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NOVEMBER

# MYSTERY



MAGAZINE



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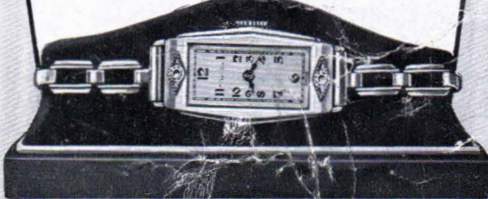
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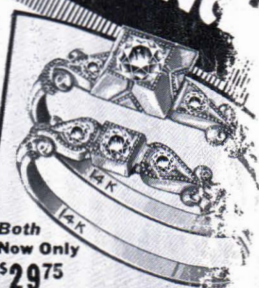
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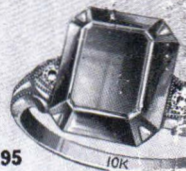


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# 10¢ DIME MYSTERY MAGAZINE

Volume Six

November, 1934

Number Four

## FEATURE-LENGTH MYSTERY NOVEL

Ghouls of the Green Death.....By Wyatt Blassingame 8  
*In that lost cavern, a green-faced man writhed horribly as the masked ones watched him die. And Fred Kane, looking on, knew the Green Plague had him in its clutches—knew that he too must die soon, writhing and shrieking, a pain-wracked madman!*

## THREE MYSTERY-TERROR NOVELETTES

The Doom Dust.....By Arthur Leo Zagat 46  
*Death was abroad in the lonely lanes, offering a fearful fate to an unprotected bride—and a ghastly fungus doom to all who interfered!*

Terror From the Deep.....By Hugh B. Cave 72  
*They knew not why they were gathered there, in that house perched above the roaring sea. They knew only the hideous fate in store for them. . . .*

Dead Men's Eyes.....By George Edson 96  
*Were those wailing ones who walked the night, blood streaming from their eyeless sockets, mere victims of the pirate torturer's work?*

## SHORT TERROR TALES

Out of the Past.....By E. G. Morris 41  
*It was a strange company in that eerie house of living shadows.*

By Order of the Dead.....By R. Currie Fleming 63  
*His will seemed mightier than death. . . .*

Daughters of Pain.....By H. M. Appel 112  
*To the torture creed of an ancient race they sacrificed their soft warm bodies. . . .*

—AND—

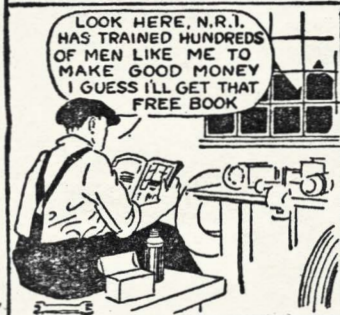
Dark Council.....A Department 122

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Story Illustrations by Amos Sewell

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**F**RED KANE looked out at the rolling darkness of the huge cemetery and a shudder ran through his tall, angular body. For just one second fear was a wet coldness along his spine. Then he laughed and wondered why he had shuddered. The cemetery was peaceful enough. A three-quarter moon hung low in the west, making the grass look ebony and silver. White tombstones were pale death flowers blooming in the moonlight. Far down the gravel drive he could see the dark blot of the caretaker's cottage. Peaceful—yet Kane had shuddered in sudden fear looking across the moon-washed slopes.

Twenty-four hours later he was to remember that shudder—and experience the weird feeling of predestined evil that may





# GHOULS OF THE GREEN DEATH

By Wyatt Blassingame

(Author of "Three Hours to Live!" etc.)

*Like some dread nightmare beast, the Green Death stalked the streets of New York, invading the homes of the innocent, leaving men in hideous agony from which there was no escape. And Detective Fred Kane, seeking the fiend behind this holocaust, found even himself a victim of the hideous pestilence—his body a living fire of pain, his brain a tortured Thing that saw death creeping inevitably upon it!*

come to a man who watches something that he has dreamed actually happen.

But now Kane shrugged. "Maybe I better give up my job with the force and start selling lavender perfume—me getting the jitters from looking at a marble orchard!"

He turned, crossed the street, and walked north half a block to the subway station. His shoes made thudding sounds on the concrete steps as he went down.

The clock over the change booth said 2:32. Kane yawned, dropped a nickel in the turnstile and pushed through. Damn, he was tired. Ten hours he'd been tramping about upper Manhattan and hadn't learned a thing which would help a cop



who was a member of the Missing Persons Bureau to find four guys who'd disappeared recently. This was no job for a detective who liked his troubles breaking fast and with something new on the ball each time. It had sounded interesting, however.

Four persons had disappeared within the last week, all from the same section—and all of them young and healthy. A girl had gone to put some flowers on her Aunt Emma's grave, and never came back. Two young men had started downtown late at night—they must have ridden this subway, Kane thought—and nothing had been heard of them since. One man had left his downtown office late, headed to his home on West 158th Street. He'd never gotten there. . . .

Kane looked up and down the bleakly lighted platform. The only other person waiting was a small, bow-legged man in a brown suit near the far end. He stood with his back turned to Kane. Trains didn't run often at this time of the night. The detective dug in his hip pocket, pulled out a newspaper.

GREEN DEATH STRIKES DOWN TWO MORE, the streamer howled. Kane wrinkled the mouth that looked surprisingly young and boyish in his dark, angular face, and made a snorting noise. That was the trouble with these papers trying to build up circulation, he thought—always playing up scare stories. He'd read the previous stories about the Green Death and he started reading this one without much interest.

Abruptly, then, his fingers tightened about the paper and his black head bent closer.

**F**IVE more persons had contracted the disease which scientists had as yet been unable to identify. The child of one of New York's most prominent millionaires, confined to the hospital last week with

the disease, had died. His face had been a vivid, horrible green before his death and his last hours had been in agony which morphine could not relieve. Doctors were fearful that an epidemic might spread through the city. Scientists admitted they were without means to fight the plague should it gain further headway.

One of the two new patients was a young man of moderate means, average family. Another was an old pauper from the Bowery. No man could know at what moment the plague might strike him. The millionaire had offered a large reward for his son's cure, and was allowing the offer to stand after the boy's death—as an incentive to medical effort which might save others from a similar fate. But so far all the furious efforts of science had been futile. Horrible agony and sure death awaited the person who contracted the disease.

Fred Kane's long, hard fingers knotted as they gripped the paper. Death from knives and guns he didn't fear. He'd looked at Death often, and grinned in his face. But this sort of thing—it didn't give a man a chance.

Kane shrugged and looked up the track for the train. Not in sight yet.

Abruptly the detective's tall, lean body stiffened. His eyes squinted almost shut. "What the hell?" he said aloud.

The bow-legged man in the brown suit had vanished. He couldn't have left the platform without coming back past Kane. He hadn't done that, yet he was gone!

The newspaper slid rustling from Kane's hand. He began to walk with long, swinging strides toward the point where the man had stood. His right shoulder was slightly higher than his left, making a hollow between his coat and shirt on the left side. Through that hollow his right hand could reach and pull a .38 police special in less than one second.



Fred Kane was a tall man. His shoulders looked too wide above his long, straight legs and hipless waist. His face was dark, with high, prominent cheekbones and a lean, hard chin. His nose was straight, high-bridged. His forehead was high, his hair straight and black. He was thirty years old, looked forty until one noticed his mouth and eyes. Then you thought he might be no more than twenty. The mouth was wide, pleasant. The eyes were surprisingly light brown in his dark face. As a rule they held a boyish twinkle. Now they had suddenly gone dead and colorless.

Kane reached the point where the bow-legged man had stood, looked around. No doors here. He stepped to the edge of the platform, looked over. The squinted eyes followed the steel tracks out into the dimly lighted tunnel.

Kane's mouth jerked wide open and his eyes seemed abruptly to swell. His cheek bones made sharp creases across his face. "God!" he said.

Along the tunnel occasional dust-coated globes threw dim patches of light. The dark figures looked like weird, abnormal shadows. For one second Kane stood motionless, amazed, staring.

There were three of them. Tall, black, flowing things that seemed to glide along the floor of the tunnel. And over the top of one, hanging as limp as an empty bag, was the bow-legged man in the brown suit. Kane could see his arm swaying slightly as the thing below him glided.

"Hey!" The word was a bellow that shook along the concrete tunnel. Kane flung his long body from the edge of the platform, hit between the tracks running. The .38 special was gripped hard in his right hand.

The tall, gliding things stopped, turned. They were nearly a hundred yards away, but Kane was eating up the distance with amazing speed.

Abruptly they twisted away from Kane, and leaped.

The dusky light from a shaded bulb shone on them for a second before they whipped into the gloom beyond. The cold lump went out of Kane's chest and his lips turned up in a hard grin. Those things were men in long, black robes.

"Hey!" he yelled, kept running. "Stop or I'm shootin'!"

**T**HE last words were drowned out by a low but growing thunder. The train was coming.

The figures were less than sixty yards ahead now. Kane's right hand began to steady in front of him, centering the gun. The thunder had grown to a roar and he could see the light of the train beyond the running men. It was coming toward him at fifty miles an hour.

Without warning the three men stopped. They were at the edge of a circle of light and Kane could see the swaying robes, the black, pointed hoods, the dangling arms of the bow-legged man. They were to the left of the tracks, but the light of the train caught them for a second. As it did one raised a slow hand, threw back the hood from about his face. Kane caught a sharp, terrified breath. The face below the hood was a livid green!

The train was even with them now, past them, and howling toward Kane. He heard the wild screaming of brakes. He leaped to the left and his foot hit a cross tie, sent him spinning. He tried to catch his balance, staggered and went crashing down straight toward the third rail.

Wild terror lashed at him. He'd seen men die in the chair, eyes bulging from their heads. The third rail held the same death. He tried to fling his body back from the rail, across the tracks in front of the oncoming train. The brakes were screaming like a mad banshee now, making the long tunnel horrid with sound.



Kane caught a glimpse of the first car thirty yards away, tearing at him.

He struck on his right side, right arm outflung. His hand rapped the protective plank above the rail. His ribs were across the track. The train was twenty yards away and coming fast.

Kane's legs doubled like pistons under him, straightened. His body plunged through space. He cleared the rail, shot between the upright pillars, hit between the next pair of tracks. The train howled over the spot where he had fallen, came to a jerking, shrieking halt.

Kane got unsteadily to his feet. He felt a little sick at his stomach and his knees were weak. He looked with wide eyes at the wheels which had almost ground him into a pulp, the high-powered third rail which he had missed by inches.

The engineer had craned his neck around the front of the train and was yelling back at Kane. "What the God damned holy hell do you—" White, frightened faces were peering from the train windows.

Abruptly Kane broke into a furious race toward the rear of the train. Behind him the engineer kept up his shouting. Kane, too, cursed as he ran. Those hooded men would be getting away while he stood here like a ninny.

He sprinted past the last car, leaped the third rail, over the tracks and jerked to a halt near the concrete wall. Close around here. His eyes glinted up and down the tracks.

The hooded men and their captive had vanished.

## CHAPTER TWO

### The Missing Return

**F**OR ten seconds Fred Kane stood flat-footed, staring along the dimly lighted tunnel. His eyes, which had been wide with surprise, narrowed slowly and the

color went out of them. The high cheekbones began to show plainly across his face. Those hooded men couldn't have vanished into air—even if the face of one was a ghastly green. A cold shudder ran down Kane's back as he thought of that face.

Persons were calling from the train window now and Kane turned, saw two men start along the side of the cars toward him. The engineer and a conductor. Kane's full boyish mouth pressed into a straight line. It was just possible that the hooded men had—

"Hey! What the hell you think this is? A race track? Of all the damned fools . . ." The engineer was sputtering profanity as he approached.

Kane said, "Aw shut up." He flicked the lapel of his gray suit, showed the badge. "I was chasing a bunch of guys through here, but they got away. How far to the first emergency exit?"

The conductor pointed a stubby finger. "Hundred yards or more, maybe two hundred."

Kane nodded and the line of his mouth straightened. It was hardly conceivable that the men could have reached the emergency exit in those few seconds. If they hadn't escaped that way there was only one other place they could be—on the train.

Leaving the conductor at the rear to keep a lookout, Kane went with the engineer to the front, boarded the train and went through it. He didn't expect to find any hooded men; they would have removed those. But he found no discarded robes, no bow-legged man in a brown suit. None of the passengers had noticed anyone enter the train.

Finally Kane gave up the search. It didn't seem possible the men could have reached the emergency exit—yet they had vanished. He shrugged, told himself they were fast runners. But doubt and a



strange, unaccountable fear gnawed at Kane's mind. There had been something supernatural, something eerie and horrible about those green-faced ghouls who had snatched the man from the subway platform and disappeared into the depths of this grimy, concrete tunnel.

Was this the way the other four had disappeared? Who were these robed, skulking figures who hid their rotting faces under dark hoods? Why were they stealing human beings and where did they vanish with them? "They must have reached that exit," Kane said, half aloud. But the very words seemed to mock him.

He called the conductor aboard, and the train pulled into the station where Kane had stood fifteen minutes earlier.

He left the cars and pushed through the turnstile. The clock above the change booth said 2:56. Inside the booth a man was nodding sleepily.

Kane stepped to the booth, peered through the glass. The man inside looked up with a start, pushed a couple of nickels toward the window. He was a short, plump, middle-aged man. His face was as round as a full moon, bald across the forehead and with a fringe of gray hair in the back. His skin was pink, his small mouth surprisingly white. His faded blue eyes were narrow and crafty.

Kane showed his badge, asked, "Anybody leave this station in the last few minutes?"

The man shook his round head. A pale light showed in the faded eyes. "How come?"

Kane said shortly, "Your damn certain nobody left here, or have you been asleep?"

A pale tongue showed between the man's white lips, vanished. "Nobody left this side. Maybe on the uptown side. I don't notice over there."

Kane said, "Okay." For a moment he looked at the round-faced man out of

narrowed, colorless eyes. Heeling about, he walked out of the station.

IT WAS five minutes of ten when Fred Kane came down the walk toward the big brick building on Centre Street. He was carrying a newspaper in his hand and his boyish mouth was a bit stiff and pale.

Two men in uniform were on the steps as Kane started up them. They were big men, but there was something strained and frightened about their faces. Unconsciously they edged away from Kane and from each other.

The detective stopped. There was a question in his brown eyes, but his mouth was smiling. "What the hell, man? You think I got dandruff?"

The policeman shifted from one foot to the other. He asked grimly, "You seen the morning papers?"

Kane said, "Yes." The Green Death had been smeared all through them. Ten new cases in the city. On the subway this morning Kane had noticed many pale, frightened faces, eyes that nervously studied the other riders. There hadn't been the usual crowding.

The policeman blurted, "Well, the papers ain't got nothing about Ed Hammond beginning to yell with a headache right in here—less'n a hour ago." The man stopped, but his lips kept twitching.

Kane said, "God!" He felt hollow inside as he went on up the steps.

Inspector McFarlane listened to his story, wriggled his square jaw, and asked, "You're sure the man's face was green?"

Kane said, "Yes, sir. A sort of nasty looking green."

"That sort of ties up with a report we got in this morning," McFarlane said. "One of the men you were searching for, Ed Nabors, 326 West 158th Street, was found this morning." The inspector paused, wriggled his square jaw. Then he



added: "A Dr. Peter McGrath was arrested when this fellow was seen in his car, throwing a fit. McGrath's from the Medical Center. He claimed he saw this fellow tossing a fit on the sidewalk, picked him up and started for the hospital with him. The reason he was throwing the fit —" McGrath paused again—"he had this Green Death."

Kane sucked a deep breath, felt the prickling of fear along his back. He was thinking of men dying in agony, not even able to fight against the thing that killed them. If a man was killed in a fight, that was one thing. But to be murdered by a little germ that crawled through your body, that you couldn't even see, couldn't put your hands on and fight. . . .

The inspector said, "I can't be certain, but it looks as though there might be a definite tie-up between this disease and the missing persons. The police will have to do their part. The whole city, even the force, is getting jumpy."

Kane nodded. If the tie-up between the Green Death and the increasing number of missing persons was discovered, the city would become panic-stricken.

The inspector's square jaw set. He snapped, "I want some action."

Kane said, "Yes, sir." He turned on his heels. "I'll go out to the Medical Center and check on Nabors."

**D**R. PETER McGRATH was a slim, blond man with a button nose and rimless glasses. With him now was Dr. Charles Stuart, average height, lean, with a bald forehead, eyes and nose like a hawk.

"I suppose you want to see me about the Nabors man." McGrath said. His voice was slow and drawing, almost insulting. His blue eyes were hostile behind the glasses.

"You're right." Fred Kane answered. "I want you to tell me what you can about

this disease, and about finding the young man."

McGrath licked his thin lips. "Dr. Stuart knows more about the disease than I. That's why he came down with me."

Kane looked toward the lean, hawk-faced doctor. Stuart said, "There's really very little I can tell you." He spoke rapidly, clipping the ends of the words. "We don't know how long after the time of contraction before the first symptoms appear. The first indication of which we know is a raging, intermittent headache, accompanied by high temperature. This generally lasts for one day. By the second day the patient's face begins to take on the greenish color, and by the end of that day he has generally gone mad from pain if not from some actual effect of the disease on the brain. Due to occasional hallucinations, I am inclined to believe the disease does affect the brain. The patients may linger for several days or may die as early as the third day."

Once more Fred Kane felt the chill breath of unknown fear against his face. His voice was husky as he said, "Ed Nabors disappeared four days ago. That means that he caught the disease *after* he disappeared."

"Not necessarily," Stuart clipped. "But to the best of our present knowledge, yes."

Kane ran a tongue over lips that were straight and hard. "May I see him?"

Flame jumped in Stuart's hawk eyes, went out. Dr. McGrath drawled, "You realize that we don't know how this disease is contracted. There is a possibility that by entering the patient's room. . . ."

Kane swallowed at the lump in his throat. If he had been entering a room to shoot it out with a gangster, he would have gone smiling. But this—this was different. He swallowed again, said, "I'm working on this case. It would be best if I saw—the thing."

"You're the law," Stuart said sharply.

He rose from his chair, motioned toward the door.

There was a girl at the end of the hallway and as the three men approached the door marked 324, she started walking rapidly toward them. Kane sucked a deep, pleasant breath into his lungs when he saw her and the eyes in his dark face were suddenly bright and youthful.

Lord! She was pretty! Hair the tawny red of a tiger lily, cheeks very white except for the flush of health and a wide scarlet mouth. Anything but a perfect figure below that face would have been a tragedy—and Kane mentally noted this was no tragedy.

She had taken less than five steps when Dr. Stuart waved her back, called, "Be there in a moment." McGrath pulled open a door and the three men entered.

The room was spotless, sunny. There was a white bed near the far wall, between two windows. Fred Kane stepped through the door, his breath suspended like a hanging sword, nameless fear crawling in his chest. Then he looked toward the bed and his breath exploded in horror. His eyes went wide and colorless; his lips jerked back across blunt teeth. "God!" he said aloud.

THE man on the bed was lying perfectly still, and for a second Kane did not realize that the stillness was caused by the heavy strait-jacket which held his arms and legs. There was a gag over his mouth, but Kane could see the rest of his face. The skin was a violent, sickening green, the color of ancient fungus or of rotting slime on stagnant water!

Against it his red hair showed in weird contrast. The green flesh kept twitching, writhing, jerking as though every muscle in the man's body were fighting with wild and demoniacal fury against the bonds that held him.

Then Kane saw the eyes. Again he said,

"God!" in a taut, half-dazed voice. For the eyes were also green! They glittered, lashing back and forth in their sockets like insane fires.

Dr. Stuart said, "After they have gone completely mad it is necessary to use the strait-jacket. Otherwise he might leap from the windows, kill himself against the walls, anything. It's the pain, you know."

Fred Kane felt sick at his belly. Standing there, looking at the man on the bed, he shuddered as he had once before while gazing out across the moonwashed cemetery; he felt once more that weird premonition of inescapable evil. Instinctively he knew that he too would yet turn green, go mad, and. . . .

"There is no cure," Stuart was saying. "He will die today or tomorrow."

"But—but the pain," Kane burst out. "Can't you do anything about that?"

"He's full of morphine," Stuart snapped. "For some reason it doesn't seem to help much."

McGrath's voice was a slow sneer. "If I had my way, he'd get no morphine. He's going to die anyway, and it only ruins what chance we have of learning anything from observation."

Kane swung toward the thin man and stared at him with wide-eyed amazement. He'd watched criminals being third degreed and never blinked, but this made him slightly sick. As he looked at the button nose, the thin lips of the doctor his own cheekbones began to show clearly across his dark face.

"Let's get out of here," he said. "I've seen enough."

The girl was waiting for them in the hall. She came toward Dr. Stuart swiftly, her wide-set, blue eyes mirroring fear and sorrow. "How—how is he?" she asked.

The doctor put a sympathetic hand on the girl's shoulder. "It's as I told you. So far there's no change."



The girl bit her lips to keep them steady. Kane leaned suddenly forward, asked, "Are you Miss Nabors?"

She nodded.

Kane said, "I was at your home yesterday but couldn't find you." He introduced himself.

"The girl's in no condition to talk to detectives." McGrath drawled.

Kane swung half about to face the doctor. Rose Nabors put her hand on his arm.

"If there's anything I can tell that might help," she said, "I'll be glad to."

Kane said, "Thanks. Your brother wasn't having headaches before he left home, was he?"

Her blue eyes widened. "No. He'd always been so healthy, went in for athletics."

"Did he have any enemies? Anybody that might have wanted to hurt him, get him out of the way?"

She shook her head slowly. "Everybody liked Ed. He was always laughing and—" Her voice broke and a white line of perfect teeth showed as she bit her lower lip.

Abruptly Kane wanted to put his arms around her. Involuntarily he raised his hands. He stopped them, staring at his upturned palms. He had just come from the room of the Green Death. Suppose he had brought the disease with him. If he touched her. . . .

"Thanks," he said, and turned abruptly away.

But when he left the hospital a few minutes later, the vision of tawny hair above a face had once again eclipsed the memory of that other, more horrible face.

**T**HE cemetery fascinated Kane. Looking at it again now in the moonlight he could feel once more that strange shudder along his spine. He cursed himself for a fool, looked at his watch. Three minutes

to twelve. He started back toward the subway entrance.

He'd come back to this section at twilight, had been walking nervously about since then. Five persons had disappeared in this neighborhood. Perhaps there would be others.

He went down the steps into the subway, stopped at the change booth. The pink-faced, bald-headed man glared at him out of furtive blue eyes. "Naw, I seen no bow-legged man in a brown hat. And nobody come out of this subway that didn't come in it on a train."

"All right," Kane said. "Keep your shirt on." He went over the turnstile without dropping a nickel, walked from end to end of the platform. Along the tunnel the dust-coated lights burned dully, the concrete wall showed in checkered light and shadow fading into dim nothingness. There was no life, no movement. He went back over the turnstile. From behind the glass door the bald-headed man watched him narrowly.

On the sidewalk again, Kane could see the cemetery, silver and black in the moonlight. There was a thick, six-foot hedge between it and the sidewalk, but from the opposite side of the street he could see over without trouble. He turned north, walking slowly.

A half block away a street light made a white circle on the pavement, one edge reaching up to the walk. Kane saw a man come into the light, then out again, moving with long swinging strides. For no reason he could name, Kane stood still and watched. He could scarcely see the man against the dark shadow of the hedge.

The man reached the drive which led in to the cemetery. There was no hedge here and for one half-second he showed clear and black against the moonlight.

And then, without warning, three hooded figures showed suddenly beside the man! Like giant and hideous geni

they seemed to have risen out of the earth. Kane saw the man spin, heard the terrified cry that split his lips—and was cut short. A robed arm swung high and down. The black figures scooped up the man and vanished behind the hedge. . . .

### CHAPTER THREE

#### Out of the Grave

IT HAD happened in less than two seconds, but before the figures disappeared, Fred Kane was running full tilt toward them, a .38 police special in his right hand. Hard muscles drove his legs like pistons; his shoulders were pushed forward; his breath came through clenched teeth from which the lips had curled back.

And deep in his belly cold fear gnawed at his bowels.

He wasn't afraid of three to one against him, but in his mind was that horrible green face he had seen below a back-thrown hood—and the agonized, pain-racked face in the hospital!

His shoes pounded across the street, skidded on the gravel drive. He hit the soft green turf to the right of the drive, running at full blast—and stopped. The hooded figures had vanished!

The hair along Kane's neck was stiff and tingling. Nothing but a bird could have escaped in the few seconds that had elapsed. His eyes ached as he stared out into the moonlight, and that cold, shuddery fear quivered along his back. Last night they had vanished from the subway. And now. . . .

Kane started walking, following the hedge. His eyes were narrowed to slits, and colorless. His mouth was straight and pale. He tried to shake off the fear that gripped him. Those men couldn't be suffering from the Green Death. If so, they'd be throwing fits, not kidnaping young

men and women. Yet—their faces *were* green. A man had disappeared, and returned with the Green Death.

Kane cursed himself for a cowardly fool, swung out toward the center of the cemetery. They had to be here somewhere. Behind a tombstone perhaps.

Monuments of all sizes and shapes rose like weird stalagmites out of the ground around him. Ahead was the dark blot of a large mausoleum. To either side of it small oak trees showed like floating shadows in the moonlight.

*Something flickered from the mausoleum to the oak*—and vanished! Fred Kane caught one harsh breath and hurled himself forward, running in a zigzag line, gun ready.

A tongue of fire licked the darkness. A shot crashed. Wind whipped Kane's face and he heard the hiss of a bullet past his ear. He hurled himself to the right, hit flat on his chest, rolled back of a grave.

He slipped his gun across the top of the slab. He pushed one eye past the corner, peered at the spot from which the shot had come. The tree trunk was slender and dark. It bulged slightly on one side.

Kane centered the muzzle of his gun on the bulge, and shouted, "This is the police. Come from back of that tree or I'm shooting!"

The bulge in the tree quivered slightly. A voice asked, "Well, why in hell ain't yuh said so?" Then a dark shadow detached itself from the tree and moved forward. Kane could see the rifle in the man's hand.

"Drop that rifle," he said. "Then come ahead."

The man bent, lowered the rifle tenderly, straightened. Three steps and he was in the moonlight. Kane got up, pistol ready, and went to meet him.

It was an old man with stooped shoulders and shaggy white hair that fell across



a narrow forehead. Eyes that were too close together were strangely bright in the wrinkled face. The mouth was toothless and the lips caved in over the gums. Somewhere Fred Kane had seen that face before.

**K**ANE'S gun was close against his hip. He asked, "Who in hell are you?"

"I oughta be askin' you that question." The man's voice was surprisingly deep with an unmistakable Bowery accent. "You come bustin' into my cemetery. I'm the caretaker."

Kane nodded, kept trying to remember where he had seen the old man before. "Why the devil were you shooting at me?"

"There's been bad things goin' on in this place the last week. A woman yellin' four, five nights ago. Tonight I heard a man shout. Then I seen you come runnin' with that gun. Yuh want me to wait till yuh stuck it in my ribs and pulled the trigger?"

Kane's eyes were thin lines in his face now. He asked suddenly, "What's your name?"

The old man's white head jerked erect. The eyes blazed, then clouded like those of a hawk. "Ike Neganzi."

Breath made a hissing sound between Kane's teeth. Now he remembered! Ike Neganzi had been a small-time political racketeer. He'd been convicted, sentenced to thirty years and had gone up swearing to have revenge on the city which had imprisoned him. Two years ago he had been released, still swearing revenge. The city had offered him the job of caretaker at the cemetery and he had accepted. The papers had played it up for a day or two with pictures.

Could this man still hate the city so much that. . . ?

Kane shrugged, stuck his gun back in its holster. "You see anybody else before you saw me? Men with hoods?"

Stark terror showed in the old man's face. "Not tonight. No!"

Kane tensed, leaning forward, lips pulled thin. "What do you mean, 'Not tonight'?"

"I seen them other nights." The sunken lips shook. "They got—green faces!"

For a half minute Kane stood motionless while dread ate slowly through his stomach. Before his slitted eyes was a vision of the face he had seen in the hospital: green and rotting, twitching with constant, unrelievable agony. Now it was his job to run down these green-faced monsters. And if he succeeded and ran them to earth, it might mean—The Green Death for him.

Ike Neganzi said, "I'm gettin' on back to my house. I don't like it out here with—with. . ." His voice trailed off. He turned, picked up his rifle and started back toward the caretaker's lodge.

Kane went toward the point where the hooded men and their victim had vanished behind the hedge. From there he began a slow, systematic search. There *had* to be some sign to show where they had gone! They couldn't vanish as if they had changed into tombs—as if they were ghouls which had risen from the grave and returned to the grave!

Kane stopped his search, stood flat-footed, cursing himself. If he let his mind run on like this he'd go nuts. The way he *had* shuddered last night when looking at this cemetery. No reason for that. And now. . . .

The sound that broke off all thought was sharp, flesh-crawling, like the grate of stone on stone. It snapped Fred Kane's muscles like a bolt of electricity, whirled him about, hand jumping for his gun.

The hand froze in sheer horror. Fear jerked his muscles into cold knots, knocked the air from his lungs. His eyes began to swell in their sockets, unbelieving.

Moonlight lay bleak across the thick

turf, the white tombs. And out of a grave beside Kane a Thing was rising! His distended eyes saw it for only one rushing second. It came straight up like a rising pillar of black smoke. Below it he could see the dark, emptiness of the grave. It cracked forward and down.

Kane tried to hurl himself to one side, to whip his hand beneath his coat and reach the .38. Fear-cold muscles moved sluggishly. They seemed to creak and strain with infinite slowness.

The Thing smashed into his head. Moonlight burst into whirling pieces, faded into blackness.

**A** PATIENT, unending river of night flowed over and through Fred Kane. He could feel his body floating in it, merged into it so that darkness flowed around him like air and through him like blood.

There was something else in the black river, something hard and fragmentary. Parts of it touched on raw, pained nerves.

The river of darkness faded into light but the tiny fragments became harsher, more numerous. Kane stirred, tried subconsciously to avoid them and could not. His eyes were open, but it was a long minute before they began to focus and his brain functioned.

With the suddenness of a bell ceasing to ring, one thought beat furiously in Kane's brain. He was afraid, horribly, unreasoningly afraid! He tried to hurl himself into terrified movement, felt his muscles jerk and become still.

Then sight returned to his eyes and thought to his mind.

He was lying flat on his back, his hands tied behind him, his feet bound together. High above him was a curving roof of solid concrete. His eyes followed this down to where it met the dirt floor on which he lay. He twisted his head, looked toward the other side. Here too was a

solid concrete wall. Fastened to it, about shoulder high, was a gasoline lamp that made white, glaring light. About ten yards below his feet a black curtain formed one wall and another made the fourth behind his head. It occurred to him suddenly that he must be in an abandoned subway tunnel.

These things Kane saw and recognized though his entire being was concentrated on the thing which had flung cold fear through his body. He knew now what the jarring fragments in the river of darkness had been.

From beyond the curtain at his feet came a steady torrent of noise. Fred Kane had never heard those sounds before, but he recognized them. They were incessant, short, high-pitched—but flat and wailing.

Beyond that curtain someone was suffering the horrors of hell, someone had gone mad with pain—and was screaming.

Like furious, pointed barbs of agony the sounds came, one on top of the other, unending. They jangled at Kane's nerves, curdled his brain into a quivering, pulsating horror.

Kane's mouth jerked open to cry out against the torture of the sounds. Then his jaw clamped tight. He began to wriggle against his bonds, writhing, twisting. The ropes held, but when he stopped to rest he had moved several yards toward the green curtain.

Kane's jaw was knotty with muscle and his cheekbones showed pink. He began to roll toward the curtain. From beyond it the screams came, high and flat.

Lying close against the curtain, Kane caught the bottom of it with his teeth, rolled his head. For just one second he stared through the space below the curtain—yet that second remained indelibly stamped on his brain. That second dragged itself throughout aeons of time while Kane ached to shut his eyes against the sight at which he gazed, frozen in horror,



unable to move. Then he was rolling back across the floor, vomiting.

Just beyond the curtain had been iron bars which reached from side to side of the tunnel. Beyond the bars was a room similar to his own, lighted in the same way. The man from whom the screams had come lay in the middle of the dirt floor.

**H**E WAS undressed except for underwear. The flesh of his body was a sickening, rotting green. His hands and feet were tied, but he twitched ceaselessly against the ropes, flopping about in an agony that lashed utterly exhausted muscles into movement. His eyes had been toward Kane, green, mad eyes. His mouth was open and saliva drooled nastily across his chin and throat. Constant twitching had rubbed the skin from his shoulders and legs, making great, dirt crusted, bloody sores. From his open mouth the cries tore like the wild screaming of a rip saw.

For two minutes Fred Kane lay weak and sick. His brain was whirling and fear crowded his lungs against the walls of his chest. The man beyond the curtain was dying of the Green Death. Why had he been brought here to die? Why had Kane been brought to this subterranean vault? Did it mean that he too. . . ? God!

He began to fight like a madman against the ropes that held him. The skin cracked and started to ooze blood, but the bonds held.

Abruptly Kane quit struggling. He lay very still, head half raised from the floor, listening. Below the constant, jarring screams there had been another sound.

It came again, nearer. A muffled voice speaking, the pad of shoes. An iron hinge grated and Kane knew that someone had entered the room of the dying man.

Rolling as silently as possible, Kane reached the curtain again, lifted it with

his teeth. Blood drained from his dark face, leaving it a sickly yellow, as he watched.

Three men had entered the death room. They wore surgeon's white clothes and surgeon's masks. Rubber gloves covered their hands. As Kane watched two of them knelt beside the bound man. One held a hypodermic. The other caught the green man's shoulder, pushed him over on one side. The thin needle of the hypo plunged into the green flesh on the inside of the elbow. As the gloved hand pulled back on the plunger, the bowl of the hypodermic was filled with blood.

The two men straightened. One of them said through his mask, "If that Nabors fool hadn't got away, we'd have almost all the patients we need, now that we've got the girl."

The man holding the hypo nodded, said, "Let's get it over with." He started toward the place where Kane lay, followed by the other two.

Fred Kane went momentarily mad with fear in that second. For he knew now why he had been brought here—and he knew the meaning of that blood-filled hypodermic.

*He was to be given the Green Death!*

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Death in His Veins

**K**ANE writhed like a snake against the ropes that held him. The skin tore loose and blood seeped into his palms, but he did not feel it. Exhausted, he went very still, his lips parted, cold; his eyes wide open and colorless.

He too would have the Green Death. There would be violent headaches for a day or so. His body would burn with fever. His skin would turn rotting green. He would go mad with pain, howl and writhe and fight to kill himself and end

his misery. And all the while that he waited to go mad he would know what was coming—and be helpless to prevent it!

"I see he's conscious," a voice said.

Kane jerked his head, saw the three men staring down at him from over surgeon's masks. The words whipped his body into one last furious effort. The muscles in his arms and shoulders bulged like whipcord. Sweat broke out on his high forehead, ran down into his eyes and across ridged cheekbones. His fingers were hooked and stiff as steel talons. Blood oozed between them as the ropes dug into his twisting wrists. But the knots held.

For more than a minute he fought, lashed by wild terror until he was all but insane. If they had come to kill him outright he could have waited and smiled. But this disease, this thing that drove men crazy and rotted their flesh as they lay helpless. . . . Finally Kane fell back exhausted. His mind was sodden, hopeless.

One of the men laughed. "He puts up as much fight beforehand as he will afterward."

"Let's get it over," the man with the hypo said. His voice was muffled by the mask, but Kane stiffened. Somewhere he had heard that voice before.

It took two men to hold Kane while the other injected the blood. Even so they were forced to strike him with the butt of an automatic. The blow didn't knock him entirely unconscious, but it seemed to break contact between his brain and muscles. He lay motionless, saw the blood-filled hypo come close to his arm, felt the prick of the needle, saw the blood from the glass bowl slowly vanish into his vein.

The men stood up. "There'll be no need to observe him for the next few hours," the man with the hypo said. They went out of the room on the side opposite the

dying man. There were iron bars beyond this curtain too, Kane noted, but the men made no effort to close the small door in them.

Complete consciousness returned to Fred Kane slowly. And with it came crawling, mind-eating horror. The blood in his body felt cold and slimy. It seemed to creep through his veins with small, scaly feet that made his skin pimple and the hair along his neck rise stiffly. From the room beyond came the dying man's screams, rolling over him in hoarse, choked notes.

He would be screaming like that soon.

Kane shuddered. He didn't know anything about medicine, but he knew that blood from the dying man's body would carry the germs of the disease. And now the germs were within his veins, coming closer to his mind like an army of rats ready to gnaw at his brain. Soon he would go mad! Mad, and screaming in agony.

"Oh God!" he said aloud. "Good God!"

Then he fought himself to calmness. His lips were thin and cold but they ceased to quiver. He'd faced death before—but this—God! He shuddered, caught his nerves in an iron will and made them steady again. He could take death when it came. There was nothing he could do for himself now. He had to die—in agony. But there was something he could do for the city. If he escaped from this place he could call the inspector, have a whole squad descend on these fiends who murdered men with disease.

He began a steady struggle against his bonds. The skin had been rubbed from his wrists and the ropes ground on raw flesh. Kane's jaw set hard and he kept working. The exertion started blood flowing from the place the gun butt had landed. It oozed out of his matted black hair and down across his forehead. His lids were narrowed against the pain in his wrists until his grimy, blood-smear-



face seemed an eyeless mask of horror.

His head was aching. Kane knew the pain came from the blow, yet he kept saying through cold lips, "It can't be the disease yet. Not yet!"

**O**NE, two hours slid by. The ropes bit deeper into his wrists, but the knots never slipped. A wild fury blew like a storm through Kane. He had to get loose! Had to! Otherwise these fiends would continue to capture persons, bring them into this hell-hole, and watch them die in agony.

Soon they would come back to watch him. Almost sick with pain he rolled over in a last wild effort. His blood and dirt caked hands bit at the ground—but the ropes held.

Kane went limp, exhausted. He was whipped. He couldn't beat these ropes. He lay breathing heavily, staring at the wall from which the gasoline lantern shed its fierce white glare.

Abruptly, then, he jerked himself to a sitting position. His lips curled back from his teeth and his eyes narrowed. "Damn it! There's a chance," he said.

Wriggling his knees under him, Fred Kane flung his body up and back, managed to stand erect. Hopping, he went across the dirt floor. The lantern was shoulder high, swung from a peg in the concrete. The floor beneath it was of dirt, but packed hard as rock.

Kane looked down at the floor, at the lantern again. Sweat and blood and dirt made a nightmare of his face; behind thin pulled lips his teeth showed strangely white. He sucked a long breath. From the next room the cries came steadily.

Well, it was better to burn, if the worst came, than to die of the Green Death. Stooping, he put his head under the lantern, straightened.

Light whirled about the room as the lantern fell. Kane tried to throw himself

to one side, out of the way of the gasoline, should it explode. His bound ankles brought him smashing to earth, close beside the lamp.

It hit the floor with a crash. Blackness whipped through the room. Light glimmered yellow and red for a half second. Kane watched as a bird might watch a snake advancing.

The red light went out and there was pitch darkness in the room except for the thin white line beneath the left curtain. Kane rolled to the spot where the lantern had fallen, lay on his hip and began to grope with his fingers. The glass shade had broken but the heavy container for the gasoline hadn't. Tortured fingers found a jagged piece of glass. . . .

Ten minutes later Fred Kane stood erect, working stiff, bloody fingers. He took several short, high steps, flexing the muscles of his legs. The men had gone to the right, not planning to return for several hours. That was probably the way out. Kane turned to the right.

It was ebony dark beyond the right curtain. Kane groped along the iron fence, found the gate and went through. The next room was like a sea of ink crowding against his eyes, seeming to clog his very lungs with darkness.

Kane started wading through the darkness, hands outstretched, feet sliding cautiously before him. He found another curtain, but no iron grating. Pushing by, he kept going. Another curtain, and there was a dull stirring in the darkness. Kane tensed, listening. The cries of the dying man were barely audible now, only a recurrent whispered horror in the blackness. Ahead there was nothing.

**K**ANE started forward again. He passed another curtain and stopped sharply. Beyond a long pool of darkness was a white line—a light below the next

curtain. A muffled voice floated through the gloom.

Sudden anger flamed in Fred Kane's body. His long fingers twitched, and were rigid. His breath came through clenched teeth. Here, just ahead, were the men who had killed him. Soon his body would be a living flame of agony without hope of anything save death. These same men had tortured others. Now. . . .

