

**THRILLING**

# MYSTERY

10¢

MAY

A THRILLING  
PUBLICATION

IN THIS ISSUE:

## DIG EIGHT GRAVES

A Novel of an  
Island of Blood  
By **WARD** and  
**JOHN HAWKINS**

## MURDER FOR FUN

A Novelet of Grim Massacre  
By **HENRY KUTTNER**

## NEXT TIME I DIE

Story of Corpse Horror

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



# Make Records of Your Singing or Instrument

Now a new invention permits you to make a professional like recording of your own singing, talking or instrument playing. With our experience you can quickly make phonographic records which we furnish and immediately play them and listen to them yourself. Record friend's voices, instrument playing, orchestras or your favorite radio broadcast entertainment right off the air and hear it as often as you like.



and to think, I just finished recording it with the new HOME RECORDO.

Yes, Bob, and it sure sounds like your voice.

It's wonderful—and so simple—please let me make a record.

# Test Your Voice At Home!

Before spending money for an audition, make a "home record" of your voice or musical instrument and mail it to a reliable agency . . . you might be one of the lucky ones to find fame and success thru this easy method of bringing your talents before the proper authorities.

## IT'S LOTS OF FUN TOO! HAVE RECORDING PARTIES!

You'll get a real thrill out of HOME RECORDING. Surprise your friends by letting them hear your voice or playing right from a record. Record a snappy talking feature. Record jokes and become the life of the party. Great to help train your voice and to cultivate speech. Nothing to practice . . . you start recording at once . . . no other mechanical or electrical devices needed . . . everything necessary included. Nothing else to buy. Just sing, speak or play and HOME RECORDO unit which operates on any electric or old type phonograph will do the recording on special blank records we furnish. You can immediately play the records back as often as you wish. Make your home movie a talking picture with HOME RECORDO. Simply make the record while filming and play back while showing the picture.

**COMPLETE OUTFIT INCLUDING 12 TWO-SIDED BLANK RECORDS ONLY \$2.98**

Everything is included. Nothing else to buy and nothing else to pay. You get complete HOME RECORDING UNIT which includes special recording needle, playing needles, 12 two-sided unbreakable records. Also guide record and spiral feeding attachment and combination recording and playback unit suitable for recording a skill, voice, instrument or radio broadcast. ADDITIONAL 2 SIDED BLANK RECORDS COST ONLY \$75 per dozen.

**SEND NO MONEY! HURRY COUPON! START RECORDING AT ONCE!**



**HOME RECORDING CO.,**  
 Studio K, 130 West 17th St.,  
 New York, N. Y.

Send entire HOME RECORDING OUTFIT (including 12 two-sided records) described above, by return mail. I will pay postman \$2.98 plus postage, on arrival. (Send cash or money order now for \$3.00 and save postage.)

Name

Address

TYPE OF PHONOGRAPH OR RECORD PLAYER

**NOTE: Canadian and Foreign \$3.00 cash with order.**

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 Reliable dealers are invited to write for full particulars.

**OPERATES ON ANY A.C. OR D.C. ELECTRIC PHONOGRAPHS RECORD PLAYERS RADIO-PHONO COMBINATIONS Old Or New Type PHONOGRAPHS and PORTABLES**

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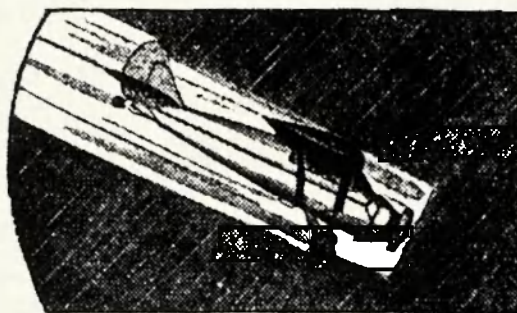
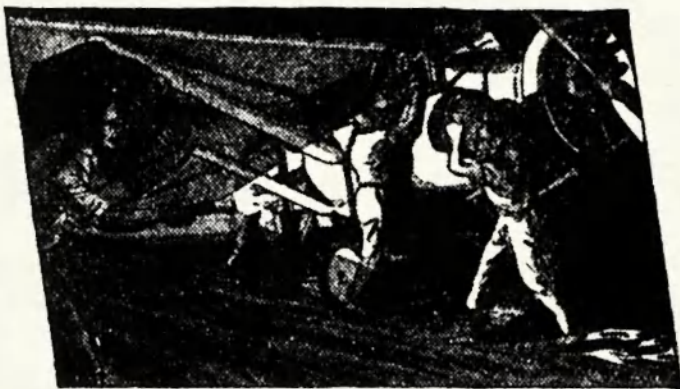
# Flying Blind-4 FEET from DEATH

TROPIC DOWNPOUR BRINGS ADVENTURE TO ROUTINE FLIGHT



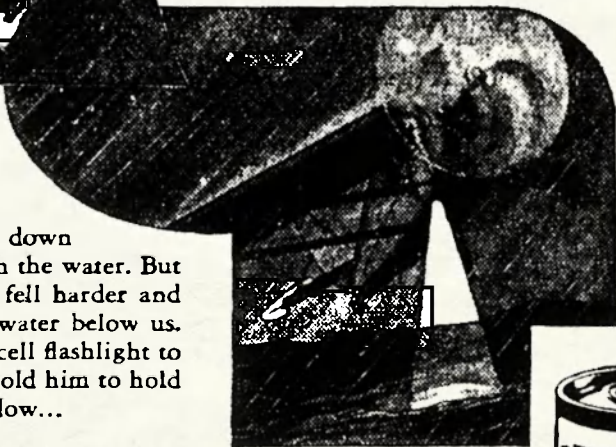
OLEN V. ANDREW

① "I had flown four friends over to Lihue, on the island of Kauai, for a weekend of camping on the beach," writes Olen V. Andrew, P. O. Box 3295, Honolulu, T. H.



② "We broke camp at three o'clock Monday morning, packed our dunnage in the plane and crawled in for the 100-mile hop back to Honolulu, all of it being over water. There was no moon, but the night was clear when we started. Five minutes later..."

③ "... we ran into a driving rainstorm. I couldn't fly over it, I didn't have proper instruments for flying through it, so the only thing to do was to get down low and keep visual contact with the water. But it kept getting darker, the rain fell harder and harder, till we couldn't see the water below us. I handed my big 'Eveready' five-cell flashlight to the fellow in the co-pilot's seat, told him to hold it out the window and flash it below..."



④ "... and there was the sea, only four feet below us! Those long Pacific rollers were almost lapping at the wheels! My heart skipped a beat to think how I had brought five people within inches of their doom! Certainly it was the power of those 'Eveready' fresh DATED batteries that saved us all, and that kept us safe above the sea for the next half hour till the storm lifted. You can take it from me, (Signed) Olen V. Andrew"



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• EVERY STORY BRAND-NEW •

# THRILLING MYSTERY

Vol. XI, No. 3

May, 1939

Price 10c

## A Complete Mystery Novel

- DIG EIGHT GRAVES** - - - - - John and Ward Hawkins 13  
*With the Ghost of a Dead Man as His Foe, an American is Catapulted Into  
Weird Battle on a Mysterious Pacific Isle!*

## Two Complete Novelets

- MURDER FOR FUN** - - - - - Henry Kuttner 46  
*A Greed-Mad Killer Runs Rampant in a Grisly Orgy at Stellar Park as  
Diabolical Fury Is Unleashed to Coil About Innocent Victims!*
- THREE CROAKS FROM SATAN** - - - - - Cleve Williams 70  
*In the Land of "Cunjur," Evil Phantasms Seek Their Human Prey Through  
the Miasma of the Mississippi Swamps!*

## Five Thrilling Short Stories

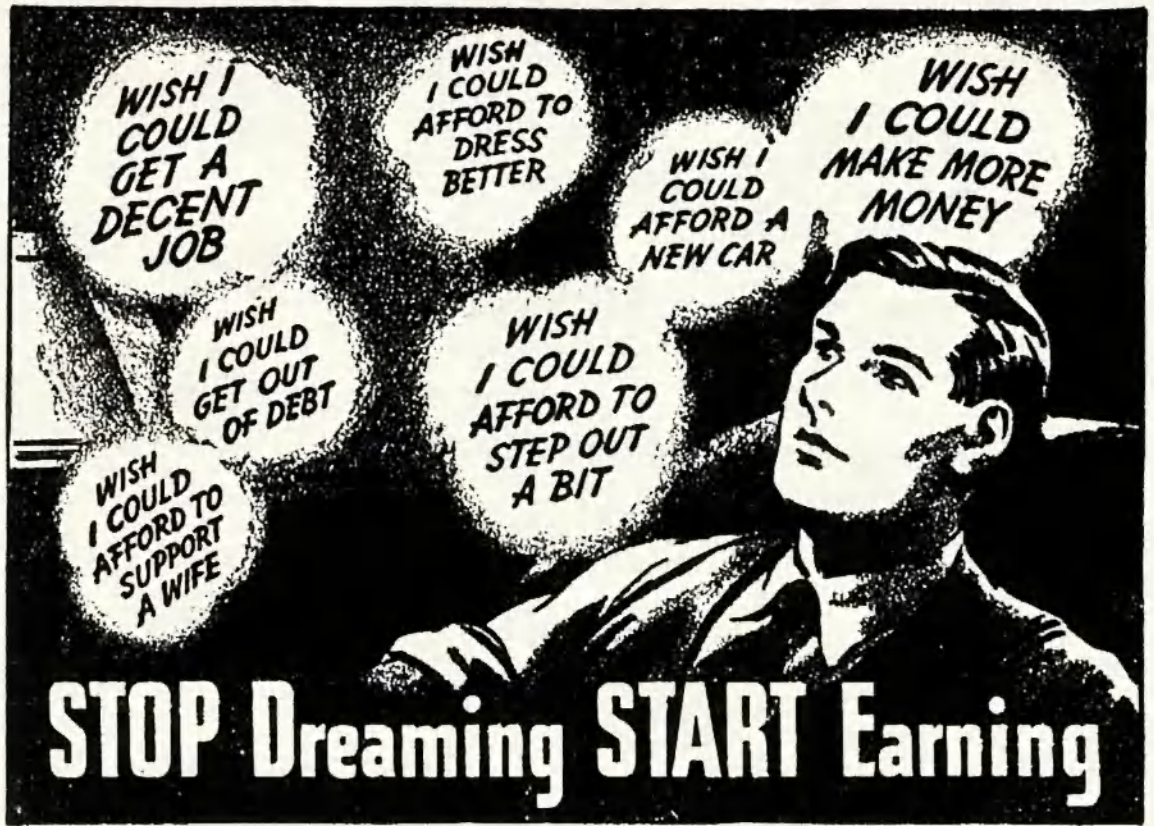
- THE PURPLE HEAD** - - - - - Ray Cummings 40  
*Retribution Stalks the Slimy Trail of a Fiendish Murderer*
- NEXT TIME I DIE** - - - - - G. T. Fleming-Roberts 59  
*Multi-Guised Death Plucks the Strings of Conscience*
- ARAB INTERLUDE** - - - - - Will Garth 68  
*A Short, Short Story Complete on Two Pages*
- DEATH'S OUTPOST** - - - - - Carl Jacobi 86  
*A Human Devil of the Jungle Spawns a Saurian Menace*
- NO ESCAPE FROM THE DEAD** - - - - - W. T. Ballard 95  
*Restless Wraiths of a Shadow World Deal Out Grim Vengeance*

## Special Feature

- HORROR-SCOPES** - - - - - Chakra 108  
*Special FREE Crystal-Scope Reading Offer!*

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National Radio  
Institute  
Established  
25 years.

# Learn to Make \$30, \$50, \$75 a Week

I will train you at home for good spare time and full time **JOBS IN RADIO**

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

**R**ADIO broadcasting stations employ engineers, operators, station managers and pay well for trained men. Fixing Radio sets in spare time pays many \$200 to \$500 a year—full time jobs with Radio Jobbers, manufacturers and dealers as much as \$30, \$50, \$75 a week. Many Radio Experts open full or part time Radio sales and repair businesses. Radio manufacturers and jobbers employ testers, inspectors, foremen, engineers, servicemen in good-pay jobs with opportunities for advancement. Automobile, police, aviation, commercial Radio, loudspeaker systems are newer fields offering good opportunities now and for the future. Television promises to open many good jobs soon. Men I trained have good jobs in these branches of Radio. Read how they got their jobs. Mail coupon.

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

The day you enroll I start sending Extra Money Job Sheets, show you how to do Radio repair jobs. Throughout your training I send plans and directions that made good spare time money—\$200 to \$500—for hundreds, while learning. I send you special Radio equipment to conduct experiments and build circuits. This 50-50 method of training makes learning at home interesting, fascinating practical. I ALSO GIVE YOU A MODERN PROFESSIONAL ALL-WAVE ALL-PURPOSE RADIO SET SERVICING INSTRUMENT to help you make good money fixing Radios while learning and equip you for full time jobs after graduation.

## Find Out, What Radio Offers You

Act Today. Mail the coupon now for "Rich Rewards in Radio." It's free to any fellow over 16 years old. It points out Radio's spare time and full time opportunities and those coming in Television, tells about my training in Radio and Television; shows you letters from men I trained, telling what they are doing and earning. Find out what Radio offers YOU! MAIL COUPON in an envelope, or paste on a postcard—NOW!

**J. E. SMITH,**  
President  
National Radio  
Institute,  
Dept. 9E00  
Washington,  
D. C.



J. E. SMITH, President  
National Radio Institute, Dept. 9E00  
Washington, D. C.

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

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

Address .....

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

# HOW DO YOU LOOK IN YOUR BATHING SUIT?

**SKINNY?  
THOUSANDS GAIN  
10 TO 25 POUNDS  
THIS QUICK EASY WAY**



**Read how thin, tired-out, nervous, rundown people have gained health and strength—quick!**

ARE you ashamed to be seen in a bathing suit, because you're too skinny and scrawny-looking? Are you often tired, nervous—unable to eat and sleep properly?

Then here's wonderful news! Thousands of skinny, rundown men and women have gained 10 to 25 pounds, new pep, new popularity—with this scientific vitamin-rich formula, Ironized Yeast.

## Why it builds up so quick

Scientists have discovered that countless people are thin and rundown—tired, cranky, washed-out—only because they don't get enough Vitamin B and iron from their daily food. Without enough of these vital substances you may lack appetite and not get the most body-building good out of what you eat.

Now you get these exact missing substances in these marvelous little Ironized Yeast tablets. No wonder, then, that they have helped thousands of people who needed these substances to gain new naturally attractive pounds, new health and pep, new popularity and success—often in just a few weeks!

## Make this money-back test

Get Ironized Yeast tablets from your druggist today. If with the first package you don't eat better and FEEL better, with much more strength and pep—if you're not convinced that Ironized Yeast will give you the new pounds, new energy and life you've longed for, the price of this first package promptly refunded.

But just one warning! Due to the success of

Ironized Yeast, a number of cheap, inferior substitutes have sprung up. Of course inferior substitutes do not give the same results. So insist on genuine Ironized Yeast. Look for the letters IY stamped on each tablet.

## Special offer!

To start thousands building up their health right away, we make this special offer. Purchase a package of Ironized Yeast tablets at once, cut out the seal on the box and mail it to us with a clipping of this paragraph. We will send you a fascinating new book on health, "New Facts About Your Body." Remember, results with the first package—or money refunded. At all druggists. Ironized Yeast Co., Inc., Dept. 77A, Atlanta, Ga.

**TUNE IN ON THE GOOD WILL HOUR**, every Sunday Evening. See your local paper for time and station.



Irvin Echard

**Gains 14 lbs. in 5 Weeks**

"I was so skinny I didn't want to go out finally. I tried IRONIZED YEAST. In five weeks I gained 14 lbs. Now I go out regularly, have good times."

Irvin Echard, Barberton, O.



**Gains 12 lbs., admired now**

"Was losing weight and pep. Then I got Ironized Yeast. In 6 weeks I gained 12 lbs. and am full of pep. Everybody admires my physique, too."

Ralph Loeffler, Arlington, Wash.

# They Needed TRAINED Diesel Men

★ INDICATES HEMPHILL DIESEL RESIDENT SCHOOLS

• Letters from employers and H. D. S. graduates on file at Hemphill Diesel Schools headquarters

## and H.D.S. Graduates went on the jobs!

The Nevada gold mine, the lumber camp in the far north, the big Texas refinery, the west coast Diesel manufacturing plant, the great motorship bound for the Orient... ALL needed trained Diesel men... and Hemphill graduates went on those jobs—just as other H. D. S. men—before and since—have gone to other Diesel jobs in this country and abroad.

### WOULD YOU LIKE TO KNOW MORE ABOUT DIESELS and DIESEL TRAINING?

On the map above you see pictured only a few of the ways and places Diesel engines are used today. If you would like to know more about Diesels... and see interesting pictures of new and unusual applications of Diesel power, send the coupon for your free copy of "March of Diesel."

You will also see eight full pages of pictures of Hemphill Diesel students learning Diesel

by working on and operating actual Diesel engines... from small stationary power plants to huge motorship Diesels.

Day or night courses are open to you, or you can start at home and obtain your practical shop training in any one of the eight Hemphill schools. To get complete information... and your free "March of Diesel"... send the coupon NOW.

## HEMPHILL DIESEL SCHOOLS

Diesel and Diesel-Electric—Full-Time Resident Courses

Or You Can Start Your Training at Home

### HEMPHILL DIESEL SCHOOLS

Please send my free copy of "March of Diesel" booklet and information on Hemphill Diesel training

NAME \_\_\_\_\_ AGE \_\_\_\_\_

STREET \_\_\_\_\_

CITY \_\_\_\_\_ STATE \_\_\_\_\_

### Send Coupon to Nearest Address

BOSTON... 124 Brookline Avenue  
 NEW YORK... 31-31 Queens Blvd., L.I. City  
 DETROIT... 2348 West L'Alayette Blvd.  
 CHICAGO... 2030 Larrabee Street  
 MEMPHIS... 449 Monroe Avenue  
 LOS ANGELES... 2010 San Fernando Rd.  
 SEATTLE... 515 Dexter Avenue  
 VANCOUVER, B. C... 1367 Granville St.

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Watch **FREE** with every ring ordered and paid for in one year!

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Curved "shockproof" **GOLD PLATE FRONT** watch with all the color and charm of natural yellow gold. Stainless back. Accurate. **GUARANTEE** by a famous \$1,000,000 **FACTORY** enclosed.

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**No Charge for Credit... We trust you! No red tape. We'll ship at once. TEN DAY FREE TRIAL. Mail Postcard or Coupon NOW. Send No Money with order! Your package comes by RETURN MAIL.**

**Send NO Money with order**

**GLADIATOR RING DOUBLE HEAD SET IN LIFETIME STERLING SILVER DECORATED with 1/20, 14 k GOLD.**

GOLO STANDARD WATCH CO., Dept. X-964  
Newton MASS. **RUSH OFFER**

Lady's Model     Man's Model

NAME \_\_\_\_\_  
ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

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Get the Story of *Roadway and Bus Traffic Inspection*. We place graduates at up to \$135 per month, plus expenses to start, or refund tuition. Men 18 to 50 eligible. Splendid Opportunities Free Booklet.  
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*See* **WOODSTOCK**

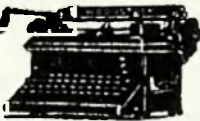
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That's the Word for

**Strange**  
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Gripping Tales of the Uncanny

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# THOUSANDS NOW PLAY WHO NEVER THOUGHT THEY COULD



## Read this typical letter from one of our students

**YES**, just like thousands of others who thought music was hard, this man got the surprise of his life when he tried this easy way to learn music at home. And no wonder! Instead of months of tedious study and practice, he found himself actually playing real tunes in the very first few weeks! He didn't believe it was possible—and his friends could hardly believe their ears when they heard him.

But read this unsolicited letter for yourself. He writes:

"I ordered your piano course just to have something to do to pass the time evenings when I was home. I didn't even dream that I could actually learn to play without a teacher, because I had always heard that it couldn't be done. I couldn't afford a teacher, so I didn't think it would do me any harm to take your course.

"When I received the lessons I took the instantaneous note-finder and struck the notes right off. I considered this just killing time, but you can imagine my surprise when after three or four weeks I found that I could actually play real tunes, something I would never have believed possible without previous knowledge of music.

"Now, when I play for people they will hardly believe that I learned to play so well with just a correspondence course in so short a time.

"I am getting now to the point where even the hardest music holds no terrors for me. Any person who takes your piano course and studies it cannot help but learn to play, because it covers everything they could ever want to know on the subject."

(Signed) \*H. C. S., Calif.

## FREE PROOF it's fun ... it's easy ... it's inexpensive ... to learn the U. S. School Way



### Plays on Radio

I am happy to tell you that for four weeks I have been on the air over our local radio station. So thanks to your institution for such a wonderful course.

\* W. H. S., Alabama

### Surprised Friends

I want to say that my friends are greatly surprised at the different pieces I can already play. I am very happy to have chosen your method of learning.

\* B. F., Bronx, N. Y.



### Easy to Understand

The manner in which the various lessons are explained is very helpful as well as interesting. It makes one feel that the explanation is being given in person.

\* W. W. Florida



Which instrument would you like to play? The piano, violin, guitar, saxophone, accordion? Never mind if you don't know one note from another. Don't worry about "talent." And forget all you have ever heard about tedious study and practice. Here's proof you can learn quickly at home—without a teacher, in spare time and at amazingly little cost.

It's easy as A-B-C. It's FUN. You learn to play by playing. Send at once for the Free Demonstration Lesson that shows HOW. And the handsome illustrated booklet that gives complete information. Just mail the coupon. (Instruments supplied when needed, cash or credit.) U. S. School of Music, 2945 Brunswick Bldg., New York, N. Y. Forty-first year. (East. 1898.)

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Without cost or obligation to me, please send me your free illustrated Booklet and Demonstration Lesson, showing how I can learn at home to play the instrument checked below. (Do you have instrument? .....)

- |  |                                   |                                   |  |
|--|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Piano           | <input type="checkbox"/> Hawaiian | <input type="checkbox"/> Trumpet  | <input type="checkbox"/> Drums and         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Violin          | <input type="checkbox"/> Guitar   | <input type="checkbox"/> Harp     | <input type="checkbox"/> Tuba              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Guitar          | <input type="checkbox"/> Banjo    | <input type="checkbox"/> Clarinet | <input type="checkbox"/> Organ             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Piano Accordion | <input type="checkbox"/> Mandolin | <input type="checkbox"/> Ukulele  | <input type="checkbox"/> Modern Elementary |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Piano Accordion | <input type="checkbox"/> Mandolin | <input type="checkbox"/> Ukulele  | <input type="checkbox"/> Modern Elementary |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Saxophone       | <input type="checkbox"/> Trombone | <input type="checkbox"/> Flute    | <input type="checkbox"/> Tertiary Harmony  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cello           | <input type="checkbox"/> Cornet   | <input type="checkbox"/> Piccolo  | <input type="checkbox"/> Voice Culture     |

Name

Address

City  State

\* Actual pupils' names on request. Pictures posed by professional models.

# Old Line Legal Reserve Life Insurance

# ONLY 77¢ PER MONTH

Per \$1000 of Insurance at Age of 21\*

## Here Are Low Rates At Your Age for POSTAL'S Famous MODIFIED "4" POLICY

Monthly Premium, less the 9 1/2% Guaranteed Dividend (at the nearest birthday) per \$1,000

Age	Age	Age	Age
21 \$ .77	30 .97	39 1.29	48 1.87
22 .79	31 1.00	40 1.35	49 1.95
23 .81	32 1.03	41 1.39	50 2.04
24 .83	33 1.06	42 1.45	51 2.15
25 .85	34 1.09	43 1.51	52 2.27
26 .87	35 1.13	44 1.57	53 2.39
27 .90	36 1.16	45 1.64	54 2.53
28 .92	37 1.21	46 1.70	55 2.66
29 .95	38 1.25	47 1.79	

A further saving is made by paying premium annually or semi-annually

\*Owing to low rates at which this policy is offered, the minimum amounts issued are: ages 21 to 45, \$1,500; 46 to 55, \$1,000.

Rates shown in table are one half permanent rates beginning the fifth year. Own all the Life Insurance you need! This Old Line, Legal Reserve Policy offers Cash and Loan values; Automatic Premium Payment clause; Guaranteed 9 1/2% Dividend and all Standard Provisions.

Ask us for full details today! Don't delay! Insurance is vital!

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**\$48,000,000.00**

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Send me without obligation complete information about your low cost Modified "4" Policy at my age.

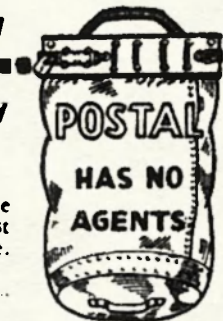
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Occupation.....

Name.....

Street.....

City.....



State.....

Organized as a Legal Reserve Life Insurance Company under laws of State of New York in 1905

# CANDID CAMERA CATCHES CO-EDS

In Every Issue Of

# COLLEGE HUMOR

GAYER AND GRANDER  
THAN EVER

15c  
AT ALL STANDS

## Are You Worried About Your Job?



If you have a career problem, do not rely on fortune telling or blind chance.

It is unfair to gamble with your future. You are not a pawn on the checkerboard of Fate.

Find out what is amiss. Learn about your cosmic birth gifts. Use your endowments as a wedge to get what you want. The gateway of opportunity is open.

At this very moment "success vibrations" are being generated through planetary trine in the zodiacal signs which rule money and employment.

With such powerful allies, this is the psychological time to go after a good job or to try for a raise of salary.

But there are other astrological factors, so you owe it to yourself to know the value of your solar horoscope as a preliminary to further analysis. Use coupon below.

ELLEN R. McKEON, 22 West 48th Street, New York, N. Y.

Please send me my Solar Horoscope. I am enclosing 15c in stamps or coin to cover cost of mailing and handling.

I was born Month Date (1-31) Year

Name

Address

TM5

# Amazing Confession

of a man  
who threw  
away an  
opportunity by  
which his brother  
tripled his income

**I** WANT you to know why I am starting to study accounting under your training. I am a married man, with two children, and a wife in poor health. For seven years I have held my job as a shipping clerk for a bakery—without a raise the past six years.

"My brother started to work at about the same time I did, and took your training in Higher Accountancy. He has never been out of work, and has progressed steadily until he is now Chief Accountant and Office Manager for an automobile company here, and is making three times as much as I am.

"I know I was a sucker for not starting when he did. But I was skeptical, and the training cost, even though small, looked like a lot of money with all my doctor bills. I know now that the most expensive thing I did was to put off this training, because I can see what it did for my brother."—E. B.

\*\*\*\*\*

Are you denying yourself a better job, with bigger pay just as Mr. B. did? Have you seen men no smarter than you go up the ladder of success while you stood still? Then—will you do one simple thing to learn how you can train yourself at home for a responsible position, possibly with an income several times as large as you are now making?

LaSalle Training has been the means by which thousands of men have gotten out of the rut of poor paying jobs and into well paying positions. A few minutes of your time each day, with LaSalle Training in Accountancy, may fit you to make more than you perhaps ever thought possible.

We offer to send you FREE proof. Yes, offer evidence that you can increase—perhaps even double or triple your income. All we ask you to do is mail the coupon below. In return we will send you a 48-page booklet which outlines the training; shows how simple and easy it is to learn, and the rewards you can get from this training. If you really are sincere, and want to better your position and pay—mail the coupon without a moment's delay.



### LASALLE EXTENSION UNIVERSITY

A Correspondence Institution  
Dept. 5329-HR Chicago

Please send me, free of all cost or obligation, your 48-page, illustrated book, "Accountancy, the Profession That Pays," telling about the profession of accountancy and your training for success in that field.

Name

Address City

Position Age

# Mr. Mattingly & Mr. Moore fall into a fine whiskey value!



"Oh, Mr. Mattingly,  
Oh, Mr. Mattingly,  
It's no wonder on the  
world I fairly beam!



"I'm not being ostentatious  
When I tell you: 'Oh, my  
gracious,  
M & M rides high in popular  
esteem!'"



"Yes, Mr. Moore,  
Yes, Mr. Moore,  
It's due to methods used  
in making M & M —



"Slow-distilled in ways old-fashioned,  
It still costs but little cash and  
It brings folks mellow flavor  
at a price that pleases them!"

**P**EOPLE everywhere are sing-  
ing the praises of Mattingly  
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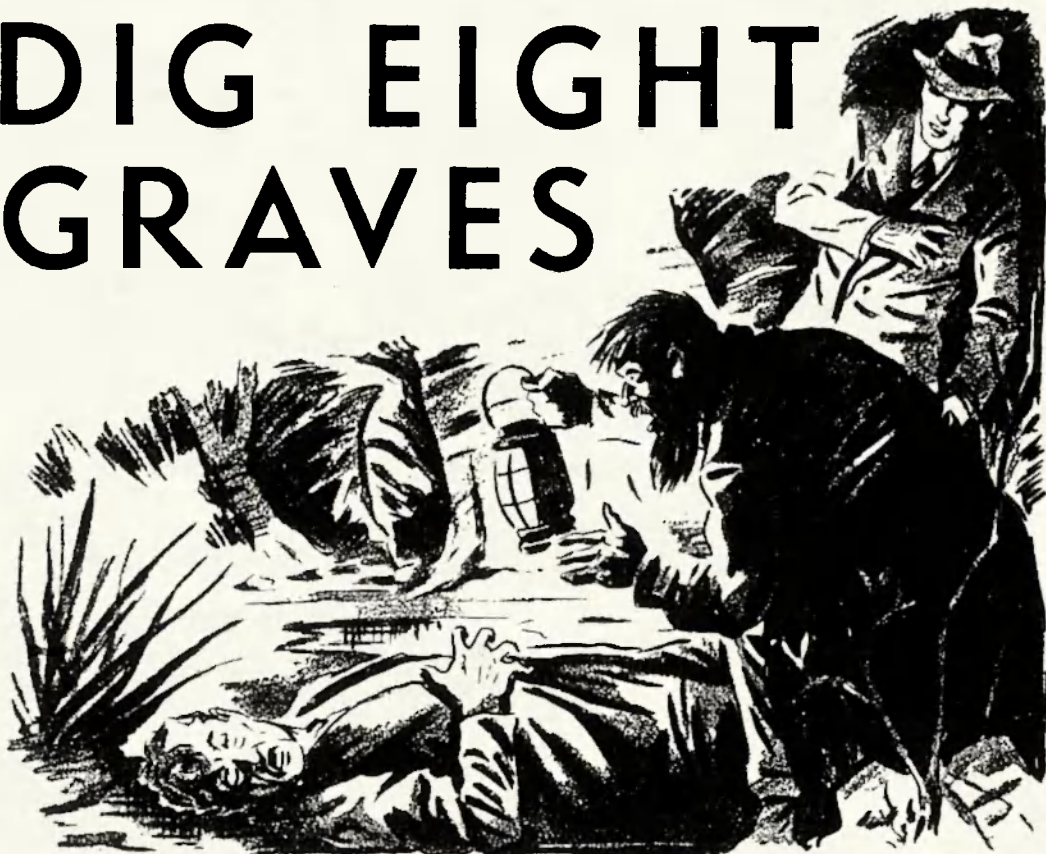
## Mattingly & Moore

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Frankfort Distillers, Incorporated, Louisville and Baltimore.*



# DIG EIGHT GRAVES



*He gibbered as he stared at something beside which he knelt*

With the Ghost of a Dead Man as His Foe, a Daring American  
Is Catapulted Into Weird Battle!

By **WARD** and **JOHN HAWKINS**

*Authors of "Motive For Murder," "Death Has No Voice," etc.*

## CHAPTER I

### *Murder in the Rain*

**P**ETER RADCLIFF leaned his slender, well knit body against the stone railing and studied Valerie Galloway, his foster sister, who stood beside him. There was

something about her that caught at his throat as she stood there facing the increasing force of the wind, her dress molded against her body and her hair streaming behind her in a shimmering pennant.

There was an expression of exultance in her wide green eyes, in her quivering nostrils and in the way her

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A Complete Novel of an Island of Blood

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## Peter Radcliff Is Suddenly Plunged Into

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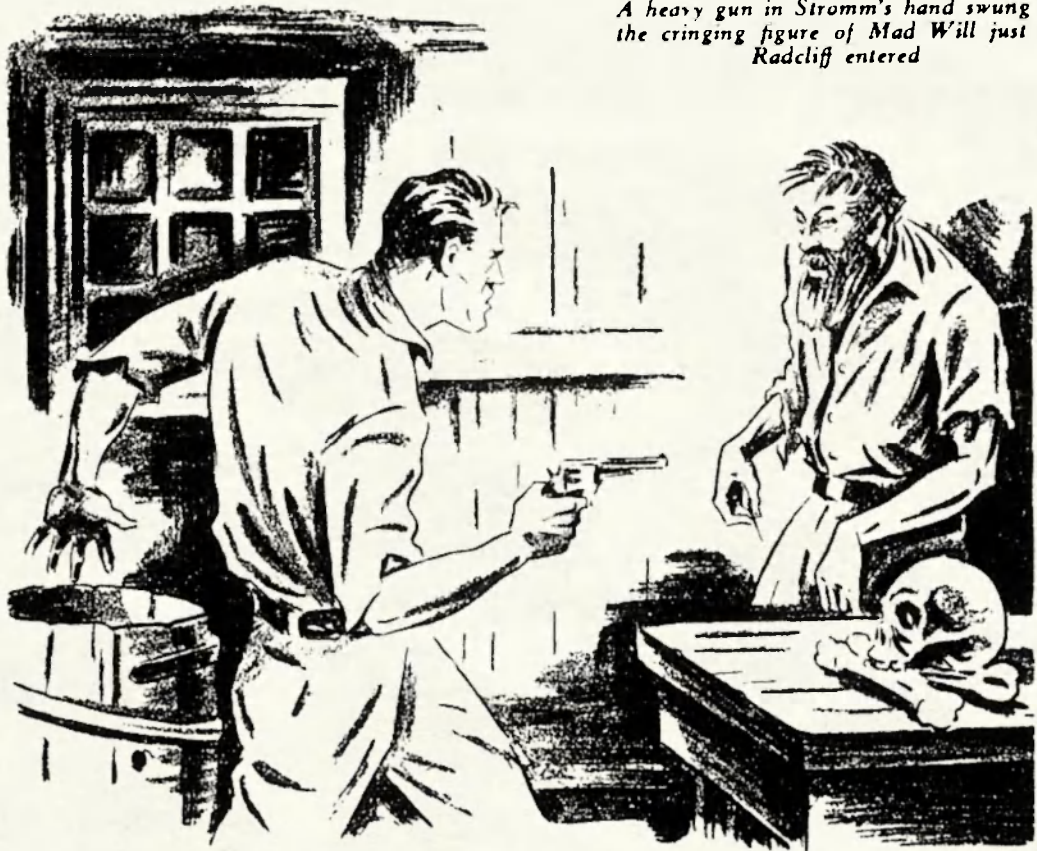
head was tautly lifted. She seemed to be listening to the wind's voice, and to joy in what it said.

"He's coming!" she cried suddenly. "There! There!"

An amused smile showed faintly on Radcliff's clean-cut face as he swung his eyes beyond the harbor below them, beyond the spray-covered reefs and into the last rays of the sun.

had been right. Eric Stromm was coming! The half-brother he had never seen. And it was joy in that coming that he saw in his foster sister's eyes.

Breathlessly they watched until the ship reached the reefs. There it seemed to poise for an everlasting moment before it plunged straight into the foam-lashed whitecaps. It looked



*A heavy gun in Stromm's hand swung at the cringing figure of Mad Will just as Radcliff entered*

Giant, burnished clouds reared on the western horizon, swept toward them on the strong arm of the wind. Beneath the clouds lay deep shadows, broken only by the white lines of shredded wave-crests.

Suddenly he, too, saw it. A patch of white—a close-reefed sail! Valerie

as if the gallant ship would surely crash full into the face of the cliff. But at the last moment it veered and skimmed diagonally down a narrow, unseen channel. Long, taut moments later, it slid into the comparative quiet of the harbor.

Valerie Galloway was gone when

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## An Aura of Fear Penetrates the Eerie

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## the Midst of Grim South Seas Horror!

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Radcliff turned to speak to her. She was a flying figure running down the winding stairway to the dock. For a moment she vanished into the darkness, but the next was on the dock that gleamed like a bone in a grave of deep shadows.

That thought came unconsciously to Peter Radcliff, an eerie thought in keeping with the weirdness of this

thought, that the man who had been father to all three had to die to bring them together. For not until this day when the ship bringing Radcliff had touched this island had they met.

**R**ADCLIFF'S mother, a Bostonian, had died at his birth. He had spent his whole life with an aunt in his mother's home city. He had



*"Stand as you are, Radcliff"*

whole island to which Fate had brought him. It was a waiflike bit of land in a storm-tossed sea, with an awe of fear hovering in its very atmosphere that Radcliff could not define.

His lips twisted a little wryly as he saw Valerie rush to the tall man who strode to her on the dock. Then their figures were merged. Eric Stromm had come home.

How strange it was, Radcliff

never seen his father; nor until now had he ever seen Stromm or Valerie.

Eric Stromm was the son of Radcliff's father's second wife in these Pacific islands. And Stromm had followed his father's footsteps as a trader and a pearler, using his mother's name.

As for Valerie, Radcliff's father had found her as an infant in an open boat fifteen hundred miles from the near-

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## Atmosphere of a Mysterious Pacific Isle!

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est land. There had never been any explanation for her presence there, and the island trader had raised her as his own child.

The three were together at last, though, on this remote island of the sea—here to claim the legacy their father had left when he had died two months before.

The first slanting onslaught of rain drove Radcliff away from the point as Eric Stromm and the girl climbed toward the house on the cliff. A flash of pain went through his foot as he turned. He had stepped on a nail not long ago, and the wound was still sensitive.

Not long ago? It seemed ages ago now. In this spot in the jeweled sea New England itself seemed an eternity away, and his Boston studio only a dim memory from another existence. The one thing that stood out as real was the cablegram which, bringing the news of his father's death, had started him on a journey across a continent and a sea to this forgotten island in the Pacific.

To the Isla de Sangre—the Island of Blood!

The island had belonged to Radcliff's father. In a way, it was Eric Stromm's home, when he was not roaming the sea. But only Valerie Galloway actually lived here now, with an old, old woman, the dead sea captain's housekeeper and her son. There was also an aged handy man and a bearded idiot who long ago had drifted here, and since he had stubbornly refused to leave had been tolerated by the island's owner and allowed to roam as he pleased.

Depressed as Radcliff had been from the moment he had set foot on the Island of Blood—a gray, threatening doom seemed somehow to have settled down on it and everybody present—he thought wryly that only an idiot would have persisted in staying there.

The sea-faring Radcliff had given the island to the old woman and her son for their legacy after a lifetime of service.

Strange people, all of them, Radcliff thought, brought together in a

strange place . . .

The path he took led him through a rain-lashed jungle, slipping along a muddy trail. The thick darkness was filled with the roaring of the rain upon the leaves.

He hurried. Not, he told himself, because he was afraid, in spite of his subconscious uneasiness in the eerie place, but because he was soaked to the skin.

Suddenly he stopped, rooted to the spot by a scream that blasted out of the darkness ahead. But at its high peak of fear it was cut off short—to a gurgling sound of terror.

