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By G. T. FLEMING-ROBERTS

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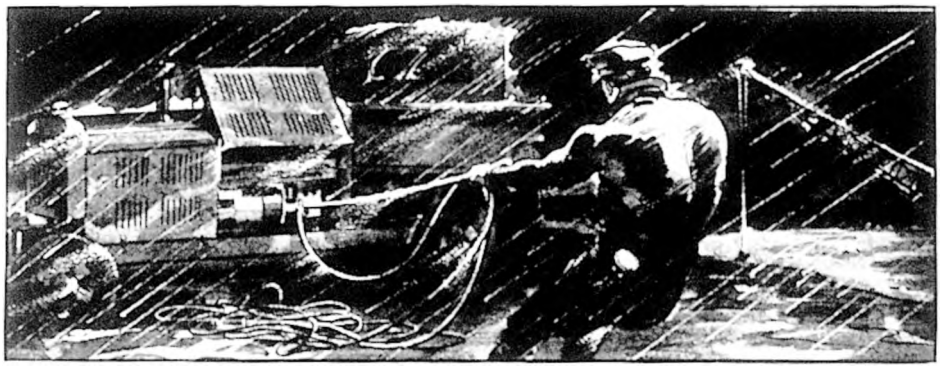

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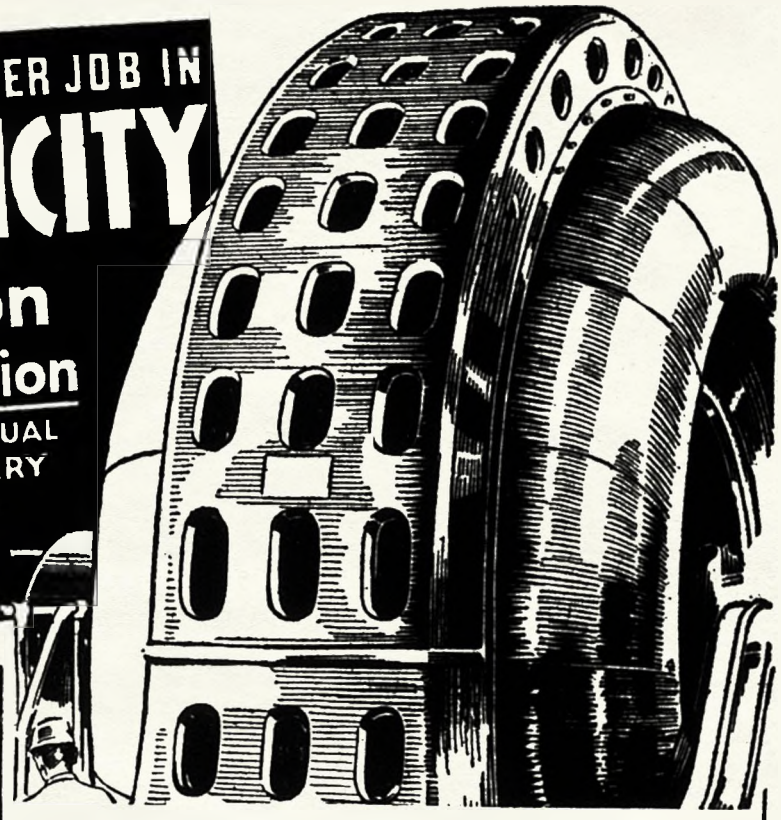

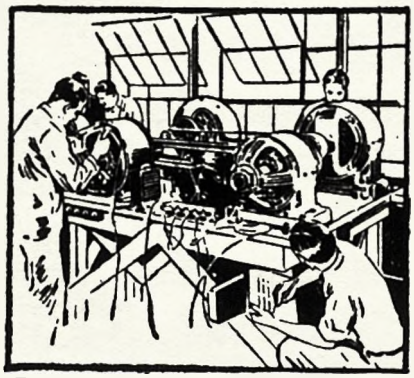

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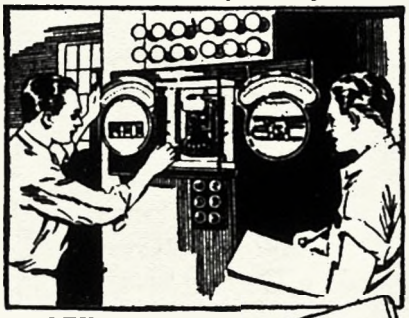

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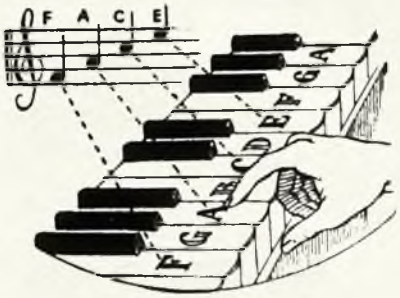

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BURNING GHOST

ALTHOUGH this story happened many years ago, it has just come to light, for the employer in question did not want to reveal the information until the mother of the victim died.

John Maxon's mother was a very devout woman and given to belief in the occult, but John who was twenty-five and married, used to ridicule his mother when she spoke of seeing an apparition at various times. It was the one thing he disliked—"occult nonsense" as he called it.

For some time, he and his wife had not been getting along. The mother lived with them and knew. Then tragedy struck. One afternoon when the mother was shopping, the young wife was burning rubbish in the backyard. In some manner her clothing caught fire and she suffocated before help could reach her. John claimed he was in a distant field and got to the scene too late to save his wife. The date of the tragedy was May 15th.

A year passed. John did not remarry although he became engaged to a girl he had known for a long time. On the May 15th one year after the tragic death, John came home and found his young nephew in the house. The boy was frightened. He claimed he had seen a lady in the backyard with her clothes on fire but when he ran out, she was gone.

John turned to his mother. "Some of your crazy ideas," he flung at her. Then he whipped the boy for allowing himself to believe such rot. "Don't let me ever hear of you talking about ghosts again." He also warned his mother.

But on May 15th of the second year, the mother never mentioned the fact that it was the anniversary of the wife's death. Evidently John had forgotten it, because he had invited his employer to dinner. Before they sat down to eat, the employer went upstairs to the bathroom to wash. Suddenly he came downstairs in a mad run: "There's a woman on fire in the backyard."

John dared not insult his employer, so he ran with the man out into the yard. The vision had gone and the employer was bewildered until he looked at John who seemed transfixed as he gazed at something before him in terror.

Before the mother or the employer could grab him, he rushed in the house, picked up his revolver and shot himself. He died after mumbling a confession that he had killed his wife.

The reason for the suicide was not revealed at the inquest. The true story has now been told for the first time, as the employer promised secrecy to the aged mother who had suffered enough. It has long been believed by many that the ghost of a murdered person returns to the scene on the anniversary of the crime.

THE HEAD OF MADAGASCAR

IN the annals of tales of horror, perhaps the story of the Head of Madagascar stands highest on the list.

After the Boer War, two Hindus who had

(Continued on page 10)

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HORROR-SCOPES

(Continued from page 8)

been orderlies for two British officers, remained with their masters as valets. There had been bad blood between these two Hindus for a long time. Several times, in violent quarrels, they had been separated by one or the other of the Englishmen, and threatened with discharge if they didn't quit their feud.

One night on a boat going to Madagascar, the two valets had been on deck alone. Their masters were at the bar. Presently, one of the Englishmen went to his stateroom and found one valet adjusting his turban. The Hindu said he had come in to use the mirror. The Englishman noticed the medicine box open, but thought nothing of it.

But the next morning, the other Englishman reported that his valet was missing. A search failed to locate the Hindu. The remaining valet was questioned but claimed he knew nothing of the other's disappearance. So the missing Hindu, the smaller of the two, was reported lost or escaped at sea.

Although the bigger Hindu's hatred of the smaller one cast suspicion on him, the Englishman knew it would be difficult to prove anything until the body of the first

(Continued on page 105)

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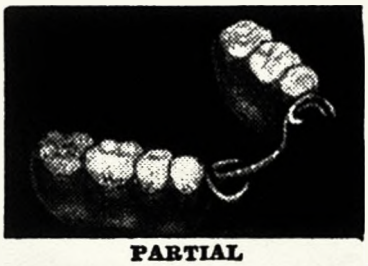

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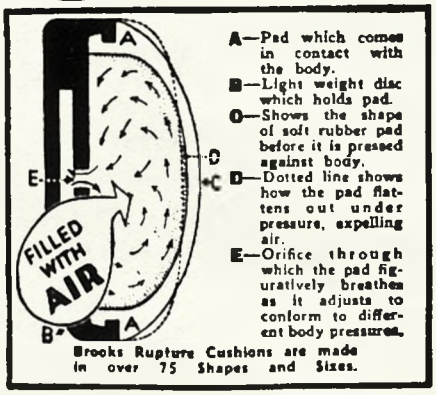
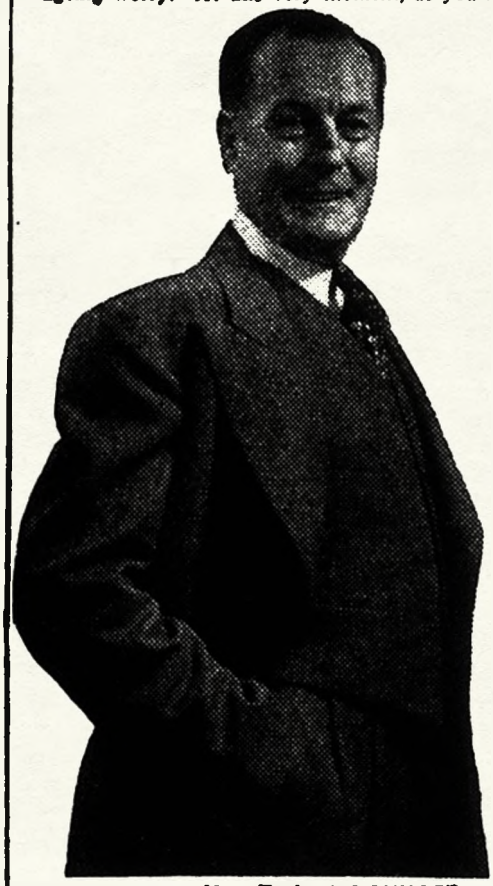


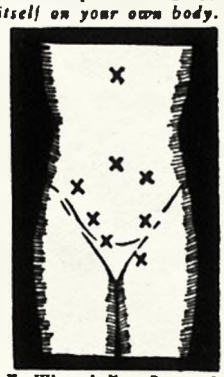
A—Pad which comes in contact with the body.
B—Light weight disc which holds pad.
C—Shows the shape of soft rubber pad before it is pressed against body.
D—Dotted line shows how the pad flattens out under pressure, expelling air.
E—Orifice through which the pad figuratively breathes as it adjusts to conform to different body pressures.

Brooks Rupture Cushions are made in over 75 Shapes and Sizes.



A BROOKS APPLIANCE WILL BE *SENT ON TRIAL* TO PROVE ITSELF *ON YOUR OWN BODY*

BROOKS asks no man or woman to buy a Brooks Appliance outright, on *faith alone.* Instead it will be sent you on *a thorough trial.* Wear it. Put it to every test for heavenly comfort and security. If you or your doctor are not satisfied, return the BROOKS and the trial will cost you nothing. So if you have reducible rupture send for a BROOKS Air-Cushion truss and let it *prove itself on your own body.* How doctors regard the BROOKS is shown by the fact that more than 9,000 have ordered, either for themselves or their patients.



X—Where Is Your Rupture?

LOW COST . . . AND THE AIR-CUSHION Support Gives Nature a Chance to Close the OPENING

Rich or poor—ANYONE can afford to buy a BROOKS. But look out for imitations and counterfeits. The Genuine BROOKS is never sold in stores or by agents. It is made up, after your order is received, to fit your particular case. The Patented Air-Cushion Support does away completely with hard, gouging, painful pads. There are no stiff, punishing springs. Instead, the yielding, clinging, secure AIR-CUSHION and velvet soft body band. Sanitary, lightweight, inconspicuous. No metal girdle to rust or corrode. And the Patented Automatic AIR-CUSHION continually works to give Nature a chance to close the opening. What a contrast to ordinary hard-pad uncomfortable trusses!

Learn How To Look YOUNGER—Send for FREE Rupture Book and TRIAL OFFER

No . . . don't order a BROOKS now . . . FIRST get the complete, revealing explanation. How the BROOKS securely holds reducible rupture is made as clear to you as ABC. Why rupture worry ends is utterly plain. How the Patented AIR-CUSHION Support gives perfect security with *heavenly comfort* is shown at a glance. Learn how you can be fitted individually for any kind of reducible rupture. THEN you'll never rest until you wear a BROOKS, prove its advantages on your own body. And remember, if not satisfied, the TRIAL is at OUR risk, NOT yours. Don't pass up an opportunity like this.

BROOKS APPLIANCE CO.
480-R STATE STREET MARSHALL, MICH.

MAIL COUPON NOW!

Brooks Appliance Co.
480-R State St., Marshall, Mich.

In PLAIN ENVELOPE, please send your FREE BOOK on Rupture, PROOF of Results, and TRIAL OFFER. No one is to call on me personally about my rupture.

Name_____

Street_____

City_____ State_____

State whether for Man ☐ Woman ☐ or Child ☐

GIVEN

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Nothing To Buy!

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Fully equipped—Balloon tires and all. NIFTY!—THIS Bike, Cash or choice of other marvelous premiums given.—SIMPLY GIVE AWAY FREE good size beautifully colored famous Art Pictures with our well known White CLOVERINE Brand SALVE, used for chaps, mild burns, shallow cuts. Salve easily sold to friends, relatives, and neighbors at 25c a box (with popular picture FREE). Remit and select premium as per catalog. 45th year. We are fair and square. Many customers waiting. Act Now! Mail Coupon! Salve and pictures sent postage paid. Be first—Write

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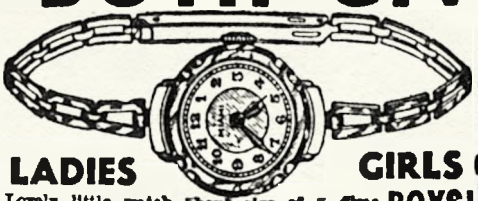

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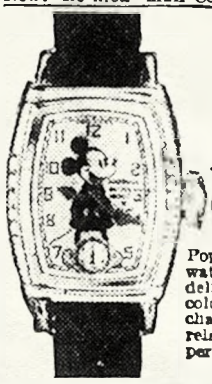

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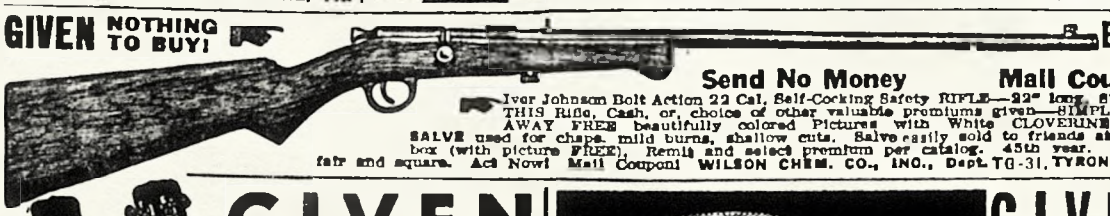

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Boys Girls Start Today Mail the Coupon!

GIVEN

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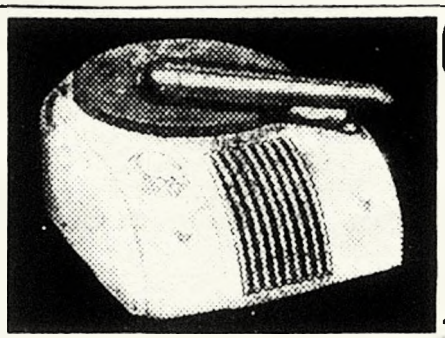

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Plays 12" record—Self-starting motor. Also produces good radio reception. See catalog for details. Other radios. GET THE NEWS! SWELL! This Radio-Phonograph, Cash or choice of other wonderful Premiums GIVEN—SIMPLY GIVE AWAY FREE good size beautifully colored popular Art Pictures with our well known White CLOVERINE Brand SALVE used for chaps, mild burns, shallow cuts. Salve easily sold to friends, relatives, and neighbors at 25c a box (with favorite picture FREE). Remit and select premium as per catalog. 45th year. We are reliable. Mail Coupon. WILSON CHEM. CO., INC., Dept. TG-31, TYRONE, PA.

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NAME.....

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WRITE, or PASTE COUPON ON A POSTAL or MAIL COUPON in an envelope NOW! Which premium do you like best?

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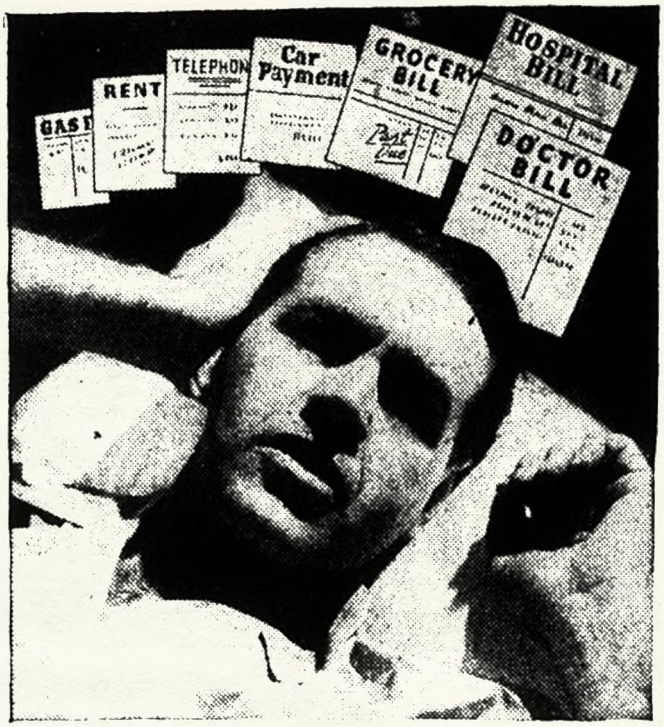
If This Were You— Laid Up By *SICKNESS OR ACCIDENT-*



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COSTS ONLY 3¢ A DAY

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Pays Cash For Common Sicknesses And All Types Of Accidents

This policy covers and pays graded benefits for all sicknesses common to both men and women, and 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 of disability, as provided.

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Young and old — men, women, children, ages 15 to 64 without Doctor's Examination — are eligible for this liberal insurance. More than $650,000.00 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.

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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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AS MUCH AS

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IN CASH for Accidental Death or Loss of Limbs or Eyesight.

UP TO $150.00

a month for sickness including Hospital Benefits.

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Cash paid as Emergency Aid or Identification Benefit.

OTHER LIBERAL BENEFITS

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

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GENUINE *Late Model No. 8*

L.C.SMITH

was $102.50

NOW $31.85 CASH

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While 297 Last!

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Buy direct from us at 1/3 mfrs. orig. price and save over $70.00! Beautifully rebuilt and unconditional 2 yr. guarantee. No down payment necessary—10 day Trial. *Hurry — only $97 at this price!*

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No obligation. Send no money. See before you buy on wide open 10 day Trial. Pay on easiest terms—only 9c a day. You get this genuine late office model L. C. Smith beautifully rebuilt with all standard improvements—basket shift, standard 84 character, 4-row keyboard, shift lock key, back spacer, 2 color ribbon, ribbon reverse, stencil cutting device, tabulator, etc. Ball Bearing throughout—quiet operation. THOUSANDS PAID $102.50—IT'S YOURS FOR ONLY $31.85 (CASH PRICE). No risk, money back guarantee.

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WIDE CARRIAGE MODELS

Wide carriage L. C. Smiths for government reports, large office forms, billing, etc. The 14 inch carriage takes paper 14" wide, has 12" writing line—only $3.00 extra with order. The 18" takes paper 18" wide has 16" writing line—only $5.00 extra with order.

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ROLL-A-WAY SECRETARIAL TYPEWRITER STAND

Mounted on casters, can be moved by touch of finger.

Big working surface, all metal, compact, strong, quiet, rigid, attractive. Two metal wings, correct working height.

For those who have no typewriter stand or handy place to use a typewriter, I make this special offer. This attractive stand that ordinarily sells for $4.85 can be yours for only $2.00 extra added to your account. *Quality built. Just note all its convenient features.*

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We give FREE with your L. C. Smith a complete 9 lesson Home Study course of Famous Van Zandt Touch Typing system. You can now learn typing quickly and easily.

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OVER 200,000 SATISFIED CUSTOMERS ALL OVER THE WORLD.

THE TERRIBLE PEOPLE

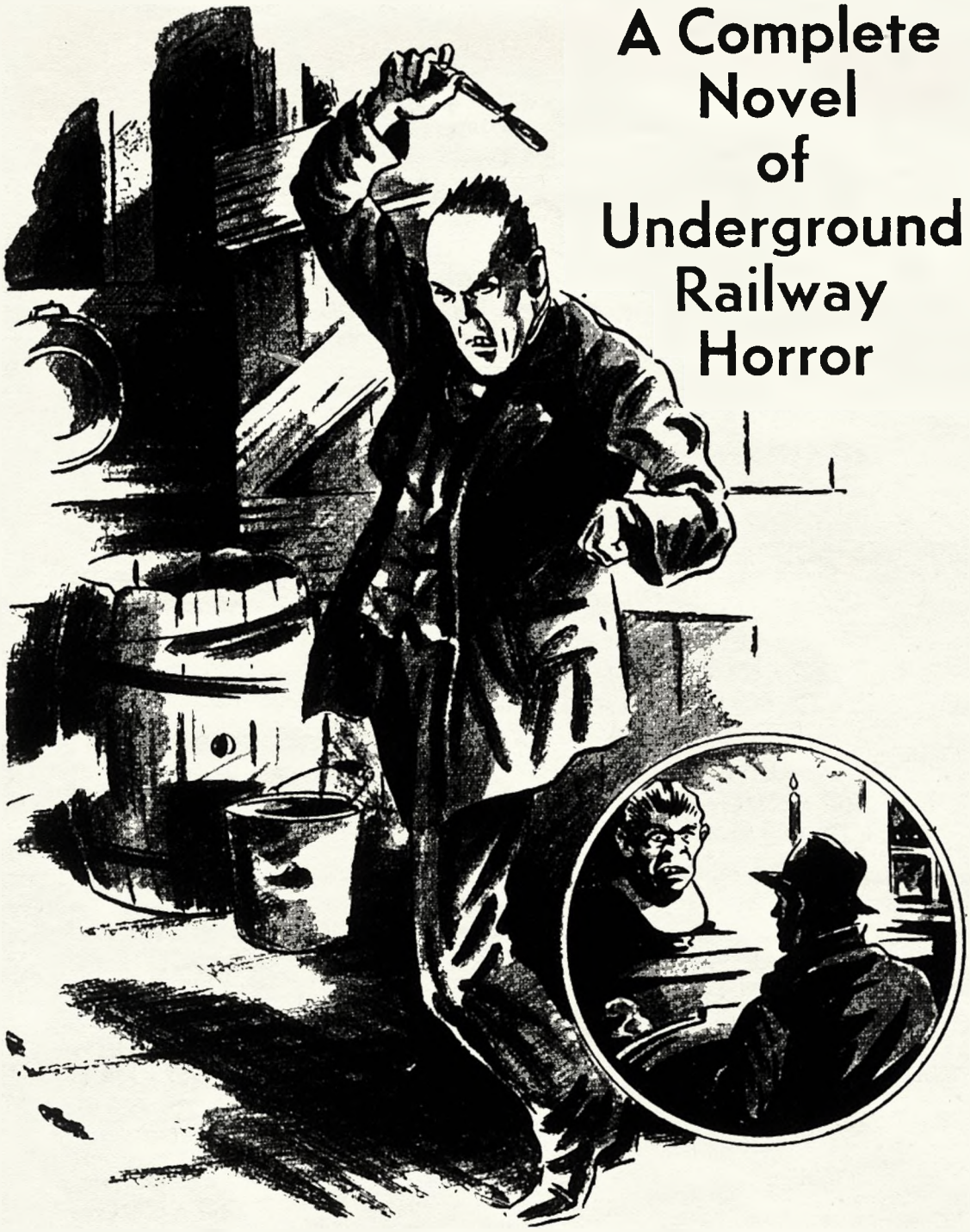
By G. T. FLEMING-ROBERTS

Author of "The Scourge of Flame," "The Killer with Claws," etc.

Death and the Howling Dog Haunt the Trimball Household as a Fearsome Minotaur Skulks the Labyrinth of Gray Gables!

As the creature gripped the knife at the blade-tip and raised its right arm, I rolled over and fired

A Complete Novel of Underground Railway Horror



CHAPTER I

Man Without a Face

BY eight o'clock, the scattered lights of Millersburg came out of the darkness beyond the reach of my headlights. It was one of those nights when the dark tent of the sky assumes infinite proportions, when a bullying wind plays ringmaster by thrashing the black circus of rebellious trees that parade across the landscape. It was the sort of night in which a lone motorist feels about as important to the universe as a microscopic plant cell.

I didn't know where to go from here. At Millersburg I would phone Gray Gables, as my destination was called, and talk to Doris. She would be as eager to hear my voice as I was to hear hers.

Doris Arden had been out of my office for three days now. I had got one letter from her during that time—all too short a letter to get from the girl

you expect to marry. Yet for all its brevity, I couldn't recall anything in it except that last line:

"Pat, darling, please come and take me away from these terrible people."

The "Pat" and the "darling" both referred to me. I'm Pat Malone, a private detective in the city. The "terrible people"—well, any guess would have been as good as mine. That word terrible has degenerated. Back in the city where I gum-shoe, there's a restaurant that serves terrible coffee. And I've been paid to protect jewelry at some society blow-outs that were terrible bores.

While Doris Arden never was a stickler for English usage, I couldn't help but believe that she had used the word "terrible" in its correct sense. Somebody was terrifying her. Otherwise, she wouldn't have risked my saying, "I told you so!"

Because I didn't want her to go to Gray Gables in the first place. The very name of the place gave me the cold creepers. And those two old women Doris called her aunts—well, there had to be something peculiar about them.

It couldn't be otherwise. Doris, left an orphan at the age of five, had been adopted by these two old maids and kept at Gray Gables for two years. After that, Ora and Zelma Trimball, her two aunts by adoption, had sent her to a boarding school in the east. And they kept her away.

Until she decided on paying them this surprise visit, she hadn't seen them in the past fifteen years. They had sent her from one school to another until she was old enough to take care of herself. No returning to Gray Gables at holiday time.

Funny thing was, in every material way, the two Trimball sisters showed genuine affection for Doris, spending lavishly from the traditional Trimball bank account so that Doris could have everything. Everything except a place to call home. So it was pretty obvious they didn't want to see Doris, which was very peculiar, Doris being the sort of person you can't see often enough.

THIS place called Millersburg was just about what it looked like on the map — an insignificant black dot. There was a general store on the right of the main drag and it was the center of night life, evidently. I pulled up to its broad plank stoop, climbed out and up, and went inside. A guy with chin whiskers and a cob pipe pointed the phone out to me. It was one of those hand-organ models with a crank on one side. I asked the billy goat with the cob pipe how to call Gray Gables and he said three longs and a short.

Maybe my longs weren't long enough, but I found I was tuned in on somebody's conversation. The voice of a woman, not entirely robbed of its music by the hum of the wires, said:

"Is there a minotaur in the labyrinth, I wonder? It makes it easy, doesn't it? To dispose of the body, I mean."

"Shut up!" a harsh, metallic and masculine voice cracked in. The woman's laugh came reassuringly. "Well, don't forget it takes money to marry me, mister," she said. "Get rid of her and—"

Somebody hung up, and I suppose it was the man with the harsh voice. Anyway, that was the end of it, and I didn't know where that scrap of conversation had come from nor what it was about. But it wasn't reassuring when I couldn't get the phone at Gray Gables to ring, even on the third trial. It didn't soothe my fine case of jitters any to believe that maybe one side of that conversation had come from Gray Gables.

I turned from the phone and asked the whiskered proprietor of the store how to get out to Gray Gables. Immediately a committee of six cracker-box loungers appointed themselves to tell me, and I got it finally that I was to keep on the highway until I came to a church on the right and then I was to turn left onto the worst road in the county. That didn't sound encouraging, either.

"Relative of the Trimball sisters, Mister?" asked the goat with the cob pipe. I said I wasn't. He shook his head.

"Kind of thought you looked a mite too sane to be a Trimball," he concluded.

"Thanks," I said, and walked out into the darkness and the wind.

I held my coat tight against the thieving fingers of the wind, walked the length of the plank stoop to the steps at one end, down the steps and around to my car. And then I bumped into something.

I raised my head. A shaft of cold air knifed up my spine and I don't think the wind had a whole lot to do with that. It was the man standing in front of me, for it was a man I had bumped into.

At first I didn't see anything about him except his face, which means I didn't really see his face because he didn't have one. What he used for a head was a criss-cross of cotton bandages that obscured every feature. His nose was just a bump in the bandage and I couldn't see even a slit for a mouth. There were black holes for the eyes and in the deep pits I could see reflected light from the eyeballs.

A MUFFLED voice, which sounded as though it came out of some old grave, said:

"I'm using your car. No argument."

I brought out that not very snappy and certainly not original come-back, "Like hell!"

The man shoved a gun into my middle.

"If you want it like hell I can make it like that. Get in and drive."

He reached behind him and opened the door of my car. He slid under the wheel and over to the right side of the cushion, all the time keeping the gun on me.

"Get in and drive," he said again.

I got in.

"Where to, mawster?" I asked, trying to be funny.

The faceless man leaned against me with his gun.

"Straight ahead," he said.

In the closed interior of the car, the man with the gun smelled like something out of the morgue — something embalmed. It was as though some meddler with the dead had taken a cadaver and rewound the clockwork of existence so that a corpse walked again.

Out of town a mile, a steepled church loomed against the gray glow of the night sky. My unknown and faceless pilot gave me a gun gouge.

Pat Malone

"Go left here," he said.

I swerved the car, picked out what appeared to be a lane to the left, turned the car into deep ruts. A bump nearly stalled the engine and I felt the shock absorbers and springs go the limit. My speed was cut to five miles an hour and knew this was what the men in the grocery store had referred to as the worst road in the county. This, then, was the way to Gray Gables.

I didn't have much driving to do. Manipulation of the car seemed to be in other hands than mine — hands I wasn't sure wished me any good. I stole a glance at my companion. Except for that slight bulge which indicated his nose, I wouldn't have known whether I was getting a profile or a front view of his face. If this was the kind of visitor that appeared at Gray Gables, I thought I understood what Doris meant by the terrible people.

"Easy on the way you're pushing that gun into me," I said. "One of these bumps and there might be some involuntary trigger action."

The man without a face said nothing, but his gun relaxed its pressure on me a little. I didn't know how many miles I was away from Gray Gables, but even a few miles might take a long time on such a road. Every now

and then the high crown of the road would slap the bottom of the car, all but kicking the engine out.

I kept on driving, watching the progress of the lights on the wall of black undergrowth which closed us in from both sides. And then I heard a thump against the floor of the car—a thump that had come from the inside.

I risked a glance downward, saw the faceless man's gun on the floor. My first impulse was to brake the car and scrap with the man for the gun. With that idea in mind, I came down hard on the brakes, not putting out the clutch, killing the engine.

BESIDE me, the faceless man toppled forward and would have fallen out of the seat entirely had there been room beneath the cowl. As it was, his bandaged head was rolling back and forth against the edge of the instrument panel until all motion of the car had ceased.

I dropped my hand to the man's shoulder.

"Hey," I said. "Hey, you!"

I gave him a shake with one hand and with the other picked up his gun. He didn't move, didn't show any sign of life. I picked up his limp left hand lying beside me on the cushion. I felt at his wrist. There was a pretty good pulse, but the guy was out—way out.

I let his gun fall back on the floor of the car, straightened, pushed back my hat and scratched my head. He was what I could call excess baggage. I couldn't take him back to town because there just wasn't any turning around on this road.

Then I recalled what Doris had said about the house right next door to Gray Gables. It was a new place built by a city doctor who had retired from active practice. Rice, I remembered, was the doctor's name. Dr. Rice had a private air field back of his house and a good-sized cabin plane. If this faceless guy needed more medical attention than Rice could give him, it would be an easy matter for the doctor to have him flown into town.

So I kept going. Every quirk in the road the faceless man would fall over on my shoulder and I had to shove him over on his side. Half an hour of this fighting with the wheel and with the hundred and sixty pounds of half dead man next to me, and I came within sight of Gray Gables.

The house, set in a grove of neglected hardwoods, was one of those creations which must have expanded with the family. It seemed to sprawl over half an acre. There was no visible light in the place. The only lighted window I could see anywhere was in the house next door, a good five hundred feet away.

This was, I presumed, the house belonging to Dr. Rice. What I could see of it indicated that it had been built by a fairly sane man. Gray Gables, on the other hand, was an architect's nightmare.

I turned into what served Gray Gables for a drive, and my engine died a natural death. Oddly enough, the wind, too, had quieted so that there was an interval of silence, somehow unnerving. I looked for a moment at the dark and silent house. It was hard to picture Doris Arden in such a place.

The unknown man beside me had not altered his sprawled position since that final bump. I felt his wrist again. I could detect no irregularity in his pulse, but then I am no medical man. I left the man in the car and went at once to the front door of the house which was sheltered by a tiny peaked roof above the weather panel. I drummed on the door with the knocker. There was no immediate answer. I was about to try again when I heard within the house the long drawn howl of a dog.

HAIRS on the back of my neck prickled up. The howl tapered off into silence. I put my hand to the knob of the door, turned it, pushed. Another moment and I was inside the house with a darkness that was like molten tar plastered against my eyeballs.

I felt for a light switch along the side of the door, didn't find it. I groped for matches, scuffed one on the box. The flare of flame brought a face out of the darkness, white, but not ghostly. Instead it was something like coming face to face with a demon—a peaked head, malevolent eyes surmounted by

Satanic brows, and from the eyes on down a flat nose, a bestial mouth, and a simian chin. My match burned out.

I struck another and the demon's face stared at me with the same fixed expression from the same spot across the room. And then I saw that it was a bust modeled after some god-awful monster, chiseled in marble and mounted on top of a book case. Beside it was a candle. I started for the candle, match in hand, when I heard whispering voices not far away. I puffed out the match and stood rigidly in my tracks, listening.

"Someone in the library, Hardy. A burglar, eh? See if you can keep him placed while I go upstairs for Mr. Vraine."

"But Mr. Bots, surely since you're serving Dr. Rice and not no one in this house, ain't it my place to see to it that Mr. Vraine comes down?"

The second whispering voice had the unmistakable quiver of fear in it.

"Not at all," said the first. "I don't ask you to do anything but keep an eye on where the prowler goes. I'm sure I saw somebody come through the dining room window."

Footsteps close to me and then treading on a stairway. In front of me, a flashlight peaked cautiously and I got a glimpse of an open-mouthed, chinless man in rusty black moving through an arched door in front of me. The light went out and I followed the sound of footsteps, detouring at least a dozen pieces of furniture my groping hands encountered.

Again the flashlight glimmered from another room indicated by a narrow door on my left. I moved quickly while there was light, went through the opening. A board creaked underfoot. The man with the light came to a halt, too frightened to turn around. Somewhere in the upper reaches of the house that damned dog broke out into a howl.

"Th-that you, Bots? It—it is you, ain't it, Bots?"

The man with the light started to turn around. As he did so, stray rays from his light caught two swiftly moving blobs of white coming out of the darkness behind him. I heeled the door shut behind me, started my hand up for my gun. And at the same time the two blobs of white became a misshapen hand and a face that was like nothing I had ever seen—a sort of incompleted masterpiece by a sculptor of horrors, something that was more hideous because it was unfinished.

THE man dropped his light. In the blackness, feet scuffled.

"One of *them! Help!* Mr. Winston, help!" the man shrilled. And then a gruesome bubbling sound, the flat dead smack of a body hitting the floor.

I didn't know what I was fighting but I waded in anyway, my gun clubbed. Something slapped me across the Adam's apple and I reeled backward through constellations of stars to hit the door flatly. In the middle of the Niagara roar that was going on in my head, I heard the howl of a dog. I gulped three times, gagged a little, then listened to tomb-like silence.

I got out matches, held the box in my right hand along with my gun, scraped a flame and held it high. I was alone in the room — except for the corpse on the floor.

CHAPTER II

Sculptor of Horrors

MY match-flame revealed a shallow fire-place with a mantel of sea green marble. Antique gold leaf candelabras were on both ends of the mantel and I carried my match to the tip of a candle. That gave me light to see the corpse on the floor—the chinless person in rusty black whom I had seen with the flashlight.

Beside him lay a curious ivory-handled knife with a keen blade that had opened a wide-lipped wound across the man's throat from ear to ear. I think nothing but the bones of the spinal column had prevented the man from being completely decapitated.