Kane crossed the room like a stalking panther. Near the thin line that marked the curtain he went down on his hands and knees. He caught the bottom of the curtain between bloody fingers, lifted it and peered under.

The room was lighted by a lamp hung on the right wall. A thick rug had been spread over the dirt floor. There were two beds, a dresser, two easy chairs, but the general shape of the room was the same as that in which Kane had stayed. In the middle of the room was a card table and at it two men were playing stud poker.

His fingers tightened on the drape, wrinkling it in tiny folds.

He didn't know these men, but he knew the type. Average height, thick-set, brutal. The slender man who had injected the blood into his arm was not here. Instinctively Kane knew that he was the central figure behind this whole fiendish business. But what could he possibly gain by such hellishness? Was he some madman playing with death in new and horrible forms?

One of the men at the table said, "Jack bets," and tossed out a chip.

The other called, said, "We better get back to that damn detective after this game. The boss'd raise hell if we missed the first things he does."

Kane's big shoulders stiffened. The slender man was probably in some room beyond this one. If Kane could hide while these men went back to look for him, he might be able to slip through.

He began to crawl toward the right wall.

His raw fingers slapped unexpectedly on a rock and pain shot through his arms. Before he could stop himself he said aloud, "Damn!"

A silence that crescendoed to a furious, intense and utter soundlessness struck the tunnel. For one second Fred Kane remained motionless on his hands and knees, mouth still open. Beyond the curtain the two gangsters sat staring at one another, immobile as a picture.

The tableau broke. Fred Kane scooped up the bottom of the curtain a half inch from the floor, peeped under. The two gangsters were whirling, coming out of their chairs, crashing them over, pulling guns as they moved. Both leaped toward the curtain.

**T**HERE was no use of turning to dash back the way he had come. Kane was weak, still tired from the struggle against his bonds. Somewhere in that long tunnel they would overtake him. His only chance was to go forward.

Kane plunged headlong into the curtain. It billowed around him, flapped against his face, almost tripped him. A gun blasted and Kane felt the drape jerk as a bullet tore through six inches from his head. Another shot.

The cloth rippled back over Kane's face, his head, and was gone. The two gunmen were near the curtain and about the center of the room. Kane was far to the right. They were half crouched, bringing up their guns, slowly, confidently.

Kane's right hand lashed through the air, struck the gasoline lantern. The thing went whirling off the wall, spinning wildly. A gun roared. Kane staggered in his stride as the bullet ploughed a shallow trench across his chest.

The lamp crashed to the floor. Blackness roared through the room. Guns



blasted and two tongues of flame spit into the darkness. Bullets struck the concrete wall, ricocheted, and shrieked into the darkness like banshees. Kane went ploughing through the curtain at the far side of the room.

Light struck his eyes again. Another lamp on the right. Directly ahead the room ended, a solid wall of concrete with two chains dangling, pulleys overhead. Behind him steps pounded. A half second and they'd be on him from the rear. In front his way was blocked.

Kane's eyes glittered at the pulleys. His flailing right hand caught the lamp and sent it crashing. Stygian dark opened its mouth and swallowed the room. He didn't stop running in time and his shoulder jarred hard against the concrete wall. He staggered backward, caught one of the chains, yanked.

Behind him guns roared in the tunnel, making wild shaking echoes. Bullets spanked the wall a few inches from his face. He heard the oiled sliding of the pulleys overhead. Gray light showed in front of him. He leaped headlong, his body tense, waiting for the bullet that would find him etched against the light.

There was a hoarse shout behind. "Don't shoot! They'll hear. . . . The gate's up!"

Fred Kane saw the train track a split second before his foot struck it. He pitched forward, hands beating at the air, clawing madly as though to hold himself erect.

For just in front of him as he fell was the electric rail!

He kept falling. Somehow he got his left foot under him, shoved. His body arched. He saw the rail come rushing at his head. Air tore in a gasp through his nostrils. Then he had cleared the charged rail, struck on the other side, rolled to his feet. He whirled, went racing down the subway tunnel.

Once he twisted his head and looked back. Nothing but solid, concrete walls.

HE SLOWED to a walk, pulling long, deep breaths into his lungs, letting them out until his chest ached. God! He was tired and his head was hurting. "It's from the blow," Kane said aloud. "It can't be the disease—yet."

He found suddenly that his fingers were trembling. While it had been men and guns that threatened his life he had been without fear. But now. . . .

"God!" he said aloud, "I—I'll be spreading the disease!"

Would he give it to other persons merely by walking near them? He had to get out of here, call the inspector to send down a squad. He knew now that the disappearing men were being hidden in an abandoned subway tunnel that had been cleverly blocked off. No one would ever find them unless. . . .

There were half a dozen persons on the subway platform. Beyond the turnstiles a faint light showed from the stairway. "Daylight," Kane said aloud. The clock on the change booth showed 6:12.

Even before Kane reached the platform he noticed the persons waiting there. Four of them had newspapers and were reading, but from time to time they would glance cautiously toward the person nearest. In every face there was fear—stark dread.

Probably there are more cases in the paper this morning, Kane thought. An epidemic, a plague. . . . And he himself carrying the germs. But he had to reach a telephone.

There was no one waiting at this end of the platform. Kane put his hands on it and tried to vault up. He was still weak and for a moment he hung swaying, legs dangling below the edge, head and shoulders above it.

A woman screamed in terror. The

newspaper she had been reading fell rustling at her feet. She stood, mouth jerking, eyes wide, arm and finger pointed rigidly toward Kane. Then she whirled. The turnstile clattered as she raced through.

Chaos broke loose on the platform. Screams rang out from both the uptown and downtown sides; wild, jangling cries of fear that shrieked weirdly along the tunnel.

Men and women dashed for the turnstiles, clawed at one another, fought through and up the steps. Fred Kane hung there at the edge of the platform staring after them, wide eyed, amazed. What had terrified them? Was the whole city mad with fear?

He struggled onto the platform. As he did so he noticed his blood covered, grimy hands. He smiled thinly. His face must be as gruesome looking as his hands. The papers had probably carried stories about persons disappearing from this section. He picked up the paper the woman had dropped. Great black letters glared from the page.

**GREEN DEATH STRIKES  
NINE MORE**

**Epidemic Feared; Police Think  
Victims Snatched, Then Diseased**

Subhead lines declared doctors were hopeless before the threat. It was possible that the Green Death might destroy New York as the plague had wiped out London in 1665. Several more patients had died. Death seemed positive once the disease was contracted. . . .

**F**RED KANE'S fingers crushed the paper, leaving spots of dried blood. His mouth was pale against his dark face and a nerve under his right eye kept twitching. He was going to die—like the man he had seen in the hospital, like others, like the one he had seen back there in the abandoned tunnel, writhing in tor-

ture on the ground, screaming, crazy with pain. Going to die in agony, unable to fight. . . .

"Oh, God!" he said aloud.

The tunnel rumbled to an oncoming train. The sound struck at Kane's fear-cold mind. Well, he wouldn't die before he'd turned those fiends over to the police. Suddenly he wondered where the green-faced men in the hoods had been while the others worked on him. The gunmen didn't have green faces.

He remembered sharply the hideous specter rising out of the ground—out of the grave itself. His teeth clamped on his lower lip to still its trembling.

There was a telephone booth inside the turnstiles and Kane stepped toward it. He raised a bloody hand and pushed it through dark hair. The rumble of the train was increasing his headache sharply. Kane's teeth dug deeper into his lip. It was just from the blow. It couldn't be the disease. It couldn't. . . .

He stepped inside the telephone booth and pulled the door shut behind him. The train had stopped, but the air inside the booth seemed to be shaking with thunder and stiflingly hot. God! It was hot, but he wasn't sweating. He wondered why.

Dropping in a nickel he raised his finger to dial headquarters, stopped. What was the number? Hell, he knew that number as well as he knew his name. The pain in his head was becoming wild, furious. His left hand clenched the receiver, his right hand clawed at the box on the wall. This pain was driving him mad. He couldn't think, couldn't. . . .

He caught himself up sharply. He had to think, had to remember that number. Let his nerves slip and he'd go insane. Had to keep control of himself.

He watched the forefinger of his right hand as though it were utterly detached from his body, as it moved toward the dial.



It dialed the operator and he heard himself asking for police headquarters. A moment later he was talking in short, broken syllables. The agony within him had become a wild fury, gnawing at his brain, crawling through his body like fire, searing his veins.

"This is Fred Kane," he said. "Missing Persons. Broadway subway, 157th Street. . . . Send a squad. . . . There're graves in the cemetery. . . . Things come out. . . ." He couldn't say any more.

The fire in his body had burned the very air from his lungs. He stood clawing at the telephone, swaying. He could hear the man at the other end shouting questions, but the words made no sense. Kane gasped, "An ambulance—got—Green Death."

The receiver clattered from his hand. He swayed backward against the wall.

God but it was hot! The fire was inside and out. His head was bursting. He had to get more air. He pushed against the door of the booth, almost fell out when it opened. Rocking like a drunken man he started toward the stairway.

Two men and a policeman were standing at the foot of the steps watching him. One was the round-faced, bald-headed man from the change booth. His pink face seemed white with fear now, but there was another look in the narrow, glittering eyes. Curiosity? Hatred? Kane couldn't tell. He stood staring at the bald-headed man, his brain struggling for a pain-blurred thought. This man worked here where these things. . . .

The policeman took a slow step forward. He was gripping his club hard. His face was drawn with terror. He said huskily, "All right. Who. . . ?"

Kane made a gesture with his right hand. He couldn't control the muscles and it swung in wide. He said, "Keep crowd back—ambulance coming. . . ."

God! He couldn't stand this torture any longer.

He pitched forward, hung like an empty sack across the turnstile.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Two Days to Live

"PUT him on the stretcher and carry him up," a voice was saying.

Hands seemed to pick Kane out of the air. Someone said, "Cheeze! This guy's temperature must be 140."

"They always run a high temperature," the first voice said in its clipped, brisk fashion. "It'll go higher with each attack until he finally burns out and dies."

Kane felt himself floating through the air. The pain in his head wasn't so bad now. It still hurt and he still felt hot, but he was breathing easier.

When his eyes finally opened he was inside an ambulance. Dr. Charles Stuart was sitting beside the cot, watching him out of black, hawk eyes over a strong, hawk nose. "How are you feeling now?" he asked. His slim fingers found Kane's pulse.

Kane said, "Better. I'll be all right in a—"

He stopped, mouth still open. The attacks were recurrent, the doctors had told him yesterday. Each one would be worse than the one before until he went completely mad. Worse than the one he'd just had . . . God!

He twisted abruptly toward the doctor. "Did the cops get there? They find that old tunnel where the men were hidden?"

The hawk eyes narrowed. The slim fingers left his wrist to move upward and touch his forehead. "Just take it easy," Stuart said precisely. "The police came out, all right."

"Damn it!" Kane said. He knew what

the doctor meant. "I'm not out of my head now. That's where the persons go that disappear. I saw them. We've got to—"

Stuart shook his head. "Just keep quiet. You'll see some of the police at the hospital, if you want. You're still weak now."

\* \* \*

Inspector McFarlane stood running his blunt fingers along his square jaw. "You just stay here and do as the doctors tell you," he said. "We'll take care of the other."

Kane clenched the side of the bed in desperation. He could see the disbelief in McFarlane's eyes. They all thought the disease had him out of his head and making up yarns about things that rose out of graves. They didn't believe his story about the empty tunnel.

"Dammit, Inspector!" Kane said. "I'm not crazy! I'm not!" His voice went high.

Dr. McGrath leaned forward. "You'll have to keep still," he said. "Otherwise you'll bring on the next attack sooner." He turned and with Stuart and McFarlane went out of the room, pulling the door shut behind them.

Kane rolled to a sitting position on the bed. His hands were clenched in the covers, his mouth straight, an ugly line of muscle along his jaw. Was he crazy already? He had seen that thing come out of the grave, hadn't he? He knew there was an abandoned tunnel opening on the subway, even if the police hadn't found it. They hadn't made much of a search, damn them. But maybe they were right. Maybe he was. . . .

"No! No!" Kane said the words aloud. He wasn't crazy yet. Not yet!

He slid his feet off the bed, stood up and stepped to the door. From outside came the mutter of voices. He put his head to the panel.

McGrath was saying, ". . . Why they

wouldn't sell the body. I offered all the money I'll make in six months to let me work on it. How the hell are we ever going to learn anything?"

Stuart said in his brisk, precise tones, "Maybe the detectives will let us have his body. He'll be dead within two days."

McGrath's voice was deep, almost drawing. "By that time half the city may have this thing."

Behind the door Fred Kane, wearing white hospital pajamas, stood half crouched, muscles taut. For a moment the voices of the two physicians were lowered. Then Stuart said, "It's the same graveyard where the detective says he got knocked on the head, where the Nabors girl disappeared last night while trying to do some detective work of her own."

Footsteps padded away from the door.

For a full minute, Kane didn't move. So the Nabors girl had vanished. He remembered how she had looked yesterday: slim, curving, her face pale and beautiful with its frame of red hair. And the fiends had captured her.

"Damn it!" Kane's lips jerked in a snarl. If nobody would believe him, he'd go back there himself. He glared about the room searching for clothes. None here.

The second attack came more suddenly than the first. There were a few throbbled notes of warning under his skull. His flesh began to grow warm as though a great fire were blazing in the room, coming closer. The air seemed hot and thin in his lungs.

The throbbing under his head became steady, intense. It began to swell, to push out on his skull as though it would burst apart. The heat began to eat at his brain. Little tongues of fire within his head, devouring his mind—driving him crazy.

Kane reeled to the bed, fell on it. His fingers sank deep into the sheets, jerk-



ing, ripping the tough linen as though it had been paper. His teeth gripped the mattress, ground together. His body writhed like that of a snake.

He did not hear the door open, the nurse's hurried call for the doctors. He did not see Stuart and McGrath watching him. He kept face down on the bed, fighting the agony as a man might fight against some wild beast that was ripping his body apart. Not once did Fred Kane cry out though he had split the sheets and torn plugs from the mattress before the pain subsided and he lay quietly, panting.

It was then that fear came to him again. "I've got to lie here," he thought, "and wait for this to happen again and again, getting worse. I've got to lie here until I go mad with torture."

He shuddered. While the pain lashed his body he had fought it, but now that it was gone there was nothing to do but wait—knowing that the same horror must come again. Nothing he could do would stop it. He had to lie there, waiting to die, waiting to be tortured.

"It's not the pain," he thought, "that drives them crazy. It's the waiting, waiting. . . . It'll get me again, and—" He choked a sob in his throat.

**T**WILIGHT showed gray and blue beyond the hospital window. Fred Kane lay staring at it. His brows were pulled straight above his eyes. He was going to die. Hope had gone out of him. But he wasn't going to lie here in this bed and die like a woman. The inspector hadn't believed the story Kane had told. He hadn't even investigated that pink-faced, bald-headed man in the subway change booth.

Kane's fingers tightened on the bed covers. He'd go back to that subway, that cemetery himself. . . .

He lay very still, making plans.

There was no chance of getting away in daylight wearing pajamas.

The wings of dusk beat thick about the windows when at last he stood up, stepped to the door. Cracking it open, he peered outside. The hall was empty. Directly across the hall was an elevator. On bare feet he slipped forward, pushed the button and raced back for his room. He stood gripping the door, watching, praying he wouldn't have another attack before he could get out.

No one passed in the hall. The light showed over the elevator; the door slid open and the Negro boy looked out.

It took Kane four steps to cross the hall. The boy saw him coming and his mouth jerked open in terror, his eyes went wide and rolling. So they all knew who he was, Kane thought.

The boy tried to cry out. The scream half stuck in his throat. Then Kane's fist landed on the boy's chin. The Negro pitched backward. His head and shoulders struck the side of the elevator and he slid to a sitting position. Kane had the door shut, the elevator started before the boy touched the floor.

Kane went to the basement, pulled the door open and looked out. No one around. The elevator boy was still unconscious. Kane glanced at him, cursed. Trying to get into those clothes would be worse than wearing the pajamas. He went out of the basement on the trot.

He hailed a taxi, climbed in. The driver turned to stare at him, wide-eyed. The detective said, "Get going and keep your eyes front. . . ."

At his apartment, Kane told the driver to wait. There was a chance he'd give the driver the disease. He didn't like that, but it was better to have one take the risk than several. He had to get out to that cemetery and subway!

Kane put on a blue double-breasted suit, hung another police special under his

armpit, went out and crawled in the taxi again. "Broadway and 155th Street—the cemetery," he said.

The moon was full and still low in the east. As they turned at 155th Street, the hedge about the cemetery was a dark blot against the silvered darkness of the grass beyond. The tombstones showed white and ghostly.

The driver pulled his head around to look at Kane. He was a small man with big eyes, thin hair. "Where'bouts out here, sir?" There was nervousness in his tone.

Kane said, "Right here." He looked at the meter. It said \$4.45. Kane got out, turned to the driver. "You married?"

The man shook his head.

"All right," Kane said. "You take the rest of the night off. Don't pick up any more fares. And take tomorrow off. Stay by yourself. If you start getting bad headaches, call the Medical Center. Tell 'em exactly what happened tonight." He tossed a fifty-dollar bill through the window.

The driver caught it, looked at it. The big eyes spread all over his small face. "Hell, boss," he said. "I don't mind a headache."

Kane said, "You'll mind that one." He pulled another bill from his pocket, asked, "You going to stay *alone*? Get me? See nobody."

"Sure."

Kane tossed him the money. "I won't have any need for it," he said bitterly. He turned on his heel and went toward the cemetery. . . .

ONCE inside the hedge, Kane picked a cautious way through the graves. He moved slowly, keeping hidden as much as possible, eyes sweeping the moon-washed slopes about him. He didn't have any definite plan, but he wanted to look

the place over. He couldn't forget the hideousness of that Thing rising out of the very ground behind him, out of a grave, perhaps. Thinking of the Thing made Kane feel cold along his back.

Abruptly he remembered the caretaker, Ike Neganzi. Last night the man had tried to shoot him. A few minutes later someone, some Thing, had risen out of the ground to attack Kane. Persons had disappeared both inside the cemetery and near it. Years ago Neganzi had sworn to make the City of New York suffer for his prison term. Could he. . . ?

Still keeping low, Kane started toward the caretaker's house.

He had entered the cemetery by one of the end gates. To reach Neganzi's, he had to pass close by the place where he had been struck the night before.

He was within fifty yards of the point when he saw the shadow, saw its swaying, rhythmic movements.

Kane froze, half crouched behind a tombstone, eyes straining against the semi-darkness. Moonlight washed most of the cemetery, but straight ahead four tall cedar shrubs were set in a square, and within the dark shadows between them Kane saw the man move, and vanish.

Keeping tombstones between himself and the cedars, Kane began to slip forward. He had gone twenty yards when he heard the soft *chunk, chunk* that came from the shadows. He edged forward.

*Chunk. Chunk.*

The sound came again, then stopped. Kane's lips pulled thin. He recognized that sound now. A spade striking soft earth. Kane's right hand went under his coat, came out again holding the gun.

The strain of staring into the darkness was beginning to make his eyes ache and a little pain was growing just back of the right one. Sudden fear lashed him like a whip. God! He couldn't have an



attack now—just as he was about to catch the man.

He wouldn't.

Kane came to his feet with a surge, leaped toward the cedars. His breath was harsh in his nostrils, the gun hard against his hip. In the shadows something whirled, sprang. . . .

## CHAPTER SIX

### Passage to Hell

**K**ANE'S left arm brushed the cedar as he went by. Straight in front of him was a mound of earth, a dark pit. Beyond that a man leaped for the trees.

"Stop!" The word burst from Kane's lips. His finger curled hard around the trigger.

The man halted, turned slowly. His face was almost invisible in the shadows. Kane had skidded to a stop at the side of the pit. He looked down, caught a sharp breath. It was a new grave. Heaps of wreaths and cut flowers were piled at one end.

The pain in his head was growing rapidly. He set his teeth hard, stared across the open grave at the man beyond. "Take a step to the right," he said.

The man moved slowly. Moonlight tipped the cedar and fell on his face. Small eyes peered out from behind rimless glasses above a button nose. Kane said, "Dr. McGrath!"

The doctor caught a sharp breath, leaned suddenly forward. "You! What are you doing here?"

Kane's teeth were grinding together against the agony that was growing steadily. Fear was coming with the pain this time. Was this the attack that would drive him insane? He pushed words through clenched teeth. "What are you doing here, digging in graves?"

The doctor hesitated and Kane saw fear

leap swiftly in his face. Kane snapped, "Talk, damn you! Quick!" He had to talk quickly or else Kane couldn't hear him. God! He *was* going mad!

McGrath's voice was still slow, but the insulting note was gone. "One of the victims was buried here. I wanted his body to study. But—" He paused and his next words seemed to come like salamanders through the flame that lashed Kane's body— "The grave was empty!"

Kane staggered. The whole world was whirling in a mist of fire.

Across the grave McGrath moved without warning. His body flickered into the shadows, vanished. Kane lunged blindly forward. His foot struck the heaped earth and he went headlong. The blackness of the grave came up at him. Then he was in it.

Kane felt his body strike the earth—and then, *oh, God, he was tearing through the earth, falling into hell.* His whole body was afire with agony and he went flaming like a meteor through darkness.

**T**HE next half hour was a frenzied blur of tortured action to Fred Kane. Occasional fleeting thoughts beat their way through the flame that roared within his body. Now and then the idea came to him that he was crazy, a raving maniac, frothing at the mouth, staggering, reeling with pain.

He never knew exactly when his fall ceased or when he staggered to his feet.

Once he thought dully that it was strange he was walking. He had fallen into an open grave—and kept falling, falling. . . . Now he was reeling through darkness. "Walking the path to hell," he sobbed aloud.

He never saw the thread of light. He never hear the screams that shuddered through the darkness, wailed, fading into moaning sobs along the tunnel. He did not know that he still gripped the .38

special in his hand. He never saw the curtain until he blundered into it, thrust it aside and stood in the glare of the lantern.

Then he saw only dimly, and for a second the sight made no impression on his pain-soaked mind.

It was a room like the others he had seen in the abandoned subway. Crouched against the wall was a girl. Her clothes were half torn from her, and he could see her left breast rising and falling, milk-white against the blue dress. Around her face and over her shoulders red gold hair fell like a storm.

It was the girl he had met in the hospital—Rose Nabors!

Directly in front of her, reeling toward her, was a man. His face was green as scum over stagnant water. Saliva drooled nastily from his mouth. His hands were extended clawlike toward her. Kane could see the long scarlet streak starting at the base of her throat and running down between her breasts where fingers had clawed once before.

On the far side of the room were three men wearing surgeon's masks and gowns. Two of them carried big sticks.

Kane saw these things through the wall of fire that blazed between his eyes and brain. He knew that the man in the center had the green death, would soon die of it.

And those fiends were killing her as surely as they were murdering him, with the disease.

The green man reeled toward the girl. His eyes were jerking insanely. His hands were almost at her throat and she cringed sideways along the tunnel, face twisted with horror.

A masked man shouted, stabbed with his left arm toward Kane. His right hand jerked the heavy stick back, hurled it.

KANE did not feel the wind as the stick whipped past his face. More by instinct than by reason he was pulling up the gun, leveling it, muzzle centered on the lunatic.

The girl screamed as fingers touched her throat, clawed. Kane heard the roar of his gun, barely conscious that he fired. He saw the insane man stagger, clap both hands to his left side, and fall.

The masked men were wrestling clumsily, gloved hands under the surgeons' gowns. The girl stared at Kane for one second, her mouth open, eyes round. Then she turned and leaped through the curtain on the far side.

Rubber-gloved hands were coming from under white gowns now. Kane saw the glint of blue steel. Again more by instinct than any thought within his agony-torn brain he acted. He leaped forward at the curtain, trying to swing his gun around. The curtain brushed over him, shutting out the light. A gun roared and a bullet spanked concrete, went wailing along the tunnel.

Kane jumped backward again. His foot slipped and he went down hard. There was nothing but darkness now, not even a crack of light to mark the curtain. They must have extinguished the lantern, he thought dully.

A red tongue licked like a snake's and vanished. Thunder rolled through the subway. Kane squeezed the trigger of his gun, felt it shake in his hand. The world was breaking into splintering roars. Red fingers stabbed at him.

He knew he wouldn't last much longer. The pain had him now. He was going out in a minute. Going mad . . . mad . . .

Something struck his left shoulder, twisting him in the dirt. He knew that a bullet had hit him, but it felt no more than a jar compared with the torture of the disease.

He heard his gun boom again, saw fire



spit back at him. Within his body the blaze lashed high; it snatched at his mind, tore at it. He screamed. . . .

**H**IS body was a charred ember, cooling into dead ashes. Perhaps he was dead now and there would be no more torture.

But even now there was pain. A dull, far-off aching. He moved restlessly and the pain stabbed a sudden finger through his body. It brought full consciousness.

He was lying in utter darkness, flat on his face. His left shoulder was hurting and his coat felt oozy, sticky.

Kane got weakly to his feet. With his right hand he pulled matches from his pocket, struck one. The light was yellow and flickering in the darkness. It showed a dirt floor, a dark, ugly stain where his shoulder had been. He held the match close to his coat. It was blood-soaked. There was a round hole just above the armpit.

The match burned Kane's fingers and he dropped it, struck another. The flame glittered on the barrel of his revolver. Still holding the match, he picked up the gun with the same hand, dropped it in his coat pocket.

He found the curtain, pushed it aside. He went across this room and another, wondering why those masked fiends had not killed him. Perhaps they had thought him dead. And the green-faced ghouls he had seen in the subway and the cemetery, what had happened to them?

He had gone perhaps a hundred yards when he heard a voice. His hand tightened around the butt of his gun, his eyes squinted. He didn't have much more time to settle accounts with these devils.

It was hard to walk without making noise. His knees were weak and he fought to make them steady. The voices were closer now. He saw a light close to the floor.

Kane almost laughed. Crazy, insane joy started with the pain in his shoulder and surged up through his head. One more curtain and he'd be at them. He'd kill them like snakes.

His gun muzzle touched the curtain. He flung it aside and lunged through.

He stopped suddenly, eyes growing wide in his face, body rocking. A half dozen policemen had spun, guns ready.

Now he knew why the masked killers had not made sure he was dead. The girl had escaped, called the police.

There was horror in the faces of the men who stared at Kane. He knew some of them. McDougald, Nelson, Ricca. But not one of them was moving toward him, not one had spoken. Then a lantern-jawed detective raised a bony finger, pointing it at Kane's face.

"Good God!" the man said. "It's Fred Kane. And his face is—green!"

The weakness flooded up from Kane's knees through his whole body. He went down slowly until he sprawled in the dirt.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### Waiting for Madness

"**N**OT much to this shoulder wound," Dr. Stuart said as he finished the bandage. He turned to the square-faced man beside the bed, snapped, "You'll have to talk fast, Inspector. He'll have another attack soon. He'll need a strait-jacket before that." The hawk-faced doctor went out of the room.

Dr. McGrath stood gripping the foot of the bed until his finger-nails showed white. His eyes glinted behind their spectacles.

The police inspector looked down at Kane, said, "Now tell me all you know about this thing."

In tumbling words, Kane told him. The story seemed weird, fantastic even now.

"I—I fell into the grave," Kane said. "I don't know how I got into the tunnel."

"We've checked that," McFarlane said. "The grave had been robbed from beneath. That abandoned tunnel runs under part of the cemetery. Probably that's the way you were carried in the first time. They escaped and evidently took several of their victims with them. But they were rushed and left a couple."

"How about the girl?" Kane said. It was strange how much he had thought about her.

McFarlane grunted. "She says she was caught while walking near the cemetery, early this morning. She was held all day by two men, and not bothered until the third one came. That was just a few minutes before you got there." He turned his big square face toward McGrath. There was a brittle tone in his voice when he said, "You notified us of your escape with Kane *after* the girl called. If you were going to tell us, why didn't you do it sooner? We might have reached Kane in time to join in the fight."

The doctor's hands tightened on the bed. He spoke slowly, "I—I ran away from the cemetery. I knew the penalty for disinterring bodies. I thought I'd run away. I was frightened. After I began to think, I knew I couldn't get away, so I called you."

Dr. Charles Stuart came back into the room. An assistant followed him carrying a heavy, full-length strait-jacket. Together they began to strap it on Kane. It hurt when they slipped his wounded arm through the sleeves. His lips were caught hard between his teeth. His face was a pale green.

Through Kane's mind flashed a picture of the other man he'd seen wearing a strait-jacket and lying on a hospital bed—crazy with pain. That man had died five hours ago. Kane's nostrils quivered

as he sucked a breath. So he was going mad now—mad. . . . He'd howl and writhe like those others had done. How long would it take him to die? How long would he have to lie in agony?

HE SHOOK his head savagely, asked, "How about the girl, Doc? You think she's got. . . ?"

"I don't know yet," Stuart said. "Very likely. . . ."

He finished strapping the strait-jacket, rolled Kane over on his back.

Straight, as unemotional as a hawk, Stuart gazed down at the detective. "Anything else you want to say?"

Kane shook his head.

McFarlane's big jaw waggled. Kane saw him swallow, blink his eyes furiously. The inspector reached out a big hand, tapped Kane on the shoulder. "So long." He almost choked.

Kane said, "So long, Chief." His lips shut tight. His jaw muscles bulged. He knew what this good-bye meant. It was his last one. Within a few hours he'd be insane—and soon . . . dead.

McFarlane turned toward McGrath. "You come with me for a while," he said.

Stuart nodded to his assistant. The man bent, taped Kane's mouth. Kane could feel the tape pulled hard across his thin lips, across his jaw. He started to shake his head, swear that nothing could make him cry out. Then he stopped, remembering the way he had screamed in the subway.

Stuart switched off the light. The doctors and McFarlane went out of the room. The door shut behind them.

Fred Kane lay flat on his back, unable to move except for his eyes, waiting. Waiting for insanity.

His eyes were green in a green face now. They were twitching nervously. He tried to keep them still. "I'll look at the window and nothing else," he thought.



It was a white-silled window, big and deep. Outside there was darkness. He was on the second floor, he remembered.

His eyes twitched away from the window, around the dark room. Kane's mind began to race, to beat at his skull. He couldn't lie here like a tied animal and wait for death. He wanted to get up and struggle for life. Waiting, that was what drove them crazy. God! He couldn't wait!

He tried to jerk himself erect, failed. His body jerked, rolled half on one side, fell back.

He tried to scream. He wanted to tell them he didn't mind the pain, but God! he couldn't lie here this way. Waiting . . . waiting. . . . Soon he'd be mad! Why. . . .

Kane clutched at his nerves, fought them to stillness. "You're turning yellow," his tongue said, though there was no sound. "That's what takes guts. Just to lie still. Even a rat can fight if it has to. But can you take it this way?"

"I'll soon be mad. I'll soon be mad." The words kept beating through his mind. It wasn't death he dreaded lying here. It was the horrors that had to come before he could die. . . .

The maddening pain came swiftly. . . .

**K**ANE did not know when the agony began to recede, but hours later the fire went out of his head. His eyes opened. There was the pale white of the wall showing through the darkness. He followed it around, found the lighter rectangle that was the night-cloaked window.

In the gray rectangle of the window was appearing a figure, like the black cloud of a cyclone forming against a slate-gray sky. The whole room swayed in his fevered gaze, and the thing in the window swayed—and grew larger.

It was the hooded man from the sub-

way! And Kane knew that beneath that hood was a green face!

The man slid soundlessly through the window. He stepped to one side and almost vanished in the deeper darkness. Another began to show in the window.

Fevered, weird thoughts hurled through Kane's mind. Why had these things come for him? They had not come to the other victims in the hospital. Was he going to be one of them—grave-haunted ghouls who roamed in darkness beneath the earth, their bodies always racked by pain, their only desire to make others share that agony?

The second one slipped through the window. Side by side like two vultures they moved toward the bed. Kane's body was a mad lashing of immovable muscles within the strait-jacket.

The men paused beside him. Green fingers reached out and clenched on his shoulders, pulled them from the bed. The other slipped something about Kane's waist. He was lifted and carried toward the window.

Kane felt the window-sill beneath his feet. His body was pushed stiff as a board across it. His feet tilted downward. Far above he could see the dark and lighted windows, the dark line that marked the top of the building. Above that stars were pale, jittery spots in a blue-black sky.

Then he was swaying at the end of a rope, being lowered slowly. To his left he could see the ladder on which the hooded men had come.

From the blackness of the wall below him a third figure detached itself. Kane had been lowered into the drive and close by an ambulance was waiting. The figure caught him as his feet touched the pavement, held him erect. The rope piled around him as it was dropped from above.

A moment later the figures came down the ladder, slipped it inside the ambu-

lance. Kane was lifted, thrust head first after the ladder. It was too dark to see plainly, but in the deep stillness he could hear breathing. Kane tensed, listening. It was the hushed, shallow breathing of fear.

Two of the men followed him into the rear of the ambulance. The door shut softly. The motor purred. The big car slid down the drive like a shadow.

"We did it," a man said.

The other said, "I hope we get there before he begins his next fit. It is probable that he will never recover consciousness once it starts. He should be mad for one or two days, then die."

**K**ANE'S nostrils flared as he breathed. So! The next was the last. Well, he was glad. The sooner he went mad the better. Perhaps then the pain would cease. Something clogged in his throat, for he knew—the pain would never end until he died. The man in the subway had been mad, and screaming.

The other man asked, "What about the girl?"

"It's just beginning to affect her."

The ambulance passed a street light and Kane's eyes flickered to the left, watched the light filter through the window, run the length of the car, and vanish. In that split second he saw the person across from him.

It was Rose Nabors, bound and gagged!

Air tore from Kane's lungs. Why had she, too, been taken from the hospital? Was she also to be made one of the fiends?

Before the ambulance stopped, Kane's body was a living, jerking bundle of fire in which floated strange and horrible images.

Green-faced monsters were bending over him, lifting him. A pale white sea of moonlight swam round and round while through it red fires lashed out to strike his body. Around him wavering

white tombs rose from a black, silver-coated earth.

Kane knew that he was mad now. He could hear terrific, throat-tearing screams that began deep in his belly, rose like flame through his chest, shattered his throat and burst within his brain, while his tongue thrashed soundlessly.

A tombstone stuck crazily into the whirling fire that was the air. Below the headstone an empty grave yawned blackly. Into the grave sank a green-faced, hooded terror and in his arms he carried Rose Nabors. Her body was a curving sweetness beneath the white gown.

The crazy tombstone was moving—or Kane was moving. He was swimming through the furious, jagged and horrible air, closer to the grave. He could see the lettering on the headstone.

Joshua Hawkes  
Died of the Pestilence  
1783

Insane laughter hurled up through Kane's belly where his very bowels were being ripped, and burst against his teeth. "Died of the Pestilence! Pestilence!"

**I**T WAS over, over at last and the sweet hand of death had cooled the fire in his body. There was no pain now, only an intense and utter weakness, a weak desire to lie still forever here in the grave into which he had descended.

Through the soft, cool darkness words came slowly. And Fred Kane realized, with shuddering revulsion, that he was still alive. That meant more torture. . . .

The words came more distinctly. "He'll live, but keep your masks on. I'm not yet positive how the disease is transmitted and he may yet be contagious. But I've got the cure, and I'll get the reward money. That \$100,000 will be just a drop in the bucket compared to what this does



for my reputation. My notes are complete as to the cure and ready for inspection."

"Did you know it was going to work out like this?"

"Of course not. A great deal of science is trial and error. That's why I needed specimens to work on and hired you two to get them. I knew how these persons had contracted the disease, and I didn't know about the ones at the hospital. That's why I had to keep an eye on them.

"But since they had told the hospital doctors what had happened, I had to get them away or everyone would have known as much as I did."

Kane's eyes came open slowly. For a long while he gazed around vacantly. At last it focused. He was in another of the subway rooms, but one well furnished. He was lying on a cot. The strait-jacket still held him but the gag had been removed. Near him were three men wearing surgeons' masks that covered all but the eyes.

One of them leaned toward Kane. "So at last you are conscious," he said.

Kane nodded a feeble answer. Every muscle in his body was aching and sick.

"You've proved a great contribution to science," the masked man said. "I thought I was giving you the Green Death when I injected the blood. I've discovered I was giving you a toxin against it—as in the case of typhoid, smallpox and other diseases. Only I overdid your dose and instead of building up resistance in you, I almost killed you. But you'll live."

One of the other men said, "Hell, you ain't gonna let him go, are you, Chief?"

The man laughed. "I mean the disease won't kill him. Of course we'll have to dispose of him."

"The girl too?"

"The girl too."

Kane's voice was weak, yet eager. "She's alive?"

"Yes. I used the toxin on her as soon

as I saw you had a chance. She's doing splendidly."

"It's tough we gotta shoot her," one of the men said. "She's too damn good-lookin'."

The brow of the slim man knitted. "I'm a bit worried about shooting them. Of course it's not likely that this section of the tunnel will ever be discovered. It's completely on the other side of the cemetery from the one that was found. But there's always a chance. And even skeletons may be identified. That might lead to. . . ." He waved a gloved hand.

"How you gonna get rid of 'em?"

For a moment the man did not answer. Then his eyes smiled. "I have it. We'll dissolve them. You shoot them, then we'll dump the bodies in acid. When that's done. . . ." He paused and the heavy-set man began to reach under his surgeon's gown, fumbling for a gun.

Kane's teeth clenched on his lower lip until warm blood spurted. He'd won through hell, only to die again, as helpless to fight as he had been against the disease. If he could only be alone for awhile there was one slim chance. . . . But if he failed, he brought more torture on himself and the girl.

His voice was hard in his throat when he said, "Listen, you claim I've been a contribution to science. I'd like one more chance at it. I've had every pain in hell these last few days. After all that I don't want to go out with a bullet. I want to fight to the end and if there's anything I haven't been through—" He tried to laugh, but the sound choked in his throat—"it's a tub of acid. I—I'd like to go into that, still fighting."

Above the white mask the eyes bored down at him. The squat man had the gun in his hand but was staring amazedly at Kane. He said, "You damn fool!"

The other said thinly, "A masochist, huh?" He hesitated. Kane lay staring up

at him, not knowing whether he hoped the man would consent or refuse. There was one chance, but such a small one!

The man said abruptly, "Very well. I'd rather like to have you live a while longer anyway. I want to see if there is any reaction after the disease. Besides, it will take us some little while to get things ready. I'll have you fed and you may talk to the girl. The dying man's last wish, you know." The eyes above the mask glittered. "Eat, drink, and be merry," he quoted, "for tomorrow—you die."

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### One Last Death

MINUTES passed while Fred Kane lay very still within the strait-jacket. Blood, thin, cold water within his veins. It seemed to drain away from his heart, leaving that cold and empty and dead.

The food which was brought tasted flat in his mouth, but he ate. Afterwards his body felt stronger, but inside he was hollow, dead. He tried to wriggle his left shoulder, found that the muscles ached less when they moved. Despite the disease the wound had healed slightly.

Then the girl was brought in. She too was on a cot, her slim body held by a strait-jacket. She was placed about fifteen feet from Kane.

The lean man said, "Tony, you stay here and keep an eye open. We'll be back when we can make it." He and one of the gunmen went out. Tony eased his broad frame into a chair near the wall.

Fred Kane rolled his head, looked at the girl on the next cot. She was watching him out of wide-spaced blue eyes. Her hair was loose and fell in a red gold heap upon the pillow. Her skin was as pale as a cape jasmine and there were dark lines under her eyes.

Sudden fury whipped the blood through

Kane. His jaw teeth grated as he clenched them. They couldn't kill this girl! He had lain still waiting for his own death, but now his muscles began to twitch, his brain to roll furiously.

The girl saw the sudden convulsing of his face. Her eyes darkened. "What is it?" she asked.

Kane said "Hello." It was all he could think of to say. It sounded insane and he cursed himself for an idiot. But he mustn't let her know for an instant what they were waiting for.

The gunman in the chair said, "Have your talk now. When the chief comes back you'll have to quit. For good."

A nerve quivered in the dark circle under her right eye. Her lips set firmly. Even they were pale, Kane noted. Otherwise she gave no indication of hearing the man's words. She said to Kane, "I—I appreciate you saving me a few days ago."

