

THRILLING MYSTERY

SEPT.

10¢

SCULPTOR OF CORPSES

A Novelet of Weird Cadavers

By RAY
CUMMINGS

A THRILLING
PUBLICATION

THE FARING
OF THE WOLF

A Novelet of
Satan's Slaves

By ROGER
HOWARD NORTON



THOUSANDS MARVEL TO SEE THEIR SKINNY BODIES FILL OUT...

As Wonderful IRONIZED YEAST Tablets Add 10 to 25 Pounds in a Few Weeks

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

Once these substances are supplied—and you get them now in these amazing little Ironized Yeast tablets—the improvement that comes in a short time is often astonishing. Thousands report wonderful new pep, gains of 10 to 25 pounds in a few weeks—complexions naturally clear—a new natural attractiveness that wins friends everywhere.

Food chemists have found that one of the richest sources of marvelous health-building Vitamin B is the special rich yeast used in making English ale. Now by a costly process, this rich imported ale yeast is combined with Vitamin B concentrate from yeast and with 3 kinds of strength-building iron.

The result is these new, easy-to-take Ironized Yeast tablets, which thousands of formerly skinny people who needed their vital substances hail as one of the greatest weight-building, health-building discoveries of all time.

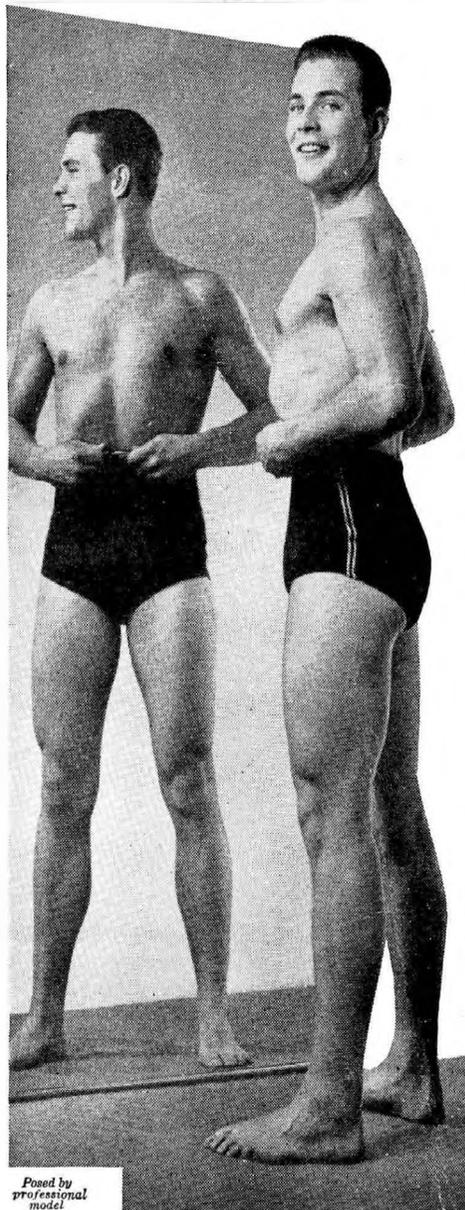
Make this money-back test

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

Only be sure you get genuine Ironized Yeast, and not some cheap, inferior substitute which does not give the same results. Look for "IY" stamped on each tablet.

Special offer!

To start thousands building up their health right away, we make this special offer. Purchase a package of Ironized Yeast tablets at once, cut out the seal on the box and mail it to us with a clipping of this paragraph. We will send you a fascinating new book on health, "New Facts About Your Body." Remember, results with the first package—or money refunded. At all druggists. Ironized Yeast Co., Inc., Dept. 779, Atlanta, Ga.



Posed by professional model



IMPORTANT

**Beware of substitutes.
Be sure you get genuine
IRONIZED YEAST.
Look for the letters "IY"
on each tablet.**

"THE HURLING MONSTER ROARED STRAIGHT AT ME!"



F. L. BROWNELL
Licensed Guide
Adirondack Forest Preserve



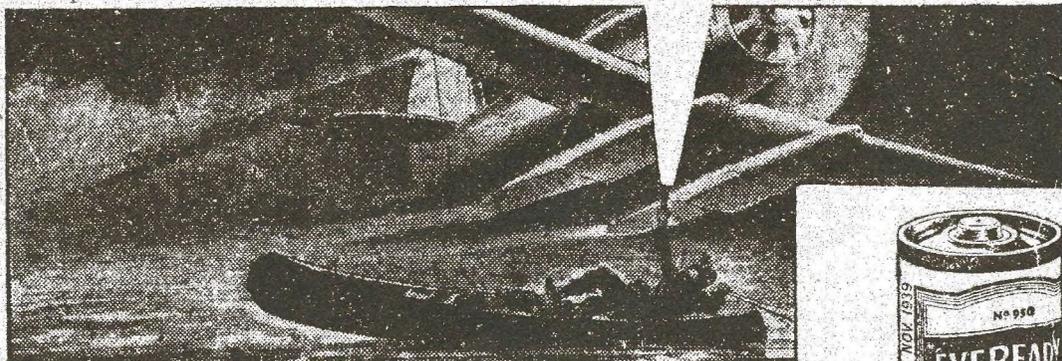
1 "One dark night," writes Mr. Brownell, "I had to cross Fourth Lake in a canoe. The utter silence gave one the feeling of being a million miles from civilization.



2 "About halfway across, the night was shattered by the roar of a powerful motor. Two specks of light, which rapidly grew larger, came towards me—a seaplane which had been anchored on the lake!



3 "The hurtling monster was roaring straight for me! The pilot couldn't hear my shouts. I made a frantic grab for the flashlight beside me. Just in time, the pilot saw its bright flash.



4 "The plane shot aside as it took the air, missing my canoe by what seemed like inches! I think I can truthfully say that those 'Eveready' fresh DATED batteries saved my life. I'll tell the world I'll never be without them in my flashlight. It just doesn't pay to take chances.

(Signed) *F. L. Brownell*



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THRILLING MYSTERY

Vol. XII, No. 2

September, 1939

Price 10c

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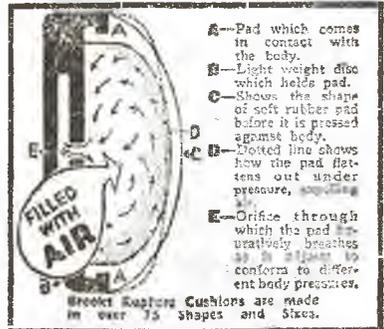
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Wouldn't it be a grand and glorious feeling to forget rupture worry completely and let peace of mind and new zest for living make you look younger? But you can't if a gouging, uncomfortable truss nags you constantly, if you never know a moment's security, if you feel your rupture is growing worse all the time, with not even hope of the opening closing up. Worry, worry, worry, day after day, for all your life . . . why, it's bound to make any man or woman look old, haggard, and worn out beyond their years. Don't, don't, don't submit to this terrible, needless tragedy of dragging, ageing worry. At this very moment, as you read these words you can



decide to enter upon a glorious new life. Not by some clap-trap, senseless "magic"; but by the thoroughly effective aid of the world-famous BROOKS Patented AIR-CUSHION Rupture Support—that holds with a velvet touch; yet so securely that you practically forget rupture, banish worry, become normally active and again know the zest and joy of life that cannot help but make you look younger. Scores of thousands know this is true. Let the Brooks help you.

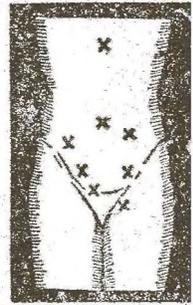


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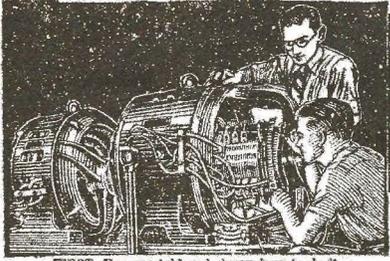
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State whether for Man Woman or Child

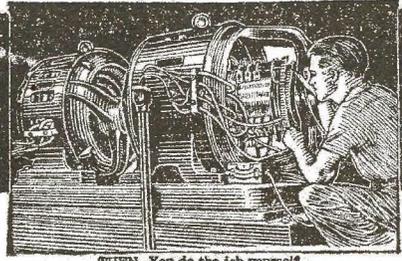


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Loud Speaker Systems

Building, installing, servicing and operating public address systems is another growing field for men well trained in Radio.



HERE'S PROOF

\$50 Monthly in Spare Time

"I work on Radio part time, still holding my regular job. Since enrolling seven years ago, I have averaged around \$50 every month." JOHN B. MORISETTE, 809 Valley St., Manchester, N. H.

Makes \$50 to \$60 a Week

"I am making between \$50 and \$60 a week after all expenses are paid, and I am getting all the Radio work I can take care of. Thanks to N. R. I." H. W. SPANGLER, 126 1/2 S. Gay St., Knoxville, Tenn.

Operates Public Address System "I have a position with the Los Angeles Civil Service, operating the Public Address System in the City Hall Council. My salary is \$170 a month." R. H. ROOD, City Hall, Los Angeles, Calif.

Radio offers you many opportunities for well paying spare time and full time jobs. And you don't have to give up your old job, leave home or spend a lot of money to train to get these jobs—to become a Radio Technician.

Get Ready Now for Jobs Like These

Radio broadcasting stations employ engineers, operators, station managers and pay well for trained men. Fixing Radio sets in spare time pays many \$200 to \$500 a year—full time jobs with Radio writers, manufacturers and dealers as much as \$30, \$40, \$50 a week. Many Radio Technicians open full or part time Radio sales and repair businesses. Radio manufacturers and jobbers employ testers, inspectors, foremen, engineers, servicemen, in good-pay jobs with opportunities for advancement. Automobile, police, aviation, commercial Radio, loud speaker systems are newer fields offering good opportunities now and for the future. Television promises to open many good jobs soon. Men I trained have good jobs in these branches of Radio. Read how they got their jobs. Mail coupon.

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

Radio is young—yet it's one of our large industries. More than 28,000,000 homes have one or more Radios. There are more Radios than telephones. Every year millions of Radios get out of date and are replaced. Millions more need new tubes, repairs. Over \$50,000,000 are spent every year for Radio repairs alone. Over 5,000,000 auto Radios are in use; more are being sold every day, offering more profit-making opportunities for Radio Technicians. And RADIO IS STILL YOUNG, GROWING, expanding into new fields. The few hundred \$30, \$40, \$50 a week jobs of 20 years ago have grown to thousands. Yes, Radio offers opportunities—now and for the future.

Many Make \$5, \$10, \$15 a Week Extra in Spare Time While Learning! The day you enroll, in addition to our regular course, I start sending Extra Money Job Sheets; show you how to do Radio Repair jobs. Throughout your training I send plans and directions that made good spare time money \$200 to \$500—for hundreds, while learning.

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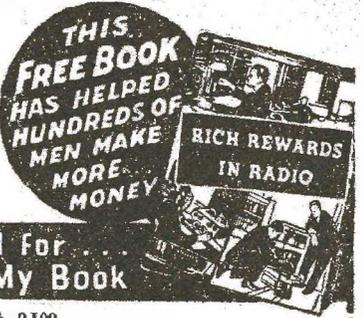
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Act Today. Mail the coupon now for "Rich Rewards in Radio." It points out Radio's spare time and full time opportunities and those coming in Television; tells about my training in Radio and Television; shows you letters from men I trained, telling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

J. E. SMITH, President
Dept. 9109, National Radio Institute
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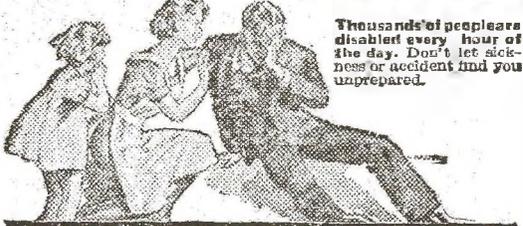
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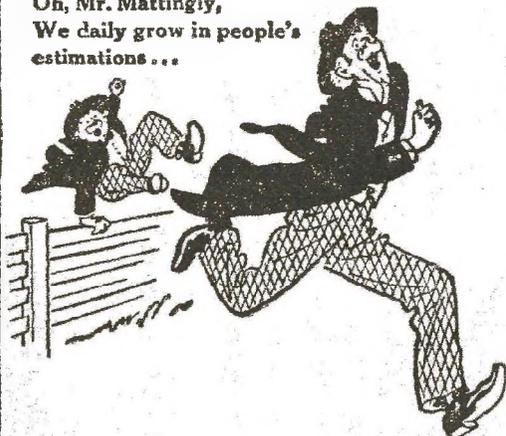
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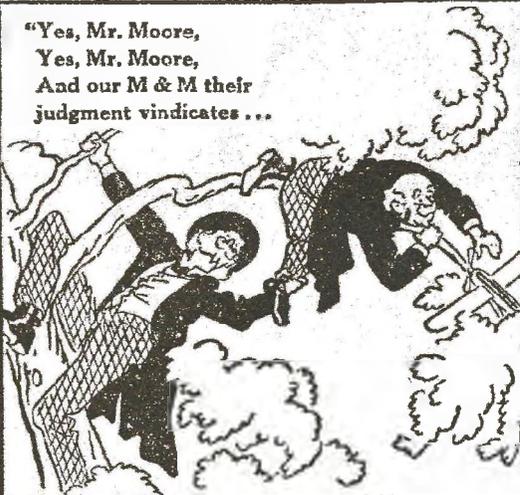
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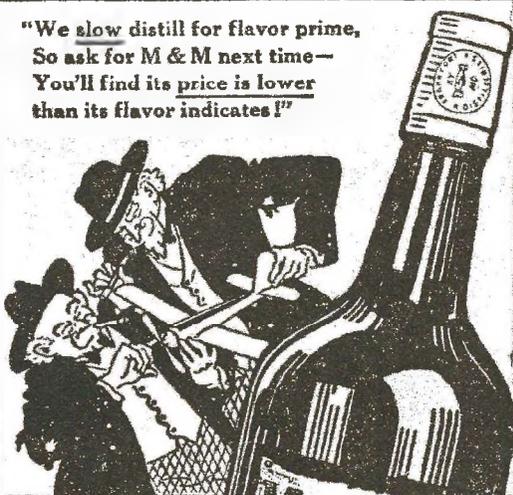
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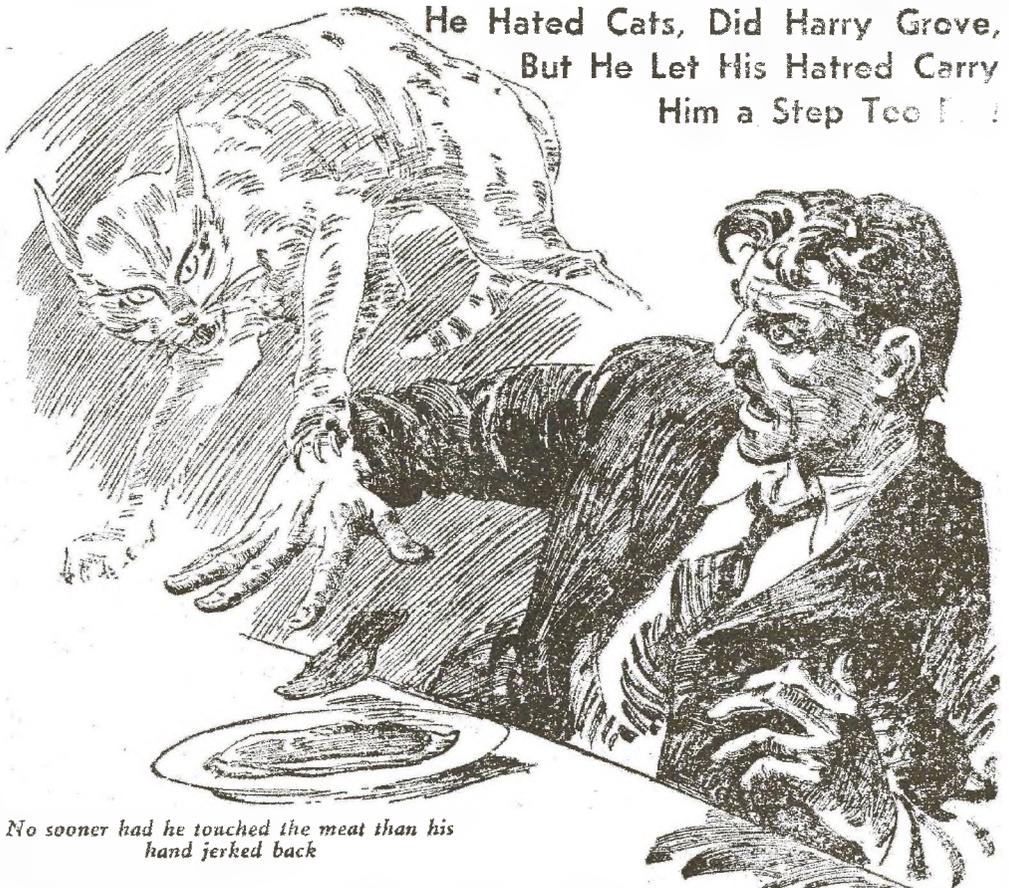
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He Hated Cats, Did Harry Grove,
But He Let His Hatred Carry
Him a Step Too Far!



No sooner had he touched the meat than his hand jerked back

THE KILLER WITH CLAWS

By G. T. FLEMING—ROBERTS

Author of "Blood of the Mummy," "House of Hungry Death," etc.

SHE didn't have any name that I ever heard. Everybody in the shop just called her the cat woman. I don't suppose anybody in the world ever liked her. You can like a man or a woman or an animal, but you can't like a thing. She was sort of a thing.

I've heard about zombies, which

superstition defines as corpses brought back to an imitation of life. The closest you could ever come to seeing a zombie would be to meet the cat woman. But if you've never met her, so much the better; she'll stay out of your dreams.

The first time I saw her, I was bending over a wood pattern for a Dutch silver candle-stick I was carving.

I am the only wood carver in the Metal-Art Shop, and it's my tedious job to make the patterns that are used in casting the base metal forms of certain ornaments. In the little shop we make anything that is cheap and shoddy and flashy and can be made out of metal—slum jewelry, costume stuff, antimony-covered castings we call Dutch silver, gold-plated points for two-bit fountain pens, most anything the jobbers order. It's a tiny factory employing about eight men and located on a dingy alley across from the odorous back porch of the cat woman's house.

As I said, I was working on this candle-stick pattern, completely absorbed, pretending I was a second Cellini, when I felt something soft rub against my shoulder. At first, thinking it was one of the other boys trying to devil me so that I'd jam the point of my number 8 tool into my finger, I tried not to notice. Then I heard a sound, something like *prrrt-prrrt*, the happy greeting of a house cat. I turned my head slightly, and there she was.

HER long, starved body was lengthened by a shapeless garb of flannel that might once have been white but was now the gray of an alley cat. She was bent over, scrawny hand clutching withered thighs, rubbing her filth-matted gray hair against my shoulder. "Don't!" I jerked back, a chill of loathing coming over me.

She made that sound again—*prrrt*. She raised her head, and I saw into the hideous vacancy of her green eyes. Nothing there, I tell you; simply windows of green glass looking into an empty chamber. She had a short, wide nose with dirty nostrils, a wide mouth that grinned senselessly and was trimmed at its corners with patches of sparse gray hairs half an inch long. Her thin lips slavered and their drooling formed droplets on the tufts of hair about her mouth. I noticed then that she had no chin worth of the name. Rather, she had chops.

She made another effort to fawn upon me and I stood up quickly. The loathing I felt for her made me grip the knobby handle of my keen carving tool in a grip that left my fingers numb.

"*Prrrt-prrrt!*"

Across the shop, Glen Arnhausser, its owner, guffawed. He came over to where I stood shivering and dropped a heavy hand on my shoulder.

"You should worry about her now, Maxie. Chust ignore her. Chust a harmless old voman not yet right in der head, my poy. She comes around der shop lots, mit intentions you should give her someding from der lunch. She don't mean noddings pad. She's nice kitty, huh?"

Arnhausser roared again; for this, I was to understand was a sample of his humor. He slapped my shoulder to indicate that I was to laugh, too. But I couldn't. I just stood there, staring at the woman and gently testing the sharpness of my tool against my palm.

Arnhausser stamped his foot. "Skat, teufel."

The lean gray shape slunk away from me into a darker corner of the shop where her bony fingers picked over a pile of old rags there. Then I saw the cats. There must have been a dozen of them, all starved and frightened creatures, gray, black, spotted, and tiger cats—all sneaking with the silence of shadows, seeming to me to take strategic positions about the room as though we were mice rather than men.

I could not work until the woman had gone away again. Out the wide alley door she went, with her cats trailing her, over into her back yard to climb the rickety steps onto her back porch. Hers was a large house, painted a scaly green, with rotten wood shingles that strewed the neighborhood when ever there was a heavy wind.

She was always coming around the shop, I learned, poking into this corner and that, treading her way among small and noisy machines with a sure-footedness that was uncanny. Always when she came I would lay down my tools and devote myself to keeping out of her way. She was always trying to fawn upon the men, uttering that strange, delightful purr that seemed her only means of expressing her disgusting affections. I never saw her find anything to eat but once, and I'll say more about that later.

EVEN Glen Arnhausser, who was goodnatured above the average, hated her, so I wondered that he did not close his doors and windows when she came around. But I think no one looked upon her as Harry Grove's did.

Harry was a big man with square shoulders and a head that I am sure would have been nearly flat on top except for his unruly black hair. He was one of these inherently cruel men, a relentless hunter with a shotgun both in and out of season. I have seen him stone the trembling curs that sneaked along the alley nosing off the tops of garbage containers. It was always a wonder to me he didn't kill some of the old woman's cats. And as it turned out, he did.

One day when I was dodging the cat woman's usual foraging, I found myself standing next to Harry Grove's bench where he was grinding pen points. He was paying only the necessary attention to what he was doing, his eyes now and then shifting to the cat woman and her mangy prowlers. There was in his eye a look of profound hatred, but also something sneaking, as though fear was a part of his expression.

"Listen, Harry, just who is that woman?" I asked.

Harry noticed me with his luminous brown eyes and then returned them to the cat woman. "Don't know," he said.

"Who takes care of her?"

"She does. She lives alone with those cats. She takes care of herself and the cats, too. There must be hundreds of cats in that house."

"But she's an imbecile," I said. "What's she doing at large? Why doesn't somebody do something about her?"

"Maybe somebody will," he mumbled, and turned away.

Every morning after that, on my way to work through the alley, I'd come across dead cats lying on the pavement back of the cat woman's house. They hadn't been shot or run over by a truck or anything like that. They were just dead—horribly dead as though there had been convulsions at the end.

I knew somebody was poisoning the cats, but I never thought of big Harry Grove as the poisoner. I could see him

killing the cats with a club or skinning them alive for sheer pleasure of being cruel, but I couldn't see him as a crafty poisoner. Unless, of course, he was afraid of something. And I couldn't picture anybody of Harry's build being afraid.

But then he was the poisoner, because one day I saw him in the supply room spreading arsenic paste on canned sardines. He was grinning at whatever ugly thing was going on in his brain and there was unholy glee in his eyes. Next morning there were five dead cats.

The cat woman's brain wasn't large enough to receive an impression etched by one of these microscopic engraving artists who can put the Lord's Prayer on the head of a pin; otherwise, she would have got the idea that she and her pets were repugnant to someone at the shop.

Or perhaps she would have got the idea had Harry's subtle killings made any appreciable difference in the size of her cat family. But I was certain the cats were multiplying as fast as Harry destroyed them. So the cat woman never knew the difference and came almost daily to poke around the shop.

ONCE, after an absence of three days, she came in scarcely able to keep herself upright on her two shuffling feet. She was more gaunt than ever, and I came to the immediate conclusion that she had been sick. Her usual *prrrt* sound was only a rasping squeak as she fawned beseechingly on Glen Arnhausser. Arnhausser cuffed her across the head and cursed at her. He was in a bad temper that day because he had been counting on a shipment of German silver which had not come in.

Arnhausser's temper was reflected in the rest of us, and the cat woman got even less than her usual attention. And then Harry Grove surprised us all by getting his lunch box and taking an oil-paper-covered package from it.

"Kitty-kitty-kitty!" he called.

Immediately, the cats came. At least a score of the famished creatures bounded lightly across the shop, all but upsetting their unstable mistress. But Harry held his package high and kicked

the cats out of the way as the cat-woman approached him.

For the first time, I saw something human in her eyes. It was a pitiful little flicker of gratitude. Her clawing hands went out in mute appeal to Harry, who with considerable chuckling removed the oiled paper to reveal a sandwich of large proportions. And then the human element that had candled her eyes for a moment was gone and in its place a baleful, beastly blaze. Her two hands slashed out and snatched at the sandwich.

I saw her teeth then, two rows of yellow snags bared to bite into the food that Harry had offered. It occurred to me suddenly that Harry might have made the sandwich with bread and arsenic paste, but I told myself that Harry was not such a fool as that.

The cat woman retired to a corner, her starved pets following her with faces uplifted and jaws open to yowl. As she ate, her shoulders hunched, her fingers closed on the food, I could have sworn I heard her growling angrily at the cats that tried to climb her skirts. She ate avidly, her teeth crunching on the filling. As she concluded the final bite, I thought I saw something black and stringy hanging from the corner of her mouth. I could not be quite sure of this, for in another moment her pink tongue had darted out and carried this last trace of her meal into her mouth.

I looked at Harry. He was watching with eyes glazed and starting from their sockets. His color was a ghastly shade of green. Then, as the cat woman came at him at an odd sort of trot, making her strange, delighted purring sound with considerable more vigor than I had ever heard it, Harry wheeled and ran across the shop to that little walled-off closet we call the cyanide room.

Certain metals have to be tempered in a cyanide bath, and in as much as the vent system to carry off the poisonous fumes is not adequate, Arnhausser had set it apart from the rest of the shop. When the cyanide treatment is in progress, no one ever entered the room without a gas mask. But today the cyanide vat was covered and cold. Harry closed the door behind him.

A FEW minutes later, when the cat woman was satisfied that there were no more handouts, she went away. I went to the cyanide room to look for Harry. I found him sitting on top of the cyanide vat, his face in his big hands. He looked up as I entered.

"She ate it," he said to me, in a flat, awed voice. "She ate the whole damned thing—with relish!"

"Listen, Harry," I said, "you're letting this thing get you down. I know you've been poisoning those cats. There isn't any sense to it. I guess I don't like the old dame any more than you do, but why be so childish about it? You didn't give her poison, did you?"

"Well, she ate it," he said. "That proves something. Only I don't know what. I wanted to see if she'd eat it."

"What was in that sandwich?" I asked. "You haven't poisoned her, too, have you?"

Harry shook his head. "Nope. But it proves something. You want to know what I made that sandwich out of? Two slices of bread and a hunk of spoiled raw liver!"

Thereafter, whenever the cat woman came into the shop, she headed straight for Harry. It was funny to see a big man like Harry Grove running in terror from a half-starved old woman who couldn't have hurt his little finger if she had stepped on it. But Harry ran just the same, always into the cyanide room to hide from her.

It was several weeks before I realized just what Harry was trying to do. And then it was too late.

August seems a funny time to start thinking about Christmas, but that's what Arnhausser had to do. His orders for holiday novelties and jewelry doubled in the summer season. This year a mail order concern wanted him to make some cheap watch parts that required a cyanide bath. So the cyanide vat was kept working over time, and in spite of all precautions the noxious vapor would some times get out into the shop and have us all coughing. One man's lungs were so weakened by the leaking gas that he caught pneumonia and was dead within a week.

One day, when we were all working at top capacity, I looked up from my

pattern carving to see the cat woman and her mangy brood enter by the back door. Everyone was so busy she was scarcely noticed—except by Harry. He was working with some finished candle stick castings, coating them with antimony, when the woman came in.

And at the first sound of her shuffling feet, he dropped behind a big wood case of castings. At first I thought that he was simply hunting for something on the floor, so I went right on with my work. In fact, I forgot Harry and the cat woman entirely until about ten minutes later.

I looked up to rest my eyes from the glint of the sharp tools with which I worked. Suddenly, Harry and the cat woman became conspicuous by their absence. I looked toward the spot where I had last seen Harry, and blinked. I couldn't see him now. I looked across the room toward the cyanide room, and the door of the chamber was encircled by a score or more of the lean-flanked cats. Something within me shouted. I couldn't quite grasp what the voice said, but its alarm spurred me to do something.

I DROPPED my tool, ran across the room to the casting case where I had last seen Harry. He was still there, but he had crawled around to the other side. He was squatting on his heels, his heavy shoulders shaking with a chuckle. His eyes, fixed in horrible fascination, were staring at the door of the cyanide room. I knew then what the cry within me was.

Somehow Harry Grove had murdered the cat woman!

With an oath, I leaped to the north wall of the shop where the metal treater's gas mask was. I pulled it from its hook and fitted it over my face. That took precious moments when I knew there were none to spare. I dashed across to the door of the cyanide room. In my hurry, I stepped on more than one cat and sent it squalling to another part of the shop. I seized the knob of the door and jerked it open.

For a moment the fumes from the steaming vat of poison clouded the goggles of the mask and I was unable to see anything. And then the toes of

my groping feet found something soft and yielding. I stooped, more than half blind though I was, and clawed at filthy garments, got a grip, dragged the woman out into the shop. One of the other men, alarmed at seeing the door of the cyanide room open, rushed across and closed it.

I threw off the mask, tossed it aside. Turning, I saw that Arnhausser and his employees were all huddled around the body—all but Harry Grove.

The cat woman was dead, of course. There was no alteration in her features. A face that had always been an idiot's mask can scarcely be hoped to take on an appearance of intelligence after death.

"A horrible accident!" Arnhausser moaned. "Der policemens at once get somepody kvick. A doctor! Somepody an ambulance call. Vot a thing to happen in mine shop!"

But this hadn't happened. No one realized it except me. This was murder, planned with unprecedented cunning. Day by day, Harry Grove had taught the cat woman to look in the cyanide chamber for him who had fed her. Harry had known that one day the cyanide vat would be open, pouring out its poisonous fumes.

And that day, he would hide elsewhere before the cat woman saw him. And she would go into the cyanide room and die. He had poisoned her as he had been poisoning her cats. But I couldn't prove it—I who had watched the deliberate proceedings, I who knew how he had whipped that diminutive brain of the idiot woman into the habit that had killed her.

If Harry knew that I knew this was murder, he didn't let on. He figured that if I went to the police it wouldn't hurt him at all. He hadn't raised a hand to the cat woman. He hadn't had anything to do with the cyanide vat. A psychologist might have made it murder, but not the police.

Nor did they. And there the matter dropped.

STILL, there was a sort of punishment. It was inside Harry. It was something that made him take to drink now as he had never taken to it

before. He drank with a deadly sort of purpose, as though alcohol would numb the pain of inward punishment. Outwardly, it appeared to do just that.

I wouldn't have known he was drunk if I hadn't been out to parties with him occasionally and knew what the effect was on him. Alcohol gave him a turtle's shell and he drew his head back inside it. He heard the orders Arnhausser gave him, he carried out those orders in a slower than usual fashion, but he never said anything. He got dumb drunk.

One day at work he pulled his head too far within his shell and passed out on his feet. He fell forward across his bench and cut a gash in his head. Arnhausser got to him before the rest of us did and Arnhausser it was who picked him up and stretched him on the floor.

Arnhausser looked at us all with his round, habitually surprised eyes. "Dis poy is pudding-headed mit der viskey, dot's vot!"

I was elected to take Harry to his little flat and put him to bed. When I got back to the shop, Arnhausser announced that Harry was through for this week. Maybe next week, if I went around and gave Harry a lecture, Harry could come back to work.

I didn't like my job of straightening Harry out. Because I knew that whatever other people thought of Harry, he was a damned, brutal killer—a cat poisoner, a woman poisoner. I made up my mind that if I went to see Harry, I'd tell him that I knew how he had killed the cat woman.

When I knocked at his door, at the end of the week and entered at the voiced invitation, I started to ask the emaciated man at the little dinner table if Harry Grove was there.

The man at the table looked at me and said: "Hi Maxie?"

This bag of bones sprawled out in front of the table was Harry Grove! His shoulders were still broad, but only because that was the way his underframe was made. His shoulders were so close to being fleshless that I thought I could see bulging spots on his coat where the bones would push through any moment. The skin on his

face, usually so smooth and tight, now hung in flabby folds. His eyes looked as though they would never sleep again.

"Harry!" I gasped. "Say, have you been sick?"

He shook his head. "Fit as—as hell. Say, have you anything to eat?"

I said I hadn't had any dinner yet, but I wouldn't think of imposing on his hospitality. It was evident he had ordered a meal for one from the delicatessen.

"Sit down," he insisted, in a way he had that made men obey. "Sit down and eat this damned food, will you? I don't want it."

I told him he looked like he needed it. "Maybe," I said, helping myself to potato salad and sliced tongue, "you're on a liquid diet."

He shook his head. "It didn't do any good. The more whiskey I took, the more I got to living down inside myself. It was driving me nuts."

He watched closely as I loaded a plate of food for myself. His lips were watering. He swallowed frequently. I have never seen a man starving to death, but I figured I came pretty close to it when I looked at Harry.

I said: "You can talk it over with me. Why did you kill her?"

He laughed. "Because I wanted to. I wanted to take a pipe wrench and beat her head in. I wanted to beat her skinny body to a pulp. She was driving me nuts, I tell you. She wasn't a woman. She was a damned cat. I hate cats! And I killed her like I did the other cats, only so the cops wouldn't see through it."

I nodded. "I knew that." I began to eat.

Harry leaned forward. His lips licked back from his teeth. His eyes stared at the fork full of food I lifted to my mouth. He said in a hushed, strained voice:

"You don't see anything, no—er—no cats?"

I scowled, chewed slowly. "No what?"

"Cats, damn you. Don't you know what a cat is?" And then his voice dropped. "Maybe it's just when I'm

alone." Something like hope flickered in his eyes. He drew himself up as though he were about to make some supreme effort. Then his two hands pounced on the plate of tongue.

No sooner had he touched the meat with his fingers than his hands jerked back as though he had rubber bands for tendons in his arms. He shook his head. He looked at the backs of his hands with the great swollen veins on them. He rubbed the back of his left hand with the palm of his right.

I put down the fork. "What's the matter with you?"

He looked at me, smiled wryly. "Didn't you notice? It's like that always. Every time I reach my hand out to pick up some food, the damned cat jumps up on the table and gouges its claws into the back of my hand. I haven't had a bite to eat since—since I killed that woman. Once I got the food to my mouth and the cat flew into my face. I thought it would gouge out my eyes and I'd be all alone with it in the dark—"

I pushed back from the table. "You're crazy," I said, my voice harsh because what I had heard had drawn my nerves taut. "Either that or you've got the delirium tremens."

He shook his head. "I haven't had a drop of whiskey. Not a drop. But," his sleepless eyes wandered about the room, "do you see a cat around here?"

I laughed; at least, that's what the sound that came from my throat sounded like.

"No," I said, "there's no cat. You've just let this thing get you down. I came here to tell you that Arnhausser wants you to come back to work tomorrow. He wants you to put antimony on some of those Dutch silver cigarette chests. He says nobody gets the smooth coat that you do."

Harry smiled. He stood up. "Okay. That's fine. I'll be there. Tell you what's the matter with me—my nerves are unstrung. Work is just the thing. I've been sitting around here too damned long, thinking."

THE next day he was at work at his bench. His eyes looked the same way, and I could have sworn he hadn't

had a moment's sleep on the night before. I could see he was working desperately, fighting the thing within that was driving him mad. Somehow, I knew he was going to lick it.

One of the cat woman's pets, a big black and white spotted tom with the scars of many a battle on his body and with only one baleful eye, had made the shop his home. That was all right with Arnhausser, because the cat kept down the mice. While we were at work, the cat would prowl around the shop and mind its own business.

I saw Harry watching the cat out of the corner of his eye, and then I saw Harry's brow wrinkle up as he put himself to concentrating on coating the cast metal boxes with antimony. That's how I knew he was going to lick the thing within him—the way he refused to pay any attention to the cat.

Noon time came, and most of the fellows in the shop had their lunches with them. Harry didn't have any lunch; he said he was on a diet. He just sat around and kept his hands in his pockets to keep from grabbing the food from the other fellows and wolfing it. The man had character all right, to sit there and watch everybody eat when he was starving to death himself.

Just about the time most of the rest of us were finishing up our food, in came the woman's spotted tom cat. It had something in its mouth. With deliberate, haughty steps, it came over to where Harry was sitting and crouched over its prize. The thing the cat had was a mouse, and it started to eat it right in front of Harry.

Harry staggered to his feet and across the room to the alley. I heard the agonized, retching sounds he made out there. Then he came back. His face had a greenish look, his lips were drawn back in an imitation of a smile, and his teeth were grinding. He went back, leaned against the wall with arms folded and watched the cat eat. He made himself watch the cat eat. And then I knew he had this inner thing licked.

But getting hold of himself had slowed down his work considerably, so that he wasn't half through with the Dutch silver cigarette boxes. He told

Arnhausser that if it was all right with him, he'd work some that night on them. Arnhausser liked to see a man stage a comeback as well as anybody else, so he patted Harry's bony shoulder and said it was all right with him. I knew that Harry was going to lick the inner thing again if it came back at night when he was alone. He was going to lick it with work.

The next morning, when the rest of us came to the shop, we found that Harry had had a lunch sent in to him in the night. Part of half a dozen sandwiches were on a paper plate and another part of them were scattered across Harry's work bench, leading up to Harry's open mouth.

Harry's head rested on the bench, his two arms sprawled out in front of him. On the back of his right hand were long, deep cat scratches. Lying on the bench, not a yard away, was the spotted tom cat, its head on its paws, its one baleful eye watching us as we looked

over Harry's dead body.

It hit me a lot harder than it did the rest of the fellows, because I knew the whole story—or as much of it, I guess, as any man is supposed to know. While the rest of the men were falling over themselves in their excitement, I was staring in horror at the tom cat. The cat had claws like sabers. I mean *like* sabers. Because they weren't the color a cat's claws ought to be. They were silvery, like saber blades.

Little tracks of silvery stuff traced across the bench from the cat to Harry's clawed right hand and from the cat to the open tray of antimony that Harry had been working with. That silvery stuff on the cat's claws was antimony. And when that stuff gets into the blood stream, even through a little scratch like a cat might make, you're finished.

I don't know how the police are going to figure this one out, but that's how it is.



IN THE NEXT ISSUE

THE HORROR IN THE CRIB

A Novelet of Dark Illusion

By ARTHUR LEO ZAGAT

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BLADE

FOR GEM
AND EVER-READY RAZORS

George Andrews Was Skeptical—Until the Spirit of the Medium Spoke to Him From Within His Own Being!



Andrews saw the head of a corpse bloodily severed, floating ahead of the body

SOUL OF TERROR

By **DON JOSEPH**

A SHADOW bell tolled slowly in an unreal distance. There was an impressive moment of silence.

Then in the enveloping darkness a transparent and ominous white figure materialized and began to float through the air.

Several persons gasped audibly and one of the women screamed, smothering the already supernatural atmosphere of the séance with a blanket of suspense. From the mouth of the rigid psychic, George Andrews saw a white foamy substance climbing up tenuously toward the ceiling. He felt

Margot's fingers squeezing his hand tightly as if she were clinging to him for protection from the threatening spirits.

