

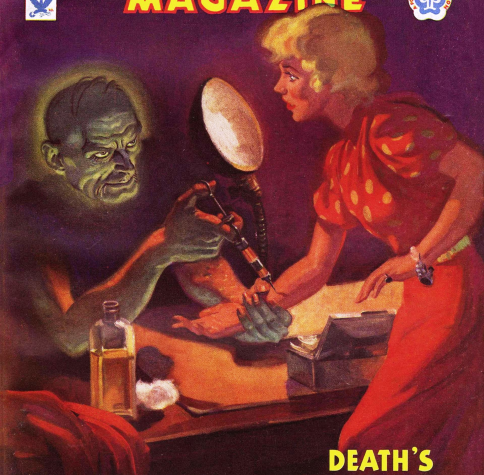
10¢

DIME

MARCH

MYSTERY

MAGAZINE



MAN OUT OF HELL

FEATURE-LENGTH NOVEL

by **JOHN H. KNOX**

**DEATH'S
GLEAMING FACE**

MYSTERY-TERROR NOVELETTE

by **FREDERICK C. DAVIS**

FROM A FAT MAN... to a HE-MAN... in 10 MINUTES!

"I REDUCED MY WAIST 8 INCHES"

WRITES
GEORGE BAILEY

"I lost 50 pounds" says W. T. Anderson. "My waist is 8 inches smaller" writes W. L. McGinnis. "Felt like a new man" claims Fred Wolf. "Wouldn't sell my belt for \$100" writes C. W. Higbee.

So many of our customers are delighted with the wonderful results obtained with the Weil Belt that we want you to—

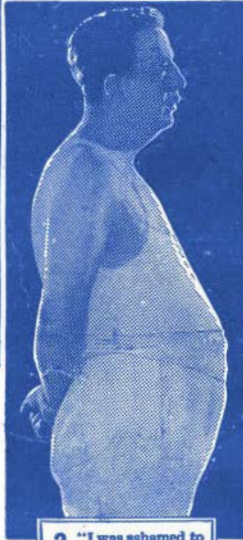
TRY IT FOR 10 DAYS AT OUR EXPENSE!

We GUARANTEE to REDUCE your WAIST 3 INCHES IN TEN DAYS!



1. "I was just a fat man with a protruding stomach... ill at ease and clumsy—no pep to do anything!"

Actual Photos Show Immediate Improvement In YOUR Appearance!



2. "I was ashamed to undress in the locker room—my friends poked fun at me and I had no answer!"



3. "Then I slipped on a Weil Belt... a transformation took place... what a difference—pounds seemed to have fallen away!"

**NO EXERCISES
NO DIETS
NO DRUGS**

"REDUCED from 44 to 36 INCHES"

Gentlemen: I feel sure that you will be interested to know that I wore one of your belts for seven months and reduced from 44 to 36 inches. Yours very truly,

George Bailey,
233-236 Eighth Ave., N. Y.

... or it won't cost you one cent.

If we had not done this for thousands of others... if we did not **KNOW** we could do the same for you, we would not dare make this unconditional guarantee!



4. "My friends were astonished!... I looked better—my clothes fitted me—and I felt like a million dollars!"

YES SIR: I too, promised myself that I would exercise but it was too much like work—and it's darn hard to diet when you like to eat. The Weil Belt was just the answer—no diets, no drugs—I feel like a new man and I lost 8 inches of fat in less than 6 months!

GREATLY IMPROVES YOUR APPEARANCE!

The Weil Reducing Belt will make you appear many inches slimmer at once, and in 10 short days your waistline will actually be 3 inches smaller—three inches of fat gone—or it won't cost you one cent!

It supports the sagging muscles of the abdomen and quickly gives an erect, athletic carriage.

Don't be embarrassed any longer with that "corporation" for in a short time, only the admiring comments of your friends will remind you that you once had a bulging waistline. **THE MESSAGE-LIKE ACTION THAT DOES IT!**

You will be completely comfortable and entirely unaware that its constant gentle pressure is working constantly while you walk, work or sit... its message-like action gently but persistently eliminating fat with every move you make.

Many enthusiastic wearers write that it not only reduces fat but it also supports the abdominal walls and keeps the digestive organs in place—that they are no longer fatigued—and that it greatly increases their endurance and vigor!

DON'T WAIT—FAT IS DANGEROUS!

Fat is not only unbecoming, but it also endangers your health. Insurance companies know the danger of fat accumulations. The best medical authorities warn against obesity, so don't wait any longer.

Send for our 10 day free trial offer. We repeat—either you take off 3 inches of fat in ten days, or it won't cost you one penny!

SEND FOR 10 DAY FREE TRIAL OFFER

THE WEIL COMPANY, INC.
93 HILL STREET, NEW HAVEN, CONN.

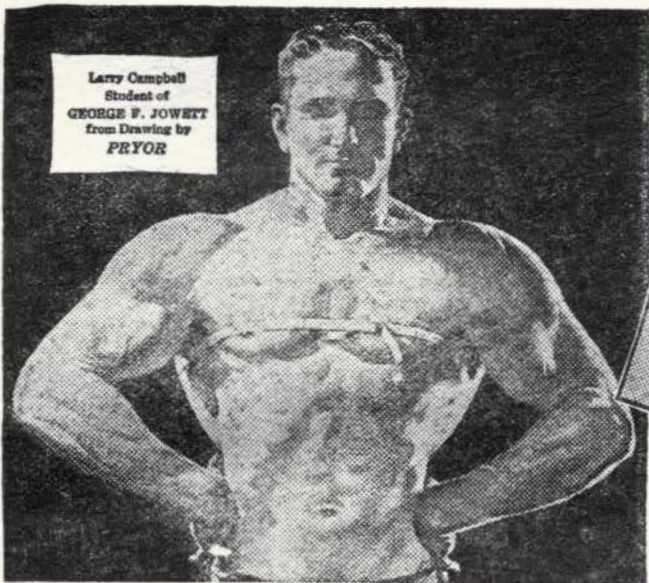
Gentlemen: Send me FREE, your illustrated folder describing The Weil Belt and full details of your 10 day FREE trial offer and Unconditional Guarantee!

Name _____

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Use coupon or write your name and address on a penny post card.

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Student of
GEORGE F. JOWETT
from Drawing by
FRYOR



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It will be a revelation to you. You can't make a mistake. The assurance of the strongest armed man in the world stands behind this course. I give you the secrets of strength illustrated and explained as you like them. I will not limit you to the chest. Try any one of my test courses listed in the coupon at 25c. Or, try all six of them for only \$1.00.

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Mail your order now and I will include a FREE COPY of "NERVES OF STEEL, MUSCLES LIKE IRON." It is a priceless book to the strength fan and muscle builder. It describes my rise from a weak, puny boy to be one of the world's strongest athletes with a chest measurement of 49 inches and an 18 inch bicep. Full of pictures of marvellous bodied men who tell you decisively how you can build symmetry and strength the Jowett Way! Reach out — Grasp this special offer!

**FORMER 110 POUND WEAKLING
...now wins strength contests!**

I WISH you could see Larry in action today... a perfect example of my weight resistance method... the only method that gives the true weight lifting muscles. I've seen Larry lift more than 225 pounds overhead with one hand... and Larry is only one of hundreds of my pupils who have excelled as strength athletes.

I want to tell you fellows... there's something about this "strong man's business" that gets you... *thrills* you! You'll get a great kick out of it... you'll fairly feel your muscles grow!

*** If YOU Do Not Add At Least ...
3 INCHES TO YOUR CHEST 2 INCHES TO
YOUR BICEPS**

... it won't cost you one cent! Signed: GEORGE F. JOWETT

All I want is a chance to prove to you that I can add 3 inches to YOUR chest and 2 inches to each of YOUR biceps. While my course is by no means infallible... so many of my pupils have gained tremendous physical development that I am willing to stake my reputation that I can do the same for you... remember... if I fail it will cost you nothing!

Those skinny fellows who are discouraged are the men I want to work with. Many an underweight weakling has come to me for help... completely discouraged... I have developed a real he-man's physique for them... covered their skinny bodies with layers of muscles... made them strong and proud... eager and ready to face the world with their new power!

Don't you feel the urge for real, genuine, invincible muscles that will make men respect you and women admire you?

Take my full course, if it does not do all I say... if you are not completely satisfied... and I will let you be the judge... then it won't cost you one penny, even the postage you have spent will be refunded to you.



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by FRYOR

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10¢ DIME MYSTERY MAGAZINE

Volume Four

March, 1934

Number Four

FEATURE-LENGTH MYSTERY NOVEL

- Man Out of Hell**.....By John H. Knox 10
Even Bill Zeigler tasted fear during those dark hours when each new dawn brought its own fresh horror of burning flesh and disappearing men!

TWO MYSTERY-TERROR NOVELETTES

- Death's Gleaming Face**.....By Frederick C. Davis 54
A place accursed by God and shunned by man was the Brabyn homestead—where a family lay dying of slow, man-made decay!
- Black Laughter**.....By Arthur Leo Zagat 92
Jean Armstrong, alone and terrified, fought for sanity—as the echo of dark, inhuman laughter dinned through those dark passageways and deserted rooms.

SHORT TERROR TALES

- Blood In Primrose Lane**.....By Grendon Alzee 45
They said that the blood was the ravening work of some mad beast of prey.
- Murder Below**By Archie Oboler 83
Queer and terrible things were happening in the ancient house where, years before, she had borne her only child.
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Can a man once buried reach back beyond the grave to wreak his vengeance?

—AND—

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Cover Painting by Walter M. Baunhofer

Story Illustrations by Amos Sewell

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Owes His Success to Radio Training
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J. E. SMITH, President, Dept. 4CK7, National Radio Institute, Washington, D. C.

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Page 12—About Civil Service Pensions

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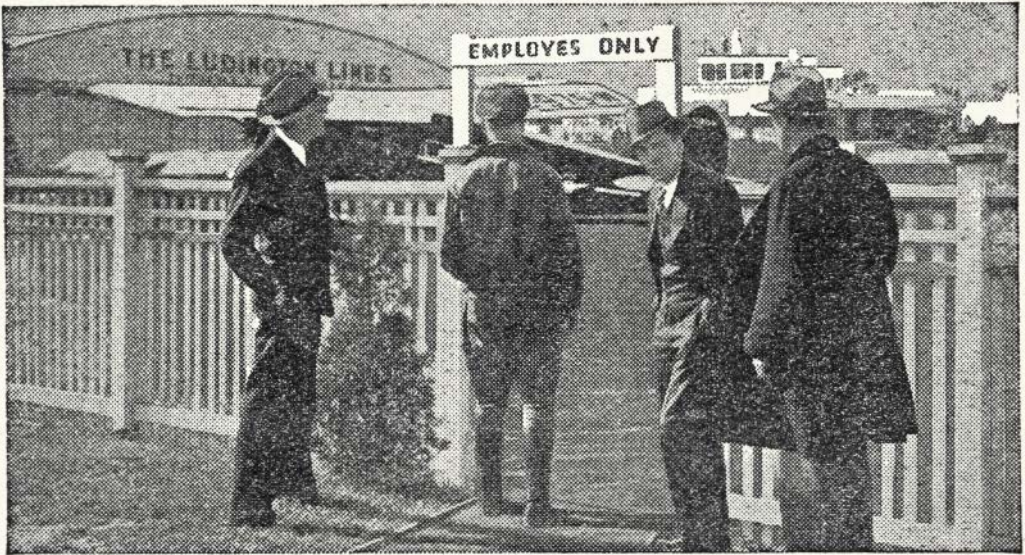
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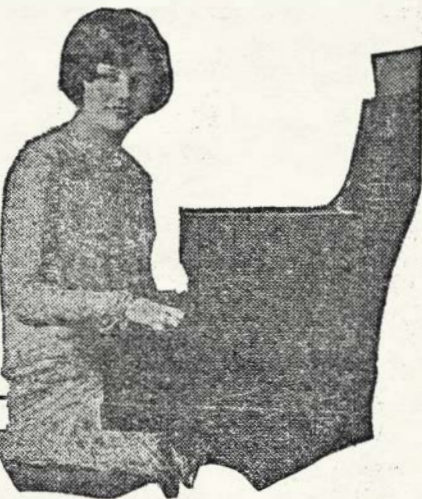
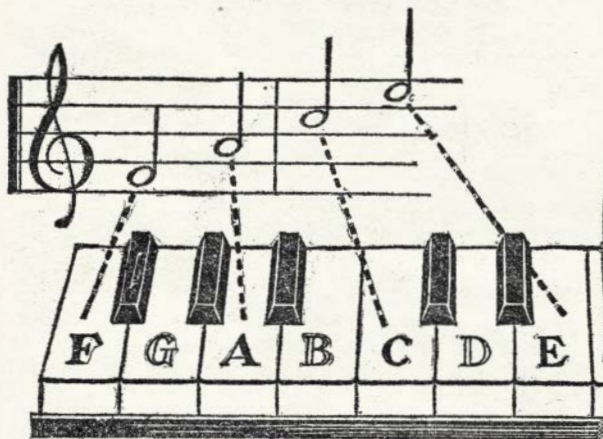
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To those who think Learning Music is hard-



PERHAPS you think that taking music lessons is like taking a dose of medicine. It isn't any longer!

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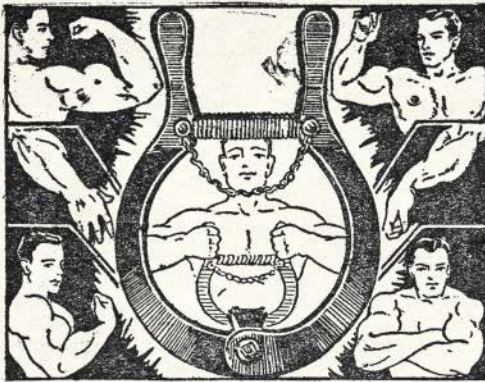
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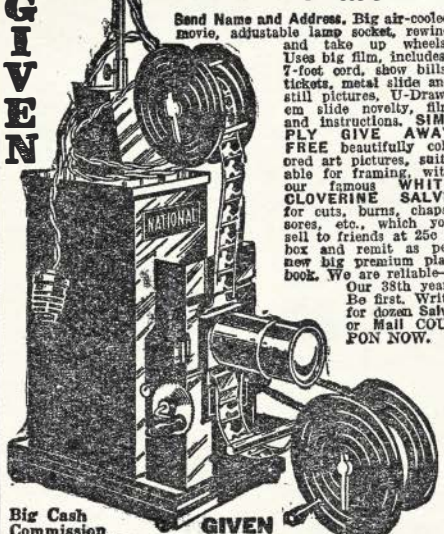
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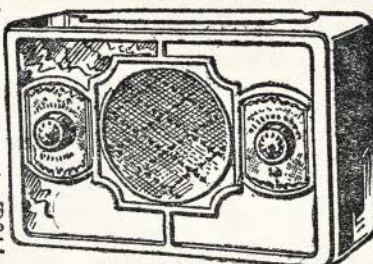


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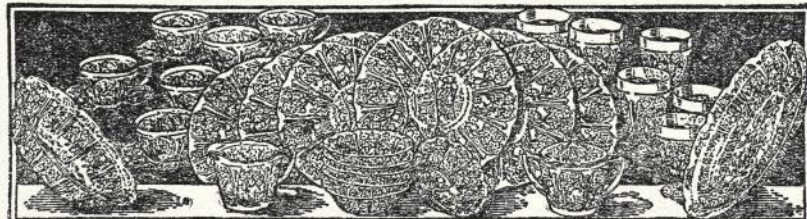
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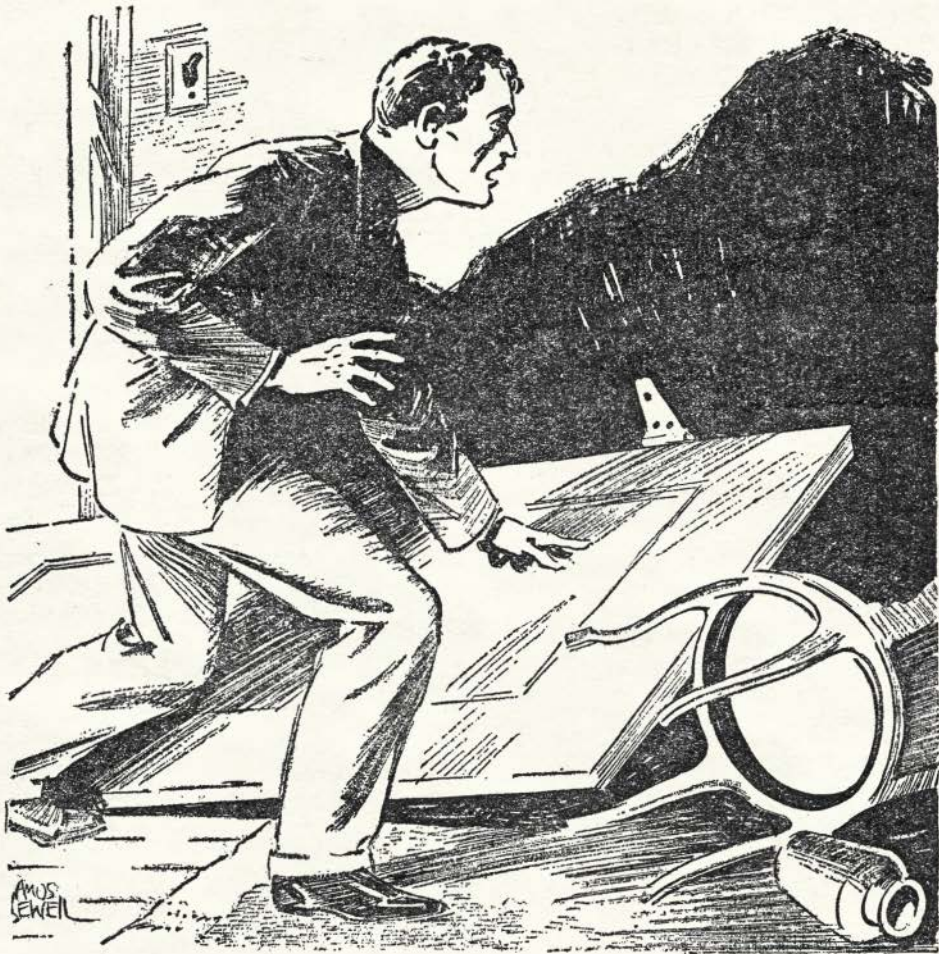
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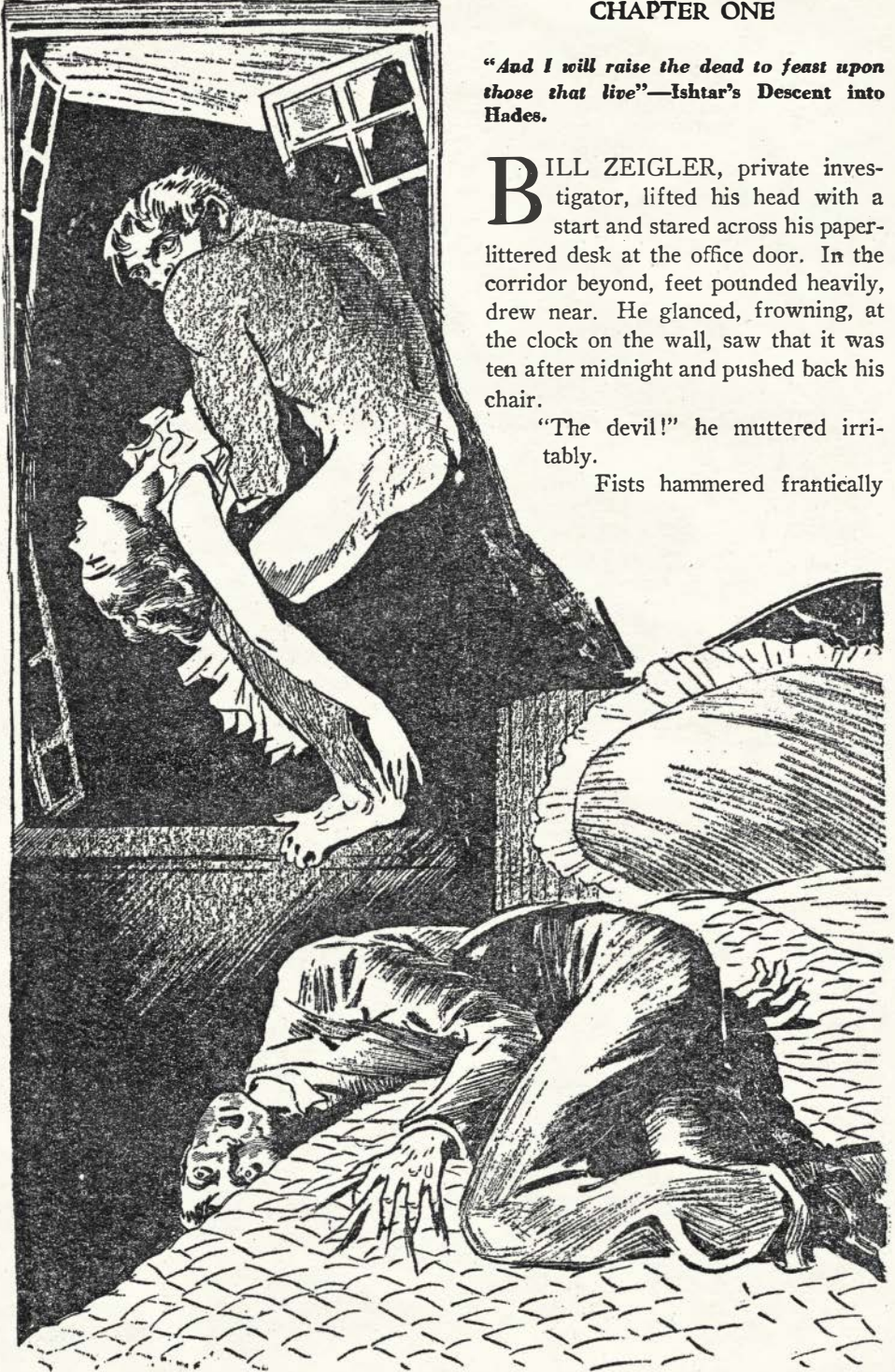
CHAPTER ONE

"And I will raise the dead to feast upon those that live"—Ishtar's Descent into Hades.

BILL ZEIGLER, private investigator, lifted his head with a start and stared across his paper-littered desk at the office door. In the corridor beyond, feet pounded heavily, drew near. He glanced, frowning, at the clock on the wall, saw that it was ten after midnight and pushed back his chair.

"The devil!" he muttered irritably.

Fists hammered frantically



at the door, and hoarse breathing was audible from beyond the thin partition. Zeigler thrust his hand under his coat, loosened the automatic in its holster.

"Who is it?" he demanded with his hand on the knob.

An unintelligible croaking sound from the hall was his only answer.

Zeigler jerked the door open quickly and stepped back. A loose-jointed figure in shabby clothes tumbled across the threshold, tripped and sprawled upon the floor. A black head lifted; a pair of large frightened eyes fastened appealingly upon Zeigler.

"Mist' Zeigler? You Mist' Zeigler?" The eyes, like, boiled eggs, shone white against the black skin. The thick lips were flecked with foam.

"I'm Zeigler. What do you want?"

The Negro scrambled shakily to his feet and stood hunched and trembling.

"He's dyin', Mist' Zeigler . . . He say to me, you get Simms; you get Massalon; you get Zeigler . . . He say, get 'em to-night; I'm dyin' . . . He say, if you don't, th' man out'n hell gonna burn you too! You ain't police, Mist' Zeigler?"

"No, I'm not the police," Zeigler said, then, his eyes narrowing: "You're not doped, are you, boy?"

"Honest I ain't, Mist' Zeigler!" The black hands, dangling limber from the shabby sleeves, lifted in a gesture of supplication. "You got to come, Mist' Zeigler . . . He's dyin'—"

Zeigler's eyes narrowed, appraising the Negro keenly. This was no ruse; the man was half dead with terror. He shrugged.

"All right," he growled. "I'll go."

He shoved the Negro into the hall, snapped off the light and closed the door. Marching the stammering black ahead of him, he swung down the corridor and descended the steps into the street. His roadster was parked at the curb.

"Get in," he ordered. Then, "Which way?"

"East Ambrose," the Negro said, "down past the railroad yards."

Puzzled by the strange summons, but unable to extract any rational explanation from the fear-fuddled Negro, Bill Zeigler, shot the car through the deserted business section, swung off through the wholesale district, skirted Chinatown and swept past the railroad yards into a district of hovels and shanties. They turned two street corners, then, in the middle of a particularly disreputable block, the Negro indicated a drab shack in the window of which a yellow light gleamed wanly.

HIS guide scrambled from the car and shuffled toward the door, leading the way. The flimsy porch creaked under Zeigler's tread. The Negro pushed the door open, and Zeigler, with one hand thrust into his coat, gripping the automatic, stepped into the room.

The yellow light from a smoking oil lamp threw its wan radiance on a scene of squalor. Outlined beneath a dirty sheet, the body of a man lay on a cot near the wall. Bill drew near, squinting, felt the hair on his scalp bristle as his eyes made out the horrid thing that lay against the pillow. With an involuntary shudder, he bent and stared at the grotesque parody of a human head that was thrust out from beneath the covering. Flabby flesh, pale with the sick pallor of decay, lay loose upon the bony framework of a face. From two sunken pits of shadow the eyes stared with glassy fixity.

Bill Zeigler sucked in his breath. "My God!" he gasped. "Cooked alive!"

"A week he's been layin' there," the Negro wailed. "Wouldn't let me git no doctor, no police . . . Then tonight . . ."

"Who did it?" Zeigler demanded.

"I don' know, suh . . . honest. I jest

found him a-layin' outside." The Negro pushed past him, seized the man's shoulder and began to shake him. "Jager! Jager!" he said hoarsely. "He's here."

The corpse-like face twitched; puffy lips peeled back, baring yellowed, uncared-for teeth. "Zeigler!" The word was a whisper that was forced with effort from the horrid mouth. The glassy eyes, suddenly alive, rolled toward Bill Zeigler's face. "You're not Ott Zeigler!"

"He's my uncle," Bill said.

The eyes flashed with a savage light, turned toward the Negro. "I told you to get Ott Zeigler, you ape!"

"He wasn't home, Jager," the Negro gulped. "I done tried to git Massalon an' Simms too. But this here Zeigler is the only one I could find."

"Well, get out of the room!"

Ducking his head in evident fear, the Negro backed from the room and closed the door behind him. The man on the bed watched him go, then turned to Zeigler. "*Massalon, Simms, Zeigler!*" he said, his hideous lips spitting out each word with a bitter emphasis. "I ought to let them die. But I got enough on my conscience . . . an' I'm dyin' . . . Listen!" From beneath the cover a scarred lean arm shot out and seized Bill's wrist in a convulsive grip. "Look at me! Then go to your uncle and the others and tell them what you've seen. Tell them Galen Jager sent you with his dying breath. Tell them the man we murdered in the Gran Chaco has come back from hell!"

He paused, leering at Bill Zeigler's incredulous face. "You think I'm raving? Listen! We cut his throat from ear to ear and buried him in the jungle. That was ten years ago. And then, last week . . . his dead face in the fog . . . the eyes shining like fire . . . The scar was there on his throat. I tried to run, but he grabbed me, dragged me away . . . Look

at me now, man!" . . . The voice grew faint; the speech was punctuated by painful gasps; the eyes rolled drunkenly.

"Who was he?" Bill Zeigler demanded.

"His name? What is a name to a soulless thing from hell? You don't believe? It was the Hindu that brought him back from hell—his servant, Gandhara Dutt, a foul, skinny devil who boasted that he could bring back the dead . . ." The sentence was broken off abruptly; the ghastly head lifted; the emaciated body jerked upright. "My God! Look there! Look!" A shrill scream burst from him.

HALF convinced that the man was insane, Bill whirled to follow the direction of a bony finger that stabbed the air, indicating the window. Then he himself stiffened, felt the breath choke in his throat. Like a ghost evoked by the dying man's scream, a turbaned head was thrust against the greasy pane. A sallow, cadaverous face hung for a moment in the wan light and vanished.

"The grave-robbler!" Jager screamed. "Gandhara Dutt! Get him, kill him!" He fell back with a spasmodic shudder as Bill Zeigler spun about and dived for the door.

Gripping his automatic, Bill kicked the door open and stared out into the moonless dark. A lean tall shadow, moving against the lesser blackness of the night, leaped to the running board of a waiting car.

Bill cleared the creaking porch and plunged out in pursuit. The car door slammed, headlights lashed out, the purring of a powerful motor rose to a roar, and the heavy sedan lurched forward. Halting in a cloud of dust, Bill Zeigler sent soft curses after the tail-light.

As he slid into his roadster seat a scrap of paper which had been propped on the steering wheel fluttered to the floor. Without stopping to pick it up, Bill kicked the

motor into action and leapt forward in pursuit of the racing sedan.

The swift events, the incredible story, tumbled about confusedly in Bill's mind. But it was more than a good guess that the occupants of that racing car held the key to the whole macabre puzzle. Bearing down heavily on the accelerator, Bill held the car in the rutted road and kept his eyes glued to the bobbing tail-light.

The chase led away from the heart of town, into an exclusive residential section. Here the big sedan threaded a circuitous route through tree-lined drives in a futile effort to shake off its pursuer. Finally it slowed, came almost to a stop.

Suspecting an ambush, Bill slammed on his brakes. He was within a block of his quarry when he saw a figure leap from the running board into the glare of his headlights. For a moment it paused as the big car plunged away; then, as Bill started forward again, the lean shadow dived into a hedge and vanished.

Bill braked his roadster to a shuddering stop. He had suddenly realized that the vast dark house which loomed beyond the encircling hedge was the home of Caraway Simms—the Simms whom the dying man had mentioned, the Simms who had once been his uncle's partner, and was now his bitter enemy.

As he hesitated, considering his next move, Bill's eye fell on the scrap of paper which had dropped from the steering wheel when he had leaped into his car. He picked it up, held it in the glare of the dash light, felt his skin prickle queerly as he read the scrawled message:

They are doomed. Save yourself. Keep out of this or your fate shall be worse than Jager's. Blood for Blood!

—The Man out of Hell.

FOR a moment Bill Zeigler hesitated. After all, it wasn't his affair. No one had really retained him to mix himself

in this ugly business. And the picture of that horribly burned face was still livid in his memory. There could be no question as to the deadly seriousness of this threat; the fact that the trail led to the house of Caraway Simms was proof enough that there was more than a fever-crazed imagination behind the stammered words of a dying derelict.

Crumpling the scrap of paper in a muscular fist, he squared broad shoulders and crawled from the car.

Beyond the hedge a wide, tree-dotted lawn sloped upward to the sprawling, silent house. A night light shone dimly through the glass panel of the front door. Bill stared about in the darkness, now ominously still. The shadow that had leaped from the car had vanished. Bill crossed the lawn to the front door.

But with hand on knocker he paused. Through the glass panel a movement in the dimly lighted hallway caught his eye. He peered in.

A girl was standing by a closed door on the left of the hall, a young girl, whose arresting loveliness startled him, almost as much as the mystery of her rapè, half-fearful attitude. She was dressed in a loose orchid negligee, and the flowing gold of her hair tumbled over one shapely shoulder in a shining cataract. She was, Bill realized, Allene Anson—Caraway Simms' step-daughter. Bill had not seen her in years, could scarcely believe that this striking beauty was the child of twelve he remembered. But why was she standing there by the door, so strangely intent, her blue eyes wide, her lips parted, listening, as if for some sound she dreaded?

Bill seized the knocker and tapped softly. With a violent start the girl turned a frightened face to the door and approached softly. A moment later Bill confronted her with the most disarming smile he could muster.

"Why," she stammered, her strained features relaxing with relief, "why it's Bill Zeigler!"

"You remember me, Allene?"

"Of course, but why . . ."

"Because I've got to see your stepfather at once."

"Come in," she said in a tremulous whisper. The look of fear had returned to her face. "I'm glad you came; you'll tell me what it means . . ." She closed the door behind him, laid a hand on his arm in a grateful gesture. "I'm scared to death, and I don't know what to do. All day he's been sitting in there." She nodded toward the closed door. "It's his private museum. I think he's losing his mind, Bill. He carries a loaded gun, and I can hear him mumbling and talking to himself. Once I tried to get him to take something to eat. He just looked at me queerly and asked, 'Do the dead come back?' Then he shut the door in my face.

"There's something ghastly here in this house, Bill . . . You must know something . . . Why have you come here—at this hour?"

"To get at the bottom of it," Bill replied grimly. He looked into her tear-wet eyes, and his own softened. "Don't worry," he said. "I'll see you through it."

He took a step toward the closed door, but she drew him back. "I'm afraid, Bill," she said in quick panic. "He might kill you. I tell you he—acts like a madman."

"I'll handle him," Bill said. "You—"

The word died on his lips. He felt the girl clutch his arm and huddle fearfully against him as a blood-chilling scream rang out from behind the closed door. It echoed away into silence, and a man's broken voice stammered hoarsely:

"The eyes! My God, the eyes!"

Bill sprang to the door.

CHAPTER TWO

"There are eyes behind that door! There are eyes! There are eyes!"—Count Kostia.

THE door was locked. Bill rattled the knob, hammered with his fists.

"Simms!" he called, "Simms!"

Heedless of the interruption, the voice within the room continued in a low, moaning soliloquy: "No, it can't be! They did not move! The eyes did not move! The dead are dead!"

Zeigler whirled on the girl. "Who's in there with him?" he demanded.

"No one," she answered. "He's been in there alone all day. He's mad, I tell you, stark mad!" Her face was pale with fear. "You won't believe me, but he's talking to a wax figure!"

"A wax figure?" Bill repeated incredulously.

"Yes," she said. "That's what started it, I think—the madness. Artists often bring their works to his private museum for safe-keeping, you know. Well, a week ago a Russian—Gorgondoff, was his name—brought this wax figure and left it."

"But what's it like?" Bill interrupted.

"A horrible thing!" She shuddered. "It's in a great air-tight glass case, the life-size figure of a man. It represents a scene from Dante's *Inferno*—a man burning in hell. It's awful!"

"Then why does he keep it," Bill asked, "if it scares him?"

"But it didn't at first," she replied. "It was only this morning that it began to affect him this way. Then he swore that the face had changed its expression. He called me in this morning and asked me if I didn't think the face looked different. And," she added hesitatingly, "you mustn't think I'm mad too, but it did! I didn't tell him that though. I could see that he was afraid of something which gave him a feeling of both guilt and horror. . . ."

Bill looked at her sharply. "I wonder," he said, "how much you know. Do you know where your step-father—"

The words froze in Bill Zeigler's throat. An unearthly wail of terror rose out of the silence of the closed room, swelled in volume till their ears tingled, then was drowned suddenly in the deafening roar of a shot-gun. There came the sound of shattering glass, the scuffle of feet.

Bill Zeigler seized the girl by the shoulders. "Go to your room," he snapped, "and lock the door. Hurry!"

"But Bill . . ." She hesitated.

"Don't argue!" he rasped.

He whirled and faced the door. The scream rang out again, shrill as the death cry of a wounded animal. Then suddenly it was choked down to a strangled moan, a whimper that faded into silence.

Bill flung himself against the door. Shoulders that had furnished the heavy artillery for a famous football squad crashed against the heavy barrier with a shuddering impact. The door shook, but did not yield.

Bill backed away to the far wall, paused for a deep breath and charged it again. And this time, as his weight struck the door, it flew open like a sprung trap, and Bill lurched forward into the dark room, trying to recover his balance as he realized that he had been tricked. At the last moment someone had unlocked the door.

He might have managed to stay on his feet if he had not stumbled, but something soft and heavy tripped his foot. He hurtled forward, sprawled across the object that lay upon the floor. It was a body, and as he raised his head, his nostrils quivered to a stench like the smell of burning flesh!

He heard the door slam behind him, and staggering to his feet, found himself in total darkness. Gripping his automatic in a rigid fist, he turned about slowly,

blinking blindly against the dark, listening.

ABRUPTLY he straightened, felt the wind of his sucked-in breath whistle between his teeth. Straight ahead of him, in the direction of the door, two bodiless eyes blazed out of the blackness with a red, unearthly light. Appalled, yet fascinated, Bill stared dumbly while the spectral orbs faded to pin points of fire, then flared wide again with horrid radiance.

And now they moved, swinging from side to side as if propelled by the weaving motion of a huge body. And they came nearer! Warily Bill retreated, his heart knocking out a crazy tune against his ribs. Now he understood the maniacal shriek which had come from beyond the closed door. Now he understood the terror of the dying derelict, for he knew that no mortal man that walks the earth has eyes which shine in the dark with a radiance of their own!

He sought to muffle his footfalls, tried to calm the crazy beating of his heart. But the ghastly eyes followed the course of his retreat unerringly. It was uncanny, unnerving, even to a man of Zeigler's coolness. Suddenly he took hold of himself. He quit retreating and raised the automatic. "Who are you?" he demanded. "What do you want?"

He almost hoped that there would be no reply. But it came, in a voice that whispered and whined like the wind at night.

"I am the Man out of Hell! I have come for the blood they owe me!"

"Stand where you are!" Bill rasped, "or I'll send you back full of lead!"

A harsh laugh, accompanied by a spitting sound like the crackle of burning faggots. "Can bullets harm me," asked that same inhuman voice, "when the worms and the grave have failed?"

"Then laugh this off!" Bill snarled.

His finger tightened on the trigger, and with a sputter of orange flame the weapon spat its slugs straight at the frightful eyes.

There followed a second in which Bill stood dazed and counfounded, holding the empty pistol in his hand. Then a cold wave of terror such as he had never before felt washed over him, and he began once more to retreat in blind, unreasoning panic. For those dreadful eyes had absorbed his lead, and continued their advance unchecked.

And now, with mounting horror, he saw them lunge swiftly toward him. He dived to one side, fell against something which toppled, and sprawled to the floor clutching a plaster statue in shaking hands. He hurled it, saw the baleful eyes, now almost above him, duck swiftly. As the plaster shattered on the floor, Bill threw himself backward, staggered to his feet and made a wild plunge in the direction of the door.

He reached the wall. His fingers, groping blindly, found the bolt. Then a hand, cold and hard as stone, fell heavily on his shoulder. He whirled, lashing out with his fists. But something heavy as a sash weight crashed into his head. His knees buckled, and a swirling torrent of darkness swallowed him up.

BILL ZEIGLER with an effort opened his eyes. He lay on his back, staring at a high ceiling crossed by carved cedar beams. He raised his head, sank back with a groan, as memory flowed back into his mind. He was, he gathered, still in the room where the monster had attacked him. The police had arrived. Two uniformed officers stood near him, and two plain clothes detectives were staring down at the body of a man in a silk dressing gown that lay nearby, the face covered by a towel. As Bill raised himself, one of the detectives turned to glare and snarl.

"So you came around finally, Sher-

lock?" It was Lieutenant Olmsley of the Homicide Bureau, whose unpleasant face was twisted now in an almost wolfish grin of evil satisfaction. He and Zeigler had met before, on cases which occasionally developed to the lieutenant's discredit. And Olmsley was not the sort to forgive or forget.

"Where's Miss Anson?" Bill asked, ignoring the other's jibe.

"In her room, safe and sound, small thanks to you," Olmsley said. "And now let's hear your version. The girl tells us that a wax figure broke out of a glass case, killed her step-father, attacked you and ran out the front door." He grinned.

Bill got up slowly, staring about him with renewed interest. A low stage with fragments of the shattered glass case rising from its edges, stood in the center of the room. The wax figure was gone. Bill stepped to the body that lay upon the floor and lifted the towel. He straightened with a grimace, let the towel fall back. What had been the face of Caraway Simms was a ghastly and unrecognizable mass of burned flesh.

"Well," Olmsley said, "I'm waiting."

Then, grimly, Bill started at the beginning and related all that had happened.

But when he told Jager's story, he omitted the names of his uncle and of Caul Massalon. He was not ready to involve them in the official investigation.

"So this fellow Jager told you to warn Simms that a man from hell had come back to get him?" Olmsley asked, eyeing Zeigler skeptically. "How did the colored boy happen to come to you in the first place?"

"He had to come somewhere, didn't he?" Bill asked. "He couldn't get to Simms. He was afraid of the police. What was more natural than for him to come to a private agency?"

Olmsley stroked his chin, squinted narrowly. "The whole business is the fishiest

damned thing I ever ran across," he said. "Sure you and the girl didn't frame up to bump the old man off?"

Bill Zeigler laughed harshly. "And then I knocked myself unconscious, I suppose? That's a good sample of your usual goofy thinking, Olmsley!" He turned and started for the door.

"Just a minute," Olmsley called. "We'll want you to repeat that story later."

"All right," Bill threw over his shoulder. "You know where to find me."

In the corridor he met the doctor who had just come from Allene's room. She had been badly shaken by the tragedy, he was told, but was resting now under the influence of a sedative. It would be best not to disturb her until morning.

Starting toward the front door, Bill reached in his pocket for a cigarette. His hand encountered a loose scrap of paper. He drew it out hurriedly. The angular scrawl resembled that on the note he had found in the car. Holding it nearer the light, he read:

You have seen my vengeance. If you continue to meddle, you shall taste it! I shall not spare you again!—The Man out of Hell.

CHAPTER THREE

*"Nor Death, that lulleth all, can lull my ghost,
One sleepless soul among the souls that sleep."*

—Archias of Byzantium.

OTT ZEIGLER was a towering figure of a man, with a great leonine head crowned by a thatch of graying sorrel hair. Wrapped in a flannel dressing gown, he paced the floor of his study.

From the leather lounge chair in which he sat blowing spirals of smoke into the dim atmosphere of the room, Bill Zeigler watched his uncle and waited for some comment on the appalling story which he had just finished telling.

Watching the man as he moved against the bizarre background of his study walls, hung with strange weapons and trophies of his travels, Bill felt the old dislike for his uncle reviving. There had always been something slightly repellent about this forceful, magnetic, secretive man.

Now Ott Zeigler paused, folded his long arms behind him and lifted his cold gray eyes to his nephew's face. "And so," he said, "you've come here to accuse me of murder?"

"I've come here to warn you," Bill Zeigler replied. "And I've come also for information. If you don't tell me what you know, you needn't expect me to continue to shield you by hiding your connection with this affair from the police."

"You'd betray your own blood, eh?"