Kane's mouth twisted. He started to say a hell of a lot of good it had done, and stopped.

He asked, "Have you seen any more of the green faced men who brought us here? They seem to vanish."

She nodded slightly, making the red hair quiver. "These are the ones. They must wear the green on their faces to frighten anyone who sees them."

For the next hour or two they talked lightly. There wasn't much to say—waiting for death. Kane's mind kept reeling, searching for some means of escape. If only he could get out of this strait-jacket. But the guard, sitting grimly at the other end of the room, was watching.

The girl dozed. Later Kane dropped into a fevered sleep.

HE AWOKE with a start. The three men were in the room once more. The slim one turned, looked at him over the surgeon's mask. "So you are awake,"



he said. "Well, we're ready." He nodded to the other two.

They lifted Kane from his cot, carried him beyond the green curtain that formed the left end of the room. Here the floor was dirt. The glow of one lantern extended down the tunnel and faded into darkness. Kane was carried through a small hole in the right side of the wall, dropped on the floor. The room was very small, concrete walled except for the thick wooden door through which he had entered. Almost the entire room was occupied by a huge glass tub filled with a clear, water-like liquid. From the right wall a rope ran up to a pulley in the center of the roof, dangled down above the tub.

The slim man said, "It took us a little while to get this ready, but it should leave no trace of you." While he talked the two gunmen went out, returned with the girl. "This was probably intended as an emergency exit when they thought the subway would run through this tunnel. It'll be an emergency exit for your souls. I've nearly a hundred gallons of *aqua regia* in that tub." He turned toward Tony, said, "Fetch that last corpse and we'll make a demonstration."

Kane rolled his head to look at the girl. They had stretched her near the left wall. Her blue eyes were wide, dark pools in her pale face. Her lips were sucked in and gripped by her teeth, but Kane could see the corners of them twitching. He wanted to scream, to shout aloud against this horror, but his voice choked in his throat. What good would it do to plead with men gone mad?

Tony returned carrying the body of a man in his arms. The corpse was green skinned, the limbs twisted from the convulsion in which this man had died. The mouth was open, dried saliva made nasty marks across the chin and throat.

"We've put in the others," the slim man said. "Watch this."

Tony lifted the corpse. He slid the feet over the edge of the thin glass tub, lowered the body till all but the head was submerged.

Kane's head jerked up from the floor, and his breath was like hot knives in his nostrils, ripping into his lungs. He heard the girl scream, a short, choked cry that broke into a whimper.

The body was clothed only in underwear when it slid into the acid. As Kane watched the cloth disappeared. The green flesh corroded, burst, and vanished. Below the ghastly, snarling head which Tony held by its brown hair a skeleton came into view. And slowly the bones became pockmarked, crumbled.

The slim man said, "That'll do." Tony released the head and it slid under the liquid. The face began to vanish.

"And now," the man said, "we'll have the last step. We'll swing you," he nodded almost pleasantly at Kane, "by the pulley." He turned to where a shelf on the wall jutted over the rope that ran to the pulley. There was a retort and a small tube on the shelf. "This will drop acid on the rope by which you hang. That'll give us time to get out of here and shut the door. When the acid eats the rope you'll fall. The tub is very thin glass. You'll hit one edge and break it. The acid will make a puddle a foot deep throughout the room. After some time it will sink into the ground. But before that," he gestured with his hand, "you'll be only a memory."

The next few minutes were a blurred haze in Kane's mind. Through his own curses he heard the girl sobbing quietly. He fought like a maniac against the strait-jacket, tried to twist his head and bite the hands of the men that lifted him. But in less than a minute the rope had been tied about his waist and he was dangling in the air, directly over the tub's edge.

On the floor below him the girl was crying in terror. The slim man said,

"Well, good luck." He and the gunmen went out. The door shut behind them.

Terror was a giant wind that whipped Kane's body. His muscles beat like uncoiling springs against the strait-jacket—and ceased. Black horror stormed through his body.

**S**OMEHOW he fought his mind to calmness. It was possible to escape from a strait-jacket, if a man thought about it. It was when a man was crazy that a strait-jacket was impossible to remove. While waiting for the others to return he'd remembered seeing Houdini do it once, but there had been no chance with the guard watching. Now there was a chance—a very little chance.

He twisted his head, looked down. Acid was falling drop by drop from the retort to the rope. The rope would hold perhaps five more minutes.

Kane began a struggle that wrenched and tore every muscle of his body. As a boy he'd seen Houdini pull this trick. The idea was to get the right hand under the left elbow, then push that elbow up and over his head until both hands were in front of him. After that he could reach the straps, even if his hands were encased in the sleeves.

He got the fingers of his right hand under his left elbow, began to push. The wound in his shoulder burned like a hot brand. He cursed savagely, kept trying.

Drop by drop the acid fell. Two more minutes. . . .

God! He had both hands in front of him now. His fingers were clumsy under the stiff canvas. He tried to clutch the straps and they slipped away from him. He got one loose and a finger showed. He pawed at the other.

The acid fell drop by drop. Frayed strands of rope twisted back from the half eaten section.

One hand burst loose. Kane jerked it over to clutch the other straps. The girl screamed.

Rolling, white-balled, Kane's eyes found the rope again. It seemed to be stretching, splitting. Too late—

Kane's free hand shot up, caught the rope above his head, and jerked. It made his body shiver, swung his feet outward. At the same instant the last strand broke. Kane plunged downward!

The acid seemed to rush toward him. The thin glass side of the tub. He screamed.

Then he was lying on the earth beside the tub, panting. That jerk on the rope had flung him just beyond the glass edge. He lay there feeling sick at his belly, the air hard and bulky in his nostrils. At last his breathing was easy and his left hand loosed the remaining straps. He climbed out of the strait-jacket, freed the girl.

The odds were still three to one. But the sense of terror was gone from Fred Kane. It was man to man now.

When the door was pushed open Kane could hear voices from the curtained room. His mouth broke into a smile. He stuck his head through the door, looked up and down the tunnel. To his right a gasoline lantern flung a brilliant glow. Beyond that was the heavy curtain. To the left the tunnel dwindled off into darkness.

Kane stepped through the doorway, paused. There was a dark shadow twenty feet down the tunnel and he went toward it cautiously. It was a rock the size of his fist. He picked it up.

Moving on the balls of his feet he went back to the lantern. Quietly he removed it from the wall. He stepped into the small room with the acid tub, extinguished the light, and emptied the gasoline. Holding the container carefully, he filled it with the acid.



**R**OSE NABORS was standing near the door. Her blue eyes were large and frightened in her face, her hands tight pressed against her breasts. Kane's mouth was boyish when he grinned at her, even more so when he leaned and kissed her. Turning he went into the tunnel.

A white streak of light showed beneath the curtain. Kane held the acid-filled lamp in his left hand, the rock in his right. He caught the curtain with his left, tossed it aside and stepped through.

All three men had their backs turned, but they heard the rustle of the curtain and spun. Kane flung the rock. It hit Tony full in his snarling face and hurled him backward.

The man in the center was Dr. Stuart. His slim body was moving like a streak of shadow, diving for Kane's legs. The detective flung the acid. It was a silver spray in the light, slashing Stuart's face. The doctor screamed, fell in a writhing mass.

Beyond Stuart the gunman was digging furiously under his white gown. Even as Kane leaped forward, the man's hand flashed into view. Light glinted on the blue steel of an automatic. The gun swung upward.

Kane's left hand still held the empty lantern base. The bullet wound in his shoulder was aching, but his right hand was coming up from the hip, fast. The sound of it meeting bone mingled with the roar of the gun. The squat man went over backwards, struck on his right shoulder, rolled face down and lay motionless. He

still held the gun in his hand. Kane stooped and took it from the unconscious fingers.

"Are—are you hurt?" It was the girl close behind him. He turned and her hands trembled at his chest.

Kane grinned. His eyes were bright and smiling in his dark face. Lord! The girl was pretty with her red hair tousled about her shoulders. Kane said, "Not hurt so I won't get over it."

She was very close to him. He could smell the fragile odor of her hair. He had walked in the shadow of death, but he was alive now and the world was for the living. She asked, "But why—why has the doctor done all this?"

Kane said, "He needed human beings to experiment with. Somehow he learned about this abandoned subway so he hired these men to kidnap persons and bring them here where he could work on them. He hoped to get a cure and collect the \$100,000 reward. But it was the fame that he really wanted. It would have been worth more than the reward."

"But will the other doctors be able to cure the disease?"

"They will when I give them Stuart's notes. He said he'd kept a complete record. That'll put a stop to any epidemic."

Her mouth looked very soft and warm. Kane stopped slowly, saying, "The doctors will put an end to it for the others, but for me it's just beginning."

"What?"

He saw that she already understood, but he told her—in the proper way.

THE END

*Thrills . . . Chills . . . Mystery!*

In Another Great Story

By WYATT BLASSINGAME

In the Next Issue

Out November 9th!

# Out of The Past

*It was a strange company in that eerie house of living shadows—blood-lusting men and women, with the manners of a bygone day. And there was Virginia Thomas, young and alluring, the strangest of all that mad group. . .*



by E. G. Morris

**D**RIVING along the river road I quietly cursed Donaldson for his insistence that I should visit him. Over the river lay a mass of blue-gray clouds, and the air was filled with that heavy stillness which precedes a summer storm.

"Why do I always have to be running places I don't want to go—" I grumbled to myself, "acting like a five-year-old child and accepting invitations I haven't the least desire to accept? Just to be pleasant!"

I jammed down on the accelerator, hoping to get to his home before the storm broke. He had told me to drive directly north on the river road and that his



house was the first, on the right side, past the country club. It was while I was looking at the rambling, ivy-covered building that I had the accident.

It was not serious. One of the front tires snubbed against large stone which was imbedded in the roadway. Before I could regain control of the car, it had swerved, veered into the deep ditch at the side. The car jolted against a pile of stones, and I was jerked from the seat, slammed against the right windshield post.

For a moment I suppose I was dazed. I lay across the seat, trying to clear the cob-webs from my brain. Then I shook my head, cleared it some, sat up, and climbed out of the auto, pulling out my luggage. The front right axle was badly bent, and the tire had been torn from the wheel. It was impossible to go on.

I peered anxiously through the gathering dusk, and about half a mile from the club, I spied a great, winding driveway. I hurried along toward it, still feeling a bit dazed. In a curious way, I noticed that the leaves hung listlessly, without a breeze to stir them. Somewhere a hound howled mournfully.

The house was tremendous when I finally came to it, sprawling across the lawn like a great gray ghost, and I was puzzled to find that no lights were visible. I was sure I had come to the right place for I had followed Donaldson's instructions implicitly.

Wide stone steps led up to the veranda. I adjusted my tie as I stepped across the creaking porch and raised the old brass knocker.

For a moment I heard nothing, and then I was aware of slow measured footsteps approaching the door. It swung slowly open and I faced a gigantic Negro. He was the tallest man I had ever seen, and his skin was an ebony veneer stretched across his skull. He had on a butler's livery which smacked of the Eighteenth

century. He held a lighted candle in his hand. A chill ran across my shoulder-blades as I gazed into his eyes which shown like phosphorus in the candle light.

I hesitated, but some power seemed to draw me across the threshold and I heard the great door slam behind me. The Negro did not speak but continued to gaze steadily at me. I saw that the candle cast a dim light in the hall, and that shadows made the high walls billow like curtains. There was no sound at all.

"Is Mr. Donaldson at home?" I asked.

The Negro did not answer, and I thought his eyes had a gloating look, like those of a jungle animal with its kill. I tried to force away the fear which tugged at my soul.

I HEARD a faint sound from a room adjacent to the hall, and a little fat man stepped out into the candle light. Rather I should say, he minced forth. He half ran, tilting himself forward with his head on one side like a little bird. I suppose he was ludicrous, but my only feeling was one of frightful fear, and a sense of tremendous mental power.

"You are Mr. Burke, I presume," he chirped, in a falsetto voice. "We have been expecting you."

He rubbed his hands together and peered up into my face. I caught the same gloating look in his eyes that I had discerned in those of the Negro. I turned toward the butler, but to my surprise he had gone, although I had not heard a sound. Where the light now came from I could not determine.

The little man placed his hand upon my forearms and I swear that I could feel that his hand was cold, even through the flannel of my sport coat.

"If you will just join us in the parlor," removing his hand from my arm, and pointing to the door from which he had entered the hall, "and meet the others.

Mr. Donaldson has been—er—detained, but he'll be here in time. Yes, in plenty of time." He rubbed his hands together and smirked curiously as we walked toward the door.

As we entered the room not a person there made a sound or a movement. I could see no visible lighting fixture, yet the room was filled with a pale, steady glow. I felt as though I had entered a wax museum, where the figures had all the semblance of living except life.

Again the fat man placed his hand on my arm, and it was all I could do to keep from cringing away from his cold grasp. He drew me toward a corner where a woman sat staring at me. She was about fifty, angular and of a strange dignity. She was dressed in a rusty black, and I caught the hint of something green in her hair—a veil I imagined. Her cheeks were heavily rouged, but in the dim light, her lips had no color at all.

"Mrs. Breckenridge," remarked my conductor. The woman did not answer.

A little to this woman's left sat a young man in some sort of dressing gown. He was very pale and thin, and I noticed that he had one hand clutched at his chest as though he were in pain. He stared straight into my eyes with that same horrible leer.

"Mr. Peevy," said the fat man, and the youth grinned, showing eye-teeth like fangs.

He led me over, across the room, to where a gentleman sat looking down at the floor. "Mr. Breckenridge."

The man to whom I was introduced did not look up, but I could see that he had a white goatee and that for some reason he had his hat on. I saw that the hand on his lap was withered and old, and that it shook steadily as though with palsy.

I had not spoken. Indeed, I am afraid I had been incapable of speech. Those to whom I had been introduced seemed

similarly stricken. Then we reached the far corner where a young girl sat. "Miss Thomas," said the man, "Miss Virginia Thomas."

She smiled, and looked up quickly into my eyes. I stepped back a pace, for her eyes had the same strange look which I had observed in the others. Yet, except for her rather quaint dress, which reminded me of an old picture I had at home, she might be any of the girls one would meet at the usual week-end party. She was quite beautiful, with deep gray eyes, and full, petulant lips. I saw that she was wan with a waxen paleness, and that she had used no make-up at all.

I stood for a space, in awkward silence, no one paying any attention to me except the fat man and Miss Thomas. Each of them continued to stare at me steadily, and wave after wave of fear ran along my spine, for I noticed that Miss Thomas' lips were slowly drawing back from her teeth until she appeared to be snarling like an animal.

My companion squeezed my arm. "Possibly you would like to freshen up a bit before supper," he murmured, gloating over me. "I will show you your room."

As we walked past Mrs. Breckenridge I again caught that hint of green about her hair. Moss, I thought to myself, and then realized how silly that was!

I was led up a carpeted stairway, upon which my feet made no sound, and I had a ridiculous feeling that I was a captive in this place. I desired to demand of this man the whereabouts of my friend Donaldson, but for some reason I could not speak, so I merely followed my guide down a long corridor and into my room.

I could not understand where the dim light came from, as I could see no lighting fixtures. I was aware also that there was something else wrong, and then it dawned upon me. There was no window!



THE man stood looking into my eyes and my senses began to swim. I felt the sweat upon my forehead, but a little voice in my brain kept shouting, "Don't go to sleep, don't go to sleep!"

The man shook his head. "I believe you'll find everything you need here. Supper in half an hour, sharp. You'll hear the bell." He pressed my arm, and at that instant I was aware of a sound behind me. I turned my head, saw nothing, and when I again faced the little man he was gone.

The hair actually lifted around my temples and I know I felt faint and ill. Out in the hall, and in that horrible room downstairs I had been in a stupor, but now I knew that I was face to face with something unnatural. A thousand weird fancies crashed through my brain. Was I insane? Was this place a mad-house?

I stood in the center of the room and looked about me. Except for the absence of the window and the strange light there was nothing unusual in the room. There was a rather musty smell, but I had often experienced that in country houses. The furniture was early American and of beautiful design. There was a handsome maple low-boy near the door, with a glass in a bird's-eye maple frame hung above it.

I stood before this mirror for a little time, and it was reassuring to see my rugged, ordinary features staring back at me. Then I felt a touch on my shoulder. Whirling about I saw that Miss Thomas stood directly behind me, but with an uncanny sense of terror I realized that her reflection had not appeared in the mirror! She was trembling, and her breast rose and fell rapidly with her breathing.

She placed a finger at her lips, and shook her head to signify that I should remain quiet.

"I have come to warn you," she said, in a peculiar whisper. "Don't delay a moment or it will be forever too late. Get

out of this house, get away from this place!"

I half opened my mouth to whisper a natural question, and I felt her hand hastily thrust across my lips. Her hand was as cold as death itself and as she touched me a peculiar change stole across her features. The strange gloating look came slowly into her eyes, her head drooped to one side and her mouth hung open, showing sharp white teeth. She pressed her cold body against me, but my only feeling was one of horror. I attempted to draw her hand away, but it took all of my rather unusual strength to move her wrist, and she was a slight girl!

I saw saliva trickle from the corner of her mouth and her eyes seemed to swell. Her lips drew back from her sharp teeth.

My mind was jumping about like a scared animal. I was incapable of thought or reason. Then the Negro butler was standing in the doorway. His gaze accused Virginia Thomas, his amber eyes half aglow in the pale light.

"Marse want you downstairs," he said.

Miss Thomas drew back, the strength ebbing from her wrist, her lips slowly assumed their natural shape and position, and she drew her staring eyes away from mine. As I looked at her, two little lines appeared between her eyes on her smooth forehead, and as plainly as though she had spoken, I received the message. "Leave at once! I have warned you!"

The moment they had passed through the open door it slammed shut. I waited a bare moment, then sprang to the door. It was locked. I threw my two hundred pounds against it, but with no result at all except that I made my shoulder sore. I could feel a languor stealing over my mind. Sick and weak, I thought I saw the little, fat man in front of me. He seemed to grow until he filled the entire room. I sank upon the bed and buried my face in my hands. With every ounce of will

power I possessed I fought against the power exerted against me.

This mental battle may have lasted for fifteen minutes. I do not know. I was in a new dimension. Time and space had merged for me. Then I became aware that a bell was ringing. I knew that it was the supper bell, and with a strange certainty I knew that my door would be open now. With the measured pace of a sleep walker I started toward it, and as I passed through it the words of Virginia Thomas were blazing across my brain. "Get out of this house! Leave at once!"

I was out in the corridor then, and at the head of the steps stood the gigantic Negro butler. How could I get past him? What was I to do? If I could just get down those stairs and out of this house! Out of this house, this house of death!

\* \* \*

I tried to run, but my legs felt as they do in a dream, with that inhuman heaviness, though I knew I was not dreaming. The butler was coming toward me his eyes wide with the gloating stare of a beast.

I made a supreme effort and eluded his grasp, started down the stairs! I could hear him behind me, and it seemed that it took an eternity of time to descend each step.

I was at the landing. Then I was halfway down. I fought with my mind as much as with my muscles. I must get out; I must get out! I heard the howling of a dog somewhere outside, and as I looked at the front door, it opened slowly!

Then there was a hideous chuckle in front of me. The fat man stood at the bottom of the stairway, his lips drawn back, his eyes gloating over me, his fat white hands stretched toward me. In a group behind him was the whole horrible company. Miss Breckenridge—with the

moss in her hair. Yes it was moss! I knew it now! Moss from a grave. An old grave, and the other people there were from graves, too. The people with their gloating eyes and snarling lips.

Miss Thomas stood with them, but there was no help from her! Her eyes were wide, and she drooled at the mouth as she swayed back and forth. I could feel the Negro's cold breath on my neck, and it seemed to crystallize the whole agony of the scene in my mind.

I received a new power. I know that I screamed, and that as I screamed I leaped, leaped exactly as one does in a nightmare, so that I fairly flew through the air with my arms outstretched. And then there was a god-given blackness.

WHEN I opened my eyes someone held my head and spoke softly to me. The immediate past faded from my mind as the new world came into being. Several persons were grouped about me. Plain, ordinary persons, and I lay in the glare of the headlights from my own car. The man who had my head on his lap, spoke more clearly now.

"That's it, mister. You're comin' around now. Don't you be a-feared, the ambulance is on its way. Lay still. . . ."

With a frightful wrench I managed to turn my aching head. I saw my car, a hopeless wreck, piled up against a half-broken tombstone. A stone which was one of a small neglected group at the edge of the river road. There was no driveway—no house—but in the glare of the headlights I could read the inscription on the stone which had wrecked my car.

VIRGINIA THOMAS

Born 1810

Died 1830

R. I. P.



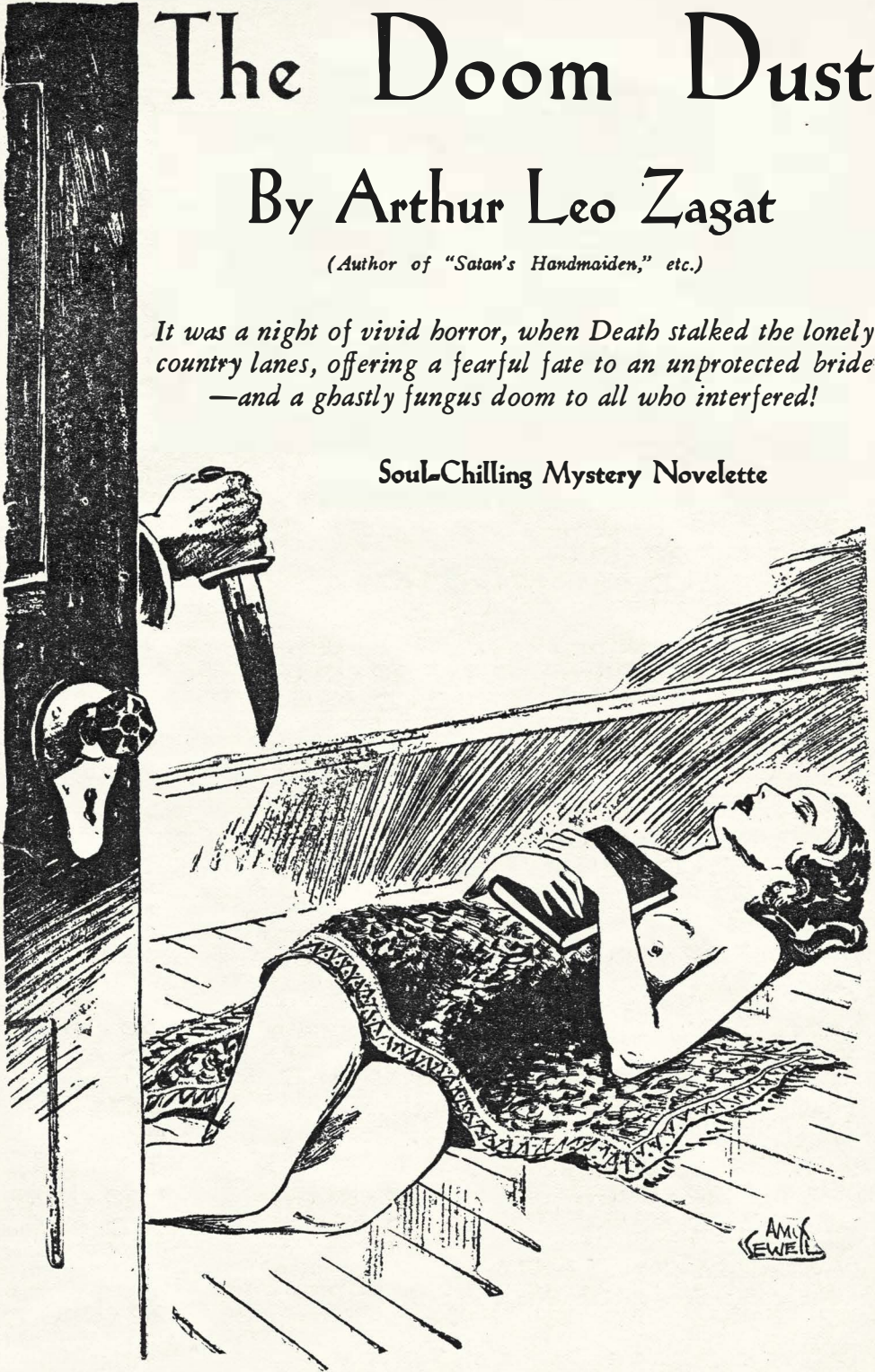
# The Doom Dust

By Arthur Leo Zagat

(Author of "Satan's Handmaiden," etc.)

*It was a night of vivid horror, when Death stalked the lonely country lanes, offering a fearful fate to an unprotected bride —and a ghastly fungus doom to all who interfered!*

Soul-Chilling Mystery Novelette







**S**TELLA WARREN was running endlessly up a long hill in an eerie half-light that cast no shadows. The two she pursued were silhouetted far ahead, against the bare grayness of the declivity, and just beyond them the road ended abruptly. Only a few steps more and they must plunge over the brink of a sheer precipice that went down to horror.

John, the man who loved her and for whom her love had blazed more and more

ardently through the three months of their marriage till it was a consuming flame, could not see the peril. He was looking back at her over his shoulder. She could see his dear face clearly despite the distance between them and her heart bled at the longing and despair with which it was suffused.

The woman who ran at his side, Lois Morne, touched, just barely touched his wrist with the tips of her pale fingers, but



it was that touch that chained John to her, so that he could neither stop nor turn back. She also was looking back, but she was aware of the abyss gaping just ahead of them and her too-red lips were parted in a soundless laugh, triumphant horrible. . . .

Fast as Stella ran she made no progress and the two elopers, their legs striding so speedily that they were a blur, remained just the same distance ahead of her. She could never catch them, but as long as she kept on running she could hold them, could hold John, from going over the cliff-edge. If she stopped. . . .

A huge bird swooped out of the brazen sky. It screamed, and the sound was oddly like a shrill bell, ringing, ringing. It hurtled down; when it reached her it would stop her and John would go over the cliff. Its head was not a bird's head, it was the head of Wan Lee, their house boy, the livid scar across the saffron of his face obliterating half his nose!

The man-bird dropped plummet-like, its long nail claws extended for the kill, its bell-cry shrilling higher till it pierced Stella's eardrums. An abortive scream scraped her throat—and she was awake in the dark. Her body and the gossamer silk of her nightgown were clammy with the cold sweat of nightmare terror. She was awake, but the shrill bell was still ringing, splitting the blackness with its clamor.

"John!" Stella called. "John! The telephone!" She kept her eyes closed against the dark, against sharp dread of what that summons might mean shrilling out of the dead of night. "*John!*"

There was no creak from the other twin bed, no answering mumble. Icy fingers squeezed Stella's heart, momentarily; then she remembered. John wasn't here, of course. He had driven away somewhere—mysteriously—last evening, had

promised to be back in the morning. It must be he calling.

Sudden fear that the ringing would stop invaded her. She threw the covers back, rolled out of bed. The floor was cold, but she didn't wait for slippers or robe. Her bare feet thudded down the stairs; she snatched up the 'phone in the entrance foyer. "Hello," she gasped. "Hello!"

"Stell!" John's voice crackled in her ear. "Stell! Is it you?"

"Yes, dear. Yes. What's the matter?" There *was* something wrong, his hoarseness, the urgency in his tone, its edge of—yes—of fear told her that even before he went on.

"Listen, Stell, and don't interrupt. In my laboratory—a black note-book—get it out of there. Don't let anyone see you do it—above all don't let anyone get hold of the book. Not anyone. I've written you . . . you'll get my letter in the morning. And don't trust. . ." A dull thud broke off the snapped, staccato phrases! Stella heard a moan, a sudden high-pitched gabble, queerly like yet unlike a human voice. Then there was a click, and silence broken only by the thin hum of wire noise.

The girl's small hand rattled the receiver-hook. "John! *John!*" Someone was talking in an indifferent monotone. "Your party has hung up, madam."

"Operator. Oh, operator!" Stella fought to keep her own voice steady. "Get him back. Please get him back!"

"One mo-ment, plee-uz!" Clickings, a burr. Then the operator again. "I am sorry, madam. I cannot get your party; their instrument seems to be out of order."

"Oh!" The receiver crashed into its cradle. Afterwards Stella berated herself for not asking where the call had come from, but then it was too late. A flicker of movement pulled her eyes to the dimness at the stairhead, the faint rustle of

silk. A shadow moved up there, was gone. Had someone been listening?

Lois? Lois Morne, her classmate whom John and she had met on their trip and who had rather awkwardly taken Stella's casual invitation to visit with them on their return at its face value. She had arrived a week ago, bag, baggage and poodle, and since then had been a charming presence in the house.

Too charming, Stella had begun to think, when it came to John. But why should Lois eavesdrop? Perhaps she had been awakened by the 'phone bell, had thought the call might be for her. Then why hadn't she said something? Why hadn't she made her presence known?

**N**ONSENSE! The girl tried to pull herself together. There hadn't been anyone there. She must not let her nerves go. John was in trouble; he was depending on her to do something for him; she mustn't fail him. In the laboratory—a black book. She peered through dimness toward the back of the entrance hall, at the blank, inscrutable door of the room she had never entered. No one besides her husband, not even Wan Lee, had ever stepped over that threshold. John had always been curiously, grimly silent about what he did in there, all day and sometimes far into the night.

She clicked on light and padded to it—took hold of the doorknob. It was immovable! The door was locked! And not even with a key. Stella stared at the nicked dial in which the futile knob centered, wrinkling her forehead at the lines and letters graved into the metal. Why, that was like a lock on a safe in a bank; one had to know the combination to get it open.

Good Lord! The notebook—how could she get in to get it? Was that what John had meant—that he had written the combination in the letter that would arrive in

the morning? But she must get in there tonight. If. . . .

"No can do," a voice squealed. Stella whirled, and recoiled from the sinister saffron of Wan Lee. "Ony Mistel John know."

"Wan! You—How—" He was fully dressed, his arms folded, his hands hidden in the voluminous sleeves of a flowing robe of black silk. Silk! Stella remembered the betraying rustle at the stair-top. Was Wan Lee the eavesdropper, then, instead of Lois? "Don't trust. . ." someone, John had started to say. Had he been about to warn her against the Chinese? The Oriental's horrid scar, a hideous scarlet gash across half his face, seemed to crawl with a monstrous life of its own, and above it slant, glittering eyes were obscurely menacing. "What are you doing here?"

"I leading third book Confucius, velly good philosophel my people. Heal Missee Wallen talk tel'phone; come see what can do. Something?"

Reading Confucius! Very likely—at three in the morning! Stella licked cold, dry lips. She mustn't let him see how afraid John's tortured voice, his desperate message, had made her. But neither could she leave the laboratory unguarded—with the book in it that had sounded so tremendously important to her husband.

"Yes," she managed an almost normal intonation. "You can do something for me. It's hot in my room, cooler here. Please bring my mattress down, the bed-clothes, and my dressing gown and slippers. I intend to sleep here, right here, the rest of the night."

There was no expression in the yellow countenance, but Stella knew Wan Lee was not deceived. He glided away, his felt slippers utterly soundless on the stairs, vanished into the dimness of the upper hall. Stella whirled, darted into the living room, flitted across it to an Adam table



in a dark corner. She jerked a drawer open; her hand fumbled among papers, clattering odds and ends within. Her fingers found cold metal; she whimpered and pulled out John's flat automatic.

She was back again at the laboratory door, the gun hidden in the folds of her sheer nightdress, was watching the Chinese' waddling descent as he grunted under his bulky burden. Her feathery, frivolous dressing gown made a splotch of vivid red over the top of the bundle. Somehow it looked as if he were bearing a horribly limp corpse, a great gout of fresh blood staining its white shroud!

One thing, she thought as she watched Wan Lee arrange the improvised bed on the floor right across the laboratory entrance, was fortunate. The room had no windows, was ventilated by narrow ducts from fans in the basement. John had told her that once, when she had wondered at a great windowless space in the stone side-wall of the house; he had said something about fumes from his experiments killing the ivy and other foliage if that were not done.

She hadn't paid much attention then, watching the adorable way in which his tiny black mustache moved under his nose as he talked. But she remembered now, and was glad. This was the only way anyone could get in. Her lips moved in a silent prayer that if anyone came she would be able to stop him.

STELLA sat bolt upright on the mattress, her back against the door, her quivering fingers tight on the butt of the automatic under the sheets. Her eyes, wide, aching, strained into black pools of shadow cast by a tiny nightlight, high up in the foyer ceiling, and the broad entrance hall was strangely unfamiliar, filled suddenly with eerie menace. Tiny creakings, the rustle of foliage outside, sent cold prickles up and down her spine.

She fought for calmness, fought not to think of the way John's voice had choked off, of the final thud and the shrill voice she had heard. Her lover was all right, she tried to tell herself; nothing had happened to him. His letter would clear things up, and she would laugh at her present terror when she read it.

But oh, how long, how long was it yet till morning? Till old Si Hopkins would come in his axle-squealing buggy and bring that letter? That letter from the—dead. Stella's heart skipped. Stark terror seized her. *John was dead, murdered!* She would never see him any more!

God! She mustn't think that; she would go mad before dawn if she did. She mustn't think at all. She stared straight ahead of her at the great entrance-door. Beyond it was the terraced garden, the gravelled path sloping down to the gate, and the mailbox with its little red flag into which Si would put John's letter in the morning. No! She must meet him there, get the letter from him. She must let no one else know of it or get a hand on it. Not Wan Lee—certainly not Wan Lee—nor even Loris Morne. John had said no one . . . no one . . . Stella forced heavy eyelids open.

*What was that?* A furtive sound brought Stella wide awake, icy fingers clamping her heart. There it was again, the sough of fabric against wood, the almost imperceptible grate of stealthy metal against metal. Someone was at the outside door, was fumbling a key into its lock. The girl snatched up the gun from where her drowsing hand had dropped it. She was on her feet, tense, quivering.

She could hear the pound of blood in her ears, the single, startled chirp of a woods cricket, and nothing else. Not another sound, but she *felt* the presence of the intruder on the other side of the stout panel at which she stared; visualized him,

a shapeless, menacing figure crouched out there on the doorstep . . . Oh God! Here, inside the house, in that corner, a black shadow was coming to life, was extending upward, was taking on the form of a man, of . . . "I see you!" she gulped. "I see you! Stop there or I'll shoot."

"No shoot, Missee Wallen," liquid syllables sounded from the shadow. "This me, Wan Lee."

Stella gasped with quick relief, then paled. What was the Chinese doing there? Had he been creeping up on her, hoping to find her asleep? The feel of the gun-butt in her wet palm was comforting. "Wan! There's someone outside, someone trying to get in!"

"I go see," His response was imperceptible, no hint of excitement tinged its thin monotone. Ignoring the gun still snouting at him, he moved to the portal. A bolt rattled and the great leaf swung open. A rectangle of graying dawn was blotted by Lee's tall silhouette—was gone as the door slammed closed and its spring-lock clicked. Stella swayed, put her free hand back to the wall behind to steady herself, waited interminably for the sound of a struggle.

Minutes dragged, and there was no sign that anything lived, out there in the garden. Was the house boy ever coming back? Had he fled—frightened away by the terror that quivered about the house? Had he been ambushed—wounded, killed, perhaps, by the trespasser whose furtive attempt to enter had awakened her? Or—her veins ran an icy stream—was he whispering out there to the other, planning an attack? Was *that* the reason he had been stealing toward the door, to let the prowler in?

**J**UST as that last thought squeezed her brain in a constricting band of steel, another furtive sound jerked her eyes away from the door, through the great

arch of the living-room, to the pale oblong of a window it half-obsured. Something was moving across that window. It was an arm—a hairy arm—stretching across the glass. She could not see the hand, but she divined that it was at the invisible corner of the frame—the corner where John had installed a patent lock! Metal snapped loudly. Had that lock been forced? Was the window about to open, to let in—*what?* What sort of thing owned that black, shaggy arm?

Paralysis of terror held Stella rigid. She could not scream; she could not move the hand in which she held John's gun, could not shoot. Wood grated—was that window opening? Oh God!

Suddenly as it had appeared, the arm was gone! The window had not opened—she must have imagined it—for the shadow of a tree bough loomed across the pane. That was it—the shadow of a branch. More than once she had been frightened by just such an apparition. Then something thumped against the big door, and its knob rattled!

She hadn't imagined the arm at that. The attack had shifted, that was all, had come around to the front entrance. Of course—Wan Lee had brought them there—easier—they were coming in . . .

Her throat worked; her frozen lips moved, but she could utter only a hissing rasp. Would she—could she—fire the gun in her hand? Could she send lead death pounding into living flesh? "Missee Wallen!" the high squeal of Wan Lee's voice came through the thick wood. "Missee Wallen, open do'!"

Then he hadn't his key! Good! She would keep him outside. Safer that way—safer . . . Oh Lord! She couldn't; she dared not. It was already growing light, soon it would be broad day and the mailman would be coming up the road. He would give John's letter to the Oriental unquestionably, that all-important letter!



At all costs she must prevent that! "All right," she contrived to say. "All right, Wan Lee, I'm coming."

The girl's trembling legs seemed to move through a viscous liquid; miles stretched between her and her goal. But she reached there at last, got her left hand on the polished knob, turned it. She jumped back, the gun jerking up. But only Lee was there, tall and gaunt against the blazing glory of sunrise. He shuffled in, and the portal slammed shut behind him.

"Well," Stella husked. "Well, Lee. What—who . . . ?"

"Nobody!" He spread his gnarled, ocherous talons wide. "Nobody there, no tracks in wet glass, nothing." He shrugged, continued without change of tone. "I go make bleafas'."

"Put up a card-table here." The Chinese slid through the door at the left, and it closed behind him. But Stella did not see that. She was staring at the pale-tinted wall, at a tiny smear that showed where Lee's voluminous sleeve had brushed against it—a smear that glistened redly in the light that swept in now through the fanlight over the big door.

## CHAPTER TWO

### The Fungus Death

"OH, Hon . . . Honey!" A sleepy, little-girl's voice broke through the gray mists swirling about her. "Why all the confabulation down there in the middle of the night?" Stella turned, looked bleakly up the green-carpeted stairs. Lois Morne was peering down at her, round-eyed and tiny in pajamas of peach silk through which the glint of her skin was a pink sheen. "Has Johnnie come home already?" The tousled aureole of yellow hair that crowned her head was repeated under her plump, ineffectual chin

by a furry bundle of dog hugged to her breast. "Oooh, I hope so. Lois is just *aching* for the walk in the dew of the dawn that he's promised her. And Babs wants to go too, don't you, baby?" The last was to the poodle, who yelped and darted a red tongue across the girl's cheek.

"No," Stella said drearily. "John has not come home." A little flare of resentment at the diminutive the other had used was quenched in the black flame of her fear for her husband. Her body ached as if the terrors of the night had been physical blows. "I hope worry about him didn't disturb your sleep."

She couldn't help that bitter jab; more than ever she felt her old friend to be an interloper. And the irony of it was that if anything more happened here, she would have to look out for that bundle of blonde fluff as well as for herself and the mysteriously precious black book behind the fast-locked door.

"We slept like logs, thank you, Babsie and I." Lois' red sandaled feet came down a step or two. "We—oh!" She broke off with a little squeal. "Oh, you've got a gun, Stella, and—and you've slept in the hall. What's happened?"

"I couldn't sleep in my room. It was too hot, so I came down here. Couldn't sleep here either and I was cleaning John's gun to kill time." Stella knew her lies were as transparent to Lois—unless she were actually the utter moron she pretended—as they had been to Wan Lee.

But it didn't matter, nothing mattered except the letter she awaited. Perhaps, beside the combination, there would be some clue in it to John's whereabouts, some hint as to where she could begin to look for him.

Worse even than the threat to herself, and the unknown menace still hovering around the place was the awful uncertainty regarding her lover's safety, the terrible not-knowing whether he were not

lying wounded somewhere, bleeding his life away. . . .

**F**ROM the gate Stella could look up the flower-bordered path, through the wide-open front door to the blank, inscrutable face of the laboratory door. The gun in her pocket would easily carry that far. She could turn her head, just a bit, and look down the steep brown ribbon of the mountain road, a hundred yards to where the trail curved and was hidden by a green curtain from behind which the mail-carrier's buggy would come.