For one moment Radcliff stood stockstill, in sweating rigidity. But the next he was plunging headlong toward the scream.

**H**E saw a light moving in the trees; saw it stop and lower. He plunged toward it and broke into a small cross-path. The man with the light was there, a hump-shouldered, crouching mound, the rain glistening on his slicker in the lantern light. "Mad Will" Carrick, the idiot, Radcliff saw instantly. He was gibbering as he stared stolidly at something beside which he knelt—a twisted lump of dead flesh in the deep mire of the pathway.

Radcliff came to an abrupt halt, his eyes held in horrible fascination. The body on the ground had been old Ely, the handy man, and that he had died in agony was plain from his bulging eyes and the utter horror on his face.

His mouth was wide and gaping, his body was bent backward until it looked as if his skinny thighs must break. Death had come to him cruelly, but before that he had known torture and fear beyond all reasoning.

Mad Will lifted the lantern and moved his vacant eyes up to Radcliff's face.

"He's dead," he said expressionlessly.

Radcliff could only stand there staring into Mad Will's eyes. Queerly at that moment came to him all Valerie had told him about Mad Will—how he had been thrown upon this island at the height of a hurricane, bruised



and broken and near death. His mind had been gone when he had regained consciousness.

No wonder this death did not particularly shock him. He, too, had died, long ago. Death had lost its horror for him.

"What killed him?" Radcliff demanded.

Mad Will seemed rummaging through his brain for a long moment. A thought flashed in his eyes, then was gone.

"The wind," he mumbled vaguely.

The sound of running feet pounding through the darkness came above the roar of wind and rain. A man's voice was shouting, then a big-bodied man broke into the clearing. Others running behind him came to a jerking halt.

The big man was Jan Vrooman, the old housekeeper's son. He stared at the body of old Ely, his face gray and sagging.

"My God!" he choked. "Old Ely! What killed him?"

The question was repeated as another big man pushed forward.

"What happened?"

Radcliff turned, drew his breath in sharply at his first near view of his half-brother. Eric Stromm's amazing size was impressive even in this dim, yellow light; as was the strength indicated in his great, flowing muscles. Ruthlessness seemed stamped on the man's deeply tanned face; and in the storminess of his gray eyes in their nests of fine wrinkles. Such wrinkles come even to a young man who for long periods gazes over the vast distances of a sun-kissed tropical sea.

His movements as he knelt beside the dead man were rhythmic; effortless. He straightened and glared around him.

"This man's been strangled!" his deep voice rumbled.

"Strangled?" Radcliff repeated sharply. "Why, there are no marks on his throat!"

Giving this half-brother of his only a contemptuous glance the big man repeated stubbornly:

"Nevertheless he's been strangled. He died of suffocation."

"Strangled!" Jan Vrooman choked. "God! This is Dussault's work!"

**V**ROOMAN'S face was suddenly ghastly. His whole fat body seemed without bones as he sagged into the mud.

"Pierre Dussault!" he repeated inanely, deadly fear in his high-pitched tones. "He's come back!"

This was meaningless to Peter Radcliff. But it was plain enough that the very name of some man called Dussault was enough to reduce at least one person on this wild island to quivering jelly. And he meant to find out who was this Pierre Dussault who apparently went about murdering helpless and harmless old men. He meant to find out immediately.

Nevertheless, Radcliff turned away from Vrooman in something like disgust. It sickened him to see a man groveling so in fear. At least it did until he saw Vrooman's eyes, and saw that they were cold bits of ice.

"Take the body to the house," Eric Stromm ordered Mad Will, and the placid mindless one obeyed.

In silent file, the others followed in the rain toward the house.

Three people waited for the grim procession. Three who knew, without having seen, that death had come again to the Island of Blood, as so often it had come before.

Anna Vrooman, blind and aged, a shrunken figure in a wheel chair, waited, her head lifted to catch each sound. Behind her stood Valerie Galloway, her green eyes wide with apprehension. The third person, a small man with a wind-tanned face and sharp black eyes, was Jake Rood, mate aboard Stromm's ship.

"It's old Ely," Vroom told his mother. "Strangled!"

The old woman's laughter—shrill, mocking laughter—cackled in the silence. It set Radcliff's nerves screaming.

"Strangled!" she chattered. "Dussault again. It was Dussault."

"Who on earth is Dussault?" Radcliff demanded angrily. "Why should he—"

No one answered him—yet. But Radcliffe knew by the frozen look on all their faces that the murderous Pierre Dussault, whoever he might be, whatever his purpose was no stranger to any one of them.

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## CHAPTER II

### *Strange Legacy*

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**A**NNA VROOMAN listened tensely as Mad Will left the handy man's body in the small room near the entrance. Then she turned her chair with a deft motion and led the way down the hall.

She turned into a huge, cold room where a fire threw only a feeble dancing warmth from a big hearth. The yellow light from three kerosene lamps barely held the shadows at bay in the corners.

In front of the fireplace she whirled her chair and faced them. Though Radcliffe had known her only for hours, to him this blind woman's certainty of movement was amazing. It was as if she were not blind at all. But there being no possible doubt of her affliction, it was as if some sixth sense guided her through this great barren house unerringly.

As the group drew nearer to her, Radcliffe's roving eyes, for the first time, saw the enormous iron safe against one wall. That safe, in all likelihood, held the legacy they were all here to collect. But it seemed a starkly inauspicious moment to have it handed out, to gloat over such material things while they were still shuddering from grim tragedy that had struck in their midst.

Apparently that was not to deter this ancient blind woman whose very presence was awesome, witchlike. With the arrival of Eric Stromm the heirs were all gathered together now, and she meant to get the matter over and be rid of her stewardship.

Again her shrill laughter broke the silence that gripped the room. Her face twitched, convulsing in all its wrinkles with her unholy mirth. The

firelight cast a yellow glow into her vacant eyes until it seemed they were alive, bright and yellow, staring at them.

And then she spoke, the very tones of her voice sending out a sense of fear of the unknown that was spine-tingling. It was as if her heart, squeezed dry of all human emotion and sympathy, was the repository of secret rife with nameless evil.

"Peter Radcliff," she said, her voice the dry whisper of dead leaves, "you asked about Pierre Dussault. The time has come that you should know of him. Even before we come to the business that has brought you all here.



*Peter Radcliff*

For he has come again to this island tonight. He is here now!"

She chuckled mockingly, as if she could see the swift glance Radcliff cast about him at his companions—and could read his thoughts. Which one of them could be this murderer, this terror?

"You need not look for him," Anna Vrooman said. "Only I can see him, I who am blind. To you, to those with you, Pierre Dussault is for ages dead—but I know he lives . . . You would hear of him? Then heed well.

"This island was once the home of Dussault. It was he who named it the Island of Blood, and named this house Red Haven. From this very room he

directed his band of cutthroats against the ships of Her Majesty, the Queen of Spain. Dussault the Bloody, they called him. And that he was, for he knew that death is the answer to everything. Death and the warmth of spilled blood!

"But they found Dussault dead in his bed one morning. Strangled, yet without a mark on his throat. The ghosts of the people he had killed had done that. There is no heaven, no hell, no rest for people killed in that fashion. They must roam, as Dussault roams, the world between the living and the dead."

Her voice rose in cackling crescendo.

"He is with us now! I can see him standing there! He is angry, restless. He killed old Ely as he was himself killed. He will kill again!"

**H**ER words rattled away into the deep stillness, and unconsciously Radcliff shivered. As foolish as it seemed to be affected by the inane jabbering of a half-mad, senile woman, he had a feeling he could not avoid that Dussault, the once bloody pirate, was with them. He felt that, in spite of his efforts to shake off the eeriness that common sense was telling him was induced by this whole unhealthy setting and because of the murdered man they had just left.

Plainly the others were feeling that unseen presence, too. Jake Rood's face was pale and drawn as his eyes nervously probed the shadows. Stromm was watching the old woman, his lips tightly set, with a close scrutiny. Valerie's hands were clenched, her green eyes staring with startled fear. Jan Vrooman was impatient, as if he waited for something more. Only Mad Will seemed unconcerned and emotionless, his long white hands twitching meaninglessly.

Anna Vrooman chuckled over some secret malicious joke of her own. She seemed to drag out her enjoyment of their fear that she could uncannily sense, before slowly she drew a huge key from the folds of her skirt and spun the wheels of her chair to the safe.

"And now your legacy," she said. "Pierre Dussault, too, is waiting anxiously to see."

Her thin, clawlike hands turned the key and swung the heavy door. The breathless watchers, leaned tensely forward as she fumbled into the dark maw of the safe's interior. The sharp sound of quickly released breaths ran around the room as she brought out a tray. And then Peter Radcliff rasped a startled curse at what he saw.

Their legacy was bones!

There was a skull, with stark eye-holes staring wickedly and inscrutably from the smooth, white, polished bone. And two shin bones gleamed whitely. The grinning skull and the bones were crossed in the traditional warning of danger.

"The skull of Dussault the Bloody!" cackled the old woman. "He laughs at it—see? He bends double with jeering mirth. Ah, he knows full well you would not shudder if his handsome flesh were once more on these white bones of his!"

With tantalizing slowness she drew a crackling paper from her deep pocket and waved it.

"Here is the will of your father, Peter Radcliff and Eric Stromm, and Valerie Galloway whom he made his child. You may read it, but I have no need. I know each word by heart." And she quoted. "'To my son, Peter Radcliff, I give the skull of Pierre Dussault. To my son who calls himself Eric Stromm, I give the right shin bone. To my adopted daughter, Valerie Galloway, I give the left shin bone. To Anna Vrooman and her son, Jan, I give the Island of Blood.'"

His father had died a madman! That was Radcliff's only explanation of this grisly inheritance.

In horrified fascination the whole group stared at the bones of the long-dead, ruthless pirate. Hesitantly, then, Jake Rood, Stromm's mate reached out and touched the skull as if to make sure it was real and not a figment of his imagination. That unconscious action brought an abrupt and startling result.

Eric Stromm's hand flashed out suddenly, struck Rood brutally across the

mouth. Rood's head snapped back from the force of the blow. He staggered and fell.

**R**ADCLIFF uttered a sharp protest, but Stromm ignored him. Rood rolled to his feet, spitting curses. Stromm stood crouched, waiting for him, smiling coldly.

Vivid hell flamed in Rood's eyes. But almost instantly he relaxed, and the upraised hand clutching the knife, dropped. And for some reason the deep gray eyes of Eric Stromm showed a faint regret.

What on earth was the meaning of that? In one brief instant Radcliff had seen the white hate that burned between Eric Stromm and his mate. But why would two men who so hated each other work together? What powerful reason held them together in mutual hate?

As if unaware of the hate-filled interlude, Anna Vrooman went on in her leaf-dry husky whisper:

"There is a curse on your legacy, children of Radcliff. It was because of this curse that Dussault the Bloody died. It was brought down on him by a Spanish nun." And again the old woman quoted: ". . . And upon you and your possession there is the curse of eternal solitude. You shall be denied heaven and hell. Your possessions shall be shunned by the living, for whosoever touches them must die! And when you are dust, the same curse shall rest upon your bones if they are touched by others than those who rightfully possess them."

The whisper died to a mumble. "The nun was impaled upon this very roof top. And that night Pierre Dussault died as he lay sleeping—strangled!"

The lamp guttered and the flame flickered in cold fingers of air. From outside came the moan and whine of the storm. But inside the tense silence was broken only by Jake Rood's bitter curses as he stared down at the hand that had touched the skull.

"It was your father's wish," the old woman said, "that Mad Will was to have the skull and bones, if you did not want them. Mad Will does not share your horror. He loves them."

There was a hint of softness in the idiot's blank eyes as he stared at the skull and bones. Yes, he wanted them—as a child wants a plaything.

"We'll keep them," Stromm said grimly.

"Then that is settled," Anna Vrooman mumbled. "You may take them now or leave them in this safe tonight."

"Leave 'em there on the table," Eric Stromm decided firmly. "Never mind the safe. But let me tell you something—all of you." His words, as he whirled to face his companions, were brittle and sharp, each with a hard, cold ring. "There's no way for these bones to leave this island except when I sail after the storm has gone, or when Peter Radcliff leaves by the next steamer. If by any chance they should disappear, I promise you I'll pull this island apart bit by bit until I find them and the man who took them. And it will be that person"—his hands closed convulsively—"who will die then!"

Radcliff was amazed by the passion displayed by his half-brother. He could not conceive how anyone could want those bones, except perhaps as gruesome curios. Certainly not to the extent of promising such violence if they were stolen. But he knew he would not touch them himself now, under any consideration. Eric Stromm must have some reason behind his violence, but also behind it was all the man's bodily strength and his cold, calculating intelligence.

**W**HEN the group had wordlessly broken up, Peter Radcliff went to his room. Pacing thoughtfully back and forth, the mystery of old Ely's death was concerning him more than the mystery of why his father's undoubtedly addled brain had picked on a pirate's bones for a macabre legacy.

Radcliff realized now that he had come thousands of miles on a wild goose chase, but he was philosophical about it. The journey, and his stay on the mystery island added to the sum total of his experience.

But the handy man's death was something that bewildered him, an-

noyed him, because he could find no logical explanation for it. Anna Vrooman's eerie story of Pierre Dussault found no lodging place in his steady-going mind. He could not credit the old man's death to a ghost.

How, then, had old Ely died? If murdered, who had killed him? And if murder had been done, the murderer was still on this island, free to strike again. Who could it be, in this spot where there were so few human souls? And if another victim *had* been selected, who would be next to die? And why?

Someone rapped softly on the door, and Radcliff opened it. Jake Rood, white-faced, slid into the room. As he closed the door, Radcliff saw the fear in the man; saw it in the white-hot eyes, the twitching mouth, and in the oily sheen of cold sweat on the cheeks. Fear was crawling through the man, reducing him to abjection.

"What is it, man?" Radcliff asked. "What's eating you?"

"I touched it," Rood whispered hoarsely, staring down at his hand. He held his fingers as if they had been injured. "I touched the skull! I can feel my fingers burning!"

"Rot!" Radcliff snapped. "Are you such a sap as to believe an old woman's tale?"

"What about old Ely? Dussault must have strangled him!"

"I don't know what killed old Ely, but I'm damned sure it wasn't a ghost. Eric Stromm isn't worried about the ghost, either. Or about touching those bones—himself."

"Stromm!" the small man cried. "That devil! You think he's a man, but you don't know him!"

"Why do you stay with him, then?"

"He took my ship, that's why!" Rood shot out angrily. "I built her with these two hands, and that devil took her—tricked me out of her! I'd die if I couldn't feel that ship beneath my feet. So he lets me stay, to laugh at me. I'll kill him for that! I'll kill him!"

Radcliff's eyes narrowed. The loss of a ship did not seem enough to fill a man with such murderous hate. And there was hot, killing lust in Jake

Rood's face. What else could be behind this? But the recognition that Stromm's mate was a potential murderer gave Radcliff food for thought. Murder had been done on this island, and. . . .

"Why did you come here?" he asked abruptly.

"To warn you against him," Rood said in deadly earnestness. "And to tell you to remember this: He wanted the pirate's shin bone that his father left him—God alone knows why. If he wants one, he'll want 'em all. And he'll get 'em, if he has to kill us all to do it!"

"All right," Radcliff said. "I'll remember it."

"And there's one thing more." Jake Rood turned quickly and went to the door. "If you don't see me again you'll know Eric Stromm did for me!"

### CHAPTER III

#### *Dussault's Work*

**R**ADCLIFF'S face was taut in puzzlement as he stared after the departing Rood. And suddenly, perhaps because the mate had shown such fear of the pirate's bones, he wanted to see them again.

The upper hallway was a pit of blackness as he opened the door. He stood outside it a moment, then moved to the stairway, following his flashlight's beam down the winding length.

On the first landing he stopped short. He could feel eyes watching him, could almost feel them pricking his skin. But his probing light showed nothing but blank walls and empty darkness, so he went on.

At the bottom step, a soft rustle of movement behind him stopped him again. He swung the light back up the stairs. For the briefest moment he saw the huge bulk of Jan Vrooman disappearing. Vrooman had passed him on the stairs! Why? And why had he not spoken? Upon what errand was he bent?

Radcliff gave it up and went on to the room that held the skull.

The fire had died to glowing embers. One lamp guttered and smoked, throwing a pale, yellow light through a blackened chimney. That light fell upon the sick whiteness of the skull and bones; and upon the hunched figure of Mad Will Carrick.

The man with the darkened mind was crooning to the bones as he caressed them with slim fingers. The ghoulis love of such gruesome things angered Radcliff, chilled him, even though he knew the man to have less than a child's intelligence.

"Get away from there, you!" he snapped.

Mad Will looked up, startled, moved quickly away to a darkened corner.

"I didn't hurt 'em," he muttered. "They're so smooth, they feel so good against my hands."

Radcliff shrugged. There was no point in upbraiding this poor soul, but Radcliff could not help his revulsion.

"You'd better get to bed, Will," he advised. "It's past midnight."

Mad Will's teeth showed oddly through his black beard as he grinned.

"Yes, to bed," he mumbled. "I'll go now."

In the doorway he stopped and looked back. His eyes flickered on Radcliff's face, and the New England man felt a sudden cold chill along his spine. Then the idiot's eyes moved to the skull and bones.

"They're so pretty," Mad Will said plaintively, and vanished.

Suddenly in the deep silence of the room Radcliff again felt that sensation of impending danger he had felt before on this night. He sensed violence gathering, as if there were a tension in the very air, a breathless waiting.

At a low, but shrill burst of laughter behind him, he jerked around. The sightless eyes of Anna Vrooman stared at him. She had come silently in her wheel chair through a door behind him. The rasp of her senile laughter set his nerves sawing.

**S**HE stopped laughing suddenly.

"Peter Radcliff?" she said.

"Yes."

"And the other was Mad Will. No need to tell me. He is the only one who touches the bones and lives. It is odd the protection God gives to his innocents."

"I'm glad you came," Radcliff said to her hurriedly. "I want to talk to you. There is much I would like to know."

"I know, I know," she cackled. "That's why I'm here. Sit down."

Radcliff moved over to a bench, wondering. What was this old woman's strange clairvoyant power? But looking in her incredibly aged face, he instinctively knew there was nothing she could do that would surprise him.

"You want to know why your father left you this skull, and why you never heard from him before his death," she said, cannily answering the question uppermost in his mind. "The last is explained in a few words. Your father's strength was great, and once, in your own country—and his—unfortunately a man was killed. So he could not go back to you, though he spoke of you often.

"As for the skull, your father had a good reason for leaving you that. He believed in Dussault, if you do not. And he learned more of the story of the bloody one than I told, but which I know. It is, too, the story of another nun who left a dying message. She had taken pity on the pirate who must wander through eternity.

"That message of hers said that at the end of a certain time—which will be just a year from now—that if the skull and shin bones of Dussault the Bloody were taken from their grave and pulverized, scattered to the four winds of heaven and over the great seas, that the spirit of Pierre Dussault would be released from bondage. And it was further said that in gratitude the pirate's released spirit would bring wealth to whoever pulverized his bones.

"Long ago your father dug up those bones and preserved them, waiting for the time to pass when he could release Dussault's wandering soul. He died himself before the time was up. In willing the bones to you, his children,

he had a twofold reason. One reason—as I, too, know full well—was that if Dussault's vengeful spirit no longer wandered the face of the earth, that his killings on this Island of Blood would cease."

She paused, and sighed, shaking her head with its witchlike tangle of stringy white hair.

"But I shall miss him—I shall miss him. . . ."

"And the other reason?" prompted Radcliff.

The old woman's cackle came shrilly. "Ah, I thought that would interest you! What else should it be except that your father, having no fortune of his own to leave you, should wish to pass on to you the promise of Dussault to bring wealth to whoever should release him?" She nodded, her lips twisting in an unpleasant grimace. "Yes, that is the message I have for you. 'Tell the children to keep the bones for exactly a year, then break them in a thousand pieces. Dussault will reward them.'"

Radcliff scowled. What nonsense was this? How could three grisly bones, "to release a long-dead pirate's spirit" bring wealth? More than ever Radcliff was sure that his father had lost his mind, ever to have believed such a witch's tale.

**I**N a way, though, the swift thought flashed to him, this might be an ex-

planation of his half-brother's passionate outburst. White men and brown, in these unpredictable islands, were unreasonably superstitious, and it could be that Eric Stromm, knowing his father set store by those skeletal relics, even though he might not know why, meant to carry out the elder Radcliff's intentions in regard to them to the letter, come what may.

It could well be that Stromm himself firmly believed tosh like that. He might believe that the bones of Dussault the Bloody could bring wealth as a reward for a released spirit.

"Maybe it's just as well your father had nothing else to leave," Anna Vrooman said acidly. "If he had, that rotten son of mine would have stolen it, as he would steal the bones now, if he knew the story I've told you, chancing the death that would surely come to him for touching them. That is why your father wanted me to tell each of you in secret what I have just told you. And remember this! Jan Vrooman is cursed with greed. His hands are stained with human blood. There is nothing his black heart would not do for gold. Remember—and be on your guard!"

Radcliff was distinctly shocked at the utter coldness with which she damned her own son. But it was all in a line with the evil that hovered everywhere over this hellish island.

[Turn Page]



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And here was another man who *could* have been guilty of the old handy man's death. A man condemned as a murderer out of the mouth of his own mother!

Peter Radcliff was suddenly aware that he might not have been there as far as Anna Vrooman was concerned. Her attention had shifted beyond him. And as he noted that, he felt an inexplicable coldness creep into the room. The skin of his back tingled, creeping up to lift his hair. Something unseen was standing beside him! He was painfully conscious of it, even as he sternly tried to tell himself that it was nervous reaction, imagination. But the woman spoke to it!

"Dussault!" she chuckled. "You are restless tonight. I know—I know. You can't be still when the wind is howling. I can see it in your eyes. They are hot and burning. And your hands—you can't keep those clutching strong fingers still. I know what is coming. Why don't you get about it? Why do you stand there working your great fingers? There is a throat waiting. Find it! Squeeze it! I know you will. I have seen it so many times before. Ah! You are going. I will wait then, a little while, to hear it. . . ."

Her voice faded and she waited, straining as if to catch some sound she knew would come. Radcliff was frozen; sweating. He damned himself for believing. What the woman said was utter nonsense!

And yet he knew that he was waiting, too!

Tense moments later, the woman threw her head back on its scrawny neck, and filled the room with the sound of her cackling laughter—coldly gripping in its implication.

"It is done!" she said. "Dussault has killed him!"

"Who?" Radcliff managed to shout from his tight, choking throat.

The woman nodded slowly. "Yes, you felt it, too. Dussault was free to kill him. He touched the skull. Jake Rood is dead!"

"It can't be! It's too insane!"

"Go, then. You'll find him strangled."

Radcliff leaped to his feet, trembling. His very sanity depended on finding out if Jake Rood were living or dead. Anna Vrooman's high-pitched, evil laughter followed him as he ran from the room and pounded up the stairs.

**J**AKE ROOD'S door was closed and locked. Radcliff pounded on it with frantic fists, shouting, but hearing nothing but the echoes of his own voice.

Furiously he threw his weight against the door, again and again. It crashed open and threw him stumbling into the room. And on the bed he saw it—twisted, grinning. The tortured body of Jake Rood. Strangled as he had lain sleeping!

Blind panic held Radcliff rooted to the spot. The roaring of his heart, pounding in his brain, the rasp of his breath, worked in rhythmic cadence with the wind and storm hammering at the windows.

Just as Anna Vrooman had predicted, he had found Jake Rood. Dussault, she said, had killed him; had squeezed the breath of life from his throat.

But that could not be—it *must* not be! Dussault had been dead for over a century. He had no body! His hands were dust long ago! Someone else had done it. Rood had said, "If you don't see me again, you'll know Eric Stromm did for me!" But Jan Vrooman had been in the hall. . . .

One of those two had killed Jake Rood, Radcliff thought fiercely. He didn't know why or how; but they must have. For ghosts could not kill!

Radcliff's light pinned the corpse in a white glare, showed the utter horror the man had known before he died. His naked body was bent; straining. His heels and head were drawn back in a tight bow of agony. His eyes bulged grotesquely, his mouth was stretched and grinning; and his skin was dark with suffocation and with sweat. Yes, he had been strangled. But there were no marks on his throat!

And then Radcliff saw the glint of metal in one of Rood's clawed hands.



Quickly he bent his light upon it—and felt sickness surge through him again.

It was a small, round disk of silver that Radcliff had last seen on a cord suspended around Valerie Galloway's slender throat. How had it come to be in a dead man's hand?

"What's happened here now?" a voice snapped from the doorway.

Radcliff swung his light toward the door, revealing Eric Stromm's big figure. Again the last words of Jake Rood drummed through Peter Radcliff's mind.

"Why are you here?" he asked tightly.

Faint amusement flickered in Stromm's eyes. "I heard you yelling. God knows, you made enough noise to wake the dead."

"No, Stromm," Radcliff whispered, "I didn't wake the dead. No one will ever wake Jake Rood again."

"Jake Rood—dead!" Another voice exploded behind Eric Stromm.

Radcliff swung his light on the heavy, bulging-eyed face of Jan Vrooman.

"Where were you, Vrooman, when this happened?" he curtly demanded.

Vrooman ignored the question. His throat was working painfully as he choked out:

"Was he—strangled?"

"Yes," Radcliff grated. "Strangled."

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## CHAPTER IV

### *The Island Police*

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**T**HE two men entered the room and stood looking down at the twisted body. Stromm's face was impassive, but in Vrooman's face was a conflict of emotion. Fear was there, but beneath it Radcliff saw a hint of hardness that would defy fear.

"Dussault—killed him!" Vrooman whispered.

"Rot!" Radcliff almost yelled. "I'm not crazy! A man killed Jake Rood—not a ghost!"

"What man?" Stromm asked casually.

Radcliff turned on him savagely. "You might have!"

"Yes." Stromm's voice was dangerously soft. "I might have. I had reason to. But what makes you think I did?"

"I saw Rood before he died. The last thing he said was: 'If you don't see me again, you'll know Eric Stromm did for me.'"

Stromm moved close to Radcliff, towered above him.

"Listen to me," he said, his voice still low. "Jake Rood has been trying to kill me for three years. Since he lost his ship to me—fairly! I should have killed him for my own safety, but I didn't. Understand that!"

Radcliff said nothing. He had only a dead man's word against a live one's. There was no definite proof Stromm had killed Rood; no proof that he had not.

"Where were you going when you passed me on the stairs?" Radcliff asked Vrooman. "Why didn't you speak, instead of sneaking by?"

"I didn't feel like talking," Vrooman said sullenly.

"Then where were you when Rood was killed?" Radcliff again insisted.

"With Stromm, here."

"Is that right, Stromm?" Radcliff shot out.

"It might be," Stromm said quietly. "I don't know when Rood was killed. Vrooman was with me for ten minutes before we heard you yelling."

Radcliff held his own voice low with an effort. "All right, we'll leave it this way for now. But remember this: Old Ely and Jake Rood were not killed by a ghost. I suspect you both. If one of you is the killer, you'd better kill me next. I'll get you if you don't!"

He stalked out of the room into the hall.

Outside Valerie's door the silver disk he had taken from Rood's dead hand seemed to burn against his palm. And he was suddenly afraid of what he might discover. In only a few hours this strange girl had touched the inmost depths of his being as had no other woman he had ever known before.

**H**E knocked, and heard her voice: "Come in."

As with difficulty he shoved open the door, a blast of air struck him in the face. The wind and storm were blowing into this room through an open window. And the girl was crouched beside it in the shadows.

The full sweep of the wind caught her, caressed her, tossed her hair. As Radcliff closed the window he saw the pallor of her face and her wide, frightened eyes.

"Jake Rood is dead," she whispered awedly.

"How did you know?"

"I could feel it."

Radcliff did not remark on that peculiar answer.

"Who killed him?" he asked, his voice low.

He saw the jerkiness of her tight nerves, but she was quiet as she sat down, looking distantly out the window.

"Perhaps, Dussault—" she finally began hesitantly, but Radcliff abruptly interrupted her.

"You don't really think that. A living man did that murder. I believe you know his name."

The girl looked deeply into his eyes. "No," she said. "I don't."

Radcliff forced his eyes away from hers. He turned his palm upward, cupping the silver disk before her.

"This," he said softly, "was between Jake Rood's fingers. I found it just after he was killed."

"Oh!" she gasped. "That's mine!"

"I know it," Radcliff answered quietly.

Her eyes lifted in a quick motion to search his taut face, probing behind his worried eyes.

"Do you think I killed him?"

"I don't want to!" he said fiercely. "Tell me how it got there—in Rood's hand."

She shook her head slowly. "I don't know, Peter. I lost it yesterday. He might have found it."

"Where did you lose it?"

"I don't know. It might have been anywhere. Look at me, Peter—tell me you believe me."

Radcliff looked steadily into the

depths of her eyes. He saw the long, shadowing lashes, the clean slope of her cheek and the curving softness of her mouth. He loved her—he knew it, then, as surely as he knew the sun would rise tomorrow. And he knew, too, that she was aware of it, from the look in her eyes, the faint flush seeping into the smoothness of her cheeks.

"I do believe you," he said softly, and handed her the disk.

Neither of them spoke then for moments. Finally, Radcliff broke the silence to tell her of Jake Rood's last words, and what Anna Vrooman had said about her son.

"It's true," Valerie said. "You cannot trust Jan Vrooman. But Anna Vrooman is no better than her son. She pretends to think of nothing but ghosts and curses, but actually she is a greedy, vicious old woman."

Radcliff's brows pulled down in puzzlement. Three people were on his list now—Stromm, Vrooman, and the old woman—any one of whom could have conceived the deaths of Jake Rood and the handy man. Still, he lacked the motive and the method.

Radcliff felt confused and desperate. But the girl was calm, though fear lay behind her eyes. The silence was broken by an imperative pounding on the front door downstairs.

**R**ADCLIFF leaped to his feet and made for the door. Who could be demanding entrance at this time of night? Besides, there was no one on this island except the people inside the house.

Jan Vrooman was already at the front door when Radcliff reached it. Three men were standing on the threshold—men whose slickers glistened with rain in the light of the lanterns they held. They pushed in without invitation.

One was a white man. Crowding at his heels were two brown-faced Kanaka seamen.

"I'm Basset of the police," the white man growled, pushing his hat back off a long, crooked-jawed face, exposing a pointed nose.

"Police?" Vrooman cried. "Why?" "John Radcliff's dead, ain't he?"

Basset growled. "And the government knows he was lousy with dough. We're here to get the government's share before the heirs get out of the islands."

Radcliff chuckled with ironic humor.

"You made your trip for nothing," he said.

Basset fixed him with bright, black, challenging eyes.

"Why?" he snapped.

"Come on, I'll show you," Radcliff said laconically, and led them to the room where the skull and bones gleamed in evil whiteness in the light of smoking lamps.

"That," Radcliff said, "is our legacy—the skull and bones of Dussault the Bloody."

Basset whirled on Radcliff, his face frozen and wintry.

"Listen, you," he snarled. "You can't get away with that! Everybody in the islands knows John Radcliff was rich. Where's his stuff?"

Anger flowed through Radcliff.

"There's nothing else," he said tightly. "He left this island to Mrs. Vrooman and her son."

"That's right," Vrooman put in.

"That's all Radcliff left. If he had any money we don't know anything about it."

Basset shucked out of his slicker, as if the sight of his uniform would force the truth out of these men. And Radcliff looked at that uniform amazed. It covered the longest, thinnest body he had ever seen—just barely. It was much too small. The Kanakas backed Basset silently, their large brown eyes fixed intently on Vrooman and Radcliff.

"Get this, you two," Basset snarled. "You can't play smart with me. I'm the law! I know John Radcliff left a wad of dough, so we're staying till we get the government's split!"

Radcliff shrugged. "Suit yourself. What I've told you is true. I ought to know. I'm Peter Radcliff, John Radcliff's son. This is Jan Vrooman, another of the heirs."

"Where's the rest of 'em?"

"Sleeping," Vrooman put in hurriedly. "You can see them in the morning. Now, perhaps you'd like a

room. You've had a hard trip."

"Yeah, give us a place to sleep."

**A** SUDDEN thought occurred to Radcliff.

"When did you reach the island?" he asked.

There was a sharp question in the look Basset shot at him, then he answered hastily:

"Tonight, of course. We come in on the other side of the island."

Vrooman hurried away with the three men, and Radcliff went to his room. He sat down on the bed, wondering. He had considerable food for thought.

He knew enough about the island and about sailing to know that it was not possible for a boat to reach the island in this storm. That meant Basset had lied! He had been on the island since before the storm began that afternoon.

That was a puzzler. Why had a member of the police lied? And another question: Was it possible, after all, that John Radcliff had been rich? With a fortune large enough to be a legend in the islands? If so, where was it?

Radcliff was glad that neither he nor Vrooman had said anything to the police about the two corpses in the house. After this disrupting night, there would be time enough for that in the morning. As dumb a member of the police as Basset would have routed the whole house out for the night. Maybe it was not exactly ethical not to report the murders immediately, but somehow Radcliff had an instinctive feeling that Basset was not too ethical himself.

At last Peter Radcliff slowly undressed and crawled between the covers. Something pricked him and he hunted around in the blankets until he found it—a small sliver that looked like a tiny splinter of wood, or a thorn. He threw it from him in tired anger. Only moments more he was sleeping the sleep of exhaustion.

He was jerked out of that sleep by the sudden thunder of a gun. A shot—followed by a hoarse scream of horror!

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 CHAPTER V
 

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*Had a Ghost Killed?*


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**K**ICKING back the blankets, Peter Radcliff slid his legs into his trousers, caught up his gun and lunged for the door. His long, hammering stride took him down the stairs, along the hall to the room of the skull and bones.

His gun was tight in his sweating hand as he plunged through the open door into the dimly lighted chamber.

Two people were there—the two Kanaka seamen. One lay face down, spilling his blood across the bare floor. Just beyond his fingertips was the cold brightness of a foot-long knife. The other Kanaka crouched against the far wall, staring with glazed eyes at his lifeless countryman.

Between the two, grinning in evil enjoyment on the floor, lay the skull of Dussault the Bloody.

It took less than a second for Radcliff to interpret this static scene—and that was too long. As he spun to face the man he knew to be behind him, that man grated:

“Stand as you are!”

In the hands of that man was a rock-steady Luger.

“Stromm!” Radcliff hotly accused. “You killed the Kanaka?”

Eric Stromm’s eyes were black with rage now. His face was a flinty, carven mask.

“Yes,” he admitted softly.

“Good God!” Radcliff choked. “Why?”

Stromm had no time to answer before they heard the sound of bare feet racing toward them, and the trouser-clad, scarecrow figure of Basset exploded through the doorway. Basset nearly dropped the gun he clutched when he saw the dead Kanaka; did drop it, when Stromm shoved the Luger in his back, with a curt command.

“Steady,” Stromm rapped. “One is enough, but I’ll make it two, if you crowd me.” He prodded Basset with the gun. “Over against the wall and

stay there.”

Basset walked stiffly to the side of the crouched Kanaka. He did not speak—but his eyes spoke for him as he fixed them on Stromm’s cold face. They promised death.

When Basset finally broke his silence, his voice was chill and rasping. “You know what this means. You shot a constable! You’ll hang for that!”

“Yes,” Stromm admitted coldly. “I shot him, but I won’t hang. That boy was stealing the skull. I caught him, and he drew a knife. I killed him in self-defense.”

Radcliff grunted in astonishment. The Kanaka had tried to steal the skull! Where was the sense to that?

Stromm snapped an order to the cringing Kanaka beside Basset.

“Put that skull back on the table!”

The Kanaka’s eyes bulged in fear.

“No!” he gasped. “Not touch it! Dussault. . . .”

Calmly Stromm centered the Luger on the Kanaka’s forehead. His finger tightened on the trigger. Two fears struggled in the brown man’s contorted face. But the certain death in the menacing gun overcame the more distant curse of Dussault.

The Kanaka dived for the skull, picked it up and plunked it down on the table. Then he backed away, rubbing his hands as if to wipe away the curse.

Stromm handed his gun to Radcliff and faced Basset empty-handed.

“Now,” he said quietly, “you can take me, if you think you’re good enough.”

**B**ASSET glared at Stromm with hate-filled eyes, wanting desperately to accept the challenge; yet afraid of the cold deadliness in the sturdy sea captain’s attitude.

Abruptly Basset snapped a command at the Kanaka, and they both stalked past Stromm.

“Let this be a warning,” Stromm said, nodding toward the dead Kanaka. “The same will happen to anyone who touches Dussault’s bones.”

The look that Basset shot at

Stromm out of his black eyes carried all the deadliness of a cobra. Bassett held a terrific hate for Stromm and Radcliff knew that from now on his half-brother's life would be in constant danger.

After they had gone, Stromm turned to Radcliff and grinned at him. "It gets better as it goes along, doesn't it?"

Radcliff was speechless, trying to fathom the mind behind that grin. He could not understand such a man—one who seemed to love danger, who could kill and accept the threat of death, and grin. He must be made of cold-drawn steel.

Stromm was chuckling as Radcliff silently left the room. The sound fell with a chill implication on the New Englander's ears. Once more in his room, he faced the multitude of questions that flooded his mind, with one or more starkly in the foreground. Death was in this house; death striking rapidly and mercilessly, and without apparent reason!

Why on earth should the Kanaka try to steal the skull? That question persisted, and then came those other questions that were constantly milling in his brain, jibing at him, unanswerable. Why had Ely and Rood died? And how?

The death of the Kanaka he could understand—the flaring of a violent temper at the threat of a throwing knife, a roaring gun, life spilling out in a stream of blood. But he could not understand the deaths of Ely and Rood.

They must have died as victims of some very real danger that menaced them all. A danger all the more dire, because unknown. What if old Anna Vrooman and the others had been right, after all, and there was but one answer—Dussault?

Desperately Radcliff cursed himself for entertaining the thought even for a moment. A ghost that killed—*bah!* And yet, what *had* killed them? And how, in the name of God, had they been killed?

on the edge of his bed, his face pale and drawn as each moment an instinctive knowledge grew within him. This murder carnival was not over! It might only have begun. That desperate nagging insistence spoke as clearly in his consciousness as though it had been a clarion voice.

Death was about to strike again! Peter Radcliff could not rid himself of that conviction.

Who would die, or how, he did not know. Finally, he got up stiffly, drew on a coat and went downstairs.

The storm had slackened, though the sky was still gray and overcast. The wind still whipped against the house with a sullen fury.

Leaning against that wind, Radcliff followed the path toward the stable. He meant to get a horse and search the island, particularly finding out if there was a police boat on the other side.

In front of the stable, the pathway was soft and deep in yellow mud. Radcliff picked his way through it to the stable door, no sound about him except the steady drip of water. He slowed, his muscles tense. Something had happened here! He could feel it! Sweating with the sensation that somewhere near here violence had had its ugly way, he stepped through the doorway and moved down a short corridor.

Another door barred his way. He opened it slowly, apprehension suddenly aflame. And it was justified by what he saw.

Mad Will Carrick was lying on the floor!

Radcliff leaped to Mad Will. The slender stick of a garrote lay tight against the back of the helpless idiot's neck, a cord was buried deep in his throat. Radcliff hastily loosened it.

Mad Will's face was already turning blue, his tongue pushing out between his teeth. But his chest heaved, and he drew in a rasping breath as Radcliff turned him over.

