

THRILLING

MYSTERY

NOV

10¢

FEATURING
**THE HORROR IN
THE CRIB**

A Novelet of
Dork Illusion

By **ARTHUR**

LEO

ZAGAT

A THRILLING
PUBLICATION

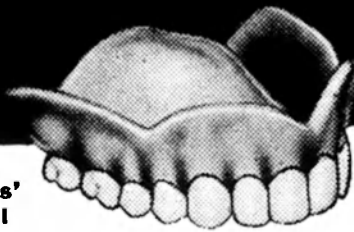
MASTER
OF THE
WALKING DEAD

By **JOSEPH
J. MILLARD**



Enjoy BEAUTIFUL Natural-Looking FALSE TEETH

LOWEST PRICES
SEND NO
MONEY



60
Days'
Trial

Mouth Comfort!

ELSIE E. BOLAND,
Norton, Kansas, writes:

"Enclosed find two pictures. One shows how I looked before I got my teeth; the other one, afterwards. Your teeth are certainly beautiful. They look more natural than some that cost three and four times what I paid for mine."

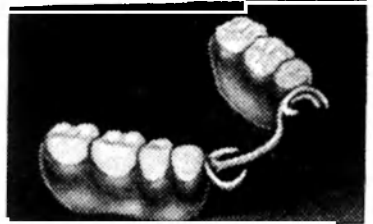


UNBREAKABLE ROOFLESS



FIT-RITE TEETH BY MAIL

We make to measure to fit you individually—BY MAIL—the World's No. 1 FIT-RITE Dental Plates for men and women—from an impression of your own mouth taken quickly and easily by our FIT-RITE improved method. We have thousands of enthusiastic satisfied customers all over the country wearing teeth we made by mail at sensible prices.



UNBREAKABLE PARTIAL



MRS. MARTHA A. WEBB, Jacksonville, Florida, writes: "My plate is not only a perfect fit, but a beautiful piece of work. I took my own impression under your instructions without the least difficulty. I could not have duplicated my

plate here for less than four times the price you charged me."

AT ROCK-BOTTOM PRICES

If you find out what others have paid for theirs, you will be astounded when you see how little ours will cost you! By reading our catalog, you will learn how to save half or more on dental plates for yourself. Monthly payments possible.

ON 60 DAYS' TRIAL

Make us prove you can't beat our fit, work or price. Wear our teeth on trial for as long as 60 days. Then, if you are not perfectly satisfied with them, they will not cost you a cent.

With Money-Back Guarantee of Satisfaction

No money need be risked. We guarantee that if you are not completely satisfied with the teeth we make for you, then any time within 60 days we will immediately refund every cent you have paid us for them. We take your word.



TO EAT WITH PLEASURE . . . TO LAUGH HEARTILY . . . TO LOOK YEARS YOUNGER . . . TO GUARD YOUR HEALTH . . . TO SPEAK DISTINCTLY . . . TO ENJOY LIFE!



MR. RAYMOND MILLS, Elgin, Illinois, writes: "It affords me great pleasure to inform you that I have experienced no difficulty in using this plate with comfort and without the assistance of any dental adhesive. I am now able to masticate different varieties of food,

as well as raw apples and hard candy, just as well as I did with my natural teeth. During the trial period, not a single sign of gum soreness developed."

OUR dentures are set with life-like, pearly-white, genuine, porcelain teeth; constructed from finest materials, with expert workmanship, to give life-long service. We make all styles of plates. A dentist who has had many years' experience in making and fitting dental plates, that look right and fit right supervises the making of each plate.

MAIL THIS COUPON NOW

U S DENTAL COMPANY
1740 Waukegan Ave.

your FREE impression
actions.

FREE

IMPRESSION MATERIAL, catalog with new low prices and easy directions. Don't put this off. Do it TODAY! CLIP COUPON OR WRITE.

Nowhere Else Can You Obtain Genuine FIT-RITE False Teeth

We Also Repair or Reproduce Old Plates—48-Hour Service

UNITED STATES DENTAL COMPANY

THE WORLD'S LARGEST LABORATORY MAKING DENTAL PLATES ONLY

DR. G. M. COLLINS, CHIEF OF STAFF
1555-1557 MILWAUKEE AVE., DEPT. E-82, CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

THIS BIG MONEY-MAKING OUTFIT...



Get Started At Once On a Fine Paying FOOD ROUTE

How would you like to have a fine-paying business of your own—a simple-to-run Food Route on which you can start making good money your very first day? Here's your big chance if you act now. To an honest, reliable man or woman in any open locality, I will give—FREE—complete business equipment containing absolutely everything needed to run a fine-paying neighborhood Food Route. You don't send me a penny. If you want to better yourself—want cash to spend—money to save—the means to live in comfort—let me show you your big chance.

Without any previous experience, you can now own a simple, pleasant, dignified Food Route—a profitable all-year 'round business of your own, in which your home is your headquarters. No training course required.

Be a Food Distributor

The complete valuable Display Outfit which I give you FREE is absolutely all you need to run a fine-paying neighborhood Food Route. And I am willing to extend liberal credit so you can build a splendid business on my capital. Food Distributors make good money

because they handle daily necessities that people simply must buy. You will distribute our guaranteed, uniform high quality products fresh from our own pure food kitchens and laboratories. You will make calls on your list of regular customers, take orders, make deliveries, and pocket a liberal share of every dollar you take in.

Splendid Cash Profits

You owe it to yourself to write and see what wonderful success so many others have enjoyed with this simple money-making Plan. Let me mail you full particulars—then you can judge whether you want to start right in making money at once. You can devote your full time or part time.

Everything You Need —FREE

I will give you FREE a complete valuable Display Outfit, including a big assortment of regular full-size packages. Without your sending me one penny, I will also give you a simple—sure-fire Plan which anyone can fol-

low. I will give you advertising material and positively everything else you need to make good profits your very first day. I will help you every step of the way.

In addition to your fine cash earnings, you can get food products and over one hundred other daily household necessities for your own use at wholesale price—so you save money as well as make money.

Get Full Particulars —NOW!

This is a sincere offer made by a big, reliable, old-established company operating from Coast to Coast. Write at once for full particulars. Unless you take advantage of my remarkable Free Outfit Offer now, you may be missing the very money-making opportunity you have been looking for. Strike out for yourself! Be independent! Make money! Enjoy life! Remember—you don't send me a penny. Just fill out and send the coupon and I will mail you full particulars. Do this TODAY!

E. J. MILLS, President
7974 Monmouth Ave., Cincinnati, O.

MAIL COUPON
for Full Details of FREE OFFER

E. J. MILLS, President,
7974 Monmouth Ave., Cincinnati, Ohio.

Without the slightest obligation on my part, please mail me full particulars about your offer of a Complete Free Outfit, so that I can start making money at once on a Local Food Route of my own.

Name.....

Address.....

(Please print or write plainly)

• EVERY STORY BRAND-NEW •

THRILLING MYSTERY

Vol. XII, No. 3

November, 1939

Price 10c

Three Complete Mystery Novelets

- THE HORROR IN THE CRIB** - - - - - Arthur Leo Zagat 14
Beset by Apparitions from Beyond, Neila Randall is the Victim of Unutterable Terror that Strikes to the Roots of Her Soul!
- MASTER OF THE WALKING DEAD** - - Joseph J. Millard 46
Molding Corpses Stalk the Darkness, Bringing Fearsome Horror as Fate Cuts a Grim, Macabre Jigsaw of Death!
- THE CASE OF THE MUMMIFIED CORPSES** - Ray Cummings 88
McClure and Son, Scientific Detectives, Investigate a Ghastly Series of Shocking Crimes which Smack of Ancient Egyptian Magic!

Five Thrilling Short Stories

- CORPSE CASTLE** - - - - - Henry Kuttner 27
In an Eerie Desert Fortress Death Thwarts the Plans of a "Genie"
- THE DEATH SONG** - - - - - Ray King 38
The Voice of a Murdered Woman Pierces Through the Veil of Mystery
- THE SECOND COUNT BAKONYI** - - - Fred Engelhardt 64
Vampirism in the Carpathians Menaces Two Young Americans
- DEATH FROM BEYOND** - - - - - Joe Archibald 74
A Labyrinth of Greed and Murder is Edward Bramwell's Legacy!
- THE SHADOWY CURSE** - - - - - Henry S. Lewis 84
Where Portraits Stare and Speak, Madness Lurks!

Special Feature

- HORROR-SCOPES** - - - - - Chakra 101
Special FREE Crystal-Scope Reading Offer! Coupon on Page 106

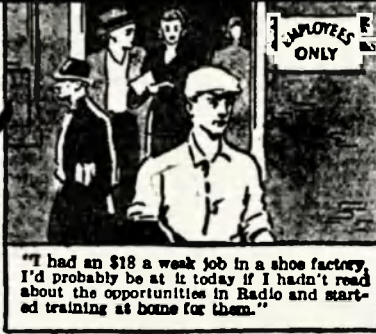
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I jumped from \$18 a week to \$50
-- a Free Book started me toward this
GOOD PAY IN RADIO

HERE'S
How it
Happened
 by S. J. E.
 (NAME AND ADDRESS
 SENT UPON REQUEST)



"I had an \$18 a week job in a shoe factory, I'd probably be at it today if I hadn't read about the opportunities in Radio and started training at home for them."



"The training National Radio Institute gave me was so practical I was soon ready to make \$5 to \$10 a week in spare time servicing Radio sets."



"When I finished training I accepted a job as serviceman with a Radio store. In three weeks I was made service manager at more than twice what I earned in the shoe factory."



"Eight months later N. R. I. Employment Department sent me to Station KWCB as a Radio operator. Now I am Radio Engineer at Station WSUI. I am also connected with Television Station WYXX."



"N. R. I. Training took me out of a low-pay shoe factory job and put me into Radio at good pay. Radio is growing fast."



Find out today how I Train You at Home
to BE A RADIO TECHNICIAN

J. E. SMITH, President
 National Radio Institute
 Established 25 Years

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

Fixing Radios while learning and equip you for full time work after you graduate.

RADIO IS A YOUNG, growing field with a future, offering many good pay spare time and full time job opportunities. And you don't have to give up your present job to become a Radio Technician. I train you right at home in your spare time.

Why Many Radio Technicians
Make \$30, \$40, \$50 a Week

Radio broadcasting stations employ engineers, operators, station managers. Radio manufacturers employ testers, inspectors, foremen, servicemen in good-pay jobs. Radio jobbers, dealers, employ installation and service men. Many Radio Technicians open their own Radio sales and repair businesses and make \$30, \$40, \$50 a week. Others hold their regular jobs and make \$5 to \$10 a week fixing Radios in spare time. Automobile, police, aviation, Commercial Radio; loudspeaker systems, electronic devices are other fields offering opportunities for which N. R. I. gives the required knowledge of Radio. Television promises to open good jobs soon.

The day you enroll, I start sending you Extra Money Job Sheets which start showing you how to do Radio repair jobs. Throughout your training I send plans and directions which have helped many make \$200 to \$500 a year in spare time while learning. I send special Radio equipment to conduct experiments and build circuits. This 50-50 training method makes learning at home interesting, fascinating, practical. I ALSO GIVE YOU A MODERN, PROFESSIONAL ALL-WAYE, ALL-PURPOSE SET SERVING INSTRUMENT to help you make money

Find Out What Radio Offers You

Act Today! Mail the coupon for my 64-page book "Rich Rewards in Radio." It points out Radio's spare time and full time opportunities and those coming in Television; tells about my course in Radio and Television; shows many letters from men I have trained, telling what they are doing and earning. Read my money back agreement. MAIL COUPON in an envelope or paste on a penny postcard --NOW!

J. E. SMITH, President
 Dept. 9M09, National Radio Institute
 Washington, D. C.

MAIL NOW - Get 64 page book FREE



J. E. SMITH, President, Dept. 9M09,
 National Radio Institute, Washington, D. C.

Dear Mr. Smith: Send me FREE, without obligation, your 64-page book "Rich Rewards in Radio" which points out Radio's opportunities and tells how you train men at home to be Radio Technicians. (Write Plainly.)

NAME AGE
 ADDRESS
 CITY STATE

A Money-Making Opportunity

for Men of Character

EXCLUSIVE FRANCHISE FOR

AN INVENTION EXPECTED TO REPLACE
A MULTI-MILLION-DOLLAR INDUSTRY

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

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

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

Now another change is taking place. An old established industry—an integral and important part of the nation's structure—in which millions of dollars change hands every year—is in thousands of cases being replaced by a truly astonishing, simple invention which does the work better—more reliably—AND AT A COST OFTEN AS LOW AS 2% OF WHAT IS ORDINARILY PAID! It has not required very long for men who have taken over the rights to this valuable invention to do a remarkable business, and show earnings which in these times are almost unheard of for the average man.

Not a "Gadget"—
Not a "Knick-Knack"—

but a valuable, proved device which has been sold successfully by business novices as well as seasoned veterans.

Make no mistake—this is no novelty—no flimsy creation which the inventor hopes to put on the market. You probably have seen nothing like it yet—perhaps never dreamed of the existence of such a device—yet it has already been used by corporations of outstanding prominence—by dealers of great corporations—by their branches—by doctors, newspapers, publishers—schools—hospitals, etc., etc., and by thousands of small business men. You don't have to convince a man that he should use an electric bulb to light his office instead of a gas lamp. Nor do you have to tell the same business man the idea that some day he may need something like this invention. The need is already there—the money is usually being spent right at that very moment—and the desirability of saving the greatest part of this expense is obvious immediately.

Some of the Savings
You Can Show

You walk into an office and put down before your prospect a letter from a sales organization showing that they did work in their own office for \$11 which formerly could have cost them over \$200. A building supply corporation pays our man \$70, whereas the bill could have been for \$1,000! An automobile dealer pays our representative \$15, whereas the expense could have been over \$1,000. A department store has expense of \$88.60, possible cost if done outside the business being well over \$2,000. And so on. We could not possibly list all cases here. These are just a few of the many actual cases which we place in your hands to work with. Practically every line of business and every section of the country is represented by these field reports which hammer across dazzling, convincing money-saving opportunities which hardly any business man can fail to understand.

Profits Typical of
the Young, Growing Industry

Going into this business is not like selling something offered in every grocery, drug or department store. For instance, when you take a \$7.50 order, \$5.85 can be your share. On \$1,500 worth of business, your share can be \$1,167.00. The very least you get as your part of every dollar's worth of business you do is 67 cents—on ten dollars' worth \$6.70, on a hundred dollars' worth \$67.00—in other words two thirds of every order you get is yours. Not only on the first order—but on repeat orders—and you have the opportunity of earning an even larger percentage.

This Business Has
Nothing to Do With
House to House Canvassing

Nor do you have to know anything about high-pressure selling. "Selling" is unnecessary in the ordinary sense of the word. Instead of hammering away at the customer and trying to "force" a sale, you make a dignified, business-like call, leave the installation—whatever time the customer says he will accept—at our risk, let the customer sell himself after the device is in and working. This does away with the need for pressure on the customer—it eliminates the handicap of trying to get the money before the customer has really convinced himself 100%. You simply tell what you offer, showing proof of success in that customer's particular line of business. Then leave the invention without a dollar down. It starts working at once. In a few short days, the installation should actually produce enough cash money to pay for the deal, with profits above the investment coming in at the same time. You then call back, collect your money. Nothing is so convincing as our offer to let results speak for themselves without risk to the customer! While others fail to get even a hearing, our men are making sales running into the hundreds. They have received the attention of the largest firms in the country, and sold to the smallest businesses by the thousands.

EARNINGS

One man in California earned over \$1,600 per month for three months—close to \$5,000 in 90 days' time. Another writes from Delaware—"Since I have been operating (just a little less than a month of actual selling) and not the full day at that, because I have been getting organized and had to spend at least half the day in the office; counting what I have sold outright and on trial, I have made just a little in excess of one thousand dollars profit for one month." A Connecticut man writes he has made \$55.00 in a single day's time. Texas man nets over \$300 in less than a week's time. Space does not permit mentioning here more than these few random cases. However, they are sufficient to indicate that the worthwhile future in this business is coupled with immediate earnings for the right kind of man. One man with us has already made over a thousand sales on which his earnings ran from \$5 to \$60 per sale and more. A great deal of this business was repeat business. Yet he had never done anything like this before coming with us. That is the kind of opportunity this business offers. The fact that this business has attracted to it such business men as former bankers, executives of businesses—men who demand only the highest type of opportunity and income—gives a fairly good picture of the kind of business this is. Our door is open, however, to the young man looking for the right field in which to make his start and develop his future.

No Money Need Be Risked

In trying this business out. You can measure the possibilities and not be out a dollar. If you are looking for a business that is not overworked—a business that is just coming into its own—on the upgrade, instead of the downgrade—a business that offers the buyer relief from a burdensome, but unavoidable expense—a business that has a prospect practically in every office, store, or factory into which you can set foot—regardless of size—that is a necessity but does not have any price cutting to contend with as other necessities do—that because you control the sales in exclusive territory is your own business—that pays more on some individual sales than many men make in a week and amounts in a month's time—if such a business looks as if it is worth investigating, get me such risk as at once for the rights in your territory—don't delay—because the chances are that if you do wait, someone else will have written to us in the meantime—and if it turns out that you were the better man—we'd both be sorry. So for convenience, air the coupon below—but send it right away—or wire if you wish. But do it now. Address

F. E. ARMSTRONG, President
Dept. 4047 M, Mobile, Ala.

**RUSH FOR EXCLUSIVE
TERRITORY PROPOSITION**

F. E. ARMSTRONG, Pres., Dept. 4047 M, Mobile, Ala.
Without obligation to me, send me full information on your proposition.

Name _____
Street or Route _____
Box no. _____
City _____
State _____



Now
is the time!

Business is Searching
for YOU, if

RIGHT now, in many lines, there is a search for really *good* men—managers, leaders—men who can take charge of departments, businesses, branch offices, and get things humming.

As always, there are not enough ordinary jobs to go 'round—but rarely before, in the history of American business, has there been so much room at the *top!* And new jobs are being created by the business pick-up in many lines—jobs that pay splendidly and that open the way to lifetime success.

Ordinarily, there would be plenty of men to fill these jobs—men in junior positions who had been studying in spare time. But most men have been letting their training slide during these dark years of depression . . . “What’s the use?”—You have heard them say. Perhaps there has been some excuse for sticking to any old kind of a job one could get the past few years—but the door is wide open for the man with ambition and ability *NOW!*

And don’t let anyone tell you that “Opportunity Only Knocks Once”—that’s one of the most untruthful sayings ever circulated. Op-

portunities flourish for *every* American every day of his life.

Far more to the point is to be ready—to be *prepared*—to make yourself *interesting* to the big-time employer—and LaSalle offers you a short-cut method of qualifying for opportunity jobs in accounting, law, traffic, executive management, and kindred occupations.

LaSalle Extension is 30 years old—averages over 30,000 enrollments a year—60 American firms each employ 500 or more LaSalle-trained men—surveys show that many LaSalle students attain 40% salary increase after graduation—10% of all C.P.A.’s in the U. S. A. are LaSalle-alumni.

Why not find out what LaSalle has done and is doing for men in *your* position? Send and get the facts; see what LaSalle can do for you, personally!

There’s no question about it—business is picking up—jobs are looking for *men*—the time has come for you to *qualify* for prosperity. Mail this coupon today!

LASALLE EXTENSION UNIVERSITY
A CORRESPONDENCE INSTITUTION

4101 S. Michigan Ave., Dept. 11929-R Chicago

I am in earnest about my success and I would like to have your special booklet—without any cost or obligation to me—about my opportunities and your success training in the business field I have checked:

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Business Management | <input type="checkbox"/> Industrial Management |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Higher Accountancy | <input type="checkbox"/> Modern Foremanship |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Traffic Management | <input type="checkbox"/> Business Correspondence |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Modern Salesmanship | <input type="checkbox"/> Business English |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Commercial Law | <input type="checkbox"/> Effective Speaking |
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| <input type="checkbox"/> Expert Bookkeeping | <input type="checkbox"/> Stenotypy |

Name.....Age.....
Position.....Address.....

Ask for one of these booklets—or a similar one on your own field of business. They are free!



Boys!

Boys!

BIG PRIZES



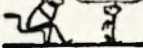
Mail Coupon

O H, BOY! What a bike! A long, low, silvery beauty made of stainless, rust-proof aluminum alloy. Light in weight, yet stronger (weight for weight) than steel. Completely streamlined bow-arch frame, 19" high. Fully equipped with hornlite with side navigation lights, streamlined sprocket-wheel guard, coaster brake, luggage carrier, frame pump, and parking stand. A truly wonderful bike. Earn it, and any of 300 other prizes. Mail the coupon today.

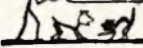


SILVER KING

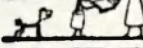
I WISH I HAD SOME SPENDING MONEY



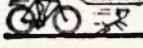
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BRING A MAGAZINE EVERY MONTH



NOW I HAVE MONEY AND A BICYCLE BEHINDS!



How proud you'll be to own this swift new bike or any of our 300 other big prizes. You'll **MAKE MONEY** while you earn them, too. It's easy to start. Need not interfere with school. Just deliver our popular magazines to people whom you secure as customers in your neighborhood. Some boys earn a prize such as a model airplane or a compo-pearl knife the first day. Perhaps you can, too. Hurry! Mail the coupon **NOW**.

Mr. Jim Thayer, Dept. 905
The Crowell-Collier Publishing Co., Springfield, Ohio
Dear Jim: Start me earning **MONEY** and **PRIZES** at once.

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

Address

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

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NOW a DYNAMIC HEAVY DUTY INDUSTRIAL WELDER

WORKS OFF 110-Volt Light W Socket. This marvelous **Dynamic Power Welder** does the work of much higher priced types. It is **RETAIL** easily portable. With **DS** Under Blocks, **Bumpers, Fenders, Tanks, Farm Machinery, etc.** Will also solder and braze on the lightest material. Works on iron, steel, tin, brass, copper and all other metals. Man without previous experience can make as much as \$5.00 on a one hour repair job. In a year's time a Dynamic-Welder **COSTS YOU LESS THAN 6 CENTS A DAY**



Go into business—Open a welding shop now. **AGENTS**—Make big profits selling to garages, factories, janitors and machine shops. Write today for our **10-DAY TRIAL OFFER.** **DYNAMIC WELDER COMPANY, 2226-H8 SILVERTON ROAD, CHICAGO, ILLINOIS.**

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WANTED AT ONCE! Mother, Home, Love, Patriotic, Sacred, Comic or any subject. Don't delay — send

us your original poem today for immediate consideration.
RICHARD BROS., 74 Woods Bldg., CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

See
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TYPEWRITERS

CANDID CAMERA CATCHES CO-EDS

In Every Issue of

COLLEGE HUMOR

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AT ALL STANDS

If This Were You—
Laid Up By
SICKNESS
OR ACCIDENT-

What Would It Mean
To YOU To Get Up To
\$150.00
A MONTH?



Amazing New Policy

COSTS ONLY 3¢ A DAY

If sickness or accident should strike YOU—lay you up, disabled—stop your income, perhaps for months—don't face the additional worry of money for bills and expenses! Protect yourself and your loved ones with the remarkable low cost Sterling Sickness and Accident Policy! For only 3c a day this amazing policy provides ACTUAL CASH—to help pay bills and expenses! Pays you up to \$150.00 a month for sickness, including Hospital Benefits; \$100.00 a month for accident; pays as much as \$2,500.00 for loss of limbs, sight, or accidental death, plus many other liberal benefits, as provided in policy.

*Pays Cash For Common Sicknesses
And All Types Of Accidents*

This policy covers sicknesses common to men and women, covers all types of accidents as happen every day in or by automobiles or trucks, on street, at home, on the farm, in factory, while at work, etc. Benefits payable from FIRST DAY, as explained in policy.

**MORE THAN
\$500,000.00 PAID**

Young and old—men, women, children, ages 15 to 64 without Doctor's Examination—are eligible for this liberal insurance. More than \$500,000.00 Cash Benefits already paid on Sterling Policies. Big, responsible, Legal Reserve Stock Company. \$100,000.00 on deposit with State of Illinois Insurance Department for protection of all policy-holders.

EASY MONTHLY TERMS

Because we deal direct with you and have no agents, your cost of this insurance is amazingly low. Only 3c a day, in easy monthly payments, brings you all these protection features. No dues—no assessments.

**10 DAYS FREE INSPECTION
SEND NO MONEY!**

Here's our sensational offer. Write, giving your age, and the name and relationship of your beneficiary. We will mail you Actual Policy on 10-days' FREE INSPECTION. No obligation whatever. Act now.

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Chicago, Ill.

**Liberal Benefits At
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AS MUCH AS

\$2,500.00

paid to you IN CASH for Accidental Death or Loss of Limbs or Eyesight.

UP TO \$150.00

a month for sickness including Hospital Benefits.

UP TO \$100.00

a month for disability due to accident.

\$100.00

Cash paid as Emergency Aid or Identification Benefit.

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Doctor's bill for non disabling injuries — 10% increase in benefits for 5 years at no extra cost.

**All Benefits as described
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From Any Photo You Send Only

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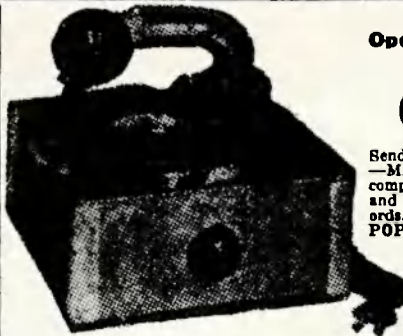


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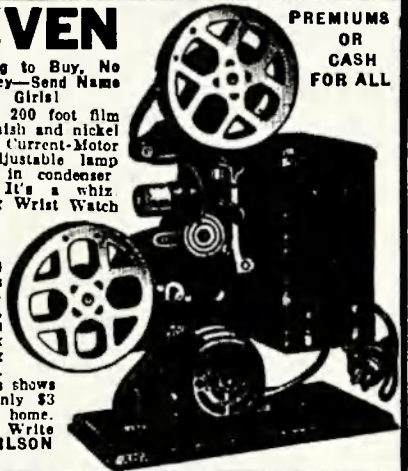
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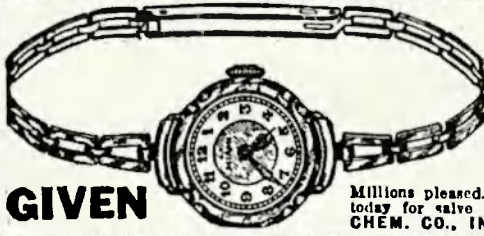
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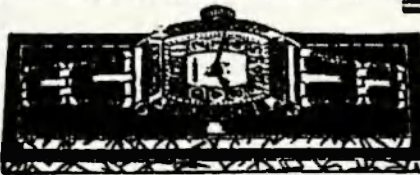
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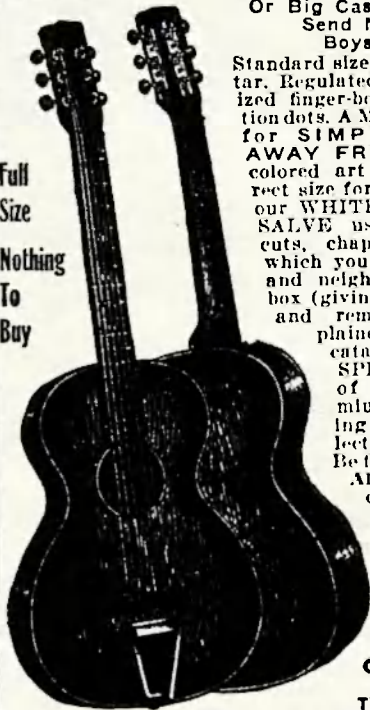
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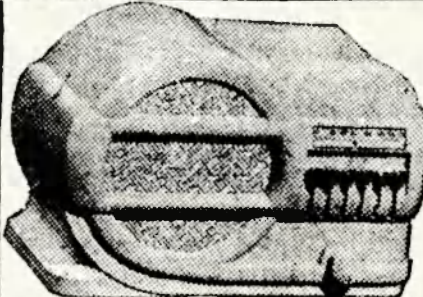
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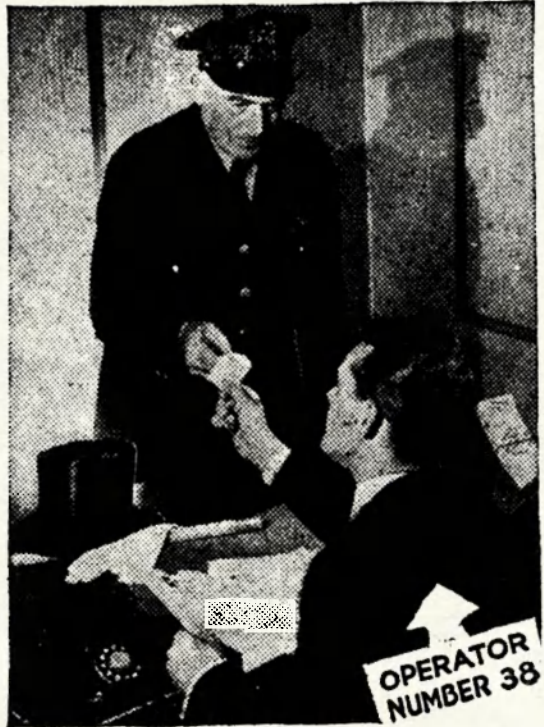
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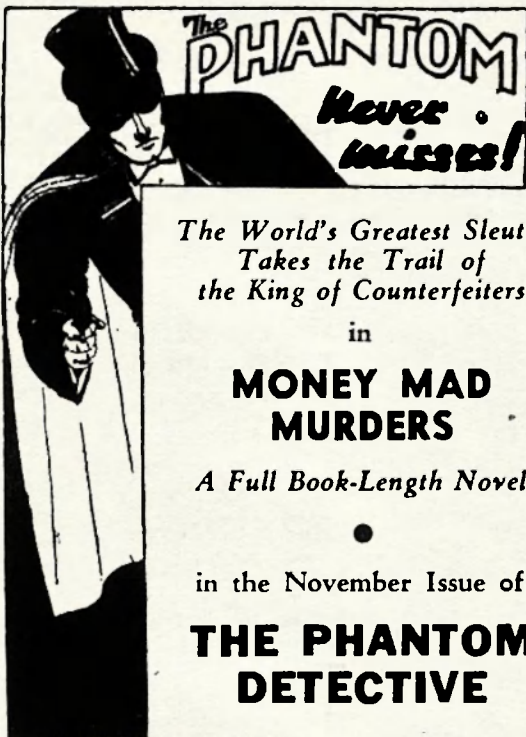
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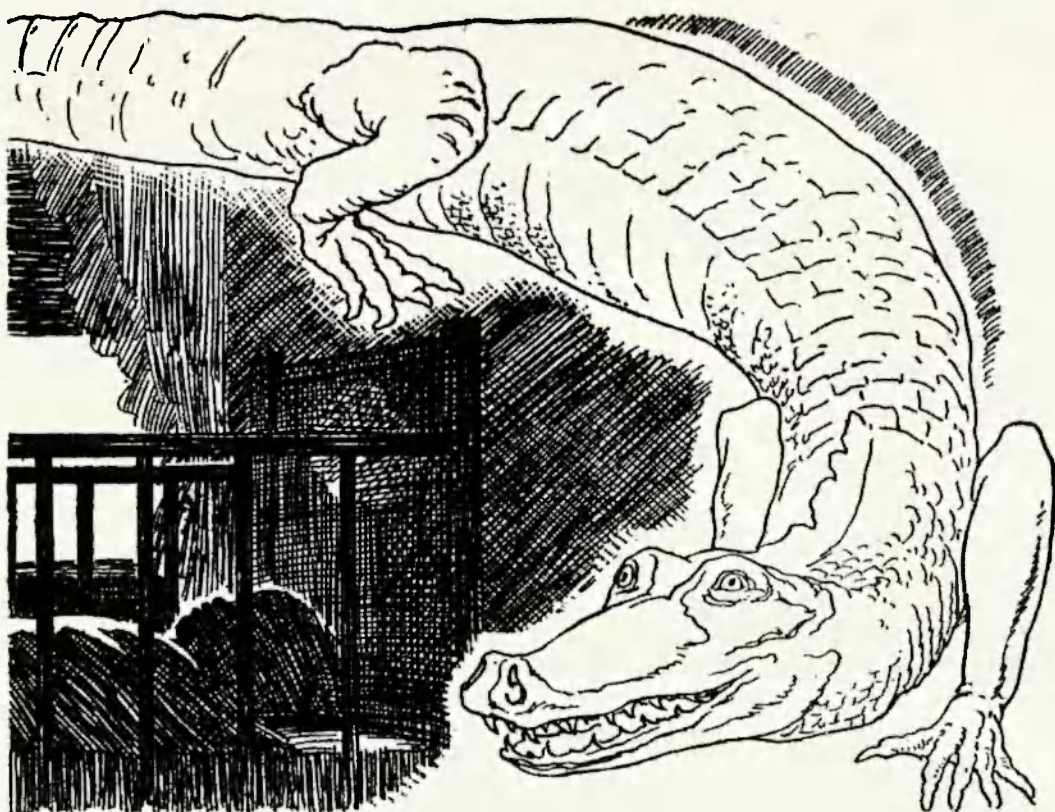
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Dark
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Neila clawed at the dark swirl of draperies



THE HORROR IN THE CRIB

Beset by Apparitions From Beyond, Neila
Randall Is the Victim of Unutterable Terror
That Strikes to the Roots of Her Soul!

By **ARTHUR LEO ZAGAT**

Author of "By Subway to Hell," "Death Fog," etc.

CHAPTER I

Hallucinations

NEILA could not sleep. She kept seeing on the screen of her closed lids the gaping dark grave into which she had watched the bronze casket descend that afternoon. She kept hearing the hollow, dreadful thud of the clods that had piled, drab and dank, an eternal blanket over Jim Randall, her husband and lover.

Amos Foster had said that she must

try to sleep, that for the sake of Baby Ralph she must get herself back to normalcy. But Neila could not sleep. She could only lie there, thinking of Jim, of Jim's mother and the hate Lucretia Randall bore for her, and the conflict between them that must reach its crisis very soon.

She tried to plan what she would say to the grim old harridan, but her thoughts blurred into panic. She opened her eyes and looked across the dim room to where her son's crib was outlined against the open window's

moonlit oblong, and the panic was a little eased.

Neila pushed herself up on her pillow. She could not sleep and she dared not think.

"I you can't sleep, read," Amos had said. "Don't brood."

She reached overhead and switched on the lamp fastened there. Its light was so focused as to be confined to the book she took from the shelf of the night table beside her bed. She adjusted the dark glasses Amos had brought her to wear at the funeral, so that she might hide her tear-reddened eyes from curious glances, one more reminder of the kindly old lawyer's thoughtfulness.

The print ran together on the page, an undecipherable blur. "Neila!" her name came out of the gloom. "*Neila!*" It was Jim's voice that called her name as if from a limitless distance! "Neila!" It was loud now! It was in the room! "The baby! Quick, Neila. The baby!"

She was out of the bed and across the room. Her hands clutched the crib's top bar and her eyes stared down into it. Her slim body was sheathed with ice and a scream ripped from her throat.

TINY reptilian eyes blinked up at her from the beribboned pillow, hooded eyes in a green, grotesque head that was long and flat and triangular, a head split by a fang-serried, malignant grin. A crocodile!

"Kill it!" Jim's voice husked in her ears. "Neila! Kill it!"

With what? The mother whipped about, looked frantically for a weapon, caught a gleam of metal on the dresser. She darted to it, snatched up the long, keen shears, whirled again, started back. Her feet caught in the silk hem of her nightgown and she fell headlong. Her hands thrust at the floor. She lifted, heard the bedroom door opening behind her as she sprang to the crib. Fingers grabbed her arm, bruising fingers. A frightened little cry came from the crib.

Baby Ralph was looking up at her, the corners of his blue eyes crinkling with recognition, his chubby little hands waving!

"Neila Randall, what on earth are you doing?"

Neila twisted, stared into the face of the woman whose dry voice had asked that. It was Lucretia Randall. Jim's mother was stiff-backed, dour even in her old-fashioned flannel nightgown. "What's the matter with you?" she demanded.

Priscilla Slade, Lucretia's aged companion, picked up Neila's glasses for her. "Looked like she was going to stab her baby with those shears," the wizened woman cackled.

Not her baby, the— But she couldn't tell them about the crocodile; they would think her mad.

"What an awful thing to say!" she exclaimed, turning back to the crib and reaching into it. "I was cutting off this torn binding from Baby's blanket." She felt only the warm infant's body, nothing else. "Look." She held up the blanket for them to see.

"But you screamed," said the grandmother, disbelief in the chilled, steel-gray of her eyes. "We heard you scream, and came running."

There was nothing in the crib, nothing on the floor, anywhere in the room. The window was screened so that nothing could possibly have got out through it. Impossible that little Ralph would be crowing so happily if the—thing actually had been in there with him. Neila made her face expressionless.

"Did I scream?" she asked dully. "Perhaps I did. I had a nightmare and I may have screamed in my sleep. It woke me and I remembered about the torn binding—" She turned away from them, cuddling her eight-months-old son.

He reached his little hands up to her face, gurgling happily, unaware that he would never know a father's care, a father's love. "Hungry, honey?" Neila cooed. "Mother will fix your bottle—"

"It isn't time yet for his feeding," Lucretia objected.

"He's getting one right now," Neila replied through lips abruptly tight, "Mrs. Randall." Calling the woman "Mother" had always annoyed her, and now there was no longer any need for it, no longer any need for Jim's sake to veil the antagonism that lay between

them. "I shall take care of my baby in my own way, whether you like it or not."

PRISSIE snorted. "The impu—" "Quiet, Priscilla," her mistress snapped. "Let me handle this." And then, "Neila Randall, I will not permit you to speak to me in that manner, in my own house."

"It may be your house," Neila said passionately, "but this is my room. I ask you to remember that I am entitled to its privacy, as long as I remain here." She gulped, decided to say now what she had intended to wait to say till Lucretia's first grief had dulled. "That won't be for long. I have lived here with you for two years because I did not wish to make it impossible for Jim to be both a devoted son to you and a loyal husband to me. Now that he is gone, I am released. Ralph and I shall move out as soon as I can make arrangements."

Hate made a gray and twitching mask of the old woman's face. "You cannot leave soon enough to suit me," she said thinly. "But the child will remain. If you think that I will allow my grandson to be brought up by a common drab from the slums—"

"Get out!" Neila's command was low-toned, but there was a virulence in it, a pent fury, that silenced Lucretia Randall and drove her back, step by unwilling step, across the moon-silvered floor to the open door and out through it. Her wizened companion retreated with her, but paused in the doorway, her sharp-featured profile parrotlike.

"You're a fool, young lady," Prissie cackled, "if you think she'll ever let you take the baby away from her. She's always got everything she wanted. She'll find a way to get that, too."

The door closed, and Neila was alone. All her control fled. Shudders ran through her girlish frame. Jim Randall, jaded and seeking some new thrill in the teeming East Side slum street, had spied her trudging home from work and won her heart at once with his flashing, boyish smile. Her teeth chattered. Her knees buckled so that she had to hold on to the crib to keep from sliding to the floor.

She had not dreamed what had happened here moments ago. She'd been awake, fully awake. But it could not have happened. It was beyond all reason that Jim had called to her from the grave, that a green-scaled monster had taken the baby's place.

Neila moaned. The terror which squeezed her heart was of a different kind now, different and worse. People who had hallucinations were mad!

A thin cry came from the crib. "Yes, honey," Neila cooed. "Yes, my love. Mother's getting your bottle."

The warm confiding little body in her arms, her lips on the satin skin of Ralph's cheek, Neila Randall sat through the long night, staring into the dreadful shadows.

"She won't take you from me." Dawn's chill gray was stealing into the room when Neila's cold lips whispered that. "Never. I won't let her."

"NO, MY DEAR," Amos Foster said, the next evening. "I haven't done anything about finding other quarters for you." His corpulent form filled the armchair in the little sitting room that opened from the bedroom. "I wanted to talk over your decision first." He smiled, his bright eyes kindly in the light of the single table lamp, his sparse hair gray at the temples. "Now that you've had time to become more nearly normal."