The house, thank God, was empty. Wan Lee had departed, a quarter-hour ago, with swinging can for milk and eggs at the Ransom's farm up the tree-cloaked hill; Lois, in shorts and halter, was somewhere out back basking in her matutinal sun bath. That same bright sun was beating down on Stella, and in its warm glare the night's alarms seemed unreal, fantastic. But she could see, even from here, a tiny smudge on the foyer-wall where the Chinese's sleeve had brushed, and it was brown now, granulated, undoubtedly a spot of blood. . . .

From somewhere upstairs, a clock clinked eight times. Si Hopkins was down below now at the Dane's; the grizzled mailman's daily round was punctual as time itself. He would be here in minutes, Babs would come scrambling out from some grassy covert and leap into the buggy for the head-scratching she had learned to expect. The kindly old man would drawl a greeting, would reach into the bag between his feet, and pull out John's letter at last.

Why didn't he come? It was time now, it must be time!—A far-off squeaking pulled Stella around, the familiar intermittent squeal of the mail-buggy's ungreased axles. In seconds, now, the gray head of his horse would poke around that bend. Everything was tight inside the

girl, her breath came from her pale lips in hissing whisper. And suddenly—in mid-squall—the axle-sound stopped!

In the name of all the saints why did Si have to stop there, today of all days? Stella pulled the gate open, took a step out into the road, stopped. No! She dared not get out of sight of the lab.

The thin shriek of the axle shuddered again through the ambient air, and the long face of Roamer, Hopkins' decrepit mare, appeared nodding around the curve.

The buggy came into view. Queer! Why were the rain-curtains up, hiding the vehicle's interior? The sky was cloudless—could it have been raining in the valley when he had set out? Stella's eyes narrowed, her scalp tightened with apprehension, with growing fear. Wholly unconsciously, her hand slid into the pocket of her linen slacks, fastened on the butt of the automatic there. Something was wrong—deadly wrong. Suddenly the sun's warmth was gone and a chill penetrated the very marrow of her bones.

Roamer plodded toward her, slowly, oh, so slowly. Time stretched into infinity, but he reached her at last, stopped; whinnying, stretching his nose for the apple she always had for him. She had forgotten it. Why were those black curtains so immovable? Why did no quavering, cheery voice greet her from behind them?

Was it fancy, or did a queerly musty odor taint the air?

Stella knew she must open those curtains, and she was afraid, horribly afraid. Her skin crawled with fear. But she fought her hand up, fought it to the rusty fasteners edging the peeling fabrikoid, jerked them open. And screamed!

It wasn't—it couldn't be Si Hopkins, this slumped, inert bundle on the buggy seat! It couldn't be anything human—this Thing in the frayed blue suit of the old mail-carrier. Where there should be hands there were two formless lumps of



a slimy substance like the scum on a stagnant pool, except that it was fish-belly white and dotted with small gall-like protuberances. The head—Stella's stomach churned—the head was a mass of the same fungoid stuff, and from its mouth, its nostrils, trailed long tendrils of something that looked like Spanish moss, clammy-white, growing even as the aghast girl stared at it. . . .

Protruding here and there through the nauseous, quivering mass, all that could be identified as belonging to the old man were little tufts of curly, silver hair.

**T**HOSE knobby balls—how they were swelling, like little balloons! There was a scamper behind the girl; a white flash passed her, scrambled into the buggy. The impetus of Bab's rush carried it against the Thing's face and one of the balls plopped open. It sprayed a tiny cloud of fine dust around the dog's head. The poodle yelped—its cry of anguish was like a human scream—threw itself backward in a somersault that landed it, thumping, on the ground.

The tiny dog lurched to its feet, started a blind, frantic rush away from the agony that had seized it, got to the side of the road and well again, writhing in the ditch. Its hairy pelt was clotting—no!—was being covered with the same odd fungus that invested Si Hopkins. Tendrils grew, spurting almost, from its nostrils, its snarling mouth. It lay still. . . . Stella averted her eyes from the horror.

But she forced them back again to the buggy. Against the dashboard lay the bulging mailbag. Had any of the death-dust sprayed the striped bed-ticking? If she touched it would that lethal fungus spring to life on her own hand, spread appallingly, eating her white, firm flesh as it had eaten the dog's, the old man's? Would it sprout from her nostrils as it sprouted from theirs? But the letter in

the mail bag held the combination that would enable her to reach the notebook John had entrusted to her care. She could seize it, flee from this place of menace, of soul-shattering terror. But as long as that book was still within the house she could not leave. Stella moaned, her hand drifted toward the bag, reached it, touched it. Her fingertips prickled—she gasped—it was only the harshness of the thick fabric. She clutched the sack, jerked it from the wagon-bed in one convulsive movement. It crashed to the ground, white papers spilled from it—from a long gash in its side.

The ground heaved under her feet. Hopkins' disaster was not some fearful accident, then. Someone had murdered him, had sprayed him with the fungoid death, had ripped the mailbag and stolen—*what?* Awful certainty pounded at the girl's brain, but she dropped to her knees, hoping against hope as she scrambled among the spilled envelopes, the scrawled postcards. Whimpering, searching, desperately searching for the familiar bold lettering she knew she would not find. She read the names of families up the mountain, over its crest, down the other slope. But no Mrs. John Warren. . . .

No Dane either, or anyone below. Their letters had been delivered. Then suddenly Stella remembered the momentary stoppage in the buggy's approach. The thing had happened there, just below the bend, not a hundred yards away. Whoever had John's letter with the combination, was near—very near. He might be—She jumped to her feet, her frantic glance shooting to the house, the hall.

Someone was in the foyer! Her hand flashed to the pocketed gun; she plunged up the path. Something metallic caught the light in the hands of the dark figure; Stella's numbed fingers fumbled to find the automatic's safety catch, couldn't. She

felt threshold-stone underfoot, catapulted into the hall. The tall form within tensed—flung an arm out at her. . . .

"No clean today," Wan Lee said blandly, holding up the can. "Cow sick." He seemed quite unconcerned. "No can hab stlawbelly-sholtcake."

STELLA stared at him. Had he, or hadn't he been at the laboratory when she first glimpsed him? She couldn't be sure. From the bright daylight outdoors it had been impossible to see clearly within the house. But she was dishevelled, breathless, holding a gun, and even Oriental fatalism could not possibly be so imperturbed at the spectacle she must present. His very poise argued guilt. He could have met Hopkins in the copse below, killed him, slipped back here through the woods and come in the back way. Her finger tightened on the trigger. But she could not shoot him out of hand—could not even accuse him. She had no proof.

"Any letters for little Lois, honey-girl?" The speaker followed her insipid voice from a door to the left.

"No, Lois. No letters for you." Yesterday she had winced at the way John's eyes had caressed the girl's voluptuous curves, all too fully revealed by her sparse costume. The thought stabbed, how happy she would be if he were here to do that now—even if Lois were stark naked.

"Oh, Si's still here!" the blonde exclaimed, and undulated toward the exit.

"Wait!" Stella snapped. "Wait. Don't go out there. Close that door and lock it." The blonde turned, pouting, but Stella paid no attention. She was at the telephone, whirling the magneto handle. She must have help. She would tell the operator to send the Dane boys up here, to dispatch Marshal Lester from Nehansic. She could hold Wan Lee off till they came. Then she would have them batter

down the laboratory door. She would get the book out, and they would guard her as far as the village. Funny, the line sounded dead. She twirled the handle again. There was no tinkle, no responding voice. The girl swayed back on her heels. The line *was* dead! It had been cut somewhere outside!

Very calmly she replaced the receiver in its hook, turned to the others. Wan Lee was standing meekly still, hands hidden within his sleeves, the milk-can dangling incongruously against the frogged buttons on his black cotton working-jacket. "Lee," she said. "Go upstairs and make the beds, I'll tell you about lunch later."

His scarred face was a still, sinister mask, but she could have sworn that his narrow eyes glittered malevolently, mockingly. "I obey," they seemed to say, "because it suits me. But watch out. My time is coming." His departure was silent, reptilian, as always.

Stella jerked around as soon as he was out of sight. "Lois!" she whispered. "I don't want to frighten you, but I need your help. Si Hopkins is out in the buggy there dead—murdered. The 'phone wire has been cut. I want you to slip out the back way, run through the woods to the Dane's, and tell them to get here as quickly as they can, with their guns. Do you think you can do that, dear?"

Color drained from the other's doll face, and her eyes grew big. "Oh, Stell," she whimpered. "I knew something was wrong. But—but why don't you go. I—I'm afraid!"

"Whatever there is to fear is here; you'll be going away from danger. The quicker you go the safer you will be. Come, I'll get the door and windows locked out here and go to the back with you. I'll watch you, cover you with the gun as far as I can see you. But hurry!" Stella's voice broke. "Please hurry!"



## CHAPTER THREE

## Encircled!

STELLA slammed the back door behind Lois, clicked the lock, watched her run like a shaggy rabbit across the clearing. With her out of the house there was at least one worry off her mind. She was almost at the dark rim of the pines now. After that—

Lois screamed! Something white flashed through the sunlight. A little cloud of mist swirled on the ground at the blonde's feet. She whirled, dived back headlong, eyes wide with terror, as scream after scream shrilled through her lips.

Stella had the door open again, blazed a single shot into the gloomy tree trunks where a flicker of movement had showed momentarily. Lois brushed by her, still screaming, and Stella slammed the door again, locked it, stooped, her fearful glance darting to the bare legs of the blonde girl who had collapsed in a dead faint on the kitchen floor.

The tanned skin, tiny hairs glinting golden against its bronze, was clean. No clammy fungus was spreading there. The lethal puff-ball had missed! Stella gasped relief, reached for a pot of water on the sink drain-board, dashed its contents into Lois' face. The girl sputtered back to consciousness, stared up at the ceiling with eyes whose blue was darkened, almost blackened with fear. "The dog-man!" she moaned. "Oh, the horrible dog-man!"

Stella recalled the shaggy arm she had seen last night. Her fingers dug into the girl's bare shoulder. "What dog-man? Lois, what was it you saw?"

"A little man, all hairy, in among the trees. He had a face like an airedale, and he threw something. He made noises, like a dog barking, awful noises. Oh, honey,"

she clung to Stella's arm, pulled herself to a sitting posture, "What was he? What is going on around here?"

"I wish I knew," Stella said bitterly.

"Upstai's all finish," Wan Lee announced, shuffling in. Then he saw the pool on the floor and his face suddenly twisted with anger. "Wach you do here, Missee?" he cackled. "Wach fo' you make my flo' wet?" He snatched at the buttons of his jacket, ripping them open. "I go. I thloo. You come my kitchen, make dilty; I go."

Stella lifted herself erect. Her face was set, the gun steady in her hand. "Oh, no!" she gritted. "No, you don't go. You stay here, right here, till Mr. John comes home safely." Had he, somehow, gotten hold of the precious notebook?

A very hell of fury blazed in the Chinese's eyes. His evil scar was blue-black with the blood surging into it. Only for an instant, though. Suddenly all expression was gone from his countenance; it was mask-like as ever. "Vely well," he muttered. "I stay. I stay in my loom up-sai's till Missa John come." He started to turn.

"One moment," Stella snapped. Ignoring his glowering look she came closer to him. Jamming her gun into his stomach she passed her free hand tightly over his clothes. Keys came out of a pocket, the house keys. She passed by sundry odds and ends of string, buttons and other odds and ends of things. There was nothing else—nothing suspicious—wait!

She remembered a lurid Chinatown yarn she had once read, felt around at the back of his neck between his shoulder blades. Something hard was there, something long and thin and hard. Her fingers slipped inside his loose collar, came out with a narrow knife whose handle was notched, whose eight-inch blade was smeared with brown that was not rust!

**H**YSTERIA plucked at Stella's nerves but her voice was steady. "This was for killing chickens, I suppose?" she said grimly. "Lois—there's some wire in—Lois!"

Where was that girl? Had—? Wan Lee lurched suddenly, a sudden leap that took him past her before she could shoot. She whirled. He was just beyond her, his arm was up and out, a white ball struck it, burst, spewed a misty cloud of tiny dancing particles around his yellow hand. Stella's scream was a choked squeal. Lee's attempt at escape had saved her life. That puff-ball had been thrown through the doorway at her—by *whom?*

She glimpsed the Oriental's pain-contorted face as she plunged past him. There was no one in the dining-room, no one in the foyer. She twisted to a sound from above, saw Lois peering down, "What happened, sweet?" the infantile blonde lisped. "Any more trouble?"

"Lois," Stella gasped. "Did you see anyone out here?"

The other went wide-eyed. "Why, no! Who could be there? I was going to my room to fix my make-up. I saw no one."

That nut would stop for lipstick on Judgment Day. "Go ahead and prink," Stella blurted, forced her eyes back toward the kitchen, knowing that she would see Wan Lee writhing on the floor in the throes of the horrible fungus-death. But he was still standing, a yellow liquid was dripping down his arm, dripping from his finger-tips. Where it gathered on the concrete floor it fizzed and smoked.

With his other hand the Chinaman was just putting a bottle down on the kitchen table. Stella could see its red label, knew it was the muriatic acid the houseboy used for cleaning. God! The skin of the Chinese where the acid bathed it was rising in great white weals—but the caustic had killed the spores that otherwise would have spread all over his body by now.

A single moan forced itself through his thin lips. Then stolid endurance of what must have been terrific pain hardened his face to its usual impassivity. He was washing the stuff off now, under a turned-on tap. A more pressing problem called for Stella's attention.

She had locked the windows, the door. A quick glance showed her they were undisturbed. But the attacker must be in the house. How had he gotten in? She whirled to a stealthy, muffled sound that came from inside the laboratory door.

Stella crouched, her tongue cleaving to the roof of her mouth, stared at the blank, forbidding panel. The unseen assailant, the prowler whom John had feared, had penetrated her defenses, was within the closed room. Even now he must have the black book in his hands!

She had failed her husband, had fallen down on the task he had given her in his frantic cry from out of the unknown. The thought exploded red fury within her skull. Her left hand darted out like the strike of a rattler, clutched the doorknob. The door pulled open. A vague, bent form, somehow uncouth, moved in the dimness. The girl thrust over the threshold, her weapon swung up, "Hands up" she cried, "or I'll shoot!"

Only a faint rustle answered her. "Hands—" An arm snaked past her side, from behind. A hand clutched the gun, ripped it from her fingers. The door crashed closed behind her, blackness crashed about her, and a shrill laugh came muffled through the thick panel!

Stella spun around, an abortive scream rasping her throat. Her hands reached out for, found wood, found a knob, turned it and thrust against it. The door was immovable, locked! It was locked! she was imprisoned, here in the dark—shut in weaponless with some hideous thing that moved furtively in the blackness—with some bestial thing which killed with



clammy white puff balls that burst and made horror of its victim!

**M**AD laughter swelled the muscles of her own neck. Wan Lee! Fool that she was—mad fool!—thinking him helpless, ignoring him. He had come up behind her with his noiseless tread, had jerked the gun from her hand and slammed to the door that shut her in to die!

Glass tinkled against glass—in here!

Her staring eyeballs ached with the pressure of utter lightlessness. Her brain writhed with terror, with anguish transcending terror. Instinct gibbered to her that the thing inhabiting this darkness with her was other than human, was foulness unspeakable.

She sensed it in the padding footfall that thudded against her straining ears, in the fetid odor that threaded the pungent smell of chemicals, that assailed her nostrils with its eerie menace. And she knew that the thing was creeping toward her, that its hairy claws were reaching out for her—for the soft flesh of her neck.

Sudden coldness invaded her, and she found sly cunning in the extremity of her fear, the sly cunning that animates the completely mad. If she couldn't see what crept upon her, it couldn't see her. She dropped soundlessly to the floor, slid noiselessly along the wall.

Noiselessly? The fabric of her clothing scraped; the faint sound that was thunderous in her ears must resound equally to the other. Frantic fingers flew—modern woman's garments are scanty, easily shed. Her skin wouldn't rustle, wouldn't scrape against wood or plaster and betray her to the unseen hunter. Naked as the day she was born, Stella slithered through the shielding darkness, naked and snarling as some primordial progenetrix, far back in the dawn of Time.

And like that far-away ancestress the nude girl crawled, through blackness that

well might be the dark of a primeval night, shuddering with fear of the nameless, invisible thing that stalked her. In time Stella lost all sense of direction, all knowledge of where she was, of where the door might be, knew only that she must slide endlessly, silently on.

A chair-leg brushed her flank, a table corner scraped her thigh. She stifed a startled cry, too late. The Thing was upon her! A hairy body prickled her with its bristles, a taloned claw sliced searingly along her arm, fingers like steel springs clamped her wrist. A surge of terror-born strength heaved the girl to her feet, lifting the other with her. Her free hand flailed into the darkness, crashed against mushy lips that drooled, was gashed by protruding fangs.

Two beasts battled in blackness, fought with snapping tooth and tearing claw—a loathsome, shaggy thing that growled, a woman once white and soft but now a snarling mad creature from which civilization was stripped as her clothes had been. The furious maelstrom whirled through the laboratory; a table toppled; bottles were swept from a shelf, crashed thunderously. Stella did not feel the splintered glass slash her bare feet, nor the acids burn them. But suddenly a tiny flame kindled by the seething mixture of chemicals, ran along the floor; a greenish light flickered, and she saw the face of the thing with which she battled.

**B**ULGING eyes were bloodshot with lust and battle-madness, under an infinitesimal brow. A flat nose dripped blood; long, yellow fangs gnashed between thick black lips. Gory foam dribbled from those lips. It flecked the stiff, green-brown hair fringing the brutish, protruding jaw and merged it with the dog-man's barrel chest. Marvelously, he was shorter than she, though wiry, powerful. Stella's clawed hand darted for his

eyes, gouged. He growled, jerked away.

In the moment's respite, the girl saw a teetering shelf, a bottle sliding from it whose red-lettered label shouted *Nitric Acid*. She snatched at it, had it, grasped it. A swift motion broke the neck from the container. Another jetted its contents straight into the man-beast's face.

The thing screamed, horribly, his shaggy hands went to eyes that were suddenly balls of blistered white, to a contorted, smoking visage. The jagged bottle was still in Stella's hands, she jabbed savagely—gripped it with both her torn hands, leaped high in the air and crashed it down on the other's flat skull. Blood gushed, there was a sickening sound of crushing bone, and the dog-man collapsing, screamed once.

Stella reeled, clutched at a table-top, held on, closing her eyes to shut out the awful sight. An acrid odor stung her nostrils—the sharp odor of singeing hair! It brought her back to awareness; her lids popped open. The light in the room was brighter, not green now but yellow and red. Flames licked along the twisted corpse of her beaten antagonist, fluttered like tiny flags from mingled reagents there on the floor, from its very boards. Greenish smoke gathered, undulated about her ankles, sent seeking tendrils up along the sun-tanned slimness of her legs.

The room was ablaze, and she was locked in it to burn, to roast. In minutes it would be a fiery caldron, a roaring furnace. . . . And there was only that tight-locked door!

Her glance lit on a desk in a corner, on a pulled-out drawer. The margin of a notebook, a black-covered notebook, peeped over the edge. There was the book, the black book John had entrusted to her, the book that had brought terror, death, surging about her. He had wanted her to hide it. Well, she would, she would hide

it in the flames, with her own charred body!

The fire reached some inflammable liquid, roared higher. Black smoke billowed, eddied. A cough racked her throat, and she pounded on the desk in effort to control that spasmodic retching. Pounded—funny that her little fist should crash so loudly. *It wasn't her fist!* It was something pounding on the door, great blows that shook the thick panel, that splintered the wood. The door was breaking down!

Stella staggered over to it, hugging the precious book to her lacerated breasts. She could hardly breathe. The heat was intolerable. She slid to her knees, slumped to the floor. A tiny current of fresher air seeped through the crevice down here, revived her a little. The panel quivered, metal screeched. And the pounding stopped!

Stella heard a scream, a woman's scream; she heard Wan Lee's cackling, high gabble. A woman—God! Lois! Was it Lois that had been hammering at the door, and the Chinese who had made her stop? A muffled shot cracked out there . . . and the pounding recommenced. Just as final blackness engulfed the beleaguered girl, the door crashed open.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Wan Lee Strikes

PAIN, dull thumping pain, racked Stella as she heaved up through weltering blackness to consciousness again. Her eyes opened, she was on the foyer-floor. A rug was thrown over her to hide her nakedness. John's book was still against her breast. A white, limp hand was just within the edge of her vision.

Her sight cleared as she turned her aching head, and she saw the flaccid form of Lois limp against the wall—saw a spreading, scarlet blotch on the blonde

girl's swelling bust. Oh, poor girl, poor girl. Lois had given her fluttering, butterfly life to save hers. To save—but there had been only one shot. Who, then, had dragged her from the flames?

Stella struggled to sit up, managed it through every fractional inch of movement sent agony stabbing through her. The shattered laboratory door gaped open. Within was charred chaos. A brassy fire-extinguisher lay on its side just within the threshold. She had laughed at John, called him an old woman, when he had insisted on buying it. And now it had saved the house. But who had used it? And where was Wan Lee?

She twisted at a thump against the entrance door, to the click of a key turning in its lock. And froze as she saw it move slowly inward, as she saw a yellow hand jag its edge, a yellow hand that clutched a long, cruel blade from whose sharp point red drops dripped. The great leaf came slowly open, and through the aperture the gaunt Oriental stepped.

Stella watched him almost impersonally. Wan Lee had come back for her, to kill her as he had killed Lois, to take the black book from her and vanish with it to the hell where such fiends go. And she didn't care. When he had cut her throat the pains that made her body a shell of agony would stop. She would be done with horror. She would rest at last in eternal oblivion. Only she would have liked to have felt John's warm lips on hers just once more before she died. Maybe he would meet her again—over there. Maybe he was there already, waiting for her. . . .

The saffron face with its sinister scar leered at her, slant eyes glittering. Why did he stand there, gloating? Why didn't he kill her and be done with it? His lips moved—he was going to taunt her first. Maybe he would torture her. She had often read of diabolic Manchu tortures. That was really funny—he couldn't hurt

her any more than she hurt already. "Missee feel betteh?" he said. "Tha's good! Maybeso Wan Lee get some clo's ffrom loom? Yes?"

Bewildered, half-delirious, the girl met this amazing speech with same dazed acceptance with which she had contemplated his supposed intention to kill her. "Yes," she breathed. "Yes, please." But when, having paused a moment to shoot the bolt on the great front door, he had flitted up the stairs, a modicum of reason returned to her. She was in his power, he was playing with her as a cat with a mouse, but she might be able to save John's book. Her eyes darted around for a hiding place, she saw none within easy reach. And then a sly thought came to her.

She turned over, skidded herself across the waxed floor to Lois' flaccid body! Her smoke-blackened hands tugged at the corpse, lifted it a bit, slid the notebook underneath, let it thump down again. And saw metal glint beyond, the automatic that had been snatched from her hand.

The gun had been under the slain girl. Stella snatched at it, hid that in turn under the rumpled rug that had covered her. Hid it—but the implication of its presence where she had found it did not come to her.

**S**HE was clothed again, had slipped into the kitchen to wash off as much as she was able of the soot and dried blood. Thought gradually began to function. Why Wan Lee had spared her she could not fathom, but she could see him from where she stood, a silent, black-robed form at the living-room window, peering out through it with a curious intentness.

Lightly, cat-footed, she moved through the dining-room, into the wall. It was the work of second to stoop, snatch the automatic from under the rug. The safety-catch slipped back easily, her finger curled about the trigger. Steady now. One shot.



It must be her first shot that would rip into the Oriental's back and pay him back for Si Hopkins, for Lois. . . . She stopped breathing.

And Wan Lee whipped around, "Look," he said, his face alight. "Missa John come!" And then, before Stella could absorb it, before she could move, he was shrieking, his thin voice thinner with sudden terror. "The dogs! The dogs! Oh, Buddha! The dog-men!"

The girl hurtled through the archway, to the window, hurled the Chinese aside. There he was, John, his red hair an oriflamme in the lowering sunlight. He was coming around the hood of his roadster, looking curiously at the curtained buggy and its grazing mare. And behind him, shaggy, repulsive, two dog-faced men were at the margin of the woods across the road. One had his arm raised, a white ball in it—about to hurl the fungus-death at John's unsuspecting back!

*Crack! Crash!* The window splintered in front of Stella; the death-thrower jerked, collapsed. She realized that she had shot through the glass, that her bullet had sped unerringly to its mark. *Crack!* She shot again, and the other squat, shaggy fellow was a limp bundle in the road-dust. John spun around, his mouth ludicrously gaping, his hand flashing to a hip-pocket. From around the house-corner someone else appeared. But this one was clean-shaven, his countenance slant-eyed and yellow as Lee's, a bulldog revolver in his saffron fist.

Stella swung her weapon around, pulled the trigger. And nothing happened. The gun was empty, she had never thought to examine the clip. She screamed to warn her husband. He didn't hear her. The newcomer's hand lifted, his gun point-blank at John.

A metallic flash whipped through the air, *plunk!* A knife quivered in the squat man's neck. His gun barked, but its

orange flame jetted at blue sky, and he was like an empty sack, sinking slowly to the waiting ground.

As Warren whirled once again, Stella saw Wan Lee running down the path to him. John's voice came clearly to her. "Some throwing, Wan. Some knife-throwing! I didn't know you had it in you." She heard him say that. And then, clutched at the window-sill, she slid down and down into blackness.

"STELL! Stell dear!" John could call her back from the Styx itself. "Honey-girl." His dear face was bending above her, dark with anxiety, with fear for her. Her arm went up, around his neck, she pulled him down for a long kiss.

"Oh, that was good," she murmured, "better than all the medicine in the world. But are you all right, my dear?"

"Alive and kicking, Stell, though there's a place on the back of my head that's mighty tender. Had quite a tussle with a couple of yellow beggars who interrupted our conversation last night. They entertained me for a while, till I managed to get away. But you, sweet? You must have been passing through hell itself."

Stella smiled tremulously. "Hell is right. But I saved the black book, John. They didn't get it."

Warren's voice was sharp. "I thought—where is it?"

"Under—under Lois."

"Under Lois! Gad! That's almost pathetic. So she did get it, when it couldn't do her any good?"

"John! What do you mean?"

"I told you to watch her. She was here for just one purpose, to get hold of that book. I wrote you as soon as I found that out, called you first chance I got. She had warned the fellows for whom she was working to intercept me, hold me while she tried to get into the laboratory."

"Oh John! We were cut off before you finished. I thought you were warning me against Wan Lee!"

"Against Wan! Jumping Jehosaphat! From what he tells me, poor old Wan has saved your life a half-dozen times since last night. But I suppose it's his own fault. I've impressed him so strenuously with the need for secrecy about everything connected with me that he didn't dare tell even you what it was all about. But there are three Ainus in the woods out there who owe their death to his knife, beside the yellow spy-master with whom Lois was working, the chap that almost got me at the last."

"Ainus?" Stella asked, wonderingly.

"They're the half-savage denizens of the southern part of the islands of Saghalien. The Japs call them that because they look so much like dogs; *inu* means dog in Japanese you know."

"I didn't know till now. And I want to forget it. So it was Lois who was behind all that happened? It must have been she who killed Si and got the letter—she who locked me in the laboratory with the Ainu she had admitted!"

"Yes! And she shot at Wan when he was trying to get you out so that he had to knife her too."

Stella shuddered. "She certainly did, John. But now that she's dead I can almost forgive her for everything except for using those horrible things that killed Si Hopkins and poor Babs. I didn't know anything so terrible existed."

"Very few do." John Warren knew that his wife's terror-numbed brain still verged

on the edge of hysteria or worse, that he must explain everything to save her reason. "They are a genus of the *Lycoperdon* fungi. Some of them are edible, like the giant puffball, *Calvatia bovista*. These *Calvatia Orientalis*, in fact, are not poisonous in themselves; it is only the extreme rapidity with which their spores grow when they land on animal flesh that gives them their lethal power. But I think that's enough, sweetheart. Don't you think you ought to go up and try to sleep a bit?"

"John Warren!" Stella's eyes blazed. "Do you mean to say that after all that's happened you're not going to tell me what it was all about? Listen here, young man, you better give me the inside on what is in that black book or I'll pack up and go right back to mother."

WARREN grinned, rather shamefacedly. "Nothing much," he muttered. "Only a formula for a new war-gas that will make the American army invincible. That's what Lois Morne and the yellow spy-master were after."

"And why, may I ask, were you trying to keep that information from me? Did you think me also a spy?"

John laughed shortly. "No. But I've just sold it to the government for enough to make us independent for life, and I wanted to have Wan Lee bake the check in your birthday cake, next Monday."

"Oh John! Oh my dear . . ."

Wan Lee kept his eyes discreetly averted as he announced, from the foyer whence he had cleared all signs of what had passed, "Luncheon leddy, Missee Wallen."

THE END

IN THE NEXT ISSUE

## INN OF THE SHADOW CREATURES

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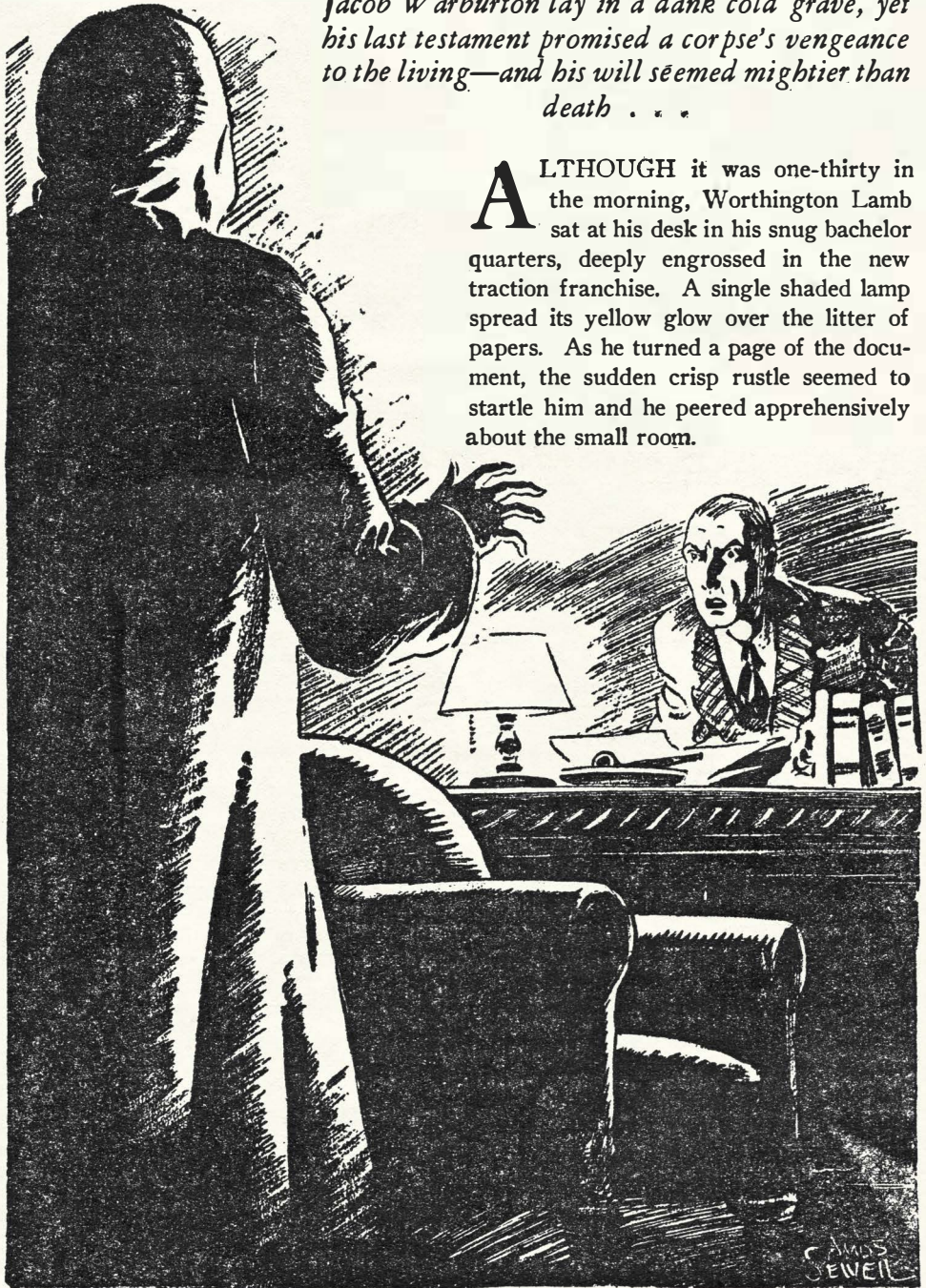


# BY ORDER OF THE DEAD

By R. CURRIE FLEMING

*Jacob Warburton lay in a dank cold grave, yet his last testament promised a corpse's vengeance to the living—and his will seemed mightier than death . . .*

**A**LTHOUGH it was one-thirty in the morning, Worthington Lamb sat at his desk in his snug bachelor quarters, deeply engrossed in the new traction franchise. A single shaded lamp spread its yellow glow over the litter of papers. As he turned a page of the document, the sudden crisp rustle seemed to startle him and he peered apprehensively about the small room.





Mechanically, he reached out toward the long-stemmed Venetian wine-glass on the small table near his desk. A distant clock boomed the half-hour, and as the sound of it melted into silence, a soft rustling noise like the swish of silken garments came from the darkened hallway beyond the fireplace.

Lamb lifted his head sharply, listening intently, then a crooked smile flitted across his sharp features. He relaxed, raised the glass to his lips, drained it, and set it down. The sound was repeated, and this time it was accompanied by the unmistakable creaking of a floor board.

His fingers gripping the edge of the desk, his watery eyes vainly seeking to pierce the gloom of the passageway, Lamb sat suddenly and stiffly erect. He waited attentive and still, the accelerated tempo of his breathing the only movement that told of the tumult in his breast.

Once again the sound came close at hand. The blood slowly drained from the attorney's face, leaving it gray and old and haggard. The muscles back of his bony jaws flexed and unflexed with the rapidity of a paroxysm.

In the darkened doorway a black shape loomed. It slid a foot or two over the threshold with a smooth gliding motion, and in the uncertain half light it showed itself as the figure of a tall man.

It was the face, however, that held Lamb hypnotized in impotent terror, for it was the bloodless, putty-hued countenance of an embalmed cadaver that looked at him with vacant staring eyes that held no hint of conscious expression.

The lawyer's throat rattled. Mouth open, eyes protruding, he slid down in his chair slowly, down on the back of his neck, his long legs doubled grotesquely under the table.

The figure came another pace into the room. A black-gloved hand stole out of

the folds of the robe; it held a short-barreled revolver.

Slowly the gun was raised until it pointed straight at the attorney's breast. A thin, wavering scream filtered through Lamb's teeth. It resolved itself into frenzy-uttered words: "Jacob! God, Jacob! Dont do it!"

The answer was a spurt of flame and a crash that blasted the night stillness. Lamb slumped the rest of the way to the floor; the somber figure turned without sound and melted into the darkness.

Somehow, torturously, the wounded man managed to drag himself around the corner of the desk with his elbows; a smear of red marked the path of his progress. His trembling fingers groped for the cords of the telephone. The instrument tumbled off onto his chest.

"Police, quick!" he sobbed into the mouthpiece: "Hello police—I've been shot—shot by a dead man. Lamb on Dorchester, yes! Send a—" The famous corporation attorney did not finish the sentence; the telephone slipped from his dead fingers.

**I**N the dingy record room at Town Hall headquarters, Detective-Sergeant Brant Collins dug his sharp elbows into the high-topped slanting desk as his darting eye scanned a newspaper file. At length he found what he wanted.

"Good Lord, Gumshoe, listen to this!" Plainclothesman Luke Waters flipped his spent cigarette in the general direction of the brass cuspidor and sauntered up to the table. Collins read from the file:

"To Worthington Lamb, I give and bequeath twenty-thousand six-hundred shares of worthless stock in his traction interests, which he sold to me under the damndest misrepresentation conceivable, and which he may use as markers in his prayer book for the short time he has left on earth. When

his rotten life here is over, he can take them with him to feed the fires of hell whither he will be bound shortly.

"JACOB WARBURTON."

Waters laughed. "That's easy, Monsieur Inspector. All we've got to do is find Warburton."

Collins' head shook approvingly. "That's right, Gumshoe. You always were the bright lad. You can trot right out and make the pinch, and I'll tell you exactly where you'll find him—in Evergreen cemetery under six feet of sod."

Waters looked at his lanky partner with a hurt expression.

"You know, Brant, I never did like bed-time stories, especially your kind. How the devil's a dead man—?"

"I should've known better," Collins interrupted with a stage sigh. "I forgot you can't read, and that to you, newspapers are just for wrappin' bundles.

"Of course you wouldn't know the circumstances of this case. Jacob Warburton, the big stock manipulator, committed suicide three weeks ago. Rich as Midas, but the depression got in one on his button, and like a lot of others he took the easiest way out by bumpin' himself off.

"That wouldn't have been so much; it was the will he left. I don't see how you missed it. All the papers played it up, and everyone had a good laugh. For instance, he left a big block of distillery stock to the WCTU, and accordin' to the file here, three other people received bequests similar to that of Worthington Lamb."

Waters cut in. "Yes, but how's a dead man—?"

"Cut it, Flatfoot!" Collins roared, his sunburned hair bristling. "You're not supposed to think; you're the beef of this team, not the brains. Next thing I know you'll be tellin' me that you believe in Santa Claus." His tone modulated. "Here's the rest of it:"

"To H. J. Corrigan, crooked contractor and politician, I leave the sum of one dollar with which to buy enough rope to hang himself."

Collins looked up from the file. "Can ya' beat it? Corrigan, ward committeeman in the 42nd and hizzonor the Mayor's right bower. Apparently Corrigan didn't play marbles the way Warburton wanted him to." Collins went on with his reading:

"To Major Herbert Langstroth, banker, capitalist, egotist and liar, I give and bequeath death within the month. Only God, myself, and the Major's conscience knows why."

Waters tried to interrupt again, but Collins held up his hand, continued his reading of the strange will:

"To Mary Brenton, pampered princess of the Brenton dynasty, I likewise decree oblivion. She repulsed my sincere and honorable attentions when I would have made her my wife. She shall join me in black eternity where nothing shall separate us, even after time has ceased to be reckoned."

Collins looked up with a serious expression. "Now who's crazy, you or—?" The ringing of the telephone cut short his comment.

"Hello—yeah! Collins—eh! What?" His lean figure jerked together in an attitude of instant alertness. He listened in silence for several minutes, then he slowly replaced the receiver on the hook. A strange expression in his eyes, he looked across the high desk at Waters.

"Somethin's screwy. Corrigan's just been found in his basement wearin' a six-foot necktie of half-inch hemp. Left a note sayin' he couldn't stand it any longer. Warburton's rung the bell for the second time tonight. Maybe you're right, Gumshoe; maybe there is a Santa Claus."

ABOUT eleven o'clock the next morning, the two Central Office men were ushered into the exotic apartment of Mademoiselle Irina Strukoff. The maid who admitted them wore a Ukrainian costume of garish colors, elaborately embroidered. Her dark, heavily-lashed eyes swept over the visitors with ill-concealed distaste.

"Where does this Strukoff dame fit into the picture?" Waters asked in a whisper as the girl left the room.

"Warburton's sweetie," Collins spilled out of the side of his mouth. "He furnished all this," he added glancing around, "although I guess she's got plenty of bucks of her own too. She's a dancer—been in some of the biggest shows on Broadway. I'm hopin' she can give us some info'."

Their whispered conversation was terminated by the parting of the red velvet hangings at the end of the room. Between them stood a woman of slight stature and remarkable appearance. Her jet black hair was pulled back so tightly from her forehead that it gave an upward slant to the outer corners of her eyes, a subtle hint of Mongolian wiliness.

Collins rose to his feet, made an elaborate bow.

"Irina Strukoff welcomes you, gentlemen of the police." The woman flashed a dazzling smile, draped herself in an indolent pose on a cushion-strewn divan. She selected a six-inch cigarette from a nearby Egyptian tabouret. Collins hastened to light it for her. Waving her thanks, she blew a gray ring at the ceiling.

"And now, in what way may I assist you?" she asked in a rich throaty voice. Collins studied her beautiful face for a moment.

"Of course you've heard about Lamb and Corrigan, Miss Strukoff? It's in the morning papers." He watched her narrowly.

"Yes, I have heard." Her answer came without hint of feeling.

"And what's the answer?" Collins came back quickly. The dancer shrugged her slight shoulders and spread out a white palm.

"There is none."