His eyes opened and there was abject fear in them as he looked up at Radcliff. He sat upright, scrambled to his feet and backed away against the wall. Radcliff's heart was torn

**T**HE first gray light of morning found him still crouched stiffly

with pity for the harmless, child-minded man as Mad Will clawed at his throat, hungrily sucking air.

"Who did it, Will?" Radcliff asked sharply.

The man only stared blankly. Radcliff had not expected an answer, had not expected the man to know. A garrotter attacks from behind, throwing the loop over the victim's head and drawing it tight with a twist of the stick.

**P**PETER RADCLIFF'S eyes shot around the room. It was small, musty, with a bare board floor. And on the floor was the yellow mud of the pathway outside, marking the would-be killer's footprints!

Mad Will quickly recovered, and Radcliff told him he wanted a horse. Mad Will shook his head.

"Can't," he said hoarsely. "Horses sick."

"What's the matter with them?" Radcliff demanded.

Mad Will turned and shuffled out, motioning Radcliff to follow. He led him to the stalls of two horses.

Radcliff saw immediately that the animals were much too sick to be used. They stood with heads hanging low; thin, bony and tired.

"Must have eaten some weeds," Mad Will said vaguely. "I don't know."

Radcliff frowned irritably. There could be no search of the island without horses. He left the stable and went back toward the house, with Mad Will following him, doglike. Rounding a turn in the path, Radcliff jerked to a frozen halt, his eyes bulging at what lay sprawled in the path before him.

The second Kanaka constable—dead!

Radcliff was abruptly conscious that he felt very queer. The muscles at the corners of his jaws began to crawl. The sensation spread over his body until all his flesh was writhing and tingling. His surroundings seemed remote and unimportant. Vaguely, he understood that something was wrong with him. He was all wrong! And then he began laughing.

A short, sharp cacchination at

first; then foolish, innane laughter seized his whole body and convulsed it. Everybody was dying! Wherever he went he found a body. It was uproariously funny!

The sound of his own laughter finally pierced his understanding. In a remote way he knew that it sounded hollow and foolish, dimly wondered if his eyes were vacant, his mouth loose and drooling. This thing was driving him insane!

Fear that was bright and horrible ran through him, scalding away the madness that clutched at his brain. Sweating and trembling, he fought his way back from the borderline of insanity.

Standing spraddle-legged in the pathway, Peter Radcliff was suddenly weak with the horror of the experience he had just undergone.

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## CHAPTER VI

### *Can This Be Madness?*

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**G**GRADUALLY Peter Radcliff's senses came back to him. His body stopped its tingling. His mind grew clear, and the fustiness of a borderline madness was replaced with a clean, hot rage.

The Kanaka on the pathway had been stabbed only moments ago. The haft of the knife protruded from between his shoulder blades. Blood still bubbled freely around the blade. Radcliff himself had passed this way not five minutes ago. The Kanaka had died so recently that his killer was bound to be close.

Radcliff plunged on toward the house at a stumbling run. Mad Will raced after him like a fear-stricken animal.

As he reached the porch, Peter Radcliff swung a hurried glance over the grounds. And then went rigid. Near the head of the long stairway that led downward to the small harbor, a man leaped out of the pathway and dodged into the bush.

Radcliff stopped short. Best to wait right here. That man would come

to the house before long, and Peter Radcliff was much interested in knowing who he was.

Again through his brain buzzed the maddening inevitable questions: Who was this island murderer? Why did he kill? And how had he strangled two of his victims without a sign of it on their throats—different from the attempt made on Mad Will? The garrote and the throat marks were plain enough in his case.

Most important of all, *who* had this crazy killer selected as his next victim? Since Radcliff did not know the reason for the murders, he could not even make a guess at that. And most puzzling of all, of course, was—*why?*

Even supposing the motive was to gain the fortune which John Radcliff was supposed to have left—a fortune which Radcliff considered a myth—the killer would gain nothing by murdering those who had died. They were not heirs.

Presently Eric Stromm broke into the clearing in front of the house. Radcliff stiffened. Stromm. . . .

Then Jan Vrooman hove in sight from a different path, and the two came on together. Radcliff drew a quivering breath. Either of these two might have garroted Mad Will and stabbed the Kanaka. And Radcliff had already suspected them of the other murders.

And then Basset moved out of the undergrowth, his long, bobbing stride bringing him close to Stromm and Vrooman. Basset, too? But surely the man would not kill his own constable!

Vrooman and Stromm muttered rough greetings as they approached the porch. Stromm's eyebrows lifted questioningly at sight of Radcliff's taut face.

"What's the trouble, Radcliff?" he drawled. "You look like you've seen a ghost."

"That other Kanaka is dead on the path there," Radcliff said shortly. "He was stabbed a few minutes ago."

Basset's long face twisted in sudden fury. His black eyes flamed as he glared at Stromm and Vrooman.

"Damn you!" he grated. "If you've

killed John, I'll—"

Abruptly he swung away, lurched down the path, before Radcliff had a chance to tell him of the other two killings for him to investigate when he got over his own murderous rage enough to attend to them.

Stromm, watching, repeated, "It gets better and better."

**H**IS face was contemptuously placid, but Vrooman's eyes were hard and glittering, a strange contrast to his fear-loosened mouth.

As Radcliff told them about the attempt on Mad Will's life, he noted that the shoes of both men were covered with the same yellow mud that had been on the floor of Mad Will's room. And that in the shadowed mind of the man who crouched behind him, as though for protection, was a plain fear of Eric Stromm. That was shown in Mad Will's darting eyes.

"So," Stromm said slowly, as though he had read the accusation in his half-brother's mind, "you think I did it."

"I didn't say so. But I want to know where you were."

"I was down at the dock to see about my ship. That was a bad blow last night."

"And you?" Radcliff shot at Vrooman.

"Just walking around," Vrooman answered sullenly.

The answers he might have expected, Radcliff thought wryly. Suddenly he was sick of the whole business. This damnable island was inundated with violence, blood and death—and he was powerless against it!

"All I have to say, Stromm," he said tiredly, "is this: Four people have been killed and another attacked, all because of the mistaken notion that our father left a fortune. At least, that's what I gather from all I can make out. Though how the deaths that have occurred could have anything to do with either finding a fortune or benefiting by it is, I confess, something beyond me.

"But I, for one, am tired of fighting, mentally and physically. The bones our father did leave are worthless. At least they are to me. Since there is

nothing here of value why don't we leave the bones and go away from this hellish bloody island before one of us is killed?"

Stromm's lips parted in the same cold grin. "Not me. I'm standing pat. My father left me a trust. I won't neglect it. You can go if you want to. So can Valerie—if she's afraid."

"We can't without your boat," Radcliff snapped, "and you know it! The steamer won't touch here for a week or more."

"Afraid you'll have to stay, then," Stromm said. "To the bloody end. I'm not leaving." And again he grinned at Radcliff. "Is that all?"

"Yes," Radcliff grated.

Stromm laughed softly. "We'd better get busy, then. We've got four corpses to bury as soon as we can get Basset to say the word."

Radcliff only nodded, but a sullen throb of anger filled him as he and Mad Will followed Stromm through the doorway. Jan Vrooman had already slipped away into the house.

They found Jan Vrooman talking to his mother, and Stromm asked Vrooman to lend a hand at the grave digging. Anna Vrooman rubbed her bony hands together and cackled.

"Dig eight graves," she advised with evil joy on her wrinkled face. "Four more will die before another day is here. . . ." Her voice trailed off in weird laughter.

Radcliff's voice was thick. "Who are the others?"

"It might be any one of us," she cackled, and would say no more.

**T**HE day was gone before the graves were finished and the bodies of Ely and Rood and the two Kanakas were placed in them.

It seemed odd that Basset remained so silent. And that the representative of the island police had made only a casual inspection of the strangely murdered Ely and Rood. Of course, it was impossible to wait for a doctor to perform an autopsy—a corpse cannot long remain unburied in the tropics. But it did seem that Basset should make some effort to find

out how they had died. Instead, he would not even speak; only watched everybody with fierce black eyes that seemed to threaten them all with death.

The first shadows of night found Radcliff in his own room changing his wet and muddy clothes. All day he had labored at grave digging in the constant downpour. And now that night was here again, he could not rid himself of the feeling that the nightmare of violence would resume its reign of terror.

Anna Vrooman had said four more would die. She had not been wrong yet.

Bending down to lace his shoes Radcliff saw a splinter on the floor and remembered that one had pricked him the night before. He saw it more plainly now, estimating it to be an inch-long bit of wood, with both ends glistening with some sort of coating.

Radcliff moved to the bed and turned back the blankets. In the nap of the two inner ones, he found three more splinters. His eyes narrowed thoughtfully.

If the coating on the points were some deadly poison, it would be a clever method of killing a man while he slept. And if the poison were such that it paralyzed the chest muscles, the victim would appear to have died of suffocation—strangled by the ghost of Dussault the Bloody!

Turning, he rushed through the door and to the room in which Jake Rood had been killed. In the blankets of Rood's bed, he found fully a half dozen of the same splinters!

That seemed definite proof that the splinters had caused Jake Rood's death. For a moment he was exultant with this discovery. Then his mind balked.

He, Radcliff, had been pricked by a splinter, but he had not died!

Reluctantly he was forced to admit the splinters had nothing to do with it. That stuff he had seen on them was probably pitch, and the splinters most likely had been collected while the blankets were being aired on the porch roof.

Back in his room, he found Mad



Will waiting with his dried shoes.

"Thanks, Will," Radcliff said, wondering if Mad Will was going to be on his hands from now on, because he had saved the simple fellow's life.

"You can wait here, Will," he said. "I'll be back shortly. Lock the door, if you're afraid."

## CHAPTER VII

### *A Message from Dussault*

**R**ADCLIFF took his gun and flashlight, and as he went down the stairway, probing each foot with the light's beams, he was aware that he was repeating his movements of the night before. And his reason was the same. He wanted to see the skull and bones.

There had to be a motive, he told himself, for all these murders. And he was wondering if by some long chance the answers could lie in his father's strange bequest. Though for the life of him he still couldn't see anything of value in the grisly relics of a long-dead pirate.

On the landing, he stopped as suddenly as he had before. For again he could feel eyes watching him, boring into his back.

Tightening his grip on his gun, he swung the light in a slow circle about him. Blank, gray walls, stairs above and below, and then, in an alcove—Jan Vrooman!

Vrooman blinked his small eyes. His puffed, square face looked luminous in the light. He stared at Radcliff.

"What are you doing here?" asked Radcliff.

"I'm going to bed," Vrooman said slowly, and turned and went upstairs.

Radcliff watched him out of sight, wondering if the coincidence of meeting Vrooman this night and the night before had any meaning. The coincidence seemed exaggerated when he found Anna Vrooman waiting in the room that held the skull and bones.

"Come in, Peter Radcliff," she said.

Radcliff moved toward her. The light did queer things to the old wom-

an's face; made her blind eyes glow more yellow in the withered sockets, bringing a strange animation to her wrinkled face.

"You need not be afraid," she said, with a caricature of a smile. "We were just talking about you—Dussault and I."

Again Radcliff felt that queer, unpleasant prickling of his skin, seemed to feel the room grow icily cold. Dussault!

The whole situation suddenly enraged him. Last night he had almost allowed this woman to make him believe against his will in the legend of Dussault. She would not do it tonight! Dussault did *not* exist!

The woman laughed. "He does exist—he's standing there beside you."

A fresh chill caught Radcliff. She had known what he was thinking!

The skull and bones glowed luminously in the yellow firelight, seemed to have a luminance of their own. The grinning jaws of the skull suggested hideous laughter. Peter Radcliff stared at it as if hypnotized.

The old woman cackled again. "Why don't you speak? Has fear closed your throat?"

Radcliff's throat was dry and choking.

"Dussault," he croaked hollowly, "is a lie!"

**A**NNA VROOMAN'S evil mirth echoed in the stillness of the room. Radcliff wanted to throttle her, to feel her thin neck between his hands. She was trying to drive him mad!

"Do you hear that, Pierre?" she chortled. "He says you are a lie. Dussault the Bloody a lie!" And again her laughter shattered the silence to brittle fragments.

Radcliff was frozen. In spite of his gritted teeth and the exercise of his firmest will power, he could feel a presence at his side, one to which the old woman spoke. Desperately he fought that realization and his sudden horrible fear.

"Dussault is a lie!" he shouted.

Anna Vrooman turned her head as though watching someone walking to-

ward the door.

"Where are you going?" she asked, and listened. Some answer she seemed to get convulsed her with more laughter—still stranger laughter.

The sound beat against Radcliff's consciousness in surging waves, plucked at his sanity with cold fingers. Once more the black cloud of madness was hovering over him.

Suddenly the coldness was gone from the room. Dussault was gone! As he had gone the night before! Who would die now?

Radcliff shot a glance at the polished skull on which the light danced in evil glee. The thing gripped him, fascinated him. Once that thing of cold, white smoothness had been beneath the warm flesh and blood of the awful Presence whose coldness had just left his side. The long-dead Thing that had once more gone to commit murder.

The woman's laughter had suddenly stopped. Her head had fallen forward. Radcliff moved to her slowly, touched her wrist with a trembling hand. She was dead!

Radcliff turned and ran blindly from the room.

Dussault had killed again. And he was not through! Someone else was dying at this moment. Death—murder—was in all the air, thick, and stifling!

In the hall he collided with Mad Will's trembling figure. The flash-light showed the gibbering fear in the man's face. This poor idiot had sensed it, too! He had known that death was prowling the house. And his fragmentary mind had been capable of only one thought—to seek protection in Radcliff's presence.

Peter Radcliff caught him by the shoulders, shook him.

"Go to Valerie's room!" he cried hoarsely. "Watch her! Let no one near her, do you hear? You're a man—protect her!"

**F**AINTE intelligence flickered briefly in that ugly, bearded face. But Radcliff's orders had stirred Mad Will. Nodding, he turned and began to climb the stairs.

Radcliff knew that he, himself, must do something at once. He must find out where Death had again struck in that evil house!

Gripping his gun, he paused in front of the first door to which he came, and stood there shaking. What lay beyond it?

Holding gun and light ready, he turned the knob and pushed the door. It creaked mournfully as it opened on solid darkness. A flood of cold swept past Radcliff, again sent his scalp to crawling as he forced himself to move into the room.

Darkness like cobwebs spun about his face. The light moved slowly ahead; a long, white, searching finger. The silence was thick, the coldness real and icy. Had Dussault. . . . Yes!

For Jan Vrooman lay on his bed, strangled as he had slept!

Bowed and twisted, his face black and grinning, and his eyes bulging. Death had come to Jan Vrooman as it had to others.

In a flood of sudden terror, Radcliff remembered the ancient woman's certainty that death would come to the house. Her strange laughter that her own unexpected death had stopped. Her son had died—and she had known it!

Then Dussault *had* killed Jan Vrooman! Dussault did exist! He could kill!

Radcliff stood there trembling, his reason slipping, fading from his brain. His throat was working. He whimpered small sounds without meaning. His heart was pounding, almost bursting in a crescendo of pain.

Long moments he stood there frozen in that world of madness. With a supreme effort of will, at last he forced his brain to obedience, but it left him weak and shaking. Slowly he walked to the corpse. He turned the body—and then he found it. A sliver clinging to the flesh of the thigh!

A sharp voice from the doorway abruptly jarred him upright.

"Get 'em up! Don't move!"

Basset of the Island Police!

Radcliff raised his hands to shoulder height, and spoke jerkily.

"You're just in time. Here's another murder!"

"Oh," Basset said, "it's you, the boy scout. I thought I'd run into your mysterious murderer . . . you can put 'em down." He lurched into the room and bent over the dead man. "Gawd!" he whispered. "What killed him?"

"I don't know." Radcliff shrugged, and laconically suggested: "It might have been Dussault."

"Bunk!" Basset snapped, straightening to face Radcliff whose flashlight flickered upward on both their faces.

**B**ASSET was so tall, compared to Radcliff's slightness, that the New Englander's eyes were on a level with the breast pocket of the island policeman. And because of that, something caught Radcliff's eyes and they narrowed.

"You know as well as I do," Basset growled, "that all this stuff about a ghost is baloney. Somebody is trying to scare us out, and—"

Radcliff nodded, his eyes still fixed on Basset's left breast pocket. He was seeing a brown stain on that uniform pocket. In the top of the stain was a small round hole. And that hole had been made by a bullet!

"What did you do with the body?" Radcliff said quietly.

"Huh?" Basset stiffened, tensed. "What you talking about?"

Radcliff's forefinger touched the hole. "That was made by a bullet. The man who wore this uniform when the hole was made was shot through the heart. The brown stain is blood that has not been completely washed out. You killed the man who should be rightfully wearing this uniform!"

Basset backed away slowly, black eyes glaring with the cold glitter of death.

"That's too bad," he snarled. "Too bad—for you—that you're so damned smart!"

Watching the rigid barrel of Basset's gun, Radcliff wondered how he, himself, could be so detached and cool. His mind was clear now, too. He was not afraid.

"I would like to know if you were the killer of the rest of them who've

died here, too," he said coldly.

Basset's mouth curled in a hard, mirthless grin. "All right, I'll tell you. It won't make any difference. Not now. Sure I killed the cop who owned this rig, after I'd heard him say he was on his way here to collect the government's share of your old man's dough. I needed that myself. I'm tired of bein' on the beach. And the Kanaka boys come along to help me get it.

"Stromm killed one Kanaka—you saw that—and I got the other one. This talk of ghosts and all the killing got him scared, especially after Stromm killed his brother when he caught him lifting the skull. He was doing that for me. I wanted to have a look-see at that skull. Maybe there might be some writing, or a map on it, or something, I thought that would give me a line on the dough. I'm still going to look at that skull, but you won't know. You'll be where you won't be worryin' about any hidden shekels when maybe I'm spendin' 'em.

"Anyhow, the Kanaka was goin' to spill his guts to you folks in hopes he could get out of the business alive, so I killed him. But that's the only one I killed here on the island. Somebody else done this to Vrooman. It'll soon be three I killed altogether, though, for now I gotta add you to my list. I—"

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## CHAPTER VIII

### *Bitter Revenge*

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**R**ADCLIFF didn't wait for Basset to finish, though he realized the odds against him, and that there was hardly a chance in a million he would come out of this alive. The policeman impersonator had both guns. His finger was even then closing on a trigger.

Peter Radcliff threw his light straight into Basset's face and dived headlong for the man's legs. Basset cursed, fired, as the light struck him. The bullet whammed over Radcliff's head, the sound echoing thunderously

through the room. But Radcliff clutched the legs tightly, heaved up in one quick motion.

Basset's scarecrow body crashed down like a falling tree. He struck the floor on his shoulders, grunted in pain. Radcliff clawed frantically for the gun, caught the wrist holding it, and cursed in pure desperation at this marauding beachcomber's amazing strength.

Basset heaved, and twisted like a snake. His free hand beat at Radcliff's face, clawed him. His rigid thumb clawed at his antagonist's eyes. Then Basset squirmed from under Radcliff, twisted in a powerful surge to straddle the smaller man's chest. Still Radcliff clung to that gun wrist with the strength of desperation, knowing that grasp of his was all that intervened between him and death.

The fury that burned through Peter Radcliff like a raging fire, gave him a sudden surge of strength. In a burst of rage he twisted the gun hand, and in the struggle Basset's finger squeezed the trigger. The gun roared. Flame touched Basset's own face, blasting his life away in a thunderous roar.

The long figure was suddenly without bones; slumped lifelessly. Radcliff twisted free, scrambled to his feet, trembling and weak with exhaustion.

He had killed a man! Accidentally, perhaps, but the man was dead. Still, Basset had deserved killing. He had knifed the Kanaka and had killed the island policeman who had owned the uniform.

But he had not killed Vrooman and Ely and Rood! The horror killer was still alive!

Radcliff turned in a quick movement to the bed, winced as a flash of pain went through his leg. The fight had opened the old nail wound. The *nail wound!* Abruptly, as though a voice had spoken to him from another world, as Anna Vrooman had claimed one spoke to her, the answer to the murder tangle burned across Peter Radcliff's mind.

It was one of those inexplicable liftings of the veil for a blinded vision

that sometimes come to a man in times of stress, without any apparent rhyme or reason. But it was as blazingly clear to Radcliff as tropical daylight. He *knew* how those strangled men had been killed!

But who had done it? Suddenly, his brain was reeling. Four of them were left on this island now—Stromm, Mad Will, Valerie and himself. Which would be the next to die?

He didn't stop for logical reasoning, but ran blindly for the stairs. Too late! Valerie's room was empty. There had been a struggle. The room was a wreck. He searched it hastily, afraid of what he might find. But there was nothing; no body.

He leaped for the door, darting along the hall. In moments he had searched the house thoroughly, then he plunged into the night.

Rain and wind battered him. He slipped, went sprawling in the mud. His gun vanished into the darkness, and he had to take precious minutes to search for it.

He staggered on, and the stable loomed before him. He crashed through the entrance, on to the door at the end of the corridor. He kicked it open, then halted—frozen by the scene before him.

**S**TROMM was crouched in the center of the room. A heavy gun in his hand swung between Radcliff and the cringing figure of Mad Will. To one side Valerie stood, frightened, waiting.

And on the table, gleaming whitely, were the skull and bones.

In that room where only the glitter of tense, white faces stood out, death was very near.

"Stand as you are!" Stromm growled.

"What are you doing?" Radcliff shouted furiously at his half-brother.

"I'm going to kill this—" Stromm rasped out a curse. "With my bare hands. I promised that to whoever stole the bones my father intrusted to me. And this devil dragged Valerie down here!"

He threw the gun crashing through the window, and crouched to leap at

Mad Will.

"Stop, Stromm!" Radcliff roared. "For God's sake, stop! He'll kill you! Look at what he's got in his hand. That splinter he's holding is death—murder!"

Stromm laughed harshly. "Have you been brain-shocked, too? A splinter can't hurt me."

"That one can!" Radcliff panted. "Others like it killed Ely and Rood and Vrooman. There's tetanus toxin on the ends—enough to kill you instantly! I *know*! Have the best possible reason to know—no time to tell you now. . . . Look out! Don't let him come near you!"

Radcliff's gun suddenly swung up and he centered it steadily on Mad Will. In his eyes was a cold, hard glint that even to an idiot must mean business. Mad Will cowered back, mouthing, but Radcliff's eyes on him were steady, contemptuous, and with promise of death in them.

"Hell, tetanus is lockjaw," Stromm growled. "That takes days to kill. Why all the dramatics, Radcliff? I told you I can take care of him with my bare hands."

Radcliff's stern eyes never wavered from Mad Will.

"I said the splinters hold the toxin," he grated. "The germ of tetanus develops a toxin—a poison—in the body that kills when it becomes strong enough. The toxin on these splinters was developed by injecting tetanus germs into horses, and separating the toxin from the blood. It's strong enough to kill instantly! It freezes the muscles—the victims can't breathe. *That's* why it looked as if a ghost killed Ely and Rood and Vrooman. Mad Will was the killer, though—not Dussault's ghost!"

Stromm's jaw dropped as he glanced at Mad Will.

"But how in hell could *he* do all this?" he demanded.

Radcliff shrugged. He saw the rapid change that had come over the man with the supposedly darkened brain. The vacant expression was no longer in his eyes; his shoulders had straightened. The simulated madness had dropped from him like a cloak.

"I can guess, in a general way, why he did it," Radcliff said. "But I think we'd better have the details from him."

There was a new kind of madness in Mad Will's flaming eyes now; an insane anger as he stared into the black gun muzzle in Peter Radcliff's inexorable hands.

"CERTAINLY," he grated. "I'll tell you. Why not? I worked for your father ten years ago as a trader. We had a row, and he fired me." He hesitated an infinitesimal fraction of a second while black hatred flared in his eyes. "There—there was a girl in the islands"—his voice dropped almost to a mumble as he said that in something like reverence—"my daughter, by my island wife—and John Radcliff—he always took what he wanted, damn his soul!"

His lips tightened to a thin line beneath the beard as he closed them on that part of his voluntary confession.

"John Radcliff black-balled me throughout the islands, so I couldn't get a job. I couldn't make a living. I swore I would get his fortune for— for her. I knew he was rich, and I was a long time planning."

He smiled wryly through his unkempt beard. "One thing John Radcliff didn't know. He didn't know I was a doctor back in the States; back before something—happened to me—as it did to Radcliff himself. And I had to flee to these islands. He didn't know of the laboratory work I had done. But I had forgotten none of it. It came in handy when I needed it.

"When all was ready I came here to this island, wrecked my boat and pretended I had lost my mind, knowing your father would no longer recognize me as I had made myself. For a long time now I tried to find out where he had hidden his wealth, but only discovered his cunning hiding place recently. Where it is, I'll never tell you. I had a fine plan all worked out for my revenge on him when I found his fortune. But damn him, he had to die on me, cheating me of personal revenge."

He straightened and shrugged.

"Well, anyway, he thought I was an idiot, and he said I was to have this skull and bones if none of you wanted them—and you won't want them. Two of you will be dead, and Valerie . . . I've taken a liking to that skull and cross-bones, you see. Kind of reminds me of another time."

"Why did you kill Rood and Ely and Vrooman?" Stromm demanded.

"Old Ely saw me making an injection in the horses when I was fixing up my little dose that I knew I might need, even if John Radcliff was dead. He knew I was not mad, and was going to tell Vrooman. I had worked on a trader with Jake Rood, and was afraid he'd remember that, given time. So I had to kill them, and in killing them the way I did, I expected to frighten you away with the legend of Dussault.

"It would have been easy to have had John Radcliff's death laid to Dussault, in these superstitious islands, but how could I kill him until I knew about his wealth? I killed Vrooman because he knew where the fortune was, but age and a worn-out heart conveniently removed Anna."

"Where is the fortune?" Stromm demanded.

**R**ADCLIFF picked up a shin-bone and cracked it across a knee. A flood of small, round objects spilled from the hollow and rattled across the floor.

"Here," he said.

"Pearls!" Stromm breathed softly. "A fortune in pearls!"

"Yes," Radcliff agreed. "And it's a little strange a man like Mad Will, who must know chemistry, was so long discovering these bones were artificial, made for the purpose. He believed, as did Anna Vrooman and her son, that they were authentic pirate relics.

"Father left us the skull and bones before anybody knew where the pearls were, with that rigamarole about pulverizing them, knowing that if we did break them, according to his instructions, we would find the pearls. I think it's plain enough why Father said Mad Will could have them, if we didn't want them—it was to make

them appear worthless, so Jan Vrooman would leave them alone.

"Mad Will was not attacked this morning. He had the garrote business all planned to divert suspicion from himself. He was really in no danger of being badly hurt. He was all ready to put the garrote on himself the minute anyone appeared, looking for him. And that happened to be me."

"Again you're right," Mad Will said casually. "But now with you two dead, the pearls shall be mine. And Valerie. . . ."

A hot, reckless light suddenly burned in Stromm's eyes.

"I think not," he said. "Your toxin might kill me, but I'll take you with me!"

Crouching, Stromm began a slow movement toward Mad Will. And suddenly Valerie screamed, shrilly.

"No! Eric—don't!"

Radcliff saw the truth in her eyes, then. She loved Eric Stromm who was willing to die that Radcliff might live, and she be free. Loved him with such desperation that she threw herself in fury straight at Mad Will Carrick.

Radcliff dived across the few feet that separated them and knocked her spinning against the wall. He wheeled, swung his fist hard at Stromm, then plunged straight into the down-falling splinter of wood.

**H**IS hands caught Mad Will's throat, closed. Mad Will fought desperately, the sliver in his flailing hand again and again piercing the flesh of Radcliff's arms. They tripped and fell, rolled fighting across the floor.

In his flaming anger at the killer Radcliff was only dully aware that Mad Will's fists were pounding his face. He could feel nothing but his own strength—that was concentrated in his squeezing fingers on the murderer's throat.

All the hell that he had suffered in the past was in that urge. A savage joy, a primeval blood-lust swept him as his fingers sank deeper into flesh.

Stromm's rough hands finally caught him and dragged him away.

"All right," he said huskily. "He's dead. Listen—about that poison in the splinter. Is there anything we can do to stop it's action for you?"

Radcliff opened his puffed eyes, looked into the two white faces that hovered him. And knew what they were thinking. They thought that he would die! Crazy laughter convulsed him, echoed through the room. He shook his head, as his lips twisted wryly. He glanced at Valerie—once—then away.

"Don't take it so hard, Eric," he said. "I'm not going to die. The stuff can't hurt me. Mad Will already tried to kill me last night. An anti-tetanus injection I had for a nail wound just before I came here protected me from that."

There was a dazed look on Stromm's face, unbelief. "You mean that injection will give you immunity?"

"Yes. An anti-tetanus injection is much the same as a smallpox vaccination. Though it doesn't last so long."

He saw their faces brighten at the calm sincerity in his voice, and flame into smiles and joyful eyes.

"That's how I knew the poison had to be a tetanus toxin," Radcliff said, "even though I've heard that few know it's been isolated. Because I did not die—and because of the sick horses. I knew, after Vrooman died,

that you weren't the killer, Eric, because the horses were sick long before you came to the island."

Stromm's throat was working with emotion. Valerie knelt beside Radcliff, laid her lips, warm and soft, against his own. He knew what she meant, and he enjoyed the utter sweetness of them for a long moment. Then, softly, he spoke again.

"You're sweet, Valerie. But I can't take your sacrifice, even though you know I love you. I'm not your kind. Stromm is. Go with him. But, please, don't forget the guy who thinks you're swell. . . ."

**R**ADCLIFF stood again at the stone balustrade looking, now, at a clear horizon. The first rays of the morning sun warmed him and filled the harbor with dancing blue light.

Down below, Eric Stromm's ship was putting out to sea. It lifted on the flood tide, went on eagerly toward the open sea.

Radcliff saw a sail belly out and fill. The ship lifted, heeled away. A slim figure was standing at the stern rail. There was a flutter of white, an upraised hand—and then they were gone, scudding outward toward the bright horizon.

"Good sailing," Radcliff whispered, "and a deep harbor."

In the Next Issue

### BLOOD OF THE MUMMY

A Novelet of the Walking Dead

By G. T. FLEMING-ROBERTS



## LOST—A PET HATE

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*Gorm staggered backward in terror*

The

# PURPLE HEAD

By RAY CUMMINGS

*Author of "The Midnight Fiend," "The Case of the Pharaoh's Bones," etc.*

**"Y**OU didn't hear the details of how he died?" John Gorm asked. "It was ghastly, Tom."

The wind tore at his words so that he had to speak louder. With the tall young Tom Rance beside him, he gestured toward the cemetery where beyond the ornate metal fence the headstones lay spread in a white array, eerie blobs in the murk of the stormy darkness.

"That's his grave," Gorm said. "That big tablet, with the cross. He

wanted it simple. I selected it from our stock—engraved it myself. A labor of love, Tom. He was a fine old fellow, your grandfather."

He knew the youth couldn't see his face in the darkness. But it wouldn't have made any difference. Gorm was quite calm now. Young Rance had no suspicion, of course, of how his grandfather had really died.

"Details?" Rance murmured. "Tell me. I only know that he was murdered."

"Murdered," Gorm echoed. "Yes,



murdered—most horribly. There was a madman the papers called Guillotine Jack, prowling these hills that summer. A fiend—God knows all his crimes had no motive, except that he was a crazed fiend with a lust for killing. He was never caught."

"And Grandfather?" young Rance prompted.

The squat little Gorm put his hand up to the youth's shoulder. "He—he was found like the others," he said. The stammer in his voice was calculated. One must summon horror for this thing that was so horrible. "They were all—all that fiend's victims were found decapitated," Gorm added. "In your grandfather's case only the head was found. It's buried there—just his head—all of him that was left to bury."

Rain was beginning to patter through the branches of the sodden willows. Off to the south there were lightning flares, and rolling, muttering thunder. Despite the wind, the night was hot, oppressive, electrical. Fog swirled around the blurred white headstones. To the left, just inside the cemetery gate, a dozen feet back from the pebbled path, stood the big marble headstone with the cross above it. The oblong mound of earth was banked with a summer growth of flowers. In the casket eight feet down under that mounded earth, the head of old Thomas Rance lay buried. Four years now. . . .

**G**ORM'S mind swept back. What he was telling the old man's handsome grandson was true enough. There had been a roaming maniac that summer—a fiend who had gruesomely decapitated half a dozen victims, and who had never been caught. Gorm had known no more of the fiend's identity than had anyone else. It was all true—except on vital little detail. Gorm had decided, that summer, that old Rance must die. The unknown, murderous fiend made an opportunity. And so Gorm had killed the old man, buried the body miles from here, and left the gory head to be found.

Of course, they blamed it on Guil-

lotine Jack! And Gorm had attended the funeral, white-faced and grim, with realistically moist eyes as he had gazed at the head of his partner where it lay in the coffin, arranged by the undertaker's art so that one hardly realized it had no body.

"Mr. Gorm! Good Lord—what's that?"

Young Tom Rance twitched away from Gorm's hand on his shoulder. The startled words jerked Gorm out of his roaming thoughts. And he stared over the metal fence through the murk—and stiffened.

They both saw it plainly—a little glow of purple-violet radiance that gleamed in the stormy darkness upon the headstone which marked the spot where the head of old Thomas Rance was buried. A little wisp of purple glow, oozing up from the grave. But all in that second it was taking form, drawing itself together, shaping itself to be a ball—an eerie, luminous ball the size of a human head. A purple head!

The staring, breathless Gorm recoiled a step. The wind through the somber, sodden willows that lined the brook beside the cemetery momentarily had ceased. There was only the patter of rain; and young Rance's murmured exclamation:

"My God—it came out of Grandfather's grave! His head—look at it!"

A purple head. *His* head—plainly materializing out of the grave. For a second or two the ghastly thing hung poised on the tip of the headstone. His head! The ghost of his head! Glowing, eerie, damnable thing, gone purplish with the putrid rotting flesh and blood. The murky darkness hid its details, but as he stared, stricken, unbreathing, Gorm's horrified imagination supplied them. The old man's rotted face—his staring burning eyes—vengeful eyes.

There was just that second or two when the ghastly apparition of the head rose up and poised. And then it moved again, floating forward.

Gorm staggered back. "You—you damned thing—"

Was that his voice? Good God, he

mustn't let young Rance hear words like that!

The bodiless, shimmering head was suddenly fitting, floating away now. Five or six feet from the ground, it slowly moved almost as though a body, invisible, were under it! Then it went faster, perched upon another headstone, moved to another, and another—dwindling by distance until at last it was a tiny radiant blob down the hill by the other fence under the willows.

Then it was gone.

Gorm breathed again. "Well, my God, Tom—"

"Grandfather's head —" Young Rance tried to laugh. "Holy mackerel, we've gone nuts, Mr. Gorm. A ghost's head? That's crazy!"

"Of course it is," Gorm murmured. "Come on back to the house, Tom. "Its gone—whatever the devil it was."

**T**HE ghost of old man Rance? Idiotic! As they went back along the dark path to the nearby house, Gorm tried to fling away his frightening thoughts. He mustn't think things like that. He needed all his wits tonight for this problem of young Rance. If the boy vanished or was found dead tomorrow, there was no Guillotine Jack this time on whom it could be blamed. But something had to be done. . . .

Despite his need for clear thought, Gorm's mind wandered. The ghost-head of old man Rance? Had the ghastly rotting head down there in its grave yielded its ghost tonight, a shimmering gruesome apparition, impelled by the nearness of this grandson whom the old man had loved? Was the damnable thing roaming down there in the cemetery now, bent upon vengeance?

The wild thoughts persisted in Gorm's mind, despite all his efforts to laugh them away. For what was left of that stormy evening, Gorm held himself calm as he and the lad sat in the dim, lamplit living room of Gorm's stone bungalow here at the edge of the Willow Brook Cemetery.

The tiny administration building of

the Willow Brook Cemetery Corporation stood beside it, the big shed and workshop nearby—the shed where the marble blocks were stored from which Gorm fashioned headstones and built mausoleums for his bereaved clients. A ghost in a cemetery! How really idiotic! Gorm, who lived at this cemetery gate, whose business was graves and headstones and mausoleums, certainly knew there were no ghosts in graveyards—or anywhere else.

At last midnight came. Young Rance had finally gone to bed. Tired from his long drive from California where he had lived with a maiden aunt, the nineteen-year-old youth was glad enough when Gorm suggested that he needed some sleep.

But Gorm had not gone to bed. In the dim living room he lay sprawled in his big easy chair, a squat ugly little figure. What must he do about young Tom Rance? A plan was forming. The thing looked clear and simple. Old Rance and Gorm had been partners—sole owners of the Willow Brook Corporation. Then old Rance had discovered the falsified books—the money which little by little for three years Gorm had been taking. Faced with exposure, Gorm had killed the old man. That was over and done with.

But now here was the grandson upon the brink of manhood. He would soon be in control of the half-interest in the cemetery corporation which his grandfather had willed to the aunt in California. The business was supposed to be languishing, almost profitless. That old woman in California would never know the difference. But not so, young Rance! Already his alert young mind was probing. And it wouldn't be so hard for him to find a motive for the murder of his grandfather—a motive that would make the authorities suspicious of old Rance's gruesome, opportune death.

The midnight storm-wind moaned around the eaves of the stone cottage. The rain had stopped, but outside it was solid black—a hot oppressive humidity, with lightning flares and threatening thunder at the southern horizon. Still Gorm sat sprawled, mo-

tionless. The boy must die, of course. That cement-lined grave under construction out there for the Franklin family, whose eccentric Uncle Peter had just died, would be the death-trap. Death by accident. It would look reasonable. Gorm would say that the boy had gone out into the midnight darkness, probably to visit his poor grandfather's grave. And in the blackness he had fallen into that concrete pit.

**Q**UIETLY Gorm rose from his chair and left the house. The darkness outside was like a wall; but in a moment, as his eyes became accustomed to it and he threaded the path down to the cemetery gate, the gleaming white blobs of the headstones became visible—the larger blobs of the mausoleums—the winding, flowered paths—the somber line of weeping willows down by the stream beyond the distant fence.

And just inside the nearer gate, was the headstone of the grave of old Rance's head. The Franklin plot was behind it, across the path. The open grave-pit, lined with concrete, under construction now for the Franklin family, had planks laid across its top. Gorm could see them.

Familiar scene. Certainly there was nothing about a graveyard at night that could frighten John Gorm. Nothing?

He went through the little metal-latticed gate and followed the path which led past old Rance's grave. The big marble marker stood eerily gleaming like a square, upright monster on guard. Gorm suddenly realized that his heart was racing. He had thought it was excitement; but abruptly now he knew it was terror.

Gorm had never in the slightest believed in ghosts. But tonight, after that weird spectre which unmistakably he and the boy had seen, Gorm was vaguely wondering. A ghost's head? Had it come up from the grave to wreak vengeance upon Gorm the murderer? Was it lurking down there by the willow-lined river now?

Impossible! But for a moment Gorm stood tensed in the darkness of

the graveyard path, staring down to where the river willows were a sodden blur. No, there was nothing. But old Rance had always been interested in spiritualism. He had always insisted that ghosts existed. Gorm's heart pounded harder as his mind leaped back to a night not long before he had killed Rance. The old man had loved his grandson. He had said that after he died he was going to make every effort to communicate with young Tom.