"Don't worry," he whispered to her. "There's nothing to it."

He sensed the sudden change in her even before she withdrew her hand frigidly and shifted away from him in her seat.

He smiled wryly, and then grinned as he caught the tense silhouettes of some of the men in the party. So they were taken in too!

Andrews had protested against this visit to the medium in the first place.

Being a healthy young man physically, and an engineer who concerned himself with the material world, he had little patience with the so-called world beyond the senses. But about a dozen of the guests at the Tanakawa Hotel had insisted that it was a better way of passing the evening than going to the one movie in the resort village, and the added insistence of Margot Mallory had induced him to forego his reluctance and come along.

He knew that she was deeply interested in communication with the dead, and it had flattered Andrews' ego a little to think that he could show up this medium and talk Margot out of her mystical leanings. She had come to Lake Tanakawa only a few days ago with her uncle and a companion, but Andrews had heard a lot in advance about her wealth and beauty from those at the summer resort who knew her in the city. He wasn't very much impressed by the wealth, since he had a good job and a promising future, but her warm blond beauty, her athletic grace on the tennis courts and on the diving board had appealed to him immediately.

The absence from the party of John Stonewall, her uncle and guardian, was an additional reason for him to lay aside his prejudices against spiritualists. Of course, Margot's companion, Mrs. Smith—an older woman who had been close to Margot's mother before the girl was left an orphan—was joining them, but she was a good sport and got along well with the younger crowd. The uncle, however, Andrews could not abide. Although in his early forties with a husky build, Stonewall already had the disposition of an old man, and this was the first time since their arrival that he had allowed his niece out of his sight after the sun went down. Why he had come to a gay summer resort Andrews couldn't imagine.

THE distant beating of drums in a savage rhythm and the moaning of the medium as though she were in mortal agony brought his mind back to the séance. But the darkness and his flagrant disbelief in the super-

natural agencies set him to thinking about the earlier events of the evening. He wondered what they had told Mrs. Smith. She had been given a separate "reading" downstairs while the rest of the party was drinking a highly perfumed tea and eating oriental candy that couldn't have been too clean judging from the gritty taste it left in his mouth. He was also curious about the hour they had set for Margot's reading. He had not had a chance—

Suddenly the idle track of his thoughts stopped dead. He listened tensely. Someone was talking to him. It was a voice whispering—but no man was within whispering distance of him! He turned his head from side to side to determine from which direction the sound was coming, but the intensity was equal from all directions.

Despite his hard-boiled skepticism he felt his heartbeat quicken, a cold breath of air blow his hair upward on his head. The medium had warned them that her spirit would speak to them from within their own souls—and it actually seemed to be doing so!

It was like some mystic slide he had ventured on. He was accepting the first premises of the supernatural and already he felt himself sliding out of time and space into some new sphere beyond disbelief. Unseen hands were touching him and all the spiritual appearances began to take on a ghostly meaning for him. This voice was really coming to him from within himself, from within his palpitating heart or his whirling head. In a last effort to keep his footing on reality he held his fingers to his ears—but the voice continued in increasing intensity.

"You have sinned," it sighed. "You have sinned and are even now planning new sins against those you love. If you have come here in doubt and derision, you shall leave in a greater agony of soul and fear than it is given most people to know . . . purify your heart with prayer. . . . Unless you cast forth your evil doubts the cold oblivion of utter darkness will haunt your footsteps. . . . Remember this. . . . What I have said to

you. . . . My warnings"

Andrews knew he wasn't hysterical or doped, knew he wasn't dreaming. Yet this voice was coming out of his mind like the sound of his own thoughts!

Next to him Margot was sighing. She caught his arm, sharp nails cutting into his flesh through his sweater. A woman in front began crying softly. Everyone in the audience was tense, electrified, terrified. These were things people hadn't believed . . . hadn't dared believe. But they were happening! Somewhere, Andrews thought morbidly, weaving these mysteries into a gleaming web of madness, were the brittle fingers of death.

Then the voice inside him began speaking to different people in the crowd, mentioning no names but telling them facts about their lives, warning them against future disasters. Andrews was dimly aware that each of them was hearing the same hollow whisperings, the same groans, as though the spirit addressing them were in its own agonies of repentance, a repentance it was insistently urging on them. A dull aching in his palm made him realize that his own fingernails were cutting into his flesh.

The voice grew more powerful, more compelling, as it held him in a vise of unwavering attention. He waited tensely for it to speak directly to him, to tell him the hidden secrets of his past life.

His breath was bated in anticipation of the horrors it might foresee in his future when a piercing scream fraught with murder and madness echoed repeatedly through the corridors of his mind. Was it the voice screaming? Was it himself? What was inside of him now and what outside? He shook his head like a punch-drunk fighter trying to get his bearings, like a sleep-drugged person slowly awakening.

The moaning of the medium became louder as he saw her twisting uneasily in her trance. The screams were coming from one of the young married women down in front. The bells took up their ululations in the dim distance and the voice stopped.

Lights came on but they were not the lights that had originally welcomed them to the room. In their purple glare Andrews recognized the deathlike illusion of mercury arc lamps. Six couples looked at each other, completely shaken by their experience, still not sure how far they had returned from the land between life and death.

"You must come back separately," the psychic said as the purple light faded and the life-giving color of the electric bulbs came on. "Separately, the spirit can speak to you out of your heart. And woe to him who speaks against this knowledge!"

AS they were coming back down the narrow tree-lined path leading to the hotel, no one uttered a word. Margot drew Andrew back to the rear of the straggling column.

"Well, George," she said quietly, "do you still think there's nothing to it?" There was a note of triumph in her voice that she couldn't entirely suppress, and Andrews had to admit that she had good cause to feel triumphant.

The ringing bells and the visual incarnations of the spirits were not too difficult for an engineer to figure out. Mundane trickery like that was recognizable. But he couldn't understand, couldn't begin to guess how that voice had come to him from within his own mind. It couldn't have been hypnosis. He knew that he had been just as normal in that room as he was at present under the brilliant summer moon. What then was it?

The very fact that Andrews admitted he was troubled by the performance seemed to harden Margot's conviction as they rejoined the others. Mrs. Smith put her arm around the girl's waist and tried to be skeptical. Andrews could see the muscles in her jaw tighten as she told them that the medium had warned her of an impending disaster unless she left the summer resort immediately.

"But I'm not leaving Lake Tanakawa for any spirits," she concluded resolutely.

Andrews was vaguely perturbed,

but Margot immediately became apprehensive.

"Oh, you must leave! You can't ignore that warning. You've got to leave tonight!" She stopped, her lovely face alive with mingled emotions of terror and solicitude. "Don't you see that it's all real, all true? I'm going back at midnight for a seance myself. I was told to, and I'm not defying the fates!"

Andrews looked at her quickly. Returning at midnight to the medium? He felt a deep foreboding surge within him. The threat to Mrs. Smith suddenly became more real to him. Mediums usually put their forecasts far enough in the future so that you couldn't call them to account, but this warning was too brief and immediate. It spelled danger, ominous danger. Mrs. Smith, though, chose to ignore it.

"Margot, please," Andrew said, taking the girl's arm. "Don't go back tonight to that place. Some other time perhaps, but not tonight."

"Why not?" she demanded shortly.

"It's hard for someone like me to explain," he said hesitantly. "I'm used to explaining things on a reasonable basis and I just can't do that here. But there's something about all this I don't like. I can't say why, but it—Oh, hell, what's the use! But I wish you'd promise not to just the same," he finished lamely as he sensed her growing irritation.

"I don't see how any 'engineer'—she underlined the word with elaborate sarcasm—"who denies the evidence of his senses can give any helpful advice. And if you really liked me you wouldn't make such a silly request!" She stopped, her eyes sparkling with anger, and turned her head aside.

Mrs. Smith smiled at Andrews sympathetically and motioned him to go on without them. He shrugged his shoulders helplessly and somberly walked ahead.

WHEN the alarm which he had carefully set went off at a quarter to twelve that night, George Andrews awakened from a fitful sleep of spirits and ectoplasm and ringing bells, and that same insistent voice.

He was still loggy with slumber as he thought for a moment that he saw a ghost walking majestically across the room. He had to rub his eyes a couple of times to discover that it was only the brilliant moonlight streaming in through the window and falling on the wall. Far down below it glowed in the mirror of the quiet lake.

"Hell," he muttered disgustedly, "what's happening to me?" He turned on the light savagely, and started to make his way across the room to the wash bowl with the same impatience. His foot caught in the lamp cord and he pitched forward sharply.

There was a lurid green sputter as the evidently loose plug was half-pulled out of the wall and jammed into the socket, shorting the circuit. Andrews swore under his breath and got to his feet. He couldn't remember striking his jaw on the bureau next to him but it hurt like blazes. He rubbed it ruefully while he rinsed his mouth at the basin.

Down the deserted hallway he rapped gently on Mrs. Smith's door. Between the two of them, he felt sure, they could persuade Margot to stay in bed instead of making midnight visits to strange spiritualists. There was no answer to his knocks, and the door yielded easily as he tentatively turned the knob.

Inside, the room was dark except for the light of the moon falling across an empty bed. The window leading to the fire-escape was open.

Andrews felt uneasy as he turned on the light, and when he saw a tiny spot of blood on the rumpled sheets his alarm became definite. The medium's ominous warning was being fulfilled! He dashed out of the room and plunged down the hall to Margot's room. That spot of blood was a grim signal!

Margot's room was empty, although there was no sign of struggle there. She must have left early.

Outside, when he reached the edge of the hotel lawn, he saw a white figure far ahead of him down the road. Without being able to see clearly enough at that distance he was certain it was Margot. No one else would be

out alone on the road at that hour. He started running to catch up to her, and then, while she was still floating in and out of the black shadows and bright moonlight, he saw her turn in the gate that led to the medium's cottage.

A strange chill raced along his spine. As he continued headlong down the road he wondered whether he shouldn't go back and wake her uncle. But there was no time. Whatever sinister fate had befallen Mrs. Smith might be waiting for Margot. All the gradually mounting fears of the past hours crashed down on him.

Past the house he ran, intending to go on to the cottage where Sergeant Hill, the state trooper, lived. He hadn't realized until then how much he had come to care for the lovely blond girl he had met but a few days ago. It hit him suddenly, stopping him in his stride. In his fear for her safety, fear that Hill would demand explanations, would be incredulous, he determined to go through with this alone.

He started back along the road, sticking close to the protective shadows of the trees. Abruptly he paused, and rubbed his eyes. Ahead of him he saw something white and much larger than the slim figure of a woman float across a corner of the cottage back yard—and suddenly disappear into thin air right in the glare of the moonlight!

At the same time, off in the valley, a bell tolled. Andrews counted while the hair on the back of his neck tried to stand up straight.

"Twelve," he said grimly. "The witching hour."

Then the uncanny stillness of the night was broken again by the distant howling of a dog, followed quickly by the faint sharp echo of a woman's scream. Andrews couldn't tell where it came from—it was too faint—but he decided that it was time for him to act.

of moonlight. He landed up against the side of the house breathing hard and waiting for the sound of a window opening that might herald someone's taking a shot at him.

He would have welcomed a shot. There would be something sharp and real about it. But there was no sound. He tried one window but it was locked. Those of the second floor would probably be open, he figured. He looked around and found a convenient old tree with one branch extending to a window ledge.

The window slid open almost noiselessly and he climbed inside. A reflection of the moonlight through the pane on the opposite side of the house gave his eyes, already accustomed to the darkness, enough light to see by. He found himself in the room where the séance had taken place. So far so good. But he couldn't help wondering how great really were the powers of that medium? If the mysterious inner voice were a true indication, she and those with her were just playing with him, letting him enter the house as a trap.

The idea of a trap began to haunt him, making him glance backward anxiously. He began feeling his way along the far wall, where no reflected light was penetrating, sliding carefully to avoid any low objects, keeping both hands pressed tightly against the surface. His right hand touched a piece of molding and suddenly, before he could take stock of what was happening, a section of the wall opened up in front of him. A secret door! Was that, he asked himself, how the spirits really got in the room during the séance?

He slipped through and closed the panel behind him. It flashed through his mind that this was only the opening of another door in the trap prepared for him, and he felt his flesh creep apprehensively. It recalled sensations he had had as a child when he had investigated a "haunted" house.

There was a presence behind him, around him—but with the door shut, his reason told him, obviously no one could get in the room. He lit a match

TO get to one of the shadowed windows of the place he had to cut through a corner of the woods and then make a run for it through a patch

and saw he was in a small chamber with a table in the middle of it filled with some electrical apparatus. Next to it was an ordinary filing cabinet.

The air in the tiny room was getting close. Andrews went over to the window to open it a bit and leaped back in the darkness. Out on the back lawn he saw a figure in white, a hood over its head—and behind it, almost nude in the moonlight, walked Margot in a trancelike state! In the corner of the lawn he had seen from the road, a trap door covered with grass slowly opened. The two went down through it, and the door closed silently above them.

Memorizing the spot, Andrews hurriedly tried to open the sliding panel. But although it had yielded easily enough from the outside, he worked himself into a feverish sweat to find the combination that would open it from the inside. He realized suddenly that the trap had sprung behind him and turned to the window as his only escape—but it was a long drop to the ground.

He was deciding how best to make it without breaking a leg when he suddenly sensed something was in the room with him, behind him. No inner voice was telling him this but his sixth sense was. He pictured a trap closing on a mouse, and stood up slowly as the thing moved toward his back. Then, quickly, he turned his head.

He had been expecting this subconsciously all the time. He knew it. It was nothing like the ghosts he had read about, this thing that was drifting inexorably toward him. If it had been it would have offered something at least familiar. It was a white formless mass of light. A luminous amoeba magnified millions of times.

All the abysmal terror of his primitive ancestors from a dim and forgotten past rose up in him, grasping his reason in a cold numbing fear. He swung blindly with his fist, but the blow seemed to pass harmlessly through the "stuff" of the spirit, and the ghost appeared to unfold, rising above his head and falling slowly around him in a spidery web of dull

light. Something slid around his throat while he fought for air, and bright spots danced before his eyes.

WHEN Andrews regained consciousness he was aware only of an aching throat and head and the damp smell of the earth he was lying on. His hands and feet were tied and a gag choked him. He began cursing bitterly for having lost his head up in the house. Much of what had happened to him was beginning to make some sense, or else, if he was wrong, he was really face to face with that world that is said to lie beyond our senses and our reason.

But whichever world it was he was dealing with, he knew that those brittle fingers of death were weaving the woof ever closer about him.

In the intense darkness he heard sobbing from the other side of the room. He muttered a brief thanksgiving that Margot was still alive. He had to do something to help her—he had to. What, he didn't know yet, didn't know exactly was what he was up against.

Suddenly a light began dancing in mid-air, growing larger and larger until Andrews recognized his ethereal assailant. The sound of Margot's sobbing had ceased and the apparition began to talk in sepulchral tones.

"Here, in the underworld of my tomb," it intoned hollowly, "have you met to learn my secret, after which you will join me, my daughter, in the world of the hereafter. Your death will be harsh but no more horrible than was mine in my laboratory. The afterlife is restless and unhappy, but I will have you with me to quiet my longing." The apparition gradually faded and Andrews, who had lain rigid during its presence in the chamber, began to work frantically at his bonds.

Margot's renewed sobbing was cut off abruptly by an unearthly moaning. Andrews turned his head in time to see a ghastly luminescent body start to drift across the room. It was the corpse of a woman! His heart froze, sweat oozed from his forehead, dripped along his contorted face.

And shivering horror rushed across him like the chill of ice along a warm back as he saw that the head of the corpse, bloodily severed from the neck, was floating ahead of the body!

Its eyes were open, and blood was dripping from the hacked and mangled throat partially covered by the long black hair of the head. Across the room it slipped, about four feet above the ground, all the terror of violent death evident in its ghastly remains, and then vanished as the two occupants held their breaths.

In the dark recesses of the room Andrews heard Margot gasping. And then her screams—the screams of a woman who is losing her mind through the slow inroads of overpowering fear—reverberated through the underground chamber.

"It's the body of Anne Smith!" she shrieked. "It's Anne Smith!"

Andrews shuddered at the thought of the fate awaiting them. As Margot strove to get control of herself again and her screams diminished to sobs, he struggled desperately to slip the gag enough to tell her of his presence and to quiet her.

The ghost reappeared, accompanied by the same inhuman moans that had come with it on its first visit. But instead of talking in tones audible to Andrews it was speaking to Margot from inside herself! Unlike the voice of the seance, he could hear no word of it himself. But he knew that it was talking to her because she began to respond, to plead with it for mercy, begging in agonized accents that her death be made swift and merciful.

In all the horror of the unnatural scene Andrews had to admire the girl's grit. Threatened with death, with a ghastly, inhuman sort of death, she was still keeping her nerve, not allowing herself to break again.

The apparition faded as it went toward her, and Andrews heard her get up and stumble across the room. A column of hazy light fell downward across her round shoulders, highlighting her curving figure. She walked as though she were going to her execution, and as the light died out at the exit to the room, a hideous

sneering laugh crashed through the silence of the darkness.

THE echoes of the insane laughter made Andrews' flesh crawl while he listened to Margot's footsteps die away down a long corridor. Before he could transform his desperation for the girl's safety into action, hard cold fingers clutched at his throat, shutting off his wind. Fingers that belonged to no body!

His thoughts raced madly. Were they killing him before they disposed of Margot? Margot! He had to do something—he couldn't just let himself be murdered. And, as spots danced before his eyes, he went limp, imitating unconsciousness. The steely clutch relaxed just as he felt himself slipping into darkness, and a grisly chuckle sounded above him in the night.

When his breath came freely again he began working furiously at the ropes on his wrists, gritting his teeth against the pain. One hand had started to slip out before, and although he felt he was taking part of the skin along with the rope he got his arms into a crooked position where he could get some leverage and tugged, panting, sweating, expecting those merciless dead fingers any moment to strangle him again.

Then suddenly he was free! But his fingers were too numb to do more than fumble at the tight knot at his ankles.

After a few minutes he felt in his pocket for matches. They hadn't, fortunately bothered taking them from him. Clumsily he lighted one, and watched the rope burn through against the tender flesh of his raw leg.

The opening from the room led to a sort of narrow corridor to his right. Crawling along it, keeping close to the wall, he felt an iron grating against the palms of his hands. Far below him came strange hissing sounds and the terrible odor of new death.

Quietly, he lay down full-length and felt the far side of the grating. It was about three feet wide and six long, flush with the floor. He listened

tensely until he was sure there was no one else in the hall, slipped the matches out of his pocket and struck one. What he saw made him turn his head in revulsion.

Extending about four feet below the grating was a cement cell, coffin-shaped. And on the concrete flooring, overrun with a hundred starving and gigantic sewer rats, was the nude and mutilated body of Mrs. Smith! The body they had seen floating across the room! Parts of the bone were already uncovered by the greasy creatures that were gnawing and tearing and bloating themselves. A foot had disappeared, leaving nothing but the shining bone.

The bottom of the pit was painted black and in one corner were two bottles of sulphuric acid, neatly labeled.

"The rats to eat the flesh, the acid to dissolve the bones," snapped through Andrews' mind. He wondered whether they had yet shown this sight to Margot. His free fist clenched and unclenched spasmodically.

The match guttered and burned his fingers, but he couldn't let go as he stared in nauseated fascination at two of the rats that were rolling the severed head over. As the match went out he saw one of them tearing the cheek away, leaving the deadly whiteness of the skull showing through.

A deep wild fury coursed through him and drove him on to desperate speed. He followed the wall around a corner and felt his hands come in contact with a flooring of cement, figured that he must be in the cellar of the house. He wasn't guessing now what was happening to Margot. He knew now that whatever it was, it wouldn't be murder—but it could be something even worse!

About twenty feet from him was a door, a light shining under it. He felt around for a weapon but found nothing. A lighted match showed another door open immediately to his right. A dull glow inside the room guided him to a table, and under the flickering light of the match he saw a piece of flimsy cheesecloth, stiff to the touch. When the match burned out

the cloth glowed . . . like—like the ghost. Andrews snapped his fingers as it came to him. If he only hadn't lost his head upstairs, he wouldn't have been fooled so easily!

HE turned and whipped across the cellar to the closed door, pausing there on his knees listening. The only sound he could hear clearly was the familiar sob of Margot, a little more hysterical than it was when he last heard it, a little more uncontrolled. He listened a moment more, seething with fury, his angry fingers twitching at shapeless air.

He knew now that whatever fiends were on the other side of the door—and he had a pretty good idea who they were and what they were after—there was nothing supernatural about them. And he had a fairly definite explanation of the spirit voice he had heard.

Andrews stood up slowly. There was no missing this time, or the hell Margot had gone through would be nothing compared to what they had in store for her. As for himself, a slip would mean more company for the rats. He took a deep breath, and swung the door open, propelling himself into the room.

The fierceness of his rush carried him across the chamber to the man standing above Margot before the fellow could make a move to defend himself. The two of them went down in a writhing heap as the woman medium ran over to help her partner with her bare hands.

Andrews ignored her tuggings, futile against the energy of his anger, and pounded the twisting figure under him until his fists were aching knobs, until he felt the boiling spring of fury simmering down within him. The medium, fearing the same fate for herself, started to run from the room. He caught her before she had taken four strides, and shoved her spinning to fall next to the still figure of the man. Andrews stumbled over to Margot.

When the bandage was pulled off her eyes and her hands untied, she saw the young engineer leaning

over her, smiling reassuringly. A lantern glowed brightly in the room. "George! Oh, George!" was all she whispered, but her hand, grasping his tightly, uttered volumes. He held her tenderly and made a gesture toward the man lying on the floor.

Margot stared in fascinated horror at the battered features of John Stonewall.

"Do you understand why they were doing this to you?" Andrews asked gently, and then went on without waiting for her answer. "If you went mad, as they intended, your uncle as guardian of your estate and then of your person would get complete control of your fortune. And even if you'd regained your sanity after that you'd have never got out of the asylum. It's easier and safer to steal from an insane person than it is to get rid of a normal one. Mrs. Smith had to go to clear the path for this devilish plan, and her body conveniently supplied the authentic note of terror." He decided to say nothing about the final horrible disposition of the corpse.

Margot was silent for a moment.

"My father," she finally said, "died in his laboratory a year ago under very suspicious circumstances although it seemed that he'd been killed by his own chemicals. Now I wonder—"

Andrews tried to draw her thoughts away from the subject, and after securing Stonewall and the medium induced her to accompany him to the State Trooper's house. The walk refreshed them both, and back at the house again, with the sergeant, Andrews took them upstairs to the secret room.

"Well, I'll be damned!" Sergeant Hill said when he saw the layout. He just stood scratching his head in amazement as Andrews pointed to the table with the electrical apparatus on it.

"That little radio sending set there," Andrews said, "is what caused all the trouble. It certainly had me puzzled for awhile. But if you examine some

of the candy that was given us before we came up to the seance earlier this evening, you'll find that it had a lot of particles in it from this can." He held the can high in the air so they could read the label, "Carborundum Abrasive," on it.

"When some of that lodged on one of the fillings in our teeth our mouths actually became receiving sets similar to the old crystal sets we used to have years ago. This phenomenon is fairly well known to radio engineers today. I didn't catch on until I had a chance, down in the cellar there, to recall and connect two facts: that the candy was gritty, and that my jaw hurt me suddenly when a light socket shorted earlier. I didn't hear the voice talking to Margot in their subterranean room there because I had already washed the stuff off my teeth.

"Of course with the teeth acting as receiving sets the sound would travel up the bones of the face to the ear, and it would sound as though it came from within your own head. All the rest of the performance was just so much obvious trickery, pulled under cover of darkness or by manipulating lights and suspended wires. Although I'll admit that once I began to believe it, I was scared stiff for awhile." He grinned at Margot. "And there's the story of your psychic with her supernatural powers."

When they got to the road Hill jerked his badly shaken prisoners to a halt.

"Maybe you'd like me to see you home safely?" he suggested to the girl.

Andrews was about to speak up when Margot cut in.

"I don't think I have anything to fear with George around—even if we should meet a ghost. Do you, Sergeant?" And for the first time since she had met him she threw her arms around Andrews' neck and pressed her lips fervently, thankfully, and passionately against his.

"Well, I'll be damned!" said Hill, scratching his head again. "And right out on the highway too!"



The DEVIL'S BROOD

Terror Stalks the Hills When Creatures Accursed Battle Over a Grim Legacy With Bestial, Insensate Fury!

By **HENRY KUTTNER**

Author of "Invasion from the Fourth," "Murder for Fun" etc.

CHAPTER I

The Gargoyles

ILENE HAVLIN was dying. The pale glow of a bedside lamp outlined the tiny, shriveled face, with brittle wisps of white hair curling over the bony forehead. Faded blue eyes opened. The woman whispered almost inaudibly:

"Laing—get out. I want to—talk with Stephen."

Dr. Felix Laing, a wiry, dark-faced man of forty or so, quirked his saturnine eyebrows at Steve Page.

"Call me if—" he began in an undertone.

He didn't finish. He didn't have to. Only the power of an indomitable will had kept Ilene Havlin alive for the past few weeks.

The doctor went out. Page moved closer to the bed. The woman's withered mouth moved. She seemed to gather strength from some secret reservoir deep within her worn-out body.

"I wish your father had come, Stephen Page."

"I'm sorry, Mrs. Havlin. He's in Europe."

"So. And I can't wait for his return.

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Joe Havlin crouched above two prostrate figures on the carpet, his huge hand clutching a knife

I will die tonight. But"—the faded eyes flamed—"not till I have seen the others! Not till then!"

Page moved his broad shoulders uneasily. Junior partner in his father's law firm, he'd had little experience with such cases. Old Rand Page had been the Havlin attorney for fifty years, but he had never told his son much of the business he had transacted. Often Steve had felt that there was some mystery about the Havlins, and his impression was confirmed now when the dying woman went on:

"You advertised? They are all coming?"

"Yes. All the Havlins. They'll be here tonight."

Involuntarily Page glanced at the window. Luckily it was not raining, though clouds had loomed heavy and ominous over the house that day. Luckily, for the little village of Spuyten was two miles away, and the Havlins, when they arrived on the bus would have to walk up a narrow mountain trail to their destination. He wondered why Mrs. Havlin had built this great house generations ago in the heart of the Alleghenies, so far distant from any habitation.

With uncanny intuition the woman read his thought.

"I came into these mountains years ago, Stephen, when my husband died. I wished to sever all connections with the family. They are—cursed." An ironic smile twisted the pale lips at Page's expression. "Don't be a fool, Stephen! Do I look like a superstitious old woman? No, it's the curse of Mendel—not of Satan. Heredity. . . . Give me a drink."

PAGE obeyed. He felt a surge of repulsion he could not control as the woman's hand tightened over his, and he noticed, for the first time, that between each finger grew—webs! Folds of skin, grayish and mottled with scabrous encrustations. He forced his gaze away.

"There's bad blood in the family," Mrs. Havlin said. "All of my descendants—all—are tainted. You will see when you meet them. And there's hatred, too. They hate one another, and they hate me. Though probably

few have seen each other before tonight. I—I sickened of my children, Stephen. They were monsters—accursed. I gave them money and sent them away. Their children I have never seen, though your father made investigation for me. I had hoped one would be clean—clean and whole. . . ."

Without a sound Ilene Havlin went limp. Her eyes rolled up, her jaw fell, and froth drooled from the slack lips. Hastily Page called the doctor. Laing came in, glanced at the unconscious woman, and went to his satchel on the table. He administered a hypodermic, made a hasty examination.

"Not much life left in her, I'm afraid," he said slowly. "The operation a few months ago weakened her fatally. Each time the comas last longer, and the lucid periods are shorter. She may wake up again, and she may not. God knows!"

The doorbell rang. Page went downstairs, the steps creaking noisily under his feet. Adrian, the butler and man-of-all-work, was opening the door, his uniform hanging loosely on the gaunt old frame.

Standing in the shadow at the foot of the staircase, Page saw the butler hesitate, make a little gasping noise, and draw back. Then his figure seemed to stiffen. He opened the door wider and stood aside.

A man and a woman stood on the porch. The woman marched in. Light pitilessly revealed her dumpy, monstrous form. Not over five feet high, she must have weighed at least two hundred pounds. She was horribly, incredibly fat. Her black, shapeless clothing sagged under the weight of bloated, unhealthy flesh. Her beady, sparkling eyes were almost hidden in encroaching pads of fat, and her over-red mouth was incongruously tiny in that dead-white mask.

"Will!" she said hoarsely. "Come in!"

The man shuffled forward. A youth, rather, not more than twenty years old, yet it was difficult to guess his age. He was huge, broad-shouldered, but not fat. Great muscles bulged the ill-fitting coat. With a shock of surprised horror Page saw that the man's head was abnormally small, drawn to a bald,

hairless point. Thick, blubbery lips pouted. A "pinhead"—a microcephalic idiot!

"Well?" the woman snarled. "What are you gaping at, you old fool? Want to see our invitation?"

Swiftly Page came forward.

"See if the parlor's comfortable," he said to Adrian, who seemed completely at a loss. "Shake up the fire, while you're at it."

As the butler vanished Page turned to the guests.

"I'm Stephen Page," he said. "I wrote you—"

"Lil Shadick's my name," the woman said. "This is my son, Will."

LIL SHADICK, granddaughter of old Ilene Havlin. And now Page guessed something of what lay behind the cryptic reference to the "Mendelian curse." A frightful heredity, a black taint in the blood, had left its indelible mark on these two before him.

Will made a little whimpering sound. He tugged at his mother's sleeve, bending low to do so.

"Cold. . . ."

"Yes. Sure it's cold. A long hike up here, Page, in the night air. You said something about a fire?"

"That's right. Come in the parlor."

"I'll do that. And I want some information, too. The old woman's dying, eh?"

"Your grandmother is dying," Page said coldly, leading the way into a great, high-raftered room where a fire blazed redly on the hearth. "I regret—"

"The devil with your regrets!" Lil Shadick snapped, her paper-white jowls bobbing. "She should have died before she had children. At least she's making amends now. Leaving her money to the family, eh? How much will I get?"

Page couldn't help the grim tightening of his lips. But, conscious of Ilene Havlin's instructions, he simply said:

"About eight thousand dollars, as I wrote you. And the same amount goes to your son."

"Mamma," the giant whimpered. "What's he mean? Can I go to school now?"

Lil Shadick's black eyes went icy cold.

"Sure," she said gently. "Go over

to the fire now, Will, and warm yourself." And, as he hesitated: "Hear me?"

"Yes'm." The giant shambled away, crouched on his hams before the hearth.

Mrs. Shadick turned back to Page. Her voice was low and deadly in its intensity.

"School—you heard him? I tried to send him to school. They wouldn't take him at first. I got down on my knees, arguing with the swine. Finally I had my way. And the kids—little beasts—made life such a hell for Will that I had to keep him home. You see what he's like, Page. He needs special care, doctors. Things I couldn't afford to give him. And when I wrote Ilene Havlin for help—my grandmother!—you know what she said? That I should have strangled Will at birth."

The fat face was hideous with fury.

"Know what else she said?" the woman went on. "That it wasn't too late. That I should push Will off a cliff some dark night. That the whole family ought to be exterminated. I notice she kept herself alive as long as she could, damn her!"

With relief Page heard the jangle of the doorbell. He excused himself and went out in the hall. Adrian wasn't in sight, so Page opened the door. At first sight the man standing on the porch seemed normal, a tall, bulky figure in a dark business suit. Then Page noticed the huge feet, the monstrous, hypertrophied hands, dangling from ragged cuffs, and the heavy, undershot jaw.

The man extended a letter.

"You're Mr. Page? I'm Joe Havlin—Mrs. Havlin's grandson."

"Glad you're here," Page said. "Come in."

"He led the way into the parlor. At the door Page hesitated, turning sharply. He had heard no sound of the other man's following, yet Joe Havlin stood at his shoulder, his heavy face blank. Despite the great feet, he moved as noiselessly as a cat.

DR. FELIX LAING came down the stairs, rubbing his hands together.

"Whew, it's cold," he said.

His saturnine eyebrows asked a question. Page stood aside while the two

entered the parlor, then he made the introductions. Apparently Joe Havlin and Lil Shadick had never met, yet a curious antagonism flared in their cold glances.

Laing drew Page aside. "I left Adrian upstairs with Mrs. Havlin," he whispered. "Thought you might need a little moral support. Am I right?"

"Yeah," Page said softly. "What a family! What's wrong with 'em?"

"They're endocrine monsters. The boy, Will, is a cretin. Thyroid deficiency. The mother's a thyroid type, too—very fat, you see. Her pituitary glands out of whack, causing obesity. And Joe Havlin is acromegalic. He's got abnormal development of the bones of the face and extremities."

"I wonder if they're all that way," Page murmured.

"Maybe—maybe not. A man's chief gift to his children is his internal secretion composition. Mrs. Havlin's endocrine balance is haywire. I imagine her husband's was, too. So the descendants may be monsters, or they may not—depending on what characteristics are recessive and what dominant. Candidly, I don't like it." Dr. Laing's dark face was worried.

"It isn't pleasant," Page grunted. "Still, it isn't their fault."

"No, I don't mean that. The endocrines have a tremendous effect on personality. None of the people here to-night are normal. Physically, or mentally. Glandular unbalance affects the mind. We both know the purpose of this conclave, Page. A gang of freaks, most of them poverty-ridden, their warped brains filled with hate and bitterness, are going to receive an inheritance. I think—" The doctor turned to a bookshelf near by. He put out a long arm and searched the shelves. "All works on abnormal psychology and pathology. Let's see if she has *Berman on 'Glands Regulating Personality'*. Yes!"

He withdrew a volume, thumbed rapidly through it, indicating a passage. read:

Introspective observation of precriminal states of mind by so-called normal persons reveals that in many of them there is an impairment of reason and will power, in others

an exaltation amounting almost to hysteria. What are these but endocrine states of the cells, experimentally reproducible by increasing or decreasing the influence of the thyroid, the adrenals, the pituitary? Crimes of passion may be traced in no small part to disturbances of the thyroid. . .

"In other words," Laing said, "crime can be traced to endocrine instability."

His eyes flicked over the grotesque group by the fire. The cretin, Will, was huddled in a motionless heap, blank-faced and silent. Lil Shadick and Joe Havlin were eyeing each other, and their faces were not pleasant. The woman's fat features were ugly as a bloated gargoyle's, and a passionless, hooded malignancy seemed to have veiled the man's.

A little shudder shook Page—a strange, eerie premonition that black horror was soon to engulf this house of endocrine monsters.

CHAPTER II

There Shall Be Death

THE doorbell rang again. Page went into the hall, the doctor at his side.

But the porch was empty. In the moonlight the tree-covered slope was a sea of shadowy black patches. For a moment Page thought he heard the sound of footsteps, then it was gone.

He stepped out into the cold frostiness of the night.

"There's no one . . . Wait!"

In the distance there came a faint noise: soft feet climbing the steep trail.

"Wait here, Doc," Page said. "I'll be back." He sprinted into the shadows.

They closed around him darkly. The night air blew cold against his face. But unmistakably the sound of quiet footsteps grew louder.

A rock turned under his heel, and Page almost fell. He recovered himself, hurried on, and almost collided with a small figure toiling up the trail.

"Ouch!" the person complained. "Look where you're going, won't you?"

A patch of moonlight outlined a small, heart-shaped face, with crisp auburn curls framing it. The girl stared, and when Page didn't speak, a

curious look of apprehension came into her blue eyes. She drew back.

Page hastened to reassure her.

"You're Jean Havlin, of course," he said. "I'm sorry you had to come up here alone. I thought you and the others could have got a guide at the village."

"They're all afraid to come up here," Jean Havlin said coolly. "I'm sure I don't know why! Noises never killed anyone yet." Though Page waited, she didn't explain her words.

"Well," he said at last, "let's get back to the house."

Together they started up the trail. Jean Havlin, Page knew, was not related by blood to Ilene Havlin. She was her granddaughter by adoption only, according to the information the attorney had received. When Ilene Havlin had learned of this, she had insisted that Jean come with the others.

"I want to see what she's like," the old woman had whispered. "She's got the Havlin name if not the blood. And I'll leave her her share of the estate."

No doubt the girl would be glad of any inheritance, Page thought, glancing aside at her neat, slightly shabby business suit.

Quite suddenly the screams began.

They came from the house. And they rang out, shrill and agonized and utterly horrible, in an ear-shattering crescendo that made Page's stomach move sickeningly within him. A woman's voice was keening out a wordless, raw-edged shriek of ultimate pain.

And it stopped.

Page found himself racing forward, the girl, white-faced and gasping, at his side. They came out of the shadows, saw the great house looming on the slope, washed in pale moonlight. The front door was ajar, but no one was visible.

Page hurdled the threshold, glanced into the parlor. It was empty. From upstairs came a frantic, hysterical crying.

THE attorney went up the steps in three leaps. At the end of the long hall he saw a bulky figure crouched before a door, beating the panel frantically with great fists. It was Will, the cretin. He turned an imbecile, tear-

stained face to Page.

"Mamma's in there! Somebody's hurting her! I heard—"

Quickly Page pushed the cretin aside. The door was locked. But under the impact of a powerful shoulder it yielded, burst open, and Page found himself stumbling forward, his nostrils filled with an acrid, strong stench that made him suddenly nauseated. At his feet lay what was left of Lil Shadick.

Her gross body was scarcely veiled by the ripped tatters of her dress. The hot odor of blood was everywhere. Moonlight slanted in from the open window, mercilessly revealing the woman's ruined corpse.

The blood had not yet coagulated. Seeing this, and realizing the significance of the open window, Page crossed to it swiftly. He leaned out, peered down at the ground, twenty-five or more feet below. On this side of the house the moonlight gave place to shadow, but Page thought he caught a glimpse of a figure moving swiftly away. How had the killer descended?

A drain-pipe a few feet away from the window, descending from eaves to ground, gave him the answer. Page swung himself to the sill, reached out, caught the pipe between his hands. The weathered boards of the house gave him purchase for his feet, and he went down the drain-pipe swiftly.

There was an ominous, ripping crackle. Beneath his hands Page felt the cool metal of the pipe give. It swung away from the side of the house, and, with a screaming of torn metal, came loose. Page scrambled desperately for a foothold, found none. He was falling through blackness, wind screaming in his ears.

He hit ground with a thump that drove the breath from his lungs. It was fully a minute before Page was able to stagger up, conscious of a dull, throbbing pain in his back. He stared around.

No movement, no sound. The killer had had plenty of time to make an escape.

"Page!" a voice called sharply. The attorney looked up, wincing as he moved his neck. Dr. Laing's dark face was framed in the open window above.

"Page, are you hurt?"

"No," the attorney grunted. "I'll be right up."

Laing's head popped in and vanished. Page made his way to the front of the house, encountering Joe Havlin on the porch. The man's tall figure, with his immense hands and feet and jutting jaw, seemed inhuman in the moonlight—a warlock done by Goya, malformed and repellent.

"What's up?" he asked. "What's your hurry?"

"Where've you been?" Page asked without answering the other's question.

"Chasing shadows. Heard noises outside and went out to have a look-see. What the devil's the matter?"

"Just a murder," Page said grimly, and hurried along the upper hall.

A small group—Will, the cretin, old Adrian, and Jean Havlin—were standing silent at its end. As Page came up the door opened and Dr. Laing looked out.