"Normal?" Neila caught up the word. "What do you mean?"

The lawyer's pudgy hand made a deprecating gesture. "It wouldn't be natural if Jim's terrible accident, the shock of his sudden death, had left you able to see things straight."

No, Neila thought, it wouldn't be natural.

"Neila," Foster's voice was low and persuasive. "I am more than twice your age. I was Jim's father's friend before you were born, and since Henry Randall's death I have been trustee of his estate. Surely, I should know Lucretia better than you. Won't you listen to me when I tell you that her hardness is all on the surface, that beneath it there is as warm and affectionate a woman as any in the world? Won't you let me plead with you to give that

real Lucretia Randall a chance? It would be cruel, to take her grandson from her, to cut her off from the last one in the world left to her to love."

"Cruel!" Neila paced the floor, slapping her arm against her side. "Not as cruel as she has been to me, using her power over Jim to keep us here in her house. Making me feel like an interloper, a—a thief. She doesn't want me here. She hates me as only a woman can hate another woman. It's only the baby she wants. But she can't have him. She can't have him, I tell you—" A sob choked her.

"You're hysterical, Neila—"

Darkness smashed into the room, cutting off the lawyer's words. The girl whirled to the lamp.

A fleshless skull grinned at her from out of a bluish, man-form glow! It topped a bony skeleton that moved toward her, its bony fingers reaching out to clutch her, its curving ribs plain against the pale oblong of the window.

"Not hysterical, Neila." Horribly, there were some of the intonations of Jim's voice in those rasping accents. "Insane, Neila. Mad!"

CHAPTER II

A Cry for Help

AND then there was light in the room again, light of the lamp on the table beside which Amos Foster had been sitting. He was on his feet, fumbling at the lamp.

"The bulb must have come loose," he said, turning to Neila. "I tightened— What's the matter, child? Are you ill?"

Neila stared at him, her pupils dilated, her lips writhing.

"You look like you've seen a ghost," he said.

"I have," the girl contrived to whisper. "I saw Jim, already a death's head. I heard him—"

The lawyer's hand was on her arm. "Child!" he exclaimed anxiously. "What are you saying?"

"Didn't you see him?" Her voice was thin and strained, frightened.

"Didn't you hear him?" she gasped.

"Of course not!" Foster's fingers were under her chin, were bringing her eyes up to meet his. "Listen, Neila. Listen to me. You're still overwrought, and I understand. I had no right to upset you as I have, and I won't do it again. But I've got to tell you this. I've got to warn you. You must not say anything like this to anyone else. You must not! Do you understand?"

"No," Neila whimpered. "I don't understand, Amos. Why shouldn't I?"

"Because if you do, you will give your mother-in-law the pretext she needs to take your baby from you, and in her present mood she will use it. With witnesses to any story like that, she could have you declared—"

"Insane," Neila gasped, her shudders abruptly stilled. "Crazy!"

"Exactly," Foster shrugged. "And then—"

"She could take Ralph away from me. But I'm not insane, Amos—"

"Of course you're not, my dear. You're just overwrought, and that's where the danger lies. Take the advice of one who wishes you well, of one old enough to be your father. Go to bed right now, even if it is very early. Get a good night's sleep, a good rest. You will be surprised how much that will do for you. By tomorrow evening you will be able to think clearly and composedly, and I'll come back then to talk all this over with you. Good night, Neila."

He went out and she went slowly into the bedroom of the little suite that for two years had been her only sanctuary from Lucretia Randall's hating eyes. She glimpsed movement out of the corner of her eyes, whirled to it. Amos Foster was right, her nerves were at the breaking point. What had startled her had been merely her own reflection, in the great mirror that formed the whole inner surface of the door to the corridor.

She went to this. The lunar luminescence filtering in through the open window, gave light enough for her to see herself. Her tousled hair made a tawny frame for the pallid oval of her face. Her cheeks were sunken, her lips

quivering. Blue shadows lived under her hazel eyes, and in those eyes crawled the little light worms of a terrible fear.

Neila turned away, undressed, drew on the misty chiffon of her nightrobe, slid her icy feet into the frivolously pomponed mules that once had so amused Jim. She went into the bathroom. After awhile she returned, carrying a large box of perfumed bath powder. Taking the cover from this, she blew across the surface of its contents, walking about the chamber as she did so.

THE air filled with the fragrant dust. It settled slowly, but when Neila had finished, and was sitting on the edge of her bed, an unbroken film of the fine powder covered the floor from wall to wall.

She kicked off her mules, slid under the sheets, adjusted the pillows so that they would support her, half sitting, half reclining. She could see the door from the hall, the door into the sitting room and the window above little Ralph's crib. Wide-eyed, she waited.

The moonlight slid slowly across the floor, the shadows retreating from it. The silver radiance on the white dust was eerie at first, but when Neila became accustomed to it, it was dream-like. Lovely. The whisper of the baby's breathing was soft, soporific. This room was at the rear side of the house, and there were no near street sounds to disturb the gathering silence. Sleep tugged at Neila's lids.

She must not let herself sleep. Dared not. She reached out to a small radio on the night table beside the bed, adjusted its volume knob to almost the lowest notch, clicked on the switch. The lighted disk with its black markings seemed friendly. In an instant it would give her music to keep her awake, swing music, lilting and merry.

Not music but speech tuned down to the merest whisper of sound, came into the room. "Once more it is seven-forty-five. Once more it is our privilege to bring you Zingar for a quarter-hour of Weird Wisdom—" Neila's hand went out to switch that program off, to tune to another station—and froze on the

knurled knob.

The door to the corridor had vanished! There was only blank wall where it had been, and out of this blank wall was growing a thing of dread. The shape was entirely cloaked by dark draperies, but somehow its outline came through these, a form of pure, heart-stopping horror, loathsome and evil.

It detached itself from the wall. Soundless and stealthily, it drifted across the room toward the baby's crib. As it passed her bed an odor reached Neila's nostrils, fetid, as if from some opened sepulcher.

Neila could not move, could not cry out. The Thing seemed to be peering into the crib. Its draperies undulated, and Neila perceived that it was about to reach down for Ralph. That brought her out of her bed, rasping a wordless protest. She rushed to the defense of her child.

The Shape turned, its dark veils outspread like the wings of some gigantic bat. "You have no right to him," Jim Randall's voice husked. "You must give him up."

"Never!" Neila cried, clawing at the dark swirl of draperies. They enveloped her and she fell—down and down into a Stygian abyss, down into a bottomless chasm.

Abruptly the blinding veil was gone. Neila was sprawled on the floor, and the dark, incredible Shape had vanished. She pushed up on her hands, saw that the corridor door again broke the wall, as it always had. She came erect, twisting. Little Ralph, untouched, unharmed, lay peacefully asleep in his crib. Neila turned again.

The dust film on the floor was no longer unmarred. There were the marks of her feet on it, as she had dashed from the bed, the mark of her body where it had sprawled. *And there were other markings.*

They came across from the corridor door, and they went back to that door. They were blurred, but they were formed like no man's, or woman's, feet were ever shaped!

HER plan had succeeded. Terribly! There, in those markings on the

floor was proof that what had come into this room was not a figment of her disordered brain, indisputable proof that what had leaned over her baby's crib was something physical, something that had materialized from beyond the curtain that divides the known from the unknowable. This, and the skeleton and the saurian monster all were real, though they were manifest only to her.

"There is no Outer World of Darkness," a voice intoned, low but deep-chested and hollow, and edged with a peculiar huskiness. "No ghost, no elemental, no apparently supernatural manifestation, has ever appeared or ever will appear except through the operation—accidental, willful or malicious—of the laws of nature and of science." The statement, so pat to the spinning, terrified chaos in Neila Randall's brain, came from the radio that all this time had remained on. "This is my message, and if its truth be challenged I will go any place, at any time, to meet that challenge."

There was an instant of rasping silence, during which Neila did not move, and then the cool, professional tones of a network announcer were saying, "With his now famous defiance, Zingar concludes his twenty-ninth broadcast. If any of you wish to dispute the assertion he has just made, or desire his help, you may communicate with him in writing addressed to this station, or, if the matter is urgent, by telephone directly to Zingar's studio, from which this broadcast originated. The number is Academy, seven-nine-four-hundred. Zingar's Weird Wisdom will be heard again at—"

Neila Randall managed to switch off that radio. Somehow her left hand was grasping the base of the telephone that stood on the night-table beside it, and the forefinger of her right hand was twirling its dial. A . . . C . . . 7 . . . 9 . . . 4 . . . 0 . . . 0 . . .

* * * * *

Zingar's hand, white and slender, each finger seemingly imbued with a separate life of its own, set the microphone into which he had been talking down on the floor beside the divan on which he was outstretched. He lay wearily back among the cushions piled

on the divan, his eyes glowing like sombre coals in their deep sockets.

Zingar's body was very thin and very long. It was clad, as always, in a lusterless black suit so fashioned with the vest high and squarely cut at the top as to be almost clerical. Zingar's face was narrow. The skin was tightly drawn over the high forehead, the knife-bridged nose and sharp chin were dead white. His hair was a smooth skull-cap as lusterless and black as his suit.

Theatrically as Zingar was clad, theatrical as was the great, high-ceiled room with its curtained walls, its trappings of skulls and naked swords and crystal globes, stagey though the flaming brazier that was its only illumination, there was something more than the melodramatic about him. A discomforting sense of the uncanny that was very real, an inescapable feel of inner power that transcended mundane things. As familiar as Richard Wayne, his friend and assistant, was with his tricks of manner and costume and voice, as well as Wayne knew these to be false as the tricks of magic for which Zingar was famous, he could never rid himself of this spine-prickling awareness.

"You are exhausted tonight, Zingar," Wayne said, from a deep-seated chair far across the room. "You've been going it too strong. If you don't rest—"

A soft buzzing interrupted him. He reached out to a marble model of the Temple of Astaris at Pilae that stood on a platform beside him, opened its ornate bronze portal and extracted from it—a telephone! The buzzing ended as he plucked the receiver from its cradle.

"Hello," he said. "Zingar's assistant speaking. What is it?"

WAYNE himself seemed as much out of place in these occult environs as the instrument itself. Sturdy, well set-up, blond-haired, blue-eyed and blunt of jaw, he might have been a football hero or a bond salesman, or anything at all rather than *Achates* to the foremost stage magician of the time. The lines of his broadly molded countenance hardened while he listened.

On the divan, Zingar's lids closed.

The voice in the telephone ended its long tale of a dead voice speaking, of manifestations beyond the pale of human experience.

"I quite understand how perturbed you must be," Wayne said soothingly. "But I'm sorry, I cannot disturb Zingar tonight. He has just gone to sleep, and if I were to awaken him he would be ill. I shall tell him about your case in the morning and will let you know if it interests him. . . . No, I am very sorry but I dare not. . . . In the morning, I promise, I'll tell him, but that's the best I can do for you."

He put the phone back into its hiding place.

"All right, Richard," Zingar said. "Get busy looking up Jim Randall and his mother. That ought to be easy, they're a Social Register family, and I recall that Jim hit the high spots before he married. Our newspaper files and other usual contacts ought to give you all we'll need to get at the bottom of this thing. It shouldn't take you more than a half-hour to get the information, and the Randall house isn't more than ten minutes from here. We can get on the job there by nine."

Wayne's jaw dropped. "How—how do you know—"

"No questions, Richard." The corners of Zingar's thin lips twitched in what might have been a smile. "That is our agreement, if you recall." There was no harm in impressing Wayne with his idol's omniscience. There was no need to tell him of the induction coil that, without any material connection to the telephone, had brought to the diaphragm hidden in the cushion on which the magician's head lay every word of Neila Randall's detailed story, of her desperate plea for help.

CHAPTER III

The Strange Dr. Anthony

THE powder film on the rug and floor in Neila Randall's bedroom was marked now by many zigzagging lines of footprints. Back and forth, back and forth she prowled, a mother

distraught, a tigress whose whelp was threatened by a peril she did not comprehend, a woman terrified.

Fifty times she had gone to the door to call to Lucretia Randall. Fifty times recollection of Amos Foster's warning had checked the cry in her throat. Who, hearing what she had to tell, would believe it? What alienist would not say at once that she was driven insane by grief? What court would not declare her unfit to take care of her babe, send her to some madhouse and give control over Ralph to his grandmother?

But Neila Randall knew she was not insane. Some eerie menace overhung her, overhung her tiny son. Alone, she could not continue much longer to fight that threat from beyond the veil, and in all the world there was no one she could call upon to help her fight it.

Once more she had gone to the phone, to call Amos Foster, and as her hand touched the instrument she had realized that not even to him, who was her only friend, dared she speak out. He would not, *could not*, again dismiss her assertions lightly. Not in conscience could even he justify himself in leaving an infant in charge of a mother who saw, and heard, the things she had seen and heard. He would insist on investigating, on asking questions of the household. Lucretia would tell him of finding Neila bending over Ralph's crib with a sharp-pointed shears in her hand, evidently about to stab the child. He would turn harshly against her.

As for Zingar— "Tomorrow," his assistant had said. "In the morning." The hands of the little clock on Neila's dresser pointed to five after nine. The morning was ten hours away. In those hours what might not happen, here in this room, to her and to Ralph? What crowning horror—

Neila whirled to a rap on the hall door. Her mouth opened and she was a rigid statue of terror staring at it, her heart stilled in the clutch of a gelid hand. The rap came again and a voice through it.

"Mrs. Randall. Mrs. Randall."

Held breath gushed from between Neila's white lips. It was only Hawkins who had rapped, the Randall's aged butler. "Mrs. Randall," he called

again, rapping imperatively.

"Just a minute," the girl answered, snatching a filmy negligee out of a closet, slipping into it as she slid her feet into her discarded mules. Then she was at the door. "I was in bed," she said. "What is it, Hawkins?"

The wizened old man in livery blinked at her, his pale eyes watering. "Beg your pardon, madam, but there is a gentleman here to see you, sent by Mr. Foster. He intimates that it is important that he speak with you immediately."

God bless Amos! He had sensed that she needed help, had sent someone. But who? Why had he not come himself?

"Show him into my sitting room, Hawkins. I will join him there as soon as I make myself presentable."

Trembling, Neila closed the door to the other room, darted to her dresser. She ran a comb through her tangled mop of tawny hair, deftly applied rouge and powder to her pallid cheeks. Lipstick hid the grayness of her lips. Back at the sitting room door, she hesitated an instant, gathering her reserves, went through, leaving it open so that she would not for a moment be cut off from Ralph.

The man standing by the window and peering out was tall, spare to gauntness. Hearing her enter, he turned, and Neila saw a narrow face that seemed all sharpness, pointed nose, pointed chin, black, piercing eyes. The voluminous folds of a sleeveless black cloak hung about him.

"GOOD EVENING?" she faltered questioningly.

"Good evening, Mrs. Randall." There was something familiar about his tones, deeply resonant and edged with a strange huskiness. "I am Doctor Anthony. Your friend, Mr. Amos Foster, suggested that I might be of aid to you."

"Amos—," Neila gulped. The old lawyer had not taken what she had said as lightly as he had pretended. "But I am not ill." Why had he sent a doctor without consulting her? Why had he not come himself? "I—" she managed a laugh—"I am quite healthy."

Doctor Anthony did not smile. "I am not a physician of the body," he responded. "My province is the mind."

The mind! No, Amos hadn't taken her lightly at all. He thought she was going insane.

"It is better that you willingly unburden yourself to one who is friendly disposed," the physician continued, "than be compelled to speak out to another who may be influenced in his judgment by—er—obligation to an employer." Those black eyes of his were on hers and they seemed to be boring into her brain, to be dissecting her soul. "Mrs. Randall, you were not frank with Amos Foster. The strange incident that occurred while he was in this room is not the only one of the same nature that has appalled you. There was one before, and there has been one since—"

The girl gasped. "How do you know?"

"I read it on the screen of your mind. I read horror there, and fear, and the cry for help you dare not utter. I can help you." Anthony's voice had a lift in it now, a certainty that lent assurance to Neila, that gave her hope. "But only if you have confidence in me. Full confidence, no matter what I may say or do. Do you trust me, Neila Randall?"

"I trust you," Neila whispered, but it was as if someone other than she were speaking. "I have confidence in you, Dr. Anthony."

"Very well," the strange man said. "Take me into the other room. Show me the door that became a blank wall out of which grew a Thing that left footmarks in the dust with which you powdered the floor. Show me the crib in which your son was metamorphosed into a saurian, and then back into a babe. Show me these things and tell me exactly how they appeared to you, and then I shall be able to help you."

"Come," Neila breathed.

His tread was curiously silent as he followed her into the bedroom. She reached for the switch in the doorjamb. His hand caught her wrist and his fingers were cold on her skin, as cold as though there were no blood in them.

"No. I want everything to be as it was when you heard your dead hus-

band's voice and saw the manifestations that so terrified you."

He went noiselessly across to the mirrored door, touched its knob. Now he was prowling back toward her bed. He paused at the little night table next to it, picked up the glasses Prissie Slade had put down there, lifted them to his eyes. The pale green lenses seemed to merge into the odd pallor of his skin, to become empty sockets in his skull.

Anthony put down the glasses again, was moving toward the crib. His long, black cloak billowed about him, undulated. The marks of his feet on the powdered floor were blurred and shapeless! He reached the crib and bent over it. His cloak billowed out as he reached down to the sleeping infant, and its black swirl was like the outspread wings of some gigantic bat!

NEILA'S breath was an icy bubble caught between her frozen lips! This was no physician! This was the—

"Hands up!" a hoarse voice commanded. "Hands up or I'll shoot!"

Neila's head jerked to it. Old Hawkins was in the doorway from the sitting room, a blunderbuss of a revolver in his palsied hand. Behind Hawkins were Lucretia Randall's twitching face and the colorless, parrotlike visage of Priscilla Slade.

"You dare not fire," Dr. Anthony said quietly. He had straightened and he was holding little Ralph in front of him,

the blanket-wrapped babe a shield. "Not unless you are more expert a shot than I think you." His free arm was behind him, and from her vantage point Neila could see its long white fingers writhing curiously, as though each had a separate, evil life of its own.

There was a little flurry in the doorway, and Amos Foster pushed through, livid with rage.

"I don't know this man," he snapped. "I never saw him before—"


A scream shrilled through his words, Lucretia Randall's scream. Her shaking finger was pointing at the infant—*at a tiny squirming skeleton denuded of flesh, that was in the crook of Dr. Anthony's arm!*

"Ralph!" Neila cried. "My baby!"—and sprang to the infant, mother-love striking terror from her, striking fear from her. She clutched the wee skeleton, snatched it from the man's hold, sprang away. A frightened little cry dragged her eyes down to that which she held. It was Ralph, little Ralph, his blue eyes frightened, his rosebud lips opening to vent another yell.

The group in the doorway was disrupted. Lucretia Randall fell to the floor in a dead faint. Priscilla was going down after her. Hawkins had reeled against the doorjamb, gray-faced and pop-eyed. Foster snatched the revolver from his lax hand. "You fiend," he yelled. "You fiend from

[Turn Page]

MR. WRIGHT FOUND OUT HE WAS WRONG!



MR. WRIGHT: Gee, this stuff is awful! Why do all laxatives taste so bad?

MRS. WRIGHT: All of them don't. Ex-Lax tastes like delicious chocolate.



MR. W.: Ex-Lax? That's O.K. for you and Junior, but I need something stronger!

MRS. W.: No, you don't! Ex-Lax is just as effective as any bad-tasting cathartic.

LATER




MR. W.: I sure am glad I took your advice. It's Ex-Lax for me from now on.

MRS. W.: Yes, with Ex-Lax in the house we don't need any other laxative!

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

10¢ and 25¢



Hell!" The gun jerked up.

Anthony leaped, jabbed a stiff forefinger expertly into Foster's neck. The lawyer stiffened, paralyzed by the jolt on a certain nerve ganglion. Anthony caught the revolver dropping from his numbed fingers, swung to Neila.

"It's all right, my dear," came his amazing reassurance. "You're safe now and your baby is safe. I told you that if you trusted me I would help you." He turned back to Foster. "She's quite safe now, Amos, isn't she?"

"Safe?" the lawyer mouthed, staring at the black-cloaked man whose white fingers held the revolver so that it seemed to cover no one and everyone. "What—what do you mean? Who are you?"

CHAPTER IV

Zingar's Triumph

ANTHONY was looking at the two women on the floor. They were stirring. They were sitting up.

"Who am I?" he said softly. "Why don't you tell your clients who I am, Amos Foster?"

"I never saw you before."

"Perhaps not. But I am sure you have heard me. Remember? 'There is no Outer World of Darkness,'" he intoned, his voice deep-chested and hollow and edged with a peculiar huskiness. "Surely you have heard me, Lucretia Randall, and you, butler. 'This is my message, and if its truth be challenged I will go any place, at any time, to meet that challenge.'"

"Zingar!" Priscilla Slade gasped. "He's Zingar!"

The tall man nodded. "I am Zingar," he agreed, "and I am here because I was challenged." His eyes were bleak now, and deadly, but like his gun they seemed to rest on no one and on everyone. "By a schemer as ingenious and as darkly evil as any I have been called upon to thwart."

"What—" Foster sputtered. "What in the name of all that's holy—"

"Nothing holy about it. Dark things

have come to pass here, and malice gave them life, or greed. Do you know which?"

"I? How should I know?"

"Do you, Lucretia Randall?"

The old woman had risen. "I don't know what you are talking about," she snapped. "And furthermore, I am not interested in the tricks of a mountebank. Hawkins! Please show this man to the door."

"Wait, Hawkins," Zingar said, and there was the faintest shadow of a smile on his thin lips. "I shall have to impose on your mistress' patience a moment or two longer. Mrs. Randall, attend me. It is true, is it not, that your husband's will left his estate in trust, its income to provide for you for life and for your son James until James married? When the young man did so, the trust estate set aside for him was to cease, and the principal to become his to do with as he pleased. Correct?"

"Yes, but—"

"Influenced by you, James Randall did not claim his inheritance when he married, but left it in the hands of the previous trustee to manage. Then Jim died, and his wife determined to leave your house, and requested a settlement of the estate.

"This had to be avoided, and it could be avoided only if Neila Randall also died, or if she were adjudged insane and her child's grandmother appointed his legal guardian. If she were adjudged insane, Mrs. Randall, because of certain wildly incredible tales she told! Because of hallucinations she had, and her apparent attempt to murder her babe, and—"

"Hallucinations?" Lucretia broke in. "What hallucinations?"

"Don't you know?" That piercing gaze of Zingar's was on her gray eyes. "Are you certain you don't?"

"The man's insane," Prissie Slade blurted indignantly. "He's clean, raving mad."

"Perhaps," Zingar sighed. "But not too mad yet to read the truth in a woman's eyes. So it was you alone, Amos Foster."

"Yes," the lawyer said thickly. He was holding on to the doorpost with both hands, as though suddenly his legs

were too weak to support him. "I—" He broke off and averted his face.

ZINGAR took up the conversation. "You were consistently stealing from the principal of the Randall estate, of which you have been the trustee for years. Lucretia Randall and her son trusted you, and you had nothing to fear, since they never asked for an accounting as long as you supplied them with enough money for their needs. You had some bad moments when Jim married, but you cleverly stirred Lucretia Randall up against the fine young woman who was changing her son from a wastrel to a real man, and she insisted on Jim's living here. As long as he did so, you would continue to handle his share of the estate.

"But your scheme boomeranged against you. James Randall was accidentally killed, and you had made it impossible for Neila to live on here. She told you she was getting out, requested you to arrange to hand over her inheritance. You were caught in a trap, and you tried to find a way out by fooling her into acting as though she were insane. If she were committed—"

"Fooling me!" Neila exclaimed. "But I saw those things. We all saw Ralph turn into a skeleton just now. And I saw a skeleton in that sitting room, Jim's skeleton—"

"Not Jim's, Neila," Zingar corrected. "Foster's."

"What!"

"Yes. There is a vacant house across the areaway outside these windows, a house that belongs to the Randall estate. Foster installed an X-ray machine in there, its beam focused through the sitting room window. When he called on you, earlier this evening, he wore clothing saturated with fluorescent salts, had painted his face and hands with a solution of the same. He was between you and the window when he turned out the lamp, and since he had to all intents and purposes made himself into a fluoroscope, you saw his skull and his bones as you would on a fluoroscope's screen."

"But my baby? He didn't paint Ralph—"

"No. But when I bent over his crib

I wrapped him, head and all, in a sheet similarly prepared that I'd brought with me, and when our friends burst in on us, I dropped the blanket. I signaled behind my back to my assistant, who remained in that other house while I came to this one. He switched on the X-ray machine and, presto, little Ralph was a skeleton. By the way, Hawkins, how did it happen that Foster came in on us this way?"

"Mr. Foster returned to the house, sir, claiming he had left his cane. I remarked to him that his friend, meaning you, was here, and he got excited. He said you must be a kidnaper after the child. So I grabbed a gun and came running up, Mrs. Randall and Priscilla following me—"

"Zingar," Neila interrupted. "You haven't explained the Shape that came into this room. X-rays don't leave footprints."

"Nor do doors vanish. That, my dear, is the oldest stunt of stage magicians. Look." He walked across to the entrance from the hall. "Move over, all of you, to the head of Neila's bed. You are on the hinge side of this door and it is a mirror. Now watch." He opened the door, swung it into the room until it made a forty-five degree angle with its threshold—and disappeared!

"You see?" Zingar smiled. "The mirror has brought the reflection of the wall at right angles to the one in which it is set, into the plane of the first one, and thus in the dim light it seems to fill the empty space. Foster, swathed in black, came around its edge and appeared to materialize out of nothingness."

"Most of this I got out of your story over the telephone, but the first illusion, the one in which your baby appeared to have been changed into a crocodile puzzled me. It wasn't till I saw those glasses on your night-table that I understood the mechanics of that."

NEILA stared. "The glasses! But they're ordinary tinted lenses—"

"They are not! They are made of a special material that passes only those light vibrations that occur in a

certain plane. Ordinary light vibrates in all planes, and so you can see an object illuminated by it through these lenses, but it will be somewhat dimmed and when it is a pale light by which you see it, will practically be blotted out. So, if a strong beam of light that has been polarized to match the polarization of the lenses throws an image on such an object, the real object will seem to disappear and the image to take its place.

"Foster had arranged a projector of such a beam of polarized light in that interesting window of the house across the areaway, and with it threw the picture of a crocodile's head on the head of your baby, that was illuminated only by pallid moonlight. That image, seen through your glasses, was so strong that it altogether obscured Ralph's little head. Your dead husband's voice, simulated by Foster and projected into this room by a loud speaker, completed the illusion of the supernatural.

"He watched you through the window, and when he saw you strew powder on the floor, saw a chance to work another deception. He probably has a key to this house. How do I know all this? Because my assistant and I checked everybody and everything before I came here. We had already found the equipment next door—"

The sound of a falling body interrupted him.

"Mr. Zingar!" Hawkins exclaimed. "There's something the matter!" The butler was on his knees beside the sprawled, still form of the lawyer. "He's—he's dead," the butler whispered. "I saw him fall, he's dead."

"Yes," Zingar sighed. "When he saw the baby turn into a skeleton he knew that his device had been discovered. He tried to kill me and failed. When I started to expose him, he put his hand to his mouth in confession of defeat. He might have brazened it out, but he was a ruined man and he chose this way of escape."

Zingar turned to Jim's mother. "Mrs. Randall, you fainted, horror-stricken at a tithe of what Neila has seen and heard and fought alone. Does not that make you realize the strength of character, the maternal devotion, she manifested for the sake of her son? Of your grandson? Do you think, now, that she is fit to be his mother?"

Tears wet the wrinkled face that had remained dry over a dead son's coffin. "I do," Lucretia Randall sobbed. "I do, indeed! Neila, can you forgive me? Can you ever forgive me?"

There were tears in Neila's eyes, too. "Forgive you? Amos Foster deceived me; why cannot I forgive you because he deceived you? Of course, I forgive you—Mother."

"Daughter!" A look of unbelieving joy transformed the old woman's countenance.

And then they were in each other's arms, the crowing little babe between them, separating them and yet binding them together.

"But I must thank Zingar," Neila exclaimed at last, pulling away. "I—Oh, he's gone!"

"Yes, madam," Hawkins said dryly. "He requested me to inform you that he is superstitious about being in the same house with a suicide."

Next Issue: WAKE NOT THE DEAD, Novelet by John H. Knox

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BY
**HENRY
KUTTNER**

Author of "Murder for Fun,"
"Death Is Where You Find
It," etc.



*Calcy's head rolled off the
pillow to the floor*

In an Eerie Desert
Fortress Mysterious
and Weird Death Stalks
to Thwart the Plans of an
Aged, Strange "Genie"

I WOKE UP. Even before opening my eyes I felt something was wrong. Sunlight slanted across my bed, and by rights no sunlight should be able to penetrate the depths of the airshaft on which my bedroom window opened.

I opened my eyes and realized that this was not my bedroom. Lofty oak rafters crisscrossed above me. I lay for a minute trying to figure it out. I'd gone to sleep last night in a frowsy two-room apartment, and now I woke up in a—castle! That's what it looked like.

A castle that might have been lifted right out of King Arthur! There were plenty of rich, ancient tapestries on the dark stone walls; I saw fur rugs, an immense fireplace, and on a table beside the bed was a box of my favorite cigarettes. Laid out across a chair was a lightweight summer suit that looked like it had cost plenty.

Something was haywire. I sat up, blinking. A man doesn't go to sleep in his own bedroom and wake up—well, where? I swung my feet to the carpet, crossed to the window. My jaw dropped.

Beyond steel bars set closely together was something incredible. Beneath me, fifty feet down, was a wide moat, green-scummed and with a drawbridge across it. Beyond stretched the desert, miles upon miles, to a blue mountain range hazy in the far distance. Inside the stone castle it was cool enough, but waves of heat rippled up outside. What the hell had happened to me?

I went to the door and opened it on an empty hall. There were doors at intervals, and a stairway at the end. Right across from me was an elevator. The splashing of water sounded faintly.

I called, softly at first, and then louder. Nobody came. I went back into the room, donned a dressing gown I saw on the bed—one with my own initials embroidered on it!—and went along the hall to the stairs. A girl was coming up them, a cute little trick in blue pajamas, with red-gold hair falling over her shoulders, and a pair of eyes that matched the pajamas. She stopped and shrank back when she saw me.

"HELLO there," I said. "Can you tell me what this is all about?"

She looked me over. Her voice was nice, too.

"I'd like to know the meaning of this," she said, half frightened and half angry. "What right have you to—"

"Listen," I interrupted. "You live here, don't you?"

She shook her head, and her eyes went wide.

"You don't—"

"I've never seen this joint in my life before," I said flatly. And I told her what had happened to me.

She couldn't figure it out. "My name's Vail Lester," she said, and amplified: "I'm a model. Dressmaker's model. I went to sleep in my own bed last night and woke up here. You mean the same thing happened to both of us?" She found it hard to believe. "You haven't any idea at all—"

"Listen!" I said. "You don't have any ideas when something as crazy as this happens."

"Hey!" somebody yelled, and a

husky giant with a bulldog face and tiny, squinting eyes came racketing down the stairs. He grabbed me and shoved his fist under my nose. "What d'you think you're doing?"

"My God," I said, "another one! I don't live here either, buddy."

He looked ready to sock me, but Vail Lester broke in and explained. The guy's eyes disappeared in a nest of wrinkles. He spluttered inarticulately.

Finally he gave an account of himself. Al Keefer, his name was—a small-time wrestler. He, too, had gone to sleep in his flat, and had waked up in this desert castle.

"It's screwy," Keefer mumbled, staring around. "I don't get the angle."

"I'm going to take a look around," I said, and went on downstairs.

It was my old training coming out. I used to be a private sleuth before the depression, but for the last few years I'd been anything from a bindlestiff to a bouncer in a night club.

There was a big hall downstairs, with crests and suits of armor and furs scattered around, but the front door was locked. It looked as though dynamite couldn't blow it open. But there were other doors here and there, and I opened one and went in.

I found myself in a library. Quite a swanky place, with bookshelves climbing up to the ceiling, and dozens of lamps all around. There was a long table in the center of the room, with chairs set along it, and ashtrays and wine-glasses at each place. The ashtrays were clean; so were the glasses. One chair was occupied.

At the head of the table somebody sat on a sort of throne, gilded and ornate. He wore a light gabardine suit, but it was splotted and darkened with dried blood. My stomach gave a little jump. I felt deadly nausea tighten my throat.

The man sat there, his stiff white hands gripping the chair's arms—and he was headless!

I took one glance at the raw, horrible neck stub and turned around in a hurry. But I was too late. Keefer and Vail Lester were right behind me. The girl went pale as death, caught her breath, and started to sway. I knew

the symptoms. I started to grab her, but she stiffened and looked at me with blue eyes that were horror-brimmed.

"I'M not going to faint," she said finally. "But shut that door!"

I obeyed.

"I could stand a drink," Keefer said hoarsely. "Cripes, what sort of place is this?"

"How the devil should I know?" I snapped. My nerves were jolting. The sight of that horror in the library had spoiled my appetite. "You wait out here. I'm going to do some investigating."

I went into the death room, walked gingerly to the body. It was that of an old man, skinny and shriveled. In a cursory examination there appeared to be no identifying marks. The head had been severed by a knife, apparently, wielded by a butcher rather than by a skilled surgeon.

The shadows of window bars lay ominously upon the table. I stood silent for a moment, eyeing the corpse. It was not the presence of death—ghastly death—that bothered me so much as the strange, inexplicable mystery of all this. Three people—Vail Lester, Al Keefer, and me, Ed Paterson—lifted right out of our normal life, as though by magic, and transported to this weird castle in the desert. Such things could not happen, I thought desperately. But—they had happened!

A chill of apprehension shook me, and made me turn sharply on my heel.

There was no one behind me, of course.

I went to the door and opened it, just in time to come face to face with a lean, tall fellow whose cold gray stare locked with mine. He, too, wore pajamas and dressing gown. His face was curious—that of an ascetic, and at the same time that of a satyr. A Vandyke and tilted eyebrows added to the illusion of a jaded Mephistopheles.

Vail and Al Keefer were behind him.

"This is Dr. Caley," the girl said. "He just came downstairs—"

Caley's voice was deep and resonant. "I know no more than you. Apparently we are equally at a loss. Er—your name?"

"Ed Paterson," I said.

He didn't hear me. His gaze went over my shoulder to the headless corpse at the table. And his face didn't change in the slightest.

"Most theatrical," he said at last, lifting those ironic black eyebrows. "If I may—"

He pushed past me and shut the door in my face. I looked blankly at the bare panel.

"He's nuts," Keefer said comprehensively. "Let's see if there's a way out of here, Paterson."

I nodded and started along the hall, with both of them at my heels. Already I had a hunch that exploring this place was not going to be easy. It wasn't only a castle—it was a labyrinth. The man who built it must have been eccentric to the last degree. Or else—the thought hit me suddenly—or else insane!

There were winding stairways, a number of elevators, even a little zoo filled with desert creatures, lizards and unpleasant-looking snakes, and a room lined with dozens of big glass tanks in which bright fish swam about. There were not many doors that seemed to lead to the open air, and all of these were locked and too strong to force. Finally we found ourselves back in the hall.

I wondered if Caley had left the library, so I opened the door and looked in. He was not in sight. The corpse still sat at the head of the table. Before I could enter somebody upstairs screamed.

"**A** DAME!" Keefer yelled, and his jaw dropped.

We all headed for the stairway. In the upstairs hall I skidded to a stop, and the scream came again. I located it, flung open a door. A fat middle-aged woman was sitting up in bed, opening her mouth for another shriek. She saw us, and her eyes goggled.

"Where am I?" she gasped.

Before she could have hysterics I spoke my piece, as calmly as I could. She kept looking at me uncomprehendingly, but I guess she understood all right. Because she told us her story logically enough.

Mrs. Garber, her name was—a scrub-woman. She had gone to bed last night in her dingy, dark flat, and had just now awakened here. It was, she said, enough to give a body the shakes.

I agreed with her. "Suppose you join us downstairs," I said. "I think we'd better stick together."

A flush spread over her fat face, and she hesitated.

"We'll leave you while you dress," I offered.

"You stay," said Mrs. Garber, pointing a plump, calloused finger at Vail. The girl nodded, and Keefer and I went out.

"Wonder where the doc is," he muttered. "D'you suppose—" His tiny eyes searched the hall.

"That there's more of us?" I finished. "Dunno. I'm going to find out."

Methodically I started opening one door after another. In the first bedroom I tried I saw a man asleep in bed. His fair hair was a tousled mop. His face, though young, was drawn and dissipated, and there were dark pouches beneath his eyes. I shook him, and he woke up after awhile.

Well, it was the same thing all over again. Victor Fleming—struggling artist—going to sleep—waking up here. He was frightened at first, but I calmed him down, got him into a dressing gown, and induced him to trail us as we continued our search. But he stuck like a leech to my heels, and jumped whenever one of us spoke unexpectedly.

We opened three more doors without result. That left two more. In the next bedroom we found that the bed had apparently been slept in, but was empty now. In the last room we found horror.

A man lay sleeping—or seemed to sleep. It was Dr. Caley. His saturnine face was twisted in a wry smile, and he lay flat on his back, eyes closed. I stared.

"It's a hell of a time to go to bed!" Keefer grunted.

"Yeah," I said, and went quickly to the bedside.

I grabbed Caley's shoulder and shook it. And then I jumped back, a hard knot under my belt, sickness choking

me. Caley's head, dislodged, rolled off the pillow and dropped to the floor at my feet. It lay there on a bearskin rug, blood still oozing from the raw neck stub.

Fleming let out a howl and fled. I heard his footsteps pattering along the hall. Keefer sprang forward and yanked off the bedclothing. A body lay there—but it was not Caley's body. It was clad in a light gabardine suit, all splotched with dried blood; obviously the corpse we had found downstairs in the library.

I SAW a closet in the corner, and opened it. Empty. Then I headed for the door, ran along the hall, down the stairs, and flung open the library door. A body still sat at the head of the table. But now I saw what I had missed before. It was Caley's body, apparently, clad in pajamas and dressing gown. And a man was standing beside it, staring at us.

A fat little man, with a ludicrously round small face and a triple chin, with a paunch that bulged out enormously. He had a blond, tightly-waxed moustache and smooth, slicked-back yellow hair.

He cowered back and blubbered: "Keep away! Keep away!"

"Nobody's going to hurt you," I said disgustedly. "What'd you kill the guy for?"

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

"I didn't think you did. Who are you?"

"Simon Quinlan. Where—"

"I know the routine," I snapped. "You went to sleep in your own bed last night and woke up here."

He looked at me in amazement. "How did you know?"

"Come along," I said. "We've got to collect some people before a few more murders are pulled off."

And off we went upstairs again, coloring Fleming on the way. He had been lurking in the back of the hall, waiting for somebody to come along and cut off his head, I supposed.

Mrs. Garber was just coming out of her bedroom with Vail Lester, as we reached the top of the stairs. For awhile there was a flurry of excited ex-

planations. Then we calmed down a bit and stood looking at one another rather blankly.

Mrs. Garber's red face was twisted with apprehension.

"I got to get home," she said slowly. "Janet—my little girl—she's sick abed. She'll be hungry. . . ."

The woman's work-worn fingers twisted together; she caught her lower lip between her teeth. In sudden sympathy Vail put her arm around Mrs. Garber, and got a grateful glance in return.

"First of all," I said, "we need some information. Anybody know what this place is?"

Quinlan, the fat little man we had found in the library nodded.

"I think I do. I've read about this castle. It's King Hagstrom's place."

"King Hagstrom?"

"The man who found a gold mine in the Mojave Desert. Like Death Valley Scotty, you know. You've heard of Scotty's Castle."

"Yeah," I said. "I've been in it."

"A regular fortress. Well, Hagstrom is supposed to have found a bonanza in the Mojave, and took a leaf out of Scotty's book. He built a castle of his own. This is it, I'm sure."

Fleming's drawn young face was worried. "But I don't know this Hagstrom! Never heard of him!"

"Neither have I," Vail said, and the others echoed her.

QUINLAN'S waxed blond moustache was quivering with excitement. "Nobody knows much about him," he said. "He's about sixty years old, I think. Popped up out of nowhere five years ago, with enough gold to fill a bank. He's got a secret mine somewhere."

