. . . . Nancy? Is that you down there?"

Peters moved away from us. I stared up the staircase. The upper hall was dimly lighted. The light struck upon the latticed rail. And behind the bars, close by the floor, I saw a monstrous, twisted face glaring down at us.

MY arm had gone around Nan.

"Answer him," I murmured.

"Or shall I try—"

"Nancy! Nancy! Can't you talk?"

"Yes—yes, Uncle."

"Who's that man with you? Is that the visitor? Peters told me—"

"Yes, it is, Uncle Eli. It's Bob Raleigh. He—"

"Bring him up here! I want to see him."

Nan and I exchanged glances. From down the hall I could see Peters standing like a statue at the porte cochere door, watching us.

"Nancy! How dare you refuse to talk to me! I won't tolerate it. I want fire, I tell you. I'm cold—I'm sick—fire and flame—it can't hurt me now. Bring that young man up here—I want to see him. I'm not afraid of fire any more. . . . Bring that man up here."

"All right, Mr. Somers," I called soothingly. "I do want to meet you."

The face suddenly disappeared. Then it showed above the rail as he stood up, a tall figure in a dressing gown, with a mop of iron-grey hair. A powerful man, undoubtedly. The light showed his face more clearly now. A gargoyle. Involuntarily I drew in my breath, staring fascinated. The skin of the whole face was ridged, purple-red, and puckered. The mouth was twisted by a purple scar in one corner so that it seemed to hold a perpetual sidelong leer that exposed his teeth.

And suddenly he laughed again with that eerie, chilling burst.

"Flames—to purge me of sin—that's what I want, you hear me? Where's Peters?" He stood rattling the rail bars like an animal in a cage. "I want Peters! I want all of us to be purged of sin. That's what fire can do. It doesn't always burn your face. It can purge you of sin. Fire and flames! I want Peters to come up here!"

Nan was shuddering against me. "Oh, Bob!" she murmured. "He's much worse. What'll we do?"

"Can Peters handle him best?"

"Yes—oh, yes, I guess so."

I saw Peters coming in the door with my suitcase. Old Somers was shouting now.

"I want more sulphur! All the sulphur I found in the cellar is gone. Sulphur mixed with fire purifies everything . . . Where's Peters?"

"He's coming," I called. "You go back to your room, Mr. Somers. He'll be right there."

"Peters—" The madman was leaning over the rail now. He saw Peters and suddenly he quieted. "Please come up, Peters. Don't you know I'm cold?"

"I'm coming, Mr. Somers," Peters called.

"There's no fire in his room?" I whispered to Nancy.

"No—I don't think so."

The weird figure in the upper hall suddenly had vanished. We heard the patter of his slippers as he went back to his bedroom. The door slammed.

"You quiet him," I whispered to Peters. "Don't build a fire up there."

"No sir. Of course not."

"And if you leave him, can you lock him in his room without his knowing it?"

At Nan's horrified exclamation I could only try to smile reassuringly.

"Yes," Peters said.

"Well, do that. Mr. Gruen and I will phone for Dr. Carter."

Peters nodded. Again it seemed he had something he wanted to say. But he checked himself and with an unfathomable look at me he went up the staircase. From behind the closed door up there we could hear the old man's mumbling voice—wild ravings of flame and fire.

I DREW the terrified Nan away. Certainly it was no time to mince words. Despite the fact that Peters seemed to be able to handle the maniac it was obvious that we should have Dr. Carter at once and possibly men and equipment from the nearest hospital to take Somers away. But this last I saw no need to mention.

We telephoned Dr. Carter. He was out; was expected back in an hour.

In the kitchen I sat silently watching as the tense, white-faced Nan prepared me a little supper. The storm had increased in violence. Rain was beating against the kitchen windows. The wind howled past the building corners. And Peters—what was it that Peters had been about to say to us?

As I ate supper, though Nan pathetically was trying to make conversation, talking of my life in New York, of our meeting there last summer, of the happy times we had had, still I found myself tensely listening to the noise of the storm; the creaking and rattle of the old house. What was going on upstairs? Was Peters having trouble with the madman?

Gruen had said he would join us here. His room was in a distant wing, and doubtless he hadn't heard old Somers shouting at me when I arrived. It was possible he did not know. Somers was so much worse now.

Stairs led upward from the kitchen. The door to the stairs was open. My nerves were so tense that I cursed the storm which seemed to be making weird sounds from overhead. Suppose the maniac were roaming the house—looking for fire!

Was that the patter of his feet, up there now? Was that his eerie, irrational voice, muffled by a door? I told myself that my imagination was playing me tricks; and then from above came a thump, so real that neither of us could mistake it.

I leaped to my feet; met Nan's terrified gaze. But only silence followed.

I laughed. "We're like two old women, Nan. A shutter banging in the wind—"

I went back to my supper, though certainly I had little appetite for it. Were there any firearms in the house,

that Somers might have hidden in his room? I finally asked Nan about that. "No," she said. "I've never seen any."

One may have a premonition of horror as it comes stalking. I think I had such a premonition now. A telephone was on the kitchen wall, and upon impulse I jumped up and went to it with the idea of phoning the nearest hospital. We wouldn't wait for Dr. Carter.

There was no hum of the current in my ear. The telephone was dead.

"The storm," I said, as Nan stared at me. "The phone is dead."

Or had the maniac cut it?

It seemed in that instant as though we were isolated in this brightly lighted kitchen — and upstairs a maniac was loose! Where were Peters and Gruen? Both had said they would join us here.

I hung up the receiver and abruptly from the head of the kitchen stairs came a shout.

"Nan! Good Lord, Nan! Come here — you Raleigh — hurry!"

It was Gruen's voice, urgent, horrified. With a dozen ghastly possibilities leaping into my mind, I dashed for the stairs.

"Coming!" I called.

A KNIFE lay on the kitchen table. I seized it, shoved Nan behind me. "Where's Peters?" Gruen called again. "Is he down there with you? Where's Uncle Eli—what happened?"

I was no more than halfway up the steep flight of stairs when I heard a thump; the sound of a scuffle; a suppressed cry.

Nan clung to me. "Bob—"

I shoved her back. "You stay in the kitchen."

I went on up the stairs. I was hardly conscious that Nan, too terrified to stay anywhere alone, was after me.

There was only silence from the upper hall now. At the top, with sudden thought that the murderous maniac might be ready to spring upon me, I paused warily, knife in hand.

There seemed nothing here; there was visible only a short segment of dim, narrow, back hallway. It turned a right angle ten feet away.

With Nan again clinging to me, I

stood listening. Was that a distant pattering of retreating footsteps? It sounded like the slap of slippers, and a scraping as though something were being dragged. And then there was the distant sound of eerie laughter. The maniac was loose!

"Fire! I want fire! We all need fire — it warms you back into life when you're cold!"

Nan and I were at the hall angle now. The main upper hall stretched dim before us. The madman's voice sounded as though he were at the main front staircase. His room was beside us; its door open. The room seemed empty.

"Gruen — Peters," I called softly. "Where are you?"

Why couldn't they answer? I had no need to guess, for in the room where Peters had been guarding the maniac, a crimsoned bath towel lay on the floor. The rug was crimsoned—a shambles of gore.

"Raleigh! Raleigh!" Gruen's distant, terrified voice rang out. "Help!"

I ran, plunging forward. But Gruen's voice turned into a scream, mingled with the maniac's laughter.

"Blood is warm, too! You can't stop me, Karl! I've got you. Your blood to warm and strengthen me. Blood and fire! They give you life. Death is cold, but fire and blood are warm!"

Gruen's scream of agony had died away. I was plunging forward along the hall toward the distant maniac voice when abruptly everything was plunged into blackness. Solid blackness, with every light simultaneously extinguished.

"Bob! Bob!"

That was Nan's terrified scream from behind me. In the blackness I had stopped running. The hall was an abyss. Had the maniac pulled the main switch? I recalled I had noticed a big fuse box at the foot of the front staircase.

"Bob, where are you?"

We found each other. Babbling with terror Nan clung to me. My senses were whirling as I stood gripping the knife, every muscle tense, straining my eyes to penetrate the abyss of blackness. Nothing to see. Nothing to hear, save the wind surging outside.

Where was the madman now? Ahead

of me, down the front staircase, gloating with demoniac, murderous frenzy over the slashed body of Gruen? Or had he dropped the body, and come creeping back here for Nan and me? He was making no sound. With maniacal cunning, I knew he could come stalking like a panther.

IN those grisly seconds as I stood frozen, with racing heart and the cold sweat of horror bathing me, I own I had no desire to dash forward and try to rescue Gruen, if indeed he were not already dead. To capture and subdue the maniac now was furthest from my thoughts. Peters, too, was a victim. I had no doubt of it. Only one idea flooded me—to get Nan out of this ghastly house, into my car and away.

The maniac seemingly was on or near the front staircase. With Nan clinging to me, all but fainting as I half dragged her with me, I fumbled my way hurriedly back along the hall. It had stopped raining. We passed a hall window; I could see fitful moonlight outside.

We came to the head of the kitchen stairs. Moonlight had come through the kitchen windows, and a pallid glow straggled up the stairs. We went down them. Into the kitchen.

Then a scream burst from Nan; and at what we saw I stood frozen, all my blood seeming turned to ice with the rush of horror that engulfed me. In a shadowed corner of the kitchen a man was sitting on a chair—a man in black with a pallid face, slashed crimson.

"Peters!" I gasped.

But he did not move; sat queerly slumped, with dangling head sagging forward on his chest. And as I stared for that ghastly second, his body pitched forward to the floor at my feet. The thump of it mingled with a moan from Nan and she wilted, unconscious, from the loop of my arm.

I stooped to pick her up, and heard behind me the dim slap of slippered feet. I tried to straighten and whirl. But it was too late. The maniac had come here from the front hall. I had an instant glimpse of his disfigured face.

Then something he threw struck me on the back of the head. The knife

clattered from my hand as I fell, with my senses whirling off into a soundless abyss of unconsciousness. . . .

AFTER a nameless interval of blackness I seemed to feel myself floating in a phantasmagoria of empty darkness. Then I was aware of the smell of sulphur, as though now the thing that had been myself was plunging down into a vast, infernal realm. Dropping into blackness. Yet it was not quite black; a little red was in it. The dim glare of fire in a pit of hell, with black, sulphuric smoke.

Fire and flames, here in this abyss.

"Fire and flames!"

Suddenly I realized that I was hearing the words. They were dim, blurred, as though echoing from an infinite distance across the void.

"Flames that destroy—but that's when the fire god is angry. He's not angry now. He's afraid of me—because I'm his master!"

Horrible, cackling laughter mingled with the wild, blurred words. But the voice was clarifying, so that abruptly I knew that this was stark reality. The maniac was here, somewhere near me.

And over the roaring of my head, now I could hear the crackling of fire. A yellow-red glow was dimly visible. Heat was beating upon my dank, sweat-bathed body; the sulphuric smoke from it wafted at me so that I choked, weakly coughing.

It may have been only a few seconds as consciousness came back to me. I tried weakly to move and found that something was holding me. A pain was stabbing at the back of my head, a wound where the maniacal old man had struck me.

I found that I was sitting propped up against a wall, with a rope lashing my wrists behind me and wound around my body, with my ankles firmly bound. Strength was coming to me; the roaring in my ears was lessening, the sweat drying upon my limbs. All my senses, swiftly now, were clarifying. My staring eyes were open, and like a lens going into focus, the blurred, dimly red scene before me sharpened into reality.

I was in what seemed to be the huge, high-ceilinged cellar of the building.

The maniac had propped me upon a broad concrete ledge against the wall some six feet from the floor, so that I was gazing down upon a thirty or forty foot stretch of the cellar.

Reality. There was no question of that. Yet the glaring, yellow-red scene could have been snatched from my phantasmagoria of hell. I saw, some thirty feet from me, down in the center of the dirt cellar floor, a huge metal caldron—a great, pot-bellied iron thing some ten feet across its circular top. A pit had been dug into the floor to hold it, so that its upper lip projected up only two or three feet.

A giant caldron of fire. Flames leaped from it. Smoke rolled up, gathered at the ceiling and was sucked away by a draft out through a tunnel-like side exit.

Save for the flames, the huge cellar was lightless. An infernal scene of smoke and leaping flames, swaying shadows; a vista of hell.

The smoke was thickening. Despite that now, all my faculties had come back, the leaping shadows and the smoke, blurred with the glare, made everything dim.

"The burial place—a warm little tomb—it will purify us all. Eh, Nancy?"

THE name shocked me. Abruptly I realized that I had been staring numbly, coping with the weirdness of what I was seeing, still with a dazed confusion. But at the mention of Nan, I snapped into horrified alertness. The figure of the maniac was visible on the other side of the caldron. The flames illumined him with momentary clearness, stalwart in the dressing gown—his iron-grey mop of hair—his ghastly disfigured face leering with the lust of murderous frenzy so that even the last vestige of human aspect was gone from it.

And beside him I saw Nan. She was lying half upon a litter of rubbish, with her clothes half torn from her, a rope binding her and a gag in her mouth. And I saw that in all this horror she was conscious. The glare was painting her livid face with a lurid, unnatural flush. Her eyes, wide with terror, were

staring across the blurred scene as though at me.

The maniac was tossing fagots into the caldron, scrambling around the littered floor with feverish, demoniac haste. The whole dim, lurid scene was a litter. Broken barrels and boxes were piled high against the wall. Among them, shadowed by them to one side of the flaming caldron, I saw that a body was propped—a man in shirt and trousers.

As I stared through the shifting glare and smoke, the panting madman suddenly turned that way.

"Not dead yet, Karl?" His fiendish, irrational laugh rang out. "You have lives like a cat. That is good. You will be conscious when the flames lick at your body—purging it of sin. All of us—going into the flames. We're not afraid of them, are we, Karl? We long for them—all of us to be cleansed at last!"

Gruen, not dead, but dying doubtless? I could see the ropes binding his body, as I was bound. And Nan. And here beside me on the cellar ledge abruptly now I was aware of the crimsoned, weltering body of Peters, only a foot or two from me. It was so close that I could see his ghastly, slashed face, with frozen dead eyes seeming to stare at me. All of us here at the mercy of this frenzied, murderous maniac, who with twisted brain was lusting for the flames. All of us, and himself too, undoubtedly to be cast into that flaming caldron.

"The fire god wants us, Nancy. Don't struggle, child. Your white flesh will be warmed. You're cold—that will all be over in a few minutes now. You and I—we'll lie in the flames together. You were always good to me—I don't forget. Fire and sulphur, to cleanse us —"

The flames were leaping higher—yellow-red tongues licking at the smoky air as though with an eagerness to seize these human victims. The chunks of yellow sulphur which the maniac was tossing into the caldron now, edged the flames with lurid purple. The orange smoke rolled up, pungent, acrid so that the maniac coughed as wildly he laughed and raved.

SILENTLY, desperately, I had been straining at the rope that bound me. But it held. Behind me, the cellar wall was rocky. I fumbled with my lashed wrists, desperately rubbing. If only there would be some sharp projection that might wear through the rope.

The skin of my hands and wrists was bleeding now. I could not tell if the rope was cutting—and it would take so long.

"Not yet, Nancy." The maniac was bending over her, and her scream of frenzied terror was mumbled, choked by the gag. "You will have to wait your turn. We will let Peters go in first."

Despite my horrified fascination as I stared at the demonlike, hellish scene by the flaming caldron, out of the tail of my eye the body of Peters beside me was visible. And abruptly I saw that it was moving. The ghastly face lifted up a little; a twitching elbow went under the body. Peters was not quite dead. With consciousness momentarily returning, with that flair of strength which sometimes comes just before death, he was hitching toward me. His hands, crimsoned with gore from the maniac's knife, came fumbling at the rope that bound me.

"Peters—"

"He killed me—he—"

I saw the madman coming toward us. Peters' hands had loosed my rope a little.

I had a glimpse of his blood-strewn face, then his fumbling hands fell away. He twitched, and I think that mercifully he died.

Then the maniac was confronting me.

"Oh, you are fully recovered, Raleigh. I knew I hadn't hurt you much. The flames are waiting for you, but Peters first."

His burned, disfigured face for just an instant glared at me with a demonic leer. Then he stooped, gathered Peters' body in his arms and with a wild laugh of lusty triumph, staggered for the caldron.

Frantically I jerked at the rope. It was loosening. My feet came free so that I could twist, working at my hands.

"Goodbye, Peters, you were a faithful servant. Lie in the flames—I will

join you in a minute."

With demon strength he raised Peters' body, hurled it down into the huge, fiery pit.

"And you, Nancy, you saw him go? I'll loose you now. You stand with me; we'll be in there with him soon."

The scream that burst from her as he bent down seemed to choke in her constricted throat.

"Hurry, Nancy, we must watch him." He had lifted her, pulling the gag from her mouth, holding her with an arm about her as she sagged.

At last I was free. The cellar was full of smoke now. The scene more than ever was blurred, so that as I leaped, plunging, the maniac did not see me until I was almost upon him.

"Why, my God—"

Then he snarled with mouthing fury as he cast Nan away and whirled to meet my rush. My fist jabbed at his gargoyle face, but with an astonishing, dexterous cunning, he ducked so that my blow only grazed him. Then he clinched, with his arms around me, his legs entwining mine so that he hung upon me, a huge puma with fangs snarling at my throat.

FOR a moment I staggered, stumbled and fell, with the madman on top of me. The strength of a demon seemed within this maniacal old man. He was taller than I; his body sprawled upon me now was solid with muscle. The red-yellow glare of the flames painted his monstrous, disfigured face; its puckered lips were twisted as he snarled like an animal.

He had me by the throat now. The blows of my flailing fists against his chest and into his face only made him snarl with greater fury. My breath was shut off by his strangling fingers. But with a last desperation I tore them loose, lunged and squirmed partly from under him so that we rolled and then broke away.

I leaped erect; but he had all my agility and was up with me. And in the lurid glare I could see him fumbling under the dressing gown. At my feet Nan was crouching, struggling up on one elbow. She screamed a warning as from under his dressing gown

the murderous maniac drew a long, thin knife, sodden with blood. And with a panting, grunting cry he lunged the blade at me, grazed my shoulder as my fist deflected the blow. Then I caught him by the wrist.

For a moment, locked together, pantingly we swayed, almost motionless, momentarily spent. His contorted face was close to mine and as the flames illumined it more clearly, I stared as there came over me a shock of startled wonderment. This face, scarred, puckered with monstrous disfigurement—the mouth no longer was twisted! The lips were parted with panting breath, snarling and baring even, white teeth. Not a puckered mouth!

And I saw that a red scar on his cheek had been knocked awry by my blows. An artificial scar! It was a youthful face, with artificial scars, red puckered, artificial skin!

Most of the scars were gone now so that here was the smooth face of youth, bathed with sweat, contorted only with the lust for killing. The arms of a powerful young man were around me. His body was solid with youthful muscle. The shock of black hair was shot with grey. But I saw that the grey was only some chalky substance clinging to the hair.

It was an amazing revelation! These luminous dark eyes staring at me, were eyes in which was murderous lust, but nothing of insanity!

"Why — why, it's you, Gruen!" I heard myself gasping.

He snarled for answer. His hand with the knife tried to break loose. I think that my recognition must have terrified him, and it struck me with so sudden an infuriated desperation that I tore the knife from him, broke from his hold and struck with the knife. It sank, and I plunged it deep; held it for a grisly instant.

He gasped with only a choked scream as he fell, twitching, with hands fumbling at the knife handle, trying to pluck the blade from his chest.

"Nan! Dear—"

She was my first thought. I found her, dropped beside her, holding her close for a moment with the heat of the fiery caldron blasting us and the sulphurous

smoke swirling overhead.

AND a groan sounded. Then a faint voice, blurred with the cackling of the fire:

"Raleigh, come here — I'm almost gone—"

It was Gruen's gasping voice, with all his assumed insanity gone from it; just the faint voice of a man dying.

We bent over him, a grotesque figure in a blood-soaked dressing gown. The knife was still in his chest. His pallid face, glistening with crimsoned colloid, blood and sweat, was a travesty. But his luminous, glazing dark eyes were trying to focus on me, and his livid lips were trying to smile ironically.

"Got me, Raleigh. I never believed that would happen. I would have—inherited the old man's millions — with Nan and him both dead. That's the old man's body — propped over there. I killed him yesterday."

The body I had thought was the dead or dying Gruen! I could see it much more plainly from here, could see the reality of scarred face and iron-grey hair, the stalwart old man's body, clad in trousers and shirt.

It was an amazingly daring, yet simple plan which the fiendish Gruen had so nearly consummated. With his faint, dying breath, he seemed anxious to tell it all to me. Peters had been in it with him. They had kept this portion of the cellar locked. The masquerading Gruen feigning insanity, had let no one near him, save Peters.

"But I could not—trust Peters," he was murmuring. "And anyway—I was going to kill him when I was through with him. But I wasn't going to kill you, Raleigh. I needed you for a witness. Don't you see how — cleverly I was working it? I cut the telephone. Put out the lights. I had you convinced —up there in the hall—that the maniac had practically killed Gruen. And —down here—you saw Peters hurled into the flames. I meant you to see Nan—down there. Then—don't you see—the maniac would have rushed at the body you thought was Gruen's. You couldn't have seen details from so far away. I would have put the dressing gown on the old man's body—and let

the body lunge—into the caldron. You would have thought it was the living maniac who had forgotten Gruen and hurled himself to his death.”

He coughed with the blood in his throat. One of his hands weakly came up with a gesture.

“Clever, wasn’t it, Raleigh? Then—you and I, Karl Gruen, would have—been the only survivors. After a little while I would have pretended to get loose. Then I would have rescued you. It was—so simple a scheme and I—had it almost accomplished—”

A torrent of blood gushed from his mouth. His whole body twitched with a convulsion. Then the light went out

of his eyes, and he was gone.

Behind me the shuddering Nan crouched with a hand against her mouth. I lifted her up. The flames in the caldron still were eagerly leaping.

We ran for the little tunnel-like exit, where the smoke was sucking out into the open air of the night. And as we passed the piled litter of crates and barrels, high on top of which old Eli Somers was propped, I stumbled against one of the lower boxes. The blow made them all quiver, shook the body loose. It fell forward, tumbling in an arc over us—a stiff dead thing gruesomely turning as it plunged head first into the fiery caldron.



In the Next Issue

THE MAD BRAIN

A Weird Novelette

By **RICHARD B. SALE**

AND MANY OTHER SPINE-TINGLING THRILLERS

SAY
"LUDEN'S"

**BECAUSE . . .
THEY ACT
3 WAYS**

- ① Soothe inflamed membranes.
- ② Menthol helps clear the head.
- ③ Build up alkaline reserve.
(Important to cold resistance.)

From a **MEDICAL JOURNAL**: "The researches (of these doctors) led them to believe that colds result from an acid condition. To overcome this, they prescribe various alkalis."

THE DEVIL

CHAPTER I

"Where the Bird of Darkness Flies—"

"WE might," Gates Dunning said in his nasal drawl, "try burning fish livers as a protection tonight. Devils are said to hate that. The ancients used it against the *Shedhim*—winged monsters who were the offspring of human women and demons."

I scowled at the back of his head and bit my lip. All through the long afternoon we had toiled up toward the rim of that hidden canyon where Harlan Temple and Spurgeon Rand had already pitched camp. And now the sun

A Complete Novelette of Evil Horror

was sinking in a bloody welter and my nerves and temper were frayed, more by Dunning's endless morbid chatter than by the ghostly nonsense I had been hearing for the past two months. This last remark was about all I could take.

"You damned encyclopedia," I growled, "if I hear you draw another comparison between the fabulous bird-monster who's supposed to haunt this canyon and any other creature out of mythology, I'm going to flatten you out. I've heard all the legends of the Mexicans and Indians and the degenerate whites of Joshua Torby's cult, and it's all rot. I don't want to hear any more."

Gates Dunning laughed—an unpleasant, simpering sound. "Very well," he said in his infuriatingly blasé tone, "but maybe you'd like to know what



A Feathered Monster Demands Blood Sacrifice

WEARS WINGS

By
**JOHN H.
KNOX**

*Author of "Death Visits
the Centennial," "Slaves
of the Dancing Beast,"
etc.*



On a catafalque of pine boughs lay the girl's gleaming body

In Weird Rituals of a Mexican Jungle Cult

those half-breed loafers in the village were saying as we passed them on our way out." He glanced toward Nell as he spoke.

"Well, what?" I snapped, doubly angry because this odious fellow was the only one of us who was scholar enough to understand the Indian dialects.

"They were saying," he answered, "that the great bird-woman was going up to the eyrie of *Camazotz*, to be the bird-god's bride."

I snorted but did not answer, and I was glad that he was walking ahead beside the burro on which Nell was riding and couldn't see my face as I walked behind, leading the second burro loaded with our supplies.