"Page? Come in . . . Not you, Mr. Havlin!"

He spoke sharply as Joe Havlin attempted to follow Page. Silently, but with a twisted smile, Havlin drew back. The door, closing, shut him out.

PAGE faced Dr. Laing, conscious of a dramatic tension in the air. It was not alone the presence of the corpse at their feet. There was something else, Page sensed, something Laing was anxious to tell.

"This isn't just murder," the doctor said. "Did you see—"

His gaze went down. And now Page, for the first time, noticed certain blood-smearred objects that were neatly arranged on the carpet around the dead woman's head. Small, fatty pieces of meat.

In a cold voice that Page sensed, was used to mask the doctor's shocked horror, Laing went on:

"After death, this woman was operated upon. Her throat and chest have been opened. The thyroid and thymus glands have been removed. I think there was an attempt to remove the pineal from within the brain-cavity. But apparently the murderer didn't have time."

Page's throat was dry. This wasn't murder—it was butchery, coldly scientific and madly logical. He remembered the doctor's warning of half an hour ago. "Crime can be traced to endocrine instability," Laing had said. And now—

"Let's go downstairs," the attorney suggested. "I want to ask some questions."

Laing nodded. "I'll look in at Mrs. Havlin first. Be with you in a minute."

In the hall the others were waiting, a chill undercurrent of fear apparent in their wary glances. Page herded them downstairs into the parlor. Will, the cretin, huddled by the fire, sobbing softly. The others sank down into their chairs, waiting.

"Mrs. Shadick has been killed," Page said.

There was no response from his audience. Only Will's crying grew louder, less restrained.

"Adrian!"

The old butler glanced up nervously. He licked pale lips.

"Yes, Mr. Page?"

"Where were you when—"

"Down in the kitchen," the man broke in swiftly, not waiting for Page to finish. "Mrs. Haviin woke up and wanted some water. The cafe was empty, and I went downstairs by the back staircase. When I heard the screams I couldn't tell where they were coming from, at first. I stepped out the back door, and then I realized they were from upstairs. So I went back inside and upstairs again."

Dr. Laing came in silently. "Adrian," he said, "you'd better keep an eye on Mrs. Havlin. She's in a coma. That okay, Page?"

The attorney nodded, and the butler shuffled out.

"Want my story?" Laing asked, and went on quickly when Page nodded. "After you left me on the porch I waited awhile, and then I heard noises in the bushes. Somebody was crying. I ran toward the sound and searched awhile. I heard the screams, came back to the house, and found the body."

Page went toward the fire. He touched the cretin's shoulder.

"Will?"

"Uh?"

"Tell me what happened, won't you?"

"I—I—" The warped brain floundered in its fog. "I dunno. Mamma—" The sobs started again. Page waited till the cretin had quieted.

"Mamma and I were here when *he*"—Will pointed at Joe Havlin—"went out. We heard a noise in the hall. Mamma told me to wait here and she went out. I heard her talking to somebody. Then I couldn't hear anything except somebody going upstairs."

A LITTLE thrill shook Page. "Somebody talking to your mother?" he asked. "Who was it?"

Tension grew in the room.

"I dunno," the cretin mumbled. "The door was shut. Somebody—"

"There's no phone in the house, you know," Dr. Laing said quietly. "What about sending someone to the village for help?"

"Who?" Page asked. His meaning was evident. Any person in this room might have killed Lil Shadick.

"Well, I'll go," Laing offered.

"No." Page shook his head. "I need your help. You'd better stick around."

The two men's glances met. The doctor seemed to understand Page's thought—that the removal of certain glands from a corpse implied a knowledge of physiology that the study of medicine might supply.

Laing grinned wryly, nodded. And suddenly he stiffened. His thin nose twitched.

"Smell that, Page?" he asked sharply.

An acrid, familiar odor crept into the attorney's nostrils. Involuntarily he looked at the fireplace.

Jean Havlin sprang up, her face white.

"Fire!" she whispered. "Somewhere—"

Under the door a billow of smoke crept. An ominous crackling sounded from the hall. Laing sprang forward, twisted the knob. He turned a dark face to the others.

"Locked!"

"Let me try!"

Joe Havlin shouldered him aside. The man smashed one of his great fists against the panel, attacked it with

his huge feet. The wood split, broke. Flames gushed in, driving Havlin back.

Laing was at the windows, flinging them wide. Too late Page shouted for him to stop. In the draft the fire gushed up hotly.

But in one glance the attorney realized that the conflagration was not serious. The carpet just outside the door was ablaze.

A faint smell of kerosene came to Page. He snatched a rug from the hearth, climbed through the splintered door, and beat at the flames.

Dimly he was conscious of other figures, vague in the black smoke, helping him. Figures that shifted and grew solid and then vanished in the red-lit gloom.

It was impossible to keep track of them. Finally, however, the fire was smothered, sending up slow trickles of greasy smoke. The lights came on.

CHAPTER III

Mad Murder

PAIGE straightened. Beside him he saw only Jean Havlin, her auburn hair disheveled, her blue eyes wide. She was trembling a little. Page grinned at her shakily.

"It's okay. No harm done."

"Somebody was trying to kill us," the girl whispered.

"I don't think so. We could have got out the windows easily enough. There was another reason."

Jean's lashes drooped. She swayed, her eyes closing, and Page caught her, feeling an involuntary thrill at the electric nearness of her pliant body. The girl shuddered, drew away, brushing the hair from her eyes.

"I—I'm all right now. It—"

Joe Havlin came from the depths of the hall, his big fists, smoke-blackened, swinging.

"Found the master switch," he grunted. "Somebody had thrown it. I used the hammer on the switch, Page. It won't be moved again in a hurry. We don't have to worry about the lights now, anyway."

The attorney glanced back into the parlor. The cretin was still crouched on the hearth. But where was Laing?

Page's gaze went probing down the hall. A door was open there, a door that had been closed up to now. With a swift word to the others the lawyer hurried forward, paused on the threshold.

Blazing light illuminated the chamber, a good-sized storeroom, cluttered with furniture and bric-a-brac. Near a huge pile of rugs in the corner was a cedar chest, and something in its position made Page hesitate. The disturbed dust on the floor showed that it had been pulled aside recently.

A faint knocking came from within the chest. As Page leaped forward he saw, from the corner of his eye, that the single window was locked, that dust lay thick upon it. But on the floor at his feet was a sticky, red pool.

Page flung open the chest. A boy lay crumpled upon a heap of furs within it, white-faced, scarcely breathing. Hastily the attorney lifted the youth, carried him into the parlor. There he laid him on a couch and made a swift examination.

The boy seemed about fifteen. Red-haired, clad in a slightly ragged coat and knickers, he lay unmoving, blood dripping from a jagged cut in his throat, staining his dark shirt and necktie. His thin frame was suddenly shaken by a nervous shudder.

It was nearly five minutes, though, before the boy's eyes opened. Fear sprang into them. He cowered back, his breath rasping.

"It's okay, kid," Page said quietly. "No danger."

The boy searched his face. Then, with a spasmodic shiver, he clung to Page as though to a rock of refuge. His eyes went to Joe Havlin and the cretin—and widened with fright.

Havlin smiled sourly. He touched Will's muscular shoulder, urged the cretin ahead of him from the room.

"No use scaring the kid to death," he grunted to Page. "Call me when you want me."

The boy swallowed convulsively. "I—I'm all right now. Only—"

JEAN applied her handkerchief to the wounded throat.

"It isn't deep," she said. "I'll get a bandage." She went out.

"You're Mr. Page?" the boy asked. "I got a letter—"

He brought it from his pocket. The attorney scanned it swiftly. It read:

Dear Mr. Page:

As I wrote you, I had intended to accompany Tommy Couste to Mrs. Havlin's home, but unforeseen contingencies prevent this. However, Tommy is quite capable of finding his way there, and I'm putting him on the train, with detailed instructions for him to follow. His elder brother, Dwight Courte, died two years ago, as I said in our previous communications. He asked me to look out for Tommy, and I've done so. But, not being wealthy, it has been difficult at times. If there is any money coming to the boy, I shall be most glad for his sake. Enclosed you will find the identification I promised.

Manley Hildreth

Page nodded, thumbed through the papers, and pocketed the material.

"You're Tommy, eh?" he asked.

"Yes, sir."

"Well, you'd better stick pretty close to me tonight. There's something going on—but I think you know that. Just what happened to you?"

The boy didn't answer for a moment. Over his eyes a veil dropped. His thin, pale face was suddenly afraid.

"I—I don't know."

"Eh?"

Tommy glanced at the shattered door. "I can't remember, Mr. Page. Something—"

"Something nearly cut your throat," the attorney said quietly. "You can't remember that?"

"Somebody hit me on the head," Tommy whispered. "After that it was all dark till I woke up here."

Page leaned closer. The boy drew back, but regardless the attorney explored Tommy's head with probing fingers.

"Hit you on the head, eh? There's no bump."

The boy's face was sullen, but through the sullenness Page sensed an overwhelming, ghastly fear.

"I can't help it!" he said shrilly. "I can't remember! I—"

"Leave him alone," Jean Havlin commanded, coming back into the room. "The kid's half dead. Here, let me—"

She pushed Page aside, bandaged Tommy's throat.

"You two stick around here," the attorney said, getting up. "If anything happens, sing out."

He went into the hall. Joe Havlin was nowhere in sight, but the cretin, Will, was lounging against the wall, staring dully into space. Page went upstairs.

He went into Mrs. Havlin's room. The old woman lay still and silent, under a great mound of covers. Adrian was nowhere in sight.

Whistling under his breath, Page went out again and methodically began to search the house. He found little. He was hesitating before a stairway that led up, apparently, to the attic, when he heard Jean cry out.

He whirled. The girl came racing along the hall, eyes wide, red lips open in fear. She gripped Page's arm.

"Downstairs—quick! Will's gone crazy! He's killing the boy!"

PAGE thrust her away, sprinted to the stairs and down them, conscious of other feet hurrying along the hall beneath him. He pushed through the shattered parlor door and stood, staring. Behind him the girl caught her breath in horror.

Joe Havlin crouched above two prostrate figures on the carpet. His huge hand clutched a clasp-knife. He straightened, whirled—and his bony, misproportioned face went blank. He glanced at the weapon he held.

"Get a way from there!" Page snarled.

He reached inside his coat—a bluff, for he carried no gun. But Havlin drew back, letting the knife fall to the carpet. He moistened his lips, started to speak, and then was silent, looking down.

The great body of the cretin lay face down, drenched in blood. Scarlet spurted from an incision in the back of his neck. Gray threads of spinal tissue showed through clotted black hair. Swiftly Page sprang forward, pulled the dying monster away. The cretin's fat hands were clasped about the throat of the boy who lay beneath him—Tommy, pale and unconscious, the bandage torn brutally away from his neck.

"Good God!" Page said tonelessly, his stomach churning. He glanced at

the cretin, saw that he was beyond aid. "Take care of Tommy, Jean," the lawyer commanded, and turned to Havlin.

The other's hooded eyes were steady. "You can't pin this on me," he said harshly. "They were like that when I came in. I heard the girl scream, and ran in from outside the house." He looked down at the knife. "That was sticking in Will's back when I came in. I pulled it out, that's all."

"Is the kid okay?" Page asked over his shoulder.

"I think so," the girl said. "His throat's bleeding, but . . . Yes, he's coming around."

Tommy shivered, touched his neck with exploring fingers. He sat up weakly and clung to Jean, while shudders racked his thin body.

"Tommy, who did this?" Page said almost harshly. "Who killed Will?"

The boy looked at the dead cretin, started to speak. Then his gaze dropped.

"I—I don't know. I couldn't see—"

Somehow the lawyer felt sure that Tommy was lying. But why? Did he know who was responsible for these monstrous killings? And if so, was it fear that held him silent—or another emotion? If a boy knew his brother was a murderer. . . .

But Dwight Courte was dead. Or was he? Page scowled, thrusting his hands deep into his pockets. He felt a strong curiosity to know what had happened to Dr. Laing. Somehow he felt that if he knew the doctor's whereabouts it would be possible to discover what lay behind these crimes.

And there was Adrian, too. What had happened to the old butler?

"Get some rope, Jean," Page said. "There should be some in the kitchen."

Without a word the girl obeyed. Page scooped up the knife, eyeing Joe Havlin coldly. The man's great fists knotted.

"What the devil! You're not going to tie me up!"

Page put his hand inside his coat again. "Yeah. Or put a bullet through you. I don't much care which."

HAVLIN'S lips twitched. "Has it occurred to you that I may be murdered? Damn it, do you expect me

to stay like a trussed chicken while somebody slits my throat?"

"You'll do as I tell you," Page snapped, but he felt uneasy. If his bluff failed to work, what chance would he have against Havlin's huge fists? Luckily, the man made no resistance as Jean, under Page's supervision, tied him to a chair.

"You'll be safe enough," the lawyer informed him. "We'll be right here."

Havlin's face was dour. "At least if another murder's committed, you won't suspect me."

Tommy lay quietly on the couch, his throat newly bandaged, and occasionally the boy sent a frightened glance toward the door. Jean sat silently by the fire.

Presently the lawyer got up and went to the bookcase. A curious thought had come to him. He scanned the shelves, removing a few volumes. These he scanned, and so deep grew his absorption that only Jean's cry made him look up.

He was too late. A menacing figure was plunging toward him, unbound ropes flying, face twisted in a snarl. Joe Havlin had freed himself from his bonds.

Taken by surprise, Page had no chance. He caught a glimpse of Jean leaping up, trying to intercept the attacker, and going down like a ninepin under the sweep of a great arm. Page struck out desperately, felt a huge fist smash into his jaw with bone-crushing force. He subsided into pain-shot unconsciousness.

CHAPTER IV

The Endocrine Monster

SLOWLY Page awoke, his temples throbbing. Groaning, he pulled himself to his feet, saw Tommy lying on the couch, his eyes closed; saw Jean in a crumpled heap near by. Joe Havlin was nowhere in sight.

Swaying, Page went into the hall. The porch door was open. On the threshold a body was lying. The attorney went to it, knelt, staring.

Joe Havlin was dead. His throat and chest had been opened, and around his

head certain small, fatty objects were neatly arranged.

Ideas were stirring in Page's brain. He went back into the hall and paused before the storeroom. If he had guessed aright, there should be an answer to the riddle beyond that door.

He opened it, switched on the light. Heaps of furniture, rugs piled in the corner—and to this tumbled heap Page went. His gaze found smears of blood marring the nap of expensive fabrics.

His lips tight, Page turned to the cedar chest and opened it. Though he had been prepared, he caught his breath a little at sight of the motionless body that had been stuffed into the box. Dried blood caked the slit throat.

Page lifted the body, laid it gently on the floor. He rummaged through the furs still within the chest, and presently, with a little sigh, brought up a brown, damp wad of tobacco. This he put in his pocket.

"Mr. Page—"

The attorney turned. Jean and Tommy stood on the threshold. The corpse was hidden from their eyes by a heavy bureau, and Page hurried toward them.

"You're okay?" he asked. "Good! Come upstairs."

"He's dead—the man on the porch!" Tommy quavered. "We saw—"

"I know. Come upstairs, both of you."

Page herded them up the steps and into Mrs. Havlin's room. Mrs. Havlin was no longer resting quietly in bed. A rope had been attached to one tall bedpost, and the woman looked at first as if she were sitting up, her head oddly twisted to stare toward the window.

Her blue-veined fingers, with their strange webs, were deeply embedded in the scrawny throat about which a noose had been drawn tight. The mound of bed clothing still covered her from the hips down. But on the upper part of her old-fashioned nightgown were great stains of blood.

And suddenly Tommy's face began to twitch and jerk. He sobbed hysterically. Turning, he leaned against the wall and gasped out half-inarticulate words.

"Her—it was her, Mr. Page! She did

it! She said she'd kill me if—if I told! I didn't dare—"

Jean's horrified gaze was fixed on the cyanosed face of the dead woman. Page nodded slowly.

"The whole thing works out," he said. "Blood all over Mrs. Havlin's nightgown. Dr. Laing murdered—yeah, I found him stuffed into the cedar chest downstairs. The story's easy to piece out. Ilene Havlin was not on her deathbed, after all. She was an endocrine monster, anyway. And her glands—the adrenals—gave her enough energy to kill the family she hated, after luring them here on the pretext of passing out inheritances. That's why Dr. Laing was killed. He suspected Ilene was not as weak as she seemed. And Adrian—it's my guess we'll find his body hidden

from the shrunken calves down. The right leg was intact. But where the left foot should have been there was only a stump, a gnarled, withered pad of flesh that terminated the shin.

"Ilene Havlin had an operation three months ago," Page said. "She couldn't possibly have slid down a rain-spout, or committed these crimes, murders that required agility as well as devilish cunning. Ilene was not the killer, though she was supposed to take the rap. The murderer came here disguised. When I was looking through the library downstairs I got on the track. All the Havlins were tainted. Not one was normal. But one person was here tonight who seemed perfectly normal. His malady wasn't easily noticeable. It was infantilism!"

IN THE NEXT ISSUE

THE CASE OF THE MUMMIFIED CORPSES

A Weird Mystery Novelet

By RAY CUMMINGS



away in some cupboard. Ilene had to have a free hand to commit her crimes. That right, Tommy?"

SHUDDERING, the boy nodded. "No ordinary-sized person could have climbed down a rain-spout that broke under my weight. I figured that out. But Ilene Harlin could. And when she'd killed the monsters of the family, she decided to kill herself. Didn't want to face a criminal trial. It sounds reasonable."

Page's face was suddenly grim and harsh. He went to the bed and with a swift movement stripped away the covers.

"But there's one weak link in the chain," he said. "This!"

His outthrust finger indicated the scrawny legs of the dead woman, bare

Tommy and Jean were staring, wide-eyed, as Page went on remorselessly.

"The pituitary and pineal glands—they cause that. They go haywire, and the victim doesn't mature. He remains a child to all appearances. It's a common medical phenomenon—*isn't it, Dwight?*"

The boy moved so swiftly that Page was caught unprepared. He brought out a small, snub-nosed automatic from some hidden pocket. And his face, twisted with rage, seemed strangely older.

"Damn you, Page!" he snarled. "You're too smart for your own good! Sure, I'm Dwight Courte—and a lot of good it'll do you to know that!"

The automatic's black muzzle centered on Page. A gust of mad laughter shook the attorney's brain. To be men-

aced with death by one who was, to all appearances, a fifteen-year-old boy!

Suddenly Page remembered the knife in his pocket, the knife he had taken from Joe Havlin. If he could get his fingers on it somehow! If he could keep the killer from shooting until—

"Okay," he said. "You win. You're smarter than I thought."

A twisted grin appeared on Courte's face at the words.

"Yeah, a lot smarter," he said. "Get back there!" The gun swung toward Jean. "You're dying, too, with him. But get back."

The girl retreated till she stood beside Page.

"You made some mistakes, though," the attorney said swiftly. "Your motive's too clear. Ilene Havlin's leaving eight thousand to each of her descendants. Not a hell of a lot, but if some of them were killed off, the others would profit accordingly. I had to guess a bit, but I think I guessed right. That you're not Tommy Courte, for example."

THE killer's cold eyes were unwavering. "Well?"

"Tommy died awhile ago. When I wrote you, you made your plans. Decided to commit these murders. But as Dwight Courte, a dwarf with a man's mind, you'd immediately come under suspicion. So you forged letters to me, letting me think that Dwight had died, and that you were Tommy, the kid. Who'd suspect a youngster of murder—especially when he himself had been attacked?"

Page's hand was moving imperceptibly closer to his pocket.

"You rang the doorbell and got us inside," he went on quietly. "Drew us away from the house by making a commotion and crying, as Laing said. Then you waited your chance, sneaked in, and saw Lil Shadick in the hall. She was tough, all right, but she wouldn't suspect a boy. You got her upstairs on some pretext and slit her throat. That was another weak link, Courte. Either the killer was strong enough to overcome his victims, or else he was able to get close enough to murder them without arousing their suspicions.

And Lil Shadick hated Ilene Havlin! She'd have been suspicious the moment she saw Ilene out of bed."

"Go on," Courte said mockingly. "What other mistakes did I make?"

"You started the fire in the hall, and during the commotion got Laing to come with you in the storeroom. He didn't realize anything was wrong till you cut his throat. You've a habit of pretending you're frightened and grabbing the nearest person—and that's a swell opportunity for you to use your knife. You killed Laing, hid his body in a pile of carpets, and climbed into the chest. You cut your neck a bit to alibi the blood on your shirt, and you waited till you heard us coming along the hall. Then you just shut the lid and shammed a faint till we rescued you. But you didn't anticipate Will's attack."

"No," Courte admitted. "He took me by surprise. But he couldn't have known I killed his mother!"

"Cretins have curious powers sometimes. Maybe Will sensed you were the murderer. We'll leave it at that. Anyway, he jumped you, and Jean ran out to get me. That left you with a free hand. You simply got out your knife, reached around, and cut Will's spinal cord, leaving the knife in the wound for Joe Havlin to pull out. He played right into your hands, especially when he knocked Jean and me out later. I can guess what happened then. Joe was going to light out for the village, and you begged him to take you with him. Begged until he let you get a little too close—for he didn't suspect you—and then you used your knife!

"I wasn't really sure, though, till I found something in the cedar chest just now. A plug of tobacco you'd used to make yourself seem almost asphyxiated. Nicotine poisoning is pretty common. When a fellow wants to get off work to go to a ball game, he'll sometimes chew a piece of tobacco and hide it in his arm-pit. The blood-stream will absorb the stuff, and for a while there'll be all the symptoms of nicotine poisoning—feeble pulse, irregular breathing, pallor, and so on. You had this tobacco—"

Almost absently Page reached into his pocket. And Courte was taken by

surprise. He had failed to realize the significance of the gesture.

THEN his gun steadied. He barked a command. But Page's hand swung up with the knife gripped tightly within it. The attorney lurched against Jean, knocking her aside as the killer's automatic barked.

Page hurled the knife. A bullet screamed past him, and glass tinkled noisily. The attorney lunged forward, bending low. He felt a blaze of agony rip along his arm as the gun barked again.

Then he cannoned into Courte, knocking the dwarfed figure back. The gun went spinning away. Page rolled over, putting his own body between Courte and the weapon. But the killer, not relishing a hand to hand battle, thought only of flight now. His agile form somersaulted over the threshold into the hall.

Page didn't wait to get the gun; he sprinted after the escaping murderer. Courte was not heading for the stairway. He plunged toward a door across the hall, flung it open, raced into the

shadowy room. Sprinting after him, Page stumbled over something and went down headlong.

His fingers touched chill flesh—the body of Lil Shadick. He sprang up, seeing a slim figure swing out of the window. Before Page could move the thing had happened.

There was a frantic scuffle, a gasping, startled cry, terminated by a heavy thud. Page reached the window, peered out. He could see the broken end of the drain-pipe, something Courte had forgotten. On the ground below a figure lay motionless. The rays of the sinking moon showed a white face staring up blindly, and a widening stain that aureoled the head, etching it in crimson horror.

Even from the window Page could see that the man was dead.

He turned, conscious of Jean at his side. The girl huddled close, shivering, and Page put a bracing arm about her slim shoulders.

"Buck up," he said gently. "It's all over. We've got to hike into town now, kid. There'll be quite a story to tell the sheriff!"

MEET ZINGAR THE MAGICIAN

in a grim spine-chilling mystery of a distraught mother's strange, eerie hallucinations!



THE HORROR IN THE CRIB

A Novelet of Dark Illusion
By ARTHUR LEO ZAGAT

COMING IN THE NEXT ISSUE



Destiny of Horror

By **RAY KING**

Author of "The Gruesome Thing," "The Case of the Walking Dog" etc.

IT was mid-evening when I returned home—a stormy night of September. I had been away all summer on a Southern voyage, a preliminary to the mining business I was entering next winter.

From the garage where I left my car, I could see Doomsday Rock with its two big gabled, ivy-clad houses fronting each other on the brink of the cliff. My home, and the home of our hated neighbors. They loomed sullen against the gray blur of the stormy sky. And at sight of them my old feeling of resentment and oppression returned.

The Warrens and the Torrences, facing each other, enemies of a hundred years, making their lives miserable by their stubborn proximity as they shared that bleak eminence. Even its name, by legend here in the neighborhood, seemed to foretell disaster to its in-

**The Fate of Famous
Namesakes Creates
a Crimson Terror!**



Alan was weakly up on one elbow, a knife in his hand

imical houses. I resented being part of it all. Yet I was a Warren—the youngest. Charles Warren, age twenty-two.

One of those forbidding, gloomy old mansions, looming with proud austerity up there in the murk was the only home I had ever known. I had been born there. And there I had been bred to hate the Torrences.

From the edge of the village, suitcase in hand, I climbed up the precipitous wooden stairway which was the only access to Doomsday Rock. The wind howled and tore at me. Over my head the two houses stood with blurred rambling gables. Their windows were like yellow eyes, staring not only at me, but at each other.

Perhaps my Southern trip, so calm and placid, made my homecoming seem all the more forbidding. A chill struck into me as I stared up at the glaring eyes of the houses. It was as though even the old buildings hated each other.

When I reached the top of the rocky eminence, the wind was a howling roar among the stunted pines. My path led me in between the two houses with their dividing line of trees.

"Well, Charles, my boy—here you are. How well you're looking!"

My grandfather, Daniel Ignatius Warren, had come to greet me at the door. He was a vigorous old fellow, despite his seventy-five years—tall, spare, erect, handsome, with a great mane of white hair.

"Here's Charles," he called to my second cousin, Alan Nero Warren, who was coming down the hall.

"Hello there, Charles. Well, I say, how brown you are."

Alan was about twenty-eight; slim, dark-haired. He was always pale; a brooding fellow. He and I went upstairs with my suitcase.

"Hell to pay this afternoon with those damn Torrences," he commented.

"I thought all that might have eased up," I said. "We were ignoring them when I left."

HE put a hand on my shoulder. "Frankly, I'm glad you're back, Charles. I got a scare this afternoon. The Warrens and Torrences have quarreled for years, but this looked like

bloodshed."

He told me. Smoke from the Torrence chimney had blown our way and annoyed Grandfather. My Uncle George and Grandfather had gone over; there had been a violent altercation. Tristan Torrence, a big, beetle-browed fellow, had come from his house brandishing a knife.

"Grandfather had his shotgun," Alan was saying. "We pulled him home, but it was a damn close call."

A sudden gust of violent wind rattled Warren Hall. Perhaps it was Alan's words, or my own vague premonitions, but suddenly it seemed as though tonight were something different from other nights, as though horror which for a hundred years had been brewing, now was upon us.

"There's something weird about all of us up on this damned Doomsday Rock," Alan added in his somber fashion. His dark eyes stared at me with apprehension in them. "I've been looking at some of the family records this summer. Do you know, it's just a hundred years ago tonight that the first death occurred here on Doomsday Rock—and it was a damned queer death."

A hundred years ago tonight. I hadn't known that. But I knew of that death.

"Orithyia—remember?" Alan was saying. "And that's a queer name. The name of a nymph who was carried off by Boreas, god of the North Wind." Alan laughed unsteadily. "That Orithyia Warren—she was out in a storm, and the wind bashed her up against a rock and killed her."

It had been adjudged an accident, but the Warrens had accused the Torrences of being murderers. And there had been others. The turgid history of the Warrens and Torrences was darkly tragic, mysteriously sinister. For generations there had been deaths that never could be explained—deaths in which the grim hand of Fate seemed to have played an ominous and strange part.

Ironically, the Warrens and the Torrences, more than a century ago, had been different branches of the same family. When first they came to

Doomsday Rock, in amity, because of a romantic marriage, they had built the two houses, one for the newly married young people, and one for the older ones.

Why they selected this gloomy height, no one will ever know. Doubtless they wanted the isolation; and perhaps they realized that, some day this eminence would be valuable as a hotel site or something of the kind as a heritage for their descendants. The Warrens were never rich; less so now than then, it seemed. And Doomsday Rock, even today with the town almost surrounding it, certainly was no great financial asset as they had possibly hoped it would be.

What a travesty now that those original Warrens and Torrences should have so closely bound themselves together! They had held a mutual ownership in the height—with an agreement that no part of it was ever to be sold to an outsider.

Then, God knows how, hatred had flared. And as though we were pawns in the hands of some grim ironic Fate, the weird deaths had begun.

And always the deaths had seemed to link the names of the victims with famous names of Doom. Was it coincidence that a Torrence woman named Marie Antoinette had fallen under a railway train which had cut off her head? I had always thought so. But now, as I stared into Alan's apprehensive eyes, the weirdness of the memory sent a shudder through me.

"A HUNDRED years ago to-night," he repeated. "That was the first of those queer deaths . . . To me, it's as though we're in the grip of something that you can't explain. A sort of tragic destiny that keeps recurring periodically. The Torrences know it, too. That damn Tristan—he's been talking about it down in the village. About a heritage of horror. That's us, Warrens and Torrences alike. Our very names seem to foretell our own doom. That's a weird idea. But it's happened several times already. You can't get away from that."

His words so matched my own thoughts that I could only stare at him

blankly. Then I tried to cast off the damnable thing.

"Nonsense," I murmured. "Those deaths were coincidence. And nothing's going to happen tonight any more than any other night."

As though to mock me, from downstairs a scream from one of the servants floated up the stairs, with the rattle of the old house in the storm blurring it.

"What's that?" Alan chattered.

We heard my Uncle George curse, as we started down the stairs. He was in the front hall, had just arrived from the village. The servants were in a commotion and one of the maids was screaming.

"What in damnation?" Uncle George shouted. I saw his big figure coming on a run. "Can't we ever have any peace? I just get home and it's the same damned thing!"

But he stopped, with his big, blue-jowled jaw dropping, as we all heard what the maid was screaming:

"He's dead! He's dead! Out there—"

Grandfather came from his study, flushed with anger at the noise.

"What's all this?" he roared. "I won't have it."

I was gripping the maid. "Dead? Who's dead?" I demanded.

"It's—it's Mr. Peter," the maid chattered. "I seen him!"

She led us back through the kitchen and pointed out the back door. It was raining now. The rain, lashed by the wind, was a slanting curtain, weirdly yellow with the glow of the kitchen light on it. The trees were sodden eerie blobs, with branches wildly swaying as the blasts lashed them.

And then I saw the ghastly figure in one of the trees. Alan was with me as I dashed out. It was Uncle Peter. God knows why he had gone out in the storm and climbed that tree. But seemingly he had. And evidently he had slipped and fallen so that his body had crashed down upon a lower limb and caught.

Alan and I stared up, numb with horror. Uncle Peter's legs had become entangled in a crotch of the tree branch. Head down, his fat little body swayed in the wind. No telling how long he had

been there, with his cries blotted out by the storm. He was dead now. . . . And my thoughts swept back to that most famous of all Peters, twenty centuries ago, who had met his death by being hung upside down!

Names of Doom! An ironic destiny of horror, damning all of us here on Doomsday Rock! How could I believe it? And yet, here it was, stark reality before my eyes!

We got poor Uncle Peter's body back into the house, carried him through the kitchen, into the big baronial hall. Uncle Peter was dead, beyond resuscitation. He had been stout, thick-necked, with a cherubic face and a bald spot. But his face was not cherubic now. Gorged purple with blood, it stared horribly at us, with protruding blackened tongue and ghastly bloodshot eyes.

THE servants, awed and chattering with terror, followed us out into the hall. But Uncle George, Peter's brother, scattered them with an oath.

"Get out, all of you!" he roared. "Get to your rooms and stay there!"

I had always liked Uncle George despite his gruff ways and his violent temper which now scattered the servants before him.

"We should phone a doctor," I suggested. "He's dead—but we have to report it."

Alan nodded a quick assent, but Uncle George leaped at me.

"Doctor? He's dead all right! Those damn Torrences—"

It was like throwing a match into a pool of gasoline. Grandfather, with the blood gone from his face, had been staring at Uncle Peter's body—at the body of his youngest son. He was shocked beyond speech, just staring. Now he spoke.

"The Torrences—" he murmured, and the hot blood flushing his face with anger.

Uncle George's shotgun was standing here in the hall. He leaped for it, but Grandfather reached it first.

"I'll attend to them," he panted. "My boy—my poor boy Peter!"

I tried to stop him as he started for the door, but he jerked from me.

"You keep out of this, Charles!" Uncle George bellowed, then he swung on Alan. "You too! We'll attend to this."

"No you won't!" I retorted. "What do you think you're going to do? Go over there and murder somebody? They've got guns, too. Do we want to start murdering each other up here?"

Alan joined me in trying to calm them. If they went over there with accusations of murder, big Tristan Torrence would jump them. There would be another death within a minute.

"I'll phone the police," I suggested hastily. "But that was an accident to Uncle Peter. His feet were entangled in that tree branch. There's no mark of violence on him."

Uncle George and Grandfather were glowering as I picked up the phone to call the police. The wire was dead! There was no need to tell us what probably had done it. Grandfather and Uncle George could blame this, too, on the Torrences, but the wind every moment was increasing in violence. It shook the old house, howling around the gables like a demon unleashed. And rain was rattling on the roof and pounding the windows. The electric lights occasionally were winking as the wind tossed the wires. The storm had blown down our telephone wires, of course.

"I'll go down and tell the police," I said. "I'll bring them back with me."

"You'll blow off those stairs a night like this," Alan declared.

"I'll try it anyway," I retorted.

But would Grandfather and Uncle George go over to the Torrences while I was gone?

"Come on with me," I suggested to my uncle. "Alan, you stay here with Grandfather."

George and I went. The night was a black inferno of wind and rain. The yellow blobs of the Torrence windows were like bleary eyes, staring at us, as though they were leering, gleeful at this Warren tragedy.

"Take it easy," Uncle George growled as we started. "If you lose your footing at the edge of the cliff, you're done for, Charles."

With his bulky figure towering beside me, he stood for a moment glowering at the blurred outlines of the Torrence place. Then he shouldered the wind and we started squarely into the gale, stumbling over the wet rocks between the stunted pines that led down a declivity to the head of the staircase two hundred feet away.

AND there we stopped with the flashlight in my hand casting its yellow beam to where the stairway should have been. But it wasn't there now. The top of it had been torn away. Twenty feet or more now hung askew, dangling over the abyss, torn away by the wind and rain that had dislodged rocks and pounded it loose.

"All right," Uncle George said grimly. "That's that."

We swung back for the house. To have tried to climb down at any point of the sheerly precipitous cliff on a night like this would have been suicide. But in the morning, by daylight, we could do it.

As we retraced our steps through the murk, the Torrence house seemed malevolently eyeing us. We got back into Warren Hall to find Grandfather and Alan seated by Peter's body. They were numbed beyond comment when we told them of the stairs. We were marooned here with our dead. Nothing we could do until morning.

Alan, with that dark brooding irony which always had been characteristic of him, flung me a glance. Heaven knows, I understood what he meant. The wind had broken our telephone; the wind had broken the stairs—both ironic coincidences to maroon us here upon this night of horror. As though we were pawns, rushing to a ghastly destiny. A hundred years ago tonight, the first unexplained death had occurred. What would come next?

Was still another of us doomed to die tonight? Would it be through violence with the Torrences? That at least, I was determined to forestall.

I flung a rug over Uncle Peter's body to hide his horrible, bloated face.

"Grandfather, you must go to bed," I said. "Take it easy, Uncle George. It's only a few hours till dawn. This

was an accident. The Torrences had nothing to do with it."

Uncle George came out of his glowering reverie. "All right, then tell me what in hell Peter was doing climbing a tree?" he demanded.

"He's not telling you anything," Alan put in, "except that we don't want to go over and kill Torrences. Or have them kill us."

We were starting upstairs. Perhaps in another few minutes Alan and I would have had Grandfather and Uncle George in their rooms. But suddenly, in the midst of a gust of wind more violent than any of the others, there was a crash against the side of the house, where a big bay window jutted out from the hall. It sounded as though a tree had gone down.

We rushed to the side door that fronted the yard between the two houses. It was not a tree. The wind had veered a little. A gust of it now was lashing from the Torrence house to us. A litter of plaster and a fragment of torn metal cornice had evidently come loose from the old Torrence building and blown over against our bay window. As though the Torrence mansion, like its owners, hated us and now was attacking!

"I'll tell them about this!" Uncle George muttered thickly. "And about Peter!"

There was no stopping him this time. His heavy face was deep purple with anger.

"Easy," Alan said. "The Torrences didn't tear that loose and throw it at us, you know."

"Didn't they?" Grandfather squealed. "Well, we'll see about that!"

I ran out after Uncle George. Then Grandfather caught us. He was carrying his shotgun. We four stalked across the black storm-swept yard.

Uncle George pounded on the Torrences' side door. It opened. Jeanne was there in the entry. She was the youngest of the Torrences; eighteen, this year. A pretty girl. There had been times in the past when I had thought we could be friends. Perhaps even more. But—

"What do you want?" she demanded. "Warrens aren't welcome here."

I TRIED to shove Uncle George and Grandfather away.

"All right," I said. "That suits us."

Then in the doorway behind Jeanne her brother Tristan loomed—a huge, dark, scowling fellow.

"So all the Warrens have come to bully a girl?" he snarled. "Go on back! To the devil with you all!"

Uncle George rasped something, shoving Grandfather and me out of the way. In another second he and Tristan would have been at each other's throats. Then in the hallway behind them another figure appeared—the little angular, hatchet-faced woman who was the Torrence housekeeper. Her wrinkled, sunken cheeks were now like chalk.

"Mr. Tristan—Miss Jeanne, I found him!" she gasped. "Dead—out there—dead. I'll show you!"

Another death. A Torrence, this time. We Warrens stood aside as the housekeeper came past us, out into the storm with Jeanne and Tristan after her. Silently we followed them as they ran down along the side wall and around the back of the Torrence place.

A body was lying on the ground. It was old Hector Torrence. They had thought he was up in his bedroom for the past several hours. Then they had missed him, and the housekeeper had searched.

Blankly, from a little distance, we stared. Hector Torrence. This weird, inexplicable thing! My mind went back to that other Hector, the Roman who was tied to a chariot and dragged until he was dead . . .

A steeply sloping rocky ramp was behind the Torrence kitchen, leading upward to higher ground of the ragged plateau which was the top of Doomsday rock. Old Hector Torrence, wandering in the storm, must have lost his footing up there so that he had slid down here to his death.

Numbly, I stared at the old man's frail body, his clothes ragged and torn from the slide, his skin and flesh abraided to a crimson, bleeding pulp; and his head crushed where he had struck against a rock at the bottom.

Another ghastly coincidence! All of us, Warrens and Torrences alike, stood

numbly staring. And in my mind was that same shuddering thought that this was our night of doom—the culmination of our weird destiny of horror.

The inexplicable weirdness of it, to me at least, was so terrifying that it seemed as though all the blood in my veins were freezing, with the dark storm-swept scene blurring before me as I stared at that grisly broken body of old man Torrence where he lay at the bottom of the horrible sliding fall. It was all a blur as I stood with Alan, Grandfather and silent Uncle George, while we watched the Torrences carry in their dead.

Jeanne's other brother, Robert, had been in a distant part of the house. Now he came running out to investigate the commotion. And like all of us, for a moment he stood gasping and numbed. Of all the Torrences, I think Robert was the one we most despised—a little rat-faced fellow, long-nosed, with glittering little eyes and a sly, soft voice.