Was that what he was doing tonight? His head! A head could talk! It could tell his grandson that the fiendish Guillotine Jack hadn't been the murderer. It could whisper that Gorm had poisoned him. And when he was dead, had cut off his head.

In the graveyard path Gorm stood and tried to laugh at his wild thoughts. He stood a moment longer, peering; then he turned to the right, off the path to where the open Franklin grave-pit yawned dark, with a big mound of fresh earth beside it. Old Uncle Peter Franklin—he who had just died—had had a horror of cremation. And a horror of graves. The worms ate at you, he had always said. Maggots crawled in you. But he had wanted to be underground, in a grave-pit, concrete-lined which would in effect be a tiny mausoleum.

**I**N the ground beside the pit Gorm crouched in the darkness, pulling away the scaffolding of planks which the workmen had used. In a moment now he would call Tom out here. The boy would come running. Easy enough to shove him into the pit. If the fall didn't kill him, here were plenty of rocks that could be thrown down to crack his skull.

Gorm presently stood up, chuckling. Everything was ready. He moved over into the path. The house was only a hundred yards away; the hot oppressive night was silent.

"Tom!" he called. "Oh Tom—"

He put an urgent terror into his voice. "Tom! Come here quickly!"

The words echoed through the murky darkness; they carried up to the house.

"Tom! Come here, Tom—" Like ripples from a stone thrown into a pond, the widening call echoed over the graveyard. "Tom! Come here! Here I am, Tom!"

Then suddenly Gorm stood stiffened, transfixed with so great a terror flooding him that his scalp prickled, the rigid muscles of his body twitched and the dark spreading scene of the midnight graveyard blurred before his gaze. Old man Rance had also been named Tom!

Tom! Here I am, Tom! The stricken Gorm was not calling it now—there was only the echo of it in his mind. But the call had been heard. From down by the blur of willows at the river, the eerie purplish spectre had appeared! The ghost's head was coming. Ghastly apparition of the rotting head that should have been here in its grave.

Numbed beyond power of speech or movement, Gorm stood transfixed, staring at the apparition as it came floating, darting forward up the hill, resting as it poised on the tip of a distant headstone. My God, where was it now? Gone? No! He saw it again, hovering at the corniced edge of a little mausoleum, resting for another leap.

The ghost's head! How clearly he could see it! The face? Did it have a face, or was the face all rotted? Did it have a mouth? Lips—moving lips with mumbled words coming from its ghastly throat? Gorm is a murderer . . . he poisoned me . . . he cut off my head. . . .

"Go away! You get out of here, Tom—I don't want you—" The scream burst from Gorm as he recoiled, staring at the oncoming round spectre. But it wouldn't go away! It made another leap, so that now it was poised on the headstone of its own grave.

Gorm was conscious that he was trying to scream. He was backing, retreating. One's last moments may hold a myriad chaotic thoughts. Gorm was scarcely conscious, as he staggered backward in terror, that he had stumbled against a plank that lay on the ground. Then there was no

ground—just a swooping, backward, whirling fall into darkness. A crash, and his head bursting into a blinding roar. Just a last dim, ironic thought that the grisly spectre of old Rance's head had wreaked its vengeance. . . .

At the bottom of the grave-pit, John Gorm died with his head split open on the concrete. Across the nearby path the mound-grave of old Thomas Rance was dark. At the top of the headstone, for a moment or two, the weird purple spectre hovered; then it sank into the ground of the grave, and vanished.

"I GUESS I hadn't quite gone to sleep," young Rance was saying. "I heard him call, 'Tom! Come here quickly!' I rushed out. Couldn't see much at first. I got here in time to see him backing across the path. I thought he'd gone nuts. He shouted at me, 'You go away. You get out of here, Tom!'"

In the darkness young Rance stood beside the grave-pit with the group of men who had hastily come in answer to his telephone call.

"Maybe he was warnin' you to get away," one of the policemen said. "Afraid the ghost would get you and him both. You say, when he called that just before he fell, that you could see the damned ghost's head?"

"There's no such thing as a ghost," the coroner snorted. "Don't be an idiot."

"I don't know what it was," young Rance asserted doggedly. "But I certainly saw it. A purplish ball that sort of glowed—like they say a ghost glows. It was just the size of a man's head. It floated and then sat there on the top of the headstone. It was there when he fell."

There was a young electrician in the crowd.

"Maybe that was St. Elmo's Fire," he said suddenly.

"What's that?" asked an officer sharply.

The electrician smiled faintly. "I'm not sayin' it was St. Elmo's Fire. Nobody knows exactly what St. Elmo's Fire is—some form of static electricity, some say. And now they're

calling it ionized air. Sailors see it sometimes, clinging to the spars of the rigging." He turned to young Tom Rance.

"It looks just about like you say," he added. "I saw it once, just before an electrical storm—a night like tonight." He shuddered. "I was indoors, and the damned thing came down the chimney. It was right in the room with me, balanced like a purple head on top of an andiron of the fireplace. Then it floated out the window."

St. Elmo's Fire? Or the ghost-head of the murdered Rance?

They opened the Rance grave, later that night. A purplish ghost's head? Even those of the men who had scoffed, stood blankly, grimly staring at the thing that festered in its coffin. The noisome, rotting flesh of the head of old man Rance was purplish!

The undertaker tried to smile as the other men turned to him. "No, I can't say's I ever seen an exhumed cadaver that was purplish like this," he said. "Formaldehyde's not supposed to do that. Of course, if the body had been poisoned—which it wasn't—and after death the head was cut off, then the clotted, poisoned blood, and the formaldehyde used for embalming might—" His voice trailed off and he shrugged.

"Too deep for me. You couldn't tell anything about it now, anyway, after all these years."

Ironically, there was no one to suspect that a murder had been committed—and another murder barely averted. The natural phenomenon of St. Elmo's Fire? Or the head of Rance's ghost? They could argue that question, but it was a gruesome mystery without an answer.



In the Next Issue

## FLIGHT OF THE FLAME FIEND

A Complete Novelet of Weird Sacrifice

By CARL JACOBI

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# A Greed-Mad Killer Runs Rampant

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## MURDER

A Complete Novelet

By **HENRY**

*Author of "The Unresting Dead,"*

### CHAPTER I

*Come Into My Parlor!*

"**A**UNT HESTER'S done crazy things," the girl said, "but this is the craziest of all. Did you get a note from her too, Bill?"

Bill Horgan wrapped his overcoat tighter about his tall body, shivering in the icy wind that blew across the pier. The low thunder of waves boomed beneath their feet. He stamped experimentally.

"I'm wondering if the wharf will hold up," he grunted. "This amusement park has been deserted for ten years at least. Yeah, I got a note, Jean. Here."

He fumbled in his pocket and showed it to her in the moonlight.

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## Satanic Fury Is Unleashed to Coil About

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in a Grisly Orgy of Death at Stellar Park!

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# FOR FUN

of Grim Massacre

## KUTTNER

*"Invasion from the Fourth," etc.*

Dear Bill:

Although you are only my nephew by marriage, I consider you one of my relatives, and consequently you are mentioned in my will. However, I shall leave nobody anything unless that person attends the house party I am giving Saturday night at Stellar Park. I have purchased one of the concessions, renovated it, and intend to have a great deal of amusement. Come at nine promptly, and wear old clothes.

Hester Lake.

"Mine read about the same," Jean Morrell said. "Good heavens, look at that!"

The pier was bordered on both sides by amusement concessions, refreshment stands and gambling booths in an advanced state of collapse. A roller coaster, a broken skeleton against the night sky, loomed above them. But Jean was staring at the shiplike building before which they stood.

Built to resemble a boat, a faded



*He thrust out the snub muzzle of an automatic from behind Hester Lake's form*

---

Helpless Victims in a Pitiless Trap of Doom!

---

sign above it announced:

#### NOAH'S ARK

Shallow water, coated with glistening oily scum, made a wide pool around the boat. On a little island was a whale of papier-mâché and wood, and as they watched its jaws gaped widely, revealing a man standing in the hollow mouth.

"Hi, there," he hailed. "You're the last to arrive. Come on in!"

"Might as well," Horgan grunted, and took Jean's arm.

He led her across a perilous gang-plank to the whale's mouth, where the other man greeted them. He was a plump, blond fellow in his forties, with a well massaged face and a perpetual smile.

"This is Marvin Morrell," Jean said. "You've never met Bill Horgan, have you, Marvin?"

"It's a pleasure." Morrell grinned, with a flash of gold teeth. "Ready for a big night, eh?" His glance dwelt on Jean's slim figure, clad in slacks and a tight-fitting sweater. "But come on in. Aunt Hester's waiting."

**A** STAIRWAY gaped at their feet, and they descended as the whale's mouth closed above them. A dimly lit concrete passageway beneath the pool gave into a round little room where they huddled closely together. Morrell touched a button, and the elevator slid upward.

"Aunt Hester's parties," Morrell said. "She's great on practical jokes. Her husband used to hold her down but after he died last year she tore loose. Ever been in her Hollywood place, Horgan? No? What a dump! Full of exploding cigar boxes, mirrors that squirt water in your face—all sorts of stuff."

"I've only seen her twice," Horgan said doubtfully. "She was at my christening, and once when she was making personal appearances back East she stayed a month at our house, but I was away then. Only got back in time to wave to her at the depot."

Everybody else in America had seen Hester Lake, however—many times. Her face had been on a million screens in theatres all over the world. Once

a famous stage star, she had come to Hollywood and become Summit Studio's chief drawing card. She played every type of role with equal facility, from whiskey-ridden hag to sentimental parts that dampened handkerchiefs from New York to Madagascar. Her practical jokes, as Morrell had said, were well known. It looked like a big evening.

The elevator stopped. A panel slid up and the three stepped out into a low-ceilinged room furnished in the best of taste, with the exception of a dozen ordinary wooden stools on which the guests sat uncomfortably. In an overstuffed, chromium-and-plush atrocity Hester Lake lounged, drinking a cocktail and smoking a black Mexican cigarette. Horgan couldn't help staring at her.

She was a character off the screen as well as on. Many of the charities to which she subscribed would have been surprised to have seen her, plump round face heavily enameled with powder and rouge, rocking back and forth as she howled with glee over a slightly off-color anecdote someone had just told. She saw the newcomers and straightened.

"Damn it, you took long enough to come!" she snarled in a voice like a parrot's croak. "Don't come near me, any of you, or I'll throw this cocktail in your face. Morrell doesn't know how to mix 'em anyway. Jean, come here and kiss me."

Smiling, the girl obeyed. She winked at Horgan as she turned away, and the old lady chuckled under her breath. When she spoke again her voice was soft and cultured.

"I'm always an actress, Bill. Come here: let me look at you. As he moved forward she gestured to Morrell. "Give him a drink, idiot. And have another yourself. I'm a perfect hostess, Bill—so meet my other guests. Your relatives."

But Horgan was looking wide-eyed around the room. He had not noticed before the glass walls that were on two sides, or what was behind them. Tableaux had been constructed behind the glass—reproductions of murders. **Horgan saw.** A wax model stood with



an axe poised above a cowering, half nude girl. An ape clutched an unconscious woman in one hairy arm, while with his free hand he strangled a limply dangling dummy. There were others, but Horgan turned away with a wry smile. Morrell wheezed oily laughter.

"**G**REAT joker, Aunt Hester, eh?" "I am indeed," the woman said. "But we must not forget the courtesies. This, Bill, is Thelma Lynch and her husband, Jasper."

A willowy blonde with dark languorous eyes; a typical business man with a bald spot across which graying hair was carefully brushed. Probably he wore a belt to conceal a growing pouch. A scrubby toothbrush moustache. Horgan acknowledged the greeting.

"Scott Hackett and George Sharpe."

Scott Hackett—a little gnome of a man, with timid blue eyes that flicked furtively from Horgan to Hester Lake. George Sharpe—dapper, well-dressed, and with a keen brown face that resembled, somehow, a knife-blade. Shaking hands heartily, he said, "You'll have to take two or three cocktails to catch up with us, Bill. You too, Jean."

"All your relatives," Hester said, and there was an odd tinge of malice in her voice. "Now that you're all here, we can begin the program."

"I'm curious," Morrell said. "You haven't pulled any tricks yet. Something new, I bet."

The old lady mumbled something hastily and got up. She left the room by a metal door that shut behind her with an ominous clang. For a moment there was silence. Then Thelma Lynch indicated the gruesome figures behind the walls.

"Not very pleasant, are they, Bill? Aunt Hester must have spent a lot fixing up Noah's Ark."

"She's got a lot," Morrell wheezed, easing his plump body into the chair Hester Lake had vacated. "I bet—"

A voice sounded. It seemed to come from the ceiling, yet a glance upward told Horgan that nothing was there apparently. It was Hester's voice, and

it said gently:

"We're ready for the program, my dear relatives. It's something a little different this time. You're right, dear Thelma, I spent quite a good deal on this place. More than you think. You will probably be surprised when you find that you can't get out."

Nobody answered. Morrell laughed vaguely, but sobered as the voice came again.

"Be quiet, you fat little fool. I've stood quite enough of your boot-licking. And all the rest of you—pretending to laugh at my practical jokes, whispering behind my back about humoring an old lady. You never quite realized my sense of humor, any of you."

Jean moved closer to Horgan, put a cold hand in his.

"Joke, Auntie?" George Sharpe said unsteadily. "Very bad taste. Start the program."

"You twadying swine," the unseen speaker murmured softly. "You, too, will be surprised. When death comes . . ."

"I don't think I like her sense of humor," Horgan said softly to Jean.

**T**HE girl eyed him, puzzled.

"She's never gone quite so far—"

"An explanation is due you," Hester Lake went on. "First of all, I have a very keen sense of humor. Secondly I am conscious of the uselessness of human beings. Filthy little mites crawling on a ball of mud—what does it matter if a mite is squashed? All your little lives seem important to you, but I heartily dislike every one of you. You want my money. When I'm dead—"

"She can keep her damned money," Horgan whispered fiercely. "I'll tell her—"

"No, don't! Please. Not yet, Bill." Jean's fingers were icy. "Aunt Hester," she said, "this is a joke, isn't it?"

"Not at all, you doll-faced little fool! As you will discover. I have arranged to kill you all in various amusing ways. Death can be very funny indeed—not to you, of course, but to me. I have planned this for a long time. You will go first, dear

Marvin, in order to prove that I'm in earnest."

Morrell tried to smile. His hands tightened on the arms of the chair.

"But Aunt Hester, I—I—" He floundered for words.

"You always were a discourteous, greedy child. I expected you would take the only comfortable chair in the room as soon as I left. It's an electric chair, dear Marvin."

Morrell sat quite still for a moment. His face slowly lost its color and seemed to hang in pouchy folds. A grin was frozen on his lips.

He laughed hysterically and flung himself out of the chair. Or tried to. There came a flash of crackling flame, and for a moment blue fire bathed Morrell's portly body. He screamed once—and fell back. He writhed, his eyes bulging. He went limp, though his legs still kicked convulsively for a second or two.

There was no sound except the low, amused laughter of Hester Lake.

## CHAPTER II

### *Such a Dear Old Lady!*

**T**HEN the spell broke. Thelma Lynch screamed and flung her arms about her husband's neck. The gnomish Hackett stood trembling, plucking at his white lips. George Sharpe, his dark face suddenly set in hard lines, sprang toward the panel by which they had entered. He fumbled vainly.

"That's useless, dear George," the unseen woman mocked. "I have taken every precaution. No one comes to this deserted park. You need not look at the walls—they are solid, and reinforced with steel. Look!" The voice rose to a shriek of mad laughter. "Look at Marvin! His expression—it's priceless."

Jean glanced at the dead man's face and, shuddering, turned away. She clung to Horgan, and he put a protecting arm around her, conscious of the uselessness of the gesture.

"She's insane," he whispered.

"We've got to get out of here. Wait a minute."

He found a footstool and crashed it against the panel that hid the elevator. The wall split, revealing a sheet of gleaming metal. He pounded vainly on this.

Silently a door swung open—a door that had been invisible before. Dim-lit gloom waited beyond it.

"You will all go through that door," Hester Lake said. "A little tour of Noah's Ark, with my own additions. Oh, don't hesitate. You must go."

"Damned if I will!" Sharpe said, rocking on his feet.

"You'll be killed if you don't. Chlorine gas is being pumped into this room. You'll smell it in a minute. When you leave, shut the door after you. It's air-tight."

In fact, an acrid, poisonous odor was becoming noticeable. Horgan coughed, scrubbing at his eyes. He gestured toward the doorway, and the others quickly followed him across the threshold. The door clanged shut.

They were in a gloomy passageway that twisted into darkness. A network of ropes hung from floor to ceiling, making their progress difficult. Abruptly the voice of Hester Lake sounded.

Perhaps I had better warn you. A few poisoned needles are attached to those ropes here and there. Don't be precipitate." She chuckled and was silent.

"She's mad!" Jasper Lynch cried.

No longer was he the immaculate business man. Sweat glistened on his cheeks. His wife drew closer. He turned on her, snarling.

"Damn you, Thelma, you got me into this crazy family! If I'd never married you—"

The woman's face was ivory white. She flung forward recklessly along the passage, fighting the network of ropes.

"Be careful!" Jean cried, and Horgan echoed her.

But Thelma ignored them. She was waiting when at last they reached the end of the hall and found a door barring their path. Luck had saved her from the poisoned needles if, in-

deed, they existed, and the others had been extremely careful.

The door swung open; they went through hesitantly into a gruesome chamber. A number of metallic globes, two feet in diameter, hung from the ceiling. Horgan glanced up with trepidation.

**H**ESTER LAKE said nothing. The six waited, staring around, not knowing from what quarter death might leap.

"Better not stand under those," Horgan suggested. "They may be iron." He pointed toward the dangling spheres. "We don't want our skulls cracked."

A long silence. Sharpe began to pace the room, weaving unsteadily. Thelma stood alone in a corner, staring silently into space. Gleam of tears showed on her pale cheeks. The gnomish Hackett was by the door, trembling. He winced as a fly brushed his cheek.

Abruptly Thelma cried out, struck the wall with a clenched fist.

"We've got to get out of here!" she screamed, with sharp hysteria. "Got to!"

"We've got to keep our heads," Horgan told her. "After all, Hester Lake's crazy. We're all sane, and we ought to be able to fight her."

"If we could only reach her—" Sharpe's tanned, slender hands were twitching.

Lynch gave a low whistle. He pointed. A dark crack showed on the wall, scarcely visible. He made a quick stride toward it, inserted stubby fingers.

Too late Horgan shouted warning. The panel slid open, and something flashed out in a blinding blur of motion. The man screamed and fell back, staring at his hand. Something clung to it—a snake, banded with yellow and black, coiling sinuously as it whipped about.

"I'm struck!" he bellowed.

"Poison! Good God, take it away!"

He made a quick gesture and the snake was dislodged. It hit the wall with a sodden thud and dropped to the floor, where it lay coiled.

"Keep away from it," Horgan warned.

He looked vainly for a weapon. Suddenly the corner of his eye caught a flash of movement. He leaped away just in time. One of the metal balls suspended overhead had dropped, hitting the floor with a crash that made the room shake.

Another fell. And the sound it made caused Horgan to go sick and faint with nausea.

Jasper Lynch had been standing beneath it.

He was dead now, and he lay unmoving, a trickle of blood red on his shirt front. Above the collar was nothing but a mangled, frightful mass. Thelma screamed and ran to him.

She knelt beside him, glaring from a face that was a tragic mask. The light went from her eyes as she toppled forward unconscious, one slim hand trailing in a pool of blood.

Horgan sprang to her, lifted the limp body in his arms, as another of the iron spheres thundered down to shake the floor.

"The walls!" he shouted, running across the room. "Get back against the walls!"

There was a mad scramble to obey. Hackett got in Sharpe's way, and was sent staggering aside by a rough shove. The little man fought to keep his footing, failed, and went down not a foot from the coiled snake.

And the reptile struck. Like a bullet the flat head shot forward, clamped on Hackett's sleeve just below the elbow. The muscular, ropy body writhed like a whip.

**H**ORGAN put down his burden against the wall and leaped to aid Hackett, but his help was not needed. Hackett tore the snake's fangs free with the strength of desperation, flung the reptile from him. It coiled in the middle of the floor—and another of the iron globes dropped.

It hit the snake. Blood and pulpy flesh spattered.

"Let's see your arm," Horgan commanded, but Hackett shook his head with a sickly smile.

"Just missed me. The fangs didn't break the skin. My coat was just thick enough to save my life." Shuddering, he glanced down at a jagged tear below his elbow.

Chuckling laughter filled the room.

"A most amusing murder," Hester Lake's voice said. "A joyous massacre, eh? I never liked dear Jasper. A perfect example of a Babbitt, and smug as the devil. Well, the game goes on. Continue, my beloved relatives."

Again the stinging smart of chlorine was strong in their nostrils. Again a door opened in the wall.

Horgan paused to lift the unconscious body of Thelma Lynch in his arms. Then he followed the others across the threshold.

The floor of this room was a jigsaw of motion. It was difficult to keep one's footing; planks swayed and jiggled perilously. Some unseen mechanism beneath the flooring made each board rock back and forth. Several chairs seemed to be dancing and rolling with the movement. The walls were quite bare, save for a small curtain about a foot square. Jean gingerly pulled it back.

"Bill!" Her voice wasn't quite steady. "Look!"

Horgan turned, saw a porthole revealed in the wall—an open porthole! Beyond it glimmered the wan moonlight, and the framework of the broken roller coaster gaunt against the stars.

"Here, take Mrs. Lynch," he said swiftly to Sharpe and in a stride he was beside Jean.

"Can you see the highway from here, Bill?" the girl asked. "If we can get help somehow—"

She leaned forward, but Horgan gripped her shoulder, thrusting her back.

"Careful!" he warned. "I don't like the look of this. The logical thing is for us to stick our heads out and yell for help. What'll happen then?"

"Don't go near it!" the gnomish Hackett cried. His wrinkled face was pasty; he plucked nervously at his lips.

Horgan went unsteadily across the

room, keeping his footing with difficulty on the rocking boards of the floor, and got a chair. Returning to the porthole, he thrust the chair's back through the gap.

Lightning-swift, a glimmer of steel swept down. The wood splintered and cracked in Horgan's hands. A plate of metal covered the porthole.

"Nice," he grunted. "A regular guillotine. She probably has a photoelectric cell that would trip the trigger when we stuck our heads through."

The healthy tan of Sharpe's keen face had turned to a sickly yellow.

"Let's burn the place down!" he cried half hysterically. "Burn it, Horgan!"

"And burn with it? She'd have foreseen that. There's more than wood around us—sheet steel, armor plate. We might as well try to burn our way out of a submarine."

**H**ESTER'S LAKE'S voice came from some concealed transmitter.

"You are clever, dear Bill. But I did not expect all of my traps to succeed. I shall leave you awhile to contemplate your sins. I think I shall take a short nap. After all, I am an old woman. You must be considerate of me." She chuckled and was silent.

"Damn the woman!" Sharpe snarled.

He knelt beside Thelma, swaying on the unsteady floor as he tried to revive her. Scott Hackett wrapped his arms around his small body, shuddering.

"I can't believe it of Hester," he said, but his voice betrayed him. He was trying to convince himself—and failing. "She's always been so good. She's supported me for years. She—"

"You're the first one she'd want to kill," Sharpe growled, with an angry jerk of his head. "All your life you've been bleeding her for money for some wildcat get-rich-quick scheme of yours. She'd save money with you dead."

"I know, George. I'm grateful to her—but Hester—why should she do a thing like this? One's own flesh and blood!" He staggered on the rocking floor. "She's mad! The little cousin I used to play with—she's always been

good to me. Always!" Hackett made a futile gesture.

"I know how you feel," Jean said. "A woman like Aunt Hester who's always tried to help the under-dog. She must have got jobs for dozens of people. She told me once that she could read character—that a criminal record meant nothing. She'd help any crook who wanted to go straight."

"Yeah!" Sharpe's voice was vicious. "I'll bet she got a thrill out of their confessions. Damned hypocrite!"

"Thank you, George," Hester Lake's voice said. "You were always rather frank. But a vain, useless upstart. However, I shall be mightily amused when you die. Continue your journey."

The concealed door they had come to expect swung open. Without waiting for the warning smart of the chlorine the five went through the portal. A blaze of light blinded them, flaring from innumerable facets. A crystal maze—labyrinth of glass walls through which they threaded their way with cold fear pacing them!

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### CHAPTER III

#### *The Joyous Massacre*

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**T**HE passages were narrow—too narrow for two to walk abreast. Horgan went first, with Jean behind him. After her trotted Hackett, and then Sharpe, carrying Thelma, who was still unconscious. Thus Hester Lake's trap was sprung to her complete satisfaction.

Jean gripped Horgan's arm, pulled him around. Eyes wide, she pointed behind her. Hackett turned and caught his breath.

"Oh, my God!" he whispered "My God!"

Walls of glass had dropped down from the ceiling, imprisoning Sharpe and Thelma in a crystal cage. He had put the woman down and was kicking frantically at the glass, his mouth forming words they could not hear. A swirl of yellow vapor drifted down toward his head.

For a moment paralysis of horror held Horgan. Then he was squeezing past Jean, past Hackett. He launched a desperate kick at the transparent wall.

It did not shatter. Only acid, probably, would eat through the substance. Sharpe was visible only a few feet away; but as far distant as if he were on another world. He clawed at his throat, ripping collar and tie away. A spasm of soundless coughing shook him. He fell to his knees, pounding the glass with fists that were soon pulped and bleeding.

Horgan thanked God that Thelma Lynch was unconscious.

Behind him Hackett was trying to soothe Jean. It was soon over, though at the last Horgan turned away, sickened. Two corpses lay within the crystal cage, one still beautiful in death, the other contorted in ghastly agony, with raw, shapeless hands outstretched toward the barrier.

Hester Lake laughed.

"George was always proud of his good looks," her voice murmured. "He's not very pretty now, is he? Two birds with one stone—a really delightful murder." She cackled harshly.

With a choking sob Jean broke away from Hackett and fled along the glass corridor. Horgan shouted, sprang after her. But he was too late.

Jean screamed, toppled forward, and went down. The floor beneath her tilted, and she plunged out of sight into a gaping hole. Horgan checked himself just in time to avoid a similar fate.

A slide led down into darkness. He bent forward, calling Jean's name. There was no response.

"Wait a minute. May be—"

Hackett was at his side, fumbling with a folder of matches. He lit one, tossed it into darkness. The brief yellow flare vaguely illuminated a pipe-like cylinder that went down at a steep angle.

"That's no good," Horgan said. "I'll have to. . . Here! let's have your belt. And your coat, too."

Quickly he stripped off his own coat and belt, knotting them into an improvised rope, and adding Hackett's

contributions. He eyed the little man doubtfully.

Hackett was an unpleasant sight. His unkempt hair was a tangled mat above a yellow skull-face, reeking with sweat. His clothing was torn and ragged, one sallow cheek had a purpling bruise, and his shirt sleeve was dyed red with blood. But he said quickly:

"I can hold your weight. I'll brace my feet against the walls. You'd better take the matches."

**H**E gave the folder to Horgan,, who put them between his teeth. Horgan lowered the "rope" down the slide and descended, foot by foot, testing each hold. The wood was bamboo, and it had been greased, he realized, after a slip that nearly jerked Hackett from his position.

At last Horgan rested, bracing himself as best he could. With difficulty he lit a match and dropped it.

"You—all right?" Hackett's strained voice floated down.

"Yeah. The slide's too deep. I can't reach the bottom, if it's got one." The match didn't help; in its pale glow the tube seemed endless.

"Horgan!" There was a sudden fright in Hackett's voice. "Come up! Quick! Quick!"

Fear closed Horgan's throat. Frantically he flung himself upward, and as he did felt the improvised rope go slack beneath his fingers. He heard a knife-edged shriek from Hackett, and then he was plummeting down to darkness.

Horgan tried to stop himself by digging feet, knees, elbows into the wood. Useless! Wind screamed in his ears as he shot down.

Then he was catapulted on a softly padded floor. He sprang up, staring around.

In the wall behind him was a round black hole from which he had emerged. As he watched, a sheet of steel slid into place. Hester Lake did not wish him to climb back up the slide.

He was in a small cell, one wall a metal grill of steel bars. Beyond this was a larger room, and directly across

from Horgan's prison was a grating similar to the one before him. Jean was there, her hair in mad disarray, stretching her hands to him through the bars.

"Bill! Are you hurt?"

"No." Horgan began to examine the door of his cell. "What happened to you, Jean?"

"Aunt Hester—she was waiting for me when I went down the slide. She had a gun, marched me over to this cell. Bill, I tried to tell you, to call up the shaft, but I didn't have a chance."

There was a keyhole in the door, Horgan saw, but the discovery did him no good. Glancing around quickly, he saw that the cell was bare, save for his and Hackett's belts and coats. Quite suddenly Horgan remembered something.

His brain began to work coldly, accurately. A slight incident—something he had overlooked at the time. But remembrance of it set the machinery of his mind in motion, wondering, sifting, discarding. A new light sprang into his eyes. He gripped the bars.

"Jean!"

"So there you are," a soft voice murmured.

Hester Lake was standing at the head of a flight of steps that led up to a trap-door in the ceiling. She descended slowly. Her heavily-enameled face was streaked with sweat and grime; white hair hung in a witch's tangle. She was smoking a long black cigarette. Before Jean's cell she halted.

"A very successful program," she said gently. "This is the last act. You are about to die."

**J**EAN didn't move.

The painted face grimaced. "Haven't you anything to say? Aren't you going to beg for mercy?"

"No," the girl whispered. "I'm not. I—"

"Spunky, eh?" The woman came swiftly to Horgan's cell. "How about you?"

Horgan's thoughts had reached a satisfactory conclusion. There was a

desperate plan in his mind—one with little chance to succeed, but the only one possible.

"Listen, Aunt Hester," he said, "you may be insane, but you're still honest. You've always kept your word. That right?"

Red-rimmed eyes watched him closely. "Well?"

"Remember when you visited us back East? Remember what you promised me for feeding your parrot while you were there? Ten dollars—and I never got it. You forgot, and I didn't remind you."

Hester Lake frowned. "What of it?"

"I want that ten dollars you promised me," Horgan told her.

Briefly the old woman glared, taken aback. Hesitantly she fumbled in her pocket, brought out an old-fashioned purse.

"Yes, I keep my promises," she mumbled, withdrawing a crumpled bill.

She wadded it up, preparatory to throwing it into the cell.

And then Horgan flung his bombshell.

"Where's Hester Lake?" he barked.

The woman lifted her head with a quick jerk, staring, momentarily off her guard. Horgan had gambled, and as his arms shot through the bars he knew he had won. His hands gripped the woman's shoulder.

She tried to wriggle free. Cloth tore, but Horgan had her arm in a rat-trap grip that couldn't be broken. He dragged her close.

A skinny hand shot down, came up with a pistol clutched in it. Horgan tore the weapon free, tossed it behind him into his cell. His fingers tightened around the woman's throat.

"Unlock this door!" he snarled.

Distended eyes glared into his. "No! You—"

"Unlock it! Now—or I'll strangle you and then get your keys."

The bluff worked. Whether Horgan actually would have carried out his threat he couldn't have said, but he was not put to the test. A key clicked in the lock, and the door creaked open. Dragging the woman with him, Horgan retrieved the gun.

"Now for Jean," he said, and still gripping his captive, he released the girl.

A flash of light showed momentarily from above. Horgan looked up just in time to see a head silhouetted beyond the open trap-door at the head of the stairway. Before he could move, the panel slammed. He heard a bolt slide into place.

"ANY other way out?" he asked the woman he gripped so tightly.

She shook her head. Frowning, and keeping the gun trained on this grizzle-haired woman so she dared not move, Horgan hurried up the stairs and examined the door. It was of sheet steel, and he knew that even his bullets would not suffice to smash the lock. His eyebrows were lifted wryly as he descended.

"He'll come back," Horgan said confidently. "When he does, he'll get a surprise. Keep your eye on that door, Jean."

But the girl was staring at the woman who had terrorized them for so many hours.

"Bill," she said incredulously, "When you asked where Hester Lake was, what did you mean?" But the answer was obvious on Jean's face. She stopped Horgan's reply with an amazed cry. "She isn't Aunt Hester! I can see that now!"

## CHAPTER IV

### *And So They Were Buried*

THE woman stood in sullen defiance, without answering. Horgan nodded.

"That's right. Something happened upstairs that gave me a clue. I started to put two and two together, then I tried a little test. I asked this woman if she remembered the ten dollars she'd promised me."

"But she did."

"She remembered something that never happened. Remember I told Marvin Morrell I'd only seen Hester

Lake twice, once at my christening, and once when I got home to wave at her from the depot? How could I have fed her parrot during her visit? No, this isn't Hester Lake. But I think I can guess who she is."

Her face hideous as a harpy's, the woman snarled:

"Yeah? You're smart, eh?"

"Smart enough to know who'd naturally resemble a movie star closest. Her double. Her stand-in. The woman who's photographed for Hester in long shots and dangerous sequences. Lots of times a stand-in hates the star she's doubling for. But I think there was something more than that."

A curse was his only answer. Horgan lifted quizzical eyebrows.

"Jean, you said that Hester Lake would help any crook who wanted to go straight. She might have got somebody with a criminal record a job as her stand-in!"

The woman's face showed that Horgan's guess had hit the mark. Horgan glanced up at the trap-door, went on:

"Somebody got the real Hester Lake out of the way, somebody who knew about this party she was planning, and then turned her practical jokes into murder traps. Substituted the real things for the fakes—stepping up the electricity in that chair so the victim would be killed instead of slightly shocked. Maybe Hester intended to pump laughing gas or oxygen through the pipes, and chlorine was substituted. A real blade was put in that guillotine instead of a rubber one."

"Okay," the spurious Hester Lake said suddenly. "You've got it pretty well figured out. Yeah, I'm Hester's double. I got in a scrape with a patient—I used to be a nurse—and they said I killed the guy for his dough. I asked Hester for help, and I got it. She pulled enough ropes to get the case against me nolle prossed. There wasn't any real evidence, anyway. And—"

"And somebody found out that you were guilty, maybe," Horgan put in, "and that the case could be brought up again and you indicted for mur-

der, if he presented his evidence. Somebody who needed your help in this murder masquerade. The person who intended to be the survivor—or one of them. He needed one or two others alive to support his word, didn't he?"

The woman's voice was loud and harsh. "That's right. We were going to knock Hester out and throw her in the pond, and then I'd disappear. It'd look like she'd gone crazy and tried to kill you all—and just happened to miss a few times. I'd—"

"Hold it!"

Horgan's voice snapped like a whip. His hand came up, gun leveled. He was staring at the stairway, and the two figures upon it. Now he knew why the masquerader had been so willing to talk, to incriminate herself. To give her ally a chance to enter unobserved!

**A** MAN stood at the head of the stairway, the body of a woman slung over his shoulder. He let her slide down swiftly, holding her upright, a living shield before his own body. And the woman, chalk-pale and unconscious, was Hester Lake.

"Hello Hackett," Horgan said. "I expected you."

Hackett's gnomish face was twisted with fury. He thrust out the snub muzzle of an automatic from behind Hester Lake's form.

"Stay where you are! Hear me?"

"Sure," Horgan said softly. "I knew it was you, Hackett. You made one bad mistake. What was your motive, anyway? Greed, I suppose. You didn't like poverty. That was why you spent so much time borrowing money from Hester for wildcat schemes. You've always hated your relatives because they had money to live comfortably, haven't you?"

Hackett's hand moved out to the wall beside him.

"That snake that struck Lynch and you," Horgan went on, "you said it's fangs didn't break your skin. But your sleeve was soaked with blood when you took your coat off upstairs. You couldn't have failed to notice a bite that deep. You pretended you



weren't bitten. There was only one reason for you to do that—and that was because you knew the snake was harmless. That it had had its poison sacs removed. It was just for effect, wasn't it? To help build up Hester Lake's insanity. You weren't taking any chances with a deadly snake, though. That mistake of yours put me on the track—"

Hackett moved swiftly. His hand flashed toward the wall, and simultaneously there came a low whirring of machinery. And another sound—the gurgling rush of water.

The killer leaped back, sent the body of Hester Lake rolling down the stairs. He tried to shield himself behind the trap-door, but Horgan anticipated the move, and fired. The bullet whined past Hackett's head as the man, realizing his peril, flung himself aside.

He overbalanced. He hung for a moment above emptiness, then toppled, to crash down in a foot of water that covered the floor.

The room exploded into a blinding blur of action. From some unseen valve water from the pool above was thundering in, rising swiftly. Hester Lake lay unconscious on the stairway, and running toward her was the masquerader, white hair flying like a witch.

"Stop her, Jean!" Horgan yelled above the noise.

The girl obeyed. Bill Horgan caught a swift glimpse of the two racing up the stairway, and then they vanished into the room above. The water was thigh deep. Horgan moved hastily forward, splashing through its icy turbulence.

At the foot of the staircase he halted, his eyes searching the shadows. But Hackett had disappeared. The black, foaming waters had swallowed him.

So Horgan thought. He realized his mistake as a bear-trap grip got his legs, toppling him over. He made a frantic clutch at air, felt the gun drop from his fingers. Then he was battling for his life under water, battling a man who seemed to have gone mad with hatred and fury.

**A**LL of Hackett's suppressed viciousness was released, and the killer's body had become a deadly fighting machine of sinew and muscle. For a moment Horgan had a glimpse of the man's jaundiced face, water streaming from the lank hair, teeth bared in a snarl. He struck out, felt bone crack against his knuckles.

Hackett screamed mad rage. The water was neck-deep, tearing at them with iron fingers, dragging them down into icy blackness. Salt water choked Horgan. He fought for breath, trying to writhe free of the killer's grip. His lungs were bursting. His eyes seemed to explode in a burst of white flame.

With grim desperation Horgan fumbled for Hackett's face, slid his palm under the man's chin. He put the last of his strength in a push that slowly drove Hackett's head up and back. And, suddenly—

A burst of bubbles foamed in Horgan's face. He felt the killer's grip relax. Hackett was gone in that frigid, tearing whirlpool, and Horgan fought up to the surface, battled his way to the steps, now half submerged. Breathing in great choking gasps, he dragged himself up.

Hester Lake was lying with the water lapping at her body. Somehow Horgan managed to pull her up the stairway, till the two of them crouched just under the trap-door. He tested it with his shoulder; it was locked.

The waters rose higher. Glancing down, Horgan felt a pulse of grateful relief to see that Hester was breathing, and apparently unhurt.

Faint sounds came to his ears from the room above. "Jean! Jean!" he called.

A sharp, shrill cry—and silence. Then the quick drum of footsteps, and the sound of a bolt sliding back. The trap-door lifted. Jean was on her knees beside the gap.

The flood was at Horgan's waist as he lifted Hester Lake up into the arms of the girl. He followed, his clothing clinging icily to his body.

"Aunt Hester!" Jean gasped. "She's not dead, Bill?"

"No," Horgan managed to say.

"She's okay. We'll get her to a doctor. But—"

His glance took in the girl's torn sweater, a scratch across her cheek. Then he saw Hester's double, the body of the masquerader, lying nearby, limp and unconscious. It was easy to understand the battle that had taken place.

"The police will take care of her," Horgan said grimly. "As for Hackett—"

He glanced at the gap at his feet. The water was almost at the level of the floor, but the seething, turbulent rise had given place to a steady, quiet motion. In that square black space something showed for a moment, the dead, contorted face of Scott Hackett, still fixed in a dreadful grin of bitter hatred, eyes wide in a glassy stare. And then it was gone, back into the watery abyss beneath.