WAS the idiot, I wondered, deliberately trying to play on my nerves? I knew he was smitten with Nell, but then so were a lot of other men and it had certainly got them nowhere. My eyes lingered on her now with a smoldering possessiveness as her lovely body swayed and undulated to the burro's gentle pace, and the crimson brush of sunset smeared the liquid ripples of her ash-blond hair.

America's Number One Bird-Woman! I had always hated that term with which the tabloids had tagged her. I had hated it even more since recent headlines had flared:

FAMED BIRD-WOMAN WILL HUNT GOLDEN ROC'S EGG.

Now, angry as I was with myself for letting Dunning's absurd babbling disturb me, I had to admit nevertheless that there was more than a mere leavening of fear in the ferment that seethed under my ribs.

The trail was steep; we were nearing the rim of that barren, craterlike valley. There was still a long trek ahead—down through the canyon to the camp on the far side. The sky was growing dark, the breeze beginning to rise, and we were hearing for the first time that weird singing of the wind through the cliff formations; a sound I was never to forget.

It was there, said the natives, that the giant bird-thing they called *Camazotz* had his lair, preying on the bodies of women, tearing the bodies of men

with inhuman talons. Somewhere, too, in those sombre cliffs was supposed to be the secret temple of the cultists who worshipped the golden egg which we had set out to find.

"'Bride of the bird-god!'" I fumed under my breath.

Why had Nell talked me into coming on this idiotic expedition, anyhow? Surely she was already sated with pub-



licity. She had lived in the spotlight since her teens when Harlan Temple had financed her first flight, which made her famous. There had followed her marriage with Luke Temple, Harlan's brother, and a famed aviator himself.

And two years ago that tragedy in the jungles of Yucatan had shocked a continent, and had linked our names for the first time—I, the obscure assistant to her famous husband, who had flown with them to photograph some Mayan ruins; I, who had been captured with them by the savage natives and who had helped her to escape after Luke Temple's horrible death; I, who later had married her, who had clung to her and kept my chin up through all the ugly hints, foul as they were groundless, which had smeared our romance and threatened to blight it. I, who still couldn't deny her anything she wanted—even this fantastic trip.

She had first sprung the idea on me a couple of months ago. At the time she had been amusing herself by flying over some of the wild and unexplored mountain territory in Arizona, and had come back from one of these trips with a weird tale she had picked up of a cult of low-breed whites and half-breed Indians and Mexicans who were said to worship a monster egg encased in gold. She had come to Harlan Temple with the story, not only because he was rich and willing to humor her whims, but also because his hobby was egg collecting and he boasted the finest collection in the country.

HARLAN TEMPLE had laughed at her at first, but she had talked him into a lukewarm interest. Further investigation had given some weight to the tale and had also introduced the gruesome story of the monster-bird itself. Harlan had finally consented, had hired Spurgeon Rand, a second-rate explorer and oil scout who, with his assistant, Gates Dunning, was in nominal charge. Temple had gone on ahead with Rand, and Dunning had come back to lead us out by the trail which only a burro could navigate.

I had scoffed at the whole business at first. But today my attitude had changed. Partly it was the queer attitude of the natives, partly the rumors, partly Gates Dunning's talk; but principally it was the fact that the crazed cult of Joshua Torby—they called themselves "The Angels of Light"—had proved an actuality. Regardless of how little there might be to the nonsense about the bird-monster and the golden egg, one thing was certain. Women were being murdered, horribly, and secret worship was held in these hills.

Ahead of me Nell's burro had stopped. I hurried forward. The dark canyon was outspread before us. Night had pooled in its bowl-like cavity and, far away against the leaden sky, I saw the ragged toothlike cliffs through which the wind was whistling with an eerie, screaming sound that chilled the blood in my veins.

"The voice of *Camazotz*," Gates Dunning whispered.

Nell was silent, her head strained forward, listening with a rapt look that angered me.

"Oh, rot!" I growled. "There are the lights of camp across there. We'd better move on, or—"

I didn't finish. I hadn't heard anything but the wind at first, but the other two had turned to stare down the trail behind us. Then I heard it, too—a low, weird chanting, a sound indescribably funereal, liquid notes of mournful, savage passion coming, it seemed, from far away in the depths of darkness.

"What is it?" Nell whispered.

She looked from my face to Dunning's. The cocky attitude had left him

now. His lips were parted, his eyes shone white in the dusk. Suddenly, without a word, he seized the rein of her burro, started pulling it aside from the trail. I followed. Moving as quietly as we could, we got the burros and ourselves hidden behind some huge boulders at a point from which we could still see the trail. Only then did Dunning speak.

"I think," he said, "that we've stumbled on a clue leading into the labyrinth. I think we're going to see the 'Angels of Light' going to their secret temple."

"What luck!" Nell exclaimed in a whisper.

I SILENCED her with an angry gesture. The sound of the chanting had grown louder and now, accenting it like the beat of a metronome, came the padded, rhythmical slap of slow, marching feet. Then, through the dark stunted trees that shielded the trail, the glow of a torch gleamed redly and the first of the ghostly procession came into view.

He was dressed in the white folds of a sheet, and the glare from the pitch torch in his hand gleamed on his skinny arms and naked legs, his ragged reddish beard and the bald dome of his head. It was Joshua Torby himself, the leader of the "Angels of Light."

Close behind him the others followed. I gasped with mingled wonder and revulsion. There were about twenty of them—men and women—all attired in flowing white like their prophet. But it wasn't simply their wild, rapt faces, nor the grisly accents of the chant the words of which I could not understand that sent cold fingers of dread brushing up the goose pimples on my flesh. It was the thing they bore above them as they marched.

It was a sort of catafalque of pine boughs and on it, her gleaming, nubile body tinted with a crimson patina from the torch's light, lay a girl. Dark of hair, and with the ivory-golden skin of a half-breed, she was a lovely, if terrifying sight. And though she lay on her back with hands folded, her lips were moving and she was adding her voice to the weird chorus.

Stunned at first, I now grasped the horrid significance of the procession and started out with a muttered curse. But Dunning grabbed my arm.

"In God's name," he whispered hoarsely, "where are you going?"

"I'm going to stop them!" I growled, "I'm going to—"

"And have them tear Nell to pieces? We're only three and unarmed, and they carry knives under their robes. You can't risk Nell's life!"

"But, my God, man, they're taking that girl to—"

"Hush!" he said. "Maybe it's only symbolic. Anyhow we can't—"

He was right. With gritted teeth and knotted fists I stood and watched them vanish. They did not take the trail toward our camp, but went over the rim and threaded their way along through the cactus and boulders. We watched them until the chanting was swallowed in the wind's cry and the glow of the torch had faded to a pinpoint of fire.

But they hadn't moved down into the valley. Instead they were moving up toward the jagged cliffs from which came the weird singing of the wind. It was only after they were a long way up that Nell found words to ask:

"You say it's only symbolic, Gates? You understand the words of the chant?"

GATES DUNNING lighted a cigarette and his hand shook slightly.

"Yes," he said, "I understand it. He faced me, his eyes slitted defiantly. "I lied to you because it was necessary. They were chanting in a corrupted Indian dialect that the god-bird must be appeased. They were chanting that the foreigners had come to disturb him, that he must be appeased or he would destroy the village."

"Then the girl—" Nell began, horrified.

Dunning drew on his cigarette, nodded. "They say," he told us, "that the victim, a virgin, is bound hand and foot and left on a high ledge for *Camazotz* to come and claim. Something apparently does claim the victims, for the bodies have been found—horribly mutilated."

"Well," I growled, "that damned Torby sneaks back and does it."

"Perhaps," Dunning conceded, pondering the glowing tip of his cigarette, "but I fancy there's more to it than that. You see, that ledge is high, and the only trail that leads down into the canyon is a long and round-about one. Yet within thirty minutes of the time a girl has been left there her body has been found a mile away, toward the other end of the canyon, her bones broken by a terrific fall, her body horribly torn, exactly as if"—his voice faltered—"as if the clutching talons of some flying monster had carried and dropped her there after his grisly nuptials were finished."

"God!" I swore. "And they were forcing that poor girl—"

"Perhaps," he said, "forcing isn't quite the word. That's the horrible part of it. The girl was going willingly, eagerly. She was chanting her surrender to the devil-god while they carried her to his arms."

CHAPTER II

"And the Chained-up Maiden Lies—"

I WALKED closer to Nell after that. Somehow I had the feeling that when Gates Dunning talked to her in that low mutter so that I didn't catch the words that he was deliberately filling her mind with the morbid legendary rot that would certainly prey on her vivid imagination. For Nell was a strange, an unusual woman. The same reckless spirit that had inspired her amazing flights was the source also of an almost perverse curiosity, a restless urge to taste all thrills that made every danger, every mystery, a direct and personal challenge.

Picking our way with flashlights, we moved slowly down into the barren depths of the canyon whose shadows reached up to claim us like an avid dark tide. There was no sound now but that eldritch wailing of the wind, screaming like a demon voice over the canyon's desolation. For desolate it was—barren sun-bleached rocks where only evil,

thorny growths could subsist, and where no rabbit scampered into the light's beam, no night bird twittered, not even a slinking lizard or a slithering snake disturbed with dry grass rustles the adamantine silence.

We reached the canyon's uneven floor, plowed through the moonless, cold dark, crossed pebbly hummocks and vast stretches of crystalline sand that glowed in the dark with a dull incandescence, finally trudged wearily into the camp under the opposite rim.

By this time I had made up my mind about what I was to do. Let them argue, cajole, ridicule, I did not care. I was pulling out of the business and so was Nell. We'd rest an hour, get fresh burros and start back.

Tents had been pitched in an orderly row and camp fires were burning. Spurgeon Rand was tending one of them and Harlan Temple another. Temple, red-faced, bluff, beginning to be bald, still the slightly tired executive despite his hiking togs, got up and came to greet us. The absence of the hired workers struck me then.

"Where are your diggers?" I called out.

"The damned fools pulled out," he said. "You know they weren't anxious to come with us anyhow. But the hell with them now."

"The hell with them is right," I agreed. "I've seen all I want to see of this place, and Nell and I are going back."

She turned as I spoke and looked at me sharply. But I ignored her, told him briefly of our encounter with Joshua Torby's fanatics. An anxious look came over Harlan Temple's face as I finished. He pondered a moment, frowning, then he grinned.

"Well," he said, "if they looked like maniacs when you saw them, they'll be looking like something worse when they get to their temple."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean," he said, "that the thing they worship is gone. I've got it here."

"Good Lord!" I cried. "The egg?"

"Come," he said, and we followed him in tense, excited silence into the tent.

It was lighted by an electric lantern,

and on a plain deal table in the center lay something covered by a white cloth. For the first time then I saw the figure squatting in a spidery huddle at the far end of the tent. He was an Indian, dressed in ragged dungarees and a blue shirt, and with a dirty bandanna binding the lank, straggling locks of his tar-black hair.

"THIS," said Harlan Temple, nodding toward the crouching gargoyle, "is Sam Looking Hawk. Sam is a very smart man and has made himself enough money tonight to do him for a long time—a thousand good American dollars, to be exact."

But Sam Looking Hawk didn't seem exactly pleased. Though his wrinkled, saddle-colored face betrayed no emotion, his sunken black eyes gleamed with a feverish unease as they wavered from our faces to the thing on the table and remained there.

"He got the egg for you?" I asked.

Harlan Temple nodded. "Sam's a member of the cult himself. But he's a bold fellow and would rob even a god for a thousand dollars."

He stepped up and, like a stage magician, flicked off the white cloth.

The soft gleam of the immense spheroid struck me like a blow between the eyes, forced a gasp between my teeth as I bent nearer. It was somewhat larger than a regulation football, and its slightly pitted shell had been covered with a glaze of gold. I don't know why I found the sight of the thing so compelling, but as I stared at it little chills ran along my back. It seemed to hold our eyes hypnotically, like a crystal globe in which the shadows of a baleful future move.

"It's amazing!" Nell cried. "It's lovely. But Harlan—"

He laughed, pleased, but with a certain nervousness in his chuckle. "You're wondering what it is? So am I. It's most certainly a genuine egg. I scraped a little of the gold leaf away and examined the shell."

"But what bird—"

"Ah, there you've got me!" He touched the gleaming surface of the monstrous egg gingerly. "It resembles the egg of the extinct *Aepyornis titan*,

or elephant bird, a long-necked creature with massive legs on which it stood ten feet high. I have one of them in my own collection—cost me ten thousand dollars. But this egg," —he paused to scratch his thinning hair—"this egg is larger. Besides, I never heard of one being found in this part of the world. The one I have came from Madagascar."

Nell had drawn cautiously nearer, was reaching out her delicate tapered fingers to caress the golden surface. Suddenly she drew her hands away, gave a little shudder, laughing.

"Ugh!" she exclaimed, "it gives me little chills—like touching a snake."

"Your imagination," I said, but the sight of it was making me uncomfortable, too.

Then Gates Dunning had to put in his oar again. He laughed, and I turned to see that he and Rand had come in and were standing behind us.

"Funny," Dunning drawled, "that you should have said that, Nell—about the snake. The Mexican god, Quetzalcoatl, was called the 'Feathered-Serpent.' Queer suggestion there of the bird-snake, or dragon idea."

I scowled at him. The others were silent, and on that silence the weird, shrill shriek of the wind fell like an audible warning.

"He was also called 'Lord of the Winds,'" Dunning added.

BUT I thought the creature up there in the cliffs was called *Camazotz*," Nell said.

Gates Dunning shrugged. "What's in a name?" he asked. "*Camazotz* was a Mayan demon, a bat-dragon who decapitated his victims. But all mythologies are but different pictures of the same thing. It's struck me for instance, since hearing that girl's mad chant tonight, that there's another myth even closer to the local monster-legend, a myth which incorporates the creature's weird attraction for women."

"Probably the women are doped," I growled.

"Perhaps," Gates Dunning said blandly. "But what I'm thinking of is the story of Leda and the Swan. You've seen the pictures—the vast bird

smothering the woman's body in his great wings, and the woman not struggling, but rather seeming to answer to his embrace."

Maybe it was his tone, maybe his smile, but something about him suddenly infuriated me. "I told you," I snarled, "to pipe down on that rot. One more crack, and by hell—"

Nell seized my cocked right arm. "Cool off, Charlie," she laughed, and began pushing me toward the tent door.

Outside I turned. "Anyhow," I said, "you've got what you want, Harlan. So there's nothing to keep us any longer. Let's start packing."

Spurgeon Rand glared at me. "Tonight?" he rasped. "What the hell's gone wrong with your nerve?"

I looked at the man. A bearded, burly giant, I had known him since the days when we were both oil scouts in South America. His reputation had always been unsavory and I had once fought him for a remark he made about Luke Temple's death. Now I wondered if he meant to provoke another quarrel, wondered, too, why he was so angry at my suggestion that we leave this hellish place.

"Rand," I said coldly, "I advise you to watch your tongue."

He laughed, an ugly snort. "'Fraid I might talk too much, eh? Oh, I know you've said things about me, but you ought to be careful. Maybe you've forgotten that I was in Yucatan when all that happened—when you and your present wife, who was Luke Temple's wife then, went off and left him in the jungles."

I took a step toward him, my fists knotted. I'd have slammed one of them into his leering face if Harlan Temple hadn't stepped between us.

"Rand," he grated, "I won't stand for any more of that libel. I know all about the case. I went there myself, found my brother's body and talked to Indians who knew what had happened. Charlie Groves and Nell couldn't have done a thing for him; he was dead when they escaped."

"Maybe they pulled your leg," Rand snarled. "I tell you, Harlan, there were no Indians in that country savage enough to pull a stunt like that on their

own initiative."

He went too far then. With a growl I flung Harlan Temple aside and lunged at Rand. I rocked him with a left hook and slammed a right to his chin that sent him sprawling. Then I stood over him and told him that if he wanted any more to get up and take it.

"Go to hell," he growled, rubbing his chin. But he didn't accept the offer.

SOMEHOW, I'd rather he had, for the hate was still smoldering in his eyes. Temple was pulling me away.

"After all, Charlie," he said, "we've other things to worry about."

"The thing to do is to pull out now," I said.

He shook his head. "Torby's fanatics," he answered, "will be on the warpath. I'd rather meet them here, armed and ready, than on some steep trail where they can wait for us in ambush. We'd better wait until morning."

That was common sense and I couldn't deny it. Here we could have our rifles loaded and be ready for anything that might start popping. I didn't think they'd have the nerve to attack us here, anyhow. As for that idiotic monster-myth, I certainly couldn't afford to let Gates Dunning's morbid ravings get my goat. That was probably what he wanted.

"All right," I agreed, and turned away, took Nell's arm and started for our tent.

But we didn't get there; a shrill chattering from behind whirled us about. We stared in amazement. The Indian, Sam Looking Hawk, was rushing from the tent. He had snatched up Temple's carbine and was stumbling out in a queer half crouch, his eyes lifted to the sky while his lips dribbled a conglomeration of excited sounds, the only intelligible words of which were, "*Camazotz—Camazotz!*"

I hadn't heard anything until now, but suddenly, as Nell's hand tightened on my arm, I caught the fearful sound. My blood jelled; the hair on my scalp seemed to crackle like charged electric wires. From somewhere in the dark reaches of air above us it came—a swishing rush that rose above the distant wind-wails, the unmistakable

sound of some huge body moving on invisible wings through the blackness.

Then Sam Looking Hawk was shooting, the gun muzzle snouting up as it blazed jet after jet of flame into the darkness. Almost instantly the screams came—indescribably terrifying, the high-pitched shrieks of a woman in torment, drifting down from above through the wind currents, a woman screaming in an agony of terror and pain.

Then I was running, for as the rushing, invisible Thing carried its screaming burden over and past us, the shrieks of the woman had jetted down, then choked to silence and, looking up, I had seen for just an instant a white object hurtling down, and above it something vast and dark, something that blotted the stars briefly and went on, something that had the vague but unmistakable shape of a monster-bird with outspread pinions.

Rand and Harlan Temple were panting behind me as we pounded over rocks and crunching gravel and kicked through beds of cactus toward the point in the blackness where the shrill screams had ceased.

Then the beam of the torch in Harlan Temple's hand, cutting its livid swathes through the blackness of night, came to a wavering halt on something that lay almost at my feet. I jerked to a halt to keep from stumbling on it, drew back in a crouch, horror gnawing at the pit of my stomach.

It was the girl we had seen on the catafalque—or what was left of her. Her body lay, face up, over a ridge of rock, and you could see by the way it was folded limply that the back was broken.

But what curdled the blood in my veins was the nude and bloodstained body itself, the fearful gashes from which the crimson life-stuff still spouted. One breast had been almost gouged away, and the flesh of her whole torso was a ripped and shredded mess—raw, bleeding flesh that still preserved the raking imprints of the monstrous talons that had clutched and torn her!

No one said a word. We couldn't. Rand and Temple both crouched there

and the flashlight shook, and its reflected light showed dough-pale faces that the stupor of horror had frozen. Mine must have looked the same. Finally Temple turned away; Rand with a gulp did likewise. Someone, I don't know who it was, said:

"We'd better get a sheet . . ."

"We can't let Nell see this," I was thinking. Yet there was a queer thankfulness mingled with the horror that numbed me. At least I had seen in time, at least I knew the abysmal peril that threatened us, at least I would be able to save her now that I was forewarned.

We were stumbling into camp when suddenly it struck me that the place looked singularly deserted. Dunning and Nell must have hidden in the tents. I stumbled to ours.

"Nell!" I called out. I parted the flap, looked in. The place was empty.

I whirled about as if I had been struck. "Harlan!" I shouted. "Where's Nell? Find her!"

He ran to his tent, turned back, looked in Dunning's tent. I hurried to the others. They were all empty. There was a horrible clutching tightness at my throat now.

"Nell!" I shrielled into the blackness. "Nell! In God's name, darling, answer me!" And when there was no answer, I began to curse. "Dunning, you beast! You devil! When I get you!"

I ran to my tent and came out with a rifle. Harlan Temple was hurrying from his tent, a revolver in one shaking hand. Rand was standing by the fire, his eyes bigger and whiter than I had ever seen them.

"Aren't you coming with us?" Harlan panted as we passed him.

"Not me," Rand growled.

I flung the most vitriolic curse I could think of at him and ran on.

CHAPTER III

"Terror Rules the Darkling Skies . . ."

NATURALLY we had no idea of where Nell might be; the valley was vast and black and the wind's wails

swallowed our cries. But some instinct told us that those dark cliffs at its far end, those jagged battlements that the wind wailed through and where the monster was supposed to lurk was the place where we must go.

We ran on madly, panting, our lungs burning, our feet and knees bruised and torn by rocks and cactus. Harlan Temple was beginning to break. The light in his hand was wavering more wildly and he began to sob: "My God, if anything's happened to Nell! God, I can't stand it! She's been like a daughter to me. No man ever loved a daughter more!"

All of which was true, but didn't help matters.

"Save your breath, Harlan," I said. "You'll need it."

But there was a fierce tenacity in the man, and despite the fact that I was younger, yet felt myself on the verge of collapse, Harlan Temple kept plugging doggedly behind me. Then we reached the foot of the black cliffs and it was no longer a matter of running. We couldn't now. There was no trail and we began to crawl and claw, fighting our way up the steep and rock-sharp slope like a pair of wounded flies.

I don't know how we made it. It was a confused and tormented nightmare that went on and on interminably until numbed brain and numbed flesh could feel no more, and only some undying impulse kept our bodies inching up like robots.

We reached the ledge finally, dragged our bodies over its sharp rim and lay panting. Above us the jagged cliffs loomed blackly, and the wind that howled like a wolf pack as it blasted through almost hurled us back into the darkness of the abyss.

"That damned Dunning," I shouted, when I had recovered my breath and crawled up, "must be in with Torby's bunch! He's framed this devilish scheme to steal Nell!"

"He's crazy about her all right," Harlan Temple stammered, "but whether he'd go that far—"

The wind swallowed the rest. Doubled low against its blast we were making for the shadows beneath the cliffs. Temple's flash beam shot out,

spotted the narrow opening of a cave. Guns ready, we pushed in. The light, reflected on the low ceiling, kindled the darkness to a ghostly glow. It was a small chamber and smelled vilely of the acrid fumes of *peyote*. Strings of dried herbs, stuffed bats and other creatures hung along its walls, and at one end, in a niche above a long, flat altar stone, stood the remains of a shattered glass case.

"The egg," Harlan Temple panted, "was in that. Sam Looking Hawk told me. This is their temple all right, but we seem to be too late."

We backed out. Again the wind's howl blasted our eardrums. My heart was pounding a wild tattoo against my ribs. Nell wasn't here. Had we guessed wrong? Or had the fiends already sacrificed her to their abysmal god?

"Nell!" I screamed wildly. "Nell!"

The wind seized my cry, tossed it like a dry chip in a whirlpool. Then, from some indeterminable point in the bawling blackness a faint cry replied: "Charlie, Charlie—"

I WHIRLED on Harlan Temple. "You heard that?"

"Yes, but where—" His face was corpselike, his knees quaking.

"Watch the cave's entrance," I said. Then I snatched the flash from his hand and dashed off.

The cry seemed to have come from the left and above. The ledge narrowed as I staggered along the cliff wall, ended where slanted upward a series of crude steps gouged in the rock. I began to climb awkwardly, pausing to yell Nell's name every few steps. But there was no answer now. I struggled higher, stumbled onto another ledge and jerked up short, staring at a strange mess of debris wedged in the notch of a huge crevice in the rock.

It looked at first like a rude hut which some primitive savage might have made of wrenched-off tree limbs. But then I saw that the thing had no roof, noted its shape—tapered down like an inverted beehive—and with sudden terror clawing at my vitals I realized what the thing was.

It was a nest!

Brute panic numbed me then. For the sudden sight of this monstrous thing, the thought of the incredible creature that had built it, the memory of the mutilated woman and that brief glimpse of vast wings had awakened in my brain the hideous germs of madness. But the thought of Nell, my Nell, in that monster's clutches would have sent me leaping at the devil himself. Gripping gun and flashlight in one hand, I reached up, seized a protruding tree limb and hoisted myself up.

Digging my toes in for a foothold, clawing my way toward the rim, I quivered with fear, thinking that the Thing I hunted might be crouching in its lair waiting for me. Then my head was over the nest's edge and I saw that it was lined with yellowed bunch grass and pine needles. Pushing a little higher, I took my courage in my teeth and flung the flash's beam in.

Horror tore at my frayed nerve ends then, gagged me, twisted my entrails into a knot. Through the whole ordeal a hope had lingered in my mind that the whole incredible business was but a monstrous hoax concocted by Gates Dunning's cunning brain. Now that possibility collapsed; now the stark and abysmal terror of the supernatural rocked my senses. For the thing that hung halfway up the inner wall of the thatched concavity, the naked, bleeding thing that resembled nothing so much as a clawed dead mouse in a hawk's nest, was Gates Dunning!