"I'm taking no chances with that girl's life," Bill answered evenly, "and I've got my own life to think of too. As for you and Caul Massalon, you can look out for yourselves."

"I'll look out for myself," Ott Zeigler assured him. "And," he added, his veiled eyes suddenly gleaming, "since you mention Massalon, I'll give you my true opinion of the whole affair. There's the man who's at the bottom of it all!

"He's the man who committed that murder in the Gran Chaco ten years ago. Now, mind you, I'm admitting nothing. Perhaps I profited by it; perhaps Simms did—strange things happen in a lawless land. But I tell you Caul Massalon cut the man's throat. And I'll tell you another thing I know." His eyes narrowed and his voice fell to a whisper, thin and harsh. "*That man was dead!* There can be no doubt of that. I saw him buried!"

"And you think Massalon . . . ?"

"I'm sure of it! Who else could it be? He's powerful and unscrupulous, and he wants to get rid of the rest of us because of what we know. He once threatened to get both Simms and me!"

"But what about Jager?" Bill protested, "and the Hindu, Gandhara Dutt, and the figure from the case—the thing that attacked me in the dark?"

Ott Zeigler lowered his eyes, fidgeted with the tassel of his robe. "I'm not attempting any detailed explanations," he said impatiently. "I remember the Hindu servant, but I put no stock in his childish claims of witchery and magic. Moreover, the Hindu himself couldn't have done all this. I tell you it's Massalon!"

"And the man who was murdered in the jungle?" Bill asked. "What was his name?"

"Ask Caul Massalon," said Ott Zeigler.

And that was all Bill could get out of him. He went away with a feeling of disgruntled disappointment. Had his uncle lied? Perhaps—about his own guilt. But in the main, there had been a ring of truth and plausibility in his contentions. That the three former partners had in recent years hated each other, Bill knew. He also knew that Caul Massalon was shrewd and conscienceless and powerful. Then why not . . . ?

Yet, despite his frantic reasoning, Bill was aware of a disturbing feeling of doubt, an alarming sense of something unearthly and diabolical at the root of it all.

AFTER a cold shower and a hasty breakfast, Bill returned to his office and found Presslar, his assistant, already there. A thin, wiry man in his middle thirties, with prematurely graying hair and sleepy eyes that veiled an astonishing alertness, Presslar looked up from the desk as Bill entered. "Gossip around headquarters says you're mixed up in the Simms murder."

"Up to my ears," Bill conceded. "Listen, Press, drop everything and get on this." Rapidly he sketched the events of the previous night. "What I want you to do," he finished, "is to get a line on

Caul Massalon. Make inquiries in the underworld resorts, see who he contacts, find out what he's up to. Also, if you have time, try to run down this fellow Gorgondoff who brought the wax figure to the Simms museum—supposed to be a sculptor. Ask about him at the art department of the library and the galleries."

Presslar was reaching for his hat even as that single syllable left his thin lips.

BILL hurried to the Simms house. He found Allene resting on a lounge in the sun room. As his bronzed face and broad shoulders appeared in the doorway, she smiled.

"I want to know what happened in there last night. I—" she hesitated, tried to smile, "—I couldn't get much out of the police!"

"They don't know too much," Bill told her. "Whatever *it* was, I tried to fight it off there in the dark. But," he shrugged, "you can't really fight a thing you can't see."

She shuddered. "I locked myself in my room, as you told me to," she said. "But when I heard the shots, I couldn't stay there any longer, alone. I crept downstairs, and I guess I was shaking like a leaf. Just as I started into the hall I saw that—that *thing* run out the door. Bill, it *was* the figure from the case!"

"But a man must have been substituted in some way."

"I don't see how," she objected. "My stepfather was alone in the museum all day. No one came to see him. The servants will tell you that too. All the other doors to the museum were heavily bolted on the inside. If a substitution was made, what happened to the original figure?"

Bill frowned thoughtfully. Again the ghastly thought of something more than human came back to haunt him. Resolutely he shrugged it off. "Could a living man have been in the case all the time?"

"Standing there holding one position for seven days in an air-tight case? What sort of man would that be?"

Reeves, the butler, interrupted their conversation. He announced that Mr. Zeigler was wanted on the telephone.

It was Presslar. "Chief?" he called over the wire. "Listen. Just got a line on this Gorgondoff bird. I ran across a long-hair with a studio down in the art belt who used to know him by sight. He gave me his address. But I'm keeping an eye on Massalon. Shall I drop him and . . .?"

"No, no," Bill said. "Hang on to him. I'll see the other fellow."

"Crest Apartments, 2830 East Margrave, then."

Bill racked the phone and hurried back to Allene. "Lucky break," he announced. "Press got a line on this Gorgondoff. I'm going around to see him."

"You call me at once, won't you, Bill?"

He stood over her, looking down gravely into the lovely face so strained and anxious. "Of course," he promised. He held her hand a moment, repressed an impulse to duck down and kiss her, then hurried from the room.

BILL located the address, a drab flat in the shabbily pretentious studio quarter of the city. The manager, a squat, oily individual, admitted to having had a tenant by the name of Gorgondoff. But the man, he said, was no longer there. He had been gone for several days, though his rent did not expire for two weeks yet. He had left a note instructing the manager to leave his rooms locked until he returned.

In reply to Bill's questions, the manager described the sculptor as a big, dark, foreign looking person, of peculiar habits. He had lived there for a month and a half. He had made no friends, rarely spoke to anyone, and admitted no one to

his studio. The strangest thing about him was that he had brought no trunks with him, only a handbag and a huge wooden box. The manager apparently had puzzled about this. The box, he said, had been rudely shaped like a coffin, but larger, and so heavy that it had required several men to carry it in. The man had taken this box with him when he left. There had also been a Hindu with the man when he came, but he had not been seen since.

"Then he had no friends, no one I could ask about him?" Bill asked.

"Well," the manager said, "there was one fellow, a painter—he's got a room here. Once he went into Gorgondoff's studio without knocking. I heard Gorgondoff cursing him. He must have seen something the other didn't want him to see. But later I saw them together often."

"Where's the painter?" Bill inquired.

"That's funny," the other replied. "He's gone too. Left the same day without a word."

"I think," Bill said, "we'd better have a look inside that studio."

"Oh, no, no," the man protested, his hands fluttering. "I couldn't do that. He said for no one to go in!"

"Listen here," snapped Bill, poking a thick forefinger in the man's face, "do you want to have the police come in?"

"No, no. It would ruin business."

"Very well. I'm a private dick. And I'm going to have a look around that studio, or I'll guarantee you I'll have the police down here in ten minutes. And all your neighbors will know it!"

The manager capitulated, led him upstairs and through a long hall to a locked door. He fitted a key into the lock, and they pushed in. They passed through a dingy bedroom into a bare studio adjoining. Bill looked the place over carefully, but found no scrap of paper or clothing, or other forgotten belonging to testify as

to its occupant. Suddenly he stiffened, sniffed suspiciously.

Zeigler stepped to the door of the bathroom and swung it open. Instantly a stifling reek assailed his nostrils. He drew back, then stared at the bathtub, a nauseous horror sweeping over him.

"God!" he gasped. Holding his breath, he drew near. Half buried in a puddle of quicklime lay the grotesquely huddled body of a man. It was naked, and the knees and the awful hand thrust up above the surface were rotted as with leprosy. The face, like the face of Simms and Jager, had been horribly burned—and the quicklime had eaten it half away, baring the white, gleaming bones of the skull!

CHAPTER FOUR

"Yea, I have issued from the House of Terror."—The Book of the Dead.

STAGGERING back from the frightful stench, Bill bumped into the pudgy manager, saw that the oily face had suddenly gone bloodless, the eyes wide with terror.

Bill pounded downstairs to a telephone, called headquarters and got Olmsley on the wire. "Hello, Big-shot," he greeted. "This is Zeigler. Got a hot tip for you. I've just located the apartment of the man who brought the wax figure to Simms—2830 East Margrave."

"What of it?" Olmsley rasped.

"Nothing much," Bill said ironically. "Only there's a dead man in his bathroom in a tub of quicklime. You might trot out here and clean up the mess."

He slammed down the receiver on Olmsley's startled oath and hurried back upstairs. But a further examination of the rooms revealed nothing. Gorgondoff had been careful and cunning. Bill left before the police arrived.

He drove to a wax museum on Plummet Street and asked the proprietor where

the wax effigies were made. The man gave him addresses of several factories in distant cities. Bill immediately sent wires to each of these places asking if a man named Gorgondoff had ever been in their employ or had been a customer. He requested that they wire him collect.

As he hurried up to his office door a man across the hall called to him. "Your phone's been ringing to beat hell."

"Thanks," Bill said, thinking that Presslar had perhaps been trying to locate him. Well, whoever it was would call again. Bill dialed the Simms' number and got Allene on the wire.

"Found something," he announced. "Rather horrible, too. After what I've seen, I'm damned glad this fiend seems to be leaving you out of his program."

"But, Bill," she gasped, "that's what I've been trying to phone you about. I got a letter . . . Listen:

"I will have no meddling with my vengeance! Tonight I shall come back for you. Blood for blood!—The Man out of Hell."

Sweat broke out on Bill's forehead, and his brows knit darkly with anger and alarm. But his voice, when he spoke again, was full of a confidence he did not feel. "Don't worry, Allene," he growled. "I'll see that you're safe if it takes a standing army to guard you!"

AS darkness fell that night, a menacing quiet lay over the Simms' estate, a hush that was both sullen and ominous. Standing on the terrace of the great house, which was now ablaze with lights, Bill Zeigler stared out across the grounds. Moonlight lay white as hoar frost on the wide, tree-dotted lawn, in strange contrast to the tall, thick hedge that cast its own deep shadow along the borders of the estate. Here and there shadowy figures stirred; a shaft of moonlight gleamed on a gun barrel; muted voices whispered.

Bill told himself that every precaution had been taken, that neither he nor Allene had anything to fear. Yet somehow, this preternatural calm disturbed him. Carefully he checked over every detail of his hastily planned defense. Had he forgotten anything?

He had not relied alone upon police protection, which consisted of a half dozen or so detectives and harness bulls—for the fiend was doubtless prepared to meet a guard of that strength.

He had thrown a cordon of hired guards around the whole estate—fifty of them, picked huskies, well armed with pistols, rifles, and riot guns. Others patrolled the grounds inside. In addition to this front-line defense, there was a six-foot policeman at every entrance to the house and a couple of detectives inside.

An ugly sort of dread, persistent and inescapable, still lingered in Bill's mind.

The Thing was cunning, inhumanly shrewd. Simms had believed himself safe, locked in his museum, gun in hand. Yet all these guards could not have saved him. How would the monster strike this time?

Feet scraped on the flagged walk, as a dim figure approached. Presslar's lean, rugged face loomed out of the dark. "Well, Chief," he greeted, "the lay-out looks good. I almost got shot myself just seeing if I could slip past them."

"Good," Bill said. "But I'm still not completely satisfied. This fiend's more cunning than you realize. He can't get in, perhaps. But has it occurred to you he may already be inside? Suppose he hid himself last night, stayed here?"

"But we've searched the place," Presslar protested.

"I know. But I'm going to give it one more thorough going-over—every foot of the grounds, every square inch of the house. If we don't find him then, I'm ready to swear that the girl is safe!"

Presslar nodded, squinted off into the dark. "Late this afternoon Massalon had a caller—one Pete (Good-eye) Vignola."

"Ex-beer-baron, now likely in the kidnaping racket," Bill said. "Well, go on."

"They had a long pow-wow in Massalon's brokerage office, then went to Vignola's office up above his beer garden. A couple of Vignola's thugs conferred with them there. After that Massalon went to Enrico's Restaurant and I followed him in and took a table behind him. While he was eating, a Hindu, nicely dressed, came from somewhere behind me, passed behind Massalon's chair, and as smoothly as a sleight-of-hand artist, slipped a letter into his outside coat pocket."

"Damn!" Bill exclaimed. "Did you follow the Hindu?"

"Yeah, but lost him trying to trail his big car with a cab. When I came back to the restaurant, Massalon who had not noticed, or had pretended not to notice the Hindu's letter, was just putting it back into his pocket.

"I waited until he was through and followed him out. In the theatre crowd at the corner, I jostled him, and lifted a letter from his pocket . . .

"Great!" Bill applauded. "Up to your old tricks!"

"Wait," Presslar cautioned. "That's where I fumbled, Chief. I got the wrong letter. The other letter was in a white envelope; the one I got was in a gray one."

Presslar produced the letter, and Bill carried it to the light which shone from one of the front windows. Under the letter-head: "Dr. Wolff's Sanitorium, Verano by the Sea," was the following message:

Dear Sir:

Your inquiry about our patient, Carmichael, received, and I'm hurrying to answer as you asked. The young fellow's well

under control, you may be sure. If he wasn't batty when you sent him here, he's damned sure batty now. I keep him locked in a cell, and part of the time in a straight-jacket.

Faithfully yours,

G. Wolff.

Bill was frowning thoughtfully as he folded the letter and thrust it into his pocket. "Looks like some more of Mas-salon's dirty work," he told Presslar. This doctor probably took his degree in sub-machine-gunnery. But it doesn't seem to help us much in this case. Well, let's get the search started."

WITH two patrols of four men each they went over the house from cellar to roof. From the dimmest corner of the attic to the coal chute, they covered every foot of possible—and impossible—hiding space. They searched the garages, the gardener's dwelling and the servants' quarters, and the grounds.

Bill glanced uneasily at his wrist watch. It was ten thirty. "For the rest of the night," he said, "we'll take turns standing guard at Miss Anson's door."

Only just now, with the worst sort of menace hanging over both of them, was he beginning to realize just how much Allene Anson might some day mean to him. . . .

At midnight he left the house once more to prowling nervously about the grounds. Presslar, sleepy but competent, had just relieved him at Allene's door. Bill himself was beginning to feel the strain of the last twenty-four hours. He needed rest, but he could not sleep. He could not rid his mind of the feverish dread which had, in the last few hours, gripped him so hard. He could not shake off the fearful premonition of peril.

Fifteen minutes passed, and he was still restlessly pacing the lawn, when, like an answer to his fears, a cry, shrill and piercing, shattered the moonlit silence.

Bill spun about, feeling a chill sweep over him. Breathing hard, he whipped out his automatic and pounded across the lawn. The scream, which had broken off with horrible suggestive suddenness, seemed to have come from the garden behind the house.

He cleared a low hedge with a leap and stumbled among rose bushes, staring wildly about him. Then he saw one of the guards—a still and huddled figure upon the ground. Goose-flesh pimpled his body. The monster had struck again!

From all directions wavering shadows ran toward him. "Back to your posts!" he bellowed at the top of his lungs. "He's in the grounds; don't let him get out!"

He sprang across the hedge and ran toward the house. Vaulting over the balustrade, he dashed madly for the door and a new uproar within reached his ears.

A woman's voice—Allene's—rose in a harrowing scream of terror. Feet pounded on the stairs. Shouts and curses mingled in a confused discord. With his heart hammering violently, Bill plunged into the house.

He pushed past the running detectives on the stairs, saw two policemen battering at the door of Allene's room. A frightened voice droned monotonously in his ears. "I seen him . . . he dragged Presslar into the room . . . locked the door. . . . I seen him . . . I seen . . ."

Bill shoved the man aside and threw his own weight against the oaken barrier. His shoulder hit the door, with a force that numbed his whole upper body. But there was a splintering of wood, and the door gave.

He lurched into the room, regained his balance, stood frozen for a giddy instant at the sight that met his eyes. Through the smashed window beyond the bed a grisly shape was vanishing—a monstrous naked thing, indescribably hideous. And under one huge arm it bore the limply unconscious figure of Allene!

AS BILL sprang forward, the monster leaped, swung by one arm from the branch of a nearby tree—a horrid ape-like silhouette against the moon-bright sky—then dropped to the ground below.

Bill followed, vaulting the low window sill. He landed on the ground with a jar that sent the breath from his lungs. But no bones seemed broken—and he was only a few yards behind the fleeing apparition!

"The side gate!" he yelled. "Stop him!"

Men ran from the front of the house. The beam of a flashlight shot out, limning momentarily the ghastly shape of the naked giant. The limp form of Allene was slung over one massive shoulder.

Bill, diving madly ahead of the others, found himself outdistanced by the racing demon. "Fire at his legs!" he shouted.

Guns barked, spurts of flame lashed the darkness. Three guards stood shoulder to shoulder in the gateway, their guns belching fire and lead. The fiend plunged on into the rain of bullets. The guards closed in. Then, with a babel of agonized cries, they crumpled and fell before a spray of fire that burst, crackling, from the monster's hand like miniature lightning.

Bill, leading the chase, hurdled the inert bodies, dived into the street, emptying his automatic at the phantom's flying legs. Then suddenly, from behind, blazing headlights swept out, bathing the fleeing ogre in a flood of light. Swerving aside to avoid the wheels of the roaring car, Bill saw it sweep past and come to a halt with grinding brakes a dozen yards ahead of the running monster. The door swung open, and into this the fiend with his burden vanished.

Bill dived for the tire rack, grasped it and clung desperately, trying to lift himself up. The car jerked forward, and with a sudden swerve flung him rolling to the ground. He scrambled groggily to his

feet as the guards ran up firing at the vanishing tail light.

Bill stared dazedly at a police car that rushed past in pursuit, then turned miserably back to the house.

As yet he was scarcely able to realize that the dreadful thing had happened! It seemed an unbelievable nightmare which his mind could not accept. How had the *thing* entered the place? How was it possible for him to have pierced the guard cordon and reached Allene?

He saw lights flashing in the garden. A group of guards had gathered about the man whose agonized screaming had first given the alarm. They had thrown water on him and revived him. Now he stared about him, stammered dazedly. As Bill pushed through the crowd, the man pointed toward a soft spot of earth beneath a tree. Some one flashed the beam of a flashlight upon the place, and a policeman gasped. There was a sunken trough in the ground, where dirt and leaves had fallen into a shallow grave.

"You mean he came out of that?" a guard choked incredulously.

"Out of that!" the man on the ground mumbled fearfully. "The place was level and covered with dry leaves. . . . I was standing right here and I seen the dirt move. . . . Then a head came up . . . then the body. . . . I was too scared to move. . . . Then it grabbed me. . . ."

The men blinked, ashen faced, open mouthed. "My God!" a husky guard muttered. "I've had enough of this. I don't mess with things that come out of graves!"

Bill went into the house. In Allene's room a group of detectives stood silent around the bed—calloused men, struck dumb by the ghastly sight. Bill stared, then turned away, sickened by the horror his eyes encountered. It was Presslar, but what was left of his face was unrecognizable—a revolting mass of burned

flesh, from which bared cheek bones protruded. The neck was broken too, and the horrible head dangled from the edge of the bed like the bulb of a wilted onion.

CHAPTER FIVE

*"Thunder armed, quick to ire
He, in vengeance swift and dire!"*

—The Rigveda.

DAZEDLY Bill stumbled downstairs, trying to collect his scattered thoughts, trying to tell himself that this whole grim business was only a ghastly dream from which he would presently awaken to find Allene safe. He slumped down into a chair, sat there clenching and unclenching his fists. He leaned back, the soft cushions easing his tired body. He closed his smarting eyes, decided he would wait there for news from the police car which had followed the escaping demon.

But Bill had had no sleep for two days and almost two nights. He dozed.

He awoke with a start, jerked himself upright and stared bewilderedly about. Gray dawn was creeping in at the windows. He sprang to his feet, muttering imprecations under his breath. A bleary-eyed policeman in the doorway grinned.

"What's the latest?" Bill snapped anxiously. "Did they trail the car?"

The big policeman shrugged. "Tried to, but it got away from them. Didn't even get the license number. The plates had been taken off."

Bill found his hat and slammed out the door into the bitter dawn. He went to his apartment, bathed and shaved, then gulped a hasty breakfast and went to his office. But the thought of Presslar's fate made the place distasteful. And the thought of Allene, alive and in the hands of the beast man, sickened him. He tried to tell himself that, since the fiend had carried her away, she *was* still alive. But what unspeakable fatemight face her now?

He called the telegraph office and found replies to his telegrams awaiting him. But none of the factories had any record of Gorgondoff. That trail was cold then. He must look elsewhere, quickly!

Since Presslar's report of Massalon's conference with the gangster, Vignola, and the communication of the Hindu, Bill's suspicions of the unscrupulous broker had quickened. But how to strike at him? How unearth his connection with the affair?

He took out the letter which Presslar had lifted from the broker's pocket. Not much there. But if this were another one of Massalon's evil schemes, it might at least furnish him with some clue as to Allene's whereabouts.

HE DROVE to the little town of Verano, on the coast, twenty-five miles away. From there he climbed by a winding road into the hills and came eventually to a great stone house set among the cliffs above the sea. A high rock wall surrounded the place, and a heavy iron gate barred his way. The sign above the gate read:

Dr. Wolff's Sanatorium—Private.

Bill got out to open the gate, but found it locked. He went back to the car and honked his horn.

Presently a tall, heavy-set man with swarthy face and dark curly hair, emerged from the front door and came briskly down the walk. He was wearing a laboratory smock, and Bill was surprised to note that his manner suggested an educated man rather than a gangster.

"You're Dr. Wolff?" asked Bill.

"Yes."

Bill, prepared to be belligerent, was surprised by the man's courteous manner. "Caul Massalon," he said, "sent me out to see your patient, Carmichael, and make a report on him." He thrust forward the letter. "He told me to bring this along to identify myself."

The man read the letter, then looked up, peering at Zeigler hesitantly. "You're an alienist, perhaps?"

"No," Bill said, "just an employee of Massalon's."

"Ah, I see." The doctor pondered. "Well," he said at length, "it's a rather irregular procedure, but you may drive in."

Zeigler drove in, then followed the man up the gravelled walk to the front of the house. They entered a reception room, where the doctor asked Bill to wait.

Bill sat down, stared about him. The place was not unusual in any way. Was he on a cold trail again? No, everything pointed to Caul Massalon as the master mind behind the diabolical happenings of the last two days. He had already killed Jager and Simms. What other motive could explain their deaths? What except that Massalon had determined to close their mouths forever and bury the secret of his ten-year-old-crime? If Massalon had imprisoned here a man who was not really mad, the poor devil might well be able to furnish some incriminating evidence with which Massalon could be forced to a show-down.

Dr. Wolff's return interrupted his thoughts. "You may see him," the doctor said. "Follow me."

They went down a long corridor and stopped before a heavy door fastened with a huge bolt. Wolff opened the door and they stepped into a cell-like room. A high window was criss-crossed with iron bars, and the light was dim. But as Bill's eyes accustomed themselves to the gloom, he became aware of the still figure of a man seated in one corner of the room, his torso enclosed in a straight-jacket. The man was young—about his own age—and extremely tall and thin. The head was abnormally large and crowned with a thatch of dark, unruly hair, beneath which an enormous bulging forehead shonewhite as a roc's egg. The face, of a lean and

tragic cast, with features pale and delicate as wax, baffled Bill with its queer expression. He could not tell whether it was insanity or an abnormal intelligence that gleamed from the black eyes.

"How are you, Carmichael?" Bill asked to break the unpleasant silence.

The man's pale face clouded with a scowl; his black eyes flashed feverishly. "How am I?" he shrilled. "I am imprisoned!"

Stealing a glance at Wolff, Bill leaned forward eagerly. "Why are you imprisoned?" he asked. He expected Wolff to interrupt, but the doctor remained silent. Now he would learn something, if the man were really sane. "I've come to investigate your case," he added.

The man called Carmichael rose, writhing in the straight-jacket, straining his arms until the blood-vessels swelled in his temples. "They say I am mad!" he hissed, "But I am a genius! You hear? The greatest genius on earth!" He stepped forward snarling. Bill backed away, his hopes collapsing.

Then abruptly the man stopped, lifted his head with a maniacal cry, and fell backward upon his narrow bed, his body jerking, his lips flecked with foam.

"Can I do anything?" Bill asked.

Wolff turned. "Yes," he replied. "You see, you've brought on a fit. I'll have to ask you to hurry to the drugstore at Verano and have them send out a prescription at once." He snatched a pad and pen from his pocket and wrote a hurried scrawl. "You needn't wait for it," he added. "They'll send it out, and I'm sure you've seen enough for your report."

BILL hurried to his car, drove through the iron gates and sped along the winding road. He had wasted more time. The man was a hopeless lunatic now, regardless of what he had been when Massalon had confined him there. Nothing could be learned from him. Massalon was

a man who guarded his secrets well! Then abruptly a suspicion crept into Bill's mind. Suppose Massalon had missed the letter, anticipated an investigation, warned Wolff in advance? The man who had acted the lunatic might not be the prisoner, Carmichael, at all!

Bill slowed the car. He decided to drive back and surprise the wily doctor, pretending he had lost the prescription.

As the car nosed around a bend in the road Bill gave the steering wheel a savage wrench to swing it back around toward the sanatorium. Then suddenly he slammed on the brakes. A girl had stepped out from a parked car and was signalling him to stop.

"I'm stalled," she said with an apologetic smile. "Could you help me?"

Bill glanced at the car—an expensive looking cream-colored sedan. It had been drawn off toward a dense thicket on the far side of the road. It was empty.

"It started sputtering," the girl explained, "and I just had time to pull it off the road before it died."

Bill crawled from behind the wheel, stared about warily. There was no one else in sight. He moved toward the car, and the girl fell in step with him, dropped a little behind. Then abruptly Bill whirled, cursing himself for a fool as he felt the cold muzzle of a pistol jab his ribs.

A feminine voice, now hard as nails, snapped authoritatively, "Grab air!"

Bill glared at the small face from which the smile had faded. Small white teeth were gritted now behind the painted lips.

Slowly his hands rose, then swept out swiftly. His left hand, seizing her wrist, swung the gun up and aside with a quick twist that brought a cry of pain to her lips as the weapon dropped from distended fingers.

"Not so fast. . . ." The sentence broke off. Feet crunched behind him, and he pivoted to face two husky ruffians who

had sprung from behind the thicket.

Bill leaped aside as the first thug lunged for him, sent a sledge-like fist crashing into the snarling face. Checked momentarily, the man wavered, staggered back with a grunt of pain as Bill's left caught him in the pit of the stomach.

But the second ruffian was on him now, ducking to avoid a murderous right hook, grappling with beefy arms, while Bill pummeled his body with short, vicious jabs. He flung himself aside to avoid the returning charge of the first attacker, and snatched for his automatic.

But he was too late. Something unseen tripped him. He stumbled, grabbed the torso of his attacker and dragged the man down with him.

The two locked bodies rolled in the dirt, twisting, jabbing and straining. Bill was panting now, battling desperately. It was obvious that they intended to take him alive, and he recalled with a flash of vivid horror the significant words of the threat:

"Your fate shall be worse than Jager's."

Then through the sweat and dirt and blood that dimmed his eyes, Bill saw the second ruffian dart forward and bend above him as the girl thrust into his hand a folded rag reeking with the sickening stench of chloroform.

The damp rag with its stifling fumes slapped against his face. Coughing, choking and spitting, he reared and twisted. But thick fingers cupped over his face held the gagging rag in place, while the soporific fumes slowly dimmed his senses.

CHAPTER SIX

"If it is writ, he too shall go

Through blood, for blood spilt long ago."

—Chorus from *Agamemnon*.

BILL opened his eyes in darkness so thick that it seemed to have solidity and weight. He was weak, dizzy, so

nauseated by the chloroform that at first he was scarcely conscious of the dull ache of his bruised and battered body. Then he realized that his wrists were bound securely behind him, his feet were tied together, and he was lying upon a clammy concrete floor.

But he could see nothing, and the black, stifling darkness was full of unguessed and evil threat. Fear such as he had never before known surged up in him, fear not simply for himself, but what was more overwhelming, fear for Allene, now that he was powerless to save her. Through his mind flashed a series of frightful pictures—the fiend, the soulless ghoul, who burned living bodies with his ghostly fire, who defied man's most murderous weapons with impunity and bedded his hideous body in a grave—this demon, holding the helpless girl in his arms, fondling her!

Expert hands had tied him, and the ropes cutting into his raw wrists and ankles held fast.

Eventually, after what seemed an aeon of this agonizing suspense, he heard a door grate. There came the creak of rusted hinges, a low mutter of voices. Reflected light flickered on the walls of his prison and went out. Rolling his body over, he heard the door close.

Then a pencil of light shot out, played upon his face. He lay still, peering from beneath lowered lids at shadowy and indistinguishable figures beyond the light, feeling his taut nerves shudder.

The light went out, and the bodies moved nearer. Something touched his foot. He doubled his legs suddenly and shot them out like a projectile, felt them collide with a body which fell back with a grunt of pain.

Growls and curses ripped the darkness, and heavy hands fell on him from all sides, slamming him flat against the clammy floor. He writhed and struggled

savagely as his nostrils quivered again to the nauseous odor of chloroform.

Again the dank rag was pressed against his face and held there by rough hands while the stinging fumes burned into him. He struggled, holding his breath for as long as possible before breathing the stuff into his gasping lungs. Then suddenly he allowed his body to go limp. And a moment later the rag was lifted away.

"Didn't take so much that time," a harsh voice grated.

"He's weak now," another replied.

Half stupified, but clinging to his remaining consciousness, Bill lay submissive while they blindfolded him, lifted him from the floor and carried him out. He was thrown into a car, whirled swiftly through winding streets, and lifted out again.

A COOL wind dank with the smell of stagnant water blew over him. He felt himself being lowered into a boat. It rocked as his captors clambered in. Oars dipped water, and the craft moved ahead. In the rough handling his blindfold had slipped down a bit so that with one eye he was able to see the dark waterfront slipping past. The boat swung about, and a seaplane came into view.

Dark figures stood on the pier, a crisp authoritative voice spoke. "Search her thoroughly—there, in the shadows around the pontoons. We want no stowaways."

Feeling that a struggle would be useless and perhaps fatal, since he was not only bound but half stupified by the chloroform, Bill continued to pretend insensibility. He was lifted, lowered through the hatch into the cabin of the seaplane and flung down upon the duralumin floor.

The powerful motor roared and the seaplane spurted forward, lifted away from the water. Bill's body rolled slightly, and with each roll he rubbed his head against

the floor, gradually pushing the blindfold down from his eyes.

The bellow of the engine increased in intensity as the great craft mounted steadily. Then, above the deluge of sound, a shrill voice rang in his ear, "All right there! I've been watching you. Come out of it!"

Bill's shoulder was seized by a clawlike hand that jerked him over upon his back. With a start of alarm, rather than surprise, he stared up into the gaunt, crafty face of **Caul Massalon**.

"Ah!" Massalon grated, "the wise guy!" He pounced down like a vulture on his prey, knelt with his bony knees digging into Bill's body. One knotted fist clutched a thin bladed dagger. "So you lifted my letter!" he snorted. "But I outsmarted you!" He ducked his head so that his leering features pressed close above Bill's face. "And now," he hissed, "you're going to die!"

Sweat, the cold sweat of a man facing his last moment, broke out in glistening beads upon Bill's brow. A beam of light wavered on the murderous blade in the man's hand. "Where's the girl?" Bill spat.

"The girl?" Massalon asked.

"Certainly—Allene Anson. I knew you were at the bottom of this all along, you dirty rat! I should have come straight to you, pounded your damned face into a pulp, made you confess . . ."

"Confess? That murder ten years ago? But I didn't do it, my friend. You're misinformed."

"You lie!" Bill hurled at the face, now wreathed with a gloating grin. "But I don't give a damn about that—I'm talking about these other murders, and the kidnaping done by this monster of yours—this Man out of Hell!"

Massalon's eyebrows lifted. "Even when you face death, you'll have your joke, eh?"

"Why deny it," Bill asked, "if you're

going to kill me anyhow?"

"Why you fool!" Massalon roared. "Do you think I don't know you're hand in glove with him? Don't play innocent, for it won't save you!"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean this!" Massalon stormed. He snatched from his pocket a scrap of white paper, unfolded it and thrust it before Bill's startled eyes. Scrawled on it was a brief, grim message:

Your doom is sealed, Massalon. Before the clock strikes seven tonight, I shall come for you. Blood for blood!

—The Man out of Hell.

SPEECHLESS, Bill turned bewildered eyes to Massalon's gaunt face. The man, now in a fury, continued to rage. "I knew who it was all along—I knew who it had to be! But he tried too much. He tried to trap the fox, and the fox escaped him!"

He whipped a watch from his pocket, bared the dial to Bill's eyes. It read three minutes to seven. "You see that?" he laughed harshly. "Three minutes from now he was to come for my blood! We are now two thousand feet from the earth, where even men from hell cannot follow. I have not only escaped him, but I have his accomplice in my clutches!"

"Good God!" Bill stammered. "Are you mad?" He could not believe that the man was simply acting. "Who do you mean—whose accomplice?"

"Whose? Whose do you suppose? *Ott Zeigler's!*" He broke into a cackling laugh. "Is it possible you've been really taken in? Don't you know that he was the murderer—there in the jungle? Simms and I were there—why deny it? But it was his powerful hands that killed the man! And now he wants to kill us too, to hide his crime! He is the Man out of Hell!"

"But, I swear . . ." Bill choked out,

his mind floundering in confusion. "No, it can't be! You're lying . . ."

"Why, as you say, should I lie—since I'm going to kill you?"

That was logical. "But you can't believe," Bill stammered in dismay, "you can't believe I've helped with this hellish scheme?"

"And why not? You are his nephew. You are always near the crime, and you are never harmed!" The man's voice was cold now, like the steel of the weapon in his hand. His eyes narrowed wickedly. "You needn't trouble to lie now. It's too late!" He pushed the point of the dagger with a slow pressure against Bill's breast. "Your body will never be found," he finished hoarsely.

Breathless, feeling that slow, sharp pressure increase, Bill's mind swirled in a maelstrom, as he tensed his body for one last desperate effort. Then abruptly a wrenching crash sounded from the rear.

Massalon spun around and paused, frozen stiff in that absurd position while the dagger dropped from his distended fingers. Jerking upright, Bill stared, saucer-eyed, at the hatch through which a grotesque and terrifying figure was descending into the cabin.

HUGE, naked legs appeared, heavily muscled and with bulging veins that shone a ghastly blue against the reddish, parchment-like skin. Naked except for a loin cloth, the whole ghoulish body followed, descending slowly into view—the massive torso, the ape-like arms, the huge prehensile hands out-thrust. And then—a crowning horror—the head, crag-like and shaggy, with matted hair from which sea water dripped and glistened.

With goose-flesh prickling his body, Bill stared past the dumb and frozen figure of Massalon at the monster's slow approach. The flesh of the face, ochre-

colored and veined with red, shrunk close about the cheekbones, and the awful, avid mouth, was like something that had rotted in a grave. And out of this horrid mask stared glassy eyes that glittered with an inhuman luminosity.

Spraddle-legged, the demon inched his way toward the paralyzed Massalon, who fell back with a shriek, beating the air before him with his hands.

"In the name of Heaven . . ." he screamed.

"In the name of Hell!" echoed a voice, weird as a banshee's cry. A great arm reached out, prodigious fingers seized the cowering Massalon. They lifted his body, which wilted at their touch, and flung it across a seat.

And now the baleful eyes turned upon Bill Zeigler.

"You will continue to meddle," said the appalling voice, "and I will come for you in your good time. Massalon thought to escape me, and I waited under the water, clinging to a pontoon. He flew away, bearing his doom with him. I shall come back for you, and I shall take you to a hell you have not dreamed of!"

Twisting to one side, Bill flung his body away from the horrid legs as the fiend stepped past him and went forward.

"Where are we now?" Bill heard the inhuman voice demand.

"About ten miles from Verano," the quaking voice of the pilot answered.

"Sweep back!" the monster ordered. "Back over Verano at this same altitude!"

Back through the cabin came the grisly phantom, and Bill glimpsed a parachute now, strapped to the monstrous back. The demon lifted Massalon and, dragging his senseless body behind him, climbed up the steps through the hatch and vanished.

A sudden rush of air returned to Bill's lungs as he rolled his body over, maneuvered about so that his hands could seize

the dagger that Massalon had dropped. With it he managed to sever the ropes that held his wrists. Then he cut his feet free and sprang up. From the window he saw the lights of Verano glittering beneath him like a sea of stars. He hurried to the hatch, thrust his head out and stared about. The fiend, with his horrid burden, had vanished.

HOLDING the dagger before him, Bill moved toward the pilot's back. He thrust the point of the dagger beneath the man's shoulder.

"Head back to town," he grated.

Chalk-faced and speechless, the pilot obeyed.

The seaplane settled down upon the water and taxied to the pier. The pilot was no match for Bill, and the dagger glistened wickedly. He submitted while Bill herded him through the hatch. They crossed the padded back of the plane and scrambled to the pier.

"All right," Bill growled, seizing the other's arm, "the station house for you, and no tricks!"

The man took a step forward, whirled suddenly, and jerking loose from Bill's grip, plunged into the water. A shower of spray rose from the dark surface. Then the man's head and arms appeared, threshing the water with long strokes.

Poised to dive after him, Bill abruptly checked himself. Why waste time chasing the man now? Somewhere Allene was helpless in the fiend's power!

He turned toward town. Threading the dim waterfront district with swift strides, he pondered the new aspect which the case had taken on. It was a dreadful thought that his own uncle could be the perpetrator of this series of horrors; yet Massalon's words and his subsequent death at the fiend's hands had hammered this conviction into Bill's mind.

Now, by a simple process of elimina-

tion, Ott Zeigler stood disclosed as the fiend behind it all. Jager, Simms, Massalon—three links in the guilty chain—were dead. And the fourth link still lived with the horrid secret locked in his black heart. Cursing himself for having been duped by the man's cunning, Bill hailed a taxi and gave the address of Ott Zeigler's apartment . . .

"Now for the showdown!" he muttered between gritted teeth as he strode up the steps.

CHAPTER SEVEN

"Go thou, and fill another room in hell!"
—Richard II.

"BUT he'll be back, sir," Henson, the manservant, insisted, "in just a few moments. I'm certain of it. He just went for a little walk, even left the light burning in his study. . . . You might sit in there and wait, sir, if you'd like. . . ."

Bill eyed him, scowling. Henson's angular figure, with the perpetually drooping shoulders, shifted nervously; his long, putty-colored face wore a strained look.

"How long has he been gone?"

"Why, sir, since eight o'clock—about twenty minutes."

Bill strode into the study with Henson shuffling along behind.

"There are magazines there, sir," Henson ventured. "And . . . anything else you'd like, sir?"

"Yeah," Bill growled, "a shot of brandy."

"Yes, sir."

Henson returned with the tray. Bill poured a stiff drink, looked at him sharply. "You're sure he'll be back in a few minutes?"

"Quite sure, sir. . . . I'm familiar with his habits."

Obviously, something was weighing on Henson's mind, but as Bill knew, Henson would die rather than reveal his master's secrets. Bill dismissed him, finished the

liquor with a gulp and began pacing the study floor.

Was Henson lying? He couldn't be sure. The lighted room seemed to indicate that Ott Zeigler had not been gone long. Perhaps he was conferring with his henchmen, receiving their reports on the night's business. But it was the thought of the girl, the girl whose whereabouts his uncle was bound to know, that made Bill clench his fists and swear savagely.

He slumped back in the chair, drumming his fingers nervously on the arm. It was the inaction, the intolerable suspense of waiting that set his nerves quivering like plucked strings. But what else was there to do? He dared not leave the place for fear of missing Ott Zeigler when he came in.

He leaned back wearily, allowed his eyelids to droop, to close. A soft languor crept over him, a pleasant restfulness. He breathed deeply, rhythmically . . . slept.

Bill opened his eyes, shook his head groggily, feeling a slight dizziness. How long had he dozed—fifteen, twenty minutes? He stared at the clock, then sprang to his feet with a mutter of anger and alarm. Both hands of the clock pointed up—twelve o'clock!

"Henson!" he bellowed. "Henson!"

THROUGH an open door he saw a shadow move furtively in the next room. He sprang through the door, seized the quaking menial by the collar.

"I might have known!" he thundered into the sallow, frightened face. "That brandy had a phoney taste! Drugged me, eh?"

"No, sir . . ." Henson stammered, ". . . just a little sleeping potion, sir . . ."

"And why a sleeping potion?" Bill demanded.

"Well, sir," Henson blurted, cringing before the threatening glare, "he told me not to let you follow him . . . said not to tell you . . . to keep you here."

"And where is he now?"

"At his summer lodge on the lake, sir. You see, well, it seemed that there was some danger, and he did not wish you to be mixed up in it . . ."

He flung the servant aside.

Plunging out into the chill, dark street, Bill craned for a taxi, then swung briskly toward a glittering Rent Car sign. If he had only shaken the truth out of Henson sooner! Hours would have been saved. But now that he was on a hot trail again he wouldn't be shaken off until the business was finished! Lake Carlotta, where his uncle's summer lodge stood on an island, was only fifteen miles from town.

A newsboy with the midnight edition scuttled yelping around a corner. "Death-Ray Fiend Strikes Again!"

Bill whistled to him, thinking that the body of Massalon must have been found. He bought a paper and carried it into the dim glare of a street lamp. He started, leaned closer, dazed, incredulous, as he read:

DEATH-RAY DEMON BURNS FIFTH VICTIM

Ott A. Zeigler, 54, wealthy retired sportsman, was murdered tonight at his island retreat on Lake Carlotta, the victim, police said, of the 'Death-Ray Fiend' whose depredations have given the authorities one of the most baffling criminals of all time.

With his face and body horribly burned, Zeigler's murder was similar to that of C. P. Simms, a former business associate, and three others who have met death at the monster's hands: Galen Jager, unemployed sailor; K. K. Presslar, private detective; and Wade Burgess, artist.

Morton Hill and Rolph McLaren, guests of Zeigler's, witnessed the killing and described its horror. Suffering from shock, both Hill and McLaren were in Hillcrest Hospital.

Police had a message, supposedly left on Zeigler's body by the slayer, which read:

Neither the heights of the air, nor the depths of waters, nor the rocks of the hills, shall hide them in the day of my vengeance.

—The Man out of Hell.

Morton Hill, a lawyer, told authorities Zeigler's life had been threatened and the sportsman had retreated to the heavily guarded island as a precautionary measure. He said he and Zeigler and McLaren were sitting in front of the summer house when the murderer suddenly appeared. Hill said he and McLaren rose to protect Zeigler, but that crackling flames had issued from the monster's hands and that almost immediately he lost consciousness.