"Well, where is this Hagstrom?" I asked. "Was it his body in the library?"

"A dead man!" Mrs. Garber shrieked, and started to cry.

"She needs a drink," the wrestler, Keefer, said, and he went downstairs.

I followed him. Fleming trailed me.

"Mr. Paterson," Fleming said in an undertone, "I—I'm afraid you think I'm a bit of a coward."

"Your nerves are shot," I told him, scarcely listening.

"Yeah . . . I'm sick. Really sick. Insomnia, you know." He fumbled in the pocket of his dressing gown. "My sleeping tablets—they're not here. I can't get to sleep without them. God!" His face was suddenly haggard. "For the last few months it's been hell. You don't know what it means not to be able to sleep without doping yourself!"

"Buck up," I said. "We'll be out of here soon."

"Well, I just wanted to tell you so—so you could make allowances."

"What you need is a shot of Scotch," Keefer suggested, coming out of the library with a bottle in each hand. "It ain't poisoned. I know good Scotch when I taste it."

Fleming took a hearty swig and gasped. "I needed that—yeah!" he murmured.

"Take it up to the others," Keefer said. As Fleming departed the wrestler winked at me. "Come on in, Paterson. I got something to show you."

He ushered me into the library, went swiftly to a small cabinet in the corner.

"I was looking for liquor," he explained, "and I found—this!"

I moved forward as Keefer opened the door. Inside the cabinet, jammed down in one corner, was a human head. I could see only tousled white hair and blood-smearred flesh.

"Keep an eye on the door," I said curtly as I reached forward.

My flesh shrank a little as I caught the thing gingerly and pulled it toward me. The blood had dried, I saw, and I guessed that the head had been severed from the body I had first seen at the library table. Pale and lined and old the face was, and the black, glazed eyes seemed to glare out of that death mask as though I held in my hands Medusa's own head. A beak of a nose jutted out above thin, rat-trap lips. From temple to cheek there was the livid line of an old scar.

"Know him?" Keefer asked.

The man must have had nerves of iron. I put down the thing on a chair, covered it with my handkerchief, and frowned.

"I don't know. It's a familiar face."

But I may have seen it in a newspaper photograph."

"I gave the guy a handout six years or more ago," Keefer said quietly. "It was just after my first mat scrap. I came out on top and I was feeling pretty good. Outside the stadium there was a bum standing in the rain, and I took him home with me, gave him a big dinner and a bed, and slipped him a century the next morning."

Quite suddenly then I remembered. One night when I was riding the rods an old man had tried to board the freight, had slipped, and was going down to death under the wheels when I grabbed him just in time. The same old man whose head now lay on the chair beside me.

I told Keefer about it. He shrugged.

"It's still screwy. I can't get the angle."

Neither could I. The solution to this fantastic mystery seemed to be glimmering just beyond the borders of my consciousness. And the threads were getting more and more tangled.

Blasting through the bouse came the nerve-jolting sound of a woman's scream.

Keefer beat me to the door, but I was not far behind him as he sprinted along the hall. The noise had come from downstairs. But in the castle's labyrinth it was next to impossible to locate it more definitely.

Hastily following, I leaped into an elevator with Keefer, shot it down, and swung open the door as it halted automatically. Before me stretched a corridor of white marble, broken at intervals by side passages.

I heard a splash.

I ran along the corridor. Abruptly I skidded to a halt. At my side a stairway led down into dimness. On a hunch I raced down them.

They ended almost immediately. A curving passage stretched ahead, lit with a curious green radiance. I ran on, hearing Keefer's pounding footsteps at my heels.

Then I stopped, staring. The wall at my side had given place to thick greenish glass; beyond it was water.

I looked into a subterranean pool. I couldn't see very far into the dimness,

but a few feet away, separated from me only by the transparent barrier, was a woman's figure, writhing and twisting in insane frenzy. Bubbles streamed up from her emptying lungs. Her hands and feet were bound to a metal chair in which she sat. As I watched, the chair overturned, fell slowly sideward.

The woman's agonized, bulging eyes glared into mine. It was Mrs. Garber.

Have you ever watched somebody dying right in front of you, while you're powerless to help them? It is not pleasant. It feels like somebody has pumped ice-water into your stomach, and there's a sick, jellyfish sensation in your spine. I yelled something, I don't know what, and turned to race back the way I had come. Keefer trailed me.

We pounded up the stairway, and suddenly the underground passage was alive with figures. Quinlan, Vail, and Fleming came out of nowhere.

"I heard a scream—" the girl started.

"There's a pool down here," I snapped. "Anybody know where it is? Quick?"

"A pool?" Fleming whirled. "I heard a splash from—from there—just now." He made for a side tunnel; we followed.

The passage broadened, opened into a great underground chamber. A broad ledge ran around its circumference. In the center was a pool, green-black, murky, and ominous. A few bubbles still broke the surface.

FLEMING did not stop. It was just possible to see the figure of Mrs. Garber down there, and the man cut the water in a clean dive. I saw him arrow down to the bottom, stroke his way to the woman's side. He was a dim shadow that twisted and shot up and broke the surface suddenly. He gasped for air.

"Knots—too tight!" he got out. "Water's soaked 'em."

I dived in. The water was ice-cold, sending a sudden shock through me. I blinked, got my bearings, and stroked down. My hand slid across chilly, plump flesh. Right then, at the touch of that flabby, inert body, I guessed that Mrs. Garber was dead.

But I worked regardless, and Flem-

ing came down and helped. It was only two minutes later that we freed the woman and got her to the surface, but those two minutes meant the difference between life and death.

Her face was frightful. I felt for a pulse in the flabby wrist, but there was none. She just lay there, a lax, shapeless heap. I lifted her, let the water drain from her open mouth. Then I lowered the woman gently face downward.

Fleming touched my arm. "Who did it?"

"I don't know," I said.

He looked around swiftly. In an undertone he murmured, "Then you'd better keep your eyes open. Let me—" He knelt beside the motionless body and began to apply artificial respiration.

I stood silent for a moment, letting my gaze flicker over the others. Fat Quinlan, his perky blond moustache drooping, his bulging eyes wide. Huge Keefer, his bulldog face grim and harsh. And Vail, looking at me, frightened. Instinctively I moved closer to her.

"Buck up, kid," I said. "I've been in tighter spots than this. We'll come out all right."

"Will we?" she asked shakily.

"Sure. Keep your chin up." I hesitated. "I'm going to take a look around. Wait here, all of you."

But my search was foredoomed to failure. Nothing stirred in all that great, silent castle. Once again I tested the doors, and realized again that we were imprisoned beyond the possibility of escape. The thought struck me: with a gun I might be able to blast the locks. But I could find no weapon. At last I went downstairs again.

Mrs. Garber had not revived. She was dead, beyond any doubt. Looking down at that still, passionate white face, I felt a deep pang of pity touch me. A locket lay on the woman's bosom, a cheap affair with a tiny photograph in it—the picture of a thin-faced little girl. Mrs. Garber's Janet, sick and hungry now, no doubt, unless a neighbor had visited her. Deep within me a cold, furious rage began to grow—a bitter hatred for the merciless killer who stalked the castle.

"Come upstairs," I said. "All of you. I want to show you something."

In the library I whipped the handkerchief from King Hagstrom's head. Vail and Fleming recognized it immediately.

"I knew him—oh, more than six years ago," the girl said. "I was a waitress in a roadside restaurant then. He came in out of the rain, sick and hungry, and I gave him a meal and a bed. And I lost my job because of it, too."

She said the last words wryly.

For all the restraint of her voice, however, I noticed that she did not look at the head after that one hasty glance.

FLEMING'S story was similar. He had seen Hagstrom lying by the highway, had helped him into his car and driven the old man to the nearest hospital. Quinlan's fat face remained frightened and puzzled.

"I don't know," he whispered. "It's been so long—I think I knew him, once. But I can't remember . . ."

As though by common consent, we went into the hall and across to another room. Sunlight slanted through the barred windows. We waited, eyeing one another furtively.

Quite suddenly I had an idea. Without a word I went back into the library. My training as a detective was coming to the fore. Standing with my back against the door, I let my gaze move slowly over the room.

Bookshelves, with the volumes carelessly arranged; plenty of lamps; the long table. . . . Wait a minute! The books were thrust in carelessly, unevenly, except on one shelf in the corner. There the volumes were aligned neatly; too neatly. That hit me right between the eyes.

I went over and pulled out the books one by one. Nothing was behind them. Working swiftly, I leafed through each volume, and it was not long before I found what I sought. Two papers. One was a legal-looking document; the other was a carbon copy of a letter from Hagstrom to a private detective agency that had none too good a reputation. I read the latter first. It said:

Dear Jackson:

I am more than satisfied with your work in tracing the various men and women who were kind to me when I was a homeless vagabond six or seven years ago. As you know, I have always wished to show my gratitude, but I was unable to do this until I became wealthy through my discovery of a gold deposit. What I plan to do next may seem eccentric, but I am rich enough to be as eccentric as I choose—and, too, it is a pleasant feeling to play the part of Aladdin's genie and wave a magic wand, so to speak.

All of those who have befriended me are in need of money. I shall give them each ten thousand dollars. I have made other preparations as well. Now, Jackson, think what it would mean if you woke up one morning in a palace and had a genie appear and hand you ten thousand dollars! Pleasant, eh? That's what I plan.

One week from today, on the evening of the 12th, abduct those people who once befriended me and bring them here. You have capable men; it should be easy to introduce a soporific into their food. When they are asleep and drugged, drive them here to my castle. My servants will put them to bed, and when they wake, in the morning, the genie will be ready to wave his wand. Return at sundown, with enough cars to provide transportation back to the city. I promise myself much pleasure in watching my friends wander, puzzled, about the castle, and finally letting them find me in my library.

You will be well paid for this, of course.
Hagstrom.

My thoughts were a turmoil. Automatically I glanced over the other paper. It was a will, stating that in the event of Hagstrom's death his immense fortune was to be divided equally among Vail, Mrs. Garber, Keefer, Dr. Caley, Quinlan, Fleming, and Paterson—me.

Eccentric? Hagstrom must have been crazy! I could understand his desire to reward those who had helped him, long ago when he had been down and out, but this fantastic wholesale abduction. . . . Still, it was not so crazy after all. Hagstrom's letter showed his motive. He wanted to play the genie.

IDEAS began to click in my mind. I carefully replaced the papers in the book and restored the volume to its shelf. Then I went out into the hall.

The door of the room opposite was open. The room itself was empty. A little chill struck through me.

"Vail!" I called.

There was no answer. I started to search the castle, shouting occasionally.

Jackson, the detective—and a damned unethical one, I thought—would return with his men at sundown. But that was three or four hours away. In the meantime anything might happen.

In one room I picked up a sharp-bladed paper-knife, a poor weapon, but the only one I could find just then. But I found nobody till I reached the zoo—the room filled with the desert fauna. Green light filtered through the dozens of aquariums in which the tropical fish swam. Snakes and lizards were motionless in their cages, bright eyes glittering.

The door of one cage was open, and a man's body lay before it, tightly bound. His head had been jammed through the opening, barring it. It was Quinlan, his round, fat face distorted in an agony of pain and horror.

In the mesh prison were Gila monsters. Eight of them, big, ugly, dragon-like creatures—and poisonous as rattlers, I knew. They had been busy on poor Quinlan. Already his face and body were bluish and swollen as venom coursed through his veins. I could tell at a glance that he was dead.

My stomach felt icy cold as I shut the door carefully and turned away. The mad killer still was loose in the castle. But where? The fact that I had now guessed his identity did not help much. I went from room to room, and at last worked my way down to the subterranean labyrinth.

I went through one dim tunnel after another, without result. And then, unexpectedly, I found what I sought. I came out into the chamber of the underground pool. The water lay black-green and repellent at my feet. I heard a cry, sensed movement behind me, and started to whirl.

Something smashed down on my head and I dropped, out for the count, as everything went black.

I couldn't have been unconscious for long. When I awoke I realized that I was sitting in one of the metal chairs, tightly bound. For a moment I struggled vainly to free myself. Then I de-

sisted and looked around.

The paper-knife lay where I had dropped it, too far away to be of any help. Vail lay, a still, white-faced figure, against the wall; her eyes were closed.

Standing above me was Victor Fleming. His young face was drawn and haggard. The pouches beneath his eyes were almost black. His eyes were dead.

"I thought you were responsible, Fleming," I said. "I found Hagstrom's letter and the will."

HE was holding a long, heavy-bladed knife. Blood was coagulated on its steel.

"It's too bad," Fleming said quietly. "I'd planned to let you live."

"To be a witness? You'd planned to pin the crimes on Keefer, hadn't you?"

"Yes," he said, and moved closer, running his thumb along the knife's edge. Then, quite suddenly, he laughed. "Oh, I'm not going to use this. You're going into the pool, like Mrs. Garber, to drown. As for Keefer, he's upstairs, knocked out."

Fleming's hand reached out, gripped the chair, and began to pull it toward the brink.

"Wait a minute," I said quickly. "Let me get this straight. You were going to blame the murders on Keefer, and my word would support yours—right? You were going to kill her?"

I nodded toward Vail. And without warning a little thrill of hope touched me. I saw the girl's lashes quiver slightly.

"I was going to drown her," Fleming admitted quite calmly. "She found out too much—like the others."

"Let me get the angle on this," I said. "You woke up before the rest of us, found Hagstrom in his library, and learned what he intended to do. Then you saw your chance to get a lot more than ten thousand bucks, and you killed Hagstrom. Right?"

"That's right," Fleming said. His quiet, passionless manner was horrible. "I'm curious," he went on. "How did you know I killed the others?"

"You made two breaks," I told him. "The first one was when you dived in

the pool to rescue Mrs. Garber, without even shedding your dressing gown. You had a reason for doing that. When you drowned the woman, you got splashed. Your robe was wet. So you just dived in as soon as possible, before anybody could notice that and ask embarrassing questions.

"The second point," I went on, "was when you told me you couldn't sleep without drugging yourself. I didn't realize the significance of that till I found Hagstrom's letter. Then I knew somebody must have wakened before the rest and talked to Hagstrom. Now we were all drugged last night—but you, Fleming, had built up an immunity against soporifics, and could throw off its effect sooner than the rest of us."

I saw Vail was moving, inching herself slowly toward the paper-knife I had dropped. Hastily I went on, before Fleming's attention was attracted to the girl.

"How could you find your way around the castle so easily? I don't get that?"

"Blueprints," he said succinctly. "I found them in Hagstrom's desk."

Vail's fingers were reaching for the knife.

"I don't see why you took such a chance," I said, as calmly as possible. "One murder, maybe. But wholesale slaughter—Hell, you'd have got plenty even without killing us all."

Fleming's mouth twitched. "One murder was too much," he told me. "It was a vicious circle—one thing led to another. I don't want to end up in the gas chamber. That damn Caley—"

"Yeah?"

QUINLAN WAS pretending to be asleep in my room. He came in, tried to wake me up, and saw I was shamming. A doctor could tell that, I guess. He started to ask questions. Questions I couldn't answer. I killed him. I had to. I dragged him into his own room and left him there. Mrs. Garber saw me do it, though I didn't know it then. She told Quinlan.

"Why—"

"Quinlan made her keep quiet. He saw a chance to blackmail me. But once he'd hinted around a bit, I knew

what I'd have to do. Mrs. Garber and Quinlan, both. To keep their mouths shut. Before I killed Quinlan, I made him write a little note. Explaining the whole thing, just what had happened, except I had him write in Keefer's name instead of mine. That note's going to be found, in a safe place, and the police will think Quinlan wrote it to protect himself from Keefer. That's about all, I think. Except for the girl. She saw me kill Quinlan."

A little more, and Vail would have the knife in her hand. . . .

"If you think you can get away with this, Fleming," I said, "you're crazier than I think."

And just then he saw Vail's fingers closing on the paper-knife I had dropped. With a vicious curse Fleming thrust me toward the pool and, chair and all, I toppled into the water.

I had been breathing deeply for some minutes before that, so my lungs were well stored with air. And as I went over I managed to take a deep breath. I went down fairly rapidly, shuddering at the contact of the icy water, and for a second panic mastered me. I wrenched and struggled frantically at the knotted strips of cloth that held me to the chair. Then I forced myself to relax.

My fingers fumbled with water-soaked knots. But I couldn't untie them. The air in my lungs was being rapidly used up. Veins began to throb in my temples. A burning, deadly pain grew in my chest.

The fear of drowning gripped me, and I was suddenly sick and dizzy. I could not hold out much longer. I hit bottom, toppled over, and lay on my side, biting my lips to keep from breathing.

A shadow flashed into view. I had a glimpse of Vail's white face and her red-gold hair streaming in the water. In her hand was the paper-knife. I felt its keen edge slice into my bonds.

Another shadow drove down—Fleming! The green light touched the blade of the long, murderous knife he held. His half-seen face was that of a demon.

He struck viciously at Vail. She twisted away. Fleming seized the chair that held me. I felt his fingers

bite into my jaw. He was trying to force my mouth open.

He succeeded. Simultaneously a red spurt colored the water. Fleming clutched his arm and shot up out of sight. Vail had managed to knife him—but almost too late. Water choked my lungs, clogged my nostrils as my starved lungs sucked it in.

I felt my bonds give. I fought up, Vail beside me. My head broke the surface. Coughing and spluttering, I drew in life-giving air.

FLEMING was stroking toward me, his teeth bared, eyes cold and quite mad. He held the knife in one hand.

"Let's have it, Vail," I gasped, and reached for her paper-knife.

She gave a soft little cry.

"I dropped it!" she said. "It's down there—"

"Get out of the pool," I snapped, pushing her away.

She swam toward the edge. Fleming was almost upon me. He was smiling, horribly. Unarmed and half drowned, I knew I was no match for the killer. His little body slid through the water with surprising agility.

I tried to dive under him and felt the knife's point rake my back. Fleming's hand seized my sleeve. With a furious effort I pulled free, hearing cloth rip and tear.

If the man killed me now, Vail would be at his mercy. And I had little chance against Fleming's murderous blade. I took a deep breath and dived. I saw the overturned chair just below me. Catching its metal back, I looked around. The paper-knife was glittering on the pool's bottom not far away.

I stroked toward it. Fleming's lean body intercepted me. His arm seemed to move with eerie slowness toward my face. The knife gleamed.

I went a little crazy then. I was remembering Vail, and Mrs. Garber, and the sick kid who was waiting for her mother in a cheap, dingy bedroom. And I grabbed Fleming by the throat. I'd forgotten to hold my breath, but I guess I did it automatically.

I felt the man's flesh give like a ripe melon under my fingers. His eyes bulged; his mouth gaped. I put all my

strength into that murderous grip.

The knife sank into my body, but I didn't feel it. I can understand something of the deadly, terrible drive that lashed Fleming, for just then I was a killer too. There was only one thing I wanted, and Fleming, reading the look in my eyes, went quite mad with fear. He had run up against a murderer as deadly as himself.

We were turning over and over in the water, a strange, slow movement without gravity, and the clutch of nightmare had us both. Over we went in that icy green glow, and the knife kept slashing at me, and I didn't even know it when Fleming dropped the weapon.

His fingers stabbed out at my eyes.

I put all my strength into a crushing, frightful pressure, and I felt Fleming's spine crack like a rotten stick between my hands. Then I knew he was dead, and I let go of the corpse and fought my way up, nearly drowned but still with enough power to swim to the edge and claw my way to safety. Vail's face was close to mine; she was helping me

clamber up; then I lay gasping, sucking in great mouthfuls of air.

"I—I guess—I'm done for," I coughed, for the pain of my wounds was now a racking torment.

Vail's cool hands moved swiftly. "Not quite," she said unsteadily. "Just flesh wounds. Lie still. Let me bandage them."

GRADUALLY the pain subsided. I lay quietly, looking up at Vail's sympathetic, intent face.

"Keefer's upstairs somewhere, I think," I said at last. "We'll have to find him. And at sundown we can get out of this hell-hole."

"You mean—"

She looked at me incredulously, and suddenly keeled over in a dead faint.

"Hey!" I said. "Buck up! It's all over now. It—it's—"

I had a funny feeling that the room was starting to swing around dizzily. I rolled over weakly, got to my hands and knees.

Then I flopped down on my face—out like a light!



Next Issue: CONSIGNED TO HELL, a Novelet of Eerie Revenge, by MARTIN KERSEY—and Many Other Stories of Gripping Mystery Thrills

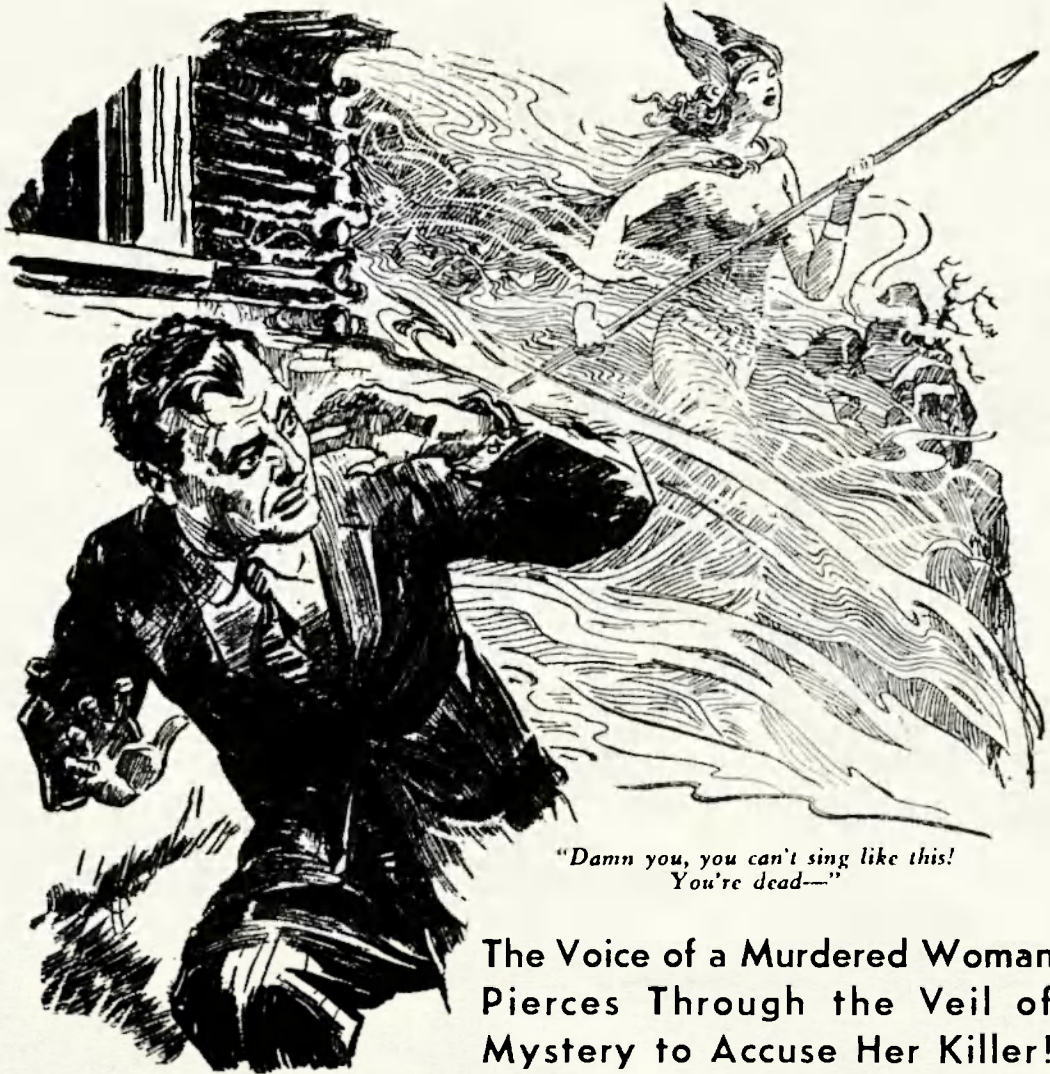
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THE DEATH SONG

By **RAY KING**

Author of "Death Cave," "The Gruesome Thing," etc.



*"Damn you, you can't sing like this!
You're dead—"*

The Voice of a Murdered Woman
Pierces Through the Veil of
Mystery to Accuse Her Killer!

“AN’ they say she was singin’ when she died,” the old villager said. “Just a year ago, the accident happened. She was singin’ at the very time when she fell off the cliff.”

Carter felt Jane shudder against him on the seat of their small coupe. He started up the motor.

“Only two miles—that left turn just ahead?” he asked. “Well, thank you very much.”

But the old man kept his foot on the running board.

“She was your mother you say, ma’am?”

“Yes,” Jane murmured.

“Then there’s somethin’ else I ought to tell you.” The old man spat his quid onto the running board and paused impressively. “I ain’t sayin’ it’s so, y’understan’. I ain’t sayin’ I heard it myself, ’cause I didn’t. But jus’ las’ week —”

“Heard what?” Carter demanded.

“Was my brother who heard it. An’ Willie Smith heard it too, another night. She died singin’, poor Gloria

Grant did. An' she's still singin'. You can hear her, up there in the crags near where she fell. The Valkyrie song, like they say she sang in the opera years ago. She's still singin' it, moonlight nights, like tonight. Her death song."

The moonlight made pallid patches in the deepening twilight of the mountain village street. Beyond Jane's shoulder young Carter could see the grizzled old man's earnest face as he stared in at them.

"Well, thank you very much," Carter said again.

He started the car. The old man took his foot off the running board.

"You can't see her," he said. "Leastwise, no one ain't seemed to have seen her yet. But you can hear her, still singin' that death song—"

His voice faded in the gloom behind them. Carter put his arm for a moment around the shuddering girl. "Queer what things superstitious villagers manage to think up," he commented.

"Yes," she agreed. Tears at the memory of her dead mother had misted her eyes, but she blinked the moisture away, and smiled. "Poor mother. Still singing? That's not so, of course. But music did mean so much to her, Charles. She loved it almost more than anything else in her life. Brunhilde, the Valkyrie was her greatest part—" Her voice trailed off. "And now that old man says she died singing it."

FOR the rest of the brief two mile drive from the village up into the lonely rocky hills, they sat silent. To Carter, it was depressing, this desolate region of crags and stunted trees, starkly eerie in the fitful moonlight. The night was damp, abnormally so for this high altitude, with a mist in the air that lay heavy in the hollows, or in places rose in swirls, pallid as swaying ghosts in the moonlight.

Carter had never been West before. He had met the small slim, brown-haired Jane Grant in New York. They were married now, living in New York where Carter was in business.

Jane Grant was an orphan. She had lived here in this lonely mountain home in her early 'teens, then had been sent away to school. Her mother had been

an opera singer—Gloria Grant. Because of delicate health she had been forced to give up her career, and live in this high altitude with Jane. And a year ago, when Jane was eighteen and away at school, news had come that her mother had met with an accident—had fallen off a rocky pinnacle near here, and had been found dead at the bottom of a little gully the next morning.

The estate was settled now, her mother's will satisfactorily executed by Willard Robson, lawyer and old family friend who had been named as executor. Jane was here now to meet him. She had decided to sell the mountain retreat; had come to pack the personal things of her mother's and of her own childhood, which she wanted to keep.

The lonely, stony road topped a rise, and Carter had his first view of Crag Cottage. It was a big bungalow of rustic logs, with spreading verandas. The moonlight silvered its peaked roof. Its windows were yellow eyes staring out into the night from under the veranda.

Behind the house a great slashed mountain of rock rose a thousand feet. In front of it, to the right, the stony ground, dotted with stunted mountain trees, sloped down the little plateau to the brink of a ragged cliff-top a hundred feet from the house—a fifty foot drop into the shadowed abyss of a ragged winding gully. Crags rose at the lip of the brink, a little serrated rank of buttes and pinnacle spires; rocky defiles like those where Brunhilde gathered her Valkyries.

There was nothing imaginative or morbid about the husky Charles Carter. But despite himself his gaze clung to those nearby crags, where the mist hung in ghostly spirals. And he found himself listening as if he knew the heavy brooding silence of the mountains would be broken by the song of a woman who was dead, but who still was singing.

"Well," Carter murmured, "so this is it, Jane."

Her childhood summer home. With her mother's tragic death here, of course the place would be too depressing, even for a few months at a time.

Carter was glad indeed that she had decided to dispose of it.

"Stop at the gatehouse," Jane said. "We'll see old Elias Boggs for a minute, if he's here."

THE road wound past a butte. A stone wall marking the property edge crossed the plateau here, from the mountain base to the gully top. An old hinged gate stood open and a little cabin was to one side, with a light in its windows.

"Well, little Miss Jane! Do tell! How you've grown."

Elias Boggs was the old caretaker who had lived here for more than ten years, since before Jane's father died. Bent almost double with rheumatism, he hobbled to the door and stood with the lamplight behind him as he excitedly shook Jane's hand.

"Mr. Robson is up there," Boggs said. "We've got a girl workin' for him, but drat her, she goes home at sundown. If you need me at the house, Miss Jane— Eh? What you say?"

"I said we'll be all right, Mr. Boggs," Jane said, and smiled.

The old fellow, Carter realized, wasn't exactly deaf. He seemed dazed, his senile mentality confused, excited at seeing Jane.

"Your poor mother, Miss Jane—you heard about the accident, you did, didn't you?" His palsied old hand twitched at his white hair. His pale blue eyes stared at Carter, eyes that suddenly were misted. "I loved her, Mr. Carter—Miss Jane will tell you. More'n ten years. Never was a finer woman than your poor dear mother, Miss Jane. An' her voice, so beautiful. I loved her music, Mr. Carter. She used to come down here an' sing for me often."

They left him presently, drove on the few hundred feet and pulled up at the side of the big rustic bungalow. With the motor off the night silence of the mountains leaped at them.

"I hope Robson hasn't cooked supper," Carter was saying. "You'll have a chance to show you can cook, Jane. And it better be good."

He stopped, stricken. The bantering smile faded from his face. With a little cry Jane clutched his arm.

"Charles! Listen!"

From out by the crags at the moonlit gully brink, a soft singing voice suddenly was quavering upward. Brunhilde's song! Faint, eerie and blurred. Then it steadied.

"Charles! Oh my God, that's Mother!"

It was a softly throbbing voice, faint but poignant, rich with living warmth as though the living woman were there. With Jane swaying against him, clutching him, Carter stared, transfixed. Was that a pallid shape, off there at the brink? He could not believe it. The shape was visible, but then he saw that it was only a swirling spiral of mist, illumined by the moonlight. But the throbbing death song of a woman who was dead, and yet was singing—that surely was more than an illusion of moonlight and mist.

"Jane! Can you see her?"

Then even as Carter gasped the question the eerie tones floated away and were gone, leaving him and Jane engulfed again by silence. Jane's face was as pale in the moonlight as though she herself were a ghost. And both of them wondered if what they had heard was only a trick of their startled fancy, or was it in truth some unexplainable thing of Life and Death and the Great Beyond of which no one living knows anything. . . .

TO the darkly saturnine, forty-year-old Willard Robson, Jane's mother's attorney, this visit of the girl and her youthful husband marked the successful conclusion of his plans. With the supper which Jane had prepared now cleared away, the suave quiet-voiced Robson sat in the big lamplit living room of Crag Cottage. Carter was with him; Jane was in the kitchen.

"Poor little Jane must have been horribly shocked at my telegram about her mother," Robson was saying smoothly. "It was a tragic thing. I was staying at the village that night. Gloria was here with a servant."

It was so easy to be casual. There never had been a breath of suspicion about Gloria's death, and there never would be. This big blond young fellow Jane had married was glad enough to

have her dispose of the place. That was obvious. When Robson had first heard of Jane's engagement he had been perturbed that it might change her decision, but it had not.

"The body was found that next morning," Robson said. "Poor Gloria! She was lying down in the gully, where evidently she had fallen from a path along the brink up here. Her life had always been rather tragic, Mr. Carter, it seemed to me. Her health barred her operatic career. That last night, her maid said Gloria went out, as she often did, to sing like Brunhilde, out among the crags. It was foggy, like tonight. She must have made a misstep. It's easy to miscalculate that brink when the fog and the eerie moonlight blur the rocks."

"She was singing when she fell?" young Carter asked.

"Yes, I believe so. Come out on the veranda. I'll show you where she fell, if the fog isn't too thick."

In the dimness of the veranda Robson stood with young Carter towering beside him. The crags, down the little tree-dotted declivity, were blurred by the swirling fog which had thickened. Overhead, sullen scudding clouds crossed the face of the full moon so that patches of blurred moonlight and shadow stalked across the mountain wilderness.

"She fell from beside that square little butte," Robson said, and gestured to where a twenty-foot rock rose like a headstone at the brink of the gully top.

Robson was glad of the darkness of the veranda now. It was easy to control his voice, but perhaps it would not have been so easy to master the look on his face or in the depths of his eyes. And this night that was so like that other a year ago had brought the past vividly before Robson. He had never exactly planned to kill Gloria. When her husband had died, years before, Robson had been executor of Grant's estate. He had juggled that a bit, but no one had suspected it.

And then suddenly, Gloria herself, not quite so artistically impractical as he had assumed, had begun to ask embarrassing questions. He could have disposed of them perhaps. He had come

up from the village, that night a year ago, to see her about it; and had found her out by the cliff, singing.

How vivid it all was to him now! They had not been standing by that little butte. He had moved her body along the gully so that it would seem she had fallen from there. But actually they had been standing forty feet to the right.

Robson's gaze went there now. Through the shimmering fog he could vaguely see the ghostly cone-spire of rock, that pinnacle beside which she had been standing, singing her Valkyrie song when he had quietly joined her. And a little later she had stopped and shown him a blood-red streak in the rock. Like the blood of Brunhilde's enemies, strewn here. She had whimsically said something like that. She had not known the significance of that blood-red streak. But Robson had known it.

CINNABAR! The ore of quicksilver! The fabulously rich lost vein of quicksilver which for generations had been rumored to be somewhere in these nearby mountains! And here it was.

And then Robson, that night a year ago, had suddenly urged Gloria to sing for him. Perhaps she had hardly been aware of his lunging shoulder, and how he had darted back to avoid her clutching hands as she lost her balance and fell into the gully. Her song had seemed still echoing among the rocks, mingling with the grim thud of her body as it struck.

Then he had climbed down into the gully, moved her body so that no attention would be brought to the place overhead from which actually it had fallen, the place where the cinnabar outcropping showed its crimson streaks. Robson had covered them carefully with leaves and brambles. The brambles were permanently growing there now. The cinnabar had not been discovered.

Robson, standing here now with Carter on the dim veranda, chuckled triumphantly to himself. Everything had worked out perfectly. He had executed Gloria's will with meticulous honesty.

Gloria and this young husband of hers were quite willing to sell the property, not knowingly to him, but to a third party who would buy it secretly for him. Another year or two would pass. Then Robson would "discover" the lost cinnabar deposit, surprisingly here at Crag Cottage.

"—and down at the village as we came through tonight, an old man told us something queer." Young Carter's low voice broke in on Robson's roving thoughts.

"Eh? Told you something queer?"

"Yes." Carter lowered his voice still further, and cast a glance back across the veranda to the living room doorway. "I didn't want to tell you before Jane. It harasses her—anything about her dead mother."

Apprehension shot through Robson.

"Told you something queer?" he repeated. Something of suspicion that Gloria had been murdered? Was there talk like that around the village? It seemed impossible.

"We thought it was just village superstition, of course." Young Carter laughed awkwardly. "It seems idiotic even to mention it to you, Mr. Robson. I wouldn't, only, just as we arrived—"

"What?" Robson demanded.

"They're saying in the village that there's a ghost up here. Jane's mother—she died singing—the death song, they call it. And they claim that her ghost still sings it, sometimes at night."

"That's rot."

"You've never heard it?"

"Don't be absurd, Carter. Of course I haven't."

More than ever Robson was glad of the darkness on the veranda. So the damned mysterious thing had spread to the village? Robson hadn't known that. He had heard, or had thought he had heard, that faint, ghostly, singing voice of Gloria out there among the crags. Two or three times at night, in the past week or so, that eerie voice had seemed to float up, quavering in the darkness for a moment or two, then dying into silence.

The prodding, guilty conscience of a murderer! Robson was an intelligent, level-headed man; his mind was analytical. His early training had accus-

ed him to surveying personal problems dispassionately. His conscience over Gloria troubled him little, but he realized, nevertheless, that inevitably that eerie moonlit scene of her death was always vividly in the back of his mind.

WHEN he had thought he had heard her song again, that had been his imagination, of course. Robson had tried to dismiss it as that. But vaguely he was terrified. The damnable voice had been so real. A week ago he had stood here on the veranda staring into the night, listening to that throbbing eerie call, so real it had seemed impossible he was imagining it. Another time he had started for the crags out there in the moonlight. The voice was there. Had he seen her pallid shape? For a moment he had thought so. It would be a menacing shape—the ghost of a murdered woman, coming back to haunt her murderer. To drive him into madness! What else could a ghost do for vengeance?

But as he had neared the crags, in a moment the eerie song had throbbed away and was gone. And then he had seen that the pallid shape was only moonlight silvering a rock-spire.

Terror had flooded Robson that night. And the terror was plucking at him again now as he stood on the veranda with young Carter—a more poignant terror, for now he had the realization that this could not be all his own guilty imagination.

"That's rot, Carter," he repeated. Queer how he could manage to hold his voice steady, with the tumult inside of him.

"Yes, that's what Jane and I thought," young Carter agreed. He tried to laugh lugubriously. "But just as we arrived tonight, Mr. Robson, it did seem as though we heard it too. Her voice, off there, singing. Beyond a doubt Jane recognized it as her mother's voice—and knew the song. Just a few fragments—just for a few seconds, and then it died away."

Robson stared blankly. He had not heard the voice tonight. He recalled now that at that time he had been in the kitchen and the water had been run-

ning, so that he would not have heard it.

"Well," he said, and mustered a faint skeptical smile, "that's interesting, Mr. Carter. But don't you think you're letting your imagination run away with you? I must say I never saw a ghost, much less heard one sing."

"Nor I—before," Carter agreed.

"And I don't think talk like that is good for Jane."

The girl abruptly appeared behind them in the living room doorway.

"You're right," Carter said. "That's enough of it . . . Here we are, Jane. We're coming back in."

A ghost that could sing, might talk! The ghost of a murdered woman, coming to tell who had murdered her! Might she not attempt to do that tonight, now that Jane and young Carter were here?

Robson tried to fling away the crazy thoughts, but all evening they obsessed him. It was difficult for him to remain calm, to try and chat normally when all the time he was straining his hearing, horribly tense, expectant that every instant the brooding silence outside the living room windows would be broken by that ghostly song.

Or would her shape—pallid wraith of the beautiful dark-haired Gloria appear at one of these windows? Was that her apparition out there now? What rot! He saw clearly that it was only the filmy curtain which the night breeze had drawn out through the window so that the moonlight struck on it.

But murderers, obsessed like this, had suddenly blurted out their guilt! Robson tried to smile ironically to himself. Certainly he was not such an hysterical idiot that there was any danger of him doing a thing like that.

"You look tired, Jane," he said quietly. "I'm tired too. I think we should all go to bed."

TOMORROW, Jane and her husband would be gone. There was just tonight. If only tonight that accursed ghost would keep quiet!

The crazy thoughts still were sweeping Robson as, an hour later, he sat tense in his bedroom. He had not undressed. Sleep was far from his

thoughts. With the light out, he sat between the bed and the windows where the moonlight shafted in. Expectantly he was listening with all his nerves taut—listening for the dreaded song. A woman who was dead and yet was singing. He realized that he was gripping the arms of his chair, with fingers bloodless, numbed by the pressure.

But outside his opened windows there was nothing but the far-flung mountain silence, and that weird luminescent moonlight struggling down through the fog. She had died on just such a night as this. . . .

God! There it was! Suddenly now, the faint distant song came floating in through his windows, striking such a terror into him that he leaped to his feet. Gloria's song—her vibrant voice. Not ringing in his head, created by his memory. He could not tell himself that now, for he could hear it coming in his windows. Her quivering, richly throaty voice, faint and blurred by the fog, eerie as an apparition itself.