He was hanging head down. His body, with ragged tatters of clothing still clinging to it, was impaled on a sharp tree limb that thrust through. He was dead, and on his blood-smeared, rigid face, with gaping mouth and bulging eyes, was the look of one who has died staring into the mouth of hell.

There was nothing else in the nest save a pile of bleaching bones at its bottom.

I whirled about, instinctively staring into the black blanketed skies envisioning the winged horror sweeping across the valley with the body of Nell in his talons, dropping her, torn and mangled, like that other victim of his inhuman appetite. The curses that grated

through my teeth then were for the Indian, who either in terror because of his theft of the egg, or through sheer treachery had lured or forced Nell and Dunning into the monster's clutches.

SUDDENLY I froze. From the darkness of the lower ledge, rising above the wind's shriek, came a cry.

"Charlie, quick! Help!"

It was Harlan Temple's voice, shrill with hysteria, swallowed by the wind.

Instantly I dropped down. My feet slammed stinging against the rocks, and with the flashlight's beam lacing the dark with white streamers, I began stumbling down the trail again. Slipping, lurching, I reached the long lower ledge, jutting like an outthrust lip from the cave's mouth, jerked to a halt. All was quiet now save the wind.

"Harlan!" I shouted huskily. "Harlan!" No answer, no movement among the massed shadows.

"Harlan!" I staggered toward the cave's narrow opening, the rifle gripped under my right arm, my finger on the trigger. The light spurting through the dark crevice revealed no movement, but I halted like a beast sniffing the air, feeling, rather than seeing or hearing, the presence of some lurking menace.

Then it came. Not from the cave, as I had expected, but from the shadows of the boulders above and about its entrance—a white surge of moving life, swarming silently on me like rushing, white-capped breakers—the sheeted followers of Joshua Torby, the blood-lusting Angels of Light!

Instantly I whirled, and realized the disadvantage of a long-barreled gun in a close fight. For as I turned the gun barrel struck a jutting rock and the shot blasted harmlessly down. The next instant they were on me.

They fought in fearful silence, in a cold, drugged, deadly frenzy. While there was still light from the flash, with which I battered at their massed heads, I glimpsed the wild, slobbering faces; masks of bestial depravity.

Then the light was gone and there was only the crush of their bodies about me, the rake of their clawing hands, the stench of their drug-soaked breaths,

the throaty, whining bleats as my flailing fists battered their faces and bodies.

But for every sheeted maniac I threw back, two others seemed to charge in, and my limbs were entangled, arms and legs pinioned. They weren't trying to kill me, I knew. They were taking me alive. That thought fired me to fresh desperation and I jerked and threshed and butted like a worm under an ant swarm.

Then horny hands were at my throat, were throttling my curses, choking off my breath. I felt myself sinking down into a slimy morass, pain tearing at my throat and lungs, fire-streaked darkness blotting my brain.

CHAPTER IV

"And Vengeance, Smothered, Never Dies . . ."

I NEVER quite passed out. I was dimly conscious when they drew back from my crushed, battered body. I heard the mumble of their voices as they consulted. I was aware when they lifted me, began carrying me toward the cave.

But as full consciousness ebbed back and an awareness of my imminent peril, the cunning of desperation seethed into my mind. I allowed myself to hang utterly limp in their grasp, I kept my eyes closed, I forced my breathing to a slow and automatic rhythm.

When at length they flung me on the altar stone and a torch flared I allowed myself to lie in an awkward sprawl, so still and deathlike that one of them laid his hand on my ribs to feel my heart-beat. There was a constant murmur; excited discussion. Through slitted eyes I saw the bony Joshua Torby bending over me, his red beard bristling, his sunken eyes alive with crawling lights.

"We ain't got the egg back yet," he croaked, "and the wrath of *Camazotz* is terrible. But we've give him one victim tonight, an' he's gone out an' got others for hisself. We'll give him another now—another live 'un for him to see the blood spurt. Maybe when he's

gorged himself, he won't bother us tonight. That'll give us time to git the egg back."

Lying there in that simulated coma I was appalled, felt my incredulous brain pushed even nearer the frightful conclusion that things utterly beyond man's knowledge were operating in this mountain fastness. For the look on Torby's face told me plainly that he was no mere schemer, no hired assassin, working out some man's bloody plans. He was sincere—a madman, but sincere—a believer, a fearful worshipper himself of the Thing that lived, gorging itself on human blood, in the monstrous eyrie among the cliffs.

I sensed the nervous stir at Torby's words, the uneasy shifting of white-robed bodies, caught from beneath my lashes the fearful glances cast toward the broken case where the sacred egg had reposed.

"Better give him the Bowl of Dreams," a guttural voice said. "Better make him ready for the sacrifice."

Torby bent over me again, his coarse red beard almost scraping my chest.

"He don't need nothin'," he said. "He's near enough out. The god likes a little fight in 'em; he likes to see 'em wiggle when his claws bring the gore spouting out."

I fought to keep my face from twitching. I had scored one point at least. For while the picture his words conjured—the picture of the god-bird's talons closing on my wriggling body—was horrible enough, it wasn't as bad as the thought of being drugged or tied.

The chanting was beginning again; sweaty hands were lifting me. The torchlight flared and wavered. I made my body limp, swung like a dressed beef in their clutches as we passed out through the narrow entrance, emerged into the howling wind which sent sparks from the torch flying, and began the slow ascent to the grisly ledge of sacrifice.

I had time now to think of what was coming, to envision the end in all its ghastliness. But strangely, a cold and iron calm was settling over my fevered senses, as if all my remaining resources were bunching like muscles for the final struggle.

NELL was gone; a thousand to one, she was already dead. What did anything matter except that my limbs were free, that I could die fighting the Thing that had murdered and tortured her?

I noticed that as we neared the upper ledge the chanting dropped lower, grew more freighted with abysmal terror, more like a prayer that is sobbed through knocking teeth. Then the ledge was reached and I felt myself flung rather than dropped on the rocks, and saw the white-clad worshippers recede with a fearful rush. I knew that this was as near the dread nest as they dared come. They had flung me here and rushed back to the trail.

I lay unmoving as I had fallen, but my teeth were gritted, my eyes fixed sharply on the nest, my muscles bunching for the final struggle, while I racked my brain for some plan of battle.

"*Camazotz, Camazotz!*" the shrilled invocation drifted from Joshua Torby's lips as he huddled before his quaking followers. "*Camazotz*, take this victim and have mercy! Spare us, *Camazotz*, and there will be other men for your rage, other virgins for sacrifice."

There was a scuffling sound, and I realized that with this parting prayer the frightened devotees were scampering for safety. But the wavering light lingered, and I turned my head and saw that the torch had been thrust into a crack in the rocks. The fanatics had vanished.

My eyes narrowed. So the god liked light for his banquet? And he did not like to have his worshippers about. So, I thought, the situation would be if a mere man, for instance, happened to be the monster and didn't want to give his game away.

I sat up, turned, and my desperate hopes scattered in a blind panic of sheer madness. Was I already insane, or was that thing which had risen above the grass-fringed rim of the monstrous nest an actuality?

It could not be human; yet neither could it be beast or fowl, though it had both wings and arms. The wings, now half extended, would have spread at least sixteen feet. The arms, covered

like the wings and the upper body with gleaming feathers of red and green, terminated each in a single curved claw.

But the face! Projecting from a sheath of feathers that covered the head, ran low on the forehead and out to the cheekbones, it was vaguely, horribly human. No mask, I knew. For though it was yellowish and crimson-splotted like something made of wax, the eyes, red and vicious, gleamed with hideous life. It had scarcely any nose—just black holes—and the mouth was lipless, a horrible exposure of bare, raw gums and teeth, like the naked jaws of a skull!

How long we stared at each other—monster and man, destroyer and prey—I do not know. But abruptly my paralysis snapped. Beast or devil, it did not matter. This thing had stolen Nell, had tortured her. If before dying under its pointed claws, I could wreak my own vengeance on its hideous body, I would be satisfied!

My hands, resting palms on the ground supporting me, began to grope feverishly, encountered a jagged fragment of rock. My right hand closed on it, and abruptly I lunged upright.

THE Thing hadn't moved, hadn't realized that I wasn't drugged and incapable of swift movement. It was startled at my sudden leap to life. It screeched a shrill cry, jerked back, but too late to escape the flying missile which I had hurled as might a discus thrower. With a cry of triumph, I saw the heavy, jagged rock smash into the monster's face, saw it topple back with an inhuman cry of pain.

Instantly I had stooped, pounced on another boulder and, gripping it fiercely, was scrambling up the laced tree limbs of the nest. I was half mad, savage, desperate, caring nothing for my own life so long as I could spill that monster's blood. And I knew now that it could be spilled!

Raising my head above the nest's edge, I stared down. The feathered demon was there, but I saw something else, too—a gaping hole in the nest where pine boughs had been pulled away, and into this hole the bird-beast was crawling, whining and jerking

about as he tried to pull the huge folded wings into the narrow aperture.

I reared myself higher, flung the second rock. It struck him at the base of the skull. A cry of pain blasted again from his hideous mouth and with a convulsive jerk he pulled himself through the hole and vanished into the darkness.

I vaulted over the nest's rim, landed on the bone pile at the bottom and scrambled up. Picking up the whitened jaw-bone of a cow, I hefted it in my hand. It was fairly heavy, still studded with teeth; it would do. Clutching it in a tense fist I plunged into the hole after the monster.

I was in utter darkness now, and the tunnel turned and twisted. I did not know at what curve the abysmal Thing might have turned to fight. But it was too late for caution. I had injured it, seriously, I believed. At all costs I must come to grips with it before it had time to recuperate.

Then ahead of me light glowed—a dim luminescence from a vaulted chamber in the rock. It was a pine torch burning evenly. I couldn't see anything else until I staggered, panting, into the opening. Then I stopped, stunned, as if a sledge hammer had struck me in the face, and the cry that whimpered from my lips was the wail of a man who realizes that his brain has cracked, that stark insanity has fastened on him.

"Nell!" I bleated, "Nell! In God's name, Nell—"

She was there, or at least my maddened brain had evoked her image. Only it couldn't be real; it was an hallucination! For she was seated on the cave floor, her legs outstretched and, lying across her lap, its feathered body half hiding her, its hideous inhuman head cradled in her arms, was the monster!

CHAPTER V

"Use Your Ears, Use Your Eyes"

I SEEMED to have reached the high point of horror then; beyond this there could be no more awful

agony.

The Thing was in her arms! One of her white hands rested against its nauseous, blood-smearred face, and the fear in her eyes was not of the monster but for it. Her sobbed cry made that doubly clear as with a savage rush I started toward it, the toothed weapon in my hand upraised.

"Charlie!" she shrielled. "Charlie, don't! Don't kill him! You can't —"

I halted above them; my temples were throbbing, my brain whirling; a red mist of murder fogged my stinging eyes. I was a madman then and I might have killed her too—I admit it— if suddenly, as I stared into that awful, mutilated face, now rigid in death or unconsciousness, I had not seen something vaguely familiar. Then Nell's cry came again.

"Don't kill him, Charlie! He's not responsible; he's not sane any longer. Don't you know who he is? Charlie, it's Luke!"

"Luke Temple!"

I could only repeat the words dully as my numbed brain fought for comprehension. Then I simply stared while she gently slipped her body from beneath the feathered shape, laid its head carefully down, and stood up to face me. I saw then that the feathers that covered him from head to foot were woven into a skin-tight garment, that the wings were artificial, though cunningly made and attached to his shoulders. Nell's hands were clutching mine, her voice clamoring for my attention.

"Listen to me, Charlie. It's Luke. See his pitiful face? The Indians did that to him; they distorted his poor brain too, with tortures and drugs. But they didn't kill him. And he became obsessed with the idea that we had tricked him, hired the Indians to do it. They kept him a prisoner for a long while, but finally Sam Looking Hawk, whose real name is a Mayan one, helped him to escape, brought him here. Luke was mad, but the vengeance idea rode him, made him cunning. He made that hideous costume for himself and became the god of Torby's ignorant fanatics."

"But Nell," I interrupted, "you don't

mean it was a mere accident, a coincidence that we came here where he was hiding?"

She dropped her eyes, began to fumble in the bosom of her sweater.

"No, Charlie," she said, "it wasn't. I lied to you, but I could do nothing else at the time." She handed me the folded envelope she had taken out. "Three months ago," she said, "I got that through the mail."

I looked at the envelope. It was addressed to Mrs. Nell Temple Groves and bore the postmark of the little mountain town from which we had come that morning. I pulled the folded sheet of note paper from the envelope. Scrawled on it were these enigmatical verses:

Where the Bird of Darkness flies,
And the chained-up maiden lies,
Terror rules the darkling skies,
And vengeance, smothered, never dies;
Use your ears; use your eyes!

"**B**UT it's unsigned!" I said.

"But I recognized Luke's handwriting at once," she answered. "Then I saw the postmark. I knew then that Luke was alive, that he was somewhere near this place, that he had sent this cryptic and rather sinister message to me. So I made those flying trips, heard the legends, knew that he must be connected in some way with them, and talked Harlan Temple into bringing us here. I should have told you, Charlie, but I was almost crazy with fear. I knew the note was a threat, knew that our happiness was threatened, might crash unless the mystery was solved."

"Darling!"

I crushed her in my arms. She was shaking, sobbing, staring down at the pitiful thing that had been Luke Temple. He lay as if dead, and the fingers in their feathered gloves had relaxed, letting fall the sharp hay hooks they had grasped. I shuddered, thinking of the horrible use to which the madman had put them.

"Tonight," Nell went on, "I was terrified when I heard the girl's screams coming out of the skies, but I knew I must discover if Luke was behind these frightful things. So when Sam Look-

ing Hawk slyly offered to show us the monster's nest while the bird-god was gone, I made Gates Dunning go with me. When we came to this ledge Sam Looking Hawk killed Gates and kept me captive in the nest until Luke came back. It was he who brought me in here. I think at first he intended to kill me, but I talked to him calmly, tried to make his crazed brain realize that we really didn't desert him in the jungles. He couldn't talk very well with his mouth mutilated that way, but I got a part of what he said."

She paused; tears came into her eyes.

"It was really his lingering love for me that won," she whispered. "He didn't touch me—though I'm afraid he would have murdered you."

"But look here," I put in, staring about the bare cave, "are you sure he told you all the truth? He didn't live here. And those wings certainly didn't carry him over the valley with the bodies of his victims."

She frowned, nodded. "There was a part of his talk," she said, "which I didn't understand. Something about an invention."

"Invention!" I echoed.

"Yes," she said. "He was working on some sort of invention before we went into the jungles two years ago. He was so secretive about it that I never knew what it was. But I wonder if it wasn't the same—"

Her words broke off with a startled scream. I whirled. Standing in the cave's entrance, a leveled revolver in his hand, was Spurgeon Rand.

"Did I hear someone mention an invention?" he asked and laughed.

"You did," I answered. "But what's the meaning of the stick-up?"

He merely came forward slowly, his eyes roving over the place, the gun held steadily on us. A flicker of interest kindled in his face when they lighted on Luke Temple's grotesque body.

"H'mm," he grunted, "so you killed him, eh? Gawd, but that was some fancy get-up. Reckon he must have finished the invention, eh, since you got rid of him?"

"What the hell are you driving at?" I snarled.

HIS eyes met mine steadily; his features were drawn into a sneer. "I'm not so dumb," he said. "And since Harlan and I came out here yesterday I've done a lot of snooping. I found this damned fake nest, even caught a glimpse of the feathered fellow there once. But I haven't yet found what I was looking for."

"What's that?"

"Oh, I guess you know," he replied. "I always suspected it wasn't an accident that the Indians got Luke Temple in the jungles. But I thought it was just on account of the woman. It wasn't until I came here that I got wind of the invention." He paused, reached into his pocket with his left hand, produced a faded newspaper clipping and handed it to me. "I found that yesterday," he explained. "It was clipped to some crudely penciled designs that also had Luke Temple's name on them, and it had blown under some bushes at the far end of the valley and was half covered with sand. It was lost, I imagine, or blown by the wind out of that secret workshop which I haven't yet found."

I held the clipping nearer to my eyes, read with amazement:

FLYING BICYCLE INVENTED BY RUSSIAN AVIATOR

Moscow, Aug. 4 (U.S.)—The Soviet Union, land of strange inventions, recently received a new one, a flying bicycle with flapping wings which are intended to permit a single flyer to hop from place to place, using his own muscles as the only motive power.

The device has been made at a Moscow factory from designs furnished by M. Chera-novsky, the Soviet aviator who built Russia's "flying wing" type of plane.

Odd and risky though the flying bicycle appears to be, laymen and a half dozen glider pilots have volunteered to test it. The source of rising power of the "ornithopter," as the inventor calls it, are two six-meter (about nineteen-foot) wings, hinged to a fuselage. The pilot stands on a treadmill, which oscillates in the manner of the driving plank of a boy's scooter.

As he crouches and shoots erect, the plank moves and the wings rise and fall. The machine is equipped with a rudder and ailerons. It may be started from the ground with a sling as an ordinary glider. It is hoped that the plane can accomplish the same flights as gliders, but in this case the pilot would choose his own direction instead of simply following prevailing wind currents.

I finished reading, jerked my eyes up to Rand's leering face.

"So that's it?" I said grimly. "He was trying to duplicate the Russian's invention and was using this place as a testing ground. And all the hocus-pocus was invented to frighten the curious natives away. That windy ledge made an ideal place for a take-off, and there was the sand at the other end of the canyon to land on. But, hell, Rand, you don't think that I—"

"Why not?" he said and laughed wryly. "Wasn't it your wife who was making secret trips out here? Wasn't it she who persuaded Harlan Temple to bring an expedition here? And it was you who hired the Indians to get him there in the jungle. But later you found that his invention wouldn't work. So you smuggled him here, and with the Indian to watch him, made him work the thing out. Then when it was finished you brought Harlan Temple here to murder him, too, knowing that your wife is mentioned in his will for a large sum which you would need to promote the invention."

IT was all so plainly plausible, yet so utterly false, that at first I almost wanted to laugh. But an instant later I realized that such a convincing theory might sound plausible to others besides Rand—to a jury, for instance.

"Why, you damned fool!" I blurted. "But it's all wrong, Rand," I added quickly, and began to tell him the whole truth of how it had happened.

He listened, but I saw that he wasn't convinced.

"If that's true," he said, "where's Harlan Temple? After all, you went off alone with him, and he's gone, and you stand to profit by his death."

I was dumbfounded, chilled with sudden dismay. Was it all to end like this? After fighting through this brain-blighting horror, were Nell and I to face the awful ordeal of public disgrace, imprisonment, death? For already the ugly hints about Luke Temple's misfortunes in the jungle had paved the way for that.

"What," I asked bluntly, "do you mean to do, Rand?"

"Take you back to camp," he said,

"and turn you over to the authorities as quickly as I can."

"You'll have to kill me first," I growled. "I've got to find Harlan Temple; he may be still alive; we can't leave him."

Rand's eyes narrowed. "Some truth in that," he conceded. "But I'll be damned if I'll hunt him and watch you, too. Tell you what I'll do. I'll take your wife back to camp and you can look for Temple. If you make a get-away, it'll be an admission of your guilt and will damn her also. And don't try any funny business. I'll be waiting, with a gun."

I was so frantic that I was willing to seize any straw. I looked at Nell; her eyes gave consent, though I could see she was afraid.

"All right," I agreed, "but you'd better take good care of her, Rand."

CHAPTER VI

Revenge Is Sweet

I STOOD silent, watched them walk away, then tackled the immediate problem. I still had no weapon but the toothed bone. But if Torby's followers were holding Harlan, there was a chance that the drugs with which they had maddened themselves had worn off. I might be able to bargain with them, even promise the return of the egg.

I worked it all out in my mind, then started toward the tunnel that led out. started toward it but halted suddenly. In the black embrasure of the hole a shadow moved, a figure emerged—Harlan Temple.

His clothing was disheveled; his dazed, feverish eyes flicked about the cavern.

"Thank God!" he blurted. "I thought I'd never— But what's happened here?"

"What happened to you?" I asked.

"Torby's bunch got me," he said hoarsely, coming nearer. "They left me imprisoned, but I escaped into a tunnel that led here."

He stood close to me, staring down

at the body of the feathered madman while I groped for words to break the truth to him—that the mutilated Thing was the brother he thought dead. Then suddenly I jumped, whirled, as something prodded my ribs. It was the cold steel muzzle of a revolver in Harlan Temple's hand, and he was smiling.

I didn't say a word. There are times when the brain works doubly swift, and in that instant I realized, with a curse for my own stupidity, the whole ugly truth.

"Well, Charlie," he said slowly, "I guess you understand."

The blood rushed to my head. My eyes bored into his leering face.

"Yes," I said, "I've got it now, Harlan. And I know, too, that the worst monsters wear a normal shape. You were hiding there and heard Rand talk?"

He nodded. "A smart man, that Rand. He had it all down straight except one point. It was I who did all those things instead of you. It was I who encouraged Luke to go on that Yucatan trip, I who hired the Indians to kidnap him, and produce another body to show for his, I who smuggled him here to finish up the invention which I found was imperfect. I kept him working in a secret cave across the valley, and he would bring the invention to this ledge to test it. The golden egg was, of course, from my own collection and I had Looking Hawk to handle Torby's bunch—feeding them drugs and terrifying them into worship of the monster. There was no danger from them and it kept the other natives away."

"But why bring us here to murder us?" I grated. "You had your invention."

"The invention," Harlan Temple said, "wasn't all I wanted. I wanted Nell; always have. Luke stole her from me, and then when he was out of the way she fell for you. But I used that on Luke—told him that you had hired the Indians to kidnap him, and I promised him vengeance in return for his work. When the thing was perfected, I suggested that he write the note to Nell and in that way lure you here."

I CURSED him fervently. "And it won't work, Harlan," I told him. "That workshop will give you away. Rand already knows—"

He laughed. "Rand thinks it was you," he answered, "and he'll keep on thinking so. As for the workshop in the cave, I've already seen to that. I've already sent complete drawings and a small model of the glider-plane to a safety deposit vault known only to me. And tonight, when I signal from this ledge, Sam Looking Hawk, who is waiting there, will set off a charge of dynamite that will blow the place to atoms. I'll come out of this adventure as the hero of the piece and Nell will marry me."

"Never!" I swore. "Nell will never believe that I—"

"What does that matter?" he said calmly. "Everyone else will, and she won't be in any position to make accusations."

I didn't have to ask him what would happen to me. The moments of my life were ticking away, slowly, horribly. And not only was I facing certain death, but I would have to die knowing that this slinking abysmal fiend was to have Nell! My brain groped like a drowning man for a straw, found none. Death, grisly-faced and terrible, was on me, and I was left with no alternative but to fight against hopeless odds, like a trapped and helpless animal.

I gripped the bone I held, lunged sideward, swinging the toothed club toward his neck. It struck him, but his left arm broke the force of the blow and at the same instant his gun exploded and fire scorched my left side as the bullet hammered through my flesh.

It was like a whip, stinging desperation to madness. Instead of falling backward, I went forward like a leaping cat. The swinging bone struck his gun arm as the revolver blasted again. Pain stabbed my thigh, but my left hand had seized his wrist with a savage twist that ripped his fingers loose from the weapon. It fell. I slammed out with the bone, but he sidestepped. I lost my balance, and as I lunged forward his up-jerked knee caught me in the groin. I lurched back and he was on me, slamming a blow to the temple,

forcing me down with a rush. My head struck the floor and it stunned me for an instant.

When I opened my eyes the knife was at my throat.

It was a long hunting knife that he had snatched from a sheath at his belt. And as he held its murderous point against my jugular vein, I stared up to see his shrewd, calm face transformed into a twisted visage of a maniac.

"Better this way," he panted. "Better this way anyhow. The knife will seem more natural."

Hope was gone now, the delirium of approaching death fastening itself on my brain so that when I first saw the creeping Thing behind him I took it for an hallucination. Then I realized what it was. Luke Temple, with the great, ponderous wings of his costume dragging like an injured vulture, was crawling across the floor, one of the murderous hay hooks gripped in his right hand.

HOPE flared briefly. He had recovered from his coma in time to hear, to learn all his brother's perfidy! Murder was shining in his sunken eyes. But it was too late to help me. The knife was already at my throat, one gouge would be sufficient—

I found my straw then, and I did what I pray that when death really faces me no torture will make me do. I began to whine, to moan and beg and cringe with all the abject signs of utter cowardice. I won't repeat all my whimpering, disgusting pleas, my sobbed prayers and moans. But I made them loud enough to cover the sounds of Luke Temple's approach.