I got down on my knees to look at the knife. The cylindrical ivory handle was ornately carved — a twining dragon in high relief, the work of some Chinese artisan.

I stood up, stared dully around the room. It was nearly cubical, with one

window on one side and no door other than the one through which I had entered. A thick layer of dust lay on the window sill. I turned slowly around, looking at each of three delicate looking antique chairs and a small writing desk.

Refusing to believe my eyes, I even went to the fireplace and looked up the narrow flue. Where was the killer? It seemed impossible that whatever the white-faced horror was, it could have passed me and got through the door.

Outside the room came the sound of excited voices, and I realized that if anybody wanted to be ugly I could quite easily be named a murderer. I shoved my gun back into its holster, went to the door. Outside I could hear the voice of the man named Bots.

"It was right from this room, Miss Trimball. Don't worry. Hardy scares easy, miss. I'll open the door—"

But I beat Bots to opening the door. I came out fast and Bots backed a little way and I thought made a move that was at least half of a gun draw. He was a big man, dressed in peg-top pants, tan boots, a waterproof jacket and cap. His face was a ruddy moon, his eyes widely spaced and nearly black.

Behind Bots were three women, but I saw only one of them at the moment. Doris Arden pushed a lighted oil lamp into Bots' hands and threw herself into my arms. Wordlessly, I hugged her close to me. Her face was pressed tight against my chest so I put my kiss in the black waves of her hair. She raised her head then, greenish eyes shining, lips smiling. She kissed me too briefly, pushed out of my embrace, and holding my hand turned to the other two women.

"Aunt Ora, Aunt Zelma, this—this is my Pat." She laughed a little.

Zelma Trimball, a lank woman who had run from old age and had been caught, stepped forward. Her withered lips were rouged, her hair stiff-looking with brown dye, her eyebrows absurdly plucked. She had added to her gaudy evening gown at least half a dozen ropes of glittering beads which her thin fingers continually sifted. She spoke to me.

"Mr. Malone, I am sorry you came at this time. I—"

HER sister interrupted.

"Zelma! That's no way to welcome a guest.

Ora Trimball, short and plump, with a face that must have been impudently pretty in her youth, put out a hand to me.

"We're both awfully glad to meet Doris' gentleman," she said.

"But what I want to know," Bots put in, "is what went on in that room. Where's Hardy?" He crowded in between Zelma and Ora Trimball, his dark eyes taking pretty careful stock of me. "What were you doing in there?"

"Trying to prevent a murder," I said. "And I did not succeed."

Bots turned from me to the door, flung it open, went into the room. The women would have followed him had I not blocked off the doorway. I called back to Bots: "Don't touch anything."

Bots cursed in a deep-chested voice.

"It's not Hardy?" Ora Trimball said. "Don't tell me it's Hardy.'

"If Hardy is the servant, I'm afraid it is Hardy," I said. "Who's this somewhat officious Mr. Bots?"

"Dr. Rice's servant," Zelma said.

"And sometimes you would think Dr. Rice is Bots' servant," Doris added. "Oh, Pat, what does it all mean? Murder—"

"Murder," Zelma said sharply, "is murder, child. It means death. Sometimes there just isn't any reason, just like there isn't any reason for death sometimes."

"There was a reason this time," I said. "Anyone here know a Mr. Winston?"

I looked from Doris' sweet face to Zelma's withered face to Ora Trimball's round face. Ora Trimball, with her sad, prominent eyes, reminded me somewhat of a pug dog.

No one had ever heard of a Mr. Winston. Yet the murdered man had called out for help from a Mr. Winston.

"Someone better be sent for this Dr. Rice," I said. "The man in there is dead, but I've another man out in the car who isn't dead — someone who seems to have been injured."

I thought it just as well not to mention the circumstances of how I had happened to bring the man with the bandaged head with me.

"What's that?"

Behind me, Bots asked the question. He came from the room where inexplicable murder had taken place, a squat-bowled pipe in his teeth. He looked a lot more like a prominent business man who had come out into the country for a week of roughing it than a servant. "What's that about an unconscious man in your car, Malone?" he asked.

Ora Trimball plucked at Bot's sleeve. "Will you just run over and tell Dr. Rice that we need him?"

BOTS gave Ora Trimball an insolent look. "Maybe I will, Miss Ora. Only just remember that I can be serving man for just one household at a time. I don't mind doing you a favor, but I'd hate to *work* here." He took a few steps across the hall, turned and addressed me: "If you've got an injured man cooped up in your car, you'd better get him out and into a bed, Malone."

I watched Bots through the door. "Nice guy," I murmured to Doris.

"Bots is all right," Doris assured me. "He's dreadful sane. And," she added in a whisper, "sanity is a novelty here."

I looked around the huge hall and believed her. The room looked like an antique shop with old furniture crowded closely together. Some of these museum pieces weren't to be sat on, as suggested by pieces of ribbon tied across their arms. Then there was that bookcase topped with that hideous demonic bust. That marble head with its bestial features would always haunt me.

Across the room, the Trimball sisters were seated on the edge of a rolled back couch, heads close together, talking in low tones. Finally Ora turned to me, a distressed look on her plump face.

"Mr. Malone, maybe you'd better bring that injured man in. I'll have my half-brother, Martin Vraine, come and help you."

And she and her lank and glittering sister went to the stairway and up into the shadows. I suppose their eyes were used to the gloom, but I didn't see how anything but a cat could navigate in the cluttered house without a light.

Alone with Doris, I took her into my arms and did a better job of kissing her. And when I looked up and saw that sculptured demon-face glaring at me from the bookcase, my hold on Doris tightened. I felt an inexplicable dread as I stared at that hideous piece of modeling. It was almost as though I feared this monster was a living thing that could take Doris from me.

The silence of the house was broken by an odd whirring sound such as a swiftly moving electric elevator might make. Doris broke our embrace, turned around quickly.

"It's James Vraine," she whispered. "He—he frightens me."

The whirring noise became louder, and from an arched doorway near the foot of the stairs a wheel-chair darted into the room. The man in the chair wore a white smock which did not conceal the fact that both of his legs were amputated above the knee. The rest of his body was thick without being fleshy. His handsome head was mounted on a sinewy pillar of neck and in the center of broad and powerful shoulders. His features approached perfection except that his mouth was a bit too small for his teeth. He was bald except for a few hairs like a scalplock plastered so close to his cranium that they appeared to have been painted there in black with a single stroke of a brush.

THE wheel-chair was considerably more than that. It was actually a small electric car run by big storage batteries mounted behind. James Vraine steered the car adroitly between pieces of ancient furniture until he was within a few feet of us. His large teeth bulged from his small mouth in a smile.

"How do you do?" he said. "I'm James Vraine, or rather what's left of James Vraine. And of course you're Pat Malone. Doris has been telling us about you. We haven't had as many guests in a long, long time at Gray Gables. It's a treat."

A lump of modeling clay rested between the man's stumps of legs. Gray clay stained his white smock.

His left hand squeezed into the clay as I took his right in mine.

"You're a sculptor?" I asked.

James Vraine nodded. "Doris, have you shown Mr. Malone that bit of my

handiwork?" He gestured toward the hideous marble bust on the bookcase. Doris sent the bust an almost terrified glance.

"It's not a thing you have to show to anyone, James," she said. "And I think Aunt Ora and Aunt Zelma are absolutely right in saying you ought to keep that ugly thing in your studio."

James Vraine uttered a short, unpleasant laugh.

"I had to throw a tantrum tonight in order to get them to let me put that bust on the bookcase. My artistic temperament gets me my own way, you see. Do you know what I do when I put on a tantrum?"

I shook my head. "Maybe you pull out your hair," I said. "It looks as though you might have."

"No, no. That would be childish," the legless man said. "No, I bump into things." He leaned forward on the control handle of his wheeled chair. "It seems impossible that half a man could be dangerous, doesn't it? Yet I can crack into chairs and break them with this outfit of mine, and I can smash into people, too."

I looked at Doris. Her sweet face was pale, her lower lip trembling. Suddenly I hated this legless cripple with his toothy smile and his bloated spider body—hated him because I knew he had deliberately terrified Doris.

James Vraine waved a hand at the bust on the bookcase.

"What do you think of it, Malone?"

"It's horrible," I said.

James Vraine chuckled. "But lifelike. Quite lifelike."

Lifelike? Such a thing as this lived only in a nightmare. Yet could I be sure of that after that ghastly white half-finished face that I had seen in the darkness a few moments ago when murder had occurred?

CHAPTER III

Death and the Howling Dog

MY first impression of Martin Vraine when I saw him coming down the stairs with his two half-sisters, Ora and Zelma Trimball, was that here at least was one sane and likeable member of the Gray Gables household. Like his crippled brother, he was well made, but his body lacked that thick, bloated appearance. He was as light as James Vraine was dark, having a thick thatch of curly, straw-colored hair. His mouth, like his brother's, was small, but he seemed to have teeth in proportion.

A sad little King Charles spaniel trailed at Martin Vraine's heels, and I couldn't help but compare the eyes of the dog with those of Ora Trimball, as the latter introduced me to her half brother, Martin.

But when Martin Vraine acknowledged the introduction, my nerves grew suddenly taut. His was the harsh male voice I had inadvertently overheard when I had tried to call Gray Gables from Millersburg—the voice of the man who was being urged to commit murder, to dispose of a body.

Little wonder that I gave Martin Vraine a shocked and, I've no doubt, dumb-looking stare, until he reminded me that his sister had told him I had brought an injured man in the car with me.

Together Martin Vraine and I went out to my car. The unknown man with the bandaged head was still there, his position unaltered; his pulse a little more rapid and certain, I thought.

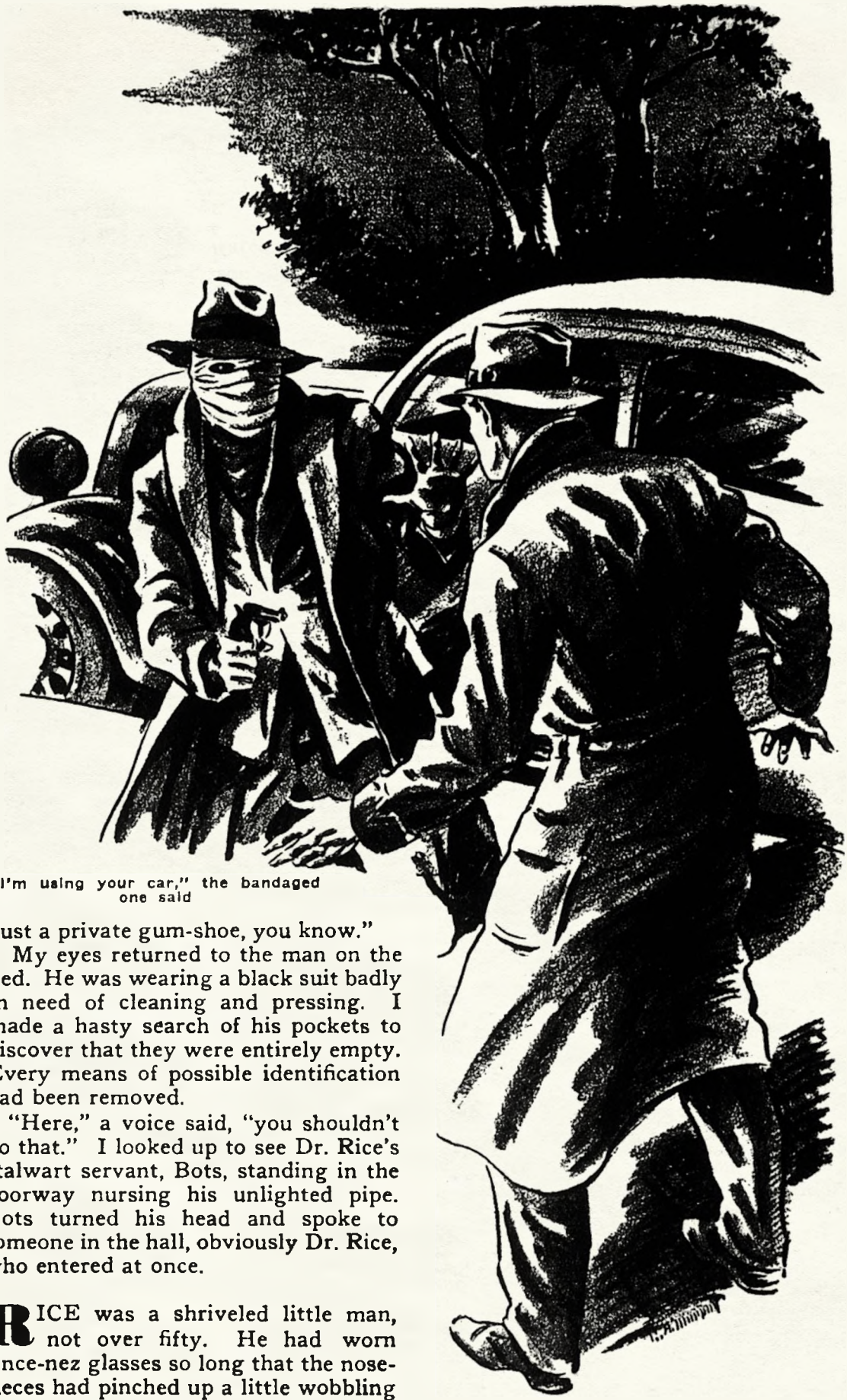
We carried the unknown man into the house and Doris, holding a lamp, led the way up the steps and pointed out the bedroom where we put the injured man. We stretched the unknown out on the bed and he moved one arm slightly, indicating that he might be on the verge of reviving. I was bending over the unconscious man when Martin Vraine turned to me.

"You're a detective, aren't you, Malone? he asked.

I looked up. "Yes," I said shortly. I wanted to add that I had my eye pretty definitely on him.

Martin Vraine went on. "This—this unfortunate business about Hardy being murdered—I suppose if you wanted to, or if it was made worth your while, you could shut the matter up?"

"No," I said. "I'll have to get in touch with the country sheriff's office at once. I have no official capacity.



"I'm using your car," the bandaged one said

Just a private gum-shoe, you know."

My eyes returned to the man on the bed. He was wearing a black suit badly in need of cleaning and pressing. I made a hasty search of his pockets to discover that they were entirely empty. Every means of possible identification had been removed.

"Here," a voice said, "you shouldn't do that." I looked up to see Dr. Rice's stalwart servant, Bots, standing in the doorway nursing his unlighted pipe. Bots turned his head and spoke to someone in the hall, obviously Dr. Rice, who entered at once.

RICE was a shriveled little man, not over fifty. He had worn pince-nez glasses so long that the nose-pieces had pinched up a little wobbling knob of flesh on his nose. He entered

the room almost timidly, looked back at Bots, and then scooted to the bed, his medical kit in his hand.

Rice gave the unknown a perfunctory examination. The unknown groaned a little under Rice's proddings.

"Possibly a slight skull fracture somewhere beneath all that bandage. I can't be certain without a more complete examination, yet I hesitate to remove those dressings about the head and face until I can better observe the man's condition."

"It seems to me that I've seen that man somewhere before," Martin Vraine said.

"That couldn't be," Bots said insolently. "You can't recognize a man if you can't see his face."

Martin Vraine gave Bots a cool glance. "I did not say I recognized him. Dr. Rice, I think if I were paying out money for a servant, I would certainly employ one who could be civil."

"Exactly, exactly," Dr. Rice said, fumbling in his medical kit. "But Bots is a good man. An exceedingly good man."

Martin Vraine grunted, left the room. I watched him go into what I supposed was his own bedroom and reappear a moment later wearing a leather jacket and a hat. As he started down the stairway, Bots went to the door of the room where the unknown man was and glanced after Martin Vraine.

"Gone off for a walk in a huff," Bots said. "Funny guy, Martin Vraine. Nearly as funny as his legless brother. Funny house, Malone, and funny people."

Bots then left me alone with the doctor and I heard his booted feet marching down the stairs.

Dr. Rice had bared the arm of his unknown patient and was making a hypodermic injection.

"When you get through here," I said, "I'd like you to take a look at the murdered servant downstairs."

Rice nodded. "Bots was telling me Hardy had been killed. Well, well. Here today and gone tomorrow."

I caught the doctor's eyes and held them. "You take it cool enough."

He uttered a short laugh. "A doctor, you know. Death is commonplace to a doctor."

"Undoubtedly you've seen many a murder committed in a room from where there is no apparent escape for the murderer and yet from which the murderer disappears," I said.

Rice blinked. "Well—" he began doubtfully.

"Well, what?"

He laughed uneasily. "The house is haunted, you know. When Bots said it was a funny house, that's what he meant. Funny house, funny people."

I STARTED for the door. "What kind of a sheriff's office have you in this county."

Rice straightened. "Sheriff?" He turned from the bed and looked at me. "Why do you ask?"

"Because I'm going to call the sheriff, of course."

"Of course," he said, "of course."

Rice started to return his attention to his patient and then snapped around so quickly that his glasses came off and clinked against the buttons of his vest.

"No, you mustn't call the sheriff," he said. "You mustn't do that."

"Why?" I demanded.

"Well—er, I don't think"— He remounted his glasses—"I don't think the Trimball sisters will like that."

Downstairs the spaniel broke into a low, mournful howl.

It was all bunk—that superstition about howling dogs and death. And yet the first time I had heard that dog howl there had been murder. I strode into the upstairs hall and hurried down the steps. At the foot of the stairs stood Bots, his pipe in his mouth. He grinned at me.

"If it's the ladies you are looking for, Malone, they're in the study all safe and sound. Shall we join them, as the fellow says?"

In spite of the big man's insolence, I began to think a little better of Dr. Rice's servant. We went from the lower hall with its conglomerate display of antique furniture, passed the door of the murder room to another door which Bots opened. Ora Trimball was busy with her knitting. Her lanky sister was less usefully occupied, toying with the glittering beads around her throat.

Doris was seated on a davenport on the far side of the room, talking to a

woman I had never seen before—an extremely attractive blonde who was dressed in a dark traveling suit and a hat with a veil.

The spaniel dog came bounding to meet us and jumped up gleefully on Bot's booted legs.

"Nice purp," Bot said. He went into the room ahead of me, without so much as removing his cap.

Doris stood up. I thought some of her usual vivacity was returning to her, for she gave me a wink and crooked her finger at me.

"Pat," she said, "I'd like to have you meet Miss Ann Peterson. Ann, this is Pat Malone."

Ann Peterson looked up at me. In spite of the coquettish veil she wore, her face would have made an excellent model for an artist who intended to paint a madonna. She extended her white gloved hand to me.

"Doris has been telling me about her —her employer and how very nice he is to her."

Doris flushed. "I've been doing no such thing. I've told her how you kick me around the office, that's all."

As for me—well, I released Ann Peterson's hand as though it had burned my fingers. Because Ann Peterson's sweet voice was the same voice I had heard over the phone talking to Martin Vraine—talking about disposing of somebody, putting a body in a labyrinth, saying that it took money to marry her.

AND then, unaccountably, the spaniel began to whimper. Miss Zelma Trimball's fingers, growing nervously taut, snapped one string of her beads. The dog on its haunches in front of Bots, tilted its muzzle and broke into a howl. And Bots—his dark eyes were focused on the south wall of the room, his pipe about to fall from his slightly parted mouth. I followed his gaze.

Ten feet up from the floor on the south wall of the room was one of those round brass plates used to cover the stove pipe opening to a chimney. It had been moved slightly to one side and the muzzle of a gun was just visible in the opening. I didn't have to look twice to see that the gun was trained on Doris Arden!

CHAPTER IV

Shrieking Walls

BOTS and I moved at the same time. I don't know what we expected to do unless it was shove a finger down the barrel of the gun, but we weren't a yard from the wall when the gun disappeared.

A voice, hideous with fear, shrieked from behind the wall.

"*Don't!* Don't for the love of heaven! I won't tell—"

And then words were unintelligible and the cry rose to a shivering pinnacle of hysteria. There was a horrible crushing sound and I wheeled, called to Bots: "In the next room!"

We went out into the huge hall and to the door of the room where Hardy had met his murderer. I flung open the door and stood there, staring at emptiness. Again my unbelieving eyes traveled from one slight piece of furniture to another. No closets in which to hide, no object which would have hidden a living thing larger than the spaniel dog, and no body on the floor. No body, understand, no body of Hardy or anybody else. No blood. No knife. And yet the very room echoed with agonized death cries.

I turned to Bots who meditatively sucked on his cold pipe.

"Beats me," he said.

I walked out of the room and closed the door behind me. Coming down the stairway, his wrinkled face as indistinct in the shadows as the product of a spirit medium's ectoplasm, was Dr. Rice.

"I've given the patient upstairs a sedative," Rice said. It will do him no harm, and until I can make more exhaustive observations, it's best that he get some rest. Quite certain his head injury isn't serious. Now, about this—this unfortunate business of Hardy—where did you say the body was?"

"I didn't say," I snapped. "Anyway, it's gone." I threaded my way across the long hall with its clutter of antiques. Next to the door of a dark room which might have been living room or dining room, there was one of those crank wall phones.

"You—you're calling the sheriff?" Dr. Rice said.

"Yeah," I said, thumbing through a thin and well-worn phone directory.

"Of course, of course," Dr. Rice cleared his throat. "And in the case of murder there has to be a—er, a body, you know."

"There's a body, damn it," I said.

Hardy wasn't running around with his head half cut off. If the body had moved from the murder room, someone had moved it. I found the long distance operator's number and was about to put the call through when I heard the whirring of James Vraine's motorized chair. The legless man rolled out of the dark doorway to where I was standing.

"Malone!" he said sharply.

I TURNED from the phone, grunted at James Vraine.

"Malone, what do you intend to do?"

"Get in touch with the sheriff," I said. "Things happen too damned fast around here to suit me."

"You're not adequate to deal with the situation?" James Vraine asked, leaning hard on the handle of his electric chariot.

"I've explained I have no official capacity," I said.

Vraine nodded. His eyes were narrowing, his lower lip drooped away from his too large teeth.

"You're not calling anyone, Malone," Vraine said. "Not anyone. We won't put up with it."

I laughed, took down the receiver of the telephone. "Nothing like a few quiet little murders to amuse your guests, eh?"

My hand went to the crank of the phone.

"No, Malone!" James Vraine shouted.

Out of the corner of my eye, I saw that the cripple's face was black with fury. Fury shook his big, bloated torso. And suddenly he turned current into the powerful electric motor that propelled him.

I saw him coming, but seeing and getting out of his way were two different things. He moved with the speed and adroitness of an attacking tarantula. I sprang back from the phone, and the steel frame of his chair nearly clipped off my right knee cap.

I reeled sideways and he instantly reversed his chair so that the cage at the rear laden with storage batteries hit me in the middle, knocked me over a chair. I must have been turning as I fell because when I hit, my forehead contacted the brass claw-and-ball leg of an antique table.

For a moment I wasn't good for anything except counting stars. I twisted over on my side in time to see James Vraine beating the phone to pieces with a section of steel from the arm of his chair, which he had detached.

I got to my feet by nearly pulling that table over on top of myself. I clung to the table, trying to get my eyes in focus. At the other end of the big room, Dr. Rice was hopping up and down and wringing his hands. I saw Doris, the two Trimball sisters, and Ann Peterson come out of the study. Bots was striding toward James Vraine, his pipe clenched between his teeth, his voice bellowing to Vraine to stop. The telephone box crashed to the floor, one side of it beaten in, a coil of wire poking through the opening.

As Bots stepped up to where he might have put hands on James Vraine, the legless man, whose movements certainly were not what you could call handicapped, reversed his chair, accelerated forward. The steel bumper of the chair slammed the booted right ankle of Bots up against the wall and Bots' forehead suddenly glistened with the sweat of pain.

JAMES VRAINE'S laughter sounded high above the crash of the chair.

"James! James!" Zelma Trimball cried out, as she fluttered across the room. "Stop it, James. You're hurting him. You're hurting Mr. Bots, don't you see? Stop, I tell you!"

James' wheel-chair pressed relentlessly against Bots' pinioned ankle. His dark eyes raised to the wrinkled, anxious face of his half sister.

"Malone was going to call the sheriff," he said. "And—and—"

He threw an arm up and around Zelma's neck and I thought for a moment that he was trying to injure the gaunt old woman in his frantic, destructive

rage. So I stepped in.

Because I stepped in to try and protect Zelma Trimball, I heard James Vraine's whispered words: *"It's* out."

Zelma Trimball uttered a faint little cry. Her eyes met her sister's appealingly. Ora Trimball bounced over to where Zelma stood, dropped a plump hand on the crippled man's shoulder.

"Back up, James. You're hurting Mr. Bots."

Pouting, glowering like a little boy who has had a scolding, James Vraine backed his wheeled chair. Bots dropped into a chair and took his pipe out of his mouth.

"Well, I guess nobody calls the sheriff," he said.

"Dr. Rice, what about your phone?" I asked.

"Well—er, I don't have a phone. You see the idea of me getting this place out here in the country was to get entirely away from my practice. It's a poor doctor who can't diagnose his own ailment. And I—well, I have high blood pressure. Yes, that's my trouble, high blood pressure from too much work and nervous strain. So whenever I really have to contact the city, I use the Trimball phone. But I can't make it too convenient, you see, or I would be in constant contact with the city, with work, with worry."

Dr. Rice stooped, picked up his satchel.

"Well—er"— he divided a glance between all of us— "I suppose that's all. I'll be in to see our patient later on, perhaps. Bots, my man, you can come with me or you can stay here. Inasmuch as the Trimball sisters have been deprived of their servant—"

"I wouldn't work here if you gave me the place," Bots said. He turned to me and added: "If you have any more trouble with James, pull a wheel off his machine." And Bots hobbled off with the doctor.

I wasn't going to have any trouble with James Vraine, at least for the present, for he maneuvered his motorized chair around and steered it back through the dark doorway from whence he had come. He had a flashlight with him and I saw its beam finger out the way to an oak door that looked as though it belonged on an ancient fortress. The door opened, he rolled in, and the door closed after him.

I TURNED to the women. The two Trimball sisters were sitting on the edge of the roll-backed couch. Zelma was knotting bead strands about her fingers. Ora's protruding eyes were moving slowly about the room in a way that got my goat—as though watching some invisible moving thing. Ann Peterson had removed her hat and was tucking at her hair in front of an ancient convex mirror. Doris was close by my side and she had caught the finger-knotting disease from Zelma, only she was pulling on a tiny handkerchief.

"If Martin would only come back!" Zelma moaned.

Ora nodded. "And yet when he announced two weeks ago that he was paying us a visit, you didn't want him to come."

"Where is Martin?" Ann demanded, turning from the mirror. "A fine boy friend I have! I drove two hundred miles to see him."

"He just went out for a walk," Ora said. "You hadn't any business to come here, following him around like a— a hussy!"

Ann Peterson laughed, opened her handbag and took out a package of cigarettes.

"No one could say we aren't well chaperoned, my dear."

Ora switched her skirts and started for the stair.

"Come, Zelma. It's bedtime. Doris, you can show Mr. Malone his room—" She pressed a plump hand over her mouth. "I forgot. Mr. Malone hasn't any room now. His—his injured man is in it. In the best guest bed, too, that man with the wrapped-up head."

"Don't worry," I said, "I'll nap down here on the couch. You go and get some rest."

"But Ora—" Zelma began.

"What?" the plump sister asked.

"Nothing, except that how will Mr. Malone lock—lock himself in? That is, if he sleeps down here."

I forced a laugh. "I'm not in the habit of locking myself in. I'm quite used to prowling ghosts by now. I was born next to a grave yard."

The two old women went off together

upstairs, their grotesque shadows following them like malignant spirits bent on their destruction.

Ann Peterson looked at Doris and me, flicked her cigarette ashes into a costly ruby glass vase that stood on the table beside her.

"Don't mind me, love birds. I'll retire to the study and leave this gorgeous parlor to you children. And"—her foot tapped impatiently—"when Martin Vraine comes in, you send him to me. "Night." Heels tapping belligerently, she went into the study and closed the door behind her.

DORIS and I took up the places vacated by the Trimball sisters on the couch, a bit closer together maybe. Doris was shivering, terrified. I knew now what she had meant by the "terrible people." The Trimball sisters themselves were something less than normal. They were concealing something—something that s e e m e d as frightening to them as it was to Doris. And the two Vraine brothers were a bit terrible in themselves, what with James' brutal tantrums and Martin who planned murder.

"Pat, how are you going to get in touch with the sheriff?" Doris asked suddenly.

I shook my head. "I'm not. There's no reason to right now, because if we can't produce a body we can't claim that there has been any murder. But what's wrong with these people? What's wrong with the house?"

A shudder coursed across her shoulders and I held her tight.

"The house is haunted," she said.

"I laughed.

"Yes, Pat. I don't mean haunted like you think. Not real ghosts. Things out of the past, I mean. This old house used to be a part of the underground railroad system that was so important in helping the negro slaves run away from their masters years ago, before the Civil War, I guess. There are places in this house where the shadows of the past lurk—secret places we don't know about. It gives me the creepers, like you say."

"Martin Vraine and his girl friend scare me a little bit more than the shadows," I said. And I told her what I had overheard when I had phoned Gray Gables.

"Why Pat, maybe they meant to get rid of me! I haven't had a chance to tell you yet, but Aunt Zelma and Aunt Ora have willed me their entire fortune. If something were to happen to me, then both Martin and James would have a chance at the Trimball wealth."

"Something nearly happend to you tonight," I said. "Someone tried to shoot you from that stove-pipe hole in the study. There must have been a passage behind that wall somewhere—one end of the labyrinth that Ann Peterson spoke of. Do you know of any such passage?"

Doris shook her head. "It's all so incredible! Murder me for money—"

"When you've been in this gum-shoe business for a little while longer," I said, "you won't think there's anything so damned incredible about that. But what is it that the Trimball sisters are hiding? What are the two Vraines doing here anyway?"

"I don't know what they're hiding. And James Vraine moved in here shortly after I left when I was a little girl. Martin Vraine just seems to be here on a visit, or maybe here to—to get rid of me."

THE Gray Gables spaniel came quietly into the room at the moment, crouched down in front of us, tail wagging. I didn't encourage the dog. It was queer that there had been murder or attempted murder both times the dog had howled. It was not so certain there hadn't been two murders, though at the present time it was impossible to establish either of them legally. And what had done the killing? Certainly not the howl of a dog.

I suggested to Doris that she go to bed. She needed rest and I told her there was nothing to be afraid of. I would probably be on the prowl all night anyway. I took her up the steps, and after we had kissed good night I took a candle and walked down the hall to the room where the unknown man was.

The man was on the huge bed as I had last seen him. He seemed to be sleeping soundly. His pulse was steady. I had an almost uncontrollable urge to strip off the bandages and see what his face was like. Who was this man

and how did he fit into the puzzle?

My mind went back to the death of the servant, Hardy. What was the name Hardy had called out before he died? Winston, I thought.

I stooped over the man on the bed and whispered, "Winston!" distinctly.

He stirred slightly, groaned, relaxed again. I shook him by the shoulder, but this didn't get me anywhere. The man was still a long way out of the picture. His name might have been Winston and then it might have been anything else.

I tiptoed down the stairs and into the hall where the malignant gaze of that demon-bust on the bookcase welcomed me. I lay down on the couch, determined to wait for the return of Martin Vraine, and maybe I closed my eyes for a little while.

CHAPTER V

Monster in the Dark

LABYRINTH. . . . Minotaur. As I lay there with my eyes closed, the two words revolved in my mind. I had heard Ann Peterson speak them over the phone. The two words belonged together. The labyrinth referred to that passage in ancient Crete which had housed the terrible minotaur, monster that was half man and half bull. And then again I could hear James Vraine's whispered words to his half-sister: *"It's out."* What was out—the minotaur out of the labyrinth?

I sought a more comfortable position on the couch, squeezed my eyelids tight shut against the stare of the bust on the bookcase. Maybe I dozed off.

I was unable clearly to define the noise that awakened me. I opened my eyes, saw that the lamp wick had burned down until it sent forth little more than a bluish glow. My searching eyes wandered about the room. An uncomfortable feeling that I was not alone came over me. My gaze lifted to the bookcase. That damned bust with the bestial head—

A chill started at the small of my back and crept across my chest. Small worms of terror crawled across my scalp. My eyeballs seemed to swell in an effort to break from the tight eyelids as they stared at the bust. It was the same face, the same peaked head, the same simian jaw, the same grinning mouth—and yet there was a change.

It seemed that color had seeped into those marble cheeks. The gums above the gleaming tusks were pink, the lips as red as those of a vampire drunk with blood lusting. And the monster's face moved. The red lips smirked, the eyes rolled, the head nodded.

My hand went up slowly toward my gun—slowly because some inner voice whispered that this was madness; I couldn't kill a nightmare. And yet the urge to kill was strong, an urge born of loathing, an instinctive feeling that this thing was evil and must be stamped out.

I got to my feet, moved slowly toward the thing. Two yards from it, I made a sudden snatch for my gun only to find that someone had thoughtfully lifted my weapon while I had been asleep on the couch. Just for a moment, panic held me. And then the monster moved, flung itself through the air toward me.

I ducked. Something landed on my shoulders, sent me diving forward to the floor. The thing clung to my back, dug into me with fingers and toes. It smelled unclean. Then it changed its tactics and beat on the back of my head with something sharp, repeated blows.

I fought against the daze that was partly from the blows on my head and partly cold fear of this unknown thing. I scrambled to my feet, heard the pattering of feet as the thing retreated. I took a couple of staggering steps forward, grasped the bookcase for support. At my feet was the marble bust, as lifeless as before. The ugly head was broken off at the neck.

It was like a dream. I felt like pinching myself to see if I was awake. My gaze moved slowly about the cluttered room—a room so large that at least half of it was filled with shadows into which the demon thing could have hidden itself. I went over to the table and turned up the lamp. Its yellow glow shoved back the shadows a little more.

I CROSSED the room soundlessly, looking behind chairs. No sign of the monster. I listened. There were

sounds that might have been the creak and pop of timbers in the old house, or something originating in my own ears, a product of my loneliness. But there was another sound, a very real sound—human voices talking in the study. Perhaps Martin Vraine had returned while I napped and was now talking with his blonde and beautiful Lady Macbeth.

I went to the study door and pressed my ear to the panel. Ann Peterson was speaking:

"Who is it?"

"Martin," came the whispered reply.

"But where are you?"

"Never mind where I am. Listen to me. Have I told you about the people down below in the labyrinth?"

"The—the what?"

"The people down below—"

I heard Ann's terrified gasp. She uttered a single word, "You're—" and the rest of her sentence was lost in a gagging, strangled sound.

I seized the knob of the door. The door was locked. I turned around, picked up the first chair that came to hand, rammed the door with it. A leg of the chair went through a portion of the panel near the lock. I put my hand through the opening, felt for a key on the inside, but there was none. I took my hand out and looked through the opening, but could see nothing but flickering candle-light on the walls. No way to get in but hack down the door. I sought out a small table with a marble top and used that on the door.

I suppose it took four minutes to beat in the lower panel of the door. Then I got down on all fours and crawled through the opening. People were coming into the hall. I turned around, looked out into the hall, saw Doris fully dressed running toward the hacked door.

"You slide a chair in front of this opening and keep people out," I said. "This isn't nice."

It wasn't nice. Ann Peterson lay on the floor not far from the wall. Her eyes glared glassily from her blue-black face, her mouth was open and her tongue was lolling out. There was no one else in the room, no possible exit except the one window which I could see hadn't been opened in a long time.

I dropped beside the body. Two yards of rope trailed from the noose that was tight about her throat. I tore the rope away from her neck, but there wasn't a chance to save her; her neck was broken.

Doris was calling to me from the door. I went over to the smashed panel and told her what had happened.

"See if you can find a key to this door."

I felt sure that whoever had the key would hang on to it or else drop it in some obscure place, because whoever had the key was the murderer. He had locked Ann in the room so that she couldn't escape him.

I EXAMINED the length of rope carefully. It was strong half-inch hemp and I saw that part of it was black with soot. Then I understood how it had been worked. Ann had been seated in a chair directly beneath the stove-pipe opening, and the killer had simply dropped the noose over her head from that opening.

I got up on the chair on which Ann must have been sitting. The cover plate was loose at the bottom. I lifted it off entirely and ran my arm into the opening. I suppose about six inches of my arm went into the hole before my hand struck a solid brick wall. There wasn't room between the walls for a rabbit let alone a man. And yet there must have been a man directly behind that opening in order to drop that rope over Ann's head. Also, hadn't I seen somebody point a gun at Doris through that stove-pipe opening earlier in the evening?

I got down, went to the door, crawled through the opening in the lower part of the door. In the hall outside, Doris was waiting for me. Across the room the two Trimball sisters stood beside James Vraine and his motorized chair. Ora was crying hysterically and her lean sister was trying to comfort her.