It was Robert who now slyly suggested that the damned Warrens must have had something to do with this, so that big Tristan, flushed with rage, turned upon us. Then Alan and I told them about Uncle Peter. For a moment we all stood there, divided branches of the same original family, glowering at each other, almost speechless. Then Uncle George let me draw him back. Grandfather held his shotgun pointing at the ground, grimly staring at the mangled old Hector Torrence. Then he turned silently and strode away.

ALAN and I made a gesture of helping carry in old Hector's body. But they rebuffed us. I tried to say something of decent sympathy to Jeanne, but she only stared at me with grief-stricken eyes.

Then we were back in Warren Hall. Silently Alan and I began locking doors and windows. We could well imagine that Tristan might later work himself into a frenzy, seize his gun and come over to attack us.

"Well," George said sardonically, "they had an accident, too. Now they know how we feel about it."

It made him and Grandfather less belligerent over Uncle Peter's death. Alan and I got them upstairs at last. Grandfather went to bed. In his own bedroom, Uncle George prepared himself several drinks.

"Better have one," Alan suggested to me. "Lord knows, we all need it tonight."

I took mine to my bedroom, and sat in an easy chair by the bed, listening to the howl of the wind. I drank a little. Then I wandered to the window and sat with a surge of the wind cooling my hot face. Only a few hours until dawn. I had no desire to sleep.

Vaguely I found myself tensely listening to every surge of the wind, expectantly as though now I must be about to hear some new cry of terror. Every rattle of the old house seemed masking some sinister sound which shudderingly I felt that I ought to hear, to warn me of some menace that was creeping upon me.

Destiny of horror! How could I scoff at it now? Warrens and Torrences alike, just pawns with seemingly damning names, marooned here on this damnable Doomsday Rock.

Suddenly as I was staring out toward the dark Torrence house, a light flashed in one of the lower windows over there. The Torrences had not gone to bed. Something was going on. What was it?

Upon impulse I went downstairs and out our side door. I knew there was little chance of my being seen in the murk of the yard, and within a minute I was by the lighted Torrence window. It was an alcove of their big sitting room. The shade was partly drawn, but the window was up a few inches from the bottom. Enough for me to see and hear the voices.

"A fortune, Robert! You wouldn't have believed it, would you? Here on this damned Doomsday Rock!"

That was the heavy guttural voice of the giant Tristan. I could see the bulking top half of him as he stood in the alcove back from the window. And the head and shoulders of the seated little rat-faced Robert Torrence were visible.

"But Tristan, you're sure of this?" Cupidity and triumph were in Robert's

voice. "I told you it was gold ore, but I never really believed it would involve big money."

"Millions!" Tristan gloated. I could see now that in his hand he was holding a huge jagged chunk of rock. The light glittered on the yellow-green vein that ran through it.

"Millions for us!" Tristan repeated triumphantly. "It crosses almost the full width of Doomsday Rock, under both the houses. I've had it assayed."

Tristan tossed the rock aside, and as he turned idly toward the window, I sank down. But still I could hear the voices.

Little Robert said slyly. "A fortune in gold? Under both houses, Tristan? Why, then those damned Warrens—"

There was only silence from the giant Tristan. He could have been at the window. I did not dare rise up to look. Then I heard their footsteps and the murmuring of their retreating voices as they left the living room.

I got back to Warren Hall and barred the little side door through which I had emerged. I took a look in Grandfather's room. He lay placidly asleep in bed. Uncle George was in bed reading. I looked into Alan's room. He was there, stretched in one of the easy chairs, with his drained whiskey glass beside him.

BACK in my own room I sat in a chair, in the darkness, with a hunting knife in my pocket and the loaded shotgun which I had found in the hall, beside me.

Gold-bearing rock under both our houses! That weird old agreement of the original Warrens and Torrences was still in force. Any survivor of these little remnants of our ill-fated families would own it all.

My thoughts blurred, wandered, as sleep stole upon me. How long I dozed I do not know. But suddenly I realized that I was fighting my way back to consciousness. The shotgun was still beside me; the knife was in my pocket. I went to the bedroom window, chagrined that I had been asleep.

The night was still black; the wind was still howling. And suddenly, down there somewhere in the darkness I saw

a tiny light bobbing, like a flashlight which someone was carrying. Shotgun in hand I went downstairs and out our side door. The light had vanished. Had it gone to the north? I thought so.

With the wind whipping at me, cautiously I prowled to the edge of the northern cliff. There was nothing there but the broken, dangling stairs. And then I saw what surely had not been there when Uncle George and I had been here earlier in the evening—a rope tied to one of the trees and dangling down the cliff face—perhaps all the way to the ground.

Had some one carrying a light come here and escaped by this rope? I did not think so. There did not seem to have been time for that. It was only a minute since I had seen the light, back between the houses.

I concluded that the light had not come this way. I started back. And then I saw the flash again. Unmistakable this time, it was close behind the Torrence house. And as suddenly it was extinguished, I thought I saw a blob dart into the Torrence kitchen door.

I was there in a moment. The door was open, swaying in the wind. Then from within the cavernous dark interior of the Torrence mansion a faint distant cry came wafting out to me. Jeanne's voice! Jeanne Torrence screaming with an agony of terror!

I stood there, stiffened, only an instant. Then I rushed forward and the darkness of the inside of the Torrence house engulfed me. The cry had come from upstairs. Or had it?

For years I had not been over the threshold of this hated house. In the big lower hall so like our own, I stood gripping my gun. There was no sound save the rattle and moan of the outer wind. Then I padded upstairs. A dim light was in the upper hall. The door of Jeanne's room was open. Her bed was rumpled where she had been lying. The clothes she had worn this evening were piled on a chair.

Across the hall another bedroom door was open. There was a dim light inside and on the threshold I stood appalled. It was Tristan's room—I knew because I saw some of his clothes hang-

ing here in a wardrobe. The room was a shambles and blood covered everything. The bloody bedding was half on the floor; chairs were overturned; things on the dresser had been scattered and crashed. It was mute, ghastly evidence of some terrible fight which had taken place here.

I was numbed, blurred, conscious only that I had staggered back and was running downstairs. Where was Jeanne? Dead or alive, where was she? And where were the other Torrences?

I found myself in the back hall by the kitchen. A door was open, with dim stairs leading downward. I plunged down into the Torrence cellar. And in a dim light there again I stood numbed with horror.

A panel of the cellar wall stood partly open—a pivoted door which when closed would seem only a part of the blank cellar wall. It disclosed a dank blackness, with a fetid current of air coming out. And another body choked the doorway. My grandfather.

HE lay here with his white cotton night robe in ribbons upon him. His stalwart old body from head to foot was crimson with ribboned flesh, a noiseless mass of crimsoned pulpy gore as though wild beasts had snarled and fought to rip it to pieces. Daniel Ignatius Warren—like Daniel in the lion's den and that Ignatius who had been thrown to wild beasts in the Roman Arena!

With my gorge rising I stood gazing. And then I saw a little metal thing lying upon the floor, and numbly stooped and picked it up. It was wet with blood, horrible with red fragments of flesh hanging to it. A small agricultural implement. A handle, a metal base, with sharp-pronged metal teeth. A weeder—used to mangle the flesh as though by the teeth of wild animals.

My rush of horror in that moment must have made me wholly unwary. I was barely conscious of a shape rising up beside me. Then something crashed on my head and I went down into a black abyss of unconsciousness. . . .

I opened my eyes to a sway of smoky yellow torchlight—a blazing torch which a man was carrying. It illumined

the masonry of an underground room on the floor of which I was lying with my arms and legs bound with rope.

Only half conscious, I saw the man's blurred figure as he propped the blazing torch in a rock crevice. Then he began heaping faggots into a pile at the feet of a girl who was bound upright to a vertical metal bar—a girl with her nightdress hanging in folds over her slim body.

Then I saw that the girl was Jeanne. I must have let out a cry, for the man dropped an armful of brush and came bounding at me. It was Alan. As always he was pallid, his thin but muscular frame shaking. But it was excitement and perhaps demoniac triumph now, so that it contorted his sweating face with bestial eagerness.

"Oh, you're conscious, Charles?" He bent over me, drawing in his breath with a sound as if his teeth were chattering. "I'm sorry about this, Charles—I didn't want to kill you. If only you'd taken that drugged liquor, you could have slept through the night in safety. I needed you—you're a mining man. You and I and Uncle George could have shared this gold that the damn Torrences found."

"Alan, you're mad! Stark mad!"

"Oh, no, I'm not," he chuckled. "There's a million dollars on this Doomsday Rock for me. The housekeeper and that damned little rat, Robert Torrence, are dead. I stuck a knife into them as they slept—not a peep out of 'em. Do you think I'd share this with any damned Torrence? Or with that domineering grandfather of ours, or grafting Uncle Peter? George is all right. He drank the drugged liquor. In the morning he'll go with me for the police."

I struggled with the ropes that held me. And he stood grinning down at me, his pale face twisted, his dark eyes glowing with the light of seeming madness. Destiny of horror upon all us Warrens and Torrences! The horror of greed and murderous lust was here now upon Alan Warren.

"In the morning you and I would have climbed down into town and reported this ghastly thing," he was saying. "I wanted your testimony to back

me up, but now you know too much. Too bad, Charles. They'll think it was Tristan Torrence who did all this. His body will be buried here and they'll think he escaped."

"By a rope at the north cliff?" I murmured.

"Oh—you saw that?"

"Yes. I saw it. Tristan found the gold vein, and—"

"So you know that, too? Well, I saw him find it. For a month now I've been working on this thing. No one will ever know about this tunnel passage that connects the two houses and runs down to a little cave almost at the bottom of the north cliff. No one will ever know about it, except me."

His laugh was ironic. "I guess those original ancestors of ours, Charles, weren't altogether spotless. They had this tunnel for some illegal purpose, that's sure. No wonder we're all doomed to a tragic fate. That's what you'd call retributive justice."

A little gasping cry from Jeanne made him whirl back to her.

"You never had any use for Alan Warren, did you?" he demanded harshly. "Well, I guess you're sorry now. You could have shared this wealth with me. But now, like your little namesake, Jeanne d'Arc, you're going to burn."

He was heaping the brush in a pile against her knees. Momentarily his back was to me, I was twisting, futilely jerking at the ropes that held my arms and legs. Then suddenly I quieted, lay limp. In the dark shadows of the rocky floor a figure near me was moving. It was Tristan Torrence. His body, horribly crimsoned, was twitching. Then he was up on one elbow, trying to drag himself toward me.

"In a few minutes now you'll fulfill your destiny, Jeanne," Alan was saying. "They'll find your charred body out between our houses—yours, and Charles', who will be beheaded. Like Charles the First. Remember? Do you know why I'm going to all this trouble? To make sure that every one believes that Tristan did it. He was in an asylum once, when he was younger. A madman, of course. Just the sort of madman who would do these things.

More than that, Tristan himself was obsessed with the doom that seems to be foretold by our names. I told you so, and it's true. People down in the village know he was obsessed with that weird idea. Several times this summer he talked about it. People down there have told me so. What a chance for me—helping our destiny of doom to fulfill itself—something every one will say is exactly what the mad Tristan would do!"

The ghastly big figure of Tristan was beside me now. His neck was slashed crimson; one of his arms was hacked. He was faintly gasping with a rattle of blood in his throat. His glazing eyes were on my face as his hand fumbled to untie my bonds.

Our destiny of horror. I saw that Tristan had torn his garments, with crude bandages to try and staunch his bleeding wounds. And now as he untied my wrists and dropped back, in his convulsive death agony he was tearing at the bandages.

"Tristan was asleep when I caught him," Alan was saying. "But even with his throat slashed he put up quite a fight."

Alan turned momentarily toward me, and I stiffened, lay quiet with my hands free behind me, but my ankles still tied.

And the panting Alan added, with his somber eyes burning at me:

"I told you there was something queer about all this, Charles. I left Tristan—thought he was dead. When I went back to get him, he wasn't quite dead." Alan's ironic laugh had a quaver in it. "He had bandaged himself, Charles. Queer, wasn't it? Like—like

Tristan who loved Isolde. Remember? That other Tristan died because he plucked off his bandages in his agony. But I didn't plan that for Tristan Torrence. He did that for himself. I told you—something weird about this."

My legs were free. And as Alan turned to seize his torch and fling it into the brush at Jeanne's feet, I was upon him. It took him by surprise. My weight knocked his smaller body prone. The torch went into the pile of brush. I was aware of a crackling as I pounded Alan until he lay limp beneath me. The brush, with the torch in it, was beginning to blaze. I jumped from Alan's inert body, scattered the crackling twigs and flung the torch aside.

AND as I turned back, Alan was weakly up on one elbow with a knife in his hand. Then he lunged unsteadily to his feet, trying to attack me, but he stumbled. His gasping scream rang out, and I saw that accidentally he had impaled himself with the knife stabbed into his chest.

He was dying, fumbling at the knife hilt when I turned him over. I had released Jeanne, and she crouched beside me, shuddering, clinging to me as we bent above Alan. Blood was gushing from his mouth; his eyes were glazing.

He tried to gasp defiance at me, but it choked with a rattle of blood in his throat. Then his body twitched with a last convulsion and he was gone.

Alan Nero Warren. Like that other, far more famous Nero, who was a murderer and who killed himself, Alan Warren had fulfilled his strange destiny of horror!

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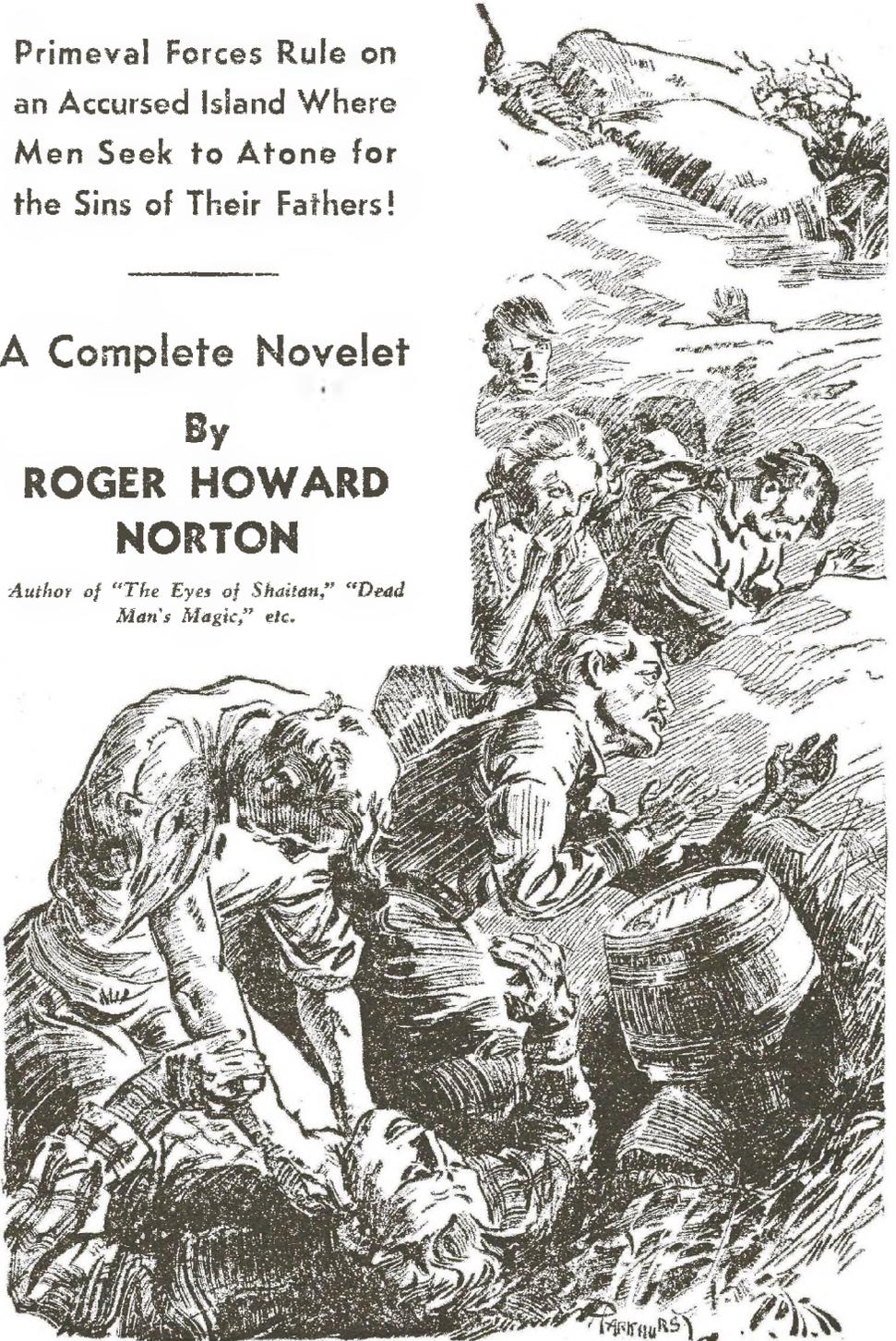
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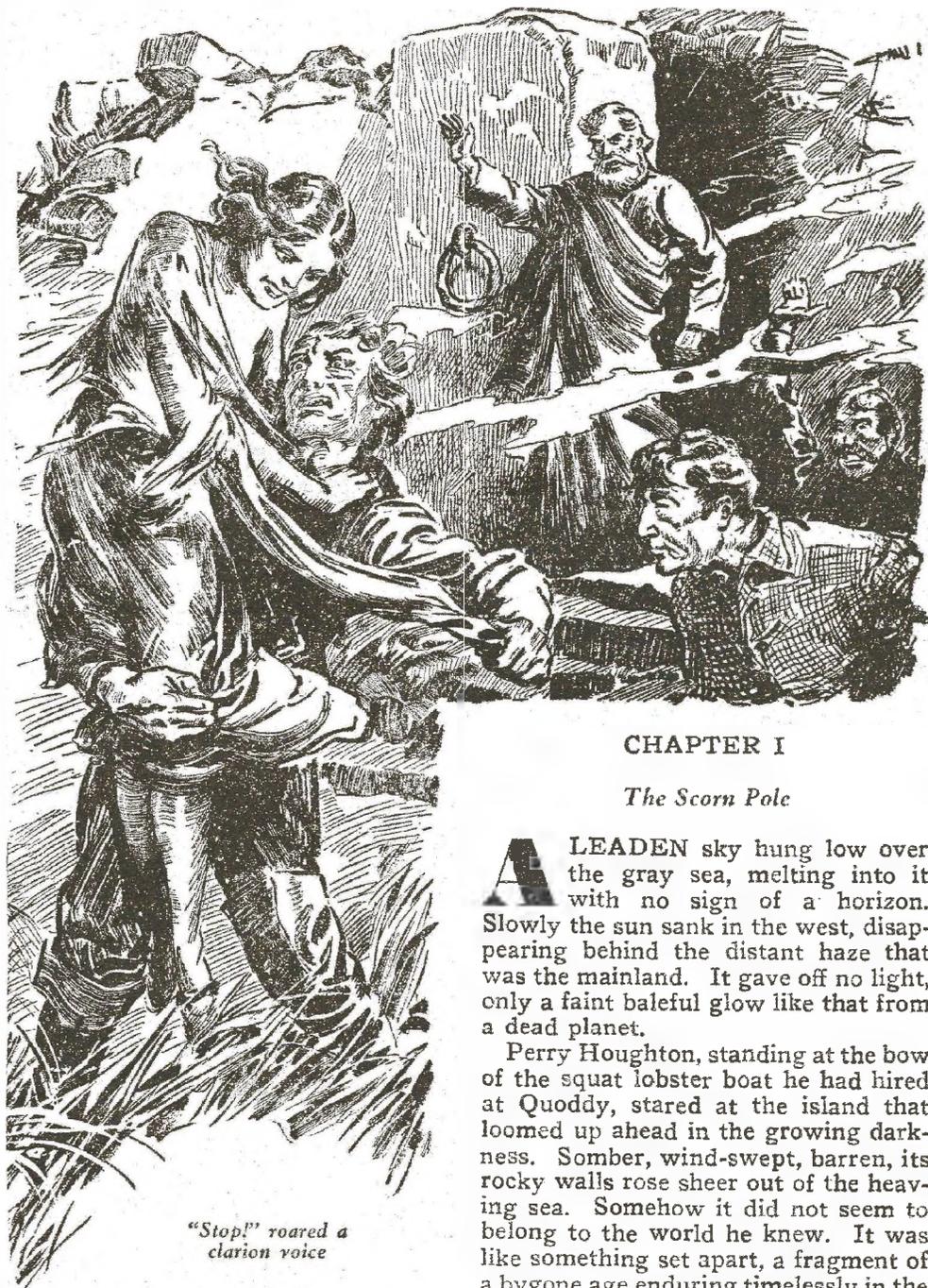
By

**ROGER HOWARD
NORTON**

*Author of "The Eyes of Shaitan," "Dead
Man's Magic," etc.*



OF THE WOLF



"Stop!" roared a
clarion voice

Myth or Prophecy
... Which Was It?

CHAPTER I

The Scorn Pole

A LEADEN sky hung low over the gray sea, melting into it with no sign of a horizon. Slowly the sun sank in the west, disappearing behind the distant haze that was the mainland. It gave off no light, only a faint baleful glow like that from a dead planet.

Perry Houghton, standing at the bow of the squat lobster boat he had hired at Quoddy, stared at the island that loomed up ahead in the growing darkness. Somber, wind-swept, barren, its rocky walls rose sheer out of the heaving sea. Somehow it did not seem to belong to the world he knew. It was like something set apart, a fragment of a bygone age enduring timelessly in the watery wastes.

"Not too late to change your mind," said the lantern-jawed fisherman who handled the sloop's tiller. "Still want to land there?"

Perry turned. "Of course. Why do you ask?"

"Why?" The fisherman laughed mirthlessly. "Because now you can see for yourself what kind of a place it is. I tell you, it's the devil's own island! I wouldn't come within ten miles of it now if I didn't need the money so bad. But it's your funeral."

There was an underlying conviction in his voice that had an almost prophetic ring.

Scowling impatiently, Houghton turned his back. He had enough on his mind without adding to his unease by listening to the ramblings of a superstitious native. That eerie island was Erica's home. In a little while, when he saw her again, he would learn the answer to all the things about her that had puzzled him for so long.

Erica. Erica Asmund. Even her name was strange. When he had first seen her at the hospital where he was an interne he had thought how much better an iron helmet, a byrnie of chain mail, a hauberik, would have suited her than the starched cap and white nurse's uniform she wore. Then she would have looked even more like a valkyr, one of the ancient handmaidens of the slain, that she so much resembled.

He had discovered later that his instinctive characterization had been a good one: that she was of Norse stock. And he discovered other things about her; that she came from an island off the coast of Maine, that her beauty was more than just of face and body, that underneath was a woman who could love and be loved.

But there were some things he could never discover. Why did a shadow come into her eyes when he held her close? Why did she shy away at the mere mention of marriage?

Her period of training at the hospital had ended a month ago, and without a word of good-by she had disappeared. Daily Perry Houghton had expected a letter from her, but none had come.

Then, his own work at the hospital completed, he had taken the first train for Maine, for the small town where he could get a boat out to the island from which she had come. Nothing had stopped him, neither the wide-eyed stares, the whispering of the villagers

when he had told them where he wanted to go, nor the difficulty of getting one of them to sail him out there.

Nothing *would* stop him. He was going to take Erica back with him, he was going to marry her though all hell marshaled its forces to prevent it!

A SUDDEN pitching of the sloop called him out of his reverie. Looking up, he saw that they had almost reached the island, that they were rolling in the ground swell that surged sullenly against its stone cliffs. Dead ahead was a narrow cove, its sides rocky walls that towered a hundred feet above them. At its end was a pebble beach.

The sun was gone now. Darkness and silence hung over the island like a pall. Houghton pulled his coat closer about him as a shiver ran up his spine.

"This where you're going to drop me?" he asked.

His face pale, the fisherman nodded. He put over the helm and the boat glided noiselessly between the sheer rock walls into the cove. Houghton helped him fend off from the pebbles of the beach. It was as if they were both afraid of what might happen if they made a noise.

"I'll wait off shore," the fisherman said nervously. "You signal when you're ready to . . ." He clutched convulsively at Perry's arm. "What's that?"

With a gentle, splashing sound something was dripping on the deck of the sloop, pattering in the water alongside. Perry looked up. The sky was dark but not cloudy.

"Can't be rain. Maybe it's—"

A drop of warm liquid fell on his face, ran across his lips. It had a salty taste!

His fingers shaking, the fisherman struck a match, then stiffened with a moan of horror. The drops that fell from the cliffs above, staining the deck, their clothes, were red!

"Blood!" croaked the fisherman. "It's blood!"

Dropping the match, he leaped to the crank of the auxiliary motor, spun it.

A moment Houghton hesitated. Then, gritting his teeth, he made up his mind. He jumped, landing knee-deep

in the water, as the boat's propeller churned, swinging it away from shore.

"You'll come back when I signal?" he called.

The fisherman, steering between the narrow rock walls, did not answer. He did not have to answer. Perry Houghton knew he would not come back, knew he had been left to face the mysteries and terrors of the desolate island that the natives feared and shunned, and with no chance of escape.

The sound of the boat's engine died away in the distance and then there was silence. Silence? No. Fainter and fainter but still audible, the ghostly red drops still splashed from the dark rocks above into the darker waters of the cove. Slowly Houghton waded ashore. His jaw set, he started to climb the path that led up to the top of the cliffs.

It was narrow, twisting, so steep that at times he had to find hand holds to keep from sliding backward. Finally he reached the top and looked around him. He was on a bleak plateau of jutting rocks, stunted trees and rolling, turf-covered hills.

But there must be houses somewhere. Slowly he started to walk along the edge of the cliff. He had taken about five steps when he suddenly checked himself, staring. Looming up out of the darkness ahead of him was a strange shape. It looked like a head. A horse's head. It was a horse's head, but it had no body! Impaled on a stake, viscous crimson gouts still oozing from its severed arteries, it glared wildly at him out of white-rimmed, sightless eyes!

He let out his held breath with a gasp. That was where the blood that had dripped down into the cove had come from, but what did it mean? Was it a warning, a threat, or the consummation of some diabolical and barbarous rite?

HE whirled as a faint sound came from his right. Again he peered through the darkness, heart thudding. He could see nothing, yet he knew that something was there, watching him. His muscles suddenly taut with fear, he drew back a step, another, then turning, began to run.

He did not know where he was run-

ning to, nor from what. He only knew he had to get away from that hellish place where a dead horse's head stared endlessly out to sea, where invisible eyes bored into his very soul.

Reaching the top of a rise, he looked back, then a low moan burst from his lips. There, loping easily over the short turf, hardly distinguishable in the darkness, was a long gray shape. It was too large for a wolf, yet it ran on all fours, pointed muzzle low. No, it was neither a wolf nor a man, but something between the two, more bestial than human, and more evil than all the fiends of hell—and it was coming after him!

Unreasoning, uncontrollable terror flooding his whole being, he began to run again like a man possessed. On he pounded through the darkness, bushes lashing at his contorted face, his feet stumbling over rocks. On, until his sobbing breath rasped in his throat. And always behind him came the gray Thing, unhurried, inexorable.

Then suddenly he saw the faint glow of lights ahead of him, the dim shapes of low buildings. With a hoarse cry he drove his stumbling body forward, reeled around the corner of the nearest house. The Thing was charging now, eyes gleaming.

"Open up!" he screamed, pounding on the door. "For God's sake!"

He clawed at the unyielding wood, his voice choked to a hoarse whisper, glaring wildly over his shoulder, already shrinking from the Wolf Thing's onslaught. Then the door swung open and he plunged inside. Whirling, he slammed it and, hearing the lock snap closed, leaned weakly against it, breathing heavily.

"What's the . . . Perry!"

That voice! Slowly he turned, his pulses pounding. There behind him, staring unbelievably, stood the girl he had come to find.

"Erica!" he whispered. "Oh, darling, I—"

An impatient, quavering voice stopped him.

"Who is it, Erica?"

With an effort Perry tore his eyes from the girl's lovely, pale face. At the other end of the low, raftered room, the lamplight accentuating the planes of

his craggy features, stood an old, white-haired man.

"It—it's Perry Houghton, Father." Erica was pulling herself together with an effort. "From the hospital. I told you about him."

A moment old Asmund's deep-set eyes studied him. Then he nodded.

"Be welcome in an evil time." There was something strange and archaic about his manner and choice of words.

"But, Perry, what are you doing here?" said Erica, her face troubled. "Why did you come?"

"Why?" He stepped impulsively toward her. "For the best reason in the world. Because I love you. Because I couldn't let you step out of my life. Because I had to find out why you went away like that."

The ardor in his voice brought a faint flush to her cheeks.

"Oh, Perry, but you shouldn't have—" She broke off with a start. "Blood! You're hurt!"

He glanced down at his stained clothes, shook his head.

"No. It's not mine. It's the blood of a horse that—"

"The blood of a horse?" In the excitement of seeing Erica again, Perry had forgotten about her father. The old man had stiffened, his somber eyes suddenly intense. "What do you mean?"

QUICKLY Perry told him of his landing on the island, of the horse's head impaled on a stake.

"The Scorn Pole," muttered Asmund. His face had gone haggard. "When you came in here you were frightened. Was there something else?"

A moment Perry hesitated. "Yes!" he blurted. "A huge gray Thing. It followed me across the island."

Slowly the old man sat down. "So," he said, "it begins." He raised his bleak eyes, met Perry's puzzled look. "You don't understand? It is the Ragnarok!"

"Ragnarok?" A faint memory stirred in Perry's brain. "You mean the Norse myth of the Twilight of the Gods?"

Asmund's face darkened. "It is not a myth! It is a prophecy! And I tell you it is here!"

"Please, Father—" began Erica.

"He loves you, this man, eh?"

"Of course I love her," Houghton answered hotly.

"Ah! And you know all about us, why we live here in isolation, some few score of us? You know that we are accursed?"

"Accursed?" Perry glanced at Erica, but her expression told him nothing.

"Is that so strange?" asked Asmund. "From time immemorial men have recognized that God has an opponent, that there is a power which is the symbol of all evil. Today we call that enemy of God's, Satan. The Egyptians called him Set. The Persians, Ahriman. My own people, Loki. And also from time immemorial there have been men who worshiped this Prince of Darkness in preference to God. We, here on this island, are descendants of such men."

"You mean you—"

Asmund shook his head. "No. None of us here today bow down before the Powers of Darkness. For over two hundred years now, ever since our ancestors were led to this island by Asmund Thornfoot, we have been trying to atone. But it is no use. We know that a curse still hangs over us. Know that one day we will have to pay for the sins of our forefathers."

CHAPTER II

The Powers of Evil

PERRY HOUGHTON stared at Erica's father, then at the girl.

"And that's why you ran away?" he demanded of her. "Why you wouldn't marry me?"

She nodded. "We have no doctor here. I studied nursing so I could help my people, but I knew I must come back to them and to Father. Knew that there was no place else for me in the world."

Houghton clenched his fists angrily. Was he to be denied the woman he loved because of an old wives' tale? Because of this strange clan's fancied sense of ancestral guilt?

"You mean you really believe that—"

"What do you know of belief?" asked Asmund angrily. "We have lived here, alone, for centuries to keep our beliefs pure. Was not our fate prophesied in the *Volospaa*?"

"The *Volospaa*?"

"You do not know the oldest of the Eddas, our ancient writings, and you dare scoff?" Taking a large black book down from the shelves, he opened it. "Here is written the end of all, the Ragnarok and the Twilight of the Gods. Listen!"

And in a deep voice he began to read.

Brother battles brother and to bane are turned.

An ice age, a sword age; shields shall be cloven.

A wind age, a storm age and the world shall founder.

A keel from the west cometh, Loki on board her.

When Garm bays ghastful at Gnipa's cave,
The fast must be loosed and the Wolf fare free!

Closing the book, he looked at Houghton with somberly burning eyes.

"Is this an ax age, a sword age? Are not the legions of darkness abroad in the world today, brother fighting with brother in Europe, in the Far East? I tell you the Ragnarok is at hand! The forces of evil are drawing nearer to us, here in America. Where else would they first strive to take root than on this island where the descendants of those who worshiped evil lived?"

Now the enormity of the old man's beliefs finally dawned on Houghton.

"Then you believe that the barbarism that is sweeping through Europe is actually inspired, directed by the Powers of Hell?" he whispered. "You believe that those forces are coming here?"

"No. They are not coming. They are already here!" Asmund's face was blazing with fanatical conviction. "The horse's head set on a stake, that is the Scorn Pole, the defiance of Odin, the All-Father. And it is the sign of Loki, the Dark One. Who set it up? That gray shape you saw, what else could it be but—"

A sudden knock on the door cut him short, startled Erica. She pressed close to Houghton and he put his arm around her.

"Who—who is it?" she called.

"Olaf Gunnarson and some others," answered a deep, booming voice. "We want to talk to Asmund."

Erica's father went to the door and opened it. Standing outside were a group of men. They were dressed in seamen's rough clothes, their breeches tucked into high boots, yet somehow Houghton got the feeling that he had been plunged back more than a thousand years, that these men were Vikings just landed from their long-ship.

The two nearest the door were big men, deep-chested. The resemblance between them was so marked that they were obviously brothers, but one of them was dark, black-haired, and the other was blond.

Asmund nodded to them. "Greetings, Olaf, Bjorn."

Olaf, the dark one, nodded back. "Greetings, Asmund. We have come—" Then, looking past the old man he saw Perry Houghton, his arm still around Erica's waist. He stiffened. "Who is that?" he asked angrily.

"He is Perry Houghton, a friend of Erica's."

THERE was an ugly look in the big man's eyes.

"A friend? He is a stranger. And we do not like strangers."

Flushing a little, Erica drew away from Houghton.

"But he is also a guest, Olaf," she said sternly. "Please treat him as one."

Houghton understood then. Olaf Gunnarson was in love with Erica. The greater part of his anger at seeing a stranger there was jealousy. The big man dropped his eyes under her reproof, muttering.

"Was it to quarrel with the one to whom I give shelter to that you came?" asked Asmund.

"No, Asmund." Bjorn, Olaf's blond brother, answered. "We came to ask your advice. But—" He, too, looked at Houghton.

"You may talk freely in front of him," said Asmund. "Come in." Then, after they had filed into the room, "Well?"

"Asmund, these are evil times." Olaf's face was grim. "There have been signs and portents we do not like. For

three nights now there has been a knocking on our door at midnight and when we opened the door, there was no one there."

"We are fishermen, Asmund," said Bjorn. "But for a week now we have caught no fish. They have disappeared. And that is not all. We went out to the fishing grounds in my boat tonight. There were four of us, Sven, Knute, Olaf and myself. Only Olaf and I came back."

Erica paled. "You mean—"

"As we left the island we thought we saw a Scorn Pole set on top of the cliffs," Olaf said. "Bjorn and I went below to prepare the lines. When we went up on deck again, Sven and Knute were gone. Where did they go?"

Despite Perry Houghton's attempt to be rational, a slow, soul-chilling dread was freezing the blood in his veins. There was no hysteria here. These men were brave, stolid, unimaginative. Yet every word they uttered was weighted with fatality, with a sense of impending doom. Their very calmness made the terror he felt hanging over them all more real.

"These are not new things you tell me." Asmund's voice was grave. "What would you have me do?"

Olaf looked at him steadily. "You are the Elder of the island. You are of the blood of Asmund the Priest who led us here. You know what is happening and why. There are some who say that it is this island which is accursed, that we should leave it and go live on the mainland."

A big, red-bearded man standing behind him nodded. "We can get work with the fisheries from Boston," he rumbled.

Olaf was still looking at Asmund. "But I say there is another way."

Slowly the old man nodded. "Yes, there is another way." There was a strange light in his eyes.

"Father!" cried Erica.

He ignored her. "The curse is not on the island. It is on us. It is an old curse. To fight it, we must have the help of the old gods, of Odin the All-Father."

A faint movement stirred the quiet men. Their eyes were beginning to glow like Asmund's.

"You will lead us in calling on him, tonight?" asked Olaf.

"I will lead you in calling on him—now!"

With an effort, Houghton broke the grip of the numbing, thought-paralyzing fear he felt.

"This is madness, Mr. Asmund! A return to the Dark Ages!"

The old man turned smoldering eyes on him.

"Was the Thing that pursued you across the island, that drove you terror-stricken into this house a creature of this age?"

HOUGHTON stiffened. He had forgotten the gray wolf shape. Was it really possible that here on this island the primeval forces of evil were being born again? That they could only be fought with the weapons of the past? Cold sweat broke out on his body.

"Go to the great stone, to the cairn where Asmund the Priest is buried," ordered Asmund. "I will prepare myself and join you there." His burning gaze swung to Perry and Erica. "You will go, too."

"But Mr. Asmund—"

The old man looked at the two Gunnarsons. Without a word they stepped toward Erica and Houghton, eyes fathomless. Then Perry Houghton knew that there was nothing he and Erica could do. Willingly or unwillingly they must attend the pagan rites. Taking Erica's hand, he led her toward the door.

That march across the island was a scene from a nightmare. The eerie, lurid light of leaping torches lit their way, making the barren landscape seem as unearthly as the plains of hell. There was no sound but the distant booming of the surf, the soft shuffle of many feet.

Then out of the darkness ahead of them appeared the *howe*, the cairn where Asmund the Priest lay buried. It was a long, low mound, turf-covered, set back about a hundred yards from the cliff's edge. At one end, sealing the entrance, was a huge circular stone with an iron ring fastened to its face.

Slowly the islanders, burly, bronzed men and tall, blond-haired women,

formed a large semicircle facing the howe. No one spoke or moved. They all stood silent, waiting. Erica's hand stole into Houghton's. He clutched it hard, felt that it was trembling, clammy.

There was a movement behind them and through the massed fisher folk strode Asmund. He was dressed in flowing gray robes. Bjorn and Olaf must have slipped away during the march across the island, for they walked behind him, carrying an enormous silver-mounted drinking horn and an oak cask bound with iron hoops. Asmund strode up to the stone at the mouth of the mound and turned.

"Odin, All-Father, hear us!" he began.

His eyes somber as the dark skies above, his voice deep and throbbing as the distant thunder of surf, he recalled the far-off land from which their ancestors had come, the ancient worship of the older gods. In measured terms he told of the conflict between them and Loki, the Dark One.

As his voice went on, men drew closer together as if for warmth and comfort, as if they felt that there were things beyond the circle of torchlight that watched them. And now Asmund was telling of the curse that lay on them, of the presence of evil they all felt, of the night walkings, of the disappearances.

"Come to our aid then, Oh, Odin! Stand forth in thy might and protect us!" Tall and erect in his gray robes, his face transfigured, Asmund had slipped back more than ten centuries, had again become a priest of the northland. "See how we pledge thee in the holy mead, and save us!"

He nodded to Bjorn and Olaf. Kneeling, they pulled the bung from the cask and started to pour a yellow liquid into the huge drinking horn. When it was full they rose. Asmund turned, looked straight at Houghton.

"The stranger first," he said. "Let him drink deep."

SILENTLY the two brothers came toward Houghton, thrust the horn into his hands. As if in a trance he took it, raised it to his lips and drank. The yellow liquor, brewed of honey,

was sweet, heady. He could feel it burn his throat.