A gloating look came over Harlan Temple's face. He was savoring a sweeter tribute than he had ever thought he could force from me—sniveling, groveling appeals to his mercy.

"In God's name, Harlan, don't do that! You can even have Nell. I'll go away, out of the country, do anything you say!"

Yes, I really said it. But as the repulsive words blistered my lips, I saw the creeping Thing now close behind him straighten up, saw the iron claw of the

hay hook reach . . .

I flung the last of my strength then into a shrill cry of terror that forced Harlan Temple to whirl—too late to save himself. As the knife left my throat, swung in a gleaming arc toward the monstrous attacker, I heaved up my body, flung Harlan Temple off balance, flung him straight onto the reaching hay hook that ripped at his throat in the same instant that his knife blade struck the feathered breast.

They went down in a wild tangle of flailing limbs and grotesquely flapping wings, and when the agitation of that hideous tangle ended as I was struggling to my feet, one body lay still—its throat ripped away. The other, Luke Temple's, lay on its back, the awful mutilated face upturned, blood staining the feathered cloth on his breast, blood running from the corners of his mouth.

But as I stumbled toward him the dying eyes seemed to lose the feverish glow of madness, seemed to grow calm, with the old courageous, generous spirit of the Luke Temple I had known. And suddenly, weakly, his right hand was lifted a little, extended for me to take.

I took it and crushed it in my own, fiercely, while the tears welled in my eyes and my throat choked. Then the eyes went glazed, the hand fell from my grasp. I turned away. . . .

THOUGH I was weak from loss of blood, my wounds proved to be superficial. Hurrying out through the dark tunnel, I crawled into the nest and over its rim and felt the cool wind about me gratefully. In the niche where the followers of Torby had left it, the stump of the pine torch still glowed with dying flickers. I snatched it up. Nell and Rand probably hadn't reached camp yet, and I might be able to signal them to come back.

I began to wave the torch. The wind fanned the dying flame to a blaze and I waved it frantically. And then suddenly, from the black reaches of the canyon, came the unexpected reply. A bursting plume of fire shot into the air and, following it, a dull and distant detonation, and I realized what I had done. The waiting Indian had taken it

for Harlan Temple's signal, and had blasted the cave workshop to atoms.

Well, I didn't care, not even after we discovered that the plans and the model which Temple had sent away were hopelessly lost. We never found the safety deposit vault where they were hidden. But Nell and I don't need them, don't want them. We're happy enough with what we have—each other—and a life from which the last ugly clouds of scandal have dispersed.

I'll have to give Rand some credit here. It was he who caught the Indian Sam Looking Hawk, as he was fleeing from the wreck of the blasted cave. Things might still have been black for Nell and me if he hadn't. But that capture turned the trick, and if we used a

few third-degree methods on the Mayan that night, the result justified it.

Somewhere back the line, Sam's Indian blood—supposedly a lip-sealing fluid—must have been tainted. His confession was full and satisfactory, and it won him a speedy and humane death at the state's hands.

Torby's cult was speedily dissolved. The wretches, harmless before Temple's agent had drugged and terrified them, were given moderate sentences and a chance to reform.

I don't know whatever happened to the golden egg. It vanished, and I think Rand stole it as a souvenir and a reward for his trouble. I never asked him about it. If it hatches any more trouble that will be his look-out.



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INVASION FROM THE FOURTH



Above her floated that weird glowing horror of warped and twisted angles.

In the Darkness of a Country Night, a Gleaming Poltergeist Hums
Its Unearthly Dirge of Foreboding Doom!

By HENRY KUTTNER

Author of "Laughter of the Dead," "Bamboo Death," etc.

"NOT a very good place for a ghost, eh?" Jack Hayward commented, steering the roadster expertly through the rolling, rocky hills that bordered the road. He smiled down at his fiancée, Marian Kirby, who was curled up on the seat beside him, her blond head on his shoulder. She opened sleepy brown eyes.

"He didn't say a ghost, Jack. He wasn't sure what it was."

"A shining thing that wasn't human!" Hayward chuckled as he remembered the furtive whispers of the gaunt, bewhiskered oldster who had supplied them with gasoline at the tumbledown service station a few miles back.

"I've heard too many of these yarns,

dear. Any reporter knows what's behind 'em—usually whiskey," he chuckled.

"Here's the place," Marian said presently. The road ended in a little valley between high, rock-strewn hills, at a dilapidated two-story farmhouse, burned paintless by years of glaring sun. Broken windows reflected the sunset. A plume of smoke drifted up languidly from the chimney.

"What a dump!" Hayward commented. "I can't imagine Nels Andreason wanting to buy it. Even for sentimental reasons." He grinned as he thought of the stolid, heavy-featured Swede, who had made so many millions in oil.

"Well, he was born here," Marian said. "You don't know him. Mr. Lennox says he's sentimental as a child."

Hayward grinned. "A good thing for your boss, too. That was the only time Lennox got the short end of a deal—when he bought this land. He's lucky anybody wants to buy it. I wish you'd quit your job, Marian. When are we going to get married? I don't like your working for a—cheap promoter," he told her.

"He's not a cheap promoter," Marian flashed. "Please don't talk as though he's a crook, Jack."

Hayward lifted his eyebrows sardonically and steered the car into the rutted, grass-covered track that led to the sagging porch. Maybe Lennox wasn't a crook, but he was certainly willing to take advantage of every opportunity. Take this affair, for instance. Andreason had offered to buy this land—a white elephant on Lennox's hands—and instead of jumping at the chance, Lennox had invited the millionaire down for the week-end to close the deal.

"He's sentimental, anyway," the dapper promoter had told Marian. "And if I get him in the house where he says he was born, he'll probably loosen up and plank down a few more thousands. He can afford it, all right. Can you come down, too? I want you to type the contracts while the iron's hot. Bring your fiancé along, if you want. Then it won't seem so dull."

A stolid-featured, barrel-bodied man

came out on the porch. Hayward recognized Seaver, Lennox's man. No doubt he had been sent down early to put the house in semi-habitable shape.

"Hello, Miss Kirby," he greeted them. "Howdy, Mr. Hayward. I'll take your bags."

"Thanks," Marian said. "Mr. Lennox here yet?"

A voice from the doorway answered her. "Sure, Marian. Come on in. You too, Hayward—glad to see you."

Edward Lennox was a short, slim figure, gray-blond hair plastered back carefully, round face pleasant. He helped Marian up the creaking, broken steps and held open the door.

"Andreason is already here," he said in an undertone. "Be nice to him, Marian, will you? He doesn't seem to be softening up any."

The house, in the hollow of the valley, was gloomy, lit cheerlessly by oil lamps. A small fire sputtered dispiritedly in the fireplace. Seated before it, puffing at a blackened pipe, was Nels Andreason.

STARING at him, Hayward got one impression: vastness. The man wasn't fat; he was merely built on a big scale, a huge Viking, yellow hair carelessly rumped, blue eyes candid. He got up, bowed to Marian, shook hands with Hayward, and rumbled a greeting.

"I have met Miss Kirby before," he said. "I've been sitting here with ghosts—you know?"

"Ghosts?" Hayward asked, eyes widening.

"Old ghosts. Old memories. This house is full of them. I spent my childhood here. Every room has its memories for me—some pleasant, some not so pleasant." He smiled wryly. "Nothing but memories. Well, I must not bore you with my talk. Sit down," he invited them.

"It's funny," Lennox said suddenly, after a long pause. "We thought this place was deserted. But when we came we found footprints all around."

"Footprints? No! Tracks, yes. They were funny," Andreason grunted. His blue eyes blinked, puzzled. "Too long for bear—and there were never

any bear in these hills. But there were claws like a grizzly's. Funny."

Hayward lit a cigarette, scarcely listening. He was looking forward to a dull week-end. Before he could reply Marian caught her breath in a little gasp and sprang up, staring at the window.

"Look!" Her voice was unsteady. "Jack—there!"

Hayward swung about, his eyes narrowing. He caught a flashing glimpse of something visible through the grimy glass—something that seemed to shine with a queer, cold radiance in the dusk. Then it whisked aside and was gone. With a leap Hayward was at the window, tugging at the rusted fastenings. Hopeless. They were fast. Scrubbing at the glass with his palm he peered out into the shadows.

There was nothing visible. He became conscious of heavy breathing beside him, turned to see Andreason peering over his shoulder, Lennox behind him.

"What is it? A man—" The Swede stared into the gloom.

"Gone now, anyway," Hayward grunted. "Some tramp, probably."

"It was shining," Andreason said oddly. "I saw that. What—"

"I—I thought it was a face at first," Marian murmured. "Then—oh, it couldn't be! The thing was all planes and angles."

"What's that?" Lennox exclaimed skeptically. "Planes and angles?"

Marian hesitated. "It looked like that. Shining planes and angles, with gaps and holes. I—I can't just describe it, but it couldn't have been a tramp."

Lennox grunted. "Probably some reflection of the light. No tramp—"

Cutting through his words came a scream—high-pitched with shock and terror, edged with agony; a man's scream, sickening in its clamorous abruptness. It ended; there came the sound of a heavy fall. In the heavy silence a curious sound drifted into the room—a humming noise, oddly cadenced, weirdly musical. It faded and was gone.

They found Seaver, the man-of-all-work, on the porch. He lay in a crumpled heap, blood oozing from an ugly

gash in his scalp. His face was drained of blood.

A cry from Andreason brought them around sharply. The giant Swede was staring into the night. Hayward, following his gaze, felt an odd sensation of uneasiness. Then it gave place to a shock of amazement as he saw the shining thing.

He could not make out its nature, nor its distance from the house. A shining cone of white fire was topped by an extraordinary conglomeration—Hayward thought of Marian's words—of *planes and angles*. Nothing held them together; they were broken erratically by patches and gaps of blackness. Yet Hayward felt as though curious eyes were on him, watching intently.

"What the devil's that?" Lennox ripped out. He took a tentative step forward—

THE shining thing vanished! It seemed to swirl and writhe in the darkness—and was gone! Swallowed up by blackness!

There was a tiny flashlight in Hayward's leather key-container, and he utilized this as he leaped from the porch and raced forward. It was a hopeless search—rock-strewn hillside, tangled grass and bushes, and no trace of any intruder.

And then Hayward stopped. The tiny beam of the flashlight centered on something at his feet—something like a footprint, vague in the dust of a little open patch that was free from vegetation. This was no footprint, however—no human track. It was unnaturally elongated, ending in four deep, pointed depressions which might have been made by claws. Hayward swept the light around swiftly.

After a moment he turned and went back to the house. Seaver was stirring under the ministrations of the others.

"Here, drink this," Lennox ordered, holding a flask to the other's lips. Seaver gulped, coughed, and choked. His eyes opened—and he screamed. Screamed like a woman—shrill, terrified.

"What's the matter?" Lennox's arm was about Seaver's shoulders, supporting him. "It's all right, old fellow."

"I'm *blind!*" Seaver shrieked, his hands fumbling out vaguely. "I'm blind! Oh, God—I can't see!"

Swiftly Hayward bent, peered into the man's eyes. Seaver's pupils were tiny pinpoints, scarcely visible.

"Keep your eyes shut. You're not blind," he said crisply. But inwardly he wasn't sure. What monstrous, incredible power did that weird shining in the dark possess?

Hayward whipped a handkerchief from his pocket and bandaged Seaver's eyes, while the man, whimpering, made futile clawing gestures at the air. Lennox bent, gripped his shoulder.

"What was it, Seaver?" he demanded. "What happened?"

Seaver quieted. "I don't know. Something hit me as I came out on the porch to smoke—and that's all I know. Now—I'm *blind!*"

He tore the handkerchief from his eyes, blinked. An expression of stupefied, unbelieving delight spread over his stolid face.

His hand groped out, touched Hayward's coat.

The reporter's face cleared. "You can see, eh? Good."

"Yes! I can see." Seaver blinked experimentally.

"Not much, but—it's getting brighter. I guess I'm all right after all," he admitted a bit shamefacedly.

"Well, come back in the house, then," Lennox grunted. Seated around the fire they discussed the phenomenon of the shining planes and angles.

"I have been wondering—" Andreaison said in his deep voice, "understand, I am not superstitious—but I am wondering whether there might not be a natural but—well, unknown explanation for such things. They are not unique, you know. Charles Fort wrote of much more amazing things—footprints in the snow made by no earthly creatures, poltergeistic visitations, and such."

"Poltergeists?" Lennox asked skeptically. "Ghosts?"

"Not ghosts. Beings—living beings, alien to our three-dimensional world. That has always been an idea, a hobby of mine. That is, that we're not isolated in this three-dimensional world of

ours. That other beings, in other dimensions, can visit our earth at will—"

"It doesn't sound very pleasant," Marian broke in, shivering. "I think I'd even prefer an old-fashioned ghost. At least, one knows what a ghost is apt to do. But your fourth-dimensional things—ugh!" She laughed somewhat nervously. Hayward glanced at her beneath lowered eyelids.

"It's fantastic, of course," Andreaison admitted. "But not necessarily unpleasant. Such things—granting that they do exist—may not be inimical to humans. But, of course, there is always the possibility that creatures so utterly alien to mankind cannot help but be dangerous in their contacts with humanity. Just as a being made out of chlorine gas would be harmful," he added.

SEAVER, rubbing his eyes, muttered something under his breath. There came an interruption then. A sharp thud sounded against the window pane.

Hayward jerked his head around quickly. For a moment he did not recognize the man whose face was visible through the grimed glass. Then Marian's whisper touched a chord of memory.

"Jack—the man at the service station! It's—"

The cogs of memory clicked. The gaunt, bewhiskered old man who was fumbling at the window with ineffectual fingers was the same one who had warned them of the "shining thing that wasn't human." Lennox got up and walked to the window, and, after a short struggle with the fastenings opened it.

"What is it, Morton?" he asked sharply.

The oldster flung himself over the sill. He scrambled into the room and stood for a moment utterly immobile, his big-knuckled hands dangling at his sides.

Then his bewhiskered, haggard face lifted slowly. Dull eyes stared directly into the electric light.

"I seen it!" Morton whispered. "The shining thing."

Hayward stepped forward and

gripped the man's shoulder. "What's that?" he demanded. "What's the matter with you?"

A sickly smile twisted Morton's face. His gaze still held fast on the electric bulb, but his head lolled limply on his shoulder.

"It heard me talking against it. After you left—it came. It put something inside my head—"

Andreason's white face loomed up like a mask as he moved forward, his eyes intent on Morton. The oldster kept on in that horrible, dull whisper.

"—inside my head. Something cold, that keeps moving and whirling—my brain don't feel right, somehow. Hollow, like. It turned my brain into ice—"

Then — "Who?" The whisper came past Hayward's shoulder; he did not know who spoke. The change in the oldster was shocking. His jaw dropped wide open.

"The shining thing!" he choked. "It ain't human—"

Suddenly his face grew sharp with feral cunning. "I come here," he muttered. "I thought it couldn't follow me, or git me 'less I was alone. But — but—"

"My head!" he screamed, his face contorted with agony. "Ah, Gawd—my brain! *It's eating my brain!*"

He whirled. Before Hayward could move the man had plunged across the room, scrambled through the open window, and was gone, racing away into the night. His mad shrieks died away, growing fainter and fainter until they were no longer audible.

Lennox poured a drink with unsteady hands. His round face was white.

"This isn't a very propitious night," Andreason said nervously, rumpling his yellow hair. "Either the man's insane, or there's something wrong. Very wrong."

"I believe in nothing I can't see or feel," Lennox said quietly. Andreason smiled.

"Do you believe in gases? Can you see or feel carbon monoxide? Yet it exists, and it's dangerous, too. Well —" He shrugged heavy shoulders. "I can take it. But Miss Kirby—this is not very pleasant for you, I'm afraid."

Marian was sitting close to Hayward, her small hand imprisoned in his big one. She smiled shakily.

"I can take it, too," she told Andreason. "There's really nothing to be afraid of, is there?"

Lennox was biting his lips. "I don't think so. But if I thought— Perhaps we'd better go back to the city, eh? We can settle our business tomorrow, Andreason."

"You may be right," the millionaire agreed after a moment. "Playing with fire is dangerous, and it isn't well to take unnecessary chances."

OPPOSITION came from an unexpected quarter. "I'm not afraid," Marian said suddenly. "We've not been harmed, have we? Besides, you want to see the place by daylight, I'm sure, Mr. Andreason."

Seaver rubbed his head and muttered an objection. But Lennox stood up, his round face set in hard lines.

"You're right, Marian. We're not a pack of hysterical children. Eh, Hayward?"

Hayward nodded absently. He was thinking—

He was still thinking some hours later, lying relaxed on his bed, fully dressed save for shoes and coat. Thinking of what Andreason had said about other beings, other dimensions, and of the curious behavior of old Morton, the service station owner. Were there truly alien dimensions coexistent which the three dimensions men knew? Science had not disproved such theories, at any rate.

Life in such a dimension would naturally assume forms dissimilar to earthly ones. And probably such other beings could not be clearly glimpsed by three-dimensional eyes. They might conceivably appear as a shining conglomeration of planes and angles.

Hayward, too, had read Charles Fort's strange books. He knew of the eccentric savant's arguments, his belief that earth was visited often by beings from Outside—things that were not of three-dimensional or terrestrial origin. Things that left queer footprints in sand and snow!

Hayward had read the "Secret Book

of Dzyan", that strange volume on which Madame Blavatsky based her "Secret Doctrine". He remembered the story of earth's creation, as told in the "Book of Dzyan" — of the "Alien Lords" who visited this planet when it still seethed with the fires of creation. No, man was not necessarily the pinnacle of evolution's pyramid. There might be—*others!*

At last Hayward dozed. Strange dreams came to him. Dreams of weird, uncanny lights that blazed and shone with fantastic brilliance, illuminating great vistas where half glimpsed beings moved obscurely. He awoke with a start.

It came again — the sound that had awakened him. A scream—from outside the house!

"Jack—*Jack!*"

Hayward sprang from the bed, leaped to the window. A full moon illuminated the ground below. The white face of Marian seemed to leap up at him, stark and twisted with fear. Above her floated that weird, glowing horror of warped and twisted angles.

The girl's scream was choked off abruptly. As Hayward whirled toward the door he heard a hubbub from nearby, as though others had been awakened. He paid no heed. He was racing down the creaking steps, plunging toward the door, sprinting out into the moonlight.

Marian was gone! But after a moment he saw the shining thing, bobbing and dancing in the air. As before, it was impossible to gauge its distance. Cursing under his breath, Hayward hurried in that direction.

The weird light vanished. Without warning the shining cone swirled into nothingness, the fantastically angled planes were eclipsed. They were one with the dimness where the shadow of the high hill was cast by the moonlight.

Hayward almost stumbled over Marian. She lay in a crumpled, unmoving heap, her flimsy nightdress half torn from her white body by the underbrush. A horrible fear leaped up within Hayward as he dropped beside her. But she was still breathing. He made a motion to put his coat around her, and then realized that he wore none. In lieu of

it Hayward picked up the unconscious girl and, cradling her in his arms, started back to the house.

The others met him — Lennox, Andreason and Seaver. They had emerged too late to see the shining thing.

"What is it?" Lennox asked, his voice not quite steady.

BEFORE Hayward could speak Seaver broke in, his stolid face glistening with sweat.

"That damned thing—it got Miss Kirby! Is she—dead?"

"No," Hayward said tonelessly. He strode toward the house, the others trailing at his heels. As he reached the porch Seaver gasped something inarticulate, clutched at his arm.

Hayward turned. Weird in the dim moonlight, shining with macabre radiance, was the alien horror. The grotesque mass of angles moved slowly from side to side above the shining cone, as though the thing were watching the little group intently. The uncanny, strangely cadenced humming drifted to their ears.

"Listen," Lennox said under his breath. "I'm going to get at the bottom of this thing. Right now! Seaver, you take Miss Kirby and stay here. Hayward — Andreason — are you game?"

Without a word Hayward put Marian's limp body into Seaver's arms, and the servant hurried into the house. The others went racing into the dimness, Lennox in the lead, straight for the shining enigma in the distance.

It seemed to draw back with an odd air of indecision, and the eldritch humming shrilled out angrily and then broke off. The swirling of milky radiance began, and abruptly the thing was gone. But Lennox shouted something over his shoulder and plunged on. Hayward, too, thought he saw something in the gloom—a darker shadow flitting away.

It was gone. But Lennox kept on, until he stopped at last, panting a little, before a boulder that lay tilted against the hillside.

"I—I lost it here," he said, breathing heavily. "See any footprints?"

Hayward utilized his tiny flashlight. There were some indistinct scratchings in the dust at their feet, but it was impossible to make out what had caused them. Lennox kicked the boulder sharply.

"I wonder—" he murmured. Suddenly he put his shoulder against the rock, thrusting strongly. The boulder swung outward slightly, leaving a space behind it wide enough for a man to squeeze through.

Hayward pushed Lennox aside. "I saw something move down there," he said curtly. "Let me go first."

The tunnel slanted down into the hillside, a narrow passage carved out of the earth, braced with planks and timbers. As Hayward moved forward cautiously, his flashlight held at arm's length for fear of a bullet, he heard a muffled whispering behind him.

"Shut up! We don't—" he said over his shoulder in a fierce undertone.

"Seaver's here," Lennox interrupted. "He came after us. Marian's all right, he said."

Hayward grunted. He didn't like to think of Marian alone in the old house, but if his hunch was right, the thing that had menaced them was at the end of this passage. He switched off the flashlight, for a dim radiance was beginning to creep out of the depths of the tunnel.

A crudely-constructed door of rough planks barred his way. Light crept through the cracks. Hayward tried it gently. It was locked, but one heave of his shoulders burst the flimsy barricade. He flung himself through the opening and leaped to one side, pivoting swiftly.

But there was no danger. He saw a small cave hollowed out of the earth, with an oil lamp set in a niche in the wall, illuminating the chamber with pale radiance. The room was bare, save for an old packing case on which lay several objects that made Hayward's eyes widen with sudden understanding.

And crouching in a corner, was a curious figure—a man, his body shrouded in a sweeping black cloak, with a mask of dark cloth hiding his face. He gave a squeaking cry of fear

and tried to scurry past Hayward to the door, where he blundered into Lennox.

"What the devil!" Lennox grunted. His fingers were tearing at the man's mask.

IT came off, but under the black cloth was another mask—a curiously constructed affair of planes and angles, painted upon a helmetlike metal globe that covered the man's head. Even in the lamplight it seemed to shine with faint gleamings of phosphorescence.

This mask, too, came off in Lennox's hands. And Hayward recognized the gaunt, bewhiskered face that stared around with the gaze of a trapped animal—Morton, the oldster who had first warned them away, the owner of the tumbledown service station a few miles away.

Lennox thrust his captive forward. Morton stumbled against the packing case and crouched, his thin lips quivering.

"So you're behind this!" Lennox snapped. "I've a good mind to—"

"Wait a minute," Hayward broke in. "Let him talk."

The oldster bobbed his head. "I'll—I'll talk," he whined. "Only don't send me to the pen! You'll go easy on me, won't you? I'll tell you everything—it's worth money to you, Mr. Lennox."

"Go ahead," Lennox said coldly. Morton pointed to the objects on the packing case.

"He made me do it," the man said. "I wouldn't have, only he said he'd protect me. I was to scare you away, so you wouldn't have any chance to look your land over, Mr. Lennox. Here—" He lifted two pieces of leather which looked like shoe-soles with thongs dangling from their sides.

"I slipped these over my shoes to make the queer tracks. I carved 'em out of the leather, and they look just like footprints. And that humming noise—well, I made it with this." He exhibited a familiar-looking tapered cylinder.

"It's a kazoo. You hum in it—"

"My eyes!" Seaver exclaimed. "You blinded me?"

Morton looked at the ground.

"With a flashlight. After I knocked

you out I opened your eyes and held my light to them."

Hayward's glance flicked swiftly around the little cave. Lennox was staring down at Morton, his lips parted. Seaver's stolid face was impassive. And Andreason stood in the doorway, frowning.

Lennox ripped the cloak from Morton's shoulders. "So this is how you did it, eh?" he snapped. "Luminous paint on one side, and black cloth on the other. And I suppose when you wanted to disappear, you just pulled the black mask over the luminous one."

Morton wet his lips. "Yeah. But you'll go easy on me, Mr. Lennox? It's worth money to you! That's why I was supposed to scare you away, so you couldn't look over the land in daylight and find out—"

"Find out what?" Lennox demanded.

"About the oil!" Morton burst out. "Your land's full of it! Even here—look at that." He pointed to a glistening, scummy black pool on the floor nearby. "There's millions on the land—but he wanted to buy it before you found out."

"Who?" Lennox asked, very calm.

"Him!" Morton's skinny forefinger pointed at Andreason. "He made me do it! Promised me a thousand dollars if he got the land without you suspecting it had oil on it."