"What do you mean by that?" Collins persisted. The woman flicked the ash from her cigarette before answering.

"In Russia," she returned slowly, studying the enameled nails of one white hand, "we believe that anything is possible, that much is probable."

Collins showed his irritation. "Should we assume then, Miss Strukoff, that you believe that Jacob Warburton climbed out of his grave last night, and carried out in part the provisions of his crazy will?"

THE dancer lifted her eyebrows, looked at Collins without smiling. "I affirm nothing; I deny nothing. I can answer only that Mr. Warburton was a very remarkable man."

Collins, quickened by the realization that he was dealing with a very clever woman, changed his tactics.

"Tell us about Warburton, Miss Strukoff. "What kind of a chap was he?"

The dancer's eyes flashed. "Ah!" she answered, "few people knew him as I did. He was an artist in every fiber of his being. He loved the beautiful, both in things and character. Those people mentioned in his will, robbed him—what you call—double-cross—and now he punishes." A light of strange fanaticism burned in her slanted eyes. She seemed to forget the presence of her visitors.

"Yeah, we know that, and a pretty thorough job he's done so far," Collins answered dryly. "But how about this art business?"

Miss Strukoff made a sweeping gesture with her slim hand, indicating a



number of exquisite statuettes in alabaster and black stone.

"These are the creations of his heart and hand. I posed for all of them," she said simply.

A movement of the crimson curtains on the other side of the room caught Collins's attention. Waters came to life at the same time.

"Cripes! What is this, a zoo?" he demanded, leaping from his chair. The dancer waved him back.

A great tawny-spotted cat stood in front of the curtain. It was a chetah, a magnificent specimen of the hunting leopard of India. The creature stood perfectly still, its cruel yellow eyes looking over the room and its occupants, the nervous twitching of its tail the only movement of its sinuous body.

Both Collins and Waters sat in frozen silence. Irini Strukoff looked from one to the other of them, a mischievous smile creasing the corners of her beautiful mouth, yet the Mongolian eyes of her held a hint of cruel enjoyment.

"Shimba!" she rasped, and then poured forth a torrent of Russian invective. The great cat slunk across the thick-piled carpet with silent tread, leaped upon the divan, settled himself beside his mistress. Waters, whose chair was quite close, edged away an inch or two. At the movement, the chetah bared its yellow fangs, and a ripple of muscle along its outstretched foreleg unsheathed a set of vicious claws.

Both men eyed this demonstration of hostility with misgivings. Mlle. Strukoff laughed.

"Poor Shimba, everyone's afraid of you; aren't they, even the great policemen!" she purred soothingly, caressing the cat's head and back with a white hand.

"You see, gentlemen, Shimba means no harm. He is my constant companion and body guard. He was given to me by

the Ameer of Afghanistan in Kabul last summer. He's really quite gentle and obeys me like a dog."

Waters, slipping his hand under his coat, loosened his service-gun in its holster and sat with his eyes glued on the leopard. Collins found it difficult to get back to business.

"Then you have no information that would help in this affair, Miss Strukoff?"

The dancer shook her head. For a moment her heavily-lidded eyes were masked by the dusky fringe of her lashes, and Collins experienced the feeling that she was not telling the truth. He shook off the suggestion, however. Such a woman is not so easily read.

As they arose to go, Waters quite unashamed, maintained a respectful distance between himself and the chetah. Not so Collins. The door by which they had entered lay in a straight line from his chair and it passed close to the divan. True to his nature he went that way.

He paused to take leave of the dancer. As he did so, the chetah suddenly shot out a paw. Collins jerked his hand away and blood oozed from two deep scratches in its back.

Quite upset by the incident. Mlle. Strukoff murmured apologies, scolded Shimba in the soft Russian vernacular. Collins applied his handkerchief and made light of his hurt.

As the dark-eyed maid handed him his hat in the outer hall, he questioned her suddenly. "Just what cognomen did your parents wish on you, my girl? In other words, what's your name?" Her answer came with surprising quickness.

"Tasso, Signore, Raquel Tasso."

"Then you're not Russian, eh?"

"No, Signore; Spanish-Italian."

"Been with Miss Strukoff long?"

The maid spread out her palms. "Ever since madame left the convent-school in Italy."

Collins settled his hat firmly on his head. The handkerchief around his hand caught the maid's eye, and a peculiar smile curled her lips.

"Shimba has long sharp claws," she said softly, and Collins saw that her dusky, inscrutable eyes were not smiling.

**C**OLLINS climbed into his roadster and sat staring straight ahead.

"What's the next move, Monsieur Inspector?" Waters asked, lighting a cigarette. For a long time the ace detective did not answer. Finally he flicked the toothpick he was chewing out of the window, pressed the starter deliberately.

"Gumshoe, this is a hell of a case. A dead man leaves a screwy document threatening four people. He makes good fifty percent in one night, three weeks after he's buried. There ain't a clue that you could recognize as such with a telescope, and no one knows a thing. You and I are bum detectives."

The little police-car swung into the stream of passing automobiles and for ten minutes the going was easy. Then a traffic snarl occupied Collins' attention. He sat slumped over the wheel, guiding the car mechanically, a worried frown creasing his forehead. Suddenly, Waters sat forward, gripped his arm. "My God, Brant! Look at that!" He jerked his head toward a black limousine which rolled by on their left, a little faster than they were traveling. The curtains were all drawn except the one in the back on the right side. The chauffeur was muffled in a heavy coat with a high collar that hid his face as though the day were cold.

On the back seat sat a tall man clothed in black. The face was gray and dead and drawn; the black Homberg shaded two hollow sunken eyes that stared somberly, menacingly toward the investigators.

Collins' heart pounded in his ears. He

jammed down on the gas just as the heavy car swung around the corner to the left.

"For the love of Heaven, Gunshoe, it's Warburton!" he spat out of the corner of his mouth, "and if I never saw a corpse before, I saw one just then. Let's go!"

The fast police-roadster slithered round the corner nearly crashing the curb. The limousine was two blocks ahead of them, but since there was no intervening traffic Collins gave the little car all he could and the distance was rapidly cut down.

When they were still about five hundred feet away, the back curtain in the car ahead snapped up. The emaciated death's head stared at them again through the rear window. Suddenly the glass shattered, the blunt nose of a gun was shoved through the jagged aperture. They saw it buck in a gloved hand and Collins felt his car drag to the right as a front tire went flat. The gun barked again. The windshield of the police-car shattered; Collins felt a hot twinge as the slug creased the lobe of his right ear.

With brakes jammed, the light car humped along. Collins fought the wheel with all the strength of his lean shoulders. He managed to halve its speed just as it climbed the curb. Another fifty feet and it crashed into an iron light-pole. The impact was sickening although both men had been braced for it. Waters jerked himself together, wrenched the door open, emptied his gun at the fleeing car, now a block away.

"Take that, and that, and that!" he snarled, an oath accompanying each bullet.

Collins transferred his handkerchief from his scratched hand to his mutilated ear. "Hell!" he complained, "when this thing heals, everybody will take me for a retired prize fighter."

\* \* \*

Waters came to Collins' little apart-

ment at eight o'clock that night. "Now, here's the setup, Gumshoe," the lanky detective told his partner. "I ain't takin' any chances tonight. We know that Warburton or his ghost made two appearances last night. I know he was at Corrigan's because one of the servants caught a glimpse of him. That visit explains Corrigan's necktie-party. He was literally scared into stretchin' his own neck.

"Two in one night makes it look like our friend from the other world's in a hurry to complete the job. There's two more, the banker and this Brenton girl.

"Maybe the old boy has a case against the banker, but the young lady's oke. Warburton was twice her age; you can't blame her for turnin' him down. Anyway it's up to us to see that she don't get hurt.

"Now, your job is to guard Miss Brenton; I'll take Langstroth. I'm goin' on the assumption that he'll appear at the banker's first. He seems to be takin' 'em in the order in which they appear in the will. If he should show up at the Brenton's first, you find a cold slug of lead'll lay a ghost as easily as a live man."

**I**T was about ten o'clock when Collins entrenched himself in the banker's study. With the help of the suave financier, the stage was set as invitingly as possible. A writing table was dragged to the center of the room, facing the only entrance to the study. Heavy curtains were drawn over the only window. Since the study was on the second floor, Collins dismissed the window as a possibility for danger.

On the table, a small lamp gave the only light, all others in the big house, with the exception of one in the lower hall, having been extinguished at Collin's order. He also arranged a Japanese screen in the corner where he had a straight line of vision toward the door.

Langstroth seated himself at the desk, a half-open drawer under his hand, in which lay a loaded revolver, while Collins took up his vigil behind the screen.

The banker proved to be a spirited chap. He busied himself with letter writing for the ensuing two hours, coolly making the most of his time in a matter-of-fact way. Collins smoked innumerable cigarettes behind his screen, helped himself once in a while to the refreshments Langstroth thoughtfully provided. Occasional whispered colloquies helped to pass the time until about twelve-thirty.

Then a period of silence ensued. Both men were becoming keyed to the situation, and it effected each differently. As the clock in the lower hall chimed one, Collins became fidgety from inaction. Langstroth remained cool as ice. It was easy to understand why he was a power in the financial world.

One-thirty, and still no sign of the expected visitor. The clock had just struck the quarter-hour when there came a soft scraping noise in the outer hall. Collins poised himself, his eye glued to the crack in the screen. The banker continued to pore over the letter on his desk, but Collins saw his hand move ever so slightly toward the gun in the open drawer.

Suddenly without further warning, a dark form materialized in the doorway. It stood perfectly still in the opening, a tall man in a dark robe; the face was the unforgettable horror Collins had seen in the limousine. There was no mistake; it was dead human parchment stretched taut over a human skull.

In spite of the fact that his scalp prickled and an icy chill rippled down his spine, Collins stepped from behind the screen, threw up his gun and fired, just as Major Langstroth snatched the weapon from the drawer and did likewise.

The ensuing two seconds were a jumbled nightmare. Two bullet holes ap-



peared instantly in the cadaverous face, one exactly in the center of the forehead, the other in the cheek, wounds from which no blood flowed.

Collins fully expected to see the figure drop. Instead with the speed of lightning, a black-clad hand shot out of the folds of its robe, a shot crashed out, and Major Herbert Langstroth slumped forward over his desk, a bullet through his heart.

Then like a feat of legerdemain, the thing in the doorway was gone. For an infinitesimal fraction of a moment, Collins stood dazed; then with an oath, he lunged at the door, sending shot after shot down the darkened hall.

Mouthing oaths because of his futile efforts, he fumbled for the hall light-switch, found it and glared wildly about. A glance told him the banker was dead. He dashed into the hallway. A succession of red drops on the floor stopped him abruptly. He had winged Warburton's ghost, and it was human blood he saw, not embalming fluid. His exultation was cut short as the thought of Mary Brenton surged into his mind, the girl who didn't deserve to die. A wave of fear gripped his heart. What if he was too late? Would Warburton get by Waters there as he had him here?

He stumbled down stairs, half mad with impatience. He backed the police-car out of the garage where he had hidden it. It should have been a twenty-minute run out to the Brenton place in the suburbs; Collins did it in ten. Around the drive to the back door he skidded and leaped out before the car came to a full stop.

In the music room, he found Mary Brenton reading beside a table despite the lateness of the hour. As he bounced into the room the girl arose in alarm while Waters bobbed up from behind a davenport.

"What's the big idea comin' in on us like that?" the burly plain-clothes man chided. I almost took you for our friend from hell."

"Warburton got Langstroth right under my nose just fifteen minutes ago," Collins snapped. "Of all the blunderin' asses, I'm—"

**A** SCREAM from the girl's lips stopped him. Both men wheeled toward the door. In it stood the tall somber figure of doom, and there were two awful bullet-holes in its face.

"Oh God! It's Jacob Warburton," she babbled. In a haze of red hate, Collins saw the loathsome figure sway slightly, then steady itself against the door-frame. He saw the gloved hand coming out of the folds of the clothing, and in a flash he remembered that he had thrown his own weapon down the Langstroth hallway in his fit of rage after emptying it.

Almost without thinking, he seized a Chinese vase from a nearby table, hurled it straight at the creature's head. Even before the missile left his hand, he saw the thing endeavor vainly to raise the gun, try to aim it at Mary Brenton. He saw it take a tottering step into the room; then its knees slowly collapsed and it crashed to the floor just as the vase caught it full in its ugly face.

To the horror of the three spectators, the creature's head rolled off its shoulders and bounded across the floor like a ball. Collins sprang forward, tore the black robe open, and then stepped back in inarticulate amazement.

The cruelly-beautiful Mongolian eyes of Irina Strukoff looked up at him, and they were hurt, suffering eyes, the eyes of a wounded animal.

Collins knelt quickly at her side. He saw at once the red stain on her dress. He turned quickly. The room was full of

people. "Get some whiskey; call a doctor quick," he ordered. Then he looked around for Waters. He was nowhere in sight.

A moment later, the Russian dancer was carefully laid out on the davenport. Collins straightened up and mopped his brow, just as a torrent of wild abuse in a foreign tongue, delivered in a high-pitched scream, added to the bedlam of the moment.

Through the wide doorway two figures catapulted. One was Waters, his clothes shredded to ribbons, his face scratched and bleeding. He pushed in front of him a fighting, snarling whirlwind of wrath.

Collins recognized Raquel Tasso. She was enveloped in a long coat with a high collar. He knew her instantly as the driver of the black car. The woman caught a glimpse of her mistress, and her shrieks of rage were changed to wild lamentation. She stumbled to the couch on which the dancer lay, flung herself on her knees, caressed her with hands that were linked together, pouring out her heart in soft Latin expletives.

Waters stood by mopping his bleeding face.

"For the love of Heaven, what happened?" Collins questioned. "Did you have a fight with a threshin' machine?" Waters, forgetting where he was, spat disdainfully into the fireplace.

"Naw," he explained disgustedly, "but I had to lick that damned bob-cat before I could make the pinch. The two of them were waitin' about a half block down the street in the car we saw this afternoon. 'I ain't hurt,' he added.

The arrival of the police-ambulance cut short further explanation. The doctor made a hasty examination, administered restoratives preparatory to moving the wounded woman. Her strength partly

restored, she smiled up at Collins, a defeated pain-wracked smile in which there was no animosity.

"You win," she whispered. "It's all over now; I've failed and it's the end of everything for me. I'll tell you now what I know you want to hear. This entire affair is the result of a pact between Jacob Warburton and myself. I loved him enough to go to hell for him. Those men wronged him, robbed him of the fortune he spent a life-time in building. I knew he was going to kill himself; it was the only way out.

"The girl Mary Brenton—Jacob had no thought of harming her. That was my affair. I added that to Jacob's will myself."

"Why?" Collins questioned gently.

The dancer's eyes took on a hard cruel look much like the chetah's. The pupils narrowed to pin-points. "I hated her because she had caught Jacob's fancy. I loved him like that," she added softly.

"Where did you get that ghastly death's head?" Collins asked bending closer.

"Jacob was a talented sculptor and artist as I told you," came the gasping answer. "He made a plaster cast of his own face. I helped him. From it he constructed a head and covered it with old vellum. Paint did the rest—Jacob's masterpiece," she laughed mirthlessly.

THE doctor waved Collins aside. As the stretcher bearing the wounded girl was carried out of the room, Waters still dobbling at his scarred face, looked after her with a sigh. "Is she goin' to croak?" he asked.

Collins pulled at his straw-colored forelock, shrugged his spare shoulders. "It don't make much difference, Gumshoe," he said softly, "She gets hers either way it goes."



# TERROR FROM

## Gripping Terror Novelette

*They knew not why they were gathered there, in that lonely house above the roaring sea. But when their dread host voiced his warning, they knew the hideous fate that was to meet them, one by one. . . .*



**E**VEN the car seemed reluctant to invade that treacherous terrain of terror. Bucking a vicious head-wind that whined in from the sea, the machine groaned slowly upward through darkness toward the gaunt structure at the top of the cliff. Gray mist fogged the windshield.

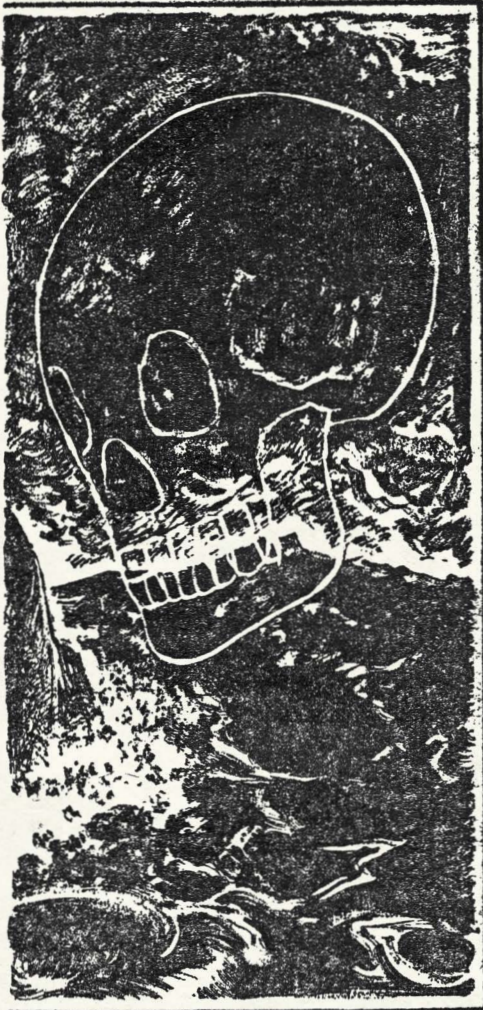
Larry Whelan's hands were rigid on



# THE DEEP

By Hugh B. Cave

(Author of "The Pain Room," etc.)



the wheel. They had to be. The road was a winding uphill snaketrack, bordered on the left by an almost perpendicular wall of black rock and on the right by a yawning gulf of emptiness where, far below, the raging Atlantic thundered at the base of the promontory.

This road, the private approach to Mr.



James Franklin's secluded summer lodge, was treacherous enough even in daylight to chill the spines of most drivers. Tonight, with a savage coastal storm about to create chaos, the road was sheer suicide!

But up there in Franklin's lodge someone with an ugly, twisted sense of humor was waiting. The summons in Larry's pocket was the sort that could not safely be ignored. A grim scowl curled his lips; worms of cold dread crawled inside him as he kept his foot jammed on the gas-pedal and glared ahead through the fogged windshield.

The storm broke in all its mad fury as the car groaned to a stop in the lodge's driveway. Like a living thing, the gale roared in from the ocean, screaming in bestial rage as if determined to destroy every man-made thing that dared to exist in such desolation. Larry climbed out of the car and became a groping blind man. Shrieking wind enveloped him, hurled his breath back into his throat and staggered him as he fought toward the big building.

Rain came with the wind, drenching him in ten seconds as he thumbed the bell and stood waiting. When the door opened he stumbled inside, exhaled an explosive grunt of relief and peered at the man who had admitted him.

The man took Larry's coat and hat and said politely: "It looks like a nasty night, sir. I believe you're the last to arrive. The others are waiting in the library." He had a thin, dark-eyed face and was so tall of body that his stooped shoulders were farther from the carpet than Larry's square ones.

Larry strode down the hall. He stopped in the library doorway. Water puddled the threshold beneath him.

He thought of the summons in his pocket—a summons in the form of a neatly typed letter that had come through the mail yesterday morning, to the law

office where he was junior partner. No need to take that letter out now and look at it. He knew its every word!

Sir: This is to advise you that on the evening of Friday, the eleventh of this month, at nine o'clock, a selected group of your acquaintances will assemble at the summer lodge of Mr. James Franklin, on Storm Cliff, eight miles North of Belchester on the Coast Road. Your presence is requested. If you value your future, your happiness, your very life, do not disregard this invitation. *Be there, or God help you!*

No signature. Nothing at all by which the writer could be identified. But at the bottom of the page appeared the typed words:

Nine persons, nine only, will be present at the rendezvous.

Nine persons? Standing there on the library threshold, Larry Whelan stared at the assembled guests and mechanically took count. He knew them all, some intimately, some not. But there were not nine; there were six.

He himself made seven. The dark-faced servant made eight. Where was number nine?

The six persons gazed at him with what seemed to be dark suspicion as he paced forward. James Franklin, owner of the lodge, stretched out of a red-leather chair and said quietly: "Well, we seem to be all here. I suppose you, too, received one of those charming letters of invitation?"

Larry nodded, then scowled, wondering vaguely why these particular persons had been brought together in such a rendezvous. James Franklin was a man of wealth, tall, athletically built, with good looks and a reputation for clean living. Albert Labot was a bald-pated, effeminate business man who had lately fought to keep his head above water after unfortunate market plunges. Nard Blunt was a



crooked horseman; his wife, Alma, a hardened and much painted lady who spent the major part of her time around paddock and betting-ring. Muriel Gates, lorgnette and all, was out of the Blue Book, with underworld connections that would have interested the police. Henry Packerby was a mild-mannered, pop-eyed professor at one of New York's universities.

These people had no love for one another. Why, then, had they been brought together?

"Look here, Whelan," Albert Labot said stiffly, glaring. "You're the last to arrive, and all of us have been asked the same question, so you may as well answer it too. Did you send those confounded invitations?"

"I didn't," Larry shrugged. "Suppose you tell me what it's all about."

They told him. They were on edge, anxious to unload their personal peeves. Out of a jumble of comments, questions and accusations, Larry sorted the truth.

The letters of invitation had been identical. Each person save Franklin had received one. Each person, including James Franklin himself, bluntly denied having written them! An hour ago, Franklin had been alone in the lodge, expecting no guests and planning to spend a quiet week-end there with his servant. His guests, uninvited by him, had arrived and he had made the best of an unpleasant situation. And now. . . .

"Apparently," Muriel Gates declared vehemently, "it is the work of some would-be practical joker. We are here and here we must stay. None but a fool would attempt to leave in this ghastly storm!"

Labot growled unpleasantly. "Nine of us, forced to remain in one another's company whether we like it or not! If this is someone's idea of a joke. . ."

LARRY wondered about Labot's word "nine." Then he stopped wondering. Footsteps whispered on the threshold behind him and he swung about, opened his eyes wide at sight of the slender feminine figure that came toward him. The girl stopped short as she entered the room. Gazing at him in astonishment she said abruptly: "Larry!" Then she relaxed, curved her attractive lips in a smile. "Well, I'll be darned. The party is complete!"

"Did you find anything?" Franklin demanded.

"Not a blessed thing." The girl came forward, put her hand on Larry's arm and peered into his face. "I'm glad you're here, mister. Your Future Troublesome Half was beginning to get the creeps. Got an invitation, did you, like the rest of us?"

Larry was silent. He had felt uneasy before. Now he felt cold hands closing about him. This girl, this pretty young woman who was apparently making the best of things and having a good time for herself was his girl. That changed the complexion of things. If she, too, had been included in those sinister invitations. . . .

"I wish to God you were out of here, Janet," he said simply.

"Out of here?" She widened her brown eyes at him. "With a story like this brewing? Not a chance! Little Janet intends to be Janet-on-the-spot when this thing breaks!"

He groaned, realized with a feeling of helplessness that he was talking not to Janet Clarke but to the *Examiner's* "Roving Reporter." Already the Roving Reporter had been on the job, prowling around the house, snooping for something to work on!

"All I wish," Janet beamed, "is that our old legendary sea-monster would join the party. Then, darling, we'd be authoring



headlines a foot high: 'Storm Cliff Monster Strikes at Mystery House Party! Fabled Demon of the Depths Comes to Life and—'

She stopped talking. Another voice, low and vibrant, had come from out of nowhere to interrupt her. Come, seemingly, from the very floor beneath her feet, to rumble its ominous way through the room.

Larry Whelan went tense. He turned slowly, stared into faces that were agape with amazement, faces beginning now to stiffen with terror. The voice continued its vibrant drone, eating into every part of the library, reaching the ears of every person present. Yet no person in the room was speaking!

"This . . . is your host speaking. Listen carefully, all of you. You were invited here tonight because I, personally, desired to entertain you. You are here and there is no escape. Remember that. *There is no escape!*

"In a short while an unseen guest will join you. His name is Death! Before he arrives, let me suggest that one of you go to the bookcase at the north end of the library where you are now assembled. Take from the fourth shelf a volume entitled *Folklore of the North Atlantic Coast*. On the reverse side of the cover you will find instructions. Do this *now*, lest you be found unprepared when the unseen guest moves among you! This . . . is your host speaking . . ."

The voice lowered to an obscene chuckle before whispering to silence. The silence was lead-heavy. For ten seconds no person in the room moved, none did more than remain utterly rigid, staring with fear-filled eyes. Then, lurching erect, Nard Blunt bellowed thickly: "What is this, a blasted farce? Are we supposed to swallow that horse-play and like it?"

No one answered him. Of the lot,

Packerby was apparently the most afraid. He sat trembling. His sweat-drenched hands made a limp rag of a once-white handkerchief in his lap. Whispered words came hesitantly from his lips. "Did—did you hear what he said? There is a book on—folklore—"

"Well, suppose we have a look at the book!" Larry Whelan said grimly. "After all—"

Stiffly he strode to the far end of the room and stood wide-legged before the bookcase, peering at rows of titles. Janet Clarke came and stood beside him. So did Nard Blunt's wife, Alma, and James Franklin.

"To my knowledge," Franklin shrugged, "there's no such book. I'm positive—"

Janet leaned forward, slid a volume from the fourth shelf and opened it in trembling hands. The title was *Folklore of the North Atlantic Coast*.

A sheet of white paper, bearing typewritten words, covered the inside of the front cover. The typed words said:

Turn to page 317 and read carefully. Read more than is written. Truth lies sometimes between the lines.

Larry Whelan took the book and slowly turned the leaves. A thin pencil-line marked off two paragraphs on the designated page.

Another interesting bit of folklore is that which surrounds a Connecticut Coast landmark known as Storm Cliff. It is said that in the year 1909 a strange and monstrous sea-beast was several times seen disporting himself in the treacherous waters off the cliff-point. Reliable witnesses described him as being some twenty feet in length, luminous green in hue, with a slimy, scaleless skin and a head somewhat human in appearance.

Between the years 1909 and 1924 no reports were made on the monster. In 1924 however, no less than seven reputable per-

sons swore to having seen him in the deep waters at the base of the cliff itself, and the belief spread that the monster was living in one of the unexplored caverns which extend into the promontory.

That was all. Larry Whelan passed the book, still open, to James Franklin and said quietly: "I thought at least we'd find something we didn't all know long ago."

Nard Blunt's wife read the printed page and shuddered. Her hard face was pale beneath its applications of paint. She said fearfully, "You—never can tell. This whole business is so queer!"

Larry glanced at her. Alma Blunt could be a hard woman when it came to crooked gambling on crooked races, but beneath the surface the woman was a coward. So, too, was her quick-tempered husband.

Larry lowered himself into a chair and built a church-and-steeple with his hands. The church-and-steeple went suddenly stiff. Guttural words, droning out of nowhere, were again rumbling through the room, and this time the voice of the unseen speaker was heavy with gloating.

*"The promised guest is among you! Beware, for he is about to—strike!"*

**I**T WAS Alma Blunt who reacted first. In the dead silence that followed those ominous words, she lurched forward, stood with both hands gripping the edge of the table. The whites of her eyes showed against the painted shadows of her face. "I'm getting out of here! So help me God, I won't stay in this damned house another minute, storm or no storm!"

Henry Packerby stood between her and the door, and Packerby made no move to restrain the woman. Lurching past him, she stumbled over the threshold, ran blindly down the corridor. Those left behind heard the front door open, heard the savage shriek of the storm as it clawed its way into the house. Then the door

thudded shut and Alma Blunt was gone—gone into the screaming hell of darkness outside.

Amazement held the other guests rigid while a clock on the fireplace mantel ticked away thirty seconds of mounting terror. Then Larry Whelan heaved himself erect and growled out: "Crazy fool! Now we've got to go out there after her!"

He strode forward, glared back from the doorway and saw that the others were hesitantly trailing him. Screaming storm-wind lashed about him as he jerked open the front door. Rain drenched him and flooded the threshold. Head down, eyes blinded, he stumbled down the steps, groped along the gravel driveway. When he stopped after going ten paces and jerked his head up to shout the woman's name, the storm smothered his voice, whined around him with a voice of its own that was shrill with mad fury.

Behind him, Packerby and James Franklin came lurching from the house. Nard Blunt stood fearfully in the doorway, hesitating a long while before finding courage enough to leave the shelter of the lodge.

Larry lurched on, felt the soles of his shoes crunch in loose gravel. Again he bellowed the woman's name. "Alma! For the love of God, Alma—" Under his breath he was muttering: "Damned frightened fool! If she doesn't watch out, she'll go over the edge of the cliff!"

An answer came to his anxious yells. Yet it was not an answer—it was something else. A chill, creeping sensation went through Larry's stiff body and he shuddered, not from the chill of wind and rain but from sudden icy terror.

The sound that came to him out of darkness was a shrill, soul-blasting shriek of stark fear, of mental and physical agony. Tocsining wildly above the shriek of the storm, it stabbed through distance and broke wailingly against his eardrums.

And it came from the direction of the cliff's yawning brink!

Sucking breath, Larry lurched forward, heaved himself across the driveway and ran blindly through darkness. The shriek came again from somewhere close by as he neared the edge of the promontory. Only instinct saved him from hurtling headlong over the rim. Skidding to a stop inches from sudden emptiness, he stood swaying.

In the dark, nothing moved. The only audible voice was the demonic howl of storm-wind blasting its way through man-high cairns of jagged rock. Alma Blunt had screamed once, twice, in mortal terror, then vanished.

A lurching shape came out of darkness and a dripping hand, Franklin's, clawed at Larry's coat-sleeve. Franklin's voice, bellowed against the wind, came in a hoarse whisper. "Where—where is she? Good God, man, if she stumbled over the precipice—"

Larry shook his head, broke loose and staggered along the cliff-edge, again shouting the woman's name. Every step he took was inviting destruction. Darkness concealed the winding curve of the brink; the brink itself was a sloping chute of wet rock. Far below, mad surf hammered a thunder-dirge at the base of the promontory.

But there was no sign of Alma Blunt. She had come this way, screamed and vanished. The grim truth caused Larry to shudder violently. The woman, in her wild dread of an unseen peril, had run blindly into a danger hellishly real and terrible.

She had paid the price of her folly.

Larry turned slowly and fought his way back toward the house. Franklin, not yet satisfied, lingered at the cliff-edge. Other shapes were stumbling about, groping through the storm.

Larry ignored the questions they flung

at him. Sick with a mental picture of what had happened, he lurched up the steps and entered the library where that fiendish voice had so correctly prophesied death. The women were there waiting. In a little while, Franklin and the others came slopping into the room.

They made a strange group. The men were drenched, disheveled scarecrows, gaunt-faced, wide-eyed with a nameless fear that grew heavier with each passing moment. The women were silent, staring. Larry Whalen stared, too—checking the expression of each separate face in a futile attempt to read what lay behind those tense masks.

Someone in this oddly mixed group knew more than appeared on the surface. Of that, Larry was positive . . .

He counted faces, reached the number seven and hooked his mouth in a sudden scowl. Seven persons, and there should be eight. The eighth was the dark-faced servant who had first admitted Larry Whalen to this house of creeping dread. And the servant was missing!

LARRY'S mind freed itself of the cobwebs that clung to it. Abruptly he realized that the servant had not been seen since he himself had first encountered the man. That meant. . . .

He stared at James Franklin and said stiffly: "There should be eight of us here, now that Alma Blunt is gone."

Franklin returned the stare. "Well?"

"The man who is missing—who *has* been missing since the very beginning—is your own servant."

Franklin stiffened, went suddenly pale. He peered around him, stared back into Larry's face. "Am I supposed to know the answer to that?"

"We've been hearing a ghost-voice," Larry said coldly, "that threatened us with death. Your servant was the only one not in this room while that voice was speak-



ing. He was the only one not here when Alma Blunt ran out into the storm! And he's *your* servant, Franklin—and this is *your* house. And we haven't been told, yet, who sent out those letters of invitation!"

Franklin heaved himself erect, his hands clenched, his eyes narrowed ominously. He stood wide-legged, glaring straight into Larry's face. "I don't like the tone of your voice, Whelan!"

It was Packerby who answered him. Packerby leaned forward, dripping water onto the carpet, and shrilled out in a whining voice: "Whether you like it or not, Whelan is right! This is your house and you're the one who invited us here!"

"You lie!"

"And all of you," Janet Clarke said quietly, "are making it most unpleasant for the rest of us. You're behaving like children!"

Packerby subsided. Franklin glared, lowered himself with a squishing sound into the chair he had risen from. But the thing had been done. Accusing eyes were focused on his scowling face. The same sinister thought was in the mind of every person present.

Then a guttural, gloating voice sounded, and the room was once more a chamber of horror!

"This . . . is your host speaking. The unseen guest has been among you and has taken his toll. Think not that the death of Alma Blunt was accidental. It was in accord with the desires of him who brought you here. In a short while, Death will strike again, *and there is no escape*. Look now at one another and wonder. Wonder which of you will be the next—to die!"

The voice trailed to silence, left a haunting echo that whispered through the room. Even before that whisper was gone, Larry Whelan was erect, snarling savagely: "That settles it! If we sit

here, we'll be picked off one by one—till only the murderer is left. The thing for us to do is to find out—now—who the killer is."

Nard Blunt jerked erect on his bowed horseman's legs. His face was mottled with suffering and anger. "But how? How can I get my hands on the devil who killed Alma?" Back of him the faces of the others were tense, waiting.

"Elimination," Larry Whelan growled. "There are only three possible explanations. First, that a demon out of the sea is actually attacking us. But a sea monster would hardly know about the books he's written up in, so let's rule him out. Second, that a maniac is loose around here. But homicidal maniacs are seldom capable of thinking rationally enough to carry out detailed plans, and the letters we've received mean this thing was planned. Third—" he let his gaze travel from face to face, searching for some telltale expression—"some sane person hates us, wants us killed. And for a good reason. Which one of us hates the others? When we know that—we'll know the murderer."

The color went out of Blunt's lean face. "The hell with that," he snarled, slumping in a chair. "None of you liked Alma; none of you like me. But that's no reason why . . ." His voice trailed off despondently.

Janet Clarke leaned forward in her chair, her oval face bright with eagerness. "Did that voice sound familiar to any of you?" she demanded. "The voice of our Unseen Host? Gregory Arnold escaped from prison a year ago. Remember? Larry and I broke the story on him—he was blackmailing most of you. You testified against him—and he swore he'd get us."

James Franklin's muscles jerked. He half stood up, then sat back. "Right!" he said eagerly. "Do you think—"

"Gregory Arnold?" Professor Packerby's whine interrupted. "Who is he? And why should I be invited? I don't know him."

Larry Whelan felt the momentary excitement of discovery leave him. "Yeah," he admitted. "You had a good hunch, Janet, but the Professor and Labot weren't mixed up with Arnold. Someone—and my guess is that he or she is in this room—hates the rest of us. Each of you think who could hate you. We'll put all the names on the table soon and discuss them. While you're thinking, we can find that voice. . . ."

## CHAPTER TWO

### The Death Chain

LARRY glared at Franklin. "Is there a cellar to this infernal house of yours?"

"No," Franklin snapped, "there isn't. The place is built on solid rock."

"Well then, our host has a speaking-tube arrangement?" Larry turned a slow circle, stared into every corner of the big room. "Somewhere in this very room we'll find what we're looking for!"

The others stared at him as he began a methodical search. His grim resolution was contagious. After a while, Packerby joined in and Albert Labot paced fearfully from the room to look into adjoining chambers. Only Nard Blunt sat motionless before the fireplace, gazing with dead, unseeing eyes, his face chalk-colored, his hands trembling. His thoughts were lost in the storm outside, in the mad maelstrom of rain and wind that had sucked his wife into its black embrace.

Larry continued his search, oblivious to everything else. When at last he stopped, peered around him, the clock on the mantle had ticked away the best part of half an hour and he was alone in the

library. The others had gone, were roaming about the house seeking the source of the malignant voice that had threatened them all with annihilation. Self-preservation was the instinct that goaded them now. Fear had taken second place.

Larry put a cigarette in his scowling lips. The room seemed enormous, seemed to have grown to twice its normal size now that he was its only occupant. Lamp-light threw crawling shadows into every corner. The wail of the wind outside and the drumming of hard rain against shut windows, were banshee sounds that quickened the beat of his heart.

Somewhere in this room was the outlet through which that gloating voice had intoned words of horror. Somewhere . . .

Abruptly he stopped thinking. From some remote part of the house had come a hoarse, screaming outcry that shrilled forth on wings of stark, gibbering terror! The scream endured for an interlude of six fearsome seconds, then ended abruptly on a high, throat-splitting note, as if a sponge had been jammed into the screamer's mouth.

Before that happened, Larry Whelan was halfway across the library, surging toward the door that led to the corridor.

Other sounds jarred in his ears as he lurched across the threshold. They came from the deep end of the hall, where a door hung open in shadows. In the chamber beyond that open doorway a savage combat was in progress. Guttural sounds spewed from human lips. Heavy feet pounded the floor with such force that the vibrations were in Larry's brain as he blundered forward.

The sounds ceased. A maniacal peal of triumph shrilled through the open doorway, smothering the *thud, thud, thud* of Larry's racing feet. Before he skidded to a stop and stumbled over the threshold, the laughter, too, had ceased, leaving a sinister silence disturbed only by

the gasp of his own labored breathing.

He lunged forward, stopped again on stiff legs. The room was a bedroom. Two windows broke the farther wall, and one of them, open, gaped back at him mockingly. Rain thundered through the aperture, drenching the floor beneath. The chamber was empty.

Terror crept into Larry's heart, loaded his body with a numbness that put weights on his feet as he paced forward. The room was—*empty!* A moment ago it had been the scene of a savage conflict. Conflict between what? Man and man, or—*man* and monster?

That voice, screaming in agony from a man's tortured throat, had belonged to James Franklin. Now nothing—no one was here, except conventional bedroom furniture and a crumpled square of carpet. Rain was slapping the floor; storm wind was tossing the window's yellow curtains in a *Danse Macabre* suggestive of things evil and unreal. But James Franklin was gone!

Larry crossed stiffly to the open window and stared out into darkness. The window was on the side of the house that faced the cliff-edge—the same perilous brink that had already claimed one terrified victim. But out there in that inferno of rain and wind and darkness, nothing human was in evidence.

A voice croaked from the bedroom doorway and Larry swung about, found himself facing Henry Packerby. Packerby blurted questions, received no answer. Slowly, Larry walked past him into the hall and stopped again, confronted wide-eyed guests who had come fearfully to investigate. Mingled voices, most of them shrill with terror, jarred against his wire-tight nerves.

His own voice was shrill, too. Glaring back into the questioning stares of his companions, he blurted out harshly: "I

don't know *what* happened! Something horrible!"

Janet Clarke put a trembling hand on his arm and stood close to him. "Who was it, Larry? Franklin?"

"Yes. Franklin."

She shuddered. Holding her close, he peered into faces that were gaunt, chalk-white in the dim light of the corridor. Nard Blunt was missing. So, too, was Albert Labot. To be missing at a time like this. . . .

The front door jarred open and Labot came lurching over the sill, drenched and disheveled. Like an animated scarecrow the man hurried forward. Shrill words jangled from his wet lips.

"Nard Blunt's gone! Gone away in his car!"

"*What?*" Larry snapped.

"It's true! He and I were searching the house together and he went out to look around outside. I followed him, because I thought he was acting queer. He snooped around a while and then sneaked into his car and drove down the road!"

Packerby, gaping into Labot's dripping face, whispered thickly: "Good Heavens! No man would be fool enough to drive a car down the cliff road in this storm!"

"I saw him go, I tell you!"

"Well, if you saw him go," Larry Whe-lan growled, "he's gone. There's nothing we can do about it. Maybe he was lucky enough to get through."

**H**E PACED into the library and sat down, waited for the others to assemble. Of the entire group, Janet Clarke was the only one not utterly terrified. The howl of storm wind and the incessant thunder of pounding rain had worked savagely on jaded nerves. Before long, Larry though, somebody would make things even worse by becoming hysterical.

But things couldn't be worse! Alma Blunt was gone, gone undoubtedly to a



hideous death in the fuming waters at the base of the cliff. Franklin, too, had vanished, under circumstances sinister with evil. What *else* could happen?