Horgan lifted Hester Lake. "We'll come back for her," he said, nodding to his aunt's unconscious double on the floor. "The water's stopped ris-

ing; she'll be safe enough. Come along, Jean."

**N**OAH'S ARK was no longer a fortress. They hurried through dim-lit passages, finding their way to the whale's gaping mouth and out of it, across the gangplank, and to the rough boards of the pier.

"My car isn't far away," Horgan said. "We'll put Hester in it, and then get her stand-in. And head for a doctor, after that."

"Poor Aunt Hester," Jean murmured. "It must have been frightful for her—"

"You're right," Horgan grunted. "Me—I've had enough of practical jokes. Next guy who tries one on me gets a punch in the nose."

The girl didn't answer; silently she kept pace with Horgan. Glancing at her sideward, he was suddenly glad that she wasn't a blood relation. Because he knew, somehow, that it wouldn't be long before he proposed to her.

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*I sprang from the coffin*

# NEXT TIME I DIE

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

*Author of "Murder by the Dead," "Dead Tongues of Terror," etc.*

**E**YES peering beneath the fringe of my eyelashes, I could see the wall of the room at the other end of the casket. There was only one light in the room and it made fantastic shadows of the flowers heaped about the casket. Petals reaching upward looked like hands of desperate, drowning men stretching up beyond the waves for help that would not come.

My own hands were rigid beside me, as helpless as those of the drowning. There was nothing I could do.

*Nothing*—there is no word more hollow. Fifteen hundred people would be seriously injured that night. Fifty-

eight were to die. And among them, Rita, my wife. Walls were to buckle, wires to break. The New Grant Theater was to be destroyed on its opening night. And within this hideous trap, lives of men, women and children would be snuffed out.

My hands were rigid beside me. I was powerless to prevent it.

Across the room, set in the wall where the shadows of flowers were like the hands of drowning men, was a fireplace. The chimney piece was made of old Dutch tiles, each one a curiosity. And in the center of the tiles was the bronze plate of an ancient sundial. For

hours I had looked at the sundial plate until the words embossed upon its rim were graven in my brain:

MY SILENT SHADOW CRIES OUT AGAINST DELAY.

Yes, once I could have stopped the destruction that was to come. Fifteen hundred people. Fifty-eight who were to die, trapped in a collapsing furnace that proudly bore my name—the New Grant Theater.

Beside me, my hands were rigid. There were three flies in the room, buzzing around my head. When they stopped buzzing, I had a horrible idea they would creep into my nostrils and smother me. It was the same horror I had of the lid of the casket. Soft, silk cushions that would smother me. Smother me? I was not conscious of breathing.

Overhead, the undertaker's radio brought swing music out of the ether. It must have been late at night, past time to expect any visitors, so he ran no risk of being thought disrespectful because his radio was going.

The music was checked for a moment while the announcer said it was coming from the pit of the New Grant Theater on its gala opening night. Good God! Did my living brain have to listen to that? Must I hear the rumble of falling masonry and hear the cries of the helplessly trapped, in debris and flame?

How much longer would this brain of mine live on? The hair of the dead sometimes lives and grows for weeks after death. The fingernails grow, too. The heart sometimes lives for hours afterwards. And the brain? How long must this brain of mine live?

I had always thought of death as a blinding flash of light and then a glorious escape into nothingness. But it is not like that. Death is a shadow, a soft-spoken shadow, crying out against delay. How many hours had passed since I talked with him, I did not know.

I did not know either why my wife was unaware that I was here. Here I was, with Death asking me to accept the notion that there was nothing I could do to prevent the collapse of the theater.

My mind went back to that time

when I was seated in my office and George Martel had come in to give his report. . . .

**M**ARTEL was no longer young. His hair was white, his eyes a faded blue, his lips puckered as though he had been eating green persimmons. As he sat down at the opposite side of my desk, his eyes were skittish about meeting mine and he got no comfort from the cigar I gave him. He had been city building inspector for a long time. He said, fumbling with the clasp of his brief-case: "Mr. Grant, you've sure got a beautiful theater there. You've put a lot of money into the inside of it, haven't you?"

I nodded. It was the most beautiful thing of its kind in the city. It had to be to meet competition.

"That's just it," Martel went on uneasily. "It's too beautiful. You've skimped on the construction of the frame in order to have plenty to spend on the interior."

I knew that better than he did. I knew that I had bitten off more than I could chew in building the theater. Everything I had in the world was in it.

"I've got a lot of figures here," Martel said, "if you'd care to go over them with me. I've figured the stresses out carefully and you have not got enough margin of safety in the walls. And the balcony will have to be all reconstructed—"

I interrupted him. "That's what I intend to do after I realize something from my investment. I intend to spend most of the year's profit on improving the place."

Martel moistened his dry lips. "I'm afraid—" he paused—"I'm sure sorry about this, Mr. Grant, but I can't let you open your doors the way the theater now stands. I've seen some clumsy construction in my time, but that new theater of yours is the worst death-trap I've ever encountered. Why, there isn't even adequate means of escape in case of fire."

I stood up then, looked down at this dried up shell of a man who was telling me I couldn't open. I said quietly, "I'm opening, Martel. You always were a calamity howler. That balcony is as

sound as a dollar. The walls could do with some buttressing, maybe, but that has got to come later. I can't afford any changes now and I can't borrow any more. I'm not taking any risk because I am completely covered by insurance."

I faced him squarely. I knew him pretty well. I knew that his wife had been in the hospital for observation and that the doctors' verdict was that she could not live without a costly operation. I knew that Martel had always been an improvident man. I knew that I could buy him. His was nothing but an extortion racket anyway. The new theater couldn't be as bad as he said it was. I had superintended the construction myself.

"Suppose," I said to him, "that someone were to give you five hundred dollars to chuck those figures in the wastebasket."

Martel paled. He was a mouse of a man. He got up quickly. "No. I couldn't do anything like that. I'm surprised at you, Grant. I—I'm—"

He gulped and sat down again. I knew that his mind was in the hospital with his sick wife. His skittish eyes flicked across my face. His lips curved into a sickly smile.

"Maybe I was exaggerating a little," he whispered. "Maybe the theater isn't so bad, Mr. Grant. If you'd promise to do some reinforcing at the earliest opportunity. You don't realize my responsibility. I've got to exaggerate, Mr. Grant. We've got to have a wide margin of safety, just in case we have made a mistake."

**H**E rambled on, preaching a sermon to his conscience. I went to the safe and got the five hundred dollars and fifty more. I pressed the money into his hands. He darted a look over his shoulder and crammed the money into his pocket. He got up quickly and left the office.

I sat at the desk a while after he had gone, smoking, trying to relax, listening to the swish of the janitor's push-broom in the hall outside. Suddenly, I was conscious of the fact that the push-broom had stopped and that I was not alone in the office. I turned around and said, "Hello, Mike."

Mike was an old man who carried his years on a bowed back and his worries on a furrowed brow. He had a smudge of dirt under his big nose. Wild hairs of white grew down over his eyes from his brows. He leaned on his push-broom and I felt him looking at me, though I could not see his eyes.

"Pretty tough work for a man of your age, isn't it, Mike?" I asked.

"I've known harder work, Mr. Grant," he said. He swept a little as an apology for being in my office.

"You don't look very cheerful tonight, Mike," I said.

His answer startled me. "Did you ever see anybody die, Mr. Grant?"

I swiveled around in my chair. "What's this?" I asked gruffly.

Mike looked at the floor. "I shouldn't have been listening, but I was. I heard what Mr. Martel said. I'm glad I did, because as a personal favor to me, I wish you wouldn't open the theater."

As a personal favor to him! I was to go into bankruptcy as a personal favor to a half-witted janitor. I'd have laughed then, only I was beginning to get hot under the collar. I opened my billfold with a snap. "How much do you want?" I demanded.

Mike's jaw fell open. He acted stunned. For a while he didn't say anything. Then, "You mean you're going to open—you're going to jeopardize the lives of—oh, God! Mr. Grant, you wouldn't—"

I got out of the chair, stood directly in front of him. I pressed some bills into his hand. "You get out, Mike. I'll run my business without any more consultation from a janitor."

For a moment, I saw Mike's eyes. They were very soft and brown under those overhanging gray brows. And they were brimming with tears. Mechanically, he wadded the money into his pocket, turned, left the room, pushing the broom in front of him.

The day for the opening approached. Martel had given his falsified report as to the safety of the new theater and there was nothing to worry about. I had selected a first-line movie production and had personally superintended the selection of a good stage show.

I had been in the office a good part of that day and there were still a few mat-

ters to attend to that night. I had a late supper brought in, and after I had eaten I pushed aside the tray, put my arms on the desk, rested my head on my forearms for a moment's relaxation.

I did not doze for even an instant. My eyes were closed but it was impossible for me to sleep. I was too tired for sleep. The clock in the bank building across the street chimed midnight, and I heard every stroke of the gong. Outside my door was a faint swishing sound.

"That you, Mike?" I mumbled without looking up, never stopping to think that Mike must have gone home a long time ago.

**T**HERE was no answer. The world at the moment was silent. There was not even the rush of a car in the street below.

I straightened up, looked around. Somebody's shadow fell across the panel of the open door—somebody who was standing in the hall. Hair on the back of my neck prickled up. There had been an epidemic of office robberies lately. I said sharply, "Who's there?"

Something like a sigh of a faint wind came from the hall and with it, a voice:

"I am here, Mr. Grant. I have come to help you arrange the opening of your new theater."

"That's all arranged," I said. "I've seen everybody who needs to be seen."

"You have not yet seen me, Mr. Grant," went on the voice. "I have arranged a spectacular climax for your opening. You must let me tell you about it, for you will not be there to see it in person."

I knew that was true. I have always been superstitious about first nights. Even before I went into the theater operating game, when I was producing legitimate shows, I had never personally attended the opening of any attraction.

I blinked at the shadow on the door. The man outside had an extremely elongated head or else he wore some sort of a peaked hat.

The voice went on, very gently, very insistently. "The music and the dancers during the second scene of your stage show will set up a peculiar vibration that will bring about the climax as

I have planned it. And the two people who helped me plan it will not be there to see it. What a pity! Martel will not be there, Mr. Grant, nor will you."

I found myself answering mechanically. "I'll be home reading," I said. "Where will Martel be?"

"Martel will be where he is now, Mr. Grant. Martel was run over by a truck fifteen minutes ago. He is now in the morgue."

A cold draft of air played across my shoulders. Blood within my veins congealed. But I fought down the beginnings of fear.

"How in hell do you know that?"

"I was at his elbow," said the voice. The shadow on my door swayed slightly. It was a long, graceful shadow, thin, somehow unearthly.

"Yes, I was beside him when it happened. He was on his way here and so was I. It was an odd coincidence. He was coming here to spoil our show for us. He had a troublesome conscience. He was going to tell you that he was going to prevent your theater from opening, and we couldn't have that, could we, Mr. Grant?"

I stood up, holding to the desk for support. "Who the devil are you?" I asked hoarsely.

For answer the shadow swayed slightly again. Its head turned and I saw that it wore a peaked hood. Something like the curved blade of a scimitar was thrust out in front of the shadow. I saw that the scimitar-like thing was attached to some sort of a crooked handle that was like a snake. I started to say something, to cry out, but my breath was locked within my throat. The thing with the curved blade was a scythe!

"Would you like to hear of the climax of the opening performance at your theater?" the shadow whispered. "As I was saying, the dancing and the music will set up a peculiar vibration. This will be sensed by those sitting in the balcony, for the balcony will sway. Panic will develop among those in the balcony. They will try to escape but the pelting of their feet will rip loose the main support of the balcony. It will fall, crushing those beneath. Electrical wiring will break, short circuit. The insulation you have used in

the walls is cheap and not at all fire-proof. A drapery in the door of the lobby will burst into flames. And there will be the beginning of the holocaust, Mr. Grant."

**T**HE phone on my desk was ringing. It had been ringing insistently for some time. The shadow had stopped speaking, if it had ever spoken at all. I was inclined to think that I had been asleep and that the ringing of the phone had awakened me. The phone was something of the world of reality. I picked it up, said "hello" into the transmitter.

It was Rita, my golden-haired wife. "John, aren't you ever coming home?" she asked. "It's past midnight."

I glanced across the top of my desk. I still had work to do—volumes of it. I told her that I would be tied up for several hours yet.

Rita's sigh came over the phone. "I do hope it will be all worth while, John. You've worked so hard. I'll be in the front row tomorrow at the opening. I'll be your best friend and severest critic. I'll—"

"Rita," I said hoarsely, "you mustn't go to the opening. You understand? You must not go!"

"Why, of course I'm going, silly," she said with a laugh. "Even if your old superstitions do keep you at home. Someone has to go who will tell you the truth about how good or bad it really is. Of course, if you think the owner's wife shouldn't make herself too pridefully conspicuous, I could sit in the balcony."

"Rita!" I shouted. "Not the balcony! Rita, listen to me."

But the phone was dead.

"Why not the balcony?" said a gentle voice behind me. "Other men's beautiful wives will be sitting in the balcony, when it happens."

I didn't turn around. I couldn't. Terror gripped every fiber of my body, held it rigid. I snarled at the voice, "I'm going to stop this thing. The theater just won't open. I won't have it!"

"The theater will open," the voice continued. "And your wife will be in the balcony. You wouldn't try to stop the show from opening, John Grant? You wouldn't deliberately ruin your-

self, would you? Everything is taken care of—for you. There will be a fire and your insurance covers the entire loss. If you close in order to reinforce the building—well, you know better than I that you can get no more money for construction."

"To hell with that!" I snapped. "I'm not having that theater open, I tell you. Where's the phone. I'll call—"

Something touched my shoulder. Very gravely, the soft voice said: "I cannot permit you to interfere, John Grant. Fifty-eight people are to die within the theater tomorrow. Fifteen hundred will be injured. I thought the climax of the show would please you. But if it does not, I still can't permit you to interfere."

**S**LOWLY, mechanically I turned my head. The hand was scarcely visible upon my shoulder because of a cobweb-gray sleeve that hung loosely at its scrawny wrist. Two scrawny fingers that were dried and white-looking touched my shoulder. Two other fingers curled queerly back toward the palm. My eyes traveled up the voluminous sleeve to the thin, hunched shoulder and the peaked hood. There was no face. The thing beside me seemed but a wrap of gray cobweb hanging upon a bony frame. The gray shadow-shape leaned upon its scythe. Eyes I could not see fastened mine, froze my brain. "How," I heard my voice asking, "would you prevent me from interfering?" I thought I knew. I wanted to hear from the shadowy thing beside me.

The hidden eyes seemed to leave my face, to wander across the desk toward the tray of dishes that was there. "A touch of acute indigestion might be the most convincing way," whispered the voice from the gray hood. "I must always be convincing, you know. I must always leave the survivors evidence their minds can grasp. There must always be a cause for death. I am like a murderer except that no one ever discovers my secret motive and lives to talk about it. That is why there must be evidence that you died of acute indigestion.

I uttered a strained, crackling laugh. "I have the digestion of a horse. You'll not stop me from saving the lives of

those people. Why, I'll—"

I sprang to my feet. But even as I did so, a sharp pain lanced through my chest. There was a sensation like velvet fingers, soft yet all-powerful, squeezing my heart.

There was no brilliant, blinding flash, no sudden cessation of feeling. A curious sensation of cold crept over my body. I fell back in my chair. I tried to speak, but my mouth had stiffened and my tongue was like a stick of wood. Billions of needles prickled flesh and muscle. And then came that horrible numbness. Through heavy eyelids, I watched my fingers clutching the arm of the chair. My brain demanded that my fingers move. I was exerting all my strength to compel my hands to move, but I could not so much as make my little finger quiver.

And then my extremities seemed things of no importance, as though they had atrophied. My body was a prison cell for a brain that lived, that called out for escape, that beat with futile thought waves against its prison. This was death. This was the beginning of death for fifty-eight others who would be crushed in a collapsing inferno I had made for them. This was the death of my wife. . . .

\* \* \*

**S**O I lay in my coffin, surrounded by flowers. How much time had passed, I did not know. Time is no fourth dimension in death. When time becomes eternity, clocks are as useless as that sundial set in the undertaker's fireplace mantel—the dial that was embossed with the words: "My silent shadow cries out against delay." Those are the words of Death. Death is the silent shadow. What purpose clocks, when it is always later than we think?

Beneath heavy eyelids, the eyes of my feeble, living brain watched. Upstairs, the radio had been turned off. Somewhere in the room where I lay in soft casket cushions I could feel a man was moving.

There was a certain quiet reverence in the way he moved, lifting baskets and sprays of flowers, getting them out of the way.

"Have no reverence for me!" my mind cried out to him. "I did not die because of acute indigestion. That was

Death's false evidence. Death took me for another reason. You would not believe it, but I am a murderer. Selfishness and avarice ruled my life. This is my punishment."

Then hands I could not see took hold of the dead end of the casket and it was pushed on its rubber tired, rolling trestle, through doors at one end of the room. And then, I judged, it was rolled down a concrete ramp. Another door opened and closed. I heard voices. One said: "Mr. Jacobs always likes to cremate two bodies at once. It saves gas."

Cremate me? For me, the all-consuming flame? I struggled within myself, fought the prison cell that was my body. I was not dead. My body, perhaps, was dead, but my brain lived. My brain would know the agony of the flame—even as those within the burning theater would know the agony of flame. No. No, they couldn't do that to me. I was alive. They just thought I was dead. Death had made some ghastly mistake. I could not move, but I was not dead.

"*Not dead. Not dead, you idiots!*" My mind screamed. And I fought against the body that shrouded me. My arms and legs stretched helpless and stiff, there was a faint tingling. That was all.

Strong hands seized the handles of the casket. It was lifted, swaying, and lowered to something that was resilient beneath my weight. The tingling sensation in my arms and legs increased. I screamed, but the scream only swelled my throat to the point of bursting; it did not pass my lips.

Somewhere above me, a churchly voice mumbled a prayer. . . . "Ashes to ashes—"

"Ashes to ashes," my mind echoed, and I thought my body quivered slightly from the hysteria within my brain. Ashes—I would soon be ashes. *And I was not dead.*

Not dead, because for the first time in what seemed like many hours, I felt something touch my cheek; I felt downy rose petals touch my cheek.

Why, in the name of God, hadn't they closed the lid of the casket? Why must I feel the rose petals falling? Why must my brain live and my eyes see? Why must life return for a brief instant and



then be thrust into an ail consuming flame?

A sinking sensation. My eyes were on the level with a tiled floor. The lowering device was letting me drop into the pit. Somewhere, I heard the muffled, continuous roar of flame. I was conscious of the proximity of awful heat. And the coffin came to rest.

**I** WAS in a narrow passage illuminated by light that was like the rays of the sun. Two overalled men seized the handles of the casket and moved it from the lowering device to something else that was on rollers. Ahead of me, I could see the roaring, yellow-red maw of the crematory furnace and in the center of it, a square, black shape that was like the end of another coffin. The head of my coffin was being raised slightly to prepare it for its trip down the short ramp into the furnace. For an instant, I saw the faces of the two attendants—faces grim, greasy with sweat, reddened by the furnace glow; demon faces of men who were thrusting me into the jaws of hell.

One of the men, turning toward the furnace, uttered a startled oath. His companion gripped his arm, shook him. "Don't let it get you, Bill," he cried. "It's always like that, when a body burns. The arms and legs curl up that way, just like a new born baby."

My eyes saw into the furnace, saw blackened, burning legs of the corpse drawing slowly up toward the body, raising up above the edge of the coffin as though trying desperately to escape the fury of the flame.

And then the wooden coffin fell apart. The flame cried out triumphantly, and I heard: "Give me a hand. Let's get this one in now."

My coffin moved forward.

Steel bands that were my rigid muscles snapped. I sprang from the coffin, saw attendants melt back before me. On the brink of hell, all the pent up energy of the past hours returned to me. I ran up the passage, away from the furnace. No one tried to stop me. Doors opened as I struck them with extended arms. I ran up a flight of stairs. One final barrier, and I was free.

*Free!* Free in the sweet, cool darkness of the night. I kept running.

There was no rejoicing in my heart. There was instead a dull ache that reminded me of something unfinished.

"My silent shadow cries out against delay."

The words burned across my brain, dulling all except the true conception of the horror they portended. And I was weak, impotent, flabby of body and soul. My knees sank under me. Eyes closed, I lay prostrate upon the ground. Oblivion spread its blanket over me.

When I regained consciousness, I found that I was on a grass plot in Raymond Park. It was morning. A ten o'clock sun burned brightly in a cloudless sky. Gradually, what had happened came back to me like a dream. Yet it was no dream. Somewhere not far away, the New Grant Theater would be a heap of charred and crumbling ruin. And like a murderer drawn to the scene of his crime, I returned to the site of the theater.

Across the street from the theater I stopped, my incredulous gaze fastened on the ornate front of the building with its three ton electrical sign rising majestically from its neon-trimmed marquee. Gay banners fluttered in the wind, bearing the words: "Grand opening today."

Today? What trick had time played on me? Here was no smoke-blackened ruin. Three or four overalled men worked around the front of the place, cleaning windows of the box office and polishing the chrome trim of the doors.

**I** STUMBLED across the street, deaf to the sound of motor horns and the squeal of brakes. I seized the arm of one of the workmen. "Is it true?" I asked tremulously. "The opening is today?"

He looked at me coolly over his shoulder. "Well, tonight is more exact," he said, and returned to his polishing.

I shoved open the plate glass door and dashed into the magnificent lobby my brain had conceived. I ran up carpeted steps to the manager's office above. A cool-looking, red-haired beauty was sitting at a desk in the outer office. She gave me an inquiring glance, then sprang to her feet as I started to the door marked private behind which

I knew I could find Ed Williams whom I had chosen to manage the theater. The red-haired girl stepped in front of me. I seized her roughly to thrust her aside. She slapped down my hands.

"Can't you read?" she demanded tartly. "You can't barge into the manager's office. Mr. Williams is very busy, getting ready for the opening."

"There isn't going to be any opening," I said. "We can't open. The building is unsafe and if we open there will be a climax—" I saw the blank stare the girl was returning to me. Of course! She did not know about the climax Death had arranged. And I could not explain so that she would believe.

"Listen," I said more softly, "get Ed Williams out here. We're not opening tonight. I'm the owner of the place—"

"You?" The girl laughed harshly. "You're crazy. A crazy old crank. Now you get out of here before I have somebody throw you out—"

And then it dawned upon me. Of course, the girl thought I was crazy. John Grant had died, or so they supposed. There was only one way I could reach Williams and stop the slaughter that Death had arranged. I'd have to go to my own office and phone Williams from there.

My own office was a small two room place in a building three blocks away. I covered the distance at a run, took an elevator to the third floor, got out, entered the office that bore my name. Bessie, my secretary, was behind her desk. She raised mild eyes to mine and inquired politely, "Yes?" She always was a trifle absent minded. I went over and leaned across her desk.

"Don't be alarmed, Bessie," I said quietly. "I'm not dead. I didn't die here last night, understand? It sounds crazy, but I didn't really die."

Apprehension stole into her face, and then terror. She sprang to her feet, would have screamed if I had not clasped my hand over her mouth.

"Keep quiet," I said harshly. "I've got to use the phone." I went into my private office, saw, out of the tail of my eye, Bessie running into the hall. I chuckled. Of course she didn't know that I was not dead. I hoped I could convince Williams.

I called the Grant Theater office and Williams answered. I said, "Listen, Ed, this is John Grant. I'm not dead—"

**W**ILLIAMS' voice cut in cheerfully. "Say, where've you been? I've been trying to get hold of you since three o'clock this morning. We've been having a little trouble with the lights. Having some short circuits. I had to get in a couple of extra electricians and I wanted you to okay the order. We won't be ready for the opening if we don't step on it."

"Ed," I said hoarsely, not understanding why everybody thought I was dead except Williams, "we're not opening. Close up your office and go home. The theater isn't safe, and I haven't the money to make it safe. I'm going to sell it as is to someone who can finish the job. We're not opening tonight."

"Not opening? Mr. Grant, are you sure you know what you're saying?"

"Yes," I said quietly. "We're not opening. The report Martel gave wasn't the truth. That's why Martel is dead. It wasn't a truck that hit him. Death was at his shoulder—"

"Mr. Grant!" Ed gasped. "Are you sick?"

"No. Not sick. Thank God I'm in time, that's all. We're not opening!"

I hung up the phone and dropped back into my chair, exhausted. Outside the door, I heard Mike's push-broom swishing. The old fellow stuck his head through the open door, leaned on his push-broom, looked at me with eyes I could not see. "Morning, Mr. Grant," he said quietly.

"Mike," I said sharply, "come in here."

Mike shuffled into the room. "Mighty glad you did what you did, Mr. Grant," he said. "Glad you took my hint and refused to open the new theater."

"Mike," I asked, "how does it happen you seem to know me when nobody else does?"

"Me, Mr. Grant? I'd know you any place. You and Mr. Martel—"

"Martel's dead," I snapped. "Did you know that?"

Mike nodded. "Sure. I saw him die. A truck hit him last night about twelve o'clock. I saw them take him to the

morgue."

"Mike—" I stared in horror at the janitor's hand. Two fingers of his right hand were bent in toward the palm. The two other fingers clutched the handle of the broom. "Mike, your hand, like—"

"Sure, Mr. Grant. Didn't you ever notice? When I was a doctor"—so Mike had been a doctor!—"I got some infection on the back of my hand. It destroyed those tendons—"

"Mike!" I stood up, head lowered, eyes searching his wrinkled face. "Mike, is there any drug known to the medical profession which could paralyze a man so he couldn't talk, couldn't move, so that he might be taken for dead?"

Mike rubbed the gray stubble of his chin. "Curare might do it if you knew just how, Mr. Grant."

"Mike," I said hoarsely. "You're Death. Last night you came here for me, drugged me, took me to an undertaker's. You got the undertaker to put on a show for my benefit. He played phonograph records of music we were going to use in opening the theater. He had someone imitate a radio announcer. You can't fool me, Mike. You got the undertaker to do all that with the money I gave you to keep you quiet about what you had heard between Martel and me. You—"

"Mr. Grant!" Mike gasped. "You'd

better go home and get to bed. I used to be a doctor, my license was revoked on account of a mercy death, but I haven't forgotten anything, and when I say you're a sick man, you're a sick man."

I looked at my hands. They were shaking. "Maybe you are right," I said. "Maybe I am sick. Maybe I'm going to die again." I laughed. "I'm going home to Rita."

"I'd do that," Mike advised. "But you ought to phone and prepare her first. It'll be quite a shock."

Shock? What was he driving at?

"Better go take a look at your face, Mr. Grant. A lot of people wouldn't recognize you. Not *like that*."

I turned woodenly, stumbled into the washroom, stared at my face in the glass. I blinked incredulously at my reflection.

The eyes were surely mine—tired, sunken eyes, but none the less mine. My features were recognizable, though they seemed ages old. But my jet black hair had turned snow white.

I lurched into the office. "Mike—" I looked bewilderedly around. Mike wasn't there. I could hear his footsteps in the hall outside. The swish of his broom on the floor was like the rustling of the robes of Death.

On my way home I got to wondering what I was to do that would give Death his motive, next time I die.

## HEADLINERS IN THE NEXT ISSUE

### THE DEVIL'S HERITAGE

A Novelet of Werewolf Horror  
By JOE ARCHIBALD

BLOOD OF THE MUMMY  
A Novelet of an Egyptian Curse  
By G. T. FLEMING-ROBERTS



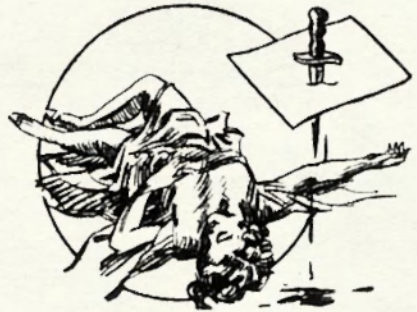
FLIGHT OF THE FLAME FIEND  
A Novelet of Weird Sacrifice  
By CARL JACOBI

# ARAB INTERLUDE

A Short Short Story  
Complete  
on These Two Pages

By **WILL GARTH**

Author of "Fulfillment," "Shadow of the Fiend," etc.



**N**ORMA KEITH coughed and opened her eyes. Dazedly she discovered that she was lying in an eerie smoke-filled stone cellar. On her right, not far from a barred casement window, a lantern in a wall bracket cast a wan glow.

"The *memsahib* awakes!"

It was a soft voice that spoke. The pretty blond girl sat up abruptly as she heard the words. A wave of horror swept over her as she found herself staring into the evil face of a turbaned East Indian.

In one brown hand he clutched a chain that was attached to a dog collar that had been fastened around her slender throat. In the other hand the East Indian held a wicked-looking kris—and the blade had been heated to white heat in an Oriental incense burner that rested on the floor!

Norma tried to leap to her feet, then dropped back down again with a helpless moan. She couldn't get up from there. For on her left wrist a huge manacle was attached to a heavy chain fastened to the wall.

"You will speak—you will reveal the secret," the East Indian said, slowly extending the point of the heated knife toward her. "I, Abdullah, must know where the jewels are hidden. If the *memsahib* does not tell she will be branded with the mark of those who do not tell the truth!"

"No—wait!" Norma pleaded wildly. "I know nothing about any jewels! You must be insane!"

For a moment Abdullah remained motionless, glaring at her. She tried to think, tried to remember how she

had reached this place. She remembered coming ashore with some other members of the ship's cruise party. They had gone on to visit the temples of the Arabian city. She had been alone with Carson White when they had chanced upon an interesting-looking little curio shop on a side street.

They had entered the place, and had been looking around. She had seen a big Oriental idol with a wide open mouth sitting on a counter. She had gone closer to it—then something like a puff of smoke had come from the mouth of the idol and she had remembered nothing more until she had opened her eyes here in this sinister place to find this diabolical fiend leering at her.

"You are a rich girl, Miss Keith," said the man who called himself Abdullah. He looked at the kris, found that the blade was growing cold and thrust the knife back into the hot coals of the incense burner. "Only a rich and foolish girl would venture alone through the streets of Cairo."

"But I was not alone," said Norma. "A man—Carson White—was with me. What have you done with him?"

"The gentleman with you has disappeared," said Abdullah. "And now you will tell me the secret of the hidden jewels!"

**I**T suddenly dawned on Norma that she had been stripped of all her jewelry. She was still wearing the white evening gown she had worn when she left the ship. But there had been expensive rings on her fingers and a pearl necklace about her throat,

and now they were all missing.

"Tell me!" Again Abdullah picked up the kris with its red hot blade. Norma screamed in terror as he drew her closer to him by pulling on the chain attached to that dog collar around her neck. His eyes glittered as he brought the red hot blade closer and closer to her shoulder.

"You will tell!"

"Drop that knife!"

The words came from the barred casement window as half of it was thrown open. A gun roared. Abdullah clapped his right hand to his breast, the kris dropping from his fingers. He reeled back and fell to the floor, the front of his robe suddenly stained crimson.

"Norma, are you all right!" Tall, dark, small-mustached Carson White leaped through the window with an automatic in his hand. "They had me tied up in the rear of this place, but I managed to work my way free of the ropes."

Carson White went to the still form of the East Indian and examined him.

"He's dead," said White. "Now we've got to get out of here. The native police will be asking all sorts of questions—might even hold us until after the ship sails."

He fumbled through Abdullah's clothing and found a key that unlocked the manacle around Norma's left wrist.

"He took all of my jewels," said Norma.

"I'm sorry," said White. "But there is no time to try and find them now. There were two other men with him and they must have heard the shot. They will be looking for us."

He led her to the window and helped her climb through it. They leaped to the ground in an alleyway behind the curio shop. Instantly Norma fumbled in the neck of her evening gown and drew out a little silver whistle. Before White realized what she was doing she had blown it three times.

"Right here waiting, Miss Keith!" called one of two big men who abruptly appeared from the shadows of the alleyway. "We followed White and have been waiting. They put on a

good act."

"What's the idea?" snarled White. "Who are these men?"

"Detectives," said Norma sweetly. "Just as I am. You and your stooge Abdullah have been staging a nice little racket, Mr. White—and you might have continued to get away with it if you hadn't been so greedy on the last cruise."

"MEANING what?" demanded White, his face suddenly paling.

"That you have been leading rich girls on the cruise to this curio shop—but only those who are foolish enough to wear their jewels when they go exploring foreign cities. Abdullah dopes them with that gas from the idol, stages that crazy torture scene—then you come to the rescue at the right moment! You fire at Abdullah with a blank cartridge. He breaks a capsule of red ink as he dies. You frighten the girl into leaving in a hurry because of the murder angle—without her jewels. Naturally she doesn't say anything about it when she gets back to the ship—it all sounds too fantastic—and the poor girl fears being mixed up in murder."

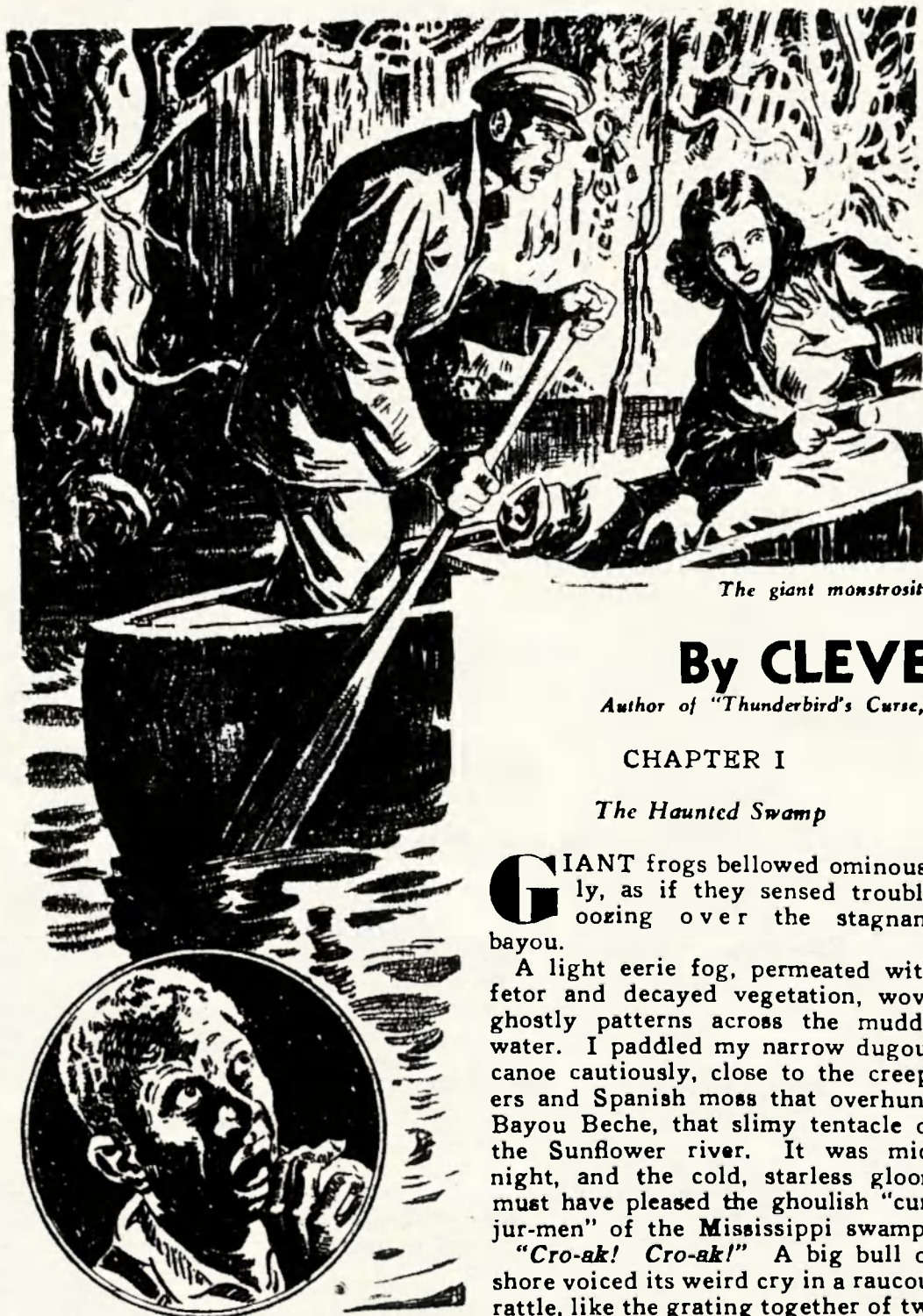
"So that's it," and White shrugged. "All right—you've got me. But what did you mean about my being too greedy the last voyage?"

"You pulled the trick on a rich girl and got away with it. But when you did the same thing with an elderly and foolish rich woman within three hours you overdid it. These two women compared notes and realized it was a racket. So I pretended to be a rich and foolish girl on this trip—but it was merely bait to trap you." Norma laughed. "You never would get rich from the jewels you got from me. They came from the ten-cent store!"

One of the detectives had disappeared, but he returned in a few moments with Abdullah. Norma shivered as she gazed at the East Indian. He had made the whole thing so realistic that she had been frightened.

"I think I like my cruises without horror as an extra added attraction," she said. "Take them away, boys."

# THREE CROAKS



*The giant monstrosity*

By **CLEVE**

*Author of "Thunderbird's Curse,"*

## CHAPTER I

### *The Haunted Swamp*

**G**IANT frogs bellowed ominously, as if they sensed trouble oozing over the stagnant bayou.

A light eerie fog, permeated with fetor and decayed vegetation, wove ghostly patterns across the muddy water. I paddled my narrow dugout canoe cautiously, close to the creepers and Spanish moss that overhung Bayou Beche, that slimy tentacle of the Sunflower river. It was midnight, and the cold, starless gloom must have pleased the ghoulish "cunjur-men" of the Mississippi swamps.

"*Cro-ak! Cro-ak!*" A big bull on shore voiced its weird cry in a raucous rattle, like the grating together of two

---

In the Land of "Cunjur" Evil Phantasms Seek

---

# from S'ATA'N

A Complete  
Novelet



*was hunting us!*

## WILLIAMS

*"Ogre of the Okanagan," etc.*

dried bones.

I swerved toward the sound, and could tell by the wobbling of our fragile craft that lovely Jeanie Hunter, my little fiancée, was shivering deliciously with the terror of this nocturnal hunt. She was in the bow, holding the flashlight under her heavy cloak.

In the stern, I had a five-foot trident. Sometimes it is dangerous to hunt the big bullfrogs. One false move, and the canoe turns over. The water is full of poisonous moccasins, turtles and sharp-toothed garfish—some of them six feet long, and all as ferocious as sharks. Frog-spearing is sporting, for the man is often in as much peril as the frog. I like night hunting, but this time I had an uneasy hunch that Jeanie would regret her curiosity, before the graveyard shift was over.



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**Human Victims Through Swamp Miasma!**

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"*Glunk! Glunk!*" This one was close by, and had a deep, guttural bass, with a menacing rumble. One of its legs would fill a frying pan. There was a curious splashing, not far off, and a sudden, uneasy oppressiveness made the air thicker and clammy.

Jeanie started nervously, so that the frail dugout nearly turned over. She smothered a scream. "Let's go back, Wayne honey," she half-whispered. "I'm afraid!"