He gave the horn back to Bjorn and the blond fisherman drank also. He stiffened momentarily, a shudder shaking his big frame, then lowering the horn, he stared with wide eyes at Perry Houghton. Now Olaf was drinking, and the crowd was pressing closer eagerly for their turn.

"Drink and pass!" called a voice. "Drink and pass!"

Someone grabbed the horn from Olaf, gave it to Erica. She took one swallow then, choking, almost dropped it. Some of the liquid spilled down the front of her dress—and it was dark red! Houghton leaned closer, staring unbelievably, his heart pounding. It was not a trick of the light. It was true! When he had drunk of the horn it had been filled with yellow mead. Now it was filled with blood!

CHAPTER III

Loki, the Dark One

FROM hand to hand went the unholy horn, each man and woman drinking deep, then standing as if frozen, with dilated eyes.

"You who have drunk, hands on the ring!" called Asmund.

The men grasped the big iron ring, bent their combined strength on it. There was a grinding, grating sound as the huge rock shifted for the first time in centuries. Tough strands of grass that had grown over it snapped, then slowly it began to roll aside.

Eyes blazing, Asmund watched. A portion of the narrow passageway beyond it showed up dark in the light of the torches and he raised his hands triumphantly above his head.

"As we roll back this stone, O All-Father, so will you—"

His voice died away. From somewhere far off, deep in the earth, a strange sound was coming. It was a low, muttering rumble at first. Then it grew louder, swelled into a deep baying roar that filled the whole night with its pitiless savagery.

There were gasps from the men,

moans from the women as the diabolical ululation pealed on. Asmund's eyes were glazed.

"When Garm bays ghastful at Gnipa's cave," he whispered, "The fast must be loosed and the Wolf fare free!"

Olaf, standing near him, had let go of the iron ring and was weaving from side to side like a drunken man. Now, lifting his head high, he suddenly howled long and shrill, his voice blending with the unearthly baying from the cairn. Gnashing his teeth, his eyes rolling wildly, Bjorn followed suit. Then another of the men who had drunk from the hellish horn joined them; and another.

With a choked cry, Erica clutched Houghton's arm.

"Good God, what's happening to them?"

He did not answer, but he knew. They had gone berserk. They had been seized by the wolf-madness of the Thing that howled from the bowels of the earth!

Like wild-fire the frenzy spread until a dozen men were leaping, howling, beating their chests in the lurid glare of the torches. Then Olaf's rolling eyes fell on Erica. Dropping on all fours like the wolf he had apparently become, he charged toward her.

With a curse, Perry Houghton leaped forward to block the Norseman's rush. He swung a terrific right to the madman's jaw but Olaf was coming too fast. His shoulder smashed into Houghton's stomach and they went down together, rolling over and over on the soft turf.

Clawed fingers tore at the young doctor's eyes. Powerful arms went around him, trying to crush his ribs. On his back, Olaf on top of him, Houghton used every ounce of his strength to break the berserk man's grip.

Saliva was dripping on his face. White teeth gleamed, slashing at his jugular. With a desperate wrench he got his hands free, gripped Olaf's throat. His muscles cording with the strain, he managed to hold his attacker off.

A piercing scream chilled his blood. Glancing up, he groaned with impotent horror. Olaf was not the only one

in whom the berserk fury had turned to lust. There, behind him, Erica was struggling frantically in Bjorn's arms.

Holding her in a bearlike clutch, his eyes red-rimmed, the blond fisherman was tearing her clothes from her with clawed fingers. As she continued to try to fight him off he growled with animal rage, buried his teeth in her bare shoulder and hurled her to the ground.

It was a saturnalia of madness. Through the snarling grunts of the berserk Olaf who was still straining to get at his throat, Houghton could hear the screams of women, the crazed howling of the men who had turned to beasts. And over all was the unearthly, inhuman baying from the cairn. The Wolf, freed of its bonds, stalked the night in human guise.

A ringing, metallic sound cut through the pandemonium like a sword.

"Stop!" roared a clarion voice. "Stop!"

LA F relaxed slightly, stopped his frenzied lunges for Houghton's throat and, glancing past his shoulder, Houghton saw Asmund drop the iron ring he had been beating against the huge stone and came running down toward them. As if he were handling only a refractory dog and not a blood crazed, lust inflamed madman, he dragged Bjorn from Erica, hurled him aside.

"What?" he snarled, eyes blazing. "You would dare touch her, lay hands on her? Asmund's blood is in her veins. Is she for you—or for him who waits, calling for her there in the *howe*?"

Silence for a split second. Then:

"His!" shouted Olaf. "She is his! Give her to him!"

Breaking Perry Houghton's grip on his throat he leaped to his feet, ran to where Erica lay and swept her up in his arms. Her slim body was marked by weals and scratches, her shoulder bloody. Dazed, she made no outcry or protest.

Asmund drew himself erect, pointed with a shaking hand.

"To the *howe* then! Let him not wait!"

"To the *howe*!" screamed a score of voices. "Give her to him!"

As Olaf started to walk slowly to-

ward the dark entrance of that ancient tumulus, carrying the half-conscious girl to the agelessly evil Thing that still howled from the bowels of the earth, Perry Houghton broke the paralysis of horror that had held him rigid, staggered to his feet.

"Asmund! For God's sake, no!"

He ran forward, tried to tear the woman he loved from Olaf's arms, but a dozen hands seized and held him.

"Asmund, she's your daughter!"

His fanatical face expressionless, the gray-robed Elder did not even turn. He walked beside Olaf to the mouth of the *howe*, stood there while the big fisherman set Erica down. She was moaning now, trying to break away, but it was too late. They thrust her into the dark opening.

"And now, the stone!" ordered Asmund.

Eager hands grabbed the iron ring. Bodies bent, strained, and the huge rock started to roll back again, closing up the entrance of the tunnel, sealing Erica inside.

Houghton stood there transfixed. He had to save her or at least get into the *howe* with her, try and protect her. But how? Then a wild, mad scheme leaped into his brain. These feverish, wild-eyed men and women had slipped back more than a thousand years, were re-enacting some ancestral rite of human immolation. They could not be reached by reason. But within the limits of their own beliefs . . .

"Fools!" he shouted. "Wait!"

Something in his voice made the men at the huge rock pause. He shook off the hands of those who held him, forced a mocking laugh.

"So you have forgotten the *Volospaa*?" A strange power seemed to flood through him, making him appear taller, giving his voice timbre and resonance. "'A keel from the west cometh,'" he quoted, "'Loki on board her.'" He glared around him. "Who drank first of the mead and turned it to blood? Are you so blind you do not know me? Is there one among you who would dare keep me from my bride?"

Would they believe him? Would they really take him for Loki, the Dark One?

He did not wait to see. Before any

of them could make a move he had run forward, squeezed past the huge rock that partially blocked the entrance of the tunnel, plunged into the darkness beyond.

He stood there for a moment, breathing heavily. His body was shaking with nervous reaction, with a chill born of the dank air.

"Erica!" he whispered. "Where are you?"

THE lurid light of the torches filtered faintly into the gloom, but he could not see her. Then there was a grinding, earth-shaking thud behind him and every last vestige of light was blotted out. They had rolled the huge stone back over the opening of the *howe*! He was sealed with Erica in the bowels of that ancient barrow! They were walled up in the burial mound of the long dead priest, with the deathless Thing whose ghastly baying drove men to madness!

He stood frozen, petrified. He did not remember when the hellish howling had died away, but he could not hear it now. He could hear nothing. There was only silence and unending, impenetrable blackness.

"Erica!" he croaked again. "Erica!"

There was no answer, not even an echo.

Where had she gone? Or hadn't she gone, had she been—taken? Heart pounding, he felt his way forward. The passageway was so low he had to stoop to clear the stone slabs of the roof. His hands slid along the dank earthen walls, guiding him. Once he slipped and fell, lying there half-stunned for several moments before he could rise and go on again. He had lost all sense of direction, but somehow he felt he was going down, descending deeper into the bowels of the earth.

Suddenly his groping fingers lost contact with the wall to his right. A turn in the passageway. He swung around, then froze, staring. He was looking into a place so weird that it could have existed nowhere else but there in the heart of that ancient barrow.

It was about twenty feet square, hewn out of the living rock. Faint starlight seeped into it from the left

through a square opening that overlooked the sea some hundred feet below. To the right was another opening where the passageway continued. In the floor next to it was a circular pit about three feet across, its sides polished and smooth as glass.

But the thing that drew and held Houghton's fascinated gaze was directly opposite him, a slab of stone set against the wall. Rusty chains were fastened to it and carved out of the rock that formed the eerie chamber's walls and roof, hanging down toward it with gaping mouths, were a dozen or more strangely carved stone serpents!

There was something so inexpressibly evil about that waiting slab, the stone vipers that seemed to writhe down toward it, that the blood turned to ice in his veins. There was a curious bronze bowl on the floor next to the slab. Then suddenly the significance of the hellish room flashed into his brain. The punishment of Loki!

When Loki, the Dark One, had finally been captured by Odin and Thor they had bound him to a rock deep in the bowels of the earth. They had suspended serpents above him so that their venom would drip down on him, searing the flesh from his bones. But Loki's wife, staying in his subterranean tomb with him, had caught the venom in a bowl and it was only when she left him to empty it that he suffered the agony the gods had planned for him. Thus was his punishment stretched out for eternity. The awful room at which Perry was looking had been created as a warning against Loki by the descendants of his worshipers, by the ancestors of Erica and her father!

With a choked cry Perry Houghton tore his eyes away from the diabolical slab, ran across the soul-chilling chamber to the passageway on its far side.

"Erica!" he shouted, plunging into its blackness. "In God's name, where—"

The words died in his throat. He had heard, seen nothing. Yet he knew that Something, some vile Presence was creeping up behind him through the darkness. He whirled around, a strange feral stench in his nostrils. His outstretched hands brushed a huge

body covered with coarse, bristling hair. Then a terrific blow crashed down on his head, a bright star exploded in his brain and he knew no more. . . .

A COLD as chill as outer space was biting through Perry Houghton's body, freezing the very marrow of his bones. A shudder racked him and he tried to move his stiffening limbs, but found he could not. With a groan he opened his eyes and then the cold that chilled his body was as nothing to the dagger of ice that stabbed him to the heart.

Above him, mouths gaping open, were the stone serpents he had seen in the hellish, subterranean chamber of the burial *howe*! He was lying outstretched, chained, on the doom-slab of Loki!

Twice he tried to cry out, but could not. His throat was too terror-constricted. Then he gave up even trying, for suddenly he knew why he was manacled to that primeval stone, and the horror that flooded every fibre of his being was too deep for any sound. He had said he was Loki! He had played the role of the Dark One to follow Erica into the *howe*! Now he was to suffer the fate of Loki!

The glaze of madness in his eyes, he stared up at the triangular heads, the fiendishly open mouths of the sculptured vipers above him. But these serpents were not alive. They were stone. How could they. . .

A hoarse sound rattled in his throat. There, on the out-thrust, forked tongue of the nearest serpent, a yellow drop was forming. It trembled, fell on the cold slab next to him. And where it touched the stone it smoked and bubbled, eating it away!

CHAPTER IV

The Wife of Loki

ALL the pent-up horror of that whole night of madness burst from Perry Houghton's lips in a soul-shaking scream. Frenzied, he twisted his body from side to side, tore at the chains till they bit into his wrists and

ankles. The hellish liquid was forming on the forked tongues of the other serpents now, dripping down faster and faster. A drop fell on his chest, another on his shoulder.

The cloth of his shirt disappeared where it touched, and a stab of pain like the sear of a red hot poker lanced through him. Again he screamed and again as the burning corrosive fell on his writhing body.

Then, like a roar of triumph, the unearthly baying howl that had signaled the opening of the barrow filled the night again, drowning out his cries. It filled the whole chamber, shook the slab on which he was lying, seemed to burst on his ear-drums from the four quarters of the compass.

His whole body felt like a living flame. Something brushed his arm. He opened his eyes and a hoarse croak that was a prayer of thanksgiving came from his cracked lips. Bending over him, her face bloodless, was Erica.

The strange bronze bowl that he had seen under the slab before was in her hands and with it she was catching the yellow drops of the hell-brew as they fell, keeping them from dripping on his body. She was trying to save him as Loki's wife had tried to save the Dark One in the eons before history.

"Erica, thank God!" he moaned. "Where were you? Where did you come from? What—"

She did not hear him. The roaring howl was so loud it would have drowned out a pistol shot. Eyes intent, she watched the drops forming, intercepted them as they fell. But even so she could not get them all. Searing agony lanced across Houghton's cheek, bit into his ankle, his thigh.

She could not save him. She could only lessen the torture temporarily so that he would suffer longer.

THEN, glancing past her, his eyes dilated with horror. There, materializing out of the darkness of the passageway behind her, was a shape. White fangs gleamed in its open jaws. Green eyes glowed balefully. Its huge body was covered with coarse gray fur. It was the beast Thing that had pursued him across the island, that had attacked him here in the lightless barrow

that was its lair! "When Garm bays ghastful in Gnipa's cave, the fast must be loosed and the Wolf fare free!"

"Erica!" he choked. "Look out! There, behind you!"

She saw his lips move but she could not understand. The howling, unearthly baying that filled the whole room drowned out his words. And then the beast leaped.

Erica screamed wildly as claws bit into her soft flesh, then she went down under the impact of that hell-spawned, diabolical shape. The big bronze bowl spun from her hands, struck the stone slab. Instinctively Perry grabbed it, kept its corrosive contents from spilling on him. Searing agony licked him in a dozen places as the burning acid dripped down unchecked.

Somewhere behind him on the floor the ungodly beast Thing had Erica in its clutches. Bound so that he could not help or even see her, deafened by the infernal roaring so he could not hear her cries, he must lie helpless on the slab of stone while that acid ate into his flesh!

There *must* be a way! He must. . . . Then, even as the tortured thought hung fire, there was a sound like an explosion. A rock shot up out of the round hole in the floor near the tunnel, shattered against the ceiling.

The deep, baying howl changed to a whistling roar and out of the round hole, like the spout of a whale, burst a geyser of water. In a solid stream it hosed across the small chamber, drenching Perry Houghton, smashing the bowl of acid from his hands and sending it spinning backward. He heard it strike something soft, clatter to the floor.

A wild, hoarse scream of utter agony echoed from the walls of the chamber. Straining his head backward, Houghton saw the gray wolf shape rolling about on the floor. Still screaming, it heaved itself up, not on all fours, but on its rear two legs like a man. Then, as it spun around in maddening pain, Houghton shouted. The bowl of acid had been dashed directly into its bestial face, and now, under the smoking shards of fur and hair the bound young doctor could see the blinded, tortured countenance of Bjorn Gunnarson.

The blond fisherman blundered into the wall, pawing at his sightless eyes, caromed off it and went staggering across the chamber toward the square opening that looked out over the sea. Missing his footing, he fell through it and with a last, strangled screech, pitched downward to the jagged rocks some hundred feet below.

Water still spouted from the blow hole, drenching Houghton. Its salt stung painfully in the open scars of his burns but he knew as long as it kept washing over him it would dilute the corrosive acid that continued to drip from the stone serpents.

Through torture-filmed eyes he saw Erica's face swim into his field of vision. Blood oozed from scratches on her throat, marred its ivory whiteness. Even though partly dazed, her first thought had been of him. With the bronze bowl in her hand, she was again trying to shield him from the rain of burning witch-brew.

"Darling!" he whispered. "I—"

His eyes blinked involuntarily at a sudden blaze of light from flaring torches. Dimly he heard shouts of horror, caught a glimpse of Erica's father, Asmund, running across the chamber toward them, followed by others of the islanders. There was a clanging sound as crowbars smashed away at the stone slab, breaking loose the chains that bound Houghton. Then he slipped away into merciful unconsciousness.

* * * * *

THE sea was blue under the bright morning sun, the turf that rolled from Asmund's house to the edge of the distant cliffs a startling green. Shifting his bandage-swathed body with a slight grimace of pain, Perry Houghton turned from the window out of which he had been staring and looked at Erica, at her grim-faced father, and at Olaf Gunnarson who sat between them, haggard and drawn.

"So it was you who planned it," Asmund was saying. "But why?"

Slowly Olaf lifted his head. "For two reasons. First, because I loved Erica, because I wanted to make sure she would not marry anyone else. Second, because I was paid to by the fishing combine in Boston."

Asmund stared at him, puzzled. "I still don't understand."

"The best fishing grounds along the whole coast are just off the island here. The Star Fisheries wanted to get hold of them. They offered to pay me well if I could get everyone to desert the island, move in to the mainland. I knew the only way to do it would be through fear. And that gave me another idea."

His red-rimmed eyes swung to Erica. "I loved Erica, but I knew she did not love me. When she came back from studying nursing I was afraid there was another man, and was every day expecting him to come here. It was for that that I prepared."

"You had always spoken of our past history, of the curse that had driven our ancestors to this country from Norway. I thought if I could convince Erica of the reality of the curse, make her feel it was real, imminent, she would not marry a stranger. She would be afraid it might be visited on him. She would marry only an island man, me, who already shared the curse with her."

"So partly," muttered Asmund, "it was my fault."

"It was your talk, your quotations from the Eddas that gave me an idea as to how it could be done. Bjorn and I set up the Scorn Pole. We made a mask and costume that looked like a wolf and dressed him up in it. When I went off in the boat yesterday, supposedly to go fishing, he stayed on the island to roam around in the darkness. Be seen and start terrorizing people. Sven and Knute went with me, but they didn't disappear as I said. I transferred them to one of the Star Fisheries boats."

"But that awful room under the cairn," said Erica. "How did you know about that?"

"Years ago," said Olaf, "when Bjorn and I were birds' nesting along the cliffs, we found the mouth of a tunnel hidden under some rocks. It led down to it."

"Our ancestors must have built it when they first came to the island," said Asmund, "to show what the punishment of Loki was and to serve as a warning to anyone who would worship him. Then I imagine that those who

knew about it died and it was forgotten."

"There was a blow-hole in it that led down to a cave at sea level," continued Olaf. "We blocked it up, leaving a small opening. As the tide rose, air was compressed in the cave and came out of the hole slowly. But when the big rock was rolled away from the mouth of the *howe* it caused a draft and the air rushed out with a roaring sound."

Perry Houghton started. So that was why the roaring had stopped when he went into the *howe*! The big rock had been rolled back again, blocking the mouth of the tunnel. And when Asmund and the others had removed it a second time to come looking for them, the pressure inside the sea cave had forced out the rocks that blocked the blow-hole, sending up a geyser of water.

"What about turning the mead into blood?" he asked.

LA F smiled faintly. "We had partially filled the horn with blood from the horse we had killed when we brought it to the cairn. We had drugged the blood heavily, then poured just a little mead on top of it when we pretended to fill the horn. The mead, being lighter than the blood, floated on top of it, concealing it. You, Bjorn and I drank off the mead, leaving the drugged blood for the others."

"That did not occur to me at the time," said Asmund. "I was frightened. I had Erica put in the mound to save her from you. But afterward, when I found that you and Bjorn had disappeared, when I discovered that the cask of mead was almost full and that you couldn't have filled the horn with it, I began to suspect."

Olaf's face had gone bloodless.

"That—that was where I made my mistake. I ran back to my boat, sailed around and waited at the foot of the cliffs near the *howe*. Bjorn went down the secret tunnel and put on his wolf costume. He was to frighten Erica, knock her unconscious, then lower her down to me.

"When she came to after that, we would be far from the island. I thought that she would be so convinced of the

power of the curse then, so grateful to me for having saved her, that she would marry me. And when you went to look for her and found her gone, you would be so frightened that you would all leave the island.

"But there was one thing I had not counted on. Bjorn had an affection for me that was strange to the point of madness. Even as a child, he was wildly jealous and used to swear that no one would ever come between us. He must have hated Erica and planned to kill her instead of lowering her down to me. It was he who rigged up that carboy of sulphuric acid, piped it down to the snake's heads. When I saw his body come falling down the cliffs. . . ."

He buried his face in his hands.

"What are you going to do with me?" he asked in a choked voice.

There was a look almost of sympathy in Asmund's eyes.

"Nothing," he said slowly. "You will do it to yourself. Your punishment will be to live with the ghost of your brother to the end of your days, and know that you are responsible for his death."

A moment longer the big man sat there, then he rose and stumbled out the door.

Asmund sighed wearily.

"And I, too, have been guilty," he said to Houghton and his daughter. "I have been a foolish old man. It was my love for the past, my talk of the ancient legends that almost brought about both your deaths. But that's done with now. We will think only of the future from now on. Your future."

Perry Houghton's heart pounded. "You mean—"

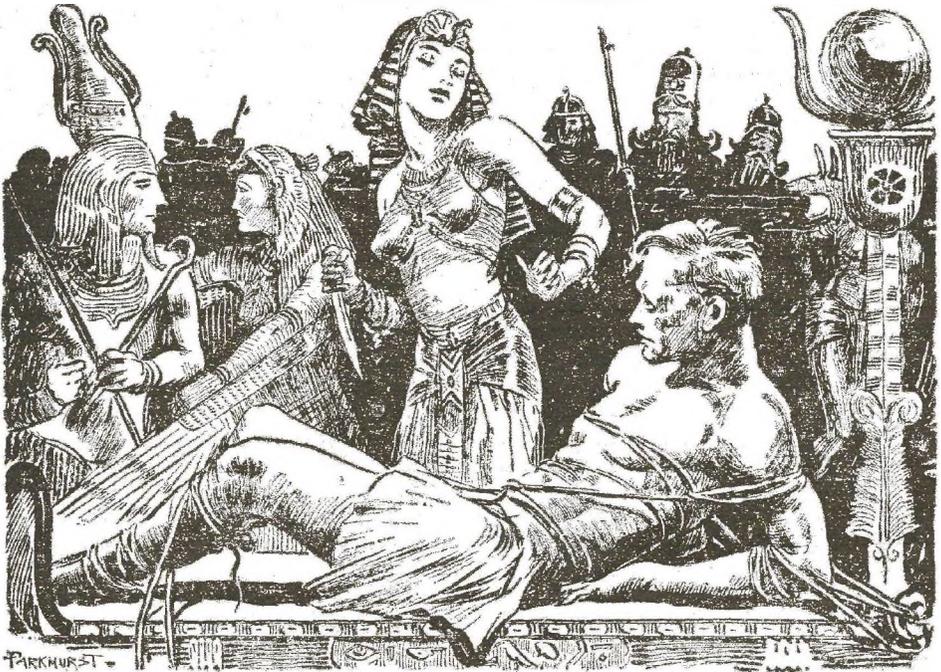
"You love Erica. She loves you. She would not marry you before, because she was afraid of the curse and because she would not leave me alone here on the island. Now you know that there is no curse, and if you wish I will leave the island and come and live near you, wherever you go."

"Father!" Erica choked. "Oh, Father!" She embraced him gratefully.

"Don't waste your kisses on me," said Asmund smiling.

And as she turned, ran toward Perry Houghton with bright eyes, the old man went out and left them alone together.

Back Through Six Thousand Years to Ancient Egypt a Madman
Carries His Victims



For a full moment she stood over him, knife poised

HERITAGE OF OSIRIS

By FRED ENGELHARDT

SETH FIELDS sat on the terrace of Shepheard's Hotel in Cairo and methodically cursed the Egyptian police from chief to lowliest constable. It was mid-April, the tag-end of the season, and except for the organdie-clad honey blonde seated opposite him the terrace was deserted. A sweating horse hauling an *arabiyeh* along the Sharia Kemel Pasha reminded him that he was hot and thirsty, and he drained his Scotch and soda in one long satisfying draft.

The girl patiently sipped a Tom Collins and waited for her companion to exhaust his vocabulary. Seth Fields

had been Glory Lane's hero since he, at the age of twelve, thrashed the toughest heir of the Newport set for tying her pigtails in knots. To her, no better yachtsman, rider, or fullback existed. Her faith in him had remained firm throughout fifteen long years, and not even the frightening tragedy that now overshadowed them could shake it.

Two weeks before Mrs. Edmund Fields and Mrs. Otis Lane, both wealthy, headstrong widows and social leaders, had suddenly packed and booked passage for England. Seth and Glory, who, with the passing of adolescence, had assumed responsibility for

their respective parents, had insisted on accompanying them.

The two matrons had given their offspring the slip in London. Seth, by the judicious distribution of a few pounds among the hotel staff, learned they had sailed for Alexandria. He and Glory flew to Cairo and met them. It would be a long time before either forgot that meeting, or the torrent of angry recriminations that poured over them.

From the first Seth had suspected there was something besides a sudden desire for travel behind this hasty pilgrimage to the land of the Pharaohs. He knew his mother had "taken up" an Egyptian mystic, one Hesiri, the winter before in New York. From Glory he learned that Mrs. Lane, too, was interested in Hesiri. His knowledge of his flighty mother's past follies made the addition of two and two simple. Hesiri, he decided, was about to cash in on a good thing.

Then, three days ago, both women had disappeared from the hotel. Their beds had not been slept in, but all their baggage and clothes, except what they were wearing, had been left behind. With the aid of the hotel detective, an ex-Scotland Yard man, wise in the ways of the natives, Seth had canvassed the place thoroughly, but no one had seen the women leave.

ENLISTING the help of the American consul, Seth had turned the matter over to the police. The inspector in charge of the case had listened to Seth's theory of Hesiri and admitted that, according to the description, the man was undoubtedly an Egyptian, probably a better class Copt. But the police had turned up no clue to the women's disappearance, nor, as far as the young couple could see, had they made any effort to do so. It was this that now impelled him to curse the force from top to bottom.

Seizing an opportunity when her companion paused for breath, the girl interjected, "Here's a policeman now, Seth. Maybe he has some news."

Seth turned as a trim, uniformed figure approached the table and, with his foot, shoved out a chair as an invitation to sit. Touching his black tar-

boosh to Seth, and bowing stiffly to the girl, the policeman accepted the chair. For a moment or two he fussed with a tiny mustache.

"I have news about your mother, Mr. Fields," he said finally.

Something in the officer's tone stifled an exclamation of joy in Seth's throat. He seized the man's arm in a viselike grip.

"She isn't—she's not dead?" he demanded.

"Oh, no. She's very much alive," the policeman reassured him, struggling to release his arm. "But—that is, you must be prepared for a shock."

"What is it, man?" Seth demanded. "Out with it."

"I'm afraid Madam Fields' experience has been too much for her. She was found wandering in the desert near Abou-Seer, about twenty miles up the river. A troop of our cavalry on maneuvers found her and brought her back to the Citadel. She is, how do you say, a little out of the head."

"Let's go, then," Seth barked, snatching up his sun helmet.

"I'll go, too," Glory said.

The officer had an *arabiyeh* waiting, and during the drive down the Sharia Mohammed Ali, he expressed the police opinion that Mrs. Fields had become separated from a private party of tourists and had lost her mind from the heat and loneliness of the desert. Glory gripped Seth's hand as they were led into the hospital ward of the ancient fortress on the edge of the city.

Seth was glad for her comforting hand when an army doctor motioned them into a private room. Mrs. Fields, three days before a robust, middle-aged American matron, was now a hideous caricature. Her skin hung loose in trembling folds. Yellow fingers picked nervously at the coverlet. Terror-stricken but unseeing eyes roamed aimlessly over the group. Her long wavy hair was streaked with white.

Her son dropped to his knees beside the bed. "Mother!" he cried.

The pitiful, trembling creature looked at him a moment without interest, then her eyes wandered again to the rest of the party. Seth appealed to the Egyptian doctor. The latter shrugged his

shoulders and sighed.

"Perhaps with rest and quiet she will recover," he said. "I would not advise moving her now. Arrangements have been made for her to stay here."

DULLY Seth allowed Glory and the policeman to lead him outside. They returned to Sheppard's, and for an hour the young man paced up and down his room in bitter silence. Glory watched him with tears of sympathy in her eyes. The officer had left them in the lobby. Suddenly Seth spun around.

"The police aren't doing anything," he declared. "They seem to be trying to hush this thing up. I don't know why. I'm going out to Aboo-Seer myself and camp there until I find this Hesiri and wring his neck."

"But how do you know he's there?" Glory asked.

"Mom's clothes were hanging on a chair in that room. She was wearing new shoes, and the soles were hardly worn. She couldn't have walked far in the desert. And unless she was deliberately dumped there, she must have been nearby all the time. It's the only clue we've got, anyway."

"Then I'm going with you," said Glory, determinedly.

Seth hesitated. "But it might be dangerous," he protested.

"Pooh! That's what you said when we went bear hunting in the Rockies last year, but I shot a bear. A big one, too. Besides, Seth, my mother may be out there with that awful Hesiri."

They enlisted the aid of the hotel clerk in preparing for the excursion, but were somewhat reluctant about engaging the *dragoman* he recommended, a ruffianly, whiskered Arab named Ali Hassan es Said. Ali Hassan, however, they discovered, had three virtues. He spoke excellent English, knew the Memphite necropolis where they proposed to camp, and he enjoyed a good fight.

"I still wish Abdul el Rasheed were going with us," Seth remarked, after the *dragoman* had left, promising to have everything ready in the morning. "He was born in this town. He's a good scout, too. Classmate of mine at Harvard."

"Why don't you get in touch with him?" Glory asked.

"He's up in the hills beyond Assouan, digging up mummies for the Egyptian Museum. I've sent him a wire, but maybe it hasn't reached him yet."

Ali Hassan was as good as his word. Seth and Glory, rising with the sun, found him in front of the hotel with an old but sturdy Buick. Behind the Buick stood a light Ford truck, laden with tents, supplies and four *fellahin*, the camp crew.

By noon they were encamped a little north of the four pyramids of Aboo-Seer, in the shadow of a high, rectangular *mastaba*, tomb of some forgotten high priest. To the south, a mile or so away, loomed the great pyramid of Sakkarah, called the Pyramid of the Steps, from its six, set-back terraces. Other tombs and small pyramids dotted the landscape around them.

That evening, weary from hours of fruitless tramping through the ancient graveyard, Glory rested in a beach chair outside her tent and drank in the beauty of the black Egyptian night. Overhead the stars gleamed unwinkingly. The triangular forms of the pyramids were all that broke the even horizon. In another tent Seth was engaged in cleaning and reloading his revolver. Ali Hassan sucked musically at a *hookah*. The *fellahin*, crouched in the lee of the truck, were deep in their own affairs.

Deciding she wanted a cigarette, Glory eased herself out of the chair and stood up, stretching. Suddenly her eyes riveted on a weird glow to the south. The soft, greenish light appeared to be floating over the sands, heading for the camp. It came closer and an excited babble arose from the *fellahin*. Then Glory screamed. The glowing light had resolved into the figure of her mother.

GLORY'S cry brought Seth bounding from his tent. He reached the girl's side in half a dozen steps, then halted in amazement. Instinctively his arm crept around her shoulders. Subconsciously he realized that Ali Hassan was breathing heavily on

the back of his neck. The *tellahin* appeared paralyzed.

Closer and closer the figure came, until it stood on the very edge of the camp. Then, raising a peremptory hand, the figure spoke.

"Go back, Glory. Go back to New York. And take these people away with you."

There was no mistaking Mrs. Otis Lane's nervous treble. Seth had heard it hundreds of times. But this time she spoke with an unwonted imperiousness. It was a command. Seth could feel the girl in his arms shaking with dry sobs.

"Mother!" she cried, tearing herself loose. "Mother!"

"Go," commanded the figure.

With that single word, the ghostly apparition began to retire, seemed to float back across the desert whence it came. Shrill cries of terror arose from the hitherto silent *tellahin*. There was a rasp of bare feet on sand, and they were gone, decamping en masse. Even the stalwart Ali Hassan gasped with a sort of terror.

"I'm going to find out what this is all about," Seth snarled, shaking off the numbness that had seized him. He thrust Glory at the *dragoman*. "You watch her," he barked.

Without pausing for a light, he set off at a lope after the retreating figure, still luminous in the distance.

For the first few minutes he easily kept the figure in sight. Then he stepped into an old excavation and tumbled head over heels. By the time he had scrambled out the other side of the pit the light was far away and barely visible. Watching the ground more carefully, the young man sprinted after it.

Straight toward the huge forbidding Step Pyramid drifted the luminous figure. Its speed seemed to have increased. Rounding a high *mastaba* that suddenly appeared in front of him, Seth saw the figure a few hundred yards ahead, at the base of the pyramid. Then the heavens burst with a roar and a display of lights, and he felt himself falling, falling into a bottomless pit.

Seth's first sensation on recovering

consciousness was that someone on the other side of the world was calling to him, calling anxiously. He felt the back of his head with tender fingers and winced. His fingers came away sticky with blood. The voice sounded nearer now and he saw lights dancing along the sand. He closed his eyes for an instant, and then remembered.

He had been pursuing the ghost—it must have been the ghost—of Glory's mother. It had vanished just as one of the pyramids fell on him. He stifled a deep-seated groan and forced his eyes open. The dancing lights were steady now, and focused on him. Then he realized they were flashlights. Glory and the *dragoman* must have followed. He answered Glory's worried hail, and a few moments later his head was cradled in her lap. He was glad to leave it there.

"OH, my darling," Glory was saying. "Are you hurt badly? Tell me. Ali, for heaven's sake, do something!"

"I'm all right," Seth replied, struggling to sit up. "Wow! My head."

The *dragoman* helped him to his feet. When he could again open his eyes without spinning like a top, Seth related his pursuit of the phantom Mrs. Lane.

"I'm positive she went into that pyramid over there," he said. "The last thing I remember is her running up the mound to its base. Then someone must have blackjacked me. It's as dark as the inside of a cow here. Even if I had been expecting some thug to bop me, I couldn't have seen him."

"What are we going to do now?" Glory wanted to know.

"Do? I'm going into that pyramid and search it from top to bottom. That was your mother, wasn't it? Or her ghost. I wonder why she wanted us to leave. Some of Hesiri's doings. I bet."

Ali Hassan coughed politely. "So sorry to disappoint you, *Effendi*," he said, "but there is nothing in the Step Pyramid. There are a number of passages, it is true, but only two chambers, and they are both small. The pyramid has been very carefully ex-

plored."

"I know Mrs. Lane went in there," Seth insisted. "I saw her. I'm going to have a look, anyway."

"It will be necessary to return to camp first," the *dragoman* said. "We must have spare batteries for the lights, and there is your wound."

"But they might get away while we're gone," Seth protested.

"The evil ones will not escape," Ali Hassan said quietly. "The pyramid has only one entrance, opposite us on the second terrace. I know it well. And I will remain here on guard." He smiled a dangerous smile and tapped the curved knife stuck in his waistband.

"Yes, that will be best," Glory suddenly decided. "You come back with me, Seth, you hear. And let me look at that cut on your head. It isn't far to camp."

The landscape had once more begun to spin like a merry-go-round, so Seth made only the feeblest protests as the girl led him away. With the aid of the flashlight, they avoided the excavation into which Seth had fallen, and were soon back at the camp. It was not Glory's first experience in bandaging Seth's wounds, and she did a neat, workmanlike job. Then, filling their pockets with spare batteries and taking Seth's revolver, they returned to Ali Hassan.

"Nothing has happened," the *dragoman* told them. "Nothing has left the pyramid but a few bats."

Glory shuddered. Ali Hassan pointed to the huge structure, which tapered into the sky like a modern office building. The bright moon, which had now risen, illuminated the towering tomb.

"We can enter now. Night or day, it makes no difference inside the pyramid," he said.

The ascent to the first terrace was comparatively easy, enough rubble and stone having fallen along the side to make it no more than an easy climb. But to get to the second, twenty-seven feet above the first, they had to crawl up the broken face like ants.

"This pyramid," said Ali Hassan, lapsing into his tourists' guide spiel,

"is very old. It was built by Zeser, a king of the Third Dynasty. It is more than six thousand years old and full of cracks. The cracks, I regret to say, are probably full of snakes."

GLORY squealed in sudden fright. Seth turned to her.

"Perhaps you had better wait out here, Glory," he said kindly. "The moon is giving plenty of light and you won't be afraid."

"Who's afraid?" the girl demanded stoutly. "I'm coming with you."

Ali Hassan entered the low sloping passage first and carefully flashed his light around for possible traces of visiting cobras. Then, bracing his hands against the ceiling, he worked his way down. Glory followed, and Seth brought up the rear. The incline became steeper and more difficult after the first ten yards, and it was a quarter of an hour before they reached a level passage.

The heat, especially in contrast to the cool night outside, was intense, and the musty odor of countless dead centuries was overwhelming. Glory was gasping for breath, and even Seth found it difficult to bear. But Ali Hassan had already plunged into the even smaller opening of the level passage, and the pair gamely crawled in after him. About thirty yards farther on the passage grew larger and sloped upward at a thirty-degree angle. Footholds cut in the polished stone floor gave them purchase, and they struggled on until, without warning, they found themselves in a narrow, lofty chamber.

This room, hewn out of the very bowels of the vast granite pile, was the King's Chamber. Ali Hassan explained. A huge red stone sarcophagus was all that it contained, with the exception of the broken lid and other rubbish which littered the floor. Diagonally across the room was another entrance, less than two feet high, which the *dragoman* explained led to the other chamber.

Glory collapsed on a jagged section of the sarcophagus lid and fought for breath. Seth himself had difficulty in breathing, and the strain had told even

on the *dragoman*, used as he was to such journeys.

"I'm going to have a look at the other chamber," Seth said. "Glory, you stay here. Ali Hassan can stay with you."

The girl was too exhausted to protest and without further words Seth dropped to his stomach and wriggled into the small opening. The passage grew even smaller as he progressed, and the coat was ripped from his back before he crawled out the other end.

This chamber was smaller than the King's and lined with blue tiles. In the center was an inscription containing the title of the bull, Apis, worshipped by the ancient Egyptians. All that interested Seth, however, was that this chamber, like the other, was empty.

He was searching the base of the walls for signs of another entrance when a shrill scream of terror jerked him to attention. It was followed by another, and still another. Hoarse shouts in a strange tongue echoed through the narrow passage as he flung himself to the floor and, revolver in hand, started the painful journey back to the other chamber. Prudence advised him to extinguish his light, lest he advertise his coming, and this made the passage still more difficult.

As suddenly as it had begun, the screaming and shouting ceased, and the old deathly quiet prevailed in the pyramid. The flickering light at the end of the passage went out. Seth groaned inwardly and forced himself forward. When his back no longer scraped stone, he got quietly to his feet and switched on his light.

The King's Chamber was deserted.

SETH'S first thought was for the outside passage. He leaped across the room and flashed his powerful torch down the polished incline. It, too, was empty. Common sense and the knowledge of the difficulty of even a deliberate journey through such a tunnel convinced him that Glory and the *dragoman* had not gone that way. There had not been time for the long descent since the cries had ceased.

Cold fear clutched at the young man's

heart. Alone in the bowels of the ancient pyramid, threatened by unknown terrors, he suddenly felt sick. The necessity for some sort of action impelled him to inspect every stone in the sides of the chamber. He remembered from a Sunday supplement story, read eons before in peaceful Newport, that the old tombs were honeycombed with ancient, sealed passages. In the hope that one of these might explain Glory's disappearance, he spent what seemed ages at the task of searching.

He had fed the last of his spare batteries into the big flashlight and had resigned himself to abandoning the search until help could be obtained when his eyes fell upon the one object in the chamber he had not searched, the sarcophagus. It stood on a granite base in the center of the chamber, and the open top was fully nine feet from the floor. Wedging his light under his belt, Seth leaped, caught the edge of the stone coffin and drew himself up. He flashed his light into the interior and a cry of horror escaped him.