The answer came out of nowhere, in the form of an almost inaudible chuckle. Vibrant with gloating, the chuckle increased in volume, filled the room with its guttural outburst. Then:

"This . . . is your host speaking. The unseen guest has claimed a second victim, and a third. Never again will James Franklin offend the eyes of God. Never again will Nard Blunt flee in terror from the extended arm of justice. If you doubt this, let any two of you depart from the house and walk down the cliff road. The distance is not great, and there will be no danger. Go!—and discover the penalty that lies in wait for those of you who may try, as he did, to escape!"

The voice became a low whisper, again almost inaudible. Then, with an obscene chuckle that put cold dread in the hearts of its listeners, it concluded sibilantly:

"In a little while, my friends, the unseen guest will again be among you. This . . . is your host speaking, and wishing you . . . good . . . cheer!"

Blood returned slowly to Larry Whelan's tense face. He turned, stared at his companions. They sat rigid as carven images. Abruptly the room had become like a chamber of horrors in some gloomy wax-museum. Each person was waiting in terror, to know if the voice would speak again.

It was Labot who disrupted the fear-laden silence. Bloating his large body with sucked-in air, he jerked to his feet. "It's a colossal hoax!" he fumed. "This whole thing is nothing but a monstrous joke, carefully planned beforehand. By God, I'm going to prove it! I'm going to find Blunt and—"

He glared at Larry. "Our lovely host,

whoever he is, said for two of us to go. Are you game?"

Larry frowned, hesitated. It might be safe for two persons to leave the house and venture down that storm-blasted cliff road, but what about those left behind? He glanced at Janet, saw that she was at least less terrified than the others. Quietly he thrust a hand into his pocket, brought out a small black revolver that had lain there, comfortingly, ever since he had first decided to accept the host's sinister invitation. Pacing forward, he pressed the gun into the girl's hand. "You're not—afraid?"

"No." She shook her head slowly. "No, of course not!"

"We'll be back in a few minutes." He leaned forward and kissed her on the mouth, then followed Labot to the door. Packerby stared after them with enormous eyes. Muriel Gates made sobbing sounds of terror. An instant later Larry was outside the house, descending the veranda steps into the screaming fury of the storm.

The house was gone, gulped in a noise-some world of darkness. Larry Whelan felt suddenly as if he and his companion had invaded a realm of screaming madness, where a God gone amuck was grinning down in hungry anticipation of horrors to come. He and Labot were perhaps stumbling blindly into a baited trap. And yet it was better, safer, to know the truth of what had already occurred. . . .

The road slanted sharply downward, beginning its steep, winding descent of the cliff-side. Only a madman or a man crazed by fear would have attempted to drive a car down that fiendish death-track in the teeth of such a storm. Nard Blunt had been crazed by terror after the hideous death of his wife, and—

Larry jerked to a stop, clawed his companion's arm. Ahead, like a black serpent lying dormant in darkness, some-

thing extended across the road, angling from the sheer cliff on one side to the yawning gulf on the other.

The thing was a chain, broken into two separate lengths that lay curled on a warped road-bed of wet rock. Larry's gaze followed each length to its terminus. Blood ran cold in his throat.

The chain was broken because something heavy, unable to stop before making contact, had crashed into it. Before that, the chain had stretched clear across the road, secured on both sides by iron rings that were looped to outjutting crags of rock.

Nard Blunt had come this way. There was no other way to come. Hunched over the wheel of his car and urged on by a terror that approached madness, Blunt had driven headlong into the trap. His car had crashed into the chain and ploughed through. And then. . .

**H**ORROR stabbed Larry's heart, filled him with a numbness that made his movements half mechanical as he advanced. Sucking breath, he stopped again. In the dark, the thing he saw now was no more than a looming black shape blurred by sheets of thundering rain. But as he moved forward the shape took form, became a car.

Jagged boulders had prevented the machine from hurtling over the brink. On its side, it lay in a shattered, crumpled heap—a monstrous beetle crushed under the foot of some destroying giant. Hurling out of control by its contact with the chain, it had lurched drunkenly into the wall of rock at the right and then hurtled across the road, spilled over on its side and skidded to the brink. Broken boulders told of the machine's mad journey.

Fighting wind and rain, Larry ploughed forward, pawed his way around the wreck. Then a low sob burst from his

lips and his eyes closed for a moment against the bloody sight that met his gaze.

No need to bend above that mutilated body and look closer. Nard Blunt's hands were rigid around a jagged half-moon of wheel. The broken steering-post was in his chest, impaling him. Death had come in a sudden grinding wave of agony.

Larry rocked backward, put wet hands to his ice-cold face and felt a shudder of horror travel through his stiff body. Behind him, Labot said hoarsely: "So it wasn't a joke! The voice was telling the truth!"

A joke? Larry stiffened with sudden terror. Merciful God, no—it was not a joke! Nor was it a joke that he and Labot had left the women alone with only Pack-erby to protect them!

He stumbled forward, bellowing at Labot to follow him. But Labot did not move. Standing rigid, he growled out: "I'm not going back!"

Larry froze stiff. "You—what?"

"We've come this far without being stopped, haven't we? Well, I'm getting out of here! This damned road may be impassable with a car, but there's nothing to keep a man on foot from getting through, is there? I'm leaving right now!"

Labot lurched around, lowered his head and ploughed into darkness. The storm swallowed him before he had gone ten steps. Larry Whelan was alone, staring in mute astonishment.

A snarl twisted his mouth. He muttered aloud, "Damned coward!" Then he turned again, fought through driving wind that threatened to make a plaything of his bent body. The way was uphill. The storm was an unleashed monster, screaming with ugly passion. . . .

The return trip took a long time, made a drenched sobbing thing of him before he groped drunkenly up the steps of James Franklin's house of mystery. The

door creaked shut behind him. Ahead, the corridor was empty and the building nurtured no human sounds.

Frowning, Larry paced forward. The empty hall mocked him. Storm voices wailed through the walls to stab his pounding heart with chill dread. Then he heard a sound that stiffened him. In the room at the end of the hall, the room where James Franklin had fought a death-battle with some monstrous assailant, a woman was sobbing.

Larry was running drunkenly when he reached the open doorway. His eyes blinked and a name shrilled from his lips. "Janet! Good God—"

The girl was on her knees above a thing that lay on the crumpled carpet. Startled, she jerked around now, gaped at Larry with eyes that were bloodshot. Then she was on her feet, stumbling forward, sobbing convulsively. Her hands clawed Larry's drenched shoulders and when his arms went about her, holding her tight, she went limp inside them. She was no longer a newspaper woman keen for adventure, but a sobbing, terrified girl seeking protection.

He stared past her at the thing on the floor and saw it twitch sluggishly in half-conscious agony. The thing was Packerby, but the professor's upturned face was no longer a mouselike countenance with pop-eyes bulging beneath graying hair. His hair was sodden with blood, his face battered, his clothing torn and disheveled.

Janet Clarke stopped sobbing and said dully: "Oh, thank God, Larry! Thank God you came back! I would have gone mad!"

Larry forced her into a chair, put both hands on her heaving shoulders and said grimly: "Take it easy now." He turned, gathered Packerby's twitching body in his arms and carried it to the bed. Packerby groaned, opened his eyes in a blood-

smearing face, then rolled over and sobbed.

LARRY peered at the girl, said curtly: "What happened?"

"I don't know, Larry! Oh God, I don't know!"

"You've got to know!" He strode forward and gripped her arms savagely. "Where's the gun I gave you?"

"There . . ." She pointed to the floor. "I—I dropped it when I saw him lying there. We were in the library, he and I and Muriel Gates. Muriel was pacing up and down like a mad woman, and then suddenly she walked out. She wanted a drink, she said, and she intended to have it."

The girl shuddered, clung to Larry's arm and stared up at him. "We heard her prowling around, looking for Franklin's liquor supply. Then we heard her scream. Packerby ran out of the library to look for her, and I heard him fighting with something. I had a gun so I went to help him, but I was too late. He was lying here on the floor. . . ."

"He'll get over it," Larry said grimly. "Then we'll hear *his* story." He paced back to the bed, used a rain-soaked handkerchief to wipe blood from Packerby's crimson face. The professor stared up at him, moaning softly. When he sat up, his eyes were so full of lingering terror that the terror seemed exaggerated, seemed to be a mask to hide something more significant.

The man's injuries were superficial. His chalk-white face was gashed in several places, but the unknown assailant had apparently been generous enough, or careful enough, to avoid striking any vital spot.

"Please—please take me out of here!" Packerby moaned. "This awful room. . . ."

Larry helped him off the bed and supported him in a slow parade to the li-



brary. Janet Clarke followed fearfully. Slumped in a leather chair, Packerby let a shuddering sigh of relief escape his thin lips and put a quivering hand on Larry's arm.

"I—I'll tell you what happened, but you won't believe me. I know you won't! When I—when I ran into that room, Muriel Gates was lying on the floor and a *thing* was standing over her."

"What kind of thing?" Larry snapped.

"That's what you won't believe!"

"At least, I'm listening. What kind of thing?"

"The monster," Packerby wailed.

"*What* monster?"

"The demon *wē* were told to read about in the book! Don't tell me I'm lying! I'm not! The thing wasn't human. It was huge and slimy and glowed like a monstrous sea-serpent!" Packerby's voice became a whimpering moan of terror. "You've seen sea-snakes—how they leave a luminous trail on the water, like phosphorus. This thing had a greenish, bloated body that glowed the same way! And it had a face like—like some hideous thing that crawls in dark caverns under the sea. . . ."

Blood rushed into the professor's twitching face as he leaned forward. He stabbed a stiff forefinger at Larry. Shriek as a child's shriek of terror, his voice blasted Larry's eardrums. "It was the demon of Storm Cliff that took Muriel Gates and the others! And it's *real*, not just a figment of people's imaginations! Maybe you think I'm stark mad, but I'm not. No one knows what kind of creatures live in the depths of the ocean. When you've studied as much as I have—"

The professor's screaming voice choked in his throat. Another voice was chuckling a low accompaniment, chanting an obscene sing-song of guttural mirth that dirged through the room.

"This . . . is again your host speaking.

Once more the unseen guest has been among you and has claimed one of you for his own. Never again will Muriel Gates sin against society. And think not that Albert Labot has escaped. Think not that it will benefit you to follow in his footsteps. Labot is dead. There is no escape for any of you!"

The voice became a sibilant whisper, hissing its way into the hearts of its hearers. "In a little while the unseen guest will again stalk among you. Until then, be at ease. Henry Packerby is the only one among you who has stumbled upon the truth. Hear him, and hang upon his words, that you may know the fate in store for you. Then, amuse yourselves by wondering *who — will — be — next — to die!*"

## CHAPTER THREE

### The Monster Strikes

LARRY WHELAN'S narrowed eyes were watching Packerby even before the voice of the Host had ceased its low droning. Somehow, Packerby seemed less innocent, less harmless, than before. The man was apparently terrified, but that terror seemed exaggerated.

With a hand that shook a little despite his efforts to control it, Larry lit a cigarette. He had to think—had to find the grim answer to this bloody mystery—if he were to save Janet's life and his own. Less than half an hour ago, he had thought he could find the killer. If everyone had said frankly who might hate them, the one whose name appeared most frequently could have been watched, perhaps caught. But in the brief time that had been howled away by the storm, some monster, real or inhuman, had struck swiftly. Franklin was gone. Labot gone, Muriel Gates gone. Were they all dead—or had one of them simply disappeared

to carry on his bloody work in secret?

Throwing away his cigarette, Larry unclipped a pencil from the breast pocket of his sodden coat and reached forward, slid a book from the table beside him. When he had finished writing on the blank first page, he passed the book to Janet Clarke.

She stared at what he had written. Stared at a square, masculine scrawl that said:

Sit quietly in this room for five minutes. Then say you are hungry and go into the kitchen. Go alone. Perhaps, in this way, we can lure the monster into striking while we are ready for him. Will you do this—and trust me?

Janet Clarke closed the book, stared at him questioningly.

"A few hours ago," Larry said grimly, "there were nine of us in this house. Now there are three. Unless we do something, we three will go the way the others went."

The girl nodded slowly. "I'll do it."

Larry glanced at Packerby and saw that the man was watching with narrowed eyes. A hard smile curled Larry's lips, a smile not of humor but of grim determination. This was a last resort. This trap, with Janet for bait, would lure the monster from his lair. If he failed—

He refused even to entertain the thought of failure. Already, worms of suspicion were crawling in his mind. Festering in his brain was the realization that only one of the fiend's victims had actually been found dead; the others had merely vanished. Perhaps they too were dead. *Perhaps not!*

The room was silent. Janet Clarke sat stiffly erect in her chair, unblinkingly watching the clock on the fireplace mantel.

Packerby was staring at the book on the table, as if hungry to read what Larry Whelan had written in it.

Then Janet relaxed, shrugged her slender shoulders. Loudly she said: "Well, it looks as though our unseen friend in-

tends to bide his time. If he stays away long enough, maybe we can eat, drink and be merry before we die. Me, I'm starved!"

She stood up, looked straight at Larry with eyes that implored him to protect her. "There must be a kitchen in this darned house somewhere. I'm going to find it and get domestic."

Packerby gaped in astonishment. Larry shrugged, remained seated as she walked to the door. Turning on the threshold, she stared at him again, as if fearful that that she might never have another chance. Then she was gone.

Larry was erect with a swift silent leap. Before he reached the doorway his hand snaked into his pocket and closed over the gun that lay there: the same gun that he had given to the girl hours ago and later retrieved from the floor of the chamber where Packerby had been attacked. On noiseless feet he trailed the girl down the hall, keeping her always in sight as she prowled deeper into the bowels of the house. A scuff of slow footsteps behind him told him that Packerby had joined the strange procession.

Slowly the girl advanced, staring fearfully at the doorway of the room where Packerby and James Franklin had encountered the monster. It took courage to walk past that forbidden doorway. It took courage, too, to push open a door at the deep end of the hall and enter the room beyond.

The room was a vault of darkness, and Janet Clarke's hand trembled violently as it groped for a light-switch in the wall. Sudden illumination revealed the chamber to be a kitchen—a large, immaculately clean kitchen with white walls and a gray-green linoleum floor.

The girl paced forward so slowly that the clicking of her high heels was like the heavy ticking of a big clock. Her face was white, her eyes wide and unblinking as

she advanced. Behind her, Larry Whelan squeezed himself into a space between door-frame and corridor-wall.

**H**E HAD forgotten Packerby. It did not occur to him, now, that the whisper of Packerby's trailing feet had ceased, that the hallway was silent as a subterranean passage in some buried world of shadow.

The girl was standing still, staring around her. Frowning, she moved toward an electric icebox that loomed against the far wall. She walked stiffly, as if the blood in her legs had run cold. Her lips were tight-pressed in a white face.

The gun in Larry's fist was a rigid thing, ready and waiting to cover the girl's every movement.

If he failed. . . .

It happened with such complete lack of warning that his jaded nerves failed to react. Through a silence broken only by the soft whisper of his own breathing, came a dull metallic click, the click of a light-switch. The white, gleaming room ahead of him was suddenly a chamber of darkness, and Janet Clarke's scream of terror came through that Stygian gloom like the shriek of a suddenly turned siren.

Then, as Larry stumbled forward following hoarse instructions, the corridor behind him was alive with a hurtling shape that flung itself squarely upon his back.

The force of that attack sent Larry to one knee and jarred the gun from his outstretched hand. Clawlike fingers raked his neck. A hissing face exploded foul breath against his own. Like a monstrous mad dog, his assailant fumed over him, hammered him to the floor, clawed and bit and scratched in sobbing fury.

Yet the thing was no uncouth monster. Even in the dark, Larry knew that. The thing was human, and not too powerful or too heavy to be flung aside! Desperation

was the secret of that mad-dog attack. And the attacking fiend was Henry Packerby!

Larry's fists became pistons, grinding savagely into soft flesh. This, then was the final showdown! Packerby, of all people, was the murdering fiend who had terrified them!

But another sound invaded Larry's consciousness, stiffened him even as he fought desperately to break the professor's mad grip. The sound came from the room of darkness ahead of him. High and shrill it screamed forth, wailing its way into the corridor.

It was a scream of utter terror, a soul-searing shriek of madness flung violently from the lips of the girl who was lost somewhere in that world of evil gloom!

Larry was suddenly oblivious to the hands that raked his face. His head jerked up; his eyes went wide, staring across the kitchen threshold. Horror came into those eyes. Cold terror ate its way into his brain, freezing the flesh of his body, congealing the blood in his pounding heart.

The room was no longer totally dark. In it, something was moving—something huge and monstrous that was human in shape but hideously inhuman in substance. Arms outstretched, the thing came from a shadowed doorway in the far wall. Came slowly, step by awful step. . . . And in the unholy glow that emanated from its advancing body, Larry made out the cringing, screaming form of the girl.

Her hands were upflung in a terrified attempt to keep the monster at bay. Her eyes were bulging, rimmed with stark, staring white. The screams that welled from her twisted lips were no longer shrill but a distorted, mumbling medley of moans and sobs.

Slowly, relentlessly, the demon closed in upon her. Her own cringing body went back, back, until the edge of a green-



glowing sink made contact with her shoulders, blocking further retreat. That whole end of the room was alive with a phosphorescent glow of horror, a greenly-gleaming mist that seemed alive in itself, yet was born out of the monster's heaving mass of slimy flesh.

Again the girl screamed, a wail that released Larry Whelan from the numbness which held him helpless. Sobbing convulsively, he heaved himself free of Packerby's clawing hands, lurched erect and flung the professor aside with a wild thrust of his arms. Then he was lunging forward, groping hands outthrust to drag the demon thing away from her.

The monster turned deliberately to face him. For an instant Larry Whelan stared, horrified, into the obscene face that topped that green-glowing body.

That face was a thing of sheer horror, a slimy, shapeless mound of green flesh spawned in some underseas inferno where monsters crawled in darkness and the light of day never penetrated. But now Larry Whelan stumbled toward it, made snarling, growling sounds in his throat as he hurled himself at the demon.

The creature stepped sideways. One of its shapeless hands stabbed downward, made sucking contact with the slimy flesh of its body. The hand whipped up again, gripping an object that was black and blunt and heavy.

The green-glowing hand lashed out, down. Black agony ate through Larry's brain as the blunt instrument in those shapeless fingers crashed home. He stumbled, tried vainly to clutch at that luminous pile of dank flesh before the agony reached his heart. Then, groaning, he sprawled to the floor, arms outflung and legs twitching. . . .

**C**ONSCIOUSNESS came slowly, lifting him through a strange world of whirling lights and dark agony.

An eternity passed then before he found strength enough to grope erect and paw his way along the wall, seeking a light-switch. He found one and, clinging to the wall for support, stared about.

The kitchen was abandoned. The green-glowing, slimy-fleshed demon was gone. Gone, too, was Janet Clarke.

Groaning, he lurched into the corridor, thumbed another light-switch as he stumbled forward. The corridor, too, was empty. Packerby, left there in a half-conscious heap, had vanished.

Packerby? Vaguely, Larry remembered the part the professor had played in the conflict which had ended with such bloody abruptness. Packerby had been in league with the unholy monster who had come out of nowhere. Perhaps the professor was also the owner of that hidden voice of hell!

But where was Packerby now? Where was Janet?

Larry shuddered, made his way stumblingly along the hall and entered the library. Driving rain no longer lashed the library windows. The howl of the storm had diminished. Why—why had he returned to the library? Why had he chosen this room, of all the rooms in James Franklin's huge horror-house?

He knew the answer. Knew that somewhere in this hellish room lay the secret of that mysterious voice. If he could discover the source of that voice. . . .

He stumbled forward, felt the floor vibrate beneath his feet as his big body lurched to the center of the room. Then, abruptly, he sucked breath, stood rigid. He was no longer alone. The chamber was no longer a place of ominous silence. A voice, the voice of the horror-master who called himself the Host, was intoning throaty words of sinister portent!

"So . . . you are still alive, Larry Whelan! That surprises me, for I thought that my work was finished. Now that you

have returned to the world of the living, it is still unfinished, and I have no time personally to attend to its completion, unless you force me to do so. Listen, Larry Whelan! Listen to the voice of your beloved!"

Larry's rigid body did not move. Stiff as wood, it stood rooted to the floor. Into the tense silence of the room came another voice, Janet Clarke's, in a moan of torment, uttering words of pitiful supplication.

*"Oh God, don't! Don't let them touch me! God of mercy, take them away! I've never done anything to you. . . ."*

Then her vibrant scream of terror shrieked forth. Through it, as Larry Whelan stood stricken, listening in horror, droned the guttural voice of the host. "You hear, Larry Whelan? Your sweetheart is pleading for mercy—mercy that you and you alone can provide. The cost is but small, for even if you refuse you will die. Walk to the table in the center of the room and open the drawer. There you will find a revolver, loaded and ready for use. Do this *now!* Then you will be informed how you may save from unspeakable horror the girl whom you love!"

Larry's feet moved, moved mechanically across the carpet. With stiff fingers he pulled open the table drawer. Eyes wide, he stared at a black revolver that lay there. Through the madness that was slowly taking possession of his numbed brain, the gun seemed to be a thing alive, leering up at him.

"The price of your loved one's liberty is small, Larry Whelan! If you refuse, if you elect to desert her and make a futile attempt to escape, death awaits you inevitably, and that death will be even less pleasant than the one which now threatens Janet Clarke! To save her, you must forfeit your own life—which is already mine to take when I so desire! The

gun lies before you, Larry Whelan! It is loaded! *Use it!*"

No trace of color remained in Larry's face. Into the room came again the moaning, pleading voice of the girl he loved—pleading not with him but with the murder-master in whose torturing hands she had become a terrified victim. But Larry hardly heard. The other voice was droning triumphant words, and the voice seemed close, fearfully close, as he stood listening to its guttural command.

"I give you sixty seconds, Larry Whelan. Sixty seconds . . . and I am watching your every move. If you have not committed suicide before that grim interval is over, your loved one dies in agony and my lovely creatures of hell will feed upon her naked body. And then, *you die likewise! I give you—sixty—seconds—to decide!*"

LARRY stared, stared with eyes that bulged in their sockets. The voice *was* close! So close that it could have emanated from only one source!

With a sudden forward step, he clamped both hands on the table and heaved it sideways. Then for ten seconds he stood rigid, breathing great gulps of air as he stared down at a small round opening in the floor.

A leg of the table had covered that circular aperture. The intervening carpet had been drilled through to allow free passage for the host's voice! In sudden frenzy, Larry gripped the table again, upended it, stared at the leg which had covered the speaking-tube. That leg was hollow. The voice, droning up through the tube-arrangement in the floor, had vibrated into a hollow table-leg and then, through the thin shell of wood, spilled forth into the room!

Motionless with a blinding realization of the truth, Larry glared at the aperture

in the floor. The voice came again, rumbling throatily from the black tube.

"Thirty seconds are all that remain, Larry Whelan. Then . . ."

Larry's lips curled. A glint of animal cunning smouldered in his eyes as he stepped back. What had the voice declared, a few moments ago? "I am watching your every move!" That was a lie! If it were anything more than a lie, the owner of the voice would know now that his secret had been uncovered!

Larry stiffened, stared down at the loaded revolver in his fist. The voice was droning, "You have ten seconds more, Larry Whelan . . ." Larry's finger curled deliberately on the trigger.

Sound, not sight, was the means by which the unseen host kept check on his victims' movements! Already, the thud of Larry Whelan's footsteps across the floor had warned the host that Larry was still alive. Now, hearing a gunshot and the thud of something falling, the monster would believe that Larry Whelan had obeyed orders!

The gun belched, filled the room with a roar of thunder. A heavy, lifeless shape made contact with the floor. But the shape was not Larry Whelan's body; it was the table itself, overturned by Larry's side-sweeping arm.

Lips curled, eyes narrowed with cunning, Larry stood stiff. In his laboring brain burned a memory of what he had read in the book which stood even now on a shelf at the far end of the room: Beneath this house of hell—beneath the very cliff upon which this horror-house was built—extended subterranean chambers. The book had said that. And James Franklin, owner of the house, had corroborated the printed words by admitting that the house possessed no cellar. Then the voice had originated somewhere in the bowels of the cliff itself!

Even now, the voice was intoning low

words, words that chilled Larry's blood as he moved on tiptoe toward the door. The words were not intended for him, but for the unhappy girl whose screams had tortured Larry's soul.

"You see, my dear, your lover has taken the easy way out. He has killed himself. He believed me when I said I would release you if he paid the price I demanded. He was a fool, my dear! In a moment I shall amuse myself by releasing, instead, these lovely creatures of mine, and allowing them to play with you!"

Horror surged through Larry's slow-moving body. Horror threatened to supplant the animal cunning in his heart and send him lunging forward at a speed that would be fatal. If the floor vibrated even once under the pressure of his feet, the sound would carry through the black tube into the host's subterranean hell-chamber, and seal the fate of the girl he loved!

Each slow step was a soul-searing torment. Tears were in Larry Whelan's eyes before he reached the threshold. Then he sped down the hall, heaved open the front door and stumbled like a drunken man down the veranda steps.

The door swung shut behind him with a dull thud.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Up from the Depths

**T**HE storm had subsided; darkness had retreated before creeping gray dawn. But darkness was still in Larry's heart and another storm, more vicious than nature's recent inferno, raged in him as he raced toward the cliff's edge.

Somewhere in the bowels of Storm Cliff, Janet Clarke was being tortured by the fiend of hell who called himself, mockingly, the Host. How long that torment would continue before death



stepped in to end it, Larry Whelan could only guess.

But where was the hidden entrance to that room of torment? Not back there in the house! He himself had searched the house from end to end, long ago. The secret lay outside.

Alma Blunt had vanished at the cliff's edge, had screamed in stark terror before she was silenced. Back in the house, James Franklin and Henry Packerby had both encountered the monster in a room whose windows overlooked this same bleak terrain of desolation. Somewhere out here on the fearful brink of the precipice lay the answer!

Sobbing hysterically, knowing that each passing moment might seal the fate of the girl he loved, Larry lurched along the rim, staggered through a gray mist that transformed every cairn of rocks into a leering ghost-shape. Rain-wet rocks threatened to hurl him headlong into the yawning abyss below.

In his brain a single shrill voice was screaming endlessly—the voice of Janet Clarke, as it had shrieked up through that sinister speaking-tube in the floor of the library.

Then he found it. Like a punch-drunk fighter he stood swaying, staring down into a narrow crevice that split the wall of the promontory. There, in mist-blurred shadows, hung a dangling black thing that was a rope ladder. Darkness had concealed it when he had come this way before. Even now, only the top rungs were visible; the rest angled down into depths blacker than night itself. His hands clawed the ladder's topmost rung.

Behind him, a monstrous bloated shape took form in the fog. Step by slow step, with gleaming arms extended, the monster advanced. But Larry did not turn.

The whine of dying storm-wind smothered the scrape of the monster's moving feet. Slowly those feet advanced, without

once deviating from their course. Then, with a sudden snakelike stab, the creature's glowing hands shot forward.

Unholy fingers buried themselves in the flesh of Larry Whelan's body. A peal of insane laughter shrilled in his ears as he was jerked from the rope ladder. For two horrific seconds he stared wide-eyed into the leering countenance of evil that glowed above him.

Then, screaming in blind terror, he was flung forward, hurled by a mighty straightening of the powerful arms that enveloped him. His stumbling feet slipped on wet shale. Clawing empty air, he hurtled over the brink, shot into a world of gray mist that had no bottom.

The fog gulped him, sucked him into its wet maw. Above, on the edge of the cliff, the monster leaned forward and stared down, chuckling in leering triumph. . . .

**F**OR a long moment the fiend stared down, mumbling a low cacophony of vile mirth. Then, stopping, he put green hands on the ladder and lowered his bloated, slimy body down through the crevice. Down . . . down . . . moving with an agility astounding in one so huge, he continued until darkness welled up around him.

The thunder of storm surf below grew louder, more sullen. Like a denizen of some deep pit the monster groped ever downward, until the fissure that nurtured him was a perpendicular shaft of impregnable blackness, filled with a hissing, booming roar.

Black surf sucked about him as he lowered his bloated body into the depths. Swirling water rose about his green-glowing torso, about his slimy shoulders. Then, without pausing, he was beneath the fuming surface, in a heaving world where the rungs of the ladder were his only guide.

Slowly, surely, his descending feet

found rung after rung until a dozen swaying rungs lay between him and the boiling surface above. Then his feet sucked in green slime, finished their descent. Bloated hands released the ladder. Here in the depths, on the floor of the ocean, the water was dull and dark, with a greenish hue that matched the monster's glowing bulk. Here beneath the raging surface the black wall of the cliff loomed like a huge, distorted barrier of shadow.

Staring creatures of the deep slithered away as the demon paced forward. Arms outthrust, he strode with an easy gliding motion toward the cliff-wall, toward a darker blotch, man-high, that loomed in the shadowed barrier.

Underfoot, a floor of slime-covered rock angled upward, slowly at first, then sharply. Seconds later, as the tunnel continued its sharp ascent, the monster's head was above water, glowing like a dripping gargoyle in the darkness of the cavern. Then, slowly, his whole dripping body emerged. . . . The tunnel floor ahead was a slime-carpeted aisle of blackness, leading into waterless gloom.

On and on the monster paced, turning once to stare back as if triumphantly gloating over the knowledge that the dark Atlantic, behind him, held now the body of his latest victim. Then the tunnel narrowed, became a slender passageway between crowding walls of damp stone. Worming his bloated body through, the demon stood at last in a small, low-roofed chamber of horror.

Sputtering candles illuminated the room's grim contents. Yellow light spilled over a nude feminine form that hung against the far wall. Near that form, a tarpaulin-covered box loomed on the wet floor.

Slowly the monster advanced, worms of sadistic hunger crawling in his eyes as he approached his helpless victim. The girl was Janet Clarke. Her own eyes were

wide, glazed by stark terror. Like frosted gems they watched every movement of the monster's slow advance. Breath struggled within the girl's tortured body, swelling her bare breasts. A dry sob welled into her throat and spilled liquidly from her parted lips.

"Oh God, don't—don't touch me again!"

The monster ceased his gloating advance, stood wide-legged before her, just out of arm's reach. His hungry eyes drank in her beauty, gazed at her so intently, so avidly, that the girl's flesh crawled as if touched by some tangible evil. Then words came acidly, gutturally from the demon's green lips.

"Your lover is dead. It is too bad, perhaps. His clever scheme might have been successful if he had not slammed the door on his way out of the house. Now . . . I am free to deal with you as I have planned."

He took a step forward. Janet Clarke's mouth writhed open, released a scream that filled the low-roofed chamber with echoes of shrill terror. Hopelessly she fought against the rust-eaten iron shackles that encircled her wrists and ankles. For answer, the monster flung out a burst of merciless laughter.

Janet Clarke somehow found voice. Hanging in her shackles, she stared at him and sobbed out almost inaudibly: "What—what are you going to do to me? Oh God, what have I ever done to you?"

"You and the others took four years of my life!"

"We—what?"

"You and the others," the monster repeated grimly, "robbed me of four years of living. Because of you, all of you, I stared at iron bars, I ate filthy food, I slept in a cell. For four years I lived in hell and planned my revenge. Now do you know who I am?"

"Gregory Arnold!"

THE bloated, green-glowing shape came a step nearer. "Yes. A short time ago you told those fools I had sworn to get them. But they didn't believe you, because Packerby and Labot were present—and because they didn't recognize me when they saw me. You did not know that when Gregory Arnold escaped from prison, he underwent a series of agonizing operations to change his entire physical appearance, that he changed his name and came back into society, to mingle with the very persons who sent him to prison."

The girl's eyes could go no wider. Stark terror filled them as they watched the monster's vicious advance. But still those green-glowing hands did not make contact with her naked body. Laughing softly, the demon stared at her, curled his lips in a crooked sneer.

"But Professor Packerby?" she gasped, fighting to keep his interest on his story, away from herself. "And Labot? Why?"

"There was another reason, too, why I desired to be rid of so many of my friends, my dear—and for this reason I added to my list. It so happens that I have sold them a tremendous amount of worthless stock. In a very few days they would have discovered its real value and then, once again, I might have wasted years of my life behind prison bars. Now I am safe. There will be no complaints. . . ."

The bloated hands reached down, dragged aside the tarpaulin that covered the coffin-shaped box near Janet Clarke's shackled legs.

A low moan broke from the girl's throat. Her trembling body flattened against the wall and a sucked-in breath swelled her breasts to the bursting point.

Her glazed eyes looked down at a wire cage whose floor was hideously alive. Then the monster's green-glowing fingers curled forward, jarred the cage-door open. Abruptly he stepped back. From

his bloated lips spewed a laugh that froze the girl's heart-blood.

The cage was—alive. . . . Through its narrow doorway came a wriggling, clawing sea of horror made up of tiny green monsters that fought furiously among themselves as they emerged. Surging forward in an undulating mass, they moved across the floor toward the naked offering that hung against the wall, awaiting them.

Crabs! . . . Tiny, savage little fiends with needle-sharp claws! Tens of dozens of them, advancing in a solid wave of slithering hell . . . seeking food!

Less than ten feet of damp floor separated the scurrying horde from Janet Clarke's bare legs. But they would not stop at her legs. They would climb. . . .

Staring in terror, the helpless girl again found her voice, sent shriek after mad shriek tocsining through the horror-chamber. And the creature who was responsible for her torment stood grinning in sadistic mirth.

"Why be afraid, my dear? They are hungry, yes, but after they have satisfied their hunger they will be quite harmless. My only regret is that your lover cannot be here now to enjoy watching them. If he were here—"

The monster's voice choked, ended in a sibilant suck of breath. Another sound had silenced him—a sound of stumbling feet in the tunnel beyond the room's narrow entrance. Even before the fiend had lurched around on stiff legs, the tunnel-mouth was filled with a swaying, sodden shape that had no right to be alive!

Like a ghost out of some deep-sea hell, the intruder stood framed in the aperture, legs wide, hands jammed against the rock walls, scarecrow body dripping water. Disheveled hair hung in a drenched mop over his forehead; the face beneath that unsightly mop was a twisted gargoyle, yellow in the flickering candlelight.

*The intruder was Larry Whelan.*



**T**HE shock of his sudden appearance gave Larry Whelan a momentary advantage. Before the fiend's astonishment had died—before cold reason had driven supernatural fear from the demon's black heart—Larry was hurtling forward!

He came in a headlong rush across the narrow room. Came with such mad abandon that the monster had no time to step sideways and avoid him. Larry's lowered head drove like a padded sledge into that green-glowing mass, buried itself there and hurled the torturer backward on crooked legs.

The girl's own body, limp and yielding and naked, broke the demon's impact with the wall. Regaining balance, he lurched forward again to annihilate the disheveled scarecrow that had dared attack him.

He came with the fury of a wounded sea-beast, uttering sounds that soured the blood in Larry Whelan's pounding heart. Roaring forward, the monster slapped a shapeless hand against his own bloated body as he charged. The hand whipped clear again and rose murderously. Green fingers were curled around a blunt black object with which Larry Whelan was already hideously familiar!

But Larry lunged beneath the thing as it whined toward him. His sodden body straightened convulsively inside the demon's outflung arms. His clenched fists, backed by heaving shoulders, beat a bloody tattoo against that hell-born countenance of green slime.

Blind terror gave him strength. Gone mad, Larry fought for his own life and for Janet's . . . and fought, too, to overcome the creeping sickness that was like a black, viscous liquid inside him.

Water—deep, dark water laden with death—had guarded the demon's hell hole! None but an expert swimmer could have labored through that black, endless

tunnel without being drowned like a struggling dog. But he had gone forward.

Savagely now, he slammed his bloated assailant against the wall, raked that body with flailing fists that worked like pistons. But the monster's vile fingers still gripped that black, blunt instrument of murder. Again, with strength doubled by desperation, the creature's arm whipped upward. And across the room a horde of green horrors had nearly reached the quivering white flesh of Janet Clarke's nude body. . . .

Larry's hand clamped around the monster's descending wrist. For a terrifying moment his upturned face hung beneath the black bludgeon. Then he lunged forward, became a clawing, snarling madman.

No human power could have stopped him. His raking fingers curled around the death-instrument and wrenched it from the fiend's grip. Again and again, mercilessly, he struck, struck until the hell-born face before him was a crimson gargoye. . . .

Then he stepped back. And the monster slumped convulsively to the floor, lay there in a writhing, moaning heap, blood mingling with the green slime that oozed from his heaving body. . . .

**L**ARRY stumbled to the girl's side. His feet lashed out in mad fury, kicking aside the little green monsters that fought to reach the girl's legs. The horde broke, raced into darkness.

Janet Clarke stared with mute thanksgiving as Larry's groping hands fumbled with the shackles that held her. Through convulsive sobs that racked her body she moaned out. "He—he has the keys, Larry. Oh, thank God you came in time. . . ."

He found keys, released her and held her in his arms. . . . And she sobbed there, clung to him so fiercely, so yearningly, that the madness in his eyes was

supplanted by new madness. Then, holding his hand, she led him slowly across the room, into an adjoining chamber no larger than an alcove.

Silent human bodies were piled there. Faces stiff in death were yellow in dim candlelight. Faces racked with agony . . . one of them belonging to the servant who had vanished so long ago, whom the monster had murdered, obviously, so that someone might be suspected of crimes that would occur later.

Janet Clarke's clothes were there, too, flung in a sodden heap on the floor. Silently, Larry helped her into them. Then she drew him forward again, pointed. In a corner of the niche stood a square mahogany box with wires, storage batteries, an electric phonograph. . . .

Larry raised the cover and stared. Black discs were stacked on the turntable, waiting to drone their recorded words through an electrically lowered reproducer. The reproducer itself spawned a length of rubber tubing that curled upward to the vault's stone ceiling.

"He—he showed me this when he first brought me here," Janet said heavily. "This is the voice. There's a timing arrangement in the phonograph and the discs were played on schedule. The voice traveled up through the cliff through a drill-hole that was made years ago by engineers who intended to blast here but abandoned the project. He laid his plans well, Larry. Sometimes the voice was a recorded disc, sometimes it was his own. He could speak from here or from several other hidden hookups in the house itself—one of them concealed in the library wall."

Larry stared, fascinated. Minutes passed before he turned, led her from the vault. Slowly he advanced toward the bloated, green-glowing shape that lay in the chamber beyond.

Tiny green monsters had discovered

the shape. He kicked them away, reached down and curled stiff fingers in the demon's unholy countenance. With a savage wrench he tore away a coating of rubberized silk and bared the face beneath.

That face, battered now and caked with congealing blood, was the agony-racked countenance of Albert Labot.

"It couldn't have been anyone else," Larry said grimly. "I thought at first that Packerby was guilty, but—" He shuddered, glanced toward the corpse-vault. "Evidently Packerby thought I was the killer, and attacked me to save you. But the killer had to be Labot. He was missing at the scene of every crime. He was the only person never present when the monster struck."

He scowled down at Labot's green-glowing garment. "His monster disguise served a double purpose. He wanted us to think, I suppose, that the fabled demon of Storm Cliff had come to life. In addition, it's a diving-suit. The suit was a convenience and helped him to come and go in a hurry. He had to work quickly or we'd have suspected him."

"His real name," Janet said dully, "is not Labot. It's Gregory Arnold. Now you know why he wanted to kill us all. Let's get out of here, Larry! Please!"

Quietly, he put an arm around her waist and led her across the room. . . .

LATER, Larry Whelan's car moved slowly down the winding cliff-road through a thinning mist that held golden streaks of sunlight. Far above, on the cliff-top, loomed the summer home of James Franklin, silent and abandoned now that its last two guests had left.

But Larry Whelan thought now only of the girl who sat very close to him, and of the time when black memories would be lost in the happiness he longed for.