At one of his windows he stood peering. The line of crags and little spires out by the brink of the gully were so muffled by the shining fog that they seemed themselves to be ghosts. Off to the left was the little butte from which everybody thought she had fallen. To the right was the rock-spire with boulders around it, where she had stood, singing like Brunhilde.

And she was there now! He couldn't miss it. Her song was mounting in power. Louder than he had ever heard it before. Pallid, wraithlike, she must be standing there now. A vengeful Valkyrie, shrouded from him by the fog.

Robson was hardly conscious that he had leaped from his window to the rocks six feet beneath. His ankle turned, with a stab of pain that shot up his leg. But he was hardly aware of it as he limped forward, trying to run. That damnable ghost voice. Defiance of Brunhilde for her enemies. A battle cry of defiance. It still came quivering from the fog-shrouded rocks where the living woman once had stood!

"Damn you, you can't sing like this!

You're dead!"

Numbly Robson was aware that he was muttering it to himself. He was running now. The crags and the little stunted trees were around him, blurred ghostly shapes, distorted by the fog and the moonlight so that he could hardly tell just where they were.

"Damn you, you can't sing like this! You're dead—"

If a ghost could sing, it could shout. It could call that Willard Robson was a murderer. But he wouldn't let that happen. He would tear it apart. Silence it! He would have to silence it now before it started to talk. A ghost couldn't sing or talk if you tore it apart.

"Damn you, I see you now!"

He thought he saw her, but it was only a rock in the fog. The song seemed to be shifting. He stumbled over a boulder as he veered sideward. She was trying to escape him!

Where was the gully brink? Had she stopped singing? She had been right here just a moment ago. He was staggering now through the brambles.

It may have been that Willard Robson was dimly aware that under his staggering tread the rocky ground abruptly had melted away. Then he must have known, just for a second or two, that he was falling. His agonized, blood-chilling scream rang out, but it was stilled by the crashing thud as his body smashed on the rocks far down in the shadowed gully.

THE ghostly death song had floated away. There was only the brooding night silence of the desolate mountains. And on the lip of the brink there was nothing but blurred, fog-enveloped rocks, dimly patched with luminescent moonlight. And on the ground, only the broken, scattered brambles, with rocks streaked like blood to mark where Robson had fallen.

* * *

"He went over just about here," young Carter was saying. "My wife and I heard the ghost of her mother singing out here. Constable, that sounds foolish, I know. I can only tell you what it seemed like to us. And we had heard it earlier in the evening."

The flashlights of the constable and

the crowding little group of villagers stabbed eerily through the fog—tiny blurred beams that shifted and struck upon the crags, materializing them like ghosts out of Nothingness.

"Easy!" someone cried. "Look out! Here's the brink right close to us. Things are deceptive in this fog."

"You thought you heard a dead woman singing out here?" the constable demanded.

"Yes," Carter agreed solemnly. "We went to our window. Then we saw Mr. Robson. He was limping, running out here. He surely must have heard that weird song. Then the fog blurred his figure, but we heard him scream as he went over."

"Here's blood on the rocks, under these brambles," a village woman said suddenly.

"Blood?" The constable and two or three other men knelt down. Then one of the men leaped to his feet.

"Blood?" he exclaimed. "Why, there's cinnabar here! Hey you people, come here an' look!"

The lost vein of quicksilver! Everyone here had heard the tale of it all his life. The old prospector who had gasped out the news of his fabulously rich strike and with excitement overtaxing his heart, had died before he could tell where it was.

These villagers of the little mountain mining town were more excited now over the cinnabar than over the accidental death of Robson. The men were tearing away the brambles, digging and poking, following the outcropping of red-streaked rocks.

"It's the real thing," someone exclaimed at last. "Who owns this property now?"

"My wife," Carter said.

"Well you're in luck. It's sure fortunate Robson fell over here. This lode might never have been discovered. There could be a million dollar profit here—mebbe more if you handle it right."

They were all silent for a moment, awed by the luck that chance had so strangely brought to Carter.

Strange indeed. And to Carter there came a new strangeness when later that night he was in the cabin of old Boggs,

the caretaker. The decrepit, senile old man was hastily putting away a small square box as they entered.

A phonograph!

"What are you doing with that?" Carter demanded.

"Don't take my records away from me, Mr. Carter," the frightened old man pleaded. "Please don't. I love her music so. Her voice—when I listen to it now at night, seems like she was still alive, singin' for me. I loved her, Mr. Carter—never was a sweeter, dearer woman than her."

HE had found several old master records of Gloria Grant's voice trials—her unaccompanied songs, recorded on the thick soft-wax discs. Fearful that they would be taken away from him, he had kept them hidden, with his little old camp phonograph.

"You've been playing these?" Carter demanded.

"Yes, Mr. Carter. Sometimes. Just a little—to remind me of her. But I was always 'fraid somebody would hear me. I never dared play one for more than a minute or two. Please don't

take them away from me! I love them."

And from here, Carter realized, the faint floating music might easily echo off from the crags at the gully brink, reaching the bungalow so that one might think the source of the music was out on the rocks.

"And you played that Valkyrie song tonight?" Carter demanded.

The absent-minded old man looked confused. He sat clutching the butter-colored discs on his lap, still fearful that someone would take them from him forcibly.

"I played them tonight?" he stammered. "No, I don't think so. I wanted to—maybe I did—I can't remember—but I was 'fraid you would hear me. It's been a few nights now, more maybe, since I played 'em."

The young man looked at the aged caretaker and wondered if his feeble mind could be depended on for the truth. He shrugged his shoulders.

To Carter it was all very strange. Yet not even Carter, nor Jane, nor anyone living, had any way of knowing how really strange it was.

Next Issue: BLACK DOOM, a Novelet by DAVID V. REED

"I TALKED WITH GOD"

(yes, I did—actually and literally)

and as a result of that little talk with God a strange Power came into my life. After 42 years of horrible, dismal, sickening failure, everything took on a brighter hue. It's fascinating to talk with God, and it can be done very easily once you learn the secret. And when you do—well—there will come into your life the same dynamic Power which came into mine. The shackles of defeat which bound me for years went a-shimmering—and now—?—well, I own control of the largest daily newspaper in our County, I own the largest office building in our City, I drive a beautiful Cadillac limousine, I own my own home which has a lovely pipe-organ in it, and my family are abundantly provided for after I'm gone. And all this has been made possible because one day, ten years ago, I actually and literally talked with God.

You, too, may experience that strange mystical Power which comes from talking with God, and when you do, if there is poverty, unrest,

unhappiness, or ill-health in your life, well—this same God-Power is able to do for you what it did for me. No matter how useless or helpless your life seems to be—all this can be changed. For this is not a human Power I'm talking about—it's a God-Power. And there can be no limitations to the God-Power, can there? Of course not. You probably would like to know how you, too, may talk with God, so that this same Power which brought me these good things might come into your life, too. Well—just write a letter or a post-card to Dr. Frank B. Robinson, Dept. 711-11, Moscow, Idaho, and full particulars of this strange Teaching will be sent to you free of charge. But write now—while you are in the mood. It only costs one cent to find out, and this might easily be the most profitable one cent you have ever spent. It may sound unbelievable—but it's true, or I wouldn't tell you it was.—Advt. Copyright, 1939, Frank B. Robinson.

MASTER OF THE

A Novelet of

By **JOSEPH**

Author of "Carry Him Under,"

CHAPTER I

Death, Step Aside!



WORTH DALE waited on the bus step for the lanky storekeeper, shifting his heavy bag to the other hand.

"Mister," the lanky man panted, "I figured I better ask. Supposin' you don't come back for your car like you plan. What should I do with it? You got relations or a wife or somebody I maybe ought to notify to come get it?"

"Listen," Dale said wearily, "for the tenth time. Get my car fixed. I'll be back for it tomorrow afternoon. And if you won't tell what it is at Bellville that's got everybody scared into hysterics, for heaven's sake stop harping about it!"

The lanky man shifted a bulge from one thin cheek to the other and squirted a yellow stream into the night. His narrow eyes, shifting from Dale's solid

The shotgun's blast was deafening but the horribly

Molding Corpses Stalk Darkness as Fate

WALKING DEAD

Ghostly Terror

J. MILLARD

"A Guy Might Get Hurt," etc.

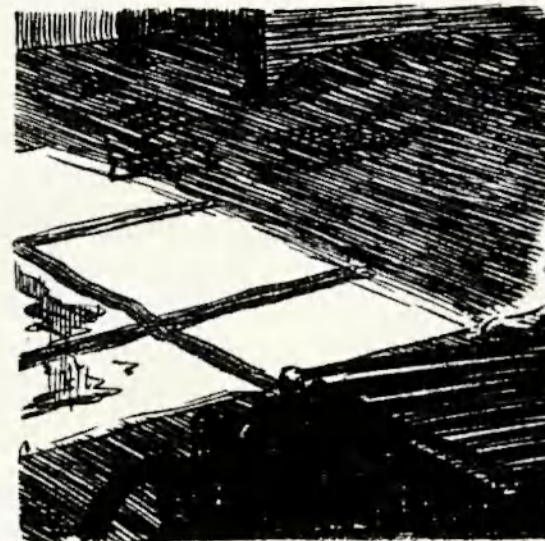
bulk to the surrounding shadows and back, were furtive.

"It ain't fitten to talk about some things," he declared in a hoarse whisper. "When dead bodies climb out of their graves and chase people, it ain't good to talk too much. Just leave it stand. Your car'll be ready in case you get back from Hellville, as folks calls it these days."

"Hell!"

Dale swore disgustedly as the man turned suddenly and scuttled back toward the friendly lights of the store. If his car hadn't broken down, he'd be in Bellville now instead of listening to prattle in the little cross-roads settlement of Dodd Corners.

The blue and white monster of a bus was well filled with passengers who slumbered uncomfortably or turned sleepy stares on the muscular figure of Worth Dale as he climbed in. Dale frowned at the filled seats and finally settled himself in the outer half of a



mutilated figure came on.

Cuts a Grim, Macabre Jigsaw of Death!

double seat, beside a fat man who snored under the protecting mantle of a plaid topcoat.

The bus driver jackknifed up out of the darkness, dropped a limp mail sack in front and came back down the aisle.

"Bellville, eh?" His sharp eyes studied Dale's square face as he separated the halves of the ticket. "You don't look like a native of Dodd Corners? You don't look scared enough for that."

The fat man beside Dale yelped sharply, struggled into the farthest corner of his seat and turned frightened eyes on his seatmate. His moon face was pasty white.

"Bellville?" he cried shakily. "You going to Bellville? Excuse me, mister. This seat is taken. You gotta move."

The driver shrugged and turned back up the aisle.

"Come on up in front on the single," he said over his shoulder. "It's only twelve miles so you probably won't sleep. I'd appreciate some company that didn't snore."

Stirs of whispered conversation, sharp questions and hushed answers, reached Dale's ear. The mystery of Bellville had surely communicated its panic to the entire countryside.

THE bus snorted, poked its glassy nose out onto the pavement and settled to a droning rumble. Dale tipped his head back and let his mind wander back over the reason for his trip to Bellville.

It had come that forenoon in a telegram signed "P. A. Connor, President, The Bellville Printing Company." The wire had read.

UNDERSTAND YOU ARE CAPABLE AT SOLVING MYSTERIES STOP SOME UNKNOWN POWER IS BRINGING DEAD BODIES OUT OF OUR GRAVEYARDS TO WALK AROUND AND FRIGHTEN OUR EMPLOYEES STOP OUR BUSINESS AT A STANDSTILL STOP SPEEDY SOLUTION IMPERATIVE STOP PREPARED TO PAY YOUR REGULAR FEES PLUS BONUS STOP WIRE IF AND WHEN YOU CAN COME

Half an hour after receiving the strange message, an answering telegram had informed P. A. Connor that Detective Worth Dale of the Dale In-

vestigation Bureau would arrive the following morning. But Dale was already in his car, driving toward Bellville. He always preferred to arrive before he was expected, to study the situation and draw conclusions uncolored by local superstitions.

Dale's lips twisted in the darkness. So dead bodies climbed out of their graves and walked, did they? It promised to be an interesting case. He had more than once seen criminals resort to grease paint and superstition in an effort to frighten people with the belief that the dead were arising. The holster under Dale's left arm carried effective medicine against "walking dead."

"Around this bend and over the ridge," the driver's voice broke into his reverie, "you should see the lights of Bellville—providing they have any lights on. We get in at nine-five, but last run the place looked like a morgue. Everybody was locked in a bedroom, nursing a shotgun, I guess."

The bus was thundering between a steep bluff on the right and a steep dropoff on the left. Heavy telephone poles jutting from the bluff overhung the road, their tops hidden in darkness.

The headlights swung around the curve, flickering over the white guard posts at the left. Abruptly a strangled curse tore through Dale's lips, echoing the driver's sharp cry.

A man was walking toward them, straight down the center line of the pavement. His pace was a queer, jerky walk—a lifting and dropping of feet like the mechanical pace of an automaton. No lifting of the head or change of pace indicated that the approaching figure was aware of the bus. Yet light flooded the highway and the roaring monster was but a scant hundred feet away.

"Get over, you fool!" shrieked the driver, pounding at the horn button, pumping frantically on the powerful brakes. "Get out of the way! I can't turn out! Get over!"

The big bus lurched and jerked to the pressure of the brakes, but to begin to stop at that speed, in so short a distance, was impossible. Although the driver swerved left, almost onto the guard posts, the right wheels still pro-

jected well over the center of the narrow road.

For just a heartbeat, the lights were full upon the man's face. In that instant, cold fingers plucked a chill from Dale's spine. There was the briefest possible impression of *deadness* in the relentless forward march of the oncoming figure. Surely no living person would face an onrushing bus without faltering or turning out of the way.

"Oh, merciful God!"

The driver's despairing scream blended into the dull thud that traveled through the lurching bus—the unforgettable crunch of metal through flesh and bone. Then something shapeless flew past Dale's window, off into the darkness as the bus ground to a stop amid the screech of sliding tires and the odor of scorched rubber. Then pandemonium burst forth among the passengers.

"I TRIED not to hit him!" sobbed the driver, turning a twisted face to Dale. "I tried not to! It wasn't my fault."

"You did all you could," Dale snapped, fighting the tenseness that gripped his nerves. "You weren't to blame. But we've got to find him. He may not be dead—only badly hurt. Come on!"

"Not dead?" The scream jerked Dale's head around to where the fat man stood clawing the cushions in an agony of panic. "Not dead? He was dead before we hit him! He was one of Hellville's walking dead! I know he was! Don't open that door! Drive on as fast as you can or the thing will get all of us."

His panic spread like wildfire. A woman sobbed helplessly. An awakened child began to scream and men muttered frightened agreement to the fat man's gibbering terror.

"Shut up, you fool!" Dale ordered. "You're scaring everybody into hysterics. We can't leave an injured man out there."

"Driver!" the fat man shrieked, starting forward. "You're pledged to protect your passengers. You daren't leave us at the mercy of the Thing that made *him*!"

An automatic sprouted suddenly in

Dale's fist, its metallic sheen unmistakable. The forward surge of passengers halted.

"One more peep out of you, Fatty," Dale snarled, "and you get acquainted with my own private corpse maker. Sit down there and shut up! I'll plug the first one who moves before we get back."

It was rough but effective medicine. The fear of Dale's gun and menacing expression overcame hysteria.

"Come on, Mister," the driver said, his pale face set in grim lines. "I've got a flashlight here that'll pick him out in a hurry. Just in case, though, you better keep that cannon handy. I been hearing too many fairy tales about this neighborhood to feel any too comfortable outside."

Beyond the yellow fan from the headlights, the night was pitch black. The tail-lights threw an angry glow on the pavement, making a weaving red ghost of the bus' exhaust plume. Rising wind plucked weird harmony from the telephone wires overhead and brought the shadows to life with sly rustlings.

"There he is," the driver whispered hoarsely, shooting his light up the steep bluff toward a jagged pathway torn through the bushes. "Look how his body tore up the ground!"

They bent over the huddled flesh, the driver moving so that his shoulder touched Dale's as if for companionship. The flashlight showed the body of an elderly man, its entire right side smashed to pulp by the terrific impact of the bus' bumper and fender.

But the left side of the man's body and head was unmarred. Whiskers shadowed the waxy flesh and over them gleamed the green scum of mold. There was mold on the torn clothing and brownish spots like moldy earth on the black shoes.

But what tore a strangled oath from Dale's tight lips was the fact that nowhere in the pulpy horror of mangled flesh and bone was there a trace of blood.

The driver poked a trembling hand into the circle of light and touched the dead hand as Dale knelt and laid his palm against the unmarked side of its face. The driver's hand jerked away.

"He feels like he'd been dead for

days!" he breathed jerkily.

"Yes," Dale agreed slowly, rising to his feet. "For days—or even weeks."

CHAPTER II

I'll Protect You

PATRICIA CONNOR'S heels beat a defiant tattoo on the empty street. Rising wind swirled around her trim figure, molding her severe business suit into tightness that betrayed the very curves it was designed to conceal. Rays from the swaying street lamp seemed to burst into flame as they touched her coppery hair.

Overhead, a moaning wind played with autumn-stripped twigs, rattling them together like skeleton fingers beating time to a *danse macabre* of flying leaves. Darting shadows fled from the light, keeping always just out of reach of its yellow fingers.

But one shadow, darker than the rest, stayed beyond the darting light. It moved steadily, relentlessly through thick shrubbery, staying the same distance behind Patricia Connor's figure as she passed the intersection and plunged into the thicker darkness of the next block.

Louder than the wailing wind was the drum beat of pounding blood in Pat Connor's ears. But louder still, for a moment when the wind lulled, was the unmistakable *scuff-scuff* of pursuing footsteps. Then the sound stopped as though whoever made it was aware that the abrupt hush had been a betrayal.

For one wild moment, a scream struggled in Patricia's throat. Then came the realization of its futility. Every house on the street was dark. Even if her scream was heard few, if any, would brave the horrors of prowling corpses to investigate. Panic wheeled her around, giving her trembling limbs an almost irresistible urge to flee back to the home she had just left.

But with the panic came the terrifying knowledge that the pursuing thing was between her and that haven. On either side lay still deeper shadows,

pregnant with unknown terrors. Ahead lay her destination, the hell-ridden printing plant where dead men with the mold of the grave on their faces marched among the presses in the dead of night.

Then her heels resumed their clicking, carrying her resolutely toward the dark bulk of the plant ahead. Even with its horrors, the familiar walls of the place would be a haven of protection from the menace outside. And besides, the drive of duty that was stronger than fear forced her on to the completion of her errand.

Why had she left on that business trip a week ago? In that brief absence, hell itself had opened to pour its unholy company upon Bellville and upon those people whose livelihood depended upon her courage.

She had heard the ghastly, unbelievable tale this morning from the lips of grizzled pressmen whose eyes reflected a terror that no human menace could ever put there. Even before her bags were unpacked upon her arrival, she had telegraphed a detective because she had refused to share the belief of the community that the reign of terror had a supernatural origin. Now, in the fear-drenched shadows of night, she began to doubt her own assurance. But in her moment of panic, the knowledge that her failure meant ruin to the entire community drove her on.

Deep shadows obscured the plant as Pat approached. It seemed almost as though the shadows were clouds of evil darkness that had rolled down to engulf the rugged building. Her imagination began to create movement among the shadows. Or was it imagination?

THE scream burst forth this time, torn from her tight throat by the horrible vision. One of the deep shadows was moving, leaving its companions to glide toward her, drifting through the night with an effortless, relentless motion. From the edges of the grotesque shape, twin arms of black projected, pumping up and down with a rhythmic, soundless beat like the rise and fall of a pendulum beating away the last moments of sanity. Then the screams became gasping sobs of

wrenching, burning agony.

"Miss Pat!" The voice came out of the moving shadow, proof that the last shred of her sanity had fled. "Miss Pat! Oh, Miss Pat, I didn't mean to frighten you that way. It's only me—Gus."

The soft voice slid across the fear-polished surface of her numbed brain, was absorbed by the tremendous roar of wrath from the pursuing shadow behind.

"Miss Connor! What's happened? If they've harmed a hair of your head, I'll blast them to a hell they'll never leave. You, in the shadow there—I've got a shotgun full of buckshot aimed at your middle."

The roar knifed through Pat's hysteria, replaced horror with a normal fear that sent her stumbling wildly back.

"Jerry! Don't shoot! It's only Gus—Gus Hentjen."

Then Jerry Sone's strong arms were around her, muffling her sobs against the rough warmth of his leather jacket while his flashlight split the night to limn with its pitiless glare the white-haired old man in the wheelchair.

"Jerry! Gus!" Pat cried, fighting for self-control. "I—I'm sorry I was such a fool."

"Any other girl would have fainted," Jerry snapped, scowling at Gus Hentjen's deeply lined face, his massive torso and corded arms against the wheels of the chair. "Gus, you should have had more sense than to barge out of the dark at such a time."

Mild anger stirred in the old man's eyes.

"At least I didn't chase her down dark streets," he snapped back.

"Stop fighting, both of you," Pat ordered with mock severity, dropping an affectionate kiss on the old man's white hair. "You're my two best friends, and you were both trying to help me. Please keep on helping. I need friends so badly now."

"I'm sorry," Gus said, his face smoothing. "We won't quarrel. But when I phoned your house and your mother said you were coming here, I was frantic. Then when I heard footsteps following you, I couldn't think of anything but getting to your side."

He smiled a wry smile, moved the plaid blanket away from his shriveled legs to reveal a heavy pistol on his lap.

"I was dumb, Gus," Jerry Sone apologized. "I been watching Miss Pat's house with my shotgun all evening. I figured when she came out I could follow without disturbing her, and be handy if she needed me."

Adoration shone in his eyes as he dropped the shotgun over his arm and moved close to Pat. A farm boy turned printer, Jerry Sone was foreman of the pressroom and, in spite of his youth, a capable manager. Together with old Gus who, ever since the printing plant started, had managed its office detail from his wheelchair, young Sone was one of Patricia Connor's most dependable employees.

"MISS PAT," Gus said, shifting his eyes nervously toward the dark building, "you can't think of going in there tonight. I'm not saying dead men really walk in there, but there's something in that building that isn't safe for you to meet."

"I've got to, Gus," Pat insisted, lifting her chin defiantly. "I must get the figures from our cost sheets or I can't send the bid in on that big job. I can't let my childish fear ruin everyone's livelihood. They depend on me, Gus."

"I'll go with you if you must go," Jerry Sone put in grimly. "I've got two barrels crammed with lead to discourage ghosts, and I'll see you home safely afterward. I'm not afraid."

Together they won the old man over at last and together they wheeled him back to his little bungalow, where he lived alone. At the door they bade him good night and left him, muttering dubiously, after he had again insisted that Jerry Sone look out for the girl.

"You were mighty brave, Miss Pat," Sone said soberly as he unlocked the door and felt for the light switches. "But I'm afraid I shouldn't have let you come here. There's something in here that isn't human, and somehow my shotgun doesn't seem so powerful now." He added after a moment, flipping switches until every inch of the plant was bathed in radiance: "At least it's worth a few pennies on the light bill to see what we're up against."

"I'll only be a few minutes," Pat said, fighting down the feeling of terror that gripped her as she bent over the files in her own private office. "I can't tell you how I appreciate your staying with me, Jerry."

Instantly she was sorry she had said that, for she knew too well the love that smoldered in Jerry Sone's heart. She had honestly tried to find a spark of answering flame in her own heart, but there was nothing but friendly affection for the tall youth.

"Listen!" Sone said abruptly, gripping the shotgun. "That sounded like a shot."

She had heard it too—a faint report from somewhere outside, borne away on the wailing wind almost before her ears were sure of its existence.

"Even if it was," Sone added after a moment's tense silence, "I'm not moving from this doorway. While I'm here, nothing will get past unless it's over my dead body."

Suppressing the shudder aroused by the grim irony of that remark, Pat bent over her figures. For several minutes there were no sounds but the scratching of her pencil, the wail of wind outside and the tick of the big clock on the wall.

Without warning, every light in the block-long building winked out. Her startled gasp blending with Jerry Sone's startled oath, Pat fled around the desk until her fingers touched the welcome leather of his jacket.

"Stay behind me," Sone whispered. "I'll . . . Heavens above!"

Hard muscles knotted beneath her fingers as his fingers tightened on the gun. Then, over his shoulder, she saw the eerie vision that had caused his exclamation.

Midway down the pressroom aisle, a weird figure glowed in the darkness. Then, as her eyes accepted the darkness, she saw that it was the first of the row of giant flat-bed printing presses. But now the whole mass of iron and steel writhed with a hellish green flame that outlined every bolt and rivet.

SHE wanted to scream but no sound could force its way past the agonizing tightness of her throat. Her

trembling limbs seemed about to fail her completely. Unconsciously her fingers kneaded the arm of Jerry Sone's jacket with terrific strength born of terror.

"Hang onto me!" Sone whispered. "We'll make a run for the door. If you feel anything, scream."

Three steps they took through the blackness. Then, as abruptly as they had vanished, the lights came on, blinding the two with brilliance. The office and pressroom looked the same. There was no green phantom down the row of presses now.

"That's warning enough," Sone said grimly. "We're getting out of here while we're still sane."

"No!" She set her teeth with desperate determination and clung to the young foreman's arm. "No! In five more minutes I'll have my work done. I've got to finish, Jerry. Maybe—maybe the wind swung the wires, made the lights go out. Jerry, please stay another five minutes! I'll hurry."

Fighting against the weakness of her trembling body, she went back to her desk, forcing herself to forget everything but the work before her. Slowly the job absorbed her attention as she bent her copper hair closer and closer to the desk.

"Jerry!" she said, looking up.

Then cold fingers gripped her pounding heart, squeezing it into an icicle of terror that pounded agonizingly in her tight breast. The door to her office was empty. Jerry Sone's tall form was nowhere in sight.

"Jerry! Where are you? Jerry, come back!"

It came then, the sudden snarling whine of an electric motor, a familiar sound that her ears interpreted as the starting moan of the big paper cutter, a gigantic power-driven knife whose guillotineline blade could slice through a thousand sheets of heavy paper as though through a soft cheese. The whine broke into the grinding clank of turning wheels as the big knife *chugged* into its grooved seat. Then the sound died away into silence.

"Jerry!"

She heard him coming back to her then, heard his heavy boots clumping back along the concrete floor. He was

coming back, coming to protect her from harm, coming to keep his promise. She flogged her trembling limbs to activity, made them carry her around the desk to the pressroom door.

Jerry Sone was coming, advancing with a queer, jerky rising and falling of the heavy boots. Like a motor-driven robot he came, steadily, relentlessly, still clutching the shotgun in his hand.

But Jerry Sone was a headless corpse, blood spurting in tiny crimson fountains around the splinter of white bone above the stump of neck. Yet he walked steadily, inexorably toward her, and as he marched, his left hand moved up to fumble dead fingers with the gory welter above the leather collar.

Sobbing in numb horror, Pat slipped downward to the floor as strength flowed out of her muscles at the unholy sight. Slowly her head tipped forward until the vision was above her view. But now her eyes focused on the trail of crimson splashes moving toward her, dripping from Jerry Sone's gory fingers.

Helpless, denied even the blessed anaesthesia of unconsciousness, she watched the crimson splashes approach. Then there were no more pools on the floor, only heavy boots lifting and falling—and the splash of something warm against her hair.

Then the dam in her throat burst and on the wings of the first tortured shriek, her senses fled into merciful blackness.

CHAPTER III

Dropped from the Sky

THE Bellville Furniture and Undertaking Company stood on the main street, its dark windows shadowy with the vague shapes of furniture, rugs, refrigerators and household appliances. Behind the store, light showed through the spectral funeral chapel, coming from the square, white-tiled operating room beyond. In this room, Rolley Bird, Bellville's funeral director, prepared his bodies.

The room itself was a cube of glistening white, surrounding the white operating table on which the body lay. It was the old man who had been struck by the bus. Stripped of its clothing, the figure plainly showed the terrific force of the impact of the bus. The entire right side, from head to hip, was a mangled mass of torn flesh from which splintered bones protruded. But nowhere was there a sign of blood or the usual raw-beef appearance of torn flesh.

Doc Summers bent over the figure from one side of the table, his pudgy figure wrapped in a white apron. Across from him, Rolley Bird, his sharp eyes alight with professional curiosity, poised a sharp knife and bent his head toward Sheriff Tom Boland and Worth Dale.

"This probably won't be nice, Dale. Are you sure you and Tom don't want to go out and test my new easy chairs till we're through?"

"Thanks, I'll stick," Dale said shortly, his face blank. "My stomach gave up in disgust years ago."

Sheriff Boland turned his gaunt face to stare briefly at Dale's thick-set figure and square face. Then he signaled for the autopsy to begin.

Despite the air of tension that gripped them all, there was calm efficiency in the way Doc Summers and Rolley Bird bent to their task. Swift strokes of the sharp knives laid bare the dead flesh down the breastbone, peeled it back away from white ribs that were whole on one side, shattered on the other. Then Doc Summers drew a small saw from his bag.

"Let's talk," Tom Boland said abruptly, turning his eyes away from the scrape of sawteeth on bone. "I ain't big enough liar to say I really enjoy this."

In the outer chapel, beyond the sound of the saw, the two dropped into chapel seats and lighted cigarettes. Boland blew out a mouthful of smoke and studied the cigarette, rolling it between his long fingers. His face was expressionless.

"You got a permit to bulge the left side of your coat that way?" he inquired mildly, without looking at Dale. "Judging by the bump, your cannon

must be at least seventy-five caliber."

Dale chuckled suddenly, dug out his wallet and handed it over, opened to his credential card. Sheriff Boland stuck the cigarette into a corner of his wide mouth, tilted his head to keep smoke from his eyes and studied the card.

"Okay," he said finally, handing it back. "Go on from there."

"There's no place to go," Dale told him. "In answer to a wire from a Mr. P. A. Connor, I took on the job of shooing the local dead back into their graves. The rest is just that my car broke down near Dodd Corners, I hopped a bus and walked into the fracas you heard about from the bus driver and the other passengers."

TINY smile wrinkles touched the corners of Boland's eyes. "Mister Connor, eh? You'll get on all right with Pat Connor."

"Suppose," Dale said, "you give me a quick picture of what's going on here. I'm still in the dark except for fairy tales."

"Hell!" Boland barked, suddenly wrathful. "All anybody knows sounds like a fairy tale. Two nights ago the corpse of old Jim Roven comes marching through the plant with his beard full of grave mold and chases the night shift out in hysterics. Last night the crew went back on my promise to stand guard. About ten o'clock, along comes a fellow that had been Roven, sure enough a corpse and walking slow and jerky like he was wound up with a spring motor in him."

He studied the cylinder of his cigarette for a moment.

"This time he headed straight for me, lifting a long knife. I put two shots over his head without his missing a step. Then I put four more in his chest and he didn't even flinch."

"Then what?" Dale asked, leaning forward tensely.

"Then," Boland said dryly, "I kind of went on out with the night crew. Didn't seem much sense in hanging around with my gun empty and the corpse still coming. Then this morning there was a notice tacked to the wall, warning the plant that the next person to come in at night would be

made a walking corpse, too. I went out to the cemetery and there wasn't a trace of digging around any of the graves."

"Was that your same corpse we hit tonight?"

"Yep! Same identical Jim Roven. He got too lazy to live so he died about three months back. A poor farmer from out west of town, he was."

"Maybe he'll quit now, with his corpse used up," Dale suggested.

"I wish I could think it was over," Boland snapped. "But somehow I don't. I think it's just beginning." He paused a moment, then added wrathfully. "Hell, it don't make sense! In the first place there ain't a crime except breach of peace so far. Then how it works has me stumped. Every night that plant's been locked tight. Even changed locks and I kept the only keys. Still it goes on and no signs of any door being opened. I think I got as much common sense as the average, but by Judas, I'm beginning to believe there is some inhuman power behind it all, danged if I ain't!"

"Gentlemen!" Rolley Bird's voice called them back to the morgue room. "I wish we could hand you some good news, but we can't. My embalming job was a good one, that's all I found. Otherwise, there isn't a ghost of an excuse for that body to move unless somebody came along and moved it."

"Sorry, Tom," Doc Summers said, shrugging into his coat. "I even performed a cranial post—and Rolley's right. Just a normal, well embalmed dead body."

Sheriff Tom Boland lifted his wide-brimmed hat to mop wet rivulets from his seamed forehead. His hand was not quite steady. Dale leaned a hard fist against the tiled wall, staring down at the body through narrowed lids.

"With a power like that loose," he rasped, "you can't tell me it will be wasted on scaring printers. Whoever is responsible has to be stopped or Heaven only knows what brand of hell we're liable to see. Sheriff, give me your key. I'm going through that plant. . . ."

WORTH DALE saw the light flitting toward him from a block

away. He was walking through the dark tunnel of the empty street, the wind tugging at his clothes and flopping the brim of his hat. The noise of the wind and the rustling leaves could effectually conceal a hidden enemy, so Dale walked cautiously with his hand on the checkered butt of his automatic.

He saw almost at once that the light came from a flashlight. Then, as it drew closer, he saw the figures of a man and a girl pushing a white-haired man in a wheelchair. He had no way of knowing that he saw Pat Connor, Jerry Sone and Gus Hentjen going to the latter's bungalow, so he crept in pursuit.

He was close when the bungalow light came on and the old man lifted his chair across the threshold with a flip of powerful arms. Dale was close enough to hear the old man say:

"Take care of her, Jerry. She shouldn't be going into that hellish plant tonight. God help you if our Pat is harmed."

"Don't worry," the tall youth answered, clutching his shotgun. "I won't let anything happen to Miss Connor."

Miss Connor! Dale pondered that, crouching in shadows until the closing door cut off the flood of light. Then the girl with the coppery hair must be P. A. Connor's daughter. And she was going into the printing plant at night, escorted only by the young fellow with the shotgun.

A curse slipped from Dale's lips. That girl was too young, too lovely, to be menaced by the shades of moldering dead. He couldn't imagine what impelling urge could send her into such a place tonight, of all nights, but it was a perfect setup for some new horror. Grim-faced, Dale swung around the bungalow, determined to be on hand if anything did happen.

He knew from what he had seen and from Boland's directions, that the printing plant must back up almost against the back yard of the bungalow. In that case, by cutting through the dark lot, he should be able to reach the plant entrance when the young man and the girl did without betraying his presence.

Moving softly, with every sense alert for danger, Dale followed the sod edge

of a driveway past the bungalow. The moaning wind had a dozen unfamiliar sounds and the shadows were deep enough to hide any number of menacing forms. Yet there was no tangible reason for the sudden prickle of warning that coursed down Dale's spine.

He stopped for a long time, listening and searching the shadows in vain. There was no apparent danger. Only a sixth sense persisted in warning him of some evil presence lurking close by.

The white ghost of a garage loomed close and Dale skirted it, his breath uncomfortably loud through tight nostrils, his palm clammy with sweat against the automatic's grips. He came to a narrow gate and slid through it, feeling the crunch of gravel under his shoes as he came into the delivery alley that ran beside the plant.

Abruptly he heard the front door of the building slam, somewhere to the left and a moment later squares of dull light sprang up along the plant wall before him. Patricia Connor and her escort had entered the building. Dale swung toward the front of the plant, throwing caution aside as he strode over the gravel.

He stopped in mid-stride, feeling again the oppressive sense of impending menace. Then he heard the sound, a soft *whir* like the rushing of some great bird speeding down at him out of the night.

HIS fingers closed on the automatic at the instant the unseen Thing struck. A huge, black shape swooped down and smashed against him with crushing force. Then, before his body could reel off balance from the blow, cruel talons dug into his flesh, snatched him up like a feather and swung his body upward into the darkness.

For a moment, the shock of utter disbelief held him rigid. Only instinct maintained his clutch on the automatic. Then, as rushing air tore the breath from his lungs and the cruel talons shifted to a more agonizing grip, he began to struggle against the unseen Thing that was carrying him away.

He might as well have sought to break the grip of a vise. But the effort to writhe free from the steely claws awoke him to the realization of the

automatic still clutched in his hand. He was being carried up, face downward, with the unseen creature clinging to his back. Efforts to turn were futile. He raised the automatic straight up above his head and pulled the trigger, aiming blindly into the rushing night.

The sobbing wind caught up the smashing report and carried it away. But with it went the sharp snarl of rage from the unseen creature, blending with a queer metallic *twang*.

Then Dale was flying through the air toward the light-washed gravel of the alley again, feeling the relentless grasp of the hidden assailant still stabbing his flesh. He had barely time to tuck his head into his shoulders and relax his muscles. Then the smashing impact of the earth drove consciousness out in a blinding flash of bursting fire.

CHAPTER IV

Lead Can't Stop Me

WHILE the scream seemed faint and far away, yet the intensity of its terror lanced through the darkness over Dale's brain. Under its cruel lash he fought through waves of pain and nausea for the strength to struggle onto his feet. His left arm hung limp and useless, his back was raw, his whole body a concentrated torture. His mysterious assailant was gone and so was Dale's automatic—stolen or lost among the shadows of the alley.

The scream came again, keening to a pitch of terror that sent the detective into a lurching run out of the alley toward the glass-paneled front door of the plant. The light was on inside but a waist-high counter blocked Dale's view. The door was locked.

The key was somewhere in Dale's pockets but the echoes of that terror-born scream made time too precious to waste in fumbling search. Hesitating only long enough to throw his good arm across his face, Dale dove headlong into the thick glass and crashed through in a welter of flying shards that plucked cruelly at his body.

He slammed through the swinging

gate in the counter and skidded to a halt, strangling a curse. Patricia Connor lay in the pressroom doorway, a vivid splash of coppery hair framing her pale, terror-twisted face. At her feet lay the headless corpse of her protector, blood still crawling from the ghastly stump of throat. As if in mockery, the shotgun lay an inch beyond his clawed, dead hands.

With a surge of relief, Dale felt the faintest murmur of pulse in Pat Connor's limp wrist. By superhuman effort he got his sound arm around her slender waist and carried her to a flat-topped desk. For the moment his spinning brain held but one idea—to get this lovely girl as far from the hell-ridden plant as possible.

Then Dale's eyes fell upon the telephone on a nearby desk. He sprang toward it and as his fingers closed over the receiver, every light in the plant winked out. For a moment he stood in the inky darkness, strangling the receiver with unconscious ferocity while cold sweat trickled into his eyes.

"Put down that telephone!"

The command boomed through the cavernous building like a voice from the tomb. It filled the night with a throbbing, sepulchral echo that rolled and beat upon Dale's eardrums from every angle. It was utterly impossible to tell where, in the huge, low building, the sound originated.

"You have seen my power!" roared the voice. "Drop that phone!"

It was weird, impossible—yet it was a human voice. And that very fact drove the madness from Dale's brain, replacing it with an icy calm. He slammed the receiver onto its prongs, cutting off the faint whisper of the operator's sleepy, "Number please!" Then, very softly, he lifted the receiver again and laid it on the desk. Without a betraying rustle, he got out a handkerchief and muffled the diaphragm so that the operator's voice would not betray his ruse.

"That is better," the voice intoned. "You are wise."

Dale's heart leaped. In that answer, the mysterious voice had betrayed its own weakness. The power behind it was not omniscient.

"Okay!" he snarled, as a faint whis-

per reached his ears from the muffled phone. "You're lucky I didn't get my call through to Sheriff Boland."

He bent forward in the darkness, hurling the last words straight into the yawning transmitter, praying that the operator was not too sleep-drugged to interpret the urgency in his voice.

"BE CAREFUL!" the voice warned. "Any trickery and your corpse will walk with the other dead who are my slaves." A moment the voice hesitated as though its owner were trying to guess what lay behind the detective's silence. Then came the order: "Walk to the pressroom door, but no further. I'll talk to you face to face."

Nerves twitching despite his efforts, Dale shuffled cautiously to the doorway. His breath caught sharply and his palms were clammy as he got his first sight of the green-flamed phantom press, writhing grimly in the distant darkness.

Then he saw the other thing. On the bed of the press sat the figure of a man, outlined in the same weird flame. It was no clever fake for, as he watched, the figure nonchalantly crossed glowing legs and sat swinging one foot. For a moment, Dale's nerves could find no antidote for the icy fingers that touched them.

"This," the voice resumed, as the figure moved one glowing hand, "is your own automatic—a weapon you know better than to underestimate."

"A gun!" Dale snarled, purposely goading the phantom. "So you aren't so all-powerful at that?"