Huddled on the bottom of the sarcophagus was the body of Ali Hassan. It lay on its side in a pool of blood. The unfortunate *dragoman's* head, almost severed from his body, lolled to one side and the bearded face stared up at him with wide-open, beady eyes.

Sickened by this sight which confirmed his worst fears, Seth slipped from the edge of the sarcophagus. His hands shot out instinctively and checked his fall as his flashlight clattered to the stone floor. Then, so quietly that he almost failed to realize it, his feet touched the floor. It was only when he noticed that his hands, still clutching the rim of the sarcophagus, were at the level of his waist that Seth understood what had happened.

Catching up his light, he directed the beam at the huge stone coffin. Only half of it remained visible, and that half was nearly perpendicular to the floor. The rest had disappeared into an oblong hole. The canny architect of the old pyramid had set the king's sarcophagus on a pivot, and used the royal sepulcher itself as the door to still another passage.

Ali Hassan's body had slipped down to the lower end of the sarcophagus, thus upsetting its perfect equilibrium and preventing it from closing automatically with the release of Seth's weight. Seth, flashing his light into the hole, saw that the sides converged at a steep angle, but footholds had been cut into the rock. At the bottom of the pit loomed the entrance to a level passage.

Confident that this was the way Glory had disappeared, he unhesitatingly descended into the pit and examined the passage. It was less than thirty feet long, but a shadow at the end indicated a sharp turn.

The tunnel was high enough to permit him to stand almost upright, and the air, although at the moment he did not realize it, was exceptionally pure for a tomb. Thinking of nothing but the vanished girl, Seth hurried along the passage. After the turn it continued to slope downward until Seth calculated he was below even the foundation of the pyramid.

Suddenly the smooth, age-old passage ended in a tumbled mass of masonry which completely blocked it. Seth cursed automatically, then sat down to think. Mentally retracing his journey, he recalled a small jagged hole in one side of the tunnel about a hundred feet back. He returned to the point and examined the hole. Fresh drill marks told him it had been made recently, probably by hopeful archeologists.

He wriggled into the hole and crawled over the untrimmed stone and in a few minutes emerged into another polished passage, less than four feet square. Moving away from the hole at a crouch, he suddenly distinguished voices. He switched off his light and far ahead made out a faint glow. It marked, he exulted, the end of his journey.

In the darkness he crawled toward the light on his hands and knees. It became plainer and he could make out its square, regular form. The voices were plainer, though low, but the language was a strange one. The exit was now less than fifty feet away. Seth became more cautious and barely moved. Then, with a crash that deafened him,

the light disappeared. Instantly he switched on his own. The passage ahead was barred by a solid block of stone.

At once Seth understood what had happened. Ali Hassan had told him that the ancient architects of the tombs equipped the passages with stone portcullises that, once dropped, sealed the tombs forever. Even the grave robbers and archeologists had found it necessary to cut their way around them. Bitterly Seth realized that one of these granite gates, unused for sixty centuries, had finally been employed to cut him off from the girl he loved.

Even as this horror ran through his head, another crash echoed through the stone corridor. Seth flashed his light back along the passage. Another gate had been dropped behind him. *He was sealed alive in a six-thousand-year-old tomb.*

After a careful inspection of the fifty-odd feet of the passage in which he was imprisoned, the young American switched off his light and sat silently in the Stygian blackness, fighting desperately against a gnawing fear. In all his twenty-seven years, Seth Fields had never been afraid, but the events of the past few days, added to the growing menace of an invisible and all-powerful enemy, had sapped his confidence.

The air, never any too good, became more and more difficult to breath. The dead, musty odor that prevailed in all ancient passages was gradually becoming intolerable. It was hot, with an obscene, insidious, enervating heat. In spite of this, Seth discovered with a start, he felt cold and clammy. The nameless horror that held him fast was stronger even than the suffocating atmosphere of the tomb.

HOW long he sat there before he heard the faint rustling, as of a shaken newspaper, he did not know. Engrossed as he was in his frightful situation, it made but a slight impress on his consciousness. He summoned the energy to switch on his light—and froze into immobility. Not ten feet away reared a swaying, unblinking, black cobra. Not the garish, hooded Indian cobra, but his smaller and in-

finitely more deadly African cousin, the natural guardian of the tombs.

Seth's passive acceptance of fate vanished in a hideous scream that echoed and re-echoed through the passage. The unyielding touch of the stone gate, against which he had thrown himself, snapped him back to reality. The viper, green eyes glittering in the ray of the torch, was slithering towards him. Beyond glittered another pair of green eyes, and a third.

With a hysterical gesture, Seth jerked his revolver from his pocket and fired wildly. The thunder of the explosions deafened him, but he could see the green eyes coming closer and closer. Calling on all his strength, he steadied his hand and took careful aim. This time the nearest eyes leaped and then vanished as the reptile's severed head thudded to the stone floor. Another shot, and another pair of eyes were extinguished.

The third pair of eyes, twin emeralds in the yellow ray of light, appeared over the square sight of the heavy Colt. Slowly, deliberately Seth pulled the trigger. The hammer fell with a hollow click on an empty cartridge.

Seth's forced calm vanished beneath a flood of wild hysteria. Dropping his useless gun, he turned and beat helplessly on the solid stone gate. His flashlight clattered to the floor unnoticed. Screaming madly, the young man hammered and hammered, until suddenly his blows drove through thin air and he tumbled forward into a bright light. The gate crashed again behind him, and, turning, he saw the ugly, triangular head of the last cobra skid across the polished floor, crushed cleanly off from the body.

Weak and sobbing, Seth remained sitting. He looked up and found several men before him—but what men. They were regarding him gravely with big black eyes. Shiny conical helmets topped their sharp, dark features. Gleaming plate-mail corselets and richly colored kilts covered their bodies. Armed with big spears and knives, they might have stepped directly from the friezes of the temples of Thebes. Seth was mildly amazed to find that he was not surprised. He heard the clat-

ter of their sandals as they moved toward him, then darkness enveloped him.

Seth's first impression on waking was a pain all along his back and neck and a strange numbness in his hands. A confused murmur of voices, reminding him of the Khan el Khalili bazaars, drummed against his ears. An attempt to turn his head revealed that he was lying on his back across a stone block, his head dangling over one edge and his legs over another. His hands, were bound tightly. Except for a short white kilt, he was naked.

THE voices rose and fell, and sheer curiosity impelled him to look. Below him, and stretching back into darkness, were row upon row of crouching figures, all dressed in the flowing kilts and robes of ancient Egypt. Although Seth did not know it, they were chanting the old Egyptian exorcisms.

What interested him most was that many of the faces were familiar. Here was an English woman he had met at Shepheard's, there a French traveler who had made the plane trip with him from London. His eyes searched for Mrs. Lane. He found her in the front row. She refused to recognize him.

An answering voice on his left caused him to look up. Above him, on a raised platform, stood a tall figure. The body was that of a normal man, but the head was the mask of a Pharaoh in ancient headdress and in keeping with the figure. Hesiri, without a doubt. From the open mouth came the *hikaou*, magic formulae forgotten for untold ages. Seth's eyes traveled on, then focused with a shock.

To the right of the queer-headed figure stood Glory, rigid and unseeing. She, like the other women, wore only a tight, sheer skirt, but around her waist was a jeweled girdle, the ends of which fell to the floor before her. Her ankles, wrists and throat were covered with jewels. A light, gold helmet, from which sprang the sacred asp of Egypt, covered her honey-colored hair and neck. In her right hand she held a glittering, long-bladed knife.

The chanting ceased and the queer-headed figure, whom Seth now recog-

nized as Osiris, highest diety of the old Egyptians, turned to the girl. He pointed to the helpless Seth and Glory, walking as though in a trance, descended the steps to the stone on which he was lying. For a full minute she stood over him, the knife poised at his throat. Sibilant hisses rose from the entranced mob below.

Seth found his voice. "Glory! Glory!" he screamed. "Wake up! It's me, Seth. Seth, do you hear?"

He struggled to free himself, to rise. Slowly the girl's eyes dropped until she was looking him straight in the face. One eye closed in an unmistakable wink, and a thrill of joy ran through the helpless man.

Osiris was again chanting. His voice rumbled on and on, then began to rise until he was almost screaming. The girl suddenly drew in her breath, bent over the recumbent Seth, rolled him over and slashed his bonds with one stroke of the keen blade. For a second the action went unnoticed, and Seth rubbed his wrists. Then cries of alarm arose from the multitude. Osiris turned from the altar to face an unfettered and raging All-American fullback.

Catching up a spearman who barred his path, Seth hurled him bodily over the sacrificial stone into the faces of the foremost spectators. A bound and he was beside the queer-headed god. A spear thudded into the wooden altar over their heads. "This way," he heard Glory crying. "Behind the altar. There's another entrance."

Osiris struggled futilely in Seth's iron grip as the latter backed with him to the brilliantly colored altar.

Half a dozen spearmen were climbing onto the platform when an interruption, in the shape of a black cat, the sacred Egyptian cat *Bast*, occurred. The animal strode out of the shadows, sat down and gravely inspected the soldiers. They drew back in confusion.

SETH felt a tugging at his arm. "Come on, now," Glory said. "They won't dare pass that cat. Now's our chance."

She guided Seth, who still carried the wriggling hawk god, through a fold in the curtain beside the altar and into a

stone passage. Taking a ceramic, pitcher-shaped lamp from a niche, she led the way through the corridor. From time to time they passed through beautifully painted and furnished chambers, worth an emperor's ransom to an Egyptologist. It was a completely undisturbed tomb. Still the girl pressed on. Seth noticed with satisfaction that the air was becoming fresher.

The passage was now rising. The grade became steeper and steeper, and they were obliged to dig their bare toes into the floor niches. Then, without warning, they were out in the open air.

The bright sun caused them to blink furiously for several minutes. When they were finally able to see, they observed a troop of cavalry galloping toward them. Glory emitted a short cheer, then, suddenly abashed, folded her arms over her bare breast and blushed as she threw an appealing look toward Seth.

But there was nothing he could offer her. Besides, he was busy tugging at the mask of their prisoner. Osiris, released from the pressure of Seth's brawny arms, lashed out with both hands and feet until the ex-fullback kned him scientifically in the stomach. The mask came off, and Seth stepped back with an oath.

"Abdul el Rasheed!" he snarled. "Why, you double-crossing heel."

His fist whipped up, and Osiris slapped back against the stone side of the *mastaba* from which they had emerged. A hail from the foremost rider attracted Seth's attention. The American stared and his mouth fell open. For the rider's face was the face of the man he had just knocked cold.

"It is all right, my friend," the rider exclaimed. "It is really I, Abdul." He dismounted, bowed to Glory, then whipped off his long cloak and held it while she wrapped herself in its folds. "You should not have been so precipitate, Seth," Abdul said. "We were also on the trail of this Hesiri, and have feared for your lives since we found your empty camp two day ago."

So they had been two days in the tombs. Seth looked at the prone figure and then at Abdul. "I see," he said slowly. "Your brother?"

Abdul nodded and gazed at his brother with oriental unconcern. "Kasr," he said, "is my twin. He was a brilliant scholar, and knew more about the old tombs and customs than the rest of us put together. Then his mind began to slip. He traced, or thought he had traced, our ancestry back to old Osiris, who, as you may know, was a real king long before he became a diety.

"For a while we kept Kasr at home, then one day he disappeared. We followed him to Paris, then London, Berlin, and on to New York. He used the name Hesiri, which is Egyptian for Osiris, and collected a rich following of foreign dupes. With their money and the aid of superstitious natives, he planned to seize the throne of Egypt.

"His plotting, ridiculous as it was, could have caused trouble, and the Khedive gave me my choice of locating Kasr and crushing this intended revolt, or else." Abdul smiled wryly. "Naturally, I did not want it openly known that my brother was insane, and the government did not want rumors of revolution floating around. The police—er—cooperated with us."

ABDUL paused, then went on.

"Troops were assigned to help me in my search. It was some of my men who found your mother, Seth. By the way, the doctors say she will recover completely in a few days. Kasr locked her in a tomb when she became suspicious of him, then turned her loose on the desert to forestall a search. Tell me how you discovered Kasr's hide-out. We couldn't."

Seth briefly related their experiences, including his discovery of the passage from the King's Chamber in the pyramid to the extensive underground tomb used by Hesiri as his headquarters. Both men then turned to Glory.

She explained that while Seth was in the second chamber of the pyramid, a group of spearmen sprang out of the secret passage and attacked her and Ali Hassan. The latter fought desperately, but was overcome and butchered. She had fainted, and remembered nothing more until she woke up in an underground chamber, luxuriously fur-

nished in the ancient fashion.

"Mother was there," she said simply. "She told me she had taken vows to devote herself and her money to Osiris and that I must do the same, now that I was there. I learned she had worn a robe painted with phosphorus when she came to our camp, so it wasn't magic after all.

"Later Osiris told me if I didn't obey him, he would kill Mother. He told me I was chosen to be the reincarnation of Isis, his wife. That's how I got these bracelets and things. But when I found that my duties included killing you Seth, I just couldn't. Not even to save Mother."

"Kasr certainly made a find," Abdul remarked, examining the bracelets Glory held out. "These are genuine, and from what you have told me, he must have uncovered an untouched tomb of incredible value."

They were interrupted by a shout from one of the troopers. He was pointing to the Pyramid of Sakkarah, which, Seth and Glory were surprised to observe, was fully a mile away. From the entrance poured a stream of people, all wearing the fluttering garments of old Egypt. They were scrambling down the sides of the pyramid.

"Kasr's late followers," observed Abdul. "I'll have them rounded up." He barked an order and the troop wheeled and galloped away. "So the passage wasn't sealed after all," he said. "Kasr must have rigged counterweights to raise the stone gates, or else the old ones did it themselves and he discovered it. He is very clever, Kasr."

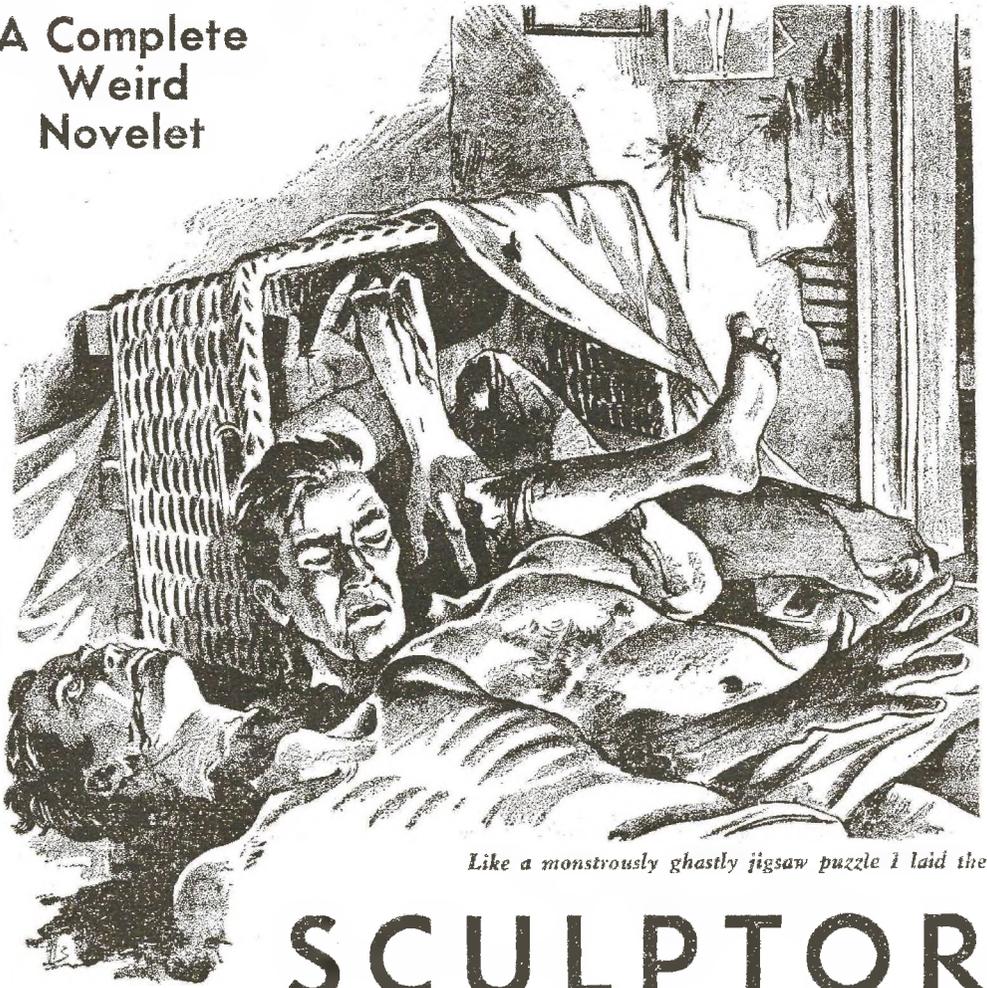
For a minute or two Abdul brooded over his prostrate twin. Then he smiled weirdly. "*Kismet*," he said. In answer to Seth's unspoken question, he explained. "Egyptian legend has it that Osiris was toppled from his throne by Set, the crocodile god. Do you get it? Set—Seth?"

Seth thought for a minute. "Very funny," he said soberly.

"Now," Abdul continued, "I am at your service. If there is anything you would like, command me."

"Yes," Seth said, and there was no hesitation in his voice. "Get me a pair of pants."

A Complete
Weird
Novelet



Like a monstrously ghastly jigsaw puzzle I laid the

SCULPTOR

CHAPTER I

Interchanged Heads

WE came to see the corpse of the girl who was found in Central Park," I told the young hospital orderly.

"She's the corpse of a man," the orderly said. "My gawd—"

"Don't get funny," I told him. "I mean Patricia Abbott who was murdered."

"We've been retained on the case of the murder of Patricia Abbott," my father put in mildly. "If you wouldn't mind letting us see the body? Or if by any chance you've already sent it to the

morgue—"

Father is always diplomatic. But I speak out and if you don't like it that's too bad."

"It's still here," the orderly said. He led us to the emergency room at the ambulance entrance. "But it's not the body of Patricia Abbott. What I'm trying to tell you—"

"We hate conundrums," I retorted. "Show us what you've got."

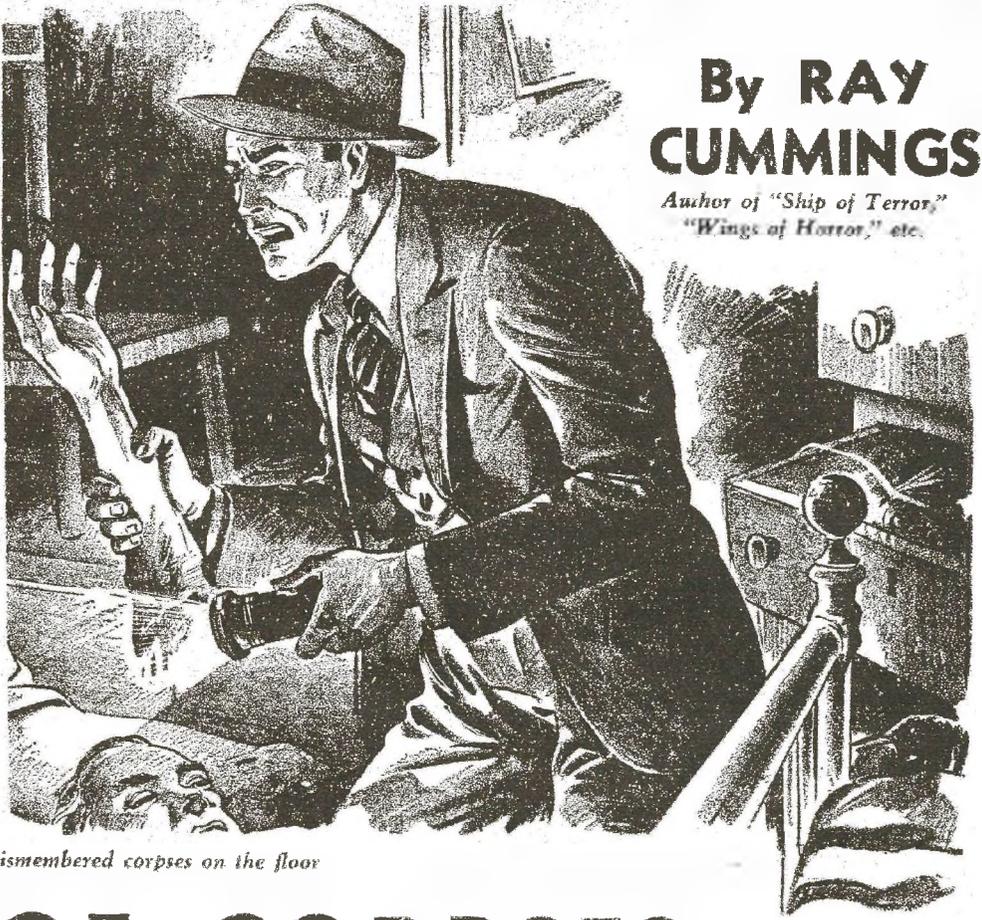
Well as it happened this case was only an hour old. Father and I didn't have much dope; and that orderly had a right to talk in riddles—damned gruesome riddles.

The thing lay on the emergency room operating table. It was the nude body

Severed Bodies Form a Gruesome Jigsaw that

By **RAY
CUMMINGS**

Author of "Ship of Terror,"
"Wings of Horror," etc.



dismembered corpses on the floor

OF CORPSES

of a man. Death had been caused by decapitation. And crudely sewn to the man's neck was the head of a beautiful, dark-haired young girl!

The suture was ghastly, where the joined neck was puckered with stitches of cord—a grisly circular collar from which the noisome ends of severed ligaments, muscles, veins and arteries were sticking out.

The head had tousled, bobbed black hair, stringy now with dried, matted blood. The face, wholly drained of its blood, was chalk-white—the face of a slim, beautiful girl, contorted now with death agony, the mouth goggling, horrible with thickened blood, the eyes bulging with anguished terror.

We had heard of this Patricia Abbott of course. She had been the twenty-year-old daughter of Robert Abbott, of the Martin-Abbott Novelty Manufacturing Company. Patricia had been adventurous. She had been nationally famous as a racing automobile driver. During the past year she had made many coast-to-coast records, driving in tests for a well-known tire company.

And now her head, weirdly sewn to this man's body, had been found in Patricia's small town car, wrecked in Central Park. And the man's body also was butchered, with female arms and strange male legs sewn to it in the same ghastly fashion.

Challenges the Wits of Bewildered Sleuths!

"Her father identified the head," the orderly was saying. "He was here awhile ago."

"It was his senior partner, John Martin, who retained us on the case," I explained. "Nobody identified the man's body?"

"No," the orderly declared. "Not yet."

IT was rather a stocky, somewhat paunchy body. On the chest was the tattooed design of a fullsome lady in tights.

"This fellow was a sailor maybe," I suggested.

"Come along, Tim," my father interrupted. "We're a bit late. . . . Thank you very much, orderly."

The orderly covered the weird, butchered body with a sheet, and we left the hospital, driving down into that conglomeration of streets known as Greenwich Village. We're the firm of McClure & Son, in case you haven't heard of us. I'm nineteen; Tim McClure, a big rangy fellow. My dad is Robert J. McClure. He's smallish, stocky, with a bristling little gray-black mustache. You'd never believe he's as strong as he is. I'd hate to take him on for rough and tumble.

We were on our way to Greenwich Village now because John Martin, the novelty manufacturer, whose partner's daughter had been murdered, had told us to come to the studio of one George Price, a sculptor, and meet him there.

Price's home and studio, we discovered when we arrived, seemed to occupy the whole of a somewhat disheveled frame building of two stories, set back from the street with an empty lot on each side of it. We drew up before it about nine o'clock; an overcast summer evening.

"Oh, here you are. Come in."

Martin greeted us at the dim side driveway entrance. He was a tall, rather handsome fellow, this novelty manufacturer. Forty-five, perhaps. Smooth shaven, with bushy, iron-gray eyebrows and a mop of wavy black hair; a man more like a successful artist than a prosperous business man. He ushered us along a dim, winding hallway, into a sort of outbuilding which

was the sculptor's studio.

"Mr. McClure and his son Tim," he said to the sculptor. "These are the detectives I've employed, as I told you before."

George Price, the sculptor, was a young fellow, perhaps in his late twenties. He was small, pale-faced, with longish, scraggly hair. I didn't particularly like his looks—sort of unwholesome, with pale, watery eyes that wouldn't look straight at you.

"How do you do?" he greeted. "Investigating that ghastly murder of the Abbott girl? Well, why Mr. Martin brings you here—"

"Simply to meet me," John Martin said quickly. "We're going in a moment, Price." The novelty manufacturer flashed us a significant glance. He didn't have to tell us why he had summoned us here. Heaven knows that was apparent the moment we laid eyes on the studio. It was a big room, two stories high, with draped skylight overhead and light on the sides. The big board floor was littered with the paraphernalia of the sculptor's art. Several half-finished clay statues stood about.

The place was dim with heavy shadows at its sides and corners, with just a single brilliant light from a central hooded bulb, which shone down on a model's dias, empty now. Father, always by nature silent, misses nothing. I saw him standing with his gaze flitting around the weird place, gauging it, his face blankly inscrutable.

He and I are pretty used to shocks. We're not inclined to show surprise at anything. But after our visit to the hospital, viewing that weird composite corpse, I certainly got a shock here in Price's studio. At least a dozen of the sculptor's statues, some small, some life-size, some heroic, all in various stages of completion, were standing here.

My heart pounded as I stared at them. They were gruesome things, everyone of them the weird representation of a composite human figure. The heads of grinning, satyrlike men, with the bodies of female figures; female torsos, with male legs and arms! Or a girl's head—the body of a man—and legs and hoofs of an animal.

PERHAPS it was art. The dual male and female things had an aspect infernal—Pan's jibing, impish head upon a slim female bacchante, dancing with wild abandon.

Undoubtedly I showed my startled surprise. And Father stood gazing at that empty model's stand as though silently picturing the model which Price would of necessity use for his ghastly, sculptured creations.

There was another occupant of the studio—a tall blond girl, exceedingly handsome, luxuriously dressed in a long pale-blue clingy affair with a summer fur draped around her slim shoulders.

"This is Miss Violet Hampton," John Martin, the novelty manufacturer said finally. "We're waiting for her father."

Her father was Thomas Hampton, prominent New York banker, we presently learned. She had come here to meet him, but he hadn't arrived.

"Well, I think we've waited long enough," Martin said. "Your father said he'd be here at eight, didn't he, Violet?"

"Yes," the girl declared. Was she frightened? She looked it. "He was dining at his club, but I've phoned there. He never arrived. I haven't seen him since breakfast."

"We don't need him," Martin said crisply, turning to Price. "The Hampton Company won't finance your scheme, Mr. Price. I haven't had a chance to consult Mr. Hampton, but I'm sure of it. Even if he would, Mr. Abbott and I would not. With his daughter's weird murder, you can understand Mr. Abbott's emotions."

The pallid young sculptor flushed. "But look here, Mr. Martin—as I said, I've got a verbal contract with you—"

"And circumstances alter cases," Martin said grimly. "Don't be an ass, Price. I'm sorry, of course. But can't you understand how my partner feels?"

Quite evidently a violent argument had been going on when we arrived, and now it suddenly flared again. We presently caught the gist of it. In former years the Martin-Abbott Manufacturing Company had been quite successful marketing small, inexpensive statuettes. They had popularized sev-

eral unique little figures—like the grinning Billiken, for instance—with a nation-wide sale.

Price, the sculptor, with his weird surrealistic ideas, was planning to create several of his composite male and female forms. He had talked Martin and Abbott, the murdered girl's father, into the idea of marketing them commercially on a huge scale, several weeks before. Hampton the banker, whose daughter was here now, had approved it, and had verbally agreed to finance it.

But the ghastly murder of Patricia Abbott had changed all that.

Somehow it's a weird thing to see a man with uncontrolled emotions making him rage, as though he suddenly were off mental balance. Price looked like that, his pale eyes wildly flashing, his pallid face abruptly turned purple-red.

"Dreamed of being rich," he almost babbled. "And now you tell me it's all off. This murder makes publicity. But I'll hold you! It's all the better for my statuettes!"

"Easy," Father murmured, as Price passed him, and he reached for the sculptor's arm.

"You let me alone!" The sculptor jerked away. "I'm not a child! I'll get a lawyer. I'm not going to be cheated out of my one chance—"

"You're ignoring the fact that my partner is a bereaved father," Martin said vehemently. "Control yourself, Price, and don't be such a fool. This is unfortunate, of course—"

The sculptor suddenly turned on him.

"All right, you get out of here." He waved his arms at us. He looked on the verge of hysteria, and evidently he knew it. "Go on, all of you, get out! I'm not myself. We—we'll talk about this some other time—"

AS Father and I, the handsome Violet Hampton, and the grim John Martin for an instant stood startled, the young sculptor suddenly exclaimed:

"All right—go when you're ready. This whole business has shaken me. I can't think, can't reason just now. Good night to you."

He strode to one of the room's doors, flung it open, and banged it after him.

"Poor fellow," Father murmured. "He is upset, isn't he?"

"I guess we'd better go," Martin said to me. "Maybe that's artistic temperament—I don't know." Then he added to Father in an undertone: "You understand now why I wanted you to come here, to size up this situation—"

He got no further. There was a peculiar scraping sound at the door, the same door through which the sculptor had vanished a moment ago.

"Is that you, Price?" Martin called.

But there was no answer. Just silence. Horror is a thing that certainly sends out an aura. The roots of my hair were suddenly prickling.

"What the devil!" Father muttered.

Then he strode for the door: flung it open.

That was a ghastly sight—so ghastly that we staggered back, with Martin and the terrified Violet Hampton behind us. In the dark doorway a figure was propped. The body of a slim, beautiful young girl, with the grisly goggling head of a gray-haired man sewn to it! A girl's torso, with male arms and male legs.

Another of the monstrous butchered corpses! It stood for a second in the dark doorway, wavering as though it were still alive. Then it fell forward with a limp thud at our feet!

CHAPTER II

The Tattooed Clue

IT took Father and me a second or two to recover from our numbed horror. Then I followed him as he leaped over the weird dual corpse and catapulted through the doorway. Price had been here only a minute ago. He ought to be here now.

The corridor was a projection of the two-story building, seeming to lead back to the main structure. It was dim, but there was enough light for us to see a fleeing figure turning an angle twenty feet or so away. We had no time to fire, before the figure was gone.

In the silence, a door slammed. We

reached the door around the angle, flung it open, jumped through with automatics leveled—and found ourselves in the dark, littered yard outside the studio. There was no sign of the fugitive.

"You go one way," Dad said hastily. "I'll take the other. He must have run around the building."

Was it Price? We couldn't tell. I darted to the right, along a little concrete walk that led to the side yard. An empty lot was beside it; no place for anyone to hide, and there certainly had been no time for our quarry to get far.

I didn't see the doorway. It was down a few steps, wholly shadowed. All I knew was that I ran past some little steps, and that suddenly arms reached out and wrapped around my knees so that I went down like a tackled football player, crashing to the walk with my gun clattering away.

A man was on top of me, and as I twisted over I saw the blob of him in the dimness—his shoulders, dark-clothed, his head with a cap pulled low. A knife in his hand came at me. I ducked as he jabbed it for my face. I'm fairly lively in a rough and tumble and I was particularly lively now under that jabbing knife, lunging with a desperation and suddenness that heaved the big fellow off me and gave me a chance to jump to my feet.

But I was not any quicker than he was. He only got to his knees, seized a stone from a row of loose stones laid along the edge of a bed of flowers, flung it. That fellow was a genius for doing things in a hurry, or he was pretty lucky. The stone hit me smack on the side of the head, sent me reeling over against the wall of the building. For a few seconds I all but passed out on my feet.

I was aware of him jumping up. Maybe he didn't know that he just about had me cold. Anyway, he flung something else at me, then turned and ran back the way I had just come. That second missile missed me. If it hadn't, I wouldn't be writing this account of the case of the butchered corpses. The thing struck the wall of the building with a thump about an

inch beside my ear.

I had no chance to chase the fleeing man. Already he had gone back into the dark, empty lot behind the studio, running like a jackrabbit for the opposite street. And I was too dizzy to stand up, much less run. For a moment I stood against the wall of the building, dizzily staring, with the blood streaming down my face where the stone had cut me. In the wood over my head that second missile was sticking. It was a butcher's meat cleaver.

I found my automatic, put it in my pocket with the cleaver. The whole dark yard was still swaying. But presently I steadied, went on around the front to meet Father. And then I saw him come running toward me.

"Tim! That you, Tim! He got away from me!"

Father wasn't exactly running; he was staggering. As he came up to me, I saw that his face was pale, contorted with pain. And his left arm hung limp.

"Tim!" he cried hoarsely. "I bumped right into him. Didn't have a chance to see him—and look what he stuck into my arm."

HE held out a blood-stained thing that was like a little ice-pick: a sharp-pointed prong of steel, mounted in a wooden handle.

"If I hadn't been quick, and lucky," Dad said, "that cursed thing would have gone into my heart. And he got away!"

The weapon, I saw then, was a shoemaker's awl.

"You fought with him?" I demanded. "Where? When?"

"Just a couple of minutes ago. Out in front—just past the front entrance of the building. Tim, he—"

"He ran which way?"

Father gestured. "He ducked across the front street, into an alley on the other side."

Well, there was not any argument on the fact that we had not been fighting the same man. And had caught nobody.

When we beat it back inside, John Martin and Violet Hampton were standing numbed, gazing down at the corpse.

"That's the head of Robert Abbott," Martin choked. "My partner—Patricia's father!"

The head was that of Robert Abbott. But the body was that of a slim young girl, with arms missing, and with male legs.

"Is that Patricia Abbott's torso?" I demanded.

Nobody could say.

Price, the sculptor, had vanished from his premises. We searched his rooms carefully, but there was no sign of him. Then we phoned for the police. And as soon after they arrived as we could manage it, we got away.

Our home and laboratory—Father has quite an equipment for the scientific analysis of crime clues—is in northern New York City, on the west side. We have a small old-fashioned frame house, set back from upper Broadway on a little rise of ground, with a tree-shrouded garden around it—a place that about the time I was born had been an aristocratic old homestead.

We got permission from the police, and took the weird dual corpse with us. And we stopped at the hospital and got the other corpse. It was about ten o'clock that night when we laid them out in our laboratory. They were certainly weird-looking things, gruesome as they lay pallidly inert on the slabs, with our hooded lights glaring on them.

Father is a methodical fellow. He had a sheaf of memos which he had already made on the case. And now he was rolling out our big X-ray machine; and he sent me into the dark-room to load up a plateholder.

"Here's the way it stacks up, Tim."

When I came back Dad shoved his neatly pencilled notes at me. They read:

FIRST CORPSE (found in Central Park)—Head: Patricia Abbott. Torso: Unknown tattooed man's torso. Arms: Girl's. Probably Patricia's. Legs: Unknown male's.

SECOND CORPSE (found in Price's studio)—Head: Robert Abbott. Torso: Girl's. Probably Patricia's. Arms: Unknown male's. Legs: Unknown male's.

Missing persons of apparent connection with the case: Thomas Hampton, banker; Peter Foley, cashier of Hampton's bank.

"What's this about Foley?" I demanded. "Haven't heard of him before."

"Martin gave me the dope on that," Father said. "And the police showed me Foley's picture. By the way, Martin is pretty scared apparently. He figures that with his partner and his partner's daughter murdered, and Hampton missing—well, Martin himself might well be slated to be the next victim."

"You couldn't blame him for figuring that," I agreed.

Martin had gone home now to his home in Westchester. And he had certainly looked apprehensive the last time I saw him. He had said he was going to engage a couple of flatfeet to guard him.

"What about this Foley?" I demanded again.

DAD explained what Martin and the police had told him. It was not generally known, of course, but Hampton's bank was in pretty bad shape. A big shortage had been discovered. And Peter Foley, the embezzling cashier, had vanished.

"It seems he made away with a good bit over a hundred thousand dollars," Father said. "Been gone several days. The police have been after him all week."

I glanced back at Father's succinct methodical notes:

Suspects: Price, the sculptor. Motive: Revenge on Martin-Abbott Company and on Hampton . . . Peter Foley, the embezzling Cashier. Motive??

I couldn't figure Foley's possible motive, save that he might be avoiding exposure by killing those who endangered him. But I could certainly see the motive of that half-crazy sculptor. He had burst out, in his angry rage, with some crack about these weird murders giving publicity that would help the sale of his ghastly little statuettes. A madman's motive. But such things had happened before now.

And there were the two men who had attacked Father and me outside Price's studio. Were they Price himself, and Foley, the missing cashier? We had no

way of knowing. One had left a butcher's cleaver, and the other an awl. A shoemaker's awl? Neither of those unusual weapons had yielded any decent fingerprints, and there was nothing about them by which it seemed that we could possibly trace them.

"We've got to identify these cadavers," Dad was saying. "Here we have the heads of Patricia Abbott and her father. The torso of a tattooed man, and the torso of a girl. Now if this is Patricia's body, it'll be helpful to know it. But even so, these two corpses represent several victims."

It was Patricia's torso. We put the X-ray on it. Patricia, we knew, had been in an automobile smash-up a year before, and a portion of her collar bone had been mended with a platinum plate. I developed our X-ray negative, and the platinum plate unmistakably showed.

"Okay," Father said. "That makes it simpler. These two corpses then, represent at least three victims."

They obviously did, because this head of Robert Abbott did not match this torso of a tattooed man. Abbott had been frail, thin. The tattooed torso was heavy-set, and flabby. To say nothing of the different sets of arms and legs!

"A sailor maybe," I suggested, as I had to the hospital orderly. "Now Dad, how the devil does a sailor fit into this?" And then a weird thought occurred to me. "That shoemaker's awl—sailors use an awl like that to puncture the canvas when they sew sails together. Or a sailor might use such an awl to puncture the flesh of a cadaver, sewing a head and arms and legs to a body!"

Father stared at me grimly from under his heavy gray-black brows. He was still nursing his left arm where that damned awl had stabbed into it.

"But why the devil are these cadavers scrambled up and sewn together?" he puzzled. "I've heard of butchered corpses—that's a favorite stunt of Jack the Ripper killers—cut 'em up an' put 'em in a trunk or something. But why sew them together? That's a new one on me."

Our front doorbell suddenly rang. In the silence of our cottage, with the

big dark garden around it, the bell was an abrupt startling clatter. Father and I exchanged glances. Then he snatched his automatic from the table, dropped it into his pocket.

"I'll go with you," I said.

WE went to the front door together. A big man in rough clothes was standing there, his cap in his hand.

"Yer Mr. McClure?" he said. "I had somethin' I'd tell yer. M'name's MacPherson. Sandy MacPherson."

He spoke with the clipped Scottish accent. A sailor! He didn't have to tell us. He came rolling into our hall, into our little reception room and sat awkwardly on a chair, with big red-knuckled hands holding his cap dangling between his knees. He was a big, raw-boned fellow, with a weather-beaten face. His rough blue shirt was open at the throat, disclosing tattooing on his neck.

"What can we do for you?" Father demanded.