Frank Pettis, a guard, said he heard the screams of Zeigler and his companions and came around the house in time to see the fiend dragging away the heavy body of Zeigler. He emptied his gun, but the demon threw the body of Zeigler into a swimming pool and then jumped in after it.

With additional police reserves called, more than a hundred men surrounded the pool while it was drained. The body of Zeigler was found, but the slayer had disappeared into an 18-inch drain pipe. Hurrying to the other end of the drain where it emptied into the lake, officers with flashlights sighted the monster retreating into a bend of the huge pipe. Poison gas was pumped into the pipe for thirty minutes. At the end of that time, Detective Chris Line-man, protected by a gas mask, entered the pipe's mouth. Seeing that the fiend was apparently unharmed and approaching, he retreated. In another moment the naked demon had come out of the pipe, and spraying the stunning death rays, fought his way through a cordon of police and plunged into the lake.

The monster was not seen after vanishing in the lake. Tracks found later on the marshy shore, and two abandoned flat irons, indicated that the demon had walked across the floor of the lake. But this theory was discredited, since no human could have stayed under the water for that length of time.

Sergeant Olmsley, who also figured in the Simms murder case, said that no plausible explanation had been made of how the murderer gained access to the heavily guarded island. The only theory advanced was that he had walked across the bed of the lake and crawled through the drain pipe into the swimming pool.

A farmer on the Junction highway reported seeing a heavy, dark sedan, with the rear compartment curtained, speeding toward Verano at about ten o'clock. The

farmer's description of the car led police to believe it was the same as used in the Allene Anson kidnaping.

BILL did not wade through the mass of expert opinion and speculation which followed. His head was swimming feverishly. The bottom had dropped out of all his theories. Now he groped in the icy dark of doubt and confusion. The Man out of Hell! The dread words fell on his ears now with a more hideous sound than ever. Conjectures which assailed his very sanity forced themselves upon him. What was the *thing*? A corpse come back from the grave, revived by some ghastly and unspeakable rites? A zombie—a grisly, soulless ghoul, neither man nor beast nor devil? Impossible! His common sense told him that. Yet the *Thing* existed, had done what no human creature could do! And Allene was at this moment in its power!

Sick with horror and dismay, Bill leaned weakly against the lamp post and stared dejectedly through the thin haze of light with unseeing eyes. He racked his jaded brain for some faint glimmer of hope, some clue, however flimsy, that he could follow.

Then he stiffened, crumpling the paper in excited hands. He had suddenly remembered the words which the monster had thundered at the pilot of Massalon's plane: "*Sweep back over Verano!*" Verano! The sanatorium of Dr. Wolff! Had it been simply a coincidence that the monster had given that direction?

Bill did not wait to follow out the new line of reasoning. His brain was sick of futile groping. Anything to lead him out of this agony of inaction was welcome. It was a dark and obscure trail, but a glimmer of hope lighted it.

He hurried toward the "We Rent 'Em, You Drive 'Em" sign with brisk, determined strides.

CHAPTER EIGHT

*"But let him try me more, and by the Fates,
He'll soon be knocking at the gates of Hell!"*

—The Incantation of Theocritus.

ON THE road beyond Verano, at a point about a half mile from the Wolff Sanatorium, Bill swerved the car aside, shut off the lights and left it. From here he would go on afoot.

He hurried along the winding road, sniffing the chill air from the sea, sensing an electric tension in the shadowy night that keyed his nerves to fever pitch. A premonition of peril, stark and imminent, brooded over the night.

Presently the great stone house came into view. Behind its high rock walls it huddled, grim and sinister at the base of bare cliffs that towered darkly behind it. Two lighted windows shone out of the shadows like yellow eyes watching his approach. Bill went softly now, muffling his footsteps, peering cautiously about him. Involuntarily he shuddered at the memory of the monster's preternatural powers. Should he have come alone? Yes, for force had failed against this infernal monster. What was required was stealth and patience—and an infinite cunning.

Crouching behind one of the massive portals, Bill stared through the gate into the grounds. The moon, now riding high above the sea at his left, cast eerie shadows through the foliage of the tall trees. An aura of unutterable evil seemed to emanate from the place, a foul miasma of horror, breathing its dank breath against his face.

Cautiously he began to lift himself over the gate. He reached the top and dropped down silently into the shadows of the wall inside the grounds. There he lay still, listening, probing the shadows with his eyes before going on. Then, on hands and knees, he began a circuit of the grounds, keeping within the shadow of the wall.

At the back of the house a light burned beyond the iron bars of a basement window. Figures moved dimly in the light. Stealthily Bill crept across the yard, stole toward the window. He dropped flat upon his stomach and peered in. Then he was gasping for breath.

On a sort of a couch that was covered with a glass case like a jeweler's tray lay the naked body of a man. His hair was gray, his face a hideous mask of suffering. He was so thin that the ribs were outlined grotesquely beneath the wrinkled flesh. Bracelets and anklets of steel held him to the couch on which he lay.

Staring down at this wreck of human flesh with a look of cool detachment, stood the man called Wolff, while leaning over his shoulder, his scrawny neck outthrust, his cadaverous face grinning repulsively, was the Hindu in the black turban—the same skinny shadow that Bill had followed on the night that the dying Jager had called him from his office.

Bill tensed, straining his ears, as the doctor spoke, the words flowing unctuously over his heavy lips. "A poor specimen, Gandhara," he said. "But we shall try it, anyhow."

The Hindu nodded, stepped toward an iron tank in a corner of the room. From the tank a snake-like tube of rubber ran into the prison of glass, and as the lean hands of the Asiatic pressed a lever, a cloud of greenish fog flowed into the case where the victim lay.

THE eyes of the tortured wretch bulged outward. He writhed and gasped in agony. The swart doctor bent close, watching his prisoner's reaction with pitiless eyes. "Good," he said presently, "that will do."

The Hindu lifted the lever, picked up an electric fan from the floor and snapped on the current. Then, as Wolff lifted the case, the air current from the fan swept

the greenish cloud toward the window and straight into Bill Zeigler's face.

As the detective fell back with stinging nostrils and burning eyes and throat, a more intense horror burned in his mind, for he had caught one vivid glimpse of the naked body from which the green fog was lifting. It had been covered with ghastly blotches like patches of rotting flesh!

Burying his face in his hands, Bill fought back the impulse to cough as he rolled over, his body jerking spasmodically. Struggling with pain and suffocation he heard the voice of Wolff drift through the window. "It is of little value, Gandhara. He's too weak."

"The girl, perhaps, Sahib?"

Bill straightened with a rush of blood mounting to his head.

"Yes," came the voice, "she is young, healthy. But she has wonderful blood—priceless for our purpose—we must save her for that."

Bill frowned. What "purpose" did the doctor have in his twisted mind? The detective's tortured brain conceived unspeakable horrors. He heard the voice of Wolff resume:

"When *he* has fetched us young Zeigler, Gandhara, we shall have an excellent specimen—the very type! Well, now for the other business!"

The light in the room went out.

Bill sprang to his feet, flattened himself against the house. His temples were throbbing, and cold sweat dripped from his brow. The monster was here, no doubt of that now. And Allene—Allene was here too! But even now they were preparing . . .

He staggered up, scuttled soft-footed around the house. A light burned in a high window which he judged must open upon the cell of the madman, Carmichael. Then, as he stared, a light flashed in a similar window to the left of it.

The dark branches of an elm tree brushed this window. Quickly Bill swung up into the tree, crawled cat-like along a limb toward the light, stared inside.

He caught his breath. Allene stood near one wall of the cell-like room, her loose gold hair glinting in the dim light, one white hand clutching a torn, sheer negligee about the half-hidden contours of her slim moulded body. With her other hand she was moving aside a picture that hung on the wall. And now a crudely cut hole on the wall appeared, and framed in it the strange pale face of Carmichael.

"Where are they?" the girl whispered anxiously. "I heard them moving. . ."

Carmichael smiled wearily. "We must wait," he said, "until things are quiet. The key fits; I've tried it! Your door is barred on the outside. When I'm sure where they are, we'll make a break."

"But can't we now?" she pleaded.

"We must wait," he insisted, his dark eyes flashing. And his face vanished as the picture moved back into place.

BILL backed along the limb, slid to the ground. Here he crouched, examining his automatic. Then, with a finger taut on the trigger, he scuttled toward the front of the house. Again he crouched still, listening. Allene's cell was on the ground floor. Except for the lights above and the lights below the other parts of the house were dark.

He tiptoed softly up the steps and tried the front door. The knob responded. It was unlocked. He opened it, gave it a little shove and stepped to one side. Nothing happened. He peered around the sill of the door. The reception room and the hall beyond were shrouded in darkness.

He crossed the reception room, paused at the entrance to the dark hall. He turned to look over his shoulder. The hair on his scalp bristled. The figure of the skinny

Hindu sprang toward him, a leaping black silhouette against the moonlight.

Bill's trigger finger jerked, a spurt of flame lashed the dark. A bony arm like an iron rod struck his wrist, knocked the pistol from his hand. He lashed out with murderous fists slamming savagely to the Hindu's lank body that writhed and twisted under the crushing punishment, but clung with an amazing strength. Snake-like arms encircled Bill's body, and straining to free himself, he rolled with his assailant to the floor. Vise-like jaws clamped on his shoulder, teeth sank into the flesh as they threshed and twisted. Then with a sudden jerk Bill tore himself loose, slammed his knotted fists into the snarling face.

The body beneath him went limp. He straightened, then stiffened as a hand, cold and hard as iron, grasped his neck, jerked him from the floor and flung him spinning across the room.

He staggered groggily to his feet, felt his blood curdle in his veins at sight of the ghastly shape towering in the moonlight from the open door. It was the monster himself—the Man out of Hell!

Throwing all his strength into one desperate lunge, he hurled his body toward the door. The hideous shape moved, the horrid eyes blazed and something struck Bill which sent his brain spinning in his skull like a top. Yawning gulfs of darkness swallowed his fading senses as he crumpled to the floor.

Consciousness returned in gradually encroaching waves. There was a persistent clammy odor, like the smell of a vault; a dim low room swam confusedly before his half opened eyes. He opened them. He seemed to be lying, naked to the waist, on a sort of operating table, his wrists and ankles manacled. Test tubes and bottles and retorts, and other curious equipment glistened on a long laboratory table. In the center of a concrete wall a dark

vault like a huge oven loomed, its iron door swinging open. Bill listened. Hearing no sound in the room, he turned his head the other way. The opposite wall was a honey-comb of smaller vaults just wide enough to accommodate the coffin-like box which each contained. The room was like a ghastly burial vault!

JERKING his head up, Bill stared at the heavy door, then at the sound of footsteps outside, he lowered it quickly, resumed his attitude of unconsciousness. Peering from beneath lowered lids he saw the cadaverous Hindu, his oily face swollen and pocked with plasters, precede the swarthy doctor into the room. Between them they bore a stretcher on which lay a sheet-covered figure with a face so utterly pale, so horribly death-like with its gaping jaw and wax-like flesh that at first Bill did not recognize it as the face of Caul Massalon.

Then with a shudder of horror he saw the stretcher come to rest upon the floor, while the two fiends lowered from a vault one of the coffin-like boxes. Into this they lifted the frightful body and dropped the lid.

"His blood," said the man called Wolff, "was bad, Gandhara—practically worthless. What we need is more youth, more fresh blood!"

Listening in awed terror to these ominous words, a passage from the Odyssey drifted weirdly through Bill's swirling thoughts, a passage which described how the pallid inhabitants of hell clutched ravenously at Odysseus, crying for fresh blood to fill their ghastly bodies. Had the blood been drained from Caul Massalon's body for such a purpose?

"Ah," said the Asiatic with an evil leer, "but we have young Zeigler now, Sahib!"

"Yes," the infamous doctor agreed. "After my examination I am convinced that he is a perfect specimen. And now—"

They moved toward the opposite wall of the room and Bill could hear the sound of the iron vault door being swung wide. Its horrible significance dawned upon him.

Wolff approached, stared a moment at Bill's motionless body and pronounced, "Still unconscious," then added with a cynical laugh, "The heat will no doubt revive him." He began to roll the table on which Bill lay toward the far wall.

Bill's brain raced madly. He would not submit to the unmentionable tortures they were preparing. He would die fighting. But he must think of Allene too, choose the moment in which there would be some chance of escape, some chance to save her!

He kept his eyes closed, controlling his nerves with a grim, desperate effort. His hands and arms were released. They were lifting him now. He lay limp, relaxed, determined to choose the moment when they were thrusting him into the oven to throw himself violently upon them.

Then abruptly, with a shock of panic and dismay, he felt himself lowered, dropped. His body touched cold metal, his eyes flew open, saw a steel lid drop with a clang above him!

Half swooning in a sweat of terror, Bill moved his body in its metal coffin, saw that the horrid thing was of thin steel, perforated with small holes. Through one of these holes he stared out into the room. Wolff and the Hindu were moving toward the door. "And now," said the doctor pleasantly, "we'll fire the furnace."

They went out and the door was closed.

Shaken with unfathomable horror, Bill lay in a frozen trance and stared at the steel lid of the coffin. If it was locked, he was doomed—doomed beyond any hope of escape! Now the words of the monster flowed back into his mind. "I will take you to a hell you have not dreamed of!"

CHAPTER NINE

*"Have mercy on me!" cried I out aloud,
'Spirit or living man, what'er thou be!'"*

—*The Inferno.*

FOR a moment which was like an age of anguish and terror, Bill lay there, his trembling hands lifted to push against the lid, but paralyzed, dreading the answer to the terrible question. Then, gritting his teeth, he forced his hands up, pushed. Half stunned with relief, he felt it yield. They had not locked it!

He pushed it open, clambered out, dashed to the door. Then he learned why his captors had been so careless. For the door was of steel, barred on the outside. The weight of his shoulder did not even shake it. Glancing wildly about for some weapon with which to attack it, his eye fell upon the coffin which contained the bloodless corpse of Caul Massalon.

Urged on by a desperate hope, Bill ran to the coffin, threw back the lid, and mastering his revulsion, lifted out the ghastly cadaver. He hurried with it to the steel case from which he had escaped, lowered it in, slammed the lid and fastened it with a latch.

Striding back across the room, he paused to let his eye run over a case of chemicals on the laboratory table. A thin tube of clear liquid attracted his glance and he frowned, staring at the label— H_2SO_4 . He flogged his memory, visions of his college chemistry class whirling through his mind. Then he had it! A distillate of green vitriol—sulphuric acid! He snatched the tube and hurried to the wooden coffin from which he had removed Massalon's body. He clambered in and lowered the lid.

He had not been a moment too soon. Raising the lid a fraction of an inch, he peered out, saw Wolff, followed by the Hindu, enter the room, rubbing his hands,

They proceeded to the oven and Wolff thrust in a tentative hand. "Good," he pronounced. "In with him now, before it's too hot!"

Straining, they lifted the steel case, shoved it into the oven, slammed the iron door and fastened it. The Wolff adjusted the dial on the outside. "I've set it to gradually increase the heat for a two hour period," he said, as he turned. "We'll see something interesting then."

Shivering at the thought of the frightful torture he had so narrowly escaped, Bill lay tense and breathless, and saw with infinite relief that the two fiends were leaving the room.

As soon as they were out, he sprang from his hiding place, ran to the door and tried it again. But as before, it was barred. He turned back, determined to find some way to open it, when the sound of the bar on the outside being moved quietly sent him scampering back to cover.

He had just lowered the lid of his gruesome hideout and adjusted his eye to the crack, when the door swung open and Allene, followed by Carmichael, stepped into the room. She stared about her, wide-eyed with fright, then turned to the man who was closing the door. "Why have we come here?" she asked in a terrified whisper. "Can we escape from here?"

Carmichael turned, straightened to his full height, stared at her with a curious look which seemed suddenly to disconcert her. For she stepped back, self consciously gathering about her the gossamer froth of silk that covered her slender body, and gazed with sudden alarm at the strange face to which Bill's eyes were also oddly attracted. The great dome-like forehead gleamed in the faint light and Bill suddenly sensed the presence of power there, as if the currents from a tremendous intellect were pulsing from the enigmatic eyes.

Then Carmichael spoke. "This farce can go on no longer," he said. "Sooner or later you would learn all."

"What do you mean?" she stammered, suddenly aghast. "You will not help me?"

"I mean," he said solemnly, "that I am in love with you—that I cannot allow you to go away except with me."

"My God!" she gasped. "Then you are with them—the monster—Wolff?"

"Wolff," he said, "is a dying wreck—a human guinea pig in these experimental chambers."

"But I thought this was his place. . . ."

"It was his place!"

"Then who is the master now—this monster?"

For a moment a dark cloud passed across the transparent whiteness of Carmichael's features. His tall frame came erect, a gleam of diabolical pride flashed in his dark eyes. "*I am the master!*" he said.

BILL gasped, clutching the phial of deadly acid, ready to leap to her rescue, but restraining himself until the imperative moment.

"You?" It burst from Allene, an incredulous sob.

He drew nearer, stood over her. "Yes," he repeated. "I am the master."

With terror and revulsion struggling in her face, the girl suddenly flung herself away from him, backed to the wall.

"Stop!" came the startled command from Carmichael's lips. He grasped her shoulder, pulled her away from the wall. "You will destroy us all!" His thin hand was shaking now as he pointed to a black metal box like a meter that was attached to the wall behind her.

"But why . . . ?"

"It's the timing apparatus," he said, "and the firing switch for a charge of dynamite that would blow this place to atoms. If I should set the hands on that

dial for a certain hour, and then press the button below it. . . .”

“Let me press it!” She sprang toward him. He pushed her back, stood between her and the deadly switchbox.

Slowly, Bill began to raise the lid of the coffin. The man’s face was turned away from him. Now was his moment. Then he checked himself.

“No,” Carmichael said to the girl. “You shall not be harmed.”

Quickly Bill drew back. Any move now would jeopardize her chance of escape. If she could only reach safety, he would stay and take his chances. He listened in suspense for the next words.

“Then let me go,” she pleaded.

“With me!” Carmichael said. “You will go away with me?”

“Never!” she cried. “You beast, you monster!”

“Wait!” he told her, in a voice curiously softened. “Before you condemn me, listen! I was born all intellect and no emotion. I was what is called an ‘infant prodigy.’ I knew calculus in my cradle. I had only two things in my life—science, and my father.

“He was an electrical engineer. Ten years ago, in the Gran Chaco, your stepfather and three other men murdered him treacherously. They stole the treasure he had discovered and enriched themselves. A Hindu servant who was devoted to my father came to the university where I was studying and told me the story.

“I was almost deranged with grief and rage. Caul Massalon, who had kept an eye on me, suspected my knowledge of the crime. I was tricked, brought to this prison with an ex-gangster for a jailer.

“For months I was on the verge of madness; then I grew calm, deadly calm, throwing the whole power of my mind into a dream of vengeance.”

“But the monster,” she interrupted,

“this horrible thing that you told me was a demon—a work of magic?”

“He is a work of magic,” Carmichael replied, a strange light shining in his pallid face. “Every age has its own magic—ours is the magic of electricity!”

“Electricity!” she echoed dazedly.

“Yes. Shall I tell you of the years I spent planning my robot part by part, here in my prison cell? Six years I worked, and I made him perfect—a terrible and wonderful creature!

“At the university they said that I would be another Steinmetz, but I have surpassed him! When the plans were complete, I sent them by the Hindu to Gorgondoff, a brilliant Russian I knew at the university. Gorgondoff made *him* in two years. Then we took possession of this place easily. Gorgondoff impersonated Wolff, forcing the latter to continue to write his reports to Caul Massalon.”

“Oh, it’s horrible,” Allene cried. “Horrible!”

“Perhaps.” He smiled. “But what a work of genius my monster is. A marvel, the dream of great minds through all the ages! Flesh-like rubber (Gorgondoff’s invention) covers his duralumin body, and a steel mesh imbedded in it makes him invulnerable to man’s weapons. Inside, a multiplicity of radio receiving circuits of different wave lengths, operating mechanical systems, controls his movements. The energy for operating him is transmitted from the electrical laboratory in the upper story of this house.

“With the television scanning and transmission system in his head, and a miniature broadcast receiver, he has senses of super-human sharpness. Through him the operator can see and hear and speak. Transmitted radio power gives him the strength of a gorilla! And from his fingers can be released an electric current

that will stun or kill, as you wish. He is a monster, yes, but a monster like the gods of fable—like Thor with his terrible hammer!"

Listening awed and dumbfounded, Bill felt the man's compelling power. The intensity of his speech, the gesture of Satanic pride, were at once repulsive and fascinating.

"And why are you telling me all this?" Allene cried.

"Because," he said, "I want you like I have never wanted anything! You shall go away with me!"

"And this hideous monster?"

"No," he said, "I am no longer interested in my Man out of Hell. My vengeance is accomplished. I am through. I shall give him to Gorgondoff, as I promised, in return for his help."

CARMICHAEL smiled. "Many things that you would call horrible, I'm afraid. Gorgondoff is a Nihilist. With 'The Man out of Hell' and others like him, he will wreak on the world such a program of destruction that the dead will turn over in their graves! Think of the possibility of such a brood of demons! In these experimental chambers, Gorgondoff is perfecting the most deadly poisons and gasses, testing each carefully on living subjects—poisons and gasses which produce dozens of unspeakable forms of death. He is breeding the most formidable disease germs of every known species, and many unheard of. His monsters will release on the world the plagues of the middle ages—The Black Death, the Cholera, and others as terrible. I have been only playing with this thing that I have made. Gorgondoff will make him the scourge of the earth!"

As Carmichael talked, Bill Zeigler felt stealing over him a numbing horror such

as no corpse arisen from the grave could have inspired. Ghosts and demons and ghouls were the terror of primitive minds—childish fancies compared with this soulless Thing of iron with lightnings and plagues at his fingertips—an advancement in horror that made the others seem trivial and unsubstantial. He swore that if Allene could only contrive to escape, he would stay and press the dynamite switch, if it cost him his life!

"How can you permit such abominable things?" the girl sobbed.

Carmichael shrugged. "I take no pleasure in cruelty," he said, "but to me, humans are no more than flies. Many more of them will pass through Gorgondoff's laboratories—human guniea pigs, like the ones he has now."

"You mean—here?" she cried. "Now?"

"Certainly."

She flung herself upon him like a fury, beating at him with her fists, sobbing with rage and terror.

"This will not help," he said. "But I might grant them a merciful death."

"What is your price?" she challenged.

"You!" he said.

She stared at him, appalled. "Then I will kill myself rather than submit to you!" she answered.

Carmichael gloated hungrily on her beauty—the magnificent hair, falling in golden ripples about the face, the graceful contours of the tense young body half revealed under the shimmering silk.

"I must have you!" he muttered, his black eyes gleaming feverishly. Then he dropped his head, muttered, as if to himself, "And I am still master here!" He raised his eyes again to her face. "And if I promise . . . ?"

The sentence was cut short. The door behind them had opened. They whirled, and Bill, staring past them, saw in the

embrasure of the door the ghastly figure of the monster—the Man out of Hell.

"Who is the master?" asked the voice of Gorgondoff through the robot's horrid mouth. "You *were* the master. But you have betrayed me. *I am the master now!*"

CHAPTER TEN

"Listen, wayfarer, to the words of my death!"
—Inscription at the City of Brass.

AT THE monster's words, Bill saw Carmichael straighten, his body tense, his face livid. "Get out of here!" he stormed.

A laugh, deep, guttural, ominous, replied. "Your monster, it seems does not know his master's words," the voice from the robot taunted. "Gorgondoff is master now. And Carmichael and the woman who inspired his treachery shall be two more guniea pigs in his laboratory. You fool, did you think you could double-cross me?"

"You defy me then?" Carmichael asked hoarsely. He looked at the girl who stood back to the wall, paralyzed with terror, staring at the frightful automaton. Then he whipped a revolver from his pocket and emptied it at the monster's eyes.

The robot ducked his shaggy head and lunged forward. At the same instant, Carmichael doubled his body into a ball and flung himself like a projectile at the monster's legs. It was his only chance—to trip the thing and avoid the terrible hands.

As Carmichael's body struck the iron legs, the thing swayed, reached down, then toppled and fell. Simultaneously, Bill sprang from his hiding place, darted past the sprawled bodies.

"Bill! Oh, Bill!" the girl cried, running toward him.

He grasped her arm, pushed her quickly from the room, and followed. Looking back from the doorway, Bill saw Car-

michael scrambling to his feet just as the robot's arm reached out and seized his leg, dragged him back.

Bill jammed the door shut and shot the heavy bolt across it. The girl was sobbing now, her body trembling as she huddled against him, muttering incoherent words.

Bill stared down the dim tunnel-like hall that ran across the basement to a flight of steps visible at the far end. "Let's go," he whispered hoarsely. "We're not out yet!"

With one arm about her shivering figure, he hurried toward the steps, gripping the phial of deadly acid in his hand.

At the top of the steps they emerged in the long, dark hall, paused there listening. Then abruptly, a horrid crash in the basement below, electrified them to action. Dragging the girl along with him, Bill plunged toward the front of the house.

A lean figure, seen dimly against the glass of the front door, moved toward them as they approached. "Stop!" growled the voice of the Hindu.

Shoving the girl behind him, Bill flicked out the stopper of the phial with his thumb, and as the gun in the Hindu's hand spat its lethal flame, he ducked quickly to one side, and flung the deadly acid into the Asiatic's face. With a howl of pain, the Hindu fell back, flailing the dark with his arms as the vitriol burned into his flesh.

Bill flung him aside. They sprang out the door, leaped down the steps and dashed across the grounds to the gate.

It was locked. Glancing back, Bill saw the robot's fiery eyes blaze in the doorway of the house and move toward them.

Lifting Allene to the top of the gate, Bill flung himself over and caught her as she dropped into his arms. "My God!" he exclaimed. "You've got no shoes!" The satin slippers had fallen from her feet.

"It doesn't matter."

"But it does!" Still holding her panting body in his arms, he began to run down the road. Pausing to look back, he saw that the monster had vanished. Hopefully, he slackened his pace. "We'll make it to the car," he gasped, "then—"

THE words were scarcely out of his mouth when a column of light slashed out from the darkness behind them and threw their distorted shadows on the road ahead. Whirling, Bill saw the great gates open, and an instant later, a big car with blazing headlights leaped through, the noise of its engine rising to a roar.

On their right, the hills rose sharply to the towering black cliffs above. Still bearing the girl in his arms, Bill plunged up through the boulders and thorny brush. Painfully he climbed, grasping the brush with his free hand to keep from slipping.

"Let me down, Bill," the girl pleaded. "I can climb. . . ."

He shook his head and struggled on. Stopping for breath, he saw the big car come to a halt below them, while a huge and grisly figure leaped out and began to scale the steep hillside with the agility of a mad gorilla.

Bill scrambled on with the energy of desperation. Reaching a more gentle slope, he began to run toward the shadowy cliffs ahead. He reached a place where scrub cedar dotted the hillside, and ducking in and out, was able for a brief time to elude the frightful pursuer. And then he ran square up against a cliff wall. Sheer and steep, it blocked their way. He struck off to the left, following its base, and presently, with a gasp of relief, sighted a dark gap in the cliffside that indicated the mouth of a cave.

Bill dived into the cave. He rested Allene on her feet, and leaned panting with exhaustion against the cave wall. "I

wish I'd had time to set that dynamite switch!" he choked out.

"I pressed the button," Allene said.

"You did?"

"Yes—when the monster came in. But I didn't have time to set the dial. I didn't even have time to see when it was set for!"

"Damn!" Bill swore. "Then we can't tell—but there's a chance, if we can just hold out long enough."

"Perhaps," she whispered, "we'd better get farther in. "There's sand and dirt here, and I can walk. You're exhausted!"

Groping along the walls, and feeling carefully before them with their feet, they proceeded into the black depths of the cave. Then suddenly, light showed ahead of them. "An opening!" he exclaimed. They hurried toward it.

The cave narrowed at the opening, and they emerged upon a high ledge that overlooked the sea. The moon, hanging low over the water, paved a path of gold across the leaden expanse of the waves. They sagged weakly against the cliff, breathing heavily.

"A godsend—this cave!" Bill panted.

He began to explore the ledge. At one end it broke off sharply, a sheer drop of two hundred feet or so. He walked to the other end, climbed up for twenty or thirty feet among loose rock and giant boulders and was halted abruptly, unable to go farther. A queer, cold feeling of alarm took possession of him. He returned to Allene's side. "I might as well tell you," he said, "there's no way off this ledge except through the cave."

"Maybe he won't find us, Bill?"

"But if he does."

"If he does," she answered quietly, looking up at him, "I guess it's the end."

He put an arm about her, drew her body close, and for a wordless moment kissed the pale face that was turned up to his. Then he released her, stepped to

the cave's mouth, peered in. He drew back with a shudder, hurried to her side.

"He's coming!" she cried.

Bill nodded. He lifted her in his arms and climbed as high as he could among the boulders above the ledge. Then, with their backs to the sheer wall of stone that blocked their escape, they stood and waited, staring down over the cliff's edge. Below them, lashed by foaming breakers, the jagged points of submerged reefs thrust up above the water like enormous black teeth.

"Darling," he said softly, "you stand here near the edge. I'll do what I can to fight him back. If I fail. . . ."

She nodded, gazing down at the churning water which sent up a ghostly music.

FROM the cave's mouth they could hear the steady crunching of the monster's heavy tread. Again Bill held the girl close, felt her warm lips return his kiss, then drew away. He looked about for a weapon. He picked up two heavy, jagged rocks, and holding these ready, waited.

Then abruptly the horrible eyes were visible, the massive body emerged from the cave's mouth. It stopped, turning its baleful orbs full upon them.

Leaping forward, Bill hurled a rock at the horrid head. It ducked. A second missile followed, struck the robot's body and rebounded. The monster stood still. "Resistance will do no good," said the voice of Gorgondoff. "Carmichael is dead and cannot save you. If you surrender, you shall live for many months perhaps—in my laboratory. If you resist, your deaths will be hellish! Will you give up?"

"Take me," Bill offered. "Let her escape, and I promise to come with you."

A hollow, fiendish laugh replied. The monster moved toward them, began slowly and relentlessly climbing the boulder

strewn incline. Seizing rocks blindly, Bill hurled them with all his strength at the approaching horror. But the Thing came on, bowing its neck against the hail of stones. And inch by inch, Bill backed away, panting, gasping, feeling the stinging sweat from his brow dim his eyes as he continued the desperate retreat, hurling the stones which could slow the monster's progress but could not check him.

Now he felt the body of Allene behind him and knew that he had reached the last ditch. He could retreat no farther. Whirling about he saw that the girl had moved to the cliff's edge, stood there poised for the leap. "It's all over," Bill gasped.

He stumbled back, fell against a huge boulder that rested at the edge of the steep path. Had it shuddered slightly when his body struck it? Could it be dislodged? He reached out swiftly, grasped Allene, drew her back. "Here!" he cried, "Push! Throw all your strength against it."

He jammed his shoulder savagely against the huge rock, saw that it was balanced there on an insecure base. It was a last desperate hope, and they threw every ounce of strength into the effort, felt the boulder totter slightly, then rock back. . . .

The monster was upon them now. A yard beyond the stone against which they were straining, he paused, stretched out his great arms toward them. A shower of jagged flames leaped into the air with a hissing crackle, threw lurid light upon their strained and horror-stricken faces, swept nearer, singeing their hair, scorching their flesh. . . .

THEY gathered the last ounce of their failing strength, released it in a final shove. The great boulder tottered back, then forward. It hung for a terrible instant, poised there. They hurled their

bodies against it. There was a crunching groan as it finally toppled from its base. . . They fell back against the cliff, blind with terror and exhaustion.

Down went the groaning boulder, shaking loose surrounding rocks which joined the crushing avalanche. Then through the cloud of dust they saw the grotesque shape of the horrid automaton. Thrown back over the cliff's edge, it whirled seaward amidst a deluge of rocks, the terrible flames still spewing from its fingers.

Bill staggered to his feet, saw that Allene had fainted. Still dizzy with exhaustion, he lifted her in his arms and stumbled down to the ledge. Then he plunged into the cave and began to thread the dark tunnel. He must escape from this trap before Gorgondoff himself should have time to come out to avenge his monster.

But nearing the opening he stopped suddenly, almost dropped the girl to the ground, as the sound of a terrific explosion boomed thunderously. A red glare now lighted the tunnel's entrance.

Allene, revived by the shock, lifted her

head. "What is it?" she cried. Then joyously, "The explosion! That den of horrors is destroyed!" She threw her arms around Bill's neck in a delirium of relief, struggled to the ground, and grasped his hand as they ran out together.

The great house was a blazing inferno.

They stood and gazed at the now crumbling pile about which the flames leaped hungrily. It was as if Hell itself had reached up to reclaim its own. Then Bill turned to the girl. She looked up into his face, and for the first time in many hours, both smiled.

"Before I carry you another yard," Bill said, "there's something I want to ask you." He grinned. "It's a little abrupt, perhaps, and under the circumstances . . . I wonder if I should wait until tomorrow."

"Are you asking my advice?" she inquired. "If you are, I think procrastination is a deplorable habit." She thrust her face up to his, lips parted invitingly. He drew her close, and the rest of the conversation was indistinct.

THE END

NEXT MONTH—

The Tongueless Horror

Mystery-Terror Novelette

By WYATT BLASSINGAME

The April Issue . . . Out March 10th!



Blood in Primrose Lane

By Grendon Alzee

At first they said that the blood in Primrose Lane was the ravening work of some mad beast of prey—and Patrolman Earl Johnson believed them. Later, when he'd looked into death's eyes and heard the Dutchman laugh, he knew better. . . . But he told no one.

AS PATROLMAN Earl Johnson turned into Railroad street he shrugged himself more snugly into his waterproof. Between the looming railroad embankment on one side and the blank faces of the warehouses on the

other nothing stirred, but from behind there came the long drawn melancholy wail of a locomotive whistle. The rumbling of the rails overhead crescendoed into rolling thunder and a white searchlight beam split the dark. In midair a

black form and a swinging shovel were silhouetted against the glare of an open fire-box. And Johnson's tall bulk seemed to shrink into itself as he peered at the gutter ahead.

Crimson flare spilled from the rushing fire and splashed momentarily against something that lay, not twenty feet ahead, an inky blot on the red reflection from the wet asphalt. As the patrolman's thumb sought the switch of his torch a blacker shadow flitted across the street and vanished.

Somewhere a dog howled.

The rough-hewn angles of the officer's face hardened as he stared at the dark huddle in the steady disc of his light. The head of the motionless body was oddly twisted under the upflung shroud of its coat, a spreading, viscid pool glinted strangely red, and the battered felt hat was somehow more alive than the motionless form of its owner.

Johnson's beam danced along the wet sidewalk, the spattered base of the warehouses, the massive stone wall slanting up to the railroad right of way. Nothing! He got himself to the black heap, lifted the drenched cloth from over the head—and sprang back as if the corpse had struck at him!

He stared down, hand at cold chin. Then he bent to it again.

The man's throat was ripped open in a jagged gash, torn from side to side in a rough-edged wound that no knife, no human weapon had ever made. And on one out-thrown wrist were the deep, indented marks of two sharp fangs!

The policeman had a swift vision of a gray shape leaping from darkness, of a futile hand guarding a throat. Then the quick thrust of fanged jaws driving the warding arm down, of gleaming white teeth slashing again and sinking deep into human flesh.

"Nodt such a nice sight to see on such a night."

Johnson whirled to the guttural voice. Where had he sprung from, this short, gray-cloaked figure standing beside him? A moment before—he could swear it—the street had been empty. And he had heard no sound.

"Here you!" he clamped a heavy hand on the intruder's shoulder. "What do you know about this?"

The other arched gray, bushy brows. "I? I know nodding, policeman. I finish reading, gome outd for a breath of air, andt find you over thiss thing bending. Would you haff me pass by? I am human, with a full complement of the curiosity of the species." He shrugged.

Johnson stared at the man. What was it that was so repulsive about him? The piercing, coal-black eyes that seemed to glow with a dark fire of their own from the shadow of the broad-brimmed hat? The sharpness of his long, thin face, the jutting angle of his pointed jaw? Or the low, warning rumble of his voice?

"Came out for air at one a. m. in the rain! Likely! Where's your dog?"

"Dog? I haff no dog! Andt your grasp on me I do not like. Please!" A stubby hand pulled insistently at the policeman's arm. Johnson released his hold.

"Look here, Mr.—"

"Gerlsheim. Ottokar Gerlsheim if that your officiousness vill satisfy."

"Mr. Gerlsheim, do you know who this is?"

Gerlsheim bent over to peer at the body. He straightened, and there was a sneer in his voice. "Yes, I know him. One of those morons, those low-grade imbeciles to whom it very humorous iss to taunt andt bedevil one more physically unfortunate."

"Never mind the stump speech. What's his name, his address?"

"His name? Chones, Bill Chones." He spat it out. "His address? I know not the number. One of those vermin-ridden shacks rotting there behindt these mausoleums of trade."

The patrolman peered through the drizzle at the black slash between the dim facades that marked the opening of an alley. That passage, he knew, led back to a squalid row of decrepit tenements called, ironically enough, Primrose Lane.

"And where do you live?"

No answer. Johnson turned, irritated, to find—no one! In the instant his attention had been diverted Gerlsheim had vanished, silently, mysteriously as he had appeared.

The policeman's searchlight lit nothing but emptiness and rain. He rubbed his chin slowly. "That's the damnedest—" Then he looked down again at the torn, ghastly heap. "Got to take care of this poor fellow."

His locust nightstick rapped on the black-wet asphalt. And again, somewhere a dog howled.

IN a backyard in Primrose Lane Mrs. Maggie O'Doul thrust clothespins into dripping garments. Beyond a crazy fence Frieda Ott, her mouth free at last of the wooden fasteners, called to her: "Mrs. O'Doul, didt you hear vat happened hass lasht night to Mr. Chones?"

Maggie's red fists sought her ample hips. "Shure an' ain't I afther tellin' me old man thot dratted beast will have us all in our graves before it's through?"

The *hausfrau's* eyes were furtive in her narrow face. She came to the fence, jerking her head for her neighbor to meet her. "You think it's a dog?" she whispered.

"And phwat else should it be?"

Frieda shrugged thin shoulders. "I liff here for *drei jahren* yet andt I haff neffer seen a dog so big he couldt a man kill."

"Nayther have I. But himself saw it last Saturd'y, just outside Mamie Ryan's at Number Ten. He come in all iv a tremble, so scared he niver raised a fist to me th' onct. 'Maggie,' he says. 'Maggie, I've seen th' ould Nick t'night.'

"Go way wid yez,' I says. 'Ye're drunk.'

"The divil a bit,' he says. 'Tis sober as a church I am, afther phwat I seen. A big gray dog he were, big as a calf, wid burnin' coals fer eyes. I swear I cud smell th' brimstone on his breath.'

"An 'tis a wonder yez cud smell anythin' phwat wid th' reek o' yer own. Phwat did he do?" I says.

"Nothin'. Just stood there an' looked at me,' he says, bitin' his nails.

"An' phwat did yez do?" I says.

"I run, Maggie, I run home so fast th' soles o' me shoes're smokin'."

Mrs. Ott wagged her head solemnly. "Didt he his crucifix wear dot night?"

"Shure an' if he didn't have his scapular on he'd get a blisterin' from me that 'd make him wish he had. An' phwy do yez ask?"

"Dot iss vot hass safed him!" The woman's eyes were round and fear peered from them. "Vere I come from in der Schwartzwald, the Black Wood, there iss—"

A clearing throat behind made both women whirl. They saw a stalwart blond giant in a gray suit that stretched tight across the broad span of his shoulders. Evidently he had come through the passage beside the crumbling hovel which Maggie O'Doul called home.

"An' phwat do yez want?"

"Just some information, ladies. I have either of you seen a big dog around here, last night, or any time before that?"

Maggie's face was suddenly a florid blank. "So it's a dog yer after! An' ain't there enough o' the mutts out in th' Lane

that yez have to be after pokin' yer nose in a loidy's yard?"

"But this is a big dog I'm looking for, not a little tike like those out there. One big enough to--well to pull a sled in a show I'm putting on."

"Shure an' I ain't niver seen or heard av a dog like thot aroun' here."

"And you, madam?"

"I? No dogs haff I seen! Nefer! No dogs!" Frieda Ott sidled away. "Too busy am I mit *mein kinder* andt *mein Haus* mit dogs to play."

"Hey, wait a minute. I'm not going to bite you. There's something else I want to know. About that Mr. Gerlsheim, that German gentleman that boards at Number Ten."

If anything Mrs. Ott's face was more vacuous than her neighbor's. "Noddings I know about him. Noddings!"

"They tell me he hasn't lived here very long, but that he's made himself very unpopular around here with his ugly ways. That right?"

"Noddings," the *frau* muttered. "Noddings I know." But Maggie was not so timorous.

"Shure," she grunted, arms akimbo. "Shure an we're dacint paypul that minds our own affairs an' kapes our noses out uv ither paypul's. The which I'm thinkin' wud be a good example fur ither paypul to folly. Be th' same token, it's thray o'clock an' me childher 'll be home from school any minute. So I'll be biddin' yez good-day."

The big man could scarcely ignore this hint. "Sorry I troubled you, ladies. Good afternoon." He tipped his hat and turned to go.

"Good afternoon," Maggie called to his retreating back. "An' bad cess to yez for a nosy busybody!" in carefully lowered tones that could by no chance reach her unwelcome visitor's ears.

Patrolman Earl Johnson rubbed his

chin meditatively in front of the O'Doul domicile. "Another close-mouthed pair," he muttered, "like the rest of them. If they knew anything they'd never tell it to a stranger!"

SINCE noon he had poked around this hidden slum, trying to solve the dark questions raised by his nocturnal adventure, with as much result as he had obtained in this last brief conversation. "There's something queer, almighty queer, about this business. But why the devil I'm spending my off time on it I don't know. Sensible thing would be to leave it to the dicks, it's their job. I'm just a flatfoot, paid to pound pavements." He turned toward the alley that led out to the daytime bustle of Railroad street.

From the mouth of that passage there burst a sudden explosion of sound. The clattering of many running feet, cat-calls, derisive howls and ribald laughter all in the shrillness of youth. It was a vicious shrillness like nothing so much as the chaotic, frantic yelping of a puppy pack hard on the heels of their first rabbit. And lurid against the background of the tumult rose a curious high-pitched wail of terror and hate.

A stone hurtled from the alley, another skimmed the concrete paving. Then a tiny brown figure scuttled out, venting an unhuman shriek of sobbing panic.