"Don't be a fool! I'm simply employing a weapon you know because I don't want you to make any mistakes through ignorance of my greater powers. I want you to leave here alive, to carry my last warning to those fools who won't leave me alone. Come down here!"

The ghostly arm beckoned imperatively. But Dale only saw it from the tail of his eye. His every effort was concentrated on visualizing the exact location of Jerry Sone's shotgun, lying on the concrete floor beyond the blood-drained corpse.

"Go to hell!" Dale roared and dived

through the darkness in a headlong leap.

His fingers finched away from the stickiness of congealing blood and closed around the comforting chill of cold iron. Still in the same swift movement, he straightened and threw the gun to his shoulder. He had no way of knowing whether it was loaded or empty, but in the latter event it was still a formidable club.

"Stop or I'll blow you apart!" he roared.

The hellish, flaming figure was in the aisle, marching toward him with grim, relentless steps—a jerky rising and falling of feet like the march of an automaton. For a wild moment, the heavy gun seemed as futile as a gesture in stopping that inexorable march.

"Stop!" Dale roared again and squeezed one of the twin triggers.

The shotgun's blast was deafening, its recoil a staggering blow at Dale's shoulder. Buckshot rattled against wood and metal, filling the darkness with the patter of death.

The marching figure was literally blasted apart by the hail of lead. One arm and shoulder vanished in a shower of glowing shreds that filled the air like burning embers. The horribly mutilated figure fell backward and seemed to hang for a moment in mid-air. Then a choked cry was torn from Dale's lips, a cry of sheer unbelief as the torn travesty of a human body climbed back to its feet and resumed its grim death march.

"Lead can't stop me!" roared the voice. "Now pay the penalty!"

Mouthing unconscious curses, Dale threw the shotgun back to his shoulder, his finger moving to the second trigger. The figure was almost upon him, a scant foot beyond the end of the gun's yawning muzzle.

Without warning, a tremendous force tore the shotgun out of his hands, whipping it away in the darkness. Then, for the second time that night, cruel talons were biting into his body, clawing fiercely at his throat. For a desperate moment, he tried to fight against the relentless fury of those steely claws. Then consciousness exploded again in a blaze of agonizing pain. . . .

"IE still until I get this dress-
ing on," Doc Summer's voice snapped at him through mists of pain. "And stop that swearing. We have a lady present."

Dale blinked against the searing stab of bright light and struggled upright. He discovered that he had been lying on one of the flat desks and that Tom Boland, Rolley Bird and the red-haired Patricia Connor were grouped around, watching Doc Summer's ministrations. His automatic lay beside him, one butt splintered, and beyond it lay the shotgun with its twin barrels bent into an arc.

"Gad!" Rolley Bird said cheerfully. "You look like a bad job of embalming. For heaven's sake, what happened, Dale?"

Dale shook his head and essayed a few lurching steps, wincing at the sting of air in his aching throat.

"How did you get that call through?" Boland demanded. "We heard the shotgun blast when we were still a block away. The lights came on as we reached the door and there you were, choking to death with that shotgun wrapped around your neck. Took Rolley and me both to pry it loose. At that, we were blame near too late to save you."

Dale told his story in a choking voice, conscious of Pat Connor's soft eyes watching him.

"I'm sorry I got you into this," she said when he had finished. "It nearly cost your life."

"You got me into?" Dale croaked.

"Yeah," Boland said drily. "Meet President Pat Connor."

"You?" Dale choked. "I thought it was your father who—"

Pat winced and turned away sharply. Over her head, Tom Boland shot him a warning glance.

"Take care of Miss Pat a minute, Doc. I'll talk to Dale."

He led the way back into the press-room where gray dust covers from the machines covered the scene of death. He lifted a corner of the cloth to reveal the horribly mangled corpse of a red-haired man whose entire left side was blown to bits.

"You plug him with a load of buck-shot?" Boland asked.

"I plugged somebody who shone in the dark and wouldn't stop walking, even with half his body blown away."

"We found Jerry Sone's head under the bloody paper cutter," Boland said tightly. "And this is the body of Miss Pat's father who was buried three months ago."

Abruptly Dale leaped to his feet and ran back down the wide aisle to the press that had glowed so weirdly. Out of the welter of horrors that had marked the night, his mind was picking fragments of memory—discrepancies in things he had seen.

"Come back here," he called softly. "I'll show you a ghost."

As they bent over his shoulder, he raised his coat to cut off the rays from the overhead lamp. In the shadow thus formed, faint greenish flames seemed to crawl over the enameled surface of the giant press. Wordlessly, Dale got out his knife and scraped a bit of glowing fire from one corner, carrying it back into bright light.

"Luminous paint of the cheapest kind," he announced, rolling the sticky fragment between his fingers. "It's been cleverly painted into the iron so it's hardly noticeable except in the dark. It's the stuff they paint light switches and watch faces with and you'll find plenty more painted onto those walking corpses. Except on that new one—the young man. He was killed so recently that your death master didn't have time to paint him up. It's a pretty cheap ghost that can't even afford a good grade of radium paint, too."

WITH Boland and Bird at his heels, staring in wide-eyed astonishment, Dale began to circle back and forth between the heavy presses, staring up at the hooded lights suspended low over each one. When at last they reached the front office again, Dale shook his head, frowning.

"There should be one more piece of the puzzle here."

"What in thunder are you looking for?" Boland demanded.

"The lamp that . . ." Dale's eyes widened with a sudden thought. "Holy smoke! Maybe that's the motive behind this whole crazy mess. If this

building was once a—”

“Put up your hands! Don’t anybody move!”

The snarling voice whirled them around toward the smashed front door, to stare open-mouthed. Gus Hentjen, his massive body straining forward from the seat of his wheelchair, was just outside the door. In his right hand was an enormous pistol that poked through the broken glass to cover everyone in the room.

“I want Miss Pat to open the door and come out here with me. Anyone else who moves gets shot.”

CHAPTER V

You’ll Never Get Me

“GUS, you fool!” Tom Boland’s roar broke the stunned silence. “Drop that gun before I beat brains into your head with it.”

“Don’t move!” Gus Hentjen warned as Pat moved dazedly to his side. Then his voice softened. “Did they hurt you, honey? Were they holding you here?”

“Holding me?” Her shocked surprise was mirrored in the faces of the rest. “Gus, they saved me from—”

Her voice broke and she began to sob against the old man’s shoulder.

“All right, Tom,” old Hentjen said wearily dropping the gun to his withered knees. “These nights of terror, a man daren’t trust his best friends. I heard a shot and Pat’s scream. When I got here and saw you around, I thought—I thought you—”

His voice broke as Rolley Bird laid a gentle hand on his shoulder and said softly:

“Pray God you’ll always be near when she needs you, Gus.”

They crowded around him then and Dale used the moment of inattention to slip away from the group, into Pat Connor’s private office. Idly he began to poke through files and records, but behind his apparent aimlessness was a grim purpose. For out of the past hour’s horrors his analytical mind had begun to lift a pattern.

He was fairly certain that he knew

how the corpses had been made to walk. His own recent encounter had given him the key. But he had to confirm his guess as to the motive before he could definitely trace the fiendish plot to its creator. If his reconstruction was correct, there must be verification in one of those old ledgers.

His sharp eyes roved down the columns of entries. A single innocent notation arrested his gaze. His breath exploded through locked teeth as the full implication of what he read smashed into his brain. Then he raised his head to look out through the doorway at the little knot of men around Pat Connors—at the one person in that group who was the master of the walking dead.

Dale himself took Pat away, and walked to her home with her.

“Go straight to bed,” he ordered her as he stood at her door with her a few minutes later. “You need sleep. By tomorrow morning, it’ll all be over.”

The moment he had discovered the true identity of the fiendish killer, Dale had hurriedly dissolved the little group. After a moment’s whispered instruction, he had sent Sheriff Boland on a mysterious errand. Bird, Hentjen and Doc Summers had gone their respective ways, while Dale himself had gone with Patricia.

“You mean”—she stared at him—“that you know who—”

“I know.” He nodded grimly. “I found the answer in your own ledgers tonight. By morning we’ll have the whole thing ended forever. I’m planning on the killer’s returning tonight—right into a trap.”

“Please be careful,” Pat said softly, her eyes shining.

Dale swiveled, reading the eager message in her eyes as he swept her into his arms.

“That,” Dale said hoarsely, when he lifted his lips from hers, “is not part of the Dale Agency’s regular service to its clients. That, Pat, means more than I ever meant anything in my life.”

When, half an hour later, Dale once more approached the ominous bulk of the plant, the last piece of the mad puzzle had clicked into place. A shivering, night-shirted newspaper publisher, roused from his bed by Dale’s insistent

pounding, had unlocked the file of back issues for the year 1918 to reveal the last piece in the grim jig-saw of death.

A rising moon peeped over the plant roof as Dale approached, throwing the sharp ridge into bold silhouette. Against the silvery disc, he saw the first sign of the killer's desperation, an almost unnoticeable dipping and wrinkling of the roof itself. Then, as Dale burst into a furious run, an entire center section of the roof sagged down as if pressed by a huge, invisible hand.

"I didn't expect him to strike so soon!" Dale panted above the crash of rending timbers.

At the plant door, he moved questing fingers through the shadows. For a sickening moment he thought Tom Boland had failed him. Then his fingers closed on the cold smoothness of a bull's-eye lantern and a short-barreled tear gas gun hidden under a low hedge.

"Boland!" he bellowed, pounding into the darkened office. "Go ahead!"

An answering shout came from somewhere high up at the rear of the building, accompanied by loud hammering. Perched on a high ladder, the gaunt sheriff was nailing shut the tiny ventilator window high up—the killer's own private entrance and exit. Dale grinned at the soft flurry of sounds that started inside the plant.

"You're trapped, rat!" he called. "If you don't surrender, I'll fill the place with tear gas."

He held the gun poised, ready for anything—anything but the answer that came to him in peals of mocking laughter.

"I won't mind," choked the mad voice, "but my pretty companion might not like your gas, Detective."

A sharp cry, instantly muffled, sent a stab of cold fear into Dale's heart. It was impossible—yet that cry of terror came unmistakably from Pat Connor's lips. With a groan, Dale sent a beam of light up through the network of wooden beams, staring helplessly at the sight it revealed.

Bound hand and foot, Pat Connor lay balanced on a precarious perch formed by slender, intersecting beams. From her bound arms a single rope looped off into a dark corner where the light could not penetrate. As he stared, that rope

jiggled gently. Dale gasped aloud.

"One pull," boomed the voice, "and she falls twenty feet to the cement floor. Go away and I promise she won't be harmed."

Dale cursed in futile rage. A chance shot at the invisible target of the hidden man would surely result in a fatal tug at that deadly rope. Yet, even if he withdrew, the only assurance of her safety was the word of an insane killer. In that mad moment, Dale made his grim decision.

Screened behind the bright light, he dropped the gas gun and drew his automatic. With bated breath he steadied his aim for the most desperate gamble of his career.

"Which will it be?" roared the voice.

Dale's answer was the smashing report of a single shot, aimed at one tiny spot where the deadly rope hung across a thick beam.

For an agonizing moment, he thought he had failed. Then the severed ends of the rope fell away from the beam and Dale hurled his powerful muscles into motion. Using a giant press for a ladder, he scrambled madly up toward the tangle of beads overhead.

The mad killer could not pull Pat from her perch, nor could he touch her without exposing himself. But he did have a gun, and Dale's only hope lay in keeping the madman too distracted to think of the helpless girl. He flicked off the light and hammered a shot toward the killer's corner. His answer was an animal snarl of rage and a booming shot that whined dangerously near Dale's head.

Then he was on the narrow cat-walk of beams, feeling his way toward the killer's lair in a circular route to draw fire away from Pat's helpless figure. The hidden gun *blammed* again and a slug plowed into Dale's thigh, nearly throwing him from his perch.

Then, as his eyes grew accustomed to the gloom, he saw the Thing hurtling toward him—a shapeless black mass that moved in a queer swinging motion that was strangely apelike.

Dale fired pointblank at the shadow and drew a choked cry of rage and pain, without halting the attack. Then it was upon him and the same steel talons were again clawing into his flesh.

The impact nearly hurled Dale from his slender footing. Even though he knew what he was up against this time, his strength was no match for the savage fury of that snarling shadow. Off balance, he teetered wildly, felt his feet slammed completely off the narrow beam, felt himself falling helplessly into the darkness as his attacker jerked free with a snarl of triumph.

Dale threw out his arms as he fell and one of them closed over a cross beam with a sickening smash that nearly unsocketed his shoulder and sent the automatic flying from his numbed fingers. With savage desperation Dale clung to the beam while the steel talons ripped and clawed in a brutal effort to loosen his grip. Then he felt his clasp loosening as the black shadow bent over him, the hot breath of its gloating laugh beating against his sweat-dewed face.

With a last surge of waning strength, Dale's big body suddenly jackknifed, throwing his legs above his head to encircle the black shape in a desperate unexpected scissors-lock. For a wild moment the Thing teetered before plunging past him into darkness. For an instant desperate talons clawed at his kicking legs. Then, with a wild shriek it plunged downward until its last cry ended in a sickening thud far below.

"Dale!" Boland's anxious voice called from the front. "Where are you? For God's sake, what happened?"

CHAPTER VI

Macabre Puppets

AT LAST the nightmare of horror was ended. Pat Connor, Tom Boland, Rolley Bird and Doc Summers were grouped in Pat's office the next morning, listening open-mouthed to Dale's summary of the case.

"The walking dead were nothing but puppet-corpses, controlled the same way Gus Hentjen used to control his little wooden dolls in his Punch-and-Judy shows. I discovered that last night when I blasted the flaming corpse with a shotgun and instead of being

blown across the room by the terrific charge, it only hung in the air and dangled off balance. I realized then that it must be supported by wires from above and I knew that explained the jerky way they walked.

"Real puppets have threads attached to their arms and legs. The operator ties these threads to his fingers and by moving the right fingers, makes the figures go through the motions of walking or sitting or whatever the operator desires. That was exactly the way the dead bodies were made to walk and gesture."

"But bodies are heavy," Rolley Bird protested. "No man could make them walk by wiggling his fingers and pulling threads."

"Not threads," Dale answered, "but wires—fine steel wires, painted a neutral color so they wouldn't be noticeable, especially to people too horrified and terror-stricken to notice details anyhow. But a puppet's body isn't supported by the fingers, anyway. It hangs from a wood cross and opposite arms of the cross are tied to the doll's legs so that tipping the cross to one side raises one leg and drops the other in a movement that imitates walking. You'll find a big cross hanging from the ceiling at the rear of the pressroom. There's a steel track up there to support the crane you use in moving heavy rolls of paper. Gus built his puppet gear with rubber rollers to work on that track.

"To make puppet corpses walk, he merely hung their weight from this cross and pushed it ahead of him as he crawled along the track. With one hand he rocked the big cross to raise and lower the legs while his other hand held the wires that controlled any simple arm movements he wanted the corpse to make. The wires supporting the body were looped in such a way that if someone got too close he could release one end of the wire and pull it up out of sight in an instant."

"Hey!" Tom Boland said sharply. "Don't forget I saw that corpse walk when the lights were on in the plant. I didn't see anything."

"How could you? The pressroom lights are all heavily shaded and hang directly over the spots where men work

at night. That leaves the ceiling in pitch darkness and makes the aisle where the corpse walked so shadowy that you couldn't notice anything wrong. Besides, the wires were very thin steel and enameled in dull colors to prevent their reflecting any lights. But I'll bet it could have happened in bright lights and still everyone would have been too shocked to notice the wires, though Gus never took that chance."

"But I don't understand how the dead man walked out on the highway," Patricia broke in. "The one the bus hit, I mean."

THAT was easy for Gus Hentjen, too. He chose a spot where the telephone poles set out from that steep hill at such an angle that they hang over the center of the road. He simply hung his car from the heavy cable, the same way linemen use a cable car to hunt for line trouble. I'm guessing he only did that as an experiment to see how it worked outdoors and to add fresh horrors to the panic he was carefully creating.

"But at that, no one but a cripple like Gus could have worked it so easily. For years he has moved around by hanging, apelike, from his hands. He developed superhuman strength in his arms. I discovered that when he swung down out of the sky on a rope last night, snatched me up and nearly throttled me with those steel-tipped gloves he wore.

"That radio aerial that runs from the ventilator window at the back of the plant across to the roof of his bungalow isn't an aerial at all. It's a steel cable he used as a path, traveling hand-over-hand to the plant to perform his horrible tricks. He wore that heavy belt, covered with steel hooks, and carried a knotted rope. When he started to the plant last night after you left him at the door, he saw me below, creeping through the shadows. He simply hooked his rope over the cable and swung down onto me, the same way he came down in the plant later to bend that shotgun around my throat. By the way, we found where he controlled the plant lights by a switch up under the roof. And by talking into that iron ventilator on the roof, his voice boomed

and echoed so that you couldn't tell where it came from."

"How did you get onto all this?" Boland demanded.

"When I figured out how the corpses walked, I looked for someone who had experience in operating puppet shows. Last night as I was looking over the books, I saw an item where the book-keeper had charged the Methodist Ladies Aid four dollars for handbills for a Punch-and-Judy entertainment by Gus Hentjen. I looked out at his powerful arms and knew he was the man. But without evidence, I knew I had to trap him actually committing some crime."

"God!" Rolley Bird whispered. "What was his motive?"

"Greed that drove him mad. I got the story, enough to piece it together, from the file of newspapers for Nineteen-eighteen. At that time this building was a hospital—a receiving station for wounded World War soldiers. Gus Hentjen worked in the hospital. At that time a tube of radium worth a hundred thousand dollars was stolen and never recovered. My guess is that Hentjen hid his loot under the floor. But, before he could recover it safely, the hospital moved to larger quarters, the printing plant moved in and laid a concrete floor for their presses. So he got a job in the new plant and slowly went mad, brooding over the fortune under his feet.

"His insane mind finally conceived the diabolical plan of walking corpses to frighten everyone away, give him a chance to move the press and dig up his loot. He was lifting the press with block and tackle hung from the roof last night when a beam snapped and tore a part of the roof down."

TOM BOLAND shook his head.

"How did you guess the motive?" he demanded.

"By the luminous paint on the press. It was a type that stops shining if it's not recharged by sunlight every few hours. But there were bits of it shining in spots where no sunlight or lamp-light could possibly reach. The only explanation I could think of was some radium close by that was activating the luminous paint. There were chisel

marks in the concrete under the press bed—fresh ones—so I figured it was hidden under the floor. It was only a guess but it made me follow the line of investigation that eventually proved I was right.”

“Hey!” Bird said excitedly. “I thought radium poisoned people if it wasn’t shielded with lead. And if it was shielded, how could it affect the luminous paint? Remember those radium deaths that were in the papers awhile back? Why didn’t the printers—”

Dale shook his head.

“Only faint emanations managed to seep through the lead container of the radium and the mass of concrete. Don’t forget that the luminous paint on the press was exposed to these radiations continuously, day and night. They didn’t affect the workmen because they didn’t take a permanent bath in the rays—as did the dials!”

“But I don’t see how he dug up those bodies without disturbing the dirt over the graves,” Boland said.

“Easy. He dug them up right after the funeral, when the dirt was fresh anyhow, and kept them in ice chests in

his cellar until this week. What I’ve wondered, though, is whether or not he would actually have harmed Miss Connor when he decoyed her here with that phone call right after I left her last night. I don’t think he would have, actually, but we’ll never know. That fall to the floor killed him instantly, last night.

“Say,” Dale added, rising, “I just remembered my car. If I don’t go get it, that idiot at Dodd Corners may sell it.”

“I’ll drive you over,” Patricia said, rising.

“That isn’t necessary,” Rolley Bird interposed. “I’m going that way and I’d be glad to . . . *Ouch!*”

He was still rubbing his bruised shin and glaring at Tom Boland’s look of blank innocence a few minutes later when they stood at the window, watching Dale and Patricia drive away. They were sitting very, very close together in Pat’s coupé as it rounded the distant corner.

“Hell, Tom!” Rolley said, grinning suddenly. “I didn’t know it was anything like that. You should have busted me leg.”

LIVING CADAVERS WAGE A GRIM
ORGIASTIC CAMPAIGN OF MURDER

in

WAKE NOT THE DEAD

A Complete Novelet by JOHN H. KNOX
in the Next Issue of THRILLING MYSTERY

College Humor

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CENTS

THE BEST COMEDY IN AMERICA

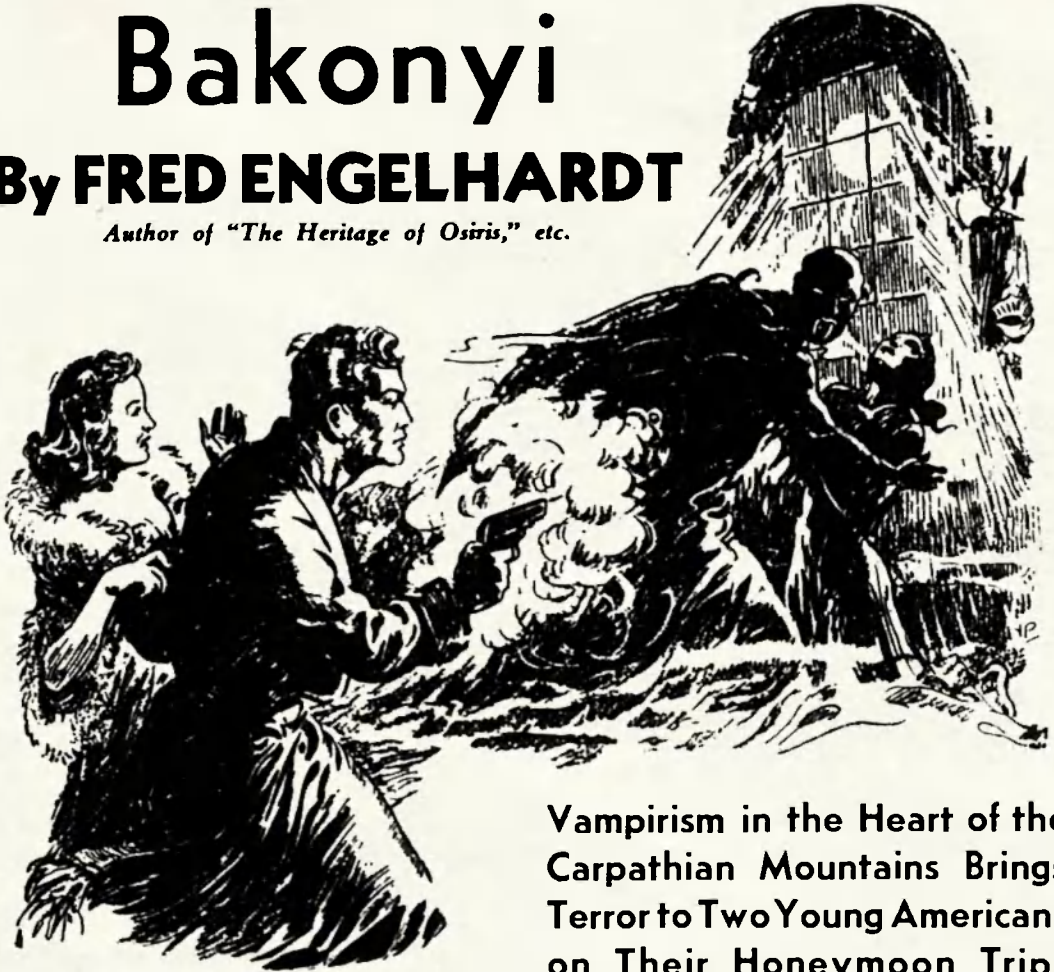
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The Second Count Bakonyi

By FRED ENGELHARDT

Author of "The Heritage of Osiris," etc.



Priscilla's scream was drowned out in the roar of Steve's colt

Vampirism in the Heart of the Carpathian Mountains Brings Terror to Two Young Americans on Their Honeymoon Trip!

PLAYBOY STEVE BACON wrestled his huge, yellow Duesenberg around a sharp curve in the tortuous, climbing Ocna-Sibiului-Orastie road, wormed neatly between a lumbering Carpathian peasant cart and the stone guard wall, and glanced expectantly at his brand-new wife.

But Priscilla Bacon was too interested in the black, overhanging crags, the silent fir-clad slopes and the gleaming Maros River far below them to waste time on pretty compliments. She shivered deliciously.

"Ohhh! What a country! Even in daylight it looks wild and mysterious."

"Glad you like it," Steve said. "Because we are approaching the ancestral halls of the Bakonyis."

"I'm so glad you bought the castle,

Stevie."

She slid her arm through his and looked up at him, taking in the wavy brown hair, the wide-set, reckless eyes, the high cheek bones and square jaw, that seemed to fit in so well with their surroundings.

"It'll be a swell place for a honeymoon," she added.

Steve smiled quietly. If it made Priscilla happy to think he had invested \$50,000 in a moldering, thousand-year-old pile of masonry for a love nest, he wouldn't disillusion her—not just yet.

But if he didn't get that \$50,000, and a lot more, too, out of Castle Bakonyi—well, then Grandfather Arminius Bakonyi was a simple, gullible old fool, and no man who could build a mighty

steel empire out of a second-rate junkyard was quite that.

"Steve," Priscilla asked curiously, "if your grandfather hadn't gone to America, would you be a count now?"

"I suppose so," Steve answered, in some surprise. "But what would I do with a title? I'm an American, and besides the count business isn't so good these days. Let Cousin Almos have it, if it makes him happy. That's my motto."

"I just wondered," Priscilla sighed.

THE big roadster struggled over a hump and sighed as it settled down on a straightaway.

"I'm glad that's over," Steve grunted, shifting into high. "I was beginning to think Transylvanian mountains didn't have any tops. That must be Orastie ahead."

The yellow roadster shot through the white-walled town like a bullet, dogs, geese and brilliantly garbed peasants alike scattering before it. A minute later Steve brought the big car screaming to a stop alongside a green-uniformed gendarme who stood rigid in the roadway, hand raised and the very feathers on his hat quivering with indignation.

"Your passports, please," he snapped at Steve in Hungarian.

"Oh, golly," groaned Priscilla, whose knowledge of the language consisted of two words. "Now we get a ticket."

Steve automatically fished the passports from an inside coat pocket and handed them over. It was, he calculated swiftly, the thirty-seventh time he had gone through this ceremony since they landed in France to follow the Calais-Istanbul highway into Transylvania.

A dozen idle peasants of all ages immediately gathered around the bright roadster. Priscilla leaned over the side to pat an awed little girl on the head.

"Look, Steve," she said. "Isn't she cute. Just like a little doll."

"I'm Vaik Bakonyi," Steve told the gendarme, giving his Hungarian name, "and this is my wife. What's the quickest way from here to Castle Bakonyi?"

"Vaik Bakonyi!" The gendarme's voice was shrill.

Both Steve and Priscilla looked around with astonishment. Every one of the peasants, and the gendarme, too, was backing away from the Deusenberg and crossing himself.

"*Nosferatu!*" breathed a withered old graybeard.

The child looked up curiously at Priscilla and babbled something in Hungarian.

An angry flush swept over Steve's usually smiling face, but with it a chill coursed up his spine. With a sudden gesture he put the car in gear. The gendarme hastily tossed the passports, unopened, into the car and pointed down the street to his left. Steve swung the roadster around, shifted into high and stepped on the accelerator.

"Why, what was the matter, Steve?" Priscilla wanted to know when they were again climbing toward the towering, black crags. "Why did those people look at us like that? And what did that little girl say?"

"Damned superstitious peasants," Steve growled. "Best to get out of there before they get more ideas."

"But what did she say?"

Steve glanced at her and debated a moment. Then: "Oh, the girl. She just wanted to know where our coffins were."

Priscilla's white brow wrinkled and a wondering look came into her violet eyes. Then she looked up again at her husband and shuddered a little.

"But how silly. Why did she ask that?" Then, suddenly, "Steve, I'm scared."

"You needn't be, honey," Steve reassured her. "I think I can explain it, but Almos can do it better. Look, there's our castle—on that peak there."

FAR above them, rising from the green forest and bathed in the dying rays of the sun, loomed the five towering, conical-roofed bastions of Castle Bakonyi, still maintaining their ten-century guard over the passes into the Banat. Priscilla drew in her breath.

"And it's ours, baby," Steve exulted.

"Aren't you glad I bought it when it was up at auction?"

"I'll tell you when I see the bathroom," Priscilla retorted, with an attempt at light-heartedness. "Is Cousin Almos expecting us?"

"I sent him a telegram from Cluj."

The castle, which had disappeared from view as they encircled the steep mountain, now appeared again directly ahead of them. The roadster rattled over a plank drawbridge and Priscilla, glancing down, clutched Steve's brawny arm. A deep gorge separated the peak on which the castle was reared from the mountain proper.

Steve braked to a stop in the flagged, enclosed courtyard and looked around. Costumed servants and retainers, and peasants from the vast Bakonyi estates, were lined up on both sides of the wide-stepped entrance to the main hall. On the steps stood Count Almos Bakonyi, negligently dressed in riding breeches and a worn hunting jacket. He came forward.

"Welcome home, Vaik Bakonyi," he said. The welcome was repeated by the peasants.

Steve quickly introduced Priscilla, and the count, who might have been Steve's elder brother, bowed gallantly and planted a chaste kiss on the girl's extended hand. Steve got out of the car and the two men shook hands.

"Illeana, here, will look after you, Cousin Priscilla," the count said, beckoning to a multi-petticoated young girl, whose pretty, dark features flushed as red as her billowing skirt as she bobbed in a curtsy.

Taking Priscilla's light handbag from the rumble, the girl followed her while the count took Steve's arm and led him into the main hall of the castle proper. A tall, yellow-bearded *chasseur* took the car away.

"Hope you're not disappointed, Vaik," the count said over a welcome whiskey and soda. "You made a good investment, besides keeping the castle in the family."

"Oh, that," Steve laughed. "I'm not worried about that. I've got plenty of money, and this is a swell place for a honeymoon."

The count looked up, and his eye-

brows rose quizzically. Steve did not miss this, and his own eyes narrowed.

"There's just one thing, Almos. I know something of the family history and legends, of course. But I wanted to ask you something." He related the incident at the crossroad in Orastie. "What's the connection between us and the vampire legend?"

"May I come in?" It was Priscilla. She had changed her costume, and her fresh blond loveliness made a charming contrast to the dark, paneled room.

"By all means, do," the count exclaimed. "Vaik, here, was just telling me about your experience with our superstitions. Apparently the villagers thought you were old Vaik, come back again. No wonder the child was curious about your coffins. No self-respecting vampire travels without one, you know."

PRISCILLA forced a laugh. "Yes," she said. "Isn't it morbid?"

"Old Vaik Bakonyi, the second count of our line," Count Almos went on, "died mysteriously during the civil wars that followed the death of King Stephen, Saint Stephen of Hungary, you know, in ten-thirty-eight. The rumor sprang up, and has since become a legend, that he was a vampire. Now the peasants around here believe our whole family is cursed with vampirism."

"And are we?" Steve asked humorously, refilling his glass.

"I think," the count said, "we had better dress for dinner. It will be served in a few minutes. You will excuse us, Cousin Priscilla?"

After dinner, while they were sipping Tokay wine in the vast, many-windowed library overlooking the serrated, wooded crests of the Transylvanian Alps, Priscilla again brought up the subject. She scarcely concealed the fact that the count's previous reticence had piqued her curiosity.

"This is Dracula's country, isn't it?" she asked. "I think I'll hang garlic and wolf's-bane at my windows tonight, just in case."

"There are hundreds of allegedly authenticated cases of vampirism around here," the count answered with

a strangely forced smile. "Charles de Achertz, in his 'Magia Posthuma,' written in seventeen-six, tells of a shepherd of the village of Blow, near Kadam in Bohemia, who visited his neighbors and relatives after death and sucked them dry of blood. His body was exhumed some three months afterward and carried, *screaming*, to a funeral pyre and burned.

"In fact, in the Eighteenth Century, it was part of the duty of garrison commanders to exterminate vampires. Count de Cabrerias has told of exhuming three vampires, dead sixteen to thirty years, and finding them as fresh as the day they died, in *blood-filled coffins*. A merchant named Peter Plojojowitz, of Kisolova, after being buried ten years, screamed when a stake was driven through his heart by order of the commandant at Gradisca."

"But that was a long time ago," Priscilla pointed out. She shivered slightly, but whether from thrill or fear Steve could not tell.

"Two years before the war," the count went on, "I read in a Budapest paper of a fourteen-year-old farm boy who returned as a vampire after death. His father was arrested for exhuming the body and filling the boy's mouth with stones and garlic."

Priscilla rose. "Well, vampires or no vampires, I'm going to bed. Coming, Steve?"

"In a little while," he said. "Run along. You must be tired."

When she had gone, he turned to the count. "By the way, Almos, what do you know of the lost treasure of the Bakonyis?"

"It wasn't much of a treasure and it isn't lost, anymore," the other answered. "Our great-grandfather found it in eighteen-fifty-three in one of the graves in the crypt under the chapel. Mostly gold and silver accumulated during the Turkish wars of the Fifteenth Century. It's really a wonder he ever came across it. The map indicating it was lost a hundred years before. Why?"

STEVE'S face fell for a moment, and the count gave him a queer look. Immediately the younger man

recovered his poise. It was, he decided instantly, a little too soon to tell this strange, unknown cousin that the missing map, a tattered scrap of parchment, was safely locked in one of his bags upstairs. However, he ventured another question.

"Whose grave was it?"

"One of the Renaissance ancestors. I forget just which one."

"Guess I'll turn in, too," Steve said. He rose, stretched and yawned, and hoped Almos had missed that little irrepressible note of satisfaction in his voice.

The count followed him up the broad stairway to his room. As Steve opened the door, he caught a glimpse of Illeana's sultry face. The girl started to speak, then saw the count and her teeth bit down on the words. Her red skirt flashed through the connecting door into Priscilla's room.

"I hope you both have a good night's rest," the count said smoothly. "I've planned a horseback ride through your estates in the morning."

Steve could not help noticing the slight emphasis on the "your" but decided to ignore it.

"If Priscilla can sleep after your stories tonight," he said.

The count smiled coldly and shrugged his shoulders. "You should know this country," he said.

The short hairs on Steve's muscular neck rose as the count closed the door. He listened to the latter's footsteps fading down the hall. It was many years since his grandfather had thrilled him with weird stores of his homeland, but those stories, under the influence of the dark Carpathians, now persisted in intruding into his thoughts.

Shaking off the chill that had started up his spine, he stepped into Priscilla's room.

"What on earth were you two talking about so long?" she demanded petulantly. "Illeana was babbling at me for half an hour, and I wanted you to tell me what she was saying."

"In the morning, sweet," Steve said.

He kissed her and returned to the sitting room.

For several minutes he paced up and down, then he unlocked his suitcase

and took out a stout leather folder. Carefully flattened against the leather was the missing map. Steve studied it for some time. The parchment was torn, but there still remained on it a crude half-circle and numerous, irregularly placed rectangles. One, toward the bottom, was marked with an X. Below this was a painfully printed inscription in ancient characters: "Through Gisela the Bakonyis will find their fortune."

Steve knew enough of the family history to know there was only one Gisela, and she was the second count's consort.

"Renaissance, huh," he muttered to himself. "Somebody's being kidded, and it's not me."

Both Steve and Priscilla were mounted the next morning before the count appeared. He had a goblet of steaming fresh ox-blood in his hand. It made Steve queasy.

"I'm so sorry," he said with all his continental grace. "I'm afraid I sha'n't be able to accompany you, after all. There are several things connected with the estate I must see to. Paul, my *chasseur*, will guide you."

IF anything of the count's dark tales remained in Priscilla's mind, they soon vanished in the bright sunlight. Repeatedly the girl exclaimed over the natural beauties of the mountain country. Steve maintained an unaccustomed silence. He could not get the count's last words of the night before out of his mind. Were they a threat—or a warning?

"Hell," he told himself finally. "I'm letting these old-maid tales get me down. A little more, and I'll be as superstitious as one of my crusading ancestors."

He laughed aloud, slapped Priscilla's mount on the rump and challenged her to a race. The day passed swiftly, with an outdoor lunch on a crag overlooking the deep valley. Until they were again close to the castle Steve managed to forget his forebodings—then every horrible story of the mountains he had heard as a child was brought back to him with full force.

They were passing a small cemetery

and Priscilla called his attention to a score of grim-faced villagers leaning against the wall, watching a youth on a spirited, coal-black stallion thread his way among the graves.

"One of those dead is *undead*," an old man explained in answer to Steve's question. "It visited the village last night. The youth is a virgin, and the stallion has never been put to stud. When they come to its grave, the stallion will rear."

Steve's questing eyes took in the picks and shovels, the axe and stake, that lay at the men's feet. Neither he nor the suddenly white-faced *chasseur*, Paul, needed to be told what was in prospect. The now familiar chill dread, inculcated in him in his childhood, swept over him. He stole a glance at Priscilla. She was sitting her horse, wide-eyed. No need for her to know, he decided. He slapped her mount and urged his own forward and they cantered back to the castle. Steve, glancing over his shoulder, saw that Paul was mumbling and crossing himself.

No man could have been more gracious than the count that evening. He quite entranced Priscilla, but Steve sat stiffly in his chair and only tasted his food. He took, however, glass after glass of aromatic *tuica*, the plum brandy of the neighboring Roumanians. When Priscilla finally wandered out onto a balcony, he seized the opportunity to acquaint the count with the incident at the graveyard.

"I told you these peasants have their superstitions," Count Almos said. "I, too, heard of the visit of *nosferatu*. A visiting gendarme was the victim, I believe."

"I—I can't believe in such things," Steve protested. "Surely, if we investigated, we'd find some simple explanation. We could lay this ghost."

"I'm not interested in discouraging the belief," the count said coldly. "In fact, to be frank with you, I've encouraged it." Steve stared at him in bewilderment. "It's hard for you, Vaik, being brought up in America, to understand my position. But until after the Great War, we Hungarian nobles ruled Transylvania. Since then our

country has been under the domination of the Roumanians. But we, by hook or crook, have kept control. This is how *I've* done it."

THE ride had exhausted Steve, and despite his natural anger and disgust at his cousin's grim words, when he retired he immediately fell into a sound sleep, so sound that he was somewhat astonished, hours later, to find himself clearing the edge of the bed and landing on his feet in one convulsive leap. For a second or two he stood there, quivering, striving to place the thing that had awakened him. Then it came again, the shrill, piercing scream of a woman in mortal terror.

Instinctively Steve had snatched a blunt Colt police special from under the pillow when he first awakened. Tightening his grip on the weapon, he hurried through the sitting room into Priscilla's bedroom. She was sitting bolt upright, her eyes wide with terror.

"What is it! Oh, Steve!"

"You all right?" Steve snapped.

Then, a quick look satisfying him, he stepped to the door into the hall. There was a sharp squeal from Priscilla and two soft arms whipped around him.

"Wait for me! Please!"

Burning to investigate the cries which had now ceased, but unwilling to leave Priscilla unprotected in this castle of nameless horrors, Steve fidgeted in the doorway while she fumbled with a negligee and slippers. His own bare feet recoiled from the cold stone when they finally stepped into the hall. Priscilla had caught up a candle and by its light they saw that the hall was empty.

"It seemed to come from this direction," Steve said. His voice was only a whisper, but the stone walls caught it and echoed and re-echoed it. With Priscilla gripping his arm, they started along the dark, cold corridor. Suddenly, as they rounded a corner, Priscilla screamed.

"There, Steve! By the window!"

Steve followed her finger—and the blood ran cold in his veins. Desperately he fought to overcome the cold paralysis that held him frozen, while his eyes followed a tall, batlike form

along the hall. At the window, the creature turned and the moonlight illuminated a dead white face, black, burning eyes, blood-red, half-opened lips, and two long, white fangs.

Priscilla's scream was drowned out in the roar of the Colt, as Steve threw slug after slug at the grinning creature. Then *it* sprang out the window. Shaking off his wife's clutching hand, Steve raced to the window and looked out. The creature had disappeared into thin air.

Steve returned and stopped at an open door. Priscilla moved forward to join him, but his outstretched arm barred her way. The same moonlight that had shone on *its* face was shining on the face of the maid Illeana, and it was a face no less horrible.