I stood over by the wall. Just watching—but I don't mind stating that I never watched anybody any closer. If that sailor had so much as moved his hands toward his body, I'd have jumped him.

"Yer wurkin' on this butchered corpse business?" MacPherson said. "I bin readin' of it in the papers, hearin' of it on the radio. I had an idea—it could be helpin' yer I'm thinkin', but I dinna ken—"

"Don't ramble," I interjected. "We're busy tonight. What's on your mind, Sailor?"

"Tattooin'," this Sandy MacPherson responded promptly. "I dinna ken if it's important, but the papers are talkin' about people bein' missin'. They didna find that banker yet?"

"Thomas Hampton?" Father asked. "No. He's still missing."

"Well," MacPherson went on in his slow stolid voice, "I coom to be tellin' yer that I tattooed that banker's chest about two years ago. He likes boorlesque gurls, so I put one of 'em on him. Few people are knowin' it. He'd had a wee drap too much, that nicht—"

Dad didn't bat an eyelash. "Well,

thanks very much for the tip," he said.

MacPherson stood up. "So if his corpse should be turnin' oop with tattooin', yer can send for me—"

He gave us his address, and presently the door closed upon him. Dad and I stared at each other.

"Well," Dad murmured swiftly, "if that sailor isn't a damn liar, this is Hampton's body. But why would that Scottie come here so promptly to tell us? Something phony about this. Take after him, Tim. That's probably a fake address he gave us."

I was already grabbing my hat and starting for our side door. I figured that the departing visitor would not be any more than halfway down the garden path by now.

Father clapped me on the back as I went through the door.

"You watch yourself, Tim," he warned anxiously.

My dad is queer. He still figures I'm a little boy so that he gets worried the minute I'm out of his sight.

"Sure," I said and grinned back at him.

CHAPTER III

One Alive

BUT in the garden it was pretty dark, with just the sheen of the lights of Broadway down through the trees. And there was no departing figure on our path! Then I saw the running blob of our late visitor off to one side. He went over our hedge with a running jump, and into the dim cross street just a second after I spotted him.

I dashed there; got to the street just in time to see him at a distant corner as he jumped into a little car and made off, heading north. I figured it would be quicker to grab a taxi than to run back to the house for our car. But taxis are like policemen—when you really need one, there are none in sight.

The tail-lights of the sailor's car were pretty well mixed up in traffic, blocks away, when at last a taxi came along.

"Follow that car ahead," I told the driver as I jumped in. "Plenty of extra

jack for you, if—"

"Okay, Boss. But hellis bells, which car?"

That taxi-driver was willing enough, but he didn't have a chance to earn his tip. We went up the avenue like a fire engine, but there didn't seem to be a car ahead of us, no matter how many we overtook, that even remotely resembled MacPherson's.

For nearly half an hour I cruised around that upper Broadway neighborhood. It was like looking for a needle in a haystack. Then, disappointed, I turned back. And I verified the address MacPherson had given us. It was only a mile or so away, and it proved to be an empty lot.

When I got home, there was a little light burning in our entryway. Another in the lab. Our car was standing in the yard at the side of the house.

But Father was gone. . . .

WHEN I dashed out after the sailor, Father, as he told me afterward, went to our telephone. He called up a friend of ours—a fellow named Simpson, night city editor of one of the newspapers. You can get a lot of dope from the newspaper boys on any given subject; a lot more than you can from the police, very often. People generally think that all a newspaperman knows he publishes. That's not so. Not by a long shot.

Father wanted dope now on the private life of Hampton, the banker. That sailor visitor of ours had said something about Hampton being fond of burlesque girls. Well, our friend the editor sure had the dope, all right. Stuff he couldn't very well publish, but there was no question of its truth. That banker's private life seemed a fruitful field for a reason for murder. Hampton was a widower—Violet was his only child. And the banker upon occasion had been partial to good liquor, and always partial to girls, not so good. His latest flame had been one Flora Belleclaire. A burlesque strip tease artist.

"We sent a man after that Flora Belleclaire a week or so ago," the night editor told Father. "Thought we might get a chance to publish the dirt, but we

never did. Not until now. But believe me, it's in the bulldog tomorrow! 'Missing Playboy Banker' stuff. Anyway, this Flora Belleclaire—she's one Jennie Smaltz, daughter of a big wholesale butcher, Otto Smaltz, down on Greenwich Street."

Well, that stiffened my dad. My antagonist, a few hours ago outside Price's studio, had heaved a butcher's meat cleaver at me. And here was a butcher linked up with the case!

"Thanks very much." Dad said quietly. "Oh, by the way, Simpson, did you ever hear if Hampton had tattooing on his chest?"

"Never heard," Simpson retorted. "If he did, shouldn't think a banker'd be very proud of it. His daughter might know. Try her."

"Thanks," Father said. "That was my intention."

He hung up and called Vivian Hampton. He didn't tell her that her missing father was murdered. My dad never acts hastily.

Vivian told him that Hampton's chest was tattooed. She described the picture. That sailor had steered us correctly. This was Hampton's body we had here all right.

The calls had not taken Father more than fifteen minutes. While he talked he had a mental picture of me failing that sailor maybe for a good part of the night. It was about half past ten now, and Father figured if he made a rush for it he could get down to the burlesque theatre where this butcher's daughter was appearing and contact her.

He stopped only long enough to comb his stiff crop of iron-gray hair, and to put on a red necktie with an alluring-looking diamond stickpin in it. Then he beat it on foot for the nearby subway station. He went downtown and got into the burlesque theatre just before the show was over.

HE found Flora Belleclaire, he said, when he told me about it, a pretty snappy number. She looked fine in clothes, and better and better without them. When there wasn't anything more she could take off, Father went outside and waited at the stage door.

My dad isn't what you'd call hand-

some. But he's always well dressed, and when he wants to look simple and glib, you'd never think he has a mind keen as a razor—which he has. Anyway, I guess he looked like ready money to that burlesque girl. An old duffer who might be easy pickings for her or her friends. However it was, he had no great trouble getting her into a taxi, and up to one of Broadway's night spots.

After Jennie Smaltz had had a couple of drinks she admitted she was a friend of Hampton, the banker.

"Well, that's fine," Father said. "I envy him." Then he took another tack. "I met Sandy MacPherson today," he said suddenly.

"MacPherson at the Eight Bells?" she asked impulsively. "My Gawd, this is a small world. How did you happen to—"

"Sure—sure," Dad cut in. "I've known him for years. Nice fellow, Sandy. He certainly knows his Scotch."

"Knows it, an' loves it," the girl said, laughing. But it struck Father that she was suddenly wary. She was no fool, this Jennie Smaltz.

"Excuse me," Dad said abruptly. "I'll be right back."

He left her and went to telephone me. He had realized, of course, that I might possibly lose MacPherson—exactly as I had. And if I were at home now, before Jennie had any possible time to warn the sailor, Dad wanted to start me on the trail.

I was at home; waiting there. And I don't mind admitting, I was sort of worried about Dad. Detective work is like that. You never get hard-boiled enough to be easy in your mind about someone you love.

"What the devil's the Eight Bells?" I demanded when Father told me what he was doing. "And where is it?"

"Look it up," he said. "Good Lord, there she goes!" He hung up on me abruptly.

It was a relief to have heard from Dad. And with the dope he gave me I got busy at once. It wasn't hard, by telephone, to locate the Eight Bells, which I found was a bar and grill combined with a sort of sailors' lodging house. It was in Hell's Kitchen, in the

extreme west Fifties, over by the river.

When I got that dope, I took our car and beat it down there. I'm only a fair actor, but I got by with it. After a drink or two at the Eight Bells bar, I had learned that Sandy MacPherson lived here; had a few rooms on the ground floor at the back of the building.

Presently I sauntered out. But I didn't go far; just down to the river-front and around the block. I wound up in the dark, squalid back yard behind the big tumbledown frame building.

MacPherson's windows were dark. Whether he was here or not I couldn't tell from the outside. I wasn't planning to fool around with that sailor now. I would just nab him and turn him over to Father for questioning.

There was a side entrance into the lodging house part of the building, which let me into a shabby gaslit hallway. MacPherson's door was locked. For a minute I stood listening, with my ear to the panel. There was no sound. Then cautiously I jimmied the door. I got it open without too much trouble and with little noise.

Still there was no sound from within. And all I could see was a dim, narrow interior hall.

Automatic in hand I stepped inside, and softly closed the door after me . . .

FROM the phone booth of the restaurant where he had telephoned me, Father had seen Jennie hastily leaving their table. He had hurriedly hung up on me and dashed back, just in time to see the girl decamping from the place. She took a taxi. Dad took another, and chased her down through the city.

Lower Manhattan, at midnight, is a weirdly gloomy sort of place—canyon streets so deserted, some of them, that you'd think you were in a city of the dead. Then the girl's taxi swung west and wound up near Greenwich street, in the wholesale produce section.

Jennie suddenly got out of her taxi and went ahead on foot—and so did Dad, about a block behind her. They passed a long line of loft buildings, all dark. Then suddenly at a little side

door of a building solidly black. the girl seemed fumbling with a key. The door opened. She went inside and closed it after her.

The sign on the front of the big squalid building said:

OTTO SMALTZ INC
WHOLESALE MEATS

The refrigerating plant of Jennie's father! Dad took a cautious look from across the street. There was an entrance into what seemed an office at the front side. The main front was a big platform, raised to the height of a truck. A big sliding iron door was behind it.

There was a wide alley and a driveway beside the building, and in a minute Father stepped into it. At the back of the building there was a little wing. It had two dimly lighted windows, one flight up, as though here might be Smaltz' living quarters.

It didn't take my dad long to get inside, through a lower window, and up a narrow dilapidated flight of steep stairs. He could hear voices in a second floor room now—the arriving Jennie greeting two men. And in another minute Father was at the partly opened bedroom door, peering in with his automatic leveled in his hand. A man was seated on a big iron white bed—a stalwart, heavy-set fellow with bristling blond hair. On a couch, Jennie was sitting on another man's lap, with her arms draped around his neck.

"A dick!" the man on the bed exclaimed. "Mein Gott, Jennie, you didn't tell him noddings—"

"No," she said. "Soon as I got wise, I broke away. He was tryin' to pump me about Sandy."

The man in the chair abruptly moaned. "If the police get after us—"

They were all alarmed. Tensely Dad listened. There was vague mention by Smaltz of somebody for whom they were all working. And they didn't trust him.

"Tom dear," Jennie suddenly murmured. "We got no right to be in this thing!"

Then as she moved on the man's lap. Dad saw the fellow more clearly—a

paunchy man with iron-gray hair; a gentleman dressed in the rough clothing of a longshoreman. His shirt was open at the throat, and Father saw that his white flabby chest was tattooed! The same picture of a girl in tights that adorned the chest of the torso which now was in our laboratory!

And then Dad saw the man's face. It was gray with terror in the bedroom lamplight. And Dad recognized him. This was Thomas Hampton, the banker! Not a victim. Thomas Hampton, still alive!

CHAPTER IV

Bloody Thread and Needle

FOR another few minutes Dad tensely crouched there listening. And at least a part of the ghastly affair became clear to him. Hampton had looted his bank of a cool two hundred thousand. He was insured for a hundred thousand more. With this evidence of his death now, his daughter Violet would inherit that money. And Hampton, with Jennie Smaltz, was going to South America.

Smaltz, with his meat business not much good anyway, would join them there and share in the loot. Smaltz had done the butchering of the corpses. MacPherson had tattooed a duplicate picture on the torso of some still unknown man so that Hampton would be "identified."

Dad understood now the purpose of MacPherson's call upon us. It was to make sure that that torso was proclaimed to be that of the missing banker! Hampton's head would never be found, of course. And the arms on the corpse were female arms—Patricia Abbott's, no doubt—so that fingerprints on the cadaver could not be matched with Hampton's fingerprints which of course could be found around his home! And the purpose of the gruesomely distorted corpses was that because there was such a grisly combining of heads and bodies that the real significance of the missing head and hands of the banker would not be un-

derstood!

"You tink Sandy is at his place now?" Smaltz was demanding. "He should come here."

"I'll phone him," Jennie said. "He's got a phone. We gotta get out of the country, Tom—an' that won't be so easy either."

"Well, you're right on that last. anyway, sister," Dad said suddenly.

With leveled gun he strode into the room. But he didn't get more than a step or two. Behind him, mingled with the gasps of terror of the two men, came the sound of a rush of oncoming footsteps. He whirled just in time to see a blob in the doorway.

Dad's automatic spat. But with incredible agility the big Smaltz had leaped from the bed, striking at Dad's elbow so that the shot went wild. He never had a chance to fire another. Like a snarling puma Smaltz was on his back, and the new arrival jumped on him from in front.

Dad went down, fighting, with the two of them on top of him. Then something heavy hit his head, so that he saw stars and went limp. But he was not wholly unconscious. There was just enough life in him left for him to know that he was being dragged downstairs.

A big door opened with a rasp.

"*Mein Gott!*" he heard Smaltz' voice say, "you will kill him now? Do I haf to cut him up like the others and hang on a hook?"

The door slammed. Just as his senses fully faded Dad was dimly aware that he was lying in the cold of a big refrigerator room. Things were hanging on hooks. Ghastly, dangling things . . .

WHEN I went into MacPherson's. up there in Hell's Kitchen, for a minute I stood tense in the dark silent hall. Then as I moved along it, my flash disclosed a squalid little kitchen, an empty bedroom, and then a little sitting room. Nobody was here.

I poked around the sitting room. On a sort of chest of drawers, with a ship model on top of it, there were tiny bottles of colored inks, needles and other paraphernalia for tattooing.

I ransacked that chest of drawers.

One drawer was locked—a challenge for me to jimmy it open. Which I did. In it was a blood-stained awl, just about like the one which had been stabbed into Dad's arm; waxed cord; a few huge sailors' needles. One was threaded with a length of cord that was stiff with dried blood.

MacPherson then, was the lad who did the gruesome sewing. That was no shock; it was what I expected. I was pretty exultant over this evidence. It probably wouldn't be hard now to nab that sailor and pin guilt on him.

I was padding back along the hall when something white in a corner of the bedroom attracted my attention—a white sheet covering a huge wicker basket. And then I got a real shock that made everything look different from the way I'd been dopping the grisly case.

I'll say that basket was about the most gruesome single thing I've ever run into. As I lifted the cover, a wave of hot noisome stench rose at me. It was the sort of basket, I knew, in which meat was delivered to retail butchers. But this one was jammed with segments of human bodies! Arms! Legs! Torsos and heads!

New victims. When I got over the shock I emptied the basket of its weird contents, and like a monstrously ghastly jigsaw puzzle I laid the dismembered corpses out on the floor, trying to match them together. They seemed readily to fit; and presently I had two complete nude men's bodies, a man's head and torso, and two male arms and two female legs left over!

One cadaver was obviously the body of George Price, the sculptor. All my theories of a mad sculptor being at the bottom of this went by the board. Price was not one of the villains, but a victim! Therefore somebody was simply using this gruesome butchery as a cover-up to shift the blame on the sculptor. But there must be a logical reason for the butchery.

Here was the complete body of Sandy MacPherson! That too, changed all my theories. And the single head that was left over—that, too, I recognized. The police had given Father a picture of the man they had been chas-

ing—the man who had vanished a week ago. Dad had shown it to me.

This third head, goggling up at me from the floor at my feet, was the head of Foley, the embezzling cashier of Thomas Hampton's bank! A head, but no body. Why was that? Why all that weird butchery?

Then suddenly things began to click in my mind. I could begin to understand. I had seen pictures of both Foley and Hampton. They looked nothing alike. But they were about the same build. Could it be that Hampton was guilty of the embezzlement, and had killed Foley so that he would be blamed? It occurred to me also that Hampton could have substituted Foley's torso for his own, with duplicate tattooing. And the reason for the heterogeneous mixture of arms and legs and heads and bodies became clear, too. No fingerprints without proper arms!

But why should Hampton now have killed MacPherson, and thus taken a chance of nullifying his identification? As I thought about this, little bits of gossip about Patricia Abbott and about Violet Hampton, began coming back to my mind.

THE ringing of a telephone almost at my elbow just about startled me out of my wits. MacPherson's telephone, insistently ringing. For a moment I hesitated, then I answered it.

"Hello, Sandy? *Mein Gott*—you, Sandy, listen here—"

I'm fair at imitating voices. Anyway, I got by with an imitation of MacPherson's voice over the phone. It was Otto Smaltz calling! He wanted Sandy to come down to his plant at once. Smaltz was frightened, that was obvious. He babbled something about the damn boss who was drunk now with murder. The boss was saying that the whole thing could be blamed on Price, who was supposed to be an insane fiend. But Smaltz didn't think that was reasonable. He and Sandy would have to figure out what they were going to do, or they'd maybe be killed too.

And then the terrified butcher babbled something that electrified me. That McClure fellow, he said, was

locked up now in one of the big refrigerator rooms, not yet killed because the boss was framing up how to trick McClure's son into coming down.

Well, I got that phone hung up as quick as I could. I'd be right down—no argument on that!

I got out of MacPherson's place like a jackrabbit, down to the corner where I'd parked my car, and I sped down through the city.

I suppose it was about half an hour or so after Dad had done this same thing. The dark and gloomy exterior of the Smaltz refrigerating plant was just about as Dad had seen it. I went into the side alley driveway. There was a dim light in what looked like a second floor back room.

Then I found a window that was broken open—the one through which Dad had entered, as he later told me. I got into the dim hallway, just in time to duck behind an angle of the steep stairs as a man came down them—a big, heavy-set fellow, with bristling blond hair. I guessed that he was the butcher, Otto Smaltz; which was right enough.

"Jennie!" he called softly. "Jennie—Mr. Hampton, vere are you?"

That reference to "Mr. Hampton" confirmed my deductions! The banker was alive! Then the rest of my theory might also be true. . . .

Smaltz looked frightened. He went forward along a corridor and into what I thought was a front office.

"Jennie, Sandy iss coming. Vere are you, Jennie?"

There was real terror in his voice now. Then I saw him, with a flashlight in his hand, going down a flight of stairs, which had a little freight elevator beside them. I waited maybe thirty seconds, then I padded down, came at the bottom into the big basement where a corridor and doors opened into big refrigerating rooms.

And suddenly the silence was broken by Smaltz' agonized cry.

"Oh, Jennie! *Mein Gott!*"

I saw him then, with a big door partly open where in the doorway he had thrown himself down upon the body of a girl. His daughter Jennie, lying here with her throat slashed, a

mass of crimson gore.

Which one of these big refrigerating rooms held my dad? I wasn't thinking of much except that. I pounced upon Smaltz. I'd make him tell me. And I'd find Dad—get him out of here!

CHAPTER V

The Last of the Corpses

SMALTZ, white-faced, stared up at me. He didn't seem to see my leveled gun. Numbed with terror he stared past me. And in that second something whizzed through the air. It missed me, struck Smaltz. With only a choked groan he sank down upon the body of Jennie, with a big knife sticking in his chest.

I whirled. There was an oncoming shape. My shot spat. But the refrigerator door, closing as Smaltz sank away from it, struck my elbow. My shot went wild as the big figure struck me, knocking me backward. I fell, with my gun clattering away and the bulk of my antagonist on top of me. The vaultlike door of the room swung closed to a crack, with the legs of the dead Smaltz sticking through it.

On the sawdust floor I was threshing, desperately fighting against big hands that gripped my throat, strangling me. In the dim interior light of the refrigerator I was aware of meat hanging on hooks, sides of beef and legs of lamb. And other things—ghastly naked things, gruesomely dangling!

"I've got you now, Tim McClure!"

He did have me. Mingling with the roaring of my head I had the dim realization of the heavy bulk of the man sprawling on my stomach, his fingers squeezing my throat. The end of Tim McClure.

Dad was here. I had seen him lying in the sawdust over by the door, almost beside Smaltz' dead body. My dad with blood on him, lying dead or unconscious. "Got you now!" the killer chuckled again.

My hands were futilely flailing. And then I gasped:

"I know you, John Martin!"

I had recalled that gossip concerning him and Patricia Abbott, and more recently with the banker's daughter Violet! Abbott's partner, getting control of the Martin-Abbott Company—I had thought of that, too, as a reason for Abbott's death! Why else would he have been killed. I'd wondered, once I knew Price was dead.

My recognition startled him; but he only muttered:

"So you know me now, at last."

Then as we threshed, faintly I saw his face, so contorted by demoniac murderous lust and triumph that almost all vestige of human aspect was gone from it.

"Martin, you damned fiend!" I choked. "I found those dismembered bodies at MacPherson's! You were going to take them from there and bury them, and—"

He chuckled. "Hampton paid me a hundred thousand dollars to give evidence that he died. A nice little stake, McClure."

He chuckled again. There is in every multiple killer a dementia, a desire to boast of his cleverness. Nearly all of them do it. I grasped at that as at a final straw.

"You've been playing around with Violet Hampton," I accused. "Had that hundred thousand dollar life insurance of hers in mind—when you could shake loose of Patricia Abbott?"

"Yes!" He took the bait all right—triumphantly. "That's another hundred thousand for me. Violet's always wanted to marry me. But I had to get Patricia out of the way first. I was too entangled with her already, and she'd have stood in the way of my plans. And I've got control of the Martin-Abbott Company now. With the publicity this weird murder case is getting. I'll make another fortune out of those crazy little statuettes!"

RATIONAL scheming business-man, for all that he was a fiendish killer! I understood all the details of his ghastly plot now. Ironic, Tim McClure solving the case of the butchered corpses just in time to die! For he had

(Continued on page 112)

The DEVIL and the

A Gripping Story
of
Haunted Depths

By

RICHARD SALE

Author of "The Isle of Troubled Night,"
"The Mad Brain," etc.

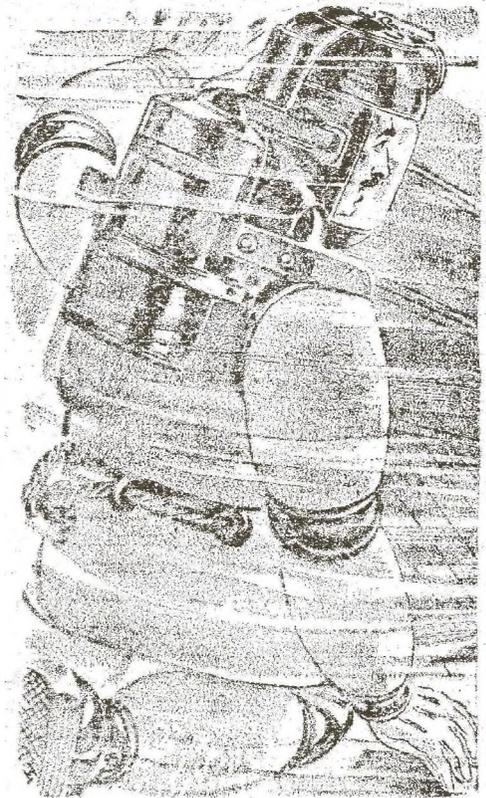
YESTERDAY

THE three terns sat upon the water listlessly, just floating. They had brown and white coats which did not seem to wet, and the color stood out boldly against the deep unfriendly blue of this Irish sea. The waters beneath them were placid enough, with only a long and sweeping ground swell moving them instead of the usual roiled combers, kicked white by the wind. It was shortly past 2:30 o'clock in the afternoon, and the crisp crystal-clear air was still chilled from the frost of the previous night.

In its waning meridian, the sun was yellow and warm, and the terns basked there sleepily, sometimes reaching back to preen themselves with their pointed bills. Behind the sea the sky was a cold cobalt; it looked wintry and hostile, although the month was May.

Northeast of the spot where the birds sat, heaving up and down on the running swell, a smudge of emerald green marked a landfall, twelve miles distant. There was haze, but the bright color could be seen distinctly. It looked more friendly than the ocean.

Quickly then the three terns began to skip across the surface, flapping their wings noisily. From the east, there came the clash of parted waters,



McGowan. I have found her!

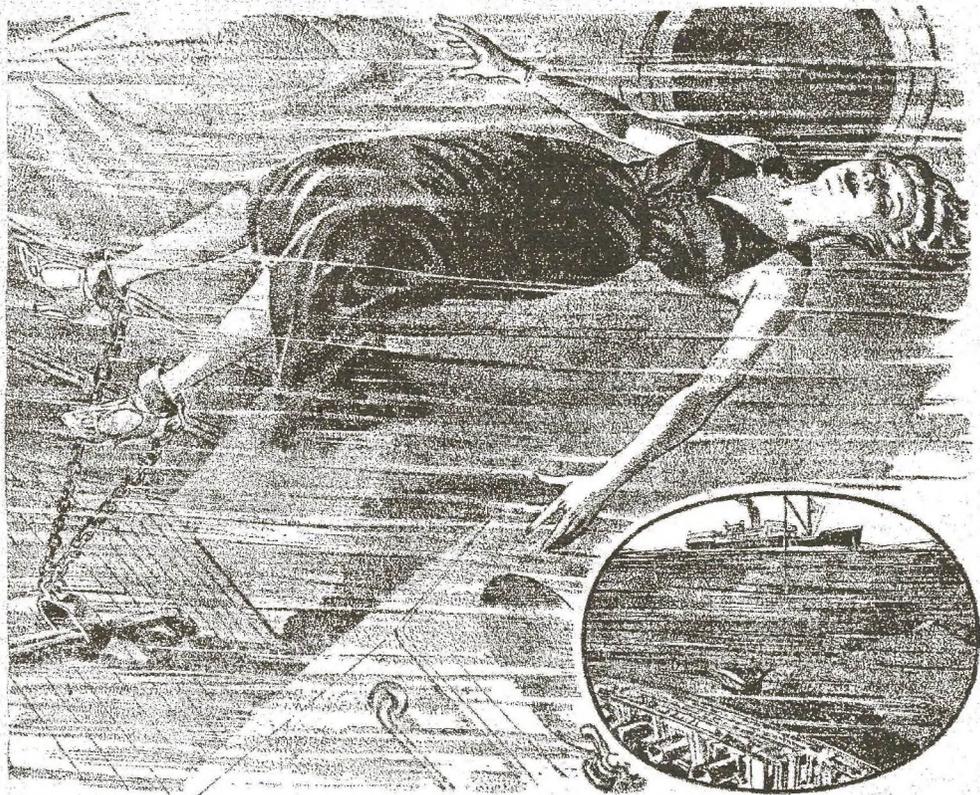
boiling and bubbling. In another instant, the terns had wheeled overhead, frightened, but curious; and they screamed harshly, their cries penetrating through the thin air sharply and shrilly, with mingled terror and consternation.

Beneath them as they circled, the sea was stabbed by a long, thin line of boiling milk which penciled itself west at terrific speed in a foaming streak that hissed and spit as it extended in length. It passed directly where the terns had dozed moments before, and then it was gone.

The terns dropped, being a curious breed of bird, and peered at the remains sharply, blinking their yellow eyes stu-

The Ghost of a Living Man Seeks

DEEP BLUE SEA



Floating erect, as though she were alive!

pidly. The milk was fading quickly, and the bubbles stopped breaking and died. In seconds, the blue of ocean closed in upon the white path and there was no trace of foam or anything unusual, except for a peculiar glassy smoothness where the line had been.

STILL frightened, the terns flew northeast to the headland, and left the mystery behind them. They flew effortlessly and with a real grace that was not consistent with their strange and gawky voices, husking noisily as they went. They had not gone an eighth of a mile before they were frightened again. This time, the morning sky shuddered faintly as a rumble

of remote and distant thunder broke the windless silence.

In the west, there was the outline of a steamship. She was big and dark and long. From her mast, she flew an English flag, and in the sunlight, her white crisp superstructure glistened prettily. She was a passenger liner. There were twin white coxcombs at her bow as she held her weight. Her course was not that of a straight line between two points, but, instead, a very carefully plotted zigzagging to and fro. Who could have foretold that in a few minutes, one thousand, one hundred and thirty-four people aboard were going to lose their lives?

Suddenly the ship faltered, the cox-

Out the Grisly Wraiths of the Dead!

combs died, a shower of flame erupted from the sea. Then another crash! There was a smell of fish upon the surface of the sea, and they came to the surface, belly up, killed by the concussion. The passenger liner listed sharply and began to fill her bowels.

She foundered quickly. Everything happened quickly. In a short time, there was a white geyser after her hull slid in, and the sea was dotted with corpses, with swimmers, with boats and oars which crept upon the swell like centipedes. It was all over with laconic brevity. It does not take as long to die as to be born.

This was the afternoon of May 7, 1915, 2:40 P. M. The headland to the northeast was the Irish coast.

Shortly after, the terns came back. Curious again, they swooped along the sea, looking at the floating bodies, wondering at the tremendous spectacle they had witnessed, the flame, the sound, the sinking and the rush of waters across the dead ship like a cobalt shroud. It was an unfriendly sea in which to die.

They circled over a life preserver, and presently, since it floated, empty, and seemed innocuous, they made a landing upon its white canvas, cork-interior sides, and squatted on the legend, *S. S. Tusilania*.

Yes, it had been a unique phenomenon, a splendid, terrible thing, this destruction of a floating palace and the lives of men and women. And it was, indeed, a very strange way for a man to kill his own wife.

* * * * *

TODAY

THIS history really begins in the mind of William McGowan, Lt., U. S. N. R. C. while he was sitting in the study of a house on Whitehall Square in London in our time. It was four P. M. and outside, a drizzling rain peppered the streets. The fog was already coming in, and it was chill, gloomy weather, full of humid smells in the streets.

The study was very comfortable. A butler had brought McGowan to the room, poured him a drink of port, and arranged a seat upon the deep leather couch in front of the hearth where a

warm and cheerful fire was leaping from the logs on the andirons.

McGowan's mind was mildly confused. He had no idea what it was all about. Indeed, the dispatch with which the engagement had been made, the apparent familiarity of the man who seemed to know all about him, the pleasant welcome in a strange house, all combined to make a puzzle.

McGowan had been in London two days, and he had no friends in the city. He had never been in England before. So it was definitely unusual to receive an invitation from one Hans Bleucher, secretary to Baron Ludvig von Gruller.

The name itself was not strange. McGowan fancied that he had read it or seen it somewhere. He felt that he should have recognized it right away, and this was so. But McGowan was young, only twenty-eight, and during the years of the World War, he had been too young to be impressed by its distant horrors, too young to retain in memory the many names and nicknames of various combatants.

He sat there, lounging, not questioning too critically the circumstances which had brought him to Baron von Gruller's house, and presently the door opened and a man came in. He was short and rather plump and he had a game right leg which he favored. He wore small heavy-lensed spectacles, and his blond hair was clipped very short. He was not young.

"I am Bleucher," he said genially, and McGowan thought the guttural German accent was more than plain. "You are *Herr McGowan*?"

"That's my name," McGowan said, smiling. He shook hands. "I don't understand all this, but you've been very kind, whatever it is."

Bleucher nodded amiably, discounting the hospitality. "You are much younger than I expected," he said. "But in diving, that is good, eh?"

"It helps," McGowan said. "The younger you are, the stronger you are. But I've seen divers twice my age who could teach me twice as much as I know now. And I'm not exactly a palooka."

Bleucher seemed amused. "The

American vernacular always pleases me. There is something very quaint about it. Tell me, *Herr* McGowan, how do you like London?"

McGowan frowned, for idle conversation only prolonged the interview and he was impatient to know what was up. But politely he said that London was all right, a little cold and damp, and too darn much rain.

"Yes, it can be dismal," Bleucher said. He sighed. "You would have liked Berlin before the war. It was a gay city in those days, but alas, they are gone. Forever, I think. Berlin now is businesslike and military and one finds efficiency in it and not spirit. Did you know, *mein herr*, that for all my accent and appearance, I am an Englishman? Naturalized, of course. And the Baron too. We left Germany shortly after the war for England. After the Baron's tragedy, he wanted to be as close as possible."

"As close as possible to what?" McGowan said, scowling. "I don't get you, Mr. Bleucher."

"Her," Bleucher said. "He will tell you about it himself."

■ ■ ■ E pointed an arm toward the ■ ■ ■ mantel, then swept it to the piano, then to a table, and finally to a desk. In each place, there was a photographic portrait of a lovely girl.

McGowan had not particularly noticed these photographs. Now he saw that she was beautiful enough to bring a gasp of admiration from him, despite the fact that he felt himself a cynic where a lady was concerned.

"Cosh," he said in a quiet voice, "she's like something you meet in a dream. Who is she, Mr. Bleucher?"

"Baroness Helda von Gruller," said Bleucher. "She is the wife of my master."

McGowan nodded his head. "I can see why the Baron came to England to be close to her," he said. "A guy might go around the world for a girl like that."

"You misunderstand," Bleucher replied. "But that is quite all right. She is lovely then?"

"Understatement."

"I am glad you think so. You will

understand the motives of the Baron the much more clearly if you really feel that way. I think he is coming now. It has been very pleasant, *Herr* McGowan, and I hope that everything works out to your mutual satisfaction. I will wait in another room until the Baron needs me. Good afternoon."

Bleucher smiled his way past another door and disappeared. From the direction he had originally come, another man entered—a tall, thin and extremely pallid man with fine features and dark hair. His mouth was firm, his eyes were intensely dark, sensitive, and tragic, and in his face was a malleable quality which suggested the deep undertone, slow moving and holy, of a passionate largo, or perhaps, an elegy.

McGowan was not poetic. He had no nerves, no repressions, nothing which might make a man crawl into his shell and regard the world with worry, awe, or fear. McGowan was a perfect extrovert, yet even so, he recognized in Baron Ludwig von Gruller a man upon whose body emotion and obsession could play any sort of tune.

"How do you do," the Baron said absently. His voice, still and gentle, touched with sorrow, was very pleasant, and McGowan instantly liked him, when he had expected to dislike him. The sound of a German name was always hard and harsh to the American, and formed a minor bias. But von Gruller, instead of being a granite rock, was a brook-worn stepping-stone.

They shook hands.

"I'm happy to see you here," Baron von Gruller said suddenly. His manner was no longer vague. In his eyes a spark lighted. It was hope, McGowan saw.

"Thanks," the reserve lieutenant said. He grinned. "I still say you've got the best of me, Baron. It's all a little strange to me. I mean, arriving in England and your telephone call and everything. Mr. Bleucher spoke to me on the telephone as if you knew everything about me. But I've never seen you before, have I?"

"No, no, we have never met," the Baron replied. "Please be seated. I am sorry there has been so much

mystery. There really is no cause for puzzles, and I will relieve your mind shortly. I know that Americans do not like puzzles. You are very young."

"Did you think I was an old man?"

"Frankly, yes. Your exploits would do credit to one of much more maturity. You are to be congratulated."

McGOWAN frowned. "You see? That's what I don't understand. You know about me. Most people don't know much about deep sea divers."

"I know a good deal about you," admitted the Baron. "I wrote to you last spring. Didn't you get my letter?"

"No."

"I didn't have an address. Doubtless the one I used was wrong. I am sorry. Yes, Mr. McGowan, you are the man who recovered the bullion from the *Mercedes* off the Virginia Capes, are you not?"

"Yes," McGowan said. "That wasn't the only—"

"Of course not. But it was the only ship you had to dive three hundred feet to work upon, was it not?"

"Well," McGowan nodded, "yes and no. There were some others, but I didn't have the right equipment for them. We didn't do much good. To tell you the truth, Baron, the *Mercedes* salvage wasn't my own job; they were paying me for it. I got a percentage, but it wasn't so much. That's why I am over here now. I read that the London Salvage Company was going to make a try for the gold of the S.S. *Tusilania*, and I thought I might get a job."

"You have the job," Baron von Gruller said quietly. He seemed to watch a spot on the ceiling with strange detachment. "I am the London Salvage Company."

McGowan stared, taken by surprise.

"I'm not interested in the *Tusilania's* gold," the Baron continued. "And I tell you this. If you find the gold, you may keep it for yourself. In entirety. You may use all my facilities yet you may keep the gold. I am concerned with something else."

McGowan could contain himself no longer. "That's white of you. In fact,

it's too darn white of you, Baron, and I don't believe it. I'd like to know what this is all about? This calling me, this giving me the *Tusilania* gold. What did Bleucher mean by saying that you had to come to England to be closer to the girl in the photograph, and then adding that she is your wife? I'm all mixed up, and I don't like it."

"She is Helda," said the Baron wistfully. "She is my wife."

"What's that all got to do with sunken treasure?"

"She is dead," said the Baron.

McGowan felt a chill down his back, although the fire on the hearth warmed his face. He had, at last, an inkling.

"She was on the *Tusilania* when it was torpedoed?" he asked.

Baron von Gruller nodded, and his face was as brittle as glass. "Yes. You understand now Bleucher's clumsy expression."

"I still don't see—"

Cautiously, the Baron interrupted. "I wish to recover her body. It is a desire I have had since the war ended. To find her, bring her out and to bury her. I must get her out of that hulk. She haunts me there."

He passed his hand across his head and shivered and closed his eyes. McGowan felt creepy.

"It is dark down there and cold upon her. That is terrible. She is lonesome there, alone among all her enemies."

THE man spoke as if the woman were alive. It was an odd thing. And McGowan tried to stop the goose pimples he felt. He spoke bluntly. "The *Tusilania* has never been located. Have you had any luck in that respect? No one was quite sure; even the master retracted on his original figures. About twelve miles southwest of that Irish headland—"

"I have located the ship," Baron von Gruller replied. The room was very still, and the fire seemed to roar thunderously. "It was simple to find her. I used my own figures, and she was there."

"Your own figures?" McGowan said slowly.

"Yes. My wife was returning from

America aboard the *Tusilania* when she sank. My wife was an operative of the Imperial German Government—a spy, if you will. She was apprehended aboard ship by a member of the British Admiralty Intelligence, and she was confined to the brig. It will be easy to find her. She was in the brig when the ship went down.

"I knew the exact spot, Mr. McGowan, from my own log. You see, Mr. McGowan, I murdered my own wife. I was commanding the submarine U-Twenty, and it was I who torpedoed the S.S. *Tusilania*."

"God in heaven!" McGowan exclaimed, horrified. "I remember your name now. Ludvig von Gruller—the Sea Devil! The Devil of the Deep, they called you. You were the man who took his submarine across the Atlantic clear to Newport News. You sank three freighters off Cape Cod in Nineteen eighteen. The only German sub to come that far was the *Deutschland* before you. The Devil of the Deep!"

"Ja," the Baron lapsed momentarily into German. "*Deutschland uber alles, uber alles in der welt . . .* even above my wife."

"But the German Embassy even printed a warning in the newspaper about that ship," exclaimed McGowan. "Why did your wife, who was a German spy, sail on her?"

"To blow her up," replied Baron von Gruller, "in case I failed. The *Tusilania* was carrying munitions."

"You knew she—was aboard?"

"Yes. But I did not know she was confined. I did not think the ship would sink so soon. I thought they would get boats off, get the passengers off—" He broke off as he saw McGowan was staring at him.

"Would you try me too, in your mind, like the thousand of them have had me on trial for twenty-three years?" he went on passionately. "I have seen them in my sleep—women and children and men in a great circle—my own and dearest wife among them. And I, in the center, accused by them before God—my lovely Heida herself, telling me it was wrong, it was wrong—"

His voice cracked, and he sobbed. McGowan was shivering and he wanted to get out and walk in the rain and think everything over. But he was trapped now.