In the instant before its tormentors poured out into the Lane the grotesque appearance of their prey photographed itself. Height of a four-year-old, its ancient, wizened face was distorted with staring fear. The huge, hairless head was thrust forward from a tiny body whose greater part was a rounding dorsal hump. The pipe-stem arms tossed wildly as thjn, twisted legs drove the misshaped, sidling form with uncanny speed.

Close behind darted the leader of the pursuers, his face alight with coming

triumph. The shadows of Primrose Lane had not yet robbed the lanky Italian lad of his olive skin. His long black hair was swept back with his swift rush; his white teeth gleamed cruelly.

"Gotta you," he gasped as his outstretched hand grazed the dwarf's back, not quite close enough to clutch. Another stride . . .

But the hunted gnome had flashed around, and now crouched tensely against the concrete, his purple lips curled back from rotted teeth. By some sleight-of-hand a knife glittered in one leathery small fist. The other lad recoiled into the press of his fellows but the ratlike creature snarled again, then haunched and sprang—straight into the embrace of a gray-clad arm that held him wriggling and helpless.

Johnson twisted the knife from his captive's grasp. "Quit that infernal squalling! I'm not going to hurt you. Quit it, I say!" Nerve-rasped by the unfortunate's piercing shrieks, by an instinctive revulsion against which pity struggled in vain, the officer clamped his big hand over the dwarf's mouth.

"Cheese it, the Dutchman's coming!"

The youngsters scattered. A guttural familiar voice reached the officer: "Be-gone, pig-dogs, imbeciles, vermin! Be-gone, foul pack of sewer-bred imps! Back to your putrid kennels while still you are able!"

The mysterious German of last night's adventure dashed through the suddenly emptied street. "Ach, my little one!" His voice grew suddenly tender as he reached for the trembling bundle in Johnson's arms. "Ach my poor persecuted one! Be still, be calm, I am here, my son, I am here. Neffer will I leaf you alone. Neffer!"

Black eyes held the officer's irresistibly, little lights crawling red and deep within them. "As for you, stupid hulk! To

oppress a cripple great pleasure giffs you, hah! From one piece with these gutter-snipers you are! Shame, policeman, shame!"

"I-I—"

"*Silence!*" The shouted command drove back the explanation that Johnson's suddenly clumsy tongue had difficulty in forming. "With such as you to bandy words I do not wish!" The harsh tones rumbled lower. "*Make your peace with your God, policeman, before the night.*"

The fiercely glowing eyes released the officer's. The German swung away, his ward perched on his shoulder. The door of Number Ten slammed shut behind the uncanny couple, and Johnson stared at the blank, unpainted panels.

He rubbed a wondering chin and whispered to himself, "Now what in the name of the devil did he mean by that?"

THERE was a long shape on the floor in the squad room of the police station covered by a gray-white canvas that only stiffly revealed the contours beneath. Patrolman Johnson started when he saw it.

"Someone hit by a car?" he asked the question almost prayerfully.

One of a trio of shirt-sleeved pinocchle players looked up briefly from his cards. "Naw. That damn dog in Railroad street. Th' wagon just brought it in. Old man's raisin' merry hell with the dicks outside—Hey, yuh gonna be all night meldin'? Quarter to twelve now, we'll be turnin' out *toute suite*—Glad I ain't got your beat t'night, Ole."

"Cut it, Andrews," a grizzled veteran interposed. "Lay off that 'Ole' stuff with Johnson."

"Say, mebbe he can put that 'Earl Johnson' stuff over on youse birds. But I knew him down on Allan street when he wuz Ole Jensen, an' Ole Jensen he is to me."

"Man's got a right to pick his own name if the one he's born with is going to hold him down. Exams or no exams, they ain't handing out no sergeancies to flatties with names that's got the smell of the old country about 'em, leastways if that smell ain't peat smoke."

"I don't see any chevrons on *him*."

"Well you will damn soon, way he's studying. And don't run away with the idea he's ashamed of the old folks either. Many a time I seen him sitting down by the waterfront with his granddad listening with both ears to old Olaf's yarns of the old country. Some of them would make your flesh creep—"

"—Hell, another four hundred hand! If this keeps up I'll owe you my next year's pay."

But the subject of this interchange heard none of it. A corner of the lifted tarpaulin in his hand, he was staring down at the body on the floor. Not many hours before he had seen that corpse alive. The black hair sweeping back in the wind, the pale, waxy face alight with coming triumph, the white teeth gleaming cruelly.

The gory shirt collar was folded back from a gaping throat across which a jagged gash was torn from side to side in a rough-edged wound which no human weapon had ever made. And on one out-thrown wrist—the deep indented marks of two fangs! Johnson rubbed his chin with his free hand and swore softly.

* * *

It wasn't raining this night, but there was no moon and the shadows along the warehouse fronts were black—too black. Policeman Earl Johnson stood for a moment at the corner where his lonely patrol of Railroad street began.

What the devil had Gerlsheim meant? He hadn't been able to get those words out of his mind all evening. As he stood staring at the torn throat of that Italian lad, the guttural accents rung again in his

ears: "*Make your peace with your God, policeman, before the night.*"

The midnight fast freight roared overhead, giving him a momentary sense of companionship. The deep melancholy of its whistle drifted back to him. If only those old stories of his grandfather's would stop running through his head; those old, creepy tales of nameless terror that used to stalk the darkness . . .

The nightstick felt comforting in his hand as did the gun, heavy against his thigh. Ought to have a belt holster for it though, on the outside. Fellow couldn't get the gat out quick enough where it hung under the tunic. Quick enough for what? Nothing was going to happen—nothing. The Dutch codger had a screw loose, that was all. Maybe, though, it would be better to walk out here in the middle of the street, away from the shadows that might hide—almost anything. Nobody around to see him and wonder.

What was that? Something had moved in the black mouth of the passage to Primrose Lane. Take a grip on yourself, man! Only nerves, of course, but—There it was again! Two red coals staring out from the dark. A lean gray shape rushing across the pavement, leaping straight for him—fangs glittered white in a slavering mouth . . .

No time for the gat; time only to slash at it with the club. Caught it, by gad, right across the side of its head! It crashed against the asphalt, then was up, lightning-swift, and leaped again for his throat. Again the locust club came down. The beast sprawled and Johnson grabbed for his gun.

The gray dog was on its feet, dashing away. Flame stabbed the blackness. Again! Twice the beast flinched, but hardly hesitated in its darting flight. It vanished in the shadows.

THE policeman's forehead was damp and cold with sweat, chill tremors rippled along his spine. At that point-blank range he couldn't have missed!

He shook his head free of superstitious mists. It was a dog, only a vicious dog. Couldn't be anything else! The image of that leaping shape had burned itself into his brain. What breed of dog was there with hair so gray and coarse, with head so sharply pointed, with fangs so long and sharp? Bah! It *was* a dog, a ravening man-killer but only a dog!

Then Johnson was once more the trained police officer, alert, vigorous. The dog had gone straight for the alley and its lair must be somewhere in the Lane. There would be little use in trying to follow it. Then he remembered something he had noticed that afternoon. There had been a puddle midway of the passage where the sun never reached.

The patrolman's long legs took him quickly to the opening. The white beam of his torch showed an empty alley, and across its middle point a wide patch of viscous mud.

Johnson was afraid, deathly afraid. There were recesses and embrasures on each side of the narrow passage, dark pools of shadow amply large enough for a dog to crouch in, black pools his torch could not probe till he was right abreast of them. Not space enough to swing a club. He plunged ahead, slit-eyed.

Here was the drying slime. And beyond, distinct in the torch beam were the tracks of the beast, black blotches against the flagstones' gray.

The white disc of light slid along the splotched concrete, picking out the paw-marks one by one. Dead silence here in Primrose Lane, silence and windows tight shut against the prowling monster that had torn two throats between midnight and midnight. Windows tight shut, save one. And beneath that gaping window

in Number Ten the moving light disc, following the trail of those muddy pads, halted.

The beam shortened as the officer's black figure approached. Then the light continued, crept slowly up eight feet of gray boards, and stopped again at a fleck of mud that glistened, still wet, on the window sill.

Johnson was up the steps in a flash. His club beat a tattoo on the locked door. No answer came from the dark house. Again the locust drove against the panels until the rust-weakened lock snapped. A flickering gas-light, turned down to the merest blue tip, revealed the entrance to the room he sought.

He rapped at the scarred panel. This might be a house of the dead for all the response from within. Perhaps it was! Perhaps the beast had done its work, and fled. The doorknob turned under his hand, before his own wrist could twist. The door grated open.

"So it iss you who thiss commotion makes!"

Johnson gasped with relief as he saw Gerlsheim standing there, gray bathrobe hugged tight around his lean figure. "Not enough it iss to torment my poor son by day; you must by night hiss sleep disturb. Why thiss hammering at my gate in the dead of night?" The German's voice was a growl, deep and vicious.

"The dog! It must be in your room. its tracks are on your window sill!" The officer's eyes strove to pierce the gloom of the chamber.

"Dog? What dog?"

"The dog that's been doing all the killing. It jumped me just now. I fought it off and tracked it straight here."

"Here? In thiss room? There iss no dog here."

"It must be, I tell you. It jumped in through your window. There's mud from its feet on your sill."

"Impossible! Just under the window my couch iss. It wouldt haff chumped right on me. Andt I haff not been diss-turbed."

Johnson stepped back, half-convinced. As he did so the wan gas light fell across the right side of the Teuton's face. The blond giant paled. Across that lined cheek, from sharp jaw to oddly-pointed ear, were two livid welts! Just such welts as his nightstick had made on the skin of an unruly prisoner not a week before!

What was it that old Olaf had said, once? "Stroock by stone or cloob, the while he is in wolf form, the mark will show on the flesh of a werewolf when again he ban a man!"

"LOOK here"—Johnson's brawny shoulder thrust against the closing door—"you know a damn sight more about that dog than you're willing to admit. Come clean, or by God I'll choke it out of you!" He had the man by the shoulder, his powerful fingers digging into thin bone.

"You would haff it then!" With a sudden jerk the man was free, his robe hanging limp from Johnson's astonished fingers. He had jumped far back in the room to a corner where no light reached.

His form vanished in the pitch-darkness. But suddenly two red balls of glowing fire were staring at the policeman from the shadow. Then a lean gray shape leaped, white fangs stabbing for the blue-collared throat. Hot, fetid breath stank in Johnson's nostrils as he met the wild leap with a swing of his club.

The beast crashed to the floor. But it was up in an instant and leaped again. Crack! Down again, and up again, swift as light. And this time Johnson was not quite quick enough.

Lucky for him in that moment that his high blue collar was of two-fold thick cloth, stiffened with buckram. He felt

the fangs strike into that cloth, felt the beast's heavy body crash against him. And he thudded to the floor under the force and weight of its leap.

The animal was atop him, snarling, growling, worrying at his collar, shifting its hold with each shake of its shaggy head until those fangs might sink into soft flesh. There was hot breath in his nostrils, wetness of foam on his cheek. He could scarcely breathe, so tightly did those iron jaws press.

He felt coarse hair, and a sinewy body that writhed and gave no grip to his clutching hands. His arms slid round the wiry body, clamped tight, constricting with all the force his huge muscles could give them.

The long teeth at his throat worried and shifted. Johnson's arms hugged tighter. His breath came in great wheezing gasps. Fiery rings formed and burst before his aching eyes. He'd never—get his—chevrons—now! One last squeeze before his throat was torn! One last squeeze . . .

Something snapped under his straining muscles, and the beast went limp.

Light! He must have light. He fumbled for his torch with shaking fingers.

Sprawled across the floor, its back oddly twisted, was a huge wolf, its shaggy flanks heaving with tortured breathing.

From the dark came a shrill, high cry. Something scuttered sidewise across the floor. The dwarfed and twisted child reached the dying animal. Its thin arms went around the hairy neck, the huge, hairless head was pressed close against the gray cheek. A piteous wail arose.

The shaggy head lifted as by tremendous effort. The glazing eyes sought the wizened face, a red tongue licked the tears from it. The child's wail faded into quiet sobbing. Then—it was done before Johnson could so much as move a finger—the white fangs gleamed in the torch

light and sank deep in the dwarf's throat!

When the policeman dared to look again two still bodies lay in a pool of dark blood. The corpse of a wolf with a broken back, and the corpse of a humpbacked child with a torn throat.

IN THE precinct station-house squad room, Patrolman Earl Johnson slumped down in his chair and stared from unseeing eyes at the place where, a few nights before, the tarpaulin-covered body of the Italian boy lay. From time to time his fingers closed nervously over a long, printed form—his application for the sergeant's examination.

Johnson rubbed a hand over his worried eyes. If the vision of that fanged gray beast would—just for an hour—quit haunting him! Or if only they could find the Dutchman! Hell! There must be some natural explanation of that gruesome battle in the dark. Gerlsheim must have been hiding out, wanted by the cops. Scared out of his wits, most likely, when he saw a policeman at the door, and lammed out the window while Johnson was fighting with the wolf. Sure—that was it. That must be it! But—

Stop thinking about it. The exam was coming soon—think about that. And then, quite abruptly, his eyes bulged at one line of type from the application which seemed to leap out at him from the printed page.

His fingers trembled as he laid the printed form back in his lap.

Did Gerlsheim forget about the hunchbacked kid? What was it he had said when he barged out and grabbed the little fellow? "I am here, my son, I am here. Neffer will I leave you alone . . . *neffer!*"

The poor twisted thing was better off dead, with his only protector gone. But—how could a *wolf* have known that?

Mechanically, Johnson picked up the form again. Must fill it out right now;

must ask the Skipper for a relief over the week-end.

And there was something else—something far more important that he had to ask the captain. Dazedly he got up from his chair and made his way from the room.

Downstairs, in his office, the grizzled captain looked up over his steel-rimmed spectacles as Johnson entered; then the official's eyes dropped to the form that Johnson clenched so tightly.

"H-Have you heard if the Central Bureau has found Gerlsheim yet, sir?"

"Who? Oh, the Dutchman with the mankiller? Nooo—not the slightest trace of him. You gave them a good description, but he had no record here, and his prints aren't on file at Washington. Why?"

Johnson licked dry lips and his eyes shifted from the captain's inquiring ones to the printed application in his hand. Should he tell that hard-headed cop there behind the big desk what he knew to be the truth? That a man—before his eyes—could turn into a gaunt gray beast. That the fangs which were bared from slaver-ing, lupine lips to plunge into the throats of its victims were really the teeth of Ottokar Gerlsheim?

Werewolves! Of course they existed! Only—only . . . Johnson gulped. The captain might understand if he told him. And he had to tell someone or go screwy! He *had* to . . .

And then, as he started to speak, he remembered that damning line of type in the application, the words which burned into his memory letters of flame: "Is there any history of insanity in your family?"

"Well, speak up, man!" the captain said testily. "What about the Dutchman? Any ideas about what happened to him?"

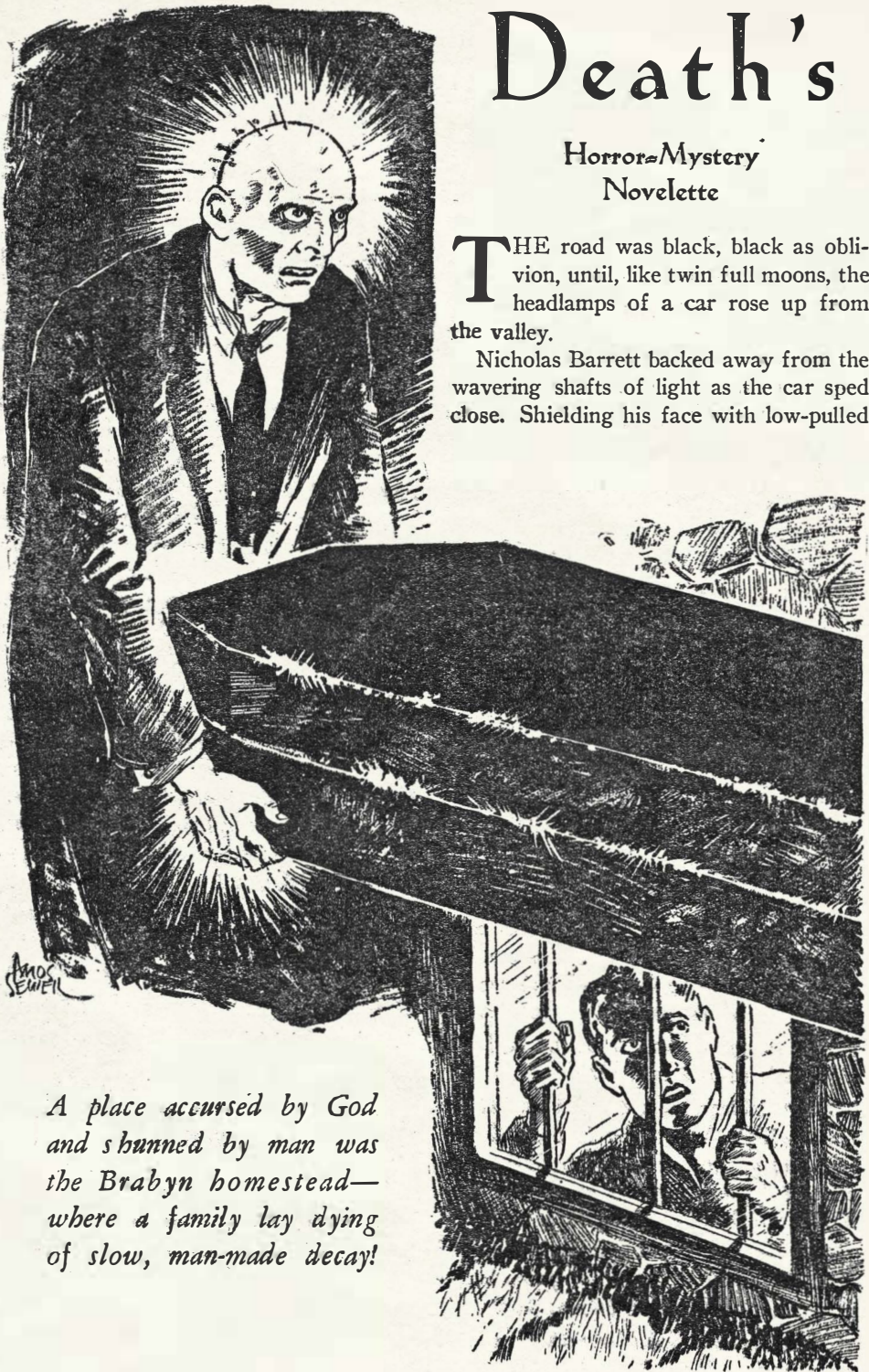
There was a haunted, tortured look in Patrolman Johnson's eyes as he faced his captain. He shook his head. He couldn't speak just then.

Death's

Horror/Mystery
Novelette

THE road was black, black as oblivion, until, like twin full moons, the headlamps of a car rose up from the valley.

Nicholas Barrett backed away from the wavering shafts of light as the car sped close. Shielding his face with low-pulled



*A place accursed by God
and shunned by man was
the Brabyn homestead—
where a family lay dying
of slow, man-made decay!*

Gleaming Face

By Frederick C. Davis

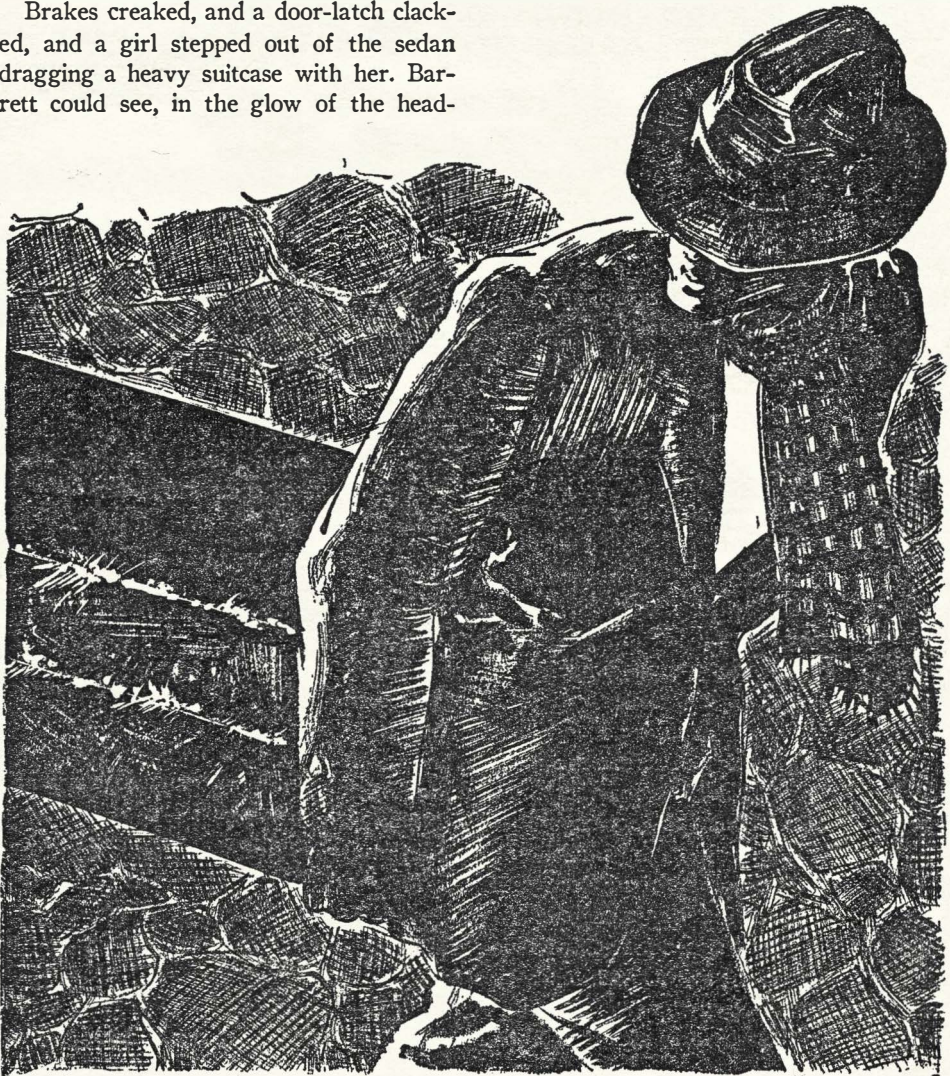
Author of "The Vat of Doom"

hat, he crouched behind stones that had tumbled from the mossy wall flanking the raw dirt highway. The car was slowing. Very near Nick Barrett it was going to stop.

Brakes creaked, and a door-latch clacked, and a girl stepped out of the sedan dragging a heavy suitcase with her. Barrett could see, in the glow of the head-

lights, as she paid the driver, that hers was the Brabyn face.

Taking the money, the driver said: "Maybe you'll be going right back."



"No," the girl answered. "I'm going to stay."

"Don't be so sure."

The girl turned. A high iron gate stood in the light, a latticework of black. On it a sign was hanging. The sign read:

QUARANTINED

She walked, lugging the weighty suitcase, toward the gate. Before she reached it there was a movement in the shrubbery near the huge stone posts. A man sidled from a shelter into the light. He was wearing a plaid mackinaw and he held a rifle in his hands.

"You better not go in," he warned.

The girl paused and peered at him. "Who are you?" she asked. "Why shouldn't I go in? This is my home."

The man with the rifle was leaning forward. "You're Elsa Brabyn, ain't you?" he queried. "My name's Bill Hallack, but I guess you don't remember me. You better not go in."

"But I've come all the way from Paris to be here. My father is ill, and I've got to see him. Why are you trying to stop me? What is the matter?"

"I guess nobody knows, except it's some kind of a fever. I can't stop you from going in if you want to. But once you go in there, you can't ever come out."

"Nonsense!"

"That's what I'm here for—to stop anybody leavin' that house. It's the selectmen's orders. You better not go in. If you do, you can't ever come out again."

Resolutely Elsa Brabyn stepped past. She pushed at the great iron gate, and it creaked open. She stepped through, and clanged it shut behind her.

The man with the rifle watched her grimly as she trod along the path which led to the huge house looming on the crest of the hill. The driver of the taxi wagged his head. Still hidden in the black-

ness near the gate, Nick Barrett waited.

With snarling motor, the sedan backed, turned end for end, and started off. The light glimmered away with it. The man with the rifle vanished in the gloom.

The girl's heels were tapping on the flagstones as Barrett skirted swiftly across the overgrown lawn. He drifted to a stop near a corner of the mansion as her knuckles rapped the door. A long, bright shaft slid out into the night as it opened.

"HELLO, Walters!" the girl exclaimed. And after a pause: "Well, aren't you glad to see me?"

The voice of the old servant of the Babryns was rumbling deep. "Miss Elsa—yes, yes, of course! But—didn't you get your father's cable? He—he asked you not to come. He—"

"I received it all right, Walters, and I've come anyway. I want to see father."

"Miss Elsa, please—please go back! Once you cross this sill, it will be too late. You must not—"

The girl's shadow moved through the shaft of light as she entered the door. "Take me to father, Walters, please!" And her voice was blotted out.

Barrett shifted quietly from the corner of the house. He walked with silent tread past the porch to the opposite side. At one of the windows a chink of light shone through heavy draperies. Barrett bent, and peered into the room.

It was a large room, furnished with antiques, and in the center of it, beside a table, a shaded light was burning. In a huge chair beside the table a man was sitting, back turned to the window through which Barrett peered. The man was leaning forward tensely, toward a door.

The door swung quickly, and the small-statured, wizened face of the servant, Walters, looked in.

"She's come, Mr. Brabyn! She says

she's got to see you. What'll we do, Mr. Brabyn? I couldn't keep her out."

The man in the chair moaned as if in torment. "Oh, merciful God!" He raised palsied hands to his face. "There is nothing we can do now—nothing!" He settled back, breathing hard. "Let her come in, Walters. Yes, let her come in."

Elsa Brabyn turned the knob and stepped across the sill. The light blinded her and she stopped. She could see nothing but the brilliant globe; the blackness beyond seemed empty. She called, plaintively: "Father?"

"Elsa . . . Elsa!"

A quiet sob came from the girl as she heard the tormented voice. She took quick steps, reaching out. Suddenly the man in the blackness blurted:

"Don't! Don't, Elsa! Don't come near me. Don't try to look at me!"

She stopped. She asked in anguish: "Father—what is the matter?"

"You must not touch me, Elsa. You must not so much as look at me. You shouldn't have come, Elsa! I implored you not to come."

"But father, you're ill. I want to be with you. I *should* be with you . . . What is it, father? Tell me!"

There was silence in the darkness behind the lamp. The troubled girl tried vainly to gaze past it. Her father's voice came again, at last: "Take a chair, my child. I will tell you."

And when the girl was seated, facing the darkness, the light shining in her worried eyes, the voice spoke again.

"You know, Elsa, that your Uncle Jerome and your Uncle Penton are dead?"

"Yes, father."

"Your Uncle Marshall and your Aunt Martha are ill, too, Elsa—as ill as I am."

"I'm sorry, father."

"We have had doctors, Elsa. Many of them. None could help us. None can

ever help us. We will not be long now, Elsa. A few days, perhaps—"

"Father!"

"It is true, Elsa. There is nothing that will help us. Nothing the white man knows can cure our illness, can counteract the—the curse of Subhaka!"

The girl leaned forward. "What—?"

"You know, Elsa, that it is not long since I returned from my last expedition. You know that the Islands of Los, off Kanakry, French Guinea, are not so far that I might have stopped off to see you in Paris. I know you wondered why I didn't see you then.

"My researches took me to Tamara, 'the cursed isle'. The natives there are ruled by primeval magic. The tribal magician was one called Subhaka, 'the man working in the shade.' He is the black power of the island—and I defied that power.

"A native, Niaki, led my expedition to the fields where the *Sinanthropus* specimen was found. To us it was scientific research; to Subhaka it was the desecration of graves. As we worked, Subhaka came and stared at us—just stared, with his glowing black eyes. He stared and the curse came."

"But, father—?"

"You will scarcely understand, my child. No white man can understand the black magic of those tribes. Suddenly Niaki, while digging, collapsed. He raved in delirium; and all the while Subhaka stared. It was the curse, Niaki said, the wrath of the black magician. Of course, as any white man would, I laughed.

"I FANCIED the sun had taken Niaki—the sun that pours upon the island like liquid fire. I treated him medically. Modern science I pitted against the evil magic of the black man. And I won. He recovered. And the natives wondered when they saw that I, a white

man, was a wizard of greater power than Subhaka.

"Then, one dark night, the tribal magician ran at us, screaming, from out of the blackness. He chattered like a fiend. He ran amuck among us, spattering us with stuff from a brimming gourd. It was blood—the blood of a sacrifice—a human sacrifice. And when Subhaka vanished in the night, the natives told me that the curse was upon me now—upon me and mine. Of course, again I laughed.

"But the fever came, Elsa. It would not yield to treatment. It was beyond the limits of the white man's knowledge, this burning, gnawing curse that began to devour my body. I returned home, terribly ill, and sought the aid of specialists. They could do nothing. The fever spread within the house. My brothers and sister contracted it, Jerome and Penton and Marshall and Martha. In spite of everything, it has been eating us away—turning us into living things that rot and—"

"Father!"

"I dropped all my work, Elsa, and concentrated on a treatment. I developed a serum. I tried it, but it seemed to have no effect on us, because the corroding fever had already begun to take us. I ventured to inject some of the serum into Walters' bloodstream before he exhibited any of the symptoms. Thank God, he has not contracted the fever!

"Upon me and mine that was the curse of Subhaka. Perhaps Walters is safe because he is outside the circle of the curse. Perhaps it is not the serum that has saved him at all. But you, Elsa. You are of our flesh. Now that you are here, exposed to the fever—I must give you an injection of the serum. It is the only hope of saving you. It must be done at once, Elsa—at once. My child, come closer—just a little closer."

The girl rose slowly, and stepped to the table. She heard a drawer slide open, and

the sounds of fumbling. She kept peering past the light; but she could not see the man who moved in that darkness.

"Roll up your sleeve, Elsa. And put your arm on the table."

"Father—"

"*You must!*"

The girl hesitated. Slowly she slipped off her jacket and rolled up the right sleeve of her gilet. She placed her arm on the table, slender and white and smooth.

Hands moved into the light, hands that trembled. One of them was holding a glass hypodermic syringe to which a glittering needle was affixed. In the tube an amber liquid glittered.

One of the trembling hands closed coldly around her wrist. The fingers of the other touched cotton to her skin, cotton soaked in alcohol. Then the hypodermic poised, needle-point down, quivering.

"Look away, Elsa."

The girl turned her head. She felt the sting as the needle pierced her flesh. A burning sensation throbbed in her muscles as the plunger of the syringe pressed down.

"It is your only hope, Elsa—this serum. I am giving you the last drop of it, my dear, the last precious drop. I made it—from the blood of Jerome."

The girl was shuddering, trembling as the fluid of a dead man's blood mingled with her own. When she felt the needle withdrawn she straightened.

"Father, I am going to stay here. I want to help you get well. But it can't go on like this. I must see you—really I must! No matter what has happened—"

"No, Elsa! No!"

"I will understand, father."

And as the girl spoke, she raised her arm. She touched the shade of the lamp and swung it. A shaking hand darted out to stop her—a hand that moved too slowly. For the beam shifted down, upon the man in the chair.

Elsa Brabyn stiffened away, hand to her mouth, staring in soundless horror.

The face turned up to hers was scarcely that of the father she remembered. The head was bald. The eyelashes, the eyebrows, were gone. The skin was peeling and inflamed. The eyes were clouded with films of gray. She saw toothless gums through which rotting bone was visible. She looked upon a frightful, decaying mask of a face.

"Father!"

"Elsa, my child," the man in the chair cried out in torment. "Elsa, my poor child."

THROUGH the slit in the window-drapes, Nicholas Barrett eyed the scene. He backed away, struck by the revulsion and horror pictured on the girl's face. He stole from the window: and his pace quickened as he penetrated deep into the darkness.

He passed barns and sheds. Once out of sight of the mansion, he slipped a flashlight from his pocket, and the dim gleam showed him his way. The house was far behind when he passed through the gate of a walled enclosure. In the glow of his light he saw headstones.

Graves were laid out within the walls in geometrical nicety. Each stone bore the Brabyn name; some were crumbling with age; and a few were white and gleaming as teeth.

Two, the newest, stood side by side, bearing the names of Jerome and Penton Brabyn. The dates of their deaths were only a few weeks past.

Barrett turned, climbed the slope and approached the rear of the barns and sheds. He ventured through a broad door and swung his light. In a moment he found a shovel; and carrying it, he returned to the private burial yard.

Standing beside the grave of Jerome Brabyn, he stripped off his coat. He

swung the blade of the shovel against the earth and drove it deep with his heel.

The soft earth yielded easily. The hole below the headstone of Jerome Brabyn yawned deeper. Barrett was standing shoulder-deep in it when the blade of his shovel thumped something hollow in the dirt.

He cleaned the earth from the lid of the coffin. With wrenches taken from his pocket of his coat he twisted at the bolts of the casket contained within the fresh pine box. He loosened the hinged head section, and clicked his light on, and turned the beam into the casket.

The lean, placid face of Jerome Brabyn lay bared in the light. Lips pressed tightly together, Barrett studied the face. He took a deep breath, and rose, clicking his light out.

Then he stared, and gasped, and recoiled with horror.

For the corpse of Jerome Brabyn was glowing—shining in the darkness! The closed eyes, the lips, the nose—the whole face, the whole head—was gleaming in the dark with a light of its own. Like an alabaster image illumined from within, the dead man shone in the grave!

Nick Barrett backed against the earth wall, taking deep breaths, staring. Quickly he clamped the leaf of the casket down. He replaced the lid of the pine box, and climbed up. And he shoveled like mad—shoveled while air beat in and out of his lungs—until the grave was level.

Through the darkness he ran, pulling on hat and coat. His footfalls pounded on the road, and then were gone.

CHAPTER TWO

Ghosts That Live

NEAR the center of the Connecticut village beyond which lay the Brabyn farm, one house was still alight.

Nick Barrett walked through the picket gate and crossed the porch. His hand

was moving toward the brass knob when it rattled. The door swung open, and a man peered out—a man with stern face, and iron-gray beard and high, straight forehead.

"Good evening, Doctor," Barrett said.

"Evening," the doctor answered gruffly. "Before you go to your room, Mr. Barrett, I want to talk with you."

He turned, and strode into a study at one side of the hall. Barrett, puzzled, closed the outer door and followed. He was still somewhat breathless from his quick walk from the Brabyn farm. The doctor, settling into a swivel chair, eyed him censoriously.

"Since you began rooming here a week ago, Mr. Barrett, you've been behaving in a way that I don't like."

"Why—I'm sorry—" Barrett laughed.

"You sleep most of the day. You go out at night. You stay out until all weird hours, then come stealing back—like a ghoul." The doctor's eyes sharpened when Barrett flinched at the word. "I think you'd better find a room somewhere else."

Barrett smiled. "Dr. Lang, you knew me when I was a kid, when my folks used to live in this town. Isn't that reference enough even if you are troubled about my behavior?"

"Ten years since I saw you last," the doctor answered. "Then you come back, don't say why, prowl around all night—and refuse to explain yourself. I don't like it."

Nick Barrett hesitated. He drew a chair close. "I wouldn't like the people here to know you'd kicked me out, Doctor," he said. "I want to—attract as little notice as possible. Perhaps if I explain myself you'll let me stay."

Barrett slipped an engraved paper from his wallet and proffered to the old physician. "You see," he said, "I am a Special Death Claim Investigator for the Seaboard Life Insurance company. I am

here investigating the Brabyn situation.

"Jerome and Penton Brabyn died strange deaths. The others in the house seem to be afflicted with the same strange malady. Since they are all insured in my company, we are involved to the extent of more than a hundred thousand dollars."

The doctor returned the wallet. "I see," he said. "Well!"

"There is, doctor, a suspicion of murder."

"What? Murder? Who by? You think somebody in that house is murdering all the others? What for?"

"I don't know. None of the beneficiaries live in the house; none of them have been near it since this situation came about. Each of the Brabyns' policies has a different beneficiary. A group of people, in half a dozen different cities, will benefit by the deaths of the Brabyns who live in the house now. I can't believe that these deaths, this malady, is natural, and at the same time I can't believe that a scattered group of people is committing murder by long distance."

"Well then?"

"Well, then," said Barrett, "it's still my job to get at the bottom of this thing. I believe you were the first doctor to be called when this fever, or whatever it is, spread through the house. What do you think it is?"

"I've no idea," Dr. Lang answered. "It's like nothing I ever saw before. The specialists Hugo Brabyn called from New York didn't get any farther with it than I did. I still visit and treat them; I'm the only one allowed to come and go—yet I almost believe he's telling the truth about the witch doctor's curse."

Barrett smiled.

"**P**OOOR fellow," the doctor continued.

"A fine man, a great scholar. An anthropologist, you know, Barrett; be-

sides, he's had medical training. A fine man—and nearing a tragic end.

"He devoted himself to anthropology because it fascinated him. He was able to spend his life in study, without being associated with a university, because his father left him a huge fortune in trust. Hugo Brabyn spent his life developing a theory of his own. I can't tell you the details of it, but he hoped to prove that *Homo Sapiens*—man—appeared first on the earth in what is now North America.

"Hugo Brabyn made an expedition to Kanakry to inspect a fossil himself. His whole life's work depended upon the truth of the findings. The discoveries were correct and Brabyn's theory collapsed. His life's work was shown to be futile. It must have been a crushing blow."

"He contracted this fever in Kanakry?"

"Apparently. He was changed when he came back—very changed. I thought his mind might have been affected, perhaps. Doubtless it was the sunstroke he suffered. The sun is murderous there in French Guinea. His health was gone, his mind clouded, his life wasted—but he still had the thing he valued highest in this world."

"And that?"

"His daughter. Elsa Brabyn. I brought her into this world. No man ever worshipped a daughter more than Hugo Brabyn loves Elsa. She is the image of his wife, who died in giving birth to Elsa; and he adored the girl he married. Elsa is that girl to him now; and more because she is his own flesh. But perhaps you're not interested in that, Barrett—you're investigating death claims."

"You forget," said Barrett. "I knew Elsa Brabyn when she was a child."

"You did? That's right, you did. I don't know that I can help you, Barrett. It's been very strange. The Brabyns are prisoners in their home, you know. The townspeople made the health authorities

investigate. There was no evidence that the fever is contagious, but the people were so afraid they forced a quarantine on the place. Someone is always guarding the gate, to keep the Brabyns isolated. Twenty-four hours a day that place is guarded."

"Have they attempted to get out?"

"No. Hardly. If you could only see them! To go out and show their faces—faces rotting away—in public! Hardly. They're content to be prisoners. But the people are afraid that the infection, or whatever it is, might spread—you see? Food is brought and left at the gate."

"Doctor, who put on the quarantine?"

"Samuel Maley, the first selectman of the village. Look here, Barrett. I can't help you. If I were asked, I'd say, in all seriousness, that the Brabyns have died and are dying of a witch doctor's curse. But that, I imagine doesn't satisfy you."

Barrett rose. "Hardly. But what you've told me makes me sure of one thing. I've got to see this thing at first hand. I've got to get inside that house."

Dr. Lang jerked up. "Inside that house? Don't be a fool, Barrett!"

Barrett turned to the door. "I've just come from there, Doctor, and I'm going back right now."

He closed the door as he spoke. Dr. Lang leaped from his chair.

"Barrett! Come back, you young fool! If you get inside that house, you'll never come out again! Come back—!"

The latch of the outer door clicked in its socket as Barrett stepped into the night.

ALMOST at the gate, Barrett paused. On the road which ran past the home of Dr. Lang there was a clapping of hoofs and the creaking of ungreased axles. A delivery wagon was drawing to a stop.

Barrett stepped aside, into the black shelter of a tree, as a white-aproned man

hopped from the seat. He was full-stomached, and on his bristling head he wore a ragged, broken-billed cap. He wheezed through the gate and strode toward the porch with choppy steps, the light radiating from the window gleaming in his fattish face.

He was Samuel Maley, keeper of the Center Store, and first selectman of the village.

Maley's knock brought Dr. Lang to the door.

"Evening, doc." Maley glanced about as he spoke. "I'm ready t' take another order out t' the Brabyn place, but I've run out of the stuff."

"Damn it, Sam!" Dr. Lang's ejaculation crackled. "Keep your voice down!"

The store-keeper sniffed. "Well," he said stubbornly, apparently not realizing that his voice was as audible as before, "I've run out of the stuff."

Dr. Lang swung the door open wider. "Come in, come in!" he ordered impatiently. "Can't you be careful in what you say?"

"Well," and Maley's voice faded with the closing of the door, "what else can I do but come here and tell you?"

Shadows passed across the windows of the room at the front of the house which Dr. Lang used as an office. The voices were not audible at Barrett's position. Remembering Maley as the man responsible for the placing of the quarantine on the Brabyn farm, his curiosity about the man grew.

Stepping close beside the window, he heard the voices of the two men inside. The shade was not quite drawn. Through it Barrett could see the men, Dr. Lang seated at his desk, Maley standing beside it.

From a drawer Dr. Lang had taken an empty brown bottle. Over its mouth he was shaking a larger one, and a white powder was spilling into it.

"I don't quite see," Maley observed. "why you don't make 'em take this stuff right out, you bein' a doctor. They got to do what you say, don't they?"

"I've told you a thousand times, Sam," Dr. Lang answered, sending a sharp glance upward, "that Hugo Brabyn refuses further treatment. He believes it is hopeless. He's afraid that medicine might only aggravate the condition."

Dr. Lang scowled and stoppered the smaller brown bottle. "Leave this matter to me, Sam. I know what I'm doing. It may not help at all, but at least there's a chance." And he handed the bottle to the store-keeper.

"You never told me," said Maley, "just what this stuff is."

"I did tell you. It's a thyroid compound. It stimulates metabolism. It will hasten the reconstructive processes in the Brabyns' bodies, if such processes are still functioning. Now I suppose you don't know any more than you did!"

Dr. Lang came quickly to his feet. "Don't walk out of here with that bottle in your hand! Get it out of sight! And don't let anybody see you use it!"

Maley muttered again as he thrust the bottle into a pocket and shuffled out.

Barrett was not beside the window when the outer door of the house opened. Again sheltered behind the tree, he watched Sam Maley emerge. The latch clicked again as Maley climbed back to the seat of the delivery wagon.