"But why, why, *why* does all this have to happen here?" sobbed Ora.

Zelma's voice, like the rustle of dead leaves, said: "Hush, dear, hush."

I asked Doris if she had seen anything that looked like a key to the study door. She hadn't. The way I figured it, the murderer had discovered Ann in the study, had locked the door from the outside, taken the key with him. Then, someway, he had got his rope

through that stove-pipe opening and hanged the girl after whispering to her.

"Pat," Doris said, "what are we going to do? We can't let this thing go on. Why, if we don't get in touch with the sheriff we'll all be involved with the law."

From across the room, James Vraine murmured: "If we're not all dead."

The five of us stared at each other for a minute of electric silence. And then Zelma snapped a strand of her beads. There was a shower of glitter from her meager bosom to the floor, a pattering of glass rain which she seemed to disregard entirely.

"We've got to tell, Ora," she said. "We've got to let them know. And then—then if Pat and Doris were to go away—then we could have the sheriff in and turn the entire matter over to him. That's the best way."

"It doesn't make any difference to me," James Vraine said. "I'm not proud."

Ora Trimball raised her eyes to her sister.

"After all these years," she said, her voice dull and tragic. "And I hoped that it would die somewhere in the darkness, that we could bury it, that its hideous body would rot away before this house crumbled into dust."

SHE sobbed a moment on her sister's shoulder. Then, straightening, she said:

"All right. You tell them, Zelma. They're too young for this thing to blight their lives as it has ours. They must know the truth and then go away."

"Maybe I can guess," I said. "There is a minotaur in your labyrinth, isn't there?"

No one answered. Zelma pointed to chairs, told Doris and me to sit down. The two sisters also were seated. Zelma drew a long breath.

"There *is* a minotaur, Pat Malone. A very real and evil monster. We don't know where it is now. It's left its hiding place. That's why Ora and I bought this house years ago, because of the secret rooms beneath it which were used in concealing fugitive slaves in the days of the underground railroad. We wanted a place where we could live our secret to its grave. We wanted to end the last tainted strain in our mother's blood by dying here—all of us dying. The same blood is in James as well as in us. And the same blood is in Martin, whose marriage we have always opposed. And the same blood is in—in that thing you call the minotaur."

Zelma leaned forward, her pitifully ugly eyes staring into mine.

"Tonight, Pat Malone, the minotaur has escaped."

CHAPTER VI

The Unknown Speaks

I LEANED forward and closed a hand over Zelma's thin, knotty fingers.

"Maybe it will make it a little easier if I tell you I've seen the—it. It resembles that bust that James Vraine made, doesn't it?"

Zelma nodded. James Vraine nodded. Ora buried her face in her handkerchief and sobbed.

"A little monster, not thirty inches in height with a head like a beast," James said. "And no brain. In that pin head there couldn't be a brain. Rotten temper, growls like a mad dog. To get it to pose for that bust I had to chain it to the floor."

Ora fixed anguished eyes on James. "Don't," she sobbed. "You're forgetting it's still our mother's child."

"It's not a murderer," Zelma said. "It's not responsible for what it does. If it has killed, it's our fault for not keeping it shut up more closely."

"It's not a murderer," I said. "But there's something else—something else in this house."

James Vraine laughed. "Don't tell me you've seen ghosts now, Malone?"

I didn't have any answer, because I didn't know what I had seen.

"About this house—these secret rooms—"

"Not rooms exactly," James Vraine said. "It's a passage down below. A sub-basement. A whole system of passages, rather, with innumerable entrances from the upper parts of this house. We don't know all the secrets of this place. Perhaps Martin does. He was always great for exploring. I'm

a little handicapped, you see." He indicated his stumps.

I nodded. "That room in which Hardy was killed and the room in which Ann Peterson was killed, there seems to be a passage between them, someplace between the walls. But the walls aren't thick enough to allow any sort of a passage—"

Doris twitched my sleeve. "Pat, I thought I heard someone prowling up stairs."

"Okay," I said. "Wait here. I'll have a look."

I hurried across the hall to the stairway, looked up its length, saw nothing. But as I got halfway up the steps I saw a faint light in the upper hall. And by the time I reached the top of the steps, the light was coming toward me —candle light, guttering in the draft, shedding its flickering illumination across the white bandaged face of the unknown whom I had unwillingly brought to Gray Gables with me.

I pressed back into a bedroom doorway, wondered if the unknown man had seen me. Except for a slight limp, he was walking quite steadily. Directly opposite my hiding place, he turned woodenly and his deep holes of eyes stared into mine.

I expected the unknown to draw a gun. At the first move, I would have jumped him. It's a lot safer to jump a man before he gets a gun into his fist. But both of the unknown's hands were visible.

HE said, his voice a muffled whisper because of the bandages:

"Did Martin Vraine come this way?"

"Huh?"

"Martin Vraine. The murderer is Martin Vraine. Has he come down the steps?"

"I haven't seen Martin Vraine in hours. Who the devil are you?"

"That doesn't matter. Stay here. If he starts down the stairs, grab him. We've got him cornered. Are you with me?"

I said I was. I wasn't, but this was no time for an argument. I wasn't with him because up to this point I hadn't been seeing through too many things any too well. Everything was too cluttered up with ghosts and shadows and howling dogs, and monsters. At this point, though, I got just a glimmer of truth. Not much, not enough to make me do what I should have done.

I waited in the doorway. I could handle Martin Vraine, I was pretty sure. He was just a guy—a big guy, but then I'm not a bantam. I listened to the retreating steps of the unknown man whispering along the corridor. And then silence except for the whir of James Vraine's electric chair on the floor below, and then another thing. From the lower floor, somewhere toward the back of the rambling house, sounded the mournful howl of the spaniel pup.

An interval of silence and then two shots crashed out in rapid succession. I sprang into the hall. The shots had come from my right and close at hand. I walked swiftly, quietly along the hall. From the room in which the unknown man had been quartered, came the dim light of a candle, and in that flickering glow I could see the unknown stretched out on his back on the floor. Gray wraiths of gun smoke clouded the lighted doorway.

I hurdled the fallen man, turned, ran into the room. This time I might not be too late, for a door, connecting this room with the next had just slammed shut. I ran to it, jerked it open, shouted.

"Stop! I've got you covered!"

And I didn't have anybody covered with anything except my eyesight, which wasn't any too effective in this gloom. Through the door I had opened, I saw a shadow moving swiftly on the opposite side of the room. I lunged, struck some sort of a stool or bench that seemed to have been placed in the doorway for the sole purpose of tripping me. I fell headlong, and by the time I was in the race again, I was behind by a couple of door slams.

I made a quick search of the upper floor of the house, from one rambling room to another, my way lighted by a candle I picked up in one of the bedrooms. A squad of heavy-footed cops could have hid in that house and nobody would have been the wiser, so there wasn't a whole lot of chance finding the swiftly moving killer. I started back along the winding hall, heard the click of sharp heels on the bare floor.

"Pat! Pat, are you all right?"

THE clicking heels brought me Doris. Her lovely eyes wide, excitement adding a fresh glow to her cheeks, she was a picture then I'll never forget.

"Pat, who's that man out there in the hall—the man on the floor? Is he badly hurt?"

"If he isn't it will be the first time this murdering devil has missed." I hurried her back to where the man lay. He had not altered his position. A deep brown stain was spreading across his shirt visible between the folds of his black coat. And between the two black holes that were his eyes was a small, blacker hole. I dropped to my knees beside the man.

"Doris," I said, "You'd better go down stairs. I'm going to take off these bandages. I think when I've seen the face beneath, I'll know a lot more about this business, including the name of the person behind all of it."

"I'm not leaving," Doris said quietly. "I can take it, Pat. Remember that time that client passed out in the office? I took it then, didn't I?"

"You took it," I said.

I started peeling off the bandages that covered the man's head and face—no simple matter because it was the job of a professional and my fingers were mostly thumbs. I got the cranium bare first. Black hair had been shaved from the vicinity of a slight wound in the top of the head. The thick dressing that had been applied to it was stiff with dried blood. The man had been conked on the head with something, no doubt of that, but I couldn't tell whether there was anything like a fracture. And then I got down to the bandage about the face and as the features were revealed for the first time, Doris uttered a faint cry.

I gave Doris a quick look. "Know this man?"

She shook her head. "It's just his face—It's horrible!"

Maybe that was the word. The poor devil's face had been cut in a score of places—nasty little wounds that must have come close to killing him with pain. The nose was slit right down the middle of the cartilage, there were cuts across the eyelids, and other little tricks like that. He hadn't got any of those cuts fighting. He had lived through a nightmare of torture by some fiend who had made the inflicting of pain an art.

"Pat!" Doris gasped.

I straightened. "Come on, kid, you've had plenty of this. I should have made you go down the stairs."

"It's not that, Pat. I've seen that man somewhere. A man who had on that same suit and had that same color hair and was about that build, was out in the rear garden the first morning I got here. He was talking to Hardy, the servant. They didn't see me come up. They were talking in low tones and I heard that man on the floor say that Hardy was to keep his eyes open inside the house and tell him everything that went on. He said Hardy wasn't to be afraid because he would be around close all the time."

A MOMENT'S silence ensued.

"He was close enough when Hardy was murdered," I said, "but not able to do much. Hardy called out the name of Winston when he was in need of help. This man must be Winston. He was up against the devil who did that to his face, the same man who killed Hardy. The killer must have got hold of Winston once, tortured him, and then Winston must have escaped and gone to some doctor to get fixed up. Winston must have run into Millersburg, and as soon as he had his head bandaged up he got back to business again, forcing me to bring him here, collapsing on the way."

"But, Pat, what does it mean?" Doris stared at me wide-eyed.

I shrugged. "We don't know. Only Hardy was working as inside man for this Winston. Hardy did something or discovered something that the killer didn't want known, so Hardy had to die. And then Winston had to die, of course, because he was sticking on the killer's trail and probably knew what we don't know—what this is all about. Anyway, I'm after the guy who did all this. If I only had a gun—"

And then it came to me that the unknown man had dropped his gun on the floor of my car. And while maybe this murdering fiend didn't fear me when I didn't have a gun, he evidently

wasn't quite so brave when I had one, otherwise he wouldn't have swiped my rod while I was sleeping on the couch downstairs. So with Doris in tow, I hurried downstairs and outdoors to my car to find Winston's gun. I didn't care about getting the sheriff right now. This was going to be strictly my party, I thought.

I got a flashlight out of the glove compartment. Its battery wasn't much good, but it was some light anyway. Winston's gun had slid part way under the front seat. I got it out. It was a nearly new automatic and examination under the light showed me it bore the stamp of the United States Government.

Things began to add up fast—a private airport next to Dr. Rice's house; Winston, a government agent on the prowl; a Chinese knife used to murder Hardy; secret hiding places beneath Gray Gables that had been proved secure years and years ago; that white, unfinished mask of a face that I had seen in the room where Hardy had met death. Even the howling of a dog had its place in the scheme of things.

I turned from the car, the government agent's gun in my hand.

"Come on, lady," I said to Doris. "The Malone Agency has something this time."

And maybe it was a bit too big for the Malone Agency to handle.

CHAPTER VII

Murder Is a Minotaur

JAMES VRAINE and his motorized chair followed us into the room where Hardy had been killed.

"Now, what?" Doris asked. She stood next to the mantel, armed with a poker, her eyes brave and bright.

"When Hardy was attacked," I explained, "I was back against the door. Yet the killer, whatever it was, escaped from this room without passing through the door. One of the entrances into the passages beneath is in this room."

James Vraine nodded. "An entrance that Martin found. He used to get me into this room and then infuriate me so that I would charge him with my chair. He could run and slip in behind the fireplace."

"But how?" I persisted. "The wall between this room and the one in which Ann Peterson was killed isn't big enough to conceal any sort of a passage."

James Vraine pointed to the tiled hearth.

"The third tile from the right on the first row—lift that and you'll find a ring-handle attached to a wire."

I did as I was told. Pulling straight up on the ring-handle, the entire wall of the room moved soundlessly towards us, the distance of about two feet.

"The fireplace swings out," James Vraine directed. "Use the damper handle as a doorknob."

I did as I was told and the shallow fireplace swung out like a door. The thing had a heavy spring hinge and James Vraine held it back while I stepped inside. It was a tiny room, only big enough for about three people to stand in. I employed my flashlight and saw that the walls of the place were covered with blood.

On the wall nearest the room where Ann Peterson had been hanged, there were iron rings in the wall, making a sort of a ladder which reached up to the smoke-pipe hole in the wall. A section of metal flue which should have joined with the hole leading up the narrow chimney had been removed. I climbed up the rings to look through the opening.

"What's up there, Pat?"

I looked down and saw that Doris had followed me. "You'd better get out of here. A man was crushed between these walls tonight."

And then it happened. The fireplace-door shut and I heard James Vraine's startled cry: "It slipped!"

I sprang down beside Doris. "Open it!" I yelled.

"I—I can't!" James' voice sounded like it was coming from the interior of a coffin, but it was Doris and I who were in the coffin.

"The wall's moving, Pat!" Doris gasped. "Closing in on us."

"Open the door!" I yelled at Vraine. In the light of the flashlight I could

see that the wall was moving slowly and unalterably toward us.

"I—I can't!" James Vraine shouted. "Somebody's latched it from below."

WE looked at each other, aghast. "He's trapped us," Doris gasped. "James Vraine is the killer!"

"He isn't," I said. "James Vraine couldn't go up the steps, couldn't have got in here to kill Ann." My eyes darted frantically about the ever narrowing confines. And then I saw the poker in Doris' hand. I snatched it from her, held it horizontally between the walls, and in another instant the moving wall had wedged the poker fast. But that didn't stop the closing of the wall; it only slowed it down, because the poker was slowly giving away, bending in the middle.

"Look, Pat, down at our feet!" Doris, shrinking from the crushing wall, holding tight to me, thrust an arm beneath my arm and pointed toward a thin thread of light shining up through a crack in the floor.

"Let go of me a minute, hon," I whispered. And then I dropped to my knees, exploring every inch of the narrowing surface of floor with my flashlight. The thread of light bordered three sides of a closely fitting trap door and on one edge that thread of light was interrupted by what might have been a latch of some sort.

"Pat, do something! There—there isn't much room left."

I simply pressed the nose of the automatic against the floor where I thought the latch was and let the gun blast twice. And before the echoes had died, the latch gave way, the floor beneath us hinged downward and we were pitched headlong into the passage below.

I broke my fall with hands and arms as much as possible, turned on my side, still gripping the gun. Doris was beside me, evidently not hurt but sobbing for breath.

Somewhere a voice spoke:

"You will please drop your gun."

I turned my head. Coming toward us was the apparition I had seen when Hardy was murdered, his face and misshapen hand clearly defined in the light of a lantern that hung from a nail on the wall of the passage. A white waxlike substance covered all the flesh of the face and the hands—some sort of a plastic that flexed easily with the muscles. The shining black eyes stared widely from the waxy face. And in the right hand, the creature held a knife, its blade stained with blood.

The creature gripped the knife at the blade tip, raised its right arm. This was no time to argue. I simply rolled over a little more and fired. The creature took two lunging steps forward and fell on his face.

[*Turn page*]

"You—you killed him!" Doris gasped.
"Maybe."

I CRAWLED to the creature on hands and knees, turned him over on his back. Quickly my fingers peeled the waxy stuff from the face, revealing yellowish skin, a nose that had undergone some sort of operation and was now plastered with adhesive tape. The eyelids, too, had been tampered with, but these were not torturing cuts.

"An Oriental," I said. "The white stuff must be something to alter the color of the skin, and the operations on the nose and eyelids are intended to alter the Oriental features. That's why Winston was in on the game. Somebody is smuggling Orientals into this country, probably for the price of a king's ransom, and then trying to change their appearance so that they don't look like Orientals and can take their place among white people, thus fooling the immigration officers. Dr. Rice's landing field is used as a depot for planes doing the smuggling and these underground passages are swell hiding places for the Orientals until their faces and skin have been changed."

"Is—is this the murderer?" Doris asked.

I shook my head.

"It's the murder-tool in the case of the death of Hardy and the man who was crushed in that wall up there—where you and I nearly got it. The howl of the dog was the killer's signal to this man down here to slip up and knife Hardy, and later, to operate the mechanism for collapsing the wall on the other man."

I turned my flashlight overhead where I could plainly make out a wooden lever, a system of stone weights, wires and pulleys for operating the closing of the wall above.

"You see, the man who tried to gun you must have been Martin Vraine. He and Ann Peterson had planned to get rid of you in order that they would have a chance at the Trimball fortune when the Trimball sisters were gone. So Martin slipped into that place behind the fireplace, tried to draw a bead on you through the smoke pipe hole. The killer was watching Martin. Probably he had been watching Martin for some time, because Martin knew about the alien smuggling business that was going on down beneath Gray Gables. Maybe Martin had tried some blackmail without much success. Remember what the man who was being crushed inside the wall yelled—something about he wouldn't tell?"

Doris nodded. "If it was Martin. You're just guessing."

"Process of elimination," I explained. "Remember just before Martin was crushed by the wall the dog howled again. That was a signal to this Oriental that someone was in that secret closet between the walls, and that closet is one of the entrances to the place we're in now. So the Oriental simply worked the levers that brought the wall smashing into Martin Vraine, trapping him and crushing him to death."

"But why kill Ann?"

"Because," I said as I helped Doris to her feet, "the killer thought that Martin might have told Ann about the smuggled aliens beneath the house. So the killer whispered through the stovepipe opening into the den, claimed to be Martin, tried to find out if Ann did know about the scheme. Ann wasn't fooled entirely by the disguised voice and consequently got it in the neck."

DORIS shook her head.

"But you don't know the killer isn't Martin," she argued.

"Yes I do. Because I know who the killer really is. Let's go. We can't stand around here forever."

I took the lantern off the nail and led on up the passage. It wound in and out, but there were no forks in the trail. We came eventually to a large room with damp brick walls, furnished with two beds, three mattresses on the floor, evidently the quartering place for runaway slaves years ago, now adapted to hide the smuggled aliens.

"Look!" Doris pointed to one of the beds. Huddled up on the filthy bed clothes was that hideous monster who was a brother to the Trimball sisters. I went over to the bed, looked down at the dwarf. Black hair that was visible on its partially exposed chest was matted with blood from a knife wound. The little monster's witless wandering

had evidently brought him to this room where the Orientals, loathing him as all who saw him must, had taken a knife to him.

In another corner of the room lay a rug which was blood stained. I recognized it as one taken from the room in which Hardy had died. Beneath it I found Hardy's body and that mass of pulped flesh and splintered bone that was recognizable as Martin Vraine's body only because of the leather jacket that covered the torso.

ON the other side of the room, a door burst open. I turned, gun in hand, to face the killer.

Bots stood in the door, his big body wearing a black suit instead of the peg top pants and boots I had first seen him in. Behind him was little weazened Dr. Rice. Bots made a grab for his gun.

"No," I said sharply, and stopped his hand in mid air.

"We're going through here, Malone," Bots said. "I suppose you're on to the game and if it will give you any notion as to just how desperate I am, I don't mind telling you that half a dozen G-men just put down on Rice's air field. Right now, they're occupied with the Orientals. I get plenty of dough for this job and you be good and we'll make a split. How about ten grand for a wedding present?"

"Two bucks buys a marriage license," I said. "And I got two bucks. Put up your hands, because it's no deal. I want you for murder."

"I said we're going through!" Bots glowered at me and kept moving forward. I wanted him to go for his gun and he did. Maybe I didn't wait for him to actually point his gun at me, but I wasn't taking any unnecessary risk with Doris just a few feet away from me. My first slug knocked a leg out from under Bots. He still had his gun in his hand when he went down, still showed fight, so I put him away with a bullet through the chest.

Dr. Rice came down on his knees to me. He was innocent, he claimed loudly. Bots had ruled him, made him work over the Orientals' faces, made him open his little airport to the smugglers' planes. Dr. Rice was just a little cherub with a halo, according to Dr. Rice. Later on, at Bots' trial—and he lived to stand trial—it came out that Bots had evidence indicating that Dr. Rice had pulled a mal-practice stunt that had resulted in the death of a girl. Bots used that as a club to whip Rice into seeing things his way.

THE G-men cleaned up things nicely, captured the score of yellow-skinned aliens on whom Rice had worked his plastic surgery. Doris and I told our story about the murders in Gray Gables.

The question arose of what power Bots had over a dog that he could make it howl when he wanted to, thus signalling to his assistants and adding to the creepy effect of his crimes. I recalled that Bots was always sucking on a pipe that I had never seen charged with tobacco.

When we examined the piece of pipe, we found a metal whistle in the shank. Blowing on the pipe, the whistle sounded, but nobody could hear it, the tone of it was pitched so high. But the dog could hear it, having a lot keener sense of hearing than man, and every time we would blow the whistle the Trimball spaniel would set up a howl.

The government men took everything for granted and didn't ask how I figured it all out. That was disappointing to me, and I said as much to Doris later when we were alone.

"Well, how did you figure it?" she obliged.

"Simple," which was what I had been waiting to say. "When I went upstairs and met the man with the bandaged face walking in the hall, I noticed the man limped. After Bots had had his ankle cracked by James Vraine's motorized chair, it wasn't hard to imagine he would limp a little. What Bots had done was to wrap bandages around his face, changed to a plain black suit, come through one of the secret passages into Gray Gables. He wanted to kill the unconscious Winston, because if Winston came to, Bots' hash would have been settled.

"So, meeting me in the hall, he said that Martin Vraine was the killer. Martin, of course, was dead, and if his body could be permanently disposed of, he

might have got the blame and never been caught for the simple reason he was dead. Wearing this bandage disguise over his face, Bots went into the room where Winston was. He pulled Winston off the bed, shot him through the chest and the head, pushed him out into the hall. Winston, being dressed just like Bots was, I wasn't supposed to guess that the dead man in the hall wasn't the same as had been talking to me a second before.

"The set-up at Gray Gables was perfect for Bots' purpose. Remember the Trimballs had taken over the place because they could hide their monster brother in the secret chambers. Also, the Trimball sisters discouraged visitors. Bots simply utilized the Trimball sisters' secretiveness to shield his own enterprise."

"You're wonderful!" Doris said.

"Now that you'll inherit the Trimball wealth," I said, "I'd be a fool not to ask you to marry me." Which sounded a lot worse than it was, because we'd settled the marrying business months before.

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GIANT SPIDERS OF THE PACIFIC PLAY HAVOC WITH THEIR HUMAN PREY

in

NIGHTMARE ISLAND

A Spine-Chilling Novelet by H. H. STINSON

COMING NEXT ISSUE

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MONSTER OF THE STORM

By JOE ARCHIBALD

Author of "The Swamp Thing," "The Devil's Heritage," etc.

Faulkner's body swung eerily in the ghostly light of the moon

From Out of the Wind and the Rain a Demon Comes From a Pit of Dread to Spread Ghastly Horror in the Peaceful Village of Northborough!

WIND and rain lashed the town of Northborough with a fury that struck terror into the hearts of those who had loved ones abroad in the darkness of the night. The water was ankle deep in the streets and it poured from the eaves of the old-fashioned houses in a steady stream. The blinding storm had struck

at early dawn, had steadily increased its hellish rage with every hour until it had assumed the proportions of a hurricane.

The elements seemed to direct the spearhead of its attack against the sides of an old farmhouse two miles outside of Northborough. The terrific wind twisted a rotting branch of a big elm loose from its bole and threw it against the sagging roof of an outbuilding. Shards of water drove against the panes of a lighted window and blurred the face that was pressed against the sheltered side.

It was the face of a woman, a frail, beautiful woman. Her skin was the color of porcelain and her eyes seemed too large for her small oval face. Fright dilated her eyes and made her lips tremble. She turned her face from the window, directed her glance toward a man who sat near a coal stove.

"I'm afraid—afraid," she said in a small tight voice. "John's out there. Does he know the bridge is out? He'll have a drink or two. He's carrying that money—"

Ed Faulkner's face was hidden in shadows. Martha Brawn did not see the tightening of his lips, the sudden tautness of the thin slabs of muscle covering his angular face. Faulkner was an odd job man. He had been sawing wood for John Brawn out in the shed and was waiting for the man to get home so he could get his pay.

Faulkner, looking at the woman, wondered why she had preferred a plodding farmer like Brawn to Doctor Ared Moxley. The people in and around Northborough wondered about it, too. Moxley was a fine, noble character and he was going to go far in his profession.

Faulkner reached into a crib and tickled a three-year-old child under the chin.

"Don't look right — you ought to send for Moxley," he said. "The child's eyes look wooden, Martha—"

"I'm frightened—there's a shadow over this house," the woman said fearfully. "Something terrible's around me. Something I can't see. I had a dream awhile ago. The door opened and a man came in. He fell to his knees and began crawling across the floor. There was no top to his head. He was trying to get to the crib there. He wore John's big shoes—his clothes—they dripped mud and blood—"

FAULKNER'S throat felt dry. He did not like the unhealthy light in the woman's eyes. She had been ill for a year. Even Doctor Moxley did not seem to know what was the matter with her.

"Dreams ain't nothin'," Faulkner said, but his hands shook as he poked playfully at the baby's nose.

"Mine are—always have been," the woman said. "He crawled toward the crib as if his life depended on it—as if he knew something—"

"John'll git home," Faulkner said. "They got lanterns at the creek." His voice was toneless. It was as if the woman's fear had been drawn into him with a breath. He wanted to get out of there. There was something sinister running through the stuffiness of the room. "I'll go get the doc, Martha."

The odd job man tooled his dilapidated car along a wind and rain-swept gravelled road. He could not get the face of John Brawn's child out of his mind's eye. It was only three years old, but there was something repulsive about it. Faulkner wondered if it was because the child had lost half the thumb on its right hand.

When Brawn had brought an axe into the house to put a new handle in it, the sharp bit had fallen off the table and had struck the boy's hand. Anything maimed had a strange effect on Faulkner.

"What a night for a murder!" the gaunt man muttered. "A murder—" He trembled in the car seat. Brawn would be carrying close to a hundred dollars. He was in Colchester collecting his milk money now.

"Her dreams always meant somethin'. The Culbert's kid—she knew it was goin' to die. Some people can see things others can't."

Doctor Moxley lived at the edge of Northborough in a secluded gabled house. Wisteria vines and smoke trees screened it from the view of those who passed along the road. There was no light showing when Faulkner drove up the lane.

He got out of the car close to the forbidding house and looked into the darkness that was heavy in the rear of the place. Ared Moxley had a laboratory out there under the trees. He had built it of field stone a year after he had purchased the old place.

Faulkner walked along the mucky path to the square stone house and knocked. The wind was howling and the blinds in the old wooden house behind Faulkner banged and rattled. The odd job man guessed that Moxley could not hear him. He tried the door and found it open.

Faulkner had been in that place before and he did not like it. He did not like the smells and the retorts and test tubes and other paraphernalia that cluttered up the place. It reminded him of a grim setting he had seen in a horror movie in Northborough. There was a single light burning there. On the bench was a book. It was opened and the pages were held down by a heavy surgeon's instrument.

Faulkner leaned over and looked at the type at the top of the pages. It said:

THE PITUITARY BODY

It was Greek to Faulkner. A door opened suddenly and a voice struck flat against Faulkner's face.

"Who's there? Faulkner, the next time you come here, you knock! Who do you think—?" Moxley came into the room. He was dressed in tweeds and he wore highly polished shoes. He was wiping his pink-stained hands with a towel.

"You hurt your hand?" Faulkner asked. He had never liked Moxley, had never known why. He sensed that the doctor had a kindred feeling for him, too. Moxley's eyes were dark and held a piercing quality. He wore his black hair long and there was a thin mustache adorning his thick full lips. This was the man worshipped by all of Northborough and the surrounding country.

"I knocked but there was too much noise," he said. "Doc—what does that word there mean? Pit—"

"Nothing a man of your intelligence would understand," Moxley said sourly. "What do you want?"

Ed Faulkner's eyes fell quickly. There were muddy tracks on the floor. They were in a place where he had not stepped.

"I got soaked coming from the house," Moxley explained.

"Martha Brawn. She ain't so good tonight, Doc. Wants you. I was workin' out there today. She said she dreamed she saw John with the top of his head off. She's nuts!"

"Keep that kind of talk to yourself, Faulkner!" said Ared Moxley acidly. "I'll go out there now. Took you long enough to get here. What time did you leave anyway?"

"A tree was down a half mile from here," Faulkner said. "Took me a half hour to get around it. Got stuck in the mud a couple of times. W-what do you do out in this place, Doc? What's that smell?"

"Formaldehyde," Moxley said with a cold grin. "It keeps corpses from spoiling. Ever see a corpse, Faulkner?"

"Once, and that was enough. Well, I'm goin' along home. . . ."

TWO hours later, a highway patrol car lurched into the yard of the farm where Jim Hasler, the sheriff lived. A white-faced roadman told Hasler that John Brawn's corpse was lying in the muck out by the creek where the bridge had gone out.

"Looks like one of them rocks fell loose from the high bank and fell on his head. Crushed the whole top of it. . . ."

The storm was breaking a little when Hasler got to where Brawn was sprawled grotesquely in the muck of the road. Other cars came churning through the heavy going. The news had spread quickly. Moxley was the coroner and had been routed out of his bed. Hasler knelt beside the dead man and went through his clothes.

"Brawn was in Colchester, collecting his milk money," he said. "There isn't a cent on him. His wallet is gone. I went up there on the bank and saw where a rock had been torn loose from the earth. It couldn't have rolled down and hit John. It looks like—"

Moxley looked the body over.

"The whole top of his head," he muttered. "Say—" The doctor suddenly let his teeth hit together sharply.

"Top of his head cut right off—"

"Murder?" Hasler asked.

"Maybe," Moxley said. "Somebody could have found him here, got his money and gone on. But we'd better look around awhile."

The sheriff combed the vicinity for proof of violence. A little way up the bank, he stooped over and pulled something out of the mud. It was an old woolen work glove and it had paint stains on it. Green paint.

"I think Faulkner painted some blinds for me the other day," Moxley said in a low voice. "He wore—"

"Faulkner?" Hasler said. "He's a harmless guy."

"Perhaps. Drinks a lot, though. He has the intelligence of a fifteen year old boy. Tonight he told me about a dream Martha Brawn had. He said she saw John with the top of his head off. Merely association of ideas, Hasler. She might have given him the idea to break Brawn's skull. We'd better go and get Faulkner. What other motive for murder here but robbery?"

Ed Faulkner had had a few drinks before he had gone to bed. When Hasler and three men banged heavy fists against his door, the sounds hardly penetrated his semi-stupor. They forced the door open and got Faulkner up. He sat on the edge of his bed, blinking at the visitors. His mouth hung open a little. Hasler shook him and then held the muddy glove up in front of his face.

"It's mine," Faulkner admitted. "Where did you get it?" His heavy-lidded eyes fell on Moxley. "H-hello, Doc. What's up? How's Martha? Funny looking kid she's got. You know what's wrong?"

HASLER slapped Faulkner across the cheek.

"Search this place," he ordered his men. "If he took that money—"

"Brawn is dead," Moxley said. "Murdered, Faulkner. You killed him. Were you out by the creek?"

Faulkner's sluggish brain cleared.

"Murder? I wasn't out there. I never—"

Moxley came out of a dark corner.

"This glove was there, Faulkner," he said accusingly. "You killed Brawn and got his money. The top of his head was—"

"Martha said that!" Faulkner said fearfully.

"Here it is," a man said icily. "Right here in the woodbox. Under some sticks."

Faulkner looked at the thing a man tossed to the sheriff. A sodden canvas bag. Brawn's money was in it. Faulkner pawed at his face. He looked into Moxley's eyes and they were like glowing coals. Faces swam around in the fetid air. Martha Brawn with her big wide eyes. A child's prematurely aged face. Moxley! He heard a harsh voice say:

"Get your things on, Faulkner. We're taking you to the jail house. . . ."

Dawn was beginning to break now. The wind was still rocking Northborough with quick thundering blasts, but a more ominous sound drifted toward the small jail where Faulkner trembled in his cell. Hasler, out in the next room, got up and went to the window. He cursed fearfully and went for his gun. Something slammed against the door and shook it on its hinges. It made a hollow booming sound. Hoarse voices rode along the crest of the wind.

"Don't let them get me!" Faulkner screeched.

"Stand back," Hasler roared. "I'll shoot the first—"

The door broke from its moorings and crashed against the floor. Hasler raised his gun but his fingers seemed to freeze. He fell back and let the shotgun slip from his hands. Angry men, mob-lust stripping them of reason, swept past him.

"The key, Jim. Give it here or we'll knock you down an' take it. We're fixin' that dirty murderer!"

Faulkner got on his knees and begged for his life when the steel door was swung open. Gnarled hands reached for him. Soft hands with long white fingers. All types of hands. Faulkner became sick with terror and he was a limp, shaking thing when they put a noose over his shoulders. There were three cars waiting outside the door. . . .

Over in the Brawn farmhouse, Martha screamed:

"He didn't—he didn't! Something else, something you can't see. Faulkner didn't—" She got away from the grasp of a big portly woman and ran to the crib. "They've been here. I know that. Their mark is on him—"

They finally got Martha Brawn calmed down a little. She began to laugh. There was no mirth in the laughter. Her eyes were wide and staring and ridden with a fever that only terror can brew. . . .

Faulkner was taken out beyond Northborough to the brow of a wind and storm swept hill where three great trees lifted gouty branches to the sky. A long streak of pink reached across the blue-black eastern sky. The condemned fell to his knees and they had to drag him through the muck toward the tallest of those three trees. Faulkner's shaking lips mumbled:

"Calvary—three crosses against the sky."

The rope around his neck tightened and caught part of his sodden coat collar in its grip. He started to scream and beg for his life when the rope was thrown over a great limb above his head. He was lifted to the flat top of a car and then they drove the vehicle out from under him. He dangled there in the unholy light of cracking dawn.

THE mob did not wait to make sure that he was dead. Fear—perhaps the first twinges of remorse sent them racing away from there, the cars lurching and swaying over the gutted road. Faulkner's body had swung far out from the bank until it dangled right over the foaming spate that was a swollen river. . . .

Doctor Moxley stood in his retreat near a window and looked out at the slowly clearing skies. He was listening for the sounds of cars out there on the road. When they went by, engines racing madly, Moxley turned and went back to his work bench. He sat on a stool and turned the page of a book.

He put aside the instrument that had marked his place in the book. Then he thought of Faulkner out there, the man's body hanging on the limb. Faulkner would keep his mouth shut about Martha's baby now. Doctor Moxley had hated Faulkner for those things he had said. Faulkner could have been very dangerous. . . .

Jim Hasler got to the place of Faulkner's doom a few minutes after the mob had gone. Doubt was running through the sheriff's mind. There had been two murders that night. His brain kept whispering that hellish possibility. Hasler wondered why Faulkner's body was not outlined against the sky. When he got close to the tree, he saw that a big limb had been torn off it. Part of it was sunk deep into the waters of the swirling river.

Even as he watched, the splintered end was whisked away by the pull of the muddy waters. Hasler stumbled toward his car, his face gray and oily with sweat. . . .

John Brawn was buried two days later. Hasler was one of the pall-bearers and when he walked away from the grave, he passed the closed car in which Martha Brawn and Doctor Moxley sat. The sheriff saw that the doctor had his arms around the widow. The woman stared straight at Hasler, but the sheriff knew she had not seen him. Her eyes were horrible to look upon for there was no grief in them. They bore no expression. They seemed numbed.

Several months after her husband's funeral, Martha Brawn appeared in the village. She seemed woefully thin and a little strange. Her Giaconda smile made Jim Hasler's limbs weak. He had not asked her about the baby. Instead, he had hurried away with that strange horror gnawing at his sensibilities. A man can steel himself against a terror that he can see. But Nature's esoteric horrors are something that sweats the very soul out of him.

Jim Hasler wanted to know why people did not see Martha Brawn's baby any more.

Northborough's citizens were not surprised when, seven months after John Brawn's burial, Martha and Doctor Moxley were married. They knew that Moxley had always worshipped the woman. He took his wife and stepchild to his secluded gabled house and everybody agreed that there never was a nobler soul than their Ared Moxley. Such a love as his was something you could expect to find only in books.

Jim Hasler had aged ten years since

the storm. He was beginning to drink too much and people began to talk about a guardian of the peace who could not leave the bottle alone. Hasler had to drink whiskey to get himself enough sleep at night. Every time he looked at his bedroom window, he seemed to see Ed Faulkner dangling in front of it. He had searched Faulkner's house after his death and had found the work glove matching the one that had put Faulkner into a grave. It was in an old coat that Faulkner had not worn on that terrible night. Hasler wondered what kind of man would wear but one glove on such a night and then drop it at the scene of a horrible crime.