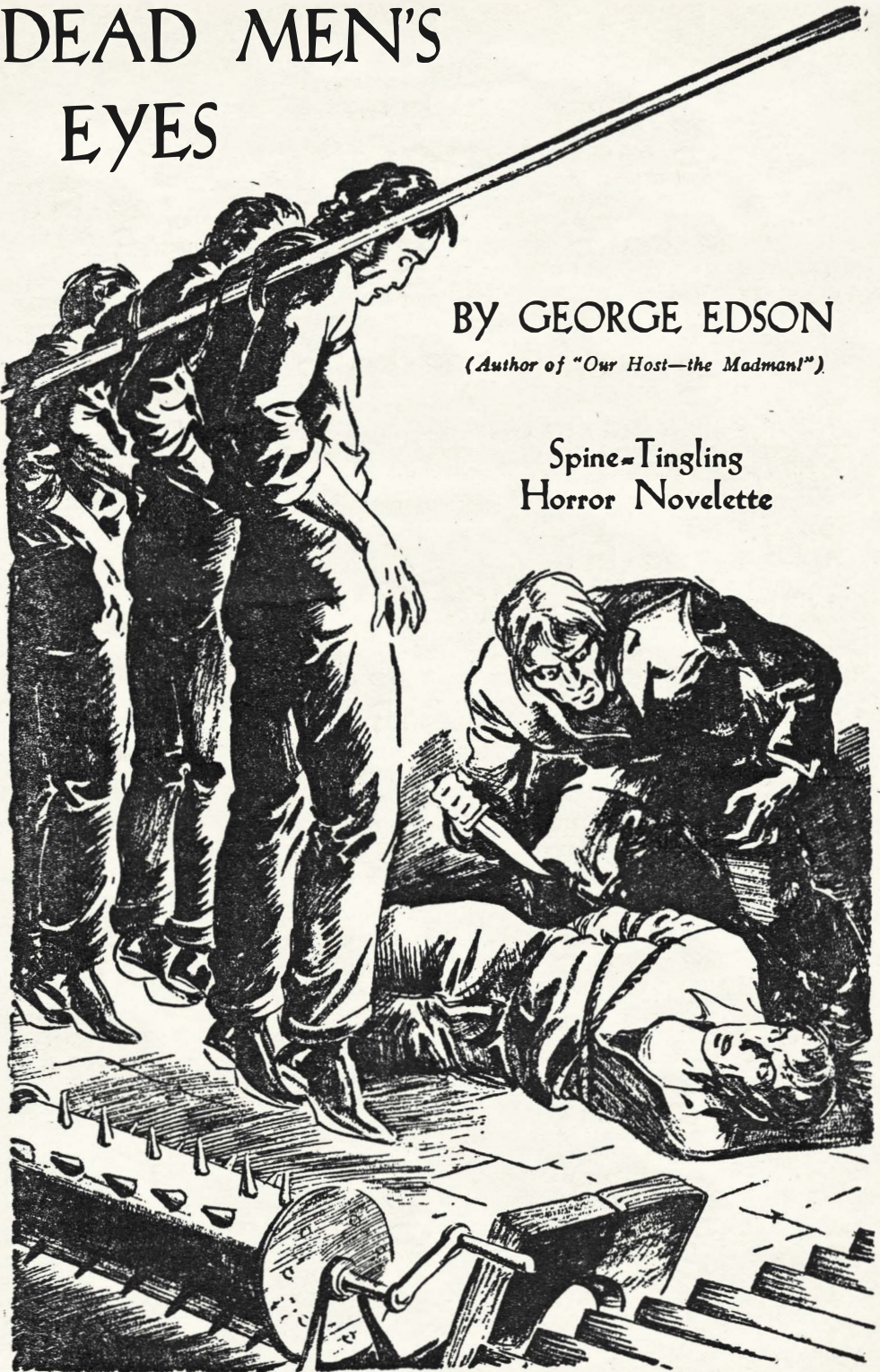


# DEAD MEN'S EYES

BY GEORGE EDSON

*(Author of "Our Host—the Madman")*

Spine-Tingling  
Horror Novelette



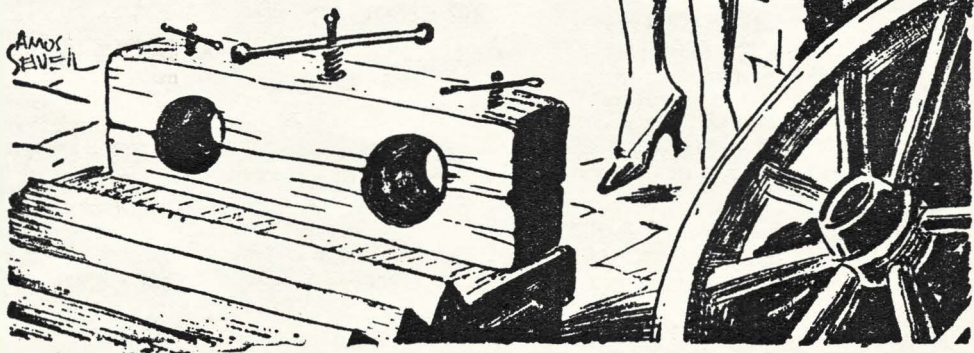


*Above the waves that beat about the isle they called the Death's Head, rose the frowning walls of that moulding, blood-washed castle where Mat Grimes had lived—Mat Grimes the pirate, who had tortured his victims hideously, then sent them, eyeless, to their screaming death in the black waters below. Did the long-dead Torturer walk again? Were these wailing ones who walked the night, blood streaming from their eyeless sockets, more victims of his fiendish work?*

THE little boat pitched, rolled; its motor labored at the task of propelling it over the last of the four miles of choppy water between the mainland and the island called the Death's-Head. Sally Clayton—within the month, she would be Mrs. Jack Marlow, for she had promised to become my wife—and I sat well back toward the stern. We could look over one of our pilot's burly shoulders and watch the Death's-Head materialize out of the thin mist.

I was wondering about the origin of the gruesome appellation. Did the Death's-Head resemble a real death's-head?

As we bobbed closer, I saw that it did. The moon slid from behind a cloud—a pale, ghostly moon which swept cold light through the mist and over what had been only a shapeless lump rising out of the



sea. And it was no longer shapeless.

A slanting cliff, crudely and yet definitely molded into the grotesque outline of a skull, took its place. But even weirder than the outline were the two black holes which must have been caves; they were where eyeless sockets would have been in a skull.

I felt a chill tingle up my spine and prick the nape of my neck. I glanced at Sally. She was staring at the apparition; her face, white and very beautiful with the light of the moon on it, wore an expression of awe.

"Quite an illusion, that death's-head," I said in what was meant to be a casual tone. "I'd just been wondering why they cursed the island with such a monicker."

"Humph!" The man we had hired to run us over to the island turned his head. "There's more'n one reason for that name, mister. Ye'll find that out, I'm thinkin'."

I peered at him. And I was surprised at what I observed in the man who must have seen that shape a thousand times—fear. Frank, absolute fear.

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"Ye'll find out there's more'n a death's-head of rock at the end of that point. There's a corpse with a real death's head on the island. The corpse of Mat Grimes. Mat Grimes—the Torturer. And it ain't a peaceful corpse, neither."

The fingers I held in my hand twitched; I could feel Sally stiffen beside me. "You mean it haunts the island?"

"If ye want to call it haunting. Mat Grimes—dead these hundred years—still roams that island. Laugh if ye like. It don't matter none to me what ye think so long as I ain't got to stay there the night. And I wouldn't stay there the night for all the gold that old pirate hid there!"

So that was it. The famous pair. A pirate's treasure and its inevitable asso-

ciation in the minds of the gullible—the guardian ghost of the departed buccaneer. Hidden gold on the Death's-Head.

What an ironical gesture Josiah Fallon, the man we were going to see, had made. Jailed for misappropriating money from the bank of which he had been president, he had served his sentence without divulging where he had put the stolen money. Now, released, he had isolated himself from the world on an island where no one else lived. On this island where Mat Grimes, also an outcast with loot to hide, isolated himself a hundred years ago.

Ironical? It was perfect. I had never liked Josiah Fallon, had almost hated him during the last months Sally had worked in his bank. But I had to give him credit for success on this trick.

"Mat Grimes—the Torturer." Sally repeated the name. "Why was he called that?"

"This is why. Old Mat Grimes settled down here after all his years of plundering in the southern seas. He built the house where the man ye're intending to visit lives. It's more like a fort than a house. Grimes, robber that he was, himself lived there in continual fear of being robbed. Mostly afraid some of his own men that he'd cheated would come for their shares. And they did. But Grimes was lucky enough to trap them.

"People say he put them through some terrible tortures in a cellar below the house—a cellar fitted with torture machines. Likely he did. One thing he did do to them before killing them is known for a fact . . . because the bodies of the men floated ashore on the mainland."

Our pilot hesitated a second, and in a low voice which shook, said: "He gouged the eyes out of their heads!"

I STARED at him for at least a full minute. There was a strange void in my



stomach. Some force seemed to draw my gaze to the Death's-Head again; I saw yawning sockets, horrible bloody sockets; and I heard agonized cries. . . .

Every muscle in my body jerked taut. I was hearing an agonized cry! As if it had come from that skull of rock!

"Jack!" Sally clutched at me. "What—what's that?"

"It—it's nothing." I tried to swallow an icy lump in my throat, tried to bring out a reassuring laugh. "Either some kind of an animal or our imaginations playing tricks on us after that story."

The cry had trailed off into a shuddering wail. That faded until in a moment the drone of the motor and the mournful moan of waves against the bottom of the cliff had smothered it completely.

"I—I ain't going on," our pilot stammered. "I'm going to put about."

I looked back at him. It would have suited me to put about. I had been against Sally taking this trip in the first place. But she had a sort of weakness for old Fallon; she believed in him, believed in his innocence. So, when he had written and asked her to come because he wanted to see her about an important matter before he died, she had insisted on coming.

I wasn't her boss yet. I couldn't stop her but I could come with her.

Now, almost on Fallon's island, I would have been delighted to start back if Sally had suggested it. But she didn't. And I'd be damned if this big mug was going to make us hunt for another boat and reach there still later. It was already ten o'clock.

"You're going to take us where we hired you to take us," I said softly.

"I won't land there! I'm—"

"Shut up." I was getting mad. "And listen to this. You're running this boat to the landing on the Death's-Head, or I am."

He whined a few incoherent protests, then turned and hunched over the wheel.

We veered past the point forming the skull and slid through a gap between two reefs which just showed above the water. Presently we rounded into a cove. A faint light far above us drew our eyes. And we saw the house of Mat Grimes—the house Josiah Fallon had somehow acquired and to which we were bound.

It perched on the very edge of a precipice rising sheer from the water. It did look like a stronghold of feudal days. It was a bleak, forbidding stone structure; and the cold light of the moon made it look even bleaker and more forbidding. I couldn't repress a shiver.

The pilot ran the boat down the cove to a landing extending out beyond a boat-house. I wished we had sent word when we were coming. Now we had a sweet climb up to that crow's nest.

It was very obvious that our cowering pilot wasn't going to set even one foot on that landing. I lifted the two bags out of the boat. But I inquired about the path before I got out myself.

"Up that way," the pilot told me quickly. "Ye got a flashlight? Then ye can't miss it."

I helped Sally jump to the landing, followed her. The motorboat roared as the pilot put it about and headed it away from the Death's-Head. I laughed at his fear. But it was a forced laugh; it didn't make either of us feel any gayer.

I stooped, opened my valise. I rummaged around in it and found my flashlight. Closing the valise again, I straightened—and froze.

Through the night came another yell.

**I**T WAS a yell of agony, mortal agony; a sound between a shriek and a sob. It was the cry of some creature suffering fearful pain, pain so great it had



robbed its victim of sanity. The yell again quivered into silence.

Sally caught my arm. I flicked on the flashlight and raked its beam over the shore and the wooded pitch above.

"Jack!" Sally's voice trembled with horror. "It—it's right near here!"

I nodded. The yell had floated down from above us, but not from far. From somewhere in those black woods which the beam from the flashlight touched.

I had heard the death cries of various animals. Some had been almost human; but this had been nearer to human than any of them.

"We've got to look," I said. "We've got to see if we can't do something."

I took Sally's hand in my free one. We ran along the landing and across the strip of beach. The flashlight showed a clear trail into the woods; we followed it, pushed ourselves up the steep incline. The trail topped the crest of a rise. There was an opening, through the trees; we could see Fallon's house far above us.

Still we heard no further sound. We plunged down into the woods again, woods so dense that only an occasional thread of moonlight filtered through the roof of foliage. And finally we stopped.

"No use," I muttered. "We can't—"

The next word clogged in my throat, turned into a choked exclamation. I had sprayed light around us once. Now as I swung the flash back toward the trail, my eyes had spotted something. Something—a hand! Extending out beyond a clump of brush!

I lunged toward it, around the brush. And I saw a thing which made my blood run cold.

Sprawled on the ground was the body of a man. His clothes were torn and bloody. His torso was horribly slashed. And his face. . . . I swayed weakly.

Both eyes had been gouged from their sockets!

## CHAPTER TWO

### The Peering Face

I TWISTED to push Sally back before she could see that ghastly spectacle; but I was too late. She had already seen. She uttered a strangled cry and reeled against me.

"Oh, merciful God!" She moaned that over and over, then: "I—I know him!"

I picked her up in my arms and carried her out to the trail. I steadied her after I set her on her feet again.

"I know him!" she repeated then. "He—he's Mr. Fallon's nephew—Alex!"

The shocked numbness was gradually leaving my brain, letting it think with a trace of reason. Old Fallon's nephew. Murdered. More than murdered—tortured, butchered with fiendish violence. And old Fallon's pet hates had been his relatives. Sally had often told me that. The logical conclusion was inevitable.

But Sally had arrived at a different conclusion. She whispered fearfully: "The corpse! Jack, the corpse of Mat Grimes! The Torturer! He did it to the others! Jack, the house—quick!"

I held her back when sheer hysteria made her yank at me. The house? We were in a hell of a spot. We had seen the body and knew about the murder. The memory of a ghastly sight like that would show in our eyes if we didn't say anything about it. Our knowledge wouldn't please old Fallon.

I admit it; the thought of our position frightened me. Yet what were we going to do? There had been a boat-house by the landing. But it or the boat in it would surely be locked, with Fallon hunting a nephew he wanted to kill. Sooner or later we'd have to go to the house.

There was one out for us. I could pretend to have swallowed—as Sally already had—the legend of Mat Grimes.

I held Sally back as we followed the

trail up toward the building on the cliff. And a few minutes later we came out of the woods and saw the house squatting on a pinnacle of rock above us.

More forbidding than ever, it looked, from this closer view—and more bleak. Its harsh stone walls were bare of any ornament. Flickering yellow light shone through the windows.

We climbed twisting steps, merely niches hacked out of solid rock, to reach an iron door. I raised one fist to knock; but the door creaked open before I had a chance. A man peered out at us.

It wasn't Fallon. It was a youngish man, tall, slender. He had a thin face and bored eyes. With a slight lifting of one eyebrow, he said: "I'll be damned if we haven't got company."

"We've come to see Mr. Fallon," I told him.

"Competition, eh? I figured this was a scoop." He shrugged and stepped back to let us past him. "Well, your trip's wasted if you don't get any more than I've got. By the way, what paper?"

"No paper."

I pushed Sally through the doorway, followed her. We found ourselves in a huge room stretching across the entire front of the house. It was sparsely furnished with a few ancient chairs, an ancient sofa and one crude table. An iron candlestick on the table held a candle. At one end of the room was a fireplace in which a log crackled. Yet, despite the blaze, the room was dank and cold; it had an obnoxious odor of decay.

The tall man closed the door and turned. He volunteered: "I saw the light from your flash through the window. Thought it might be one of the others. My name's Gerard. I got a tip on Fallon being out here on old Grimes' island and had an idea it'd make a swell story."

"The others?" I looked at him. "You mean there are others beside Fallon?"

"I'll say. Three of 'em. Three nephews—and are they on his tail after the money he's supposed to have here! And does he hate 'em! I think he'd kill—"

"Where is Fallon?"

"Out there somewhere. So are they. But I'll bet they aren't together. There's no friendship lost between any two of that bunch. Every—"

A creak from the iron door which he had just closed interrupted him. Sally and I twisted. And we saw Josiah Fallon.

FALLON had been a stout man before he had gone to prison. Now he was gaunt, a little stooped—as if those three years behind walls had crushed him. And his face was sallow and bitter.

His sullen eyes raked over Gerard, over me and fixed on Sally. A gleam snapped into them.

"Sally!" He hurried toward her. "You've come! Thank God! You've come before it's too late!"

"Mr. Fallon. . . ."

The strain had been too much for Sally. She started to crumple. I caught her, carried her across to the sofa.

"What's the matter, my dear?" Fallon tagged over to the sofa and took one of her hands, began to rub it. "What is it?"

Anger surged up inside me. I jerked Sally's hand away from him and forgot all previous plans for caution.

"What's the matter? You know well enough! We found your nephew's body down there! She saw it! She saw that slashed chest and those eyeless sockets!"

"Where?" Gerard, his voice cracking with excitement, jumped over to me and clawed at my shoulder. "My God, man, where? This is a real story!"

I didn't answer him. I had fastened an accusing gaze on Fallon's face. I watched the sallow skin tighten, the lips twitch. And then—I stiffened. For the face distorted into a grin.

"That's one of 'em!" He rasped out a laugh which sounded more like a curse. "One! They want money! Maybe they'll learn there's a curse on those who want money!"

The significance of the gruesome sight Sally and I had seen had not yet struck me with such force as it did at this moment. A chill of eerie horror crawled over me. A hundred years ago men had come to this island for Mat Grimes' treasure. He had trapped them, tortured them, then gouged out their eyes as a final diabolical gesture. They had been looking for money; they would never again look for anything. Now here was Fallon on Mat Grimes' island. Here had come his nephews after his money. . . .

And Mat Grimes was reincarnated.

"Where's the body?" Gerard kept at me. "Where?"

"And you!" Fallon turned on the reporter. "You're another! Think you've fooled me? You're here for money like the rest of them! I tell you all I haven't got any! Still you stay! Be careful the same thing doesn't happen to you!"

I glanced at Gerard and told him: "You'll find the body down in the gully. It's behind a clump of brush."

Gerard wheeled, started for the door. I shifted my eyes back to Fallon.

Abruptly I heard a sound behind me. I twisted. A door leading into the room from the rear of the house was swinging open.

**T**HE man who entered was gaunt, with hunched shoulders and long arms which dangled down in front of him like the arms of an ape. His head was a hairless blob set on the hunched shoulders. His face—I shuddered—his face was nothing but a mass of scarred flesh!

"Mr. Fallon."

He said just that in a hoarse, croaking voice. Fallon pivoted, looked at him. And the crazy gleam in his eyes faded;

he lifted one hand and drew it across his forehead with a sigh.

"Yes. Yes, Eric," he spoke dully. "I—I'm all right. You don't need to worry."

The gaunt man turned and slouched out of the room. I frowned. The point of the scene I had just witnessed was a mystery to me. But whatever it was, it had certainly had an effect on Fallon. He had become a tired old man.

"You must excuse me, Marlow," he said. "I—I'm quite ill. Eric is my one servant here." A note of bitterness crept into his tone. "He's another—a man who was in prison with me. You can see that his appearance makes him an outcast. He was glad to isolate himself from the world with me. He will show Sally and you to rooms. Sally—I think she must have been fatigued from the trip. That's why she fainted. But Marlow, I must see her a little later. It's a matter of the utmost importance. I—"

Abruptly he stopped. His eyes widened, filled with stark terror. He clutched at his neck.

"Oh—my God!"

It was half screech and half groan. He wheeled as he tore the last syllable from his throat—wheeled and stumbled out of the room!

I stared after him. What the devil had come over Fallon?

He had said with such apparent sincerity that Sally must have fainted from fatigue. Fatigue! Not five minutes ago I had told him clearly enough why she had fainted. . . .

But now Sally was stirring. I leaned over her, stroked her forehead until she opened her eyes. She stared up at me and whispered: "Oh, Jack. I—I'm sorry."

I just smiled at her. I could see her expression gradually change as memory returned. She shuddered.



"Don't think about it, Sally," I said.

"Jack, did you tell Mr. Fallon? Where—where is he?"

I explained that he had pleaded sickness and gone to his room.

"What did—did he say?"

I thought I might as well describe what had happened in order to prepare her for what might happen any minute in this weird house. I did.

"But—but Jack! You don't—you can't believe Mr. Fallon did that! To his own nephew! No matter how much he disliked him!" Defiance throbbed into her voice. "He didn't! I know he didn't! You believe it because you don't like him!"

I shrugged.

"Jack!" She whispered this. "It was someone—something else! Something unnatural! I could feel it when we first saw the island! The story—"

"Steady, Sally," I interrupted. "You're letting that ghost story get the best of you."

"I—Jack!"

She had glanced over my shoulder, abruptly stiffened. Horror leaped into her eyes. Her cheeks went even whiter.

I twisted my head. I looked across the room to a window at the end. And a petrifying chill clutched my heart at what I saw.

Framed in the window was an agonized face with two hideous, eyeless sockets.

**B**LOOD welled out of the gaping holes like streams of red tears. It slavered down over writhing lips. A trembling hand rose to view. Frantically it pawed at the glass. It seemed to be trying to knock, to attract attention. Then it dropped. The face distorted into a ghastly grimace of pain, jerked back from the window—and disappeared.

"Oh, my God!" Sally's voice was a hollow sob. "That—that was Morris Fallon!"

I tore my eyes from the window. She had fainted again. I stumbled to my feet. I couldn't leave Sally alone.

I started to call for Eric. But the shout died in my throat when I saw the iron door from outside slowly swing open.

The man who entered was tall, dark, perhaps forty years old. He had an ugly, vulpine face and crafty eyes. I recognized him. He was the third nephew—Walter Fallon.

"I heard someone groaning up here a minute ago. Who—"

"Morris Fallon." I pointed toward the window. "He's out there—around the corner of the house. He's hurt."

"Hurt?" Walter Fallon's tone was curious instead of concerned. "Bad?"

His attitude angered me. I snapped: "Bad enough to suit you."

Fallon stiffened; his features contorted with quick rage. He muttered something under his breath, then whirled and let the door clank shut behind him.

"Jack!" Sally called.

I spun back to the sofa. Her eyes were still glazed with horror; she had fixed them on the window through which we had seen the face. I moved my body to block the line of vision.

"Try not to think of it, Sally," I told her. "Don't—"

"I—I can't help it."

"You must. It—"

The outside door burst open. Walter Fallon rushed into the room.

"God!" he cried. "The old devil murdered him! Gouged out his eyes! Just like he said he'd do to us all!"

I saw him dig one hand into a pocket and pull out a revolver. His vulpine face twisted into a snarl. He started toward the door leading toward the rear of the house.

"By God, he isn't going to get me! I'll jam a slug into his miserly heart first."

"No! No!" Sally wobbled to her feet. "He didn't do it! He. . ."

But Fallon had already gone.

"Jack!" She caught my arm and yanked me toward the door. "You've got to stop him!"

I said firmly: "Listen, Sally. This isn't our affair. Besides, I'm not leaving you alone for one second while we're on this hellish island. Not for anything or anybody."

"Please! Jack, please! For me!"

I knew, as soon as she put it on that basis, that I was licked. Still I wasn't going to leave her here. She was safer with me. I took her arm.

"All right," I sighed. "We'll go. Though my opinion is that a bullet would put old Fallon right where he belongs."

The door opened on a long corridor. Faint yellow light filtered into it from a room straight back at the end. We moved toward it—stopped.

From that room had come the blast of a shot, a choked groan. The light flickered out.

For an instant we both stood motionless, tense. I thought I heard vague sounds of movement, footsteps and then something scraping. I jerked out the flash I had stowed in my pocket after arriving at the house.

Snapping it on, I pushed in front of Sally and grabbed her hand. I pulled her after me down the corridor.

The room was huge, stretching across the width of the house as did that other room; it was sumptuously furnished. I swung the beam from the flash around it. Around it again.

It was empty!

### CHAPTER THREE

#### Out of the Grave

**A**N EERIE chill stabbed along my spine; my throat felt dry, constricted. Only a few seconds ago I had heard

the roar of a gun and a groan in this room. There was only the one door out of it. And now it was empty.

"Jack!" Sally's whisper shook with awe. "They—they're gone!"

I nodded grimly. Once more I raked the beam of light around the room. Suddenly I centered it on a spot in the middle of the floor. Blood? I moved toward it, bent. Yes, it was blood—still wet.

Slowly I straightened and drew in a deep breath. One window was open. Through it came the moan of the waves, mournful, haunting. I went over and glanced out, down. The wall of the house was sheer with the cliff; I could just see the caps of foam riding the waves.

"Oh!"

I yanked back as Sally crashed against me. I caught a glimpse of her white, terrified face and wide eyes. I raked light around the room—discovered nothing wrong.

"What is it, dear? What's the—"

"Jack! I saw it! The corpse!"

I stared at her.

"The corpse of Mat Grimes! Oh, it—it's ghastly! The face—gray—and foul eyes gleaming through the darkness at me!"

"But Sally." I put one arm around her. "There isn't anything here. You can see for yourself."

Fearfully she twisted her head and followed my light as it swung from one end of the room to the other.

"But it was there, Jack! It was! It seemed to—come right out of the wall!"

Out of the wall! The phrase clicked in my head. Of course. A passage through the wall. I should have expected to find that in a house built by a pirate with treasure to hide.

And now there was a solution to the disappearing act. By coming through the secret door old Fallon had surprised the man who had intended to kill him. He

had stabbed his nephew, probably in the back, and thus a blotch of blood on the floor so soon. Blood wouldn't have flowed that quickly from a bullet wound. Reflex action of the finger had caused Walter Fallon to fire one harmless shot. The sounds of movement after the shot had been made by old Fallon dragging his nephew through the passage.

"We're getting out of—"

I heard a faint creak and a rasping noise. A wild idea flashed through my mind as I jerked up the flash. The single door—it was closed.

I leaped across to it, tried it. It was locked!

**A** MOMENTARY weakness oozed over me. We were trapped, caught like mice in a cage. All the windows in the room were in the back wall—opening on a death leap down to the reefs at the bottom of the cliff. The door was of solid oak; only a battering-ram would splinter it.

I heaved a shoulder against it to test the lock. The solid oak panels would crack before ever that lock broke.

I thought of Eric, of trying to reach him with shouts. But what was the use? Eric, a criminal and an outcast, would be working with his master. It must have been he who had locked the door.

Gerard? That he hadn't returned to the house long ago proved that curiosity had drawn him to his death.

"What are we going to do?" Sally was beside me asking that frantic question. "Jack, what—what are we going to do?"

"I don't know," I said.

But I thought of one thing I could do. Equip myself with the most effective weapon the room afforded. I had a feeble hope that I might have overlooked Walter Fallon's revolver. No, evidently old Fallon had taken it. The best I could do was a long iron candlestick for a club.

I had kept Sally close to me as I searched. And suddenly she gripped my arm, whispered: "Listen!"

I stood motionless, listening. At first I heard nothing but the moan of the sea far below us. Then—it was muffled, just audible. A human moan of pain.

"Can you hear it?"

I nodded, shuddering. I could hear it and see in my imagination the agonized face of Walter Fallon.

That left the two of us. And Josiah Fallon wouldn't be fool enough to let us return to the world from this island of the damned. Not if he could help it. The locked door proved that he had other intentions. For me—death. For Sally? I had always mistrusted his supposedly paternal fondness for her. And certainly he hadn't asked her to come here so that he could kill her.

I tightened my lips. This waiting and thinking was hell; I had to do something. I might surprise old Fallon if I could find his secret passage.

There wasn't any use arguing with Sally about Fallon being the killer. So I whispered: "I'm going to hunt for the trick door. It's the only way out of here."

"But—but, Jack!" She trembled. "That's where—the corpse—"

Admiration surged up inside me when she added: "What—whatever you think best, Jack."

I drew her over to one corner of the back wall. Starting there, we moved slowly along the dark panels lining the side-wall and the wall toward the front of the house. I had Sally hold the candlestick I had taken for a club, while I inspected the strips of wood covering the cracks between each pair of panels. But I found none which didn't look and feel firm. We reached the door, began on the second section of the wall.

Suddenly I stiffened. I trained my flash on a faint mark on one strip. It



was an imprint left by a wet finger; in the center of it was what appeared to be the protruding head of a small nail.

This was the panel!

Old Fallon's finger had been wet with the blood of his nephew. The head of the nail was a cleverly conceived button to release a lock.

**I** TRIED it. It pressed in to the level of the wood with a little click. The entire panel gave as I pushed against it. Twisting, I took the long iron candlestick from Sally. Then I pushed the panel back farther, sprayed light through the opening.

Narrow stone stairs led downward to a corner beyond which I could not see. Damp, fetid air rose to my nostrils. And to my ears the sound of that moan—still muffled, but louder now.

I gestured to Sally and squeezed through to the top step. I held the panel for her to follow. Then, slowly and silently, I started to descend.

I lifted the candlestick as I neared the corner. But around it were only more stairs and an iron door. The door had no latch on this side. I laid my forearm against it, switched off my flash, pushed. It swung open.

Dim, eerie yellow light glimmered around the corner of a tunnel boring through the solid rock. Around that corner, too, came the sound of the agonized moaning we had heard.

Sally clutched my shoulder. I twisted, whispered: "Steady, dear, steady."

She pressed her quivering lips together and gave me a plucky little nod.

I inched my way along the tunnel until I reached the corner. Hugging one slimy wall, I peered around it. My breath caught in my throat.

I was looking into Mat Grimes' torture chamber.

The one candle on a low table spread

light over a hideous array of torture machines. The shapes of other fiendish devices were vaguely visible in the gloomy recesses of the dungeon—monstrous devices which made my senses reel.

But it wasn't the sight of those torture contraptions that made my brain throb with horror. It was the sight of those three dangling bodies with their ghastly, eyeless heads.

They were strapped by the shoulders, the three in a line, to a horizontal bar some six feet above the stone floor. Alex Fallon was on one end, Morris Fallon on the other—and in the middle, not yet dead, Walter Fallon.

His powerful physique had kept him conscious when most men would have fainted, kept him conscious to suffer agony beyond conception. His face, drenched with the blood which had poured out of those gaping sockets, was terribly distorted. His arms writhed in a vain attempt to pull his shoulders free.

I spun. Sally was huddled against the wall behind me. I knew by the look in her eyes that she had seen the gruesome spectacle. I jammed the flash into her hands and kept the iron candlestick.

"Stay right here," I whispered shakily.

I turned back toward the torture chamber and raked my eyes around it. Somewhere down here was old Fallon. I gripped the fingers of my right hand tighter about the candlestick.

Quickly I slid past the corner, into the dungeon of horror. I glided across it to the line of dangling bodies. Now I could catch mumbled phrases between the moans from the lips of the living one.

"Oh, God. . . . Let me die. . . . My eyes—my eyes. . . ."

I shuddered.

"You fiend. . . . You murdered me. . . . My own uncle. . . . Oh, dear God—my eyes. . . ."

The moaning voice trailed into silence.

At last he had mercifully fainted. He could live but a little longer, but at least he would die without pain.

"Jack!" Sally's shrill shriek split the silence. "The corpse!"

I wheeled. And what I saw struck stark terror to my heart, froze the blood in my veins.

Coming toward me was a figure from the grave.

**T**HE gaunt frame was hunched; clinging to it were tattered, filthy clothes of an ancient mode. Scraggly white hair hung down over the face. Face—God! It was a death's-head with gray, scabrous skin stretched over it. Mad eyes burned from out two black holes. Bloodless lips were set in a mocking leer.

The gruesome specter moved toward me with slow, measured steps. One scaly hand trained the muzzle of a revolver on my middle.

"So I don't have to go after you." The voice was dry, rasping. "You come to me. To me—death."

I tried to force the numbness out of my muscles, tried to lift the iron candlestick. It seemed to weigh a thousand pounds.

"You saw what happened to these?" The thing's free hand gestured toward the mutilated corpses behind me. "They wanted the money, too."

I tried to swallow the lump in my throat.

"But they didn't get it. Nor will you get it. You'll die like they did."

Those last words pounded in my brain. Yes, I'd die. I'd die like they had—and I was afraid. Yet the thought of my own death wasn't what made horror gnaw at my stomach. It was the thought of what my death would mean. Sally would be left alone. Helpless in this creature's clutches.

A fit of wild frenzy seized me. I trembled, stiffened, threw myself forward.

Flame spat from the muzzle of the revolver. Hot fire dug into my thigh. I stumbled. I was falling. . . .

I heard the scream and saw Sally rush at the specter. And then, just as I hit the floor, I saw it twist and smash her in the face.

She reeled back, crumpled. The specter spun toward me. I clawed to my knees and hurled the candlestick at its skull. But it ducked, retched out a snarl, leaped at me. It brought the muzzle of its gun down on my head.

A black cloud swirled in front of my eyes. Desperately I fought against unconsciousness. The sound of Sally's voice calling my name came to me out of the void; I fastened my mind on it and held with all the power of my will.

Moments passed during which I hovered on the very brink of oblivion. Then, slowly and laboriously, I crawled away from it. I felt myself being rolled over on my stomach. My arms were jerked behind me, tied. After them my legs. . . .

## CHAPTER FOUR

### The Head of Death

**I**T MUST have been two or three minutes before I could lift my head and penetrate the cloud enveloping it. Fresh horror gripped me at what I saw when finally I did so.

The specter had dragged Sally across to one wall of the chamber. It had bound her wrists and now, with the aid of a box, was drawing one long end of the rope through an iron ring attached to the wall, seven or eight feet above the floor. Stepping down from the box, the specter kicked it aside.

Sally appeared to be unconscious. But when her arms were lifted over her head

and began to pull up her body, she moaned and opened her eyes. She cast a wild, terrified look toward me.

"Jack. . ."

The specter cackled, kept hauling on the rope until she was forced to stand upright.

"You—you damned fiend!" I yelled.

The specter's intention had dawned on my fogged brain. It was going to make her hang by her wrists with just the tips of her toes scraping the floor. Somewhere I had read that this simple torture was one of the most painful of all. The body of the victim went through agony from the steady pull it exerted on the shoulders and arms; the mind was tantalized because the feet could feel security beneath them, yet never quite gain it.

For an instant the specter swung mocking eyes toward me, then shifted them back to Sally. It made the rope fast to a plug in the wall while she was still in a normal standing position.

"Your sweetheart thinks I'm going to hurt you," it rasped. "But I wouldn't hurt you for the world. Ah, no. You're much too pretty. I merely want you here where you must watch your sweetheart. That may help your memory. Yes, you're very pretty."

One scaly hand lifted and touched her throat. She tried to jerk away when it slid down toward her breasts, but couldn't.

Nausea churned at the pit of my stomach. Outraged fury sent hot flames through my head. I twisted my wrists, yanked at the rope circling them until blood trickled down over my hands from gashes in the flesh.

The specter rattled out a laugh. The talons of its foul gray hand clutched at her dress, ripped it, pawed the bared white skin.

"Oh, don't. . . ." Sally cried. "Don't!"

Again the specter laughed, but dropped

the hand and hitched back a couple of steps. It said: "Yes, you're right. Business must come before pleasure. So now you will tell me where on this island Josiah Fallon has the money hidden."

"I—I don't know about—any money," Sally answered wildly.

"But you do." The rasping voice hardened. "Josiah Fallon knew he was going to die. He sent for you. For what reason except to give you—the one person of whom he was fond—the money he had taken from the bank and could never use himself? You came. He saw you tonight and he wouldn't waste time. He realized that he had too little time left him on this earth. And his nephews were trailing him like buzzards. So he told you where you could find the money. Now, my dear, you're going to tell me."

With frantic insistence, Sally cried: "I don't know. He—he didn't tell me about—about any money. Oh, where is he? Have you—have you killed him?"

**T**HE specter shrugged, merely answered: "He was very obstinate."

"Oh. . . ." Her gasped exclamation trailed off into a frenzied moan.

I wrenched at the rope, sawed my arms back and forth. Rolling over on my left side, I braced my left hand against the stone floor and groped for the knot with the fingers of the other. I felt it with the tip of the longest one. I struggled to work the others up to it.

Pain again swept over my body from my wounded leg. But hope, welling up in my chest, deadened it. I could get free if I had time. Time. . . .

"I made a mistake," the specter was saying. "I didn't allow for his illness. I forced him a little too strenuously and he couldn't talk. With you—well, I have better plans for you. The pressure will be less direct. You will watch another



suffer instead of suffering yourself. I want you to be able to talk when you're ready. And then—when business is finished—comes pleasure. You must be fit for that. . . .”

The specter wheeled, glided slowly toward me. The same leer contorted the hideous face. But the eyes burning out of the dark pits in the skull had brightened with unholy glee.

Lying on my side, my arms and hands were hidden from those eyes. My fingers were on the knot, were tearing at it. It wouldn't give. I didn't have time. . . .

One twitching gray hand fumbled under the tattered coat. It reappeared gripping a knife with a long curved blade—a blade dark with crusted gore.

From across the room Sally screamed: “Oh, God! Merciful God! Save him! . . .” And then her screams became incoherent.

The specter paused, glanced over one shoulder at her. He shrilled: “The money? The money? Where?”

She babbled wild pleas, prayers, threats. None of these made any impression on the specter. It turned back to me, glided on again.

And now it was crouching over me. Bending lower. I stared at the scabrous, gray face. Stared—and in this last moment of eyesight, saw something which registered in a sane corner of my brain.

That face was a fake!

But what good that I had detected the spirit-gum and gease-paint, knew that the ghastly face was only a product of make-up? What good? The hand gripping the knife was descending.

But abruptly it paused in its descent. From somewhere in the dungeon had come a terrible yell. A man's yell.

The fiend hidden behind clever make-up jerked erect, spun. I dragged air into my burning lungs and lifted my head. I stared across the chamber.

Josiah Fallon, white and shaking, lurched out of a gloomy recess into the flickering light from the candle!

“You devil!” His voice was a hollow rumble. “You—you damned monster!”

“Fallon!” the fiend exclaimed. “I thought you were dead! I—”

**H**E BROKE off as Fallon rushed at him. Deliberately he dropped his knife, sidestepped, then twisted and sprang for Fallon's throat. His outstretched hands, like the jaws of a wolf, fastened around it. Fallon uttered a choked groan.

I went back to work on the knot. It was loosening. If I had just a couple of minutes. . . .

The fiend was rasping out bestial snarls of triumph. Fallon's face had darkened, swelled. His tongue lolled out; spittle slavered down over his sagging chin. He wobbled on weak legs.

From across the room came Sally's hysterical screams.

I had one knot untied. There was another underneath it. I tore at that one with numb fingers.

Fallon slumped. The fiend loosened his hold on the old man's neck.

“Oh, no!” he muttered. “I'm not going to kill you yet. I'm saving you for a last resort. The girl may not talk even when I operate on her sweetheart. But you're fond of her. You'd talk if I started on her.”

I felt my reason totter at the limitless inhumanity of this devil. If I could only get at him, get my hands on him. . . .

The second knot was loosening—loosening. My hands were free!

I doubled, ripped at the rope around my legs while the masked devil bound Fallon. I succeeded in getting it untied. And I struggled up to my one good leg just as the fiend twisted back toward

me. I hurled myself at him before he had recovered from surprise.

I drove my fists at his face. Left—right. The first only grazed the side of his neck, but the second, the right, connected. He crumpled. My weight swung onto my wounded leg; I fell on top of him. We both rolled over on the floor.

He clutched at my throat. I battered at his sham face. His hands got a grip, lost it, got another. I gagged and coughed; I swung with all my strength.

His fingers slipped from my windpipe. He groaned and flopped over on his back. He lay still.

I drew air into my burning lungs, worked up to my one good knee and dragged myself over to him. My blows had ruined his make-up. The wig of scraggly hair had pulled from his head.

And I recognized the professed reporter—Gerard.

He looked as if he'd be out for some time. I hauled myself up and hopped on one foot toward Sally. She was moaning with pain.

She whimpered as I ripped the end of rope from the plug in the wall. She swayed, started to slump. I turned and tried to catch her; we both fell.

"Oh, Jack. . . . Thank God! You're safe."

"It's all over," I murmured. "It's—"

"Jack! Quick!"

Her eyes, staring at something over my shoulder, widened with new terror. Gerard had fooled me; he hadn't been unconscious. Now, on his knees, he grabbed the knife he had dropped when Fallon had rushed at him, and pushed to his feet. He lunged toward me before I could scramble up on my one good leg.

**I** FLUNG out a hand in a feeble gesture of defense. And then, abruptly, he jerked to a halt.

Another figure came into my vision. It was Eric, Fallon's servant! Scarred face distorted and long arms outstretched, he heaved himself at Gerard. Nimbly the latter sidestepped. Eric clutched at him, pawed the air, stumbled.

Gerard spun and swung up his knife for the thrust just as I jumped. My fist caught his shoulder, knocked him off balance. But I was falling. . . .