Barrett passed through the gate swiftly. He was pulling himself over the tail-board of the delivery wagon when it started up.

FIFTEEN minutes later the wagon squeaked to a stop at the edge of the triangular village green. Barrett elbowed up and legged out silently as Maley puffed out of the opposite side. Across

the road sat the Center Store, a dim light burning behind its windows.

Maley sluffed up the steps and rattled a key in the lock. He turned to fasten the bolt then strode across the store and through a door at the rear. When he disappeared, Barrett left the shadow of the wagon. Quick steps took him across the road, and into the parking space which flanked the store.

The building had once been a dwelling; one of the rear rooms Maley used as living quarters, and the others were used for storage. A light was shining now in the one corner room, shafting through a doorway into the others. Through the grimy panes, Barrett could see barrels and boxes and shelves and beyond, in the brighter light, part of a cot and a stove.

Maley was out of sight, but his moving shadow crossed the doorway several times as Barrett watched. Presently the paunchy store-keeper's hand swung into view, holding the brown bottle. Leaving it on the top of the cold stove, he strode through the doorway, and back into the store.

When he returned, a moment later, he was carrying a cardboard carton packed tight with groceries. Maley placed it also on the stove and removed various bags and packages from it. One smaller box he fumbled with. Soon he took up the brown bottle uncorked it, and poured some of its content through an opening in the box.

He shook the box, after closing it again, as though to make sure the stuff he had added was thoroughly mixed in.

Next he opened a plump brown paper bag. He upended the brown bottle again, and dumped white powder into the bag. He fingered into it, and made mixing motions, for several minutes. He tied the bag tight, then stepped away again, carrying the brown bottle.

Immediately he reappeared behind the doorway, he knotted a string about the

plump brown bag. He was straightening when a sound echoed through the door—a quick, sharp knock.

Barrett saw a startled inquiry form on the store-keeper's lips. Alarm held him motionless a moment, while the knock sounded again. The doorway blackened as he stepped through it, peered at the front of the store, and went on.

Barrett heard the lock of the front door click, and Maley's voice ask: "Who's that?"

"Leon Wilkes. Can't you see me?"

"Well—" Maley hesitated. "Come on in, then."

Inside the store footfalls sounded. Maley led the way through to the corner room. The man who followed was lean and sharp-visaged. His hands dangled from long wrists and protruded beyond his coat-sleeves, and his beak of a nose glistened in the light.

"Funny time of night for you to be comin' around, Leon," said Maley suspiciously.

"You're first selectman, aren't you? Well, being a lawyer, it's my business to get at the bottom of things. And I'm Hugo Brabyn's lawyer—always have been, don't forget that."

"I ain't forgot," Maley sniffed. "What do you want?"

"I've got a right to talk with my own client. This man of yours at the gate won't let me in Brabyn's house. I just come from tryin' to get in, and I don't want to be kept out of there any more. I won't stand for it."

"You can't go in when there's a quarantine. I don't go in myself. Doc Lang's the only man who's allowed to go in and out of there."

"And it looks suspicious to me," Leon Wilkes asserted, his nose twitching. "Amos Lang put you up to quarantining the Brabyn place. Amos Lang made you do it so nobody but him could come and

go. Who knows what's happening to the Brabyns? I don't, and you don't—and I'm Hugo Brabyn's lawyer, don't forget that."

"I ain't forgot it, Leon. What good would it do for you to see Hugo Brabyn? Like as not you'd get the fever and—"

"Fever? How do I know it's fever? It looked that way at first, and Hugo Brabyn thought it was himself, but there's no way of telling what he thinks now. Why, Amos Lang could kill Hugo Brabyn some way, and say it was a natural death, and nobody'd know the difference! Then Hugo Brabyn'd die intestate. And Amos Lang 'd get a quarter of a million dollars to build his sanitorium!"

SAM MALEY blinked. "Well, the springs here 're right healthful, and it's a pity they ain't been developed. It'd bring the town a lot of money and do it a lot of good if Amos Lang's sanitorium did get built. It seems to me that—"

"Sam, you fool, that's beside the question. Good or bad, the sanitorium can't be built without the money. There'll never be any money for it unless it comes from Hugo Brabyn, and it'll never come from Hugo Brabyn unless he dies intestate. You and I can't tell *what* Amos Lang is doing to those Brabyns."

"Why!" exclaimed Maley, aghast, "you're as much as accusin' Amos Lang of killin' the whole lot of 'em!"

"Amos Lang's dreamed of that sanitorium all his life, hasn't he? He wants nothing more than to build it and be the head of it, and you know it, Sam. I'm not accusing him. But I'm telling you that you got to let me go into that house and talk with Hugo Brabyn and see what he thinks."

"You think maybe he'll have you change his will?"

"I think maybe Amos Lang doesn't want anybody to get at Hugo Brabyn right now, that's what I think!"

Sam Maley scowled. "Leon," he said flatly, "you can't do it." Wagging his head stubbornly, he lifted the box of groceries from the stove. Walking with them through the door he added: "You'd pick up the fever and spread it all around and likely die of it yourself!"

Barrett, standing beside the window, heard the argument continue as the men passed through the store. After the lock clicked, they continued to talk. Barrett eased toward the front of the building, and saw Maley climbing into the delivery wagon, and Wilkes standing beside the vehicle, gesticulating angrily.

"I'll take this thing over your head, Sam! I'll go to the state police! I'll go to the health authorities!"

"Leon," came the implacable voice of the store-keeper, "there's no use talkin'. You think I want everybody in this town to catch the fever and rot away like the Brabyns? No, sir! You can't do it!"

The reins flipped, and the mare jerked the wagon away. Wilkes snorted his anger and began striding off. Barrett, standing in the shadow of the building, watched it clatter away into the darkness and disappear past the crest of a hill.

The road to the Brabyn farm circled the hill. Barrett ran, taking a short cut over the brow of the hill. When he reached the stone wall which edged the farm, he heard the clattering of Maley's wagon. The store-keeper had already reached his destination, left the box of supplies, and turned back.

Past the molded stone wall the Brabyn mansion hulked black against the starless sky. Barrett legged over it silently, walked through the rank grass slowly to avoid sound, and came to the side of the house. Windows at the rear were lighted. He edged toward them.

The box of groceries sat on the table in the kitchen. Walters was busy un-

packing it, storing some of the articles on the shelves, and others in the huge refrigerator. When he was finished, he clicked out the light and stepped out of sight through a door, yawning.

Barrett waited minutes. He pried fingers under the window, and it rose. Cautiously he pushed it open, and ducked through into the musty blackness.

He groped until his fingers touched the wall. The opposite door yielded into a narrow hallway. Halfway along it a pencil of light shone beneath another door. Barrett toed along the hallway, to the door under which the light gleamed. He stooped at the keyhole.

Peering through it, Barrett could see a patch of the corner of the room beyond. A shaded light was turned upon a desk and a man was hunched there, in an attitude of despair. Barrett studied the utterly bald head, the scaly face, the squinting, gray-filmed eyes. This was Hugo Brabyn.

Barrett groped farther along the hall. Passing an open door, he paused, looking in. He risked a flash of his torch, and the beam showed him a dining-table and chairs. He was turning away, when a dull, faint gleam attracted his eyes—a spot which glowed greenly in the blackness.

Silently entering the room, Barrett moved toward the luminescence. It was as high in the air as his eyes; it was, seemingly floating in space. When he reached a hand toward it, his fingers touched glass. The glowing thing was inside a cabinet.

Barrett found the catch, and opened the glass door, and reached again. He lifted the glowing thing in his fingers. It was a smooth, small cylinder; it was cool to the touch of his finger tips. Puzzled, Barrett touched the button of his torch again, and in its light examined the object.

It was a table salt-shaker, fashioned of deep amber glass and the glow was coming from inside it.

In darkness again, Barrett studied the thing in his hand. It was brighter now, like the body of a firefly. Its glow seemed to dim, slowly as Barrett watched it. He turned it up, and shook it, and shining specks fell through the air and came to rest on his outstretched palm.

Barrett quickly put the salt-shaker into his pocket. He felt his way out of the room, and along the rest of the hall, into the large study beyond. It was here, in this room, that he had seen the girl talking with Hugo Brabyn.

Arms out, he crossed soft carpet, through utter blackness. At his fourth step something brushed his leg.

A crash!

BARRETT stopped, sucking in breath. He had knocked something to the floor and the concussion seemed to make the house tremble. In a second, a sharp sound came from behind Barrett—the click of a door opening. He whirled.

There was a glow in the hallway. A dim, green light moved closer; a shine that was a human face!

Barrett stood stock-still as it came, as footfalls echoed in the hall. The thing he saw was a bald head with widened eyes—eyes that were peering at him and glowing strangely. The toothless jaws of the face hung open. And beneath, he saw swinging hands shone eerily in the dark!

The luminous face came into the room. Every detail of it was clear. As it paused, the light emanating from it shone dimly upon the walls and reflected from the panes of hanging pictures. It stared around in tormented terror, while the shining hands groped.

A click sounded in the room; light beamed from a lamp on the desk. Revealed to Barrett was Hugo Brabyn. The

man was standing beside the desk, one hand on the switch of the lamp. The hand was where the glowing hand had been. Brabyn's head was where the shining head had been in the darkness.

This living man glowed in the dark like the corpse in the grave of Jerome Brabyn!

Hugo Brabyn's bulging eyes fixed on Barrett. He leaped heavily, swinging swollen arms. Barrett recoiled before the rush. He backed against a table that stopped him. And Brabyn clutched.

Barrett found himself gripped in Brabyn's arms, held close to the panting body. Horrified, he peered up at the ghastly, hairless face; at the grey-filmed eyes. A breath like putrescent fumes beat into his face. He lunged away.

Leaping aside, scrambling beyond the desk, his one swinging arm struck the shaded lamp. It spilled and crashed to the floor, the bulb bursting with a hollow explosion. Darkness filled the room.

And there, again in the darkness, Hugo Brabyn's luminous ghostly face moved closer.

Suddenly new sounds came into the room—doors clicking open. Barrett crouched, peering. He could not see the doors themselves, but he saw what came through them. First one face, shining in the dark like Brabyn's appeared—a man's face. Then a second, at a second door, also shining with the same evil light. And this was a woman's.

They were as ghastly as Hugo Brabyn's, as wretched. Their glowing mouths moved. Voices came from them.

"Hugo—Hugo—what is it?"

Barrett was still staring at the luminescent face of Hugo Brabyn. It was closer to his now. The mouth opened. The shining, rotting jaws champed upon husky words:

"Go back! Go back!"

Something swished through the blackness. Something sharp-edged, driven by frenzied power, crashed to the side of Nick Barrett's head. The three luminous faces vanished into utter blackness.

CHAPTER THREE

The Dead Bury Their Own

THE room was filled with musty gloom. The ceiling was low and beamed, apparently it was the moldy underside of a floor. Litter lay in the faint moonlight which shafted in through a high window. The damp cold pierced to Barrett's bones.

He hunched on the floor, peering at the stark bareness of the cellar. The welt on the side of his head throbbed at each heartbeat. His senses were clear now, but he had lain there in that room a long time.

He was weak; his throat and mouth were dry, burning; hunger gnawed like a rat—in the pit of his stomach. Unsteadily he brought himself to his feet and braced himself against the wall. Looking through the window, he saw black iron bars criss-crossing it.

He breathed deep of the cold air gusting through the broken panes. The ground lay level with his eyes, black and rolling.

He reached through a broken pane, gripped the iron rods, and bore at them. They were rusty and old, but strong beyond Barrett's strength. Turning, he tottered across the littered floor toward the door in the opposite wall.

His hands passed over his pockets and found them empty; his belongings had been stripped from them. Clutching the knob of the door, he tugged and pushed; but it was firm.

Faintly he heard from above a continuous, throaty moaning, rising and falling

like the sighing of a sea. It rose again to heights of torment, to fall to levels of exhaustion and despair. It was coming from some unseen agony-gripped throat.

Strength was coming back to Barrett as he heard footfalls coming closer. They sluffed and bumped until the heels beat hollowly just outside the door.

A key rattled in the lock and Barrett struggled to his feet. There was a broken chair in the room, and he supported himself on it as he watched the door. It inched open; the gleam of a candle shone through. And behind the candle appeared the ghastly mask that was the face of Hugo Brabyn.

The man stood inside the half-closed door, gray-filmed eyes turned upon Barrett. One of his palsied hands was raised, leveling a heavy-calibered revolver. The lips of the toothless mouth were lax; they worked painfully as he said in a husky voice:

"I see you are almost yourself again, Mr. Barrett."

Barrett blurted: "Stand aside. Get out of the way. I'm leaving this place."

"No, Mr. Barrett. You're staying."

The huge revolver trembled as Brabyn pointed it. The man's clouded eyes gleamed dully in the candlelight. "I should not hesitate to use this gun, Mr. Barrett, if you tried to get out."

Barrett said: "What are you trying to do? What are you keeping me here for?"

"I gave my word of honor that I would permit no one who entered this house to leave it again."

"Your word of honor—to whom?" Barrett demanded.

"To Doctor Lang."

BARRETT blurted: "You're crazy if you think you can keep me here! My company will follow me up."

The glazed eyes looked hopelessly sad. "I'm sorry, Mr. Barrett. I have given my

word, and I must keep it. I cannot allow even my own daughter to leave here now, though God knows I want her to go—before it's too late."

"Why?" Barrett demanded.

"The fever—" The voice was moaning. "We are quarantined here because the authorities fear it is contagious. Perhaps it is not, but it is impossible to be sure. My brother and sister contracted it from me, which indicates that it is contagious. Yet Walters has not. Perhaps his peculiar blood condition makes him immune, perhaps it was the serum I gave him. But I have no more of the serum now. It is impossible to let you go, Mr. Barrett."

"It's just as impossible," Barrett snapped, "to try to keep me here!"

The voice of Hugo Brabyn droned on. "I am positive that this is no natural illness; I am convinced that it is born of black magic, a curse upon me and mine. Yet, for fear I may be wrong, for fear that the germs may spread to innocent people beyond, I have given my word of honor—"

"Dr. Lang comes here, doesn't he?"

"It will do no good to argue, Mr. Barrett. I am very sorry for you—very sorry. I attacked you in the library last night because I was afraid you might slip out again, carrying the germs with you, if germs there be. I half thought you were a blundering burglar, who knew nothing of the conditions here. I took the liberty of looking through your pockets while you were unconscious. Now I know who you are, and why you are here—but it can make no difference, Mr. Barrett."

Barrett managed a wry smile. "I tell you, you can't keep me a prisoner here in his cellar. God! How long have I been here now?"

"It was last night you came, Mr. Barrett. You struck your head when falling."

"I've been here twenty-four hours?"

Here, in this wet hole? What're you trying to do to me?"

"Merely detain you, as I must. I can only say, again, that I am sorry—but I can't break my word of honor. Are you hungry, Mr. Barrett?"

"Yes."

Keeping his gray-glazed eyes on Barrett, keeping the gun leveled, Hugo Brabyn turned his horrible head and shouted huskily up the stairs.

"Walters! Walters!"

From above came: "Yes, Mr. Brabyn."

"Bring down a tray, Walters—the best food in the house."

While Hugo Brabyn continued to stare at Barrett, the moaning continued to come from above. It was louder now, the exhausted protest of a soul in torment.

"That is Marshall you hear, Mr. Barrett; my brother. He is dying."

"Damned if I can believe that he's dying of any witch doctor's curse!"

"You do not believe because you do not understand the black man's power, Barrett. But I know."

The man was silent, and Barrett studied him. He felt pity for Hugo Brabyn, as well as revulsion. There was determination shining in the depths of those glazed eyes, and even firmness in that mask of a face. And there was silence in the cellar room until, at last, footfalls descended the stairs.

Walters pushed through the door, carrying a loaded tray. Brabyn directed him to place it on the floor. Savory odors arose. On a hot platter lay a charcoal-broiled steak covered with golden, melted butter. Luscious vegetables circled it. A pot of steaming coffee sat beside it. The mere sight of the food brought a surge of new hunger through Barrett's body.

"We keep you down here, Mr. Barrett, only for your own sake," the husky tones of Hugo Brabyn came. "We will make you comfortable as best we can."

Brabyn backed out the door, and pulled it shut. The bolt slid into its socket, and footfalls thumped on the stairs as Barrett moved toward the tray of food. It was dark again in the cellar room, blindly dark until Barrett's eyes began to grow accustomed again to the gloom.

Hunger drove him to the tray. By the sense of feel he took up knife and fork, and sliced into the tender steak. He was raising a cube of it toward his mouth when his muscles froze. He stared in horror at the bite of meat on the tines.

It was glowing—shining in the dark!

THE green glow was visible now that Barrett's pupils had dilated. He lowered the morsel of meat, peering at it; and his eyes turned to the tray. Everything on it was shining with a soft, green light, a glow that seemed to exude a warning.

From upstairs came the sound of footfalls. They were passing along the hallway. Barrett heard, faintly, the voice of Walters announce:

"Dr. Lang is here, Mr. Brabyn."

Barrett gazed spellbound at the glowing tray, at the food which was shining as the living and dead bodies of the Brabyns shone in the dark. He had never known such agonizing hunger before. His tongue curled yearningly over his lips as the aroma went deep into his being. But there was not a morsel of the food which was not covered with coldly glowing phosphorescent light.

Barrett recalled the strange brown bottle that Dr. Lang had given to Sam Maley; he remembered Maley's mixing the powder with the food destined for the Brabyn house; he remembered Leon Wilkes' veiled accusation against the doctor. And now he stared down at some of that food which gleamed poisonously!

Crazily, Barrett took up the knife and scraped at the steak—scraped in a desperate attempt to removing the shining stuff.

Luminous particles clung to the blade, and yet it pressed others deep into the meat. Barrett dug at them in attempts to remove them—fruitless attempts.

He could not get the stuff entirely off. He could not possibly remove it from the vegetables. And the coffee! In its amber depths swirled inseparable particles.

Torture to keep the food out of his mouth. And slow, horrible death if he ate it!

Barrett dragged himself up. He fastened cold hands on the tray. He strode across the room with it, to the barred window. Madly he seized the plate and flung it against the iron bars. He crashed the coffee-pot against the rods. The fragments and the stuff spattered out. Some of it still lay within reach; and Barrett tore himself away from it in agony.

It was then that Barrett realized the moans were no longer coming from above—that the house was silent.

Clinging to the bars of the window, Barrett peered out.

The moon had passed behind a cloud. The night was without limit, boundless black. There was no faint light anywhere, until Barrett made out the glow of green. It was the shape of a human head, that shining thing. It bobbed in space at each new sound of a step. Below it two hands were visible, hands that also shone. They were turned back, as though bearing a burden. It was Hugo Brabyn, walking through the night.

Barrett knew, from the sounds, that another man was following Brabyn, perhaps Dr. Lang. The pair was proceeding slowly, with heavy steps. There *was* a burden swinging between them: Barrett could see it dimly now.

It was a long, pine box, and through its cracks a green light glimmered.

Brabyn, his bent head a gleaming green, was leading the way toward the private graveyard, helping to carry a coffin with-

in which lay the shining dead body of another Brabyn.

He knew that he would be kept prisoner here in this cellar room, knew that starvation, sooner or later, would drive him to devour the fresh food that would be brought him—food salted with the shining poison.

He snatched at the broken chair in the room and flung it away. Crashing against the wall, it splintered and fell apart. Barrett stared at it, strode to it, and took up one of the rear legs.

He broke the rungs and the cross-slat out of it and strode to the window. He thrust the implement through the bars, and bore back. He tugged carefully, lest he break the wood. It whined with the tension Barrett put upon it; but suddenly something gave. The screw that held one of the rods in place had torn out of the dried wood of the window-frame.

Barrett breathed hard as he pried at the next rod. He was bearing back, tugging, when coldness seized him. He heard footfalls outside the door—quiet foot-steps descending the stairs. They were coming slowly, coming nearer.

QUICKLY Barrett pulled the bars back into place and let them hang. He stood his implement in the corner, so that it would be behind the door and out of sight when it opened. He faced the door, breathing hard.

A quiet voice in the hallway called: "Nick Barrett."

Barrett asked breathlessly: "Who's that?"

"Elsa Brabyn."

"Elsa!" Barrett pressed against the panels. "Do you remember me, Elsa? Do you remember when—"

"Of course. I want so much to help you, Nick."

"Then for God's sake, let me out of here! Get the key and unlock the door."

"I can't. I can't, Nick," the girl's voice answered. "I have no key. There is only one key, and father keeps it."

"Phone someone in the village and tell them I'm here!"

"There is no phone. I can't get out myself, Nick. I don't know how I can help you, but I'll try."

"All right," Barrett said, breathing hard. "Good girl!"

He stood silent as Elsa Brabyn's foot-falls moved away from the door and went down the steps. When the sounds disappeared, he crossed quickly to the window with the chair-leg. He began to work feverishly at the bars.

Another came loose, and another. Barrett tore them out until the opening was large enough to pass his body.

He pulled himself over the ground and came dizzily to a standing position. Listening, he could hear, far away, the muffled thumping of a shovel against yielding earth. It was coming from the valley, from the burial ground behind the house. Hugo Brabyn and Dr. Lang must still be there, working in the darkness. A glowing live man burying a glowing corpse!

The house itself was filled with a tomb-like quiet. Barrett loped along its side, toward the rear. His feet slashed through the grass as he hurried past the rear door. In the open, as the moon slid from behind a cloud, he came to an abrupt stop.

A blurred, black movement surprised him. It was near a rear window—near the kitchen window through which Barrett had entered the house the night previous. As he peered he could see, now, that the window was open, that a man was outside it, crouching.

The sound of Barrett's feet in the grass had startled the man, had stopped him in the act of sneaking into the house. There was no movement for a second, but, faintly, Barrett could hear the sharp, sibilant breathing of the surprised prowler.

Suddenly the man at the window sprang away. Barrett gave a dizzy leap at the same moment. Because he knew how to sprint, he closed the gap between himself and the fleeing prowler quickly. His head pounded with the pain of the exertion, and his mind was numb, but he flung arms out and fastened fingers on the shoulder of the man who was scrambling to escape.

Instantly the man jerked about and struck out. Barrett glimpsed only the outline of a lean, lowered face before the fist crashed against his cheek. Thrust back, he kept his grip, and ducked low. He tightened arms around the unknown man's body as blows rained on his back. He straightened, spilling the man over; and they clawed in the grass, rolling.

Barrett's weakness was telling now, as his adversary's attempts to break away grew more frantic. Again a fist smashed against Barrett's head, and the black world reeled around him.

Dew-wet grass brushed his hot face as he sprawled out. Gasping, he rolled over, elbowed up, struggled again to his knees and his feet. Through the pounding of the pain in his head he could hear the rhythmic sound of running. He jolted off a few steps and stopped, confused.

The sound had disappeared; the prowler was gone.

Barrett swayed, and held his pounding head. As he moved, steadying himself, something brushed against his foot. Slowly he picked it up. It was a hat. The hat that must have fallen in the struggle from the other man's head.

There was no sound now; the other man had vanished into the night. Barrett slid over the wall and, in the road, struck a match. The hat he held was crushed and old. Turning out its stained sweat-band, Barrett saw initials. They were: "L. W."

Grimly Barrett thrust the hat into his

pocket and walked, steadily as he could, along the road to the village.

CHAPTER FOUR

Wilkes Talks of Death

BARRETT found the village center quiet and dark; the only light was the dim glow behind the windows of the Center Store. The walk from the Brabyn farm had increased Barrett's hunger almost beyond endurance: nothing in the world seemed as important to him now as food. He strode to the door of the Center Store and knocked. But no response came. Repeated knocks echoed empty. And Barrett peered through the panes, at the food stacked on the shelves, and moaned . . .

Barrett peered about grimly. A drain-pipe ran down the side of the building near the window at which he stood, and beneath its outlet lay several old bricks. He heaved one up and cracked it against a pane of the window. Splinters flew inward and the tinkle of them was engulfed in the quiet.

Barrett reached in, loosened the latch, and shoved the sash up. He did not even wait to learn if anyone had been alarmed by the crash of glass. Legging in, he hurried through the doorway that connected with the store. Bright-labeled food lay now within reach.

Barrett snapped open the door of the meat refrigerator. He took up a bottle of milk, uncapped it, and gulped half of it down before he stopped. With a knife he sliced a segment from a cheese; back in the store he found an open box of salted crackers. Sitting on the counter, careless of who might see him, Barrett munched and drank, and felt strength come back into his aching body.

When he finished he was replete. The pain of the blow on his head was more endurable. Tossing a bill on the counter

—more than enough to pay from the broken glass and the stuff he had eaten—he moved about the store. In the rear corner room he lighted a bulb.

In here he had seen Sam Maley spill the contents of the brown bottle into the food destined for the Brabyn home. He probed through a roll-top desk which sat in one corner, in search of it; but it was not there. There was a closet, which yielded no trace of the brown bottle to Barrett. He searched thoroughly, every inch of the room; but the bottle was not there.

Shrugging, he crawled out the way he had come, through the window. Feeling equal to anything now, he began to walk. Ten minutes of following a black tar road brought him in sight of a small house with blinded windows which were dimly gleaming. Unhesitatingly, Barrett clicked the gate, walked to the front door, and knocked.

A step sounded, and the door inched open to disclose a lean, hawk-like face—the sharp features of Leon Wilkes.

"What do *you* want?" Wilkes grated.

"I'm returning something that belongs to you, Mr. Wilkes. Your hat."

Wilkes' sharp eyes darted to the misshapen felt in Barrett's hands. His hand shot out, through the crack, to snatch it away; but Barrett jerked it back. They peered at each other intently.

"Perhaps we'd better talk this over, Mr. Wilkes."

Wilkes was pale. His eyes seemed to carry veiled threats as he studied Barrett.

PRESENTLY he stepped back, drawing the door open without a word. Barrett stepped into a living-room lined with sectional book-cases which were filled with calf-bound legal tomes. Wilkes latched the door before he turned to face Barrett. "What're you driving at?"

"If Doctor Lang or the selectmen knew you tried to get into the Brabyn house to-

night, Mr. Wilkes, it might not be so pleasant for you."

"What business did *you* have there?"

Barrett's answer was to open his wallet and display his credentials. Sight of them brought a change into Wilkes' lean face. Something of respect shown in his eyes behind a sudden look of confusion. He gestured, returning the wallet, and said: "Sit down."

"Since you," said Barrett, still standing, "are Hugo Brabyn's lawyer, you drew up his will?"

"Yes."

"I want to know all the provisions of it."

Wilkes' mouth worked as he considered and reconsidered his unspoken refusal.

"It's rather necessary, Mr. Wilkes, since there's a strong suspicion of murder in this case."

"That's just why I went to the house tonight—to try to see Hugo Brabyn. I haven't been able to talk with him since Doc Lang slapped that damned quarantine on the place. Murder? I don't doubt it!"

"The provisions of the will, Mr. Wilkes?"

Wilkes gave Barrett a sharp glance, and pulled open a drawer of a filing-case. From a folder he extracted a legal paper. He sat, and studied it, not offering it to Barrett.

"Hugo Brabyn," he explained hesitantly, "was left something better than a million dollars by his father, in trust. On Hugo Brabyn's death, by the terms of his father's will, that fund is to be divided equally among Hugo Brabyn's brothers and sister and daughter."

"Now there is only one of the older Brabyns left, beside Hugo."

"Only one?" Amazement showed on Wilkes' lined face.

"Another of them died tonight," Nick Barrett said quietly.

"Good God!" Wilkes' hand trembled, and the paper rattled. "And the other can't live long—now. It will leave only Hugo Brabyn and Elsa. Then she'll inherit all the estate—if she's alive after Hugo Brabyn dies."

"If?"

"If Hugo Brabyn dies without direct heirs, there are other provisions. The money is to be used to establish a sanatorium in the village, over which Dr. Lang will preside.

"Hugo Brabyn made this will after the fever began to take him. He is a kindly, generous man. He wishes to help his friends. Dr. Lang has been the family physician ever since Hugo Brabyn was a boy. Perhaps its natural that Brabyn would want to help Dr. Lang, if he could do it without depriving his own family."

"Perhaps, eh? Do you mean that Dr. Lang influenced Hugo Brabyn to make that provision?"

"If it's murder—if Hugo Brabyn is the last of the Brabyns to die—who else would gain?"

"You are the executor of the estate, Mr. Wilkes?"

"No. Samuel Maley is named executor."

"Maley? Why?"

WHEN Hugo Brabyn and Sam Maley were young, they both loved the same girl—Eileen Westfall, who became Elsa Brabyn's mother. Hugo and Maley were rivals then. But after Hugo married Eileen, they became friends. Fast friendships do often spring up between enemies after the conflict is over. It happened to them.

"Perhaps Hugo Brabyn named Sam Maley executor because he knew Maley had loved Eileen—Sam never looked at another girl after he lost her—and Hugo Brabyn wanted to make up for it somehow. He's that sort of man."

"But that's a large estate, and Maley isn't—"

"Sam Maley has nothing but his store, and it scarcely pays. He's slaved all his life. He can't keep up the grind much longer. Either he'd drop dead behind that counter of his some day, or he'd have to go on the town charity, if Hugo Brabyn hadn't named him executor and provided for Sam Maley's old age by doing it. The office of first selectman pays nothing, and the executorship will save him eventually from the poor house."

"Sam Maley's too stupid to manage such an estate!" Barrett protested.

Wilkes eyes glittered. "Don't let that old fox fool you. He only pretends to be stupid. He's as keen and bright as a razor. Hugo Brabyn insisted on naming him executor because he knows that, and he knows that Sam Maley is so fond of Elsa Brabyn that—"

"Sam Maley will be executor of the estate in any event. It's only if Elsa Brabyn dies before Hugo that Dr. Lang will receive the funds to build the sanatorium."

Barrett struck his open palm on the chair arm. "Exactly. God, that girl shouldn't have come home! Fever, black magic, or poison or whatever it is, she shouldn't have come home!" He rose, frowning. "And you, Mr. Wilkes," he asked, "have not been inside the Brabyn house since the quarantine?"

Wilkes came quickly to his feet. "No—of course not! Tonight I tried, because—" he broke off and lapsed into sudden silence.

Barrett studied the lawyer's sharp eyes a moment. Then he said: "If it became known, Mr. Wilkes, that the Brabyns have died and are dying of poison put into their food, it wouldn't go so well with you if it became known you were sneaking into their kitchen, would it?"

"What! What do you mean?"

"I dare suggest," Barrett said quietly, "that you keep this little talk of ours under your hat—and keep your hat on your head when you go for any nocturnal strolls."

Wilkes was stiff and staring when Barrett strode past. He opened the door quickly, and glanced back to find a panic-stricken look haunting Wilkes' eyes. Closing the door he went out quickly.

As he strode along the road he weighed Wilkes' protest, that he had not been in the Brabyn house since the quarantine. He doubted it. If Wilkes had sneaked into the house before, it might mean that he was guilty of poisoning the food. But for what reason, when—

Barrett's mind switched quickly to a recollection of the brown bottle that Dr. Lang had given Sam Maley. Had the doctor lied when telling Maley it was a thyroid compound? Was it, instead, some ghastly poison which Maley, believing the doctor and acting as his unwitting tool, had mixed with the Brabyn's food?

If Lang had spoken the truth about the contents of the brown bottle, then someone else must have introduced the shining poison into the Brabyn's bodies through the food.

Was it Wilkes—sneaking into the kitchen unseen?

Was it Walters—who prepared the food, who alone had escaped the effects of the poison, who had brought Barrett the glowing tray—Walters, murdering the Brabyns for some hidden reason?

What of Hugo Brabyn himself—a broken man, killing his brothers and sister, and even himself, so that the entire Brabyn estate might go to Elsa, whom he adored above all else in the world?

Or Dr. Lang? Barrett's mind could not draw itself from that clearest possibility. He remembered Lang's furtiveness over the brown bottle, his anxiety that it not be seen or its secret use become known.

Lang's life-long dream of his own sanatorium in the village to be brought to reality by means of the sinister stuff in the brown bottle?

Nick Barrett trudged on. He strode quickly along the road which led to the house of Dr. Amos Lang.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Secret of the Cistern

THERE were no lights downstairs, but on the floor above a window glowed. Barrett entered quietly, and trod up the carpeted stairs to the upper hallway. The door of Dr. Lang's room, he saw, was closed. As he toed toward it he heard a strange, rhythmic, scraping.

Barrett paused, wondering. The keyhole gave him a sectional view of the room beyond the closed door. Over a table in the center of it, Dr. Lang was bending, the glare of a table lamp gleaming in his intent eyes. Barrett's breath came faster.

At one side of the table was a pile of clocks—cheap alarm clocks. A dozen of them were heaped upon each other. Dr. Lang added another to the pile while Barrett watched. Then, leaning, he reached into an open crate which sat on the floor, and lifted a paper box from it.

Tearing open the box, Dr. Lang took out another clock. He struck a small hammer against its face, and the glass shattered. He fingernailed the paper face of the clock, and tore it out, and put the clock on the heap. Bending over the ripped circle, he took up a knife, and scraped.

Barrett saw him gather a tiny heap of white powder upon a sheet of paper, and scoop the stuff into a small brown bottle. He rose from the table with an air of having completed a trying job. Quickly he replaced the faceless clocks in the crate

and, carrying it, started for the door.

Barrett backed quickly into the room he had rented and shut himself in. Dr. Lang came into the hallway, and trod quickly down the stairs. Barrett heard the latch of the rear door click and heard the doctor step outside.

He eased from his room and ran quietly down the stairs. The rear door of the lower hallway was standing ajar, and there were sounds of movement outside it. Barrett let himself silently out the front entrance and, hugging the black-shadowed wall, worked his way rearward until he could see the yard behind the house.

Dr. Lang was bent over the stone housing of a cistern which sat in the center of the yard. A splash echoed from the black depths as something fell into the water. The sound was repeated swiftly as Dr. Lang took clocks from the crate and dropped them through the open trap of the housing. When the last clock fell into the water, he hurried again into the rear door and closed it.

Barrett hesitated, chilled. He heard Dr. Lang moving inside the house. Quietly he stole to the cistern, raised the trap, and peered down into hollow blackness. Making sure, by listening a moment, that Dr. Lang was not in the rear of the house, Barrett dared strike a match and hold it low beneath the open trap.

The surface of the water flashed in the light, but beneath it Barrett saw the glitter of metal. The water was low enough so that they could be seen clearly—a heap of faceless clocks, more by far than Dr. Lang had dropped in tonight. Scores of them! And all with dials missing.

Barrett closed the trap, and circled quickly to the front of the house. As he pressed in, he paused, thinking he had heard another door opening or closing.

somewhere inside. Waiting through a moment of quiet, he crossed the sill, and climbed the stairs. The first floor was still dark and when he reached the landing, he saw that there was no line of light beneath the doctor's door.

Barrett found it locked. From the door of his own room he took a key, and tried it. The two locks were old and cheap, and the way opened to him. Barrett slipped inside, and stood, back to the closed door, peering.

For, across the room, on a shelf, he saw a dim, green glow!

He moved toward it, hand outstretched, and closed his fingers around it. He felt the cool smoothness of a bottle. When he uncorked it, a brighter glow came through the bottle's mouth.

Barrett heard a rustling in the room. Quickly he replaced the bottle, and struck a match. In the yellow gleam he peered at a long table which sat against one wall. On it was a small, rude cage, a wooden framework covered with chicken-wire; and inside the cage was a rabbit.

Barrett dropped the match and trod on it. From outside he heard the metallic snarl of an automobile's self-starter. Quickly Barrett darted from the room and dashed down the stairs. Through the pane of the rear door he saw that the garage was open; the old sedan of Dr. Lang was crawling out. The glow of the dash was reflected in the doctor's narrowed eyes.

Barrett whirled, sidled out the front door, and darted to the shelter of bushes which flanked the driveway. The car panted toward him and, at the edge of the road, paused. Barrett sprang out. He hoisted himself to the rear spare tire fastened on the rear and clung there as the sedan spurted off.

THE black road blurred beneath Barrett; the wind tore at him. His arms ached as he kept his grip. He was able to recognize the turns the sedan took, and

knew that Dr. Lang was driving to the Brabyn farm.

When the corner of the stone wall flashed past Barrett, he lowered himself. The car was slowing when he let his feet touch the dirt; instantly he was flinging his legs through a wild run. Letting go, he sprang to the side of the road and, waiting there, saw Dr. Lang's car stop at the gate of the Brabyn place.

The headlights dimmed before the doctor climbed out. The armed guard at the gate allowed him to pass, and he walked to the porch of the house. Presently the big front door opened, and Walters admitted the doctor.

Barrett crossed the wall. Quick steps took him to the side of the house, as lights appeared behind several of the corner windows. Barrett hesitated, then went on resolutely. Crossing the porch quietly he raised his hand to knock.

A voice was audible beyond the panels: "Mr. Brabyn is resting, Doctor. He is very weak. Perhaps it would be better not to disturb him."

"Very well," came through in Dr. Lang's tones. "Where is Martha?"

"In her room. She has been calling for you, Doctor. It is pitiable, the way she pleads for help—but I'm afraid she is dying."

"I'm afraid so, Walters. I'll go—"

Barrett knocked. A startled silence followed. Then a latch clicked, and Walters peered out. Barrett thrust against the door, pushing the little man back, and stepped into the vestibule.

"It's—I thought—" Walters' gulping exclamation broke off uncompleted.

Dr. Lang was staring. "Barrett! For God's sake, what are you doing here?"

Barrett smiled tightly. "I can explain that in a few words, Doctor. Walters, you had better leave us alone. Go to your room, wherever it is. I want to talk with Dr. Lang privately."

Walters hesitated until at a reluctant nod from the doctor he left. When the door closed, Dr. Lang studied Barrett coldly.

"I warned you that if you came in here—"

"Let that go, Doctor. This is your second visit tonight, isn't it? One more Brabyn soon to be buried, and then Elsa put out of the way, and you're all set. That's right isn't it?"

Dr. Lang snapped: "What the devil do you mean? I came back here because Martha Brabyn is dying, and—"

"Dying," said Barrett grimly, "of the witch doctor's curse?"

Dr. Lang stiffened. "You'd best leave this matter alone, Barrett. I'm in command here!"

"No doubt," Barrett interrupted. "Hugo Brabyn himself believes that the witch doctor's curse is responsible for what is happening in this house. But you know better than that, Doctor. You and I know better than that."

"I know nothing about—"

"These people are dead and dying because they've been poisoned—because *you've* poisoned them, Doctor. You've poisoned them with radium!"

Dr. Lang's jaws clamped hard. "So you know—"

"I know all about it. You've bought clocks, with luminous dials. The paint of the numerals contains infinitesimal particles of radium salts. You've scraped the radium paint off the dials of the clocks and given it to the Brabyns to take. For weeks and months the people in this house have been taking radium into their systems without knowing it."

"Barrett, for God's sake—!"

NO DOUBT Hugo Brabyn came back from Kanakry with a fever and suffering from sun-stroke. No doubt you were able to give him the radium in

pills or capsules, at first. But when he became convinced that nothing could cure him, and he refused treatment, you were forced to take another means of feeding the Brabyns the radium.

"You made Sam Maley believe there was no other way of helping the Brabyns—'helping' them! You gave him the stuff, the paint scraped off the clocks, and induced him to mix it into the salt and sugar brought to this house. He did it because he wanted to help the Brabyns, and because he trusted you. All the while, he's been helping you, without knowing it, to kill the Brabyns."

"Barrett, I tell you—!"

"God only knows how you pulled the wool over the eyes of the specialists Brabyn brought here, but you're clever enough to manage that. The poison hadn't been acting long when they came, of course. Then you capitalized the witch doctor legend—and it's nothing more than that—to the limit. You've watched the radium rot the Brabyns away, turn them into living corpses."

Dr. Lang was still stiff, staring. "And why," he demanded, "should I do that?"

"So that, under the provisions of Hugo Brabyn's will, you will receive funds to build your sanatorium, the dream of your life. You've contrived and are contriving to kill all the Brabyns so that Hugo will die last. Even now you're starting to poison Elsa Brabyn. God, if she gets that poison into her system, I'll—!"

"You learned about the will, I suppose, from Leon Wilkes?"

"It doesn't matter. I—"

"It matters somewhat, Barrett," Dr. Lang said sharply. "If the Brabyns die as you say, it is true I will be able to build the sanatorium. But you've overlooked one important fact: The sanatorium will be built around the natural springs here. And

all the springs, all the land surrounding them, is owned by Leon Wilkes."

Barrett swallowed and kept quiet.

"The springs have not been developed so far because Wilkes refuses to sell them; he'll only lease them. His terms are high. He knows that if the funds are left me to build the sanatorium, the sanatorium must be built, and he will get his price. He'll get far more out of it, Barrett, than I will. He didn't tell you that, did he?"

Barrett smiled tightly. "No," he admitted, "Wilkes didn't tell me that. Perhaps he took me in a bit. In the light of that knowledge, I might wonder if the stuff you made Sam Maley mix into the salt and sugar was not, after all, genuinely medicine. But I can't forget the clocks, doctor. I can't forget those clocks."

"Barrett!" Dr. Lang stepped closer. "I've come here because a patient is dying. I'll discuss all this—"

"After you are in the custody of the police, Doctor. You can do nothing for Martha Brabyn. Since there is no reason for the quarantine on this place, you and I are leaving right now, together. And you, Doctor, are to consider yourself under arrest."

"You young fool—!"

"Come ahead!" Barrett interrupted. "I advise you not to make trouble. Are you coming?"

Dr. Lang glared. "You're making a serious mistake, young man!" But Dr. Lang snatched up his hat and strode into the vestibule.

Barrett stepped ahead of him and opened the door. Their heels hit the porch with hollow thumps.

Then the thing happened swiftly. Barrett glimpsed the quick black movement that descended on Dr. Lang's head. A sharp crack sounded; the doctor groaned and lurched back against Barrett. Barrett jerked, ducking away from another black

figure which came beside the door. The next instant his ears rocked with the explosion of a blow that crashed to his head. With the doctor in his arms, he fell.

CHAPTER SIX

Caught by the Death Glow

THE world, to Barrett, was a fog filled with flashing lights. He felt himself carried and heard footfalls beating on wooden floors. His body sagged in the hands that gripped him as he was dragged up a steep, narrow flight of stairs.

After long moments of waking nightmare he felt himself sitting upright in a chair quite immovable. His legs were bound; his hands were tightened downward by cords twined about his wrists. He looked about, through darkness lightened only by a faint shaft of moonlight filtering in through a dormer window.