"Shh! Don't move, or we'll be in the water." Cautiously, I laid down the paddle, caught up the long spear. "Never be afraid of a frog that croaks twice. Only three croaks should worry you. The conjur doctors say that when the devil turns into a frog, to haunt the swamps, he croaks three times."

"Never mind your devils. There's death on this bayou. I feel it! Let's go back to the house party." Jeanie's clear soprano was tremulous, an unusual state for her to be in.

"You were determined to see what it was like, kid," I told her. "Now you can help catch one anyhow. Shine the torch on shore." We were very close, now.

"*Glunk!*"

Obediently, Jeanie collected her courage, clicked the switch. As the glare of the beam cut the haze, I saw it—a monster frog, even for this semi-tropical country. There was something so uncannily sinister about the malevolent glitter of its great green eyes that I hesitated for a moment, without knowing why. As a track and field man in college, specializing in the javelin and pole vault, this was easy for me.

Carefully I raised the spear, while the giant creature stared at me, unblinking. Then, when my arm was in mid-air, the frog croaked a signal that paralyzed me.

"*Glunk-glunk-glunk!*"

Its bellow held a menace as threatening as doom. And I had been taught that a man could only hear that cryptic croak once in a lifetime.

"Three croaks from Satan!" I was remembering the hex tales of the swamps, and unaccountably cold fear

was crawling along my muscles. This frog was different.

**I** SHOOK the feeling off almost immediately. It is natural, in youth, to believe folk legends unquestioningly, and there were gruesomely evil murder stories about this bayou—stories that involved my own family. But I was no longer a child. Frog-hunting was a familiar sport, and this was just a frog—

I shot my barbed trident straight through the fog, stabbing the big fellow between the eyes. A five-pound frog can put up quite a struggle.

Jeanie believes these swamp stories less than I, who had been brought up on them, but she squealed affrightedly. Still she forced herself to sit calmly, shutting off the light while I thrust the croaker, still kicking, into a bag.

Suddenly I agreed with her that we should go, and the faster the better.

"Nice work, kid," I said. "After all, I'm hunting my own frogs on my own swampland. My great-grandfather, the river pirate, hunted men for their gold, near here, so it's a come-down for me." Joking, I was trying to make her forget her fears, and to ignore a noxious aura of evil that was being diffused through the swamp miasmas. "Some say it's a cruel sport, but I think the frog gets a better break than a deer gets, because—" I broke off suddenly, for there was a slight slithering sound from an overhanging bush. "Whatever you do, Jeanie, don't move!" I barked.

She mustn't know but the slithering thing was a water-moccasin that had been sleeping in the bush. There was a light thud on the bottom of the paper-thin dugout. It was in the canoe, its venomous fangs doubtless seeking her silken ankles in the dark!

I didn't dare ask her to turn on the torch. Fright would cause her to move, and overturn the craft. There were worse things in the chill, foul water.

Softly I clutched the broad paddle, scooped along the bottom. The frog-bag went overboard, with a splash. Another scoop, and I felt a squirming,



rubbery thing, and shoveled it into the water. There went the snake, swimming away.

I heaved a sigh of relief. The deadly reptile, coming so closely after the three menacing croaks, had shaken my nerve a little. If I told this story every Negro on the Delta, and a good many whites, would regard me as damned to Hell, for meddling with the unknown. It was time to turn back.

"Flash the light on the boat, kid," I said. "I want to make sure—"

She sprayed the beam into the fog, then swung it around toward the dug-out. Its rays danced first on the shore.

Jeanie screamed, and as I glanced up, black horror caught me by the throat.

Standing in the light was a colossal green nightmare of a frog—an impossible monstrosity with malign, flashing eyes. It stood higher than a man. It must have been more than six feet tall. Its belly was pallid white, the white of a corpse, as it reared up on its hind legs, there in the mud. In its webbed claws was a long trident, poised to stab. The frog was hunting us!

The hell-spawned phantasm could have slain us immediately, and dragged us to the pit. I was stunned by this proof of tales that demons do haunt swamps, that primitive folk who sense evil in the dark places where fear lurks in hiding, know what they are talking about.

The creature could have pinned us on the barbs of its trident, in that moment, as though we had been a pair of the bull-frogs I had hunted. But it stopped to utter a fiendish croak.

**M**Y body went rigid, while a wave of cold terror crinkled my scalp. For as it croaked, I thought I saw three goutts of blood on the head of the monster—goutts corresponding to those on the frog I had stabbed! Could this be—

"*GLUMP-GLUMP-GLUMP!*"

It was a gargantuan voice, a horrible bellow that matched this spectral apparition, which seemed to have sprung from the insane brain of a Delta voodoo man.

I do not credit the voodoo men and

cunjur doctors any more than does the average landowner who has been brought up on their superstitions. There had been a time when I had laughed at the idea of "three croaks from Satan." But that was before I saw a frog the size of a rabbit change to a frog bigger than a man, with a spear lifted to rip the fair white body of the girl I loved!

Then the frog goblin's trident shot back for a thrust!

Instantly, I was released from the ghastly spell it had cast over me. It was as though the starter's gun had barked, and we were competing in a nightmare game with Death.

My paddle struck the water, swerved around quickly behind the stern. Immediately the bow, where Jeanie sat, swung swiftly away from shore; so swiftly that the flashlight dropped from her nerveless fingers into the muddy bayou. Another stroke, and we were shooting away from shore.

There was a grunt behind me, and a searing hot pang tore through my left shoulder, but it did not stop me. Just as Death was creeping up on me, the monster missed. If the barb had struck full, I should have been hooked, and dragged from the boat. Terror gave me new strength, and I paddled like a maniac, even while blood dribbled down my arm. A hundred feet from shore, I looked back, my heart hammering madly.

The shoreline was black and dismal, only a little darker than the water. There was not a sign of the fearful creature to be seen.

But there was a terrifying stillness, now, that spread all up and down the whole bayou. An uncanny silence that seemed to weight down the spirit. It was as heavy and foreboding as the Cimmerian night. I felt that all the noxious reptiles in the ooze had ceased their complaining cacophony, to listen for the voice of their master.

The cunjur mon past masters of mystery, swear that hell is not fiery, but is a place of slime, peopled with monsters that crawl. They should know. Now the Master spoke.

"*GLUMP-GLUMP-GLUMP!*"

Three croaks from Satan! Croaks

that were the more sinister because they had no tangible meaning. Except that the swamp men and black witches said they meant Death, and horror unutterable. Why had we been chosen to hear them?

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## CHAPTER II

### *Ghastly Warning*

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**I** WAS afraid that Jeanie had been frightened out of her wits, as I nearly had. Creeping forward, I found her huddled in the bottom of the dug-out, unconscious.

Madly I paddled toward the lodge landing, at the spot where the bayou joins the river. The water swirled in phosphorescent fury, like the ghost-fire from the swamps, beneath the strokes of the paddle blade.

There was a house party at my log cabin, and it was up to me to check on it quickly, lest this thing menace the others. This might possibly have been some ghastly jest, a misguided and almost fatal practical joke. Or it might be something more tenuous and more terrible. Something that had best be forgotten. The legend was that whoever heard the three croaks would die. . . .

But no matter what it was, the party was going to be broken up. I was responsible for the safety of my guests, and I must speed Jeanie out of the swamps. For always the fearsome thought swirled in my mind that she, too, had heard the three enigmatical croaks of the frog chimera. In the circumstances, there was no solving the thing that night, but I could at least get everybody away from the deadly bayou.

Not that I was a gay capitalist, giving parties on my plantation. Nothing like it. Once the Herons had had wealth. It was wealth with a blood taint, for it had been gathered by Wayne Heron, the great-grandfather after whom I was named—the river pirate.

They said I looked like old Wayne Heron, too. Tall, rangy and easy-go-

ing; big nose; straw-colored hair and light gray eyes that contrasted with a heavily tanned skin. Not a perfect picture of a pirate, but he had robbed and killed on the river, after his war service.

His victims were chiefly Yankee carpetbaggers, not the kindly Northerners, but those vultures who preyed on the South following the War Between the States. Because he helped many a Southerner ruined by that conflict, he was deemed something of a hero, even while he looted the steamboats.

He'd bought broad plantations, but legend said he'd buried the remaining gold, and died without naming the place, except in a map that my grandfather had found worthless. So, without capital to back up the cotton planting, the Heron family gradually came down in the world.

Now, just out of college, I was an orphan, possessed only of some acres of swampland and an inclination to study law in the office of my former guardian, Archibald Early.

"I'll give you a hand, my boy, until you get on your feet," the tall, iron-gray Early said, when I showed up with a fine athletic record and no job. "You read law in my office. In due course, I'll find you a place in the sun." He had always been mighty fine about helping me out, this friend of my father's.

So I was still in Clarksville when Jeanie Hunter came down from Nashville, visiting one of the girls. Naturally, she went around with some of the other fellows, at first, but not after we took a fancy to each other. She had promised me that.

"But honey, I won't see Bert Runion any more," she'd said to me. "Why don't we get married right now?" Her mouth had a tiny quirk that made a dimple when she smiled.

"We can't, kid," was what I had regretfully said, "until I make some money. And until the recession goes back and cotton goes up, that's not likely."

Her head only reached to my shoulder, so that when I told her that, with her in my arms, I could smell the wis-

teria blossom she wore in her light brown hair.

**S**O that's how it was, when I invited the crowd to my old fishing lodge. Two other couples, with Mr. and Mrs. Early for chaperones, and old black Bilby, the conjur man, to cook the fish and frogs we caught. And Runion, a wealthy young cotton planter who practically invited himself.

The party was all right, except that Runion had made a pass or two at Jeanie. It was inhospitable, of course, but I'd taken him out into the woods and cooled him off. His story was that Jeanie encouraged him. I doubted that . . . Come to think of it, what had he said, getting up from the ground?

"You'll croak for this!"

And two hours later I had heard "three croaks from Satan!" Had that been Runion's masquerade? If so, it was a diabolical prank that might have killed Jeanie.

In smoldering wrath I swept up to the landing, and found the crowd gathered excitedly on the dock.

"We've got to go back to town, Heron!" "Fats" Browne called, across the water. "Mrs. Early has been killed!"

"How?" I had to ask, while I was putting Jeanie on the torch-lit dock, so the two girls could revive her. Somehow, though, I knew the answer before they told me. "A frog?" I asked, then I could have bitten my tongue off, for speaking.

"A frog spear. And how did you find out?"

Browne's tone was suddenly hostile. There was suspicion in Mike Houghton's hatchet face. Even the pale, deep-set eyes of Archibald Early had a queer look. The girls, plump Rosalie Hill and auburn-topped Sue Wilder, were murmuring over Jeanie, as she revived, and paid no attention.

It was silly, but eerily of a pattern with the other happenings of the night. Jeanie could prove I'd done no murder. I'd said nothing about a spear, anyway.

Now I determined not to mention

the giant frog. People become mighty jumpy, when there is murder in such a ghostly setting as this swampy bayou. They had not yet noticed my bloody shoulder.

"We've taken her into the lodge, Wayne." Early's fine voice was mournful, of course. But somehow his habit of rubbing his dry palms together grated on me at the moment, for it reminded me of an undertaker. "She came out to look for stars, and was stabbed in the throat. We can't find the weapon." He told me quickly how they had taken her body back into the lodge.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Early." I put my hand on his shoulder. "We'll get the three cars and go back to Clarksville for the sheriff, since it—since she's already been moved."

"Why, yes. Runion had found her and had already moved her, thinking she might not be—dead. So the rest of us came down from the lodge—" The crowsfeet about his eyes became deeper.

"Oh! Runion was outside, while you all were in—"

"All in due course, Wayne. Yes, Runion was outside. So was Bilby. For that matter, so were you and Miss Hunter. But nobody in this party had a motive, and Bilby says there have been strangers prowling—"

Jeanie was on her feet, so we moved toward the lodge, a hundred yards away. As we stumbled up the path, I tried to ask her to keep quiet about the frog, but too late.

"Why'd you faint, Jeanie?" The red-headed Wilder girl is always to the point.

"We saw a frog, bigger than a man—and it tried to kill us!"

**I** HAD started them wondering, and Jeanie had finished it. I doubted now that a court of law would believe either one of us. The thing was too insane—and we had a frog trident!

We walked the rest of the way in an ominous, brooding silence.

The lodge was lit by a kerosene lamp that threw gruesome, skittering shadows about, over the skins, gay

blankets and antlers that ornamented the place. They had laid the body of gaunt, gray-haired, discontented Mrs. Early on a divan. The three wounds in her corded throat were shocking enough, and I was examining them, when—

Mike Houghton's sharp face went suddenly pale as a ghost's.

"Someone's been in here!" His voice was actually trembling. "The lily pad!"

The seven of us gaped. It was odd that a green lily pad should be on the breast of the dead woman. I bent over it first. Printed on the thing with a sharp instrument, so that the letters were dark bruises against an emerald background, was a message.

A ghastly warning from hell itself!

The Frog! It could have been nothing else. I stumbled back from the corpse, and leaned against the wall, feeling that my face must be as livid as that of the dead woman. Jeanie came to my side, and I could feel her slight young body shuddering as she clung to me.

Early's mouth was queerly compressed, and his long upper lip twisted, as he read the message. Its brevity, and its ominous implications, were blood-curdling. More menacing than a direct threat.

#### GO. THIS PLACE IS NOT FOR HUMANS!

Beneath the crudely-printed letters was a clumsy picture. Five straight lines that slanted together at the bottom, like the five fingers of a hand. Light half-moons connected the fingers, making them webbed.

"I don't understand this." Early was rubbing his hands nervously again. "It looks like a hand."

"Or a foot," Fats Browne broke in. "Those curved lines joining the straight ones make it like a frog's."

"Frawg? Oh, sweet Lawd, save me!" Old Bilby had come in, unnoticed with Bert Runion. Bilby's face was absolutely gray, and his thick lips wobbled. "De debbil musta croaked three times!"

It did not escape me that his kinky gray hair was tied up in knots with

red flannel strips and with white thread—the infallible sign of a Negro using a charm against witches.

Runion, who looked like a sleek movie star and knew it, was reading the message for himself. His pale face had some bruises that matched my knuckles, and I smiled. He was stockier than I, but had allowed his temper to spoil his aim. He looked up, biting thin red lips.

"I think you're due to do some explaining, Heron."

I stayed calm, and let him have it. "Suppose you start, Runion. Where were you when Mrs. Early was killed?"

He flushed angrily. "In my car, getting a drink. Flask in the side pocket."

"Can you prove it?"

"I don't have to prove anything to you—lawyer's clerk."

My fists were balling up, but Early cut in, impatiently. "Boys! After all, I can't have you quarreling in the presence of—" He nodded toward the body of his wife.

"SORRY." I began, touched by the anguish in his strained face. And then Bilby startled us.

"Marse Runion's right. He was out at de car. They was a Cajun wid him." The whites of the old Negro's eyes rolled nervously.

"Cajun!" Early seemed bewildered.

"You're lying, Bilby! There was no one with me."

Runion's brown eyes were snapping with fury. But we were all looking at him dubiously, even the three frightened girls.

"Mebbe it was two Cajuns, Marse Runion. Or two cunjur men. Mebbe dey done flew away." Bilby had a peculiar look—half fright, half bravado. "I'se de onliest black man wid nerve enough to come to Bayou Beche, no-ways. Dat's why Marse Heron brung me to cook."

Bilby was right. Darktown knew that he doctored Negroes for weird sicknesses, and probably had charms making him immune from the fears that beset ordinary Negroes in this swamp. But the frog had frightened

even Bilby.

"In due course, we'll take all this up." Early's long upper lip was distorted, and he spoke brusquely. "Let's get the cars ready. We are accomplishing nothing."

"Right." Runion combed his oiled pompadour. "And this place is not for humans."

"Shut up!" Fats Browne growled, his chubby face reddening. "You're scaring the girls."

But the girls were already frightened into trembling silence. I was wishing the three of them would say something, for we six men were all speaking at cross purposes. They came with us, as we walked from the lodge to the parked cars, in morose, uncertain silence. By the wavering light of the electric torches, Jeanie seemed as wide-eyed as a startled deer, and it made her even lovelier. Tall, graceful, Sue was smoking a cigarette nervously, in little jerky puffs. Rosalie's round face was drained of color.

We reached the cars, and Runion tramped on the starter of his costly sedan, to move it around. It whined protestingly, futilely, in the night, like some creature in torment. But it did not start. We tried the other two machines.

All three cars had been drained of gasoline.

The town was twenty miles away.

We were trapped in the swamplands! And written in our minds, with letters of fire, was the ghoulish monster's warning: "This place is not for humans!"

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### CHAPTER III

#### *Trapped!*

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**A**N incredible situation confronted us as we stumbled dazedly back toward the lodge. Incredible, because it was plain, at least to me, that there was some ghastly thing crouching in the dark, ready to maim and destroy. Almost unbelievable, because super-

natural monsters should not need to drain gasoline tanks.

I found cold comfort in the thought of the others that the thing might be human. That seemed more fantastic than the idea that it was a fiend out of hell, for not one in my party had a legitimate motive for murder, nor for nightmarish, deadly pranks. Nor was there sense in the theory that passing prowlers would molest us in such a weird manner. No matter what it was, the thing that was threatening us was more terrible than the others could imagine—as Jeanie and I knew. We had seen and heard and felt the monster!

There seemed no sense at all to the crazy tangle. I began to feel as the Negroes did, that it was easier to believe in the devil and let it go at that.

Inside the cabin was a woman, foully murdered. Lurking somewhere in the dark was the nightmare frog, in which no one wanted to believe, although its diabolical handiwork and warning were plain. And we were trapped on the scene of the crime and could summon no help.

I remembered that there was an old double-barrelled shotgun in the lodge, and resolved to load it.

It was impossible to avoid suspecting Runion of some hand in this mystification, because his story conflicted with Bilby's. Runion suspected me, and each of us had a grievance against the other. Then there was Bilby. We all knew that he had done more than trifle with the black magic of the swamps.

And he had named two Cajuns—poor white trash from Louisiana—or two conjur men, without explaining why. If there were other human beings wandering through these swamplands at night there was no good reason for it.

I had the feeling that Early, Browne and Houghton were doubtful of me—and with reason! Was I not holding back the craziest part of this nightmare—the account of the frog Thing?

But there had been no time for any explaining or conjecturing until now. We'd get it over with in the cabin—now. Perhaps the insane things that

had happened were not really linked together in a single plot. It kept running through my mind that unearthly beings did not drain gasoline tanks. Or did they? Stranger things than that had happened near here.

We were all ready to spring at each other's throats, because of our wordless worry, and still I was sure that no man of the party could think of a reason why any of the others would commit a murder. Mrs. Early had been a kindly soul, so colorless that no one could be angry with her. She never bothered anyone. That was why the girls had wanted her for chaperone.

Before we reached the lodge, Rosalie, her plump, harum-scarum face white as a sheet, stared up into the sky.

"Looks like a storm coming," she said uneasily.

It did. There was an ominous flicker of heat lightning every few minutes, and a sultry, foreboding tension in the air. The frogs and crickets had fallen silent again, as though they were listening.

"THIS thing isn't over yet."

Runion's dark eyes were darting about, toward the forest, then toward the ominous, muddy bayou.

"O, Lawdy, gemmuns, let's git in and lock de do'! Naw we can't—they's a corpse inside!" Bilby, shuffling feverishly along to keep in the torchlight, began to moan, as frightened black men do.

"Maybe we'd better move Mrs. Early into one of the bedrooms, sir," I suggested to Early, as we paused beside the little front porch.

He assented sadly. "Then we can all stay in the livingroom and get down to the facts of this—though the testimony so far seems to be as insane as anything I've ever heard."

Mike Houghton turned to the girls. "You three wait here just a minute. We'll be right back. Here's a flash."

It took only a short time for the four of us to remove the body reverently, and cover it with a sheet, while Bilby was bringing in wood from the shed. We acted swiftly throughout.

Early was brooding sorrowfully, so we did not even try to express our sympathy to him. Silently I took down my shotgun and a box of shells from the shelf, and handed them to Houghton, who nodded approval and started loading it for possible defense.

Fats Browne went to call the girls, while I touched off a big blaze in the stone fireplace. It was time we became more cheerful, or we'd have some nervous breakdowns on our hands. It was against local custom to use alcohol on mixed parties, but I even thought we'd get some of Runion's liquor.

"Bert," I called, "how about mixing the girls a drink from that bottle you mentioned? They need it."

"We all need it," he grunted sourly, and I heard him go out the back door.

Early and I both heard Bilby protesting hysterically in the kitchen, as Runion unlatched the door. Then the old man came in with some dark object in one fist, and a carving knife in the other hand. I meant to ask him what he was up to, but I never got that far.

Browne had gone to call the girls, now that the livingroom was cleansed of its atmosphere of horror. Even the mysterious lily pad, with its gruesome warning, had been stuck away in a corner.

"Sue! Sue!" I heard Browne yelling outside.

Then Jeanie and Rosalie dashed in, stumbling on the threshold, and looking as though they had seen the thing that was threatening us. Jeanie's hands were at her breast, as though her heart sought to burst through her bosom.

"She's gone!" she choked. "Sue disappeared!"

The two girls reacted according to their natures. Jeanie is a "clinging vine," and I love her for it, but in moments of crisis she can come through. Rosalie, who is "hard-boiled" in dealing with familiar things, was on the verge of hysteria. She flung herself into Houghton's arms, so that he almost dropped the shotgun. Her body, garbed in a modish sport frock of coral jersey, was

shaken by sobs as he stroked her corn-colored hair.

Early was leaning against the window as though his virile frame needed support, while he stared out at the searching Browne. Bilby clung to the mantelpiece, and his immense feet tapped a tattoo on the pine floor.

**“WE** were walking up and down—”

Jeanie could hardly get out the words. She walked slowly, gracefully, toward where I was standing by the gun shelf. The sheen of light from the fireplace cast a touch of gold upon her brown hair, and on the amber frock that clung closely to her slim figure. When her body touched mine, I felt slow shudders vibrating through her.

“Wayne, she just vanished into the dark!” she whispered tremulously. “We had the light pointed the other way, toward the woods . . . We were looking for her when Fats called.”

The back door banged, and Bert Runion appeared. For the first time, I noticed that his suit was green. He had a bottle in each hand.

“I heard Fats calling Sue,” he said, his voice alarmed. “What’s the matter?”

“Sue’s gone.” Early’s voice, from the window, was like the toneless clang of a funeral bell.

“Then let’s do something! What are we waiting for?”

Runion slammed down the bottles, picked up a stick of pine from the woodbox.

“I knows it’s some of them foreign Cajun cunjur folkses, callin’ up de debbil,” Bilby moaned.

I glowered at him. That kind of talk only made things worse. My fingers were nervously bending the iron poker into a half circle, while I tried to think. Useless to chase a kidnaper that was not of this earth; useless to keep suspecting each other. Fear seemed to be seeping into the cabin, throttling us all into inaction. But we had only been standing there, paralyzed, for a few moments, when Browne loomed in the outer door, and

shook his head sadly.

“Satan’s gonna say ‘*Glump-glump-glump*,’” the cunjur man was drooling on. “Iff’n she’d just wore dat H’l chahm I give her—”

His feeble-minded muttering was cut short by a scream that stabbed us to the soul—a keening of purest agony.

In an instant I reached the window where Early stood. The night was black as hell’s deepest pit—except down by the boat landing. There, a pillar of flame and dancing—hopping fantastically.

Houghton, Runion and I crashed into each other as we pounded outside through the door. Early must have recognized her first, for I heard him cry: “Oh, my God!” as we ran.

The screaming, writhing figure that hopped, in the midst of an aura of fire, was tall, red-haired Sue Wilder!

The frog had struck again.

Sue rolled in the mud as we reached her, and the hellish halo that had surrounded her went black. Fats Browne reached me with the flashlight, and we bent over Sue, while the other four scattered, to search the outskirts of the woods and the boat landing.

Later, I was to be haunted in nightmares by the sight we saw in the glow of that flash. Tears were rolling unashamedly down Fats’ chubby cheeks as we saw what had been done.

Either Sue had been stripped nude, or her clothing had been burned off. Probably the former, for her gracefully proportioned chest and shoulders that had been so lovely in a bathing suit were still only lightly tanned. But from the waist down she was a terrible crimson and black.

She whispered, just once. “The frogs! Cold paws . . .”

**T**HEN she stopped. No mention of fire that had seared her feet and legs, and made her hop like some naked white human frog. Something more terrible than fire. Cold paws!

“Frogs!”

Browne and I exchanged glances of horror. Then there was more than one! The deadly menace that encompassed us could not now be mis-

taken. There were monster frogs, and they *did* intend to kill us. Or drive us mad.

"She's gone. Must have breathed some flame." Browne stood up and his tone was hopeless.

"Mike! Runion! Mr. Early! Bilby!" I was suddenly panic-stricken. The night seemed to have a thousand eyes, watching ominously.

Houghton dashed up from the landing, with the shotgun. "Can't find a thing—"

He stopped short. There was no sign of the other three men who had gone with him.

"She's dead," I said in a monotone. "She said there were frogs—more than one. We've got to get out of this place if we have to walk. They'll be coming back. Run, guard the other girls, while we bring Sue." I picked up her shoulders.

"This place is not for humans," Browne muttered, taking the feet, and his words were like a dirge. "There won't be any humans pretty soon."

"Shut up!" I snapped. "We'll all be nuts if we keep that up." Maybe I was trying to cover up the fact that I was shaking, myself.

Browne stopped still, for a second. "Or we'll all be dead." Then he started again.

Houghton was running along the path toward the lodge, ahead of us.

We had barely reached the porch with the poor, burned body, when a shrilling scream came from inside the lodge.

"Great God!" Browne almost dropped the corpse's feet. "Another?"

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## CHAPTER IV

### *Frog Monster*

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**T**HE coming storm sent a threatening roll of thunder over the bayou as we stood, holding the dead girl, peering anxiously into the ominous dark of the lodge. Death's wings seemed to be fluttering over my cabin.

The lamp had gone out, and the fire had died down. Mike Houghton

struck a match inside, and was lighting the kerosene lamp again. We rushed through the shadowy living room with Sue's body, put it beside that of Mrs. Early, and came back to— we knew not what.

At first, I thought Rosalie Hill had been slain. She was lying, rigid, on the divan. My eyes focused on her plump body.

Mike Houghton's face was working, as he brought water, and started lav- ing her face.

"She has a lump on her head," he said, "but her heart is beating."

We turned her over. There were no marks on her pretty, even features or on her white throat. The knit frock that hugged her plump body tightly was not even disarranged.

Dully, my mind took that in. Then suddenly I realized that something more terrible must have happened, but my brain refused to accept the thought. I galvanized twitching muscles into life, dashed madly about the living room. I looked into the kitchen; into the two bedrooms of the bare little shack. Browne was yelling outside.

Jeanie was not in the lodge!

Uncomprehendingly I saw, pinned against the mantelpiece with a knife, the mummified body of a frog.

Was she in the hands of those phantasms from hell?

I was still numb, when Browne slammed the door and bolted it.

"Early's disappeared," he said, "and so have Bert Runion and Bilby."

Bilby? He must have stabbed the frog for a "charm."

Rosalie moaned. The three of us hung over her, as she spoke. It was little enough.

"The—the light went out. Jean went to the door, to see what was going on. I was here by the window. Something hit me. . ."

"She's fainted again." Houghton put aside the wet towel he was using on Rosalie. "I think it's Bilby. Those damn' witch doctors are up to something. Maybe Bilby tried to join his gang, and Runion and Early chased him."

"I'm not so sure." Fats Browne



appeared from the kitchen with a carving knife. "Things have happened before on this bayou that never were explained. Bilby may be a witch doctor, but he looked scared. Maybe they're holding some hellish demon Sabbat around here, and it's got beyond control. Four thousand blacks in this country believe in hexing. I'm sure now that none of us had anything to do with it. Even Runion and Early had nothing to gain."

I knew they were wasting their time.

"Listen, you all," I said swiftly. "See this gash in my shoulder? It was made by a frog—a frog bigger than the tallest man I've ever seen. Jeanie Hunter saw it. And here in the lodge we got a warning from a frog. Sue and Mrs. Early were killed by frogs. We're not getting anywhere guessing. It's frogs, I tell you—frogs from hell. Let's get out and fight frogs, until we go down!"

My voice must have been hysterical, for they were staring at me with ashy faces.

"Lawdy, Heron, you can't expect us to believe—" Browne was stubbornly incredulous. "I have to be shown. After all, this is the Twentieth Cen—"

**T**HEN we heard it, and fell silent at the terrible sound. It was the third time that night that I had heard the three croaks from Satan. Each time, they had been fatal to someone. "GLUMP-GLUMP-GLUMP!"

The three of us reached the window together.

Standing on the edge of the forest, holding a torch in one huge claw, was a monster bullfrog, erect on its hind legs. The flaring light from the torch made the corpselike belly and dull green skin stand out against the blackness of the trees behind it. The thing was inhuman, monstrous; like some horrid caricature.

I give Mike Houghton credit for courage. Without a word he reached down beside the unconscious girl and fetched up my shotgun. He leveled it. Houghton has an army medal for marksmanship at V. M. I.

Both barrels bellowed. The frog

thing stood absolutely unmoved!

Then it turned that fearsome, reptilian head from side to side, as though in triumphant mockery. As if both charges of buckshot had been so many raindrops!

Fats Browne sighed quietly, and fell across Rosalie in a faint.

Suddenly, the frog's torch blacked out. Some hellish thaumaturgy, some conjur trick of the swamp, seemed to make it vanish instantly, and there was only the horrible night, closing in on us.

Fear and anguish struggled in my mind. Jeanie was in the hands of things like that! A racking, fiendish terror whispered, inside me, that any effort to win her back, to save her from their clutches, would bring down a terrible doom. No human efforts could prevail against these things from the pit. It seemed hopeless.

The river pirate who had been my great-grandfather brought me out of it. I turned, to stare vacantly at the window—and there was his pale face, grim and indomitable! "He laughed at hell!" they had said of Wayne Heron.

Like a flash, I turned to Mike Houghton.

"Those damned things have got Jeanie!" I rasped. "I don't know where this one went, but I'm following! You guard them, here."

Houghton nodded, like a pale robot. His lips formed the words: "So long."

I picked up an electric flashlight, and went into the night. Only then did it dawn upon me that the image I had seen of that courageous old soldier and robber might have been my own reflection in the window-glass. But that window had been open!

At least, it had given me courage to start.

Weapons were useless. But I remembered showing off, on the previous day. There was a pike-pole I had used to demonstrate how I had pole-vaulted thirteen feet for Ole Miss—the University of Mississippi. It was over here, where I had done a broad-jump of twenty-two feet. With the torch, I spotted the stout ash pole, tipped with a spike.

Cautiously, I moved toward the spot where the frog had disappeared, and flashed the light on the mud. There were no tracks.

I could not follow the frog to Jeanie.

Again, thunder rumbled over the bayou, and a flicker of lightning flamed luridly. The frogs and crickets set up a terrific clamor, and a startled loon called plaintively. Something had happened on the water.

I went down and launched a dugout. Death seemed to help me shove the canoe into the bayou.

**I**T was insane, going out against a supernatural force, a thing that could laugh at gunfire, with no better weapons than a torch and a pole. But I knew that courage was the only aid against things that were not human. Of that I had little enough, but the spirit of the old pirate must have been with me, for I dipped the paddle like an automaton.

There was little use, anyhow, in trying to track the monster frog through the swamp—even if it had left tracks. The heart of the swamp was the bayou, and the bayou was disturbed. If fiends were holding an unholy convocation in the swamp, it might well be by the edge of the water. I pointed the canoe up the bayou, away from the running water, and headed into the stagnant stretches that were inhabited only by things that crawled and swam.

The frogs fell silent again as I approached Jiggerhead Island.

Something had disturbed them. It was not I, for my progress had been swift and silent. So swift, that I seemed to have shipped some water over the gunwale of the dugout, for my feet were wet. But swamp men recognize little signs like the croaking of frogs. There was something unusual on the bayou.

Jiggerhead was a small, egg-shaped island only a quarter of a mile from shore. Once it had been part of the mainland. The river had run through the bayou, then, and gradually cut the island off. Now there was a dam, and the water was stagnant. The Negroes

used it as a station for catching gar and catfish, and often baited the waters with fresh meat to lure the fierce gar.

Swinging the little dugout around to the outer side of the island, I saw what had disturbed the frogs. It was a scene from the terrible seventh circle of the Inferno!

On the windward side was a great bonfire. Moving about in its light were three gigantic green frogs—monsters like the one that had stabbed me, and the one that had ignored bullets. Two of the hellish beasts were digging a hole—a hole that looked like a grave. A third stood guard with a long spear, watching.

And there was Jeanie!

She was like a glorious statue as she stood there in the infernal red fire-light, tied to a tree, with the dark woods behind her. Her frock had been torn away, so that she seemed almost nude, but a few wisps of white were clinging to her rounded body. Although a deadly fear for her hung about me, wraithlike, a thrill shot through me because of the defiant courage with which she was facing these obscene creatures from Gehenna. It moved me to ignore the horror of the scene and to shove for shore.

Then, for the first time, I noticed that I was sitting in water! The canoe was sinking under me. I had paddled half a mile without noticing that somehow a hole had been hacked in its bottom.

I could never make shore alive in that canoe!

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## CHAPTER V

### *Not for Humans*

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**M**Y paddle tore at the water, but the boat was almost under. The effort strained my torn shoulder, and hot blood bubbled from the stinging wound. It took little imagination to penetrate the water, where the garfish were always lurking. They would be maddened by blood, and would strip the flesh from my bones in short

order.

There was a thud at the bow of the dugout. I must have struck the Negro fish-pen, a latticed box of stout timbers, without a top. I barely climbed to the trap, carrying my pole, as the canoe capsized and went under. The trap swayed dangerously beneath my weight, as I perched on the narrow edge, balancing. Bilby had told me of capturing a mighty gar, and imprisoning it in a trap, which was anchored by a stone. This, I imagined, was the same trap.

I was close to shore now; only fifty feet away. The demon frogs could have seen me if their eyes had not been blinded by the glare of the fire as they dug that grave.

Fifty feet, but it might as well have been a mile. With blood flowing from me, I would not last two minutes in the same water with hungry gars if I trusted myself to the water.

I tried to pole the trap closer to shore. It would not budge. The anchor refused to drag on the ooze of the bottom.

In despair, I looked up—to see one of the frog monsters embracing Jeanie!

She struggled furiously as the Thing caressed her soft shoulder. Then it loosened the ropes that bound her to the tree, and took her into its arms with a grip of steel. The two fiends with shovels halted their work to watch.

Writhing in its clutch, she was helpless.

"Wayne! Wayne!" she screamed, but I was helpless, too.

Sweat burst out on my forehead as I saw a white strip of silk become unfastened, as she twisted, and slip to the ground, leaving her half-nude to the embrace of the slimy phantom from hell. Then the spectre turned, nodded to the other two frog Things, and in unison, they gave the three croaks from Satan.

*"GLUMP-GLUMP-GLUMP!"*

With Jeanie in its arms, the creature that seemed to be directing their grave-digging swung her over its shoulder, hopped out of the firelight and vanished in the dark!

In that moment, I almost went mad.

Only a little blood oozing from my wound was separating us—and that blood meant the difference between living, and trying to save Jeanie, or a death in the river, under the teeth of blood-hungry fish.

Blood? The gar fish would be ravenous for blood. I thought of the big fish in the pen on which I stood balanced. Bending over, I groped laboriously, almost slipping into the bayou. My trembling hand caught the stout rope which was nailed to the trap at one corner. Its other end was tied around a hundred-pound stone. It would have held a river gunboat.

Feverishly, half deliriously, I hauled in the slack, balancing over the hungry jaws of the voracious fish trapped below me. With my nails, I tore at the open wound on my shoulder, and let the blood run onto the rope. Then, hoping against hope, I dropped the slack loop into the fish-pen between my feet.

**T**HERE was an angry swirl of water, as the mighty garfish, a thing Bilby had said was as long as I, snapped at the bloody rope with teeth like those of a shark. It must be ravenous, after several days in the trap. The rope parted!

Using the pole for a paddle, I slashed at the water like a maniac. It was no time for caution. Jeanie had been in the grip of the satanic frog for five minutes!

I propelled that clumsy craft, a wooden square holding a finny prisoner, almost twenty-five feet before the two grave-diggers heard the splashing. Their great eyes glared, unblinking, out over the water. I paddled ten feet more before they saw me in the firelight.

Then one of the giant frogs dropped its spade, picked up a rifle, and as it crashed, a bullet hummed within a foot of my ear!

Another shot, and it would get me.

With a last desperate slash at the water, I reversed the pike-pole, thrust the spike end toward the shore and leaped, in a madman's vault, toward the monsters!

There was no knowing how deep the water was, and I had to take a chance that the pike-pole would find bottom. As it was, I almost went under, but managed a vault of ten feet, landing with a splash near the edge of the water.

The rifle lashed a second shot over my head as I hit the ooze.

I fought without thinking. The very idea of battling such goblin monsters would have paralyzed me had I been capable any longer of thinking coherently. My pole was still in my hands. It was a reflex action that caused me to jerk it up and, using both arms, to ram it with all my force into the belly of the frog Thing with the rifle. With a terrible, inhuman cry, it collapsed.

So they could be hurt!

I plunged at the second demon. It met me with a smashing blow from the flat of its spade—a blow that thudded on my skull like the crack of doom. Then I grappled it, and my big hands clung to the spade like iron claws. I tore the tool away and struck with the edge of the steel blade, for the head. It crunched with a horrible popping sound, but the frog, with its head bashed to a shapeless mass, fought on.

Using the spade like an axe, I slashed deep into its shoulder, and then, as it tottered toward the water, I followed with a stab at the chest. It flopped into the mud, writhed convulsively, and was still. For a second I gawked dazedly. Then the frogs could be killed.

The sudden silence was broken by a sharp report, and I felt a numbing shock in the left arm, a blow that spun me around. The realization that I had been shot did not come until I struck the ground, with blackness swirling around me.

Dully I wondered what had happened. I had knocked out one frog with a blow to the belly. Another had been beaten to pulp. As my eyes cleared, here was a third colossal green and white phantasm, pointing a glittering revolver at me!

I was still rigid with pain when the frog Thing fired again, and a bullet

smashed my right shoulder. Agony almost put me under, this time, but there was something I had to do . . . Jeanie!

**S**HE was there. With one big claw, the frog was gripping her arms, while it sighted the pistol for a third shot at me. My girl's white flesh was marred by angry red bruises. Evidently she had fought off the monster, until it heard the shots and dragged her here to investigate. Her big eyes dilated with terror as she recognized me.

"Wayne!"

To save Jeanie's life or my own, I could not get up, with a bullet in either arm. The hammer of the frog's gun was going back as I tried to rise, and fell back, helpless. I sought to *speak* but could not. The thing read my thoughts.

"She becomes the bride of the frog," it rumbled, in an unearthly bass, "and you—you can become the bridegroom of the bayou. She joins you later, because—this place is not for humans!" The gun steadied.

Jeanie acted like lightning.

She lunged at the demon, striking it from behind with her shoulder. The frog Thing fired, and missed, as it stumbled a few steps toward me.