Andreason moved forward, his face grim.

"What are you talking about?" he snarled. "Are you accusing me—"

"Hold it!" Lennox snapped. "Don't try to shut him up, Andreason. It's too late now."

"What d'you mean?" Andreason rasped.

"I mean that you can't get away with it. Your millions don't mean a thing to me. Hayward—Seaver—you're witnesses. All of you! This is one time— By God, Andreason, I'm going to spread this over every paper from New York to 'Frisco!"

Andreason's face was a frozen white mask.

"So it's blackmail, eh?" he grated. "And I'm supposed to shell out—so you won't throw dirt on my reputation? I don't think it's worth it!"

LENNOX laughed then. "I may be just a promoter—I haven't got your millions—but I'm no blackmailer. You couldn't pay me enough to hush this thing up. I don't like being played for a sucker, Andreason. And that's why I'm going to see you behind bars—or know the reason why!"

Andreason's hand dropped to his pocket, but Lennox was too quick for him. Abruptly a gun appeared in his hand, aimed unwaveringly at the millionaire's heart.

"Don't try that, either," Lennox grated. "Hayward, get his gun."

"Don't be a fool!" Andreason snapped. "It was my handkerchief—"

Hayward's eyebrows were raised as he deftly searched the millionaire and brought out a flat, stubby automatic from a shoulder holster. The reporter held it negligently, smiling a little.

"I don't think we'll print the story," he said quietly.

Lennox stared at him. "Eh? Why not? You can't—"

"We may print a story," Hayward pointed out. "But not this one. I've been wondering about certain things, and I think I've got the right answers. For instance—why did Andreason wait for Morton to implicate him?"

Lennox stared. "He didn't think Morton would dare!"

"Yeah. Maybe. But he had every chance to get the drop on you—on all of us—while we were listening to Morton's story. And Andreason isn't a fool, you know. Neither am I, Lennox. Sometimes a puzzle has more than one answer."

Hayward's voice was harsh. "You're a promoter, Lennox. You've been mixed up in shady schemes before. Suppose your plan did work out. Suppose I spread this story over every paper in the country—that one of our wealthiest oil millionaires tried to gyp you out of valuable property. Blackmail wasn't your scheme. You had something *better* than a shakedown!"

Hayward's hard smile was sardonic as he went on. "You had an oil company up your sleeve. I'll bet there wasn't a pint of oil on this land, except for what you've planted here. But with a million dollars' worth of free

advertising, you wouldn't find it difficult to organize a company and sell enough stock to make you rich.

"If Andreason tried to steal your land, it must be worth millions—that's how your investors would figure. And you'd pocket the profits when the investors started wondering what happened to their money, and skip the country. Morton wasn't working for Andreason. He was working for *you!*"

"You're smart," Lennox said softly. His round face was chalk-white. "Better not fire that gun, though. I'm aiming at your belly, and I'll shoot the second you do. I don't think you want to die, even if I die with you. Just step aside so I can get out of here."

Hayward looked into Lennox's pale eyes and saw death there.

"Okay," he said. "That's all right with me." He edged aside. "The door's open, Lennox. Get out."

Thunderous silence filled the cavern as Lennox backed through the portal. "Don't come after me," he warned. "If you do, I'll shoot to kill."

The others waited, tense—

When the scream came it sent Hayward plunging into the tunnel, ice gripping his heart. Marian! He cursed the luck that had brought the girl after them just in time to meet the escaping Lennox.

The passage was very dimly lit by the light from the cave. Hayward heard a shot scream past his head, and instinctively ducked, plunging forward with his body doubled up to present as

small a target as possible. He caught a flashing glimpse of a black figure standing spraddle-legged above a crumpled white form, and crashed down as he blundered against the wall.

Hayward twisted his body in mid-air and hit on his left side. He heard a bullet scream and crash against wood. He snapped a shot up at the vague dark figure, felt a sledge-hammer shock jar his shoulder. Instantly racking pain dug into his arm. The gun dropped from his convulsing fingers.

THE dark figure made no move. Then suddenly Hayward was aware that it was growing shorter. It was doubling up, quite silently, and it fell forward and lay motionless in the dimness.

After a moment Hayward got up. His right arm hung uselessly, and he fumbled for and found the gun with his other hand. But there was no need for the weapon. His bullet had entered Lennox's chest at an angle and ripped out through the back of the neck, shattering the spine. A wry little smile was frozen on the dead man's face.

Hayward dropped to his knees beside Marian. She stirred, opened her eyes. Fear sprang in them, dying as she recognized the reporter.

"Are you okay, kid?" he asked. "He didn't hurt you?"

"No. Jack, I—Jack!"

Marian couldn't say any more just then. And there was a reason for it.

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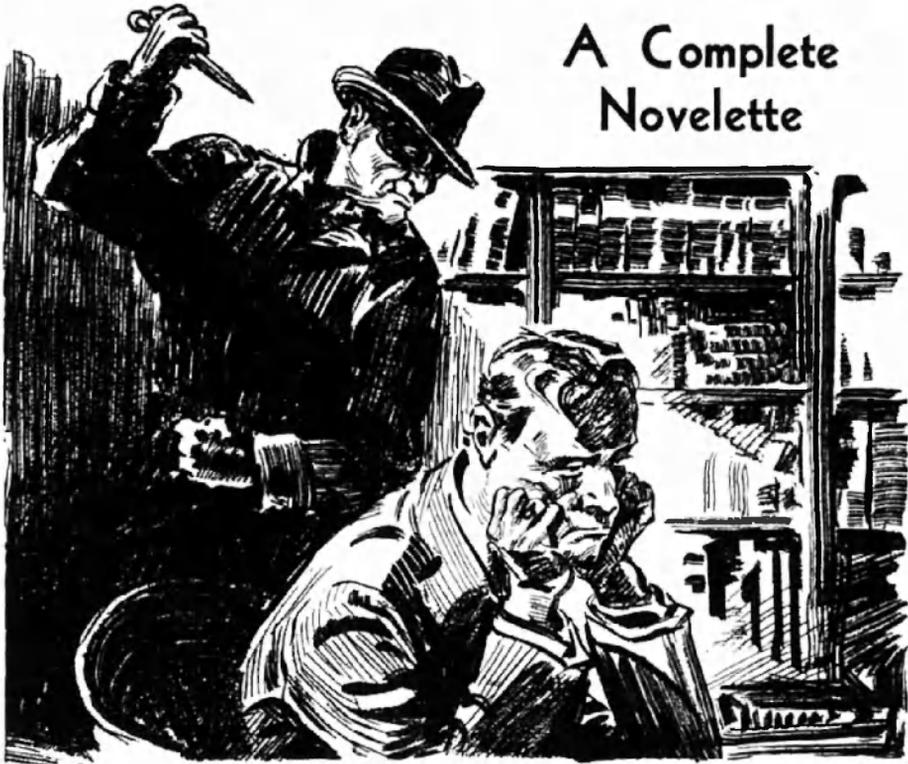
CHAPTER I

A Grisly Hallucination

HER cousin had tried to keep her away. Two years older than she, he had not been hit by the death of George Mont as she had been. Naturally. George Mont was uncle to Philip; to Louise he had been an adored father, indulging her in everything, taking the place of both father and mother to her. Realizing this, Philip Ramsey had said, when he met her at the air-

Was This Girl Insane—Or Did She Actually

These Horrors Were Louise Mont's Welcome



A Complete Novelette

A deadly figure, scissors in his hand, stood behind the seated man.

Without CORPSES

port: "Don't go to the house, Lou. Go to a hotel instead. Everything in the place will remind you of your father."

Louise, the target of every woman's eye in her French clothes, had shaken her dark head.

"I want to be reminded of Dad. I haven't seen him for nearly two years. Now—I'll never see him. Dying while I was off in Paris, finishing a silly art course— Buried while I was racing home by boat and plane— Give me the key, Phil."

Still Ramsey had demurred. His

frank, good-looking face was doubtful.

"It isn't as though you were coming home—in the true sense of the word. After the old home was destroyed by fire, your father bought the Grover place, and—"

"The Grover place?" Louise Mont gasped. "Why, he didn't write me it was *that* place."

A picture of the ancient, lichen- and ivy-smothered manor set back in a wild and unkempt area of gnarled oak and leprous cedar trees flashed across her mind. The homestead, a pre-Civil War

See the Same Murder Committed Twice?

mansion of decaying architecture, had been uninhabited for years, desolate, forsaken, alone with its ghosts and memories.

As a child Louise had passed by the eerie old place almost on tiptoe and with bated breath, while fragments of delicious horror from stories she had read, or had heard from old Negro mam-mies, drifted obscuringly across her mind like the Spanish moss trailed down from the twisted trees—like the cobwebs draped across the dirty window panes in the manner of an old witch hiding behind her spidery veil.

UNCLE GEORGE restored the old place," Ramsey was quick to add. "He preserved the original plan and style of the house, but it's all done over. It will be a strange place to you, Lou. Under the circumstances, I don't think you ought to plan on staying there. No servants, no supplies, the nearest neighbor fifty yards away—the present sadness—oh, damn it, Lou! Don't let the tears come. I'm sorry, but—"

"Give me the key, Phil."

Ramsey contemplated the clear, dark eyes of his cousin, the stubborn set of her small, round chin, the sweet lines of her lissom young figure. She was a lovely thing in French grey. What had been the matter with that fool Bill Jarvis, anyhow—letting a girl like Louise Mont slip out of his life?

With a sigh of surrender, Ramsey fished out and handed over the key.

"At least, I'll go with you," he said cheerfully.

"No, Phil," she answered him, her lovely eyes reminding him of those of a wounded setter. "I'd rather be alone—at first. Please."

What could he do save acquiesce? He did so, doubtfully. He stood and gazed uncertainly after her as she walked along the elm-shaded street into the shadows of late afternoon, shadows which seemed to be reaching out cunningly, slyly, to entangle this girl in their intangible but nonetheless real labyrinth.

Something of this silly sort of notion assailed Louise Mont as she neared the old Grover mansion. She noted with

approval the glistening white sides and green shutters of the house itself, the evidences of intensive landscaping and gardening, the general atmosphere of something being done. But, with it all, there was an air about the place that a thousand painters and gardeners could not have dispelled.

She felt it distinctly as she paused at the front gate and peered toward the house through the filtered red glare of the setting sun. In spite of its renovation of white, the colonial façade was poorly decipherable through the dipping and snarled branches of trees and clumps of shrubbery that had thus far defied the hand and knife of the landscaper. Insects were droning their evening vespers to the departing day, but the moment she passed through the gate it seemed that even this insect noise was left outside the boundaries of the Grover property. She had to force herself step by step along the flagstone walk.

At last she stood on the lofty veranda. The oppressiveness of the place bore down on her until she thought she would smother. A deep instinct, intuition, men called it, warned her not to enter this gloomy old pile alone.

But the thought of going to an impersonal place like a hotel, with callous lights and unheeding noise and laughter all around her, was unbearable. She straightened slim shoulders and walked up to the front door. The key rasped loudly as she put it in the lock. The door squeaked as she opened it, as though it had not been opened for years, though the home had been tenanted by her father and two servants up to a short time ago.

SHE stood in the front hall, motionless for a moment, before reaching for the light switch at her right. Through broad double doorways to right and left she could see furniture with sheeting over it. The clumps of white looked ghostly in the dimness. The hall was cold in spite of the warm spring night.

Louise sighed, and turned on the lights. She closed the door behind her.

With the lights, a bit of warmth crept into the house. And then she let out a

small sound, half sob and half cry, as she saw a coat hanging on the rack near the door. A shabby but still distinguished looking old tweed thing that he had stubbornly refused to give away. It hung there now, perhaps had been the last garment he wore before his swift illness struck him.

She ran to the rack and buried her face in the coat. She smelled the redolent tobacco odor that took her back to childhood, when she had run to meet her father on his return from his office at night, and had smelled that masculine tweed-and-tobacco aroma.

She cried a little and then went on down the hall toward a doorway in the rear. She knew what that doorway led to. Dad had sent her diagrams of the place. It was the rear room he had fixed up as his special den and library. In there would be his most prized personal possessions—the pipe rack with the dog's-head holders, the ink-stand used by Jefferson, her picture in its silver and enamel frame.

The warmth of that thought almost buried the deeply driven chill that had struck her since her first glimpse of this place which was her home, but in which she had never set foot before. Almost buried it—but not quite! The chill grew a bit as she walked toward the library.

Her high heels tapped loudly in the gravelike silence of the empty house. *Tap, tap, tap.* She found herself growing curiously breathless. They had called Louise psychic, in Paris. Now the tap of her heels seemed to be trying in some psychic way to tell her something.

She stopped at the library door. It was closed. She could hear the beat of her own heart as she stood there; could actually hear the rasp of her dress over her breast as she breathed.

Then she opened the door. It stuck a little, only half opened. But that half-opening was enough to reveal to her a sight that froze her where she was. She stood with wide eyes and blood-drained face while her heart seemed to stop.

letting in the grayness of day's death. In that grayness she could see a deep alcove in the middle of the right wall. There was a desk set half in the alcove, with a chair drawn up to it. And in the chair sat a man.

The figure was dreadfully familiar. She could see the man's profile a little, though he sat almost with his back to her and with his head sunk on his chest. She could see his right hand resting on the desk. There was a big scarab ring on the middle finger that she had seen many, many times before.

Breath came back explosively to her lungs.

"*Dad!*" she cried. "Oh, my God! Dad! They told me you were dead—"

Her words stopped as though a knife had sliced through them. For suddenly, in the grayness, there were two figures. Her father, making no move whatever at the sound of her voice, still sat with his chin on his chest before the desk. And a man had crept up behind him.

The man was masked. He wore a dark suit, with the coat collar up so that no lightness of shirt front showed. A black and deadly figure, he stood behind the seated man, who seemed absolutely unaware of his presence.

There was a long, thin knife in his hand.

"*Dad! Look out—*"

She took two reeling steps forward. And the knife plunged down. Squarely into the back of the seated man it plunged. She could hear the sickening contact of steel with flesh.

She swayed there in the doorway, eyes glazed, sobbing for breath. The body of her father had sprawled forward on the desk. A crimson flood coursed down his back and dripped to the carpet beside the chair. The masked man stood behind the chair, paying no attention whatever to her.

Louise heard a scream rip out, realized dimly that it was from her own lips.

Then her knees buckled, and she fell to the floor, senseless. The gray of evening faded in the blackness of night, with her motionless body revealed as a dim light patch in the darkness near the doorway.

THE room was fairly light in spite of the dusk, with two big windows

LOUISE lay back in the great leather chair in the far corner of the library. Around here were Phil Ramsey, a plump woman with sympathy showing in her pleasant face, who lived next door and had come over when she heard the scream, and elderly, frosty looking John Graham, her father's attorney and oldest friend.

"I told her not to come here," Ramsey kept saying to the lawyer. "I told her. She should have gone to a hotel. It was crazy of her to come here, and be alone in this big old place."

Graham said nothing. But in his cool old eyes and the lean dryness of his face there was sympathy as plainly to be seen as in the face of the plump neighbor. The latter leaned toward Louise.

"Feeling better every minute, aren't you, honey? You poor dear! You were at the breaking point. That long trip home, after the cable about your father. You shouldn't have been alone when you came in here."

Louise tried to stop her ears to the sympathy. For that sympathy was a horrible thing. The sympathy—and the way the three were looking at her.

"I tell you, I did see it!" she exclaimed once more. "I saw Dad—my own father—sitting at that desk in the alcove. I saw a masked man in black steal up behind him and—stab him!"

Her cousin sighed. His handsome face was a little strained looking. His glance met the lawyer's. Graham cleared his throat.

"Let's try to take this methodically, point by point, Louise," he said. "You say you saw your father. But George died six days ago, and was—put into his grave—three days ago. You say you saw him seated at that desk in the alcove. But the desk, as you see, is in the center of the room. *And there is no alcove!*"

Louise's eyes went to the point in the wall where she had seen the deep recess, in which the desk had been half contained. Her gaze had gone wildly to that spot time and again. She saw now what she had seen before; plain, blank wall, with a small book-case where the big recess had been.

"You see," Ramsey said gently, "we

don't get anywhere with this. You couldn't have seen some one else whom you mistook for your father in the poor light—and who seemed to have been murdered before your eyes—because there is no body here, and not even a trace of blood on the carpet. Besides, who would be sitting at that desk in the dusk in an empty house? And again, this room is not even like the room you describe."

He touched her hand, gently, soothingly.

"You were seeing ghosts, Lou. Ghost figures in a ghost room. Overstrained nerves—"

THE horror was no longer in Louise's dark eyes. But a grim doubt was there which was worse. That terrible scene she had seemed to observe—and which she couldn't possibly have seen! The looks in the eyes of her cousin, the dry but kindly old attorney, and the sympathetic, plump woman who lived next door!

They thought she was mad. And she could hardly blame them. She wondered herself.

But she stopped that awful wonder. She had not only seen the man at the desk—her father—killed— she had *heard* the knife strike his back. You didn't witness "ghost scenes" as clearly as that? Or—did you?

"We'll leave here now," Ramsey said. "You're coming home with me. Isabel and I will take care of you for a few days, till you feel better."

Louise's eyes clouded. She didn't like Isabel, her cousin's blond wife, or trust her. She shook her head a little.

"I'll be all right at a hotel, Phil."

"Oh, but I insist," said Ramsey with kindly firmness. "You need a few days in bed, with no movement or effort of any kind. A few days with a nurse in attendance."

And suddenly Louise's breath caught, as she got the true meaning of his words, and the way the neighbor woman was nodding her head.

It wasn't physical attendance they thought she needed; it was *mental* help.

"No!" she panted. "No! I won't—"

She looked around the library in

which they had found her lying.

Desk in the center of the room, instead of to the right in an alcove. No alcove there, or anywhere else in the library. No slightest trace of bloody murder. Her father in his grave, so that she couldn't possibly have seen him at the desk.

She closed her eyelids wearily over the gnawing doubt in her eyes.

"All right," she said. "I'll go with you, Phil. Maybe for a few days it will be best."

CHAPTER II

A Will Is Missing

"**B**ILL, you don't think I'm—in-sane?"

It was a tortured whisper coming from the girl's lips. Her eyes were wells of darkness in her white face.

Private Detective William Jarvis, who had just flown down on the afternoon plane from Chicago, caught Louise's hand in his own big one. The sight of her lying helpless there, looking like a kid of fifteen instead of a woman of twenty-three, was doing funny things to his breathing. The sight of her had always done that since high-school days, even after he had gone up to Chicago to be a private detective, and she had gone east to an expensive finishing school. There had always been a special place reserved for Louise Mont in Bill Jarvis's life. But he'd never tried to do anything about it; she was a rich man's daughter. He was private law, getting a good income, but never able to save much of it.

"You don't think I'm crazy, Bill?"

Jarvis grinned. It made his rather homely, heavy-boned face look quite nice.

"For nearly two years," he said, "I haven't seen you. Not since I saw you off at the pier in New York. And you looked me with a question like that."

Louise did not smile back. Her lips looked as if they had lost the trick of smiles.

"You'll admit there's reason for asking you the question," she said som-

berly. "And the others all think I'm mad."

"The others?"

"Phil and Isabel. Mr. Graham. Even Doctor Rufe."

Jarvis lit a cigarette, after Louise had refused one.

"Tell me the whole thing in definite order. I've heard scraps, but no complete story."

Louise moved her knees up under her chin. She was sitting up in the bed they'd persuaded her to lie in, with pillows propped behind her. She looked younger, more kidlike, than ever.

"I got the cable in Paris that Dad was suddenly and frightfully ill. Pneumonia. I started at once. And then, in less than forty-eight hours, I got a radiogram that he had died. It was pretty bad on the trip, Bill. You know what Dad meant to me. And his going like that—"

AS her lips trembled, he patted her shoulder reassuringly.

"I went at once to the Newark air field from the boat, and took a plane here. Phil, my cousin, met me at the field. He had the key to Dad's house. He wanted me to go to a hotel, was afraid of the influence the empty house might have on me. But I insisted on going there. I let myself in and went down the hall to the library. I opened the door. And the instant I did, I saw it. The desk half in the alcove, with Dad sitting at it with his back to the door—"

"How did you know it was your father if his back was toward you?" Jarvis cut in.

"It wasn't squarely toward me. I could see his profile. That big, funny, homely nose of his. And the long jaw. And I saw his hand, with his big scarab ring on it. I called out to him. And then I saw a man walk behind him with a knife in his right hand—"

"Where did the man come from?"

"I don't know. Some dark corner of the room, I suppose. It was almost night. I couldn't see too well. And I was watching Dad so hard that I didn't see the other man at all, till suddenly there he was. As though he had appeared from thin air. I tried to go for-

ward, but the man brought the knife down—God, I can hear it now! The sound it made when it hit his back! And then I fainted.”

“And when you came to, Phil and Graham, and this woman from next door were with you,” nodded Jarvis. “How did they get in on it?”

“The woman next door said she heard me scream. She came over, couldn’t get in the front door because it had locked when I closed it after me. She was going to call the police, when she saw Phil coming up the walk. He had come after me, in a few minutes, to make sure that I was all right. He climbed in a window, and then phoned Graham.”

“Why?”

“Mr. Graham lives only a block away. He was Dad’s oldest friend. Phil said he phoned just on impulse.”

Jarvis drew at his cigarette and watched Louise’s face. He didn’t like the circles under her eyes, or the way her round chin trembled now and then, or the look in her eyes.

“Bill, I swear to you I saw what I describe. There’s no possibility that it was a hallucination. I saw the knife go into Dad’s back, saw the—blood—flow. I *must* have seen it!”

“So?” prompted Jarvis gently.

“Oh, don’t speak to me like that! Soothingly, humoringly! The others do that. I think they’re actually considering having me sent to an—institution.”

“Hardly that,” said Jarvis. “You’re no crazier than I am, if that’s a recommendation. What do you want me to do?”

“Find out what actually happened in that room,” said Louise. She caught his hand. “Something must have, Bill. *It must have!* Because if it didn’t—then I should be shut away someplace!”

Jarvis ground out his cigarette. He stood up, raw-boned, tall, with his clothes immaculately clean, but as rumpled looking as if he had slept in them. They always looked that way.

“Okay, kid,” he said. “Meanwhile, keep a stiff upper lip. If you say you saw something—you saw it. I’ll go find the pieces of it.”

HE left the upstairs room where Louise lay, and walked down the stairs. At the front door Phil Ramsey stood talking with a middle-aged man with a Vandyke. The man had a black physician’s bag in his hand.

Ramsey turned eagerly at the private detective’s approach.

“What do you think, Mr. Jarvis?”

“What the hell is there to think?” said Jarvis, a little roughly because he was so disturbed. He didn’t like to admit to himself how much he was disturbed! “Miss Mont certainly is sane. And I don’t think she’s the type that has visions.”

“Of course she must be sane,” concurred Ramsey. “But—” He bit his lip, then turned toward the man with the Vandyke. “This is Doctor Rufe. Mr. Jarvis. Or I should say Detective Jarvis?”

Rufe looked at Jarvis out of heavy-lidded brown eyes. His face was thin, colorless. Heavy blue veins stood out on the back of the hand he offered for Jarvis’s clasp.

“Detective?” he repeated inquiringly.

“Rather, an old friend of Louise’s,” said Jarvis. “Don’t you remember me?”

“Bill Jarvis! Of course!” The doctor’s hand tightened on his. “You went to school with Louise. That was before your mother, George Mont’s sister, moved here with you, Phil.”

With an ease of manner that he was far from really feeling, Jarvis said, “What do you think of all this, Doctor?”

Rufe shrugged. “I don’t think it’s anything serious. Louise went into that house, at the end of her rope—from a nervous standpoint. She had had a terrific shock, and then days of grief on her way home. She told me she felt guilty at leaving her father for so long. She entered his home, a place new to her, and she seemed to see the person she had been thinking of so intensely, her father. Then she seemed to see him murdered. That, I believe, was the expression of her guilty feeling.”

“But that seems to indicate—” Jarvis stopped, biting his lip.

"Madness?" inflected Doctor Rufe. "Not at all. Simple hallucination brought about by shock and nerve strain. I'll go up and see how the patient is, if you'll pardon me. I think she'd better get up, now. She was only in bed for the rest she needed, not because she is physically ill."

He went on up the stairs. Jarvis muttered a polite phrase to Phil Ramsey, and left the house. He went toward the business block of the town. It was about four in the afternoon, and he wanted to catch Attorney Graham in his office. Presently he was going to the Mont house, the old Grover place. But first, methodically, he wanted to know all he could of the background set up by the death of George Mont.

JOHAN GRAHAM was just leaving as Jarvis got to his office, an old-fashioned room in an old-fashioned building, with an old-maidish looking secretary presiding over the office ante-room. Jarvis introduced himself. Graham stared.