Then there was the night that Hasler hurried to Moxley's to have the doctor stem the flow of blood from a deep gash in his hand.

Hasler had found Moxley in his workshop. Moxley seemed to live there. When Moxley had gone to a cabinet to get antiseptic for Hasler's wound, the sheriff had looked at something on the table.

It was a chart showing the outlines of a small child. The nose and lips had been extended by strokes of a pencil. The feet and hands were enlarged the same way and there were straight lines running parallel with the figure marked. First Three Months — Six Months — A Year — The penciled marks had made a horrible caricature out of the picture. Moxley had come over suddenly to whisk the sheet of paper out of Hasler's reach.

"I didn't know you was an artist, Doc," Hasler had said.

"No? I am—of a kind, Hasler." Moxley's eyes had bitten deep into those of the sheriff. "You been drinking again?"

"Yeah, a little. I keep thinking of Faulkner. If he was innocent—"

"I'd let sleeping dogs lie, Hasler. If they ever pin it on you that you let them take Faulkner—"

With the passing of time, the doctor's house assumed an aura of mystery. Night after night, a light blinked from the window of Ared Moxley's laboratory. People passing along the road could see it. They said he worked that way to forget the things in the gabled house.

A little while later Doctor Moxley's sister came to Northborough. She was a drab, thin-faced woman with an acid disposition, but she could keep her tongue in her head. It was not long after she came there that Moxley's wife went stark raving mad.

Jim Hasler was passing the house in his car when he heard the horrible screaming. He jumped out of the car and started running. When he got to the door he went in without knocking. He saw Moxley coming out of a room and he was carrying something wrapped in a blanket. Unintelligible sounds came from the thing and Hasler took a step backward.

Moxley's face became livid. He called to his sister and she came running out of the kitchen. The doctor handed her the blanketed figure and then lunged toward the sheriff.

"You get out of here, Hasler! You snooping rat!"

Hasler backed out through the open door, horror welling up inside of him in a great lump. That bundle — the thin woman could hardly walk under the weight of it. It was as if she were carrying a calf. Hasler hardly felt the thrust of Moxley's heavy boot. It struck him in the groin and he tumbled over backward and fell writhing to the ground.

Not until he was on his feet and moving away from the house was he conscious of the fierce pain in his stomach. When he got back to the car, he leaned against it and became violently ill.

"S-something awful there," he mumbled fearfully.

BACK in the gabled house, Doctor Moxley pulled himself together and slumped down on a couch. His feverish eyes were fixed on the kitchen door. When his sister came out, he said:

"I-I'm sure now. It must be taken away."

"Martha, too," Miss Moxley said. "I had to give her a hypo. Were you insane when you married her? Wasting your life—"

"Wasting my life?" Moxley said with a mirthless laugh. "Maybe. I'm young yet. I got something up here

that'll send me a long way, sister." He stabbed at his forehead with a long thin finger. "Tomorrow I'll get in touch with the authorities. I guess the people of Northborough won't blame me. They know I did everythin' I could for her. For Brawn's kid." He laughed and sent his fingers streaming through his sweaty hair. "Funny, ain't it? For Brawn's kid. Never could figure it as hers. She was a pretty thing once. I'd never have thought that—"

"I'm getting away from here," Anne Moxley interrupted. "I couldn't stand this house any longer."

"She must have loved that farmer," Moxley went on. "Losin' him set her off. You know, she knew he was going to die. How, I wonder? Psychic, I guess—"

"Crazy!"

"Yeah—crazy!" Moxley said. "She's got to be taken away. The kid—I know all I need to know—"

"Shut up—*You'll* go crazy!" Anne shrieked.

Forty-eight hours later, Doctor Moxley was alone in the gabled house. There was not a single Brawn left in Northborough. In town they talked about the tragedy with hushed voices. Hasler passed a group standing in front of the post office and heard a woman say:

"My heard bleeds for Doctor Moxley. If ever there was a noble soul—"

Hasler shivered and pulled his coat collar up around his neck. Little Martha Brawn in a madhouse. Yes, she was gone. But she had not taken Hasler's terror with her. It still preyed on him as if it was a monster that had grown out of his flesh. The inexplicable dread of something he knew was hidden inside Moxley's head was melting the flesh off his bones. . . .

Martha Brawn in the madhouse, was becoming only an unpleasant memory to Northborough people. Time heals all scars. An age builds up cities but an hour destroys them. Doctor Ared Moxley kept climbing. Comely maidens began to catch his eye and they kept hoping to hear the news that Moxley's demented widow was dead.

The devil comes out of his pit at times to play ghastly tricks. He burned a drab brick building over a hundred miles from Northborough. He put the kindling into the hands of one of the patient's there. It was an old newspaper that had been stuffed into a packing case and it carried a picture of a man that had sent the patient into a terrible fury. He set it afire, threw it into the elevator shaft. The print under the picture said:

SPEAKS TODAY AT AMES COLLEGE

Noted Authority on the Pituitary Body—

Three inmates had fled the fire. Follow-up stories had to do with a wild beast terrorizing a whole country. The Northborough paper gave the story very little space. Finally the story died.

With the passing of time, a new hospital came to Northborough and Doctor Ared Moxley was put in charge of it. The old house with the gables fell into ruin, but when Jim Hasler happened to pass it, he was sure he could hear a woman screaming.

* * * * *

A SHABBILY dressed man shuffled through a darkened street of a city far away from Northborough. He walked with his gray head bent to one side as if he was continually listening for something. His face was heavily bearded, his eyes were strange. They carried a permanent shocked expression. He came to the outskirts of the city where tents rocked in a stiff wind. There was the smell of animals there. Wild beasts set up a nervous clamor as heavy wagon wheels began rolling through the mud. Men worked there. Their shouts and cursing boiled out of the confusion and drove against the derelict's face.

The man stopped, looked at the great letters painted on the side of a huge van. They said:

TUNNARD'S MAMMOTH CARNIVAL

The man came to a tent and he went inside. He stopped short, his rheumy eyes dilating. The light in the place was thin and it made the things moving around in there more horrible than they really were.

Ed Faulkner looked at a man who reminded him of a great frog and he knew he ought to get out of there. His limbs seemed frozen. The human skeleton got up and walked toward Faulkner. The frog man moved across the floor of the tent on all fours. He had a great wide mouth and the skin around it was greenish. Something stirred in the shadows beyond the ring of light. It came out and looked at Faulkner with two pairs of eyes. The freak had two little heads. Faulkner's throat constricted.

"You look for work maybe?"

"Y-yeah," Faulkner said.

"You got somethin' wrong with your neck, huh?"

"Y-yeah," Faulkner mumbled.

The human skeleton's head became warped with what was meant to be a pleasant grin.

"I'm Korla," the man said, "the corpse that walks. I take you to see boss. We have a strike three days ago. He need men."

"Yeah," Faulkner said. It was all he could say. Horror thickened the saliva in his throat. He wanted to turn and run away from there but he was hungry and weary of walking. For many nights he had not seen a bed. For years he had wandered. He turned to follow Korla when a great hulk of a man lurched into the freak's tent. The scant light played on his rugged, craggy features.

His sluggish eyes were deeply set, his brow furrowed. His nose was thick and heavy and his lips were great pendulous things. The monstrosity conjured up a grin. His lips curled over his huge teeth and left his blue gums bare. The freak's skin was thick and strangely wrinkled, like that of an elephant. A great knobby hand pushed the human skeleton playfully.

The living corpse said to Faulkner:

"He is Binzar the Terrible. Harmless like a baby. You shake hands with this man, Binzar. Nice Binzar, hah!"

The giant stuck out his huge hand and Faulkner's own shaking one came in contact with it. Binzar's hand pressed hard and Faulkner wondered at his strange grip. His shocked eyes dropped to the huge leathery hand and then his insides crawled. Most of the thumb of the giant's right hand was missing. Faulkner pulled his hand loose and fell back three steps. He acted as if he had been hit by a sledge hammer.

"Do not be afraid," Korla said. "He won't hurt you."

The man with the two heads laughed. Binzar almost trampled the frog man as he made his way across the tent floor.

"Wh-where did they g-get h-him?" Faulkner asked. His voice shook and big beads of sweat welled out of his stubbled face.

"Ten years ago—he's growed a lot since. He stumbled in here the way you did. He's about eighteen now." Korla grinned. His terrible bony hands shoved a cigarette between his fleshless lips.

"L-let's get out of here," Faulkner muttered. Horrible memories swirled around him and crazy voices whispered from the dark. The past rolled back in a wave and engulfed Ed Faulkner. He stumbled along in the tracks of Korla.

FAULKNER was given a job with the carnival. The big boss said, when Faulkner asked him a question:

"That big brute? Harmless. We only had trouble with him once. A town in Pennsylvania. He attacked a man and we had to hammer his thick head with a wheel spoke. He went crazy—foamed at the mouth. Cost us plenty to settle with the man he mauled."

"W-what did the m-man look like?" Faulkner asked. "Did he have long black hair that needed cutting? A thin mustache maybe? Dark eyes—"

"Yeah," Tunnard said. "How did you know? Were you there?"

"N-no." To himself Faulkner said: "Somebody that looked like Moxley. Moxley—the doctor will want to see a specimen like Binzar. Ha!"

"Say—who are you?" Tunnard said.

"Who—me? Nobody much. Call me 'Twist!' "

Faulkner went out. That night he slept in a big van. When he awoke close to dawn, he saw the giant sitting close to the wagon door. Binzar's eyes were like a faithful dog's. Faulkner's blood ran cold when Binzar said in his slow rumbling voice:

"I sit here. Watch that nobody come an' hurt you."

Does he remember? Faulkner wondered. Does he remember me sitting by a crib? He could. His wits ain't much, but it wasn't so very long ago. John Brawn's boy—Martha's— What did Moxley do? He had me hanged by the neck. He killed Brawn to get Martha, to get the boy—to make this thing out of him. Yes, I found out how he did it.

There was a packet of old papers in Faulkner's ragged coat. They had been torn from a medical book. Faulkner knew the print on them by heart.

. . . over-function of the pituitary. In this condition, the extremities of the body become enlarged. The feet and hands and head and notably the bone of the lower jaw, become overgrown. The face becomes abnormally big. It is due to the alterations in nutrition caused by the disease of a small gland inside the head which is known as THE PITUITARY BODY.

The victim's skin becomes wrinkled and leathery. If the excess of growth hormone of the anterior lobe of the pituitary begins in childhood, before ossification of the ends of the long bones, the result will be GIANTISM. A child with a tendency for the disease—fed pituitary extract—taken from sheep—could easily be turned into a monster. The shock of the enforced feeding could easily affect the brain. . . .*

Acromegaly. Ared Moxley got curious about it. Maybe he doubted the things he had read and wanted to prove something to himself. I should have gone back and killed him, Faulkner thought. They would have hanged me again though.

The freak's eyes kept themselves glued to Faulkner. All that day and the next he followed Faulkner around like a dog. Tunnard said to Faulkner:

"He's your job—keep him in line. You'd think that big brute had seen you before somewhere."

"You show anywhere in Vermont? Northborough or someplace?" Faulkner said. He tried to keep from shaking, tried to make his voice sound casual.

"Colchester in about nine weeks," Tunnard said.

Faulkner walked away, his head tipped to the side, his eyes holding a light that he did not want Tunnard to see. . . .

TUNNARD pitched his great tents on the outskirts of Colchester. The town was gripped with carnival fever. Advance notices had been on Northborough billboards for two weeks. They showed a great lithograph of Binzar, the elephant man. Doctor Ared Moxley had studied one of those posters for fully fifteen minutes.

"Stooped and dull-eyed," Moxley had said. "A perfect specimen. Pachydermatous skin. I must not miss seeing that freak." Moxley carried his age well. His hair was still dark and heavy, in need of a trim. His mustache was carefully groomed. He had put on just a little weight.

Moxley went to the carnival the second night. There was a threat of rain in the sky. Mists wreathed the midway and made the carnival lights look like eerie will o' the wisps. Music blared. The raucous rapid-fire talk of the barkers boiled through the confusion. Animals paced their cages, sullenly growling.

Their smell was hanging thick in the fog.

Near the freak show tent, Faulkner crouched. His sunken eyes kept raking the crowd, probing for a face that had been firmly stamped on his brain. For an hour he did not move. Suddenly his gaunt frame jerked as if it had come in contact with a live wire. There he was. There was Ared Moxley. The years rolled back again and carried Faulkner into the hands of a mob.

The terrible jolt when the car was driven out from under him . . . choking . . . choking . . . his coat collar caught in the noose . . . saving him. The limb torn off the tree by the fury of the wind . . . flood waters . . . fighting . . . fighting . . . something had happened to his neck. . . .

The barker drew the curious mob closer. The human skeleton came out and people recoiled at the sight of him. Korla grinned and gnashed his teeth. The barker gave lurid accounts of what else the customers would see behind

* Editor's Note:
Acromegaly, a Personal Experience (London, 1912), by Leonard Mark. Giants and Dwarfs, by Palmer Howard Futcher (Harvard University Press, 1933).

the canvas. Faulkner kept his eyes on Moxley. The doctor shouldered his way to the ticket booth. Faulkner went inside and got close to Binzar.

"He is coming now," he said. "This time you will finish him for me. He's trying to get me, Binzar. I'm afraid of him."

The horrible travesty of a man bared his teeth and swept Faulkner almost off his feet with a big hand.

"He no get you. Binzar your friend. You stay there in dark where he can't see. I know. He come get Binzar too. He keep following me."

Moxley came in just as Binzar climbed up to his little stage. The doctor walked toward the freak. He had no eyes for anything else in the tent. Binzar let out a terrible roar and leaped at Moxley. The doctor turned to run but Faulkner got in the way and Moxley tripped and fell. People who had followed Moxley in, fought like maniacs to get out of the tent of horrors.

The leathery skinned giant picked Moxley up as if he were but a doll and hurled him across the tent. A voice ripped through all other crazy sounds.

"Look at his right hand, Doc! Look at John Brawn's son's right thumb!"

Moxley, half stunned, picked himself up. His bulging eyes peered through a film of stark terror and fastened to those great knobby hands reaching toward him. The right hand! Most of the thumb was gone! Moxley's horror became a great suffocating shroud that kept winding around him. That voice! Not the monster's.

"Yeah, it's him, Doc," Faulkner taunted. "You did a good job. *You* made it!"

"Faulk—" The name on Moxley's lips was broken in half by Binzar's terrible hands. Great fingers dug deep into the doctor's throat. Tunnard and several carnival hands burst into the tent. Korla, the walking corpse, and the frog man tried to pull the monster away from Moxley. Faulkner crouched in the shadows, laughing and babbling.

"He knows, Doc! You won't ever stop him!"

"The gun— Get me that gun!" Tunnard roared.

Binzar did not feel the heavy tent stake mallet that was brought down upon his great head. He had never forgotten Moxley. Lying in his crib, that face looking down at him with evil in its eyes. That face he always had seen while he had been kept in a dark room. He had seen it in the dark of his asylum cell. It had danced in the flames when that place had caught fire. His brain had that face stamped upon it. Binzar kept pressing with his horrible hands.

Tunnard shouted, when a man jumped into the tent:

"Give it to me—hurry!" Faulkner leaped toward Tunnard, but his clutching hands missed. The roar of the gun filled the tent and sent the freaks into a frenzy. The giant's big frame quivered and he fell atop Moxley's corpse, a great hole in the back of his head. Faulkner slipped out into the night where panic reigned. Women were screaming. A police siren kept screeching. Faulkner moved swiftly toward the blackness of the woods. He moved like a wraith. . . .

MORNING. The sky was sullen and an eerie wind moaned through the trees that hemmed in a Potter's Field. Jim Hasler, chief of police of Northborough, looked down at the horrible dead thing that men had put into a great rough pine box. His knees were shaking. He looked at the corpse's right hand where the thumb—

"Comb the countryside for that man Twist," Tunnard yelled. "He did it—he set Binzar on that doctor. It's easy to spot him. He walks with his head twisted half around. . . ."

"Twist?" Hasler drew a sleeve across his clammy face. "Walks with his head like something had happened to his neck?"

"Yeah. I could swear Binzar knew him before," the carnival man said.

Hasler turned away from the grave, hurried across the bleak burying ground. He knew all he had to know. He had to get to where they could not hear him laugh like an idiot. He got into the dark woods, was frozen in his tracks by a hoarse, cold voice.

"You goin' to let 'em take me again, Jim Hasler?"

"No, Faulkner, no," Hasler said, and he broke away from there and went

crashing deeper into the woods. He was laughing crazily.

Not long afterward, Hasler watched the procession that was Moxley's funeral wind its way through the streets of Northborough. There were hundreds of mourners behind the hearse.

Near Hasler, women were crying. He had to turn his back on the hearse when it passed him. He did not want those people to see him fighting down a burst of idiotic laughter. Moxley had been a hero to these people—a noble soul.

Execution Methods Throughout the Centuries Displayed in

MUSEUM OF DEATH

A Novelet of Hate's Havoc

By DON JOSEPH

COMING NEXT ISSUE

●

CASTLE OF HORROR

By RAY CUMMINGS

Author of "The Purple Head," "The Midnight Fiend," etc.

Its eyes seemed to glow at us with a weird, baleful menace

Walls Do Not a Prison Make When a Ghost Tramps the Confines of a Century-Old Mansion!

I clasped the hand of the nervous girl beside me.

"Anne, dear," I murmured tensely, "you've got to tell me what's frightening you!"

"Oh, Jack, if—if I only dared."

I moved over into the shadows of the moonlit little garden of the old Inn. I could not let her see it, but horror was written on my face. It had struck at me the instant I saw Anne this afternoon—the first time I had seen her since our brief friendship in New York City some two years ago. My name is Jack Rance. I was only twenty-two that summer; a salesman, on a new route through these up-State villages.

Anne's appearance had shocked me.

She had grown thinner, paler, in a way that perhaps had made her even more beautiful. But it was more than that. There was something about her, indefinably frightening, that made her seem alien, other-worldly.

And she was frightened; secretly, horribly frightened. I could not miss it. Her dark eyes, with the glint of the moonlight in them, were deep turgid pools of horror.

"Please don't talk so loud," she murmured. She flung an apprehensive glance around us. Beyond the scraggling hedge, the yellow lights of the windows of her step-father's ramshackle old Inn were visible. It was an old one-story rambling building, a lonely hostlery set by a willow stream on a rutted side road of the sylvan valley. There were only two guests here besides myself this night which was destined to be a thing of ghastly horror for Anne and me; both of them men, and her step-father, the burly Peter Block.

"Afraid someone will hear you?" I said softly. "Your step-father?"

"No. Not—anyone here. Jack, there's something horrible up there at the castle—something that roams out, on moonlight nights like this. Something that comes down here."

I studied the old castle through the trees. It loomed with grim outlines against the summer night-sky—a deserted, crumbling old castle, looped and turreted, standing aloof on its height as though it were an ancient feudal fortress. It was incongruous, here in New York State, near the Canadian border.

I seized Anne by her slim shoulders.

"What does that mean? You're not talking sense. You're trying to tell me that a ghost comes down from the castle and haunts the Inn here? Is that it? I heard in the village this afternoon as I came through that the castle is supposed to be haunted."

"Oh, Jack—"

Dear Anne. My words had plunged her into such a state of terror that she huddled trembling in my grip. Her gaze, avoiding mine, darted at the shadows of the moonlit shrubbery near us, as though she feared that even now the nameless supernatural thing from the castle was lurking down here, watching us.

"What—what do they say in the village?" she stammered.

I told her briefly what I had heard: that some fourteen years ago the master of Stuyvesant Hall was a painter of renown; he had quarreled with Gloria, his beautiful young wife—jealous of her with another man. And in a frenzy he had killed her and himself. And now — so the villagers said — the pallid ghosts of the couple had been seen roaming up there on the castle ramparts and out on the crags around it.

"Who was the man that husband was jealous of?" I demanded. "Have you ever heard?"

"Yes. I—I think it was a Dr. Carter —a physician."

"What became of him?"

"I don't know. I never heard anything about him. That part about the ghosts of Stuyvesant and his wife haunting the castle now," she added, "that's only been recently. It's mainly been since this last moon that they've been seen." She paused, then sucked in her breath with sudden decision. "I've got to tell you, Jack. There's been murder around here. Men have been—are being killed."

"Murder? Here at the Inn?" I shook her. "You know what you're saying, Anne?"

"Yes—oh, yes. Travelers stopping here for a night. All strangers. A man comes—nobody knows him—my step-father doesn't know who he is. And then—then in the morning he's gone. Just—vanished. What can Father do? If he tells the police—there would be a scandal—his business would be ruined. Nobody would come here, with murder stalking the place."

HER earnestness impressed me.

"Oh, Jack, there'll be another one killed tonight! . . . She went on. "It's on nights like this that the — Thing comes down—"

Her long dark hair had tumbled down, framing her livid, contorted face. And suddenly it seemed a face wild as Ophelia's. A face haunted by terror—wild with irrationality. I stared again into those dark pools of

her eyes where something was lurking. Something, God knows, which seemed to me far more than her fear that men were disappearing, perhaps murdered.

Abruptly she moved away from me.

"Jack— don't look at me like that! Don't, I tell you! I—I'm not crazy—dear God, I'm not."

It was blood-chilling, her look of wild frenzied anguish, and that stark note of tragic pleading in her voice. "Those dreams," she said hysterically. "It's the dreams that make me know these men are being murdered. Every night—nearly every night I dream of murder—men alive, and then they are dead with their throats cut. And blood drooling down on them. It—it's so red, Jack. Every night in my dreams it haunts me."

The ravings of a mind unhinged? Was it only that, torturing her now? Somehow I did not think so. Her icy hand clutched mine on the sward between us. Cold sweat was pouring out on her fingers.

Certainly I did not believe in ghosts, murderous or otherwise! This deserted old castle being haunted by the ghosts of Gloria Stuyvesant and her famous artist husband? That, rationally, could be created by a murderer who wanted to keep the villagers away from the crumbling old structure. Why would he do that? Was there something hidden there of value? Or was there some reason why he feared to have anyone come?

The thoughts steadied me. But then another leaped at me. Someone, here at the Inn tonight, who was about to be murdered. Did the distraught Anne know that, perhaps more definitely than she was willing to admit? I had met a Robert Styles, who was a guest here—a smallish, wiry fellow of iron-gray hair.

I had chatted with him for a time before supper—an interesting fellow. He had told me casually that he was interested in spiritualism; had seemed, I realized now, to have paused as though expecting that I might mention the village gossip of ghosts up at the old Castle. I had not, and he dropped the subject. Was he here, investigating the village gossip in the interests of psychic research?

The other guest was a man named Paul Arton. I knew nothing about him. He had arrived after dark tonight, seemingly furtively, from the village on foot — a queer-looking, middle-aged man with a spindly neck and a pale face with glittering little eyes.

Was tonight's victim to be one of these? Or myself, perhaps?

Thoughts are instant things. With this rush of them, I was staring numbly at Anne; and I murmured, "Dreams? What do you mean, you dream of men being murdered?"

Her gaze avoided me. "I can tell when I'm going to dream," she said softly. "Something queer inside of me. And I can feel it—now."

Under my vehement questions she seemed trying to explain, though she was only half coherent. She told me of weird dreams of ghastly horrors, so that when she awakened in the morning she was bathed in cold sweat, exhausted with the struggle to remember the phantasmagoria of jumbled fragments which upon the instant of awakening had seemed so like a reality. And in another instant they would fade, leaving only the knowledge that she had known things of horror which now were gone.

"And you'd only remember that there was murder and blood?" I murmured.

"Yes. And a painting—there's always a painting in those dreams. You can't find it, but it's a big painting in oils. And there is money—I can remember something about money—"

Vivid dreams of men being murdered —an oil painting—and money—always money? Weird murder plot? But rational surely—if they involved money.

But what was making the girl dream these ghastly things? Or was she not dreaming them? Was she—

MY half-formed thoughts were stricken away by the sudden sight of a figure looming in the doorway of the Inn. It was no more than a hundred feet or so from us—a burly, thick-shouldered figure looming in silhouette against the yellow lamplight of the room behind him.

"Your step-father," I murmured. "You suppose they've missed us?"

Block, I was sure, could not see us from where he stood. He seemed peering out into the moonlit night, and then after a moment he went back.

"Anne," I whispered suddenly, "I'm going to get you out of here, take you to the village—"

"No, Jack," she gasped, "you—you don't understand. Maybe I can conquer it—"

Conquer it! What futile words! I gripped her again by her shoulders.

"Somebody, something's behind this," I muttered. "And I'm not going to let you stay here!"

"No, Jack. Not now—we can't escape—it would get us—"

"Tonight, Ill come to your room," I whispered. "We'll leave in my car—it's only three miles to the village. Anne, I'm telling you—"

Her answer was only a low wail of terror. She was struggling in my grip to get away from me. My clutching hands tore her filmy dress at the shoulders. It dropped from one, exposing the white flesh there. I stared. The moonlight glinted on a red mark there on her shoulder—a queer patch, five-pointed, a little reddish star.

Her gaze followed mine.

"What's that?" I asked.

"That? A strawberry mark. I was born with it. It's always been there."

She said it casually enough; she was gazing past my head, and suddenly I saw a new horror leap to her face.

"Jack — there behind you!" she warned.

I tensed, pivoted around. There was a dark thicket some fifteen feet from us. A face was in it, a face patched with moonlight and shadow; lurid green, gaunt, horrible and pallid. Its eyes seemed to glare at us with a weird, baleful menace. Was it human, or a phantom?

The gaze of the damnable thing seemed to freeze me to the ground. It exuded a feeling of horror so tangible that it seemed to envelope me in a ghastly mesh of horror.

"Oh, Jack—that—that's what makes me dream—"

Anne's whispered words brought me to myself. I lunged to my feet. The ghastly luminous green face had vanished from the thicket. I leaped for the shrubbery; catapulted through it. Nothing was there. I stood panting, staring into the dark woodland aisles, where here under the thick trees the moonlight came down only in faint eerie straggling beams. Nothing here. . . . Or was that a wraithlike luminous blob vanishing into the darkness further down the glade? I ran again. Chasing a ghost. Was it that?

How far I went I do not know. Perhaps almost quarter of a mile. Whatever it was I had been pursuing was gone. There was only silence and patched moonlight darkness.

Anne was gone from the garden when I returned. It made my heart pound. Whatever this weird murderous plot into which I had stumbled, I had only one thought now. Get Anne out of here; take her to the village. And then tell the police. Tell them—what? Were Anne's dreams not dreams—but reality? God knows she had hinted at it.

I WAS standing now at the edge of the woods, staring at the dark outlines of the ramshackle old Inn. Its front windows were yellow rectangles. The bedrooms near the back, where it branched into two wings, were mostly dark. One of them, with shade down, was dimly lighted. Anne's room. Quietly now, with my heart pounding and a weird tumult of conflicting emotions within me, I went there.

There was a slit at the bottom under the lowered shade, and the lower sash was raised. I peered in. Anne was seated on her bed; she was trembling, twitching with her terror. Her face, drained of its blood so that it was chalk-white, stared blankly before her, as though with her wild dark eyes she was trying to stare at dim distant reaches of horror that for her lay beyond the walls of the room.

I realized that to get Anne out of here now might arouse the Inn. Who was there here that I could trust? The smallish, alert-looking Robert Styles? The spindly-necked, weird-looking Paul Arton? Peter Block, Anne's burly step-father? Or the handyman? His name was Jim Lucas—a tall, stalwart, rather handsome young fellow—a na-

tive, I understood of the nearby village.

Could I trust any of them? Abruptly I realized that I could not. I decided to come back for Anne later in the night.

I turned from her window. And then a light in a window farther down this side wing of the old stone building caught my attention. The shadow of a man showed, moving in the room. Upon impulse I went that way. It was some fifty feet. I had almost reached it, when a figure suddenly came from around an angle of the structure. The moonlight disclosed a small man—bareheaded, with iron-gray hair.

It was Robert Styles, the chap who was interested in psychic research. We recognized each other simultaneously.

"You, Rance," he gasped. His glance at me was suspicious. "What are you doing out here?"

"Hot inside," I said. "I've been for a walk."

He caught the look I gave him, and he gripped me.

"All right," he said softly, "we're both thinking the same things. Something queer about this old place—"

"Is there?" I murmured. Was he here at the Inn, not to investigate ghosts, but to investigate rational murders? With Anne so weirdly involved, the thought made my heart pound.

HE had started past me, furtively toward the lighted window. Together, silently, we crouched there. The little bedroom had a single occupant. It was Paul Arton. He was a queer looking fellow indeed, with his scraggling gray-brown hair above a bulging forehead, cadaverous body, and his pale face with glittering little beady eyes.

I heard Robert Styles suck in his breath.

"Good Lord," he whispered, "what's this mean?"

I could only shake my head, warning him to silence. Arton, in his shirt-sleeves, was seated on his bed. A big leather wallet was in his hands. He had opened it, was counting its contents of crisp bills. We could not see them clearly, but it seemed that they were of large denomination. And Arton undoubtedly seemed furtive.

Then abruptly both Styles and I grew tense, startled. Arton's hall door was ajar. Now it was moving very slowly, silently inward so that the crack was widening. Presently it stopped; and in the foot-wide slit another figure momentarily was disclosed. The bedroom light briefly illumined it—a man spying on Arton, as we were, to see what he was doing.

The man's face for just a second was visible as he took a quick look and withdrew. But I recognized him, and Styles evidently did also. It was the tall, black-haired, young Jim Lucas—the handyman, the only servant here. The cook left each night after the evening meal.

Suddenly Arton rose from the bed, placed the wallet in the pocket of his jacket which was hanging on a chair. For a moment he stood, pondering. Then he reached into the jacket's side pocket and drew out a small, ugly-looking little revolver. He inspected it carefully to make sure it was loaded, then replaced it.

Styles was plucking at me. Silently, we withdrew, rounded the corner of the Inn and headed for its front door.

"Now what in hell—" Styles began. He got no further. From the front door of the Inn the big burly Peter Block appeared, with an apron tied around his bulging middle.

"Well, well," he greeted us. "Nice night, friends, isn't it? Come on in. Can I serve you coffee and sandwiches—or perhaps a little drink before you retire?"

I had no chance of talking to Styles again. Did Block suspect I had been out with Anne? It seemed that he was eying me queerly from beneath his bulging, bushy brows, but whatever he suspected, he said nothing.

I had to get Anne away from this place of horror. I was still telling myself that, when, presently, I had retired to my bedroom. My door was locked. I put out my light, sat in darkness on the bed, pondering what I would do. My little car was in one of the outbuildings nearby. I could roll it out without making any noise. Then, at Anne's window, I would get her, as soon as the house had quieted. Once I had Anne in the car and out on the

road, nothing else would matter. . . .

Suddenly, in the silence, I heard the sound of a door furtively opening and closing. It seemed the small side door of the Inn, down the corridor not far from me. At my window, I was just in time to see a dark hurrying figure emerge from the Inn. Paul Arton! His dark clothes, dark hat, made him faintly to be seen in the outside dimness, but I could not mistake his slouching shoulders and shambling gait.

Within a second or two he had vanished into the shadows of the woods. Then, in a moment, I saw the blob of him emerge, climbing the rocky slope toward the castle. He was visible for another minute, and then the darkness up there swallowed him. It set my heart racing. Anne had been right. Something was destined to transpire here tonight—

I MUST get Anne out of here now. I climbed out my window, taking my suitcase with me. Her window was dark; its lower sash was up. In another moment I stood there at her sill, with so great a terror flooding me that the scene in her bedroom blurred before my gaze.

The moon had come out. I was standing in moonlight, and the shafts of it struck into the window so that the bedroom was plainly illumined. Its hall door was closed; locked doubtless. Her bed was rumpled, as though she had been lying on it. But she was gone! Up to the castle, to participate in the ghastly affair of tonight? I was cold with terror as I ran—a chilling shudder numbing me as though the blood in my veins were turning to ice. I must find her, quickly now.

The rifted clouds overhead presently revealed the moon. The rocks of the hillside were eerie with moonlight. I climbed, panting, thinking only that Anne must be up here, in deadly danger, in the ghastly clutches of—what?

And then, suddenly, as I came near the base of the front wall, high up on the rampart diagonally over my head, an eerie green-ghostly shape was visible. The ghost of the master of Stuyvesant Hall? I stood beside a rock, for that instant breathlessly staring upward. The luminous blob seemed slowly floating along the top of the rampart. And then I sucked my breath, went cold with a new rush of horror.

There was another blob up there now! A woman. Tall, slim, in a long flowing robe. The moonlight gleamed on her pallid face as she stood, transfixed, staring at the slowly advancing luminous ghost. Was she too an apparition? For a second or two I thought so. And then as slowly she backed away from the advancing, menacing shape, the moonlight struck her more clearly.

I saw that is was Anne!

Anne, slowly backing, with stiff, unnatural tread, like a somnambulist stricken with terror and slowly retreating. The uneven surface up there made her recede from my line of vision. Then she had vanished.

The greenish man-shape too was suddenly invisible. I had the startled impression that it had stopped, was crouching up there at the brink. And abruptly I realized that I was standing in full moonlight. I had no more warning than that. The frowning top of the rampart was some fifty feet over me. Abruptly I was aware that something was projecting, and moving, up there. A huge, black blob.

There was a little scraping, crunching sound, and then the blob, a great chunk of masonry, came hurtling down. I leaped sideward, into a shadow; and the gigantic missile missed me by a foot. It crashed into fragments on the rock beside me— a hundred pounds or more of crumbling masonry that would have mashed me into bloody pulp had it found its mark!

For a moment I crouched, motionless, silent. I was sure now that I could not be seen from above. Then, abruptly in the silence, a grim chuckle floated down. It was my assailant, who thought that he had killed me!

From the shadow where I was crouching I moved backward. It took me ten minutes or more of arduous climbing over broken rocks, past little fissures and gullies until I came to the side ascending path, where at the castle's base there was a small door. I tried its big rusted handle. The handle stuck; the solid door was unyielding to my shoving shoulder. And then sud-

denly I was aware of a sheen of yellow light. It was coming upward from a small areaway nearby. I saw a small flight of stone steps going down into the lower level, ten feet or so below ground where there was seemingly a basement entrance. A little door was down there. Beside it was a cellar window, barred, with a broken, dirty pane of glass behind the bars.

SILENTLY I descended into the dark areaway; crouched at the barred window where now the faint murmur of men's voices was audible. It was a mouldering cellar room, eerily illumined by a flickering candle which stood on an old board table. Two men were seated about it. One was in a chair shoved a foot or two backward.

The shadow of a board partition was on him so that I could not see him clearly, save that a luminous green sheen seemed radiating from him. The other man was Paul Arton. He sat in his shirt-sleeves, with his spindly neck and over-large head painted weirdly by the candlelight. He was smiling with a greedy, foxy look, his little pig-eyes glittering with cupidity. On the table before him lay a pile of banknotes.

"Well, there's your money," Arton said softly.

"Very good," the other man agreed. He shifted forward out of the shadows so that I could see him more plainly—a blob of figure in a dark robe that by the candlelight shone luminous green. A cowl was over his head that almost shrouded his face, but still I could see a little of it. Ghostly trappings of a human murderer.

The face was daubed with luminous ointment, to shine in darkness; a gaunt, weird, visage with those gleaming eyes. The lurking apparition who had spied upon me and Anne in the garden; the glowing greenish shape up on the rampart which only a little while ago had thought it had killed me with falling masonry.

"Let me see it now," Arton was saying. "That old painting of Gloria Stuyvesant. It better be good—tell me more about it, Carter. Where is it? If I'm buying—"

Carter! My mind leaped back. One Dr. Carter had been the lover of Gloria Stuyvesant here fourteen years ago—and he had vanished when the woman was killed by her jealous husband. . . .

"I'll take you to it," Carter declared. "It's good all right. You can sell it for a fortune abroad—if you're careful. No question of that. A big night for you tonight, Arton—"

I understood at least part of the murderous plot now. The painting was a bait. Rich men were lured up here to sell them a painting, out which they thought they could make a lot of quick, illegal money. That's always been a good lure for suckers. And these victims were murdered to keep them from telling how they had been defrauded. It was a grim midnight scene. The man in the robe and cowl was furtively moving a hand toward his belt. A knife came out which he held below the table edge.

Then abruptly beside me, here in the darkness of the areaway, there was a sound. I had no time to move. A figure reared up from almost down at my feet. It was the bulky form of a man who gripped my legs. For a moment I fought with a silent, startled frenzy against the man's heavy body which sprawled on me. And then I realized that he was only convulsively twitching. His blood was spewing out on my hands and face—nauseous, sticky, horrible.

It was Peter Block, the innkeeper, with his slashed throat a ghastly crimson welter, and blood gushing in a horrible frothy foam from his mouth with his expiring breaths. Silently I bent over him; and now he recognized me.