"Barrett!"

The sound of his name jerked Barrett's eyes from the window. He saw, dimly, another chair, and a man sitting in it, bound as he was. Six feet separated him, but he could discern the drawn face of Dr. Amos Lang.

"I heard you move, Barrett. Where are we?"

The doctor's voice was weak and gasping. Barrett eyed him and tugged vainly at his bonds. Panting, he gave up, and answered: "In some room of the house. Who hit us? Did you see his face?"

"No." The doctor's head twisted as he listened. There was no sound anywhere in the house. Presently he called: "Walters! Walters!"

His voice rang back from the walls, giving him his only answer. The silence continued a long moment. Then he said: "There's no use to shout. Nobody'll hear us. Nobody'd dare come into this place

if they heard. Did you see the man, Barrett, the man who attacked us?"

"No."

"He must have been waiting outside the door and listening to us talk."

"No doubt."

The doctor sighed. "I tell you again, Barrett, you were making a mistake. I am not guilty of this horrible thing. Hugo Brabyn has been my good friend these many years."

Barrett answered tightly. "I saw you scraping the radium paint from the clocks."

"I admit I did that, Barrett. But not for the purpose you imagine. It was only recently that I began to believe that the Brabyns were dying of radium poisoning. Such a thing is very rare, but I remembered the case of a woman who painted the numerals on clock dials in a factory in New Jersey. I began to experiment with the stuff, to see if it would produce the symptoms shown by the Brabyns. That's all you saw, Barrett—I was working on the experiment."

"It will be a bit difficult for you to prove that you were only working on an experiment, Doctor," Barrett said grimly.

"No doubt." The doctor sighed again. "I went to the city and purchased a case of clocks with radium dials, I scraped the paint off them and fed the stuff to a rabbit. The animal has begun to rot away as the Brabyns have and are doing. It has convinced me that someone has poisoned the Brabyns with radium."

"There is no question of that, Doctor. The question is—who poisoned them?"

"Perhaps," the doctor answered, "Leon Wilkes' attempt to fasten suspicion on me is a way of covering himself—but I won't accuse any man of such a horrible thing. You may be interested to know, Barrett, that even before Elsa Brabyn entered this house, I warned her."

"Warned her?"

"Yes. To eat nothing here that she did not prepare herself. To test it before she ate it. I brought here, and gave to her to use, a small galvanoscope—a device which will detect radium emanations. I urged her not to eat anything which brought a reaction in the galvanoscope. I pray to God she's heeded my warning!"

Barrett was staring. "You did that?"

"Of course. It was too late to help the others, but, if there was poison in the food, I could save Elsa in that way. You see, Barrett, that shoots your theory to pieces. I'll never receive the money for the building of the sanatorium if Elsa outlives Hugo Brabyn, which she is certain to do."

"Then neither will Wilkes—"

"No, neither will Wilkes."

"Listen!"

Somewhere beyond the door there was the sound of footfalls. They gritted on stairs, coming closer. Both bound men listened as they approached the closed door.

The lock of the door clicked, and it swung inward, slowly. In the gloom it was impossible to see the face of the man who stepped in. He stood just over the sill and the sound of a throaty chuckle seeped into the room.

The man's face was not shining in the dark; he could not be Hugo Brabyn.

Suddenly a sharp click echoed, and brilliant light filled the room. The glare blinded Barrett a moment. When he could see, a fattish face materialized. The glowing eyes were turned on him, and the full lips were leering. It was a face Nick Barrett knew.

The face of Samuel Maley.

A SECOND guttural chuckle came from Maley's lips as he peered.

"She is dead," he said in a chanting tone. "She is dead. Martha Brabyn is dead."

Dr. Lang was straining at his bonds. "Sam!" he snapped. "Untie us, Sam!"

"No, Doctor. No, Doctor," the paunchy man answered in a monotone. "I won't let you go. I'm going to keep you tied. Walters is tied up, too. Hugo Brabyn is in his bed, too weak to rise. He is dying, too. He won't last long now, Doctor."

Barrett demanded: "Where is Elsa?"

"Elsa?"

At the sound of the name, the leer went off Samuel Maley's piggish face. Something like gentleness and reverence came into it.

"Elsa is in her room. I have locked her in. She will understand."

Dr. Lang jerked desperately at his tied wrists. "Sam, you—you devil! You've done this! You've done this to the Brabyns!"

"They do not matter, Doctor. Nobody matters. Nobody now but Eileen and me."

Barrett echoed: "Eileen?"

"Eileen—Elsa."

Sam Maley's hands moved as he sighed the names. From a pocket beneath his white apron he drew a bottle, a squat, brown bottle. He turned it slowly in his hands, peering at it.

"They are the same. Elsa is Eileen. Eileen is Elsa. Do you understand?" And his eyes sought the eyes of the men bound in the chairs.

"Sam—you tricked me!" Dr. Lang said explosively. "I gave you medicine to put into the salt and sugar that was to be brought here, and you didn't use it. You threw it away. You put in poison instead—radium salts!"

Sam Maley peered with lowered lids at the doctor, and fingered the brown bottle gingerly.

"Nobody but you will ever know," Maley broke in droningly. "Nobody will ever find the original bottles of radium—I buried them. I was careful when

I purchased them in the city. Nobody will ever learn I did it. You'll never tell anyone, Doctor—or you, either." His eyes shot to Barrett.

Sam Maley came into the room, twisting at the cork of the bottle, chuckling insanely. "You've forced me to do this. Do you think your lives mean anything to me—more than having Eileen with me? And the money—the money—"

He paused and turned away. He walked from the room slowly, and along the hall. The sound of splashing water came through the door while Barrett and Dr. Lang peered at each other.

"He keeps calling Elsa Eileen," the doctor whispered. She is the image of her mother. She is her mother, living again. Years ago Maley loved Eileen Westfall and Hugo Brabyn took her from him. He becomes Elsa's guardian when Hugo Brabyn dies—the guardian of the reincarnation of the girl he loved. He wants her with him—he'll keep her with him—"

"The crazy idiot, he'll—"

"You heard him mention the money, Barrett. He'll be able to control Elsa through the money. He'll be able to take what he wants of it himself, and what will it matter to him, after he dies, if it becomes known that he stole the Brabyn money? It's crazed him, the thought of having all that wealth in his hands—and with Elsa—"

Footfalls were coming again toward the door. Dr. Lang broke off as Sam Maley crossed the sill. Maley was still holding the brown bottle in one hand, and in the other he carried a brimming glass of water.

"You've forced me to this," he mumbled, peering at the bound men. "You've forced me to make you die as the Brabyns have died. It is the fever, the curse; and you've caught it! It will kill you as it killed the Brabyns!"

"Sam!" Dr. Lang shouted the word. "You daren't do that! You can't keep us here. They'll hunt for us; they'll—"

"It won't matter—won't matter. It won't be long until you're buried too, along with the Brabyns. Then Elsa and I will be gone far away. Europe and Asia and around the world, living like a king and a queen. And nobody will touch us, nobody will harm us—"

Maley was coming slowly into the room as he spoke. His voice trailed off as he peered into the corkless brown bottle. Abruptly he tilted the bottle over the glass of water, and white powder spilled. He shook the glass, and it became a milky mixture.

"I put the quarantine on. I can keep people out. Everybody'll know you've caught the fever. Nobody'll dare come in to find you!"

HE DROPPED the bottle to the floor. He towered over Barrett, and again came that ghastly, inane chuckle. Suddenly his free hand shot out, and his fingers gripped Barrett's underjaw. He forced Barrett's head back until the tendons strained.

It was Maley's intention to pour the poisonous stuff into Barrett's mouth! Realizing it, Barrett attempted to twist his head away, but he found Maley possessed of an undreamed-of strength. He heard Dr. Lang calling desperately, "Sam—Sam, for God's sake, stop!" And now the blunt, strong fingers were digging into the flesh of Barrett's cheeks, pressing between his teeth, inexorably forcing his jaws apart.

Maley's voice came in a chant. "You're going to drink it; you're going to drink it! It'll eat at your heart. It'll rot your bones. It'll make you bald, and blind, and horrible like Hugo Brabyn. You're going to drink it—"

Barrett's desperate effort was not

enough to combat the strength in Maley's squeezing fingers. His jaws were being forced still farther apart. In spite of himself he could not keep his lips closed. He felt Maley move, felt the cold rim of the glass touch his mouth.

Then—the stuff spilled through Barrett's lips. It filled his mouth. One instant he choked in a crazy attempt to spit it out; but Maley's huge hand clapped across his face. The glass clinked to the floor as Maley kept Barrett's head back, and his palm pressed tight over his mouth.

"Swallow it! You can't keep from swallowin' it!"

"Sam—stop!" Dr. Lang's voice was a shriek. "Stop!"

Barrett was battling for breath, battling to keep the shining poison from trickling down his throat. Back still farther Maley forced his head, keeping his lips tight closed.

"Swallow it!"

Maley looked up quickly. His head cocked as he listened. From below came a moaning voice:

"Doctor! Doctor—Lang."

The call came in the husky tones of Hugo Brabyn. Sam Maley straightened with a mutter. A door swung below, and a hesitant footfall sounded at the bottom of the hallway stairs.

"Doctor—Lang!"

Maley answered with a snap: "Go back, Hugo! Go back to your bed!"

"I want—Doctor Lang."

Snarling with rage, Maley spun away from Barrett. He strode swiftly out the door to the head of the stairs. "Go back!" he shouted again. "Do you hear me? Go back!"

Barrett's head dropped down, the muscles paining. He shot the poisonous stuff from his mouth, across the room. Gasping, he spat particles from his lips—particles that would corrode the life out of him if they lodged in his system. He

peered through the door, at Sam Maley's hulking body.

There were footfalls again on the steps below. Hugo Brabyn was coming up.

Maley started down angrily. His heels thumped and he disappeared from view. Quickly, then, a flutter of movement sounded outside the door. Elsa Brabyn stopped on the sill, blinking in the light, gazing in horror at Barrett and Dr. Lang.

"Elsa, look out for him!" Dr. Lang whispered.

The girl came quickly to Barrett. A knife glittered in her hand, a long carving blade. As she brought its edge to the bonds that fastened Barrett's hands, the voices of Hugo Brabyn and Sam Maley mingled in argument on the stairs.

"Father knows now; he heard everything Sam said. Father unlocked my door. You must keep Maley from him—you must!"

The ropes dropped loose. Barrett jerked his wrists up, as new blood throbbled in his fingers. He took the knife quickly from the girl.

She was at the door, watching, while Barrett hacked loose the strands that bound his ankles. As he started for Dr. Lang's chair Elsa cried softly: "He's—coming!"

MALEY'S feet beat quickly on the stairs. He sprang to the landing and faced the door, peering in at Barrett. Barrett turned away from Dr. Lang as the huge figure moved closer. The sweated arms raised as Maley poised for a rush.

"Stay back, Maley!" Barrett commanded tightly.

Maley's puffy lips drew back and a snarl tore from his throat. He heaved himself across the sill, bent forward, his face beet-red with wrath. Barrett, facing him, brought the knife forward as a warning. But Maley inched closer, crouch-

ing. And suddenly, snarling, he leaped.

Barrett flung himself aside to avoid the lumbering rush. He struck out with a left that grazed Maley's jaw but did not stop him. The big man crushed against Barrett, and his hand gripped the wrist of Barrett's hand that clasped the knife. He twisted the blade downward and pulled, pulled the knife toward Barrett's chest.

The point glimmered low as Barrett summoned strength to thrust his arm straight. He wrenched loose from Maley's crushing grasp, tore his hand free, and thrust at the fattish face. Maley lurched back, across the still of the door, still gripping Barrett's wrist.

A vicious twist loosened Barrett's fingers. The knife fell, clicked against the stair-railing, and clattered down to the steps. Maley, panting, crouched at the head of the stairs and swung his thick arm for another rush. Barrett faced him in the hallway. And then, from the dark well of the stairs, he heard the slow footfalls of Hugo Brabyn coming up.

Dr. Lang was straining desperately at the bonds which fastened him to his chair. Elsa Brabyn was struggling with the knots, endeavoring to free him, and glanced quickly, in terror, toward Barrett who stood beyond the door.

Barrett stepped forward quickly, firmly balanced. His fists shot out in clean, hard-driving blows, as Maley straightened and attempted a new rush. Maley's body jerked to a standstill as Barrett's fists clipped him. He straightened with a sharp intake of breath. And Barrett went at him, step by step.

Maley made a heavy lunge that Barrett sidestepped. His knuckles clicked to the side of Maley's head. The heavy man tottered, spilled to his side, and lay gasping.

Then it was that Barrett glimpsed Hugo Brabyn on the stairs—the man whose

ghastly face glowed faintly in the gloom. His gray-filmed eyes were fixed on Maley; he was dragging himself up the steps slowly, one at a time; and in his raised right hand, closed within fingers from which the skin was peeling, he gripped the long-bladed knife which had dropped on the stairs.

Elsa Brabyn cried: "Father, don't!"

Barrett moved to grasp the dying man's arm even as Hugo Brabyn lunged with the knife. Sam Maley was gasping, peering at the poised blade. He scrambled back, dragged himself to his knees. And the blow fell.

Maley ducked forward, and the arm of Hugo Brabyn struck across his shoulder. The blade stopped in empty air. Maley sprang up, clutching at Brabyn, and Brabyn made another futile thrust. Maley shoved the man away with a vicious blow toward the head of the stairs. Breath sighed from Brabyn's lungs as he tottered, but still he grasped Maley's arm. As he felt the weight of his body pulled sharply.

A piercing scream of rage and fright broke from Maley's throat as he snatched at the newel-post and missed. The next instant Brabyn was spilling down the stairs and Maley, jerked off balance, was catapulting over him. Their bodies crashed down the flight one swift, terrible moment. And when they struck the floor below, they rolled and then lay still.

Nick Barrett clung to the top of the stairs. Neither Brabyn nor Maley was

moving. He hurried down, and bent over the two men. Maley's head lay at a grotesque angle, twisted; his neck was broken. And Brabyn was lying face up, arms spread, the hilt of the knife protruding from his chest—driven deep during the fall.

The hall was dark, and in the gloom the prostrate body of Hugo Brabyn glowed.

Barrett saw Elsa Brabyn gazing in terror down the stairs, and hurried up them. The girl had succeeded in loosening some of the ropes that bound Dr. Lang and the physician was liberating himself. Barrett stood beside Elsa Brabyn and she turned toward him, pale and dry-eyed.

"Nick—Nick!"

Sobs surged behind her lips. Barrett knew that she could not long keep them back. He put his arms around her and held her close; she clung to him.

He gazed past her shoulder down the stairs into the dark room below. The body of Hugo Brabyn lay glowing greenly in the gloom. From the flesh into which the knife had plunged blood was trickling—blood that shone in the dark.

"I'm going to get you away from here, Elsa. I'm going to take you away," he murmured.

"Yes," she sobbed, "Oh, yes. Soon, Nick, dear. And we'll never have to come back, will we?"

But Nick Barrett did not waste words in his answer.

THE END

NEXT MONTH—

HUGH B. CAVE, ARTHUR LEO ZAGAT, WILLIAM B. RAINEY,

H. M. APPEL and other Mystery Masters!

Murder Below

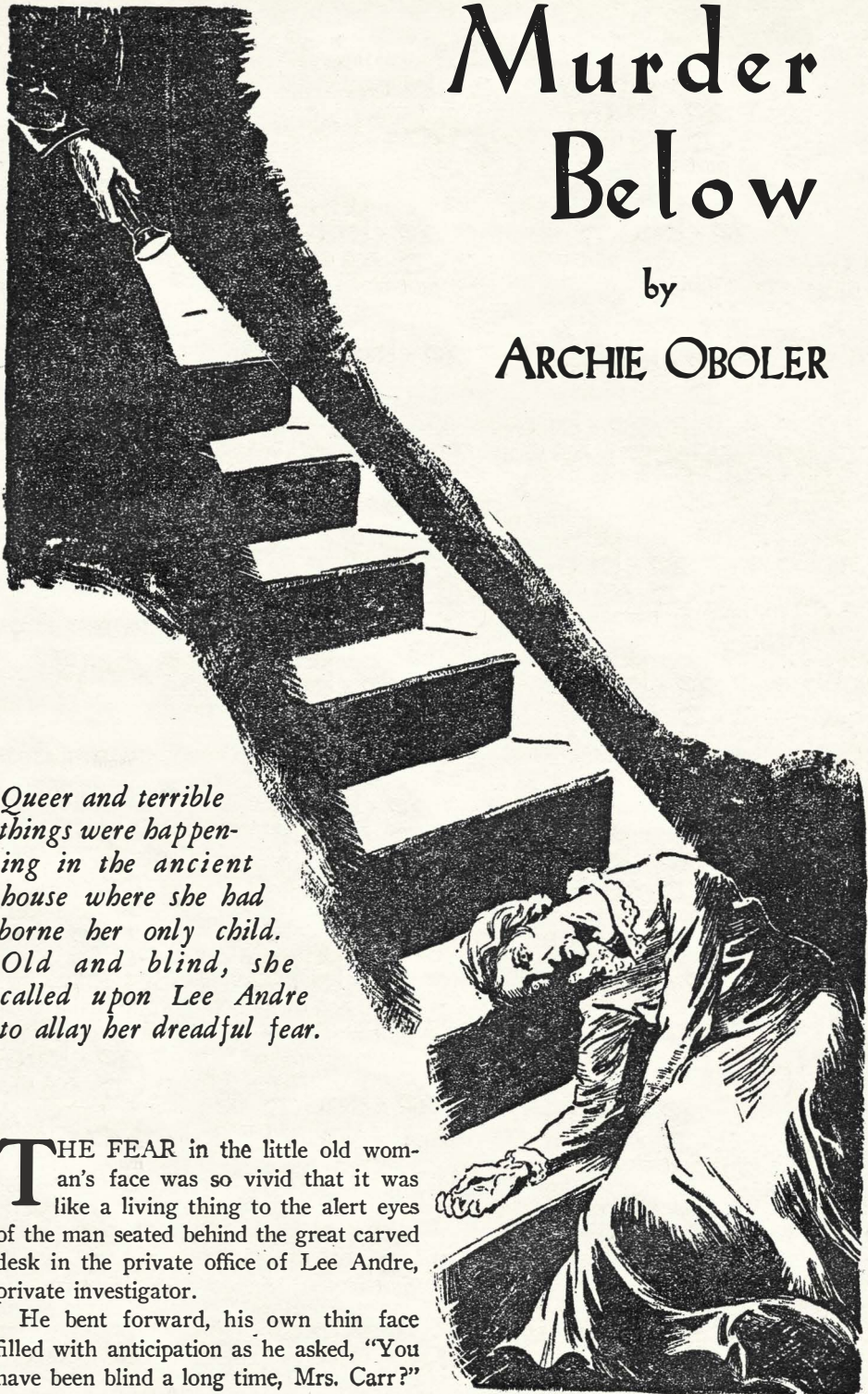
by

ARCHIE OBOLER

Queer and terrible things were happening in the ancient house where she had borne her only child. Old and blind, she called upon Lee Andre to allay her dreadful fear.

THE FEAR in the little old woman's face was so vivid that it was like a living thing to the alert eyes of the man seated behind the great carved desk in the private office of Lee Andre, private investigator.

He bent forward, his own thin face filled with anticipation as he asked, "You have been blind a long time, Mrs. Carr?"



"Almost thirty years," answered the little old lady. Her sightless eyes were lifted toward the detective. "I became blind three months before my baby was born. I was never"—she faltered—"I have never been able to see him."

The long, thin fingers of the detective's left hand drummed soundlessly on the desk-top before he spoke again.

"And now, after thirty years, because of a dying statement of your husband, you believe your son still lives; believe that he did not, as you had been told, die a few months after birth?"

"Yes," whispered the woman, and over her wrinkled face passed a look of strange dread. "I must find him. I must!"

Andre looked long and penetratingly at little old Mrs. Carr seated before him; then he said, "I believe I can help you. But I'll take the case on one condition—you must tell me absolutely everything. Now suppose you start all over and tell me exactly what happened."

The woman's aged hands fumbled nervously with a lace-edged handkerchief. Her bent little body shuddered deeply; finally, in a low, tremulous voice, she spoke:

"My husband and I were very happy, excepting for one thing: we had no children. The years went by, empty for both of us, it seemed. I was almost forty when at last it happened—I was to have a baby. You can imagine our joy.

"Three months before the baby was to be born, I went blind, completely blind. Hemorrhage of the optic nerve, I was told. My husband called in the greatest specialists in the country, but they could do nothing. I would be blind forever. I would never see my baby.

"And yet, even that could not take from me all my happiness. I was to have a baby. Nothing else in the world mattered.

"We lived then in the very same house I have now. Only in those days our closest neighbor was a mile away, and the city was a long ride away over poor roads.

"My baby was born prematurely on a night of storm. Only my husband and Ella, our house-woman, were there. For days I was semi-conscious. When I regained my senses again and asked for my child, my husband told me that he had taken the baby to a hospital in the city so that it might have the best of attention."

Andre waited in silence until the tears had ceased coursing down the sightless wrinkled face.

"And then?" he asked.

"It was not until I was much stronger that he told me the terrible news. The baby had died shortly after birth."

"Exactly what was the situation or conditions of your husband's sudden death?" Andre asked.

"I am not very strong, and so I stay in my rooms most of the time. My husband always came in, after dinner, to read to me. That evening, two weeks ago, he rushed into the room, and from his rapid breathing I could tell that he was very excited.

"Has—has anyone been—?" he began.

"Then he uttered a hoarse cry and fell heavily to the floor. I screamed for Ella and together we lifted him to the bed. Ella ran for water, and as I stood there crying, holding his hand, suddenly he spoke: 'He lives,' he whispered. 'He lives . . . Daniel . . .' and then something that sounded like the word 'bay.'

"I COULD feel him struggling to say more, but in a few seconds he was dead. 'Daniel'—that was the name we had planned to give our baby. I know my son lives, and I've got to find him before—"

"Before what?" Andre demanded sharply. When the old woman did not

answer, he said, "You live in Highland Park, don't you, Mrs. Carr?"

"Yes, yes, but—"

"For the past two weeks, since the night of your husband's sudden death, in fact, there have been three horrible murders in the vicinity of your home. Is that not so?"

The face of the blind old woman whitened abruptly. The expression of fear stood out in every feature.

"Yes," she answered slowly. "That is why I am here. I need help. The help of someone who is strong and sure. There are strange things happening—inside my home—since that night my husband died and told me that Daniel still lived. I am afraid. I want your help."

Andre got to his feet. "And you shall have it," he said. "Go back to your hotel and rest for a while, Mrs. Carr. Within an hour—by five this afternoon—I will call for you and we will drive out to your home in my car."

His questing gray eyes were strangely gentle as he looked down at the sightless, motherly face of the old lady, that face with the strange echo of fear in it.

"Don't worry any more," he added, helping her into the elevator. "I am sure I can help you!"

He picked up the phone from his desk and called a police number. "Inspector Beals, please," he said. "Hello, Inspector; Lee Andre. Listen: I've got something quite interesting for you. . . . Well, it'll take all of four hours, if not more . . . Busy, eh? That's too bad. . . . Oh, not particularly. Might have some bearing on those Highland Park murders you've been worried about. You'll be right over? Good! I'll be waiting."

When Inspector Beals, short, florid-faced, and the best man-hunter on the force, arrived, Lee Andre was deeply immersed in a book.

Inspector Beals, as usual, came right

to the point. "Now what the hell is all this about these Highland Park murders?"

"What time is it?" asked Andre irrelevantly.

"Five sharp. What—?"

"I'm going to introduce you to a blind little lady who doesn't deserve the cards Life's dealt her," said Andre. "Then we're going for a ride — to Highland Park."

Beals grumbled under his breath, but he did not push his questioning any further. He knew Lee Andre too well for that. He had a profound admiration for the private investigator, an admiration founded on an appreciation of one who gets results. He knew quite well that Andre never went on wild goose chases.

In the twenty-minute drive down to the hotel where Mrs. Carr was waiting, Andre briefly sketched the situation to the police official.

"But what possible tie-up is there between this missing son and the murders?" demanded the latter when Andre had finished.

"Beals," returned Andre, "that woman came to me not so much as a mother wanting her missing son found for her, but as a woman in horrible dread. It shows in her face. It quivers in every word she speaks. And it's our job to find out what she's afraid of."

"SO YOU think that this disappearing son of hers had a hand in those attacks," muttered Inspector Beals. "Not very firm ground to work on, have you?"

"Inspector," mused Andre, "when you come into a room where a man lies dead, a pistol in his hand, and no witness to his death, how are you able to tell, practically instantly, whether the case is a suicide or a murder?"

"You know the answer to that as well as I do. Observation—past experience.

Mix in a little intuition if you want to."

"Experience . . . intuition. Precisely," said Andre. "That's the very reason I'm on this case."

"What're you talking about?"

"You'll see—perhaps."

"I'm beginning to get this," Inspector Beals said. "I suppose, somewhere in that library of crime of yours, you ran across a similar case that happened somewhere years and years ago, eh? Come to think of it, I remember a case like this that I read about a long time ago."

Andre was non-committal. "Perhaps," he admitted again. Then, after a brief silence: "Inspector, would it surprise you very much if the murderer happened to be a cripple?"

"Very much, Andre," replied Inspector Beals, a sardonic grin on his face, "for I happen to have positive knowledge, that these three Highland Park murders weren't done by any cripple."

"Really?" returned Andre, unconcernedly.

"Yes, sir! And we've got a very good idea who this murderer is. He's a discharged employee from one of the homes, a drug addict. I spoke to Chief Freed out there, and he tells me he expects his men to pick up the fellow any moment."

"Then why did you accept my invitation to come with me?" Andre wanted to know.

Inspector Beals smiled, a little shamefacedly. "Well," he hesitated, "you see it's this way—"

Andre smiled and put a hand on the other's arm. "Sure, I know, Inspector, you're always laughing at my everlasting curiosity, but your own bump is pretty well developed. Well, I'm certain you're going to get some excitement out of tonight's work."

"Yeah?" scoffed Inspector Beals. "There's nothin' new under the sun, and I've seen my share and more!"

Andre's mouth quirked up in the corners, and he said nothing whatever.

When the limousine bearing the two men and the blind woman drew into the long, tree-shaded drive leading to the Carr home, the detectives learned the reason why Mrs. Carr had been driven to call on Andre. Scarcely a moment had passed, she had said, since the sudden death of the doctor, when her acute ears as she rocked the weary hours away in her room, had not caught peculiar sounds in the empty house below.

These strange noises—doors opening and furniture being moved about—so unnerved the blind woman that at last it had forced her to seek outside help.

Inspector Beals grumbled to himself at these revelations. A neurotic old woman imagining things, had been his personal verdict. But Andre had listened avidly, his gray eyes glistening with that constant look of eager curiosity.

The residence they drove up to was a sprawling architectural creation of the '80s, a huge house bristling with spires, cupolas, and budding bay-windows.

Ordering his chauffeur to remain outside and keep his eyes wide open, Andre led the little old woman, supporting her with his left arm, up the worn steps to the front door, while the bulky police official made up the rear guard.

Mrs. Carr handed Andre a key. "I told Ella to visit her sister's while I was in town," she explained. "I did not want her to stay here alone."

Andre fitted the key into the lock and turned it, and pushed the heavy door open. He stepped inside and pressed the electric switch button. The hall light revealed a long, narrow passageway.

Inspector Beals stepped forward. "You must be tired, Mrs. Carr," he said gruffly. "Can I take you to your room?"

"Please," she replied.

When the old woman was comforta-

ble in a rocking chair in her room facing the head of the stairs, Andre said, "Mrs. Carr, since your housekeeper isn't here, I wonder could you give us some information on this house? Do you remember the lay-out of these rooms?"

"Perfectly," replied the blind woman. She went on to tell them that the house contained eight rooms, five rooms upstairs and a kitchen, dining room, and parlor below.

"And the basement?"

"The house is heated by stoves. There is no basement," she told him.

"I see. Thank you, Mrs. Carr," said Andre. "Now, if you don't mind, we'll look over the house."

When they were outside the woman's room, Inspector Beals turned to the investigator. "See here, Andre," he spluttered, "I'll bet we're wasting our time. There's no crime picture here. That woman's old, neurotic. Her mind's a little upset by the death of her husband. She sits there alone all day and thinks up a lot—"

HIS WORDS were cut short by a sudden noise at the rear of the house, a sound as of a heavy object being dragged down a flight of steps.

Together the men rushed down the stairs. By the time they had reached the kitchen, the noise had ceased. Inspector Beals found the light-switch, and in the glare of the center light, they saw that the room was deserted.

"I thought she said there was no basement," exclaimed Inspector Beals, pointing to one side.

There, swung wide open, stood a door; the gleam of the flashlight in Andre's hand revealed steps leading downward.

Andre moved the circle of light, and the beam uncovered a sight which brought an exclamation of horror from the police official's lips. Crumpled at the foot of the stairs was the body of an old

woman, her neck twisted grotesquely to one side, her eyes bulging in the fixed stare of death!

In a moment the two men were bent over the still figure; Andre, after a moment's inspection, said, "She's dead, all right. This must be the housekeeper."

Inspector Beals began groping around looking for a light. After a moment he called, "Andre! Let me have your flashlight. It's blacker than—"

As Andre came forward, throwing the strong beam right and left as he walked, he suddenly exclaimed, "Look!"

Inspector Beals followed the direction of the pencil of light; it revealed the fact that one wall of the place, apparently, was made of solid metal with a heavy iron door, the few inches of space between it and the jamb exposing the blackness of another room ahead, the only opening in the glistening expanse.

Inspector Beals jumped to one side of this door and Andre to the other.

"Come out of there!" demanded the police official, rapping with his gun on the metal wall. "Come out or we come in shooting."

There was no sound from within.

Andre's foot glided out; with a violent kick he shoved the door wide open and jumped back.

"Come out!" rasped Inspector Beals again, his gun bearing directly on the opening.

Again there was no reply.

The shaft of light darted into the darkness beyond the door. Twenty feet past the opening, the circle of light hit a blank wall. There was no sound, not the slightest trace of movement from within to betray an occupant.

Again Inspector Beals called with no reply. With an impatient exclamation, Andre stepped into the room beyond the barrier, his light sweeping back and forth.

Inspector Beals, his heavy face glistening with sweat, was close behind Andre, his gun menacing the looming shadows. But as the light moved around, he relaxed, straightening up with a sheepish grin on his face.

"Nobody here," he said.

But Andre appeared not to have heard him; he stood in a tense crouch, his eyes following the survey of the circle of light around the small room.

A brass bed, a small table, two chairs, and a cabinet completed the furnishings. The bedding on the old-fashioned bed, Andre saw, was dirty and mussed. He moved closer, and grunted in surprise. Every article in the place was bolted to the floor!

ANDRE'S quiet tenseness disturbed the other man. He said, "Well, what's the matter?"

Andre was looking slowly from object to object. It seemed to Inspector Beals, as he watched him, that the other's eyes were glowing in the dark with a curious inward light.

"I said what's the matter?" he repeated impatiently. "The murderer must be hiding some place else. I'm going out there." He swung the hand in which he grasped the gun in the direction of the door.

Even as he made the gesture, he staggered back, his arms flailing out wildly as he struggled for balance. His mouth hung open, his face a picture of angry surprise, then he fell, crushing beneath his bulk one of the frail chairs, the gun flying from his hand as his fingers clawed at air.

When he struggled to his feet again, his face apoplectic with rage, he found himself in the spot-light of Andre's hand-lamp.

"Who pushed me?" he demanded. "Somebody shoved me!" Then his voice

broke with rage. "W-where's my gun? Hey, Andre, where's my gun? Why—why don't you answer me? W-what's going on here, anyway? Where's my gun?"

Andre's hand moved out, and the irate police official saw the glint of his revolver.

"Don't get excited," came Andre's voice. "It's all over. For a few minutes, anyhow. Come on, let's get out of here." Then, as the other man still stood there. "Quick! Follow me!"

Something in the other man's voice made Inspector Beals obey, in spite of his rage and confusion. He followed Andre out of the room, through the basement, past the crumpled body, and up the stairs.

When they stood once more in the kitchen, Andre shut the door behind them and carefully locked it.

"Now, what is it?" asked Beals.

"Look over the rooms downstairs," was Andre's answer. "I'm going up to talk to Mrs. Carr, then you and I have work to do."

When the police official went upstairs to the old woman's room, ten minutes later, after a fruitless search of the ground floor, he found Mrs. Carr alone.

"Where's Mr. Andre?" he demanded.

"He went down the hall to my husband's study," the blind woman told him. "Is—is everything all right?"

"Yeah," grumbled Beals, with a suspicious glare at the sightless eyes. Then he went down the hall, peering into room after room until he found Andre. The detective was seated behind a huge desk, in a somber, book-circled room, intently reading a large, brass-ringed note-book.

"Find something?" demanded Beals.

Andre looked up. "Plenty," he said tersely. Then he seemed to collect himself and stood erect, the papers falling from his hand. "Come with me."

He led the way to another room up the hall. As he opened the door, Inspector Beals behind him could see that the place was filled with apparatus. Obviously it was a laboratory.

Andre walked over and fondled a microscope whose brass tubing gleamed dully in the half-light.

"Dr. Carr appears to have been somewhat of a research worker," he said.

"In what?" snapped Inspector Beals.

"Many queer things. This, for instance." He walked over and stood by an instrument, a two-foot cube, in appearance not unlike an over-size box camera.

INSPECTOR BEALS gave a snort of impatience. "What's this foolishness?" he demanded. "A woman's been murdered in this house, and here you're snooping around like a correspondence-school detective. What's it all about?"

The thin man looked reflectively at the disturbed face of the police official. "I play the game my own way," he said softly. "And I'll have the murderer before we leave tonight!"

"What!" exclaimed Beals.

"Inspector! Listen to me!" There was a strange expression of mingled fascinated curiosity and incredulity on Andre's face as he spoke. "I've run into something so impossible here that I doubt my own senses. Something that neither of us ever dreamed of! Don't ask questions now; just help me. Here, take this extension cord. We're going back to the basement."

Inspector Beals stared at him a moment. His mouth opened, then he shut his jaws firmly, shrugged his shoulders and picked up the coil of wire.

Through the silent tomb of a house and into the kitchen went the two men. After Andre had plugged one end of the extension-cord into a receptacle close to the door leading into the basement, he

screwed a bulb into the brass socket. Then, light held high, he led the way down the steps, past the murdered woman, and into the basement itself.

Something of the suppressed excitement in the other's attitude communicated itself to the police official; he watched attentively as Andre, holding the brilliant light before him, began to examine the walls in the fore-part of the room.

All at once Andre stopped with a muttered exclamation. Inspector Beals pressed forward to see the light revealing a hole that had been dug down under the walls at a spot where the floor was not cemented. He bent over. The hole curved downward, then upward again like the burrow of some great underground beast.

"Give me the light," Beals muttered.

As Andre handed him the portable bulb, Inspector Beals tensed.

"There's — there's something coming up here," he grated.

Andre swiftly reached out, seized the light, and flipped the switch.

In the darkness that swooped down upon them, both men stood tensely close to the opening in the floor. Closer and closer came the heavy, brushing sounds. Then a shuddering, gasping noise, and Andre's fingers turned on the socket-switch. It clicked, but nothing happened. The bulb had gone dead!

As Andre turned and ran back toward the stairs to get his flash-light, he heard Inspector Beals' voice sound out in a loud bellow of pain. A heavy gun roared suddenly, to be followed, almost simultaneously, by the clang of a metal door.

It seemed hours, but it was, actually, a matter of seconds before Andre, light in hand, rushed back to the basement. One sweep of the beam and he saw that the room was deserted. Beals was gone!

Andre saw that the door in the metal

wall was shut. He started forward when a shriek, terrifyingly inhuman, lifted the hair on his scalp. Then Beals' voice, quivering with a strange note of terror:

"Andre! For God's sake! Andre!"

Andre tore at the door. It came back slowly. And through the ever-widening gap came the hoarse gasping sounds of a man struggling for life.

Finally the opening was wide enough, and Andre jumped in, the revealing beam of his light thrust before him. Then he stopped, body bent, face twisted in an involuntary spasm of horror. This—this ghastly travesty was impossible. It could not be. And yet—it was!

Andre's dry lips gaped open; clammy sweat covered his palms as he stared, wide-eyed at the sight before him.

WRAPPED around the burly frame of Inspector Beals, there on the floor, was a huge, gray-white octopus; two horrible, hairy arms clamped around the blood-congested face of its victim!

Then, as the light shifted, the distended eyes of the watcher saw that the naked frame was not that of a beast—it was human and yet inhuman in form. A being that was a monstrous caricature of a man. The torso was small, half that of the man beneath it, weird in proportion to the tremendously long, thin extremities that coiled and twisted.

But it was the head of the Thing—it was the head that tied up Andre's muscles in the paralysis of terror, that kept him in quivering inaction while the life was slowly being crushed from the body of his friend.

Large, monstrously shaped, twice normal size, hairless and wrinkled, the skin loomed a sickly greenish-white, like that of a creature that lurks in eternal subterranean darkness.

Darker and darker went the face between the crushing claws; and, with a gasp, Andre tore loose from the paral-

ysis of his own horror, reaching for the gun in his shoulder-holster.

Just as the detective's fingers closed on the butt of the weapon, the Thing turned its head; the light caught the features. Andre staggered back as if something had struck him between the eyes, horror, unbelief, and terror quivering through his frame.

It was a face out of a nightmare that gaped up at him; a huge, drooling thing the color of something long dead . . . a gap where a nose should have been, a dull gash of a down-curving mouth, two heavy folds of dead-white tissue instead of eyes, and in the sloping forehead a single, tiny, unblinking eye that glared malignantly into the light!

For an instant there was no sound, no movement, then the Thing slowly released the livid neck and pivoted toward Andre.

Out came the gun into Andre's hand. It roared once, then, as the Thing leaped forward, it spat fire again. A shriek like the wail of a demon-tortured soul blasted the air, and then again all was still. . . .

* * *

Inspector Beals awoke to the smell of antiseptic, a fiery pain in his throat. As his eyes flickered into focus, he saw above him, the face of Lee Andre.

"What the hell!" he muttered as he struggled to sit upright.

Then Andre's arms were helping him, and he sat up to find himself in bed. His head throbbed with an insistent ache. He raised a hand to his bandaged neck.

"Easy, Inspector," said Andre.

Beals tried to speak again. "What—" he managed, but Andre silenced him.

"It's all over," he said, his voice still vibrant with excitement. "You and I have just been through the maddest experience two men ever had. Take it easy, and I'll tell you all about it."

Inspector Beals relaxed, his eyes wide open, his hand at his throat.

"Thirty years ago," Andre began, "that woman upstairs had a baby. She was told it died. But it didn't die. It lived on—right here—in the very same house with her!"

"You mean—that Thing down there—was her—" gasped the inspector.

Andre nodded. "Nature did something she may never do again in a million years. That monster down there was human flesh—no, I'm not crazy! I thought I was a little while ago, but it's true, damnably true.

"You'll remember that Doctor Carr and that old housekeeper were the only people present that night, thirty years ago, when the baby came. You can imagine the madness of that moment when the doctor grasped his new-born child and found that it was what medical men call a *Cyclocephalus*, a child so deformed, through some strange development of the embryo, that it could not be considered human.

"Human monstrosities, weird twistings of the stuff that makes us all, occur more often than is generally known, but, invariably, they die shortly after birth.

"But in this case the Thing lived. Perhaps the father could not bear to kill this, his flesh and blood. Perhaps he—well, who can tell? In any event he permitted the Thing to go on, this horrible monster with its inhuman features, its single, cyclopean eye in its misshapen head.

"He told the mother her baby had died. But the Thing lived on there below the house in those steel quarters, its existence known only to the unfortunate father and his faithful housekeeper. The years crept by. There in the darkness, like some beast of the night, the inhuman son existed while the doctor desperately experimented—X-ray, ultra-violet, infra-rays—with what hope, God alone knows . . .

"And then, one day, the Thing must have broken loose from its confines. The old doctor must have come from the basement, been attacked by it, struggled upstairs to his wife's room to warn her—remember he gasped out the word 'bay'—then collapsed from the strain on his aged heart. Those mysterious murders followed. Next, the housekeeper met the monster. Mrs. Carr herself might have been"—Andre made a grimace—"well, we came just in time!"

Inspector Beals had full command of his faculties now. "Where—where is it now?"

Andre told him all that occurred after he had been attacked.

"I shot," he concluded, "and did what the father should have done thirty years before. His failure to kill his inhuman issue cost four innocent lives."

"How did you know—" began Beals.

"The steel-enclosed room lined up with my theory of a monster hidden from the mother by the father," explained Andre. "Then, fortunately, old Doctor Carr was a scientifically-minded man. He left complete records of the case. I found them.

"You know, the fortunate thing was that the monster had lived down there so long that, instinctively, after its wild nightly excursions, it returned to the only home it had ever known."

His eyes glistened. "Imagine what would have happened as it grew bolder and began to go on through the city!"

The police official shuddered convulsively, then shook his head in confusion.

"It's all so hard to believe," he said, in his face the muddled, awe-stricken expression of one who has looked upon the impossible.

Lee Andre grinned down at him.

"So, after all, there can be 'something new under the sun,' " he said.

And, for once, Inspector Beals nodded his head in thorough agreement.

BLACK LAUGHTER

By ARTHUR LEO ZAGAT

Author of "The Swamp Terror," etc.

Jean Armstrong, alone and terrified in the big house where she had once known happiness and love, fights for sanity—as the echo of black, inhuman laughter dins through dark passage-ways of deserted rooms.





Mystery-Terror Novelette

reverberations of the dream-heard gong that twice before had swept her out of sleep.

Last night, and the night before, that deep-toned bell had sounded in her dreams—a welling vibration just above the lower threshold of hearing—a bass note somehow infinitely menacing. And each morning had brought . . . Jean whimpered, way back in her throat.

Far off, the long-drawn, melancholy wail of a locomotive whistle sounded. Jean forced her attention to it.

JEAN ARMSTRONG woke with a start. There was no sound in the darkness of her bedchamber, nothing moved against the moon-painted rectangle of her window. But Jean was in a cold sweat of fear, and terror pounded in her temples.