The girl's eyes were wide open and rolled up, until only the whites showed. There was no blush now in those tanned cheeks. They were white with the whiteness of death. Plain on her soft, bared throat were two tiny punctures.

All the training Western civilization could give and his own sober common sense could not beat down the nameless fear in Steve's mind. Clouding his brain were the accumulated superstitions of his countless mountain ancestors, waxing stronger by the minute in the gloomy Castle Bakonyi, with its centuries-old aura of horror.

FOOTSTEPS sounded on the stone flagging of the corridor. Steve turned and was somewhat relieved to see Count Almos approaching. He stood back as the count entered the room and bent over the dead girl. A brief inspection, then the count stepped to the open window and blew two short blasts on a small silver whistle he wore suspended around his neck. With a start Steve realized that this was the first sound to break the unholy silence of the castle since the last tortured scream was torn from Illeana's throat, with the exception of the Colt.

"We're going," he told the count. He had to wet his lips before he could get the words out. "As soon as it's light enough to see, Priscilla and I are getting out of here. You can have the

damned castle."

A shadow fell across them before the count could answer. It was the *chasseur*, Paul. A strangled cry burst from his tight lips when he saw the dead girl. The similarity of their features suddenly struck Steve—father and daughter.

"You will help me carry the body to the south ramparts," the count told Paul coldly. "It's a long drop from there, and when the body is discovered at the bottom of the gorge in the morning, no one will notice those marks on her throat. Afterward, you know what we must do. But first kill a cock and smear some blood on her."

Steve forced Priscilla back along the passage and into their room. A glance at his white, strained features stopped the questions trembling on her lips. She sat quietly in a chair while Steve dressed and reloaded the Colt. A dull rumbling startled them both. Steve went to the window and looked out. The sky in the north was black, except when it was split by flashes of lightning. A few minutes later the first drops of rain fell.

Nervously Steve paced the floor. He picked up a book and tried to read. It was an Hungarian edition of the "Magia Posthumia" mentioned by the count. He flung the book into a corner. Eventually the eastern sky lightened, but the storm did not die away. If anything, it increased in violence.

"We'll never get away from here today," he growled to Priscilla. "A chamois couldn't get down that slippery, dirt mountain road in this rain."

A fat maid-servant, trembling in every limb, brought them breakfast. Steve was surprised to find himself hungry.

"The count and Paul are burying the little Illeana in the crypt," the maid babbled. "They said she committed suicide by jumping from the Archer's Bastion. So the priest wouldn't come from the village."

Fifteen minutes later Steve, armed with a flashlight, was gingerly descending the broad, winding steps that led from the chapel down into the bowels of the mountain, to the natural crypt where generations of Bakonyis

and their retainers lay buried. A curious thumping noise assailed his ears.

A flickering light marked the bottom of the stairs. The *thump, thump* was louder now, and measured. Every instinct told Steve to go back, but the count's half-voiced warnings were too great a lure. He had to learn the truth.

THE young American's heart leaped into his throat. All the Western veneer peeled from him, and he crouched on the stone step, eyes popping with cold fear, like any Transylvanian peasant. In the dim, wavering light of two half-gutted candles stood Count Bakonyi, stripped to his shirt and swinging a heavy sledge. Opposite him crouched the *chasseur*, his astrakan cap pushed back and his blond beard flecked with saliva.

Even as Steve watched, the sledge came down again and the stake sank another few inches into a fresh grave.

"I don't believe it," Steve told himself viciously. "It can't be so! Not an educated man like Almos!"

Suddenly the crypt was torn by an unearthly cry. Paul averted his head while the count redoubled his blows. The stake sank from sight. Steve ran an unsteady hand over his unshaven face. It was dripping cold sweat. He turned and fled, stumbling, up the stone steps, to the welcome light of day. A few minutes later the count and Paul followed. The count laid a sympathetic hand on the younger man's shoulder. Paul stumbled away across the flagged courtyard.

"I had to do it, Baik," the count said hoarsely. "It had to be done. Or she, too, would have returned. A vampire's victim becomes herself a vampire."

"But that scream," Steve rasped. "It was horrible."

"Yes," the count nodded, "and we cut off her head before we buried her!"

Steve returned to his room in a daze and meekly accepted a drink Priscilla poured for him. She was white-faced but calm.

"Did they . . . did you . . ." she began.

"Illeana's been buried," he snapped. His overwrought nerves were begin-

ning to give way. He had to find something to take his mind off the sight he had just witnessed.

"One of the servants must be a crook," Priscilla said, bustling around the room. "I was packing and noticed that the lock was broken on your trunk. You'd better see what's missing."

Steve crossed the room in one bound and flung open the trunk. His fingers probed through the layers of clothing. *The parchment was gone.*

"So that's it," he gritted. "So that's why Almos couldn't go with us yesterday."

He ran down the stairs and through the main hall. A glance into the big library showed him Almos bent over an ancient quarto volume. The *click, click* of high heels told him Priscilla was following him. He drew her aside.

"I've got something to do," he whispered quickly. "You stay here and watch Almos. If he should go to the chapel, go with him and make a lot of noise."

Priscilla nodded, even though she did not understand. Steve did not bother to explain, but hurried outside. There he met Paul. The man was very drunk and was supporting himself by bracing one hand against the wall as he moved along through the rain. A red-capped bottle of some white liquor protruded from his jacket pocket.

Steve still had his flashlight, and his second trip to the underground crypt took him only a few seconds. At the foot of the stairs he spied the tools the count and Paul had used to bury the girl. He paused only long enough to get his bearings, then flung the tools over his shoulder and strode towards the back of the cavern.

"Good thing I memorized that map," he gritted to himself. "A few minutes now will tell the story."

IT WAS gloomy in the deep recesses of the crypt, but Steve went unhesitatingly to a low, white stone sarcophagus, which had sunk during the centuries deep into the soft earth flooring. He cast his light over the lid. If there ever was an inscription on the

tomb, time had erased it. But he knew he had the right one.

There were fresh marks along the underside of the lid, and this convinced him. Inserting the end of a crowbar under the lid, he heaved and forced the stone cover aside. Catching up his light, he flashed it inside. The sarcophagus was empty, but the stone bottom had an iron ring set in one end. Steve shoved the lid completely off, then seized the ring and pulled.

Slowly, at first, but with increasing ease, the flat stone came up until it rested against the foot of the coffin. Again Steve flashed his light inside. A narrow flight of steps, hewn out of living rock, led downward. He cocked an ear toward the chapel stairs, but heard nothing. Without further ado, he started down.

The steps ended in a rough, man-made tunnel. Steve flashed his light around. The walls were of a peculiar hue.

"Greenstone trachyte," he muttered to himself, recalling his college geology. "There should be—ah, here it is."

There was a grim smile of satisfaction on his face as his finger traced out a distinct greenish vein running slantwise across the face of the rock.

Priscilla met him at the door when he returned.

"Almos hasn't left the library," she told him. "Paul went in half an hour ago. He was awfully drunk. They had a terrible argument, but I couldn't tell what they were saying."

They did not see the count again until evening, when he knocked on their door.

"I'm afraid we'll have to forage for ourselves," he said wearily. "The servants have all deserted. Even Paul has left me."

They opened cans in the big kitchen and the count carved a steak for Priscilla, who took over the cooking. Several times Steve caught the count looking quizzically at him. He stole a look in a mirror. There was rust on his left shoulder. Steve smiled. It didn't matter.

"Paul was certainly drunk today," Steve remarked casually. "But why on earth does he drink *vodka*, of all

liquors. That's a Russian beverage."

"That's easy to explain," the count said. "We were both captured during the war and spent two years together in a Russian military prison. Vodka is all there was to drink, and Paul acquired a taste for it."

Steve was expecting the count to open the conversation when they returned to the library, but when the latter did, he drove all thoughts of the stolen parchment from the younger man's mind.

"I've finally located the grave of Count Vaik," he said, bluntly. "I've been searching for it for years. If you will come with me, we will settle this matter for once and for all."

"You mean whether there *is* a vampire?"

The count scowled a moment, then recovered himself.

"You will see for yourself, I hope. Will you come?" he asked.

Steve glanced at Priscilla.

"She'll be safe," the count said. "*Until midnight.*"

FOR the third time that day Steve descended into the underground crypt, but this was a trip that was really horrible in its potentialities—if the count's guarded hints were to be taken literally.

Steve again picked up the tools. The count was burdened with a light, the heavy quarto volume and an axe. Checking against the ancient volume, the count led the way unerringly to a back corner of the crypt, opposite the tomb of Gisela. He stopped before a similar crude sarcophagus.

"This is it," he said quietly. "There was nothing to mark it, except a reference in this old book."

Taking off the crowbar, he quickly pried off the lid and let it slip over the side with a grating sound. It thudded against the soft dirt. Holding up the lantern, the count let its rays fall into the coffin. Steve, keeping one eye on the count, flashed a look inside—and staggered back with a cry, all his suspicions and doubts drowned under a flood of sheer horror.

The coffin was nearly full of fresh blood, and immersed in it was the

grinning, open-eyed corpse of old Count Vaik Bakonyi.

Steve's insides were churning and he fought to keep from being sick. He turned and started staggering through the blackness, blindly seeking the open air. The count caught him by the arm and ruthlessly spun him around.

"You can't go now," the count hissed. "We've got work to do."

White-lipped himself, and with every muscle in his face taut with the strain, the count shoved the crowbar into that frightful pool and with one mighty heave tumbled the corpse out onto the ground. He held out his hand, and Steve automatically passed him the axe.

The broad blade flashed upward in the yellow rays of the lantern. Helplessly the younger man followed the whistling steel. A terrible cry froze his blood and an agonizing weakness came over him. He could swear the cry came from the throat of that thousand-year-old corpse. Then the blade bit into solid flesh and the cry abruptly ended. The severed head rolled across the hard-packed earth and nestled against Steve's foot. Instantly the invisible shackles fell from him and he recoiled.

"You carry the head and lantern," the count panted. "I can handle the body. We still have to burn him, you understand."

Obediently, still a slave to the insidious horror of the crypt, Steve leaned over and started to pick up the grisly object. Then, suddenly, he stiffened and sniffed. Another odor than the sickening, sweetish smell of fresh blood assailed him. A sharper, more pungent odor. He turned slowly and looked at the count, loathing and growing intelligence reflecting in his eyes.

For perhaps five seconds the two men glared at each other across the red, swirling pool. Then the count, with a strangled cry, straightened and hurled the truncated corpse over the coffin into the younger man's face.

Steve staggered under the shock, but recovered in time to meet the count as the latter rushed around the coffin. A swinging, right-hand blow made

Steve's head sing, but he kept his fists up and beat off the other's frenzied attack. Then, his head clearing, he bored in. The count, fifteen years older and ten pounds lighter, was no match for the young American. Half a dozen blows and he was down and out.

Priscilla gasped when Steve, splashed with gore from the coffin, staggered into the library and flung the count, his arms bound with his own belt, into a chair.

"There's the vampire," he gritted. "Our loving cousin, Álmos! I thought as much when I discovered the old mine this afternoon and found he had been there before me, guided by my map."

"But—"

"The vampire legend made it easy for him to carry out his masquerade. A black cloak, white face powder, lipstick and these"—Steve held out two slender white objects—"and there's your vampire. They're wolf fangs, hollowed out and fitted with sharp steel tubes. Clamped on his own teeth, they enabled him to pierce a victim's throat and suck out the blood. He's a blood drinker, anyway.

"Originally he just wanted to keep the peasants in line. But he couldn't resist trying his tricks on us. After all, I own the castle and the gold mine under it. That's the Bakonyi fortune. This mountain is shot through and through with veins of auric telluride,

gold ore forty percent pure or better."

"Steve! Stop him! He's going to jump!"

STEVE spun around, but it was too late. The count was standing on the broad sill of one of the tall, open windows. He flashed the couple a last, vicious look and disappeared into the darkness. Steve leaned out the window and looked down.

"My God," he breathed. "It's a three-hundred-foot drop."

"But why," Priscilla asked a few minutes later, "why did he want to kill us? We never harmed him."

"He didn't. He didn't dare. There would be an investigation. He just wanted to scare us away, and keep us away. He killed Illeana to do that, but the storm kept us from leaving—and then I discovered the mine. He must have put blanks in my revolver when he stole the map.

"Then he killed Paul, probably because Paul became suspicious. And he needed Paul's body for the last act of his horrible drama. Shaven, and with the hair dyed, it passed easily in that light and in that terrible tub of blood for old Vaik. He had me convinced there."

"But how—"

"He forgot one little thing—Paul's breath. Vodka, especially cheap vodka, has an ungodly smell. That head had a breath you could hang your hat on."

GRIM HORROR STALKS
HAITI, LAND OF LEGEND
AND MYSTERY, IN
**BLACK
DOOM**



A Complete Novelet by DAVID V. REED

Coming in the Next Issue

DEATH FROM BEYOND

By
JOE ARCHIBALD

Author of "The Devil's Heritage," etc.

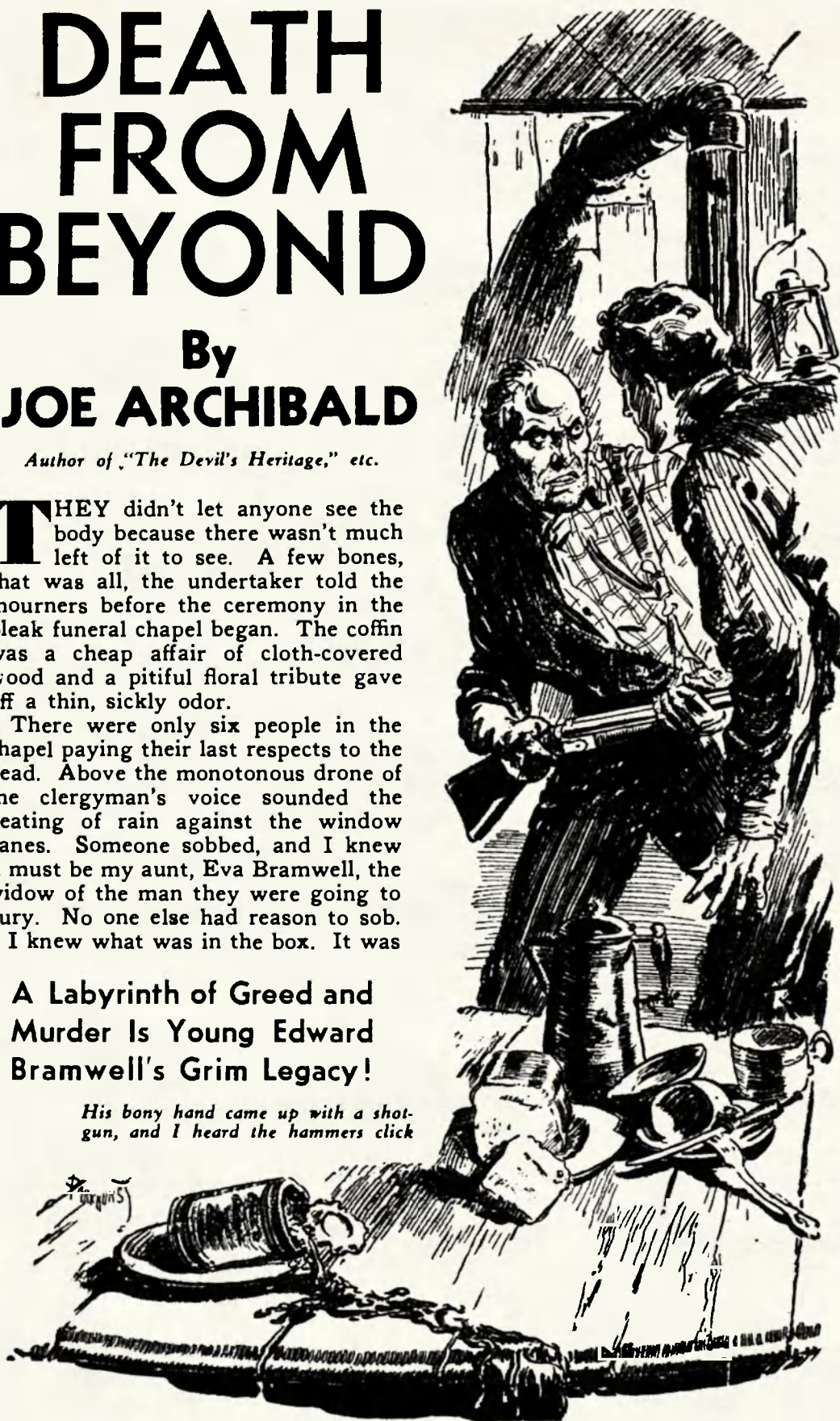
THEY didn't let anyone see the body because there wasn't much left of it to see. A few bones, that was all, the undertaker told the mourners before the ceremony in the bleak funeral chapel began. The coffin was a cheap affair of cloth-covered wood and a pitiful floral tribute gave off a thin, sickly odor.

There were only six people in the chapel paying their last respects to the dead. Above the monotonous drone of the clergyman's voice sounded the beating of rain against the window panes. Someone sobbed, and I knew it must be my aunt, Eva Bramwell, the widow of the man they were going to bury. No one else had reason to sob.

I knew what was in the box. It was

**A Labyrinth of Greed and
Murder Is Young Edward
Bramwell's Grim Legacy!**

His bony hand came up with a shot-gun, and I heard the hammers click



I who had gone to the upstate city to identify it. Remains of a man found in a half-burnt shack near the railroad yards. A blackened gold watch with a name engraved on the back. A skull with snags of decayed teeth. A man had handled the skull as if it were but a turnip, and I recalled with a shudder the hollow rattling sound that had come from inside it.

The mortician had got out the thing that I now carried in my pocket. Why I carried it I did not know. It was a thirty-eight caliber bullet. "Got into a drunken brawl, no doubt," had been the consensus of opinion. "Was murdered or killed himself. Who knows?"

In that cold matter-of-fact style the authorities had dismissed the death of my Uncle John. A derelict had died and the world was better off without him. My recollections of him were faint. He had simply left his wife, the woman who brought me up. A train accident had robbed me of my parents when I was very young. Only one of the three Bramwell men now remained alive—my father's brother, Henry.

The minister finished his ritual and silence gripped the chapel. I helped my aunt to rise and gave her my arm. A hearse was waiting at the curb and one hired car stood behind it. After the committal services at the grave in a rain-swept burial ground, we drove back to the house where I had grown up.

"HENRY didn't come," my aunt said in a weary, tearless voice. "He hated your Uncle John. He won't like what we did for him, Edwin."

"It was the decent thing to do," I replied. "He was your husband, my own flesh and blood. Murdered—perhaps."

I fingered the bullet in my pocket, my mind traveling on to picture Uncle Henry whom I had seen on one of his infrequent visits to see my aunt. I remembered him as a tall, gaunt man with a long, thin face in which the under structure of bone stood out prominently. The Bramwells were all like that.

So lost in thought was I that I

started when my aunt suddenly spoke. "Strange we forgot—both of us."

"Forgot what?" I queried in a tired voice. The gloom of my experience was still upon me and the funeral was not yet two hours over.

"Today is your birthday, Edwin. I have something to give you—a legacy it is," my aunt said, leaving the room. "Wait here."

I heard the stairs creak under her heavy step, the muffled sound of her footsteps over my head. She was gone a long time. When she returned, she was carrying a large, bulky brown envelope that was sealed in many places with wax. She handed it to me, and I asked her what it was.

"I was with your father before he died," she explained. "Uncle Henry was there, too, if I remember correctly. Your father simply told me that this was all he had to leave to you, but that if you followed in his steps and became a writer, Edwin, it would be worth more than a small fortune to you. You were barely four years old then. He bade me guard this package with my life and not to let it fall into evil hands. He said something about justice having to wait. I don't know what on earth he could have meant by that. He died before I could find out."

A strange presence seemed to pervade the room as I turned the envelope holding my legacy over and over in my hands. I knew it was not money. It looked like any one of those bulky envelopes that had been coming back to me from the publishers with monotonous and heart-breaking regularity. My aunt looked at me curiously, but I felt that I must be alone when I opened it so I went upstairs to my room.

There I opened the envelope, my heart pounding against my ribs. I took out a manuscript the pages of which were seared at the corners and scribbled over with pencil. When I scanned the first few of them, I saw that the writer had apparently been almost illiterate. I sat down slowly, eyes riveted on the title page. The manuscript began —

I will be dead when this is published and my only regret is that I won't be able to see

three other devvils squirm when the hand of the law reeches out to grab them. I wonder if they hav sufferd like me—I wont ever no—I dont think they did them rats. Its abowt the Fletcher baby that I want to tell abowt. I helpt steel him from his home and kill him. 2 innersent men have been hung for that crime God help me. I see them swingin when I look out the winder heer—swingin from a gallers that aint there. I see theer buggin eyes turn towards me and oncet one of them poked a finger at me. I think I am goin crazy but befor I do I want to rite all this down. They say nobody bleeves what a madman rites but I want the world to bleeve what I rite. I went to see a doc and he says I am in my rite mind alrite. I had to laff—

I COULD scarcely believe what I was reading on those pages. Interest in the Fletcher case had never died. For the past three years I had been reading up on the case until all the lurid details were stamped indelibly on my mind. Magazines reviewed the case every so often. It had been the subject of violent discussions and controversies for nearly twenty-one years.

Most people who remembered the case believed that it had never been satisfactorily closed. There was a fortune waiting to be dropped into the hands of the person who could bare the real truth of the world-famous case. How my father had obtained the confession I didn't know. I only knew at this moment that it was in my hands, and it had the feel of authenticity.

Feverishly I read on. Names were mentioned there before my wide staring eyes, names that had been written into the history of the case. Andrew Burnham! I had to look twice to be sure my eyes had not tricked me. I knew that he was a senator now. And Harvey Stone, the man who had cried all during the trial. The Fletchers' butler. A pitiful figure of a man, the papers said. Other names leaped out of the scrawled pages as I read on, and three hours later, when I came to the end, I knew a secret that only three other people in the world knew. Three who would never tell lest they find their feet kicking in mid-air, feel the bite of a rope against their necks.

I knew now what my father had meant when he said to my aunt: "If these papers should fall into the wrong

hands—justice will have to wait—" He had wanted his son, Edwin Bramwell, to reap the golden harvest from such a stunning exposure that he had not lived to gather for himself.

I walked downstairs, and my aunt said when she looked at me: "You look ill, Edwin."

"I guess I am a little," I admitted in a breathless voice. "Was someone here while I was upstairs, Aunt Eva?"

She looked at me strangely. "No, Edwin. Why do you think—"

"Oh, I don't know. I was sure I felt a presence." I sat down in a chair. "That farm out there—Uncle Henry's, I mean. My mother left it to him, didn't she? I wonder would he mind—I must have a really quiet place like that."

Aunt Eva looked skeptical. "I don't know, Edwin. Henry is a strange man. He's lived alone so long now—and it was old when your folks lived there. I was in a frenzy to get away the last time I saw it. But if that is what you want—" She shrugged.

"Yes. Something seems to be drawing me there. I don't know what. I have work to do—important work. More important than anyone could ever imagine. Wrong hands—I see what he meant. A man could bleed them dry—"

"What're you talking about, Edwin?"

"Huh? Oh, I forgot myself," I laughed jerkily, then added, "I'll pack my things tonight. You are sure that no one knew what was in that envelope besides my father?"

Aunt Eva thought awhile. Then she shook her head. "Not now. I'm sure—not now."

I trembled all over at the thought that my name would soon be printed in big letters in newspapers and magazines from coast to coast. I was destined to be the man who would smash the most sensational kidnaping case in the history of the nation.

I started on my journey the next day, my precious legacy hidden in my luggage where I was sure it would be safe. It was night when I reached the Henry Bramwell valley. The house I came to at the end of a long tiresome trip was a desolate abode indeed.

A SINGLE light from a window cut through the dusk as I covered the last hundred yards of road. The dooryard was choked with weeds and an old wellhouse stood in the middle of it, the blackened framework leaning drunkenly. There were wheel tracks in the ground. I stopped and looked about me and I saw the back end of an old car protruding from a shed door.

I started toward the back door, making as much noise as I could. A door slammed. The sound seemed to come from the other end of the house, but before the weird echo had died, the door directly in front of me swung open and a tall, gaunt man peered out at me. A chill went through me and my tongue clove to the roof of my mouth when my uncle's hollow voice shattered the stillness.

"Who are you? What you want?"

I walked into the area of light and said with an effort: "I am your nephew, Uncle Henry. I thought I—I'd come and—"

"Nephew?" Silence held then for a long moment. "Oh—Sarah's boy, Edwin, huh? You've come here? Come in, then."

I looked at my uncle as I passed through the door. His eyes were sunken deep into his skull, but the feverish light in them drained a lot of the strength out of my legs. I wished I had not come even before the door shut behind me. Slowly I turned, my bag still gripped in my hand.

"You stare at me like you was afraid, boy!" Uncle Henry said. "Drop your bag and set down. You et?"

I shook my head and put my bag near the old-fashioned table, sat down in a rickety chair. The old man stared silently at me, dug at his stubbled chin with a horny nail. He seemed to be trying to fathom my thoughts, and I caught a wariness about him that fed the fear which had dogged me all the way across the little valley.

"I came here to work," I said to break the uncomfortable silence. "It's quiet and I didn't think you'd mind, Uncle Henry. I—"

The old man laughed crookedly. "Thought you was after my money.

Ain't got much. Say, you buried John up in the fam'ly plot, didn't you? Fools! The wuthless, no-good left Eva t'shift fer herself."

He shrugged, went over to a pail on the sink and dipped water out of it with a dipper. He gulped it down, wiped his mouth on his sleeve. He looked not unlike Uncle John, whose picture I had seen often on the dresser in my aunt's room. His head was nearly bald. His nose was long and thin and hooked.

"Quiet here all right," he went on. "'Ceptin' for—"

I heard the sound myself then and stitffened in my chair. My eyes turned toward the ceiling. Weird scuffling noises up there made my blood run cold.

"Rats! I killed hundreds of 'em. They come up from the swamp." The gaunt old man grinned, baring decayed yellow teeth.

I shuddered. The slapping of loose-slatted blinds and the creak and groan of timber rocked by blasts of the ever-rising wind filled the bleak house. But rats were earthly things. The sounds swirling about me were natural sounds. Nevertheless, a terrible feeling assailed me, one that I could not understand. It seemed to tell me that someone was in the house, someone who did not belong there. I looked at Uncle Henry, his deep-set eyes having drawn my gaze.

"Got your work all planned out, Edwin?"

"I—yes, in a way," I said.

"Kinda thought you'd be a writer, too, somehow. Figgered you'd some day come here to where your father used to work. Nat'chel you should, ain't it? Nobody'll bother you—I'll see to that. Not 'til you're finished, Edwin."

"Thanks. I'll try and be some help around, too. I—why what's the trouble, Uncle Henry?"

THE old man's face had blanched a little, and he lay down on a shabby, begrimed couch. "Bring me some water, Edwin. Don't know why these spells come over me. Ain't been feelin' right."

I scooped water out of the bucket on

the sink and he drank it avidly. Sweat oozed out of his forehead and his breathing was labored.

"Maybe I could get a doctor," I suggested anxiously. "I see you have a car out there."

My uncle's eyes became stormy, and he cursed at me unreasonably. "You won't do nothin' of the sort, you hear, Edwin? Never had one of them critters, an' don't intend to. Don't you ever bring one!"

I went over near the stove and sat down. I could not keep my hands from trembling. I swung my eyes toward the window once and thought I saw a face pressed against the dirty pane. The scampering of vermin sounded in the wall behind me and the wind outside took on a wailing sound. Horror pawed at me and I fought to shake it off. There was no reason, no tangible reason for my being afraid. But why that aura of dread expectancy that hung in the fetid air of the room? My eyes began to get heavy and I was glad when weariness numbed a lot of my inexplicable terror.

Uncle Henry's voice seemed to come from a long distance. "Better go to bed, Edwin. Take the lamp. First door to your right—where your father worked."

I nodded, got up and went to the old iron sink where the pail of cool well water stood. I took a dipper of it and drank thirstily for my throat felt terribly dry. Then I went upstairs.

A feeling of revulsion swept over me as I stared at the tumbled bed in the room I was to use. It seemed as though the place had not been touched since my father left it. There was a table in one corner of the room and a typewriter, its cover whitened with dust, stood upon it. Papers littered the floor under a layer of dust.

Again I felt a presence that stirred my blood. My father? It could not be. There was a sinister emanation flowing through the room. My father had left nothing but kindly recollections behind him.

For some time I was busy attempting to bring a semblance of order out of the chaos in that room before I became conscious of a feeling of nausea. It was

purely physical, I was sure of that, despite the revulsion I had felt for my task. I tried to conquer it but had to lie down on the bed. Weakly I drew the patchwork quilt up over me and lay still.

After awhile the sickness passed and I drifted into sleep. Once I woke, not sure whether the measured thudding I heard had been a part of my dream or was a reality. As it continued out there in the dark I lay listening. It might be a mile away, I thought as I found myself unable to identify it. Sounds carry far in the stillness of the night, especially in a mountainous country. I dropped off to sleep again and, when I next opened my eyes, it was morning.

For days I worked on the manuscript that was my father's gift to me. The revelations that poured out of those scribbled pages again shocked me beyond expression.

—Burnham planned it. He hated Fletcher because Fletcher got the woman he wanted. He got Harvey Stone the butler to help him for ten thousand and it was Stone that handed the kid out thru the winder to me that night. Me, Joe Dawson, you no I was the guy that drove for Fletcher and it was me that said at the trial I wood surch the hole world for the skunks that took the kid. I took the money—the 75 thousan to the kidnapers to. I got most of it—I wish it was in hell. I said I reckernized the kidnapers as 2 guys I seen hangin around the house and I give them descriphuns of the 2 that got convicted and hung. Louie Gruzzi and Nate Scholl they had a record. We planted some marked ransom money on them and then put the cops wise to pick them up.

I know where the kid's clothes are hid under a rock in the park next to that statue of Columbus. I giss that proves I aint lyin. You ask Burnham about the ransom note because I rote it for him. I can prove that by—

ABSORBED in my work, I wrote for hours on end and as the typewritten sheets piled up, I felt that strange, invisible menace getting closer to me. The nights were what I dreaded. I slept with the manuscripts under my pillow and a chair braced against the door even though it was bolted. The horror that had crept into me the first day I had entered my uncle's house kept thickening inside me.

I kept hearing those thudding sounds

out there in the night. And at the end of each day—I worked seventeen—I thought Uncle Henry looked as if something were eating at his vitality, too. There were times when I stopped working and got up to walk the floor.

One night as I finished nine hours of work on the growing story, I heard voices below me. I listened, mouth half-open, the blood in my veins pounding at the rush of anger in the voice that sounded like my uncle's. Someone had come to the house. Who? I hurried downstairs, went out into the kitchen and saw a small dark man standing in the middle of the room. But he was smiling.

"No, I have no use for a man here," Uncle Henry said. "Can't pay you. Maybe some other time when things get—"

"I see," grinned the stranger, "but I come a long way, Bramwell. If I could have something to eat—"

My scalp crawled as I watched this scene. There was something unnatural about it—like everything else in that desolate house. Uncle Henry put a plate on the table, pointed to a chair. The visitor took off his coat, walked across the room and hung it on a hook behind the stove. He looked at me queerly as he returned to the table. I felt it stronger then—that horror which had become almost a part of me. I glanced at my uncle. His face was in the half-light, but I could have sworn he was fighting a terrible rage.

I watched the stranger eat for several seconds. His eyes were beady and they darted aimlessly around the kitchen as he wolfed the coarse food my uncle had given him. I let my eyes stray toward the coat he had hung in the dark corner behind the stove. How had he known the rack was there?

I went back upstairs. Half an hour later I heard a door slam. I looked out of the window and saw the short man trudging towards the woods. He stopped once and looked back. Maybe it was the wind that laughed, not he.

It must have been around midnight when I sat up straight in bed listening to my uncle's tread as his heavy boots bit into the gravel crossing the yard. I went to the window and looked out.

Carrying heavy tools and a lantern, Uncle Henry disappeared into the woods as I watched. Soon I heard the dull thumping sounds with which I was growing familiar coming out of the darkness.

I drew my clothes on again and went downstairs and out of the house. I approached a clump of bushes and stopped suddenly. Through a gap in the twisted, spiny branches I saw my uncle standing beside a partially dug grave. He heard me when I made a slight move and he called out hoarsely: "Who's there?"

I walked out into the open. "It's me—Edwin. What are you doing, Uncle Henry?"

The old man laughed quietly. "Diggin' a grave, boy," he replied. "I've got to have a place, you know. I ain't goin' to be buried up there in the same plot with Brother John. No, sir!"

He went back to work, and the sound of the pick biting into stone and hard-packed earth ran hollowly through the awesome stillness. The trickling of water led me toward a big overhanging rock that was almost covered with slimy green moss. The cool waters of a spring gleamed in a shard of moonlight that cut through the branches of a giant oak and I scooped the cooling liquid up in my cupped hands and drank. Then I walked slowly back toward the old house, horror robbing me of most of my feeling.

THE next morning a haggard face stared back at me as I looked into the mirror over an old washstand in my room. When I got downstairs, my uncle was just leaving the house. He had an axe in his hand and my eyes were drawn to its steel blade.

"Look kinda sick, Edwin," he said to me. "Didn't sleep much, eh?" I shook my head and he said: "How you comin' along with your writin'?"

"Nearly done," I was glad to tell him. "Another day or two."

"Nearly done, eh?" His voice seemed a little regretful.

I breathed easier when the old man had gone. From the window I watched him until the mists writhing near the woods swallowed him up. The sky was

overcast and a thin drizzle of rain was falling. I had to keep the lamp lit in the kitchen as I munched a cheerless breakfast.

When I finished, the urge to prowl through that ancient house was stronger than my common sense. . . . Flesh crawling, I climbed the creaking stairs, but I did not go to my room. Instead, I entered Henry Brammell's room. A drunken old wooden bedstead with yellowed sheets and dirty blankets met my eye. There was an antique rocking chair and a dresser in the room. I closed the door behind me with a hand that was shaking and clammy with sweat.

I went to the dresser, poked at the clutter piled upon it. A revolver that was beginning to rust lay there. It was fully loaded and there was a smell of oil rising from it. I went to a closet and looked inside. A discarded suit hung there, and I fingered it before hurrying from the room. Horrible thoughts that I could not isolate milled inside my head and robbed me of the desire to work that day. I weighed the advisability of packing hurriedly and leaving the terrible place behind. I knew it was the thing I should do but an uncanny fascination held me there as if it had me fettered.

Uncle Henry did not come in until after dark. His eyes seemed set even deeper in his head. I did not speak, but watched him go to the bucket of water and drink. A grating sound seeped out of the broken plastered wall and he flung the dipper aside and went across the room to bang his fist against that wall. The gnawing stopped. He swung toward me, his face twisted with rage.

"Damn devils," he swore. "Place is alive with 'em. Drive a man—" He lapsed into incoherent muttering.

Hours later I was shocked out of my sleep by the echo of a shot pulsating through the gloomy house. I jumped out of bed, ran down the hallway that had become as silent as a tomb, and entered my uncle's room. He stood there in loose-hanging trousers and undershirt, barefooted, staring down at something on the floor. The weapon was still in his hand. I saw the thing

there, a rat almost as big as a cat. Its blood spattered the worn carpet. I felt nausea claw at my stomach. The gaunt old man laughed when he looked at me.

"I should think you'd use arsenic to kill those things." I quavered. "Not—"

"Poison? Ain't got none and anyhow 'twouldn't kill these devils. Go back to bed, Edwin!"

I went back to bed but could not sleep. A slight burning sensation was in my throat that I could not ignore. Then a sudden pain knifed through my abdomen and brought the sweat out on me in a cold wave of nausea. Legs drawn up, I lay wide awake until the faint gray light announced the coming of dawn. Daylight made me feel better and I got up, reluctant to lie still another minute.

While I was donning my clothes, thankful that I would go through only a couple more such nights, my eyes traveled over the floor and I saw something lying on the bare stretch near the wall. I knelt down to pick it up and saw that it was a piece of yellow cheese. White powder dusted my fingers as the stuff broke under pressure. I felt fear then, a fear that took the strength out of my limbs. The seed of a horrible suspicion was spawning in my brain. I knew what I would do that day.

UNCLE HENRY looked at me strangely as we ate breakfast. "You ain't been workin'," he chided me almost angrily. "You won't never get nothin' done unless you—"

"I'll finish my work in good time," I snapped at him. "Anyhow, what does it matter to you?"

"Place is gettin' you, ain't it, Edwin?" he interrupted me, and I felt ashamed of my weakness.

I wanted to ask him about a man but could not. We did not speak to each other during the rest of the meal, and afterward my uncle took his axe and went out to the woods. When he had gone, I went upstairs and hid my manuscript where I knew no one would find it unless they tore the very house down.

Then I ventured into my uncle's room again and looked for the gun that I had seen on his cluttered dresser. There it was. I picked it up and exam-

ined it quickly. Two cartridges had been fired. I had heard but one shot in the night!

I started for Granby an hour later. All the way a voice inside of me kept telling me not to go back. A man possessed of normal sense, I reasoned, would keep on going until the old car I had borrowed from my uncle's shed fell to pieces. But I knew that something stronger than my own will would send me back there. I had to go back. But before I did so I was going to see a doctor.

Granby was a small hamlet a few miles from the desolate farm. At the drugstore I asked the little old man behind the counter a question. He looked at me strangely, glanced out through the window at the ancient car that I had left standing at the curb.

"That's Henry Bramwell's old fli-ver," he said. There was suspicion in his eyes.

I nodded. "He's my uncle. I'm Edwin Bramwell—visiting him."

"Oh." He considered for several seconds. "Haven't seen Henry for nigh onto four months. Looked bad when he was in, too. I'd say he was failin' fast."

"I'm afraid so," I said, and wondered why a lot of the horror had come to Granby with me. Then I asked the question that had been hovering on my lips. "Did he buy arsenic to kill rats when he was in?"

The pharmacist thought a moment, then nodded. "Now you speak of it, he did. 'Nough to kill a regiment of 'em, I told him. Told me the place was infested with 'em out there. Why?"

My whole body felt as if it had suddenly been packed in ice. I leaned against the counter, gritting my teeth. I was glad the druggist had been moving toward his back case when he asked the question, so he could not see my face.

"Any good doctor 'round here?" I asked next.

"Yes—in the yellow house near the school," he replied, turning to face me. "You can't miss it."

The doctor examined me and plied me with questions. At last he said gravely, "Mr. Bramwell, all your symp-

toms point to a significant fact. Your life is in danger. You are suffering from slow doses of arsenic poisoning."

I sat heavily into a chair. "I was afraid of that," I said slowly. "Please don't say anything to anyone, Doctor, until I see you again."

He looked dubious but finally consented.

I HAD another stop to make, this time in a city that was the county seat, some six miles from Granby. At the police station I introduced myself as a writer and explained that I was doing some amateur sleuthing and asked for some help in the department laboratory. The police chief was an amiable fellow, glad to have a little diversion from routine.

"Could you find out for me if this bullet came from this gun?" I asked, laying the two objects on his desk. I had been careful to empty Henry's gun before leaving the farm.

The chief sent the gun and bullet to the laboratory. I had a hard time cloaking my feelings while I waited. At last the messenger returned, and my nails made deep dents in the palms of my hands as I mentally prayed that the hellish thought I had brought from the farm would fail to bear fruit. Disappointment came with the confirmation of my wild fear.

"There's no doubt about it, Mr. Bramwell," the man said. "This bullet was fired from this revolver."

Driving back to that benighted house, I wondered if I were a little crazy. How could it happen in a modern world? The bullet that had come out of the skull of my Uncle John had been fired from the gun which I had taken from the room where my Uncle Henry slept, the gun with which he had shot a rat. Why would that man kill his brother, then try to poison me?

It was dusk when I reached the house. My uncle stood there in the semi-darkness of the kitchen, his fists clenched, his eyes aflame with rage. "What'd you take my revolver for, Edwin? You been pokin' in my room, you ungrateful whelp? What you been lookin' for? Why did you hide all your papers 'fore you—"

"Why are you trying to kill me?" I retorted wildly, my breath sounding almost labored in the stillness. "You said you didn't have arsenic in this house. You lied, damn you! The druggist in Granby told me. And I went to a doctor. He told me I am suffering from arsenic poisoning!"