"Got control of Anne," he was muttering. "He—paid me big—finished with me now so he—killed me, damn him. I'm glad he—could never find the painting. That's a—joke—I hope he—never does find it—"

HE was still horribly trying to laugh at the irony of it as his last breath came with a gurgle of crimson and he died. I rose to my feet. I had been aware that there had been a cry from behind the cellar window—grisly sounds in there which had blotted out the sounds we were making outside. The light was gone from the cellar now. For a second I stared in upon

blank silent darkness, but I knew that Arton was lying in there, weltering ....

Got control of Anne. . . . Block's dying words leaped at me. The woman I loved was trapped here in this grim dark old building. . . . I was hardly aware that I had leaped from the areaway. Moonlight was shining on the crags behind the towering building. The little cellar door by the barred window had resisted by frantic efforts to break it. I ran in the moonlight along the side of the lower base.

And then I came upon a small portal partly hidden by a broken pergola which sagged under a tangle of old vines. A rusted beamed door that stood ajar, was here.

I had no light, save a few matches which I dared not use. Within the interior darkness there was nothing but the fetid, mouldering air of cellar rooms long closed. No cat could have stalked more cautiously. Once I thought I heard voices. Over my head? It seemed so. Then I found stairs going upward —a small circular staircase spiraling vertically.

I passed what seemed two floors. The exit door at the first would not yield to my shoving. Still it seemed that somewhere here there was a faint droning voice. At the second level I shoved at a small metal door; and as it swung, at once the droning muffled voice leaped into reality.

Amazement and horror rushed over me, so great a wave of horror that the ghastly, eerie scene at which I gazed blurred before me. Control of Anne? I understood it now; it was here before my staring eyes—this thing so eerie that my blood chilled and the roots of my hair prickled. I found that I was on a small balcony which ran around two sides of a big lower salon. Candlelight was down there—a candle held by the robed Dr. Carter. He was walking slowly backward, and in front of him was Anne—tall, willowy in her long robe with her mass of dark hair tumbling down on her shoulders. As he backed, slowly she advanced. Weird advance— a slow, measured tread, with her arms outstretched and her eyes blankly staring. . . . Then came his low, intense voice.

"We're trying to find a painting, Anne—a painting of mother and child. Can't you remember? Dig deep, Anne, I command you."

"Yes. I remember." Her tone was drab; toneless; mechanical.

"You once knew where it was—I'm sure of that, Anne. Her husband was proud of Gloria Stuyvesant's beauty. And then he hid the canvas so that no one would see it, because he was madly suspicious and jealous of another man. You wouldn't know that—but there must be something deep in your mind about the painting. Dig deep. Where is it now? Try to bring that out of your memory. Lead me to it, Anne."

The scene, the weird words so horrified me for a moment I crouched, staring down through the bars of the little balcony rail. The two figures, eerie in the candlelight, were some twenty feet below me—the bearded Carter with his weird eyes staring into the eyes of the advancing girl.

Artificial somnambulism? Hypnotism? Was it only that? Or that, combined with some weird drug, potent enough to be an hypnotic? The expanded pupils of her eyes—I had noticed that, in the garden. I had thought it only her terror, but was it because she was drugged? And she had spoken of her queer feelings—her presentiment that the ghastly things which had happened to her were to be repeated tonight.

WHAT drug could it be? Small, persistent doses of curare? That, doubtless; and mingled perhaps with other combinations of diabolical drug-hypnotics. I remembered reading of the recent scientific developments, the experimentations of curare-drugging—its ability to lower the basic quality of the will, so that the victim could be commanded as one would command an animal. And a young female —the most receptive of all victims!

Carter's voice was droning: "You're going to show me where you remember that he hid the painting, Anne. Somewhere here in the castle, of course. This is our last try—you're going to take me there now. Do you understand?"

"Yes. I will take you to it."

Weird, slow advance. Carter was standing aside now; and the girl, with

her measured unnatural tread, went past him. Then slowly she turned, moved through a little doorway at the side of the room, with Carter tensely following, holding his candle aloft. For a moment its glimmer flickered in the adjacent room. I recovered my wits. I had run the length of the balcony; the end of the lower salon was up a few steps so that the drop here was not much over ten feet. I landed on the salon floor. And then I reached the door to the other room; stopped for a second warily.

"All right, I'll let you rest now, Anne," Carter's voice was saying.

"What—what happened?" I heard her gasp faintly.

She was in a chair, crouching, trembling; he was standing before her with his back to the door. "You're all right," he said. "Just get your strength—then we'll try again. One last try—"

He muttered something which I couldn't hear. There was a knife in his hand which he held behind him. One last try to find the painting, and then he would kill her, of course, fearful of the fragmentary memories which she would have. The game was up for him now; he had got all the money he dared get, from the victims he had lured here.

IT was ironic that though his bait for the rich men victims was a valuable painting, he had never been able to find that painting for himself! He seemed convinced that the knowledge of where it was hidden was in Anne's subconscious mind. He was trying to draw that knowledge out, make her lead him to the painting. The puzzling question leaped at me—why should Anne's subconscious mind hold that knowledge?

Carter did not hear me as I leaped forward out of the doorway, until I was almost upon him. He ripped out a startled oath as I gripped him, seizing his wrist of the hand that held the knife. And now the light fell full on his face. Queer . . . I had thought I had never seen him, save as the gaunt lurking villain in the trappings of a ghost. But now came full recognition.

"Why," I muttered. "I know you—Robert Styles—"

Robert Styles! That second mysterious guest at the Inn—he who had told me with such diabolic candor that he was interested in spiritualism, so that I had thought he might be here to investigate the ghostly manifestations! And then later, when I had encountered him prowling in the garden, he had in reality been watching me! Deciding then that I was learning too much and that I must be killed—which he thought he had done when he so nearly dropped the rock upon me from the Castle ramparts! Wily villain! He had made me vaguely think that he might be a detective, investigating those mysteriously vanishing men!

My recognition, now as we fought, startled him. He was a slight fellow, no match for me. He tried to wrench free, to stab at me with the knife. But I twisted it from his hand. We fell. As we went down, I gripped the knife-handle, plunged it wildly. It slipped into his chest with a gruesome spurting of blood. His body, sprawled partly under me, was horribly writhing. I climbed off it. Anne, trembling, dazed, had slid out of the chair and was crouching on the floor. I threw myself down beside her, holding her against me.

"You're all right now, dear," I whispered. "Thank God it's over. . . . Don't you know me?"

"Yes—yes—Jack—"

She was numbed, confused, half drugged, quivering with exhaustion and blurred terror. I held her pallid face against me so that she might not see the weltering murderer as he struggled with death.

The burning candelabra on the table illumined the room with its eerie flickering light. I saw now that it was a small room; apparently it had been an artist's studio. It was thick with dust and cobwebs—the gathered silt of years of disuse.

Over in a corner an old easel stood, with pigments, a palette, brushes and other painters' paraphernalia littering a table beside it. Old canvases stood against the wall; small, half-finished paintings, charcoal drawings and sketches.

And then my attention was caught by a big, life-size oil painting

framed, which hung alone here on one of the bare walls. It was a woodland scene of dogs baying at a treed quarry. It was a mere daub; a chromo—an artist of utterly no skill, or was it merely that it had been hastily done? A heedless sketch, a daubing with great, thick crude strokes.

And then abruptly I leaped to my feet. Down in one corner the painting looked very queer. . . .

"What is it?" Anne murmured. "Oh, what is happening—"

"I've got an idea," I muttered. "By God, that would be ironic, this painting—"

Then I ran to the table where the pigments, brushes and the palette lay strewn. I grabbed an artist's knife. And then I was scraping the painting. . . . Weird metamorphosis. The overlay of dried, daubed paint came off in flakes. And under it was the pallid aristocratic beauty of the woman who had been Gloria Stuyvesant. Mother and child. In her arms, close against her she held a little girl of beauty like her own, with tousled dark curls.

I stared, transfixed. On the child's left shoulder, revealed by her brief frock, a tiny birth-mark showed pale-red—a little five-pointed blotch, like a red star. . . .

The same mark that was on Anne's shoulder! Anne, not an innkeeper's daughter, but the heir to the Stuyvesant fortune! That was why her subconscious mind — memories of her childhood—held knowledge of where the painting was hidden! And that was the final, the biggest stake of all for which the villainous Styles had been playing. His desire to get a grip on the Stuyvesant fortune. The lost painting was valuable in itself—but more than that, it was Styles' only way of proving Anne's identity!

Styles was lying gasping, with blood gushing horribly from his mouth in a dark-red torrent. His glazing eyes saw the picture. And, as he recognized it, amazement was on his contorted, goggling face. Amazement and chagrin.

"You see," he faintly gasped, "she did know where it was—brought me in here, at last. And now you've got the painting—and her. Well—the devil take you both—"

A gushing of blood from his throat engulfed his words. For another moment he twitched with a dying spasm, and then he lay still.

"He's gone, Anne," I murmured. "It's all over."

She could not answer. Trembling, cold to my touch, still blurred with the damnable drug, she huddled in my arms, staring numbling up at the painting and then down to the little red star on her shoulder. For another interval I held her. And then I picked her up in my arms and ran with her from the shambles of the room.

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DEATH IS A LITTLE MAN

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Author of "The Ripper Creeps," "Twin of the Beast," etc.

CHAPTER I

Murder by Magic

IN the dank, death-smelling undertaker's morgue in the "dust-bowl" town of Chico City, six people stared silently at a corpse. Sheet-covered, it lay on the slab, its coarse brutal face exposed, livid and gape-mouthed and awful.

Turning from the terror-blanched faces of the five members of the Chico Land Syndicate, Colonel Fabian Crum looked down intently at the thing that lay on the sheet beside the dead man. It was nothing more than a crude foot-high image made of dried mud and horsehair. But its tiny evil mouth was wide, its pin-head eyes stared up in obscene mimicry of the corpse's glassy stare. And there was a crack in its skull, too.

"Murder by magic," Crum murmured. "Yes, it's interesting."

The others stared at him. Standing on a flat box so that his eyes would be lifted above the level of the slab, he might have seemed comic. But no one wanted to laugh. In fact, they had begun to notice that the longer you looked at that suave, bony face, so curiously suggestive of an actor, the less cause for humor you were able to find in the fact that the trimly propor-

Victims See Their Death in Miniature

A nail was driven into Blocker's skull

tioned little man with the tiny watch-charm pistol dangling across his black vest front was not over four and a half feet high.

Now, as his birdlike cynical eyes lifted to sweep their faces, Paul Legrange, the pudgy speculator from New Orleans, whined:

"Laugh if you please, but I believe in voodoo. It works."

Uneasy silence held the others. Then Cal Mayhew laughed nervously. Seated in his wheel chair, the big banker resembled a chained Titan. For despite his rugged, commanding face, his powerful torso, you could not forget that under the lap-robe lying across his knees were legs as useless as so much dead matter.

"Voodoo," he blustered, "only works if you believe in it."

"That's beside the point," Karl

When Eerie Murder Magic Is Invoked!

Blocker put in. He was a square-built man with a Prussian haircut, cold eyes and the tanned, hard-jawed face of a man who has seen far places, which he had. "As long as it works at all, it does the job. There lies our dead foreman. Yesterday he had a row with this Negro *wangateur* they call Ole Jule. He hit Jule with a riding crop.

"Last night he got that *ouanga*—just as we got ours. Today his horse comes in without him and he's found with his skull cracked—just like that vile little image. Coincidence? Maybe. But I learned in the Congo that there's only one way to deal with witchcraft—root it out!"

"He's right as far as that goes," Ella Ryder's voice broke in. A thin, scrawny woman in mannish clothes, she screeched like a parrot. "But it's not just Ole Jule alone. Behind him are these shiftless tenant farmers. They say we're driving them from their homes, just because we're introducing modern farming methods. But the homes never were theirs. My family owned most of this county at one time; we gave these shiftless peasants a chance to pay for them. But they haven't; they never would. The places I don't own are mostly mortgaged to Cal Mayhew's bank—"

"And now," her husband, Winton Ryder put in, "they're resorting to witchcraft, trying to terrorize us!" He choked on his fury. Pallid, pinch-faced, he was an insignificant-looking creature who rarely dared speak except to underscore his wife's remarks.

"Let's see the *ouangas* the rest of you got," Crum said.

THE group gave a slight start. Even Cal Mayhew ceased to smile as he added his grotesque figurine to the pile which the others had placed before the little detective. Crum fingered them delicately.

"I notice," he said, "an odd difference in each. Mrs. Ryder's has a knotted horsehair about its throat. Her husband's is the same. But Mr. Blocker's has a tiny nail pushed into its skull. Mr. Legrange's has what seems to be a sliver from a razor blade embedded in its throat, while yours—"

Crum didn't finish. He looked at Mayhew. The banker winced.

"Has no head at all," Mayhew growled uneasily.

"Quite," Crum said. "Interesting. I'm sorry I can't take the case."

"Can't take it?" Legrange sputtered. "But look here, we can pay plenty. You're just the man we need. That's why we were so anxious to catch you as your trailer came through. We read about that Texas case and—"

"Yes," Crum said, "I'm sorry." He got down from the box. "But I've already been called in on another case. I only consented to stop long enough to advise you. My advice now is to be a little easier on your tenants." He bowed suavely, put on his hat and walked out, leaving them to stare after him in annoyed silence.

A little later his big car, dragging the sleek Zeppelin-shaped trailer which contained not only living quarters for two, but one of the most compact crime-detecting laboratories in the world, was skimming north along the highway. Moodily, Crum watched the somber landscape brooding under the pale moon.

Hunched over the wheel, Aga Aslan, the giant Asiatic who was Crum's chauffeur, bodyguard and technical assistant, shifted nervously in his seat.

"This country," he said, "somehow it make me creepy. You think there's nothing in this voodoo case?"

"I think it's only started, Aga," Crum said softly. "But I don't want the case. Those syndicate members are driving the poor from their homes. If somewhere, back in this dreary brushland, there's a black sorcerer working his jungle magic to avenge his white friends, well, let somebody else catch him."

Aga started to agree, but instead he sat back, slamming on his brakes. White wooden "horses" hung with red lanterns loomed ahead and the word "Detour" stood out blackly above an arrow pointing to a dirt road.

Swearing, Aga swung the big car off the highway. The road bumped and twisted between plowed grainland and brushy pastures and came finally to an old wooden bridge. The car made it across, but jerked up suddenly as with a cracking sound one of the trailer's

wheels sank in rotten timber.

They spent half an hour trying to extricate it, then gave it up and started walking off in opposite directions to look for help. It was the glare of the fire that first attracted Crum as he swung along the dark road. Then the sound of excited voices caused him to pause, move nearer in the shadows.

A battered old truck loaded with household goods was pulled off on the road's shoulder, and in the glare from a campfire a dark-haired young woman was talking to a tan-faced young man in overalls.

"They may run us off the land, Jess," she said fiercely, her light-splashed face shining with a wild barbaric beauty, "but they won't get hold of Simmie. I'll fight tooth and nail for Simmie!"

"Careful!" The man looked about him." If they find he ain't here and that he had a row with that foreman, Follin . . . well, they're gettin' a big city detective to take the case and—"

"But Simmie wouldn't have killed Follin—"

"Maybe not. But I'll bet he's hidin' with Ole Jule right now."

The woman didn't answer. Crum stepped back a few paces, then came forward swinging his flash from side to side. They watched his coming, but both were startled when they saw his tiny shape. After he had introduced himself Jess Pollard gasped.

"Crum?" he said respectfully. "Say, you ain't the big detective the Syndicate's hired?"

Crum smiled genially.

"I can scarcely call myself big," he said, "but I am the detective. As for the Syndicate, I turned them down. Now, however, I'm afraid I've broken my trailer axle. If I'm delayed here I may look into the case just to keep myself amused."

This seemed to relieve them somewhat, though fear still shone in their faces. Nevertheless, Jess Pollard, the young farmer, volunteered his help. They went back, got the trailer free and found that the axle was unbroken. But one of the tires was badly ripped by nails and Crum pretended that he had no spare for it. So the trailer was dragged up near the Pollard camp.

While they worked they talked. Crum learned the Pollard's tragic story, a story of years of thrift nullified by drought and dusters. Then the Syndicate had come. Cal Mayhew's bank and Ella Ryder's estate held most of the mortgages, and with capital furnished by the speculators, Blocker and Legrange, mortgages had been foreclosed and most of the county turned into a gigantic mechanized farm.

Crum was sympathetic.

"But," he said, "you mustn't give up hope. You're both young, and since there are just the two of you—"

Their eyes dropped.

"Well, uh, we got Mary's little brother, Simmie," Jess Pollard faltered. "He ain't here right now. 'Course, he's a help with the work, just fourteen, but strong as a man —" He stopped at a warning look from his wife. "I mean he's a good worker—"

Crum dropped the subject there. He'd have to go back to town to see about a tire, he told them. They agreed to watch his trailer.

Back in the big car, skimming toward town again, Aga expressed his puzzlement. Crum told him what he had heard and directed him to drive to Mayhew's house.

"While I'm there," he said, "you can loaf about town and find out all you can about this boy Simmie."

THE big Mayhew house stood deep in trees that surrounded it on all sides and lined the walk leading up to the front. Moving through this gloomy tunnel, Crum felt his nerves quiver to some nameless aura that seemed to fill the shadowy air. On the front steps lounged the dark shape of the huge Negro servant, Lub, who pushed Mayhew about in his wheel chair, and Crum could hear him softly singing:

> Oh death he is a little man,
> And he goes from doah to doah—

A cold tingle crept along his spine.

"Is your master at home, Lub?" he called.

"Yassuh." The big Negro sat up. There was something sly and secretive, mocking as an idol's leer, in the mask-like features. "They's all up in Mist'

Mayhew's study room. Mist' Legrange and Mist' Blocker they stays heah at de house, an' Miz Ryder and her husband they walked over fo' a pow-wow."

"Good," Crum said. "Don't bother to show me up."

The criminologist went up the staircase and the carpeted hall above with a noiseless tread. Quarreling voices located the room, but it ceased when he knocked. Winton Ryder opened the door and all stared with surprise as Crum stepped in.

"Excuse the interruption," he said, "but an accident has delayed me here. I've decided to take your case."

"Splendid!" Legrange said. "That's a load off my mind. The way things stand there'd be sabotage and more murders. But if you can get the goods on Old Jule, we'll be glad to pay you—"

He glanced at the others for confirmation. Blocker nodded vigorously, Mayhew indifferently, but Ella Ryder was glowering.

"We?" she shrilled. "Who are *we*? I'll have nothing to do with it. If you men are scared, hire a nurse, but no money of mine will go to pay him!" She turned to her husband. "Come on, Winton, we'll leave these cowards!" And dragging him along, she went out like a whirlwind.

Legrange looked after her. His beady eyes, set deep in folds of fat, were veiled, thoughtful.

"I wonder," he said slowly, "if she wouldn't be glad to see those *ouangas* work—on the rest of us?"

Crum looked at him.

"Meaning what, Legrange?"

But before Legrange could answer, Blocker broke in with a laugh. "It's nothing," he said, "except that Paul's losing his nerve. You see, in a project of this kind it's essential that there be no withdrawals until the first harvest is in. For that reason we've all agreed that no one can take out his investment. Even if one of us dies, the money can't be taken out, but remains under the syndicate's control. It's sensible, and if Paul doesn't like it, I've offered to buy out his share. Now, Colonel, we may as well talk terms. Ella's just had a fit because she can't boss everything. But the rest of us want you."

They discussed terms and came to an agreement. Crum promised to get busy on the investigation tomorrow. As he left the meeting broke up. Blocker and Legrange told their host good night and trailed down the hall to their rooms.

Crum went out alone. The Negro, Lub, was nowhere to be seen. The dark trees of the walk rustled like a ghostly waterfall. Again Crum's sensitive nerves quivered to that nameless premonition, that almost clairvoyant sense of lurking, imminent horror. But he dismissed it impatiently, reached the street and strolled toward town.

It was still some time before Aga was supposed to meet him. Perhaps he might locate him downtown. But after a couple of blocks he turned back. Something about that sinister house of greed and hate and secret fear drew him like a magnet.

But the lights were already out. The guests and host alike must have gone straight to bed. Darkly the great house brooded there, as if the shadow of the sorcery-haunted jungle had already closed over it. Softly Crum turned in at the walk, halted. Against the dark bole of one of the big elms a ghostly figure seemed to lean. But it seemed inhumanly tall, utterly immobile.

He stepped nearer and a cold clutch tightened under his ribs. In a trice his flash was out, spraying the ghastly apparition. It was Ella Ryder. But she wasn't standing. Her feet in their sturdy Oxfords were about a foot from the ground. Her pallid face leered at him like a waxen mask. Head twisted sideward, she was hanging against the tree's bole, supported by a rope that ran from her throat to a limb above.

On the ground under her feet lay the mannikin of hair and clay with the long horsehair about its throat—a grisly simulacrum of the equally lifeless thing above it.

CHAPTER II

Devil in the Trees

CRUM put out his light. On the dark silence a wave of wind drove through the trees again; a limb creaked

like a crackle of ghoulish laughter. Quietly he walked toward the house. The big Negro, Lub, was nowhere in evidence. Crum entered and went up the stairs. Silence, utter, ominous, filled the gloomy recesses of the house. At Cal Mayhew's room he knocked.

There was no answer at once, so he opened the door, reached up and pushed the light button. The study was empty, but through a door that opened on the bedroom he saw Cal Mayhew sit up in his wheel chair with a start.

"Hey, what the hell—" He blinked at the intruder.

"Mrs. Ryder," Crum said, is dead."

"Dead? You don't mean it?" Mayhew looked dazed. "Where's Lub? Confound him, he's supposed to be here to put me to bed, but I've yelled my head off and he hasn't come. I must have dozed— Well, give me a hand here. Where's the woman? What happened to her?"

Crum told him, helped him get the wheel chair going, then preceded him down the hall. At the next door—Blocker's—Crum knocked, then opened it and snapped on the light. Blocker, in his pajamas, sat up with an oath. Leaving Mayhew to do the explaining, Crum hurried to Legrange's door. But when he snapped on the light here he found the room empty.

"Legrange is gone," he announced quietly.

Blocker, in a bathrobe, had come into the hall.

"The hell he is!" he exclaimed. "Where's that woman?"

Blocker's strong arms braking the progress of the wheel chair, they helped Cal Mayhew down the stairs. They paused in the hall long enough to call the sheriff, then hurried out. But no sooner had they reached the walk than a cry rang out from the tree tunnel.

"Help, help! Murder!"

They spurted forward. A match flared, showed the cringing shape of Winton Ryder. Quaking in every limb, he goggled at the body of his wife.

"They've killed her!" he screamed. "With a rope—just like that hair around the *ouanga's* neck!"

"Yes, that's obvious," Crum spoke. "But where were you, Ryder?"

Ryder gulped, his wild eyes blinked into the glare of Crum's torch.

"I went back. She was waiting for me out here."

"You went back?" Mayhew snarled. "To spy on us?"

"Well, yes." Ryder was sweating. "She thought you might talk about her. She wanted to know . . . But after Colonel Crum left the rest of you went to bed—all but Legrange. I saw him sneak out the back of the house and followed him. Lub went with him—"

He broke off, glancing toward the house. Feet pounded and two running shapes were visible against the light. Lub, the whites of his eyes shining, came up first. Legrange followed.

"Where have you been, you scoundrel?" Mayhew bellowed.

Lub gaped speechlessly at the hanging woman. Legrange, panting up, answered Mayhew.

"It's all my fault, Cal—" He stopped, white jowls quivering as he forced his bugging eyes to Ella Ryder's face. Then he looked down, saw the *ouanga* and sprang back as from a viper. He looked at the others, almost angrily. "Didn't I warn you?"

"Never mind that," Mayhew growled. "Where have you been?"

Legrange looked from face to face.

"Why, I—hang it, I don't care if you know. I was trying to get Lub to bribe Ole Jule to lift the curse!"

"On yourself only, I imagine," Mayhew rumbled. He turned to Lub. "And you, you scoundrel, you led him on, I suppose, took his money?"

Lub began to stammer a terrified denial. Legrange broke in.

"He's telling the truth—"

"But you're not!" Winton Ryder shrilled. "You killed her, damn you! I saw you go out with Lub but I didn't see where you went. You could have sneaked back here, murdered her—"

"Oh, go to the devil," Legrange said contemptuously. "You probably did it yourself. Wouldn't blame you much either." He turned away and walked back toward the house.

THE sheriff arrived with a deputy and a doctor and they took the hanging woman down. Death seemed

to have resulted from simple strangulation. The woman had apparently strayed near the tree and someone hiding among its branches had cast the noose down, throttled her attempt to scream, dragged her off the ground and strangled her. Crum examined the thick bark of the tree's bole carefully.

His eyes, sharp as a bird's, missed nothing. Only at the place where the body had hung was any of the bark disturbed.

"Whoever climbed the tree must have been barefoot," the sheriff said.

"Even a barefoot person," Crum answered, "would have dislodged some bark—unless he was extremely small and light."

"Or," Blocker said nastily, "unless he was a voodoo devil who didn't walk on the earth anyhow."

The undertaker's ambulance arrived, and Aga, in Crum's big car, followed it. While they loaded the woman in, Crum spoke with his assistant. After explaining what had happened, he asked in a whisper:

"What did you find out about that boy, Simmie?"

Aga's swart face bunched in a frown. "*Bismillah!*" he swore. "It was hard to learn anything from these close-mouthed natives. But I did get something. The boy's got a bad record. He's a tough kid for his age. Served a year in the reformatory."

Crum made a clucking sound with his tongue, turned his worried eyes away. The big Negro, Lub, was pushing Cal Mayhew's wheel chair back toward the house. Again through Crum's mind ran that eerie chant:

> Oh death he is a little man,
> And he goes from doah to doah—

A little man. That hideous little image. Crum shuddered involuntarily. The ambulance had pulled away; the sheriff was talking to Blocker. The latter turned toward Crum now.

"Thought we hired you for a watch-dog, Colonel," he said with an ugly laugh. "You'd better get busy or there will be no one to pay you." He started toward the house. "Well, sweet dreams!"

Crum watched him.

"Iron nerves," he muttered, "or—"

The sheriff strolled over. He was a tall, raw-boned, clean-shaven young man, with a tanned face and a plainsman's deep-set eyes.

"I suppose you realize," Crum said, "that any of these people may be trying to kill the others because of a certain financial arrangement they seem to have?"

Sheriff Hurley nodded.

"I thought of that. But how's it possible? Could Legrange have got out here and killed that woman without being seen or giving her a chance to scream?" He laughed nervously. "You'd have to imagine an ape-man traveling through the trees for that. Blocker might have the physique for that, but not Legrange. And, of course, Cal Mayhew, with his useless legs—"

"I've been wondering about those legs," Crum said.

HURLEY looked at him narrowly. "I get you. But it's no go. Cal couldn't be faking. He was injured in a truck wreck about six years ago. His feet were cut half off and his legs were badly crushed by a bale of cotton. The nerves were permanently injured. Both are completely paralyzed to the hips.

"Cal's been to every big specialist in the country, takes off a couple of months each year and goes hunting for a doctor who will give him some hope. Only I guess he's given up now. He said a doctor at Johns Hopkins finally convinced him this summer that it was a waste of money. No, Cal couldn't do no tree climbing. Of course, there's that Negro, Lub. But he might be working for any of them. Winton Ryder's known him all his life, and Legrange and Blocker are always playing up to him."

"And Ryder himself had both motive and opportunity," Crum added. "His wife controlled all their money, I understand."

"Yeah, that's right. Only that little weasel don't seem capable—"

"Which is a decided advantage to him," Crum pointed out. "And while he doesn't look strong, he's active, and he's a little man. Yes, I think I'll talk to Ryder a bit."

"He went off with the ambulance,"

the sheriff said. "You'll probably find him at the morgue."

Aga drove Crum to the undertaker's morgue. The doctor was still there but Winton Ryder had gone. Crum lingered, talking, introduced the subject of Cal Mayhew's legs. The doctor verified all that Sheriff Hurley had told him about them.

"I told Cal it was hopeless long ago," he said, "but Cal's a stubborn man. I'm glad the man at Johns Hopkins finally convinced him. Well, I'm going to do a post-mortem on Mrs. Ryder tomorrow, if you'd like to be here."

Crum said he would. He told the doctor good night and went out. The windswept street was dreary, deserted. Again the sense of helpless horror settled over Crum, the sense of something hellish, but just beyond his reach. He had theories, yes. But none seemed quite to fit. He tried to dismiss the uncanny feeling, fished in his pocket for cigarettes.

His fingers touched something—cold, hard. He brought it out, stared at it with stiffening muscles. It was a little mud image. Smaller than the others, there could be no doubt it had been meant for him. Hideous, naked, evil, it lay in the palm of his hand, and what struck him with a peculiar nauseous force was the fact that its clay belly was ripped open in a wide deep gash.

Quickly he pocketed the thing, walked on to the car. He hoped Aga hadn't seen. He was ashamed that the thing had shaken him so, with a cold, physical revulsion. He wasn't a superstitious man. But he had seen things in Haiti, in Africa—

Angrily he shook his thoughts loose from morbid memories. Nonsense. This thing was a matter of cold-blooded but perfectly rational murder. He stepped toward the open door of the car, stopped. From somewhere down the dark street came a wild cry:

"Hey, Colonel, Colonel!"

It was Winton Ryder. He came dashing up, leaned exhaustedly against the car, gasping for breath. He was hatless, his black hair sweat-plastered against his forehead.

"Been trying to find you," he panted. "Called the sheriff's office, but you weren't there and I didn't want to tell them. They wouldn't believe—But it's Legrange all right!"

"What's Legrange?"

"The fiend back of Ella's murder!" Ryder chattered. His face grew cunning. "I suspected him from the start. He's from New Orleans and knows plenty about voodoo. After I left here I went back to that house—"

"Spying again?"

"Right! What of it? It's my wife that's been murdered. I sneaked around the house and watched Legrange's window. And I saw—" He paused, his eyes dilated, gasped for breath. "God! I don't know what I did see. It looked like a devil, the dim impression I got of it. It came out of Legrange's window; those trees brush right against it, you know. It came out, a flying blot of blackness and it went rushing through those trees like an ape—"

"You don't mean Legrange did?"

RYDER gulped.

"Not Legrange in his natural shape, at least. But he knows voodoo, he's the master of it, whatever it is. Ugh, it was horrible. It wasn't big. I couldn't tell much about its shape, seeing just a moving shadow swinging through the branches, but it couldn't have been bigger, well, bigger than you."

"You followed it?"

"Hell no," Ryder gulped. "I ran. I don't want to be the next one!"

Crum studied him a moment.

"Get in," he ordered then.

The car swooped through the silent streets and came to a stop before the Mayhew house again. This time with no attempt at silence, Crum led the way to the house. They pounded on the front door until the big Negro, Lub, in a faded bathrobe, opened it for them.

His eyes got big when he saw them.

"Somethin' done happened?"

"You haven't heard anything?"

"Not a sound, suh."

Crum went past him and his short legs flashed up the stairs. This time he went straight to Legrange's door, rattled the knob. It was locked.

"All right, Aga, break it in."

The big Asiatic threw his shoulder against the door. It crashed like a berry crate. Crum snapped on the light.

The others stopped with choked exclamations of horror. Only Crum, fighting the nausea that rose in him, went straight to the bed.

The scene was sickening in its awfulness. Half covered by a sheet, the obese body of Paul Legrange lay like a scraped and scalded hog in a bloody welter. Curtains from the open window fluttered over him, veiled and revealed by turns the gray and ghastly horror of his face. The head was half severed from the body in a grinning wound that reached from ear to ear. On the bedside table, just as in Ella Ryder's case, lay Legrange's particular *ouanga* —an ugly, fat little image of mud with a razor blade embedded in its throat.

For a moment as Crum stared at the charnel horror, he seemed to feel the mud image in his own pocket writhe and leer. Then feet were pattering in the hall, doors slamming. The high-pitched voice of Cal Mayhew could be heard yelling for Lub to come and help him into his chair.

Gratefully jerked back to reality by the stir, Crum became himself again. His birdlike eyes swept past Legrange's body to the open window, the gnarled tree limb that brushed it. They dropped to the sill, and with a start he moved nearer. There was a magazine lying there, and on the glazed surface of its cover, something gleamed redly.

It was the bloody print of a hand—a hand scarcely larger than Crum's own, a hand that must have belonged to a very small man, to a child, or to some nameless monster such as Ryder swore he had seen rushing through the trees!

CHAPTER III

The Little Black Sorcerer

IN the blood-sultry atmosphere of Paul Legrange's death room, the three remaining members of the Chico Land Syndicate glared at each other with eyes in which the hate and terror were no longer veiled. Even the sardonic Blocker was shaken now; his bullet head seemed even more rigid on his thick neck, his eyes were even icier.

Cal Mayhew in his wheel chair held his big shoulders hunched. His face, no longer ruddy, wore the look of a crippled gladiator who still bares his teeth in defiance. As for Winton Ryder, there was no attempt at bravado to soften the raw horror that twitched in his sallow face, crawled in his bloodshot eyes.

"Let's throw it up," he said despondently. "The devil with the whole plan. We can't fight this, and we can't fight that gloating black demon out there."

They scowled, cursing him with their eyes. For despite their efforts to hide it, his words had conjured the image that was in the back of every mind—the gnarled, black, implacable witch-ban, squatting somewhere in the brush, busy with his diabolical machinations.

But Blocker jerked himself together.

"Keep your fool mouth shut!" he growled. "Nobody's withdrawing. Ole Jule may be just a tool—the tool of one of you two. That handprint looks like his, eh, Hurley?"

"It could be," the sheriff said. "Anyhow we'll get him. I've got a posse out after him now. But it may be hell, if the tenants defend him."

"We'll get machine-guns!" Blocker thundered. "Shoot them down!"

Hurley turned away, spoke to Crum.

"Ole Jule's an old man," he said. "Somehow I can't figure him climbing through those trees. Of course, if we had his fingerprints—"

"I may be able to tell something about that," Crum said, "even without his prints. I'm going to take that handprint to my laboratory."

He went over, took the magazine and carefully wrapped it in a newspaper. Blocker glared at him sourly.

"You'd better do something more than putter in your laboratory," he said, "while the rest of us are in danger of getting it in the neck!"

"Yours," Crum said easily, "wasn't to be in the neck, Blocker."

Blocker paled but didn't answer. Crum, followed by Aga and the sheriff, went out. As they passed down the dark tree lane the rustling leaves

seemed to whisper eerie mockeries of their thoughts.

"This voodoo stuff grows on you," the sheriff muttered, "I'd as soon not fool with Ole Jule. But I've got to get him."

"Get him," Crum said," but see that nothing happens to him, Hurley."

They parted and Crum and Aga got into their car.

"Back to the trailer," Crum directed.

The Pollard campfire was almost burned down when they reached it, but a figure rose from beside the dark trailer and stepped into the light. It was Mary Pollard. She looked tired, but her pretty face was smiling.

"Jesse had to go off, but I didn't want to leave your trailer unguarded," she explained.

CRUM thanked her. There was a queer twitch in his heart as he stepped inside and snapped on the light. Seating himself at a small desk, he scrawled two messages and handed them to Aga.

"I'll be busy here for at least an hour," he said. "You go back to town and send these telegrams. Then hang around the Mayhew house and keep your eyes open. Come back for me in an hour and a half."

Aga nodded and went off. Mary Pollard came to the door, stared in wonder at the gleaming white laboratory with its strange and complicated instruments.

"Do you mind if I watch?" she asked him.

Crum said he didn't, but as he placed the magazine cover under the lens of his photomicrographic camera, he was careful to keep his small body between the bloody hand print and her eyes. Presently he switched the lights for developing. Silently the woman watched him.

Working under the red glare, Crum looked like some mythical gnome in an enchanted cavern. The girl's courage began to rise. Here was a magic greater than voodoo—the magic of science that never erred, convicting the guilty, saving the innocent.

"I'll bet you've saved many innocent lives," she said.

Crum made a nervous sound deep in his throat, snapped on the lights again. He puttered about, drying his hands. Presently, trying to make his tone casual, he asked:

"That brother of yours hasn't come back yet, has he? I might use him to run an errand."

She dropped her eyes. "No, he hasn't come in. He's probably staying with some friends. He often does."

"And Simmie has lots of friends, I imagine."

"Why, yes, of course." She paused, searching his impassive face. "Of course, some people in town don't like him." She gave a little laugh. "Simmie's full of life, mischievous. He and a bunch of town boys used to have a 'Jungle' gang. You should have seen the way they'd whizz through the trees, swinging like monkeys. But they scared a lot of people at night, dropped things on their heads and—"

Something in his look caused her to break off. He had turned away. She watched him in uneasy silence, saw him take a large photograph of a hand-print, lay it flat and draw lines across it. He counted, tabulated. Presently he took enlarged prints of each finger, studied them closely, jotted notes.