“Again!” she whispered with icy lips. “Please God. Not again.” She lay still, rigid in the paralysis of nightmare. The silence of the old house weighed on her like a pall, but within it, within her tightened brain, she could still hear the dying

“That’s the midnight freight at Hope-ton Junction. Bill Sims is the engineer on it, he lives down in the village and his father is the postmaster there.” The homely thought gave her a hold on reality, broke the spell binding her to immobility. Her slim hand moved along the blanket, slid under her pillow, felt the coldness of the little pearl-handled .22 hidden there. Her last night’s resolution came back, her braggart boast to Rand Lane. She would not wait till morning this time.

Gripping the gun, she pushed back the

covers, swung silk-pajamaed legs from the bed and slipped tiny feet into frivolous feather-trimmed mules. She shivered a little in the crisp cold and pulled a quilted robe around her. Then she was moving across the carpeted floor.

With her hand on the door knob she hesitated. Should she call for help? She shrugged. The servants sleeping above; Elmer Thomas, toothless and decrepit; his wife Prudence, sour-faced and hysterical; they would be a hindrance in any emergency, not a help. Why hadn't she let Rand send out a guard from the village, as he had proposed? Too late now. The knob rattled, hinges creaked, and she was out in the hall.

The musty, warm odor of the ancient house folded around her, comforting for a moment. But shadows lay in pools on the staircase she must descend, shadows that might hide—almost anything. Jean turned to go back, time enough when daylight came to see if the bell's prophecy had been fulfilled. A vision of Rand's face rose before her, smiling that taunting, thin-lipped smile of his.

"Just as I thought," he would say slowly. "You haven't the courage. You are afraid."

She *was* afraid, deathly afraid of what she might find. But she dare not let Lane know it. For five years now, since her father's death, he had tried to break her spirit, to dominate her. Trustee under the will, he had control of her estate and managed it to suit himself. But he had never succeeded in controlling her, in managing her. He had wanted her to go to New York, to go abroad, had insisted on it. Because he had insisted she had refused, as she had refused everything he had ever asked. Instinctively she knew that if she once yielded to him he would gain an ascendancy she could never again throw off. It had been hard, fighting alone. But it was almost over now—in three months she would reach her twenty-third birth-

day and after that she need never see Rand Lane again.

There was nothing, Jean told herself, on the stairs, in the foyer below, that could harm her. She knew every inch of the way, every last inch of this house as only one can know a house who has been born within its walls. She turned again and went down the steps, her slippers making little slapping noises on each tread.

The girl reached the big entrance door at last. Nothing had happened, nothing had struck at her from the midnight dimness that was somehow unfamiliar to her taut nerves. She was at the door and all that was left to do was to turn the key in the lock and draw the two strong bolts. All? How many thousands of times had she done those simple, mechanical things? But now—Jean scraped the very bottom of her reservoir of courage before she could force her hand to perform them.

It was done. Clutching the pearl-handled revolver Jean brought her ear to the panel and listened. Silence. She opened the inside door, pushed against the heavy storm door. A soft pressure resisted her thrust. Jean whimpered again, color drained from her small-featured face and an electric tingling rippled under the clinging, short-cap of brown curls that made her so like a pert boy. It *was* there, the thing she feared.

But was it? Snow had fallen during the evening. Only an hour's light fall, but perhaps it had drifted against the door. Perhaps it was that which held it with that light, yielding resistance. Perhaps—she had to know, had to see! She thrust again, and something slithered aside as the door-edge scraped past it. A shapeless bundle, humped and motionless. Not drifted snow! The bell in her dream had fulfilled its threat once again.

JEAN'S terror-widened eyes flicked quickly away from the dark, still heap, swept across the expanse of snowy lawn,

glimmering bluely under the moon, probed into the black band of tall pine woods thirty feet beyond. The edging of white on the upper branches of the giant evergreens emphasized their brooding gloom. There was no movement there—not even a swaying of the dark foliage in a non-existent breeze. Standing motionless in the doorway, the girl's glance came back across the unmarred, soft sheet. Unmarred! There was not the faintest footprint on the thin powdering of fragile crystals, not the least sign that anyone had passed across it since the snowfall had stopped. Yet there was no snow on the thing that lay so still, so dreadfully still, here before her. No snow on the thing that had not been there when last she had looked across the whitened lawn.

Jean dared to look more closely at it. The moon's tender luminance softened the lines of the dead face that gazed at her with sightless eyes, made it less horrible than the others had been in the bright morning glare. But there was the same look of startled fear on it, there were the same blackened, congested lips with the tip of red tongue protruding between them. And on the bared throat, there were the same dark bruises left by strangling fingers, bruises that were too far apart to have been made by her small digits, by Elmer's or his sour-faced wife. If it had not been for that circumstance . . .

A metallic flash streaked through mid-air. *Spang!* A knife, deep-driven, quivered in the doorpost right beside Jean's head. *Spang!* Another knife trembled in the other post. From the woods cackling, eerie laughter shuddered. *Spang!* A third blade shivered in the sill, just at her feet. Jean's mouth opened in a soundless scream—and she twisted to a noise behind her, to a bony clutch on her arm!

"Miss Jean! Miss Jean! What are you doing here?" Elmer Thomas's querulous,

high-pitched voice—Elmer's skull-like, cadaverous face.

"Look out! Someone . . ." Wheee, *chunk!* A fourth knife whizzed past Jean's ear, thudded into Elmer's throat. Blood gushed. The old man's face was reproachful as he slid down out of her sight.

Jean got control of her limbs, slammed shut the storm door. *Thud!* A knife-point snicked through the center panel. Frantically Jean pushed shut the inside door. Wood-muffled, crazy laughter sounded once more.

Jean looked down at the contorted, gory visage of the old man who had served her father, had known the mother she did not remember. A special provision in Dad's will had kept Elmer and his wife here when Lane's cut in her allowance had sent away the other servants, had kept Elmer here—for this! No use to bend to him, no one could have survived that awful gash.

Hysteria tore at the girl's throat—grimaced her lips. A laugh started inside her, a mad laugh she fought to stifle. Her head went back, uncontrollably, and her gaze focussed on a framed picture high on the wall, a picture lit by the moon's rays coming through the fanlight over the door. Her father's face looked calmly down at her, strong-lined, indomitable. His eyes challenged her. His firm mouth, under the grizzled mustache that always flavored his kisses with tobacco smell, seemed to move, seemed to say: "Steady, Jean-girl. Steady." She gulped the laugh down.

"Elmer! Elmer!" A tenuous voice quavered from the third floor. "Where are you? Is anything wrong? I heard . . ." Bare feet thudded. Prudence was coming down. She must not—must not see this, unprepared.

"Wait!" Jean forced steadiness into her voice. "Wait. Don't come down here. I'm coming up to you." She fumbled the bolts back into their sockets, got to the

stairs, started up them. Her limbs dragged as if through a heavy, viscous fluid. She had to pull herself up by the bannister, dark-polished by decades of use. She had to pull herself up, hand over hand. "Wait, Prudence. It's Jean. I'm coming."

CHAPTER TWO

Alone with—Murder

PALE, shaken, Jean tried to shut her ears to the old woman's moaning as she twirled the magneto handle of the phone. Through the parlor door lamp-light folded over the kneeling woman, scrawny in her drab flannel nightgown, as she swayed from the waist in a litany of mourning and her withered hands fluttered above the lifeless husband, whose scrawny neck had received the knife meant for his mistress.

Jean frowned. *Had* the knife really been meant for her? Those flashing blades had come with too much dexterity, too much skill, for the thrower to have missed the target she had made. Only Elmer's neck and head could have showed beyond her, yet the dagger that had done for him had gone unswervingly to the vital point, clearing her own ear by a hair's breadth.

A sleepy voice in the receiver said; "Number, please." The operator at Hope-ton. Tommy Slade.

"Get me Sheriff Jenkins. Quickly!"

Jean could hear the boy jerk awake. "Right, Miss Armstrong." Clickings and a burr. "Somethin'—somethin' wrong again, Miss?"

"Yes, Tommy." Strange that her voice could be so steady, so calm, when all inside her was boiling, maddening fright. "Oh hurry, hurry!"

"I'm ring— Here he is."

"Hello." She could visualize the sheriff's gaunt, weathered face, deep-sunk eyes blinking drowsily. "Whut is it?"

"Jean Armstrong, Sheriff . . ."

"Godfrey mighty, thar ain't . . ."

"Another. Yes! And Elmer's been killed.—Come quickly, please. But be careful. Someone's in the pines—a knife-thrower. He murdered Elmer. Oh, be careful!"

"Be there in twenty minutes." Something reassuring in the crisp, purposeful phrase. "Keep away from the windows an' keep yer doors locked. I'll toot twice."

"No fear . . ." But a tinkle told her that the sheriff had hung up.

Keep away from the windows, he had said. But Jean could not. She had to look, had to make sure she did not know the dead man. The other two had been strangers, unknown to her, unknown to any in the countryside. Tramps, apparently, unshaven, unwashed. But this one—?

JEAN picked up a round-globed lamp from the parlor table, carried it out into the hall. "Prudence, hadn't you better go up and rest till the sheriff comes?" she asked gently. But the bereaved woman paid not the slightest attention to her as she swayed and moaned endlessly. The girl set the lamp down under the antlered hat-rack, went back into the parlor, pulling velour portieres across between her and the light. Now she would not be silhouetted against the pane, it would take keen eyes to see her there at all. From the bay window she would be able to see the patch of ground where—it—lay. Safely, she hoped.

The snow was still unmarked. Jean craned to get the body within view. Light enough—why—it—it wasn't there!

Nothing was there, except a dark, irregular oval where the body had been. The girl gasped, and fear laid its frigid fingers on her once again. The body had vanished—and there was nothing to show how it had gone. She reeled, grasped the sill with shaking fingers, stared out again, quivering. It wasn't . . .

A shriek knifed through the curtains from the foyer! Another! It twisted the girl around, pulled her through the heavy curtains. Prudence was on her feet, backed against the door. Her jaw chattered—yammering—and her bleared eyes started from their sunken sockets. One pipe-stem arm was upraised—one wrinkled finger pointed at the wall above the stairs.

"What is it? Oh what is it, Prudence?"

The woman's mouth worked, rasped sound. "Look. The picture. Look."

Jean whirled. Her father's picture—a knife handle stuck out from it, still trembling, its point buried in the portrait's breast. "*Oh-h-h!*" Indignation swept through her for an instant—blotted other emotion. Then the full impact of the happening smashed her. He was in the house—the killer was in the house! Through locked doors—locked windows—he had gotten in! As if in confirmation, cackling, mad laughter floated down to her from where the stairs lifted into darkness.

And in answer—in terrible answer—cackling, mad laughter came from behind her. From—she whirled to it, whitening—from Prudence, from a gibbering, red-eyed Prudence who stared at her insanely and laughed, and laughed, and laughed.

"Oh God!" The exclamation wrenched from Jean was a prayer. "Oh God help me." She was alone now, alone with a corpse, alone with an insane woman and a killer. A mad killer who threw knives with unerring aim, who choked men to death and wafted them through the air to lie across her door, who spirited them away without trace and who had come through solid walls, locked doors, to drive her insane too.

The floor rocked under her feet and the walls danced dizzily as nausea retched her. She raised hands to throbbing temples and felt coldness of metal against her

forehead. Through all the terror of the night she had unconsciously kept the little pistol clutched tightly in her small fist, the pistol Dad had given her before he—went away. Again she heard his deep, calm voice; "Steady, Jean-girl. Steady," just as it used to sound when, on their trips in the woods, something untoward occurred and she felt control slipping, woman-like. Just as he had whispered it when, tear-eyed, she had watched death's pallor stealing over his dear face. It drove back the gray reaching fingers of madness from her brain, brought sanity back to her. Sanity and red hot fury—unreasoning anger. She leaped for the stairs, reckless of danger, reckless of anything save the desire, the clamor, to kill!

She reached the first landing, crouched, and glared down the unlit hall. In the blackness something blacker moved, something scraped, fumbling along the wall. Her pearl-handled weapon spat flame, spat again. She fanned lead across the narrowness of the corridor, could miss nothing that lurked down there.

Could not miss? A door opened and shut, making sharp noise. The door of her father's room, locked since his death! And through the momentary phosphorescent rectangle of its opening, a hunched black figure had flitted. Uncanny, mocking laughter drifted to her.

The berserk lust to kill was still on Jean. In the pocket of her robe were extra cartridges. How she blessed her foresight now! Swiftly, she broke and reloaded her gun. Then she was at the door that had opened, was flinging it wide, gun cocked and ready. Moonlight flooded the chamber, searched out every corner of it, painted with its bluish silver the great four-poster bed, the Morris chair, the brick, book-shelf bordered fireplace. And no one was there! Jean's eyes flicked to the window—it was nailed shut as it had been for almost five years. She dropped

to her knees and looked under the bed. Nothing! There was no other hiding place—

Midnight terror closed about the girl again, dark, impenetrable. The very light bathing this well-loved room seemed the sourceless cold luminescence of nightmare horror . . .

Arrrnk! An auto horn sounded from outside. *Arrrnk!* A flivver horn. Sheriff Jenkins had arrived. A sob tore through the constricted muscles of Jean's throat. Warmth crept back into her limbs and she pulled herself slowly erect. Pounding came to her from the door below, and muffled shouting. "Open up! Open up!"

THE gaunt peace-officer scratched the gray stubble of his chin. "I'll be switched," he drawled. "Ef I kin make it out. Are yer sure it happened thet away?"

"Does all this look as if I have been dreaming?" Jean Armstrong gestured wearily.

Prudence Thomas was no longer laughing. She hunched in a chair, a gray bundle of misery, and there was no light of reason in her old eyes that stared vacantly into space. Elmer's age-shrunk form lay on the floor, stiffening now to a waxen mummy, the life-blood that had poured from his gashed throat a drying pool. From John Armstrong's portrait on the wall the black handle of a knife projected, casting a long shadow across the determined face so like her own. "Or do you think I did it myself?"

Jenkins looked at her speculatively from under his bushy eyebrows. "Wall, I mought think even thet ef it warn't fer two things."

"What are they?"

"Yer wouldn't stick a knife in yer old man's pitcher. All Hopeton county knows as how yer loved him ter much fer thet, keepin' his room jest like it was an' all.

An' my depities did find tracks in the pines. Ter be sure they was scuffed up an' might er been made by anyone, but yer couldn't hev gotten out thar an' back without leavin' tracks in the snow."

The girl argued perversely, "Someone did—why not I? Someone brought that body here and took it away without leaving tracks, and that somebody got into the house. He's here now, I'm sure he is." Her voice rose on that, broke on a shrill note of panic.

"Now, now, don't yer go gettin' all worked up again. Ef thar's anybody here Silas an' Pete'll find him."

Jean became conscious of the thump of boots overhead, saw a short, dark figure pass across the stair-head, pause for a moment to look down. "We war out thar fer ten minutes 'fore I honked, sarchin' the woods," the sheriff continued. "Yer saw him durin' thet time, yer say, an' he couldn't hev got away without my spottin' him. We'll find him."

"I couldn't find him in father's room and I saw him go into it." The girl's hands twisted, one within the other. "There's something unreal about him, something—diabolical!" Her eyes were dark pools of terror. "He isn't here—and he *is* here. I can feel him now, staring at me!"

The sheriff laid a gnarled hand on her shoulder, its touch light for all its hugeness. "Now, don't yer go off on thet track. Them knives is real enough, an' so is the one thet threw them. We'll git him. Don't yer be afraid, we'll git him."

"Oh, I hope so. I hope you get him before anything more happens." She shuddered. "Before anyone else is killed."

The man of the law touched the forty-eight in his belt, and smiled grimly. "Thar won't be any more killin' hereabouts, less'n I do it." He eyed the flickering kerosene lamp. "One thing puzzles me, Miss Armstrong, I know yer Dad

had a Delco system here, how come yer ain't usin' the 'lectric lights 'stead o' them lamps?"

Palpably, Jean thought, he was trying to change the subject, trying to talk normalcy back to her. She answered him, speaking low: "My allowance is just enough for my food and absolutely necessary clothing. These things were bought before Dad passed away. The electric generator went out of order and I didn't have enough money to get it repaired."

"Everyone thought Jack Armstrong left yer well fixed."

"Oh, he did. There must be at least two hundred thousand in bonds and investments, beside this house and the land. But although father and I were pals, he had a queer idea that a girl could not manage money properly. Something mother did before I was born had to do with that. So he left the estate in trust and I do not get control until my twenty-third birthday. My trustee has the right to give me as much or as little as he chooses till then."

"Hmmm. President Rand Lane o' the Hopeton National Bank's yer trustee, ain't he?"

"Yes."

"Knew Lane was a tight-fisted note-shaver but I'll be durned ef I kin see why he's so miserly with yer. Arter all, it's yer money."

"He wanted me to leave here, I refused, and he cannot brook opposition."

JENKINS' eyes were suddenly bleak, and a little muscle twitched in his weathered cheek. "Wanted yer to go away, eh," he said slowly, and there was a rumble deep in his chest.

"Yes. All these years he's tried to . . ."

She stopped as two tight-faced young men appeared at the head of the stairs, silver stars glittering on their leather mackinaws and blued automatics in their capable hands.

"Ain't ary one up here, Hen," the taller twanged nasally. "We've done sarched every inch o' the two floors."

That was Peter Lanning. His loose-fitting clothing made his six feet gawky, but there was strength in the set of his jaw, dependability in the level gaze of his eyes. The other, Silas Paynton, squat, long-armed, swarthy-faced, contrasted with him oddly, disquietingly.

"Haow 'bout the attic," Jenkins called.

"Ain't none. Thar . . ."

"The roof is flat," Jean explained. "Except for gables along the front. The third floor ceiling is right under it, and there isn't room for a cat between."

"Did yer take a look at the roof?"

"No way o' gettin' up there, 'cept from outside. No way o' someone gettin' in, neither."

Jenkins turned to the girl. "Thet right?"

"I—I think so. They always put a ladder up against the side of the house when there was anything to be done up there. I am sure nobody has been up for years."

"Hmmmm. The boys hev gone through the upstairs, me an' you hev sarched down here an' the cellar. Thar ain't no one in the house 'cept us. Thar ain't no one got away. Yet there was someone here. Et's got me stomped."

Jean's mouth twisted. "I tell you the—the killer *is* here. You can't find him but he's here. He'll stay here until he—he gets a chance to do something terrible to me. Not kill me—he's had chance enough to do that. Something else—something worse. That's what scares me—that I can't imagine what he is after, yet I know it's something—something hellish."

"No one's doin' nothin' ter yer. I'll see ter thet." The sheriff's tone lacked conviction and his eyes shifted to the dark corners where the lamplight did not reach. "I'm here an' . . ."

They whirled to an exclamation from

Prudence. The mindless old woman was mumbling something but her words were unintelligible. Her head, framed in straggly gray strings of hair, lifted in an attitude of listening, and little lights crawled in her empty eyes.

"It's acomin'," she yammered, her false teeth clicking. "It's acomin', Satan's wrath's acomin'. I hear them buzzin', buzzin', the hordes o' little imps in his retinoo." Her cracked voice squeaked louder, shriller, but above it they could hear a burring hum from somewhere without. "The servant o' Beelzebub is acomin', *the steward o' Lucifer is here!*"

The mad woman shrieked the last against a thunderous roar, just outside, shrieked it and fell writhing from her seat. And as she sprawled across her husband's body the roar stopped. There was a momentary silence, then a thunderous clap on the door.

"God Almighty!" Jenkins squeezed out and twisted to the door, his gun leaping into his fingers. Again the summons boomed.

"Get back, Miss Armstrong, get inter the parlor! I'm goin' ter open it."

The deputies, pale but game, hurtled down the stairs. The sheriff shot the bolts back, got his hand on the knob, slammed open the inside door, flung wide the storm door. An appallingly tall figure stood there, black against the moonlight. From the floor Prudence squealed, "Get thee behind me, Satan! Get thee behind me!" The officer fell back, slowly, and the lanky figure came as slowly in.

CHAPTER THREE

"It Did Not Happen"

"WHAT'S going on here?" A thin, inflectionless, almost feminine voice came from the newcomer, and his black eyes glittered under a round cap of

black fur. "Point that gun away from me before it goes off."

Jenkins' arm dropped to his side. "Beg pardon, Mr. Lane. We thought—we thought . . ."

"That I was the devil, I suppose, as I heard someone scream. What's it all about, Jean?" He looked sardonically down at the old woman grovelling at his feet, at the blood-smeared corpse. "Tom Stevens 'phoned me from the exchange the old fool had been killed and I drove out here as quickly as I could manage."

He unwound a heavy woolen scarf from around his neck, pulled off the fur cap with its attached ear-muffs. "But why the heavy artillery and the pale faces?" He smiled thinly and passed a gloved hand over his hairless scalp. His was a ferret's face, sharp-featured and predatory. "Are you expecting an attack in force?" Threadlike lines from pointed nose to lip-corners showed cruelty, ageless shrewdness, but otherwise the saturnine countenance was that of a young man.

"Rand, terrible things have been happening." There was no welcome in Jean's face as she stood backed against the side-wall, arms outstretched and palms pressed against it. "There is a madman loose in the house and we can't find him." She watched the sheriff send Pete Lanning outside, motion Silas to the stair-landing above. Lane wriggled out of his fur-lined coat, hung it carefully on the antlered rack, and came toward her, his long-fingered hands dry-washing each other in the immemorial gesture of the banker.

"A madman? It seems to me there is quite enough insanity already here that can be more easily found."

"It's been enough to drive anyone crazy," Jean flung at him. "Let alone that poor old woman." Even now she felt the antagonism with which he always inspired her. "You asked what happened and I

am trying to tell you if you will let me. But I shan't if you keep interrupting."

Lane bowed. "Proceed. I shall be silent as the grave."

"I heard that bell in my dreams again, and it woke me up. I told you yesterday I would trace it down if it came again. I came downstairs to do so, and . . ." She relived the terrors just passed and re-awakened horror squeezed her throat, made utterance difficult. But she won through the narrative. "Can you explain it, Rand?" she finished. For the first time Jean asked something from the man—perhaps his financier's mind, coldly analytical, could solve the mystery. "Can you understand what is happening?"

LANE shrugged. "It seems clear there is a homicidal maniac somewhere about. But I see nothing mysterious, remembering of course the hysterical make-up of the female mind."

"Oh how can you say . . ."

Jean's outburst was stayed by the other's raised hand. "My dear, you requested my silence while you had your say. Please accord me the same courtesy."

The girl bit her lips. "All right. But I am no more hysterical than you are."

"Others can better judge that. But we shall not discuss it at present. Do you wish me to go on?"

"Please."

"Very well. As I started to say, it is evident there is a murderous lunatic at large, someone who is dexterous at knife-throwing. A foreigner perhaps, a Sicilian or East Indian. I believe many individuals of both races are skilled in that art. For some reason he has picked on this house for his ministrations. Perhaps for no reason a sane being could comprehend. Having killed two tramps, probably in the vicinity of the hobo 'jungle' we know to exist near the railroad crossing at Hope-ton, he carried and deposited them here as

a way of disposing of them that appealed to his twisted brain. Tonight he was probably lurking in the pine grove when you so foolishly exposed yourself as a target. He threw four knives at you, unsuccessfully, then another that found a billet in Thomas' throat. You got behind the door and he could not reach you any longer." Lane spread his hands wide. "That is all there is to it."

"But the third corpse that was out there and disappeared. The knife that was thrown into Dad's picture from inside the house. The figure I shot at that dived into father's room and vanished. You have not explained those at all."

The corners of Lane's narrow-slitted mouth lifted a trifle. "I said *four* knives were thrown before the one that killed Thomas, you remember. One of these passed over your head and struck the portrait. As for the rest—" again the banker's lip-joinings quirked in his humorless smile—"they are figments of your hysterical imagination. You expected to see a corpse outside the door and saw one in a drift of snow. Not having noticed the dagger in the picture before Prudence glimpsed it and finally lost a mind that has long been tottering, you jumped to the conclusion that the killer was in the house."

"In the same way your hysterical, overwrought eyes changed a flickering shadow to a running human form at which you fired. The reflected flash of your gun made you think a door had opened down the hall. The final laugh—well, that may have been Mrs. Thomas, or it may have been the other lunatic, still outside." He paused.

"You see, Jean, there is no such thing as the supernatural outside of a few unbalanced minds. In the real world any event that cannot be naturally explained simply did not happen."

"By jingo!" the listening sheriff ex-

claimed. "He's right! Ye've hit the nail on the head, Mr. Lane! Thar warn't no tracks in the snow so thar warn't no corpse. Thar ain't no one in the house, so thar never war. Ef'n yer don't know how somethin' happened it never did happen. That's what eddication does fer yer!"

Lane glanced at Jenkins suspiciously, but turned back to Jean. "This is no place for you my dear. Suppose you go upstairs, dress, and pack a few things. I have a room reserved for you in the Hopeton House, and tomorrow afternoon you can be in New York, in a fine hotel. You can go to theaters, concerts, and forget all this. I'll let you have enough money . . ."

"No! Never! I shall not leave this house until I am a free agent." For a moment the girl had been swayed by the specious theory, but now she knew he was wrong, all wrong. She had seen the things he stigmatized as products of her imagining, she *had* seen them!

Over and over Jean said it to herself. Otherwise, the thought froze her. For if she had not seen them, if they had not really been there, the name for what was wrong with her was not hysteria, was not overwrought nerves. It was . . . insanity!

"You have been trying to force me to go away for years, and you won't succeed now. I shall never give in to you." She flung the words at Lane.

The banker stepped back, and something baleful crept into the narrowing eyes with which he regarded Jean fixedly. "You refuse to leave here," the words came icily from his thin lips that seemed not to move at all. "Even now you refuse to leave?"

"I do." Jean's chin thrust forward and she felt her face set in frozen defiance. "Since you want me to go—I stay."

And Rand Lane's answer was, "Very well. Stay. I see no reason for my losing any more sleep. . . ."

He got his coat from the rack, shrugged

into it. "I shall leave you to the sheriff, since you prefer his protection to mine." The black cap covered his gleaming baldness. "I hope, I sincerely hope, you will not regret your choice." It sounded like a threat, a challenge. A grisly suspicion crept into the turmoil of Jean's mind. "Good—night. Pleasant dreams. Good luck, Jenkins, and good hunting."

The door slammed behind him. Jean heard his feet crunch away through the snow, heard his motor throb into life, roar briefly, and hum away into the night. And still she stared stonily at the door that had shut behind him. Was it possible that . . . No. Incredible. What could he gain by her death, what could he possibly gain?

"**F**AUGH. Good riddance!" Jenkins made no secret of his relief at the banker's departure. "They ain't ary place in Hopeton county that don't smell sweeter when he's gone."

The girl turned slowly to him. "If Dad only knew what he was doing to me when he put me in that man's power!"

"Your Dad war so upright he never would believe some men air skunks. An' Lane knows the most about handlin' money of anyone aroun'. But naow, girlie. There ain't ary use o' your stayin' up an' frettin'. Why don't yer go to your room an' try ter git some sleep? Come mornin', what with the cor'ner an' the reporters thar won't be no rest fer yer."

Jean knew she would not sleep, but she had no more strength to fight. "All right. But what about . . ." She glanced at Prudence who had apparently fallen asleep on the floor.

"She's best off as she is. Tomorrer we'll take her away—an' him too. Come. I'll take yer fur's yer room."

"No. You stay here. Si Paynton is up there, and I am not afraid. Good night, Mr. Jenkins, and thank you."

"Goodnight, girlie. Rest easy."

Not afraid? Perhaps not. Afraid wasn't quite the word. Jean was moving—what was the expression in that volume of Bunyan on the table in the parlor—she was traveling through the Valley of the Shadow. The shadow—not of death, of something far worse than mere annihilation. As she climbed wearily up the worn carpet of the stairs the answer came to her, the answer to the riddle of how Rand Lane could gain by the events of this terrible midnight. Not by her death—that would end his trusteeship and take the estate from his control. Nor was it her *life* that was being attacked. She saw it clearly now. Death had struck all about her and left her unscathed, physically untouched. But her mind, her reason, had been rocked to its very foundations.

There was the crux. If she were insane, if he could prove her insane, drive her insane, she would be committed to an institution and someone must be appointed to administer her property. Someone—who better than the very man her own father had chosen as her trustee? Rand Lane. Rand Lane, who must account for his stewardship in three short months. Rand Lane, who for five years had made every effort to send her away where she could have not even nominal watch over his management of Dad's estate. Rand Lane, who had looked without pity at the poor, mindless creature below and coined a jest at her expense.

"What cannot be naturally explained simply did not happen," he had said. "Those things were figments of your hysterical imagination, my dear." *You are crazy, my dear. Your mind is gone.* Oh, the monster, the inhuman, vile monster!

But he couldn't do it. She'd fool him. She'd trick him. A crafty look crept into the girl's eyes. How surprised he would be tomorrow when she walked into his office and said: "See. Here I am, and I am just as sane as I was last night." How

funny he would look! Jean's head jerked back and peal after peal of laughter came from her white lips. Threadlike laughter, laughter that would not stop. How funny—Then suddenly the laugh did stop. My God! To laugh in such a place, at such a time. Icy fingers tightened about her heart. Was she—was she really—was it too late, had he succeeded?

Jean stood stock still, she had reached the upper landing, and probed herself. No—not yet. But she must be wary, careful. She must keep tight hold on herself. No matter what happened she must keep herself under absolute control.

But what could happen with three armed men guarding her?

Strange that Silas Paynton was not up here. The lamp they had lighted threw its yellow illumination all down the hall and there was no sign of the squat, dark deputy. She had heard the sheriff tell him to stay just here. Maybe he had gone up to the servant's floor, thinking he could watch better from there. He was a strange, dour-looking, habitually silent fellow. Every winter she saw him wandering alone and aimlessly over the countryside. In the summer he was never around. Jean wondered where he went then. Not that it mattered, except that it helped to think about something else.

Although the moonlight wasn't in her room any longer, the illumination from the hall came dimly into it. Jean caught her breath as she moved across the threshold, but there was nothing to fear. She closed the door, took off her dressing gown, her mules, slid into the soft welcome of her bed. The high-piled down took her aching body. She stared at the ceiling, vaguely lit by light reflected from the snow, and wondered how much longer it was till morning. She would not think about Lane, about . . . Her tired eyelids drooped—snapped open again.

The deep-toned, dying reverberations of an ominous gong echoed in her ears.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Killer Dances

ACROSS the luminescence of the ceiling a shadow sprawled, its outline changing slowly, forming, taking on the contours of—a man! Jean stared at it, lay rigid and stared up at the huge blot in the pale truncated triangle above—while icy waves pulsed over her. It wasn't there, it couldn't be there! "Steady, Jean-girl. Steady." She was dreaming and the shadow was not there. Or it was the shadow of a tree, a bush, distorted.

Something bumped softly, nearby, thudded stealthily. It came from her left, where her window was. Was it—was it something—someone—coming in? There was a ledge just outside, and a drainpipe down which she used to shin, long ago when things like this never happened.

There was the soft bumping sound again! Her legs, her arms, were wooden, lifeless. She scarcely breathed. But she could turn her head. She could turn it and see what was at her window, *who* it was. Dared she? She must, she couldn't lie there and wait for it to come in. Her head moved, slowly, slowly, on her pillow, turned till she could see the opening.

A face stared in at her, stared straight at her. A twisted face, pallid, grotesque. A face she knew. Peter Lanning's face, but horribly changed. It leered in at her, bobbed and leered in at her. He must be standing on the ledge, but how was he holding on? His arms were straight down, and his wide shoulders away from the sill. No, he couldn't be standing there, he couldn't sway like that if he were standing on the ledge. He was turning slowly, his head, his shoulders were turning. He

wasn't standing on anything! He was hanging there, in mid-air—he was dead and hanging there! He was swaying pendulum-like and rotating at the end of something she could not see—

Through the glass, muffled but unmistakable, came the eerie, cackling laugh of the mad killer.

It galvanized the girl, hurled her from her bed with no conscious volition of her own, snapped her to the window without thought. She stared out and saw—

Almighty God! She *was* mad, stark, gibbering mad! For what she saw, or thought she saw, was flatly impossible.

High over the white-clad lawn, high as the roof, supported by nothing at all, a hunched black figure danced against the pale glare of the sky! Capered in mid-air! Jigged on nothingness and laughed its uncanny, triumphant laugh!

"In the real world any event that cannot be naturally explained simply did not happen." But this was happening. She was seeing it, was hearing it. It was happening and it couldn't be explained. It couldn't be explained and so it was not happening.

"Twice two make four. My name is Jean Armstrong and I am in my room in the house where I was born. Steady, Jean Armstrong, steady. That man out there is real, and something is holding him up that you cannot see."

She flogged her brain into logical thought, willed it to reason. "Rand Lane is trying to drive me crazy, and I won't let him. Keep steady now and he will not succeed. If that man is real he is alive and I can kill him. I am a good shot and he is an easy target. My pistol is in the pocket of my robe and I can get it by reaching behind me." Slowly, painfully, step by step, she worked it out.

And outside the killer danced and laughed, laughed and danced, and the dead

man bobbed and swayed before her window.

The little revolver was in her hand, cocked. Now to raise the sash. Would it be better to do it slowly, or in one quick jerk? The latter. Her left hand gripped the handhold.

Now! In one motion she threw the frame up, leaned out, aimed and fired. Fired again as the capering figure jerked to the impact of her first bullet.

The crazy laughter cut off in a shrill scream, and a black form dropped, plummet-like, to the snow.

Jean reeled away from the open window. "Thank God! Oh, thank God! He *is* real. He was alive and I have killed him. I am not mad. I am sane . . . sane!"

Knuckles thudded against her door. "Miss Armstrong! Miss Armstrong! What is it? Are yer—"

SOMEHOW Jean got to the door, and flung it open. Sheriff Jenkins had his gun in his hand. "I thought I heard a shot."

"You did!" Strange that she should be so proud of having slain a man. "I just shot down the mad killer."

Startlingly, his face flushed dull red and contorted with what was certainly anger, fury. His eyes blazed wrath. "Shot him down! Yer . . ." Then the inexplicable anger was gone from his expression, his voice. "Yer killed him. Great work! Wonderful! Yer a marvellous girl. But Jack Armstrong's daughter couldn't be anythin' else. What happened? How did yer do it?"

Jean's brain raced, but her tone was calm and her countenance inscrutable as she explained. "Look," she ended. "There's poor Pete's body hanging right outside here, but the one who did for him is out on the lawn. He won't throw any more knives or hang any more people."

Steady, Jean, steady. She must not show she had noticed anything, must pretend she still trusted him. There was a way out. There must be a way.

"Godfrey mighty, I'm sorry 'bout Lanning. He war a good, steady goin' lad. Got ter leave him like thet till the cor'ner gets here, but yer kin go sleep in another room."

"No. I will stay here. After all I have gone through I shall not mind him at all."

Did a glimmer of suspicion flicker over the officer's gaunt countenance? It vanished before she could be sure. "Just as yer say. It won't make much difference. I'll camp right outside here. Somethin' might happen yet." He said it grimly. "I wouldn't be at all surprised."

"Oh, I hope you are wrong. But do what you think best. I am going to try to sleep."

The door closed and Jean leaned against it. Sleep! No sleep for her tonight, perhaps never any more. She knew now the source of all that had beset her. The second's dropping of Jenkins' mask had betrayed him. Did he realize her knowledge? He must know she could not have missed the murderlust that had glared at her.

Just as she thought she had won through, terror closed in on her once again. He, whom she had called the mad-killer, was a mere tool in the hands of a man outside her door, the man whose sworn duty it was to protect her, the man whose safety now lay only in her death. He was working with Lane and the two hounds were baying her down.

Why had he not shot her off-hand? Only because he was scheming a shrewder, safer way. She heard him plodding up and down the hall outside, knew that each thudding step was also a step nearer her death. He must move soon, the false light before the dawn was already silhouetting the pines. Others, the coroner, state

police perhaps, would be here in an hour or two. She must be silenced before they came.

What was it Rand Lane had said in his silky voice as he bowed himself out. "Good luck, Jenkins. Good hunting." "Good hunting indeed! She was the quarry they hunted and she was nearly run to earth.

Nearly, but not quite. They didn't have her yet. She had fought them, baffled them till now and she would go down fighting if go down she must. Jean swung to her closet door, ripping off dressing gown, pajamas, not feeling the freezing cold at all. She tore clothes from hooks, hangers, jerked them on. In seconds she was fully clad, sweater, riding-breeches, moccasins.

CHAPTER FIVE

At Bay

THE girl flitted across to the window, sat on the sill and swung her feet out. They struck Peter Lanning's body and she gasped, but did not pause. Nothing to fear in a dead man, nothing *he* could do to her. She had to push the corpse aside to reach the pipe that was her path to escape. And did it without a qualm.

The gelid drain stung her fingers, but she gripped it, clamped it with her knees. The suspended corpse, released, swung at the end of its tether and thumped against the window-pane. Glass smashed! Nothing to fear from a dead man—except betrayal!

The door slammed open inside the room. Jean thrust away from the wall and dropped. She thudded to the ground, leaped to her feet. Above, a hoarse voice shouted. "Stop! Stop yer she-devil or I'll shoot!" She sprang into a run, a zig-zagging run across the open ground. If he shot he might bring her down, but the

bullet would tell the tale of his crime. She was half across the lawn and there was no gun-crash from behind. She glanced back, saw Jenkins leaping to the ground, glimpsed a flashing knife in his hand. That was his scheme then! Had she waited she would have been another victim of the knife-thrower.

"Stop! Damn you!" His hoarse shout flung after her as he heaved erect and plunged into pursuit, his long legs carrying him over the snow at a rate she could not match. But the pines were just ahead—if she could reach them . . . A dark mound, a white face, flitted past her. The body of the man—Silas! Behind her Jenkins pounded, just behind. "Got yer!" he grunted. She swerved, light-footed, and he plunged past her, slithering clumsily on the icy ground, unable to turn in time. Dark tree trunks were about her, and undergrowth whipped against her legs.

He threshed after her, cursing. She darted deviously, the boles were thick in here and the darkness almost absolute. But she could not go silently and he kept on after her, guided by the rustle of her passage.

"You can't get away. You can't!" Her breath was going, her chest heaved, and blood pounded in her throat. She couldn't—run—much longer. The highway beyond! If she could reach it—if some late motorist were passing—

She burst out of the trees on to cleared macadam and white light of headlights engulfed her. A horn blared raucously. Somehow she found voice to scream.

Brakes squealed. A bellow of rage drowned their complaint, and Jenkins lumbered into the road. But he was twenty yards away, and the car had stopped only feet from her. She stumbled toward it, the blaze of its lights blinding her. They dimmed, and she could make out the vague form of the driver springing into the road, could see the gun in his hand.

He was armed! Luck! What Luck! Then her eyes traveled up to his face.

It was Rand Lane!

IT was Rand Lane and his gun was sweeping up, was snouting at her. Behind Jenkins' heavy feet pounded as he came after her with his knife. Good hunting! Good hunting indeed! Gun or knife—which would take her?

The gun! It flashed, point-blank at her, crashed thunderously. Funny. She felt nothing. Had he—had he missed? Missed at this distance? The knife, then! In her back! No! She whirled to take it. And saw Jenkins falling, collapsing like a pricked balloon, his knees buckling under him and the blade dropping from his flaccid hand. He sprawled on the road, writhed, flopped over on his back, and was still.

"Jean! Are you—did he—are you all right?" Rand's voice, in back of her, but Rand's voice as she had never heard it. Quivering. Choked. "Jean!"

His usually masklike, expressionless face was contorted with emotion. "All right—Rand. Whole in body—and in mind."

"God be praised!" His gaze jerked past her, went to the body in the road. Fear flared in his eyes, faded out. "Done for! Lord, if I only had the guts to do that long ago."

She scarcely heard him. "Rand—I thought you—were the one—behind it all."

He looked at her again, smiled his thin smile, bitter now. "No. *He* was—behind it. But I helped him. God forgive me, I helped him."

She stepped back from him, loathing, horror in her face. "You helped him. You knew what was going on and you helped him?"

Certainly this was a new Lane. The hard-faced, brass-souled banker was gone. He stood before her in the drab gray of

an overcast dawn, head bowed, mouth working, abject. "He forced me to. But at the last I could not stand the thought of what he was doing to you and I came back to stop it. Thank God I was in time."

"You—you—In time! Yes—to save *me*. But what about Elmer, and Prudence? What about the others—the three tramps—Peter Lanning?"

Something of the old hardness crept back. "Two senile, doddering fools with only months left to drag out lives that were a burden to them. Three derelicts—spewed out by society. They do not matter. But you—oh my dear—the world would be empty if you were gone." He clawed a hand toward her in an angular, awkward gesture of appeal.

Jean shuddered with disgust. She turned away, started toward the trees. "Jean, where are you going? Jean!"

"Back to the house to pack and get away. Anywhere where I shall never have to see you again." It was all she could do. Her story, his confession, would never be credited. He had not done the killings with his own hands.

"Jean!" Agony edged his cry. "Can't you forgive me?"

Laughter vibrated in her throat, dark laughter. Every nerve in her body was raw, quivering because of him and he asked for forgiveness! "Forgive you!" And the laugh rang out, humorless, scorching, whipping him with a lash of scorn. "Go ask Prudence Thomas to forgive you. *She* has lost her mind!"

He plodded after her, stumbling, caroming into tree trunks, arms extended to her and red eyes pleading.

"I did try to save you. I tried to get you to go away. I fought him off for years while I tried to get you beyond his reach. Even at the very last, when it had already begun, I asked you to go back to Hopeton to stay with me. You re-

fused. Always you refused. I had to let him go ahead."

She stopped and turned on him. "I don't believe you. You were the one who engineered the whole thing. He was your tool, not you his."

"I swear it! By all . . . He made me." Youth was gone from his face. It was sallow, old. Strength was gone from it. It was the face of a broken man. The lips trembled with weakness. "I came here ten years ago, unknown. *He* found out who I was—why I had come to Hope-ton. My superior in a 'Frisco bank embezzled funds and framed me. I escaped from jail—the law hounds lost my trail. I went into the rattletrap bank here and made it an institution. I was respected, admired. Then he struck. He showed me my face, my fingerprints on a yellowed circular he had kept for five years. Five years he had waited till he saw a way to use his knowledge. Then I became your trustee!