I took the revolver and bullet from my pocket. I was a little inarticulate with terror, but my anger steadied me, kept me from reeling against the wall. "Your gun, Uncle Henry, fired this bullet that was in the skull of John Bramwell. How?"

I knew it then. Uncle Henry was not there before me, never had been. This man's was the evil personality I had felt the moment I had walked into that accursed house. That grave out there had been dug for me. I was beyond all ordinary sense of fear as I stood there watching the gaunt man's eyes fill with an insane light. But this man was a Bramwell. This was John—not Henry!

"So you know, Edwin!" The voice was like a feline purring.

HIS bony hand struck for something near him. Up came a shotgun, and I heard the hammers click as I set myself for a charge. Yawning muzzles of the weapon came to within a foot of my stomach. Uncle John laughed like a fiend. He began to talk, gloatingly, unhurriedly. He wanted me to know some things before he killed me.

"Yes, Edwin, Uncle John—that ne'er-do-well Bramwell. Too no-good to be buried with decent folk, Henry said, didn't he? A few years after your father died I heard he gave somethin' to your Aunt Eva for her to keep for you. I figgered 'twas money an' I tried to get that envelope from her. I beat the daylight out of that woman of mine, but she never told me where she hid it.

"Wan't until a year ago that I found out somethin'—don't make no move, Edwin. I met a broken-down newspaper man in a flophouse. He knew your father, Edwin. Said your father had inferred that he knew somethin' about the Fletcher case, but the feller

never believed your father. But we do, don't we, Edwin?"

"What would you want of it? They know you can't write. They'll know if—"

"No, Edwin, nobody'll know. I'm dead, ain't I? I'm buried. But I got to kill that hellcat of mine, too, to be safe. Oh, I've had nigh onto a year to plan all this. That man you saw the other night was my man. I sent him to Henry to find out all about my brother's habits, his house—everythin'. He got paid, but he come back for more, so I had to kill him last night.

"You see now, Edwin? Now where did you hide that manuscript? I been lookin' for it an' I'll find it if I have to tear down the house. When I get it, I'll be rich. There's thousands of dollars in that thing for me. I'll make 'em pay me thousands, them people that escaped the noose that time, Edwin. The world can wait for the story 'til I'm ready to let 'em have it—for more money. Get it two ways, Edwin. You wouldn't have thought of that, would you?"

"Blackmail," I said hoarsely. "Then, after they're bled dry, you'd turn them over to the hangman, you devil!"

"So I was right, huh, Edwin? That was your legacy." He laughed and thrust the barrels of the gun closer to my stomach. Up to that time I had died a thousand deaths—had felt my whole body break wide open from blasts of heavy shot. The man's face did not look human.

"Wanted you to write that story an' get it done 'fore I shot you, Edwin. Guess it'll do now. The bones you and Eva buried up there wan't mine. They was that broken-down newspaper man's. Henry—he was surprised when I killed him. Clothes fit me good, don't they?" He cackled with horrible enjoyment.

"The arsenic, you devil," I cried. "Why did you give that to me when you could have shot me easier—quicker?"

"Arsenic?" His eyes widened and his mouth snapped open. He seemed stunned for a moment like a mad dog that has run into a stone wall. Then he gritted his teeth and I saw his hand convulse on the trigger. But the shot-

gun did not rock the house with its thunder.

Instead the gun by some miracle slipped out of my uncle's shaking fingers and clattered to the floor. A reflection of the horror I knew to be in my own eyes shone in his as he clutched at his chest. His long legs buckled beneath him and he swayed, then fell forward on his face. Did a laugh come from the dark shadows of the far recesses of the house? It seemed to me that someone was laughing.

I DON'T know how long I stood there gazing down. Foam made a hissing sound as it oozed between his bared teeth. The eyes were open but lacked even the luster of one of the dirty window panes of the accursed house. I knew the man was dead, but still I could not move. Slowly reaction set in and I moved away from the wall.

My eyes were drawn to the water bucket that stood on the sink. Time enough had elapsed since Uncle Henry's murder for slow doses of arsenic to eat into the vitals of his murderer and stop that black heart from beating.

That night I had to do what I did not want to do. I had to find out one more thing. With a lighted lantern I went out to the spring and examined the ground all around it within a radius of a hundred feet. Soon I found the place where lush earth had been broken not so long ago. The turf came up easily as I dug at it. Renewed horror took hold of me as I knelt there, my dilated eyes fixed upon the tiny rivulets of wa-

ter that trickled out of the nearby bank. The place where I knelt was higher than the spring pool, the pool that somehow had become poisoned by arsenic.

That picture remained in my mind like a hideous nightmare for years afterward. A rivulet of water running through a grave where a man lay. A body that had not been accorded the dignity of even a rough, hand-made coffin. And enough arsenic in the man's pocket to kill a regiment. Arsenic that had gradually been washed out of the grave and into the spring pool from which the Bramwell's had always taken their drinking water. Nausea convulsed me as I stumbled away from the spot, stumbled past the half-dug grave that was to have received my own mortal remains.

I had to go back into the house to get my precious manuscript. When I had secured it from under the floor of the closet in my room, I ran out of the place with it clutched close to my chest. I got the old car started and drove away from there as if all the demons from hell were at my heels.

Everybody knows who Edwin Bramwell is. They know he has a great deal of money. But they say he is a strange man, that he has what psychologists call claustrophobia—a dread of confined, lonely places. They say he does his work in an office in the heart of a big city and that he keeps all the windows thrown wide open so that he can hear the traffic roar. There is a reason for that.

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COMPLETE GRIPPING STORIES OF THE UNCANNY
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STRANGE STORIES

NOW ON SALE **15c** AT ALL STANDS

THE SHADOWY CURSE

By **HENRY S. LEWIS**

Author of "Just Take It Easy," "Crime Marches Out," etc.

ELLA SAUNDERS could not have uttered a more terror-ridden shriek if death himself had stalked malevolently down the moon-shadowed corridor.

"Oh, I can't stand it! I can't stand it any longer!" she sobbed, clutching at her throat with fear-crazed fingers. "I'll go mad!"



Ella Saunders

But her frantic eyes and her unbelieving ears would not be still. Like a cursed reanimation of an evil specter, the gimlet eyes in the ancestral portrait glared mockingly at the paralyzed heiress. From the thin-lipped mouth itself came words of horror, and the whole wall on which the picture hung

seemed to reverberate with the mockery of the voice emitting them.

"You are mad, Ella Saunders," said the portrait sepulchrally, the small red eyes gleaming with evil life. "It is the curse of the Saunders, curdling your blood, drawing the last shreds of sanity from your brain. Ella Saunders, you are as certainly doomed as though you were dead. Nay, worse.

"Nothing—nothing can halt the collapse of your mind and the decay of your soul!"

The blood itself froze in Ella Saunders' pounding heart. Madly she bolted from the corridor, running hysterically from the nameless terror. With a frenzy born of utter despair she pounded her bloodless hands against her throbbing temples, until it seemed as if her head would burst apart.

Wildly she looked about her. She had fled into the library, she saw dazedly. There was a telephone on the desk next to the chair in which she had collapsed. Desperately then she tore through the pages of the phone book, forced her blurred eyes to memorize the swimming numbers.

Frantically she lifted the receiver, spun the dial.

"Acme Detective Agency," came the prompt response. "Who is calling, please?"

"Ella Saunders," the gasping heiress sobbed. "Oh, please—"

"Sorry," said the man's voice sharply. "One experience with you was enough. We had to sue you to collect our fee!"

"But you've got to come!" the girl her voice pure hysteria. "I am going mad, I tell you! The portraits on the walls—they talk to me, look at me

Where Portraits Stare and Speak, Madness Lurks!

with their horrid red eyes! I—I'll kill myself if you don't come at once!" she screamed, and then lapsed into broken sobs.

Something that sounded like "Oh my God!" came back over the wire. Then the clipped male voice sighed resignedly.

"Oh, all right. Try to get yourself together, Miss Saunders. Better take a sedative, we'll be there in—let's see—well, by eleven-thirty at the latest. Tell the butler to let us in." The phone clicked off.

"Damn!" exploded Pete O'Reilly in his New York office.

"I'll bet she's got the d.t.'s," said his partner, Tom Sherman, as he rose languidly from his Morris chair across the room. "I could hear her shrieking in the receiver."

O'Reilly muttered angrily and grabbed up his hat.

"That's the trouble. The last time, she pulled a fast one on us. But tonight—well, I don't like it, Tom. She was not only on the level, she was literally scared to death. We better get up there before she does something desperate."

FORTY five minutes later the two detectives were speeding up the Storm King highway under a cold bleak moon that stared down balefully over the November countryside to make the barren fields, the winding road and the leafless trees even more stark and cheerless.

Neither man was in a placid frame of mind as the car wound up the gravel roadway to the huge Saunders mansion, desolate-looking in its grim stone architecture, with only lights from within to disturb the silent pulse of night.

O'Reilly loosened his collar, shivered. "Come on, Tom. Let's get this over with." He pounded the door knocker harshly.

Reeves, the thin-blooded, unemotional butler let them in. Without a word he led the two detectives into the library.

Ella Saunders, startled, looked up from red-rimmed eyes and rose jerkily to her feet.

"You think I've been drinking!" she

said bitterly as the two men stared at her. "But I haven't. Here, I'll show you—"

With a little puff of blue flame the dim ceiling lights winked out. Almost at once a harsh, rasping voice began to chuckle weirdly.

O'Reilly found the hair on the back of his neck beginning to rise. Sherman gasped involuntarily, and his hands got sweaty. Ella Saunders stood rooted to the spot with a half shriek on her sensuous lips.

"You cannot break the curse of the Saunders," intoned the mocking voice. All three whirled about like automata, stared incredulously at the portrait on the far wall. The picture of an old English slave trader. Only now the long-dead voice had come alive, and the eyes sparkled with hatred.

"Go, you two men," rasped the portrait. "Go, before I step forth from this picture frame to throttle you to death! Ella Saunders must await her fate alone. Nothing under the sun can halt her grim march toward utter lunacy!"

The voice stopped speaking. But the eyes continued to glare evilly. Rooted to the spot, the two detectives stood as though a part of the unearthly spell, until a dull thud tore them from their trance.

"The girl!" O'Reilly exclaimed. "She's passed out. Quick, Tom—we've got to bring her to, before she has hallucinations and goes mad altogether!"

"Hallucinations," Sherman muttered. "We saw the same thing, didn't we?"

Panting from what they had seen and heard, the two detectives got the unconscious girl to her bedroom, loosened her clothing and bathed her face and wrists with ice-water.

She came to, after a while, and immediately began screaming. O'Reilly clamped his hand over her mouth, held her writhing body while he talked soothingly in calm, measured tones, though his eyes were a little wild and desperate.

Finally the girl began to cry brokenly. O'Reilly sighed, knowing the spell was postponed for the time being, and after a few minutes he left the room with Sherman at his heels.

"Go to bed now," he said quietly at

the door. "There must be some logical explanation for all that's happened. We'll tear this place upside-down, if we have to, Miss Saunders. But I don't think that will be necessary. I've got an idea what's behind all this. And as for who—"

He shrugged, and Sherman followed him out into the hall.

"I heard a radio somewhere," O'Reilly said as they went downstairs. "Must be a party going on in the basement. Let's drop in. If the guy who's pulling all this fast stuff is down there, we may be able to frighten him into showing his hand."

IT was a party, all right, the two detectives found as they made their way into the dungeonlike corridors underneath the mansion.

"Why, hello!" a loud voice greeted them when their faces appeared at the entrance of the ornate, crimson-walled cocktail lounge.

"Good evening," O'Reilly said coolly. "Mind if we join you? Miss Saunders has gone to bed. Somebody's been trying to frighten her to death, you know."

There was a chorus of cynical protest.

"Oh come, now," said a high precise voice. "I can't imagine any of us having the energy for such nonsense."

"Well, I can!" Sherman snapped. "Who are you?"

"Me?" The fat man with the smooth face and the cold eyes laughed unpleasantly. "Why, I'm Archer Livingston. An attorney, if you're interested. I handle Miss Saunderson's estate."

O'Reilly glared at him. "You would. And who are these other people? Come on, speak up! We're detectives, so you'd better not waste our time."

"Really?" The drawling sneer came from a dissolutely handsome young man in dinner clothes. "Well, I'm Joe Service. A cousin of Miss Saunders. I get one-third of her estate when she dies. Lucky, aren't I?"

Sherman clenched his fist, and Service backed up judiciously.

"Puh-lease, Mr. Cop! Take it easy."

"Don't mind Joe," a cooing-dove soprano said. O'Reilly raised his eyes,

stared disdainfully at the ill-concealed curves of a blond girl whose eyes were too round and too blue.

"I'm Bari Barry," she said quickly. "A friend of Mr. Joe Service."

O'Reilly scowled at her. "I don't doubt it," he said pointedly. The girl flushed angrily.

"Gentlemen! Gentlemen!" said a protesting baritone from behind the bar. A well set-up young man put down the cocktail shaker he'd been manipulating.

"So?" O'Reilly snapped.

"I'm Santa Claus," the man parroted. "They call me that because I'm so broke I just hang around here like a lapdog. How about a little drink, friends? Arthur Harris, sirs, at your service!"

O'Reilly surveyed the foursome up and down contemptuously.

"Come on, Tom," he snorted grabbing Sherman by the arm. "Let's get out of here. The place smells."

Together the two detectives strode back up the corridor headed for the ground floor, the others' mocking laughter ringing unpleasantly in their ears.

As they strode down a long hall toward the library a high, muffled shriek from a point below the ceiling stopped them dead in their tracks, hearts contracting.

O'Reilly stared at the portrait above a high door.

"Get out of my house!" said the painted spinster in her high shrewish voice. Her eyes gleamed hatefully. "Get out of here at once, do you hear?"

O'Reilly swore then. "Nuts!" And taking the revolver from his shoulder holster, he threw it butt-first at the picture. There was a ripping tear and the sound of jangling metal.

"Come on!" O'Reilly shouted. "There's a loud-speaker behind that portrait. Let's trace the wiring, quick!"

SO engrossed were the two detectives in following the thin copper strands along the wall that the unearthly scream from behind the high vaulted door had sounded twice before they heard it.

"Ella Saunders!" Sherman gasped. "Here comes the payoff!"

Together the two detectives rammed their shoulders against the heavy oak door. Finally it gave with a splintered crash. O'Reilly was first into the musty trophy room, pride of the Saunders family for generations. And what he saw there brought him up short, gasping.

In the far end of the room, on a raised platform, was an open Egyptian mummy case. Arms swathed in yellow mummy-wrappings were locked about Ella Saunders' frantic shoulders. The mummy's right hand was clutching a wicked-looking hypodermic syringe, about to plunge it into the girl's white, unprotected shoulder.

"Drop that girl!" O'Reilly shouted. "The game's up—Arthur Harris!"

The man's defiant snarl echoed hoarsely with the bark of O'Reilly's revolver. The man in mummy wrappings jerked convulsively, then collapsed slowly to the floor, blood from a deep scalp wound dyeing even redder the auburn tresses of Ella Saunders as she, too, slumped floorward in a dead faint. . . .

"So you see," O'Reilly said an hour later, after the State police had taken away the still-snarling Arthur Harris, "that guy thought he had a perfect set-up. Nobody suspected him, because nobody knew—except Ella Saunders."

They were all gathered in the cocktail lounge. O'Reilly, needing a drink now, was putting the finishing touches on a Martini. Tom Sherman toyed with a sidecar. Ella Saunders, still pale and distraught, was obviously trying to pull herself together.

"This Arthur Harris," O'Reilly went on, "had things a little too good. Erst-while chemist, electrician, gigolo, what-have-you—well, he thought he could scare Miss Saunders into insanity, then take over her estate.

"So he rigged up this complicated loud-speaker business behind the portraits. He painted the ancestral eyes with phosphorus. You know—it gleams like all getout in the dark, or semi-dark. He had a couple of microphones hidden about the place, and it never was any trouble for him to sneak away from the

rest of you and begin broadcasting. Broadcasting, that is, for his wife's special benefit!"

"His wife!" Livingston exclaimed.

"Right. Ella Saunders Harris."

The heiress went white.

"When Harris saw us arriving tonight, he knew the jig was up. He tried to scare us out of the place. And when that failed, he went to the trophy room and put on those yellow mummy-wrappings. Only first he spoke through the loud-speaker in his wife's room. Told her to come into the mummy—I mean, trophy room, or else she was slated to die at once.

"He planned to stick that hypodermic syringe in her. Cannibis Indica, see? Somewhat like hasheesh. Makes you have hallucinations. With that stuff in her, she'd really be 'seeing things.' Then Harris could put her away in the nut-house for keeps—and, as her husband, grab her estate."

ATTORNEY LIVINGSTON gasped. "But how did you know?"

"Oh, that." O'Reilly's eyes were moody. "You see, this Harris wore a little gold band on his finger. A wedding ring. I noticed it first thing tonight. He used it to taunt Miss Saunders—Mrs. Harris, I mean. She wanted to keep the marriage secret. So she could still have her 'freedom', I guess."

Tom Sherman spoke up then. "But Pete—"

"Yeah, I know." O'Reilly smiled cynically. "Sure, he could have been married to some other dame. But in that case, Ella Saunders would have left herself wide open for a sweet little lawsuit, in case the other woman ever found out. Catch on?"

Tom Sherman grimaced. "Yeah, I get it. And because Cousin Joe Service had one-third interest in her estate—and also because Attorney Livingston handled her affairs and so would be tempted to do a little finagling—well, if Harris' plans had gone wrong, they would have been suspected."

"That's right." Pete O'Reilly shivered then, though the room was warm.

"Come on, Tom. Let's get out of here. Those mummies upstairs—hell, they give a man the creeps!"

The Case of the **MUMMIFIED CORPSES**

By RAY CUMMINGS

Author of "The Purple Head," "The Secret Grave," etc.

CHAPTER I

Egyptian Horror

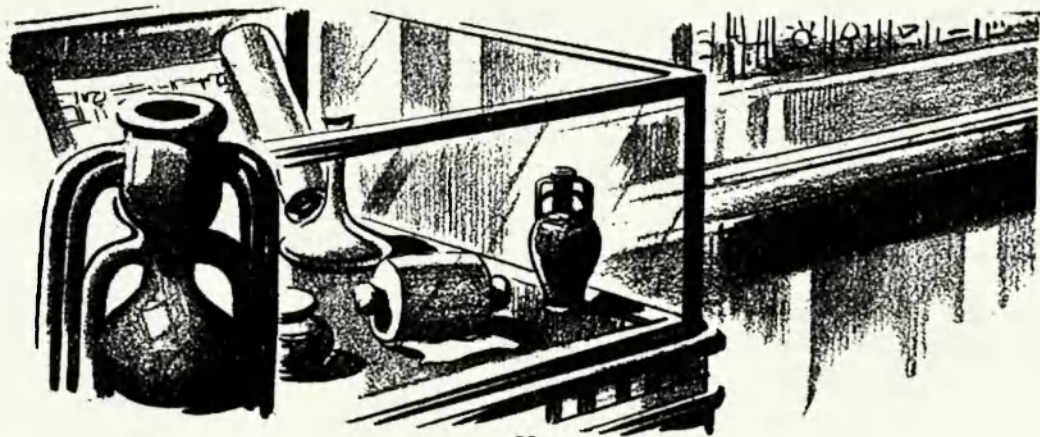
THE gruesome mystery began at a roadside in a patch of woods down on Long Island. The night was Stygian black. An automobile with bright headlights crept slowly along the winding road. Suddenly the driver jammed on his brakes. The car came to a screeching halt.

The motorist, wide-eyed, staring, with a cold sweat breaking out on his forehead, leaped from the car. He had seen an oblong, grisly thing lying to one side of his path. His hand shook as he examined it—this resin-soaked aromatic smelling travesty of the dead. And now, with the fullness of his headlights upon it, he knew that it was a mummy!

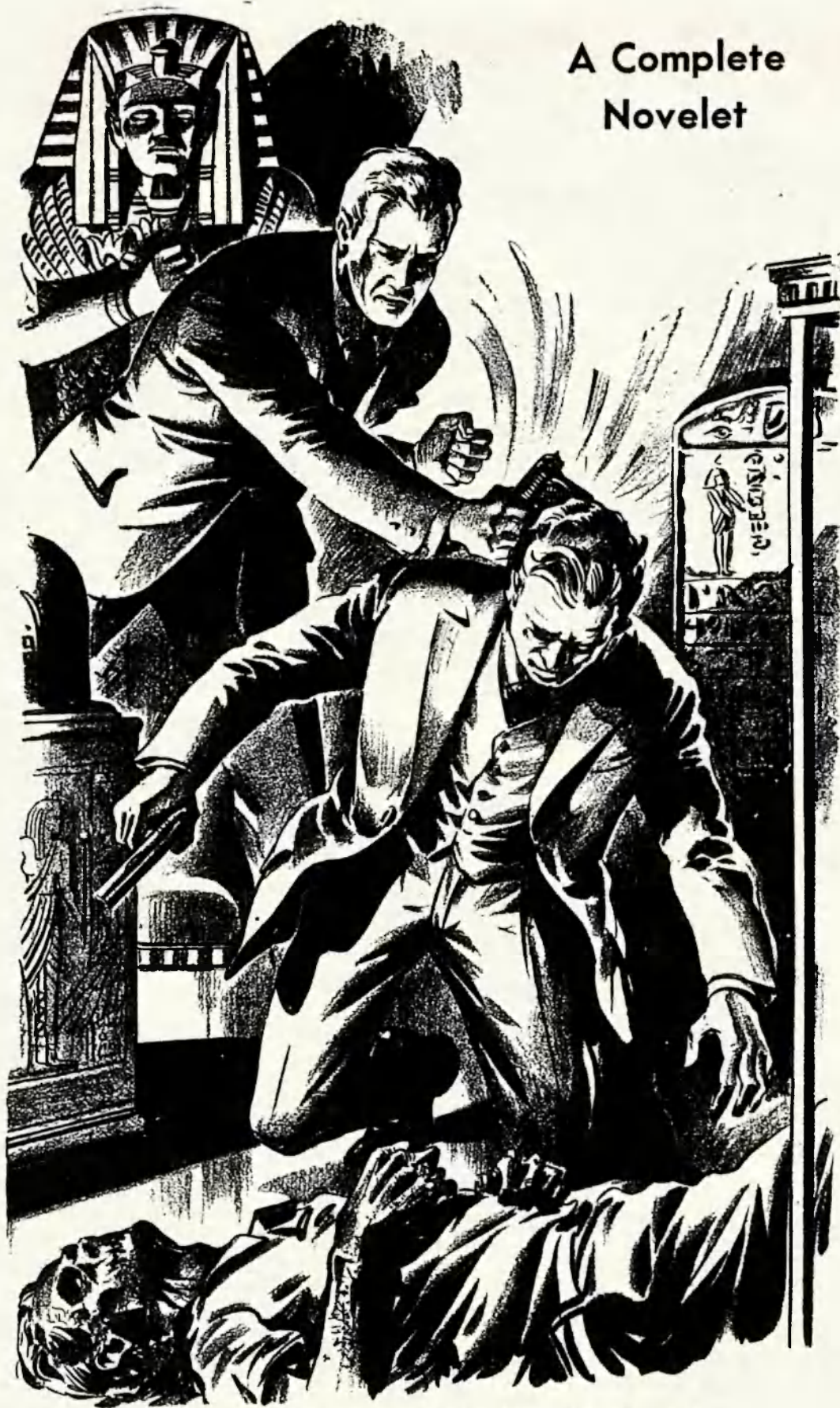
He lifted the strange burden to the empty seat beside him, in his car; then he climbed in with it. Wild, uncanny tales of the rifled tombs of the dead in Egypt, the curses upon those who tampered with them, or those who even contacted these dead, rushed at him. He was young, imaginative and not too brave. When he reached the police station, he was trembling and shattered by his experience.

The affair caused little comment in the papers. It was a mummy, they thought, of a young Egyptian girl. My father and I saw the notice, but gave it little discussion at the time. Nobody came to claim the lost mummy. The police queried the large public museums, and many of the smaller private ones. None seemed to have had any mummies stolen. How so unusual a thing as an Egyptian mummy could be lost on a Long Island roadside seemed

**McClure and Son Investigate a Ghastly Series of
Crimes Which Smack of Ancient Egyptian Magic!**



A Complete
Novelet



The horror of that instant had thrown him wholly off guard

destined to remain a mystery.

That was the beginning of one of the weirdest cases into which we have ever been plunged. My father is William McClure. We're McClure & Son, Private Investigators. Police-sergeant Dolan, of Forest Valley, where the lost mummy was being held, is a friend of ours. He phoned us, a couple of evenings after it was found, and asked us to drive out and take a look at it.

WE DID. With Dolan beside us we stood gazing silently down at the desiccated, brown-gray face of what apparently had been a girl or woman of ancient Egypt whose body might have been moldering in a tomb for two or three thousand years. The mummy should still have been there. It was revolting.

"See anything queer about it?" Dolan demanded.

"I'm no expert on mummies," my father said.

"It's not a mummy," Dolan informed us grimly. "It's a corpse!"

"What?" I exclaimed.

"A corpse," Dolan reiterated. "This girl was undoubtedly alive a few days ago!"

My father and I exchanged swift glances. A large cadaverous, lantern-jawed man in black had joined us.

"This is Jonathan McNabb, our local undertaker," Dolan added. "We thought that mummy looked queer, so McNabb telephoned for the medical examiner to perform an autopsy, as you might say."

"What did you find?" my father demanded.

"The organs and viscera," McNabb said, "show that it's a girl who hasn't been dead more than sixty or eighty hours. No sign of poison; no wound on the body to cause death."

The cadaverous undertaker had a hollow resonant voice that reminded me of a tomb. He let it trail off hopelessly as he shrugged. I saw my father stiffen at his words. His jaw tensed.

"No sign of what killed her?" he demanded briskly.

"Only—she turned into a mummy," McNabb said.

It gave me the creeps. I'd just heard

a radio drama based on the strange deaths following the excavation of the tomb of a Pharaoh; explorers who had offended the deities of Egypt, desecrated the sanctity of Egypt's dead, and who had paid, to the last man, with their lives. The drama had been well done. And as I stood here now, recalling how those men died mysteriously in the Western world thousands of miles from the Nile, I wondered who this girl might be.

I hoped emphatically that we were not embarked on some strange phenomena of ancient Egypt. Easy to laugh at it, maybe. But somehow, as we stood over that weird corpse in the Forest Valley station house, it seemed that here might be some avenged, supernatural thing, against which policemen and detectives like ourselves would be powerless. It gave me the shudders.

"Oh, there's Judge Van Dyke," the sergeant said abruptly, in an aside to us. "It looks as though there's goin' to be hell, before this thing's done with."

We turned to see a small stocky man of about forty. He was a recently retired judge of New York City. His summer home was here in the Long Island hills only a mile or so from Forest Valley. Having heard of this strange corpse, he had hastened to inspect it. He was a nervous little fellow, this ex-judge, Van Dyke. I recall distinctly—and certainly I had plenty of cause to remember it afterwards—that he flung the cadaverous McNabb a side-long glance as he came forward, shook hands with Father and me as the sergeant introduced us, and then whirled to the weird cadaver.

AS HE stared, his face went suddenly ashen. I could see his lips moving soundlessly as he leaned closer in his inspection, as though he were denying to himself the evidence which he saw before him.

"Dear God!" he burst out suddenly. "It can't be! But somehow—" He swung to face the sergeant. He seemed trying to gain control of himself. "I think," he continued slowly, "that this is the body of a young girl I know—the sister of a friend of mine. She was to

THE CASE OF THE MUMMIFIED CORPSES

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visit relatives out West. She didn't arrive. We've kept in telephonic communication with them, hoping against hope that she had not met with foul play. But here — I'd swear it is Patricia Vance." He had a queer jerky way of talking, with a swift, nervous crisp intonation.

The sergeant told us that young Arthur Cantlin, who had an estate near here, was the one who had first suspected that this corpse wasn't a mummy. He, we learned, had inherited from his father who died a year ago, a small private museum in New York City: the Cantlin Museum, devoted largely to Egyptian relics. Young Cantlin's father had been an enthusiastic amateur Egyptologist. And the son, coming to view the lost mummy, had become suspicious of its authenticity, and had suggested the autopsy.

Just then a friend of Judge Van Dyke's, whom he had telephoned to meet him here, arrived. He was John Griffin, a big, blond, handsome fellow of middle-age, reputedly wealthy real estate operator of Forest Valley. He had been a friend and business associate of Cantlin, Senior, he told us. The sergeant and the judge led him to the weird corpse. He stood an instant, gazing at the harrowing sight.

"My God, gentlemen," he said finally, "that's the body of Patricia Vance!"

Father and I left presently, parted from the judge and Griffin, and drove back to our home and laboratory on upper Broadway. The papers now were full of the weird mummy-murder, and two nights later we were definitely drawn into the case. A telephone call came from John Griffin. He was at Judge Van Dyke's, with young Arthur Cantlin, the Egyptologist. They were speaking for the judge, Griffin said, and the judge wanted to engage us. Griffin's voice was tense. Judge Van Dyke, he said, was afraid for his own safety, and wanted us to see what should be done to protect him.

THE CALL came about eight o'clock — a sultry summer evening. We started at once, drove over the Queensboro Bridge and out to Forest Valley. Beyond the town, almost at once the road skirted the lonely edge of a cemetery, a little wooded patch with marble

headstones and the white blobs of mausoleums gleaming pallid in the fitful moonlight. We were just nearing the cemetery corner when the road made a turn. It flung our headlight beam out toward the tombstones. A figure crouching by one of the graves was suddenly illumined.

Was it a ghost, or a human? I could feel my heart suddenly leap into my throat, and the roots of my hair prickled. Then the damned thing moved; stood erect. It was no more than fifty feet away, and now I could see a pallid face staring at us. It was a human figure, clarified as our light bore down upon it to be revealed as a dark-haired young woman.

For a second or two she stared into our headlights, her beautiful face stamped with horror. Then she turned and fled. In the darkness of the cemetery we could see only the dwindling blob of her as she ran, eerie, ghostlike in the darkness. Then she seemed to climb the other fence, and vanished.

"Say, was that something really human?" I gasped.

"We certainly frightened her, whoever she was," Father muttered.

I DROVE on. The lights of Judge Van Dyke's big bungalow showed yellow through the trees as our road wound past the cemetery, and on past a small square marble-and-brick building which stood alone in the woods. What it was, we didn't know then. But for some reason it looked gruesome, like a huge mausoleum set here in the woods, with a dark hill on each side behind it.

"Cheerful neighborhood the judge picked for his home," I commented.

Only the big handsome John Griffin and young Arthur Cantlin were in the judge's living room to receive us. Cantlin was a slim, smallish fellow in his twenties, dressed now in polo shirt, riding breeches and leather puttees. Both he and Griffin were obviously nervous, not only because of what they vaguely understood the judge was about to disclose to us but because they were worried about the judge himself.

"He and I were out riding this afternoon," Cantlin said. "Then he told me

he had to go to Forest Valley—some business there.”

“Whatever the details, the judge hasn’t yet come home,” Griffin said. “He told me to phone you—have you here by nine o’clock. No doubt he’s stopped somewhere at a roadhouse for dinner. But good Lord, why he’d ride out in these hills now, under the circumstances—”

“What circumstances?” Father demanded.

They didn’t have much to tell us. The judge was a bachelor, living here alone with two or three servants. He was the nervous type. Now, with this weird murder of Patricia Vance, he seemed afraid for himself.

“I think,” Griffin said, “that he expects to tell you why he’s afraid. But Cantlin and I certainly don’t know. He wouldn’t confide in us. Only one thing—” He exchanged a glance with young Cantlin. “He’s afraid of McNabb,” Griffin added abruptly.

It seemed suddenly as though Griffin and Cantlin were shuddering.

“Why?” Father asked bluntly. “What’s McNabb got to do with it?”

“I don’t know,” Griffin said with a wry attempt at a smile. “All the judge ever told me was that something happened between him and McNabb about a year ago.”

“It’s queer under the circumstances,” Cantlin muttered, “that when the judge’s brother died last week, he’d give the funeral to McNabb.”

Another death! “The judge had a brother?” Father demanded.

“Lee Van Dyke, an artist,” Griffin said. “He died of bronchial pneumonia.”

“He’s buried here in the cemetery down the hill?” I asked.

“Yes,” Cantlin agreed. “Patricia Vance—that mummified corpse—was engaged to Lee Van Dyke. She and Nina Vance were at his funeral only a few days ago.”

Father shot me a look. “Was there any suspicion that Lee Van Dyke was murdered?” he demanded.

GRIFFIN and Cantlin were startled. “Good Lord, no,” Cantlin ejaculated. “Not that any of us ever

heard,” he amended. “Lee was hurt in an auto accident a few months ago. Got cut in the chest—rammed by the steering post of the car he was driving. But that had nothing to do with his death. He died of bronchial pneumonia.”

“So they say,” Griffin muttered.

“What about this Nina Vance?” Father pursued.

“She is Patricia’s older sister,” young Cantlin added. “She works for me. She’s the curator of my little Egyptian museum, in New York. Father had a company incorporated—the Egyptian Exploration Company, is what we call it.”

The gruesome thing all seemed somehow to be linked together, with the same people involved.

Abruptly now we heard the front door open. A quick step sounded in the hall, and a young woman walked in on us. It was the dark-haired young woman we had seen crouching in the cemetery! We had seen her face plainly in our headlight beam; no chance to mistake her.

“Hello, Nina,” young Cantlin greeted. “You took quite a walk, didn’t you?”

Nina Vance! Sister of the mummified corpse!

Griffin introduced us. “This is Mr. McClure and his son—you know, the two detectives the judge sent for,” he added, lowering his voice as though the servants might hear him.

This Nina Vance, curator of young Cantlin’s Egyptian Museum in New York, was obviously quite at home here; and she was about as handsome a black-haired beauty as you’d ever want to see. If Cantlin and Griffin were nervous and tense, it was nothing compared to the obvious tenseness of Nina Vance. Her face was pale; and there was still that horror lurking in her eyes.

There was hardly time for her to more than acknowledge Griffin’s introduction of us, with her lips quivering despite her efforts at self control, when suddenly we all heard the sound of horse’s hoofs on the gravel of the driveway outside the living room windows. Judge Van Dyke was returning from his ride.

 CHAPTER II

Mummies While You Wait

FOR no reason, except maybe a premonition of horror, we were all on our feet, tensely listening, as the hoof-beats slowly passed the house and went around to the back. They sounded queer. You couldn't miss it; like a horse walking, stopping to browse grass at the edge of the drive.

"That—that must be Francis," Nina Vance murmured.

Then from the servants' quarters one of the maids screamed. We heard her tearing through the hall, screaming, "Oh, my God! Oh, my God, Nina—Mr. Griffin! Oh, my God—"

We met her in the hall. She was incoherent, chattering. She turned and ran back, and we all followed her out through the kitchen to the backyard space between the house and the nearby garage and stables. One of the servants had lighted a yard light. It glared downward on the judge's sorrel polo pony where the horse stood with the reins dangling from his neck, his head lowered as he calmly munched at the edge of a grass plot. Quite evidently, unguided, he had wandered home, carrying his ghastly rider!

We all stood numbed, staring with a blank, horrified silence. Astride the pony's back, with ankles lashed by a thong under the animal's belly, sat what obviously had been Judge Van Dyke. His dead body was shrunken now within his clothes; a hideous, desiccated and shriveled thing with the aromatic smell of resin wafting from it! Then as the pony shifted, I saw the judge's face—a face still with his familiar features but now gruesomely shrunken; flaky skin gray-brown and dried, drawn like shriveled parchment over the cheekbones! A mummified corpse like Patricia Vance, with the smell of the grave upon it, as though for centuries this mummified body had been moldering in its tomb!

The big, handsome John Griffin was standing stricken, with his jaw dropped; beside him the swaggering

young millionaire polo player, Arthur Cantlin, stood gazing, numbed by silent horror. At my elbow the beautiful dark-haired Nina Vance was swaying. I heard her gasp.

"Oh, my dear one—Oh, dear God, Francis—" I felt her sway against me; then she slipped before I could grasp her and fell unconscious at my feet.

The large Van Dyke bungalow was in a turmoil when Sergeant Dolan, Captain Franklin and half a dozen of their men arrived from Forest Valley. We had revived Nina Vance, and carried the gruesome, revolting corpse of Judge Van Dyke into the living room. It's never our idea to mess up the regular run of police investigation. There wasn't much that Dolan and Franklin could do, however.

The gruesome murder of the judge hadn't taken place here. That was obvious. By telephoning around in Forest Valley I learned that the judge had been seen in town late this afternoon, after he had parted from young Cantlin. Where the judge went then, Heaven only knew, but his pony had come home, from miles away.

It was Captain Franklin's idea now to send for McNabb to take charge of the body. The medical examiner, a fat little fellow named Dr. Peters, had arrived. He agreed that McNabb should take the corpse to McNabb's Undertaking Parlor in town where, tomorrow, the two of them would perform an autopsy on it.

MY glance met Father's, when that scheme was outlined.

"You're thinking," Father whispered to me, "that, according to Griffin and Cantlin, the undertaker had some reason for killing the judge."

"I damn sure am."

"Well, if he did, Tim, he killed Patricia Vance, too," Father retorted. There was a dangerous glint in his eye. "A bizarre method of death like this means it's the same murderer."

I had no argument with him on that.

"We'll have to find out what motive McNabb had," Father added grimly. "And what possible reason could he have also for killing Patricia Vance?"

I could only shrug. And I couldn't

help my mind dwelling again on the idea of some weird, supernatural vengeance connected with Egypt. Father stared at me when I mentioned it. I could see he was checking up.

"I can see the connection with things Egyptian," he declared. "Her sister, Nina Vance, is an Egyptologist. But what the devil has the judge got to do with Egypt or its cryptic mysteries?"

I had no answer. Cantlin, as owner of the Egyptian museum, certainly seemed connected also. And John Griffin had said that he and Cantlin's father had been partners. We felt now what we had vaguely sensed before—that every one of these people in some mysterious way was linked to the gruesome thing.

McNabb arrived presently to take the corpse. In the light of what we now knew, to me he seemed a suspicious sort of fellow, with his deep-set, burning black eyes, gaunt face, and hollow, tomblike sanctimonious sort of voice. It was as though working so much with the dead had given him a graveyard aspect. His face and lips were almost bloodless, as though embalming fluid instead of blood flowed in his veins.

And this time McNabb's partner, William Quirk, was with him. He was, Cantlin and Griffin had told us, caretaker at the graveyard and engraver of the headstones. If McNabb looked ghoulish, Quirk was worse. He was a small, wizen-faced man with a twitching manner and alert, darting black eyes.

He didn't say a word; just followed McNabb around, obsequiously obeying orders. But his eyes were like gimlets, boring into everything. And when he saw that mummified cadaver of the judge I heard him suck in his breath. The look on his face gave me the creeps; it was the look of a ghoul.

"I'm going to telephone to Bud." Father's words brought me out of my grisly thoughts. We had a chance at the hall telephone once again, which was in a dim recess. Father called up Bud Wellington, one of our employees. Bud, off duty, fortunately was at home. Father told him swiftly what had happened; told him to call up the news-

papers—dig into their morgues.

"Public and private life of ex-Judge Van Dyke," Father ordered. "And look up this Jonathan McNabb, undertaker and cemetery owner here in Forest Valley. If he's appeared in the news, or any news that wasn't published. Get me, Bud? Something happened between Van Dyke and McNabb and I want the low-down. Dig it up if you can."

"A motive for murder?" Bud demanded.

"Right," Father agreed. "But I want facts only, not someone's imagination. And there's a John Griffin up here, a real estate man. Used to be a partner of Arthur Cantlin, Senior. Find out Griffin's connection with the Egyptian Exploration Company. And anything you can get about Nina Vance, it's curator. Tim or I'll call you later. Stay home but use your phone plenty!"

FATHER hung up. McNabb and Quirk had left, taking the mummified cadaver of the judge with them.