Then I struck. Not for nothing had I trained my legs on college tracks until the muscles were like rawhide. I hooked one foot around the monster's ankle, and with the other leg launched a powerful kick. The leg muscles are the strongest in the human body, and I felt the frog's bones crunch as, with powerful leverage, my striking foot broke its knee.

The Thing screamed until my eardrums rang. It spun around, staggered and fell; it reeled up, tottered another step—and splashed into the bayou. There was a fearful commotion and rolling of the waters, bubbling moans—and then silence. The garfish strike fast.

Then I fainted . . .

Eight hours later, they found us. Jeanie had bandaged my injured arm and shoulder. She had also been smart enough to get the ropes that had tied

her, and lash the injured frog Thing firmly. By the time the rescue launch reached us I knew that these had been three men, with papier-mache and cloth disguises, and tin buckets in the throats, so that their croaks were magnified.

Bert Runion led the rescuers. They were the sheriff, Fats Browne and Mike Houghton. Jeanie, who had partially covered her lovely self with my blue turtle-neck sweater, had built a signal fire.

"And so," I told the sheriff when I had almost reached the end of my story, "the leader of this plot had a map, taken from my father's papers. We had thought the map worthless. It referred to treasure my great-grandfather buried, but the directions were inaccurate because, after they were written, the river changed the landscape, and made this island. The man who stole the map was smart enough to figure that the money was here. He was smart enough to play on the superstitions of Negroes and whites alike, to drive them away so he'd not be disturbed in digging."

Sheriff Hardie nodded his dewlaps solemnly. "So he hired a couple of strange Cajuns, and got three frog disguises, and scared you all away?" he asked.

"Yeah, sheriff, but this Cajun who's tied up says they meant no murder at first. But they must all finally have gone mad in this miasmatic place. They poured that stolen gasoline on Sue and fired it. They intended to terrify us so we'd never try to come back. A slight scare would only have made us curious."

"They had me scared," Runion broke in, "but I didn't really run away, Heron. I went to bring help. I

don't believe you'll ever see Bilby again, though. He's still running."

**H**OUGHTON was still puzzled. "How could these frog-men stand a load of buckshot?"

"They didn't. The man who was plotting it all put a box of blanks in the lodge, and swiped my loaded shells."

"But," said Fats Browne, "who killed Mrs. Early?"

"He killed her himself. He was tired of her, and this was a good chance. Jeanie's curiosity put her in his reach. He knew he could never marry her, so—"

The Louisiana swampman, tied, and still wearing his frog-disguise, nodded.

"*Oui, m'sieu.* Eet was those way. He brought us strangaire to scare folk and to deeg."

"Yeah. You see, sheriff, you'd investigate an ordinary crime, and people would be curious. He had to make them stay away. But this was the last day for digging, so he thought he'd get rid of Mrs. Early and—"

"I guess I'm dumb." The sheriff was apologetic. "But who was the head man in this here?"

"Archibald Early, of course! He found my great-grandfather's treasure map." I turned to Jeanie. I couldn't move my arms, but it hadn't taken her long to adapt herself. "In that hole the frogs dug is a big chest," I told her. "I'm betting it has enough gold for us to get married on. Am I right—huh, kid?"

Jeanie kissed me. "Yep, honey. I opened it. There's enough."

Runion watched enviously. "Let's go," he said, "this place is not for humans."

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For Details See **HORROR-SCOPES**

By **CHAKRA** on Page 108

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# DEATH'S OUTPOST



*Relentless, the monster came on*



In the Papuan Jungle, a Human  
Devil Spawns a Diabolical  
Saurian Menace!

By

**CARL JACOBI**

*Author of "Murder for Medusa," "Head in His  
Hands," etc.*

**T**OWARD evening Callahan wakened from his sleep under the stern awning of the gasoline launch and gazed ahead at the open spot in the jungle where a rude stockade encircled three *nipa*-thatch huts. Ambunti at last! The Union Jack hung above the post like a limp dishcloth, and a white man with a freshly-chalked sun helmet stood waiting on the little jetty.

Callahan scowled. By all rights he should be relieved at reaching his goal. Two hundred and thirty miles up the Sepik in the midst of New Guinea's rainy season was no picnic. But the post before him looked anything but an end to a rainbow. It resembled rather another native bur-

ial place, at least a dozen of which he had sighted along the shore.

The Chinese boatman swung the tiller. Two minutes later the launch was secured to the bollards, and Callahan leaped to the planking.

"You're Andrews, district officer in charge," he said, extending his hand. "I'm Callahan, your new assistant. You've been expecting me, I suppose."

"Glad to know you," Andrews said, shaking the hand vigorously.

He was a heavy-set man with little blood-shot eyes and a lobster-red face which would never accustom itself to a tropic sun. Scars of ancient insect bites stood out on either cheek. He drew two whitish cheroots from a breast pocket, offered the newcomer one of them, and waved his arm hospitably.

"Come inside, and I'll fix you a drink and show you around."

The showing around didn't take long. Ambunti, the most remote interior outpost in the mandated territory, was all the officials on the coast had warned Callahan it would be: Three thatch huts, one for the D.O. and his assistant; a slightly larger one for the five native police-boys; and a windowless storage shack. On three sides thick jungle brooded. On the fourth was the river, dark and sullen.

But Callahan had been in the wilds before, and he knew it was neither the isolation nor the forlorn location that oppressed him. Over the post an atmosphere of evil seemed to hover, as existent as the miasma that drifted over a morning swamp.

"What's that smell?" he asked Andrews as they returned to the main hut.

The district officer shrugged. "Crocodiles maybe," he replied. "I don't notice it myself, but the shores are thick with them a mile upstream. By the way, the launch starts back for the coast in an hour. If you want to write, you'd better do it now. After that we'll be cut off and alone—alone, that is, save for Trakert and Fenley."

"And who," asked Callahan, frowning, "are Trakert and Fenley?"

**T**RAKERT, Andrews explained, was a map survey man, a cartographer, employed by the Australian government to chart both geographically and geologically the Sepik River, mouth to source. At present he was a short distance in-country examining sedimentary rock formations. Fenley—

"Fenley's a pest," Andrews said. "He's a missionary, so he says, but about all he does is stir up trouble among the natives."

After that Callahan went to his assigned room, splashed water on his wrists and face and proceeded to change his clothes. Close-knit mosquito screening covered the two windows, but a horde of insects had crawled in from somewhere and were scurrying across the floor, table and chair tops.

As he stood there, slowly removing the articles from his canvas duffle bag, Callahan felt it again, a definite yet unexplainable aura of menace that brooded about him. He frowned, then started as an old-fashioned ship chronometer on the wall abruptly rang four bells—six o'clock.

He returned to the main chamber just as the veranda door opened, and a tall good-looking man entered. Dark-faced, and with a high forehead, he carried a small geologist's hammer at his belt, and in his hand he held a large clamp-board, the paper of which was filled with notations.

"Lans Trakert, Callahan, my new assistant," Andrews introduced. "Trakert is the survey chap I told you about, Callahan. He knows more about rocks and rivers than any man in the country."

Trakert smiled as he shook hands. "Welcome to hell," he said sarcastically. "This place is the world's worst jumping-off spot, in case you haven't heard."

The truth of the surveyman's words were brought home to Callahan an hour later when they sat about the table for the evening meal. An electrical storm, which according to Andrews was a nightly occurrence at Ambunti, sprang up from nowhere, and in a trice the compound and sur-

rounding jungle was a raging inferno.

Lightning zigzagged through the stifling heat. Wind rattled and shook the sago palms. Rain thundered incessantly on the thatch roof.

In the dingy light of the oil lamps Andrews ate his food stolidly, seemingly untroubled by the battling elements. It was not until cigars had been passed around that Callahan looked across at the district officer and said quietly:

"It strikes me that this is rather a useless place for an outpost. Just what constitutes your biggest work here? Suppressing head-hunting outbreaks?"

Andrews lit his cigar, blew out a cloud of smoke and dropped the match in a dish before answering. His eyes slowly narrowed in his moon face.

"Ambunti is here for a number of reasons," he replied. "Primarily, of course, our job is to collect taxes from controlled villages. We also settle native disputes and check tribal fighting. Head-hunting is of course a big angle, but of late it's gone beyond that. Our greatest threat right now lies in the *Sangumenke*."

"What," Callahan asked, "is the *Sangumenke*?"

It seemed for a moment that Andrews was desirous of avoiding the question. He swiveled the cigar between his fat lips and coughed nervously.

"IT'S a native secret society," he said at length. "No one knows much about it, though vague reports have filtered in to the officials at Moresby and Madang for months. The general belief seems to be that it's some sort of a religious organization that practices killing for ritualistic purposes. Sort of a *mafia*, y'know. The hell of it is, whenever you ask a Papuan about it, he either gets scared stiff and won't talk, or else he fills you with so much poppycock the information's worthless.

"According to the few natives I've managed to pump at all, the *Sangumenke* have developed head-hunting to an art. They hunt heads in the old way, of course, and they dry and

cure 'em, but their treatment of the decapitated head is rather unique. Mind you, I'm only quoting what I've been told. The natives who belong to this society are supposed to have a process whereby they can graft onto the decapitated body the head of a crocodile and still maintain life."

A blinding lightning streak flashed outside the windows, and an explosion of thunder vibrated the hot air. Callahan looked across at the district officer with perplexed eyes.

"But—but surely you can't believe such idiocy as that?"

Andrews met the gaze, and his eyes wavered. "Callahan, when you've been in these evil smelling jungles as long as I have, you're ready to believe anything. Life here is a bit different than it is on the coast. We're surrounded by primitive people who have primitive methods and beliefs. Besides, Trakert, here, has seen the living proof."

The survey man brushed a hand through his wavy hair uneasily.

"I thought I saw it at any rate," he said deprecatingly. "It was horrible. I was three miles upstream, returning from a study of the delta caused by a small tributary there. The sun had gone down, and it was pretty dark, but the thing stood on the shore and simply looked at me. I—I wanted to scream."

"A native with a crocodile's head?" Callahan asked slowly.

Trakert nodded. "The thing was hideous. It had a native's tattooed body, shell loin cloth and spear in its hand. But the head was the head of a crocodile. The mouth was open, and I could see the teeth."

Even after he had gone to his room that night and undressed for bed, the survey man's words lingered in Callahan's brain. Was Trakert one of those impressionable people who, after once hearing a story, imagine it is an experience encountered in his own life? But no, Trakert didn't seem that type. He was calm and deliberate, even to the point of cold-bloodedness.

The room was a sweating oven. The storm had passed on now, leaving



clammy heat in its wake. Outside Callahan could hear the drone of insects, the occasional call of a night bird.

For an hour he lay there, unable to court sleep. Then finally he dozed off into a restless, dream-filled slumber.

When he awoke it was still dark, and the radium hands of his watch told him it was exactly two hours after midnight. The hut was silent save for the intermittent snoring that filtered through the bamboo partitions from Andrews' room at the other end of the corridor. Callahan lay there, listening.

**S**OMETHING had jarred him into consciousness, something foreign to the usual jungle night. He slid out of the cot and moved across to the window. Starlight made the compound a vague place of blue shadows. But the intervening space between the hut and the stockade wall was empty.

Yet as Callahan stood there, he heard the unmistakable creak of the stockade gate slowly opening. Into his restricted path of vision a vague form moved slowly.

A chill stole up Callahan's spine. The gate should be closed at this time of night with a native police boy guard keeping a ceaseless vigil beside it. Quietly the assistant turned, picked up his revolver from the table and passed through the door that opened into the corridor leading to the main room of the hut.

In the center of the veranda he stopped. He saw the shadow again, moving silently across the compound.

Callahan inched the screen door open, stole down the steps and began to close in. He had covered half of the distance when the shadow whirled abruptly, leaped forward and faced him.

It is not to be listed to Callahan's credit that he did not scream. Rigid, jaw agape, he stood there, frozen with horror, brain refusing to believe what his eyes saw.

The naked body of a Papuan native was revealed in the starlight. The

long arms hung apelike at its sides, and the naked feet were spread wide in defiance. But what held the assistant there, galvanized to inactivity, was the head. Not a native head! Not a human head! But the flat, scaly head of a crocodile!

The huge mouth was partially open, disclosing rows of teeth, and white flaccid flesh. The lidless eyes were chips of agate. A hybrid growth it was, half man, half saurian. By sheer force of will Callahan whipped his revolver upward.

He had no opportunity to use it. With a hiss the monster sprang, hurled itself on the body of the assistant. He went down with a thousand terrors converging in his soul.

The monster seemed in no haste. It fought deliberately, forcing Callahan's struggling hands slowly downward, bringing its foul head inch by inch down toward the helpless white.

Just how the events arranged themselves after that Callahan could never be sure. His agonized eyes caught the glint of his fallen revolver on the ground three feet away. With a last frantic superhuman burst of strength he twisted sideward and stabbed out his hand to grasp it.

He jerked the gun around and fired. Sobbing, he continued to pull the trigger again and again, long after the hammer had clicked down on an empty cartridge. Vaguely he was aware of his assailant leaping away in the gloom, of lights appearing suddenly in the officer's hut. Mercifully then he felt a great inner weariness, and fell back into oblivion. . . .

**C**ALLAHAN came to in the main room of the hut with Trakert and Andrews standing before him. Andrews had just finished pouring whiskey down the assistant's throat, but the district officer set the glass down on the table now, and said:

"Take it easy, son. Don't talk until you feel you can."

The liquor restored his strength quickly. But it was a quarter of an hour before he sat upright in his chair and told his story to the two men across the table.

Curiously, Andrews seemed to accept it without undue amazement. Trakert, at the district officer's request, went out to round up the five police boys and search the compound.

The surveyman came back to report almost immediately. Four of the police boys insisted they had been sleeping until awakened by the sounds of the shots. The fifth, detailed to guard duty that night, was nowhere to be found. Only a pool of blood marked the spot where he usually stood sentry duty near the stockade gate.

Andrews took a big pull from the whiskey bottle when he heard this information and slumped into a chair.

"That settles it," he said. "Either the government moves this post a hundred miles nearer the coast, as I've repeatedly demanded they should, or I get out. A man can stand just so much of this; no more."

The rest of the night passed quietly, though Andrews insisted on sitting on the veranda, revolver in hand, watching—watching for he knew not what.

But morning brought three visitors to Ambunti. The first of these lived near and stopped in at the post frequently. The arrival of the other two came as a bombshell.

Harrison Fenley was a hawk-faced, gaunt man with thin lips and narrow, almost Asiatic eyes. He wore a much soiled suit of whites, and he carried a gold-headed cane which Callahan suspected was for display purposes only.

Fenley styled himself a missionary, but when the assistant discreetly asked questions about church affiliations, the man's answers were vague and indefinite. A renegade undoubtedly, who was keeping well away from his past here in the jungle.

"I thought I heard several shots last night," Fenley said smoothly. "I came over to see if there was any trouble."

"No trouble," Andrews replied curtly.

And then as they stood there on the veranda they heard the plane!

It came out of the southwest, flying high, a cumbersome biplane, equipped

with pontoons. Motor droning, it circled, dipped in salute over the post, then glided down to a jumpy landing on the broad river. Ten minutes later it was working its way slowly toward the jetty.

"It's the government inspector from Moresby," Andrews said. Satisfaction sounded in his voice. "My suggestions that the post be moved have apparently brought results."

Callahan viewed the plane with disgust. "It's a wonder they didn't let me come up here that way," he said. "That dirty launch took more than a week to make the trip."

**P**RESENTLY the plane was alongside the jetty. The cabin door opened and the government inspector stepped out. And then both the district officer and his assistant stared with unbelieving eyes. Leaping lightly to the planking came a young girl.

A white girl here at Ambunti! It wasn't possible. But it was possible. Tastily clad in a tailored suit of pongee, with a white beret set roguishly over one eye, she stood there staring about her with curious eyes.

"Hello, Davis," Andrews said slowly, in response to the inspector's greeting. Then his emotions went out of control as he glared at the girl. "What in the name of eternal hell-fire—"

Davis, a slight man with a toothbrush mustache and fair, almost feminine complexion, smiled.

"My daughter, Hope, gentlemen. She insisted on coming along."

In the main room of the officers' hut Callahan viewed the newcomers with misgivings. The government inspector might be efficient in an executive capacity back at the coast, but his thin figure seemed horribly inadequate here. As for the girl—the assistant thought of his experience of the night before, and he shuddered.

Talk then centered down to argument. Slowly and methodically Andrews began to catalogue his reasons why the post should be moved nearer the coast.

"Ambunti is sitting on a dynamite

box," the D. O. summarized. "Only last night Callahan here was attacked in the compound by a member of the *Sangumenke*."

The conference over, Callahan followed Hope Davis out on the veranda and sat down beside her. She was beautiful, he suddenly realized, beautiful in a delicate yet resourceful way. She didn't belong here at this jumping-off spot where hell itself seemed to be lurking in the background.

"Tell me, Mr. Callahan," she said. "What is the *Sangumenke*?"

He explained as well as he could, but he held back details. She frowned slowly.

"And you really believe these natives have the ability to graft the head of a crocodile onto a human body and still maintain life?"

"Well—" Callahan began. But Fenley, the missionary, moved onto the veranda then and smiled crookedly at them.

"Mr. Callahan not only believes it," he said. "He has seen the living proof of it."

Night came and with it another storm. The government inspector had stated that he and his daughter would remain at least three days until he could make out a complete report. Fenley had not yet left the post, and the six of them sat in the main room, speaking unconsciously in low tones. One by one they left to retire, until once again Callahan was alone with the girl.

The assistant lighted a cigarette and looked at her, content to drink in her beauty.

"You shouldn't have come here," he said at length. "The place is— Well, as Andrews said, it's a dynamite box. We're surrounded by something we don't understand."

**S**HE made no reply, and Callahan got up and strolled nervously toward one of the windows. It was hot in the room. The bamboo shutters had been dropped to keep out the rain, but the storm was dying now, and he pulled the rope slowly.

Suddenly the cigarette slipped from his lips. In the window he saw. . .

It was gone in an instant, but Callahan's brain retained a photographic impression of the hideous sight that had passed before his eyes. The head of a crocodile, of a live crocodile surmounted on the neck of a native, staring at him balefully.

Revulsion swept through him as he leaped to the door and raced across the veranda to the outer steps. That window opened on the back side of the hut. He tore open the screen door and, revolver in hand, ran through the drizzle, approaching the opening from the outside.

Nothing. No shadow stood there by the sill. No figure stood ready to attack him. Callahan continued on to the front of the police boys' hut. One of the natives, clad in Sam Brown belt, looked at him curiously.

"Did you see anything— anyone here?" the assistant demanded.

"No, *tuan*." The native shook his head stolidly.

But Callahan was not content until he had searched the entire compound. Everything, he found, was in order. The stockade gate was closed. An exceedingly nervous police boy guard stood near it.

With matches the assistant examined the ground beneath the window. The ground was hard and wet, but close to the thatch wall where the eaves sheltered it, he thought he made out the print of a naked foot.

At length, bewildered, he returned to the room.

"Nothing," he said in answer to Hope Davis' gaze. "I thought I heard something, that's all. You'd better get some sleep."

Early next morning Government Inspector Davis announced he was leaving for a tour of the neighboring native villages. There were three of them within walking distance of the post.

"If, as you say, Ambunti has become such a danger spot," Davis told the district officer, "I must see with my own eyes the attitude of the Papuans. I'll be back by nightfall."

He left with two police boys as guides, and Callahan frowned as he watched his slight figure march across

the compound and disappear through the gate.

The day passed slowly. Trakert, Fenley, Hope Davis and Callahan sat on the veranda, sweating profusely, trying to stifle their emotions in a game of whist.

"I'm really not supposed to play cards, y'know," Fenley, the missionary, said.

But he did play and, as the assistant noted, he played well. Trakert, the surveyman, also played a good game, but the girl kept her attention on the table with difficulty. At intervals she glanced at Callahan, and her eyes were dull with fear.

**C**ALLAHAN played mechanically. A native with a crocodile head, alive, and with the ability to attack! If anyone had told him that story two weeks before, he would have laughed it to ridicule. Now, like a nightmare, the memory of his battle with the hideous thing there in the compound returned to send a cold shudder down his spine.

Five o'clock passed, and still the government inspector did not return. Hope Davis nervously paced the length of the veranda. Pallor began to show in her face.

"You—you don't think anything could have happened to Father?" she said to Callahan. "Oh God, I wish he hadn't gone!"

The assistant shook his head and smiled to thwart her fears.

"Let's walk down to the river," he suggested. "It's beautiful at sunset. You'll like it."

They strolled slowly down the short path to the jetty. Parrots scolded and chattered above them, and bright-colored butterflies fluttered on all sides. The scarlet sun was dipping over the roof of the jungle, but off to the east sullen, low-riding clouds harbingered another storm.

They moved to the end of the jetty, stood staring over the broad river.

When it came the girl shielded her eyes against the sun and went slowly rigid like a slack wire drawn taut. Callahan felt a sickening wave of hor-

ror surge over him.

A native dugout canoe was drifting on the current close to shore. In it was a single occupant, propped upright against a flat-bladed paddle. A horrible figure! Callahan went suddenly sick.

The uniformed body of Government Inspector Davis was mounted in the craft like a lifeless doll. But merciful God! The body had been decapitated, and the head was the head of a crocodile! Even as the assistant stood there swaying, the canoe passed them on a swirl of current and continued downstream.

Hope Davis gave vent to her emotions then in a single prolonged scream. Callahan caught her as she fell in a dead faint. He lifted her in his arms and stumbled at a run back down the path to the post. On the veranda he seized Andrews by the arm.

"Davis murdered!" he yelled. "Come on."

Heavy though he was, the district officer responded like a deer. The two men ran back down the trail, fought their way down river along the shore.

But there was no need of haste. The canoe had lodged in a thick clump of reeds. Andrews splashed out, lifted the ghastly body and carried it to the bank. For a long moment the two men stared down upon it. Then Callahan made a careful examination.

"Severed high on the neck," Callahan said at length, fighting back a surge of nausea. "Davis can't have been dead more than a few minutes. But the crocodile was killed days ago. Something was used to stop the flow of blood. Whoever placed the croc head on the body did a crude job of it. Look, sir, you can see the splinters of bamboo jammed into the flesh to hold it in position."

The district officer leaned against the bole of a tree. His lips were moving, but no sound came from them. He was unable to answer.

"We can't let Hope see this again at close range," Callahan said. "I'll send a police boy down to take care of the body. Come, man, get hold of yourself."

**A**NDREWS was completely unstrung. Silently he permitted his assistant to lead him back down the path to the post. On the veranda Callahan braced himself for an ordeal.

Oddly, the veranda was deserted. They went into the main room of the hut. Here, too, there was no sign of Trakert, Fenley or Hope Davis. And then a single object centered itself in Callahan's gaze, and he rocked backward with an oath.

A chair on the far side of the room was overturned. Beside it the mat rug was a twisted heap.

Callahan vaulted forward into the corridor leading to the sleeping rooms. Five feet forward he halted, staring down at the motionless figure of Harrison Fenley. The missionary lay supine, arms outflung, a blood-smearred welt over one eye.

But the girl, Hope Davis, and Trakert were gone!

Back on the veranda the assistant rushed, to stare about him with frantic eyes. He tore open the screen door and raced across to the police boy hut.

Over the threshold he slewed to a stop, heart pounding. A police boy lay dead in his bunk, a knife buried deep in his chest. Of the other native soldier there was no sign.

But at the stockade gate, to which Callahan ran like a madman, there was a single object which seemed to scream back at him in its mute appeal. A girl's handkerchief, splattered with blood, lay on the ground. Five yards farther on along the river trail was a torn remnant of a dress.

Callahan remembered little of his frenzied passage down that trail. It was dark, with the jungle walls pressing close, and the shadows that formed about him were a thousand devils of mockery.

The river trail, he knew, led to the most distant of the neighboring villages. Halfway it dipped low into marshy ground, and it was here that the crocodiles abounded. A nameless fear rose up within him.

Suddenly the trees fell away, and he burst into an open spot, lined with thick *lallang* grass. Ahead he could hear the low souging of the river.

And then a flare of light materialized out of the gloom, and a flaming torch rose up before him. A man held that torch in one hand high above him. He strode forward, a step at a time, advancing toward the assistant.

In the flickering light Callahan gazed with horror at the monster. The body was that of a native, dark-skinned and naked save for a loin cloth, but the head was the head of a crocodile. The jaws were gaping, the eyes . . .

This time Callahan didn't wait for the attack. Whipping up his revolver he fired three times pointblank. Relentless, the monster came on.

**C**ALLAHAN flung the weapon before him with all the strength he possessed. Then he braced himself and closed in. It was a demon of a nether world that received him. A terrific, blinding blow caught him hard over the heart; long, apelike hands stabbed out to coil about his throat.

In an instant his windpipe was shut off, and his lungs were bursting within him. He fought the hold loose, delivered a powerful right into the monster's midsection. Then they were down, rolling over and over.

In meeting the attack the monster had cast aside its torch, and the flaming wood lay in a clump of weeds, flickering weirdly, casting Gargantuan shadows over the surrounding jungle. Callahan's head was pressed back now, his arms pinned to his sides.

Terror lent unknown strength to his body. He got his hands free. He lurched upward, seized one of the monster's arms and snapped it backward with a peculiar twisting motion. An abrupt scream of agony split the air. Callahan bent the arm farther, felt bone and sinew give way in a sickening crack. Then the monster fell backward, sobbing moans issuing hollowly from its throat.

The assistant staggered to his feet weakly, seized the dying torch and held it above him. "Hope!" he cried hoarsely. "Where are you?"

A low gurgle guided him twenty feet into the bush. He found the girl

lashed to a tree, a gag in her mouth.

"Are you all right?" Callahan asked.

She shook her head. "All right," she gasped. "I — I —"

Callahan led the way back to the clearing, took the rope and proceeded to bind his motionless assailant thoroughly. It was not until then that he tore off the false crocodile head and stared down at the familiar features of the white man before him.

\* \* \*

"YOU see," Callahan said the next morning on the veranda of the post, "it was a carefully worked-out scheme, and the attacks in each case were very much premeditated. Trakert played a lone hand for a big stake, but he lost. It was only the background that he used for a stage setting that fooled us. Do you know what this is, Andrews?"

The assistant held out to the district officer a flat piece of grayish rock. Andrews examined it.

"Mica schist," he replied. "But I still don't see —"

"Mica schist, yes. You remember Trakert was an experienced geologist. I found this rock slab in his room. While studying geologic conditions in this district, Trakert apparently found large deposits of that mica schist. He recognized it immediately for what it was, a strong indication of the presence of emeralds.

"Emeralds, Andrews! Trakert had struck it rich! He knew, however, that if he attempted to mine and take those stones out of the country he would have to pay a high duty to the mandate government. Mining them in secret with Ambunti so close was, of course, impossible. So he reasoned that the mountain must come to Mohammed. Or in other words, the post itself must be moved.

"Trakert built his plot carefully. He suggested from time to time that you demand to the officials that the post be located nearer the coast because of increasingly dangerous conditions here, and he enlarged upon the story of the *Sangumenke*.

"The *Sangumenke* as a secret native society no doubt exists, but not as Trakert would have had us believe. It

was he who appeared in the compound that night with a crocodile head, killed the native guard and attacked me. It was he who stole from his bedchamber with that disguise and looked in the window when Hope and I were in the main room alone. Previously he had killed a number of the reptiles, and dried and cleaned the heads and fashioned those masks out of them. The first time he attacked me the shots from my revolver almost got him. After that he substituted blanks for the cartridges in my gun.

"When Government Inspector Davis came, Trakert realized he must bring his plot to a head. So he left the post, came upon Davis and the two police boys as they were making their return from the village inspection trip and murdered them. Then he fixed up the body in the dugout canoe, sent it floating downriver for the proper theatrical effect. He wanted to impress you, Andrews, you see, that the post must be moved from here, and moved at once.

"He might have won if he hadn't stepped too far. His eye had been caught by the beauty of Hope Davis, and he wanted her as well as the emeralds. Back at the post he managed to send one of the police boys away by subterfuge, then kidnaped Miss Davis. Fenley, the missionary, tried to stop him, but Trakert struck him, leaving him, as he thought, to die. Fortunately it was only a glancing blow, and Fenley will recover. Then to complete the picture Trakert murdered the last police boy at Ambunti and carried off Miss Davis. You know the rest."

**A**NDREWS, the district officer, lit a cheroot with shaking fingers.

"I see," he said. "All right, Callahan, you can take Davis' plane, fly back to Port Moresby and hand Trakert over to the authorities. He'll hang for this, of course. As for you, Miss Hope —"

The girl had risen from her chair and moved across to Callahan's side slowly. She smiled tremulously.

"I think I'll be well taken care of," she said.

Restless Wraiths of a Shadow World Deal Out Grim Vengeance  
in the Land of the Living



*I could see where the bullets struck his vest. But there was no blood*

# NO ESCAPE FROM THE DEAD

By **W. T. BALLARD**

*Author of "Death Holds the Stakes," "Call a Dead Man," etc.*

**T**HE man was dead—and I sat at the table drinking with him! The hand which raised the glass to his full lips looked as lifelike as my own—yet I knew that it was Tony Horton's hand. And Tony Horton had died just ten years ago this night.

My forehead was moist although the room was chill, cold almost. I watched the cocktail disappear from

his slim-stemmed glass, saw him return the glass to the table. Then he smiled.

"Shall we join the others, Matson?" He rose and I followed him.

I pinched the back of my hand hard, knowing this was a dream; that it wasn't happening, that I would wake up in my Franklyn Avenue apartment. It had to be a dream; and yet—it wasn't.

Horton went through the arched doorway, paused, waited for me and slid one hand beneath my arm. Involuntarily I shuddered, yet the pressure on my sleeve was steady, friendly. It was as if a living man were walking beside me through the high-ceilinged hall.

The room we entered was spacious, the beamed ceiling a good fourteen feet from the polished floor, and the enormous crystal chandelier blazed above the heads of the well dressed throng.

"I'm so glad you got here in time for the dancing, Matson," Horton said. "I expected you for dinner."

I stared at him, then dropped my eyes beneath his steady gaze.

"Tire trouble," I murmured. "And the road is in bad shape."

He nodded and his voice sounded almost sad. "I noticed that it hadn't been kept up. But come, I want you to meet Franz Wiltman, the playwright. Oh, Franz!"

A tall, military-set man with bronzed stubby hair and a hawk nose turned and came toward us.

"Franz," Horton said, "I want you to know Phil Matson. Phil is the executor of my estate."

"How do you do?" The voice was a rumble. The hand which clasped mine was hard, almost calloused.

**I** MURMURED something. It is a wonder that I managed to speak at all. Franz Wiltman's plays were famous—classic almost—but it wasn't the prominence of his work which held me tongue-tied. It was the fact that I remembered a headline out of my youth—a stirring headline which meant war. For Franz Wiltman had been one of those who had gone down on the *Lusitania*.

"Quite a nice party, Tony," Wiltman was saying. "I'm extremely glad you insisted that I come. I don't go in for these things as a general rule."

I wanted to back away from him, to dash from the cursed house into the cold rain which was falling steadily outside. But I couldn't run! I could only stand there, fascinated. Then an orchestra at the far end of the ball-

room began to play.

I stared about at the people. Surely they were not all dead. They couldn't be! This was a tremendous hoax of some kind. Someone was playing a joke—a ghastly joke. As I stood there I tried to figure it out.

My memory of Tony Horton—the living Tony Horton—was vague. At the time of his death I had been a junior member of one of Los Angeles' oldest law firms, a firm which had handled the business of the Horton's for fifty years. Because of the untimely deaths of my three senior partners, I was now, at thirty-five, the head of the firm.

As I have said, I'd known Tony Horton by sight only. It would have been easy enough to make someone up to resemble him. But why? Why should anyone take the trouble—make the effort?

I'd driven out tonight to the old Horton ranch, as it was called, to arrange for the transfer of the estate to the legatee. By Tony Horton's will, the whole property descended to a cousin, Albert Fairchild, but was not to pass into his possession until ten years after Horton's death. The will also stated that Fairchild must be in the Horton ranchhouse before midnight of this day and that, should he fail to appear, the property was to be divided among half a dozen designated colleges.

Glancing at my watch, I noticed it was well after ten and Fairchild had not yet arrived. I wondered suddenly if he were coming. I had not seen him since he had stopped in at my office almost six months ago, just before he sailed for China. If he failed to show up. . . .

My thoughts snapped back to the gaily lighted room as I saw Simms, the Horton butler, come in with a tray of drinks. Here at least was one man whom I knew to be alive. He had stayed on at the ranch after Horton's death, serving as caretaker. I had seen him occasionally on business connected with the estate. Turning, I walked toward him.

"Has Mr. Fairchild arrived?" I asked in a low voice.



The man's face was unreadable. "He hasn't, sir. I'm beginning to think something is detaining him."

"You're not half as worried as I am. Odd party, isn't it?" I watched him closely as I spoke, but there was no change in his masklike expression.

"Why, no sir. It quite reminds me of old times. Mr. Horton was always one to entertain. I can remember as many as thirty house guests over a week-end and people were always driving out from town. Mr. Horton never cared to be alone."

**I**NDICATING my host, I said, "You're sure that is Mr. Horton over there?"

The butler's eyebrows lifted slightly. "Of course it's Mr. Horton. I thought you knew him."

My voice was sharper than I meant it to be. This thing was getting on my nerves.

"Let's cut the comedy, Simms. Tony Horton died ten years ago."

"Of course." The butler's voice was steady. "Just ten years ago tonight. Will you have a drink, sir?"

With one gulp I drained the glass and replaced it on the tray.

Simms turned and moved through the crowd and I stared stupidly after him. Maybe the man was crazy. Living alone did things to people and he had been living at this lonely house for ten years. Still, I hadn't been living alone and I'd been talking to Tony Horton. Yes, and having a drink with him!

Quietly I slipped into the hall. Ever since a man had attempted to hold me up two months before I'd carried a gun in the door pocket of my car. Until now I had never felt the need of one, but if someone was trying a hoax of some kind, I meant to get to the bottom of it. Whatever it was, Simms was evidently in on the play. Desperately I wished Fairchild would arrive. I wanted to talk to someone—tangible.

It was still raining dismally, the cold drops slanting down, lashed before a stout north wind. Turning up my coat collar I slogged toward the stables where I had garaged my road-

ster. At the door I fumbled with the catch, finally got it open and switched up the light.

I got the gun and examined the clip to make certain no one had tampered with it. A feeling of relief swept through me when I slid the automatic into my hip pocket. I took the extra clips from the car and dropped them into my pocket also, then started back toward the house.

The rain whipped directly into my face blurring my vision. Upon reaching the shelter of the carriage entrance I was about to open the door when footsteps sounded on the gravel behind me. My hand streaked toward my hip as I swung around, froze there.

A girl crossed the ray of light thrown from the window on my left and ran up the two steps.

"Mary!" My voice sounded funny.

"Phil Matson!" Her surprise equaled mine. "What in the world are you doing here?"

I stared at her. "The question might work both ways. How'd you find this place?"

"I didn't. I was taking a short-cut to town and made a wrong turn. My car went into the ditch just below here. Fortunately I saw the light. This is luck—finding you."

"Is it?" Something in my voice caught her attention.

"Why, Phil! What is the matter? Why do you look at me like that?"

**I** WANTED to tell her, but I couldn't. After all, why should I terrify her? "Listen, Mary," I said. "I can't explain, but will you do something? Take my car and go on into town."

She showed her astonishment. "But, Phil, I can't! I won't drive anywhere tonight."

She was shivering with cold and I reached out and pulled her under the shelter. It was evident that she'd had a nasty shock. But she would have a worse one—in the house. Whatever happened, I couldn't let her go in there. I wouldn't! Then—

"Oh, there you are, Matson." It was Tony Horton! He sounded very cor-

dial. "I've been wondering where you'd gotten to."

Then he noticed the girl. I hesitated for an instant then introduced her. There was nothing else to do. I watched her face, thinking that perhaps she had heard of Horton, but there was no change of expression.

"Miss Bryant is an old friend of mine," I said. "She had an accident with her car and saw your lights. I'm letting her take my roadster on into town."

"On a night like this?" Horton was determined. "Nothing of the kind! There's plenty of room and I'm sure Miss Bryant would rather stay. Wouldn't you?"

Mary smiled. "You're very kind, Mr. Horton. I was beginning to think Phil was trying to get rid of me."

I knew she was laughing at me. Words crowded impulsively to my lips, but I forcibly quelled them. I couldn't tell her that the man who was inviting her to stay was dead! I couldn't tell her that she, I, and the butler were the only live people in the house. Mutely I stood aside as she stepped into the hall and shook the moisture from her coat. Simms took her wraps and Horton offered his arm.

Then they went into the ballroom and I followed, saw Tony Horton introduce her to several of the guests. In a moment they were dancing. When I saw her in the arms of a man whom I knew had been dead for ten years a stifling horror gripped me. I visualized his coffin, wondered if it were empty. I shuddered and walked to the side table and hurriedly drained two punch glasses.

Horton strolled up and stood beside me. "Remarkable girl, Matson. I certainly enjoyed talking to her."

Something inside of me seemed to snap. Fiercely I swung about.

"Damn it! When will this farce cease?"

His eyebrows went up questioningly. "Farce?"

I passed one hand across my forehead, conscious of its moisture. "Sorry," I mumbled. "I didn't mean anything. Where's Mary?"

"She's dancing with Howard Ellis."

"Howard Ellis!" I gaped at him. "Ellis? The playboy?"

Tony smiled. "He might be the devil the way you say it. I'll admit he had a habit of making headlines, but well—" He shrugged.

**I** STARED at him. When he said that Ellis had made the headlines, he put it mildly indeed. For five years Ellis' name had made banners in every paper in the country. Wealthy, young, he had married and been divorced three times in five years.

The last time he had not bothered with divorce. Rather, he had chosen a gun and had the misfortune to be caught. Four years before, after a two-year legal fight in which the best attorneys in the country had used every possible trick in their efforts to free him, he had been hanged!

My mouth was dry as I looked around the room for a glimpse of Mary. She was nowhere in sight.

Furiously I faced Horton. "Where is she?"

He shrugged and I had the impression that he was laughing at me, although his lips remained straight.

"Don't you trust your girl, Matson?"

"I most certainly do!" I said through clenched teeth. "Which is more than I can say about you. Tell me where she is! What has that fiend, Ellis, done with her?"

Horton's voice sounded bored. "You're attracting attention, Matson. We don't want a scene."

I took half a step, one hand extended to catch the front of his coat, the other a knotted ball at my side. Then something in his dark eyes stopped me. My hand dropped helplessly to my side. What good would it do to hit a dead man? You couldn't! It wasn't—

I swung on my heel and went into the hall. His laugh followed me—a low, vibrating laugh that made the short hairs at the back of my neck stand with cold horror. I wanted to run. It was all I could do to keep myself from running. I shifted my automatic from the hip to my side coat pocket as I went along the hall.

Having been through the house half a dozen times in my capacity of executor of the estate, I was familiar with the floor plan. I began a systematic search of the rooms.

Outside, the rain streamed down in never-ending fury. The wind was rising also and the windows rattled, almost drowning the music from the orchestra in the ballroom.

I looked in the study, the music room, tried the pantries, and even the kitchen. Then I started back toward the front of the house, determined on a showdown with Tony Horton.

As I reached the foot of the wide stairway, a woman's scream, piercing above the music and the noise of the storm, floated down from above. I turned and raced up the carpeted steps, the gun from my pocket seeming to leap into my hand. At the top I paused for an instant. Then the scream came again from the direction of the upper sitting room at the end of the hall.