When at last he faced her again, she wondered at the worried manner which had supplanted his aplomb. Almost with painful effort he asked:

"Mrs. Pollard, how long has Simmie been gone?"

Color faded from the woman's face; her hand clenched.

"Look here, has someone been telling you things about Simmie?" She stopped, turned in sudden panic toward the open trailer door.

From outside came a clamor of angry voices, the nervous dancing of horses' hoofs on packed earth. The woman sprang through the door. Crum followed, looked down the road. In a circle of light cast by lanterns a group of gesticulating men clustered about two others on horseback.

"Take it easy, Hurley," Crum heard. "It ain't no use—"

"Stand back, all of you!" the sheriff's voice rang out. "The first man that touched my prisoner—"

His words were drowned by a sharp chorus of threatening cries. In the lantern glow shapes swarmed and leaped. The horses reared; one figure was dragged down into the melee.

"Hold him! Gimme that rope!" men were shouting.

The woman gave a cry, Crum darted past her, ran down the road.

The scuffle was over when he reached them. Panting men stood about the pinioned shape of Sheriff Hurley. Faces turned to stare at Crum. Besides the two men holding the sheriff a score of others, armed to the teeth, surrounded the second horse on which a strange figure sat.

Black as the ace of spades, he was no larger than Crum himself. But as he sat there with arms tied to his sides and bandy legs bound at the ankles by a rope that ran under the horse's belly, there was a weirdly contemptuous calm on the withered face with its black shoe-button eyes and crinkly skull cap of short gray hair.

"Colonel Crum!" Hurley raised his dusty face. "Men, this is Colonel Crum, a world-famous detective. You can't get by with this!"

Hostile eyes raked the dapper figure of the small detective.

Crum smiled. "What's the trouble, gentlemen?"

"They aim to lynch Ole Jule," Hurley sputtered. "Me an' my deputy found him, but these posse-men have gone haywire, want to take the law—"

"You're darn right!" A thick-shouldered giant thrust himself forward, towering over Crum's slight figure. "He admits he's guilty, but no court could convict him on that confession."

CRUM looked at the sinister little black man on the horse.

"You admit murdering those people, Jule?"

The black idol returned Crum's stare. "White man," he said, "I ain't touched none of them people. It's they own evil done kilt them. I ain't been outa my shack in the brush for two days."

"But you made the *ouangas?*"

There was a pause. "I made one *ouanga*—the one Follin had with him when he died. I don't know nothin' about the others."

"It's a lie!" one of the mob rasped. "He made the *ouangas* and he climbed through the trees and killed them. He left his hand print."

A spot of cold under Crum's ribs began to spread through his body.

"We can't say that until we make a comparison," he began.

"Comparison, bosh! Whose else could it be? Unless it's yours." There was a coarse laugh. "No other man in the county is little enough to leave that hand print. What are we waiting for, men?"

Crum took a step back, but too late. Swooping forward, the giant grabbed him. Hurley, struggling, was forced back to the ground. The ropes that bound Ole Joe were ripped loose and he was dragged down.

Helpless in the giant's grip, Crum watched in horror the mob's silent savagery. In seconds a noose had encircled Ole Jule's neck, a man had swung himself into the saddle of Hurley's horse and affixed the other end of the rope to the pommel. Crum's stomach turned at sight of the little Negro's face.

Helpless in the grip of two brawny youths, his eyes gleamed whitely, his withered lips were drawn back from rotten teeth in the grimace of a doomed animal. Yet as they bellowed at him to confess or be dragged to town, Ole Jule stubbornly shook his black head.

"All right!" the giant growled. "Let him have it!"

The horse started forward; the slack went out of the rope. Crum's body tensed. He could delay no longer. The decision had been made for him.

"Stop it!" his voice rose shrill and high." I've got proof Jule didn't do it. Kill him and every man of you will face the chair!"

Something in the confident ring of his words stopped them.

"He's bluffing!" somebody yelled. But the horseman had turned.

"He'd better not be bluffing! What's your proof?"

"The fact," Crum said, "that the bloody handprint couldn't be Jule's. I've got an enlarged photograph of it in

my laboratory. It couldn't be Jule's because it's print of a child's hand."

There was an instant of utter silence. Crum's skin tingled. Behind him he knew that Mary Pollard was watching, listening.

The big man holding him glowered.

"You're trying to trick us," he said. "You can't tell age by fingerprints; fingerprints don't change—"

"Not," Crum said, "as far as pattern's concerned, no. But the friction ridges grow with age. And the scientist, Forgeot, by counting the number of intersecting ridges on a five millimeter line, has given us a scale by which to tell age fairly accurately. The count runs from fifteen or eighteen in newborn infants, to from seven to ten in adults. In this case the count was twelve—a child in his early teens."

"My God! A kid? Say, if you're lying to us—"

"I can compare Ole Jule's handprint in a moment."

"But a kid!" The man on the horse flung his glance about and suddenly it came to rest on the stricken figure of Mary Pollard alone on the fringes of the light. "A kid!" he repeated in a different tone. "Say, Mrs. Pollard, send Simmie Hinds out here!"

Faces turned to stare. But the woman stood immobile. Her hands were behind her back, her blazing eyes were fixed on Crum.

"You beast!" she burst out. "You spy, you Judas! Pretend to be our friend, then frame Simmie! Well, you won't—"

Somebody yelled a warning, but the woman had already brought the big revolver around. It crashed and a lancing jet of fire streaked toward Crum. He dropped like a cat, then raised his head to see that the woman had turned, was already crawling through the barbed wire fence.

Once on the other side, she straightened.

"I'll be back, I'll be back for you!" she screamed. "Wait till the rest of us cheated people hear how they've hired you to frame an innocent boy!"

Nobody tried to follow her as she turned and went streaking across the field.

CHAPTER IV

The Curse Still Works

MARY POLLARD made good her threat. By a little after midnight the reports began to drift into town of scattered bands of marauders armed with guns, torches, dynamite, roaming the countryside, blasting tractors and buildings belonging to the syndicate. Hurley, with all the men he could muster, had been unable to stop it. He had refused to fire on the mobs which included women and children.

"If you can't stop them," Karl Blocker raged, pacing the floor, "you'd better get out and find that boy anyhow! We're dead certain he's the killer now. Isn't that right, Crum?"

"Not dead certain," Crum replied. "Even though the prints do match the description wired me from the reformatory."

"Certain enough anyhow!" Blocker dismissed it. "Besides, we've got a witness now who swears that Simmie Hinds killed Follin."

"In a fair fight," Crum qualified. "The boy was defending himself from an attack. It proves nothing with regard to the other killings."

"Still, it's the most logical theory," Mayhew asserted. "The kid could have climbed through those trees and done it all."

"I'm not worrying about any kid," Winton Ryder's quavering voice put in. "I'm thinking of Ole Jule, sitting in that jail now, saying the rest of us are going to die horribly too."

"Shut up!" Blocker showed his teeth, tapped a revolver in his coat pocket. "Whatever it is, it'll have a fight if it tackles me. I'll be right in my room waiting!" But as he strode out his jowls were white.

Cal Mayhew's eyes followed him uneasily. His large hands fingered a big revolver lying in his lay.

"So will I," he muttered, but his voice cracked a little as he gave his wheel chair a spurt toward the door.

Crum and Sheriff Hurley went out.

"Smart of you to wire for that kid's

fingerprints," the sheriff said. "He could have done it. These trees are close to the house all around, the upper windows easily reached. You sent another telegram, too, didn't you?"

Crum nodded noncommitally.

"Haven't heard from it yet."

They had stepped on the porch and the small detective was staring across the shadowy lawn where the shadowy figures of guards moved. It occurred to him that he hadn't seen Aga since coming back to town.

Hurley went off to join the searchers for Simmie Hinds, and Crum strolled out and questioned the guards. But no one had seen Aga. That was queer. A cold sense of alarm began to grow on him. He thought of the little death image in his pocket. Had Aga got one too? Had Aga been lured away?

Feverishly he began making the rounds of the estate. It was at the back of the garden behind the house that the probing beam of his flashlight spotted the first scrap of cardboard. Playing the light about, he found the second scrap a few feet away, then a third. Fitted together, the lettering showed him that they had been torn from one of his own personal cards. Aga had left a trail. But where did it lead?

Silently, Crum considered. Something had happened to Aga, something the full possibilities of which he shrank from considering. In following the trail alone, he was courting peril, the peril at which perhaps the grisly little *ouanga* with the ripped belly hinted. But to go back for help was to sacrifice an advantage. Alone, his small, light body was capable of almost invisible and inaudible movement. Taking out the small, specially built derringer which he carried in a shoulder holster, Crum began following the trail of the torn cards.

THE silence of the garden was creepy, ominous. Softly, stooping, his sharp eyes were able to pick out the white scraps in the darkness. He left the garden, entered a trail that crawled through a tract of brushland. After about a hundred yards the trail ended in a clearing. A dilapidated old shanty stood here, and between it and Crum, the heaped-up roof of a dug-out.

Breathless, silent, he stood listening. In the wild, vast silence he seemed an ineffectual midge, and to his supersensitive nerves there came the weird suggestion of creeping shapes moving and watching. But actually he could see nothing, hear nothing. Cautiously he moved forward, crouched to one side of the dugout. Still there was no sound, yet somehow the air that came up from that pit struck his senses with the faint but nerve-shattering reek of death. Thrusting his flash out and away from his body, he sprayed the beam down into the darkness.

His skin tightened, his scalp crawled. Against the back wall of the dank and web-infested cellar leaned the limp body of Aga. Blindfolded, gagged, his powerful arms were outspread and fastened to stakes driven into the earthen floor.

And on either side of him, completing the grisly tableau, lay two other bodies—the first, that of a boy, bound and lying on his side; the second, that of the huge Negro, Lub. Face up he lay, eyes goggling from his skull, mouth twisted in a hideous leer of pain made doubly grotesque by the bent and obviously broken neck.

No movement, no sound to break the stifling hush of that charnel pit.

"Aga!" It broke from Crum's lips, a cracked syllable of horror and despair. Then his heart leaped into a spasm of relief. The big figure moved.

Casting caution to the winds, Crum went down the steps in quick leaps. But no sooner had his feet struck the ground than he regretted his lack of caution. A blaze of light enveloped him, and from the door above and behind a voice grated:

"Drop that gun and get 'em up!"

Crum obeyed, raised his hands, turning. Beyond the light grim faces leered down; the barrels of two rifles poked through the glare. They parted as a shape pushed through, came slowly down the steps—Mary Pollard. Her face was flushed under the dark hair, her eyes blazed. She carried a shotgun. Even under the circumstances, Crum

could not repress a gasp of admiration as she faced him coldly.

"Well, you walked right into our trap, didn't you?" she asked.

"I don't understand," Crum said. "What about that boy?"

"Simmie's not dead," she said, "luckily for you. He's sleeping off the dope you must have given him to keep him quiet."

"I?"

"Of course. Wasn't your man here with him?" She stepped over, ripped the bandage from Aga's eyes and the tape from his mouth.

"But why do you think that I—" Crum began.

"We ain't so dumb." It was Jess Pollard, coming down the steps now. Some Syndicate member is killing the others off. He's hired you to lay the blame on Simmie. You doped Simmie and kept him here. You made the print of his hand on that magazine and left it in that room—"

"Somebody did," Crum agreed. He was glancing down at the brownish-stained palm of one of the boy's hands, then at Aga. "How'd you get here?"

"I followed Lub," the big Asiatic answered. "Saw him sneak away from the house and come here, looking to see if the kid was still here, I guess. But when I covered him with my gun, he jumped it, grappled with me. In the scuffle I broke his neck. Then these others found me here. They wouldn't believe me—"

"Hell, no—and we don't believe you now," a man growled. Others came pushing down into the cellar. "The hell with this time wasting!"

Two of the men carried coils of rope.

"What," Crum asked, "do you plan to do?"

"We plan," one of the farmers answered, "to string you and your man up until you're ready to tell who hired you to frame Simmie."

Pushing past Crum, they seized Aga, ripped his arms free, yanked him upright. Jess Pollard grabbed Crum. The little detective stared at Aga. The latter stood in a slouch, but Crum knew that the powerful muscles of his shoulders were ready to bunch and he read the question in his fearless eyes: "What about it, Chief? You say when."

THERE'D be hell in that cryptlike space, Crum knew, if he gave the word. He had seen it happen before. They didn't know the giant's strength. As for himself, he was like a cat in the dark. With the lights out, they might make it.

But here was the woman, there was the helpless boy on the floor. They had thrown a loop of rope over Aga's neck now; a man advanced on Crum with the second coil.

"Wait," the little detective said suddenly. "Even if you think I'm guilty, you admit there must be someone behind me."

"And I can give you a hint about that," Aga put in. "Blocker held a long conversation with Lub just before the Negro came out here."

"Nuts!" one of the men said. "It's a stall!"

"Still, if it's true," Crum insisted, "you wouldn't want him to go free." He turned to Mary Pollard. "How many men have you got here?"

"Plenty!" she answered.

"Enough to surround the Mayhew house?"

"More than enough."

"Good," Crum said. "Then I'm ready to earn a reprieve. Give me an hour and I'll point out the real criminal to you."

"It's a trick!" voices rasped. "Drag him out!"

But Mary Pollard, who had been studying Crum's face, held up her hand.

"If it's a trick it won't get them far. We'll keep the big fellow with a rope around his neck and over a tree limb, ready to drag him up if the little man betrays us. We'll give him an hour, no more. If he don't keep his promise, we'll storm the house and burn it."

"We can't trust 'em—" a man began growling.

Mary stared at him.

"If you're afraid, Hen Townsend, go home!" she said. "Come on, men, we'll take a chance."

A group of picked men marched ahead with Aga and Crum. Others car-

ried the boy on a stretcher. Approximately a hundred more, armed to the teeth, moved on the house in grim silence.

The first guards started to fire, then saw the size of the mob and retreated into the house. The ragged arm then spread out and formed a circle around the entire building. Crum, with a guard on each side, and Mary Pollard following, was escorted to the front of the house where he called for Sheriff Hurley.

Hurley and two deputies came out.

"What do you want?"

A roar went up, drowning Crum's voice.

"We want the man behind the killings! We want Blocker!"

Hurley gasped.

"Blocker? Blocker! Don't you know Blocker's dead? We just found him—with a nail driven into his skull!"

CHAPTER V

The Little Killer

THE clamor died. There was a moment of incredulous silence. Then like an angry tide, came the cry:

"They lied! String 'em up!"

Crum turned to Mary Pollard.

"You've got to stand by me now if you want to get the man who intended to kill Simmie."

For a moment the woman's frank eyes weighed him. Then she nodded.

"I'll give you your chance."

The way the mob quieted to her ringing voice sent a thrill of admiration through Crum again. An armed truce was declared. Into the house went Crum and Mary Pollard. Two unarmed deputies were taken as hostages by the mob.

Crum gave the sheriff an outline of what had happened as they went up to Blocker's room. It was empty save for the corpse and a deputy. The ghastly shape of Blocker sat near the window, his heavy body slumped sideward in an easy chair, his face wearing a hideous frozen leer. There was a revolver in one hand. The ugly little *ouanga* was clutched in the other dead hand. It had a nail driven into its skull and so did Blocker.

WITH the door closed behind them, Hurley, ashen-faced and sweating, seemed to wilt sickly.

"There's deviltry in this!" he grated. "It ain't human. Blocker must have been slugged from behind and the nail driven in while he was unconscious. But he had a gun. How in hell could any human—"

Crum's eyes narrowed.

"He was facing the door," he said. "Get the significance of that?"

Hurley blinked.

"Yeah, I guess so. Blocker believed that the attack would come from the hall. He believed the tree climbing business was a blind. . . . And, say, if that's true, Mayhew in his chair—"

Crum shook his head.

"No, Hurley, the attack did come through the trees, through the window. That's why Blocker was taken by surprise. See, the trees are close here and the screen is unlatched."

"Then it's narrowed down to Winton Ryder," Hurley asserted.

"Why so?"

"Well," Hurley said, "Ole Jule and the kid are out of it. That leaves Cal Mayhew and Ryder, both with motives and opportunity. But while Cal might have killed those in the house, he couldn't have killed Ella Ryder. He couldn't have done any climbing, that's certain." He paused and a weary grin spread over his face. "You see, I've done a little detecting too. I remembered what you said about Cal's legs. I wondered if there was a remote possibility that he might have got those legs cured while he was away this summer. So I slipped up close to him and, without his noticing, jabbed one of his legs with a needle—jabbed it in almost an inch."

"Well?"

"He didn't bat an eye," the sheriff said. "Are you satisfied about Cal's legs now?"

"I suppose so," Crum answered." I did send a wire to a friend of mine on the Johns Hopkins staff about that very matter. But that stunt of yours seems fairly conclusive."

"Then," Hurley said impatiently, "let's go ahead and arrest Ryder. He and Cal are in the study and I believe we can make the little weasel confess." He turned and led the way to the door. "Mrs. Pollard, you'd better stay here."

"I'll do nothing of the kind," said Mary Pollard. "I'm going with you."

They knocked on the door of Mayhew's room.

"Come in," the banker called.

They stepped into the room. Mayhew sat in his wheel chair near the front window which opened on the trees. He had a revolver in his lap but his hands were folded. Hurley closed the door, bolted it, turned.

"Where's Winton Ryder? I thought—"

"Get 'em up, get 'em up!" a quavering voice commanded harshly, and they turned as one man to see Ryder in the bedroom doorway, an automatic in one shaking hand. His face was a twisted mask of fear, the knuckle of his trigger finger was white. Crum and the others raised their arms.

"What's the meaning of this?" Hurley grated.

Cal Mayhew grinned.

"Why," he said, "Winton was eavesdropping as usual and heard you say you were going to arrest him. He doesn't want to be framed, and—" he picked up his revolver—"I don't blame him."

"And now"—Ryder was getting his voice steady—"that woman's going to go to the window and disperse that mob or she's going to be shot!"

Hurley, who had been edging nearer to Ryder, stopped. Mary Pollard was staring at the latter with narrowed eyes. Cal Mayhew was grinning.

"Better do as Winton says—"

The woman didn't move. Suddenly Crum felt the cold chill of an intuitive warning. One of his hands, held shoulder high, drooped, began to fumble nervously with the tiny silver-plated pistol on his watch chain.

"Do as he says, Mrs. Pollard," he urged.

BUT he was too late. With a quick ducking movement of her lithe body, Mary Pollard charged at the quaking weakling. Crum heard the crash of Ryder's gun, saw Hurley leap toward the woman protectively, and that was all. His eyes had never entirely left Cal Mayhew, whose big revolver now jerked up, aimed at either Hurley or the woman.

But just as his trigger finger tightened to fire, something happened to Cal Mayhew. He probably never knew exactly what it was. The last thing he saw from the corner of his eye was the queer little detective fantastically aiming a watch-charm pistol at him. He might have felt something like a wasp's sting, but at any rate his pistol suddenly dropped and he fell back in his chair.

Crum spun about—and his heart sank. Ryder, though his first shot had missed, was still master of the situation. He had knocked the woman to the floor and still held Hurley at bay. Now he was looking at Crum.

The latter faced him, the watch charm pistol still in his hand.

"All right, Ryder, you saw what happened to Mayhew."

Ryder gave an ugly laugh.

"Sure, and I *know* what happened, too. That little toy you've got there is a real gun. It fires a tiny shell loaded with the jungle arrow-poison *curare*. I read the papers, you see, even if Cal didn't. I read about that case of yours down in Texas. And I read something else too. That gun fires only one shot!"

Crum sighed; the little gun dropped from between his fingers. A knock sounded at the bolted door, a voice called:

"What's wrong in there, Sheriff?"

At a warning glance from Ryder, Hurley answered, "Nothing. A gun went off accidently."

"Well, here's a telegram for Colonel Fabian Crum."

"Shove it under the door," Ryder ordered.

The yellow envelope appeared. Crum looked at it.

"That," he said to Ryder, "might contain something which would clear you."

"Pick it up," Ryder said. "But no tricks.

Crum picked the message up and

opened it. He read it and handed it to Hurley. He gave a sigh.

"That's a load off my mind. Of course, I had to shoot Mayhew to keep him from shooting you or Mrs. Pollard. However, if Ryder really had been the killer—"

Hurley was gaping.

"But isn't he? I don't see that this telegram makes any difference. It just says that there are no records of a person answering to Cal Mayhew's description having been at the Johns Hopkins clinic this summer."

"Isn't that enough?" Crum asked. "You see, I wondered from the start, why a man like Cal Mayhew, a stubborn man as the doctor told me, a man who had been disregarding the best medical advice for years, should suddenly this summer have given up hope just because one more doctor told him the same thing. I guessed the reason, but I wasn't sure. Your experiment with the needle added to my confidence, but still I wasn't absolutely sure. Now, however—well, if Cal Mayhew wasn't at Johns Hopkins, why should he have lied and said he was there? Why, unless he was hiding something—his real whereabouts, what he was actually doing?"

"I still don't get it," Hurley said. "You said the killer traveled through the trees, and said he was a little man."

Crum nodded.

"The littlest man in the room," he said, and smiled. He stepped over to Mayhew's chair. "Mrs. Pollard, come here, please. I want you and Hurley to help me lift him out."

Bewilderedly Mary Pollard and Hurley obeyed. One on each side, they gave a tug at the big-shouldered body of Cal Mayhew. And then a strange thing happened. The upper part of the body came free, and Mary Pollard, who had charged a loaded gun, staggered back with a stifled scream. Hurley, too, lost his balance, and out of the chair rolled the massive torso, leaving the blanket-covered legs in the chair.

SOMETHING else rolled out too—a bloodstained razor and the head of a hammer which had been concealed between the short stumps of the upper body and the false legs below.

"Amputated!" Hurley gasped. "He went somewhere and had it done this summer! And these—" he was examining the false legs—"are useless things of cork covered with rubber. Yes, I get it now. Cal planned it all last spring when the plans for the Syndicate were first laid. Perfected his scheme to murder the others and get complete control of the money and the property. No wonder he was willing to sacrifice those legs of his which were just dead weight." He shivered. "God, but he made himself into a terrifying monster!"

Crum nodded. "And with Lub to look after him, no one else had to know, of course. With those powerful arms of his it was no trick for him to learn to swing through the trees like an ape, carrying that light half-body. I suppose he spent his night practicing tree climbing before the others arrived. It was just a lucky break, of course, which gave him Simmie as a goat for his crimes."

He turned to the blinking figure of Winton Ryder.

"Well, Ryder, you seem to be the only one who profits financially by this mess. What do you plan to do now?"

"Why, why," Ryder stammered, "first I'm going to pay you."

"Good," Crum said. "But I mean about the Syndicate?"

Ryder glanced at the window through which the murmur of the mob was audible. "I think," he said, "I'll send them back to their places. To blazes with the Syndicate. And Colonel, instead of the thousand we promised you, I'm going to pay you two thousand."

"Thanks," Crum said. "Now about how much is the mortgage on the Pollard place?"

"I'm not sure," Ryder said, "but about that much, I think."

"Then," Crum told him, "I'll take that mortgage instead of the cash."

Mary Pollard stepped toward him.

"I won't let you do that! I'm already ashamed of the way I've acted!"

"Your acting," Crum cut her short, "requires no apologies. It's magnificent. As for the other, Mrs. Pollard,

you've got no say about that. If I want to buy your mortgage, I can do as I please with it. However, you needn't let it worry you. I don't need the money. When I retired from my career as a chemist I had more than I'll ever need. My crime detecting pays for itself—as entertainment."

"You're a strange man," the woman told him.

Crum laughed. "I'm always wondering why people say that. When I quit being a chemist I did it because I was inventing chemical things that kill people. Why is it strange that I decided I'd get more fun out of helping people instead?"

Crum turned to the sheriff.

"Well, Hurley, I'll leave the mess for you to clean up. My friend Aga will be getting impatient to have that noose off his neck. In fact, I think he'll be so glad he won't even kick about changing that tire and shoving off tonight."

COLONEL FABIAN CRUM TACKLES THE BIZARRE AND BAFFLING CASE OF THE MURDERED MOUNTAIN CLIMBERS IN

THE CYCLOPS' EYE

Another Complete Mystery Novelet

By JOHN H. KNOX

NEXT ISSUE

ICE BOUND

By MICHAEL O'BRIEN

Author of "Hater of Beauty," "Dread Ecstasy," etc.

When Science Goes Berserk, Black Magic at Its Worst Cannot Match Its Soul-Killing Viciousness!

ROD SAUNDERS stopped the coupé at the ivy-covered gateway of the old mansion.

"Last stop, all out," he said.

As the girl beside him sat waiting, he put one arm around her and kissed her firmly on the lips.

"Bravo," the girl in the back-seat applauded. "You'd think you two were going to be separated for a year instead of just a few hours."

Rod Saunders grinned. "I'm just preparing Letty for a future of sudden separations as the wife of a newspaperman. So long, kids. Don't let your uncle try any experiments on you. I'll be back around midnight. If I wasn't in such a hurry, I'd carry your bags up to the house. Sure is a gloomy looking shebang. So long."

He waved and drove off. The two sisters—Letty and Bess Clinton—walked up the gravel path, swinging their light week-end bags in high spirits. But as they drew near the portal of the old house, their steps slowed.

Perhaps it was the house that made their high spirits drop. Some houses seem to have a kind of life that either attracts or repels. This house repelled, because it was old, because it was but dimly lighted, because it was covered with ivy that was not green and alive, but dead and sere.

But chiefly it was because the house belonged to a man whom they had seen but seldom. His manner had always been so aloof and vaguely frightening that the two girls now waited with some anxiety for an answer to their ring. It did not matter that he was their uncle, their dead mother's brother. Even when they had been children, he had always seemed old to them, strange, not like other men. Naturally it had been beyond them to understand that long, lonely hours of scientific work might change a man and stifle his human feeling toward even his blood-kin.

As the door opened slowly, the two girls gave a simultaneous gasp.

Standing in the dimly lighted doorway, head slightly inclined in voiceless, somber welcome, stood a figure that might have stepped out of the Middle Ages. The figure was clad in a Monk's robe and cowl. Still more startling was the blood-red color of his garb. And most startling of all was the appendage on the stump of his left arm. In place of a wrist and hand was a hook that reminded the two girls of the pirate chieftain in Peter Pan!

THEY knew him now, of course. They had heard about this cousin of theirs, the only child of an aunt long dead. They had even heard that for the past year he had been assisting the scientist in his work. Before that he had been a wanderer, a seaman who had lost his hand by amputation.

"Cousin Frank," Letty murmured.

The grim lips split in what was meant for a smile.

"Come in, cousins," he said in a low voice. "From our uncle's description, you must be Letty, and you are Bess. You look much alike, but our uncle is scientifically precise in all things, so I have no doubt about my correctness."

He took their bags, apparently using his hook with as much ease as he used his hand.

"I'll take you to your rooms. Follow me. Of course, one room would have done just as well, but this is a big house, and Uncle Amos thinks it's time it had some use. When you've freshened up from your trip, you can join me in the library downstairs."

"Where's Uncle Amos?" Letty inquired.

"He was called away, but he will be back soon."

The two girls descended half an hour later. Entering the library they saw their strange cousin. Now dressed normally, he motioned them to chairs.

"It's been a long time," he said softly. "You've both grown extremely beautiful. I suppose you remember the time when we were last together."

Their eyes went simultaneously to the hook. Frank Moffet's mouth smiled crookedly, but his eyes did not smile at all.

"Yes," he said, "at a performance of Peter Pan, the only time your Uncle Amos ever took us children anywhere. Do you remember what we said we wanted to be when we got home from the theater?"

"I wanted to be Peter Pan," said Letty.

"And I wanted to be Wendy," said Bess.

The cousin waved his hooked hand.

"I wanted to be Captain Hook. I got half my wish. I have a hook . . . but I never became a captain."

The spasm of bitterness that contorted his face was quickly gone. But Letty had seen it, and could not repress a shiver. Yet she determined to be pleasant to this newly discovered cousin. After all, he had something to be bitter about.

"Did Uncle Amos tell you why he sent for us?" she asked.

"Don't you know? It's a matter of a trust fund that Uncle Aaron left to all of us."

"Oh, yes," Letty said quickly.

"Amos has had the use of the interest, but now the fund is to revert to us, according to the date specified in the papers."

"How—how much is in it?" Bess asked timidly.

"In round numbers, about a hundred thousand dollars."

Both girls opened their mouths and eyes in awe.

"A sizable sum," their cousin said. "Uncle Amos will miss it. Would you like a highball?"

"Yes, please," they said with alacrity, wondering if this was to be a prelude to dinner. They were hungry.

HE went into the kitchen, returned with tall glasses that were temptingly iced. He distributed the glasses, raised his own.

"To our mutual trust—fund," he said, laughing hollowly. "I saw your amazement when I opened the door. You were shocked by my red robe and all. It's one of your Uncle Amos' queer quirks. He says that while his science is in certain respects twentieth century research, in others it smacks of the medieval. Hence the regalia. Incidentally, don't let him inveigle you into being subjects for his experiments.

"His heart may nourish a spark of affection for his sisters' children. But when the scientific urge is on him, he couldn't tell the difference between you and a couple of rabbits. What's the matter? Are you sleepy? I think I hear Uncle Amos' step. Better be bright and chipper for him . . ."

Time passed — and Bess Clinton awoke to a sensation of warmth, caress, and horror! The warmth was like that of a south wind after she had taken a dip in the surf. The caress was as of a mild electric current flowing through her, probing the recesses of her being, lulling and soothing. But the horror was her powerlessness to move, her awareness of terror without the capacity to act against it!

She was standing erect. Her clothes were gone. In their place was a skin-tight vestment the color of her flesh. She seemed to look through a window that yet was not a window. Her eyes, out of their corners, beheld on each side a similar window. And through the front window she saw a man in red.

The cowl was pulled down over his face. Was this a dream? She tried to

open her mouth to scream out but her lips did not part and no sound came. Though her vocal chords were paralyzed and her body could not move, her brain could think. That was her hell—the power to think while her body was helpless . . .

Her uncle! That was her first thought. He was subjecting her to one of his experiments. He had come in after the highball and had wasted no time.

The warmth continued. Her body knew no discomfort, no fatigue. All her torment came from her mind, which was telling her gradually where she was.

She was encased in something—thick windows—on all sides of her. They held her up, warmed and caressed her. But that could not be! They were not windows.

She remembered having read about her uncle's most recent experiments—something to do with freezing—the curative power of low temperatures. These were not windows through which she was looking.

She was encased in a block of ice!

Whence came the warmth, the caress? But it was no longer so warm! The breeze had turned cool. The figure in red was moving, his hands busy but out of her sight. The breeze continued to blow and grow cool. Now it was no longer a breeze. It was a wind as fierce as the gale one meets in winter, turning a corner.

No, not a corner, not in a city street. Bess Clinton's terrified thoughts changed to scarifying images—an iceberg on a cold green sea, a frozen river, the aurora borealis, the polar caps. Now it was as though her whole being were wrapped in frost.

For an instant the images faded. For a single heart-beat she knew the full terror of the truth.

She was freezing to death!

Then the images began to come back. But they were of palms and desert wells. They were warm. She felt so sleepy and languorous. . . .

Then she knew nothing, felt nothing. She was a girl frozen into a block of ice.

She was dead!

LETTY CLINTON was awaking from a sleep that was not a sleep. She did not open her eyes, for they were already open. Vaguely she felt they had been open all the time, but had not seen till now. Or had they? She didn't know. The gap in her memory was so painful, she almost groaned.

But she did not succeed. She could not utter even an involuntary groan! She was helpless, paralyzed—but worse still was the unreasoning, blind fear that choked her heart.

She saw a dark-robed shape bending over her, felt herself being lifted.

"What's happening to me?" she thought in wild panic. If only she could have fought, shouted, kicked—But her muscles would not react! She was being carried down a flight of stairs, then another, into a cryptlike place.

Her throat tightened as if for a scream, but no sound escaped. She had seen Bess! Her sister was silent, motionless, standing erect—in a block of ice!

Letty was lowered into a long, triangular vat of gun-metal steel. Above her she saw the hooded, red-robed man. Abruptly she remembered her cousin's warning, and the thought was like a white-hot sword. She was the victim of her uncle's experiment!

She heard the roar of a Niagara. Water splashed down at her. Was she being drowned? She struggled to rise, fought just to move. She could not.

The warm water rose along her thighs, her shoulders, laving and caressing her. A delicious sense of well-being invaded her body. But her mind strove against it, cried out that she was welcoming terror.

Her sister was gone, dead, sacrificed to an old man's lust for knowledge! His horrible science made sport with their young lives!

"Rod, where are you—where are you!" her mind called vainly.

She was warm now, but soon she would be cold. She knew that from the one glimpse she had caught of Bess. She would feel her veins freeze, her muscles lose their power, her nerves grow numb. Then at last her brain would solidify to dead, gray ice—and

Letty Clinton would be a victim of perverted science that was meant to benefit humanity!

The shape in red drew up its cowl, raised its left arm above the edge of the vat. In place of wrist and hand was a hook. The grim lips split mirthlessly.

"To our mutual trust—fund," he whispered, using a wrench to give the huge faucet valve another turn. "Frozen assets. A vicious sense of humor, eh? She is dead, and he is dead, and soon you will be dead, too. Science slipped up, that was all. That *will* be all!"

BUT it wasn't. The iron door behind the man in red was opening stealthily. A hand thrust in, firmly gripping an automatic. Behind the hand was the face of Rod Saunders!

He saw the hook. The sight checked the shout that was on his lips. That hook might go plunging down into the lovely, white body. A shudder coursed through him.

"Stop," he said softly, but audibly.

The red-robed man whirled. His hook flashed out savagely, but the automatic spoke. Only once it spoke, yet a bullet crashed into the brain of the man in red!

Rod whispered to Letty as he stopped the flow of water.

"Don't talk. You're safe."

He knew that he could not tell her all that had happened because he did not know all. He would never know, nor would anyone else. But he had been able to reconstruct most of it since his unexpectedly early return to the mansion.

The old scientist had developed a new method for the gradual but steady lowering of the temperature of a human body.

The body was not encased in ice, but in glass, of which the ice was but the outer covering. Through the glass ran colorless filaments capable of receiving a current of electricity. This kept the body warm within the ice, until such time as the experimenter cared to reduce the temperature. There was also a device for maintaining the oxygen supply. But he had never intended to use his apparatus for murder.

The scientist was dead. Rod had found him in his laboratory, with a suicide note beside him. He had committed suicide, so he said, because he had unintentionally killed his two nieces while testing out his experiment. But Rod, from what he had seen, knew that he had been dead before the girls had come. Clearly, his nephew had killed him.

WILD sobbings burst from Letty at his explanation. But at last she grew quiet enough to be taken to see Bess. Rod had freed Bess from the glass and had carried the body upstairs, laid it on a bed and covered it.

"With valvular heart disease, which we know she had," Rod said softly, "we can assume that her heart gave out before she suffered. Doc Williams didn't tell you this, but he told Bess and me. Bess didn't have long to live. She kept up a bold front. I'm sure, if she knows anything now, she's glad Moffet chose her first, thus saving you.

"Your cousin Frank was a strange creature, at war against life, as the diary he left shows. You were beautiful, but he was maimed. Then there was the hundred thousand, don't forget, and his twisted mind. We must try to forget him."

"Yes," she murmured. "We must remember Bess and forget his distorted mind. . . ."

Her voice trailed off. Letty Clinton slept.

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THE EXECUTION OF CHOPPER CHUN

By ARTHUR J. BURKS

Author of "Crime Hunters," "Death Plays Tricks," etc.

He saw the miniatures of the men he had murdered

JAKE CHUN was all innocence when the friends of the last man he had gunned down picked him up and took him to the dark room. The police knew, as well as he did, that Chun could have put seven notches on his chopper if it had been the custom these days. But so far he'd kept his mitts clean. They had never been able to get enough evidence on him to bring him before a jury.

The Seven-Time Murderer Killed by the Tommy-Gun —But a Third Degree of Terror Proved to be a Far More Effective Weapon!

Before they took him to the dark room, they faced him with Roger Dunne, younger brother of the last man he had chopped down. Roger Dunne, his face white as a sheet, went after the jaundiced looking killer with feet, teeth and fists. The others had to pull the kid off. Jake Chun grinned at the kid, looking down at him contemptuously from his six feet of height and his two hundred and ten pounds.

Jake Chun was a throwback to something or other. His hair began just above the bridge of his nose and ran back over a flat head, down into the back of Jake's collar. His face was broad and yellowish. Chopper Chun, as he was known to the men who hired him, was one of the deadliest killers alive. His specialty was work with a tommy gun. He was a master with it.