"Detective?" he repeated with raised brows, much as Doctor Rufe had.

"I'm here more or less unofficially," said Jarvis. "Just snooping around to find out what the devil Miss Mont did see. It couldn't have been her father, who lies dead in his grave. And she couldn't have seen some one else murdered, because there was no body. It's the damndest thing I ever heard of."

"It's nothing but overstrained nerves," declared Graham firmly. "Don't you go thinking it might be something else! What did you want to ask me?"

"About the financial setup since Mr. Mont died. What did he have in his will?"

Graham touched his fingertips precisely together and leaned back in the chair in which he had seated himself when Jarvis entered.

"You've touched on an odd thing," he said. "As far as we have been able to find, there is no will."

"That would be odd," said Jarvis slowly. "Mont was a wealthy man, wasn't he?"

"Yes. There's about a quarter of a million dollars in securities and property."

"Men with that much of an estate don't usually die intestate, do they?"

"They don't," agreed Graham. "And I can't believe, yet, that George Mont did. He made a will, years ago. I drew it up for him. Three people of the town duly witnessed it. But that will can't be found. I hesitate to think that George Mont destroyed it. But we have looked among his effects, in his safe deposit boxes, everywhere, without finding it. Perhaps he tore it up, intending to draft a new one, and died too soon. That has happened before."

"What was in the old will?"

"Mr. Mont left three-quarters of his estate, personal and real, to his daughter, Louise. The other quarter to his sister. Doctor Rufe and I were to be co-executors of Louise's share till she was twenty-one. Since that time, his sister, Mary Ramsey, has died, and Louise has long passed the twenty-one mark, so that the executor clause is invalid."

"If the will is not found," asked Jarvis evenly, "what happens?"

"The division will not be quite as Mont intended. Under the law of this state, when a man dies with no will, half of his estate goes to his wife and children, half to his own family and, or, their children. In the present case, that means that Louise will get half, and Philip Ramsey, son of Mont's sister, will get the other half."

Jarvis was silent. Graham said:

"What is this leading to, Mr. Jarvis? You think there is some connection between a lost will and the queer thing Louise thought she saw?"

"I don't know," said Jarvis. "I've never tried to chase visions before. Thanks for the information."

CHAPTER III

Murder Encore

IT was five o'clock when he reached George Mont's house, in the library

of which Louise had seen a dead man murdered, or had thought so. There was still plenty of light. But he found, when he had let himself in with Louise's key, that the hall was dim.

It was very quiet in the house. His footfalls were loud as he went down the hall. He started a little as he saw some one moving in a broad doorway to the left, then grinned at himself as he realized that he had only seen his own image in a great pier-glass at the far end of a sitting room. The grin sobered at once. This was a rotten place for a girl as hard hit as Louise had been to enter alone. You could see almost anything in a joint like this, particularly if your nerves were at the snapping point.

He got to the library and went in. The sun slanted in at the two windows, revealing everything with almost microscopic clarity.

There was a big desk in the center of the room, with a chair drawn up to it. Here the dead man was supposed to have been sitting. Only desk and chair had been to the right, half in an alcove there. Jarvis walked to the place where Louise had said there was an alcove.

Plain wall there, with a small bookcase. He drew out the bookcase. He found again, plain wall without a break in it. A faint dark outline showed where the bookcase had been for many months, while dirt gradually left its silhouette against the ivory paint. He tapped the wall carefully all along that side. In no spot did it have a hollow sound, indicating that an alcove lay concealed behind panels. But, to be sure, Jarvis went to the next room in front of the library, and paced it off, then paced the distance in the hall. The partition was about six inches thick, perhaps less. He hadn't been really looking for anything as dramatic as a double wall; but he proved definitely that there was none.

He went to the windows and examined the sills. If a man had been killed before Louise's eyes in this room, the body might have been taken out the window—

But a thin film of dust had accumulated since the house was shut up. And this film, on the sills, was entirely un-

disturbed. No one had come out this way. And the neighbor was supposed to have run over too quickly for any one to have gone out the front door with a corpse. The rear door? It was possible—

However, the annoying thing was that the library, in so fundamental a fact as a large alcove, was not as Louise had described it. There was one plain wall, an honest, untouched partition; and the other three sides of the room were booklined to the ceiling.

Jarvis got down on his knees with a lens and began going over the carpet. Blood had flowed, according to Louise. Quite a lot of it. And no blood spot can ever be entirely cleansed.

But in no part of the twelve-by-fifteen carpet did he find the slightest sign of a stain. The carpet was light in color, and was almost brand new, as most of the furnishings in the newly-bought home were.

Jarvis finally ran water through the carpet around the spot where Louise had thought the chair had been, and where blood was supposed to have splashed. He caught the fluid in a bottle. He would test that, to see if there were faint traces of blood that might have been cleaned up so well that no remnant of it showed to the naked eye. He hoped to God he would find some such trace.

He left the house with his homely, bony face screwed up with worry. For the life of him he didn't see how there could be any material basis for what Louise Mont thought she had seen.

But if there were no material basis, if that scene existed only in her mind—

He moistened her lips that had suddenly gone dry. Murder hallucinations had implications that were not pretty!

LOUISE was alone in the Ramsay home. The nurse had been discharged. Louise was so agitated by her presence, so afraid that she was retained just to see that she did nothing further to indicate mental unbalance, that Rufe had thought it best to let the woman go. Ramsey and Isabel were having dinner with friends on the other side of town.

Isabel had brought dinner up to Louise before they left. Louise pushed the tray aside now, and stood up. She was in negligee. She began to get dressed, her firm, round chin stuck out a little.

It was nearly eight. Bill Jarvis had left her over four hours ago, and had not phoned since. That seemed to indicate that he had found nothing in the library of the Mont home. But there must be some trace in there of a tangible scene she had witnessed! She meant to go now, herself, and examine that room.

She slipped out of the house and walked toward the old Grover place. It was six blocks away, but it felt good to walk in the open air after her many hours in bed with her mind torn at by the whips of self-doubt.

It was not quite full dark as she stood a second time in front of the gate and looked at the rambling place in its half-block of lawn.

The lawn was unkempt now; the house had a look of desertion, of neglect. Again she felt a strange, premonitory chill touch her spine. But she walked up to the door and opened it briskly, trying to disregard the chill. She was only being reminded of the dreadful thing she had seemed to see here before, she told herself. She would see nothing like that tonight. Her nerves were not so taut and strained tonight.

She clicked on the light in the hall. This time, on an impulse she hated to acknowledge even to herself, she did not close the front door after her. Leaving it slightly ajar she began walking down the hall toward the library.

As before, the tap of her heels echoed through the empty place with intolerable loudness. Her heart was hammering again with baseless fear. She was childish enough to walk on tiptoe for a few steps, to hush the drum-tap of her heels. Then she frowned and began walking normally again.

She got to the library. She would go over the room within inch by inch! She could remember exactly how it had looked to her. Surely she could find some trace that the appearance had not been all a thing of the mind!

The door was closed, as it had been

on that other night. She put her hand on the knob. And her hand was frankly trembling. *Danger*, a voiceless instinct seemed trying to whisper to her. *Something horrible in there!*

She bit her lip, actually started back away from the door. Then she took a deep breath and turned the knob. Nonsense! Everything was all right. And she must examine that room.

She opened the door, which stuck again when half ajar.

Strangely, she was almost prepared for what she saw. Her senses reeled, as did her body. But primitive instinct had warned her, deep down, enough so that consciousness did not fade at once.

THE library was unlighted, but illumination came in from the hall chandelier fairly clearly. It shone on the desk—to the right, half contained by an alcove. It rested on the chair drawn up to the desk, and on a figure seated in the chair. The figure of a man, with his hands on the desk and his body inclined forward so that his head rested on his hands, as though he were very tired.

She could see part of the profile—a large, homely nose, a long chin. On one of the hands there was a large scarab ring.

Her father!

This time Louise did not cry out. She stood in the doorway, eyes glaring at that figure which simply could not be there. A sort of moan came from her lips. The figure seemed to stir just a little, as though it had heard.

Then there was the second figure again—the man in black with the black mask over his face. Abruptly, as if materializing out of thin air, he stood behind her father. In his hands something glittered. He raised it high.

"Dad!"

It was a scarcely audible croak that came from her lips. "Dad—"

The glittering steel plunged down. She could *hear* it as it struck the defenseless back. The figure in the chair jerked once, settled forward again. A carmine stream came from around the hilt of the knife.

Hilt of a knife? No. This time the tragic figure at the desk had been

stabbed by something different. From the dead back protruded the hooked handles of a pair of shears.

That much she saw, and then, as before, she sagged to the floor, senseless. But there the parallel ceased. She knew now that her mind was crumbling. She was going mad!

She had a dim sense of much time having passed when her eyes opened again. She cried out suddenly, and struggled to sit up as she remembered the last thing her gaze had rested on.

The cry changed to a sob of bewilderment. She was not on the floor of the library. She was in a bed, in a room that looked familiar. It was the room given her at the Ramsey home. And there were people around her.

She saw Isabel's white, scared face. She saw her cousin, and saw that he was shrinking away from her. And then she saw two men with stony, accusing faces. One was in police uniform.

The four were looking at her so strangely, so terribly. She cowered back on the bed from them. And then she caught a glimpse of something on the floor beyond them. Something white.

IT was a body with a sheet over it. It could not be anything else. The human outlines were all too plain under the concealing mantle. It lay very stark, very still, with a little blood crawling slowly from under the edge of the covering sheet. Next to it lay a black physician's bag.

Wildly her eyes went to the face of the man in uniform. She started forward, and Ramsey and Isabel stepped back quickly, fearfully.

"It's Doctor Rufe," said the man in uniform harshly. "You've killed him, with a pair of shears."

Louise's hands clenched convulsively over the bedclothes. She saw then that she was in negligee, that part of the right sleeve was torn out.

"I didn't!" she panted. "I didn't kill him! It was Dad who was killed—in the library of his home. I saw—"

She saw the man in uniform look significantly at the other man, and shake his head. She heard, painfully and in

fragments, the sentence, "—arrest you—murder of Doctor Rufe—"

One name swam in her reeling brain. She panted it out.

"Bill Jarvis! Call him at once! Oh, my God! *What has happened?*"

CHAPTER IV

The Bloodless Corpse

JARVIS sat in the office of the chief of police. His face was strained, white, a little sick looking.

"She'll be kept under observation at the prison hospital till the trial," the chief repeated. "She won't be sent to the chair, of course. She's insane. Moving around in a dream, thinking she saw her dead father stabbed, and actually stabbing and killing a man while she dreamed that."

"She's as sane as I am," said Jarvis obstinately. Before his eyes was the picture of Louise's face, blanched, wild, pitiful. And in his ears rang her words: "Bill, I didn't do it! I couldn't have done it and not have known it, could I?"

The chief shook his head.

"We've traced everything that happened. She called the doctor at his home. The doctor's housekeeper verified that. He went to the Ramsey place, and upstairs to her room. When his back was turned, she stabbed him with those shears. By the way, her prints are all over them."

"But you've heard her story," said Jarvis. "She says she dressed and went out of the house. She went to her father's place to look over that library. There, she saw again the thing she had seen before—her father seated at the desk, and being stabbed. Do you think that's all a lie?"

"No," replied the chief, "I don't think it's a lie. I think she really seemed to see that, after having seemed to dress and leave the house. But while she was thinking she saw her father stabbed with the shears—she was actually murdering Doctor Rufe with them!"

"Why on earth would she want to kill Rufe? There's no reason."

The chief sighed. "You don't look for reasons with lunatics. And Louise Mont is just that, Jarvis. Whether the death of her father touched her off, or there's a strain of insanity in the family, I don't know. But she's undoubtedly crazy. As I said, that will spare her life. She'll be sent to the state home for the insane—"

"She might better go to the chair," retorted Jarvis bitterly. Then, "You've found no trace that she actually did go to the Mont house?"

"None. No one saw her leave Ramsay's, or enter the Mont place. The first time she was seen was when Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay came back from dinner with one of his out of town customers, and found her lying on the bed with her negligee torn—and Doctor Rufe dead on the floor with the shears in his back and the torn bit of negligee gripped in his right hand."

The chief bit the end off a cigar and lit it.

"As sure as God made trees," he said regretfully, "she stabbed the doctor at the exact minute when she thought she saw some one stabbing her father in another part of town. And she'll have to be shut away for life, under guard, to see that she doesn't have any more crazy visions—in which she kills more people!"

"I tell you she's not crazy!" Jarvis bit out, all the more vehemently because of his own sick doubts.

"If you can prove that," shrugged the chief, "I'll be as glad as any one. But you can't, Jarvis. There is simply no sane answer to the affair."

BILL JARVIS'S face was grim and desperate as he opened the door of the Mont place and snapped on the hall lights. He was here on a last battle for the girl he now admitted, in the secret places of his heart, he loved. He was fighting against the doubts that simply would persist in his own breast. It seemed so damnably conclusive that Louise was subject to fits of homicidal mania—

He walked down the hall toward the library. A figure moved within a room to his left, and he was so unstrung that he exclaimed aloud, drew his gun.

Then he swore as he saw that he had been fooled a second time by the same thing, a moving reflection of himself in a great pier-glass at the end of the room.

He continued to the door of the library. It was closed. He sighed. There was no sign whatever that any one had been in the house this night; neither Louise nor any one else.

He opened the door. It stuck about halfway open. He lit the lights from the switch to the right of the doorway, and walked in. He saw just what he had seen earlier in the day when he had left here with water run through the carpet, water in which there was no trace whatever of human blood to substantiate Louise's fantastic story. There was the desk, in the center of the room. There against the right wall was the small book-case, with no hint of any alcove.

Jarvis got out his lens and once again went over the entire floor of the library.

There was no trace that a body had ever lain on that floor, or spilled blood on it from a chair. He moved once more to the wall where Louise had thought to see a deep alcove. Ruthlessly he dug into it with the heavy blade of his knife till he had a hole through plaster and lathe. He found himself looking into the next room; the partition was as honest as it seemed to be.

He went back to the hall and came into the room again, trying to reconstruct in his mind the thing Louise had said she saw. She had opened the door; he opened the door. She had stood in the threshold and looked to the right. . . .

Jarvis suddenly stopped in his efforts to do exactly as the girl had done. Again, when he opened the library door, he noticed that it stuck when a little less than halfway ajar. It came to him suddenly that it had not stuck this afternoon when he entered here. It had opened easily the entire way.

He stepped around the half opened door and looked at the other side to see what was holding it. For thirty seconds he stared down. Then, with his eyes narrowed to hard slits, he sank to his knees. He had found the first thing

to hint that something besides an imagined ghost scene had actually transpired in here.

THE reason the door only opened halfway was that behind it a nail had been driven into the floor to act as a door stop and allow it to swing only so far!

Jarvis got to his feet without touching the nail. Why would any one want to prevent the door from opening all the way? Perhaps to ensure that whoever entered the room would, for a moment at least, be able to see only the right half of the room. The door swung left, would cut off a view of that side. But the right wall of the room was blank partition—

Jarvis was breathing a little fast now. He remembered that pier-glass in the room across the hall. He went to it. It was a good mirror, though old, nearly five feet wide and six tall. The pride of Louise's mother's dressing room, probably, before she died. Jarvis carried it to the library and set it in front of the small book-case, along the right hand wall.

He stepped to the doorway, walked back to the pier-glass and swung the far end out from the wall eighteen inches or so. Then he returned to the threshold, and stared at the great glass.

With the door stuck half-opened, and cutting off the left side of the room, practically the only thing his eyes could rest on was that pier-glass. And in it he saw the left, opposite side of the room as if it were the right side!

Jarvis's jaw was a bleak square. He stared at the reflected side of the room, saw that it was a wall covered from floor to ceiling with books, and noted which books were centered in the mirror. Then he walked to the book-shelves and began taking those books out.

He stacked them on the floor. Nearly all the shelves were bare before he found the thing he had been vaguely hunting, a small catch at the back of one of the shelves. He pressed the catch. Nothing happened. He pushed against the shelves.

The entire section, from floor to ceiling moved back soundlessly and easily.

He bent down. The section had been mounted on ordinary furniture castors, well oiled. It would push back as easily loaded with books as it had empty—would push back into a deep alcove, which was just the size of the shelved section!

When the big case had rolled back a foot, Jarvis could see around its edge into an alcove at least five feet deep. With the movable book-shelves pushed back against the end of the alcove, one would see a shallower alcove innocently lined with books, as most of the walls were lined.

But when the case had moved back less than a yard, it stopped. It was not yet against the end of the alcove, so Jarvis squeezed around the edge of it and looked in, his flashlight raying over the place, to see what blocked it.

The light jumped as it played on something that looked like a corpse. Then it steadied as he saw that this wasn't all it appeared to be.

It lay on its face, a tailor's wax dummy in fair condition, clothed in worn blue serge. In the back, the serge was slit twice, and around each slit were stiffened patches where some fluid had leaked and then dried. His fingers investigated the slits. Under them was an ordinary hot-water bottle, from which the fluid, something resembling blood, had come.

Then Jarvis rolled the figure over.

"Good God!" he breathed.

The face staring up at him was the face of George Mont. It had been years since he had seen Louise's father, but he could not be mistaken. It was her dead father's face to the last detail!

Anger so intense that it left him trembling, swept over Jarvis as he stared at this mute testimony that Louise had seen every last thing she said she had.

She had stepped into this room, first in the dimness of evening and then with only light from the hall, and had seen in the pier-glass the alcove formed on the opposite side of the room by rolling the book-shelves back. She had seen, in reflection, the desk and chair half set in that alcove. She had seen her father in the chair, had seen him stabbed, had seen blood, or what looked like it, com-

ing from the wound. All this had apparently taken place on the right side of the room—actually on the left.

The anger subsided, and Jarvis was an emotionless manhunter again. Why had this bizarre act been arranged? And by whom?

He bent over the wax figure again, stared at the faithful reproduction of George Mont's face. That could have only been obtained by taking a mask from the actual features. A death mask. And no one could have done that, or could have taken the scarab ring showing on the middle finger of one of the wax hands, without somebody knowing it. Bodies were not commonly left unwatched.

Jarvis came back out of the alcove. He pulled the shelving back into place, and began putting back the books he had taken out. To the best of his memory, he replaced them in just the order they had been before. Then he stepped to the phone in the hall and called Louise, at the prison hospital. He was allowed to speak to her.

"Darling," he said, "the Marines are coming. Keep your nerve up till they gallop in and rescue you."

"Bill!" He bit his lip at the frenzy in her voice. And he heard some woman—an attendant who had come to the phone with Louise—say, "Easy, Miss Mont."

Her voice came, more composed. "Have you found out anything, Bill?"

"I've found out plenty," he said grimly. "But for the moment don't say anything to any one about it. Can you tell me what funeral parlor handled your father's body?"

"Yes." There was wonder in her voice, now. And a tone of disappointment. "It was the Heksher Undertaking Establishment. Phil told me. It was one time when he was trying to tell me how impossible it was that I could have seen Dad at the desk. He said Dad had been duly embalmed and buried by Heksher—but why do you want to know, Bill?"

"That's my secret for another hour or two. Meanwhile, don't forget the Marines."

He hung up and flipped through the phone book. He found the address

of the Heksher parlors, and the home number of Harry L. Heksher, their proprietor. He called the latter.

"Mr. Heksher? This is Detective Jarvis speaking."

He made his voice harsh, heavy. There was an instant of silence. Then:

"Detective Jarvis? Why would a detective be calling me?" came the gasping voice of the mortician.

"It's about a mask made from the dead face of Mr. George Mont in your embalming room." Jarvis hesitated a moment to let that sink in. "I'd like to know whom you permitted to make it."

"My dear sir," spluttered the man at the other end of the wire. "You're mistaken. No mask was made of Mr. Mont, or any one else. I positively assure you my establishment does not allow—"

"Cut it!" snapped Jarvis. "I happen to know such a mask was made. And it couldn't have been made without your knowledge. Also a ring was taken from Mont's finger. That's very serious. I'll be around to see you in a little while, and you'd better have the answers!"

CHAPTER V

Jarvis On the Job

JARVIS broke the connection on the man's excited protests, and walked down the hall to the street door. He snapped the light-switch, plunging the hall in darkness, and made sure the door was closed and locked. Then he went back to the library.

He carried the big pier-glass back to its place in the other room, returned to the library, and turned off the light there, too. The whole house was in darkness, now.

He crouched behind the desk in the center of the room and waited.

Less than five minutes had passed when he heard the whine of a motor-car, driven fast, on the quiet street outside. It passed the house. Down the block he heard it stop. Then, after a

time, he heard a key inserted softly in the lock of the street door, followed by stealthy footsteps in the hall.

Jarvis drew his gun, and crouched a little lower. He heard the door-knob turn softly, then heard the door open. And he heard a little gasp as the door stopped half open.

There was a click as a flashlight snapped on. He could not see who held the light. But he saw the beam point down at the nail in the floor and saw a hand grasp it and work it till it came loose. There was agitation in that hand. The nail should never have been forgotten when the stage was being cleared of traces of the last sinister play-acting!

The light clicked out, with the nail removed. The man who held it didn't want to risk its being seen through a window. Jarvis heard him move softly in the dark to the bookcase. Then, still in the dark, there was a muffled sound as shelving and books rolled back till there was an opening into the forgotten alcove behind.

Jarvis got up, slowly, so that his clothing wouldn't rasp and give him away. He levelled his gun in his right hand and his flash in his left—toward the alcove.

He heard the shelving being pulled forward again, and snapped on his light. A man screamed with surprise and fear, and whirled squarely in the beam. The wax figure with George Mont's face was over his shoulder. The shelving was not quite out in place again.

"Don't move," said Jarvis softly. "Keep your hands right where they are. Don't give me an excuse to shoot, because I'd like to—very much."

THE man said nothing. Panting, blinking in the light, he stood with one hand on the shelving and the other bracing the grotesque figure slung across his shoulder.

"I thought our undertaker friend would give you a quick call after being contacted by the law," Jarvis said, backing slowly toward the light-switch. "And you came right over here to remove the evidence from behind those bookshelves. All accord-

ing to schedule."

He got to the switch, turned it on, and pocketed his flashlight. Glaring, panting like a beast in a trap, Attorney John Graham faced him.

"Such a brilliant guy," said Jarvis, through thin lips. "But you had to forget that one little nail. And that gave the show away."

"You have nothing on me," panted Graham. "This figure, the alcove—there's nothing criminal involved!"

"You have a convenient memory. You can even forget murder." Jarvis walked forward with handcuffs out. "Please recall that there was a dead man, not a wax dummy, connected with one of those little acts of yours. I refer to Doctor Rufe. You killed him."

"No, no! Miss Mont did—"

"You carried her back to the Ramsey house after she had seen her father stabbed the second time. Drugged her, didn't you, to make sure she wouldn't snap out of it too soon? From there you called Rufe, in a falsetto, woman's voice, and told him to come right over. You killed him with the shears, and put Louise's prints on their handles and a bit of her negligee in his dead hand."

"I swear I didn't," bleated Graham.

And without warning he pushed the dummy at Jarvis, and sprang.

The detective never would have dreamed there was such strength in the lawyer's spare body. It was like whipcord. He struggled to hold him, felt a gun barrel touch sideways along his cheek, got the wrist behind it.

He wrenched. The gun roared, but the slug missed him. A moment later it dropped to the floor as he twisted the thin but sinewy wrist. Graham was sobbing curses and banging at his head with the flashlight he still held. Jarvis's senses reeled. Abruptly, to his own dulling amazement, he was almost licked. But he must not be beaten. The man would kill him, and there would never be any trace of what he had done to Louise. She would spend the rest of her life among the criminally insane.

With the last remnant of his strength he caught the banging flashlight. He hung onto it till he had recovered a

little, then wrenched it free. Graham was striking out at him with knees and fists. But Jarvis could take that punishment, and did, while he pushed the man away from him for an effective blow.

His right fist swung from his hip. It had behind it the pitiful eyes of a girl who was more than half convinced that those who called her insane were right. It had in the exploding anger Jarvis had felt since the moment he saw the pieces of a plan designed to place that girl among gibbering maniacs for the rest of her life.

His knuckles cracked on the side of the lawyer's jaw. And Graham went down without a sound, with a curious, uneven line along his jaw where the bone had broken.

Bloody-faced, still a little dazed from the battering of the flashlight, Jarvis went to the hall phone and called the chief of police.

"FOR money," Jarvis said to Louise. They were in the Mont library. He had the stage set again as Graham had set it, to convince her once and for all that in no particular had she deviated from sanity and clear seeing. "He did it for dirty dough, as most things are done.

"Your father's will was never lost. He had it in his safe, with himself and Doctor Rufe named as executors. Your father died. The executor clause didn't mean anything since you were twenty-one. But it would mean something again if you were judged legally irresponsible—insane.