And then, as I fell, I saw that Eric had lurched to his feet again. He had grabbed that hand which held the knife, had grabbed the knife from that hand—was driving it into Gerard's chest!

Gerard retched out a horrible groan, clawed at his chest. Then he pitched forward to the floor and rolled over on his back.

With a guttural cry, Eric wheeled and rushed over to his master. I could hear him mumbling brokenly as he tore the ropes from Josiah Fallon's legs. I pulled myself up to one knee, looked down at Gerard.

His eyes were open, fixed on me; his lips were moving. I listened.

"So I lose." His voice was still mocking. "I don't get the money. But—it was a good scheme. I'd explored this house—hunting for Mat Grimes' treasure. But I'd never been able to find it. Then Fallon came. I thought I'd get his, instead."

His eyes closed. But he kept on talking—slowly, weakly. He knew he was dying and he seemed to hope to stave off the inevitable by words.

"I was an actor once. So I thought I'd take advantage of the legend of Mat Grimes' ghost to cover my identity. At first, you see, I didn't intend to kill anyone. Fallon and one of his nephews saw me land on the island. I pretended to be a newspaper reporter, after an interview.

"That—that was early this evening. I soon saw that I'd have to get rid of the nephews to get a chance at Fallon. I caught one of them at the other end of the island and stabbed him. I gouged out his eyes to make the others think that Mat Grimes' ghost really existed. Then they wouldn't suspect me."

He paused, as if exhausted; but finally he continued.

"I did the same thing to the second—for the same reason. And—" His face twitched, voice lowered to a cracked whisper—"and I found out that I got a strange kick out of doing it."

I shivered.

"After that I put on these clothes I'd found out here and this make-up. I got Fallon when he left you, dragged him down here. He wouldn't talk. I tortured him till I was afraid he'd died. Then I decided to get the girl. I dragged in the two corpses to scare her into talking, then I came up after her. Walter Fallon was in the room when I opened the panel. I stabbed him. I—I gouged out his eyes."

My stomach grew more nauseated as I listened. The tale Gerard was telling seemed too ghastly to be true.

"I almost got the girl once. Then I went up by another passage and locked you in the room. But I neglected Eric. And I—I should have killed you immediately." He sighed. "Little mistakes. So now—I lose."

I watched him die. After that I passed out cold.

**M**Y NEXT sensation was of something wet, like a raindrop, falling on my forehead. I opened my eyes and looked up into Sally's face. The something wet had been a tear.

"Don't cry, dear," I murmured. "Give me a little smile."

And she did—through the tears. A quivering little smile that was anxious and tender and sweet. She stroked my forehead with one cool hand.

I lay there for a long time. I tried to keep the insistent memories of what had happened tonight out of my mind, but couldn't. I imagined I never would be able to forget them entirely. And in my mind with the memories was a thought: I had misjudged Josiah Fallon and ought to apologize to Sally. I did.

"Sally, I'm sorry about accusing Fallon. Is he all right?"

"He's dead, Jack."

"Oh."

"You'd have liked him if you'd known him better. He was—well, almost a second father to me. He talked with me a little just before he died. He never stole any money from the bank, Jack. He had Eric get some papers he couldn't find at the time of the trial. They prove it. That's why he wanted me to come here. To get them and use them to clear his name. He couldn't do it. He had isolated himself on this island and could never again leave it because he had become subject to fits of insanity. Jack, he thought he'd killed Alex."

"He did? Then that's why he changed so quickly and ran out of the room."

"Yes. He'd have a fit and want to do horrible things. When he'd recover from it, he'd be afraid he had done them. He couldn't remember."

I winced as a quick pain streaked down my thigh.

"Eric carried you up to this bed and took the bullet out of your leg," Sally said. "He seemed to know how—told me it was best. Jack, I pity Eric. He was so devoted to Mr. Fallon. Let's have him with us."

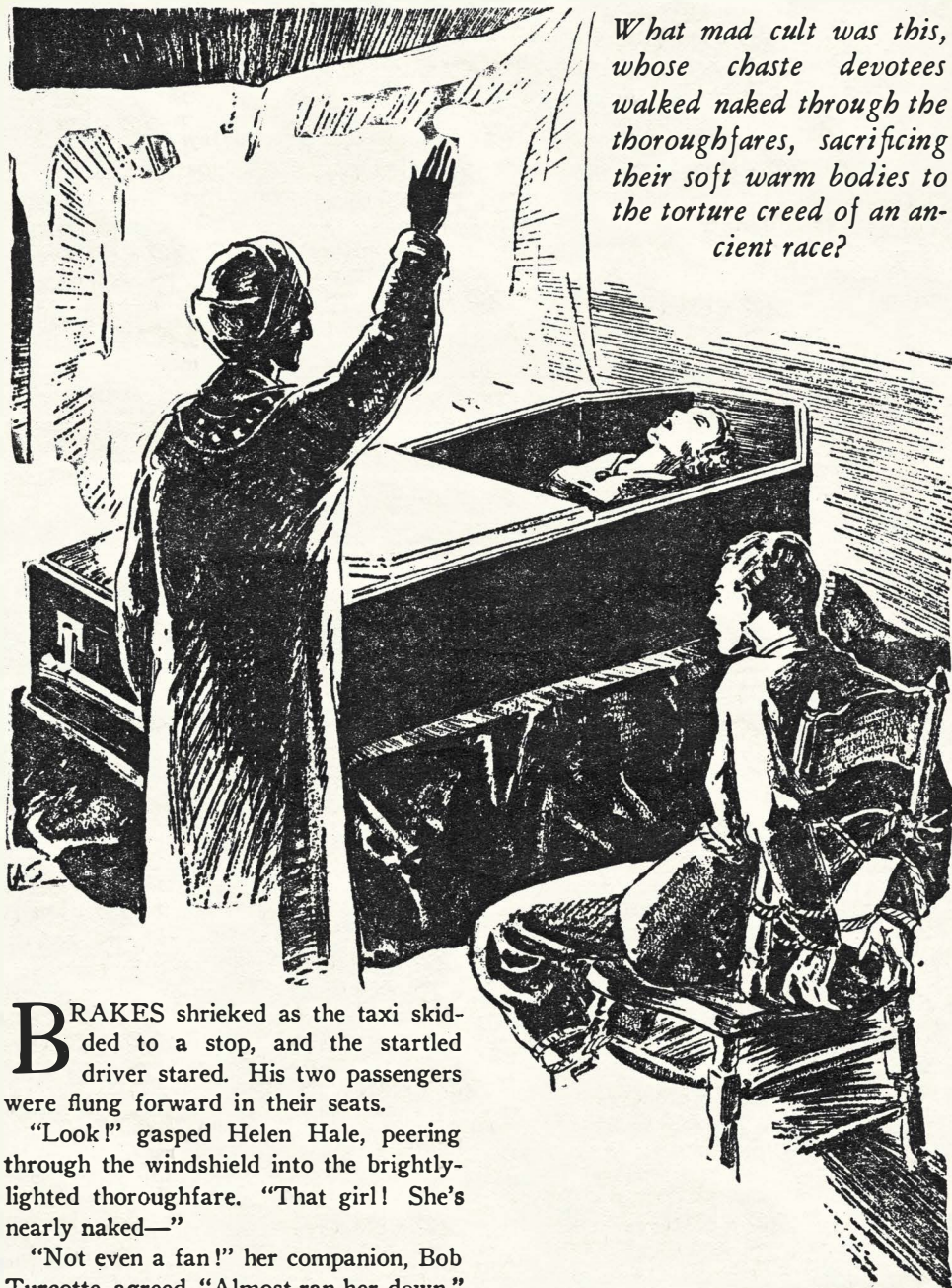
"All right," I said. "And sweetheart, let's have a kiss."



# Daughters of Pain

By H. M. APPEL

(Author of "Murder from the Sky," etc.)



*What mad cult was this,  
whose chaste devotees  
walked naked through the  
thoroughfares, sacrificing  
their soft warm bodies to  
the torture creed of an an-  
cient race?*

**B**RAKES shrieked as the taxi skidded to a stop, and the startled driver stared. His two passengers were flung forward in their seats.

"Look!" gasped Helen Hale, peering through the windshield into the brightly-lighted thoroughfare. "That girl! She's nearly naked—"

"Not even a fan!" her companion, Bob Turcotte, agreed. "Almost ran her down." He frowned toward a crowded theater entrance on the right, where a blasé throng stood stunned to momentary silence. "Pretty raw publicity—"

"It's Mary!" Helen's cry quavered with unreasoning dread. "Oh, I knew something ghastly was going to happen. That's why I wired you to come—"

A bluecoat at the corner snapped out of his trance, came running toward the young woman. She was blonde and quite lovely, clad in a wisp of lingerie. Moving with halting steps over the cobblestones, slender white body pitilessly revealed in the incandescent glare, she paused directly opposite the Lyric lobby. Then, raising a red apple to her lips, she took one bite and dropped in a heap.

Turcotte leaped down, reached her side a step ahead of the policeman. A glance told the gruesome tale. The girl was dead.

"Suicide!" the officer grunted. "Now don't this beat hell, mister?"

The crowd surged forward, clamoring, peering.

"Get her into my cab," Turcotte snapped. He gathered the crumpled corpse in his arms. Helen was holding the car door ajar. The patrolman cleared a path with his club.

"Nearest hospital!" Turcotte prodded the driver, who seemed dazed. "Stop gog-gling! Show us some speed."

Helen Hale pulled off her tan cloak and wrapped it around the body. Tears streaming down her cheeks, she helped Turcotte to support the limp form upon the cushion.

The policeman, perched on a jump-seat, demanded plaintively: "Ain't that a crazy way to do it? She must have got out of a parked car. Here's something that dropped when you picked her up." He proffered a length of ribbon.

Turcotte saw letters crudely printed on the strip of silk, flicked on the dome-light and read:

#### "DAUGHTERS OF SEKHMET"

"What does that mean?" He stared at the officer.

"Search me. Suicide club, maybe. Or she might have belonged to one of those nutty nudist outfits."

Words of protest burst up in Helen Hale's throat, but Turcotte interrupted her deliberately, fearing that anything she might say would let her in for troublesome notoriety. She subsided, grieving over the girl again.

A FEW minutes later they swung up to the hospital receiving-platform. Following a hurried examination, the interne shook his head. "Nothing to do. Cyanide. Anyway, it was quick and painless."

The patrolman said, apologetically: "I'll have to turn in your names. Of course it was suicide—I saw her take the dose myself—but you know how these things are."

Turcotte called another cab. While waiting, he urged Helen Hale into the deserted visitors' lounge. "Now tell me," he whispered anxiously, "who was the girl? Why did you think this was going to happen? When you met me at the station, I knew something had gone wrong."

He was a tall, good-looking, very much worried young man who had been building up an enviable record on the staff of an Eastern daily. His work in connection with a famous kidnaping case had won high praise.

"Oh Bob!" She controlled her voice with difficulty. "That's why I asked you to come sooner than we had planned—to have our wedding at once—and take me away from Chicago." She pressed a curly head against his breast, weeping.

Face puckered with trouble, he stroked her hair. "Please, don't! I can't understand. For God's sake"—his tone sharpened involuntarily—"tell me what's going on!"

"I don't know," Helen said brokenly. "Mary had been acting so strangely. She was my dearest friend. After we went to have our fortunes told, she seemed terrified by evil premonitions. And now—"



this! Oh, why did she choose such a horrid way to die?"

Turcotte swore softly. "I'll attend to the fortune-teller. Filthy vermin, all of them. Told the poor girl something that upset her mind, no doubt. But what a pity—"

The cab arrived. "To police headquarters," he directed. "We must tell them who she was, and I'll check up with the Department. We'll have them pick up the fellow who may be responsible. Or was it a woman? Do you remember the fortune-teller's address?"

Helen's face clouded. "No, I don't. Mary received a card in the mail about a week ago. It offered a free consultation to her and to one girl-friend. Just for a lark, we went. In the dark I didn't notice which streets we followed. The house was somewhere south of the Loop."

"That's bad. Was the fortune-teller a man?"

She caught her breath in an odd cry of dismay. "Bob! I can't even recall his name! He was a dark, bearded mystic dressed in white, flowing robes and a turban. It's so strange that I can't remember. I don't recall a thing he said."

Turcotte looked at her queerly. "What seemed to trouble Mary? What did she do that was peculiar?"

"The look in her eyes, Bob! As though she saw . . . Death . . . beckoning. She thought she was going to die. Some times, she would grow pale and tense; her eyes would widen and burn; twice I heard her whisper loathingly, 'Unclean! I am unclean!' Then, afterward, she wouldn't know what she had said."

Turcotte's face fell into haggard lines. His arm tightened about her waist protectively.

**A**T HEADQUARTERS, a grizzled sergeant broke in upon their brief explanation. "Wait! Lieutenant Wayne will want to hear this." In an adjoining

office, a thickset, elderly man looked up patiently. His grave eyes brightened a little at sight of Helen Hale, whose svelte slimness and soft lips drooping with grief held their own appeal.

"Yes? What is it, Moss?"

"This fellow's a reporter from New York. About that dame who done the Dutch, in front of the Lyric a while ago—says he knows her, that she was a nice girl—"

"All right, Moss. Let him tell it."

Turcotte recounted the known facts. Lieutenant Wayne looked at Helen. "You say you don't remember his address? Nor his name?"

She shook her head. "Only his eyes!" she burst out abruptly. "Terrible eyes that frightened me so . . ."

"Then you'd know his picture. We have a file of licensed fakers. Moss!" He turned to the sergeant. "Bring in a batch of photographs. Let her look them over."

Helen examined a great many of the prints, with no show of recognition. Then, near the bottom of the stack, she found one that made her pause. Turcotte, watching, saw her body grow rigid. The hand which held the photograph seemed frozen. When he caught sight of the expression upon her face, his startled exclamation cracked:

"Helen! Good God! What's the matter?"

In hushed, flat tones she murmured, "Unclean! Unclean!" With a visible effort she tried to tear her eyes away from the picture. Turcotte snatched it out of her tight-clenched fingers. A spell seemed broken. She reeled as though about to faint. He caught her in his arms.

"Bob!" She looked up at him piteously. "That's the man. Oh, I can't remember—but something horrible is yet to happen . . ." Her voice faded on a note of nameless fear.

Turcotte licked his dry lips, turning



perplexed eyes toward the officers. The sergeant's face was screwed up in a ludicrous expression of amazement. "But," he blurted, "that's Sidi Ghanna! And he's—" Noting Wayne's imperative gesture he bit off his remark.

The lieutenant said: "That girl needs a doctor. She's all upset and hysterical. Take her home. We'll do what we can."

After a moment's hesitation, Turcotte led Helen through the door. Moss followed, tapping him on the arm.

"Just a minute. She can sit out here."

Lieutenant Wayne said gruffly: "No use getting her more worked up than she is. But—tell me frankly—there's nothing funny about her, is there?"

"What the hell do you mean?"

"Don't get mad. Is she a regular customer of these yogi chaps, astrologists, and such? A little 'gone' on the subject, maybe?"

"I don't believe she ever went to one before in her life! She's the finest—"

"Sure, sure." Wayne patted his shoulder. "I just wanted to know. Because, you see—" he picked up the photograph from his desk, "this fellow, Sidi Ghanna, is *dead*."

"Dead? Then how—" Turcotte stared at the mystic's picture. "How long has he been on record as deceased? Under what circumstances did he die?"

**S**ERGEANT MOSS read from a typed slip pasted on the back of the photograph: "Sidi Ghanna. Egyptian cultist. Called himself a high priest of Sekhmet. No police record. Murdered in his study. Knife wound in back. Laid in the morgue three days, until suspect, Mulai, his assistant was picked up." Moss added extemporaneously: "I remember that yellow-faced devil. The landlady testified that two hours after Mulai left the house, she still heard Sidi Ghanna praying in his room. She gave the fellow an air-tight

alibi. Found the old man dead before Mulai returned."

"Well . . ." Turcotte was confused. "It must be just a striking resemblance. You might hunt for another fortune-teller who looks like him. His queer eyes give me the creeps, even if he is dead. I've got to take that poor girl home before she collapses."

In the cab, Helen Hale was shaken by spasmodic tremors. She moaned: "Don't let anything like that happen to me; Oh, Mary, Mary—what did he do to you? To die in the street, before all those staring people. Bob! I'm afraid of the eyes . . . the eyes . . ."

Perspiration beaded Turcotte's forehead as he tried to comfort the overwrought girl. She trembled in his arms, whimpering like a frightened child. It was with genuine relief that he helped her down upon reaching the North Shore cottage where she lived with her widowed mother. Mrs. Hale was quite overcome.

Turcotte phoned for the family doctor. The physician arrived, administered sedatives to both women. Later, when they were alone, he growled: "Damn these foreigners who unseat feminine minds with their quackery! Looks to me, Turcotte, like the result of hypnotism. Can't say how long the condition may last. You'd better stay."

The opiate had little effect upon Helen.

Throughout the long, dark hours she tossed and moaned, while Turcotte sat beside the bed, trying to quiet her. As in a nightmare she muttered broken phrases which dismayed him with their sinister portent.

"Unclean! Unclean!" There was stark terror in her pitiful cry. "Oh, the eyes! He commands! But I won't go—I won't go. . ."

Toward morning the girl fell into a trance-like slumber. Worn out with watching and with the nervous strain, Bob

Turcotte slept in his chair until the sun was high.

Then, he carried a tray to Helen's room when she called. The girl seemed surprised.

"So early, Bob? Or did you stay last night?"

"Don't you remember?" Curiosity puckered his eyes. "I sat with you for hours, trying to chase off the bad dreams."

"Dreams?" She looked mystified. "But Bob, I didn't dream, did I? Perhaps *you* did—"

Her serenity, the very fact that her fears had vanished, hit him hard. What evil power had bred in her mind the hideous fright of the night before, then left it calm?

"You really don't remember—" he stammered, "about Mary?"

Helen's face whitened. Her voice fell low. "How *could* I have forgotten that?" She began to weep; not hysterically, but with the quiet grief of a girl for her chum. Mrs. Hale appeared in the doorway, beckoning.

**TURCOTTE** sat in the living room and read a story in the morning *Tribune*. The traffic cop had talked. Black headlines clamored:

#### DAUGHTER OF SEKHMET SUICIDE

The papers denounced the authorities for permitting queer cults to flourish. A taxi-driver had supplied the only definite clue, reporting of his own accord that the girl had ridden in his cab. He had picked up two fares just outside the Loop. A man, muffled to the ears in a long cloak, and a woman darkly clad. They had told him to park across from the theater. During the excitement, the man had disappeared. Stepping to the telephone, Turcotte called Lieutenant Wayne.

"Good morning," he said. "Yes, she had a bad night. . . The gruesome business has done something to her memory. Her doctor believes both girls were hypnotized."

"That," Wayne agreed, "might account for her reaction to the picture. I suppose all hypnotists' eyes look much alike."

Turcotte said: "I believe Sidi Ghanna is still alive. Where did he live?"

"South State—No. 6517 is the address on this photograph. But don't be ridiculous! I tell you we had him in the morgue and buried him!"

Turcotte looked in an encyclopedia for the fabled Sekhmet whose high priest Sidi Ghanna had claimed to be. His brow corrugated in a frown when he read that this lion-headed Egyptian goddess of destruction was sometimes known as the "Devil's Daughter."

"Sounds like a hop-head's dream," he grumbled. "Ten to one headquarters will never get to the bottom of it. I'll do a little snooping on my own."

It was long past the luncheon hour when he mounted the dirty steps of a dilapidated apartment-house and rang the bell. A blowsy woman opened the door a crack.

"Don't want to buy nothing today! Or—were you looking for furnished rooms?"

Turcotte pulled a dollar bill from his vest pocket and smoothed it carefully. "You might be able to tell me if it is true that Sidi Ghanna is dead."

"I'll say! Dead as a smelt this year gone," she shrilled. "Didn't I find him layin' there with a long knife stuck in his back? And blood all over a nice new rug, for which I never got a nickel damages out of Mulai?"

"Ah, yes—Mulai. Does he live here now?"

"That yellow-faced imp? Do you think I'd have the likes of him around, drag-

ging in his queer friends? I'll say not!" Her face tightened covetously. "But why are you looking for him? Maybe I can help."

Turcotte passed over the dollar bill. "Where does he live?" He tried to make his tone casual. "If I find Mulai, do you suppose he could do a bit of hypnotizing for me?"

The woman laughed raucously. "That ape? It took old Sidi to do the hypnotism stunt. He had the face for it. But Mulai—never! How could a cross-eyed man hypnotize anybody?" She started away, saying: "You wait a minute—"

Returning, she handed him a slip of paper. "Here's a bill from the transfer company. Shows where he moved all of Sidi's stuff—the old man willed everything to him—but he never paid for the hauling. They left the bill with me, and a lot of good that did them!"

Soon Turcotte found the address, in a block of vacant store buildings. He hammered at the locked door but nobody answered. There were drawn curtains in second-story windows. He circled through an alley, approached from the rear. A back-door opened at his touch. The interior was dark, a musty atmosphere of disuse hanging over the place, but there was a bucket of fresh garbage at the foot of a stair.

He ascended the steps cautiously, cursing creaky boards which seemed to shout an alarm. Gun in hand, he stepped into the gloomy upper hall, began feeling his way along the wall. His groping fingers touched a doorknob. It rattled slightly. Waiting, he heard no sound. Turning the handle with care, he pushed open the portal. A blinding light flashed in his eyes. Someone swung a heavy club. He groaned and fell, pistol clattering across the floor.

**I**T SEEMED but a moment later when Turcotte found himself rolling and

twisting upon hard boards, but through a window high overhead he saw the pale crescent of a new moon. Hours had flown and night had fallen. There was a sweetish taste of drugs in his mouth.

Struggling to his feet he struck a match, and by its light, saw that he was confined in a narrow cubicle formed by three solid steel walls and a grating. A freight elevator. The shaft made an admirable jail. A pull at the starting lever proved the power was off. He shook the gate, looked up at the window. Leaping high, he caught a cross beam and got astride the elevator frame. The window was still far out of reach. He began climbing the cable. Fortunately, grease upon it had hardened from disuse and he managed to inch his way higher and higher until abreast the glass. Kicking out panes and sash he hooked a foot through the aperture and flung himself sidewise, catching the sill with one hand. In the dark it seemed a long way to the ground, but he risked the drop, landing upon his feet in the alley with a jolt that jarred his spine.

Hurrying along the street, he passed a dingy pawn-shop, turned back. For an exorbitant price he purchased a revolver without a permit. Farther down he came to a drug store, and through the window could see public telephone-booths. Going in, he dialed a number. Mrs. Hale answered. She broke into a torrent of weeping and he had to put another nickel in the slot before she quieted sufficiently to make herself understood.

"Helen's gone!" the woman sobbed. "Something terrible has happened to her. She'll die, like Mary did—"

"Gone!" he cried hoarsely. "When? Where?"

"She seemed better—she was sitting up in bed, reading some letters the postman brought. Then I heard her shriek. I went to her room and she was cowering against



the pillows, screaming, "The eyes! The eyes! And Bob! Some one had sent her a picture in the mail—just a pair of horrid eyes that seemed to burn right through you. I went to call Doctor Hewitt. When I returned—" Mrs. Hale's voice broke miserably again—"she was gone—gone, I tell you! I know she'll never come back alive."

"You called the police? No? Then 'phone Lieutenant Wayne. Tell him they've hypnotized Helen with that picture, after preparing her mind for it when she went to the fortune-teller. Tell him to throw out a dragnet for Mulai. I'm going to head her off if I can."

Turcotte ran toward the building in which he had been imprisoned. He stopped upon the corner, where he might observe people passing along two streets. Soon his vigil was rewarded. Half a block down the more dimly lighted thoroughfare a familiar form appeared, walking rapidly, looking neither to right nor left. The girl turned into the dark alley.

He ran after her, calling: "Helen! Wait—"

She was at the rear door of the store room when he seized her hand. She did not speak—just shouldered him aside—tugging at the latch. He caught her up in his arms and wheeled to flee. But a voice within the building snarled, "Stand still—unless you want her shot." Turcotte thrust Helen behind him, reached for his gun. From a window overhead, some one dropped a heavy object. It glanced off his skull and he staggered blindly. The door burst open. Swift-moving figures bore him down.

**W**AVES of laughter beat against Turcotte's brain. Malicious, hellish laughter that was, somehow, obscene. He opened his eyes, found himself sagging drunkenly against tight ropes that bound him to a chair.

Again the laughter came, a chorus of it. Shriill, demonic, threatening. He became aware of several moving forms. As his vision cleared, he saw a circle of hateful, leering faces, lighted by dark, foreign eyes in which grim fires seemed to burn.

A resonant, commanding voice silenced their raucous mirth. Turcotte's pain-dimmed eyes sought the speaker. The large chamber, which resembled the meeting place of a lodge, was shrouded in darkness save for a circle of light cast by one bare electric bulb. Striding into view came a man in vestments of white, a turban upon his head. The saffron countenance, the black crossed eyes, identified him as Mulai, once Sidi Ghanna's assistant. He paused in front of Turcotte, lips curled in an evil smile.

"You have come to a ceremony for one who is as dead. Later, you too shall pass beyond the veil."

Turcotte cursed him feebly.

Mulai stepped over to the wall and pressed a switch. Another light glowed at the farther end of the room. Turcotte uttered a cry of heart-broken grief. A black coffin loomed against a white curtain hung from the ceiling. Lying motionless within it was the body of the girl he loved. He screamed: "You've murdered her!"

He surged against the ropes which bound him. The more he twisted and squirmed, the louder Mulai's companions in crime laughed. The turbaned leader's face clouded impatiently.

"Stop it!" he grated. "All must be done with due solemnity or the effect may be spoiled." He turned, approaching the coffin, addressing Helen Hale.

"O, daughter of Sekhmet, rise and speak if you hear my command."

The girl sat up, slowly, stiffly. Her eyes opened wide. The pallid lips moved: "I hear. I obey your will."

Mulai lifted her down from the somber bier. Leading her by the hand he brought

her to the center of the room. "Tonight's demonstration," he said to the half dozen brown-faced orientals, "shall be even more spectacular. This time I shall take steps to insure publicity. No longer shall the police suppress the truth."

He turned to Turcotte, teeth bared in a smile. "Perhaps you wonder at the nature of our plans? When one or two more girls have . . . committed suicide . . . in public places, each wearing the girdle labeled 'Daughters of Sekhmet,' I am sure that a convincing threat to the wealthy parents of other girls will produce huge cash payments to insure the safety of their children. Actual abduction will be entirely unnecessary."

"Suicide!" Turcotte raged. "You mean *murder!* After you've hypnotized them."

Mulai smirked. "Authorities agree that the thing you mention is impossible. Experts will never accuse me. A person, hypnotized, will perform no revolting act that would be refused if conscious. That is why"—he frowned—"we can influence this girl to commit suicide only by making her *want to die!*"

ONE of the men sprang forward. Hooking his fingers in the bodice of Helen's dress he ripped the upper part away. Turcotte swore angrily, heaving and straining against his bonds. Another man tore off the girl's skirt. A third bound a ribbon round her breast, upon which was lettered:

#### DAUGHTERS OF SEKHMET

Tears of rage streamed down Turcotte's bloody face. Ropes seared his flesh. His heart pounded with superhuman efforts to break free. But the bonds held.

Mulai raised his hands and spoke to Helen again: "I bid you waken!"

Helen's taut body relaxed. She rubbed her eyes like a tired child. Then, observ-

ing her own nakedness, she gasped, whirled to flee.

Turcotte lunged and jerked with utter disregard for lacerated flesh. Helen, seeing him there, screamed:

"Bob! They'll murder us! Oh, don't let them drag me naked into the streets—"

Mulai thundered: "Is it death that you fear? Soon you will be *glad* to die!"

He jerked a cord running through staples in the ceiling. Curtains slid back along the farther wall. At the sight disclosed beyond, Helen Hale dropped in a cringing heap. Her terrified shrieks were like dagger-thrusts in Turcotte's breast.

Within a dimly-lighted booth stood a number of hideous creatures more beast than human. Their bare bodies were masses of inflamed flesh, their faces but shapeless blobs. Light glinted redly from their staring eyes. Motionless, they stood poised as though to spring.

"Lepers!" Turcotte shouted wildly. "For God's sake, run!"

Mulai's henchmen chanted: "Unclean! You shall be unclean!"

They seized the girl, dragged her toward the waiting monsters. Fear seemed to paralyze her throat muscles. Then they loosened in a wild torrent of shrieks. Supported between grinning captors, the toes of her shoes dragging on the floor, she was borne from one to another of the repulsive things in the alcove, and her flesh defiled by contact with their claws.

Frantically struggling, mouth twisted in mute agony, Helen finally collapsed. Curtains slid across the booth again.

Turcotte, bleary-eyed and broken, hung in the ropes groaning wretchedly. Mulai walked to the edge of the white drape.

"Behind this screen the power of Sidi Ghanna will enter into me. Soon, in the ritual of the apple, this Daughter of Sekhmet shall find peace in the arms of Death. You know the hour—ten. The place—Drake Hotel."

A confused murmur arose among the swarthy men. Mulai commanded: "Silence! Let there be no sound after I rouse her, or the spell may be broken. Remember, I must hold her subject to my will, so that she will *want* to die. Stand motionless until she follows me."

Mulai stepped back of the curtain. It was transparent. A pale green light spread over its shimmering expanse. Seen through this chiffon veil the man seemed a nebulous figure. Soft organ music began to play. He raised his voice in a chant, making strange gestures. As Turcotte listened, he knew that Mulai was conducting a mass for the dead.

**A**BRUPTLY a different, deeper voice was raised in a series of commands: "Sidi Ghanna speaks! You will sleep! You will slumber deeply. You will obey."

The figure of Mulai, behind the screen, seemed to fade. The green light changed to an aching white. In his place appeared a turbaned, bearded head of large proportions. Turcotte winced as with a terrific mental shock when he looked into the strange, hypnotic eyes of the dead Egyptian. For minutes the monotonous commands were repeated and he fought against an overpowering lassitude. Then, the spell lightened noticeably when the voice changed again, to a sharper tone.

"Unclean! You are unclean! You have been defiled by a touch that is lingering death. For you, Helen Hale, in life remains but suffering and corruption. Only through the ritual of the apple may you be cleansed. I shall lead. You will follow. *You must obey!*"

Helen sat up in the coffin. Her staring eyes were fixed upon the hypnotic orbs. Her words, like an echo from the grave, droned dully: "I hear. I will obey. Only let me die. . ."

Mulai hurried out of the shadows. Taking care to not obstruct Helen's vision of

Sidi Ghanna's compelling stare, he swung open a glass lid which had been dropped across the lower part of her body and lifted her out of the coffin. Draping a dark cloak around her shoulders, he turned and marched toward the stairs. Helen followed, entranced, her rapt glance riveted upon the back of his head.

A brawny forearm had locked across Turcotte's throat, choking off his outraged cry. Swift-moving hands removed ropes which bound him to the chair; lashed his ankles and wrists tightly. They carried him to the coffin, tied him there with windings of hemp across his neck so that he might not rise. Latching the glass lid over his legs they trooped out, conversing in a foreign tongue. Only the apparition of Sidi Ghanna remained.

Turcotte's brain throbbed in an aching skull. Bitterly he cursed his helplessness, writhing at thought of Helen's doom. The hypnotic tones of the Egyptian battered his senses remorselessly with monotonous commands: "You sleep. You slumber deeply. You must obey my will. . ." The fierce unwinking gaze seemed to bore into his very soul and he felt his senses swaying. Twisting his face aside, he became aware suddenly of a soft whirring sound that seemed to emanate from a hidden mechanism.

"Tricked!" He swore violently. "A talking picture of the dead Sidi—or movies and a phonograph!"

In blind frenzy he jerked and kicked and rolled so galvanically that the coffin swayed on its support, slid sidewise, crashed upon the floor. Glass in the bottom lid was shattered. His bound feet flew out. The ropes across his throat burned painfully. Squirming over upon his stomach, he groped with hands tied behind his back, seeking glass fragments stuck in the casket lid. A jagged point slashed his wrist. He sawed against it prayerfully, unmindful of the pain. The



ropes parted. He squeezed out from under the cords around his neck; a moment later, he had his ankles free. Picking up a chair, he hurled it at the face upon the curtain. A smash of metal sounded. A shaft of light shot in an arc across the ceiling. The deep voice squawked ridiculously, then was silent.

"Phonograph, all right," he grunted, running toward the curtained booth. "Those novel-length records, made before Sidi died." The loathsome figures in the alcove proved his suspicion to be correct. Wax mannikins! As he raced down the back stairs a heavy object comfortingly thumped against his thigh. They had not troubled to disarm him, accounting as one already dead. Through the alley into a deserted street he rushed. A cruising taxi hove in view. He wrenched open its door, gasping: "Drake Hotel! Police business! Stop for nothing—"

THE driver was game. Astonished traffic cops dodged aside when the car roared past. Soon the brilliant sign of the Drake loomed ahead, but when half a block from the entranceway the driver slapped on the brakes and coasted to a stop.

"Best I can do, Captain! Traffic jam. Time for the bigwigs to be coming out from that N. R. A. meeting."

Head down, Turcotte butted through a crowd which had overflowed the street. He brought up against a roped-off space within which stood a cordon of police. A cop seized him by the arm.

Turcotte struggled and was clubbed for his pains. Dazed, he tried to explain. Suddenly a sharp cry burst from his lips: "There she is! Stop her!"

Cars arriving early had been permitted to park along the curb opposite the Drake's marquee. Silhouetted against the open door of a cab some twenty yards away, Helen Hale stood, the fatal apple in her hand.

The staring policeman's grasp loosened. Turcotte's brain functioned swiftly. No chance to reach her side in time to forestall the poisoned bite. Mulai was crouching behind the taxi, face taut with mental strain. His was the will which guided her faltering steps, that would command, "Taste the apple and die."

Turcotte's arm raised, tipped with spurting fire. Mulai pitched forward upon his face. Disregarding a policeman's hoarse warning, Turcotte burst through the cordon, dashed to Helen's side. She had dropped her cloak, just before the bullet entering Mulai's brain had snapped the hypnotic spell. Now she cringed.

Turcotte caught her up and stumbled toward a parked limousine. The door swung open and a white-haired old gentleman jumped down.

"Put her in there! Give her the robe. What ever possessed her. . . .?"

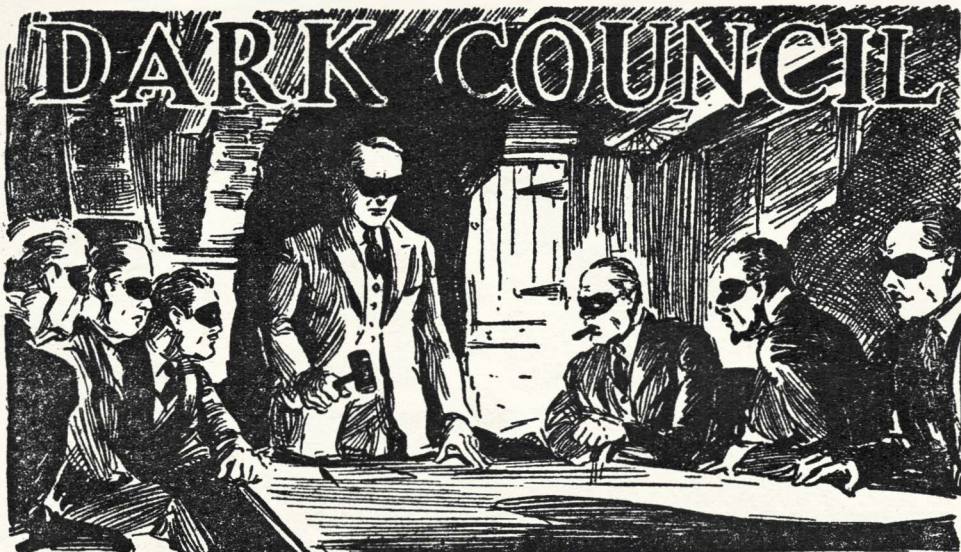
Police came rushing from all directions, waving guns and clubs. Lieutenant Wayne appeared. He ordered a space cleared around the car. To Turcotte he whispered:

"Only your shot saved the girl. My men just 'phoned. They raided the place too late."

Turcotte snapped: "Send them back to lie in wait. Some of the henchmen of that gang are sure to return. Now, break a way for us out of this jam."

THE crowd parted before Wayne's sharp commands. The limousine crawled from its place at the curb. The chauffeur asked the white-haired old gentleman: "Where to, sir?"

"Just drive! Give them a breathing spell." He climbed in beside the driver, cast a sympathetic glance across his shoulder. "I'd certainly like to know what happened. Whatever it was, one can plainly see that those young folks have been through hell!"



**T**ERROR has manifold meanings and there are myriad ways in which it can be felt. It can be present in the pitiful crying of a frightened child bewildered by the darkness of the night. It can come to us in the moment of our first youthful contact with death. Mild and fairly innocuous terrors, these, which all of us have sampled at one time or another. But there are other, greater terrors—such as the full-blown, soul-chilling varieties which form so large a part of this magazine's sturdy fiction fare.

There is the terror of loathsome crawling things of the night; of cunning, unhinged minds and the evil they can do; of delicate, life-wracking tortures; of the weird workings of the supernatural. . . .

There are, in fact, more kinds of terror than there are names to give them—and because of this, we have been able to offer you, in *Dime Mystery*, a well-rounded bill-of-fare in terror dishes. In this issue, perhaps as never before, we have given you a veritable feast of fear in a multitude of forms.

In "Ghouls of the Green Death," that blood-chilling, gripping novel by Wyatt Blassingame, for example, you have encountered many fears. You have known the panic that seized a city when the horrible Green Death swept life from the streets. You have felt the chilling horror that clawed at Fred Kane's heart when the nameless creature rose from the dark grave to lay its slimy hands upon him. And greater still, you have known the gibbering fear that came upon him like a roaring wave when he knew at last that he too must die—not as others die, but with the agonies of the Green Death upon him, making of him a shrieking, tortured madman.

There was the creeping fear of the horrible fungi which consumed all liv-

ing things, an apt weapon in the hands of the insidious, intriguing Ainus—that you found in "The Doom Dust," Arthur Leo Zagat's spine-tingling novel-ette. There was the nameless fear of the dark unknown that stalked through the pages of "Out of the Past"; of the lurking death that lay in wait for those nine trapped ones, in "Terror From the Deep"; the terror of hideous torment in "Dead Men's Eyes."

Such terrors, and many others, you have lived and felt while reading this issue of *Dime Mystery*. But there are still myriad varieties, even stronger, which have not yet fallen to your lot to feel. And in the next issue will be served a heaping platter of these dishes, in stories by such experts in the nuances of terror as Hugh B. Cave, Wayne Rogers, H. M. Appel, Arthur Leo Zagat and others.

In that issue, and in the following ones, a true banquet of dread and dark mystery is in store—a thousand delicacies prepared for the palates of the sage sophisticate in terror!





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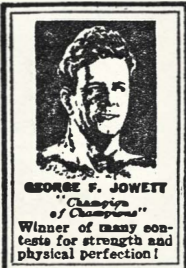
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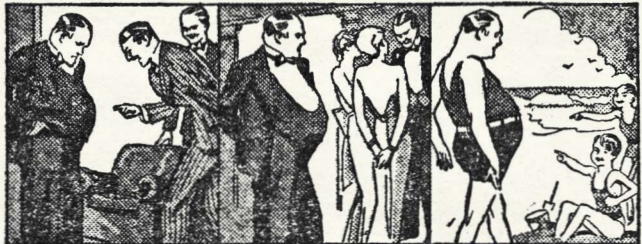
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33x6.00-21	3.65	1.25	32x6 10 "	7.95	2.75
31x6.50-19	3.60	1.35	36x6	8.95	3.95
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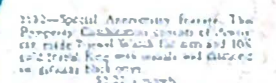
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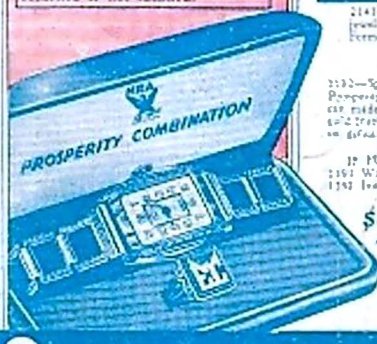
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