"You killed my brother, you yellow rat!" young Roger said venomously.

"The law," said Chopper Chun, in a deep bass voice that didn't sound really human, "couldn't bring me to trial for it!"

"No. You've got a mouthpiece who always gets you off!"

"Well, Counsellor Latham is pretty good," said Chopper Chun. "But what's the beef? You fellows going in for snatching now? I don't think it's legal to snatch even a guy like what you think I am! Latham will know."

"Tonight," said Roger Dunne, "Latham doesn't even know where you are! We've taken care of that."

"And what do you intend doin' with me?" said Chopper Chun, as though he didn't care much. "Not that it matters. Four times in a row nobody's been able to hang anything on me. . . ."

"Seven times altogether, Chun," said Lew Riegel, another of Chun's captors. "We know, exactly."

"It's nice to be known," said Chopper Chun, puffing out his barrel of a chest a little. He could afford to swagger. He was in the clear, any way, anyone looked at it.

"You're superstitious, aren't you, Chun?" said Roger Dunne.

"Who? Me?" said Chopper Chun. He looked swiftly about him, batted his knuckles against the wooden wall, before he said, "No! Of course not!"

One of the men took out a pack of butts, took one, gave one to someone else. He offered a third to Chopper Chun. Then he lighted a match, touched his own, his friend's, and extended the match to Chun with a shaking hand. Chun blew out the match.

"Say, just what is this, anyways?" he demanded. " 'Course, I ain't superstitious, but I never take no chances. Man in my racket don't. There *might* be something to that three-on-a-match business, you know. Get on with whatever you've laid out for me."

Then they took him into the dark room. It was just that. A dark room where pictures were devoloped. Probably belonged to the Dunne kid, he figured. He looked about him, grinning. A soundproof joint, plainly. He could yell his head off here, and nobody would hear him. Here is where the beating up would occur. He noticed tall, slender bottles on a shelf above a sink of clear water that looked cold. It didn't make sense.

"Take a look at those seven bottles, Chun," said Roger Dunne, panting, his eyes blazing. "If I tell you, Chopper, that in each of these bottles is the soul of a man you killed, you wouldn't believe me, would you? But you've visited a lot of mediums in your time—oh, we know a lot about you!—and have heard them insist that they've communed with spirits. And spirits, they will tell you, can crawl under a closed door, or come through a keyhole, or simply go through the panels. And spirits are friendly to mediums that are right. . . ."

THE yellow face of Chopper Chun went putty gray.

"*We* have medium friends, too, Chopper," said Lew Riegel. "And you must realize that the spirits of those seven you shot down, without giving them a chance for their lives, must have taken a desire for vengeance across to the other side with them. Our medium friend—and he's one of the best—insists that your seven victims are right here, Chopper Chun; one in each of those bottles!"

Chopper Chun, laughed, but his laughter had a hollow sound. There was no faith in it. He was shaking a little. His eyes bulged as he looked at the bottles. There was *something* in

each one of them. But a drape had been hung in such a manner that the light didn't strike them squarely, and he couldn't be sure, not without taking a closer look. And nothing could have induced him to approach those seven bottles that stood so calmly there on the shelf above the sink.

The men with him suddenly went out, shutting the door. Chopper Chun whirled, hammered at the door with his bare fists, yelled for them to let him out. He knew, even as he yelled, that the door wouldn't budge, that nobody heard him. He whirled back, close against the wall opposite the bottles, arms flung wide, as though he were weirdly crucified.

It didn't help a bit when the light in the ceiling went out. Through a dictaphone arrangement of some sort came the voice of Roger Dunne,

"Keep your eyes on the bottles, Chopper Chun!"

There had been a glow of light in the corner to his left, under the bottles, for a second after the light had gone out. The killer had seen something there that had nothing to do with ghosts of murdered men. He had seen, as in a nightmare, a chopper, a tommy gun. There must be a reason why it was there. It was some sort of a plant, of course. He wouldn't fall for it.

Besides, to get it he would have to get too close to those bottles—and seven ghosts were in those bottles! He decided that a split second after the light went out. Nothing, *nothing*, could induce him to get close enough to the bottles to grab that tommy. After all, what would he do with it after he got it?

Chopper tried not to look toward the bottles. But it was impossible to prevent his eyes from straining toward them through the inky blackness of the dark room. Slowly, eerily, a vague glow started in one of them. He could, after a few seconds, make out the shape of the bottle, and a dim glow, like phosphorescence, within it.

The glow was sort of bluish. It wavered in the bottle, assuming vague form, becoming formless the next instant. It sort of stood on end, like a column of smoke, and did a wriggle in the bottle.

Then it was gone, blacked out. Chopper Chun laughed. This was just a gag, a gag to make him talk maybe. A sort of variation of the third degree the cops would use if they dared, on men like Chopper Chun. Then, the second bottle began to glow. A brighter light, almost white, this time. It rose, not from the bottom of the bottle, but grew out of nothingness, halfway up the bottle toward the neck. It, too, wavered. . . .

"The first was the soul of Franklyn Hostetter, Chun! Our medium told us his soul was blue, because he was a good man—too good to be blasted down by a rat like you!" That was Lew Riegel talking, and there was something ghostly, something weirdly menacing, in his voice, so that Chun wasn't even sure that it had been Riegel who had spoken.

"The second one is the soul of Frank Wieber, Chun! It's a white one, but I don't remember why souls are white. Did you know souls had color, Chun?"

Chopper Chun could not answer, and he wouldn't have been heard if he had. The white light faded slowly out, as though it were too weak to remain visible.

The next bottle's inner glow was golden, like a tiny ray stolen from brilliant sunlight. . . .

"The soul of Mary D'Arcy, Chun!" said Riegel.

CHOPPER CHUN cringed. He should never have gunned down the moll, he knew. Bad for the reputation, even among his own kind, to tommy a skirt. But she had seen his face, and he'd known she would yell copper. So, he had let her have it. Yeah, he supposed maybe the soul of a nice moll *would* be golden. . . .

"The fourth is the soul of John Capper, Chopper Chun!" said Riegel. "Maybe his light is black because he wasn't a good man, but that didn't give you the right to blast him!"

The fifth was light green, for the soul of Nathan Gelb who, with John Capper, had managed the National State Bank of Strathmore, one as president, the other as head cashier. But they shouldn't have tried to stop the getaway, after the knockover by Chopper

Chun and his friends. They'd left him behind to cover their breakaway, because he could handle the typewriter so nice.

The sixth dull, vague light, was brown, a shade murky, for Joseph Ricker. . . .

The seventh was violet, for Roscoe Keane. . . .

But by this time Chopper Chun could not remember why he had shot down those two. They must have got in his way somehow, and he'd had to drop them, to save his skin, or the skins of the men who had hired his educated stutter gun, his sense of timing, balance, his artistry with a trigger. They'd had it coming, of course, or they wouldn't have got it.

"You're chain-lightning with a chopper, Chun!" said Roger Dunne. *"The answer to everything is in the left-hand corner when you've figured out what it is!"*

What the devil did they mean? Was he supposed to turn the snout of that chopper on his own mug and press the trigger? He'd be blasted if he would! Not when he had seen, seven times in a row, what could be done to the human face with a tommy. No, if these avengers thought he would lose his nerve, fall for that gag, they were plumb crazy!

The seventh light went out, and for fully ten minutes, while his heart sounded like a triphammer in his breast, he pounded the door until his knuckles were bleeding. When he finally stopped there was no sound at all save a weird, unholy, ghostly silence. Chopper Chun, fascinated by such terror as he had never known before, stared through the dark at the shelf where the seven bottles were that were now unilluminated.

The first bottle became light again, with a murky, unreal sort of light. A white light this time, with flecks in it, like broken-off gold-leaf. This floating stuff seemed to coalesce into something, to take form. It took form on the bottom of whatever the liquid was in the bottle, if it really were liquid. It took the form—

Of Franklyn Hostetter! The form, complete in every detail, could not be mistaken. It wasn't over an inch and a half in length, inside the bottle. But it was a human figure, floating in strange water there, or in the corked air inside the glass. A tiny figure that rose along the glass, inside the bottle, almost to the neck of the bottle, then dropped back down toward the bottom of the container as the light which showed it went out. But the form was that of Franklyn Hostetter, and nobody else.

A CRY of agony, of terror, burst from the lips of Chopper Chun.

"Too bad," said a voice which could have been either that of Dunne or Riegel, "that you can't kill the dead—with that chopper!"

Darkness again. Silence, save for the hoarse, rasping breath of Chopper Chun. He had just seen, in ghastly miniature, the figure of Franklyn Hostetter. And that made him remember when Hostetter had been shot down . . . without a chance . . . as he was running away from a jewelry store. But he had been yelling for the police, and Chopper Chun had done his duty. He'd practically cut the man in two, across the middle of the back. In falling, Hostetter had whirled clear around, to face his slayer. Chopper Chun had seen his face plainly, seen the blood gush from his mouth, noticed his upraised, clenched right hand, heard him say,

"You bloody murderer! Curse you, I'll get even!"

Was he getting even now?

Then Frank Wieber's bottle glowed again. He remembered everything about the man, even his clothes. Chopper hadn't been able to help gunning him either. He and his pals had taken Wieber, furrier, over for a big load of white foxes and chinchillas. Wieber had gone daffy, and started after the robbers, with a gun in each fist. Chopper, fat legs wide apart, had held the Chopper on Wieber, blasting away. He'd seen holes speckle Wieber's face like pockmarks. And Wieber, his face a ghastly mess that writhed and twisted as Wieber kept firing—never realizing that the bullets were going into the floor at his feet—marched right into the hail of tommy lead.

Mary D'Arcy, in the third bottle, the golden-souled girl. A depositor in a bank, caught when the boys moved in.

She had looked too much at what she could see of the faces of the knockover artists, and Chopper Chun hadn't even been masked by a handkerchief. Naturally . . . well, what could Chopper do, if he were to keep on living, free, out of prison?

She looked lovely, small and golden as she was, in that bottle. Hatred for Chun was in her eyes, too. He couldn't miss it, as his glims strained to take in every detail of her face, her figure, her dress.

The lights in the bottle were something by way of company to the killer as he stood alone in the blackness, and when "Mary D'Arcy" went out, he started screaming again. He had seen three ghosts—and there were four left to see. They would be fearful to look at, because they had been terrible to look at the last time he had seen them.

Slowly, one by one, and lingeringly, the other four showed themselves in vari-colored lights. Seven miniatures, all told, seven ghosts of the murdered, one of them a woman. Unmistakable, each one of them. And presently Chopper Chun stood face to face in the darkness, with the seven he had murdered—for whom he had not paid his debt to society.

But the silence was getting him. The darkness was like velvet on his face. His heart began to hammer audibly once again.

"How do you feel, seeing them again, Chopper Chun?" taunted Riegel. "Not so simple, is it, to do away with ghosts? What good is a chopper now? Figure it out, and maybe—"

THE voice broke off short, as though the speaker had given far more of a hint than he had intended. Chopper Chun's knees almost gave way, letting him down. The back of his coat, soaked with sweat, made a strange sound as it rubbed down along the wall.

Hearing it, realizing that his courage had drained out of him like air out of a toy balloon that has been pricked, Chopper Chun straightened. Red dots, punctuating his terror, danced in the utter darkness before the eyes of Chopper Chun. He blubbered like an idiot. Drool dampened his chin.

"I can't stand it," he muttered.

Maybe those weird red dots he saw, dancing before his eyes, were the spirits coming out of the bottles, right through the glass, preparing to coalesce in the open, and attack him somehow. He couldn't imagine how, but there in the dark even the limited imagination of Chopper Chun drove him frantic with terror. He would, he thought, have walked gladly into the gas chamber, and taken his medicine. It would have been easier, more peaceful, than this.

"The chopper, Chun!" said the voice of Dunne. "It's the answer, if you only knew it!"

"If you think I'll swallow the muzzle of a chopper," screamed Chun, "you're crazy! Did you ever see what a chopper does to a man? I won't do it!"

His lips twisted into a sly grin as the thought came to him. He'd bet they hadn't thought of *this* use of the chopper! Expected him to swallow the muzzle, eh?

But he'd fool them!

His fat hands closed lovingly over the chopper. One hand balanced it, the other slid to the butt, finger curling with delight of long association, around the trigger. Chopper Chun backed to the wall opposite the bottles. Then, listening, straining his ears, he made sure of the height of them above the sink, by the tiny sound of the seven little figurines dancing in their glassy prison.

Raising his weapon, judging time and distance expertly, Chopper Chun started the tommy to chattering. He roared with delight when he heard the bottles crash asunder. Over the sound of their crashing he heard sounds of hammers striking an anvil, proof that there was a piece of thick metal behind the bottles, covering the wall above the sink. But the meaning of it did not register with him. His bullets should have knocked out the wall, but they didn't!

Back and forth he played the tommy, blasting down those seven bottles. None must be left. Nothing on the shelf was spared. Glass pieces, very small, glistened in the lancing pencils of flame.

The tommy fell silent. No more ghosts. No more bottles. But the silence was deadly. It intensified the

beating of his own heart. The smell of powder burned his nostrils. He had always liked the acrid bite of it. Now, though, it seemed weirdly different.

Chopper's knees were threatening to buckle again. They were letting him down in spite of himself. A roaring was beginning in his ears, inside his head. His breathing was labored. His head was nigh to bursting. *Tiny fingers were at his throat, cutting off his breathing!*

The shutter-gun fell from his relaxing fingers. He heard it strike the floor as though it had fallen a far distance. He found himself practically sitting on the floor. His fingerprints touched first, informing him of this phenomenon. But he couldn't make his legs hoist him back up. He tried, straining . . . but he needed to breathe more deeply before he could manage it, and he couldn't. Those hands at his throat!

They must be all the hands of the seven he had shot down in cold blood. He could feel their clammy fingers tightening about his neck.

CHOPPER scarcely realized it when the light went on. It was blurry. It spun, as though it were pinwheel of flame. He could make out nothing in the room, hard as he tried. Then, again as from a far distance, came the voice.

"Wise Chopper Chun! It didn't matter which bottle you broke—and you broke them all, directly above the sink of water! Did anyone ever tell you how the gas is made that kills a condemned man?"

Horrified realization momentarily sobered Chopper's bewildered mind. He looked at the sink. Fumes were rising from it, white, ghostly fumes! The sink had been left filled with water for a purpose. There had been stuff in each of the bottles that, when mixed with water, gave off deadly gas fumes. These, not the fingers of the dead, were strangling him. He tried to cry out.

"If," the inexorable voice went on, "you care to give us names, maybe we can get you out in time! Wouldn't you rather have a few extra weeks or months of life than die right now? If so, turn your face right, toward the door!" Silence settled down.

It took all his strength, but he turned his face. The door came open. Men with hands over their mouths came in swiftly. Chopper Chun, coughing, crying, cursing, even praying, began to talk, furnishing names, dates, places, addresses of hideouts. His recital was a confession that might never send him to death, but that his hearers would remember until *they* died.

When he had finished the coppers, who had listened from beyond the door, came in. "I wish you'd let him stay in there and die!" one, a sergeant, said.

"I'd rather the law did it," said Roger Dunne quietly. "Besides, he wouldn't have! The gas we dished out to him was perfectly harmless. Oh, it made breathing difficult, might even have knocked him out, but it wouldn't have killed him, unless it had scared him to death. The kind he'll get now, when the men he's just ratted on talk in their turn, will do a better job! That's what we were after, anyway."

"Those . . . those . . . gimiks in the bottles?" croaked Chopper Chun. "What was they? What made them dance? And the lights?"

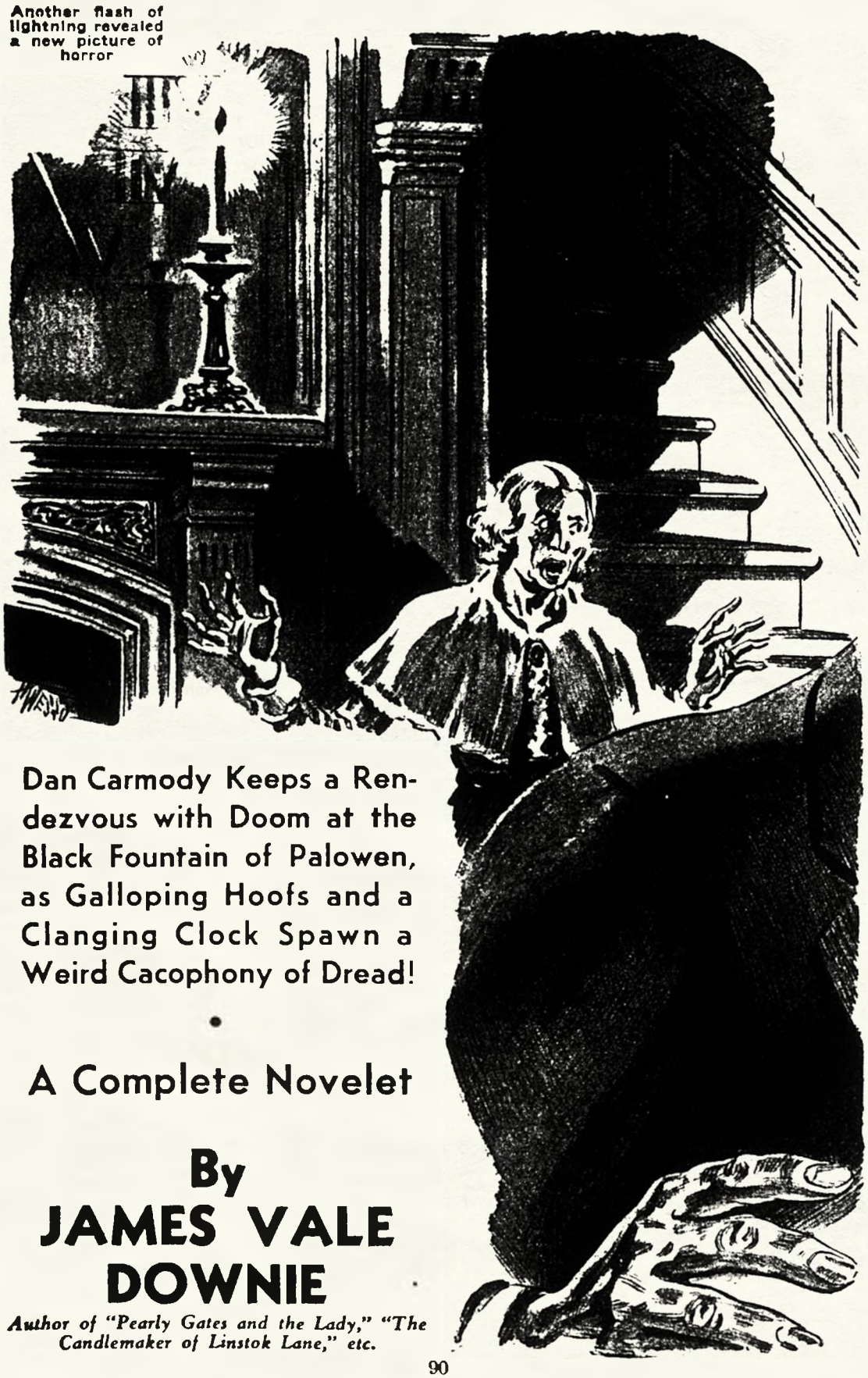
"Lights are easy to rig, Chun," said Lew Riegel. "If you've ever seen a stage play you know that. As for the little figurines . . . well, the pictures of all your victims have been published. We copied them in miniature, using material that responds to photo-electric light. The figurines responded to the lights—which we controlled from outside, naturally—exactly as the doors of Pennsylvania Station respond to the approach of pedestrians. They open, apparently by ghostly hands.

"The approaching human body breaks an invisible beam of light, setting off certain mechanism. But you wouldn't understand, Chun. It's just that we splashed lights on the figures, from below and behind, and they danced as we wished them to. The colors of the lights did not matter—so we made them plenty ghostly."

Lew Riegel paused for a moment.

"Yes, Chopper Chun," he said softly, "those lights meant lights out for you. And the next light you'll see will be the little green one in Sing Sing's death-house!"

THE HOUSE OF



Dan Carmody Keeps a Rendezvous with Doom at the Black Fountain of Palowen, as Galloping Hoofs and a Clanging Clock Spawn a Weird Cacophony of Dread!

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A Complete Novelet

By JAMES VALE DOWNIE

Author of "Pearly Gates and the Lady," "The Candlemaker of Linstok Lane," etc.

THE RETROKRON

CHAPTER I

Legend of the Past

CARMODY sat in his water-logged Packard, felt for his handkerchief and wiped mingled rain-water and perspiration from his forehead.

His lights out, engine dead, he was in darkness like the inside of a box of stove-polish. The crash of thunder, the lash of rain, had ceased for the moment, leaving the world in dripping darkness that, by contrast with the turmoil of the previous half hour, was silent as the tomb.

He lowered a window and listened tensely. At first he heard nothing but the gurgle of water and the soughing of wind in wet leafage. Then he caught it—the faint and far drum-beat of hoofs on the mountain road.

Kitalot . . . Kitalot . . . Kitalot . . . Kitalot . . .

DAN CARMODY had been certain for an hour that he was being pursued, but had lost the sound during the storm. Now he heard it louder than before. It was whacky—a horseman chasing an automobile powered to do ninety miles an hour. But he'd been obliged to take the hairpin turns and slippery mountain defiles in low gear.

He had been pretty well down the mountain when the latest storm broke. In a valley between two low ranges the road had leveled and, a minute or two later, his engine had begun to misfire. His lights had died in the final deluge and he had crept five hundred yards with one door open, steering by the echo of his exhaust from roadside banks, rocks and trees. Fool's progress, he had given it up only when the motor stopped firing altogether.

Kitalot . . . Kitalot . . . Kitalot . . .

This, he reflected bitterly, was the result of taking advice from a dim-wit filling station attendant at Romney. A twenty-five mile sand-clay cut-off would, the pumper had reckoned, save him a fifty-mile cement detour. Besides, he added, two guys had just cracked the bank at Bentleyville, escaping with fifteen thousand dollars into the mountains, on horseback, *al la* Dick Turpin, and the police, with some lack of logic, were stopping all cars for search and question.

Kitalot . . . Kitalot . . . Kitalot . . .

The hoofbeats were louder, nearer and, suddenly, more menacing. He was forced to give up the idea that there were only two riders. They made as much noise as a squadron of cavalry. Doubt and dread assailed him. He began to hear the hoofbeats from all sides, as though an army of mounted men were sweeping through the hills, under cover of the darkness.

Presently the rain stopped and the blackness above was faintly relieved. It became possible to see something of his surroundings. He was standing in an avenue of large trees at the edge of a village. A cold breeze combed wet masses of pendulous leafage with a melancholy sound between a sigh and a sob—a sound like the ceaseless wash of the surf upon a far and lonely strand. An ancient growth of weeping willows, by the sound.

His flashlight was dead, but he twisted a newspaper into a long roll to make a torch and stepped out into the wet roadway. By this red flare he saw a semicircle of dripping trees, their outflung branches shaggy with moss, their bark furrowed with age.

On the right he saw the mildewed brick of a drive entrance with a fallen iron gate, its rich design still visible in its ruin, and a gateless footwalk beyond. Through a break in the trees he saw three white columns—the facade of a Georgian mansion. One pillar lay prostrate at the right.

On his left, opposite the mansion gate, the torch-glare showed a crescent of stone wall with sloping ends. From the cobble pavement a flight of masonry steps rose from either tip to the center, under which a stone gargoyle poured a thick jet of water into a half bowl of black marble. Water eddied over the brim of the fountain, splashed in a stone gutter clogged with moss and willow leafage. Beyond, he made out vaguely, on higher ground, a small park, a white church, the stores and dwellings of a slumbering village.

His torch was burning short. He turned back to his car to get another newspaper—and saw the girl in the gate!

HE had not heard her. There had been a sound that might have been the *frou-frou* of her flowered silk, hoopskirted gown over voluminous petticoats. But he concluded, a moment later, that it had been the soughing of the night wind in wet willows.

She moved in silence over the glistening cobbles, avoiding the puddles without looking at them. He did not see her feet until a moment later. Her black hair hung in ringlets to her bare shoulders and her arms were bare. She carried, in lieu of an umbrella, a pink parasol with a top the size of a dinner plate.

"Good evening," said Carmody.

The girl smiled shyly, moved across the road toward the fountain without speaking.

Carmody strode after her. The torch singed his hand. He dropped it with a stifled expletive as the girl reached the tip of the fountain wall on the right

and began to ascend one of the stone staircases. She reached the top and stood directly over the black basin.

"Wait—please wait a minute!" Carmody cried hoarsely.

The girl smiled, silently, seemed a little startled. The torch burned low on the stones. He stooped to snatch it up and fan the paper into flame. When he straightened up the girl was gone. She had descended, apparently, into the fountain.

The wet willows shuddered and sighed aloft—cried "hush" to Carmody's intemperate demand. With a harsh and perturbed exclamation, he plunged forward to the brim of the bowl and peered into its cold and mysterious depths.

He saw nothing in the basin, but, above it—above the stone spout—his eyes fell upon a stone tablet with a four-line inscription in half-obliterated, but still legible, Roman characters.

The plaque was of such obvious antiquity as to create the suspicion that it had been brought from the Old World to the New by some settler of colonial days, perhaps to perpetuate a familiar legend that the fateful centuries had left as yet unsatisfied.

Carmody was able to spell out its message hurriedly, while yet his flickering flambeau threw feeble rays among the sobbing trees. When he had deciphered the legend, which read like a stanza from an ancient Scottish ballad, he was no wiser, but decidedly less comfortable than when he had got out of his car. It ran:

WHEN FOWER DARKE RYDERS
COM TO DRYNK
RED WINE FRO BLACK PALOWEN'S BRINK
ONE CAVALIER SALL RYDE AWAY
AND ONE SALL DIE AND ONE SALL STAY.

CHAPTER II

Palowen Hall

CARMODY bent forward tensely, peering at the inscription. His hand dropped on the brim of the marble basin and he drew it back quickly, with a strange revulsion, as though the black vessel had contained something other than water. He shivered and exploded impatiently, the principal source of his annoyance being the apparent blunder of the ancient stonecutter in not making clear the fate of all *four* of the "darke ryders."

What had happened to the fourth cavalier?

And the ghostly, but lovely, belle of the sixties—how was she to be fitted into this doomsday forecast of the ancient oracle?

Ghosts, he told himself, are never as darkly, poignantly beautiful as that girl was. But, on the other hand, living girls do not sink into black marble fountains like moonbeams before the clouds of the night sky. Dan Carmody took refuge from the enigma in a half-hearted and rather petulant skepticism.

"Wet night for a masquerade," he muttered wryly and turned back to his car.

The name of the place seemed to be Palowen. Whatever it was, he was stuck there for the night. The hasty glimpse he had obtained of the village satisfied him there was no garage or filling station in the place, nor any facilities for drying out the car and restoring it to operating condition.

Between dark masses of foliage on the right, he caught again the faint gleam of white pillars. That the house was inhabited, save by the ghost of long departed grandeur, he had no assurance. There was no light visible. Grass waist-high grew in the lawns. If externals counted for anything, nobody had lived there for a generation. Yet from this house the girl had come!

With sudden, grim resolve he stamped out his torch on the cobbles, got back into his car and ran it slowly into the weed-grown drive, using battery and starter in lieu of engine.

Carmody mounted the steps of the portico, found a verdigrised brass knocker, which he raised and lowered three times. He waited in front of a double door ten feet high. There were tall dark windows on either side. He became conscious of a sound from within—a slow and rhythmic beating, like the clank of a man in armor, doing a

sentry turn with measured tread in the corridor of some dungeon of the dark and evil ages of antiquity.

The door opened slowly.

A very small and bent old lady with a wrinkled face, like a wilted and shriveled yellow rose, stood there with a candle. She looked up at Carmody, puzzled and intent.

"I'm sorry to disturb you," he said. "My car stalled in front of your house."

The old woman's lips fluttered almost invisibly, but her eyes betrayed the wildest excitement. No sound that he was able at first to detect came from her mouth. But a moment later he heard something like the buzz of a large mosquito.

Carmody leaned lower—until his ear was within a few inches of her thin, fluttering lips, and the candle, which she carried in her left hand, scorched his nose. She was talking in a thin, piping whisper.

"Welcome, Paul . . . Paul Palowen . . . Welcome home," she said.

With a stiff little curtsey, the old lady turned and led the way into the house.

DAN CARMODY found himself in a reception hall of noble proportions. Its raftered ceiling was lost in shadow. At the back was a massive chimney of sooty masonry, now fireless. Upon its long oak shelf burned two thick candles in brass candlesticks eighteen inches high. A wide staircase ascended, at the left of the chimney, to a landing, then flung across the back of the hall and upward to a gallery which ran around three sides of the room.

The hall was paved with smooth flagstones, wainscoated with oak that had been plentifully stained by the swarthy brush of time. A heavy oak table stood in the center, upon it a green vase with a broken brim, in a drift of petals fallen from the long withered sheaf of cut roses in the parched jar. A few worn rugs, some antique chairs and a dilapidated couch completed the noteworthy furnishings —except for one startling object!

High above the mantel and dimly illuminated by the flickering candles, he saw the dial of a large clock of strange design. This timepiece was of huge dimensions, as wall clocks go. It had, at first glance, the appearance of a gigantic spider. The dial was black—of marble, or malachite, and the Roman figures, of which all but four or five were gone, were of bronze.

Three smaller dials, for days, months and years, he surmised, were set into the large face like goggling eyes and a roundly gaping mouth. For pendulum a rusty, double-edged bar of metal, like a sword blade, transfixing a leftward-facing black skull, swung ponderously below, disappearing oddily at the bottom of its orbit.

From behind the dial, at the top, four chains ran horizontally to metal sheaves, two at the right and two at the left, and downward to the weights which, evidently, motivated the mechanism. The weights were round cannon-balls of about five inches diameter, two to a chain, apparently. But only two sets were visible, the others seeming to disappear into a recess behind the mantel shelf. It was these chains that suggested the crooked, shouldering legs of the spider. The whole device was surrounded by a deep and dingy gilt frame.

The clock was going. It was ticking, or, rather, it was clinking and clanking with a voice that chilled his blood. The noise seemed deafeningly loud. It was like the metronomic slump and jingle of the gyves on the ankles of a row of condemned prisoners, slowly marching through dark, stone corridors of a medieval dungeon. Its rusty pinions ground and wheezed, slowly but unceasingly, with a *gur-r-ink gur-r-rank* that crashed upon him with an almost physical impact.

As he stared upward, with gathering horror, he came to the hideous realization that the dial was reversed. *The clock was running backward!*

It was a retrokron—a diabolical device for turning time backward into the primeval matrix of Night!

In the musty pages of medieval demonology, in obscure records of witchcraft and the black art, Carmody had found vague references to such accursed devices, incredible to modern minds. He tried to smile at this impious gimcrack, but could not. The slow beat

of the machine carried conviction to the core of his being. And now, the crescendo of galloping hoofs joined the sodden clangor of the retrokron to spawn a weird cacophony of dread!

But, while the clock was agonizingly slow, the hoofbeats were feverishly rapid. Carmody's vividly imaginative mind saw himself a prisoner, dragging his irons backward—back into the horrid deeps of time to meet some fearful fate that was rushing upon him with the speed of a black wind from Erebus.

Gur-r-rink . . . gur-r-rank . . .

Kitalot . . . kitalot . . . kitalot . . . kitalot . . .

THE old lady set her candle on the square table.

"Hark . . . do you hear the horses?"

"Yes, I've heard them for the past hour," said Carmody.

"It is Morgan and his mountain riders," whispered the crone.

"Hardly they."

"Yes, it is Morgan. He has been here twice. I have been so afraid for Enid—your sister. It is our opinion, Paul, that Colonel Morgan is a very wicked man."

"I quite agree, but—"

"I'm so glad you're back, Paul," she interrupted. She looked about vaguely, as though she expected somebody else to enter through one of the closed portals. "I have many sorrowful things to tell you, but I expect you are tired now. Would you like to go to bed, Paul?"

"Yes, I should, since you are kind enough to ask," he replied wearily.

He decided it would be best to accept the old lady's hospitality without question. He was dog-tired and sick to death of the distant *kitalot . . . kitalot* of the horses, as well as the *macabre* clink-clank of that villainous clock.

He had not brought his bag from the car, but he could go out for it later. He took off his damp ulster and threw it, with his gray fedora, upon a wooden settle.

"Your room is quite ready," quavered the old lady. "Please to follow."

On the landing she stopped.

"Enid has gone out," she murmured. "Somebody is sick. I am sorry I do not know who it is. She told me . . . but I have forgotten. Enid is a bold, practical girl, Paul, and she has grown so pretty. She is much prettier than I."

"Nonsense," said Carmody politely.

"You are a sweet and kind brother," she twittered. "It is good to have you home from the wars, for sister Enid's sake. You always loved Enid better, Paul—better than Grace. . . ."

CHAPTER III

The Clock of Doom

HE struggled, as he took the old crone's arm to help her up the second flight of stairs, behind the chimney, to evolve a theory that would explain some of the appalling mysteries of Palowen. It was apparent that Grace and Enid were sisters of similar age. Paul Palowen was their brother, probably older by a couple of years, and he had been away from home. But, in Palowen, time seemed to have stopped! Worse, by force of that diabolical retrokron the flow of days, months and years had been reversed.

The two girls had apparently been affected in different ways. Grace's mind had stopped, it would seem, when time turned back, but her body had gone on growing older and more frail with each passing year. Enid had remained young both in body and mind. As for the real Paul Palowen, he, perhaps, was dead—killed in battle. And now a stranger of the later years had been, for some obscure reason, haled fatefully to Palowen Hall upon this night of storm and dreadful portent.

The conviction settled upon him that Doom's clock was about to strike for Palowen and all beneath its roof. The night pulsed with warning that the Four Dark Riders were on their way to the Black Fountain—that things of dreadful import were to be done there in settlement of some old account, some ancient and sorrowful business which the silt and talus of the centuries could not totally submerge!

The crone moved down the gallery toward the front of the house. She opened a door on the left, stood aside for him to enter.

Carmody stepped into the darkness. A dank and musty smell greeted his

nostrils. His feet rang on bare boards. By the dim light of the candle behind him he saw a low-ceilinged bedroom with two front windows in deep embrasures, a mantel and chimney at the far end. There was no furniture of any sort. Two old trunks stood under a window.

"I guess we've got into the wrong room," suggested Carmody, with an involuntary shiver of distaste.

"Good night," sighed the old lady, turning away.

The door slammed shut behind him, as though propelled by a gust of wind from the draughty salon. There was not, he felt, enough strength in the withered arms of the crone so to fling the heavy oak about.

Carmody laughed and tried the door. It was locked. He called loudly, but received no answer.

In the silence he heard, somewhat louder than before, the slow beat of the retrokron, more softly, now, the hoof-beats of galloping horses.

CARMODY found himself in perfect darkness. He felt in the pocket of his coat for matches and found none. His cigar lighter was in a pocket of the ulster which he had left downstairs.

Suddenly he was seized with mingled rage and fear. The rattle and clank of that horrible clock was driving him insane.

He threw his shoulder against the oak door with no result other than bruised muscle. He shuffled across the floor, fell over one of the trunks. The trunk was unlocked. He plunged his hand into a mass of clothing, finding nothing that would serve his purpose.

Carmody stood up and felt his way along the wall to the right. He must, he thought, be against the front wall of the house, and, if so, he should come to a window through which an escape might be effected.

He came to a right-angle turn and found, not a window, but a narrow door, which opened, apparently, into a narrow and dark passage.

Inexplicably the ticking of the clock had increased to a tumbling-barrel clatter that was almost deafening. Carmody was mystified to the last degree. He was, he thought, somewhere in the front of the mansion, or in a passage adjoining a front bedroom. And the clock, as he remembered it, was hung on the front of the chimney at a height of about fifteen feet—that is, at the rear of the house.

Yet the grinding of its rusty mechanism seemed now to come from the wall at his right, or from underfoot. It was impossible to be very sure of the direction. Cobwebs smeared his face and dust choked his nostrils and throat as he blundered forward in the darkness.

Carmody's groping hand encountered a protruding knob, mounted upon an iron wheel. He divined that it had something to do with the clock. There were other wheels with grips on either side of the one he had encountered. Perspiration oozed upon his scalp.

Perhaps he could make the infernal thing strike and so attract the attention of the old lady, deaf as she was. If not, he could, perhaps, twist a gear and jam the vitals of the machine in such a way as to stop that maddening march of doom. Carmody grasped the center wheel and gave it a mighty wrench.

A grinding clatter was followed by a series of thumpings and a crash that shook the house. The idea flashed through his mind that one or more of the rusty chains that supported the counterweights had parted, allowing the iron balls to fall to the floor of the salon!