"Oh, he was shrewd, cunning. The scheme he broached was fool-proof. He had a tool to his hand, Silas Paynton. A circus man, slack-wire walker and knife-thrower. Paynton had thrown his knives too unerringly once and killed a girl. Jenkins found that out, too, and used it to enslave him. Jenkins was a devil, a fiend from the lowermost reaches of hell!"

A light dawned on Jean. "Paynton was a knife-thrower and wire-walker. Then that was how . . ." They were through the woods and out on the lawn. Sunrise painted the snow with rose, but Paynton was a black blotch in the clearing and Peter Lanning's lax body hung swaying before her window. "That was how it was done!"

"**Y**ES. Look up there." The girl followed the direction of his pointing finger. She saw a fine wire arcing from the top of a tall pine to a chimney just

above her father's room. She saw that Lanning's corpse hung from another wire that was also fastened to the roof.

"It was an ingenious scheme and it worked," Rand said. "You would never have seen that wire if you did not know just where to look. Nor would any others until there was opportunity to remove it."

"The bodies of the tramps . . ."

"Were trolleyed across the lawn suspended from another wire, adjusted so that a jerk would free it. The gong-sound you heard in your sleep was the twang of that wire when it was released. Paynton fished the third body back up to the roof with a hook on the end of the same wire. The chimney from the fireplace in your father's room was cleaned thoroughly when you locked it after his death, and it made a convenient passage for Silas to the interior of the house, and out of it when you saw and chased him."

It was all so simple, so diabolically simple! Jean shuddered as she pushed the house-door open and passed Elmer's stiffened body. Prudence lay across it, sound asleep. Jean went up the stairs and Lane kept at her elbow, still talking. The sound of his voice was a murmur in her ears. She was so tired, so terribly tired. She shut him out of her room and fell across her bed. She had to rest. . . .

A CONFUSED roar woke Jean—shouting voices, coarse, threatening. She skidded to the window. Who were those men, brutish-faced, in tattered non-descript clothing, pouring across the lawn? Twenty of them, more, waving clubs, knives. They were streaming into the house! She twisted and ran out into the hall.

Lane was at the head of the stairs, his gun in his hand. "Stop there!" he was yelling. "Stop there or I shall shoot." She got to his side. "What do you men want?"

The foyer below was filled with them, a milling throng of humanity's dregs. One, a hulking fellow with simian arms and scarred, lowering face, bellowed back. "We want *you!* An' we'll damn well get yuh, too." A growling murmur ran through the mob, ominous.

Lane's voice was tight, controlled. "You want me! What do you mean?"

"Yer one o' the guys what croaked Boston Red an' a couple other bindle stiffs. The Dayton Kid piked yer car las' night, wid two guys luggin' a stiff inter it. He spotted the boat out there on the road and follied yer tracks here. We want yuh an' the dame too. Yer goin' ter be strung up, like yer pal outside, an' the skirt's goin' ter wish she were 'fore we get through with her."

"You are mistaken. But even if you were right in your accusation you cannot take the law into your own hands." Lane had won back to his old hauteur, his old superiority. "If you have any charges against me turn me over to the police."

The word was like red meat thrown to a pack of starving wolves. It brought a howl, vociferous, rabid.

"Shut up, youse guys," their leader shouted them down. "Lemme handle this." Then to Lane: "There ain't goin' ter be no perlice in this. The Dayton Kid is wanted fer crackin' a crib an' half the rest of us are on the lam. Nossir. We'll tend ter yuh ourselves. . . ."

Jean watched, listened, as if she were at a play. She no longer had capacity for emotion, was numbed to that which threatened her. But Lane was an erect, pale statue and the black revolver never trembled in his rock-steady hand. "There are six bullets in this revolver, and I cannot miss. Six of you will die the moment one foot touches that bottom step. Who wants to be the first?"

"Be damned to yuh. You may get six, but the rest of us'll get yuh. An' it'll be

just too bad when we do. It won't be hangin' then. What d'yuh say, men?"

They said it in a feral roar. "Let's get him."—"Burn him!—Rip his guts out!"

"Okay! Come on!" The mob surged forward, halted at a ringing shout from Rand. "Wait!"

They halted and listened.

"I will surrender. On one condition. You may do with me as you please, but you must leave the girl alone."

They milled again, undecided. Lustful eyes peered up at Jean, then shifted to Lane's steady gaze. From the outer fringes of the crowd a husky voice croaked, "The hell with him. We want the dame!"

The banker's icy voice dropped again into their midst. "Remember—six of you die if you do not take my terms. And I will not fire at the front men alone. Any of you may be the ones to die."

The big leader grinned suddenly, a crafty light on his face. "Okay. T'row yer heat down an' we'll let the termaty go."

Lane's thin smile flickered for a moment, but his eyes were marble. "Not so easy. She gets the gun, and she is as good a shot as I. What do you say?"

The other gestured defeat. "All right, wise guy. Give her the roscoe an' snap down here."

Jean felt the gun-grip in her cold hand, heard a whispered, "Do you forgive me?" She nodded, unable to speak. Then she watched him walk steadily down the stairs, walk unflinching into that drooling, red-eyed pack. Rough hands seized him—and the door slammed open.

"Scram, guys!" an undersized runt shrilled from the doorway. "The bulls! T'ree cars, comin' fast!"

Jean saw them melt away. In seconds the hall was clear. Only the dead old man and the sleeping, white-haired woman remained. And from outside came the approaching hum of speeding cars.

Back From Beyond



By Wyatt Blassingame
Author of "Wolf Bait," etc.

Can the dead kill? Can a man once buried reach back beyond the grave to wreak his vengeance on human flesh and blood?

DON MARDIS, assistant district attorney, walked heavily up the magnolia bordered walk to his home. Twice that day he had heard indefinite rumors of blackmail among important persons of the city, rumors with-

out traceable roots. Investigation had left him baffled, worried. He had interviewed two men supposed to have been victims. Both had seemed frightened, but both had denied having been approached.

Mardis looked up, saw the light of his

father's study. Thinking of his father, a smile twitched the corners of his wide mouth. There was more than the bond of blood between these two. Since his mother's death fifteen years before, Judge Mardis had been father and mother—and friend—to Don.

Mardis shrugged and looked up to where a new moon hung low in the west, as white as a curved magnolia petal. To hell with blackmailers! Tonight he and his father were going down to see the lightweight champion take on a kid from Chicago. It should be a good fight. He began to whistle softly.

The steps of the house were a dull blur in the shadow of the magnolia trees. Mardis went up them with two long strides. Then he stopped, his lips were still puckered in a whistle that made no sound.

The French windows leading into his father's study were closed, but he could see through the lace curtains. The white glow of a floor lamp spotlighted the desk in front of the window and the two men seated there. For three long seconds Don Mardis stood as though chiseled from ice.

His father sat behind the desk, back to the window. In his right hand, muzzle toward the ceiling, he held an automatic. Fear and indecision showed in his position. Then the shoulders squared.

Across the desk, facing the window a man sat leaning forward, his head pushed into the light cast by the floor lamp. Below shaggy blond hair a white forehead sloped to a rolling bulge over close-set eyes. A crooked nose threw the right half of his mouth in shadow. Air came with a soundless rush into Don Mardis' lungs as he stared, and memory flooded his brain like an icy current.

The man who sat facing his father was Emil Cardire. Or, more accurately, *had been Cardire*. Three years ago he, Don Mardis, had seen Cardire electrocuted. He had seen the man twitch as the last

vestige of life seeped from him in the electric chair.

Slowly the Judge moved the gun upward and around toward his own temple. The leer of Cardire's lips widened. Like a man flung from a catapult, Don Mardis bounded forward, smashed open the front door. "Dad!" he shouted, "Dad!"

AS the door flung open a shot thundered under the high ceiling, echoed against the white plastered walls. With one leap Mardis crossed the wide hall, drove into the door leading to his father's study, hurled it open.

Judge Mardis was crumpling over his desk. A stream of blood poured down his face, began to spread over the mahogany table. Don Mardis leaped across the room, clutched his father's shoulders with lean brown fingers.

Rigidly he stepped back. In his chest all emotion, all feeling guttered like a candle flame, and went out. "Dad," he said again, tonelessly. "Dad."

The left side of his father's head had been almost blown away where the bullet had torn out.

Numbed, Mardis turned to face the chair where Cardire had sat. It was empty. Blinking, unbelieving, Mardis looked around the room. Filled built-in bookcases showed dully in the shadows.

The man whom Mardis had seen executed by the State three years before, who had sat leering at his father five seconds past, had vanished!

Mechanically the attorney was conscious of the sweat breaking out on his forehead, running into his eyes. He drew a long breath.

Laughter jarred through the still air. Don Mardis spun to face the window. In the shadows of the porch he saw the dim face and flaming eyes of the man who had died.

He stepped forward and pushed the

long window open, went through it to the porch outside, cursing himself. What he had seen was a man. He knew that there was no such thing as a ghost. But, man or ghost, it had killed his father.

The magnolia trees were like dark clouds above the wide strip of lawn. Beyond the lawn the lights of automobiles moved down St. Charles avenue, but the yard itself showed dark and empty. His ears caught the throb of a starting motor to the right, on Maple street.

Don Mardis reached the edge of the porch in two strides, bounded over the bannisters, hit running. As he hurtled the iron fence that bordered the lawn on Maple street he saw the automobile flick under an arc light a block away, vanish.

For a long moment he stood gazing after it. A low sob shook him. There was no need to try to catch Cardire now. By the time Mardis could reach his roadster the other would be half a mile away in any direction.

Slowly Mardis turned, crawled back over the fence, started across the lawn for his home. He walked like a man in a trance, his brain dulled by the terrible suddenness of what had happened. His father *couldn't* be dead! He and his father were going to the prize fight. It was Cardire who was dead.

Mardis went up the steps to his home, through the open French windows into the room where the body of his father sprawled over the desk. For a moment he stood silent, unmoving. The blood had spread into a wide viscid pool on the desk top and was dripping slowly over the edge. In the intense silence he could hear the whisper of the slow drops on the thick carpet.

With dry eyes Mardis looked at the body of his father. He said huskily, "Dad, I don't know just what happened, but I saw the man. And I'll get him, dad. . . ."

THE room blazed with white light from the chandelier overhead. Jules Beauchamp, New Orleans' small, thick-set, dark-complexioned chief of police, looked from the body of Judge Mardis to where the son stood in the center of the room. Don Mardis was six feet tall, 175 pounds, broad in the shoulders and lean in the hips. His face was long, with high cheek bones, and the width of his forehead made the strong, broad lines of his chin look almost pointed. His black eyes were sunken now, and the skin stretched taut across his cheeks.

Beauchamp reached up and grasped the young man's shoulder. "Your father's suicide," he said slowly, "has got you unnerved. Perhaps there was a man in the room when you came; if so we'll find him. But it couldn't have been Cardire. He's dead."

Mardis' lips twitched at the corners. "Damn it," he said, his voice low, "I saw Cardire! He sat"—Mardis nodded jerkily—"there, across from Dad. I know it was he."

A shadow of exasperation came in Beauchamp's eyes. He spoke as if to a child, "But, Mr. Mardis, there were no finger prints on this side of the desk. Of course, he might have worn gloves, this fellow that you say—"

Mardis flung his shoulder from under the older man's hand. "Are you calling me a liar? How in hell—"

Beauchamp gestered with thick, heavy knuckled hands. "Now, sir, you know I'm not calling you a liar, but you're all worked up over your father's death. Now you go on over to the D. A.'s house, or to your club or somewhere, and leave the matter to us. We'll get everything fixed up."

The fire died from Mardis' eyes as his lean fingers closed on the official's arm. "I didn't mean to blow up that way," he said. "I know my story sounds crazy,

but"—his eyes shifted to the still body of his father—"it *was* Cardire—or his ghost. And I'm going to get him!"

He turned and went out the door into the hall, across the porch and down the stone magnolia-shadowed steps.

As he walked grief was hot within him, but he forced his brain to grapple analytically with the facts.

Three years before Emil Cardire, spiritualist, had been a fad among the New Orleans wealthy. Social and political leaders of the city had consulted him, payed him fabulous sums for advice. Some of them had laughed at the whole matter, said they put no faith in spiritualism; others had been more serious. But all who went had been impressed, and vast numbers had gone. Then Cardire had been convicted of the murder of a young woman, one of his clients. Judge Mardis had sentenced him to death. Don Mardis had seen the current fling the man's body against the belts that bound him in the chair. He had seen the body carried away in its wicker casket.

Madame Willoworth, now under indictment for fraud, had been Cardire's assistant and had continued to carry on his work. Although the girl's murder had put a blight on the craving of New Orleans society for dealing with the dead, lately, however, Madame Willoworth's popularity had been growing.

The lines of Don Mardis' mouth grew harder. If Emil Cardire were alive—or for that matter, if he were dead—it would be through Madame Willoworth that he could be found. And man or spirit, he'd find Cardire!

THEN Mardis remembered. Maurine

Kent, daughter of the D. A., had told him that morning of a seance to be held tonight at the home of Jane Marston, her best friend. He had seen Maurine when he went by the Marston home to

pay his respects. Dr. Marston had died the day before, and Mrs. Marston, a sincere spiritualist, was having Madame Willoworth try to get in touch with her husband's spirit before the body was buried. She would permit no one except her daughter and Maurine to attend the seance.

Mardis' eyes were thoughtful as he turned back toward his home. Inside the front hall he picked up the telephone, gave the number of the district attorney. Arthur Kent was not only his friend, he was the father of the girl Mardis loved.

It was Kent himself who answered. "Yes?" The D. A.'s voice came through the receiver, oddly off key.

"This is Don Mardis. I'm coming over to see you; it's important."

Kent's voice went shrill. "Don't come over here—I won't be here. I'm leaving right now, going out of town on a few days' vacation. Tell Maurine to stay with Jane. She's over there now. Tell her I'll write."

"But I've got to see you," Mardis said. "It's about—about dad."

"I tell you," the District Attorney's voice took on new tension, "I haven't got time. I'm leaving. And listen—drop the case against Madame Willoworth!"

"What!" It was an exclamation more than a question.

Kent's voice dropped to a hoarse, frightened whisper, "I tell you when the dead start walking, it's . . . it's . . ." The sound of the receiver being jammed down on the hook hammered at Mardis' ear.

Mardis put the phone back on the stand. He stood staring down the hallway at the door and the dark shadows beyond. Wild thoughts surged through his brain.

Emil Cardire was on earth again. "Alive?" Mardis whispered the word. The beliefs of Conan Doyle and the other spiritualists whirled hotly in his head. But those men were wrong; had to be wrong!

He had to stick to reality. Something had slipped somewhere, and Emil Cardire was alive—apparently, even if he had been electrocuted!

Slowly Mardis raised the telephone again, called the home of Jane Marston. It was Maurine Kent who answered.

"Listen, dear," he said, "I've got to come out and see you for a minute."

Maurine's voice was low, throaty. "What is it, Don? What's the trouble? You sound so—so worried."

"I'll tell you when I get there. Be out in front in fifteen minutes."

MAURINE KENT ran down the steps of the Marston home to meet Mardis as he came up the walk. She was wearing a black dress and her light golden hair stirred softly around her face as she moved. Mardis caught both her hands in his own as he tried to make his voice steady.

"Dad died tonight—suicide!"

He felt her hands tighten on his. She moved closer, until her face touched his chest. The wind stirred her hair and it moved like corn silk across his chin. Then she raised her face, and her eyes held all the help it was possible to give.

He said, his hands still clutching hers, "I can't tell you about it tonight. But you've got to help me. What times does the seance start here?"

She looked at him, her eyes wide and questioning.

"No," he shook his head. "I don't believe in that stuff. But I think—I think, that maybe dad"—he looked away for a second, his throat muscles trembling—"was driven to commit suicide by—another man. And this Madame Willoworth may know something about it. What time does she come here tonight?"

"**S**HE'S here. The seance is supposed to start at midnight." Maurine

looked at a jeweled wrist watch. "It's five minutes of twelve now."

Mardis caught her by the shoulders. He could feel the softness of her body under the dress. "Can you hide me where I can see without being seen?"

"Come on," she said. "I'll try."

Don Mardis followed her up the stone steps, across the porch. She pulled open the screen door, then the wooden door swung open upon a dark hall.

The front of the house was dark, but from under a door at the far end of the hall came a white slit of light. Silently he let the screen door close, pushed the front door shut. Maurine's gold and silver hair was a blur in the darkness as she led him three steps down the hallway, then into a room opening on the left. Through this they moved silently toward the far end. From under curtains hung across the far end of the room came a ghastly, greenish light.

A foot from the curtain Maurine stopped. She put a white finger to her lips, then pointed toward a narrow, green-lighted slit in the curtain. Her hand touched Mardis' cheek as she moved away.

The sound of her steps faded and silence crept through the room; the damp, eternal quiet of the grave. Then, suddenly, it broke as the clock in the hall boomed twelve hollow strokes.

Slowly Don Mardis knelt beside the curtain, caught one side between thumb and forefinger, pulled it slightly back.

The big room beyond was lighted only by one small green bulb swung from the center of the ceiling. It flung ghastly light on the coffin resting beneath. Beside the coffin knelt a woman, dressed in flowing black robes and her long, inky hair fell in waves to the floor. Mardis saw the sharply-chiseled profile, the green tint of the light on the deathly pale skin.

Half hidden in the deep shadow sat

Jane Marston, her mother, and Maurine Kent. They sat leaning tensely forward, eyes straining at the gray-green coffin, at the green-faced woman kneeling there.

Fingers crushing hard against the curtain, Don Mardis stared into the room. What could this woman do? She could not fake the spirit of Dr. Marston. This morning Mardis had seen the body. It had not been a pleasant thing to look at. The head was half amputated where glass had ripped his throat when his car had wrecked.

The curtain wrinkled under Mardis' tense, cold fingers. Already that day he had seen one dead man walking. From the dawn of history men had believed in a life after death. And there were doctors and psychologists, men who had devoted a life to scientific study, who believed in spiritualism. How could a man know what lay beyond the grave?

And Mardis heard again the panicky voice of District Attorney Kent. "When the dead start walking . . ."

The woman inside the room began to moan. Her voice grew stronger, became a wailing chant. Her body swayed back and forth, hands waving in front of her face, hands which, in the shaded light, showed an unearthly green. Her voice rose and fell rhythmically. Abruptly it stopped.

She rocked far back on her heels, hands clawing at the air, then swayed sideways. Mardis could see green foam spew from her lips, drooling down her chin. Her eyes were rolled back in her head, showed only the whites. She began to mutter in thick incomprehensible syllables.

Without warning she lunged to her feet, body rigid, one hand pointing beyond the three women who seemed to shrink together in fear. Her voice leaped in a scream. "Bring me the lamp! The fire we have prepared."

Maurine stood up, moved backwards

from the room, her face turned hypnotically toward the woman beside the casket.

WAVERING orange light smeared over the door through which Maurine had gone a half minute before. The two Marston women sat hushed, leaning forward in their chairs. In the orange glow of the lamp she carried, Maurine's hair shimmered gold and bronze. She put the lamp on the little table at the foot of the coffin, backed to her chair, sat down.

The lamp tinted the green foam drooling from the medium's mouth with flecks of orange. Her moaning words became barely intelligible. "Apollo," she chanted, "God of fire, protect me now. Apollo, god of fire, protect me now." The green flecked foam dripped, fell in splotches on the floor. . . .

Still chanting, she picked a newspaper from the table where the lamp sat, tore one sheet from it. She held one end of the sheet over the lamp chimney until it caught into bright red flame, blazed high. Her eyes were fixed on the dancing flames as the fire ate downward toward her hand. Then the woman shut her eyes, moved her face into the midst of the flames, and held it there.

"Apollo, god of fire; protect me now," she chanted unbrokenly. Her hand was in the midst of leaping flames but there was no sign of pain. Then the charred paper under her fingers broke and fell.

Abruptly the woman leaned forward, flung a thick coil of her hair into the lamp chimney. The yellow flame bent round it, but there was no smoke, no odor of burning hair. She straightened, pulled her hair from the lamp. "Apollo, god of fire," she chanted thickly while the foam ran from her mouth, falling in heavy patches on the floor.

Abrupt silence fell like a dark blanket over the room as the woman ceased mut-

tering. For a moment she stood quiet, unmoving. Then she raised one arm, pointed again toward the door through which Maurine had brought the lamp.

"Now bring me the iron!" she cried.

Again the girl arose, took the lamp. The sound of her slippers was like the rustling of dead leaves as she moved. When he saw her returning, Don Mardis caught his breath sharply.

The girl carried a long iron poker, holding it by the wooden handle. The point was white hot, cooling slowly to a glowing red. Again the medium began her muttering, weird chant, fiercer now, and again the green foam smeared her lips.

The woman reached out a bared hand, grasped the red-hot iron.

The hair along the nape of Don Mardis' neck prickled. He heard a short, startled scream as Mrs. Marston slumped forward in her chair. Maurine and Jane caught her. The three women stared in frozen horror.

Still chanting, the medium held the red hot poker in her right hand, tore open the breast of her dress with her left. Don Mardis could see the swelling of white breasts, see the red glow of the hot iron glint on them.

Then the medium pressed the red-hot poker against her breasts, held it there!

Slowly she took it away, shifted her hand to catch the iron by the handle. There was no mark on her breast as she adjusted her dress.

The medium stepped to the fireplace, placed the poker on the hearth, turned back to the coffin.

KNEELING, the woman began once more her wailing chant. Abruptly she screamed sharply and Mardis' hand jerked at the curtain. In the room beyond no one noticed.

The scream died and the woman's voice

became a supplicating whine. "Oh, Apollo, now that you have shown your power to protect me from fire, grant us one more favor. The widow of the man whose earthly body lies here prays for word from the beyond. Restore him to his earthly mould that he may speak and comfort her. I will rap twice on the casket, and if thou art willing to grant this, reply by rapping."

She paused. Mardis could feel the cold sweat break out along his spine, and the heavy pounding of his heart.

Madame Willoworth raised her hand, rapped twice on the gray steel coffin. The ghost of an echo lingered in the room after the sound had died.

Dead silence answered. Then, very slowly, deliberately, from inside the steel casket came two distinct, metallic raps.

Mardis stared at the ghastly light falling over the coffin and the woman kneeling beside it. Inside the coffin there was the body of Dr. Marston with only the embalmers' thread holding the head upon the neck!

A low rustling sound filled the coffin, stirred the dead air around it. Mardis fought at the horror that ran snakelike down his spine. Something was moving inside the coffin!

The low rustling sound continued, and then he saw it! Dimly under the green light something moved inside that casket, something white and flat, slowly coming up, up. . . .

The corpse of Dr. Marston was sitting bolt upright inside the steel coffin!

Stiffly erect it sat there, facing its wife and child. With popping eyes Mardis stared at the rigid back, the deathly pale profile. Sudden terror clutched at the attorney, stilled his heart and lungs. Then he gulped air with a wheezing sound.

Slowly the mouth of the corpse opened. Words fell from the blueish lips with a dead, flat sound.

"Edith, I come to tell you it is so. There is another life. Always I will watch over you. Join Madame Willoworth and help her spread the truth." The body fell back stiffly. Edith Marston gave one piercing shriek, pitched unconscious from her chair.

The two girls half lifted and half dragged Mrs. Marston from the room.

His cold fingers holding the curtains slightly apart, Mardis saw Madame Willoworth slowly get to her feet, move trance-like toward the fireplace where the still hot poker stood.

And then again he remembered the body of his father. He saw the dark pool of blood, flecked with brain-tissue, smearing over the rich mahogany of the desk. There had been no life in his father sprawled across the desk top. And this—this was some trick—it *had* to be a trick! Perhaps the same trick that had pulled Emil Cardire back from his grave—to force his father to his death!

With a choking cry he surged to his feet, burst through the curtains into the room, lunged to the coffin.

Inside lay the body of Edward Marston exactly as he had seen it that morning!

Forcing his trembling hands inside the casket, Mardis touched the man's face. It was clammy cold. Undoubtedly dead. His fingers jerked down the body, touched something round and hard underneath the coat.

HE heard the thud of shoes on the rug, the whispering of moving robes behind him, whirled. Madame Willoworth, black hair streaming, swept at him. The dull red of the poker gleamed over her head, then slashed at his head in a downward rush.

Don Mardis lunged, felt the hot breath of the iron on his cheek and hot pain as the blow crashed into his shoulder, spinning him sideways. The odor of burn-

ing wool was rank where the iron had burned his coat.

The woman leaped at him again, the poker raised. Mardis spun away. Then he stiffened, hands at his side. Madame Willoworth drew back. Beyond the casket, under the ghastly green light, he saw Emil Cardire, a snub-nosed automatic in his hand.

Cardire's voice was calm, mocking. "Back through that curtain, and go slow. I'm coming with you. If we run into anybody keep going. Keep your mouth shut. Or you'll never open it again!"

For a long second Mardis did not move. Then a mirthless grin twisted his mouth. He wheeled, walked slowly through the curtains into the dark room beyond. He heard Cardire's step behind him, the low-pitched, chuckling voice, "You make a good target against those windows. Keep going."

Don Mardis went through the room, out the front door, down the steps and along the walk to where his roadster was parked. Emil Cardire's shoes echoed the sound of his own. Beside his roadster, Mardis stopped, turned. Three feet away Cardire stood, his right hand in his coat pocket. The pocket sagged forward.

"All right," Mardis said, "what now?"
"Under that wheel."

Mardis opened the door, got in. Cardire pulled the snub-nosed gun from his pocket, crawled in after him.

"Get going," Cardire said. "Through Auduburn over to River street, close to the number 10 docks."

The fear that had gripped Mardis as he watched the corpse sit up in its casket was gone. In its place had come cold determination. His trained brain was working now, reasoning, linking fact with fact with the steadiness of sand running through an hour glass.

Calmly he turned his switch, started his motor. The gears made a low grinding

noise as he pulled back the lever. The car rolled forward.

He turned into Auduburn Park and asked, quietly matter-of-fact, "Cardire, why did my father shoot himself? What did you have to do with it?"

Cardire chuckled. "The Judge was surprised to see me. He was not, he said, a believer in spirits."

Mardis could feel the muscles contracting in his throat. "Did you kill him?" the words came thickly.

The man who had been electrocuted three years before laughed. "No. He shot himself." There was a long pause. Mardis' thoughts moved swiftly, steadily; but he followed directions when Cardire said, "Turn left at the next corner. Third house on the right."

The street was unpaved, darkened, full of ruts and tin cans. The headlights glinted on the cans, making them shine like the eyes of beasts. Low wood shacks leaned along both sides of the street. In front of the third one Mardis pulled to the curb, braked the car. A few yards behind the house he could see the dark rise of the levee. The river in New Orleans flows higher than the street.

Cardire pushed open the door, stepped to the curb. The automatic was barely visible as he motioned for Mardis to follow him. Slowly Mardis turned, slid his long legs to the running board, got out.

"**A**LL right," the spiritualist said. "Go up to the door, reach inside to the left, and switch on the light. I'm right back of you—with this!" He poked the muzzle of the automatic into Mardis' back.

The fact that probable death awaited him inside that dark, shabby cottage never touched Don Mardis' mind. He was not without fear of death, but the icy anger deep in him drove him forward, made of him a mechanism handling thought after

thought, precisely, coldly. Here must lay the reason behind his father's death. He had come to find that reason.

He turned to face Cardire who stood in the doorway, the automatic in his hand. "Make yourself comfortable," the medium sneered. "It'll take me a few minutes to get ready for you." He pulled the door shut. Mardis heard the key click in the lock. He heard the thud of Cardire's shoes moving across the front room.

Mardis' eyes moved swiftly, studying the room. Against the far wall stood an old double bed, covered by a patchwork quilt. One dirty window opened on the left, another at the head of the bed. Both were heavily barred. Blackness blanketed the panes. On the right was a closed door, and beside that a small desk.

Moving on the balls of his feet, stiff-kneed, Mardis went to the desk, opened it. A pen with a chewed holder sprawled among scattered papers. Cubby holes were crammed with other papers and small note-books.

He had no time to lose. One after another, rapidly, he looked at the papers, dropping them to the floor. The lines about his mouth began to harden.

He picked up one of the note-books, opened it. There were the names of the great and near-great in New Orleans, politicians, lawyers, doctors, newspaper men. Mardis' lean, brown fingers raced through the pages, stopped at the letter M. *Mardis—Judge*, he read.

His face sombre, Mardis stepped toward the door opening on the right. His step made a hollow ringing sound, and he stopped abruptly. Kneeling, he tapped lightly on the floor with his knuckles. A hollow note answered him.

He was standing on a trap door.

Methodically he searched for the switch or lever which tripped it. His eye moved slowly. It would have to be in some place connecting with the floor. And then he

noticed the leg of the desk. Keeping close to the side of the desk he tugged the left corner of it backward. A large square section of the floor silently fell away in front of him. Leaning over he saw murky water four feet below. He pushed the desk forward and the trap swung back to its place.

The lock on the door behind him clicked. Mardis pivoted to face it. Emil Cardire stood on the sill. In his left hand he held a white sheet of paper, and his right forearm was snug against his hip, his fingers gripping the snub-nosed automatic. Cardire's eyes flicked at the note-book in Mardis' hand. He grinned unpleasantly. "So you found out, eh? A lot of good it will do you! If you could arrest me, it would mean nothing; the State can't touch me. Legally I don't exist because I'm officially dead. But you won't prosecute, anyway. Not after you've seen that!"

Mardis' cheek-bones showed in high relief; his eyes were gleaming points as he said calmly, "Cardire, you tried to blackmail my father. You found that fifteen years ago, when mother was very sick and dad had to get some money, he used some of the State's funds. He'd paid that money back. But you would use that against him anyway."

Cardire chuckled. "That little book will give you a lot of interesting details about a lot of persons."

Mardis said, "And with the information you have here, you forced them to fake your electrocution three years ago!"

CARDIRE smiled. "It was very simple. I drew up all the information I had about certain persons who had money and power and placed that information where it would reach the newspapers if I died. The persons concerned saw to it that there was no current in the wires which touched me in the electric chair. I was actor enough for the rest.

"But I could not make your father pay. Tonight, he preferred death. To deed me his property, he said, would make you know there was something wrong. And he could not bear to have his son think he had done wrong."

Cardire chuckled. "Surely the son of such a man will save his father's name—even if his father is dead. Surely he will part with his property for the good name of his father." Cardire rustled the paper he held in his hand. "Otherwise the newspapers get this."

Don Mardis' face was impassive as he watched the black snout of the automatic level at his breast.

His death alone would not save his father's name—but if Cardire died with him. . . .

He took a single step backward. "Very well," he said, his voice low. "Give me the paper."

Again Cardire chuckled. "I thought you would be reasonable about it." He stepped toward Mardis, holding the paper before him. Mardis reached for it with one hand and with the other he shoved viciously on the desk.

The floor pitched downward. Mardis felt his shoes skid on the trap, shoot into space.

Cardire beat wildly at the air with both hands. The gun roared. Then muddy waters smashed into Mardis, closed over him, shutting out the thunder of the gun.

Mardis went down six feet under water. His feet, straight beneath him, touched nothing solid. He whipped the water with both hands, kicked outward with his legs, and came to the surface.

Treading water he whipped a wet hand across his eyes. Three feet away he saw Cardire's head break through the surface. The man floundered wildly, then lunged upward, his outstretched fingers catching the edge of the swinging trap door. He hung there.

Mardis flung himself through the water, caught the medium's waist, pulled him from the swinging door. Cardire screamed, high and piercing. Then water sloshed over his head, cutting his cry into a gurgle.

Cardire's frantic fingers tore at Mardis' hair and face. Hands battered against him, but he clung to the man's waist, fought his way down, down . . . Water pressed hard against his ears-drums and his lungs ached. Cardire's arms closed with terrific pressure around his head, the medium's legs around Mardis' waist. He was hanging on now, fear crazed, clinging desperately to the only thing he could touch.

Mardis let go with his hands, moved fumbling fingers upward. His left hand found Cardire's hair. Mardis' lungs throbbled painfully and his ribs seemed to crush in against the cavity that had been his chest.

He smashed his right fist downward below the hair he clutched in his left hand and felt the jar run through his arm. He struck again. The arms around his head quivered and went lax. Mardis pushed the man away from him, placed both hands on Cardire's shoulders, heaved downward.

Treading water Don Mardis gulped great lungfuls of air. Overhead he could see the square of light. It slanted across the trap door swinging downward. He lunged upward and caught the door. For a full minute he hung there, watching the water below him. The circles he had made widened into the blackness, then the muddy water became still. . . .

SITTING in the swing on the Marston front porch, Maurine Kent leaned her head against Don Mardis' still wet shoulder. "If you had been a little later,"

she said softly, "Mrs. Marston would have made over all her property to Madame Willoworth. She believed it was really her husband. I—I thought so, too. I still don't understand how you knew."

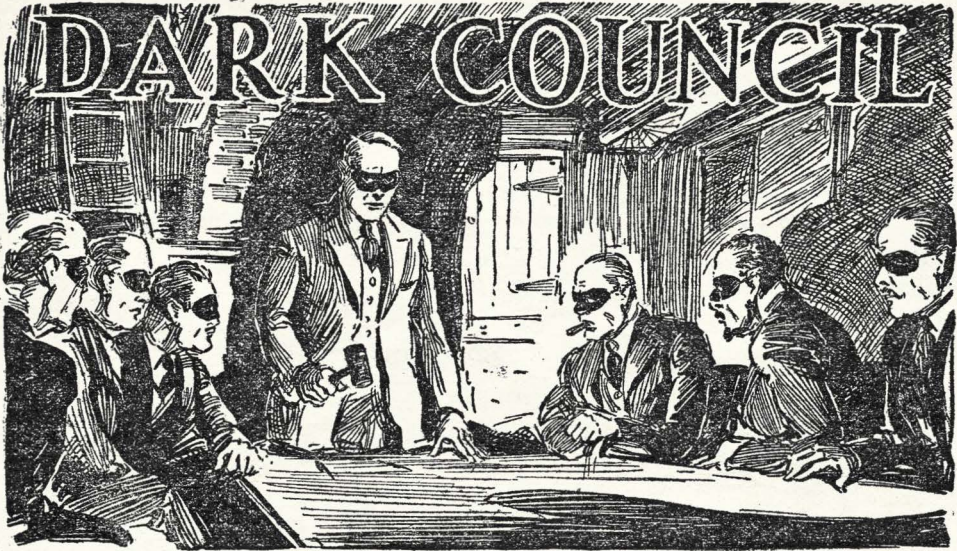
Mardis slid an arm around her shoulders. "I felt the rope around the doctor's body that tied him to the casket. The box had a revolving bottom. Cardire was tied to the other side. When Madame Willoworth attacked me, he released himself, slid out the false bottom.

"But the fire trick fooled me for a while. Only when I saw the formula in Cardire's book did I remember my chemistry. If you will mix one-half ounce of camphor and two ounces of aquavite with one ounce of liquid styrax, an ounce of quicksilver, and two ounces of pulverized red stone, shake it and let it set for twelve hours you can rub it on yourself and be a regular Daniel in the fiery furnace. But don't soak that lovely hair of yours in a solution of salt and borax washing powder the way she did hers. I don't want you taking chances with it." He ran his fingers caressingly through her hair.

The girl smiled and her voice was low. "Don, your father would be mighty proud of you."

For a long moment there was no sound except for the gentle squeaking of the chains that held the swing. Then a car droned past down the avenue. Maurine said, "There's still one thing I don't understand. How did Madame Willoworth make that horrid foam that ran out of her mouth?"

Don Mardis raised her chin with brown fingers and a smile flickered in his eyes. "A few months from now I'm going to ask you to marry me. If you say 'No,' I'll wash your mouth with some of the soap she had in hers. It tastes like hell!"



IS THERE any real difference between horror and terror? We believe there is—rather a big difference, as a matter of fact. And we believe further that both of these qualities have a very definite place in any good mystery story of the type which is featured in this magazine.

Take for instance, this situation: A girl comes upon a seemingly deserted mansion in the woods and, entering unannounced, comes eventually to a spot from which she can look down into a dimly lighted room in which four black-robed figures are bending above the bound, almost nude body of a beautiful woman. At that moment the woman screams, and the watching girl sees one of the robed figures straighten. In one hand he holds a dripping scalpel. In the other he holds aloft, as though in triumph, a crimsoned strip of human flesh! He moves, on slowly deliberate feet, to a corner of the room wherein a large dog is chained. And for a moment, then, he stands there, holding that dripping, human morsel high above the slavering, eager jaws of the huge beast!

In that moment the watching girl knows horror

But later that night, long hours after she has fled that ghastly torture scene, the girl who watched tastes a new emo-

tion—terror! For, let us say, she discovers that which makes her believe that those four black-robed human monsters have in some way tracked her to her home. She is alone in the house, and she hears footsteps in the hallway. She glimpses a face at her bedroom window. Will she, too, suffer the ghastly fate of the beautiful woman? Slowly her door swings open And she screams in *terror!*

Get the point? See the difference? Realize why both emotions have legitimate place in the sort of tingling tales that are published each month in *Dime Mystery*? Personally, we think that terror is by far the stronger of the two emotions—but we're not overlooking the fact that horror, too, belongs. In short, you'll find that a good *Dime Mystery* yarn, nine times in ten, comes pretty close to having *all* the makings. Horror, terror, mystery, suspense—and, in most cases, a good meaty crime problem for the reader to sink his teeth into and try to solve!

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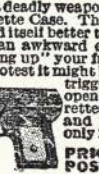
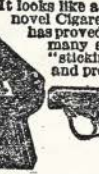
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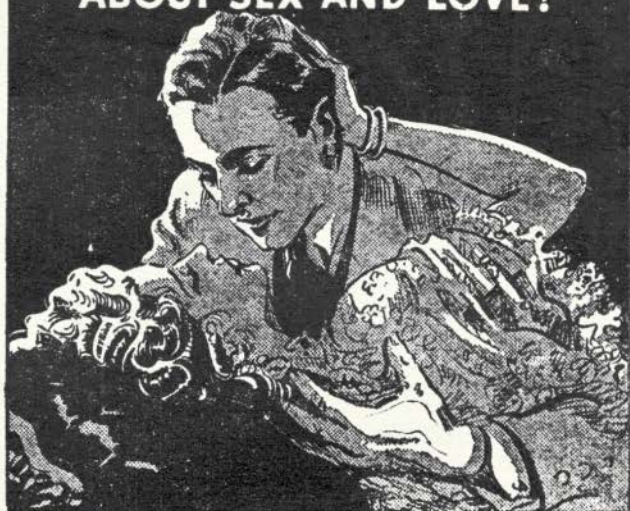
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Gamble a stamp today by mailing the coupon for a free copy of my book, "Everlasting Health and Strength." It tells you all about my special Dynamic-Tension method, and what it has done to make big-muscled men out of run-down specimens. It shows you, from actual photos, how I have developed my pupils to the same perfectly balanced proportions of my own physique, by my own secret methods. What my system did for me, and these hundreds of others it can do for you too. Don't keep on being only 25 or 50 per cent of the man you can be! Find out what I can do for you.

Where shall I send your copy of "Everlasting Health and Strength?" Jot your name and address down on the coupon, and mail it today. CHARLES ATLAS, Dept. 83-C, 133 East 23rd Street, New York City.



CHARLES ATLAS, Dept. 83-C, 133 East 23rd Street, New York City.

I want the proof that your system of Dynamic-Tension will make a New Man of me—give me a healthy, husky body and big muscle development. Send me your free book, "Everlasting Health and Strength."

Name.....
(Please print or write plainly)

Address.....

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

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STOP YOUR Rupture Worries!

Learn About My Perfected Unique Rupture Invention!

Why worry and suffer with that rupture any longer? *Learn now about my perfected rupture invention.* It has brought ease, comfort, and happiness to thousands by assisting Nature in relieving and curing many cases of reducible hernial. *You can imagine how happy* these thousands of rupture sufferers were when they wrote me to report relief, comfort and cures! How would YOU like to be able to feel that same happiness—to sit down and write me such a message—a few months from today? Hurry—send coupon quick for Free Rupture Book, PROOF of results and invention revelation!

Mysterious-Acting Device Binds and Draws the Broken Parts Together as You Would a Broken Limb!

Surprisingly—continually—my perfected Automatic Air Cushions draw the broken parts together allowing Nature, the Great Healer, to swing into action! All the while you should experience the most heavenly comfort and security. *Look!* No obnoxious springs or pads or metal girdles! No salves or plasters! My complete appliance is feather-lite, durable, invisible, sanitary and **CHEAP IN PRICE!** Wouldn't YOU like to say "good-bye" to rupture worries and "hello" to NEW freedom . . . NEW glory in living . . . NEW happiness—with the help of Mother Nature and my mysterious-acting Air Cushion Appliances?

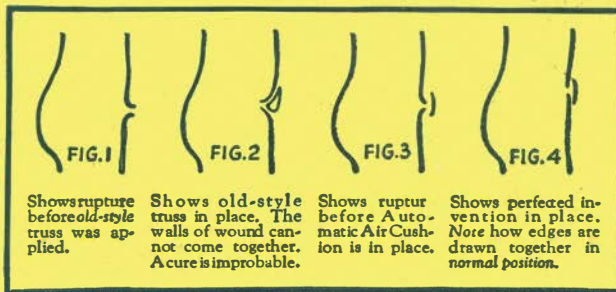


FIG. 1 Shows rupture before old-style truss was applied.

FIG. 2 Shows old-style truss in place. The walls of wound cannot come together. A cure is improbable.

FIG. 3 Shows rupture before Automatic Air Cushion is in place.

FIG. 4 Shows perfected invention in place. Note how edges are drawn together in normal position.

Rupture Book FREE!

CONFIDENTIAL COUPON for RUPTURE SUFFERERS

H. C. Brooks,
594-II State St., Marshall, Mich.
Rush me your new Free Book, amazing rupture method revelation, proof of results, all without obligation, and in plain, sealed envelope.



H. C. BROOKS
Inventor

Name _____

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City _____

State _____

State
whether
for man,
woman
or child

PROOF! Reports on Reducible Rupture Cases

"LIFTS 400 LBS."

"Have no further use for your Appliance as I'm O. K. Wore it a year. I now can lift 400 lbs. without any fear."—John L. Helges, 635 W. Locust St., York, Pa.

"CAN RUN UP HILL"

"I had a rupture about 14 years, then wore your Appliance for 3. It is about a year since I threw it away. I feel fine, gaining weight nicely. I can run up and down hill which I never could before."—Mr. J. Soederstrom, 2909 Trowbridge Ave., Cleveland, O.

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