"He prepared for the insanity judgment with a dummy, a death mask, a pier-glass, and a walled up and forgotten alcove. You saw your own father, supposed to be dead, stabbed twice.

The second time, shortly afterward, Rufe was murdered with your shears in your room. That clinched the case of criminal mania against you, removed the other executor named in your father's will, and left Graham in full charge of your three-quarters share of the Mont fortune."

Louise shook her head. She was very pale, but the horrors of the past few days were fading from her dark eyes.

"You mean he meant to steal the money?"

"Nothing so crude as that," said Jarvis. "Stolen bonds, darling. More realistically, hot paper. He has told the whole thing. A fence in Chicago had hot bonds for sale at forty cents on the dollar. Graham could buy nearly two hundred thousand dollars worth for eighty thousand. The bonds would be buried in a safe deposit box in your name, and so sink out of sight as long as you were 'insane,' which would be forever. And Graham would pocket over a hundred thousand dollars clear. That's a great deal of money. He figured it was well worth a murder and two attacks on a tailor's dummy."

Louise looked at the revealed alcove, the pier-glass, the wax figure seated at the desk, the door stopped at its half-opened position by the nail. She shuddered and came close to Jarvis.

"If things like this are apt to happen to somebody just because she has money," she said tremulously, "then that somebody ought to have a nice, big, homely, bony detective to help keep her out of trouble. Don't you think so, Bill?"

Jarvis's mouth opened, shut again when he could find no words. She was standing on tiptoe. He bent down.

He did think so. And after that kiss he *knew* so!

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See

HORROR-SCOPES by CHAKRA

on Page 8

MEAT for the MANY

A Demonic Fiend Welcomes
Scavengers at a Mass
Murder Feast

By
RICHARD TOOKER

*Author of "Zombies Never Die," "Swine of
Canthros," etc.*

FOUR dead eyes glared up under the pile of bloody straw in a vacant stall as "Curly" Brannon stepped boldly up to the sagging, cow barn door and looked out at the weather-beaten farmhouse a hundred yards away.

It was morning chore time, just before breakfast. A calf was bawling hungrily from the weaning pen. Curly was breathing a bit fast as he looked off at the house. His buttoy black eyes glittered oddly bright in the stolid mask of his pimply brown face. He was twice a murderer now, and proud of it; he was eager to add three more to his tally.

He wondered if old lady Umdahl or Harvey, the oldest boy, could possibly have heard anything during that last tussle with Ottie. The kid had yelped a little before he went down in a spurt of blood. But the cream separator had been going full speed in the back room at the house. He could hear the vibrant humming of it now as he listened. Couldn't hear much with that noise going.

The first two had gone down easily enough. Oldman Umdahl's head had been caved in with a hammer blow from



The hammer smashed down

behind, as he bent over to sit down to a cow. Brannon had dragged the body hastily into the pile of straw bedding in the empty stall, covering it deep. Harvey Umdahl had been out on a trip to the house with a full milk pail to empty into the separator, so ten-year-old Oattie had been next, as he came whistling from the calf pen with an empty feed pail.

Again, the hammer from behind—a quick, smashing blow that drove a hole clean through the skull; another bleeding corpse dragged hastily into the pile of bedding before it had ceased to kick. Then a quick scattering of straw over the blood stains. The cows had begun to snort and blow at the smell of blood. So had the horses, on the other side of the barn.

Curly Brannon turned away from the door and walked back along the drain behind the row of cows as he saw Harvey Umdahl come out of the house with an empty milk pail and set down to milking again. Young Umdahl was eighteen and a pretty tough customer, even for a stocky heavyweight like Curly Brannon. It would be harder to get him if he suspected anything.

There was an old .32 pistol in Brannon's pants pocket; but he didn't want to use it if he didn't have to. That would warn the old lady in the house. Besides, pistols left signatures in ballistics, he'd heard, and there mustn't be any such clues to the vanishing of the Umdahl family—not if Curly Brannon could help it.

HARVEY UMDAHL was coming in with his milk pail screaming on the bail ears. Brannon leaned closer into the flank of the cow, milking noisily. The rustle of a corpse kicking in the straw sounded faintly. He'd have to work fast, before Young Umdahl caught on, when he didn't see or hear anything of the old man or Oattie.

Stamping down along the drain, Harvey Umdahl stopped behind the last cow to be milked. He looked around before he sat down. He couldn't help noticing how the cows were snorting and blowing. Brannon thought he might have seen a spot of blood somewhere, too.

"Hey, pa!" young Umdahl called out, uncertainly.

He started to look out the back door of the stable, then Curly Brannon rushed him from behind, jerking the bloody hammer from his hip pocket. Umdahl whirled at the sodden squish of Brannon's boots in the mucky earth behind the drain. His Norse blue eyes started from his head as he saw the mad killer light in Curly Brannon's black eyes—the hammer swinging up for the death blow.

"You devil!" he yelled and grabbed a manure fork leaning against the wall.

The tines of the fork came up as the hammer smashed down. Brannon grabbed the fork by the handle, shoved it down as he struck again at Harvey Umdahl's head. The fork and hammer connected at the same time. Umdahl groaned as he went down to his knees; the fork tines, driven by his falling weight, shoved into Brannon's left foot, crunching on the bone.

Another smash with the hammer and young Umdahl stretched out. A long-drawn "Ah-h-h" escaped his sagging lips as his lungs emptied of the last breath. Again Brannon dragged a quivering body into the pile of bedding. So far, so good; now only the old lady and the baby. . . .

Steadying his breathing determinedly, Curly Brannon tried his weight on his left foot that the fork tines had punctured when he went down. He hadn't figured on that wound. It was a damned bad break of luck, even though it could have been worse. That foot would likely swell up and give him a nasty handicap. Dirty manure fork too; a man could get blood poison that way.

He waited a few minutes to see if by any chance the struggle with Harvey Umdahl had been heard from the house. No sign, though. The cream separator kept right on grinding.

His breathing steadied down to normal again. Carrying his part full milk pail, he started for the house, trying to walk as if his left foot didn't hurt. The handle of the hammer, sticking out of his hip pocket, was hidden by the skirt of his greasy denim jacket.

Old lady Umdahl suspected nothing

when Brannon came in behind her where she was turning the separator crank in the back room. She didn't even look around. Her baggy, rotund figure swayed up and down ponderously on the separator crank as she pumped it round and round. He drew the hammer from his back pocket steadily and let her have it over the back of the head. She keeled over with a grunt, struck the floor heavily. He hit her again to make sure.

THE milk ran over in the separator bowl, and he turned off the faucet from the feeder tank as the machine ran down. His stubby fingers weren't even trembling as he turned to the kitchen door, with the hammer held behind him. He'd always known he could do the trick without turning a hair. Most murderers were sappy; they got excited and made mistakes. Not him!

He heard three-year-old Olga start to cry. The kid had been sick with a cold for several days. He tramped on through the kitchen toward the sound of the crying. As he stepped into the bedroom, the little girl looked up at him, startled. Something in his eyes frightened her. Her sticky mouth cramped open. She screamed "Mamma!" but it didn't bother him any. He thrust the bloody hammer into his jacket pocket, gritted his teeth, strode over to the bed, grabbed the feebly struggling child by the neck. In a minute it was all over.

He left the limp body of the baby on the bed, tramped outside and looked around coolly, favoring his punctured foot. He was mighty proud of himself thus far. He'd show 'em how to do a nice mass murder and get away with it!

Not a soul in sight on the rolling plains of that Montana landscape. Off in the west, the Little Horn Hills ranged like monster wigwams against the golden blaze of the morning sun. Six miles to the nearest neighbor—fifteen miles to town. Not a chance of any one seeing or hearing anything at that hour.

Visitors were few at the Umdahl place. Old Knut Umdahl had been an

unsociable old cuss, his family mostly work slaves. Their relatives were all in the old country. They had rented from a big land company, and the district manager would have no cause to come around for a month or so.

Besides—and that had been the masterly finishing touch to his plot—the Umdahls had planned to drive to Oregon in their car in search of better paying land, and Brannon was to have stayed behind to take care of the ranch in their absence.

He had a pal out on the coast, with whom he was in touch occasionally by letter. His pal had already done time and would be glad to play the part of Knut Umdahl. He could forge all the letters instructing Curly Brannon to dispose of the ranch property and live stock, the Umdahls having decided to stay in Oregon.

"They'll never hang it on me in a million years," Brannon muttered as he turned back to the house. "All I've got to do is clean up and keep my mouth shut. I'll cash in more'n a thousand bucks and no risk. Easy pickin's!"

He went into the bedroom, picked up the baby, put her into a wash tub and carried it out to the barn, hiding the small body in the straw with the old man and the two boys. Then he carried the tub back to the house.

THE old lady was a bigger job, especially with his foot starting to hurt like hell. With two good stompers under him he could have carried her in one load, wrapped in a tarp to make certain no one saw him from a distance. But the way his foot felt, the less strain he put on it the better.

So he carpeted the back room heavily with old newspapers, rolled the body over on the papers, got the axe and hacked off the legs, arms and head. That made two loads in the wash tub.

After they were all out in the barn under the straw, he burned the bloody papers and scrubbed the axe and hammer. His foot was getting feverish by this time. As soon as he turned out the stock to pasture, he took off his shoe in the house and examined the tine holes. Nasty gouges, blue and dirty through the slow-oozing blood.

He wished the foot had bled more. He had a vague appreciation of the fact that blood washed poison out of a wound. Heating some water, he washed the foot in a bath as hot as he could stand, bandaged it tightly and worked it back into the shoe.

"It'll be hell workin' that spade to-night when I bury 'em," he growled as he limped around on the foot, making pretense of getting himself some breakfast. He wasn't so good at it that he could be hungry. "Only tough break I've had so far," he grunted. "Damn that fork anyhow—but it's a good thing he didn't punch it through my belly at that!" He cackled at his own joke, and didn't like the sound of his voice.

Now all that remained was to wait for darkness to cover the grave digging. He had the spot all picked out behind the cow barn. The soil was moist there from the drain and not trampled hard as it was inside the barn. Easy digging and things rotted fast in hot ammonia, with grub worms boring like big, fat, white pigs.

The car would vanish convincingly on the "trip to Oregon" in that quicksand sinkhole down in Antelope Creek, which wound along through scrubby clumps of cottonwoods and willows half a mile from the ranch. He had considered dumping the bodies there, too, but it would be taking a chance to haul five of them that far in the car; a rabbit hunter might see him. Besides, bodies had a way of getting washed out of quicksand during high water.

The car would anchor itself pretty certainly. Now, if it had been a sedan, so he could lock the doors on the bodies, the quicksand pit would have been an ideal way to get rid of them. As it was, he had to bury them, and hope that the rats and grub worms would speed the process of decay.

He counted especially on the rats helping him out. It had been a dry year and rats were hungry and numerous. They'd make short work of the bodies once they found them. Every rat in the neighborhood would be there when the word of a barbecue got around as it always did among rats by some unknown grapevine of the rodent world.

His foot was swelling a little when he put in the cows and did the evening chores. He hurried through and was done by dark. Then he got the spade and went to work back of the cow barn.

HE suffered a lot from the sore foot as he dug. He could shove down the spade with his right, but he had to steady himself at least with his swollen left foot; it began to throb and pinch inside the shoe. He'd figured to get all the bodies under cover that night, but the damned foot handicapped him. He was plumb tuckered out by one o'clock, with a hole only big enough for three. He'd have to leave the Umdahl boys under the straw until tomorrow night.

With the three bodies covered, he rested a long time flat on his back, then limped out to the garage and started the touring car. He drove it out without lights and down into the creek bottoms. It wasn't much of a trick to plunge it over the low bank into the quicksand hole. Before he jumped for solid ground, the car had mired two feet down. He waited in the dark, watching the car sink from sight.

It seemed to him that something was breathing loudly somewhere near. Then he grunted when he discovered that he was making the noise himself.

"Damn it, what makes me breathe that way!" he grumbled. "I'll be scarin' myself if I don't watch out."

He limped back to the house through the dark and went to bed exhausted, sleeping heavily in spite of the fever-throbbing foot, from which he had removed the shoe with difficulty.

In the morning the foot was swollen so badly that he couldn't put on his shoe. He got one of old man Umdahl's Number Twelves and drew that on over the bandages. Everything was all right when he went out and put in the cows for morning chores. He drove the cattle over the triple grave back of the barn, until the surface was well trampled.

The two left under the straw hadn't been disturbed, except that the rats had been at them. They had eaten half of Harvey Umdahl's face, and Ottie's eyes were just a couple of bloody holes.

While milking he noticed a couple of big rats wabbling sluggishly along the sill of the stable, as if they were sick. The monsters were just about foundered, and he knew what was bogging them down.

"Tank up, you devils!" he muttered. "Quicker you get rid of that meat the better I'll like it!"

His guffaw gabbled back at him from the echoing walls. He didn't like the sound of it at all. A cow looked around at him with an odd expression in her eyes.

He spent most of that day doctoring his foot, which had begun to worry him no little. That night he gritted his teeth to the pain of the dangerously swollen member and buried the Umdahl boys alongside the others. He observed with satisfaction while he worked that the rats were getting thicker, just as he knew they would. He hoped they would strip the bones until there was nothing left.

THE foot kept him awake that night. Right after chores were done the next morning, he loaded the pick-up flivver truck with the week's cream and drove into town. His foot burned as if on fire; the whole leg seemed to be swelling now, but he knew he had to stand it.

He didn't want to go to a doctor; they might send him to a hospital; and if he got delirious he'd talk. Besides, those tine holes might not look as if he'd made them himself by accident—not to a doctor. He didn't fancy the idea of answering any questions about the injury.

At the cream station the buyer weighed in the cans and started the fat test.

"Old man Umdahl said he told you to have the checks made out to me," Brannon said to the buyer, humbly. "It's all I got to live on while they're gone."

"Yep, that's right. So the old man hiked out for Oregon? Guess he found more free air than free range out there in the Little Horns. Pretty dry up there."

"Yeah. He don't think much of Montana. If he can locate out in Oregon I

don't expect him back. Said maybe he'd have me sell out for him."

Brannon was standing on one leg, and the buyer noticed the big shoe.

"Hurt yourself?" he asked.

"Yeah. Poked myself with a fork." Curly Brannon ground his teeth to stifle a groan of pain. "Too much work for one man."

"Better see a doctor, boy. You're liable to lose that foot if blood poison sets in."

"Oh, it'll be okay," Brannon mumbled.

He cashed the cream check, bought some medicine for the foot and drove back to the ranch. He knew now that he was in for a fight with blood poison. The fever from the foot was boiling in his blood, making his head light.

He saw funny-looking things out of the corners of his eyes. Once, it looked as if old lady Umdahl was rolling after him down the road, without any legs, arms or head. He caught himself talking aloud a good deal and cursed himself for the indulgence. He had to stop that along with the laughing or he'd go raving mad.

Making a couple of crude crutches from a length of shiplap, he was able to get around without too much strain on the foot. Even Knut Umdahl's big shoe was too small now; only a huge lump of bandages would fit the foot.

"I may have to saw the damned leg off myself," he babbled that night while milking. "But I ain't callin' a doc or anybody. I got to go it alone, if it kills me. Wish my pal was here. But I guess he couldn't get here in time to help anyhow. Better play safe till I get well."

BEFORE he finished the evening chores, he saw a dozen or more rats creeping around the barn, all logy from their gorging in the graves. Taking the lantern out back of the stables, he saw the big, grey demons burrowing fresh holes into the graves, crawling in and out, making funny grunting noises.

"Go to it," he chuckled. "The more the merrier. I'll bet half the rats in the whole damn county is makin' for the Umdahl place right now. After you git through I'll move the bones somewhere else."

That night he slept deliriously from sheer exhaustion, dreaming dim, horrible dreams that bathed him in icy sweat. By morning he was barely able to drag himself through chores. When the hogs were finally fed with skimmed milk it was nearly noon. The place teemed with rats, most of them gorged and slow. But some were scrawny; they hopped around like tiny deer—the ones that had come in too late.

He raved and babbled to himself most of the time. In his condition he was afraid to risk another trip to town. By mid-afternoon he was mad with pain and fear of death by blood poisoning.

"It's got to come off! It's got to come off!" he howled.

Hobbling into the machine shed, he looked up at the saw, hanging on the wall. The sweat broke out on him in rivers of crawling horror. He couldn't do it himself—not yet anyway. Besides, he'd have to cut the meat first and lay open the bone. He jerked around and ran as fast as he could on his homemade crutches to the house.

To avoid the handicap of working after dark, he started the evening chores early. The rats were overrunning the farm even in daylight. They didn't seem afraid of him at all. In fact, he noticed they were even interested in him, entirely too familiar.

Several old fellows, with whiskers like gray beards, came up to the edge of the drain while he was milking and lifted their noses questingly. They looked more like half-starved tom-cats than rats, with their scabby noses wiggling. There was blood and caked manure all over them from their burrowing in the graves. Apparently, the meat was about gone from the bodies behind the barn. The rats were looking for more.

He'd figured the devils would leave the place when the bones were clean. His fevered wits groped sluggishly for the reason they were attracted to him until it struck him suddenly. His swollen foot, dripping with bloody pus from the festering holes! That was what the rats smelled on him.

He cried out hoarsely at the thought. Frightened, the cow he was milking

kicked viciously, dumping him, pail and all out over the drain. As he staggered up he saw the rats darting in for his monstrous foot. He cursed as he snatched a manure fork and laid around him. They ran off a little way and looked back at him with their beady eyes shining redly. He sneaked back to the cow and started milking again, chilled to silence. That leg of his would have to go or else—

FROM then on, it seemed that everywhere he went an army of rats followed him. No use trying to fight them off. They ate the few he killed, and they'd eat him, he knew, if they ever got a chance. His foot smelled as dead as those bodies out back and if he ever went down, if he ever let them get started. . . .

"Yo-o-ow!" he shrieked. "Yo-o-ow! Get away from me! Leave me be!"

When he finally got into the house he could hear rats scurrying around everywhere, gnawing under the floor, running up in the walls behind the lath. In the dusk he lighted the lamp, took it into the front bedroom and lay down. He was afraid to sleep, kept yelling, not knowing what he did half the time. But the fever drugged him at last into a delirious stupor of sleep.

Burning pains in his leg brought him to his senses again. He screamed as he jerked up and saw several rats working at his bundled leg, tearing the bandages away. He leaped up and ran out of the bedroom, slammed the door.

Too crazed to feel the pain in his foot, he stumbled through the dark house and out into the cool, starlit night. He had to get away, anywhere. Maybe he could reach a doctor in time. Nothing made any difference now. He'd rather spill everything to the law than let the rats get him.

Half fainting, he staggered for the pick-up truck, standing in the yard. He knew the rats were humping along after him, following him from the house, taking their time. He tried to pay no attention to the monsters as he switched on the ignition, staggered around in front to the crank.

The old wreck never started easily.

(Concluded on page 113)

THE BELLS TOLL BLOOD



He clutched the dripping tongue in his hand

Paul Jarrel Plunges Into a Diabolical Welter
of Crime to the Sound of
Clanging Metal

By **CARL JACOBI**

Author of "Satan's Kite," "Death Rides the Plateau," etc.

JERKING a pipe from his lips, the hotel proprietor leered at me across the counter.

"No," he said, "there ain't no train, and no one here can drive you to Remer 'til tomorrow mornin'. You'd better figger on layin' over for the night."

I shifted my grip-sack to my other hand in irritation. "Doesn't anyone have a car?" I said. "I'll pay ten dol-

lars for the trip, to a responsible party."

Farther back in the lobby four men looked up from a game of cards and stared at me through the murky lamp light. The nearest of the four, a big, bullet-headed Finn, pushed back his chair and shuffled forward.

"Stranger," he said, "if you're really bent on gettin' to Remer tonight, there's a bus of an independent line

comes through here in five minutes. But if you want my advice, don't take it. That road is the devil's highway to-night. The bells—are ringing!"

"What bells?" I demanded. "What are you talking about?"

The Finn made no reply for a moment. Behind thick glasses a look of abject fear seemed to gleam in his eyes. He strode to the door, pulled it open. "Listen."

Rain-swept blackness lay beyond the door. Then I heard it—

From the north it came, a distant bong, bong, bong. Rising and falling with the scream of the wind, there was something indefinably ominous about that hollow metallic cadence. It was the ringing, the far-distant clangor of huge bells.

The Finn closed the door, and a shudder passed through him.

"Bells," he said huskily. "No one knows from where they come. But they are the bells of hell!"

THAT had happened half an hour ago. The wayside hotel was somewhere in the black miles behind now. Remer wasn't far ahead. Yet as I sat in the jolting bus, with the rain drooling down the windows, the Finn's strange warning persisted in my thoughts.

Did I still hear the bells? I thought I did, but they seemed to sound from the east rather than the north now.

There were only two other passengers in the bus. One, a girl, attractively clad in trench coat and beret, occupied the rear seat. The other, a tall man, sat in front, behind the driver. Since I had entered he had kept his face hidden in the shadow of a broad-brimmed hat. But now he turned abruptly, and I felt myself recoil in horror.

I was gazing into a face of living-death. From the eyes to the mouth, the flesh was a greyish, putrid black, as if in the last steps of decay. In horrible contrast the broad brow was a stark, bloodless white.

For a long moment the man kept his black eyes riveted in my direction. Then he jerked to his feet, made his way down the swaying aisle and dropped

into the seat at my side.

"You are going to Remer?" he asked. His words came slowly, as if the slightest movement of his facial muscles caused excruciating pain.

I nodded. But I could not hide the feeling of revulsion that was overwhelming me.

"From Crosby?"

"From Elk River."

The man folded his hands before him. "If my face bothers you," he said, "you may look the other way. An explosion of acid caused the discoloration. I have applied an antidote, and it will pass in a few weeks."

Somehow his explanation failed to temper my horror. I glanced in the rear-vision mirror at the front of the bus, and in it I saw that the girl in the rear seat was watching us with dilated eyes.

For five minutes no further word broke the silence. Then without warning, it happened.

A scream of brakes, and the bus caromed to a stop. Ahead, in the twin headlight beams, a huge yellow and black sign, leered back at us mockingly: ROAD CLOSED. DETOUR.

The driver swore, peered uncertainly through the windshield.

"Damn odd, if you ask me," he grumbled. "This road's supposed to be open clear to Grand Rapids. Must be a wash-out."

The man at my side rose to his feet and paced forward.

"You need have no fear of this detour, driver," he said. "It's the old Cloquet road, and my summer home lies only a half mile off it. Take the first turn to the left."

A moment later we were moving forward again. The gargoyle-faced man turned back down the aisle. But this time I saw he was heading past me toward the girl in the rear.

She anticipated his move with a low cry, flung herself erect and pushed by him. While he stood staring, she slipped into the seat beside me, grasped my arm.

"Don't—don't let him touch me. Oh, I'm so frightened. Those bells—"

"Yes," I replied. "They're ringing

again, aren't they? Take it easy, Miss. We'll be in Remer shortly."

ONCE more the bus coasted to a halt. But this time I realized brakes had not stopped us. The driver was working frantically, trying to slip free from a sea of black, clinging mud that stretched from one side of the road to the other.

Water geysered from the spinning wheels. Even as the girl and I exchanged glances, I knew we were hopelessly mired.

The driver switched off the motor and turned with a sigh. "Guess you'll have to sit tight, folks. I'll hustle out, see if I can find something to jam under the wheels."

He seized an electric flash and swung out into the darkness. Silence settled over the interior of the bus.

But it was silence of only a minute's duration. From the open door a high-pitched scream stabbed into our ears. Again it came, a cry of utter agony, ending in a hoarse frenzied shriek.

For an instant I sat there rigid. Then I raced down the aisle and leaped out into the road. Ten yards I battled my way forward in the glare of the bus headlights. A moment later I came upon a contorted shadow lying on the road shoulder. A startled cry spewed from my lips.

The uniformed body of the bus-driver lay there. He was dead! His hands were clenched tight about the black handle of a knife that protruded from his chest, directly above the heart. From the wound a stream of blood bubbled outward.

I forced myself a step closer. There was no sign of the man's assailant.

"Oh, God, how terrible!"

The girl passenger had followed me out of the bus and stood now staring downward with wide-open eyes. Behind her came the man with the gargoyle face.

"The man has been murdered," he said.

A harsh, hysterical laugh burst from my lips. "Murdered, yes. I'm going to—"

"You can do nothing in this storm.

My place is only a short distance ahead. We will go there and later this can be reported to the authorities."

There was a note of finality in his voice, suppressing all arguments. For a moment I stood there, a queer thick sensation in my throat. Then I picked up the driver's flashlight, waded across the muddy road, pushed into a clump of man-high underbrush. Rain and wind smote my face as I continued my search. But there was no trail, no footprints of any kind. The opposite side of the road was likewise devoid of clues. It was as if the attacker had vanished into thin air.