"Mr. McGowan," the Baron said suddenly, harshly, "you will join me? The buoy already marks the resting place of the ship. She is there. She lies on her side. *I have seen her! I have stood on her plates!*"

"I don't know," McGowan whispered. "There would be a hell of a lot of arrangements. We couldn't just dash into it." He had the feeling this man wanted to leave in the morning. "A ship—equipment—"

"I have everything," said the Baron. "I have the *Mario*, a well equipped salvage ship. I have been down to the *Tusilania* in the wonderful Tritonia diving suit which can withstand the pressures. There is bad current, but I reached it. But the Tritonia suit is too large, too cumbersome—I could not go into the ship. I need a self-contained suit and some one who can use it. You have that."

McGOWAN nodded. He had a Craig-Nohl diving dress, self-contained, light rubber, with a shelf of shiny oxygen and helium tubes on the shoulders, and a four-thousand-candlepower light to be worn on one shoulder also.

"You see," McGowan said, "in this suit, I breathe seventy-nine percent helium and twenty-one percent oxygen, while in other suits, you breathe ordinary air under pressure. The normal time for decompression of a diver who has been down a hundred feet deep and does not want the bends, is forty-seven minutes, whereas with helium, we decompress in two minutes and can be hauled up almost instantly. Furthermore the suit is light and mobile. It is true that it would permit the wearer to pass into the *Tusilania* herself."

"You have two suits? The Tritonia suit was self-contained, but too massive for quick movement down there."

"I have two suits," McGowan admitted, looking skeptical. "You were actually on the *Tusilania*?"

"Yes," said Baron von Gruller. "She lies in three hundred and twelve feet of water. I could see her rivets. I stood on her plates, covered with slime. There was little corrosion. By daylight, there was fifteen feet visibility, but down inside the ship it was black as night. She was full of ghosts. . . ."

"Where?"

"Twelve miles. Off Old Head of Kinsale."

"All right," McGowan said evenly. "Count me in."

* * * * *

THE sea had not changed. It was a bit rougher than it had been that May day in 1915 when two torpedoes broke into the starboard side of the sunken liner. There was a northerly wind, and a chop, and McGowan was glad he was a good sailor, for the *Mario*, although ruggedly built for rotten weather, was round-bottomed, and she rolled like a ball.

There was a buoy on the surface, and from this buoy a heavy steel cable sank down through the water. It was anchored at the bottom into the inch-thick steel plates of the *Tusilania's* upturned starboard side. For she lay on her port side, all seven hundred and sixty-nine feet of her. A sliding stage had been fastened to the cable by a clip, and it only remained for the divers to lower themselves down to the base on the plates of the corpse below them in the deep blue sea.

The cold water closed over two rubber-suited monsters as they descended on the stage. McGowan was in one of the suits, and was vaguely troubled. Baron von Gruller, in the other, was excited and strange. McGowan could not repress the feeling that he was in the company of a madman. A gentle, sad, and very lonely madman, no doubt, but a madman just the same.

Too, McGowan had a pretty good idea that he was not going to penetrate to the *Tusilania's* strong-room and safes. From the plans of the ship, he estimated that the strong room was down on D deck. To reach it by passing through the deck and down into the pitch blackness of the water-filled hull was not only dangerous but prac-

tically impossible.

There was one way to reach the strong-room. Detonate dynamite against the ship's plates and open up her starboard side, then burrowing through the coal bunkers until the strong room's wall was reached. And then use an underwater acetylene torch.

The *Mario* carried no such equipment for large-scale operation of that kind. Everything belonged, anyway, to a company which had contracted with the Admiralty to salvage all war-sunk ships.

McGowan had been down once before, to set in the cable. It was eerie down there, and he could feel the dead all around him. He had felt them almost tangibly, and it bothered him. He had found one of the torpedo holes, almost amidships on a line between the third and fourth funnels, a huge and gaping gap of twisted metal. A wonderful place for a diver to fall in and be instantly killed by the sudden change in pressure. Or to catch his suit and rip it, and crush him with the ghastly weight of the sea.

"McGowan!"

The Baron's voice came through the earphones. It sounded metallic and far away, yet the man stood beside him on the grate-floored stage which was going down into the water as rapidly as the electric winches could safely drop it.

"What will we find?" asked the Baron.

Death, McGowan thought. Lots of it, plenty of it. You could feel it already, as daylight faded into the darkening depths, and the cold water grew colder, pushed by them in fast and dangerous currents. Aloud, he said:

"Before we explore, Baron, we must lay out avenues on the hull. She is over seven hundred feet long and ninety feet wide. You could easily get lost in her. We must scratch directions."

"No, no," the Baron protested. "I cannot wait. Tomorrow the fog may come in, the wind may rise, a storm may blow. We may have to finish. Today, conditions stay good, and I can wait no longer. I must go into her."

"We'll rope you," McGowan said, as the water lost color and grew dark. "As you go, pay out your rope. That way, you'll be able to find your way back."

"Helda," McGowan heard the man whisper, forgetting that the telephone carried even his breathing. "Helda, I am coming. . ."

IT was high noon, and visibility now was the best it would ever be. Faint shadows played upon the green and slimy steel, studded with sea anemones. Very dark. You couldn't see more than fifteen feet, if that much. And now, it would grow darker. McGowan switched on his shoulder lamp, and there was sudden daylight around him.

Here was the deck, amidships, a single lifeboat still hanging in its davits.

"Watch the wood," McGowan cautioned. "It may be rotten. Be careful of the currents. They can sweep you off. A fall here would be death. It's ninety feet to the bottom. Even a difference of twenty, that suddenly, could kill you."

"Ja. ja." The Baron was panting with excitement. "I know all that. Look, her deck! I am touching it. Think of it, McGowan. Twenty-three years ago, I saw it through a periscope! And now I can touch it. It is like touching her. She is here. I feel that."

"If she was in the brig," McGowan said, "you can't reach her body today. We haven't equipment. The brig is down on D deck, same as the strong-room. We can't get down there. We'd get lost."

Lost in this phantom thing that once had plied the seas so proudly would be horrible. There was nothing trim or pretty about her now. She was a tombstone, fallen in her own grave. McGowan shuddered.

"On the top," he spoke in his transmitter.

"Yes," came an answer from the *Mario*, two hundred and forty feet or so above the raised starboard side of the *Tusilania*.

"We are on her starboard side, amidships, by the deck railing. We are going to leave the stage, paying out rope

to mark our way. Tell me when the time is up. All okay."

"Be careful."

"The light functions perfectly. There are no dead yet."

"Be very careful."

McGowan thought: Don't worry about that. I'm not being paid to throw my life away down inside this rotten hull.

He had come for gold, and there was no getting at gold. Not today. Tomorrow, perhaps, he might make a try through the first torpedo gap. Going down in there slowly, the coal bunkers would be beyond. But you couldn't go down inside the salon, the staterooms, the halls and corridors of that ship and find anything.

You could get lost on a ship of this size even when she was in port with her lights blazing. How much more easily the same feat could be accomplished now, for you did not walk on her floors: you walked on her port walls.

She lay on her side. When you went through doors, you had to crawl, for you were sliding through two feet of clearance, instead of walking upright through seven feet of clearance. And the dark.

Dear God, you never thought that anything could be as black as the sea inside that steel. Night was luminescent in comparison, and the four-thousand-candle-power bulb seemed forlorn and inadequate in the density.

"Like walking in India ink," thought McGowan, "thick ink. Or black blood, congealed from the dead around and about."

THE wood seemed solid enough. Twenty-three years in the water. They had to be wary of it. Slowly, they paid out rope and lowered themselves into the ship until presently they were clinging to the railing of the main staircase. Everything was slimy.

"A stateroom to the left," the Baron said. "I will look."

"Watch yourself. Watch for bad wood."

"I walk on the walls. They are steel."

"But the currents can sweep you off."

"Ja." The Baron moved away, walking slowly toward the stern.

His light showed the way. The white paint of the walls was gone beneath a green grassy moss which waved gently in the grip of unseen cataracts of current. McGowan waited by the staircase. He thought to himself that any other diver in the world would have given an arm to stand where he stood now, and yet he had no taste for it at all.

He had often thought of the tremendous thrill he would feel to stand within the watery confines of this greatest wreck of all, and yet now he felt no thrill, only a dread, feeling a mute and weird pall around him that precluded any anxiety to explore. One thousand and more had perished in this hulk and they were too close to him as he stood there, waiting for von Gruller.

The Baron was mad, yes; he would have to be mad to walk these halls, once filled with horror, and not have qualms. McGowan would have gone crazy if his hand had sunk this ship, and he had come back to prow it. The Devil of the Deep, he ruminated, come back to pick at his prey. Well, the Devil was in his element, under the sea. He had killed this ship from under the sea, he had sent her down to his own element, and now he came to pick at her bones, still in his element, still submarine.

"*Gott im himmel!*" he heard the Baron gasp.

In another moment, he saw von Gruller coming toward him from the open stateroom, and McGowan's hair stood up on his neck. For in von Gruller's wake, came a skeleton, white and ghastly, floating behind the German and following him with tenacity.

"McGowan!" von Gruller gasped.

McGowan was rigid. For seconds, he could not move, struck dumb by the gruesome scene. He believed, in those silent moments, that this was real: the dead had found their murderer and now would avenge themselves. Von Gruller came to him, and he saw the German's face through his helmet was white, shaken, the eyes wide with terror.

"Stand still!" McGowan snapped.

"Stand still, Baron! The thing is following your wake. You make a suction when you move!"

Von Gruller paused by the staircase. The skeleton, still floating slowly, bumped into him gently. It hung there. McGowan reached out, glad that he wore gloves. He gripped some part of the thorax and pulled it toward him. There were still sinews left, for the bones held together. Only the right foot was missing.

"I'll take it to the stage and have it sent up," he said. "Wait here."

"Ja."

BUT McGowan did not reach the stage with it. Outside, swift currents wrenched the bones from his hand, and they drifted away swiftly toward the bow. McGowan wasn't sorry. They had seen the first dead, and the sea would not give up the body. All right, all right.

"On the top."

"Yes, Mac?"

"We found a body but it was swept away. No identification. Just bones."

"Where are you?"

"Grand staircase. How long?"

"Ten minutes."

They had been down ten minutes. By heaven, it was more like ten hours, McGowan felt. He went back slowly and carefully to where he had left the Baron, but when he reached the staircase, the Baron was gone.

"Baron!" he snapped into his telephone. "Where are you?"

No answer. No sound at all, except a faint whine in his earphones which probably came from the surface ship. McGowan was shivering. He didn't know whether it was from fear or cold. Yes, cold, for down here it was bitter cold and his hands, inside those gloves, were blue, while the sweat ran off his face and down his neck.

"Baron! For God's sake!"

"Ja, Mac?"

McGowan relaxed. "Where are you, Baron? I don't see you and I don't see your rope."

From the surface came, "All right on the bottom?"

"All right," Mac said. "Keep off the line. Baron, listen."

"I heard you," said von Gruller. "I was busy a moment. I have tied my rope to the staircase where we entered the ship."

McGowan turned his shoulder, and in the light of the lamp, he saw the hawser which went down into the darkness of the staircase on its side. "But where are you?"

"I am going down," said von Gruller. "Do not follow, McGowan. You were not paid to follow me. I am going to try and get down. I'll be back."

"Don't try to reach that brig this way," McGowan warned. "You'll kill yourself. You'll never make it. Don't be foolish. We'll go in through the torpedo gaps tomorrow."

The German did not answer. McGowan could hear him breathing heavily as he worked his way down into the inner darkness. Soon, the Baron called, "Mac! McGowan!"

"Yes?"

There was a long pause. "They are here now—the dead." The Baron's voice was a brittle whisper, cold, fearful, gaspy. "*Mein Gott*, Mac, I wish you were here—"

"Where?"

"C deck. Twelve bodies." The Baron caught his breath and it sounded like a sob. "Eight men—four women—all around me in a circle. . . . They are watching me—"

MCGOWAN shuddered. "Try and rope them—bring them up."

"*Nein, nein*, I cannot touch them." Tremors shook that voice coming up through the dark, cold waters to McGowan's ears. "They watch me as though I were the Devil himself. It is amazing; it is amazing. They are full bodies, no bones. They are preserved, crushed by the pressure, but remarkably preserved. The water is cold—perhaps that is it. McGowan—McGowan!"

"I can hear you."

"It is like a tribunal. They are around me, all around me, more of them, trapped against the ceiling. They seem to stand erect—I will have to break through them—it is like my dreams, they are trying me here for murder—"

"Baron!" McGowan said sharply.

"They're dead. Decayed, dead, gone! Don't be a fool! You're down too far. Come back!"

No answer. He could hear the Baron grunting and there were sounds of frantic sobs, which suddenly ceased. Then a sigh and a faint whisper, "*Gott sei danke*," and more silence.

"Baron!"

"They could not stop me," von Gruller said. He sounded far away and dazed. "*Nein*, they could not stop me. I cut my way through them, with my knife. They cringed back. I killed them once; I can kill them again. They tried to stop me—to keep me from the brig, but I am coming, Helda. I am coming to my *leibchen*—"

"Twenty minutes," said the Surface.

McGowan felt panicked. Panicked and afraid. "Did you hear that, Baron? Twenty minutes. We've got to go back. It will take you a long time to come up again, and we've got to go back. The exposure is bad, we're not used to it. Come back."

"D deck," the Baron replied sepulchraly. "She is down here. I am close to her—I can feel it—there are many, many bodies now, McGowan, many dead, all by my hand, by my cold blue right hand. They follow me, they follow in my wake—all crushed, but well preserved—*ahg!*" There was a long silence, and then McGowan could hear the Baron sobbing. "A giant Negro looming up—he frightened me."

"In the name of God," McGowan breathed in cold horror, "Come back!"

He walked to the staircase and took a firm grip on the German's safety line and began to haul up on it. It was a dangerous thing to do for it might easily unseat the man below him in the bowels of the dead ship, but McGowan felt, in terrible desperation, that it was the only thing to do. There was no weight on the end as he hauled, for the Baron had left slack.

Then the German spoke again. "The brig. . ." A long pause. Then a tear-filled sob. "Helda! Helda! The beasts, to chain you here in irons! McGowan, I have found her! Floating erect, as though she were alive! They chained her feet, her feet cling to the chains on

(Continued on page 110)



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THE SWAN SONG

EVERYONE in that vicinity in Maine knew that Ted Bradford was madly in love with Eve Jordan. It was true romance—a beautiful love between this mountain lad and the young concert singer from the city. Evenings they used to stroll up the mountain road—and Eve would sing a few notes and then listen to her echo returning across the cliff. She said she wished she were a bird and could fly above the gorge and sing to Ted.

Then came a tragedy. One evening Eve went up the mountain path alone. She was to meet Ted at their rendezvous when his day's work was through. No one knew how it happened, but Eve must have lost her footing or ventured too close to the cliff—and she fell to the gorge below, her beautiful body badly broken in death.

Ted nearly went mad. His friends tried to comfort him. Often when hunting in the woods, he would stop and cock his head as though listening for Eve's voice, then run madly toward the imaginary echo, until he came out of his trance.

Then one afternoon he was with some friends near that tragic cliff. Suddenly a hunter shot at a wild swan flying over the valley. As the wounded swan fell to the gorge, it let out its death cry—beautiful musical notes—the swan song of death.

Instantly Ted went wild. He darted madly toward the cliff; and before his friends could grab him, he plunged to the gorge below.

They found his body close beside that of the dead swan. But hunters wondered why the swan had fallen. There were no bullet marks on its body. Natives said they never heard such beautiful notes from a dying swan—"like those of a woman's voice."

THE LABORATORY VISITOR

A strange story comes from Prague, told by a doctor now in New York City.

A few months ago, a kindly Jewish doctor was working in his laboratory in Prague. He was experimenting on a formula which was now his life's work. He had saved enough money in the bank to enable him to continue his experiment in the remaining years of his life.

One evening he had finished taking inventory of his stock, and placed all his chemicals back on the shelf, recording the contents of each bottle. Finally he walked over to turn off the electric switch, when suddenly he felt a presence near him. He turned, and for a moment thought he saw his dead brother standing in the laboratory.

"Who are you? How did you get in here?" asked the doctor, realizing that the man was a stranger—his brother had been much older than this man, but the resemblance was striking.

The stranger smiled and then with great effort he spoke softly: "Take your money and leave for America at once."

The visitor tried to say more, but something seemed to be choking him. He walked to the door and disappeared before the doctor could stop him. In fact, the doctor had

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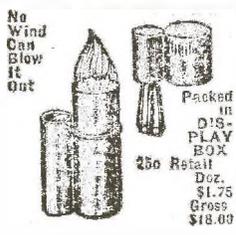


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(Continued from page 105)

"Must have been a piece of chalk in the roller," said her husband, and dismissed the matter.

But the next day Mrs. Grover received a cablegram that her sister had been drowned within a small boat which had sunk off Vancouver.

Mrs. Grover endeavored to make arrangements for the return of her sister's body, but was told it would take several days because the boat was in eight fathoms of water. Divers had to be engaged to bring up the body of her sister and two other bodies in the boat.

But Mrs. Grover finally got action, and later the body of her sister was shipped back to Chicago under direction of a reliable undertaker. When the coffin arrived, Mrs. Grover asked the undertaker if it would be possible to open the casket so that she could have a last look at her dear sister.

At first the undertaker argued against it. But finally he agreed, warning Mrs. Grover not to touch the body.

"By some strange chemical action," he said, "which happens only rarely in bodies found on the bottom of the sea, your sister's body has turned to chalk."

GRAVEYARD PROTECTOR

SOME years ago in Wales a large coal mining company, in order to put through a branch railroad line to the mine, had to remove the bodies from an old graveyard.

Several days before the laborers reached the graveyard they reported the loss of some dynamite. The evidence pointed to a strange man who had been seen in the vicinity of the powder-shed the night before. Detectives decided to watch the following night.

About midnight, the man was seen walking near the powder house. The detectives yelled to him to stop, but he disappeared into a small shed. The detectives approached cautiously and ordered him to come out or they would shoot. He refused to come out. Believing that he might be armed or carried dynamite, they fired several shots into one spot where the man must be hidden.

They waited, then finally opened the door carefully. The man was dead, lying on the floor. There was a bullet hole through his heart. Just then another detective came in and said that the stolen dynamite had been found under a half-built trestle near the graveyard.

The detectives sent for the undertaker. Identification was impossible. No one knew who the decrepit old man was—so in order to keep his body under observation for several days, the body was ordered embalmed.

The undertaker assigned his young assistant to embalm the body. Suddenly the assistant called to his boss: "This man has already been embalmed."

"You're crazy," said the boss—"we just brought him in." But investigation proved that he had been embalmed, for under the man's armpit was the opening where the embalming fluid had been pumped.

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When a doctor was called for closer examination, he said: "I can't account for it—but this body has been dead for a long time; in fact putrefaction has set in, as in one long buried."

No one could account for the strange phenomenon until it was later discovered that one of the unmarked graves in the condemned cemetery was empty—it had been uprooted by an old tree.

Had this zombie body escaped to battle against those who would disturb the bones of the peaceful dead?

GHOST OF THE WATER

A well known woman professional swimmer will tell this story in her memoirs someday. We will call her Grace Halstead.

When Grace was a child, her grandfather, a retired sea captain, worshiped her. He taught her how to swim and predicted that someday she would be famous.

Grace was five when her grandfather died. His wish was that he be buried at sea.

The following year Grace was playing on the beach near her seashore home. Suddenly her mother missed the child. The mother called desperately and summoned the neighbors. They couldn't find Grace, and her mother was frantic, believing the child had ventured into the surf and had been carried out by the undertow.

Suddenly one of the neighbors saw the child's body lying on the sand on the upper end of the beach. The child was unconscious. She must have been in the water.

(Continued on page 108)

IN THE NEXT ISSUE

THE HORROR IN THE CRIB

A Novelet of Dark Illusion

By ARTHUR LEO ZAGAT

MASTER OF THE WALKING DEAD

A Novelette of Ghostly Terror

By JOSEPH J. MILLARD

THE CASE OF THE MUMMIFIED CORPSES

A Weird Mystery Novelet
By RAY CUMMINGS

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(Continued from page 107)

But the mother said: "Something strange which she did not reveal at the time. Not until the doctor had been summoned and brought the child back to consciousness.

Then the mother called attention to a man's footprints in the sand (bare feet) leading from the edge of the water to the child's body. They did not lead beyond the child or back again—they just disappeared as though the man had been lifted up into the air.

The mother was not sure, until the child later insisted: "Grandpa carried me out of the sea and placed me on the sand."

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Dear Chakra:

My parents and grandparents were ignorant people but healthy. I am studying psychic matters, but have been told that I could never be successful for I couldn't expect to be intelligent enough on account of my ancestors. Is this true?

GRACE NOBS

Dear Miss Nobs: Whole statistics show that in most cases "blood will tell"—there is nothing to prove that brains are inherited; if nature intended heredity to govern mind power, then childbirth would occur late in the universal lives when they were more intelligent. It seems that nature is more concerned with physical strength than mental strength. Your intelligence is up to you.

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7-39

BEST FUN, FICTION AND FOTOS

Dear Chakra:

I and my sister have proof that our father's ghost appeared in our living room and left a mark. Is there some society that will investigate this and record our case?

GEORGE WATSON

Dear Mr. Watson: You write to the Psychic Research Society of New York at 71 West 23rd St., New York City. They keep record of all such cases.

Dear Chakra:

In all cases of ghosts being seen, how long after death are such manifestations?

WILLIAM BETTMAN

Dear Mr. Bettman: Although many cases show unlimited ages of ghosts—most cases have occurred within three days of death.

Dear Chakra:

I was hypnotized the other night and I actually saw things in the room which were never there. Did I actually see them with my eyes, or was it purely imagination?

WILFORD MEIGS

Dear Mr. Meigs: You probably saw them all right, but in reverse action. When your eyes pick up an actual image, they register it on your brain. But in hallucinations, the image is first recorded on the brain and then forced back through your eyesight, so the effect is the same. That is why it is so hard to differentiate between actual psychic vision and brain vision. Where two or more people see the same image, it is likely to be true vision.

Dear Chakra:

I am an undertaker. In opening graves for removal of bodies to other places, I have found several cases of bodies having turned to stone. Is there a psychic reason for this?

JOHN NORTWAY

Dear Mr. Nortway: It is more than likely due to physical reasons, caused by certain chemicals in the soil. There are certain sections in the world where all buried bodies become ossified. Some bodies recovered from the depths of the sea are of chalk-like substance. One diver reported finding a body which, when picked up, crumbled into bits of chalk. Other bodies have become leathery or mummified. Some grow long lengths of hair and even great fingernails. Some bodies quit a terrific moan when exposed to the air after long burial. One undertaker swears he heard a corpse cry: "Grace"—the name of the dead man's wife.

CHAKRA.

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The National Dunking Association is a new organization formed to encourage dunking sports in the United States. One of the ideas, we understand, is to spread goodwill, good cheer and good fellowship, and thus do much to counteract the evil forces at work in the country today.

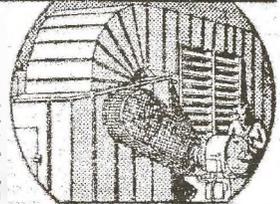
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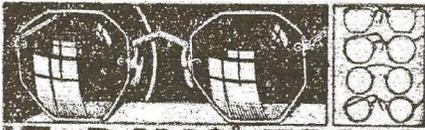
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THE DEVIL AND THE DEEP BLUE SEA

(Continued from page 103)

the floor and she stands at my height, to meet me, even her arms are outstretched—she might be alive!"

McGowan paused and listened in his earphones, blood dancing in his brain until he thought he would go crazy. Faintly he heard the German whisper: "Helda, *leibchen*, you have been alone so long . . . I cannot break these chains . . . Helda, Helda, you have waited long enough, I will not leave you again . . ."

McGowan strained on the rope and tugged. He felt a weight at last, and he heard the German grunt in his phone as the pull reached him.

"No, no, McGowan," the Baron called sadly.

NO more weight. Very suddenly, McGowan, alarmed, hauled on the rope until his arms ached. In a short time the end of it came in view. There was no man on the end of it. McGowan, numb now, without feeling at all, turned his light on the end and stared. There was a clean sharp break in the rope. A knife had cut it in two.

"Baron!" McGowan cried in agony.

Just once more, Baron Ludvig von Gruller spoke, and his voice was quiet and calm, quite clear as it came into McGowan's helmet.

"I have closed the door, Mac. Do not try to find me. I had always planned it this way. For twenty-three years. I cannot leave her, I will be beside her now for the rest of Time. When you return to London, please see Bleucher, McGowan, he has something for you. And so farewell. Or perhaps, I should say, *auf weiderschen*, for it is possible that one day we will meet again. But when you take us out, McGowan, keep us together. That day when you come down here, keep us together, or leave the door closed as it is, and pass us by. . . ."

"Thirty minutes," said the Surface.

Sick, cold, numb, McGowan stumbled back to the stage by the cable. He clung to the stage and tried to breathe, but his insides were all awry.

BEST FUN, FICTION AND FOTOS IN

"Take me up," he said harshly.
 "Take me up."
 And the stage began its ascent to the world of sun and life.

TOMORROW

THE sea does not change. It is the mother of life. From it man has sprung, and to it, he returns. The years will pass. In the *Tusilania's* safe will still repose three hundred thousand dollars in currency and jewels. In her strong-room, from two to fifteen million dollars in gold. In her lanes and corridors, the dead, keeping vigil and waiting for the day when they will lie in the earth at peace.

Men will go down again, for treasure, for curiosity, for superstition. One day they will take from her all that she holds.

But the sea, while rich, is stubborn and stingy. What she owns, she holds dear, challenging the ingenuity of man.

And no matter who may come to that place in the Irish Sea, to drop into the depths and walk the decks which once were filled with life, McGowan will not return.

For McGowan never dived again. The dead of the *Tusilania* were too close to him for the rest of time. He had had communion with the ghosts, and in his mind's ear, he constantly heard the Baron's quiet voice:

"Leave the door closed as it is, and pass us by . . ."

Requiescat in pace.

Novelets by

ARTHUR LEO ZAGAT

RAY CUMMINGS

JOSEPH J. MILLARD

IN THE NEXT ISSUE

**YOU CAN'T GO NUTS
 IF YOU BINK DONUTS!**

SEE PAGE OPPOSITE
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SCULPTOR OF CORPSES

(Continued from page 93)

me. I realized now that I had cracked my head in falling; and his grip was just about shutting off my wind.

I was also aware now of the weird frigidity here on the refrigerator floor: numbing, stiffening coldness. It was part of why I was lying limp, seemingly unable to struggle against Martin. And I think also that he must have been numbed without knowing it: numbed so that he sprawled, gloating at me instead of dispatching me.

I felt suddenly that my senses were fading. Martin's hands still pressed my throat. I was trying to struggle a little, but it was futile. The dim, horrible scene of the refrigerator interior was blurring, but still I could see those ghastly things hanging on hooks here—dismembered chunks of Hampton's butchered body, with blood dripping from them.

Martin seemed to be following my gaze.

"They won't find that here either," he muttered. "I must remember to bury it. Had to kill that fool, and Jennie. Too dangerous to let them live. Violet can identify the tattooing on her father's body. I'll take that chance. It was too dangerous to let Sandy live." With one hand Martin had seized a meat cleaver now, and was raising it over my head.

"You'd better—wait just a minute before you do—anything—"

That was Dad's gasping voice from over by the door. It so startled the gloating, murderous Martin that he twisted around. And his hands involuntarily loosened at my throat so that I gasped in air, gulped, with my head clearing and a little strength coming back to my numbed limbs.

Numbed. I was conscious more than before of the horrible numbing coldness that was here. And in that second, Dad gasped again:

"Just let me speak, Martin! You'll be glad—"

I could see Dad on his feet now. He was standing swaying at the partly opened big refrigerator door, a ghastly,

BEST FUN, FICTION AND FOTOS IN

almost pitiable figure with the blood streaming down his pallid face. I saw, too, that he had managed to shove Smaltz' legs out of the doorway, so that it was being held open only by Dad's shoulder as he stood tottering on his feet.

"I wrecked the—refrigerator controls, Martin," Dad was gasping. He tried to laugh, but it was only a weird gurgle. "Wrecked them at the—lowest temperature. I guess it's—pretty far below zero, and I—put the dead-latch on this door. If it—clicks closed now—that's the end of us all, Martin. We'll freeze in here before we're ever found. Just—more corpses here."

Then he did laugh, wildly, hysterically. But I could see his burning eyes on me—his eyes, gauging me and Martin, pleading with me.

Dad certainly looked as though he were about to collapse and fall. That big heavy door would click closed, and—

"Watch out!" Martin screamed.

He jumped off me, leaped to his feet, pounced at Dad. Then Dad fell, but he fell in the doorway, blocking it, still holding the door. And he wasn't quite as badly off as he had seemed, for his arms reached out, wrapped around Martin's legs.

"Your chance now, Tim!" he yelled at me.

My chance, and I didn't miss it. Despite my numbed, freezing fingers I seized the heavy meat cleaver. I jumped with it, swung it, crashed it down on Martin's skull. Without even a groan he sank—the last of the butchered corpses.

Well, I think that's about all I have to record of the strange case. The thing is over and done with now. It's just a gruesome memory. But Dad and I somehow don't like to go shopping in butcher stores, where from outside you can see into the refrigerator room where the meat hangs on hooks, or sides of beef sometimes lie in baskets. We've just about decided to become vegetarians.

Next Issue: THE CASE OF THE MUMMIFIED CORPSES, another McClure and Son Novelet by RAY CUMMINGS

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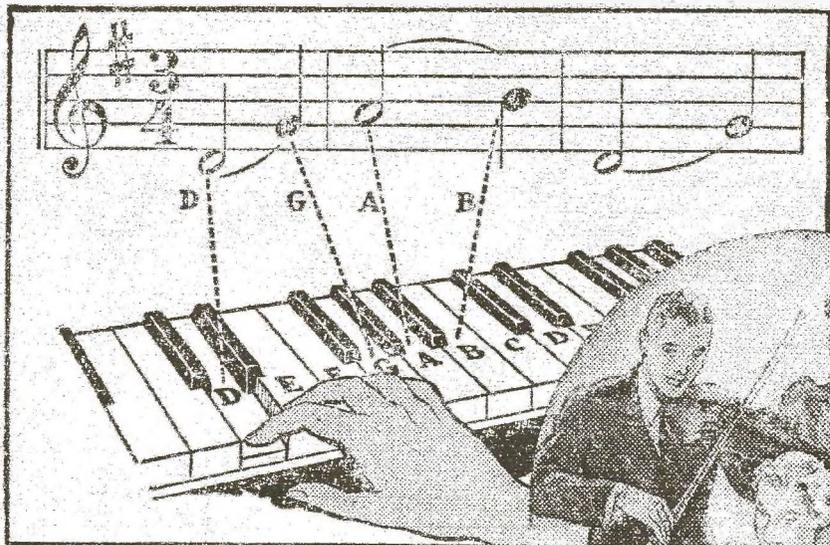
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6-50-20	2.45	1.25	30x3-25	3.70	2.40	32x4-21	7.95	3.75
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6-50-26	2.45	1.25	30x3-25	4.00	2.70	32x4-21	9.15	4.35
6-50-27	2.45	1.25	30x3-25	4.05	2.75	32x4-21	9.35	4.45
6-50-28	2.45	1.25	30x3-25	4.10	2.80	32x4-21	9.55	4.55
6-50-29	2.45	1.25	30x3-25	4.15	2.85	32x4-21	9.75	4.65
6-50-30	2.45	1.25	30x3-25	4.20	2.90	32x4-21	9.95	4.75
6-50-31	2.45	1.25	30x3-25	4.25	2.95	32x4-21	10.15	4.85
6-50-32	2.45	1.25	30x3-25	4.30	3.00	32x4-21	10.35	4.95
6-50-33	2.45	1.25	30x3-25	4.35	3.05	32x4-21	10.55	5.05
6-50-34	2.45	1.25	30x3-25	4.40	3.10	32x4-21	10.75	5.15
6-50-35	2.45	1.25	30x3-25	4.45	3.15	32x4-21	10.95	5.25
6-50-36	2.45	1.25	30x3-25	4.50	3.20	32x4-21	11.15	5.35
6-50-37	2.45	1.25	30x3-25	4.55	3.25	32x4-21	11.35	5.45
6-50-38	2.45	1.25	30x3-25	4.60	3.30	32x4-21	11.55	5.55
6-50-39	2.45	1.25	30x3-25	4.65	3.35	32x4-21	11.75	5.65
6-50-40	2.45	1.25	30x3-25	4.70	3.40	32x4-21	11.95	5.75
6-50-41	2.45	1.25	30x3-25	4.75	3.45	32x4-21	12.15	5.85
6-50-42	2.45	1.25	30x3-25	4.80	3.50	32x4-21	12.35	5.95
6-50-43	2.45	1.25	30x3-25	4.85	3.55	32x4-21	12.55	6.05
6-50-44	2.45	1.25	30x3-25	4.90	3.60	32x4-21	12.75	6.15
6-50-45	2.45	1.25	30x3-25	4.95	3.65	32x4-21	12.95	6.25
6-50-46	2.45	1.25	30x3-25	5.00	3.70	32x4-21	13.15	6.35
6-50-47	2.45	1.25	30x3-25	5.05	3.75	32x4-21	13.35	6.45
6-50-48	2.45	1.25	30x3-25	5.10	3.80	32x4-21	13.55	6.55
6-50-49	2.45	1.25	30x3-25	5.15	3.85	32x4-21	13.75	6.65
6-50-50	2.45	1.25	30x3-25	5.20	3.90	32x4-21	13.95	6.75
6-50-51	2.45	1.25	30x3-25	5.25	3.95	32x4-21	14.15	6.85
6-50-52	2.45	1.25	30x3-25	5.30	4.00	32x4-21	14.35	6.95
6-50-53	2.45	1.25	30x3-25	5.35	4.05	32x4-21	14.55	7.05
6-50-54	2.45	1.25	30x3-25	5.40	4.10	32x4-21	14.75	7.15
6-50-55	2.45	1.25	30x3-25	5.45	4.15	32x4-21	14.95	7.25
6-50-56	2.45	1.25	30x3-25	5.50	4.20	32x4-21	15.15	7.35
6-50-57	2.45	1.25	30x3-25	5.55	4.25	32x4-21	15.35	7.45
6-50-58	2.45	1.25	30x3-25	5.60	4.30	32x4-21	15.55	7.55
6-50-59	2.45	1.25	30x3-25	5.65	4.35	32x4-21	15.75	7.65
6-50-60	2.45	1.25	30x3-25	5.70	4.40	32x4-21	15.95	7.75
6-50-61	2.45	1.25	30x3-25	5.75	4.45	32x4-21	16.15	7.85
6-50-62	2.45	1.25	30x3-25	5.80	4.50	32x4-21	16.35	7.95
6-50-63	2.45	1.25	30x3-25	5.85	4.55	32x4-21	16.55	8.05
6-50-64	2.45	1.25	30x3-25	5.90	4.60	32x4-21	16.75	8.15
6-50-65	2.45	1.25	30x3-25	5.95	4.65	32x4-21	16.95	8.25
6-50-66	2.45	1.25	30x3-25	6.00	4.70	32x4-21	17.15	8.35
6-50-67	2.45	1.25	30x3-25	6.05	4.75	32x4-21	17.35	8.45
6-50-68	2.45	1.25	30x3-25	6.10	4.80	32x4-21	17.55	8.55
6-50-69	2.45	1.25	30x3-25	6.15	4.85	32x4-21	17.75	8.65
6-50-70	2.45	1.25	30x3-25	6.20	4.90	32x4-21	17.95	8.75
6-50-71	2.45	1.25	30x3-25	6.25	4.95	32x4-21	18.15	8.85
6-50-72	2.45	1.25	30x3-25	6.30	5.00	32x4-21	18.35	8.95
6-50-73	2.45	1.25	30x3-25	6.35	5.05	32x4-21	18.55	9.05
6-50-74	2.45	1.25	30x3-25	6.40	5.10	32x4-21	18.75	9.15
6-50-75	2.45	1.25	30x3-25	6.45	5.15	32x4-21	18.95	9.25
6-50-76	2.45	1.25	30x3-25	6.50	5.20	32x4-21	19.15	9.35
6-50-77	2.45	1.25	30x3-25	6.55	5.25	32x4-21	19.35	9.45
6-50-78	2.45	1.25	30x3-25	6.60	5.30	32x4-21	19.55	9.55
6-50-79	2.45	1.25	30x3-25	6.65	5.35	32x4-21	19.75	9.65
6-50-80	2.45	1.25	30x3-25	6.70	5.40	32x4-21	19.95	9.75
6-50-81	2.45	1.25	30x3-25	6.75	5.45	32x4-21	20.15	9.85
6-50-82	2.45	1.25	30x3-25	6.80	5.50	32x4-21	20.35	9.95
6-50-83	2.45	1.25	30x3-25	6.85	5.55	32x4-21	20.55	10.05
6-50-84	2.45	1.25	30x3-25	6.90	5.60	32x4-21	20.75	10.15
6-50-85	2.45	1.25	30x3-25	6.95	5.65	32x4-21	20.95	10.25
6-50-86	2.45	1.25	30x3-25	7.00	5.70	32x4-21	21.15	10.35
6-50-87	2.45	1.25	30x3-25	7.05	5.75	32x4-21	21.35	10.45
6-50-88	2.45	1.25	30x3-25	7.10	5.80	32x4-21	21.55	10.55
6-50-89	2.45	1.25	30x3-25	7.15	5.85	32x4-21	21.75	10.65
6-50-90	2.45	1.25	30x3-25	7.20	5.90	32x4-21	21.95	10.75
6-50-91	2.45	1.25	30x3-25	7.25	5.95	32x4-21	22.15	10.85
6-50-92	2.45	1.25	30x3-25	7.30	6.00	32x4-21	22.35	10.95
6-50-93	2.45	1.25	30x3-25	7.35	6.05	32x4-21	22.55	11.05
6-50-94	2.45	1.25	30x3-25	7.40	6.10	32x4-21	22.75	11.15
6-50-95	2.45	1.25	30x3-25	7.45	6.15	32x4-21	22.95	11.25
6-50-96	2.45	1.25	30x3-25	7.50	6.20	32x4-21	23.15	11.35
6-50-97	2.45	1.25	30x3-25	7.55	6.25	32x4-21	23.35	11.45
6-50-98	2.45	1.25	30x3-25	7.60	6.30	32x4-21	23.55	11.55
6-50-99	2.45	1.25	30x3-25	7.65	6.35	32x4-21	23.75	11.65
6-50-100	2.45	1.25	30x3-25</					

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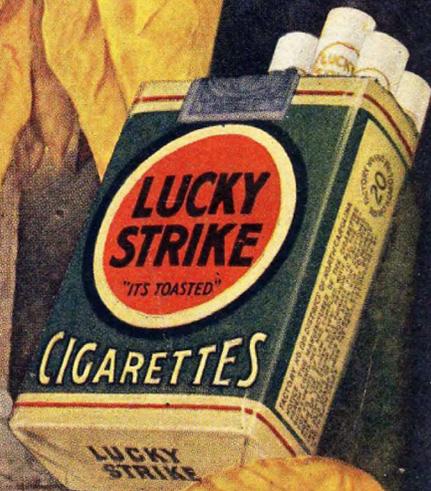
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