The retrokron stopped. Silence like the peace of heaven descended on the house. It gave him grim satisfaction. Whatever series of events had been dependent upon the hideous retrogression of that perverted and satanic device would now be thrown off schedule, if not completely nullified.

Carmody stumbled onward, fell over a trestle and a chair, picked himself up and blundered forward again. Presently his hand fell upon a round, smooth surface—a door-knob. He twisted the knob and a narrow door fell open.

He found himself in a larger room, in pitch darkness. Feeling his way along the wall he came to a wider door, not locked. He opened it and burst into the gallery. With unspeakable relief he

found himself free of that dust-choked passage and looked down to see the two candles still burning on the mantel over the fireplace.

He seemed to be directly across the salon from the door by which the crone had admitted him to the unfurnished chamber. How he had reached his present position was, for the moment at least, a mystery.

HE moved cautiously along the gallery toward the rear and found that the footway crossed behind the chimney to the head of the main stair. By this route he reached the door of the empty chamber again and found that the door was, as he had suspected, locked by means of a massive forged bar, which could, he decided, have fallen into place by accident. He could not, however, dismiss from his mind the idea that the old woman had, for some unfathomable reasons of her own, intended to make him prisoner in the bedroom.

The old lady was not in sight. Carmody wiped the dust and cob-webs from his face and hurried down the staircase.

The galloping of the horses was growing thunderous. This was a disappointment. Somehow he had felt that the destruction of the retrokron would end the menacing hoofbeats.

With a new crash of thunder the storm recommenced. Peal on peal reverberated through the valley. Rain like shrapnel lashed the high windows behind their heavy curtains. Then came again the clatter of hoofs in a crescendo that grew until the sound seemed to come from directly in front of the house. It was impossible to distinguish clearly between the rattle of the steel shoes on the cobbles and the rumble of the storm.

Carmody froze with the realization that the long pursuit was coming to a close. The hounds were drawing to a kill. The dark riders were at the fountain.

He leaped to one of the front windows and thrust aside the heavy, dusty drapes. A shower of dust puffed out of the faded fabric.

He could see nothing.

"It is Morgan, Paul . . ."

He whirled to find Miss Palowen at his elbow.

"Probably not Morgan," he assured her. "It may be some farmer coming to town for a doctor," he added without much conviction.

"It is Morgan," insisted the old lady gently. She clasped her hands in an agony of fear.

A jagged flash of lightning, lasting two or three seconds, illumined the highway, the little square and the Black Fountain.

Before the fountain stood two glistening black horses. Both were drinking from the basin. The riders wore shimmering black raincoats, or cloaks, and broad-brimmed black hats. Their faces were covered with swarthy masks.

The rider on the left was sitting easily in his saddle while his horse drank eagerly from the basin. To the saddle behind him was strapped a bag, or bundle, wrapped in some glistening material, probably oilcloth. The flanks of both animals were quivering from their exertions. Their nervously pawing feet struck sparks from the wet stones.

CHAPTER IV

Two Dark Riders

TWO of the dark riders had come! But the legend had said there would be *four*. Two more riders of the night were due to keep this doom-tryst. Where were they? Why didn't they come and get it over with?

Carmody's face flushed angrily and his eyes flashed. His jaw closed tightly and his hands clenched until the nails cut into his palms. One thing, he muttered to himself, was certain. No power of the dark earth or blacker heavens should drag *him* into this ghastly business, whatever it was! He had, and would have, no part in it. He was resolute on this point. Whatever was to be done would be done, he thought, at the fountain, and to the fountain he would not go.

"I am not one of them," he growled.

"I am *not* one of them!"

True enough, he had driven into the village with his lights out, but that didn't necessarily mean anything. When the old north-country soothsayer had carved "Fower Darke Ryders" he had meant horsemen—not men in automobiles. Hang it, that guy never even heard of automobiles!

It was the attitude of the man on the right, the larger of the two, that filled Carmody with horrible foreboding. He was leaning back in his saddle. His left arm was raised and held a gleaming knife over his comrade's back. The shorter man must have sensed some danger, for he started to turn around.

Darkness fell again, sharply as the click of a camera shutter.

With it came a piercing shriek, clearly audible above the distant reverberations of thunder and the lash of the rain against the windows.

One line of the carved legend burned through Carmody's brain in letters of fire:

ONE CAVALIER SALL RIDE AWAY
AND ONE SALL DIE . . .

"Is it Morgan, Paul?" whispered the old lady in great agitation.

"No, not Morgan," shuddered Carmody.

He stared with aching eyeballs into the night, praying for, and yet coldly dreading, another flash of lightning.

It came, a jagged graph of golden incandescence that creased the dark valley from range to range.

A picture of new horror was printed in his brain. One black horse stood reared upon its haunches, away from the ghastly fountain, eyes burning and nostrils distended. His stricken rider had fallen over his withers and now lay, face up, in the black basin. His mask and hat had been pulled off and the white blotch of his face was visible against the black water. One booted leg hung over the brim of the basin.

The other rider had wheeled and was preparing to gallop away. In his right hand he carried the black bundle which had been attached to his companion's saddle. The knife was not visible.

But a new figure had been added to the weird tableau of crime. The girl in the flowered silk was returning. She was, apparently, rising from the fountain!

CARMODY saw her face, the upper part of her body and the silly parasol above her head, and she seemed to be standing upon the black water of that hideous vessel—upon the body of the murdered horseman. Darkness shrouded the lower part of her figure, so, that, in the brief duration of the blinding flash, he could not be sure that she was not rising out of the wall, or behind it.

Her wide eyes stared in horror and her mouth opened as she looked down into the ogrish platter at her feet. Then darkness like wool-felt thudded down and with it came a woman's scream. The horrible scene burned in Carmody's brain like the red-hot wire in a turned off light-bulb.

Time dragged. A greater horror, he knew instinctively, was to come. But what?

With crawling scalp he waited and, with the crackling blast of the next lightning bolt, he *knew!*

The girl in the flowered silk had been dragged to the road. She crouched in the path of the plunging hoofs of the horse of the remaining masked rider. The other horse was galloping away, to the left, riderless.

The girl's face was raised, and her hands were elevated in terror-stricken supplication. Her parasol lay in the road. If ghost she were, assuredly the girl in the flowered, hoop-skirt gown was a pitiable and appealing wraith!

Again darkness descended. And again came a shriek from a woman's throat.

"Enid," gasped the old woman. "Morgan will kill her. It is Enid. . . ."

Carmondy whirled, searched the salon for something that could be used as a weapon. The tall brass candlesticks on the mantel caught his eye. They were about eighteen inches long and made of solid metal. He swept one candlestick from its place and lunged to the wide doorway—through it into the seething darkness.

The flame of the candle was extinguished as he passed the threshold. In a half-dozen strides he cleared the

weed-grown flagstone footwalk which led directly to the road. He had reached the small gate when the next flash came, and he was running with headlong speed. His shoulder struck the rough brick of the pillar as he hurtled through.

The gigantic rider in the black mask was intent upon killing or capturing the girl. Hampered somewhat by the bundle in his left hand, he leaned low from the saddle, clawing for her with his right. In her frantic struggles to escape, the girl had lost a good part of her light summer clothing. What was left of it clung revealingly to her body, hung in soggy corrugations between the hoops of her skirt.

She crouched now, almost under the treading hoofs of the rose, the rider's hamlike right hand clamped about the upper part of her bare left arm. The girl was moaning softly, incapable, in her terror, apparently, of uttering a louder cry. But the voice, if not loud, was certainly not that of a ghost. It was intensely human.

With a curse that was half a groan of apprehension, Carmondy leaped to the opposite side of the horse, grabbed its bridle and whirled the candlestick in a high arc, aimed at the black rider's head.

He heard the satisfying crunch of flesh and bone.

But the rider did not fall! Instead, Carmody felt the candlestick wrested from his grasp.

He jumped back, but too late. The lost weapon plunged downward in a blow that grazed the side of his head and glanced from his shoulder.

Carmody went down. He sank with the cannon-roar of a clap of thunder in his ears, sank into the purgatorial limbo of palsied semi-coma.

THE whip-lash of the rain slowly aroused his sleeping sensibilities.

In utter darkness he heard the nervous clumping of the hoofs of a standing horse, the moaning of the girl. He lay on his back on the cobble pavement, his legs and hands twitching, unable to get up. The moisture that ran into the corner of his mouth was salt. The gash on his forehead was bleeding.

The next flash of lightning whipped him back to the desperate need for action. The black-masked rider had dismounted and was standing between Carmody and the fountain, still clutching the arm of the girl, who was crouched on the pavement. He was still holding the candlestick and staring in Carmody's direction with an expression of superhuman ferocity in the two bloodshot eyes that showed above his mask.

Growling bestially, he stepped forward. Carmody heard the clatter of a missile badly aimed, striking the pavement beside him. Then lightning showed him the masked rider standing over him with a new weapon, a revolver, in his hand. Fear of rousing the village had probably prevented him from using the gun before. Now, in the pandemonium of the storm, a gunshot would scarcely be heard. The gun was leveled at Carmody's breast.

But now Carmody saw something else that froze his blood with even greater horror than the threat of the bandit's revolver.

The girl's moaning had stopped. She had, he thought, seen it too and had fainted.

For, horribly tottering, but erect and alive, in front of the black fountain, stood the other rider, the murdered man! His face was unmasked, save by his matted black hair and short, ragged beard. His raincoat was gone, his undercoat torn open. Thin withes of willow leafage circled his head grotesquely, clinging to the muck-black hair. And the nickled hilt of a hunting knife protruded upward from his chest, between his shoulder and his chin!

He staggered forward, struggling to speak. A horrible sound, not speech, not the utterance of a human throat, came bubbling from his bloody chest. The handle of the knife moved like an accusing finger, silver and crimson, as though the hideous sound were issuing from that open wound, while the man's snarling mouth gaped soundlessly, his eyes blazing like hot rivets in a bucket of muck, shouting wordlessly the hate and vengeance that were throttled in his throat.

The cry of rage was not loud, but the masked rider heard it. He wheeled and saw the fountain give back its dead.

A shot crashed, was absorbed by the over-arching foliage of the willows. The bolt of yellow flame revealed the spectral scene—the fountain roiled and ruddy, the advancing dead man who was yet alive.

Carmody struggled to his knees as a second shot crashed. He felt for the candlestick and found it, arose, staggered slowly toward the masked giant. He heard the creak of wet leather, the harsh impact of the horse's shoes on the cobbles. He did not encounter the body of his enemy.

Instead he stumbled upon an obstruction that lay across his pathway nearer to the fountain. He sank to his knees.

His hand brushed a bearded face—found the horn handle of a knife. As hoofbeats pounded in his brain, his hand closed on the knife-handle and he wrenched it from the wound. His left hand held the candlestick and pressed it against the body of the dead man as he pried and twisted the knife out with his right.

Strangely the diminuendo of the departing hoof-beats changed—grew loud again. Was the killer coming back to complete his work?

A flash-lamp blazed in his eyes.

CHAPTER V

The Fourth Cavalier

CARMODY, crouching beside the body of the stabbed rider, now certainly dead, looked up to see a horseman in a leather coat, high boots and broad-brimmed gray hat, with a powerful flashlight in one hand, reining a quivering black horse back on its haunches. It was the horse that had galloped in terror from the scene a few moments before — the dead man's mount.

The horseman turned his torch upon the face of the slain rider.

"Soupy Joe, all right," he drawled. "Did you kill him?" he inquired indifferently, and added, "I'm the sheriff."

Carmody looked at the knife in his hand.

"No," he said, "I didn't kill him. His partner did it."

"Well, it appears like *somebody* did. And a damn good riddance of a pesky varmint that might've cost the county a lot more trouble. He and his pal cracked the bank at Bentleyville today and got away with fifteen thousand in cash. I got the word over the telephone, just before the storm, and I've been on the lookout for these black-legs ever since. But I couldn't do anything while the cloudbust was a-comin' down. . . . Say, who are you, anyhow? And what you doin' with that bear-skinner's knife?"

The sheriff turned his light into the eyes of the young traveler, who said gloomily:

"My name is Carmody. I'm a stranger here."

"Yeah—I know you're a stranger. But how'd you get here?"

"I came in my car."

"You did? Well, now, I thought I heard a horse galloping east as I came into the village. I know it wasn't Soupy Joe's nag, for I'm a-settin' on it. So what would you say it mighta been?"

"A horse, I expect," said Carmody wearily.

"Don't get smart. I know it was a horse. But *whose* horse—that's what I wanta know."

"There were two of them, as I told you," the young man explained. "Two riders in black ulsters and masks stopped here fifteen or twenty minutes ago to breathe and water their horses. While they were here the big one—"

"That'll be Kanawha Kelly, Joe's partner," nodded the sheriff.

"Maybe so. Anyway, he stabbed this man lying on the ground—the one you call Soupy Joe—and was riding away when Miss Enid Palowen came across the square. The murderer knew he had been seen—perhaps feared he had been recognized—"

"Hold on, stranger—"

"My name's Carmody."

"Yeah, maybe," growled the sheriff suspiciously. "But there ain't nobody round here by that woman's name you mentioned. Not no more, in these times. There was an Enid Palowen, sister of old Granny Palowen. But she's been dead and gone for sixty years and sleepin' peacefully under one of them white stones over in the Presbyterian

churchyard. I don't think she'd trouble to haunt the likes of Soupy Joe Barker, anyhow. Where'd she go—the gal?"

"She's lying there on the other side of the road," Carmody told him, peering into the shadows with knitted brows. "I must go to her at once and take her into the house. Her sister will die of anxiety and fright."

"Sister of hell! You stick where you are if you don't want a slug from my gun. Granny Palowen's got no sister."

The sheriff swept the cobbled roadway, the fountain and the driveway entrance with his flashlight.

The girl was gone.

Suddenly Carmody was not at all sure that she had ever been there. This thought gave him a feeling of bafflement and futility, which was immediately followed by a more desperate sinking of heart as his mind fastened on what he thought was the true explanation of her disappearance.

Obviously Kanawha Kelly had picked up the unconscious girl and had ridden away with her.

"K e l l y — Kelly's got her," he groaned.

The sheriff grunted. That he took no stock in the girl in the flowered silk was quite apparent.

"For God's sake, follow him," pleaded Carmody. "Or give me that horse and a gun and I'll go. We can't leave her in the hands of that brute."

But the sheriff had found something else of more interest than the mysterious girl in the hoop-skirt.

"By-gee whillikens, what's that?"

He centered his light on the black, glistening bundle that lay in the middle of the road.

"That's the bag Kanawha Kelly murdered his partner to get hold of," Carmody said. "In his hurry to get away he must have left it behind. Maybe he took fright at sound of your horse and thought the dead man was riding after him. Or maybe he dropped it by accident as he picked up the girl."

"Hand it here. And you stay right where you are, young Carmody, till I come for you. Maybe you're all right, but don't try to leave town till I tell you. Which way did you say that hyena went?"

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"That way," said Carmody, pointing.

The leather-coated sheriff dug heels into the flanks of the dead man's steed and galloped away down the weltering village street.

The rain had stopped and the clouds were breaking. An eerie pencil of moonlight stabbed the wet willows and rested like the silent finger of fate on the edge of the black marble basin.

Carmody stood dazedly listening to the gurgle of the water, the soughing of the wind in the willows that wept over the dead thief's body. The moon's finger crept slowly across the fountain to the gargoyle, reached the stone tablet with its queer inscription. He could not read it by the pallid light, but he remembered every word, particularly the ghastly end:

ONE CAVALIER SALL RIDE AWAY AND ONE SALL DIE AND ONE SALL STAY.

The oracle, he muttered, had been cockeyed. Two cavaliers, counting the sheriff, had ridden away—instead of one. And *nobody*—Carmody was prepared to put money on this—was going to remain behind in the house of the retrokron. He had made up his mind to go just as quickly as he could get his car started—with or without the formality of a farewell to Granny Palowen.

But he had to return to the house to get his overcoat and hat.

Suddenly resolute, he dropped the bloody knife beside its victim and staggered to the white-pillared portico. His clothes were drenched and muddy. He carried the brass candlestick in his hand. He pushed open the creaking high doors.

The one remaining candle guttered on the mantel.

The retrokron was gone! No vestige of it was visible above the shelf. Where it had been was a gaping, oblong black hole. Granny Palowen was not there. Carmody caught up his overcoat and hat and turned to the great door, which he had left standing open.

A gust of wind slammed the doors, fluttered and flared the candle.

Then he heard a sound from the stair.

AN instant later the dark-haired girl, the wraith of the Black Fountain, stood on the landing. She stared at Carmody, but he could not tell whether she saw him or not. Remnants of the flowered silk dress hung in tatters, in ribbons of soiled and sleazy fabris, about her hips and shoulders. Steel hoops protruded like the ribs of a starved animal.

From this wreck of an ancient garment rose a creature in the first bloom of girlish loveliness. Her youthfulness smote him—for she was scarcely more than a child—and her terror. Her eyes were clouded with fear and pain.

"She's dead," sobbed the girl. "Granny Palowen's dead."

Carmody dropped his coat and hat on the settle and took a step toward the foot of the stair.

"She thought it was Morgan's men—Morgan the raider. That's the way it has always been. Poor Granny, she has never remembered anything that happened since the Civil War, not even her own husband and baby that died long ago. Her brother, Paul, was killed at Gettysburg. She was talking about him tonight. She told me he had come home. She's been funny that way all day, and she never called me anything but Enid, her sister's name, who died when she was a girl. I'm really not anything to her—no kin, I mean. But I've stayed with her nights for the past two years.

"And now she—she's made me think queer things and feel all creepy and terribly lonely and shut away, sort of. It's her talk of what happened away back that does it. Why can't people let dead things stay dead? And she made me put on this old dress of her sister's, out of a trunk in a bare room upstairs that she calls Mr. Paul's room, when my clothes were drenched in the first storm tonight. It made me feel as if I were somebody else—somebody dead a long while ago. I—I felt awfully queer when I met you out there with your torch that first time."

"But not as queer as I felt, Miss—"

"And then, when I came back across the park from Mrs. Miller's and climbed the steps on the other side of the fountain wall, and saw that awful man and

the dead body in the fountain, I thought—"

"I don't blame you."

"I was half crazy, when I got back, but I wouldn't have told her. She'd heard the noise, though, and the shooting and she was sure it was Morgan. She was relieved when she saw me. She'd got upstairs to her bed somehow . . . Then she died . . . while I was getting her drops . . . with her cheeks sucked in and her eyes open . . . Oh, God!"

The girl buried her face in her hands, her elbow resting on the newell post. The young traveler passed around the square table to cross in front of the fireplace. He stumbled over a large gilt frame and the broken fragments of a shattered pier glass, which had been hung on the front of the chimney. Only then did he discover, with a backward glance, the great clock hung against the wainscotted gallery wall over the entrance.

The gallery, with the control mechanism, ran from one bedroom to another, behind this wall. What he had seen upon first entering the salon, was a mirrored reflection in the glass over the mantel, the effect of which had been to show the dial with its few remaining numerals, in reverse. Carmody smiled wanly at this simple explanation of the retrokron—and was faintly sorry he had jammed the clock.

HE stepped around the broken glass to the girl's side.

"It was the Fourth Dark Rider," said Carmody gently, "who came for her, for Granny Palowen. Now I understand. The sheriff had nothing to do with it."

The young woman did not understand, perhaps, his allusion to the legend carved above the Black Fountain, but she felt the sympathy of his tone, the strength of his personality, the comfort of his voice and manner. Following his eyes to the clock she whispered in awed, soft tones, as she descended to the salon floor.

"It's stopped—Granny's clock. It was never right, but she wound it regularly, or had me do it, when she

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(Concluded from page 103)

couldn't turn the cranks any more. It made a terrible racket, but she thought the sound of it in the house, ticking away, was so heartsome. She told me her granddaddy had it made in Switzerland to outdo Thomas Jefferson, who had a clock over his door at Monticello that he was mighty proud of . . . Now it's stopped . . . it sort of frightens a person . . . makes you feel that maybe everything else is going to stop . . ."

She clung to him, sobbing softly, in the silence.

"Maybe everything's just beginning," he said.

She lifted her face and the dark, gentle, terror-haunted eyes opened widely to his kindly gaze. The warm color came slowly back to her cheek, her damp shoulders. Her lips were red and half parted as she breathed a new, needful question. And a phrase that seemed, miraculously, to have the flavor of old vintage, the sweetness of the ripened grape, sang through Carmody's mind: *Red wine of Palowen!*

"Who are you?" the girl asked eagerly.

"I am Dan Carmody," he said. "One of the four dark riders who came tonight to Palowen. I was going to try to get my engine started and . . . get along toward Baltimore. But if you wish it, my dear, I'll stay with you."

"Oh, I'd be glad of that," the girl whispered.

And so was fulfilled the anciently carved doom-word of Palowen.

MYSTERY HEADLINERS NEXT ISSUE

THE CYCLOPS' EYE

A Colonel Crum Novelet

By JOHN H. KNOX

NIGHTMARE ISLAND

A Complete Horror Novelet by H. H. STINSON

MUSEUM OF DEATH

A Novelet of Hate's Havoc

By DON JOSEPH

PLUS MANY OTHER UNUSUAL STORIES

HORROR-SCOPES

(Continued from page 10)

Hindu was discovered and death by violence proved. The British law is firm on the matter of corpus delicti.

But when the boat docked at the government pier at Madagascar, a leak was discovered in the hull. A diver was commissioned to examine the bottom of the boat carefully.

It was then that a horrible discovery was made. A human head was found wedged between the propeller shaft and the blades in an odd manner which was believed almost implausible. But on examination the head was identified as that of the missing Hindu. Evidently, the propeller blades had decapitated the body when it was thrown overboard.

When confronted with the head, the second valet insisted that he knew nothing—but then the most horrible part of the story was revealed. In the dead man's mouth, wedged behind his teeth, was a portion of a human ear.

When the Englishman learned this, he ordered his Hindu valet to take off his turban. And then corpse-justice triumphed. The fragment of ear in the mouth of the victim had been bitten from the large Hindu, evidently in a mad battle of death.

In the face of this evidence, the guilty man confessed. Although he tried to prove self-defense, the fact that he was larger and stronger than the victim, convicted him and he was hung for murder. One head and one body were buried in the same grave.

THE DANCING APPARITION

THERE are still some readers who doubt the verity of stories in this department even making the accusation that such yarns are manufactured in this office. Let it be said that every effort is made to check up on stories reported.

For example, when we learned of the Dancing Apparition story we were told that it happened in Utah. So we asked our western correspondent Dick Robson, to make a report on the data on hand. Under the date of May 26, 1940, we received a letter from Mr. Robson enclosing a clipping from the Deseret News of Salt Lake City. Mr. Robson had written on the clipping the following: "This is true, and an interne at St. Mark's Hospital in Salt Lake City committed suicide thinking he was losing his mind." The clipping reads as follows:

At first we thought this ghost story was only an errant little tale, but investigation disclosed that at least every other person in town had heard it. The characters are a young man, a lovely dancing ghost and a missing overcoat.

All versions agree that the youth bowed before a wan miss sitting alone at a dance.

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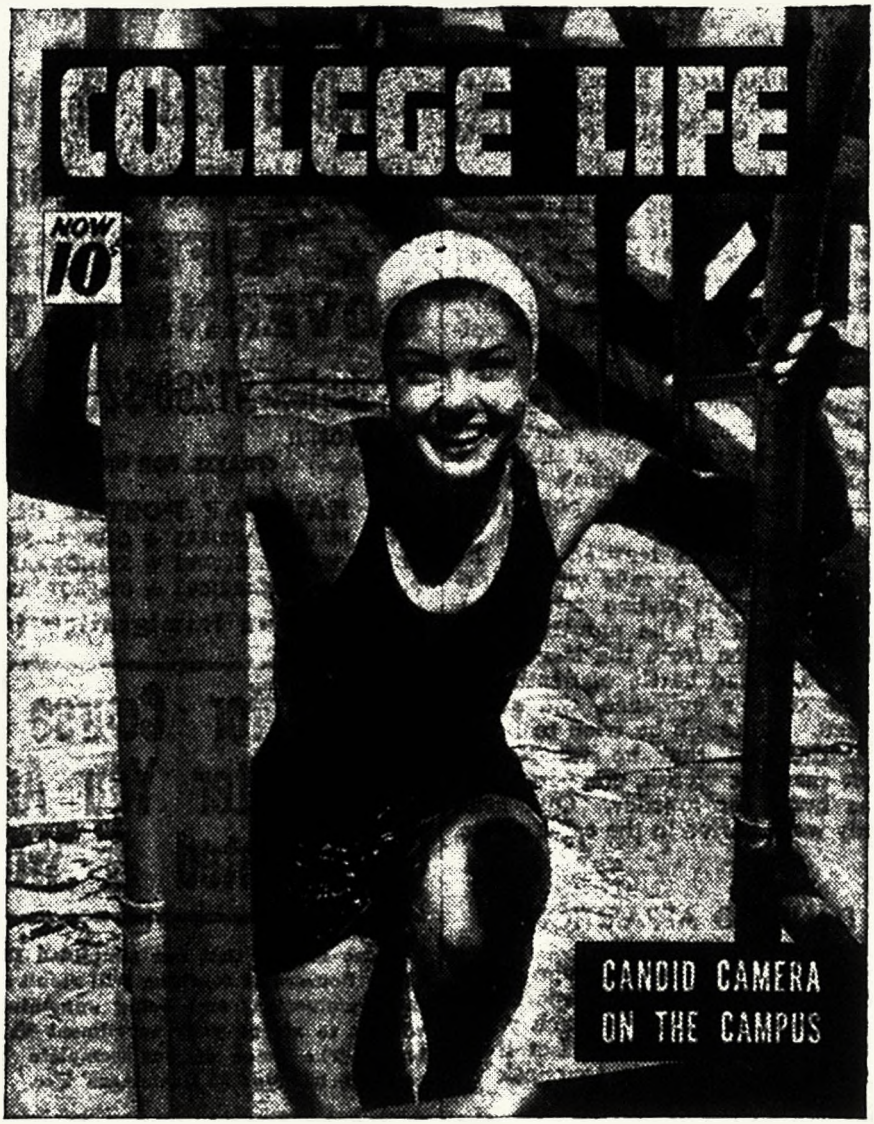
Glorifying the 1940 Coed



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(Continued from page 105)

As the evening wore on, our gallant won consent to take the maiden home.

Amazed was he at learning that the girl had no coat, had faced the icy blasts of winter clad in a light frock. He placed his own overcoat about her and drove to an address she whispered. Arriving there, she asked that he remain in the automobile until she could tell her mother she had returned.

But as time passed and the girl failed to return to the car, our gallant rapped at the front door intent at least on recovering his overcoat. A middle-aged lady answered his summons. He informed her of events, meanwhile watching mounting consternation register on the woman's face.

"But my daughter has been dead for three years," she finally faltered. "Come in and I'll show you her picture."

Only one look did the youth take at the colored photograph, then insisted: "That's the girl."

"But I'll take you to the cemetery and show you her grave," the lady promised.

They drove there, stopping finally before a large white headstone. Hanging—as a shroud over the stone—was his overcoat.

THE LIGHTHOUSE OF DEATH

AT the top of the Gulf of Bothnia, near the city of Boden, Sweden, stands a lonely lighthouse. Recently a war correspondent picked up a strange story concerning this beacon of the sea.

Years ago on a Christmas eve, the daughter of the lighthouse keeper awaited the return of her lover by sea. He had promised to come and spend Christmas with her at which time their betrothal would be announced to the celebrating villagers.

But the boat due at sundown had not appeared. The anxious girl believing the ship had been delayed by rough water, went to the top of the lighthouse to make sure the light would not fail. She knew her lover would be watching it because he had said it symbolized her love.

At the stroke of midnight a terrific gale blew up, lifting the mist of the pounding breakers as high as the beacon. Suddenly, the father heard his daughter scream. When he rushed to her, he saw her gazing wildly at some imaginary object before her, and holding outstretched arms to the sea. She seemed to be in a trance and was calling the name of her lover. Then, before the bewildered father could grab her, she leaped over the high railing and plunged to her death in the sea.

The next day on the beach, the villagers found the bodies of the girl and her lover, he having been washed overboard as his boat was nearing the shore. Sailors said he had insisted on remaining on deck looking at the lighthouse—and just before he disappeared he had screamed—"the light has gone out."

Today, natives will tell you that no one sails those waters on Christmas eve—for at

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midnight, whether the water is calm or rough, a strange mist rises from the sea and obscures the beacon light for several minutes. The phenomenon has never failed to happen at the stroke of twelve.

THE SECOND FLANDERS

THE famous retreat from Flanders last May when the English army had been threatened with annihilation, will go down in history as another miracle like the one reported at Mons in the last war where English were saved when disaster had threatened them.

The previous Sunday when hope looked dark for the bottled troops who were being bombed mercilessly and trapped at the water's edge, King George had proclaimed a day of national prayer. At one of the churches, an old lady had lost her mind, screaming that her son was saved. She kept saying—"the angel has saved him—the angel has saved him."

Friends tried to comfort her, but she insisted that her son would come back. They hoped he would, although they feared that none would be saved.

"But a miracle did happen," according to Daisy Breeden, a newspaperwoman. "When the fateful time came, the turbulent Channel waters turned into the calm of a millpond and a sheltering blanket of fog threw up a barrage to aid in the exhausted home-coming of the valiant warriors as they swam and waded, beneath a rain of shells, to the bridge of boats that carried them to rest and safety

from a hell let loose. Over 600 boats of every shape, size and variety—manned by volunteer crews that gambled their lives to help rescue those who had borne the brunt of the conflict—ferry-boats, barges—were in that choppy channel."

And the old woman's son was saved. He returned on the first boat. As he rushed into his hysterical mother's arms, he cried: "We were saved mother—by the Angel of Mons—I saw her—the same one I saw at Mons in the last war. She calmed the waters and sent the fog."

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Dear Chakra:

Does science accept the possibility of brain waves? Nelson Ernst.

Dear Mr. Ernst: Yes—A device for recording brain waves was exhibited recently to the American Medical Association. Waves were recorded in about two minutes on a broad strip of paper that folded into book form. A normal person has a brain wave spectrum ranging from one to fifty waves per second. It is claimed that through brain waves, many of the theories of psychic science will be proved.

Dear Chakra:

I heard that a doctor in Paris had proved the possibility of voodoo power. Is this true? Helen McWilliams.

Dear Miss McWilliams: To a certain extent, yes. Professor Charcot of Paris demonstrated that a bluish aura surrounds a person for several feet. When a wooden doll, made in the image of the person, was brought within the aura of that person—the person felt a pin-prick on his body in the same place that the doll was pricked.

Dear Chakra:

Thank you for interpreting my dream of two months ago. My son has walked again just as my dream promised. Although at that time the doctors said he never would. Don't you think that dreams can be psychic quite often? Mrs. Beatrice Brown.

Dear Mrs. Brown: Yes, dreams are more often due to psychic forces than to physical conditions or mental action.

Dear Chakra:

Is it true that a person under hypnosis, often has the power of premonition and vision? Martha Klein.

Dear Miss Klein: Yes, this has been demonstrated by Dr. Thomas L. Garrett of New York City, leading hypnologist. A man under hypnosis was able to "see" how a crime was committed and aided the police in bringing the guilty one to justice.

Chakra.

Alien Registration Notice

Printed by THRILLING MYSTERY
as a public service

As part of the National Defense program, a nationwide registration of aliens will be conducted from August 27 through December 26, 1940, by the Immigration and Naturalization Service of the Department of Justice. Registration will take place in the post offices of the nation. It is expected that more than three and one-half million aliens will be registered during the four-month period.

Registration is made compulsory by a specific act of Congress, the Alien Registration Act of 1940, which requires all non-citizens to register during the four-month official registration period. The law requires that all aliens 14 years or older are to be registered and fingerprinted. Alien children under 14 years of age will be registered by their parents or guardians. When alien children reach their fourteenth birthday, they will be required to register in person and be fingerprinted.

A fine of $1,000 and imprisonment of six months is prescribed by the Alien Registration Act for failure to register, for refusal to be fingerprinted, or for making registration statements known to be false.

As part of its educational program to acquaint non-citizens with the registration requirements, the Alien Registration Division is distributing more than five million specimen forms listing the questions that will be asked of aliens at registration time. Besides the usual questions for establishing identification, the questionnaire asks the alien to tell how and when he entered the country, the method of transportation he used to get here, the name of the vessel on which he arrived.

He is also asked to state the length of time he has been in this country and the length of time he expects to stay. He must also describe any military or naval service he has had, and list the names of any organization, clubs, or societies in which he participates or holds membership. In addition, he is required to describe his activities in any organization, and to affirm whether or not the organization furthers the interests or program of a foreign government.

To make their registration easier, aliens are being asked to fill out sample forms, which will be available prior to registration, and take them to post offices where they will be registered and fingerprinted. Every registered alien will receive by mail a receipt card which serves as evidence of his registration. Following registration, the Act requires all aliens, as well as parents or guardians of alien children, to report changes of residence address within five days of the change.

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The Alien Registration Act was passed so that the United States Government may determine exactly how many aliens there are, who they are, and where they are. Both President Roosevelt and Solicitor General Biddle have pointed out that registration and fingerprinting will not be harmful to law-abiding aliens. The Act provides that all records be kept secret and confidential. They will be available only to persons approved by the Attorney General of the United States.

Fingerprinting of aliens carries no stigma whatsoever. Thousands of citizens are voluntarily fingerprinted every year. Members of the United States Army and Navy are all fingerprinted, as are many Government workers. In recent years many hospitals have established the practice of taking footprints of newly-born babies. Because fingerprinting is the only infallible method of accurate identification, the United States Government has adopted it as part of its registration program.

In signing the Alien Registration Act, President Roosevelt said, "The Alien Registration Act of 1940 . . . should be interpreted and administered as a program designed not only for the protection of the country but also for the protection of the loyal aliens who are its guests. The registration . . . does not carry with it any stigma or implication of hostility towards those who, while they may not be citizens, are loyal to this country and its institutions. Most of the aliens in this country are people who came here because they believed and

had faith in the principles of American democracy, and they are entitled to and must receive full protection of the law."

The Immigration and Naturalization Service asks for the cooperation of all citizens in carrying out the Alien Registration program in a friendly manner so that our large foreign population is not antagonized. It is suggested that citizens may be of great help to their non-citizen neighbors or relatives by explaining to those who do not speak English well what the registration is, where aliens go to register, and what information they must give.

The Registration of Aliens program has been set up as a separate division of the Immigration and Naturalization Service. The program is being directed by Earl G. Harrison, under the general supervision of Major L. B. Schofield, Special Assistant to the Attorney General.

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I have been surprised at the practical manner in which even advanced work is explained. It is a lot easier than I had expected. I only wish I had started this plan of getting ahead a few years earlier. But when I was 18 to 20 I felt pretty sure of myself. I didn't take enough stock in what more experienced people told me about the importance of being thoroughly trained for the job I wanted.

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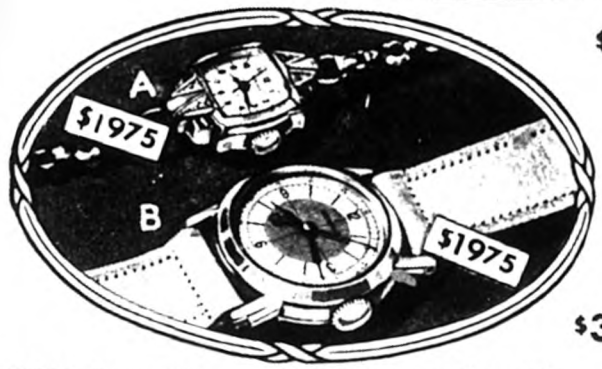

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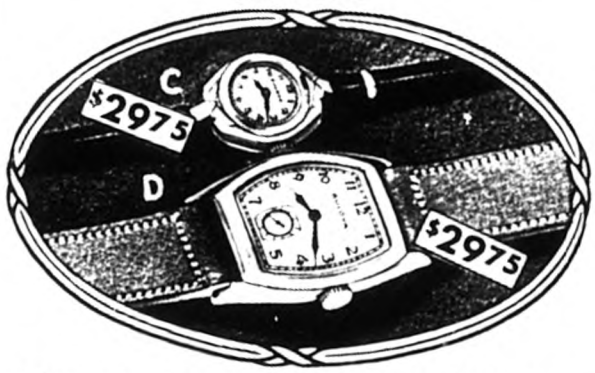

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Attained Age at Death	Natural or Ordinary Accidental Death Amount	Auto Accidental Death Amount	Travel Accidental Death Amount
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41-50	750.00	1500.00	2250.00
51-56	500.00	1000.00	1500.00
57-62	300.00	600.00	900.00
63-68	200.00	400.00	600.00
69-75	100.00	200.00	300.00

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