Returning to the corpse I lifted it and carried it back to the bus. I scribbled my name and address on a sheet of paper and fastened it to the steering wheel. When the bus failed to arrive on schedule at Remer, a search would follow, and witnesses would be wanted for investigation.

I went back to the man and the girl, and I nodded slowly. "All right, let's go."

We began to plod down the black road. Above, thunder boomed steadily.

"I'm Paul Parrel," I said to the girl. "Day foreman of the new Hibboholm open pit mine just out of Remer. And you?"

"Grace Lanning." Her voice was low, tremulous. "I'm visiting friends at Remer. Oh, God, they told me not to come this way. They warned me of the bells. Tell me, do you hear them now? Do you?"

I listened. But all I heard was the wail of the wind and the hiss of the rain in the thick woods that flanked the road on both sides.

"I don't hear them." I told her. "But what do you know about those bells?"

She shook her head. "Only what my friends wrote me in that letter. No one knows their source, and they only began a week or so ago. No one knows who rings them. But there is some vague and awful mystery behind them."

THE man with the gargoyle face turned into a narrow side path. Following this, we emerged into a large glade, and before us, towering upward

like some huge mausoleum, was a great stone house. By the light of a terrific lightning flash I looked upon a black many-gabled roof with two towers mounted on its highest surface. A premonition of impending evil beat upon me.

Advancing up the steps, the man fitted a key into the lock and opened the door.

"I have no phone connection," he said, "but I have plenty of room for both of you. You can stay 'til morning, then walk to Remer."

We passed into a large room, lit by a single lamp and an open grate on the far side. The chamber was built lodge style, two stories high, with a beamed ceiling lost in the shadows. At each side a curved staircase swept upward to a gallery that ran the full width above.

The man motioned to a divan, disappeared for a moment, then returned with a tray and three glasses of wine.

Grace Lanning sipped her drink slowly. I noted that she avoided gazing directly at our host and that her eyes still held that wild look of fear.

A moment later the man excused himself, passed up the staircase and through a connecting door. We sat alone in the shadows of that monstrous room. Over in a far corner a pendulum clock ticked slowly. Outside the wind wailed and rain surged against the windows.

And then, filling the house from wall to wall, came the clangor of all hell! Vibrating from somewhere above, a deep-pitched, resonant boom thundered into our ears. It was a huge bell, and it struck five times in measured rhythm.

The sound died off, and the room plunged once again into silence. An instant later there knifed down to us a woman's shriek. Soul-chilling, filled with horror, it was like a cry from the grave.

Grace Lanning leaped to her feet. There were other screams now, five, six, ten of them, mingling with hysterical bursts of feminine laughter.

And then, close at hand, a whip cracked, and a voice snarled:

"Be quiet, swine. What are you wailing about? It is not yet your time." A second crack of the whip, and the screams dwindled off.

Terror eating into me, I strode to the staircase. "There's something funny going on here," I said. "I'm going to find out what the hell it is."

She was at my side instantly, mounting the stairs with me. We opened the gallery door, passed through. A low narrow corridor stretched before us. Striding toward us came the figure of our host.

"I apologize for the disturbance," he said softly. "I neglected to inform you that I am a physician specializing in mental cases. I keep a number of patients here in my summer lodge for closer study. Doctor Ramsey Hale. You have perhaps heard of me."

"Patients?" Without compunction I pushed past him, ripped open the adjoining door. I found myself in an illuminated corridor running parallel with the first. But opening onto it were a series of rooms whose construction held me there stiff and unmoving.

Not rooms but cages! Iron grilled cages—a double tier of them, extending one after another. Like the housing quarters of a circus menagerie the cages were floored with wet moldy straw. Rusty feed pans and slime-coated water-buckets were fastened to the corner bars.

And in each of those cages was a beautiful young girl!

I felt my throat grow hot and thick. Nausea clawed at me. Behind me Grace Lanning uttered a low cry.

The inmates of the two nearest cages lay sleeping. Both were young women in their early twenties, scantily clad, with their matted hair hanging low over their shoulders. Their faces were filled with exhaustion and the marks of long suffering. Yet in the delicate molding of their features I could see that at some time not long distant, each had held a place of respect.

ABOVE in two upper tier cages two figures scuffed back and forth, stopping at intervals to press

white faces to the bars and stare at me.

The horror of it all held me there motionless for an instant. Then I seized Hale by the shoulder.

"Patients?" I cried. "Kept in kennels like beasts?"

His black eyes gleamed like evil entities. "Mentally they are animals," he replied. "Since you are interested in my subjects, step down the corridor, and I will show you my laboratory."

He began to pace down the hallway. Mechanically I followed a step, halted as Grace Lanning clutched at me.

"Take me out of here. Oh, God, don't you realize where we are? This is the house of the bells!"

It came without warning. A click and thick darkness engulfed us. The girl's voice ended in a scream of terror. Even as my hands groped out to her, a heavy body rushed upon me from behind. Cold fingers fastened about my throat.

I know how to use my fists. Bossing mining camps, one learns to rely on physical strength. Yet now as I slammed my fists outward I knew I wasn't fighting anything human. My fists struck only empty air, and the pressure on my throat increased.

With blind instinct my hands curled to claws, lashed outward. A maelstrom of blazing lights swirled in my eyes. Behind me mad laughter—Hale's voice—rose up to echo down the corridor. I made one last effort—felt myself falling into a pit of blackness.

Hours seemed to have passed before I regained consciousness. In the dim light I saw nothing at first. Then my eyes accustomed themselves to the gloom, and the realization of my surroundings came swiftly.

I WAS a prisoner in one of those cages. Grace Lanning was gone. And that roar above was the ringing of the bells!

Trembling, I groped to my feet, staggered to the cage door, wrenched at the bars. Frantically I tore at the huge padlock, strove to rip it free from the connecting chain. But the door and the lock were impregnable.

I stood there, listening. Steadily

those bells boomed, in mad rhythm. *CLANG—CLANG—CLANG—*

Then, with startling suddenness the sounds ceased. Simultaneously a door slammed at the end of the hallway and footsteps advanced.

It was Hale. The man's discolored face was a ghastly mask of triumph as he stepped to the grilled door and peered in at me. Behind him towered a huge Negro, naked to the waist.

I jammed my hands through the bars. "You damned fiend!" I screamed. "What have you done with Miss Lanning?"

Hale gave no indication that he had heard. Slipping a key from his pocket, he inserted it in the lock of the cage next to mine. He opened the door and entered, the Negro a step behind. Slow horror stealing over me, I watched.

A girl, young and lovely, with long, blond hair pressed against the bars of that cage. Hale slid a cigarette between his lips and nodded to the negro.

"Prepare her!"

The black's thick lips twisted in a leering grin of anticipation. He seized the girl, jerked her toward him. With a frantic lunge she fought to free herself.

What happened then will remain forever in my memory. With a sudden side-swiveling motion the Negro jerked his hand forward and back. A ripping sound issued from the girl's lips. Blood gushed from her mouth.

Merciful God! It was the girl's tongue the black clutched dripping in his hand!

The scene began to whirl before me. I closed my eyes, uttered a prayer aloud. An instant later, when I looked again, the Negro was dragging the blond girl down the corridor. Behind them, like some monk of the Inquisition, strode Hale.

They passed out of my sight, and I stood at the cage door like a man in a trance. Grace Lanning! Had she too been forced through a similar torture? Or was she in one of those cages—waiting?

HOPING against hope I jammed my hands into my pockets. And then I was working frantically at the padlock with a pocket nail-file. Through the stillness the watch on my wrist ticked away the passing minutes.

The lock gave! I slipped free the chain, opened the door and darted into the corridor. Slowly I crept forward, peering into each cage of the upper and lower tier. Blank, vacant eyes gaped back at me. They were watching me, those beastlike girls. But in none of the cages did I see Grace Lanning.

A closed door at the end of the corridor barred my passage. Cautiously I inched it open. Beyond, a circular staircase twisted upward. I stole across to it and began to climb.

At the landing I halted to calm my pounding heart. Above me there was no sound. The silence of the grave hung on all sides.

And then, ricocheting down the stair shaft a long-drawn-out scream blasted into my ears. Again it came, a shriek of utter fear. And distorted though it was, I knew that voice!

I raced upward. At the top step I clawed instinctively for the door I knew must be there, twisted the latch, flung the barrier open.

A wave of horror swept over me!

The room was one of two towers I had noted from the grounds outside. Windowless, the walls were crenelated by a series of small openings. Suspended from the ceiling were three gigantic bells.

They were bells such as one would expect to find in the belfry of a country church or the spire of some bucolic village hall. But oh, God, how satanically changed.

The iron clapper of each bell had been removed, and in its place hung the head and torso of a woman. Upside down, the three corpses dangled there. And I saw that each had been embalmed, chemically treated in such a manner as to turn the flesh into a hard, stonelike surface.

My senses reeled. But even as I slumped backward against the wall,
(Continued on page 106)

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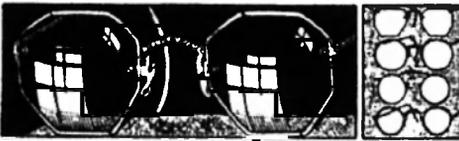
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(Continued from page 105)
the pull cable above jerked taut, the three corpse-clappers began to move, and the bells began to ring.

CLANG—CLANG—CLANG—

The sound pounded into my eardrums, ate into my brain. With a sob I stumbled to the door on the opposite side of the tower, got it open and rushed into a narrow tunnel-like hallway.

The hall was brilliantly lit by electric lights. Half way my gaze focused on the side wall. Two men stood there, arms and legs lashed wide apart to four hooks in the masonry. Their eyes were closed; they hung limp and motionless.

Dead? As I stepped closer, I saw they were not. They were unconscious but still alive. I began to work at their bonds.

A moment later they were lying side by side on the floor. One was slight of build, thin-faced with a Vanddyke beard. The other, taller, heavier, had an ugly knife wound in his left arm.

I chafed their wrists until the eyes of the smaller man flickered open. He looked at me dazedly; then a mad flow of words issued from his lips.

"The last girl!" he cried. "In the other tower! Hurry!"

He sank back, the effort overcoming him. But instantly I was on my feet, racing down the corridor. Grace Lanning! Terror-stricken, I reached the door, ripped it open.

Exactly what happened after that I cannot be sure. I remember standing stiff and motionless on the threshold. I remember fighting back a hoarse scream. Then a bomb burst within me.

The chamber held but a single, enormous bell. Beneath it stood the Negro, apelike arms extended over his head as he labored to remove the clapper. To the side Ramsey Hale was bent over a table littered with vials and chemical tubes. And beyond, near the far wall was a huge copper vat, filled with some crimson liquid.

That much I saw at first glance. But there was more—

SUSPENDED directly over that vat, dangling from a rope about her waist was the figure of Grace Lanning. Her long, black hair trailed downward. Her face was like lime.

With a hoarse cry I lunged forward, leaped on Hale and clawed for his throat.

"You damned fiend!" I cried. "I'll—"

It was a tiger that turned to face me. Hale dropped the vial he was holding, darted nimbly aside and leveled a brutal kick at my legs.

"Kill him!" he yelled to the Negro. "Kill the fool!"

Limping, I fought back, closed in. Twice my fists ground into the discolored flesh of that face. Twice I saw him waver before me. Then I whirled to meet the danger I sensed behind.

The Negro was upon me like a lunging juggernaut. A terrific blow catapulted into my jaw. An inner heaviness seemed to rise up within me. Then, for a second time that night, I felt myself falling into oblivion.

CONSCIOUSNESS returned slowly, like the uplifting of a great weight from my chest. I stood a prisoner at the side wall, wrists lashed tight over my head, fastened to an iron hook in the masonry. Opposite, still suspended motionless, hung the body of Grace Lanning.

The copper vat had been moved to the center of the room now, and the Negro was stirring its contents with a wide-bladed paddle.

Ramsey Hale strode forward.

"I have recaptured the two prisoners you were foolish enough to release in the corridor," he said. "They are dangerous men who came here to destroy me, but they will not escape again.

"But now, if you will watch closely, you will find yourself witness to an interesting experiment. You will note the bell above, the most perfect of the four in this house. A bell that has not three but five perfect tones. The hum note is correct both in the fundamental and the nominal. The metal is a perfect mixture of copper and tin in

(Continued on page 108)

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(Continued from page 107)
the proportion of four to one."

"In God's name," I cried, "what are you going to do?"

"You know something about alchemy, perhaps, my friend?" Hale's face was a leering death-mask there before me. "You have heard of those medieval sorcerers who made gold out of lead? Likewise they constructed bells of master tone and silver harmony. And the one necessary ingredient to their metal-molding was a curious thing.

"A curious thing, my friend. It was the soul of a young woman. Do you understand? Without that no bell could be perfect; quality and beauty of tone were impossible.

"Unfortunately I am not in a position to cast a bell here. But that has not deterred me from using the magic formula. As you have seen, I have removed the cold, iron clappers and replaced them with human ones. And I have hardened the flesh by submerging the corpse in the liquid in that vat."

With a peal of laughter he turned toward the opposite wall. Grace Lanning opened her eyes abruptly, uttered a scream of terror.

"Oh God, don't touch me!"

Her cry ate into me, lent strength to my paralyzed muscles. And then at that instant hope flashed back to me. The wall hook which held me captive loosened in the masonry. Even as Hale moved toward Grace Lanning my straining arms jerked free.

Across the floor I lunged, unmindful of the Negro who flailed his arms in a mad effort to stop me. Hale whirled, a startled cry on his lips.

Like blocks of wood we struck. And then we were fighting savagely. Dizzy, still weak from the blow on the head of a moment before, I lashed my fists outward, looked for some instrument of defense.

There was none—nothing but a heavy, unwieldy jar filled with some liquid on the instrument table, three feet away. Hale, screaming profanity, suddenly broke away and leaped back. He too saw the table, and he reached for a heavy knife that lay upon it.

Simultaneously the Negro seized the massive clapper he had removed from the bell. He lifted it in both hands and advanced toward me.

I was cut off!

Hale threw back his head and laughed. "Now, my fine friend, we shall see what we shall see. Interfere with my plans, would you—"

Poised there, they leered at me. Suddenly with a speed born of desperation my right hand shot to the table, closed around the big glass jar. I knocked off the loose cover, lifted it and flung it straight at that mocking face with all the strength I possessed.

The result was cataclysmic. The Negro uttered a single deafening scream. His head jerked back, and he crashed like a poled ox to the floor.

HALE seemed only surprised at first. I could see the liquid trickling down his face. And I could see tiny holes appear like magic in the skin as the liquid burned its way inward. Slowly the flesh began to turn white.

Then he turned and ran. Headlong toward the huge copper vat he ran. His feet struck the outer wall of the vessel. He staggered and pitched forward.

An instant later there was only a bubbling hiss as the crimson liquid closed over him.

In a daze I turned to Grace Lanning then. Gently I freed her bonds, chafed her wrists.

"Are you hurt?" I asked thickly. "Did—"

She shook her head. Together we moved toward the door, passed into the outer corridor.

The two men were there at the far wall. Lashed again to those wall hooks, they looked back at me with terrified eyes. I leaped forward, tore at their ropes.

Neither spoke until they were standing free. Then the professional looking man with the Vandyke grasped my arm.

I nodded. "Ramsey Hale is dead."

"Is he—"

"Thank God for that." The man

(Continued on page 110)

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(Continued from page 109)
 shuddered. "But he is not Ramsey Hale. I am Hale, and this is my house."
 "You?" I said.

Color was draining back into the waxen face. "And this is my assistant, Doctor Margan. You see, this is my summer home, my private hospital, so to speak. My practice has to do with mental cases. The man who brought you here and used my name is Serge Borlov."

"But—" I fumbled slowly for words.

"Borlov came under my study several months ago. I took him in because I was interested in his strange background. Borlov is a Slav by birth. I have his complete history. His mother was burned at the stake somewhere in Transylvania for witchcraft. His father died under even queerer circumstances. Bell ringer at a church in Serajevo, he jumped from the bell tower for some unknown reason to the pavement below."

Doctor Hale was slowly regaining his composure. "From his earliest years," he went on, "Borlov worked with bells. He erected them, molded them, designed their tuning and construction. But at intervals his heritage cropped out, and he changed to a blood-mad fiend.

"In August 1932 he was wanted by the police at Prague for molding a gigantic bell and throwing a living woman into the molten metal. In December 1933 he was hunted in Belgrade in connection with the disappearance of three young girls. We planned to hand him over to the Continental authorities after we had studied his case."

"But," I interrupted, "if this is your house, why are those cages on the second floor?"

Hale pressed his finger tips together nervously. "I have said my practice concerned mental cases," he said. "I had a number of patients here, mostly young women, who were convalescing from slight mental disorders.

"Borlov was a good patient for the first few weeks. Then one day he discovered the bells in the towers, and his background returned to him. I had

CANDID CAMERA CATCHES CO-EDS IN

this house built, you see, as a replica of a small Spanish castle I had seen during my travels abroad.

"Borlov leaped upon me, made me and Doctor Margan prisoners. Those cages were installed for animals upon which I sometimes make glandular experiments. Borlov locked the women patients in them and began to put his horrible plans into action.

"He had one underlying obsession, which accounts for this young woman's presence here. He believed the old sorcerer's belief that a bell can be made perfect in tone only by the insertion of the body of a beautiful young girl in the bell casting. In none of my women patients did he see such a person. So—in a way you know better than I—he left the house and set about to lure an outsider here—"

But I had heard enough. "Miss Lanning—Grace," I said. "The storm seems to be over. Do you feel well enough to walk to Remer?"

She nodded slowly. "Yes, Paul."

I passed my arm around her and led her slowly down the stairs.

HORROR-SCOPES

(Continued from page 10)

diers. He looked forward to the day when he could join the national guard. It was his ambition to go to West Point. That was the only reason he studied his lessons, as his mother confessed.

Then came the World War. Many of the local boys enlisted. Charlie asked his mother if he could join the army; but his mother was adamant. Her father had been killed in the Spanish-American War and she couldn't stand the thought of her only son being shot to pieces. So she told Charlie she would die if he enlisted. He promised her he wouldn't. But from that day on he was a sad boy. He became morose and melancholy, although he was only sixteen.

At the end of the war, three boys in that town had been killed; one had died in France and two in camps. Their bodies were brought home and placed in a special plot in the local cemetery. Charlie made it his duty to care for that plot.

Several months later, Charlie failed to return home one evening. Investigation proved that he had been struck by a hit-and-run driver on the main highway near the cemetery, and although bleeding and fatally hurt,

(Concluded on page 112)

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Before me, a Notary Public in and for the State and County aforesaid, personally appeared N. L. Pines, who, having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that he is the Publisher of Thrilling Mystery, and that the following is to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management, etc., of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the above caption, required by the Act of August 24, 1912, as amended by the Act of March 3, 1933, embodied in section 537, Postal Laws and Regulations, printed on the reverse of this form, to wit:

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N. L. PINES, Publisher.
Sworn to and subscribed before me this 30th day of September, 1937. Robert A. Pape, Notary Public. My commission expires March 30, 1938.

(Concluded from page 111)

he had crawled to the soldiers' plot and had fallen in death at the graves of the World War veterans. They buried him right next to that plot and even gave him a military decoration in appreciation of his care for the soldiers' graves.

Then one day, after Charlie had been forgotten by most townsfolk, a former resident of that town, Will Burden, returned to visit relatives. Before the war he had gone to school with Charlie Olmstead, but had not learned of Charlie's death.

About dusk, Burden drove up to the main store of the town where many people congregated for an evening talk. The natives remembered Will Burden and greeted him.

Just as they were about to tell him what had happened since he moved away, he spoke up: "Just as I was driving up the road near the cemetery, I saw Charlie Olmstead walking past. I called to him and he waved. I stopped, but he ran over to the cemetery as though he was in a hurry. What's the idea of him still wearing a uniform? Doesn't he know the war is over?"

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

To Horror-Scopes: Is one who believes that mothers can cause birthmarks on children, looked upon as being silly and superstitious, by educated people? I know positively that I caused a birthmark on my daughter, due to being frightened shortly before she was born. But every time I tell this to anyone, my friends try to shut me up as being a moron.

MRS. GUS DEMOND

Dear Mrs. Demond: The medical profession will not admit this as a fact—but you will find many doctors and educated people who will believe it. Mothers should be considered, not laughed at. Tell your story whenever you wish. No gentleman or lady will laugh at you. You have one thing in your favor. The actual birthmark on your daughter. Whether or not it is coincidence, remains to be proved. But there are many thousands of so-called coincidences.

To Horror-Scopes: Is it a fact that Jean Harlow had a premonition of death?

G. R. HARKINS

Dear Mr. Harkins: According to several persons quite close to Jean Harlow, this is a fact.

To Horror-Scopes: I understand that the husband of Amelia Earhart wired to a certain well known psychic in New York, shortly after Miss Earhart disappeared, asking if there was any message of hope. What was the report at that time? M. H. SIMMS

Dear Mr. Simms: The psychic who received this telegram consulted two other psychics, one of whom uses a strange instrument for recording thought-waves. The instrument failed to pick up any thought-waves; indicating death. The other psychics could report little hope either.

To Horror-Scopes: Did the ancients believe in ghosts?

H. LAMAR

Dear Mr. Lamar: Back as far as history goes—there are stories of ghosts.

—CHAKRA

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MEAT FOR THE MANY

(Concluded from page 99)

He felt everything going red and black as he wildly spun the crank. The engine sputtered, died. He started to heave on the crank again, but couldn't get it over center somehow. His head whirled sickly; an invisible hand seemed to throw him. But he never felt the shock as he hit the ground. . . .

HIS pain seemed eased when he aroused dimly. His eyes were bleared at first. Vaguely, he knew that he was on the ground under the stars, in front of the truck. But why did his leg feel so good?

He moved weakly, started to get up. His eyes bulged as he looked down across his stomach. Rats! A heaving mass of rats, nursing where his leg should have been.

Screaming, he beat and clawed at the greedy horde. A few pulled away groggily. The others clung on stubbornly to a leg that was mere raw bone and blood-dewed tendons.

He strove to get up, crawl away. But he couldn't make it. He was faint from loss of blood, dying. That was why he felt better. Panting, he sank back.

"Eat it!" he shrieked. "Eat it—it feels good! Ha—ha—ha!"

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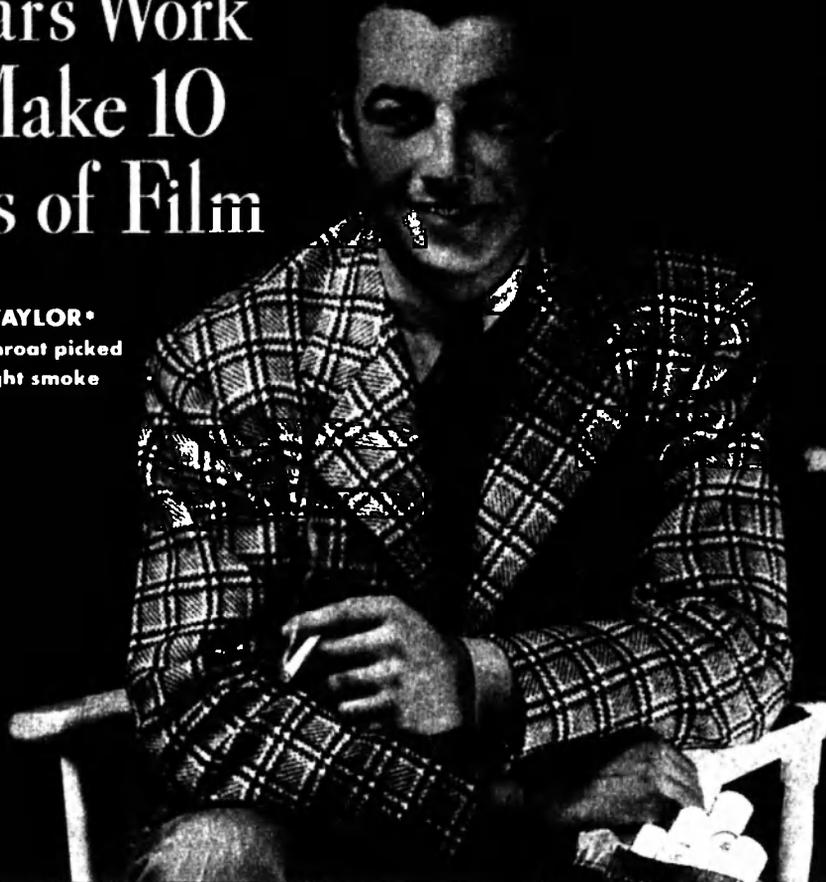
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