I dived toward it, found the door closed, locked. I rattled the knob, called, rattled it again.

"Phil! Phil!" Mary's voice came faintly.

I pressed the automatic against the lock and pulled the trigger, then kicked in the door. Ellis leaped to his feet from a divan directly across the room. Mary pulled herself free of his grasping fingers.

**H**ER dress was torn and her hair disarranged. She circled the table and crouched behind me.

"Phil! Don't let him touch me."

My lips were stiff. "I won't, honey. It's all right."

Ellis was smiling at me, his lips twisting into a cynical smirk.

"You rather overrate your power, Matson."

"Do I? Stay where you are!"

The smile never left his lips. His face was flushed and as he took a step toward us, he seemed to almost stagger. His hands were out now as he came on. My gun came up, steadied, but he did not appear to notice it.

I squeezed the trigger. I could see where the bullets struck his vest, but

there was no blood and he continued toward us—a terrible thing! A thing no power on earth could stop. I didn't try, but caught the girl in my arms and raced toward the stairs.

I didn't take time to look backward to see if he were following. I exerted all my effort and thoughts to reach those stairs. When I did, I raced down them, the girl still in my arms. The wonder is that I did not fall, that I managed to keep my feet. Never afterward could I remember how, but somehow I got to the front door, jerked it wide and jumped out into the night.

The rain—cold, fresh—brought me to with a shock. I set Mary on the ground, peeled off my coat and pulled it about her shoulders. Then I caught her again in my arms and ran toward the stable. My one thought was to get my car, to get away from this house of horror.

The estate could go. I'd ceased to care about that; had ceased to care about anything except to get away from this place and get Mary away—safe among the living, the breathing; with people who could be stopped by bullets.

Nothing else mattered now, for suddenly, in that room upstairs, with those dead hands reaching out from the grave to touch her, I realized that I loved Mary Bryant. I knew now that I had loved her for the year that I'd known her, and that I would love her forever.

Slipping, panting, mud-splattered and thoroughly soaked, I came to the stable, put the girl on her feet, and tugged the door open. Then I felt along the wall for the switch. In another minute we would be safe.

It might be a rotten night for driving, but nothing could be worse than to remain here. I found the switch, pressed it, then a horrible chill crept through me.

My car was gone! Never again will I experience so total a feeling of helplessness as swept over me at that moment. The whitewashed walls of the building gleamed in the light. The concrete floor, marked by the muddy tracks of my tires, mocked me.

The girl swayed against me and I was startled by the whiteness of her cheeks. Her eyes were on mine, probing. "Has . . . What's the matter?"

"Nothing, dear," I lied. "Everything will be all right. You're perfectly safe here."

Quickly I turned out the light. I didn't want to worry her more by telling her about the car.

**H**ER tone was so low that it barely reached my ears. "That terrible man!"

"Don't think about him," I told her and drew her closer.

My head bent and my mouth found hers. Her lips were cool, wet from the rain, but they clung to mine and I sensed her fervor. She shivered and tried to press closer.

"Phil, I'm afraid!"

I shook her gently. "There's nothing to be afraid of, Mary. I love you. Do you hear me, darling? I love you. I think I always have, but I've been too blind to realize until tonight."

She gave a little sigh and her free arm slid up and tightened about my neck.

"I've loved you a long time, Phil. I'd begun to think you didn't care, that you never would—"

She broke off as feet made crunching sounds on the wet gravel outside. I twisted her so that my body was a shield. My hand tightened on my gun and I stood tense, waiting.

"Who is it?" I called.

The sound ceased. Then Tony's voice said:

"I wondered where you'd gone, Matson. What in the world are you doing out here?"

Rage filled me, driving from my mind the knowledge that this man was dead. My voice was harsh.

"I was looking for my car. What have you done with it?"

"Oh, your car?" His voice seemed to mock me. "I'm sorry about that, Matson, but Fairchild phoned from a lunch-room. His car broke down and I told Simms to take yours to him. No other car was available so . . . I hope you don't mind?"

"Mind?" I was furious, but con-

trolled myself. "Then Fairchild is on his way here?"

"Of course. When ten million is at stake, a man would hardly fail to keep an appointment. He'll be along in a few minutes, I think. But why are you standing out here in the cold? Wouldn't Miss Bryant be more comfortable indoors?"

I was sure that he was mocking us, this man who should have been in his coffin for ten years.

"We don't like some of your guests, Tony," I snapped.

"Oh, you mean Ellis?" He laughed and the tinkling sound, mixed with the steady tapping of the rain on the roofs, made me shiver in spite of myself. "Don't mind Ellis. He's harmless."

My voice grated. "Miss Bryant doesn't step into that house again until Fairchild shows."

I couldn't see him shrug because of the gloom, but I knew he did.

"Have it your own way," he said and turned back along the drive. Then he stopped as lights suddenly wove up the hill and illuminated the drenched landscape as they swung into the drive. "Here's Fairchild now. Welcome him, will you? He probably won't like seeing me."

**T**HE arrival of the car relieved me so much that I did not notice that Horton hurried toward the house, not waiting to receive his cousin.

"It's all over now, honey," I told the girl. "I'll straighten out the legal details of transfer in five minutes and we'll be on our way."

She sighed with evident relief as the car slid to a stop before the stables, the twin lamps casting us into pronounced relief.

"That you, Fairchild?" I yelled.

His voice carried assurance. "What's left of me, Matson. And a rotten night it is. If Tony could only see the nasty weather he dragged us into with that absurd will, he'd be sorry he ever wrote in the terms."

At those words I shuddered, started to tell him that Tony Horton was still here to see. Then I stopped as I re-

membered the girl at my side. She was frightened enough without learning that our host was—dead.

Fairchild climbed from the car, followed by Simms, and dashed for the shelter of the stable, shook the moisture from his coat.

"Sorry to be late, but I drove down from 'Frisco yesterday and stopped at Santa Barbara to see some friends. And the rain—"

I nodded. "Miss Bryant, Mr. Fairchild. Miss Bryant is a friend of mine. Her car went into the ditch below here and she came up here for help."

He shook hands. "Let's go to the house and get this transfer business over with. I'm afraid you'll have to give me a lift into town. My car's out of commission. I called here for help. I was surprised to see Simms."

I shrugged. "Simms stayed on as caretaker here. He's been quite satisfactory, and if you need anyone after you take over I can recommend him."

Fairchild laughed. "I won't need anyone for long. I plan to sell as soon as possible and head for the Orient. That's the spot, Matson. Something doing every minute."

I nodded abstractly. I wanted to tell him that something seemed to be doing here also. Simms moved ahead of us toward the house.

"Listen, Mary," I said to the girl. "You stay in the roadster. We'll try not to be long, and you'll be safer here."

Fairchild showed his surprise. "Safer? What in the world would she be afraid of in the house?"

Not troubling to answer, I opened the car door and held it for her. She looked at me strangely, then got in. I took Fairchild's arm and started for the house.

"I must tell you something," I said in an undertone.

"Later, Matson," he said impatiently. "Let's get in now and get things over. It must be almost twelve."

"But, Fairchild—"

I broke off as Mary screamed. Then I heard her as she raced toward us. The next minute she was quivering in

my arms, crying.

"Phil! I'm afraid! He's out there in the dark—waiting—"

Fairchild's voice rasped with impatience. "What nonsense is she talking? Who's out there waiting?"

**H**IS tone roused my anger. "You don't understand—" I began.

"It is almost twelve," he said crisply, "and I understand that unless I'm in that house by midnight, I lose something like ten million dollars. Just what is this—an act of some kind to attempt to do me out of my inheritance? I'm going in."

He whirled and went briskly toward the door.

For an instant I stood there, then I put an arm about the girl's damp shoulders and followed. I didn't like it, but there was nothing else to do. I couldn't leave her there alone to face the terrors of the night, even though I felt certain that Ellis was inside, and that she was in more danger there than in the car.

When Fairchild reached the door it opened and Simms attempted to take his hat and coat, but Fairchild waved him aside.

"Don't bother. We'll only be here a little—" He broke off as the music from the ballroom reached him. He swung to face me as we stepped into the arched hall. "What mummery is this, Matson? Are you by chance giving a party?"

"I'm not." My tone was tense, my eyes on the ballroom door.

"Then what—" His mouth sagged and the color drained from beneath his bronzed skin as Tony Horton appeared at the door.

Horton bowed slightly. His right hand held a drink in a stemmed glass, his evening linen glistened immaculately.

"Welcome, my dear cousin. We have been waiting for you."

The face Fairchild turned toward me was hardly sane. "What—what are you trying—"

My voice was brittle. "I'm not trying anything."

Suddenly I found myself disliking Fairchild, distrusting him more than

I did the smiling dead man there.

Horton intervened. "Don't blame Matson." His smile changed from one of welcome to a purposeful something that seemed to cut at Fairchild like a knife. "I assure you that Matson has nothing to do with it. Simms! Take Mr. Fairchild's hat and coat."

People were crowding the ballroom door watching us, their dead eyes mocking. Fairchild turned as if to run; stopped. A sneer twisted his handsome mouth.

"No, you don't," he said, speaking rather to me than to Tony Horton. "I understand now. You've arranged with someone to impersonate Tony. Well, it won't work. I don't scare so easily." He swung to face Horton.

"And as for you—whoever you are—I warn you that this night's work will bring you nothing but grief. My cousin is dead. I know he is!"

The smile had left Horton's face. "Of course, I'm dead, you fool. And no one should know it better than you—since you murdered me."

The words jerked me about and I saw Fairchild cringe, a look of horror spreading about his face.

☛ "IT'S a lie!"

"It's no lie." Horton's voice was perfectly calm, like that of some judge pronouncing a sentence. "The dead don't lie, my cousin. We have no reason to lie—nothing to gain, nor to lose. Those of us who died naturally rest, but those of us who die by violence—he half turned and his sweeping gesture included all those crowded in the doorway—"can never rest. So it was written ages ago, and so it will remain. We have come back tonight to right a wrong—a wrong done me when you poisoned my wine. For when you killed me, my cousin, you took more than my life, my money and my goods. You robbed me of my final rest."

There was a murmur from the crowd. Fairchild's lips were waxen as he turned to me.

"Stop this, Matson. Do you hear me? Stop this farce. There's no proof—no trace of poison was found—"

"No trace? No." Horton had taken a step forward. "No evident trace was found because you used a little known alkaloid. You escaped the living, my cousin—but you can't elude the dead. Simms!"

The butler stepped forward.

"You have pencil and paper?" Horton asked.

The butler nodded.

"Then take this down," Horton told him, and dictated a confession. "Show it to Matson."

The butler stepped behind Fairchild, thrust the paper into my unwilling hand. I stared at it, read what the butler had written. It wasn't a confession. It was a statement by Simms himself, stating that, to his knowledge, Albert Fairchild had murdered his cousin by placing poison in his wine. At the bottom, a paragraph had been added:

I, Albert Fairchild, do hereby confess that the above statement is true. This confession I make of my own free will, being under no compulsion whatsoever.

"Will it hold?" Horton asked me.

I looked up. "I guess so. Confessions have been repudiated, you know!"

Tony Horton's mouth was grim. "I don't think this one will be. If it is, I'll come back and see that my cousin regrets so doing. Simms, give Mr. Fairchild a pen."

The butler already had a pen in his hand. "I won't sign!" Fairchild said, angrily. "You can't make me. I'm leaving."

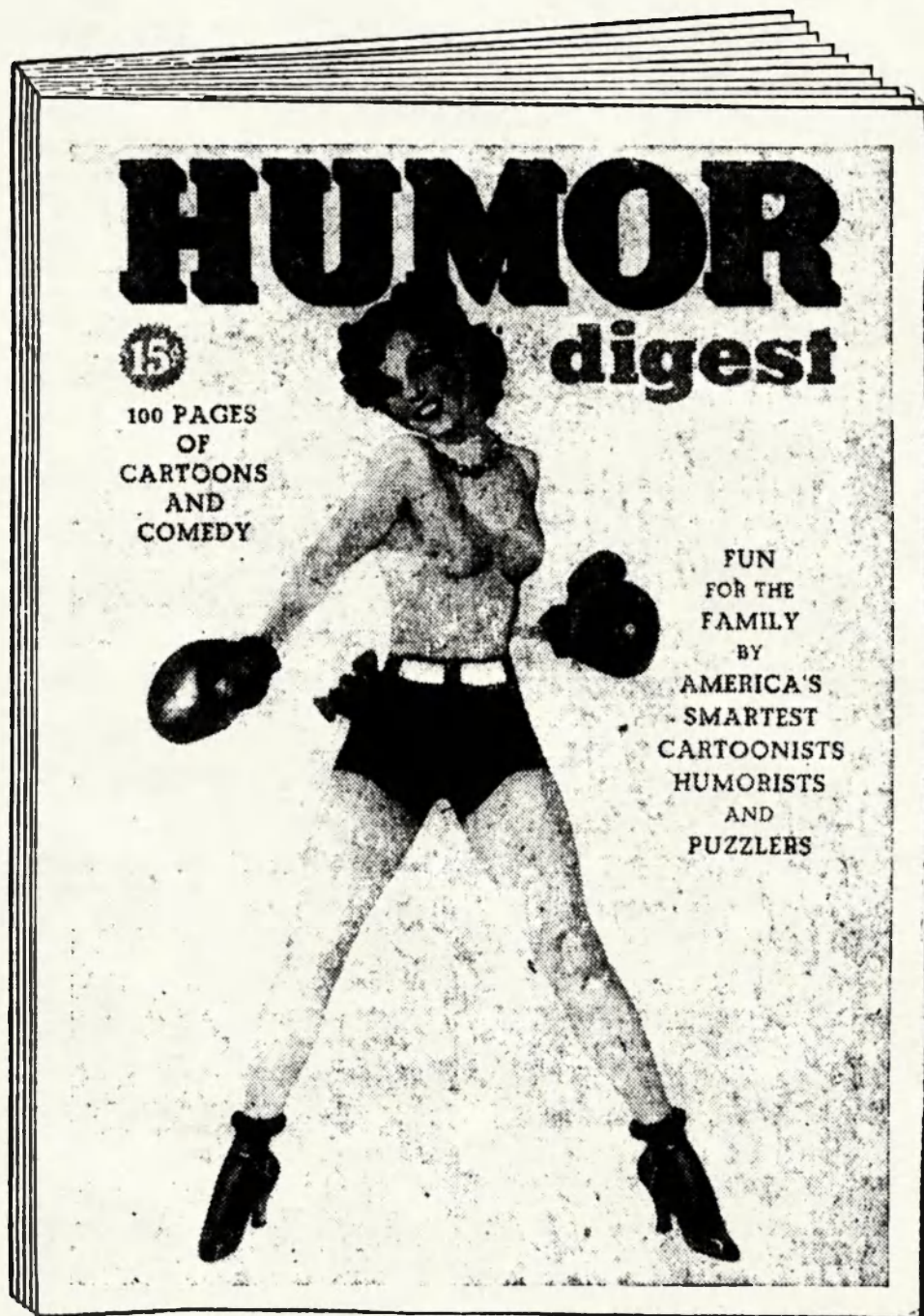
"You're staying, Bert." Horton's voice was ominously quiet. "And I think you'll sign. Hawkins will make you. Hawkins, in case you don't recall, is that Kansas farm torturer who killed a dozen people before the mob took him out and hung him. He's a past master at making people do things. Hawkins! Will you speak to my cousin?"

A squat, heavy-set man with long arms and an extremely low forehead pushed through the crowd. He crouched slightly as he lumbered forward, his long arms and big hands swinging in the manner of an ape.

(Continued on Page 104)

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*(Continued from Page 102)*

Fairchild uttered a hoarse, unintelligible sound of terror and backed away against the wall, at the same time jerking a Luger from his pocket. His hand leaped as the gun exploded and a hole appeared directly in the middle of Hawkins' forehead. But the torturer never paused, never missed a step! He came forward slowly, his thick, bestial lips drawn back from his yellowed fangs in a grimace of pleasure.

**T**HE gun roared again, and yet again, but still the man came on, his hands outstretched like enormous claws.

With a shriek of terror Fairchild hurled the gun into the horror's face just as the man's fingers grasped for his throat. He hammered at Hawkins' chest, but the torturer's superior weight carried Fairchild to the floor.

I jerked out my own gun, but Horton's sharp voice stopped me.

"You want some of that, Matson?" His tone was intense, terrible.

"Give me credit—" I stopped, not because of myself, but the girl at my side.

Gibbering noises came from Fairchild as the twisting fingers mutilated his face into a red mass of beaten flesh.

"I'll sign! I'll sign anything! For the love of God, save me!"

Horton stepped forward. "Enough." He pulled the terrorist back. Simms slid the confession forward and Fairchild scrawled his name on the stained paper, then the butler handed it to me.

Horton's voice was without emotion. "Take my dear cousin down to the wine cellar and lock him in. There's a phone in the upstairs study, Matson."

I nodded and went up the stairs, taking the girl with me. I called the police after bolting the door. Then I looked at the girl.

Her face was without color, waxlike. I thought of Simms, below stairs, alone with Fairchild and the dead.

When I finished calling the police I called my secretary. I told him to get into his car and drive out to the old Horton ranch at once.

His voice reached me faintly. "How



will I find the place? On a rotten night like this?"

"Drive out the main road to Spaulding's Corners," I told him, "then turn and drive east for about seven miles. I'll send Simms down to the entrance to the private road to meet you."

"Simms?" His voice sounded funny. "You mean Horton's old butler?"

"Sure," I said impatiently.

"But Mr. Matson"—the secretary's voice sounded jumpy—"Simms is dead!"

I started. "Dead? Are you crazy?"

"No, sir," he said. "He dropped dead on the street in Los Angeles this afternoon. Don't you remember? The call came into the office. One of our business cards was in his pocket. I went down to the morgue to identify him. I couldn't make a mistake. He came in every month to turn in a report of the estate affairs to us."

I hung up slowly. The girl was watching me, wonderingly.

"Phil! What's the matter?"

"There's nothing to worry about, dear," I told her. "The police are on their way, but I just found out that Simms is dead. You and I and Fairchild are the only living people in this house."

I COULD see an expression of horror grow in her eyes. "But, Phil! Aren't—aren't you dead?"

I stared at her. "Mary! What are you trying to tell me?"

She spoke slowly, as if searching for words. "Phil! Don't you understand? I'm dead. I thought you were, too. I was killed this evening when my car slid into the ditch. It overturned. Don't you understand?"

No words can express how I felt as I stared at her. I half rose.

"No, Mary! It can't be! You're not dead. I need you—love you! Stay with me!"

She was crying, as somewhere in the house a clock began to strike.

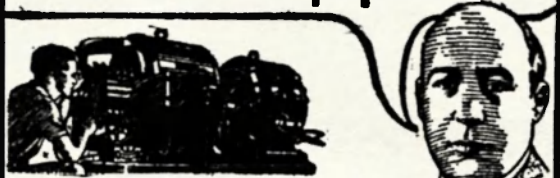
"I've got to go, Phil. I can't stay, dear. I love you. I'll always love you, but I can't stay. Sometime—somewhere . . ." Her voice trailed off.

I was alone here. The room was  
(Continued on Page 106)

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(Continued from Page 105)  
empty.

Phil Matson lowered his head on his arm for a moment, as he finished speaking, then straightened and looked at the police, at Fairchild, his wrists pinioned by handcuffs, standing between two officers.

"That's all, gentlemen. I don't expect you to believe what I said. I don't expect anyone to believe it, but here's the proof."

He picked the confession up from the desk. "You'll find it's in Simms' handwriting. There are a number of reports by him on file at my office. That is the only proof I have to offer."

"Can't you see, Captain, that he's crazy?" Fairchild sneered. "That he's out of his head? I told you what happened. I arrived here this evening to find the house apparently deserted. I came in and found Matson lying in the rear hall. He'd evidently attempted to come down the back stairs. They were old and collapsed under his weight. I got some water and tried to revive him. He seemed to come to, but as soon as he saw me he began screaming something about, 'murderer'! He jumped to his feet and dived toward me, knocking me backwards onto the floor. He had the strength of ten men." Fairchild shuddered.

"He bound my wrists, carried me downstairs and locked me in the old wine cellar, then he came back with this absurd confession. I signed it to humor him. I knew that as soon as the police arrived they would realize that he was out of his mind."

"Out of my mind?" Matson sprang to his feet. He dived across the desk before anyone could stop him, and seized Fairchild by the throat. "Out of my mind, am I? Murderer!"

He swung Fairchild off the floor as if the man had been a midget, jumped toward one of the windows and shoved Fairchild over the sill, holding him dangling over the high cliff on which the house stood.

"Tell them the truth!"

**F**AIRCHILD was chattering with fright. "Don't drop me! For

God's sake, don't drop me! I'll talk. I did murder my cousin. I thought no one knew, then I found out that Simms did know. He's been black-mailing me for years. I got him on the street this afternoon—got him with a hypodermic needle, but he saw me. He said that I would hang, that he'd left a confession in this house, that he'd sent word to Matson about it. I came out here. I found Matson where he'd fallen. I should have killed him then, but I didn't think he'd found the confession. And when he came to, I found that the bump on his head had driven him crazy, that he was a madman. Help me, won't you? Won't somebody help me!" he pleaded frantically.

They dragged Matson back. They had to use force, pry his locked hands from his grip on Fairchild. They pushed him into a chair. He was quiet, but his face was very white. Suddenly one of the police stepped forward, bent over Matson, then straightened.

"Captain! This guy was worse hurt than we realized. He's dead!"

"Dead?" They all crowded forward.

Fairchild chose that moment to make a break. He dived toward the head of the stairs, but he never got there. A bullet from a policeman's gun brought him down. A young patrolman stood looking at Matson for a long while. Finally he forced a laugh, but there was not much mirth in it.

"Boy, Captain! Did you ever hear such a screwy story? This guy, Matson, must have really conked himself when those old stairs let go. Of all the impossible dreams!"

The captain was looking at Matson also. He was Irish. Sometimes Irish people see things that other folks do not. His voice sounded a little strained.

"Sure, it was impossible," he said, "but just the same, Matson's girl was killed in an automobile accident tonight. He couldn't have known it. She was killed after he left town. And yet . . . Maybe he did," the captain said heavily.

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28x4-20-29	1.25	1.00	34x4-20-29	1.25	1.00
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#### THE WAX HEAD

**T**HE recent rumor that a woman's preserved head is being held by a cannibal tribe of headhunters in Dutch New Guinea recalls a tale told by Charles Miller, the famous explorer of Dutch New Guinea.

When Mr. Miller was a young man in Merauke, New Guinea (his father was the military commander) he knew that dried heads were the greatest treasure a native could possess. The head of a white person was especially esteemed.

In order to have some fun with the natives, Miller once modeled a head out of wax. With the help of an artist, he made the wax head resemble his own. Then he sent for a certain witch-doctor to come and see the magic head.

The eyes of the witch-doctor almost popped out as he looked at the head and then at Miller. But soon his face clouded. He realized the deception and he began to mumble a strange curse on anyone who would make fun of a sacred belief. He left in anger.

Miller laughed and put the head away in a trunk in the cool cellar. Perhaps he would have more fun with it later. Then he forgot about it.

Later he visited Holland and while he was there the World War broke out. Miller went to Paris and enlisted with the French flying corps.

Luck seemed to be with him, until one day he crashed—and his jaw was badly crushed. It was many months before he left the hospital, his jaw repaired by a number of plastic surgery operations.

After the war he returned to Dutch New Guinea. One day he thought of the wax head in the trunk with his old papers. He opened the trunk and unwrapped the head.

He was astounded. The jaw of the wax head was badly smashed resembling in every way the damage to his own jaw many months before. Friends swore that nobody had opened the trunk.

Miller repaired the wax head and then buried it in a secret place. While he does not admit it to everyone, he hopes that no witch-doctor ever digs it up; for Miller now respects the Black Magic of the natives of Dutch New Guinea.

#### THE ANIMAL TRAINER

**T**HIS strange story was told at a recent luncheon of the Circus Saints & Sinners Club at Hotel Astor, New York City. It concerns a Mrs. Freda Kirch now residing in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

When Freda was a child in Germany, her father was an animal trainer with a circus. Like Clyde Beattie, he put tigers and lions in the same cage and made them do tricks. But the two species never made friends.

Although he loved his animals and kept

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## BEST FUN, FICTION AND FOTOS IN

lions and tigers together when they were cubs, they became enemies as soon as they grew up. Many times he told his daughter he would give anything if he could make them friendly—perhaps inter-breed them; but instinctively they hated each other.

Then tragedy struck. One night as the circus was moving from one town to another, a cage containing a tiger was rolled too close to a lion's cage. Only inches separated them.

The two beasts began to claw each other through the bars. Freda's father rushed to stop the battle. The lion struck him on the head, fracturing his skull. He died without regaining consciousness.

Freda came to America. She later married and settled in Milwaukee. Recently she visited her friend Martha in New York City. One afternoon they went to the Central Park Zoo.

As the two women were about to enter the lion building, Freda stopped short. Her face grew white. She grabbed her friend's arm for support.

"Martha," she said, "I can't go in—take me home."

Later she told Martha: "As I looked into the building I saw my father standing in front of the third cage. There was a smile on his face, and he seemed very happy about something. It was father's ghost, I'm sure!"

Martha insisted that it was Freda's imagination. The smell of the lions brought back memories of circus days in Germany, and naturally she thought of her dead father and believed she actually saw him.

But Freda went back to Milwaukee without visiting the Zoo.

Sometime later, friend Martha went to the Zoo alone. She stood in front of the third cage in the lion building. She saw a beautiful beast—its head slightly different from the usual lion—and it had faint stripes on its back. But when she noticed the sign above the cage, she gasped. Had Freda actually seen her father's ghost smiling in triumph at the fulfillment of his life's ambition? For the sign read:

"TIGLON; Father, a Siberian tiger. Mother, an African lioness. Born in Germany."

(This Tiglon, the only one of its kind in the world, is still in the Central Park Zoo. It was purchased by New York City for \$35,000. Those visiting New York during the World's Fair should not miss seeing it.)

## THE PEARL OF JAVA

**A** NEW YORK banker tells this story: What strange curse lay within that super-pearl brought to the surface some time ago by a native diver in the waters near mysterious Java?

A cruel foreman of the diving crew was Jeffrey Morgan. When the native found the exceptional pearl in deep water, he endeavored to hide it as he came back into the boat. But Morgan was suspicious. He ordered the native to turn it over to him at once. The native refused, realizing he had

(Continued on Page 110)

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(Continued from page 109)

a fortune in his fist.

Morgan, hot tempered, drew his revolver. The native, ugly and hating Morgan, threw the pearl with all his strength into Morgan's face. Morgan, believing it was a knife, fired. The native dropped dead.

The pearl bounced on the bottom of the boat. Morgan, in trying to grab it, slipped and hit his head on an iron oar-lock. He was knocked unconscious. The pearl slipped from Morgan's fingers and fell into the water. Another native, seeing it sinking, dived in after it.

When Morgan regained consciousness, all the divers were gone. One of them possessed that valuable pearl. But he never found it, for Morgan was drowned a week later.

Sometime afterwards, the pearl found its way into the possession of an American adventurer who was friendly with the lucky native. But the next day this native who sold it, was killed by an automobile in the main street.

The pearl reached New York. It was sold to a rich broker. The adventurer who sold it to him was killed in an airplane accident on his way to California a few days later, with the money from its sale in his pocket.

But the broker was not superstitious, although he knew the full history of the pearl which the adventurer had told him after the sale. He didn't believe the story.

The broker gave the pearl to his lady friend, who lived in a pent-house in uptown New York. A few days later this lady became jealous over the broker's attention to another woman. That night, when the broker called on her, she threw the pearl in his face. It bounced off the terrace. Then, hysterical, she tried to throw herself into the courtyard twenty floors below. But the broker caught her in time and calmed her.

Then he searched for the pearl in the courtyard. It had been raining. The pearl had disappeared, evidently carried down into the sewer, back into the sea.

Later when the broker married this lady, he told the story to a banker friend. He did not regret the loss however. He was glad the pearl had returned to the deep from whence it had come.

But in November, 1938, this broker and his wife were killed in an automobile accident near Syracuse, New York. Was it coincidence, or a strange fate caused by that pearl of death? Who knows?

### JUSTICE OF THE SEA

**A** WEIRD shipwreck story comes from the Indian Ocean. A vessel sank, and the few passengers and crew took to the big life-boat. The survivors were later picked up by a British freighter.

The doomed vessel had been cursed from the day it left Madagascar—for a tragedy had occurred on board the first night out. The captain had been found dead in his cabin. It looked as though he had had a

(Continued on Page 112)

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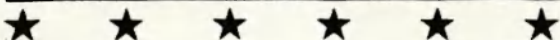
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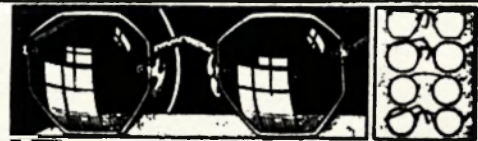
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(Continued from page 110)

heart attack and had fallen on an iron kettle, crushing his skull. That was the report made by the first mate, Mr. Brown, a brute of a man whom the crew hated. The captain had been a kindly old man—with a fatherly face—and he wore a beard.

Several of the crew suspected the first mate—but, because the old captain had been complaining of his heart, the members of the crew could not voice their suspicions. All they knew was that the old captain had been a God-fearing and superstitious man, always telling them about the justice of the sea.

Thus, shortly after the secret burial at sea, when the boat was struck by a derelict the crew believed that the sea was demanding its justice.

It took several hours for the first mate, now the skipper, to agree to abandon ship. And the five passengers (three men and two women) were ordered into the big life-boat. The two women huddled together and covered their heads with shawls. The crew, including the first mate, got in also and rowed away from the sinking vessel. The first mate sat by himself at the bow, with his instruments.

Suddenly one of the women screamed. The others turned around to the bow. The first mate had fallen overboard—and before they could rescue him he was pulled under by sharks.

The woman remained hysterical—and not until after she had been rescued and placed in a cabin on the boat which found them did she become rational.

"Were both men killed?" she finally asked. "Both men?" gasped the others, knowing that only Mr. Brown, the first mate, had been lost.

"Why, yes—I saw Mr. Brown being pulled into the sea by an old man with a beard. I thought the old man had gone mad and was

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grabbing Mr. Brown in frenzy. Then the sharks . . . it was awful."

## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Dear Chakra:

Are prophetic dreams usually clear or in symbols?

**GILL McCORD**

Dear Mr. McCord: Usually in symbols, but quite often very easily interpreted. For example, recently a man named James Goucher told a friend he had dreamed that his belt wouldn't stay fastened. The next day the newspapers carried the following item: "James Goucher, a window cleaner, fell from the sixth floor of the Burke Tower, landing on a second floor awning, saving his life. He was taken to Center Hospital. Both legs were fractured. Goucher said his safety belt had broken."

Dear Chakra:

Is it true that if a man's arm is amputated, he can still feel any pressure on the amputated arm in some psychic way?

**AL BARNES**

Dear Mr. Barnes: There is no scientific reason why he should, although there are several cases where an amputated limb has been thrown into a fire, and the man deprived of the limb imagined he felt a burning sensation just as though he still had his arm and it was being burned. Usually amputated limbs and fingers are destroyed before the wound has healed, and the pain of healing might be attributed to pressure on the amputated part.

Dear Chakra:

After a person has died in a house, does that person's soul return to the house when it is empty?

**MARJORIE GARDNER**

Dear Miss Gardner: Haunted Houses are usually associated with spirits of those who met violent death—not natural death. If the latter were true, there would be more haunted houses reported. Ghosts are supposed to be only those taken from life before their allotted time.

Dear Chakra:

Is it true that a person who desecrates a grave will be stricken with death or sickness within 24 hours?

**WILLIAM NEBBS**

Dear Mr. Nebbs: There are no facts to substantiate this. The cases of grave-curse were mainly ancient ones, where graves held poison gases which escaped when the graves were opened. Also, disease germs in a body might have some deleterious effects. Grave-diggers who often have to uncover graves in cemeteries are listed as a good risk by insurance companies—and they would be the first to feel any curse should it be true. Body snatching was once a flourishing crime in England.

Dear Chakra:

How can a person train himself to see ghosts?

**MILLY TILLMAN**

Dear Miss Tillman: Unless a person is a born psychic or has mediumistic power naturally, the development of spirit-seeing power is not likely. Don't try—the chances are you will only uncover some self-hypnotic control which might affect your health.

—CHAKRA

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| <input type="checkbox"/> Aviation Engineering            | <input type="checkbox"/> Highway Engineering      | <input type="checkbox"/> House Planning           | <input type="checkbox"/> Poultry Farming           | <input type="checkbox"/> Structural Engineering     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Boilermaking                    | <input type="checkbox"/> Management of Inventions | <input type="checkbox"/> Machinist                | <input type="checkbox"/> Public Works Engineering  | <input type="checkbox"/> Surveying and Mapping      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bridge and Building Foremanship |   |   | <input type="checkbox"/> Radio                     | <input type="checkbox"/> Telegraph Engineering      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bridge Engineering              |   |   | <input type="checkbox"/> R. R. Locomotives         | <input type="checkbox"/> Telephone Work             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Building Estimating             |   |   | <input type="checkbox"/> R. R. Section Foreman     | <input type="checkbox"/> Toolmaking                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Chemistry                       |   |   | <input type="checkbox"/> R. R. Signalmen           | <input type="checkbox"/> Toolmaking                 |
|  |   |   | <input type="checkbox"/> Refrigeration             | <input type="checkbox"/> Ventilation                |
|  |   |   |  | <input type="checkbox"/> Welding, Electric and Gas  |
|  |   |   |  | <input type="checkbox"/> Woolen Manufacturing       |

### BUSINESS SUBJECTS

- |  |  |  |  |   |                                  |
|--|--|--|--|---|----------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Accounting              | <input type="checkbox"/> Advertising                 | <input type="checkbox"/> College Preparatory | <input type="checkbox"/> Grade School Subjects | <input type="checkbox"/> Railway Postal Clerk   | <input type="checkbox"/> Signs   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bookkeeping             | <input type="checkbox"/> Cost Accounting             | <input type="checkbox"/> C. P. Accounting    | <input type="checkbox"/> High School Subjects  | <input type="checkbox"/> Salesmanship           | <input type="checkbox"/> Spanish |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Business Correspondence | <input type="checkbox"/> First Year College Subjects | <input type="checkbox"/> Foremanship         | <input type="checkbox"/> Illustrating          | <input type="checkbox"/> Secretarial Work       |                                  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Business Management     | <input type="checkbox"/> French                      |  | <input type="checkbox"/> Lettering Show Cards  | <input type="checkbox"/> Stenography and Typing |                                  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cartooning              | <input type="checkbox"/> Civil Service               |  | <input type="checkbox"/> Managing Men at Work  | <input type="checkbox"/> Traffic Management     |                                  |

### DOMESTIC SCIENCE SUBJECTS

- |   |   |  |
|---|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Advanced Dressmaking | <input type="checkbox"/> Home Dressmaking                       | <input type="checkbox"/> Tea Room and Cafeteria Management, Catering |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Foods and Cookery    | <input type="checkbox"/> Professional Dressmaking and Designing |  |

Name..... Age..... Address.....

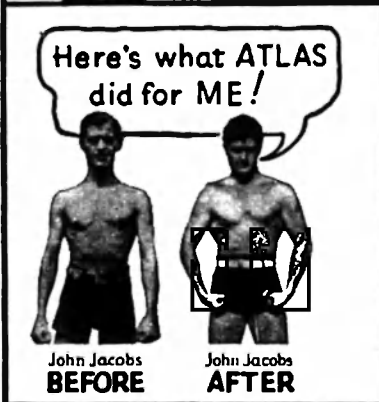
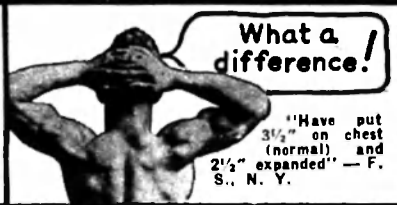
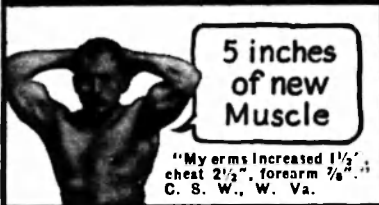
City..... State..... Present Position.....

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# Will You Give Me 7 Days to PROVE I Can Make YOU a *New Man*?

LET ME START SHOWING YOU RESULTS LIKE THESE



**CHARLES ATLAS**  
A recent photo of Charles Atlas, twice winner and holder of the title, "The World's Most Perfectly Developed Man." This is not a studio picture but a simple enlargement made from an ordinary small snapshot. No muscles "painted on" or retouched in any way. This is Charles Atlas as he looks today!

## 7-Day TRIAL OFFER

I could fill this whole magazine with enthusiastic reports from OTHERS. But what you want to know is—"What can Atlas do for ME?"

Find out—at my risk! Right in first 7 days I'll start to PROVE I can turn YOU into a man of might and muscle. And it will be the kind of PROOF you (and anyone else) can SEE, FEEL, MEASURE with a tape!

My FREE BOOK tells about my amazing 7-DAY TRIAL OFFER—an offer no other instructor has ever DARED make! If YOU want smashing strength, big muscles, glowing health—I'll show you results QUICK!

**FREE BOOK** I myself was once a 97-pound weak-limbed, sickly, half-alive. Then I discovered "Dynamic Tension." And I twice won—against all comers—the title, "The World's Most Perfectly Developed Man!"

I have no use for apparatus. "Dynamic Tension" ALONE (right in your own home) will start new inches of massive power pushing out your chest—build up your shoulders to champion huskiness—put regular mountain of muscles on your biceps—free you of constipation, pimples—make those stomach muscles of yours hard ridges!

Make me PROVE it! Get me a postage stamp. Send coupon for my FREE BOOK AT ONCE! See me personally: Charles Atlas, Dept. 77-E, 115 East 23rd St., New York, N. Y.

**STERLING SILVER CUP BEING GIVEN AWAY**  
This valuable cup of solid sterling silver, stands about 14 inches high on a black mahogany base. I will award it, engraved, to my pupil who makes the most improvement in his development within the next three months.



**CHARLES ATLAS, Dept. 77-E**  
115 East 23rd Street, New York, N. Y.

I want proof that DYNAMIC TENSION will make a new man of me—give me a healthy, husky body and big muscle development. Send me your free book "Everlasting Health and Strength"—and full details of your 7-Day Trial Offer.

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GEORGE LOVE, tobacco auctioneer, has seen Luckies buy the Cream of every Crop. "So Luckies," he says, "have been my favorite for 21 years." Most independent tobacco experts smoke Luckies.



Have you tried  
a Lucky lately?

RECENT tobacco crops have been outstanding in quality. New methods, developed by the United States Government and the States, have helped the farmer grow finer tobacco. As *independent* experts point out, Luckies have always bought the cream of the crop. Thoroughly aged, these fine tobaccos are now ready for your enjoyment. And so Luckies are better than ever. Have you tried a Lucky lately? Try them for a week. Then you'll know why



*Easy on Your Throat—  
Because "IT'S TOASTED"*

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**... WITH MEN WHO KNOW TOBACCO BEST—IT'S LUCKIES 2 TO 1**