"Let's get out of here," Father said. "I'd like to see McNabb with that corpse—when he doesn't see me." He smiled wryly. "We might get some hint on how a living person can be turned so quickly into a mummy."

We got away unobtrusively, took our car and drove back into Forest Valley. It was now getting on toward midnight. McNabb's somber little cottage was near the edge of town. It was the last house on a somnolent street. We parked well away, where the street wound off into a lonely road, and we went ahead on foot.

From a little distance we surveyed McNabb's premises. His cottage stood in the center of a big tree-shrouded garden. The grounds at the back, extending a good hundred feet down a declivity to a sullen little willow-lined stream, were solidly dark. There was a vacant lot beside McNabb's. Next door to that was a low frame structure which housed an all-night bar and grill.

The restaurant was lighted. McNabb's place was wholly dark. Then, taking a few steps to the side, we saw that there was a dim light showing behind one of the back lower windows.

"Let's have a look," I suggested. We crept silently around to the back of the house. Presently we were crouching at the lighted window. The shade was fully down, but the sash was partly up from the bottom. We listened. There was no sound. Were McNabb and Quirk in there? We thought not.

"It's his embalming room," Father whispered. There was a smell coming out of the slit of window, of formaldehyde and disinfectants. Formaldehyde, we knew, was the basis of all embalming fluids.

Then cautiously I moved the shade aside. The room was empty. With the shade raised about an inch, we had a good view. It was the sort of place which, to an undertaker, no doubt, would be just a workshop. But to anybody else, an eerie shudder. There was a large tub in which the cadavers could be washed, soap and sponges and towels, a porcelain wash-stand, and a medicine cabinet. This stood open, showing razors, scissors for haircutting the dead, toilet articles, maybe a first-aid kit, and cosmetics. Things for grooming corpses.

Shelves held bottles of chemicals and embalming fluids. On a slab in the center of the room lay the only occupant of the somber place, the mummified corpse of Judge Van Dyke. It was on its back, the grisly shriveled brown face upturned to the light directly above it. The grotesquely large riding clothes were still on it. The arms were crossed on the breast.

"Someone was here a minute ago," Father whispered. "See that cigarette?"

THERE was a small flat-top desk to one side. An ash tray on it held a lighted cigarette that trailed a wisp of smoke upward. Had we been heard? Was McNabb about to spring upon us? I listened for any sound. There was none save the dismal croak of the frogs in the distance. I glanced behind and about us. Only the shadowy trees were there. But I had my hand on my revolver and was prepared for any emergency.

Father was plucking at my sleeve. "That paper," he whispered.

I saw a square of white paper with a lead pencil on it lying on McNabb's desk. We were close enough to see that it was a penciled sketch of something, or a crudely drawn map.

Then we stiffened. We heard footsteps approaching the room. Then McNabb came in, a tall, bony figure in black trousers and white shirt. His thin sunken-cheeked face was grim; his small black eyes were glittering. He went to the corpse. The judge's white shirt was unbuttoned from throat half way down his chest. A scalpel was lying on the side of the slab, a tiny knife of razor sharpness. McNabb picked it up, and swiftly, skillfully went to work.

With the shirt and undershirt of the corpse stripped aside to bare the shriveled, mummified brown flesh of the corpse, McNabb wielded the scalpel with deft incisions. Presently he lifted a segment of the skin, a few inches or so square, held it up to the light as he carefully examined it. Then he wrapped it in a piece of gauze and sat down, cocking his feet up on an edge of the slab.

What was he waiting for?

Father drew me back from the window cautiously and put his mouth to my ear.

"Stick here, Tim," he whispered. "I'm going to that restaurant and phone Bud."

I nodded.

For five minutes or so, McNabb did nothing but sit there. Then, like a shadow, Father was back, motioning me to come away from the window.

"Anything happen, Tim?"

I shook my head. "You get Bud?"

Father sure had some dope on the murdered judge. He had been suspected of wholesale bribe-taking; had been forced to resign his judgeship. To save scandal, the D. A. had agreed to keep the affair hushed up.

"What did McNabb have to do with it?" I demanded. "Any motive for murder?"

"Plenty," Father retorted. "Less than a year ago, McNabb had a case in court, with Judge Van Dyke presiding. The judge decided against McNabb, probably to earn a bribe. They

had a public altercation out of court. McNabb threatened the judge's life."

"Anything else?" I asked.

"About John Griffin," Father said. "He's half-owner with young Cantlin of the Egyptian Exploration Company. And Cantlin Senior's will endowed it with a hundred and fifty thousand dollars. The endowment is to be made next month, out of the liquidation of securities from Cantlin Senior's estate if young Cantlin doesn't change his okay."

"Signifying what?"

Father shrugged. "Nothing that I can see. Not yet, anyway. I'm wondering," he added, "if Lee Van Dyke, the judge's brother, died a natural death. If he didn't—well, then I could imagine that Patricia Vance might have suspected he was murdered and she was killed to silence her."

"And Nina Vance was in the cemetery!" I exclaimed. "At Lee's grave, maybe. But why?"

"Nina Vance was in love with the judge," Father declared. "Didn't you get that idea, Tim? But what she would have been doing at the cemetery—"

It was a queerly tangled web, but at least we were picking up the threads.

CHAPTER III

Scarified Tissue

FATHER and I were standing well back from McNabb's windows, exchanging vehement whispers. Across the empty lot, the lighted side windows of the restaurant were visible. Out in the street, suddenly we saw a small coupé pull up hastily in front of the restaurant. A dark-haired woman, wrapped in a dark evening cloak got hurriedly out of the car and hastened into the grill.

It was Nina Vance! The lights in front of the restaurant showed her clearly. A moment later she appeared, silhouetted at one of the side windows where there was a telephone booth. Father knew this, having used it only a moment before to call Bud.

Father is pretty proficient at lip-read-

ing; he's practiced it for years. And he's never without a small but high-powered pair of binoculars. He whipped them out now.

I stood breathless beside him. "Make anything out of it?"

"Not yet."

Then he thought he caught a fragment as she moved her arm and he could see her lips.

"My husband! Oh, yes, of course, I'll come. Oh, my God—money? Of course I've got it, and I'll give it gladly!" Father repeated aloud for me.

So Nina Vance was married! To whom? We saw her hang up; start out of the restaurant. Father grabbed me.

"Stay with McNabb," he whispered. "Don't let him see you. Just watch what he does. And that diagram on his desk—get it if you can! I'll meet you at Van Dyke's later tonight."

He ran for our car. Nina came out of the restaurant and drove off. Half a minute later I saw Father go by, following her. He told me later about it.

Within half a mile they turned into a well traveled highway, and the lights of Father's following car weren't noticed by the girl. It's not a long drive to New York. Presently they were crossing the bridge, and then west on a crosstown street. At Lexington Avenue, Nina suddenly parked, leaped out and hurried away on foot.

Father went around another corner, jumped from his car and got behind the girl again without any difficulty. Then he saw where she was headed. The Cantlin Museum, owned by the Egyptian Exploration Company!

The museum was a big rambling brick and marble building, set in a large shrouded garden well back from the street. Nina hurried furtively toward it, with Father watching from a dark line of shrubbery. At a small dark side door she paused, opened it with a key, and closed it quietly after her. Father waited a moment; then he cautiously tried the door. It was locked. With his ear to the panel, he could hear nothing from within.

MCCLURE, senior, is a fast worker upon occasion. It wasn't
[Turn to Page 98]

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hard for him to get through a window into the lower floor of that museum. He found himself in a sort of cellar, with a litter of boxes, barrels and discarded packing cases. Against a wall he stood listening. A dark stairway was near at hand; he heard a quick footstep, and then the faint, muffled blur of voices.

Like a stalking cat, he went up the stairs and found himself in one of the large public rooms of the museum. Faint sheens of the city lights shafted in its large windows. Dimly he could see glass cabinets that were ranged along the walls, with weird things of old Egypt in them; and spread about the room there were oblong table cabinets, with flat glass tops in which smaller objects were displayed.

It was a place of the dead, doubly weird now in the silence of the night, pallid and eerie with faint shafting light and heavy with black shadows. A sinister menace seemed hanging here—a menace which, as though beyond all knowledge of human science, could strike at a living human, shrivel a living body all in a moment into an age-old mummy. These dark silent things standing inert in the big glass cabinets, mummies who had moldered in their tombs on the Nile for thousands of years, were all seemingly staring at him with a mute menace.

"Nina, are you sure this is all? If you're lying to me, I'll—I"

"No! No—that's all of it I have. I swear—"

Father stiffened as the sudden fragments of voices floated to him—the voice of Nina and that of a man who had met her here. Then he saw them. The girl was crouching by a side wall partly across the room. The man was close beside her, but one of the glass-topped tables hid him, so that only the dim blobs of his arms were visible, and an edge of his dark shoulder. The girl seemed to have opened a secret wall recess, taking money out which had been hidden there.

The loot of the judge's bribe-taking? Bud Wellington had said that the judge's accounts had been investigated, but there had never been any sudden influx of money; he had been too clever

for that, evidently caching it away in hiding for use in future years. It seemed now that Nina Vance had hidden it, or at least some of it, here in some secret recess of the museum which only she knew about. If that were so, then Father reasoned that she was the judge's wife!

And now this man seemed forcing Nina to give up the money. Father's automatic was in his hand. In the silence of the big eerie room, again a fragment of Nina's agitated voice floated to him:

"Alive? Safe? And you'll take me—"

FATHER was slowly stalking forward now. And suddenly he was conscious that the big sliding glass door of a cabinet beside him was open and that his elbow had brushed something—something that moved! He leaped away, startled, and then whirled with his gun leveled into the cabinet at this new adversary. The occurrence was so bizarre that it sent a cold shudder through him, made his heart pound and the blood chill in his veins.

A mummy stood silently in the cabinet, mutely staring at him, a ghastly upright blob. Father's finger twitched at the trigger of his gun. But for another second he withheld his fire. The mummy was motionless, just staring. No! It was moving again. He caught an instant glimpse of its gray-brown, shriveled, horrible flaky face. And it was dressed in man's clothes that were much too large for it. A terribly dead thing masquerading as a man!

It was a brief tableau: Father staring tense, stricken, fascinated with horror at the impending attack; the mummy staring, moving. Then Father realized that it wasn't stepping from the cabinet; it was falling forward, out through the cabinet doorway. The next second it had dropped the two feet to the floor, landing with a limp thud. One of its flailing arms slapped down a second later as it rolled a half-turn and lay still.

With his breath stopped and the weird sight blurring before him in the eerie darkness, Father stood numbly gazing down at the pinched and horri-

ble dead mummy-face. And the features were vaguely familiar! The clothes, grotesquely large because of the shrunken body within them, were familiar—polo shirt, flaring corded riding trousers, leather puttees.

It was the mummified corpse of young Arthur Cantlin!

Chilled by the sight, for just a second or two Father stood staring, his thoughts whirling and his heart pounding. The horror of that instant threw him off guard. Then beside him he was aware of a faint rustling! He whirled, but it was too late. Something crashed on his head and he went down into the soundless abyss of unconsciousness!

WHEN Father dashed away from me, following Nina Vance into New York, I went back to the window to watch McNabb. The undertaker apparently hadn't moved. He was still sitting there beside the mummified corpse of Judge Van Dyke. For an hour or more I crouched there at the window, watching him. Despite his quietness, I could see that he was tense, expectant, as though waiting for something to happen.

Then at last he suddenly jumped up and left the room. I could hear him in a nearby hall, apparently telephoning. It was my opportunity to get that diagram which was lying on the desk. I slid up his window, got in, seized the paper and was out again in twenty seconds. I was barely in time to avoid McNabb as he came back. The number he called hadn't seemed to answer.

He sat down again; waited another five or ten minutes. Then with sudden decision he jumped up and donned his black coat and a black cap. I saw him put the gauze containing the segment of skin into his side pocket. Then he noticed that the diagram which I had filched from his desk was gone. That seemed to puzzle him. He began searching the room for it, apparently in doubt just where he had left it.

I had had a brief squint at the diagram, but it hadn't done me any good. It was the sort of thing that suggests a pirate's crude map of buried treasure.

There was a square object, between crescent lines that might designate hills. And there was an X to mark the spot. Of what? I couldn't imagine.

McNabb in a minute gave up his search for his missing diagram. He left the room. I darted across the back yard. I had a hunch he was on his way out now. I was right. He came swiftly from a side door of his cottage, and started off on a path, with me trailing him—a path that in five minutes led us into the cemetery.

Suddenly I realized that I had lost him. The dipping paths occasionally had cut him from my sight; but this time, though I stood rigid beside the shaft of a headstone for a full minute, he did not appear. Had he discovered I was following him? Was this a ruse to ambush me? I wondered if he could be quite near me, behind a clump of bushes, watching me as furtively as I had been watching him.

Thoughts raced through my mind, as I paused, tensed and waiting for a move by McNabb. Had he come here to meet his partner, the ghoulish little Quirk? I had concluded that McNabb, after cutting that mysterious slab of skin from the chest of Judge Van Dyke's mummified corpse, might have been waiting all that time for Quirk to arrive.

I cautiously moved forward again. Still there was no sign of McNabb, Quirk or anyone else, nothing but winding paths, grave mounds and gleaming headstones and occasional shrubs. I went half-way across the cemetery, somewhat past where I had last seen McNabb. Then abruptly, by the dim path at my feet, I caught sight of a small white object. I stooped and picked it up. It was a folded piece of gauze. Within it was the ghastly segment of mummified skin which McNabb had cut from the judge's cadaver!

QUICKLY I jumped behind the nearest tombstone, with the feeling that at any moment it was possible for a shot, or a stalking armed blob, to stab at me from the shrouding darkness. The eerie and fitful shadows here made discernment of objects difficult. I strained to see about me. Then

I chanced using my flash, briefly to take a look at that segment of skin. An ugly old scar ran across it. It was not a new scar; an old one which showed that it had been healed for some time.

Then suddenly I realized that I was standing now just about where Nina Vance had been crouching when Father and I discovered her with our headlight beam. It was at the head of Lee Van Dyke's grave! The proof of that was before me—the pallid marble headstone engraved with Lee Van Dyke's name.

Then I saw that the grave mound was queer. The dirt had been recently turned, more recent, apparently, than at the funeral a week ago. I dropped to my knees, peering closer, my hands running over the loose earth. I used my flash cautiously once more. Flowers which had been planted after the interment were scattered and withering. Some were stuck in, as though in a clumsy effort to hide the fact that a ghoul had been at work!

Lee Van Dyke's grave had been opened! That was what Nina Vance may have suspected. She had verified it to her horror. Why had the grave been opened? I had the startling facts now and they clicked together like a jig-saw puzzle that suddenly goes right and gives you a picture altogether unexpected. My mind flashed back. That auto accident Lee Van Dyke had had! A steering post rammed into his chest! That wound would heal with a scar!

And now Lee Van Dyke's grave had been robbed, his body removed, I had no doubt. The connection wasn't hard to dope out. The brothers in features looked somewhat alike. It was Lee's body then, which had been mummified, dressed in the judge's clothes!

Then Judge Van Dyke was alive! And that, obviously, was the reason for the bizarre murder method. The shriveled, parchmentlike face of the corpse would enable the cadaver of Lee to pass as that of the judge! And McNabb, who had prepared Lee's body for burial and knew the scar was there, had taken the first opportunity to remove it, fearing that someone else would discover the substitution of bodies!

How had the segment of skin come

to be dropped here? Had McNabb been startled into dropping it?

The whole complexion of the case had been changed! It seemed to tie up with Father's lip-reading of Nina Vance, at the restaurant telephone. She had learned that the judge was alive! I had vaguely wondered at her attitude at the judge's house. She was probably his wife! She had some, at least, of his bribe-money hidden away. She had mentioned that money over the telephone! The judge then, was in this ghastly thing—doubtless the main brains behind it. Where was he hiding? Had McNabb come here to meet him in the cemetery?

CHAPTER IV

Electric Furnace

I HAD been standing beside a tombstone, with my small flashlight illuminating the grave mound and scattered, withered flower plants at my feet. Suddenly the darkness of the cemetery was split by the flash of a shot. There was a spurt of yellow-red flame, and a bullet came whizzing past my head.

I dropped down and back behind another headstone. And then I saw a crouching blob some twenty or thirty feet away. I fired, but it darted sideward, and I missed. A second later another shot came, the leaden slug thudding into the tombstone, and chips of marble pinged against my face. Too damn close for comfort. I went flat on the ground, waited through a silence, then cautiously raised my head with my automatic in front of it.

Fifty feet away there was a running blob—a man making his getaway. I tried to wing him, but it was no go. Then I was after him. With my next shot he seemed to fall. Or did he? A dip in the ground might have hidden him. Or he might be lying there, waiting for me incautiously to rush up.

I took my time getting to where that blob seemed to have fallen. I didn't go direct, but in a big circle. Then at last I saw the vague outline of some-

(Continued on Page 107)



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HANDS OF THE UNSEEN

IT has been said that once a spot such as a shrine, church, graveyard or altar has been dedicated to spiritual forces, anyone using that place for worldly activities will meet the "hands of the unseen."

Three instances of late seem to prove that this belief is based on something more than guesswork.

First: In Connecticut recently, a man built a dance-hall on the grounds of an ancient cemetery. He did not know that this property was once dedicated to the dead. On opening night of the dance-hall, one of the musicians was stricken with appendicitis. A new player was soon substituted, and an hour later, the lights went out. In some strange manner which the electrician could not explain, water had short-circuited the buried wires. Shortly after that was fixed, one side of the floor collapsed—termites had eaten into the timbers. After a series of strange mishaps, the manager abandoned the place. It is now for sale.

Second: In New Jersey this past June, a man bought an abandoned church in Sussex County. He remodeled it and opened a tavern. Within two weeks, after a series of mishaps, he was taken to a hospital for a nervous disorder. At this writing, he is not expected to live.

Third: The following is quoted from the New York *Herald-Tribune* of June 24, 1939: "Port of Spain, Trinidad: Mysterious dropping of stones marked with macabre crosses

in a suburban bar here today, attracted a crowd to the little roadhouse where strange goings-on have struck terror into a family for three days. More than 100 persons, including policemen and newspaper men, sought vainly to find the cause of the strange occurrences. They gasped when pictures crashed from the walls as if loosened by some unseen hand. The family attributed the incidents to the strange native rite of *obeah* and the practice of black-magic on this spot previously."

Who knows?

TOMBSTONE NUMBER

SAMUEL MARKHAM, manager of a monument company in the East, reports an incident which he considers the weirdest in his experience.

Some weeks ago, a young woman came into his office and ordered a tombstone for her uncle's grave. She was the trustee of the estate. She told Mr. Markham that her uncle had been a very fastidious old bachelor who could not tolerate mistakes of any kind. She insisted that the tombstone be perfect in every respect—if there were the slightest flaw in it, she said, her uncle could never rest in his grave.

Markham took the order—and on the order card he had the girl write down the exact location. She copied the number from the cemetery map which she carried: "Grave 3—Plot 125"

A few days later the tombstone was ready
(Continued on Page 102)



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(Continued from Page 101)

and inspected. Then Markham ordered his foreman to erect the tombstone in accordance with the order on the card. The relatives were to visit the grave that afternoon when the job was completed.

The foreman and two helpers went to the cemetery and stopped their truck in front of Plot 125. It had been raining during the night and there was a puddle of water beside the plot.

The foreman took out the order card. He was about to check up as to the individual grave number, when a gust of wind came up out of nowhere and knocked the card from his hand. The card landed in the water.

Although the ink had smeared a little, the foreman could still read the grave number—so the men began to erect the huge tombstone.

Just as they were completing the job, a car sped up and out jumped the excited niece.

"Oh," she said, "I hoped I could catch you before you started. There was a mistake made on the grave number. It should be Number Eight—not Number Three."

"The foreman pointed to the order card. "Why—we DID put the stone on grave Number Eight—according to the card."

Then they inspected the smeared order card. "Yes," said the foreman, rather bewildered at the strange discovery—"it WAS Number Three you wrote—but a breeze blew it out of my hand into a puddle, and see what happened? The water blurred the Number Three, causing the ends to close in, and making a perfect Number Eight."

MARK OF MYSTERY

JED SANTOS was always ashamed of the ugly triangular birthmark on his neck. His mother consoled him by telling him that his dead father also had a similar birthmark. But later friends told him that his father's mark had not been a birthmark, but was due to a burn he had received when living in South America.

However, Jed believed his mother, because he knew that marks on the body, when caused by accidents, are not inherited.

When Jed was 18 he became a seaman on a merchant ship which carried freight between New York and South America. One night in a storm his ship floundered. Jed, an excellent swimmer, managed to swim to the nearest shore where he dropped unconscious on the sand. He was on the Yucatan coast but knew nothing of the strange ways of the natives.

When he regained consciousness, he found himself in a native hut, comfortably propped up and surrounded by food and beverages. He could not speak to the natives but he knew that he was being highly honored. Days later, when they led him to the nearest civilized community, they gave him a bag of gems. Then he realized that the native chief had a mark on the neck very similar to his own. It must have been on account of his birthmark that he had been so wonderfully

treated by a tribe that he later learned was the most savage on the peninsula.

Back home, his friends doubted his experience. But the birthmark interested him—and then to his surprise, his mother confessed that his father's mark was not of birth but a ritual tattoo of a mystic cult to which the elder Santos had once belonged. But the mother swore that her son's mark was caused by birth, a mere coincidence of similar formation.

And up until this very year, has Jed Santos, now an old man, believed that his birthmark had no significance, either of nature or mysticism. Not until last June when he read the following newspaper item released by the Associated Press, did he realize that his case is food for thought:

"Camden, Ark., June 24, 1939: Jake Carroll, a cattleman, is sure he has discovered a new trait of nature. Carroll has marked his cattle for years with a single crop in each ear. Today he exhibited a calf born with the familiar Carroll crop, perfect in each ear."

Have the Yucatan Indians solved a secret of nature by some mystic ritual?

THUNDER PHONE CALL

A PROMINENT lawyer of New York City has just revealed this story. During this past summer, his doctor had ordered him to get away for a few days because he had been overworking. His nerves were in bad condition.

He was at the time engaged in defending the adopted daughter of an old scientist who had passed away without leaving a will. Relatives who hated the adopted daughter, were trying to claim the estate.

If there had only been a will! But none could be found. A thorough search had been made of the old man's mountain home, Manordale, a lonely spot miles from the city.

The case was to come up in September. If no will was found, things looked bad for the daughter who could not find her adoption papers.

It was in June that the lawyer was ordered to rest. He went to his own country place in Connecticut. One evening he was sitting alone in his living room when he heard a thunderstorm approaching. He began to think of the dead scientist, who had been experimenting with artificial lightning.

The lawyer must have dozed off in his chair. Suddenly he was startled by a crash of thunder. He rushed to the front window before the storm broke. As he closed it, he heard the telephone ring. He picked up the receiver and heard a deep voice say: "Go to Manordale at once." Then the connection broke and he could not get the operator.

Excited, the lawyer believed that something of great importance had come up. So he drove to the dead scientist's home, 65 miles away. It was not until he reached that valley that he heard thunder again in the distance. Arriving at Manordale, he found

(Continued on Page 104)



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(Continued from Page 103)

no one there. The caretaker was visiting neighbors. But then, he noticed that lightning must have struck a corner of the house and knocked down a small part of the wall. A beam was still smoldering.

He looked in the hole and discovered a hidden alcove he had never seen before. With a flashlight, he examined the damage and then was startled to find a small wall-cabinet. He managed to open the cabinet and found the adoption papers and a will leaving all to the adopted daughter.

It was not until the next day, when he checked up on the strange happenings, that he realized the mystery of it all. No one had phoned him. No one but he had heard any thunder, either at his place or at Manordale. No storm had been reported. He could not have received a phone call, because his line had been out of order all day due to a broken pole caused by an auto accident.

His practical doctor still insists that the lawyer must have dreamed of the phone message due to his nervous condition—and that the broken wall at Manordale had been caused by spontaneous combustion. But the lawyer definitely remembers closing the window at the time the phone rang, and finding it closed later. What do YOU think?

THE REPORTER'S DOG

READERS of this department will be interested in the recent success of a fellow reader who says: "I want to give credit to Horror-Scopes, for if I hadn't been a steady reader, I wouldn't have been able to take advantage of a strange coincidence when it came into my own life."

This reader does not want his real name mentioned, for reasons you will understand. He is a newspaper reporter on one of two rival newspapers in a mid-western city. We will call him Max Jordan.

For the past few months he has been worried for fear of losing his position. The rivalry between the two papers was intense, and his newspaper was not doing well. The editor was constantly criticizing his work.

One of Jordan's neighbors was a middle-aged doctor who was very well known. No one had ever thought about the doctor's history before he came to this city ten years ago. This doctor was very fond of dogs. Jordan had a collie which would visit the doctor frequently. A side door of the office opened on the lawn. The dog would stroll up to the screen door, wag his tail—and the doctor would give the animal a friendly word. The doctor often boasted that he believed the collie loved him better than its master.

One night, recently, the collie was killed by a car. Jordan was terribly cut up about it—and he knew the doctor would also be distressed when informed of the accident. But the next afternoon, Jordan decided to stop at the doctor's office and reveal the sad news. As Jordan came to the screen-door, the doctor looked up.

"Hello, Max—Your dog just paid me a

visit a few moments ago. "I thought you would be along shortly."

Jordan was dumbfounded. He remembered reading in Horror-Scopes that people who see a vision of a dead pet often follow that pet in death within a few days. For fear of upsetting the doctor, Jordan didn't tell him about the dog's death. He would wait a day or so.

But when Jordan arrived home, he began to wonder. Was the doctor going to die soon? Of course, he dreaded the thought, but what could he do in the face of fate? One fine thing he could do however—prepare an obituary article that would do credit to the doctor's memory.

So for two days, he gathered all the biographical material he could dig up. The doctor's nurse gave him a lot of private data believing that Jordan was writing a feature for the Sunday edition.

Midnight, the following Thursday, Jordan had the biography completed. And the next morning he took it to his office to keep in his desk. At 2 o'clock, Jordan's mother phoned that the doctor had just had a heart-attack. Jordan rushed over, and a few minutes later the doctor was dead.

With mingled emotions of grief and duty, Jordan returned to his office—wrote a short opening paragraph as to time and cause of death—then brought the article to his city editor. There was just time to catch the evening edition—and Jordan's paper scooped its rival with a masterful biography to the great credit and advancement of Reporter Jordan, now the assistant editor of the paper. He could not have achieved this had not his dog come back from its grave to greet a dear friend.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Dear Chakra:

Are visions that are seen in a crystal, of physical nature so that they could be photographed?

TOM WOODIN

Dear Mr. Woodin: There is no record of any crystal-ball photo, showing a "vision." It is believed that they are seen only with the inner-eye—the crystal simply aiding concentration so that the subconscious mind picks up the vision by some extra sensory power and the gazer believes he sees it in the crystal with his actual eye. The effect on the brain seems the same.

Dear Chakra:

What is meant by thought projection?
GRACE GOLD

Dear Miss Gold: Thought projection is the power to project an image by extreme thought force, so that one can see with the eye, that which is being seen by thought only. Certain mystics claim to be able to create matter by thought—but that is to be proved to science. Of course, advocates of thought projection claim that God created the world by thought projection. His will was powerful enough to create matter, in accordance with his vision of it.

Dear Chakra:

Is it true that human beings use only half of their brain substance?

JACK HOWS

(Continued on Page 106)



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(Continued from Page 105)

Dear Mr. Hows: Psychologists differ as to the exact amount, but all will agree that more than 40% of the brain is never utilized. This gives strength to the argument that the rest of the brain is for extra sensory perception not yet discovered.

Dear Chakra:

Has anyone ever estimated that if a vote were taken of people in America, how many of them would answer "yes," to: "Do you believe in the supernatural, mainly ghosts?"

MARION JEPPI

Dear Mr. Jepps: A few years ago a vote was taken of over 10,000 in England. Over 55% said they believed. But in America it is more than likely the vote would be less, for occult books have a smaller sale in the United States than in England. But occult study is growing rapidly in this country. It is safe to say that the great majority believes in extra sensory perception.

Dear Chakra:

Is it true that evil thoughts reveal in time a facial ugliness that makes one repulsive to good people?

BEATRICE HOLMES

Dear Miss Holmes: There are many cases to substantiate this, although the pages of history are full of cases of beautiful women who had the hearts of fiends. It is more than likely that the ugliness results from dissipation which usually accompanies evil thinking. It is admitted however, that evil thoughts affect one's personality and many people are able to sense a feeling of dislike of such individual. Vicious thinking affects the eyes more than the facial muscles. Hence the old saying: "All devils have pig eyes." Hypnotists usually have eyes that disturb most people, especially those hypnotists who use their power negatively.

CHAKRA.

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THE CASE OF THE MUMMIFIED CORPSES
(Continued from Page 100)

thing lying on the ground: it was a man sprawled on a grave mound. When I was close enough, I pounced, flinging myself down on him.

It was a weird encounter, so horribly nightmarish that it set me shuddering. The man was dead, but it hadn't been my bullet that killed him! A shriveled face was upturned to the dank gloom of the night—a face with that same ghastly mummified look of the grave. The man's whole body was shriveled within its clothes, a thing that might have been moldering here a thousand years. But it hadn't. For I saw that it was the mummified corpse of the ghoulish little Quirk!

Then the man with whom I had been exchanging shots had escaped. Was it Judge Van Dyke? Or McNabb? For ten minutes at least I lay there on the ground, alert, straining all my senses. I was fairly near the lower end of the cemetery, and at last I concluded my adversary had leaped this nearby fence and escaped. Then abruptly I recalled that queer diagram I had filched from McNabb's desk.

Off to my left the gloom, with a little starlight added to it now, showed the dim contours of the nearby hills. I had a flash of realization. Father and I had passed a weird-looking, small, rectangular building not more than a quarter of a mile from here on our way up to Van Dyke's. We had wondered what it was. I recalled the look of McNabb's diagram—that rectangle set between the hills. And I knew that was the answer.

I got out of the cemetery in a hurry and trotted up the road. The small brick-and-marble building stood dark and silent. The woods were black on both sides. The front garden drowsed under the perfume of flowers. All supposed to be nice and cheery. But now I could read the sign over the building's facade:

**THE FOREST VALLEY
CREMATORY**
McNabb & Quirk
(Continued on Page 108)

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(Continued from Page 107)

Another of McNabb's and his partner's enterprises! The place where you bring a body for cremation if you don't want to bury it. With memory of that diagram McNabb had made, I prowled around the back of the building, a dark yard where a sudden declivity went down into tree-shrouded darkness. The descent was fairly steep, but raggedly broken so that I could easily climb down.

THE crags were dim in the vague starlight, with black hollows between them. Within a minute I was well below the crematory ground level. Off to the left I could see where a high-tension power line brought current over the hill from Forest Valley—high voltage for running the electric furnaces of the crematory.

I had reached what I thought was about the spot marked by the X on McNabb's diagram. And then I saw the last thing I had anticipated. A man's body was lying here, wedged between two rocks. It was the body of McNabb! What grim irony that he should be lying here, almost at the spot he had marked! He lay face down, limp, still warm, not a mummified corpse. As I turned him over, the limp right hand fell away from gripping a knife-handle—a knife which was buried to the hilt in his heart. The cadaverous white face, with distended, glazed eyes goggled up at me. Was he a suicide? The attitude indicated so—as though he had thrown himself face down to press the knife into his chest. But with the suspicion of Judge Van Dyke being alive, obviously McNabb was another victim. Killed because he had discovered the substitution of Lee's body for that of the judge!

McNabb, who had prepared Lee's body for burial, of course, had seen that scar on Lee. And seeing it again on the supposed mummified corpse of the judge, he had recognized it at once. He had removed it, waited to talk to Quirk. Together, doubtless, they would have taken it to the police.

I was crouching behind a rock, peering into the darkness. Was the judge lurking around here?

BEST FUN, FICTION AND FOTOS IN

And still I hadn't found out what that X on the diagram indicated. Not Mc-Nabb's body, surely. Doubtless it was something he must have had reason for suspecting would be in this neighborhood.

Then suddenly in the darkness I saw a sheen of light. It lay on the ground, off to one side of me—a dim sheen on the rocks, quivering almost like a glow of phosphorescence. Cautiously I moved toward it. And now in the silence I was aware of a very faint crackling, hissing sound. It seemed electrical and, as I listened, it steadied into a murmuring hum.

Another few feet brought me to where I could see that the green glow was coming from a crevice in the rocks, an inward, downward rift in the cliff. I could barely squeeze into it, but after a few feet it turned a right-angle and widened into a little tunnel-passage, faintly yellow-green with an electric glow. Ahead of me seemed the entrance to a cave in the ragged, honey-combed cliff. Some ghastly apparatus was in action here now! I could hear the crackling electrical hum rising a notch in pitch, growing louder as I cautiously advanced.

And then I stiffened, stood staring with a shock of horror that blurred all my senses as numbly I peered at the lurid scene before me!

WEIRDLY the small subterranean grotto was lighted by an eerie, yellow-green glow which came from an electrical apparatus that stood no more than ten feet from me. It was a big, oblong glass box, like a glass coffin lying horizontal on a metal chassis. But it wasn't a coffin. Wires led to it, and there were metallic pipes connecting it with a bell-like apparatus overhead. It was a ghastly little electric furnace, and an apparatus for exhausting the air, withdrawing moisture, heating, drying and desiccating with some grisly processes of chemicalizing human flesh under intense heat.

And the horrible thing was working now! A human body was visible inside it. Nina Vance! I stared with blurred vision at the weird, greenish

(Continued on Page 110)

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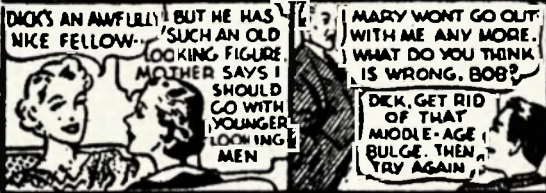
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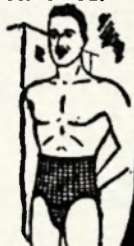
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(Continued from Page 109)

interior of that little furnace. Chemical fumes, turgidly green-yellow, whirled around her body. For a second it seemed that she was quivering. Then, even as I stared, the white flesh of her body rapidly turned red, then brown.

For a second I stood there, stricken with horror. And then I saw, across from the furnace, on the dirt floor, a seated blob—a man bound with rope, a gag in his mouth. His body was hunched down, his back against the wall.

It was my father! His face was ghastly in the greenish light, but his eyes were open, and they swung toward me with recognition as I leaped toward him.

In that instant as I sprang, I was aware of a nearby recess of the cave suddenly made visible by my forward rush, a shadowed recess with a pile of loose earth and a hole where a grave was partially dug. A man's body lay there ready to be dumped into it.

With an agonized stare of horror, Father's eyes were trying to warn me. But it was too late. From the black shadows behind me, a figure came with a rush. My automatic spat, but the roaring shot went over my assailant's head. In another moment our bodies met. A blow from his fist knocked my automatic away, and we went down, rolling in the darkness.

The sheen from the ghastly furnace did not reach here; it was solid black. For a second or two I was underneath, with my antagonist sprawled over me, his fists pounding me. Then I squirmed loose, rammed his head back against the rocks. I thought I had him, but with amazing strength he heaved me back and staggered to his feet.

Again in the blackness we clinched, struggling to throw each other. He fought silently, panting, with only an occasional muttered oath. Who was he? The human mind works queerly. As I fought desperately, across the background of my consciousness, thoughts were surging.

This murderous fiend had killed Patricia Vance because she had suspected Lee's death to be murder. He had

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killed McNabb and Quirk because they were on his trail. It wasn't the judge. It was too large a man for him. The man lying near the grave seemed to be the judge. This villain then, had abducted the judge to force him to give up his hidden bribe money; he had faked his death to avoid having the judge looked for as a kidnaped person would be.

He had lured Nina, the judge's wife, to get that portion of the bribe-money which she had hidden. And then had killed her because she knew his identity. He had used this gruesome method of murder to make possible the judge's faked death, and thus to throw suspicion for all the murders on McNabb.

BUT who was he? Why had he killed Cantlin? Father's words, what Father had learned from Bud, flashed to me. The Egyptian Exploration Company was to be endowed in a month from now with a hundred and
(Continued on Page 112)

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(Continued from Page 111)

fifty thousand dollars! That was according to Cantlin Senior's will—if young Cantlin didn't change his okay!

There was the key to the fiend's identity! Young Cantlin had been killed because he had decided to change his okay of that hundred and fifty thousand endowment! And only one man would lose by it—the man who owned half of the company! So Cantlin had been killed to make sure the huge endowment would go through!

"Why—" I gasped, "you—John Griffin—I know you now!"

It so startled him that he let out an oath of surprise. Momentarily his big hands which were fumbling at my throat, relaxed. I heaved desperately, caught him off balance, and threw him. Then suddenly I was aware that he was fumbling at something behind him. He had found a knife.

It was in a ghastly sheath—in the chest of Judge Van Dyke, whom Griffin had stabbed and was about to bury here. A little light from the furnace reflected into the recess and struck upon Van Dyke's ghastly features. And I saw Griffin's sweating, demoniacal face now as he seized the knife.

As he jabbed the glinting blade at me, I heaved and rolled us both into the grave. I was on top as we landed. The knife cut the flesh of my arm, but I reached, seized his wrist. Then I realized that I had the knife, jabbing it, slashing at his face, his throat—wild, frenzied blows with his hot blood spurt-ing out on me, his screams of agony ringing in my ears until at last he went limp. I leaped shudderingly out of the grave, where his body lay weltering in its sickening hot gore.

That's about all I have to record of the weird case of the Mummified Corpses. Griffin had thought that Judge Van Dyke was dead, but he wasn't, quite. He had a fearful time of it for weeks in a hospital, but they pulled him through. Poor Nina Vance had married him just a few weeks before. He had insisted on keeping it secret for a while. He was terrorized for his safety—afraid of McNabb's vengeance, and other threats he had had from the underworld, so that he

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felt that marrying Nina openly would put her life also into danger.

Nina Vance was really a pathetic figure. She had wanted the judge to make restitution; had taken a considerable amount of his hidden money, hoping to buy back with it her husband's honor and safety.

Several undertakers, chemists and other scientists proved satisfactorily how Griffin, who himself had been an undertaker's apprentice in his younger days, produced that ghastly mummified aspect in the cadavers of his victims. They talked of the influence of heat upon formaldehyde and other chemicals; of resin crystals heated in solution and then vaporized.

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Thus, was Griffin's result obtained. There's a triumph of science for you! I can't say that Father and I shared much in the general enthusiasm. We had seen that damned little furnace in operation, with Nina Vance's body inside it.

Memory of that will haunt us for quite a while.

HEADLINERS

IN THE NEXT ISSUE

CONSIGNED TO HELL

A Novelet of Eerie Revenge
By MARTIN KERSEY

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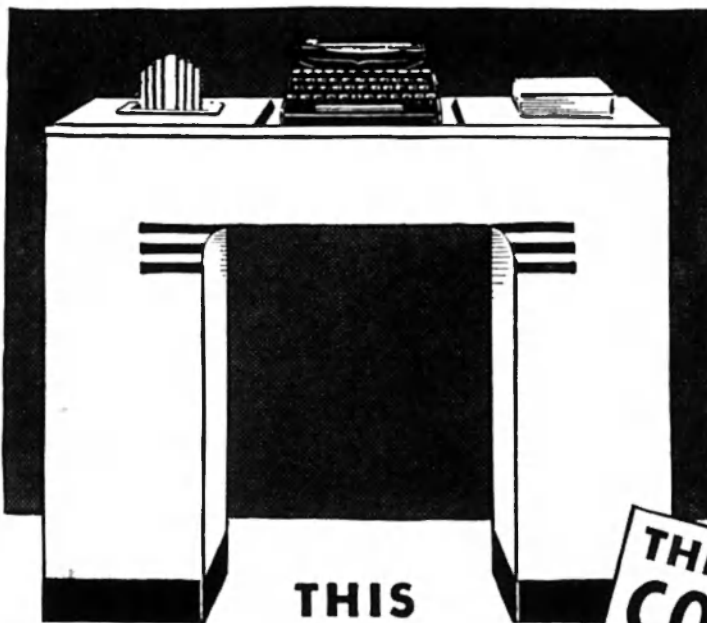
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